

Arthur Aronson
True & False Ideas

Contents

	<i>page</i>
Chapter 1 Rules that must be kept in mind when one is seeking the truth in this question of ideas and in many similar questions.	50
Chapter 2 The principal things that can be known about one's soul through a little careful deliberation.	52
Chapter 3 The author of <i>The Search after Truth</i> gives a different account of ideas in the first two Books to that given in the third, where he deals with them explicitly.	54
Chapter 4 What the author of <i>The Search after Truth</i> says concerning <i>the nature of ideas</i> in his third Book is based merely on fancies deriving from childhood prejudices.	58
Chapter 5 That it is possible to prove geometrically the falsity of <i>ideas</i> taken as <i>representations</i> . Definitions, axioms and questions serve as principles in these demonstrations.	65
Chapter 6 An explanation of some expressions: 'We do not see things immediately'; 'It is the ideas of them which are the immediate object of our thought'; and 'It is in the idea of each thing that we see its properties.'	70
Chapter 7 Arguments against ideas construed as <i>representations</i> distinct from perceptions. First demonstration	77
Chapter 8 Second demonstration	80
Chapter 9 Third demonstration	86
Chapter 10 Fourth demonstration	87
Chapter 11 Fifth demonstration	92

Chapter 12	On the way in which the author of <i>The Search after Truth</i> wants us to see all things in God. He has spoken inexactly or prevaricates about the things which he claims are seen in God.	101
Chapter 13	He prevaricates also in his explanation of the ways in which we see things in God. The first is by means of ideas. Starting from this he denies that there are in the intelligible world any ideas which represent each thing in particular, something that cannot be denied without error.	106
Chapter 14	The second way of seeing things in God, which is to see them in an <i>infinitely intelligible extension</i> which God contains within Himself. What is said concerning this is either completely unworthy of God or manifestly self-contradictory.	111
Chapter 15	That infinite intelligible extension cannot be the means by which we see things that we do not know but wish to know.	123
Chapter 16	That what our author makes our mind do in order to discover its ideas in his <i>infinite intelligible extension</i> is contrary to experience and to the general laws that God has laid down for Himself in order to provide us with knowledge of His works.	129
Chapter 17	Another discrepancy: the author says sometimes that we see God in seeing creatures in God, and at other times that we do not see Him but only his creatures.	135
Chapter 18	Concerning three prejudices which might prevent one conceding what has been said against the new philosophy of ideas so readily. The first is one's esteem for its author.	140
Chapter 19	The second prejudice: that this new philosophy of ideas shows us better than any other how much minds are dependent on God, and the extent to which they should be united with Him.	143
Chapter 20	The third prejudice: that in rejecting his philosophy of ideas we are reduced to saying that our soul thinks because that is its nature, and that God, in creating it, gave it the faculty of thinking.	151

Chapter 21	When the author says there are things we see without ideas, what he understands by this is so impossible to make out, and is the cause of so much confusion, that one can have no clear notion of it.	155
Chapter 22	If it were true that we saw things by means of <i>representations</i> (which for the author is the same thing as seeing them in God), he would have no basis for his claim that we do not see our soul in this way.	160
Chapter 23	A reply to his arguments which try to show that we have no clear idea of the soul but that we have a clear idea of extension.	164
Chapter 24	Conclusions of the author's arguments against the clarity of the idea of the soul. How it comes about that he cannot find this in himself.	182
Chapter 25	Whether we know the souls of others without ideas.	191
Chapter 26	Whether we see God in Himself and without ideas.	193
Chapter 27	On the origin of ideas. There is no reason to believe that our soul is purely passive in regard to all its perceptions, and it is more likely that it has received the faculty of forming many of them from God.	199
Chapter 28	Various thoughts on the claims of the author of <i>The Search after Truth</i> that one cannot be entirely assured of the existence of bodies except by faith.	209
Conclusion		219

Translator's notes

On True and False Ideas

A demonstration that what the author of the *Search after Truth* says about these rests upon false premisses, and that there is nothing as baseless as his claim that we see all things in God.

Sir, I have told you of my plan to look at the *Treatise on Nature and Grace* and to make public my judgement of it. ¹ I did not doubt that you would show my letter to its author, or that you would consider, as you did, that it was really directed to him, for in my view it is more honest and Christian to act frankly than to attack a friend secretly and to conceal from him something which I do not believe would displease him, as that would suggest that I suspected him of being insincere in his claim that he strives only for truth.

I am glad that I did not think this of my friend, and it gives me great pleasure to learn from your reply that I was not mistaken in thinking that St Augustine did not mean this when he said that it is wrong to prefer others to be in error than to discover that oneself is: *nimis perverse seipsum amat, qui alios vult errare, ut error suos lateat*. For you assure me that, having shown him my first letter, which you knew I had intended him to see, he indicated that he agreed with me on the question of writing against the opinions of one's friends, and that he was not at all annoyed that I had written against the *Treatise*. Thus I have no worries in this respect. But I'm afraid you won't be surprised when you see that this is not the work you've been waiting for, but merely a preamble to it. The reason is this. Our friend advises us in the second edition of his *Treatise* that if we are to be able to understand it we must first grasp the principles established in his *The Search after Truth*, and in particular his findings on the nature of ideas, i.e. his view that we see all things in God. Thus I set about studying this question. But having applied myself to it diligently, I found so little truth in what our friend teaches, to say the least, that it seemed to me that I could do no better than to begin by showing him that he has more reason than he thinks to doubt a number of

assumptions which he takes as certain, so that he may be persuaded by sense experience to try to understand the mysteries of grace through the teachings of the saints rather than by himself.

I am sure, Sir, that you will agree with me when you realise just how much he contradicts himself on the question of ideas, and the extent to which he has failed to follow the rules of reasoning which he rightly prescribes for others. This you can judge for yourself from what follows. I would only add that if I have thrown some light on a question which up until now has seemed very obscure and complicated, this is due solely, on the one hand, to my having been guided by those clear and distinct ideas which everyone can find in himself if only he pays attention to what is in his mind, and on the other, to my having observed the following rules, which I believe should be presented first so that, once they are accepted, the same truths can be reached by the same route by all.

Chapter 1

Rules that must be kept in mind when one is seeking the truth in this question of ideas and in many similar questions

These rules are, in my opinion, so reasonable that I do not believe that there is any man of good sense who does not agree with them, and who would not at least agree that one can do no better than observe them whenever possible, or agree that they can provide the true means of avoiding many of the errors that one often unwittingly makes in the natural sciences.

The first is to begin with those things that are clearest and simplest, and which cannot be doubted, provided one pays attention to them.

The second is not to obscure something known clearly by trying to explain it further in terms of notions which are confused. To do this is to attempt to illuminate light by means of shadows.

The third is not to seek reasons *ad infinitum*, but to stop when we get to what we know to be the nature of a thing, or what we know with certainty to be a quality of it. One must not ask why extension is divisible, for example, or why mind is capable of thought, for it is the nature of extension to be divisible, and that of mind to think.

The fourth is not to ask for definitions of terms that are clear in themselves, and which can only be obscured by trying to define them,

Chapter 1

since we would be forced to explain them in terms of notions which are not as clear. Such are the words *think* and *exist*, for example, in the proposition 'I think therefore I exist'. Hence the objection made against Descartes in these terms in the *Sixth Objections* is a very weak one:

In order that you might know that you think, and conclude from this that you exist, you must first know what thinking is and what existence is. And since you do not yet know either of these, how can you be certain that you exist, since in saying *I think you do not know what you say, and you know even less when you say therefore I exist?* [CSM II, 278]

Descartes replies to this that no one knows so little that they do not know what *thinking* is or what *existence* is, so there is no need to define these words in order to be assured that one is not mistaken when one says 'I think therefore I exist.'

The fifth is not to confuse questions which must be answered by providing a formal cause with those which require an efficient cause, and not to ask for the formal cause of a formal cause – something that is the source of many errors – but only for its efficient cause. An example will help us make this clearer. If I am asked why this piece of lead is round, I can reply by giving the definition of roundness, i.e. by providing the formal cause, and say that it is because, if one conceives of straight lines drawn from as many points as one wishes on the surface to a particular point inside this piece of lead they will be equal. But if one continues to ask how it comes about that the surface of the lead is as I have described it, how it comes about that it is not shaped as it would be if the lead were a cube, then a Peripatetic will seek another formal cause, saying that it is because the lead has received a quality called roundness which has been drawn from the depths of its matter in order to make it round, and that it does not have any other quality which would make it a cube. But good sense required us to reply by providing an efficient cause, by saying that the exterior surface of this piece of lead is due to its having being melted down and thrown into a hollow mould whose concave surface made the lead's surface convex, so that all its points, etc.

The sixth is to take great care not to conceive of spirits as bodies, nor bodies as spirits, by attributing to either what is peculiar to the other. This occurs when one attributes a fear of a void to bodies, or when one attributes to minds the requirement that bodies be spatially proximate if they are to be perceived by them.

The seventh is not to multiply beings unnecessarily, as so often happens in everyday philosophy. This occurs, for example, when one wants to account for stone, gold, lead, fire and water solely in terms of the diverse arrangements and configurations of the parts of matter while still retaining substantial forms of stone, gold, lead, fire and water, where these are in reality quite different from anything that can be imagined in terms of the arrangement and configuration of parts of matter.²

I now want to show what, I believe, can be discovered easily if we follow these few rules about how the soul and its operations are to be conceived, in regard to one of its faculties, the understanding.

Chapter 2

The principal things that can be known about one's soul through a little careful deliberation.

St Augustine recognised long before Descartes that if we are to discover the truth we can begin with nothing more certain than the proposition that 'I think, therefore I exist.' He considers, in respect to the *I think*, all the different ways in which we think, whether it be knowing something with certainty (which he calls *intelligere*) or doubting or remembering. For it is certain, he says, that there is nothing at all that we can do that does not at the same time bring with it compelling proof of our own existence [*City of God*, XI, 26]. He concludes from this that, for the soul to know itself, it has only to distinguish itself from those things which are distinct from its thought, and what remains will be what it is. That is to say, the soul can only be a substance that thinks or is capable of thinking. It follows from this that we can know what we are only by attending seriously to what occurs in our minds. In this we must take particular care not to include anything of which we are not certain, and to reflect when we find it difficult to explain things in words which, since they have usually been invented by men who have only been attentive to what happened in their bodies and those around them, are scarcely suitable for relating the operations of the mind to the individual senses which provide us with the occasion to think of them.

Now when the mind, having freed itself of childhood prejudices, has come to know that its nature is to think, it easily recognises that it

would be as unreasonable to ask why it thinks as it would be to ask why extension is divisible and capable of taking on different shapes and moving in different ways. For, as I said in the fifth Rule, when one has come to know the nature of a thing, there is no longer anything, by way of formal causes, left to seek. Consequently, I can only ask myself why mind exists, and why extension exists. And I must reply here by giving the efficient cause, which is that God has created both of these.

Thus just as it is clear that *I think*, it is also clear that *I think of something*, i.e. that I know and perceive something. For that is what thought is essentially. Consequently, since it is not possible for there to be thought or knowledge without an object known, I can no longer ask for the reasons why I think of something, since I cannot think without thinking of something. But I can of course ask why I think of one thing rather than another.

The changes which occur in simple substances do not cause them to be something different from what they are, but only to be in some other way than they were. And this must be what distinguishes things or substances from modes, or ways of being, which can also be called modifications. But true modifications cannot be conceived without conceiving of the substance of which they are the modifications; so if it is my nature to think, and I can think of different things without changing my nature, then these different thoughts can only be different modifications of the thinking which constitutes my nature. Although it is not necessary for my argument, perhaps we could speculate that there is in me some thought which does not change and which can be taken as the essence of my soul. I can find two thoughts which one might consider to be like this: the thought of a universal Being and that of my own soul. Both of these are to be found in all other thoughts: that of the universal Being, because it contains the idea of being in its entirety, whereas our soul only knows something under the notion of possible or existent being; and the thought that our soul has of itself because, whatever it is that I know, I know that I know by an implicit reflection that accompanies all my thoughts. Thus I know myself in knowing other things. And it seems to me that the principal way of distinguishing those beings which are intelligent from those which are not is that the former *sunt conscia sui et suae operationes* [are conscious of themselves and their actions] whereas the latter are not. That is to say, the former know that they exist and that they act, whereas the latter do not, the Latin

Thoughts = modes of spirit

think = be =
N
primary
of substance

capturing this better than the French.

But no matter how much care we take in our deliberations, we are not aware of anything else in our soul's thoughts which can change—and which we therefore judge to be only modifications of the soul, and to occur only in things which do not change. For in neither do we see anything but the perception and knowledge of an object. We will therefore only confuse ourselves and make our heads swim if we seek to understand how the perception of an object can be in us, or what one is to understand by this. If we pay careful attention we will find that this is the same as asking how matter can be divisible and have shape. For since it is the nature of the mind to perceive objects, some necessarily, so to speak, and others contingently, it is ridiculous to ask how it comes about that our mind perceives objects. As for those who are not prepared to understand the perception of objects by deliberating upon it, I do not know how to make them understand better.

Hence as regards the formal cause of our perception of objects, there is no question to be asked. This is because nothing could be clearer, provided only that one fastens on to what one understands clearly oneself and does not run this together with things which one does not understand clearly but mistakenly wishes to include. This is the cause of all man's errors concerning his soul, as St Augustine correctly points out in Book X of *On The Trinity*.

The only legitimate question which could be asked about the cause of our perceptions is one concerned solely with the efficient cause of our contingent perceptions, namely, what is the cause of our thinking of one object at one time and of another at another time? As far as necessary perceptions are concerned there can be no doubt that these are due to God, and we shall postpone discussion of this until the end of the treatise.

Chapter 3

That the author of *The Search after Truth* gives a different account of ideas in the first two Books to that given in the third, where he deals with them explicitly.

What I have just said concerning the soul and its perceptions corresponds so closely to our natural conceptions that the author of *The*

Chapter 3

Search after Truth himself speaks in the same way as long as he confines himself to the first ideas that come into his mind on this question, and as long as he does not muddle these up with other philosophical notions, which he too readily assumes to be fundamentally correct and in need only of amendment.

We can see that in his simple and natural judgements on this question, there is very little that does not accord fully with what we have said. There are nevertheless some expressions which are perhaps ambiguous, and what he has done is to take these badly understood ideas in the wrong sense, although in themselves they can also be taken in a truthful way. At the beginning of the third Book, he says in general terms: 'But if, by the essence of a thing, one understands what is first conceived in the thing, that on which all the modifications that are noticed in it depend, one cannot doubt that the essence of the mind consists in thinking [ST, 198 note a]. In the first Chapter of the first Book, in a comparison of matter and spirit, he explains at greater length what occurs in the soul:

Matter or extension has two properties or faculties. The first faculty is that of taking on different shapes, the second is the capacity for being moved. The mind of man likewise contains two faculties. The first, which is the *understanding*, is that of receiving various ideas, i.e. of perceiving various things. The second, which is the *will*, is that of receiving various inclinations, or of willing different things. We shall first explain the relations between the first of the two faculties belonging to matter and the first of those that belong to mind. [ST, 2]

Notice the words 'receiving various ideas, i.e. perceiving various things'. In what follows one would only have to substitute this definition for the *definiendum* to exclude the false notion of ideas that he presents elsewhere when he wants us to conceive of them as particular *representations*³ of objects which are actually distinct from the perceptions and the objects. [He continues:]

Extension can receive two kinds of shape. Some are only external, like the roundness of a piece of wax. Others are internal, and these are the ones which are characteristic of all the small parts of which the wax is composed, for it is indubitable that all the small parts that make up a piece of wax have shapes very different from those that make up a piece of iron. That which is external I call simply *shape*, and I call *configuration* the shape which is internal and which is necessary for wax to be what it is. Likewise, it can be said that the ideas of the soul are of two kinds, taking the term *idea* generally to cover everything which the mind perceives immediately. The first

represent to us something outside of us, such as a square, a house, etc. The second only represent to us what happens in us, such as our sensations, sadness, pleasure, etc. For it will be seen in what follows that these latter ideas are nothing but a way of being of the mind, and it is because of this that I will call them modifications of the mind. [ST, 2]

It is a matter of choice how one defines words. Nevertheless, it is annoying that the generic name should be given to one species and denied to the other, for this may lead one to think that the latter does not share in the notion of the genus at all. To avoid this drawback, I may also be allowed to devise my own dictionary and say that the perception of a square is a modification of my soul just as much as is the perception of colour, for the perception of a square is something in my soul. Since it is not its essence, it must be a modification of it. Moreover, on Malebranche's account, there is an analogy between my soul having a perception of a square and extension having a shape. Now shape is a modification of extension; thus to receive the notion of a square, i.e. to perceive a square, is a modification of my soul. Nevertheless, it must be noted here that he takes the word 'idea' as a perception and not as the representation which he maintains elsewhere we need in order to perceive things. And this agrees with Book 3, Part II, Chapter 1, where, in regard to sensations, i.e. perceptions of colour, light and so on, he says that the soul had no need of representations, and yet he calls these perceptions ideas. [He continues:] 'These inclinations of the soul can also be called modifications of the same soul because it has been established that the inclination of the will is a way of being of the soul and therefore it can be called a modification of the soul.' This is sufficient as far as I am concerned. Whatever other reasons he believes he has for not referring to it as a modification, I am happy to consider it as such and to call it by that name if indeed, as he acknowledges, it is one.

He goes on to say that our soul is completely passive with regard to perceptions but not with regard to inclinations. I shall draw some important conclusions from this but I will do that elsewhere, since they concern the cause of ideas and not their nature. It is the nature of ideas with which I am presently concerned. This is why I confine myself to noting that the author of *The Search after Truth*, having spoken of these ideas extensively in the first chapter of his book, indicates in a number of ways that ideas of objects and perceptions of objects are the same thing. And it is worth noting, in case one thinks

that this has escaped his attention, that he continues to take the word idea in the same way in Part [2] of Book 2, especially in the [fifth] Chapter. For what he refers to in the title of this chapter as 'the mutual relations of ideas in the mind and traces in the brain', he calls in the same chapter 'the natural and mutual correspondence of thoughts in the soul and traces in the brain'. Thus he takes ideas to be the same thing as thoughts. And one only has to read this chapter to be convinced that ideas and thoughts are synonymous terms throughout. Nevertheless, when he discusses the nature of ideas at a 1st level fundamental level in the second Part of Book 3, and in the Elucidations of the Search after Truth, it is clear that what he is calling ideas is no longer the thoughts of the soul or perceptions of objects, but particular representations of objects distinct from these perceptions, which he says 'really exist and are required for the perception of material objects'.

I have no wish simply to point out the apparent contradiction here, for it may not be so much a contradiction as a lack of exactness, in that he has used the same word in two different senses without having alerted us sufficiently to this. But I do maintain two things. First, that ideas taken in the latter sense are in fact chimeras. They have been invented solely in order that we might better understand how our soul, which is immaterial, can know the material things that God has created. But the manifest failure of these speculations results in an attempt to persuade us, in a roundabout way, that God has ^{represented} given our souls no means at all by which to perceive the real and true ^{reality} bodies that He has created, but only a means of perceiving intelligible ^{ideas} bodies which are outside our souls and resemble real bodies. Secondly, the author is a man of the world who speaks with the greatest force against those who abandon the clear ideas which they find in themselves and follow confused notions which remain with them as childhood prejudices. Yet he himself has fallen into the extraordinary views that I am undertaking to refute only because he has not been able to rid himself entirely of these prejudices and has retained a false principle which he holds in common with almost all scholastic philosophers, but which has led him to much stranger views than others because he has pushed it further than they. As in the case of those who have turned from the true path, they stray furthest who move the fastest.

I shall begin with the second point, as the falsity of the paradoxes that he advances on this question can be recognised more easily when

their cause has been discovered. I apologise for using strong language. It is, I believe, just the love of truth and the desire to understand it better that compel me to do so, for without this I would cease to respect the person whom I am refuting. What I find here is only a striking example of human infirmity, which causes minds that are otherwise very clear and penetrating to fall into very great errors when they philosophise on these abstract matters, when they allow themselves inadvertently to take as true some common principle that they have not taken sufficient care to examine, and which turns out not to be true. For falsity is as fertile as truth. A false principle which one carelessly takes as true can lead to our becoming entangled in many absurd opinions just as a true one can lead us to discover many new truths.

Chapter 4

What the author of *The Search after Truth* says concerning the nature of ideas in his third Book is based merely on fancies deriving from childhood prejudices.

As all men have first been children, and were then concerned with almost nothing but their body and what affected their senses, they were not aware for a long time of any vision but corporeal vision, which they attributed to their eyes. And they could not help noticing two things about this vision. First, if we are to see the object it must be before or *present to our eyes*, and because of this they regarded the presence of the object as a necessary condition of seeing. Second, one also occasionally sees visible objects in mirrors or in water or in other things which represent them to us, and in this case it is thought, erroneously, that what one sees is not these same bodies but their images. This was for a long time the only idea they had of what they called *seeing*, and through habit they became accustomed to associate the idea behind this word with either the case where the object is present in direct view, or that where the object is seen only by its image reflected in a mirror. The difficulties in separating ideas which are habitually found together in the mind are well known, and this is one of the most common causes of error.

But, with time, men have perceived that they know various things that they cannot see with their eyes, either because they are too small,

or because they are not visible, like the air, or because they are too distant, like the towns of foreign lands which we have never visited. It is this that has made them believe that there are things which are seen with the mind and not with the eyes. They would have done better to have concluded that we see nothing with the eyes, only with the mind, albeit in a different way. But they need more time to reach this conclusion. In any case, having imagined that the mind's vision is similar to the vision they have attributed to the eyes, they apply this word 'vision' to the mind, as usual with the same conditions that they imagine obtain in the case of the eyes.

The first such condition is the presence of the object. For they do not doubt — indeed they take it as certain — that, for the mind just as for the eyes, the object must be present if it is to be seen. But when philosophers — i.e. those who believe they know nature better than the vulgar and have not allowed themselves to be influenced by any principle before they have examined it properly — when they attempted to use it to explain the mind's vision, they encountered great difficulties. Some recognised that the soul is immaterial, whereas others, who believe it to be corporeal, considered it as a subtle matter shut up in the body, which it cannot leave in order to seek objects outside, nor can objects outside come in to join it. How then can one see, since an object cannot be seen if it is not present? To overcome this difficulty they introduce another sense of seeing which they are accustomed to calling 'seeing' in the case of corporeal vision. This is the case where one sees things not by themselves but by means of their images, as when one sees a body in mirrors. For as I have already indicated, they, and almost everyone else, believe that in this case it is not bodies that one sees but only their images. They stick to this and the belief has such force for them that they do not accept that there is any doubt as to its truth. Consequently, taking it as a certain and incontestable truth, they are no longer worried about finding out what these images or *representations* could be, which the mind needs in order to perceive bodies.

Something else, which in fact derives from what we have just said and is not really that different from it, reinforces this opinion still more, and this is that we have a natural inclination to want to know things by example and comparison since, provided we are careful, we can appreciate that it is vexing to believe something remarkable without being able to give an example of it. Thus when men begin to realise that we see things with the mind, instead of reflecting on and

Page 58

x sees y if x present y

∃ x present z & z is not "what before the eye" [i.e. z is not y]

∃ x present z & z is not "what before the eye" [i.e. z is not y]

noting what they perceive clearly happening in their minds when they know things, they imagine that an analogy will improve their understanding. Since we have become afflicted by sin, our love for the body is all the greater, this causes us to think that we know corporeal things much better and more easily than spiritual things. Thus they believe that they will find some analogy in the body which will allow them to understand how we see with the mind everything that we conceive, and above all material things. But they do not realise that this is not a means of clarification but rather a means of obscuring what would be very clear to them if they were only to reflect upon it, for the mind and the body are two substances which are wholly distinct and, as it were, opposites, so their properties should have nothing in common. Only confusion can result from trying to explain the one by the other, and one of the most pervasive sources of error is our constant application of the properties of the mind to bodies and the properties of bodies to mind.

But however that may be, they are insufficiently enlightened to avoid this pitfall. They try with all their might to construct an analogy with bodies in order, they believe, that they and others might better understand how our mind can see material things. And this is what they did, and what one finds all the harder to understand. And they had no difficulty in establishing the analogy. It almost presents itself ready-made, as a result of another prejudice, namely that there must at least be a great resemblance between those things having the same name. As I have already indicated, they give the same name to corporeal and to spiritual vision, and as a result they argue that what happens in mental vision must be roughly similar to what happens in bodily vision. In the case of the latter, we can only see what is present, i.e. what is before our eyes; or, if we occasionally see things which are not before our eyes, these are only images which represent these things. Thus it must be the same with the mind's vision. And they do not hesitate to make an indubitable principle out of the maxim that we see with our mind only those objects present to our soul. But they do not mean this in the sense of objective presence, by which a thing is only objectively in our mind in virtue of our mind knowing it. If this were what they meant it would just be a different way of saying that the thing is objectively in our mind (and consequently present to it) and is known by our mind. They do not take the word presence in this way, but rather intend it as a prerequisite for the perception of an object, as something which is necessary if the object is to be in a state

I know about x) I know M w. I know a object in presence of M. I know I know about x) I know M w. I know a object in presence of M. I know I know about x) I know M w. I know a object in presence of M. I know

whereby it can be perceived, something they found to be necessary in vision, or so they thought. And from this they quickly pass to another principle, namely, that since all the bodies that our soul knows cannot be individually present to it, they must be present in the form of images which represent them. And philosophers have a stronger attachment to this than others, for they hold the same view in the case of corporeal vision. They imagine that our eyes only perceive objects via images which they call intentional species and they believe they have a convincing proof of these, for when we close off a room except for a single hole, and place in front of this hole a glass in the shape of a lens, stretching behind it at some distance a white canvas, then light from outside forms images on this canvas which represent perfectly, to those who are in the room, the objects which are outside and opposite the hole.

Thus they adopt another principle which they take to be incontrovertible, namely, that the soul only sees bodies via images or species which represent them. They draw different conclusions from this, depending on the procedure adopted by the particular philosopher, and some of them are very poor. Gassendi reasons in the following way, or at least these are the opinions he proposes as objections to be answered by Descartes:

Our soul can know bodies only by means of ideas that represent them. Now these ideas are not able to represent material things unless they are themselves material and extended. Hence they are such. But if they are to serve the soul in knowing body they must be present to the soul, i.e. they must be received in the soul. Now that which is extended can only be received in something which is itself extended. Hence the soul must be extended and therefore corporeal.

However damnable this conclusion, I do not see that it is easy to disallow it if one accepts these principles, and hence it must be concluded that the principles are not true.

Other philosophers, however, fearing such a conclusion, have claimed that they can avoid it by maintaining that these ideas of bodies are at first material and extended, but that before being received into the soul they are spiritualised, just as gross matter is refined by being passed through an alembic. I do not know if they use this analogy, but it comes down to the same thing when they maintain that ideas of bodies, which they call impressed species, being material and sensible to begin with, are made intelligible and

Very odd! I think one of x has being, subjectively of we # x has been written in answer to

as of objects \Rightarrow as of intellects (e.g. a clock)

being received in the passive intellect.

I am astonished that the majority of philosophers have reasoned in this way and have as a result blindly accepted as incontestable two principles: that the soul can only perceive objects which are present to it, and that bodies can be present to it only through particular representations called ideas or species which, being similar to them, take their place and are in immediate contact with the soul in place of them. Nothing indeed is more astonishing than that the author of the *Search after Truth*, who professes to follow a completely different path, should accept these and other principles without any further scrutiny. For he knows better than anyone that the comparison of corporeal and spiritual vision, on which this is all apparently based, is false in every respect. This is not only because it is the soul and not the eyes that see, but also because even if it were the eyes that saw, or the soul in so far as it is in the eyes, one would find nothing in this vision to support the claim of the scholastic philosophers that one ought to find two things in the mind. The first is the presence of the object, which they say should be in immediate contact with the soul. This is in fact quite contrary to corporeal vision, for although in ordinary parlance one says that the object should be present to our eyes if we are to see it (something which has been a source of error), it is the other way round entirely if we speak exactly and philosophically. The object must be absent from the eye, since it must be some distance from it, for what is in the eye or too close to it cannot be seen. The same holds for the second thing, which is that we see particular representations which, being similar to objects, enable us to know them. He is well aware that neither our eyes, nor our soul by means of our eyes, see anything like this. He knows that when one sees oneself in a mirror it is oneself that one sees and not the image which I have already spoken of and which the Schools call *intentional species*, which are mere chimeras. Finally, he is well aware that, although the objects that we see form perfect enough images on the back of our eye, it is certain nonetheless that what our eyes see are not these small images painted on the retina, and that vision does not take place by means of these, but in another way, as Descartes shows in the *Dioptrics*.

It is certainly surprising that, knowing full well the falsity of everything that follows from these opinions, he is so persuaded by them that he takes them, without any hesitation, as the unassailable

of the gods exist? 'they are the same?'

foundation for all he has to say on the matter. For this is what happens in Book 3, Part II, entitled *On the Nature of Ideas*. It is clear from the title of the first chapter — *What is meant by ideas; that they really exist and are needed for the perception of objects* — what he seeks to show, and this is how he undertakes to establish his principles:

I believe, he says, that everyone agrees (it is as if someone were speaking who wanted everything judged by everyday prejudices) that we do not perceive objects which are outside of us by themselves. We see the sun, the stars, and an infinite number of objects outside of us, and it is not likely that the soul leaves the body and as it were strolls about the heavens in order to contemplate all these objects. Thus it does not see them by themselves, and the immediate object of our mind when it sees the sun, for example, is not the sun but something which is in immediate contact with our soul, and this is what I call an *idea*. Thus by the word *idea* I understand here nothing other than what is the immediate object, or what is closest to the mind, when it perceives something. It must be noted that if the mind is to perceive some object, it is absolutely necessary that the idea of the object itself be actually present to it. This is indubitable. [ST, 217]

This, Sir, is how he broaches the subject. He does not examine what he assumes to be indubitable, because belief in a commonplace should be accepted without investigation. He does not doubt that. He takes it as one of his first principles that one only needs to consider it briefly to put it beyond doubt. He does not put himself to the trouble of convincing us by proving it. It is sufficient to tell us that 'everyone agrees with it'.

Nevertheless, it is clear from what we know from the first chapter, namely that 'the idea of an object' is the same as 'the perception of that object', that he is presenting us with something completely different here. For it is no longer the perception of bodies that he calls an *idea*, but rather a particular representation of bodies which he claims is needed to make good the absence of any body that can be joined intimately to the soul, so that the representation is thereby the immediate object and what is closest to our mind when it perceives it. He does not say that it is in the mind or that it is a modification of it, which he would say if he had meant by it only the perception of the object, but only that it is 'the closest to the mind', because he regards this representation as being actually distinct from our mind as well as from the object.

This can be understood better in the following way. To say that the

soul and everything in it, such as its thoughts and modes of thinking, are understood without ideas is a manifest contradiction if, by 'idea of an object' one understands 'only the perception of that object'. For that would be to say that the soul perceives without perceiving and that it knows without knowing. Thus it is clear that he wishes to indicate by his statement that for the soul to know itself it has no need of a *representation* to compensate for something absent, since it is always present to itself.

I speak principally here of material things, which surely cannot be in contact with our soul in the way necessary for it to perceive them, because, since they are extended and the soul is not extended, there is no relation between them. Besides which, our souls do not leave the body in order to gauge the grandeur of the heavens, and consequently they can see external bodies only by means of the ideas which represent them, and with this everyone must agree. [ST, 219]

It would be impossible to speak more confidently if one were presenting the axioms of geometry. And he continues in the same tone:

Thus we maintain that it is absolutely necessary either (a) that the ideas that we have of body and or all other objects that we cannot perceive by themselves come from these bodies of these objects; or (b) that our soul has the power of producing these ideas; or (c) that God produced them in us when He created the soul, or produces them every time we think about an object; or (d) that the soul has in itself all the perfections that it sees in bodies; or finally (e) that it is joined to a wholly perfect being who contains all the perfections of created beings. [ST, 219]

If these alleged *representations* of body are not to be purely chimerical, I freely grant that they must be in our soul in one of these five ways. But as I am convinced that they are only chimeras, I am greatly astonished that our friend, who has destroyed so many other chimeras, should succumb to these.

The conclusion has the same air of confidence, but does contain some modest words which will be instructive for those who are convinced that nothing has been proposed which is not of the greatest clarity:

We can only conceive objects in one of two ways. Let us determine which is the more probable, without either prejudice or fear of the difficulty of the question. We can perhaps resolve the question clearly enough, even though we do not claim to provide demonstrations which everyone will find beyond

question, but only proofs which are very convincing at least to those who consider them seriously, for it would appear presumptuous to maintain otherwise. [ST, 219]

And I, Sir, am not afraid of appearing presumptuous in saying two things to you. This first is that since ideas taken as *representations* distinct from perceptions are completely unnecessary for our soul to see bodies, it is consequently completely unnecessary that they be in it in one of the five ways. Secondly, the least likely of the ways, and the one which explains least how our soul can see bodies, is the one which our friend prefers to the others.

Chapter 5

That it is possible to prove geometrically the falsity of *ideas* taken as *representations*. Definitions, axioms and questions serve as principles in these demonstrations.

I believe, Sir, that I can demonstrate to our friend the falsity of these *representations*, provided he is willing, in good faith, to go back to what he himself has said, on many occasions, should be observed if one wishes to discover the truth in metaphysics just as in the natural sciences; that is, one must take as true only what is clear and evident: and one must not make use of alleged *entities* of which we have no clear and distinct idea in order to explain the effects of nature, whether corporeal or spiritual. I shall try to prove this by the geometrical method.

Definitions

- (1) I call *soul* or *mind* the substance which thinks.
- (2) To *think*, to *know* and to *perceive* are the same thing.
- (3) I also take the *idea* of an object and the *perception* of that object to be the same thing. I leave to one side whether there are other things that can be called *ideas*. For it is certain that there are *ideas* in this sense, and that they are attributes or modifications of our mind.
- (4) I maintain that an object is present to our mind when our mind perceives and knows it. I leave open for the time being whether there is another sense in which an object is present to the mind,

namely that where the object must be present in a knowable state prior to our knowledge of it. But there can be no doubt that the sense in which I say an object is present to the mind when the mind knows it is one which cannot be questioned; and this is what leads us to say that a person we love is often present to our mind, because we think of them often.

(5) I maintain that a thing is objectively in my mind when I conceive it. When I conceive of the sun, a square or a sound, then the sun, the square or the sound are objectively in my mind, whether or not they are external to my mind.

(6) I have said that I take perception and idea to be the same thing. It must nevertheless be noted that, while this thing is single, it stands in a twofold relation, to the soul that it modifies, and to the thing perceived in so far as this latter is objectively in the soul, and the word 'perception' more directly refers to the former relation, the word 'idea' to the latter. Thus the perception of a square has as its most direct meaning my soul perceiving the square, whereas the idea of a square has as its most direct meaning the square in so far as it is objectively in my mind. This distinction is of great use in resolving many difficulties which are based on insufficiently understanding that it is not a question of two different entities, but rather a single modification of our soul which necessarily contains both these relations, for I cannot have a perception which is not the perception of my mind as a perceiving mind, and the perception of what it is that is perceived, and moreover nothing can be objectively in my mind (what I call the idea) which my mind does not perceive.

(7) In so far as I reject them as superfluous entities, I understand by representation only what is imagined to be really distinct from ideas taken as perceptions. I am not denying that there are representations or representative modalities, since I believe it is clear to whoever reflects on what occurs in his mind that all our perceptions are essentially representative modalities.

(8) To say that our ideas and our perceptions (taking these to be the same thing) represent to us the things that we conceive and that they are their images, is to say something completely different from saying that pictures represent their originals and are the images of them, or that spoken or written words are the images of our thoughts. For in the case of ideas we mean that the things we conceive are objectively in our mind and in our thought. And this way of being objectively in the mind is so peculiar to the mind and to

thought, since it is what specifically gives them their nature, that one seeks in vain anything similar outside the mind and thought. As I have already remarked, what has thrown the question of ideas into confusion is the attempt to explain the way in which objects are represented by our ideas by analogy with corporeal things, but there can be no real comparison between bodies and minds on this question.

(9) When I say that idea and perception are the same thing, I understand by perception everything my mind conceives, whether this be in its first awareness of things, or the judgements that it makes about them, or what it discovers about them through reasoning. Thus, although there are an infinite number of figures whose nature I know only after lengthy reasoning, when I have engaged in this reasoning I do not hesitate to count the idea I have of these figures as being as true as the idea I have of a circle or a triangle, which I can conceive straight away. And, although it is perhaps only by reasoning that I am completely certain that there really exist outside my mind an earth, a sun and stars, the idea which represents to me the earth, the sun and the stars as actually existing outside my mind merits being called an idea no less than if I had it without any need for reasoning.

(10) There is yet another equivocation that needs disentangling. We must not confuse the idea of an object with that object conceived, at least as long as one does not add 'insofar as it is objectively in the mind'. For being conceived, in regard to the sun that is in the sky, is only an extrinsic denomination, i.e. only a relation to the perception which I have of it. This is not what should be understood when one says that the idea of the sun is the sun itself, in so far as it is in my mind. To say that something is objectively in the mind does not just mean that it is the object which my thought is about, but that it is in my mind intelligibly, as is customary for objects which are in my mind. And the idea of the sun is the sun, in so far as it is in my mind, not formally as it is in the sky, but objectively, i.e. in the way in which objects are in our thought, which is a way of being much more imperfect than that by which the sun actually exists, but which nevertheless is not such that it derives from nothing or needs no cause.

(11) When I say that the soul does this or that, and that it has the faculty of doing this or that, I understand by the word 'do' the perception that it has of objects, which is one of its modifications. I

am not concerned with the efficient cause of this modification, with whether God provides it or whether the soul provides its own, for this does not bear upon the nature of ideas, only upon their origin, and these are quite different questions.

(12) I call a faculty the power that I know with certainty that a thing has, whether it be spiritual or corporeal, acting or acted upon, or existing in such-and-such a way, i.e. having such-and-such a modification. Power = power to be made feel a way - F. (power to make)

(13) And when this faculty is indubitably a property of the nature of this thing, I then say that it has it from the author of its nature, who can only be God.

Axioms

(1) If one claims to know things scientifically, one should take as true only those things that one can conceive clearly.

(2) Nothing should cause us to doubt whatever we know with complete certainty, whatever difficulties are put forward against it.

(3) It is a manifest confusion of the mind to wish to explain what is clear and certain by obscure and uncertain things.

(4) One should reject as fictitious those entities of which one does not have a clear idea and which one knows to have been invented solely in order to explain things which are considered inexplicable without them. causes?

(5) This is even more beyond dispute when they can be explained properly without these entities invented by the new philosophers.

(6) Nothing is more certain for us than the knowledge we have of what occurs in our soul, when we restrict ourselves to this. I am very certain, for example, that I conceive of body when I believe I do, although I cannot be certain that the body I conceive really exists or is as I conceive it.

(7) It is certain, whether by reason, supposing that God is not a deceiver, or at least by faith, that I have a body and that the earth, the sun, the moon and many other bodies that I know exist outside my mind actually do exist outside my mind. causes

(8) The act necessarily presupposes the power, i.e. it is certain that what does something (taking the word 'do' broadly as in Def. 11) has the power to do it, and hence that it has this faculty as defined in Def. 12. power

Examples of knowledge of existence

Questions

I ask that everyone reflect seriously on what occurs in his mind when he knows various things, by considering everything that he notices in the one simple thought, without reasoning or otherwise seeking comparisons with corporeal things, and in only stopping himself when he comes to something so certain that it cannot be doubted.

And if you cannot do this by yourself, I ask that you follow me and examine in good faith whether what I maintain is clear to me will not also be clear and certain for you.

(1) I am sure that I exist because I think, and thus that I am a substance that thinks. of matter

(2) I am more certain that I exist than I am that I have a body, or that there are other bodies. For I can doubt that there are bodies, whereas I cannot doubt in the same way that I exist. propensity

(3) I can conceive of perfect being, being itself, universal being. Thus I cannot doubt that I have an idea of it, taking 'the idea of an object' as 'the perception of an object', following Def. 3.

(4) I am sure that I conceive of bodies when I can doubt whether any exist, for it is enough that I know them as possible. And when I take a body to exist which does not exist, I am mistaken, but it is no less the case that this body will be objectively in my mind even though it does not exist outside my body, and thus I will know it in the way described in Def. 4.

(5) When my senses cannot assure me of the existence of external things, reason will convince me, by adding the fact that God is not a deceiver. And if I cannot be entirely assured by reason, I can at least be assured by faith (I say this so as to give the matter the greatest certainty, even for the author of *The Search after Truth*). Hence to me, since I have faith as well as reason, it is very certain that when I see the earth, the sun, the stars, and people who converse with me, these are not imaginary bodies or people that I see, but the works of God, and they really are men whom God has created just as He has created me. And it does not matter to me that among thousands of these objects there may be some which exist only in my mind. It is sufficient for my point that, wherever my certainty comes from, whether from reason or from faith, the bodies that I believe I see are as a rule actual bodies that exist outside me.

(6) I am no less certain that I know an infinite number of objects in general, and not only in particular, such as the even numbers in

Knowledge of all sorts of numbers, follows by reason (in case of ideas directly). Abstract ideas well examples

general, which are infinite, or the square numbers in general, and so on for the others. The same holds for bodies, for I know with certainty a cube in general, a cylinder and a pyramid, even though there are infinitely many different sizes of each of these types of body.

(7) It is also beyond doubt that I know things in two ways, either by seeing them directly or by explicit reflection, as when I reflect upon the idea or the knowledge that I have of a thing and examine it with more attention in order to determine what is contained in that idea, taken in the sense of Def. 3.

If I had a little Erastus, I would interrogate him as is done so ingeniously in the *Christian Conversations*,⁴ and I am sure that he would answer me on all those things of which he is completely confident. If, on the other hand, I were to ask him whether, in addition to everything else, one must accept these other ideas, these *representations*, etc., I am no less sure that he would say to me that he knows nothing of them, that he has nothing to say about them, and that he only gives answers concerning things of which he has a clear conception, which he does not have in the case of *representations*. And as for the author of *The Search after Truth*, I would consider that I had done him an injustice if I had the slightest doubt that he would not recognise, in good faith, that there is nothing here which is not very certain.

But I have still to explain other terms and expressions which I said nothing about in the *Definitions*, because it seemed to me that they called for more discussion if they were to be understood properly and if difficulties due to mere equivocation, which have still not been disentangled, were to be forestalled. I turn to this matter now.

Chapter 6

An explanation of some expressions: 'We do not see things immediately'; 'It is the ideas of them which are the immediate object of our thought'; and, 'It is in the idea of each thing that we see its properties.'

At first sight it would appear that the following expressions — 'We do not see things immediately', 'It is the ideas of them which are the immediate object of our thought' and 'It is in the idea of each thing

that we see its properties' — cannot be accepted as true without adhering to the philosophy of imaginary ideas. For it is difficult to understand how these ways of speaking can be correct if there is, over and above the objects that we know, nothing in our minds which represents these objects.

I do not reject these ways of speaking. I believe them to be acceptable if properly understood, and I can even accept the last implication. But I deny that it follows from this that one must allow ideas other than those which I have defined in the preceding chapter, Defs. 3, 6 and 7; these have nothing to do with *representations* distinct from perceptions, which is all I argue against, as I indicated specifically in Def. 7.

To understand this fully, two or three points must be made. The first is that our *thought* or *perception* is essentially *reflective* upon itself: or, as it is said rather better in Latin, *est sui conscia*. For I do not think without knowing that I think; I do not know a square without knowing that I know it; I do not see the sun or, to avoid any doubt, I do not imagine I see the sun, without being certain that I imagine I see it. I may not remember sometime later that I have seen it, but at the time I conceive it I know that I conceive it. See what St Augustine says on this in Ch. 10 of the tenth Book of *On The Trinity*.

The second point is that, as well as this implicit reflection which accompanies all our perceptions, there is also something explicit, which occurs when we examine our perception by means of another perception. This is easily shown and it occurs above all in the sciences, which are constituted through the reflections men have made on their own perceptions, as when a geometer finds in examining his perception of a triangle that, having conceived it as a figure bounded by three straight lines, it must have three angles, and that these three angles are equal to two right angles.

There is nothing in these two points that can reasonably be contested. Combining them with what we said in Defs. 3, 6 and 7, it follows that, since every perception necessarily represents something and for this reason is called an *idea*, it cannot be essentially reflective upon itself and its immediate object is not this *idea*, i.e. the *objective reality* of the thing that my mind is said to perceive. For example, if I think of the sun, the objective reality of the sun, which is present to my mind, is the immediate object of this perception; and the possible or existing sun, which is outside my mind, is so to speak its mediate object. It is clear from this that, without invoking *representations* distinct

joined to my soul, and hence that it exists.

I shall look at this in more detail below. For the moment, my only conclusion is that I need recognise no ideas other than those which I have defined as not being different from perceptions if I am to recognise the truth of the expression 'we do not see things immediately' and 'it is our ideas that are the immediate objects of our thoughts'. It is also clear from this what must be understood when it is said that 'it is in the idea of each thing that one perceives its properties', and nothing could be more useless in this context than representations distinct from perceptions, supposedly needed for our minds to conceive of number and extension.

In clarifying this I believe I can do no better than offer an example in which I assume nothing which anyone would not recognise as occurring in his own mind, provided his attention does not wander and he is not distracted by wondering how something occurs in him which he cannot doubt occurs.

The philosopher Thales, having to pay twenty workers one drachma each, counted twenty drachmas and paid each worker. He would not have been able to do this unless there were at least two perceptions in his mind: one of twenty men and one of twenty drachmas. And I remind you for the last time that *idea* and *perception* are the same thing in my dictionary, and thus that, when I make use of the expression 'idea' and 'idea of an object', I understand by this the *perception of an object*.

Having some spare time he began to reflect, and thinking about what the two perceptions or ideas have in common, namely that there is 20 in both, he abstracts from what is particular in them the abstract idea of the number 20, which can subsequently be applied to twenty horses, twenty houses, twenty stadiums. This is a third idea or perception.

He then takes it into his head to reflect on this abstract idea of the number 20, i.e. he considers it with greater attention, with a reflective vision that is one of the most admirable faculties of the mind. And the first thing that he discovers is that it can be divided into two equal halves, for he easily sees that if he puts 10 on one side and 10 on the other this makes 20. And he sees at the same time that if he adds 1 to 20, the number 21 cannot be divided into two equal parts, because the closest one can get to an equal division is to put 10 on one side and 11 on the other. This leads him to judge that we may usefully employ different words to designate numbers that can be divided

into equal halves and those that cannot, calling these *even* and *odd* respectively. Then, still considering what is contained in this idea or perception of the number 20, he asks what its factors are, i.e. what numbers taken together make exactly 20. He begins with *unity*, and sees immediately that unity must be one of the factors, since 1 taken twenty times makes 20. From this it is easy to derive the general rule that 1 is the factor of all numbers, since it is its own factor, 1 being 1, and all of the other numbers are only definite multitudes of 1s.

Next he takes 2, and finds that 2 is a factor of 20, for in counting in 2s — 2, 4, 6, etc. — he arrives at exactly 20. He takes 3 and discovers that this is not a factor of 20, for counting in 3s — 3, 6, 9, 12, etc. — he finds that after having done this six times he arrives at 18, after which there is only 2 left before 20. Then he takes 4 and finds that it is a factor of 20, because 4 taken five times is exactly 20. He finds the same for 5, for 5 taken four times is exactly 20. He next finds that neither 6, 7, 8 or 9 can be factors of 20, for the same reason as he found 3 not to be. But 10 is a factor because 10 taken twice is 20. Neither 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 nor 19 can make exactly 20, when taken any number of times, so they cannot be a factor of it. But 20 can be a factor because 20 taken once is 20. From this various reflections follow:

First, because there can be numbers having no other factor than unity and themselves, it is a good idea to give them a name which distinguishes them from the others, and they can be called *prime numbers*.

Second, all the even numbers, since they are divisible into two equal parts, have 2 as a factor.

Third, 2 is the only even number which is *prime* because it alone of all the even numbers has only unity and itself as a factor.

There is no need to continue the list. Here are my thoughts on what I have said. First, I have not presupposed any representations, only that this philosopher has, first of all, two direct perceptions of twenty men and twenty drachmas, without troubling how he comes by these, for I am happy to allow, if you wish, that it is God who has given them to him on the occasion of corporeal motions which occur in his sense organs and his brain. However this may be, and whatever opinion one holds on the matter, it cannot be denied that he has these two perceptions, since it is granted that he perceives, that he is acquainted with these twenty men and twenty drachmas, and that it is not at the same time possible that he does not see, that he is not

acquainted with these twenty men and twenty drachmas, provided he has these two perceptions, however he has them, for this is something which has to do not with the *nature* of his ideas but their origin.

Secondly, once these two *perceptions* which I call *ideas* are granted, it is undeniable that the mind has the faculty of doing everything which this philosopher does, for it is an everyday occurrence, and thus we are assured that we can do it *certissima scientia et clamante conscientia* [by a very certain science and with a cry from our conscience], as St Augustine puts it. Strictly speaking, it is this that should be called 'seeing the properties of things in their ideas': seeing in the idea of extension that it must be divisible and movable, seeing in the idea of mind that it must be a substance completely distinct from extended substance, seeing in the idea of God, i.e. in the idea of a perfect Being, that He must necessarily exist, seeing in the idea of a triangle that its three angles must necessarily be equal to two right angles. For this, one need not know that our mind has the power of reflecting on its own thoughts or, once the object has been perceived, that it can consider it more attentively.

This is undeniable, and all the sciences depend on it, especially the more abstract ones such as metaphysics, geometry, arithmetic and algebra. For in these all one does is to conceive the simplest objects clearly and distinctly, and use these in forming definitions. By relating these simple objects in the most straightforward way, axioms are formed. And from these simple reflections on our basic knowledge (and not on some imaginary *representations*), one draws this wonderful series of conclusions, which, by their obviousness, force all reasonable minds to yield to them, because of this single principle: that everything that is contained in the true idea of a thing (i.e. in the clear perception that we have of it) can be truthfully asserted. And it must be God who has given us an unshakable inclination to assent to this, and to take it as the foundation of all human certainty. For those who say that they disagree with it cannot really do so, for it would seem that the sciences in which one applies oneself solely to examining these ideas, i.e. the natural perceptions which we have of things, and to penetrating the content of these ideas, sciences such as arithmetic, algebra and geometry, are considered by everyone to be indubitable.

But my principal aim in this chapter being to undo the equivocation in the word 'immediately', I declare here that if, by conceiving

of the sun, a square or a cubed number *immediately* one understands this to be the opposite of conceiving them by means of ideas, such as I have defined these in the last chapter, i.e. as the same things as perceptions, then I agree we do not see them *immediately*, for nothing could be clearer than that we only see, perceive or know them by means of the perceptions that we have of them, in whatever way it is that we have these. But it is clear also that this is no less true of the manner in which we conceive of God and our soul than it is of our manner of perceiving material things. But if by not knowing them *immediately* one understands only the ability to know them through representations distinct from perceptions, I maintain that, in this sense, it is not only mediately but also immediately that we know not only God and our soul but material things also. That is to say, we can know them without any intermediary between our perceptions and the object, and I say 'our perceptions' here because I acknowledge that we often need reflective perception as well as direct perception in order to know them properly.

If the above is granted then I can, I believe, show the falsity of the hypothesis of *representations*, for to show this I need only do two things. The first is to demonstrate clearly and evidently that none of the principles and demonstrations on which this edifice of ideas has been built have solid foundations. The second is to show that, in order to know those things that God has wished us to know, we have no need of representations distinct from perceptions. This will, I hope, be clear from the following demonstration.

Chapter 7

Arguments against ideas construed as *representations* distinct from perceptions.

Propositions to be proved

In its knowledge of material things our soul does not need *representations* distinct from perceptions which, it is claimed, are necessary to compensate for the absence of everything which cannot itself be united to our soul.

the painting of it that he needs to produce could not resemble this unknown animal, so a man could not limit intelligible extension in the way needed for it to be the idea of the shape he wishes to know — e.g. the shape a lens must have if it is to magnify objects — if he did not already know this shape, i.e. if he did not already have the idea of it. And if he already has the idea of it, he knows this object and there is no use in his forming another idea of it in this *infinite intelligible extension*.

He puts forward an objection to this, and his reply to it is the same as that which we should make to him when he puts forwards its counterpart:

It might be said that the mind has general and confused ideas which it does not produce, and that those which it does produce are clearer and more distinct individual ideas. But this amounts to the same thing, for just as the artist cannot draw the portrait of a particular man in such a way that he could be certain of having succeeded unless he had a distinct idea of that particular man, and indeed unless the man were there, so the mind that has, for example, only the idea of being, or animal in general, cannot represent a horse to itself, or form a very distinct idea of it, or be sure that it resembles a horse perfectly, unless it already has a prior idea with which it compares the second. Now if it has a prior idea, it is useless to form a second one, and therefore the same objection applies for the first idea . . . and so on. [ST, 223–4]

It is easy to see that the same thing can be said in reply to him: ‘for, just as a painter’ . . . and so on. Thus the mind, which only has the idea of a shape in general, could not limit intelligible extension in the way which would be required if it were to find there the idea of the shape of a lens designed to magnify objects, and be assured that this idea perfectly resembles what it seeks, unless it already has a prior idea of this shape with which to compare the second. Now if it has the prior idea, it is useless to seek a second in intelligible extension.

I would be very surprised, Sir, if someone could show me that what he says against his adversaries is conclusive but that what I say, following his example, is not even more conclusive against him.

Chapter 16

That what our author makes our mind do in order to discover its ideas in his *infinite intelligible extension* is contrary to experience and to the general laws that God has laid down for Himself in order to provide us with knowledge of His works.

We have seen in Chapter 14 that this *infinite intelligible extension* is, as Malebranche portrays it, completely unintelligible, and that it is nothing more than a mass of contradictions, and in Chapter 15 that, if it is understood as *he* wants to understand it, then the mind cannot discover in it the ideas of things that it does not know but needs to know. To overthrow this new philosophy of ideas completely, it only remains for me to show that even if what he makes our mind do, in order for it to be able to discover its ideas in this *infinite intelligible extension*, could enable it to discover them there (which it can't, as we have just shown), we should still reject everything he says on the matter as chimerical because it is clearly contrary to what we know with certainty to occur in our mind, and to the general laws God has laid down for Himself in order to provide us with knowledge of His works.

Two considerations suffice to show this. The first is that Malebranche does not undertake to explain how our mind could see bodies in some extraordinary case such as that where we make the fantastic assumption that God has not created them and that they remain only possible. His aim has been rather to explain the common and ordinary way in which our mind actually sees the bodies that God has created, failing which it would be impossible for it to see them. Now when one has an aim like this, it isn't enough to talk of purely possible things and to pretend to subtlety by inventing imaginary systems. One must be careful above all to assume nothing contrary to what is certainly the case, as nothing is more liable to lead to the rejection of these ingenious reflections than our being able to say: you torment yourself in vain trying to teach me how I do such a thing, since I am convinced by incontrovertible experience that I do not do it but the exact opposite.

The second consideration is that, when it is a case not of some extraordinary and irrelevant effect but of a common, natural, ordinary effect which is a consequence of what God has willed to happen in the world, according to the laws that He has established, one must

not imagine that it is enough to have shown (according to what we believe) that God is its creator to claim that it depends on His will to such an extent that one only has to suppose that He does this for no reason other than that He wishes it, without our needing to look for any other reason for it. Malebranche does not deny this for it is his first great maxim, one he sometimes takes further than he should, but which is incontestable when God acts according to the ordinary course of nature. What is at issue here is not what God does in the extraordinary and supernatural illuminating acts of grace, but what he does in respect to our more ordinary and natural perceptions of the most common objects.

These perceptions are of two kinds, according to the first chapter of Book 1 of *The Search after Truth*. The first represent to us something outside of us, such as a square or a house, etc. The second only represent to us what occurs in us, such as our sensations of light, of colours, and of sound. I will begin with the latter.

He wants God to be responsible for these, and we both agree about this. But it is necessary on his part that he acknowledge, as he does, that God does not bring them about in our soul haphazardly, but that He produces them only in a well-regulated way according to the intention He had when He joined our soul to our body. For, restricting ourselves to light and colours, he teaches, following Descartes, 'that the sensations of light and colours are only necessary in order that we might know objects more distinctly, and this is why our senses lead us to attribute them only to objects.' From this he concludes 'that the judgements to which our sense impressions lead us are quite correct if they are considered in relation to the preservation of the body' [ST, 60]

In the next chapter he adds that:

the reason why all sensations cannot be explained like other things, with words, is that attaching the ideas of things to such words as they please depends on men's will. But these same men do not attach their sensations to words, or to anything else, at will. They do not see colours, no matter how much one talks to them about them, unless they open their eyes. They do not taste flavours unless some change takes place in the arrangement of fibres in their tongue and brain. In short, some sensations do not depend upon the will of man, and only He who has made them keeps them in this mutual correspondance of modifications in their soul and body. [ST, 62]

Two things follow from this: first, that God only causes these

sensations in our soul when some change occurs in the sense organs; second, that the function of these sensations, and above all those of light and colours, is only to enable us to know the bodies around us more distinctly for our own bodily self-preservation, and that this is why it is well for our soul to attribute them to bodies and to represent to itself the one as light and the others as coloured in such-and-such a way, according as the corpuscles which are reflected from these objects strike the fibres of the optic nerve differently and set them in motion in different ways. This is the common, ordinary way in which God causes these sensations in us.

But because Malebranche tries too hard to show that the ideas of all bodies that we see are in his *infinite intelligible extension* it makes him forget all these truths, which he had previously explained so well, so as to be able to persuade us that when our soul sees a block of white marble it does not see a square shape in this block, but it contemplates a part of infinite intelligible extension and conceives of it as limited in the appropriate way so as to have this shape, and also that it does not attach the sensation of the colour white to this marble, as we have believed up to now that it should on the basis of what the creator of the union of body and soul has instituted, but that it attaches it to some part or other of this same intelligible extension. I say 'some part or other' because this is what he teaches when he says that:

In order for us to be able to see the intelligible sun sometimes large and sometimes small it is enough that we see at one time a great part of intelligible extension and at another time a smaller part, and that we have a vivid sensation of light to attach to this extension. Therefore, as all the parts of this intelligible extension are of the same nature, all of them can represent any body whatever.

One example will suffice to show that one cannot more directly contradict the institution of the Author of Nature. I sell three different kinds of marble at different prices, because they are different colours: one is white, the other black, and the third mottled. Now in saying that these three different colours are only strictly speaking in my mind and not in the marble, it must not be imagined that there is nothing in any of them which causes it to appear to me to be of one colour rather than another. This is surely due to a different arrangement of the small parts of their surface, which is responsible for the corpuscles which are reflected from the marble towards our

eyes stimulating the fibres of the optic nerve in different ways. But because our soul would find it too difficult to discern the difference in these stimulations, which is only one of degree, God has decided in this respect to give us the means to discern them more easily by those sensations of different colours, which He has willed be caused in our soul on the occasion of these various stimulations of the optic nerve, just as tapestry workers have a pattern, which they call a 'rough pattern', where the various shades of the same colour are indicated by completely different colours, so that they are less liable to mistake them.

But God's plan would be overturned if, on the pretext that none of these types of marbles is strictly white, or black, or mottled, the colours being only modifications of my soul, I could attach any colour I wish to them. For in that case the colours, far from enabling me to distinguish them, would only serve to confuse them. This is why God has not made it depend on my free will, and I am convinced of this by experience for I cannot freely ascribe the colour white to the marble that appears to me black, or black to that which appears to me white or mottled. This is not at all a choice I have, for I cannot prevent myself from attaching and applying, so to speak, white to the marble which strikes the organs of sight in a way which, according to the law that God has laid down for Himself, must be the cause of my soul having the sensation of whiteness.

We can be sure that Malebranche would contest none of this. Hence he must have given up what he knew best when, having to defend his new philosophy of ideas at any price, he finds himself reduced to attributing to our soul the illusory power to attach the sensation of green, red, blue, or any colour it likes to any part whatever of *intelligible extension*, which he cannot even claim has caused some motion in the organ of vision.

The way in which we perceive a body according to its size and shape is no less contrary to the claim he makes that, in order to have this perception, I must look for its idea in *infinite intelligible extension*. For in regard to individual bodies, this perception still necessarily depends on what occurs in our sense organs, there being no one who does not know that our soul usually perceives bodies as larger or smaller according as the images portrayed on the back of the eye are larger or smaller. It is not that these images cause our perceptions, but rather that, according to the institution of the Author of Nature, they are invariably formed in our mind when objects strike our

senses and depending on how they strike them, whether it be God who causes these in us, together with perceptions of sensible qualities, or whether He has given our soul the faculty of producing them by itself, which falls under a completely different question from the one I am considering here. This being the case, and it cannot be doubted that it is, is it not evident that it is a pure fantasy, contrary to this institution of nature, not to maintain that but to want our soul to be able to have these perceptions only by applying itself to an *infinite intelligible extension*, in which it is forced to seek the ideas of the shapes of bodies that we think we see and which, according to this new philosophy of ideas, we do not see?

As for abstract shapes, which are the object of geometry, it is well known that those that are somewhat complex, and especially curvilinear ones, are not usually known at a glance, and we must consider the motions that generate them, and a long series of arguments is often necessary in order to know their principal properties: without these one cannot say, above all according to Malebranche, that one has a clear idea of them. Now is this at all like the alleged way of having the idea of them by going to find them in an *infinite intelligible extension* where they can only be found if one has put them there?

But the way Malebranche has found of reconciling his doctrine of ideas on this point with his other doctrine that God acts as a universal cause, whose general volitions must be directed to each effect by what he calls *occasional causes*, is even more inconsistent with our experience; for the occasional cause, which he believes is responsible for God giving each individual idea to us, is our desire for it. This is what he indicates in the *Second Elucidation*:

It should not be imagined that the will orders the understanding in any other way than by its desires and impulses, for the will acts in no other way. And the understanding should not be taken to obey the will by producing in itself the ideas of things that the soul desires, for the understanding does not act: it only receives illumination or ideas of things through the necessary union it has with Him who contains all beings in an intelligible fashion, as has been explained in the third Book. Here, then, is the whole mystery: man participates in sovereign reason, and the truth is revealed to him to the extent that he attends to it and beseeches it. Now the soul's desire is a natural prayer that never goes ungranted, for it is a law of nature that ideas are all the more present to the mind as the will desires them more fervently. [ST, 559]

It would be nice if this were true. But it is so contrary to experience that I cannot understand how someone can venture to put forward such things without first deliberating; and if one had done this one would not fail to recognise that there are many objects that displease us and that we do not want to see, the ideas of which we cannot help being forcefully present to our mind, and that we suffer painfully the troublesome representations that, far from desiring, we very much wish not to see.

But it is even more obvious that, in regard to the essences of things, and to extension and number, to which he sometimes limits what we can see in God, one cannot truthfully say that 'it is a law of nature that ideas are all the more present to the mind as the will desires them more fervently'. I only know in a confused way what a parabola is; I very much desire to have a clearer and more distinct idea of it, which would enable me to know its properties, and I am sure that if I only desire this, with however much fervour one likes, I will not experience what I am told with great confidence: 'that the desire of the soul that wishes to have the idea of an object is a natural prayer which never goes ungranted, and that experience teaches us that the idea of what we have desired to know is all the more present and clear as our desire is stronger'. For inasmuch as experience teaches me anything about this it surely teaches me exactly the opposite.

It is the same with numbers. I have very much desired for many years, with all possible fervour, to know the year of the *Julian period*, which I spoke of in the last chapter, which has as its three characteristics 5, 6 and 7. We can suppose as much as we like *that God is the author of our ideas*, but it is certain that I will find myself to be mistaken if I expect that my desire for it will be the occasional cause which will determine God to make the idea of this number present to my mind. But if, in order to find it, I use the method described in one of the *Journaux des Savants*,¹⁶ I forget what year, then whether one's desire to know it is small or great, it will be the search carried out by this method that could be called 'a natural prayer which never goes ungranted'. Nevertheless, we are assured that the desire is this 'natural prayer that never goes ungranted', for in addition to what I have already quoted, a little further on it is stated that:

Whenever we wish to think about some object the idea of that object is present to us, and, as experience teaches us, this idea is clearer and more immediate as our desire is stronger . . . Thus when I said that the will orders the understanding to present some particular object to it, I only meant to say

that the soul that wishes to consider this object carefully draws close to it through its desire because this desire, as a result of the efficacious wishes of God, which are inviolable laws of nature, is the cause of the presence and of the clarity of the idea representing the object. I could not have spoken in any other way, nor could I have explained myself as I am now doing, for I had not yet proved that God alone is the author of our ideas, and that our particular volitions are the occasional causes of it. [ST, 559]

It is difficult enough for two people to agree when each of them bases himself on contrary experiences. I fancy nevertheless that it will not be difficult to judge which of our two experiences conforms most to those of other men. I have, moreover, just found a passage in our friend which I cannot see how to reconcile with the maxim of the *Elucidations* that 'whenever we wish to think of some object the idea of that object is present to us', for I do not know if a proposition more directly contrary to this can be found than the following: 'It is absolutely false, in the state that we are in, that the ideas of things are present to our mind every time we wish to consider them' [ST, 249].

Chapter 17

Another discrepancy: the author says sometimes that we see God in seeing creatures in God, and at other times that we do not see Him but only His creatures.

Another discrepancy in this author, which I have touched on in passing but which I have not looked at sufficiently is that he says first that we see God in seeing material things and then that we do not see Him but only material things.

He says we see Him at [ST, 232] and he even claims that God could not have made things otherwise, by a strange argument which he calls a demonstration:

The last proof, which will perhaps be demonstrative for those accustomed to abstract reasoning, is this: It is impossible that God have any special end for His actions other than Himself, and thus it is necessary not only that our natural love – I mean the impulse that He produces in our mind – tends towards Him, but also that the knowledge and light He gives it must reveal to us something in Him, for everything that comes from God can be only for God. If God made a mind and gave it the sun as an idea or immediate object of knowledge, it seems to me that He would have made this mind and its idea

this, as I have already noted, is that he has suddenly lost sight of 'ideas' taken as 'perceptions', and has carelessly substituted for this word his bizarre notion of *representations*, which he imagines to be like pictures and images which our mind must envisage before it forms perceptions. We can give some meaning to his statement that 'one cannot perceive the idea of an infinitely perfect Being by something created' by substituting the word 'representation' for the word *idea*, since it is clearly difficult to conceive how one could have a *representation distinct* from God if this is like a picture or image which our mind must contemplate before it can form a perception of the infinitely perfect Being. This is all one can say in mitigation of this proposition, which would be a very dangerous one if the word 'idea' were taken in the same sense at the beginning and at the end of the sentence. For if we take it in the same sense at the end as at the beginning, it would be necessary either that the perception we have of God not be a mode or attribute of our mind but something uncreated, which is inconceivable, or that we have no perception of God, which would completely destroy the proof of His existence from our idea of the infinite, and which is completely inconsistent with his statement that it is the best proof of it.

And in fact we see that all those critics of Descartes who have disagreed on the soundness of his proofs of the existence of God from the idea of a perfect Being, always stubbornly deny that we have any idea of God. One of the objections in Gassendi's large book of *Instances*²⁰ is that *omnes homines Dei in se ideam non animadvertunt* – it is not true that all men can find the idea of God in themselves. Descartes replies that:

If we take the word 'idea' in the way I took it in my demonstrations, as the perception we have of an object, no-one can deny that he has in himself the idea of God, at least so long as he does not say that he does not understand the meaning of the phrase 'the most perfect thing which we can conceive of', for this is what everyone understands by the word 'God'. Now to say that one does not understand words as clear as these is to prefer to go to extreme lengths rather than admit that one had been wrong in rejecting another's view. To which I may add that one can hardly imagine a more impious confession than that of a man who says that he has no idea of God in the sense in which I take the word 'idea'; for this is to profess not to know Him either by natural reason, or by faith, or in any other way at all; since if we have no perception which corresponds to the meaning of the word 'God', then there is no difference between saying that God exists and saying that

one believes that nothing exists. [CSM II, 273]

And in the same passage he adds something which may serve as a reply to Malebranche's claim – 'that nothing created can represent infinite Being' – for these philosophers insisted that *we would understand God if we had a clear idea of Him*. Descartes replies that:

this objection is baseless. Since the word 'understand' implies some limitation, it is impossible for a finite mind to understand God, who is infinite. But that does not prevent one being able to have an idea of the infinite, i.e. a perception of it; just as one can touch a mountain without being able to put one's arms around it. [CSM II, 273–4]

And Malebranche also recognises this, in the passage I have looked at, where he says that 'it is given that the mind perceives the infinite, even though it does not understand it'.

I believe that even Malebranche will not be able to find anything more plausible to reconcile the different things he says about the idea of God, whether allowing it or denying it. But I hope that he will himself conclude from this that it would have been better to have taken the notion in the way Descartes proposed, which is the only clear and distinct sense it can have, rather than to have formed a new sense which we have shown throughout this treatise is based merely on a false assumption that he shares with the scholastics, but which is fraught with many greater absurdities because he pushes it further than they did.

Chapter 27

On the origin of ideas. There is no reason to believe that our soul is purely passive in regard to all its perceptions, and it is more likely that it has received the faculty of forming many of them from God.

There is nothing of which one should take more care, in dealing with a scientific matter, than to avoid the muddle and confusion which results from running together different questions. This has required me to distinguish, in a number of places in this treatise, between what concerns the nature of ideas and what concerns their origin, and to put off dealing with the latter point until the end.

But to clarify things and anticipate objections which are not relevant, I must point out two things. The first is that I take the word

idea to mean 'perception', in the same way as the author of *The Search after Truth* does in the first Chapter of his work. The second is that we are concerned here only with purely natural knowledge, and not with the way in which the Holy Ghost illuminates us in the order of grace.

Given this, the question is to determine whether all our ideas or perceptions come from God, or whether there can be some which we provide ourselves.

Malebranche is of the former opinion in *The Search after Truth*, and he advances it with great zeal in many places in his book. He assumes from the beginning:

that the first and principal agreement found between the faculty that matter has of receiving different *shapes* and *configurations*, and that which the soul has of receiving different *ideas* and *modifications* is that, just as the faculty of receiving different shapes and configurations in bodies is entirely passive and involves no action, so the faculty of receiving different ideas and modifications in the mind is entirely passive and involves no action. [ST, 3]

And this is how he distinguishes the understanding, i.e. that faculty which can receive many perceptions, and the will, i.e. that faculty which can receive many inclinations, by the fact that the latter is not purely passive as the former is:

For just as the Author of Nature is the universal cause of all the *motions* which occur in matter, so too is He the general cause of all the natural *inclinations* which occur in minds . . . But there is a very significant difference between the impression of motion that the Author of Nature produces in matter and the impression of motion towards the general good that the same Author of Nature continually impresses in the mind. For matter is altogether without action; it can exert no force to arrest its motion or to direct it and turn it in one direction rather than another . . . But such is not the case with the will which can in one sense be said to be active, because it has within itself the force to direct in various ways the inclination or impression that God gives it. For although it cannot stop this impression, it can in a sense turn it in the direction that it wants, and thus cause all the disorder found in its inclinations. [ST, 4–5]

And this is what he says in the *Elucidations*: 'If it is maintained that to decide different things is to give oneself different modifications, then I agree that in this sense the mind can modify itself differently through the action that God puts into it' [ST, 551].

This is what he claims in respect to the will and its inclinations. But

as regards perceptions, he always maintains that our understanding does not act, and that all it does is to receive them from God. He repeats this in the *Second Elucidation*: 'It must not be thought that the understanding obeys the will by producing in itself the ideas of things that the soul desires. For the understanding does not act: it only receives illumination or the ideas of things' [ST, 559].

I do not claim to refute what he claims, in all these passages dealing with the origin of ideas taken as perceptions, in as convincing a way as, I believe, I have destroyed his teachings in the same book concerning the nature of ideas taken as *representations*. For there is a great difference between what can be taken exception to in each of these two kinds of views.

I shall content myself with showing that there is no good argument to show that our soul is purely passive in respect to all its perceptions, and that it is much more likely that it received the ability to form them from God. And in showing this I shall only make use of things which are agreed upon.

(1) I do not know why he appears to want only to acknowledge conditionally something which he cannot avoid acknowledging absolutely. 'If it is maintained', he says, 'that to will different things is to give oneself different modifications, then I agree that in this sense the mind can modify itself differently'. The 'if' here is completely otiose; for he agrees in this same passage that the inclinations of the soul, i.e. its volitions, are *modes of being* of the soul. And a *modification* is undeniably the same thing as a *mode of being*. Thus it is indisputable that if a soul can will different things (as is appropriate to it) by directing the impression it receives from God towards the general good however it pleases, it can also provide itself with different modifications. And this is what is established absolutely, without the 'if', in the *First Elucidation* in these terms:

I answer that faith, reason, and the inner sensation I have of myself force me to abandon the comparison of the soul with matter where I do. For I am completely convinced that I have within myself a principle of my determinations, and I have reasons for believing that matter has no comparable principle. [ST, 547]

He thus acknowledges that our soul can be given, and can in fact give itself, new modifications at almost every moment in respect to its determinations and volitions. And I maintain that by this admission he loses all means of showing what at the same time he wants to

show, namely that it can give itself no new modification in respect to its perceptions. For why would the soul be purely passive in respect to its perceptions and not in respect to its inclinations?

The reason cannot lie in the fact that it is a creature, as if it were impossible for creatures to perform any action and absolutely necessary that God perform them all, *the creature contributing nothing to it except passively*. For if that were the case, then since our soul is no less a creature in regard to its inclinations than in regard to its perceptions, it would have to be the case that it had no power to direct itself, which Malebranche declares to be contrary to faith and reason, and to the internal sensation we have of ourselves.

Nor could the comparison of the soul with matter make one believe that the faculty which our soul has of receiving different ideas must be completely passive, because the faculty which matter has of receiving different shapes is completely passive and contains no action. For since this comparison is wrong in regard to the faculty by which matter can be given different motions compared with the faculty that the soul has of receiving different inclinations, there is no necessary reason why it should be true in regard to shapes on the one hand and perceptions on the other. And conversely it is easy to use the comparison to show that the soul can be active in regard to its perceptions just as much as in regard to its inclinations.

For it should be noted that our soul and matter are two simple beings (i.e. they are not composed of two different natures, as man is) and above all the different faculties that we predicate of the soul are not actually distinct things but only the same reality considered in different ways. To allow, then, that the soul is active in respect of one of its faculties, namely the will, is to allow that it is active absolutely and by nature; and hence it is wrong to compare it with a simple being such as matter, which is by nature purely passive. Nothing, then, can be concluded from this comparison which should play no part in any reasonable demonstration.

I may even add that, if one is to conclude anything from this, it would be the opposite of what Malebranche concludes. For matter is unable to give itself different shapes only because it is unable to give itself different motions, since it is certain that it cannot give itself shape if it cannot move itself. Now inclinations are to the soul, according to Malebranche, what motions are to matter, so the power the soul has to give itself different inclinations should at least provide a probable argument that it also has the power to give itself different

perceptions; since if matter had the power to give itself motions, it would also have the power to give itself different shapes.

(II) Unless what is active in the soul is extended to cover not just its inclinations but its perceptions as well, I do not see how Malebranche can explain what he believes to be necessary if we are to be free. In this respect, we need only understand what he says in Book 1, Chapter 1:

The mind, in so far as it is thrust towards the good in general, cannot direct its impulse towards a particular good (which is what its freedom consists in), unless that same mind, insofar as it is capable of ideas, knows that particular good. By this I mean, in plain language, that the will is a blind power that can proceed only towards those things that the understanding represents to it. As a result, the will can direct its tendency towards the good and all its natural inclinations in various ways, only by ordering the understanding to represent some object to it. The power that the will has of directing its inclinations therefore necessarily includes the power of being able to convey the understanding towards the objects that please it. [ST, 5]

It would clearly follow from this that our mind, in order to act freely, can give itself new perceptions. This can be proved by the following demonstration.

According to Malebranche, the mind considered as being thrust towards the good in general can only direct its impulse towards the particular good, which is what its freedom consists in, through the power it has to do this; and it is because it is able to have ideas, i.e. perceptions, that it comes to know the particular good which it did not previously know.

It is impossible for our mind to come to know an object which it did not previously know, except through a perception that it did not previously have.

It follows from this, therefore, that the mind cannot be free on his account unless it has the power to give itself new perceptions as well as new inclinations.

I don't know if he believes he has been able to avoid this difficulty in what he says about this passage in the *Elucidations*:

It should not be imagined that the will orders the understanding in any way other than by its desires and its impulses. Nor should the understanding be taken to obey the will by producing in itself the ideas of the thing the soul desires. The whole mystery is that the desire that my soul has to know an object is a natural prayer which is always answered. And thus this desire, as a result of the efficacious decrees of God, is the cause of the presence of the

clarity of the idea representing the object. [ST, 559]

But he hasn't noticed that the only gain from this is to change the word 'order' to the word 'desire', which is of no help to him in extricating himself from the difficulty he is faced with in explaining the freedom of the will in the way he wants; for he has not retracted the general proposition that 'the mind, in so far as it is considered as being thrust towards the good in general (i.e. as the will), cannot direct its impulse towards a particular good (which is what freedom consists in) unless that same mind, in so far as it is capable of ideas, knows that particular good'. Nor has he retracted the consequence he draws from it, namely that

the power that the will has of directing its inclinations *therefore necessarily* includes the power of being able to convey the understanding towards the objects that please it, i.e. the power of being able to bring it about, through its desires and as a result of the efficacious decrees of God, that the understanding represent to it the objects which please it.

Now one can only maintain this by arguing in an endless circle. For he says in the same passage 'that the will is a blind power that can proceed only towards those things that the understanding represents to it'.

– Thus, in so far as an object pleases it, the understanding must represent that object to it.

– Thus in so far as it can desire the understanding to represent to it the objects that please it, the understanding must have represented them to it.

– Thus, it follows that what it wishes to be done must already have been done.

The same would hold if we removed the words 'which please it', which are perhaps only there inadvertently, from the proposition, and concentrated only on the desire that he supposes the soul must have to know the particular good that we will call *A*, if it is to be able to direct the impulse which God has given it towards the good in general towards this good *A*.

For the soul, in the form of the will, cannot desire to know the good *A* unless, in the form of the understanding, it has the perception of *A*, since the will, *being a blind power, can only convey itself to those objects that the understanding represents to it*. Hence it must have a perception of the good *A* in order to desire it. Now it is its desire that makes it have this, according to our friend, so it must have

what it desires to have if it is to be in a state in which it desires to have it.

Now suppose it is said that this perception of *A* which it already has is only an obscure perception of it contained in the desire, and that it wants a more perfect perception of it; this desire, on Malebranche's account, depends on us and is a modification which the soul can give itself, and hence the soul must be able to give itself what is essentially contained in this desire, and without which one could not say without manifest contradiction that it had the desire. Now this desire necessarily contains a perception, if only an imperfect one, of *A*, since it clearly would not be possible for me to have any will or desire in regard to *A* if I had no perception of it at all: *ignoti nulla cupido* [I desire nothing of which I am ignorant]. It is clear then that one cannot reasonably say that I give myself the desire to know *A*, and that my freedom consists in this, unless at the same time one recognises that I can give myself a perception of *A*.

Perhaps it will be said that this only shows that I must already have an obscure and confused perception of *A* before my soul can desire to know it more perfectly.

But how are we to understand this obscure and confused perception of the particular good I have called *A*? Is it an idea or a perception which represents *A* so confusedly that it could just as easily be representing to our soul the goods *B*, *C*, *D*, or an infinity of other particular goods to which my soul can direct the impulse it has from God towards the good in general; or does this idea, although called obscure and confused, only represent *A* to my soul?

If one maintains the former, it will follow that this idea will not give my soul the power to desire *A* any more than the power to desire *B*, *C*, *D*, and an infinity of other similar things, unless, out of this confusion, it chooses *A*. But it can only do this if it has a perception of *A* which is more distinct and less confused than those of the other goods, and consequently it would have to provide itself with this before it could desire to know *A* more perfectly.

If one maintains the latter, then either our soul would have to have all the infinitely many obscure and imperfect notions of each one of the particular goods together, in order to desire to know one rather than another of them more perfectly, or else its turning the impulse that it has from God towards the general good in the direction of whatever particular goods it wants would not depend on its freedom, but it would only be able to turn it towards the particular good of

which it already has an obscure idea. Otherwise we would have to explain how it comes about that God has given it, independently of its freedom, the obscure idea of one particular good rather than another, without our being able to connect this to its desires as the occasional causes that determined the general decrees of God, for this would lead to an infinite regress. Hence I cannot see that the way in which Malebranche has claimed to explain freedom can be sustained unless he recognises that our soul can provide itself with new modifications in respect to its ideas as well as in respect to its inclinations.

(III) I do not know whether I should respond to the arguments that he puts forward in Book 3, Part II, Chapter 3, to show that the soul does not have the *power to produce ideas*. For I have already noted on several occasions that in the third Book it is not *perceptions* but *representations* that he understands by the word 'idea'. I do not believe at all that our soul has the power to produce these *representations*; in my opinion they are only chimeras.

Nevertheless, if one wanted to apply these same arguments to perceptions, it would be very easy to see their weakness.

'No one', he says, 'can doubt that ideas are real beings, since they have real properties, they are different from one another, and they represent quite different things' [ST, 222]. And I agree, provided that by the word 'being' we understand 'modes of being' as well as substances.

'One cannot reasonably doubt that they are spiritual and are quite different from the bodies they represent' [ST, 222]. This again is true.

'And this seems sufficient to make one wonder whether the ideas by which bodies are seen are not more noble than the bodies themselves' [ST, 222]. This is true in one sense, because they are spiritual. But in another sense it is not true, because ideas taken as perceptions are only modes of being whereas bodies are substances.

'Thus, when it is claimed that men have the power to form such ideas as please them, one runs the risk of claiming that men have the power to create beings which are worthier and more perfect than the world God has created' [ST, 222]. I deny this inference; for ideas, taken as perceptions, are not 'beings' properly speaking, but only modes of being.

But even if it were true that ideas were only lesser and insignificant beings, they are still beings, and spiritual beings; and given that men do not have the

power of creation, it follows that they are unable to produce them: for the production of ideas in the way they explain is a genuine creation. [ST, 223]

I shall not go to the trouble of explaining in what way others explain the production of ideas, nor what they understand by the word 'ideas'. But taking ideas as *perceptions*, as one must if one is to speak precisely, and as Malebranche himself takes them at the beginning of his work, it is not correct to say that the soul would have to have the power to create them if it had the power to provide itself with some ideas, i.e. perceptions. For creation is the production of a substance: and one never says, if one is speaking exactly, that giving a new mode to a substance is *creating*. This is all right in figurative language, as when David asks God 'to create a new heart in him', or when St Paul says 'that we have been created in Jesus Christ in good works'. But speaking exactly and philosophically, creation, as I have said, is the creation of a substance, whereas our perceptions are not substances but only *modes of being* of our soul. Thus it is not true that the soul cannot provide itself with new perceptions unless it has the power to create.

And Malebranche must agree with this, for he cannot deny that our particular inclinations and volitions are *modes of being* of our soul any more than that our perceptions are. Now he agrees that our soul can give itself new modes in the case of its inclinations and volitions without it thereby having the power to create. It is therefore not necessary that it have the power to create in order to give itself new modes in the case of ideas.

(IV) It is enough for me to have shown that one has no grounds for believing that our soul, not being purely passive in regard to its inclinations, should be so in regard to its perceptions. This does not prevent us being able to say that our soul is perhaps active only in so far as it functions as a will, for it is perhaps only in willing that we are able to give ourselves different perceptions.

I could stop here, for I am not sufficiently enlightened to be able to determine which perceptions we necessarily receive from God and which our soul is able to provide itself with. I shall nevertheless say something about this, but only by proposing what seems to me most likely, without settling anything absolutely.

(1) There are grounds for believing that God, in creating the soul, gave it the idea of itself, and that it is perhaps this thought of itself that constitutes its essence; for as I have already said elsewhere,

nothing seems more essential to the soul than to have consciousness and inner sensation of itself, which the Romans more appropriately called *esse sui consciam* [knowing oneself].

(2) The same can be said of the idea of infinity, or of a perfect Being. It is inconceivable that we could have formed it ourselves, and we must get it from God. And provided Malebranche understands only *perception* by the word *idea*, I would have no difficulty agreeing with him when he says:

It is certain that the mind perceives the infinite though it does not understand it fully, and that it has a very distinct idea of God, which it can have only through its union with Him (i.e., as I understand him, it can only be derived from God). We even have the idea of the infinite before that of the finite, for we can conceive of infinite Being simply in conceiving of being, without considering whether it is finite or infinite. But in order to conceive of a finite being, something must necessarily be omitted from the general notion of being, which consequently must be prior to the former. [ST, 232]

But on this account, instead of his analogy between mind and matter, which he had to abandon half-way, he could have chosen a better one, between the will and the understanding, saying that just as God is content to give the will an impulse towards the good in general which it can direct through its different inclinations towards particular goods, He may have been satisfied to give the understanding the idea of infinite Being by giving it the power to form from this idea the ideas of finite beings. I do not say that I agree with this, only that it agrees well enough with his principles.

(3) It can hardly be doubted that it is God who gives us perceptions of light, sound and other sensible qualities, as well as perceptions of sadness, hunger, and thirst, albeit on the occasion of what occurs in our sense organs or in the constitution of our body.

(4) There is also every indication that God provides us with our perception of very simple objects such as extension, the straight line, prime numbers, motion, time, and those very simple relations which enable us to see clearly the truth of first principles, such as 'the whole is greater than the part'.

(5) On the other hand, there is every indication that our soul provides itself with the ideas or perceptions of things that it can know only by reasoning, such as almost all curves.

But however we come by ideas, we are always indebted to God for them, as much because it is He who has given our soul the faculty of

producing them as because, in a thousand ways which are hidden from us, according to His plans for us for all eternity, he arranges by the secret orders of His providence all the events of our life. On this depends our knowing an infinity of things that we would not have known had He arranged them differently.

Chapter 28

Various thoughts on the claims of the author of *The Search after Truth* that one cannot be entirely assured of the existence of bodies except by faith.

I had intended to stop at this point, but, having toiled over another passage in *The Search after Truth* which is clearly related to his philosophy of ideas, since consideration of the intelligible world, the intelligible sun, and intelligible spaces make up one of the principal proofs of what he tries to establish, I think I should add here the arguments which have always prevented me from being able to agree with him.

It is a question of knowing whether, in the passage that I wish to examine, we can be convinced by reason of the existence of bodies, or whether we can only be convinced of this by faith.

He deals with this question in one of the *Elucidations*, entitled: 'That it is very difficult to prove that there are bodies, and what we should think of the proofs of their existence' [ST, 568].

He first praises Descartes, in that:

wanting to establish his philosophy on unshakable foundations, he did not believe he could assume that there are bodies, nor that he ought to prove their existence on the basis of sensation, even though these [arguments] seem very persuasive to the ordinary man. Clearly he knew as well as we do that he had only to open his eyes to see bodies, and that we can approach them and touch them to ascertain whether our eyes deceive us in what they report. He knew the mind of man well enough to judge that such proofs were not rejected. [ST, 572]

Our friend could have stopped here, and he would have done well to do so. But he goes further, for he claims that this cannot be demonstrated by argument, even when one has recourse to Descartes' statement that God is not a deceiver and that He would be

had He given us so many different sensations of the bodies around us, including that which we believe is joined to our soul, and if there were nothing in the world except God and our mind. He claims that, even with this, we could and should not maintain that bodies exist, but rather that we can only be completely assured of their existence through faith:

But although Descartes has given us the strongest proofs that reason on its own can furnish for the existence of bodies, and although it is evident that God is no deceiver and that He could really be said to deceive us if we deceived ourselves in making use of the mind and the other faculties which He created in the way we should. Notwithstanding this, we can still say that the existence of matter is still not perfectly demonstrated. For in the area of philosophy we must not believe anything until the evidence compels us. We use our freedom as much as possible; and our judgements should not go beyond what we perceive. Thus when we see bodies, let us judge only that we see them and that these perceptible or intelligible bodies actually exist. But why should we judge for certain that there is an external world like the intelligible one that we see? (ST, 572]

And a little further on:

For us to be fully convinced that there are bodies, we must have demonstrated not only that there is a God, and that God is no deceiver, but also that He has assured us that He has really created such a world, and I have found no proof of this in Descartes' writings. *God* speaks to the mind and obliges it to believe in only two ways: through evidence and through faith. I agree that faith obliges us to believe that there are bodies: but, as for evidence, it seems to me that it is incomplete and that we are not inescapably led to believe that there is something other than God and our own mind. It is true that we have a very strong propensity to believe that there are bodies around us. Here I agree with Descartes. But this propensity, however natural it is, does not force us to believe in bodies through evidence; it merely inclines us towards belief by impression. Now our free judgements should follow only light and evidence, and if we let ourselves be led by sense impressions we shall almost always err. [ST, 573]

And having gone through an argument to prove the existence of bodies, he adds:

This argument is perhaps sound enough. Nevertheless, it must be agreed that it should not be taken as a conclusive demonstration of the existence of bodies. For God does not make us yield to it inescapably. If we consent to it, we do so freely: we are able not to consent to it. If the argument I have given is sound, we should believe it entirely probable that there are bodies, but we

should not be completely convinced by this single argument. Otherwise it would be we who acted, and not God in us. It is by a free act, and consequently one liable to error, that we consent, and not by an invincible power; for we believe because we freely will to do so, and not because we perceive it to be evident. Surely only faith can persuade us that there really are bodies. There can be no exact demonstration of the existence of anything except that of a necessary being. And if you pay close attention, you will see that it is not even possible to know in a completely evident way whether or not God is truly the creator of the material and sensible world. For such evidence is found only in necessary relations, and there is no necessary relation between God and such a world. He was able not to create it, and if He has created it it is because He has willed to do so and willed to do so freely. [ST, 573]

In what follows, Sir, I offer three or four reflections on his claims to have proved that it is only faith that can assure us that there are bodies, and on the proofs he employs.

First reflection

It is very strange that he has not noticed that, if he keeps within the principles he has set out here, it is impossible for him to *demonstrate* anything from anything he puts forward in his *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. For he does not say that he has learned, by revelation from God, the great maxims on which the whole of the treatise turns, namely 'that if God wishes to act externally, it is because He wishes to obtain for Himself an honour worthy of Him; that He acts by the simplest means; that He does not act through particular volitions but through general ones which are determined by occasional causes'. He has not undertaken to prove this from Scripture, and if he believed he could do so, he should have said that he knows it by faith, and not that he *demonstrated* it.

Now he couldn't say that there was a more necessary relation between God and these ways of acting than between God and the creation of the world. For although he says on a number of occasions (e.g. Discourse 1, Part 1, Section 18) that the laws of nature are constant and immutable, he is obliged to recognise in other passages (e.g. *ibid.*, Section 20) that the law of impact

is not essential to God but arbitrary, that there are occasions when these general laws must cease to produce their effect, and that it is inappropriate that men know that God is master of nature in the sense that, if He submits

Himself to the laws that He has established it is because He wants to rather than because of any absolute necessity.

Thus he is able to demonstrate nothing from all these maxims, which are the foundation of everything that is distinctive in his treatise, if it is true, as he claims in the passage we have just quoted, that it is not possible to know in a completely evident way whether or not God is truly the creator of the material and sensible world because such evidence is only appropriate to necessary relations, and there is no necessary relation between God and such a world, which He was able not to create. For He was also able not to act through general volitions directed by occasional causes, and consequently there is no necessary relation between God and this mode of action. On this account, then, one could have neither complete evidence nor exact demonstrations on this question.

It might be said that it is enough that it is sufficient that what he has said on these things has a great appearance of truth, and that it is not necessary that he prove them by completely exact demonstrations. However, as far as he is concerned, it is very obvious that he cannot say anything like that, after what we have just looked at; for he didn't write about such important questions in order not to convince anyone. Now he has told us very directly that we are not to acquiesce in his arguments, however correct they seem, if they are not demonstrative,

because it would be we who acted, and not God in us, and it would be by a free act, and consequently one liable to error, that we would embrace its judgements, and not because of an indubitable conviction; for we believe it because we freely will to do so, and not because we perceive it to be evident.

Thus there is nothing new done in this book, either for the Church in general or for those in particular who are singled out as 'priding themselves in their great fairness and rigorous exactness', if what has been provided has only a great appearance of the truth, for on his principles he should at least have *evidently demonstrated* his basic foundations. However, it wouldn't take me long, Sir, to show you that is very far even from saying nothing which is not very close to the truth.

Second reflection

Nothing is less true than Malebranche's statement that:

in order to be convinced that there are bodies, we must demonstrate not only that there is a God, and that God is no deceiver, but also that God has assured us that He has really created them; and if we did not have the faith which obliged us to believe that there are bodies, we would not be inescapably led to believe that there are any.

For I maintain, on the contrary, that the very principle that is the foundation of faith, which does not presuppose it but is prior to it, necessarily shows that there are bodies and other beings as well as God and my mind.

This is the principle that one should take as true what could only be taken as false on the pain of allowing in God things wholly contrary to divine nature, such as His being a deceiver, or being subject to other imperfections which the light of nature shows us evidently not to be in God. In holding this principle, neither faith nor particular revelation concerning the existence of bodies is assumed. Hence what evidently follows from the principle, when one adds to it only those things which I can no more doubt than I can my own existence, should be taken as completely demonstrated, and consequently I have reason to take the following arguments as genuine demonstrations.

First argument

There is a certain argument from [the fact of] our speaking for the existence of bodies, if we add to it the principle that God is not a deceiver. For I cannot doubt that I have believed myself to speak ever since I have known myself, i.e. that I joined my thoughts to certain sounds which I believe are formed by the body to which I have supposed I am joined, in order to make them understood to others similar to me whom I supposed to be around me and who, as far as I can tell, are able on their part to show, either by other words which I imagine I hear or by signs I believe I see, that they have understood what I wished to say to them.

Now if I had no body and there were no men other than myself, it would be necessary for God to deceive me on an infinite number of occasions, by forming in my mind directly, by his own agency — and without being able to say that he used the occasion of the motions which occur in my body, for we are assuming that I have none — all

the thoughts I have from so many different sounds, as if these were formed in the organs of my body, and by replying to me Himself internally, whenever it is appropriate, so that I could not doubt that it was the people to whom I thought I spoke who were responding, and this would occur not once or twice but on an infinite number of occasions.

Thus, since God is not a deceiver, it must necessarily be the case that I have a body, and that other men similar to me attach their thoughts to sounds just as I do so as to make them known to me.

Second argument

I have learned several languages so that I might understand different people. I am completely certain that I have not invented them; and I have judged these languages quite differently, some appearing to me more beautiful than others, and I believe I know with great certainty that some are newer and some older. And I have noticed that, believing myself to speak to particular people, they understand me properly when I speak in one of these languages, but not when I speak in another.

Now we would have to attribute to God behaviour completely unworthy of Him if only He and my mind existed; for it would be necessary that He be the author of all these different languages, without our being able to conceive of any point in this apart from His wish to amuse Himself and to deceive me, and that, making me believe that I speak now one language and now another, He also wants to make me believe, by mimicking the characters of those to whom I believe I am speaking, that there were some that did not understand and some that did.

I cannot suppose, therefore, without believing unworthy things of God, that there are no men outside me, or that there are no beings other than God and my mind.

Third argument

I believe that I have heard men speaking to me on countless occasions, some of them saying, it seemed to me, good things and others very bad things which would have made me offend God greatly if I had followed the impressions that their words could have given me, for they were such as to lead me to believe that there is no God. Now I am quite sure that these thoughts did not come from me, since I am horrified by them; thus they must have come from God, who has

spoken to me internally instead of these people who I believe were speaking to me externally. Now the idea that I have of a perfect Being does not allow me to attribute to Him a conduct unworthy of His goodness; thus I must treat the supposition that only God and my mind exist as being impossible.

Fourth argument

Still stronger arguments can be had from the art of writing, i.e. forming certain visible characters which can awaken in the mind of those who see them the ideas of their sounds, which have already been taken as signs of thoughts. I am sure I have not invented this art, and when I learned it I imagined that it was from other people similar to me. It would again be necessary that this be done by God, who took the place of all those people by fantasies He put in my mind, as if to amuse Himself with me. Can one think this and not believe that He is a deceiver? But since I have understood that the greatest use of this art is to make oneself understood to people who are absent and who can by the same means reply to what we have written to them — on many occasions only after a long delay, when they are far away — I have used it with this aim on countless occasions, and I have never failed to receive a reply at the time I thought. If both of these, i.e. the letter and the reply, had only been fantasies which God had Himself placed directly in my mind, could there be any doubt that He had taken pleasure in misleading me? Now this would have to be the case if only God and my mind existed. Hence this hypothesis, which contains so many things unworthy of God, should be rejected as impossible.

Fifth argument

I believe that the art of writing has produced countless books, that I myself have read many of them, that they have been on different topics, and that I did not produce these books. There were amongst them different histories, written in several languages, some of which seemed to me true, some doubtful, and some false. I took to be true, at least as far as the main incidents were concerned, those which related things which occurred in their own time, and were seen and known by everyone, or which were related in the same way by several other authors whom one could not reasonably believe to have conspired together in order to lie. I took as doubtful those which were not so well attested, and as false those which were manifestly

contrary to the facts, or which had been constructed only to provide stories, like poems or novels. What could I say about this on the hypothesis that only God and my mind exist? Being quite certain that I have not composed these histories myself, God would have to be their author, and to have impressed them in my mind and my spiritual memory when I imagined I read them in books, and I would no longer know how to assess them. For, being in God, they all become true, even the most false of them, which is a ridiculous contradiction. And the most true would become false, since if only God and my mind exist then nothing they tell us actually occurred in the past. Do we need anything else to show the absurdity of this supposition, when we know God?

Sixth argument

It has been my belief that I read other books on all kinds of subject. Some of these deny the greatest truths, even that of God's existence; others, such as those I thought to be by pagan poets, are full of things completely contrary to decency and modesty. Could I believe without impiety that God produces both these, imprinting them directly in my mind? I would have to believe this if there were only me and God, for I am sure that I haven't produced them.

Seventh argument

The sensations of pain, hunger, and thirst can, if you want, prove nothing concerning the existence of my body, taken alone; but when we consider God along with these, they prove it demonstratively.

When I have believed myself to get too close to a fire, I felt a smarting pain, which I call burning, and which made me draw back from it. And since this pain ceased or lessened considerably as soon as I believed I moved away from the fire, I was led to believe that God had given me this sensation of pain for the conservation of my body, which would have been quite pointless and unworthy of Him if I hadn't had a body. Thus I do have a body.

From time to time I believed I needed to eat and drink, i.e. to take food and drink, which I believed to be bodies, into that body that I believed was united to my mind. And I was informed of this need by a sensation which I call hunger, and by another I call thirst. When these sensations were strong, I felt uncomfortable and I imagined that my heart languished. But after I ate and drank I felt better. Would it not be to accuse God of nothing short of deluding me if He

had given me these sensations, with everything that follows, always in the same way on countless occasions during my life, if I did not have a body which needed all of these things?

Eighth argument

The same holds for other sensations. If it had pleased God to give me sensations of light, colours, sounds, odours, cold, and warmth without reference to anything, I would be less surprised, and I am sure He could have done this if I had no body. But why, if He did not wish to deceive me, did He give me sensations of light and colours, and vivid ones at that, only when I believe I open my eyes, if I have no eyes? For if I have no eyes, my imagining that I open my eyes can have no bearing on these sensations of light and colours. Why does He never, or almost never, give me the sensation of a brilliant light which dazzles me except when I believe I am facing the body I call the sun, if that body does not exist? Why, taking great pleasure in hearing harmonious sounds, does He only ever give me this pleasure when I imagine that bodies around me are agitated, and when I imagine that their motion is at least the occasional cause of my experiencing these sounds? If there were no bodies, could it be in God that we would find this invariable rule of accompanying almost all our vivid sensations by the images of those bodies to which I am naturally led to attribute them? And wouldn't He at least have had to have given us some means of avoiding error where it was impossible that this would not throw us into it?

Third reflection

This reflection concerns the objection he tries to forestall in *The Search after Truth*, and which it was easy to foresee. It is that one must be convinced that there are bodies before having faith, since faith presupposes that there are bodies: prophets, apostles, holy Scripture, miracles. He replies to this as follows:

But if you attend closely you will see that, even if one only assumes the appearance of men, prophets, apostles, sacred Scripture, miracles, etc., what we have learned from these supposed appearances is absolutely undeniable; for as I have proved in several places in this work, only God can represent these appearances to the mind, and God is no deceiver, for faith itself assumed all this. Now through the appearance of Sacred Scripture and miracles we learn that God has created a heaven and an earth, that the Word

was made flesh, and other such truths which assume the existence of a created world. Thus it is certain through faith that there are bodies, and that by faith all these appearances become realities. [ST, 575]

I don't know whether I am mistaken, Sir, but I don't believe that there has ever been a more vicious circle; for we must decide whether, having assumed that there are no bodies and that only God and my mind exist, I can hold onto this assumption until I have faith and abandon it only through faith. I maintain that this is impossible and that Malebranche's argument does not establish it at all. For as long as I make the assumption, I must believe that only God could have represented to my mind everything good or bad that I have ever read in books which I know I have not written. Hence He must have represented to me what I imagine I read in the Koran just as much as what I believe I read in the book called the Bible. Thus on the hypothesis that there is only me and my mind, if the argument that 'God is no deceiver and only He could have represented to my mind what I imagine I have seen in the Bible, therefore this must be held to be unquestionable' holds good for the Bible, I do not see why it does not also hold good of the Koran. And thus I am sure that I can only resolve this difficulty by using the maxim that God cannot be a deceiver to convince myself of the evident falsity of the supposition that there are no bodies apart from God and my mind, and not to conclude from it that, even before recognising the absurdity of this hypothesis, a few appearances of prophets, apostles, sacred Scriptures and miracles might be enough to get us to put our faith in the Scriptures and thereby change these appearances into realities.

If I could be shown that there is no contradiction in this, I would admit that I am stupid, for I believe I see it clearly.

Fourth reflection

I do not know whether he has noticed that, if the principles he laid down in his *Treatise on Nature and Grace* were true, he would have to retract what he positively asserts in *The Search after Truth* – that before faith I cannot be completely convinced that there is something other than God and my mind – for he did not claim to have taken these principles from divine revelation but from the idea of a perfect Being, and yet I can evidently conclude from that that it is impossible that there should only be me and my mind. Thus if they were true and

necessary, as principles should be, we could be certain of the falsity of the supposition without recourse to faith. I shall limit myself to two or three examples.

(1) *If God wishes to act externally, this is because He wishes to obtain a worthy honour for Himself.* On the one hand, I am sure that God wishes to act externally, since I cannot doubt that I am His work: and on the other, I am very conscious of not being able to render Him an honour worthy of Him.

Thus in acting externally He must have in view something other than me, something which can render Him an honour worthy of Him: thus, I cannot believe that only God and my mind exist.

(2) *It is unworthy of the perfect Being to act in the ordinary course of events through particular acts of will: it is more worthy of Him to act as a universal cause, whose acts of will are directed to particular effects by occasional causes.*

Now if I had no body and if my mind were the only creation, then since God would have created me by a particular act of will, He would also create in me thousands and thousands of things by particular acts of will, without occasional causes, above all in everything that seems to me to concern the body that I would not have and other bodies that would not be there either.

Thus it is not true that I have no body and that my mind is the sole creation of God.

(3) *God acts in the simplest ways and according to general laws.* This would not be so if I had no body and He acted only in relation to me. Thus it is not true . . . , etc.

I do not accept these demonstrations because I do not accept that the principles from which they are derived are sufficiently general or necessary to demonstrate a disputable proposition. But I believe the conclusion is derived correctly, and consequently he must recognise either that these maxims are not as he believes them to be, or that he was mistaken in saying that it is only faith that can assure us that there are bodies.

Conclusion

Here, Sir, are the first difficulties I have had with the particular opinions of our friend. They still don't cover those in the *Treatise on Nature and Grace*. But he himself believes that they are closely

related, since he asked that one study them before studying those of his *Treatise*, and he refers to them explicitly in the first Chapter of his third Discourse. Hence the best approach I could have taken when dealing with the new views of the latter work, was to begin with *The Search after Truth*.

I found this to be more advantageous both for him and for me. It means I don't have to contrast the two, something which often foists on us very annoying questions of fact, nor do I have to combat it with old rules and principles of a philosophy that he does not accept. More usually, I have only had to oppose his own statements to one another, to ask that he take more care in his thoughts, to warn him, as he does so many others, to take more notice of reason than prejudice, and to make him remember the maxims he has established for properly seeking after truth.

If I have succeeded in this, I do not claim to take the glory, for I cannot say how all this has come into my mind, since I myself have never formed any opinions on the matter until now; so if it is thought that I have thrown some light on it, I would freely acknowledge that it must have been more luck than skill.

But if, on the other hand, I have been mistaken, and have blinded myself when I imagined myself to have discovered blindness in others, it would be right that I should bear the shame. And it seems to me, as far as I can plumb the depths of my heart, that I would not complain, and I would not think ill of it if I were treated as I deserved if I have been unwise enough to speak with so much confidence without being right: for it is a human and pardonable fault to fall innocently into some error which does not have evil consequences. But in any discussion whatever, we will scarcely excuse a man who is not content with attacking what he should accept, but who does it with so much presumption that he undertakes to pass off the aberrations of his mind as true demonstrations.

But I shall say, furthermore, Sir, that if everything I have written on this question of ideas is sound (and I admit to you in good faith that it is impossible for me to believe otherwise so long as I have no enlightenment other than that which I have presently) I would be very glad, if our friend were not persuaded by it and continued to hold the first views he had, that he would defend them as best he can without sparing me, and that he would use whatever words he judges most appropriate to show that he was not wrong; and that it was I who have fought poorly against that beautiful maxim which is so worthy of God: *that we see all things in God*.

Translator's notes

1 The book is addressed to the Marquis de Rouey, as is much of Arnauld's later correspondence on Malebranche.

2 The doctrine of substantial forms derives from Aristotle, and was the most widely ridiculed feature of scholastic natural philosophy in the seventeenth century. The thrust of the doctrine is that physical bodies are comprised of matter and form, the latter providing the body with all its features and qualities. Those features of a body which are essential to it, i.e. constitutive of it, make up its substantial (as opposed to its accidental) form, the medieval paradigm for which was the soul as the substantial form of the human body. Aristotle explicitly opposes the doctrine of substantial forms to the Atomist belief that only matter need be invoked in explaining the properties of physical bodies. Late scholastic natural philosophy – whose most important sources in the seventeenth century were Johannes Magirus' *Physiologia Peripatica* (Frankfurt, 1597) and Scipion du Pleix's *Corps de Philosophie* (Geneva, 1645) – takes over this doctrine, but focuses on the imposition of form on an original propertyless substratum called 'prime matter', an imposition which differentiates the prime matter into four elements (secondary matter). These four elements then do all the explanatory work, and in some respects what results resembles some of the newer corpuscularian philosophies of the seventeenth century.

3 I have translated the expression '*être représentatif*' as 'representation' throughout, and not literally as 'representative being/entity'. It is crucial to Malebranche's theory, and to Arnauld's criticism of this theory, that the *êtres représentatifs* are actual entities distinct both from what they represent and what they represent it to. This is obvious from the context, and in any case the term 'representation' in the British philosophy from the late seventeenth century onwards usually has this connotation.

4 Malebranche's *Conversations chrétiennes* first appeared in 1676 and Erastus is one of its interlocutors.

5 Giovanni Domenico Cassini (1625–1712) was *de facto* director of the Paris Observatory from 1669 onwards. In 1672 he collaborated with