

THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS OF DESCARTES

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH BY

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{427} NOTES DIRECTED AGAINST A CERTAIN PROGRAMME

{428} PREFATORY NOTE TO THE

NOTAE IN PROGRAMMA.

The former friend and now opponent of Descartes, Regius or Le Roy, had issued from Utrecht in anonymous form a sort of poster or manifesto on the nature of the human mind. Descartes undertook a refutation written in Latin which is here translated. It was printed, apparently without his knowledge, in December 1647, and was accompanied by Verses and a Preface which had not his approbation. Neither the Verses nor the Preface are reproduced here. This is the last writing on Descartes' part which concerns the relationship between him and his former disciple at Utrecht. The latter, however, did not confess himself defeated but returned later to the charge.

E. S. H.

{429} RENÉ DESCARTES: NOTES DIRECTED

AGAINST A CERTAIN PROGRAMME

PUBLISHED IN BELGIUM AT THE END

OF THE YEAR 1647 UNDER THIS TITLE

An Explanation of the Human Mind or Rational Soul : What it is and what it may be.

A few days ago I received two pamphlets attacking me, one openly and directly, the other only covertly and by implication. Of the first I make no account ; indeed I am indebted to the author, for by the very fact that with all his inordinate labour he has succeeded in collecting nothing but groundless revilings and calumnies that none could credit, he has borne me witness that he could find nothing in my writings to which he could reasonably take exception, and thus has corroborated their truth better than he would have done by praising them, and moreover has effected this at the expense of his own reputation. The other pamphlet troubles me more, though I am not mentioned openly in the discussion, and it is published without the name of author or printer; for it contains opinions which I deem pernicious and erroneous and is issued in the shape of a Programme which may be affixed to Church doors, and exposed to the view of any chance reader. It is said, however, that it was previously printed in another form, with the name appended (purporting to be the author's)¹, of one whose doctrine is believed by many to be identical with my own. I am constrained to expose his errors, lest, perchance, they be attributed to me myself by those who happen to come across these papers, and have not read my writings.

{432} The following is the Programme in the form in which it finally saw the light : —

AN EXPLANATION of the Human Mind or Rational Soul : What it is, and what it may be.

I. The Human Mind is that wherein the processes of thought² are first accomplished by man; and it consists of the faculty of thinking alone, and the inward principle.

II. So far as the laws of nature are concerned, they seem to allow that the mind may be either a substance, or a mode of a corporeal substance, or, if we follow some other philosophers who state that extension and thought are attributes inherent in certain substances, as in subjects, then, as these attributes are not mutually opposed but

1 Regius

2 actiones cognotivae.

diverse, there is no reason why mind should not be an attribute co-existing in the same subject with extension, though the one attribute is not comprised in the concept of the other. Whatever we can conceive can exist. But mind can be conceived, so that it can be any one of the aforesaid, for none of them involves a contradiction. Therefore it may be any one of these things.

III. Hence they are in error who assert that we conceive the human mind clearly and distinctly, as though it were necessarily³ and really distinct from the body.

IV. The fact that mind is in truth nothing other than a substance, or an entity really distinct from body, in actuality separable from it, and capable of existing apart and independently⁴, is revealed to us in Holy Scripture, in many places. And thus what in the view of some, the study of nature leaves doubtful⁵ is already placed beyond all doubt for us through divine revelation in Scripture.

V. Nor is it any objection that we may have doubts about the body, but in nowise about the mind. For this only proves that, so long as we doubt about body, we cannot say that mind is a mode of body.

VI. The human mind, though it is a substance really distinct from body, is nevertheless, so long as it is in the body, organic in all its activities. And therefore as there are diverse dispositions of the body, so there are correspondingly diverse processes⁶ of the mind. {433}

VII. As mind is of a nature diverse from body, and from the disposition of body, and cannot arise from this disposition, therefore it is incorruptible.

VIII. As it has no parts and no extension in its concept, it is idle to speculate whether it exists as a whole in the whole, and is present as a whole in each individual part.

3 Sive actu (note in the first edition).

4 per se.

5 Si accuratam et non moralern rerum veritatem et cognitionem quaeramus (note in first edition).

6 cogitationes.

IX. As mind can be affected in equal degree by things imaginary and by things real, hence⁷ the study of Nature leaves us doubtful whether any material things are really perceived by us. But even this doubt is banished by divine revelation in Holy Writ, whereby it is beyond all doubt that God created heaven and earth, and all that in them is, and even now conserves them.

X. The bond which maintains body and soul in union is the law of the unchangeableness of Nature whereby every individual thing persists in the state in which it is, until it is thrown out of that state by some other thing.

XI. As mind is a substance and in being born is brought for the first time into existence, the most accurate opinion seems to be that of those who hold that the rational soul was brought forth by God, by generation and by an immediate act of creation.

XII. The mind has no need of innate ideas, or notions, or axioms, but of itself the faculty of thinking suffices for the accomplishment of its processes⁸.

XIII. Therefore all common notions, engraven on the mind, owe their origin to the observation of things or to tradition.

XIV. In fact the very idea of God which is implanted in the mind, is the outcome of divine revelation, or of tradition, or of observation.

XV. Our concept of God, or the idea of God which exists in our mind, is not an argument strong enough to prove the existence of God, since all things do not exist of which concepts are observed within us ; and this idea, as conceived by us, and that imperfectly, does not, more than the concept of any other thing, transcend our proper powers of thought. {434}

XVI. The thought of the mind is twofold : intellect and will.

XVII. Intellect is perception and judgment.

XVIII. Perception is sense, memory, and imagination.

⁷ Non moraliter, sed exquisitam et accuratam rerum veritatem quaerenti (note in first edition).

⁸ actiones.

XIX. All sensation is the perception of some corporeal movement, which requires no intentional images⁹ and it is effected, not in the outward channels of sense, but in the brain alone.

XX. The will is free, and inclines indifferently to opposites in nature, as our self consciousness bears us witness.

XXL Will is self-determined, and is to be termed blind no more than vision is to be termed deaf.

‘No men more easily attain a great reputation for piety than the superstitious and the hypocrites¹⁰.’

The following is an examination of the programme.

Notes to the Title.

I observe *in the title* a promise is made, not of bare assertions regarding the rational soul, but of an explanation of it, so that we must needs believe that in this programme are contained all, or at least, the principal arguments¹¹, which the author had, not only for proving his propositions, but also for unfolding them, and that no other arguments are to be expected from him. In that he terms *the rational soul* ‘*the human mind*’, he has my approbation, for thus he avoids the ambiguity of the word *soul*¹² and in this point follows me.

Notes to the Individual Articles.

In the first article he seems to aim at a *definition* of the rational soul, with imperfect success, for he omits the genus (i.e. that it is a substance, or a mode, or something else) and he expounds only the *differentia*, which he has borrowed from me, for no one before me, so far as I know, asserted that mind consisted in *one thing alone*, namely the *faculty of thinking and the inward source* (sc. of thinking).

9 species intentionales.

10 vide ‘Principles,’ Vol. i, p. 217. This aphorism, reproduced at the end of Regius’ poster is a saying of Descartes.

11 rationes.

12 anima.

In the second article he begins to speculate about its genus, and {435} says that *'the laws of nature seem to allow that the human mind may be either a substance, or a mode of a corporeal substance.'*

This assertion involves a contradiction, no less than if he had said, 'The laws of nature allow that a mountain can exist with or without a valley.' For a distinction must be drawn between things which from their nature can change, like the facts that I am at present either writing or not writing, that one man is prudent, another imprudent ; and things which never change, such as are all the things that pertain to the essence of anything, as is generally acknowledged by philosophers. Of course there is no doubt that it can be said of contingent things that the laws of nature permit these things to be either one way or another — for instance, the fact that I am at present either writing or not writing. But when the point at issue is the essence of something, it is manifestly foolish and contradictory to say that the laws of nature allow that it may be after any fashion save the fashion after which it really is. Nor does it more pertain to the nature of a mountain that it cannot exist without a valley, than to the nature of the human mind that it is what it is, namely, that it is a substance, if substance it be, or, indeed, that it is a mode of a corporeal substance, if in truth it be such a mode. Of this *our friend* endeavours at this point to convince us, and to prove it throws in these words, *'or if we are to follow some other philosophers etc.'* while by *'other philosophers'* he obviously means myself, for I was the first to consider thought the predominant attribute of immaterial substance, and extension the predominant attribute of material substance. But I did not say that these attributes were inherent in the substances, as in subjects diverse from themselves. Here we must beware of understanding by the word 'attribute' nothing other than 'mode.' Whenever we see a quality assigned to anything by nature, whether it be a mode that can suffer change, or the very essence of that thing, manifestly unchangeable, we term that quality its attribute. Thus in God there are many attributes, but no modes. Thus too one of the attributes of any substance is this, that it exists *per se*. Thus the extension of any body can, within itself, admit diverse modes, for it is one mode of its extension, if that body be spherical, another if it be square ; but extension itself, which is the subject of these

modes, is not in itself a mode of material substance, but an attribute, because it constitutes the essence and nature of material substance. {436} Thus, finally, the modes of thought are diverse, for affirmation is a different mode of thought from negation, and so on ; but thought itself, being the inward source¹³ from which these modes arise, and in which they are inherent, is not conceived as a mode, but as an attribute which constitutes the nature of a substance. Whether thought be material, or immaterial, is the question at present before us.

He adds that ‘ *these attributes are not mutually opposed, but diverse.*’ In these words again there is a contradiction, for when the question concerns attributes that constitute the essence of substances, there can be no greater opposition between them than the fact that they are different. Once it is admitted that ‘ this is different from that,’ it is equivalent to saying that ‘ this is not that’ ; but to be and not to be are contraries. ‘ *Since they are not mutually opposed,*’ he says, ‘ *but different, there is no reason why mind should not be an attribute co-existing in the same subject with extension, though the one attribute is not comprised in the concept of the other.*’ In these words there is an obvious fallacy, for he comes to a conclusion with regard to every possible attribute, which can be valid only in the case of modes properly so called ; and yet he nowhere proves that the mind, or inward principle of thought, is such a mode. On the contrary, from his own words in *Article V* I will soon demonstrate that it is not so. Of the other attributes which constitute the natures of things, it cannot be said that those which are different, and of which neither is contained in the concept of the other, are co-existent in one and the same subject, for that is equivalent to saying that one and the same subject has two different natures, and this involves a contradiction, at least so long as the subject in question is simple and not composite — as in the present case.

Three points are to be noted here, a sufficient grasp of which would have prevented this writer from falling into such obvious errors.

13 principium.

First: It belongs to the theory of modes that, though we can easily comprehend a substance apart from a mode, we cannot, conversely, clearly comprehend a mode unless at the same time we conceive the substance of which it is a mode (as I have explained in the *first part of the Principles, Article LXI*), and on this point all philosophers are agreed. That *our friend* however paid no respect {437} to this rule, is manifest from his *5th Article*. In that passage he admits that ‘*we can doubt about the existence of the body, while, at the same time, we do not doubt about the existence of the mind.*’ Hence it follows that the mind can be comprehended by us apart from the body, and, accordingly, is not a mode of the body.

The *second point* which I would note here is the difference between simple and composite entities¹⁴. A composite entity is one in which are found two or more attributes, any one of which can be comprehended distinctly apart from the other, for it is from the fact that one can be thus cognised without the other, that each of these constituent elements is seen to be, not a mode, but a thing, or the attribute of a thing which exists by virtue of that attribute. A simple entity is one in which such attributes are not found. Hence it is clear that that subject in which we understand extension only, with the various modes of extension, is a simple entity. So, too, is a subject in which we comprehend thought only, with the various modes of thought. But that in which we observe extension and thought co-existent is a composite entity, to wit, a Man, who consists of soul and body. *Our author* seems to assume that man is body alone and that mind is but a mode of body.

Finally, we must note here that in subjects compounded of several substances there is frequently one substance predominant. This we contemplate in such a way as to treat any of the remaining substances which we connect with it as nothing more than a mode. Thus a *man clad* may be contemplated as a compound of man and clothes, but the being clad, in comparison with the man, is only a mode, although garments are substances. In the same way *our author* might, in the case of man, who is a compound of soul and body, consider body the predominant element, in relation to

14 entia.

which the being animate, or the possession of thought, is nothing other than a mode. But it is foolish to infer from that, that the mind itself, or that through which the body thinks, is not a substance different from the body.

This dictum he endeavours to corroborate by means of the following syllogism : ‘ *Whatever we can conceive can exist. But the mind is one of the aforesaid (viz. a substance, or a mode of a corporeal substance), because it can be conceived ; for none of these things involves a contradiction. Therefore etc.*’ Here it must be noted that though the rule, ‘ *whatever we can conceive can exist,*’ {438} is mine, and true, so long as the question concerns a clear and distinct concept, in which is contained the possibility of the thing to be realised¹⁵ (because God can bring into being everything which we clearly perceive to be possible), nevertheless we must not make rash use of it. A man might quite easily imagine that he rightly understood something which in reality he did not understand, being utterly blinded by some sort of prejudice. This is the case of *our author* when he maintains that there is no contradiction involved in the statement that one and the same thing possesses either of two natures which are utterly incompatible, to wit, that it is a substance, or a mode. If he had only said that he perceived no reasons for believing the human mind to be an immaterial substance rather than a mode of a material substance, his ignorance might have been excused. If he had said that no reasons could be found by the brain of man to prove either alternative, his arrogance would certainly have been reprehensible, but his statement would have evinced no contradiction. But when he says that the ‘ *laws of nature allow that the same thing may be a substance, or a mode,*’ his words are altogether self-contradictory and betray the irrationality of his brain.

In the third article he makes known his judgment concerning me. For it was *I* who wrote that ‘ the human mind can be clearly and distinctly perceived as a substance different from corporeal substance.’ *Our friend*, however, though he relies on no other arguments than those self-contradictory ones which he has unfolded in the preceding

15 rei.

article, proclaims that I am in error. Of that I make no account. Nor do I examine the words ‘*of necessity*’ or ‘*in actuality*,’ which contain a certain ambiguity; for they are not of great moment.

Moreover, I scruple to examine the statements regarding Holy Writ in the *fourth article*, lest I should appear to assume the right of investigating another man's religion. Thus much I will say : Here one must distinguish between three types of questions. Certain things are believed through faith alone. Such are the mystery of the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the like. Others, however, though they have a certain bearing on faith, can nevertheless be investigated by the natural reason¹⁶. Among these are generally ranked by the orthodox theologians the existence of God, and the distinction of mind from body. Finally, there are others which {439} belong in no wise to the sphere of faith, but only to the sphere of human reason, e.g. the question of the squaring of the circle or of making gold by the art of alchemy. And even as these men abuse the words of Holy Scripture, who, from a distorted interpretation of it presume to elicit these last questions, so do those others diminish its authority who undertake to solve the first type of question by arguments sought from philosophy alone. Nevertheless all theologians contend that these questions should be shown to be in no wise incompatible with the light of nature¹⁷, and to this end they direct their most zealous endeavours. As for questions of the second class, not only do they deem them in no way incompatible with the light of nature, but they even exhort philosophers to solve these questions, so far as in them lies, by theories evolved from the mind of man. But never have I seen any one who would affirm that the laws of nature allow that anything should be otherwise than Holy Scripture teaches, unless he wished to show indirectly that he had no faith in Scripture. For as we were born men before we became Christians, it is beyond belief that any man should seriously embrace opinions which he thinks contrary to that right reason that constitutes a man, in order that he may cling to the faith through which he is a Christian.

16 ratio naturalis.

17 lumen naturalis.

But perhaps *our author* does not imply this, for his words are, ‘ *Through study of nature some may find doubtful that which is already placed beyond all doubt for us by the Divine Revelation in Holy Writ.*’ In these words I find a two-fold contradiction. In the first place, though he refutes the doctrine that the essence of one and the same thing does not always remain the same (because, if it be supposed to become different, it will be by this very fact a different thing, to be indicated by a different name), yet he supposes that that essence, so far as the study of Nature goes, is doubtful, and accordingly changeable. The second contradiction is in the word ‘ *some,*’ because, as Nature is the same for all men¹⁸ a thing that can be doubtful only to ‘ *some*’ is not doubtful according to Nature’s showing¹⁹.

The fifth article is to be related to the second rather than to the *fourth*, for in it the author is concerned, not with Divine Revelation, but with the nature of mind — the question as to whether it is a substance or a mode. To prove the defensibility of the view that mind is nothing other than a mode, he attempts to refute an {440} objection taken from my writings. I wrote that we could not doubt that our mind existed, because, from the very fact that we doubted, it followed that our mind existed, but that meantime we might doubt whether any material things existed ; whence I deduced and demonstrated that mind was clearly perceived by us as an existence, or substance, even supposing we had no concept whatever of the body, and denied that any material things had existence ; and, accordingly, that the concept of mind did not involve any concept of body. This argument he thinks to explode by saying that ‘ *it only proves that, so long as we doubt about the body, we cannot term mind a mode of body.*’ Here he shows that he is utterly ignorant of what it is that philosophers term a ‘ *mode*’ ; for the nature of a mode consists in this, that it can by no means be comprehended, except it involve in its own concept the concept of the thing of which it is a mode — as I have explained above. *Our friend*, however, admits that mind can sometimes be cognized apart from body, to wit, when there are doubts about the body ; whence it assuredly follows that mind cannot be termed a mode of body. And what is sometimes true about

18 omium eadem.

19 per naturam.

the essence or nature of a thing is always true. Nevertheless he affirms that *the laws of nature allow that mind may be only a mode of body*. These two statements are manifestly irreconcilable.

In the sixth article I fail to apprehend his meaning. Certainly I remember hearing in the Schools that *the mind is an activity²⁰ of the organic body*, but till this day I never heard the mind itself termed ‘organic.’ For this reason I crave *our author’s* indulgence, to the end that, as I have nothing certain to base my remarks on at this point, I may expound my conjectures, not as though they were true to fact, but simply as conjectures. I seem to observe two irreconcilable statements. One of these is to the effect that the human mind is a substance really distinct from the body. This *the author* openly states, but, so far as he can, waives argument on the point, and contends that it can be proved only by the authority of Holy Scripture. The other statement is that that same human mind, in all its activities, is *organic* or instrumental, that is to say, such that it does not act²¹ of itself, but is used by the body as though it were something that strengthened its members²² and other corporeal modes, and so he affirms in effect, if not in so many words, that *the mind is nothing other than a mode of body*, as though he {441} had drawn up his whole artillery of argument to prove this point and this alone. These two statements are so manifestly contraries that I do not think *the author* wished them both, at one and the same time, to find credence with readers, but deliberately coupled them together, so that he might in some sort give satisfaction to the more simple-minded, and to his friends the theologians, by his citation of Scriptural authority, and that, meantime, his more keen-witted readers might realize that, when he said ‘*mind is distinct from body*’ he was speaking in irony, and that he was heart and soul of the opinion that mind is nothing but a mode.

In the seventh article again, and *the eighth*, he seems to be speaking merely in irony. And he retains the same Socratic figure of speech in *the latter part of article IX*. But in

20 actus.

21 nihil agat.

22 membrorum suorum confirmatione.

the first part he appends a reason to his assertion, and thus, it would seem, is to be taken seriously in this passage. He teaches that, *so far as nature shows, it is doubtful whether any material things are really perceived by us*, and submits as his reason the statement that ‘*the mind can be affected in the same degree by things imaginary as by things real.*’ If this theory is to be received as true, it must be granted that we have use of no understanding²³ properly so called, but only of that faculty which is usually termed the ‘*common sense*²⁴’ whereby impressions are received of things imaginary as much as of things real, so that they affect the mind — a faculty which philosophers commonly allow even to the brute creation. But surely those who have understanding, and are not fashioned like the horse or mule, even although they are affected not only by images of real things but also by those which occur in the brain from other causes (as happens in sleep), can distinguish the one kind of image from the other with the utmost clearness, by the light of reason. The method in which this happens, surely and infallibly, I have explained *in my writings*, so accurately that I am convinced that no one who has read them throughout, and is capable of understanding them, can be a sceptic.

In *the tenth and eleventh articles* it is still possible to suspect him of irony. If the soul be believed to be a substance, it is foolish and ridiculous to say ‘*the bond which maintains body and soul in union is the law of the unchangeableness of nature, whereby every individual thing persists in the state in which it is.*’ For it is equally true of things disunited as of things united that they persist in the same state so long as nothing changes that state. {442} This is not at present the point at issue. The question is, how it happens that the mind is united with the body, and not dissevered from it. But if soul be supposed to be a mode of body, it is rightly said that no bond of union need be sought other than the fact that it persists in the state in which it is, since modes have no other state than that present to the things of which they are modes.

23 intellectus.

24 sensus communis.

In article twelve he appears to dissent from me only in words, for when he says that *the mind has no need of innate ideas, or notions, or axioms*, and at the same time allows it the faculty of thinking (to be considered natural or innate), he makes an affirmation in effect identical with mine, but denies it in words. For I never wrote or concluded that the mind required innate ideas which were in some sort different from its faculty of thinking ; but when I observed the existence in me of certain thoughts which proceeded, not from extraneous objects nor from the determination of my will, but solely from the faculty of thinking which is within me, then, that I might distinguish the ideas or notions (which are the forms of these thoughts) from other thoughts *adventitious* or *factitious*, I termed the former ‘*innate*.’ In the same sense we say that in some families generosity is innate, in others certain diseases like gout or gravel, not that on this account the babes of these families suffer from these diseases in their mother's womb, but because they are born with a certain disposition or propensity for contracting them.

The conclusion which he deduces in *article XIII* from the preceding article is indeed wonderful. ‘*For this reason*,’ he says (i.e. because the mind has no need of innate ideas, but the faculty of thinking of itself is sufficient), ‘*all common notions, engraven on the mind, owe their origin to the observation of things or to tradition*’ — as though the faculty of thinking could of itself execute nothing, nor perceive nor think anything save what it received from observation or tradition, that is, from the senses. So far is this from being true, that, on the contrary, any man who rightly observes the limitations of the senses, and what precisely it is that can penetrate through this medium to our faculty of thinking must needs admit that no ideas of things, in the shape in which we envisage them by thought, are presented to us by the senses. So much so that in our ideas there is nothing which was not innate in the mind, or {443} faculty of thinking, except only these circumstances which point to experience — the fact, for instance, that we judge that this or that idea, which we now have present to our thought, is to be referred to a certain extraneous thing, not that these extraneous things transmitted the ideas themselves to our minds through the organs of sense, but because they transmitted something which gave the mind occasion to form these ideas,

by means of an innate faculty, at this time rather than at another. For nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the organs of sense beyond certain corporeal movements, as *our author* himself affirms, in *article XIX*, taking the doctrine from my *Principles* ; but even these movements, and the figures which arise from them, are not conceived by us in the shape they assume in the organs of sense, as I have explained at great length in my *Dioptrics*. Hence it follows that the ideas of the movements and figures are themselves innate in us. So much the more must the ideas of pain, colour, sound and the like be innate, that our mind may, on occasion of certain corporeal movements, envisage these ideas, for they have no likeness to the corporeal movements. Could anything be imagined more preposterous than that all common notions which are inherent in our mind should arise from these movements, and should be incapable of existing without them ? I should like *our friend* to instruct me as to what corporeal movement it is which can form in our mind any common notion, e.g. the notion that ‘ *things which are equal to the same thing are equal to one another,*’ or any other he pleases ; for all these movements are particular, but notions are universal having no affinity with movements and no relation to them.

He goes on to affirm, in *article XIV*, that even the idea of God which is in us is the outcome, not of our faculty of thinking, as being native to it, but of *Divine Revelation or tradition, or observation*. The error of this assertion we shall the more readily realise if we reflect that anything can be said to be the outcome of another, either because this other is its proximate and primary cause, without which it could not exist, or only because it is a remote and accidental cause, which, certainly, gives the primary cause occasion to produce its effect at one time rather than at another. Thus all workmen are the primary and proximate causes of their works, but those who give them orders, or promise them reward, that they may perform these works, are accidental and remote causes, because, {444} probably, they would not have performed the tasks unbidden. There is no doubt that tradition or observation is a remote cause, inviting us to bethink ourselves of the idea which we may have of God, and to present it vividly to our thought. But no one can maintain that this is the proximate and efficient²⁵ cause,

25 effectrix.

except the man who thinks that we can apprehend nothing regarding God save this name ‘*God*,’ and the corporeal figure which painters exhibit to us as a representation of God. For observation, if it takes place through the medium of sight, can of its own proper power present nothing to the mind beyond pictures, and pictures consisting only of a permutation of corporeal movements, as our author himself instructs us. If it takes place through the medium of hearing, it presents nothing beyond words and voices ; if through the other senses, it has nothing in it which can have reference to God. And surely it is manifest to every man that sight, of itself and by its proper function, presents nothing beyond pictures, and hearing nothing beyond voices or sounds, so that all these things that we think of, beyond these voices or pictures, as being symbolised by them, are presented to us by means of ideas which come from no other source than our faculty of thinking, and are accordingly together with that faculty innate in us, that is, always existing in us potentially ; for existence in any faculty is not actual but merely potential existence, since the very word ‘*faculty*’ designates nothing more or less than a potentiality. But that with regard to God we can comprehend nothing beyond a name or a bodily effigy, no one can affirm, save a man who openly professes himself an atheist, and moreover destitute of all intellect.

After expounding his opinion concerning God, *our author*, in *article XV*, thinks to refute all the arguments by which I have proved God’s existence. At this point it occurs to one to marvel at the man’s self-confidence, in that he imagines that he can so easily and in so few words overturn all that I have built up by dint of long and concentrated meditation, and to the explanation of which I have devoted a whole volume. But all the arguments which I have adduced in this matter can be subordinated to *two*. *In the first place* I have shown that we have a notion or idea of God such that, when we sufficiently attend to it and ponder the matter in the manner I have expounded, we realise from this contemplation alone, that it cannot be but that God exists, since {445} existence, not merely possible or contingent as in the ideas of all other things, but altogether necessary and actual, is contained in this concept. This argument, which is held as certainly and obviously proved, not only by myself but by several others, and these men pre-eminent in learning and genius who have sedulously investigated the

matter — this argument, I say, *the author of the Programme* thinks to refute in this fashion : ‘ *Our concept of God, or the idea of God which exists in our mind, is not an argument sufficiently strong to prove the existence of God, since all things do not exist of which concepts are observed within us.*’ By these words he shows that he has read my writings, but has in nowise had either the power or the will to understand them. For the point of my argument is, not the idea in general, but its peculiar property, a property which is evident in the highest degree in the idea we have of God, and which can be found in the concept of no other thing, namely, the necessity of existence, which is required as that crown of perfections without which we cannot comprehend God. *The other argument* by which I proved the existence of God, I deduced from my clear proof of the fact that we should not have had the faculty for conceiving all the perfections which we recognise in God, had it not been true that God existed, and that we were created by Him. This argument *our friend* thinks he has more than exploded by saying that *the idea we have of God does not, more than the concept of any other thing, transcend our proper powers of thinking.* If by these words he only means that the concept which we have of God without the aid of supernatural grace is no less natural than all the concepts we have of other things, he is at one with me ; but on that basis nothing can be concluded against me. If, however, he thinks that that concept does not involve more objective perfections than all the others taken together, he is obviously wrong. I myself, on the other hand, have founded my argument entirely on this preponderance of perfections, in which our concept of God transcends other concepts.

In the six remaining articles there is nothing worthy of note except the fact that, when he wishes to distinguish the properties of the soul, he speaks of them confusedly and inappropriately. I have said that these are all to be subordinated to two predominant properties, one of which is the perception of the understanding, the other the determination of the will. These two *our friend* calls {446} ‘ *understanding*’ and ‘ *will*.’ Then he subdivides what he calls ‘ *understanding*’ into ‘ *perception*’ and ‘ *judgment*.’ In this point he differs from me, for when I saw that, over and above perception, which is required as a basis for judgment, there must needs be affirmation,

or negation, to constitute the form of the judgment, and that it is frequently open to us to withhold our assent, even if we perceive a thing, I referred the act of judging, which consists in nothing but *assent*, i.e. affirmation or negation, not to the perception of the understanding, but to the determination of the will. Thereafter he enumerates, among the species of perception, nothing but *sense, memory, and imagination*, from which one may gather that he admits no *pure intellection* (i.e. intellection which deals with no corporeal images), and, accordingly, that he himself believes that no cognition is possessed of God, or of the human mind, or of other immaterial things. Of this I can imagine but one cause, namely, that the thoughts he has concerning these things are so confused that he never observes in himself a pure thought, different from every corporeal image.

Finally, in closing, he adds these words, taken from some portion of my writings : ‘ *No men more easily attain a great reputation for piety, than the superstitious and the hypocrites.*’ What he means by these words I fail to see, unless perhaps he ascribes to hypocrisy the use he has made of irony, in many places, but I do not think that by that means he can attain a great reputation for piety.

For the rest, I am constrained to admit here, that I am covered with shame to think that in time past I lauded *this author* as a man of most penetrative genius, and wrote somewhere or other that ‘ I did not think he taught any doctrines which I should be unwilling to acknowledge as my own²⁶.’ But in truth when I wrote these words I had as yet seen no specimen of his work in which he was not a faithful copyist, except only on one occasion in one little phrase²⁷, which brought such ill results to him, that I hoped he would make no further venture in that line ; and, as I saw him in other matters embrace with a great show of zeal the opinions that I deemed nearest the truth, I attributed this to his genius and penetration. But now a manifold experience compels me to conclude that he is swayed not so much by love of truth as by love of novelty. As he holds all he has learned from others to be old-world and out-worn, thinking nothing sufficiently novel except what {447} he has hammered out of his own

26 Letter to Voetius.

27 Hominem esse ens per accidens.

brain ; and, at the same time, is so unhappy in his inventions, that I have never noted a single word in his writings (excluding what he transcribed from other men), which I did not condemn as containing some error, I must therefore warn all those who are convinced that he is a champion of my opinions, that of these opinions — I speak, not only of those in the *Metaphysics*, on which he openly opposes me, but also of those in the *Physics*, for he treats of this subject somewhere in his writings — there is none which he does not state awry and distort. Hence it causes me more indignation that such a Physician should handle my writings and undertake to interpret, or, in other words, to falsify them, than that other men should attack them with the utmost bitterness.

For I never yet saw one of these bitter critics who did not father on me opinions different from mine by a whole heaven, and so maundering and preposterous, that I had no fear that any man of intelligence could be persuaded that they were mine. Thus, even as I write these words, two new pamphlets are brought me — productions of an adversary of this type²⁸. In the first of these it is stated that ‘ *There are some Neoterics who deny all credibility to the senses, who contend that the Philosophers deny God, and dare to doubt His existence, and who, meantime, admit that there are implanted by Nature in the human mind actual notions, species, and ideas of God.*’ In the second it is said that ‘ *these Neoterics bare-facedly proclaim that God is, not only negatively, but positively, the efficient cause of Himself.*’ In either pamphlet the only thing effected is the conglomeration of numerous arguments to prove, first, that we have no *actual* knowledge (*cognitio*) of God in our mother’s womb, and accordingly that ‘ *no actual species or idea of God is inborn in our mind*’ ; secondly, that ‘ *we must not deny God*’ and that ‘ *they are atheists and punishable by law who deny Him*’ ; and thirdly and finally that ‘ *God is not the efficient cause of Himself.*’

I might well suppose that all these *dicta* were not directed against me, because my name is not mentioned in the pamphlets, and of the opinions attacked in them there is none which I do not think absurd and erroneous. Nevertheless, as they are not

28 Pamphlets by Jacques de Revis (Jacobus Revisus).

dissimilar to those which have often ere now been slanderously imputed to me by men of that kidney, and as there are no other {448} persons recognizable to whom these opinions could be attributed ; as, finally, there are many who do not doubt that I am the object of attack in these pamphlets, I take this occasion to admonish their author to this effect :

First: — By innate ideas I never understood anything other than that which he himself, on page 6 of his second pamphlet, affirms in so many words to be true, viz. that ‘ *there is innate in us by nature a potentiality whereby we know God*’ ; but that these ideas are *actual*, or that they are some kind of species different from the faculty of thought I never wrote nor concluded. On the contrary, I, more than any other man, am utterly averse to that empty stock of scholastic entities— so much so, that I cannot refrain from laughter when I see that mighty heap which our hero — a very inoffensive fellow no doubt — has laboriously brought together to prove that infants hare no notion of God so long as they are in their mother s womb — as though in this fashion he was bringing a magnificent charge against me.

Secondly: — I have never taught that *God is to be denied, or that He can deceive us, or that one must doubt about everything, or that all credibility is to be denied to the senses, or that sleep cannot be distinguished from waking, or the like* — doctrines which are sometimes thrown in my teeth by ignorant detractors. I have repudiated all these doctrines expressly and with the strongest arguments — stronger, I make bold to say, than any that have by any man before me been brought to the refutation of these doctrines. That I might the more fittingly and effectively compass this end, I proposed, at the beginning of my Meditations, to regard as doubtful all the doctrines which did not owe their original discovery to me, but had been for long denounced by the sceptics. What could be more unjust than to attribute to a writer opinions which he states only to the end that he may refute them ? What more foolish than to imagine that, at least for the time being, while these false opinions are being propounded previous to their refutation, the author commits himself to them, and that, accordingly, the man who states the arguments of the Atheists *is an Atheist for the time* ? What more childish

than to say that, if he were to die meantime, before writing or evolving the *hoped for refutation* he would die an Atheist — that he taught pernicious doctrine merely as a preliminary, but that ‘*evil should not be done that good may {449} come of it*’ and so forth ? Some one will say, perhaps, that I related these false opinions, not as the opinions of others, but as my own. But what of that ? In the self-same book in which I related them I refuted them all. From the very title of the book it might be understood that I was altogether hostile to these beliefs, for it purports to give ‘*proofs of the existence of God.*’ Is there anyone obtuse enough to think that the man who compiled such a book was ignorant, so long as he was penning its first pages, of what he had undertaken to prove in the following ? I enunciated the objections as though they were my own, to suit the exigencies of the style of ‘*meditations,*’ which I judged the style best fitted for unfolding arguments. If this explanation does not satisfy our captious critics, I should like to know what they say of Holy Scripture — with which no human documents are to be compared — when they see in it some things that cannot be rightly understood unless they be supposed to be the utterance of impious men, or, at least, of others than the Holy Ghost and the Prophets? Such are Ecclesiastes, chap, ii., these words ‘*There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat or who else can hasten thereunto more than I?*’ and, in the following chapter, ‘*I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts; for that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts ; even one thing befalleth them : as the one dieth so dieth the other: yea they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast,*’ etc. Do they believe that here the Holy Spirit teaches us that we should indulge the belly, and have abundance of delights, and that our souls are no more immortal than the souls of beasts? I do not think they are so mad. Neither should they calumniate me because in writing I have not made use of the precautions which are observed by some other writers, but not by the Holy Spirit.

In the third place, and finally, I warn the author of these pamphlets that I never wrote that ‘ God should be said to be, not only negatively, but positively, the efficient cause of Himself,’ as he affirms in a very rash and ill-considered manner in page 8 of his second pamphlet. Let him turn over, read, and thoroughly search my writings, he will find in them nothing like this, but the very reverse. The fact that I am far indeed from accepting such monstrous opinions is well known to all who have read my writings, or have any knowledge of myself, or, at any rate, do not think me utterly fatuous. On this account I am only moved to wonder what is the aim of these detractors ; for if they wish to convince any one that I wrote things of which the very contrary is found in my writings, they should have taken the preliminary precaution of suppressing all my publications, and should even have wiped out the memory of them from the minds of those who had already read them ; for so long as they fail to effect this they do themselves more harm than me. Moreover, I marvel that they should inveigh with such bitterness and such zeal against me, who have never troubled them, nor done them any hurt, though, perhaps, possessing the power to hurt them if they provoked me ; and meantime should take no action against many other men who devote whole books to the refutation of their doctrine, and ridicule them as simpletons and blindfold gladiators²⁹. But I am unwilling to add any word here that might make them renounce their habit of impugning me in their pamphlets. I am glad to see that they think me of so much importance. Meantime I pray Heaven to grant them sanity.

Written at Egmond, in Holland,

towards the end of December 1647.

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Page references are given in curly brackets.]

29 ‘Simplicios et Andabatas.’ Anclabatae were Roman gladiators whose masks had no opening for the eyes and who fought blind in order to amuse the spectators.