

The Squashed Philosophers Edition of...

Meditations on First Philosophy

René Descartes

1641

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MEDITATIONS

on First Philosophy in which the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Mind and Body are Demonstrated.

DEDICATION

To the Most Wise and Illustrious the Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology in Paris.

We have faith that the human soul does not perish with the body, and that God exists, but it certainly does not seem possible to persuade infidels of any religion, or of any moral virtue, unless, to begin with, we prove these two facts by natural reason.

For the truth will easily cause all men of mind and learning to subscribe to your judgment; and your authority will cause the atheists, who are usually more arrogant than learned or judicious, to rid themselves of their contradictions. And, finally, all others will easily yield to such a mass of evidence, and there will be none who dares to doubt the existence of God and the real and true distinction between the human soul and the body. It is for you now in your singular wisdom to judge of the importance of the establishment of such beliefs.

PREFACE to THE READER

I have already touched, in passing, on the two questions of God and the human soul in the Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, published in French in the year 1637. These questions have appeared to me to be of such importance that I did not judge it to be expedient to set it forth at length in French, in case it be read by feebler minds and they come to believe that it was permitted to them to attempt to follow the same path.

I now intend to discuss these matters in greater depth, without expecting any praise from the vulgar or hoping that my book will have many readers. I should never advise anyone to read what I have to say excepting those who desire to meditate seriously with me, and who can detach their minds from affairs of sense, and deliver themselves entirely from every sort of prejudice. I know too well that such men exist in a very small number. Those many who form their criticisms on detached portions of my reasonings will not obtain much profit from this Treatise. And although they may perhaps find trivial complaint, they can for all their pains make no objection which is deserving of reply.

I venture to promise that it will be difficult for anyone to bring to mind criticisms of any consequence which have not been already touched upon. This is why I beg those who read these Meditations to form no judgment upon them unless they have given themselves the trouble to read all the objections as well as the replies which I have made to them

SYNOPSIS of THE SIX FOLLOWING MEDITATIONS

In the following meditations I will show that doubt is possible, and from that show that to doubt is proof of the existence of mind. In order to know that the soul is immortal we must first have a clear picture of the

soul- we know that mind is indivisible and that you can't have half a soul, and that the body may change, but mind is always mind. I will prove that God exists without reference to the corporeal world. I will prove that what we perceive is true and explain the origin of falsity. And I will prove that things exist

MEDITATION ONE

Of the Things which may be brought within the Sphere of the Doubtful.

So many of the opinions I held so firmly in my youth were false, that I must admit how doubtful is everything I have since constructed. Thus, I have become convinced that, if I ever want to establish firm structure for the sciences, I must build anew from the foundation. To-day, since I have a leisurely retirement, I shall at last seriously address myself to this problem. To examine each opinion would take forever; so I shall begin by attacking those principles upon which all others rest.

I have formerly accepted as true and certain those things I learn through the senses. Like the fact that I am seated by this fire, in a dressing gown, with this paper in my hands. And how could I deny that this body is mine, unless I was as mad as those whose cerebella are so clouded by black bile that they believe they have an earthenware head or a glass body? Yet, I must remember that I have dreams, which are almost as insane. Often I have dreamt that I was dressed and seated near this fire, whilst I was lying undressed in bed! It seems to me that I am now awake, but I remind myself that I have dreamt that too. Yet even dreams are formed out of things real and true. Just as a painter represents sirens or satyrs from a medley of different animals; even quite novel images are still composed of real colours.

For the same reason, although general things may be imaginary, we are bound to confess that there are simpler objects which are real and true; such as colours, quantity or magnitude and number. That is why Physics, Astronomy, Medicine and those sciences which consider composite things, are dubious; but Arithmetic, Geometry and sciences which treat of things very simple and general contain some certainty. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three always form five, and a square has four sides. It does not seem possible that truths so clear and apparent can be uncertain.

Now, I have long believed in an all-powerful God who made me. I can imagine that other people deceive themselves, but how do I know that I am not deceived when I add two and three, or count the sides of a square? If God is good, how can it be that he sometimes permits me to be deceived?

Let us, for the present, imagine that God is a fable. Whether I have come about by fate or accident or by a continual succession of antecedents - since to deceive oneself is a defect, it is clear that the author of my skills must be a greater deceiver still.

I confess that there is nothing in all that I formerly believed, which I cannot doubt in some measure. We must be careful to keep this in mind, and fear not that there is peril or error in yielding to distrust, since I am not considering questions of action, but only of knowledge.

So, I intend to attach myself to the idea that some evil genie is deceiving me; that the heavens, the earth, colours, figures, sound, even my body and senses are nought but illusions and dreams. This task is a difficult one, for just as a prisoner who dreams of liberty, when he begins to suspect that it is but a dream, fears to awaken, so I may fall back into my former opinions.

MEDITATION TWO

Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily Known than the Body.

Yesterday's meditation left me all but drowning in doubts. Nonetheless, I will continue the journey in hope of finding, like Archimedes moving the earth, some fixed point of certainty.

It is not even necessary that God puts ideas into my mind, for it is possible that I am producing them myself. But am I myself something? I have chosen to deny that I have senses and body, but the deceiver can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think that I am something. So, we must definitely conclude that; I think, I exist, is necessarily true each time I mentally conceive it.

But I do not yet know clearly what I am. I believed myself to be a man, but what is a man? To say 'man is a reasoning animal' means that I should have to inquire into the subtleties of what an animal is, and what reasonable. But I know that I considered myself as having bones and flesh, that I was nourished, that I walked, that I felt, and that I thought, and I referred all these actions to the soul: but I did not stop to consider what the soul was, or if I did, I imagined that it was something extremely subtle like a wind or flame within my grosser parts.

I have determined to imagine that that evil genie is deceiving me even about my knowledge of my own self. So what are those attributes of my own self?

I knew that I could eat and walk, but that would be impossible if my body were a deceit. I knew that I had sensations. But one cannot feel without body, and besides, I have dreamt of having sensations. What of thinking? This surely is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. Could it be the case that if I ceased to think, then I would cease to exist?

Putting aside all which is not necessarily true: then I can accurately state that I am no more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason.

I am, however, a real thing; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks. I exist, but what am I? I am the I whom I know exists. The very knowledge of my existence does not depend on uncertain things, nor could I feign it; for there would still be the I that feigns things. I am a thinking thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, imagines and feels.

Finally, I am the same who perceives things like noise and heat by the organs of sense. But could these be naught but dreams and chimera? I seem to comprehend corporeal things in the world, and even to know them better than I know the contents of my mind, but could they still be false?

Let us consider one simple corporeal thing - this piece of wax: freshly taken from the hive, with the sweetness of its honey and the aroma of flowers. It has its colour, its figure, its size. It appears hard, cold, and if you strike it with the finger, it will emit a sound. But while I speak, I take it near to the fire; the smell, colour, shape is all destroyed. It becomes liquid, it heats so that scarcely can one handle it, and when one strikes it, no sound is made. All sensation is changed, yet we confess that it is the same wax

I can imagine that this wax might be made into a square or a triangle and still be the same wax. No! More! I imagine that it, or any piece of wax, could be formed to any shape, even though my mind cannot encompass such an infinitude of forms. It seems that I could not even understand through the imagination what this piece of wax is. So, must I conclude that the wax is properly known through vision rather than from intuition of mind? But if we grant this, may we not also grant that the men I see outside my window are just automatic machines wearing hats and coats?

It is now manifest to me that bodies are not properly known by the senses or by the imagination, but by

the understanding only. Things are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but because they are understood. I now see clearly that there is nothing which is easier for me to know than my mind.

But it is difficult to rid oneself of a long-held view, so it will be well that I should rest at this point, to meditate on this new knowledge.

MEDITATION THREE

Of God: that He Exists.

I shall now close my eyes and my ears, and put away all thought of physical things, to try to better understand my own self. So far, my only assurance is to accept those things which I perceive very clearly and very distinctly as true, yet I know that I have often been mistaken. It remains possible that God might deceive me, though I cannot imagine how he might persuade me that I don't exist, or that two plus are not five. To remove such doubt, I must enquire as to whether God exists, and whether he is a deceiver.

If I hear sound, or see the sun, or feel heat, I judge that these sensations come from things outside of me. Just now, for instance, whether I will it or not, I feel heat, and it seems obvious that this feeling is produced by something different from me, ie. the fire. But I must doubt that it is nature which impels me to believe in material things, for, given a choice between virtue and vice, nature has often led me to the worse part. But I do not find it any more convincing that ideas proceed from objects outside me, for there is often a great difference between knowledge and appearance. The sun, for instance, seems very small, yet we know from astronomical calculation that it is very great. It seems that blind impulse, not judgement, has given me my knowledge of the world.

Those ideas which represent substances all seem more solid than those that represent modes or accidents; and that idea of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, seems to have even more objective reality.

Now it is manifest that effects derive their reality from their causes, that something cannot proceed from nothing and that the perfect cannot proceed from something imperfect. For example, the idea of stone can only be produced by something which possesses, either formally or eminently, all that constitutes stone. Likewise heat must come from a cause at least as perfect as heat, and so on.

But further, the idea of heat, or stone, cannot exist in me unless it has been placed there by some cause at least as real as that which I conceive exists in the heat or stone. Thus the light of nature causes me to know clearly that my ideas may fall short of the perfection of the objects from which they derive, but they can never be greater or more perfect. What I can conclude from all this is that I cannot myself be the cause of an idea, the cause must be outside me and greater than my idea. But I seem to know so little about corporeal objects, as we found with the wax yesterday, that such ideas may well proceed from myself. Moreover, things such as light, colours, tastes, heat or cold are so obscure and confused that I do not even know if they are true or false. It seems that I have no ideas that might not originate solely in my own mind.

There remains only the idea of God, whose attributes of infinity, independence, all-knowledge and all-power seem so exceptional that no idea of them could have come from within me; hence we must conclude that God exists.

The idea of substance could be from within me, as I am a substance, but, since I am finite, the idea of an infinite substance must proceed from elsewhere. I could not have gained the idea of infinite substance

just by negating the finite, as I perceive darkness as negation of light; for there is manifestly more reality in infinite substance than in finite. Indeed, how could I have the notion that I am finite and imperfect, unless I had some idea of a Being more perfect, by which to recognise my deficiencies?

We must say that the idea of God is very clear and distinct and more objectively real than others. Even if we can imagine that God does not exist, we cannot imagine that the idea of him means nothing.

Possibly all those perfections of God are in some way potentially in me, for I am sensible that my knowledge increases little by little, and I see nothing which can prevent it from increasing to the perfection of the Divine. At the same time, I recognise that this cannot be, since it can never reach a point so high that it could not attain to yet greater increase. But I do not easily see why the idea of perfection must have been placed in me, so I ask, do I derive my existence from myself, or my parents, or some other source than God? But if I myself were the author of my being, I should doubt nothing, desire nothing, lack no perfection and be unable to ever find myself discovering new things.

It is perfectly clear and evident to all who consider the nature of time, that, in order to have existence at a particular moment, a substance must have the power to create itself anew in the next moment. But I am conscious of no such power in myself, and by this, I know clearly that I depend on some being different from myself. Possibly, this being is not God, perhaps it is my parents or some other imperfect cause?

This cannot be, because, as I have said, there must be at least as much reality in the cause as in the effect; and since I am a thinking thing, it must be that the cause is likewise a thinking thing. But from what cause does God derive? If it derives from another cause, we must ask whether this second cause has a cause. But it is perfectly manifest that there can be no regression into infinity.

Finally, it is not my parents who conserve me, they are only the authors of that body in which the self, ie. the mind, is implanted. Thus we must necessarily conclude from the simple fact that I exist, and that I have the idea of a perfect Being, that the proof of God's existence is grounded on the highest evidence.

It only remains to ask how I have acquired this idea of God. Not through the senses, nor as a fiction of my mind, for I cannot take from or add anything to it. The only alternative is that God, in creating me, placed this idea within me, like the mark of the workman on his work. The whole strength of the argument is in recognising that it is not possible that my nature should be what it is, and that I should have the idea of God, if God did not veritably exist. From this, it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that deception necessarily proceeds from some defect.

But before I go on, it seems right to pause to think on His majesty; at least as far as my dazzled mind will allow. For faith teaches us that the glory of this, and the other, life is contemplation of the Divine.

MEDITATION FOUR

Of the True and the False.

Over these past days I have found little certainty respecting corporeal objects, some respecting the mind, and more regarding God. I shall now go on to consider things purely intelligible which have no contact with matter.

I recognise it as impossible that God should ever deceive me; for fraud and deception testify to imperfection, malice or feebleness, which cannot be of God. So, my capacity for judgement, as it is from God, can never mislead me if I use it aright. The more skilful the artisan, the more perfect his work, and

God always wills what is best; is it then for the best that I should be subject to error?

In the first place, knowing that I am feeble and limited, while God is infinite, I recognise that some of his ends, which seem imperfect, would be found to be perfect if we could but comprehend the whole.

Considering my own errors, I find that they depend on my knowledge, and on my power of choice or free will. Though I recognise that my knowledge, memory and imagination are imperfect, in my free will I find power so great that I cannot conceive of any greater, and so see there the image of God. Thus, when I feel indecisive, this rather evinces a lack of knowledge than any imperfection of will: for if I always recognised clearly what was true and good, I should never have trouble deliberating.

Whence then come my errors? They come from the fact that my will is much wider in range than my understanding, and extending it to things which I do not understand I fall into error and sin. If I abstain from giving judgement on things that I do not perceive with clearness and distinctness, it is plain that I act rightly. But if I determine to affirm what is not true, then I deceive myself, and misuse free will to create error.

I have no cause to complain that God has not given me more powerful intelligence, since it is proper that a finite understanding should not comprehend all things. Nor have I reason to complain that He has given me a will larger than my understanding, since free-will is such that if it were less than complete, it would not exist at all.

Finally, I must not complain that God concurs with me in errors of my will, because, in a certain sense, more perfection accrues to me from the fact that I can will them, than if I could not. This is no imperfection of God; but it is without doubt an imperfection in me not to make a good use of my freedom. I nevertheless perceive that God could have created me so that I never should err, although I remained free yet limited in my knowledge, perhaps by giving me a perfect memory. Nevertheless, it seems that it is a greater perfection that parts of the universe should have error rather than all parts be the same.

In this day's Meditation, I have discovered the source of falsity and error. I see that as long as I make judgements only on matters which I clearly and distinctly understand, I can never be deceived and will, without doubt, arrive at truth.

MEDITATION FIVE

Of the Essence of Material Things, and, again, of God, that he Exists.

Many questions about God and my own nature remain. But I must try to emerge from the state of doubt I have held to these last few days, and to see which of my ideas of the corporeal world are clear and which confused.

In the first place, I can clearly imagine extension in length, breadth or depth. I can number different parts, and attribute to them size, figure and movement. For example, when I imagine a triangle, even if it be imaginary, it has a certain nature, or essence, immutable and eternal, which I have not imagined. For instance, its angles equal two right angles.

I have seen triangles; yet, I can form in my mind other shapes which have never been seen, but still clearly know their properties. Hence they are something, for it is clear that what is true is something, and I have shown that what I know clearly is true. Indeed, I have always counted geometry and mathematics as the most certain.

When I think of it this with care, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than having three angles can be separated from the essence of triangle. Still, from the fact that I, say, know that a mountain must have a valley, it does not follow that there is a mountain. Similarly, although I conceive of God as having existence, my thought does not impose any necessity upon things. Just as I can imagine a winged horse, although no such exists, so I could perhaps attribute existence to God, although no God existed.

But this is mere sophism; for whether the mountain and the valley exist or not, they cannot be separated from one another. But from the fact that I cannot conceive God without existence, it follows that existence is inseparable from Him, and hence that He exists. I cannot think of God without existence, though it is in my power to imagine a horse either with or without wings.

It is not necessary that I should ever think of God, nevertheless, whenever I do, it is necessary that I attribute to Him every perfection, although I cannot enumerate them all. The idea of God, I discern in many ways. First, because I cannot conceive anything but God to whose essence existence necessarily pertains. Second, because it is not possible for me to conceive two or more Gods. Third, granted that such a God exists that He must exist eternally. Finally, because I know an infinitude of other properties in God, none of which I can either diminish or change.

For the rest, we must always return to the point that only those things that we conceive clearly and distinctly are true. And this applies just as much to those matters that are understood only from careful examination as to those which are manifestly obvious. For example, in the case of every right-angled triangle, although it is not so obvious that the square of the base is equal to the squares of the two other, still, when this has once been apprehended, we can be certain of its truth.

If only my mind were not pre-occupied with prejudices, there would be nothing I could know more immediately and more easily than God. Once I recognise this, and see that He is not a deceiver, I can infer that what I perceive clearly and distinctly must be true. And such knowledge will remain true, even if I forget the reasons which led me to the conclusion. And so I very clearly recognise that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends alone on the knowledge of the true God. Now that I know Him, I have the means of acquiring a perfect knowledge of many things.

MEDITATION SIX

Of the Existence of Material Things, and of the Real Distinction between the Soul and Body of Man

It now remains to inquire whether material things exist. I clearly and distinctly know of objects, inasmuch as they are represented by pure mathematics, and I know that my imagination is capable of persuading me of physical existence, perhaps by the application of knowledge to the body, which is immediately present to it and which therefore, exists.

This is the more clear when we see the difference between imagination and pure intellection. For example, when I imagine a triangle, I conceive it, not only as a figure of three lines, but also by an inward vision, which I call imagining.

But if I think of a chiliagon, a thousand-sided figure, I cannot in any way imagine or visualise it, as the imagination is a different power from understanding. It may be that I can imagine corporeal objects by turning the mind towards the body. This differs from pure intellection, where the mind turns on itself. Because I can discover no other explanation, I think it likely that the body does exist.

First I shall consider those matters perceived through the senses which I hitherto held to be true.

I perceived that I had all the members of this body - which I considered part, or possibly the whole, of myself. Further, I sensed that this body was amidst others, from which it could be affected with pain or pleasure. I also experienced appetites like hunger, thirst, and also passions like joy, titillation, sadness and anger. Outside myself, in addition to extension, figure and motions of bodies, I beheld in them hardness, heat, light and colour, and scents and sounds, so that I could distinguish the sky, the earth, the sea and other bodies. And because I remembered that I had made use of the senses rather than reason, I came to believe that all the ideas in my mind that had come to me through the senses.

But when I inquired, why painful sensation leads to sadness, and pleasurable sensation to joy, or a mysterious pinching of the stomach called hunger leads to desire to eat, and so on, I could only reason that nature taught me so. There is certainly no affinity (that I at least can understand) between the craving of the stomach and the desire to eat, any more than between pain and sadness.

But experience has gradually destroyed my faith in my senses. I have seen round towers from afar, which closely observed seemed square, and colossal statues, which appeared tiny when closely viewed. I found error in the external senses, and in the internal; for is there anything more internal than pain? And yet I learn that some persons seem to feel pain in an amputated part, which makes me doubt the sources of my own pain. I have experienced sensations when I sleep, yet I do not think they proceed from objects outside of me, so I do not see any reason why I should believe those I have while awake. Furthermore, nature persuaded me of many things which reason found repellent, so that I did not believe that I should trust nature. I knew that my will did not control the ideas I received from the senses, but did not think that reason to conclude that they proceeded from outside myself, since possibly some hidden faculty in me might produce them.

Now that I begin to know myself better, I do not so rashly accept all which the senses seem to teach, but nor do I think I should doubt them all.

I know that God may have placed in me the things which I comprehend, but I can only explain my ability to make distinctions between one thing and another by concluding that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing. And although possibly I possess a body, because I have a clear and distinct idea of myself as only a thinking and unextended thing, and it is thereby that I possess an idea of body as an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this soul, by which I am what I am, is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.

I further find that faculties of imagination and feeling cannot be conceived apart from me, that is without an intelligent substance in which they reside. I also observe in me faculties like change of position, which can only be conceived as being attached to corporeal substance. There is also in me a faculty of perceiving sensible things which is entirely passive, but this would be useless if there were not an active faculty capable of forming and producing these ideas. But this active faculty does not presuppose thought, and, as I am a thinking thing, it is necessarily the case that the faculty resides in some substance different from me. Either this substance is a body, that is, a corporeal nature, or it is God, or some other noble creature. But He would be a deceiver if these ideas were produced other than by corporeal objects. Hence we must allow that corporeal things exist. They may not be exactly as we perceive them, but we must at least admit that such part of them as is clear and distinct (such as that described by mathematics) are truly to be recognised as external objects.

Nature teaches me by the sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, etc. that I am not merely lodged in my body as a pilot in a ship, but that I am so closely united to it that I seem to compose with it one whole. For if that were not the case, when my body is hurt, I, the thinking thing, should not feel pain, but would perceive the wound just as the sailor perceives something damaged in his vessel. For all these sensations of hunger, thirst, pain, etc. are in truth just confused modes of thought produced by the apparent intermingling of mind and body.

But there are many other things which nature seems to have taught me. For example; I hold the opinion that all space in which there is nothing that affects my senses is void. That a warm body contains something similar to my idea of heat. That a white or green body has in it the same whiteness or greenness that I perceive. Or that bitter or sweet taste exists in bitter or sweet things. Or that the stars, towers, and other distant bodies are of the same figure as they appear to our eyes. Nature teaches me to flee from things that cause the sensation of pain, and seek things that communicate to me the sentiment of pleasure. But I do not see that this teaches me that from those sense-perceptions we should ever form any conclusion regarding things outside of us, without having carefully mentally examined them. For it seems to me that it is mind alone, and not mind and body in conjunction, that is requisite to knowledge of the truth about such things. Thus, although a star makes no bigger impression on my eye than a tiny candle flame, yet I have always judged it larger.

Approaching fire I feel heat, and approaching too near I feel pain, but there is no reason to accept that there is something resembling my notion of heat in fire, or than it contains something resembling pain. All that I have any reason to believe is that there is something in it that excites in me these sensations of heat or of pain. Nature has provided me with this sense merely to signify to my mind what things are beneficial or hurtful. Yet, I interpret them as the essence of bodies outside me, as to which, in fact, they can teach me nothing but what is most obscure and confused.

This pursuit or avoidance things, taught me by nature, sometimes leads to error; as when the agreeable taste of some poisoned food may induce me to partake of the poison. Though here nature may be excused, for it only induces me to desire pleasant food, not poison. Thus, I can infer that I am not omniscient, which should not be astonishing, since man is finite in nature.

But we frequently deceive ourselves even in those things to which we are directly impelled by nature, as happens with those who when they are sick desire things hurtful to them. It might be said that sickness corrupts nature, but a sick man is as much God's creature as he who is in health. Just as a badly-made clock still follows the laws of nature, so the body of a man with no mind in it, would have the same motions as at present, excepting those movements due to the direction of the will. It would be natural for such a body, if it suffered the dropsy, to move the nerves and other parts to obtain drink, which is the feature of this disease although it is harmful to the sufferer. This comparison of a sick man to a faulty clock may be a mere verbal quibble, but it remains to inquire how the goodness of God does not prevent the nature of man from being fallacious.

There is a great difference between mind and body, as body is by nature always divisible, and the mind is indivisible. When considering the mind, I cannot distinguish in it any different parts. And although the whole mind seems united to the whole body, yet if a foot or an arm is separated from my body, nothing has been taken away from my mind. Those faculties of willing, feeling, conceiving, etc. cannot be said to be its parts, for it is one and the same mind which employs itself in willing and in feeling and understanding. But I know that corporeal objects can readily be divided into parts, which alone would teach me that the mind or soul is entirely different from the body, if I had not already learned it from other sources.

I further notice that the mind does not receive impressions from the body directly, but only from the brain, or perhaps even from the small part of the brain where common sense resides. But because the nerves must pass through a long route, it may happen that some intervening part is excited, which may excite a mistaken movement in the brain. More usually, when, say nerves in the feet are violently moved, their movement, passing through the medulla of the spine to the inmost parts of the brain, gives a sign to the mind which makes it feel pain, as though in the foot. By this, the mind is excited to do its utmost to remove the cause of the evil as dangerous to the foot. It is true that God could have constituted the nature of man such that this movement would have conveyed something quite different to the mind, but nothing would have contributed so well to the conservation of the body.

Notwithstanding the supreme goodness of God, the nature of man, composed of mind and body, can sometimes be a source of deception.

This consideration helps me to recognise the errors to which my nature is subject, so as to avoid them, or correct them more easily. Knowing that my senses usually indicate to me truth respecting what is beneficial to the body, and being able almost always to avail myself of many of those senses in order to examine things, together with my memory to connect the present with the past, and my understanding of the causes errors, I ought no longer to fear the falsity of my everyday senses. So, I ought to set aside all the doubts of these past days as hyperbolic and ridiculous, particularly that very common uncertainty respecting dreams, for I now see that memory never connects dreams together as it unites waking events. I ought in never to doubt the truth of such matters, if having called up my senses, memory, and understanding to examine them, nothing is perceived by any one of them which is repugnant to that set forth by the others. For because God is no deceiver, it follows that I am not deceived in this.

But because the exigencies of action often oblige us to make up our minds before having leisure to examine matters carefully, we must confess that the life of man is frequently subject to error. We must in the end acknowledge the infirmity of our nature.