

# Dialogues on Metaphysics and Religion

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Larger omissions are reported, between brackets, in normal-sized type. The numbering of the segments of each dialogue is Malebranche's.

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## FOURTH DIALOGUE

**The nature and properties of the senses in general. The wisdom of the laws of the union of soul and body. This •union changed to •dependence by the sin of the first man.**

**Aristes:** Where have you been, Theodore? I was impatient at not meeting you.

**1. Theodore:** What? Isn't reason enough for you? Can't you spend your time contentedly with reason if Theodore isn't there? For intellects that are blessed, reason suffices for •eternity; but after being left with it for only •a few hours you have become impatient at not seeing me. What are you thinking of? Do you expect me to let you have a blind and disorderly attachment to me? Love reason, consult it, follow it. For I tell you that I won't have as friends those who neglect it and refuse to submit to its laws.

**Aristes:** Hold on, Theodore—*listen* for a moment!

**2. Theodore:** There can't be a lasting and sincere friendship that isn't based on reason, which is an unchangeable good, one that everyone can have without its having to be divided. Friendships based on good things that are parcelled out and can be used up always lead to trouble and don't last long. Aren't they false and dangerous friendships?

**Aristes:** Indeed. That is all true—nothing more certain. But Theodore!

**Theodore:** What do you want to say?

**3. Aristes:** What a difference there is between •seeing and •seeing—between •knowing what men are telling us at the time when they are telling it and •knowing what reason is telling us at the time when it is responding to us! What a difference between •knowing and •sensing—between •ideas that enlighten us and •confused sensations that stir us up

and trouble us! How fertile this principle is—what light it casts! What errors, what sloppy errors it dispels! I meditated on the principle, Theodore, and followed its consequences. What made me impatient was my desire to see you and thank you for teaching it to me. . . . Now I am convinced, not by the force of your words but by the evident replies of internal truth. I understand what you told me, and also many other matters that you *didn't* talk to me about! I understood them clearly, and ·out of all of them· the one that remains the most deeply engraved in my memory is that *I have lived my whole life in an illusion*—always seduced by the testimony of my senses, always corrupted by their charms. How unworthy sensible goods are! How powerless bodies appear to me to be! No, this sun, brilliant as it appears to my eyes, doesn't *contain* and doesn't *cast* this light that shines on me. The colours that beguile me in their variety and liveliness, the beauties that charm me when I look around my environment—all this belongs to *me*. None of it comes from bodies, none of it is in bodies, because none of it is contained in the idea of matter. And I am convinced that we must judge God's works not by our changing sensations of them but by the unchangeable, necessary, eternal ideas that represent them—by the archetype from which they have all been formed.

**Theodore:** What pleasure you are giving me! I see that you have consulted reason with all creation silent; for you are still thoroughly enlightened by it, thoroughly animated, thoroughly filled. What good friends we will be, you and I, with reason always as our common good and as the bond of

our togetherness. We shall each enjoy the same pleasures and possess the same riches. For truth is given in its entirety to everyone and in its entirety to each of us. All minds are nourished by it without its store being lessened in any way. What a joy it is, once more, to see you so filled with the truths that you are telling me!

**4. Aristes:** I am also filled with gratitude for what I owe you. That's why I was impatient. Yes, you taught me about that tree in the earthly paradise that gives life and immortality to minds. You have shown me the heavenly manna by which I am to be nourished in the desert of this present life. You have taken me imperceptibly to the inner master who enlightens all intellects (nothing else does). A few minutes of attention to the clear and luminous ideas presented to the mind by the inner master taught me more truths and freed me from more wrong notions than everything I had read in the books of the philosophers or been taught by my masters or indeed by you, Theodore. ·I should explain that last remark·. The trouble is that however precisely you speak to me, when I •hear you and at the same time •consult reason, I hear the confused sound of two replies that are simultaneous yet different, one •sensible and the other •intelligible. The reply that strikes my ear takes up some of the capacity of my mind, and lessens its liveliness and penetration ·in listening to the inner master·. That is the least of the trouble. ·What matters more is this·: You need •*time* in which to say what you have to say, whereas the responses of reason are •*eternal* and unchangeable. These replies always *have* been made, or rather they are always *being* made but not through a period of time; and though we require some time to hear them it takes no time to make them since they are not actually *made*. They are eternal, unchangeable, necessary. Allow me the pleasure of declaring to you some of what I think I have

learned from our common master, to whom you were kind enough to introduce me.

**5.** As soon as you left me, Theodore, I entered into myself to consult reason, and I perceived everything differently from how I had when you were talking to me and I was deferring to your proofs—proofs •that the ideas of created things are eternal, •that God formed bodies on ·the model of· the idea of extension, •that this idea must therefore represent their nature, and •that I should thus study *it* in order to discover the properties of bodies. I understood clearly that to •consult my senses and look for truth in my own states is to •prefer darkness to light and to •renounce reason. At first my senses opposed these conclusions, as though they were jealous of these ideas that they saw depriving them of the privileged place they had long held in my mind. But their objections turned out to be so full of falsehood and contradiction that I condemned them as deceivers and false witnesses. Indeed, I saw no force in their testimony, whereas I observed a wonderful clarity in the ideas that they tried to obscure. The senses went on speaking to me with assurance, arrogance, extreme pushiness; but I made them shut up, and I called back the ideas that had left me because they couldn't stand the confused noise and tumult of the rebellious senses.

I must admit, Theodore, that the empirical arguments you had given me against the authority of the senses have been marvelously useful to me. I used them to silence these noisy rebels. I convicted them of falsity through their own testimony. At every moment they betrayed themselves. Everything they said was incomprehensible and quite incredible; but apart from that they gave me the same reports of quite different things and contrary reports of the same things, depending on how they were concerned with them. So I silenced them, and firmly decided that in my judgments on God's works I would go not by the testimony of the senses

but by the ideas that represent these works and on the model of which they were formed.

It was by following this principle that I came to grasp that light was not in the sun or in the air where we see it, nor are colours on the surface of bodies, and that real situation might perhaps be this: The sun moves the tiny parts of the air, which then impress the same motion on the optic nerve, which transmits it to the part of the brain where the soul resides; and that these tiny bodies, whose motion alters when they encounter solid objects, are reflected in different ways according to the differences in the surfaces that reflected them. That, if it were right, would give us light and the variety of colours supposed to be in bodies.

6. I also grasped that the heat I feel was *not* in the fire, nor is cold in the ice, nor—an even stronger result—is there pain in my own body where I have often felt something so sharply and so cruelly. . . . All this is for the same reason that sound is not in the air, and that the vibrations of strings differ infinitely from the sound they make, just as mathematical relations among the vibrations differ from tonal relations among the sounds.

It would take too long, Theodore, to go in detail through the arguments that convinced me that bodies have no qualities except those that result from their shapes and no action except their different motions. But I can't conceal from you a difficulty that I haven't been able to overcome, however hard I tried. I have no difficulty following the action of the sun, for example following it through all the spaces between it and me. For, on the supposition that the world is full, I can conceive how an impression can be transmitted from where the sun is to where I am—to my eyes and thence to my brain. But, from the clear idea of this motion, I haven't been able to understand the origin of the *sensation* of light. I saw that a mere motion of the optic nerve could make me

sense light: when I pressed my finger against the corner of my eye at the place where I know this nerve ends, I saw *intense light on a dark background* on the other side of that eye. But this change of motion into light did and still does appear to me to be altogether incomprehensible. What a strange transformation—from a movement or pressure in my eye to a flash of light! Furthermore, I don't see this flash

in my soul, of which it is a state; or

in my brain, where the movement terminates; or

in my eye, where the pressure is exerted;

and I don't even see it on the side of the eye on which I press. Rather, I see it in the air—in *the air!*—which is incapable of being in such a state, and on the other side from the side of the eye that I press. What an amazing thing!

7. I thought at first that my soul, being informed of the movement in my body, was the cause of the sensation it had of bodies in its environment. But a little reflection disabused me of that thought: it seems to me that the soul *isn't* informed that the sun is moving fibres of the brain. I saw light before I knew anything about this movement. Children, who don't even know that they *have* a brain, are affected by a flash of light as well as philosophers. Moreover, how do the movements of a body relate to the various sensations that follow? How can I see light in bodies when it is a state of my mind? and how can I see it in the bodies surrounding me when the movement is only in my own body? And why do I see light on the left side when I know for sure that I pressed my eye on the right side? I realized from all this, and from many other things it would take me too long to tell you about, that I had these sensations willy-nilly; that therefore I was in no way their cause; and that bodies weren't their cause either, for the following reason.

If bodies could act and make themselves sensed in the way I sensed them, they would have to have a

more excellent nature than I do, endowed with a terrific power and even (some of them) with wonderful wisdom, always uniform in their behaviour, always effective in their action, always incomprehensible in the surprising effects of their power.

That seemed to me a monstrous and horrible thought, though my senses supported this madness and were entirely consistent with it. But please, Theodore, explain the matter to me.

**Theodore:** This is not the time to resolve your difficulties, Aristes, unless you want to leave the general truths of metaphysics and turn to the explanation of the principles of physics and the laws of the union of soul and body.

**Aristes:** A few words on the subject, please. I want very much to meditate on the matter. My mind now is all ready for it.

**8. Theodore:** Listen, then; but remember to think over the things I am going to tell you. When we look for the reason for certain effects and, tracing back from effects to causes and to the causes of those, and so on, we finally reach a general cause or a cause that we see has no intelligible relation to the effect that it produces or rather *seems* to produce. At that point, rather than imagining chimeras, we should bring in God, the author of the laws of nature. But the appeal to God should be postponed as long as possible. For example, if you asked me for the cause of the pain we feel when we are pricked, it be wrong for me to answer *straight off* that prick-followed-by-pain is one of the laws of the author of nature. I ought instead to tell you that a prick can't separate the fibres of my flesh without moving the nerves leading to the brain and in that way moving the brain itself. But if you wanted to know why, when a part of my brain is stirred up in a certain way, I feel the pain of a prick—since this question

concerns a general effect, and we can't work our way further back to a particular or natural cause—then we have to bring in God, the general cause. For your question amounts to asking about the authorship of the general laws of the union of body and soul. Since you see clearly that there can't be any necessary relation or connection between movements in the brain and sensations in the soul, we obviously have to bring in a power that isn't to be found in either the brain or the soul. It isn't enough to say that because the pricking wounds the body the soul must be informed of this by pain so that it will take care of the body. This would be to give the final cause [= 'the purpose'] rather than the efficient cause [= 'the cause' in our present sense of the word], and the difficulty would still stand: we still wouldn't know what makes the soul suffer when the body is wounded, and makes it suffer in a specific way when the body receives a wound of a specific sort.

**9.** Some philosophers say this:

The soul causes its own pain. Pain is just the sadness the soul has because of a disorder that occurs in the body it loves—a disorder that it knows about through some difficulty it is having in the exercise of its functions.

But to say this is to fail to attend to our own sense of what takes place in ourselves. For instance, each of us senses when he is bled or is burned that he isn't the cause of his pain. He feels it although he dislikes it, and he can't doubt that it comes from an external cause. And another point: the soul doesn't delay feeling pain (or pain of such and such a kind) until it has learned about some movement (or a movement of such and such a kind) in the brain! Nothing is more certain. Finally, pain and sadness are quite different. Pain comes before knowledge of harm, while sadness comes after. There is nothing pleasant about pain, but sadness

·sometimes· pleases us so much that when people try to drive it from our minds—to cheer us up without at the same time freeing us from whatever it is that makes us sad—we find them as irritating and disagreeable as if they were disturbing our joy. That is because when we are suffering some ill or are deprived of some good, sadness is the most appropriate state for us to be in, and the feeling that comes with this passion is the sweetest we could enjoy when we are in that state. So pain is quite different from sadness. . . . But let us return to your difficulties about the action and qualities of light. ·I have five points to make about this·.

**10. (1)** There is no ‘transformation’. Motion in the brain can’t be changed into light or colour. Since states of bodies are simply the bodies themselves in some particular condition, they can’t be transformed into states of minds. That’s obvious.

**(2)** You press the corner of your eye, and you have a certain sensation. This is because ·God·, the only one who can act on minds, has established certain laws through whose operation the actions and undergoings of soul and body are co-ordinated [see the twelfth dialogue].

**(3)** When you press your eye, you see light although there is no luminous body. That’s because the effect your finger has had on your eye and thus on your brain is *similar to* the effect that the bodies we call ‘luminous’ have on bodies surrounding them and thus on our eyes and our brains. All this results from natural laws. For one of the laws of the union of soul and body—one of the laws according to which God acts invariably on the two substances—is that a pressure or disturbance of this kind is followed by a certain sensation.

**(4)** The light is a state of your mind, so it can exist only *in* your mind, because it is a contradiction that a state of a thing should exist somewhere other than where the thing

itself is. Yet you see this light in great spaces that your mind does not fill, since your mind doesn’t occupy any place. That is because the great spaces that you see are simply *intelligible* spaces that don’t fill up any place. The spaces you see [*voyez*] are quite different from the material spaces that you look at [*regardez*]. We mustn’t confuse •the ideas of things with •the things themselves. Remember, we don’t see bodies in themselves; they are visible to us only through their ideas. Often we see them when they are not there, which is certain proof that what we see is intelligible and is quite different from what we look at.

**(5)** Finally, you see the light on the opposite side from where you pressed your eye because. . . .the pressure of your finger on the left has the same effect on your eye as a luminous body on your right would have ·in normal vision. . . . Thus God makes you sense the light on your right since he invariably follows the laws he has established, thereby maintaining a perfect uniformity in his conduct. God never performs miracles, he never acts by special volitions contrary to his own laws unless order requires or permits that he do so. His conduct always manifests the character of his attributes. ·His laws remain always the same because· his character remains always the same (except where the demands of his unchangeableness are outweighed by the demands of some other of his perfections; I’ll show you this later).

There! I think that disentangles your difficulties. To dispel them, I bring in God and his attributes. But this is not to say, Aristes, that God, ·having once established the laws of nature·, stands idly by, as some philosophers maintain. Certainly, if God *does* still act at present, our only way of seeing him as the cause of certain effects is by bringing him in for *general* effects, ones that we see clearly have no necessary and essential relation to their natural

causes. What I have just told you, my dear Aristes—guard it carefully in your memory, place it with your most precious possessions. And although you understand it, let me briefly re-state the essence of the matter so that you can easily recover it from your memory when you are in a position to meditate on it.

**11.** There is no *necessary* relation between the two substances that make us up. States of our bodies can't through their own efficacy change states of our minds. Nonetheless, states of a certain part of the brain (never mind which) are always *followed* by sensations, states of our souls; and this happens entirely through the invariably operative laws of the union of these two substances—or, to put it more openly, through the constant and invariably operative acts of the will of ·God·, the author of our being. There is no relation of causality running from body to mind—or, come to that, from mind to body. I go further: there is no such relation from a body to a body, or from a mind to another mind. In short, no created thing can act on any other by an efficacy of its own. I shall prove this ·more general thesis· to you shortly [in the seventh dialogue]. But ·even at our present stage· isn't it at least evident that a body, extension, a merely passive substance, can't by its own power act on a mind, a being of a different nature and infinitely more excellent than it is? Clearly, then, in the union of body and soul the only tie between them is the efficacy of divine decrees, decrees that are unchangeable and always have their effects. God has willed—and he goes on willing continuously—that various vibrations in the brain shall always be followed by various thoughts in the mind that is united to it. This constant and efficacious will of the creator is what properly constitutes the union of these two substances. For the only *Nature* there is, i.e. the only natural laws there are, are efficacious acts of God's will.

**12.** Don't ask, Aristes, *why* God wants to unite minds to bodies. That ·he does so· is an established fact the ultimate reasons for which have so far been unknown to philosophy. But here is one that it is well for me to put to you. Apparently God wanted to give to us (as he did to his son) something that we could offer up as a sacrifice to him. Apparently he wanted us, by a kind of *sacrifice and annihilation of ourselves*, to become worthy to have eternal blessings. This certainly looks right, and it is in conformity with order. We are now being tested in our bodies. It is through them as the occasional cause that we receive from God many thousands of different sensations that are the stuff of our merits through the grace of Jesus Christ. [See the explanation of 'occasional cause' fairly low on page 10.] For there to be a •general cause that. . . .could bring about an infinity of different effects by the simplest means and by general laws that are always the same, there *had* to be •occasional causes. (I'll show you this soon.) But we mustn't think that *bodies* were the only occasional causes that God could find to give his conduct the simplicity and uniformity that governs it. There are actually others to be found in the nature of angels. . . . But let us not speak of what is beyond us. What follows is something that •I am not afraid of affirming to you, that •is absolutely necessary to clarify the topic of our discussion, and that •I ask you to retain it in order to meditate on it at leisure.

**13.** God loves •order—this love comes from the necessity of his being, and can't be stopped. He loves and esteems all things in proportion as they are lovable and estimable. He necessarily hates •disorder. This is perhaps clearer and more unassailable than the proof I shall some day give you [eighth dialogue] that I'm now passing over. The soul is united to the body and has a stake in the body's survival; but it would manifestly be a •disorder if a mind that is capable of knowing and loving God, and hence is made for doing just that,

should be obliged to *concern itself* with the needs of the body; so it has had to be informed about how things are going on the bodily side by proofs that are instinctive—meaning proofs that are short yet convincing—of how the body that we animate stands in relation to bodies surrounding us.

**14.** God alone is our light and the cause of our well-being. He has all the perfections that anything has. He has all the ideas of them. So he contains in his wisdom all truths, •speculative and •practical [= roughly •non-moral and •moral]. . . . So he alone should be the object of our minds' attention, as he alone can •enlighten them and •govern all their movements, just as he alone stands above us. Certainly a mind concerned with—directed towards—created things, however excellent they may be, is not in the order God requires it to be in or in the state that God put it in. Now, if we had to examine every relation that the bodies in our environment have with the present disposition of our own bodies in order to judge whether, how, or to what extent we should have dealings with them, it would take a big share of—no! it would *entirely fill* the capacity of our minds. And our bodies wouldn't benefit from this. They would soon be destroyed by something that took them by surprise. For our needs change so often and sometimes so quickly that, if we weren't to be taken unawares by some bad accident we would have to exercise a vigilance of which we aren't in fact capable. For example, when should we eat? what should we eat? when should we stop? [Theodore elaborates this point, with more examples of what we would be in for if we had to *think* about every move we make, e.g. ducking to avoid a falling stone while not losing one's balance.]

**15.** This makes it evident that when God wanted to unite minds to bodies, and needed to set up occasional causes of our confused knowledge of the presence of objects and their properties in relation to us, the occasional causes couldn't

be •episodes of *attention* on our part, requiring us to have clear and distinct knowledge of these bodies. Rather, the occasional causes had to be •the various movements of the bodies themselves. God had to give us instinctively recognisable indications of how the bodies in our environment relate to our own bodies, so that we could succeed in the work of preserving our lives without unceasing *attention* to our needs. (The indications don't have to tell us about the nature and properties of the surrounding bodies, only their relations to us.) He had to undertake to give us sensations that would at the proper time and place *warn us in advance* of what our body needs to do, so that *we* could be left totally absorbed in the search for the true goods. The indications [*preuves*] had to be

short, so that they could convince us *quickly* about our bodily needs; lively, so that they would be *effective* in governing our movements; and certain and obviously undeniable, so that we could the more *surely* preserve ourselves.

But notice that the indications are confused; and the only certainty they give is not about how objects relate to one another (which is what the really *evident* truths of geometry are about) but only about how they relate to our bodies. These relations depend on the state of our bodies at the time. We find tepid water hot if the hand feeling it is cold, and this is appropriately so; and we find it cold if it is felt with a warm hand. We do and should find the water pleasant when we are moved by thirst, but when our thirst is quenched we find the water flat and distasteful. So, Aristes, let us admire the wisdom of the laws of the union of soul and body. Although all our senses tell us that sensible qualities are spread out over objects, let us attribute to bodies only properties that we clearly see belong to them after we have carefully consulted the idea that represents them. The senses tell us different

things about the same objects, according to the stake they have in them, and they inevitably contradict themselves when the good of the body demands it; so let us regard them as •false witnesses regarding the truth but as •reliable guides regarding the preservation and conveniences of life.

**16. Aristes:** What you are telling me goes right to the heart, Theodore! How upset I am at having all my life been the dupe of these false witnesses! The trouble is that they speak with so much confidence and force that they (as it were) sow conviction and certainty all through our minds. They order us around us with so much arrogance and zeal that we give in without thinking about it. How are we to enter into ourselves when the senses are shouting at us and pulling us out? Can we hear the replies of internal truth while the noise and tumult of the senses is going on? You made me understand that light can't be a state of bodies, but as soon as I open my eyes I begin to doubt that. When the sun strikes me, it dazzles me and blurs all my ideas. I understand *now* that if I pushed this pin into my hand all it could do is to make •a quite small hole in the hand. But if I actually did push it in, •a great pain would seem to be produced in the hand. At the moment the pin went in I certainly wouldn't doubt •that the pain was in my hand•. What power our senses have! What force for casting us into error! What disorder, Theodore! And yet in this very disorder the creator's wisdom shines out wonderfully. Light and colours *had* to appear to be spread out on objects if we were to distinguish them easily. Fruit *had* to seem filled with taste so that we would eat it with pleasure. Pain *had* to be •apparently• attached to the finger that was pricked so that the liveliness of the sensation would make us draw back. There is infinite wisdom in the order that God has established. I accept it, I can't doubt it. But I find in this

order one considerable *disorder* that seems to me unworthy of our God's wisdom and goodness. For in fact this order of •God's• is for us unfortunate creatures an abundant source of errors and the inevitable cause of the greatest evils that attend life. The end of my finger is pricked, and I suffer and am unhappy; I can't think of the true goods •that will flow from this painful event•, and my soul can only attend to my injured finger, which is filled with pain. What a strange affliction! A mind depends on a body and because of that it loses sight of the truth. It is split between—no, it is *more* occupied by its finger than by its true good. What disorder, Theodore! There is surely some mystery here. Please unravel it for me.

**17. Theodore:** Yes, there is undoubtedly some mystery here. What a debt philosophers have to religion, my dear Aristes, for the only way out of this difficulty is through religion. God's conduct seems to be full of contradictions, yet nothing is more uniform. Good and evil—I am speaking of physical evil—don't come from two different sources. The very same God does everything in accordance with the very same laws. But sin brings it about that God becomes the righteous avenger of the crimes of sinners, which he does without changing anything in his laws. I can't entirely clarify this matter for you right now, but here—briefly •and in outline•—is the resolution of your difficulty.

God is wise. He judges all things rightly. He esteems all things so far as they are estimable, and loves them so far as they are lovable. In short, his love for order can't be shaken, and he can't be side-tracked from his pursuit of it. He can't call it off. He can't sin. Now, minds are more estimable than bodies, and so (pay special attention to this) although God can •unite minds to bodies he can't •subject them to bodies. •Now, to come to your 'mystery', here are the two crucial

facts·:

- The pricking of my finger informs and warns me.
- The pricking of my finger hurts me and makes me unhappy, preoccupies me in spite of myself, blurs my ideas, prevents me from thinking of things that are truly good.

The former of these is right and in conformity with order. The latter is certainly, ·as you say·, a disorder, and unworthy of God's wisdom and goodness. The evident truth of this is shown to me by reason; yet experience convinces me that my mind depends on my body. *When I am pricked with a pin, I suffer, I am unhappy, I can't think*—it's impossible for me to doubt this. So we have here a manifest contradiction between •the certainty of experience and the •evident truth presented by reason. So much for the difficulty; now here is what resolves it. In the eyes of God the mind of man has lost its dignity and its excellence. We are no longer such as God made us, and the •union of our minds with our bodies has changed to •dependence ·of mind on body·. Because man has disobeyed God, it was right that his body ceased to be under his control. We are born sinners and corrupt, worthy of the divine anger, and totally unworthy of thinking of God, loving him, worshipping him, enjoying him. He is no longer willing to be our good or the cause of our happiness; and if he continues to be the cause of our existence rather than annihilating us, that is because his mercy prepares for us a redeemer—the man-God—through whom we shall have access to him, association with him. . . . Thus reason dispels the great contradiction by which you were so upset. It makes us clearly understand the most sublime truths. But this is because faith leads us to understanding and by its authority changes our doubts, and our uncertain and disturbing distrust, into conviction and certainty.

**18.** So hold firmly to the thought that reason has brought to you, Aristes, namely that ·God·, the infinitely perfect being, always follows unchangeable order as his law; and thus, although he can unite the •more with the •less noble, •mind with •body, he can't make the mind subservient to the body; he can't deprive the mind of liberty and the exercise of its most excellent functions, and—what a cruel penalty *this* would be!—against its will turn its attention away from its sovereign good and onto the lowest of created things. And conclude from all this that before sin exceptions were made, in man's favour, to the laws of the union of soul and body. Or, better, conclude that initially there was a law, since abolished, by which man's will was the occasional cause of his brain's being in a condition such that although his body was affected by the action of ·external· objects his soul was sheltered from them, so that interruptions never forced their way into its meditations and its ·religious· ecstasy. When you are deep in thought and the light of truth fills and delights you, don't you feel in yourself a remnant of this power? At those times it seems that noise, colours, odours, and other less intrusive and lively sensations hardly interrupt you at all. But you can't rise above *pain*., however hard you try (or so I believe, Aristes, on the basis of my own case). If we are to speak accurately of man as an innocent being made in God's image, we must consult divine ideas of unchangeable order, for they contain the model of a perfect man such as our father ·Adam· was before his sin. In *our* case our senses blur our ideas and make intellectual focus tiring to us, but *Adam's* senses informed him respectfully ·rather than shouting and insisting on being heard·. At the least sign from him they fell silent, not even informing him—if he didn't want them to—of the approach of

certain objects. He could eat without pleasure, look without seeing, sleep without dreaming. . . . Don't think that this is paradoxical. Concerning the state of the first man in whom everything squared with God's unchangeable order, *consult reason*; don't go by what you *sense* in your disordered body! We are sinners, and I am speaking of the man who was innocent. Order doesn't permit the mind to lose the liberty of its thoughts while the body is repairing its forces during sleep. At that time—at *all* times ·before he first sinned·—the righteous man had whatever thoughts he wanted to have. But now that man has become a sinner, he is no longer worthy of having exceptions to the laws of nature made on his account. He deserves to be stripped of his power over an inferior nature since, because by his rebellion he has turned himself into the most despicable of creatures—worthy not only of •being put on a par with *nothing* but of •being reduced to a state that is, for, him worse even than nothingness.

**19.** So don't stop admiring the wisdom and wonderful order of the laws of the union of soul and body, through which we have such a variety of sensations of objects in our environment. These laws are altogether wise. As at first instituted, they were beneficial to us in every way, and it is only right that they remain in force after sin, though they have distressing consequences. For the uniformity of God's conduct ought not to depend on an irregularity in ours—that is, it would be wrong for God to be swayed from his law-abiding conduct by our sin. But after man's rebellion it wouldn't be right that his body should be perfectly submissive to him. It should be subservient only to the extent needed for the sinner to preserve for a while his wretched life and to perpetuate the human species until the accomplishment of the work that his posterity is to take up through the righteousness and power of the coming redeemer. . . . Let me now assemble in a few words the

principal things I have just told you, Aristes, so that you may readily retain them and make them the subject of your meditations.

**20.** Man is composed of two substances, mind and body. Thus, he has two quite different sorts of goods to look for separately—•goods of the mind and •goods of the body—and God has given him two very sure means for these tasks: •reason for the mind's good and the •senses for the body's, •evidentness and light for the true goods and •confused instinct for the false ones. I call goods of the body 'false' or 'deceptive' because they aren't what they appear to our senses to be. Also, although they *are* good from the point of view of our survival, they don't have *within themselves* the power to do this good; they do it only through the divine volitions or the natural laws for which they are occasional causes. I can't explain this any further just now. Now it was appropriate that the mind should sense qualities that bodies don't have *as being* in the bodies. This was to enable the mind *not to love or fear the bodies* but to unite with them or get away from them according to the urgent needs of the bodily machine, the delicate springs of which require a vigilant and fast-acting guardian. . . . This is the cause now of our errors and our superficial judgments; it is why we—not being content to join certain bodies and keep away from others—are stupid enough to *love them and fear them*. In short, this is what has corrupted our hearts, every movement of which *should* take us toward God, and has blinded our minds, the judgments of which *should* rely on light alone. . . . We don't use the two means I have spoken of—reason and the senses—for the purpose for which God gave them to us; instead of consulting reason to discover the truth, and accepting only ·propositions having· the evidentness that comes with clear ideas, we take the word of a confused and deceptive instinct that has nothing reliable to say except

about the welfare of the body. This is what the first man did *not* do before his sin. There is no doubt that he didn't confuse the mind's states with physical states of affairs. At that time his ideas weren't confused; and his perfectly submissive senses didn't prevent him from consulting reason.

**21.** The mind is now as much punished as rewarded in its relation to the body. If we are pricked, we suffer from the prick, however hard we try not to think of it. That is a fact. But, as I told you, the reason is that it is not right that •exceptions be made to laws of nature in favour of a rebel, or rather that •we have a power over our bodies that we don't deserve. It is enough for us that by the grace of Jesus Christ the miseries we suffer today will tomorrow be the basis of our triumph and our glory. We don't *feel* true goods. Meditation repels us. When something happens that improves our minds, we aren't informed of this *naturally* by a thrust of pleasure. In fact the true good deserves to be loved by reason uniquely. It should be loved with an enlightened love that is under our control, not with the blind love that instinct inspires. The true good deserves our attention and our care. It doesn't need, as bodies do, borrowed qualities to make itself lovable to those who know it through and through. For us *now* to love the true good we have to be prompted by the thought of spiritual pleasure. But this is because we are feeble and corrupt; it is because desire\* puts us out of order and, to conquer it, God must inspire us with a different desire\* that is entirely holy; it is because we can't have the equilibrium of perfect freedom without something pulling us towards heaven to act as a counterweight to the weight pulling us to the ground. [\*Both occurrences of 'desire' in that sentence translate *concupiscence*, which in French as in English ordinarily refers to earthly, fleshly desires. Theodore's speaking of a *concupiscence* that is 'entirely holy' is a dramatic oxymoron.]

**22.** So let us enter into ourselves unceasingly, my dear Aristes, and try to silence not only our •senses but also our •imagination and our •passions. I have talked only about the •senses because they are the source of whatever force and malignancy is possessed by imagination and the passions. In general, whatever comes to the mind from the body solely through natural laws concerns only the body. So pay no attention to it. . . . Let us distinguish soul from body, and distinguish the quite different states that these two substances can be in; let us reflect often on the wonderful order and wisdom of the general laws of their union. Such reflections enable us to know ourselves, and to get rid of ever so many prejudices. That is how we learn to know *man* —•which is knowledge we need because• we have to live among men and with ourselves. These reflections enable the entire universe to appear to our minds *as it is*—stripped of a thousand beauties that •really• belong •not to •the universe but• only to •us, yet possessing the intricate mechanism that makes us admire the wisdom of its author. Finally, as you have just seen, these reflections make us aware not only of •the corruption of nature and •the necessity for a mediator—two great principles of our faith—but also vastly many other truths that are essential to religion and morality. You have made a start on meditating, Aristes; keep that up and you will see the truth of what I am telling you. You will see that every rational person should ply the trade of meditator!

**Aristes:** The word 'meditator' throws me off balance, now that I partly understand what you have said and am fully convinced of it. Because of the blind contempt for reason that I had, I thought you were suffering a kind of illusion, Theodore. I must own up, •though it seems from your choice of words that you already know. In conversation with a

group of people· I described you and some of your friends as ·professional· ‘meditators’. This stupid joke struck me as witty and clever; and I think you are well aware of what I meant by it. I insist that I didn’t *want* to believe it of you, and I cancelled the bad effect of this teasing with sincere praise that I have always believed was quite justified.

**Theodore:** I don’t doubt it, Aristes You had a bit of fun at my expense, and I enjoy it. But today perhaps you won’t much mind learning that it cost you more than it did me! You should know that the group ·you were with· included one of those ‘meditators’; and as soon as you had left he thought himself obliged to defend not •me but •the honour of universal reason against which you had offended by turning minds away from consulting it. When this meditator first spoke, everyone rose up in your favour. But, after he had put up with some teasing and the air of contempt inspired by an imagination in revolt against reason, he pleaded his cause so well that imagination *lost*. You were not made fun of, Aristes. The meditator seemed saddened by your blindness. . . .

**Aristes:** Would you believe it, Theodore? I am delighted by what you tell me. The harm I was afraid I had done was soon enough remedied. But to whom do I owe this? Isn’t it

Theotimus?

**Theodore:** You’ll know who it is when I’m quite convinced your love for the truth is great enough to be extended to those to whom you owe this somewhat ambiguous obligation!

**Aristes:** The obligation is not ambiguous. I protest that if it is Theotimus I shall love him for it and esteem him the more for it. The more I meditate, the more I feel myself drawn towards those who search for the truth, those whom I called ‘meditators’. . . . So do me the favour of telling me who the excellent man is who wanted to spare me the embarrassment that I deserved and who upheld the honour of reason so well without making me ridiculous. I want to have him for a friend. I want to deserve to be in favour with him; and if I can’t succeed in that I want him at least to know that I am no longer what I was.

**Theodore:** Well then, Aristes, he *will* know this. And if you want to be included among the meditators, I promise you that he will be one of your good friends. Meditate, and all will go well. You will soon win him over when he sees you with an ardour for the truth, with a submission to the faith, and with a deep respect for our common Master.

## FIFTH DIALOGUE

**The use of the senses in the sciences. In our sensations there is a clear idea and a confused sensation. The idea does not belong to the sensation. The idea is what enlightens the mind, and the sensation is what focuses the mind and makes it attentive; for it is through the sensation that the intelligible idea becomes sensible.**

**Aristes:** I have travelled far since you left me, Theodore. I have explored a lot of territory. Guided solely by reason (it seems to me), I have in a general way gone through all the objects of my senses. Though I had already become somewhat used to these new discoveries, I was astonished by what I found. Lord, what *poverty* I saw in things that a couple of days ago seemed to me to be magnificent! And what wisdom, what grandeur—what *marvels*—there are in everything the world regards as negligible! A man who sees only with his eyes is a foreigner in his own land. He is astonished by everything and knows nothing. . . . Sensible objects yield endless illusions. Everything in the realm of the senses deceives us, corrupts us, speaks to the soul solely on behalf of the body. Only reason doesn't disguise anything. How happy I am with reason, and with you for teaching me to consult it, for raising me above my senses and above myself so that I could see the light!. . . . Man's mind (I now see) is simply darkness; its own states don't enlighten it; its substance, entirely spiritual as it is, has nothing intelligible about it; his senses, his imagination, his passions lead him astray at every moment. . . .

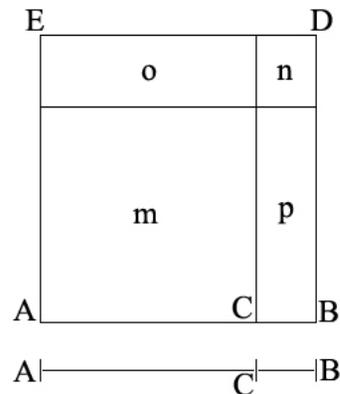
**1. Theodore:** I believe what you are telling me about your progress, Aristes, for I'm convinced that an hour's studious meditation can take a mind like yours a long way. Nevertheless, to make me even surer about how far you have gone, answer me this. You see the line AB. Let it be divided in two parts at this point C. I shall now prove to you that the square on the whole line is equal to the squares on each of

the parts plus the two rectangles formed on those two parts.

**Aristes:** What are you up to? Everyone knows that multiplying a whole by itself is the same as multiplying it by each of its parts.

**Theodore:** Well, *you* know it. But let's suppose that you don't. What I am 'up to' is demonstrating it *to your eyes*, thereby showing you that your senses *can* clearly disclose the truth to you.

**Aristes:** Let us see.



**Theodore:** Look intently—that is all I ask of you. Without entering into yourself to consult reason, you will discover an evident truth. ABDE is the square of AB. Now, the square is equal to all it contains, i.e. equal to itself. Hence, it is equal to the two squares on the two parts, m and n, plus the two parallelograms, o and p, formed on the parts, AC and CB.

**Aristes:** That leaps to the eye.

**Theodore:** All right, but it is also *evident*. So there are evident truths that leap to the eye. Thus, our senses make truths evident to us.

**Aristes** [jeering]: That's a fine truth that it was hard to discover! Is *that* the best you can do to defend the honour of the senses?

**Theodore** [severely]: You are not being responsive, Aristes. It wasn't reason that prompted you to duck the question in that way. I ask you: *isn't* that an evident truth that your senses have just taught you?

**Aristes:** There is nothing easier.

**Theodore:** That is because our senses are excellent teachers. They have easy ways of letting us know the truth. *But reason with its clear ideas leaves us in darkness*—that's what people will tell you, Aristes. They will say to you:

Prove, to someone who doesn't know it, that  
 $10^2 = 4^2 + 6^2 + (2 \times (4 \times 6))$ .

These numerical ideas are clear; and the truth to be proved in terms of intelligible numbers is the same as one that could be raised concerning a 10-inch line sitting in plain view and divided into 4 inches and 6 inches. Nonetheless, you'll see there is some difficulty in making the truth understood through reason, because this:

- to multiply a number by itself is the same as to multiply each of its parts by itself

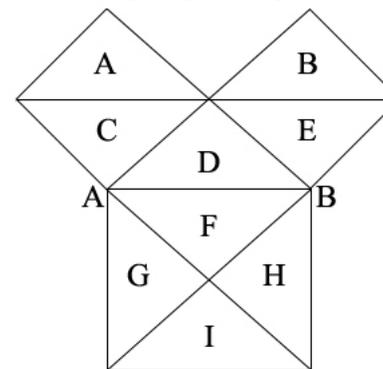
is not so evident as the truth that

- a square equals all the figures that it contains.

And the latter is what your eyes teach you, as you have just seen.

**2.** But, if you find the theorem that your eyes taught you too easy, here is another that is harder. I shall prove to

you that *the square on the diagonal of a square is double the square on its sides*. Open your eyes—that is all I ask of you.



Look at the figure I am drawing on this sheet of paper. You can see that the triangles I have drawn have a right angle and two equal sides; don't your *eyes* tell you, Aristes, that the triangles are equal to one another? Now, you see that the square constructed on the diagonal AB contains four of these triangles and that each of the squares on the sides contains two of them. Hence, the large square is double the others.

**Aristes:** Yes, Theodore. But you are reasoning.

**Theodore:** I'm reasoning? I *look*, and I *see* the result I have just told you. Well, if you like, say that I am reasoning, but I'm doing so on the faithful testimony of my senses. Just open your eyes and look at what I show you. [He then goes through the relevant pairs of triangles, asserting their equality.] To discover this truth, all you need do is to look intently at the figure and move your eyes across it so as to compare its parts with one another. So our senses can teach us the truth.

**Aristes:** I deny that that follows, Theodore. What enlightens us and reveals the truth to us in this case is not our senses but reason joined to our senses. Don't you see

that in the sensory view we have of this figure we find all at once •the clear idea of extension joined to •the confused sensation of colour that affects us? The relations in which the truth consists are found by us •in the clear idea of extension that reason contains, not •in the white and black that make it sensible—white and black that are mere sensations, confused states of our senses whose relations can't be discovered. When we see sensible objects there is always •a clear idea and a •confused sensation, the idea representing their •essence, the sensation informing us of their •existence. The idea makes known to us their nature, their properties, the relations they do or can have to one another—in short, *the truth*; whereas the sensation makes us sense the differences among them and how they relate to our convenience and survival.

**3. Theodore:** By your answer, I see you have indeed explored a lot of territory since yesterday. Well done! But tell me, please, isn't the colour that is here on the paper itself extended? Certainly I see it as such. If it is, I'll be able to discover clearly the relations of these parts—these triangles we are looking at—without thinking of •the extension that reason contains. •The extension of the colour is all I need to learn physics and geometry.

**Aristes:** I deny that the colour is extended, Theodore. We see it as extended, but our eyes deceive us, for the mind will never comprehend that extension belongs to colour. We do see this whiteness *as* extended; and now I'll tell you why. This sensation in the soul enables us to see the paper or—a better way of putting it—enables *intelligible* extension to affect the soul, puts it into a certain state in which intelligible extension becomes sensible to it; and *that* is how the whiteness of the page is *related to* extension. •It is *not* because the whiteness *is* extended•. Come on, Theodore! Will you say

that pain is extended because when we have rheumatism we feel it as extended? [Similar questions regarding sound and light.] What we have here are sensations in the soul—*states* of the soul—and the soul never draws its idea of extension from its own resources; so although all these •sensible• qualities are *related* to extension and make it sensed by the soul, they aren't themselves in any way extended.

**4. Theodore:** I grant you that colour like pain is not spatially extended. Experience teaches that someone can feel pain in an arm he no longer has, and that in dreams we see colours as spread out on imaginary objects; so obviously these are only sensations or states of the soul. The soul isn't in any of the places it sees, so its states can't be in any of them either. This is beyond question. But although pain can't be •spatially extended in my arm, or colours on the surfaces of bodies, why can't we suppose them to be, as it were, •*sensibly* extended, comparably with how the idea of bodies—that is, intelligible extension—is •*intelligibly* extended? Why not suppose that the light I see when I press the corner of my eye carries with it the *sensible space* that it occupies? Why do you suppose that the light is related to *intelligible* extension? When the soul sees or senses sensible qualities as spread out on bodies, why do you suppose that what's happening is that the idea or archetype of bodies—•intelligible extension•—is touching the soul?

**Aristes:** It is because only the •archetype of bodies can represent their nature to me and only •universal reason can enlighten me through the display of its ideas. The substance of the soul has nothing in common with matter. The mind doesn't itself *have* all the perfections of all the beings that it can know, but they are all included in the divine being, •God•. Thus, God sees all things *in himself*, but the soul can't see them *in itself*—it can find them only in universal

and divine reason. Hence, the extension that I see or feel doesn't belong to me. If it did, I could know the works of God by contemplating myself. Just by attending carefully to my own states, I could learn physics and several other sciences that are simply knowledge of the relations of extension. In short, I would be *my own light*—a blasphemy· which fills me a kind of horror. But please explain the difficulty you find in my position, Theodore.

**5. Theodore:** It can't be explained •directly. To do that, we would need to have the idea or archetype of the soul revealed to us. Then we would *see clearly* that colour, pain, taste, and the other sensations of the soul have nothing in common with the extension that we sense as extended. We would *see intuitively* that the extension we see is as different from the colour that makes it visible as intelligible numbers are different from our perception of them; and we would see at the same time that our ideas are quite different from our perceptions and our sensations—a truth which, ·as things are·, we can discover only by serious reflections, only by long and difficult reasonings, ·and not by *intuitively seeing* it, seeing it at a glance, as we could if we had access to the archetype of the soul·. But I can prove to you •indirectly that our sensations or states don't *contain* the idea of extension to which they are *related*. . . . Suppose that you are looking at the colour of your hand and at the same time feeling pain in it. You would then see the colour of the hand as extended, while feeling the pain as extended. Don't you agree?

**Aristes:** Yes, Theodore. Moreover, if I touched my hand ·with my other hand· I would feel it as extended; and, if I plunged it into hot or cold water I would feel the heat or cold as extended.

**Theodore:** Note this then. Pain is not colour, colour is not heat, nor is heat cold. Now, the extension of the

colour—or the extension *joined to* the colour—that you see when you look at your hand is the same as the extension of the pain, the extension of the heat or of the cold that you are also able to sense. Hence, the extension doesn't *belong to* any of these—not to the colour, the pain, or any of your other sensations. If they did, so that our sensations were themselves extended as they appear to us to be, you would sense as many different hands as you have different sensations. And so you would also if the coloured extension that we see were merely a sensation in the soul as are the colour, the pain, or the taste. . . . So there is one and only one idea of a hand, Aristes, an idea that affects us in different ways, acting in our souls and putting them into states of colour, heat, pain, etc. The •bodies that we look at don't cause our various sensations, for we often see bodies that don't in fact exist. And anyway it is evident that a body *cannot* act on a mind—whether to put it in a certain state, enlighten it, make it happy or unhappy through nice or nasty sensations. And it isn't the •soul acting on *itself* that puts it into states of pain, colour, etc. This doesn't need to be proved after what has already been said. So it is the •idea or archetype of bodies that affects us in different ways. That is, it is ·God·, the •intelligible substance of reason that acts with irresistible power on our minds, putting them into states of colour, taste, pain—doing this by drawing on what it contains that represents bodies.

So you mustn't be surprised, my dear Aristes, that you can learn certain evident truths by the testimony of the senses. Although the substance of the soul is not intelligible to the soul itself, and though its states can't enlighten it, when these states are joined to *intelligible* extension they make it *sensible*, and can show us the inter-relations that constitute the truths of geometry and physics. But it remains true to say that the soul is not its own light, that its states

are all dark, and that it can't find exact truths anywhere except in reason.

**6. Aristes:** I think I understand this, but I'll need to take time to meditate on it because it is so abstract. It isn't pain or colour in itself that teaches me the relations among bodies. The only place where I can find these relations is in the idea of extension that represents them; and that idea is not a state of the soul (though it comes to be joined with sensations that are states of the soul). The idea becomes sensible only because

the intelligible substance of reason acts in the soul, putting it into a certain state (giving it a certain sensation) through which it. . . one could say *reveals*, but it's a confused revelation, that such and such a body exists.

When ideas of bodies become •sensible, they lead us to judge that there are bodies acting in us; whereas when these ideas are simply •intelligible we don't naturally believe any such thing. The reason for this difference, it seems to me, is that it's up to us whether we *think* of extension but not whether we *sense* it. When we sense extension, whether we want to or not, there must indeed be something other than us that is impressing the sensation on us—only we go wrong in thinking that the 'something' in question is the thing that we are sensing. So we come to think that the bodies in our environment cause the sensations we have of them; we are always wrong about that, and are often wrong even in our belief that the bodies of which we have sensations do *exist*. But we can imagine or think about bodies at will, so we judge that our volitions are the true cause of the ideas or images that we have at those times; and we are reinforced in this false belief by our internal sensation of our *effort of attention* when we are imagining or thinking. In fact only God can act

in us and enlighten us, but his way of working isn't sensible, and so we aren't conscious of his working in us at all, and instead:

what *he* brings about in us without our willing we attribute to *objects*, and what *he* brings about in us depending on our volitions we attribute to *our own power*.

What do you think of this line of thought, Theodore?

**7. Theodore:** It is very judicious, Aristes—the work of a meditator! . . . But let us return to the sensible demonstration I gave you that the square on the diagonal AB is equal to the squares on two of the sides; I want to make three points about it. **(1)** What makes the demonstration evidently true and wholly general is

•the clear and general idea of extension—the straightness and equality of lines, angles, triangles—

and not at all

•the white and the black, which make all these things sensible and particular without making them intrinsically clearer or more intelligible.

**(2)** My demonstration makes it evident as a general truth that •the square on the diagonal of any square is equal to the squares on two of its sides, although it is far from certain that •the particular square you see with your eyes *is* equal to the other two; because you aren't even certain that what you see is a square, that *this* line is straight, that *that* angle is 90°. The relations that your mind conceives between sizes are not the same as the relations among these •black and white• figures. **(3)** Although our senses don't enlighten the mind by themselves, in making the ideas we have of bodies sensible they awaken our attention and thereby lead us indirectly to a grasp of the truth. So we *should* make use of our senses in pursuing any of the sciences concerned with relations of

extension; and we shouldn't be afraid that the senses will draw us into error, provided we strictly observe the precept *Judge things only by the ideas that represent them and never by the sensations we have of them*—a precept of the utmost importance that we should never forget.

**8. Aristes:** All of that is perfectly true, Theodore; and it is just how I have understood the matter since I thought seriously about it. Nothing is more certain than that our states are merely darkness, that they don't themselves enlighten the mind, that we don't know clearly any of the things we sense most vividly. This square here is not what I see it as being:

It doesn't have the size I see it as having. (No doubt you see it as larger or smaller than I do.) It doesn't have the colour that I see it as having. (You may see it as having a different colour.)

What I see isn't strictly *the square*. I judge it to be drawn on this paper; but possibly there is no square or paper here, just as there is certainly no colour. But although my eyes issue so many doubtful or false reports about the figures drawn on the page, this is nothing compared to the illusions of my other senses. The testimony of my eyes often approaches the truth: my eyesight can help my mind discover the truth; it doesn't completely disguise its object; it makes me attentive, thus leading me to understanding. But the other senses are such liars that we are *always* under an illusion when we let them guide us. Still, our eyes are not given to us for discovering exact truths in geometry and physics. They are given to us simply to keep watch on movements of our bodies in relation to other bodies in our environment, simply for our convenience and our survival. If we are to survive, we must have a kind of knowledge of sensible objects that somewhat approximates to the truth. That is why we have,

for instance, a certain sense of the size of a certain body at a certain distance. If the body were too far from us to be a threat, or if it were too small to harm us even though closer, we would lose sight of it. It would be annihilated for our eyes. . . .because a large distant body or a small nearby one has in effect *no* relation to our own bodies, so that it ought not to be perceptible to the senses whose only role is to speak to us about our survival. . . .

**Theodore:** I see you have gone far in the land of truth, Aristes!. . . Now that you have found ·universal reason, God·, the faithful master who enlightens and enriches anyone who devotes himself to him, you have no more need for me or for anyone else.

**Aristes:** What, Theodore? Do you want to break off our discussions *now*? I know that if we are to philosophize it is reason that we must do it with; but I don't know *how* to do it. It is *possible* that reason itself will teach me; but I haven't much hope of that if I don't have a vigilant and faithful monitor to lead me and inspire me. If you leave me, farewell philosophy! because left to myself I would be afraid of going astray. Before long I would be mistaking replies that I had given to myself for those of ·God·, our common master.

**9. Theodore:** I haven't the slightest intention of leaving you, my dear Aristes. Now that you are meditating on everything that is said to you, I hope that *you* will keep *me* from the misfortune you are afraid of for yourself. Each of us needs the other, though we aren't getting anything from anyone else. You have taken quite literally a word that slipped out when I was paying honour to reason. Yes, it is from reason *alone* that we receive light. But reason uses those who are in touch with it to recall its stray children to it and lead them to understanding by way of their senses. Don't you know, Aristes, that reason has itself become incarnate in order to be

within reach of every man, to strike the eyes and ears of those who can't see or understand except through their senses? [Theodore's thought is: Reason is God, and God became incarnate—i.e. became a being with a fleshly body—in the person of Jesus Christ.] Men have seen with their eyes eternal wisdom, the invisible God who lives within them. They have touched with their hands, as the well-loved disciple says, the word that gives life. [That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life. . . .] (1 *John* 1).] Internal truth has appeared outside us—coarse and stupid us—to teach us the eternal commands of divine law in a way we can sense and feel. . . . Don't you know that the great truths that faith teaches us are stored in the church, and that we can't learn except by a visible authority arising from wisdom-made-flesh? It is indeed always internal truth that instructs us; but it uses every possible means to call us back to it and to fill us with understanding. So don't be afraid that I will leave you. For I hope that internal truth will make use of *you* to keep *me* from abandoning it and mistaking my imaginings and reveries for its divine oracles.

**Aristes:** You do me much honour. But I see that I must accept it since it reflects credit on our common master, reason.

**Theodore:** I do you the honour of believing you to be rational! That is a great honour. For any man who consults and follows reason thereby raises himself above all other created things. By it he judges and passes final sentence—or, rather, reason decides and sentences through him. But don't think I am deferring to you. Don't think, either, that I am raising myself above you. I defer only to reason, which can speak to me through you (as it can speak to you by way of me); and I raise myself only above the brutes, above those who

renounce the most essential of their qualities. [The French *brute* often meant 'lower animal' and is often thus translated in these texts; but here Malebranche seems to be using it in its wider sense.] But though •each of us is rational, my dear Aristes, let us not forget that we are extremely prone to error. This is because •each of us is capable of coming to a decision without waiting for the infallible judgment of the true judge, ·reason·, i.e. without waiting for the evidentness that (so to speak) tears our assent from us. If we *always* paid reason the compliment of letting it deliver its decisions for us, it would make us infallible. But instead of waiting for reason's replies and stepping carefully in its light, we push ahead of it and lose our way. We are so full of movement—so fidgety—that we become impatient at having to attend and keep still. Whipped on by ·our sense of· our intellectual poverty, we are eager to achieve true goods—and this eagerness often plunges us into great evils. Nothing is pleasanter than blindly following the impulses of instinct, while nothing is harder than holding fast to the delicate and sublime ideas of truth while the body weighs the mind down. But let us try to support each other without relying too much on one another, my dear Aristes. Perhaps, if we walk quite slowly and are as careful as possible not to rely on bad ground, we won't both lose our footing at the same time.

**Aristes:** Let us move on a little, Theodore. What are you afraid of? Reason is an excellent support. There is nothing unstable about clear ideas; they don't age; they don't adapt themselves to special interests; they don't change their tune as our ·sensory· states do, saying Yes or No according to the body's urging. . . . Let us go on to some other matter, please, as I agree with you entirely on this one.

**10. Theodore:** Not so fast, my dear fellow. You are granting me more than I ask, I'm afraid, unless it's that you don't

yet have a firm enough grasp of what I am telling you. Our senses deceive us, it is true, but that mainly happens because when we have a sensation of an object we attribute the content of the sensation to the object itself, thinking that *it* is green or cold or whatever. But we have several kinds of sensation that we don't attribute to objects. For example we have feelings of joy, sadness, hate—all the ones that accompany movements of the soul. . . . We feel *these* in the soul, and that's where they are. So they are good witnesses, for they speak the truth.

**Aristes:** . . . *Don't* we attribute our feelings of love, hate, and the other passions to the objects that are the occasions of them? Don't they spread their malignity on objects and represent them to us as altogether other than what they in fact are? Speaking for myself: when I have an aversion to someone, I feel in myself a disposition to interpret everything he does as malign. His innocent actions appear to me to be criminal. I want to have good reasons to hate and despise him. My passions all try to *justify* themselves at the expense of their objects. If my eyes spread colours on the surface of bodies, so too my heart does all it can to spread its internal dispositions—its 'false colours'—on the objects of its passions. . . . I am even more afraid of listening to and following my passions than I am of giving in to the often innocent and benign illusions of my senses.

**11. Theodore:** I'm not saying we should give in to the promptings of our passions; and it's good that you are aware of their power and malignity. But you must agree that they do teach us certain truths. For it is after all a *truth* that I now have much joy in hearing you, and that the pleasure I now feel is greater than the pleasure I had in our previous discussions. So I know the difference between those two pleasures, and my only way of knowing this is through •the

feelings of pleasure that I had in them, i.e. through •states my soul was in; so it turns out that my states are not too dark to teach me a truth that doesn't change according to my point of view, the solicitations of my body, or whatever.

**Aristes:** Say that you *sense* this difference between two of your states (between two of your pleasures), Theodore, but please don't say that you *know* it. Whereas God knows it without sensing it, you sense it without knowing it. If you had a clear •idea of your soul, if you saw its •archetype, then you would *know* what you in fact only *sense*; you could then know exactly the difference in the various feelings of joy that your goodness to me excites in your heart. But you certainly *don't* know this. Compare your present feeling of joy with your feeling the other day, Theodore, and tell me *precisely* how much greater one is than the other. If you do that, *then* I'll believe that your states are *known* to you! We know things only when we know what proportions they bear to one another. You know that one pleasure is greater than another—but greater by *how much*? You might want to object: 'Even when ideas are involved, we can't always answer questions about proportions. For example, although we know that a square inscribed in a circle is smaller than the circle, we don't know exactly *how much* smaller (that's why we don't know how to square the circle).' But there is a big difference between this and my comparison of pleasure-sizes. We can go on to infinity approximating ever more closely to the difference between the area of a circle and the area of a square inscribed in it, seeing *evidently* at each stage in the progression that we still have something less than the difference that is in question. But it's our clear idea of extension that enables us to do this. It is because •our minds are limited that we have •difficulty discovering the proportion of circle to square; but it is •the obscurity of

our sensations and the darkness of our states that make it •impossible to discover ·proportional· relations among them. It seems evident to me that even if we were geniuses as great as the most sublime intellects, we still couldn't discover ·proportional· relations among our states unless God showed us the archetype on the basis of which he made them. For you have convinced me that we can know things and their properties only by way of the eternal, unchangeable, and necessary ideas that represent them.

**12. Theodore:** Very good, Aristes! Our senses and our passions can't enlighten us. But what about our imagination? It forms such clear and distinct •images of geometrical figures that you can't deny that it is by means of •them that we learn geometry.

**Aristes:** Do you think I have already forgotten what you just told me, Theodore? or that I didn't understand it? The evidentness that accompanies the geometer's reasoning, the clarity of lines and shapes formed by the imagination—all that comes solely from our ideas and not at all from our states, not at all from the confused traces left behind by the flow of animal spirits. When I imagine a shape, when I build a structure in my mind, I work with materials that don't belong to me. It is from the clear idea of extension—the archetype of bodies—that I derive all the intelligible materials that represent my plan to me, all the space that provides me with a patch of ground on which to build. It is from this •idea ·of extension· that I shape up the body of my work in my mind, and the •ideas of equality and proportions are what I use in doing and correcting the work. . . . It is certainly by intelligible ideas that we direct the flow of ·animal· spirits that mark out these images or imagined shapes. And everything luminous and evident about these figures proceeds not from the confused sensations that

belong to us but from the intelligible reality that belongs to reason. This doesn't come from our particular personal states; rather, it is flash of light from the luminous substance of our common master.

I can't •imagine a square, Theodore, unless at the same time I •conceive it. And it appears evident to me that my image of a square is precise and regular only to the extent that it corresponds to the intelligible idea I have of a square, that is, of

a space enclosed by four perfectly straight and absolutely equal lines which, joined together at their endpoints, make four perfect right angles.

It is about *that* sort of square that I am sure that the square on the diagonal is double the square on one of its sides, and that there is no common measure between diagonal and sides. In short, *that* is the sort of square whose properties can be discovered and publicly demonstrated. But there is no knowledge to be had from the confused and irregular image that the flow of animal spirits traces in the brain. And this holds ·not just for squares but· for all other shapes as well. So geometers do *not* get their knowledge from confused images in their imaginations; rather, they get it from clear ideas of reason and from nowhere else. Those crude •images can indeed hold the geometers' attention by (so to speak) giving *body* to their ideas; but it's •ideas that give them their grip, enlighten them, convince them of the truth of their science.

**13.** Shall I go on depicting the illusions and phantoms of an imagination in rebellion against reason and supported and enlivened by the passions—the soothing phantoms that lead us astray, the terrible ones that make us afraid, the monsters of all varieties that are born of our disorders and which grow and multiply in an instant? [Theodore here uses the word *monstre* metaphorically. In its literal sense, in which it will

occur several times below, e.g. sixth dialogue, section 9, it means 'newly born person or animal that is disturbingly unlike typical members of its species'.] They are basically mere chimeras, but our minds feast on them and rush to get involved with them, for our imaginations find much more reality in the spectres to which they give birth than in the necessary and unchangeable ideas of eternal truth. That is because these dangerous spectres strike the imagination, whereas ideas don't affect it. What use can a faculty be when it is so licentious—a fool who likes playing the fool, a flighty person whom we can't pin down to anything, an insolent person who is not afraid of interrupting us in our most serious exchanges with reason? Granted, our imaginations *can* make our minds attentive: the imagination has such charms and such power over the mind that it makes the mind willingly to turn its thoughts to anything that concerns the imagination. But it mustn't be allowed to run away with us, because in addition to its limitation of being able to relate only to ideas representing *bodies*, it is so subject to illusion and so hot-headed that it will instantly carry you off to the land of chimeras unless you keep it always on a tight rein, controlling its lurching movements.

**Theodore:** [He begins, with 'astonishment and joy', by repeating in other words much of what Aristes has said. Then:] But be warned that abstract principles, pure ideas, escape the mind as soon as we neglect to contemplate them and instead dwell on what is sensible. So I advise you to meditate often on this matter, so that you so completely *possess* it and are so familiar with its principles and consequences that you'll never slip into mistaking the liveliness of your sensations for the evidentness of truth. It isn't enough just to understand that the moving force behind our snap judgments is failure to distinguish knowing from sensing. . . .

We must strengthen our hold on this basic truth by following out its consequences. The only way of completely grasping principles of practice is by *using* them. [Theodore elaborates on this, not adding anything to what has gone before, ending with:] In short, if we distinguish the evidentness of light from the liveliness of instinct, it is hardly possible for us to fall into error.

**Aristes:** I understand all this. . . . Let us go on to something else, if you think that's a good idea.

**Theodore:** It's a bit late now, Aristes, for us to start out on anything at all lengthy. But what about tomorrow? What direction do you want us to take? . . .

**Aristes:** It is up to you to lead me.

**Theodore:** Absolutely not! The choice is yours. It should *matter* to you where I take you. Mightn't I deceive you? take you where you shouldn't go? Most men imprudently pursue useless studies, my dear Aristes. Such a person hears praise for chemistry, astronomy, or some other empty and dispensable science, and throws himself impetuously into it. [Malebranche was writing before real chemistry began as a science; what he is talking about here is alchemy, which was indeed disreputable. The contempt for 'astronomy' that he expresses is presumably based on his running it together with astrology.] He doesn't know whether his soul is immortal; he probably can't prove to you that there is a God; but he will solve equations in algebra with amazing facility! Another knows all the subtle nuances of language, all the rules of the grammarians, but has never meditated on what his duties are. . . . He plunges blindly into linguistic and literary studies of these sorts, disregarding knowledge of man and the rules of morality and perhaps even forgetting the elementary theological things that children are taught in their catechism. Such a man is a machine that goes where it is pushed, directed by chance rather than

by reason. [Theodore develops this, with warnings against following others, following intellectual fashions, rather than steering by 'the authoritative replies of inner truth'. He continues:] We ought to *learn* what we ought to *know*, and not let our heads be filled with useless furniture. . . . Think

about this, Aristes, and tell me tomorrow what the topic of our discussion is to be. This is enough for today.

**Aristes:** It is much better for you to tell me, Theodore.

**Theodore:** It is infinitely better for reason to tell both of us. Consult it seriously, and I shall think of the matter as well.

## SIXTH DIALOGUE

**Proofs of the existence of bodies derived from revelation. Two sorts of revelation. How it comes about that natural revelations in sensation provide us with an occasion for error.**

**Aristes:** That was a hard question you gave me to settle, Theodore! I was quite right to say that it was for you to lead the way in this intelligible world that you have brought me into. *You* know your way around among the sciences, knowing the strong ones from the weak, and knowing how useful and intellectually rich each of them is. [Here as throughout the work, a 'science' is any organized and theoretically grounded field of study.] Whereas, I admit, *I* don't know which way to turn. What you have already taught me may well be helpful in keeping me from going astray in this unknown land; all I need for that is to follow the light carefully and yield only to the evidentness that comes with clear ideas. But it isn't enough to *be on the move*; one needs to know *where* one is moving to! It isn't enough to keep discovering new truths; one needs to know how to locate truths of a special kind, namely—the fertile principles that •give the mind all the perfection of which it is capable in this life, the truths that •should govern our judgments concerning God and his wonderful works, and •should also govern the movements

of the heart and give us at least a foretaste of the sovereign good that we desire.

If our choice among the sciences had to depend purely on evidentness, without bringing in usefulness, arithmetic would come out on top. Truths about numbers are the clearest of all: they concern exact relations that are based on *unity*, and our only way of having clear knowledge of other relations—that is, relations involved in other sciences—is by expressing them in terms of arithmetical measures. This science is not only •evident but also •fertile and •deep—so much so that I might plumb its depths for a million years and still find an inexhaustible further stock of clear and luminous truths. Still, I don't think you were recommending that we turn in that direction, charmed though we are by the evidentness that radiates out from every point in it. After all, what *use* would it be to penetrate the most hidden mysteries of arithmetic and algebra? It isn't enough to run long distances into the interior of a sterile land, discovering places that have nothing to recommend them except that

no-one has ever been there before. Rather, we should head directly to those fortunate countries where fruit is to be found in abundance, solid food that can nourish us. So when I did my best to compare the sciences with one another in terms of *evidentness* versus *usefulness*, I found myself in a strange predicament. Sometimes the •fear of error gave preference to •exact sciences like arithmetic and geometry, which provide rigorous proofs that admirably satisfy our pointless curiosity. At other times, the •desire to know (not how ideas relate to one another, but) how the works of God that surround us relate to one another and to ourselves drew me towards •physics, morality, and the other sciences that often rely on experiences and phenomena that are somewhat uncertain. It's a strange thing, Theodore, that the most useful sciences are filled with utterly dark places whereas in sciences that are not so necessary •to our well-being• we find a clear, smooth, unbroken road to follow. Tell me, please, •how to weigh the ease •and certainty• of some •sciences• against the usefulness of others, so as to give preference to the science that deserves it. And •how to make sure that the sciences that appear the most useful are just the ones that actually are so, and that the ones that appear to have no virtue but their evidentness don't •also• have great uses that have gone unnoticed. I tell you, Theodore, I've thought a lot about this, and I still don't know which way to go.

**1. Theodore:** You didn't waste any time in your reflections, my dear Aristes. Though you don't know precisely what you should devote yourself to, I am sure—even at this stage—that you won't let yourself be pulled into any of the numerous false studies that half the world is furiously engaged in. I am quite sure that if I choose the wrong way in the course of our discussions, you are capable of correcting me. When men look up and look around, they don't always follow those who

are in the vanguard. They follow them only when they (the leaders) go the right way and where the followers themselves want to go. And when the leader of the group rashly starts along a dangerous route that doesn't lead anywhere, the others bring him back. So keep up your reflections on your steps and on mine. Don't trust me too much. Watch carefully to see if I am taking you where we should both be going.

Take note of this then, Aristes. There are two kinds of sciences: ones that

consider relations of ideas,

and ones that

consider relations among things by means of their ideas.

The former sciences are through-and-through evident, whereas the latter can be evident only on the assumption that •things are similar to the •ideas of them that we use in reasoning about them. These ideas are very useful, but they are surrounded by obscurities, because they make factual assumptions that are very hard to verify exactly. If we could find some way of making sure that the assumptions are correct, we could •have the best of both worlds, that is, we could• avoid error and at the same time discover truths that matter greatly to us. In the background of this is something I have said already: how *ideas* are related to one another concerns us only when they represent relations among *things* that are somehow connected with us. Thus it seems to me to be evident that the best use we can make of our minds is to look into

•which things *are* somehow connected with us,

•how they are connected with us, and

•the cause and the effects of these connections;

all this in conformity with clear ideas (assuring us of the natures and properties of things) and with unquestionable empirical observations (assuring us about how things are

related and connected with us). But to avoid falling into useless triviality, our whole inquiry should be directed to what can make us happy and perfect. So, to put all this in a nutshell: it seems evident to me that the best use we can make of our minds is

to try to get an *understanding* of •the truths that we believe on faith, and of •everything that serves to corroborate them.

Comparing the usefulness of *these* truths with what we can get from knowing truths of other sorts—well, there’s no comparison! We do in any case *believe* these great truths; but our faith doesn’t let us off from filling our minds with them and becoming assured of them in every possible way (this applies to those of us who *can* do this). On the contrary, faith is given to us as a basis for regulating every move our minds make as well as every movement of our hearts. It is given to us to lead us to an understanding of the very truths that it teaches us. Many people upset the faithful with weird metaphysics, and insultingly ask us for proofs of what they ought to believe on the infallible authority of the church. There are so many of them ·that it is our Christian duty to mop up after them, reducing the damage they do among the faithful; so·, although your faith is too firm for *you* to be shaken by their attacks, your charity ·towards those whose faith is shakier· should lead you to remedy the disorder and confusion that these ·bad metaphysicians · introduce everywhere. So, do you approve the plan I am suggesting for what we are to discuss, Aristes?

**Aristes:** I certainly do. I didn’t think you would be willing to leave metaphysics. If I *had* thought that, I think I would easily have solved the problem of which to prefer among the sciences. For clearly no discovery is comparable to understanding the truths of faith. I thought you were aiming

only at making me something of a philosopher and a good metaphysician.

**2. Theodore:** I am still aiming only at that, and I don’t claim to be leaving metaphysics, although in the next bit of our conversation I may allow myself some freedom about what counts as metaphysics! This general science has precedence over all the other sciences. It can draw examples from them, and some details that it needs to make its general principles perceptible, ·but apart from that it takes extremely little *from* them·. In saying this I am taking ‘metaphysics’ to name •the general truths that can serve as principles for the particular sciences; I am *not* using the word ·as it commonly is used·, to stand for •abstract considerations about certain imaginary properties—considerations whose main use is to furnish quarrelsome people with an inexhaustible supply of material for disputation.

I am convinced, Aristes, that to *understand* the truths of faith we need to be good philosophers, and that the stronger our hold on the true principles of metaphysics the firmer we shall be in the truths of religion. . . . I shall never believe that true philosophy is opposed to faith, or that good philosophers can have different beliefs from true Christians. For Jesus Christ in his divinity •speaks to philosophers in their innermost selves and also •instructs ·them as· Christians through the visible authority of the church; and either way he cannot possibly contradict himself (though we could *imagine* contradictions in what he says, or take our own conclusions for utterances of his ·and on that basis think there are contradictions in them·). Truth speaks to us in different ways, but it certainly always says the same thing. So religion should not be opposed to philosophy—except the false philosophy of the pagans. The latter is philosophy based on human authority, consisting

of *unrevealed* opinions that don't bear the mark of truth, namely the irresistible evidentness that compels attentive minds to assent. The metaphysical truths that we discovered in our previous discussions enable you to judge whether true philosophy contradicts religion. I for one am convinced that it doesn't. If I have put forward any propositions contrary to the truths that Jesus Christ teaches us through the visible authority of his church, they must be propositions that have no place in true and solid philosophy—ones that I have drawn solely from my own resources and that don't bear the truth-mark of irresistible evidentness. But I don't know why I'm taking up our time telling you truths that no-one could possibly doubt, even if they aren't attended to much.

**Aristes:** I must say, Theodore, that I have been charmed to see that what you have taught me—or rather what reason taught me through you—holds together wonderfully with the great indispensable truths that simple and ignorant men believe on the church's authority, these being men whom God wishes to save along with philosophers. You have convinced me, for instance, of the corruption of my nature and my need for a redeemer. I know that all intellects have only one unique master, God, and that only Jesus Christ, reason made flesh and made accessible to our senses, can deliver carnal man from the blindness in which we are all born. I take the greatest pleasure in saying that those fundamental truths of our faith (as well as others that there isn't time to express) follow necessarily from the principles you have demonstrated to me. Go on, please. Wherever you lead me, I shall try to follow.

**Theodore:** Ah, my dear Aristes, I tell you again: watch out that I don't go astray. I'm afraid of your being too easy to please, and that your approval will make me careless and thus make me fall into error. Be nervous on my behalf! And

don't believe everything you may be told by a man who is, as I and all men are, subject to illusion. Also, if it isn't *your own* reflections that put you in possession of the truths I'll try to demonstrate to you, you won't learn anything.

**3.** There are only three sorts of things about which we know anything and with which we can have some connection: •God, the infinitely perfect being, who is the source or cause of all things; •minds, which are known only through the inner sense that we have of our own nature; and •bodies, which we are sure exists because of the revelation we have of them. Now, what we call a man is simply a composite. . .

**Aristes:** Not so fast, Theodore! I know that there is a God or infinitely perfect being [second dialogue]. For if I think of such a being—and I certainly *do*—that being must exist, since nothing finite can represent the infinite. I also know that minds exist, on the assumption that there are beings resembling me [first dialogue]. For I can't *doubt that I think*, and I know that what thinks is something other than extension or matter. You have proved these truths to me. But what do you mean by our being assured of the existence of bodies by 'the revelation we have of them'? What! Don't we see them? Don't we feel them? When someone shoves a pin into us, we learn that we have a body not from *revelation* but from truly *sensing* it.

**Theodore:** Yes, no doubt we sense it. But our sensation of pain is a kind of •**revelation**. I can see that this way of putting it startles you; that's why I chose it! I wanted to remind you of something that you keep forgetting:

It is God himself who produces in our souls all the different sensations that occur in them on the occasion of changes happening to our bodies. This happens in conformity with the general laws governing the union of the two substances composing man—laws that are

(as I shall explain later) simply the regular causally effective volitions of the creator. The needle-point that pricks the hand doesn't pour pain into the hole that it makes in the body; and the soul doesn't itself produce this unpleasant sensation either, because it suffers pain that it doesn't want. ·So· it must be a higher power ·that causes the sensation of pain·. It is God himself, then, who, gives us sensations so as to **·reveal** to us what is happening. . . . in our bodies and in the bodies surrounding us.

[\* See the explanation of 'occasion' in the first dialogue, page 10.] I have told you this often; please remember it! [\* See the explanation of 'occasion' in the first dialogue, page 10.] I have told you this often; please remember it!

**4. Aristes:** I stand convicted, Theodore! But what you are saying prompts a very strange thought. I hardly dare put it to you, for fear that you'll regard me as a visionary. The fact is that I'm starting to doubt that there are any bodies. The reason is that God's revelation of their existence is not sure. It is after all certain that sometimes—for instance in dreams or when we are fevered—we see things that don't exist. If God, acting (as you say) in accordance with his general laws, can sometimes give us deceptive sensations. . . .why can't he do that all the time? ·And even if he doesn't do it all the time·, how can we distinguish truth from falsity in the obscure and confused testimony of our senses? It seems to me only prudent to suspend judgment about the existence of bodies. Please give me a rigorous demonstration of their existence.

**Theodore:** 'A rigorous demonstration'! That's a bit much to ask, Aristes. I admit I don't have one. On the contrary, it seems to me that I have a 'rigorous demonstration' that one *couldn't* rigorously demonstrate the existence of bodies! But

don't worry: I am equipped with proofs that are certain and capable of dispelling your doubt, ·even though they are not strictly rigorous·. I'm glad that such a doubt entered your mind. For, after all, if we doubt that

there are bodies

for reasons that make it impossible for us to doubt that

there is a God, and the soul is not corporeal,

this shows for sure that we have overcome our superficial opinions, and that we are giving reason the upper hand in our thinking. What most people do is to subordinate reason to the senses, ·and on that basis they we regard the existence of bodies as much surer than the existence of God·. Here is what I think to be a demonstrative proof that it is impossible to give a rigorous demonstration of the existence of bodies.

**5.** The notion of *infinitely perfect being* doesn't contain a necessary relation to any created thing. God is entirely self-sufficient; so it isn't *necessary* that matter emanates from him. And actually all I need is something weaker, namely: it isn't *evident* that matter necessarily emanates from him. Now, we can't give a 'rigorous demonstration' of a truth if *we can't show*. . . .that the ideas we are considering together—·as we are now considering the ideas of *God* and of *matter*·—necessarily contain a relation between them. It follows that it isn't possible to give a demonstrate rigorously that bodies exist. In fact, if bodies exist it is because God willed to create them. Now we have to distinguish two different situations regarding God's volitions. (a) Thousands of his volitions—such as the volitions to punish crimes and reward good works, and to require love and fear from us—are necessarily contained in the idea of *infinitely perfect being*. . . .(b) The volition to create bodies, on the other hand, is *not* contained necessarily in that idea—the notion of something that is infinitely perfect or entirely self-sufficient. Far from its being *included* in that notion, the notion of an

entirely self-sufficient being seems to *rule out* any volition to create bodies. So we have to fall back on revelation to be sure that God has willed to create bodies. . . .

**6. Aristes:** I understand, Theodore, that we can't demonstratively infer the existence of bodies from the notion of *being that is infinitely perfect and self-sufficient*. [He repeats Theodore's argument for this, and continues:] . . . so there can be no way except the authority of revelation for us to be sure that there are bodies. But revelation doesn't appear to me to justify our being sure either. I clearly discover in •the notion of an infinitely perfect being that •he can't will to deceive me, but •experience teaches me that •his revelations are deceptive; and I can't reconcile these two truths. . . . God isn't a deceiver: he can't will to deceive anyone, whether foolish or wise; and yet we are all misled by sensations that he gives to us and that reveal to us the existence of bodies. So it is quite certain that we are often deceived. And it *doesn't* appear to me to be certain that we aren't *always* deceived. Let us look at the basis you have for the certainty you claim to have about the existence of bodies.

**7. Theodore:** There are revelations of two broad sorts—natural and supernatural. What I call 'natural' are revelations that

take place in accordance with certain general laws that are known to us, laws that codify how God acts in our minds on the occasion of events in our bodies.

And 'supernatural' is my label for revelations that

occur either •through general laws that are unknown to us or •through particular volitions •that God has added to the general laws in order to remedy the troubles that the general laws would otherwise have led to, because of sin, which messes up everything.

Both kinds of revelation, natural and supernatural, are true

in themselves. But the former are at present an occasion of error for us, not •because they are false in themselves but •because we don't use them as God intended when he gave them to us, and •because sin has eaten into nature and infected our relation to the general laws with a kind of contradiction. Certainly the general laws of union of soul and body—through which God reveals to us that we have a body and are surrounded by many other bodies—are very wisely instituted. Remember our previous conversations. These laws aren't deceptive in themselves; there is nothing deceptive about them as first set up, in God's plans, before sin occurred. For it should be known that, prior to sin, before the blindness and confusion that the body's rebellion produces in the mind, the situation was as follows (•I shall be making nine points•):-

1. Man had clear knowledge by the light of reason that God alone could act in him, make him happy or unhappy by pleasure or pain, or in any way affect what state he was in.

2. He knew by experience that God affected him always in the same way in the same circumstances.

3. So he realized by experience and by reason that God's conduct was, and had to be, uniform.

4. This led him to believe in the existence of things that served as occasional causes under the general laws in accordance with which he sensed that God was acting in him. (For, I repeat, he knew that only God was acting in him.)

5. He could keep himself from sensing the action of sensible objects whenever he wanted to.

6. His inner sense of his own volitions, and of the submissive and deferential behaviour of sensible objects, taught him that they were inferior to him because subordinate to him. For, at that time, •before sin•, everything was perfectly in order.

7. Thus, consulting the clear idea accompanying the sensation he had on the occasion of these objects, he saw clearly that the objects were nothing but *bodies*, since the accompanying idea represents nothing but bodies.

8. He concluded from this that his various sensations were simply revelations through which God taught him that he had a body and was surrounded by many other bodies.

9. But, •knowing by reason that God's conduct must be uniform, and by experience that the laws of the union of soul and body were always the same, and •realizing that these laws were established simply to tell him what he needs to know if he is to survive, he readily found out that

he shouldn't judge *what bodies are like* on the basis of his sensations of them, and shouldn't •even• judge *that bodies exist* on that basis, at times when his brain was moved not by an external cause but simply by a movement of •animal• spirits set in motion by an internal cause.

•When man was in his pre-sinful state•, the flow of his animal spirits was perfectly obedient to his volitions, so he could recognize when an external cause was producing the present traces in his brain. (•He could think: 'The cause must be external. It can't be movements of my animal spirits, because I am not *moving* them•.) So he was not like mad or feverish people, or like us when we are dreaming; that is, he wasn't liable to mistake phantoms for realities. . . . Everything about this appears to be evident, and to follow necessarily from two unquestionable truths: •prior to sin, man had very clear ideas and his mind was free of snap judgments; and •his body, or at any rate the principal part of his brain, was perfectly submissive to him.

In the light of this, Aristes, consider again the general laws through which God gives us the sensations—the natural revelations—that assure us of the existence of bodies and

their relation to us. You can see that those laws are very wisely set up, and these revelations are not at all deceptive in themselves. It couldn't have been better arranged, for the reasons I gave you before. Then how does it come about then that these laws now throw us into endless errors? It is, to be sure, because •our minds are darkened, •we are filled with childhood prejudices, •we can't make the use of our senses for which they were given to us. And all of this is precisely because man, by his own fault, lost the power he was meant to have over the principal part of his brain, the part where every change is invariably followed by some new thought. [Recall that for Malebranche every mental event is a 'thought'; our present topic is brain-events that are followed by *sensations*.] For our dependence on our bodies greatly weakens our union with universal reason. •Why does it have that effect?• Because our minds are situated between •bodies that blind us and •God or reason that enlightens us, in such a way that the more they are united to •one the less they are united to •the other.

. . . .So• the cause of our error isn't falsity in the natural revelations that are made to us but •imprudence and rashness in our judgments, •our ignorance concerning the line of conduct that God should follow, in short, •the disorder that *sin* has caused in all our faculties and the confusion that it has introduced in our ideas. It hasn't done this by changing the laws of the union of soul and body, but by inciting our bodies to rebel, thus making us unable to put those laws to the use for which they were established. . . . Still, Aristes, despite all this •confusion that sin has introduced•, I don't see that there can be any good reason for doubting that there are any bodies. I can be mistaken with regard to the existence of some particular body, but I see that this is because God follows exactly •his• laws of the union of soul and body; I see that the uniformity in •God's conduct

shouldn't be disturbed by an irregularity in •ours. . . . This line of thought suffices to keep me from being mistaken about the existence of a particular body. . . . But this line of thought doesn't—and I don't see how any other possibly *could*—keep me from believing that there are bodies, given the many different sensations I have of them, sensations that are so coherent, so connected, so well-ordered that it seems to be certain that if *none* of them were truthful that would have to be because God wanted to deceive us.

**8.** But in order to free you entirely from your theoretical doubt, faith provides us with a demonstration that can't be resisted.

Whether or not bodies exist, we certainly 'see' them, and only God can give us these sensations. So it is God who presents mind with appearances of men with whom I live, books that I study, preachers whom I hear. Now, I read in the appearance of the New Testament about the miracles of a man-God, his resurrection, his ascent into heaven, the preaching of the apostles, and the happy outcome of that preaching, namely, the establishment of the church. I •compare all this with what I know of history, the law of the Jews, and the prophecies of the Old Testament. We are still only considering appearances (remember that I spoke of reading in '*the appearance of the New Testament*'); and, I repeat, I am certain that God alone gives me these appearances, and that he isn't a deceiver. I then run a new •comparison: I compare all the appearances that I have just mentioned with the idea of God, the beauty of religion, the holiness of morality, the necessity of a creed; and eventually I find myself led to believe what faith teaches us.

I believe this without needing an absolutely rigorous demonstrative proof of it. For I don't see anything as more irrational

than lack of faith, as more imprudent than refusing to accept the greatest authority we can have in matters that we can't examine with geometrical rigour—because time is lacking or for a thousand other reasons. Men *need* an authority to teach them the indispensable truths, the ones that should lead them to their end; and rejecting the authority of the church is overturning providence. This appears evident to me, and I'll prove it to you later on [thirteenth dialogue]. Now, faith teaches me that God created heaven and earth. It teaches me that scripture is a divine book. And this book—or the appearance of it!—tells me clearly and positively that there are many thousands of created things, and all at once my appearances are changed into realities. *Bodies exist*; this is absolutely demonstrated when faith is assumed. Thus, I am assured that bodies exist not just by the natural revelation of the sensations of them that God gives me, but far more still by the supernatural revelation of faith. There, my dear Aristes, are the grand arguments against a doubt that was pretty strained and unnatural in the first place (few people are philosophers enough to *have* such a doubt). It's true that objections can be raised against the existence of bodies—objections that appear insurmountable, especially to people who don't know that God must act in us through general laws—but I don't believe that anyone can *seriously* doubt their existence. So we really didn't need to spend time removing a 'doubt' that was so little of a threat. For I am quite certain that you didn't need everything that I have just told you in order to be sure that you are here with Theodore.

**Aristes:** I am not so sure of that. I *am* certain that you are here, but that is for a very special reason that doesn't help with the general problem, namely, it is because you say things to me that no-one else would say to me and that I would never say to myself. Setting that aside, I could be

in doubt even about whether I were with Theodore. I have such affection for Theodore that I seem to encounter him everywhere. For all I know, this affection might increase, and my apparent encounters with him increase correspondingly, so that (though it seems hardly possible) I come to be unable to tell the true Theodore from the false one!

**Theodore:** You are being foolish, my dear Aristes. Please give up these fawning compliments! They are unworthy of a philosopher.

**Aristes:** How severe you are! I wasn't expecting that answer.

**Theodore:** And I wasn't expecting yours. I thought you were following my reasoning; but your answer gives me reason to fear that you have led me to *waste time* addressing your doubt about the existence of bodies. [Theodore talks about how thoughtlessly 'most men' propose problems, not listening to the solutions, and thinking mainly about how to look good and to flatter the people they are talking with. Aristes feels the jab go in, but also asks challengingly 'Are you now reading my heart?' to which Theodore replies that he doesn't know the state of Aristes' heart and that what he has been reading is his own. 'I fear for *you* what I am afraid of in *myself*.' He acknowledges that his manners are harsh and irritating, but says that this should not matter to true 'meditators'. Then:] I should like to observe in your answers, my dear Aristes, somewhat more simplicity and far more attentiveness. I should like reason always to have the upper hand in you and imagination to have been silenced. But if your imagination is tired of being silent, let us leave metaphysics, and take it up another time. Do you know that the meditator of whom I spoke a while ago wants to come here?

**Aristes:** Who? Theotimus?

**Theodore:** Yes indeed! Theotimus himself.

**Aristes:** Ah, that excellent man! What a joy this is! What an honour!

**Theodore:** He learned somehow that I was here and that we were doing philosophy together. For it doesn't take long for people to know where Aristes is at any given time, because everyone wants him. That is what it is to be a fine wit and to have so many brilliant qualities. Such a person must be everywhere if he isn't to disappoint anyone. He is no longer his own master.

**Aristes:** What slavery!

**Theodore:** Do you want to be free of it? Become meditative, and soon everyone will leave you at it. The great secret of not attracting a crowd is to speak reason to people. This language that they don't understand gives them their walking papers without giving them cause for complaint.

**Aristes:** That is true. But when will Theotimus be with us?

**9. Theodore:** When you please.

**Aristes:** Ah! Please tell him at once that we are expecting him, and make a special point of assuring him that I have greatly changed. But please don't let that interrupt our discussion. I give up my doubt. But I am not sorry I put it to you, because the things you told me in resolving it show me how to resolve a number of apparent contradictions that I couldn't reconcile with our notion of God. When we dream, God makes us see a thousand objects that don't exist; but this is because he should and does follow his general laws for the union of soul and body; it's not that he wants to deceive us. If he acted on us by particular volitions rather than according to general laws, we wouldn't see all these phantoms during sleep. I'm no longer surprised at

seeing monsters and the manifold irregularities in nature, ·because· I see them as caused by the simplicity of God's ways. The suffering of innocent people no longer surprises me; and if victory usually goes to the strong, that is because God governs the world by general laws and *postpones* avenging crimes. God is •just, despite the fact that impious people flourish and that the armies of unjust conquerors win battles. He is •wise, although the universe is filled with things made by him that have a thousand defects. He is •steadily unchanging, although he seems to contradict himself all the time—for example· providing copious rain so that the fruit can develop and then spoiling it all with hailstorms. None of these conflicting effects indicates any contradiction or change in the cause that produces them. On the contrary, they come from God's strictly following the same laws, and from his conduct's not depending in any way on ours. When someone feels pain in an arm that has been amputated, it's not that God wanted to deceive him. It is purely because •God doesn't change his plans, and strictly obeys his own laws; because •he approves those laws and will never condemn them; because •nothing can disturb the uniformity of his conduct, or oblige him to deviate from what

he has done. It seems to me, Theodore, that I'm getting a glimpse of how this 'general laws' principle has an infinity of extremely useful consequences.

**Theodore:** Oh, *good*, my dear Aristes; I'm *very* pleased! I didn't think you had attended closely enough to grasp the principles underlying the answers I gave you, ·and it seems that I was wrong·. That is very good. But we'll have to examine these principles in depth so that you will know more clearly how solid and wonderfully fertile they are. To be capable of applying them to all the problems that involve them, it isn't enough to •have some idea of them, or even to •understand them; you also need to •be practised in the *use* of them. But I think it will be better to put off the examination of these great principles until Theotimus has arrived. In the mean time, try to discover for yourself •what the things are that have some connection with us, •what the causes of these connections are, and •what are their effects. For it is a good thing for your mind to be prepared regarding the topic of our future discussions, so that you can more easily correct me if I go astray, or follow me if I lead you directly where we ought to head with all our might.