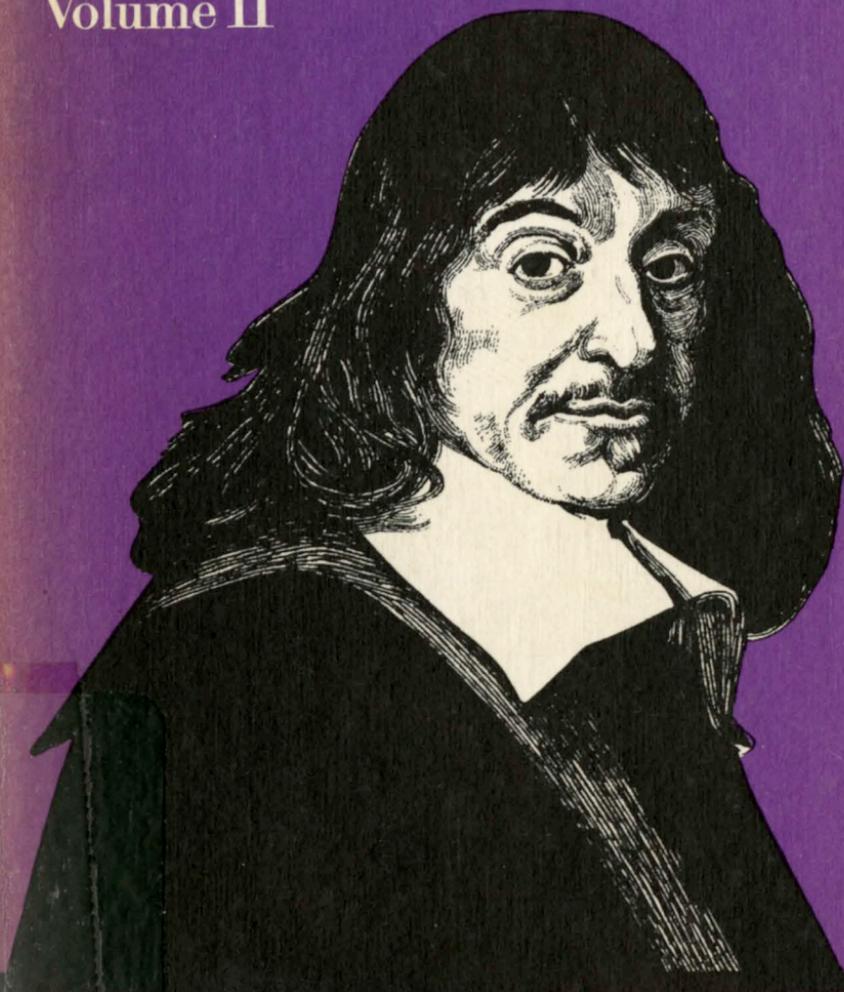


The Philosophical Works of Descartes

Translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane
and G.R.T. Ross

Volume II



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THE PHILOSOPHICAL WORKS
OF
DESCARTES

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH BY

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inconceivable, which amounts, in my opinion, to saying that we have no idea of Him, it follows that no proof of His existence has been effected, much less of His work of creation.

REPLY.

When it is said that we cannot conceive God, to conceive means to comprehend adequately. For the rest, I am tired of repeating how it is that we can have an idea of God. There is nothing in these objections that invalidates my demonstrations.

OBJECTION XII.

(Directed against the fourth Meditation, *Concerning the true and the false.*)

And thus I am quite sure that error, in so far as it is error, is nothing real, but merely defect. Hence in order to go astray, it is not necessary for me to have a faculty specially assigned to me by God for this purpose¹.

It is true that ignorance is merely a defect, and that we stand in need of no special positive faculty in order to be ignorant; but about error the case is not so clear. For it appears that stones and inanimate things are unable to err solely because they have no faculty of reasoning, or imagining. Hence it is a very direct inference that, in order to err, a faculty of reasoning, or at least of imagination is required; now both of these are positive faculties with which all beings that err, and only beings that err, have been endowed.

Further, *M. Descartes says*—I perceive that they (*viz. my mistakes*) depend upon the cooperation of two causes, *viz. my faculty of cognition, and my faculty of choice, or the freedom of my will*². *But this seems to be contradictory to what went before. And we must note here also that the freedom of the will has been assumed without proof, and in opposition to the opinion of the Calvinists.*

REPLY.

Although in order to err the faculty of reasoning (or rather of judging, or affirming and denying) is required, because error is a lack of this power it does not hence follow that this defect is anything real, just as it does not follow that blindness is anything real, although stones are not said to be blind merely because they

¹ Med. iv. vol. i. p. 173, l. 2.

² Cf. Med. iv. vol. i. p. 174, l. 11.

are incapable of vision. I marvel that in these objections I have as yet found nothing that is properly argued out. Further I made no assumption concerning freedom which is not a matter of universal experience; our natural light makes this most evident and I cannot make out why it is said to be contradictory to previous statements.

But though there are many who, looking to the Divine foreordination, cannot conceive how that is compatible with liberty on our part, nevertheless no one, when he considers himself alone, fails to experience the fact that to will and to be free are the same thing [or rather that there is no difference between what is voluntary and what is free]. But this is no place for examining other people's¹ opinions about this matter.

OBJECTION XIII.

For example, whilst I, during these days, sought to discuss whether anything at all existed, and noted that, from the very fact that I raised this question, it was an evident consequence that I myself existed, I could not indeed refrain from judging that what I understood so clearly was true; this was not owing to compulsion by some external force, but because the consequence of the great mental illumination was a strong inclination of the will, and I believed the above truth the more willingly and freely, the less indifferent I was towards it².

This term, great mental illumination, is metaphorical, and consequently is not adapted to the purposes of argument. Moreover everyone who is free from doubt claims to possess a similar illumination, and in his will there is the same inclination to believe that of which he does not doubt, as in that of one who truly knows. Hence while this illumination may be the cause that makes a man obstinately defend or hold some opinion, it is not the cause of his knowing it to be true.

Further, not only to know a thing to be true, but also to believe it or give assent to it, have nothing to do with the will. For, what is proved by valid argument or is recounted as credible, is believed by us whether we will or no. It is true that affirming and denying, maintaining or refuting propositions, are acts of will; but it does not follow on that account that internal assent depends upon the will.

Therefore the demonstration of the truth that follows is not

¹ The Calvinists', F. V.

² Cf. Med. iv. vol. i. p. 176, par. 2.

it should exist actually in the thing of which it is the idea¹; that I pass judgment on matters of which I am ignorant², and the like, show only that you, O flesh, wish rashly to attack matters which in many cases you have failed to understand. For it is not to be inferred from the fact that a man desires bread, that the bread is more perfect than the man, but only that he who is in want of bread is less perfect than he himself is when he has no lack. Again from the fact that something exists in idea, I do not infer that it exists in the actual world, except when no other cause for that idea can be given but the thing which it represents as actually existing; and this I have shown to be true not of many worlds, nor of any other thing, save God alone. Nor, once more, do I pass judgment on matters of which I am ignorant, for I have adduced reasons for my judgment, reasons so convincing that none of them has been at all impugned by you.

9. When you deny that we continually require the activity³ of the primal cause in order that we may continue to exist, you dispute a matter which all Metaphysicians affirm to be manifest, but one about which the unlearned often do not reflect, attending as they do only to causes of coming into being, but not to those of being⁴. Thus an architect is the cause of a house and a father of his son in respect of coming into being merely, and for this reason, when it is an absolute production, an effect can remain in existence without any cause of this kind; but the sun is the cause of the light proceeding from it, and God is the cause of created things, not only in respect of their coming into existence, but also in respect of their continuing to exist, and must always expend His activity on the effect in the same way in order to make it stay the same thing.

This can be plainly demonstrated from what I explained about the independence of the parts of time, which you in vain attempt to elude by propounding the necessary character of the connection between the parts of time considered in the abstract⁵. Here it is not a question of abstract time, but of the time or duration of something which endures; and you will not deny that the single moments of this time can be separated from their neighbours, i.e. that a thing which endures through individual moments may cease to exist.

¹ Above, p. 167, par. 2.

² Above, p. 168, par. 2.

influxu.

⁴ causas secundum fieri, non autem secundum esse.

⁵ Cf. above, p. 169, par. 1.

I refuse to undertake to prove them before your eyes. For these matters are such that anyone ought to experience them in himself, rather than be convinced of them by ratiocination; but you, O flesh, appear not to pay heed to what the mind transacts within itself. Refuse then to be free, if freedom does not please you; I at least shall rejoice in my liberty, since I experience it in myself, and you have assailed it not with proof but with bare negations merely. Perchance I shall receive more credence from others, because I affirm that which I have experienced and anyone may experience in himself, than you who make your denial merely because you chance not to have experienced it.

Yet it can be shown conclusively from your words that you yourself have had that experience. For in denying *that we can guard against error*, because you will not have it that the will can be borne towards anything to which it is not determined by the understanding, you at the same time allow that *we can refrain from persisting in error*¹. But to do so is wholly impossible unless the will has the power of directing itself towards one side or the other apart from any determination by the understanding, the fact which you denied. For, if the understanding has once determined the will to propound some false judgment, I ask you: when first it (the will) begins to take heed lest it continue in error, what is it that determines it to do so? If that determination is due to itself then it can be moved in a certain direction without impulsion by the understanding, which you denied, and about which alone the dispute has been raised. If, on the other hand, it is the understanding which is responsible, it is not the will itself which takes heed; and what happens is merely that, just as it was formerly impelled towards the falsity which the understanding set before it, so now it accidentally happens to be directed towards the truth, because the understanding has set the truth before it. But besides this I should like to know what conception you have of the nature of falsity, and how you think that it can be an object of the understanding. I, who by falsity understand only the privation of truth, am convinced that it is an absolute contradiction that the understanding should apprehend the false under the guise of the truth; but this would be a necessary consequence if understanding could determine the will to embrace the false.

4. As to the profit to be derived from these Meditations I have given sufficient warning in the brief preface, which I think you have

¹ Above, p. 181, *sub fin.*

I further add that I do not desire that my simple word should be accepted regarding the truth of what I promise, but that judgment should be made on the writings which I have already published. For I did not there make trial of one question or two, but explained more than a thousand which had not so far been expounded by any one before; and although hitherto many had looked at my writings askance, and endeavoured in all sorts of ways to refute them, no one that I know of has as yet been able to find them not true. If an enumeration is made of all the questions that have during all the centuries through which the other philosophies have flourished, been through their means solved, we shall find them neither so numerous nor so celebrated as those of mine. But further, I state boldly that the solution of no one question has ever been given by the aid of the principles of the philosophy of the Peripatetics, that I myself cannot demonstrate to be false and illegitimate. And to prove this, let any one set before me, not all, for I do not consider that they are worth the trouble of employing much time upon, but some of the most striking questions, and I promise that I shall stand by what I have said. I simply make it known here in order to remove all matter of dispute, that in speaking of the particular principles of the Peripatetic philosophy, I do not except questions the solution of which are derived either entirely from the experience common to all men, or from the consideration of figures and movements proper to mathematicians, or finally from the notions of metaphysics which are commonly received, and which seem to have been admitted by me just as much as are the preceding, as appears from my *Meditations*.

I go further and say what may seem to be a paradox, viz. that there is nothing in all this philosophy in so far as it is termed Peripatetic and different from others, that is not new; and that on the other hand there is nothing in mine that is not old. For, as regards principles, I accept those alone which have been generally accepted by all philosophers, and which for that reason are the most ancient of all; and that which I finally deduce from them appears to be, as I clearly show, so contained and implied in these principles, that it would seem that it is likewise very ancient, since nature herself has engraved it upon our minds. But, on the other hand, the principles of the ordinary philosophy, at least at the time at which they were invented by Aristotle or by others, were new, nor should they be esteemed to be better now than they then were; and nothing has been as yet deduced from them which is not contested,

and which, according to the custom of the Schools, is not subject to change at the hands of individual philosophers, and hence which is not entirely new, since it is every day made afresh.

As to theology, as one truth can never be contrary to another truth, it would be a kind of impiety to fear that the truths discovered in philosophy were contrary to those of the true Faith. And I even assert that our religion teaches us nothing which could not be as easily, or even more easily, explained in accordance with my principles, than with those commonly received. And it seems to me that I have already given a sufficiently full proof of that at the end of my Reply to the Fourth Objections, in respect of a question in which we usually have the greatest trouble in making philosophy accord with theology. And I am still ready to do the same in regard to other questions, were there need; and even likewise to show that there are many things in the ordinary philosophy which are not really in accordance with these that in theology are certain, although this is usually dissimulated by those who support that philosophy, or through long habit of acceptance of them, the fact is not perceived.

We must not likewise fear that my opinions may increase too much by attracting to them a multitude ignorant and greedy for novelty. On the contrary, since experience shows that those who approve of them are the more cultivated, whom not novelty but truth attracts, they cannot make headway too quickly.

We must not either apprehend that it may disturb the peace of the Schools; but on the other hand, since all the philosophers embroil themselves in so many controversies that they can never be in a greater warfare than they now are, there is no better method for establishing peace amongst them, and refuting the heresies which day by day revive their controversies, than by obliging them to receive the opinions which, like mine, are proved to be true. For the clear conception that we have of them, will remove all matter of doubt and disputation.

And from all this we see clearly that there is in truth no reason why some men should be so anxious to turn away others from a knowledge of my opinions, except that holding them to be evident and certain, they are afraid that they should stand in the way of that reputation for learning that they themselves have acquired through the knowledge of other less probable reasoning. So that this very envy that they bear, is no small proof of the truth and certainty of my philosophy. But lest perhaps I may seem to be boasting falsely

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