

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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Contents

FIRST DIALOGUE	1
SECOND DIALOGUE	11
THIRD DIALOGUE	20
FOURTH DIALOGUE	33
FIFTH DIALOGUE	45
SIXTH DIALOGUE	55
SEVENTH DIALOGUE	65
EIGHTH DIALOGUE	79

NINTH DIALOGUE	93
TENTH DIALOGUE	107
ELEVENTH DIALOGUE	121
TWELFTH DIALOGUE	132
THIRTEENTH DIALOGUE	142
FOURTEENTH DIALOGUE	151

FIRST DIALOGUE

The soul and its distinctness from the body. The nature of ideas. The world that our bodies inhabit and that we look at is quite different from the one we see.

Theodore: Well then, my dear Aristes, since this is what you want, I will have to talk to you about my metaphysical visions. But for that I'll need to go indoors, away from the distractions of this enchanting garden. I'm afraid of taking as •immediate responses of inner truth what are really •snap judgments, or •obscure principles generated by the laws of the union of soul and body; and I'm more likely to do that when there is all this background noise going on. So let us go into your study so that we can more easily dig down into ourselves. Let's try not to allow anything to prevent us from consulting the master that we have in common, universal *reason*. At our discussions it will be *inner truth*—the voice of reason—that is in charge, dictating what I say to you and what you are willing to learn through me. In short, reason *and reason alone* will judge and decide our differences, because today we are thinking only of philosophy; and, although you entirely accept the authority of the church, you want me to speak to you at first as though you didn't accept truths of faith as principles of our knowledge. Faith must in fact guide the steps of our minds, but only sovereign reason can fill them with understanding.

Aristes: Let us go where you like, Theodore. I dislike everything that I see in this world of material things that we take in through the senses, now that I've heard you speak of another world entirely filled with beautiful things that are intelligible. [In this work, a thing is called 'intelligible' if it can be known about through the intellect, i.e. through sheer thinking; the contrast is with things that are 'sensible', meaning that they can be known about through the senses—e.g. they are audible or visible or the

like.] Take me away to that happy, enchanted region; get me to survey all those wonderful things you told me about the other day with such confident eloquence. Let's go! I'm ready to follow you into the land that you believe can't be reached by people who listen only to their senses.

Theodore: In gently making fun of me, you are following the hidden promptings of your ever-playful imagination, but I have to say that you are speaking of something that you don't understand. In fact I *shan't* take you into a foreign land, but perhaps I'll teach you that you are in fact a foreigner in your own country. I'll teach you that the world you live in is not what you •believe it to be, since it is not what you •see or •feel it as being. You base your beliefs about your environment on your senses, and you haven't an inkling of how enormously much they delude you. Your senses give reliable testimony concerning how to stay alive and physically healthy, but about *everything* else there is no accuracy, no truth, in what they say. You will see this, Aristes, without going outside yourself, without my taking you away 'to that enchanted region' that your •imagination represents. Imagination is a lunatic that likes to play the fool. Its leaps and unforeseen starts distract you, and me as well. Please let's keep •reason uppermost in our discussions. We want to hear its pronouncements, but it is silent and elusive when imagination pushes itself forward; and we, instead of silencing the imagination, listen to its little jokes and linger on the various phantoms that it offers us. Make it behave itself in the presence of reason, therefore; silence it if you wish to hear clearly and distinctly the responses of inner

truth. [Aristes apologizes for his little joke, and Theodore accepts that, again remarking on Aristes' lively imagination. Then:]

Theodore: . . . What I have just said to you was simply to make you understand that you have a terrible antagonism to the truth. The quality that makes you brilliant in the eyes of men. . . is the most implacable enemy of reason. I am putting to you a paradoxical thesis whose truth I can't now demonstrate. But you will soon acknowledge it from your own experience, and you may see the reasons for it in the course of our discussions. There is still a long way to go before that. But, believe me, clever minds are as closed to the truth as stupid minds are, the only difference being that ordinarily the stupid mind respects the truth whereas the clever mind regards it as of no account. Still, if you are determined to curb your imagination you'll meet no obstacles to entering the place where reason gives its responses; and when you have listened to it for a while you will find that what has appealed to you up to now is *negligible*, and (if God touches your heart) you will even find it *disgusting*.

Aristes: Then let us go quickly, Theodore. . . . Certainly I'll do everything you ask of me. . . . Now that we have reached my study, is there anything here to prevent us from entering into ourselves and consulting reason? Do you want me to close the shutters so that darkness will conceal anything in the room that is visible and can affect our senses?

Theodore: No, my dear fellow. Darkness affects our senses as well as light. It does remove the glare of the colours, but darkness at this time of day might put our imaginations into a flutter. Just draw the curtains. . . . Now, Aristes, reject everything that has entered your mind through the senses; silence your imagination; let *everything* be perfectly silent in you. Even forget, if you can, that you have a body, and

think only of what I say to you. . . . Attention is all I ask of you. No conquests are made in the land of truth unless the mind battles resolutely against impressions from the body.

Aristes: I think that is so, Theodore. Speak. But let me interrupt you when there is something that I don't understand.

Theodore: Fair enough. Listen. **1.** ·A property has to be *had* by something·. There couldn't be an instance of a property that was had by The Nothing [*le néant*]. Now, I *think*; so *I am*—because the property of thinkingness has an instance, there has to be a thing (not The Nothing!) that *has* it, i.e. a thing that *does* the thinking, and that is myself·. But *what* am I—the *I* that thinks whenever I'm thinking? Am I a body, a mind, a man? . . . Well, can a body think? Is a thing that has length, breadth, and depth capable of reasoning, desiring, sensing? Certainly not; for the only states that such an extended thing can have consist in spatial relations; and obviously *those* are not perceptions, reasonings, pleasures, desires, sensations—in a word, thoughts. Since my perceptions are something entirely different from spatial relations, and since they are certainly *mine*, it follows that this *I* that thinks, my very substance, is not a body.

Aristes: It seems clear to me that any details concerning *how* something is extended are purely concerned with spatial relations—for instance a thing's shape consists in a set of facts about how its parts are spatially related to one another—and thus that something extended can't know, will, or sense. But my body may be something other than extended. For it seems to me that what feels the pain of a jab is my •finger, what desires is my •heart, what reasons is my •brain. My inner sense of what occurs in me tells me this. Prove to me that my body is *merely* something extended and then I'll admit that my mind—what thinks, wills, and

reasons in me—is not material or corporeal [= ‘of the nature of a body’].

2. Theodore: So, Aristes, you think your body is composed of some substance that isn’t extended? Don’t you realize that extension is all a mind needs to work with to construct brain, heart, arms, hands, all the veins, arteries, nerves, and the rest of your body? ·And as well as being *sufficient* for your body, extension is also *necessary* for it·. If God destroyed your body’s extension, would you still have a brain, arteries, veins, and the rest? Do you suppose that a body can be reduced to a mathematical point? I don’t doubt that God could make everything in the universe from the extension of a single grain of sand; but surely when there is absolutely *no* extension there is no corporeal substance. Think hard about this; and so that you’ll become convinced of it, take note of what comes next.

Whatever exists either •can be conceived by itself or •can’t be conceived by itself. There’s no middle ground, for the two propositions are contradictories [= ‘are propositions that cannot both be true and cannot both be false’].

Now, if something can be conceived all on its own as existing without depending on anything else—can be conceived without our idea of it ·also· representing some other thing—then it is certainly a being or a substance; and if something can’t be conceived by itself with no thought of anything else, then it is a *state* of a substance or a *way* that substance is.

[In this next bit, Theodore uses the expression *l’étendue*; this can mean ‘extendedness’ or ‘that which is extended’. It seems that the former names a property, the latter a thing that *has* the property. Theodore holds, as a matter of metaphysics, that there isn’t any *thing* that *has* extension; there is only *the extended*, or *l’étendue*. In this part of the text, the untranslated French term will be used, because Theodore’s doctrine comes out in English either as •plainly wrong (‘Extendedness is a thing,

not a property’) or as •trivially true (‘What is extended is a thing, not a property’). This will come up again in the tenth dialogue, section 9.] For example, we can’t think of roundness without thinking of *l’étendue*; so roundness is not a being or substance but a state. We can think of *l’étendue* without thinking of any other thing in particular. Hence, *l’étendue* isn’t •a state that a being can be in; it is itself •a being. . . . Our only way of distinguishing •substances or beings from •states or ways-of-being is through this difference in how we perceive ·or think about· them.

Well, then, go back into yourself! Don’t you find that you can think of *l’étendue* without thinking of anything else? Don’t you find that you can perceive *l’étendue* all by itself? So *l’étendue* is a substance and in no way a state or manner of being. Hence, *l’étendue* and matter are one and the same substance. Now, I can perceive my thought, my desire, my joy, my sadness, without thinking of *l’étendue*, and even when pretending that *l’étendue* doesn’t exist. So my thought and the rest are not states of *l’étendue*, but states of a substance that thinks, senses, and desires, and is quite different from *l’étendue*.

All the properties that come under extension—all the different ways of being extended—consist in spatial relations. (·For example, a thing’s being *cylindrical* can be expressed purely in terms of how far some of its parts are from some others·.) Now, obviously my pleasure, desire, and thoughts are not •spatial relations; for •*these* can be compared, measured, exactly fixed by principles of geometry, whereas we can’t in this way compare or measure our perceptions and sensations. So my soul is not material. It is not the way-of-being of my body. It is *a substance* that thinks, and has no resemblance to the extended substance [*la substance étendue*] of which my body is composed.

Aristes: That seems to be demonstrated. But what conclusion can you draw from it?

3. Theodore: I can draw endlessly many conclusions, for the principal tenets of philosophy are based on the soul's being distinct from the body—tenets including the doctrine that we are immortal. A word about that in passing: if the soul is a substance distinct from the body rather than being a property of the body, it obviously follows that even if death *were* to destroy the substance of which our bodies are composed—which in fact it *doesn't*—it wouldn't follow that our souls were destroyed. But it's not yet time to get to the bottom of this important question; before that, there are many other truths I must prove for you. Try to concentrate on what comes next.

Aristes: Proceed. I'll follow with all the attention I can muster.

4. Theodore: I think of many things: of
 a number,
 a circle,
 a house,
 certain particular beings,
 being.

Now all this exists, at least while I am thinking of it. Certainly, when I think of a circle, of a number, of being, of the infinite, or of a certain finite being, I perceive *realities*. For if the circle I perceive were •nothing, in thinking of it I would be thinking of •nothing, which is tantamount to not thinking of anything. Thus, I would be thinking and not thinking at the same time! And another point: the circle that I have in mind has properties that no other shape has. So the circle exists when I think of it, because *nothing* doesn't have properties—there's no question of one nothing being different from another because their properties are different.

Aristes: What, Theodore! Everything you think of exists? Does your mind give existence to this study, this desk, these chairs, because you think of them?

Theodore: Slow down! I tell you that everything that I think of *is*, or (if you will) *exists*. The study, the desk, the chairs that I see—all this exists at least while I see it. But you are running together •what I am seeing with •a piece of furniture that I don't see. There's as much difference between the desk that I do see and the desk that you think you see as there is between your mind and body.

Aristes: I understand you in part, Theodore, and I'm embarrassed at having interrupted you. I am convinced that everything we see or think of contains some reality, but you aren't speaking of objects but of ideas of objects. Our *ideas* of objects do no doubt exist while they are present in our minds. But I thought you were speaking of the objects themselves.

5. Theodore: 'Of the objects themselves!' Ah, we're not there yet! I am trying to present my reflections in an orderly way. You would be surprised at how many principles are needed if one is to demonstrate things that no-one has any doubt about. Does anyone doubt that he has a body? walks on solid ground? lives in a material world? But you will soon know something that few people understand, namely that while our bodies walk about in •a corporeal world our minds are unceasingly moving in an •intelligible world which affects them and thereby becomes •sensible to them.

While taking their ideas of things to be *nothing*, men go to the other extreme when they credit the created world with having far *more* reality than it has. They don't doubt the existence of •objects, and they attribute to them many qualities that they don't have. Yet they don't so much as *think about* the reality of their •ideas. That's because they

listen to their senses instead of consulting inner truth. For, once again, it is far easier to demonstrate the reality of ideas—that ‘other world entirely filled with beautiful things that are intelligible’, as you put it—than to demonstrate the existence of the material world. Here is why.

Ideas exist eternally and necessarily, whereas a corporeal world exists only because God chose to create it. In order to see the intelligible world, therefore, we need only to consult *reason*, which contains intelligible ideas that are eternal and necessary, the model on which the ‘sensorily’ visible world is based; and that’s something that any rational mind can do. As for the material world: well, it is in itself invisible (‘I’ll explain this later’), but we can *judge that it exists*, and for that we need God to reveal it to us. His choices ‘about what material things to create’ were purely *his*, depending only on his will; we can’t learn about them from reason, which deals only in necessities. [Theodore speaks of reason as *containing* ideas because he thinks of reason—which Malebranche nearly always spells with an initial capital—as a *thing*. We learn later that it is *the mind of God*, and since God *is* a mind we could take it that ‘reason’ is another name for God. In this version, however, ‘reason’ is used instead of ‘Reason’ for stylistic reasons.]

Now, God reveals the facts about what he has created in two ways—•through the authority of holy scripture and •by means of our senses. •Accepting the authority of scripture—and we can’t reject it!—we can rigorously demonstrate *that there are bodies*. •And our senses can sufficiently assure us of *the existence of this and that body in particular*. But this second way is not now infallible: here’s someone who thinks he sees his enemy in front of him when really the man is far away; here’s another who thinks he has four paws when really he has only two legs; here’s a third who feels pain in his arm which was amputated long ago. Thus, ‘the testimony of the senses, which I call *natural revelation*. . . . is at present

subject to error—I’ll tell you why later. But *special revelation*—such as we have in holy scripture—can never directly lead to error, since God can’t want to deceive us. This has been a short digression to give you a glimpse of certain truths that I’ll prove to you in due course; I wanted to make you curious about them. . . . Now back to the main thread. Listen!

I think of a number, a circle, a study, your chairs—in short, I think of such and such *beings*. I also think of *being*—as such—which is to think of the infinite, of being that isn’t determined or limited in any way. All these ideas have some reality at the time I think of them. You won’t doubt this, because ‘you are aware that’ Nothing has no properties and these ideas do have properties. They light up the mind, enabling it to know them; some even strike the mind in a way that enables it to *sense* them, and this comes about in hundreds of different ways. Anyway, the properties of some ideas certainly differ from the properties of others; ‘so they *do have* properties, so they *are real*’. Because the reality of our ideas is genuine, and even more because this reality is necessary, eternal, and unchangeable, it’s clear that. . . here we go! you and I are whisked off to a world other than the one our bodies inhabit, a ‘world entirely filled with beautiful things that are intelligible’.

Let us suppose, Aristes, that God were to annihilate everything he has created except you and me, your body and mine. . . . Let us suppose further that God were to impress on our brains all the same traces ‘that he has in fact impressed’—or rather that he were to present to our minds all the same ideas that we in fact have in our minds today. On that supposition, Aristes, in which world would we spend the day? Wouldn’t it be in an intelligible world?

Now note this well: **that intelligible world is the one that we do exist and live in, though each of us animates a body that lives and walks around in another world.** The

intelligible world is the one we contemplate, admire, and sense. But the world that we *look at*—the world we take account of when we look around us—is simply *matter*, which is invisible in itself and has none of the beauties that we sense and admire when we look at it. Think hard about this:

If the material world were destroyed, it would have no beauty. (That is because it would be nothing; and Nothing has no properties, and so doesn't have the property of being beautiful.) Now, if the world were turned into nothing but God still produced the same traces in our brains—or rather presented to our minds the same ideas that are now produced in the presence of objects—we would see the same beauties as we do now. So the beauties we see are not material beauties; they are intelligible beauties that are made sensible as a result of the laws that govern the union of soul and body. In supposing matter to be annihilated we don't suppose the annihilation of the beauties we see when we look at the objects surrounding us.

Aristes: I am afraid, Theodore, that there's something wrong in your supposition. If God destroyed this room, it certainly wouldn't be visible any longer; for 'Nothing has no properties'!

6. Theodore: You're not following me, Aristes. Your room is absolutely invisible in itself. You say that if God destroyed the room it wouldn't then be visible because Nothing has no properties. That would be true if your room had the property of being visible; but it doesn't! What I see when I look at your room—i.e. when I turn my eyes on all sides to take it in—would still be visible even if your room were destroyed and even, I may add, if it had never been built! I maintain that someone who has never left China can see everything I see when I look at your room, provided that

his brain goes through the same movements that mine does when I survey the room—which is perfectly possible. People with a high fever, and people who sleep and dream—don't they see chimeras of all sorts that never were? What they see exists, at least while they see it; but what they *think they see* doesn't exist. . . .

I tell you again, Aristes—strictly speaking your room is not visible. It's not really your room that I see when I look at it, because I could very well see what I am now seeing even if God had destroyed your room. •The dimensions that I see—intelligible dimensions that represent to me these spaces in your room—are unchangeable, eternal, and necessary, and they don't occupy any place. The dimensions of your room, on the other hand, are variable and destructible, and they take up space. But I am afraid that by telling you too many truths I am now multiplying your difficulties! For you seem to have some trouble distinguishing •ideas, the only things that are visible in themselves, from •the objects that ideas *represent*—objects that are invisible to the mind since they can't act on it or be presented to it.

Aristes: Indeed, I am rather at a loss, because I have trouble following you into this land of ideas that you say is genuinely real. I can't get a *grip* on anything that doesn't involve *body*. As for your 'ideas': I can't help thinking they are genuine, for the reasons you have given me, but there seems to be almost nothing *solid* about them. Tell me this: what happens to our ideas when we stop thinking of them? It seems to me that they return to nothing. And if that is right then your 'intelligible world' is destroyed. If the intelligible room that I now see is annihilated when I close my eyes, its reality doesn't amount to much! And if by opening my eyes I can create an intelligible world, that world certainly amounts to less than the one our bodies live in.

7. Theodore: You are right about that last point, Aristes. If you bring your ideas into existence and can annihilate them with a wink of an eye, there is not much to them. But if they are eternal, unchangeable, necessary—in short, *divine*—they will certainly be more considerable than matter, which is powerless and absolutely invisible in itself. Can you really believe that when you decide to think of a circle, the substance (so to speak) of which your idea is made is brought into existence by *you* and will be annihilated as soon as *you* choose to stop thinking of it? Be careful here! If you bring your ideas into existence, it is by willing ·or deciding· to think of them. But how can you decide to think of a circle if you don't already have some idea of it from which it can be fashioned and formed? Can you decide to make something of which you have no knowledge? Can you make something out of nothing? Certainly you can't decide to think of a circle if you don't already have the idea of it—or at least an idea of *l'étendue* of which you can consider certain parts without thinking of others. You can't come to see it close up, see it *clearly*, unless you already see it confusedly, as though from a distance. Your attention ·takes you to it, ·makes it present to you, even ·shapes it; but obviously your attention doesn't make it out of nothing. Your lack of attention takes you away from it, but it doesn't annihilate it. If it *did*, how could you have a desire to produce it again? ·Such a desire involves the thought

I want to have in my mind the idea of. . .

but how can you complete this by

. . . a circle

if you have absolutely no idea of a circle already?· Having no such idea, you have no model that you could use in re-making the idea of *circle* in your mind. Isn't it clear that you couldn't do this?

Aristes: Clear? Well not to me, Theodore. You win the argument, but you don't convince me. ·This earth is real: I feel it; when I stamp down on it, it resists me; there's some solidity to it. But that ·my ideas have some reality independent of my thought, existing even when I'm not thinking of them—that's what I can't get myself to accept.

8. Theodore: That is because you weren't able to enter into yourself to consult reason. Tired from the hard work of attending ·to reason·, you have listened to your imagination and your senses, which speak to you even when you haven't asked them anything! You haven't reflected enough on the proofs I gave you that the senses can deceive. Not long ago there was a man, otherwise quite rational, who thought there was water up to his waist and was always afraid it would rise and drown him. He felt that water as you feel your earth. . . . People could talk him out of this error, but he soon fell back into it. When a man thinks he has been turned into a cock or an ox, he senses himself as having in place of his legs the feet of a cock, in place of his arms the legs of an ox, in place of his hair a comb or horns. Why can't you see that the resistance you feel when you stamp is only a sensation striking your soul? that all our sensations are absolutely independent of objects? Haven't you ever, while asleep, felt a heavy body on your chest that kept you from breathing? or that something struck and even wounded you? or that you struck others, walked, danced, jumped on solid ground? You think this floor exists because you feel it resisting you. Well then, ·if *reality* is a matter of *resistance*·, does it follow that air is less real than the floor because it has less solidity? Is ice more real than water because it is harder? But you are twice mistaken—once about the floor, once about your ideas·. **(1)** The floor resists *your foot*, I agree. But a body can't resist *a mind*; so when you stamp with your

foot and have a sensation of resistance or solidity—a sign of something resisting your mind—what causes *that* resistance is something entirely different from the floor.

Still, I accept that the floor resists you. **(2)** But do you think that your ideas *don't* resist you? Then try to show me two unequal diameters of a single circle or three equal diameters in an ellipse! Try to find the square root of 8 or the cube root of 9! Try to make it right that we do to others what we wouldn't want others to do to us! Or, to take an example relating to yours, try to make two feet of intelligible extension equal one. (Note that I say *intelligible* extension. The point is not that a two-foot long *object* can't be squashed down to half of that length. I'm talking about two feet considered as a length in geometry, an abstract length, something that you know about by *thinking* not by *sensing*. Try making a two-foot item of *that* kind equal one foot, and you'll find that you can't do it.) The nature of this extension won't allow it: it *resists* your mind. So don't doubt its reality. The floor can't be penetrated by your foot—that is what your senses teach you in a confused and deceptive way. Intelligible extension is also impenetrable in its fashion—it makes you see this clearly by its evidentness and its own light.

You have the idea of space or extension—of a space, I say, that has no limits. This idea is necessary, eternal, unchangeable, common to all minds—to men, to angels, even to God. It can't be wiped out of your mind, any more than can the idea of existence or the infinite (I mean *existence* or *being* in the abstract, not any particular thing that exists). It is always present to the mind; you can't separate yourself from it or entirely lose sight of it. This vast idea of indeterminate space is the source out of which are made not only the idea of a circle and other ideas of purely *intelligible* shapes but also the idea of every *sensible* shape that we see when we look at the created world—for example,

not only when we investigate the geometrical properties of the circle, but also when we see the full moon. All this takes place when intelligible parts of this ideal, immaterial, intelligible extension are variously brought before our minds: sometimes when through our attention to these shapes we *know* them; sometimes when because of traces and movements in our brains we *imagine* or *sense* them. I can't explain all this to you in more detail just yet. Just hold onto these two points. **(1)** The idea of an infinite extension must necessarily have a great deal of reality, because you can't take all of it in: whatever movement you give your mind, you can't take your thought right through it. **(2)** It can't possibly be merely a state of your mind, because something infinite can't itself be a state of something finite. Say to yourself:

My mind can't take in this vast idea. The idea goes infinitely beyond my mind; which shows clearly that it is not a mental state. States of things can't extend beyond the things of which they are states. . . . My mind can't measure this idea, because it is finite whereas the idea is infinite; and the finite, however great it may be and however often repeated, can never equal the infinite.

Aristes: How ingenious and quick you are! But slow down, please. I don't grant you that the mind perceives the infinite. I agree that the mind perceives an extension to which it sees no end, but it doesn't see an infinite extension. A finite mind can't see anything that is infinite.

9. Theodore: It is true that the mind doesn't see an infinite extension, Aristes, in the sense that its thought or its perception is equal to an infinite extension. If it were, it would take it in, and so would itself be infinite. For it would take an infinite thought to measure an infinite idea, encompass all at once everything the infinite includes. But

the mind does see all at once that its immediate object, intelligible extension, is infinite. And this is not because it doesn't see an end to it, as you think; for if that were so, the mind could *hope to find* an end or at least could *wonder whether* there is an end. Rather, the mind sees clearly *that there isn't* an end.

Imagine a man who drops down from the clouds and when he has landed on earth starts walking in a straight line—I mean, walking along one of the great circles into which geographers divide the earth. Let us suppose that he keeps on walking this line, and that nothing blocks his way. After several days of travel, not finding an end, can he conclude that the earth is infinite? No! If he is wise and cautious in his judgments, he will believe the earth to be very large, but he won't think it is infinite. And when his walking eventually brings him to his starting-point, he will realize that he has gone around the earth. But when the mind thinks about intelligible extension and wants to *measure* the idea of space, it sees clearly that it is infinite. The mind can't doubt that this idea is inexhaustible. If the mind takes enough of it to represent the space occupied by a hundred thousand worlds and again at every instant a hundred thousand more, the idea will never run out of space to meet the mind's demands; and the mind sees this and can't doubt it. Yet this isn't how the mind finds out that the idea is infinite. Rather, it knows that it *won't* ever use up all of the idea because it sees that the idea *is* infinite.

Of all the people who go in for reasoning, geometers are the most exact. Now, everyone agrees that there is no fraction which when multiplied by itself gives the product eight, although this number can be approached without limit by increasing the terms of the fractions or the lengths of the decimals: e.g. the series 2.828^2 , 2.8284^2 , 2.82841^2 . . . approaches 8. Everyone agrees that a hyperbola

and its asymptotes, as well as various other such lines continued to infinity, will approach one another indefinitely without ever meeting. Do you think they discover these truths by trying, and form a judgment about what they don't see on the basis of some small part that they have seen? No, Aristes, that's the basis for judgment used by people who follow the testimony of imagination and the senses. True philosophers make judgments only about what they see. Yet they aren't afraid of affirming—without having put it to the test—that *no* part of the diagonal of a square, even one a million times smaller than the smallest particle of dust, can be used to measure exactly and without remainder the diagonal of the square and one of its sides. Thus the mind sees the infinite in the •small as well as in the •large—not by repeated •division or •multiplication of its finite ideas, which is no way to reach the infinite, but by the very infinity which it finds in its ideas and which belongs to them. That is how it learns, at a single blow, that there is no unity (•because everything is divisible•) and that there are no limits to infinite intelligible extension.

Aristes: I surrender, Theodore! Ideas have more reality than I thought; and their reality is unchangeable, necessary, eternal, common to all intellects, and doesn't consist in states of one's intellect, because the intellect is finite and so can't be in a state that is infinite. My •perception of intelligible extension is mine; it is a state of my mind; it is I who perceive this extension. But •the extension I perceive isn't a state of my mind. I realize that it is not *myself* that I see when I think of infinite spaces, of a circle or square or cube, when I look at this room, when I look up at the night sky. The *perception of* extension is mine. But as for the extension itself along with all the shapes I discover in it, I would like to know *how* all that can be independent of me.

·My question is about *how*, not *whether*·. My perception of extension can't exist without me, so it is a state of my mind. But the extension that I *see does* exist without me. *You* can contemplate it without my thinking of it, you and any other man.

10. Theodore: You needn't be afraid to add '... and so can God'. For all our clear ideas are, in their intelligible reality, *in God*. It is only *in him* that we see them. (Don't think that what I am saying now is new. It is the opinion of St Augustine.) If our ideas are eternal, unchangeable, necessary, you plainly see that they have to exist *in* something unchangeable. It is true, Aristes, that God sees intelligible extension—the model that is copied by the matter of which the world is formed and in which our bodies live—in *himself*, and (I repeat) it is only in him that *we* see it. Our minds live entirely in universal reason, in the intelligible substance that contains the ideas involved in all the truths we discover. ·We have two basic ways of discovering truths, the two ordinarily labelled •*a priori* and •*a posteriori*, or •discovery through reason and •empirical discovery. But I want to describe them in terms of the metaphysic that I am presenting to you. So: we make discoveries through

•general laws [see twelfth dialogue] governing the union of our minds with this reason I have been telling you about,

and we make other discoveries through

•general laws governing the union of our souls with our bodies.

[The rest of this paragraph expands what Malebranche wrote, in a way that the apparatus of ·dots· can't handle.] I should say a little about the latter of these. When we discover things through our senses, changes in our souls are caused by traces imprinted in the brain by the action of objects, or the flow of animal

spirits. I say 'caused by', but this is not strictly speaking *causation*, because a body can't strictly *cause* any change in a mind. Brain traces and animal spirits are what we might call 'natural causes' of changes in sensory state; or, more accurately, they are 'occasional causes', by which I mean that a bodily change is the *occasion* for *God* to cause a change in the soul—and what God exerts on the soul really is causation strictly so-called.

If I explain all this in detail now I'll get things out of order, but I do want to satisfy in part your desire to know *how* the mind can discover all sorts of shapes, and how it can see the sensible world in intelligible extension. Well, think of the three ways in which you can have (say) a circle in mind: you can •conceive it, •imagine it, or •sense or see it. When you •conceive a circle, what happens is that intelligible extension comes before your mind, indeterminate as to size but with all points equidistant from some given point and all in the same plane; that's how you conceive a circle in general. When you •imagine a circle, a determinate part of this extension—a part whose boundary is all equidistant from one point—affects your mind lightly. And, when you •sense or see a circle, a determinate part of this extension sensibly affects your soul, putting it into a certain state through the sensation of a certain colour. It is only through *colour* that •intelligible extension becomes •visible and represents some particular body, because it is only from colour-differences that we can see one object as different from another. All the •intelligible parts of •intelligible extension are of the same nature in their capacity as *ideas*, just as the parts of •material extension are of the same nature in their capacity as *substances*. But sensations of colour being essentially different, it is by them that we form judgments about the *variety* of bodies. What enables me to distinguish your hand from your coat, and to distinguish both from the air surrounding them, is the

fact that my sensations of them differ in light and colour. That is obvious. If I had the same colour-sensation from everything in your room, my sense of sight wouldn't show me a variety of objects. So you are right: intelligible extension variously brought before our minds can give us our ideas of •geometrical figures as well as ideas of •objects we admire in the universe and also of •everything our imagination presents us with. Just as we can use a chisel to form all sorts of figures from a block of marble, God can represent all material things to us by various presentations of intelligible extension to our minds. But *how* God does this, and *why* he does it in this way, are questions we can tackle later.

That's enough for our first discussion, Aristes. Try to get used to metaphysical ideas, and to rise above your senses. If I'm not mistaken, that will carry you into an intelligible world.

Contemplate its beauties. Go over in your mind everything I've told you. Nourish yourself on the substance of truth and prepare yourself to push further into this unknown land that you have so far barely entered. Tomorrow I'll try to take you to the throne of •God•, the sovereign majesty to whom belongs from all eternity this happy and unchanging place wherein our minds live.

Aristes: I am still utterly astonished and shaken. My body weighs down my mind, and I have trouble keeping a firm hold on the truths you have opened up to me. Yet you intend to lift me even higher! My head will spin, Theodore; and if I feel tomorrow as I do today, I won't have the confidence to follow you.

Theodore: Meditate on what I have told you today, Aristes, and tomorrow I promise you you'll be ready for anything. . . .

SECOND DIALOGUE

The existence of God. We can see all things in him, and nothing finite can represent him. So we have only to think of him to know that he exists.

Theodore: Well there, Aristes, what do you think of the intelligible world I took you to yesterday? Has your imagination recovered from its fright? Does your mind walk with a firm and sure step in that land of meditators, that region that can't be entered by those who listen only to their senses?

Aristes: What a beautiful spectacle that archetype of the universe is, Theodore!. . . . What a pleasant surprise it is when in *this* life the soul is carried into the land of truth

and finds there an abundance of what it needs to nourish it. I am not yet quite accustomed to that. . . .entirely spiritual food—sometimes it seems to me quite hollow and light. But, when I taste it attentively, I find so much flavour and solidity in it that I can no longer bring myself to graze with the animals on the material earth!

Theodore: Oh, my dear Aristes, what are you saying to me? Are you speaking seriously?

Aristes: Most seriously. I really don't want to listen to my senses any longer. I keep wanting to enter the innermost part of myself and live on the good things I find there. My senses are for leading •my body to its usual pasture, and I allow •it to follow them there. But I'm no longer willing to follow my senses •myself! I want to follow reason and it alone, and—through my attention to it—to stride into the land of truth and find delicious food there—the only food that can nourish intellects.

Theodore: That's because you have temporarily forgotten that you have a body. But before long you will go back to thinking of it, or rather to thinking in terms of it. The body that you are now ignoring will soon oblige *you* to drive it to pasture and to busy *yourself* with its needs. The mind is not at present so easily disengaged from matter. But while I've got you as a pure •unembodied• spirit, please tell me what you have discovered in the land of ideas. Concerning reason—about which we on this material earth say so much and know so little—do you now know what it *is*? Yesterday I promised to raise you above all creatures and take you to the very presence of the creator. Wouldn't you have liked to fly up there by yourself, without thinking of Theodore?

1. Aristes: I confess I did think that I could—with all due respect to you—go by myself along the path you had shown me. I followed it, and it seems to me that I gained clear knowledge of what you told me yesterday, namely that universal reason is an unchangeable nature and exists in God alone. I'll tell you briefly what steps I took, and you can tell me whether I went astray.

After you left me, I remained for some time unsteady and taken aback. But, urged on by an inner ardour, I seemed to be saying to myself somehow (I don't know how!), *Since reason is common to me and to Theodore, why can't I consult*

it and follow it without him? I did consult it, and followed it too. And if I'm not mistaken it took me •to God•, to the one who *possesses* this reason as his own, by the necessity of his nature. Indeed, reason seems to lead very naturally to God. And here, quite simply and straightforwardly, is the line of reasoning that I followed.

Infinite intelligible extension is not a state of my mind. It is unchangeable, eternal, and necessary. I can't doubt that it is real and infinite. But anything unchangeable, eternal, necessary, and above all *infinite* •isn't a created thing and •can't belong to a created thing. So it belongs to God and can't exist except in him. Hence, there is a God and there is reason. There's a God in whom there exists the •archetype which I contemplate of the created world I live in [that is, the •model or •pattern from which the created world is somehow copied]. There's a God in whom there exists the reason that enlightens me by purely intelligible ideas that it lavishly supplies to my mind and to the minds of all men. I am certain that all men are united to this same reason that I am united to; for I am certain that *they* do or can see what *I* see when I enter into myself and discover the truths or necessary relations contained in the intelligible substance of universal reason that lives in me—or, rather, in which all intellects live.

2. Theodore: You haven't gone astray, my dear Aristes. You have followed reason, and it has led you to God, who generates reason from his own substance and possesses it eternally. But don't imagine that it in leading you to God it revealed to you *his nature*. When you contemplate intelligible extension, you see simply the archetype of our material world and of an infinity of other possible worlds. As a matter of fact, you do also see the divine substance, for it is the only thing that is visible—the only thing that can light up the mind. But you don't see it •in itself; you don't see it •in its

own nature. You see it only •in its relation to created natural things—the relation consisting in their *participating in* the divine substance, i.e. of its *representing* them. So strictly speaking what you see is not God, but rather the matter that he can produce. Certainly, by way of infinite intelligible extension you see **that** God is: because nothing finite can contain an infinite reality, only he can contain what you see. But you don't see **what** God is. There are no limits to God's perfections, whereas what you see when you think of immense spaces doesn't have an infinity of perfections. I say 'what you see' and not 'the substance that represents to you what you see'; for that substance—which you don't see in itself—*does* have infinite perfections.

To be sure, the substance that contains intelligible extension is all-powerful, is infinitely wise, and contains an infinity of perfections and realities—for example an infinity of intelligible numbers. But none of this has anything to do with intelligible extension. There is no wisdom, no power, no number *one*, in the extension that you contemplate. You know that any two numbers are commensurable because they have *one* as a common base. If the parts of extension as it is divided and subdivided by the mind could be reduced to *units*—smallest possible segments of a line—then they would be commensurable with one another in terms of that unit. But you know that that's certainly false—there is no unit of extension. Thus, the divine substance contains an infinity of different intelligible perfections, and by them God enlightens us, showing himself to us not •as he is in particular but only •in general terms, and not as he is •in himself but only •in relation to what he can produce. (God has this infinite variety despite being, in himself, *simple*—without parts—this simplicity being more than we could achieve.) Still, although we can't know God as he is in himself, try to follow me and I'll take you as near to him as possible.

3. [In this next paragraph, the notion of *being a thing of a specific kind* is connected with *not being infinite in every way*. The underlying assumption is that whatever makes a thing be of a certain kind must involve some constraint, some sort of limit, some non-infinity, in its nature.] Infinite intelligible extension is the archetype only of an infinity of possible worlds like ours. All I see by means of it are particular things, material things. When I think of this extension, I see the divine substance only to the extent that •it represents bodies and •bodies can participate in it. But there are two points I want to make about what the situation is

when I think of *being* •in the abstract• and not of certain particular beings, and when I think of *the infinite* and not of a certain particular infinite •such as the infinity of the series of numbers or the infinite extent of space•.

(i) The first point is that I don't see any such vast reality in the states of my mind. For if I can't find in my mental states enough reality to represent •the infinity of space, there is all the more reason that I shan't find in them enough reality to represent •every sort of infinity. Thus, it is only

God, the infinite,
the unlimited being
the infinite that is infinitely infinite,

that can contain the infinitely infinite reality I see when I think of *being* •in general, or of *infinity* in general•, rather than merely of certain particular beings or certain particular infinities. [The French phrase here translated as 'the unlimited being' could as well have been translated as 'unlimited being'. The former seems to be concrete—*the thing or being that isn't limited in any way*, i.e. God; whereas the latter seems to be abstract—*what it is just to BE without being limited in any way*. Because the French for these is exactly the same, it is not always clear which translation is better, but it doesn't matter much, because Malebranche holds that thinking about unlimited

being is exactly the same as thinking about *the* unlimited being. The only unlimited being is God, and the whole truth about God is contained in his being unlimited.—All of this applies equally to the phrase translated as ‘(the) infinite being’. See eighth dialogue, section 7.]

4. (ii) The second point is this: It is certain that the idea of

being,
reality,
unbounded perfection,
being-infinite-in-every-way,

is not the divine substance in its role as representing, or as being participated in by, *one particular* created thing. For every creature is necessarily a thing of a certain sort: That God should make

a being in general, or
a being that is infinite in every way,

is a contradiction; because such a being would be God himself, i.e. identical with its own cause. [Theodore gives an example involving the Christian Trinity, and then moves to one that is, intellectually speaking, ‘a better fit for our minds’.] It is evident that the idea of *a circle in general* is not intelligible extension

in its role as representing such and such a circle, or
as able to be participated in by such and such a circle.

The idea of a circle in general—or the essence of *circle*—represents or fits infinitely many circles. It contains the idea of the infinite. To think of a circle in general is to perceive an infinite number of circles as a single circle.

I don’t know if I am getting across the thing I want you to understand. Here it is in a few words. The idea of being without restriction, of the infinite, of generality, is not the idea of creatures or the essence that fits them; it is the idea that represents God or the essence that fits him.

All particular existing things participate in being, but no particular thing is identical with it. Being contains all things; but the totality of things that have been or could be created can’t fill the vast extent of being. [Throughout this discussion, it should be borne in mind that the French *l’être* can equally well mean the abstract ‘being’ (or ‘existence’) or the concrete ‘the being’ (or ‘the existing thing’). Thus, to think about *l’être infini* can be either to •think about what it is to exist in an infinite way, without limits of any kind, or •to think about the being that exists in that way, i.e. to think about God.]

Aristes: I think I see your meaning. You define God as he defined himself in speaking to Moses, ‘I am what I am’ (*Exodus* 3:14). Intelligible extension is the idea or archetype of bodies. But ·our idea of· being without restriction, or in a word ‘Being’, is the idea of God: it is what represents him to our minds as we see him in this life.

5. Theodore: Very good. But note especially that God or the infinite isn’t visible through an idea that represents it. There is no archetype or idea *of* the infinite, which is its own idea. This idea can be known, but it can’t be *made*. What can be made are only created things—things of this or that *kind*—which are visible through ideas that represent them even before they are made. We could see a circle, a house, a sun, even if there were no such thing. All •finite things can be seen in •the infinite, which contains intelligible ideas of them. But •the infinite can be seen only in •itself, ·not by way of an idea that represents it·, for nothing finite can represent the infinite. If we think of God, he must exist; ·I’ll explain why in a moment·. We *can* think about a being of this or that specific *sort* without its actually existing. ·Because it is finite·, we can think about it through an idea that represents it, and with the help of that idea we can see •its essence without •its existence, see •the idea of it without •*it*. But we can’t see the essence of the infinite without its existence, the

idea of being without being. For being is not represented by any idea. There is no archetype that contains all its intelligible reality. It is its own archetype, and it contains in itself the archetype of all beings.

So you can see that the proposition 'There is a God' is all by itself the clearest of all propositions affirming the existence of something, and that it is as certain, even, as 'I think, so I am'. You can also see what God is, because •God and •being and •the infinite are one and the same thing.

6. But, once again, don't get this wrong. You see what God is only confusedly, as though seeing from a distance. Though you do see the infinite (or unrestricted being), you see it only in a very imperfect way, so you don't see God *as he is*. You don't see the infinite as a simple being. You see the multiplicity of created things in the infinity of the uncreated being, but you don't clearly see its unity, ·i.e. you don't see clearly that it is an absolutely *single* thing·. That's because you see it not in its self-contained reality but rather in its relation to possible creatures. . . . You see it as

universal reason, which brings to intellects whatever light as they need for •leading their lives and •discovering such perfections of God as can be grasped by limited beings.

That is a view of its *relations*. But you don't discover the ·non-relational· property that is essential to the infinite, namely

its being •*all things* and at the same time being •*one*; its being a •composite (so to speak) of an infinity of different perfections while being so •simple (·i.e. so *non-composite*·) that in it each perfection contains all the others without there being any real distinction.

God doesn't impart his substance to creatures. He imparts only his perfections, not •as they are in his substance but •as his substance represents them; and he imparts *only as*

much of them as his limited creatures can have. Here's an example ·to illustrate that last point·. Intelligible extension represents bodies: it is their archetype or their idea. But, though this intelligible extension doesn't occupy any place, bodies are spatially extended; that's the only way they can exist, •because of their essential limitedness as creatures and •because no finite substance can have the property of being

*one and at the same time all things,
perfectly simple yet having every sort of perfection.*

This property is incomprehensible to the human mind, ·yet we know that intelligible extension has it·. Thus, intelligible extension represents infinite spaces, but doesn't *fill* any of them; and though it does in a sense *fill* all minds and discloses itself to them, this doesn't imply that our minds are spacious! (They would have to be infinitely spacious if they were to see infinite spaces by the kind of contact through which they see finite stretched-out spaces.) The divine substance is everywhere, without itself being spatially extended. It has no borders. It isn't contained in the universe. But what we see when we think of spaces is not this substance as spread out everywhere. If *that* were what we had to do in order to think about infinite spaces, we couldn't do it, because our minds are finite. The intelligible extension that we see in the divine substance containing it is just that substance itself in its role as representing material things and thus being participated in by them. That's all I can tell you. But note this concerning •the unrestricted being, •that which is infinite in every way we are aware of: there is more to it than ·merely· the divine substance considered as representing all possible beings. The totality of these beings can't equal the intelligible reality of the infinite. (We can't have specific ideas of all these beings, but we can be sure of that much about them.) In a sense, then, it is

God's substance itself that we see. But in this life we see it in such a confused way and at such a distance that we see *that* it is rather than *what* it is; we see that it is the source and model for all beings, rather than seeing its own nature or seeing its perfections in themselves.

Aristes: Isn't there a contradiction in what you are telling me? If nothing finite can have enough reality to be able represent the infinite (and it seems to me that that's clearly right), mustn't we inevitably see God's substance •in itself •rather than seeing any of its •properties or attributes, all of which are infinite•?

7. Theodore: I don't deny that we see God's substance in itself. We *do* see it 'in itself' in the sense that

our seeing of it doesn't involve something finite that represents it.

But we *don't* see it 'in itself' in the sense that

we get right through to its simplicity, and discover its •many• perfections.

Since nothing finite can represent infinite reality (we agree on that), it is clear that if you see the infinite you see it only in itself •and not through any finite representation of it•. And it's certain that you *do* see it. If you *didn't*, then in asking me whether God or an infinite being exists you would be raising a ridiculous question involving a proposition the terms of which you wouldn't understand. It is as if you were to ask me whether a 'Blictri' exists, that is, a something you know not what. (I choose 'Blictri' as a word that doesn't awaken any ideas.)

Surely all men have the idea of God, i.e. think of the infinite, when they ask whether there is such a being. But they believe they can think of it without its existing, because •they believe that in asking the question they are involved merely with an idea of theirs that *represents* God or the

infinite. In taking that view• they overlook the fact that •they *can't* have such an idea, because• nothing finite can *represent* the infinite. Created things can be seen without their existing, because we see them not in themselves but in the ideas that represent them; so men can think of many things that don't exist; but they •wrongly extend this and• imagine that it is the same with the infinite and that they can think of *it* without its existing. That is how it comes about that men are engaged in a search for something that they encounter at every moment but fail to recognize! They would recognize it soon enough if they entered into themselves and reflected on their ideas.

Aristes: You convince me, Theodore, but I still have a lingering doubt. It seems to me that the idea I have of *being in general*, or of *the infinite*, is something that I *made*. It seems to me that the mind can make general ideas for itself out of a number of particular ideas. When we have seen a number of trees, an apple tree, a pear tree, a plum tree, etc., we get from them a general idea of *tree*. In the same way, when we have seen a number of existing things we form from them the general idea of *existence*. So this general idea of existence may be only a confused assemblage of all the others. That's what I have been taught; it is how I have always understood the matter.

8. Theodore: Your mind is a wonderful workman, Aristes! It can derive •the infinite from •the finite, the idea of •being without restriction from ideas of certain •particular beings. Perhaps it finds in its own resources enough reality to supply finite ideas with what they need in order to become infinite! I don't know whether *that* is what you 'have been taught', but I think I know you have never properly grasped the matter.

Aristes: If our ideas were infinite, they wouldn't be of our making and wouldn't be mere states of our minds—no

argument about that. But perhaps they are finite, although we can perceive the infinite by means of them. Or it may be that •the infinite we seem to see is not basically infinite after all. It may be, as I have just said, only a confused assemblage of a number of finite things. The general idea of existence may be only a confused accumulation of ideas of particular existents. I have trouble ridding my mind of this thought.

9. Theodore: Yes, Aristes, our ideas are finite, if by 'our ideas' you mean our perceptions or the states of our minds. But, if by 'idea of the infinite' you mean what the mind sees—what is the immediate object of the mind—when it thinks of the infinite, then certainly that is infinite. . . . The impression that the infinite makes on the mind is finite. When we •confusedly think of a large object, or indeed of the infinite, we have less perception in our mind, are less imprinted with ideas, in short we have less *thought*, than when we •clearly and distinctly know a small object. But though the mind is almost always more affected, more permeated, more changed by a finite idea than by an infinite one, nonetheless the •infinite idea (a being with no restrictions) contains more reality than does the •finite idea (beings of such and such kinds).

You couldn't get it out of your mind that general ideas are only a confused assemblage of particular ones, or at least that you can make them out of such an assemblage. Let us see what is true and what is false in this stubborn thought of yours. Here is what has been happening, Aristes. You think of a circle one foot in diameter, then of a two-foot circle, then three, four, and so on, and then you stop specifying the length of the diameter and think of a *circle* in general. That leads you to say: 'The idea of a circle in general is only the confused assemblage of the circles I have thought of.' But that conclusion is certainly false; for the idea of a circle in

general represents an •infinity of circles and fits all of them, while you have thought of only •a finite number of circles.

Well, then (you will want to conclude), you have found the secret of making the idea of a circle in general out of the five or six you have seen. This is true in one sense and false in another. It is false if taken to mean that

there is enough reality in the idea of five or six circles to derive the idea of a circle in general.

But it may be true if taken to mean that

after recognizing that the size of circles does not change their properties, you stopped thinking of them one by one, each with its different size, and instead thought about them in a general way, with size left out.

In this way you have (so to speak) formed the idea of •*circle in general* by spreading the idea of •generality over the confused ideas of the •circles you have imagined! But I maintain that you couldn't have formed a general idea if you hadn't found in the idea of the infinite enough reality to give generality to your ideas. You couldn't think of an indeterminate diameter if you didn't see the infinite in extension, thus becoming able to increase or lessen the diameter infinitely. The idea of the infinite is inseparable from your mind. I maintain that if it weren't joined quite naturally to the particular ideas you perceive, you could never think of those abstract *kinds* of things. You could think of this or that circle but never of *the circle* [or: of *circularity*]. . . . That is because no finite and determinate idea can ever represent anything infinite and indeterminate. Yet the mind rashly combines its finite ideas with the idea of generality that it finds in the infinite. Just as it spreads the idea of •indivisible unity over the idea of a certain extension which is in fact •infinitely divisible, the mind also spreads the general idea of •perfect equality over •particular ideas. That throws it into an infinity of errors. For

all the falsity in our ideas comes from our confounding them with one another, and also mixing them up with states of our minds. But that's something we will talk about another time.

Aristes: That is all very well, Theodore, but aren't you taking •our ideas to be something different from •our perceptions? It seems to me that the idea of a circle in general is only a confused perception of a number of circles of different sizes, that is, an accumulation of different states of my mind: they are almost effaced, but each of them is the idea or perception of one particular circle.

10. Theodore: I certainly do see plenty of difference between our •perceptions and •our ideas, between •we who perceive and •what we perceive. It's because I know that something finite can't find in itself what is needed to represent the infinite. It is because I know, Aristes, that I contain no intelligible reality in myself and, far from finding ideas of everything in my substance, I don't even find there the idea of my own being. I am entirely unintelligible to myself, and I shall never see what I am unless God chooses to reveal to me the idea or archetype of the minds that universal reason contains. But that's a topic for another time.

Surely, Aristes, if your ideas were only states of your mind, the confused assemblage of thousands of ideas would never be anything but a confused composite with nothing general about it. Take twenty different colours and mix them together to create in yourself •the idea of• a *colour in general*; produce several different sensations in yourself at the same time, so as to get •an idea of• *sensation in general*. You'll soon see that you can't do this. By mixing different colours. . . you will always get some particular colour. By •giving yourself many different sensations all at once, and thus creating• a great number of different movements of the brain fibres and

animal spirits, you will make yourself •dizzy; but that is just •one particular sensation. The point is that *any* state of a particular thing such as our mind must itself be particular. It can never achieve the generality that ideas have. It is true you can •think of pain in general, but you could never be in a pain-state that was anything but a particular pain. If you can think of pain in general, that's because you can attach generality to *anything*. But, I repeat, you can't draw this idea of generality from your own resources. It has too much reality; it must be supplied to you from the abundant store of the infinite.

Aristes: I have nothing to say to you in reply. Everything you are telling me seems obviously right. But I am surprised that these general ideas, which have infinitely more reality than particular ones do, make *less* of an impression on me than particular ideas do and appear to me to have much *less* solidity.

11. Theodore: That is because they make themselves less felt or, rather, that they don't make themselves *felt* at all. Don't judge the reality of ideas, Aristes, as children judge the reality of bodies. Children think that all the spaces between heaven and earth are nothing real since they don't make themselves *felt*. There's as much matter in a cubic foot of air as in a cubic foot of lead, but most people are unaware of this because lead is harder, heavier, in short, more *feelable* than air. Don't follow their lead. Don't estimate the reality of an idea by

the •sensation you have of it, which confusedly indicates to you what it •does,

but by

the •intelligible light that reveals to you what it •is.

Otherwise you will think that sensible ideas that make an impression on you, such as the idea you have of the floor

under your feet, have more reality than purely intelligible ideas do, when in fact there is fundamentally no difference between them.

Aristes: ‘No difference’, Theodore? No difference between the idea of the extension I •think of and the idea of the extension that I •see—the one that I press with my foot and that resists me?

Theodore: No, Aristes, there are *not* two kinds of extension, or two kinds of ideas representing them. If the extension that you think were to affect you, or to give your soul by some state of sensation, it would appear to you as *sensible*, though really it is *intelligible*. It would appear to you to be hard, cold, coloured, and perhaps painful, for you might attribute to it all your own sensations. I repeat: we shouldn’t judge things by our sensations of them. We shouldn’t think that ice has more reality than water because it is harder to the touch.

If you thought that •fire has more force or efficacy than •earth, •you would be wrong but •your error would have some foundation. For there is some reason to judge how great a power is by the size of its effects. But to believe that

- the idea of extension that gives you a sensation is of a different sort from, having more reality than,
- the idea involved when you *think* of extension without having any sensible impression

is to mistake the absolute for the relative, judging what things are in themselves by the relation they have to you. That’s the way to give more reality to the point of a thorn than to all the rest of the universe—more even than to infinite existence! But when you get used to distinguishing your sensations from your ideas, you’ll come to recognize that the one and only idea of extension can be known, imagined, or *felt*, depending on how the divine substance that contains it brings it before our minds. . . . In due course you’ll understand more clearly what I am hinting at here.

Aristes: Everything you’ve just said, Theodore, is terribly abstract, and I’m having trouble keeping it before me. My mind is working queerly—a little rest, please! I need to think at leisure of all these grand and sublime truths. I’ll try to become familiar with them through the strenuous efforts of entirely pure thought about them. But just now I am not capable of that. I must rest in order to regain my strength.

Theodore: I knew you wouldn’t be pure spirit for long, Aristes! Go, lead your body to pasture. Divert your imagination with the various objects that can revive it and give it pleasure. But try all the same to retain some taste for the truth; and, as soon as you feel able to meditate on it and be nourished by it, drop everything else and pursue truth. As far as you can, even forget what you are. You have to think of your body’s needs, but it is a great disorder to be preoccupied with its pleasures.

THIRD DIALOGUE

The difference between our sensations and our ideas. We must judge things only by the ideas that represent them, and not at all by the sensations we get in their presence.

Theodore: Hello, Aristes! What a dreamer you are! What are you so deep in thought about?

Aristes: Ah, Theodore, you surprised me! I'm returning from that other world that you took me to in these last days. Now I go there all alone, with no fear of the phantoms that block the way in. But when I am there I find so many dark places that I become afraid of going astray and getting lost.

1. Theodore: For someone to be able to leave his body when he wants to, and to bring his mind up to the land of intellects—that is a great thing, Aristes, but it isn't enough! One also needs some knowledge of the map of the land, showing which places poor mortals can't get to, and which they can enter freely without fear of illusions. It seems to me that most travellers in these dangerous regions have been led astray, drawn by certain seductive spectres into crevasses from which it is virtually impossible to return, because they haven't taken proper heed of just one thing that I am going to get *you* to pay heed to. Listen to me very carefully. And never forget what I tell you today. Never mistake •*your own* sensations for •*our* ideas, the •*states of your* soul for the •*ideas that enlighten all minds*. This is the chief recipe for avoiding error. Whenever you contemplate •*ideas* you discover something true; but you'll never be enlightened by •*your own* states, however closely you attend to them. You can't quite understand what I am saying to you—I'll have to explain myself some more.

2. You know, Aristes, •*that* God, in his role as universal reason, contains in his substance the primordial ideas of

all created things and all possible things. [*'God'* here translates *le Verbe divin* = 'the divine Word', which Malebranche sometimes uses to name God, on the strength of various passages in the New Testament—especially 'the word was with God, and the word was God'. None of his doctrines depends on this; and avoiding it helps to create a salutary difference of *tone* between this version and Malebranche's original.] You know •*that* all intellects are united with sovereign reason, and discover in it such of these ideas as God chooses to reveal to them. (This occurs as a consequence of general laws that he has set up to make us rational and to enable us to be in a society with one another and with him. Some day I shall elaborate on this whole mystery.) You don't doubt •*that* intelligible extension, for instance, which is the primordial idea or archetype of *bodies* [i.e. the model from which bodies are copied], is contained in universal reason, which enlightens every mind including •*the one with which it is consubstantial*. [He means •*'God's mind'*, which is 'consubstantial' with universal reason in the sense that universal reason is the same substance as—is one and the same thing as—God's mind.] But perhaps you haven't reflected sufficiently on the difference between the intelligible ideas contained in universal reason and our own sensations or states of our souls; perhaps you think there is no point in marking the difference exactly.

3. What a difference there is, my dear Aristes, between the light of our ideas and the darkness of our sensations, between knowing and sensing! And what a need there is to get used to distinguishing them readily! . . . Man is not his own light. His substance, far from enlightening him, is itself unintelligible to him. He knows *nothing* except by the

light of universal reason, which enlightens all minds by the intelligible ideas that it reveals to them. . . .

4. Created reason, our soul, the human mind, the purest and most sublime intellects can indeed see the light; but they can't produce it or pull it up from their own depths or generate it from their own substance. In

eternal, unchangeable, necessary wisdom

they can discover

eternal, unchangeable, necessary truths;

but in

themselves

all they find are

sensations

—often very lively ones, but they are always obscure and confused. . . . In short, they can't discover the truth by contemplating themselves. They can't be nourished by their own substance. They can find the life of the intellect only in the universal reason that enlivens all minds and enlightens and guides all men. Reason is the internal solace of those who follow it, reason calls back those who leave it, and reason by its terrible reproaches and threats fills those who are determined to abandon it with confusion, anxiety, and despair.

Aristes: My reflections on what you have told me these last days, Theodore, have persuaded me. Only God enlightens us by the intelligible ideas he contains. There aren't two or more wisdoms, two or more universal reasons. Truth is unchangeable, necessary, eternal; the same in time and in eternity; the same for foreigners and for us; the same in heaven and in hell. . . . If men are not equally enlightened by it, that is because they aren't equally attentive, and they mingle—some more, some less—their •states of mind with •ideas, mingle •particular promptings of their self-esteem

with the •general responses of internal truth. Twice two makes four in all nations. We all hear the voice of truth telling us not to do to others what we wouldn't want them to do to us. And those who disobey this voice feel the internal reproaches that threaten and punish them for their disobedience, if they enter into themselves and listen to reason. I am now quite convinced of these principles. But I don't yet properly understand how •knowing differs from •sensing or •feeling—a difference that you judge to be necessary for avoiding error. Please help me to see it.

5. Theodore: If you really had meditated on the principles that you say you are convinced of, you would see it for yourself. . . . Answer me: Do you think that God •feels the pain that we suffer?

Aristes: Certainly not, for the feeling of pain makes one miserable.

Theodore: Very well. But do you believe he •knows it?

Aristes: Yes, I believe he does. For he knows everything that happens to his creatures. God's knowledge has no limits, and he can know my pain without being either unhappy or imperfect. On the contrary. . . .

Theodore: Oho, Aristes! God •knows pain, pleasure, heat, and the rest, but doesn't •feel these things! He knows pain because he knows what the state of the soul is in which pain consists. He knows it because he alone causes it in us (I'll prove that to you later on), and •of course• he knows what he does. In short: he knows it because his knowledge has no limits; he doesn't feel it, because that would make him unhappy. Thus, to know pain is not to feel it.

Aristes: That is true. But isn't feeling pain knowing it?

6. Theodore: Certainly not, since God in no way feels it yet he knows it perfectly. But let's not get held up by verbal

difficulties. If you insist that feeling pain is knowing it, at least agree that it isn't knowing it clearly, isn't knowing it by light and evidentness, in short isn't knowing its nature—and so strictly speaking it isn't knowing it! For you to feel pain is for you to be miserable without knowing what you are or what state of yourself is making you miserable. But to •know something is to •have a clear idea of its nature and to •discover certain of its relations by light and evidentness. I know the parts of extension clearly because I can plainly see their relations. I see clearly that similar triangles have proportional sides, that there is no plane triangle whose three angles are not equal to two right angles. I see these truths or relations clearly in the idea or archetype of extension. For that idea is so luminous that people can turn themselves into geometers or good natural scientists just by studying it, and it is so rich in truths that they won't ever be exhausted by all the minds there are.

7. It is not the same with my being [here = 'my nature']. I have no idea of it; I don't see its archetype. I can't discover any relations among the states of my mind. I can't by turning in to myself recognize any of my faculties or my capacities. My internal *sense* of myself teaches me

that I am, that I think, that I will, that I sense, that I suffer,

and so on, but it doesn't reveal to me

what I am, what the nature is of my thought, my will, my sensations, my passions, my pain, or the relations these things have to one another.

This is because—to repeat myself—I have no idea of my soul and don't see its archetype in universal reason, so I can't discover by contemplation what the soul is, or what states it can be in, or of how its states relate to one another—these relations being something that I sense keenly without knowing them and that God knows clearly without sensing

them. All this follows, my dear Aristes, because. . . .for many reasons God hasn't seen fit to reveal to me the idea or archetype that represents the nature of spiritual beings. If my substance were intelligible of itself or in itself, if it were luminous, if it could enlighten me, I would •certainly be able by contemplating myself to see that I could have certain particular sensations which I have never in fact experienced and which I may never have any knowledge of. I would •know what the sweetness of harmony is without attending any concerts; without ever tasting a certain fruit I would •be able not to *sense* but to *know clearly* the nature of the sensation it would arouse in me. But we can know the nature of things only in the reason that contains them in an intelligible manner; so it is only in reason that I can discover what I am and what states I can be in, for in myself I can only *sense* them. There is even the more reason to think that it is only in reason that I can discover the principles of the sciences and all the truths that are capable of enlightening the mind.

Aristes: [He expresses his agreement with all that, and suggests that 'we move on a little'.]

8. Theodore: Very well, Aristes. You are now ready to make thousands upon thousands of discoveries in the land of truth. Distinguish ideas from your sensations, but do it properly! I repeat: do it properly, and you won't be drawn into error by those enticing phantoms that I told you about. Always rise above yourself. Your states are total darkness, remember. Go higher to reason, and you will see light. Silence your senses, your imagination, and your passions, and you'll hear the pure voice of internal truth, the clear and clearly true responses of our common master. Don't confuse the clear •evidentness that comes from comparing ideas with the •liveliness of the sensations that come to you and stir

you up. The livelier our sensations are, the more darkness they spread! Our phantoms appear to have more body and reality when they are very fearsome or very attractive; but those are just the ones that are the most dangerous and most apt to seduce us. Get rid of them, or distrust them. In brief, flee from whatever •affects you and latch on to whatever •enlightens you. Reason must be followed despite •the enticements, the threats, the insults of the bodies that are united to, despite the action ·on our bodies· of the objects that surround us. Have you got all this clear in your mind? Are you quite convinced of it by the reasons I have given you and by your own reflections?

Aristes: That's an awfully *forceful* speech to make in a discussion of metaphysics, Theodore! You seem to be arousing sensations in me rather than giving birth to clear ideas. (I'm putting this in *your* language.) Honestly, I *don't* really understand what you are telling me. I see it, and a moment later I don't—because all I ever get is a glimpse. It seems to me that you are right, but I don't understand you very well.

9. Theodore: Ah, my dear Aristes, your reply is more proof of what we were just saying. And it's not a bad thing that you should think about it ·some more·. I tell you what I see, and you don't see it: this shows that men don't instruct men. I am not your master or your teacher; I am a mere guide—an energetic one, perhaps, but not a very accurate or intelligible one. I speak to your ears, apparently producing nothing but noise in them. Our one and only master doesn't yet speak clearly enough to your mind—or, rather, reason always *speaks* to it quite clearly but you don't *attend* well enough to hear properly what it is telling you. But judging by the things you have been saying to me, and what I have been telling you, I thought that you *did* understand well enough my principle and its consequences. But I see that

it's not enough to give you general advice relying on abstract metaphysical ideas. I must also give you some particular proofs of the necessity of these views.

I urged you to get the knack of spotting the difference between •knowing and •feeling, between our clear •ideas and our invariably obscure and confused •sensations. And I maintain that this—just this *distinction*—suffices for the discovery of an infinity of truths. I base this on the fact that reason alone enlightens us, that we aren't a light unto ourselves or an intellect to anyone else. You will clearly see whether this basis is solid when you stop listening to me and in private attentively consult internal truth. Still, I'll offer something to help you with all this, starting with a question. I often see you playing musical instruments in a knowledgeable and confident manner—you know music, don't you?

Aristes: I know enough to charm away my bad temper and to banish my melancholy.

10. Theodore: Good. Then tell me about the various sounds that you combine so rightly and pleasingly. What is an octave, a fifth, a fourth? Why is it that when two strings are tuned to the same note we can't touch one without making the other move too? You have a very fine and delicate ear: answer my questions by consulting *that*.

Aristes: I think you are making fun of me. What we have to consult ·to answer questions like that· is not the senses but reason.

Theodore: That is true. We should consult the senses only about facts. Their power is very limited, but reason covers everything. Consult reason, then, and take care not to muddle its replies with the testimony of your senses. Well, then, what does it reply?

Aristes: You're hurrying me too much! Still, I'll give you an answer: it seems to me that *sound* is a quality spread out in the air, a quality that can affect only the sense of hearing. . . .

Theodore: Do you call *that* consulting reason?

Aristes: What do you want me to say to you? Come, here is an octave—*Do-do*. Here is a fifth—*Do-so*. Here is a fourth—*Do-fa*.

Theodore: You sing well, but how badly you reason! I think you are just enjoying yourself.

Aristes: To be sure, Theodore! But as for your other question, I reply that it is *sympathy* that makes strings of the same pitch move one another. Haven't I got that right?

Theodore: Let's be serious, Aristes. If you want me to enjoy *myself*, try to instruct me.

Aristes: I shall do nothing of the sort, if you please. You play your role, and I'll play mine. Mine is to listen.

Theodore [sarcastically]: How nice and pleasing your manners are! Come, then, let me have the monochord [a kind of one-stringed violin, used for teaching acoustics] and attend to what I'm going to do and say. In pulling on this string, I move it from the state in which its tension has been holding it; and when I let go—see! no need for me to prove it!—the string moves up and down for some time, making a great number of *visible* vibrations. (So there must also be many other commotions that are too small for our senses to detect; because a string can't vibrate, becoming alternately straight and curved—and thus shorter and longer—unless its *tiny* parts lengthen and shorten very quickly.) Now I ask you, can't a body in motion move something that it comes up against? Of course it can, and therefore this string can move the air that surrounds it (and even the subtle matter

filling its pores), and this in turn moves something else, and so on to your ear and mine.

Aristes: That is true. But what I hear is a *sound*, a sound spread out in the air, a quality that is quite different from vibrations of a string or commotions of moving air.

Theodore: Slow down, Aristes! Don't consult your senses, and don't base your judgments on their testimony. Sound is indeed entirely different from moving air; but just for this reason you have no ground for saying that sound is spread out in the air. For note this: all I can do by touching this string is to make it move, and in moving all *it* can do is to disturb the air that surrounds it.

Aristes: 'All it can do is to disturb the air that surrounds it!' But don't you hear it produce a sound in the air?

Theodore: Clearly I hear what you hear. But when I want to learn some truth I don't consult my ears—and you *are* consulting yours, despite all your good resolutions, Enter into yourself, then, and consult the clear ideas that reason has to offer. Can you conceive that when air is agitated it can *contain* the sound that you hear, and that a *vibrating* string can *produce* this sound? Once again, don't ask your ears! To be on the safe side, pretend you are deaf. Now attend closely to the clear idea of *extension*—the archetype of bodies, representing their nature and properties. Isn't it obvious that the only possible properties of extension are spatial relations? Think seriously about this.

Aristes: It is obvious. The properties of extension can consist only in different ways of being extended; and these are just spatial relations.

Theodore: So the properties of extension are simply shapes—spatial relations that are stable and fixed—and

motions—spatial relations that are successive and changing.

That being so, Aristes, the sound that you admit is something other than motion is *not* ‘spread out in the air’, and a string can’t produce it in the air. Rather, it is simply a sensation or a state of the soul.

Aristes: I see I must either give in or deny the principle that the idea of extension represents the ‘whole’ nature of bodies. Perhaps it represents only one of the properties of bodies. After all, who told you that bodies are nothing but extension? Perhaps the essence of matter consists in something else, which *can* contain sounds and even produce them. Give me proof that this is wrong.

Theodore: ‘First’, *you* prove to *me* that this ‘something else’ that you propose as the essence of matter won’t be capable of thinking, willing, or reasoning. I hereby claim that the strings of your lute think as much as you do, or at least that they ‘audibly’ *complain* when you disturb their rest! Prove to me that *that* is wrong, and I will convince you that the strings spread no sound.

Aristes: It is true that, if the nature of body consists in something other than extension, I have no idea of that ‘something else’, so I can’t prove to you that it doesn’t think. But please prove to me that there is nothing to matter except extension, so that matter cannot think. It seems to me that we *need* this proof if we are to silence freethinkers [= roughly ‘atheists’], who maintain that the soul is mortal because the body is mortal—their assumption being that all our thoughts are only states of that unknown thing we call body, and any state can go out of existence.

11. Theodore: I have already answered that; but it is so important that although this is not the place for it I gladly

‘go into it again. I call your attention to the fact that the answer to this question depends, as do all other truths, on the great principle that

our enlightenment comes from the ideas that universal reason contains.

Add the thesis that

God’s works have been formed on the basis of those ideas,

and the result is that we should look to those ideas in order to discover the nature and properties of created things. Take note of this, then, as something you can learn by attending to the ideas that reason provides: We can think of extension [*l’étendue*] without thinking of anything else, from which it follows that it is a ‘thing’, a ‘substance’ and not a ‘state’. That is because we can’t think of a state without thinking of the thing *of* which it is a state; for a ‘state of a thing’ is just ‘the thing itself in some condition or other’. We can’t think of shapes and motions without thinking of extension, because shapes and motions are simply states of extension. This is clear, if I am not mistaken. If you don’t find it clear, it must be that you can’t tell states of substances from the substances themselves; in which case we might as well stop philosophizing. For . . .

Aristes: Please let us go on philosophizing!

Theodore: Very well. The idea or archetype of extension is eternal and necessary. We see this idea, as I have already proved to you; and God also sees it, because nothing in him is hidden from him. We see it clearly and distinctly, I repeat, without thinking of anything else. We can perceive it by itself, or rather we can’t perceive it as the state of some other thing, since it contains no necessary relation to other ideas. Now, anything that God ‘sees’ and makes us ‘see’ clearly and distinctly in his light is something that he can ‘do’. He can

bring about anything that doesn't involve a contradiction, for he is all-powerful. So he can create extension—that which is extended, *l'étendue*—entirely by itself. It follows that this *étendue* will be a being or a substance, and the idea we have of it will represent its nature to us. So if God has created this extension, there will surely be matter, for what other sort of being would that extension be? I believe you see *now* that this matter is incapable of thinking, of sensing, of reasoning.

Aristes: I admit that as our ideas are necessary and eternal and are the very ideas that God consults, when he makes things he will make ones that these ideas represent; and we won't be mistaken if we attribute to matter only what we see in its archetype. But perhaps we don't see this archetype in its entirety. . . . Perhaps

- the subject of extension,
- the *thing* that is extended,
- the 'something else' that may be contained in the archetype of matter without being known to us,

will be capable of thinking.

12. Theodore: It will be capable of doing much more than that! You can have it doing anything you like, and no-one can will be able to challenge you. It can have thousands upon thousands of faculties, virtues, and wonderful properties. It can act in your soul, enlighten it, make it happy and unhappy. [‘Act in’ translates *agir en* and *agir dans*; ‘act on’ translates *agir sur*. It seems clear that Malebranche meant the first two differently from the third.] In short, there will be as many powers—and, when you come right down to it, as many *gods*—as there are different bodies. Since I know absolutely nothing about this ‘something else’ that you take to be the essence of matter, how can I know that it *doesn't* have all the qualities it pleases you to attribute to it? You can see from this •that if we are to know God's works we must consult the ideas of them that he

gives us of them, ideas that are clear, ideas on the basis of which God designed his works; and •that we run tremendous risks if we go down any road but that one. For if we consult our senses and blindly swallow their testimony, they will persuade us that some bodies, at least, have marvellous power and intelligence.

Our senses tell us that fire spreads heat and light. They persuade us that plants and animals work for the survival of themselves and of their species with much skill and a kind of intelligence. We see then that there is more to the capacities of these bodies than mere shapes and motions. So the obscure and confused testimony of our senses leads us to think that there must be more to bodies than extension, since the states of extension can be nothing but motions and shapes. But let us

- consult reason attentively,
- consider the clear idea we have of bodies,
- avoid confounding *ourselves* with bodies,

and then perhaps we shall discover that we are crediting bodies with having qualities and properties that *they* don't have and that only *we* have. You say that perhaps we don't see the whole of the archetype or idea of matter. •Even• if that *were* really so, we •still• oughtn't to attribute to matter anything except what the idea of matter represents to us, for we shouldn't base a judgment on what we *don't* know. . . . So note once again the driving force •of my argument•, namely: **We can think of extension without thinking of anything else.** So God can create extension without creating anything else. And this extension will exist without that unknown *thing* that they attribute to matter. Extension will then be a substance and not a state of substance. [Theodore means something like this: ‘People think of matter as *something* that is extended, and this *thing* thought tempts them to smuggle in powers and properties that don't come from extension; as it has tempted you,

Aristes, to smuggle in something that is capable of thinking. I am saying that extension is itself a substance; the thought of it doesn't involve any thought or pseudo-thought of an underlying *thing* that is extended.'] And *this* is what I think should be called 'body' or 'matter'. I have plenty of reasons for this. It's not just •that we can't think of things' states without thinking of the things *of* which they are the states (so that the only way to distinguish things from their states is to see if the former can be thought of without the latter); but also •that extension by itself with the properties everyone attributes to it is sufficient to explain all natural effects—I mean that whenever we observe an effect of matter, and know clearly what it is, its natural cause can be discovered in the idea of extension.

Aristes: I find that convincing. I understand better than ever that to know God's works we must •carefully consult the ideas that he in his wisdom contains, •silence our senses and especially our imaginings. But this road to the truth is so rough and difficult that hardly anyone travels along it. To see that the sun is shining brightly we need only open our eyes. To judge if sound is in the air, we need only to make some noise. Nothing easier! But when the mind is attending to the ideas that don't strike the senses, it works frightfully hard. We tire very soon, as I know from experience. How lucky *you* are to be able to meditate on metaphysical matters!

Theodore: I am made like others, my dear Aristes. I would be honoured if you thought I was like you; your only mistake about this is in thinking I am somehow superior. What would you expect? The difficulty we all find in connecting up with reason is a penalty for sin (and a proof of it!), and its driving force is the rebellion of the body. We are condemned to earn our livelihood by the sweat of our brows. In this life the mind must *work* to be nourished by truth—this is

common to all men. But, believe me, this food of the mind is so delicious—and it gives so much eagerness to the soul that has tasted it—that although we get tired looking for it, we never tire of wanting it and we keep renewing our search; for this 'food' is what we are made for. But if I have tired you out, hand me that instrument—that monochord—so that I can give you a rest from ·fiercely intellectual· attention and convey through the senses, as far as possible, the truths I want to get you to understand.

Aristes: What do you want to do? I ·already· understand clearly that sound is not spread out in the air and that a string can't produce it. The reasons you have just given me seem convincing. Since all bodily states come down to spatial relations, it follows that neither •sound nor •the power of producing it is contained in •the idea of matter. That is enough for me. Still, here is another proof which occurs to me. [It concerns illusions experienced in dreams and in states of feverish illness. These illusory sounds etc. are 'only in the soul', Aristes says. He then continues with a further thought:] Everything you have told me up to now leads me to think that nothing in the objects of our senses is *similar* to the sensations we have of them. These objects correspond to their ideas, but it seems to me they have no ·systematic· relation to our sensations. Bodies are merely extension capable of motion and various shapes. This is evident when we consult the idea that represents them.

Theodore: Bodies, you say, have no resemblance to the sensations we have; and to know their properties we must consult not our senses but the clear idea of extension that represents the nature of bodies. Keep this important truth well in mind.

Aristes: It is obvious, and I'll never forget it.

13. Theodore: Never! Well, then, please tell me what an octave is and what is a fifth, or rather teach me what must be done to hear these musical intervals.

Aristes: That's easy. Pluck the whole string, and then put your finger *there* and pluck the string again, and you will hear an octave.

Theodore: Why am I to put my finger *there* and not *here*?

Aristes: Because if you put it *here* you would get a fifth and not an octave. Look, *look*—all the notes are marked. . . . But you're laughing.

Theodore: I am now very knowledgeable, Aristes. I can make you hear any note I wish. But if we had broken our instrument, all our knowledge would be in bits.

Aristes: Not at all. I would make another. It's only a string on a board—anyone can do that.

Theodore: Yes, but that's not enough. The intervals must be marked exactly on the board. So how would you divide it up so as to mark where we should put our fingers to hear an octave, a fifth, and other intervals?

Aristes: I would pluck the whole string and then, while it was still sounding, slide my finger along it until I heard the sound I wanted to mark. I do know music well enough to tune instruments.

Theodore: Your method is not very precise, since it is only by trial that you find what you are looking for. If you became deaf—or, rather, if there were a loosening of the small nerve that keeps your eardrum taut and tunes it to your instrument—what would become of your knowledge? Would you then be unable to mark exactly the different notes? If becoming deaf involves forgetting music, then your

·musical· science is not based on clear ideas. Reason has no part in it, for reason is unchangeable and necessary.

Aristes: Ah, Theodore! I had *already* forgotten what I just told you I would *never* forget. What was I thinking of? I gave you ridiculous answers, and you had reason to laugh. The trouble is that I naturally listen to my senses more than to my reason. I'm so used to consulting my •ears that I answered your question without •*thinking* well. Here is another answer, which you will like better. To mark an octave on this instrument we must divide the space along the string into two equal parts. Then if we first pluck the whole string and then pluck one or the other of its halves ·with a finger pressed down on its mid-point·, we will get an octave. Next we pluck the whole string and then two thirds of it, getting a fifth. Finally we pluck the whole string and then three quarters of it, getting a fourth; and the two last intervals add up to an octave. [The interval from C up to G is a fifth, and the interval from G up to the C above is a fourth.]

14. Theodore: That answer teaches me something. I understand it distinctly. I see from it that an octave—or rather the natural cause that produces the octave—is as 2 to 1, the fifth as 3 to 2, and the fourth as 4 to 3. These relations of numbers are clear. And, since you tell me that a plucked string yields these intervals when it has been divided into portions whose lengths are expressed by these numbers, I could mark them on the monochord even if I were deaf. That is reasoning on the basis of clear ideas. . . . But *why* are a fifth and a fourth equivalent to an octave?

Aristes: That is because *sound is to sound as string is to string*. Thus, since an octave is sounded when we pluck a whole string and then half of it, an octave is as 2 to 1. . . . [Aristes develops this in some detail, the developments all being arithmetical.]

Theodore: I conceive all this clearly, given that *sound is to sound as string to string*. But I don't understand this principle. Do you think it is based on clear ideas?

Aristes: Yes, I think so. For the string or its various vibrations cause different sounds. Now, the •whole cause is to its •half as •2 is to •1, and effects correspond exactly to their causes. So the effect of the whole cause is double the effect of half of it. And the •sound of the whole string is to the •sound of half of it as •2 is to •1.

Theodore: Is all this clear in your mind? As for me, I find some obscurity in it—and I try my best to yield only to the evidentness that clear ideas bring with them.

Aristes: What do you find to criticise in my reasoning?

15. Theodore: Well, it's clever enough—you aren't lacking in cleverness. But the underlying principle is obscure. It isn't based on clear ideas. Watch out for that! You think you know what you do in sensing, and you base your case on a snap judgment that you earlier admitted to be false. To make you aware of the fallacy in your proof, let me subject you to a little experiment. Give me your hand—I shan't do you any great harm. As I rub the hollow of your hand with the cuff of my sleeve, do you feel anything?

Aristes: I feel a little heat, or a pleasant sort of tickling.

Theodore: And now?

Aristes: Ow! Theodore, you're hurting me! You are rubbing too hard. I feel a distressing pain.

Theodore: No you don't, Aristes. You feel a pleasure two or three times greater than the ·tickling· one you felt just before, and I'll prove this to you by your own reasoning:

My rubbing your hand is the cause of what you feel. Now, the •whole cause is to •half of it as •2 is to •1,

and effects correspond exactly to the action of their causes. Hence, the effect of the •whole cause (or the whole action of the cause) is double the effect of •half of it.

So the doubled motion involved in rubbing twice as hard or twice as fast should produce twice as much pleasure. So I *haven't* given you pain, unless you maintain that •pain is to •pleasure as •2 is to •1.

Aristes: I am indeed punished for having reasoned on an obscure principle. You hurt me, and your excuse is a 'proof that you were giving me a double pleasure. Nasty!

Theodore: You got off easily; if we had been near the fire, I might have done something much worse.

Aristes: What would you have done?

Theodore: Perhaps I would have taken a burning coal and put it somewhere near your hand; if you said that gave you pleasure, I would—to give you more pleasure—have touched your hand with it; and then I would have 'proved' to you by your own reasoning that you were wrong to complain.

Aristes: So I had a narrow escape! Is *that* how you instruct people?

Theodore: What do you want me to do? When I give you metaphysical proofs, you forget them right away. I have to get them to you through your senses, so that you'll have no difficulty understanding and remembering them. Why did you forget so quickly that •we should reason only on the basis of clear ideas, and that •a vibrating string can only agitate the air surrounding it and can't produce the different sounds you hear?

Aristes: It is because when I pluck the string I immediately hear the sound.

Theodore: I realize that. But you don't *conceive clearly* that the vibrations of a string can spread or produce sound. You agreed to that. The idea of matter doesn't contain *sound*; still less does it contain *the power of acting in the soul to make it hear sound*. From the fact that

vibrations of a string or of the air are followed by one sound or another,

you may infer that

in the present state of things, that is what is needed for you to hear sound.

But don't imagine that there is a necessary relation between these things—i.e. between the vibration and the experience of hearing sound. It may well be that I don't hear the same sounds as you, even if I hear the same notes or intervals. If (as is quite likely) my eardrum differs in thickness from yours by a certain amount, and so resonates more easily at a different pitch, I will surely hear a louder sound than you do when the string is plucked. And a final point: I don't see any quantitative relation between musical intervals. It's not clear that the two sounds making up an interval differ as *more to less* in the way the strings producing them differ *as longer to shorter*. This appears evident to me.

Aristes: It seems so to me too. But given that the vibrations of a string don't cause sound, how does it come about that I hear a sound when the string is plucked?

Theodore: This is not the time to answer into that question, Aristes. We'll be easily able to answer it when we have treated the efficacy of causes, or laws of the union of soul and body. My present concern is only to get you to see the difference between *knowing clearly* and *sensing confusedly*. My only purpose is to convince you of this important truth: to know God's works, we must attend to the ideas that represent them, not to the sensations that we have of them. . . .

Aristes: I agree. I am fully convinced. Let us move on, for I get tired of hearing you endlessly repeating the same things.

16. Theodore: We shall move on to wherever you like. But, believe me, it isn't enough just to see a principle—we must see it *well*. For there is seeing and then again there is *seeing*. The principle I am getting into your mind is so necessary and so useful that it should be present to the mind at all times—not forgotten as you keep forgetting it. Let us see if you are quite convinced of it and do indeed know how to use it. Tell me why when two strings are tuned to the same note we can't pluck one without starting the other vibrating as well.

Aristes: That question seems to me to be very hard. In different authors I have read many explanations that hardly satisfy me. I am afraid that my own answer may start you joking again, or lead you to perform some experiment at my expense.

Theodore: No, no, Aristes, don't be afraid! But don't forget the 'clear ideas' principle. I'm sorry to keep on at you about this principle, but I'm afraid that 'sympathy' or some other chimera will keep you from following it.

Aristes: Well, let's see! When I pluck a string it moves the air by its vibrations. The air, which is now agitated, can give motion to other strings that it encounters.

Theodore: All right. But if that's the whole explanation then other strings will be moved even if they are tuned to a different note from the first string.

Aristes: I was thinking about that. A little *sympathy* would fit in nicely here, but you won't allow it.

Theodore: I'm willing to accept the word for what *little* it is worth. Certainly *there is* 'sympathy' between strings tuned to the same note, because *they act on one another*, and

that's what the word 'sympathy' means. But the problem is: what produces this sympathy?

Aristes: It isn't because of their length or thickness: there is sympathy between some pairs of strings that are unequal in length and/or thickness, and there is no sympathy between strings that are equal in those respects but are not tuned to the same note. So everything must depend on the sound—i.e. on the sameness of sound of the strings between which there is sympathy. But this doesn't explain the sympathy, because the sound is not a state of the string and the string cannot produce it. Here I am indeed at a loss.

Theodore: You are easily at a loss. There is sympathy between strings when they are tuned to the same note. That's the fact you want to explain. Then see what makes two strings produce that same sound, and then you'll have everything you need to solve your problem.

Aristes: If two strings are equal in length and in thickness, they will produce the same sound if they are subject to the same amount of tension. If they have the same thickness and different lengths—one is twice as long as the other, say—four times as much tension will be needed in the longer one if they are to produce the same note.

Theodore: So what is the effect of difference in tension on strings that are equal in length and thickness?

Aristes: It makes them capable of sound that is more or less high pitched.

Theodore: Yes, but that's not what we want. That concerns only a difference in *sound*, and no sound can move a string: sound is an effect of motion, not a cause of it. Tell me then how tension makes the sound become higher.

Aristes: It seems to be because it makes the string vibrate faster.

Theodore: Good, that is just what we want! What makes the second string vibrate is the vibration of the other, not the sound it makes. Two strings equal in length and thickness and equally taut make the same sound because they vibrate at the same rate; and if the sound made by one rises higher than the other, this indicates that the former string has become more taut and has started to vibrate faster. Now one string moves another only by means of its vibrations, for a body is moved by another only by means of that other body's motion. This being so, tell me now why strings with the same note communicate their vibration, and dissonant strings don't—so far as the senses can tell, at any rate.

17. Aristes: I see the reason for this clearly. Here are two strings tuned to the same note: let that be yours and this be mine. When I pull my string back away from you and then release it, it pushes air towards you, and the air that it pushes moves your string a little. Mine then quickly makes a number of similar vibrations, each of which moves the air and pushes your string as the first jolt did. That is what makes your string vibrate; for several small jolts suitably spaced will produce a detectable movement; but when the jolts come at different rates, they interfere with one another. Thus when two strings are tuned to different notes—i.e. when they can't vibrate at the same rate or at commensurable rates because they have different tensions or their lengths or thicknesses are different and incommensurable—they can't move one another. [Two items are 'commensurable' if they are equal, or if their inequality can be expressed by fairly simple fractions—e.g. one is two thirds of the other.] For if my string moves and pushes the air and your string towards you at the same time that yours is pushing air towards me, then each will reduce the motion of the other instead of increasing it. The vibrations of the strings must then be made equal, or one of them some

multiple of the other, if there is to be a detectable transfer of motion between them; and the motion will be the more detectable by the senses the more the interval between the notes they produce approaches unison. That is why in an octave they move more than in a fifth, and in a fifth more than in a fourth: the two strings begin their vibrations more often at the same instant. Are you happy with this reason?

Theodore: [After applauding Aristes for giving an explanation based on clear ideas, dealing with movements etc. and not with sounds, he continues:] What leads us to fall into error so often is the falsity or obscurity of our ideas rather than weakness of our minds. •Geometers rarely make mistakes, while •physicists make them most of the time. Why so? It is because •physicists generally reason with confused ideas while •geometers reason with ideas that are

the clearest we have.

Aristes: I see the necessity of your principle better than ever. You did well to repeat it often and drive it home to me through my senses. I will try to remember it. [He repeats Theodore's main propositions, and continues:] Isn't this what you want me to keep well in mind, Theodore?

Theodore: Yes, Aristes; and, if you do, you will travel without fear in the land of intellects. . . . But don't assume that you *properly* know the things that I have told you and you have repeated, until you have meditated on them often. For we never fully grasp what men tell us unless internal truth repeats it to us while all creation is silent. Goodbye now, Aristes. I leave you alone with reason. Consult it in earnest and forget everything else.

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. . . .

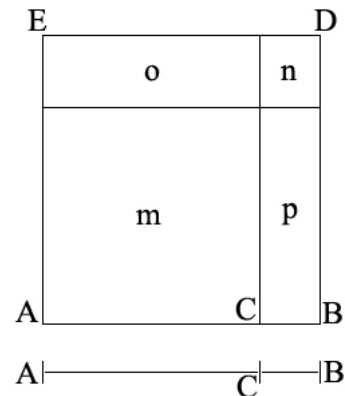
1. Theodore: I believe what you are telling me about your progress, Aristes, for I'm convinced that an hour's studious meditation can take a mind like yours a long way. Nevertheless, to make me even surer about how far you have gone, answer me this. You see the line AB. Let it be divided in two parts 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

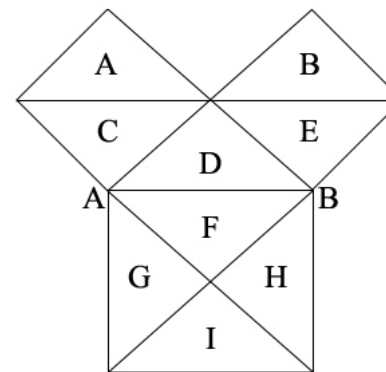
is not so evident as the truth that

- 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 second 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 with Theodore. I have such affection for Theodore that I seem to encounter him every-

where. 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.

SEVENTH DIALOGUE

The inefficacy of natural causes and the lack of power in created things. We are immediately and directly united to God alone.

[Theotimus has now joined the group, and engages in some joking conversational skirmishes with Aristes. Then Theodore gets down to business.]

Theodore: . . . Tell us please, Aristes, what has entered your mind on the topic I put to you in our last discussion. What are the things with which we have some connection? What are the causes of these connections, and what are their effects? . . . [Aristes replies jokingly, and Theodore, who is in a bad temper with Aristes throughout this dialogue, reproves him sharply. Then:]

1. Aristes: It seems to me, Theodore, that there is nothing to which I am more closely united than I am to my own body. For it can't be touched without my being affected. The moment it is injured I feel that I am hurt and discomfited. When a mosquito intrudes on my evening walk by sinking its venomous proboscis into my skin, I feel that I have been stabbed in my soul—tiny though that proboscis is. The mere noise the mosquito makes in my ears sounds an alarm in me—a sure sign that I am more closely united to my body than to anything else. Yes, Theodore, this is so true that we are •connected to all the objects that surround us only *through* •our •connection with• our bodies. If the sun didn't affect my eyes it would be invisible to me; and, if I became deaf I would no longer enjoy so much the company of my friends. It is even through my body that I adhere to my religion, because it is through my eyes and ears that faith entered my mind and my heart. In short, everything that matters to me relates to •me through •my body; so I am more

closely united to my body than to anything else.

Theodore [sarcastically]: Did you meditate for a long time, my dear Aristes, to make this great discovery?

Theotimus [pouring oil on troubled waters]: Those are all quite good things to say, Theodore.

Theodore: Yes, Theotimus, •good to be said• by people who consult their senses only. Who do you think Aristes *is*, when you applaud his saying things that any peasant might say? I no longer recognize Aristes in this reply.

Aristes: I see I have started off badly.

Theodore: *Very* badly! I didn't expect this beginning, because I didn't think you would have forgotten today what you knew yesterday. But old opinions keep returning to the attack, driving us back from the ground we have won; we can't hold our position unless we dig in and stay vigilant. Well, then: I contend that we, far from being united more closely to our bodies than to anything else, aren't united to them *at all*. I exaggerate my way of speaking a little, so that it will impress you and you won't again forget what I tell you. No, Aristes (speaking now precisely and strictly), your mind isn't and can't be united to your body. It can only be united to what can act in it. Now, do you think your body can act in your mind? Do you think that it is through *your body* that you are rational, happy or unhappy, and so on? Does your body unite you to God? Isn't it rather God who unites you to your body and, by way of your body, to everything in your environment?

Aristes: To be sure, Theodore, it is God who has united my mind to my body. But couldn't it be said. . .

Theodore: What? That it is your mind that is acting on your body right now, and your body on your mind? I understand you. You want to say:

God made this union of mind and body. But then with that union established, your body *can* act on your mind, and through it so can everything else. And with that same union established, your mind can act in your body, and through it on things in your environment.

Isn't that what 'could be said'?

Aristes: There is something about it that I don't understand too well. *How* does it all take place? I ask this as someone who has forgotten the better part of what you have told me, because I didn't think about it.

Theodore: I doubt that! What you really want is for me to prove more rigorously and in greater detail the principles of which I have spoken to you thus far. I must try to give you what you want; but please be attentive, and *respond* to what I say. Theotimus, you can monitor both of us.

2. Do you think, Aristes, that matter, which you judge perhaps not to be capable of moving itself or putting itself into any state, can ever affect the state of a mind, make it happy or unhappy, represent ideas to it, give it different sensations? Think about this, and answer me.

Aristes: That seems to me to be impossible.

Theodore: I repeat: *think* about it! If anything represents bodies it is the idea of extension; consult *it* to judge whether bodies can have any property other than the passive capacity to be given various shapes and various motions. Isn't it

utterly evident that properties of extension can only consist in spatial relations?

Aristes: That is clear, and I have already agreed to it.

Theodore: It follows that bodies can't possibly act on minds.

Aristes: Not of themselves, not 'by their own force', so it will be said. But why can't they do so by a power resulting from their union with minds?

Theodore: *What?* By 'a power resulting from their union'? I can't find any meaning in these general terms. Remember the principle of clear ideas, Aristes. If you abandon that then you'll be in darkness, and a single step will tumble you into a crevasse. I *do* understand

- how bodies, in consequence of certain natural laws, can 'act on' our minds in this sense: the states of bodies bring into play the efficacy of divine volitions, i.e. the general laws of the union of soul and body

—a matter I shall explain shortly. But I *don't* understand

- how bodies could be given a power—one that is really *theirs*—through the efficacy of which they could act in our minds.

What would that power be? Would it be a substance or a state? If a substance, then it isn't bodies that act but that substance *in* them. If the power is a state, then there will be a state of bodies which is neither motion nor shape; extension will be able to have states that aren't spatial relations. But why am I going into all this? It is up to *you*, Aristes, to give me some idea of that power that you think of as the effect of the union of soul and body.

Aristes: It will be said that *we don't know* what that power is. But what can you conclude from an admission of ignorance on our part?

Theodore: That it is better to keep quiet than to say things that one doesn't know ·to be true·.

Aristes: Agreed. But when we propose that bodies act on minds we are saying something that we *do* know ·to be true·. Nothing is more certain. Experience doesn't allow us to doubt it.

Theodore: Yet I doubt it very much, or rather I don't believe a word of it! Experience teaches me that I feel pain when a thorn pricks me. *That* is a certainty. But let's not go further than that. Experience *doesn't* teach us that the thorn acts on our minds, or that it has some power. I advise you not to believe a word of that!

3. Aristes: I don't believe that a thorn can act on my mind, Theodore. But it may be said that it can act on my body and, by way of my body, act on my mind in consequence of the union of my body with my mind. I agree that matter cannot act immediately on a mind—note the word 'immediately'.

Theodore: But isn't your body *matter*?

Aristes: Yes, undoubtedly.

Theodore: So ·by your own concession· your body can't act *immediately* on your mind. Thus, even if your finger was pricked by a thorn and your brain was disturbed by this action, neither ·finger nor brain· could act on your soul and make it feel pain. Your brain and your finger are nothing but matter, and so neither of them can act immediately on your mind.

Aristes: But ·if it's not my finger or my brain, what is it·? It isn't my soul that produces in itself the sensation of pain that afflicts it, for it feels the pain without wanting to do so. I feel that the pain comes to me from some external cause. So your reasoning proves too much. I am well aware that

you are going to tell me that it is God who causes my pain in me; and I agree. But he causes it only as a result of the general laws of union of soul and body.

Theodore: What are you getting at, Aristes? What you have just said is true, ·but you said it as though arguing against me·. Explain your thought more distinctly.

Aristes: I think, Theodore, that God has united my mind to my body and that, by virtue of that union, my mind and my body mutually act on each other in consequence of natural laws that God always follows quite exactly. That is all I have to say to you ·on this topic·.

Theodore: You don't make yourself clear, Aristes, which is a pretty good indication that you don't understand what you are saying. 'Union', 'general laws'—what sort of reality do you mean these terms to refer to?

Theotimus: Aristes seems to think the terms are clear and unambiguous because usage has made them so common. When something obscure and false has come our way many times without our pausing to examine it, we can hardly believe that it isn't true. The word 'union' is one of the most ambiguous words there is, but it is so common and comfortable that it goes everywhere without anyone stopping it ·to demand its credentials, that is·, without anyone considering whether it arouses a distinct idea in the mind. For something familiar doesn't attract one's attention—the attention that is needed if anything is to be understood; and whatever affects the imagination agreeably appears very clear to the mind, which is perfectly trustful as long as it is bought off ·with agreeable currency·.

Aristes: What, Theotimus! Are you entirely on Theodore's side ·about this·? Can we doubt that soul and body are united in the closest manner in the world? If I weren't sure

that both of you are too good to play such unkind tricks I would be tempted to think that you have teamed up to throw me into confusion and amuse yourselves at my expense.

Theotimus: You are a little too sure of yourself, Aristes. Theodore is upholding the side of truth, and if he overdoes things a little it is to set us right. He sees the weight of our old opinions carrying us along, and the force he uses on us is simply to hold us back. Please let's hear him out.

4. Theodore: You maintain Aristes, that your soul is united to your body more closely than to anything else. Well, I'll settle for that in the meantime, but only on condition that for a day or two you will also agree with me in not explaining certain effects in terms of a force of which neither you nor I have any knowledge. Isn't that quite reasonable?

Aristes: Only too reasonable. But what are you getting at?

Theodore: I am getting at this: *Between your mind and your body there is the closest union in the world.* How could we doubt *that!* But you weren't able to say what exactly this union *is.* So let us not take it to be a force that can explain the effects whose cause we are looking for.

Aristes: But if the effects depend necessarily on it?

Theodore: If they do depend on it, we shall indeed have to return to it. But let us not *assume* that they do. If I asked you, Aristes, how it comes about that by pulling on the arm of this chair I can move the whole chair, would you think you had explained this adequately if you replied that this happens because of the 'union' between the arm of the chair and the rest of the chair? Theotimus certainly wouldn't be satisfied with such a reply. It is all right for *children* to give answers like that, but not *philosophers*, at least when they purport to be doing philosophy. To satisfy Theotimus's mind on this question, we would have to work our way back to

the physical cause of the union of the parts of hard bodies, and to prove to him that the hardness of bodies has to come from the pressure on them of invisible matter around them. So the word 'union' doesn't explain anything, and stands in need of being explained itself. Take vague and general words for reasons if you want to, Aristes, but don't try to pay us in that currency! Although many people accept it and are satisfied by it, it's a little harder to palm it off on us, because of our fear of being deceived.

Aristes: What do you want me to do? I pay you in currency that I have accepted in good faith, and I have nothing better. As it is generally accepted in the world, you might see your way to being satisfied with it. But let us have some idea of how *you* go about paying people. Give me good reasons for thinking that body and mind inter-act, without bringing in the notion of the 'union'.

Theodore: Don't assume that they *do* inter-act, Aristes, rather than merely that their states correspond. Don't assume anything that experience doesn't teach you, and try to focus your attention on what I am going to say. Do you think that a body can act on matter and move it?

Aristes: Who can deny it?

5. Theodore: Theotimus and I, and soon perhaps Aristes too! For bodies to act on bodies would be a contradiction—yes, a *contradiction.* This paradox appears to be contrary to experience, opposed to the tradition of the philosophers, incredible to the learned and to the ignorant; but I shall prove it. Tell me, can a body on its own move itself? Please consult the *idea* you have of body; for always remember that we must judge things by the •ideas that represent them and *not* by the •sensations we have of them [third, fourth and fifth dialogues].

Aristes: No, I don't see that bodies can move by themselves. But no more do I see that they can't. I am in doubt about this.

Theodore: You do well to doubt and stop short when you can't clearly see your way ahead. But try to see clearly, and to dispel your doubt. Let us move ahead boldly!

Aristes: In this darkness I am afraid of taking a false step. Throw some light!

Theodore: The light you want will come from clear ideas, my dear Aristes, if you consult them *attentively*. Contemplate *intelligible extension*. This idea represents bodies because it is their archetype, i.e. they have all been made according to its pattern. The idea is entirely luminous; so consult it. Don't you see clearly ·from the idea· that bodies •can be moved but •cannot move themselves? You hesitate. Well then, suppose this chair can move itself: *when* will it decide to move? which way will it go? how fast? ·To cope with these questions· you would have to credit the chair with *thoughts*, and with *decisions* that could determine how it moves. In short, you would have to make a man out of your armchair. Otherwise, a power of moving itself would be of no use at all to it.

Aristes: A man of my armchair! What a strange thought!

Theotimus: It is a thought that many people actually have, as Theodore realizes. Everyone who judges things from his own resources—i.e. by the sensations he has of them rather than by the ideas that represent them—makes each object into something resembling himself. He makes God act like a man. He attributes to the lower animals what he senses in himself. To fire and the other elements he assigns 'inclinations' of which he has no other idea than his *feeling inclined* to do this or that. Thus, he humanizes all things.

But don't leave it at that. Follow Theodore, and answer his questions.

Aristes: I don't think that *this chair* can move by itself. But how do I know there isn't some *other* body to which God has given the power of moving? Remember, Theodore, you have to prove that for bodies to act on one another would be a contradiction; ·so this has to hold for absolutely all actual and possible bodies·.

6. Theodore: Well then, Aristes, I shall prove it to you. It is a contradiction for a body to be neither in motion nor at rest. For even God in his omnipotence cannot create a body that is nowhere, i.e. that doesn't stand in spatial relations to other bodies. A body is at rest when it keeps the same spatial relations to others, and it is in motion when these relations keep changing. Now, it is evident that every body either changes or doesn't change its spatial relations ·to other bodies·; there is no middle ground ·between changing and not-changing·. The propositions *It changes* and *It doesn't change* are contradictories [= 'are propositions that cannot both be true and cannot both be false']. So it is a contradiction that a body be neither in motion nor at rest.

Aristes: That didn't need proving.

Theodore: Now, the will of God is what gives existence to bodies and to all created things, for their existence is certainly not necessary. And created things *stay* in existence because the will that created them continues to operate; if this will were to stop, necessarily bodies would go out of existence. (When I speak of God's will as 'stopping', I am speaking of him according to our way of thinking). So it is this same will that sets bodies in motion or keeps them at rest, because it is this will that gives them being—that is, brings them into existence and keeps them in existence—and they can't exist without being in motion or at rest. Note

that God cannot do what is impossible or what contains an obvious contradiction. He cannot will something that cannot be conceived. So he can't •will that this chair exist without at the same time •willing that it exist in some particular place and •putting it there—since you couldn't conceive of this chair as existing but not existing in some particular place.

Aristes: Still, I seem to be able to think of a body without conceiving of it as in motion or at rest.

Theodore: I'm not denying *that*. You can indeed think of a body in a general way and make any abstractions you like, ·e.g. abstracting from its colour or its spatial position·. I agree. That is what often deceives you. But—I'll say it again—you cannot conceive •that a body exists and •that it is not at the same time somewhere and •that its relations with other bodies neither change nor stay the same and consequently •that it is neither in motion nor at rest. [The point is this: Aristes has said that he can have a thought that includes a chair and *omits the chair's being spatially located*; whereas Theodore is declaring to be impossible a thought that includes a chair and *includes the chair's not being spatially located*.] Hence, for God to make a body without making it move or be still would be a contradiction.

Aristes: Oh well, Theodore, I grant you that. When God creates a body, he must at first make it move or make it stay still. But when the instant of creation is past, this no longer holds: bodies move around by chance, or according to the law of the strongest. [French: *la loi du plus fort*. This phrase standardly relates to any illegitimate attempt by a person or group to further its ends by having recourse to force. Malebranche—perhaps as a mild joke—is shifting the phrase from politics to physics, presumably using it to label a thesis that he regards as the foundation of all physics, namely that 'bodies that are pushed or collided with always move in the direction from which the least pressure comes' (quoted from page 110 below).]

7. Theodore: 'When the instant of creation is past!' But, if that instant *doesn't* pass then you are at the end of your tether, and you will have to surrender. Now pay attention. God's will is all-powerful; he wills that there be such-and-such a world, and the world comes into being. If he no longer wills that there be a world, the world is thereby annihilated. For the world certainly depends on the volitions of the creator. If the world continues to exist, it is because God continues to will it to do so. From God's perspective the •conservation of creatures is simply their •continued creation. That is from the perspective of God who acts. From the viewpoint of created things there appears to be a difference ·between creation and conservation·, because in •creation they •come into existence out of nothing, whereas in •conservation they ·merely· •stay in existence. But in reality creation doesn't stop, because in God conservation and creation are one and the same volition, which consequently is necessarily followed by the same effects.

Aristes: I understand your reasons, Theodore, but I'm not convinced by them. 'If God no longer wills that there be a world, the world is thereby annihilated' strikes me as *false*. For the world to be annihilated it isn't sufficient (it seems to me) that •God no longer wills that it exist; what's needed is for •God positively to will it *not* to exist. There is no need for a volition when nothing is to be done. Thus, now that the world has been made, let God leave it alone, and it will stay in existence for ever.

8. Theodore: You aren't *thinking* about this, Aristes! You are making created things independent. You are judging God and his works by the works of men—works that •presuppose the natural order rather than (like God's works) •creating the natural order. Your house stays in existence although your architect is dead. This is because its foundations are

solid, and it has no connection with the life of the person who built it. It doesn't depend on him in any way. But the basis for our existence depends essentially on the creator. •The arranging of the stones depended in a sense on man's will, because in the natural order of things stones wouldn't come together like that without purposeful human agency; but •the resultant house has no such dependence. But the universe is derived from nothing, so it depends to such an extent on the universal cause that if God ceased to conserve it it would necessarily return to nothing. For God doesn't want to make—and indeed *cannot* make—a created thing that is independent of his volitions.

Aristes: I admit that between created things and the creator there is a relation, a connection, an essential dependence, Theodore. But wouldn't it be sufficient for this dependence that God can annihilate created things whenever he likes?

Theodore: Certainly not, my dear Aristes. What greater mark of a thing's independence can there be than its staying in existence by itself and without support? Strictly speaking, your house doesn't depend on you. Why? Because it survives without you. You can burn it down whenever you choose, but you don't *sustain* it. That is why there is no essential dependence between it and you. Thus, even if God could destroy created things whenever he chose, if they can stay in existence without the continual influence of the creator they don't essentially depend on him. For you to be fully convinced of what I am saying, suppose for a moment that God no longer exists. On your view, the universe stays in existence, because

the going out of existence of a cause
doesn't undercut the effect any more than does
the staying in existence of a cause that doesn't *do*
anything.

That is evident. Now, on the supposition that the universe still exists and God doesn't, you can't think of the world as essentially dependent on the creator. (The supposition involves an impossibility, it is true. But the mind can join or separate things as it pleases—even supposing states of affairs that are impossible—in order to discover their relations.) Hence, if bodies essentially depend on the creator for their continued existence they need to be sustained by his continuing influence, by the causal power of the will that created them in the first place. If God merely stops willing that they exist, it will necessarily follow—just from this—that they will go out of existence. If they continued to exist when God no longer willed that they do so, they would be independent. Indeed, they would be independent to such an extent that God couldn't destroy them. I shall now prove this to you.

9. An infinitely wise God can't will anything that isn't worthy of being willed; he can't love anything that isn't lovable. Now there is nothing lovable about nothingness! So it can't be what a volition of God's aims at. Since it doesn't have any reality at all, nothingness certainly doesn't have enough reality to stand in any relationship with the action of a God, an action of infinite worth. So God cannot positively will the annihilation of the universe. It is only creatures who can, through weakness or error, have volitions that aim at nothingness. They can do this because a certain object can—or they think it can—be an obstacle to their getting what they want. But when you have thought about it you'll see how utterly evident it is that an infinitely wise and all-powerful God cannot, without contradicting what he is, deploy his power in not making anything—indeed, not merely *not making anything* but *destroying* his own work, not correcting defects in it that he didn't put there but annihilating natures that he has made. Thus, Aristes, on

your view that to annihilate the world it isn't sufficient for God to stop willing its existence—your view that God must also positively will that the world no longer exist—the world is independent and *necessarily* existent. For God couldn't destroy it without renouncing his attributes, and for him to do that would be a *contradiction*.

So don't lessen the dependence of created things; if you do, you risk falling into the impiety of making them entirely *independent*. God can annihilate them whenever he pleases, as you say, but that is because he can stop willing what he freely willed. [Theodore next discusses the status of God's acts of the will: they apply through all time, but don't consist of first one episode, then the next, then the next, and so on; they are eternal and unchangeable but not absolutely necessary, though they do have a kind of conditional necessity. This extremely difficult half-page is omitted here, on the excuse that Theodore himself calls it a digression. He goes on:] I should return to our subject. Are you now convinced that creatures essentially depend on God, to such an extent that they can't stay in existence unless he continues to will that they do so?

Aristes: I have done all I could to resist your reasons. But I surrender! I have no answer to give you. The dependence of creatures is quite different from what I thought.

10. Theodore: Then let me recapitulate what I have been saying, and draw some consequences from it. But take care that I don't infer anything that isn't clearly contained in the premises. Creation does not stop: from God's side, the conservation of creatures is just their continued creation—a single volition that continues and operates unceasingly. Now, God cannot •conceive and so he cannot •will that a body be nowhere or that it not have certain spatial relations with other bodies. So God cannot will that this chair ex-

ist. . . .without his placing it in some particular place. •So the positions and movements of bodies are wholly the work of •God, leaving no work to be done by •other bodies or by •any other things whatsoever. Thus, it would be a contradiction (•note the crescendo!•) for

one body to move another, or

for you to be able to move your chair, or

for all the angels and demons joined together to be able to move a wisp of straw.

The demonstration of this is clear [and Theodore repeats it. Then:] God adjusts the efficacy of his action to the inefficacious action of his creatures. This is what I have to explain to you, in order to make reason agree with experience and to give you an understanding of the greatest, most fruitful, and most indispensable of principles, namely:

God communicates his power to creatures and unites them among themselves solely by putting them into various states that are occasional causes of the effects that he himself produces.

I repeat, *occasional* causes. They •aren't themselves efficacious causes, but• they determine the efficacy of God's volitions; •for example, when you set yourself to raise your arm, this mental act of yours can't possibly cause any event in the world of matter, but it is the *occasion* for God to hoist your arm. The relationships of occasional causes to efficacious causes are encoded in general laws that God has prescribed for himself. He has done this so as to make himself recognisable through his works, and also to confer on •his work a uniformity of action that makes the parts hang together and saves •it from being confused, irregular, and unintelligible. I'm telling you this, my dear Aristes, to give you ardour and arouse your attention. For what I have been saying about motion and rest in matter might •otherwise• strike you as rather unimportant; you might think that such

simple little principles couldn't lead you to the great and important truths of which you have already caught a glimpse and which underlie almost everything I have said to you up to now.

Aristes: Don't be afraid that I will lose sight of you, Theodore. It seems to me I am following you quite closely, and your words charm me so that I seem to be swept along. Courage, then! I'll be able to stop you if you skip lightly over some places that are too difficult and too dangerous for me.

11. Theodore: Let us suppose then, Aristes, that God wills that there be a ball on the floor. No sooner said than done! Nothing is more mobile than a sphere on a plane, yet all the powers imaginable can't move the ball if God doesn't intervene. For—to repeat the point—if God wills to create or conserve the ball just precisely *here* (and he absolutely must put it *somewhere*), no force will be able to make it move from here. Don't forget this. It is our principle.

Aristes: I believe it, this principle. The only possible •mover is the •creator—the one who gives bodies their existence and puts them in the places they occupy.

Theodore: [This speech contains a rather large addition to what Malebranche wrote. For ease of location it is tagged with asterisks instead of little dots.] Very well. The •moving force of a body, then, is simply the •efficacy of God's will, which conserves it—i.e. the body in question—successively in different places. Granting this, suppose that the ball is moved and that in doing so it encounters another ball at rest. Experience teaches us that the second ball will inevitably be moved, with an unbroken rule governing how its movement relates to that of the first ball. Now, it isn't the first ball that moves the second. That is clear from the principle *that all seeming interaction among bodies is really an occasional-cause pattern in which the

only causal efficacy is that of God's volitions. One could spell this argument out in the following simple way:

God moves the second ball; so the first ball doesn't move it, because the ball-moving role is already fully occupied by God.

But a slightly more complex argument is stronger and deeper*:

One body couldn't move another without passing on to it some of *its own* moving force. Now, the •moving force of the first ball is simply the •volition of the creator who conserves it successively in different places. It isn't a •quality belonging to the ball itself. Nothing belongs to the ball except its own states; and states can't be separated from the substances that have them, so they can't be passed along from one substance to another. Hence, bodies can't move one another, and a collision between them is only an *occasional* cause of the distribution of their motion.

[Theodore then offers a brief sketch, omitted here, of some of the rules governing how motion is distributed in collisions. In the first edition of the work he had more, but Malebranche came think it contained a mistake, and deleted it. Then:] But there is no point in going into detail about the laws of motion now. All you need to know is •what reason has shown us, namely that bodies can't move themselves or other bodies that they bump into; and •what we learn from experience, namely that there are certain strictly observed laws in accordance with which God moves bodies.

Aristes: That seems to me to be incontestable. But what do you think, Theotimus? You never contradict Theodore.

12. Theotimus: I have been convinced of these truths for a long time. However, as you want me to oppose Theodore's opinions, please resolve a little difficulty that I have. I

understand that a body can't move itself. But now suppose this:

A body X is in motion, and God hasn't yet established laws for communication of motion ·in collisions·, so that there are not yet any occasional causes. In the line of X's motion there is a second body Y, which is concave and like a mould to body X.

What will happen? I contend that X will move Y, as a genuine cause that is necessarily connected with its effect. What do *you* say will happen? Choose!

Aristes: What will happen? Nothing. For, where there is no cause there can't be any effect.

Theotimus: What, *nothing*? Surely something new must happen. For either body Y will be moved on impact or it won't.

Aristes: It won't be moved.

Theotimus: So far, so good. But what will become of body X on encountering Y, Aristes? Either it will rebound or it won't. If it rebounds, we shall have a new effect of which Y is the cause. If it doesn't rebound, that will be even worse ·for your view·, for then we'll have a force that is destroyed or at least rendered inoperative, ·and that is impossible·. So the collision of bodies is not an *occasional* cause but a *very real and true cause*, since the impact is necessarily connected with whatever effect you choose. Thus. . .

Aristes: Just a minute, Theotimus. What are you proving? Given that bodies are impenetrable—i.e. given that no body can *sink into* another, coming to share the other's space with it—it is necessary for God at the instant of collision to set himself to choose between the alternatives you have proposed. That is all; I simply overlooked it ·when answering your challenge·. You are far from proving that a moving

body is able, by means of something that belongs to it, to move another body that stands in its way. If God hasn't yet established laws for the communication of motions, the nature of bodies—their impenetrability—will oblige him to make laws that he judges to be appropriate; and he will opt for the laws that are simplest provided they suffice for the things he wants to make out of matter. But clearly impenetrability doesn't itself have any causal efficacy; it merely serves to provide God. . . with an *occasion* for varying his ·particular· actions without changing anything in his ·general principles of· conduct.

Still, I don't mind saying that a moving body is the true cause of motion in the bodies it collides with, for we needn't quibble over a word. But what is a body in motion? It is a body transported by divine action. If the action that transports it is applied to the body it collides with, it can transport that second body as well. Who doubts that? But this action—this moving force—doesn't belong to bodies at all. It is the efficacy of the will of ·God·, the one who is creating them—i.e. keeping them in existence—in a series of different places. Matter is essentially movable. By its nature, it has a passive capacity for motion (·it can *be moved*·). But it doesn't have an active capacity (·it can't *move* anything·); the only thing that moves any body is the continual action of the creator. Thus, one body can't move another through an efficacy that belongs to its nature. If bodies had the force of moving *in themselves*, the stronger would as •genuine causes overpower the others when they bumped into them. But bodies are moved only by something other than themselves, so their collision is merely an •occasional cause which, because of their impenetrability, obliges ·God·, the mover or creator, to spread his action ·out among several bodies·. And because God is bound to act in a simple and uniform way, he has had to make for himself the simplest possible

general laws, so that •when change is necessary he changes as little as was possible, and so that •through a single action he can produce an infinity of different effects. That is how I understand matters, Theotimus.

Theotimus: You understand them very well.

13. Theodore: *Perfectly* well. We agree on the principle. Let us follow it a little further. It follows, Aristes, that you by yourself can't raise your arm, move to a different chair, cross your legs, sit up straight, do harm or good to others, make the slightest change in the universe! Here you are in the world with no power, as immobile as a rock, as stupid as a log, so to speak. Your soul can be united to your body as closely as you please, and be attached through it to all the bodies surrounding you, but what good will this imaginary union do you? How can you stir yourself to move merely the end of your finger, to utter merely a one-syllable word? If God doesn't come to your aid, your efforts will be in vain; you will only form impotent desires. For, on a little reflection, do you really know *how* to go about pronouncing the name of your best friend, or bending the finger that you use most? Let us suppose this:

You know that our arms can be moved only by means of animal spirits flowing through the nerves to the muscles, contracting the muscles and pulling the attached bones towards them. (Not everyone knows this; indeed it is still a matter of dispute among the learned.) You also know the anatomy and the working of your machine as precisely as a clock maker knows his own work.

But •while equipped with all this knowledge (as we are supposing)•, remember the principle that bodies can be moved only by their creator. This principle is sufficient to tie down—why do I say 'tie down'? it is sufficient to *annihilate*

all your alleged faculties. For animal spirits are bodies, tiny though they are: they are just the most finely divided part of the blood and other bodily fluids. So only God can move them; only he can, and knows how to, make them flow from the brain into the nerves, from them to the muscles, and from one muscle to its opposing muscle—all of which is necessary for your limbs to move. Hence, notwithstanding a union of soul and body such as you like to imagine, you are still motionless and dead unless God chooses to align his volitions with yours, aligning •his always efficacious volitions to •your always impotent desires. There is the unravelling of the mystery, my dear Aristes. The only thing to which creatures are immediately united is God. They depend essentially and directly only on him. They do not depend on one another because they are all equally powerless. It is all right to say 'Created things are united among themselves' and even 'Created things depend on one another', as long as such statements are not understood according to the plain man's ideas, i.e. as long as we agree that this 'unity' or 'dependence' comes about only in consequence of the unchangeable and always efficacious volitions of the Creator. [Theodore repeats the main outlines of the account, Then:] In short, God wills unceasingly that the states of mind and of body be aligned. This constitutes the 'union' and 'natural dependence' of the two parts of which any man is composed. . . .I get nothing from my own nature, nothing from the imaginary 'nature' that the philosophers write about; everything comes from God and his decrees. God has joined all his works together, though he hasn't put into them any entities that tie them together. He has made some subordinate to others without giving efficacious qualities to any of them. Such qualities are vain inventions of human pride, fantasies produced by the ignorance of philosophers! Men have had their *senses* stirred when in the presence of bodies, and have been

internally affected by the way their own efforts *feel* to them; and through all this they haven't recognized the invisible operation of the creator—the •uniformity of his conduct, the •fertility of his laws, the •ever-present efficacy of his volitions, the •infinite wisdom of his ordinary providence. My dear Aristes, please don't go on saying that your soul is united to your body more closely than to anything else! All it is united to immediately is *God*, and his decrees are the unbreakable links among the parts of the universe—including the link between your soul and your body. . . .

14. Aristes: Ah, Theodore! Your principles are so clear, so sound, so Christian! And at the same time so attractive and moving! I am entirely filled with them. So! God is himself present in our midst, not as a mere spectator and observer of our actions, good or bad, but as •the ultimate force that gives us social relations with one another, •the link of our friendship, •the soul, so to speak, of our dealings and conversations with one another. I can speak to you only through the efficacy of his power; I can affect or move you only through the motion that he puts into me. I don't even know how my vocal organs need to be disposed if I am to speak to you smoothly as I am now doing. The working of these organs is beyond me. The variety of words, tones, cadences yields seemingly infinite detail. God knows this detail: he alone governs what happens in it at the moment I have a desire. Yes, it is he who exhales the air which he first made me breathe in. [He continues with further details along the same lines, emphasizing God's role in (a) linking Aristes' volitions to the movements of his body, and (b) linking those movements to the sensory intake of Theodore and Theotimus. Then:] All of this depends on the two principles of which I am convinced: that only •God•, the creator of bodies, can be their mover, and that God communicates his power to

us only through the establishment of certain general laws whose applications are determined by our various states. Oh, Theodore! Oh, Theotimus! God alone is the bond of our •three-man• society. Since he is its driving force, let him also be its goal. Let us not misuse his power. May misfortune fall on those who make God's power serve their criminal passions. Nothing is more sacred than power; nothing more divine; so it is a sort of sacrilege to put it to non-religious uses. I now understand this: it would be to put the just avenger of crimes into the service of wickedness. By ourselves we can't •do anything. So we shouldn't, *by ourselves*, •will anything either. Since we can't act except through the efficacy of divine power, we shouldn't will anything that doesn't agree with divine law. Nothing is more evident than these truths.

Theodore: They are excellent conclusions.

15. Theotimus: They are marvellous principles for •morality. But let us return to •metaphysics. Our souls are not united to our bodies in the way the man in the street imagines. All they are united to immediately and directly is God. It is only through the efficacy of his action that we three are here together in this place. Indeed it's more than just *in this place*; the three of us are united here •not just spatially but• in belief, we are filled with the same truth, seemingly animated by a single mind, set alight by the same ardour. Following •the laws of the communication of motion, God •brings our bodies together; by following •the laws for the union of soul and body, he •gives us the same sensations. But how does it come about that •we are so united in mind, Aristes? Theodore utters certain words in your ears. This is just air struck by the vocal chords. God turns the air into words (so to speak), turns it into various sounds. He makes you hear the various sounds by way of states that he puts you into. •All that falls within the scope of the divine

activities we have just been talking about. But where do you get the *sense* of these words? What reveals to you and me the same *truths* that Theodore contemplates? If the air that God moves when Theodore speaks doesn't contain the •sounds that you hear, it certainly won't contain the •truths that you understand!

Aristes: I know what your point is, Theotimus. What enlightens all our intellects is our each being united to universal reason. I know more than you think! Theodore has already carried me to where you want to lead me. He convinced me that there is nothing visible—nothing that can act in the mind and be revealed to it—except the substance, the intelligible and efficacious substance, of reason. That's right: no created thing can be the immediate object of our knowledge. The only way we can see anything in the material world inhabited by our bodies is for our minds to walk attentively in another world, contemplating the beauties of an archetypal and intelligible world contained in •divine• reason. Just as our bodies live on the earth and feed on the various fruits it produces, our minds are nourished by the truths contained in the intelligible and unchangeable substance of •God•, the divine word. Because of the laws of the union of soul and body, the words Theodore utters in my ears tell me to attend to truths that he is uncovering in sovereign reason. This turns my mind in the same direction as his. I see what he sees because I look where he looks. And by words uttered in response to his, I converse with him and with him enjoy a good that is common to us all (and we achieve this although neither his utterances nor my own have any sense *in* them). For we are all essentially united to reason—united in such a way that without reason's help we can't enter into social relations with anyone.

Theotimus: I find your reply extremely surprising, Aristes. Given that you know all that you have just told me now, how could you reply to Theodore that we are united to our bodies more closely than to anything else?

Aristes: •I can't justify my reply, but I can explain why I gave it•: one says only what comes to one's mind, and abstract truths don't come to mind as naturally as things that we have been told all our lives. When I have meditated as much as you, Theotimus, I shall no longer speak in this mechanical way; I'll base my words on the replies of inner truth. Even *today* I understand—and shall *never* forget—that we are united immediately and directly only to God. •He has two ways of connecting us with other items•. It's •by the light of his wisdom that he makes us see the magnificence of his works, the model on which he forms them, the unchangeable artifice that controls their springs and motions; and it's •by the efficacy of his volitions that he unites us to our bodies and, through them, to the bodies in our environment.

16. Theodore: You could add •a third way that God has of connecting us to other items, namely• that it's •by the love that God has for himself that he communicates to us our unconquerable ardour for the good. But we'll talk about that another time. It is sufficient now for you to be fully—*fully*—convinced that the mind can't be united immediately and directly with anything except God; that we can have relations with creatures only through the power that the creator communicates to us in accordance with his laws; and that we can be joined together in society with him only by means of reason, which is consubstantial with him. [That last clause means that reason is God.] Once you accept this you'll see that it is of the utmost importance for us to try to get some knowledge of the attributes of this supreme being on whom we are so utterly dependent. For,

after all, he necessarily acts in us in accordance with his nature; so his way of acting should bear the character of his attributes. Not only should our duties be related to his perfections, but in our practical conduct we should steer by his conduct—that is, by the so-called ‘laws of nature’—so that we may in the right way go about carrying out our plans and find a combination of causes that will further them. Faith teaches us many truths about this by the short method of authority, and experience teaches us by proofs from sensation that are very pleasing and helpful. But none of this now gives us understanding; that must result from hard, focussed work. Anyway, since knowing and loving God is what we are made for, it’s clear that no occupation is preferable to meditation on his perfections, meditation that should fill us with love and govern how any rational creature goes about his business.

Aristes: I understand, Theodore, that the worship God requires of minds is a spiritual worship. It is for him to be known and to be loved, and it is for us to form judgments about him that are worthy of his attributes and to let every movement of our hearts be governed by his volitions. For God is a spirit, and wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. [Here ‘spirit’ translates *esprit*, which is usually translated by ‘mind’.] But I must confess I am terribly afraid of dishonouring the divine perfections by the judgments I make about them. Isn’t it better to honour them by silence and admiration, and to restrict our truth-search to truths that are less elevated and better suited to the capacity of our minds?

Theodore: What do you mean, Aristes? You aren’t thinking! [Theodore continues with a lengthy scolding, making such points as that you can’t love something about which you don’t know anything, and the assurance: ‘You won’t dishonour the divine perfections by making judgments unworthy of

them, provided you never judge them from your own case.’ He then says that they should now stop the conversation ‘until tomorrow at the usual time’.]

Aristes: Goodbye, Theodore. If you please, Theotimus, let’s all three meet at the appointed hour.

Theotimus: I am staying with Theodore, but I’ll return with him since you want me to. [At this point Aristes leaves.] Well, Theodore, how altered Aristes is! He pays attention, he has stopped joking, he is less preoccupied with conversational style; in short, he listens to reason and is sincerely submissive to it.

Theodore: True. But his careless old opinions cut across his path and introduce some confusion in his ideas. Reason and prejudice take turns in speaking from his mouth. Sometimes truth makes him speak, sometimes memory cuts in. But his imagination no longer dares to rebel. That indicates a good foundation and gives me every hope.

Theotimus: What would you expect, Theodore? Old opinions can’t be simply discarded like unwanted old clothes. It seems to me that you and I have been as Aristes is now. We aren’t born philosophers; we become philosophers. With Aristes we’ll have to go over the great principles incessantly, getting him to think of them so often that his mind will take possession of them and when he needs them they will come to his mind as a matter of course.

Theodore: That’s what I have been trying to do up to now. But it is an effort for him, for he loves the detail and the variety of thoughts. Please always stress to him the need to understand the principles fully, so as to calm down the liveliness of his mind; and please don’t forget to meditate on the topic of today’s discussion.

EIGHTH DIALOGUE

God and his attributes.

Theodore: Well then, Aristes, how do you feel? We must know what frame of mind you are in so that we can allow for it in what we have to say to you .

Aristes: I have gone over in my mind what you said to me so far, and I admit that I haven't been able to resist the evidentness of the proofs supporting your principles. But when I wanted to meditate on the topic of God's attributes, which you proposed for us, I found so many difficulties in it that I was blocked. I was going to tell you that the matter is too high-flown or too abstract for me. I couldn't get to it, and I couldn't get any grip on it.

Theodore: What! you don't want to say anything to us?

Aristes: It is because I haven't anything good to say, anything that satisfies me. I shall listen to the two of you, if you please.

Theodore: That doesn't please us at all. But since you don't wish to tell us what you thought, at least follow me and tell me your opinion of what has come to *my* mind.

Aristes: Willingly. But Theotimus?

Theodore: He will be the judge of any little differences that arise from the diversity of our ideas.

Theotimus: 'The judge'! What do you mean by that? It is for reason to preside over us and give final decisions.

Theodore: I mean, Theotimus, •that you will be a subordinate judge who depends on reason, and •that you are to pass judgment only according to the laws that reason prescribes to all three of us. Let us lose no time, please. Listen to what

we say to each other, compare that with the replies of inner truth, and on that basis warn and correct the one who goes astray. Come on, Aristes—follow me, and stop me only when I skip too lightly over difficult places.

1. By 'divinity' we all understand •the infinite, •being [or existence] without restriction, •[the] infinitely perfect being. [These are being offered as three ways of saying the same thing.] Now nothing finite can represent the infinite. So if we can •think of God then we •know that he exists. Don't be surprised if Aristes allows me this, Theotimus, for he agreed to it before you joined our conversations [second dialogue].

Aristes: Yes, Theotimus, I am convinced that nothing finite can have enough reality to represent the infinite—that when we see something finite ·it can't represent infinity to us, because· we can't discover in it an infinity that it doesn't contain. Yet I am certain I see the infinite. Hence, the infinite exists, because I see it and I can see it only in itself ·and not as represented by something finite·. As my mind is finite, my knowledge of the infinite is finite: I don't grasp infinity, I don't have the measure of it and I'm quite certain I shall never shall. ·The crux of my trouble seems to be this·: I don't merely find no end in what is infinite; I see that it doesn't have an end. In short, the perception I have of the infinite is limited; but the represented reality in which my mind gets lost (so to speak) has no limits. That is something that I can no longer doubt.

Theotimus: I don't doubt it either.

Theodore: Granting this, it is clear that as the word 'God' is only short-hand for 'the infinitely perfect being', it would be

a *contradiction* for us to be mistaken when we attribute to God only what we see clearly pertains to the infinitely perfect being. There is a supplementary reason for being confident about this. We never go wrong when we judge God's works solely on the basis of what we see clearly and distinctly in their ideas, because God modelled his works on these ideas (their archetypes), so that they must accurately represent their nature. Well, then, there is all the more reason why we shall never go wrong in attributing to God himself only what we see clearly and distinctly belongs to the infinitely perfect being—that is, what we discover not in an idea of God that is distinct from God but rather in God himself, in his substance. Let us then attribute to God or to the infinitely perfect being *all perfections*, however incomprehensible we find them to be, provided we are certain that what we are attributing *are* indeed

true perfections, true realities,
and *are not*
'attributes' that have a touch of nothingness about them, that are limited by imperfections or limitations similar to those of created things.

Take note of this.

2. God is the infinitely perfect being. So God is independent. Think of this, Aristes, and stop me only when I say something you don't see clearly to be a perfection and to belong to the infinitely perfect being. God is independent. So he is unchangeable.

Aristes: 'God is independent, so he is unchangeable'! Why unchangeable?

Theodore: Because there can't be an effect or change with no cause. Now God is independent of the efficacy of causes external to himself; so if a change occurred in him it would be *he* who caused it. Now, though God is the cause of, or

force behind, his volitions and decrees, he didn't at any time produce a change in himself. For his decrees, though perfectly free, are themselves eternal and unchangeable, as I have already told you [page 72]. God *has made* these decrees, or rather he *is unceasingly making them* on the basis of the eternal wisdom that is the unbreakable rule of his volitions. These decrees have infinite effects; they produce countless thousands of changes in the universe; but the decrees themselves are always the same. That is because the efficacy of these unchangeable decrees comes into action only by the circumstances of occasional causes. (They are sometimes called 'natural causes', but that label might encourage the dangerous assumption that there is a 'Nature' with its own causal efficacy, different from the will of God and from his omnipotence. So 'occasional cause' is better.)

Aristes: I don't understand all this very well. God is free and indifferent with respect to the movement of a certain body, for instance. [In this dialogue, 'indifferent' is used to mean something like 'not pushed in either direction'. If God is 'indifferent' with respect to whether my arm goes up, he is *absolutely open* to making it go up and *equally open* to letting it stay down.] If he is indifferent, he can produce that effect or not produce it. Assuming that the body in question *does move*, this effect is a consequence of God's decrees, I agree. But it is certain that God is able instead *not* to produce it. So he is able *not* to will to produce it. So God is not unchangeable, because he can change his will and not will tomorrow what he wills today.

Theodore: You are forgetting what I told you in our last discussion, Aristes [seventh dialogue, section 9]. God is free and indeed indifferent with regard to thousands upon thousands of effects. He can change his will in the sense that he is indifferent as between willing and not willing a certain effect.

But think: now that you are seated, can you be standing? You •can absolutely, but you •can't conditionally: •it is possible that at this moment Aristes should be standing, but •*given that he is sitting* he can't now be standing, for you can't be standing and seated at the same time. You must understand that there is in God no succession of thoughts and volitions—that by an eternal and unchangeable act he knows everything and wills whatever he chooses to will. God wills with perfect freedom and total indifference to create the world. He wills to make decrees and establish simple and general laws in order to govern it in a way that reflects his attributes. But once these decrees have been given, they can't be changed—not that they are absolutely necessary but they are conditionally necessary. Do take note of this: the reason they can't be revoked is simply that they do now exist, and that when God made them he knew so well what he was doing. He sometimes willed that something be the case for a limited period of time; but that doesn't mean that he changed his mind. On the contrary, his initial single act of the will specified the time for which the supposed state of affairs was to last. So God does not and cannot change his thoughts, his designs, his volitions. He is unchangeable: this is one of the perfections of his nature. And nonetheless he is perfectly free in everything he does outside •himself•. He can't change, because whatever he wills he wills not in a series of volitions but in a simple and invariable act. But he is able *not to* will it, because he wills *freely* what he does in fact will.

Aristes: I shall think about what you are telling me, Theodore. Let us go on. I believe that God is unchangeable. It appears evident to me that it is a perfection not to be subject to change. That is enough for me. Even if I couldn't reconcile God's unchangeability with his freedom, I believe

him to possess these two attributes since he is infinitely perfect.

3. Theotimus: Let me present you with a small problem, Theodore. You have just said that the efficacy of God's unchangeable decrees comes into action only by the circumstances of occasional causes, often called natural causes. Those were your words. But tell me, what now becomes of miracles? A collision, for example, is the occasional cause of motion's being communicated from the moving body to the other one; but won't God be able to suspend the effect of the general law of the communication of motion in a particular case? and hasn't he often suspended it?

Theodore: I shall answer this by addressing *you*, Aristes; for I see that Theotimus is asking me for further explanations that he thinks *you* need, because he's afraid you didn't get my thought. So, Aristes, when I say that God 'always' follows the general laws that he has prescribed, I mean 'always in the course of his ordinary and general providence'. I don't rule out miracles or effects that don't follow his general laws. But besides—and now I'm talking to you, Theotimus—when God performs a miracle and doesn't conform to the general laws that we know, I claim that either •he acts in accordance with *other* general laws that we don't know or •what he does then •is an exception to his laws, but• is a response at that time to circumstances that he had in view from all eternity. He had them in view in performing that simple, eternal, invariable act that contains both •the general laws of his ordinary providence and also •exceptions to those same laws. These circumstances •that call for an exception to some law• shouldn't be called 'occasional causes' in the sense we give that phrase when we say that a collision is the 'occasional cause' of a body's starting to move. In the latter case, God makes general laws to produce a uniform correlation between

his volitions and the occurrence of these circumstances of moving bodies etc.. It is not like that with the *exceptions* to the general laws. In those, God acts sometimes in one way and sometimes another, although always as required by the attributes of his that he values most at that time, so to speak. If at that time the demands of his justice matter more to him than the demands of his wisdom and all his other attributes, he will side with justice in making the exception. . . . But I am afraid that Aristes doesn't like our digressing in this way, Theotimus, so let us get back to our topic. . . . Well, then, God, or the infinitely perfect being, is independent and unchangeable. He is also omnipotent, eternal, necessary, immense. . .

Aristes: Hold on a moment! He is omnipotent, eternal, necessary—yes, the infinitely perfect being has those attributes. But why *immense*? What do you mean?

4. Theodore: I mean that the divine substance is everywhere, not only in the universe but infinitely beyond it. For God is not contained in his work; rather, his work is in him; it exists in his substance, which keeps it in existence by his all-powerful efficacy. It is in him that we exist. It is in him that we have movement and life, as the apostle says: 'In him we live, and move and have our being.' (*Acts 17:28*)

Aristes: But God isn't corporeal, so he *can't* be spread out everywhere.

Theodore: It is because he isn't corporeal that he *can* be everywhere. If he were corporeal he couldn't penetrate bodies—that is, occupy the very same space that they do—as he does. It is absolutely impossible for bodies to penetrate one another, for example by two one-foot boards coming to occupy the very same space, because it is a contradiction that two feet of extension should make only one. But the divine substance is not corporeal, so it is not

extended in space as bodies are—great in an elephant, small in a gnat! Wherever it is, it is there in its entirety, so to speak; and it is everywhere—or rather everything is in it, for the deepest and most intimate *place* that any created thing has is in the substance of the creator.

•Created extension is to •God's immensity what •time is to •eternity. All bodies are extended in the immensity of God, as all times follow other times in his eternity. God is *always* everything that he is, with no succession in time. He fills everything with his substance without being spatially extended. In his existence there is neither past nor future: everything is present, unchangeable, eternal. In his substance there is no large or small. Everything is simple, equal, infinite. God •created the world, but his volition to create it is not •past. God •will change the world, but the volition to change it is not •future. . . . In short, it is not true that God *has* existed or that he *will* exist; he simply *exists*. It *can* be said that God existed in time past, but he *was then* everything that he *will be* in time future. This is because his existence and his duration (if I may speak of him as having a duration) is in its entirety •in eternity and is in its entirety •in every moment that passes in his eternity. Similarly, God is not in part in the sky and in part on earth. He is entirely present in his immensity and entirely present in every spatially extended body in his immensity. He is—*all* of him is—present in each part of matter, even though there is no limit to how small those parts can be, because matter is divisible to infinity. Or, to put all this more exactly: it's not so much that God is in the world as that the world is in God or in his immensity; similarly, it's not so much that eternity is in time as that time is in eternity.

Aristes: It seems to me, Theodore, that you are explaining something obscure in terms of something else that is none

too clear! I'm not struck with the same sense of *evidentness* as I was in the days past.

5. Theodore: I don't claim to give you a clear understanding of God's immensity, Aristes, or of *how* he manages to be everywhere. I find this incomprehensible, as you do. But I do claim to give you *some* knowledge of God's immensity by comparing it with his eternity. You have agreed that God is eternal. I thought I could convince you that he was immense when I compared the eternity that you accept with the immensity that you don't.

Theotimus: What do you want Theodore to do? He compares divine matters with divine matters. That is the way to explain them, as far as it is possible. But you compare them with finite things, which is just the way to make a mistake, such as this:

Man's mind fills no space. Therefore the divine substance is not immense.

Bad inference!

There is more of created extension in a large space than in a small one. Therefore, if God were everywhere, there would be more of him in a giant than in a pygmy.

Another bad inference based on comparing the infinite with the finite. If you want to judge God's attributes, look to the infinite, the notion of the infinitely perfect being, as Theodore does; don't dwell on ideas of particular finite things. Theodore doesn't judge God's immensity by the idea of created bodies or minds. He knows that the divine substance doesn't have the imperfections and limitations that created things are bound to have. That is why he judges that God is everywhere, and is nowhere in the way that bodies are.

Aristes: What? God is there in his entirety so to speak, and also there, and there and there and there and there, and

everywhere else, and in spaces thought of as beyond the world? This is incomprehensible.

Theodore: Yes, God is in everything, or rather everything is in God; and the world, however large it is taken to be, can't equal him or provide any measure of him—e.g. by being a millionth as big as he is. This is indeed incomprehensible, I agree; but that is because the infinite is beyond us. Come on, Aristes! Isn't God here in your garden, in the sky, and in his entirety everywhere that he is? Would you go so far as to *deny* that God is everywhere?

Aristes: He's present everywhere by his operation. But...

Theodore: What?—'by his operation'? What sort of reality is God's operation as distinct from (and separate from) his substance? By God's 'operation' you don't mean the effect that he produces; for the effect is not an action but the upshot of an action. By God's 'operation' you seem to mean the act through which he operates. Now, if the act through which God produces or conserves this chair is here, certainly God is here himself; and if he is here he must be here in his entirety; and the same holds for all the other places where he operates.

Aristes: I think that God is in the world in the way you think your soul is in your body, Theodore. For I know you don't think the soul is spread out in all parts of the body. It is in the head because it reasons there. It is in arms and feet because it moves them. Similarly God is in the world because he conserves and governs it.

6. Theodore: That comparison is full of old opinions and obscurities. The soul is not *in* the body, nor is the body *in* the soul, though their states are correlated through the general laws of their union. Rather, both are *in* God, who is the true cause of that correlation. Minds are in divine reason, Aristes,

and bodies are in God's immensity; but neither of them can be in the other, for they have no *essential* relation to one another. It is only •through God that they have a necessary relation—this relation is established •from outside them both, and doesn't come from their own essences. Mind can think without body, but it can't know anything except in divine reason. Body can be extended without mind, but it can't be extended except in God's immensity. This is because the qualities of body have nothing in common with the qualities of mind; for body cannot think, and mind cannot be extended. But both participate in God, who gives them their reality and has it himself. For he possesses all the perfections that created things have, but none of their limitations. He knows, as •created• minds do; he is extended, as bodies are; but he has thought and extension in a totally different way from created things. Thus, God is everywhere in the world and beyond it; but the soul is nowhere in the body. The soul doesn't know *in the brain*, as you suppose. It knows only in God, though it has its knowledge only as a result of what happens in a certain portion of matter called 'brain'. And it doesn't move the limbs of its body by applying a force that belongs to its nature. It moves them only because he who is everywhere in his immensity uses his power to bring about what his creatures want in their powerless desires. So, Aristes, don't say that •God is in the •world that he governs as the •soul is in the •body that it animates. That comparison has *nothing* true in it: the soul can't be in the body nor can the body be in the soul; and anyway minds, not being able to *operate* in the bodies they animate, couldn't be spread out in them *by virtue of their operation*—in the way that, according to you, God is everywhere by virtue of his operation.

Aristes: What you are saying seems to be to me very difficult. I'll think about it. But meanwhile please tell me: Before the world existed and God operated in it, where was he?

7. Theodore: I ask *you* that, Aristes—you who hold that God is in the world only by his operation. . . No answer? Well, I tell you that before creating the world God was where he is now and where he would be if the world were annihilated. He was *in himself*. When I tell you that God is in the world and infinitely beyond it, you aren't getting my thought if you believe the world and the imaginary spaces •beyond it• are the place occupied by God's infinite substance. God is in the world only because the world is in God. For God is only in himself, only in his immensity. If he creates new spaces, he doesn't thereby acquire a space to be present in; he doesn't make himself even more immense! He is eternally and necessarily where these spaces are created, but unlike these spaces he is not 'there' in the sense of being *located there*.

Extension, Aristes, is a reality, and all realities exist in the infinite. •Bodies are extended, and •God is extended too, since he has all absolute realities (i.e. all perfections). But God is not extended *as* bodies are, because he doesn't have the limitations and imperfections of his creatures. •Here are three differences•:

God's substance does not have parts.

One part does not contain, as in bodies, the negation of another part.

The *place* of God's substance is simply his substance itself.

•Similarly on the other side of the body/mind divide. Created• minds have knowledge, and •God does too; but he doesn't think •or know• as they do. •Here are three differences•.

What God's knowledge is immediately knowledge *of* is himself.

In him there is no succession or variety of thoughts.

One of his thoughts doesn't, as in us, contain the negation of all others. His thoughts don't mutually exclude one another.

God is always one and always infinite, perfectly simple yet composed (so to speak) of all realities or all perfections. [•For a reason given in a note on page 14 above, the next bit could be read in either of two ways. This ambiguity, which runs all through the work without doing any obvious metaphysical damage, has generally been handled in the manner given in the first reading; but the second reading ought to be given a hearing, as it is here and in a few other places. •The mention of Moses is a reference to *Exodus* 3:13-14: 'Moses said unto God, . . . "They shall say to me, 'What is his name?' What shall I say unto them?" And God said unto Moses: "I AM THAT I AM." And he said: "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, 'I AM hath sent me unto you'."]]

first reading: This is because the true God is *the being*, not merely *a being of such and such a kind*, as he himself said to his servant Moses. . . . He is the unrestricted being, not a finite being which is, so to speak, a mixture of being and nothingness. You must attribute to the God whom we worship only what you conceive in the infinitely perfect being.

second reading: This is because the true God is *Being*, not merely *a being*, as he himself said to his servant Moses. . . . He is Being without restriction, not a finite being which is, so to speak, a mixture of being and nothingness. You must attribute to the God whom we worship only what you conceive in infinitely perfect Being.

Don't deny anything of him except what is finite, i.e. what involves nothingness. And though you don't understand

clearly everything I am telling you—and I don't either!—you will at least understand that God is as I am representing him to you. For you should know that to judge worthily of God, we *must* ascribe to him only attributes that are incomprehensible. This is evident, because •God is in every sense the infinite being, with nothing finite pertaining to him, and •whatever is infinite in every sense must be in every way incomprehensible to the human mind.

Aristes: [He accepts, apologizes, and laments that pagans and many Christians haven't had a proper view of God.]

8. Theotimus: You seem to be quite satisfied with what Theodore has just said to you, Aristes—that God's attributes are incomprehensible in every way. But I fear there is an equivocation in it. For it seems to me that we clearly conceive an immense limitless extension. The mind doesn't take in or get the measure of this extension, I agree; but it has clear knowledge of its nature and properties. Now, what is God's immensity if not an infinite intelligible extension

by which God is everywhere, and
in which we see spaces that have no limits?

So it isn't true that God's immensity is in every sense incomprehensible to the human mind, since we know *intelligible extension* most clearly—so clearly that in it and through it geometers discover all their demonstrations.

Aristes: It seems to me you don't quite grasp Theodore's thought, Theotimus. But I haven't meditated enough on the matter, and I can't give you an explanation of something that I only glimpse. Please answer for me, Theodore.

Theodore: What, Theotimus! Are you muddling God's immensity with intelligible extension? Don't you see that these two things are infinitely different from one another? God's immensity is his substance itself—•spread out everywhere,

•in its entirety everywhere, •filling all places yet without local extension. [For God to have ‘local extension’ is for him to be •spread out through the whole of space, occupying it in the way that sticks and stones occupy parts of it (with the difference that God would penetrate the sticks and stones etc., occupying places that they *also* occupied). Theodore’s alternative to this is God’s being •wholly in the whole of space and wholly in each part of it; which he might have compared with an instant of time’s being present in the whole of space and in each part of it.] *That* is what I claim to be utterly incomprehensible. But intelligible extension is merely God’s substance considered as representing bodies, and as something in which bodies—with all their limitations and imperfections—can participate. . . . No finite mind can comprehend God’s immensity, or any of the other attributes. . . .of God. These are always infinite in every sense, always divine and consequently always incomprehensible. But nothing is clearer than intelligible extension. Nothing is more intelligible than the ideas of bodies, since it is by those ideas that we know quite distinctly (not the nature of •God, but) the nature of •matter. To be sure, Theotimus, if you judge God’s immensity by the idea of extension, you will think God to be extended in the way that bodies are. Make that extension infinite—as immense as you please—you won’t exclude from it the imperfections that the idea represents. God’s substance (•on this view of it) won’t be *in its entirety* everywhere that it is. [Theodore continues with a stern warning against thinking that one can have clear ideas of God’s attributes. Summing up:] All the absolute attributes of the Deity are incomprehensible to the human mind, though it can comprehend clearly •what there is in God relative to creatures, by which I mean •intelligible ideas of all possible creations.

Theotimus: I see I was mistaken, Theodore, in confounding infinite intelligible extension with God’s immensity. . . . Still, I

knew quite well that an infinite corporeal extension. . . .would still have nothing divine about it. For God is not the being that is infinite *in extension*; he is the being that is infinite *period*. The being that isn’t restricted in any way. Now, what is infinite has the property, which (as I have often heard you say) is incomprehensible to the human mind, of being at the same time *one thing and all things*, composed (as it were) of an infinity of perfections yet so simple that each of its perfections contains all the others without any real distinction. Certainly this property is further from fitting the material universe and its parts than it is from fitting the substance of the soul; for although the soul isn’t composed of *parts*, it can be in several different *states* at the same time—a faint sketch of the simplicity and universality of God.

Theodore: You are right, Theotimus. There is no substance more imperfect, more unlike God, than matter, even infinite matter. Matter corresponds •perfectly to intelligible extension, which is its archetype; but it corresponds •most imperfectly to the divine immensity, and it corresponds •not at all to the other attributes of the infinitely perfect being.

9. Aristes: What you are saying now makes me understand that •Spinoza•, our irreligious contemporary who made the universe his God, really didn’t have a God. He was a real atheist. But I can’t help thinking that plenty of good men have quite unworthy opinions about God, which they could have avoided by a little philosophizing. Their God isn’t identical with the universe; he is its creator—and that’s pretty well everything they know about him. That would be quite good if only they *stopped* there, rather than •blundering on and• corrupting the notion of the infinite. But •they *do* go on, and• construct an •idea of the •incomprehensible being—I’m sorry for them when I think of it! Theotimus was quite right

in saying to me that men naturally *humanize* everything. It would be pardonable if they were only incarnating God (so to speak) by investing him with their own qualities; but some of them go much further than that, and strip God of all incomprehensible attributes and all characteristics that are essential to an infinitely perfect being. Or all but one, the exception being *power*; but they get this wrong too, for they share power out between God and what they call 'Nature' in such a way that, although they leave most of it to God, they don't let him *use* it.

Theotimus: That is for fear of bothering God with trivial matters, with actions unworthy of his attention and of his greatness. For we naturally believe that God should be content with our thinking of him as being such as *we* would like to be. Man is at all times shot through with his inner sense of what is happening in his mind and in his heart. He can't avoid having a confused sense both of what he is and of what he wishes to be. So he finds it quite natural to *spread* himself onto the objects of his knowledge and to apply human standards in estimating not just everything in his environment but also, even, to the infinite substance of God. It is true that the notion of *infinitely perfect being* is deeply engraved on our minds. We are never without a thought of *being*. But, far from grasping this vast and immense notion of *unrestricted being* so as to estimate by *its* standards the God who unceasingly presents himself to us, we consider this immense notion as a mere fiction of our minds. That is because *being in general* doesn't strike our senses, and we judge the solidity and reality of objects by how forcibly they push us around.

Aristes: I do understand all this, Theotimus. It is just what Theodore was telling me a week ago. My mind can't get a grip on the abstract ideas you present me with; they don't affect

me through my senses; but I don't take that to show that they are mere phantoms. I believe they are sublime truths that a person can't reach unless he silences his imagination and his senses, raising himself above himself. I have resolved that from now on I will no longer judge God from my own case, or by ideas representing created things, but exclusively by the notion of *the infinitely perfect being*. Please continue to question and instruct me, Theodor

10. Theodore: Very well, let us proceed. You believe that God is good, wise, just, merciful, forbearing, strict.

Aristes: Not so fast. I mistrust these ordinary-language terms. I believe God is wise, good, just, mild, and that he has all the other qualities that scripture attributes to him. But I don't know whether everyone who utters these words has the same thoughts. The infinitely perfect being is •good, •just, •merciful! I find this obscure. Define these terms for me. [The three will be discussed in sections •11–12 and •13–14 and •15 respectively.]

Theodore: Oho, Aristes! You are afraid of being ambushed! You do well. When we philosophize about sublime and delicate matters, we should beware of unclarities and ambiguities, and ordinary-language terms are not the most free from such troubles! We ought to define these terms, then, but that is not so easy. Before we get into it, we may be helped by this question: Do you think that God knows and that he wills?

Aristes: As to that, yes. I haven't the least doubt that God knows and wills.

Theodore: How do you come to be so sure of that? Is it because *you* know and will?

Aristes: No, Theodore. It is because I know that knowing and willing are perfections. I'm not modelling God on myself,

for although I sense and suffer and doubt, I am certain that God doesn't sense or doubt. And when I say that God knows and wills, I don't claim that he does these in the way men do. I say only in general that God wills and knows, and I leave it to you and Theotimus to explain *how* he does so.

Theodore: What? *How* he does so? All God's ways of doing things—the *how* of them—are incomprehensible. We don't even know how *we* know or how *we* will; for, having no clear idea of our souls, we can't clearly comprehend anything in our states. So there is all the more reason why we won't explain to you exactly *how* God knows or *how* he wills. Nevertheless, consult the notion of the infinitely perfect being. See if I am following it. For I tell you boldly that God is a light unto himself. He finds in his substance the essences of all things and all their possible states, and finds in his decrees the existence of all things and all their actual states.

Aristes: It seems to me that you aren't risking much in what you 'boldly' say.

·WISE·

11. Theodore: I don't claim that I am. But, since you accept this principle, let us draw some conclusions from it. So all truths are in God, because no truth escapes the knowledge of an infinitely perfect being. And everything that God knows he knows *in himself*. So his substance contains all truths, that is, all intelligible relations (truths are simply real relations, and falsehoods imaginary ones). So not only is God wise but he is wisdom, not only is he knowing but he is knowledge, not only is he enlightened but he is the light that enlightens him to himself and indeed to every intellect. For it is in *his* light that you see what I see, and that he himself sees what you and I both see. I see that all the diameters of a circle are equal. I'm certain that God himself sees this and that all minds do or can see it. Yes, I am certain that

God sees precisely the same thing that I see, the same truth, the same relation that I perceive now between 2-plus-2 and 4. Yet God sees nothing except in his substance. Hence, the very truth that I see is a truth that I see in him. You know all this, Aristes, and you have already agreed to it. But these principles slip out of our minds so easily, yet are of such great importance, that it is time well spent to recall them to mind and make ourselves familiar with them.

Aristes: This is then one of the great differences between God's way of knowing and ours. God knows all things in himself, whereas we know nothing in ourselves: we know nothing except in a substance that isn't ours. God is wise through his own wisdom, but we become wise only through the union that we have with him, that is, with wisdom eternal, unchangeable, necessary, common to all intellects. For clearly minds as limited as ours can't find in their own substance the ideas or archetypes of all possible beings and their infinite relations. Anyway, I am certain that men, angels, and indeed God see the same truths that I see—so certain that I can't doubt that same light enlightens every mind.

12. Theotimus: To be sure, Aristes, if God sees precisely what we see when we think that twice two makes four, it is *in him* that we see this truth; for God sees it only *in his wisdom*. As for his seeing that we are now thinking of it—even *that* is something that he sees only in his decrees and in his eternity, i.e. he sees it in his eternal decree *that* we should think this at this time, and not in an observation of our present state, for he doesn't derive his knowledge from what is now going on in his creatures. But mightn't it be said that what minds see are not the same truths but similar truths? God sees that twice 2 makes 4. You see it, I see it. That's three similar truths rather than one unique truth.

Aristes: It's three similar perceptions of one and the same truth, but why three similar truths? And who has told you that they are similar? Have you compared your ideas with mine and with God's to see the resemblance clearly? Who told you that tomorrow, that time without end, you will see as you do today that twice 2 makes 4? Who told you that even God can't make minds capable of seeing clearly that twice two *doesn't* make 4? Surely it is because you see the same truth that I see, but by a perception that isn't mine though perhaps it is similar to mine. You see a truth that is common to all minds, seeing it by a perception that is yours alone, because our perceptions, our sensations, all our states are special to ourselves. You see a truth that is unchangeable, necessary, eternal. For you are so certain of the unchangeability of your ideas that you aren't afraid that tomorrow you will find them all to have changed. Just as you know that they exist·ed· prior to you, so you are well assured that they will ·exist after you, and indeed will never go out of existence. Now, if your ideas are eternal and unchangeable, it is evident that they can exist only in the eternal and unchangeable substance of God. [He goes on a little about this. Theotimus replies politely. Then:]

Theodore: We all agree, then, ·on these three things·. (1) God is infinitely wise, and is so essentially and through himself, by the necessity of his being. (2) Men can be wise only by the light of divine wisdom. (3) This light is communicated to them as a result of their *attending*; this is the occasional cause that brings into play the general laws of the union of men's minds with universal reason (as we shall soon see). Now let us prove that God is just.

·JUST·

13. In the simplicity of his being, God contains the ideas of all things and their infinite relations—that is, every truth.

Now we can distinguish in God two kinds of truths or relations:

- relations of magnitude; these are speculative truths whose evidentness calls only for *judgments*, and
- relations of perfection; these are practical truths, which arouse ·not only judgments but· also *movements*.

(·Although I lay those out as separate categories, they can be mixed, because· relations of perfection can be expressed in terms of relations of magnitude, and indeed it is only when expressed in that way that they can be clearly known. But we needn't linger on that point here.) 'Twice two makes four' is a relation of equality in •magnitude; it is a speculative truth that doesn't arouse any movement in the soul—whether love or hate, esteem or contempt, etc. 'A man is more valuable than a lower animal' is a relation of inequality in •perfection, which demands not only (·judgment·) that the mind assent to it but also (·movement·) that knowledge of this relation or truth make a difference to love and esteem. Pay attention then. God contains in himself all the relations of perfection. Now, he knows and loves everything that he contains in the simplicity of his being. So he esteems and loves all things to the extent to that they are worthy of love and esteem. He unconquerably loves the unchangeable *order*, which does and must consist only in the relations of perfection that hold among his attributes and among the ideas that he contains in his substance. He is therefore *just* essentially and of himself. He cannot sin because nothing can quell his love for himself, and so he cannot *not* do justice to his divine perfections, to everything he is, to everything he contains. He can't even will positively and directly to produce some disorder in his work, because he esteems all created things in proportion to the perfection *in their archetypes*. For example, •he cannot without a reason will that the mind be subject to

the body; and •if this does happens that is because man is not now such as God made him. •He cannot prefer injustice; and •if it exists that is because the uniformity of his conduct shouldn't depend on irregularity in ours. The time of his vengeance will come. •He cannot will anything that would corrupt his work; and •if there exist monsters [see note low on page 51] that disfigure it that is because his attributes are more honoured by the simplicity and generality of his ways than •they would have been• by his excluding the defects that he does in fact permit in the universe. . . . Thus, God is just in himself, just in his ways, just essentially, because all his volitions necessarily conform to the unchangeable order of justice that he owes to himself and to his divine perfections.

But man is *not* just in himself. For the unchangeable order of justice, which contains all relations of perfection among all possible beings and all their qualities, exists only in God and not at all in our own states; and accordingly, if man were to love himself by a movement •of the heart• of which *he himself* was the cause, this self-love, far from being able to make him just, would corrupt him infinitely more than the self-love of the wickedest of men. [Theodore means: if the situation were that •human beings looked *always and only* into themselves for guidance of their thoughts and feelings, each of them would be worse than the wickedest people are in the situation that in fact obtains—i.e. the situation in which •the pipeline to God isn't completely blocked.] For there has never been a soul so black, and possessed of a self-love so disordered, that the beauty of the unchangeable order couldn't move it on certain occasions. So we are perfectly just only when we see in God what he sees there himself, and accordingly judge as he does, and esteem and love what he loves and esteems. Thus, far from being just *in ourselves*, we shan't be perfectly just until we are freed from these bodies of ours that disturb all our

ideas. When that happens we shall see, without any shadowy parts, the eternal law on the basis of which we shall govern every judgment that we make and every movement of our hearts. Charitable people •who still have their bodies• can be said to be truly just, though they often form very unjust judgments. They are *just in the movements of their hearts*. But they aren't strictly and unqualifiedly *just*, because they don't know exactly all the relations of perfection that ought to determine their esteem and their love.

14. Aristes: I understand (because you told me, Theodore) that justice and truth both reside eternally in an unchangeable nature. The •distinction between• just and unjust, as well as •that between• true and false, are *not* inventions of the human mind, as certain people with corrupt minds have claimed. [The target here is presumably Hobbes.] They have maintained this:

Men have made for themselves laws for their survival, basing them on self-interest. They agreed on these laws among themselves, and *that*—•their *agreement*—is why they were obliged to obey them. Someone who breaks the agreement, being weaker than the other parties to it, finds himself among enemies who satisfy their self-interest by punishing him. So he ought out of self-interest to observe the laws of the country he lives in, not because they are *just* in themselves but because obedience to them frees a person from fear of those who are stronger. (•As for the laws' being just in themselves, we can see that they aren't•, because laws in other countries are totally different.) Everything is permissible by nature to all men. Each individual has a right to everything, and if I yield my right it is because the force of competitors obliges me to. Thus, self-interest is the rule of my actions. My law is an

external power; and if I were the strongest I would naturally regain all my rights.

Can anything more beastly and mindless be asserted? The lion's strength is what gives it control over other beasts, and I admit men often *do* use force to grab control over others. But to believe that this is *permissible* and that the stronger have the *right* to anything and aren't committing any injustice—if they take it—that is surely to take one's place among the lower animals. Yes, Theodore, I agree that the unchangeable order of justice is a law that even God doesn't ever dispense with, a law by which every mind should regulate its conduct. God is *just* essentially and by the necessity of his being. But let us see whether he is good, merciful, forbearing; for it seems to me that all this can hardly be reconciled with the strictness of his justice.

·MERCIFUL·

15. Theodore: You are right, Aristes. God isn't good or merciful or forbearing according to the plain man's ideas. These attributes as ordinarily conceived are unworthy of the infinitely perfect being. Yet *God possesses these qualities* is true, in the sense that reason teaches us this and scripture (which can't contradict itself) makes us believe it. To explain all this more clearly, let us see first whether God is *essentially just* in the sense that he necessarily rewards good works and strictly punishes everyone who offends him or (so to speak) injures his attributes.

Aristes: I can conceive, Theodore, that, if creatures are capable of offending God, he won't fail to avenge himself—he who loves himself by the necessity of his being. But what seems to me *not* to be conceivable is that God is ever offended. And if it *were* possible, as he loves himself necessarily, he would never have given existence—or at any rate that freedom or power—to creatures capable of resisting him.

Isn't that evident?

Theodore: You present me with a difficulty that will soon be explained, Aristes. Follow me please, without getting ahead of me. Isn't it clear from what I was just telling you that unchangeable order is the law of God, the inviolable rule of his volitions, and that he can't help loving things in proportion to how lovable they are?

Aristes: That is what you have just demonstrated.

Theodore: Then God can't will that his creatures not love in accordance with the same unchangeable order. He can't exempt them from following this law. He can't will for us to have more love for what merits less. But you hesitate! Doesn't this seem certain to you?

Aristes: I find some difficulty in it. A kind of inner feeling convinces me that God can't will that we love or esteem anything more than it deserves; but I do not see this quite clearly. For what do our love and our esteem matter to God? They don't matter at all. *We* may want others to esteem and love *us* because we all need one another. But God doesn't need us. He is so utterly *above* his creatures that one would think he takes no interest in our judgments regarding him and his works. That has at least some likelihood.

Theodore: It has all too much likelihood for minds that are corrupt! It is true, Aristes, that God doesn't fear or hope for anything from our judgments. He doesn't depend on anything; he is abundantly self-sufficient. Yet he necessarily takes an interest in our judgments and in the movements of our hearts. Here is proof of that. The only thing that gives minds a will, or makes them capable of willing or loving, is a natural and irresistible movement that God continually impresses on them—a movement toward the good. Now, God acts in us only because he wants to act; and he can want

to act only through his will, only through the love he has for himself and for his divine perfections. And, as I have just shown you, the order of these divine perfections is what properly constitutes his law, since he is *just* essentially and by the necessity of his being. So he can't will that •our love, which is simply the effect of •his own, be contrary to his, tending in a different direction from his. He can't will that we have a greater love for what is less worthy of love. He wills necessarily that the unchangeable order that is his natural law should also be ours. He can't exempt himself from it or exempt us. And, since he has made us such that we can either follow or not follow that natural and indispensable law, we must be such that we can be either punished or rewarded. Yes, Aristes, if we are free, it follows that we can be happy or unhappy; and if we are capable of happiness and of unhappiness, that shows for sure that we are free. Suppose some man's heart is disordered by his bad use of his freedom—how does that relate to the order of justice that God owes to his divine perfections? The answer is that it conforms to that order if •but only if• this sinner is unhappy in proportion to his disorders. Now God's love of order cannot be quelled; so he punishes without exception whoever does injury to it. This is not because the sinner 'offends' God in the sense that one man 'offends' another, nor is it because God punishes him because he enjoys getting vengeance. Rather, God cannot *not* act in accordance with his nature. . . . Thus, God is not indifferent with regard to the punishment of our disorders. He is neither forbearing nor merciful nor good according to the plain man's ideas, since he is *just* essentially and by a natural and necessary love that he has for his divine perfections. He can *defer* a reward or penalty as is required or permitted by the order of his providence, . . .but he must at *some* time deal with men

according to their deeds. God is good to the good and, so to speak, bad to the bad, as scripture says: 'With the pure you will show yourself pure; and with the froward [= 'perverse'] you will show yourself froward' (*Psalms* 18:26) He is forbearing and merciful, but that is in his son and *through* his son: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have life everlasting' (*John* 3:16). He is good to sinners in this sense:

Through Jesus Christ he gives them the grace they need for changing the wicked dispositions of their hearts so that they may cease being sinners and do good deeds; and once they have become good and just, he can •be good to them, •pardon their sins in view of the debt-payment by Jesus Christ, and •crown their merits—merits that are really gifts from him, because they were acquired through the good use of his grace.

But God is always strict, always follows exactly the eternal laws, always acts according to his nature. . . . All this is in conformity with scripture, Aristes, as well as with the notion that all men have of the infinitely perfect being, though it doesn't at all fit the crude ideas of stupid and hardened sinners who want •a God who is in a human way meek and indulgent or •a God who doesn't intervene in our affairs and doesn't care what sort of life we lead.

Aristes: I don't think these truths can be doubted.

Theodore: Think about them, so that you will remain convinced, Aristes, not just by •a kind of inner feeling with which God inwardly persuades everyone whose heart is not hardened and entirely corrupt, but also by •an evidentness that will put you in a position to *demonstrate* it to those rare geniuses who think they have found in self-interest the true source of natural morality.

NINTH DIALOGUE

God always acts according to his nature. Everything he has done is for his glory in Jesus Christ, and he has not formed his plans without considering how to carry them out.

1. Theodore: What do you think today of what was said yesterday, Aristes? Have you really contemplated the notion of the infinite, of being without restriction, of [the] infinitely perfect being? Can you now contemplate it entirely *in itself*, not clothed in the ideas of creatures, not made flesh (as it were), not limited, not degraded so as to fit the weakness of the human mind?

Aristes: Oh, Theodore, how hard it is to separate the ideas of •this or that particular being from the notion of •*being*! How hard it is to avoid attributing to God anything that we are aware of in ourselves! At every moment we *humanize* the deity, and routinely limit the infinite. It is because the mind •wants to comprehend the incomprehensible, •wants to see the invisible God. It looks for him in the ideas of creatures, not going beyond its own sensations, which affect it and pervade it. But how far all this is from representing the deity! And those who judge the divine perfections by what they feel to be going on in themselves—what strange judgments they make concerning God’s attributes and his wonderful providence! I have a glimpse of the things that I am telling you, but I don’t yet see them well enough to *understand* them.

Theodore: You have been meditating, Aristes. I can tell from your answer. You understand that if we are to form sound judgments regarding the divine attributes and the rules of providence, we must never relax in our separation of the ideas of •particular beings from the notion of •*being*, and we must never consult our own inner feelings or sensations.

That’s all that is needed. Let us move on, and be on guard—all three of us—against running aground on that dangerous reef of judging the infinite by something finite.

Aristes: We surely *will* strike that reef, Theodore, for all the currents run that way! I have had experience of that since yesterday.

Theodore: I believe we will, Aristes, but perhaps we’ll avoid being wrecked by it. Let us, at least, not run onto it through •inattention as most people do. I hope that by our concerted •vigilance we will avoid a good many of the dangerous errors into which people rush blindly. Let us not indulge our natural laziness, Aristes. Have courage! Our common master, the author of •our faith, will give us some understanding of •it if we know how to question him with the serious attention, and with the respect and submission, that we owe to his word and to the infallible authority of his church. Let us begin then.

2. You agreed yesterday, Aristes, that God knows and wills—not because *we* know and will, but because knowing and willing are true perfections. What do you think of that now? I plan today to consider God through a consideration of what he *does*—his going outside himself, so to speak, and undertaking to spread himself around in the production of his creatures. So we have to be sure that God does know and will, because if he doesn’t, we can’t see that he could possibly produce anything. For how could he act wisely without knowledge? How could he make the universe without willing to do so? Do you believe then, Aristes, that God who is

sufficient unto himself is capable of forming desires?

Aristes: When you question me in that way, you always cause me to develop new doubts. I'm well aware that you do this for my own good, not wanting to leave unblocked any possible refuge for old opinions. Very well then, Theodore, I shall play along. I have no doubt at all that God knows, but I do doubt that he can ever will anything. For what could he will—he who is fully sufficient unto himself? Willing is something that *we* do, but this is a mark of our poverty: not having what we need, we desire it. But the infinitely perfect being can't will anything, can't desire anything, since he sees that he doesn't lack anything.

Theodore: Oh my, Aristes! You surprise me. *God can't will anything?* But can the infinitely perfect being have created us in spite of himself or without having willed it? We exist, Aristes. This is an established fact.

Aristes: Yes, we *exist*, but we weren't *made*. Our nature is eternal. We are something that necessarily arises out of the deity. We are part of him. The infinitely perfect being is the universe—it is the totality of everything there is.

Theodore: Oh, come on!

Aristes: Don't think that I am impious or crazy enough to *accept* these fantasies. But I would be glad to have you teach me how to refute them, for I have heard there are minds corrupt enough to let themselves be taken in by them.

Theodore: I don't know whether everything we now hear about certain people is true, Aristes, or even whether those ancient philosophers who dreamed up the opinion you are expounding ever believed it to be true. Although there are few extravagances that men are not capable of, I would like to think that the men who produce fantasies like *that* can hardly believe them. The author [Spinoza] who revived this

impiety agreed that God is the infinitely perfect being, so how *could* he have believed that every creature is simply a part or a state of God? Is it a perfection to be unjust in one's parts, unhappy in one's states, ignorant, foolish, impious? There are more sinners than good men, more idolaters than faithful people; what disorder, what strife between God and his parts! What a monster, Aristes! What a frightful and ridiculous chimera! A God necessarily hated, blasphemed, scorned, or at least unknown by most of his parts—for how many people would recognize such a deity? A God who is necessarily wretched or non-sentient in most of his parts or states, a God who punishes or wreaks vengeance on himself! In short, a being who is infinitely perfect yet composed of all the disorders in the universe. What notion is more filled with obvious contradictions than this one? To be sure, if there *are* people capable of making for themselves a God from such a monstrous idea, it is either because they don't want to have a God at all or because they have minds born to look for the properties of triangles in the idea of a circle! Believe me, Aristes, no man of good sense has ever been convinced of this madness, though several persons have propounded it *as though* they were convinced of it. For a twisted sense of self-importance might provide someone with motives for confiding such a view to his companions in debauchery and for wanting to appear quite convinced of it. But no-one could possibly *believe* it to be true, however bad he is at reasoning and however unafraid he is of being mistaken. Someone who puts it forward can't be inwardly persuaded of it—unless the corruption of his heart has so blinded him that it would be a waste of time trying to enlighten him. So let us return to our subject, Aristes.

3. We exist. This is an established fact. God is infinitely perfect. Hence, we depend on him. We don't exist *against* his will. We exist only because he wills that we exist. But

how can God will that we exist when he has no *need* of us? A being who lacks nothing, a being who is fully self-sufficient—how can such a being will something? This is what gives rise to the difficulty. [The verb *vouloir*, mostly translated here by ‘will’, can also more plainly mean ‘want’. So Theodore can be asking: How can a being who lacks nothing *want* something?]

Aristes: It seems to me easy to remove the difficulty. We need only say that God created the world not for himself but for us.

Theodore: But what about us? For whom did he create us?

Aristes: For himself.

Theodore: Then the difficulty is back. For God has no need of us.

Aristes: Let us say then, Theodore, that God made us from sheer goodness, from sheer love for us.

Theodore: Let us *not* say that, Aristes, at least without explanation. For it appears evident to me that

- the infinitely perfect being loves himself infinitely, loves himself necessarily, that
- his will is simply the love he has for himself and his divine perfections, that
- his love cannot be moved from outside him (as ours is from outside us),

and that therefore

- his love cannot lead him to anything outside himself; because he is the sole cause of what he does he must also be its end, what it aims at.

In short, any love in God other than self-love would be disordered, contrary to the unchangeable order that is contained in him and is the inviolable law of his volitions. We can say that God made us ‘from sheer goodness’ in the sense that he made us without being in need of us. But he made us *for*

himself. For God can will only through his own will, which is simply his love for himself. The reason, the motive, the end of his decrees can be only in him.

Aristes: Your reasons appear evident to me, but I’m finding it hard to *accept* them.

Theotimus [intervening for the first time in this dialogue]: Don’t you see, Aristes, that to look for the motive and the end of God’s actions outside him is to *humanize* him? But if this thought of making God act simply from sheer goodness toward men attracts you so strongly, I’ll give you another argument. If God created men out of love for men, why do the damned outnumber the saved twenty to one—a *hundred* to one?

Aristes: Because of the first man’s sin.

Theotimus: Yes. But wouldn’t God prevent a sin that is so fatal to creatures whom he has made ‘from sheer goodness’?

Aristes: He had his reasons.

Theotimus: Then God has in himself good reasons for everything he does, reasons that don’t always square with a certain idea of goodness and charity—an idea that gratifies our self-importance but is contrary to divine law—contrary to the unchangeable order that contains every good reason God can have.

Aristes: But God is sufficient unto himself, Theotimus, so why did he form his plan of creating the world?

Theotimus: God has his reasons, his end, and his motive all in himself. Before he made his decrees, what other than himself *could* there have been that determined him to form them? He is self-sufficient; so it was with a complete freedom that he determined *himself* to create the world. If God *needed* his creatures, he would *necessarily* produce them, because nothing can quell his self-love. Yes, Aristes,

all we can legitimately infer from God's self-sufficiency is that the world is *not* a necessary emanation of the deity—and that's what our faith teaches us also. But to suppose that the richness of God's nature might render him *powerless*—by the argument that because God doesn't •need anything he can't •will anything, and so can't •do anything—is to go against an incontrovertible fact and to deprive the creator of the glory that his creatures will eternally offer him.

4. Aristes: How can that be, Theotimus? Did God create the world because of the glory that he would derive from it? If *that* was the motive that determined the creator, then there is •after all• something outside God that determines him to act. How does it happen that God does without such glory for an eternity—the eternity before he created the world? Anyway, *glory*—what do you mean by that word? Really, Theotimus, you are entering a maze that you'll have trouble getting out of.

Theotimus: A maze indeed. But fortunately Theodore knows his way through it, and won't leave me stranded. [Theodore indicates a willingness to help Theotimus out.]

Aristes: *What, Theodore? God made the universe for his glory*—you approve a thought so human and so unworthy of the infinitely perfect being? Take over from Theotimus if you please. Let us have an explanation.

Theodore: This is where we need to be very attentive and vigilant if we are not to end up on that reef that you know about, Aristes. Watch out that I don't run us onto it. When an architect has constructed a building that is functional and well designed, he is inwardly gratified by it because his work bears witness to his skill in his art. [Here and throughout, 'work' refers to the product, not to the action of making it. This will be important in section 10 of this dialogue and section 7 of

the tenth.] Thus, the beauty of his work can be said to do him honour since it testifies to the qualities that he prides himself on, qualities that he esteems and loves and is glad to possess. And if someone happens to stop to contemplate the building and admire its arrangement and its proportions, the architect derives a further glory from this, one that is also based mainly on the love and esteem that he has for qualities that he possesses and would be glad to have in a higher degree. For if he believed that the profession of architect was unworthy of him, if he attached no value to this art (or science), his work would cease to be an honour to him, and he would be embarrassed by people's praise for his work.

Aristes: Be careful, Theodore: you are heading straight for the reef!

Theodore: This is just an analogy, Aristes. Let me continue. It is certain that God necessarily loves himself and all his qualities. Now it is evident that he can't act except in accordance with *what he is*. Hence, his work bears witness to the attributes on which he prides himself, and he thereby does honour to himself by it. As God loves and esteems himself in a way that can't be stopped, he finds glory and has gratification in works that somehow express his own excellent qualities. This then is one of the senses in which God acts for his glory. And, as you see, this glory is not something outside him, for it is based solely on *his* esteem and love for *his own* qualities. Suppose there were no intellects to admire his work, suppose there were only senseless or stupid men

who failed to see its wonders,
 who on the contrary held this wonderful work to be of no
 account,
 who blasphemed it,

who (because of the monsters it contains) saw it as the necessary effect of a blind nature, who were scandalized to see innocence oppressed and injustice enthroned.

Even if all this were so, God would still derive from his work the glory for which he acts, this glory whose driving force is his love and esteem for his own qualities, this glory that determines him at all times to act according to *what he is*, i.e. in a way that testifies to his attributes. Thus, given that God wills to act, it isn't possible that he should *not* act for his glory in this first sense (·the one I have been expounding·), since it isn't possible that he should *not* act according to what he is, and out of his love for himself and his divine perfections. But as he is sufficient unto himself, this glory can't irresistibly determine him to will to act; indeed, I don't think that this glory *can* be a sufficient motive to make him act unless he finds the secret of making his work divine—making it appropriate to his action, which is divine. [The 'secret' will be revealed in section 6.] However great, however perfect the universe may be, in being finite it will be unworthy of the action of a God whose worth is infinite. So God will *not* form the plan of producing it. To my mind, this is the greatest difficulty.

5. Aristes: Why so, Theodore? It is easy to remove this difficulty: let us make the world infinite. Let us make it out of an infinite number of vortices [this is a technical term from Descartes's physics]. For why suppose there is a great sky surrounding everything, with nothing beyond it?

Theodore: No, Aristes. Let us allow the created world to have the character that is suitable for it, not giving it anything approaching the divine attributes. But let us try nevertheless to get the universe out of its non-religious [French: *profane*] state and, by way of something divine, make it worthy of

divine satisfaction, worthy of the action of a God whose worth is infinite.

Aristes: How are we to do that?

Theodore: By uniting it with a divine person.

Aristes: But Theodore! You always fall back on truths of •faith to get yourself out of a difficulty. That is not •philosophizing.

Theodore: What would you have me do, Aristes? I do *this* because it gives me solutions, and because if I don't appeal to faith I'm left with thousands and thousands of difficulties that I can't solve. Anyway, *isn't* the universe sanctified by Jesus Christ (existing *in* him, as it were), and *doesn't* this make it more divine, more worthy of God's action, than all your infinite vortices?

Aristes: Yes, without doubt. But, if man had not sinned, God would not have become man ·in the person of Jesus Christ·.

Theodore: I don't know about that, Aristes. Even if man hadn't sinned, a divine person would still have united himself with the universe in order to sanctify it, to get it out of its non-religious state, to make it divine, to give it an infinite dignity so that God, who can act only for his glory, should receive from it a glory corresponding perfectly to his action. *Could* God be united to his work without being made man? He did become •man, but couldn't he have become •angel? Yes, he could; he *could* have bestowed on angels the favour that he gave to man. ·So why did he pick *man*? Was it purely because man sinned, and had to be redeemed? No: more was at stake than that·. In becoming man, God brings together the two ·kinds of· substances, mind and body, of which the universe is composed, and through this union he sanctifies the whole of nature. *That* is why I don't think that sin was

the only cause for the son of God becoming man. Anyway, God foresaw sin and permitted it; and that ·in itself· is a sufficient reason ·for saying that it was not purely because of sin that God became man in the person of his son Jesus Christ·. For it is a certain proof that •the universe redeemed by Jesus Christ is worth more than •the same universe in its initial state ·with no sin·; otherwise, God would never have let his work be corrupted. This is a sure sign that God's *main* plan is his son's becoming man. Let us see then, Aristes, how God acts for his own glory. Let us justify the proposition that struck you as being so commonplace and perhaps so devoid of sense and so untenable.

6. First, God thinks of a work whose excellence and beauty would make it express qualities that he irresistibly loves and is glad to possess. But this doesn't suffice to get him to form the plan of producing this work, because he can't stand in any real relationship to a finite world, a non-religious world that doesn't yet have anything divine about it. Such a world can't express *infinity*, one of God's essential attributes; therefore, God can't find his satisfaction in it, and so he can't create it without belying himself. What, then, is he to do? Religion tells us. He *makes his work divine* by the union of a divine person with the two ·kinds of substances, mind and body, of which he composes it. In this way, he enhances his work infinitely and receives from it, primarily because of the divinity he bestows on it, that •*first glory*, the glory related to that of the architect whose building does honour to him because it expresses the qualities that he takes pride in possessing. . . .

The architect also receives a •*second glory* from the spectators and admirers of his building, and he works so hard to make it the most magnificent and superb building possible because he is aiming at this kind of glory. Similarly, God resolves to make for himself a temple (·namely, the universe·)

in which he will be eternally glorified, mainly because he is aiming at the worship that our sovereign priest ·Jesus Christ· was to establish in his honour. Yes, Aristes, vile and despicable creatures that we are, by way of our divine head we do and eternally shall render divine honours to God, honours worthy of his majesty, honours that he does and always will receive with pleasure. . . . God looks on us in Jesus Christ as gods, as his children, as his heirs, and as co-heirs of his well-beloved son. He *adopted* us in this dear son. It is through him that God gives us access to his supreme majesty. It is through the son that the father takes pleasure in his work. ·I said earlier that God had to find a certain 'secret' [near the end of section 4]. Well, this is it·. It is through this secret, which he in his wisdom found, that he goes outside himself (if I may put it that way). . . . with a magnificence from which he derives a glory capable of satisfying him. . . . Jesus Christ appears only in the fullness of time, but before all the centuries he exists in the creator's plans, and when he is born in Bethlehem *that* is when God is glorified, *that* is when he is satisfied with his work. . . . God's becoming man is the first and chief of his plans. It is what justifies his action ·in creating the universe·. It is, if I am not mistaken, the only solution for thousands upon thousands of difficulties, for thousands upon thousands of apparent contradictions.

Man is a sinner, Aristes: he is not such as God made him. God has thus let his work be corrupted. Reconcile this with his wisdom and his power. Get yourself out of this predicament by yourself without the help of the man-God, without admitting a mediator, without supposing that what God chiefly aimed at was his son's becoming man. I challenge you to do this using every principle of the best philosophy! As for me, whenever I try to philosophize without the help of faith, I am stopped short. •Faith is what guides and

supports me in investigating truths that have something to do with God—such as the truths of •metaphysics. As for •mathematical truths—measures of sizes, numbers, times, motions, everything that differs simply by greater or less—I agree that faith is no help in discovering them; and that experience in conjunction with reason is all we need for getting knowledge in all parts of •natural science.

7. Aristes: I understand what you are saying, Theodore, and I find it quite in conformity with reason. I also feel an inner joy when I see that by following faith we rise to an understanding of truths that St Paul teaches us in several places in his wonderful Epistles. But two small difficulties occur to me. •First, it seems that God wasn't perfectly free in the production of his work, since he gets from it a glory that is infinite and that gives him so much satisfaction. The •second is that the satisfaction God gets from seeing himself so divinely honoured by his creatures ought not to be something he is deprived of for an eternity—that is, through all the time before the birth of Jesus Christ.

Theodore: I reply that the infinitely perfect being is entirely self-sufficient, and therefore he irresistibly and *necessarily* loves only his own substance, only his divine perfections. This is evident and suffices for your •first difficulty. As for the •second, take note that God must never do anything that belies his own qualities, and that he must let essentially dependent creatures have all the marks of their dependency. An *eternal* world looks like a *necessary* emanation of the deity, which implies that it has always existed; but the essential mark of a thing's being dependent is that *it once didn't exist*. It is necessary •also• that God show that he is self-sufficient, show that throughout an eternity he could *do without* his work. Through Jesus Christ, he derives from it a glory that pleases him; and he wouldn't get this glory

if God-as-man were eternal, because that would offend his attributes, which must be honoured as far as possible.

Aristes: I grant you that, Theodore. Only a necessary and independent being should be eternal, and everything that isn't God should bear the essential mark of its dependency. This appears evident to me. But without making the world •eternal, God could have created it •sooner than he did by a thousand million centuries. Why so long a delay in a work from which he derives so much glory?

Theodore: He didn't delay it, Aristes. *Sooner* and *later* are properties of time that have no relation to eternity. If the world *had* been created a thousand million years sooner than it was, the question you have raised would still arise, and •by answering it in your way• you would have to begin again—and so on •backwards• ad infinitum. Thus, God *didn't* create his work 'too late', because an eternity necessarily had to precede it, and 'sooner' or 'later' by a thousand million centuries doesn't make an eternal wait any shorter or longer.

Aristes: I don't know what to say in reply, Theodore. I shall think about what you have just said concerning how God acts only for his glory, only for the love he has for himself. For I see that many consequences flow from this principle. What do *you* think of it, Theotimus?

8. Theotimus: The principle seems to me undeniable. It is *evident* that the infinitely perfect being can find the motive of his volition and the reasons for his conduct only in himself. But I don't know. . . . I think I would like it if God loved us a little more, or that he did something purely out of love for us. After all, scripture teaches us that God so loved us that he gave us his only son. That is a great gift, Aristes, which seems to indicate a rather more disinterested love—a love less focussed on *himself*—than the love that Theodore attributes to him.

Aristes: Well, Theodore, what do you say to that?

Theodore: I say that Theotimus is running onto the reef, or rather he is feeling the current sweeping him towards it—unless he is merely expressing a mock-concern, trying to see how *you* feel about this.

Aristes: You aren't answering the question.

Theodore: That's because I want *you* to answer it. But since you choose not to, at least try to get hold of my thinking. I believe that God so loved us, Aristes, that he gave us his son, as scripture tells us. But I also believe something else that scripture teaches me, namely that God so loved his son that he *gave us to him*, along with all the nations on earth (*Psalms 2:8; Matthew 28:18*). Finally, I also believe on the strength of scripture that if God predestined us in his son, and if he chose his son as the first of the predestined, it is because he wished to make Jesus Christ his high priest so as to receive from him, and from us through him, the adoration that is due to God. [The 'predestined' are those who are chosen in advance to have eternal life in heaven.] Here is the order of things in a nutshell: All things are ours, we are Jesus Christ's, and Jesus Christ is God's. 'All are yours,' St Paul says, 'whether things present or things to come; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's' (1 *Corinthians 3:21-3*). This is because God is necessarily the end—the aim or purpose—of all his works.

Get a clear thought of God's loving all things in proportion as they are lovable, Aristes. . . . Conceive of him as acting *according to his nature*, and you will have no difficulty understanding that he loves us so well that he does for us everything that he can do, acting as he is bound to act. You will understand that •God loves the natures he has made, loves them for being such as he made them, loves them according to the degree of perfection contained in their

archetypes; and that •he will make them even happier to the extent that they deserve this through conforming to his law. You will understand that at first God created man *just* and *faultless*, and that if he made him *free* it is because he wanted, without neglecting what he (God) owes to himself, to make man happy. You'll find it easy to believe that even after man has sinned and deserved God's anger, God can still love him with so much charity and goodness that he sent his son to deliver man from his sins. You'll have no doubt that God cherishes man as sanctified by Jesus Christ so much that he gives him a share in his inheritance and in eternal happiness. But you *won't* ever reach the thought that God acts exclusively for his creatures, or performs an act of sheer goodness that isn't motivated by the divine attributes. I say it again, Aristes: God can *not* act; but if he *does* act he can only perform actions regulated by *himself*, by the law that he finds in his substance. He can love men, but only because of how they relate to him. . . . So God's love for us is not •self-interested in the sense that he *needs* us for something; but it is so in the sense that he loves us only through his love for himself and his divine perfections, which we express in our nature. . . .

Theotimus: All this seem to me sufficiently well explained, Theodore. [He briefly repeats Theodore's main points, illustrating each with biblical quotations. Then:] Let us move on to something else. After Aristes has thought about all this, I hope he will be convinced of it.

Aristes: I am already quite persuaded, Theotimus, and it's not my doing that Theodore doesn't go into more detail than he does.

9. Theodore: We must try to understand •first• the most general principles, Aristes. And then the rest of the story follows of itself, everything unfolds to the mind in an orderly

way and with wonderful clarity. So let us look again at the notion of the infinitely perfect being, to see what God's plans can be—not the details of his plans, but some of their more general features. The little that we can discover concerning them will turn out later to be of great use to us. ·Let us start, then·. Do you think that God wants to make the most beautiful and perfect work possible?

Aristes: Yes, without doubt. For the more perfect his work is, the more it will express the qualities and perfections in which God prides himself. . . .

Theodore: So the universe is the most perfect that God can make? But really! So many monsters, so many disorders, the multitude of impious men—all *that* contributes to the perfection of the universe? [See note on 'monster' on page 54.]

Aristes: I am at a loss about this, Theodore. God wishes to make a work that is the most perfect possible, for the reason you have given. . . . Yet I can see that the work would be more accomplished if it were free of thousands upon thousands of defects that disfigure it. Here I run head-on into a contradiction. It seems that either •God didn't do what he planned to do or •he didn't adopt the plan most worthy of his attributes.

Theodore: ·Neither of those is right. The trouble is that you haven't yet fully understood the principles. You haven't meditated sufficiently on the notion of [the] infinitely perfect being, from which they flow. You don't know how to make God act according to his nature.

Theotimus: But, Aristes, mightn't it be that the disorders of nature, the monsters, even the impious men, are like the shadows in a picture that give force to the work and make the figures in it stand out?

Aristes: There's an elusive something about that thought that pleases the imagination, but it doesn't satisfy the mind. For it is quite clear to me that the universe would be more perfect if there were nothing disordered in any of its parts, yet there are defects in just about *every* part.

Theotimus: Then it must be that God doesn't *want* his work to be perfect.

Aristes: That can't be right either. For God can't positively and directly will irregularities that disfigure his work and express none of his perfections. . . . That seems to me evident. God *permits* disorder, but he doesn't *make* it, he doesn't *will* it.

Theotimus: 'God permits'—I don't really understand that expression. *Whom* does God permit to freeze the vines and destroy the harvest that he made grow? Why does he permit the occurrence in his work of monsters that he doesn't make and doesn't want? Well, *what?* Are we to say that the universe is not such as God willed or wanted it to be?

Aristes: Yes, for the universe is not such as God made it.

Theotimus: That may be true with regard to disorders that have slipped in through the misuse of freedom. For God did not make men impious; he permitted them to become so. I understand this ·notion of God's permitting something·, though I don't know the reasons for it. But certainly it is only God who makes the monsters—·they don't come from our misuse of our free-will·.

Aristes: They are strange creatures, these monsters, if they don't do honour to him who brings them into existence. ·And there are other problems of the same kind·. Why is it that God covers the whole countryside with flowers and fruit today and will ravage it with frost or hail tomorrow?

Theotimus: It's because the countryside will be more beautiful in its sterility than in its fecundity, though its sterile state doesn't suit *us*. We often judge the beauty of God's works by what use we can make of them, and so we make mistakes about what is really beautiful.

Aristes: Still it is better to infer beauty from usefulness than to infer it from uselessness. A country desolated by a storm—[sarcastically:] what a beautiful thing that is!

Theotimus: Yes, yes. But to be serious about this: a country inhabited by sinners *ought* to be in desolation.

Aristes: If the storm spared the lands of good men, you might be right, though even then God's way of punishing the sinners seems unsatisfactory. It would be more fitting to deny rain to the field of a brute than to make his wheat germinate and grow and then destroy it by hail. That would surely be the shorter way. But, anyway, the *less* guilty are often the ones who are the *more* maltreated. What contradictions there seem to be in God's behaviour! Theodore gave me the principles to dispel these contradictions, but I understood them so badly that I now can't remember them. I can see that you are enjoying my predicament, Theotimus. Well, if you don't want to put me on the right track, let Theodore speak.

Theotimus: Fair enough.

10. Theodore: You see, Aristes, that it isn't enough to have caught a glimpse of the principles. They have to be well understood so that they will be present to the mind when needed. Listen then, since Theotimus doesn't want to tell you what he perfectly well knows. You are not mistaken in thinking that the more perfect a work is the more it expresses the perfections of the workman, . . . and that God thus wants

to make his work the most perfect possible. But you are in difficulties because you grasp only half the principle.

God wants his work to honour him—you understand that. But now note the other half:

God does not want his actions to dishonour him. He wants his actions as well as his work to bear the character of his attributes. Not satisfied that *the universe* honour him by its excellence and its beauty, he wants his *ways of producing it* to glorify him by their simplicity, their fruitfulness, their universality, their uniformity—by all the characteristics expressing qualities that he glories in possessing.

So don't suppose that God willed unconditionally to make the most perfect possible work. Rather, he willed to make the most perfect of those that could be made in ways most worthy of him. For what God in his plans wills simply, directly, unconditionally is always to act in the most divine manner possible; and that is to make his actions as well as his work bear the character of his attributes; it is to act exactly according to what he is—according to the *whole* of what he is. . . . Hold on to this principle, my dear Aristes, and don't let it get away! It may be the most fruitful of all principles.

I say it again: don't think that God ever forms a plan blindly—I mean, without considering what will be needed to carry it out. That is how *men* act, and they often regret their decisions because of difficulties that they lead to. Nothing is *difficult* for God, but some ways of going about things are, though not difficult for him, unacceptable because they are not worthy of him. His ways must bear the character of his attributes, as well as his work. God must therefore take into consideration ways as well as works. It isn't enough that his work honours him by its excellence; his ways of working must also glorify him by their divinity. Suppose that

a world •more perfect than ours could be created and conserved, but only by ways that are correspondingly •less perfect, so that the latter world would express God's qualities less well than ours does

—I'm not afraid to say that God *cannot* prefer this supposed world to the universe that he has actually created. He is too wise, he loves his glory too much, he acts too exactly in accordance with his nature, for such a preference to be possible for him. For God is indifferent in his plans (·that is, the choice between two plans is for him a mere toss-up, so to speak·) only when they are equally wise, equally divine, equally glorious for him, equally worthy of his attributes—only when they are exactly equal in how they proportion the beauty of the work to the simplicity of the ways of producing it. When they are not equal in this respect, although God can *not act at all* because he is sufficient unto himself, he cannot choose and follow the lesser course. He can *not act*; but he can't act uselessly, or increase the complexity of his ways of acting unless this correspondingly increases the beauty of his work. His wisdom forbids him from following any but the wisest possible plan. His love for himself doesn't permit to choose one that does not honour him the most.

11. Aristes: I get your principle, Theodore. [He repeats it in some detail. Then:] A more perfect world ·than ours·, but one produced in a less simple and less fruitful way, would not bear the character of the divine attributes as much as ours does. This is why the world is filled with impious people, with monsters, with disorders of every variety. God could convert all men, prevent all disorders. But he shouldn't do that at the price of disturbing the simplicity and uniformity of his conduct, for he should honour himself by the wisdom of his ways as well as by the perfection of his creatures. He doesn't *permit* monsters; it is he who *makes* them. But he

makes them only •in order to avoid changing anything in his conduct, only •out of respect for the generality of his ways, only •to follow exactly the natural laws that he has established; and he has established those *not* because of the monstrous effects they were bound to produce but for effects that are more worthy of his wisdom and his goodness. He wills monsters and the rest only indirectly, only because they are a natural consequence of his laws.

Theodore: How quickly you draw your conclusions!

Aristes: That is because the principle is clear; it is because it is fruitful.

Theodore: This principle seems at first to be too general to have much substance to it. But when we follow it closely we are captivated by the astonishing truths that it reveals—how many of them there are and how quickly they swarm in on us! You can learn from this that the most general principles are the most fruitful. . . . Hold fast to them, if you can, and follow them: they will give you a good view of the country in a short time.

Aristes: That's what I find when I meditate a little on what you are telling me, Theodore; and even now, without any mental effort, I seem to see in your principle, all at once, the resolution of many difficulties that I have always had concerning God's conduct. I understand that all the effects that contradict one another, the works that fight against with and destroy one another, the disorders that disfigure the universe, don't show any contradiction in the cause that governs the universe, any defect of understanding or lack of power, but show a prodigious fruitfulness and a perfect uniformity in the laws of nature.

Theodore: Slow down, Aristes; we'll go into all this more exactly later on.

12. Aristes: I even see how your principle delivers the reason for men's predestination. I used to believe that God had chosen certain individuals from all eternity—chose them as a sheer act of the will, with no human or divine reasons for choosing the ones he did—and that *then* he consulted his wisdom for means for sanctifying them and leading them surely to Heaven. But I now understand that I was mistaken. God doesn't form his plans blindly without relating them to means. . . . There are in him reasons for the predestination of the elect. He does so because the future church formed •in his way does him more honour than any other church formed •in any other way. . . . God didn't predestine either us nor even Jesus Christ because of our natural merits, but for reasons given to him by his inviolable law, by unchangeable order, by the necessary relation of perfections that are contained in his substance. . . . Am I in fact following your grand principle, Theodore?

Theodore: Quite well. But aren't you afraid of going too far into theology? You are already in the thick of the greatest mysteries.

Aristes: Let us get back •to metaphysics•. It's not for me to penetrate these •theological• mysteries.

Theotimus: You do well to move back quickly, Aristes, because •that theological territory is perilous•. St Augustine doesn't want us to seek reasons for the choice God makes among men. Predestination is not done *for* anything or *because of* anything; the reason why God takes this man and leaves that one is simply that he is merciful to whom he pleases to show mercy.

Aristes: What, Theodore! Does St Augustine claim that God consults his wisdom in carrying out his plans but not in forming them in the first place?

Theodore: No, Aristes, he doesn't. Theotimus seems to be expounding St Augustine in terms of the thought of certain •other• men. The sacred doctor wasn't denying that God had reasons for his choice and for distributing his grace as he does; he was merely rejecting a *bad* reason that the heretics of his time, •the Pelagians•, attributed to God. He was always ready to consider reasons that are consistent with the faith and don't deprive grace of its unforced freedom. It would be as well for you to know, and be able to answer, the reasoning of these heretics. Here it is, in brief [from here to the end of this paragraph]: God wants all men to be saved and to arrive at knowledge of the truth. Hence, they can all be saved by their own efforts—efforts that come purely from their own natures. But if they can't do this without the help of internal grace (say the more moderate •Pelagians•), let us see whom God will give this grace to. He makes a choice of some rather than others—all right, but his choice must be rational. Now, it is a common notion [= 'an obviously necessary truth'] that he who •selects the worse •chooses badly. So God, if he doesn't bestow his grace equally on all and instead *chooses* some, must choose those who are better, choose the less wicked over the more wicked. For it can't be doubted that the choice he makes of some rather than others is wise and rational. He has no partiality •or bias• toward any person. So it is absolutely necessary that the reason for his choice in the distribution of his grace is to be found in the good use that we can still make of our natural powers. It is for us to will, to desire to be healed, to believe in the mediator, to implore his mercy—in short, to *make a start*—and God will come to our aid. By using our free will properly we will *merit* God's bestowing his grace on us.

Aristes: These people reason well.

Theodore: Perfectly well, but from false ideas. They

didn't consult the notion of the infinitely perfect being, and ·instead· made God act as men do. Listen, why do you think God makes it rain?

Aristes: To make our farm-lands fertile.

Theodore [sarcastically]: So if we want rain to fall on a certain field we have only to sow or plant in it! God doesn't make it rain equally on all lands; so he has to choose; and he must choose rationally, making rain fall on lands that have been planted rather than fallow land or sand or sea. ·Obviously not!· With this in mind as a comparison, find the fallacy in the reasoning of these ·Pelagian· enemies of grace. But please don't pick away at inessentials.

Aristes: I understand, Theodore. Our cultivating lands or letting them lie fallow makes no difference to how much rain falls on them. That's because ordinarily rain falls only in consequence of the general laws of nature according to which God conserves the universe. In the same way, the distribution of grace doesn't come from our own merits. God bestows primary grace only in consequence of certain general laws [see twelfth dialogue, sections 16-21]. He doesn't act in the manner of •men—of •particular causes and •limited intellects. The reason for his choice comes from the wisdom of his laws, and the wisdom of his laws comes from how they relate to his attributes—from their simplicity, from their fruitfulness, in short from their divinity. So the choice God makes among men when distributing his grace is rational and perfectly worthy of his wisdom, though it is not based on differences in men's natures or on inequalities in their merits.

Theodore: There you go, Aristes! In a few words you have overthrown the firmest support of Pelagianism. A man who takes water needed for his field and pours it into the sand or into the sea would not be wise. Yet that's exactly what

God does in consequence of his laws, and in doing it he acts most wisely, divinely. This is sufficient to silence the proud heretics who offer to teach God to make a wise and rational choice among men!

Well now, Theotimus, are you still anxious about Aristes' falling into the crevasse? I mean the one with which St Augustine—not without reason—threatens those who look to their own merits to explain why they have been chosen? Aristes wants the distribution of grace to be entirely unforcedly free, so let's not be worried on his account. Rather, let us be sorry for certain others (you know who they are) who claim that God chooses his elect out of sheer goodness toward them, without wisdom and reason on his part. ·They are in a very bad way·, for it is a horrible sacrilege to believe that God is not wise in developing his plans as well as in carrying them out. . . . Grace is not distributed according to our merits (as St Augustine maintains, following St Paul and all the church); but it is directed by a law to which God makes no exceptions. For God made a plan containing the predestination of *these* individuals rather than *those* because there is no plan wiser than this, none more worthy of his attributes. This is what your friends couldn't grasp.

13. Theotimus: What can you expect, Theodore? It is so natural for us to run onto the reef of judging God from our own case. We all like independence; and we see submitting to reason as a kind of servitude, and see *having* to obey reason as a kind of powerlessness. So we are afraid of making God wise at the price of making him impotent—wise in consulting reason, impotent in having to obey it. But God is his own wisdom. Sovereign reason is co-eternal with him ·because· he and it are one and the same thing. He necessarily loves it; and although he is obliged to follow it he remains independent. ·That is, he doesn't depend on

anything other than himself; this squares with his obedience to reason, because sovereign reason is *not* other than God. Everything God wills is wise and rational, not because •God is above reason, not because •what God wills is just simply and solely because he wills it, but because •he cannot belie himself, cannot will anything that doesn't conform to his law, to the unchangeable and necessary order of his perfections.

Theodore: To be sure, Theotimus, we overturn everything if we claim that God is above reason and that his plans are guided by nothing but his sheer will. That false principle—which Descartes held—casts darkness so thick that it confuses the good with the bad, and the true with the false, and turns everything into a chaos where the mind no longer knows anything. Here is an example of the damage it does. St Augustine conclusively proved original sin by the disorders we find in ourselves.

Man suffers; so he is not innocent. Mind depends on body; so man has gone rotten, and is not such as God made him. (God can't have subjected the more noble mind to the less noble body, for *order* doesn't allow it.)

These are superb arguments, but what force do these inferences have for those who aren't afraid to say that God's will is the sole rule of his actions? They have only to reply:

- This is what God willed.
- It is our self-importance that makes us think it unfair that we should suffer.
- It is our pride that takes offence at the mind's being subject to the body.
- Since God *did* will these alleged disorders, it is impious to submit them to the judgment of reason, because God's will does not recognize reason as the rule of its conduct.

According to this principle, the universe is perfect because God willed it. By the standard of God's plans, monsters are works as accomplished as any other things. It is good for us to have eyes situated as they are in our heads, but if God had put them somewhere else—anywhere else—that would have been no less wise. Turn the world upside down, make a chaos of it, and it will still be just as admirable, since all its beauty consists in conformity with the divine will—which isn't obliged to conform to order. And—I would add—which isn't known to us! So all the beauty of the universe *disappears* when looked at through this great principle, this principle that •God is superior to the reason that enlightens all minds, and that •God's actions are governed by nothing but his sheer will.

Aristes: Oh, Theodore, how well your principles hang together! I see already, from what you have just said, that it is *in God* and *in an unchangeable order* that we see beauty, truth and justice. We aren't afraid of criticizing God's work, of noting defects in it, and of even concluding from them that it has gone rotten. What emboldens us to do this is that in it are judging God's conduct by what we know of *his* law; the unchangeable order that we partly see is the very law of God, inscribed in his substance in characters eternal and divine. . . . Are we impious or foolhardy to judge in this way what God must or must not do? Not at all. Rather, to suspend our judgment on these matters we would need to be either impious or blind. That is because we judge God not by our authority, Theodore, but by the sovereign authority of the divine law.

Theodore: There we have a reflection worthy of you, my dear Aristes. Do not forget then to study this law, since it is in this sacred code of unchangeable order that judgments of such importance are to be found.

TENTH DIALOGUE

God's magnificence in the size and indefinite number of his different works. The simplicity and fruitfulness of his ways of conserving and developing them. God's providence in the first shove that he gives to matter. This first step of his action, which is not determined by general laws, is directed by infinite wisdom.

Theotimus: What do you think of the general principles that Theodore proposed yesterday, Aristes? Have you followed them? Didn't their generality, their sublimity, put you off and tire you out? Speaking for myself, I admit to being confused. I wanted to follow them, but they escaped me like phantoms, so that I have taken lot of trouble with little result.

Aristes: When a principle has nothing to say about anything that affects the senses, that makes it hard to follow and to grasp. We embrace something that has no *body*—how are we to hold onto it?

Theotimus: We quite naturally take it to be a phantom. For the moment the mind is distracted the principle vanishes, and we find to our surprise that we don't have hold of anything. Then we grasp the principle again, but it escapes once more. In fact, it escapes us only when we close our eyes (as we often do without being aware of it), and yet we believe that it is the principle that vanishes. This is why we look on it as a phantom that creates an illusion in us.

Aristes: True, Theotimus. I think that is why general principles have a certain resemblance to chimeras, and why the general run of people, not being constituted for the work of *attending*, treat them as chimerical.

Theotimus: Still, there is an enormous difference between the two things (·general principles and chimeras·). For •general principles please the •mind that they enlighten by their evidentness, whereas •phantoms please the

•imagination that brings them into existence. ·And that points to another difference·. Because these principles. . . are presented to the mind through its attention, they *seem* to be made by the mind; but I think you know ·as I do· that they exist *before* we do, and aren't brought into existence by the power of our ·intellectual· activity. For all these unchangeable truths are simply relations holding amongst *ideas*, which exist necessarily and eternally. Whereas phantoms, which are produced *by* the imagination or are produced *in* it as a natural result of general laws of the union of soul and body, exist only briefly.

Aristes: I agree, Theotimus, that •nothing is more solid than the truth and that •the more general a truth is the more reality it has and the more light it casts. Theodore has convinced me of this. But I am such a rough, unpolished, sense-bound creature that I often find general truths to be not to my taste, and I'm sometimes tempted to give them up altogether.

Theotimus: Ah. . . Theodore?

Theodore: You'll do nothing of the sort, Aristes. Truth is worth more than onions and cabbages; it is excellent food. [Theodore calls it *manne* = 'manna', a miraculous food that the Israelites in the desert picked up from the ground every morning, at first gathering one omer (four litres) per person; *Exodus* 16.]

Aristes: Most excellent, I agree. But at times it seems quite empty and unsubstantial. I don't find much taste to it, and

each day you want us to gather it up afresh. It's not much fun.

Theodore: Well then, Aristes, let us spend today as the Jews spent their sabbath. Perhaps yesterday you did the work of two days.

Aristes: Certainly I worked hard, Theodore, but I got nothing.

Theodore: Yet when I left you yesterday you were thoroughly engaged in drawing consequences. The way you were going about it, you ought to have your two measures quite full.

Aristes: What measures? two omers? Then give your principles more *body*, Theodore, if you want me to fill these measures. Make them more sensible [here = 'easier to connect with the senses'] and more palpable. They slip through my fingers; the slightest heat melts them; and, after I have worked hard, I find I have nothing.

Theodore: You are nourished without noticing it, Aristes. These principles that pass through your mind and escape from it always leave behind some light.

Aristes: That is true. I feel that strongly. But...to start again every day and forgo my usual food! Couldn't you make the principles of your philosophy more •sensible?

Theodore: I'm afraid that would make them less •intelligible. Believe me, Aristes, I always make them as sensible as I can. But I am afraid of spoiling them. It is permissible to *incarnate* the truth [= 'put flesh onto it, present it as solid and sensible'] in order to keep the mind focussed on it—our naturally weak mind that gets no hold on anything that has no *body* to it. But it is still necessary for •the sensible to lead us to the intelligible, •flesh to take us to reason, and •the truth to appear just as it is, without any disguise. What is really solid isn't the

sensible; only what is intelligible can nourish intellects, by its evidentness and its light. You know this. Try to remember it. and to follow me.

Aristes: What do you want to talk about?

1. Theodore: About general providence, that is, the ordinary course of action that God takes in governing the world.

You have known—and perhaps also have forgotten—that the infinitely perfect being, •though self-sufficient, was able to make the plan of forming this universe; that he •created it for himself, for his own glory; that he •put Jesus Christ at the head of his work, at the start of his designs and procedures, so that everything would be divine; that he •did not have to undertake the most perfect *possible* work but only the most perfect one that could be produced in the wisest and most divine ways. . . . Thus we have the creator ready, so to speak, to go outside himself, outside his eternal sanctuary, ready to set to work to produce creatures. Let us see something of his magnificence in his •work, but let us •also follow him closely in the majestic way he goes about his ordinary course of •action.

The magnificence in his work bursts out everywhere. Wherever we look in the universe, we see a profusion of amazing things, and if we stop being amazed by them that is surely because we stop giving them the attention they deserve. Consider the astronomers, who measure the size of heavenly bodies and want to know how many stars there are: the more they come to know, the *more* struck with wonder they are. At one time the sun appeared to them to be as large as the Peloponnese, but today the best of them take it to be a million times larger than the earth. The ancients counted just one thousand and twenty-two stars; but today no-one ventures count them. God himself had already told us that no man could ever know the number; but •even without

that assurance· the invention of telescopes now forces us to acknowledge that our star-catalogues are far from complete. They list only the stars that can be seen without glasses, and those are surely a tiny minority of the total. I think indeed there are many more of them than we'll ever discover, more than are visible through the best telescopes; and yet many of those unviewable stars are probably as big and as majestic as our sun. How great, then, is God in the heavens! How elevated he is in their heights! How magnificent he is in their brilliance! How wise and powerful he is in their orderly movements!

2. But, Aristes, let us take leave of the large. Our imagination gets lost in those immense spaces that we wouldn't venture to limit but which are afraid to think of as unlimited. How many wonderful things there are on the earth we inhabit, on this imperceptible speck (to those who are concerned only with celestial bodies). But this earth, which our astronomer friends count for nothing, is still too vast for me. I confine myself to your gardens. What animals, what birds, what insects, what plants, what flowers, and what fruit!

Sitting in the shade the other day, I decided to observe the variety of plants and small animals that I found beneath my eyes. Just sitting there, I counted more than twenty sorts of insects within a very small space and at least as many different plants. I took one of these insects. . . ., examined it attentively, and I'm willing to say about it what Jesus Christ says about the lilies of the field, that Solomon in all his glory was not so magnificently ornamented. I spent some time admiring this little creature—so unfairly treated as negligible, and indeed so unworthily and cruelly treated by the other animals to whom it apparently serves as food. Then I began to read a book that I had with me, and found in it something astonishing, namely that the world

contains an infinite number of insects at least a million times smaller than the one I had been examining and ten thousand times smaller than a grain of sand. [Leeuwenhoeck, a pioneering microscopist, had said this in a letter to the Royal Society.] Do you know what unit of measurement is used by people wanting to talk about minuteness or, if you will, the magnitude of these living atoms? For, although they are small in relation to us, they are nonetheless quite large in relation to others. That measure is the diameter of the eye of those small domestic animals that bite us so much. . . . It is by subdivisions of this measure—for it is too big itself for their purposes—that observers of the curiosities of nature measure the insects that exist in liquids and of which they prove by principles of geometry that an infinity can be discovered that are at least a thousand times smaller than the eye of the common louse. Don't be upset by that basis for measurement; it is one of the most exact and most common. This little animal has made itself well enough known, and some can be found all the year around. These investigators are glad to have a means whereby the facts that they advance can be verified at any time, making secure our judgments about the multiplicity and fineness of the wonderful works of the author of the universe.

Aristes: That surprises me a little. But tell me, Theodore, regarding these animals that are imperceptible to our eyes and that appear to be almost like atoms under good microscopes—are *they* the smallest? Couldn't there be many others that the skill of man will never reveal? Perhaps the smallest that have ever been seen are to others that won't ever be seen as an elephant is to a gnat. What do you think?

Theodore: We are getting lost in the small as we did in the great, Aristes. There is no one who can say he has finally come to the smallest of the animals. Formerly it was the mite;

but today the little mite has become monstrously big! The more powerful our microscopes become, the more persuaded we are that the wisdom of the creator is not limited in the smallness of the amounts of matter he can deal with, and that from an atom that is imperceptible to our senses—from a sort of *nothing*, as it were—he makes things that surpass the imagination and even exceed the most capacious intellects. I will explain this to you.

3. The variety and succession of beauties that ornament the universe are simply a result of the general laws governing how motion is passed along, and all those laws depend on a single very simple and natural law, namely that bodies that are pushed or collided with always move in the direction from which the least pressure comes, their movement being proportional to how small that pressure is. All the shapes and states of matter have no cause except motion, and this motion is communicated in accordance with laws that are so simple and natural that nature seems to act only by blind impulse. When we have become convinced of all this, we understand clearly that it isn't *the earth* that produces plants, and that *sexual intercourse* couldn't possibly create such a wonderful work as the body of an animal. We may indeed believe that general laws of the communication of motion suffice for the •development and growth of parts of organic bodies, but we can't be persuaded that they could ever •create such a complex machine. We see that if we don't want to fall back on miracles, we are *forced* to the conclusion that the seed of a plant contains in miniature the plant that grows from it, that an animal contains in its entrails the animal that will come from it. It goes further. We understand that each germ must contain a whole species which it is capable of conserving; for instance, that

each grain of wheat contains in miniature the cluster of grains that grow out of it, each grain in that cluster

contains in miniature the cluster that grows out of *it*, and that each of the grains in *those* clusters can be as fertile as were those in the first cluster.

What we call 'an animal' or 'a plant' is made up of an almost infinite number of organic parts; the unaided laws of motion alone couldn't possibly adjust all these to one another and to the achieving of certain ends. Those simple and general laws *are* sufficient for the •growth and the eventual •appearance to us of those wonderful works, each of which God formed in the first days of the creation of the world; and that •growth-inducing power is a considerable thing. •And there is more to it than merely making the little animal or plant get *bigger*•. The minute animal or the seed of a plant doesn't have precisely the same proportion of size, solidity, and shape among its parts as the animals and the plants do; •so if we took a microscope to the sperm of a donkey we wouldn't see tiny donkeys•. But in the germ of a plant or animal the essential working parts are so wisely arranged that the general laws of motion will eventually bring them to have •not just the size but also• the shape and the form that we observe in them. I now take that for granted.

4. Think about it, Aristes! A fly has as many organic parts as a horse or an ox, and perhaps more. A horse has only four feet, whereas a fly has six—and also wonderfully structured wings. You know what the head of an ox is like. Well, look through a microscope at the head of a fly and compare it with the ox's head, and you'll see that I am not just bullying you •into accepting my view•. The eye of an ox has only one lens, whereas we can now see several thousand lenses in the eye of a fly. Moreover, a cow has only one or two calves each year, while a fly has a swarm containing more than a thousand flies (the smaller the animal, the more fertile it is). And you may have heard that bees in their present form don't have a king to honour but only a queen to woo, she being the

sole source of the entire tribe. (Swammerdam, a famous pioneering microbiologist, says that one bee produces about four thousand.) Now, try to imagine the awful smallness, the wonderful delicacy, of all the bees—the thousands of organized bodies—that the mother-bee carries inside her. And take in this (though your imagination is frightened by it): it is inconceivable that a fly should be •formed from a maggot (or a maggot from an egg) rather than merely being •contained in it.

Aristes: As matter is divisible to infinity, I have no trouble grasping that God could make miniature versions of every large thing that I see. A Dutch scientist, I hear, has discovered the secret of showing in the cocoons of caterpillars the butterflies that emerge from them. In tulip bulbs I have often seen, even in the middle of winter, whole tulips with all the parts that they •will• have in spring. So I can well suppose that every seed contains a plant and every egg an animal similar to the one they came out of.

5. Theodore: You are not there yet. Around six thousand years ago the world began and bees started producing swarms. Suppose •conservatively• that each swarm contains a thousand creatures. The first bee must be at least a thousand times larger than the second, and the second a thousand times larger than the third, and so the third to the fourth, and so on progressively down to •bees in• the six thousandth •generation, which are buzzing around us now•. This is clear from our supposition, given that a container is always larger than what it contains. Conceive then (if you can!) the wonderful fineness that all the *present* bees had when they were contained in the *first* bee.

Aristes: That's easy! We need only look for the right value of the last term of a series such that

- its first term expresses the natural size of a honey-bee.

- each succeeding term is one thousandth of the size of its immediate predecessor, and
- the series has six thousand and one terms.

The bees around us *now* were, at the beginning of the world, smaller than they are today: a thousand times a thousand times a thousand times. . . you carry on from there Theodore, saying 'a thousand times' 5997 more times and then saying 'smaller!' *That* is their right size •in the first bee•, according to your supposition.

Theodore: I understand you, Aristes. . . . All we need is to write a fraction in which

the numerator is *one*, and

the denominator is *one* followed by a mere eighteen thousand zeroes.

There's a fine fraction! But aren't you afraid that a unit so broken and shattered will dissipate, and that your bee will become *nothing*?

Aristes: Certainly not, Theodore. For I know that matter is divisible to infinity, and that 'small' things are small only by comparison with larger things. What we call an 'atom' can be divided for ever, any part of extension is in a sense infinitely large •because it is infinitely larger than some of its parts•. My imagination balks at this, but I have no trouble *conceiving* it, and thus conceiving that God can make in miniature everything we see on a larger scale in the world which we look on in wonder. Indeed the smallness of bodies can never be a hindrance to God's power; I conceive this clearly. For geometry demonstrates that there is no basic unit in extension, and that matter can be divided endlessly.

Theodore: Very good, Aristes. [He and Aristes play around with these ideas a little, e.g. wondering how many bees the first bee must have contained to provide for six thousand generations. Then:]

6. Theotimus: Let us drop these speculations, Theodore. God furnishes us with enough works within our reach without dwelling on those we cannot see. The wonderful construction of any *one* animal or plant shows well enough that the creator's wisdom is infinitely beyond us. And he makes them each year in such profusion that his magnificence and grandeur must astound and impress *even* the stupidest of men. We needn't look to other organisms: we find in our own body a machine composed of a thousand working parts and all are so wisely adjusted to their purpose, so well interconnected, and so well arranged in a hierarchy, that this *on its own* is enough for us to abase and prostrate ourselves before the author of our being. [He gives an example: the complexity of mammalian musculature.]

Aristes: It is true, Theotimus, that just the anatomy of the human body or of the most negligible of animals gives so much illumination to the mind and impresses it so strongly that we would have to be numb not to acknowledge *God as the author of the work.*

7. Theodore: You are both right. But, as for me, what I find most wonderful is that God makes all these excellent works—or anyway makes them grow and develop before our eyes—by precisely following certain very simple and fruitful general laws that he has prescribed for himself. I don't wonder at *•trees covered with flowers and fruit as much as I wonder at •their marvellous growth in consequence of natural laws.* A gardener takes an old string, smears it with a fig, and buries it in a furrow; then some time later—I have seen this—all those little seeds, the ones we feel between our teeth when we eat figs, have pushed out into the earth, growing roots in one direction and an orchard of fig trees in the other. *That is what I wonder at!* I'll give you five more examples of the sort of thing I mean. *•Irrigation of the fields,*

following natural laws and using an element as simple as water, brings up from the earth an infinity of plants and trees of different kinds. •One animal instinctively and brutishly comes together with another and thereby perpetuates its species. •A •male• fish follows the female and fertilizes the eggs she leaves in the water. •Land ravaged by hail is some time later quite restored, covered with plants and its usual riches. •From lands that have been spared, the wind snatches up seeds and spreads them with the rain on lands that have been desolated. All of this and countless other effects are produced by this law, so simple and so natural:

Each body moves towards the least pressure.

These results in accordance with this law—that is certainly something to wonder at! Nothing in the universe is more •beautiful or more •magnificent than the profusion of animals and plants we were talking about. But, believe me, nothing is more •divine than how God fills the world with them, the use he makes of a law that is so simple that it seems to be good for nothing.

Aristes: I am of your opinion, Theodore. We can leave it to *•the astronomers to measure the size and movements of the stars in order to predict eclipses, to •the anatomists to dissect the bodies of animals and plants in order to identify the working parts and see how they are connected with one another, in brief to •the physical scientists to study the detail of nature in order to wonder at all its marvels.* Let us mainly stay with the general truths of your metaphysics. I think we have done enough by way of disclosing the magnificence of the creator in the infinite multiplicity of his wonderful *•works.* Let us now follow him some way through his course of *•action.*

8. Theodore: When you have examined the general rules of providence, Aristes, you will marvel even more at the

parts of the universe, or rather at the infinite wisdom of its author. When we examine God's work without relation to *how* he made and conserves it, ever so many *defects* in it leap to the eye, and sometimes trouble the minds even of philosophers so greatly that they look on this wonderful work either as •the necessary effect of a blind nature or as •a monstrous mixture good and bad created things brought into existence by a good god and a bad one. But, when we bring into consideration *the ways in which* God necessarily governs the universe in order to make his action •as well as his work• bear the character of his attributes, these defects that disfigure created things don't reflect back on the creator. For if there are defects in his •work, if there are monsters and thousands upon thousands of disorders, there are quite certainly none in his •actions. You already understood this, but your grasp of it needs to be improved.

9. Do you still remember my demonstrating to you that it is contradictory that any creature should be able to move a straw by its own efficacy? [seventh dialogue]

Aristes: Yes, Theodore, I remember that, and I am convinced of it. Matter can be moved only by its creator.

Theodore: Only the creator, therefore, can make *any* change in the material world, because all the possible states of •any perceptible bit of• matter consist merely in its perceptible shape and the shapes of its imperceptible parts, and the only cause of any of these shapes is *motion*.

Aristes: I don't understand very well what you are telling me. I'm afraid of a surprise. [Regarding the untranslated expression *l'étendue*—meaning either 'extension' or 'that which is extended'—look back to the explanation inserted in the first dialogue, section 2 (page 3, to which Theodore now refers.)]

Theodore: I proved to you, Aristes, that matter and *l'étendue* are but one and the same thing. Remember that. I am

reasoning on the basis of that assumption, or rather of that truth. For *l'étendue* is all it takes to make a material world, or at least a world that is just like the one we inhabit. •We need to get straight about this, because• if you don't now have the same ideas as I do, discussion between us would be pointless.

Aristes: I do remember your proving to me that *l'étendue* is a being or a substance and not a state of substance, on the ground that we can think of it without thinking of anything else. For it is indeed evident that anything we can perceive by itself is not a *state* or *way of being* but a *being* or a *substance*. This is the only way we have of distinguishing substances from their states; I'm convinced of this. But this thought keeps coming back into my mind: •granting that *l'étendue* is a substance•, mightn't matter be some *other* substance?

Theodore: It is another word, but it is not another thing, provided that by 'matter' you mean the stuff that our world is composed of. For that is certainly composed of *l'étendue*; and I don't think you meant •to suggest• that the material world is composed of two •kinds of• substances. One of them would be useless, and I think it would be yours, for I don't see that anything really solid can be made of it. How would we make a desk, chairs, furniture out of your matter, Aristes? Such a piece of furniture would be very rare and very precious! But give me a portion of *l'étendue* and there is nothing I can't make of it by means of motion.

Aristes: It is •precisely• *that* that I don't understand very well, Theodore.

10. Theodore: Yet it is quite easy, provided we judge things by the •ideas that represent them rather than resting content with quick judgments based on the •senses. Think of an indefinite portion of *l'étendue*, Aristes. If all its parts preserve

the same spatial relations to one another, this is simply a big mass of matter. But if something starts to move, and the parts of this thing continually change their locations relative to the other parts, then an infinity of forms are introduced. I mean an infinity of shapes and configurations. I use 'shape' for the form of a body large enough to make itself sensed, and 'configuration' for the shape of the insensible parts of large bodies.

Aristes: Yes indeed—all sorts of shapes and configurations, but perhaps not enough for all the different kinds of bodies that we see. The bodies that you make purely out of your *étendue* differ only accidentally or superficially, whereas most of those we see may differ essentially or deeply. Earth is not water; a stone is not bread. Yet it seems to me that using *l'étendue* and nothing else you could only make bodies of the same species.

Theodore: So, Aristes, the snap judgments of the senses are back! A stone is not bread, true enough. But I ask you: Is flour wheat? Is bread flour? Are blood, flesh and bones bread? Are they *vegetation*? Are these bodies of the same or different species?

Aristes: Why do you ask me that? Anyone can see that bread, flesh, and bones are essentially different kinds of bodies.

Theodore: I ask you because flour is made from wheat, bread is made from flour, flesh and bones from bread. It is the same matter throughout. And if you still insist that all these bodies are of different species, why won't you allow that essentially different bodies can be made from the same portion of *l'étendue*?

Aristes: Because your 'shapes' and 'configurations' are accidental to matter and don't change its nature.

Theodore: True, matter always remains matter whatever shape we give it; but a round body can be said not to be of the same species as a square body.

Aristes: What! If I take some wax and change its shape, won't it still be the same wax?

Theodore: It will be the same wax, the same matter; but it can be said to be not the same body, for certainly what is round isn't square. Let us get rid of ambiguities.

—It is essential to a round body that all the parts of its surface are equidistant from the part which is its centre, giving it a certain shape; but it isn't essential to it that its internal or insensible parts have such and such a specific configuration.

—It is essential to wax that its small parts have a certain configuration, but that isn't changed by whatever shape we may give to its mass.

—It is essential to matter that it is extended, but it is not essential to it that there be a specific shape in its mass or a specific configuration among its insensible parts.

In short: round body needs shape, wax needs configuration, matter needs neither. Now ask yourself: what happens to wheat when it is milled? to flour when it is kneaded and baked? It is clear that what has changed is the configuration of the insensible parts along with the shape of the mass. I don't see how any change could be more essential than that.

11. Aristes: It is claimed, Theodore, that a change of substantial form is added to the other changes you have mentioned.

Theodore: Yes, I know it is. But I can't think of anything more accidental to matter than a fictional substantial form. What change can it make in the wheat when we grind it?

Aristes: It is only because of that ·substantial form· that the wheat becomes flour.

Theodore: What? ·You are saying that· if it weren't for the substantial form, wheat that is finely ground wouldn't turn into flour?

Aristes: Well, perhaps flour and wheat are not essentially different. Perhaps *they* are two bodies of the same species.

Theodore: And flour and dough, are *they* of the same species? Be careful ·how you answer·, for dough is just flour and water blended together. Do you think that by kneading them we can't make dough without the help of a substantial form?

Aristes: We can; but without that ·substantial form· we can't make bread.

Theodore: So it's a substantial form that changes dough into bread. At last we've arrived! Now, *when* does this happen to the dough?

Aristes: When the bread is baked, when it is done.

Theodore: True, for unbaked bread is not strictly bread. It still has only the substantial form of wheat or flour or dough. . . . But what if the substantial form failed to arrive? In that case would the well-baked dough *not* be bread? Now, this form doesn't come until the dough is baked, so let us try to do without it—that is, let step in metaphysically at the point where the dough is baked but the substantial form hasn't yet arrived, and consider what we have in the oven at that point. Isn't it clear that what we have is *bread?*· It turns out to be difficult to bring the substantial form into an account of the powers of matter; we don't know how to go about it.

Aristes: Go ahead and have your fun, Theodore, but not at *my* expense, for I swear that I have always regarded these alleged 'forms' as fictions of the human mind. ·Rather than going on with your fun·, tell me how so many people have held this opinion.

Theodore: It is because the senses lead us to it quite naturally. When we sense different ·kinds of· objects we have sensations that *are* essentially different, and this leads us to think that the objects ·also· differ essentially. And in a way they *do*, for the configurations of the insensible particles of wax are essentially different from those of water . But as we don't see these small parts, their configuration, their difference, we judge that the masses they compose are substances of different species. Now experience teaches us that all bodies have the same basic underlying *stuff*, because one can be made out of another. So we conclude that there must be something that makes them different in species, and we assign this role to the substantial form.

12. Aristes: I understand very well, Theodore, how much we need the great principle that you proved at such length in our previous sessions [third, fourth and fifth dialogues], namely that we mustn't judge the nature of bodies by the •sensations they arouse in us but solely by the •idea that represents them and is the model on which they have all been formed. Our senses are false witnesses, and needn't be listened to except regarding facts. They indicate confusedly to us how bodies in our environment relate to our own, doing this well enough for the preservation of life; but there is nothing exact in their testimony. Let us at all times follow the principle.

Theodore: Let us follow it, Aristes, and understand that all the states of *l'étendue* are and must be nothing but shapes, configurations, sensible and insensible motions; in short, only spatial relations. An indefinite ·portion of· *l'étendue*

in which there is no motion—i.e. no change in the spatial relations among its parts—is therefore just a great mass of unformed •matter. Once motion is put into this mass and its parts move in an infinity of ways, then there is •in it• an infinity of different •bodies. •Why an *infinity* of them?• Because it is impossible for all the parts of this •portion of• *l'étendue* to change their spatial relations to one another by the same amount; and so we can't conceive of the parts' moving without producing an infinity of shapes, i.e. of different bodies. For example, your head keeps the same spatial relation to your neck and to the other parts of your body, which is why what you have is one body. But the parts of the air surrounding you move in different ways across your face and the rest of your machine, so the air doesn't unite with you to make one body. Think about the individual parts of your bodily tissues, one by one, and imagine that one particular part •remains in the same (or nearly the same) spatial relation to such and such neighbouring parts, while •its relations with a number of other neighbouring parts keeps changing. In carrying out this thought you will •mentally• construct an infinity of small channels in which the bodily fluids will circulate. One part of a tissue in your hand doesn't move away from an adjoining part of the same tissue, but it constantly changes its situation in relation to the •animal• spirits, the blood, the other bodily fluids, and an infinite number of small bodies that brush against it in passing and then escape through the pores left in our flesh by the interlacing of the tissues. This is what makes a given part or a given tissue precisely what it is. Bear in mind then all the parts of which your tissues are composed. Relate them to one another and to the bodily fluids of your body, and you will have no trouble seeing the truth that I am trying to get you to understand.

Aristes: I follow you, Theodore. Certainly nothing is clearer than that all the possible states of *l'étendue* are simply spatial relations, and that it is only the variety of motion and rest of parts of matter that produces the variety of shapes—the variety of different bodies—that we wonder at in the world. When we make judgments about objects on the basis of our sensations of them we are constantly in a strange predicament; for we often have essentially different sensations of the same objects, and similar sensations of very different substances. The testimony of the •senses is always obscure and confused. We have to judge all things by the •ideas that •clearly and accurately• represent their nature. If I consult my senses, snow, hail, rain, and steam are bodies of different species. But by consulting the clear and luminous idea of *l'étendue* I can grasp (it seems to me) that a little motion can change ice to water, and even to steam, without changing the configuration of the small parts of which these bodies are composed. I also grasp that by changing the configuration •of those extremely small parts• we could turn anything into anything. For, since bodies differ essentially only in size, configuration, motion and rest of the insensible parts of which their masses are composed, it is obvious that (for example) to make gold out of lead or out of anything you like, we need only to split up and then recombine the small parts of lead so as to give them the size and configuration that are essential to the small parts of gold—the size and configuration that makes stuff *gold*. This is easily *conceived*. But I believe that •in practice• those who are looking for ways to make gold out of other substances are less likely to make new gold than they are to reduce to smoke and ashes the gold they started with!

Theodore: True, Aristes. For who knows what the size and configuration *is* of the small parts of this prized metal? And

even if that were known, who knows what the configuration is of the small parts of lead or quicksilver? [Theodore continues with further grounds for pessimism about the project of making gold out of quicksilver, contrasting this with the ease with which steam turns into rain, and likening it to the mysteries of how water becomes part of a plant. Theotimus complains that he is rambling, and Theodore turns to the topic of providence.]

13. Certainly it is by the sun that God gives life to the world we live in. It is by it that he raises mists. It is by the motion of mists that he produces winds. It is by the contrary directions of winds that he amasses the mists and makes them into rain; and it is by rains that he makes our lands fertile. It doesn't matter whether I have the details of this right, Aristes. You do in any case believe (for example) that rain makes the plants grow; for if it doesn't rain everything dries up. You believe that a certain plant has the power of purging, another of nourishing, still another of poisoning; that fire softens wax, hardens clay, burns wood, and that in burning wood it turns part of the wood into ashes and then into glass. In short, you don't doubt that all bodies have certain qualities or powers, and that the ordinary providence of God consists in putting these powers to work to produce the wonderful variety in his work. Now all there is to these powers, and to their being put to work, is the efficacy of *motion*, since it is through motion that everything gets done. For it is obvious that fire burns only through the motion of its parts; that it can harden clay only because the particles that it spreads in all directions bump into particles of water in the clay and set them in motion so that they leave the clay; and similarly with fire's other effects. So fire has no force, no power, except through the motion of its parts; and this force comes to be applied to a given thing through the thing's moving near to the fire. In similar fashion. . .

Aristes [interrupting]: What you say of fire I extend to cover all natural causes and effects. Carry on from there.

14.Theodore: You understand then that ordinary providence consists principally in two things: •laws of the communication of motion, since everything in bodies takes place by means of motion; and •the wise way in which God arranged things at the time when he created them, so that his work could be conserved by the natural laws that he had decided to follow.

As for the natural laws of motion: God chose the simplest. He willed and still does that every moving body move (or tend to move) in a straight line, and that when it bumps into another body it diverge as little as possible from a straight line. ·He also did and does will· that •a body shall move in the direction in which it is being pushed; that •if it is pushed at the same time in opposite directions, the stronger push overcome the weaker; and that •if the two pushes are not in exactly opposite directions, the body shall move in a line that is the diagonal of a parallelogram the sides of which are parallel to these pushes and differ in length as the pushes differ in strength. [Strictly, Theodore speaks not of the strengths of pushes but of the size or greatness of motions.] In short, God chose the simplest laws deriving from the single principle that *the stronger shall overcome the weaker*. Also, I hold that •*there will always be in the world the same quantity of motion in any given direction*. We learn this from experience; and ·there is also another reason for accepting it, namely that· God is unchangeable in his nature, so that the more uniformity we assign to his actions the more we make them express his attributes. On the basis of •this I contend that the centre of gravity of any body will be the same before and after a collision, whether that centre is in motion or at rest. There is no need, Aristes, to go into more detail regarding

the natural laws God follows in the ordinary course of his providence. Let them be what you like—it doesn't matter much at the moment. You know for sure •that only God moves bodies, •that everything he does in them he does through motion, •that he gets the motion of one to lead to motion in another only in accordance with certain laws (never mind what they are), and •that his laws come into play only when bodies collide [seventh dialogue]. You know •that the collision of bodies is, because of bodies' impenetrability, the occasional or natural cause that kicks in in accordance with the general laws. You know •that God always acts in a simple and uniform manner; •that a body in motion will always move straight ahead, but •that impenetrability obliges a moving body to change direction; but •that this change is the least possible—whether this is because moving bodies always follow the same laws or because the laws they follow are the simplest there are. That is enough concerning the general laws of the communication of motion. Let us come now to the ·initial· formation of the universe, and to the wise way in which at the time of the creation God *arranged* all the parts of the universe, positioning them for all the succeeding centuries in the light of these general laws; for what is marvellous in divine providence consists in *that*. Follow me, please.

15. I am thinking of a mass of matter without motion, Aristes. It is just a block, ·and I want to do three things with it. •First·, I want to make a statue out of it. A little motion will soon do that for me: all I have to do is to move away the unwanted matter, and what remains is the statue (before I did this, the two lots of matter constituted *one body* because they were at rest with relation to one another). •Secondly·, I want this statue to have not only the shape of a man but also human organs and all the parts we don't see. Again, a little motion will make them for me. Take the heart, for

example. I want to make the heart out of some of the matter in the statue; I *move* the matter surrounding that matter, while keeping all the rest motionless. That portion of matter will no longer be joined to the rest as *one body*; and thus the heart is formed. And I can conceptually do the same thing to get the other organs such as I conceive them to be. This is evident. •Finally, I don't just want my statue to have the organs of the human body; I want the mass of which it is made to be turned into flesh and bones, into blood and animal spirits, into brain and so on. Again, a little motion will provide what I want. Assuming that flesh is composed of tissues with such and such a configuration, interlaced with one another in such and such a manner,

then if the matter that fills in between the interlacings of the tissues I am conceiving begins to move, so that it alters its spatial relations to the matter of which these tissues are to be composed, ·that separates out the tissues from the matter surrounding them, thus making them different bodies from their surroundings·, and there you have it—flesh. And I conceive that blood, ·animal· spirits, vessels, and all the rest of the human body can be formed in the same way, with a little motion. But what is infinitely beyond the capacity of our minds is to know just which parts are to be taken away, which to be left. [This is the only occurrence here of the notion of taking-away and letting-stay. Until now, Theodore has spoken only of 'moving' portions of matter.] Let us now suppose that in this machine that is like our own ·bodies· I want to take *a very small portion* of matter and give it a certain shape, certain organs, a certain configuration in its parts that suits me; again, all this will be brought about by means of motion. And it can't be brought about in any other way, for it is evident that it is only through motion that two portions of matter that make *one body* can be separated ·so as to make *two*·. Thus, I have no trouble conceiving that in a human

body God can form •another such body a thousand or ten thousand times smaller, and in •this one yet another, and so on •downwards•, with each new one being a thousand or ten thousand times smaller than its predecessor in the series; and that he can do this in a single creative stroke giving an infinity of different motions (only he knows what they are) to the infinite parts of a certain mass of matter.

Aristes: What you are saying about the human body can easily be applied to all the organic bodies of animals and plants.

16. Theodore: Very good, Aristes—*yes!* Now conceive of an indefinite mass of matter as large as the universe and suppose that God wants to make a beautiful work of it, a work that will last, a world in which the beauties will be conserved and perpetuated in their species. How will he go about it? Will he at first move parts of matter at random, turning it into the world *gradually* by following certain laws? Or will he instead make it all at once? Bear in mind that the infinitely perfect being knows every result of every motion that he can communicate to matter, whatever we suppose the laws of the communication of motion to be.

Aristes: It seems clear to me that God won't move matter more than he needs to; and since *the first* effect he can have on all the parts suffices to produce *every* sort of work, he surely won't want to create those works gradually by a great deal of unnecessary motion.

Theotimus: But what will become of the general laws of the communication of motion if God doesn't use them?

Aristes: That perplexes me a little.

Theodore: What are you perplexed about? •At the moment of creation• these laws are not yet in effect—or rather they don't exist. For those laws govern *what* is the occasional

cause of *what* when bodies communicate motion to one another in collisions. When there are no occasional causes, those laws don't exist. Thus, before God moved matter, and consequently before there could be any collisions, God didn't need and couldn't follow general laws for the communication of motion. And another point: God's only purpose in following general laws is to make his conduct uniform and make it bear the character of his unchangeability. Thus, the *first* step in this conduct, the *first* motions, can't and needn't be determined by these laws •because that first shove given to matter is a *single* event, and the concept of *uniformity* gets no grip on it•. Finally, if there were to be laws strictly governing the first formation of organic bodies of animals and plants, there would have to be an infinity of them, so that they would hardly be *general*. Thus, the first impress of motion that God initially made in matter didn't need to be and in fact *couldn't* be governed by certain general laws; so this step had to be taken exclusively with a view to the beauty of the work that God wanted to form and was going to preserve through future time in consequence of general laws. Now, this first impress of motion wisely distributed was all it took to form *all at the same moment* the animals and plants (the most excellent works that God has made from matter) and all the rest of the universe. This is evident, because bodies differ among themselves only in their over-all shapes and in the configurations of their parts, and motion by itself can do all that, as you agreed. . . .

17. Theotimus: That being so, I see very well that it would be a waste of one's time to try explaining on Cartesian principles, or on any others like them, the biblical account of the creation.

Theodore: . . . But it isn't a waste of our time to investigate what must happen to matter in consequence of the laws of

motion. Here is why. Although God formed all the parts of the universe all at once, he had to bear in mind the laws of nature that he wanted to abide by so that his conduct would bear the character of his attributes. His work couldn't have remained beautiful if he hadn't related it to the laws of motion. . . . Theotimus, you have read Descartes's physics, and you'll read it some day, Aristes, for it is well worth reading. So I don't have to go into these explanations any further.

We ought now to examine what this first impress of motion had to be—the shove through which God at one instant formed the universe for a certain number of centuries; for that is a scenic look-out, as it were, from which I want to get you to look and wonder at the infinite wisdom of God in how he arranged matter. But I'm afraid that your imagination may already be worn out by the exceedingly general matters we've have been discussing, and won't have left you with attention to contemplate so vast a subject. For, Aristes, what wisdom there is in this first step in God's action, in this first impress of motion he will make! What relations he has to think about, what combinations of relations! Before this first act, God certainly knew clearly what all its results would be, including the combinations they would enter into—not only all the physical combinations but all the combinations of the physical with the moral, and of the natural with the supernatural. He compared *all* these results with *all* the results of *all* possible combinations from *all* possible alternative starting-points. He made all these comparisons in planning to make the work that was to be most excellent in ways that would be wisest and most divine. . . . So there he is, unhesitatingly resolving to take

this first step. Try to see where the first step leads, Aristes. Note that a grain of matter pushed at first to the right rather than to the left, moved with greater rather than less force, could change everything in the physical realm, and thence in the moral, and even in the supernatural! Think then of the infinite wisdom of him who has compared and regulated everything so well that from the first step he takes he orders everything to its end and proceeds majestically, invariantly, always divinely, without ever belying himself, without ever changing his mind, until he takes possession of the spiritual temple that he builds through Jesus Christ and to which he relates every step in his conduct.

Aristes: You are right to end our discussion here, Theodore, for we would soon get lost in so vast a subject.

Theodore: Think about it, Aristes, for starting tomorrow we must go into it.

Aristes: If we set sail on that ocean we'll drown.

Theodore: No, we won't, provided we stay on our ship. Remaining in the church and always subject to its authority, we can strike lightly against the rocks yet not be shipwrecked. Man is made to worship God in the wisdom of his conduct: let us try to lose ourselves happily in its depths. There can be a great reward for this: the human mind is at it best when in strict silence it worships God's perfections; but this silence of the soul can be had only after we have contemplated what is beyond us. So, Aristes, courage! Contemplate and admire the general providence of the creator. I have placed you at a vantage point from which you should discover wisdom that is incomprehensible.

ELEVENTH DIALOGUE

The same subject continued. General providence in the arrangement of bodies and in the infinitely infinite combinations of the physical with the moral, of the natural with the supernatural.

Theodore: Have you. . . . observed from the vantage point ·I gave you· the beautiful order of created things and the simple and uniform conduct of the creator?

Aristes: Yes, Theodore, but I am short-sighted. I have discovered plenty of territory, but so confusedly that I don't know what to say to you. You have placed me too high. We discover things from a distance but we don't know *what* we are seeing. You have as it were winched me above the clouds, and my head spins when I look down.

Theodore: Well then, Aristes, let's go down a little.

Theotimus: But lower down we won't see anything.

Aristes: Oh please, Theodore, a little more detail!

Theodore: Let us go down, Theotimus, since Aristes wants us to. But let the three of us bear in mind our vantage point; for we shall soon have to climb up to it again once our imaginations are somewhat reassured and strengthened by some detail that is more sensible and more within our reach.

1. Remember our bees of yesterday, Aristes. This little animal is a wonderful piece of work. How many different organs, what order, what connections, what relations in all its parts! Don't imagine that it has fewer parts than elephants do; apparently it has more. Then try to grasp the number and marvellous interplay of all the springs of this little machine. The feeble •action of light is what releases all these springs. The mere •presence of objects determines and directs all their motions. Now think about the workmanship that went into these small animals—work that is so exactly

formed and so diligently carried out! It doesn't come from their own wisdom and foresight (which they don't *have*) but from the wisdom and foresight of God, who assembled all those many springs and arranged them so wisely in relation to so many different objects and purposes. Certainly, Aristes, you would know more than has ever been known by the philosophers [here = 'philosophers and scientists'] if you knew in detail the reasons for the construction of the parts of this small animal.

Aristes: I believe it, Theodore. This is beyond us already. But if such great skill and profound understanding are necessary to make a simple little insect, what must it be like to produce an infinity of them in a nested series in which each one is more than a thousand times larger than the next in the series? (That figure is right, because each bee has a thousand offspring, and the container must be larger than what it contains.) That frightens the imagination, but the mind detects the wisdom of ·God·, the author of so many marvels.

Theodore: Why so Aristes? If the little bees are organized in the same way as the bigger ones, whoever conceives a big one can conceive an infinity of smaller ones each contained within another. So it's not the large number and small size of these animals, all of them alike, that should increase your wonder at God's wisdom. It's just that your frightened •imagination wonders at the minuteness of what is usually seen only on a large scale.

Aristes: I thought there was no such thing as wondering *too much*, Theodore!

Theodore: Yes, but your wonder must be from *reason*. Don't worry: if you enjoy wondering, you will find a great deal of material to satisfy you in the great number and small size of these bees one contained in another.

Aristes: Why so?

Theodore: Because they are *not* all alike.

Aristes: I *imagined* as much. You claimed yesterday that the larvae of these bees, and the eggs from which these larvae come, have as many organs as the bees themselves; but what likelihood is there of *that*? [He is implying that the eggs/larvae and the bees are not alike because the eggs/larvae have *fewer* organs than the bees have.]

2. Theodore: Your *imagination* was doing badly, Aristes! For, quite on the contrary, larvae have all the organic parts of bees and *also* the parts that are essential to larvae, i.e. parts that are absolutely necessary if the larvae are to be able to look about, eat, and prepare nourishing juice for the bee that they carry, in larval form, within them and that they sustain by means of these organs.

Aristes: Oh ho! So larvae are *even* more wonderful than bees: they have many *more* organic parts.

Theodore: Yes, Aristes. And the eggs from which the larvae develop are even more wonderful than the larvae themselves, and so on up the line. So bees a thousand years ago had many more organic parts than their descendants do today. This is a strange paradox. But note this: it is easy to see that general laws of the communication of motion are too simple for the *construction* of organic bodies.

Aristes: Yes, that seems right to me. Still, these *laws* are sufficient to make things *grow*, and that is a great thing. Some people claim that insects come from putrefaction. But if an insect has as many organic parts as a bull, I would as soon say that the big animal could be formed from a heap of mud as that bees are engendered from a piece of rotten flesh.

Theodore: You are right. And just because the laws of motion can't *construct* bodies that have an infinity of organs, the insects must be *already constructed*, and *contained in* the larvae from which they emerge. But, Aristes, don't think that when the bee is contained in the larva from which it is to emerge it has the same relations of size, solidity, and configuration as it will have when it comes out. For it has often been observed that, for example, the head of a chicken embryo in the egg—analogous to the larva of an insect—is larger in proportion to the rest of the body than is the head that the hatched chicken will have, and that the bones get their consistency only after the other parts. All I'm saying is that all the organic parts of bees are formed in their larvae, and fit so well with the laws of motion that the bees can grow and take their shape as bees just through their own construction and the efficacy of the laws of motion, without God's providing finishing touches through extraordinary providence, *i.e.* through miracles. *This* is what constitutes the incomprehensible wisdom of divine providence. It is how providence can be justified, even though it often produces monstrous animals; for God isn't obliged to perform miracles to prevent monsters from being formed. At the time of creation he constructed animals and plants for future centuries. He established laws of motion necessary for making them grow. Now he *rests*, because all he does now is to follow those laws.

Aristes: What wisdom there is in the general providence of the creator!

Theodore: Do you want us to climb back up to the ‘scenic look-out’ from which we can survey the marvels of providence?

Aristes: It seems to me I am there, Theodore. I wonder at, and I worship with all the respect of which I am capable, the infinite wisdom of the creator in the variety and incomprehensible precision of the various motions that he initially gave to the small portion of matter in which he formed all at once the bees for all time. The *bees*? Not just *them*, but an infinity of larvae that can be regarded as animals of a different species; and he has crammed in an insensible nutriment by a thousand means that are beyond us. All this is done in accordance with the laws of motion, laws that are so simple and so natural that, although God does •everything by means of them in the ordinary course of his providence, it seems that he does •nothing, doesn’t affect anything, in short that he is resting.

Theodore: You find then, Aristes, that this action is divine, and that it is more excellent than •what is credited to God by some other theologies. For example, more excellent than •that of a God who acts at every moment by particular volitions, instead of following these general laws; or a God who wants to free himself from the cares of governing of his work, and who therefore gives to all the insects *souls*, or rather *intellects* strong enough for them to be able •to form their bodies or at least •to direct them according to their needs, regulating everything they do.

Aristes: What a comparison!

3. Theodore: Courage then, Aristes! Look further! At the instant when God first set into motion the parts of that little

bit of matter from which he made bees—or any other insect you please—for all time, what do you think he foresaw? At a particular place and time, one little bee caused a man to turn his head so that he caught sight of a woman for whom he then developed a criminal passion, •whereas without the bee he would never have noticed her•. At another time and place, a bee unwisely got into the nostrils of a horse, causing it to rear up and throw its rider, who was killed by the fall; he was the best king in the world, and his tragic death had an infinity of unfortunate consequences. Now, do you think that at the moment of the first push God foresaw all that? But let us not combine the physical with the moral, because that involves problems that can’t be resolved without appeal to certain principles that I haven’t explained to you. Do you think that God foresaw that a certain insect by a certain motion would produce something monstrous or disordered simply in the material world?

Aristes: Who can doubt that God foresaw all the consequences of that first input of motion that turned a certain portion of matter, all in an instant, into the whole species of bees? He even foresaw at a glance all the consequences of *each* of the infinity of motions any *one* of which he could have given at the outset to that same portion of matter. He also foresaw all the consequences of all the combinations of that portion of matter with all the others, and how they would move according to each of the possible choices of specific general laws.

Theodore: Well, then, Aristes: wonder at and worship the depth of the wisdom of God who devised that first impress of movement into a certain small portion of matter, after an infinite number of comparisons of relations, all made by an eternal act of his intellect. From that portion of matter, move on to another, then to a third. . . Survey the *entire universe*,

and then judge, on the basis of one sweeping overview, the infinitely infinite wisdom that settled on the first input of motion by which the whole universe was formed in all its parts and for all times—doing this in such a way that its result is assuredly the most beautiful work that can be produced in the most general and simplest ways, or rather in such a manner that the work and the ways of producing it express, better than any other work made in any other way, the perfections that God possesses and glories in possessing.

Aristes: [He exclaims over the size of this achievement of God's. Then:] You have placed me at the true vantage point from which we see the infinite wisdom of the creator.

Theodore: Do you know, Aristes, that as yet you are seeing nothing?

Aristes: *Nothing?*

4. Theodore: ·Actually, you see· quite a lot, but it is as nothing compared to the rest. You have surveyed the infinitely infinite combinations of motions of matter. But combine the •physical with the •moral, ·i.e.· •motions of bodies with •volitions of angels and men. Combine in addition the •natural with the •supernatural, and relate all this to Jesus Christ and to his church. It's not likely that in the first movements that God put into matter he neglected to direct his action with a view to how these motions ·and their consequences· would relate to his great, his *principal* work—for that's what his church *is*. Understand then how wisely the first motions of matter had to be settled if it is true that

the •order of nature is subordinate to the •order of grace,

if it is true that

death overtakes us in consequence of natural laws,

and there's nothing miraculous about a man's being crushed when a house collapses on him.

For you know that it is the fortunate or unfortunate moment of death on which our eternity depends.

[The point is: How we spend eternity depends on our spiritual state when we die; that state may vary from time to time; so *when* we die may make the difference between salvation and damnation for us. The statement that the order of nature is subordinate to the order of grace means that in God's ordering of the universe it is the case that

x dies at time t because that will send him (say) to heaven and *not* that

x will go to heaven because he dies at time t.

Therefore, when God at the instant of creation creates all the structure and sets it in motion, he has to foresee which material events—·e.g. times of dying·—will relate in suitable ways to the supernatural events that he plans to have happen.]

Aristes: Not so fast, Theodore. It is God who fixes that moment. ·The time of· our death depends on him. It's only God who can give us the gift of staying in existence.

5. Theodore: Who doubts that? Our death depends on God in several ways—at least seven of them·. It **(1)** depends on God because it depends on us: it is in *our* power to leave a house that threatens to collapse, and it is God who gave us that power. It **(2)** depends on God because it depends on the angels: God gave *them* the power and the commission to govern the world—the exterior of his church so to speak. ·If we die at a time that is fortunate for us·, our fortunate death **(3)** depends on God because it depends on Jesus Christ: in *him* God has given us a head who watches over us and won't allow an *unfortunate* death to come upon us if we ask him in the right way for the gift of persevering [here = 'living for ever']. But also (and you seem to be questioning this) our death also **(4)** depends on God in that he ordered and produced that first input of motion which was to have among its consequences that a certain house would collapse

at a certain time in certain circumstances. Everything (5) depends on God because it is he who established all the causes, free causes as well as necessary ones, and his foreknowledge is so great that he uses the free as well as the necessary. For God didn't communicate his power to minds at random: he did it only after having foreseen all the results of the movements of minds as well as those of matter. Besides, everything (6) depends on God because no cause can act except through the efficacy of God's power. Finally, everything (7) depends on God because he can interrupt the ordinary course of his providence by miracles, and he does so whenever the unchangeable order of his perfections requires it, by which I mean: whenever the demands of his unchangeability are of less moment than the demands of his other attributes. But we'll explain all this to you more exactly later on. But take this in now: Our salvation is already assured in the network of causes, free as well as necessary, and that all the effects of general providence are interlinked in such a way that, because of the general laws, •the tiniest motion of matter can contribute to an infinity of important events, and •each event depends on an infinity of subordinate causes. You may marvel yet again at the depth of the wisdom of God: before taking his first step, he related the first motions of matter not only to •all the natural or necessary results of this step but also—with even more reason—to •all the moral and the supernatural results according to every possible supposition. That is, he saw what *all* the physical, moral, and supernatural implications would be of his 'first step', for *every* possible first step and for *every* possible set of laws of motion.

Aristes: Certainly, Theodore, from the vantage point at which you have placed me I can see a wisdom that has no limits. I understand clearly and distinctly that general

providence bears the marks of an infinite intellect, and that it is incomprehensible—but not in the way that those who have never examined it find it incomprehensible. *Oh, the depth of the treasures of God's wisdom and knowledge! How impenetrable are his judgments and how incomprehensible his ways!* A providence founded on an absolute will is far less worthy of the infinitely perfect being; it bears the character of God's attributes much less than this providence that is ordered by the inexhaustible treasures of *wisdom and of foreknowledge*. [This is aimed at Descartes, who held that God does not have reasons for what he does, so that when he decides to do something the rock-bottom story is just that *he decides to do it*—an employment of his will which is 'absolute' = unconditioned = not constrained by reasons.]

6. Theodore: That is what I wanted to get you to see. Let us now get down to some details that will relax your mind and make •sensible some of the things you have just been •conceiving. Have you never amused yourself by keeping in a box and feeding a caterpillar or some other insect that is commonly thought to be transformed into a butterfly or a fly?

Aristes: Oh my, Theodore! From the large you suddenly jump back to the small. You keep coming back to insects.

Theodore: That's because I like it when we admire something that everyone else regards as negligible.

Aristes: I remember taking care of silkworms when I was a child. I enjoyed seeing them make their cocoons and bury themselves alive in them, and then later revive themselves.

Theotimus: Right now, Theodore, I have in a sandbox an amusing insect of whose natural history I know a little. Its Latin name is 'Formica leo', and it is transformed into one of those species of insects that have a very long belly and are

called, I believe, *demoiselles*. [The word is not translated because the standard insect-related translation of it, 'dragonfly', is wrong here: *both* the name 'Formica leo' *and* what the two men say about how the insect lives and reproduces show that their topic is not the dragonfly but the lion ant. The flying form of this used to be lumped in with dragonflies under the label *demoiselle*; the two look a little alike.]

Theodore: I know what it is, Theotimus. But you are wrong in believing that it is transformed into a *demoiselle*.

Theotimus: I have *seen* it, Theodore: it is an established fact.

Theodore: Yes, Theotimus, and the other day I saw a mole transformed into a blackbird! How do you think one animal can be *transformed* into another? That would be as difficult as for insects to be *formed* from a bit of rotten flesh.

Theotimus: I understand, Theodore. Formica leo isn't transformed. It simply divests itself of its clothing and its armour and abandons its horns. . . . I have in fact seen these horns in the tomb that they make in the sand and from which they emerge—no longer as Formica leo but as the more magnificent *demoiselle*.

Theodore: There you are. Formica leo and *demoiselle* are not strictly two animals of different species: the former *contains* the latter. [Theodore then describes in lengthy detail the behaviour of Formica leo, including its food-hunting and finally its making a 'tomb' in which it buries itself. He continues:] And then, after some weeks we see it come out in all its glory and in the form of a *demoiselle*, having left several envelopes and cast-off skins of Formica leo. Now, how many organic parts must there be for all these motions? How many vessels are needed to conduct the blood with which a Formica leo nourishes itself and its *demoiselle*? It is clear then that this animal, having stripped itself of all those

parts in its tomb, has many fewer organs when it appears in the form of a flying insect than it had in the form of Formica leo (unless we maintain that organs can be constructed and mutually adjusted through the laws of motion, ·which we know they can't·). ·I stress the need for a system of •organs that make all these movements possible, because the only alternative is· to suppose that God empowered some •intellect to take care of the needs of these insects, maintaining the species and constantly renewing it; and that supposition makes •divine providence ·merely· •human and makes it bear the marks of a limited intellect.

Aristes: Certainly, Theodore, Formica leo has a greater diversity of organs than the flying insect does, and for the same reason the silkworm has more than does the butterfly. [He adds details about silkworms, leading on to:] There is more artistry in the eggs of silkworms than in the worms themselves. Given that the organic parts of the worms are *in* the egg, as you say, it is clear that the whole egg contains more artistry than the worms alone, and so on ad infinitum.

Theodore: I wish you had read Malpighi's book on the silkworm, and what he has written on the formation of the chicken in the egg. You would then perhaps see that everything I tell you has some basis. Yes, Aristes, the egg is the work of an infinite intellect. Men find nothing in the silkworm's egg; and in the chicken egg they see only the white and the yolk and perhaps threads that they also take for the embryo of the chicken. . . . [There ensues a long conversation about eggs, and the different ways in which they fit into the life-spans of different species of animal. All this is offered as yet further proof of the amazing complexity of God's ordinary providence. This takes us to near the end of the next section.]

7. . . . Aristes: It is incomprehensible.

Theodore: It is indeed. But it is good to understand clearly that God's providence *is* absolutely incomprehensible.

8. Theotimus: Theodore, I must tell you of an experiment that I made. One day in the summer, I took a lump of meat that I enclosed in a bottle, and I covered it with a piece of silk. I saw various flies come to lay their eggs on this silk, and as soon as the eggs had hatched, the larvae chewed through the silk and let themselves fall onto the meat, which they very soon devoured. But by then it smelled too bad, so I threw it all away.

Theodore: That is how flies come from what is rotten. . . . After the larvae have eaten well, they enclose themselves in their cocoons and come out as flies; and because of that the ordinary man thinks that insects come from what is rotten.

Theotimus: That is certainly right. Several times I have put some meat in a clean bottle and then hermetically sealed it, and I have never found larvae in the bottle [After some more discussion of the idea that flies are generated by rotten meat—a topic that Theodore thinks too feeble to deserve much discussion—the conversation wheels back onto familiar ground. The following few speeches talk of comprehending or conceiving *that* such-and-such is the case. The topic isn't •having an idea of *how* it might be the case, but rather •grasping the mere thought of its *being* the case somehow.]

Aristes: Certainly we can't comprehend that a machine composed of an infinity of different organs, perfectly well-coordinated and arranged for different tasks, might be merely the effect of that simple and natural law that *a body is moved in the direction of least pressure*. For that law is more fitted to destroy this machine than to form it. But no more can we comprehend that animals *contain* all their descendants.

Theodore: If we don't comprehend that this is so, we do at any rate comprehend that it isn't impossible since matter is infinitely divisible; but we shan't ever comprehend that laws of motion might *construct* bodies composed of an infinity of organs. We have enough trouble conceiving that these laws might gradually make them grow. What we easily conceive is that the laws can destroy them in a thousand ways. We don't comprehend *how* the union of two sexes can be a cause of fertility, but we easily comprehend that this is not impossible—given that the bodies in question are already formed. But that this union should cause the organization of the parts of an animal, and of the whole animal—that is certainly something we shall never comprehend. [Theodore's main point here is a denial of the main implication of what Aristes has just said.]

Aristes: I have heard, though, that Descartes had started a Treatise on *The Formation of the Foetus* in which he claims to explain how an animal can be formed from the mixture of the seed of the two sexes.

Theodore: That philosopher's unfinished work can help us comprehend how the laws of motion suffice to make the parts of an animal grow little by little. But no-one will ever show that these laws can form the parts and bind them all together. Apparently Descartes recognized this himself; for he did not pursue his ingenious conjectures any farther.

[In the course of the ensuing conversation, Aristes suggests that Descartes might have done better if he had applied his ideas only to plants, not to animals. Then:]

9. Theodore: By no means. The enterprise would have been equally impossible. If seeds didn't contain in miniature what we see on the large scale in the plants, the laws of motion would never be able to make them fertile.

Aristes: Plants in seeds, an apple tree in a pip! This is still hard to believe, even though we know that matter is infinitely divisible.

Theotimus: I made an observation that greatly contributed to persuading me of this. . . . I took about twenty of the largest beans, Aristes, opened two or three of them, and saw that they were made up of two parts that are easily separated and (I have learned) are called their 'lobes'. [He planted the others, removing and examining some every couple of days for two weeks, and found that •the seed was partly caught between the lobes, •that the root grew down from part of the seed while •the plant grew upwards from a different part, and that in due course the lobes turned into above-ground leaves which protect the central part of the plant.] Thus I was persuaded that the seed of the bean contained the plant's root and the plant itself. and that the bean's lobes were the 'soil' in which this small plant was already seeded and already had its roots. . . .

Aristes: I believe all of that. But that this seed contains *the plant we shall see in twenty years* is what is difficult to imagine, and your observation doesn't show that it is so.

Theotimus: True. But we do now see that the plant is in the seed. Without the help of a microscope we can see that even in winter the tulip is in its bulb. We can't now see in the seed every part of the plant. Come on, then, Aristes, let's try to *imagine* them! We *can't* imagine how the plants that will appear in a hundred years are in the seed. This is something we have to *conceive*. It can at any rate be conceived. But we do not see that plants can be formed purely through the general laws of the communication of motion. We can't imagine how that can happen. Even less can we conceive it. So what reasons can we have for maintaining that this does happen, and for denying what Theodore was just telling us?

Aristes: I would be strongly inclined to believe that God conserves animals and plants by particular volitions—deciding separately on each movement of each portion of matter—if Theodore hadn't shown me that if we take away from providence its generality and its simplicity we make it human and make it bear the character of a limited intellect and of a particular cause. So we must come back to where we were, and believe that when God first put motion into matter he structured it so wisely that he formed all at once the animals and the plants for all time. This *could* happen, because matter is infinitely divisible. And it *did* happen, because this is the action that is most worthy of the infinitely perfect being.

Theotimus: Add to that, Aristes, that scripture teaches us that God is now at rest and that at the beginning he didn't just make the plants for the first year of creation but also made seed for all the rest: 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth' (*Genesis* 1:11). Those last words, 'whose seed is in itself', added to these, 'and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made' (2:2), seem to me to indicate that God doesn't act to conserve his creatures in the way he acted to form them in the first place. He has only two ways of acting: by •particular volitions, and through •general laws. And what he is doing now is just to follow his own laws except where there happen to be good reasons obliging him to interrupt the course of his providence—reasons I don't think you will find in the needs of animals and of plants.

10. Aristes: Undoubtedly not. For ·even· if there were only half as many plants and animals as there are, there would still be plenty. Tell me, what is the point of there being so many plants that are useless to us, so many insects

that bother us? These little animals are the work of infinite wisdom, I admit. But that's just what makes the difficulty. Why should God form so many excellent works to nourish the swallows and devour our buds? Wouldn't the world be just as perfect if caterpillars and chafers didn't come and strip trees of their leaves and their fruit?

Theodore: Aristes, if you judge God's work exclusively in relation to yourself, you will soon blaspheme against providence; you will soon make strange judgments about the wisdom of the creator.

Aristes: *What!* Isn't it for •man that God made everything?

Theodore: Yes, Aristes, for •one •man in particular, Jesus Christ, the man of whom St Paul wrote in *Hebrews 2* that God has subjected *everything* to him. God made everything for his church, and made his church for his son; so he made everything for his son. But—coming now to •man in general—if God *did* make fleas 'for man' it was to bite and to punish him! Most animals have their own special vermin, but man has several species •of vermin• all to himself—that's how true it is that God made everything for man! It was to devour man's wheat that God made locusts; it was to infest man's lands that God gave wings (as it were) to the seeds of thistles; it was to blight all man's fruit that God formed an infinity of species of insects. In this sense, if God didn't do everything 'for man', he came close!

Bear in mind, Aristes, that God's foresight is infinite. . . . Before giving to matter the first push that forms the universe for all time, . . . he foresaw that in certain circumstances man would sin, and that his sin would be passed along to all his posterity in consequence of the laws of the union of soul and body. Hence, since he willed to permit this deadly sin, he must in the light of his foresight have combined the physical with the moral so wisely that all his works would

always inter-relate in the most harmonious possible way. And a part of this perfect harmony consists in the order of justice according to which, •man having revolted against •the creator as God foresaw must happen, •creatures revolt (as it were) against •man and punish him for his disobedience. That is why so many different animals make war on us.

11. Aristes: What? Before man sinned God had *already* prepared the instruments of his vengeance? For you know that man wasn't created until after all the rest. That seems very harsh to me.

Theodore: Man didn't have enemies before his sin; his body and his environment were submissive to him; he didn't have pains inflicted on him. It was right that God protected him by special providence, committing him to the care of some guardian angel to prevent the unfortunate consequences of the general laws of the communication of motion. If man had preserved his innocence, God would have always had the same concern for him, for he never fails to do right by his creatures. Well, then! Don't you *want* God to use his foresight and choose the wisest possible combination of the physical and the moral? Would you *want* an infinitely wise being •not to make his conduct have the marks of his wisdom? or •to make man and *try him out* before making the creatures that trouble us? or •to change course and revise his work after Adam sinned? Aristes, God never has second thoughts about anything he has done, and never belies himself •by working in ways that don't exhibit his attributes. [The remainder of this paragraph expands Malebranche's words—though apparently not his thought—in ways that •small dots• can't easily indicate.] God's first step is controlled by his foresight of everything that is to follow it—but that's only a tiny part of the story. It's not just a matter of surveying

•everything that will ensue if the first shove is S_1 , but also comparing that with

•everything that will ensue if the first shove is S_2 , everything that will ensue if the first shove is S_3 , and so on through countless possible first moves; and *each* of those sets of consequences is a stand-in for an infinity of such sets, corresponding to the infinity of possible sets of natural laws from which God has to choose just one; and the evaluation of each of the members of this infinity of infinities of consequences is also a stand-in for countless different evaluations, depending on how God chooses to link the physical and moral realms, and the natural and supernatural realms. I say it again, Aristes: God foresaw that man in certain circumstances would rebel. After having compared all the different possible ways things might go, he thought he must permit sin. (I say *permit*, for he didn't *make* man sin, that is, subject man to the necessity of sinning.) So he was bound in wisely combining the physical with the moral to make his action bear the marks of his foresight. So (you say) he prepared the instruments of his vengeance prior to sin. Why not, since he foresaw this sin and wanted to punish it? If God had made innocent man miserable, if he had *used* these instruments prior to sin, we would have something to complain of. But is a father forbidden to keep rods ready to chastise his child, especially if he foresees that the child is certain to disobey him? Shouldn't he also show the child these threatening rods in order to keep him to his duty? Can we doubt that bears and lions were created before sin? And doesn't it suffice to believe that these cruel beasts which God now uses to punish us respected Adam's innocence and the divine majesty that he reflected? But if you think it bad that God prepared instruments for punishing man before any sin was committed, console yourself. For God by his foresight

also found the remedy for the evil before it had happened. Certainly, before Adam's fall God already had the plan of making his church holy through Jesus Christ. For St Paul teaches us that, in their union that preceded sin, Adam and Eve were a representation of Jesus Christ and his church:

·A man. . . shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh·. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (*Ephesians* 5:31-2)

—so that the •first Adam. until he sinned, was the figure of the •second ·Adam·, 'the figure of him that was to come' (*Romans* 5:14). . . . God permitted sin. Why? Because he foresaw that

•his work redeemed in a certain way would be better than
•the same work as first constructed.

He established general laws that would bring ice and hail to the fields; he created cruel beasts and an infinity of nasty animals. Why so? Because he foresaw sin. He set up an infinity of marvellous relations among all these works; he pre-figured Jesus Christ and his church in a thousand ways. That is an effect of his foresight and his wisdom, and a sure sign of them. . . .

12. Aristes: I understand what you are saying. God had good reasons for creating large animals that could punish us. But why so many small insects that do us no good and no harm either, ones whose mechanisms may be more marvellous than those of the large animals? ·It wasn't so that these works would increase our admiration for God, because· the mechanisms are hidden from our eyes and don't give us knowledge of the creator's wisdom.

Theodore: Without pausing to prove that even the smallest animal has some relation to us, I reply that God's chief

purpose in forming these small insects was not •to help or hurt *us* but rather •to adorn the universe with works worthy of his wisdom and his other attributes. The ordinary man treats •those• insects as negligible, but some men do attend to them; and apparently even angels wonder at them. Anyway, these small works do express God's perfections and make the universe more perfect in itself though less comfortable for sinners; and that is enough reason for God to have created them (given that he could conserve them without bringing in extra general laws)—enough reason, that is, even if the insects in question were neglected by every intellect. . . .

Aristes: I understand that, Theodore. A world filled with an infinity of animals large and small is more beautiful and shows more intelligence than would another in which there were no insects. And such a world doesn't (so to speak) *cost* God more than any other, i.e. doesn't require a more complex and less general providence, and so it bears as much as any other •possible world• the character of divine unchangeability. So we shouldn't be surprised that God made so many insects. [Sections 13 and 14 contain a long

exchange of views about the multifarious ways in which the natural world 'figures' or 'represents' Jesus Christ and/or his relationship to the church. This starts with **Aristes:** 'Grubs crawl on the ground, leading there a sad and humiliating life. But a tomb is made from which they emerge in glory. It has seemed to me that by this God wanted to represent the life, death, and resurrection of his son and indeed of all Christians.' **Theodore** sees Jesus as represented in the plant world: 'The seed that we sow must die, so to speak, in order to be revived and yield its fruit. I find here a natural representation of Jesus Christ, who died to regain life in glory.' **Theotimus** adds another: 'In the dispositions of bodies God has represented the dispositions of the holy soul of Jesus, and especially the extremeness of his love for his church. . . . The lower animals are not capable of *love*, strictly speaking, but they express that great passion in their behaviour, and preserve their species in about the same way that men do. So they represent naturally the violent love of Jesus Christ that led him to shed his blood for his church.' This material, nearly one-sixth of the whole dialogue, is low-grade theological poetry, and without philosophical interest even of an indirect kind.]

TWELFTH DIALOGUE

Divine providence in the laws of the •union of soul and body, and God's uniting us through these •laws• to all his works. Laws of the •union of mind with reason. Societies are formed through these two sorts of laws. How God distributes worldly goods to men through angels, and distributes internal grace and all sorts of goods through Jesus Christ. The generality of providence.

Aristes: [He exclaims over the wonderfulness of the divine foresight involved in the matters discussed in the tenth dialogue.]

Theodore: If the mere arrangement of matter and the necessary effects of certain very simple and general laws of motion strike us as so marvellous, what must we think of the various *societies* that are established and preserved through the laws of the union of soul and body? What judgments will we make concerning the Jewish people and their religion, and of the church of Jesus Christ? . . . Natural laws work through •collisions of bodies, and •such occasional causes—altogether blind and simple as they are—produce an infinity of wonderful works through the wisdom of the creator's providence. Well then, Aristes, what will be the beauty of God's house, the celestial Jerusalem? The nature of this is •not corporeal but• intellectual, enlightened by eternal wisdom and existing *in* that same wisdom. . . . How magnificent this temple of the true Solomon will be! Won't •it be as much more perfect than •this universe as •minds are nobler than •bodies? . . . God's wisdom is not exhausted by the marvels that he has •already• made. There is no doubt that he will derive from •spiritual nature beauties that will infinitely surpass everything he has made from •matter. What do you think of this, my dear Aristes?

Aristes: I think, Theodore, that you enjoy hurling me from abysses into abysses.

Theodore: Yes, from deep abysses into still deeper ones. Would you rather confine us to considering only the beauties of this visible world, only God's general providence in structuring bodies and setting them in motion? •That would be a poor choice•. This earth that we inhabit is made *only* for the societies that are formed on it. If men can form societies together, it is in order to serve God in a single religion. Everything is by nature related to the church of Jesus Christ, the spiritual temple that God is to inhabit eternally. So we shouldn't stop in this first abyss of God's providence regarding the division of matter and structure of bodies; we should leave it and go into a second, and from there into a third, until we have reached the final stage of all this, where everything is related by God. It isn't enough to *believe* and *say* that God's providence is incomprehensible; we must *know* this and *comprehend* it. And, to be quite sure that it is incomprehensible in every way, we must try to explore it in every way and to follow it everywhere.

Aristes: But we'll never finish the topic of providence if we follow it all the way to heaven.

Theodore: I agree, if we follow it the whole way there. But we will soon lose sight of it. We'll have to pass very lightly over things that deserve—for the magnificence of the work and for the wisdom of the action—much more attention. For God's providence over his church is an abyss where even a mind enlightened by faith discovers almost nothing. But let

us begin the subject.

1. You know, Aristes, that

man is composed of two substances, mind and body, the states of which are correlated through the general laws that are causes of the union of these two natures; and these laws are nothing but the constant and always-effective volitions of the creator.

Let us look a little into the wisdom of these laws.

At the moment a torch is lit it spreads light in all directions, or rather it pushes out in all directions the matter surrounding it. Because of differences in their surfaces, bodies reflect the light differently—or rather they do different things with the pressure on them caused by the torch. (These ‘different things’ are probably just vibrations or shocks that the very tiny particles of matter ·of which the light consists· receive from ·fairly small· bodies that they brush past on their way to the ·larger· bodies that they illuminate. But that is by the way.) All these vibrations—these variations of pressure that are alternatively faster or slower—are passed out instantaneously in every direction, in loops, since everything is a plenum.

[Theodore is relying on Descartes’s (meta)physics. Descartes held that

- there is no empty space (everything is a plenum),
- no portion of matter can be compressed or expanded,
- no portion of matter goes out of existence in the ordinary course of events, and
- no two portions of matter can occupy the same location at the same time.

From these premises he validly inferred that when a portion of matter p_1 moves it must *instantaneously* make portion p_2 move (to make room for p_1), at that same instant portion p_3 must move (to make room for p_2); and so on, to infinity unless a *closed moving loop* of matter forms, with p_n moving into p_1 ’s initial space *while* p_1 moves out of it, with no time-lag. Hence ‘instantaneously. . . in loops’.]

Thus, as soon as our eyes are open all the light-rays reflected

from the surface of bodies and entering through the pupil of the eye spread out through the eye’s fluids and come together again in the optic nerve. (How the eye works in relation to the action of light is a wonderful thing, but we mustn’t stop for it; if you want to study it, consult Descartes’s *Optics*.) The optic nerve is then moved in various different ways by differences in the pressure-vibrations that are reaching it; and the movement of this nerve is passed along to the part of the brain that is closely united to the soul. What happens then is the result of laws of the union of soul and body.

2. (1) How we are informed of the presence of objects. Although bodies are invisible in themselves, the sensation of colour that they occasion in us (whether we want it or not) persuades us that we see the bodies themselves, because no part of God’s operation in us—the goings-on within the eye, that I have just described—is detectable by the senses. And because colours affect us ·only· slightly, instead of regarding them as sensations of ours we attribute them to objects. Thus we judge that objects •exist and that they •are as we see them—black and white, red and blue, and so on.

(2) Although differences of light reflected from objects consist only in differences in the rate of pressure-vibration, the sensations of colour corresponding to these changes in vibrations have essential differences, to make it easier for us to distinguish objects from one another.

(3) Thus, with the aid of •sensible differences of colours that exactly mark the boundaries of the •intelligible parts that we find in the idea of space or extension, we discover at a glance countless different objects—their sizes, shapes, positions, and motion or rest. Our intake of all this is exactly right for our survival, but it is very confused and doesn’t suffice for any other purpose. Remember that the senses aren’t given us to discover the truth, or exactly how objects relate to one another, but to preserve our bodies

and provide everything that can be useful to them. For example, we have to sort out the things that we see into those that are good for our health and those that are bad for it; and we can't do this securely just on the basis of colour, because light may be reflected in the same way by two bodies whose natures are different; so sensations of colour don't make a big impact on our lives. They are useful to us in distinguishing objects from one another, rather than in taking them to ourselves or keeping them at a distance. So we refer our colour-sensations to the external objects rather than to the eyes that receive the light, because we always refer sensations to whatever it is better for our body to refer them to. (This is something we do naturally; we have no choice about it.) We refer the pain of a jab not to a pin but to the finger pricked. We refer heat, smell, and taste to the sense-organs and to the objects. And we refer colour only to objects. It is clear that all of this must be for the good of the body, and there's no need for me to explain it to you.

3. There, Aristes, are what seem to be the simplest and most general truths about sensations of colours. Let us now look into how all this comes about. It seems to me that infinite wisdom is needed to regulate the details of colours in such a way that objects near and far are seen approximately according to their size. (Not *extremely* far, for when bodies are so small or so far away that they can do us neither good nor harm, we don't see them.)

Aristes: Certainly, infinite wisdom is needed to bring it about that whenever I open my eyes, colours are distributed across the idea I have of space, in such a way that there is formed in my soul a new world (as it were)—a world that *is in me* and relates well enough to the world that *I am in*. But I doubt that God is quite exact in the sensations he gives us, for I know that the sun doesn't shrink as it moves away from the

horizon, and yet it appears to me to do so.

Theodore: Still, you're sure that God is always *exact* in making you see the sun as smaller in *exact* proportion to its distance from the horizon. This exactness signifies something.

Aristes: I believe it. But how does it come about?

Theodore: It is because God, abiding by the laws governing the union of body with soul, gives us—snap!, with no delay—the sensations of colour that *we* would give *ourselves* if we had a God-like knowledge of optics and if we knew exactly the network of relations among the shapes of bodies that are projected onto the back of our eyes. For God has set himself to act in our souls purely on the basis of what is happening in our bodies. *He acts in the soul as if he knew nothing of what is going on outside except what he knows through his knowledge of what is taking place in our organs.* That is the principle; let us follow it.

Now, when the sun is rising or setting, there are two reasons why it appears further from us than it does at midday: one is that we observe a great deal of terrain between us and the horizon where the sun is at sunrise and sunset; the other is that the sky looks like a slightly flattened dome. [The remainder of this speech slightly amplifies what Theodore says, in ways that the apparatus of little dots can't easily record.] If the sky *were* a flattened dome, an object at its edge would be further from us than an object high above us; so the sky's appearing like a flattened dome has the result that the sun looks further away at sunrise and sunset than at other times. Now, if it *were* further away at those two times than at noon, the image of it traced at the back of the eye would be smaller at those two times than at noon. (Quite generally, the more distant a body is, the smaller the image of it that is traced at the back of the eye.) But at those times the image *isn't*

smaller than it is at noon; it is near enough to the same size. And so we have the sun, at sunrise or sunset, •producing the same-sized image as at noon and yet for two different reasons •appearing to be further away than it is at noon. Putting these to together, we get the inevitable result that at those two times the sun *appears larger* than it does at noon.

Theotimus: [He describes an experiment with smoked glass which, he says, confirms Theodore's point that the rising or setting sun seems further away because •one sees so much of the earth between oneself and it. He calls •this '*the reason*' for the phenomenon; the flattened-dome point disappears from the conversation.]

4. Theodore: Bear this in mind, Aristes: although you are convinced that the sun isn't smaller at midday than at sunset, you see it as much smaller. And judge from this that the sensation of a shining circle that represents the sun to you gets its precise size only through relations to the colours of all the objects you see between yourself and the sun, since it is your *view* of these objects that makes you think the sun to be distant. Judge from this also that the basis I have shown you for the different appearances of the size of the sun must also be the basis for the apparent sizes of everything we see. And try to grasp the wisdom of the creator who, the *instant* your eyes are open, gives you an infinity of different sensations of colour of an infinity of objects, sensations that show you their size-differences not •on the basis of the size-differences amongst the images traced at the back of the eye but—extraordinarily—•determined by the most exact possible reasonings of optics.

Aristes: In this matter, I don't wonder so much at the wisdom, exactitude, and uniformity of the creator as the stupidity or pride of the philosophers who think it's the soul itself that forms ideas of all the objects in our environment.

Still, I acknowledge that an infinite wisdom is necessary to produce in our souls, as soon as our eyes are open, the distribution of colours that shows us something of how things are in the world. But I would be glad if our senses never deceived us, at least in things of consequence or in such a very obvious way. The other day, when I was going very quickly downstream, it seemed to me that the trees on the bank were moving; and a friend of mine often sees everything revolving in front of him, so that he can't stand up. These illusions are most obvious and most troublesome.

5. Theodore: God couldn't do anything better, Aristes, because he wants to act in us in accordance with certain general laws. Recall the principle that I just gave you:

The occasional causes of what occurs in the soul must occur in the body, because it is the soul and the body that God chose to unite together. Thus, God must be led to do such-and-such in our soul purely by various changes occurring in our body. He is to act in our soul as though he knew nothing about our environment except what can be inferred from what happens in our bodily organs.

I repeat, Aristes, *this is the principle*. Pretend that your soul knows exactly everything that happens to its body, and that it gives itself all the sensations most suitable for the preservation of life. This will be exactly how God acts in the soul. [Theodore goes to explain the moving-trees phenomenon, and another of his own (looking at a clock through your legs, and *not* seeing it as upside down), arguing that this is all wonderfully to God's credit. He acknowledges that the dizzy spells of Aristes' friend are probably due to pathology, the animal spirits going astray, and continues:] But what can you expect? The laws of the union of soul and body are infinitely wise and always exactly followed; but the

occasional causes that bring these laws into play (·i.e. the relevant bodily events·) are sure to let us down quite often because now (·i.e. since sin came into the world·) the laws of the communication of motion are not under the command of our will.

Aristes: What order and wisdom there is in the laws of the union of soul and body! As soon as our eyes are open, we see an infinity of different objects and their different inter-relations; and we get this without putting any work into it. Even if no-one thinks about this, it is utterly wonderful.

6. Theodore: By this means God doesn't just *reveal* his works to us—he also *connects* us with them in thousands upon thousands of ways. Here's an example:

I see a child about to fall. Just this glimpse—this one agitation of the optic nerve—releases certain springs in my brain that will make me run forward to help it and shout for others to help; at the same time, my soul will be affected and moved, as it should be for the good of any human being.

If I look a man in the face, I take in whether he is sad or joyful, whether he looks up to me or thinks I am trash, whether he wishes me well or ill; and I get all of this through certain movements of the eyes and lips that have no relation to what they signify. When a dog shows me its teeth, I judge that it is angry; but when a man show me his teeth I don't think he wants to bite me. The man's laugh inspires confidence in me, but a similar sound from a dog makes me afraid. ·These associations of bodily traits with mental states come to us smoothly and naturally; when we try to think them out, we don't do so well, as is shown by the fact that· painters who want to express the passions find themselves in difficulties. They often take one look or facial expression for another. But ·in everyday life· when a man is agitated by some passion,

everyone who sees him is aware of it, though they may not notice what exactly is happening with his lips, his eyes, his nose. This is because God unites us ·with one another· by means of the laws of the union of soul and body.

·Through those laws, God correlates ·your passion with ·your facial expression, and ·events in my eyes and brain with ·beliefs about your mental state. In this four-item sequence, the second and third items are of course linked by the laws of the communication of motion·.

Not only are men united with men in this way, but each creature is united with all those that are useful to it, each in its own way. For example:

I see my dog behaving in an ingratiating way, wagging its tail, arching its back, lowering its head. This sight connects me to the dog, producing a kind of friendship in my soul and also certain motions in my body that also attach the dog to me in return.

There you have it: *that* is what produces a man's liking for his dog and the dog's devotion to its master! A little light releases certain springs in the two machines—the bodies of the man and the dog.—that have been assembled by the creator's wisdom in such a way that they can help one another to survive. That much of the story applies to both; but man, in addition to the machine of his body, has a soul and consequently has sensations and motions corresponding to the changes that occur in his body; while the dog is a mere machine whose movements directed to their end should make us wonder at the infinite intelligence of him who constructed it.

Aristes: I understand, Theodore, that the laws of the union of soul and body serve to unite each mind not only to a certain portion of matter but also to all the rest of the

universe—to some parts more than to others, though, depending on how necessary they are to us. My soul spreads out (so to speak) through my body, by means of pleasure and pain. It goes outside my body by means of other less vigorous sensations. And by light and colours it spreads out everywhere, right up to the heavens. . . . How marvellous this linkage is!

7. Theodore: You will be even more impressed if you consider instead the results of these laws in the establishment of societies, in the education of children, in the growth of the sciences, in the formation of the church. **Society:** How do you know me? You see only my face, a certain arrangement of matter that is visible solely by its colour. I move the air with my speech; this air strikes your ear, and you know what I am thinking! **Education:** We don't just train children as we do horses and dogs; we also inspire in them a sense of honour and honesty. **Sciences:** You have in your library the opinions of the philosophers and the history of all the past; but without the laws of the union of soul and body your entire library would be at best white and black paper. Track these laws into **religion**. How does it come about that you are a Christian? It's because you aren't deaf! Faith is instilled in our hearts through our ears. Our certainty about things we don't see comes from miracles that were seen. What enables a minister of Jesus Christ to move his tongue to announce the Gospel and absolve us from our sins is the power we get from these laws of the union of soul and body. It is obvious that these laws are all-important in religion, in morality, in the sciences, in societies, for the public good and for the private. So this is one of the greatest means that God employs in the ordinary course of his providence for conserving the universe and carrying out his plans.

8. Now think about how many relations and networks of relations had to be sorted out to establish these wonderful laws and apply them in such a way that all the results were the best and the most worthy of God possible. [Theodore adds details of God's care and foresight—e.g. dogs don't smell flowers because they don't need to, and so on.]

Aristes: The mind gets lost in these sorts of reflections.

Theotimus: True, but nevertheless it comprehends that God's wisdom in his general providence is in every way incomprehensible.

9. Theodore: Then let's move on. The mind of man is united to his body in such a way that his body relates him to everything around him—not only objects he can see, touch, etc. but invisible substances as well, since men are connected not only in their bodies but also in their minds. All this comes from the general laws God uses in governing the world—it's what is marvellous about providence. The mind of man is also united to God—that is, to the eternal wisdom, the universal reason, that enlightens all intellects. And here again the uniting is done by general laws that are brought into play by *our attention*, this being the relevant occasional cause. Movements stirred up in my brain are the occasional or natural cause of my sensations. But it's my attention that is the occasional cause of the presence of ideas to my mind. [Note that the ideas are present *to* the mind, not present *in* the mind. As the first dialogue makes clear, Theodore holds that all these ideas are *God's*; they are not states of *our* minds; we get to contemplate them and use them in our thinking, but they are no more parts or aspects of ourselves than is the saw that we grip and use for cutting wood.] I think of whatever I want to. It is because of me that we are discussing this topic rather than some other, because I chose to focus my attention on it and then drew you in. But it isn't up to me whether I feel pleasure, hear

music, simply see blue. Here is why:

We are not constructed so as to be able to know how sensible objects relate to one another and to our body. It wouldn't be right if our sheer survival required the soul to attend to everything that might threaten us, ·so an alternative way of informing it had to be found·. The soul gets the needed information from the short and sure evidence of instinct and sensation, which frees it to be totally occupied in doing its duties to God and looking for the true goods, the goods of the mind.

It is true that now our sensations cast darkness and confusion on our ideas, so that we *don't* always think of what we want to. But that is a result of sin. [Theodore repeats things he has said earlier about why God permitted sin, declaring them to be irrelevant to the present topic.]

10. Our attention, then, is the occasional and natural cause of the presence of ideas to our mind in consequence of general laws of its union with universal reason. God had to set it up in this way, and I shall now explain why.

God willed that we be free—so as to make us capable of deserving heaven, and also so as to use free causes as satisfactorily as necessary ones in carrying out his plans, thus making *shine out* the wisdom of his providence and his role as searcher of hearts. Now, just as we can love only through love of the good, we ·necessarily· always decide to do what appears best to us at the moment of decision. ·And what appears best to us at a given moment depends upon what ideas we are contemplating at that moment·. So if we had no command over our attention, or if our attention was not the natural cause of our ideas, we would not be free or worthy of merit ·or demerit; because we would have no control over what ideas were present

to us, and thus no command over how we acted·. We couldn't even *hold back* from deciding, because we wouldn't be able to consider reasons that might lead us to hold back. For example, if Adam hadn't been in command of his ideas through his attention, his distraction—his wavering away from the good, the initiating cause of his disobedience—wouldn't have been voluntary.

·And so, as I said, it was essential to God's over-all plan that he give us command over •our own attention, and make •that the occasional cause of the presence to us of this or that idea·.

For you should know that God forms all societies and governs all nations—the Jewish people, the present church, the future church—by the general laws of the union of minds with eternal wisdom. [Theodore goes on at some length about how these laws enable good kings to govern well and bad ones to govern badly. And about how the same laws are of service to 'the angels and all the blessed spirits' as well as to 'the malice of demons'. In the course of this speech he refers to the union of minds 'with wisdom' and 'with reason', clearly making these fall under a single set of general laws.]

11. Aristes: It seems to me, Theodore, that you are considering the wisdom of ·God's· providence only as shown in the establishment of general laws and in the linkage of causes with their effects, letting all created things act according to their own nature, the free freely and the compelled in accordance with the power that the general laws give them. . . . This is certainly the most beautiful part of providence, but it isn't the most satisfactory. God's infinite foreknowledge is the foundation of the generality and uniformity of action that express his wisdom and the unchangeableness; but it seems to me *not* to express his goodness toward men or the

severity of his justice against the wicked. It isn't possible that God should—just by *general* providence—•give us revenge against those who harm us or •provide for all our needs. And how are we to be satisfied when there is something missing? So I admire your providence, Theodore, but I'm not very satisfied with it. It is excellent for God but not so good for us. I want God to provide for all his creatures.

Theodore: He does provide for them Aristes, lavishly. Do you want me to display the good deeds of the creator?

Aristes: I know that every day God does thousands of things for us. It seems that the whole universe exists only for us.

Theodore: What more do you want?

Aristes: I want us to lack *nothing*. God made all created things *for us*; yet this or that person doesn't have bread. A providence that provided an equal supply to all things of the same kind, or that distributed good and evil exactly according to merits—now, *that* would be a real providence! What good is this infinite number of stars? What does it matter to us that the motions of planets are so well ordered? I wish God would leave all that, and think a little more about *us*. The earth is devastated by the wickedness and malignity of its inhabitants. God should make himself feared; it seems that he doesn't interfere in the details of our affairs. The simplicity and generality of his ways brings this thought to my mind.

Theodore: I understand, Aristes; you are presenting yourself as someone who rejects •providence and thinks that here below everything is made and ruled by •chance. And I understand how, from that standpoint, you want to dispute the generality and uniformity of God's action in governing the world because this conduct doesn't meet our needs or our wants. But please note that I am reasoning from established

facts and from the idea of the infinitely perfect being. I grant you that the sun rises equally on the good and on the wicked, and often scorches the lands of good men while making the lands of the impious fertile. In short, men are not miserable in proportion to their guilt. That is what has to be reconciled with a providence worthy of the infinitely perfect being.

[In the first half of this next paragraph, Theodore takes the question to be: Given the world as it is, does it result from God's frequently intervening in particular situations? This misunderstanding of what Aristes has said is odd, given that one man wrote all of this.] Hail wrecks the crops of a good man, Aristes. Either •this distressing effect is a natural result of general laws or •God produces it by special providence. If he produces it by special providence, then far from providing for everyone he positively wants and brings it about that the best man in the district lacks bread. So it is far better to maintain that this miserable effect is a natural result of general laws. And this is what we usually mean when we say that God 'permitted' a certain misfortune. Another point: you agree that to govern the world by general laws is to proceed in a way that is fine and great, worthy of the divine attributes; your only complaint is that it doesn't sufficiently convey the character of God's fatherly goodness toward good people and the severity of his justice toward the wicked.

what Theodore says next: *C'est que vous ne prenez point garde à la misère de gens de bien, et à la prospérité des impiés. Car les choses étant comme nous voyons qu'elles sont, je vous soutiens qu'une Providence particulière de Dieu porterait nullement le caractère de sa bonté, puisque très souvent les justes sont accablés des maux, et que les méchants sont comblés de biens.*

conservatively translated: This is because you don't take into account the misery of good men and the prosperity of

the impious. For, things being as we see they are, I put it to you that a special providence on the part of God wouldn't at all convey the character of his goodness and his justice, since very often the righteous are crushed by misfortunes and the wicked are laden with goods.

what he's getting at: ???

But on the supposition that God's conduct should convey the character of his wisdom as well as his goodness and his justice, although goods and evils are not now proportioned to the merits of men, I find no harshness in his general providence. In support of this I have two things to say. **(1)** From an infinity of possible combinations of causes with their effects, God has chosen the one that best reconciled the physical with the moral; and that when he chose to cause that hailstorm he was motivated not by its predictably falling on the land of a certain good man but rather by its predictably falling on the land of a certain wicked man. Note the signification of the word 'motivated': if God afflicts the just, it is because he wants to test them and make them deserve their reward; *that* is his motive. **(2)** Since all men are sinners, none of them merits God's abandoning the simplicity and generality of his ways in order on this earth to proportion goods and evils to their merits and their demerits. In due course God will give to each according to his deeds, at the latest on the day when he will come to judge the living and the dead and enact general laws of punishment that will stand for ever.

12. Yet, Aristes, don't think I'm claiming that God *never* acts by special volitions, and that *all* he does now is to follow the natural laws that he initially set up. I am claiming only that God never abandons the simplicity of his ways or the uniformity of his conduct without weighty reasons, because the more general providence is, the more it conveys the character of the divine attributes.

Aristes: But *when* does he have these great reasons? Perhaps never!

Theodore: [He repeats what he said in the ninth dialogue, about cases where the claims of uniformity are outweighed by something else. He knows nothing about *when* this occurs.] But I do know that it *does* sometimes happen, because faith tells me so. Reason makes me know that it is possible, but it doesn't assure me that it actually happens.

Aristes: I understand your thought, Theodore, and I see that it perfectly fits reason as well as experience. I agree with the part about needing *faith* to know that God sometimes departs from his laws because actually we see that all the effects that are known to us have natural causes, and thus that—so far as experience can tell—God governs the world according to general laws that he established for that purpose.

13. Theotimus: True, but scripture is filled with miracles that God worked for the Jewish people, and I don't think he neglects his church so much as to forsake it so as to maintain the generality of his conduct.

Theodore: Certainly, Theotimus, God works infinitely more miracles for his church than for the synagogue. The Jewish people were accustomed to see what are called miracles. An enormous number of them had to occur, because the abundance of their lands and the prosperity of their armies were tied to and limited by their scrupulous observance of the commandments of the law. For it isn't likely that the physical and the moral could be correlated so exactly that Judaea was always fertile to the extent that its inhabitants were good men; and so among the Jews there were countless miracles. [Footnote by Malebranche: By 'miracle' I mean: effects depending on general laws that are not naturally known to us.] But I think there are even more miracles

among us—not to apportion •worldly goods and evils to our works, but to distribute freely among us •true goods or help that we need in acquiring them. But all this happens without God’s departing at every moment from the generality of his conduct. This is what I must explain to you, for it is certainly what is most wonderful in providence.

14. [The remainder of the dialogue—about one third of the whole—is almost purely theological, with little philosophical interest. Adam’s sin gave us difficulties and needs and limitations that he didn’t have before he sinned. God’s general providence operates in a world of sinners, in pretty much the way described in this and earlier dialogues. Three episodes in this long discourse are philosophically significant.

[(1) In section 4 of the eleventh dialogue Theodore has implied that the movements of our bodies are tied to our volitions *and to those of angels*; in section 16 of this twelfth dialogue he says explicitly that angels ‘have power’ over our bodies, and then he amplifies (or corrects) that to the statement that angelic volitions are *occasional* causes of our bodily movements: ‘Nothing happens in bodies except through motion, and it would be a contradiction for the angels to be true causes of motion (see section 6 etc. in the seventh dialogue). So the power of angels over bodies and consequently over us derives solely from a general law that God made for himself to move bodies according to what the angels will. Hence, God does not abandon the generality of his providence when he uses the services of angels to govern nations, because angels act only through the efficacy of a general law.’ Theodore doesn’t discuss any interplay amongst the *three* occasional causes of our bodily movements: •movements already occurring in our bodies, •our volitions, •the volitions of the angels.

[(2) Also in section 16, he gives an account of the sources of Jesus Christ’s volitions, and various relations between the divine son and his father. In the course of discussing the unfailing success of the requests that Jesus makes to God the father, Theodore says this: ‘What Jesus presents to God the father’ is not in truth a moral intercession like that of one man pleading on behalf of another, but rather an intercession that is powerful and invariably unfailing in virtue of the general law that God made to refuse nothing to his son. ‘If it is comparable with anything in the human condition, it is’ like the intercession involved in our practical desires when we decide to move our arms, walk, or speak. ‘I speak of ‘intercession’ here’ because all the desires of creatures

are powerless in themselves,
are effective only through the power of God,
do not act independently,
are basically nothing but prayers.’

That last clause [*ce ne sont au fonds que des prières* is a strikingly dramatic and at the same time perfectly accurate summing up of Malebranche’s account of human action.]

[(3) This passage from section 18 is noteworthy: ‘Compare your idea of providence with mine. Which of the two shows more wisdom and foreknowledge? Mine bears the character of God’s most unfathomable quality, namely his ability to foresee free acts of a creature in every sort of circumstance. On my view, God makes just as good use of free causes as of necessary ones in carrying out his plans. On my view, God doesn’t form his wise plans blindly: before forming them (I speak in human terms), he compares all possible works with all possible ways of carrying them out. On my view, God must derive an infinite glory from the wisdom of his conduct, yet *his* glory takes nothing away from the glory of the free causes to whom he communicates his power

without depriving them of their freedom. God gives them a part in the glory of his work and of theirs by letting them act freely according to their nature; and in doing this he increases his own glory. For it is infinitely more difficult to

execute his plans surely through free causes than through necessary causes.' [The point of the aside 'I speak in human terms' is that Theodore doesn't think of God as *first* investigating possibilities and *then* drawing up plans, because he doesn't take God to be *in time*.]

THIRTEENTH DIALOGUE

The ordinary way of speaking of providence is not necessarily to be criticized. The principal general laws by which God governs the world. His providence in keeping his church infallible.

1. Aristes: [He offers an excited sketch of the wonderful things he has been learning.]

Theodore: I see that you have followed closely and approvingly the principle I have been presenting these last days, for you seem to be still quite moved by it. But have you really grasped it, made yourself master of it? I still have doubts about that, because you have hardly had time to meditate enough to put yourself in complete possession of it. Share some of your reflections with us, please, so that I may shake off my doubt and be at peace. ·I ask this because I think that· the more useful and fertile a principle is, the more likely it is to be somewhat misunderstood.

2. Aristes: I think so too, Theodore; but what you told us is so clear, your way of explaining providence so perfectly squares with the idea of the infinitely perfect being, and with everything we see happen, that I really *know* it to be true. What joy I feel in seeing myself freed of the superficial opinion that I see befalls the ordinary man and even many philosophers! The moment something bad happens to a wicked man (or one reputed to be wicked), everyone makes a

snap judgment about God's plans, rushing to the conclusion that God wanted to punish him. But what if—as only too often happens—a rogue and scoundrel meets with success or a good man is defeated by the slanders of his enemies? Do they say that this is because God wants to reward the one and punish the other? Not at all! Some say that •it's because God wants to test the virtue of the good man; others say that •the good man's misfortune is something that God merely *permits* and that he didn't deliberately cause it. ·None of these people are *thinking* well! They aren't reasoning as cogently as someone who argues like this:

God leaves unfortunate people in their misery.

So he hates and despises them.

So I take pride in hating and despising them also.

What gets people into having opinions about God's plans? Shouldn't their falling into contradictions at every moment teach them that they know nothing of God's plans?

Theodore: Is *that* how you understand my principles, Aristes? Is that how you apply them? I find those whom you condemn to be more right than you are.

Aristes: What, Theodore! You're joking, or you are having fun by contradicting me.

Theodore: Not at all.

Aristes: *What?* Do you endorse the irresponsibility of the impassioned historians who record the death of a monarch and then pronounce judgment on what God planned for him, doing this on the basis of their feelings and the interests of their nation? You *can't* approve of how they go on: in their accounts of the death of Phillip II of Spain, either the Spanish historians or the French ones must be wrong, or both, when they describe the death of Philip II and give conflicting accounts of God's purpose in it. Don't kings have to die, as well as the rest of us, and isn't *that* the rock-bottom fact of the matter?

Theodore: Those historians are wrong, but you are not right. There's no need to judge that God deliberately harms an enemy monarch whom we hate—that's true. But we can and should believe that he aims to punish the wicked and reward the good. Those who form judgments of God on the basis of their idea of *the strict justice of an infinitely perfect being* judge well, while those who attribute to him plans that favour their unruly inclinations judge very badly.

3. Aristes: True. But when someone is crushed in the ruins of his house, that is just a consequence of natural laws, and the best of men wouldn't have escaped.

Theodore: Who would question that? But have you already forgotten that it is *God* who established these natural laws? The false idea of an imaginary *nature* still occupies part of your mind and prevents you from getting hold of the principle I explained to you. Pay attention now. Since it is God who established these natural laws, he must have combined the physical with the moral in such a way that the results of

these laws are the best possible—I mean the most worthy of his justice and his goodness as well as of his other attributes. So we are *right* when we say that the terrible death of a brutal or impious person is due to God's vengeance. For although such a death is usually just a result of the natural laws that God established, he established them only for effects like this. On the other hand, if some misfortune comes upon a good man when he is just about to do a good deed, we should *not* say that *God* wanted to punish him, since God didn't establish general laws with an eye to effects like that. We should say either that *God* has permitted this misfortune because it is a natural result of the laws that he established for other effects that are better, or that *he* planned by this means to test this good man and have him deserve his reward. For we must certainly take into account, when thinking about God's motives in combining the physical with the moral in the particular way he did, the great goods that he foresaw us extracting from our present miseries with the help of his grace. So men are right in attributing to God's justice the ills that come to the wicked. But I think they are also mistaken about this in two ways. *First*, they make these judgments only for punishments that are extraordinary and striking; if a rascal dies of fever, they don't ordinarily think of this as punishment by God. For *that* he must die by lightning or at the hands of the hangman! *Second*, they imagine that remarkable punishments are effects of a special volition on God's part. . . . In fact, infinitely more wisdom is required to *combine* the physical with the moral in such a way that this wicked person is justly punished as a consequence of the causal network than to *punish* him by a special and miraculous providence.

Aristes: That is how I too understand it, Theodore. But what you say doesn't justify the arrogance of those who think they see God's plans in everything they see happen.

4. Theodore: But I don't claim that •they are always right. I only say that •they are right when their judgments are free from passion and bias and are grounded in the idea we all have of the infinitely perfect being. Also I don't claim that they do well when they assert too positively that God had such and such a plan. For example, when a great affliction comes upon a good man, they will be sure that God merely *permitted* this to occur; •but they could be quite wrong about that, because• I am sure that if God foresaw that this affliction would bring great merit to the man, that will have been part of his reason for setting up the general laws in the way he did. . . . Never mind! What does it matter if minds fall into contradiction and perplexity with their false ideas, provided that basically they aren't mistaken on essential matters? Provided that men don't attribute to God plans contrary to his attributes, and don't represent him as acting so as to cater to their passions, I think we should listen to them calmly. Instead of tangling them in contradictions that can't be sorted out on their principles, we should in charity accept what they say so as to confirm them in the idea they have of providence since they aren't capable of having a better one. For it is indeed better to attribute a human providence to God than to think that everything happens by chance.

[Theodore develops this point at length, also maintaining that the plain person's simple views about providence have more truth in them than one might at first think. The conversation, in which Theotimus plays a large part, concerns those two themes and Aristes' question about how much harm is done to someone's life by his having a 'human' idea of how God's providence works, e.g. not preparing for a lawsuit he is involved in because he trusts God to bring him through it safely. All this occupies the rest of this section, the whole of sections 5 and 6, and the start of:]

7. Theotimus:For bringing plain people to virtue, a confused idea of providence is as useful as *yours* is, •Aristes•. It can't meet the problems that impious people raise; it can't be defended without falling into countless contradictions; I agree. But plain folk don't trouble themselves with such things. Faith sustains them; and their simplicity, their humility, shelters them from the attacks of the ungodly. So I think that when we are addressing the public at large, we should speak of providence according to the commonly accepted idea of it, reserving what Theodore has taught us for •silencing self-styled freethinkers and for •reassuring those who might be shaken by the thought of events that seem to contradict the divine perfections. Even with them, however, we must •have reason to• suppose that they can attend well enough to follow. Otherwise, if they are Christians, it would be better to stop their worries simply by the authority of scripture.

Aristes: I give in, Theotimus. We must speak to men in terms of their own ideas if they can't examine matters thoroughly. If we criticized their confused views about providence, that might lead to their downfall. It would be easy to tangle them in contradictions, and hard to get them out of the tangle. . . . I think that this, mainly, is why Jesus Christ and the apostles didn't explicitly teach us the principles of reason that theologians use to support the truths of faith. . . . So I am quite resolved to leave people free to speak of providence in their own ways, provided that they don't •say anything that openly offends against the divine attributes, •assign weird and wrong plans to God, or •have him aiming to satisfy *their* disordered inclinations. As for philosophers—and especially those self-styled freethinkers—I shall certainly not endure their impertinent mockery! I hope to have my turn and to discomfit them mightily. They have sometimes reduced me

to silence, but I am going to silence *them*. For I now have the means of replying to all the strongest and most plausible objections they have raised against me.

8. Theodore: Take care, Aristes, that vanity and self-esteem aren't contributing to your zeal! Don't *look for* opponents, so as to have the glory and pleasure of defeating them; what is needed is for those who have resisted the truth to be laid low ·not by you but· by *the truth* itself. If you set out to confound them you won't win them over, and maybe instead *they* will confound *you*. You do indeed have the means of forcing them to silence; but only if they are willing to listen to reason, which they certainly *won't* do if they sense you are trying to defeat them. If they make fun of you, they will lead others to laugh in support of them. If you scare them off, they will see to it that others are scared off also: you will be left alone with your principles that no-one will understand in the slightest. Here is a better way to proceed:

With the people whom you especially have in mind, propose your opinion to them ·not *as* your opinion, but· as though you wanted to ask them what you should think about it. In order to answer you, *they* will have to think about it, and perhaps its evidentness will convince them. Above all, don't let them think you are playing with them. Speak as a would-be pupil in good faith, so that they won't see that you are (for their own good) pretending. But, when you see that they have taken in the truth and made it their own, then you can argue *against* it, with no fear that you will talk them out of it.

They will regard the truth as a good that belongs to them, acquired by them through their own intellectual efforts. They'll be motivated to defend it, if not because they love it truly then because their self-esteem will be at stake. In

this way you will bring them in on the side of truth, and will create bonds of interest between them and the truth—bonds that won't be easily broken. Most men regard the truth as a useless piece of clutter, or rather as a very troublesome and inconvenient one. But, when they have found it for themselves, and regard it as something good that others want to take away from them, they attach themselves to it so strongly, and examine it so attentively, that they'll never be able to forget it.

Aristes: . . . I'll try to follow your good advice; but do you think I have a good enough grasp of your principles to be able to convince others of them and to reply to all their objections?

Theodore: If you approach them in the manner of a would-be learner, you don't need a more exact knowledge of these principles. The principles themselves will teach you as well as I can.

Aristes: What? As well as you can?

Theodore: Better! You'll see by experience. Just remember the principal truths that I have explained to you and that you must bring to bear on all the questions you will put to them. •Remember that God can act only according to his nature, only in a way that testifies to his attributes; that he therefore chooses both what he is going to make and how he is going to make it on the basis that both—the work and the way to it—shall jointly express his perfections better than would any other work done in any other way. That, Aristes, is the most general and the most fertile principle. •Remember that the more simple, uniform and general the ways of providence are the more (other things being equal) it bears the character of God, and thus that God governs the world by general laws so as to display his wisdom in the

network of causes. •But remember that created things don't act on one another through their own efficacy, and that God passes his power along to them only by taking their states to be the occasional causes that bring into play the general laws that he has prescribed. Everything depends on this principle.

9. Here, Aristes, are the five sets of general laws through which God governs the ordinary course of his providence.

1. General laws of the communication of motion, for which collisions are the occasional or natural cause. It is by setting up these laws that God gave the sun the power of shining, to fire the power of burning, and similarly other powers that bodies have of acting on one another. Everything that 'second causes' do—that is, everything brought about by created things such as bodies—is actually something that *God* does by obeying his own laws.

2. Laws of the union of soul and body, the states of which are occasional causes of changes in each other. It is through these laws that I have the power of speaking, of walking, of sensing, of imagining, and the rest; and that objects have the power of affecting me and moving me by way of my organs. It is through these laws that God unites me to all his works.

3. Laws of the union of soul with God. Because God is the intelligible substance of reason—that is, because whenever we use our reason we consult *reason*, the eternal and unchanging *reason* which is an attribute of the substance we call God—these are the laws that enable us to think rationally. It is because of these laws, which are brought into play by our *attention*, the occasional cause, that the human mind has the power to turn its thought in whatever direction it chooses, and to discover the truth. These three general laws are the only ones we learn from reason and experience; but the authority of scripture makes us aware of two others as well. They are:

4. General laws that give to good angels and to bad ones power over bodies, these being substances that are inferior to them. . . .

5. Finally, the laws by which Jesus Christ received sovereign power in heaven and on earth. . . .

There, Aristes, are the most general laws of nature and of grace that God follows in the ordinary course of his providence. . . . (There are also others, which I needn't go into, such as the laws through which hell's fire has the power of tormenting demons, baptismal waters have the power of purifying us, . . . and so on.) Although God prescribed these general laws for himself and doesn't abandon the generality of his conduct without good reasons, remember that he *does* abandon them in any case where he receives more glory by doing so than by following them. •But *only* in such extraordinary cases. Don't think of God as abandoning his laws at the drop of a hat, so to speak. For all you need in reconciling the apparent contradictions in the effects of providence is to maintain that ordinarily God does and must act through general laws. Take hold then of these principles, and in discussion with anyone you mean to convert proceed in such a way that he comes to think of the principles for himself.

Aristes: . . . Suppose that I succeed—with the help of your advice—in my plan, and have convinced the people of the truth of our principles, how am I to get them to recognize the authority of the church? For they are born into heresy, and I should like to get them out of it.

Theodore: . . . You may think that to convert heretics you need only give good proofs of the infallibility of the church, •but in fact• it is necessary for God to get involved. When someone is unfortunately caught in some sectarian error, this will *daily* form so many hidden bonds in his heart that he

will be blinded and shut off from the truth. If someone urged you to become a protestant, you certainly wouldn't listen to him willingly. Well, you should know that protestants may be more ardent in their conviction than we are in ours, because they are engaged more often than we are in urging one another to *show* how firm they are in their faith. Thus they are kept in their sect by countless attachments, bonds, prejudices, and considerations of self-esteem. Think what skill we would need to make them examine fairly the proofs we can give them that they are in error!

Aristes: I know, Theodore, that on the subject of religion they are extremely sensitive and touchy. But don't worry. The people I have in mind are not as sensitive as many of the others are; and I shall make such a good show of wanting to *learn* that they, in order to respond to me, ·i.e. to my assumed needs·, will have to examine the doubts I shall put to them. Just give me some proofs of the infallibility of the church consonant with the idea that you have given me of providence.

10. Theodore: Scripture, which heretics dare not reject, makes it certain that God 'will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth' (1*Timothy* 2:4). So we must find in the order of providence good means for giving every man access to knowledge of the truth. . . . I don't say that God wills to do everything needed for all men to be saved. He doesn't will to perform miracles at every moment, or to infuse irresistible grace in every heart. . . . He mustn't abandon the generality of his providence without sufficient reasons. . . . So all I am saying is that we must find in providence some *general* means corresponding to God's wish that all men should come to know the truth. Now, we can achieve this knowledge in only two possible ways—through inquiry or through authority.

Aristes: I take you to be saying, Theodore, that the way of inquiry may correspond to God's wish to save learned people, but that he also wants to save the poor, the simple, the ignorant, those who don't know how to read. . . . [He goes on to say that even the learned haven't all got the true message, and continues:] The way of inquiry is quite insufficient. Now that the reason of man is weakened, we must proceed by the way of authority. That way is perceptible, it is sure, it is general. It corresponds perfectly to God's wanting all men to have access to knowledge of the truth. But where are we to find this infallible authority, this safe road that we can follow without fear of error? The heretics claim that it is to be found only in the sacred books.

11. Theodore: It is to be found there, but it is by the authority of the church that we know this. St Augustine was right when he said that without the church he wouldn't believe the bible. How can simple men be certain that our four gospels have infallible authority? The ignorant have no proof that they were written by those who are named as their authors, or that the texts haven't been corrupted in essential matters; and I don't know whether even the scholars have really certain proofs of these two points. But even when we are certain that the gospel according to St Matthew (for example) really is by that apostle, and that it is today in the form in which he composed it, *unless an infallible authority tells us that St Matthew was divinely inspired* we still can't rest our faith on that gospel as we would on the words of God himself. Some people maintain that we can't read the sacred books without perceiving—*sensing*—that they are divine in origin; but what is this claim based on? If we are to regard them as infallible, we need something other than guesswork or shallow impressions. We need in fact one of two things:

- the Holy Spirit reveals this to us, one person at a time;
or
- the church reveals it to us, with one revelation for everyone.

Now the latter is much simpler, more general, more worthy of God's providence than the former.

But that is not the only role the church has in what we take from the bible. Suppose that of the above two options, the former is the right one, meaning that the church doesn't come in at that point, and that everyone who reads scripture can know by a special revelation that the gospel is a divine book and that it hasn't been corrupted by malice or negligence on the part of the copyist. *Who will give them an understanding of it?* Don't say that their reason will provide it; because reason doesn't suffice always to capture the true sense. Here are a couple of examples, to prove the point:

- The Socinians are rational, as other men are, yet they find in the bible that the son is not the same substance as the father.
- The Calvinists are men, and so are the Lutherans; and they claim that the words 'Take, eat, this is my body', taken in the context in which they occur, mean that what Jesus Christ gives to his apostles is merely something that *represents* his body.

Who will undeceive either of these groups? Who will lead them to knowledge of the truth that God wants us all to reach? On *their* view of how matters stand, there would have to be help from the Holy Ghost at every moment for each individual person—help of the sort they say is *not* given to the church as a whole when it is assembled to decide these matters. What folly, what blindness, what pride! They fancy that an individual can understand scripture better

does the universal church—the church that is the sacred storehouse of tradition, and that deserves, more than does any individual, to be protected (by its chief, Jesus Christ) against the powers of hell.

12. Most men are persuaded that God guides them by special providence, or rather that he so guides those whom they hold in great esteem. They tend to think that a certain person is so dear to God that God won't let him fall into error or lead others into it. They credit him with having a kind of infallibility, and take their stand on this. [Theodore continues at length about the absurdity of this, given how unreliable individual men are. There are, he says, things that God could do to produce belief through special providence, but he doesn't do them. He continues:] Why should God enlighten a certain scholar specially so that he may capture the sense of a passage of scripture? The authority of the church suffices to keep us from going astray. Why would anyone be unwilling to submit to it? Jesus Christ entrusts his infallibility to the church, and that is all that is needed to preserve at the same time the faith of humble and obedient children in their mother. . . .

Aristes: . . . It is indeed infinitely simpler and more in conformity with reason that Jesus Christ should assist his church so as to prevent it from falling into error rather than assisting each person individually, especially individuals who have the impudence to call established matters into question and thereby accuse the saviour either of having abandoned his bride, the church, or of having been unable to defend her! . . .

Theodore: It is true, Aristes. For the apostolic Roman church is visible and recognizable. It is everlasting for all times and universal for all places; at any rate it is the society most exposed to the eyes of all the earth and most venerable

for its antiquity. None of the particular sects have any sign of truth, any mark of divinity. Those that appear now to have some lustre began a long time after the church. Everyone knows this, including those who let themselves be dazzled by that small flash that hardly goes beyond the boundaries of their own country. . . .

Theotimus: [He exclaims at length over the fact that some people doubt that the church of Rome is infallible. 'Provided we have the idea of Jesus Christ that we must have of him, we can't conceive of his church becoming the mistress of error. For that we needn't engage in great inquiry; it is a truth that jumps to the eyes of the simplest and the most primitive people.' And so on. Theodore then starts on a different tack, arguing that even if the church were not infallible you would have to be crazy not to believe its central doctrines. Thus:]

Theodore: Just suppose, Aristes, that Jesus Christ is neither head nor husband of the church, that he doesn't watch over it, that he isn't at its centre until the end of time to guard it against the powers of hell. In that case, it doesn't have the divine infallibility that is the unshakeable foundation of our faith. Even then, it seems evident to me that someone would have to have lost his mind or become utterly obsessed to prefer the opinions of heretics to the decisions of the church's councils. As an example, let us consider the nature of the Eucharist on the supposition that the church is not infallible. [In this context, 'the Eucharist' refers not to the sacrament, the ceremony, but to the elements used in it, the sacramental bread and wine.]

What do we have in the Eucharist—the body of Jesus Christ or the symbol of his body? We are at a loss to know. We all agree that the apostles knew the answer to our question. We agree that what they taught about this must have been believed in all

the churches that they founded. What do we do to clear up this contested matter? We convene the most general assemblies that we can. We bring together into one place the best witnesses we can have of what is believed in different countries. A bishop is well aware of whether in the church he presides over it is or isn't believed that the body of Jesus Christ is in the Eucharist. We ask the bishops then what *they* think of this. They declare it to be an article of *their* faith that the bread is changed into the body of Jesus Christ. They pronounce anathema—excommunication, removal from membership in the church—on those who maintain the contrary. The bishops of other churches who couldn't get to the assembly express approval of the decision; or if they are out of touch with those at the council they remain silent and show well enough by their silence that they are of the same opinion. . . .

That being so—and it is what happened—I maintain that even if Jesus Christ had abandoned his church we would have to renounce common sense to prefer the opinion of Calvin or of Zwingli to that of all these witnesses who attest a fact that they couldn't possibly not know.

Aristes: That is utterly evident. But it will be objected that the bishops, who have to know what *is* at present believed about the Eucharist in their churches, may fail to know what *was* believed about it a thousand years ago, and that it can happen that all the particular churches have imperceptibly fallen into error.

Theodore: On the supposition that Jesus Christ is not governing his church, I agree that it can happen that all churches generally fall into error. But it's a practical impossibility that they should all fall into the *same* error. That they should fall into error without leaving an obvious

historical record of their disputes is also virtually impossible. Finally, that they should all fall into an error like the one the Calvinists attribute to us is *absolutely* impossible. For what has the church decided? ·That is, what *is* this supposed error that the churches have fallen into?·

- That the body of a man is in an infinity of places at the same time.
- That the body of a man is in a space as small as that of the Eucharist.
- That after the priest has pronounced certain words the bread is changed into the body of Jesus Christ and the wine into his blood.

What? This extravagant folly (as a heretic would call it) got into the heads of Christians of *all* the churches? You'd have to be mad to maintain *that*, it seems to me. We won't get a single error becoming widespread unless it is in general conformity with the dispositions of the mind. All peoples have been able to worship the •sun. Why? Because that star dazzles all men generally. But if one mad people worshipped •mice, others will have worshipped •cats! If Jesus Christ had abandoned his church, all Christians might have gradually given in to Calvin's heresy about the Eucharist—·namely that it *symbolizes* the body of Jesus Christ—because that view, wrong as it is, doesn't shock either reason or the senses. But that all the Christian churches should have come to accept an opinion that outrages the imagination, shocks the senses, and amazes reason, and have done this so imperceptibly that it wasn't noticed—I say it again: to believe *that*, we would have to renounce common sense, to have no knowledge of man and no thoughts about his inner dispositions.

Now I concede ·for purposes of argument, at least· that if God abandoned his church it is possible that all Christians should fall into the same error, a shocking error quite contrary to the dispositions of the human mind, and that

they should do this without even noticing that they were doing so. I contend that even on *this* supposition we can't refuse to submit to the decisions of the church unless we are absurdly prejudiced. According to the supposition, it is possible that the church is mistaken. That is true. But we don't need to bring in any *suppositions* to conclude that it can much more naturally happen that a particular person falls into error. The 'error' in question doesn't concern a truth involving principles of metaphysics; it is a matter of *fact*—the question of what Jesus Christ meant by the words 'This is my body'—and it can't be better answered than by the testimony of those who came ·immediately· after the apostles. . . .

To confine ourselves to the point that the council's decision is contrary to reason and to good sense, I again submit that the •more offensive it appears to reason and to good sense •the more certain it is that it conforms to the truth. For, after all, weren't the men of past centuries made like those of today? Our imagination rebels when we are told that the body of Jesus Christ is at the same time in heaven and on our altars, but does anyone seriously think there may have been an age when men were *not* struck by such a frightening thought? Yet, in all the Christian churches this terrible mystery has been believed. The fact is established by the testimony of those who are best placed to know it, namely by the declaration of the bishops. That is how men have been instructed by a higher authority, an authority that they thought to be infallible and that can be seen at a glance to be infallible if we have the idea of Jesus Christ and his church that we ought to have. Make any suppositions you like, there can't be any doubt about what we should believe when we see •the decision of a council ranged against •the dogmas of a particular individual or assembly that the church hasn't approved.

Aristes: So those who remove from the church of Jesus Christ the infallibility that is essential to it don't free themselves thereby of the obligation to accept its decisions. To be free and clear of that obligation, they would have to renounce common sense! Still, we often see that the most common opinions are not the truest, and we're quite prepared to believe that what is advanced by one learned man is much more sure than what everyone else thinks.

Theodore: Aristes, you touch on one of the chief causes of the heretics' error and obstinacy: they don't properly distinguish dogmas of faith from truths that can be discovered only through intellectual effort. Anything that depends on an abstract principle is out of reach for most people, so that good sense tells us not to trust the multitude on such a matter, because they are much less likely to be right about it than a

single man who applies himself assiduously to the search for truth about it. So it is true—and we often see this—that the most common opinions are not the truest. But in matters of faith the opposite holds. The more witnesses there are who attest to a fact, the more certainty it has. Dogmas of religion are learned not from theoretical thinking but from authority, from the testimony of those who preserve the sacred storehouse of tradition. What everyone believes, what everyone has always believed, is what we must continue to believe eternally. For in matters of faith, of revealed truths, of accepted dogmas, the common opinions are the true ones. . . . [Theodore continues with a criticism of the moral character of those who don't see this. The dialogue ends on a note of hope that Aristes will succeed in converting his heretical acquaintances.]

FOURTEENTH DIALOGUE

The same subject continued. The incomprehensibility of our mysteries is certain proof of their truth. How to clarify the dogmas of faith. The incarnation of Jesus Christ. Proof of his divinity against the Socinians. No creature, not even angels, can worship God except through Jesus Christ. How faith in him makes us acceptable to God.

1. Aristes: [He expresses rapturous happiness over 'the state you have put me in'. He has been despondent over the depth and darkness of the Christian doctrines, but now:] The more obscure our mysteries are—what a paradox!—the more credible I now find them. Yes, Theodore, I find in the very obscurity of our mysteries, accepted as they are now in so many different nations, an invincible proof of their truth.

How, for example, are we to reconcile •unity with •trinity, a society of •three different persons in the nature of •one God who is in no way divided? This is incomprehensible, all right, but it isn't incredible. It is beyond us, it is true. But if we bring a little good sense to bear we will believe it; or at least we will if we want to be of the religion of the apostles. For if they didn't know this inexpressible mystery or if they didn't teach it to their successors, it couldn't possibly have gained

in our minds the universal belief that it gets throughout the church and among so many different nations. [Aristes then reports at some length the argument that Theodore has used for this conclusion. One notable episode in this: 'If Jesus Christ didn't watch over his church, the unitarians would soon outnumber the true catholics. . . .for there is nothing in these heretics' opinions that doesn't enter the mind naturally.']

2. Theodore: . . . I understand how you are in a state of great calm. Enjoy it, my dear Aristes. But please let us not think about the church of Jesus Christ in the way we think of merely human societies. It has a head who will never allow it to absorb error. Its infallibility is supported by the divinity of its leader. We don't have to judge purely through the rules of good sense that this or that one of our mysteries can't be an invention of the human mind. We have a decisive authority, a way even shorter and surer than that kind of inquiry. Let us humbly follow this way so as to honour by our trust and our submission the power, vigilance, goodness, and other qualities of the sovereign shepherd of our souls. For it is, in a way, to blaspheme against the divinity of Jesus Christ—or at least against his love for his spouse, the church—to require that the truths needed for our salvation be given proofs other than the ones drawn from the authority of the church.

If you believe some article of our faith because your investigation of it shows you clearly that it is in the apostolic tradition, your faith comes into this as well as your reason, because your faith shows in your honouring the mission and apostolate of Jesus Christ. Your faith, that is, expresses your judgment that God sent Jesus Christ to the world to teach it the truth. But if you believe only for this reason, without bringing in the infallible authority of the church, you aren't honouring the wisdom and generality of providence,

which furnishes simple, ignorant people a very sure and very natural means of learning the truths needed for salvation. You aren't honouring the power—or anyway the vigilance—of Jesus Christ over his church. You seem to suspect him of wishing to abandon it to the spirit of error. And so the faith of those who humbly submit to the authority of the church does much more honour to God and to Jesus Christ than your faith does, since it more exactly expresses the divine attributes and the qualities of our mediator. . . .

3. But remember that the humble and submissive faith of people who yield to authority is not blind or rash. It is based on reason. Certainly infallibility is contained in the idea of •divine religion, of •a society headed by a person whose nature is that of eternal wisdom, of •a society established for the salvation of the simple and the ignorant. Good sense dictates that we believe the church to be infallible. We must therefore blindly yield to its authority; but that is because reason shows us that •there is no danger in this, and that •if any Christian refuses to submit blindly his refusal belies the judgment that he should make concerning the qualities of Jesus Christ.

Our faith is perfectly rational in its source. What established it was not quick shallow opinions, but right reason. For Jesus Christ proved his mission and his qualities in an irresistible way. His glorious resurrection is testified to in such a way that we would have to renounce common sense in order to call it in doubt. It hardly ever happens these days that the truth gets itself respected through the show and majesty of miracles. That is because it is upheld by the authority of Jesus Christ whom we recognize as infallible and who has promised his assistance. . . .and his vigilance. . . .

[Shortly after this Theotimus interrupts, saying that 'we are spending too much of our dwindling supply of time on the infallibility of the church', and asking Theodore to

expound his 'method' of getting a deeper understanding that will generate greater respect for the Christian religion and its morality. Theodore gives a short answer of which Aristes says he doesn't understand a word, because it is too general. Theodore agrees that. . .]

4. Theodore: . . . some more explanation is needed. I always carefully distinguish •dogmas of faith from the •proofs and explanations that can be given of them. I look for the dogmas in the tradition and agreement of the universal church; and I find them better displayed in the definitions of the church councils than anywhere else. I think you'll agree that as the church is infallible we must adhere to what it has decided.

Aristes: But don't you also look to holy scripture for them?

Theodore: I think that is the shortest and surest way to find them, but it must be in holy scripture as explained by tradition, by which I mean: explained by the •general councils (i.e. the ones that are •generally accepted •everywhere), explained by the same mind that dictated them. . . . The councils interpret scripture better than I do. . . . Also, they teach us several truths that the apostles entrusted to the church and that have been disputed. These truths are not easily found in the bible, for ever so many heretics are able to find the exact opposite there. In short, Aristes, I try to be well assured of the dogmas on which I wish to meditate so as to have some understanding of them. And then I use my mind in the same way as those who study physics. I focus as hard as I can on the idea that my faith has given me of my subject. I always look for illumination in what appears to me to be simplest and most general, and when I find it I contemplate it. But I follow it only as far as it draws me irresistibly by the force of its evidentness. The least obscurity makes me fall back on dogma, which in my fear of error will always be my inviolable rule in questions regarding faith.

People who study physics never reason in a way that goes counter to experience, but nor do they infer from experience anything that is counter to reason. They have no doubts as to the certainty of experience or the evidentness of reason, but they are hesitant about how to reconcile the two because they don't see how to pass back and forth between them. Well, when I am doing theology my •equivalent of the •experiences •of the physicist• are the facts of religion, the established dogmas. I never call them into question. This is what guides me and leads me to understanding. But when I *think* I am following them but become aware of colliding with reason, I stop right there, knowing well that dogmas of faith and principles of reason must actually be in agreement even if they are in conflict in my mind. So I remain •submissive to authority, •full of respect for reason, and merely •convinced of the weakness of my mind and •perpetually in distrust of myself. Finally, if ardour for the truth revives I resume my investigations; and by switching my attention to and fro between the ideas that enlighten me and the dogmas that sustain and direct me, I discover how to pass to and fro between faith and understanding without having any particular method for doing so. But •that happens only rarely•. Usually I become weary from my efforts, conclude that I'm not capable of completing the investigation, and leave it to others who are more enlightened and more diligent than I am. •In these cases• my only reward for my work is becoming increasingly aware of the smallness of my mind, the depth of our mysteries, and the greatness of our need for an authority to lead us. . .

[Aristes is dissatisfied, and asks for an example—specifically the example of 'the fundamental truth of our religion'. Theodore somewhat reluctantly agrees.]

5. Theodore: . . . To discover by reason the one among all religions that God established, we must attentively consult the notion we have of God, the infinitely perfect being, for it is evident that whatever is produced by a cause must necessarily have some relation with its cause. . . . In God's case the relation is this: everything that he causes bears the character of his attributes. That is because he knows what these attributes are and glories in having them. (Men, in contrast, don't always act in accordance with their natures, because they are ashamed of themselves. I know an avaricious man whom you would take to be the most liberal man in the world!). . . . So when God acts he necessarily proclaims outwardly the unchangeable and eternal judgment he has of his attributes, since he delights in them and glories in possessing them.

Aristes: That is evident. But I don't see where all these generalities are leading.

6. Theodore: To this, Aristes. God *perfectly* proclaims his judgment about himself only through •the incarnation of his son, •the consecration of his high priest, and •the establishment of the religion we profess. Only in this •trio of works• can he find the worship and love that express his divine perfections and agree with his judgment about them. •We can look at his creative work as having four stages•. When God made chaos out of nothingness,
 he proclaimed *I am the Almighty*.
 When he formed the universe out of chaos,
 he delighted in his wisdom.
 When he created man free and capable of good and evil,
 he expressed the judgment he has of his own justice
 and his goodness.
 But in uniting his word to his work,
 he proclaims that •he is infinite in all his attributes,

that •this great universe is nothing in comparison to him, that •by the standard of *his* holiness, excellence, and sovereign majesty everything else is irreligious.

In short, he speaks *as God*, he acts according to what he is—and according to the *whole* of what he is. Compare our religion, Aristes, with that of the Jews, the Moslems, and all the others you know; and judge which is the one that most clearly proclaims the judgment that God has and *must* have of his attributes. . . .

7. . . . God is spirit, and wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth. ['Spirit' here translates *esprit*, which in this text is often translated by 'mind'.] True worship doesn't consist in externals—what one says or physically does, e.g. the posture of our bodies in prayer—but in the posture of our minds in the presence of divine majesty. That is, it's a matter of the judgments and movements of the soul. Now, someone who worships God through Jesus Christ proclaims by his action a judgment similar God's own judgment concerning himself. Of all the judgments proclaimed by worship, *this* one—namely, that God is to be approached through Jesus Christ—is the one that most exactly expresses God's perfections and especially that excellence or infinite holiness that separates him from everything else and raises him infinitely above all creatures. Hence, faith in Jesus Christ is the true religion, access to God through Jesus Christ is the sole true worship, the sole way of putting our minds [*esprits*] in a posture for worshipping God. . . .

Consider someone who gives some of his goods to the poor, someone who risks his life to save his country, or someone who accepts death rather than commit an injustice, in each case acting as he does in the knowledge that God is powerful enough to reward him for the sacrifice he is making. Such a person proclaims by his action a judgment that does honour to divine justice. . . . Yet his action, full of merit though it

is, is not *perfect* worship of God if the person in question refuses to believe in •Jesus Christ and claims to have access to God without •his intervention. . . . And because it falls short of perfection in this particular way· this action that is otherwise so meritorious is of no use for the person's eternal salvation. [Theodore rather obscurely explains why, then allows Aristes to take over and put the point more clearly.]

8. Aristes: It seems to me that I understand what you have been saying. . . . Compared to God, the universe is nothing and must be counted as nothing. But it is only Christians, only those believing in the divinity of Jesus Christ, who truly count themselves and this vast admirable universe as *nothing*. Philosophers may *make* this judgment as a matter of •theory, but they belie it rather than proclaiming it in their •actions. They have the nerve to approach God as if they no longer knew that the distance from him to us is infinite. . . . It is only Christians who are permitted to open their mouths and give divine praise to the Lord. Only they have access to his sovereign majesty. It is because they truly count themselves and all the rest of the universe as *nothing* in relation to God when they maintain that their only way to any relation with him is through Jesus Christ. The *nothingness* to which their faith reduces them gives them true reality before God. . . . This is the unshakable foundation of our holy religion.

9. Theodore: Certainly, Aristes, you do understand my thought. There is an infinite distance between •finite and •infinite; it is even truer that there is an infinite distance between •the complete nothingness to which sin has reduced us and •divine holiness! [He continues this theme at very great length, aided by Aristes. Their central thesis is neatly stated, a little later, by Aristes: 'It is only the man-God who can join creature to creator'. The idea is that the infinite

or super-infinite 'distance' between man and God can't be bridged except through Jesus Christ, who as a man can relate to men and as divine can relate to God. To deny this essential mediating role of Jesus Christ is to imply that we can reach God directly, which implies a lessening of his infinite greatness, which is blasphemy. The point emerges nicely in a discussion of certain Christian heresies:]

Theodore: What do you say then, Aristes, of the Socinians and Arians and all those false Christians who deny the divinity of Jesus Christ and who nevertheless claim to have access through him to God?

Aristes: They are people who find some relation between infinite and finite, and who take themselves to be something—rather than *nothing*—in comparison with God.

Theotimus: No they don't, Aristes. They recognize that it is only through Jesus Christ that they have access to God.

Aristes: Yes, but their Jesus is a mere creature, and is therefore finite. So they *do* find some relation between finite and infinite; and they proclaim this false judgment, this insult to God, when they worship him through Jesus Christ. . . . Every cult founded on a supposedly non-divine Jesus assumes some relation between finite and infinite, and thereby· infinitely depreciates the majesty of God. It is a false 'worship', insulting to God and incapable of reconciling him with men. . . .

[Theotimus agrees, then raises the question of how Jesus Christ relates to the angels. In the quite long discussion of this topic, two main points emerge, both expressed here:]

10. Theotimus: . . . Without Jesus Christ, heaven itself isn't worthy of the majesty of the creator. Angels by themselves can't have relation or access to—can't associate with—the infinite being. Jesus Christ must get involved, must pacify

heaven as well as earth, in short must reconcile *everything* with God. It's true that he isn't the 'saviour' of angels in the same sense that he is of men: he didn't deliver them from their sins as he did us. But he *did* deliver them from the natural inability of any creature to have some relation with God, to be able to honour him divinely. So he is their head as well as ours, their mediator, their saviour. . . .

11. . . .Theotimus: Here is why there is so little on this topic in the bible. It's because scripture wasn't written for the angels, so it has no need to say over and over again that Jesus Christ has come in order to be •their head as well as •ours, and that we together with the angels will form a single church and a single chorus of praises. . . .

[After some more about angels, a new topic is introduced:]

12. Aristes: You told us [section 7], Theodore, •that God wants to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, i.e. by judgments and movements of the soul, and •that our worship and also our good deeds derive their moral goodness solely from the judgments they proclaim—judgments that are in conformity with God's attributes. . . . You know what I mean. But do you think that simple people have anything as rarefied as that in mind? Do you think that they make these judgments that worship God in spirit and in truth? If they don't make the right judgments about God's attributes and perfections, they won't proclaim them in their actions, so they won't be doing good deeds. Nor will they worship in spirit and in truth through their faith in Jesus Christ, if they don't know that

to approach the father through the son is to declare that creatures and especially sinners can't have any direct relation to God.

And this seems to me to be something that many Christians don't have in their thoughts at all—*good* Christians, whom I

don't think you would venture to condemn.

Theodore: In order to perform a good action, it isn't absolutely necessary to have a clear knowledge that in acting as we do we are proclaiming a judgment that honours God's attributes, or that is in accordance with the unchangeable order of the divine perfections. But in order for our actions to be good it is necessary •that the actions themselves *do* proclaim such judgments and •that the person acting have at least confusedly the idea of the order of God's perfections and that he love it, even if he doesn't know much about what it is. . . . Someone who gives alms, whatever his *thoughts* about what he is doing, does through his generosity proclaim the judgment that God is just; the clarity of his proclamation is great in proportion as what he gives away is of value to him. . . .; and the clearer his proclamation the greater the honour that he pays to divine justice, and the more he invites God to reward him, even if he has no actual thoughts about being rewarded. . . .

Since sin came into the world, our ideas have been so confused and the natural law so dulled in our minds that we need a written law to teach us through the senses what we ought to do or not to do. As most men don't enter into themselves, they don't hear the internal voice that cries out to them 'Thou shall not covet'. They needed to hear that voice externally, so that it could enter their minds through their senses. Still, they couldn't ever wipe out entirely the idea of order, that general idea corresponding to the words *We must, We ought to, It is right to*. For that indelible idea is awakened by the slightest of signs, even in children who are still at their mothers' breasts. Without *that*, men would be. . . .absolutely incapable of good and evil. . . . Let us come now to the objection about those good Christians who worship God in the simplicity of their faith.

13. . . . These people quite simply turn to God. I agree that they aren't *aware of* being in a situation of such great respect, i.e. one in which they relate to God across an infinite distance through the mediation of the man-God Jesus Christ. They don't know in the way you do that this is their situation. Nevertheless, it *is* their situation, and God sees very well that that's how they are situated, at least in the disposition of their hearts. They leave it to Jesus Christ, who is at their head and who speaks for them, to present them to God in the state that befits them. . . . It isn't necessary, Aristes, that •we have exact knowledge of reasons for our faith, i.e. reasons that metaphysics can supply, but it is absolutely necessary that •we profess our faith. Similarly, it isn't necessary that •we have clear thoughts about *what* gives our actions their moral status, but it is absolutely necessary that •we perform good actions. Still, exact knowledge and clear thoughts are good to have, and I don't think that those who are engaged in doing philosophy could employ their time more usefully than in trying to obtain some *understanding* of the truths that faith teaches us.

Aristes: Certainly, Theodore, there is no more intense pleasure—well, no more solid joy—than what comes from getting an understanding of the truths of our faith.

Theotimus: Yes, for those who love religion greatly and whose hearts are not corrupted. There are others—people to whom the light is painful, people who get angry at seeing truths that we might prefer were not so.

Theodore: There aren't many of those, Theotimus. But there are many who shy away from the philosophical exploration of the foundations of our faith for a different reason. It is because they are quite reasonably afraid of falling into some error and drawing others along with them. They would be like to have matters clarified and religion defended; but

people naturally mistrust those they don't know, so they are fearful, they get angry, and then they come out with emotional judgments that are invariably unfair and unkind. That silences many people who probably should have spoken and from whom I would have learned better principles than those I have put to you. But often it *doesn't* silence the thoughtless and rash authors who brazenly announce everything that comes to their minds! As for me, when a man has the principle of yielding only to evidentness and to authority, when I am aware that all he is trying to do is to find good proofs of accepted dogmas, I don't fear that he may go dangerously astray. Perhaps he will fall into some error, but what of that? The possibility of error is part of our wretched condition. If reasoning were allowed only to those who are infallible, reason would be banished from the world.

Aristes: Before our meeting, I held the view that we absolutely must banish reason from religion, because it could only cause trouble there. I see now that if we abandoned reason to the enemies of the faith, we would soon have our backs to the wall, and be derided as brainless. The person who has reason on his side is powerfully armed for the conquest of minds; for after all we *are* all rational—*essentially* so—and to claim to strip ourselves of our reason as though it were a ceremonial gown is to make ourselves ridiculous and to try pointlessly for the impossible. Thus, at the time I decided that reasoning was never necessary in theology I had a sense that I was requiring of theologians something they would never grant me. But now I understand, Theodore, that I was doing something much worse than that: I was succumbing to a very dangerous excess that did little honour to our holy religion that is founded on sovereign reason—reason granted to us so as to make us more rational. It is better to hold fast to the attitude you have adopted: to support dogmas on

the authority of the church and to look for proofs of these dogmas in the simplest and clearest principles that reason provides us. As for philosophy: the only part of it that can be of much use to religion is metaphysics; and what *it* should do is to serve religion, bathing the truths of our faith in light that will serve to strengthen the mind and put it in full agreement with the heart. In this way we shall preserve the character of rational men, despite our obedience and our submission to the authority of the church.

Theodore: Remain steadfast in that thought, Aristes, always submissive to the authority of the church and always ready to listen to reason. But don't take the opinions of certain doctors, of certain communities, even of an entire nation, for certain truths. Don't dismiss them too easily, either. As for the views of philosophers: accept them whole-heartedly only when their evidentness obliges and forces you to. I give you this advice as a remedy for any harm I may have done in our conversations. . . .