

# JAIME BALMES

FUNDAMENTAL  
PHILOSOPHY, VOL. I (OF  
2)

Jaime Balmes

**Fundamental Philosophy, Vol. I (of 2)**

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# Содержание

INTRODUCTION	5
BOOK FIRST.	8
CHAPTER I.	8
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	14
CHAPTER IV.	19
CHAPTER V.	23
CHAPTER VI.	26
CHAPTER VII.	28
CHAPTER VIII.	35
CHAPTER IX.	39
CHAPTER X.	41
CHAPTER XI.	43
CHAPTER XII.	45
CHAPTER XIII.	48
CHAPTER XIV.	51
CHAPTER XV.	53
CHAPTER XVI.	58
CHAPTER XVII.	60
CHAPTER XVIII.	63
CHAPTER XIX.	67
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	70

# Fundamental Philosophy, Vol. I (of 2)

## INTRODUCTION

The following translation of the great work of the lamented James Balmes on Philosophy, was undertaken at my suggestion and recommendation, and thus far I hold myself responsible for it. I have compared a considerable portion of it with the original, and as far as I have compared it, I have found it faithfully executed. The translator appears to me to have rendered the author's thought with exactness and precision, in a style not inferior to his own.

I have not added, as was originally contemplated, any Notes to those of the author. To have done so, would have swelled the volumes to an unreasonable size, and upon further consideration, they did not seem to me to be necessary. They would, in fact, have been an impertinence on my part, and the reader will rather thank me for not having done it. The work goes forth, therefore, as it came from the hands of its illustrious author, with no addition or abbreviation, or change, except what was demanded by the difference between the Spanish and English idioms.

James Balmes, in whose premature death in 1849, the friends of religion and science have still to deplore a serious loss, was one of the greatest writers and profoundest thinkers of Spain, and indeed of our times. He is well and favorably known to the American public by his excellent work on European civilization, – a work which has been translated into the principal languages of Europe. In that work he proved himself a man of free and liberal thought, of brilliant genius, and varied and profound learning. But his work on the bases of philosophy is his master-piece, and, taken as a whole, the greatest work that has been published on that important subject in the nineteenth century.

Yet it is rather as a criticism on the various erroneous systems of philosophy in modern times, than as containing a system of philosophy itself, that I have wished it translated and circulated in English. As a refutation of Bacon, Locke, Hume, and Condillac, Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Spinoza, it is a master-piece, and leaves little to desire. In determining the fundamental principles of philosophy, and constructing a system in accordance with the real world, the author is not always, in my judgment, successful, and must yield to his Italian contemporary, the unhappy Abbate Gioberti.

When criticizing the errors of others, the distinguished author reasons as an ontologist, but when developing his own system, he is almost a psychologist. His ontology is usually sound, indeed, and his conclusions are for the most part just, but not always logically obtained. He recognizes no philosophical formula which embraces the whole subject-matter of philosophy, and does not appear to be aware that the *primum philosophicum* is and must be a synthesis; and hence he falls into what we may call, not eclecticism, but syncretism. This is owing to the fact that his genius is critical rather than constructive, and more apt to demolish than to build up.

What I regard as the chief error of the illustrious Spaniard, is his not recognizing that conceptions without intuitions are, as Kant justly maintains, empty, purely subjective, the mind itself; and hence, while denying that we have intuition of the infinite, contending that we have a real and objectively valid conception of it. Throughout his book the reader will find him maintaining that the human mind may, by discursion, attain to valid conceptions of a reality which transcends intuition. This I regard as an error. Discursion is an act of reflection, and though there is always less there can never be more in reflection than in intuition. If we have no intuition of the infinite, we have and can have no proper conception of it, and what is taken to be a conception of it is simply the human mind itself, and of no objective application or validity.

The excellent author is misled on this point, by supposing that in intuition of the intelligible the mind is the actor and not simply the spectator, and that an intuition of the infinite implies an

infinite intuition. In both cases he is mistaken. In intuition we are simply spectators, and the object affirms itself to us. In intuition of the infinite, it is not we who perceive and affirm the infinite, by our own intellectual act, but the infinite that reveals and affirms itself to our intellect. In apprehending the infinite as thus revealed and affirmed, we of course apprehend it in a finite, not in an infinite manner. That which is intuitively apprehended is infinite, but the subjective apprehension is finite. The limitation is on the part of the subject, not on the part of the object.

The error arises from failing to distinguish sharply between intuition and reflection. In intuition the principal and primary actor is the intelligible object. In reflection it is the intellective subject; in the intuitive order the object presents itself as it is, with its own characteristics; in the reflective order it is represented with the limitations and characteristics of the thinking subject. As the subject is limited, its conceptions are limited, and represent the infinite not as infinite, but as the not-finite; and it is in the reflective order, if we operate on our conceptions, instead of our intuitions, only by a discursive process that we can come to the conclusion that the not-finite is the infinite. The author not distinguishing the two orders, and taking conceptions which belong to the reflective order as if they belonged to the intuitive order, supposes that we may have valid conceptions beyond the sphere of intuition. But a little reflection should have taught him that, if he had no intuition, he could have no conception of the infinite.

Following St. Thomas and all philosophers of the first order, the author very properly maintains that it is by the divine intelligibility, or the divine light, that the human mind sees whatever it does see; but he shrinks from saying that we have intuition of God himself. So far as we are to understand intuition of God as intuition, or open vision of him as he is in himself, he is undoubtedly right. But objects are intelligible only in the light of God, and it is only by this light that we apprehend them. Do we ever apprehend objects by the light of God without apprehending the light which renders them apprehensible? In apprehending the object, we apprehend first of all the light which is the medium of its apprehension. The light of God is God, and if we have intuition of the light, we must have intuition of him who is the true light that "enlighteneth every man coming into this world." We cannot see God as he is in himself, not because he is not intelligible in himself, but because of the excess of his light, which dazzles and blinds our eyes through their weakness. So, very few of us can look steadily in the face of the sun without being dazzled, yet not therefore is it to be said we cannot and do not see the sun.

The author does not seem to be aware that *substance* as distinguished from being or existence is an abstraction, and therefore purely subjective, and no object of intuition. Abstract from a thing all its properties or attributes, and you have remaining simply zero. The substance is properly the concrete thing itself, and in the real order is distinguishable simply from its phenomena, or *accidents*, – an abstract term, – not from its so-called attributes or properties. Hence, the question, so much disputed, whether we perceive substances themselves, is only the question, whether we see things themselves or only their phenomena. This question the Scottish school of Reid and Sir William Hamilton, have settled forever, and if it had not, Balmes has done it, making the correction I have suggested, in a manner that leaves nothing further to be said.

The author's proofs of the fact of creation are strong and well put, but fail to be absolutely conclusive in consequence of his not recognizing intuition of the creative act. They all presuppose this intuition, and are conclusive, because we in reality have it; but by denying that we have it, the author renders them formally inconclusive. We have intuition of God, real and necessary being, we have also intuition of things or existences, and therefore must have intuition of the creative act, for things or existences are only the external terminus of the creative act itself. Hence it is that Gioberti very properly makes the ideal formula, or *primum philosophicum*, the synthetic judgment, *Ens creat existentias*. Real and necessary Being creates existences. This formula or judgment in all its terms is given intuitively, and simultaneously, and it is because it is so given we are able at one blow to confound the skeptic, the atheist, and the pantheist. The illustrious Spaniard, uses in all his argument

this formula, but he does so unconsciously, in contradiction, in fact, to his express statements, because he could not reason a moment, form a single conclusion without it. His argument in itself is good, but his explication of it is sometimes in fault.

If the learned and excellent author had recognized the fact that we have intuition of the creative act of the first cause, and the further fact that all second causes, in their several spheres and degree, imitate or copy the first, he would have succeeded better in explaining their operation. He does not seem to perceive clearly that the *nexus* which binds together cause and effect is the act of the cause, which is in its own nature causative of the effect, and by denying all intuition of this *nexus*, he seems to leave us in the position where Hume left us, because it is impossible to attain by discursion to any objective reality of which we have no intuition.

These are all or nearly all the criticisms I am disposed to make upon the admirable work of Balmes. They are important, no doubt, but really detract much less from its value than it would seem. It has, in spite of these defects, rare and positive merits. The author has not indeed a synthetic genius, but his powers of analysis are unsurpassed, and as far as my philosophical reading goes, unequalled. He has not given us the last word of philosophy, but he has given us precisely the work most needed in the present anarchical state of philosophical science. Not one of the errors to be detected in his work is peculiar to himself, and the most that the most ill-natured critic can say against him is, that, while he retains and defends all the truth in the prevailing philosophy of the schools, he has not escaped all its errors. Wherever he departs from scholastic tradition he follows truth, and is defective only where that tradition is itself defective. He has advanced far, corrected innumerable errors, poured a flood of light on a great variety of profound, intricate, and important problems, without introducing a new or adding any thing to confirm an old error. This is high praise, but the philosophic reader will concede that it is well merited.

The work is well adapted to create a taste for solid studies. It is written in a calm, clear, and dignified style, sometimes rising to true eloquence. The author threw his whole mind and soul into his work, and shows himself everywhere animated by a pure and noble spirit, free from all pride of opinion, all love of theorizing, and all dogmatism. He evidently writes solely for the purpose of advancing the cause of truth and virtue, religion and civilization, and the effect of his writings on the heart is no less salutary than their effect on the mind.

I have wished the work to be translated and given to the English and American public, not as a work free from all objections, but as admirably adapted to the present state of the English and American mind, as admirably fitted to correct the more dangerous errors now prevalent among us, and to prepare the way for the elaboration of a positive philosophy worthy of the name. We had nothing in English to compare with it, and it is far better adapted to the English and American genius than the misty speculations we are importing, and attempting to naturalize, from Germany. It will lead no man into any error which he does not already entertain, and few, perhaps none, can read it without positive benefit, at least without getting rid of many errors.

With these remarks I commit these volumes to the public, bespeaking for them a candid consideration. The near relation in which I stand to the translator makes me anxious that his labors should be received with a kindly regard. He who translates well a good book from a foreign language into his own, does a service to his country next to that of writing a good book himself.

O. A. BROWNSON.

August 7, 1856.

## **BOOK FIRST. ON CERTAINTY**

### **CHAPTER I. IMPORTANCE AND UTILITY OF THE QUESTION OF CERTAINTY**

1. We should begin the study of philosophy by examining the question of certainty; before raising the edifice, we must lay the foundation.

Ever since there has been philosophy, that is, ever since men first reflected on themselves and the beings around them, they have been engaged with those questions which have for their object the basis of human knowledge, and this shows that on this subject serious difficulties are encountered. Inquirers, however, have not been discouraged by the sterility of philosophical labors; and this shows that in the last term of the investigation an object of high importance is discovered.

Philosophers have cavilled in the most extravagant manner upon the questions of certainty; on few subjects has the history of the human mind presented such lamentable aberrations. This consideration may excite suspicion that such investigations offer nothing solid to the mind, and serve only to feed the vanity of the sophist. But here, as elsewhere, we attribute no exaggerated importance to the opinions of philosophers, and we are very far from believing that they ought to be regarded as the legitimate representatives of human reason. It cannot, however, be denied that they are in the intellectual order the most active portion of the human race. When the whole body of philosophers dispute, humanity itself may be said to dispute. Every fact affecting the human race merits a thorough examination; to undervalue it, on account of the sophisms which envelop it, is to fall into the worst of all sophisms. There should be no contradiction between reason and common sense; yet such a contradiction there would be, if we should, in the name of common sense, condemn what occupies the reason of the most enlightened minds. Oftentimes it happens that what is grave and significant, that which makes a thinking man meditate, is the result neither of a disputation, nor of the arguments therein adduced, but the simple existence of the dispute itself. In itself it is sometimes of little importance, but by reason of what it indicates, of great consequence.

2. All philosophical questions are in some manner involved in that of certainty. When we have completely unfolded this, we have examined under one aspect or another all that human reason can conceive of God, man, and the universe. At first sight it may perhaps seem to be the simple foundation of the scientific structure; but in this foundation, if we carefully examine it, we shall see the whole edifice represented: it is a plane whereon is projected, visibly and in fair perspective, the whole body it is to support.

3. However limited may be the direct and immediate result of these investigations, they are of incalculable advantage. It is highly important to acquire science, but not less important to know its limits. Near these limits there are shoals which the navigator ought to know. It is by examining the question of certainty that we ascertain the limits of human science.

In descending to the depths to which these questions lead us, the understanding grows dim, and the heart is awed with a religious fear. A moment ago we were contemplating the edifice of human knowledge, and grew proud to see it with its colossal dimensions, its beautiful forms, its fine and bold construction; we enter it, and are led through deep caverns, and, as if by enchantment, the foundation seems to be subtilized, to evaporate, and the superb edifice remains floating in the air.



4. It must be remarked that in entering on the examination of the question of certainty, we do not conceal from ourselves its difficulties. To conceal would not be to solve them; on the contrary, the first condition necessary to their complete solution, is to see them with perfect clearness, and to feel their full force. It is no humiliation to the human understanding to seek those limits beyond which it cannot pass, but it is to elevate and confirm it. Thus the intrepid naturalist, when in search of some object he has penetrated to the bowels of the earth, feels a mixture of terror and pride to be thus buried in subterranean caverns, with just light enough to see immense masses barely suspended above his head and unfathomable abysses beneath his feet. There is something sublime, something attractive and captivating in the obscurity of the mysteries of science, in uncertainty itself, in the very assaults of doubt, threatening to destroy in one instant the work accomplished by the human mind only in the space of long ages. The greatest men have at all times enjoyed the contemplation of these mysteries. The genius which spread its wings over the east, over Greece and Rome, over the schools of the Middle Ages, is the same we now behold in modern Europe. Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Abelard, St. Anselm, St. Thomas of Aquin, Luis Vives, Bacon, Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibnitz, all, each in his own way, felt the sublime inspiration of philosophy.

Whatever tends to raise man to lofty contemplation in the sanctuary of his soul, contributes to his aggrandizement; for it separates him from natural objects, reminds him of his noble origin, and proclaims to him his high destiny. In a mechanical and sensual age, when every thing seems opposed to the activity of the powers of the soul, except when they administer to the wants of the body, it is well to renew those great questions in which the mind roams free and untrammelled over unbounded realms of space.

Only intellect can examine itself. The stone falls, but knows not that it falls; the ray calcines and pulverizes, ignorant of its power; the flower knows not that its beauty is enchanting; and the brute beast follows his instincts, but asks not the reason of them. Man alone, a fragile organization, appearing for a moment on earth again to return to the dust, harbors a spirit, which first inspects the external world, and then, anxious to ascertain its own nature, enters into itself as into a sanctuary, and becomes its own oracle. What am I? What do I do? What do I think? What phenomena do I experience within myself? Why am I subject to them? What is their cause, their order of production, their relations? The mind asks itself these questions, – serious and difficult indeed, but noble and sublime questions; an unfailing proof that there is within us something superior to inert matter susceptible only of motion and a variety of forms, that there is something, which, by an internal activity, spontaneous and rooted in our very nature, presents us an image of that infinite Activity, a single act of whose will created the world from nothing.[\(1\)](#)

## CHAPTER II. TRUE STATE OF THE QUESTION

5. That we have certainty, common sense assures us, but what is its basis, and how it is acquired, are two difficult questions, which it is for philosophy to answer.

Three very different questions are involved in that of certainty; and if confounded, they contribute not a little to the creation of difficulties, and the confusion of matters which, even when they have their various aspects most accurately marked, are sufficiently hard and complicated.

It will greatly conduce to the due determination of our ideas, carefully to distinguish between the existence of certainty, its basis, and the mode in which it is acquired. Its existence is an indisputable fact; its basis the object of philosophical researches, and the mode of acquiring it frequently a concealed phenomenon not open to observation.

6. That bodies exist is a fact that no man of sane mind can doubt. No questions raised upon this point can ever shake our firm conviction in the existence, without us, of what we call the corporeal world. This conviction is a phenomenon of our existence. Explain it, perhaps we cannot; but we certainly cannot deny it; we submit to it as to an inevitable necessity.

What is the basis of certainty? Here we have not a simple fact, but a question solved by every philosopher in his own way. Descartes and Malebranche recur to the veracity of God; Locke and Condillac to the peculiar character and evolution of certain sensations.

How does man acquire this certainty? He knows not: he had it before reflecting on it; he is astounded to hear it made a matter of dispute, and he might never have suspected it could be asked, why we are certain that what affects our senses exists. It is of no use to ask him how he made so precious an acquisition; he regards it as a fact scarcely distinct from his own existence. He has no recollection of the order of sensations in his infancy; he finds his mind now developed, but is as ignorant of the laws of its development as he is of those which presided over the generation and growth of his body.

7. Philosophy should begin by explaining, not by disputing the fact of certainty. If we are certain of nothing, it is absolutely impossible for us to advance a single step in any science, or to take any part whatever in the affairs of life. A thorough-going skeptic would be insane, and that too with insanity of the highest grade. To such a one, all communication with other men, all succession of external actions, all thoughts, and even acts of the will would be impossible. Let us, then, admit the fact, and not be so extravagant as to say that madness sits on the threshold of philosophy.

It is the part of philosophy to analyze, not to destroy its object; for by destroying its object it destroys itself. Every argument must have a resting-point, which must be a fact. Whether it be internal or external, idea or object, the fact must exist: we must begin by supposing something, and this something we call a fact. Whoever begins by denying or doubting all facts, is like the anatomist, who, before dissecting a corpse, burns it, and casts its ashes to the wind.

8. Philosophy then, it may be said, commences not with an examination, but with an affirmation. Granted, and this is a truth whose admission closes the door on much sophistry, and sheds a brilliant light over the whole theory of certainty.

Philosophers are deceived when they imagine that they begin by doubting. Nothing is more false; when they think, they affirm, if nothing else, at least their own doubt: whenever they reason, they assert the connection of ideas, that is, the whole logical world.

Fichte, who certainly was not easily satisfied with anything, begins to treat of the basis of human knowledge by making an affirmation, and this he confesses with an ingenuousness that does him honor. Speaking of reflection, the foundation of his philosophy, he says: "The rules to which this reflection is subject, are not proved to be valid, but are tacitly presupposed to be known and admitted. They are, in their remotest origin, derived from a principle, the legitimacy of which can

only be established on condition that *they are valid*. This is a circle, but an *inevitable circle*. But supposing it to be inevitable, and that we frankly confess it so to be, it is, in order to establish the highest principle, allowable *to trust all the laws of general logic*. We must start on the road of reflection with a proposition conceded by all the world without any contradiction."<sup>1</sup>

9. Certainty is to us a happy necessity; nature imposes it, and philosophers do not cast off nature. Pyrrho once came very near being hit by a stone, but he very naturally took good care to get out of its way, without stopping to examine whether it was a real stone, or only the appearance of one. The bystanders laughed at him for this, and, at the same time, showed how inconsistent this act was with his doctrine; but he gave this answer, which, under the circumstances, was exceedingly profound: "It is hard entirely to throw off human nature."

10. In sound philosophy, then, the question turns not upon the existence of certainty, but upon its motives, and the means of acquiring it. It is an inheritance of which we cannot divest ourselves, although we repudiate those very titles which guaranty its possession to us. Who is not certain that he thinks, feels, wills; that he has a body, and that there are around him others similar to his, of which the corporeal universe consists? Prior to all systems, humanity was in possession of this certainty, so, also, is every individual, although he may never during his whole life have once asked himself what the world is, what bodies are, or in what sensation, thought, and will consist. Not even if we examine the foundations of certainty and acknowledge the serious difficulties concerning them, which arise from ratiocination, is it possible to doubt everything. There never was, in all the rigor of the word, a true skeptic.

11. It is the same with certainty as with other objects of human knowledge. The fact is presented to us in all its magnitude, and with all clearness; but we do not penetrate to its innermost nature. Our understanding is as well provided with means to acquire knowledge of phenomena in the spiritual as in the material order, and it is sufficiently perspicacious to detect, delineate, and classify the laws to which they are subject; but when it would ascend to the cognition of the very essence of things, or would investigate the principles of the science which makes its boast, it feels its strength fail, and the ground whereon it stands, tremble and sink beneath its feet.

Happily, man possesses certainty independently of philosophical systems, not limited to phenomena of the soul, but extending as far as is needed in order to direct his conduct, both with regard to himself and to external objects. Before inquiring if there is certainty, all men were certain that they thought, willed, felt, that they had a body whose motions were governed by the will, and that there existed an assemblage of various bodies, called the universe. Since inquiries with regard to certainty were first instituted, it has remained the same with all men, even with those who disputed it; not one of whom could ever go farther than Pyrrho, and succeed in casting off human nature.

12. We cannot determine to what extent the force of mind of some philosophers, engaged in combatting nature, may have succeeded in creating doubt on many points, but certain it is: first, that no one ever went so far as to doubt the internal phenomena whose presence he felt inwardly; second, that if indeed any one ever did persuade himself that no external object corresponded to these phenomena, this must have been so strange an exception as to merit, in the history of science, and in the eyes of sound philosophy, no more weight than the illusions of a maniac. If Berkely went so far as to deny the existence of bodies, thus making the sophisms of reason triumph over the instincts of nature, he is alone, and in opposition to all mankind, and richly merits to have this saying applied to him: "Insanity is insanity still, no matter how sublime it may be."

Those very philosophers, who carried their skepticism the farthest, agreed upon the necessity of accommodating themselves in practice to the appearances of the senses, and of reserving doubt for the world of speculation. Philosophers may dispute on every thing as much as they please, but, the dispute over, they cease to be philosophers, and are again men, similar to other men, and, like

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<sup>1</sup> Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. Theil. i., § 1. Ed. Berlin, 1845, p. 92.

them all, enjoy the fruits of certainty. This, Hume, who denied with Berkely the existence of bodies, confesses: "I dine," he says; "I play a game at backgammon; I converse, and am happy with my friends; and when, after three or four hours of amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, so strained, and so ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther. Here, then, I find myself absolutely and necessarily determined to live, and talk, and act, like other people, in the common affairs of life."<sup>2</sup>

13. We must, in discussing certainty, guard against the feverish desire of shaking the foundations of human reason. We should, in this class of questions, seek a thorough knowledge of the principles of science, and the laws which govern the development of our mind. To labor to destroy them is to mistake the object of true philosophy: we have only to make them a matter of observation, just as we do those of the material world, without any intention of disturbing the admirable order prevailing in the universe. Skeptics, who, in order to render their philosophy more solid, begin by doubting every thing, resemble the man, who, desirous of ascertaining, and exactly determining the phenomena of life, should bare his bosom, and thrust the knife into his heart.

Sobriety is as necessary to the health of the mind, as to that of the body: there is no wisdom without prudence, no philosophy without judgment. In the soul of man there is a divine light which directs him with admirable certainty. If we do not persist in extinguishing it, its splendor guides us, and when we reach the term of science it shows it to us, and makes us read in distinct characters the words, —*enough, you can go no farther*. These words are written by the Author of all beings; he it is that has given laws to the body as well as to the mind, and he contains in his infinite essence the ultimate reason of all things.

14. The certainty which is prior to all examination is not blind; on the contrary, it springs either from the clearness of the intellectual vision, or from an instinct conformable to reason: it is not opposed to reason, but is its basis. Our mind, in discursive reasoning, knows truth by the connection of propositions, or by the light which is reflected from one truth upon another. In primitive certainty the vision is by direct light, and does not need reflection.

When, then, we note the existence of certainty, we do not speak of a blind fact, nor do we seek to extinguish the light in its very source; we would rather say, that it is more brilliant there than in its radiations. We see a body whose splendor illumines the world in which we live; ought we, if requested to explain its nature and its relations with other objects, to begin by destroying these? When naturalists would examine the nature of light, and determine its laws, they do not begin by removing the light itself, and placing themselves in darkness.

15. True, this method of philosophizing is somewhat dogmatic, but dogmatic as it is, it has on its side, as we have seen, Pyrrho, Hume, and Fichte. It is not simply a method of philosophy, it is the voluntary submission of our very nature to an inevitable necessity, the combination of reason with instinct, a simultaneous attention to different voices calling from the depths of our soul. According to Pascal, "nature confounds the Pyrrhonians, and reason the dogmatists." This passes for a profound saying, and is so under a certain aspect; but it is notwithstanding somewhat inexact. The confusion is not the same in both cases: reason does not confound the dogmatist, unless he separates it from nature; but nature confounds the Pyrrhonian, either alone or joined with reason. The true dogmatist founds his reason upon nature; it knows itself, confesses the impossibility of proving every thing, and does not arbitrarily assume any principle that it needs unless nature itself furnishes it. And thus it does not confound the dogmatist, when guided by it he seeks a sure foundation for it. Nature, when it confounds the Pyrrhonian, attests the triumph of the reason of dogmatists, whose principal argument against Pyrrhonians, is the voice of nature itself. Pascal's thought would have been more exact if thus worded: nature confounds the Pyrrhonian and is necessary to the reason of dogmatists. This is less antithetical, but more true. Dogmatists do not deny nature; reason without it is impotent; to exercise

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<sup>2</sup> *Treatise of Human Nature*, vol. i., p. 467.

its strength it needs a resting point. With such, Archimedes offered to move the earth, without this his immense lever could not stir a single atom.[\(2\)](#)

### CHAPTER III.

## CERTAINTY OF THE HUMAN RACE, AND PHILOSOPHICAL CERTAINTY

16. Certainty does not originate in reflection; it is the spontaneous product of man's nature, and is annexed to the direct act of the intellectual and sensitive faculties. It is a condition necessary to the exercise of both, and without it life were a chaos; we therefore possess it instinctively, and without any reflection, and we enjoy the fruit of this as of all those other benefits of the Creator, which are inseparably joined to our existence.

17. It is, then, necessary to distinguish between the certainty of the human race and philosophical certainty, although, to speak frankly, it is not easy to conceive what can be the value of any human certainty distinct from that of the human race. If we set aside the efforts which the philosopher sometimes makes to discover the basis of human knowledge, we shall readily find him confounded with the rest of mankind. This cavil leaves no trace in his mind with respect to the certainty of all that the human race is certain of. He then discovers that the doubt which he felt was not a real doubt, although he may have deluded himself into a contrary belief. His doubts were simple suppositions, nothing more. When his meditation is over, and perhaps even while it lasts, he finds that he is as certain as the most ignorant individual of his internal acts, the existence of his own body, of other bodies around him, and of a thousand other things, which constitute the amount of knowledge requisite to the wants of life.

Question all, from the infant of a few summers, to the sage of many years and mature judgment, on the certainty of their own existence, their acts internal or external, their friends and relatives, the people among whom they dwell, objects seen or heard of, and you will not detect any hesitation in their answers, or any kind of difference in the grades of their certainty. If they have no knowledge of the philosophical questions touching these matters, you may read in their countenances wonder and astonishment that any one should seriously investigate things so *evident*.

18. Impossible as it is for us to know in what manner the sensitive, intellectual, and moral powers of children are developed, it is equally impossible to prove a *a priori*, by analyzing the operations of his mind, that reflex acts do not concur to the formation of certainty; but it will not be difficult to find proofs of this in the exercise of these faculties when well developed. If we observe attentively, we shall see that the child's faculties habitually operate in a direct, not a reflex manner; which shows that the development is made directly, not by reflection. Were the primitive development the work of reflexion, the reflective power would be great in the child. But this is not the case. Very few men are ever endowed with it, and in the greater part of them it is very nearly null. They who attain to it, acquire it only by assiduous labor, and not without great violence to himself, can any one pass from direct to reflex cognition.

19. No matter what you teach a child, he perceives it indeed, but call his attention to the perception itself, and his understanding is at once obscured and confused. Let us make the experiment. Suppose we would teach a child the elements of geometry.

"Do you see this figure bounded by three lines? It is called a triangle; the lines are called sides, and the points where they unite the vertices of the angles." – "I understand that." – "Do you see this other figure bounded by four lines? It is called quadrilateral, and, like the triangle, has its sides and vertices of angles." – "Very well." – "Can a quadrilateral figure be a triangle, or *vice versa*?" – "It cannot." – "Never?" – "Never." – "Why not?" – "One has three, and the other four sides: how then can they be the same thing?" – "Who knows? It may seem so to you, but – " – "See here! This has three, and this four sides; and three and four are not the same thing."

Torture his understanding as much as you please, but you cannot drive him from his position: and thus we see that his perception and his reason operate directly, that is, by direct application to the object. Of himself he does not direct his attention to his own internal acts, does not think upon his own thoughts, does not combine reflex ideas, nor seek in them the certainty of his judgment.

20. And here we detect a vital error in the art of thinking as it has hitherto been taught. The young intellect is exercised in reflection, the most difficult part of science, which is as inconsiderate as it would be to commence his physical development by the most painful gymnastic exercises. Man's scientific development should be governed by his natural development, which is direct not reflex.

21. Let us apply this remark to the exercise of the senses. "Do you hear that music?" asks the child. – "What music?" – "Did you not hear it? Are you deaf?" – "It *seems* to you that you hear it." – "But, sir, I hear it so distinctly! How can it be possible?" – "But how do you know?" – "I hear it."

From his *I hear it* you cannot drive him: he will not hesitate a moment, nor will he appeal to any reflex act in order to avoid your importunities. "*I hear it*: do not you hear it?" He asks nothing more, and all your philosophy cannot equal the *irresistible force* of sensation which assures him that there is music, and that whoever doubts it is either deaf or in jest.

22. Had the faculties of the child been developed by alternate direct and reflex acts; had he, when acquiring knowledge of things, thought of something besides the things themselves; evidently a continuation of such acts would have left some impression on his mind, and urged to assign the motives of his certainty, he would indicate those very means that he made use of in the gradual development of his faculties; he would abstract the object, retire into himself, think upon his own thought in one way or another, and thus encounter the difficulty. Nothing of this character takes place, which proves that no such reflex acts have been performed, that there have been only perceptions accompanied by internal consciousness and certainty of their existence; but all in a confused, instinctive manner, without any thing like philosophical reflection.

23. What has been said of the child, may be proved true also of adults, however clear and perfect their intellect. If not initiated into questions of philosophy, they will give very nearly the same answers to difficulties proposed on the same matters, and even upon many others more exposed to doubt. Experience proves better than all ratiocination that no one acquires certainty by reflex acts.

24. Philosophers teach that the sources of certainty are the internal sense or consciousness of acts, the external senses, common sense, reason, and authority. A few examples will show us that there is reflection in all these, and how most men, and even philosophers, when they act like men and not like philosophers, think.

25. Suppose a clear-headed person, one however who is ignorant of the questions of certainty, has just seen some monument, the *Escorial* for instance, which leaves a lively and lasting impression on his mind, and while he recollects his gratification on seeing it, try to make him doubt the existence of this recollection in his mind, and its correspondence as well with the act of seeing as with the edifice itself, and he will very certainly think you are in jest, or will be astounded, and will suspect you of being out of your senses. He discovers no difference between things different as are the actual existence of his recollection, its correspondence with the past act of seeing, and the agreement of both with the edifice seen. He knows in this case no more than a child of six years: "I recollect it, I saw it, it is as I recollect it." This is all his science: he neither reflects, nor separates; all is direct and simultaneous.

No matter what suppositions you make, you can never get from the majority of men any better account of the phenomena of the internal sense, than you got from the supposed individual's recollection of the *Escorial*: "all that I know is that it is so." There are here no reflex acts; certainty attends the direct act, and no philosophical considerations can add one iota to the security given by the very force of things, and the instinct of nature.

26. Example of the testimony of the senses.

If we see any object, no matter what, at a proper distance and in sufficient light, we judge of its size, figure, and color, and we are very confident of the truth of our judgment, although we may never, in all our life, have thought of a theory of sensation, or of the relations of our organs, either to each other or to external objects. No reflex act accompanies the formation of our judgment; all is done instinctively, and without the intervention of philosophical considerations. We see it, and nothing else: this is enough for certainty. It is only after having handled books in which the question of certainty is agitated, that we turn our attention to our own acts; but this attention, it is to be remarked, lasts only so long as we are engaged in the scientific analysis; when this is forgotten, which it very soon is, we return to our general routine, and seldom recur to philosophy.

Note well that we speak here of the certainty of the judgment formed in consequence of sensation only in so far as it is connected with the uses of life, and not at all of its greater or less exactness with respect to the nature of things. Thus it matters little that we consider colors as inherent qualities of bodies, although in reality they are not; it is sufficient that the judgment formed does not in any sense change our relations to objects, whatever may be the philosophical theory.

27. Example of common sense.

In the presence of a numerous assembly, throw a quantity of printer's types at random upon the ground, and tell the bystanders that their names will all be found printed. They will all with one accord laugh at your folly. But what is the reason of this? Have they all reflected upon the basis of their certainty? Assuredly they have not.

28. Example of reason.

We all reason, and in many cases rightly. Without art or reflection of any kind, we often distinguish the solid from the futile, the sophistical from the conclusive. This does not require us to regard the course of our understanding; without scarcely noticing it we follow the right road; and a man may, in his life, have formed a thousand rigorous and exact ratiocinations without ever having once attended to his method of reasoning. Even those most versed in the dialectic art, repeatedly forget it; they perhaps follow it very correctly in practice, but they pay no express attention to any one of its rules.

29. Ideologists have written whole volumes on the operations of our understanding, and the simple rustic performs these operations without thinking that he performs them. How much has been written on abstraction, generalization, and universals! Yet this is all well regulated in the mind of every man, ignorant as he may be of a science which examines it. In his language you will find the universal and the particular expressed, and every thing occupying its proper place in his discourse: he encounters no difficulty in his direct acts. But call his attention to these acts themselves, to abstraction for example; and what was in the direct act so clear and lucid, becomes a chaos the moment it passes to the reflex order.

Thus we see that reflection, whose object is the act performed, is of very little importance even in reasoning, its most reflective medium.

30. Example of authority.

All civilized people know the existence of *England*, but most of them know this only from having heard or read of it, that is, by authority. Their certainty of the existence of England evidently is not surpassed by that of objects of their own vision; and yet how many of them have ever thought of analyzing the foundations of such a certainty? Yet is the certainty of those who have examined it greater than that of those who have not examined it? In the present case, as in an infinity of others analogous to it, there is no intervention of reflex acts: certainty is here formed instinctively, and needs no medium invented by philosophers.

31. These examples show that philosophers take a very different road to certainty from that taught by nature. He who created all things out of nothing, has provided them with all that is necessary to the exercise of their functions according to their respective positions in the universe; and one of the first necessities of an intelligent being is the certainty of some truths. What would become of



us, if before beginning to receive impressions, and before the germination of primary ideas in our understanding, we were obliged to perform the painful task of elaborating some system capable of saving us from uncertainty? Were it thus, our intellect would perish at its very birth, for no sooner would it open its eyes to the light than it would be involved in the chaos of its own cavils, and it could never, with its scattered forces, succeed in dissipating the clouds which would arise on all sides, and which would finally sink it in total darkness.

If the greatest philosophers, the most clear and acute intellects, the strongest and most vigorous geniuses have labored to so little purpose to establish solid principles, such as might serve for the foundations of science, what would have happened had not the Creator succored us in this necessity, and given certainty to the tender intellect, just as he prepared for the preservation of the body the milk that nourishes and the air that vivifies it?

32. If any part of science ought to be regarded as purely speculative, it is undoubtedly the part which concerns certainty; and this proposition, paradoxical as it may seem at first sight, is true, and can be easily demonstrated.

33. What does philosophy here propose to do? To produce certainty? But it exists independently of all philosophical systems, and mankind were certain of many things before ever any one thought of such questions. Moreover, since the question was first raised, few, compared with the whole human race, have examined it; so it is now, and so it will be; and all the theories invented on this point can have no effect upon the fact of certainty. What has been said of its production may be said of the attempt to consolidate it. When have the generality of men had, or when will they have, time and opportunity to examine these questions?

34. Philosophy could here have produced nothing but skepticism, for the variety and opposition of systems were more calculated to create than to dissipate doubts. Happily nature is the most invincible opponent of skepticism; the sage's dreams pass not from his library to the every day uses of the life of ordinary men, or even of those who labor under or imagine them.

35. Philosophy here can propose to itself no more reasonable object than simply to examine the foundations of certainty, with the sole view of more thoroughly knowing the human mind, not of making any change in practice; just as astronomers observe the course of the stars, investigate and determine the laws to which they are subject, without therefore presuming to be able to modify them.

36. But even this supposition places philosophy in a very unsatisfactory position; for if we recollect what we have already established, we shall see that science observes a real and true phenomenon, but gives it a gratuitous explanation, by making an imaginary analysis of it.

Experience has in fact shown our understanding to be guided by no one of the considerations made by philosophers; its assent, when it is accompanied by the greatest certainty, is a spontaneous product of a natural instinct, not of combinations; it is a firm adhesion exacted by the evidence of the truth, the power of the internal sense, or the impulse of instinct; not a conviction produced by a series of ratiocinations. These combinations and ratiocinations therefore exist only in the mind of philosophers, not in reality; when, therefore, they attempt to designate the foundations of certainty, we are told what could or should have been, but not what is.

If philosophers would only be guided by their own systems, and would not forget them nor set them aside as soon as, or even before, they have finished explaining them, it might be said, that even if no reason can be given for human certainty, one can be given for philosophical certainty; but since these same philosophers make no use of these scientific means save when developing them *ex professo*, it follows that their pretended foundations are a mere theory, having little or no connection with the reality.

37. This demonstration of the vanity of philosophical systems relating to the foundation of certainty, far from leading to skepticism, has a directly contrary tendency; for it makes us appreciate at their true value, the emptiness of our cavils, compares their impotence with the irresistible force of nature, and thus destroys that foolish pride which would make us superior to the laws imposed

upon our understanding by the Creator himself; it places us in the channel through which the torrent of humanity has for ages run; and it disposes us to receive with sound philosophy what the laws of our nature force us to accept.[\(3\)](#)

## **CHAPTER IV.**

### **EXISTENCE OF TRANSCENDENTAL SCIENCE IN THE ABSOLUTE INTELLECTUAL ORDER**

38. Philosophers have sought a first principle of human knowledge; each has assigned his own, and now after so much discussion it is doubtful who is right, or even if any one is right.

Before inquiring what the first principle is, they ought to have ascertained whether there be any such principle. We cannot suppose this last question to be answered affirmatively; for it is, as we shall hereafter see, susceptible of different solutions, according to the aspect under which it is seen.

The first principle of knowledge may be understood in either of two senses; as denoting one first truth from which all others flow, or as expressing a truth which we must suppose if we would not have all other truths disappear. In the former sense it is a spring from which the waters flow, which fertilize the intellect; in the second sense it is a point whereon to rest a great weight.

39. Is there any one truth from which all others flow? There is in reality, in the order of beings, in the universal intellectual order; but in the human intellectual order there is none.

40. There is in the order of beings one truth, the origin of all truths; for truth is reality, and there is one Being, author of all beings. This being is a truth, – truth itself, – the plenitude of truth, – for he is being by essence, the plenitude of being.

Every school of philosophy has in some sense recognized this unity of origin. The atheist talks of the force of nature; the pantheist of an only substance, of the absolute, of the unconditioned; both have abandoned the idea of God, and now labour to replace it by something which may be made the origin of the existence of the universe, and of the development of its phenomena.

41. There is in the universal intellectual order one truth from which all others flow; it is, that the unity of origin of all truths is not only found in realized truths, that is, in beings considered in themselves, but likewise in the concatenation of ideas representing these beings. And thus if our understanding could ascend to the knowledge of all truths, and embrace them in their unity and in all the relations uniting them, it would see them after arriving at a certain height, notwithstanding their dispersion and divergence as now perceived by us, converge to a centre, in which they unite, like rays of light in the luminous object from which they issued.

42. The most profound philosophical doctrines often appear in the treatises of theologians explaining the doctrines of the church. Thus St. Thomas, in his questions on the understanding of angels, and in other parts of his works, has left us a very luminous and interesting theory. According to him, spirits understand by a number of ideas smaller in proportion to the superiority of their order; and so the diminution goes on even to God, who understands by means of a single idea which is his own essence. And thus according to the holy doctor, not only is there one being, author of all beings, but also one infinite idea which includes all ideas. Whoever fully possesses this idea will see every thing in it; but since this full possession, called comprehension in theology, is solely a property of the infinite intelligence of God, creatures, when in the other life they shall have obtained the beatific vision, will see more or fewer objects in God according to the greater or less perfection in which they possess it. How wonderful! The dogma of beatific vision well understood, is also a truth which sheds much light upon philosophical theories. Malebranche's sublime dream about ideas was, perhaps, a reminiscence of his theological studies.

43. The transcendental science which embraces and explains them all, is a chimera to our mind so long as we inhabit this earth, but it is a reality to other spirits of a higher order, and it will also be so to us when, freed from this mortal body, we attain the regions of light.

44. So far as we may conjecture from analogy, we have proofs of the existence of this transcendental science, which includes all sciences, and is in its turn contained in one sole principle,

or rather, in one only idea, in one only intuition. If we observe the scale of beings, the grades of distinction between individual intelligences, and the successive progress of science, the image of this truth will be presented to us in a very striking manner.

One of the distinctive characteristics of our mind is its power of generalization, of perceiving the common in the various, of reducing the multiplex to unity; and this power is proportional to its degree of intelligence.

45. The brute is limited to its sensations and the objects causing them. It has no power of generalization or of classification; nothing beyond the impression received or the instinct of satisfying its wants. Man, however, as soon as he opens the eyes of his understanding, perceives unnumbered relations; he applies what he has seen in one case to different cases; he generalizes and infolds very many ideas in a single idea. The child desires an object above his reach; he immediately takes a chair or a stool, and improvises a ladder. A brute will watch the object of its appetite whole hours when placed beyond its reach, without ever thinking of doing like the child, and forming a ladder. If every thing be so disposed as to enable it to climb, it will climb, but it is incapable of thinking that in similar circumstances it ought to act in like manner. In the former case, we see a being having the general idea of a *means*, and its relation to the *end*, of which it makes use when necessary: in the latter we see another being having indeed before its eyes the end and the means, but not perceiving their relation, unable to go beyond the material individuality of objects.

In the former there is perception of unity; in the latter there is no bond to join the variety of particular facts.

It is seen by this simple example that the child will reduce all the infinity of cases, in which an object may be placed beyond his reach, to this one case; he possesses, so to speak, the formula of this little problem. True, he does not render himself an account of this formula, that is, does not reflect upon it; but he has it in reality; and if you give him an opportunity he will at once apply it, which proves that he has it. Or speak to him of things placed too high for his reach, and point rapidly from one to another of the objects before him; he will at all times instantly apply the general idea of an auxiliary medium; he will avail himself perhaps of his father's arm, or that of a servant, a chair, if in the house, a heap of stones, if in the fields; he discovers in all things *the relation of the means to the end*. When he sees the end, he immediately turns his attention to the means of attaining it: the general idea seeks individualization in a particular case.

46. Art is the collection of rules for doing any thing well; and is the more perfect in proportion as each rule embraces a greater number of cases, and consequently as the number of these rules is smaller. Doubtless, buildings that were solid, well proportioned, and adapted to the purpose for which they were destined, had been constructed before the rules of architecture were reduced to formulas; but the great progress of intelligence in the construction of buildings consisted in ascertaining what there was common to all well-built houses, in determining the cause of beauty and of solidity, in themselves considered, by passing from the individual to the universal, that is, by forming general ideas of beauty and solidity applicable to an indefinite number of particular cases, by simplifying.

47. The same may be said of all other liberal and mechanical arts: the progress of intelligence in all of them consists in reducing multiplicity to unity, and including the greatest possible number of applications in the least possible number of ideas. This is why lovers of literature and the fine arts labor to discover an idea of beauty in general, in order to attain a type applicable to all literary and artistic objects. It is also obvious that those engaged in mechanical arts always endeavor to govern their proceedings by a few rules, and he is held to be the most skilful who succeeds in combining the greatest variety of results with the greatest simplicity of means, by making that, which others connect with many ideas, depend upon one idea alone. When we see a machine produce wonderful effects by a very simple process, we praise the artificer not less for the means than for the end: this we say, is grand, and the simplicity with which it works is the most astonishing.

48. Let us apply this doctrine to the natural and exact sciences.

The merit of our actual system of numeration consists in including the expression of all numbers in a single idea, making the value of each figure ten times that to the right, and filling all intervals with zeros. The expression of infinite numbers is reduced to the simplicity of a single rule based upon a single idea; the relation of position with a tenfold value. Logarithms have enabled arithmetic to make a great advance by diminishing the number of its fundamental operations, since, with them it reduces multiplication and division to addition and subtraction. Algebra is only the generalization of arithmetical expressions and operations, their simplification. The application of algebra to geometry is the generalization of geometrical expressions; formulas of lines, figures, bodies, only the expression of their universal idea. In this idea as in a type, geometry preserves its first and generative idea, and it requires only the simplest applications in order to form an exact calculation of all lines belonging to the same class, which can possibly be met with in practice. In the simple expression  $dz/dx = A$ , called the differential coefficient, is contained the whole idea of infinitesimal calculus. It originated in geometrical considerations, but so soon as its universality was conceived, it poured a flood of light upon every branch of mathematical and natural science, and led to the discovery of a new world, whose confines are still unknown. The prodigious fecundity of this calculus emanates from its simplicity, its prompt generalization of both algebra and geometry, and its uniting them in a single point which is the relation of the limits of the differentials of any function.

49. It is to this unity of idea that the human intellect in its ambition aspires, and once obtained, it proves the cause of great progress. The glory of the greatest geniuses is that they discovered it: the advance of science has consisted in profiting by it. Vieta explained and applied the principle of the general expression of arithmetical quantities; Descartes extended this to geometrical quantities. Newton established the principle of universal gravitation; and he, at the same time with Leibnitz, invented the infinitesimal calculus; and the exact and natural sciences march, by the light of a vast flambeau, with gigantic strides along paths never before trodden. And all this because intelligence has approached unity, and become possessed of a generative idea, involving infinite other ideas.

50. It is worthy of remark, that as we advance in science, we meet numerous points of contact, close relations, which no one at first sight would have suspected. Ancient mathematicians discussed the conic sections, but were far from imagining that the idea of the ellipse could be the basis of a system of astronomy: the foci to them were simple points, the curve a line, and the relations of both the object of combinations at once profitless and without application. Ages pass away, and these foci are the sun, the curve the orbit of planets. The lines on the geometrician's table represented a world!

The intimate connection of mathematical and natural science cannot be questioned; and who shall say to what extent both are connected with ontological, psychological, theological, and moral science? The extended scale over which beings are distributed may at first sight seem to be an assemblage of unconnected objects, but seen with the eyes of science, it is perceived to be a delicately worked chain, whose links present, as we advance, greater beauty and perfection. We see the different realms of nature united by close relations: the sciences, of which they are the objects, mutually borrow each other's light, and enter on each other's territory. The complication of objects among themselves involves this complication of science; and the unity of the laws imposed upon different orders of beings makes all sciences approach, and tend to form, one only science. If it were given us to see the identity of their origin, the unity of the end and the simplicity of the means, we should come into the possession of the true transcendental science, the only science which involves all others, or more correctly speaking, the only idea in which every thing is represented as it is, and every thing seen without any necessity of combination, or effort of any kind, just as a magnificent landscape, its outlines, form, and colors are pictured on a perfectly clear mirror. In the meantime, we must rest satisfied with shadows of reality, and must see in the instinctive tendency of our understanding to simplify, to reduce every thing or make it approach as much as possible to unity, the announcement, the sign of this single science, this intuition of the one infinite idea; just as in the desire for happiness which agitates our heart, the thirst after enjoyment which torments us we discover a proof that all

is not ended here below, and that our soul has been created for the possession of a good not to be attained in this mortal life.

51. If we compare men with men, and pay attention to the character of genius, the most elevated point of human intelligence, we shall see the truth of what has been said of the scale of human beings, and the progress of science. Men of true genius are distinguished by the unity and extent of their conceptions. If they treat a difficult and complicated question, they simplify it, consider it from a high point of view, and determine one general idea which sheds light upon all the others. If they have a difficulty to solve, they show the root of the error, and with a word dispel all the illusion of sophistry. If they use synthesis, they first establish the principle which is to serve as its basis, and with one dash trace the road to be followed in order to reach the wished-for result. If they make use of analysis, they strike in its secret resort the point where decomposition is to commence, they at once open the object, and reveal to us its most obscure mysteries. If there is question of a discovery, while others are seeking here and there, they strike the ground with their foot, and exclaim, "the treasure is here." They make no long arguments, nor evasions; their thoughts are few but pregnant; their words are not many, but in each of them is set a pearl of inestimable value.

52. No doubt there is in the intellectual order a single truth from which all other truths emanate, one idea which includes all other ideas. This philosophy teaches, and the efforts, the natural and instinctive tendencies of every intelligence, toiling after simplicity and unity, show it: such also is the dictate of common sense, which considers that thought the highest and most noble which is the most comprehensive and the most simple.[\(4\)](#)

## CHAPTER V. TRANSCENDENTAL SCIENCE IN THE HUMAN INTELLECTUAL ORDER CANNOT EMANATE FROM THE SENSES

53. In the human intellectual order, such as it is in this life, there is no one truth from which all others flow: philosophers have sought one in vain; they have found none, for there was none to be found. In fact, where could it be found?

54. Would it emanate from the senses?

Sensations are as various as the objects which produce them: by them we acquire knowledge of individual and material things; but no one truth, source of all other truths, can be found in any one of these, or the sensations proceeding from them.

55. If we observe our impressions received through sensation, we shall perceive that they are all equal so far as the production of certainty is concerned. We are just as certain of the sensation caused by any noise whatever, as we are of that produced by an object which we see, an odorous body which we smell, a savory morsel which we taste, or any thing which strongly affects our sense of touch. There is no gradation in the certainty produced by these sensations: they are all equal; for if we speak of sensation itself, we experience it in such a manner as to leave no uncertainty; and if we speak of the relation of sensation with the existence of the object causing it, we are just as certain that the sensation called *sight* corresponds to an external object *seen*, as we are that an external object *touched* corresponds to the sensation called *touch*.

Hence we infer that no one sensation is the origin of the certainty of other sensations; in this they are all alike: and most men have no other reason than their experience why they should be sure of this certainty. We are aware that what happens to individuals from whose eyes cataracts have been removed, shows that simple sensation does not suffice for the due appreciation of the object perceived, and that one sense aids another: but this does not prove any one of them to be preferable; for as the blind man, whose sight was suddenly restored, did not form an exact judgment as to the size and distance of objects seen by sight only, but required the assistance of touch; so is it very probable that if a person of good eyesight had been deprived from his birth of the sense of touch, he would not be able, were this sense given him suddenly, to form an exact judgment concerning objects touched, until, by the aid of sight, he had become accustomed to combine the new and the old order of sensations, and learnt by practice to determine the relations of sensation with its object, or to know by sensation the properties of its object.

56. This fact of the blind man is however contradicted by others which lead to a directly opposite result. The youth, upon whom the oculist, Jean Janin, performed the same operation, and other persons blind from their birth, whose eyesight Luigi de' Gregori partly restored, did not, like the blind man of Cheselden, deem these objects stuck to their eyes, but that they saw them as things really external and separate. Rosmini thus relates it,<sup>3</sup> although he gives the preference to the Cheselden case, which he says was repeated in Italy by the professor Giacomo di Pavia with precisely the same results.

57. It is not easy to ascertain how this combination of one sensation with another enables us to judge rightly of external objects; chiefly because the development of our sensitive and intellectual faculties is completed before we can reflect upon it: and thus we find ourselves certain of the existence and properties of things before we have thought of certainty, and much less of the means of acquiring it.

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<sup>3</sup> *Saggio sull' origine delle idee*, p. 5, c. iv., tr. 11, p. 285, where he cites the theoretico-chemical observations on the cataracts of those born blind, by Luigi de' Gregori, professor of chemistry and ophthalmia, published at Rome in 1826.

58. But even supposing us, after occupying ourselves with sensations and their relations with objects, to set aside the certainty which we already have, and to act as if we sought it, we can find no one sensation the basis of the certainty of the other sensations. We should meet in that all the difficulties to be encountered in the others.

59. One of the chief difficulties upon this point is to determine the relations of the sense of sight with that of touch, and how far the one depends upon the other. We propose hereafter to examine these questions at some length, and we shall therefore now refrain from entering upon them, as well because they are not of a character to be incidentally investigated, as because whatever their solution, it is not at all opposed to what we shall here establish.

60. It would be of no advantage to us to know that the certainty of all sensations was, philosophically speaking, founded upon that of some one sensation. Every sensation is a contingent, individual fact: how then are we to draw from it light to guide us to necessary truths? No matter under what aspect we consider sensation, it is only an impression received through our organs. We are sure of the impression because it is intimately present to our mind; and its repetition aided by other sensations, whether of the same or another sense, makes us certain of its relations with the object producing it: but every thing is done instinctively, with little or no reflection; and we are always condemned, however much we reflect, to reach a point beyond which we cannot pass, for nature herself there stops us.

61. Far then from finding in any sensation a fundamental fact on which to found a philosophical certainty, we discover a collection of particular and mutually distinct facts, equal, however, so far as the production in us of that security which we call certainty is concerned. It is of no use to decompose man, and reduce him first to an inanimate machine, then allow him one sense, making him perceive different sensations, afterwards grant him another sense, making him combine the new and the old sensations, and so on synthetically to the possession and exercise of them all. These things may do to entertain one's curiosity, to nourish philosophical pretensions, or to give a show of probability to imaginary systems; but they are in reality of little or no use; the evolutions which the observer imagines do not resemble those of nature; and the true philosopher ought to examine what really is, not what is only in his conception.

Condillac, animating his statue by degrees, and making the whole sum of human knowledge flow from one sensation, is like those priests who got inside the statue of the idol, and thence emitted their oracles. It is not the statue which receives animation, that speaks and thinks, it is Condillac from within it. Let us, however, grant to the sensist all he demands; let us allow him to regulate as he pleases the mutual dependence of sensations; for the instant we require him to make use only of pure sensations in his discussions, he will be utterly disconcerted, how much soever he may suppose them to be transformed. But we reserve these questions to the place in which we shall examine the nature and origin of ideas.

62. Why are we sure that the agreeable sensation which we experience in our sense of smell proceeds from an object called a *rose*? Because we recollect having experienced the same sensation on a thousand other occasions; because both sight and touch confirm the testimony of smell. But how do we know that these sensations are something beside the impressions received in our soul? Why may we not believe them to come from some cause or other, without relation to external causes? Is it because other men say the contrary? Are we certain that they exist? How do they know what they tell us? How do we know that we hear rightly? There is the same difficulty with the other senses as with that of hearing, and if we doubt the testimony of three senses, why shall we not doubt that of four? Reasoning is here of no avail; it would lead us to cavils which would require an impassible doubt, and would tear from us a security, of which, notwithstanding all our efforts, we cannot despoil ourselves.

Moreover, if we appeal to the principles of reason, in order to prove the truth of sensation, we leave the territory of sensations, and do not place in them the primitive truth, origin of all other truths, nor accomplish what we undertook.



63. Hence it follows: First, that there is no one sensation which is the origin of the certainty of all others; this we have only indicated here, reserving the demonstration of it to our treatise on sensations. Secondly, although such a sensation were to exist, it could not serve as the basis of any thing in the intellectual order, for with sensation alone it is impossible even to think. Thirdly, that sensations, so far from being able to serve as the basis of transcendental science, cannot serve of themselves alone to establish any science; because necessary truths cannot flow from them, since they are contingent facts.[\(5\)](#)

## CHAPTER VI. TRANSCENDENTAL SCIENCE. – INSUFFICIENCY OF REAL TRUTHS

64. We have thought proper briefly to refute Condillac's system, not on account of its intrinsic importance, or because it was not before in sufficiently bad repute, but in order to clear the field for higher and more strictly philosophical discussions. We should not omit to guard philosophy against the prejudice cast upon it by a system as vain as it is profitless. All that is most sublime in the science of the mind disappears with the *statue-man* and transformed sensations: we vindicate the rights of human reason by showing that before entering upon more transcendental questions it is indispensable to discard Condillac's system; just as it is necessary before making a good road to clear away the brushwood which obstructs the passage.

65. We come now to the proof that in the human intellectual order, such as it is in this life, there is no one truth the source of all truths; because no one truth includes them all.

Truths are of two kinds, real and ideal. We call facts, or whatever exists, real truths; we call the necessary connection of ideas ideal truths. A real truth may be expressed by the verb *to be*, taken substantively, or at least it supposes a proposition in which this verb has been taken in this sense: an ideal truth is expressed by the same verb taken copulatively, as signifying the necessary relation of a predicate with a subject, abstracting it, however, from both. *We are*, that is, *we exist*, expresses a real truth, a fact. *Whoever thinks exists*, expresses an ideal truth, for it does not affirm that there is any one who thinks or exists, but that if there is any one who thinks, he exists; or, in other words, it affirms a necessary relation between thought and being. To real truths corresponds the real world, the world of existences; to ideal truths the logical world, that of possibility.

The verb *to be*, is sometimes taken copulatively, although the relation expressed by it be not necessary: such is the case with all contingent propositions, and when the predicate does not belong to the essence of the subject. Sometimes the necessity is conditional, that is, it supposes a fact; and then there is no absolute necessity, since the supposed fact is always contingent. When we speak of ideal truths, we refer to those that express an absolute necessary relation, abstracting it from all order of existence; and on the other hand, we understand by real truths all those that suppose a proposition in which a fact has been established. To this class belong the truths of natural science, for they all suppose some fact which is the object of observation.

66. No real finite truth can be the origin of all others. Truth of this kind is the expression of a particular contingent fact, and consequently can neither include other real truths or the world of existences, nor ideal truths which refer only to necessary relations in the world of possibility.

67. Were we to see intuitively infinite existence, cause of all existences, we should know a real truth, origin of all others; but as we know this infinite existence only by discursion and not by intuition, it follows that we do not know the fact of that existence in which the reason of all other existences is contained. Neither is it possible for us, after having by means of discursion reached this cognition, to explain from this point of view the existence of the finite by the sole existence of the infinite; for if we abstract the existence of the finite, the discursion, by which we attained to the cognition of the infinite, disappears, and then our whole scientific fabric tumbles to the ground. Demonstrate to a man by means of discursion the existence of God, and require him, setting aside the point of departure, and depending upon the sole idea of the infinite, to explain not only the possibility, but also the reality of creation; and he cannot do it. If he only sets aside the finite all his reasoning fails, and no effort can prevent its failing; he is like an architect who, after having built a superb cupola, is required to support it although the foundations of the edifice are removed.

68. Take any real truth whatever, the plainest and most certain fact, and yet we can derive nothing from it if ideal truth comes not to fecundate it. We exist, we think, we feel; these are indubitable facts, but science can deduce nothing from them; they are particular contingent facts, whose existence or non-existence neither affects other facts nor reaches the world of ideas.

These truths are of the purely sensible order, have not of themselves any relation with the order of science, nor can they be elevated to it if not combined with ideal truths. Descartes, when he brought forward the fact of thought and existence, driven as he was by his attempt to raise a scientific edifice, passed unawares from the real to the ideal order. *I think*, he said; and had he stopped here he would have reduced his philosophy to a simple intuition of consciousness; but he wished to go farther, he wished to reason, and then of necessity availed himself of an ideal truth: *whoever thinks exists*. Thus with a universal and necessary truth he fecundated his individual and contingent fact; and as he needed some rule to guide him in his onward march, he sought one in the admissibility of the evidence of ideas. And thus also we see how this philosopher, who so toiled in search of unity, came all at once in contact with triplicity: *a fact, an objective truth, a criterion*: a fact in the consciousness of the subject; an objective truth in the necessary relation of thought with existence; a criterion in the admissibility of the evidence of ideas.

We may defy all the philosophers in the world to reason upon any fact whatever without the aid of ideal truth. We shall find in all facts the same sterility as in the fact of consciousness. This is no conjecture, but a rigid demonstration. Only one existence contains the reason of all other existences; if, then, we do not immediately and intuitively know it, we cannot discover any one real truth, origin of all others.

69. Even supposing there to be in the order of creation a fact of such a nature, that the whole universe is only a simple development of it, we should not therefore have found the real truth source of all science, for it would not enable us to make any advance towards the world of possibility, the ideal order, infinitely superior to that of finite existences.

If we suppose the progress of natural science to lead to the discovery of a single, simple law, which presides over the development of all others, and the application of which, varied according to circumstances, is a sufficient reason of all the phenomena now referred to many and very complicated laws; this would, without doubt, be an immense progress in sciences the object of which is the visible world; but what would it give us to know of the world of intelligences? What of the world of possibility?(6)

## CHAPTER VII. THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE ME CANNOT PRODUCE TRANSCENDENTAL SCIENCE

70. The testimony of consciousness is sure and irresistible, but it has no connection with that of evidence. The object of the one is a particular and contingent fact; that of the other, a necessary truth. That I now think, is to me absolutely certain; but this thought of mine is not a necessary but a decidedly contingent truth; for I might never have thought, or even existed: it is a purely individual fact, is confined to me, and its existence or non-existence in nowise affects universal truths.

Consciousness is an anchor, not a beacon: it saves the understanding from shipwreck, but does not light it on its way; in the assaults of universal doubt, consciousness is at hand to shield it from destruction; but if asked to direct us, it gives us only particular facts.

These facts have no scientific value, except when made objective, or rather, when the mind, reflecting upon them, bathes them in the light of necessary truths.

We think, we feel, we are free; these are facts; but of themselves they are barren. If we would fecundate them, we must take them as a kind of material of universal truths. Thought becomes immovable, it congeals, if deprived of the impulse of these ideas; sensation is common to us and the brutes; and liberty, without combination of motives presented by reason, has no object, no life.

71. Here we discover the cause of the obscurity and sterility of German philosophy since Fichte. Kant fixed himself upon the subject, without, however, destroying objectivity in the internal world; and therefore his philosophy, although containing many errors, offers to the mind some luminous points: but Fichte went farther, planted himself upon the *me*, and made no use of objectivity, save when it was necessary to the more solid establishment of a fact of consciousness; and so he found only realms of darkness and contradiction.

Men of gifted minds have labored in vain to make some ray of light emanate from a point condemned to obscurity. The soul sees itself in its own acts; and that it presents immediately to itself facts conducing to its own cognition is the only title it has, more than other beings distinct from it, to be conceived by itself. What would it know were it not to perceive its own thought, its will, and the exercise of all its faculties? How is it to discuss its own nature, if not from data furnished by the testimony of its own acts? The *me* then does not see itself intuitively; is offered to itself only mediately, by its acts; that is, so far as it is known, it is in the same category as all other external beings, which are all known by their effects upon us.

The *me* in itself considered, is not a luminous point; it supports the fabric of reason, but is not the rule according to which it is to be constructed. The true light is found in objectivity, for it is properly the object of knowledge. The *me* can neither be known nor thought, save inasmuch as it makes itself its own object, and consequently places itself on a level with other beings subject to intellectual activity, which operates only by virtue of objective truths.

72. Intelligence cannot be conceived without at least internal objects; but if the understanding do not conceive relations and consequently truths in them, they will be sterile. These truths will have no connection, will be isolated facts, if they involve no necessity; and even those relations which refer to particular facts furnished by experience will not be susceptible of any combination if they do not, at least conditionally, involve some necessity. The brilliancy of the light in the room where I now write is in itself a particular, contingent fact, and science, as such, cannot make it its object except by subjecting the movement of the light to geometrical laws, that is, to necessary truths.

Science then may find a resting-point in the *me* itself as subject, but no point of departure. The individual is of no service to the universal, nor the contingent to the necessary. Assuredly there would be no such thing as the individual A's science, if the individual A himself did not exist; but

the science which stands in need of the individual subject is not science properly so called, but the collection of individual acts by which the individual perceives science. This collection of acts is not the science perceived, which is something common to all intellects, and does not need this or that individual: the fund of truths constituting science does not spring from this collection of individual acts, particular facts, which are lost like minutest drops in the ocean of intelligence.

How then can science be based solely upon the subjective *me*? How can the object be made to spring from this subject? Consciousness has no connection with science, except in so far as it furnishes facts to which we may apply objective, universal, and necessary principles, independent of all finite individuality, constituting the patrimony of human reason, but not requiring the existence of any man.

73. No analysis of the facts of consciousness will produce the origin of the lights of science. Such an act would be either direct or reflex. If direct, its value is objective not subjective, the act does not found science, but the truth perceived, not the subject but the object, not the *me*, but that which is seen by the *me*. If reflex, it supposes another previous act, to wit, the object of reflection, which is primitive, and not the act.

Neither is the combination of the direct with the reflex act of any service to science, except as connected with necessary and objective truths, which are independent of the subject. An act individually considered, is an internal phenomenon, which, apart from objective truths, teaches us nothing. It has, indeed, a scientific value, if considered under the general ideas of being, cause, effect, principle or product of activity, modification, or its relations with its subject, which is the *substratum* of other similar acts; that is, if it be considered as a particular case, comprised in the general ideas as a contingent phenomenon, to be appreciated by the help of necessary truths, as an experimental fact to which a theory may be applied.

The reflex act is only a cognition of a cognition, feeling, or some other internal phenomenon; and therefore all reflection upon consciousness presupposes a prior direct act. The object of this direct act is not the *me*; the fundamental principle of the cognition therefore is not the *me*, as the object known, but only as the necessary condition, since there cannot be thought without a thinking subject.

74. These considerations destroy the very foundations of the system of Fichte, and that of all who take the human *me* as their point of departure on the voyage of science. The *me*, in itself, is not presented to us; we know it only by its acts; and herein it participates of a quality of other objects, the essence of which is not immediately offered to us, but only what emanates from it by the exercise of their activity upon us.

Thus guided by objective and necessary truths, which are the laws of our understanding, the type of the relations of beings, and consequently a sure standard of them, we ascend by reasoning to the cognition of things themselves. We know that our mind is simple, because it thinks, whereas the composite, the multiplex cannot think. It is thus we know the *me*. We are conscious of its thinking activity, and this is the material furnished by the fact, but then comes the principle, the objective truth to illumine the fact, and show the repugnance between thought and composition, and the necessary connection between simplicity and consciousness.

Upon examination, this reasoning will be found to apply not only to the *me*, but to every thinking being; and this is why we can extend our demonstration to all such beings: the *me*, therefore, which applies this truth, does not create, it only knows it, and knows itself to be a particular case comprised in the general rule.

75. To pretend that truth has its source in the subjective *me*, is to begin by supposing the *me* to be an absolute, infinite being, the origin of all truths, and the reason of all beings; which is equivalent to making philosophy commence by deifying the human understanding. But as one individual has no more right to this deification than another, to admit it is to establish a rational pantheism, which, as we shall hereafter see, is nearly, if not quite, identical with absolute pantheism.

If we suppose individual reason to be only a phenomenon of the one absolute reason, and consequently what we call spirits not to be true substances, but modifications of a single spirit, and

each particular consciousness to be only a manifestation of the universal consciousness, we can then conceive why the source of all truth is sought in the *me*, and why we interrogate our own consciousness as a kind of oracle through which the universal consciousness speaks. But the difficulty is that such a supposition is gratuitous, and that they who thus seek the reason of all truths, begin by establishing the most incomprehensible and absurd of propositions. Who will persuade us that our consciousness is only the modification of another? Who will make us believe that what we call the *me* is common to all men, to all intelligent beings, and that the only difference between them is the difference of the modifications of one absolute being? Why, then, is not this absolute being conscious of every consciousness which it comprises? Why does it not know that which it contains, and by which it is modified? Why does it believe itself multiplex, if indeed it be one? Where is the bond of this multiplicity? If each particular consciousness were only a modification, would it preserve its unity, and a connected series of all that happens to it, when this series, this unity is wanting to the substance which it modifies?

76. However this may be, not even by supposing pantheism, can the friends of subjective philosophy at all advance their pretensions. With pantheism they legitimate, so to speak, their pretension, but do not realize it. They call themselves gods, and as such, have a reason for the source of truth being in them; but as there is in their consciousness only one apparition of their divinity only one phase of the orb of light, they can only see in it what it presents to them; and their divinity finds itself subjected to certain laws which make it impossible for it to give the light demanded by philosophy.

77. If we interrogate our consciousness upon necessary truths, we shall perceive that, far from pretending to found or to create them, it both knows and confesses them to be independent of itself. If, thinking of this proposition: "It is impossible for a thing to be, and not be at the same time;" we ask ourselves if the truth of this originates in our thought, consciousness at once answers that it does not. The proposition was true before our consciousness existed; and should it now cease to exist, the proposition would still be true; true, also, when we do not think of it: the soul is as an eye which contemplates the sun, but is not, therefore, necessary to the existence of the sun.

78. Another consideration demonstrates the sterility of all philosophy which seeks in the *me* alone the sole and universal origin of human knowledge. Every cognition requires an object; purely subjective cognition is inconceivable; although we suppose the subject and object to be identified, duality of relation, real or conceived, is still necessary; that is, the subject as known must stand in a certain opposition, – opposition at least conceived, – with itself as subject knowing. Now, what is the object sought in the primitive act? Is it something not the subject? Then the philosophy of the subject falls into the current of other philosophies, since in this something which is not the subject are objective truths. Is it the subject itself? Then we ask, is it the subject in itself or in its acts; if the subject in its acts, then the philosophy is reduced to ideological analysis, and has no special characteristic; if the subject in itself, we say it is not known intuitively, and least of all can they who call it the *absolute* pretend to this cognition; it is for them even more than for others a dark abyss. In vain will you stoop over this abyss, and shout for truth; the dull rumbling which reaches your ears is only the echo of your own voice; the profound cavern rolls back to you only your own words still more hollow and mysterious.

79. Eminent among the philosophers most given to empty cavils is the author of the *Doctrine of Science*, Fichte, of whose system Madame de Staël ingenuously remarked, that it very much resembled the awakening of Pygmalion's statue from sleep, which, turning alternately to itself and to its pedestal said, *I am, I am not*.

Fichte says, in the beginning of his work entitled *Doctrine of Science*, that he proposes to seek the most absolute principle, the absolutely unconditioned principle of all human knowledge. This his method is erroneous: he begins by supposing what is unknown, and does not even suspect that there may be a true multiplicity in the basis of human cognitions. We believe that there may be, and that there really is such a multiplicity, that the sources of our knowledge are various, and of different

orders, and that we cannot reduce them to unity without leaving man and ascending to God. We repeat it, this equivocation has become exceedingly general, and its only result has been uselessly to fatigue inquiring minds or to drive them to extravagant systems.

Few philosophers have toiled harder than Fichte after this absolute principle; and yet, to speak plainly, he accomplishes nothing; he either repeats Descartes' principle, or amuses himself with a play upon words. We feel pity at seeing him labor so earnestly to so little purpose. We beg the reader to follow us with patience in our examination of the German philosopher's doctrine, not with the hope of finding a thread to serve as a clue to the Dædalus of philosophy, but in order to judge, with a knowledge of the cause, doctrines which have made so much noise in the world.

"If this principle," says Fichte, "is absolutely the first, it can neither be defined nor demonstrated. It must express the act, which neither is nor can be presented among the empirical determinations of our consciousness, but rather lies at the bottom of all consciousness, and alone makes consciousness possible."<sup>4</sup>

Without any antecedent, or any reason, without even taking the trouble to show on what he bases it, Fichte assures us that the first principle must express an act. Why may it not be an objective truth? This, at least, would have deserved some attention, for all preceding schools, the Cartesian included, located the first principle among objective truths, not among acts. Descartes himself needed an objective truth in order to establish the fact of thought and existence. "Whoever thinks exists," or, in other words, "whoever does not exist cannot think."

80. This last remark shows one of the radical vices affecting the doctrine of Fichte and other Germans, who attribute an altogether unmerited importance to subjective philosophy. They accuse others of too easily making the transition from the subject to the object, but forget that they, at the same time pass, unauthorised by any reason or title, from objective thought to the pure subject. Confining ourselves to the passage of Fichte just cited, what, we ask, will an act be which neither is nor can be presented among the empirical determinations of our consciousness? The principle in question is not exempted from being known because it is absolute; for if we do not know it, we cannot assert that it is absolute; and if it is not, and cannot be presented among the empirical determinations of our consciousness, it neither is nor can be known. Man knows not that which is not present in his consciousness.

The absolute principle upon which all consciousness rests, and which makes it possible, either does or does not belong to consciousness. If the former, it is liable to all the difficulties affecting the other acts of consciousness; if the latter, it cannot be the object of observation, and therefore we can know nothing of it.

Fichte confesses that in order to arrive at the primitive act, and separate from it all that does not really belong to it, we must suppose the rules of all reflection to be valid, and start with some one of the many universally admitted propositions. "Conceding us," he says, "this proposition, you must, at the same time, concede as act that which we desire to place as the principle of the whole *Doctrine of Science*; and the result of the reflection must be that this act is conceded to us as the principle together with the proposition. We take any fact of empirical consciousness, and strip it one after another of all its empirical determinations, until reduced to all its purity it contains that only which thought cannot absolutely exclude, and from which nothing further can be taken."<sup>5</sup>

These words show that the German philosopher proposed ascending to a perfectly pure and wholly indeterminate act of consciousness, which, however, is impossible. Either he takes the act in a very broad sense, and understands by it the *substratum* of all consciousness, in which case he only expresses in other words the idea of substance; or else he speaks of an act properly so called, that is, of some exercise of that activity, that spontaneity which we feel within ourselves; and in this sense the

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<sup>4</sup> *Wissenschaftslehre, Th. I, § 1*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

act of consciousness cannot be separated from all determination without destroying its individuality and existence. Man cannot think without thinking something, desire without desiring something, feel without feeling something, or reflect upon internal acts without fixing his reflection upon something. There is some determination in every act of consciousness: an act perfectly pure, abstracted from every thing, and wholly indeterminate, is impossible, absolutely impossible; subjectively, because the act of consciousness, although considered in the subject, requires some determination; objectively, because such an act is inconceivable as individual, and consequently as existing, since it offers nothing determinate to the mind.

81. Fichte's indeterminate act is only the idea of act in general. He imagined he had made a great discovery when he conceived nothing in the groundwork but the principle of act, that is, the idea of substance applied to that active being whose existence consciousness itself makes known to us.

If we may be allowed to say candidly what we think, our opinion is, that Fichte, with all his analytical investigations, has not advanced philosophy one step towards the discovery of the first principle. We see from what has already been said how easy it is to stop him by simply demanding an account of the suppositions made on the first page of his book. Still, wishing, as we do, to oppose him with all fairness, we will not take up his ideas without allowing him to explain them himself.

"Every one admits the proposition: A is A; just as that  $A = A$ , because such is the meaning of the logical copula; and indeed without the least deliberation we perceive and affirm its complete certainty. Should any one ask a demonstration of it, we should by no means give any, but should maintain that the proposition is absolutely certain, that is, without any further foundation. Thus incontestibly proceeding with general consent, we claim the right to *suppose something absolutely*.

"We do not, in affirming the preceding proposition to be certain in itself, suppose that A *is*. The proposition A is A, is not equivalent to this: A *is*, or, *there is an A*. (*To be* placed without a predicate has an entirely different meaning from *to be* with a predicate, whereof more hereafter.) If we make A denote a space contained between two straight lines, the proposition remains exact, although the proposition, A *is*, be evidently false. But, we assert: *if A is*, A *is thus*. The question is in no wise whether A is in general or not. The question is not of the *contents* of the proposition, but only of its *form*; not whereof we know something, but what we know of any object whatever.

"Consequently, by the above assertion, that the proposition is absolutely certain, this is established, that between the *if* and the *thus* there is a necessary connection; and it is this necessary connection between both which is supposed *absolutely* and *without other foundation*. I call this necessary connection provisionally = X."

All this show of analysis amounts only to what every logical student knows, that in every proposition the copula, or the verb *to be*, denotes not the existence of the subject, but its relation to the predicate. There was no need of so many words to tell us so simple a thing, nor of such affected efforts of the understanding in treating of an identical proposition. But let us arm ourselves with patience, and continue to listen to the German philosopher:

"But to return to A itself, *whether* A is or not; nothing is as yet affirmed thereon. The question then occurs: under what condition is A?

"X at least is supposed *in* and *by* the *me*, for it is the *me* which judges in the above proposition, and indeed judges by X as by a law, which consequently being given to the *me*, and by it established absolutely and without other foundation, must therefore be given to the *me* by the *me* itself."

82. What does all this Sanscrit mean? We will translate it into English: in identical or equivalent propositions there is a relation which the mind knows, judges, and according to which it decides upon the rest: this relation is given to our mind; identical propositions need no proof in order to obtain assent. All this is very true, very clear, and very simple; but, when Fichte adds that this relation must be given to the *me* by the *me* itself, he asserts what he neither does nor can know. Who told him that objective truths come to us from ourselves? Is one of the principal philosophical questions, such as is that of the origin of truth, to be thus easily solved with a dash of the pen? Has he, perchance, defined



his *me*, or given us any idea of it? Either his words mean nothing, or they mean this: I judge of a relation; this judgment is in me; this relation, as known and abstracted from real existence, is in me; all which may be reduced to Descartes' more natural and simple expression: "I think, therefore I exist."

83. Upon carefully examining Fichte's words, we clearly see that he made no more progress than the French philosopher. He goes on: "*Whether and how* A in general is supposed, we know not; but as X must mark a relation between an unknown supposition of A and an absolute supposition of A under the condition of this supposition, in so far at least as that relation is supposed, A exists *in the me*, and is supposed *by the me*, just as X. X is possible only in relation to an A: but X is really supposed in the *me*, therefore A also must be supposed in the *me* in so far as X is referred to it."

What confusion and mystery in the expression of the commonest things! How great Descartes appears beside Fichte! Each makes the fact of consciousness revealing existence the beginning of his philosophy. The one expresses his thoughts clearly, with simplicity and in a language which all the world does or may understand; the other, in order to seem an inventor, and to show that he has no master, envelops himself in a cloud of mystery, with darkness all around, whence in a hollow voice he pronounces his oracles. Descartes says: "I think, I cannot doubt it, it is a fact attested to me by my internal sense; no one can think without existing; therefore I exist." This is clear, simple, and ingenuous; it manifests a true philosopher, one without affectation or pretension. Fichte says: "Take any proposition whatever; for example, A is A: " and then goes on to explain how the verb *to be* in propositions does not express the absolute existence of the subject, but its relation with the predicate; the whole with a show of doctrine, wearisome in its form, and ridiculous in its sterility; and this too when he only wants to inform us that A is in the *me*, because the relation of the predicate with the subject, that is, X, is possible only in a being, since A denotes some being or other. Let us compare the two syllogisms. Descartes says: "No one can think without existing; but I think; therefore I exist." Fichte says literally what follows: "X is only possible in relation to an A; but X is really supposed in the *me*; therefore A must also be supposed in the *me*." There is at bottom no difference at all, and the only difference in form is that which exists between the language of a vain man and that of a sensible man.

At bottom the syllogisms are not different, we repeat it. Descartes' major proposition is: "Whatever thinks exists." He does not prove it, and admits that it cannot be proved. Fichte's major is: "X is possible only in relation to an A," or, in other words, no relation of a predicate with a subject, in so far as it is known, is possible without a being which knows. "X must mark a relation between an unknown supposition of A and an absolute supposition of the same A, *at least in so far as that relation is supposed*," that is, inasmuch as it is known. And how does Fichte prove a relative supposition to suppose an absolute supposition, that is, a subject in which it is supposed? Like Descartes, he does not prove it at all. There is no relative A without an absolute A; what does not exist cannot think. This is clear and evident; farther than this neither Fichte nor Descartes goes.

Descartes' minor is: "*I think*;" this he does not prove, but refers to consciousness beyond which he confesses that he cannot pass. Fichte's minor is this: "X is really asserted in the *me*;" which is equivalent to saying: the relation of the predicate with the subject is really known by the *me*; and as, according to Fichte himself, the proposition may be selected at pleasure, to say that the relation of the predicate with the subject is known by the *me*, is the same as to say that any relation whatever is known by the *me*; which in clearer terms may be expressed thus, *I think*.

84. Here we would remark, that the difference, if any there be, is altogether in favor of the French philosopher, who understands by thought every internal phenomenon of which we are conscious. In order to establish this fact, he has no need of analyzing propositions, and confusing the understanding upon those very points where it most requires clearness and precision. Fichte, to arrive at the same point, takes a roundabout way. Descartes points his finger to it, and says: *this is it*. The one acts like a sophist, the other like a true man of genius.

Had the German philosopher confined his forms, little calculated as they are to illustrate science, to what we have thus far examined, their greatest inconvenience would have been to weary

both the author and his readers; but unfortunately his mysterious *me*, which makes its appearance at the very vestibule of science, and which, in the eyes of sound reason, can only be what it was to Descartes, – the human mind, knowing its existence by its own thought, – goes on dilating in Fichte's hands, like a gigantic spectre, which, beginning in a single point, ends by hiding its head in the heavens and its feet in the abyss. This *me*, absolute subject, is then a being which exists because it supposed itself: it is a being which creates its own self, absorbs every thing, is every thing, and is revealed in the human mind as in one of the infinite phases of its infinite existence.

What we have thus far said, suffices to show the tendencies of Fichte's system. We are here treating of certainty and its foundations; this, then, is not the place to anticipate what we propose to say more at length upon this system when we come to explain the idea of substance and refute pantheism: for this is one of the gravest errors of modern philosophy; everywhere, and under all aspects, it must be combatted, but to do this we must attack it in its roots. This is why we have examined at such length Fichte's fundamental reflection in his *Doctrine of Science*, and stripped it of the importance which he claimed for it, so as to make it the basis of a transcendental science; for he flattered himself with being able to determine the absolutely unconditioned principle of all human knowledge.[\(7\)](#)

## CHAPTER VIII. UNIVERSAL IDENTITY

85. In order to give unity to science, some appeal to universal identity; this, however, is not to discover unity, but to take refuge in chaos. Universal identity is not only an absurdity, but a groundless hypothesis. Excepting the unity of consciousness, we find in ourselves nothing that is one; but multiplicity of ideas, perceptions, judgments, acts of the will, impressions of various kinds; and in relation to external objects, we perceive multitude in the beings which surround us, or as some pretend, in their appearances. Where then are unity and identity, for we can neither find them within nor without ourselves?

86. If it be said that nothing is offered to us but phenomena, and that we do not attain to the reality, the absolute and identical unity hidden beneath them, we can reply with this dilemma: either our experience is confined to phenomena, or it reaches the very nature of things: if the former, we cannot know what is concealed under the phenomena, nor absolute and identical unity; if the latter, then nature is not one but multiplex, for we everywhere encounter multiplicity.

87. It is curious to observe how easily men, the most skeptical in the simplest things, suddenly become dogmatic at the very point where the greatest motives of doubt are presented. With them the external world is either a pure appearance, or a being having no resemblance to the conception formed of it by the human race: the criterion of evidence, that of consciousness, and that of common sense have little power to command assent: the crowd alone should be satisfied with such weak foundations; the philosopher demands others far more solid. But strange as it may seem, the very philosopher who styled reality a deceitful appearance, and saw obscurity in what the human race considered luminous, so soon as he quitted the world of phenomena and arrived in the dominions of the absolute, finds himself illumined by a mysterious splendor, he requires no discussion, but by a most pure intuition, he sees the unconditioned, the infinite, the one in which every thing multiplex is involved, the great reality, the basis of all phenomena, the great All which re-unites in its breast all existences, re-assumes every thing, and absorbs every thing into most perfect identity. He fixes his philosophic eye upon this focus of light and life, sees it roll out like the ocean of existence in vast billows, and thus explains what is various by what is one, the composite by the simple, the finite by the infinite. All these prodigies do not require him to leave himself; he has only to go on destroying all that is empirical, to ascend even to pure act by mysterious by-paths unknown to all except himself. This *me*, which may have believed itself an existence perishable and dependent on another superior existence, is astounded at finding itself so great; it discovers in itself the origin of all beings, or, more correctly speaking, the only being, of which all others are but phenomenal existences; it is the universe itself become by a gradual development conscious of itself: whatever is without itself, and at first appears distinct, is only itself, a reflection of itself, presented to its eyes, and unfolded under a thousand different forms like a magnificent panorama.

Let not the reader think we have imagined a system for the sake of combatting it; the doctrine which we have here exposed, is the doctrine of Schelling.

88. One cause of this error is the obscurity of the problem of knowing. To know, is an immanent action, having, at the same time, relation to an external object, excepting those cases in which the intelligent being becomes, by a reflex act, its own object. In order to know a truth, whatever it may be, the mind does not quit itself; it does not operate beyond itself; its own consciousness tells it that it remains, and that its activity is developed, within itself.

This immanent action extends to objects the most distant in time and place, and the most unlike in their nature. How is the mind to come in contact with them? How is it to ascertain whether their representation conforms to reality? There can be no cognition without this representation; without

conformity, there is no truth, cognition is a pure illusion to which nothing corresponds, and the human understanding is unceasingly the sport of vain appearances.

Undeniably this problem is liable to very serious difficulties, which perhaps the science of man, while in this life, cannot solve. Here arise all the ideological and psychological questions ever treated by the most eminent metaphysicians. However, as it is not our intention to anticipate what is to be hereafter considered, we shall confine ourselves to the point of view indicated by our present question of certainty and its fundamental principle.

89. Consciousness attests the fact of representation; without this there is no thought; and the affirmation *I think* is, if not the origin of all philosophy, at least its indispensable condition.

90. Whence comes the representation? How is a being placed in such communication with other beings, and this not by a transient but by an immanent act? How explain the conformity between the representation and the object? Does not this mystery indicate that there is unity, identity, at the bottom of all things, that the being which knows, is the very being known, which appears to itself under a distinct form, and that what we call realities are only phenomena of one and the same being, always identical, infinitely active, which develops its strength in various ways, and forms by its development what we call the universe? No! This neither is nor can be! It is an absurdity which the most extravagant reason cannot accept: it is a resource as desperate as it is impotent to explain a mystery, if you will, but one a thousand times less obscure than the system which pretends to clear it up.

91. Universal identity explains nothing, but greatly confuses everything; it does not dissipate the difficulty, but strengthens it, and renders it insolvable. It certainly is no easy matter to explain how the mind obtains the representation of things distinct from itself; but it is no easier to show how the mind can have the representation of itself. If there is unity, complete identity between the subject and the object, how are the two presented to us as distinct things? How can duality proceed from unity, or diversity spring from identity?

It is a fact testified by experience, not the experience of external objects, but that of consciousness, by that which is most hidden in our soul, that there is in every cognition a subject and an object, perception and the thing perceived, and without this difference the act is not possible. Even when by an effort of reflection, we take ourselves for our own object, the duality appears; if it does not exist, we imagine it, for without this fiction we cannot think.

92. Even in the most intimate and concentrated reflection, duality, upon careful examination, is to be found, not by fiction, as it might seem at first sight, but in reality. When the understanding turns upon itself, it does not see its own essence, for it has no direct intuition of itself: it sees its acts, and these it takes for its object. The reflex act is not the act reflected. When I think that I think, the first thought is distinct from the second, and so distinct that one succeeds the other, for the reflective thought can exist only subsequently to the thought reflected.

93. This is confirmed by a profound analysis of reflection. Is reflection possible without an object reflected upon? Evidently not. What is this object in the present case? The thought itself: then this thought must have preceded the reflection. If it be supposed that they must not of necessity follow in different instants of time, and that the dependence is saved, notwithstanding the simultaneousness, still the force of the argument is not lost; we grant, but do not concede, that the simultaneousness is possible; but the dependence at least is not possible without distinction. Dependence is a relation; relation supposes opposition of extremes; and this opposition draws with it distinction.

94. That these acts are distinct, although simultaneous, may be demonstrated in another manner. One of them, that reflected upon, may exist without the reflex act. We continually think, without thinking that we think; and the same may be proved true of every reflection whatever, whether it is occupied with the act thought, or it disappears and leaves only the direct act: these acts are, therefore, not only distinct but separable; therefore, the duality of the subject and the object exists not only in the external world, but also in that which is the most intimate and pure in our soul.

95. It avails not to say that the object of reflection is not any determinate act, but thought in general. This is in many cases false; for we not only think that we think, but that we think a determinate thing. Moreover, although the object of reflection is sometimes thought in general, not even then does the duality disappear: in that case the subjective act is an individual act, existing in a determinate instant of time, and its object is thought in general, that is, an idea representative of all thought, an idea which involves a sort of confused recollection of all past acts, or of what is called activity, intellectual force. The duality then exists more evidently, if possible, than when the object is a determinate thought. In one instance at least two individual acts are compared; but in this case an individual act is compared with an abstract idea, a thing existing in one instant of time with an idea that either abstracts it, or confusedly embraces all that has passed since the epoch when the consciousness of the reflecting being commenced.

96. These arguments have much greater weight when directed against those philosophers who place the essence of the mind not in the power of thinking but in thought itself; who give to the *me* no other existence than what springs from its own knowledge, affirming that it exists only because it *supposes* itself, by knowing itself, and only in so far as it *supposes* itself, that is, in so far as it knows itself. With this system there is duality, or rather plurality, not only in the acts, but even in the *me* itself; because this *me* is an act, and acts follow like a series of fluxions developed to infinity. Thus, far from saving the unity and identity of subject and object, plurality and multiplicity are established in the subject itself; and the unity of consciousness itself, in danger of being broken by the cavils of philosophers, is forced to take refuge in the obscurity of invincible nature.

97. We have thus incontestably proved that there is in us a duality of subject and object, that without it knowledge is inconceivable, and that representation itself is a contradiction unless in one sense or another we admit things really distinct in the recesses of intelligence. We beg to observe that we have a sublime type of this distinction in the august mystery of the Trinity, the fundamental dogma of our holy religion, covered, indeed, with an impenetrable veil, but which sends forth light to illustrate the profoundest questions of philosophy. This mystery is not explained by feeble man, but is for him a sublime explanation. Thus Plato availed himself of glimmerings from this focus as a treasure of immense value to philosophical theories; thus the Holy Fathers and theologians, in endeavoring to throw some light upon it by arguments of congruity, have illustrated the most occult mysteries of human thought.

98. The upholders of universal identity, besides contradicting a primitive and fundamental fact of consciousness, signally fail in their efforts to explain by it either the origin of intellectual representation or its conformity to its object. Evidently no man has an intuition of the nature of the individual *me*, and still less of the absolute being which these philosophers suppose as the *substratum* of whatever exists or appears. It is impossible for them to explain *a priori*, without this intuition, the representation of objects or their conformity to the representation. The fact, therefore, on which they would base their whole philosophy, either does not exist, or is unknown to us: in neither case can it serve as the foundation of a system.

Were this fact to exist, it could not be presented to our mind by any enunciation to which we could arrive by reasoning. It must be seen rather than known; either occupy the first place or none. If we begin to reason without taking this fact for our basis, we start from the apparent in order to attain to what truly is; we make use of an illusion to arrive at reality. Thus it evidently follows from the system of our adversaries that philosophy must either start with the most powerful intuition, or else it cannot advance a single step.

99. The schools distinguish between the principle of being and the principle of knowledge, *principium essendi et principium cognoscendi*; but this distinction has no place in the system which we oppose; being is there confounded with knowledge; what exists, exists because it is known, and it exists only in so far as it is known. To draw out the series of cognitions, is to develop the series of existences. They are not even two parallel movements; they are but one movement; the *me* is the

universe, and the universe is the *me*; whatever exists is a development of the primitive fact, is the fact itself which is displayed under different forms, extending like an infinite ocean; its position is unlimited space; its duration eternity.[\(8\)](#)

## CHAPTER IX. UNIVERSAL IDENTITY, – CONTINUED

100. These systems, as absurd as they are fatal, although under distinct forms, and by various means, they tend to prepare the way for pantheism, contain a profound truth which, disfigured by vain cavils, seems to be an abyss of darkness, whereas it is in itself a ray of most brilliant light.

The human mind seeks that by reason to which it is impelled by an intellectual instinct; how to reduce plurality to unity, to re-unite, as it were, all the variety of existences in a point from which they all proceed, and in which they are all absorbed. The understanding knows that the conditioned must be included in the unconditioned, the relative in the absolute, the finite in the infinite, the various in the one. In this, all religions, all schools of philosophy agree. The proclamation of this truth belongs to no one of them exclusively; it is to be met with in all countries of the world, in primitive times, back even to the cradle of the human race. Beautiful, sublime tradition! Preserved through all generations, amid the ebb and flow of events, it offers us the idea of the Divinity presiding over the origin and destiny of the universe.

101. Yes! The unity sought by philosophers is the Divinity itself, – the Divinity whose glory the firmament declares, and whose august face of ineffable splendor appears to us in our inmost consciousness. Yes! it is the Divinity which enlightens and guides the true philosopher, but blinds and confounds the proud sophist; it is what the true philosopher calls God, and venerates and adores in the sanctuary of his soul, but what the insensate philosopher, with sacrilegious profanation, calls the *me*. Considering its personality, its consciousness, its infinite intelligence, and its most perfect liberty, it is the foundation and the keystone of religion: distinct from the world, it produced the world from nothing, and preserves and governs it, and leads it by mysterious paths to the destiny assigned in its immutable decrees.

102. There is then unity in the world; there is unity in philosophy. In this all agree; the difference is that some separate, with the greatest care, the finite from the infinite, the thing created from the creative power, unity from multiplicity, and maintain the necessary communication between the free will of the omnipotent agent and finite existences, between the wisdom of the sovereign intelligence and the fixed course of the universe: while others, affected with melancholy blindness, confound the effect with the cause, the finite with the infinite, the various with the one, and reproduce in the domain of philosophy the chaos of primeval times; but all scattering and in frightful confusion, without any hope of order or union: the earth of these philosophers is void, and darkness is upon the face of their deep; the spirit of God has not moved over the waters to fecundate the chaos, and produce oceans of life and light out of darkness and death.

The absurd systems invented by philosophical vanity explain nothing; the system of religion, which is that also of sound philosophy, and of all mankind, explains everything: the intellectual, as well as the corporeal world, is a chaos to the human mind the instant it abandons the idea of God: restore this and order reappears.

103. The two capital problems: whence the intellectual representation, and whence its conformity to objects, have with us a most simple explanation. Our understanding, although limited, participates in the infinite light; this light is not that which exists in God himself, but a semblance communicated to a being created according to his image.

Illumined by this light, objects shine upon the eyes of our mind, whether because they are in communication with it by means unknown to us, or because the representation is given to us directly by God, in the presence of objects.

The conformity of the representation to the thing represented, results from the divine veracity. An infinitely perfect God cannot take pleasure in deceiving his creatures. Such is the theory of Descartes and Malebranche, eminent thinkers, who took no step in the intellectual order, without

looking to the Author of all light, and who never wrote a page on which the name of God was not traced.

104. As will hereafter be seen, Malebranche admitted that man sees every thing in God, even in this life; but his system, far from identifying the human *me* with the infinite being, carefully distinguishes them, not finding other means to sustain and enlighten the former than by approximating and uniting it to the second. To read the great metaphysician's immortal work is enough to convince one that his system was not that of this pure, primitive intuition, which is an act required of all empiricism, and which seems to rise within the limits of philosophy, from that intuition of the simple fact, the origin of all ideas and all facts, in which one of the dogmas of our religion, the beatific vision, seems realized upon earth in the domain of philosophy. These are senseless pretensions, and as far from the mind as from the system of Malebranche.[\(9\)](#)



## CHAPTER X. PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION: MONADS OF LEIBNITZ

105. The pretension to find a real truth, the fountain of all others, is dangerous in the extreme, however indifferent it may at first sight appear. Pantheism, and the deification of the *me*, two systems which coincide at bottom, are a consequence not easy to be avoided if it be attempted to establish all human science upon one fact.

106. The real truth or fact, which would serve as the basis of all science, should be immediately perceived, otherwise it would lack the character of origin and basis of other truths; because the medium by which it should be perceived would itself have the better right to the title of first truth. If this intermediate fact were the cause of the other, evidently this latter would not be primitive; and if the priority were given to the order of knowledge instead of the order of being, we should still have the same difficulty as now to explain the transition from subject to object, or the legitimacy of the medium by which we perceive the primitive fact.

Since then, the immediate presence, the intimate union of the understanding with the thing known is necessary, it is clear that as the *me* has this immediate presence only for itself and its own acts, the fact sought for must be the *me* itself. That which is immediately present to us is the facts of consciousness; by them we place ourselves in communication with what is distinct from us. In case then that we must find a primitive fact, the origin of all others, this fact must be the *me*. If we deny this consequence, we must deny the possibility of finding any fact which may be the source of transcendental science. Here we see how the apparently most innocent philosophical pretensions lead to fatal results.

107. There is here certainly very little chance for evasion, but there is one so specious as to merit an examination.

The fact, which is the scientific origin of all others, is not necessarily their true origin. By distinguishing between the principle of being and the principle of knowledge, all difficulty seems to be avoided. It is absurd and contrary to common sense, that the *me* is the origin of all that exists; but not that it is the representative principle of all that is or can be known. Representation is not synonymous with causality. Ideas represent but do not cause the objects represented. Why, then, is it not possible to admit a fact representative of all that the human understanding can know? It is certain that the perception of this fact must be immediate, that is, it must be supposed intimately present to the understanding perceiving it; for which reason, it can be nothing else than the *me*: this, however, is not to deify the *me*, but only to concede to it a representative force, which may have been given to it by a superior being. It makes the *me* not an universal cause, but a mirror which reflects the internal and external worlds.

This explanation reminds us of the famous system of *monads* advanced by Leibnitz; an ingenious system indeed, the lofty flight of one of the mightiest geniuses that ever honored the human race. The whole world formed of invisible beings, all representative of the same universe, whereof they are a part, but by a representation adequate to their respective categories, and in conformity to their corresponding point of view, according to the place which they occupy, unrolling themselves in an immense series, which, commencing with the lowest order, goes on ascending to the very portal of infinity; and at the uppermost point of existences is the monad, which, in itself contains the reason of all things, which has produced them from nothing, given to them their representative force, and distributed them into their proper categories, establishing among them a sort of parallelism of perception, will, action, and motion, in such a manner that, without any one communicating any thing

to another, they all move on in most perfect conformity, in ineffable harmony. This is grand, beautiful, and wonderful; a colossal hypothesis which the genius of Leibnitz alone could ever have conceived.

108. Having paid this tribute of admiration to the eminent author of the *Monadology*, we observe that its gigantic conception is only an hypothesis which all the talent of its inventor could never base upon a single fact capable of giving to it an appearance of probability. Omitting the very serious difficulties, which this system, doubtless against the will of its author, opposes to the explanation of free will, we shall confine ourselves to the examination of the bearings of this system upon the question now before us.

In the first place, the representation of the monads, being a mere hypothesis, can serve to explain nothing, unless philosophy is to be made the sport of ingenious combination. The *me* is a monad, that is, an indivisible unity; of this there can be no doubt. The *me* is a monad representative of the universe: this is an absolutely gratuitous assertion, and until it is proved in some way or other, we have the right to ignore it.

109. Now, suppose the representative force, as understood by Leibnitz, to exist in the *me*; this hypothesis does not impugn what has been said against the primitive origin of transcendental science. On close inspection, the hypothesis of Leibnitz will be found to explain the origin of ideas, but not their connection. Make the soul a mirror, in which, by an effect of the creative will, every thing is represented; still it does not explain the order of these representations, show how one of them springs from another, or assign to them any other bond than the unity of consciousness. This system then is quite out of the question: we are not disputing on the manner in which representations exist in the soul, nor on their origin; but we are examining the opinion which pretends to found all science upon a single fact, and to unfold all ideas as simple modifications of that fact. This Leibnitz never said, nor can any thing be found in any of his works to indicate such a thought. Moreover, the difference between this system of *Monadology* and that of the German Philosophers, which we impugn, is too palpable to escape any one.

I. So far is Leibnitz from advocating universal identity, that he establishes an infinite plurality and multiplicity: his monads are beings really different and distinct among themselves.

II. The whole universe, composed of monads, proceeded, according to Leibnitz, from one infinite monad; and this procession was not by emanation, but by creation.

III. In the infinite monad, in God, Leibnitz places the sufficient reason of every thing.

IV. Knowledge has been freely given by God himself to the monads.

V. This knowledge, and the consciousness of it, belong to the monads individually, and Leibnitz never even remotely took into consideration this foundation of all things, which by its transformation ascends from nature to consciousness, or descends from the region of consciousness and is converted into nature.

110. These differences so marked need no comments; they show most evidently that the philosophers of modern Germany cannot shield themselves under the name of Leibnitz; although, in truth, these philosophers have no failing of that kind: far from seeking guides, they all aspire to originality, and this is one principal cause of their extravagance, Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte, all pretend to be founders of a philosophy; and Kant was so governed by the same ambition, that he made very important alterations in the second edition of his *Critic of Pure Reason*, lest he should be taken for a plagiarist from Berkeley's idealism.[\(10\)](#)

## CHAPTER XI. PROBLEM OF REPRESENTATION EXAMINED

111. All our knowledge is by representation, without which it would be inconceivable; and yet what is representation in itself considered? We cannot say: it enlightens us as to other objects, but not as to itself.

It is obvious that we do not attempt to conceal the very grave difficulties which the solution of this problem offers: on the contrary, we point them out with all clearness, in order to avoid that vain presumption which is as fatal to science as to every thing else. But let it not be supposed that we intend to banish this question from the arena of philosophy: for many and serious as are its difficulties, we are yet of opinion that they allow of sufficiently probable conjectures.

112. The representative force may emanate from any one of these three sources: identity, causality, or ideality. We will explain ourselves. A thing may represent itself; and this we call representation of identity. A cause may represent its effect; and this is what we understand by representation of causality. A being, whether substance or accident, may represent another distinct from itself, which is not its effect; and this we call representation of ideality.

We do not see how it is possible to assign any other source of representation: holding, therefore, the division to be complete, we will examine its three points; and we beg to call the attention of the reader more especially to this matter, because it is one of the most important in philosophy.

113. That which represents must have some relation to the thing represented: whether essential or accidental, inherent or communicated, this relation must exist. Two beings, having absolutely no relation, one of which nevertheless represents the other, are a monstrosity. There is nothing without a sufficient reason; and there being no relation between the thing representing, and that represented, there is no sufficient reason of the representation.

It is here to be borne in mind that, for the present, we abstract the nature of this relation; we do not assert it to be either real or ideal; we only say that, between the thing representing and that represented, there must be some link, whatever that link may be. Its mysteries, its incomprehensibility, do not destroy its existence. Philosophy perhaps may be unable to explain the enigma; but it can demonstrate the existence of the link. Thus, abstracting all experience, it is possible to demonstrate *a priori*, that there is a relation between the *me* and other beings, by the mere fact of their representation existing in the *me*.

The incessant communication of intelligences with each other, and with the universe, proves that there is a point of union for them all. Representation, alone, is a convincing proof of this: so many beings, apparently dispersed and unconnected, are intimately united in some centre, so that the simple phenomenon of intelligence leads us to affirm the common link, the unity in which plurality is joined. This unity, with pantheists, is universal identity; with us, it is God.

114. Here observe that this relation between the thing representing and that represented, is not necessarily direct or immediate; it suffices that it be with a third object: thus, they who explain representation by identity, and they who account for it by intermediate ideas, must equally admit it; for, on the present matter, there is no difference between those who hold these ideas to be produced by the action of objects upon our mind, and those who make them proceed immediately from God.

115. Whatever represents any thing, contains in some sense the thing represented; for an object cannot be represented unless it is in some manner or other in the representation. It may be the object itself, or its image; but this image cannot represent the object, unless it is known to be its image. Every idea then involves the relation of objectivity; otherwise it could not represent the object, but only itself. The act of intelligence is immanent, but in such a manner, that the intellect does not need to go out of itself to attain its object. When we think of a star a million leagues distant, our mind certainly does not go to the point where the star is; but by means of the idea, it destroys in an instant

this immense distance, and unites itself with the star. What it perceives is not the idea, but its object: if this idea did not involve a relation to the object, it would cease to be an idea to the mind, and would represent nothing except itself.

116. There is then, in every perception, a connection of the being that perceives with the thing perceived. When this perception is not immediate, the medium must be such as to contain a necessary relation to the object; it must conceal itself in order to offer to the eye of the mind only the thing represented. From the instant that it presents itself, and is seen, or even noticed, it ceases to be an idea and becomes an object. The idea is a mirror, which is most perfect when it creates the most perfect illusion. It must necessarily present only the objects, and project them at the proper distance, without allowing the eye to see the crystalline plane which reflects them.

117. This union of the thing representing, with that represented, of the intellect with its objects, may, in some instances, be explained by identity. In general, no contradiction is discovered in any thing representing itself to the eye of the understanding, if we suppose them to be united in some way or other. In case then that the thing known is itself intelligent, we see no difficulty in its being its own representation, and consequently none in confounding ideality and reality in the same being. If an idea can represent an object, why may it not represent itself? If an intelligent being can know an object through the medium of an idea, why may it not know that object immediately? The union of the thing known with the intellect is to us a mystery, it is true; but is the union effected by the medium of an idea less so? To the idea may be objected all that can be brought against the thing itself; and it is even more inexplicable how one thing represents another, than how it represents itself. The thing representing and that represented, have between them a sort of relation of containing and contained. It is easily conceived that the identical contains itself, since identity expresses much more than to contain; but it is not so easily conceived how the accident can contain the substance, the transitory the permanent, the ideal the real. Identity is then a true principle of representation.

118. We would here make the following remarks necessary to avoid equivocations.

I. We do not assert a necessary relation between identity and representation; for this would make every being representative, since every being is identical with itself. We establish this proposition: identity may be the origin of representation; but we deny the two following: identity is the necessary origin of representation; representation is a sign of identity.

II. We determine nothing as to the application of the relations between representation and identity, so far as finite beings are concerned.

III. We abstract the duality which results from supposing only subject and object, and enter into no question on the nature of this duality.

119. These ideas being fixed, we may observe that we have an incontestable proof that there is no intrinsic repugnance between identity and representation in two dogmas of the Catholic religion: the beatific vision and the divine intelligence. The dogma of the beatific vision teaches us that the human soul in the mansion of the blessed is intimately united to God, and sees him face to face in his very essence. No one ever said that this vision was made by the medium of an idea, but theologians, and among them St. Thomas, expressly teach the contrary. We have then identity united with representation, that is, the divine essence representing, or rather presenting, itself to the eyes of the human mind. The dogma of divine intelligence teaches that God is infinitely intelligent. God does not need to go out of himself, nor employ distinct ideas in order to understand; he sees himself in his essence. Here, too, identity is united with representation, and the intelligent being identified with the thing understood.[\(11\)](#)

## CHAPTER XII. IMMEDIATE INTELLIGIBILITY

120. Neither active nor passive representation can be predicated of all things; we mean to say, that there are some beings which are not endowed with intellectual activity, and cannot be even passively the object of the acts of the intellect.

As regards the power of active representation, which is at bottom only the faculty of intelligence, it is evident that many beings are destitute of it. There may be greater difficulty with regard to passive representation, or the fitness to be the immediate object of the intellect.

121. An object cannot be known immediately, that is, without the mediation of an idea, if it do not itself perform the functions of this idea, and unite itself to the intellect which is to know it. This alone takes from all material objects the character of being *immediately intelligible*: so that if a mind be imagined having no idea of the corporeal universe, it could know nothing of it, although for all eternity in the midst of it.

Hence it follows that matter neither is, nor can be, intelligent or intelligible: the ideas which we have of it come from another source; without them we might be united to matter, and never know or even suspect its existence.

122. An opportunity is here presented of explaining an exceedingly curious doctrine of St. Thomas. This eminent metaphysician was of opinion that it required greater perfection to be immediately intelligible than to be intelligent; so that the human mind, although endowed with intelligence, does not possess intelligibility.

In his *Summa Theologica*,<sup>6</sup> the holy Doctor asks if the soul knows itself by its essence, and answers that it does not, and thus defends his position:

"Things are intelligible accordingly as they act, and not as they have the power to act, as is said in the ninth book of Metaphysics (tex. 20 tr. 3). For any thing that comes under knowledge is being, is the true, in so far as it is in act, and this is manifestly apparent in sensible things. Thus the sight does not perceive that which may be colored, but that only which actually is colored. And in the same manner as is manifest, the intellect, in so far as it knows material things, knows that only which is in act... Hence, also, in immaterial substances, each one is intelligible by its essence, accordingly as it is in act by its essence. Therefore, the essence of God, which is a pure and perfect act, is absolutely and perfectly intelligible by itself; thus God knows, by his essence, not only himself but also all other things. But the essence of the angel belongs to the class of intelligible beings as an act, but not as a pure and complete act, wherefore his understanding is not completed by his essence. For, although the angel knows himself by his essence, he cannot know all things by his essence, but knows those distinct from himself only by their images. But the human intellect is in the class of intelligible beings is only a possible being... Therefore, considered in its essence, it is an intelligent power; hence of itself it has the faculty of understanding, but not of being understood, except inasmuch as it acts. On this account the Platonists placed the order of intelligible beings above the order of intellect; because the intellect understands only by participation of the intelligible; but according to them, that which participates is beneath that of which it participates. If, then, the human intellect places itself in act by the participation of separate intelligible forms, as the Platonists held, it would know itself by this participation of incorporeal things. But as it is natural to our intellect in the present life to look to material and sensible things, it follows that our intellect knows itself only as it is placed in act by the species (ideas) abstracted from sensible things by the light of the intellect acting, which is the

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<sup>6</sup> P. 1a, Q. 87a, A. 1o

act of the intelligible things themselves... Therefore our intellect does not know itself by its essence but by its acts."

Such is the doctrine of St. Thomas. Cardinal Cajetan, one of the most penetrating and subtle minds that ever existed, has a commentary on this passage, worthy of the text. These are his words: "Two things expressly follow, from what is said in the text. The first is, that our intellect has of itself the faculty of understanding. The second is, that our intellect has not of itself the faculty of being understood. Hence the order of intellect is below the order of intelligible beings. For if the perfection, which our intellect has of itself, is sufficient to understand, but not to be understood, it necessarily follows that greater perfection is required in a thing to be understood than to understand. And because St. Thomas saw this consequence, which at first sight does not seem true, and might even be objected to him, he excludes this apprehension, by showing that this must be admitted to be true not only by the Peripatetics, from whose doctrine it results, but also by the Platonists."

But afterwards, in answer to an objection brought by Scotus, called the Subtle Doctor, he adds: "But because in order to understand an intellect and an intelligible object are required, and the relation of the intellect to the intelligible, is the relation of the perfectible to its perfection, since the intellect in act consists in its being itself the intelligible thing, as is evident from what has been said above; it follows that immaterial beings are divided into two orders, intellects, and things intelligible. And as the intelligible consists in perfective immateriality, it follows that any thing is intelligible inasmuch as it is immaterially perfective. That intelligibility requires immateriality is shown by this, that no material thing is intelligible, unless, inasmuch as it is abstracted from matter... It has already been shown that any thing is intelligible by this, that not only itself, but others, also, are in the intelligible order, either in act or in potentiality; it is thus nothing more than to be perfected or perfectible by the intelligible."

123. This theory may be more or less solid, but it is in either case something more than ingenious; it raises a new problem in philosophy of the highest importance: to assign the conditions of intelligibility. It has moreover the advantage of being in accordance with a fact attested by experience; this fact is the difficulty experienced by the mind in knowing itself. If it is immediately intelligible, why does it not know itself? What condition is wanting? Its intimate presence? It has not only presence but identity. Perhaps the effort to know itself? But the greater part of philosophy has no other end than this knowledge. By denying immediate intelligibility to the soul, we can explain why so great a difficulty is involved in ideological and psychological investigations, by showing the reason of the obscurity experienced in passing from direct to reflex acts.

124. The opinion of St. Thomas is not a mere conjecture: we may, in order to establish it in some manner upon fact, assign a reason which seems to us greatly to strengthen it, and which may be regarded as merely an extension of the one already given.

A thing to be intelligible must have two qualities: immateriality, and the activity necessary to operate upon the intelligent being. This activity is indispensable, for in the act of intelligence, the intellect is in some sense passive. When the idea is present, the intellect cannot but know it: when it is wanting, it is impossible for the intellect to know it. The idea, therefore, enables the intellect to act; without it the intellect can do nothing. Consequently, if we admit that any being can serve as idea to the intellect, we must concede that being an activity to excite intellectual action; and so far we make it superior to the intellect excited.

Thus we explain why our intellect, in this life at least, does not know itself by itself. Experience shows that its activity needs to be excited. Left to itself it is like one asleep; and this want of activity in our mind, in the absence of exciting influences, is one of the most constant of psychological facts.

This is not, however, to say that we have no spontaneity, and that no action is possible without an external determining cause; but only that this same spontaneous development would not exist, if we had not previously been subjected to the influence of causes which brought out our activity. We may learn things not taught us; but we could learn nothing, if teaching had not presided over the first

development of our mind. There are, it is true, many ideas in our mind, which are not sensations, and which cannot have emanated from them; but it is equally true that a man, deprived of all his senses, could not think, because his mind would want the exciting cause.

125. We have dwelt thus long upon the explanation of the problem of intelligibility, because we consider it of scarcely less importance than that of intelligence, although we do not find it treated in philosophical works as it merits. We will now reduce this doctrine to clear and simple propositions, so that the reader may form a more complete conception of it; and also, in order to deduce some consequences which have been only slightly indicated in our exposition:

I. A thing must be immaterial in order to be immediately intelligible.

II. Matter cannot be intelligible by itself.

III. The relations of spirits to bodies, or the representation of the latter in the former, cannot be purely objective.

IV. Some other class of relations must necessarily be admitted to explain the representative union of the world of intelligences with the corporeal world.

V. Immediate objective representation supposes activity in the object.

VI. The power of an object to represent itself to the eyes of an intelligence, supposes in it a faculty of acting on that intelligence.

VII. This faculty necessarily produces an effect, and consequently involves a kind of superiority of the object over the intelligence.

VIII. An intelligent being is not necessarily immediately intelligible.

IX. Immediate intelligibility seems to require greater perfection than intelligence.

X. Although not every intelligent being is intelligible, yet every intelligible being is intelligent.

XI. God, who is in every sense infinite activity, is infinitely intelligent and infinitely intelligible by himself.

XII. God is intelligible by all created intellects, provided it be his will to present himself immediately to them, and strengthen and elevate them as may be necessary.

XIII. There is no repugnance in immediate intelligibility being communicated to some beings, which are consequently intelligible by themselves.

XIV. Our soul, while united to our body, is not immediately intelligible, and we know it only by its acts.

XV. In this want of immediate intelligibility is found the reason of the difficulty of ideological and psychological studies, and the obscurity which we experience in passing from direct to reflex knowledge.

XVI. Therefore, the philosophy of the *me*, or that which seeks to explain the internal and external world by starting from the *me*, is impossible; it commences by denying one of the fundamental facts of psychology.

XVII. Therefore, the doctrine of universal identity is also absurd, since it gives both intelligence and immediate intelligibility to matter, which can have neither.

XVIII. Spiritualism, therefore, is a truth which springs as well from subjective as from objective philosophy, from intelligence as from intelligibility.

XIX. We must, therefore, go beyond ourselves, and even rise above the universe to find the origin of either subjective or objective representation.

XX. Therefore, we must ascend to a primitive, infinite activity, which places intelligences in communication among themselves and with the corporeal world.

XXI. Therefore, purely ideological and psychological philosophy leads us to God.

XXII. Therefore, philosophy cannot commence by a single fact, the origin of all other facts, but must, and does end with this supreme fact, the infinite existence, which is God.[\(12\)](#)

## CHAPTER XIII. REPRESENTATION OF CAUSALITY AND IDEALITY

126. Besides the representation of identity, there is what I have called the representation of causality. A being may represent itself, a cause its effect. Productive activity is inconceivable, if the principle of the productive act does not in some manner contain the thing produced. Therefore we say that God, the universal cause of all that does or can exist, contains in his essence all real and possible beings in a virtual or eminent manner. A being can just as well present whatever it contains in itself, as it can represent itself; causality, therefore, under the conditions above explained, may be an origin of representation.

127. And here we would remark how profound a philosopher St. Thomas shows himself to be, when he explains the manner in which God knows his creatures. In his *Summa Theologica*,<sup>7</sup> he asks if God knows things distinct from himself, and answers in the affirmative; not that he regards the divine essence as a mirror, but that by recourse to a more profound consideration he seeks the origin of this knowledge in causality. This is his doctrine in a few words: It is manifest that God knows himself perfectly; therefore he knows all his power, and consequently all the things to which it extends. Another reason, or rather enlargement of the same reason, is, that the being of the first cause is its intellect: all effects pre-exist in God as in their cause; they must, therefore, be in him in an intelligible manner, since they are his intellect itself. God then sees himself by his essence; but he sees other things not in themselves, but in his essence, inasmuch as his essence contains the similitude of everything.

The same doctrine is found in another place,<sup>8</sup> where he asks if they who see the divine essence see all things in God.

128. Representation of ideality is that which neither proceeds from the identity of the thing representing with that represented, nor from the relation of cause and effect. Our ideas are of this class, for they are neither identical with their objects nor do they cause them. It is impossible for us to know whether, besides this representative force which we experience in our ideas, there are finite substances capable of representing things distinct from, and not caused by, themselves. Leibnitz maintains that there are such substances; but, as we have seen, his system of monads must be regarded as merely hypothetical. It is better to say nothing than to make conjectures which lead to no result; we shall therefore content ourselves with establishing the following propositions:

I. If any being represent another which is not its effect, it has not this representative force of itself, but has received it from another.

II. The communication of intelligences can only be explained by recurring to a first intelligence, which, being the cause of the others, can give them the force to act upon one another, and consequently to produce representation.

129. Causality may be a principle, but is not a sufficient reason, of representation.

In the first place, a cause cannot represent its effect unless intelligible in itself. Thus, although we attribute to matter an activity of its own, we cannot concede it the power to represent its effects, for want of the indispensable condition of immediate intelligibility.

130. In order that effects may be intelligible in their cause, it must of necessity possess the character of cause in its fulness, by uniting all the conditions and determinations requisite to the production of the effect. Free causes do not represent their effects, because these effects with relation to their causes are found only in the sphere of possibility. The production may be realized, but is not necessary; and thus the possible, but not the real, is seen in the cause. God knows future contingencies,

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<sup>7</sup> P. 1a, Q. 14a, A. 5o.

<sup>8</sup> Q. 12a, A. 8o



which depend upon the human will, not precisely because he knows the activity of man, but because he sees in himself, without succession of time, not only all that may, but all that will happen; since nothing can exist in the present or in the future without his will or permission. He also knows future contingencies dependent solely on his own will, because he knows from all eternity what he has resolved, and his decrees are indefectible and immutable.

131. Even if we refer to the necessary order of nature, and suppose one or more second causes to be known, it is not possible to see in them all their effects with entire security, unless the cause act in isolation, or all the others are known together with it. As experience shows us that all the parts of nature are in intimate and reciprocal communication, we cannot suppose the above isolation, and consequently the action of every second cause is subjected to the combinations of others, which may either impede or modify its effect. Hence the difficulty of establishing general, and at the same time, perfectly safe laws in all that concerns nature.

132. The preceding considerations, it is to be observed, demonstrate anew the impossibility of transcendental science based upon a fact from which all other facts proceed. Intellectual representation is not explained by substituting necessary emanation for free creation. Even supposing the variety of the universe to be purely phenomenal, and at bottom only a being always one, identical, and absolute, it cannot be denied that the phenomena are governed by certain laws, and subject to various conditions. Either the human intellect can see the absolute in such a way as to discern by a simple intuition whatever is contained in it, all that it is or can be, under all possible forms; or else it is condemned to follow the unfolding of the unconditioned, the absolute, and the permanent, through its conditioned, relative, and variable forms. The former, which is a sort of ridiculous plagiarism from the dogma of beatific vision, is, in treating of the intellect in its present state, so palpable an absurdity, as to merit neither debate nor refutation. The latter subjects the intellect to all the fatigue of investigation, and destroys at one blow all the illusory promises of transcendental science.

133. The understanding is, in its acts, subject to a law of succession, or the idea of time. The same thing obtains in nature, whether it is so verified in reality, or time is considered as a subjective condition which we transfer to objects; be this doctrine of Kant, which we shall in due time examine, as it may, it is certain that succession, at least for us, exists, and that we cannot ignore it. In this hypothesis an infinite evolution can be known to us only in an infinite time. Thus, by a metaphysical necessity, we are unable to know not only the future evolution of the absolute, but also the present and the past. This evolution being absolutely necessary, according to the doctrine to which we have reference, an infinite succession must have preceded us; thus the present organization of the universe must be regarded as one round of an unlimited ladder, which in the past as in the future, has no measure but eternity. We can know the present state of the world solely by observation, and then only to a very limited degree; we must, therefore, of necessity, deduce it from the idea of the absolute, by following it in its infinite evolution. Were this not, however, in itself radically impossible, it would, nevertheless, labor under the inconvenience of being too long a task to be accomplished in the lifetime of any one man, or even in that of all men who have ever lived, taken collectively.

134. But let us return to the representation of causality. The ideal representation may be reduced to that of causality; for since a spirit can have no idea of an object not produced by it, unless communicated to it by another spirit, the cause of the thing represented, we infer that all purely ideal representations proceed either directly or indirectly, mediately or immediately, from the cause of the objects known. And since, on the other hand, as we have already seen, the first being knows things distinct from himself only, as he is their cause; we hold the representation of ideality to be reduced to that of causality, thus in part verifying the principle of Vico, the profound Neapolitan thinker: "the intellect only knows what it does."

135. From this doctrine flow two consequences of which we must take note:

I. There are only two primitive sources of intellectual representation: identity and causality. That of ideality is necessarily derived from that of causality.

II. In the real order, the principle of being is identical with the principle of knowledge. That only which gives being can give knowledge. The first cause can give knowledge only in so far as it gives being: it represents because it causes.

136. The representation of ideality, although connected with that of causality, is yet really distinct from it. The explanation of its nature belongs indeed to the treatise on ideas; but we cannot relinquish, without an illustration, a point so closely connected with the problem of intellectual representation.

Some conceive ideas to be a sort of image or copy of the object; but this is true only with respect to the representations of the imagination, that is, the purely corporeal; and even here it is necessary to suppose the external world to be such as the senses present it, which, however, under many aspects, is not true. To be convinced how illusory is the theory founded on the likeness of sensible things, we have only to ask, what the image of a relation is, or, how causality, substance, and being are portrayed. In the perception of these ideas, there is something more profound than any thing apparent in sensible things, something of an entirely different order. Necessity has led us to compare the understanding to an eye which sees, and the idea to an image present; but this is only a comparison; the reality is something more mysterious, more secret, more intimate: there is an ineffable union between the perception and the idea: man cannot explain it, but he experiences it.

137. Our consciousness attests that there is in us unity of being, that the soul is at all times identical with itself, and that it remains constant notwithstanding the variety of ideas and of acts which pass over it, like waves over the surface of a lake. Ideas are a mode of being of the mind: but what is this mode? In what does it consist? Does the production and reproduction of ideas proceed from a distinct cause which continually acts upon our soul, and produces immediately those modes of being which we call representations, or ideas? Or must we admit that there has been given to the mind an activity to produce these representations, subject, however, to the determination of exciting causes? These are questions which, for the present, we shall only indicate.[\(13\)](#)

## CHAPTER XIV. IMPOSSIBILITY OF FINDING THE FIRST PRINCIPLE IN THE IDEAL ORDER

138. We shall in vain seek in the region of ideas for that which we could not find in that of facts, for there is no ideal truth, the origin of all other truths.

Ideal truth only expresses the necessary relation of ideas, abstracting the existence of the objects to which they relate: hence it follows, first of all, that ideal truths are absolutely incapable of producing the knowledge of reality.

No ideal truth can lead to any result in the order of existences, unless there be some fact to which it applies. Otherwise, however fruitful it may be in the order of ideas, it will be absolutely sterile in that of facts. The fact without the ideal truth remains in its isolated individuality, incapable of producing any thing more than cognition of itself: but in return, the ideal truth, apart from the fact, remains purely objective in the logical world, and has no means of descending to that of existences.

139. Let us apply this doctrine to the most certain and most evident ideal principles, to those which contain the most general ideas, and which ought, therefore, to possess the fecundity in question, if, indeed, it be anywhere to be encountered.

"It is impossible for the same thing to be and not be at the same time." This is the famous principle of contradiction, which may undoubtedly claim to be regarded as one source of truth to the human understanding. The ideas contained in it are the clearest and most simple conceivable; in it is affirmed the repugnance of being to not-being, and of not-being to being, at the same time, which is most evident. But what advance can we make with this principle alone? Present it to the most penetrating mind, to the most powerful genius; leave them alone with it, and there will result only a sterile, although pure and most clear intuition. Since it does not affirm that any thing is or is not, nothing can be inferred either for or against any existence: it only offers to the mind this conditional relation: that if any thing does exist, it is repugnant for it not to exist at the same time that it exists, or to exist at the same time that it does not exist. But if the condition of existence or non-existence be not given, *yes* and *no* in the real order are indifferent; nothing is known concerning them, however great the evidence in the ideal order.

To pass from the logical world to that of reality, all that is required is a fact to serve as a bridge. If this fact be offered to the understanding, the two banks are joined, and science commences. I feel, I think, I exist: these are facts of consciousness; combine any one of them with the principle of contradiction, and what before were sterile intuitions become prolific ratiocinations, embracing at once the world of ideas, and that of reality.

140. Even in the purely ideal order, the principle of contradiction is sterile unless joined with particular truths of the same order. In geometry, for example, it is often argued thus: such a quantity is either greater or less than another, or equal to it; for otherwise it would be both greater and less, equal and unequal, at the same time, which is absurd. Here the principle of contradiction is effectively applied, not alone, but together with a particular truth which makes such an application available. Thus, in the above argument, no use could be made of the principle of contradiction, to prove equality or inequality were not the existence or non-existence of one of the two previously proved or supposed: since this neither does nor can result from the principle of contradiction which includes, not a particular idea, but the most general ideas presented to the human mind.

141. General truths, of themselves, even in the purely ideal order, lead to nothing, because of the indeterminateness of the ideas which they contain; and, on the other hand, particular truths of themselves produce no result, because they are limited to what they are, making reasoning, which cannot take one step without the aid of general ideas and propositions, impossible. Light results from

the union of one with the other; separated they afford only an abstract and vague intuition, or the contemplation of a particular truth, which, limited to a contracted sphere, can give no knowledge of beings considered under a scientific aspect.

142. We shall see when we come to treat of ideas, that our mind has two very distinct classes of them; the one supposes space, and cannot abstract it, such are all geometrical ideas: the other does not relate to space, and includes all non-geometrical ideas. These two orders of ideas are separated by an impassable abyss, if the two orders are not approximated by a simultaneous use of both. The ideal order is not complete without this approximation; and the real order of the universe is turned into a chaos, or rather disappears, if real and ideal truths are not combined, in both the geometrical and non-geometrical orders. From all geometrical ideas imaginable, considered in all their ideal purity, nothing would result for the ideal non-geometrical order, for the world of material, much less of immaterial realities; and, on the other hand, from non-geometrical ideas alone we could not get so much as the idea of a right line. This observation shows that there is for us in the ideal order no one truth, the origin of all other truths; for if we take the geometrical order, we are limited to those combinations which do not go out of it; if the non-geometrical order, we lack the idea of space, without which we lose even the possibility of conceiving the corporeal world.[\(14\)](#)

## CHAPTER XV. THE INDISPENSABLE CONDITION OF ALL HUMAN KNOWLEDGE. – MEANS OF PERCEIVING TRUTH

143. We have not been able to discover, either in the real or the ideal order, a truth, the origin of all other truths to our intellect while in this life. Therefore it stands proved that transcendental science properly so called is for us a chimera. Our cognitions must, doubtless, have some resting-point, and this we shall now investigate.

For the better understanding of the subject now before us, we will recall the true state of the question. We do not seek a first principle, which of itself alone illumines or produces all truths; but we seek a truth which shall be the indispensable condition of all knowledge; for this reason, we do not call it an origin, but a resting-point. The edifice does not originate in the foundation, but rests upon it. We must consider the principle sought for as a foundation, just as in the preceding chapters, we treated of discovering a seed. These two images *seed* and *foundation*, perfectly express our ideas, and exactly trace the limits of the two questions.

144. Is there a resting-point of all science, and of all knowledge, scientific or not scientific? If there is, what is it? Are there many, or only one? Evidently there must be a resting-point. If asked the reason of an assent, we must at last come to a fact or a proposition, beyond which we cannot go; for we cannot admit the process *ad infinitum*. This is the point where we must of necessity stop, and consequently the resting-point of certainty.

145. Starting with a given assent, we may, perhaps, arrive at different principles, independent one of the other, all equally fundamental, as regards our mind: in this case there will be not only one, but many resting-points.

We do not believe it possible to determine *a priori*, whether there is unity or plurality for our intellect in this matter. That human science must be reduced to a single principle is a proposition that has been asserted, but never yet proved. Since the source of all truth, as has been shown in the preceding chapters, is not in man, it is evident that the principles, on which his knowledge is founded, must be communicated. Who shall assure us that they are not many in number, and of different orders? Nothing then in the present question can be resolved *a priori*, and we must descend to ideological and psychological observations.

146. Our mind acquires truth, or at least the appearance of truth; that is to say, that in one way or another, it performs those acts which we call perception and sensation. Whether the reality does or does not correspond to the acts of our soul, is at present of no consequence, is not what we now seek: we place the question on a ground accessible to the most skeptical; for even they do not deny perception and sensation; although they destroy reality, they admit appearance.

147. The means by which we perceive truth are of different orders; and this is why truths perceived correspond equally to different orders, parallel, so to speak, with the respective means of perception.

Consciousness, evidence, and intellectual instinct or common sense, are the three means; to which correspond truths of consciousness, necessary truths, and common-sense truths. These are distinct, different, and in many cases unconnected with each other; and he, who seeks to acquire complete and accurate ideas upon matters relating to the first principle of human knowledge, must mark out their limits with great care.

148. That means which we have called consciousness, or the intimate sense of that which passes within us, that which we experience, is independent of all the others. Destroy evidence, destroy intellectual instinct, yet consciousness remains. In order to feel, and to be sure that we feel, and what we feel, we need only experience. If we suppose the principle of contradiction to be doubtful, still

it will not shake our certainty that we suffer when we suffer, that we rejoice when we rejoice, that we think when we think. The presence of the act, or the impression at the bottom of our soul, is intimate, immediate to us, and of irresistible efficacy to place us above all doubt. Sleeping or waking, sane or insane, the testimony of consciousness is the same; there may be an error in the object, but there can be none in the internal phenomenon. The lunatic who believes that he counts numberless bags of dollars, certainly does not count them, and in this he is deceived; yet he has in his mind the consciousness of what he does, and in this he is infallible. A man who dreams that he has fallen into the hands of robbers, is deceived as to the external object, but not as regards the act by which he believes it.

Consciousness is independent of all extrinsic testimony; its necessity is inevitable, its force irresistible in producing certainty; it is infallible in what concerns only itself; if it exist it must give testimony of itself; if it does not exist it cannot give it. In it reality and appearance are confounded; it cannot be apparent without being real; the appearance alone is already a true consciousness.

149. We include in the testimony of consciousness all that which we experience in our soul, all that which affects what some call the human *me*, ideas, thoughts of every class, acts of the will, sentiments, sensations; in a word, every thing of which we can say: I experience it.

150. Manifestly the truths of consciousness are rather facts to be pointed out, than combinations to be enunciated. This is not to say that they cannot be enunciated, but that in themselves they abstract all intellectual form, are simple elements, in ordering and comparing which the intellect may occupy itself, but which of themselves give no light, *represent* nothing, but only *present* what they are; that they are mere facts, beyond which we cannot go.

151. The habit of reflecting upon consciousness, and of joining purely intellectual operations with facts of simple internal experience, makes it difficult to conceive this isolation, in which every thing purely subjective is by its nature found. We endeavor to abstract reflection, but we reflect upon our very effort to abstract it. Our intellect is a fire, which, extinguished on one side, burns on the other; the very effort to extinguish it ordinarily makes it burn brighter. Hence the difficulty of distinguishing the two characters of purely subjective and purely objective, to mark the dividing line between evidence and consciousness, between the known and the experienced. Nevertheless, the separation of two such different elements may be made easy, by considering that brutes are, in their own way, conscious of what they inwardly experience; not supposing them to be mere machines, we must allow them consciousness, or the intimate presence of their sensations. Without this even sensation is inconceivable, for that can have no sensation which does not perceive that it feels. Brutes reflect not on what passes within themselves; they experience it, but nothing more. Sensations succeed one another in their soul, connected only by the unity of the being experiencing them; but they do not take them for objects and consequently, do not combine or transform them in any manner; they leave them as they are, simple facts. From this we may derive some light for the conception of what the simple facts of consciousness are in us when abandoned to themselves, perfectly isolated, separated from purely intellectual operations, and under no subjection to reflective activity, which, combining them in various ways, and elevating them to the region of the purely ideal, presents them to us in such a manner as to make us forget their primitive purity.

An effort is necessary in order clearly to perceive what the facts of consciousness are, and what its testimony is; for without this it is impossible to advance one step in the investigation of the first principle of human knowledge. Confusion on this point makes us fall into transcendental equivocations. We shall hereafter have occasion to observe this, and we have already encountered lamentable examples of such deviations in the errors of the philosophy of the *me*.

152. Evidence is usually called an intellectual light. This is a very happy metaphor, and even exact; but, like all metaphors, it has the defect of being of but little service to explain the mysteries of philosophy. We also find intellectual light in many acts of consciousness. There is also a sort of clear light in that intimate presence by which an operation or an impression is offered to the mind; it

shines upon the eye of the soul, and makes it see what is before it. If, then, we define evidence only by calling it the light of the intellect, we confound it with consciousness, or, at least, by the use of ambiguous language, give others occasion of confounding them.

Let us not be thought to blame those who have used the metaphor of light, or to flatter ourselves with being able to define evidence with all exactness; for who can express in words this phenomenon of our mind? If we are to have any metaphor, that of the intellectual light seems to be the most adequate. For, in truth, when we fix our attention upon evidence, in order to examine its nature and its effects on the mind, it very naturally presents itself under the image of a light, whose splendor illumines the objects, and enables the mind to contemplate them: but this, we repeat, is not enough. We will, then, although we do not undertake exactly to define it, point out a mark to distinguish it from every thing else.

153. Evidence is always accompanied by the necessity, and consequently, by the universality, of the truths which it attests. There is no evidence of the contingent, except in so far as subjected to a necessary principle.

Let us explain this doctrine by comparing examples taken respectively from consciousness and evidence.

That there is in me a being which thinks, I know, not by evidence, but by consciousness. That whatever thinks exists, I know, not by consciousness, but by evidence. In both cases the certainty is absolute, irresistible; but in the first it rests upon a particular, contingent fact; in the second upon a universal and necessary truth. That I think is certain for me, but not necessarily so for others; the disappearance of my thought does not overturn the world of intelligences; if my thought should now cease to exist, truth in itself would suffer no change; other intellects might and would continue to perceive truth; and neither in the real nor in the ideal order would there be less concert and harmony.

I ask myself if I think, and in the bottom of my soul I read that I do think: I ask myself if this thought is necessary, and not only does experience tell me that it is not, but I can find no reason why it should be necessary. Even supposing that my thought ceases to exist, I perceive that I continue to reason in due form. Thus I examine what would have happened if I had not existed, or what may hereafter happen if I cease to exist; and I assent to principles and draw conclusions without transgressing any law of the intellect. The ideal world and the real world are presented to my eyes as a magnificent spectacle at which I indeed assist, but from which I may withdraw without the representation undergoing any change, except that I should leave vacant the imperceptible place which I now occupy. But it is very different with the truths which are the object of evidence. It is not necessary for me to think; but it is so necessary for whatever thinks to exist, that no efforts of mine could suffice to abstract this necessity for one moment. If, taking an absurd position, I suppose the contrary, and imagine for an instant the relation between thought and being to be cut short, I break the chain which supports the order of the entire universe; every thing is reversed, thrown into confusion; and I know not if what I see be chaos or nonentity. What has taken place? The intellect has only suffered a contradiction, at the same time affirming and denying thought, because it affirmed a thought to which it denied existence. It has violated a universal and absolutely necessary law, the violation of which throws every thing into chaos. Not the certainty of the soul's existence, supported by the testimony of consciousness, suffices to prevent the confusion: the intellect by contradicting itself has denied itself; from its insensate words, not being, but nonentity has resulted, not light, but darkness; and this darkness cast over whatever exists or is possible turns back upon it and involves it in eternal night.

154. We have here fixed and defined the conditions of consciousness and evidence. The object of the former is the individual, the contingent; that of the latter the universal and the necessary. Only in God, the source of all truth, the universal and necessary principle of being and of knowledge, is consciousness identified with evidence; and it is not possible to abstract the testimony of his consciousness, without annihilating everything. What would remain in the world were I to disappear?

the creature asks itself, and answers: *everything except myself*. Were God to ask himself this question, he would answer: *nothing*.

155. We have given the name of intellectual instinct to the impulse which in many cases produces certainty without the aid of the testimony either of consciousness or of evidence. If you show a man a target, then blindfold his eyes, and turn him around at random several times, and, after this, place a bow in his hands, and assure him that the arrow will strike the precise centre of the target, he will say that this is impossible; and nothing can induce him to believe so great an absurdity. And why not? Because of the testimony of consciousness? No! For the question is now of external objects. Neither does he depend on evidence; for the objects of evidence are things necessary, and it is not intrinsically impossible for the arrow to hit the mark assigned. On what then rests his profound conviction that this is not possible? If we suppose him to know nothing of theories, of probabilities, and combinations, to have no knowledge of this science, and never to have so much as thought of such things, his certainty is just as great as it would be were he able to base it upon some sort of calculation. All the bystanders, whether rude or cultivated, ignorant or learned, need no reflection to be equally certain; all will say, or think, "this is impossible; it cannot happen." We again ask, what is the foundation of so strong a conviction? Not springing from consciousness, or from either mediate or immediate evidence, it manifestly can have no other origin than that internal force which we call intellectual instinct, and which may be called common sense, or anything else, so long as the fact itself is recognized. It is a precious gift, which the Creator has given to us, to make us reasonable even before we reason, and to enable us rightly to govern our conduct when we lack time to examine motives of prudence.

156. This intellectual instinct embraces many objects of different orders; it is the guide and the shield of reason: the guide, because it precedes and shows the way; the shield, because it defends reason from her own cavils, and because sophistry becomes dumb in its presence.

157. The testimony of human authority, equally necessary to the individual and to society, commands our assent, by means of an intellectual instinct. Man believes man, believes society, even before thinking of the motives of his faith; few examine them at all, and yet this faith is universal.

We do not here inquire if intellectual instinct sometimes deceives, or why, or in what cases it deceives; at present we only seek to establish its existence; and with regard to the errors to which it leads, we shall simply remark, that in a weak being, such as man, the rule is continually changing, and as it is not possible to find a man good, without any admixture of evil, so is it impossible to find truth without some admixture of error.

158. We make sensations objective only by virtue of an irresistible instinct. Nothing is more certain, more evident to the eyes of philosophy, than the subjectivity of all sensations; that is, sensations are immanent phenomena, are within us, and do not go out of us; and yet nothing is more constant than the transition made by the whole human race from the subjective to the objective, from the internal to the external, from the phenomenon to the reality. On what is this transition grounded? If the most eminent philosophers experienced so much difficulty in finding the bridge, which unites the two opposite banks; if some of them, wearied with investigation, resolutely asserted that it was not possible to discover it, will the commonalty of mankind discover it from their very childhood? Evidently, motives of reasoning do not explain the transition; appeal must be made to the instinct of nature. There is then an instinct, which by itself assures us of a truth demonstrated with difficulty by the most abstruse philosophy.

159. Here I shall notice the errors of those methods which isolate man's faculties, and, in order better to know the mind, disfigure and mutilate it. One of the most constant and fundamental facts of ideological and psychological science, is the multiplicity of acts and faculties of the soul, notwithstanding its simplicity attested by the unity of consciousness. There is in man, and in the universe, an assemblage of laws, the effects of which are simultaneously evolved with harmonious regularity; to separate them, is often equivalent to placing them in contradiction; for, no one of them



being capable of producing its effect if isolated, but requiring to be combined with the others, they produce, when made to operate alone, instead of their regular effects, the most hideous monstrosities. If you retain in the world only the law of gravitation not combined with that of projection, every thing will be precipitated towards one centre; instead of that infinity of systems which adorn the firmament, you will have only a rude and indigested mass. If you destroy gravitation, and preserve the force of projection, all bodies will be decomposed into imperceptible atoms, and be dispersed, like most subtle ether, through regions of immensity.[\(15\)](#)

## CHAPTER XVI. CONFUSION OF IDEAS IN DISPUTES ON THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

160. There are, in our opinion, various principles, which, with regard to the human intellect, may be called equally fundamental, both because they serve as foundation in the common and scientific orders, and because they do not rest upon any other, since it is impossible to assign any one which enjoys this quality as an exclusive privilege. In seeking the fundamental principle, it is customary in the schools to observe that they do not endeavor to find a truth from which all others emanate, but an axiom the destruction of which draws with it that of all other truths, and the firmness of which sustains them, at least indirectly, in such manner that whoever denies them may be refuted by indirect demonstration, or reduction *ad absurdum*; that is, admitting the above axiom, it may follow that whoever denies the others will be convicted of being in opposition to one which he himself has acknowledged to be true.

161. It has been much disputed whether this or that principle merit the preference. We believe that there is here a confusion of ideas, proceeding in great part from not sufficiently marking the limits of testimonies so distinct as those of consciousness, of evidence, and of common sense.

Descartes' famous principle, *I think, therefore I am*; that of contradiction, *it is impossible for a thing to be and not to be at the same time*; and what is called the principle of the Cartesians, *whatever is contained in the clear and distinct idea of anything, may be affirmed of it with all certainty*; are the three principles that have divided the schools. In favor of each, reasons the most powerful, and even conclusive against the others, considering the ground on which the question was placed, have been brought forward.

If you are not certain that you think, argues the partisan of Descartes, you cannot be certain even of the principle of contradiction, or know the criterion of evidence to be valid; for both, it is necessary to think; whoever affirms or denies anything, thinks; without thought, neither affirmation nor negation is possible. But let us admit thought: we have already a foundation, and one of such a nature that we find it in ourselves, attested by consciousness, irresistibly forcing upon us the certainty of its existence. The foundation once laid, we see how the edifice can be raised; for this we need not go out of our own thought; there is the luminous point to conduct us in the path to truth; let us follow its splendor, and having established an immovable point, let us draw from it the mysterious thread to guide us in the labyrinth of science. Thus our principle is the first, the basis of all others; it has sufficient power to sustain itself, sufficient also to impart firmness to others.

This language is certainly reasonable; but it has this fault, that the conviction which it is intended to produce, is neutralized by the not less reasonable language of those who hold a directly contrary opinion. One who maintains the principle of contradiction may reason thus: if you do not admit it to be impossible for the same thing to be and not be at the same time, it may be possible that you think and do not think at the same time; your assertion, then, *I think*, is of no weight, for its opposite, *I do not think*, may, at the same time, be true. In this case, the conclusion of existence is invalid; for, even admitting the legitimacy of the consequence, *I think, therefore I am*, as we know on the other hand that this other premise, *I do not think*, is possible, the deduction cannot be made. Nor is the other principle: *whatever is contained in the clear and distinct idea of anything, may be affirmed of it with all certainty*, of any more value without the principle of contradiction; because if being and not-being are possible at the same time, an idea may be clear and obscure, distinct and confused; a predicate may be contained and not contained in the subject; we may be certain and uncertain, affirm and deny; therefore it is of no service.

He who argues thus seems quite reasonable; but strangely enough, the advocate of the third principle brings equally strong arguments against his two adversaries. How is it known, he asks, that the principle of contradiction is true? Only because we see in the idea of being the impossibility of its being and not being at the same time, and *vice versa*; therefore, we are sure of the principle of contradiction only from the application of the principle: *whatever is contained in the clear and distinct idea of anything, may be affirmed of it with all certainty*. If nothing can be sustained without relying upon the principle of contradiction, – and this is based upon our principle, – ours is the foundation of them all.

162. They are all three right, and all three wrong. They are right in asserting that the denial of their respective principles is the ruin of the others. They are all wrong in pretending that the denial of the others is not the ruin of their own. Whence then the dispute? From the confusion of ideas, by which they compare principles of very different orders, all indeed very true, but not to be compared with each other for the same reason that we cannot compare the white and the warm, and dispute whether a thing has more degrees of heat or whiteness. Comparison requires not only opposition in the extremes, but also something in common; if things are totally unlike, comparison is impossible.

Descartes' principle is the enunciation of a simple fact of consciousness; that of contradiction is a truth known by evidence; and that of the Cartesians is an assertion that the criterion of evidence is valid, and that it is a truth of reflection expressing the intellectual impulse by which we are borne to believe the truth of what we know by evidence.

The importance of this question requires a special examination of each of the three principles, which we shall make in the next chapters.[\(16\)](#)

## **CHAPTER XVII.**

### **THOUGHT AND EXISTENCE. – DESCARTES' PRINCIPLE**

163. Am I certain that I exist? Yes. Can I prove it? No. Proof supposes reasoning; there is no solid reasoning without a firm principle on which to rest it; and there is no firm principle unless we suppose the existence of the reasoning being.

In effect, if he who reasons is not certain of his own existence, he cannot be certain of his own reasoning, since there will be no reasoning if there be no one to reason. Therefore there are, unless we suppose this, no principles on which to rest; there is nothing but illusion, or rather there is neither any illusion, for there can be none where there is no one illuded.

Our existence cannot be demonstrated: we have so clear and strong a consciousness of it that it leaves us no uncertainty; but it is impossible to prove it by reasoning.

164. It is a prejudice and a fatal error to believe ourselves able to prove everything by the use of reason; the principles on which it is founded are prior to its use; the existence of reason, and that of the being that reasons, are prior to both.

Not only are not all things demonstrated, but it may even be demonstrated that some things are indemonstrable. Demonstration is a ratiocination in which we infer from evident propositions, a proposition evidently connected with them. If the premises are of themselves evident, they do not admit of demonstration; if we suppose them in their turn demonstrable, we shall have the same difficulty with respect to those on which the new demonstration is founded; therefore we must either stop at an indemonstrable point, or proceed to infinity, which would be never to finish the demonstration.

165. And it is to be remarked that indemonstrability does not belong solely to certain premises; it is found, in some measure, in every argument by its very nature, abstracting the propositions which compose it. We know that the premises A and B are certain; from them we infer the proposition C. By what right? Because we see that C is connected with A and B. But how do we know this? If by immediate evidence, by intuition, here is something else that cannot be demonstrated, the connection of the conclusion with the premises. If by argument, ratiocination, establishing ourselves on the art of reasoning, there are two considerations, both tending to demonstrate indemonstrability. I. If the principles of the art are indemonstrable, we have at once something indemonstrable; if they are demonstrable, we must make use of others which serve as their basis, and at last either come to one which does not admit of demonstration, or else proceed to infinity. II. How do we know the principles of reasoning to be applicable to this case? By another act of reasoning? Then we shall encounter the same difficulty as in the other case. Is it because we see that it is so? because it is immediately evident? Then here again we have an indemonstrable point. These reflections will clearly show that to demand proof of everything is to demand what is impossible.

166. A being which does not think has no consciousness of itself: the stone exists, but does not know that it exists, neither would man himself in a similar case, were all his intellectual and sensible faculties in complete inaction. We easily conceive the difference of these two states by calling to mind what occurs, when from waking we pass into a profound sleep, and again when we awake from it. The first starting-point of our cognitions is this intimate presence of our internal acts, abstraction made of the questions which may be raised upon their nature. If every thing existed as at present, and there also existed, besides the world which we see, infinite other worlds, not even then would any thing exist for us, had we not those internal acts of which we are speaking. We should be like an insensible body placed in the immensity of space, which would suffer no mutation were every thing around it to disappear, and would perceive no change even if it were itself to sink into the abyss of nothing. On the other hand, if we suppose every thing to be annihilated except this being within us which feels, thinks, and wills, there still remains a point whereon to base the edifice of human cognitions: this being,

though alone in immensity, would render itself an account of its own acts to the extent of its ability, and might go into numberless combinations having for their object the possible though not the real.

167. The famous principle of Descartes, *I think, therefore I am*, has been often attacked, and justly and conclusively so, if this philosopher really understood his principle in the sense which the schools are accustomed to give it. If Descartes presented it as a true argument, as an enthymema with an antecedent and a consequent, the argument was clearly defective in its foundation. For when he said, "I am going to prove my existence with this enthymema: I think, therefore I am: " this objection might have been made; your enthymema is equivalent to a syllogism in this form: whatever thinks, exists; but I think; therefore, I exist. This syllogism, in the supposition of a universal doubt, excluding even the supposition of existence itself, is inadmissible in its propositions and in their connection. In the first place, how do you know that whatever thinks exists? Because nothing can think without existing. How do you know that? Because what does not exist, does not act. But how in its turn do you know this? Supposing every thing to be doubted, nothing to be known, these principles are not known; otherwise we fall short of the supposition of universal doubt, and consequently go out of the question. If any one of these principles must be admitted without proof, it is just as well to admit your own existence and save yourself the trouble of proving it with an enthymema.

In the second place, how do you know that you think? Your argument may be retorted, as dialecticians say, in the following manner: nothing can think without existing; but your existence is doubtful, for you are trying to prove it; therefore you are not sure that you think.

168. Manifestly, then, Descartes' principle, taken as a true argument, cannot be defended; and it is so easy to see its defect, that it seems impossible for so clear and penetrating an intellect to have overlooked it. It is therefore probable that Descartes understood his principle in a very different sense; and we will now briefly show what meaning, in our judgment, the illustrious philosopher must have given to it.

Supposing himself for a moment in universal doubt, without accepting for certain anything that is known, he concentrated himself on himself, and in the depth of his soul sought a point whereon to base the edifice of human cognitions. Although we abstract all around us, we clearly cannot abstract ourselves, our mind, which is present to its own eyes, only the more lucidly, the greater the abstraction in which we place ourselves with respect to eternal objects. Now in this concentration, this collection of himself within himself, this withdrawal from every thing for fear of error, and asking himself if there be any thing certain, if there be any foundation and starting-point in the career of knowledge; first of all is presented to him the consciousness of thought, the very presence of the acts of his mind. If we mistake not, this was Descartes' thought: I wish to doubt of every thing; I refrain from affirming as from denying any thing; I isolate myself from whatever surrounds me, because I know not if it be any thing more than an illusion. But in this very isolation, I meet with the intimate sense of my internal acts, with the presence of my mind; I think, therefore I am; this I feel in a manner that leaves no room for doubt or uncertainty; therefore, I am; that is to say, this sense of my thought makes me know my existence.

169. This explains why Descartes did not present his principle as a mere enthymema, as an ordinary argument, but as determining a fact presented to him and first in the order of facts: even if he inferred existence from thought, it was not by deduction, properly so called, but as one fact contained in another, or rather identified with it.

We say *identified*, because it really is so in Descartes' opinion; and this confirms what we have already advanced, that this philosopher did not offer an argument, but laid down a fact. According to him, the essence of the soul consists in thought; and as other schools of philosophy distinguish between substance and its acts, considering the mind in the first class, and thought in the second, so Descartes held that there was no distinction between mind and thought, that they were the same thing, that thought constituted the essence of the soul. "Although one attribute," he says, "suffices to make us know the substance, there is, nevertheless, in every substance one attribute, which constitutes its

nature and its essence, and on which all the others depend. Extension in length, breadth, and depth, constitutes the essence of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of the substance which thinks."<sup>9</sup> From this it follows that Descartes, in laying down the principle, *I think, therefore I exist*, only declared a fact attested by consciousness; and so simple did he consider it, and so unique, that in evolving his system, he identified thought with the soul, and its essence with its existence. He was conscious of thought, and said: "this thought is my soul; I am." It is not now our purpose to weigh the value of this doctrine, but only to explain in what it consists.[\(17\)](#)

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<sup>9</sup> Descartes. *Principes de la Philosophie*, 1<sup>ière</sup> partie.

## CHAPTER XVIII. THE PRINCIPLE OF DESCARTES, CONTINUED. – HIS METHOD

170. Descartes did not always express himself with, sufficient accuracy when announcing and explaining his principle; and hence his words have been misinterpreted. In the passage where he establishes consciousness of our own thought and existence as the foundation whereon all our cognitions must rest, he uses terms from which it can be inferred that he not only means to declare a fact, but that he also intends to afford a true argument. Nevertheless, if we read his words attentively, and compare them with one another, it will be evident that such was not his idea, although we should not sometimes be wrong in saying that he did not make sufficient account of the difference, which we have just pointed out, between an argument and the simple declaration of a fact; and that, when concentrating himself on himself, he did not have a sufficiently clear *reflex* knowledge of the manner in which he rested upon his fundamental principle. To convince ourselves of this, let us examine his own words: "While we thus reject every thing of which we can have the least doubt, and even *feign* that it is false, we easily suppose that there is no God, no heaven, no earth; that we have not a body: but we cannot in like manner suppose that we are not whilst we doubt the truth of all these things; for we experience so great repugnance to conceive that what thinks is not at the same time that it thinks, that notwithstanding all the most extravagant suppositions, we cannot help believing this conclusion, *I think, therefore I am*, to be true, and consequently the first and most certain to present itself to him who orders well his thoughts."<sup>10</sup>

In this passage we detect a true syllogism: whatever thinks, exists; but I think; therefore I exist. "We have," says Descartes, "so great repugnance to conceive that what thinks is not at the same time that it thinks;" which is the same as to say, whatever thinks, exists; and this, in scholastic terms, is to establish the major. He then says: "notwithstanding all the most extravagant suppositions, we cannot help believing this conclusion, *I think, therefore I am*, to be true;" which is equivalent to proving the minor, and the conclusion of the syllogism. We know that Descartes was somewhat taken up with the idea of proving at the same time that he was engaged in declaring. This was the general tendency of his age, and even the most ardent reformers with difficulty preserved themselves from the surrounding atmosphere. We encounter this same spirit throughout his meditations, admirably joined, however, with the spirit of observation.

But through these obscure or ambiguous explanations, what thought do we discover at the bottom of Descartes' system when we abstract his having, or not having, rendered himself an exact account of what he experienced? This thought: "By an effort of my mind I can doubt the truth of everything; but this effort has a limit in myself. When I turn my attention upon myself, upon the consciousness of my internal acts, upon my existence, doubt is at an end; it cannot extend so far: I find *so great repugnance* that the most extravagant suppositions cannot overcome it." This his very words show: besides declaring this fact, he rises to a general and undoubtedly true proposition; he draws a conclusion also very legitimate; but neither of these was at all necessary to the present case; neither seemed to explain well his opinion, but either served to confuse it.

171. Descartes did nothing more in this point than what all philosophers do; and strange as it may seem, he did not differ from the chiefs of the metaphysical school diametrically opposed to his own, that of Locke and Condillac. That man, in seeking to examine the origin of his cognitions, and the principles on which his certainty is based, encounters the fact of consciousness of his internal acts, that this consciousness produces a firm certainty, and that we can conceive nothing more certain, is a

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<sup>10</sup> Descartes. *Principes de la Philosophie*, 1<sup>ière</sup> partie, N. 7.

fact on which all ideologists agree, and which all establish, although not in the same words. The more we reflect on these matters, the more we discover in them the realization of a principle confirmed by reason and experience, that many truths are not new, but only presented under a new form, and that many systems are not new, but only expressed in new formulas.

172. Even the universal doubt of Descartes, rightly understood, is practised by every philosopher; whence we see that the basis of his system, opposed by many, is in fact adopted by all. In what does his method consist? It may all be reduced to these two points: I. I wish to doubt of everything: II. When I wish to doubt of myself, I cannot.

Let us examine these points, and we shall see that they are common to all philosophers with Descartes.

Why does Descartes wish to doubt of everything? Because he proposes to examine the origin and certainty of his cognitions, his whole knowledge; and therefore he cannot help supposing nothing to be true. If then he supposes anything, he does not examine the origin and motives of the certainty of everything, since he excepts that which he supposes to be true. He must suppose nothing to be true, that he knows nothing of anything; otherwise he cannot say that he examines the foundation of everything. Either there is no such philosophical question, although one is found in all books of philosophy, or else Descartes' method must of necessity be followed.

But in what does this doubt consist? Can it, rationally speaking, be a real and true doubt? No! that is absolutely impossible. Man does not, because a philosopher, destroy his nature; and nature is invincibly opposed to this doubt taken in a strict sense.

173. What then is this doubt? Nothing more than a *supposition*, a *fiction*; a supposition and fiction such as we make at every step in all science, and which, in reality, is only non-attention to a conviction of our own. Use is made of this doubt in order to discover the first truth on which our understanding rests; and this only requires a fictitious doubt: there is no necessity of its being positive, for it will evidently make no difference whether we really doubt of everything, admit absolutely nothing, or say: I suppose that I have nothing for certain, know nothing, admit nothing. An example will make this explanation more evident. Whoever knows the rudiments of geometry, knows that in a triangle, the greater angle is opposite to the greater side, and he is absolutely certain of the truth of this theorem; but if he propose to demonstrate it to another, or repeat the demonstration to himself, he abstracts the said certainty, and proceeds as though he had it not, in order to show that it is founded upon something.

In all our studies, at every step, we do the same. Such expressions as these are common: "This is so, it is evident; but *let us suppose* that it is not; what will be the result?" "This demonstration is conclusive, but let us set it aside and suppose that we have it not; how shall we demonstrate what we desire?" Arguments *ad absurdum*, so much in use in every science, more especially in mathematics, consist not only in abstracting what we know, but in supposing something directly contrary. "If the line A," says continually the geometrician, "is not equal to B, it is either greater or less: let us suppose it to be greater, etc." Thus to investigate truth, we frequently abstract what we know, and even suppose the contrary. Apply this system to the investigation of the fundamental principle of our cognitions, and Descartes' universal doubt will follow, in the only sense admissible at the tribunal of reason, and possible to human nature.

It is probable that the illustrious philosopher understood it in the same sense, although we must confess that his words are ambiguous. We cannot conceive what object he could have had in understanding it differently, supposing, as we do, that he had no other purpose than to pave the way for the investigation of truth. By his manner of expressing himself, he gave occasion to disputes, which greater clearness would have prevented.

As he did not express himself with sufficient clearness, so his adversaries did not press him with all the precision and energy possible. To settle this whole matter, it would have sufficed to ask him this question: Do you mean to say that, in commencing our philosophical investigations, there



is a moment in which we *really* and *actually* doubt of every thing; or do you deem it sufficient to abstract certainty, and to suppose that we have it not, as is frequently done in other studies?

174. Descartes was like all reformers who are ruled by one idea, and express it so strongly as to seem to admit no other beside it. In their language every thing is absolute, exclusive. They anticipate the combat which they must sustain, perhaps already experience it, and so they concentrate all their strength on the idea whose triumph they propose, and lose sight of every thing else. It cannot be inferred from this that they have no others which notably modify the principal; but to oppose their adversaries, who say, "This is absolutely false," they assert that it is absolutely true. History and experience furnish innumerable examples of such exaggerations.

The dominant idea of Descartes was to demolish the philosophy which at that time reigned in the schools; and he gave it so rude a shock as to make the world tremble. See how he expressed his contempt for many called philosophers: "Experience shows that they who make profession of being philosophers are often less wise and less reasonable than they who never applied themselves to this study."<sup>11</sup>

175. The second part of Descartes' method consists in taking thought for the point of departure, and in declaring that in trying to doubt of every thing man finds a limit in the consciousness of his thought, his existence. This is evidently the phenomenon which remains in the mind of the observer after doubting of every thing else; at least he cannot doubt that he doubts, and consequently that he thinks; for it must be remarked that this is an argument which has always been used against skeptics, which is equivalent to Descartes' method, and establishes as an undeniable phenomenon a certainty superior to all sophisms, the consciousness of one's self.

When Descartes said, *I think*, he meant by this word every internal act, every phenomenon immediately present to the soul; he spoke not of thought taken in a purely intellectual sense, but included in it all that of which we have immediate consciousness. "By the word *thought*," he says, "I understand all that is done within us, in such a manner that we perceive it immediately by ourselves: this is why not only to understand, to will, to imagine, but also to feel, are here the same thing as to think. For if I say that I see, or that I walk, and thence I infer that I am; if I mean to speak of the action performed with my eyes or with my feet, this conclusion is not so infallible that I have no reason to doubt it; because it may be that I think I see, or walk, although I do not open my eyes or stir from my seat; for this sometimes happens when I am asleep, and the same might also happen even if I had no body; but if I mean to speak only of the action of my thought or of the feeling, that is to say, the knowledge that I possess, which makes it seem to me that I see, or that I walk, this same conclusion is so absolutely true that I cannot doubt it; because it relates to the soul, which alone has the faculty of feeling, or of thinking, in any other manner whatever."<sup>12</sup>

176. This passage shows very clearly Descartes' ideas; he destroyed every thing by doubt, excepting one thing which defied all his efforts, the consciousness of himself; and this consciousness he took for the basis, on which, with full certainty, he might build anew the edifice of science. Locke and Condillac did nothing else; they followed, indeed, a different path, but their point of departure was at all times the same. Locke says: "First, I shall inquire into the *original* of those *ideas*, notions, or whatever else you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind; and the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished by them."<sup>13</sup> "Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own *ideas*, which it alone does or can contemplate, it is evident that our knowledge is only conversant about them."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Les Principes de la Philosophie*. Preface, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> *Les Principes de la Philosophie*. 1<sup>ière</sup>. partie, N. 9.

<sup>13</sup> *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Prologue.

<sup>14</sup> *Essay on the Human Understanding*. Book iv., Chap. I., § 1.

"Whether, to speak metaphorically," says Condillac, "we ascend even to the heavens, or descend into the abysses, we do not go out of ourselves, and it is always our own thought that we perceive."<sup>15</sup>

177. All ideological labors commence then by establishing the fact of consciousness of our ideas; and it cannot be otherwise with respect to their certainty. Man, although he overthrow and destroy every thing, still encounters himself, the one who overthrows and destroys every thing. When he has gone so far as to doubt the existence of God, the world, his fellow-beings, his own body, he still, in the midst of this immense solitude, encounters himself. The effort to conceal himself from his own eyes serves only to render him more visible: he is a spirit to be killed by no blow, and rays of light flow from every wound inflicted on him. If he doubts that he feels, he at least feels that he doubts; if he doubts of this doubt, he feels that he doubts of doubt itself; thus, in doubting of direct acts, he enters into an interminable series of reflex acts, necessarily linked one with the other, and unrolled to the internal view like folds of a scarf which has no end.[\(18\)](#)

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<sup>15</sup> *Essai sur l'Origine des Connaissances*. Première partie, C. 1., § 1.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### VALUE OF THE PRINCIPLE. I THINK: ITS – ANALYSIS

178. We have already seen that Descartes' principle, considered as an enthymema, cannot aspire to be fundamental. In every argument there are premises and a consequence; and to be conclusive, the premises must be true, and the consequence legitimate. To say that an argument may be a fundamental principle, is a manifest contradiction.

But if we take Descartes' principle in the sense above explained, that is, not as an argument but as the declaration of a fact, the contradiction ceases, and it is a question, worthy to be examined, whether it merits the title of fundamental principle or not, and in what sense. We have already somewhat illustrated this matter, but not yet sufficiently cleared it up; we have made some preliminary remarks in order to show the state of the question, but have not yet completely solved it.

179. The proposition, *I think*, as we have remarked, expresses something more than merely thought, strictly so called: it embraces acts of the will, sentiments, sensations, acts, and expressions of all kinds which are realized within us; it includes all phenomena immediately present to our mind, and attested by consciousness.

Nothing that distinguishes between various acts and impressions can be a fundamental principle: such a distinction supposes analysis, and analysis requires reflection. We do not reflect without rules and objects already known; consequently, to admit classifications in the first principle, is to divest it of its character and to contradict ourselves.

180. We must not confound what is expressed by the proposition *I think* with the proposition itself. The thing itself and the form are here very different: the nature of the form may make us conceive ambiguous ideas of the thing itself: the thing itself is a most simple fact; the form is a logical combination, and includes very heterogeneous elements. This demands explanation.

The fact of consciousness, in itself considered, abstracts all relations; it is nothing but itself, leads to nothing but itself; it is the presence of the act or impression, or rather it is the act, the impression itself, which is present to the mind. There is no combination of ideas, no analysis of conceptions; when it comes to this latter, it leaves the territory of pure consciousness, and enters the objective regions of intellectual activity. But as language is to express the products of this activity, and as it is cast, so to say, not in the mould of consciousness, but in that of the intellect, it is impossible for us to speak without some logical or ideal combination. Were we seeking an expression of pure consciousness, unmixed with intellectual elements, we should seek it not in language, but in the natural sign of grief, joy, or some other passion; in this alone is it expressed spontaneously and uncombined with foreign elements, that something passes in our mind, that we are conscious of something; but the instant that we speak, we express something more than pure consciousness: the external world indicates the internal, the product of intellectual activity, its conception; and this involves a subject and an object, and therefore pertains to an order far superior to that of consciousness.

181. To demonstrate the truth of what we have just said, let us examine the expression, *I think*. This is a true proposition, and it may, without being in the least changed, be presented under a strictly logical form, *I am thinking*. Here we have a subject, a predicate, and a copula. The subject is *I*; that is to say, we at once find the idea of a being, the subject of acts and impressions, the possessor of an activity expressed in the predicate. This *I* is then presented to us as something far superior to the order of pure consciousness; it is nothing less than the idea of substance. We will analyze more at length what is contained under it.

We have, in the first place, the idea of unity: the *I* has no meaning, if it do not denote that something is one and identical, notwithstanding the plurality and diversity realized in it. The experimental unity of consciousness draws with it, as a rigid consequence, the unity of the being possessing it. This being is the subject; and in it are realized the variations without which it would be

impossible to say *I*. We hold then that in so simple an expression the ideas of unity and its relation to plurality, of substance and its relations to accidents, are contained; that is, the idea of the soul, although expressive of a most simple unity, is, under the logical aspect, composite, and contains many things pertaining to the ideal order, and not to be found in pure consciousness. The idea of the soul, strictly speaking, although in a certain sense common to all men, is in itself highly philosophical, for it involves a combination of elements belonging to the intellectual order.

182. The predicate *thinking* is the expression of a general idea, comprehending not only all thought, but also all phenomena which immediately affect the mind. These phenomena, considered in what they have in common, under the general idea of present to the mind, are expressed in the word thinking.

The relation of the predicate with the subject, or the agreement of *thinking* with the soul, also expresses an analysis worthy of attention. We at once detect a decomposition of the conception of the soul into two ideas; that of the subject of various modifications, and that of thinking. Otherwise the proposition has no meaning, or rather its expression becomes impossible. The idea of subject involves the ideas of unity and substance, and that of thinking involves the idea of activity, or of passivity, so to speak, accompanied by consciousness.

183. To render the proposition possible, we must suppose the decomposition of the ideas to commence at some point, that is, either in the idea of the soul we find that of *thinking*, or in that of *thinking* we find that of the soul. Fixing ourselves in the soul, and abstracting *thinking*, we meet with the idea of subject, or of substance in general; and there, however much we cavil, we shall never find the idea of *thinking*. The soul in itself is not manifested to us; we know it by thought; in thought therefore we must fix the point of departure, not in the soul; wherefore in the above proposition, what is primitively known is rather the predicate than the subject; and of the two conceptions, that of subject has rather the character of a thing contained, than of a thing containing.

The soul by itself, so to speak, springs up with the presence of thought. If the intellectual activity is concentrated in search of its first basis, it finds it, not in the pure subject, but in its acts, that is, in its thoughts. These last are then the first object of reflective intellectual activity, its first element of combination, its first *datum* for the solution of the problem. Fixing its sight on this element, it discovers a unity in the midst of plurality, a being that remains the same through the ebb and flow of the phenomena of consciousness; and this identity is incontestably asserted by consciousness itself. The idea of the soul then is taken from that of thought, and consequently the subject springs from the predicate, rather than the predicate from the subject.

184. The thought from which we derive the idea of the soul is not thought in general, but thought realized, existing in ourselves. But this reality is sterile unless offered to the mind under a general idea; for it is evident that the soul does not come from one single act, since it is unity, the subject of plurality. To arrive at the idea of the soul we require unity of consciousness, and this we know only as we have experienced it, that is, so far as we perceive the relation of the one to the multiple, of a subject to its modifications.

Such elaboration is necessary to the production of so simple an expression as *I think*; and here we see how much reason there is to distinguish between the thing itself and the form, and how inconsiderately they act who confound things so different. Thus, from want of due analysis, they take in philosophy immense strides from one order to another, confound ideas and entangle matters.

185. To completely illustrate this matter, we will examine the relations of existence to thought; a very easy examination, if we bear in mind the observation just made.

It is certain that we conceive existence before thought: nothing can think without existing: existence is an indispensable condition to thought: to think and not to exist is a manifest contradiction. But what is first offered to our mind is not existence, but thought, and this not in the abstract, but determinate, experimental, or as the expression now is, empirical. The idea of existence is general, includes all beings, and consciousness cannot commence with it. At one time we obtain this idea by

abstraction; at another, it is a form pre-existing in our mind, not the first that occurs to us, or to speak more exactly, not the last point to be attained when we follow back the thread of our cognitions in order to discover their starting-point. This consciousness, when made objective, and when the conception which it offers is analyzed, presents to us the idea of existence as contained in itself.

Hence we infer that the *therefore I exist* is not, strictly speaking, a consequence of the *I think*, but the intuition of the idea of existence in that of thought. There are here two propositions *per se notæ*, as the scholastics say: the one general, *the thinking is existing*; the other particular, *I thinking am existing*. The first belongs to the purely ideal order, and is intrinsically evident, independently of all particular consciousness; the second participates of the two orders, the real and the ideal; the real, in so far as it includes the particular fact of consciousness; the ideal, in so far as it includes a combination of the general idea of existence with the particular fact; since thus only is the union of the predicate with the subject conceivable.

186. It will now be very easy to solve all the questions discussed in the schools.

First question. Does the principle *I think* depend on another? We answer with a distinction. If by this principle is meant the simple fact of consciousness, it evidently does not. For our understanding there is nothing prior to ourselves; whatever we know so far forth as known by us, supposes our consciousness; if we suppress it, we destroy every thing, and although we attempt to destroy every thing, it still remains indestructible, since it depends on nothing, presupposes nothing.

If by the principle *I think* is meant a proposition, it can only have proceeded from reasoning or analysis, and so cannot be the fundamental principle of our cognitions.

187. Second question. When the other principles are wanting, is this one also wanting? We must apply the same distinction here: as a simple fact? No! as a proposition? Yes! Deny every thing, even the principle of contradiction, and consciousness still subsists; but deny the principle of contradiction, and every proposition is destroyed, every combination becomes absurd: analysis, and the relation of the predicate with the subject, are unmeaning words.

188. Third question. Admitting the principle *I think*, can he who denies the others be reduced at least indirectly to truth? We again distinguish: you speak of reducing him either by reasoning or by observation; that is, either you wish to convince him by arguments, or else to turn his attention to himself, as is done with a man distracted, or one suffering mental derangement. The second is possible, but not the first. Whoever denies all principles, that of contradiction included, makes all argument impossible; in vain then will you reason with him. Let us see.

You think, one may say to him, at least you so assert, when you admit the principle *I think*. True. Then you must also admit the principle of contradiction. Why so? Because otherwise you could think and not think at the same time. Very well. But then you destroy your own thought. How? Is it not true that you think? Certainly. According to yourself it is possible that at the same time you do not think. I agree with you. Therefore, you destroy your thought; for if you do not think, the *I think*

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