

deceive myself or not this suppositive manner of conceiving remains the same. It is only then when our knowledge is clear in confused notions or when it is intuitive in distinct notions that we see the whole idea of it.<sup>a</sup>

*XXVI. That we have in us all ideas; and of Plato's reminiscence.*

In order to conceive well what an idea is, we must forestall an equivocation, for some take the idea for the form or differentia of our thoughts, and in this way we have the idea in our spirit only in as much as we think of it, and every time we think of it anew we have other ideas of the same thing, although similar to the preceding ideas.† But it seems that others take the idea for an immediate object of thought, or for some permanent form which remains when we are not contemplating it. And indeed our soul always has in it the quality of representing to itself any nature or form whatever, when the occasion for thinking of it arises. And I believe that this quality of our soul, in as much as it expresses some nature, form, or essence, is properly the idea of the thing, which is in us and is always in us whether we think of it or no. For our soul expresses God and the universe and all essences as well as all existences.

This agrees with my principles, for nothing ever enters into our spirit naturally from outside, and it is a bad habit that we have, to think as if our soul received certain \*messenger† species and as if it had doors and windows. We have all these forms in our spirit all the time, because our spirit always expresses all its future thoughts, \*and already thinks confusedly of everything that it will ever think distinctly.† And nothing can be taught us of which we do not have in our spirit the idea, which is as the matter out of which this thought forms itself.

<sup>a</sup> [Yet we have effectively in our spirit all possible ideas and even think of them all the time in a confused manner.]

It is this that Plato excellently well considered, when he put forward his reminiscence, which is very sound provided that it is taken aright and purged of the error of pre-existence \*and that we do not imagine that the soul must already have known and thought distinctly at another time what it learns and thinks now.† He also confirmed his sentiment by a fine experiment<sup>1</sup>, introducing a little boy<sup>a</sup> whom he leads insensibly to some very difficult truths of Geometry concerning incommensurables without teaching him anything, solely by asking questions in order and appositely. Which shows that our soul \*knows all this virtually and† only needs *animadversion* to know truths, and consequently that it has at least the ideas on which these truths depend. It may even be said to possess these truths already, if they are taken as relations of ideas.

*XXVII. How our soul can be compared to empty tablets, and how our notions come from the senses.*

Aristotle preferred to compare our soul to tablets which are still blank, where there is space for writing<sup>a</sup>, \*and he maintained that there is nothing in our understanding which does not come from the senses.† That agrees better with popular notions, as is the manner of Aristotle, whereas Plato goes deeper. These sorts of Doxologies<sup>b</sup> \*or practicallogiest may nevertheless pass in ordinary usage, much as we see that those who follow Copernicus say none the less that the sun rises and sets. I even find that they can often be given a good sense according to which there

<sup>a</sup> [in his dialogue called Meno]

<sup>1</sup> *Meno* 87c-88b.

<sup>a</sup> *De Anima*, III, 4, 430<sup>a</sup>, 1 "What the mind (nous) thinks must be in it just as the characters may be said to be on a writing-tablet on which as yet nothing stands written". To this Leibniz adds in the next phrase the familiar " nihil est in intellectu nisi prius fuerit in sensu ". This does not however occur in any extant text of Aristotle, and must be said to originate from Scholastic tradition.

<sup>b</sup> in the sense of "formalæ".

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is nothing false in them, as I have already remarked in what way one can say \*truly† that \*particular‡ substances act on one another, and in this same sense one can also say that we receive \*knowledge \*from outside‡ through the agency of the senses, \*because some external things contain \*\*or express more particularly†† the reasons which determine our soul to certain thoughts.† But when it is a question of the exactitude of metaphysical truths it is important to recognise the extent \*and independency of our soul, which goes infinitely further †than the vulgar think, although in the ordinary usage of life we only attribute to it what we more obviously perceive and what belongs to us in a particular manner, for there it serves no purpose to go further.

Yet it would be well to choose terms proper to the one and the other sense in order to avoid equivocation. \*Thus those<sup>e</sup> expressions which are in our soul whether they are conceived or not can be called *ideas*, but those which are conceived or formed can be called *notions*, *concepts*.† But in whatever way it is taken it is always false to say that all our notions come from the senses which are called external, for the notion which I have of myself and of my thoughts and consequently of being, substance, action, \*identity and many others† come from an internal experience.

*XXVIII. God alone is the immediate object of our perceptions which exists outside us, and he alone is our light.*

Now in rigorous metaphysical truth there is no external cause which acts on us except God alone<sup>d</sup> and he alone

<sup>a</sup> [species]

<sup>b</sup> [than what we conceive more distinctly, and what we attribute to ourselves more particularly in the ordinary usage of life, where there is no purpose in going further.]

<sup>c</sup> [forms]

<sup>d</sup> [and one can say that God is the sole immediate external object of our thoughts.]

communicates himself to us immediately by virtue of our continual dependence. From which it follows that there is no other external object which affects our soul \*and which immediately excites our perception.† Hence we have in our souls ideas of everything only by virtue of the continual action of God on us, that is to say because every effect expresses its cause and thus the essence of our soul is a certain expression, imitation \*or image† of the divine essence, \*thought and will,† and of all the ideas which are comprised therein. It can be said then that God alone is our immediate object outside us and that we see all things by him; for example when we see the sun and the stars it is God who has given to us \*and conserves for us† the ideas of them and who determines us to think of them effectively \*by his ordinary concursus† at the time at which our senses are disposed in a certain manner, according to the laws which he has established. God is the sun and the light of souls, *lumen illuminans omnem hominem viventem in hunc mundum*: <sup>1</sup> and this is not a sentiment new today. After Holy Scripture and the Fathers, who have always been rather for Plato than for Aristotle, I remember \*having previously remarked† that in the time of the scholastics, some believed that God is the light of the soul, and according to their way of speaking *intellectus agens animal rationalis*.<sup>2</sup> The Averroists turned it in a bad sense, but others, among whom was I believe William of St. Amour<sup>3</sup> and several mystical Theologians, have taken it in a manner worthy of God and capable of elevating the soul to knowledge of its good.

<sup>1</sup> "The light which lighteth every man that cometh into this world"

(*Gospel according to St. John*, 1, 9.)

<sup>2</sup> "the active intelligence of the rational soul."

<sup>3</sup> Died about 1272, one of the founders of the Sorbonne. *Opera*, Constant, 1692.