kind of faculty which would ever enable me to go wrong while using it correctly.

There would be no further doubt on this issue were it not that what I have just said appears to imply that I am incapable of ever going wrong. For if everything that is in me comes from God, and he did not endow me with a faculty for making mistakes, it appears that I can never go wrong. And certainly, so long as I think only of God, and turn my whole attention to him, I can find no cause of error or falsity. But when I turn back to myself, I know by experience that I am prone to countless errors. On looking for the cause of these errors, I find that I possess not only a real and positive idea of God, or a being who is supremely perfect, but also what may be described as a negative idea of nothingness, or of that which is farthest removed from all perfection. I realize that I am, as it were, something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being: my nature is such that in so far as I was created by the supreme being, there is nothing in me to enable me to go wrong or lead me astray; but in so far as I participate in nothingness or non-being, that is, as far as I am not myself the supreme being and am lacking in countless respects, it is no wonder that I make mistakes. I understand, then, that error as such is not something real which depends on God, but merely a defect. Hence my going wrong does not require me to have a faculty specially bestowed on me by God; it simply happens as a result of the fact that the faculty of true judgement which I have from God is in my case not infinite.

But this is still not entirely satisfactory. For error is not a pure negation, but rather a privation or lack of some knowledge which somehow should be in me. And when I concentrate on the nature of God, it seems impossible that he should have placed in me a faculty which is not perfect of its kind, or which lacks some perfection which it ought to have. The more skilled the craftsman the more perfect the work produced by him; if this is so, how can anything produced by the supreme creator of all things not be complete and perfect in all respects? There is, moreover, no doubt that God could have given me a nature such that I was never mistaken; again, there is no doubt that he always wills what is best. Is it then better that I should make mistakes than that I should not do so?

As I reflect on these matters more attentively, it occurs to me first of all that it is no cause for surprise if I do not understand the reasons for some of God's actions; and there is no call to doubt his existence if I happen to find that there are other instances where I do not grasp why or how

certain things were made by him. For since I now know that my own nature is very weak and limited, whereas the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible and infinite, I also know without more ado that he is capable of countless things whose causes are beyond my knowledge. And for this reason alone I consider the customary search for final causes to be totally useless in physics; there is considerable rashness in thinking myself capable of investigating the impenetrable purposes of God.

It also occurs to me that whenever we are inquiring whether the works of God are perfect, we ought to look at the whole universe, not just at one created thing on its own. For what would perhaps rightly appear very imperfect if it existed on its own is quite perfect when its function as a part of the universe is considered. It is true that, since my decision to doubt everything, it is so far only myself and God whose existence I have been able to know with certainty; but after considering the immense power of God, I cannot deny that many other things have been made by him, or at least could have been made, and hence that I may have a place in the universal scheme of things.

Next, when I look more closely at myself and inquire into the nature of my errors (for these are the only evidence of some imperfection in me), I notice that they depend on two concurrent causes, namely on the faculty of knowledge which is in me, and on the faculty of choice or freedom of the will; that is, they depend on both the intellect and the will simultaneously. Now all that the intellect does is to enable me to perceive the ideas which are subjects for possible judgements; and when regarded strictly in this light, it turns out to contain no error in the proper sense of that term. For although countless things may exist without there being any corresponding ideas in me, it should not, strictly speaking, be said that I am deprived of these ideas, but merely that I lack them, in a negative sense. This is because I cannot produce any reason to prove that God ought to have given me a greater faculty of knowledge than he did; and no matter how skilled I understand a craftsman to be, this does not make me think he ought to have put into every one of his works all the perfections which he is able to put into some of them. Besides, I cannot complain that the will or freedom of choice which I received from God is not sufficiently extensive or perfect, since I know by experience that it is not restricted in any way. Indeed, I think it is very noteworthy that there is nothing else in me which is so perfect and so great that the possibility of a further increase in its perfection or greatness is beyond my understanding. If, for example, I consider the faculty of understanding, I

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1. . . . i.e. not simply the defect or lack of some perfections to which I have no proper claim (added in French version).
2. . . . it cannot be said that my understanding is deprived of these ideas, as if they were something to which its nature entitles it (French version).
it. I also pass over the fact that it is surprising that everyone else, or every other mind, should not share your understanding, especially since there is no reason why God should not be thought to have imprinted the idea of himself on them as well as on you. This one fact surely shows that there is no idea imprinted on us by God, for if there were, if one and the same idea were always imprinted on everyone, then everyone would conceive of God in terms of a similar form and image, and would give him the same attributes and have exactly the same view of him, whereas, notorioulsy, the opposite is true. But I have already spent too much time on this topic.

On the Fourth Meditation: ‘Truth and falsity’

1. In the Fourth Meditation you begin by going over the results which you consider you have demonstrated in the previous Meditations - results which, you presume, have opened the way for further progress. To avoid delay here, I shall not keep insisting that you should have provided a firmer demonstration of these results; I shall simply ask you to remember what has been conceded and what not, so that the discussion may avoid being dragged into the realm of preconceived opinion.

Next you reason that it is impossible that God should deceive you; and in order to make excuses for the deceptive and error-prone faculty which God gave you, you suggest that the fault lies in nothingness, which you say you have some idea of, and which you say you participate in, since you take yourself to be something intermediate between nothingness and God. This is a splendid argument! I will pass over the impossibility of explaining how we have an idea of nothingness, and what kind of idea it is, and how we participate in nothingness, and so on. I will simply point out that this distinction does not obviate the fact that God could have given man a faculty of judgement that was immune from error. Without giving him a faculty of infinite scope, he could have given him the kind of faculty which would never lead him to assent to falsehood, so that he would clearly perceive anything he did know, and would avoid making any definite assertion on one side or the other in cases where he was ignorant.

When you discuss this objection you state that it is no cause for surprise if you do not understand the reason for some of God’s actions. This is correct, but it is still surprising that you should have a true idea which represents God as omniscient, omnipotent and wholly good, and yet that you should nonetheless observe that some of his works are not wholly perfect. For given that he could have made things more perfect

but did not do so, this seems to show that he must have lacked either the knowledge or the power or the will to do so. He was certainly imperfect if, despite having the knowledge and the power, he lacked the will and preferred imperfection to perfection.

Your rejection of the employment of final causes in physics might have been correct in a different context, but since you are dealing with God, there is obviously a danger that you may be abandoning the principal argument for establishing the natural light the wisdom, providence and power of God, and indeed his existence. Leaving aside the entire world, the heavens and its other main parts, how or where will you be able to get any better evidence for the existence of such a God than from the function of the various parts in plants, animals, man and yourself (or your body), seeing that you bear the likeness of God? We know that certain great thinkers have been led by a study of anatomy not just to achieve a knowledge of God but also to sing thankful hymns to him for having organized all the parts and harmonized their functions in such a way as to deserve the highest praise for his care and providence.

You will say that it is the physical causes of this organization and arrangement which we should investigate, and that it is foolish to have recourse to purposes rather than to active causes or materials. But no mortal can possibly understand or explain the active principle that produces the observed form and arrangement of the valves which serve as the openings to the vessels in the chambers of the heart. Nor can we understand the source from which this active principle acquires the material from which the valves are fashioned, or how it makes them operate, or what organic structure it employs, or how it makes use of them, or what it requires to ensure that they are of the correct hardness, consistency, fit, flexibility, size, shape and position. Since, I say, no physicist is able to discern and explain these and similar structures, why should he not at least admire their superb functioning and the ineffable Providence which has so appositely designed the valves for this function? Why should the physicist not be praised if he then sees that we must necessarily acknowledge some first cause which arranged these and all other things with such supreme wisdom and in such precise conformity with his purposes?

You say that it is rash to investigate the purposes of God. But while this may be true if you are thinking of the purposes which God himself wished to remain hidden or ordered us not to investigate, it surely does not apply to the purposes which he left on public display, as it were, and which can be discovered without much effort - purposes which are in any

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1 Above p. 37. 2 Above p. 38.
case of such a kind as to lead us to bestow great praise on God as their author.

You may say that the idea of God which is in each of us suffices to give us true and authentic knowledge of God and his purposes, without any reference to the purposes of things or anything else. But not everyone is in your happy position of having such a perfect idea from birth and seeing it before him with such clarity. And since there are some to whom God has not granted such clear vision, you should not begrudge their being able to come to know and glorify the craftsman by an inspection of his works. I need hardly stress that this does not prevent us from being allowed to make use of the idea of God, since this too appears to be entirely derived from our knowledge of things in the world; indeed were you to admit the truth, you would say that you owed a considerable amount, if not everything, to this kind of knowledge. For I ask you, what progress do you think you would have made if, since being implanted in the body, you had remained within it with your eyes closed and your ears stopped and, in short, with no external senses to enable you to perceive this universe of objects or anything outside you? Would you not have been absorbed in private meditation, eternally turning thoughts over and over? Answer in all honesty and tell me what idea of God and yourself you think you would have acquired under such circumstances.

2. The solution which you go on to offer is that a created thing which appears imperfect should be considered not as a whole, but as a part of the universe, and from this point of view it will be perfect. This is an admirable distinction; but here we are dealing with the imperfection of a part not as a part, or in comparison with the complete whole, but as something complete in itself which performs its special function. And even if you relate this to the universe, we are still faced with the problem of whether the universe would not really have been more perfect if all its parts had been perfect than it is now when many of its parts are imperfect. Thus a republic whose citizens are all good will be more perfect than one in which most or some of the citizens are bad.

So when you go on to say later on that the universe will be in some sense more perfect if some of its parts are subject to error than it would be if they were all alike, this is like saying that a republic has, in a sense, more perfection if some of its citizens are bad than it would have if they were all good. Hence, just as it seems that a good ruler ought to prefer it if all his citizens are good, so it seems that the author of the universe ought to have ordained that all the parts of the universe should be created such as to be immune from error. You could say that the perfection of the parts which are immune from error appears greater by contrast with those which are liable to error; but they are not intrinsically more perfect. In the same way, the virtue of good men does in a sense shine out more by contrast with those who are vicious, but it is not for that reason intrinsically more shining. Hence, just as we should not want some of the citizens to be bad merely so as to make the good citizens stand out more brightly, so it seems that it should never have been allowed that some parts of the universe should be subject to error just so that those which were immune from error should shine more brightly.

You say that you have no right to complain that the role God wished you to undertake in the world is not the principal one or the most perfect of all. But this does not eliminate the question of why God was not satisfied with giving you a role to play which was the least perfect of a set of perfect roles, without actually giving you an imperfect role. A ruler cannot be blamed for not appointing all the citizens to the highest offices but keeping some in lower, and others in the lowest, positions; but he would be criticized if he not only assigned some to the lowest offices but also assigned some to positively base roles.

You say that you cannot produce any reason to prove that God ought to have given you a greater faculty of knowledge than he did; and no matter how skilled you understand a craftsman to be, this does not make you think that he ought to have put into every one of his works all the perfections which he is able to put into some of them. But the objection which I have just raised still stands. The difficulty, you see, is not so much why God did not give you a greater faculty of knowledge, but why he gave you a faculty subject to error. The question is not why the supreme craftsman did not want to bestow all the perfections on all his works, but why he wished to bestow imperfections on some of them.

You say that although you have no power to avoid error through having a clear perception of things, you can still avoid it by firmly resolving to adhere to the rule of not assenting to anything which you do not clearly perceive. But although you can always keep this rule carefully in mind, it is not still an imperfection not to perceive clearly matters which you need to decide upon, and hence to be perpetually liable to the risk of error?

You say that error resides in the mental operation itself in so far as it proceeds from you and is a kind of privation, but not in the faculty God gave you, nor in its operation in so far as it depends on him. But although the error does not immediately reside in the faculty God gave you, nor in its operation, it does indirectly attach to it, since it was created with the kind of imperfection which makes error possible. Admittedly, as you say, you have no cause for complaint against God who, despite owing you

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1 Above p. 43. 2 Above p. 39. 3 Cf above p. 43. 4 Cf. above p. 41.
to look more beautiful (there being no part of the body more beautiful than the eye), and someone who thinks that there ought not to have been any creatures in the world who were liable to error (i.e. not wholly perfect).

Your supposition that God has assigned us base roles and has given us imperfections, and so on,

1 is plainly false. It is also quite false that God gave man a faculty which is 'uncertain, confused and inadequate even for the few matters which he did want us to decide upon'.

3. You here ask me to say briefly whether the will can extend to anything that escapes the intellect. The answer is that this occurs whenever we happen to go wrong. Thus when you judge that the mind is a kind of rarefied body, you can understand that the mind is itself, i.e. a thinking thing, and that a rarefied body is an extended thing; but the proposition that it is one and the same thing that thinks and is extended is one which you certainly do not understand. You simply want to believe it, because you have believed it before and do not want to change your view. It is the same when you judge that an apple, which may in fact be poisoned, is nutritious: you understand that its smell, colour and so on, are pleasant, but this does not mean that you understand that this particular apple will be beneficial to eat; you judge that it will because you want to believe it. So, while I do admit that when we direct our will towards something, we always have some sort of understanding of some aspect of it, I deny that our understanding and our will are of equal scope. In the case of any given object, there may be many things about it that we desire but very few things of which we have knowledge. And when we make a bad judgement, it is not that we exercise our will in a bad fashion, but that the object of our will is bad. Again, we never understand anything in a bad fashion; when we are said to 'understand in a bad fashion', all that happens is that we judge that our understanding is more extensive than it in fact is.

You next deny certain propositions about the indifference of the will. But although these propositions are self-evident, I am not prepared to set about proving them here. These are the sorts of things that each of us ought to know by experience in his own case, rather than having to be convinced of them by rational argument; and you, O Flesh, do not seem to attend to the actions the mind performs within itself. You may be unfree, if you wish; but I am certainly very pleased with my freedom since I experience it within myself. What is more, you have produced no arguments to attack it but merely bald denials. I affirm what I have experienced and what anyone else can experience for himself, whereas your denial seems merely to be based on your own apparent failure to

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1 Above p. 215.  2 Above p. 216.  3 Ibid.
understand the immeasurable greatness of God even though we do not attend to his justice; but if we attend to both, it is quite self-contradictory to suppose that he is immeasurably great and yet not just. Again, it is possible to have true knowledge of the existence of God even though we lack knowledge of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, since the latter can be perceived only by a mind which faith has illuminated; yet when we do perceive them, I deny that it is intelligible to suppose that there is a real distinction between them, at least as far as the divine essence is concerned, although such a distinction may be admitted as far as their mutual relationship is concerned.

Finally, I was not afraid of being so preoccupied with my method of analysis that I might have made the mistake suggested by my critics: seeing that there are ‘certain bodies which do not think’ (or, rather, clearly understanding that certain bodies can exist without thought), I preferred, they claim, to assert that thought does not belong to the nature of the body rather than to notice that there are certain bodies, namely human ones, which do think, and to infer that thought is a mode of the body.¹ In fact I have never seen or perceived that human bodies think; all I have seen is that there are human beings, who possess both thought and a body. This happens as a result of a thinking thing’s being combined with a corporeal thing: I perceived this from the fact that when I examined a thinking thing on its own, I discovered nothing in it which belonged to body, and similarly when I considered corporeal nature on its own I discovered no thought in it. On the contrary, when I examined all the modes of body and mind, I did not observe a single mode the concept of which did not depend on the concept of the thing of which it was a mode. Also, the fact that we often see two things joined together does not license the inference that they are one and the same; but the fact that we sometimes observe one of them apart from the other entirely justifies the inference that they are different. Nor should the power of God deter us from making this inference. For it is a conceptual contradiction to suppose that two things which we clearly perceive as different should become one and the same (that is intrinsically one and the same, as opposed to by combination); this is no less a contradiction than to suppose that two things which are in no way distinct should be separated. Hence, if God has implanted the power of thought in certain bodies (as he in fact has done in the case of human bodies), then he can remove this power from them, and hence it still remains really distinct from them.

It is true that, before freeing myself from the preconceived opinions acquired from the senses, I did perceive correctly that two and three

¹ Above p. 283.
response, because no falsity can occur in them. Hence when people say that a stick in water ‘appears bent because of refraction’, this is the same as saying that it appears to us in a way which would lead a child to judge that it was bent – and which may even lead us to make the same judgement, following the preconceived opinions which we have become accustomed to accept from our earliest years. But I cannot grant my critics’ further comment that this error is corrected ‘not by the intellect but by the sense of touch’. As a result of touching it, we may judge that the stick is straight, and the kind of judgement involved may be the kind we have been accustomed to make since childhood, and which is therefore referred to as the ‘sense’ of touch. But the sense alone does not suffice to correct the visual error: in addition we need to have some degree of reason which tells us that in this case we should believe the judgement based on touch rather than that elicited by vision. And since we did not have this power of reasoning in our infancy, it must be attributed not to the senses but to the intellect. Thus even in the very example my critics produce, it is the intellect alone which corrects the error of the senses; and it is not possible to produce any case in which error results from our trusting the operation of the mind more than the senses.

10. My critics’ remaining comments are put forward as doubts rather than as objections, and I am not so confident of my powers as to venture to guarantee that I shall be able to give a satisfactory explanation of matters which I see still give rise to doubt in the minds of many learned and highly intelligent men. But nevertheless, so as not to desert the cause, I will do what I can and give a frank account of how it happened that I managed to free myself entirely from these same doubts. In so doing, I shall be delighted if my comments are perhaps of some help to others; and if they are not, I shall at least not feel myself to have made any rash promises.

When, on the basis of the arguments set out in these Meditations, I first drew the conclusion that the human mind is really distinct from the body, better known than the body, and so on, I was compelled to accept these results because everything in the reasoning was coherent and was inferred from quite evident principles in accordance with the rules of logic. But I confess that for all that I was not entirely convinced; I was in the same plight as astronomers who have established by argument that the sun is several times larger than the earth, and yet still cannot prevent themselves judging that it is smaller, when they actually look at it. However, I went on from here, and proceeded to apply the same fundamental principles to the consideration of physical things. First I attended to the ideas or notions of each particular thing which I found within myself, and I carefully distinguished them one from the other so that all my judgements should match them. I observed as a result that nothing whatever belongs to the concept of body except the fact that it is something which has length, breadth and depth and is capable of various shapes and motions; moreover, these shapes and motions are merely modes which no power whatever can cause to exist apart from body. But colours, smells, tastes and so on, are, I observed, merely certain sensations which exist in my thought, and are as different from bodies as pain is different from the shape and motion of the weapon which produces it. And lastly, I observed that heaviness and hardness and the power to heat or to attract, or to purge, and all the other qualities which we experience in bodies, consist solely in the motion of bodies, or its absence, and the configuration and situation of their parts.

Since these opinions were completely different from those which I had previously held regarding physical things, I next began to consider what had led me to take a different view before. The principal cause, I discovered, was this. From infancy I had made a variety of judgements about physical things in so far as they contributed to preserving the life which I was embarking on; and subsequently I retained the same opinions I had originally formed of these things. But at that age the mind employed the bodily organs less correctly than it now does, and was more firmly attached to them; hence it had no thoughts apart from them and perceived things only in a confused manner. Although it was aware of its own nature and had within itself an idea of thought as well as an idea of extension, it never exercised its intellect on anything without at the same time picturing something in the imagination. It therefore took thought and extension to be one and the same thing, and referred to the body all the notions which it had concerning things related to the intellect. Now I had never freed myself from these preconceived opinions in later life, and hence there was nothing that I knew with sufficient distinctness, and there was nothing I did not suppose to be corporeal; however, in the case of those very things that I supposed to be corporeal, the ideas or concepts which I formed were frequently such as to refer to minds rather than bodies.

For example, I conceived of gravity as if it were some sort of real quality, which inhered in solid bodies; and although I called it a ‘quality’, whereby referring it to the bodies in which it inheres, by adding that it was ‘real’ I was in fact thinking that it was a substance. In the same way clothing, regarded in itself, is a substance, even though when referred to the man who wears it, it is a quality. Or again, the mind, even though it is in fact a substance, can nonetheless be said to be a quality of the body to

1 Lat. gravitas, literally ‘heaviness’. 

1 Above p. 282. 2 Ibid.
Objections and Replies

which it is joined. And although I imagined gravity to be scattered throughout the whole body that is heavy, I still did not attribute to it the extension which constitutes the nature of a body. For the true extension of a body is such as to exclude any interpenetration of the parts, whereas I thought that there was the same amount of gravity in a ten foot piece of wood as in one foot lump of gold or other metal — indeed I thought that the whole of the gravity could be contracted to a mathematical point. Moreover, I saw that the gravity, while remaining coextensive with the heavy body, could exercise all its force in any one part of the body; for if the body were hung from a rope attached to any part of it, it would still pull the rope down with all its force, just as if all the gravity existed in the part actually touching the rope instead of being scattered through the remaining parts. This is exactly the way in which I now understand the mind to be coextensive with the body — the whole mind in the whole body and the whole body in any one of its parts. But what makes it especially clear that my idea of gravity was taken largely from the idea I had of the mind is the fact that I thought that gravity carried bodies towards the centre of the earth as if it had some knowledge of the centre within itself. For this surely could not happen without knowledge, and there can be no knowledge except in a mind. Nevertheless, I continued to apply to gravity various other attributes which cannot be understood to apply to a mind in this way — for example its being divisible, measurable and so on.

But later on I made the observations which led me to make a careful distinction between the idea of the mind and the ideas of body and corporeal motion; and I found that all those other ideas of ‘real qualities’ or ‘substantial forms’ which I had previously held were ones which I had put together or constructed from those basic ideas. And thus I very easily freed myself from all the doubts that my critics here put forward. First of all, I did not doubt that I ‘had a clear idea of my mind’, since I had a close inner awareness of it. Nor did I doubt that ‘this idea was quite different from the ideas of other things’, and that ‘it contained nothing of a corporeal nature’. For I had also looked for true ideas of all these ‘other things’, and I appeared to have some general acquaintance with all of them; yet everything I found in them was completely different from my idea of the mind. Moreover, I found that the distinction between things such as mind and body, which appeared distinct even though I attentively thought about both of them, is much greater than the distinction between things which are such that when we think of both of them we do not see how one can exist apart from the other (even though we may be able to understand one without thinking of the other). For example, we can understand the immeasurable greatness of God even though we do not attend to his justice; but if we attend to both, it is quite self-contradictory to suppose that he is immeasurably great and yet not just. Again, it is possible to have true knowledge of the existence of God even though we lack knowledge of the Persons of the Holy Trinity, since the latter can be perceived only by a mind which faith has illuminated; yet when we do perceive them, I deny that it is intelligible to suppose that there is a real distinction between them, at least as far as the divine essence is concerned, although such a distinction may be admitted as far as their mutual relationship is concerned.

Finally, I was not afraid of being so preoccupied with my method of analysis that I might have made the mistake suggested by my critics: seeing that there are ‘certain bodies which do not think’ (or, rather, clearly understanding that certain bodies can exist without thought), I preferred, they claim, to assert that thought does not belong to the nature of the body rather than to notice that there are certain bodies, namely human ones, which do think, and to infer that thought is a mode of the body. In fact I have never seen or perceived that human bodies think; all I have seen is that there are human beings, who possess both thought and a body. This happens as a result of a thinking thing’s being combined with a corporeal thing: I perceived this from the fact that when I examined a thinking thing on its own, I discovered nothing in it which belonged to body, and similarly when I considered corporeal nature on its own I discovered no thought in it. On the contrary, when I examined all the modes of body and mind, I did not observe a single mode the concept of which did not depend on the concept of the thing of which it was a mode. Also, the fact that we often see two things joined together does not license the inference that they are one and the same; but the fact that we sometimes observe one of them apart from the other entirely justifies the inference that they are different. Nor should the power of God deter us from making this inference. For it is a conceptual contradiction to suppose that two things which we clearly perceive as different should become one and the same (that is intrinsically one and the same, as opposed to by combination); this is not less a contradiction than to suppose that two things which are in no way distinct should be separated. Hence, if God has implanted the power of thought in certain bodies (as he in fact has done in the case of human bodies), then he can remove this power from them, and hence it still remains really distinct from them.

It is true that, before freeing myself from the preconceived opinions acquired from the senses, I did perceive correctly that two and three

1 Above p. 283.

Cf. p. 283.
natural light is to be trusted only to the extent that it is compatible with

29. **God is not the cause of our errors.**
The first attribute of God that comes under consideration here is that he
is supremely truthful and the giver of all light. So it is a complete
contradiction to suppose that he might deceive us or be, in the strict and
positive sense, the cause of the errors to which we know by experience
that we are prone. For although the ability to deceive may perhaps be
regarded among us men as a sign of intelligence, the will to deceive must
undoubtedly always come from malice, or from fear and weakness, and
so cannot belong to God.

30. **It follows that everything that we clearly perceive is true; and this
removes the doubts mentioned earlier.**
It follows from this that the light of nature or faculty of knowledge which
God gave us can never encompass any object which is not true in so far as
it is indeed encompassed by this faculty, that is, in so far as it is clearly
and distinctly perceived. For God would deserve to be called a deceiver if
the faculty which he gave us was so distorted that it mistook the false for
the true (even when we were using it properly). This disposes of the most
serious doubt which arose from our ignorance about whether our nature
might not be such as to make us go wrong even in matters which
seemed to us utterly evident. Indeed, this argument easily demolishes all
the other reasons for doubt which were mentioned earlier. Mathematical
truths should no longer be suspect, since they are utterly clear to us. And
as for our senses, if we notice anything here that is clear and distinct, no
matter whether we are awake or asleep, then provided we separate it
from what is confused and obscure we will easily recognize—whatever
the thing in question—which are the aspects that may be regarded as
true. There is no need for me to expand on this point here, since I have
already dealt with it in the *Meditations on Metaphysics*; and a more
precise explanation of the point requires knowledge of what I shall be
saying later on.

31. **Our errors, if considered in relation to God, are merely negations; if
considered in relation to ourselves they are privations.**
Yet although God is no deceiver, it often happens that we fall into error.
In order to investigate the origin and cause of our errors and learn to
guard against them, we should realize that they do not depend on our

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