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 17
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*;[1] 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

1 Cf. Med. VI: vol. II, pp. 54ff.

intellect so much as on our will. Moreover, errors are not things, requiring the real concurrence of God for their production. Considered in relation to God they are merely negations,[1] and considered in relation to ourselves they are privations.

32. *We possess only two modes of thinking: the perception of the intellect and the operation of the will.*

All the modes of thinking that we experience within ourselves can be brought under two general headings: perception, or the operation of the intellect, and volition, or the operation of the will. Sensory perception, imagination and pure understanding are simply various modes of perception; desire, aversion, assertion, denial and doubt are various modes of willing.

33. *We fall into error only when we make judgements about things which we have not sufficiently perceived.*

Now when we perceive something, so long as we do not make any assertion or denial about it, we clearly avoid error. And we equally avoid error when we confine our assertions or denials to what we clearly and
18 distinctly perceive should be asserted or denied. Error arises only when, as often happens, we make a judgement about something even though we do not have an accurate perception of it.

34. *Making a judgement requires not only the intellect but also the will.*

In order to make a judgement, the intellect is of course required since, in the case of something which we do not in any way perceive, there is no judgement we can make. But the will is also required so that, once something is perceived in some manner, our assent may then be given. Now a judgement – some kind of judgement at least – can be made without the need for a complete and exhaustive perception of the thing in question; for we can assent to many things which we know only in a very obscure and confused manner.

35. *The scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect, and this is the cause of error.*

Moreover, the perception of the intellect extends only to the few objects presented to it, and is always extremely limited. The will, on the other hand, can in a certain sense be called infinite, since we observe without exception that its scope extends to anything that can possibly be an object of any other will – even the immeasurable will of God. So it is easy

1 '... that is, he did not bestow on us everything which he was able to bestow, but which equally we can see he was not obliged to give us' (added in French version).

for us to extend our will beyond what we clearly perceive; and when we do this it is no wonder that we may happen to go wrong.

36. *Our errors cannot be imputed to God.*
But it must not in any way be imagined that, because God did not give us an omniscient intellect, this makes him the author of our errors. For it is of the nature of a created intellect to be finite; and it is of the nature of a finite intellect that its scope should not extend to everything.

37. *The supreme perfection of man is that he acts freely or voluntarily, and it is this which makes him deserve praise or blame.*
The extremely broad scope of the will is part of its very nature. And it is a supreme perfection in man that he acts voluntarily, that is, freely; this makes him in a special way the author of his actions and deserving of praise for what he does. We do not praise automatons for accurately producing all the movements they were designed to perform, because the production of these movements occurs necessarily. It is the designer 19
who is praised for constructing such carefully-made devices; for in constructing them he acted not out of necessity but freely. By the same principle, when we embrace the truth, our doing so voluntarily is much more to our credit than would be the case if we could not do otherwise.

38. *The fact that we fall into error is a defect in the way we act, not a defect in our nature. The faults of subordinates may often be attributed to their masters, but never to God.*
The fact that we fall into error is a defect in the way we act or in the use we make of our freedom, but not a defect in our nature. For our nature remains the same whether we judge correctly or incorrectly. And although God could have endowed our intellect with a discernment so acute as to prevent our ever going wrong, we have no right to demand this of him. Admittedly, when one of us men has the power to prevent some evil, but does not prevent it, we say that he is the cause of the evil; but we must not similarly suppose that because God could have brought it about that we never went wrong, this makes him the cause of our errors. The power which men have over each other was given them so that they might employ it in discouraging others from evil; but the power which God has over all men is both absolute and totally free. So we should give him the utmost thanks for the goods which he has so lavishly bestowed upon us, instead of unjustly complaining that he did not bestow on us all the gifts which it was in his power to bestow.

39. *The freedom of the will is self-evident.*
That there is freedom in our will, and that we have power in many cases to give or withhold our assent at will, is so evident that it must be

counted among the first and most common notions that are innate in us. This was obvious earlier on when, in our attempt to doubt everything, we
20 went so far as to make the supposition of some supremely powerful author of our being who was attempting to deceive us in every possible way. For in spite of that supposition, the freedom which we experienced within us was nonetheless so great as to enable us to abstain from believing whatever was not quite certain or fully examined. And what we saw to be beyond doubt even during the period of that supposition is as self-evident and as transparently clear as anything can be.

40. *It is also certain that everything was preordained by God.*
But now that we have come to know God, we perceive in him a power so immeasurable that we regard it as impious to suppose that we could ever do anything which was not already preordained by him. And we can easily get ourselves into great difficulties if we attempt to reconcile this divine preordination with the freedom of our will, or attempt to grasp both these things at once.

41. *How to reconcile the freedom of our will with divine preordination.*
But we shall get out of these difficulties if we remember that our mind is finite, while the power of God is infinite – the power by which he not only knew from eternity whatever is or can be, but also willed it and preordained it. We may attain sufficient knowledge of this power to perceive clearly and distinctly that God possesses it; but we cannot get a sufficient grasp of it to see how it leaves the free actions of men undetermined. Nonetheless, we have such close awareness of the freedom and indifference which is in us, that there is nothing we can grasp more evidently or more perfectly. And it would be absurd, simply because we do not grasp one thing, which we know must by its very nature be beyond our comprehension, to doubt something else of which we have an intimate grasp and which we experience within ourselves.

42. *Although we do not want to go wrong, nevertheless we go wrong by our own will.*
Now that we know that all our errors depend on the will, it may seem
21 surprising that we should ever go wrong, since there is no one who wants to go wrong. But there is a great difference between choosing to go wrong and choosing to give one's assent in matters where, as it happens, error is to be found. And although there is in fact no one who expressly wishes to go wrong, there is scarcely anyone who does not often wish to give his assent to something which, though he does not know it, contains some error. Indeed, precisely because of their eagerness to find the truth,

people who do not know the right method of finding it often pass judgement on things of which they lack perception, and this is why they fall into error.

43. *We never go wrong when we assent only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive.*

It is certain, however, that we will never mistake the false for the true provided we give our assent only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive. I say that this is certain, because God is not a deceiver, and so the faculty of perception which he has given us cannot incline to falsehood; and the same goes for the faculty of assent, provided its scope is limited to what is clearly perceived. And even if there were no way of proving this, the minds of all of us have been so moulded by nature that whenever we perceive something clearly, we spontaneously give our assent to it and are quite unable to doubt its truth.

44. *When we give our assent to something which is not clearly perceived, this is always a misuse of our judgement, even if by chance we stumble on the truth. The giving of our assent to something unclear happens because we imagine that we clearly perceived it on some previous occasion.*

It is also certain that when we assent to some piece of reasoning when our perception of it is lacking, then either we go wrong, or, if we do stumble on the truth, it is merely by accident, so that we cannot be sure that we are not in error. Of course it seldom happens that we assent to something when we are aware of not perceiving it, since the light of nature tells us that we should never make a judgement except about things we know. What does very often give rise to error is that there are many things which we think we perceived in the past; once these things are committed to memory, we give our assent to them just as we would if we had fully perceived them, whereas in reality we never perceived them at all.

304 I have sometimes asked myself the following question. Is it better to be
305 cheerful and content, imagining the goods one possesses to be greater and more valuable than they are, and not knowing or caring to consider those one lacks; or is it better to have more consideration and knowledge, so as to know the just value of both, and thus grow sad? If I thought joy the supreme good, I should not doubt that one ought to try to make oneself joyful at any price, and I should approve the brutishness of those who drown their sorrows in wine, or dull them with tobacco. But I make a distinction between the supreme good – which consists in the exercise of virtue, or, what comes to the same, the possession of all those goods whose acquisition depends upon our free will – and the satisfaction of mind which results from that acquisition. Consequently, seeing that it is a greater perfection to know the truth than to be ignorant of it, even when it is to our disadvantage, I must conclude that it is better to be less cheerful and possess more knowledge. So it is not always the most cheerful person who has the most satisfied mind; on the contrary, great joys are commonly sober and serious, and only slight and passing joys are accompanied by laughter. So I cannot approve of trying to deceive oneself by feeding on false imaginations; for the resulting pleasure can touch only the surface of
306 the soul, leaving it to feel inner bitterness when it perceives their falsehood. It could indeed happen that the soul was so continually diverted that it never perceived this; but that would not amount to the enjoyment of the happiness we are discussing, since the latter must depend on our conduct, whereas the former could come only from fortune.

But the case is different when we can turn our minds to different considerations which are equally true, some leading to contentment and others preventing it. In such a case it seems to me that prudence demands that we dwell primarily on those which give us satisfaction. Indeed, since almost everything in the world can be looked at from one point of view which makes it appear good, and from another which brings out its defects, I think that the primary way in which we should display skill is in looking at things from the point of view which makes them seem most to our advantage, provided this does not involve self-deception.

So, when Your Highness considers the circumstances which have given her more leisure to cultivate her reason than many others of her age, if she will please also consider how much more she has profited from them than others, I am sure that she will have reason to be contented. And I do not see why she should prefer to compare herself to other women in a matter
307 which gives her cause for regret than in a matter which could give her satisfaction. Our nature is so constituted that our mind needs much

relaxation if it is to be able to spend usefully a few moments in the search for truth. Too great application to study does not refine the mind, but wears it down. Consequently, we should not reckon the time which we could have spent on instructing ourselves by comparison with the number of hours we have had at our disposition but rather, I think, by comparison with what we see commonly happens to others, as an indication of the normal scope of the human mind.

I think also that there is nothing to repent of when we have done what we judged best at the time when we had to decide to act, even though later, thinking it over at our leisure, we judge that we made a mistake. There would be more ground for repentance if we had acted against our conscience, even though we realized afterwards that we had done better than we thought. For we are responsible only for our thoughts, and it does not belong to human nature to be omniscient, or always to judge as well on the spur of the moment as when there is plenty of time to deliberate.

Besides, the vanity which makes a man think better of himself than he deserves is a vice which only weak and base souls display; but this does not mean that the strongest and most noble souls have a duty to despise themselves. We must do ourselves justice, and recognize our perfections as well as our faults. Propriety forbids us to boast of our good qualities, but it 308
does not forbid us to be aware of them.

Finally, it is true that we lack the infinite knowledge which would be necessary for a perfect acquaintance with all the goods between which we have to choose in the various situations of our lives. We must, I think, be contented with a modest knowledge of the most necessary truths such as those I listed in my last letter.[1]

In that letter I have already given my opinion on Your Highness's question whether it is more correct to see everything in relation to oneself or to put oneself to great anxiety for others. If we thought only of ourselves, we could enjoy only the goods which are peculiar to ourselves; whereas, if we consider ourselves as parts of some other body, we share also in the goods which are common to its members, without losing any of those which belong only to ourselves. With evils, the case is not the same, because philosophy teaches that evil is nothing real, but only a privation. When we are sad on account of some evil which has happened to our friends, we do not share in the defect in which this evil consists; and whatever sadness or distress we feel on such occasions cannot be as great as the inner satisfaction which always accompanies good actions, and 309
especially actions which proceed from a pure affection for others which

1 The letter of 15 September 1645, p. 265 above.

has no reference to oneself, that is, from the Christian virtue called charity. In this way it is possible, even while weeping and deeply distressed, to have more pleasure than while laughing and at one's ease.

It is easy to show that the pleasure of the soul which constitutes happiness is not inseparable from cheerfulness and bodily comfort. This is proved by tragedies, which please us more the sadder they make us, and by bodily exercises like hunting and tennis which are pleasant in spite of being arduous – indeed we see that often the fatigue and exertion involved increase the pleasure. The soul derives contentment from such exercise because in the process it is made aware of the strength, or skill, or some other perfection of the body to which it is joined; but the contentment which it finds in weeping at some pitiable and tragic episode in the theatre arises chiefly from its impression that it is performing a virtuous action in having compassion for the afflicted. Indeed in general the soul is pleased to feel passions arise in itself no matter what they are, provided it remains in control of them.

310 But I must examine these passions in more detail so as to be able to define them. It will be easier for me to do so in this letter than if I were writing to anyone else, because Your Highness has taken the trouble to read the treatise which I once drafted on the nature of animals.[1] You know already how I think various impressions are formed in their brain: some by the external objects which act upon the senses, and others by the internal dispositions of the body, either by the traces of previous impressions left in the memory, or by the agitation of the spirits which come from the heart. In man the brain is also acted on by the soul, which has some power to change cerebral impressions, just as these impressions in their turn have the power to arouse thoughts in the soul which do not depend on the will. Consequently, the term 'passion' can be applied in general to all the thoughts which are thus aroused in the soul by cerebral impressions alone, without the concurrence of its will, and therefore without any action of the soul itself; for whatever is not an action is a passion. Commonly, however, the term is restricted to thoughts which are caused by some special agitation of the spirits. For thoughts that come from external objects, or from internal dispositions of the body – such as the perception of colours,
311 sounds, smells, hunger, thirst, pain, and the like – are called external or internal sensations. Those that depend solely on the traces left by previous impressions in the memory and the ordinary movement of the spirits are dreams, whether they are real dreams in sleep or daydreams in waking life

1 Descartes is probably referring to a treatise on animal physiology which he drafted in 1629–31, and not to writings prepared after the publication of the *Principles of Philosophy*.

when the soul does not determine itself to anything of its own accord, but idly follows the impressions that happen to be in the brain. But when the soul uses the will to determine itself to some thought which is not just intelligible but also imaginable, this thought makes a new impression in the brain; this is not a passion within the soul, but an action – and this is what is properly called imagination. Finally, when the normal flow of the spirits is such that it commonly arouses sad or cheerful thoughts or the like, this is not attributed to passion, but to the nature or humour of the person in whom they are aroused; and so we say that one person has a sad nature, another is of a cheerful humour, and so on. So there remain only the thoughts that come from some special agitation of the spirits, whose effects are felt as in the soul itself. It is these that are passions properly so called.

Of course almost all our thoughts depend on more than one of the causes I have just listed; but each thought is called after its chief cause or 312
the cause with which we are chiefly concerned. This makes many people confuse the sensation of pain with the passion of sadness, and pleasurable sensation with the passion of joy, which they also call enjoyment or delight. People also confuse the sensations of thirst and hunger with the desires to drink and eat, which are passions. This is because the causes that give rise to pain commonly also agitate the spirits in such a way as to arouse sadness, and those that produce a pleasurable sensation agitate them in such a way as to arouse joy, and likewise in other cases.

Sometimes also people confuse the inclinations or habits which dispose to a certain passion with the passion itself, though the two are easy to distinguish. For instance, when it is announced in a town that enemies are coming to besiege it, the inhabitants at once make a judgement about the evil which may result to them: this judgement is an action of their soul and not a passion. And though this judgement is to be found in many alike, they are not all equally affected by it; some are more affected than others in proportion to the greater or less habit or inclination they have towards fear. Their souls can receive the emotion that constitutes the passion only after they have made the judgement, or else at least conceived the danger without making a judgement, and then imprinted an image of it in the brain, by another action, namely imagining. When a soul does this it acts upon the spirits which travel from the brain through the nerves into the 313
muscles, and makes them enter the muscles whose function is to close the openings of the heart. This retards the circulation of the blood so that the whole body becomes pale, cold and trembling, and the fresh spirits returning from the heart to the brain are agitated in such a way that they are useless for forming any images except those which excite in the soul the passion of fear. All these things happen so quickly one after the other that

the whole thing seems like a single operation. Similarly, in all the other passions there occurs some special agitation in the spirits leaving the heart.

That is what I was going to write to Your Highness a week ago, and I was planning to add a detailed explanation of all the passions. But I found it difficult to list them, and so I had to let the postman leave without my letter. Having in the meantime received the one Your Highness was kind enough to write me, I now have more points to answer, and so I must postpone the examination of the passions.[1]

314 I must say at once that all the reasons that prove that God exists and is the first and immutable cause of all effects that do not depend on human free will prove similarly, I think, that he is also the cause of all the effects that do so depend. For the only way to prove that he exists is to consider him as a supremely perfect being; and he would not be supremely perfect if anything could happen in the world without coming entirely from him. It is true that faith alone tells us about the nature of the grace by which God raises us to a supernatural bliss; but philosophy by itself is able to discover that the slightest thought could not enter into a person's mind without God's willing, and having willed from all eternity, that it should so enter. The scholastic distinction between universal and particular causes is out of place here. The sun, although the universal cause of all flowers, is not the cause of the difference between tulips and roses; but that is because their production depends also on some other particular causes which are not subordinated to the sun. But God is the universal cause of everything in such a way as to be also the total cause of everything; and so nothing can happen without his will.

It is true also that knowledge of the immortality of the soul, and of the
315 felicity of which it will be capable after this life, might give occasion to those who are tired of this life to leave it, if they were certain that they would afterwards enjoy all that felicity. But no reason guarantees this, and there is nothing to show that the present life is bad except the false philosophy of Hegesias (whose book was banned by Ptolemy because many of its readers killed themselves).[2] True philosophy, on the contrary, teaches that even amid the saddest disasters and most bitter pains we can always be content, provided that we know how to use our reason.

As for the extent of the universe, I do not see how the consideration of it

1 In Elizabeth's reply to Descartes' letter of 15 September, she made the points that resignation to God's will does not reconcile one to the ill-will of men; that belief in immortality might make one seek death; and that consideration of the vast extent of the universe might make us doubt of God's providence (AT v 301).

2 Hegesias, a Greek philosopher of the third century B.C. who advocated suicide. See Cicero, *Tusculana*, I. 34.

tempts one to separate particular providence from the idea we have of God. God is quite different from finite powers. They can be used up; so when we see that they are employed in many great effects, we have reason to judge it unlikely that they also extend to lesser ones. But the greater we deem the works of God to be, the better we observe the infinity of his power; and the better known this infinity is to us, the more certain we are that it extends even to the most particular actions of human beings.

When Your Highness speaks of the particular providence of God as being the foundation of theology, I do not think that you have in mind 316
some change in God's decrees occasioned by actions that depend on our free will. No such change is theologically tenable; and when we are told to pray to God, that is not so that we should inform him of our needs, or that we should try to get him to change anything in the order established from all eternity by his providence – either of these aims would be blameworthy – but simply to obtain whatever he has, from all eternity, willed to be obtained by our prayers. I believe that all theologians agree on this, including the Arminians, who seem the most jealous of the rights of free will.[1]

I agree that it is difficult to determine exactly how far reason ordains that we should devote ourselves to the community. However, it is not a matter on which it is necessary to be very precise; it is enough to satisfy one's conscience, and in doing so one can leave a lot of room for one's inclination. For God has so established the order of things, and has joined men together in so close a community, that even if everyone were to relate everything to himself and had no charity for others, he would still commonly work for them as much as was in his power, provided he exercised prudence, and especially if he lived in an age in which morals were not 317
corrupted. Moreover, as it is a nobler and more glorious thing to do good to others than to oneself, it is the noblest souls who have the greatest inclination thereto and who make least account of the goods they possess. Only weak and base souls value themselves more than they ought, and are like small vessels that a few drops of water can fill. I know that Your Highness is not at all like that. Base souls cannot be persuaded to take trouble for others unless you can show them that they will reap some profit for themselves; but in order to persuade Your Highness to look after her health, it is necessary to point out to her that she cannot long be useful to those she loves if she neglects herself.

1 Followers of the Dutch theologian Jakob Hermans (1560–1609), who opposed the Calvinist doctrine of predestination.

AT IV TO PRINCESS ELIZABETH, 3 NOVEMBER 1645

330 So seldom do good arguments come my way, not only in the conversations I have in this isolated place[3] but also in the books I consult, that I cannot read those which occur in Your Highness's letters without feeling an extraordinary joy. What is more, I find your arguments so strong that I would rather confess I am overwhelmed by them than attempt to rebut
331 them. For, although the comparison which Your Highness refuses to make to her advantage[4] could be adequately confirmed by experience, yet the virtue of judging others favourably is so praiseworthy, and it fits so well with the generosity that prevents you from wishing to measure the scope of the human mind by the example of the average person, that I am bound to hold both these virtues of yours in very high esteem.

Nor would I venture to contradict what Your Highness writes about repentance. For this is a Christian virtue which serves to make us correct our faults – not only those committed voluntarily, but also those done through ignorance, when some passion has prevented us from knowing the truth.

I agree that the sadness of tragedies would not please as it does if we feared that it might become so excessive as to make us uncomfortable. But when I said that there are passions which are the more useful the more they tend to excess, I only meant to speak of those which are altogether good; as I indicated when I added that they should be subject to reason. There are, indeed, two kinds of excess. There is one which changes the nature of a thing, and turns it from good to bad, and prevents it from remaining subject to reason; and there is another which only increases its quantity,
332 and turns it from good to better. Thus excess of courage is recklessness

3 Egmond–Binnen.

4 In her letter of 28 October, Elizabeth had written: 'You have shown that it is better to know truths which are disadvantageous to us than to be deceived in an agreeable fashion, and that it is only matters allowing different considerations which are equally true which ought to oblige us to dwell upon those which bring us more happiness. Your arguments for these views are so good that I am astonished that you want me to compare myself with others of my age in respect of something which I do not know about, rather than something of which I cannot be ignorant, even though the latter is more advantageous to me' (AT IV 321: see also the letter to Elizabeth, 6 October 1645, p. 268 above).

only when the courage passes the limits of reason; but while remaining within those limits, it can have another kind of excess, which consists in the absence of irresolution and fear.

These last few days I have been thinking about the number and order of all the passions, in order to examine their nature in detail. But I have not yet sufficiently digested my opinions on this topic to dare to tell them to Your Highness. I shall not fail to do so as soon as I can.

As for free will, I agree that if we think only of ourselves we cannot help regarding ourselves as independent; but when we think of the infinite power of God, we cannot help believing that all things depend on him, and hence that our free will is not exempt from this dependence. For it involves a contradiction to say that God has created human beings of such a nature that the actions of their will do not depend on his. It is the same as saying that his power is both finite and infinite: finite, since there is something which does not depend on it; infinite, since he was able to create that independent thing. But just as the knowledge of the existence of God should not take away our certainty of the free will which we experience and feel in ourselves, so also the knowledge of our free will should not 333
make us doubt the existence of God. The independence which we experience and feel in ourselves, and which suffices to make our actions praiseworthy or blameworthy, is not incompatible with a dependence of quite another kind, whereby all things are subject to God.

As for the state of the soul after this life, I am not so well informed as M. Digby.[1] Leaving aside what faith tells us, I agree that by natural reason alone we can make many favourable conjectures and have fine hopes, but we cannot have any certainty. The same natural reason teaches us also that we have always more good than evil in this life, and that we should never leave what is certain for what is uncertain. Consequently, in my opinion, it teaches that though we should not seriously fear death, we should equally never seek it.

I do not need to reply to the objection which theologians may make about the vast extent which I have attributed to the universe, since Your Highness has already replied on my behalf. I will add only that if such a vast extent could make the mysteries of our Faith less credible, the same is true of the vast extent that the astronomers have always attributed to the heavens. They have always thought them so large as to make the earth, by 334
comparison, only a point; yet the objection is never made against them.

If prudence were mistress of events, I do not doubt that Your Highness would succeed in everything she undertakes; but all men would have to be perfectly wise before one could infer from what they ought to do what they

1 See above, p. 251.

will in fact do. At least it would be necessary to know in detail the humour of all those with whom one was to have any dealings. Even that would not be enough, because they have in addition their own free will, whose movements are known only to God. Our judgements about the actions of others are normally based on what we would wish to do ourselves if we were in their place. And so it often happens that ordinary and mediocre minds, being similar to those which they have to deal with, see into their purposes with greater penetration and enable them to succeed in their undertakings more easily than more refined minds do; for the latter, dealing only with those who are inferior in knowledge and prudence, make judgements about matters in an utterly different way. Your Highness should be consoled by this fact when fortune is opposed to your plans.