

doctrines can bear a sound sense. So I wish that men of intellect would seek to gratify their ambition by building up and moving forward, rather than by retreating and destroying. I would rather they emulated the
 101 Romans who built fine public works than that Vandal king whose mother advised him that since he could not hope for renown by rivalling those magnificent structures he should seek to destroy them.

PHIL. §§24-7. When able men have fought against innate truths, their aim has been to prevent others from passing off prejudices and concealing laziness under a high-sounding name.

THEO. We agree about this; for, far from approving the acceptance of doubtful principles, I want to see an attempt to demonstrate even Euclid's axioms, as some of the ancients tried to do. If it be asked how one can know and investigate innate principles, I reply in conformity with what I have said above: apart from the instincts the reason for which is unknown, we must try to reduce them to first principles (i.e. to identical or immediate axioms) by means of definitions, which are nothing but a distinct setting out of ideas. I do not doubt that even your friends, opposed as they have so far been to innate truths, are in favour of this method, which appears to conform to their chief aim.

Chapter iii

'Other considerations concerning innate principles, both speculative and practical.'

PHILALETHES. §3. You would have truths reduced to first principles; and I grant you that if there is any innate principle it is undeniably this: '*It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be [at the same time]*'. But it appears hard to maintain that this is innate, since we must also be convinced 'that impossibility and identity, are two innate ideas'.

102 THEOPHILUS. Those who support innate truths must indeed maintain and be convinced that those ideas are also innate – I acknowledge that that is my own opinion. The ideas of *being*, *possible* and *same* are so thoroughly innate that they enter into all our thoughts and reasoning, and I regard them as essential to our minds. But I have already said that we do not always pay particular attention to them, and that it takes time to sort them out. I have said too that we are so to speak innate to ourselves; and since we are beings, being is innate in us – the knowledge of being is comprised in the knowledge that we have of ourselves. Something very like this holds of other general notions.

PHIL. §4. If the idea of identity is natural,¹ 'and consequently so clear and obvious to us, that we must needs know it even from our cradles; I would

¹ Locke: 'If identity... be a native impression'. Coste's change.

Ch. iii OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

gladly be resolved, by one of seven, or seventy years old, whether a man, being a creature, consisting of soul and body, be the same man, when his body is changed?' And whether, on the supposition of metempsychosis, Euphorbus would be the same as Pythagoras?

THEO. I have said often enough that what is natural to us need not therefore be known from the cradle. Furthermore we can know an idea without being able to settle straight away all the questions which can be raised about it. As if someone were to argue that a child cannot know what a square and its diagonal are because it will have trouble grasping that the diagonal is incommensurable with the side of the square. As for the question itself, it appears to me to be demonstratively settled by the doctrine of monads which I have published elsewhere [e.g. 'On nature itself']; but we shall discuss this matter more fully later [pp. 232 ff].

PHIL. §6. I see that it would be useless to object to you that the axiom according to which 'the whole is bigger than a part' is not innate, on the grounds that the ideas of whole and part are 'relative', and depend on those of number and extension; for you would be likely to maintain that there are logically derivative innate ideas,¹ and that those of number and extension are innate too.

103

THEO. You are right. Indeed my view is rather that the idea of extension is posterior to those of whole and part.

PHIL. §7. What do you say about the truth 'that God is to be worshipped' – is it innate?

THEO. I believe that the duty to worship God implies that at certain times one should indicate that one honours him beyond any other object, and that this follows necessarily from the idea of him and from his existence, which on my theory signifies that this truth is innate.

PHIL. §8. But atheists seem to prove by their example that the idea of God is not innate. Apart from the ones which were 'taken notice of amongst the ancients,' have not whole nations been discovered – such as at the Bay of Saldanha, and in Brazil, the Caribee Islands, and Paraguay – who had no idea of God² nor any names standing for God or the soul?

THEO. The late M. *Fabricius, the well-known Heidelberg theologian, wrote an *Apology* for the human race, to clear it of the charge of atheism. He was a very careful writer and quite above many prejudices. However, I have no intention of getting into this debate about the facts. I will concede that there are whole peoples who have never thought of the supreme substance or of what the soul is. I remember when, at my request, seconded by the distinguished M. *Witsen, someone attempted to obtain for me in

¹ 'idées innées respectives'.

² Locke: 'no notion of a God'. Coste's change.

Holland a version of the Lord's Prayer in the language of Barantola, he got no further than 'hallowed be thy name', because it was impossible to make the Barantolans understand the meaning of 'holy'. I remember too that in the *Credo* written for the Hottentots, it was necessary to use their words for a gentle and pleasant wind to translate 'Holy Spirit'. This is not unreasonable since our Greek and Latin words *pneuma*, *anima*, *spiritus* primarily signify simply the air or wind which one breathes, as being one of the most rarefied things that our senses acquaint us with; one starts with the senses in order to lead men gradually to what is above the senses. However, all these difficulties in the way of attaining abstract knowledge count not at all against innate knowledge. There are people who have no word corresponding to 'being'; does anyone suspect that they do not know what it is to be, granted that they hardly ever think of *being* in isolation? Before I finish, what I have read in our distinguished author about the idea of God is so fine and so much to my liking that I cannot forbear quoting it: 'Men... can scarce avoid having some kind of ideas of those things, whose names, those they converse with, have occasion frequently to mention to them: and if it carry with it the notion of excellency, greatness, or something extraordinary' which engages some part of one's being and is impressed upon the mind under the idea of an absolute and irresistible power which one cannot help fearing (or, I would add, an ultimate goodness which one cannot help loving),¹ then 'the idea is likely to sink the deeper, and spread the farther; especially if it be such an idea, as is agreeable to the [simplest lights]² of reason, and naturally deducible from every part of our knowledge, as that of... God is. For the [brilliant] marks³ of extraordinary wisdom and power, appear so plainly in all the works of the creation, that a rational creature, who will but seriously reflect on them, cannot miss the discovery of [the author of all these wonders]:⁴ and the influence, that the discovery of such a being must [naturally have on the soul]⁵ of all, that have but once heard of it, is so great, and carries' with it thoughts which are so weighty and so fit to be propagated in the world,⁶ 'that it seems stranger to me, that a whole nation of men should be any where found so brutish, as to want the notion of a god; than that they should be without any notion of numbers, or fire.' (*Essay* i.iv.9) I wish that I might copy word for word many other excellent passages from our author which we are obliged to pass over. All I shall say at this point is that this author when he speaks of 'the simplest lights of reason' which are 'agreeable to'

¹ Parenthetical clause added by Leibniz. The unquoted clauses preceding it represent an expansion by Coste.

² Locke: 'common light'. Coste's change.

³ Locke: 'of a God is. For the visible marks'. Coste's changes.

⁴ Locke: 'discovery of a deity'. Coste's change.

⁵ Locke: 'necessarily have on the minds'. Leibniz's adverb, Coste's noun.

⁶ Locke: 'carries such weight of thought and communication with it'. Coste's change.

Ch. iii OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

the idea of God, and of what is 'naturally deducible' from them, appears to differ hardly at all from my own views about innate truths. When he says that it seems to him as strange that there should be men with no idea of God as it would be surprising to find men who had no idea of number or of fire, I would point out that the inhabitants of the Mariana Islands – named after the Queen of Spain, who supported missions to them – had no knowledge of fire at the time that they were discovered. My source is the account which Father *Le Gobien, the French Jesuit in charge of missions to distant lands, has presented to the public and sent to me.

PHIL. §15. 'If it be a reason to think the notion of God innate, because all wise men had it, virtue too must be . . . innate; for wise men have always had' a genuine idea of it.

THEO. It is not virtue but the idea of virtue that is innate. Perhaps that is all that you mean.

PHIL. §16. 'Tis as certain, that there is a god, as that the opposite angles, made by the intersection of two straight lines, are equal. There was never any rational creature, that set himself sincerely to examine the truth of these propositions, that could fail to assent to them: though yet it be past doubt, that there are many men, who having not applied their thoughts that way, are ignorant both of the one and the other.'

THEO. I grant it, but that does not stop them from being innate, i.e. one's being able to find them within oneself.

PHIL. §18. It would be useful also to have an innate idea of *substance*; but in fact we have that neither as innate nor as acquired, since we have it neither by sensation nor by reflection.

THEO. It is my opinion that reflection enables us to find the idea of substance within ourselves, who are substances. And this is an extremely important notion. But perhaps we shall speak of it at greater length later in our discussion.

PHIL. §20. 'If there be any innate ideas . . .¹ in the mind, which the mind does not actually think on; they must [at least] be lodged in the memory, and from thence must be brought into view by remembrance; i.e. must be known, when [the memory of them is conjured up], to have been perceptions in the [*soul] before, unless remembrance can be without remembrance.' For this inner conviction² that such an idea has been in our mind before is strictly 'that, which distinguishes remembering from all other ways of thinking.'

THEO. Knowledge, ideas and truths can be in our minds without our ever having actually thought about them. They are merely natural tendencies,

¹ Locke: 'any innate ideas, any ideas'. Coste's omission.

² Locke: 'this consciousness'. Coste's change.

that is dispositions and attitudes, active or passive, and more than a *tabula rasa*. However, the Platonists did indeed believe that we have already actually thought about everything that we find again within us; to say that we do not remember doing so will not refute them, since certainly countless thoughts come back to us which we have forgotten having had. It once happened that a man thought that he had written original verses, and was then found to have read them word for word, long before, in some ancient poet. And we often have an unusual capacity to conceive certain things because we have conceived them formerly without remembering doing so. A child who has become blind may forget having ever seen light and colours; this is what happened to the famous Ulrich Schönberg at the age of two and a half, as a result of smallpox. He was born in Weiden, in the Upper Palatinate, and died at Königsberg in Prussia in 1649; he taught philosophy and mathematics there and was universally admired. Such a man may well retain the effects of former impressions without remembering them. I think that dreams often revive former thoughts for us in this way. After Julius Scaliger had extolled the eminent men of Verona in verse, a certain man calling himself Brugnolus, who came from Bavaria but had settled in Verona, appeared to him in a dream and complained of having been overlooked. Scaliger, who could not remember having ever before heard of him, nevertheless wrote an elegy in his honour on the authority of this dream. Later his son, Joseph Scaliger, while travelling in Italy, learned in more detail that there had formerly been in Verona a famous grammarian or scholarly critic of this name who had contributed to the restoration of literature in Italy. This story can be found in the elder Scaliger's poems, which include the elegy, and in his son's letters. It is also presented in *Scaligerana*, which has been put together from Joseph Scaliger's conversations. It is very likely that Julius Scaliger had had some knowledge of Brugnol and no longer remembered it, and that his dream had in part consisted in reviving a former idea – although there had not occurred that 'remembering', strictly so-called, which makes us know that we have had that same idea before. At least, I see nothing which compels us to insist that no traces of a perception remain just because there are not enough left for one to remember that one has had it.

PHIL. I must acknowledge that you reply naturally enough to the objections which we have made to innate truths. Perhaps, then, our authors do not deny them in the same sense in which you maintain them. So I shall merely reiterate, sir, that §24. there has been some reason to fear that the belief in innate truths may serve as an excuse to ease 'the lazy from the pains of search,' and may let masters and teachers, for their own convenience, 'make this the principle of principles, that principles must not be questioned'.

Ch. iii OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

THEO. I have already said that if *that* is your friends' purpose, to urge us to look for the proofs of truths which admit of them, whether or not they are innate, then I entirely agree. The belief in innate truths, taken in my way, should not distract anyone from that; not only is it good to look for the explanation of instincts, but it is one of my chief maxims that it is good to look for the demonstrations even of axioms. I remember that in Paris, when they laughed at the late M. *Roberval, who was old by then, because he wanted to demonstrate Euclid's axioms following the examples of Apollonius and Proclus, I showed the importance of such an inquiry. As for the 'principle' of those who say that we should never argue with people who deny principles, it does not wholly apply to any principles except those which can be neither doubted nor proved. Of course, restrictions may be imposed on public disputes and certain other assemblies, in order to prevent outrages and disturbances; and under these it may be forbidden to question certain established truths. But this is a matter of public order rather than of philosophy.