

Translations of Malebranche by Gordon H. Clark

Malebranche, I, 3, p 42      “never take...your own sentiments for our ideas, the modifications which touch your soul for the ideas which enlighten all spirits. That is the greatest of all precepts for avoiding confusion. You never contemplate the ideas without discerning some truth; but no matter what attention you pay to your own modifications, they will never enlighten you...

... the divine Logos, as universal reason, includes in his substance the primordial ideas of all beings created and possible...all intelligences who are united with the sovereign reason find in him some of these ideas, insofar as it pleases God to reveal them to them. This occurs because of general laws which he has established to make us rational, and to produce among us and with him a certain society...

But perhaps you have not sufficiently reflected on the difference between the intelligible ideas which the universal reason foresees and our own feeling or modifications of our souls, [a difference] which one might perhaps think is useless to examine carefully.

“Indeed...There is a difference between the light of our ideas and the obscurity of our sentiments, between knowledge and sensation. It is necessary to become accustomed to notice that difference with ease. Whoever has not sufficiently reflected on that difference, always believing he has clear knowledge of what he vividly senses, can only wander in the darkness of his own modifications. For, and grasp well this important truth, man is not his own light. His substance, far from enlightening him, is itself unintelligible to him. Man knows nothing except by the light of reason. By reason I always mean that universal reason who enlightens all minds by the intelligible ideas that he reveals in his illuminating substance.”

Malebranche I, 3, p 43

“Created reason, our soul, the human spirit, the purest and most sublime intelligences can indeed see the light; but they cannot produce it or draw it from their own resources; they cannot generate it from their own substance. They can discover the eternal truths, immutable and necessary, in the divine logs, in the eternal wisdom, immutable and necessary, but they can find only sentiments, often lively, but always obscure and confused, only modalities full of darkness. In a word, they cannot by contemplation of themselves, discover truth. They cannot nourish themselves out of their own substance. They can find the life of intelligences only in the universal reason which animates all spirits.”

“...It is solely the divine logos who enlightens us by the intelligible ideas which he possesses; for there are not two or several wisdoms, two or several universal reasons. Truth is immutable, necessary, eternal, the same in time and eternity, the same among us and foreigners, the same in heaven and in hell. The eternal logos speaks the same language to all people, to the Chinese and to the Tartars as to the French and Spanish; and if they are not equally enlightened it is because they are unequally attentive.

p. 44

“God ... knows pain because he know what that modification of the soul is, in which pain consists. He knows it because it is he alone because it is he would causes it in us... He knows it because his knowledge has no limits. But he does not sense it, for then he would be unhappy. To know pain, therefore, is not to sense it.”

p 45. "... if one insists that to feel pain is to know it, at least agree that it is not to know it clearly, it is not to know it by the light [of God] and by evidence, in a word, it is not to know its nature, and thus, to speak exactly, it is not to know it. To feel pain, for example, is to feel unhappy, without well knowing either what it is, or what is that modality of our being which makes us unhappy. But to know is to have a clear idea of the nature of the object [known] and to discover its verbal relationships by light and by evidence."

"I know clearly the parts of space because I can see evident their relationships. I see clearly that similar triangles have their sides proportional, that there is no plane triangle whose three angles are not equal to two rights. I see these truths clearly, or there relationships, in the idea or archetype of extension; for this idea is so luminous that it is by contemplating it that geometers and good physicists are produced; and it is so production of truths that all spirits in concert will never exhaust it."

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"It is not the same with my own being. I have no idea of it. I do not see its archetype I cannot discover the relationships of the modifications which affect my spirit. I cannot, by turning myself toward myself, recognize any of my faculties or capacities. The interior experience which I have of myself teaches me that I am, that I think, that I will, that I sense, that I suffer, etc., but it does not let me know what I am, the nature of my thought, of my will, of my feelings, my passions, my pain, nor the relations these things have among themselves, because ????? a glance having no idea of my soul and failing to see in it its archetype in the divine logos, I cannot in contemplating it discover either what it is, nor the modalities of which it is capable, nor indeed the relationships among these modalities, relationships which I sense vividly without knowing them. All this...because...I am not my own light, my substance and my modalities are nothing but darkness, and God has not seen fit, for many reasons, to reveal to me the idea or archetype which represents the nature of spiritual beings; for if my substance were intelligible by itself or in itself, if it were luminous, if it could enlighten me,...certainly I could see by contemplating myself that I am capable of being touched by such and such sentiments which I have never experienced, and of which I shall perhaps never have any knowledge. I would not have had need [if my substance were intelligible or luminous in itself] of a concert to know the sweetness of harmony; and although I had never tasted a certain fruit, I could have – I do not say sensed, but known with evidence the nature of the feeling it excites in me. But since we cannot know the nature of the entities except in the reason which ????? them in an intelligible manner, although I cannot sense myself except in myself, it is only in it [reason] that I can discover what I am and the modalities of which m nature is susceptible, and with greater reason, it is only in it that I can discover the principles of the sciences and all the truth capable of illuminating the spirit."

p 47.

"Ariste [the student] ... I believe that there are essential differences between knowing and sensing, between ideas that enlighten the spirit and the sentiments which touch it; I agree that although I sense myself only in myself, I cannot know what I am except in the reason which contains the archetype of my being and the intelligible ideas of all things."

VII Theodore [the teacher] ... distinguish, but distinguish well between our ideas and our sentiments [= feelings, opinions, sensations ?] Another point: distinguish well and all those entertaining fictions ... will not lead you into error. Always rise above yourself. Your modalities are only shadows: remember it! Rise higher, as for reason, and you will see light. Silence your senses, your imaginations, and your passions, and you will here the ??????? of inferior truths, the clear and evident replies of our

common master. Never confuse the clarity which results from the comparison of ideas with the vividness of sentiments which touch and shake us. The more lively our sentiments are, the more they spread darkness. The more our fantasies are terrible or agreeable, the more they appear to have bodies and reality, the more dangerous they are and apt to seduce us. Dissipate and defy them. In a word, flee everything that touches you, and run and attach yourself to everything that enlightens you. One must follow reason in spite of the ??????, the menaces, the insults, of the body to which we are united ... “ [Man does not teach man. It is because I am not your master or your doctor [professor]. I am only a monitor, vehement perhaps, but not very exact and not well heard. I speak to your ears. Apparently I only make too much noise. But our only master does not yet???? early enough to your spirit, or rather reason speaks to it [your spirit] without ceasing and very precisely; but, for lack of attention you do not understand well enough what it says.