FOUCHER/DESGABETS

translations from the Cartesian debate

Walter Ott

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Translations from the Cartesian debate on Ideas and Representation

Selected and translated by Walter Ott

July 29, 2020
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PREFACE

While waiting for the first draft of (what I hope will be) my next book to cool, I decided to put a bit more work into these translations and make them public. My hope is that other researchers and teachers will find them interesting and maybe even useful.

Anyone new to these figures might start with chapter 3 (the sixth supposition). Not only is this one of the rare explicit discussions of the nature of representation in the modern period, it also shows Foucher in top form.

INTRODUCTION

By any measure, Descartes's *Meditations* (1641) and *Principles of Philosophy* (1647) mark a clear division in the history of the philosophy of mind. His departures from the scholastics are profound. But the details of his view – especially what ideas are, and how they can represent anything – are, to say the least, obscure. For Descartes often borrows the terminology of his predecessors without making clear what it could mean in the context of his own view. And he at times exaggerates the degree to which he and the Aristotelians agree. Subsequent philosophers could claim to be following in his footsteps while advancing the most divergent views.

By the 1670s, the battle was on. Both Nicolas Malebranche (1638-1715) and Dom Robert Desgabets (1610-1678) take themselves to be following Descartes's insights to their logical conclusions, though they could hardly disagree more on what those conclusions are. When the sharp-tongued skeptic Simon Foucher (1644-1696) takes aim at Malebranche and Descartes in 1675, he seizes on a series of issues around ideas and representation that are still with us today. In Foucher's own time, his attacks would be taken up by George Berkeley, among others. But they are fascinating in their own right, as are Desgabets's efforts to parry them.

With the exception of the excerpts from Foucher's initial volley (1675), the texts below have never before, to my knowledge, been translated into English. But why translate them now? Someone might well argue that anyone interested enough in Foucher and Desgabets to be reading this already has, in all likelihood, a command of French. Add access to google books or Gallica, and this work looks like a waste of time.

There are two potential and overlapping audiences. First are people interested in the modern debate over ideas and representation who in fact don't happen to read French, or who do but would like to have in one place the relevant excerpts, along with some unobtrusive commentary, to see whether looking at the originals is worth their time.

Second are teachers of modern philosophy. The back-and-forth among these figures makes a refreshing change from the massive, often self-contained works that characterize much of the rest of such a course. For example, one could easily work in chapter 3 (the high point of the debate, from my point of view) between Descartes and Berkeley, even if the students aren't reading any Malebranche. (As we'll see, Malebranche's positive views are largely irrelevant to the debate: Foucher's arrows are really aimed at Descartes.)

THE DEBATE

The debate begins with Simon Foucher's *Critique of the Search After Truth, in which is examined at the same time a part of the* Principles *of Mr. Descartes* (Paris: Martin Coustelier, 1675). As the title indicates, Foucher takes aim both at Descartes's *Principles of Philosophy* (1644) and at Nicolas Malebranche's *The Search After Truth*, the first half of which was published in 1674. Foucher appears to have been unaware that he was reading only half a book. Malebranche himself, in the preface to the 1675 edition of the second part of the *Search*, mocks and insults Foucher, on this point and others ('When one critiques a book, it seems to me that he should have read it first'). I include Malebranche's brief responses below.

Dom Robert Desgabets undertakes a proper reply in his *Critique of the Critique of the* Search After Truth*, in which one discovers the path to solid knowledge* (Paris: Jean Depuis, 1675); (Malebranche himself wanted nothing to do with Desgabets; their views differ as much as Malebranche's and Descartes's). Foucher answers four years later with his *New dissertation on the search after truth, containing a response to the critique of the critique of the search after truth, wherein are revealed the errors of the dogmatists, both ancient and modern* (Paris: Robert J.B. de la Caille, 1679).

The nice thing about this exchange is that all parties keep to the initial structure of Foucher's 1675 critique. That book is organized around a series of numbered 'suppositions,' claims common to Descartes and Malebranche (or so Foucher thinks) that he wishes to challenge.

The most interesting suppositions by far are numbers four through seven. So rather than present each work as one, I've decided to translate just these suppositions and interleave them. For example, we start with Foucher's fourth supposition (1675), then look at Desgabets's response to that supposition (1675), and then Foucher's reply to Desgabets (1679) on that same supposition. This allows a kind of head-to-head comparison that would otherwise require a lot of flipping around. I preface each supposition with a short introduction.

I've also decided to include Desgabets's short 'Treatise on Sensible Qualities' (chapter five), which provides a quick summary of the relevant bits of his position.

A quick word on the translations: Foucher's 1675 *Critique* is available in a translation by Richard Watson.[1] After completing my own translation, I checked it against his and sometimes followed his example. Translations from Malebranche's *The Search After Truth* are those of T. Lennon and P. Olscamp.[2] References to Descartes are to the edition of Adam and Tannery.[3]

On pagination: numbers in brackets refer to the pages of the original French texts, which you can get through google books or Gallica. The exception is Malebranche's preface to the 1675 appearance of part two of the *Search*; the pages are unnumbered, so I use the pages of the scanned version.

[1] (Watson and Grene 1995).
[2] (Malebranche 1997).
[3] (Descartes 1897). English translations are from Descartes (1984).

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1. THE FOURTH SUPPOSITION: Of the pure understanding

In the sixth of his Meditations*, Descartes distinguishes between the intellect and the imagination. '[W]hen the mind understands, it in some way turns toward itself and inspects one of the ideas that are within it; but when it imagines, it turns toward the body and looks at something in the body that conforms to an idea understood by the mind or perceived by the senses' (AT VII 73). Roughly, Descartes's claim – most clearly set out in his unpublished* Le Monde *– is that imagination requires a body, for it consists in the mind's attending to a resemblance or picture traced in the brain. Although it sounds silly to us, something like that was a commonplace in the seventeenth century and can be found in earlier authors (Aquinas, for examples, talks of the need of the mind to 'turn toward' the phantasms, which are literal, corporeal images).*[4] *In the replies to Gassendi, Descartes clarifies his view: '[t]he pure understanding both of corporeal and incorporeal things occurs without any corporeal semblance* ['speciem corpoream']. *In the case of the imagination, however, which can have only corporeal things as its object, we do indeed require a semblance which is a real body: the mind applies itself to this semblance but does not receive it' (AT VII 387). It is these 'corporeal semblances,' which Foucher calls 'traces,' that allow the mind to imagine and to remember what it has imagined. Foucher will argue that, as far as our evidence goes, even the pure understanding or intellect depends on brain traces; indeed, all thinking, as far as we can tell, might consist in these traces.*

1.1 Foucher, 1675

[35] The fourth supposition concerns the different ways in which we can know.

The Author proposes three: the senses, [36] the imagination, and pure understanding. As for the first two, he is free to suppose them, for you don't need to be a philosopher to know that we have senses and we can imagine. But as for what knowledge by pure understanding might be, only Philosophy can teach us. We wouldn't know to achieve this knowledge without having acquired the science of the nature of our soul, and without having discovered in it whether or not the soul can function without the organs of our body.

But when we are still occupied with the search for the method of discovering the truth, it is obvious that we shouldn't pronounce on this point.

First, it is impossible to be certain from experience that our soul doesn't simply consist of traces in our brains when the soul exercises the operations we call simple intellections. {...} [37] In the second place, we have good reason to think that even in simple intellections, the soul forms traces, figures, and movements in the organs of the brain that are destined for the imagination.

For experience teaches that these organs are not less fatigued by simple intellections than by imaginations.

Moreover, it is obvious that if these operations left no traces in the brain, we often could not [38] remember having performed them, whereas we easily remember having formed the conception of a thousand-sided figure, and that might have been formed by the nature of the mind.

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[4] As we'll see below, Desgabets holds the same view: 'in imagination we apply ourselves to an image formed in the brain, in which one perceives some real and 'entitative' resemblance with the object, as they say in the Schools.'

The Author[5] supposes this truth, in the course of which he speaks of the fault of memory that happens during fainting spells one sometimes falls into. 'Thus,' says he, 'the soul not having any thoughts of pure intellection without leaving a trace in the brain, one does not remember them on being revived.'[6] And here he admits that brain traces are necessary for memory, and that the thoughts of pure intellection leave no such traces.

From all of this, it follows infallibly that one cannot remember the thoughts of pure intellection, since they leave no traces in the brain, as he remarks in the third chapter of his first book, where he speaks of the soul. 'By the pure understanding the soul perceives spiritual things, universals, common notions, [39] the idea of perfection, the idea of a perfect infinite being, and all its thoughts such as its natural inclinations, its passions, and its perceptions. By the pure understanding the soul even perceives material things, extension with its properties, because only the pure understanding can perceive a circle, a perfect square, a thousand-sided figure, and similar things. These sorts of perceptions are called pure intellections or pure perceptions because the mind does not form corporeal images in the brain to represent all these things.'[7]

From this we can conclude that we would have no memory of any of these subjects; and this is to declare simply that we would have no knowledge (*sciences*) of them. For we cannot, if what the author says is true, remember the thoughts we had of them, or of our reflections on the mind, on universals, on general notions, on the being of God, on matter itself, on extension or its properties: for there would be no faculty of understanding [40] sufficient for this system, which could perceive spirits, or a circle, or a perfect square, a thousand-sided figure, etc.

How could we form these Meditations on all things, retaining our notions, establishing our principles, generating questions, disputing, even simply having any fixed idea that we could examine?

What is more important, if what he says is true, then we cannot even speak of all that he takes to be the objects of the intellect alone. For, 'since the mind does not form images in the brain to represent all things,' there remain no vestiges or traces of the thoughts he has of these things. From which it follows that since words signify only by the convention of man, having no images fixed [in traces in the brain], we would not be able to join those images to words, and still less could we accustom men to conceive always the same thing solely by the pronunciation of certain words that are indifferent in themselves to [41] all sorts of significations.

1.2 Malebranche (1675)

[50] In the fourth article or chapter, the author fights hard throughout against my claims about knowledge. He doesn't see that there are two kinds of traces, one which the mind forms to represent things to itself, like the trace that accompanies the idea of a square. The others, which accompany abstract ideas, do not represent them, like the traces that the sounds of

[5] By 'the Author,' Foucher always means Malebranche.
[6] Malebranche (1997, 203).
[7] Malebranche (1997, 16-17).

words and the sight of characters produces in the brain, which have no power to represent or to reveal ideas. The great reasonings of our Author are destroyed by this distinction.

1.3 Desgabets (1675)

[91] The fourth supposition comes in the discussion of the different manners of knowing, which gives our author the opportunity to say things that are fundamental in the *Search After Truth* [henceforth 'SAT']. Typically, we reduce these manners to three: sensation, imagination, and pure intellection. You only attack what the Author of the SAT says about pure intellection, because you recognize that one doesn't have to be a [92] philosopher to know what is given by sensation, and what we are capable of imagining.

First, I declare, as regards pure intellection, taken in the sense of the author of the SAT for an operation independent of body: you are right in all that you say to combat this opinion, and I grant you that it is impossible to assure oneself by experience that the imagination does not create traces on the brain when one exercises the operations that are here being taking for pure intellections. I also find equally true what you say about the experience that teaches us that our organs are no less fatigued by simple intellections than they can be by imagination, and that memory conserves the most metaphysical kinds of thoughts, which is an infallible sign [93] that they are joined to the traces in the brain just as much as the other kinds of thoughts.

But if one wants to give an exact doctrine about our manners of knowing, one must speak entirely otherwise and assign their difference not by looking at their different objects, or the causes of our ideas, but by the different manners of knowing. It thus seems that it is true to say that…there are only two general ways of perceiving things, namely, knowing by pure intellection or imagination. For sensation, by which we have originally come by all our knowledge, pertains sometimes to one, sometimes the other. Very clear experience teaches us that the faculties of knowing sometimes reach their objects immediately, and that in such a case one has [94] an idea without envisioning any intermediary or image in order to perceive it, as happens when we think of the divine perfections, or of the truths of faith and philosophy. By contrast, in imagination we apply ourselves to an image formed in the brain, in which one perceives some real and 'entitative' resemblance with the object, as they say in the Schools.

As to the exterior senses (of which the interior ones are like doubles, which maintain and renew their action), one must speak entirely otherwise than we have until now, since there is nothing altogether more known and unknown, where the very clear notions that one has [95] are obscured by false judgments. This gives me occasion to say in passing, Sir, that your Academy is absolutely inexcusable in amusing itself with mere bagatelles when it can find solid foundations for knowledge in the consideration of the nature of our senses that one can know without philosophizing.

Let us look, if you please, at what happens most clearly and certainly in the action of our senses, and consider what happens to a man who is burned, who receives a wound, who eats some good meat, &c. First, we can see that the exterior things and the organs of our bodies have the power to give us an infinity of different perceptions and sensations in virtue of the union of the soul and body, which consists in their mutual action [96] on one another. Whereupon I must add in passing that, God being recognized as the general mover, we must not be stopped short by the difficulty that some people create here, who say that the way in

which body gives the mind its thoughts, and the soul voluntary movements to the body, is inconceivable. It seems that this difficulty is not so great, since God takes part in this action and we have of this action an intuitive experience. We must then recognize that the fire, the wound, and the meat of which we have spoken make [the soul] have a very vivid sensation of pain and pleasure, and that this sensation does not exist at all without the subject, and being considered *in abstracto* only by metaphysicians, this action of the senses gives very clear knowledge of the soul or, perhaps better put, of the person herself who perceives that she has this pain or pleasure, [97] and who knows herself intuitively in this respect. For who does not see that this knowledge must count as pure intellection, since its object, being very spiritual, cannot be imagined, and indeed one cannot form any corporeal image of pleasure or pain, nor of anything which is both the subject and object?

This simple doctrine being adopted, one can draw many necessary and important consequences that will settle our disputes. First, it follows that there are some knowings[8] that come to us from the senses that must count as very pure intellections; and that, since it is no less certain that the senses sometimes form and at other times give occasion to form images in the brain which one looks at in order to imagine by their [98] means a corporeal object, one must say that the senses provide for both intellection and imagination.

Second, it follows that it is properly the senses that give us this intellectual knowledge, because it is clear that they provide the perceptions in question, and it is indubitable that these perceptions are our ideas or thoughts, i.e., that they true knowings of ourselves insofar are as we are in that state. It is true that I here distance myself from the author of SAT, who denies the name 'idea' to our perceptions and sensations. But it seems to me that it would be to distance oneself even further from reason and experience to say that in order to feel pleasure or pain, one requires something other than pleasure or pain themselves.[99] Indeed, we sense in ourselves that there is no idea of pleasure or pain that can be distinguished from pleasure and pain themselves, unless one thinks expressly and reflectively. Thus it comes to those who remind themselves in memory of the pleasure or pains of the past; for one knows that in this case and others like it, an idea becomes the object of another idea.

Third, it follows that these perceptions are very spiritual and pure passions of the understanding that the soul doesn't create, but receives. So one must attribute to the body a true power to act on the soul, and to give it all sorts of thoughts or ideas, which are equally immaterial. And even though all intellections, without exception, come originally from the senses, they do not resemble anything that [100] takes place in the senses, so we will discuss them further on.

Fourth, it follows that it is only an equivocation that fools the Academicians and an infinity of others, all of whom call the object of the senses or of sensation the exterior object that acts on us, even though that object is often not well known to us. For whereas it is not necessary to give the name 'object' to the thing that is known, it is still reasonable; and therefore it is the man insofar as he has sensations who is their object, since he knows himself very well as such by the action of the senses, even if the exterior things is known as well. And since this exterior thing is known only rarely, it would be to abandon what is clear in our knowledge of ourselves

[8] I realize this isn't idiomatic English; there's nothing else that quite does the job of '*connoissances*.' Just rendering it as 'knowledge' sacrifices the sense of *acts* of knowing.

and to confuse oneself about exterior things [101] that one regards as objects of knowledge even they are not at all known, except under the very vague and confused notion of something that acts on us.

Fifth, it follows that even those who are disabused of their errors regarding the alleged corporeal qualities, which we have spoken of above, have not entirely avoided the trap that one finds here, for it is difficult to come to know truths that are contrary to prejudices unless one thinks of them often and seriously, in order to apply them to the subjects that present themselves. Thus the habit that one has formed of taking for the object of sense exterior things that act on us, because one thinks one perceives there the alleged corporeal qualities of heat, light, color, sound, &c., leads us to believe [102] that exterior things are always the objects of the knowledge that the senses give to us, and that sensing is a unique way of knowing that cannot be reduced to imagination or to pure intellection. This in turn leads us to believe that the soul or, better, the man is not the true object of sensation, and that a sensation is not a true idea at all; from which one draws a disastrous conclusion, namely, that man does not know himself, and does not know what he is.

Sixth, it follows that the exterior objects are sometimes the true objects of the senses, and that one knows them clearly by their means: which you might notice if it pleases you, Sir, because you suppose that the senses never make us know such objects as they are in themselves. You have perhaps [103] followed the author of SAT, who is absolutely against the use of the senses for knowing the truth. However, since many times the senses make us perceive that which is efficacious in exterior objects, we were right in saying so, when they are in those objects. Thus when they act on us, and we think of bodies, movement, rest, figure, arrangement of parts, and of all that can result from their assemblage, all of this is the object of a distinct knowing and of a very pure intellection that sensation gives us, and we have as clear an idea as any.

Seventh, it follows that all our knowings or ideas that the senses give us (and there are no others) are absolutely immaterial. One must not [104] imagine that sensation that makes us know ourselves as having heat or pain, does less than the voice of a Preacher or Philosopher who gives us knowledge of the ideas of God, of mysteries, of natural truths, &c. All that comes equally by the senses: *Fides ex auditu*:[9] and the blind would be able to speak of colors if the senses did not give us the most spiritual of our ideas.

1.4 Foucher (1679)

[20] Since you approve, Sir, what I say in this chapter I have nothing to defend. {...} [22] Nevertheless, you propose seven points concerning sensation. Allow me to examine them.

The first is that objects produce in us pain and pleasure, and cause in us pure intellections, because pain is spiritual, you say, and pleasure spiritual as well.

If you call all the ways our soul can exist 'pure intellections,' I grant you that sense causes in us pure intellections. But watch out, lest you are obliged to agree, for the same reason, that the ideas that accompany the brain images are themselves ideas of pure intellection, [23] because they are ways of being[10] of our soul and all of those ways, whatever they may be, are just as

[9] Romans 10:17: 'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'
[10] 'Ways of being' is sometimes translated here as 'modes,' since modes are ways a substance has of existing.

'spiritual' as all the others. In other words, they are all equally of the nature of the soul regardless of what this nature may be, which we do not yet know.

If you call all acts of knowledge that count as ways of being of our soul 'pure intellections,' I say to you that, according to this position, we have only one means of knowing, and that, whether by sense or imagination, the only things we know immediately are these ways of being of our soul.

In the second place, you remark that it is, properly speaking, sense that gives us our intellectual knowledge.

It is true that we come [to knowledge] on the occasion of the changes that objects produce in [24] us by means of the organs of sense, but I think that either you are equivocating on the word 'sense' or else this point reduces to the one that follows.

In the third place, you insist that we must attribute to bodies 'a true power of acting on our senses, and of giving to them all sorts of thoughts or ideas.'

This is astonishing, Sir, since in other places you claim that God is the sole mover of bodies and that bodies do not have even the power to produce movement in one another. And yet you recognize 'nevertheless a true power in bodies of acting on our Soul, and of giving to them all sorts of thoughts or ideas'! You are in part in agreement with Mr. Descartes. But your proposition is more general than his. He claims only that some ideas come to us from exterior objects. And you claim that all of them come from [25] such objects 'without exception because our soul does not make them, but receives them.' {...}

But to know whether God produces these ideas in the soul on the occasion of movements that are in the brain or if these movements truly produce ideas is something I do not undertake to decide here. I leave it to the Cartesians to defend Mr. Descartes on this point. It seems to me however that one cannot decide this question without knowing the essence of the Soul and of matter.

In the fourth place, you complain that 'an equivocation has fooled the Academicians and infinity of others with them who call an object of sense that exterior thing that acts on us.' Instead, we must recognize [26] 'that it is man himself who is the proper object of sense.' This reflection us judicious, Sir, but you should know that the Academicians made it a very long time ago. So far from being fooled by this equivocation, on the contrary, they make the same charge themselves against the Dogmatists, who, they say, fall into the very error you repeat. Nevertheless, permit me to tell you that you fall into this error yourself, as we will see in your sixth point.

Fifth, you claim that the error of taking external things for the objects of our senses has the consequence 'that man does not know himself and does not know what he is.' Even when we recognize that man knows by sense only the different ways [27] of being of which he is capable, this is not sufficient to show that man grasps the essence and nature of the soul, even less that of matter. If anything, this point only leads to the sentiments of the Academicians, who deny that the senses judge the truth of things outside of us!

In the sixth place, you claim that 'exterior things are sometimes the true objects of sense, and that we know them clearly by their means.' These exterior things that the senses make us know are figures, you say, motions and extension. {...} You claim however that the objects of these sorts of sensations are not man, but material objects outside of man! And this is to concede [28] something of advantage to the Academicians, whose error you remarked upon in the fourth point.

Finally, the seventh thing you remark is that 'all the knowings or ideas that we attribute to the senses are absolutely immaterial, especially since there are no others.' I concede this point, but the word 'immaterial' is joined to a very obscure idea, and we will never know what this immaterial being is until we know the essence of the soul and of matter.

We can nevertheless be assured without fear of being misled, that all our ideas are of the nature of the soul just as every way a thing has of being are of that being's nature. [29] Moreover, we can still say that we have in us a single manner of knowing that we call 'sense,' when objects act on us.

We call this way of knowing 'imagination' when we know the images produced in our brain by objects subsisting outside of us in the absence of these objects. And we call it 'intellection' when the traces that are in our brain are too feeble, confused or fleeting to compose what one properly calls images, and to be joined to determinate and fixed ideas.[11]

[11] I take Foucher to be (mockingly) inverting the Cartesian equation of sense and imagination with confusion, and intellection with clarity and distinctness.

2. THE FIFTH SUPPOSITION: Of ideas that represent things outside of us

Here, Foucher presses two key points. The first, which will become the focus of supposition six, turns on the means by which ideas are meant to represent external objects. Like many of his contemporaries and predecessors, including the scholastics and Descartes himself, Foucher assumes that representation requires resemblance. Foucher argues that there is no way for a mode ('a way of being,' in the Cartesian scheme) of a mind to resemble a mode of a material object. (This is the same line of thought Berkeley advances in his 'likeness' argument; see The Principles of Human Knowledge, *Part I, §8.)*

The second point asks how we can be sure that some of our ideas have a source external to us, and even if we can, how we could know anything about what that source might be in itself. In reply, Desgabets presses his own version of 'direct realism,' which rejects the claim that we are only immediately acquainted with our own mental states. For more of Desgabets's positive view, see chapter 5 below.

2.1 Foucher, 1675

[44] The fifth supposition is that we have in us two sorts of ideas, ideas that represent things outside of us, and others that represent what is in us.

It seems that this assumption is widespread, and many regard it as incontestable; nevertheless, it contains the most difficult problems to resolve in the science of ideas.

For as the Author rightly notes, all our ideas are nothing but ways of existing of our soul.[12] We know nothing immediately and truly but these ideas, as he remarks often and justly, when he claims that by this word 'idea,' we mean 'what the mind immediately perceives.'[13] From which we can conclude that it [45] is not so easy as he imagines to say which ways of being of our mind represent matter and things outside of us, on one hand, and which represent things in us on the other. For these two sorts of ideas belong to us equally and are, properly speaking, nothing but our soul disposed in such-and-such a way.

But it is still our soul, and since our soul is a being (according to the first supposition)[14] that has nothing in it resembling matter and extended objects, it is difficult to conceive how it could represent anything other than its own ideas.

The Author rightly remarks that the senses do not make us know things outside of us. This is because objects contain nothing in them that resembles that which they produce in us, for matter cannot have any ways of being that resemble those of which the soul is capable.

But the same reasoning shows that [46] we ought not to judge objects outside of us anymore by the ideas of imagination or intellection, than by sense.

For if matter isn't capable of having ways of being that resemble those of matter, it is equally true that the soul cannot have resemblances of those modes that *can* be in matter.

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[12] Foucher here lumps Descartes and Malebranche together as 'the Author'; but Foucher must be thinking of the Descartes of the *Principles*. Malebranche thinks ideas are solely in the mind of God, and couldn't be further from Descartes on this point, as he will testily point out (2.2).

[13] Malebranche (1997, 2).

[14] Namely, that the soul is an immaterial substance.

My opponent will say that the soul in one way represents matter and in another does not. But this response is not open in the context of the system we are examining, in which we suppose that the soul isn't capable of having *any* mode that resembles the ways of being of matter. From which it obviously follows that either all of our ideas represent material objects or none do. And that destroys all the pretensions of this Work.

But let's see where these ideas that represent things outside of us are supposed to come from [the senses, the imagination, or the intellect].

[47] Our Author doesn't claim that they come to us from the senses, and what he says on that score is not unreasonable. Really, our senses only allow us to know that which objects produce in us, and not what these objects may be in themselves.

Still, the Author claims that we can know material objects by imagination and pure intellection.

But already we can see that must be wrong, since imagination isn't capable of presenting to us objects outside of us. And here is the reason: imagination is only made up of ideas we have received, or at least can receive, by the senses. And these ideas, as the Author recognizes, represent only the effects objects produce in us, and not what these objects are in themselves. From which it follows that since he doesn't claim that ideas of sense represent objects, he must [48] admit that the ideas of the imagination cannot represent anything other than our soul's own ways of being.

It's also evident that the imagination contains nothing but ideas we receive by sense. Even the Author recognizes this, when he says that the only difference between ideas of sense and imagination is that the latter are less strong and vivid than the former.

There remains only pure intellection, the final place in which we might find ideas that represent [things outside of us]. It's also on this way of knowing that the Author bases his hope for discovering external objects, as one can see from the third book [of SAT], where he claims that we see all things in God. But although that is a hypothesis we will not discuss at present, we must consider what it is on which he bases this Supposition, namely, that we know things outside of us, since it concerns all the ways by which we are capable of knowing objects. And [49] after he has refuted all the other ways but his own, he concludes that his own is the most acceptable. And here we say that if he didn't start with the assumption that we can know things outside of ourselves, his reasonings would have no effect.

Still, he wouldn't be the first to fall into that trap. There are very few authors, among all those who have written before him, who do not presuppose the very same thing.

But they have no more right to this assumption than a blind man would if he reasoned thus: *I do not see light when I'm standing; I don't see it when I'm sitting; I don't see it when I turn to the left or right; therefore, I will see it when I bend over*. No one could find that argument convincing. Its fault consists in the simple assumption that a blind man wouldn't easily make, since he's already sure that he cannot see light. In our case, we are not sure [50] whether we can or cannot enjoy the truth.

2.2 Malebranche, 1675
In his fifth supposition, he foists upon me many beliefs I do not hold. It is simply not true that 'I hold that all our ideas are nothing but ways of being [51] of our soul.' I claim on the contrary in the third Book that he critiques, a chapter expressly for proving that that opinion is untenable. When one critiques a book, it seems to me that he should have read it first.

Nor is it true that I claim 'that the ideas we receive by sense, only represent [their objects] to us as effects that exterior objects produce in us': I say just the opposite in many places, in the fifteenth chapter of Book one and elsewhere. What does he quote to the contrary? Or did he not bother to examine what he was critiquing?

As for the rest, I just don't understand his reasoning....

2.3 Desgabets, 1675
[104] It is not only in the reasoning philosophers have made about the senses that they have obscured by vain speculations what is best known by experience: the [105] same happens to them with regard to those ideas that are nothing other than our thoughts, and which therefore are the best known things possible. Thus those who begin their discussion of ideas by remarking that we have in us two sorts of ideas, one which represent things outside of us and the other that represent only what is in us, do not enter into the matter by a well-chosen route. For it is obvious that this difference is purely accidental to our ideas {...}

Let us see, Sir, what [106] you say about our ideas, and first avoid the trap that you, as much as the author of SAT, set for us, when you say that our ideas are only ways of being of our soul, and that we only immediately and truly know these ideas. {...} Among the faults of this opinion is this: that it makes it appropriate to doubt the reality of things one knows, since on your account it seems that one doesn't properly speaking know them at all, and that our knowings have for their true object only our own ideas. But it is easy to dispel this cloud in reminding people of good faith and experience that we think directly, immediately, and truly of things we think of, and that we very rarely think of our own thoughts or ideas. Who is the geometer who thinks of his own thoughts, rather than of a circle, etc.? Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that when one knows something one knows that one knows, but this doesn't have to be by means of an idea distinct from this [original] knowledge itself, unless this is one of those cases where one's thought or idea becomes the object of another thought, which we'll get to when we talk of the soul and its operations.

I shall pause here at what you say often enough [108], that our ideas are only the way our soul is, because I don't see how you can draw from this anything that aids your cause. Indeed there is no mystery in saying that our ideas are not the substance of the soul itself but modes, ways, or accidents. Only in God are thoughts subsistent things, because they are not distinct from his essence. I would say the same of the following supposition, the resemblance of our ideas to the things they represent. But since you insist again on the senses, which do not make us know, according to you, the things outside us, I would say to you that the senses make us always know the things they make us think of: that often they only make us think of ourselves, [109] insofar as we have these innumerable perceptions that one takes for corporeal qualities, but that often as well they make us think of external things. When a philosopher, for example, who knows the nature of sound, listens to the playing of a lute, and this makes him think of

the comings and goings of the strings which vibrate the air and the organ of hearing in certain proportions, he knows by sense this instrument as it is in itself, and thus many other things: which proves that external things are often known by sense, as I claimed above.

For the rest, it is strange to find people donning the lofty title Philosopher only in order to dispute the certainty and existence of exterior things. {...}

[111] [To all the academicians]...I say again in one word: that exterior things act on our organs, this action forms traces in the brain that are properly our interior senses, and that it is the species formed in the brain that are related in such a way to the ideas or thoughts that accompany them and that the senses have given us, so that we can regard them as a second sense, by means of which our exterior senses and their action is [112] rendered subsistent, in such a way that often the animal spirits touch these species when the idea is renewed and formed just as it was when it was first formed. It happens often enough that the impression of the interior senses is so strong that it is difficult to discern it from that of the exterior, which happens often in crazy people and people with vivid imaginations. {...}

2.4 Foucher, 1679

[30] 'It is easy to disperse this cloud': this is how you speak of my opinion and that of the Author of the SAT. You say that 'it is easy to dispel this cloud by reminding people of good faith and experience that we think directly, immediately, and truly of things we think of, and that we very rarely think of our own thoughts or ideas.'

Do you believe, Sir, that one is never fooled by good faith? And what does experience make us know to our benefit, other than that certain effects [31] are produced in us by exterior objects that are unknown or at least such that we must regard them in that way, just as you acknowledge in another place, when you say that we think of exterior objects 'under the very vague and confused notion of something that acts on us'?

You refuse to count as being of 'good faith' those who believe that there is heat in fire, light in the sun, colors on a canvas, unless they also believe in good faith that all these things are outside of them and known by their own experience.

'We very rarely think of our own thoughts or ideas'! But do you not know, Sir, that one often takes his ideas for real objects? It is in doing so that we are fooled: one thinks [32] one knows exterior objects when one only knows one's ideas.

For the rest I do not know why you reject the distinction among ideas that the Author [of the SAT] draws. It seems to me that this distinction is of consequence. The only fault I find with it is that it is simply taken for granted. It needs to be well established and it needs to be made evident that our soul is capable of having ideas that represent not only the existence but if you like the nature and true being of the things that are outside of us. Nevertheless, it is a distinction everyone makes, if we are to judge by the writings the Philosophers left to us.[33]

3. THE SIXTH SUPPOSITION: Of ideas that represent without resembling

Here Foucher gets to the heart of the matter, in my view: what exactly does it mean to say that an idea represents a material body, and how can it do so? A key assumption here is that representation requires resemblance. This is something all parties to the debate – Descartes, Desgabets, and Foucher – agree to. In his Principles (I.71)*, Descartes argues that sensations fail to represent bodies or their modes because they resemble nothing at all in bodies. But as Foucher argues, the problem is to see how* any *mode of a mind (even an idea of shape) could resemble anything in bodies. He also points up the cost of giving up the resemblance requirement. If ideas must resemble their objects, then the first-person accessible features of the idea let you work out what the idea is an idea* of*, that is, what it represents. If we give up on resemblance, Foucher argues, for all we know, all of our ideas represent the same object. Foucher also argues that if you give up the resemblance requirement, you lose all right to say that sensations are not representations. Foucher also introduces an argument of ancient pedigree: the example of Caesar, which reappears in Berkeley's* Three Dialogues *(p.204 in the Luce and Jessop edition).*[15]

For his part, Desgabets rolls out a distinction from the medievals, between two different kinds of resemblance: real or 'entitative' resemblance (as between a picture and its original) and 'intentional' or 'representational' resemblance. Descartes himself, in the Meditations *and elsewhere, seems to appeal to this distinction: on his view, corporeal species (brain images) resemble their objects in the literal sense, while incorporeal ideas resemble only intentionally.*[16] *Foucher does a tidy job of exposing this sleight of hand.*

3.1 Foucher, 1675

[50] The sixth supposition is of no less consequence than the preceding ones. Although it is not as obvious, it nevertheless guides the greater part of the book we speak of, which would certainly have been very different if the Author had accepted the contrary of this supposition or even attempted to investigate what one ought to accept by it.

I speak of the resemblance of our ideas in regard to what they represent, and I object to the Author's supposing that it is not necessary that ideas resembles their objects in order to represent them.

First, this supposition is another consequence of the first [that the soul is an immaterial substance], because that entails that the soul has nothing in it that can resemble the modes of bodies, and also of the preceding supposition, according to which our ideas represent [51] objects outside of us.

In the second place, this destroys what the Author says about the errors of our senses. For if it is possible that ideas are not at all similar to certain objects that we represent, there is no longer any reason to assume that the modes we receive by the senses do not represent the objects that causes them, however different they might be from each other.[17]

Either our ideas can represent without resembling or not.

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[15] The example goes back at least to Ockham, though he uses Hercules rather than Caesar. See Adriaensson (2017).

[16] For arguments for this reading of Descartes, see my 2017 , as well as Scott (2010).

[17] Both Malebranche and Descartes deny that sensations represent anything outside of us (although they certainly indicate states of affairs and so help to preserve the mind-body union). Foucher's point is that they cannot hang on to that claim while admitting that ideas can represent without resembling.

If they can represent without being similar to their objects, all of the ideas [or sensations] we have, whether of the senses, the imagination, or whatever other faculty you like, can equally be said to represent. What's worse, all of our ideas, whatever they are, might turn out to represent one and the same object. And this is what no one can accept.[18]

If, on the other hand, it is necessary for ideas to resemble in order to represent, then we have to conclude that we will never attain knowledge, or else that our notions of the soul and matter on which [52] the Author bases his work are entirely at odds with what those things truly are.

I leave the resolution of this dilemma to anyone who cares to try it.

The Author bases his work on what Mr. Descartes has said on this question, but I am astonished that Mr. Descartes, who so loves to meditate, has meditated so little on this subject, which is one of those that is most important to knowing the truth.

Maybe he didn't want to investigate this issue, for fear of being obliged to abandon his notion of matter, on which he established his system of physics; whatever the case, it is easy to see the truth that I am presenting.

We mean by 'representing' nothing but rendering something present, or producing the same effect as if it actually acted on us, or at least causing something similar; otherwise, we don't know what the word means.

Both Mr. Descartes and the Author claim that our ideas represent objects outside of us, on which there are two things to say. [53]

First: if our ideas represent things, they must produce the same effect in us as the things themselves would if they were present, if they are to make us know these things as they are in themselves and not just the modes that these same things excite in us when they act on the senses. For since these modes are not likenesses, according to these philosophers, the ideas represent nothing except the effects objects have on us. In order to represent things as they are in themselves, our ideas would have to dispose us exactly as if the things themselves were actually in us, and immediately present to us. And for that to happen, it would be necessary that our ideas cause in us an effect that is at least similar to the effect the things would have if they were really there. And ideas can't do that unless they are like the things themselves. Otherwise, so far from causing in us modes such as we [54] would have if the objects were present, it is obvious that the modes would be entirely different. From which it follows [given the definition of representation] that they would not represent things.

The second thing to say is that these philosophers admit this truth [that ideas have to resemble in order to represent] when they insist that our senses do not represent objects

[18] Foucher here points to one of the key advantages of the resemblance view: you can at least, from the first person perspective, work out what the object of your idea *would* be if it existed. If there's representation without resemblance, then no intrinsic feature of the idea gives you the slightest clue as to its object. (This is a familiar objection to contemporary teleosemantic accounts of intentionality.)

outside of us, since the modes that they cause in us do not resemble objects. Here, they presuppose that similitude is necessary for representation: they even claim that we have ideas that do resemble external objects: but they attribute these solely to the imagination. They claim that whatever they have that resembles objects should be referred to the organs of the brain.

Nevertheless we have to realize that what we know in imagination is not whatever is in the organs of the brain but what is truly in our own souls.[19] [55] The Author admits as much when he says that 'the image that the sun imprints on our brain doesn't resemble either the idea our soul has of it, as I will prove, nor does the soul perceive the movements that the sun makes in the base of the eyes or in the brain.'[20]

But if what we know in this way involves a similitude, we have to admit that this likeness pertains to our soul. And if we admit that, we are left with the claim that in imagination we do not know the figures and material images that are in our brain, but instead only the soul's own ideas.

And it is admitted also that in imagination what we know is similar to the objects we represent.

We see that it is in vain that philosophers refer to the imagination the ideas that are supposed to resemble the objects they represent, since these ideas [56] would not be ideas at all, if they do not exist in the proper substance of our soul. And since these ideas are no less different from the images in our brain than they are from external objects, it's evident that these philosophers affirm on one hand the very things they condemn on the other.

Nevertheless it is only just that we consider the reasons on which they found their opinion. And since the Author bases his view entirely on what Mr. Descartes has said, we will look at the reasons provided by Mr. Descartes.

These reasons consist in the experience we have, or so he claims, of things that represent while being dissimilar from what they represent.[21] For example, a grapevine is said to represent a place where wine is sold, even though it resembles neither wine nor the place it is sold. The word 'tree' represents a tree, even though it has no resemblance to this object.

It is true that this word is not like a tree, nor a grapevine like [57] wine. But if this word or grapevine fails to excite in us an image that does resemble a tree, or wine, it does not at all represent these objects: in which one can see that his whole 'proof' is founded on an equivocation.

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[19] Descartes of course does not admit this: he thinks that in imagination, the mind is directly in contact with the brain, and immediately aware of the patterns and traces there. In that one way, Descartes endorses (an admittedly bizarre, to contemporary ears) direct realism. As Foucher will point out, it's no easier to understand how the mind could be immediately aware of brain traces than it is to see how the mind could be immediately aware of objects outside the human body.

[20] Malebranche (1997, p.227).

[21] See esp. Descartes's *Le Monde*.

Properly speaking, it is not at all this word that represents the tree; it is the idea that the word excites in us that does the representing, because it is that idea that resembles the tree, and this is obvious when one pronounces the word 'tree.' We imagine something like what we see when a tree is really present in front of our eyes.

I don't say that the image the word excites in us must resemble what a tree is in itself; I say only that it must resemble the effect that the object produces in us via our senses. {...}

And if we claim that the word represents the tree in itself, that is obviously false, so long as we have no idea of what the tree is in itself, since words suppose ideas. From which it follows that it is not the word that represents the tree: it's the image or the idea that the word excites in us.

We can say the same about the grapevine and all other signs men use. And to avoid equivocation, we have to remark that the word 'represent' can be taken in many senses.

One can say that a painter represents a mountain, but not as an efficient cause, and not immediately and by himself, if I'm compelled to use the distinction, nor as a formal cause; it is only by means of his canvas and even then he represents [59] nothing unless it resembles a mountain more than river. And here we see that resemblance is necessary for representation.

One can say if one likes that words 'represent' ideas, but only as determinative causes of efficient causes, in so far as, as the Author rightly remarks, they determine the animal spirits to pass in certain fibers in our brains which are fit to dispose our souls in the same way as the objects themselves. {...}

[60] Finally, if we wanted to know external objects in themselves and by themselves, so that they passed into the substance of our soul, we would not find it impossible that our ideas should represent them, even if they didn't resemble them, and would render the objects present only as words do. But as the Author realizes, we do not know objects in themselves; from which it necessarily follows that either our ideas don't represent objects, or else they do represent and hence resemble them.

It would only obscure this truth [61] to try to prove it further. But not only is it useful to know; if we do not admit it, we exclude ourselves entirely from the knowledge we seek. {...}

3.2 Malebranche, 1675

He foists upon me what he calls my sixth 'supposition': but he really has not the slightest acquaintance with my thoughts on this matter. He does not appear even to have read what I wrote. [52] In the end, he attacks what I have never said. He claims in many places 'that I base my position on what Mr. Descartes has asserted on this question.' However, the opinion of Mr. Descartes is entirely different from mine. But it is obvious to those who understand Mr. Descartes, and who have thoroughly read what I have written on this question, that the Author understands neither Mr. Descartes nor my own opinions. Yet he argues to excess without knowing what he attacks and sometimes it is impossible to understand him.

3.3 Desgabets, 1675

[115] I must begin by treating the doctrine contained in this supposition by warning you, Sir, that the manner in which you insist on the resemblance that must obtain between our ideas

and their objects in order to represent them contains what is most odious in your critique. It is the most false and dangerous sense one can give to the common maxim: nothing is in the intellect that is not first in the senses, by which some pretend to prove not just that all our ideas come originally from the senses, but that they are resemblances of what passes [116] through the organs of sense; that is, that they [ideas] are nothing but local motions or other sorts of modes of matter, which on their view renders the soul material and consequently mortal, if one credits the libertines.

You complain about what you take the Author [of SAT] to suppose: that is not necessary for ideas to resemble their objects in order to represent them. And you expend a great deal of effort in trying to prove that a perfect resemblance is necessary. But I have to tell you that it is useless to reason based on an equivocation. It is indubitable that each idea bears a resemblance to its object, and nevertheless is something very different from that object. {...}

[117] For every man has an intimate knowledge of what passes within him when he thinks of something, and perceives with equal evidence that his thought is an expression or a kind of interior painting of the thing represented, which therefore must resemble it, and nevertheless is something totally different. Each of us thus arrives without thinking of it at the distinction that's known as intentional, as opposed to entitative, resemblance.

But it's not too hard to dispel the mystery of the alleged resemblance of our ideas and their objects, and to make clear the origin of your confusion (*embarras*) concerning it.[22] Since you have little meditated on the doctrine of sensible qualities,[23] [118] you reason like the rest, as if heat for example (which is certainly an idea and a perception in us) were just the same, whether it is in the fire or in our thought. So it is hardly surprising that you there is a resemblance of nature between ideas and their objects. This was pardonable before, but now it is insupportable, after the clarification of the doctrine of supposed sensible qualities. Let us leave behind our prejudices and say that there is nothing easier than to discover the difference between ideas and their objects.

We can begin with the induction one can make from the ideas of God, who perfectly knows creatures, which is to say that he has idea of them that are very perfect. Creatures are all limited; they are spiritual and corporeal, and nevertheless the ideas God has of them are very perfect and immaterial. This same difference appears in our ideas compared with those of God...since ours are very imperfect and limited. {...} We know our own souls and matter (which are substances)...by immaterial ideas that are only modes or accidents: and what greater difference can there be, than that between substance and accident, and mind and body? If there were no resemblance between a flat painting and the relief it represents, between the description [120] of a battle that one writes or speaks out loud and the battle itself, one could never serve to represent the other; and nevertheless what could be more dissimilar than the beings or natures of the these things?

It must therefore remain firm, that the intentional resemblance or representational resemblance is something of another genus than the real, and that however perfect it is one cannot draw any consequence to a resemblance of being or nature: so that all you say, Sir, to

[22] This can mean either confusion or embarrassment. Foucher will exploit this ambiguity in his 1679 reply.
[23] Desgabets replays Foucher's mockery; see 3.1, page 52 above.

prove the resemblance between our thoughts and their objects only concerns the resemblance of representation, which nobody denies, and so all your work is beside the point.

You make again an effort against Mr. Descartes and against the author [121] of the SAT, who believe with reason that our ideas represent to us the things that are outside us. If Pierre speaks and I mistake Paul for him: if one presents me with copper and I think of gold, neither Pierre nor the copper is the object of my thought, but if I see a running horse and I think of a race, my idea has for its object this same thing that acts on me and gives me the idea I have. And in this there is no difficulty, even though you insist again on what you've already said and I've refuted, namely, that our senses do not represent objects outside of us.

Finally, what you object on the imagination can be cleared up in one word: the corporeal species traced in the brain has some true resemblance with its object, and the soul turns itself toward this image to form a spiritual idea so that the soul thinks of this object by means of this image. By contrast, in pure intellection the soul receives simply an idea that represents its object without perceiving the corporeal species that is tied to this idea and which is lodged in the storehouse of memory.

3.4 Foucher, 1679

[33] I am not surprised, Sir, that you announce that this chapter gave you more pain than any other in my *Critique*. You call the reflections here difficult (*embarras*). You are right to do so, Sir, for they are an embarrassment (*embarras*) to the Dogmatists. I am sure that we give them a Gehenna large enough when we oblige them to explain the relation our ideas have to the things they represent.

But if they knew how to laugh a little at this embarrassment, they would find plenty of material. However, instead of bringing [34] light to these difficulties as they should, they blow dust in our eyes and run and hide in the thickest gloom that the School ever suffered.

It is hardly surprising that you bring into this region the distinction that you use to cover all the difficulties that are endemic to the Search after Truth, in saying that our ideas resemble the things they represent not 'really' or 'entitatively,' to avail myself of the proper terms of this distinction, but only 'intentionally,' or if you do not blush to speak the language of the School, our ideas resemble things outside of us 'representatively, and not objectively.' What will you say if we [35] refuse to admit these terms, on the grounds of their obscurity? {...}

First you must open your eyes to see what they really amount to, and you will see that all their force reduces to nothing, and all their radiance vanishes.

What does it mean to say that our ideas resemble 'intentionally' or 'representatively,' if not that they are similar insofar as they must be similar in order to represent? And this is just what is in question. We have to know in what consists the similitude of ideas in the respect in which they represent.

And when one says that this similitude is 'intentional' or 'representative,' one only repeats the question in a more confusing (*embarras*) way and in words more barbaric. Thus when one thinks one has got hold of something solid, one finds a hollow term that is incapable of satisfying us.

Nevertheless, since I believe that you love as much anyone else attaining reasonable contentment, I am glad to see if we can draw some benefit from what you take as authorizing this distinction.

It is from the start useless to make an induction as you do in putting forth the ideas of God. For we do not know how God conceives matter any better than we know how we do it ourselves.

It is also useless to appeal to the people of good faith in regard to the material things you think we know. Besides, it would be a *petitio principii* – one only returns by this means to the question at hand. We've already seen that it is not impossible to be fooled by good faith, and perhaps those who believe they know material things know nothing after all but the very spiritual ways of being, that is to say, perhaps they know only their own ideas.

It is useless therefore to appeal to experience, for here once again one would have to know (*sçavoir*) what we truly know (*connaître*) by experience, and it is no less useless to ask that we believe in good faith, for it is not a question of what we believe but of what we *should* believe.

In the second place, let us see if it is possible to find any immediate and veritable representation that does not have any resemblance. And take care not to use as an example [38] the representation of ideas, since that is exactly what is in question. Let us not confuse (*embarras*) ourselves any further with the equivocations I spoke of in the *Critique*.

You propose a painting as your example and say, 'If there were no resemblance between a flat painting and the relief it represents, between the description of a battle that one writes or speaks out loud and the battle itself, one could never serve to represent the other; and nevertheless what could be more dissimilar than the beings or natures of the these things?'

As for the battle as it is written or in real life, I exclude these things, for there must be some relation to the ideas that are, after all, in question. And I would judge these matters along with the laws of signs I have already remarked on in the *Critique*.[39]

It is necessary to see whether paintings or portraits can represent without 'entitative' resemblance. According to your distinction, that means, without there being anything in their being that is similar to the objects they represent.

When we say that a painting represents Caesar, this is not insofar as it makes us know the mind or interior parts or movements of this Prince; and if we know more than the painting shows us, this comes from one of the many ideas we have received elsewhere being excited and rousing others, because they are joined and united by the traces that accompany them, but in truth, the painting represents properly and immediately only the external appearance of Caesar, that is [40] to say, his figure and color.

Now, how is it that the painting represents the exterior figure of the Prince if it does not have a true figure expressed and traced on the canvas in colors? Does not all the art of the Painter consist in making this figure resemble the original?

We know that this figure will never resemble the Original as much as it would were it a relief. Nor, in turn, does the relief represent Caesar so perfectly as a statue, but in this, you will see that the more resemblance there is, the more representation there is.

Is not the figure in the painting as real and entitative as the figure of Caesar? And can you, Sir, conceive of paintings without figure and without extension? For my part, I declare that I cannot conceive [41] that any resemblances can subsist except in the being of something.

Calling these resemblances representative or intentional, or whatever you please, will not make them any less attached to some sort of substance. As a result, they are as real as any other manners of being, for nothingness cannot resemble anything.

Paintings show us only, therefore, beings they resemble, and represent exterior figures, because they have real figures that are similar to those which they represent. And as a result this example that you bring up decides nothing in your favor; indeed, it is very much detrimental to your case. [42]

4. THE SEVENTH SUPPOSITION

That we know by the senses that there is extension outside of us

There are two questions to pull apart here: 1) how do we know that there is any *cause of our sensory experiences outside or us? 2) how do we know that that cause is extension? Foucher is happy to grant that our sensory experiences have some cause outside of us (1); he's mainly concerned with how the Cartesians claim to answer 2): what assures us that the* nature *of this cause is extension?*

4.1 Foucher 1675

[62] The seventh and last supposition is contained in this passage from chapter 9 of the first book: 'One can be assured that outside us ordinarily there are extension, figures, and motion when we see them. These things are not imaginary. They are real, and we are not deceived in believing that they have a real existence independent of our mind, although it is very difficult to prove it. The judgments that we make concerning extension, figures, and motions therefore contain some truth. But this is not the case with those we make concerning light, colors, etc.'[24]

This is how the Author exempts himself from proving one of the most important things we would want to know in order to discover the truth: what is the case with objects. He claims that there are figures, extension, and motion; he admits that it is difficult to prove it and doesn't undertake to do so. Should we just take his word for it? No, for even in his own Preface he forbids us to take his word for anything. And it would be nice to have evidence on such a grand question.

If we consult Mr. Descartes, [63] we find that he engages with this question, at least in part: for he regards this supposition as a consequence of what he has already proved, namely, that we have two sorts of ideas, of thought and extension, which are so different that they have nothing in common. From this he concludes that since we are very convinced, or so he thinks, that thought pertains to us, and is the first thing we know in ourselves since the idea that we have of thought includes nothing in it of extension, nor anything else, we must judge that extension is something foreign to us, and that we can take it to be matter.

But even if:
-all the parts of this reasoning were past doubt;
-it were evident that in our ideas of thought we include nothing that could pertain to matter, such as motion, figure, etc.,
-it were impossible that the same subject be capable of thought and extension, at least not at the same time;
-one could not doubt that whether these two ideas are modes of our own soul;
-this reasoning should finally appear to us totally conclusive;

Even if all that were true, we would still have to answer an objection to the contrary, which the Author seems to have foreseen, although he hasn't answered it, no more than Mr. Descartes or any of his followers. {...}

[24] Malebranche (1997, 48). Foucher refers to the ninth chapter; in later editions of the SAT, a new division of chapters was created, making the chapter in question the tenth.

[Descartes's expositor Rouhault replied that we know extension by sense. But] [65] all that sense provides are modes of our own soul, and there is nothing resembling these modes in material bodies. Should we then conclude that, if we know extension by sense, extension itself is only one of the modes our own soul, and there is nothing resembling it in material objects?

At first Rouhault replied that we don't in fact know extension by sense, and I admit this response astonished me. For it is obvious that we know extension by sense, as we do light and [66] colors. When I see a red square, for example, I perceive at the same time the figure, color, and extension, since I judge it by its size! In fact we know extension by sense twice over, since we know it by sight and touch, although we know colors only by the eyes.

The Author himself also agrees in good faith that we know extension by sense, as well as light, heat and color. For the greatest number of examples he provides of the errors of the senses concern the size of objects, their movements, distance, etc. But these properties necessarily suppose extension. 'We have seen,' he says, 'in the preceding chapters that the judgments we make about the reports of our eyes concerning extension, figure, and motion are never exactly true, although it is necessary to agree that they are not entirely false. They contain at least [77][25] this truth, that there is extension outside us.'[26]

[In my discussion with Rouhault,] I didn't bother to prove that we know extension by sense, because that is what our own experience teaches us, and because no one can convince anybody on this point, anymore than someone can be obliged to admit he sees light in the plain of day if he decides to maintain the contrary.

I asked therefore of Mr. Rouhault with some curiosity how he thought we know the extension of objects. He replied, we know it by reasoning thus: we experience the fact that objects act on us at different points, from which we conclude that they are extended.

But this response only proves that there is extension our soul. [Consider this dilemma:] Either something that acts at different points must be extended or not.

If it must be extended to act at different points, it follows that our [78] soul is extended, since it acts at different points on the organs of our bodies, even if these are the smallest parts of which our bodies are made up.

And if it is not necessary that what acts at different points be extended, we cannot conclude that exterior objects must be extended simply on that basis.

Moreover, doesn't this line of argument presuppose that our own souls are extended? Otherwise, how could objects could act on the soul at different points? The soul must contain different points as different routes by which it is capable of receiving the action of objects: how can that be conceived without supposing that it is extended?

[25] The pagination of the original text is wrong, and skips from 66 to 77. No material is omitted here.
[26] Malebranche (1997, 48).

I am not surprised by what the Author admits, that it is hard to prove that there is extension outside of us, but I am surprised that anyone should build so much on something so difficult to prove.

Even if the response of Mr. Rouhault were embraced by all those who follow the philosophy [79] of Mr. Descartes, it would be not a jot less difficult to reply to this objection. And the objection is not so out of the way and particular that it doesn't spring to mind immediately, when one enters with sincerity into this manner of philosophizing about sensations.

For all of our sensations are nothing but experiences of the many modes of which our soul is capable. We know by sense truly nothing but what objects produce in us. It follows that if we claim that we know extension and figures, as well as light and colors, by sense, then this extension and these figures are no less in us than light and colors.

And when we try to accord extension the privilege of being both in our soul and in external objects, even though colors are only in our soul: this would be [80] to admit that the perception we have by sense makes us know only the modes of our own soul, which would destroy the system of Mr. Descartes, by granting that the soul and matter are capable of taking on the very same mode. That would be to advance something entirely opposed to the principles of the very philosophy one was trying to defend.

4.2 Malebranche 1675

The author has no reason in his seventh supposition to claim that I prove that there is extension. Since my goal is only to combat the errors of the senses in regard to sensible qualities, it would be absurd for me to follow the method he attacks. {…} I establish nothing about the supposition he foists on me.

4.3 Desgabets 1675

[122] This final supposition concerns again the knowledge [123] that we have of the existence of things outside of us. The author of the SAT, speaking soberly, expressly says that it is very difficult to prove the existence of such things: this is why you are right, Sir, to find strange that the author has not proved one thing that is fundamental: but you should not believe, for all that, that it is impossible to do so. Beyond what we said in the fifth supposition, one can also employ the general principle: that being the foundation of the certitude of our knowings in virtue of the correspondence between our ideas and the things we think of, it is sufficient and absolutely necessary [214] to assure ourselves of it.

We have only to think of the extended substance that is matter, of figures, of situations of their parts, of angels, of souls, of men and their operations to be very certain that they exist. For whether the thought represents to us substance or accident, body or mind, it is equally necessary that all of that exists outside of us, unless one thinks of nothing, and the first operation of the mind cease to conform to its object.[27] We must nevertheless remind ourselves

[27] Here Desgabets announces what Foucher will mockingly call his 'grand principle.' At first, it seems substantive and highly implausible: Desgabets appears to claim that anything one can think of – golden mountains, unicorns who play hopscotch in the clouds – exists. In fact, the principle is less substantive and more plausible than it seems. It holds only that all objects of 'simple conception' exist; our 'precipitous judgments' about these things may be false. And simple conceptions are only guaranteed to have objects because they are simple concepts of

of what we've already said, that things exist in the way we see them and not otherwise. A voyage which one remembers and a voyage for which one prepares must not be considered as existing in the time in which one thinks of them: but one must not imagine that they [125] are any less real for that, just as a mountain that is not here is elsewhere, without speaking of the reality of the possibility that things have in their subjects. {...}

I must remark, that whether one stays awake or sleeps, is hungry or sick, ... all the thoughts that one has in all these diverse states are equally true, provided one limits them to simple conception. I must warn that I say nothing but what everyone acknowledges...since there's nothing even in the imagination of people who have visions that is not very possible. But I recognize no possibility [126] but those that are such effectively and which depend on God, instead of others that invent a pure possibility that excludes all reality of the thing which does not allow one to know its nature and properties.

We must now prove the fundamental proposition that I have advanced and produce the general reason for it, which is that God, as cause and universal mover who produces in us all our thoughts or ideas according to which they have something positive in them, just as one must attribute to God all that is real in the world. For it is a very real and positive thing, to think of something, and as a result thought or simple conception (being entirely from God) must be true, and this could not be if the thing about which one thinks could be nothing. On the contrary, all falsehood [127] and all beings of reason are nothing but a privation of perfection that must reside in the use of our Reason, so one can only attribute it to ourselves insofar as we are imperfect, faulty, and capable of misusing our faculties.

The case here is just the same as with a portrait. A portrait comes from the science of painting in whatever resemblance it has to its original; but insofar as it represents its original badly, it does not come from any science, but rather from a lack of science. Similarly, God would be the source of error if there were any in our simple conceptions or in the judgments that conform to them.

We must now join to this doctrine another truth that is grounded in our own being as men or rational animals, and which we learn, that all our knowings comes to us [128] by the senses, that is to say the action of the body on us. The extreme diversity that there is among the thoughts of the soul and organic movements of our bodies doesn't prevent their union. That union is so tight that the one never moves without the other. We know this much from experience, as long as one undertakes a serious reflexion on the manner in which we acquire knowledge from the start of life to the end. It is easy to see, having done that, that our knowings of external things come to us by their acting on us, which happens by degrees: for in the mother's womb and in infancy we only know those sensations by means of an imperfectly formed body, which does not permit even the time to make any reflexion on these sensations. It is only later, little by little, that it gives one liberty [129] to stop and think, and to develop our thoughts by extending them outside of oneself, and to the things that are causing this impressions on the senses.

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substances. So although the mountain with the property of being made of gold does not exist, the mountain, taken purely as extended substance, must exist. For further discussion, see esp. (Cook 2002).

But especially since the action of the external senses is rendered substantial by the movements of animal spirits in the traces or species that they form and carry toward the center of the brain, which is the principal seat of our soul, it often happens that the interior senses (which consist in traces or species) are made to have the same ideas as if external things were actually present and acting by themselves. But when we are in such a state as to be able to govern the course of our animal spirits and to examine something by means of multiple senses, it is obvious that it is external things that make themselves known by acting [130] on us and giving us an idea of what they are: so we must reject the faulty judgment we would make of God [namely, that he is a deceiver], if we deceived ourselves after these precautions.

This must be taken for an absolute truth; and the corruption of man by sin, which some use to object to my reasoning here, does nothing to damage it. It [the corruption] only proves that we have been deprived of a great portion of our light. But nevertheless, just a poor man who puts on a shirt possesses a real shirt, we have to say that the light that remains to us is very real, and that it is impossible to be fooled if we use this light as we can and must.

It is now, Sir, that I respond in one word to what you object to Mr. Rouhault, whose response I perhaps understand better than you do. I have [131] grasped better than you the beautiful qualities you attribute to him and the incomparable light that has given him the knowledge of Mathematics and Physics that all the world admires. Know, then, when he said to you that we do not know bodies by sense, he was speaking only in the way you and others do, who take sense to be a faculty that does not in fact produce knowledge of things outside of us; and he believed that we can know the nature and existence of extended things by pure intellection, which is quite true. But we must add that it is the senses that provide us this pure intellection.

As far as what you report him saying in reply to you – that we know extended objects by reasoning, in that we experience these objects acting on us at different points; this is very true when it is [132] a question of knowing the precise size of some particular object. But when you conclude from this response of Mr. Rouhault that our soul is extended, since objects act at different points, it seems to me you misunderstand him: for these different points are not those of the soul but of the nerves whose action being transmitted to the soul, the soul judges by this means the size of an object, as happens when we touch a stone with our two hands.

4.4 Foucher 1679

[42] You try to prove here that the senses make us know that there is extension outside of us, by applying your grand principle.[28] And you insist that one cannot suspect our primary conceptions of error without falling into the necessity of attributing this deception to the Author of nature.

But why conclude that God would be a deceiver if our senses failed to show us that there is extension outside of us? One would have to conclude the very same thing on the grounds of color, heat, [43] light, etc., and yet you do not conclude that God deceives us regarding all the qualities people call 'sensible,' even though the senses never stop deceiving us, or giving us occasion to be deceived concerning these qualities. Why would we not have more right to draw this evil conclusion [that God is a deceiver] from figures than from colors?

[28] Presumably, that anything one thinks of must be real: see 4.3 above, pp. 124-5.

In any case, can we not doubt whether God has given us senses only for judging what exterior objects can produce in us and not for knowing them as they are in themselves? If we judge with so much temerity, our error would come from ourselves and we would fall into the mistake you yourself condemn, of the man who judges that a stick in water is bent, and who is deceived in judging by this simple appearance.[44]

I don't know whether Mr. Rouhault would welcome what you ascribe to him in explaining his reply to me. What you say doesn't touch the heart of the question.

You only say that the different points of which he speaks are the organs of the brain. I reply to you that the question is not about these organs; of course it isn't hard to conceive these organs being struck at different points, since they are no less extended than material objects. It is not the organs that sense but the soul, according to the system of Mr. Descartes. And it is a question of knowing how our soul perceives extension and figures that are engraved in the organs of the brain.

Look, Sir, if you [45] have any new explanation to give us that could make us understand how our soul judges the size of an extended object, [tell us what it is]. But watch out, for it is just as necessary to know how our soul perceives the small figures that are painted and engraved on the organs of the brain as it is the large figures that one can touch with our two hands. {...}

[46] You recognize that colors are in us. But the figure of these colors, the extension of these colors, where is it, if not in the same place where the colors are! And since these colors are in our Soul only and not even in the organs of the brain: I leave it to you to explain how they can exist without their colors and figures: in one word, without all the measures and proportions that we perceive in laying our eyes on a painting, for example, or, if you like, in receiving the appearance of a rainbow, the figure and color of which are only imaginary. {...}

[47] We still don't know how our soul, which you suppose is without extension, judges extensions and figures that are imprinted on the organs of our brain. And if one cannot solve this difficulty, one must not imagine that one has discovered anything of the truth about the bodies that are outside of us.

5. Desgabets, Treatise on Sensible Qualities
In this work, not published in his lifetime, Desgabets gives a nice summary of his view.[29]

It's now well known that heat, cold, light, color, taste, sound, and odor are not at all corporeal sensible qualities with which exterior things are affected, as people thought until the present, but are instead our own internal, spiritual sensations and perceptions, which are excited in the soul by the actions of things in our environment and by our organs. In just the same way, pleasure and pain are excited by things outside us. This fundamental truth can be demonstrated in many ways by experience and by reason, but it will suffice here to remark that a crystal glass being ground in a mortar, the simple rearrangement of its parts is capable of changing all of what one regards as its qualities, for it is no longer hard, glistening, ringing, and polished, but has become soft, silent, opaque, and bumpy.[30] One can draw many consequences from this:

1° That before this discovery, it was impossible that there could be a true physics in the world, so long as we searched in matter and natural bodies for qualities they don't possess.

2° That it was impossible not to take the corporeal for the spiritual and the spiritual for the corporeal.

3° That it was impossible to know either the nature or the functions of our senses, by which one thought one perceived what one doesn't perceive in external things.

4° That it is the soul itself that is the true object of sensing, as are all spiritual things when our senses make us think of them (*fides ex auditu*).[31]

5° That corporeal things are only the object of sense when they make us know what they are in themselves, which happens rarely enough, as when, for example, heat makes us think of the scattering of the parts of the wood that is burned.

6° That speaking rigorously, it is the soul itself that is black and white, hot and cold, tasting good or bad, sounding low or piercing, because the soul is the subject of all these things.[32]

7° That, since any man has an intuitive knowledge of his own thoughts, abstract reasonings, colors, sounds, tastes and other such qualities of his soul, the soul is known infinitely better than all other things.

8° That all our ideas and simple conceptions, being states of the soul which God endowed with the qualities of an agent and of producing change/motion in general, they [simple conceptions] always conform to their object, which is the foundation of the absolute certitude

[29] (Desgabets 1985). Helpful treatments of Desgabets on these issues include (Easton 2018) and (Cook 2002).
[30] Cp. Locke, *Essay* II.viii.20.
[31] Romans 10:17: 'So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.'
[32] I've argued that this is the logical consequence of taking sensations to be modes of the soul. Malebranche himself thinks that 'the soul actually becomes blue, red or yellow, and that the soul is painted with the colors of the rainbow when looking at it' (Malebranche 1997, 634). Compare Berkeley, *Principles* Part I, §49.

of all our sciences and knowings, and lack the precipitous judgments that are capable of falsehood.

9° That our willings and choices, which are actions of our souls, can only move it towards those things that are known by means of the senses and the ideas it reinvigorates, when the corporeal species to which they are joined come to be produced by the animal spirits: one always knows as a man, that is, as a composite of soul and body whose reciprocal commerce or union shines through all our actions and passions.

10° That there being nothing in matter other than extension in length, width, and depth, and its first appurtenances, which are motion, rest, figure, arrangement, bigness and smallness of parts, there are no other corporeal forms in the world besides the assemblage of these modes of matter and as a consequence all sciences of corporeal things such as physics and medicine etc. are only an extension of mathematics.

11° That the soul, insofar as it is the subject and principle of all our thoughts, and matter, the subject of all its modes, being things in the world most contrary in their properties, as is apparent from the pain and pricking of a pin, the distinction between mind and body is easily known.

12° That the soul, having successively its thoughts and perceptions, and remaining always the same beneath its accidents, knows itself as a subsistent being, just as matter, remaining always the same beneath its forms, is equally a substance.

13° That our thoughts and perceptions being spiritual and nevertheless having duration and having successive parts and flowing in their existence which makes them begin, continue, and end, it suits them insofar as they depend on movements which gives them being in this way and with which they are united thought not identical by nature. Voluntary motions are free, which in fact proves the dependence that all our thoughts have on the motion of organized bodies, and the dependence voluntary movements have on our soul, and it is this same thing that constitutes the substantial union that makes us men, in other words, what makes us rational and what makes it the case that our thoughts are formed successively, just like the motions on which they depend.

14° Finally, that this dependence, being as well known as the difference between the motions of our organs and the thoughts that depend on them, we must reform the ancient and dangerous adage by saying 'nothing is in the intellect that does not come from the senses' rather than 'nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses.'

If one wants to know what foundations support the reformation that is now happening in the sciences, one must reflect on the truths these truths:

1° That God is all powerful and free, and this truth should not be undermined.

2° That prior seeing that God has formed his decrees for the production of creatures, one cannot see in him any formal attributes that would be relevant to these decrees, since they result from his free action.

3° That every essence and truth depends on God acting freely and that what is true and necessary could be otherwise.

4° There are no purely possible creatures and there is nothing truly possible except things taken formally and not according to their substance.

5° That creation – that is, the production of substances – does not take place in time, and that it only concerns the formation of those things that depend on movement.

6° That the world taken in its totality is immense and its extent is so vast that we conceive spaces that we call imaginary.

7° That animals are nothing but machines made by the hand of God.

8° That God is the sole mover, that created minds and bodies cannot do anything except change and determine the course of movements that are already in the world.

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