

ELEMENTS OF METAPHYSICS WITHIN THE REACH OF EVERYONE

Following is the Translation of Father Claude Buffier's *Éléments de métaphysique*, written sometime during the early years of the 18th Century. Father Buffier was a Jesuit thinker who lived from 1660 to 1737. He was one of the editors of that leading Journal : *Memoires de Trevoux* for over thirty years (1701 to 1731). The full title of the work, whose translation is being presented below, is *Éléments de métaphysique a la portée de tout le monde, pour accoutumer l'esprit a former des idées justes et précises*. The ideas presented in the work were certainly new when they were expressed.

Éléments de métaphysique is a small treatise written in a dialogue form containing six conversations between Teandre, the exponent of Buffier's philosophical views, and Eugene who is quite skeptical of the attempts of philosophers to construct abstract and abstruse systems of metaphysics. Eugene is gradually led by Teandre to see wherein exactly the metaphysicians of repute, including Descartes, have gone wrong. Spinoza appears to be the main target of attack. Berkeley, who has been referred to as 'philosophe ecossais' is also criticised. The treatise also attempts to refute both the skeptics and the solipsists. Its positive contribution consists in advocating the authority of *sensus communis* (common sense) as the source of Primary Truths concerning the external world—things and persons that exist outside of us. Buffier develops a completely new idea of metaphysics as having for its proper object an exact and precise analysis of our ideas. Buffier's originality in this respect is beyond any doubt.

Long before Thomas Reid established Common Sense school in British Philosophy, Father Buffier had already expounded the importance and significance of 'common sense' for philosophers to save themselves from the possible anarchy of ideas. Father Buffier had one other work to his credit, viz., *Traité des vérités premières*, which is his major work. It was translated into English long ago in the year 1780. It seems that that work failed to catch the attention of the historians of philosophy, which it

certainly deserved. The work is certainly important. It must have influenced Thomas Reid's thinking as is clear from the occasional references which Reid himself makes to Buffier in his own writings. The 'Traité' is Buffier's much earlier work written sometime around 1724. The *Éléments de métaphysique* was written to stress again the main philosophical argument of that earlier work.*

Those who are aware of the history of Cartesianism and especially the predicament into which Cartesianism landed itself in the beginning of the 18th Century, will be able to appreciate the contribution which this small treatise would make to the understanding of the whole philosophical canvass of the early decades of that century. One will also notice unmistakably the tone of the work which foreshadows in some measure the spirit of the 20th century analytical philosophy which grew out of the influence of Moore and Wittgenstein.

FIRST CONVERSATION

At a conversation where one speaks about things that lead to powerful and lengthy debates, Eugene contended that one does not understand anything of those matters about which there are metaphysical subtleties which are neither well-founded nor judicious. Teandre, who was then very much occupied with metaphysical investigations, appeared to take this contention seriously, imagining possibly that it was he who was addressed. He asked Eugene whether he (Eugene) was fully persuaded that metaphysics at all needs to be mistaken as vain subtleties or that it was somehow incompatible with the things well-founded and judicious.

Eugene replied : "It was a subject which I myself would not mind taking pains to go deep into, but, to be frank enough, it was not something worth anybody's pains. In general, however, the subject is so subtle that it scarcely appears to be well-founded. Nothing is so subtle as the metaphysics."

"I know that there are many people," rejoined Teandre, "who do not love temperamentally any discussions at all. But if

* A full introduction and commentary on the text of the *Éléments de métaphysique*, prepared by the Translator himself will be published very soon by the *Indian Philosophical Quarterly*. —Ed.

the disputes that occur amongst the people demand any examination, it would be too early for anyone to take sides according to his own views or to blame equally the two sides, claiming that they are metaphysical subtleties and that their discussion is not worth our troubles."

"Possibly you will laugh at me," said Eugene, "but as for me, I admit in all seriousness that I am somewhat prejudiced against metaphysics and against the disputes which it causes."

"That does not astonish me at all," replied Teandre, "since you have acknowledged that you have never deigned to fathom the depths of that which really is deep. Bear patiently then with that which I reclaim here for it. I pray you not to condemn it or at least to know it well before you come to condemn it. It is a point which is in your interest as also in the interest of the subject-matter. It is in the interest of the subject-matter because (if we thrash it out thoroughly) it will never be deprived of the esteem from a man of your calibre. It will be in your own interest because it won't be a matter of sufficient dignity for you to form your judgment about it without knowing the reasons."

Eugene, taking all this on his own behalf jovially and politely, said, "Can I not think as the tribunals do sometimes with a view not to entertain? Without knowing the cause they allow the case to be lost, but nevertheless without injustice. The legitimate prejudices against an opinion are left unexamined."

Teandre replied, "It will be no longer the question of establishing the justness of your prejudices." "I understand you," interrupted Eugene, "but for dispelling whatever doubts you may have (about me) on this count, I shall only say that the subjects which I have seen treated by the most celebrated metaphysicians, appear to me to transform themselves into vapours and to come to nothing. Take, for example, the famous dispute between M. Arnauld and P. Malebranche on the subject of occasional causes; they reach a point so sublime that one does not understand them any more and it appears that at that point even they do not understand each other properly."

"That is to say," Teandre interrupted, "you would regard the faults of metaphysicians to be the faults of metaphysics. That

reminds me of the words of Mr. Duke of Laroche-foucault : 'The world is full of devotees who develop nausea about devotion and of friends who arouse disgust in friendship; but that's neither the fault of friendship nor of devotion.' Let us likewise say here : Is it the fault of metaphysics if one comes to push it too far or to apply it badly ? The best things would then be those that are put to greatest misuse. Even reason sometimes supports the least reasonable things through artificial use which one makes of the intellect. In fact, one can respect metaphysics much without making it appear least inestimable, since, according to me, metaphysics is nothing but reason alone in its most perfect state."

"If it were the case," said Eugene, "I would have very much removed my prejudices. But since I believe them to be firmly rooted, I shall give them up without much ado if you somehow make me see that they are not so; I shall even pray you (to tell) whether a matter, so dry as that, can be admitted in a conversation which, through the use of that single word—'metaphysics'—may have already annoyed the company."

Those who were present interrupted Eugene to assure him that they had immense pleasure in seeing him continue his conversation with Teandre; that, that which they had said so far had nothing of the rebutting air which appears properly to belong to the field of metaphysics and that they were even curious to see how the things which are usually regarded as so knotty and frivolous could be made the subject matter of an amusing and reasonable conversation.

"I accept with joy," said Eugene, "the condescendence which the company wishes me to assume and request Teandre freely to tell us in what way he understands (the statement) that metaphysics should be the perfection of reason. Is it possible that uptil now we all had been very much jealous of reason, but so little of metaphysics ?"

Teandre smiled and said, "One is sometimes jealous without realising it. Besides, one has talents which one does not perceive for oneself; for example, after coming in the world, one comes to know prose well without ever realising it." Although the comparison is somewhat pleasing, it is not less appropriate. Whoso-

ever knows how to think with all the precision and exactitude which the human reason is capable of, will not cease to be a metaphysician, even if he would not believe himself to be one."

"Would it ever be possible," asked Eugene, "that all people will ever agree that the knowledge which is so very abstract will be so plausible and so solid as to be within the reach of everyone?" Teandre replied, "Metaphysics is within the reach of everyone but it's not as all the people understand it to be. For, it is true that all cannot think about all the things with the most exact precision, but all do think with precision on certain points like excellent metaphysicians; especially those points which depend upon the knowledge and experience of the matters with which they are themselves most familiar. Thus a practitioner (lawyer) thinks and judges very roughly of the things which literature speaks of but he performs marvellously at the metaphysics of the practice and the procedure of the law-courts, because he has of them the most distinct and precise ideas."

"If you thus transform," said Eugene, "a practitioner into a metaphysician, I can imagine myself how you will soon do the same with respect to a commerce-man, a financier, and for stronger reasons, a negotiator and a politician."

"Say it openly," interrupted Teandre, "that I shall do the same in respect of all men who can be versed in some knowledge as exactly as it is possible; for example, a clever musician in the field of music, an excellent painter in the field of painting, and if you desire it further, I shall not find less of metaphysics in certain artisans, or in the farmers, whom we regard sometimes as the most rustic sort of people; at least in what one finds of them, when it is the question of discussing their own interests—a sort of wisdom which enables them to discover thousand different ways do to the same thing. It is that which makes the exercise of metaphysics the most essential and the most subtle one."

"But," asked Eugene, "if all the men naturally find themselves to be metaphysicians, each in his own profession, metaphysics would then be nothing in particular and would it not be then in vain that its advocates give it so grand a title, when they call it : science par excellence—the principle and the foundation of the sciences, in a word, the universal science?"

"If it is true," responded Teandre, "that it enters everything and that it should be a veritable science, to call it a universal science will not amount to attributing to it a false prestige. Further, if it teaches, as I have said before, to think of everything with exactitude and greatest precision of which the spirit and the reason of man are capable, one will not be mistaken in regarding it as 'science par excellence'—the principle and the foundation of the sciences. What is more noble and more fundamental in all the sciences than to have the exact and the precise knowledge of the object to which they address themselves?"

"I have not in fact expressed everything that is on my mind." Eugene resumed. "I would like to ask you: if every one is naturally a metaphysician with regard to the things in which he is well-versed, why does one accept that which is for all a common and natural exercise — a particular science?" Teandre replied, "Is it not common and natural for all to think and to speak, to sing or to march? However one does conduct a special study of each one of those activities: what we call *logic* for reasoning properly, *rhétorics* for speaking well, *music* for singing with charm, and *dance* for stepping with grace and firmness (balance); each of those activities presupposes a faculty common to all men, but such a study, all the same, recommends itself for acquiring perfection in them. Moreover, nature can be so favourable to certain individual, that without the help of logic, or of rhétorics, of music or of the art of dancing, he will reason or speak, sing or dance, better than some of those who have studied those disciplines; but if he had studied those like them, he would have found himself even still more perfect in each of those faculties while the others would have found themselves much less perfect if they were to practise less. It is the same with metaphysics. It's common to all to be able to think of things with an exact precision; but, some, either through natural talent or through the habit of dealing with things more spiritual, can think of them with greater justice and discernment than others who would be metaphysicians by profession. This does not exclude the possibility that the former would have a still more grand disposition to think with justness even if they had done a study of metaphysics. Thus that science (metaphysics) has as its proper and particular object: to make analysis of the objects of the spirit so exact that one can think

about all the things, with greatest possible exactitude and greatest possible precision."

"It appears to me," said Eugene, "that I have come across several definitions of metaphysics that are very different from that of which you speak. Your definition, to speak the truth, appears to me to be more neat and more interesting than the others. But, between us, since the opinions are expressed very diversely concerning the object and the purpose of metaphysics, isn't there any point at all which is itself so obscure that one does not understand only what it is?"

"If a science," said Teandre, "could subsist by itself and independently of those who formulate it, then metaphysics will itself take the revenge of the insult to which you appear to subject metaphysics. But unfortunately it is at the mercy of many spirits who neither know how to honour it adequately nor do they know how to make out its true character. However, I shall make you discover, if you please, that all the definitions of metaphysics can very well be reduced to the one which I have mentioned and of which you appear to be satisfied."

"I quite follow that," said Eugene, "but I am afraid that I am not equally at rest; for, if it were in the nature of metaphysics to make us think of everything with justness, why is it that one finds so often the metaphysicians thinking so bad; and if you permit me to say, even worse than the others about things which are of common experience in life?"

Teandre replied: "That is because they do not apply metaphysics at all or they apply it very badly. It is not strange to find that a philosopher does not distinguish clearly the matters with which he ought not to engage his mind. It is like an excellent dancer who cannot perform a foreign or a new dance which he does not know at all, but as soon as he is ready to take the pains of practising the steps and of following the rules by himself, he will do it better than others. A better metaphysician can thus understand nothing of the financial affairs or of commerce, of negotiating, or of politics in which he had never been instructed; but if he condescends to devote himself to them he will soon have in them the notions even more precise than the notions of those who are in the profession."

"I have had some experience in the field of what they call *Exchange* amidst the commerce-men in Europe; a majority of them know very well the practice in it and they never make any mistake; but it is necessary to have in that field, besides practice, the exact ideas of which they should present a judicious analysis. It is this which they are incapable of. Now, a philosopher, there being a need of that kind of knowledge, would speak for long times to different men of commerce before being able in his own way to formulate neat ideas, while theirs (apart from the practice) are confused. Once he has learnt the idea, he can make it comprehend in two words, for all those who have some inclination for such exposure."

Teandre pursued further, "It is possible that excellent metaphysicians make abuse of their metaphysics in applying it to the subjects which do not demand such application. Consider, for example, the matters concerning morality and civic society, where one does not allow oneself to be governed by very exact precisions. This they do, so as to call forth or to subdue the vulgar element in men, to displease them or to induce them to revolt. Still, may I assert that that abuse is a real failure of metaphysics rather than a false application of it? In effect, the exactitude and the precision of ideas which the metaphysics seeks and employs, ought to acquaint us with the nature of moral and civil things in such a way that it should allow us to have their proper extent, not exceeding their limits beyond very precise rules. If there are those who, besides being clever metaphysicians, do not think properly in respect of ordinary conduct of life, it is because they have neither enough knowledge of the world around, nor of how people behave; thus, their metaphysics, for want of proper matter, falls upon falsities. I assure you that the scholars are sometimes to the masses what the masses are to the scholars. They find themselves to be less of metaphysicians than one would believe for want of an experience of things in life and the others are more of metaphysicians than they think because of their precise and subtle reflections on the objects which are familiar to them."

It occurred all of a sudden to many people in the group that the conversation was becoming tiresome. Eugene however informed Teandre that he was willing to renew the discussion bet-

ween the two of them in a particular *promenade* of which they fixed the place and the time. That which they said in that *promenade* made the subject matter of the following conversation.

SECOND CONVERSATION

"You appear to me to confuse," said Eugene, "at some places the metaphysicians and the ordinary people so that I do not see at all still, of what use the profession of metaphysicians in particular would be. If the familiar experience of certain objects makes man a metaphysician, then there will be a philosopher without being required to think at all and he will again have for himself the benefit of having been spared of the cost of study and reflection."

"While he is spared of what you say," returned Teandre, "it is not for him a benefit; it is not like a mason who would compliment himself for having been spared of the cost of the knowledge concerning the rules of architecture, independently of which he places with sufficient regularity the stones, one over the other; that is sufficient in his case for a sort of routine for which he cannot formulate any reason. The perfection of the mind is not only to act and think, but to act and think with reflection and rule. Without that he (the mason) does not have the merit of the rightness of his actions or of his thoughts; he will carry them out with a certain risk. It is rather the objects which determine him to think; he does not determine anything of them himself and he remains as if confined to those objects, remaining incapable of knowing other objects with the same facility and the same discernment. On the contrary, a philosopher who invites his own attention not only to the objects which occupy him but also to the connections which they have with infinite other things, attends to multiple objects and makes their proper knowledge infinitely perfect. Thus, distinguishing all the ideas of the things that are presented to his spirit, he perceives on the one hand into the minutest differences and on the other, the least resemblance which is found or which can be found between them. It is exactly that which makes one a metaphysician and that which distinguishes him from the vulgar. He then finds the same difference between those people who speak good some-

times, and a man of letters who does good always with the help of rules and reflections which direct his spirit."

"I believed at first," retorted Eugene, "to find myself unexpectedly a metaphysician; but since it is necessary to have reflections and rules, I can very well decline anew to become one."

"I believed," interrupted Teandre, "that you were rather excited (by what I said). For, were you to desire seriously to grasp that which I said, you would find in yourself a man of greater dignity, doing a very right kind of analysis of his thoughts, first distinguishing them and again reuniting them as perfectly as possible."

"That which you propose," reopened Eugene, "could have sufficient charm but if it is necessary to get back to the things which have repelled me so strongly in the school at the time of my studies, will they not repel me still more even today? Were they not only the strange names with which they were donned?—the abstractions, universals, individuals, relations? For, in the end, each one of these appears to me to be more difficult than all else. They are also beyond everything insofar as their utility is concerned."

Teandre replied with a smile, "Are you a man to be scared of words? That will be like your own shadow frightening you."

"It is not really the words that displease me," responded Eugene, "but the barbarity of words which I do not understand at all and which does not enable me to understand anything."

Teandre said, "Would you believe that the expressions that are so barbarous and against which you grudge, signify very nearly the same things that you find so plausible in our first conversation? You will judge this by considering the term 'abstraction'—which appears to be most difficult and which is most important for good understanding. Have you never noticed that it is in the objects that certain powers, qualities or circumstances are really inseparable? For example, understanding and the will are really very much inseparable from the soul; for, an understanding without will and a will without understanding will no longer be a soul and will be no longer anything. However we can in our soul and through our thought, separate the two

things which are inseparable in themselves. In thinking sometimes in accordance with will, we don't think in accordance with understanding or in thinking sometimes in accordance with understanding we don't think in accordance with will. Colour is really inseparable from the thing coloured, and it is impossible that in reality, one finds colour where one does not find a coloured thing, may be of wood, of stone, of gold, of silver or of some other material; however, one could, in thought, separate the colour from the coloured thing, think of the colour without thinking of that which is coloured."

"That which you say is indeed evident," interrupted Eugene "and presents no difficulty; but I do not see at all what's in the expression 'abstraction' that you wish to explain to me, and that which one says ordinarily to be the principal object of the metaphysics."

"That which you find evident and without difficulty," responded Teandre, "is exactly that which the philosophers understand by the word 'abstraction'; the word signifies only separation and comes from the Latin word '*abstrahere*' which means 'to separate'; *abstraction is then the separation which the mind makes through the thought of the things which are not at all separated in themselves.*"

"I wonder," said Eugene, "that I myself and so many honest people with me have upto now heard so often the expression 'abstraction' without comprehending it very well, whereas it was so easy to make out what it means. But I wonder at the same time why metaphysics entertains itself by considering the abstractions and occupies itself with them. For what good purpose should one conceive as separated the things which are not really separated? Is it not to see them in a state different from the one in which they really are and consequently to see them under a false and unreal light?"

"Your objection is ingenious," replied Teandre, "and it ought to make us admit of an abuse of metaphysics in which different philosophers have fallen, and possibly even the leaders of the more brilliant and recent sects of philosophers. They have regarded sometimes as really separated that which is not at all

separated except through abstraction which their spirit makes. Get to know then in a manner which you will no longer misunderstand, the nature of abstraction : while in its own way the spirit separates a circumstance, a modification, a particularity or quality, (for these different words here have the same significance) from the thing which is *circonstanciée*, modified or particularised, it does not judge it, for that matter, as really separated : if it does, that will be a false judgment. What it does is that it directs its attention only to that circumstance or particularity, without drawing its attention to the rest of the thing."

"Thus while the mind perceives in a pearl whiteness or roundness which are indeed the circumstances or modifications, the mind can consider, and considers often, either the whiteness or the roundness independently of one another and independently of the pearl even in which they are found, but without judging that they are really separated. It is not then to judge anything false about the pearl if one makes an abstraction while taking into account one of the circumstances without directing attention to all the rest which the pearl is, or of that which is there in the pearl. When I think uniquely of the vivacity of your spirit, I make an abstraction, not actually directing my attention to the solidity of your spirit, although really and in effect, the solidity of your spirit should not be separated from its vivacity, since the one and the other are only the qualities of the same spirit which is yours and which is equally vivacious and solid."

"But as the same thing has different qualities which each in particular can occupy our spirit, we regard them as each in particular, applying our mind with more attention and more efficacy; for, limited as it is, if the mind sees at the same time different qualities of an object it will see them only in a gross and confused manner. Instead, if it takes them each in particular, it can place it much more within its reach in order to scrutinize everything that they are and to know through them more perfectly all that which the object is. This is commonly known in this world as seeing the same thing from its different sides or its different facets and under the different shades to which it is susceptible. Far from it then, as you appear to fear that metal physics, in the use of abstractions, is an exercise fallacious and

dangerous. It is, as I have said, a more dignified exercise of the human spirit, and the only one which puts him in the state of reflecting about all the things with propriety and utmost precision which it is capable of."

"In effect," pursued Teandre, "what is it in the human beings that makes them to think with little justice? It is this. Instead of considering an affair or an object in all its aspects, one does not disentangle those aspects enough; it is that which causes the confusion in the mind; it perceives neither all the differences that exist between them, nor those points in which they can have resemblance or some common element."

"Besides, a quality common in many different objects, considered inasmuch as it enables us to organise them properly, is that which they call in the school, the *universal*; for example, the quality of philosopher, which is common to Socrates, Plato, to Descartes and to others is called in that context, *universal* and all the qualities which bring together, or are common to many objects are called the *universals*. A thing (or a being) considered inasmuch as its substance is itself particular and is not at all the substance of another thing. It is that which one calls '*individual*'. Further, the connection of some circumstance of a thing with some circumstance of some other thing, is that which one calls *relation*. Now, you can see in the *first place*, how the abstractions can yield themselves as the object of metaphysics, since it teaches us to consider the objects in their different facets, and the consideration of each one of those facets is in itself an abstraction. *Secondly*, you can see how the abstractions, far from having anything that is fallacious, have only that which is very useful. *Thirdly*, how they are connected with the universals, the individuals and the relations, that one can learn at so little a cost. *Fourthly*, how those expressions, which caused us worry, signify all that is easy and that you don't really have reason of your own to get frightened."

"It is true," said Eugene, "but does not part of the mistake lie with those who have instructed me? Is it my fault not to have understood that which they do not make intelligible? Well, I shall be then willing to make presently amends for those prejudices which I did have. For, in the light of all that which you

say about the nature of metaphysics, not only shall I not find anything easier than that but also anything which should be of a greater use, nor that which should suit better to my taste. Metaphysics has the reputation of amusing itself with vain subtleties, but now it appears to me on the contrary that it ought to dissipate them (vain subtleties) since in showing to the spirit distinctly all the sides and all the facets of an object, it can easily bring about a discernment through which one can see with the utmost justice all that the objects are and that which they are not."

"You anticipate yourself," said Teandre, "that which I wish you to sense as the advantage of metaphysics, that one sacrifices the wrong that is appropriated in the frivolous speculations. Its most essential service is to place within the reach of the spirit all the most interesting things of life. One sometimes finds the great men and the ordinary people, the men of letters and the ignorant ones speak much on the important subjects without deciphering precisely what it's all about; one finds that much of the discourse leads often to confusion about everything. However, I happened to learn more than once through the help of the metaphysics of one of my friends in less than two pages that which fills the entire volumes in which, so to say, the ideas are sunk beneath the language (*parole*) and where topic under discussion runs the risk of being shipwrecked."

"I shall be extremely obliged," retorted Eugene, "if you will allow me to know some of those precise discourses which treat briefly indeed, the subjects of which I have apparently spoken, as also the others which treat them without understanding anything any more. Why deal with and improve after all the very large works on the matters which are indeed so many?"

"You will not believe," responded Teandre, "how few they are when one knows to reduce them to their just and proper measure. Each question, howsoever confusing it might be, is only, so to say, a glance of an eye or a certain point of view. It is necessary to realise it. It's there that one succeeds in getting an exact analysis which the metaphysics makes."

"I know however," resumed Eugene, "about those very extensive works which have clever metaphysicians as their authors."

"Those authors," said Teandre, "could have been still more clever or they could have at least exercised more cleverness in being more precise. Furthermore, I do not wish to say that this always is the defect of metaphysics in a work which is more extensive; for, in the first place, it happens often that in the treatment of the principal question one indeed introduces several other incidental matters. In the second place, that which includes a great number of facts does demand sometimes a greater understanding for getting clear about them; also a manner, in which a metaphysical mind will always expose them to itself with much more precision and neatness than the others, cutting short all that which is not useful, so as to steer by the shortest way to the point where the metaphysician has them all in view. In the third place, metaphysics happens to be expressed by those who have some metaphysics in their mind but who haven't anything of it in the language, for want of experience, and expressions at hand needed for delineating with precision and justice the ideas which they have in their head."

"But," said Eugene, "with so much of precision in metaphysics that you appear to insist upon for the operations of mind, do we not have to fear at all that one will not find there much of dryness or even of pedantism?"

"That fear," responded Teandre, "cannot notice, I may assert in a way, certain abuses (abortions) of metaphysics which have brought to it some, but not all, prerogatives. In effect, it will have, if it is necessary, to unravel the nature and the ways of making statements, inasmuch as it will be necessary for entering the thoughts of others with facility and even with agreement, everything which one wishes to introduce there. Thus, though the metaphysics concentrates mainly on the objects of logic, of mathematics, of theology and of the other kinds of most sublime knowledge, it will not extend itself any way less on eloquence, on grammar and on the other parts of literary field. Those who mix up science and literature without applying any metaphysics have less of principles than of routine and can scarcely be regarded as the people from Parnasse. They observe possibly the laws but without having them in spirit."

"You take the same course," interrupted Eugene, "in order to do metaphysics which, they say, Cicero took for eloquence. You

extend its domain over all kinds of faculties, thinking as if they all belong to it. But, as for me, (he added in laughing), since I am fair, I do not love at all the usurpations."

"I shall not take possibly a wrong step," resumed Teandre, "if I imitate Cicero on this point. The science of good speech and that of thinking justly about everything can extend themselves to all the things. However, if one does not yield to the usurpations which you fear and yet preserves still the delicacy of the sense of equity, I would not push that far the jurisdiction of metaphysics. That is why, although there should be absolute precision and accuracy which it generates in the mind and which makes one succeed in arts, sciences and, I may also say, even in the business, I agree willingly that the metaphysics would lose its name (i. e. would replace itself) for learning each of the sciences and the other occupations where it enters. The unpretentious character that I lend to metaphysics will not exclude anything that is useful; everything that is useful will be included in it. It will not then be anything less than, as we have already said, the principle of all the sciences and the universal science."

While Teandre spoke to Eugene this way, there occurred a rain which interrupted their *promenade* and their conversation also. A little later, they recommenced in the same manner and I am going to report it now.

THIRD CONVERSATION

"You have made me to conceive in our previous conversation," said Eugene to Teandre, "a lofty idea of the metaphysics through the extension of its use. But then, will it not find itself to be so vast that it would become almost impossible to accomplish it ? To agree with you, it is necessary that a treatise on metaphysics should include all the sciences and all kinds of imaginable knowledge. In that case, consider how concise it will have to be; otherwise it will scarcely find itself to be short of the entire library."

"I subscribe to your thought," replied Teandre, "The treatise cannot be finished at all if one wishes to explain in it all that which is susceptible to metaphysics just as a treatise on eloquence or a treatise on architecture will be immense if one wishes to

apply the rules to each of the works that can be created through the help of eloquence or of architecture. But for determining the limits of a treatise on metaphysics, what is it that one should do? One insists at first upon the objects of our spirit which are most essential and through which we reach all others; they are the attainments of our mind. Further, since in our knowledge, nothing is so important as demarcating clearly the truth and the evidence, a treatise on metaphysics should indeed make that as the very first and the principal subject of inquiry. In addition, one finds in it precise notions of all things that are most universally the objects of our thought concerning the nature and the properties of all the things and particularly the spiritual beings who are most noble. That is why some people regard metaphysics as the science of being or of being in general. In this way metaphysics leads us to make exact analysis of our knowledge of the nature of our soul which is the principle, and of the properties of things which form the most extended object. It makes us apply the same method to all the particular objects which deserve to be known exactly. This way it accustoms us to judge and to think of them, no more as a common man in the world, who knows them only in a confused and gross manner, but with all the precision and the accuracy which the human spirit is capable of."

"Your plan," said Eugene, "appears to me to be as interesting as the works which I have heard saying on that matter but which, as far as I can judge, know very little. But note well, I want you to perceive that you won't be able to replace anything for *abstraction*, which nevertheless, as you said before, is the principal subject matter of metaphysics."

"You have brought to my notice," said Teandre, "that I do not employ here the word, '*abstraction*'. But let me tell you that I do not speak less of that which is signified by that word, since it only marks the kind of exercise by which our mind thinks of one of the facets or circumstances of a thing without thinking of its other facets or circumstances. To think each of the facets in particular of every thing for forming the most exact and the most precise notion, is indeed the object of metaphysics and for attaining that object, it has to employ the *abstractions*."
I.P.Q...2

"I recognise," said Eugene, "that I have forced you to repeat that which you have already put forth on other occasions; but pardon a new metaphysician, who would like to have greater facility to understand that which you wish to explain to him and who would therefore like to be more familiar with those expressions."

"Speak no more of that facility alone," Teandre resumed, "but speak also of a facility, entire and perfect, whereby a just soul like that of yours, is naturally a metaphysician; so that, for executing it in a supreme degree, all that he needs to do (with a little exercise that can be easily mastered if he wishes so) in order to grasp the use of expressions for certain notions, is to present them appropriately to his mind."

"Since the understanding of expressions is so useful," returned Eugene, "allow me to request you to see if I have well understood your thought in respect of those expressions of which you have given me the notions, which cover the first elements of metaphysics, for one can repeat them (though not frequently) in the beginning for crystallizing them and for getting used to them as well. You have informed me that the true metaphysics is the science of considering the things from all the possible facets to which they are susceptible, and the abstraction with which the metaphysics is principally occupied, is only a consideration of each of the facets of one and the same thing to which the spirit brings itself uniquely without bringing itself then to the consideration of the other facets of the same object. For example, when I consider of soul inasmuch as it thinks, that is to say, of its faculty of thinking, I do not consider the essence of its nature, nor its faculty of willing, nor its immortality, nor any other particularities or prerogatives which lie in it."

"You have grasped my thought so well," said Teandre, "that you express just as I would express myself."

"You want me to add," pursued Eugene, "that the word '*abstraction*' signifies *separation*, because the spirit, through its operation, separates in its thought, that which is not at all separated in reality; consider for example, whiteness in a pearl without thinking of the pearl itself; although the pearl and the whiteness of the pearl are really the same, mind comes to know

the pearl inasmuch as it is white. You have further pointed out that the abstractions or considerations of facets or particular circumstances of an object help to know the object in the most perfect manner leading us to see all that it has in particular or all that it has in similarity and in common with other objects."

"That is of course that which I already said," resumed Teandre. "But I doubt if, with some subtlety one will not detect at all that you alter it somewhat."

"Let us then be content, I request you," interrupted Eugene, "with the plausible metaphysics for which you have developed taste in me without mixing anything with it from the too subtle metaphysics that has repulsed me at other times."

"It is not necessary," said Teandre, "for you to think that *plausible* is incompatible with *subtle*, for in the end the most subtle reflections can become plausible when they are essentially true. Although it is so, you add to that which I have said, a word which will make a possible difference, imperceptible at first, but essentially very real, in speaking of that which one and the same thing has in *common* with the others. As for me, I have taken care to avoid here the use of the word, '*common*' which you employ; for although the words '*similar*' and '*common*' in the ordinary language are used indifferently, i. e. one for the other, they must not be taken thus in the discourse of a metaphysician who intends to avoid every shadow of confusion. But it can arise from the use made without discernment of the two expressions, '*similar*' and '*common*'. Thus on seeing the whiteness in two objects, they say that they have something in *common*. Again, they say that the reason and the faculty of reasoning is *common* to all the men. Usage authorises that and certainly one ought to follow the usage; but the metaphysician ought to remind us always that faculty of reasoning, common in all the men, is however a resemblance of reason or of the faculty of reasoning."

"What!" asked Eugene, "is it not always the same faculty of reasoning that is there in all the men?"

"It is same," replied Teandre, "and yet it is not the same; the word '*same*' as well as the word '*common*' forms here the

equivocation that I fear and that which I wish to avoid. In effect, it signifies equally, in the *first place*, that which is simply similar, that is to say, same only in resemblance; in the *second place*, that which is substantially common or the same in substance. Thus, to speak with metaphysical exactness, the reason or faculty of reasoning is similar in all the men but it is not substantially common in all the men, since in the end, if we take the term in its narrow sense, majority of men or majority of things have nothing and will have nothing in common substantially."

"I acknowledge however," said Eugene, "that my imagination does not grasp at all still that distinction which you wish to find between the words '*common*' and '*similar*' and between the two meanings of the word '*same*'; for, it appears to me that all that is very much the same in every sense cannot be shown to have in them any shadow of difference."

"Let us attempt," resumed Teandre, "to make out for you that difference, somewhat subtle, so that it appears to you not only sensible but also palpable. You say in speaking of water which is at the source of a stream that it is the *same* as the one in the stream itself or that it is common to the stream and to the source because it is the *same substance* of water which has passed from source to the stream."

"That's true," said Eugene.

"But," Teandre resumed, "nothing thus passes from the substance of one man to the substance of another man, so that the substance of one, as we have said, is neither a part nor the whole of the substance of other. All that which is the *same* in respect of that which is in *common* between the one and the other, is then only in the resemblance and not at all in the substance. On the other hand, water which has passed from the source in the stream is substantially the same water. The words '*same*' or '*common*' then signify sometimes a simple resemblance between two or more substances and sometimes a single substance; one thus finds in their significance a real difference."

"But," interrupted Eugene, "that which is actually the substance of water at the source is nothing of that which is actually the

substance of water in the stream. You will allow me then, if you please, to reject the comparison that you were making as also the consequence that you wished to draw from it."

"You will permit me in your turn," responded Teandre, "to reject neither one nor the other but to approve of the ingenious reflection that you make concerning 'water which is actually at the source' and the 'water that is actually in the stream'; for, they are, as you say, two substances of water and they are not the same at all, and that is not through the resemblance; instead, a portion of water which is at the source and which is actually in the stream is the same substance of water since it is found successively in two diverse situations. But a portion of water which is actually at the source and a portion of water which is actually in the stream, are not only in different situations but are two substances, which through the resemblance of their qualities form in our mind the same idea of water, but which, for all that, are nothing less than the same and the single substance; since the portion of water in the stream can actually be destroyed whereas the portion of water at the source subsists in its entirety. It is therefore a veritable abstraction of our mind, which considers that which is similar to the two portions of water, without considering in what or how one is not the other."

"See, how much grateful I ought to be to you for your thought," Teandre added, "and how you ought to be grateful unto yourself, in connection with the clarification that you asked on the point in question."

"At least," resumed Eugene, "I should be grateful to the doubt which made to occur in my mind that which I proposed to you; for, it appears to me presently, that I find very clear that which I found formerly incomprehensible and even absolutely false. Your explication is therefore exact and right. But its rightness and its exactitude appear to me to be useless and I do not see what use they can be put to."

"As for me," said Teandre, "I find that it is always of a very grand use to have exactly discovered a truth which one misunderstood before. Let us therefore work without rest to discover the truths—so says a good spirit. They appear at first to be sterile,

but they are always fruitful and will be found to have an important use when we think of them even a little."

"The subject that we are discussing is itself an example. The difference of significance between the word '*same*' and the word '*common*'; which you find to be less important, would you believe that I regard it as essential? Think according to the sentiment of a man who will not be a suspect at all on this point. It is Mr. Bayle who says that it is necessary to see that that equivocation of the word '*same*' is the basis of the miserable system of Spinoza, which presupposes the same substance in all the things because they have something in *common* known to exist. But in responding this way to Spinoza that that which he takes for the *same* and the *common* is only the similar and that he construes the identity of abstraction as the identity of reality, the system would find itself at once reduced to fumes."

"Further I am afraid that the facile manner of thus taking abstractions for the realities is an abuse quite familiar to the ancient philosophies as also to the new philosophies. The Aristotelians have yielded to it. Descartes also is not careful. Has he not fallen from his high position, with his secterians? The extension is a particularity, a circumstance or modification of body which is separable only through abstraction. Descartes happily takes that abstraction for the reality and extension for the substance of the same body. But he does not hold—and this is an example which he himself gives—that the movement is the substance or solidity is the substance and thousand other similar abstractions for as many substances which will be as many chimeras."

"You frighten me," said Eugene, "by the consequences that you pretend to draw from a reflection which appeared to me at first to be extremely trifling. I had more than once tried to express my resentment against you, but you make it fall back on that prince of modern philosophy. Heavens forbid! I am afraid, without much substance you deal with Descartes and his followers."

"Yes," interrupted Teandre, "I treat them freely in philosophy, that is to say without mercy as they themselves have treated Aristotle and the ancients. But it is not that which matters to me today. That which I propose to you is not an affair of the

present moment viz., bringing it up to date. Besides, it is long time that we have been speaking. I ought to be at a place where I promised to make myself available. It is sufficient to tell you that that which appears sometimes trifling in metaphysical truth is often of an extreme importance so far as the consequences are concerned."

"Those consequences are so strange," resumed Eugene, "that I pray you not to oblige me to receive them so promptly and before having thought about them with greater attention. For some confidence that I have begun to develop due to your insights, it is necessary to have some leisure in order to allow them to settle in my mind and to get thoroughly acquainted with them."

"I appreciate your prudence," replied Teandre, "it is not proper to admit anything as true unless one examines its truth oneself. I shall be then very much content if you will no longer regard as frivolous the subtleties of the metaphysics, in case I make you see the certitude of the consequences of which I have spoken."

Eugene promised Teandre expressly that he would always try to follow his views and grasp all that he proposes, as much as it's possible for him. Upon this, they spoke about many civil matters but none of them referred to the theme of the conversation.

FOURTH CONVERSATION

Eugene, having rejoined Teandre, commenced on his own to assure that he had recognised the importance of never mistaking an abstraction for a reality as also of search for the most exact and precise truth. "As for the truth," he added, "I am afraid that I myself was struck with the disadvantage or the abuse of abstractions, while I always wanted to distinguish neatly that what the truth is; please enlighten me as to whether I am renewing here the famous question which is proposed on other occasions: What is truth? For, it appears to me that one has still to answer that question."

"The philosophers have always replied that question," said Teandre, "when they define the truth as *conformity of our thought with its object.*"

"I confess," said Eugene, "that I do not remember that definition myself. But I also confess that I do not find myself very much satisfied even if I am reminded of it; for, if the truth is a conformity of my thought, then it's a particularity or a circumstance of my thought; it will be then contingent and will not subsist by itself; it will not be eternal. This appears to me to be contrary to what the philosophers of great authority have informed us at their best concerning the nature of truth. Will there be no risk involved in still taking abstractions for realities in what they advance as the chapters on truth?"

"Your suspicion," responded Teandre, "is at least as well-founded as their authority; it is certain that the truth, not being anything else than a particularity, circumstance or quality of our knowledge and of our thought, is contingent in such a way that if there were no thoughts and knowledge in the world there would not have been any truth as such. Further as God is a spirit which subsists necessarily and which knows the entire eternity, it is also in Him that the truth subsists essentially, eternally and necessarily; but, for all that, it is not to be considered as independent of thought, since it is the thought of God himself which should always conform to the reality of things."

"I have still some difficulty," resumed Eugene, "in conceiving that the truth should be really something other than the being who thinks; for, in that case, is not the reflection of our new philosophers plausible that even if one destroys in one's thought all the intellect in the world, one can still conceive the truth?"

"That which you imagine then," said Teandre, "is just an abstraction and not a reality. You can think of the truth in abstraction, without thinking of any intelligent being; but really there cannot be any truth without thought, nor thought without intelligent being, nor any intelligent being without a being who thinks and who therefore should be a spiritual substance. Here is then that which enables us to grasp the exchange of views on this point between different philosophers."

"By means of thinking through abstraction on truth, which is a particularity of thought just as the thought itself is a particularity or modification of our soul, they accustom themselves

to regard the truth as something independent of the thought and of spirit; almost like the children who find in a mirror the representation of an object independently of the light rays of which it is, nevertheless, only a modification."

"For attempting a better understanding," said Eugene, "that the truth subsists really only in the spiritual substance inasmuch as the thought of the spirit conforms to its object, note well what I ask you : What is it that one understands here by '*object*' of our spirit ?"

"I shall be indeed embarrassed," replied Teandre, "to say to you in general that which one understands by that term; each one understands it after his own manner and the manner of many people is to understand it with little clarity; but if you ask me as to what I understand myself in particular and as to what I believe one ought to understand by that term, I can possibly satisfy you."

"You judge well," said Eugene, "that which is there uniquely. It is that which makes me to listen to you."

"Possibly, without paying attention to it right now," said Teandre, "you may attend to something else; for, without giving thought to it, one may adjust the most clear notions with the notions about which one is already prejudiced, but without regard to those which could have come to the spirit from others on the subject in question. It appears to me that *in saying that the truth is the conformity of the thought with its object*, one must distinguish absolutely two sorts of *objects*, which are really two sorts of truths. Many philosophers have confused them. It is on that point that there occurs the most strange confusion in their principles. Lest I am misunderstood on such an important point, let us observe, I pray you, that *truth*, in the exact significance of that expression, applies only to a judgment that we form; so that, *truth is the conformity of the judgment that we bring about with the object of the same judgment*. In effect, if there is no judgment at all, there is nothing to be judged as true or false; and consequently, one will not find any more the truth nor the falsity in the sense in which I understand it here. It is the question of presently distinguishing well what the object of the judgment is; as for example, in the propositions :

'the sun is bright' or 'a circle is round', what is the object which ought to conform to the judgment that you make since that conformity would decide the truth?"

"The object of judgment that I make," said Eugene, "is here that the *sun* is effectively *bright* and that a *circle* is effectively *round*, and it is that which appears to me to render those two propositions true."

"Will they be true," continued Teandre, "if God, through his omnipotence were to annihilate the sun and all the circles which are in the world?"

"I am afraid you are setting up for me some kind of a trap," responded Eugene, "in order to find me soon embarrassed. However I think it will be alright to say in reply that since the nature of every *circle* is to be *round* and the nature of the *sun* is to be *bright*, even when the sun and all the circles are annihilated, it will be always true to say that *the sun is bright* and *a circle is round*."

"But," resumed Teandre smilingly, "for being *bright* or for being *round*, it is necessary to *exist*; but neither sun nor any circle will be there any more since we suppose that they will be annihilated, and then it will not be true to say that *the sun is bright* and *a circle is round*. May I clear up my thought?"

"It's more than an honour unto me," replied Eugene, smiling in his own way. "Here am I in all the embarrassment that I fear and in the trap which you set up for me. After all, it is necessary to say here that *the sun is bright in case it exists* and that *a circle is round in case there exists some circle*."

"Don't you complain any more," said Teandre, "of a trap and of an embarrassment from which you have come out so well; but for deriving all the benefit that I have in view, think carefully of what I ask you still further: whether these truths, viz., the sun is bright and a circle is round, absolutely include the truth of the existence of the sun and of the existence of any circle."

"They do not necessarily include them," said Eugene, "since in the supposition that you have made about the annihilation of the sun and of all the circles, neither the sun nor any circle

would exist. It would be especially true to say that *'the sun by its nature is bright, and that a circle by its nature is round.'*"

"I have then difficulty about only one thing," said Teandre, "and that is how to learn then what the nature of the sun is and what the nature of the circle is since neither one nor the other existed."

"I do not see how to reply," said Eugene, "except that the sun and the circle, as well as their nature, will be in our thought."

"You have touched the point," said Teandre. "It is necessary to distinguish the thought that we have of the nature of things (i. e. thought independent of their existence) from the actual nature of things, which is other than their existence. And here it is that which must make sensible the two kinds of truths which some philosophers have not at all distinguished: firstly, an *internal truth*, of which the object is purely in our spirit; secondly, an *external truth* of which the object is not only in our spirit but also exists effectively and really outside of our spirit and such that our spirit conceives it. Thus every external truth is at the same time internal (since it will not be a truth if it were not in the spirit); but truth is not always *external*. Now, inasmuch as truth remains simply internal, we do not judge, nor can we judge, anything of the existence of the object which is outside of our thought; instead, through external truth, we judge that the object which is in our thought has still outside of our thought, an existence, effective and real."

"For distinguishing better still, the two sorts of truths, let us add that the *internal truth* is the conformity of one of our ideas with another idea that our spirit proposes as an object; and the *external truth* is the conformity of those two ideas reunited and linked together, with an object existing outside of our spirit and which we would represent actually to ourselves; or well, if you wish, the *internal truth* is only a judgment on the fitness (propriety) and the connection of two ideas actually presented to our thought. On the other hand, the *external truth* is not only a judgment on the fitness of the two ideas, but also a judgment on the connexion of two ideas united together with an object which exists outside of our spirit. The proposition for

example, 'the existence of the two coins of gold worth twenty francs each in my purse is the existence of forty francs in my purse,' I say, can be considered as an *internal truth* or as an *external truth*. As an internal truth, it is true necessarily, whereas it is not at all necessarily true as an external truth. In effect, as I do not have actually two coins in my purse, the existence of forty francs in my purse is an existence which subsists only in my thought and not in reality. If I had actually or really two coins of gold worth 20 francs each in my purse, the truth of the proposition will be no more only *internal*, but it will be *external* as well, because it will have an object existing outside my thought conforming to the judgment that I have made in my thought."

"It will be something like being ill at ease," said Eugene, "not to understand it, as also the manner in which you explain; but I wish to understand equally well what could be the use of a reflection so natural and so certain as that."

"It is immense," said Teandre, "and it ought to provide such basis to the entire metaphysics that for want of that reflexion, many new philosophers have only ruined its foundations. They have accepted as a universal principle the truth that '*all that I find clearly included in the idea of any thing is true and can be asserted of that thing.*' The principle is evident and incontestable for the *internal truths*, and is not at all proper for the *external truths*. In effect, if the clear idea that I have of any thing does not conform to all that which is in itself the effective nature of that thing, the same truth will then subsist without an external truth. But it is that which happens to all of us in respect of all the things outside us; for, having only a clear idea of that which appears to us of those things, unless their inner and effective nature is known to us (since it is God alone who knows it), the clear idea that I form of them does not conform to all that which is in itself the effective nature of that thing. Consequently, that clear idea which I have becomes only an internal truth and not an external truth. Attending to all the truths, internal and external, indifferently, the sublime spirits have understood the change as being that which applies to the internal truths. They have still further, through the simple idea of God, thought of proving the existence of God, using the premiss: 'the

existence of God is essentially implied in the idea of God'; but they thus prove only the existence of God in idea, that is to say they prove only that one cannot form for himself the idea of God without including in it the idea of existence; but all this makes it only an internal truth, which proves nothing with regard to that which is outside our idea and of our spirit. They did not therefore prove the existence of God in reality which is outside of our spirit but that it's only in our spirit and in our idea. But it is the very unique question of proving (that proposition) when one is in difficulty of demonstrating the existence of God to the atheists. Certain philosophers thus confuse thousand other internal truths with as many external truths, considering one and the other as only one kind of truth. However, one claims to understand them when they write: "I have a clear idea of that thing; the truth is in all its light; Who can miss the truth here ?" — But what truth ? A truth purely internal and truth of idea, which, if one is not on one's guard, leads often to illusion and to error, in making us take imperceptibly the ideas for the realities, the abstractions for the existence of things and the systems for the effects."

"The improprieties that you note," said Eugene in laughing, "are not possibly considerable, but when these philosophers have built their metaphysical systems on such ingenious illusions, would they not simply make realities dull and drab ? Further, to speak seriously, the truths which they have established do not form in the least a solid science and you will allow me in that case to believe the persons whose equity and ingenuity is above all suspicion. They have convinced me more than once that the truths established by the illustrious authors do not yield to the demonstrations like those of geometry. Is there any thing more certain than the truths of geometry ?"

"Nothing is more certain," responded Teandre. "I assure you that it is the strongest and the most vivid evidence to which the human spirit should be susceptible. I shall be even in accord with you in saying that the chains of certain Cartesian truths are as evident as the geometrical chains of reasoning. But it is necessary that you also agree with me that the geometrical truths are very often only the *internal truths*. It is demonstrated in geo

metry, for example, that a perfect globe, may it be as big as that of the universe, will hold on a body as small as the point of a needle; but in spite of the most clear demonstrations which prove that truth, have people ever held it although the world is a sort of globe? The metaphysics of our philosophers is thus a globe which holds on a point of needle; they are the demonstrations of geometry and not of the actual things; speculations and not realities; *internal truths* and not *external verities*."

"But," resumed Eugene, "if the speculations do not accord with the realities then the geometrical demonstrations would not have contributed as much as they have in attaining the perfection in the fields of mechanics and the arts, which are the actual practices of pure realities."

"It will not lend any support to you," resumed Teandre, "so as to find me in an embarrassing situation. The cleverest sophist will not have the guts to make me fear. You think that there is incompatibility between the speculation and the practice. But that is not at all that which I wish to say. On the contrary, all knowledge of reality and of practice presupposes speculation and accord with each other very well. But all the speculative knowledge does not however presuppose practice and reality. The globe on the needle is a proof of that. In the principles of metaphysics, it is necessary to devote oneself at first to distinguish the pure *internal verities* from the *external verities* which presuppose always the internal ones. Further, as the real metaphysicians have never any difficulty over the internal truths, I wish that they devote themselves principally to establish the external truths with a view to finding out those that we ought to admit as incontestable about the things which exist outside of our thought and outside of us."

"One will not have that," reacted Eugene, "if one fails to examine the reality of everything which exists besides us, since the entire universe is to be comprehended."

"It is true," responded Teandre, "that it is necessary to devote at first only to that which one calls the *first truths*, which are the source and the principle of all the truths which one can establish about the real existence of objects outside us; so that every truth

which is not a necessary consequence of those truths will be declared thereby as purely internal truth and speculation."

"The design which you propose," said Eugene, "appears to me to be useful; but in addressing yourself first to the external truths, I do not want you to treat the internal truths with such indifference to which you should not condescend in speaking about them."

"If I misunderstand them," said Teandre, "I shall not get to the heart of them in making analysis with all the care that I am capable of. If ever you wish to look into the book entitled : *Les principes du raisonnement* (*The Principles of Reasoning*), you will find that the second part is only an exposition of the nature of internal truths and of that which serves them in principle. It is at this point alone that concerns essentially everything that is called *logic*; a logical truth is only an internal truth and all that which the logic informs will never succeed, without some other support, to make us discover or know even a single external truth. Therefore, whenever it pleases you, we shall search for the foundations in that direction."

Eugene and Teandre fixed a day for their new conversation. On his way home, Eugene met another philosopher with whom he spoke about that matter. The latter, having taken a long time to think about those matters, communicated to Eugene many reflexions for being proposed to Teandre. One will know them easily in the conversation which follows.

FIFTH CONVERSATION

Eugene did not fail to join Teandre in a garden where they had agreed to meet. With a view to getting well prepared for the conversation, not only had he gone over and over again in his mind through the reflections which were inspired in him by the philosopher whom he had met, but he had also read carefully the second part of the book : *Les Principes du raisonnement* (*The Principles of Reasoning*). He began by thanking Teandre for having suggested to him the work, so proportionate. He also mentioned that the natural impatience which he had, had never allowed him to read a book that was either too long or too difficult to comprehend. "I find it easy," he added, "to

repeat to you here the precis. It would be less of a botheration for you to demand any clarification on the truths which you call *logical* or *internal* than to lead us with greater facility to the examination of the external truths."

"An internal truth is only a connexion of an idea with another idea, both of them presented to our spirit, which perceives in them the rapport and the liaison, but without there being any need that there exists outside of us any thing which is really such that we have actually presented to the thought."

"Such truths are those of geometry and of all the demonstrations of sciences; but all those demonstrations, being connections of ideas, form only an ideal science, unless one finds some real object which, existing outside of us, corresponds to that which we have actually presented to the spirit."

"It is there that you should go deep into the matter, it appears to me, in order to enable me to grasp it and understand clearly. What do you then claim today for me to discover more?"

"I propose myself," said Teandre, "to bring to your notice the general principles, for assuring us that that which is presented to our thought exists effectively outside of us in such a way that it is present in our spirit and in our thought. That is to say, it remains for us to examine what are the truths which serve as principles of everything which we can know as certain and evident concerning all that which exists outside us."

Eugene then recalled what the philosopher whom he had met had said to him and asked Teandre: "Will you not have the disposition to show gradually that which has made the illustrious philosophers of our times outspoken, which is of course the same thing as discussing the subject under reference in order to lead me further methodically to a labyrinth of consequences wherein, following their example, I can relish myself in a brilliant chain of internal truths, but which have only an uncertain and ruinous foundation? You expect me to state what the true principles about the objects which exist outside of us are; but if I had the nature to doubt as to whether there are any such principles at all, shall I appear to you to be a very strange but at the same time a very poor philosopher?"

"You do appear to me to be a strange philosopher," replied Teandre in laughing. "But you won't be alone. So little you estimate the opinion of some persons who mingle with philosophers. They will say to you that we haven't any evidence except what they call *metaphysics*. It is that which they take uniquely to consist in the intuitive perception of thoughts or sentiments which we experience actually in ourselves and in the consequences which can be drawn from them by way of geometrical demonstration and by means of that which we call as *internal truths*."

"Since I find myself thus in accord with such persons of spirit," resumed Eugene, "my doubt is not then so ill founded. I request you therefore to commence voluntarily to dispell it."

"I shall request you on my own behalf," said Teandre, "to start examining if the doubt is still lingering in you."

"If I say to you, yes, and if I think it thus, will you not believe in me?" replied Eugene.

"If I said to you," resumed Teandre, "and if I supposed that I doubt my own proper existence would you believe me? Can you ever believe that?"

"No, it is not even a fact at all," resumed Eugene, "our own existence proper is evident to us and every one is convinced of it; but every one is not convinced that each one has the evidence that there exists any being other than oneself."

"All do not say it," said Teandre, "but all, in the heart of their heart, have the sentiment and the thought that we have you and me. But I ask you, if you actually make that reflection; is it possible for you to think seriously that there is no being besides you, that I have no concern with you, that you do not see, nor understand anything really that does not concern you?"

"To speak frankly," responded Eugene, "I am accustomed since long ago to think that there is something besides me, that the custom prevails and that I can scarcely contradict it."

"But," resumed Teandre, "can you ever figure it out to yourself that it has been always possible for you to contradict in good faith that custom or that there can be some one in the world who has been ever sure of that point more forcibly than you yourself?"

"I believe strongly," said Eugene, "that if some one had held it with that force, in his case it would be a little extravagance."

"You are taking a good step," replied Teandre. "I am sure enough that it is well nigh impossible for you to meet a man, who would doubt seriously that he is not the only person who exists in the universe, without thinking that he had in fact lost all the spirit, so that it is evident to each one of us that there exist beings other than he himself."

"However," said Eugene, "to speak as seriously as you would like me to speak, I say to you that it does not seem to me that I have the same evidence for the existence of others as I have for my own existence proper, and I find that that concerns me very much more lively and intimately."

"When I notice an object at noon-time and in bright sunlight," said Teandre, "I see it with greater clarity and also more luminous than when the sun has only arisen. But I do not see that object more veritably, so that it is impossible for me, one way or the other, to judge that I do not see it. It is more or less the same with respect to the evidence about my existence proper and about the existence of other persons; the one, as you have remarked, strikes me more vividly, but the other does not strike me with less certainty either. Although, it is not as you expect, the same sort or particular kind of evidence, it is always an incontestable evidence, unless we wish to dispute over the word, '*evidence*' ! But in order to forestall any dispute of words so frivolous, I shall call up for my evidence *that which is impressed in the spirit of all the men in such a way that it is impossible for them to judge otherwise* and such is the truth by which we judge necessarily that there exists some thing outside of us."

"I admit," resumed Eugene, "that by the path of feeling (emotion) you have brought me to your side. But the philosophers don't stop there only. They certainly want to be led by the path of reasoning and it is the demonstration which I pray you to furnish me against them for bringing them to your view."

"You ask me for them," replied Teandre, "that which you do not obtain and I admit that it is something which it is impossible for me to provide."

"Admit then," interrupted Eugene with vivacity, "that they are not so much mistaken or rather that they reveal themselves to be true philosophers who would not allow themselves to be convinced about that which does not admit of demonstrative proof."

"It cannot admit of any demonstration in this case," resumed Teandre, "but it is thereby that they ought to be convinced more of that point in question. Do they ever wait for a demonstration for being convinced of their proper existence, or is it possible for them to construct one about it? Not at all. Here is the reason. I request you to understand it well for being able to stop at one stroke an infinity of wrong-headed thinkers of their worse reasonings."

"A demonstration is not something else than a *suite* or a chain of propositions in virtue of which one obliges his opponent to acknowledge the consequence of a principle or a truth which he has admitted. It is of course necessary that he has admitted a principle or a truth for which it should be possible for him to make a demonstration. But in the case of the point which is in question, he cannot admit to have any first truth, since the proposition which is on our hand, viz., *there exist things other than me*, is itself a first truth."

"But," replied Eugene, "it is also that about which they are not convinced that there is a first truth, that *there exists something outside of us*."

"Admit at least," resumed Teandre, "that if I propose that as a first truth, it will be entirely absurd to demand that I should prove it since a first principle cannot prove itself. For, I define a first principle as that *which is so clear that it can neither be proved nor attacked with the help of any proposition which is more clear and more immediate to the natural light of the spirit*. Thus to undertake to prove the first principle or truth is to undertake to illuminate that which is more clear than that which one wishes to clarify."

"If the thing which one wants to prove," said Eugene, "is not clear to the others, will they then be obliged to admit as first truth that which you admit yourself?"

"If the first truth," responded Teandre, "is not clear with respect to myself, then it is necessary for us to dispense with reasoning altogether. For, in the end, all reasoning presupposes a known principle. Now, a principle such as the one which is known to all the human beings, is that which we call *first principle*. It is necessary that one who refuses to admit it asserts that it is impossible for the mankind to ever reason with him; and if he admits some first truth, he should say what it is, in order that we can work out demonstrations from it."

"It is always said," resumed Eugene, "that the first and the unique truth which one admits is that of his own proper existence, without admitting thereby anything else; and a Scottish writer¹ has published, they say, a work for proving that he did not have any evidence for the existence of any thing other than himself and further that he had evidence of himself only as a *spirit* but not of himself as a *body*, not having any veritable demonstration of the existence of any body at all."

"Do you believe," said Teandre, "that the Scottish writer has found some very faithful followers?"

"Why not?" asked Eugene smilingly.

"In effect," replied Teandre for himself in laughing, "why don't human beings use the incontestable right which they have to say or to imagine as many extravagant things as it pleases them? One will not contradict oneself if one says that nothing is lower in taste than this in our century. However, here is an alternative to which I have recourse if the Scottish writer deserves to be refuted by some one. Either there is some thing true, or there is nothing true concerning the existence of things outside of us. If there is nothing that is true, all the thoughts and all the reasonings of men on all the things of the world will be so many falsehoods and illusions, in which case one can always ask: how is this illusory principle so universally received in the mind of every human being? Further, if there is something that is true concerning the existence of things outside of us, then one has to say it. And that which one says then will be a *first truth* about which it will be extravagant to ask a demonstration."

¹ Bishop Berkely.

"Could not some people say," resumed Eugene, "that we are assured of the existence of bodies or things outside of us through faith, or at least through the assurance of the state we are in that God cannot deceive us?"

"But," replied Teandre, "for being instructed through faith, which presupposes God, and for being assured that God cannot deceive us, it is necessary to be assured that there exists some being other than me myself, since God and myself are not the same substance, or else, I myself will be God substantially. This is very nearly the impious absurdity of Spinoza, which tends thereby to destroy our most clear first ideas and the most distinct primitive notions. Therefore, apostle Saint Paul, who knew better than our philosophers, far from proving the existence of bodies through that of God, proved on the contrary, the existence of God through that of bodies; so that it is true that the existence and the order of visible things are a first truth, which, according to Apostle St. Paul, precedes even the truth or the knowledge of the existence of God."

"That which you come to explain to me," resumed Eugene, "arouses a new thought in me about which I request you to give me your reaction. If there is a man who insists that one will have to demonstrate to him that there exist in the world things other than himself, and suppose I ask him : wherefrom he has learnt the idea of the *other*, will he not find himself completely embarrassed in replying to it?"

"Your reflection," replied Teandre, "appears to me to be not only subtle but also judicious; for, ultimately, the idea of *other than oneself*, which is in each of us, is either natural in us or received from elsewhere. If it comes from elsewhere, and not from ourselves, there exists then something other than us; and if it is natural in us, it is the nature which forces us to admit it and to judge that it is true, without which it is impossible to imagine how and why, each one of us being necessarily a lone being, the idea of another being should ever come to us in our spirit. But it is a sheer waste of subtlety and solidity to reason against a man who makes an objection as foolish as the one about which we are speaking."

"The reasoning," said Eugene, "will not possibly be so ill-used as you think, since the objection is proposed by the same philo-

sophers who have spirit and the reputation; and just to acknowledge to you frankly, it is one of them who gave me recently some embarrassment in responding to him on this point."

"Your embarrassment is a common phenomenon in the world and this should make you rather less uneasy. On the contrary you ought to be grateful to yourself. For, the more one is sensible the more one ought to be content for not being able to respond to such things as are pointless."

"He was nevertheless," said Eugene, "a philosopher of great name."

"'Philosopher' ! In so far as it pleases you," said Teandre, "I respect the name; but separated from the thing which it signifies, I scorn at it or I laugh at it. Moreover it is not rare to find the men of spirit who are on certain articles excellent philosophers but who are, on other articles, frivolous and who speak rather for intriguing the reason than for illuminating it. Philosophers who reject verbally (for they cannot do it in the heart of their heart) the notions and the principles most intimate to our intelligence make themselves intelligible in their own fashion. It is that which they call *metaphysics* and what the rest of the mankind calls *extravagance*. The true metaphysics does not at all seek to destroy the nature of things but to consider them as they are in their different aspects. But in the nature of man, there is a principle which makes him to sense, despite all the vain subtleties and that which responds to all the false reasoning, — the principle which is beyond all reasoning: that *each one of us exists much the same way as other beings exist with us*. If some one speaks contrary to this, he would be joking; and then one can respond to him with jokes. If he pretended to speak seriously then there is no need for him to have thinking spirit. For, if he himself or each one of us were the only being in the world it will not be necessary to think at all in order to converse since conversation always requires that there are at least two persons in the world."

"I admire with you," said Eugene, "how one offends the common sense when one takes into his head to transgress the limits; but, if possible, I wish to know how he comes to contradict all the philosophers and those who give prominence very rightly to the recognition of common sense as the first and the universal principle of philosophy."

"You may have embarrassed many people a great deal," said Teandre, "but on better grounds now they have embarrassed you. In the remaining, I shall strongly consider your point. But before one gets confused in philosophising, let us ask to begin with, firstly : Is there such a thing as common sense among the human beings ? and secondly: What is common sense ?"

"I believe very much," said Eugene, "that our philosophers will be able to convince themselves on the first point, but how will they get themselves convinced on the second ?"

"But not to be able to convince them on the second point," replied Teandre, "will amount to destroying the first point; if there is any common sense at all then it is something real. And everything that has some reality can be cleared up by philosophers. But majority of them appear to be afraid of clarifying the question for not being driven to a point, which they do not wish, and for not being constrained to admit that their profound reflections end themselves in hollow ideas."

"However," said Eugene in laughing, "since basically they haven't anything against common sense having a right kind of authority, can you not, in their absence, give me a precise notion of that which one can call *common sense* in the context of first truths which are mainly in question here ?"

"It appears to me," said Teandre, "that one can discover that notion in the single term viz., common sense, and I shall define it voluntarily thus : *the sentiment which is common to men of all times and of all places, when they have acquired the use of reason*. I am persuaded that in applying that rule with care to first truths, one will find those that are necessary to assert the existence of objects outside of us. It is this which we shall examine in the following."

While he was speaking in this way, Teandre perceived some companions who, entering the gardens where they had retired, came to interrupt them and to make them change the discourse.

SIXTH CONVERSATION

"You have developed in me such a strong taste for metaphysics," said Eugene to Teandre in a new conversation which

they held together, "that by being forced to consider the things closely and in all their different aspects, I began to feel sorry all about it."

"Why is that so?" asked Teandre.

"It is because," responded Eugene, "finding some people with a taste completely opposite and seeing that there is less of discernment in what they think of the things, I am tempted sometimes to find them very much unreasonable, which they will not admit and even if you make them see it, they will still refuse to admit."

"I admit to you," said Teandre, "that I have, for myself, experienced great difficulties in getting along reasonably with a great number of people who appear to be reasonable enough in their civic affairs but who reason only in parts in respect of matters which demand accuracy and precision of the mind. Because for want of patience and for want of proper metaphysics, they do not think with sufficient care about the things which they speak. Thereby they do not develop necessary discernment even for perceiving that they do not understand that which they say. But our metaphysics, on the one hand, exposes us to that impropriety, and, on the other hand, discovers for us that human beings are facts of a certain kind existing independently of us and inspite of all our worries. Their existence need not disquiet us at all. We will just allow those philosophers to be what they are. Left to ourselves, we would not engage with them in the discussions of which they will be simply incapable and where they will imagine themselves to be right inspite of good reasons to the contrary."

"In order to make amends," added Teandre, "let both of us try to leave alone the confusion which reigns ordinarily in their discourse and their ideas; and through the help of an accurate metaphysics, let us try today to know exactly the nature of *common sense* which is so often misunderstood."

"I am not at all surprised," said Eugene, "since the very name itself leads to some misunderstanding. It appears to contradict its own nature. For, to speak the truth, common sense is scarcely common. In effect, the diversity amidst the sentiments of men being almost as great as that amidst their faces and their

temperaments, hardly will there be found two men who have on the same subject, indeed, the same sentiment. In a variety so general, where will one find the common sense?"

"The analogy which renders your objection plausible will also render the response that I shall make equally plausible. Though all the faces of men differ in respect of something, all the same they have something similar: all have a mouth, eyes, a forehead and the face of a certain extension, so that those who will not have very nearly that configuration will pass for monsters and they will be virtually that in effect. All the temperaments have thus something in common; for example, to desire happiness, not to love at all being deceived, to have needs to nourish oneself, etc. There's something, I say, that is common or similar in all in spite of their diversity. It is not essential for a man to have a face of a kind which will suit to a particular man rather than to another particular man. But the conformity to face or to temperament which is in all the men is essential to them. It is so in respect of their sentiments too; so that a man, who in his sentiments and his thoughts will have nothing similar to the sentiments and thoughts of other men will pass for a veritable monster and he will be that in effect."

"Our philosophers," said Eugene, "will they not ask if there are some sentiments which are common to all the men?"

"At least," resumed Teandre, "they will be obliged to acknowledge that if there are any of the kind, they will be so many first truths without which there won't be any further truth (as we have remarked already), of which human beings can ever be convinced. They can be convinced only through the path of reasoning through principles. Reasoning always presupposes a principle and if there exists no more any common principle, the mankind will be simply a group of visionaries, who each in his own way, will regard the other men as so many fanatics. Do you find the reasoning to be plausible?"

"So plausible and so much contented am I with it that I do not see how one can respond to it," replied Eugene.

"I also do not see how to respond to it any more than you see it," said Teandre. "But the other day, when I proposed

this to one philosopher, I was surprised to hear him disproving the point which you approve of. That proof, he said, is *only plausible*; it does not attain the level of a philosophical wisdom. However, since *plausible* is basically only that which affects the human reason by means of sentiment, I conclude that he and those of his like will admit as philosophic sagacity the thoughts which are opposed to the sentiment of human reason. And when they regard themselves thereby as the heroes of metaphysics, I was persuaded that they were rather a plaything since metaphysics is only perfection of reason distributed in all human beings and in the first sentiments common to all of them. Thus, not to agree on this point, it appears to me, is not to understand that which one says nor that which one wishes to say. It is to mesmerise the others by mesmerising oneself."

"I am delighted," said Eugene, "that you render that *philosophic sagacity* as ridiculous as I had believed it to be formidable. The reasonings that have been thrust have never been to my taste and you have enabled me to see these subtleties with such attention on my part that those reasonings can never become plausible."

"There is a maxim," resumed Teandre, "which says that one cannot clearly follow the ideas that are most essential to a man. For, in the end, it is the ideas of the sentiment, most certain and evident, to which one can oppose the thorny subtleties and the exaggerated speculations for which one has not made out any case."

"Don't you remember at all," he continued, "that ancient sophist who wanted to prove through divisibility to infinity of the particles of matter that it required infinite time for covering an inch of a space? How sensible that philosopher must have been who was at first embarrassed to respond to him by means of reason and then responded just by way of experience — just by walking at the same time and saying to the sophist: you may reason to the infinity, I come to make my step in an instant."

"Have you thought enough about it?" interrupted Eugene. "Do you know that the reasoning of the sophist whom you hate so much is adopted by one of the metaphysicians of our own

times for whom I have expressed to you a great esteem and who is possibly the most estimable in our times ?”

“He is illustrious Mr. Bayle,” pursued Eugene. “He says clearly after citing the reasoning which you have mentioned that it is doubtful if one can judge the possibility of movement; and if I am not mistaken, he does it in his *Dictionaire Critique*.”

“You are not mistaken at all,” responded Teandre, “it is that which reminds of a thought that I read in *Les Principes du raison*, 1 leg., 3^e lettre : It is not necessary always to rely upon the authority of a single individual even if he were the most judicious and the most clever of all; for, in this world which is so very sensible, can one ever escape a non-sense ? What a great genius Mr. Bayle was ! He would have been indeed happy to get rid of it. I feel it necessary to add to that which you come to associate with him. He said that elsewhere : ‘With regard to the consequences and the conduct of life, the creation of divinity and the system of atheism are indifferent.’ He thought accordingly to make everything problematic and to find everywhere *for* and *against*. That is why a majority of mediocre minds who read so familiarly the writings of that author do not think at all, not being able to perceive the dangers or the blunders therein. In order to awaken them with success and utility, you would need the pen of a man who will think of it with less abuse of liberty but with more accuracy and firmness. For, in the end, with all the esteem that I have for the beauty and the penetration of Mr. Bayle’s spirit, I shall, at the various places in his writings, be able to show him as an example of one of those thinkers who take pleasure in searching beyond reason something which they imagine, instead of confining themselves to the areas which lie near them for finding that which they ought to find.”

“Shall I be transgressing the limits of reason,” resumed Eugene, “if I ask you a particular question ? For, I do not want to insist any more on the article of Mr. Bayle, which you presently treat too seriously and which leads us far too away. I pray you then to say to me as to how one can assure oneself that a certain sentiment is in all the men when one has not seen every one of them and even how one can have the knowledge of it, in respect of you and me, the smallest section of mankind.”

"I ask you," replied Teandre, "as to how we are assured that all the men in their natural state have a need to nourish themselves in order to live, although, neither you nor I have seen all the men who are in the world."

"While one can only form the bizarre doubts, whose statement alone excites derision or indignation, the difficulty carries with itself its response. It is the impressions of nature in each of us which it is not possible for us to deny and which find themselves confirmed through all that which we can acquire through experience, without our requiring to contradict them or without suspecting that any one can ever seriously contradict them."

"What are they," resumed Eugene, "the impressions of the nature and of the experience? You will allow me to assert nevertheless that they are not at all as strong as those which I have when I think that *two and two make four*. They do not have all the evidence whose truth is easily amenable."

"You will also permit me to say to you," replied Teandre, "that you appear to forget what kind of truth we are speaking here; it is the *external truth*. We have established previously that they do not have the same vivacity of evidence as the internal truths and that they were not to be regarded as less real and less evident."

"I certainly deserved your reproach," said Eugene, "and as a penalty I frankly make my confession to you. I am not however sorry for having taken that liberty. Thereby I restress the point where you can hope to instruct me on the subject of primary external truths. However, shall I be mistaken in thinking that you will find not many of such truths which would be of common sentiments to all the men?"

"Howsoever small the number may be," resumed Teandre, "there are always some. And that which we can do in preference to those which will require more of circumspection, is to admit at first only such truths as are most incontestable."

"Show me, I pray you, which truths you consider to be such as one can hold," said Eugene, "and such that good sense will never permit me to reject them. That will also occupy you in attending to the difficulties which overcome me."

"Will you be able to overcome them on the basis of the following propositions ?

I. There is something which exists outside of me and that which exists outside of me is other than myself.

II. There is something that I call *soul*, *spirit*, *thought*, in the other men and in myself and the thought is not at all that which is called *body* or matter, neither material nor corporeal thing.

III. That which is known through the sentiment or through the experience of all the men ought to be taken as true and one cannot disagree on that without defying the common sense."

"I do not figure for myself," interrupted Eugene, "that one can ever disagree on reasonable grounds with the first of those propositions; but is it equally clear that what we call *soul*, is nothing of that which we call *body* or *matter* ? Can one not maintain that the spirit results from invisible particles of matter whose energies we do not see just as we do not see those by which the magnet attracts the iron even though they are real ? Furthermore is it not true that even some fathers of the Church have taken the souls and the angels to be corporeal ?"

"Those who have held souls or angels as corporeal substances," said Teandre, "have possibly believed that the spirits have a very subtle body but they have never believed, nor advanced, that the spirits or angels are subtle bodies alone or are composed of material particles. All men conceive by *intelligence* or *volition* something other than the particles of matter, however subtle they can be and of some figure or movement which one can imagine them to have; so that with all our effort we can never persuade ourselves that a grain of sand, a drop of water or something that is material can ever become that which we call *sentiment* of our will, or *thought* of our intelligence. From this it is evident that although one acts on good faith that that which one understands by *spirit*, is nothing of that which one understands by *body* and that the one is not at all the other, what can be their particular constitution and their inner nature, we do not know at all."

"There are some further difficulties," resumed Eugene, "which I shall propose against that which you say. I acknowledge that they are somewhat obscure but I wish as well that some one should clarify them."

"In what way," observed Teandre, "would you try to find a clear and evident response to those confused and obscure objections ? Before one understands a response, it is necessary to understand what is asked; and if one does not understand the difficulty distinctly, how can one understand distinctly the clarification which one wants to offer ? It is the secret which the makers of the systems employed, that they have advocated on their behalf the liberty of the spirit but at the same time they have rendered it impossible for the mankind to refute them clearly. They have succeeded. But in what manner ? By posing the principles so obscure that all the natural intelligence will not succeed in clarifying all the obscurity in them. About them, they boast that one cannot refute them clearly. I believe that for refuting them as clearly as is needed, it is necessary that their principles are capable of being clarified and that reason can acquire them with all the clarity. Instead, in a chaos and abyss of extravagant ideas, the reason itself becomes confused so to say, and gets confounded. It is therefore necessary that reason remains content with proposing its proper enlightenments which are present in all the men, for rejecting that which is not agreeable and that which is formed only in the defections of some sick brain, such as that of Spinoza."

"Those kinds of brains," said Eugene, in laughing, "do not permit us to reason."

"Yes," resumed Teandre, "just as the kettledrums do. The more empty they are, the more sound they make. But one finds there the least of reason."

"Let us speak seriously," added Teandre. "It is not necessary to pretend that one responds to everything; the reason has its own limits while the visions do not have them at all. Since one wishes least to enter into that which I have proposed to you, I do not believe that one can disagree with some first truths which can be phrased in the following manner :

- I. There exists something outside of me and I am not the only being who exists in the world.
- II. There is such a difference between that which I call *spirit* or *soul* and that which I call body or *matter*, that I cannot

seriously confuse one with the other, nor does good sense judge that the properties of one which are the figure and the movement, can in any way agree with the properties of the other : the sentiment and the thought.

III. That which is affirmed through the experience and the testimony of all the men is incontestably true.

IV. There is in the human beings something which is called *reason*, and which is opposed to *extravagance*; something which is called *prudence*, which is opposed to *imprudence*; something which is called *freedom* as opposed to the necessity to act.

V. That which unites a great number of different parts in an effect which recurs regularly, will not be an effect simply through chance but it is an effect of that which we call an intelligence.

VI. A fact attested by a very large number of sensible people who claim to have been the witnesses, cannot sensibly be revoked in doubt."

"But," interrupted Eugene, "if someone comes to dispute with me on the point that they should be the first truths, how shall I prove that in the end ?"

"Just by commencing to ask your adversary," responded Teandre, "whether he did not admit at least some one of those propositions as true. For example, that you and he are not the same person. If he did not admit it, it is necessary for you as I said to you, to save the trouble of speaking to him any more; for, if he is one and the same thing as you, then he already knows that which you know and if he does not know it, then he is not that which you are. If then you continue to converse with him, he will admit that it is a truth and for showing him that it is a first truth, you will just remind him that it cannot be proved in itself, nor can it be refuted by a proposition which is more clear or which makes an impression, stronger and more necessary, upon our mind. It will be necessary to ask of him further if he could earnestly doubt that there exist men other than him or whether a clock can be constructed as a result of chance and whether it will continue to show hours very regularly purely as a matter of

chance. In respect of every other proposition that I have mentioned as first truth, one can do the same and appeal to the sentiment of the mankind to know if it is possible to consider seriously that they are not true, inspite of all the embarrassment resulting from the subtleties and obscurities of sophisms which one presents in opposing them. It is then essential never to forget that wherever one finds the uniformity of sentiments among human beings, it is the nature of man that speaks, and that it is a philosophy of false admixture to contradict through concocted reflections the universal sentiment of the nature, instead of working carefully with all our attention to know it, to distinguish it and to retain it with us."

"Was it not," interrupted Eugene, "a common sentiment among the human beings to follow idolatry? The error was universal and it could then be confused with a first truth."

"Do you not remember," replied Teandre, "that I have always stressed as essential character of a primary truth that one cannot reject it through a proposition which is more clear? Now, I request you to know that the fundamental proposition of idolatry, is that *there are many gods*. Can it not be objected or rather can it not be completely reversed through the propositions which are incomparably more clear? If *the plurality of gods were possible*, one god would be opposed infinitely to the other infinite god and consequently one of the two will cease to be infinitely powerful and also to be god. The error of the idolatry is thus that it does not have the character which I have given to the first truths. It can happen that an error results as universal through the prevention of the mind or through the interest of passions, which is indeed the true source of idolatry; but I say that it is easy to discover its falsity through the simplest use of reason."

"I understand," said Eugene, "the character of those propositions which according to you, are the first truths. But please take the trouble, I pray you, to tell me if they are equally certain."

"As I always fear equivocation," resumed Teandre, "I shall respond to you that it is equally true that they are certain and incontestable, inasmuch as it is equally impossible to disagree with them seriously; except possibly, as I have already said to

you, either amidst the bizarre spirits whose number is as small as the number of monsters or amidst the overdone metaphysicians who wish to bring their knowledge uptodate where they lose themselves completely."

"If they are of that kind," resumed Eugene, "then they misunderstand the entire class of truths. More than any one, they make most of the supreme kind of *metaphysical truth*, and in that they claim to have marvellously all the privileges."

"It is," said Teandre, "that kind of truth that does not inconvenience them at all. The other kinds of truth which have practical consequences will not be to their taste. It will do well for them to conclude that basically, amidst the human beings, there aren't any pure names such as : prudence or imprudence, vice or virtue, reason or extravagance, religion or impiety; they can become sometimes a nuisance. It is therefore better to deny every principle. It is rather done. It is true then that they do not see even a bit of what they deny. For them it does not matter. It is enough to say : *One cannot prove it to me*. They can also add : *I deny that two and two make four, I deny that I think, I deny that I exist; I challenge all the metaphysicians of the world to prove it to me.*"

"Though it is so," added Teandre, "it is necessary to recognise that the internal truths are intuitive to ourselves; that it is absolutely necessary to be out of one's own mind for disagreeing with them. But with regard to the external truths, it is also necessary to be out of one's own reason in order to deny them. It is that which occurs to some either through the defect in the spirit or through self-conceit."

"Can you," resumed Teandre, "attribute that defect to one of the most judicious philosophers, who while speaking to me about the existence of bodies, said that one could not disagree with the fact of their existence without being a fool but even then, there aren't any truths that are unflinchingly certain and absolutely evident."

"That is to say," interrupted Teandre, "your philosopher and myself will be soon of one accord, or rather to express nearly, we have already agreed. If he wishes to call as 'unflin-I.P.Q...4

chingly and absolutely evident' that sort of truth to which alone one gives commonly the name of *metaphysical certainty* (and which uniquely consists in intuitive perceptions in ourselves, such as our sentiments and thoughts which make the strongest and the most vivid impression of certainty of which we are susceptible), I shall consent, if you wish, not to raise a quarrel about a word. The external truths, in that sense, are not said to be *absolutely evident*. Unless we prevent ourselves from those equivocal expressions, I am content with him, since he asserts that one will have to be senseless for not acknowledging the first truths which I have mentioned to you. For, if it is extravagant to reject them, it is certainly reasonable to assert them."

"Between ourselves," said Eugene, "I do not know if the thought of my philosopher will not at all be this that it is necessary to admit as true that which is not basically an extravagance and that it is relevant to make its use by way of accommodating it with the human ideas that are commonly accepted. In effect, it appears to me that it suits the following example : *One will have to be a fool to refuse to believe that the sun will rise tomorrow*; however, it is not absolutely impossible that the sun will fail to rise tomorrow." "It is likewise certain," he added, "in respect of human beings that each one of them will die; Do you find those thoughts to be so unreasonable?"

"No," continued Teandre, "not if you see that one makes a right kind of discernment in connection with the first truths which are in question now, and which are received by us independently of every presupposition. But the truths of which our philosopher gives examples are admitted on the supposition of a natural order concerning the things, without affirming anything about that which can happen outside the sphere of that order and as an effect of the omni-potence of God."

"Furthermore, let us guard ourselves against searching for evidence, or a metaphysical truth, there, where our spirit will not find or should not find. But let us attribute to each kind of objects, a kind of evidence of which they are uniquely susceptible. Let us distinguish singularly with care the vivacity of evidence from the certitude of evidence. It is impossible for men who have not at all lost their reason, not to carry certain

judgments spread naturally in all the spirits of mankind. Let us not misunderstand the evidence, since it is the nature which brings us there and let us not think that for being a philosopher, it is necessary to renounce *common sense*. Let us rather make *common sense* the basis of all our philosophy, in admitting the principles such that one will be manifestly extravagant in not admitting them; for, it is as much necessary to discover the source of all our judgments. Consequently, it is through the first truths that one can attain all others by way of reasoning. They are *truths*, since they are universally admitted amongst the mankind, at least under the name of *probabilities*, so great that it would be necessarily a non-sense to reject them. They are *first truths*, since there isn't anything which is more simple, more clear, more vividly presented to the spirit of all men. Moreover one neither proves them nor rejects them through the propositions which should be there at first."

"But here is the time which marks the end of our conversation," said Teandre, "I am obliged to leave because I want to arrange several things for a trip I must make to the countryside."

"I have to say 'yes' to all that," said Eugene, "but I am all sorry for it, since that interrupts the course our metaphysical conversations for which I had begun to develop taste."

"It will be quite alright for you," replied Teandre, "to continue them in some manner even in my absence. For that, you will have to read a work on the matters which we have spoken of. The work has the title: *Traité des premières vérités et de la source de nos jugements* (Treatise of First Truths and of the source of our judgments). There, the things are treated in greater details; the objections and the responses are placed in their proper light; and there, one enters in the details of things of which we have spoken only in general. Further, you may note down the places on which you desire to have clarifications, so that on my return we shall speak about them in a manner which will not exhaust you at all."

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