

DISCOURSE ON THE METHOD

of rightly conducting one's reason and seeking the truth in the sciences

If this discourse seems too long to be read at a sitting you may divide it into six parts. In the first you will find various considerations regarding the sciences; in the second, the principal rules of the method which the author has sought; in the third, some of the moral rules he has derived from this method; in the fourth, the arguments by which he proves the existence of God and the human soul, which are the foundations of his metaphysics; in the fifth, the order of the questions in physics that he has investigated, particularly the explanation of the movement of the heart and of some other difficulties pertaining to medicine, and also the difference between our soul and that of the beasts; and in the last, the things he believes necessary in order to make further progress in the investigation of nature than he has made, and the reasons which made him write this discourse.

ap. 1 p. 111

Part One

Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world: for everyone thinks himself so well endowed with it that even those who are the hardest to please in everything else do not usually desire more of it than they possess. In this it is unlikely that everyone is mistaken. It indicates rather that the power of judging well and of distinguishing the true from the false - which is what we properly call 'good sense' or 'reason' - is naturally equal in all men, and consequently that the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some of us are more reasonable than others but solely because we direct our thoughts along different paths and do not attend to the same things. For it is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to apply it well. The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues; and those who proceed but very slowly can make much greater progress, if they always follow the right path, than those who hurry and stray from it.

ap. 2 p. 111

For my part, I have never presumed my mind to be in any way more perfect than that of the ordinary man; indeed, I have often wished to have as quick a wit, or as sharp and distinct an imagination, or as ample or prompt a memory as some others. And apart from these, I know of no other qualities which serve to perfect the mind; for, as regards reason or sense, since it is the only thing that makes us men and distinguishes us from the beasts, I am inclined to believe that it exists whole and complete in each of us. Here I follow the common opinion of the philosophers, who say there are differences of degree only between the accidents, and not between the forms (or natures) of individuals of the same species.

ap. 3 p. 112

But I say without hesitation that I consider myself very fortunate to have happened upon certain paths in my youth which led me to considerations and maxims from

which I formed a method whereby, it seems to me, I can increase my knowledge gradually and raise it little by little to the highest point allowed by the mediocrity of my mind and the short duration of my life. Now I always try to lean towards diffidence rather than presumption in the judgements I make about myself; and when I cast a philosophical eye upon the various activities and undertakings of mankind, there are almost none which I do not consider vain and useless. Nevertheless I have already reaped such fruits from this method that I cannot but feel extremely satisfied with the progress I think I have already made in the search for truth, and I cannot but entertain such hopes for the future as to venture the opinion that if any purely human occupation has solid worth and importance, it is the one I have chosen.

ap. 3 p. 112

Yet I may be wrong: perhaps what I take for gold and diamonds is nothing but a bit of copper and glass. I know how much we are liable to err in matters that concern us, and also how much the judgements of our friends should be distrusted when they are in our favour. I shall be glad, nevertheless, to reveal in this discourse what paths I have followed, and to represent my life in it as if in a picture, so that everyone may judge it for himself; and thus, learning from public response the opinions held of it, I shall add a new means of self-instruction to those I am accustomed to using.

ap. 4 p. 112

My present aim, then, is not to teach the method which everyone must follow in order to direct his reason correctly, but only to reveal how I have tried to direct my own. One who presumes to give precepts must think himself more skilful than those to whom he gives them; and if he makes the slightest mistake, he may be blamed. But I am presenting this work only as a history or, if you prefer, a fable in which, among certain examples worthy of imitation, you will perhaps also find many others that it would be right not to follow; and so I hope it will be useful for some without being harmful to any, and that everyone will be grateful to me for my frankness.

ap. 4 p. 112

From my childhood I have been nourished upon letters, and because I was persuaded that by their means one could acquire a clear and certain knowledge of all that is useful in life, I was extremely eager to learn them. But as soon as I had completed the course of study at the end of which one is normally admitted to the ranks of the learned, I completely changed my opinion. For I found myself beset by so many doubts and errors that I came to think I had gained nothing from my attempts to become educated but increasing recognition of my ignorance. And yet I was at one of the most famous schools in Europe, where I thought there must be learned men if they existed anywhere on earth. There I had learned everything that the others were learning; moreover, not content with the subjects they taught us, I had gone through all the books that fell into my hands concerning the subjects that are considered most abstruse and unusual. At the same time, I knew how the others judged me, and I saw that they did not regard me as inferior to my fellow students,

even though several among them were already destined to take the place of our teachers. And finally, the age in which we live seemed to me to be as flourishing, and as rich in good minds, as any before it. This made me feel free to judge all others by reference to myself and think there was no knowledge in the world such as I had previously been led to hope for.

ap. 5 p. 113

I did not, however, cease to value the exercises done in the Schools. I knew that the languages learned there are necessary for understanding the works of the ancients; that the charm of fables awakens the mind, while the memorable deeds told in histories uplift it and help to shape one's judgement if they are read with discretion; that reading good books is like having a conversation with the most distinguished men of past ages - indeed, a rehearsed conversation in which these authors reveal to us only the best of their thoughts; that oratory has incomparable powers and beauties; that poetry has quite ravishing delicacy and sweetness; that mathematics contains some very subtle devices which serve as much to satisfy the curious as to further all the arts and lessen man's labours; that writings on morals contain many very useful teachings and exhortations to virtue; that theology instructs us how to reach heaven; that philosophy gives us the means of speaking plausibly about any subject and of winning the admiration of the less learned; that jurisprudence, medicine, and other sciences bring honours and riches to those who cultivate them; and, finally, that it is good to have examined all these subjects, even those full of superstition and falsehood, in order to know their true value and guard against being deceived by them.

ap. 6 p. 113

But I thought I had already given enough time to languages and likewise to reading the works of the ancients, both their histories and their fables. For conversing with those of past centuries is much the same as travelling. It is good to know something of the customs of various peoples, so that we may judge our own more soundly and not think that everything contrary to our own ways is ridiculous and irrational, as those who have seen nothing of the world ordinarily do. But one who spends too much time travelling eventually becomes a stranger in his own country; and one who is too curious about the practices of past ages usually remains quite ignorant about those of the present. Moreover, fables make us imagine many events as possible when they are not. And even the most accurate histories, while not altering or exaggerating the importance of matters to make them more worthy of being read, at any rate almost always omit the baser and less notable events; as a result, the other events appear in a false light, and those who regulate their conduct by examples drawn from these works are liable to fall into the excesses of the knights-errant in our tales of chivalry, and conceive plans beyond their powers.

ap. 7 p. 114

I valued oratory and was fond of poetry; but I thought both were gifts of the mind rather than fruits of study. Those with the strongest reasoning and the most skill at ordering their thoughts so as to make them clear and intelligible are always the

most persuasive, even if they speak only low Breton and have never learned rhetoric. And those with the most pleasing conceits and the ability to express them with the most embellishment and sweetness would still be the best poets, even if they knew nothing of the theory of poetry.

ap. 7 p. 114

Above all I delighted in mathematics, because of the certainty and self-evidence of its reasonings. But I did not yet notice its real use; and since I thought it was of service only in the mechanical arts, I was surprised that nothing more exalted had been built upon such firm and solid foundations. On the other hand, I compared the moral writings of the ancient pagans to very proud and magnificent palaces built only on sand and mud. They extol the virtues, and make them appear more estimable than anything else in the world; but they do not adequately explain how to recognize a virtue, and often what they call by this fine name is nothing but a case of callousness, or vanity, or desperation, or parricide.

ap. 8 p. 114

I revered our theology, and aspired as much as anyone else to reach heaven. But having learned as an established fact that the way to heaven is open no less to the most ignorant than to the most learned, and that the revealed truths which guide us there are beyond our understanding, I would not have dared submit them to my weak reasonings; and I thought that to undertake an examination of them and succeed, I would need to have some extraordinary aid from heaven and to be more than a mere man.

ap. 8 p. 114

Regarding philosophy, I shall say only this: seeing that it has been cultivated for many centuries by the most excellent minds and yet there is still no point in it which is not disputed and hence doubtful, I was not so presumptuous as to hope to achieve any more in it than others had done. And, considering how many diverse opinions learned men may maintain on a single question - even though it is impossible for more than one to be true - I held as well-nigh false everything that was merely probable.

ap. 8 p. 115

As for the other sciences, in so far as they borrow their principles from philosophy I decided that nothing solid could have been built upon such shaky foundations. Neither the honour nor the riches they offered was enough to induce me to learn them. For my circumstances did not, thanks to God, oblige me to augment my fortune by making science my profession; and although I did not profess to scorn glory, like a Cynic, yet I thought very little of the glory which I could hope to acquire only through false pretences. Finally, as for the false sciences, I thought that I already knew their worth well enough not to be liable to be deceived by the promises of an alchemist or the predictions of an astrologer, the tricks of a magician or the frauds and boasts of those who profess to know more than they do.

ap. 9 p. 115

That is why, as soon as I was old enough to emerge from the control of my teachers, I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth travelling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it. For it seemed to me that much more truth could be found in the reasonings which a man makes concerning matters that concern him than in those which some scholar makes in his study about speculative matters. For the consequences of the former will soon punish the man if he judges wrongly, whereas the latter have no practical consequences and no importance for the scholar except that perhaps the further they are from common sense the more pride he will take in them, since he will have had to use so much more skill and ingenuity in trying to render them plausible. And it was always my most earnest desire to learn to distinguish the true from the false in order to see clearly into my own actions and proceed with confidence in this life.

ap. 10 p. 115

It is true that, so long as I merely considered the customs of other men, I found hardly any reason for confidence, for I observed in them almost as much diversity as I had found previously among the opinions of philosophers. In fact the greatest benefit I derived from these observations was that they showed me many things which, although seeming very extravagant and ridiculous to us, are nevertheless commonly accepted and approved in other great nations; and so I learned not to believe too firmly anything of which I had been persuaded only by example and custom. Thus I gradually freed myself from many errors which may obscure our natural light and make us less capable of heeding reason. But after I had spent some years pursuing these studies in the book of the world and trying to gain some experience, I resolved one day to undertake studies within myself too and to use all the powers of my mind in choosing the paths I should follow. In this I have had much more success, I think, than I would have had if I had never left my country or my books.

ap. 11 p. 116

Part Two

At that time I was in Germany, where I had been called by the wars that are not yet ended there. While I was returning to the army from the coronation of the Emperor, the onset of winter detained me in quarters where, finding no conversation to divert me and fortunately having no cares or passions to trouble me, I stayed all day shut up alone in a stove-heated room, where I was completely free to converse with myself about my own thoughts. In 1619 Descartes attended the coronation of Ferdinand II in Frankfurt, which took place from 20 July to 9 September. The mentioned army was that of the Catholic Duke Maximilian of Bavaria. It is thought that Descartes was detained in a village near Ulm. His day of solitary reflection in a

stove-heated room was, according to Baillet, 10 November 1619. See above, p. 4. †1 Among the first that occurred to me was the thought that there is not usually so much perfection in works composed of several parts and produced by various different craftsmen as in the works of one man. Thus we see that buildings undertaken and completed by a single architect are usually more attractive and better planned than those which several have tried to patch up by adapting old walls built for different purposes. Again, ancient cities which have gradually grown from mere villages into large towns are usually ill-proportioned, compared with those orderly towns which planners lay out as they fancy on level ground. Looking at the buildings of the former individually, you will often find as much art in them, if not more, than in those of the latter; but in view of their arrangement - a tall one here, a small one there - and the way they make the streets crooked and irregular, you would say it is chance, rather than the will of men using reason, that placed them so. And when you consider that there have always been certain officials whose job is to see that private buildings embellish public places, you will understand how difficult it is to make something perfect by working only on what others have produced. Again, I thought, peoples who have grown gradually from a half-savage to a civilized state, and have made their laws only in so far as they were forced to by the inconvenience of crimes and quarrels, could not be so well governed as those who from the beginning of their society have observed the basic laws laid down by some wise law-giver. Similarly, it is quite certain that the constitution of the true religion, whose articles have been made by God alone, must be incomparably better ordered than all the others. And to speak of human affairs, I believe that if Sparta was at one time very flourishing, this was not because each of its laws in particular was good (seeing that some were very strange and even contrary to good morals), but because they were devised by a single man and hence all tended to the same end. By tradition the constitution of Sparta was attributed to Lycurgus. †1 And so I thought that since the sciences contained in books - at least those based upon merely probable, not demonstrative, reasoning - is compounded and amassed little by little from the opinions of many different persons, it never comes so close to the truth as the simple reasoning which a man of good sense naturally makes concerning whatever he comes across. So, too, I reflected that we were all children before being men and had to be governed for some time by our appetites and our teachers, which were often opposed to each other and neither of which, perhaps, always gave us the best advice; hence I thought it virtually impossible that our judgements should be as unclouded and firm as they would have been if we had had the full use of our reason from the moment of our birth, and if we had always been guided by it alone.

ap. 13 p. 117

Admittedly, we never see people pulling down all the houses of a city for the sole purpose of rebuilding them in a different style to make the streets more attractive; but we do see many individuals having their houses pulled down in order to rebuild them, some even being forced to do so when the houses are in danger of falling down and their foundations are insecure. This example convinced me that it would be unreasonable for an individual to plan to reform a state by changing it from the foundations up and overturning it in order to set it up again; or again for him to plan

to reform the body of the sciences or the established order of teaching them in the schools. But regarding the opinions to which I had hitherto given credence, I thought that I could not do better than undertake to get rid of them, all at one go, in order to replace them afterwards with better ones, or with the same ones once I had squared them with the standards of reason. I firmly believed that in this way I would succeed in conducting my life much better than if I built only upon old foundations and relied only upon principles that I had accepted in my youth without ever examining whether they were true. For although I noted various difficulties in this undertaking, they were not insurmountable. Nor could they be compared with those encountered in the reform of even minor matters affecting public institutions. These large bodies are too difficult to raise up once overthrown, or even to hold up once they begin to totter, and their fall cannot but be a hard one. Moreover, any imperfections they may possess - and their very diversity suffices to ensure that many do possess them - have doubtless been much smoothed over by custom; and custom has even prevented or imperceptibly corrected many imperfections that prudence could not so well provide against. Finally, it is almost always easier to put up with their imperfections than to change them, just as it is much better to follow the main roads that wind through mountains, which have gradually become smooth and convenient through frequent use, than to try to take a more direct route by clambering over rocks and descending to the foot of precipices.

ap. 14 p. 118

That is why I cannot by any means approve of those meddling and restless characters who, called neither by birth nor by fortune to the management of public affairs, are yet forever thinking up some new reform. And if I thought this book contained the slightest ground for suspecting me of such folly, I would be very reluctant to permit its publication. My plan has never gone beyond trying to reform my own thoughts and construct them upon a foundation which is all my own. If I am sufficiently pleased with my work to present you with this sample of it, this does not mean that I would advise anyone to imitate it. Those on whom God has bestowed more of his favours will perhaps have higher aims; but I fear that even my aim may be too bold for many people. The simple resolution to abandon all the opinions one has hitherto accepted is not an example that everyone ought to follow. The world is largely composed of two types of minds for whom it is quite unsuitable. First, there are those who, believing themselves cleverer than they are, cannot avoid precipitate judgements and never have the patience to direct all their thoughts in an orderly manner; consequently, if they once took the liberty of doubting the principles they accepted and of straying from the common path, they could never stick to the track that must be taken as a short-cut, and they would remain lost all their lives. Secondly, there are those who have enough reason or modesty to recognize that they are less capable of distinguishing the true from the false than certain others by whom they can be taught; such people should be content to follow the opinions of these others rather than seek better opinions themselves.

ap. 16 p. 118

For myself, I would undoubtedly have been counted among the latter if I had had only one teacher or if I had never known the differences that have always existed among the opinions of the most learned. But in my college days I discovered that nothing can be imagined which is too strange or incredible to have been said by some philosopher; and since then I have recognized through my travels that those with views quite contrary to ours are not on that account barbarians or savages, but that many of them make use of reason as much or more than we do. I thought, too, how the same man, with the same mind, if brought up from infancy among the French or Germans, develops otherwise than he would if he had always lived among the Chinese or cannibals; and how, even in our fashions of dress, the very thing that pleased us ten years ago, and will perhaps please us again ten years hence, now strikes us as extravagant and ridiculous. Thus it is custom and example that persuade us, rather than any certain knowledge. And yet a majority vote is worthless as a proof of truths that are at all difficult to discover; for a single man is much more likely to hit upon them than a group of people. I was, then, unable to choose anyone whose opinions struck me as preferable to those of all others, and I found myself as it were forced to become my own guide.

ap. 16 p. 119

But, like a man who walks alone in the dark, I resolved to proceed so slowly, and to use such circumspection in all things, that even if I made but little progress I should at least be sure not to fall. Nor would I begin rejecting completely any of the opinions which may have slipped into my mind without having been introduced there by reason, until I had first spent enough time in planning the work I was undertaking and in seeking the true method of attaining the knowledge of everything within my mental capabilities.

ap. 17 p. 119

When I was younger, my philosophical studies had included some logic, and my mathematical studies some geometrical analysis and algebra. These three arts or sciences, it seemed, ought to contribute something to my plan. But on further examination I observed with regard to logic that syllogisms and most of its other techniques are of less use for learning things than for explaining to others the things one already knows or even, as in the art of Lully, for speaking without judgement about matters of which one is ignorant. Raymond Lully (1232-1315) was a Catalan theologian whose *Ars Magna* purported to provide a universal method of discovery. †1 And although logic does contain many excellent and true precepts, these are mixed up with so many others which are harmful or superfluous that it is almost as difficult to distinguish them as it is to carve a Diana or a Minerva from an unhewn block of marble. As to the analysis of the ancients and the algebra of the moderns, they cover only highly abstract matters, which seem to have no use. Moreover the former is so closely tied to the examination of figures that it cannot exercise the intellect without greatly tiring the imagination; and the latter is so confined to certain rules and symbols that the end result is a confused and obscure art which encumbers the mind, rather than a science which cultivates it. For this reason I thought I had to seek some other method comprising the advantages of these three

subjects but free from their defects. Now a multiplicity of laws often provides an excuse for vices, so that a state is much better governed when it has but few laws which are strictly observed; in the same way, I thought, in place of the large number of rules that make up logic, I would find the following four to be sufficient, provided that I made a strong and unswerving resolution never to fail to observe them.
ap. 18 p. 120

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgements than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it.
ap. 18 p. 120

The second, to divide each of the difficulties I examined into as many parts as possible and as may be required in order to resolve them better.
ap. 18 p. 120

The third, to direct my thoughts in an orderly manner, by beginning with the simplest and most easily known objects in order to ascend little by little, step by step, to knowledge of the most complex, and by supposing some order even among objects that have no natural order of precedence.
ap. 19 p. 120

And the last, throughout to make enumerations so complete, and reviews so comprehensive, that I could be sure of leaving nothing out.
ap. 19 p. 120

Those long chains composed of very simple and easy reasonings, which geometers customarily use to arrive at their most difficult demonstrations, had given me occasion to suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way. And I thought that, provided we refrain from accepting anything as true which is not, and always keep to the order required for deducing one thing from another, there can be nothing too remote to be reached in the end or too well hidden to be discovered. I had no great difficulty in deciding which things to begin with, for I knew already that it must be with the simplest and most easily known. Reflecting, too, that of all those who have hitherto sought after truth in the sciences, mathematicians alone have been able to find any demonstrations - that is to say, certain and evident reasonings - I had no doubt that I should begin with the very things that they studied. From this, however, the only advantage I hoped to gain was to accustom my mind to nourish itself on truths and not to be satisfied with bad reasoning. Nor did I have any intention of trying to learn all the special sciences commonly called 'mathematics'. These are subjects with a theoretical basis in mathematics, such as astronomy, music and optics. †1 For I saw that, despite the diversity of their objects, they agree in considering nothing but the various relations or proportions that hold between these objects. And so I thought it best to examine only such proportions in general, supposing them to hold only

between such items as would help me to know them more easily. At the same time I would not restrict them to these items, so that I could apply them the better afterwards to whatever others they might fit. Next I observed that in order to know these proportions I would need sometimes to consider them separately, and sometimes merely to keep them in mind or understand many together. And I thought that in order the better to consider them separately I should suppose them to hold between lines, because I did not find anything simpler, nor anything that I could represent more distinctly to my imagination and senses. But in order to keep them in mind or understand several together, I thought it necessary to designate them by the briefest possible symbols. In this way I would take over all that is best in geometrical analysis and in algebra, using the one to correct all the defects of the other.

ap. 20 p. 121

In fact, I venture to say that by strictly observing the few rules I had chosen, I became very adept at unravelling all the questions which fall under these two sciences. So much so, in fact, that in the two or three months I spent in examining them - beginning with the simplest and most general and using each truth I found as a rule for finding further truths - not only did I solve many problems which I had previously thought very difficult, but also it seemed to me towards the end that even in those cases where I was still in the dark I could determine by what means and to what extent it was possible to find a solution. This claim will not appear too arrogant if you consider that since there is only one truth concerning any matter, whoever discovers this truth knows as much about it as can be known. For example, if a child who has been taught arithmetic does a sum following the rules, he can be sure of having found everything the human mind can discover regarding the sum he was considering. In short, the method which instructs us to follow the correct order, and to enumerate exactly all the relevant factors, contains everything that gives certainty to the rules of arithmetic.

ap. 21 p. 121

But what pleased me most about this method was that by following it I was sure in every case to use my reason, if not perfectly, at least as well as was in my power. Moreover, as I practised the method I felt my mind gradually become accustomed to conceiving its objects more clearly and distinctly; and since I did not restrict the method to any particular subject-matter, I hoped to apply it as usefully to the problems of the other sciences as I had to those of algebra. Not that I would have dared to try at the outset to examine every problem that might arise, for that would itself have been contrary to the order which the method prescribes. But observing that the principles of these sciences must all be derived from philosophy, in which I had not yet discovered any certain ones, I thought that first of all I had to try to establish some certain principles in philosophy. And since this is the most important task of all, and the one in which precipitate conclusions and preconceptions are most to be feared, I thought that I ought not try accomplish it until I had reached a more mature age than twenty-three, as I then was, and until I had first spent a long time in preparing myself for it. I had to uproot from my mind all the wrong opinions

I had previously accepted, amass a variety of experiences to serve as the subject-matter of my reasonings, and practise constantly my self-prescribed method in order to strengthen myself more and more in its use.

ap. 22 p. 122

Part Three

Now, before starting to rebuild your house, it is not enough simply to pull it down, to make provision for materials and architects (or else train yourself in architecture), and to have carefully drawn up the plans; you must also provide yourself with some other place where you can live comfortably while building is in progress. Likewise, lest I should remain indecisive in my actions while reason obliged me to be so in my judgements, and in order to live as happily as I could during this time, I formed for myself a provisional moral code consisting of just three or four maxims, which I should like to tell you about.

ap. 23 p. 122

The first was to obey the laws and customs of my country, holding constantly to the religion in which by God's grace I had been instructed from my childhood, and governing myself in all other matters according to the most moderate and least extreme opinions - the opinions commonly accepted in practice by the most sensible of those with whom I should have to live. For I had begun at this time to count my own opinions as worthless, because I wished to submit them all to examination, and so I was sure I could do no better than follow those of the most sensible men. And although there may be men as sensible among the Persians or Chinese as among ourselves, I thought it would be most useful for me to be guided by those with whom I should have to live. I thought too that in order to discover what opinions they really held I had to attend to what they did rather than what they said. For with our declining standards of behaviour, few people are willing to say everything that they believe; and besides, many people do not know what they believe, since believing something and knowing that one believes it are different acts of thinking, and the one often occurs without the other. Where many opinions were equally well accepted, I chose only the most moderate, both because these are always the easiest to act upon and probably the best (excess being usually bad), and also so that if I made a mistake, I should depart less from the right path than I would if I chose one extreme when I ought to have pursued the other. In particular, I counted as excessive all promises by which we give up some of our freedom. It was not that I disapproved of laws which remedy the inconstancy of weak minds by allowing us to make vows or contracts that oblige perseverance in some worthy project (or even, for the security of commerce, in some indifferent one). But I saw nothing in the world which remained always in the same state, and for my part I was determined to make my judgements more and more perfect, rather than worse. For these reasons I thought I would be sinning against good sense if I were to take my previous approval of something as obliging me to regard it as good later on, when it had perhaps ceased to be good or I no longer regarded it as such.

ap. 24 p. 123