

William Molyneux (1656-1698)

Preface

TO

DESCARTES, SIX METAPHYSICAL MEDITATIONS,
(LONDON, 1680)

Had honor or applause and not the publick advantage of English Readers been the design of this Undertaking, the consideration of the common Fate of Translations had discouraged Me from permitting this even to have seen the light; for meer Versions do alwayes carry with them this Property, that if not well done they may much disgrace, but if well, not much commend the doers.

And certainly I might well have expected the same chance, had this been the Translation of an History, Play or Romance; wherein there is requisite not only a bare version but a conformation of Idiom and language, manner and customary expression; But the nature of this present Work will not admit of the like liberty, and therefore, I hope, amongst Judicious Readers it may be exempt from the common Fate of Translations; for if we look upon it as a Philosophical or Metaphysical Tract, or rather as (really it is) a Physico-Mathematical Argumentation, we shall find that a great stridness of Expressions is requisite to be observed therein. So that had a Translator taken upon him to use his own liberty of Phrase, he would thereby have endanger'd the sense and force of the Arguments; for Politness of language might as well be expected in a Translation of Euclide as in this. And all that are acquainted with this famous authors design, do very well know, that it was his intention in these Meditations Mathematically to demonstrate, that there is a God, that that mans mind is incorporeal. And it was his opinion, that metaphysicks may as clearly be demonstrated as mathematicks, as witness his expression in the Dedicatory Epistle of this Work to the Sorbone Doctors, *Eas (Rationes feilicet) quibus hic utor certitudine & evidentiâ Geometricas aequare, vel etiam superare existimen;* that he reputed his Arguments used in these Meditations, to equal if not excell Geometrical certainty.

And this, I suppose, is sufficient to make the Reader, not expect herein any smoothness of phrase or quaintness of Expression; what is here delivered in English is immediately taken, as it is naturally in the Original. The words, we hope, may be apposite enough, and fit to express what is here designed, and I think it a derogation from the Authors

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skill to draw the Picture of his mind in any other Colours, than what his own Copy expresses.

Thus far in vindication of the Philosophical plain stile and rough Language of the following Translation. I shall add a line or two, first relating to the Readers, secondly of the Author, and lastly of the Meditations themselves, together with the Motives which excited me to this Work.

As to the Readers, 'tis, I suppose, so evident, that candour of mind, and freedom from prejudice is requisite to all that desire to advantage themselves by reading other mens notions, that it need not be here insisted on with much earnestness; yet considering the Antiquity of this subject, and the novelty of the Arguments here produced, it seems to be more than ordinarily requisite for an impartial perusal of the ensuing ??? Neither are the following Meditations to be slightly passed over, but with diligence and attention to be read; for as in mathematical demonstration, the careless missing of any one single Position may render the Conclusion obscure and sometimes inconsequent, so in these metaphysical Demonstration, which (as before has been noted from the illustrious Author thereof) for certainty do equal, if not excel Geometrical Propositions, the slight attention to any one particular Argument may frustrate the design of the whole discourse.

The Reasoning therefore here being close and solid, and (as in Mathematicks) the knowledge of the latter depending on the knowledge of what went before, 'tis the duty of every Reader seriously to attend the Particulars, as also the connexion of the whole. Let him weigh the Arguments and perpend the Conclusions, and after a clear and distinct Knowledge, lett him pass his judgement.

And to this end I shall make it my request to every Reader, that he would not be content with a single perusal of the following Discourses, but that he would often repeat his reading them over; for by this means the force of those Arguments, which at first may by chance escape the most diligent and attentive Peruser, by a second or third Essay may offer themselves more fully to his Consideration. This Was the desire of our Author in an other of his peices, I mean his Principles of Philosophy, which I am sure do not require so strict an attention of mind, as these abstracted speculations; and therefore if it were his Request in that case, we may Reasonably think that 'twas no less his desire in this.

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When we come to speak of the Incomparable Author of these Meditations, we have reason to lament our own Ignorance, and to blame the Ingratitude of the Age wherein he lived, for not transmitting to Posterity more certain and ample Records of the Life and Conversation of this Excellent Philosopher, all that has been Written in this kind give us only so much light into the Life of this Prodigious Man, as may make us wish for more; imparting which, I shall recommend the Readers to a further enquiry into the inward Thoughts, (largely discover'd in the Writings) of our Famous Author, of whose outward actions and condition we have so small knowledge.

These Things Consider'd, I need not make any long Apologies for my undertaking a translation thereof; The excellency of the Original is sufficient to vindicate my endeavours to present the English World with a Copy, and be that sha'l blame my Intentions of Communicating the Methods of Thruth to those that have only the English Tongue, may as well find fault with those English that propagate the Christian Religion among savage Indians, and translate the Scriptures into their Language, because they have not the English Tongue. To understand Latin is no (or at most a very small part of Learning and that which certainly every Cobler in Rome was once endov'd with; and therefore must there then be no translations out of Greek into Latin? I deubt not, but there are many Persons in our Nations, tho to wanting Latin, are notwithstanding very capable of the most abstracted speculations; the late disturbances of our Kingdomes occasion'd may Youths who were then in a fair way of Instruction, to forsake their learning, and divert their intentions from Literature to Arms, and yet many of these have afterwards become Men of extraordinary abilities and qualifications for learning notwithstanding their deficiency in the Roman Tongue. And I see no Reason why it should not be the desire, and consequently the endeavour of every true English man, to make his language as universal as is now the French, into which the best Books in all sorts of Learning, both Poetry and Prose, are daily translated out of all languages, but especially out of Greek and Latine. Among which these Meditations are to be found, entituled, *Les Meditations Metaphysiques De Rene Des Cartes touchant la Premiere Philosophie*, This was translated out of the Authors Latine into French by Monsieur le D. D. L. N. S. The several Objections also, which were made by divers learned Persons

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against these Meditations, with the Authors Answers, were translated into French by M. B. L. R. And, I hope, no one will assert, that the French are more fit to receive those metaphysical Notions delivered herein than the English Nation.

But 'twas none of the smallest motives I had to this undertaking, that tho some famous English Authours have taken notice of the Arguments here produced (for the proof of a Deity drawn from the Idea we have of God in our Mind, &c.) Particularly the most excellent and learned Dr. Stillingfleet in the first Chapter of the third Book in his *Origines Sacrae*, who refers his Readers to a further search into these Meditations in the 400 page of that Discourse; as also the Reverend Dr. Henry More in his antidote against Atheism, and more fully in his Appendix annex'd thereto, hath treated of our Authors demonstrations; and yet nothing of the genuine original from whence they have borrowed all their Copies (tho some of them drawn in a larger size, yet I question whether so expressive) nothing of our Authors proper management hath ever appear'd in English. Those that assert these Arguments to have been long before thought upon by some of the Fathers, I shall refer to our Authors just vindication of himself in his several Answers to Objections made against these Discourses.
