simply in the power of acting, but in action itself. It follows clearly that, since the mind cannot exist without living nor live without acting nor act without being aware of it, it must think continuously and it will cease to be when it ceases to think.

CHAPTER 7

The Mind is Immortal

Although everyone would wish to be immortal and there is hardly anyone who does not try to overcome death through their work, their children, their buildings or their conquests, there are still many who wage open war on the immortality of their soul or who make it an article of faith rather than a conclusion of their reasoning. It is true that just as this truth, which is so important for the conduct of life, has had some enemies it has also had powerful defenders. All religions presuppose it and all schools of philosophy (with the exception of Epicurus) have undertaken to prove it. Although I believe that they all realized their objective and there is no reasonable mind which ought not surrender to the strength of their arguments, I may still be forgiven if I say that there is no school, ancient or modern, from whose principles this truth follows as necessarily and evidently as from our own, in which this conclusion is so easy to draw, so simple and obvious, that I am surprised that Mr Descartes is sometimes reproached for not having proved it. It is true that he did not put it on the frontispiece of his Meditations nor explicitly discuss it in his metaphysics;\(^{33}\) but that does not mean that it should not be said to be included there as a conclusion which follows infallibly from his principles. In fact, are those who want their soul to be mortal not claiming simply that it cannot exist or act without the body? If that is true, is it not obvious that he has demonstrated that they are mistaken by showing that the thing which thinks is really distinct from the body and therefore can exist without it? It follows clearly that the soul has no need of the body to exercise its thoughts and that it cannot exist without thinking.

On the contrary, no matter how strong and how close the union of body and mind appears to us, since their union cannot convert them into one single thing we have more reason to believe — given the impediments we experience, which the body causes every day in the operations of our understanding — that death will set the mind free rather than believe that the mind should accompany the body in death.

\(^{33}\) The title of the first edition of the Meditations (1641) did include a reference to the immortality of the soul; it read *Meditationes de prima philosophia, in qua Dei existentia et animae immortalitas demonstratur*. However, the second and subsequent editions substituted the phrase ‘*animae a corpore distinctio*’ in place of ‘*animae immortalitas*’.
I realize that some of the mind’s operations suffer the effects of a good or poor bodily constitution as long as it is united with the body. Some think they are entitled to conclude from this that, when they are no longer united, the mind will not act any more and can no longer exist. But this conclusion is as unsustainable as that of a man who, seeing a skilled painter engaged as a result of a promise in imitating exactly the good or poor paintings done by another inferior artist during all the time they work together, would attribute to him all the defects of the originals which he copies or would believe that he could do nothing himself if they were separated just because he saw him temporarily imitate the ignorance of his partner. It is the same with the human mind. The laws of its union with the body (as we shall show in the appropriate place) force the mind to imitate, as much as its nature allows, the constitution of the body with which it is joined by means of those of its thoughts which depend on the body. However we cannot thereby conclude that it would feel the effects of the body’s weaknesses or that it should no longer exist once their union is broken. We know very well that these are two substances which are not only distinct but even completely different, and that should lead us no further than to admire the power and wisdom of him who joined them so closely together that it seems as if they are one and the same thing.

I could be content with this demonstration if I only wanted to prove that the mind is immortal. But since I wish to clarify completely the whole state of the question and get rid of any doubts you may have, I ask you to consider with me that ‘life’ is a very equivocal term, not only because of the various things to which it is attributed but also because of the different meanings it has. The principal meanings revolve around these three. The word ‘life’ is sometimes taken to mean simple existence, sometimes an existence accompanied by action and, finally, it sometimes means the co-existence or association of one thing with another. But however it is understood, the human mind must be immortal. To show that, let us begin with the first meaning.

Life is understood as simple existence in the passage of Boethius where he defines eternity as the complete and perfect possession of a life without end.\footnote{\textit{Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy}, Bk. V, § 6: PL 63, 858; ‘Eternity is the complete, simultaneous and perfect possession of everlasting life.’} This is the same sense in which, in Scripture, God swears by his life, that is, by the necessity of his existence,\footnote{Cf. \textit{Genesis}, xxii, 16; \textit{Isaiah}, xlv, 23; \textit{Jeremiah}, xxii, 5; \textit{Epistle to the Hebrews}, vi, 13.} and in which Aristotle said that the life of animals is their being.\footnote{\textit{De juventute et senectute}, 467\textsuperscript{b}20: ‘for an animal \textit{qua} animal cannot avoid being alive;’ \textit{On the Generation of Animals}, Bk. I, ch. 23, 731\textsuperscript{b}5: ‘since, if it is a living animal, it must also live.’} It is also in accordance with the same meaning that our adversaries say that the soul dies with the body, that is, in their language, that it ceases to be. Therefore to die, in a sense which is the opposite of the way we understand ‘life’ in this context, is not to exist any more. Now among things which can cease to