

Marsilio Ficino

FIVE QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE MIND¹

FIVE questions concerning the mind: first, whether or not the motion of the mind is directed toward some definite end; second, whether the end of this motion of the mind is motion or rest; third, whether this [end] is something particular or universal; fourth, whether the mind is ever able to attain its desired end; fifth, whether, after it has obtained the end, it ever loses it.

MARSILIO FICINO TO HIS FELLOW-PHILOSOPHERS SENDS GREETING

Wisdom, sprung from the crown of the head of Jove,² creator of all, warns her philosophical lovers that if they truly desire ever to gain possession of their beloved, they should always seek the highest summits of things rather than the lowest places; for Pallas, the divine offspring sent down from the high heavens, herself frequents the high citadels which she has established.³ She shows, furthermore, that we cannot reach the highest summits of things unless, first, taking less account of the inferior parts of the soul, we ascend to the highest part, the mind. She promises, finally, that if we have concentrated our powers in this most fruitful part of the soul, then without doubt by means of this highest part itself, that is, by means of mind, we shall ourselves have the power of creating mind,⁴ mind which, I say, is the companion of Minerva herself and the foster-child of highest Jove. So then, O best of my fellow-philosophers, not long ago on Monte Cellano I may perhaps have created, in a night's work, a mind of this kind, by means of mind; and this mind I would now introduce among you in order that you yourselves, who are far more fruitful than Marsilio, prompted by a kind of rivalry, as I might say, may at some time bring birth an offspring more worthy of the sight of Jove and Pallas.

¹ Epistolae, Book ii, No. 1 (ed. Venice, 1495 Main 70591), fols. xxxviii ff. Cf. Opera (ed. Basel, 1576), pp. 675 ff

²[Summism caput. Literally, the "highest part of the head," this phrase is also used frequently to refer to the highest part or summit of a mountain. Thus Ficino applies it to the head of Jove and, by implication, to the summit of Mount & nano, also figuratively, to the highest realm of being, and the highest part of the soul.]

³"Pallas enim Divina progenies quae coelo demittitur alto: Altas ipsa colit quas et condidit arses." CL Virgil, Eclogue IV, l. 7: "earn nova pro-genies caelo demittitur alto"; and Eclogue II, l. 61: "Pants quas condidit arses ipsa colat").1

⁴[Mente mentem procreaturos. Mind, as the highest faculty of the soul, creates the contemplative or highest state of the soul. This is here figuratively identified with the philosophical treatise produced by mind. CL Plotinus Ennead III viii. 5 and Ficino's Latin translation iii. viii 4: "[The higher soul's) contemplation and natural disposition, which is de-sirous for learning and eager for inquiry, and further, the present birth pangs caused by those things of which it has gained knowledge, and its complete fruitful bass, bring it about that, itself completely made into 2 thing contemplated (contemplamen), it may produce another thing con-templated."]

THE MOTION⁵ OF EACH NATURAL SPECIES, BECAUSE IT IS DRIVEN IN
A CERTAIN ORDERLY MANNER, IS KNOWN TO BE DIRECTED AND TO
PROCEED FROM SOME DEFINITE ORIGIN TO SOME CERTAIN END

The motion of each of all the natural species proceeds according to a certain principle. Different species are moved in different ways, and each species always preserves the same course in its motion so that it always proceeds from this place to that place and, in turn, recedes from the latter to the former, in a certain most harmonious manner. We inquire particularly from what source motion receives order of this kind.

According to the philosophers, the limits of motion are two, namely, that from which it flows and that to which it flows. From these limits motion obtains its order. Therefore, a motion does not wander from one uncertain and disorderly state to another but is directed from a certain and orderly state [its origin] to a certain and orderly state [its end], harmonizing with that origin. Certainly, everything returns to its own place rather than to that which belongs to another. If this were not so, different species of things would sometimes move in the same manner, and the same species in a different manner; and, similarly, the same species would be set in motion in different ways at different times, and different species often in the same way. Further, if this were not the case, the orderly sequence of motion would have been destroyed—the sequence by which a motion gradually flows forth at a certain time through many appropriate steps and seemingly forms and, by turns, flows back after a definite interval of time. Add to this that, if each motion did not proceed according to a certain principle, it would not be directed to one determined region, or quality, or substance, rather than to any other whatsoever.

THE MOST ORDERLY MOTION OF THE COSMOS IS DIRECTED
BY DIVINE PROVIDENCE TO A DETERMINED END

If individual motions are brought to completion according to such a wonderful order, then certainly the universal motion of the cosmos itself cannot be lacking in perfect order. Indeed, just as the individual motions are derived from and contribute to universal motion, so from the order of universal motion they receive order and to the order of universal motion they contribute order. In this common order of the whole, all things, no matter how diverse, are brought back to unity according to a single determined harmony and rational plan. Therefore, we conclude that all things are led by one certain orderer who is most full of reason. Indeed, a supremely rational order flows from the highest reason and wisdom of a mind; and the particular ends to which single things are directed have been prescribed by that mind; certainly, the common end of the whole to which the single ends are led must also be prescribed by that mind.

⁵ [Motion in the sense of change from one condition to another as well as from one place to another.]

CONCERNING THE ENDS OF THE MOTION OF THE ELEMENTS, OF PLANTS, AND OF BRUTES

We are not in doubt concerning the ends of the motion of the elements and plants and irrational animals. Certainly, some elements, because of a certain heaviness, descend to the center of the universe; while others, because of their lightness, ascend to the vault of the superior sphere. It is clear also that the motion of plants originates from the powers of nutrition and generation and is terminated in the sufficient nourishment of the plant itself and reproduction of its kind. The same is true of the powers which we and the brutes have in common with the plants. The motion of irrational animals, which characteristically pertains to sense, arises from the sensible form and the need of nature and, by means of that which is perceived from without, moves toward the fulfillment of bodily needs. The same is true of that nature which we ourselves have in common with all animals. Certainly, it must be recognized that all these motions which we have just mentioned, because they strive toward some particular thing, are the result of a particular power and, further, that in those ends which we have described they achieve sufficient rest and are perfected as much as their natures require.

FIVE QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE MOTION OF THE MIND

It remains for us to inquire concerning the motion of the human mind: first, whether or not the mind strives toward some end; second, whether the end of its motion is motion or rest; third, whether this good [toward which the mind strives] is something particular or something universal; fourth, whether the mind is strong enough eventually to attain its desired end, that is, the highest good; fifth, whether, after it has attained the perfect end, it ever loses it.

THE MOTION OF THE MIND LOOKS TOWARD A CERTAIN END

If other things do not wander upward and downward in a foolish accidental way but are directed according to a certain rational order toward something which is in the highest degree peculiar and appropriate to them and in which they are entirely perfected, then certainly mind,⁶ which is the receptacle of wisdom,⁷ which comprehends the order and ends of natural things, which orders its daily affairs in a rational manner to a certain end, and which is more perfect than all the others we have mentioned; mind, I say, must be directed in a far greater degree to some ordered end in which it is perfected according to its earnest desire. Just as the single parts of life⁸ [of man], that is, deliberations, choices, and abilities, refer to single ends (for any one of these looks toward its own end, as it were, its own good); so in like manner the whole life [of man] looks toward the universal

⁶ ["Mind" here is used in the broader sense, meaning the rational soul, and its achievements are listed in order of perfection, according to the familiar threefold division of knowledge into *scientia divina*, *scientia naturalis*, and *scientia humana*]

⁷ For *spiae* read *sapientiae*]

⁸ [*Singulae vitae partes* and *universa vita*, the parts and whole of human life, considered as the activity of the soul.]

end and good. Now, since the parts of anything serve the whole, it follows that the order which is inherent in them in relation to each other is subordinate to their order in relation to the whole.⁹ It follows further that their order in relation to particular ends depends upon a certain common order of the whole--an order which especially contributes to the common end of the whole. Indeed, if any mover whatsoever moves for its own benefit, then it is reasonable to suppose that mind brings any of its own [parts] to their proper ends only because they contribute to the common end and good of the mind. Finally, who is so weak in mind that he believes it possible for the mind to strive, both by nature and by plan, to give diverse and single things an order in relation to one thing, without the mind itself having an order in relation to one thing? Furthermore, the ultimate common end moves the rest everywhere (for all other things are desired for the sake of that which is desired first). Therefore, it would not be extraordinary if, the ultimate and common end itself being absent, the rest could not be present at all. In the same way, unless the perfect form of an edifice is prescribed by the architect, the different workmen will never be moved to particular tasks which accord with the plan of the whole itself. Nay, truly, by no means will they be moved to their prescribed occupations by anyone who does not first possess the common prescribed end of the whole work.

THE END OF INTELLECTUAL MOTION IS NOT MOTION BUT REST

If the end of intellectual motion is itself motion, then certainly the intellect is moved in order that it may be further moved, and again is moved in order that it may be moved yet further, and so on without end. From this it is brought about that, persevering in its own motion, the intellect does not cease to be moved and on that account does not at any time cease to live and to know. Perhaps this is that continuous motion of the soul by which, in the opinion of some Platonists, the soul is always set in motion and always lives. I believe, however, that the mind, because it knows rest and judges rest itself to be more excellent than change, and because it naturally desires rest beyond motion, desires and finally attains its end and good in a certain condition of rest rather than of motion. For this there is the following evidence: the mind makes more progress at rest than in motion; the familiar objects of the mind are the eternal reasons of things, not the changeable passions of matter; just as the characteristic power or excellence of life,¹⁰ namely, intelligence and will, proceeds beyond the ends of mobile things to those things which are stable and eternal, so life itself certainly reaches beyond any temporal change to its end and good in eternity; indeed the soul could never pass beyond the limits of mobile things, either by understanding or by willing, unless it could transcend them by

⁹ [The order immanent in the parts, being lower and less perfect, depends upon the order of the whole which transcends the parts.]

¹⁰ [*Virtus*. The active potentiality intrinsic to the *essentia* or nature of a given substance. Then intelligence proper and will which is a parallel function of intelligence comprise the *operatio* or action of the thinking being, and this *operatio* must be referred to the *essentia*. Since *operatio* in this case is internal or self-returning activity, it includes as a prior element, external or outgoing activity which Ficino calls *vita*, "life." In this way, reflective action, *intelligentia*, is dependent upon *vita*, and both ultimately upon *essentia*.]

living; finally, motion is always incomplete and strives toward something else, while the nature of an end, especially the highest, is above all such that it is neither imperfect nor proceeds toward some other thing.

THE OBJECT AND END OF THE MIND IS UNIVERSAL TRUTH AND GOODNESS

Now it is asked whether the end of intelligence and will is some particular truth and goodness or universal truth and goodness. It is universal, certainly, for the following reasons. The intellect grasps a certain fullest notion of that which the philosophers call being and truth and goodness, a notion under which everything that either is or is possible is completely comprehended. That which is itself called being and truth and goodness, and which contains all things, the Peripatetics (i.e. followers of Aristotle) think is the common object of the human intellect, because just as the object of sense is said to be the sensible, so the object of intellect itself is the intelligible. The intelligible, moreover, comprehends all in its fullness. Again, the intellect is prompted by nature to comprehend the whole breadth of being; in its notion it perceives all, and, in the notion of all, it contemplates itself; under the concept of truth it knows all, and under the concept of the good it desires all. The Peripatetics refer both of these to the concept of being, while the Platonists think that goodness is fuller than being. This question, however, clearly has no bearing on the problem in hand, and we shall for the present use these three names, that is, **being** and **truth** and **goodness**, as if they were synonymous. (In the commentary on the *Philebus* we have discussed this very matter more diligently.)

The first question appears to be whether or not the intellect can attain a clear understanding of everything which is included under being. Certainly it can. The intellect divides being into ten most universal genera, and these ten by degrees into as many subordinate genera as possible. It then arranges certain ultimate species under the subordinate genera; and, finally, it places single things, without end, as it were, under the species in the manner we have described. If the intellect can comprehend being itself as a definite whole, and, as it were, divide it by degrees into all its members, diligently comparing these members in turn both to each other and to the whole, then who can deny that by nature it is able to grasp universal Being itself? Surely that which sees the form of the whole itself, and which, from any point, beholds the limits of the whole, and the gradations through which it extends, can comprehend as middle points the particular things which are included under these limits. Now, it goes without saying that since the intellect, according to the Platonists, can devise the one and the good above being and below being, how much more will it be able to run discursively through the broad whole of being! Certainly, next to the notion of being (the name of which we have already repeated many times), the intellect can at its pleasure think of that which is most different from being, that is, nonbeing. If it can go from being to that which is infinitely far from being, then how much more must it be able to run through those things which are contained under being as middle points! For this reason Aristotle says: just as matter, which is the lowest of natural things, can put on all corporeal forms and by this means become all corporeal things, so the intellect, which is, as it were, the lowest of all supernatural things and the highest of natural things, can take on the spiritual forms of all things and become all. In this manner the universe, under the concept of being and truth,

is the object of the intellect; and similarly, under the concept of goodness, it is the object of the will. What, then, does the intellect seek if not to transform all things into itself by depicting all things in the intellect according to the nature of the intellect? And what does the will strive to do if not to transform itself into all things by enjoying all things according to the nature of each? The former strives to bring it about that the universe, in a certain manner, should become intellect; the latter, that the will should become the universe. In both respects therefore, with regard to the intellect and with regard to the will, the effort of the soul is directed (as it is said in the metaphysics of Avicenna) toward this end: that the soul in its own way will become the whole universe. Thus we see that by a natural instinct every soul strives in a continuous effort both to know all truths by the intellect and to enjoy all good things by the will.

THE ORIGIN AND END OF THE SOUL IS NONE OTHER THAN INFINITE TRUTH AND GOODNESS

It is indeed necessary to remember that the universe, which we say is the end of the soul, is entirely infinite. We reckon to be peculiar and proper to each thing an end for which that thing characteristically feels a very strong desire, as if this end were the highest good for it; an end, moreover, for whose sake it desires and does everything else; and in which at length that thing rests completely, so much so that it now puts an end to the impulses of nature and desire. Surely, the condition natural to our intellect is that it should inquire into the cause of each thing and, in turn, into the cause of the cause. For this reason the inquiry of the intellect never ceases until it finds that cause of which nothing is the cause but which is itself the cause of causes. This cause is none other than the boundless God. Similarly, the desire of the will is not satisfied by any good, as long as we believe that there is yet another beyond it. Therefore, the will is satisfied only by that one good beyond which there is no further good. What can this good be except the boundless God? As long as any truth or goodness is presented which has distinct gradations, no matter how many, you inquire after more by the intellect and desire further by the will. Nowhere can you rest except in boundless truth and goodness, nor find an end except in the infinite. Now, since each thing rests in its own especial origin, from which it is produced and where it is perfected, and since our soul is able to rest only in the infinite, it follows that that which is infinite must alone be its especial origin. Indeed, this should properly be called infinity itself and eternity itself rather than something eternal and infinite. Certainly, the effect nearest to the cause becomes most similar to the cause. Consequently, the rational soul in a certain manner possesses the excellence of infinity and eternity. If this were not the case, it would never characteristically incline toward the infinite. Undoubtedly this is the reason that there are none among men who live contentedly on earth and are satisfied with merely temporal possessions.

AT SOME TIME THE SOUL CAN ATTAIN ITS DESIRED END AND GOOD

Surely the rational soul can at some time reach its perfect end. If those things which are less perfect in nature attain their natural perfection in the possession of their desired ends, how much more will the soul, which is both most perfect and the end of all natural things! If those things which do not prescribe an end either to themselves or to others, at

some time attain an appropriate end, how much more will the mind, which seeks and discovers its own end and, further, determines the end of many things, foreknows the end of many, and sees the end of all! If natural power is not ineffectual in the lowest things, certainly it is not ineffectual in the soul, for the soul is so great a thing that it can accurately measure by how great an interval every smallest thing is exceeded by the greatest things. Moreover, the soul would never naturally follow a certain end unless it were able to attain it, for by what¹¹ other power is it moved to it [a certain end] except by that by which it can attain it? Further, we see that when it [the soul] strives very eagerly, in motion toward a certain end, it makes great progress; assuredly, in so far as it makes progress by a certain power, by that same power it is at some time perfected. Finally, we see that the soul is gradually moved more and more rapidly, just as any element moves faster and faster toward its natural goal the closer it comes to it. Therefore, the mind, like the element, does not forever proceed in vain from one point to another without end but at some time or other attains an end which is desired for the sake of itself alone.

Further, there are in things and actions, both natural and human, certain beginnings and ends. It is contrary to nature itself and to the rationality of a beginning for anything to ascend continually from one beginning to another without a [first] beginning. It is contrary to the rationality of an end for anything to descend successively from one end to another without a [last] end. All action takes its beginning from the highest agent. All desire takes its beginning from the highest end. All things which have a certain characteristic because of something else are necessarily related to that very thing which has that characteristic through its own nature. Therefore, if there were no extremes on both sides [i.e., a first beginning and a last end], absolutely no action would commence nor any appetite be aroused. Finally, since any mover moves for its own benefit, where the highest mover is, there is also found the highest end. This is the case in every order of things. Truly, this is the case in the order of the universe.

But it might be well to expand further the above argument concerning the mind. If someone asks us which of these is more perfect, intellect or sense, the intelligible or the sensible, we shall promise to answer promptly if he will first give us an answer to the following question. You know, my inquiring friend, that there is some power in you which has a notion of each of these things—a notion, I say, of intellect itself and of sense, of the intelligible and of the sensible. This is evident, for the same power which compares these to each other must at that time in a certain manner see both. Tell me, then, whether a power of this kind belongs to intellect or to sense. Tell me, I entreat you, without hesitation, so that with the help of what you say I may soon answer the question which you asked. Now, then, I hear you answering thus: a power of this kind does not belong to sense. Certainly we all continually make very active use of the senses. If, then, sense were able to perceive both itself and these other things, all men, or at least most men, would clearly and easily know the very power of perceiving and of knowing, and intelligible and sensible things. Since, however, those who know all these are very few in number, and indeed those few gain this knowledge only with effort and after a long, hard process of logical reasoning on the part of intelligence, it is certain that sense has no power to know either itself or intellect and the objects of intellect. Nay, indeed, all this remains for the intellect to know. Further, the power which inquires earnestly concerning both intellect and sense is the same as that which discovers these by argumentation, and

¹¹ [For *quae* read *qua*.]

which by reason decides which is more perfect. Because this power inquires by reasoning and assigns a reason for its decision, it is reason, not sense. Therefore, intellect alone is that which knows all things.

To that original question of yours I now give the following answer. Intellect is at least as much more perfect than sense, as its power is extended in its action more widely and more perfectly than that of sense. Sense, as you yourself have shown, can perceive neither itself nor intellect and the objects of intellect; whereas intellect knows both. Moreover, another certain degree of perfection may be attributed to intellect. Certainly, when intellect successively compares itself and sense and the rest with respect to their degrees of perfection, it has the highest form of perfection itself, before its eyes, as it were; and, bringing each near to this form, it judges that one which comes nearest to it to be the more perfect. If intellect thus touches upon the highest form of perfection, it does so undoubtedly because of a certain highest affinity between that highest form and itself. Therefore, intellect is not only more perfect than sense but is also, after perfection itself, in the highest degree perfect. I see, in addition, a third degree of perfection belonging to intelligence. Since the intellect inquires into and judges itself, it is certainly reflected into itself. Moreover, that which has this characteristic [of being reflected into itself] exists and remains within itself. It is, furthermore, entirely incorporeal and simple. Finally, since it goes forth from itself to itself in a circular motion, it can be perpetually moved, that is, it can always act and be alive. It goes without saying that intellect, as if more perfect, is characteristic of fewer men and is perfectly employed much later in life and much more seldom. Indeed, as if it were an end, it is granted [to us] only after the vegetable powers and senses have been exercised. To sense the intellect gives guidance and laws, and for sense it prescribes an end. Intellect, when it argues and ponders, guides its own motion according to free choice. Sense, however, when reason does not resist, is always driven by the instinct of nature. It goes without saying that reason often chooses in a way different from that which sense and the need of the body demand, for clearly the beginning of the choice does not depend on the body. Otherwise, the end of the choice would always have a regard for the body. It is seen from this that reason is never subjected to bodily things in its motion, because in its speculations it transcends bodily things, in its pondering it extends itself to things diverse and opposite, and in its choice it often opposes the inclination of the body. Therefore, we say that intellect is much less subjected to any corporeal substance, in essence and in life. Moreover, sense seems to be dulled in a certain manner by advancing age, whereas intellect is certainly by no means dulled. Intellect can, however, be diverted from its speculative intention when it occupies itself excessively with the care and cultivation of the body. Moreover, when the object of sense is very violent, it injures sense at once, so that sense, after its occurrence, cannot immediately discern its weaker objects. Thus extreme brightness offends the eye, and a very loud noise offends the ears. Mind, however, is otherwise; by its most excellent object it is neither injured nor ever confused. Nay, rather, after this object is known, it distinguishes inferior things at once more clearly and more truly. This indicates that the nature of the mind is exceedingly spiritual and excellent. Moreover, sense is limited to corporeal objects; the intellect, in its inmost action, frees itself from all corporeal things, seeing that in its essence and life it has not been submerged.¹² It separates the corporeal forms from the passions of matter. It also distinguishes from the corporeal forms those

which through their own nature are completely incorporeal. Certainly it has itself been separated from the passions of matter and the conditions of corporeal forms. Further, sense is satisfied with particular objects alone, whereas the familiar objects of the intellect are the universal and everlasting reasons of things. With these it could never become familiar unless it were in a peculiar way similar to them. In this way, intellect shows itself, also, to be absolute and everlasting.

Finally, we say this especially because it [intellect] reaches reasons of such a kind through certain species which it both makes and receives itself. These must necessarily be unconditioned by the passions of matter, otherwise they could not refer to those reasons and ideas. Furthermore, unless intellect itself were free from the passions of matter, it could neither create species of this kind nor receive them in this way.

THE MIND IS MUCH BETTER ABLE THAN SENSE TO ATTAIN ITS DESIRED END

Reason is certainly peculiar to us. God has not bestowed it upon the beasts, otherwise he would have given¹³ them discourse which is, as it were, the messenger of reason. [He also would have given them] the hand, the minister and instrument of reason. [If the beasts possessed reason] we would also have seen in them some indications of deliberation and of versatility. On the contrary, we now observe that they never act except in so far as they are driven by a natural impulse toward a necessity of nature. Thus all spiders weave their webs in a similar manner; they neither learn to weave nor become more proficient through practice, no matter how long. Lastly, if the beasts possessed reason, definite indications and works of religion manifest to all would have appeared among them. Where intellect is present, intellect which is, as it were, a kind of eye turned toward the intelligible light, there also the intelligible light which is God shines and is honored and loved and worshiped.

As intellect is more perfect than sense, man is more perfect than the brutes. Because of this very thing, he is more perfect: he has a characteristic not shared by the beasts. Thus on account of his intelligence alone man is judged to be more perfect, especially since, by means of the function of intelligence, he approaches the infinite perfection which is God, through love, thought, and worship. Moreover, the especial perfection of each thing consists in the possession of its appropriate end. The attainment of this end is easier and more abundant in proportion to the richness of the innate perfection of that thing; for where that formal perfection which is innate from the beginning is more strong, at that very place final perfection, according to the order of nature, is granted more easily, more abundantly, and with greater felicity, for the latter [final perfection] obeys the former [formal perfection] yet does not result from its obedience. From this we conclude that reason can attain its wished-for and appropriate end more easily than sense; man, more easily than the beasts.

THE IMMORTAL SOUL IS ALWAYS MISERABLE IN ITS MORTAL BODY

We know by experience that the beast in us, that is, sense, most often attains its end and good. This is the case, for instance, when sense, so far as pertains to itself, is entirely

¹³ [For *dedisse* read *dedisset*.]

satisfied with the attainment of its adequate object. We do not, however, know by experience that the man in us, that is, reason, attains its desired end. On the contrary, when sense itself, in the greatest delights of the body, is as much satisfied as is possible to it, reason is still violently agitated and agitates sense. If it chooses to obey the senses, it always makes a conjecture about something; it invents new delights; it continually seeks something further, I know nor what. If, on the other hand, it strives to resist the senses, it renders life laborious. Therefore, in both cases reason not only is unhappy but also entirely disturbs the happiness of sense itself. Yet if reason tames sense, and concentrates itself in itself, then, driven by nature, it searches eagerly for the reasons and causes of things. In this search it often finds what it does not want, or does not find what it does want, or, by chance, does not understand as much as it desires and is able to. Truly, reason is always uncertain, vacillating and distressed; and since it is nowhere at rest while thus affected, it certainly never gains possession of its desired end or permits sense to take possession of its proper end which is already present.

Nothing indeed can be imagined more unreasonable than that man, who through reason is the most perfect of all animals, nay, of all things under heaven, most perfect, I say, with regard to that formal perfection which is bestowed upon us from the beginning, that man, also through reason, should be the least perfect of all with regard to that final perfection for the sake of which the first perfection is given. This seems to be that most unfortunate Prometheus. Instructed by the divine wisdom of Pallas, he gained possession of the heavenly fire, that is, reason. Because of this very possession, on the highest peak of the mountain, that is, at the very height of contemplation, he is rightly judged most miserable of all, for he is made wretched by the continual gnawing of the most ravenous of vultures, that is, by the torment of inquiry. This will be the case, until the time comes when he is carried back to that same place from which he received the fire, so that, just as he is now urged on to seek the whole by that one beam of celestial light, he will then be entirely filled with the whole light.

MAN, THE MORE LABORIOUSLY HE FOLLOWS HAPPINESS WHEN HE IS PLACED OUTSIDE HIS NATURAL CONDITION, THE MORE EASILY HE REACHES IT WHEN RESTORED TO THAT NATURAL CONDITION

The reasons we previously offered for the facility with which human happiness may be attained plainly seemed to show the truth itself according to a certain natural order. For what reason then is so much difficulty, as experience teaches, placed in the way of our strivings, so that we seem to be rolling the great stone of Sisyphus up the steep slopes of the mountain? What wonder? We seek the highest summits of Mount Olympus. We inhabit the abyss of the lowest valley. We are weighted down by the burden of a most troublesome body. Panting toward the steep places, we often slide back to a sudden precipice because of this burden itself and because of the overhanging rocks on both sides. Moreover, from one side as many dangers and obstacles as possible detain us, while from the other the harmful blandishments of certain meadows delay us. Thus, alas, outside the sublime fatherland, we, unhappy people, are confined to the lowest places, where nothing presents itself which is not exceedingly difficult, where nothing happens which is not lamentable.

How, then, shall we reply to a contradiction of this kind? On the one hand, the argument promised the greatest ease; on the other, experience shows in an equal degree, the greatest difficulty. Only the law of Moses will solve this conflict for us. Indeed, we have been placed outside the order of first nature, and —O sorrow!—live and suffer contrary to the order of nature. The more easily the first man was able to receive happiness when in the beginning he was entirely devoted to God, the more easily he has lost ease itself when thereafter he turned against God. Therefore, the greater the difficulty with which all the descendants- of the first parent receive blessedness when placed outside the order of nature, the greater the ease with which they would receive it if restored to that very order.

What do the philosophers say to these things? Certainly the Magi, followers of Zoroaster and Hostanes, assert something similar. They say that, because of a certain old disease of the human mind, everything that is very unhealthy and difficult befalls us; but, if anyone should restore the soul to its previous condition, then immediately all will be set in order. Neither does the opinion of the Pythagoreans and Platonists disagree with this. They say that the soul is manifestly afflicted in the sensible world by so many ills because, seduced by an excessive desire for sensible goods, it has imprudently lost the goods of the intelligible world. The Peripatetics perhaps will say that man wanders from his appropriate end more than the brutes because he is moved by free will. For this reason, as he makes use of various conjectures in deliberating, man subsequently strays on this side or on that side. The irrational animal, on the contrary, is not led by its own will but is directed to the end appropriate for it by the very providence of nature, which never strays, just as the arrow is directed to the target. However, since our error and violation of duty result not from a defect of nature but rather from the variety of the opinions of reason and the divergence of resolution from the straight way, they by no means destroy the natural power but rather throw the will into turmoil. Just as, even when an element is situated outside its proper location, its power and natural inclination toward that natural place are preserved together with its nature, in so far as it is able at some time to return to its own region; so, they think, even after man has wandered from the right way, the natural power remains to him of returning first to the path, then to the end.

Finally, the most precise investigations of the theologians briefly sum up the whole matter in the following way. There can be no inclination toward any motion greater than the moving power. Since the inclination of the soul is clearly directed toward the infinite, it undoubtedly depends solely upon the infinite. If, on the contrary, the inclination of the soul had resulted immediately from some limited cause which moved the soul besides God, then it would also have been directed in like measure to a limited end. The reason for this is that, however much the power of moving were infinite in its infinite origin, it would be limited in a subsequent cause which is limited. Motion follows the quality of the most immediate rather than of the remote moving power. The mover which alone turns the soul toward the infinite is therefore none other than infinite power itself. This power, conformably with the free nature of the will, moves the mind in a certain manner which is in the highest degree free toward the paths to be chosen; while conformably with the infinite power of the moving cause, it urges the mind toward the desired end, so much so that the mind cannot fail to strive after that end. If motion of this kind could not reach the end to which it is directed, certainly none could. Where infinite power is active, in that very place infinite wisdom and goodness rule. This power, moreover, neither moves

anything in vain nor denies to anything a good which that thing could and should receive. Accordingly, since man, on the one hand, because of the use of reason and contemplation, comes much nearer to the blessed angels than do the brutes, and, on the other hand, because of divine worship, comes touch nearer than they to God, the fountain of blessedness, it is necessary that he can at some time be much more blessed than they in the possession of his desired end. This is necessary in order that he who is more similar to the celestial beings, both because of the ardor of the will and because of the light of intelligence, may be, in like manner, more similar to them in happiness of life, for the power and excellence of thinking and willing originate from the power of life.

Now, in the body the soul is truly far more miserable, both because of the weakness and infirmity of the body itself and its want of all things and because of the continual anxiety of the mind; therefore, the more laborious it is for the celestial and immortal soul continually to follow its happiness, while fallen into an intemperate earthly destructible body, the more easily it obtains it when it is either free from the body or in a temperate immortal celestial body. The natural end itself, moreover, seems to exist only in a natural condition. The condition of the everlasting soul which seems to be in the highest degree natural is that it should continue to live in its own body made everlasting. Therefore, it is concluded by necessary reasoning that the immortality and brightness of the soul can and must at some time shine forth into its own body and that, in this condition alone, the highest blessedness of man is indeed perfected. Certainly, this doctrine of the prophets and theologians is confirmed by the Persian wise men and by the Hermetic and the Platonic philosophers.

THE MIND WHICH HAS ATTAINED BLESSEDNESS NEVER LOSES IT

When, indeed, the soul attains the infinite end, it certainly attains it without end, for it attains it in the same manner in which it is influenced, drawn along, and led by it [the end]. If the soul has been able at some time to rise up again to immensity from a certain finite condition infinitely distant from immensity, then certainly it can remain infinitely steadfast in immensity itself. This must indeed be true, for the same infinite power which attracted the soul to itself from afar will, when close by, hold it fast within itself with indescribable power. Finally, in the infinite good nothing evil can be imagined, and whatever good can be imagined or desired is most abundantly found there. Therefore, at that place [shall be found] eternal life and the brightest light of knowledge, rest without change, a positive condition free from privation, tranquil and secure possession of all good, and everywhere perfect joy.

THE END OF FIVE QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE MIND