Descartes on the differences between humans and machines, and between humans and animals.

From Discourse on the Method, Part V

Nor will this appear at all strange to those who are acquainted with the variety of movements performed by the different automatons, or moving machines fabricated by human industry, and that with help of but few pieces compared with the great multitude of bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins, and other parts that are found in the body of each animal. Such persons will look upon this body as a machine made by the hands of God, which is incomparably better arranged, and adequate to movements more admirable than is any machine of human invention. And here I specially stayed to show that, were there such machines exactly resembling organs and outward form an ape or any other irrational animal, we could have no means of knowing that they were in any respect of a different nature from these animals; but if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible, there would still remain two most certain tests whereby to know that they were not therefore really men. Of these the first is that they could never use words or other signs arranged in such a manner as is competent to us in order to declare our thoughts to others: for we may easily conceive a machine to be so constructed that it emits vocables, and even that it emits some correspondent to the action upon it of external objects which cause a change in its organs; for example, if touched in a particular place it may demand what we wish to say to it; if in another it may cry out that it is hurt, and such like; but not that it should arrange them variously so as appositely to reply to what is said in its presence, as men of the lowest grade of intellect can do. The second test is, that although such machines might execute many things with equal or perhaps greater perfection than any of us, they would, without doubt, fail in certain others from which it could be discovered that they did not act from knowledge, but solely from the disposition of their organs: for while reason is an universal instrument that is alike available on every occasion, these organs, on the contrary, need a particular arrangement for each particular action; whence it must be morally impossible that there should exist in any machine a diversity of organs sufficient to enable it to act in all the occurrences of life, in the way in which our reason enables us to act. Again, by means of these two tests we may likewise know the difference between men and brutes. For it is highly deserving of remark, that there are no men so dull and stupid, not even idiots, as to be incapable of joining together different words, and thereby constructing a declaration by which to make their thoughts understood; and that on the other hand, there is no other animal, however perfect or happily circumstanced, which can so do. Nor does this inability arise from want of organs: for we observe that magpies and parrots can utter words like ourselves, and are yet unable to speak as we do, that is, so as to show that they understand what they say; in place of which men born deaf and dumb, and thus not less, but rather more than the brutes, destitute of the organs which others use in speaking, are in the habit of spontaneously inventing certain signs by which they discover their thoughts to those who, being usually in their company, have leisure to learn their language. And this proves not only that the brutes have less reason than man, but that they have none
at all: for we see that very little is required to enable a person to speak; and since a
certain inequality of capacity is observable among animals of the same species, as
well as among men, and since some are more capable of being instructed than
others, it is incredible that the most perfect ape or parrot of its species, should not in
this be equal to the most stupid infant of its kind or at least to one that was crack-
headed, unless the soul of brutes were of a nature wholly different from ours. And
we ought not to confound speech with the natural movements which indicate the
passions, and can be imitated by machines as well as manifested by animals; nor
must it be thought with certain of the ancients, that the brutes speak, although we
do not understand their language. For if such were the case, since they are endowed
with many organs analogous to ours, they could as easily communicate their
thoughts to us as to their fellows. It is also very worthy of remark, that, though
there are many animals which manifest more industry than we in certain of their
actions, the same animals are yet observed to show none at all in many others: so
that the circumstance that they do better than we does not prove that they are
endowed with mind, for it would thence follow that they possessed greater reason
than any of us, and could surpass us in all things; on the contrary, it rather proves
that they are destitute of reason, and that it is nature which acts in them according
to the disposition of their organs: thus it is seen, that a clock composed only of
wheels and weights can number the hours and measure time more exactly than we
with all our skin.

I had after this described the reasonable soul, and shown that it could by no means
be educed from the power of matter, as the other things of which I had spoken, but
that it must be expressly created; and that it is not sufficient that it be lodged in the
human body exactly like a pilot in a ship, unless perhaps to move its members, but
that it is necessary for it to be joined and united more closely to the body, in order
to have sensations and appetites similar to ours, and thus constitute a real man. I
here entered, in conclusion, upon the subject of the soul at considerable length,
because it is of the greatest moment: for after the error of those who deny the
existence of God, an error which I think I have already sufficiently refuted, there is
none that is more powerful in leading feeble minds astray from the straight path of
virtue than the supposition that the soul of the brutes is of the same nature with our
own; and consequently that after this life we have nothing to hope for or fear, more
than flies and ants; in place of which, when we know how far they differ we much
better comprehend the reasons which establish that the soul is of a nature wholly
independent of the body, and that consequently it is not liable to die with the latter
and, finally, because no other causes are observed capable of destroying it, we are
naturally led thence to judge that it is immortal.