

The Philosophical Writings of **DESCARTES**

translated by

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VOLUME II



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Meditations on First Philosophy

Translator's preface

Descartes' most celebrated philosophical work was written in Latin during the period 1638–40, when the philosopher was living, for the most part, at Santpoort. This 'corner of north Holland', he wrote to Mersenne on 17 May 1638, was much more suitable for his work than the 'air of Paris' with its 'vast number of inevitable distractions'. The work was completed by April 1640, and was first published in Paris in 1641 by Michel Soly under the title *Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae* (*Meditations on First Philosophy*); the subtitle adds 'in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the immortality of the soul'. In earlier correspondence Descartes had referred to his work as the *Metaphysics*, but he eventually decided that 'the most suitable title is *Meditations on First Philosophy*, because the discussion is not confined to God and the soul but treats in general of all the first things to be discovered by philosophizing' (letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640).

Descartes was not entirely satisfied with Soly as a publisher, and he arranged for a second edition of the *Meditations* to be brought out in Holland, by the house of Elzevir of Amsterdam. This second edition appeared in 1642, with a new and more appropriate subtitle, *viz.* 'in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body'. The second edition contains a number of minor corrections to the text¹ (though in practice the sense is seldom affected), and except where indicated it is this edition that is followed in the present translation.

A French translation of the *Meditations* by Louis-Charles d'Albert, Duc de Luynes (1620–90) appeared in 1647. This is a tolerably accurate version which was published with Descartes' approval; Adrien Baillet, in his biography of Descartes, goes so far as to claim that the philosopher took advantage of the French edition to 'retouch his original work'.² In fact, however, the French version generally stays fairly close to the Latin.

1 But the strictures in AT against the first edition are not always well founded; for a full discussion see F. Alquié (ed.), *Oeuvres philosophiques de Descartes* (Paris: Garnier, 1963–73), vol. II, pp. 377ff. See also General Introduction, above p. ix.

2 A. Baillet, *Vie de Monsieur Des-Cartes* (1691), vol. II, p. 172.

There are a number of places where phrases in the original are paraphrased or expanded somewhat, but it is impossible to say which of these modifications, if any, were directly initiated by Descartes (some are certainly too clumsy to be his work). There is thus no good case for giving the French version greater authority than the original Latin text, which we know that Descartes himself composed; and the present translation therefore always provides, in the first instance, a direct rendering of the original Latin. But where expansions or modifications to be found in the French version offer useful glosses on, or additions to, the original, these are also translated, but always in diamond brackets, or in footnotes, to avoid confusion.¹ For details of the *Objections and Replies*, which were published together with the *Meditations* in the 1641 and 1642 editions, see below, p. 63.

J.C.

¹ For detailed comparison between the French and Latin versions see G. Rodis Lewis (ed.), *Descartes, Méditations: texte Latin et traduction du Duc de Luynes* (Paris: Vrin, 1946).

*To those most learned and distinguished men, the Dean and Doctors of
the sacred Faculty of Theology at Paris, from René Descartes.*

I have a very good reason for offering this book to you, and I am confident that you will have an equally good reason for giving it your protection once you understand the principle behind my undertaking; so much so, that my best way of commending it to you will be to tell you briefly of the goal which I shall be aiming at in the book.

I have always thought that two topics – namely God and the soul – are prime examples of subjects where demonstrative proofs ought to be given with the aid of philosophy rather than theology. For us who are believers, it is enough to accept on faith that the human soul does not die with the body, and that God exists; but in the case of unbelievers, it seems that there is no religion, and practically no moral virtue, that they can be persuaded to adopt until these two truths are proved to them by natural reason. And since in this life the rewards offered to vice are often greater than the rewards of virtue, few people would prefer what is right to what is expedient if they did not fear God or have the expectation of an after-life. It is of course quite true that we must believe in the existence of God because it is a doctrine of Holy Scripture, and conversely, that we must believe Holy Scripture because it comes from God; for since faith is the gift of God, he who gives us grace to believe other things can also give us grace to believe that he exists. But this argument cannot be put to unbelievers because they would judge it to be circular. Moreover, I have noticed both that you and all other theologians assert that the existence of God is capable of proof by natural reason, and also that the inference from Holy Scripture is that the knowledge of God is easier to acquire than the knowledge we have of many created things – so easy, indeed, that those who do not acquire it are at fault. This is clear from a passage in the Book of Wisdom, Chapter 13: ‘Howbeit they are not to be excused; for if their knowledge was so great that they could value this world, why did they not rather find out the Lord thereof?’ And in Romans, Chapter 1 it is said that they are ‘without excuse’. And in the same place, in the passage ‘that which is known of God is manifest in them’, we seem to be told that everything that may be known of God can be demonstrated by reasoning which has no other source but our own mind. Hence I thought it was

quite proper for me to inquire how this may be, and how God may be more easily and more certainly known than the things of this world.

- 3 As regards the soul, many people have considered that it is not easy to discover its nature, and some have even had the audacity to assert that, as far as human reasoning goes, there are persuasive grounds for holding that the soul dies along with the body and that the opposite view is based on faith alone. But in its eighth session the Lateran Council held under Leo X condemned those who take this position,¹ and expressly enjoined Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and use all their powers to establish the truth; so I have not hesitated to attempt this task as well.

In addition, I know that the only reason why many irreligious people are unwilling to believe that God exists and that the human mind is distinct from the body is the alleged fact that no one has hitherto been able to demonstrate these points. Now I completely disagree with this: I think that when properly understood almost all the arguments that have been put forward on these issues by the great men have the force of demonstrations, and I am convinced that it is scarcely possible to provide any arguments which have not already been produced by someone else. Nevertheless, I think there can be no more useful service to be rendered in philosophy than to conduct a careful search, once and for all, for the best of these arguments, and to set them out so precisely and clearly as to produce for the future a general agreement that they amount to demonstrative proofs. And finally, I was strongly pressed to undertake this task by several people who knew that I had developed a method for resolving certain difficulties in the sciences – not a new method (for nothing is older than the truth), but one which they had seen me use with some success in other areas; and I therefore thought it my duty to make some attempt to apply it to the matter in hand.

- 4 The present treatise contains everything that I have been able to accomplish in this area. Not that I have attempted to collect here all the different arguments that could be put forward to establish the same results, for this does not seem worthwhile except in cases where no single argument is regarded as sufficiently reliable. What I have done is to take merely the principal and most important arguments and develop them in such a way that I would now venture to put them forward as very certain and evident demonstrations. I will add that these proofs are of such a kind that I reckon they leave no room for the possibility that the human mind will ever discover better ones. The vital importance of the cause and the glory of God, to which the entire undertaking is directed, here compel me to speak somewhat more freely about my own achievements

¹ The Lateran Council of 1513 condemned the Averroist heresy which denied personal immortality.

than is my custom. But although I regard the proofs as quite certain and evident, I cannot therefore persuade myself that they are suitable to be grasped by everyone. In geometry there are many writings left by Archimedes, Apollonius, Pappus and others which are accepted by everyone as evident and certain because they contain absolutely nothing that is not very easy to understand when considered on its own, and each step fits in precisely with what has gone before; yet because they are somewhat long, and demand a very attentive reader, it is only comparatively few people who understand them. In the same way, although the proofs I employ here are in my view as certain and evident as the proofs of geometry, if not more so, it will, I fear, be impossible for many people to achieve an adequate perception of them, both because they are rather long and some depend on others, and also, above all, because they require a mind which is completely free from preconceived opinions and which can easily detach itself from involvement with the senses. Moreover, people who have an aptitude for metaphysical studies are certainly not to be found in the world in any greater numbers than those who have an aptitude for geometry. What is more, there is the difference that in geometry everyone has been taught to accept that as a rule no proposition is put forward in a book without there being a conclusive demonstration available; so inexperienced students make the mistake of accepting what is false, in their desire to appear to understand it, more often than they make the mistake of rejecting what is true. In philosophy, by contrast, the belief is that everything can be argued either way; so few people pursue the truth, while the great majority build up their reputation for ingenuity by boldly attacking whatever is most sound.

Hence, whatever the quality of my arguments may be, because they have to do with philosophy I do not expect they will enable me to achieve any very worthwhile results unless you come to my aid by granting me your patronage.¹ The reputation of your Faculty is so firmly fixed in the minds of all, and the name of the Sorbonne has such authority that, with the exception of the Sacred Councils, no institution carries more weight than yours in matters of faith; while as regards human philosophy, you are thought of as second to none, both for insight and soundness and also for the integrity and wisdom of your pronouncements. Because of this, the results of your careful attention to this book, if you deigned to give it, would be threefold. First, the errors in it would be corrected – for when I remember not only that I am a human being, but above all that I am an ignorant one, I cannot claim it is free of mistakes. Secondly, any passages

¹ Although the title page of the first edition of the *Meditations* carries the words 'with the approval of the learned doctors', Descartes never in fact obtained the endorsement from the Sorbonne which he sought.

which are defective, or insufficiently developed or requiring further explanation, would be supplemented, completed and clarified, either by yourselves or by me after you have given me your advice. And lastly, once the arguments in the book proving that God exists and that the mind is distinct from the body have been brought, as I am sure they can be, to
 6 such a pitch of clarity that they are fit to be regarded as very exact demonstrations, you may be willing to declare as much, and make a public statement to that effect. If all this were to happen, I do not doubt that all the errors which have ever existed on these subjects would soon be eradicated from the minds of men. In the case of all those who share your intelligence and learning, the truth itself will readily ensure that they subscribe to your opinion. As for the atheists, who are generally posers rather than people of real intelligence or learning, your authority will induce them to lay aside the spirit of contradiction; and, since they know that the arguments are regarded as demonstrations by all who are intellectually gifted, they may even go so far as to defend them, rather than appear not to understand them. And finally, everyone else will confidently go along with so many declarations of assent, and there will be no one left in the world who will dare to call into doubt either the existence of God or the real distinction between the human soul and body. The great advantage that this would bring is something which you, in your singular wisdom, are in a better position to evaluate than anyone;¹ and it would ill become me to spend any more time commending the cause of God and religion to you, who have always been the greatest tower of strength to the Catholic Church.

7 *Preface to the reader*²

I briefly touched on the topics of God and the human mind in my *Discourse on the method of rightly conducting reason and seeking the truth in the sciences*, which was published in French in 1637. My purpose there was not to provide a full treatment, but merely to offer a sample, and learn from the views of my readers how I should handle these topics at a later date. The issues seemed to me of such great importance that I considered they ought to be dealt with more than once; and the route which I follow in explaining them is so untrodden and so remote from the normal way, that I thought it would not be helpful to give a full

1 'It is for you to judge the advantage that would come from establishing these beliefs firmly, since you see all the disorders which come from their being doubted' (French version).

2 The French version of 1647 does not translate this preface, but substitutes a brief foreword, *Le Libraire au Lecteur* ('The Publisher to the Reader'), which is probably not by Descartes.

account of it in a book written in French and designed to be read by all and sundry, in case weaker intellects might believe that they ought to set out on the same path.

In the *Discourse* I asked anyone who found anything worth criticizing in what I had written to be kind enough to point it out to me.¹ In the case of my remarks concerning God and the soul, only two objections worth mentioning were put to me, which I shall now briefly answer before embarking on a more precise elucidation of these topics.

The first objection is this. From the fact that the human mind, when directed towards itself, does not perceive itself to be anything other than a thinking thing, it does not follow that its nature or essence consists only in its being a thinking thing, where the word 'only' excludes everything else that could be said to belong to the nature of the soul. My answer to this objection is that in that passage it was not my intention to make those exclusions in an order corresponding to the actual truth of the matter (which I was not dealing with at that stage) but merely in an order corresponding to my own perception. So the sense of the passage was that I was aware of nothing at all that I knew belonged to my essence, except that I was a thinking thing, or a thing possessing within itself the faculty of thinking.² I shall, however, show below how it follows from the fact that I am aware of nothing else belonging to my essence, that nothing else does in fact belong to it. 8

The second objection is this. From the fact that I have within me an idea of a thing more perfect than myself, it does not follow that the idea itself is more perfect than me, still less that what is represented by the idea exists. My reply is that there is an ambiguity here in the word 'idea'. 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me. Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing, even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself. As to how, from the mere fact that there is within me an idea of something more perfect than me, it follows that this thing really exists, this is something which will be fully explained below.

Apart from these objections, there are two fairly lengthy essays which I have looked at,³ but these did not attack my reasoning on these matters so much as my conclusions, and employed arguments lifted from the standard sources of the atheists. But arguments of this sort can carry no 9

¹ See *Discourse*, part 6: vol. 1, p. 149.

² See *Discourse*, part 4: vol. 1, p. 127.

³ One of the critics referred to here is Petit: see letter to Mersenne of 17 May 1638. The other is unknown.

weight with those who understand my reasoning. Moreover, the judgement of many people is so silly and weak that, once they have accepted a view, they continue to believe it, however false and irrational it may be, in preference to a true and well-grounded refutation which they hear subsequently. So I do not wish to reply to such arguments here, if only to avoid having to state them. I will only make the general point that all the objections commonly tossed around by atheists to attack the existence of God invariably depend either on attributing human feelings to God or on arrogantly supposing our own minds to be so powerful and wise that we can attempt to grasp and set limits to what God can or should perform. So, provided only that we remember that our minds must be regarded as finite, while God is infinite and beyond our comprehension, such objections will not cause us any difficulty.

But now that I have, after a fashion, taken an initial sample of people's opinions, I am again tackling the same questions concerning God and the human mind; and this time I am also going to deal with the foundations of First Philosophy in its entirety. But I do not expect any popular approval, or indeed any wide audience. On the contrary I would not urge anyone to read this book except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me, and to withdraw their minds from the senses and from all preconceived opinions. Such readers, as I well know, are few and far between. Those who do not bother to grasp the proper order of my arguments and the connection between them, but merely try to carp at individual sentences, as is the fashion, will not get much benefit from reading this book. They may well find an opportunity to quibble in many places, but it will not be easy for them to produce objections which are telling or worth replying to.

But I certainly do not promise to satisfy my other readers straightaway on all points, and I am not so presumptuous as to believe that I am capable of foreseeing all the difficulties which anyone may find. So first of all, in the *Meditations*, I will set out the very thoughts which have enabled me, in my view, to arrive at a certain and evident knowledge of the truth, so that I can find out whether the same arguments which have convinced me will enable me to convince others. Next, I will reply to the objections of various men of outstanding intellect and scholarship who had these *Meditations* sent to them for scrutiny before they went to press. For the objections they raised were so many and so varied that I would venture to hope that it will be hard for anyone else to think of any point – at least of any importance – which these critics have not touched on. I therefore ask my readers not to pass judgement on the *Meditations* until they have been kind enough to read through all these objections and my replies to them.

Synopsis of the following six Meditations

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In the First Meditation reasons are provided which give us possible grounds for doubt about all things, especially material things, so long as we have no foundations for the sciences other than those which we have had up till now. Although the usefulness of such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight, its greatest benefit lies in freeing us from all our preconceived opinions, and providing the easiest route by which the mind may be led away from the senses. The eventual result of this doubt is to make it impossible for us to have any further doubts about what we subsequently discover to be true.

In the Second Meditation, the mind uses its own freedom and supposes the non-existence of all the things about whose existence it can have even the slightest doubt; and in so doing the mind notices that it is impossible that it should not itself exist during this time. This exercise is also of the greatest benefit, since it enables the mind to distinguish without difficulty what belongs to itself, i.e. to an intellectual nature, from what belongs to the body. But since some people may perhaps expect arguments for the immortality of the soul in this section, I think they should be warned here and now that I have tried not to put down anything which I could not precisely demonstrate. Hence the only order which I could follow was that normally employed by geometers, namely to set out all the premisses on which a desired proposition depends, before drawing any conclusions about it. Now the first and most important prerequisite for knowledge of the immortality of the soul is for us to form a concept of the soul which is as clear as possible and is also quite distinct from every concept of body; and that is just what has been done in this section. A further requirement is that we should know that everything that we clearly and distinctly understand is true in a way which corresponds exactly to our understanding of it; but it was not possible to prove this before the Fourth Meditation. In addition we need to have a distinct concept of corporeal nature, and this is developed partly in the Second Meditation itself, and partly in the Fifth and Sixth Meditations. The inference to be drawn from these results is that all the things that we clearly and distinctly conceive of as different substances (as we do in the case of mind and body) are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other; and this conclusion is drawn in the Sixth Meditation. This conclusion is confirmed in the same Meditation by the fact that we cannot understand a body except as being divisible, while by contrast we cannot understand a mind except as being indivisible. For we cannot conceive of half of a mind, while we can always conceive of half of a body, however small; and this leads us to recognize that the natures of

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mind and body are not only different, but in some way opposite. But I have not pursued this topic any further in this book, first because these arguments are enough to show that the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind, and are hence enough to give mortals the hope of an after-life, and secondly because the premisses which lead to the conclusion that the soul is immortal depend on an account of the whole of physics. This is required for two reasons. First, we need to know that absolutely all substances, or things which must be created by God in order to exist, are by their nature incorruptible and cannot ever cease to exist unless they are reduced to nothingness by God's denying his concurrence¹ to them. Secondly, we need to recognize that body, taken in the general sense, is a substance, so that it too never perishes. But the human body, in so far as it differs from other bodies, is simply made up of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents² of this sort; whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance. For even if all the accidents of the mind change, so that it has different objects of the understanding and different desires and sensations, it does not on that account become a different mind; whereas a human body loses its identity merely as a result of a change in the shape of some of its parts. And it follows from this that while the body can very easily perish, the mind³ is immortal by its very nature.

In the Third Meditation I have explained quite fully enough, I think, my principal argument for proving the existence of God. But in order to draw my readers' minds away from the senses as far as possible, I was not willing to use any comparison taken from bodily things. So it may be that many obscurities remain; but I hope they will be completely removed later, in my Replies to the Objections. One such problem, among others, is how the idea of a supremely perfect being, which is in us, possesses so much objective⁴ reality that it can come only from a cause which is supremely perfect. In the Replies this is illustrated by the comparison of a very perfect machine, the idea of which is in the mind of some engineer.⁵ Just as the objective intricacy belonging to the idea must have some

1 The continuous divine action necessary to maintain things in existence; see below, Fifth Replies pp. 254f.

2 Descartes here uses this scholastic term to refer to those features of a thing which may alter, e.g. the particular size, shape etc. of a body, or the particular thoughts, desires etc. of a mind.

3 '... or the soul of man, for I make no distinction between them' (added in French version).

4 For Descartes' use of this term, see Med. III, below p. 28.

5 First Replies, below p. 75.

cause, namely the scientific knowledge of the engineer, or of someone else who passed the idea on to him, so the idea of God which is in us must have God himself as its cause. 15

In the Fourth Meditation it is proved that everything that we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, and I also explain what the nature of falsity consists in. These results need to be known both in order to confirm what has gone before and also to make intelligible what is to come later. (But here it should be noted in passing that I do not deal at all with sin, i.e. the error which is committed in pursuing good and evil, but only with the error that occurs in distinguishing truth from falsehood. And there is no discussion of matters pertaining to faith or the conduct of life, but simply of speculative truths which are known solely by means of the natural light.)¹

In the Fifth Meditation, besides an account of corporeal nature taken in general, there is a new argument demonstrating the existence of God. Again, several difficulties may arise here, but these are resolved later in the Replies to the Objections. Finally I explain the sense in which it is true that the certainty even of geometrical demonstrations depends on the knowledge of God.

Lastly, in the Sixth Meditation, the intellect is distinguished from the imagination; the criteria for this distinction are explained; the mind is proved to be really distinct from the body, but is shown, notwithstanding, to be so closely joined to it that the mind and the body make up a kind of unit; there is a survey of all the errors which commonly come from the senses, and an explanation of how they may be avoided; and, lastly, there is a presentation of all the arguments which enable the existence of material things to be inferred. The great benefit of these arguments is not, in my view, that they prove what they establish — namely that there really is a world, and that human beings have bodies and so on — since no sane person has ever seriously doubted these things. 16
The point is that in considering these arguments we come to realize that they are not as solid or as transparent as the arguments which lead us to knowledge of our own minds and of God, so that the latter are the most certain and evident of all possible objects of knowledge for the human intellect. Indeed, this is the one thing that I set myself to prove in these Meditations. And for that reason I will not now go over the various other issues in the book which are dealt with as they come up.

1 Descartes added this passage after reading the Fourth Set of Objections (see below pp. 151-2). He told Mersenne 'please put the words in brackets so that it can be seen that they have been added' (letter of 18 March 1641).

THIRD MEDITATION

The existence of God

Review of
Meditation 2

I will now shut my eyes, stop my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will eliminate from my thoughts all images of bodily things, or rather, since this is hardly possible, I will regard all such images as vacuous, false and worthless. I will converse with myself and scrutinize myself more deeply; and in this way I will attempt to achieve, little by little, a more intimate knowledge of myself. I am a thing that thinks: that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things,¹ is willing, is unwilling, and also which imagines and has sensory perceptions; for as I have noted before, even though the objects of my sensory experience and imagination may have no existence outside me, nonetheless the modes of thinking which I refer to as cases of sensory perception and imagination, in so far as they are simply modes of thinking, do exist within me – of that I am certain.

In this brief list I have gone through everything I truly know, or at least everything I have so far discovered that I know. Now I will cast around more carefully to see whether there may be other things within me which I have not yet noticed. I am certain that I am a thinking thing. **Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything?** In this first item of knowledge there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. **So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.**²

Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things which I afterwards realized were doubtful. What were these? The earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I apprehended with the senses. But what was it about them that I perceived clearly? Just that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things appeared before my mind. Yet even now I am

¹ The French version here inserts 'loves, hates'.

² '... all the things which we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are true' (French version).

Challenges to the
truth rule

not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake; or at any rate, if my judgement was true, it was not thanks to the strength of my perception.¹

But what about when I was considering something very simple and straightforward in arithmetic or geometry, for example that two and three added together make five, and so on? Did I not see at least these things clearly enough to affirm their truth? Indeed, the only reason for my later judgement that they were open to doubt was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident. And whenever my preconceived belief in the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind's eye. Yet when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced by them that I spontaneously declare: let whoever can do so deceive me, he will never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something; or make it true at some future time that I have never existed, since it is now true that I exist; or bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction. And since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt which depends simply on this supposition is a very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical one. But in order to remove even this slight reason for doubt, as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else.

First, however, considerations of order appear to dictate that I now classify my thoughts into definite kinds,² and ask which of them can properly be said to be the bearers of truth and falsity. Some of my thoughts are as it were the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term 'idea' is strictly appropriate – for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Other thoughts have

¹ '... it was not because of any knowledge I possessed' (French version).

² The opening of this sentence is greatly expanded in the French version: 'In order that I may have the opportunity of examining this without interrupting the order of meditating which I have decided upon, which is to start only from those notions which I find first of all in my mind and pass gradually to those which I may find later on, I must here divide my thoughts ...'

various additional forms: thus when I will, or am afraid, or affirm, or deny, there is always a particular thing which I take as the object of my thought, but my thought includes something more than the likeness of that thing. Some thoughts in this category are called volitions or emotions, while others are called judgements.

Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false; for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter. As for the will and the emotions, here too one need not worry about falsity; for even if the things which I may desire are wicked or even non-existent, that does not make it any less true that I desire them. Thus the only remaining thoughts where I must be on my guard against making a mistake are judgements. And the chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me. Of course, if I considered just the ideas themselves simply as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else, they could scarcely give me any material for error.

38 Among my ideas, some appear to be innate, some to be adventitious,¹ and others to have been invented by me. My understanding of what a thing is, what truth is, and what thought is, seems to derive simply from my own nature. But my hearing a noise, as I do now, or seeing the sun, or feeling the fire, comes from things which are located outside me, or so I have hitherto judged. Lastly, sirens, hippogriffs and the like are my own invention. But perhaps all my ideas may be thought of as adventitious, or they may all be innate, or all made up; for as yet I have not clearly perceived their true origin.

But the chief question at this point concerns the ideas which I take to be derived from things existing outside me: what is my reason for thinking that they resemble these things? Nature has apparently taught me to think this. But in addition I know by experience that these ideas do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me. Frequently I notice them even when I do not want to: now, for example, I feel the heat whether I want to or not, and this is why I think that this sensation or idea of heat comes to me from something other than myself, namely the heat of the fire by which I am sitting. And the most obvious judgement for me to make is that the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else.

I will now see if these arguments are strong enough. When I say 'Nature taught me to think this', all I mean is that a spontaneous impulse leads

1 '... foreign to me and coming from outside' (French version).

me to believe it, not that its truth has been revealed to me by some natural light. There is a big difference here. Whatever is revealed to me by the natural light – for example that from the fact that I am doubting it follows that I exist, and so on – cannot in any way be open to doubt. This is because there cannot be another faculty¹ both as trustworthy as the natural light and also capable of showing me that such things are not true. But as for my natural impulses, I have often judged in the past that they were pushing me in the wrong direction when it was a question of choosing the good, and I do not see why I should place any greater confidence in them in other matters.² 39

Then again, although these ideas do not depend on my will, it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me. Just as the impulses which I was speaking of a moment ago seem opposed to my will even though they are within me, so there may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things; this is, after all, just how I have always thought ideas are produced in me when I am dreaming.

A
hidden
faculty?

And finally, even if these ideas did come from things other than myself, it would not follow that they must resemble those things. Indeed, I think I have often discovered a great disparity <between an object and its idea> in many cases. For example, there are two different ideas of the sun which I find within me. One of them, which is acquired as it were from the senses and which is a prime example of an idea which I reckon to come from an external source, makes the sun appear very small. The other idea is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me (or else it is constructed by me in some other way), and this idea shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth. Obviously both these ideas cannot resemble the sun which exists outside me; and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all.

All these considerations are enough to establish that it is not reliable judgement but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other way. 40

But it now occurs to me that there is another way of investigating whether some of the things of which I possess ideas exist outside me. In so far as the ideas are <considered> simply <as> modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from

Ideas & Degrees of
Reality

1 '... or power for distinguishing truth from falsehood' (French version).

2 '... concerning truth and falsehood' (French version).

within me in the same fashion. But in so far as different ideas <are considered as images which> represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective¹ reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances.

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality – cannot arise from what is less perfect. And this is transparently true not only in the case of effects which possess <what the philosophers call> actual or formal reality, but also in the case of ideas, where one is considering only <what they call> objective reality. A stone, for example, which previously did not exist, cannot begin to exist unless it is produced by something which contains, either formally or eminently everything to be found in the stone;² similarly, heat cannot be produced in an object which was not previously hot, except by something of at least the same order <degree or kind> of perfection as heat, and so on. But it is also true that the *idea* of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone. For although this cause does not transfer any of its actual or formal reality to my idea, it should not on that account be supposed that it must be less real.³ The nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode.⁴ But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the

1 '... i.e. participate by representation in a higher degree of being or perfection' (added in French version). According to the scholastic distinction invoked in the paragraphs that follow, the 'formal' reality of anything is its own intrinsic reality, while the 'objective' reality of an idea is a function of its representational content. Thus if an idea *A* represents some object *X* which is *F*, then *F*-ness will be contained 'formally' in *X* but 'objectively' in *A*. See below, Second Replies pp. 74f.

2 '... i.e. it will contain in itself the same things as are in the stone or other more excellent things' (added in French version). In scholastic terminology, to possess a property 'formally' is to possess it literally, in accordance with its definition; to possess it 'eminently' is to possess it in some higher form. Cf. below, p. 201.

3 '... that this cause must be less real' (French version).

4 '... i.e. a manner or way of thinking' (added in French version).

idea. For if we suppose that an idea contains something which was not in its cause, it must have got this from nothing; yet the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively <or representatively> in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.

And although the reality which I am considering in my ideas is merely objective reality, I must not on that account suppose that the same reality need not exist formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is enough for it to be present in them objectively. For just as the objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas – or at least the first and most important ones – by *their* very nature. And although one idea may perhaps originate from another, there cannot be an infinite regress here; eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally <and in fact> all the reality <or perfection> which is present only objectively <or representatively> in the idea. So it is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like <pictures, or> images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect. 42

The longer and more carefully I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth. But what is my conclusion to be? If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. But if no such idea is to be found in me, I shall have no argument to convince me of the existence of anything apart from myself. For despite a most careful and comprehensive survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find.

Among my ideas, apart from the idea which gives me a representation of myself, which cannot present any difficulty in this context, there are ideas which variously represent God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and finally other men like myself. 43

As far as concerns the ideas which represent other men, or animals, or angels, I have no difficulty in understanding that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of corporeal things and of God, even if the world contained no men besides me, no animals and no angels.

As to my ideas of corporeal things, I can see nothing in them which is so great <or excellent> as to make it seem impossible that it originated in myself. For if I scrutinize them thoroughly and examine them one by one, in the way in which I examined the idea of the wax yesterday, I notice

that the things which I perceive clearly and distinctly in them are very few in number. The list comprises size, or extension in length, breadth and depth; shape, which is a function of the boundaries of this extension; position, which is a relation between various items possessing shape; and motion, or change in position; to these may be added substance, duration and number. But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things.¹ For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgements, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they represent non-things as things. For example, the ideas

44 which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things,² if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind.

Such ideas obviously do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing – that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. If on the other hand they are true, then since the reality which they represent is so extremely slight that I cannot even distinguish it from a non-thing, I do not see why they cannot originate from myself.

With regard to the clear and distinct elements in my ideas of corporeal things, it appears that I could have borrowed some of these from my idea of myself, namely substance, duration, number and anything else of this kind. For example, I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that I am a substance. Admittedly I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is not extended, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously; but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'.³ Again, I perceive that I now exist, and remember that I have existed for some time; moreover, I have various thoughts which I can count; it is in these

1 '... chimerical things which cannot exist' (French version).

2 'And since ideas, being like images, must in each case appear to us to represent something' (French version).

3 '... in so far as they represent substances' (French version).

ways that I acquire the ideas of duration and number which I can then transfer to other things. As for all the other elements which make up the ideas of corporeal things, namely extension, shape, position and movement, these are not formally contained in me, since I am nothing but a thinking thing; but since they are merely modes of a substance,¹ and I am a substance, it seems possible that they are contained in me eminently. 45

So there remains only the idea of God; and I must consider whether there is anything in the idea which could not have originated in myself. By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, <eternal, immutable,>independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and which created both myself and everything else (if anything else there be) that exists. All these attributes are such that, the more carefully I concentrate on them, the less possible it seems that they² could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.

Definition of
'God'

It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite.

And I must not think that, just as my conceptions of rest and darkness are arrived at by negating movement and light, so my perception of the infinite is arrived at not by means of a true idea but merely by negating the finite. On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For how could I understand that I doubted or desired – that is, lacked something – and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison? 46

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and so could have come from nothing,³ which is what I observed just a moment ago in the case of the ideas of heat and cold, and so on. On the contrary, it is utterly clear and distinct, and contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea; hence there is no idea which is in itself truer or less liable to be suspected of falsehood. This idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being is, I say, true in the highest degree; for although perhaps one may imagine that such a being does not exist, it cannot be supposed that the idea of such a being represents something

1 '... and as it were the garments under which corporeal substance appears to us' (French version).

2 '... that the idea I have of them' (French version).

3 '... i.e. could be in me in virtue of my imperfection' (added in French version).

unreal, as I said with regard to the idea of cold. The idea is, moreover, utterly clear and distinct; for whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive as being real and true, and implying any perfection, is wholly contained in it. It does not matter that I do not grasp the infinite, or that there are countless additional attributes of God which I cannot in any way grasp, and perhaps cannot even reach in my thought; for it is in the nature of the infinite not to be grasped by a finite being like myself. It is enough that I understand¹ the infinite, and that I judge that all the attributes which I clearly perceive and know to imply some perfection – and perhaps countless others of which I am ignorant – are present in God either formally or eminently. This is enough to make the idea that I have of God the truest and most clear and distinct of all my ideas.

47 But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand, and all the perfections which I attribute to God are somehow in me potentially, though not yet emerging or actualized. For I am now experiencing a gradual increase in my knowledge, and I see nothing to prevent its increasing more and more to infinity. Further, I see no reason why I should not be able to use this increased knowledge to acquire all the other perfections of God. And finally, if the potentiality for these perfections is already within me, why should not this be enough to generate the idea of such perfections?

But all this is impossible. First, though it is true that there is a gradual increase in my knowledge, and that I have many potentialities which are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God, which contains absolutely nothing that is potential;² indeed, this gradual increase in knowledge is itself the surest sign of imperfection. What is more, even if my knowledge always increases more and more, I recognize that it will never actually be infinite, since it will never reach the point where it is not capable of a further increase; God, on the other hand, I take to be actually infinite, so that nothing can be added to his perfection. And finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced merely by potential being, which strictly speaking is nothing, but only by actual or formal being.

If one concentrates carefully, all this is quite evident by the natural light. But when I relax my concentration, and my mental vision is blinded by the images of things perceived by the senses, it is not so easy for me to remember **why the idea of a being more perfect than myself must**

1 According to Descartes one can know or understand something without fully grasping it 'just as we can touch a mountain but not put our arms around it. To grasp something is to embrace it in one's thought; to know something, it suffices to touch it with one's thought' (letter to Mersenne, 26 May 1630).

2 '... but only what is actual and real' (added in French version).

necessarily proceed from some being which is in reality more perfect. I should therefore like to go further and inquire whether I myself, who have this idea, could exist if no such being existed. 48

From whom, in that case, would I derive my existence? From myself presumably, or from my parents, or from some other beings less perfect than God; for nothing more perfect than God, or even as perfect, can be thought of or imagined.

Yet if I derived my existence from myself,¹ then I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all; for I should have given myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I should myself be God. I must not suppose that the items I lack would be more difficult to acquire than those I now have. On the contrary, it is clear that, since I am a thinking thing or substance, it would have been far more difficult for me to emerge out of nothing than merely to acquire knowledge of the many things of which I am ignorant – such knowledge being merely an accident of that substance. And if I had derived my existence from myself, which is a greater achievement, I should certainly not have denied myself the knowledge in question, which is something much easier to acquire, or indeed any of the attributes which I perceive to be contained in the idea of God; for none of them seem any harder to achieve. And if any of them were harder to achieve, they would certainly appear so to me, if I had indeed got all my other attributes from myself, since I should experience a limitation of my power in this respect.

I do not escape the force of these arguments by supposing that I have always existed as I do now, as if it followed from this that there was no need to look for any author of my existence. For a lifespan can be divided into countless parts, each completely independent of the others, so that it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at this moment – that is, which preserves me. For it is quite clear to anyone who attentively considers the nature of time that the same power and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment of its duration as would be required to create that thing anew if it were not yet in existence. Hence the distinction between preservation and creation is only a conceptual one,² and this is one of the things that are evident by the natural light. 49

I must therefore now ask myself whether I possess some power enabling me to bring it about that I who now exist will still exist a little while from now. For since I am nothing but a thinking thing – or at least

1 '... and were independent of every other being' (added in French version).

2 Cf. *Principles*, Part I, art. 62: vol. 1, p. 214.

since I am now concerned only and precisely with that part of me which is a thinking thing – if there were such a power in me, I should undoubtedly be aware of it. But I experience no such power, and this very fact makes me recognize most clearly that I depend on some being distinct from myself.

But perhaps this being is not God, and perhaps I was produced either by my parents or by other causes less perfect than God. No; for as I have said before, it is quite clear that there must be at least as much in the cause as in the effect.¹ And therefore whatever kind of cause is eventually proposed, since I am a thinking thing and have within me some idea of God, it must be admitted that what caused me is itself a thinking thing and possesses the idea of all the perfections which I attribute to God. In respect of this cause one may again inquire whether it derives its existence from itself or from another cause. If from itself, then it is clear
 50 from what has been said that it is itself God, since if it has the power of existing through its own might,² then undoubtedly it also has the power of actually possessing all the perfections of which it has an idea – that is, all the perfections which I conceive to be in God. If, on the other hand, it derives its existence from another cause, then the same question may be repeated concerning this further cause, namely whether it derives its existence from itself or from another cause, until eventually the ultimate cause is reached, and this will be God.

It is clear enough that an infinite regress is impossible here, especially since I am dealing not just with the cause that produced me in the past, but also and most importantly with the cause that preserves me at the present moment.

Nor can it be supposed that several partial causes contributed to my creation, or that I received the idea of one of the perfections which I attribute to God from one cause and the idea of another from another – the supposition here being that all the perfections are to be found somewhere in the universe but not joined together in a single being, God. On the contrary, the unity, the simplicity, or the inseparability of all the attributes of God is one of the most important of the perfections which I understand him to have. And surely the idea of the unity of all his perfections could not have been placed in me by any cause which did not also provide me with the ideas of the other perfections; for no cause could have made me understand the interconnection and inseparability of the perfections without at the same time making me recognize what they were.

1 '... at least as much reality in the cause as in its effect' (French version).

2 Lat. *per se*; literally 'through itself'.

Could my
parents have
created me?

Partial causes

Lastly, as regards my parents, even if everything I have ever believed about them is true, it is certainly not they who preserve me; and in so far as I am a thinking thing, they did not even make me; they merely placed certain dispositions in the matter which I have always regarded as containing me, or rather my mind, for that is all I now take myself to be. So there can be no difficulty regarding my parents in this context. Altogether then, it must be concluded that the mere fact that I exist and have within me an idea of a most perfect being, that is, God, provides a very clear proof that God indeed exists.

51

It only remains for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not acquire it from the senses; it has never come to me unexpectedly, as usually happens with the ideas of things that are perceivable by the senses, when these things present themselves to the external sense organs – or seem to do so. And it was not invented by me either; for I am plainly unable either to take away anything from it or to add anything to it. The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.

innateness of the idea of God

And indeed it is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work – not that the mark need be anything distinct from the work itself. But the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself. That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that he is God. The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have – that is, having within me the idea of God – were it not the case that God really existed. By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me, that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp, but can somehow reach in my thought, who is subject to no defects whatsoever.¹ It is clear enough from this that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect.

52

God is no deceiver

But before examining this point more carefully and investigating other

1 '... and has not one of the things which indicate some imperfection' (added in French version).

truths which may be derived from it, I should like to pause here and spend some time in the contemplation of God; to reflect on his attributes, and to gaze with wonder and adoration on the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my darkened intellect can bear it. For just as we believe through faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists solely in the contemplation of the divine majesty, so experience tells us that this same contemplation, albeit much less perfect, enables us to know the greatest joy of which we are capable in this life.

*The essence of material things, and the existence of God
considered a second time*

There are many matters which remain to be investigated concerning the attributes of God and the nature of myself, or my mind; and perhaps I shall take these up at another time. But now that I have seen what to do and what to avoid in order to reach the truth, the most pressing task seems to be to try to escape from the doubts into which I fell a few days ago, and see whether any certainty can be achieved regarding material objects.

But before I inquire whether any such things exist outside me, I must consider the ideas of these things, in so far as they exist in my thought, and see which of them are distinct, and which confused.

The essence
of matter

Quantity, for example, or 'continuous' quantity as the philosophers commonly call it, is something I distinctly imagine. That is, I distinctly imagine the extension of the quantity (or rather of the thing which is quantified) in length, breadth and depth. I also enumerate various parts of the thing, and to these parts I assign various sizes, shapes, positions and local motions; and to the motions I assign various durations.

Not only are all these things very well known and transparent to me when regarded in this general way, but in addition there are countless particular features regarding shape, number, motion and so on, which I perceive when I give them my attention. And the truth of these matters is so open and so much in harmony with my nature, that on first discovering them it seems that I am not so much learning something new as remembering what I knew before; or it seems like noticing for the first time things which were long present within me although I had never turned my mental gaze on them before.

But I think the most important consideration at this point is that I find within me countless ideas of things which even though they may not exist anywhere outside me still cannot be called nothing; for although in a sense they can be thought of at will, they are not my invention but have their own true and immutable natures. When, for example, I imagine a

triangle, even if perhaps no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought, **there is still a determinate nature, or essence, or form of the triangle which is immutable and eternal, and not invented by me or dependent on my mind.** This is clear from the fact that various properties can be demonstrated of the triangle, for example that its three angles equal two right angles, that its greatest side subtends its greatest angle, and the like; and **since these properties are ones which I now clearly recognize whether I want to or not, even if I never thought of them at all when I previously imagined the triangle, it follows that they cannot have been invented by me.**

No invention

It would be beside the point for me to say that since I have from time to time seen bodies of triangular shape, the idea of the triangle may have come to me from external things by means of the sense organs. For I can think up countless other shapes which there can be no suspicion of my ever having encountered through the senses, and yet I can demonstrate various properties of these shapes, just as I can with the triangle. All these properties are certainly true, since I am clearly aware of them, and therefore they are something, and not merely nothing; **for it is obvious that whatever is true is something; and I have already amply demonstrated that everything of which I am clearly aware is true.** And even if I had not demonstrated this, the nature of my mind is such that I cannot but assent to these things, at least so long as I clearly perceive them. I also remember that even before, when I was completely preoccupied with the objects of the senses, I always held that the most certain truths of all were the kind which I recognized clearly in connection with shapes, or numbers or other items relating to arithmetic or geometry, or in general to pure and abstract mathematics.

65

But if the mere fact that I can produce from my thought the idea of something entails that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, is not this a possible basis for another argument to prove the existence of God? Certainly, the idea of God, or a supremely perfect being, is one which I find within me just as surely as the idea of any shape or number. And my understanding that it belongs to his nature that he always exists¹ is no less clear and distinct than is the case when I prove of any shape or number that some property belongs to its nature. Hence, even if it turned out that not everything on which I have meditated in these past days is true, I ought still to regard the existence of God as having at least the same level of certainty as I have hitherto attributed to the truths of mathematics.²

66

At first sight, however, this is not transparently clear, but has some

¹ '... that actual and eternal existence belongs to his nature' (French version).

² '... which concern only figures and numbers' (added in French version).

appearance of being a sophism. Since I have been accustomed to distinguish between existence and essence in everything else, I find it easy to persuade myself that existence can also be separated from the essence of God, and hence that God can be thought of as not existing. But when I concentrate more carefully, it is quite evident that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the fact that its three angles equal two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle, or than the idea of a mountain can be separated from the idea of a valley. Hence it is just as much of a contradiction to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking a perfection), as it is to think of a mountain without a valley.

However, even granted that I cannot think of God except as existing, just as I cannot think of a mountain without a valley, it certainly does not follow from the fact that I think of a mountain with a valley that there is any mountain in the world; and similarly, it does not seem to follow from the fact that I think of God as existing that he does exist. For my thought does not impose any necessity on things; and just as I may imagine a winged horse even though no horse has wings, so I may be able to attach existence to God even though no God exists.

67 But there is a sophism concealed here. From the fact that I cannot think of a mountain without a valley, it does not follow that a mountain and valley exist anywhere, but simply that a mountain and a valley, whether they exist or not, are mutually inseparable. But from the fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from God, and hence that he really exists. It is not that my thought makes it so, or imposes any necessity on any thing; on the contrary, it is the necessity of the thing itself, namely the existence of God, which determines my thinking in this respect. For I am not free to think of God without existence (that is, a supremely perfect being without a supreme perfection) as I am free to imagine a horse with or without wings.

And it must not be objected at this point that while it is indeed necessary for me to suppose God exists, once I have made the supposition that he has all perfections (since existence is one of the perfections), nevertheless the original supposition was not necessary. Similarly, the objection would run, it is not necessary for me to think that all quadrilaterals can be inscribed in a circle; but given this supposition, it will be necessary for me to admit that a rhombus can be inscribed in a circle – which is patently false. Now admittedly, it is not necessary that I ever light upon any thought of God; but whenever I do choose to think of the first and supreme being, and bring forth the idea of God from the treasure house of my mind as it were, it is necessary that I attribute all

perfections to him, even if I do not at that time enumerate them or attend to them individually. And this necessity plainly guarantees that, when I later realize that existence is a perfection, I am correct in inferring that the first and supreme being exists. In the same way, it is not necessary for me ever to imagine a triangle; but whenever I do wish to consider a rectilinear figure having just three angles, it is necessary that I attribute to it the properties which license the inference that its three angles equal no more than two right angles, even if I do not notice this at the time. By contrast, when I examine what figures can be inscribed in a circle, it is in no way necessary for me to think that this class includes all quadrilaterals. Indeed, I cannot even imagine this, so long as I am willing to admit only what I clearly and distinctly understand. So there is a great difference between this kind of false supposition and the true ideas which are innate in me, of which the first and most important is the idea of God. There are many ways in which I understand that this idea is not something fictitious which is dependent on my thought, but is an image of a true and immutable nature. First of all, there is the fact that, apart from God, there is nothing else of which I am capable of thinking such that existence belongs¹ to its essence. Second, I cannot understand how there could be two or more Gods of this kind; and after supposing that one God exists, I plainly see that it is necessary that he has existed from eternity and will abide for eternity. And finally, I perceive many other attributes of God, none of which I can remove or alter. 68

But whatever method of proof I use, I am always brought back to the fact that it is only what I clearly and distinctly perceive that completely convinces me. Some of the things I clearly and distinctly perceive are obvious to everyone, while others are discovered only by those who look more closely and investigate more carefully; but once they have been discovered, the latter are judged to be just as certain as the former. In the case of a right-angled triangle, for example, the fact that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the square on the other two sides is not so readily apparent as the fact that the hypotenuse subtends the largest angle; but once one has seen it, one believes it just as strongly. But as regards God, if I were not overwhelmed by preconceived opinions, and if the images of things perceived by the senses did not besiege my thought on every side, I would certainly acknowledge him sooner and more easily than anything else. For what is more self-evident than the fact that the supreme being exists, or that God, to whose essence alone existence belongs,² exists? 69

¹ '... necessarily belongs' (French version).

² '... in the idea of whom alone necessary and eternal existence is comprised' (French version).

Although it needed close attention for me to perceive this, I am now just as certain of it as I am of everything else which appears most certain. And what is more, I see that the certainty of all other things depends on this, so that without it nothing can ever be perfectly known.

Admittedly my nature is such that so long as¹ I perceive something very clearly and distinctly I cannot but believe it to be true. But my nature is also such that I cannot fix my mental vision continually on the same thing, so as to keep perceiving it clearly; and often the memory of a previously made judgement may come back, when I am no longer attending to the arguments which led me to make it. And so other arguments can now occur to me which might easily undermine my opinion, if I were unaware of God: and I should thus never have true and certain knowledge about anything, but only shifting and changeable opinions. For example, when I consider the nature of a triangle, it appears most evident to me, steeped as I am in the principles of geometry, that its three angles are equal to two right angles; and so long as I attend to the proof, I cannot but believe this to be true. But as soon as I turn my mind's eye away from the proof, then in spite of still remembering that I perceived it very clearly, I can easily fall into doubt about its truth, if I am unaware of God. For I can convince myself that I have a natural disposition to go wrong from time to time in matters which I think I perceive as evidently as can be. This will seem even more likely when I remember that there have been frequent cases where I have regarded things as true and certain, but have later been led by other arguments to judge them to be false.

Now, however, I have perceived that God exists, and at the same time I have understood that everything else depends on him, and that he is no deceiver; and I have drawn the conclusion that everything which I clearly and distinctly perceive is of necessity true. Accordingly, even if I am no longer attending to the arguments which led me to judge that this is true, as long as I remember that I clearly and distinctly perceived it, there are no counter-arguments which can be adduced to make me doubt it, but on the contrary I have true and certain knowledge of it. And I have knowledge not just of this matter, but of all matters which I remember ever having demonstrated, in geometry and so on. For what objections can now be raised?² That the way I am made makes me prone to frequent error? But I now know that I am incapable of error in those cases where my understanding is transparently clear. Or can it be objected that I have in the past regarded as true and certain many things which I afterwards recognized to be false? But none of these were things which I clearly and

1 '... as soon as' (French version).

2 '... to oblige me to call these matters into doubt' (added in French version).

distinctly perceived: I was ignorant of this rule for establishing the truth, and believed these things for other reasons which I later discovered to be less reliable. So what is left to say? Can one raise the objection I put to myself a while ago, that I may be dreaming, or that everything which I am now thinking has as little truth as what comes to the mind of one who is asleep? Yet even this does not change anything. For even though I might be dreaming, if there is anything which is evident to my intellect, then it is wholly true. 71

Thus I see plainly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him. And now it is possible for me to achieve full and certain knowledge of countless matters, both concerning God himself and other things whose nature is intellectual, and also concerning the whole of that corporeal nature which is the subject-matter of pure mathematics.¹

1 '... and also concerning things which belong to corporeal nature in so far as it can serve as the object of geometrical demonstrations which have no concern with whether that object exists' (French version).

Objections and Replies

Translator's preface

As soon as he had completed the *Meditations*, Descartes began to circulate them among his friends, asking for comments and criticisms. He also sent the manuscript to Friar Marin Mersenne (1588–1648), his friend and principal correspondent, asking him to obtain further criticisms. He wrote to Mersenne in a letter of 28 January 1641: 'I shall be glad if people make me as many objections as possible – and the strongest ones they can find. For I hope that in consequence the truth will stand out all the better.' The resulting six sets of Objections (the first set collected by Descartes himself, the remainder by Mersenne) were published in Latin, together with Descartes' Replies, in the same volume as the first (1641) edition of the *Meditations*. The second edition of the *Meditations* (1642) contained in addition the Seventh Set of Objections together with Descartes' Replies, and also the Letter to Dinet (all in Latin). The terms 'Objections' and 'Replies' were suggested by Descartes himself, who asked that his own comments should be called 'Replies' rather than 'Solutions' in order to leave the reader to judge whether his replies contained solutions to the difficulties offered (letter to Mersenne, 18 March 1641).

The volume containing the French translation of the *Meditations* (by de Luynes), which appeared in 1647, also contained a French version of the first six sets of *Objections and Replies* by Descartes' disciple Claude Clerselier (1614–84). Although it is frequently said that Descartes saw and approved of this translation,¹ there is, as with the *Meditations* proper, no good case for preferring the French version to the original Latin which Descartes himself composed.² It should also be remembered that all the objectors wrote in Latin, and had before them only the Latin text of the *Meditations* when they wrote. The present translation is therefore based entirely on the original Latin.

¹ Descartes visited Clerselier in 1644 and saw some of his work; he did not, however, wish the Fifth Set of Objections and Replies to be included in the translation (see Author's Note, below p. 268). Clerselier's version of the Seventh Set of Objections and Replies did not appear till after Descartes' death, in the second French edition of 1661.

² See Translator's preface to *Meditations*, above p. 1.

The First Set of Objections is by a Catholic theologian from Holland, Johannes Caterus (Johan de Kater), who was priest in charge of the church of St Laurens at Alkmaar from 1632–56. Caterus had been asked to comment on the *Meditations* by two fellow priests who were friends of Descartes, Bannius and Bloemaert; and it is to these two intermediaries that both Caterus' Objections and Descartes' Replies are addressed. Descartes wrote to Mersenne on 24 December 1640 that Caterus himself wished to remain anonymous.

The Second Set of Objections is simply attributed to 'theologians and philosophers' in the index to the first edition, but the French version of 1647 announces that they were 'collected by the Reverend Father Mersenne'. In fact they are largely the work of Mersenne himself.

The Third Set of Objections ('by a celebrated English philosopher', says the 1647 edition) is by Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) who had fled to France, for political reasons, in 1640. Although many of Hobbes' points are of considerable philosophical interest, Descartes' comments are mostly curt and dismissive in the extreme.

The Fourth Set of Objections is by the French theologian and logician Antoine Arnauld (1612–94), who became Doctor of Theology at the Sorbonne in 1641. Both the Objections and Replies are addressed to Mersenne as intermediary, and the tone of both authors is courteous and respectful throughout.

The Fifth Set of Objections is by the philosopher Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655). His comments are very lengthy and come near to being a paragraph by paragraph commentary on the *Meditations*. Gassendi's tone is often acerbic, and Descartes frequently reacts with bristly defensiveness. For the further prolonged debate between Descartes and Gassendi which followed the publication of the Fifth Objections and Replies, see the Appendix, pages 268ff below.

The Sixth Set of Objections was printed with no indication of the author in the first and second editions, and is described in the 1647 French edition as being 'by various theologians and philosophers'. The compiler, as in the case of the Second Objections, is Mersenne.

The Seventh Set of Objections is by the Jesuit, Pierre Bourdin (1595–1653). Descartes had been eager to obtain the support of the Jesuits for his philosophy, but he was very disappointed with what he called 'the quibbles of Father Bourdin'; he wrote to Mersenne 'I have treated him as courteously as possible but I have never seen a paper so full of faults' (letter of March 1642). Descartes' Replies take the form of comments or annotations which are interspersed with Bourdin's Objections.

The Letter to Father Dinet, in which Descartes describes his reaction to Bourdin's Objections, was printed at the end of the Seventh Set of

Objections and Replies in the second (1642) edition. Dinet was Bourdin's superior in the Jesuit order, and had taught Descartes at the College of La Flèche. An abridged version of the letter to Dinet is translated below; the Objections and Replies are translated in full.

NOTE ON TYPOGRAPHY AND QUOTATIONS

The time-honoured practice in presenting the *Objections and Replies* (one which goes back to the earliest editions) has been to use italic type for the objectors' words and Roman type for those of Descartes. This convention has been abandoned in the present edition. It is unnecessary, since there is (with the exception of the exchange with Bourdin, where an alternative device is used) never any doubt about who is speaking; and it is potentially confusing, since the use of roman type in quotations from the *Meditations* can mislead the reader into supposing he has before him the exact words of Descartes. In fact, however, the objectors are often cavalier about quotations, paraphrasing and altering the syntax to suit their purposes. Because of this, readers referring back to the *Meditations* should not always expect to find that quotations in the *Objections and Replies* correspond word for word with the relevant passages in the *Meditations*.

J.C.

FIRST SET OF OBJECTIONS¹

Gentlemen,

Observing your enthusiastic desire for me to make a detailed examination of the writings of M. Descartes, I felt myself obliged, in this matter, to go along with the wishes of such very good friends. In complying with your request I hope to make you realize the great regard which I have for you, and also to establish the inadequacy of my own intellectual powers, so that in future you may show me a little more indulgence, if I require it, and not press me so hard if my performance here turns out to be inadequate.

92 M. Descartes is in my judgement a man of the highest intellect and the utmost modesty – a man such as even Momus,² were he now with us, would approve of. ‘I am thinking’, he says, ‘therefore I exist; indeed, I am thought itself – I am a mind.’ Granted. ‘But in virtue of thinking, I possess within me ideas of things, and in particular an idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being.’ True again. ‘However I am not the cause of this idea, since I do not measure up to its objective reality; hence something more perfect than myself is its cause, and accordingly there exists something besides myself, something more perfect than I am. This is someone who is not a being in any ordinary sense but who simply and without qualification embraces the whole of being within himself, and is as it were the ultimate original cause, as Dionysius³ says in chapter eight of the *Divina Nomina*.’

But here I am forced to stop for a while to avoid becoming exhausted. My mind ebbs and flows like the Euripus with its violent tides: first I accept, but then I deny; I give my approval but then I withdraw it; I am unwilling to disagree with the author, but I am unable to agree with him. My question is this: what sort of cause does an idea need? Indeed, what is an idea? It is the thing that is thought of, in so far as it has objective being in the intellect. But what is ‘objective being in the intellect’? According to what I was taught, this is simply the determination of an act of the

¹ By Caterus. For details of the author and the addressees, see Translator's preface, above p. 64.

² In Greek mythology the personification of criticism and fault-finding.

³ Dionysius the Areopagite, a fifth-century writer who sought to introduce certain neoplatonic elements into Christianity.

intellect by means of an object. And this is merely an extraneous label which adds nothing to the thing itself. Just as 'being seen' is nothing other than an act of vision attributable to myself, so 'being thought of', or having objective being in the intellect, is simply a thought of the mind which stops and terminates in the mind. And this can occur without any movement or change in the thing itself, and indeed without the thing in question existing at all. So why should I look for a cause of something which is not actual, and which is simply an empty label, a non-entity?

'Nevertheless', says our ingenious author, 'in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality it must surely derive it from some cause.'¹ On the contrary, this requires no cause; for objective reality is a pure label, not anything actual. A cause imparts some real and actual influence; but what does not actually exist cannot take on anything, and so does not receive or require any actual causal influence. Hence, though I have ideas, there is no cause for these ideas, let alone some cause which is greater than I am, or which is infinite.

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'But if you do not grant that ideas have a cause, you must at least explain why a given idea contains such and such objective reality.' Certainly; I do not normally stint my friends, but am as lavish as possible. I take the same general view about all ideas as M. Descartes takes of a triangle. He says: 'even if perhaps no such figure exists, or has ever existed, anywhere outside my thought, there is still a determinate nature or essence or form which is immutable and eternal'.² What we have here is an eternal truth, which does not require a cause. A boat is a boat and nothing else. Davus is Davus and not Oedipus.³ But if you insist on having an explanation, the answer lies in the imperfection of our intellect, which is not infinite. For since it does not comprehend in one single grasp that totality that is all at once and once for all, it divides and separates out the universal good, and being unable to bring forth the totality, it conceives of it piecemeal, or, as they say, inadequately.

The author goes on to say, 'And yet the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.'⁴ There is an equivocation here. If *nothing* is the same as an entity which does not actually exist, then this, since it is not actual, is nothing at all, and hence comes from nothing, that is, does not come from any cause. But if 'nothing' means something imaginary, or what they commonly call a 'conceptual entity'⁵ then this is not 'nothing' but something real which

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¹ Med. III, above p. 28.

² Med. v, above p. 45.

³ A reference to Terence, *Andria* I, ii, where the slave Davus, on being asked a question, replies 'I am Davus, not Oedipus' (alluding to the fact that Oedipus alone was able to solve the riddle of the Sphinx).

⁴ Med. III, above p. 29.

⁵ Lat. *ens rationis*, literally 'entity of reason'.

is distinctly conceived. Nevertheless, since it is merely conceived and is not actual, although it can be conceived, it cannot in any way be caused.

But he goes on: 'I should like to go further and inquire whether I myself who have this idea could exist if no such being existed' (that is, as he says just before this, if there did not exist a being from whom my idea of a being more perfect than myself proceeds). He goes on: 'From whom, in that case, would I derive my existence? From myself, presumably, or from my parents or from others etc. Yet if I derived my existence from myself, then I should neither doubt nor want, nor lack anything at all; for I should have given myself all the perfections of which I have any idea, and thus I should myself be God.'¹ But if I derive my existence from some other, then if I trace the series back I will eventually come to a being which derives its existence from itself; and so the argument here becomes the same as the argument based on the supposition that I derive my existence from myself.² This is exactly the same approach as that taken by St Thomas: he called this way 'the way based on the causality of the efficient cause'.³ He took the argument from Aristotle, although neither he nor Aristotle was bothered about the causes of ideas. And perhaps they had no need to be; for can I not take a much shorter and more direct line of argument? 'I am thinking, therefore I exist; indeed, I am thought itself, I am a mind. But this mind and thought derives its existence either from itself, or from another. If the latter, then we continue to repeat the question – where does this other being derive its existence from? And if the former, if it derives its existence from itself, it is God. For what derives existence from itself will without difficulty have endowed itself with all things.'

- 95 I beg and beseech our author not to hide his meaning from a reader who, though perhaps less intelligent, is eager to follow. The phrase 'from itself' has two senses. In the first, positive, sense, it means 'from itself as from a cause'. What derives existence from itself in this sense bestows its own existence on itself; so if by an act of premeditated choice it were to give itself what it desired, it would undoubtedly give itself all things, and so would be God. But in the second, negative sense, 'from itself' simply means 'not from another'; and this, as far as I remember, is the way in which everyone takes the phrase.

But now, if something derives its existence from itself in the sense of 'not from another', how can we prove that this being embraces all things and is infinite? This time I shall not listen if you say 'If it derives its existence from itself it could easily have given itself all things.' For it does

¹ Med. III, above p. 32f.

² Cf. Med. III, above p. 34.

³ This is the second of Aquinas' 'Five Ways': *Summa Theologiae*, Pars I, Quaestio 2, art.

3. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* VIII, 251ff; *Metaphysics* A, 1072ff.

not derive existence from itself as a cause, nor did it exist prior to itself so that it could choose in advance what it should subsequently be. Admittedly, I am sure I have heard somewhere that Suarez¹ argued as follows: 'Every limitation proceeds from some cause; therefore if something is limited and finite this is because its cause was either unable or unwilling to endow it with more greatness or perfection; and hence if something derives its existence from itself, and not from some cause, it is indeed unlimited and infinite.'

I do not entirely accept this, however. For what happens if the limitation arises from the thing's internal constitutive principles, that is, from its essence or form? Remember that you have not yet proved this essence to be infinite, even though the thing derives its existence from itself, in the sense of 'not from another'. That which is hot, for example, if you suppose there to be such a thing, will be hot as opposed to cold in virtue of its internal constitutive principles, and this will be true even if you imagine that its being what it is does not depend on anything else. I am sure that M. Descartes has plenty of arguments to support a thesis that others have not perhaps defended with sufficient clarity.

At last I find myself in agreement with the author. He has laid it down as a general rule that 'everything of which I am clearly and distinctly aware is a true entity'.² Indeed, to go further: 'whatever I think of is true'. For from our boyhood onwards we have totally outlawed all chimeras and similar 'conceptual entities'. No faculty can be diverted from its proper object. The will, if it moves at all, tends towards the good. Even the senses do not in themselves go astray: sight sees what it sees; the ears hear what they hear; and even if you see fool's gold, there is nothing wrong with your vision. The error arises from your judgement, when you decide that what you see is gold. Hence M. Descartes most properly puts all error down to the judgement and the will. 96

But now use this rule to make the inference you wanted. 'I am clearly and distinctly aware of an infinite being; hence this is a true entity and something real.' Yet will not someone ask 'Are you clearly and distinctly aware of an infinite being?' What, in that case, is the meaning of that well-worn maxim which is common knowledge: *the infinite qua infinite is unknown?* When I think of a chiliagon, and construct for myself a confused representation of some figure, I do not distinctly imagine the chiliagon itself, since I do not distinctly see the thousand sides. And if this is so, then the question obviously arises as to how the infinite can be thought of in a distinct as opposed to a confused manner, given that the

1 Francisco Suarez (1548-1617). Commentator on, and critic of, Aristotle; author of the *Metaphysical Disputations*.

2 Cf. Med. III, above p. 24, and Med. v, above p. 45.

infinite perfections that make it up cannot be seen clearly 'before the eyes' as it were.

97 This is perhaps what St Thomas meant when he denied that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident.¹ He considers an objection to this put by Damascene: 'The knowledge of the existence of God is naturally implanted in all men; hence the existence of God is self-evident.' His reply is that the knowledge that God exists is naturally implanted in us only in a general sense, or 'in a confused manner', as he puts it, that is, in so far as God is the ultimate felicity of man. But this, he says, is not straightforward knowledge of the existence of God, just as to know that someone is coming is not the same as to know Peter, even though it is Peter who is coming. He is in effect saying that God is known under some general conception, as an ultimate end or as the first and most perfect being, or even under the concept of that which includes all things in a confused and general manner; but he is not known in terms of the precise concept of his own proper essence, for in essence God is infinite and so unknown to us. I know that M. Descartes will have a ready answer to this line of questioning. Yet I trust that these objections, which I am putting forward purely for discussion, will remind him of the dictum of Boethius: 'There are certain common conceptions of the mind which are self-evident only to the wise.'² Hence, it should be no surprise if those who desire to increase their wisdom ask many questions and spend rather a long time on these topics. For they know that these matters have been laid down as the fundamental basis of the whole subject; and if they are to understand them, intensive scrutiny is required.

98 Let us then concede that someone does possess a clear and distinct idea of a supreme and utterly perfect being. What is the next step you will take from here? You will say that this infinite being exists, and that his existence is so certain that 'I ought to regard the existence of God as having at least the same level of certainty as I have hitherto attributed to the truths of mathematics. Hence it is just as much of a contradiction to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking a perfection), as it is to think of a mountain without a valley.'³ This is the lynchpin of the whole structure; to give in on this point is to be obliged to admit defeat. But since I am taking on an opponent whose strength is greater than my own, I should like to have a preliminary skirmish with him, so that, although I am sure to be beaten in the end, I may at least put off the inevitable for a while.

I know we are basing our argument on reason alone and not on appeals to authority. But to avoid giving the impression that I am wilfully

¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Pars 1, Q. 2, art. 1.

² Quoted by Aquinas, *loc. cit.*

³ *Med.* v, above pp. 45f.

taking issue with such an outstanding thinker as M. Descartes, let me nevertheless begin by asking you to listen to what St Thomas says. He raises the following objection to his own position:

As soon as we understand the meaning of the word 'God', we immediately grasp that God exists. For the word 'God' means 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. Now that which exists in reality as well as in the intellect is greater than that which exists in the intellect alone. Hence, since God immediately exists in the intellect as soon as we have understood the word 'God', it follows that he also exists in reality.¹

This argument may be set out formally as follows. 'God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that than which nothing greater can be conceived includes existence. Hence God, in virtue of the very word or concept of "God", contains existence; and hence he cannot lack, or be conceived of as lacking, existence.' But now please tell me if this is not the selfsame argument as that produced by M. Descartes? St Thomas defines God as 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived'. M. Descartes calls him 'a supremely perfect being'; but of course nothing greater than this can be conceived. St Thomas's next step is to say 'that than which nothing greater can be conceived includes existence', for otherwise something greater could be conceived, namely a being conceived of as also including existence. Yet surely M. Descartes' next step is identical to this. God, he says, is a supremely perfect being; and a supremely perfect being includes existence, for otherwise it would not be a supremely perfect being. St Thomas's conclusion is that 'since God immediately exists in the intellect as soon as we have understood the word "God", it follows that he also exists in reality'. In other words, since the very concept or essence of 'a being than which nothing greater can be conceived' implies existence, it follows that this very being exists. M. Descartes' conclusion is the same: 'From the very fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from God and hence that he really exists.'² But now let St Thomas reply both to himself and to M. Descartes. 'Let it be granted', he says,

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that we all understand that the word 'God' means what it is claimed to mean, namely 'that than which nothing greater can be thought of'. However, it does not follow that we all understand that what is signified by this word exists in the real world. All that follows is that it exists in the apprehension of the intellect. Nor can it be shown that this being really exists unless it is conceded that there really

¹ *Loc. cit.* In the passage cited Aquinas is in fact criticizing St Anselm's version of the ontological argument.

² Above p. 46.

is something such that nothing greater can be thought of; and this premiss is denied by those who maintain that God does not exist.

My own answer to M. Descartes, which is based on this passage, is briefly this. Even if it is granted that a supremely perfect being carries the implication of existence in virtue of its very title, it still does not follow that the existence in question is anything actual in the real world; all that follows is that the concept of existence is inseparably linked to the concept of a supreme being. So you cannot infer that the existence of God is anything actual unless you suppose that the supreme being actually exists; for then it will actually contain all perfections, including the perfection of real existence.

100 Pardon me, gentlemen: I am now rather tired and propose to have a little fun. The complex 'existing lion' includes both 'lion' and 'existence', and it includes them essentially, for if you take away either element it will not be the same complex. But now, has not God had clear and distinct knowledge of this composite from all eternity? And does not the idea of this composite, as a composite, involve both elements essentially? In other words, does not existence belong to the essence of the composite 'existing lion'? Nevertheless the distinct knowledge of God, the distinct knowledge he has from eternity, does not compel either element in the composite to exist, unless we assume that the composite itself exists (in which case it will contain all its essential perfections including actual existence). Similarly even if I have distinct knowledge of a supreme being, and even if the supremely perfect being includes existence as an essential part of the concept, it still does not follow that the existence in question is anything actual, unless we suppose that the supreme being exists (for in that case it will include actual existence along with all its other perfections). Accordingly we must look elsewhere for a proof that the supremely perfect being exists.

With regard to the essence of the soul and its distinction from the body, I have only a little to say. For I confess that our highly gifted author has already so exhausted me that I can hardly add one word more. His proof of the supposed distinction between the soul and the body appears to be based on the fact that the two can be distinctly conceived apart from each other. Here I refer the learned gentleman to Scotus, who says that for one object to be distinctly conceived apart from another, there need only be what he calls a formal and objective distinction between them (such a distinction is, he maintains, intermediate between a *real* distinction and a *conceptual* distinction). The distinction between God's justice and his mercy is of this kind. For, says Scotus, 'The formal concepts of the two are distinct prior to any operation of the intellect, so that one is not the same as the other. Yet it does not follow that because

justice and mercy can be conceived apart from one another they can therefore exist apart.¹

But I see that I have gone far beyond the normal limits of a letter. These, gentlemen, are the matters which I thought needed to be raised on this subject, and I leave it to your judgement to pick out the more important points. If you take my side, then M. Descartes will easily be prevailed upon, out of friendship, not to think too badly of me for having contradicted him on a few points. But if you take his side, I shall submit and own myself beaten; indeed, I shall be only too happy to avoid a second defeat. And so I conclude with my good wishes to you both. 101

1 Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense* I. 8. 4.

AUTHOR'S REPLIES TO THE FIRST SET OF OBJECTIONS

Gentlemen,¹

You have indeed called up a mighty opponent to challenge me, and his intelligence and learning could well have caused me serious difficulty had he not been a good and kind theologian who preferred to befriend the cause of God, and its humble champion, rather than to mount a serious attack. But though it was extremely kind of him to pull his punches, it would not be so acceptable for me to keep up the pretence; and hence I would rather expose his carefully disguised assistance to me than answer him as if he were an adversary.

102 First of all he summarizes my chief argument for proving the existence of God, thus helping to fix it all the more firmly in the reader's memory. And after briefly conceding the claims which he considers to have been demonstrated with sufficient clarity, thereby adding the weight of his own authority to them, he raises the one question which gives rise to the most important difficulty, namely the question of what should be understood by the term 'idea' in this context, and of whether such an idea requires a cause of any sort.

Now I wrote that an idea is the thing which is thought of in so far as it has objective being in the intellect.² But to give me an opportunity of explaining these words more clearly the objector pretends to understand them in quite a different way from that in which I used them. 'Objective being in the intellect', he says, 'is simply the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object, and this is merely an extraneous label which adds nothing to the thing itself.'³ Notice here that he is referring to the thing itself as if it were located outside the intellect, and in this sense 'objective being in the intellect' is certainly an extraneous label; but I was speaking of the idea, which is never outside the intellect, and in this sense 'objective being' simply means being in the intellect in the way in which objects are normally there. For example, if anyone asks what happens to the sun through its being objectively in my intellect, the best answer is that nothing happens to it beyond the application of an extraneous label

1 For the addressees, see above p. 64. 2 Above pp. 66f; Cf. Med. III, above pp. 28f.

3 Above p. 67.

which does indeed 'determine an act of the intellect by means of an object'. But if the question is about what the *idea* of the sun is, and we answer that it is the thing which is thought of, in so far as it has objective being in the intellect, no one will take this to be the sun itself with this extraneous label applied to it. 'Objective being in the intellect' will not here mean 'the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object', but will signify the object's being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there. By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect – not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect; but, as I did explain, it is not therefore simply nothing.¹ 103

When the learned theologian says that there is an equivocation in what I say here,² he apparently means to remind me of the point I have just made, in case I should forget it. He says, first of all, that when a thing exists in the intellect by means of an idea, it is not an actual entity, that is, it is not a being located outside the intellect; and this is quite true. Next he goes on to say that 'it is not something fictitious or a conceptual entity but something real which is distinctly conceived'; here he concedes everything which I have assumed. But he then adds 'since it is merely conceived and is not actual' – i.e. since it is merely an idea, and not a thing located outside the intellect – 'although it can be conceived it cannot in any way be caused'. This is to say that it does not require a cause enabling it to exist outside the intellect. This I accept; but it surely needs a cause enabling it to be conceived, which is the sole point at issue. Thus if someone possesses in his intellect the idea of a machine of a highly intricate design, it is perfectly fair to ask what is the cause of this idea. And it will not be an adequate reply to say that the idea is not anything outside the intellect and hence that it cannot be caused but can merely be conceived. For the precise question being raised is what is the cause of its being conceived. Nor will it suffice to say that the intellect itself is the cause of the idea, in so far as it is the cause of its own operations; for what is at issue is not this, but the cause of the objective intricacy which is in the idea. For in order for the idea of the machine to contain such and such objective intricacy, it must derive it from some cause; and what applies to the objective intricacy belonging to this idea also applies to the objective reality belonging to the idea of God. Now admittedly there could be various causes of the intricacy contained in the idea of the machine. Perhaps the cause was a real machine of this design 104

which was seen on some previous occasion, thus producing an idea resembling the original. Or the cause might be an extensive knowledge of mechanics in the intellect of the person concerned, or perhaps a very subtle intelligence which enabled him to invent the idea without any previous knowledge. But notice that all the intricacy which is to be found merely objectively in the idea must necessarily be found, either formally or eminently,¹ in its cause, whatever this turns out to be. And the same must apply to the objective reality in the idea of God. Yet where can the corresponding reality be found, if not in a really existing God? But my shrewd critic sees all this quite well, and he therefore concedes that we can ask why a given idea contains such and such objective reality. His answer is that, in the case of all ideas, what I wrote in connection with the idea of a triangle holds good, namely that 'even if perhaps a triangle does not exist anywhere, it still has a determinate nature or essence or form which is immutable and eternal'. And this, he says, does not require a cause. But he is well aware that this is not an adequate reply; for even if the nature of the triangle is immutable and eternal, it is still no less appropriate to ask why there is an idea of it within us. Hence he adds 'If you insist on having an explanation, the answer lies in the imperfection of our intellect', etc.² In making this reply he simply means, I think, that

105 no plausible reply to make. For surely to claim that the imperfection of our intellect is the cause of our having the idea of God is as implausible as claiming that lack of experience in mechanics is the cause of our imagining some very intricate machine as opposed to a more imperfect one. On the contrary, if someone possesses the idea of a machine, and contained in the idea is every imaginable intricacy of design, then the correct inference is plainly that this idea originally came from some cause in which every imaginable intricacy really did exist, even though the intricacy now has only objective existence in the idea. By the same token, since we have within us the idea of God, and contained in the idea is every perfection that can be thought of, the absolutely evident inference is that this idea depends on some cause in which all this perfection is indeed to be found, namely a really existing God. The latter inference would not present any more problems than the former, were it not the case that we all have the same ability to conceive of the idea of God, whereas everyone is not equally experienced in mechanics, and so not everyone can have an idea of a very intricate machine. Because the idea of God is implanted in the same way in the minds of all, we do not notice it coming into our minds from any external source, and so we suppose it belongs to the nature of our own intellect. This is correct enough, but we

1 See above p. 28, note 2. 2 Above p. 67.

forget something else which is a most important consideration – indeed one on which the entire luminous power of the argument depends – namely that this ability to have within us the idea of God could not belong to our intellect if the intellect were simply a finite entity (as indeed it is) and did not have God as its cause. Hence I went on to inquire ‘whether I could exist if God did not exist’.¹ But my purpose here was not to produce a different proof from the preceding one, but rather to take the same proof and provide a more thorough explanation of it. 106

At this point my critic has, through his excessive desire to be kind to me, put me in an unfortunate position. For in comparing my argument with one taken from St Thomas and Aristotle, he seems to be demanding an explanation for the fact that, after starting on the same road as they do, I have not kept to it in all respects. However, I hope he will allow me to avoid commenting on what others have said, and simply give an account of what I have written myself.

Firstly, then, I did not base my argument on the fact that I observed there to be an order or succession of efficient causes among the objects perceived by the senses. For one thing, I regarded the existence of God as much more evident than the existence of anything that can be perceived by the senses; and for another thing, I did not think that such a succession of causes could lead me anywhere except to a recognition of the imperfection of my intellect, since an infinite chain of such successive causes from eternity without any first cause is beyond my grasp. And my inability to grasp it certainly does not entail that there must be a first cause, any more than my inability to grasp the infinite number of divisions in a finite quantity entails that there is an ultimate division beyond which any further division is impossible. All that follows is that my intellect, which is finite, does not encompass the infinite. Hence I preferred to use my own existence as the basis of my argument, since it does not depend on any chain of causes and is better known to me than anything else could possibly be. And the question I asked concerning myself was not what was the cause that originally produced me, but what is the cause that preserves me at present. In this way I aimed to escape the whole issue of the succession of causes. 107

Next, in inquiring about what caused me, I was asking about myself, not in so far as I consist of mind and body, but only and precisely in so far as I am a thinking thing. This point is, I think, of considerable relevance. For such a procedure made it much easier for me to free myself from my preconceived opinions, to attend to the light of nature, to ask myself questions, and to affirm with certainty that there can be nothing within me of which I am not in some way aware. This is plainly a quite

1 Above pp. 32ff.

different approach from observing that my father begot me, inferring that my grandfather begot my father, and in view of the impossibility of going on *ad infinitum* in the search for parents of parents, bringing the inquiry to a close by deciding that there is a first cause.

Moreover, in inquiring about what caused me I was not simply asking about myself as a thinking thing; principally and most importantly I was asking about myself in so far as I observe, amongst my other thoughts, that there is within me the idea of a supremely perfect being. The whole force of my proof depends on this one fact. For, firstly, this idea contains the essence of God, at least in so far as I am capable of understanding it; and according to the laws of true logic, we must never ask about the
 108 existence of anything until we first understand its essence.¹ Secondly, it is this idea which provides me with the opportunity of inquiring whether I derive my existence from myself, or from another, and of recognizing my defects. And, lastly, it is this same idea which shows me not just that I have a cause, but that this cause contains every perfection, and hence that it is God.

Finally, I did not say that it was impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself. This is obviously the case when the term 'efficient' is taken to apply only to causes which are prior in time to their effects, or different from them. But such a restriction does not seem appropriate in the present context. First, it would make the question trivial, since everyone knows that something cannot be prior to, or distinct from, itself. Secondly, the natural light does not establish that the concept of an efficient cause requires that it be prior in time to its effect. On the contrary, the concept of a cause is, strictly speaking, applicable only for as long as the cause is producing its effect, and so it is not prior to it. However, the light of nature does establish that if anything exists we may always ask why it exists; that is, we may inquire into its efficient cause, or, if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not need one. Hence, if I thought that nothing could possibly have the same relation to itself as an efficient cause has to its effect, I should certainly not conclude
 109 that there was a first cause. On the contrary, I should go on to ask for the cause of the so-called 'first' cause, and thus I would never reach anything which was the first cause of everything else. However, I do readily admit that there can exist something which possesses such great and inexhaustible power that it never required the assistance of anything else in order to exist in the first place, and does not now require any assistance for its preservation, so that it is, in a sense, its own cause; and I understand God to be such a being. Now I regard the divisions of time as being separable from each other, so that the fact that I now exist does not imply that I

1 Literally: 'we must never ask if it is (*an est*) until we first understand what it is (*quid est*)'.

shall continue to exist in a little while unless there is a cause which, as it were, creates me afresh at each moment of time. Hence, even if I had existed from eternity, and thus nothing had existed prior to myself, I should have no hesitation in calling the cause which preserves me an 'efficient' cause. By the same token, although God has always existed, **since it is he who in fact preserves himself, it seems not too inappropriate to call him 'the cause of himself'.** It should however be noted that 'preservation' here must not be understood to be the kind of preservation that comes about by the positive influence of an efficient cause; all that is implied is that the essence of God is such that he must always exist.

These considerations make it easy for me to answer the point about the ambiguity in the phrase 'from itself' which, as the learned theologian has reminded me, needs to be explained. There are some who attend only to the literal and strict meaning of the phrase 'efficient cause' and thus think it is impossible for anything to be the cause of itself. They do not see that there is any place for another kind of cause analogous to an efficient cause, and hence when they say that something derives its existence 'from itself' they normally mean simply that it has no cause. But if they would look at the facts rather than the words, they would readily observe that the negative sense of the phrase 'from itself' comes merely from the imperfection of the human intellect and has no basis in reality. But there is a positive sense of the phrase which is derived from the true nature of things, and it is this sense alone which is employed in my argument. For example, if we think that a given body derives its existence from itself, we may simply mean that it has no cause; but our claim here is not based on any positive reason, but merely arises in a negative way from our ignorance of any cause. Yet this is a kind of imperfection in us, as we will easily see if we consider the following. The separate divisions of time do not depend on each other; hence the fact that the body in question is supposed to have existed up till now 'from itself', that is, without a cause, is not sufficient to make it continue to exist in future, unless there is some power in it that as it were recreates it continuously. But when we see that no such power is to be found in the idea of a body, and immediately conclude that the body does not derive its existence from itself, we shall then be taking the phrase 'from itself' in the positive sense. Similarly, when we say that God derives his existence 'from himself', we can understand the phrase in the negative sense, in which case the meaning will simply be that he has no cause. But if we have previously inquired into the cause of God's existing or continuing to exist, and we attend to the immense and incomprehensible power that is contained within the idea of God, then we will have recognized that this power is so exceedingly great that it is plainly the cause of his continuing existence,

and nothing but this can be the cause. And if we say as a result that God derives his existence from himself, we will not be using the phrase in its negative sense but in an absolutely positive sense. There is no need to say
 111 that God is the efficient cause of himself, for this might give rise to a verbal dispute. But the fact that God derives his existence from himself, or has no cause apart from himself, depends not on nothing but on the real immensity of his power; hence, when we perceive this, we are quite entitled to think that in a sense he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence that he derives his existence from himself in the positive sense. And each one of us may ask himself whether he derives his existence from himself in this same sense. Since he will find no power within himself which suffices to preserve him even for one moment of time, he will be right to conclude that he derives his existence from another being, and indeed that this other being derives its existence from itself (there is no possibility of an infinite regress here, since the question concerns the present, not the past or the future). Indeed, I will now add something which I have not put down in writing before, namely that the cause we arrive at cannot merely be a secondary cause; for a cause which possesses such great power that it can preserve something situated outside itself must, *a fortiori*, preserve itself by its own power, and hence derive its existence from itself.

As for the dictum 'Every limitation proceeds from some cause',¹ I think that what is meant here is something true, but that it is inappropriately expressed, and that the underlying difficulty is not solved. Strictly speaking, a limitation is merely a negation or denial of any further perfection, and such a negation does not proceed from a cause, though the thing itself which is so limited does. But even if it is true that everything which is limited proceeds from a cause, this is not self-evident and needs to be proved from other premisses. For, as the subtle theologian points out, a
 112 thing can be regarded as limited in various ways; for example, it can be limited because this is part of its nature, just as it belongs to the nature of a triangle that it consists of no more than three lines. What does seem to me self-evident is that whatever exists either derives its existence from a cause or derives its existence from itself as from a cause. For since we understand not only what is meant by existence but also what is meant by its negation, it is impossible for us to imagine anything deriving existence from itself without there being some reason why it should exist rather than not exist. So in such a case we are bound to interpret 'from itself' in a causal sense, because of the superabundance of power involved – a superabundance which, as is very easily demonstrated, can exist in God alone.

1 Above p. 69.

My opponent goes on to grant me a principle¹ which, though it does not admit of any doubt, commonly receives very little attention. But so great is its importance for rescuing the whole of philosophy from darkness that, by adding the weight of his authority to it, he has greatly helped me in my enterprise.

At this point, however, he shrewdly asks whether I am 'clearly and distinctly aware of the infinite'.² I did try to anticipate this objection, but it is one which occurs so spontaneously to everyone that it is worthwhile replying to it at some length. So let me say first of all that the infinite, *qua* infinite, can in no way be grasped. But it can still be understood,³ in so far as we can clearly and distinctly understand that something is such that no limitations can be found in it, and this amounts to understanding clearly that it is infinite.

Now I make a distinction here between the *indefinite* and the *infinite*. I 113
 apply the term 'infinite', in the strict sense, only to that in which no limits of any kind can be found; and in this sense God alone is infinite. But in cases like the extension of imaginary space, or the set of numbers, or the divisibility of the parts of a quantity, there is merely some respect in which I do not recognize a limit; so here I use the term 'indefinite' rather than 'infinite', because these items are not limitless in every respect.

Moreover, I distinguish between the formal concept of the infinite, or 'infinity', and the thing which is infinite. In the case of infinity, even if we understand it to be positive in the highest degree, nevertheless our way of understanding it is negative, because it depends on our not noticing any limitation in the thing. But in the case of the thing itself which is infinite, although our understanding is positive, it is not adequate, that is to say, we do not have a complete grasp of everything in it that is capable of being understood. When we look at the sea, our vision does not encompass its entirety, nor do we measure out its enormous vastness; but we are still said to 'see' it. In fact if we look from a distance so that our vision almost covers the entire sea at one time, we see it only in a confused manner, just as we have a confused picture of a chiliagon when we take in all its sides at once. But if we fix our gaze on some part of the sea at close quarters, then our view can be clear and distinct, just as our picture of a chiliagon can be, if it is confined to one or two of the sides. In 114
 the same way, God cannot be taken in by the human mind, and I admit this, along with all theologians. Moreover, God cannot be distinctly known by those who look from a distance as it were, and try to make their minds encompass his entirety all at once. This is the sense in which

¹ 'Everything of which I am clearly and distinctly aware is a true entity'; above p. 69.

² *Ibid.*

³ See footnote 1, above p. 32.

St Thomas says, in the passage quoted, that the knowledge of God is within us 'in a somewhat confused manner'.¹ But those who try to attend to God's individual perfections and try not so much to take hold of them as to surrender to them, using all the strength of their intellect to contemplate them, will certainly find that God provides much more ample and straightforward subject-matter for clear and distinct knowledge than does any created thing.

St Thomas did not deny this in the passage quoted, as is clear from the fact that in the following article he insists that the existence of God is demonstrable.² But when I said that God can be clearly and distinctly known, I was referring merely to knowledge of the finite kind just described, which corresponds to the small capacity of our minds. Indeed there was no need to construe it in any other way in order to establish the truth of the claims I made, as will be readily apparent if one recalls that I made the statement about clear and distinct knowledge of God in only two places. The first was where the question arose as to whether the idea which we form of God contains something real or only the negation of the real (as, for example, the idea of cold contains no more than the negation of heat) – a point on which there can be no doubt.³ And the second place was where I asserted that existence belongs to the concept of a supremely perfect being just as much as three sides belong to the
 115 concept of a triangle;⁴ and this point can be understood without adequate knowledge of God.

The author of the objections here again compares one of my arguments with one of St Thomas',⁵ thus as it were forcing me to explain how one argument can have any greater force than the other. I think I can do this without too much unpleasantness. For, first, St Thomas did not use the argument which he then puts forward as an objection to his own position conclusion as I do; and lastly, on this issue I do not differ from the Angelic Doctor in any respect. St Thomas asks whether the existence of God is self-evident as far as we are concerned, that is, whether it is obvious to everyone; and he answers, correctly, that it is not. The argument which he then puts forward as an objection to his own position can be stated as follows. 'Once we have understood the meaning of the word "God", we understand it to mean "that than which nothing greater can be conceived". But to exist in reality as well as in the intellect is greater than to exist in the intellect alone. Therefore, once we have understood the meaning of the word "God" we understand that God exists in reality as well as in the understanding.' In this form the argument is manifestly invalid, for the only conclusion that should have

1 Above p. 70. 2 *Summa Theologiae*, Pars I, Q. 2, art. 2. 3 Med. III, above p. 31.
 4 Med. v, above p. 45. 5 Above pp. 71ff.

been drawn is: 'Therefore, once we have understood the meaning of the word "God" we understand that what is conveyed is that God exists in reality as well as in the understanding.' Yet because a word conveys something, that thing is not therefore shown to be true. My argument however was as follows: 'That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature, or essence, or form of something, can truly be asserted of that thing. But once we have made a sufficiently careful investigation of what God is, we clearly and distinctly understand that existence belongs to his true and immutable nature. Hence we can now truly assert of God that he does exist.' Here at least the conclusion does follow from the premisses. But, what is more, the major premiss cannot be denied, because it has already been conceded that whatever we clearly and distinctly understand is true. Hence only the minor premiss remains, and here I confess that there is considerable difficulty. In the first place we are so accustomed to distinguishing existence from essence in the case of all other things that we fail to notice how closely existence belongs to essence in the case of God as compared with that of other things. Next, we do not distinguish what belongs to the true and immutable essence of a thing from what is attributed to it merely by a fiction of the intellect. So, even if we observe clearly enough that existence belongs to the essence of God, we do not draw the conclusion that God exists, because we do not know whether his essence is immutable and true, or merely invented by us. 116

But to remove the first part of the difficulty we must distinguish between possible and necessary existence. It must be noted that possible existence is contained in the concept or idea of everything that we clearly and distinctly understand; but in no case is necessary existence so contained, except in the case of the idea of God. Those who carefully attend to this difference between the idea of God and every other idea will undoubtedly perceive that even though our understanding of other things always involves understanding them as if they were existing things, it does not follow that they do exist, but merely that they are capable of existing. For our understanding does not show us that it is necessary for actual existence to be conjoined with their other properties. But, from the fact that we understand that actual existence is necessarily and always conjoined with the other attributes of God, it certainly does follow that God exists. 117

To remove the second part of the difficulty, we must notice a point about ideas which do not contain true and immutable natures but merely ones which are invented and put together by the intellect. Such ideas can always be split up by the same intellect, not simply by an abstraction but by a clear and distinct intellectual operation, so that any

ideas which the intellect cannot split up in this way were clearly not put together by the intellect. When, for example, I think of a winged horse or an actually existing lion, or a triangle inscribed in a square, I readily understand that I am also able to think of a horse without wings, or a lion which does not exist, or a triangle apart from a square, and so on; hence these things do not have true and immutable natures. But if I think of a triangle or a square (I will not now include the lion or the horse, since their natures are not transparently clear to us), then whatever I apprehend as being contained in the idea of a triangle – for example that its three angles are equal to two right angles – I can with truth assert of the triangle. And the same applies to the square with respect to whatever I apprehend as being contained in the idea of a square. For even if I can understand what a triangle is if I abstract the fact that its three angles are equal to two right angles, I cannot deny that this property applies to the triangle by a clear and distinct intellectual operation – that is, while at the same time understanding what I mean by my denial. Moreover, if I consider a triangle inscribed in a square, with a view not to attributing to the square properties that belong only to the triangle, or attributing to the triangle properties that belong to the square, but with a view to examining only the properties which arise out of the conjunction of the two, then the nature of this composite will be just as true and immutable as the nature of the triangle alone or the square alone. And hence it will be quite in order to maintain that the square is not less than double the area of the triangle inscribed within it, and to affirm other similar properties that belong to the nature of this composite figure.

But if I were to think that the idea of a supremely perfect body contained existence, on the grounds that it is a greater perfection to exist both in reality and in the intellect than it is to exist in the intellect alone, I could not infer from this that the supremely perfect body exists, but only that it is capable of existing. For I can see quite well that this idea has been put together by my own intellect which has linked together all bodily perfections; and existence does not arise out of the other bodily perfections because it can equally well be affirmed or denied of them. Indeed, when I examine the idea of a body, I perceive that a body has no power to create itself or maintain itself in existence; and I rightly conclude that necessary existence – and it is only necessary existence that is at issue here – no more belongs to the nature of a body, however perfect, than it belongs to the nature of a mountain to be without a valley, or to the nature of a triangle to have angles whose sum is greater than two right angles. But instead of a body, let us now take a thing – whatever this thing turns out to be – which possesses all the perfections which can exist together. If we ask whether existence should be included

among these perfections, we will admittedly be in some doubt at first. For our mind, which is finite, normally thinks of these perfections only separately, and hence may not immediately notice the necessity of their being joined together. Yet if we attentively examine whether existence belongs to a supremely powerful being, and what sort of existence it is, we shall be able to perceive clearly and distinctly the following facts. First, possible existence, at the very least, belongs to such a being, just as it belongs to all the other things of which we have a distinct idea, even to those which are put together through a fiction of the intellect. Next, when we attend to the immense power of this being, we shall be unable to think of its existence as possible without also recognizing that it can exist by its own power; and we shall infer from this that this being does really exist and has existed from eternity, since it is quite evident by the natural light that what can exist by its own power always exists. So we shall come to understand that necessary existence is contained in the idea of a supremely powerful being, not by any fiction of the intellect, but because it belongs to the true and immutable nature of such a being that it exists. And we shall also easily perceive that this supremely powerful being cannot but possess within it all the other perfections that are contained in the idea of God; and hence these perfections exist in God and are joined together not by any fiction of the intellect but by their very nature.

All this is manifest if we give the matter our careful attention; and it does not differ from anything I have written before, except for the method of explanation adopted. This I have deliberately altered so as to appeal to a variety of different minds. But as I readily admit, it is the kind of argument which may easily be regarded as a sophism by those who do not keep in mind all the elements which make up the proof. For this reason I did have considerable doubts to begin with about whether I should use it; for I feared it might induce those who did not grasp it to have doubts about the rest of my reasoning. But there are only two ways of proving the existence of God, one by means of his effects, and the other by means of his nature or essence; and since I expounded the first method to the best of my ability in the Third Meditation, I thought that I should include the second method later on. 120

As to the 'formal' distinction which the learned theologian introduces on the authority of Scotus,¹ let me say briefly that this kind of distinction does not differ from a modal distinction;² moreover, it applies only to incomplete entities, which I have carefully distinguished from complete entities. It is sufficient for this kind of distinction that one thing be

1 Above p. 72.

2 For a more precise account of the types of distinction discussed here see *Principles*, Part I, art. 60-2: vol. I, pp. 213ff.

conceived distinctly and separately from another by an abstraction of the intellect which conceives the thing inadequately. It is not necessary to have such a distinct and separate conception of each thing that we can understand it as an entity in its own right, different from everything else; for this to be the case the distinction involved must be a real one. For example, the distinction between the motion and shape of a given body is a formal^o distinction. I can very well understand the motion apart from the shape, and vice versa, and I can understand either in abstraction from the body. But I cannot have a complete understanding of the motion
121 apart from the thing in which motion occurs, or of the shape apart from the thing which has the shape; and I cannot imagine there to be motion in something which is incapable of possessing shape, or shape in something which is incapable of motion. In the same way, I cannot understand justice apart from the person who is just, or mercy apart from the person who is merciful; and I am not at liberty to imagine that the same person who is just is incapable of mercy. By contrast, I have a complete understanding of what a body is when I think that it is merely something having extension, shape and motion, and I deny that it has anything which belongs to the nature of a mind. Conversely, I understand the mind to be a complete thing, which doubts, understands, wills, and so on, even though I deny that it has any of the attributes which are contained in the idea of a body. This would be quite impossible if there were not a real distinction between the mind and the body.

These, gentlemen, are the points which I thought needed to be made in reply to your friend's very kind and extremely intelligent comments. If what I have said is inadequate, I ask your friend to let me know of any omissions or mistakes; and if you can prevail on him to do this for me, I shall regard it as a great service.

SECOND SET OF OBJECTIONS¹

Sir,

The task of defending the Author of all things against a new race of giants,² and of demonstrating his existence, is one which you have undertaken with such great success that from now on men of good will can hope that no one who carefully reads your *Meditations* will fail to acknowledge the existence of an eternal power on whom every single thing depends. We therefore wanted to draw your attention to various passages, which are indicated below, and ask you to clarify them, so that, as far as possible, there may be nothing left in your work which is not clearly demonstrated. You have trained your mind by continual meditations for several years, so that what seems doubtful and very obscure to others is quite clear to you; indeed, you may have a clear mental intuition of these matters and perceive them as the primary and principal objects of the natural light. We are simply pointing out the issues on which it seems worthwhile to burden you with the task of providing a clearer and more extended explanation and demonstration. You have embarked on your arguments for the greater glory of God and the immense benefit of mankind and, once you have done what we ask, there will scarcely be anyone left who can deny that they do indeed have the force of demonstrations. 122

First, then, may we remind you that your vigorous rejection of the images of all bodies as delusive was not something you actually and really carried through, but was merely a fiction of the mind, enabling you to draw the conclusion that you were exclusively a thinking thing. We point this out in case you should perhaps suppose that it is possible to go on to draw the conclusion that you are in fact nothing more than a mind, or thought, or a thinking thing. And we make the point solely in connection with the first two *Meditations*, in which you clearly show that, if nothing else, it is certain that you, who are thinking, exist. But let us pause a little here. The position so far is that you recognize that you are a thinking thing, but you do not know what this

¹ Compiled by Mersenne. See Translator's preface, above p. 64.

² In Greek mythology the Giants rebelled against the Gods.

123 thinking thing is. What if it turned out to be a body which, by its various motions and encounters, produces what we call thought? Although you think you have ruled out every kind of body, you could have been mistaken here, since you did not exclude yourself, and you may be a body. How do you demonstrate that a body is incapable of thinking, or that corporeal motions are not in fact thought? The whole system of your body, which you think you have excluded, or else some of its parts – for example those which make up the brain – may combine to produce the motions which we call thoughts. You say ‘I am a thinking thing’; but how do you know that you are not corporeal motion, or a body which is in motion?

124 *Secondly*, from the idea of a supreme being, which you maintain is quite incapable of originating from you, you venture to infer that there must necessarily exist a supreme being who alone can be the origin of this idea which appears in your mind.¹ However, we can find simply within ourselves a sufficient basis for our ability to form the said idea, even supposing that the supreme being did not exist, or that we did not know that he exists and never thought about his existing. For surely I can see that, in so far as I think, I have some degree of perfection, and hence that others besides myself have a similar degree of perfection. And this gives me the basis for thinking of an indefinite number of degrees and thus positing higher and higher degrees of perfection up to infinity. Even if there were just one degree of heat or light, I could always imagine further degrees and continue the process of addition up to infinity. In the same way, I can surely take a given degree of being, which I perceive within myself, and add on a further degree, and thus construct the idea of a perfect being from all the degrees which are capable of being added on. You say, however, that an effect cannot possess any degree of reality or perfection that was not previously present in the cause. But we see that flies and other animals, and also plants, are produced from sun and rain and earth, which lack life. Now life is something nobler than any merely corporeal grade of being; and hence it does happen that an effect may derive from its cause some reality which is nevertheless not present in the cause. But leaving this aside, the idea of a perfect being is nothing more than a conceptual entity, which has no more nobility than your own mind which is thinking. Moreover, if you had not grown up among educated people, but had spent your entire life alone in some deserted spot, how do you know that the idea would have come to you? You derived this idea from earlier preconceptions, or from books or from discussion with friends and so on, and not simply from your mind or from an existing supreme being. So a clearer proof needs to be provided

1 Cf. Med. III, above pp. 28–31.

that this idea could not be present within you if a supreme being did not exist; and when you have provided it, we shall all surrender. However, the fact that the natives of Canada, the Hurons and other primitive peoples, have no awareness of any idea of this sort seems to establish that the idea does come from previously held notions. It is even possible for you to form the idea from a previous examination of corporeal things, so that your idea would refer to nothing but this corporeal world, which includes every kind of perfection that can be thought of by you. In that case you could not infer the existence of anything beyond an utterly perfect corporeal being, unless you were to add something further which lifts us up to an incorporeal or spiritual plane. We may add that you can form the idea of an angel just as you can form the idea of a supremely perfect being; but this idea is not produced in you by an angel, although the angel is more perfect than you. But in fact you do not have the idea of God, just as you do not have the idea of an infinite number or an infinite line (even if you may have the idea, the number is still impossible). Moreover, the idea of the unity and simplicity of one perfection that includes all others arises merely from an operation of the reasoning intellect, in the same way as those universal unities which do not exist in reality but merely in the intellect (as can be seen in the case of generic unity, transcendental unity, and so on).

Thirdly, you are not yet certain of the existence of God, and you say that you are not certain of anything, and cannot know anything clearly and distinctly until you have achieved clear and certain knowledge of the existence of God.¹ It follows from this that you do not yet clearly and distinctly know that you are a thinking thing, since, on your own admission, that knowledge depends on the clear knowledge of an existing God; and this you have not yet proved in the passage where you draw the conclusion that you clearly know what you are. 125

Moreover, an atheist is clearly and distinctly aware that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles; but so far is he from supposing the existence of God that he completely denies it. According to the atheist, if God existed there would be a supreme being and a supreme good; that is to say, the infinite would exist. But the infinite in every category of perfection excludes everything else whatsoever – every kind of being and goodness, as well as every kind of non-being and evil. Yet in fact there are many kinds of being and goodness, and many kinds of non-being and evil. We think you should deal with this objection, so that the impious have no arguments left to put forward.

Fourthly, you say that God cannot lie or deceive. Yet there are some

1 Cf. Med. III, above p. 25; Med. V, above p. 48.

126 schoolmen who say he can. Gabriel, for example, and Ariminensis,¹ among others, think that in the absolute sense God does lie, that is, communicate to men things which are opposed to his intentions and decrees. Thus he unconditionally said to the people of Nineveh, through the prophet, 'Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed.' And he said many other things which certainly did not occur, because he did not mean his words to correspond to his intentions or decrees. Now if God hardened Pharaoh's heart and blinded his eyes, and if he sent upon his prophets the spirit of untruthfulness, how do you conclude that we cannot be deceived by him? Cannot God treat men as a doctor treats the sick, or a father his children? In both these cases there is frequent deception though it is always employed beneficially and with wisdom. For if God were to show us the pure truth, what eye, what mental vision, could endure it?

It is not, however, necessary to suppose that God is a deceiver in order to explain your being deceived about matters which you think you clearly and distinctly know. The cause of this deception could lie in you, though you are wholly unaware of it. Why should it not be in your nature to be subject to constant – or at least very frequent – deception? How can you establish with certainty that you are not deceived, or capable of being deceived, in matters which you think you know clearly and distinctly? Have we not often seen people turn out to have been deceived in matters where they thought their knowledge was as clear as the sunlight? Your principle of clear and distinct knowledge thus requires a clear and distinct explanation, in such a way as to rule out the possibility that anyone of sound mind may be deceived on matters which he thinks he knows clearly and distinctly. Failing this, we do not see that any degree of certainty can possibly be within your reach or that of mankind in general.

127 *Fifthly*, if the will never goes astray or falls into sin so long as it is guided by the mind's clear and distinct knowledge, and if it exposes itself to danger by following a conception of the intellect which is wholly lacking in clarity and distinctness, then note what follows from this. A Turk, or any other unbeliever, not only does not sin in refusing to embrace the Christian religion, but what is more, he sins if he does embrace it, since he does not possess clear and distinct knowledge of its truth. Indeed, if this rule of yours is true, then there is almost nothing that the will is going to be allowed to embrace, since there is almost nothing that we know with the clarity and distinctness which you require for that kind of certainty which is beyond any doubt. So you see how, in your

¹ Gabriel Biel, fifteenth-century philosopher; Gregory of Rimini, fourteenth-century theologian.

desire to champion the truth, you may end up proving too much, and thus overturn the truth rather than build it up.

Sixthly, in your reply to the First Set of Objections, you appear to go astray in one of your arguments, which you put as follows: 'That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature . . . of a thing can be truly asserted of that thing. But once we have made a sufficiently careful investigation of what God is, we clearly and distinctly understand that existence belongs to his nature.'¹ The conclusion should have been: 'hence, once we have made a sufficiently careful investigation of what God is, we can with truth affirm that existence belongs to the nature of God'. Now it does not follow from this that God in fact exists, but merely that he would have to exist if his nature is possible, or non-contradictory. In other words, the nature or essence of God cannot be conceived apart from existence; hence, granted the essence, God really exists. This comes down to an argument which others have stated as follows: 'If there is no contradiction in God's existing, it is certain that he exists; but there is no contradiction in his existing.' The difficulty here is with the minor premiss 'but there is no contradiction in his existing': those who attack the argument either claim to doubt the truth of this premiss, or deny it outright. Moreover, the phrase in your argument 'once we have made a sufficiently clear investigation of what God is' presupposes as true something which not everyone yet accepts; indeed you yourself admit that you apprehend infinite being only in an inadequate way. And clearly the same must be said of every single attribute of God. Whatever is in God is utterly infinite; so who can for a moment apprehend any aspect of God except in what may be called an utterly inadequate manner? How then can you have 'made a sufficiently clear and distinct investigation of what God is'?

Seventhly, you say not one word about the immortality of the human mind. Yet this is something you should have taken special care to prove and demonstrate, to counter those people, themselves unworthy of immortality, who utterly deny and even perhaps despise it. What is more, you do not yet appear to have provided an adequate proof of the fact that the mind is distinct from every kind of body, as we mentioned under point one. We now make the additional point that it does not seem to follow from the fact that the mind is distinct from the body that it is incorruptible or immortal. What if its nature were limited by the duration of the life of the body, and God had endowed it with just so much strength and existence as to ensure that it came to an end with the death of the body?

These, Sir, are the points which we wanted you to clarify, so as to

¹ Above p. 83.

enable everyone to derive the utmost benefit from reading your *Meditations*, which are argued with great subtlety and are also, in our opinion, true. And after giving your solutions to these difficulties it would be worthwhile if you set out the entire argument in geometrical fashion, starting from a number of definitions, postulates and axioms. You are highly experienced in employing this method, and it would enable you to fill the mind of each reader so that he could see everything as it were at a single glance, and be permeated with awareness of the divine power.

AUTHOR'S REPLIES TO THE SECOND SET OF OBJECTIONS

Gentlemen,

I read with great pleasure the comments which you made on my little book dealing with First Philosophy. They make me appreciate both your goodwill towards me and your piety towards God and zeal to further his glory. And I cannot but be very happy, not only because you have thought my arguments worthy of examination, but also because I think I can give you a reasonably adequate reply to all the criticisms that you make. 129

First, you warn me to remember that my rejection of the images of bodies as delusive was not something I actually and really carried through, but was merely a fiction of the mind, enabling me to draw the conclusion that I was a thinking thing; and I should not suppose that it followed from this that I was in fact nothing more than a mind.¹ But I already showed that I was quite well aware of this in the Second Meditation, where I said 'Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point.'² Here I wanted to give the reader an express warning that at that stage I was not yet asking whether the mind is distinct from the body, but was merely examining those of its properties of which I can have certain and evident knowledge. And since I did become aware of many such properties, I cannot without qualification admit your subsequent point that 'I do not yet know what a thinking thing is.' I admit that I did not yet know whether this thinking thing is identical with the body or with something different from the body; but I do not admit that I had no knowledge of it. Surely, no one's knowledge of anything has ever reached the point where he knows that there is absolutely nothing further in the thing beyond what he is already aware of. The more attributes of a thing we perceive the better we are said to know it; thus we know people whom we have lived with for some time better than those whom we only know by sight, or have merely heard of – though even they are not said to be completely 130

1 Above p. 87. 2 Above p. 18.

unknown to us. In this sense I think I have demonstrated that the mind, considered apart from those attributes which are normally applied to the body, is better known than the body when it is considered apart from the mind. This was my sole purpose in the passage under discussion.

But I see the suggestion you are making. Given that I wrote only six Meditations on First Philosophy, you think my readers will be surprised that the only conclusion reached in the first two Meditations is the point just mentioned; and you think that as a result they will reckon that the Meditations are extremely thin and not worth publishing. My reply is simply that I am confident that anyone who judiciously reads the rest of what I wrote will have no occasion to suspect that I was short of material. And in the case of topics which required individual attention and needed to be considered on their own, it seemed quite reasonable to deal with them separately, Meditation by Meditation.

Now the best way of achieving a firm knowledge of reality is first to accustom ourselves to doubting all things, especially corporeal things. Although I had seen many ancient writings by the Academics and Sceptics on this subject, and was reluctant to reheat and serve this precooked material, I could not avoid devoting one whole Meditation to it. And I should like my readers not just to take the short time needed to go through it, but to devote several months, or at least weeks, to considering the topics dealt with, before going on to the rest of the book. If they do this they will undoubtedly be able to derive much greater benefit from what follows.

131 All our ideas of what belongs to the mind have up till now been very confused and mixed up with the ideas of things that can be perceived by the senses. This is the first and most important reason for our inability to understand with sufficient clarity the customary assertions about the soul and God. So I thought I would be doing something worthwhile if I explained how the properties or qualities of the mind are to be distinguished from the qualities of the body. Admittedly, many people had previously said that in order to understand metaphysical matters the mind must be drawn away from the senses; but no one, so far as I know, had shown how this could be done. The correct, and in my view unique, method of achieving this is contained in my Second Meditation. But the nature of the method is such that scrutinizing it just once is not enough. Protracted and repeated study is required to eradicate the lifelong habit of confusing things related to the intellect with corporeal things, and to replace it with the opposite habit of distinguishing the two; this will take at least a few days to acquire. I think that was the best justification for my devoting the whole of the Second Meditation to this topic alone.

You go on to ask how I demonstrate that a body is incapable of

thinking.¹ You will forgive me if I reply that I have as yet provided no opportunity for this question to be raised. I first dealt with the matter in the Sixth Meditation where I said 'the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct', etc. And a little later on I said:

It is true that I have a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly it is certain that I (that is, the mind) am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.² 132

From this we may easily go on to say 'whatever can think is a mind, or is called a mind; but since mind and body are in reality distinct, no body is a mind; therefore no body can think'.

I do not see what you can deny here. Do you claim that if we clearly understand one thing apart from another this is not sufficient for the recognition that the two things are really distinct? If so, you must provide a more reliable criterion for a real distinction – and I am confident that none can be provided. What will you suggest? Perhaps that there is a real distinction between two things if one can exist apart from the other? But now I will ask how you know that one thing can exist apart from another. You must be able to know this, if it is to serve as the criterion for a real distinction. You may say that you derive this knowledge from the senses, since you can see, or touch etc., the one thing when the other is not present. But the evidence of the senses is less reliable than that of the intellect: it can variously happen that one and the same thing appears under different forms or in several places or in several different ways, and so be taken for two things. And, after all, if you remember the remarks about the wax at the end of the Second Meditation you will realize that bodies are not strictly speaking perceived by the senses at all, but only by the intellect;³ so having a sensory perception of one thing apart from another simply amounts to our having an idea of one thing and understanding that this idea is not the same as an idea of something else. The sole possible source of such understanding is that we perceive one thing apart from another, and such understanding cannot be certain unless the idea of each thing is clear and distinct. So if the proposed criterion for a real distinction is to be reliable, it must reduce to the one which I put forward. 133

If there are those who claim that they do not have distinct ideas of mind and body, I can only ask them to pay careful attention to the contents of the Second Meditation. If, as may well be the case, they take

1 Above p. 88. 2 Above p. 54. 3 Above p. 22.

the view that the formation of thoughts is due to the combined activity of parts of the brain, they should realize that this view is not based on any positive argument, but has simply arisen from the fact that, in the first place, they have never had the experience of being without a body and that, in the second place, they have frequently been obstructed by the body in their operations. It is just as if someone had had his legs permanently shackled from infancy: he would think the shackles were part of his body and that he needed them for walking.

Secondly, when you say that we can find simply within ourselves a sufficient basis for forming the idea of God,¹ your claim in no way differs from my own view. I expressly said at the end of the Third Meditation that 'this idea is innate in me'² — in other words, that it comes to me from no other source than myself. I concede also that 'we could form this idea even supposing that we did not know that the supreme being exists'; but I do not agree that we could form the idea 'even supposing that the supreme being did not exist'.³ On the contrary, I pointed out that the whole force of the argument lies in the fact that it would be impossible for me to have the power of forming this idea unless I were created by God.⁴

134 Your remarks about flies, plants etc.,⁵ do not go to show that there can be a degree of perfection in the effect which was not previously present in the cause. For, since animals lack reason, it is certain that they have no perfection which is not also present in inanimate bodies; or, if they do have any such perfections, it is certain that they derive them from some other source, and that the sun, the rain and the earth are not adequate causes of animals. Suppose someone does not discern any cause cooperating in the production of a fly which possesses all the degrees of perfection possessed by the fly; suppose further that he is not sure whether there is any additional cause beyond those which he does discern: it would be quite irrational for him to take this as a basis for doubting something which, as I shall shortly explain at length, is manifest by the very light of nature.

I would add that the claim regarding flies is based on a consideration of material things, and so it could not occur to those who follow my Meditations and direct their thought away from the things which are perceivable by the senses with the aim of philosophizing in an orderly manner.

As for your calling the idea of God which is in us a 'conceptual entity',⁶ this is not a compelling objection. If by 'conceptual entity' is meant something which does not exist, it is not true that the idea of God is a

1 Above p. 88. 2 Above p. 35. 3 Above p. 88. 4 Cf. above p. 35.

5 Above p. 88. 6 *Ibid.*

conceptual entity in this sense. It is true only in the sense in which every operation of the intellect is a conceptual entity, that is, an entity which has its origin in thought; and indeed this entire universe can be said to be an entity originating in God's thought, that is, an entity created by a single act of the divine mind. Moreover I have already insisted in various places that I am dealing merely with the objective perfection or reality of an idea; and this, no less than the objective intricacy in the idea of a machine of very ingenious design, requires a cause which contains in reality whatever is contained merely objectively in the idea. 135

I do not see what I can add to make it any clearer that the idea in question could not be present to my mind unless a supreme being existed. I can only say that it depends on the reader: if he attends carefully to what I have written he should be able to free himself from the preconceived opinions which may be eclipsing his natural light, and to accustom himself to believing in the primary notions, which are as evident and true as anything can be, in preference to opinions which are obscure and false, albeit fixed in the mind by long habit.

The fact that 'there is nothing in the effect which was not previously present in the cause, either in a similar or in a higher form' is a primary notion which is as clear as any that we have; it is just the same as the common notion 'Nothing comes from nothing.' For if we admit that there is something in the effect that was not previously present in the cause, we shall also have to admit that this something was produced by nothing. And the reason why nothing cannot be the cause of a thing is simply that such a cause would not contain the same features as are found in the effect.

Discussion of the
causal principle

It is also a primary notion that 'all the reality or perfection which is present in an idea merely objectively must be present in its cause either formally or eminently'.¹ This is the sole basis for all the beliefs we have ever had about the existence of things located outside our mind. For what could ever have led us to suspect that such things exist if not the simple fact that ideas of these things reach our mind by means of the senses?

Those who give the matter their careful attention and spend time meditating with me will clearly see that there is within us an idea of a supremely powerful and perfect being, and also that the objective reality of this idea cannot be found in us, either formally or eminently. I cannot force this truth on my readers if they are lazy, since it depends solely on their exercising their own powers of thought. 136

The very manifest conclusion from all this is that God exists. But there may be some whose natural light is so meagre that they do not see that it is a primary notion that every perfection that is present objectively in an

1 Cf. *Med.* III, above pp. 28ff, and footnote 2, p. 28.

idea must really exist in some cause of the idea. For their benefit I provided an even more straightforward demonstration of God's existence based on the fact that the mind which possesses the idea of God cannot derive its existence from itself.¹ So I do not see what more is required to make you surrender.

You suggest that I may have derived the idea which gives me my representation of God from preconceived notions of the mind, from books, conversations with friends etc., and not from my mind alone.² But there is no force in this suggestion. If I ask these other people (from whom I have allegedly got this idea) whether they derive it from themselves or from someone else, the argument proceeds in the same way as it does if I ask the same question of myself: my conclusion will always be that the original source of the idea is God.

137 Your further comment that the idea of God could have been formed from a previous examination of corporeal things seems to me just as implausible as saying that we have no faculty of hearing but acquire knowledge of sounds simply from seeing colours. Indeed, there seems to be a greater analogy or parity between colours and sounds than there is between corporeal things and God. When you ask me to 'add something further which lifts us up to an incorporeal or spiritual plane',³ I cannot do better than refer you to my Second Meditation, in the hope that you will see that it is at least good for something. For what could I accomplish here in one or two sentences, if the lengthy account which I gave there – which was designed with this sole aim in mind, and to which I think I devoted as much effort as to anything I have ever written – failed to achieve anything at all?

The fact that I dealt only with the human mind in the Second Meditation is no drawback here. For I readily and freely confess that the idea which we have of the divine intellect, for example, does not differ from that which we have of our own intellect, except in so far as the idea of an infinite number differs from the idea of a number raised to the second or fourth power. And the same applies to the individual attributes of God of which we recognize some trace in ourselves.

But in addition to this, our understanding tells us that there is in God an absolute immensity, simplicity and unity which embraces all other attributes and has no copy in us, but is, as I have said before, 'like the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work'.⁴ In virtue of this we recognize that, of all the individual attributes which, by a defect of our intellect, we assign to God in a piecemeal fashion, corresponding to the way in which we perceive them in ourselves, none belong to God and to ourselves in the same sense. Moreover, there are many indefinite

1 Med. III, above pp. 33ff. 2 Cf. above p. 88. 3 Above p. 89. 4 Med. III, above p. 35.

particulars of which we have an idea, such as indefinite (or infinite) knowledge and power, as well as number and length and so on, that are also infinite. Now we recognize that some of these (such as knowledge and power) are contained formally in the idea of God, whereas others (such as number and length) are contained in the idea merely eminently. And this would surely not be the case if the idea of God within us were merely a figment of our minds.

138

If the idea were a mere figment, it would not be consistently conceived by everyone in the same manner. It is very striking that metaphysicians unanimously agree in their descriptions of the attributes of God (at least in the case of those which can be known solely by human reason). You will find that there is much more disagreement among philosophers about the nature of anything which is physical or perceivable by the senses, however firm or concrete our idea of it may be.

No one can possibly go wrong when he tries to form a correct conception of the idea of God, provided he is willing to attend to the nature of a supremely perfect being. But some people muddle things up by including other attributes, which leads them to speak in a contradictory way: they construct an imaginary idea of God, and then – quite reasonably – go on to say that the God who is represented by this muddled idea does not exist. Thus, when you talk of an ‘utterly perfect corporeal being’,¹ and take the term ‘utterly perfect’ in its absolute sense, so that a corporeal being is taken to be a being in which all perfections are found, you are uttering a contradiction. The very nature of a body implies many imperfections, such as its divisibility into parts, the fact that each of its parts is different and so on; for it is self-evident that it is a greater perfection to be undivided than to be divided, and so on. If on the other hand by ‘a perfect body’ you simply mean that which is as perfect as a body can be, this will not be God.

As for your further point about the idea of an angel, namely that even though we are less perfect than an angel, there is no need for the idea to be produced in us by an angel,² I quite agree. I myself observed in the Third Meditation that the idea can be put together from the ideas which we have of God and of man.³ So what you say does not in any way go against my position.

139

As for those who deny that they have the idea of God, but in its place form some image etc., although they reject the name, they concede the reality. I do not myself think that the idea is of the same kind as the images of material things which are pictured in the imagination; I maintain it is simply that which we perceive with the intellect, when the intellect apprehends, or judges, or reasons. Now in my thought or intellect I can somehow come upon a perfection that is above me; thus I

1 Above p. 89. 2 *Ibid.* 3 Above p. 29.

notice that, when I count, I cannot reach a largest number, and hence I recognize that there is something in the process of counting which exceeds my powers. And I contend that from this alone it necessarily follows, not that an infinite number exists, nor indeed that it is a contradictory notion, as you say, but that I have the power of conceiving that there is a thinkable number which is larger than any number that I can ever think of, and hence that this power is something which I have received not from myself but from some other being which is more perfect than I am.

It is irrelevant whether or not this concept of an indefinitely large number is called an 'idea'. But in order to understand what this being is which is more perfect than myself, and whether it is the infinite number itself, which really exists, or something else, we must consider not just the power of endowing me with the idea in question, but also all the other
 140 attributes which can exist in the being that is the source of the idea. And as a result we shall find that it can only be God.

Finally, when it is said that God 'cannot be thought of', this refers to the kind of thought that has an adequate grasp of God, not to the inadequate thought which we possess, and which is quite sufficient for knowledge of the existence of God. It is not important that the idea of the unity of all the perfections of God is said to be formed in the same way as the Porphyrian universals.¹ But there is a crucial difference, in that the idea in question denotes a certain positive perfection peculiar to God, whereas generic unity adds nothing real to the nature of the single individuals concerned.

Thirdly, when I said that we can know nothing for certain until we are aware that God exists,² I expressly declared that I was speaking only of knowledge of those conclusions which can be recalled when we are no longer attending to the arguments by means of which we deduced them.³ Now awareness of first principles is not normally called 'knowledge' by dialecticians. And when we become aware that we are thinking things, this is a primary notion which is not derived by means of any syllogism. **When someone says 'I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist', he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss 'Everything which thinks is, or exists'; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. It is in the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones.**
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1 E.g. generic unity: cf. above p. 89 and note below, p. 410.

2 Above p. 89; cf. Med. III, above p. 25 and Med. V, above p. 48.

3 Cf. Med. V, above p. 48.

The fact that an atheist can be 'clearly aware that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles'¹ is something I do not dispute. But I maintain that this awareness of his is not true knowledge, since no act of awareness that can be rendered doubtful seems fit to be called knowledge.² Now since we are supposing that this individual is an atheist, he cannot be certain that he is not being deceived on matters which seem to him to be very evident (as I fully explained). And although this doubt may not occur to him, it can still crop up if someone else raises the point or if he looks into the matter himself. So he will never be free of this doubt until he acknowledges that God exists.

It does not matter that the atheist may think he has demonstrations to prove that there is no God. For, since these proofs are quite unsound, it will always be possible to point out their flaws to him, and when this happens he will have to abandon his view.

It will be quite easy to make him do this if all he can produce by way of demonstration is the claim that you introduce at this point, namely that the infinite in every category of perfection excludes every other entity whatsoever, etc.³ First, we may ask how he knows that this exclusion of all other entities belongs to the nature of the infinite. He will have no reasonable reply to make to this, since the term 'infinite' is not generally taken to mean something which excludes the existence of finite things. And, what is more, his knowledge of the nature of the infinite – since he regards it as a nonentity and hence as not having a real nature – must be restricted to what is contained in the mere verbal definition of the term 142 which he has learned from others. Secondly, what would the infinite power of this imaginary infinite amount to, if it could never create anything? Finally, the fact that we notice some power of thought within ourselves makes it easy for us to conceive that some other being may also have such a power, and that it is greater than our own. But even if we suppose that this power is increased to infinity, we do not on that account fear that our own power thereby diminishes. The same holds good for all the other attributes we ascribe to God, including power (provided we remember that any power that we possess is subject to the will of God). And hence God can be understood to be infinite without this in any way excluding the existence of created things.

Fourthly, in saying that God does not lie, and is not a deceiver,⁴ I think

¹ Above p. 89.

² Descartes seems to distinguish here between an isolated cognition or act of awareness (*cognitio*) and systematic, properly grounded knowledge (*scientia*). Compare the remarks in *The Search for Truth* about the need to acquire 'a body of knowledge firm and certain enough to deserve the name "science"', below p. 408; see also p. 104 below, and *Rules*, vol. 1, pp. 10ff.

³ Above p. 89.

⁴ Above pp. 89f.

I am in agreement with all metaphysicians and theologians past and future. The points you make against this have no more force than if I had said that God is not subject to anger or other emotions, and you were to produce as counter-examples passages from Scripture where human feelings are attributed to God. As everyone knows, there are two quite distinct ways of speaking about God. The first is appropriate for ordinary understanding and does contain some truth, albeit truth which is relative to human beings; and it is this way of speaking that is generally employed in Holy Scripture. The second way of speaking comes closer to expressing the naked truth – truth which is not relative to human beings; it is this way of speaking that everyone ought to use when philosophizing, and that I had a special obligation to use in my *Meditations*, since my supposition there was that no other human beings were yet known to me, and moreover I was considering myself not as consisting of mind and body but solely as a mind. It is very clear from this that my remarks in the *Meditations* were concerned not with the verbal expression of lies, but only with malice in the formal sense, the internal malice which is involved in deception.

However, the words of the prophet which you cite – ‘Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed’ – were not even a verbal lie but simply a threat, the fulfilment of which was conditional on a particular eventuality. And when God is said to have ‘hardened the heart of Pharaoh’, or words to that effect, this should not be taken to mean that he brought this about in a positive sense; he merely hardened Pharaoh’s heart in a negative sense, by not bestowing on him the grace which would have brought about his change of heart. Nevertheless, I would not want to criticize those who allow that through the mouths of the prophets God can produce verbal untruths which, like the lies of doctors who deceive their patients in order to cure them, are free of any malicious intent to deceive.

Nevertheless – and this is a more important point – from time to time it does appear that we are really deceived by the natural instinct which God gave us, as in the case of the thirst felt by those who suffer from dropsy. These patients have a positive impulse to drink which derives from the nature God has bestowed on the body in order to preserve it; yet this nature does deceive them because on this occasion the drink will have a harmful effect. Nevertheless, this is not inconsistent with the goodness or veracity of God, and I have explained why in the Sixth Meditation.¹

In the case of our clearest and most careful judgements, however, this kind of explanation would not be possible, for if such judgements were

1 Above pp. 58–61.

false they could not be corrected by any clearer judgements or by means of any other natural faculty. In such cases I simply assert that it is impossible for us to be deceived. Since God is the supreme being, he must also be supremely good and true, and it would therefore be a contradiction that anything should be created by him which positively tends towards falsehood. Now everything real which is in us must have been bestowed on us by God (this was proved when his existence was proved); moreover, we have a real faculty for recognizing the truth and distinguishing it from falsehood, as is clear merely from the fact that we have within us ideas of truth and falsehood. Hence this faculty must tend towards the truth, at least when we use it correctly (that is, by assenting only to what we clearly and distinctly perceive, for no other correct method of employing this faculty can be imagined). For if it did not so tend then, since God gave it to us, he would rightly have to be regarded as a deceiver.

Hence you see that once we have become aware that God exists it is necessary for us to imagine that he is a deceiver if we wish to cast doubt on what we clearly and distinctly perceive. And since it is impossible to imagine that he is a deceiver, whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive must be completely accepted as true and certain.

But since I see that you are still stuck fast in the doubts which I put forward in the First Meditation, and which I thought I had very carefully removed in the succeeding Meditations, I shall now expound for a second time the basis on which it seems to me that all human certainty can be founded.

First of all, as soon as we think that we correctly perceive something, we are spontaneously convinced that it is true. Now if this conviction is so firm that it is impossible for us ever to have any reason for doubting what we are convinced of, then there are no further questions for us to ask: we have everything that we could reasonably want. What is it to us that someone may make out that the perception whose truth we are so firmly convinced of may appear false to God or an angel, so that it is, absolutely speaking, false? Why should this alleged 'absolute falsity' bother us, since we neither believe in it nor have even the smallest suspicion of it? For the supposition which we are making here is of a conviction so firm that it is quite incapable of being destroyed; and such a conviction is clearly the same as the most perfect certainty.

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But it may be doubted whether any such certainty, or firm and immutable conviction, is in fact to be had.

It is clear that we do not have this kind of certainty in cases where our perception is even the slightest bit obscure or confused; for such obscurity, whatever its degree, is quite sufficient to make us have doubts

in such cases. Again, we do not have the required kind of certainty with regard to matters which we perceive solely by means of the senses, however clear such perception may be. For we have often noted that error can be detected in the senses, as when someone with dropsy feels thirsty or when someone with jaundice sees snow as yellow; for when he sees it as yellow he sees it just as clearly and distinctly as we do when we see it as white. Accordingly, if there is any certainty to be had, the only remaining alternative is that it occurs in the clear perceptions of the intellect and nowhere else.

Now some of these perceptions are so transparently clear and at the same time so simple that we cannot ever think of them without believing them to be true. The fact that I exist so long as I am thinking, or that what is done cannot be undone, are examples of truths in respect of which we manifestly possess this kind of certainty. For we cannot doubt
 146 them unless we think of them; but we cannot think of them without at the same time believing they are true, as was supposed. Hence we cannot doubt them without at the same time believing they are true; that is, we can never doubt them.

It is no objection to this to say that we have often seen people 'turn out to have been deceived in matters where they thought their knowledge was as clear as the sunlight'.¹ For we have never seen, indeed no one could possibly see, this happening to those who have relied solely on the intellect in their quest for clarity in their perceptions; we have seen it happen only to those who tried to derive such clarity from the senses or from some false preconceived opinion.

It is also no objection for someone to make out that such truths might appear false to God or to an angel. For the evident clarity of our perceptions does not allow us to listen to anyone who makes up this kind of story.

There are other truths which are perceived very clearly by our intellect so long as we attend to the arguments on which our knowledge of them depends; and we are therefore incapable of doubting them during this time. But we may forget the arguments in question and later remember simply the conclusions which were deduced from them. The question will now arise as to whether we possess the same firm and immutable conviction concerning these conclusions, when we simply recollect that they were previously deduced from quite evident principles (our ability to call them 'conclusions' presupposes such a recollection). My reply is that the required certainty is indeed possessed by those whose knowledge of God enables them to understand that the intellectual faculty which he gave them cannot but tend towards the truth; but the required certainty

1 Above p. 90.

is not possessed by others. This point was explained so clearly at the end of the Fifth Meditation¹ that it does not seem necessary to add anything further here.

Fifthly, I am surprised at your denying that the will exposes itself to danger by following a conception of the intellect which is wholly lacking in clarity and distinctness.² What can give the will certainty if it follows a perception which is not clear? Every philosopher and theologian – indeed everyone who uses his reason – agrees that the more clearly we understand something before giving our assent to it, the smaller is the risk we run of going wrong; and, by contrast, those who make a judgement when they are ignorant of the grounds on which it is based are the ones who go astray. Whenever we call a conception obscure or confused this is because it contains some element of which we are ignorant. 147

It follows that your objection concerning the faith which should be embraced³ has no more force against me than it does against anyone who has ever developed the power of human reason – indeed, it has no force against anyone at all. For although it is said that our faith concerns matters which are obscure, the reasons for embracing the faith are not obscure but on the contrary are clearer than any natural light. We must distinguish between the subject-matter, or the thing itself which we assent to, and the formal reason which induces the will to give its assent: it is only in respect of the reason that transparent clarity is required. As for the subject-matter, no one has ever denied that it may be obscure – indeed obscurity itself. When I judge that obscurity must be removed from our conceptions to enable us to assent to them without any danger of going wrong, this very obscurity is the subject concerning which I form a clear judgement. It should also be noted that the clarity or transparency which can induce our will to give its assent is of two kinds: the first comes from the natural light, while the second comes from divine grace. Now although it is commonly said that faith concerns matters which are obscure, this refers solely to the thing or subject-matter to which our faith relates; it does not imply that the formal reason which leads us to assent to matters of faith is obscure. On the contrary, this formal reason consists in a certain inner light which comes from God, and when we are supernaturally illumined by it we are confident that what is put forward for us to believe has been revealed by God himself. And it is quite impossible for him to lie; this is more certain than any natural light, and is often even more evident because of the light of grace. 148

The sin that Turks and other infidels commit by refusing to embrace the Christian religion does not arise from their unwillingness to assent to

1 Above pp. 48f. 2 Above p. 90. 3 *Ibid.*

obscure matters (for obscure they indeed are), but from their resistance to the impulses of divine grace within them, or from the fact that they make themselves unworthy of grace by their other sins. Let us take the case of an infidel who is destitute of all supernatural grace and has no knowledge of the doctrines which we Christians believe to have been revealed by God. If, despite the fact that these doctrines are obscure to him, he is induced to embrace them by fallacious arguments, I make bold to assert that he will not on that account be a true believer, but will instead be committing a sin by not using his reason correctly. And I think that all orthodox theologians have always taken a similar view on this matter. Furthermore, those who read my books will not be able to suppose that I did not recognize this supernatural light, since I expressly stated in the
 149 Fourth Meditation, where I was looking into the cause of falsity, that it produces in our inmost thought a disposition to will, without lessening our freedom.¹

However, I should like you to remember here that, in matters which may be embraced by the will, I made a very careful distinction between the conduct of life and the contemplation of the truth. As far as the conduct of life is concerned, I am very far from thinking that we should assent only to what is clearly perceived. On the contrary, I do not think that we should always wait even for probable truths; from time to time we will have to choose one of many alternatives about which we have no knowledge, and once we have made our choice, so long as no reasons against it can be produced, we must stick to it as firmly as if it had been chosen for transparently clear reasons. I explained this on p. 26 of the *Discourse on the Method*.² But when we are dealing solely with the contemplation of the truth, surely no one has ever denied that we should refrain from giving assent to matters which we do not perceive with sufficient distinctness. Now in my *Meditations* I was dealing solely with the contemplation of the truth; the whole enterprise shows this to be the case, as well as my express declaration at the end of the First Meditation where I said that I could not possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude, since the task in hand involved not action but merely the acquisition of knowledge.³

Sixthly, in the passage where you criticize the conclusion of a syllogism which I produced,⁴ it is you who seem to have made a mistake in the argument. In order to get the conclusion you want, you should have stated the major premiss as follows: 'That which we clearly understand to belong to the nature of something can be truly asserted to belong to its nature'; and if the premiss is put like this, it contains nothing but a useless tautology. But my major premiss was this: 'That which we clearly
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1 Cf. above p. 40. 2 See *Discourse*, part 3: vol. 1, p. 123. 3 Above p. 15.

4 Above p. 91.

understand to belong to the nature of something can truly be affirmed of that thing.' Thus if being an animal belongs to the nature of man, it can be affirmed that man is an animal; and if having three angles equal to two right angles belongs to the nature of a triangle, it can be affirmed that a triangle has three angles equal to two right angles; and if existence belongs to the nature of God, it can be affirmed that God exists, and so on. Now the minor premiss of my argument was: 'yet it belongs to the nature of God that he exists'. And from these two premisses the evident conclusion to be drawn is the one which I drew: 'Therefore it can truly be affirmed of God that he exists.' The correct conclusion is not, as you want to argue: 'Therefore we can with truth affirm that existence belongs to the nature of God.'

Hence, to deploy the objection which you go on to make, you should have denied the major premiss and said instead 'What we clearly understand to belong to the nature of a thing cannot for that reason be affirmed of that thing unless its nature is possible, or non-contradictory.' But please notice how weak this qualification is. If by 'possible' you mean what everyone commonly means, namely 'whatever does not conflict with our human concepts', then it is manifest that the nature of God, as I have described it, is possible in this sense, since I supposed it to contain only what, according to our clear and distinct perceptions, must belong to it; and hence it cannot conflict with our concepts. Alternatively, you may well be imagining some other kind of possibility which relates to the object itself; but unless this matches the first sort of possibility it can never be known by the human intellect, and so it does not so much support a denial of God's nature and existence as serve to undermine every other item of human knowledge. For as far as our concepts are concerned there is no impossibility in the nature of God; on the contrary, all the attributes which we include in the concept of the divine nature are so interconnected that it seems to us to be self-contradictory that any one of them should not belong to God. Hence, if we deny that the nature of God is possible, we may just as well deny that the angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, or that he who is actually thinking exists; and if we do this it will be even more appropriate to deny that anything we acquire by means of the senses is true. The upshot will be that all human knowledge will be destroyed, though for no good reason. 151

I now turn to the argument which you compare with my own, *viz.* 'If there is no contradiction in God's existing it is certain that he exists; but there is no contradiction in his existing; therefore' etc.¹ Although materially true, this argument is formally a sophism. For in the major premiss the term 'contradiction' applies to the concept of the cause on

1 Above p. 91.

which the possibility of God's existence depends; in the minor premiss, however, it applies simply to the concept of the divine existence and nature itself. This is clear from the fact that if the major premiss is denied the proof will have to go as follows: 'If God does not yet exist, it is a contradiction that he should exist, since there can be no cause which is sufficient to bring him into existence; but (as was assumed), there is no contradiction in his existing; hence' etc. If on the other hand the minor premiss is denied, the proof will have to be stated thus: 'There is no contradiction in something if there is nothing in its formal concept which implies a contradiction; but there is nothing in the formal concept of the divine existence or nature which implies a contradiction; hence' etc.

- 152 These two proofs are very different. For it may be, with respect to a given thing, that we understand there to be nothing in the thing itself that precludes the possibility of its existence, while at the same time, from the causal point of view, we understand there to be something that prevents its being brought into existence.

But even if we conceive of God only in an inadequate or, if you like, 'utterly inadequate' way,¹ this does not prevent its being certain that his nature is possible, or not self-contradictory. Nor does it prevent our being able truly to assert that we have examined his nature with sufficient clarity (that is, with as much clarity as is necessary to know that his nature is possible and also to know that necessary existence belongs to this same divine nature). All self-contradictoriness or impossibility resides solely in our thought, when we make the mistake of joining together mutually inconsistent ideas; it cannot occur in anything which is outside the intellect. For the very fact that something exists outside the intellect manifestly shows that it is not self-contradictory but possible. Self-contradictoriness in our concepts arises merely from their obscurity and confusion: there can be none in the case of clear and distinct concepts. Hence, in the case of the few attributes of God which we do perceive, it is enough that we understand them clearly and distinctly, even though our understanding is in no way adequate. And the fact that, amongst other things, we notice that necessary existence is contained in our concept of God (however inadequate that concept may be) is enough to enable us to assert both that we have examined his nature with sufficient clarity, and that his nature is not self-contradictory.

- 153 *Seventhly*, as to why I wrote nothing concerning the immortality of the soul, I did already explain this in the Synopsis of my *Meditations*.² And, as I have shown above, I did provide an adequate proof of the fact that the soul is distinct from every body. However, you go on to say that it does not follow from the fact that the soul is distinct from the body that it

1 Above p. 91. 2 Above pp. 9f.

is immortal, since it could still be claimed that God gave it such a nature that its duration comes to an end simultaneously with the end of the body's life.¹ Here I admit that I cannot refute what you say. For I do not take it upon myself to try to use the power of human reason to settle any of those matters which depend on the free will of God. Our natural knowledge tells us that the mind is distinct from the body, and that it is a substance. But in the case of the human body, the difference between it and other bodies consists merely in the arrangement of the limbs and other accidents of this sort;² and the final death of the body depends solely on a division or change of shape. Now we have no convincing evidence or precedent to suggest that the death or annihilation of a substance like the mind must result from such a trivial cause as a change in shape, for this is simply a mode, and what is more not a mode of the mind, but a mode of the body which is really distinct from the mind. Indeed, we do not even have any convincing evidence or precedent to suggest that any substance can perish. And this entitles us to conclude that the mind, in so far as it can be known by natural philosophy, is immortal. 154

But if your question concerns the absolute power of God, and you are asking whether he may have decreed that human souls cease to exist precisely when the bodies which he joined to them are destroyed, then it is for God alone to give the answer. And since God himself has revealed to us that this will not occur, there remains not even the slightest room for doubt on this point.

It remains for me to thank you for the helpful and frank way in which you have been kind enough to bring to my notice not only the points which have struck you, but also those which might be raised by atheists and other hostile critics. As far as I can see, all the objections which you raise are ones which I have already answered or ruled out in advance in the *Meditations*. As to the points about the flies generated by the sun, the natives of Canada, the inhabitants of Nineveh, the Turks and so on,³ the objections you raise cannot occur to those who follow the road which I have indicated and who lay aside for a time whatever they have acquired from the senses, so as to attend to dictates of pure and uncorrupted reason. Hence I thought that I had already adequately ruled out such objections in advance. But despite this, I take the view that these objections of yours will greatly assist my enterprise. For I expect that hardly any of my readers will be prepared to give such careful attention to everything I have written that they will remember all the contents by the time they come to the end. Those who do not remember everything may easily fall prey to certain doubts; and they will subsequently see that 155

1 Cf. above p. 91. 2 Cf. Synopsis, above p. 10. 3 Above pp. 88-90.

their doubts have been dealt with in these replies of mine, or failing that, these replies will at least give them the opportunity to examine the truth more deeply.

I now turn to your proposal that I should set out my arguments in geometrical fashion to enable the reader to perceive them 'as it were at a single glance'.¹ It is worth explaining here how far I have already followed this method, and how far I think it should be followed in future. I make a distinction between two things which are involved in the geometrical manner of writing, namely, the order, and the method of demonstration.

The order consists simply in this. The items which are put forward first must be known entirely without the aid of what comes later; and the remaining items must be arranged in such a way that their demonstration depends solely on what has gone before. I did try to follow this order very carefully in my *Meditations*, and my adherence to it was the reason for my dealing with the distinction between the mind and the body only at the end, in the Sixth Meditation, rather than in the Second. It also explains why I deliberately and knowingly omitted many matters which would have required an explanation of an even larger number of things.

As for the method of demonstration, this divides into two varieties: the first proceeds by analysis and the second by synthesis.

Analysis shows the true way by means of which the thing in question was discovered methodically and as it were *a priori*,² so that if the reader is willing to follow it and give sufficient attention to all points, he will make the thing his own and understand it just as perfectly as if he had discovered it for himself. But this method contains nothing to compel
 156 belief in an argumentative or inattentive reader; for if he fails to attend even to the smallest point, he will not see the necessity of the conclusion. Moreover there are many truths which – although it is vital to be aware of them – this method often scarcely mentions, since they are transparently clear to anyone who gives them his attention.

Synthesis, by contrast, employs a directly opposite method where the search is, as it were, *a posteriori* (though the proof itself is often more *a*

1 Above p. 92.

2 Descartes' use of the term *a priori* here seems to correspond neither with the modern, post-Leibnizian sense (where *a priori* truths are those which are known independently of experience), nor with the medieval, Thomist sense (where *a priori* reasoning is that which proceeds from cause to effect). What Descartes may mean when he says that analysis proceeds 'as it were *a priori*' (*tanquam a priori*) is that it starts from what is epistemically prior, i.e. from what is prior in the 'order of discovery' followed by the meditator. Cf. note 2, above p. 25.

priori than it is in the analytic method).¹ It demonstrates the conclusion clearly and employs a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems and problems, so that if anyone denies one of the conclusions it can be shown at once that it is contained in what has gone before, and hence the reader, however argumentative or stubborn he may be, is compelled to give his assent. However, this method is not as satisfying as the method of analysis, nor does it engage the minds of those who are eager to learn, since it does not show how the thing in question was discovered.

It was synthesis alone that the ancient geometers usually employed in their writings. But in my view this was not because they were utterly ignorant of analysis, but because they had such a high regard for it that they kept it to themselves like a sacred mystery.

Now it is analysis which is the best and truest method of instruction, and it was this method alone which I employed in my *Meditations*. As for synthesis, which is undoubtedly what you are asking me to use here, it is a method which it may be very suitable to deploy in geometry as a follow-up to analysis, but it cannot so conveniently be applied to these metaphysical subjects.

The difference is that the primary notions which are presupposed for the demonstration of geometrical truths are readily accepted by anyone, since they accord with the use of our senses. Hence there is no difficulty there, except in the proper deduction of the consequences, which can be done even by the less attentive, provided they remember what has gone before. Moreover, the breaking down of propositions to their smallest elements is specifically designed to enable them to be recited with ease so that the student recalls them whether he wants to or not. 157

In metaphysics by contrast there is nothing which causes so much effort as making our perception of the primary notions clear and distinct. Admittedly, they are by their nature as evident as, or even more evident than, the primary notions which the geometers study; but they conflict with many preconceived opinions derived from the senses which we have got into the habit of holding from our earliest years, and so only those who really concentrate and meditate and withdraw their minds from corporeal things, so far as is possible, will achieve perfect knowledge of them. Indeed, if they were put forward in isolation, they could easily be denied by those who like to contradict just for the sake of it.

¹ Descartes may mean that though the proofs involved are *a priori* (*viz.*, in the traditional, Thomist sense), the method of synthesis starts from premisses which are epistemically posterior – i.e. which are arrived at later in the order of discovery. (See previous footnote.)

This is why I wrote 'Meditations' rather than 'Disputations', as the philosophers have done, or 'Theorems and Problems', as the geometers would have done. In so doing I wanted to make it clear that I would have nothing to do with anyone who was not willing to join me in meditating and giving the subject attentive consideration. For the very fact that someone braces himself to attack the truth makes him less suited to perceive it, since he will be withdrawing his consideration from the convincing arguments which support the truth in order to find counter-arguments against it.

158 But at this point someone may raise the following objection: 'When we know that the proposition before us is true, we certainly should not look for arguments to contradict it; but so long as we remain in doubt about its truth it is right to deploy all the arguments on either side in order to find out which are the stronger. Nor does it seem that I am making a fair demand if I expect my arguments to be accepted as correct before they have been scrutinized, while at the same time prohibiting consideration of any counter-arguments.'

This is not a just criticism. For the arguments in respect of which I ask my readers to be attentive and not argumentative are not of a kind which could possibly divert their attention from any other arguments which have even the slightest chance of containing more truth than is to be found in mine. Now my exposition includes the highest level of doubt about everything, and I cannot recommend too strongly that each item should be scrutinized with the utmost care, so that absolutely nothing is accepted unless it has been so clearly and distinctly perceived that we cannot but assent to it. By contrast, the only opinions I want to steer my readers' minds away from are those which they have never properly examined – opinions which they have acquired not on the basis of any firm reasoning but from the senses alone. So in my view no one who restricts his consideration to my propositions can possibly think he runs a greater risk of error than he would incur by turning his mind away and directing it to other propositions which are in a sense opposed to mine and which reveal only darkness (i.e. the preconceived opinions of the senses).

I am therefore right to require particularly careful attention from my readers; and the style of writing that I selected was one which I thought would be most capable of generating such attention. I am convinced that
159 my readers will derive more benefit from this than they will themselves realize; for when the synthetic method of writing is used, people generally think that they have learned more than is in fact the case. In addition, I think it is fair for me to reject out of hand, and despise as worthless, the verdict given on my work by those who refuse to meditate with me and who stick to their preconceived opinions.

But I know that even those who do concentrate, and earnestly pursue the truth, will find it very difficult to take in the entire structure of my *Meditations*, while at the same time having a distinct grasp of the individual parts that make it up. Yet I reckon that both the overall and the detailed scrutiny is necessary if the reader is to derive the full benefit from my work. I shall therefore append here a short exposition in the synthetic style, which will, I hope, assist my readers a little. But they must please realize that I do not intend to include as much material as I put in the *Meditations*, for if I did so I should have to go on much longer than I did there. And even the items that I do include will not be given a fully precise explanation. This is partly to achieve brevity and partly to prevent anyone supposing that what follows is adequate on its own. Anyone who thinks this may give less careful attention to the *Meditations* themselves; yet I am convinced that it is the *Meditations* which will yield by far the greater benefit.

Arguments

160

*proving the existence of God and the distinction
between the soul and the body
arranged in geometrical fashion*

DEFINITIONS

I. *Thought*. I use this term to include everything that is within us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it. Thus all the operations of the will, the intellect, the imagination and the senses are thoughts. I say 'immediately' so as to exclude the consequences of thoughts; a voluntary movement, for example, originates in a thought but is not itself a thought.

II. *Idea*. I understand this term to mean the form of any given thought, immediate perception of which makes me aware of the thought. Hence, whenever I express something in words, and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that there is within me an idea of what is signified by the words in question. Thus it is not only the images depicted in the imagination which I call 'ideas'. Indeed, in so far as these images are in the corporeal imagination, that is, are depicted in some part of the brain, I do not call them 'ideas' at all; I call them 'ideas' only in so far as they give form to the mind itself, when it is directed towards that part of the brain. 161

III. *Objective reality of an idea*. By this I mean the being of the thing which is represented by an idea, in so far as this exists in the idea. In the same way we can talk of 'objective perfection', 'objective intricacy' and

so on. For whatever we perceive as being in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in the ideas themselves.

IV. Whatever exists in the objects of our ideas in a way which exactly corresponds to our perception of it is said to exist *formally* in those objects. Something is said to exist *eminently* in an object when, although it does not exactly correspond to our perception of it, its greatness is such that it can fill the role of that which does so correspond.¹

V. *Substance*. This term applies to every thing in which whatever we perceive immediately resides, as in a subject, or to every thing by means of which whatever we perceive exists. By 'whatever we perceive' is meant any property, quality or attribute of which we have a real idea. The only idea we have of a substance itself, in the strict sense, is that it is the thing in which whatever we perceive (or whatever has objective being in one of our ideas) exists, either formally or eminently. For we know by the natural light that a real attribute cannot belong to nothing.

VI. The substance in which thought immediately resides is called *mind*. I use the term 'mind' rather than 'soul' since the word 'soul' is ambiguous and is often applied to something corporeal.²

VII. The substance which is the immediate subject of local extension and of the accidents which presuppose extension, such as shape, position, local motion and so on, is called *body*. Whether what we call mind and body are one and the same substance, or two different substances, is a question which will have to be dealt with later on.

VIII. The substance which we understand to be supremely perfect, and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that implies any defect or limitation in that perfection, is called *God*.

IX. When we say that something is *contained in the nature or concept* of a thing, this is the same as saying that it is true of that thing, or that it can be asserted of that thing.

X. Two substances are said to be *really distinct* when each of them can exist apart from the other.

POSTULATES³

The *first* request I make of my readers is that they should realize how feeble are the reasons that have led them to trust their senses up till now,

¹ Cf. Med. III, above p. 28.

² E.g. a tenuous wind permeating the body. Cf. Med. II, above p. 17.

³ Lat. *Postulata*. Descartes is here playing on words, since what follows is not a set of postulates in the Euclidian sense, but a number of informal requests.

and how uncertain are all the judgements that they have built up on the basis of the senses. I ask them to reflect long and often on this point, till they eventually acquire the habit of no longer placing too much trust in the senses. In my view this is a prerequisite for perceiving the certainty that belongs to metaphysical things.

Secondly, I ask them to reflect on their own mind, and all its attributes. They will find that they cannot be in doubt about these, even though they suppose that everything they have ever acquired from their senses is false. They should continue with this reflection until they have got into the habit of perceiving the mind clearly and of believing that it can be known more easily than any corporeal thing.

Thirdly, I ask them to ponder on those self-evident propositions that they will find within themselves, such as 'The same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time', and 'Nothingness cannot be the efficient cause of anything', and so on. In this way they will be exercising the intellectual vision which nature gave them, in the pure form which it attains when freed from the senses; for sensory appearances generally interfere with it and darken it to a very great extent. And by this means the truth of the following axioms will easily become apparent to them. 163

Fourthly, I ask them to examine the ideas of those natures which contain a combination of many attributes, such as the nature of a triangle, or of a square, or of any other figure, as well as the nature of mind, the nature of body, and above all the nature of God, or the supremely perfect being. And they should notice that whatever we perceive to be contained in these natures can be truly affirmed of them. For example, the fact that its three angles are equal to two right angles is contained in the nature of a triangle; and divisibility is contained in the nature of body, or of an extended thing (for we cannot conceive of any extended thing which is so small that we cannot divide it, at least in our thought). And because of these facts it can be truly asserted that the three angles of every triangle are equal to two right angles and that every body is divisible.

Fifthly, I ask my readers to spend a great deal of time and effort on contemplating the nature of the supremely perfect being. Above all they should reflect on the fact that the ideas of all other natures contain possible existence, whereas the idea of God contains not only possible but wholly necessary existence. This alone, without a formal argument, will make them realize that God exists; and this will eventually be just as self-evident to them as the fact that the number two is even or that three is odd, and so on. For there are certain truths which some people find self-evident, while others come to understand them only by means of a formal argument. 164

Sixthly, I ask my readers to ponder on all the examples that I went through in my *Meditations*, both of clear and distinct perception, and of obscure and confused perception, and thereby accustom themselves to distinguishing what is clearly known from what is obscure. This is something that it is easier to learn by examples than by rules, and I think that in the *Meditations* I explained, or at least touched on, all the relevant examples.

Seventhly, and lastly, when they notice that they have never detected any falsity in their clear perceptions, while by contrast they have never, except by accident, found any truth in matters which they grasp only obscurely, I ask them to conclude that it is quite irrational to cast doubt on the clear and distinct perceptions of the pure intellect merely because of preconceived opinions based on the senses, or because of mere hypotheses which contain an element of the unknown. And as a result they will readily accept the following axioms as true and free of doubt. Nevertheless, many of these axioms could have been better explained, and indeed they should have been introduced as theorems rather than as axioms, had I wished to be more precise.

AXIOMS OR COMMON NOTIONS

165 I. Concerning every existing thing it is possible to ask what is the cause of its existence. This question may even be asked concerning God, not because he needs any cause in order to exist, but because the immensity of his nature is the cause or reason why he needs no cause in order to exist.

II. There is no relation of dependence between the present time and the immediately preceding time, and hence no less a cause is required to preserve something than is required to create it in the first place.¹

III. It is impossible that *nothing*, a non-existing thing, should be the cause of the existence of anything, or of any actual perfection in anything.

IV. Whatever reality or perfection there is in a thing is present either formally or eminently in its first and adequate cause.

V. It follows from this that the objective reality of our ideas needs a cause which contains this reality not merely objectively but formally or eminently. It should be noted that this axiom is one which we must necessarily accept, since on it depends our knowledge of all things, whether they are perceivable through the senses or not. How do we know, for example, that the sky exists? Because we see it? But this 'seeing' does not affect the mind except in so far as it is an idea – I mean

¹ 'Preserve', here and below, has the technical sense of 'to maintain in existence'.

an idea which resides in the mind itself, not an image depicted in the corporeal imagination. Now the only reason why we can use this idea as a basis for the judgement that the sky exists is that every idea must have a really existing cause of its objective reality; and in this case we judge that the cause is the sky itself. And we make similar judgements in other cases.

✓VI. There are various degrees of reality or being: a substance has more reality than an accident or a mode; an infinite substance has more reality than a finite substance. Hence there is more objective reality in the idea of a substance than in the idea of an accident; and there is more objective reality in the idea of an infinite substance than in the idea of a finite substance. 166

VII. The will of a thinking thing is drawn voluntarily and freely (for this is the essence of will), but nevertheless inevitably, towards a clearly known good. Hence, if it knows of perfections which it lacks, it will straightaway give itself these perfections, if they are in its power.

VIII. Whatever can bring about a greater or more difficult thing can also bring about a lesser thing.

IX. It is a greater thing to create or preserve a substance than to create or preserve the attributes or properties of that substance. However, it is not a greater thing to create something than to preserve it, as has already been said.

X. Existence is contained in the idea or concept of every single thing, since we cannot conceive of anything except as existing. Possible or contingent existence is contained in the concept of a limited thing, whereas necessary and perfect existence is contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being. } God

PROPOSITION I

*The existence of God can be known
merely by considering his nature*

Demonstration

To say that something is contained in the nature or concept of a thing is the same as saying that it is true of that thing (Def. IX). But necessary existence is contained in the concept of God (Axiom X). Therefore it may be truly affirmed of God that necessary existence belongs to him, or that he exists. 167

This is the syllogism which I employed above in replying to the sixth point in your Objections.¹ And its conclusion can be grasped as

¹ Above pp. 106f.

self-evident by those who are free of preconceived opinions, as I said above, in the Fifth Postulate. But since it is not easy to arrive at such clear mental vision, we shall now endeavour to establish the same result by other methods.

PROPOSITION II

*The existence of God can be demonstrated
a posteriori merely from the fact that we
have an idea of God within us*

Demonstration

The objective reality of any of our ideas requires a cause which contains the very same reality not merely objectively but formally or eminently (Axiom v). But we have an idea of God (Def. II and VIII), and the objective reality of this idea is not contained in us either formally or eminently (Axiom VI); moreover it cannot be contained in any other being except God himself (Def. VIII). Therefore this idea of God, which is in us, must have God as its cause; and hence God exists (Axiom III).

PROPOSITION III

*God's existence can also be demonstrated from the
fact that we, who possess the idea of God, exist*

Demonstration

If I had the power of preserving myself, how much more would I have the power of giving myself the perfections which I lack (Axioms VIII and IX); for these perfections are merely attributes of a substance, whereas I am a substance. But I do not have the power of giving myself these perfections; if I did, I should already have them (Axiom VII). Therefore I do not have the power of preserving myself.

Now I could not exist unless I was preserved throughout my existence either by myself, if I have that power, or by some other being who has it (Axioms I and II). But I do exist, and yet, as has just been proved, I do not have the power of preserving myself. Therefore I am preserved by some other being.

Moreover, he who preserves me has within himself, either formally or eminently, whatever is in me (Axiom IV). But I have within me the perception of many of the perfections which I lack, as well as an idea of

God (Defs. II and VIII). Therefore he who preserves me has a perception of the same perfections.

Finally, this being cannot have the perception of any perfections which he lacks, or which he does not have within himself either formally or eminently (Axiom VII). For since he has the power of preserving me, as I have already said, how much more would he have the power of giving himself those perfections if he lacked them (Axioms VIII and IX). But he has the perception of all the perfections which I know I lack and which I conceive to be capable of existing only in God, as has just been proved. Therefore he has the perfections within himself either formally or eminently, and hence he is God. 169

COROLLARY

God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. Moreover he can bring about everything which we clearly perceive in a way exactly corresponding to our perception of it

Demonstration

All this clearly follows from the preceding proposition. For in that proposition we proved that God exists from the fact that there must exist someone who possesses either formally or eminently all the perfections of which we have any idea. But we have the idea of a power so great that the possessor of this power, and he alone, created the heavens and the earth and is capable of producing everything that I understand to be possible. Therefore in proving God's existence we have also proved these other facts about him.

PROPOSITION IV

There is a real distinction between the mind and the body

Demonstration

God can bring about whatever we clearly perceive in a way exactly corresponding to our perception of it (preceding Corollary). But we clearly perceive the mind, that is, a thinking substance, apart from the body, that is, apart from an extended substance (Second Postulate). And conversely we can clearly perceive the body apart from the mind (as everyone readily admits). Therefore the mind can, at least through the power of God, exist without the body; and similarly the body can exist apart from the mind. 170

Now if one substance can exist apart from another the two are really distinct (Def. x). But the mind and the body are substances (Defs. v, vi and vii) which can exist apart from each other (as has just been proved). Therefore there is a real distinction between the mind and the body.

Notice that I introduce the power of God as a means to separate mind and body not because any extraordinary power is needed to bring about such a separation but because the preceding arguments have dealt solely with God, and hence there was nothing else I could use to make the separation. Our knowledge that two things are really distinct is not affected by the nature of the power that separates them.

FOURTH SET OF OBJECTIONS¹

Letter to a distinguished gentleman

Sir,

197 Though you have done me a kindness, you certainly want your reward. Indeed, you are exacting a heavy price for the great favour you have done me, in that you have allowed me to see this brilliant work only on condition that I should make public my opinion of it. This is certainly a hard condition, which only my eagerness to see this superb piece of work has driven me to accept; and I would gladly try to get out of it if, instead of the traditional Praetor's dispensation applying to contracts entered into 'through force or fear', I could claim a new excusing condition applying to those 'made under the influence of pleasure'.

What exactly do you want? You can hardly be after my opinion of the author, since you already know how highly I rate his outstanding intelligence and exceptional learning. Moreover, you know of all the tedious commitments that keep me busy, and if you have an unsuitably high opinion of my powers, that certainly does not make me any less aware of my own inadequacy. Yet the work you are giving me to scrutinize requires both an uncommon intellect and, above all, a calm mind, which can be free from the hurly-burly of all external things and have the leisure to consider itself – something which, as you are well aware, can happen only if the mind meditates attentively and keeps its gaze fixed upon itself. Nevertheless, since you command, I must obey; and if I go astray it will be your fault, since it is you who are compelling me to write. Now it could be claimed that the work under discussion belongs entirely to philosophy; yet since the author has, with great decorum, submitted himself to the tribunal of the theologians, I propose to play a dual role here. Firstly I shall put forward what seem to me to be the possible philosophical objections regarding the major issues of the nature of our mind and of God; and then I shall set out the problems which a theologian might come up against in the work as a whole.

¹ By Arnauld (see above p. 64). The Objections are addressed to Mersenne, who acted as intermediary between Arnauld and Descartes.

THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND

The first thing that I find remarkable is that our distinguished author has laid down as the basis for his entire philosophy exactly the same principle as that laid down by St Augustine – a man of the sharpest intellect and a remarkable thinker, not only on theological topics but also on philosophical ones. In Book II chapter 3 of *De Libero Arbitrio*,¹ Alipius, when he is disputing with Euodius and is about to prove the existence of God, says the following: 'First, if we are to take as our starting point what is most evident, I ask you to tell me whether you yourself exist. Or are you perhaps afraid of making a mistake in your answer, given that, if you did not exist, it would be quite impossible for you to make a mistake?' This is like what M. Descartes says: 'But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me.'² But let us go on from here and, more to the point, see how this principle can be used to derive the result that our mind is separate from our body. 198

I can doubt whether I have a body, and even whether there are any bodies at all in the world. Yet for all that, I may not doubt that I am or exist, so long as I am doubting or thinking.

Therefore I who am doubting and thinking am not a body. For, in that case, in having doubts about my body I should be having doubts about myself.

Indeed, even if I obstinately maintain that there are no bodies whatsoever, the proposition still stands, namely that I am something, and hence I am not a body.

This is certainly very acute. But someone is going to bring up the objection which the author raises against himself: the fact that I have doubts about the body, or deny that it exists, does not bring it about that no body exists. 'Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware? I do not know,' he says 'and for the moment I shall not argue the point. I know that I exist; the question is, what is this "I" that I know? If the "I" is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware.'³

But the author admits that in the argument set out in the *Discourse on the Method* the proof excluding anything corporeal from the nature of 199

1 *On Free Will*. Augustine's views were a major source of inspiration for the Jansenist school of theology, of which Arnauld was a prominent supporter.

2 Med. II, above p. 17.

3 Above p. 18.

the mind was not put forward 'in an order corresponding to the actual truth of the matter' but merely in an order corresponding to his 'own perception'. So the sense of the passage was that he was aware of nothing at all which he knew belonged to his essence except that he was a thinking thing.¹ From this answer it is clear that the objection still stands in precisely the same form as it did before, and that the question he promised to answer still remains outstanding: How does it follow, from the fact that he is aware of nothing else belonging to his essence, that nothing else does in fact belong to it?² I must confess that I am somewhat slow, but I have been unable to find anywhere in the Second Meditation an answer to this question. As far as I can gather, however, the author does attempt a proof of this claim in the Sixth Meditation, since he takes it to depend on his having clear knowledge of God, which he had not yet arrived at in the Second Meditation. This is how the proof goes:

200 I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God. The question of what kind of power is required to bring about such a separation does not affect the judgement that the two things are distinct . . . Now on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it.³

We must pause a little here, for it seems to me that in these few words lies the crux of the whole difficulty.

First of all, if the major premiss of this syllogism is to be true, it must be taken to apply not to any kind of knowledge of a thing, nor even to clear and distinct knowledge; it must apply solely to knowledge which is adequate. For our distinguished author admits in his reply to the theologian, that if one thing can be conceived distinctly and separately from another 'by an abstraction of the intellect which conceives the thing inadequately', then this is sufficient for there to be a formal distinction between the two, but it does not require that there be a real distinction.⁴ And in the same passage he draws the following conclusion:

By contrast, I have a complete understanding of what a body is when I think that it is merely something having extension, shape and motion, and I deny that it has

1 The argument in question comes in the *Discourse*, part 4: vol. 1, p. 127. Descartes' qualifying comments, quoted by Arnauld, are from the Preface to the *Meditations*; see above, p. 7.

2 See Preface, above p. 7. 3 Above p. 54. 4 Cf. First Replies, above pp. 85f.

anything which belongs to the nature of a mind. Conversely, I understand the mind to be a complete thing, which doubts, understands, wills, and so on, even though I deny that it has any of the attributes which are contained in the idea of a body. Hence there is a real distinction between the body and the mind.¹

But someone may call this minor premiss into doubt and maintain that the conception you have of yourself when you conceive of yourself as a thinking, non-extended thing is an inadequate one; and the same may be true of your conception of yourself² as an extended, non-thinking thing. Hence we must look at how this is proved in the earlier part of the argument. For I do not think that this matter is so clear that it should be assumed without proof as a first principle that is not susceptible of demonstration.

As to the first part of your claim, namely that you have a complete understanding of what a body is when you think that it is merely something having extension, shape, motion etc., and you deny that it has anything which belongs to the nature of a mind, this proves little. For those who maintain that our mind is corporeal do not on that account suppose that every body is a mind. On their view, body would be related to mind as a genus is related to a species. Now a genus can be understood apart from a species, even if we deny of the genus what is proper and peculiar to the species – hence the common maxim of logicians, ‘The negation of the species does not negate the genus.’ Thus I can understand the genus ‘figure’ apart from my understanding of any of the properties which are peculiar to a circle. It therefore remains to be proved that the mind can be completely and adequately understood apart from the body. 201

I cannot see anywhere in the entire work an argument which could serve to prove this claim, apart from what is suggested at the beginning: ‘I can deny that any body exists, or that there is any extended thing at all, yet it remains certain to me that I exist, so long as I am making this denial or thinking it. Hence I am a thinking thing, not a body, and the body does not belong to the knowledge I have of myself.’³

But so far as I can see, the only result that follows from this is that I can obtain some knowledge of myself without knowledge of the body. But it is not yet transparently clear to me that this knowledge is complete and adequate, so as to enable me to be certain that I am not mistaken in excluding body from my essence. I shall explain the point by means of an example.

Suppose someone knows for certain that the angle in a semi-circle is a right angle, and hence that the triangle formed by this angle and the diameter of the circle is right-angled. In spite of this, he may doubt, or

1 Above p. 86. 2 ‘... i.e. your body’ (supplied in French version).

3 Not an exact quotation. Cf. *Med.* II, above pp. 17–19.

not yet have grasped for certain, that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides; indeed he may even deny this if he is misled by some fallacy. But now, if he uses the same argument as that proposed by our illustrious author, he may appear to have confirmation of his false belief, as follows: 'I clearly and distinctly perceive', he
 202 may say, 'that the triangle is right-angled; but I doubt that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides; therefore it does not belong to the essence of the triangle that the square on its hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides.'

Again, even if I deny that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the square on the other two sides, I still remain sure that the triangle is right-angled, and my mind retains the clear and distinct knowledge that one of its angles is a right angle. And given that this is so, not even God could bring it about that the triangle is not right-angled.

I might argue from this that the property which I doubt, or which can be removed while leaving my idea intact, does not belong to the essence of the triangle.

Moreover, 'I know', says M. Descartes, 'that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. And hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated by God.'¹ Yet I clearly and distinctly understand that this triangle is right-angled, without understanding that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides. It follows on this reasoning that God, at least, could create a right-angled triangle with the square on its hypotenuse not equal to the squares on the other sides.

I do not see any possible reply here, except that the person in this example does not clearly and distinctly perceive that the triangle is right-angled. But how is my perception of the nature of my mind any clearer than his perception of the nature of the triangle? He is just as certain that the triangle in the semi-circle has one right angle (which is the criterion of a right-angled triangle) as I am certain that I exist because I am thinking.

Now although the man in the example clearly and distinctly knows that the triangle is right-angled, he is wrong in thinking that the aforesaid relationship between the squares on the sides does not belong to the
 203 nature of the triangle. Similarly, although I clearly and distinctly know my nature to be something that thinks, may I, too, not perhaps be wrong in thinking that nothing else belongs to my nature apart from the fact

¹ Med. vi, above p. 54.

that I am a thinking thing? Perhaps the fact that I am an extended thing may also belong to my nature.

Someone may also make the point that since I infer my existence from the fact that I am thinking, it is certainly no surprise if the idea that I form by thinking of myself in this way represents to my mind nothing other than myself as a thinking thing. For the idea was derived entirely from my thought. Hence it seems that this idea cannot provide any evidence that nothing belongs to my essence beyond what is contained in the idea.

It seems, moreover, that the argument proves too much, and takes us back to the Platonic view (which M. Descartes nonetheless rejects) that nothing corporeal belongs to our essence, so that man is merely a rational soul and the body merely a vehicle for the soul – a view which gives rise to the definition of man as ‘a soul which makes use of a body’.

If you reply that body is not straightforwardly excluded from my essence, but is ruled out only and precisely in so far as I am a thinking thing, it seems that there is a danger that someone will suspect that my knowledge of myself as a thinking thing does not qualify as knowledge of a being of which I have a complete and adequate conception; it seems instead that I conceive of it only inadequately, and by a certain intellectual abstraction.

Geometers conceive of a line as a length without breadth, and they conceive of a surface as length and breadth without depth, despite the fact that no length exists without breadth and no breadth without depth. In the same way, someone may perhaps suspect that every thinking thing is also an extended thing – an extended thing which, besides the attributes it has in common with other extended things, such as shape, motion, etc., also possesses the peculiar power of thought. This would mean that although, simply in virtue of this power, it can by an intellectual abstraction be apprehended as a thinking thing, in reality bodily attributes may belong to this thinking thing. In the same way, although quantity can be conceived in terms of length alone, in reality breadth and depth belong to every quantity, along with length.

204

The difficulty is increased by the fact that the power of thought appears to be attached to bodily organs, since it can be regarded as dormant in infants and extinguished in the case of madmen. And this is an objection strongly pressed by those impious people who try to do away with the soul.

So far I have dealt with the real distinction between our mind and the body. But since our distinguished author has undertaken to demonstrate the immortality of the soul, it may rightly be asked whether this evidently follows from the fact that the soul is distinct from the body. According to the principles of commonly accepted philosophy this by no means

follows, since people ordinarily take it that the souls of brute animals are distinct from their bodies, but nevertheless perish along with them.

I had got as far as this in my comments, and was intending to show how the author's principles, which I thought I had managed to gather from his method of philosophizing, would enable the immortality of the soul to be inferred very easily from the real distinction between the mind and the body. But at this point, a little study composed by our illustrious author was sent to me,¹ which apart from shedding much light on the work as a whole, puts forward the same solution to the point at issue which I was on the point of proposing.

As far as the souls of the brutes are concerned, M. Descartes elsewhere
205 suggests clearly enough that they have none. All they have is a body which is constructed in a particular manner, made up of various organs in such a way that all the operations which we observe can be produced in it and by means of it.²

But I fear that this view will not succeed in finding acceptance in people's minds unless it is supported by very solid arguments. For at first sight it seems incredible that it can come about, without the assistance of any soul, that the light reflected from the body of a wolf onto the eyes of a sheep should move the minute fibres of the optic nerves, and that on reaching the brain this motion should spread the animal spirits throughout the nerves in the manner necessary to precipitate the sheep's flight.

One point which I will add here is that I wholly agree with the distinguished author's doctrines concerning the distinction between the imagination and the intellect or thought, and the greater certainty which attaches to what we grasp by means of reason as against what we observe by means of the bodily senses. I long ago learned from Augustine, in Chapter 15 of *De Animae Quantitate*, that we must completely dismiss those who believe that what we see with the intellect is less certain than what we see with these bodily eyes, which have to contend with a perpetual discharge of phlegm.³ This leads Augustine to say in the *Soliloquies*, Book 1, Chapter 4, that when doing geometry he found the senses to be like a ship. He goes on:

For when they had brought me to the place I was aiming for, I sent them away, and, now that I had set foot on the shore, began to examine these matters using my thought alone. But for a long time my footsteps remained unsteady. Hence I think that a man can sooner sail on dry land than he can perceive geometrical matters through the senses, even though the senses do appear to give us some small assistance when we begin to learn.

¹ The Synopsis (see above pp. 9f). ² Cf. *Discourse*, part 5: vol. 1, pp. 139ff.

³ One of the four 'humours' of medieval physiology.

CONCERNING GOD

206

The first proof of the existence of God, which our author sets out in the Third Meditation, falls into two parts. The first part is that God exists if there is an idea of God in me; the second is that given that I possess such an idea, the only possible source of my existence is God.

In the first part, the only thing I would criticize is this. The author first asserts that 'falsity in the strict sense can occur only in judgements'; but a little later he admits that ideas can be false – not 'formally false' but 'materially false',¹ and this seems to me to be inconsistent with the author's own principles.

I am afraid that on a topic as obscure as this I may not be able to explain what I want to say with sufficient lucidity; but an example will clarify the issue. The author says that 'if cold is merely the absence of heat, the idea of cold which represents it to me as a positive thing will be materially false'.²

But if cold is merely an absence, then there cannot be an idea of cold which represents it to me as a positive thing, and so our author is here confusing a judgement with an idea.

What is the idea of cold? It is coldness itself in so far as it exists objectively in the intellect. But if cold is an absence, it cannot exist objectively in the intellect by means of an idea whose objective existence is a positive entity. Therefore, if cold is merely an absence, there cannot ever be a positive idea of it, and hence there cannot be an idea which is materially false.

This is confirmed by the very argument that the author uses to prove that the idea of an infinite being cannot but be a true idea, since, though I can pretend that such a being does not exist, I cannot pretend that the idea of such a being does not represent anything real to me. 207

The same can plainly be said of any positive idea. For although it can be imagined that cold, which I suppose to be represented by a positive idea, is not something positive, it cannot be imagined that the positive idea does not represent anything real and positive to me. For an idea is called 'positive' not in virtue of the existence it has as a mode of thinking (for in that sense all ideas would be positive), but in virtue of the objective existence which it contains and which it represents to our mind. Hence the idea in question may perhaps not be the idea of cold, but it cannot be a false idea.

But, you may reply, it is false precisely because it is not the idea of cold. No: it is your judgement that is false, if you judge that it is the idea of cold. The idea itself, within you, is completely true. In the same way, the

1 Above p. 30. 2 *Ibid.* (not an exact quotation).

idea of God should never be called false – not even ‘materially false’, even though someone may transfer it to something which is not God, as idolaters have done.

Lastly, what does the idea of cold, which you say is materially false, represent to your mind? An absence? But in that case it is true. A positive entity? But in that case it is not the idea of cold. Again, what is the cause of the positive objective being which according to you is responsible for the idea’s being materially false? ‘The cause is myself’, you may answer, ‘in so far as I come from nothing.’ But in that case, the positive objective being of an idea can come from nothing, which violates the author’s most important principles.

208 But let us go on to the second half of the proof, where the author asks ‘whether I who have the idea of an infinite being could derive my existence from any other source than an infinite being, and, in particular, whether I could derive my existence from myself’.¹ The author maintains that I could not derive my existence from myself since ‘if I had bestowed existence on myself I should also have given myself all the perfections of which I find I have an idea’.² But his theological critic has an acute reply to this: the phrase ‘to derive one’s existence from oneself’ should be taken not positively but negatively, so that it simply means ‘not deriving one’s existence from another’. ‘But now’, the critic continues, ‘if something derives its existence from itself in the sense of “not from another”, how can we prove that this being embraces all things and is infinite? This time I shall not listen if you say “If it derives its existence from itself, it could have given itself all things.” For it does not derive its existence from itself as a cause, nor did it exist prior to itself so that it could choose in advance what it should subsequently be.’³

To refute this argument, M. Descartes maintains that the phrase ‘deriving one’s existence from oneself’ should be taken not negatively but positively, even when it refers to God, so that God ‘in a sense stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect’.⁴ This seems to me to be a hard saying, and indeed to be false.

Thus I partly agree with M. Descartes and partly disagree with him. I agree that I could only derive my existence from myself if I did so in the positive sense, but I do not agree that the same should be said of God. On the contrary, I think it is a manifest contradiction that anything should derive its existence positively and as it were causally from itself. Hence I propose to establish the same result as our author, but by a completely different route, as follows.

In order to derive my existence from myself, I should have to derive my

1 Cf. above pp. 32–4. 2 Above p. 33. 3 First Objections, above pp. 68f.

4 First Replies, above p. 80.

existence from myself positively and, as it were, causally. Therefore it is impossible that I derive my existence from myself. 209

The major premiss of this syllogism is proved by the author's own arguments based on the fact that, since the moments of time can be mutually separated, 'it does not follow from the fact that I exist now that I shall continue to exist unless there is some cause which as it were creates me afresh at each moment'.¹

As for the minor premiss,² I think it is so clear by the natural light that it is scarcely susceptible of any proof, apart from the trivial kind of proof that establishes a well-known result by means of premisses that are less well-known. What is more, the author seems to have recognized its truth, since he has not ventured to deny it openly. Consider, for example, what he says in replying to his theological critic:

I did not say that it was impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself. This is obviously the case when the term 'efficient' is taken to apply only to causes which are prior in time to their effects, or different from them. But such a restriction does not seem appropriate in the present context . . . for the natural light does not establish that the concept of an efficient cause requires that it be prior in time to its effect.³

This is quite true, so far as the first disjunct goes, but why has he omitted the second one? Why did he not add that the natural light does not establish that the concept of an efficient cause requires that it be different from its effect? Was it because the light of nature did not permit him to make this assertion?

Since every effect depends on a cause and receives its existence from a cause, surely it is clear that one and the same thing cannot depend on itself or receive its existence from itself. 210

Again, every cause is the cause of an effect, and every effect is the effect of a cause. Hence there is a mutual relation between cause and effect. But a relation must involve two terms.

What is more, it is absurd to conceive of a thing's receiving existence yet at the same time possessing that existence prior to the time when we conceive that it received it. Yet this is just what would happen if we were to apply the notion of cause and effect to the same thing in respect of itself. For what is the notion of a cause? The bestowing of existence. And what is the notion of an effect? Receiving existence. The notion of a cause is essentially prior to the notion of an effect.

Now we cannot conceive of something under the concept of a cause as bestowing existence unless we conceive of it as possessing existence; for

1 Cf. above p. 33.

2 That I cannot derive my existence from myself positively and causally.

3 First Replies, above p. 78.

no one can give what he does not have. Hence we should be conceiving of a thing as having existence before conceiving it as having received existence; yet in the case of any receiver, the receiving precedes the possessing.

The argument can also be put as follows. No one gives what he does not have. Hence no one can give himself existence unless he already has it. But if he already has it, why should he give it to himself?

Finally, the author asserts that 'it is evident by the natural light that the distinction between creation and preservation is only a conceptual one'.¹ But it is evident by the same natural light that nothing can create itself. Therefore nothing can preserve itself.

But if we may come down from the general thesis to the particular case of God, it will now in my view be even clearer that God cannot derive his existence from himself in the positive sense, but can do so only in the negative sense of not deriving it from anything else.

211 This is clear first of all from the argument that the author himself uses to prove that if a body derives existence from itself it must do so in the positive sense. He says: 'The separate divisions of time do not depend on each other; hence the fact that the body in question is supposed to have existed up till now "from itself", that is, without a cause, is not sufficient to make it continue to exist in future, unless there is some power in it which, as it were, recreates it continuously.'²

But so far from this argument being applicable in the case of a supremely perfect or infinite being, we can actually infer the opposite result, and for opposite reasons. Contained within the idea of an infinite being, is the fact that the duration of this being is infinite, i.e. not restricted by any limits; and it follows from this that it is indivisible, permanent, and existing all at once, so that the concepts of 'before' and 'after' cannot be applied, except through an error and imperfection of our intellect.

It manifestly follows from this that an infinite being cannot be conceived of as existing even for a moment unless it is also conceived of as having always existed and as being bound to continue to exist for eternity (the author himself establishes this elsewhere). And hence it is pointless to ask why this being should continue in existence.

Augustine, whose remarks on the subject of God are as worthwhile and sublime as any that have appeared since the time of the sacred authors, frequently explains that in God there is no past or future but only eternally present existence. This makes it even clearer that the question of why God should continue in existence cannot be asked without absurdity, since the question manifestly involves the notions of

1 Above p. 33. 2 First Replies, above p. 79.

'before' and 'after', past and future, which should be excluded from the concept of an infinite being.

Moreover, God cannot be thought of as deriving his existence 'from himself' in the positive sense, as if he had created himself in the beginning. For then he would have existed before he existed. God is thought of as deriving existence 'from himself' only (as our author frequently declares) because he does in reality keep himself in existence. 212

But self-preservation does not apply to an infinite being any more than an original self-creation. For what, may I ask, is preservation if not a continual re-creation of something. Thus all preservation presupposes original creation. What is more, the very terms 'continuation' and 'preservation' imply some potentiality, whereas an infinite being is pure actuality, without any potentiality.

We should therefore conclude that God cannot be conceived of as deriving existence from himself in the positive sense, except through an imperfection of our intellect, which conceives of God after the fashion of created things. A further argument will make this even clearer.

We look for the efficient cause of something only in respect of its existence, not in respect of its essence. For example, if I see a triangle, I may look for the efficient cause that is responsible for the existence of this triangle; but I cannot without absurdity inquire into the efficient cause of this triangle's having three angles equal to two right angles. If anyone makes such an inquiry, the correct response would be not to give an efficient cause, but to explain that this is the nature of a triangle. This is why mathematicians, who do not deal with the existence of the objects they study, never give demonstrations involving efficient or final causes. But it belongs to the essence of an infinite being that it exists, or, if you will, that it continues in existence, no less than it belongs to the essence of a triangle to have its three angles equal to two right angles. Now if anyone asks why a triangle has its three angles equal to two right angles, we should not answer in terms of an efficient cause, but should simply say that this is the eternal and immutable nature of a triangle. And similarly, if anyone asks why God exists, or continues in existence, we should not 213

try to find either in God or outside him any efficient cause, or quasi-efficient cause (I am arguing about the reality, not the name); instead, we should confine our answer to saying that the reason lies in the nature of a supremely perfect being.

The author says that the light of nature establishes that if anything exists we may always ask why it exists – that is, we may inquire into its efficient cause, or if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not have one.¹ To this I answer that if someone asks why God exists, we

1 First Replies, above p. 78.

should not answer in terms of an efficient cause, but should explain that he exists simply because he is God, or an infinite being. And if someone asks for an efficient cause of God, we should reply that he does not need an efficient cause. And if the questioner goes on to ask why he does not need an efficient cause, we should answer that this is because he is an infinite being, whose existence is his essence. For the only things that require an efficient cause are those in which actual existence may be distinguished from essence.

This disposes of the argument which follows the passage just quoted: 'Hence', says the author, 'if I thought that nothing could possibly have the same relation to itself as an efficient cause has to its effect, I should certainly not conclude that there was a first cause. On the contrary, I should go on to ask for the cause of the so-called "first" cause, and thus I would never reach anything which was the first cause of everything else.'¹

214 Not at all. If I thought we ought to look for the efficient cause, or quasi-efficient cause, of any given thing, then what I would be looking for would be a cause distinct from the thing in question, since it is completely evident to me that nothing can possibly stand in the same relation to itself as that in which an efficient cause stands to its effect.

I think the author's attention should be drawn to this point, so that he can give the matter his careful and attentive consideration. For I am sure that it will scarcely be possible to find a single theologian who will not object to the proposition that God derives his existence from himself in the positive sense, and as it were causally.

I have one further worry, namely how the author avoids reasoning in a circle when he says that we are sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true only because God exists.²

But we can be sure that God exists only because we clearly and distinctly perceive this. Hence, before we can be sure that God exists, we ought to be able to be sure that whatever we perceive clearly and evidently is true.

Let me add something which I forgot to include earlier. The author lays it down as certain that there can be nothing in him, in so far as he is a thinking thing, of which he is not aware,³ but it seems to me that this is false. For by 'himself, in so far as he is a thinking thing', he means simply his mind, in so far as it is distinct from the body. But all of us can surely see that there may be many things in our mind of which the mind is not aware. The mind of an infant in its mother's womb has the power of thought, but is not aware of it. And there are countless similar examples, which I will pass over.

1 Above p. 78. 2 Cf. Med. v, above p. 48. 3 Cf. Med. III, above p. 33.

POINTS WHICH MAY CAUSE DIFFICULTY TO THEOLOGIANS

In order to bring to an end a discussion that is growing tiresomely long, I would now like to aim for brevity, and simply indicate the issues rather than argue them out in detail.

First, I am afraid that the author's somewhat free style of philosophizing, which calls everything into doubt, may cause offence to some people. He himself admits in the *Discourse on the Method* that this approach is dangerous for those of only moderate intelligence; but I agree that the risk of offence is somewhat reduced in the Synopsis.¹ 215

Nevertheless, I rather think that the First Meditation should be furnished with a brief preface which explains that there is no serious doubt cast on these matters but that the purpose is to isolate temporarily those matters which leave room for even the 'slightest' and most 'exaggerated' doubt (as the author himself puts it elsewhere);² it should be explained that this is to facilitate the discovery of something so firm and stable that not even the most perverse sceptic will have even the slightest scope for doubt. Following on from this point, where we find the clause 'since I did not know the author of my being', I would suggest a substitution of the clause 'since I was pretending that I did not know . . .'³

In the case of the Fourth Meditation ('Truth and Falsity'), I am extremely anxious, for many reasons which would take too long to list, that the author should make two things clear, either in the Meditation itself or in the Synopsis.

The first is that when the author is inquiring into the cause of error, he is dealing above all with the mistakes we commit in distinguishing between the true and the false, and not those that occur in our pursuit of good and evil.

The discussion of the first kind of error is all that is needed for the author's plan and aim, and the comments he makes there on the cause of error would give rise to the most serious objections if they were stretched out of context to cover the pursuit of good and evil. Hence it seems to me that prudence requires, and the order of exposition to which our author is so devoted demands, that anything which is not relevant and which could give rise to controversy should be omitted. For otherwise the reader may be drawn into pointless quarrels over irrelevancies and be hindered in his perception of what is essential. 216

The second point I should like our author to stress is that, where he

¹ *Discourse*, part 2, (see vol. I, p. 118); Synopsis, above pp. 9, 11.

² Cf. Med. II, above p. 16; Med. VI, above p. 61.

³ Med. VI, above p. 53. Descartes adopted Arnauld's advice and inserted a qualifying phrase in brackets.

asserts that we should assent only to what we clearly and distinctly know, he is dealing solely with matters concerned with the sciences and intellectual contemplation, and not with matters belonging to faith and the conduct of life, and hence that his strictures apply only to rashly adopted views of the opinionated, and not to the prudent beliefs of the faithful.¹

As St Augustine wisely points out in *De Utilitate Credendi*,² Chapter 15,

There are three things in the soul of man which it is very important to distinguish, even though they are closely related: understanding, belief and opinion.

A person *understands* if he grasps something by means of a reliable reason. He *believes* if he is influenced by weighty authority to accept a truth even though he does not grasp it by means of a reliable reason. And he is guilty of being *opinionated* if he thinks he knows something of which he is ignorant.

To be opinionated is a very grave fault, for two reasons. Firstly, if someone is convinced that he knows the answer already, he will be unable to learn, even when there is something to be learnt. And secondly, hastiness is in itself a mark of a disordered soul.

If we understand something, then we owe it to reason; if we believe something, we owe it to authority; and if we are opinionated about something, this is based on error. This distinction will help us to understand that we are not guilty of being hasty and opinionated when we hold on to our faith in matters which we do not yet grasp.

217 Those who say that we should believe nothing but what we know are obsessed with avoiding the charge of being opinionated, which it must be admitted is a disgraceful and wretched fault. But we should carefully reflect on the fact that there is a very great difference between, on the one hand, reckoning one knows something and, on the other hand, understanding that one is ignorant about it yet believing it under the influence of some authority. If we reflect on this we will surely avoid the charges of error on the one hand, and inhumanity and arrogance on the other.

A little later, in Chapter 12 Augustine adds 'I could produce many arguments to show that absolutely nothing in human society will be safe if we decide to believe only what we can regard as having been clearly perceived.' These, then, are the views of St Augustine.

M. Descartes, prudent man that he is, will readily judge how important it is to make the distinctions just outlined. For otherwise those many people who in our age are prone to impiety may distort his words in order to subvert the faith.

But what I see as likely to give the greatest offence to theologians is that according to the author's doctrines it seems that the Church's

1 See footnote to Synopsis, above p. 11. 2 'On the Benefits of Faith'.

teaching concerning the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist cannot remain completely intact.

We believe on faith that the substance of the bread is taken away from the bread of the Eucharist and only the accidents remain. These are extension, shape, colour, smell, taste and other qualities perceived by the senses.

But the author thinks there are no sensible qualities, but merely various motions in the bodies that surround us which enable us to perceive the various impressions which we subsequently call 'colour', 'taste' and 'smell'. Hence only shape, extension and mobility remain. Yet the author denies that these powers are intelligible apart from some substance for them to inhere in, and hence he holds that they cannot exist without such a substance. He repeats this in his reply to his theological critic.¹ 218

Further, he recognizes no distinction between the states of a substance and the substance itself except for a formal one; yet this kind of distinction seems insufficient to allow for the states to be separated from the substance even by God.

I am sure that the great piety of our illustrious author will lead him to ponder on this matter attentively and diligently, and that he will take the view that he is obliged to devote his most strenuous efforts to the problem. For otherwise, even though his intention was to defend the cause of God against the impious, he may appear to have endangered the very faith, founded by divine authority, which he hopes will enable him to obtain that eternal life of which he has undertaken to convince mankind.

1 First Replies, above p. 86.

AUTHOR'S REPLIES TO THE FOURTH SET OF OBJECTIONS

I could not possibly wish for a more perceptive or more courteous critic of my book than the gentleman whose comments you have sent me.¹ He has dealt with me so considerately that I can easily perceive his goodwill towards myself and the cause that I defend. At the same time, where he has attacked me he has looked into the issues so deeply, and examined all the related topics so carefully, that I am sure that there are no outstanding difficulties elsewhere that have escaped his watchful attention. What is more, where he thinks my views are not acceptable, he has pressed his criticisms so acutely that I am not afraid of anyone's
219 supposing that he has kept back any objections for the sake of the cause. In view of this, I am not so much disturbed by his criticisms as happy that he has not found more to attack.

REPLY TO PART ONE, DEALING WITH THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND

I shall not waste time here by thanking my distinguished critic for bringing in the authority of St Augustine to support me, and for setting out my arguments so vigorously that he seems to fear that their strength may not be sufficiently apparent to anyone else.

But I will begin by pointing out where it was that I embarked on proving 'how, from the fact that I am aware of nothing else belonging to my essence (that is, the essence of the mind alone) apart from the fact that I am a thinking thing, it follows that nothing else does in fact belong to it'.² The relevant passage is the one where I proved that God exists – a God who can bring about everything that I clearly and distinctly recognize as possible.³

Now it may be that there is much within me of which I am not yet aware (for example, in this passage I was in fact supposing that I was not

1 Descartes addresses Mersenne, who acted as intermediary between him and Arnauld, author of the Fourth Set of Objections; see Translator's preface, above p. 64.

2 See above p. 140. 3 Cf. above Med. v, pp. 48f, and Med. vi, p. 54.

yet aware that the mind possessed the power of moving the body, or that it was substantially united to it). Yet since that of which I am aware is sufficient to enable me to subsist with it and it alone, I am certain that I could have been created by God without having these other attributes of which I am unaware, and hence that these other attributes do not belong to the essence of the mind.

For if something can exist without some attribute, then it seems to me that that attribute is not included in its essence. And although mind is part of the essence of man, being united to a human body is not strictly speaking part of the essence of mind.

I must also explain what I meant by saying that 'a real distinction cannot be inferred from the fact that one thing is conceived apart from another by an abstraction of the intellect which conceives the thing inadequately. It can be inferred only if we understand one thing apart from another completely, or as a complete thing.'¹ 220

I do not, as M. Arnauld assumes,² think that adequate knowledge of a thing is required here. Indeed, the difference between complete and adequate knowledge is that if a piece of knowledge is to be *adequate* it must contain absolutely all the properties which are in the thing which is the object of knowledge. Hence only God can know that he has adequate knowledge of all things.

A created intellect, by contrast, though perhaps it may in fact possess adequate knowledge of many things, can never know it has such knowledge unless God grants it a special revelation of the fact. In order to have adequate knowledge of a thing all that is required is that the power of knowing possessed by the intellect is adequate for the thing in question, and this can easily occur. But in order for the intellect to know it has such knowledge, or that God put nothing in the thing beyond what it is aware of, its power of knowing would have to equal the infinite power of God, and this plainly could not happen on pain of contradiction.

Now in order for us to recognize a real distinction between two things it cannot be required that our knowledge of them be adequate if it is impossible for us to know that it is adequate. And since, as has just been explained, we can never know this, it follows that it is not necessary for our knowledge to be adequate.

Hence when I said that 'it does not suffice for a real distinction that one thing is understood apart from another by an abstraction of the intellect which conceives the thing inadequately', I did not think this would be 221

¹ Cf. above p. 140, and First Replies, above pp. 85f.

² The name is supplied here and elsewhere for the reader's convenience; in the original Descartes refers to his critic simply as 'the distinguished gentleman'.

taken to imply that *adequate* knowledge was required to establish a real distinction. All I meant was that we need the sort of knowledge that we have not ourselves made *inadequate* by an abstraction of the intellect.

There is a great difference between, on the one hand, some item of knowledge being wholly adequate, which we can never know with certainty to be the case unless it is revealed by God, and, on the other hand, its being adequate enough to enable us to perceive that we have not rendered it inadequate by an abstraction of the intellect.

In the same way, when I said that a thing must be understood *completely*, I did not mean that my understanding must be adequate, but merely that I must understand the thing well enough to know that my understanding is *complete*.

I thought I had made this clear from what I had said just before and just after the passage in question. For a little earlier I had distinguished between 'incomplete' and 'complete' entities, and I had said that for there to be a real distinction between a number of things, each of them must be understood as 'an entity in its own right which is different from everything else'.¹

And later on, after saying that I had 'a complete understanding of what a body is', I immediately added that I also 'understood the mind to be a complete thing'. The meaning of these two phrases was identical; that is, I took 'a complete understanding of something' and 'understanding something to be a complete thing' as having one and the same meaning.

But here you may justly ask what I mean by a 'complete thing', and how I prove that for establishing a real distinction it is sufficient that two things can be understood as 'complete' and that each one can be understood apart from the other.

222 My answer to the first question is that by a 'complete thing' I simply mean a substance endowed with the forms or attributes which enable me to recognize that it is a substance.

We do not have immediate knowledge of substances, as I have noted elsewhere. We know them only by perceiving certain forms or attributes which must inhere in something if they are to exist; and we call the thing in which they inhere a 'substance'.

But if we subsequently wanted to strip the substance of the attributes through which we know it, we would be destroying our entire knowledge of it. We might be able to apply various words to it, but we could not have a clear and distinct perception of what we meant by these words.

I am aware that certain substances are commonly called 'incomplete'. But if the reason for calling them incomplete is that they are unable to exist on their own, then I confess I find it self-contradictory that they

1 First Replies, above p. 86.

should be substances, that is, things which subsist on their own, and at the same time incomplete, that is, not possessing the power to subsist on their own. It is also possible to call a substance incomplete in the sense that, although it has nothing incomplete about it *qua* substance, it is incomplete in so far as it is referred to some other substance in conjunction with which it forms something which is a unity in its own right.

Thus a hand is an incomplete substance when it is referred to the whole body of which it is a part; but it is a complete substance when it is considered on its own. And in just the same way the mind and the body are incomplete substances when they are referred to a human being which together they make up. But if they are considered on their own, they are complete.

For just as being extended and divisible and having shape etc. are 223 forms or attributes by which I recognize the substance called *body*, so understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the substance which is called *mind*. And I understand a thinking substance to be just as much a complete thing as an extended substance.

It is quite impossible to assert, as my distinguished critic maintains, that 'body may be related to mind as a genus is related to a species'.¹ For although a genus can be understood without this or that specific differentia, there is no way in which a species can be thought of without its genus.

For example, we can easily understand the genus 'figure' without thinking of a circle (though our understanding will not be distinct unless it is referred to some specific figure and it will not involve a complete thing unless it also comprises the nature of body). But we cannot understand any specific differentia of the 'circle' without at the same time thinking of the genus 'figure'.

Now the mind can be perceived distinctly and completely (that is, sufficiently for it to be considered as a complete thing) without any of the forms or attributes by which we recognize that body is a substance, as I think I showed quite adequately in the Second Meditation. And similarly a body can be understood distinctly and as a complete thing, without any of the attributes which belong to the mind.

But here my critic argues that although I can obtain some knowledge of myself without knowledge of the body, it does not follow that this knowledge is complete and adequate, so as to enable me to be certain that I am not mistaken in excluding body from my essence.² He explains 224 the point by using the example of a triangle inscribed in a semi-circle, which we can clearly and distinctly understand to be right-angled

1 Above p. 141. 2 *Ibid.*

although we do not know, or may even deny, that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides. But we cannot infer from this that there could be a right-angled triangle such that the square on the hypotenuse is not equal to the squares on the other sides.

But this example differs in many respects from the case under discussion.

First of all, though a triangle can perhaps be taken concretely as a substance having a triangular shape, it is certain that the property of having the square on the hypotenuse equal to the squares on the other sides is not a substance. So neither the triangle nor the property can be understood as a complete thing in the way in which mind and body can be so understood; nor can either item be called a 'thing' in the sense in which I said 'it is enough that I can understand one thing (that is, a complete thing) apart from another' etc.¹ This is clear from the passage which comes next: 'Besides I find in myself faculties' etc. I did not say that these faculties were *things*, but carefully distinguished them from things or substances.

Secondly, although we can clearly and distinctly understand that a triangle in a semi-circle is right-angled without being aware that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other two sides, we cannot have a clear understanding of a triangle having the square on its hypotenuse equal to the squares on the other sides without at the same time being aware that it is right-angled. And yet we can clearly and distinctly perceive the mind without the body and the body without the mind.

Thirdly, although it is possible to have a concept of a triangle inscribed in a semi-circle which does not include the fact that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides, it is not possible to have a concept of the triangle such that no ratio at all is understood to hold between the square on the hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides. Hence, though we may be unaware of what that ratio is, we cannot say that any given ratio does not hold unless we clearly understand that it does not belong to the triangle; and where the ratio is one of equality, this can never be understood. Yet the concept of body includes nothing at all which belongs to the mind, and the concept of mind includes nothing at all which belongs to the body.

So although I said 'it is enough that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another' etc., one cannot go on to argue 'yet I clearly and distinctly understand that this triangle is right-angled without understanding that the square on the hypotenuse' etc.² There are three reasons for this. First, the ratio between the square on the

¹ Med. vi, above p. 54. ² Above p. 142.

hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides is not a complete thing. Secondly, we do not clearly understand the ratio to be equal except in the case of a right-angled triangle. And thirdly, there is no way in which the triangle can be distinctly understood if the ratio which obtains between the square on the hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides is said not to hold.

But now I must explain how the mere fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one substance apart from another is enough to make me certain that one excludes the other.¹ 226

The answer is that the notion of a *substance* is just this – that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other substance. And there is no one who has ever perceived two substances by means of two different concepts without judging that they are really distinct.

Hence, had I not been looking for greater than ordinary certainty, I should have been content to have shown in the Second Meditation that the mind can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the body is attributed to it, and that, conversely, the body can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the mind is attributed to it. I should have added nothing more in order to demonstrate that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, since we commonly judge that the order in which things are mutually related in our perception of them corresponds to the order in which they are related in actual reality. But one of the exaggerated doubts which I put forward in the First Meditation went so far as to make it impossible for me to be certain of this very point (namely whether things do in reality correspond to our perception of them), so long as I was supposing myself to be ignorant of the author of my being. And this is why everything I wrote on the subject of God and truth in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations contributes to the conclusion that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, which I finally established in the Sixth Meditation.

And yet, says M. Arnauld, 'I have a clear understanding of a triangle inscribed in a semi-circle without knowing that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the other sides.'² It is true that the triangle is intelligible even though we do not think of the ratio which obtains between the square on the hypotenuse and the squares on the other sides; but it is not intelligible that this ratio should be denied of the triangle. In the case of the mind, by contrast, not only do we understand it to exist without the body, but, what is more, all the attributes which belong to a body can be denied of it. For it is of the nature of substances that they should mutually exclude one another. 227

1 Cf. Med. vi, above p. 54. 2 Cf. above p. 142.

M. Arnauld goes on to say: 'Since I infer my existence from the fact that I am thinking, it is certainly no surprise if the idea that I form in this way represents me simply as a thinking thing.'¹ But this is no objection to my argument. For it is equally true that when I examine the nature of the body, I find nothing at all in it which savours of thought. And we can have no better evidence for a distinction between two things than the fact that if we examine either of them, whatever we find in one is different from what we find in the other.

228 Nor do I see why this argument 'proves too much'.² For the fact that one thing can be separated from another by the power of God is the very least that can be asserted in order to establish that there is a real distinction between the two. Also, I thought I was very careful to guard against anyone inferring from this that man was simply 'a soul which makes use of a body'. For in the Sixth Meditation, where I dealt with the distinction between the mind and the body, I also proved at the same time that the mind is substantially united with the body.³ And the arguments which I used to prove this are as strong as any I can remember ever having read. Now someone who says that a man's arm is a substance that is really distinct from the rest of his body does not thereby deny that the arm belongs to the nature of the whole man. And saying that the arm belongs to the nature of the whole man does not give rise to the suspicion that it cannot subsist in its own right. In the same way, I do not think I proved too much in showing that the mind can exist apart from the body. Nor do I think I proved too little in saying that the mind is substantially united with the body, since that substantial union does not prevent our having a clear and distinct concept of the mind on its own, as a complete thing. The concept is thus very different from that of a surface or a line, which cannot be understood as complete things unless we attribute to them not just length and breadth but also depth.

Finally the fact that 'the power of thought is dormant in infants and extinguished in madmen'⁴ (I should say not 'extinguished' but 'disturbed'), does not show that we should regard it as so attached to bodily organs that it cannot exist without them. The fact that thought is often impeded by bodily organs, as we know from our own frequent experience, does not at all entail that it is produced by those organs. This latter view is one for which not even the slightest proof can be adduced.

229 I must admit, however, that the fact that the mind is closely conjoined with the body, which we experience constantly through our senses, does result in our not being aware of the real distinction between mind and body unless we attentively meditate on the subject. But I think that those who repeatedly ponder on what I wrote in the Second Meditation will be

1 Cf. above p. 143. 2 *Ibid.* 3 Above pp. 56ff. 4 Above p. 143.

easily convinced that the mind is distinct from the body, and distinct not just by a fiction or abstraction of the intellect: it can be known as a distinct thing because it is in reality distinct.

I will not answer my critic's further observations regarding the immortality of the soul, because they do not conflict with my views. As far as the souls of the brutes are concerned, this is not the place to examine the subject, and, short of giving an account of the whole of physics, I cannot add to the explanatory remarks I made in Part 5 of the *Discourse on the Method*.¹ But to avoid passing over the topic in silence, I will say that I think the most important point is that, both in our bodies and those of the brutes, no movements can occur without the presence of all the organs or instruments which would enable the same movements to be produced in a machine. So even in our own case the mind does not directly move the external limbs, but simply controls the animal spirits which flow from the heart via the brain into the muscles, and sets up certain motions in them; for the spirits are by their nature adapted with equal facility to a great variety of actions. Now a very large number of the motions occurring inside us do not depend in any way on the mind. These include heartbeat, digestion, nutrition, respiration when we are asleep, and also such waking actions as walking, singing and the like, 230 when these occur without the mind attending to them. When people take a fall, and stick out their hands so as to protect their head, it is not reason that instructs them to do this; it is simply that the sight of the impending fall reaches the brain and sends the animal spirits into the nerves in the manner necessary to produce this movement even without any mental volition, just as it would be produced in a machine. And since our own experience reliably informs us that this is so, why should we be so amazed that the 'light reflected from the body of a wolf onto the eyes of a sheep'² should equally be capable of arousing the movements of flight in the sheep?

But if we wish to determine by the use of reason whether any of the movements of the brutes are similar to those which are performed in us with the help of the mind, or whether they resemble those which depend merely on the flow of the animal spirits and the disposition of the organs, then we should consider the differences that can be found between men and beasts. I mean the differences which I set out in Part 5 of the *Discourse on the Method*, for I think these are the only differences to be found. If we do this, it will readily be apparent that all the actions of the brutes resemble only those which occur in us without any assistance from the mind. And we shall be forced to conclude from this that we know of absolutely no principle of movement in animals apart from the

1 See above p. 144 and vol. 1, pp. 139ff. 2 Above p. 144.

disposition of their organs and the continual flow of the spirits which are produced by the heat of the heart as it rarefies the blood. We shall also see that there was no excuse for our imagining that any other principle of motion was to be found in the brutes. We made this mistake because we failed to distinguish the two principles of motion just described; and on
 231 seeing that the principle depending solely on the animal spirits and organs exists in the brutes just as it does in us, we jumped to the conclusion that the other principle, which consists in mind or thought, also exists in them. Things which we have become convinced of since our earliest years, even though they have subsequently been shown by rational arguments to be false, cannot easily be eradicated from our beliefs unless we give the relevant arguments our long and frequent attention.

REPLY TO PART TWO, CONCERNING GOD

Up till now I have attempted to refute my critic's arguments and to stand up to his attack. But from now I will follow the example of those who are matched with opponents who are superior in strength: instead of meeting him head on I will dodge his blows.

Only three criticisms are raised by M. Arnauld in this section, and they can all be accepted if they are taken in the sense which he intends. But when I wrote what I did, I meant it in another sense, which seems to me to be equally correct.

The first point is that certain ideas are materially false.¹ As I interpret this claim, it means that the ideas are such as to provide subject-matter for error. But M. Arnauld concentrates on ideas taken in the formal sense, and maintains that there is no falsity in them.

The second point is that God derives his existence from himself 'positively and as it were causally'.² By this I simply meant that the reason why God does not need any efficient cause in order to exist depends on a
 232 positive thing, that is, the very immensity of God, which is as positive as anything can be. M. Arnauld, however, shows that God is not self-created or self-preserved by any positive influence of an efficient cause; and this I quite agree with.

The third and last point is that 'there can be nothing in our mind of which we are not aware'.³ I meant this to refer to the operations of the mind; but M. Arnauld takes it to apply to the mind's powers, and so denies it.

But let us deal with the points more carefully one at a time. When M. Arnauld says 'if cold is merely an absence, there cannot be an idea of cold which represents it as a positive thing',⁴ it is clear that he is dealing solely

1 Above p. 145. 2 Above pp. 146ff. 3 Above p. 150. 4 Above p. 145.

with an idea taken in the *formal* sense. Since ideas are forms of a kind, and are not composed of any matter, when we think of them as representing something we are taking them not *materially* but *formally*. If, however, we were considering them not as representing this or that but simply as operations of the intellect, then it could be said that we were taking them materially, but in that case they would have no reference to the truth or falsity of their objects. So I think that the only sense in which an idea can be said to be 'materially false' is the one which I explained. Thus, whether cold is a positive thing or an absence does not affect the idea I have of it, which remains the same as it always was. It is this idea which, I claim, can provide subject-matter for error if it is in fact true that cold is an absence and does not have as much reality as heat; for if I consider the ideas of cold and heat just as I received them from my senses, I am unable to tell that one idea represents more reality to me 233 than the other.

I certainly did not 'confuse a judgement with an idea'.¹ For I said that the falsity to be found in an idea is *material* falsity, while the falsity involved in a judgement can only be *formal*.

When my critic says that the idea of cold 'is coldness itself in so far as it exists objectively in the intellect',² I think we need to make a distinction. For it often happens in the case of obscure and confused ideas – and the ideas of heat and cold fall into this category – that an idea is referred to something other than that of which it is in fact the idea. Thus if cold is simply an absence, the idea of cold is not coldness itself as it exists objectively in the intellect, but something else, which I erroneously mistake for this absence, namely a sensation which in fact has no existence outside the intellect.

The same point does not apply to the idea of God, or at least to the idea of God which is clear and distinct, since it cannot be said to refer to something with which it does not correspond. But as for the confused ideas of gods which are concocted by idolaters, I see no reason why they too cannot be called materially false, in so far as they provide the idolaters with subject-matter for false judgements. Yet ideas which give the judgement little or no scope for error do not seem as much entitled to be called materially false as those which give great scope for error. It is easy to show by means of examples that some ideas provide much greater scope for error than others. Confused ideas which are made up at will by 234 the mind, such as the ideas of false gods, do not provide as much scope for error as the confused ideas arriving from the senses, such as the ideas of colour and cold (if it is true, as I have said, that these ideas do not represent anything real). The greatest scope for error is provided by the

1 *Ibid.* 2 *Ibid.*

ideas which arise from the sensations of appetite. Thus the idea of thirst which the patient with dropsy has does indeed give him subject-matter for error, since it can lead him to judge that a drink will do him good, when in fact it will do him harm.

But my critic asks what the idea of cold, which I described as materially false, represents to me. If it represents an absence, he says, it is true; and if it represents a positive entity, it is not the idea of cold.¹ This is right; but my only reason for calling the idea 'materially false' is that, owing to the fact that it is obscure and confused, I am unable to judge whether or not what it represents to me is something positive which exists outside of my sensation. And hence I may be led to judge that it is something positive though in fact it may merely be an absence.

Hence in asking what is the cause of the positive objective being which, in my view, is responsible for the idea being materially false, my critic has raised an improper question. For I do not claim that an idea's material falsity results from some positive entity; it arises solely from the obscurity of the idea – although this does have something positive as its underlying subject, namely the actual sensation involved.

235 Now this positive entity exists in me, in so far as I am something real. But the obscurity of the idea is the only thing that leads me to judge that the idea of the sensation of cold represents some object called 'cold' which is located outside me; and this obscurity in the idea does not have a real cause but arises simply from the fact that my nature is not perfect in all respects.

This does not in any way violate my fundamental principles. One fear that I might have had, however, is that since I have never spent very much time reading philosophical texts, my calling ideas which I take to provide subject-matter for error 'materially false' might have involved too great a departure from standard philosophical usage. This might, I say, have worried me, had I not found the word 'materially' used in an identical sense to my own in the first philosophical author I came across, namely Suarez, in the *Metaphysical Disputations*, Part IX, Section 2, Number 4.²

But let me now turn to my critic's principal complaint – though it is one which seems to me to be the least well-taken of all his objections. This concerns the passage where I said that 'we are entitled to think that in a sense God stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause to its effect'.³ M. Arnauld says that it is 'a hard saying, and indeed false' to suggest that God is the efficient cause of himself; but I actually denied that suggestion in the passage just quoted. For in saying that God 'in a sense' stands in the same relation as an efficient cause, I made it clear that

1 Above p. 146. 2 See note above p. 69.

3 First Replies, above p. 80; Arnauld's comments, above p. 146.

I did not suppose he was the same as an efficient cause; and in using the phrase 'we are quite entitled to think' I meant that I was explaining the matter in these terms merely on account of the imperfection of the human intellect. Indeed, throughout the rest of the passage I confirmed this. Right at the beginning, having said 'if anything exists we may always inquire into its efficient cause', I immediately went on 'or, if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not need one'.¹ These words make it quite clear that I did believe in the existence of something that does not need an efficient cause. And what could that be, but God? A little later on I said that 'there is in God such great and inexhaustible power that he never required the assistance of anything in order to exist, and does not now require any assistance for his preservation, so that he is in a sense his own cause'. Here the phrase 'his own cause' cannot possibly be taken to mean an efficient cause; it simply means that the inexhaustible power of God is the cause or reason for his not needing a cause. And since that inexhaustible power or immensity of the divine essence is as *positive* as can be, I said that the reason or cause why God needs no cause is a *positive* reason or cause. Now this cannot be said of any finite thing, even though it is quite perfect of its kind. If a finite thing is said to derive its existence 'from itself', this can only be understood in a *negative* sense, meaning that no reason can be derived from its positive nature which could enable us to understand that it does not require an efficient cause. 236

Similarly, in every passage where I made a comparison between the formal cause (or reason derived from God's essence, in virtue of which he needs no cause in order to exist or to be preserved) and the efficient cause (without which finite things cannot exist), I always took care to make it explicitly clear that the two kinds of cause are different. And I never said that God preserves himself by some positive force, in the way in which created things are preserved by him; I simply said that the immensity of his power or essence, in virtue of which he does not need a preserver, is a *positive* thing. 237

Hence I can readily admit everything my critic puts forward to prove that God is not the efficient cause of himself and that he does not preserve himself by any positive power or by continuously re-creating himself; and this is the sole result established by M. Arnauld's arguments. But I hope that even M. Arnauld will not deny that the immensity of the power in virtue of which God needs no cause in order to exist is a *positive* thing in God, and that nothing which is similarly *positive* can be understood to exist in any other thing in such a way that it does not need an efficient cause in order to exist. That is all I meant when I said that, with the sole exception of God, the only sense in which anything can be said to derive

1 Above p. 78.

its existence 'from itself' is a *negative* one. And I had no need to make any further assumptions in order to resolve the difficulty which had been raised.

But since M. Arnauld has given me such a sombre warning, that 'it will scarcely be possible to find a single theologian who will not object to the proposition that God derives his existence from himself in a positive sense and as it were causally',¹ I will explain a little more carefully why this way of talking is extremely useful and even necessary when dealing with the topic under discussion. Indeed, as I shall show, it seems to me to be wholly innocent of any suspicion of being likely to cause offence.

238 I am aware that theologians writing in Latin do not use the word *causa* ['cause'] in matters of divinity when they are dealing with the procession of Persons in the Holy Trinity. Whereas the Greek writers use *αἰτιος* and *ἀρχή* interchangeably, they prefer to use only the word *principium* ['principle'] taken in its most general sense, to avoid giving anyone an excuse to infer that the Son is less important than the Father. But where there is no such risk of error, and we are dealing with God not as a Trinity but simply as a unity, I do not see why the word 'cause' is to be avoided at all costs, especially when we come to a context where it seems extremely useful and almost necessary to use the term.

Now if the term 'cause' serves to demonstrate the existence of God, it can hardly be more useful; and if it is impossible to achieve complete clarity in the proof without it, the term can hardly be more necessary.

But I think it is clear to everyone that a consideration of efficient causes is the primary and principal way, if not the only way, that we have of proving the existence of God. We cannot develop this proof with precision unless we grant our minds the freedom to inquire into the efficient causes of all things, even God himself. For what right do we have to make God an exception, if we have not yet proved that he exists? In every case, then, we must ask whether a thing derives its existence *from itself* or *from something else*; and by this means the existence of God can be inferred, even though we have not given an explicit account of what it means to say that something derives its existence 'from itself'. Those who follow the sole guidance of the natural light will in this context spontaneously form a concept of cause that is common to both an efficient and a formal cause: that is to say, what derives its existence 'from another' will be taken to derive its existence from that thing as an efficient cause, while what derives its existence 'from itself' will be taken to derive its existence from itself as a formal cause – that is, because it has the kind of essence which entails that it does not require an efficient

1 Above p. 150.

cause. Accordingly, I did not explain this point in my *Meditations*, but left it out, assuming it was self-evident. 239

Now some people are accustomed to judge that nothing can be the efficient cause of itself, and they carefully distinguish an efficient cause from a formal cause. Hence, when they see the question raised as to whether anything derives its existence from itself, it can easily happen that they think only of an efficient cause in the strict sense, and thus they suppose that the phrase 'from itself' must be taken not as meaning 'from a cause', but only in the negative sense, as meaning 'without a cause' (that is, as implying something such that we must not inquire why it exists). If we accept this interpretation of the phrase 'from itself', then it will not be possible to produce any argument for the existence of God based on his effects, as was correctly shown by the author of the First Set of Objections;¹ and hence this interpretation must be totally rejected.

To give a proper reply to this, I think it is necessary to show that, in between 'efficient cause' in the strict sense and 'no cause at all', there is a third possibility, namely 'the positive essence of a thing', to which the concept of an efficient cause can be extended. In the same way in geometry the concept of the arc of an indefinitely large circle is customarily extended to the concept of a straight line; or the concept of a rectilinear polygon with an indefinite number of sides is extended to that of a circle. I thought I explained this in the best way available to me when I said that in this context the meaning of 'efficient cause' must not be restricted to causes which are prior in time to their effects or different from them. For, first, this would make the question trivial, since everyone knows that something cannot be prior to, or distinct from, itself; and secondly, the restriction 'prior in time' can be deleted from the concept while leaving the notion of an efficient cause intact.² 240

The fact that a cause need not be prior in time is clear from the fact that the notion of a cause is applicable only during the time when it is producing its effect, as I have said.

The fact that the second restriction cannot also be deleted implies merely that a cause which is not distinct from its effects is not an efficient cause in the strict sense, and this I admit. It does not, however, follow that such a cause is in no sense a positive cause that can be regarded as analogous to an efficient cause; and this is all that my argument requires. The same natural light that enables me to perceive that I would have given myself all the perfections of which I have an idea, if I had given myself existence, also enables me to perceive that nothing can give itself existence in the restricted sense usually implied by the proper meaning of

1 Above pp. 68f.

2 Descartes here rephrases his earlier argument, First Replies, above p. 78.

the term 'efficient cause'. For in this sense, what gives itself existence would have to be different from itself in so far as it receives existence; yet to be both the same thing and not the same thing – that is, something different – is a contradiction.

Hence, when we ask whether something can give itself existence, this must be taken to be the same as asking whether the nature or essence of something is such that it does not need an efficient cause in order to exist.

241 The further proposition that if there is such a being he will give himself all the perfections of which he possesses an idea, if indeed he does not yet have them,¹ means that this being cannot but possess in actuality all the perfections of which he is aware. This is because we perceive by the natural light that a being whose essence is so immense that he does not need an efficient cause in order to exist, equally does not need an efficient cause in order to possess all the perfections of which he is aware: his own essence is the eminent source which bestows on him whatever we can think of as being capable of being bestowed on anything by an efficient cause.

The words 'he will give himself all the perfections, if indeed he does not yet have them' are merely explanatory. For the same natural light enables us to perceive that it is impossible for such a being to have the power and will to give itself something new; rather, his essence is such that he possesses from eternity everything which we can now suppose he would bestow on himself if he did not yet possess it.

Nonetheless, all the above ways of talking, which are derived by analogy with the notion of efficient causation, are very necessary for guiding the natural light in such a way as to enable us to have a clear awareness of these matters. It is exactly the same sort of comparison between a sphere (or other curvilinear figure) and a rectilinear figure that enabled Archimedes to demonstrate various properties of the sphere which could scarcely be understood otherwise. And just as no one criticizes these proofs, although they involve regarding a sphere as similar to a polyhedron, so it seems to me that I am not open to criticism in this context for using the analogy of an efficient cause to explain features which in fact belong to a formal cause, that is, to the very essence of God.

242 There is no possible risk of error involved in using this analogy, since the one feature peculiar to an efficient cause, and not transferable to a formal cause, involves an evident contradiction which could not be accepted by anyone, namely that something could be different from itself, or the same thing and not the same thing at one time.

It should also be noted that I have attributed to God the dignity of being a cause in such a way as not to imply that he has any of the

1 Cf. *Med.* III, above pp. 33f, discussed by Arnauld, above p. 146.

indignity of being an effect. Just as theologians in saying that the Father is the 'originating principle' of the Son do not thereby admit that the Son is something 'originated', so, in admitting that God can in a sense be called 'the cause of himself', I have nowhere implied that he can in the same way be called 'the effect of himself'. For an effect is normally referred principally to its efficient cause and is regarded as being inferior to it, although it is often superior to other causes.

In taking the whole essence of a thing to be its formal cause in this context, I am simply following the footsteps of Aristotle. For in the *Posterior Analytics*, Book 2, Chapter 11, Aristotle passes over the material cause, and calls the first kind of αἰτία, or cause, τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι,¹ or the 'formal' cause, as it is normally rendered in philosophical Latin. He then extends this notion to all the essences of all things, since at this point he is not dealing with the causes of a physical compound (any more than I am in this context), but is dealing generally with the causes from which any kind of knowledge can be derived.

It was, however, scarcely possible for me to deal with this topic without attributing the term 'cause' to God. This can be shown from the fact that in trying to achieve the same result as I did by another route my critic has completely failed to achieve his objective, at least in my view. First of all he explains at length that God is not the efficient cause of himself, since the notion of an efficient cause requires that it be distinct from its effect. Next he shows that God does not derive his existence from himself in the 'positive' sense, where 'positive' is taken to imply the positive power of a cause. And then he shows that God does not really preserve himself, if 'preservation' is taken to mean the continuous creation of a thing. All this I gladly admit. But then he again tries to show that God cannot be called the efficient cause of himself on the grounds that 'we look for the efficient cause of something only in respect of its existence, not in respect of its essence'. He goes on,

But it belongs to the essence of an infinite being that it exists no less than it belongs to the essence of a triangle to have its three angles equal to two right angles. And hence if someone asks whether God exists, we should no more give an answer in terms of an efficient cause than we should do so if someone asks why the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles.²

This syllogism can easily be turned against M. Arnauld, as follows: although we do not ask for an efficient cause with respect to something's essence, we can nevertheless ask for an efficient cause with respect to something's existence; but in the case of God, essence is not distinct from existence; hence we can ask for the efficient cause in the case of God.

1 Literally, 'what it is to be something'. 2 Cf. above p. 149.

But to reconcile our two positions, the answer to the question why God exists should be given not in terms of an efficient cause in the strict sense, but simply in terms of the essence or formal cause of the thing. And precisely because in the case of God there is no distinction between existence and essence, the formal cause will be strongly analogous to an efficient cause, and hence can be called something close to an efficient cause.

Finally, M. Arnauld adds:

244 If someone asks for an efficient cause of God, we should reply that he does not need an efficient cause. And if the questioner goes on to ask why he does not need an efficient cause, we should answer that this is because he is an infinite being, whose existence is his essence. For the only things that require an efficient cause are those in which actual existence may be distinguished from essence.¹

This, he says, disposes of my argument, that 'if I thought that nothing could possibly have the same relation to itself as an efficient cause has to its effect, then in the course of my inquiry into the causes of things I should never reach anything which was the first cause of everything else'.² But it seems to me that this point neither disposes of my argument nor in any way shakes it or weakens it. On the contrary, the principal force of my proof depends on it, and the same is true of absolutely all the proofs that can possibly be constructed to demonstrate the existence of God from his effects. Moreover, almost all theologians maintain that an argument based on God's effects is the only kind of argument that can be adduced to prove his existence.

245 Thus, in refusing to allow us to say that God stands toward himself in a relation analogous to that of an efficient cause, M. Arnauld not only fails to clarify the proof of God's existence, but actually prevents the reader from understanding it. This is especially true at the end when he concludes that 'if we thought we ought to look for the efficient cause, or quasi-efficient cause, of any given thing, then what we would be looking for would be a cause distinct from the thing in question'.³ How would those who do not yet know that God exists be able to inquire into the efficient cause of other things, with the aim of eventually arriving at knowledge of God, unless they thought it possible to inquire into the efficient cause of anything whatsoever? And how could they reach the end of their inquiries by arriving at God as the first cause if they thought that for any given thing we must always look for a cause which is distinct from it?

Let us suppose that Archimedes, in speaking of the properties which he demonstrated of a sphere by taking it as analogous to a rectilinear figure

1 Above p. 150. 2 First Replies, above p. 78. 3 Above p. 150.

inscribed in a square, had said this: 'If I thought that a sphere could not be taken to be a rectilinear or quasi-rectilinear figure with an infinite number of sides, I should attach no force to my proof, since the proof does not strictly apply to a sphere as a curvilinear figure but applies to it only as a rectilinear figure with infinitely many sides.' And let us also suppose that M. Arnauld objected to taking the sphere in this way, but nevertheless wanted to retain Archimedes' proof. It seems to me that the move M. Arnauld has made regarding God is just the same as if he were to say: 'If I thought that Archimedes' conclusion was supposed to hold of a rectilinear figure with infinitely many sides, I should not accept that it applied to a sphere, since I am quite sure and certain that a sphere is in no sense a rectilinear figure.' In saying this he would not only be failing to establish Archimedes' result, but would be preventing himself and others from properly understanding the proof.

I have pursued this issue at somewhat greater length than perhaps the subject required, in order to show that I am extremely anxious to prevent anything at all being found in my writings which could justifiably give offence to the theologians.

Lastly, as to the fact that I was not guilty of circularity¹ when I said that the only reason we have for being sure that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true is the fact that God exists, but that we are sure that God exists only because we perceive this clearly: I have already given an adequate explanation of this point in my reply to the Second Objections, under the headings *Thirdly* and *Fourthly*, where I made a distinction between what we in fact perceive clearly and what we remember having perceived clearly on a previous occasion.² To begin with, we are sure that God exists because we attend to the arguments which prove this; but subsequently it is enough for us to remember that we perceived something clearly in order for us to be certain that it is true. This would not be sufficient if we did not know that God exists and is not a deceiver.

As to the fact that there can be nothing in the mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, of which it is not aware,³ this seems to me to be self-evident. For there is nothing that we can understand to be in the mind, regarded in this way, that is not a thought or dependent on a thought. If it were not a thought or dependent on a thought it would not belong to the mind *qua* thinking thing; and we cannot have any thought of which we are not aware at the very moment when it is in us. In view of this I do not doubt that the mind begins to think as soon as it is implanted in the body of an infant, and that it is immediately aware of its thoughts,

Reply concerning the
Cartesian circle

The mind as
essentially conscious

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1 *Ibid.* 2 Above pp. 100f, pp. 103f. 3 Above pp. 33, 150.

even though it does not remember this afterwards because the impressions of these thoughts do not remain in the memory.

247 But it must be noted that, although we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds, we are not always aware of the mind's faculties or powers, except potentially. By this I mean that when we concentrate on employing one of our faculties, then immediately, if the faculty in question resides in our mind, we become actually aware of it, and hence we may deny that it is in the mind if we are not capable of becoming aware of it.

REPLY TO THE POINTS WHICH MAY CAUSE DIFFICULTY TO THEOLOGIANS

I have countered M. Arnauld's first group of arguments and I have side-stepped the second group. The arguments in the final section I completely agree with, except for the last one, and here I hope I can persuade him, without difficulty, to come round to my view.

I completely concede, then, that the contents of the First Meditation, and indeed the others, are not suitable to be grasped by every mind. I have stated this whenever the opportunity arose, and I shall continue to do so. This was the sole reason why I did not deal with these matters in the *Discourse on the Method*, which was written in French, but reserved them instead for the *Meditations*, which I warned should be studied only by very intelligent and well-educated readers. No one should object that I would have done better to avoid writing on matters which a large number of people ought to avoid reading about; for I regard these matters as so crucial that I am convinced that without them no firm or stable results can ever be established in philosophy. Although fire and knives cannot safely be handled by careless people or children, no one thinks that this is a reason for doing without them altogether, since they are so useful for human life.

248 The next point concerns the fact that in the Fourth Meditation I dealt only 'with the mistakes we commit in distinguishing between the true and the false and not those that occur in our pursuit of good and evil', and that when I asserted that 'we should assent only to what we clearly know' this was always subject to the exception of 'matters which belong to faith and the conduct of life'.¹ Now this is something that the entire context of my book makes clear; moreover I have explained the point quite explicitly in my reply to the Second Objections, under the heading *Fifthly*, and I have also given advance warning of it in the Synopsis.² I say this in order to show how much I respect M. Arnauld's judgement and how much I welcome his advice.

1 Above pp. 151f. 2 Above pp. 11, 106.

There remains the sacrament of the Eucharist, with which M. Arnauld believes my views are in conflict. He says: 'We believe on faith that the substance of the bread is taken away from the bread of the Eucharist and only the accidents remain'; and he thinks that I do not admit that there are any real accidents but recognize only modes which are unintelligible apart from some substance for them to inhere in, and hence that they cannot exist without such a substance.¹

I think I can easily get round this objection if I say that I have never denied that there are real accidents. It is true that in the *Optics* and the *Meteorology* I did not make use of such qualities in order to explain the matters which I was dealing with, but in the *Meteorology*, p. 164, I expressly said that I was not denying their existence.² And in the *Meditations*, although I was supposing that I did not yet have any knowledge of them, I did not thereby suppose that none existed. The analytic style of writing that I adopted there allows us from time to time to make certain assumptions that have not yet been thoroughly examined; and this comes out in the First Meditation where I made many assumptions which I proceeded to refute in the subsequent *Meditations*. Further, it was certainly not my intention at that point to establish any definite results concerning the nature of accidents; I simply set down what appeared to be true of them on a preliminary survey. Lastly, my saying that modes are not intelligible apart from some substance for them to inhere in should not be taken to imply any denial that they can be separated from a substance by the power of God; for I firmly insist and believe that many things can be brought about by God which we are incapable of understanding. 249

But if I may express myself rather more freely, I will not hide the fact that I am convinced that what affects our senses is simply and solely the surface that constitutes the limit of the dimensions of the body which is perceived by the senses. For contact with an object takes place only at the surface, and nothing can have an effect on any of our senses except through contact, as not just I but all philosophers, including even

1 Above p. 153.

2 Descartes' page reference is to the 1637 edition of the *Meteorology*. The relevant passage runs as follows:

To make you accept all these suppositions more easily, bear in mind that I do not conceive of these particles of terrestrial matter as atoms or indivisible particles. I regard them as all being composed of one single kind of matter, and believe that each of them could be divided repeatedly in infinitely many ways, and that there is no more difference between them than there is between stones of various different shapes cut from the same rock. Bear in mind too, that to avoid a breach with the philosophers, I have no wish to deny any further items which they may imagine in bodies over and above what I have described, such as 'substantial forms', their 'real qualities', and so on. It simply seems to me that my arguments must be all the more acceptable in so far as I can make them depend on fewer things. (AT VI, 239)

Aristotle, maintain. So bread or wine, for example, are perceived by the senses only in so far as the surface of the bread or wine is in contact with our sense organs, either immediately, or via the air or other bodies, as I maintain, or, as many philosophers hold, by the intervention of 'intentional forms'.¹

250 But we must note that our conception of the surface should not be based merely on the external shape of a body that is felt by our fingers; we should also consider all the tiny gaps that are found in between the particles of flour that make up the bread, and the tiny gaps between the particles of alcohol, water, vinegar and lees or tartar that are mixed together to form wine; and the same applies to the particles of other bodies. For, since these particles have various shapes and motions, they can never be joined together, however tightly, without many spaces being left between them – spaces which are not empty but full of air or other matter. Thus in the case of bread, we can see with the naked eye relatively large gaps which can be filled not just with air but with water or wine or other liquids. And since bread does not lose its identity despite the fact that the air or other matter contained in its pores is replaced, it is clear that this matter does not belong to the substance of the bread. Hence the surface of the bread is not the area most closely marked out by the outline of an entire piece of bread, but is the surface immediately surrounding its individual particles.

We must also note that not only does this surface move in its entirety when a whole piece of bread is moved from one place to another, but there is also partial movement when some particles of the bread are agitated by air or other bodies which enter its pores. Hence if there are any bodies whose nature is such that some or all of their parts are in continual motion (which I think is true of most of the particles of bread and all those of wine), then the surfaces of these bodies must be understood to be in some sort of continual motion.

251 Finally we must note that the surface of the bread or wine or any other body should not in this context be taken to be a part of the substance or the quantity of the body in question, nor should it be taken to be a part of the surrounding bodies. It should be taken to be simply the boundary that is conceived to be common to the individual particles and the bodies that surround them; and this boundary has absolutely no reality except a modal one.

Given that contact occurs only at this boundary, and that we have sensory awareness of something only by contact, we may now consider

¹ According to the scholastic theory referred to here, what is directly perceived via the senses is not the object itself but a 'form' or 'semblance' (Lat. *species*) transmitted from object to observer.

the statement that the substances of the bread and wine are changed into the substance of something else in such a way that this new substance is contained within the same boundaries as those occupied by the previous substances, or exists in precisely the same place where the bread and wine were – or rather (since their boundaries are in continual motion) in the same place where they would be if they were still present. Clearly, from this statement alone, it necessarily follows that the new substance must affect all our senses in exactly the same way as that in which the bread and wine would be affecting them if no transubstantiation had occurred.

Now the teaching of the Church in the Council of Trent session 13, canons 2 and 4 is that 'the whole substance of the bread is changed into the substance of the body of Our Lord Christ while the form¹ of the bread remains unaltered'. Here I do not see what can be meant by the 'form' of the bread if not the surface that is common to the individual particles of the bread and the bodies which surround them.

As I have already said, it is at this surface alone that contact occurs. And Aristotle himself admits, in the *De Anima*, Book 3, Chapter 13, that not just the sense that is specifically called the sense of touch but 'all the other senses, too, perceive by means of touching': 'καὶ τὰ ἄλλα αἰσθητήρια ἀφ'ἧ αἰσθάνεται'.

Everyone agrees that 'form' here means precisely what is required 252 in order to act on the senses. And everyone who believes that the bread is changed into the body of Christ also supposes that this body of Christ is precisely contained within the same surface that would contain the bread were it present. Christ's body, however, is not supposed to be present in a place strictly speaking, but to be present 'sacramentally and with that form of existence which we cannot express in words but nonetheless, when our thought is illumined by faith, can understand to be possible with God, and in which we should most steadfastly believe'.² All these matters are so neatly and correctly explained by means of my principles that I have no reason to fear that anything here will give the slightest offence to orthodox theologians; on the contrary I am confident that I will receive their hearty thanks for putting forward opinions in physics which are far more in accord with theology than those commonly accepted. For as far as I know, the Church has never taught that the 'forms' of the bread, and wine that remain in the sacrament of the Eucharist are real accidents, which miraculously subsist on their own

1 Lat. *species*; see preceding footnote.

2 A further quotation from session 13 of the Council of Trent; see preceding paragraph but one. The decrees of the Council (1545–63) were and are a recognized authority on matters of Roman Catholic doctrine.

when the substance in which they used to inhere has been removed.¹

253 It may be, however, that the theologians who first attempted to give a philosophical account of this topic were so firmly convinced that the accidents which stimulate our senses were something real and distinct from a substance that it did not even cross their minds that there could ever be any doubt on this matter. And hence, without any scrutiny or valid argument, they supposed that the 'forms' of the bread were real accidents of this sort; and they then became wholly occupied with explaining how these accidents could exist without a subject. But, as it turned out, they found that this task presented so many difficulties that this alone should have told them that they had strayed from the true path, like travellers who come upon rough ground and impassable terrain.

First of all, they seem to run into a contradiction – at least those who concede that all sense-perception occurs by means of contact – in supposing that objects, in order to stimulate the senses, require anything more than the various configurations of their surfaces; for it is self-evident that a surface is on its own sufficient to produce contact. If, however, they do not concede that sense-perception occurs through contact, then nothing they can contribute to the topic will have any semblance of truth.

Next, the human mind cannot think of the accidents of the bread as real, and yet existing apart from its substance, without conceiving of them by employing the notion of a substance. So it seems to be a contradiction, given that the whole substance of the bread changes, as the Church believes, to suppose that something real which was previously in the bread nonetheless remains. For if something real is understood to remain it must be thought of as something which subsists; and though the word 'accident' may be used to describe it, it must nonetheless be conceived of as a substance. Hence the supposition that real accidents remain is in fact just like saying that the whole substance of the bread
254 changes but nevertheless a part of that substance called a 'real accident' remains. And though this may not be a verbal contradiction, it certainly involves a conceptual contradiction.

This seems to be the chief reason why some people have taken issue with the Church of Rome on this matter. But surely everyone agrees that when we are free, and there is no theological or indeed philosophical reason to compel us to adopt an alternative view, we should prefer opinions that cannot give others any opportunity or pretext for turning

¹ The seven paragraphs that follow were not included in the first edition of the *Meditations with Objections and Replies*, which simply prints a short concluding sentence at this point.

away from the true faith. Yet the supposition of real accidents is inconsistent with theological arguments, as I think I have just shown clearly enough; and it is also completely opposed to philosophical principles, as I hope I shall clearly demonstrate in the comprehensive philosophical treatise on which I am now working.¹ I shall show there how colour, taste, heaviness, and all other qualities which stimulate the senses, depend simply on the exterior surface of bodies.

Lastly, we cannot suppose that there are real accidents without gratuitously adding something new and indeed incomprehensible to the miracle of the transubstantiation (which can be inferred simply from the words of the consecration). The gratuitous addition would involve the alleged real accidents existing apart from the substance of the bread in such a way that they do not thereby themselves become substances. This is not only contrary to human reason but also violates the theological axiom that the words of the consecration bring about nothing more than what they signify; moreover theologians prefer not to attribute to miracles what can be explained by natural reason. All these difficulties are completely removed if my explanation of this matter is adopted. For my account not only makes it unnecessary to posit a miracle in order to explain the preservation of the accidents once the substance has been removed, but it goes so far as to make it impossible for them to be removed without a fresh miracle (e.g. one which would alter the relevant dimensions). Tradition has it that this has sometimes occurred when in place of the consecrated bread some flesh, or a tiny child, has appeared in the hands of the priest. But it has never been believed that these happenings were due to the cessation of a miracle; they have always been ascribed to a new miracle. 255

Moreover, there is nothing incomprehensible or difficult in the supposition that God, the creator of all things, is able to change one substance into another, or in the supposition that the latter substance remains within the same surface that contained the former one. Nor can anything be more in accordance with reason or more widely accepted among philosophers than the general statement that not just all sense-perception but, in general, all action between bodies occurs through contact, and that this contact can take place only at the surface. It clearly follows from this that any given surface must always act and react in the same way, even though the substance which is beneath it is changed.

So if I may speak the truth here without fear of causing offence, I venture to hope that a time will come when the theory of real accidents will be rejected by theologians as irrational, incomprehensible and hazardous for the faith, while my theory will be accepted in its place as

¹ Descartes refers to the *Principles of Philosophy*; see esp. Part 4, arts. 198ff: vol. 1, p. 284.

certain and indubitable. I thought it right to state this openly here, in order to forestall, as far as I could, the slanders of those who want to seem more learned than others and are thus never more annoyed than when some new proposal is made in the sciences which they cannot pretend they knew about already. The truer and more important such people believe a doctrine is, the more fiercely, in many cases, they will attack it; and when they are unable to refute it by rational argument, they will claim without any justification that it is inconsistent with holy scripture and revealed truth. To try to use the authority of the Church in order to subvert the truth in this way is surely the height of impiety. But I appeal against the verdict of such people to the higher court of pious and orthodox theologians to whose judgement and correction I most willingly submit myself.

those who are too assiduous in their studies are not suited to the pursuit of truth; and those who know me will certainly find it hard to suppose that this saying applies to me. But we should pay special attention to the phrase 'those things that are done under the sun'. This phrase frequently recurs in the book, and always refers to natural things, leaving out their subordination to God; this is because God is above all things, and hence is not included in those which are *under* the sun. Thus the true sense of the passage cited is that man cannot achieve correct knowledge of natural things so long as he does not know God, which is just what I too have asserted. Finally, in Chapter 3, verse 19, the statements 'The death of man is as the death of the beasts' and 'Man hath no pre-eminence above a beast' are obviously intended to apply only to the body; for the passage mentions only things which belong to the body. Immediately afterwards we find a separate comment about the soul: 'Who knoweth if the spirit of the sons of Adam goeth upward and if the spirit of the beasts goeth downward?' In other words, who knows whether human souls are destined to enjoy celestial bliss, so long as man relies on human reasoning and does not turn to God? Now I have certainly tried to prove by natural reason that the human soul is not corporeal, but I grant that only faith can enable us to know whether it will ascend above.

6. As for the freedom of the will,¹ the way in which it exists in God is quite different from the way in which it exists in us. It is self-contradictory to suppose that the will of God was not indifferent from eternity with respect to everything which has happened or will ever happen; for it is impossible to imagine that anything is thought of in the divine intellect as good or true, or worthy of belief or action or omission, prior to the decision of the divine will to make it so. I am not speaking here of temporal priority: I mean that there is not even any priority of order, or nature, or of 'rationally determined reason' as they call it, such that God's idea of the good impelled him to choose one thing rather than another. For example, God did not will the creation of the world in time because he saw that it would be better this way than if he had created it from eternity; nor did he will that the three angles of a triangle should be equal to two right angles because he recognized that it could not be otherwise, and so on. On the contrary, it is because he willed to create the world in time that it is better this way than if he had created it from eternity; and it is because he willed that the three angles of a triangle should necessarily equal two right angles that this is true and cannot be otherwise; and so on in other cases. There is no problem in the fact that the merit of the saints may be said to be the cause of their obtaining eternal life; for it is not the cause of this reward in the sense that it

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¹ Above pp. 28of.

determines God to will anything, but is merely the cause of an effect of which God willed from eternity that it should be the cause. Thus the supreme indifference to be found in God is the supreme indication of his omnipotence. But as for man, since he finds that the nature of all goodness and truth is already determined by God, and his will cannot tend towards anything else, it is evident that he will embrace what is good and true all the more willingly, and hence more freely, in proportion as he sees it more clearly. He is never indifferent except when
 433 he does not know which of the two alternatives is the better or truer, or at least when he does not see this clearly enough to rule out any possibility of doubt. Hence the indifference which belongs to human freedom is very different from that which belongs to divine freedom. The fact that the essences of things are said to be indivisible¹ is not relevant here. For, firstly, no essence can belong univocally to both God and his creatures; and, secondly, indifference does not belong to the essence of human freedom, since not only are we free when ignorance of what is right makes us indifferent, but we are also free – indeed at our freest – when a clear perception impels us to pursue some object.

7. My conception of the surface by which I think our senses are affected² is exactly the same as the normal conception which all mathematicians and philosophers have (or should have), when they distinguish a surface from a body and suppose it to be wholly lacking in depth. But the term 'surface' is used in two senses by mathematicians. In one sense they use the term of a body whose length and breadth alone they are studying and which is considered quite apart from any depth it may have, even though the possession of some degree of depth is not ruled out; alternatively, they use the term simply for a mode of body, in which case all depth is completely denied. So to avoid this ambiguity I stated that I was talking of the surface which is merely a mode and hence cannot be a part of a body. For a body is a substance, and a mode cannot be a part of a substance. But I did not deny that the surface is the boundary of a body; on the contrary it can quite properly be called the boundary of the contained body as much as of the containing one, in the sense in
 434 which bodies are said to be contiguous when their boundaries are together. For when two bodies are in mutual contact there is a single boundary common to both which is a part of neither; it is the same mode of each body, and it can remain even though the bodies are removed, provided only that other bodies of exactly the same size and shape take their places. Indeed, the kind of place characterized by the Aristotelians as 'the surface of the surrounding body' can be understood to be a surface in no other sense but this, namely as something which is not a

1 Above p. 281. 2 *Ibid.*

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