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Meditations on First Philosophy in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction the human soul and body

René Descartes

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but which is not in the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.—In his original text, Descartes is following a tradition (started by Aristotle) which uses ‘first philosophy’ as a label for the study of metaphysics.

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First Meditation: On what can be called into doubt

Some years ago I was struck by how many false things I had believed, and by how doubtful was the structure of beliefs that I had based on them. I realized that if I wanted to establish anything in the sciences that was stable and likely to last, I needed—just once in my life—to demolish everything completely and start again from the foundations. It looked like an enormous task, and I decided to wait until I was old enough to be sure that there was nothing to be gained from putting it off any longer. I have now delayed it for so long that I have no excuse for going on *planning* to do it rather than getting to work. So today I have set all my worries aside and arranged for myself a clear stretch of free time. I am here quite alone, and at last I will devote myself, sincerely and without holding back, to demolishing my opinions.

I can do this without showing that all my beliefs are false, which is probably more than I could ever manage. My reason tells me that as well as withholding assent from propositions that are obviously •false, I should also withhold it from ones that are •not completely certain and indubitable. So all I need, for the purpose of rejecting all my opinions, is to find in each of them at least *some* reason for doubt. I can do this without going through them one by one, which would take forever: once the foundations of a building have been undermined, the rest collapses of its own accord; so I will go straight for the basic principles on which all my former beliefs rested.

Whatever I have accepted until now as most true has come to me through my senses. But occasionally I have found that they have deceived me, and it is unwise to trust

completely those who have deceived

[The next paragraph presents a series of examples that I set forth. It is set out here as a discussion because I want to show how Descartes presented it.]

Hopeful: Yet although the senses sometimes deceive me about objects that are very small, such as gnat wings, they apply to my belief that I am here, sitting at my desk, a winter dressing-gown, holding a quill in my hands, and so on. It seems to be only the senses that deceive me about beliefs like these, which come from the intellect. For example: how can I doubt that the parts of my body are mine? To doubt such things is to doubt that myself to brain-damaged madmen. Kings are kings when really they are peasants, men dressed in purple when they are dressed in rags, pumpkins, or made of glass. Such a man would be thought equally mad if I doubted that I was

Doubtful (sarcastically): What a fool I am for doubting! As if I were not a man who sleeps and wakes all the same experiences while asleep and awake—indeed sometimes even more so. In my dreams I am convinced of just what I am, that I am sitting by the fire in my study, when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!

Hopeful: Yet right now my eyes are open, when I look at this piece of paper I am awake, I am not asleep; when I rub one hand against the other deliberately and know what I am doing, such things happen with such clarity to someone

Doubtful: Indeed! As if I didn't remember other occasions when I have been tricked by exactly similar thoughts while asleep! As I think about this more carefully, I realize that there is never any reliable way of distinguishing being awake from being asleep. This discovery makes me feel dizzy, [joke:] which itself reinforces the notion that I may be asleep!

Suppose then that I am dreaming—it isn't true that I, with my eyes open, am moving my head and stretching out my hands. Suppose, indeed that I don't even *have* hands or any body at all. Still, it has to be admitted that the visions that come in sleep are like paintings: they must have been made as copies of real things; so at least these general *kinds* of things— eyes, head, hands and the body as a whole—must be real and not imaginary. For even when painters try to depict sirens and satyrs with the most extraordinary bodies, they simply jumble up the limbs of different kinds of real animals, rather than inventing natures that are entirely new. If they do succeed in thinking up something completely fictitious and unreal—not remotely like anything ever seen before—at least the colours used in the picture must be real. Similarly, although these general kinds of things— eyes, head, hands and so on—could be imaginary, there is no denying that certain even simpler and more universal kinds of things are real. These are the elements out of which we make all our mental images of things—the true and also the false ones.

These simpler and more universal kinds include *body*, and *extension*; the *shape* of extended things; their *quantity*, *size* and *number*; the *places* things can be in, the *time* through which they can last, and so on.

So it seems reasonable to conclude that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all other sciences dealing with things that have complex structures are doubtful; while arithmetic, geometry and other studies of the simplest and most general

things—whether they really exist or not—must be something certain and indubitable. For example, whether I am awake or asleep, two plus three makes five and a square has four sides. It seems impossible to suppose that such truths might be false.

However, I have for many years been troubled by the thought of an all-powerful God who made me and who knows that I am. How do I know that he is not deceiving me? That there is no earth, no sky, not even I, but only a void, no shape, no size, no place, while nevertheless things appear to me to exist? And what if I am wrong? And that others go wrong even when they think they have the most perfect knowledge; so how do I know that I do not go wrong every time I add two and two and say four? Or of a square? Well, you might say that I could be deceived like that, because he is not good. But, I reply, if God's goodness is infinite, he will not let me be deceived all the time. He will stop him from allowing me to be deceived all the time. Yet clearly I sometimes *am* deceived.

Some people would deny the existence of God rather than believe that even if there is a God, he deceives me. Let us grant them—for purposes of argument—that there is no God, and theology is fiction. I am a product of fate or chance or of the laws of nature and its causes and effects. But the *less* powerful the cause, the *more* likely it is that I will be deceived all the time—because deception is a perfection, not an imperfection. Having no answer, I am driven back to the position that I was in when I raised about any of my former beliefs. I conclude in a flippant or casual way that I am not a product of powerful and well thought-out causes. I want to discover any certainty, I must

from these former beliefs just as carefully as I withhold it from obvious falsehoods.

It isn't enough merely to have noticed this, though; I must make an effort to remember it. My old familiar opinions keep coming back, and against my will they capture my belief. It is as though they had a *right* to a place in my belief-system as a result of long occupation and the law of custom. These habitual opinions of mine are indeed highly probable; although they are in a sense doubtful, as I have shown, it is more reasonable to believe than to deny them. But if I go on viewing them in that light I shall never get out of the habit of confidently assenting to them. To conquer that habit, therefore, I had better switch right around and pretend (for a while) that these former opinions of mine are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until I have something to counter-balance the weight of old opinion, and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents me from judging correctly. However far I go in my distrustful attitude, no actual harm will come of it, because my project won't affect how I •act, but only how I •go about acquiring knowledge.

So I shall suppose that some malicious, powerful, cun-

ning demon has done all he can to deceive me, and that this being done by God, who is the source of truth. I shall think that the things I see on earth, colours, shapes, sounds and smells are all merely dreams that the demon has contrived to pass my judgment. I shall consider myself as having no body or flesh, or blood or senses, but as being deceived that I had all these things. I shall not let my train of thought; and even if I can't do otherwise, I shall at least do what I *can* do, which is to stop myself from accepting any falsehoods, so that I shall not be deceived by a powerful and cunning he may be— even in the slightest. This will be hard if I am overcome by laziness pulls me back into my old habits. I am like a man who dreams that he is free, starts to wake up, and wants to go on dreaming, but is pulled up, so I am content to slide back into my old habits, for fear being shaken out of them because I am not used to peaceful sleep may be followed by a nightmare, and that I shall have to struggle not to fall into the imprisoning darkness of the problem.

Second Meditation:

The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than

Yesterday's meditation raised doubts—ones that are too serious to be ignored—which I can see no way of resolving. I feel like someone who is suddenly dropped into a deep

whirlpool that tumbles him around and around, and cannot stand on the bottom nor swim to the surface, but must force my way up, and try once more.

that I started on yesterday. I will set aside anything that admits of the slightest doubt, treating it as though I had found it to be outright false; and I will carry on like that until I find something certain, or—at worst—until I become certain that there is no certainty. Archimedes said that if he had one firm and immovable point he could lift the world with a long enough lever; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one little thing that is solid and certain.

I will suppose, then, that everything I see is fictitious. I will believe that my memory tells me nothing but lies. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are illusions. So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain!

[This paragraph is presented as a further to-and-fro argument between two people. Remember that this isn't how Descartes wrote it.]

Hopeful: Still, how do I know that there isn't something—not on that list—about which there is no room for even the slightest doubt? Isn't there a God (call him what you will) who gives me the thoughts I am now having?

Doubtful: But why do I think this, since I might myself be the author of these thoughts?

Hopeful: But then doesn't it follow that I am, at least, *something*?

Doubtful: This is very confusing, because I have just said that I have no senses and no body, and I am so bound up with a body and with senses that one would think that I can't exist without them. Now that I have convinced myself that there is nothing in the world—no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies—does it follow that I don't exist either?

Hopeful: No it does not follow; for if I *convinced myself of something* then I certainly *existed*.

Doubtful: But there is a supremely powerful and cunning deceiver who deliberately deceives me all the time!

Hopeful: Even then, if he is deceiving me I undoubtedly

exist: let him deceive me all he can, he cannot make me about that *I am nothing* while *I think*. After thoroughly thinking the matter over, I realize that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, must be true. I cannot doubt it or think it.

But this 'I' that must exist—I still don't understand what it is; so I am at risk of conceiving something else, thereby falling into error in the future. But what that I maintain is the most certain and true. In fact, straight about what this 'I' is, I shall know more about what I believed myself to be in my meditation. I will eliminate from the list of things that could be even slightly called into question anything I have been using, which will leave me with only myself that are certain and unshakable.

Well, then, what did I think I was? A man? Shall I say 'a rational animal'? I will have to ask what an animal is, and this question would lead me on to other questions that would take more time than I can spend. On the beliefs that spontaneously came into my mind whenever I thought about what I was, I had been that I had a face, hands, arms, legs, and other of bodily parts that corpses also have. My next belief was that I ate and drank, and that I engaged in sense-perception. All these things, I thought, were done by *the soul* (= 'the mind'); it has no religious implications. As to what this soul was like, I imagined it to be thin and filmy—like a wind or fire—without any more solid parts. I was more sure of this than of thinking that I knew exactly what I was. If I had tried to put my conception of the soul into words, I would have said this:

By a 'body' I understand whatever has a definite shape and position, and can occupy a ·region of· space in such a way as to keep every other body out of it; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways.

I would have added that a body can't start up movements by itself, and can move only through being moved by other things that bump into it. It seemed to me quite out of character for a body to be able to •initiate movements, or to be able to •sense and think, and I was amazed that certain bodies—·namely, human ones·—*could* do those things.

But now that I am supposing there is a supremely powerful and malicious deceiver who has set out to trick me in every way he can—*now* what shall I say that I am? Can I *now* claim to have any of the features that I used to think belong to a body? When I think about them really carefully, I find that they are all open to doubt: I shan't waste time by showing this about each of them separately. Now, what about the features that I attributed to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now ·I am pretending that· I don't have a body, these are mere fictions. Sense-perception? One needs a body in order to perceive; and, besides, when dreaming I have seemed to perceive through the senses many things that I later realized I had not perceived in that way. Thinking? At last I have discovered it—thought! This is the one thing that can't be separated from me. I am, I exist—that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. But perhaps no longer than that; for it *might* be that if I stopped thinking I would stop existing; and ·I have to treat that possibility as though it were actual, because· my present policy is to reject everything that isn't necessarily true. Strictly speaking, then, I am simply a thing that thinks—a mind, or soul, or intellect, or reason, these being words whose meaning I have only just come to know. Still, I am a real, existing thing. What kind of

a thing? I have answered that: a t

What else am I? I will use my i anything more. I am not that stru that is called a human body; nor permeates the limbs—a wind, fire, imagine; for I have supposed all t ·because I have supposed all bodi I go on supposing *them* to be noth But these things that I suppose to are unknown to me—might they n the *I* of which I am aware? I don't shan't discuss the matter, because about things that I know. I know asking: what is this *I* that I know? depend on things of whose existen it can't depend on anything that I The word 'invent' points to what my imagination in this matter: if I that I was something or other, that mere story-telling; for imagining the shape or image of a bodily t on a theory of his about the psychology of imagination suspect, for while I know that everything relating to the imagination· could be mere drea for me to say 'I will use my ima understanding of what I am'—as am now awake, and see some truth fall asleep so as to see even more dreams'! If my mind is to get a c own nature, it had better not look

Well, then, what am I? A thing? A thing that doubts, understands, refuses, and also imagines and se

That is a long list of attributes for me to have—and it really is I who have them all. Why should it not be? Isn't it one and the same 'I' who now

doubts almost everything,
 understands some things,
 affirms this one thing—namely, that I exist and think,
 denies everything else,
 wants to know more,
 refuses to be deceived,
 imagines many things involuntarily, and

is aware of others that seem to come from the senses?

Isn't all this just as true as the fact that I exist, even if I am in a perpetual dream, and even if my creator is doing his best to deceive me? Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? The fact that it is I who doubt and understand and want is so obvious that I can't see how to make it any clearer. But the 'I' who *imagines* is also this same 'I'. For even if (as I am pretending) none of the things that I imagine really exist, I *really do imagine them*, and this is part of my thinking. Lastly, it is also this same 'I' who senses, or is aware of bodily things seemingly through the senses. Because I may be dreaming, I can't say for sure that I now see the flames, hear the wood crackling, and feel the heat of the fire; but I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'sensing' is strictly just this *seeming*, and when 'sensing' is understood in this restricted sense of the word it too is simply thinking.

All this is starting to give me a better understanding of what I am. But I still can't help thinking that bodies—of which I form mental images and which the senses investigate—are much more clearly known to me than is this puzzling 'I' that can't be pictured in the imagination. It would be surprising if this were right, though; for it

would be surprising if I had a clearer idea of bodies that I realize are doubtful, unknown and uncertain—than I have of what is true of my own self. But I see what the error is, and I turn away from it towards that error because my mind is naturally inclined, refusing to respect the boundaries of truth. Well, then; I shall let it run free for a while; but when the time comes to rein it in it won't be pulled back.

Let us consider the things that I understand best of all, namely, myself and see. I don't mean bodies in general, but my thoughts are apt to be confused—like this piece of wax, for example. It is like the honeycomb; it still tastes of honey, though the flowers from which the honey was gathered, the shape and size are plain to see; it is easily handled easily; if you rap it with your hand, it makes a sound. In short, it has everything that is necessary for a body to be known perfectly clearly. But words I hold the wax near to the fire, the smell vanishes, the colour changes, the heat increases; the wax becomes liquid. I touch it, and it no longer makes a sound. But is it still the same wax? Of course it is. So what was it about the wax that was so clearly? Evidently it was not any of the senses told me of; for all of them—taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing—would be deceived if it is still the same wax.

Perhaps what I now think about the wax's nature was all along. If that is so, it is not the sweetness of the honey, the heat, the whiteness, the shape, or the sound

more obviously to the conclusion that •I exist. What I see might not really be the wax; perhaps I don't even have eyes with which to see anything. But when I *see* or *think I see* (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not *something*. Similarly, that •*I exist* follows from the other bases for judging that •*the wax exists* - that I touch it, that I imagine it, or any other basis—and similarly for my bases for judging that anything else exists outside me. As I came to perceive the wax more distinctly by applying not just sight and touch but other considerations, all this too contributed to my knowing myself even more distinctly, because whatever goes into my perception of •the wax or of any other body must do even more to establish the nature of •my own mind. What comes to my mind from bodies, therefore, helps me to know my

mind distinctly; yet all of that part is hardly worth mentioning—when my mind contains *within itself* to it distinctly.

See! With no effort I have reached what I wanted to be! I now know that even if I were not perceived by the senses or by imagination but only by not through their being touched or by the mind alone, I can be understood; and this helps me to know that I can perceive my own mind more distinctly than I can anything else. Since the grip of doubt has now shake off, however, I want to pause a moment on this new knowledge of mine, fix it in my memory.

Third Meditation: God

[Before we move on, a translation matter should be confronted. It concerns the Latin adjectives

clarus and *distinctus*

the corresponding French adjectives

clair and *distinct*

and the corresponding English adjectives

‘vivid’ and ‘clear’.

Every other translator of this work into English has put

‘clear’ and ‘distinct’

and for a while the present translator in cowardly fashion followed suit. But the usual translation is simply wrong, and we ought to free ourselves from it. The crucial point concerns *clarus* (and everything said about that here is equally true of the French *clair*). The word can mean ‘clear’ in our sense, and when Descartes uses it **outside** the *clarus et distinctus* phrase, it seems usually to be in that sense. But **in** that phrase he uses *clarus* in its other meaning—its more common meaning in Latin—of ‘bright’ or ‘vivid’ or the like, as in *clara lux* = ‘broad daylight’. If in the phrase *clarus et distinctus* Descartes meant *clarus* in its lesser meaning of ‘clear’, then what is there left for ‘distinctus’ to mean? Descartes doesn’t explain these terms here, but in his *Principles of Philosophy* 1:45–6 he does so—in a manner that completely condemns the usual translation. He writes: ‘I call a perception *claram* when it is present and accessible to the attentive mind—just as we say that we see something *clare* when it is present to the eye’s gaze and stimulates it with a sufficient degree of strength and accessibility. I call a perception *distinctam* if, as well as being *clara*, it is so sharply separated from all other perceptions that every part of it is *clarum*. . . . The example of pain shows that a perception can be *clara* without being *distincta* but not vice versa. When for example someone feels an intense pain, his perception of it is *clarissima*, but it isn’t always clear, because people often get this perception muddled with an obscure judgment they make about something that they think exists

in the painful spot. . . .’ and so on. Of course, as stupid as that intense pain is always, it is as vivid, up-front, not shady or obscure. And that is true for every nook and cranny of it to be vivid. . . .] saying that it is in our sense ‘clear’.]

I will now shut my eyes, block out all my senses. I will regard all my mental images as empty, false and worthless (if I can block them out of my mind altogether). I will give up on myself, examine myself more deeply, and gradually to know myself more intimately. . . . That which thinks, i.e. that doubts, affirms, denies, some things, is ignorant of many others. . . . This thing also imagines and has sensations. . . . As I remarked before, even if the ideas of experience and imagination don’t come from sensory perception and imagination, they are simply as *mental* events, certainly.

That lists everything that I truly know. . . . The first thing I have, up to now, discovered is that I look more carefully to see whether I am certain of facts about myself. *I am certain that I think.* Doesn’t that tell me what it takes to know anything? In this first item of knowledge, I had a vivid and clear perception of what I know. . . . It wouldn’t be enough to make me certain if it ever turned out that something that I thought clearly was false. So I now seem to have discovered a general rule that *whatever I perceive clearly is true.*

I previously accepted as perfectly certain and evident many things that I afterwards realized were doubtful—the earth, sky, stars, and everything else that I took in through the senses—but in those cases what I perceived clearly were merely the ideas or thoughts of those things that came into my mind; and I am still not denying that those ideas occur within me. But I used also to believe that my ideas came from things outside that resembled them in all respects. Indeed, I believed this for so long that I wrongly came to think that I perceived it clearly. In fact, it was false; or anyway if it was true it was not thanks to the strength of my perceptions.

But what about when I was considering something simple and straightforward in arithmetic or geometry, for example that two plus three makes five? Didn't I see these things clearly enough to accept them as true? Indeed, the only reason I could find for doubting them was this: Perhaps some God could have made me so as to be deceived even in those matters that seemed most obvious. Whenever I bring to mind my old belief in the supreme power of God, I have to admit that God could, if he wanted to, easily make me go wrong even about things that I think I see perfectly clearly. But when I turn my thought onto the things themselves—the ones I think I perceive clearly—I find them so convincing that I spontaneously exclaim: 'Let him do his best to deceive me! He will never bring it about that I am nothing while I think I am something; or make it true in the future that I have never existed, given that I do now exist; or bring it about that two plus three make more or less than five, or anything else like this in which I see a plain contradiction.' Also, since I have no evidence that there is a deceiving God, and don't even know for sure that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt that depends purely on this supposition of a deceiving God is a very slight and theoretical one. However, I shall want to remove even this slight reason for doubt; so when I get the

opportunity I shall examine whether (there is) whether he can be a deceiver seems, then I can never be *quite* ce

First, if I am to proceed in an or my thoughts into definite kinds, a properly be said to be true or false. so to speak, images or pictures of t a man, or a chimera, or the sky, o strictly speaking these are the only called 'ideas'. Other thoughts have for example when I will, or an affra thought represents some particular something more than merely the lik thoughts in this category are call while others are called judgments.

When ideas are considered sole taken to be connected to anything for whether it is •a goat that I am either way it is true *that I do imag* in the will or the emotions; for eve wicked or non-existent, it is still t that is left—the only kind of thought for mistakes—are judgments. An commonly involve is to judge that outside me. Of course, if I consider simply as aspects of my thought anything else, they could hardly le

Among my ideas, some seem t •caused from the outside, and othe by me. As I see it, •my understand what *truth* is, and what *thought* is own nature, •which means that it noise or seeing the sun or feeling t outside me; and •sirens, hippogriff

invention. But perhaps really all my ideas are caused from the outside, or all are innate, or all are made up; for I still have not clearly perceived their true origin.

But my main question now concerns the ideas that I take to come from things outside me: why do I think they resemble these things? Nature has apparently taught me to think that they do. But also I know from experience that these ideas don't depend on my will, and thus don't depend simply on me. They often come into my mind without my willing them to: right now, for example, I have a feeling of warmth, whether I want to or not, and that leads me to think that this sensation or idea of heat comes from something other than myself, namely the heat of a fire by which I am sitting. And it seems natural to suppose that what comes to me from that external thing will be like it rather than unlike it.

Now let me see if these arguments are strong enough. When I say 'Nature taught me to think this', all I mean is that •I have a spontaneous impulse to believe it, *not* that •I am shown its truth by some natural light. There is a great difference between those. Things that are revealed by the natural light—for example, that *if I am doubting then I exist*—are not open to any doubt, because no other faculty that might show them to be false could be as trustworthy as the natural light. My natural *impulses*, however, have no such privilege: I have often come to think that they had pushed me the wrong way on moral questions, and I don't see any reason to trust them in other things.

Then again, although these ideas don't depend on my will, it doesn't follow that they must come from things located outside me. Perhaps they come from some faculty of mine other than my will—one that I don't fully know about—which produces these ideas without help from external things; this is, after all, just how I have always thought ideas are

produced in me when I am dreaming. My ideas, or impulses that I have been talking about, which are opposed to *my will*, come from within me. I have no evidence that *I* can cause things that resemble these things.

Finally, even if these ideas *do* come from things other than myself, it doesn't follow that they resemble those things. Indeed, I think I have often dreamed of things very unlike my ideas of them. For example, I have had for me two different ideas of the sun: •the one is based on the senses—it is a prime example of an idea that must have an external source—and it makes me think of a small; •the other is based on astronomy—it is based on notions that are in part constructed by me in some other way—and it makes the sun to be many times larger than the first. These two ideas cannot both resemble the sun. The first convinces me that the idea that I have of the sun comes directly from the sun itself in fact.

These considerations show that I cannot be deceived, but merely some blind impulse that I have. I think there exist outside me things that resemble these 'likenesses' of themselves through the natural light in other way.

Perhaps, though, there is another way to see whether some of the things of which I have ideas do exist outside me. Considered in themselves, my ideas seem to be all on a par with each other, from inside me in the same way. I have ideas representing things other than themselves, but they differ widely. Undoubtedly, some of these substances amount to something more than themselves more representative reality, and some that merely represent modes [= 'qualities'] of things that gives me my understanding of them.

infinite, unchangeable, omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of everything that exists except for himself—certainly has in it more representative reality than the ideas that represent merely finite substances.

Now it is obvious by the natural light that the total cause of something must contain at least as much reality as does the effect. For where could the effect get its reality from if not from the cause? And how could the cause give reality to the effect unless it first had that reality itself? Two things follow from this: that something can't arise from nothing, and that what is more perfect—that is, contains in itself more reality—can't arise from what is less perfect. And this is plainly true not only for 'actual' or 'intrinsic' reality (as philosophers call it) but also for the *representative* reality of ideas—that is, the reality that an idea represents. A stone, for example, can begin to exist only if it is produced by something that contains—either straightforwardly or in some higher form—everything that is to be found in the stone; similarly, heat can't be produced in a previously cold object except by something of at least the same order of perfection as heat, and so on. (I don't say simply 'except by something that is hot', because that is not necessary. The thing could be caused to be hot by something that doesn't itself *straightforwardly* contain heat—i.e. that isn't itself *hot*—but contains heat *in a higher form*, that is, something of a higher order of perfection than heat. Thus, for example, although God is obviously not himself *hot*, he can cause something to be hot because he contains heat not straightforwardly but in a higher form.) But it is also true that *the idea of* heat or of a stone can be caused in me only by something that 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 intrinsic reality to my idea, it still can't be less real. An idea need have no intrinsic reality except what

it derives from my thought, of which the idea that has representative reality is itself. For if there is a cause that contains at least as much reality as there is *representative* reality in the effect, then it follows that an idea contains something that is more real than it must have got this from nothing; y is involved in something's being real, and so it can't be an idea, though it may not be veridical, and so it can't *come from* nothing, and so it can't *come from* nothing.

It might be thought that since the cause of an idea is merely considering in my ideas is merely considering in my ideas, it can be possessed by its cause only *representatively*, not *intrinsically*. That would mean that an idea, because only ideas have *representative* reality. But that would be wrong. Although ideas can't originate from another, there can be a chain of such ideas; eventually one must originate from a cause whose cause isn't an idea, and *that* cause must contain *intrinsically* all the reality of the idea. So an idea contains only *representatively*. So it is clear to me that my ideas are like pictures that easily *fall short* of the perfection of the things they are taken, but which can't *be* less real than the things they are taken.

The longer and more carefully I consider this, the more vividly and clearly I recognize that this is my conclusion to be? If I find that this is my conclusion to be?

•some idea of mine has so much reality that I am sure the same reality is in the cause either straightforwardly or in some higher form that I myself can't be the cause of it. Then, because everything must have a cause, it necessarily follow that

- I am not alone in the world: there exists some other thing that is the cause of that idea.

If no such idea is to be found in me, I shall have no argument to show that anything exists apart from myself; for, despite a most careful and wide-ranging survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find.

Among my ideas, apart from the one that gives me a representation of myself, which can't present any difficulty in this context, there are ideas that variously represent God, inanimate bodies, angels, animals and finally other men like myself.

As regards my ideas of other men, or animals, or angels, I can easily understand that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of bodies and of God, even if the world contained no men besides me, no animals and no angels.

As to my ideas of bodies, so far as I can see they contain nothing that is so great or excellent that it couldn't have originated in myself. For if I examine them thoroughly, one by one, as I did the idea of the wax yesterday, I realize that the following short list gives everything that I perceive vividly and clearly in them:

- 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;
- 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 qualities that can be known by touch, I think of these in such a confused and

obscure way that I don't even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether my ideas represent things or of non-things. Strictly speaking, they can be true or false; but we can call them 'false' in a certain sense—we call them false if they represent a non-thing as a thing. For example, heat and cold have so little clarity that they don't enable me to know whether

- cold is merely the absence of heat;
- heat is merely the absence of cold;
- heat and cold are both real qualities;
- neither heat nor cold is a real quality.

If the right answer is that cold is merely the absence of heat, the idea that represents it to me is not positive and deserves to be called 'false' in the same way as other ideas of this kind.

Such ideas obviously don't have anything other than myself. •If they represent non-things—then they are deficient in some way, a deficiency or lack of perfection in some way. I can say that they arise from nothing; I can say that they are not light. •If on the other hand they are real, I can say why they shouldn't arise from myself. I can say that such a slight reality that I can't easily grasp is not a non-thing.

With regard to the vivid and clear ideas of myself and bodies, it appears that I could have no doubt about them from my idea of myself, namely *substantia*, and anything else of this kind. For I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing conceived as a substance, and I also think that I am a substance, and I conceive of myself as a thing that is a substance, and of the stone as a thing that is a substance. I think, so that the two conceptions

they seem to have the classification 'substance' in common. Again, I perceive that I now exist, and remember that I have existed •for some time; moreover, I have various thoughts that I can •count; it is in these ways that I acquire the ideas of •duration and •number that I can then transfer to other things. As for all the other elements that make up the ideas of bodies— extension, shape, position and movement—these are not straightforwardly contained in me, since I am nothing but a thinking thing; but since they are merely modes of a substance, and I am a substance, it seems possible that they are contained in me in some higher form. •That is, I am not myself extended, shaped etc., but because I am a *substance* I am (so to speak) metaphysically one up on these mere *modes*, which implies that I can contain within me whatever it takes to cause the ideas of them.

So there remains only the idea of God: is there anything in *that* which couldn't have originated in myself? By the word 'God' I understand a substance that is infinite, eternal, unchangeable, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, which created myself and anything else that may exist. The more carefully I concentrate on these attributes, the less possible it seems that *any* of them could have originated from me alone. So this whole discussion implies that God necessarily exists.

It is true that my being a substance explains my having the idea of substance; but it does not explain my having the idea of an *infinite substance*. That must come from some substance that is itself infinite. I am finite.

It might be thought that •this is wrong, because• my notion of the •infinite is arrived at merely by negating the •finite, just as my conceptions of •rest and •darkness are arrived at by negating •movement and •light. •That would be a mistake, however•. I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one,

and hence that my perception of it in some way prior to my perception of myself. Whenever I know that I doubt something, I understand that I *lack* something wholly perfect. How could I grasp the idea of a more perfect being that enables me to know my defects by comparison?

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is 'false', and thus have come from no-thing (I noted this a few moments ago). It is not cold and cold. On the contrary, it is utterly true and contains in itself more representation than any other idea; •that is, it stands for something more powerful, more real, than any other idea. It is more true—less open to the suspicion of being any other idea. This idea of a supreme being is, I say, true in the highest sense. I might imagine that such a being is unreal, but I suppose that the idea of such a being is more unreal in the way that the idea of a unicorn is, moreover, utterly vivid and clear, so that I don't grasp the infinite, or the additional attributes of God that I cannot even *touch* in my thought; for the idea of infinite not to be grasped by a finite mind is enough that I *understand* the infinite. All the attributes that I clearly perceive in some perfection—and perhaps could not be ignorant—are present in God either in some higher form. This is enough to give me of God the truest and most certain ideas.

•Here is a possible objection to what I have said. Perhaps I am greater than I myself.

all the perfections that I attribute to God are ones that I *do* have in some potential form, and they merely haven't yet shown themselves in actuality. My knowledge is gradually increasing, and I see no obstacle to its going on increasing to infinity. I might then be able to use this increased—and eventually infinite—knowledge to acquire all the other perfections of God. In that case, I already have the potentiality for these perfections—why shouldn't this potentiality be enough to enable me to have caused the idea of them—that is, to have caused my idea of God?

But all this [that is, the whole of the preceding paragraph] is impossible for three reasons. •First, though it is true that my knowledge is increasing, and that I have many potentialities that are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God, which contains absolutely nothing that is potential. Indeed, this gradual increase in knowledge is itself the surest sign of imperfection, because if I am learning more, that shows that there are things I don't know, and that is an imperfection in me. •What is more, even if my knowledge increases for ever, it will never actually be infinite, since it will never reach the point where it isn't 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, thirdly, strictly speaking *potential* being is nothing; what it takes to cause the representative being of an idea is *actual* 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 blurred by the images of things I perceive by the senses, I lose sight of the reasons why my idea of *more perfect being* has to come from a being that really is more perfect. So I want to push on with my enquiry, now asking a new question: If the more perfect being didn't exist, could I exist? My hope is that the answer to this will yield a

new proof of the existence of a perfect being. It will be easier for me to keep in mind the idea of God in concentration.

Well, if God didn't exist, from where would my idea of his existence come? It would have to come from my parents, or from some other being (a being more perfect than God, of course, but that is unthinkable).

If I had derived my existence from another being, I now doubt or want or lack anything. But if I have given myself all the perfections of God, I am God. I mustn't suppose that it would be harder to get than the ones I now have. It would have been far more difficult for me to emerge out of nothing or from nothing to acquire knowledge of the many things I now know because that would merely be giving rise to accidents. If I had derived my existence from a greater achievement—I certainly would have had the knowledge in question, which I would have to acquire, or indeed any of the attributes that would be contained in the idea of God; for that would be harder to achieve. . . .

Here is a thought that might lead to a new argument. Perhaps I have always existed. Then wouldn't it follow that there would be no end to my existence? No, it does *not* follow that I am divided into countless parts, each of which is independent of the others, so that from my existing at one time it would follow that I exist at later times, and so on, and so on. I am in existence—one might say that I exist at each moment. Anyone who thinks that I have existed at one time will understand that what it takes to keep me in existence is also needed to keep me from existing.

ment of its duration. So there's no *real* distinction between •preservation and •creation—only a *conceptual* one—and this is something that the natural light makes evident.

So I have to ask myself whether I have the power to bring it about that I, who now exist, will still exist a minute from now. For since I am nothing but a thinking thing—or anyway that is the only part of me that I am now concerned with—if I had such a power I would undoubtedly be aware of it. But I experience no such power, and this shows me quite clearly that I depend •for my continued existence• on some being other than myself.

Perhaps this being is not God, though. Perhaps I was produced by causes less perfect than God, such as my parents. No; for as I have said before, it is quite clear that there must be at least as much reality or perfection in the cause as in the effect. And therefore, given that I am a thinking thing and have within me some idea of God, the cause of me—whatever it is—must itself be a thinking thing and must have the idea of all the perfections that I attribute to God. What is the cause of this cause of me? If it is the cause of its own existence, then *it is God*; for if it has the power of existing through its own strength, then undoubtedly it also has the power of actually possessing all the perfections of which it has an idea—that is, all the perfections that I conceive to be in God. If on the other hand it gets its existence from another cause, then the question arises all over again regarding this further cause: Does *it* get its existence from itself or from another cause? Eventually we must reach the ultimate cause, and this will be God.

It is clear enough that this sequence of causes of causes can't run back to infinity, especially since I am dealing with the cause that not only produced me in the past but also preserves me at the present moment.

One might think this:

Several partial causes could have produced me. I received the idea of one attribute to God from one source, and another from another. Each of these sources is somewhere in the universe, but not all.

That can't be right, because God's unity or inseparability of all his attributes is the most important of the perfections that I have to have. The idea of his perfection as a substance couldn't have been produced by several that didn't also provide me with the idea of unity themselves; for no cause could have more perfections than that the perfections are united with each other, showing me what they are.

Lastly, as regards my parents, the idea I have ever believed about them is true. They are the cause who *keep* me in existence. Insofar as they are, indeed, they did not even *make* me. I have no idea about an arrangement of matter that could be the cause as containing me (that is, containing all I now take myself to be). So the cause-of-me that I am enquiring about is not them.

Given the failure of every other candidate, I infer that the only successful cause of me is God. I conclude that the mere fact that I have the idea of a most perfect being is a clear proof that God does indeed exist.

It remains for me only to ask *how* I got the idea of God. I didn't get it from the senses, because I didn't expect it, unexpectedly, as do most of the ideas of things to see and touch and hear things.

that I invented, either; for clearly I can't take anything away from it or to add anything to it. When an idea is sheerly invented, the inventor is free to fiddle with it—add a bit here, subtract a bit there—whereas my idea of God is a natural unit that doesn't invite or even permit such interference. The only remaining alternative is that my idea of God is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.

It is no surprise that God in creating me should have placed this idea in me, to serve as a mark of the craftsman stamped on his work. The mark need not be anything distinct from the work itself. But the mere fact that God created me makes it very believable that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness in the same way that I perceive myself. That is, when I turn my mind's eye upon myself, I understand that I am a thing that •is incomplete and •dependent on something else, and that •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 but infinitely, not just potentially but actually—and hence

that he is God. The core of the argument is that I can't exist with the nature that I have—namely, the nature of me the idea of God—if God didn't create me. To mean the very being the idea of what I am is to mean that has no defects and has all the qualities that I can't *grasp* but can somehow *touch* with my mind. It is clearly that it is not possible for him to create me if the natural light makes it clear that I must depend on some defect.

But before examining this point further, I will investigate other truths that may be discovered. I will pause here and spend some time reflecting on his attributes and contemplating his adoration on the beauty of this immortal nature. The eye of my darkened intellect cannot see clearly, but I believe through faith that the sun of truth in the next life consists in contemplating his glory. My present experience tells us that this same sun, though much less perfect, provides the greatest light for this life.

Fourth Meditation: Truth and falsity

In these past few days I have become used to keeping my mind away from the senses; and I have become strongly aware that very little is truly known about bodies, whereas much more is known about the human mind and still more about God. So now I find it easy to turn my mind away from

objects of the senses and the images of the intellect alone; these are quite different from the objects of sense and sense is made of matter. Indeed, none of the [bodily] things is as distinct as my

not doing so?

Thinking harder about this, three helpful thoughts come to me. Two concern our knowledge of God's reasons generally; the third is specifically about human error. (1) I realize that it is no cause for surprise if I don't always understand why God acts as he does. I may well find other things he has done whose reasons elude me; and that is no reason to doubt his existence. I am now aware that my nature is very weak and limited, whereas God's nature is immense, incomprehensible and infinite; so *of course* he can do countless things whose reasons I can't know. That alone is reason enough to give up, as totally useless, the attempt that physicists make to understand the world in terms of what things are *for*, that is, in terms of God's purposes. Only a very rash man would think he could discover what God's impenetrable purposes are.

(2) In estimating whether God's works are perfect, we should look at the universe as a whole, not at created things one by one. Something that might seem very imperfect if it existed on its own has a function in relation to the rest of the universe, and may be perfect when seen in that light. My decision to doubt everything has left me sure of the existence of only two things, God and myself; but when I think about God's immense power I have to admit that he did or *could* have made many things in addition to myself, so that there *may* be a universal scheme of things in which I have a place. If that is so, then judgments about what is perfect or imperfect in me should be made on the basis not just of my intrinsic nature but also of my role or function in the universe as a whole.

(3) My errors are the only evidence I have that I am imperfect. When I look more closely into these errors of mine, I discover that they have two co-operating causes—my faculty of knowledge and my faculty of choice or freedom of

the will. My errors, that is, depend on (a) my intellect and (b) my will. Let us consider (a) first. The intellect doesn't affirm or deny anything, only to present me with ideas regarding judgments; so strictly speaking it doesn't affirm or deny anything at all. There may be many existing things whose intellect gives me no ideas, but I can't say that I am *deprived* of such ideas, since my nature somehow entitled me to have them. I can't reason why God *ought* to have given me more than he did. Just because I understand that a craftsman, I don't infer that he *ought* to have made more of his works all the perfections he is capable of. So all I can say is that there are some things that this is a purely negative fact about me; I can't fly; it doesn't mean that there is something in my nature. (b) I can't complain about my lack of will or freedom of choice that isn't extended to all things since I know by experience that will is perfect in me. My will is so perfect and so great that I can't see it becoming even greater and more perfect. I can't see that this is true of my will and not of God's will in my nature. I can easily see that my will is finite, to put it mildly; and I infer that God's is much greater understanding—incomprehensible and infinite one; and the fact that I can't understand shows me that God actually has a much greater understanding. Similarly, if I examine memory at rest, I discover that in my case they are limited, while in God they are immense. I can't see my will, or freedom of choice, which is finite, to put it mildly; that I can't make sense of the idea of God's will, indeed, my thought of myself as finite, to put it mildly, depends primarily upon my will. C

greater than mine in two respects: •it is accompanied by, and made firm and effective by, much more knowledge and power than I have; and •it has far more objects than my will does—that is, God makes more choices and decisions than I do. But these comparisons—having to do with •the amount of knowledge that *accompanies* and *helps* the will, or with •the number of states of affairs to which it is *applied*—do not concern the will in itself, but rather its relations to other things. When the will is considered ·not relationally, but· strictly *in itself*, God's will does not seem any greater than mine. The will is simply one's ability to do or not do something—to accept or reject a proposition, to pursue a goal or avoid something. More accurately: the ·freedom of the· will consists in the fact that when the intellect presents us with a candidate for acceptance or denial, or for pursuit or avoidance, we have no sense that we are pushed one way or the other by any external force. I can be *free* without being *inclined both ways*. Indeed, the more strongly I incline in one direction the more free my choice is—if my inclination comes from •natural knowledge (that is, from my seeing clearly that reasons of truth and goodness point that way) or from •divine grace (that is, from some mental disposition that God has given me). Freedom is never lessened—indeed it is increased and strengthened—by •natural knowledge and •divine grace. When no reason inclines me in one direction rather than another, I have a feeling of indifference—that is, of its not mattering which way I go—and that is the poorest kind of freedom. What it displays is freedom, considered not as a perfection but rather as a lack of knowledge—a kind of negation. If I always saw clearly what was true and good, I should never have to spend time thinking about what to believe or do; and then I would be wholly free although I was never in a state of indifference.

So the power of willing that C
extremely broad in its scope and als
the cause of my mistakes. Nor is m
to blame: God gave it to me, so
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understand it correctly. Well, the
come from? Their source is the fac
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That is the source of my error and

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when there *isn't*. (1) A while ago I
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whether my thinking nature—which

the same as this corporeal nature or different from it. I take it that my intellect has not yet found any convincing reason for either answer; so I am indifferent with regard to this question—nothing pushes or pulls me towards one answer or the other, or indeed towards giving any answer.

The will is indifferent not only when the intellect is wholly ignorant but also when it doesn't have clear enough knowledge at the time when the will is trying to reach a decision. A probable conjecture may pull me one way; but when I realize that it is a mere conjecture and not a certain and indubitable reason, that in itself will push me the other way. My experience in the last few days confirms this: the mere fact that I found all my previous beliefs to be somewhat open to doubt was enough to switch me from confidently believing them to supposing them to be wholly false.

If when I don't perceive the truth vividly and clearly enough I simply *suspend judgment*, it's clear that I am behaving correctly and avoiding error. It is a misuse of my free will to have an opinion in such cases: if I choose the wrong side I shall be in error; and even if I choose the right side, I shall be at fault because I'll have come to the truth by *sheer chance* and not through *a perception of my intellect*. The latter, as the natural light shows me clearly, should be what influences my will when I affirm things. I have said that error is essentially a *privation*—a lack of something that I should have—and now I know what this privation consists in. It doesn't lie in •the will that God has given me, or even in •the mode of operation that God has built into it; rather it consists in •my misuse of my will. •Specifically, it consists in •my lack of restraint in the exercise of my will, when I form opinions on matters that I don't clearly understand•.

I can't complain that God did not give me a greater power of understanding than he did: created intellects are naturally finite, and so they naturally lack understanding of many

things. God has never owed me anything to me, nor is he obliged to him for his great generosity to me, nor is he obliged to me because he did not give me everything.

Nor can I reasonably complain that God has given me a will that extends more widely than my intellect. My intellect is a single unitary thing; its nature is such that it could be no way of taking away part of it. But my will is not the great extent of my will because it is not the will of him to whom he gave it to me?

Finally, I must not complain that God has given me the acts of will in which I go wrong. What God has given me that comes from God is wholly true and perfect. The imperfection in me that I *can* perform are essentially a privation; and this is a privation to which God consents, because it is a privation when it is considered in relation to what God would have really a privation but rather a mere fact about something that is a mere fact about something that does not involve the notion that it *ought* to be otherwise. I ought to restrain my will when I don't clearly understand. It is true that God ought to have forced me to do so. But God has given me the freedom to do as I please. In cases where he did not give me clear understanding, I am surely not to blame for that. But I am to blame for that freedom by coming to conclusions that I don't fully understand. Of course, God has arranged things so that, while keeping me free, I am still being limited in what I understand. He could do this either by giving me a clear understanding of everything I ought to think about; or by •forcing me to form opinions on matters that I don't clearly understand. I can see that in any way, I would—considered just in

existed—have been more perfect than I actually am. But the universe as a whole may have some perfection that requires that some parts of it be capable of error while others are not, so that it would be a worse universe if all its parts were exactly alike—in being immune from error. I am not entitled to complain about God's giving me a lower role in his scheme of things—by selecting me as one of the creatures that isn't protected from error.

What is more, even if I have no power to avoid error by •having a vivid perception of everything I have to think about, I can avoid it simply by •remembering to withhold judgment on anything that isn't clear to me. I admit to having the weakness that I can't keep my attention fixed on a single item of knowledge (—such as the no-judgment-when-clarity-of-perception-is-lacking rule—); but by attentive and repeated meditation I can get myself to remember it as often as the need arises, and thus to get into the habit of avoiding error.

This is where man's greatest and most important perfec-

tion is to be found; so today's meditation, which I have turned into the cause of error, has been vindicated. My error, which is right in my explanation of the cause of error, is corrected by my will so that I form opinions only on what is clear and vividly and clearly reveals, I cannot be in error. This is why. Every vivid and clear perception is of something real and positive; so it cannot be false, and must come from God. He is surely not the cause of error, and be downright contradictory to suppose that he is. So the vivid and clear perception of truth cannot be false. I have learned not only how to avoid error, but how to arrive at the truth. It is beyond question that I can reach the truth if I think hard enough. I can perfectly understand, keeping the truth before me, all other matters in which my thoughts are confused and obscure. That is what I shall be ready to do from now on.

Fifth Meditation: The essence of material things, and the existence of God considered

There are many enquiries still to be made about God's attributes, and many about my own nature (that is, the nature of my mind). I may take these up at some time; but right now I have a more pressing task. Now that I have seen how to reach the truth—what to do and what to avoid—I must try to escape from the doubts that beset me a few days ago, and see whether anything can be known for certain about material objects.

Before enquiring into whether there are any such things, I should consider the *ideas* of them in my thought, in order to see which of those ideas are distinct and which confused.

I distinctly imagine *quantity*—that is, the length, breadth and depth of the quantity, or rather of the thing that is quantified. I also enumerate the thing's parts, to which I attribute various sizes, shapes, positions and movements; and to the movements I attribute various durations, that is, I say how long each movement lasts.

Size, shape, position and so on are well known and transparent to me as *general kinds* of phenomenon, but there are also countless *particular* facts involving them that I perceive when I attend to them. The truths about all these matters are so open to me, and so much in harmony with my nature, that when I first discover any of them it feels less like •learning something new than like •remembering something I had known before, or •noticing for the first time something that was already in my mind without my having turned my mental gaze onto it.

The most important point is that I find in myself countless ideas of things that can't be called *nothing*, even if they don't exist anywhere outside me. For although I am free to think

of these ideas or not, as I choose, they do not have their own true and immutable essences under my control. Even if there are no triangles outside my thought, I am constrained in how I think of a triangle. I am constrained in how I think of a determinate nature or essence: that it is eternal, unchanging, and independent of me. The things that I can prove about triangles, that the angles equal two right angles, that the sum of its angles is its greatest angle, and so on. I know these properties of the triangle, whether or not I didn't give them a thought when they were first in my mind. So they can't have been invented by me.

It does not help to point out that I have never seen triangular bodies, so that the ideas of them do not come to me from them through the senses. I can prove truths about the properties of triangles and countless other shapes that I know through the senses. These properties are not pure nothing: whatever is true about these properties are true because I am aware of them. I have already proved that everything I am aware of is true; and even if I hadn't been aware of them, I constituted that I *have to* assent to these propositions as long as I perceive them.) I went back in the times when the objects of my attention, I regarded the clearly apparent truths of pure mathematics—including arithmetic—as the most certain of all.

The preceding two paragraphs lead to this conclusion: The mere fact that I find in my thought an idea of something *x*, and vividly and clearly perceive *x* to have a certain property, it follows that *x* really does have that property. Can I not turn this to account in a second argument to prove the existence of God? The idea of God (that is, of a supremely perfect being) is certainly one that I find within me, just as I find the ideas of shapes and numbers; and I understand from this idea that it belongs to God's nature that *he always exists*. This understanding is just as vivid and clear as what is involved in mathematical proofs of the properties of shapes and numbers. So even if I have sometimes gone wrong in my meditations in these past days, I ought still to regard the existence of God as being at least as certain as I have taken the truths of mathematics to be.

At first sight, this looks like a trick. Where things other than God are involved, I have been accustomed to distinguish a thing's existence from its essence. The question 'What is the *essence* of triangles (or flames or sparrows)?' asks what it takes for something to qualify as a triangle (or flame or sparrow). Answering this still leaves open the *existence* question, which asks whether there are any triangles (or flames or sparrows). I can easily believe that in the case of God, also, existence can be separated from essence, letting us answer the essence question about God while leaving the existence question open, so that God can be thought of as not existing. But on more careful reflection it becomes quite evident that, just as having-internal-angles-equal-to-180° can't be separated from the idea or essence of a triangle, and as the idea of highlands can't be separated from the idea of lowlands, so existence can't be separated from the essence of God. Just as it is self-contradictory to think of *highlands in a world where there are no lowlands*, so it is self-contradictory to think of *God as not existing*—that is, to

think of a supremely perfect being, namely the perfection of existence, usually translated as 'mountains in a world without mountains' but that is *obviously* not self-contradictory. It is not self-contradictory to think of a valley from this, but Descartes may have been misled. The word *vallée* can mean 'valley' in our sense but it can also mean the lower slopes of a mountain, or the plain at the foot of a mountain. So 'highlands'/'lowlands' has to be understood in a compact and fairly close to what he presumes.

Here is a possible objection to the first argument:

I can't think of God except as existing. I can think of a river without banks, but I can't think of a river without banks, though, it certainly doesn't exist. I can think of rivers in the world; so why can't I think of God? The former fact that God exists? The latter fact is not settled by my thought. I can think of a winged horse even though it doesn't exist. I can attach existence to God. I can think of God existing.

This involves false reasoning. From the fact that I can think of a river without banks, it does not follow that a river without banks exists anywhere, but simply that I can think of it. On the other hand, from the fact that I can think of God as existing it follows that *God* and not just the idea of God which is to say that God really exists. I can think of it, but I can't make it so; it doesn't create necessity the opposite way: the necessity of my thinking of God. I can think, depriving me of the necessity of existence (that is, a supreme perfection), like my freedom with or without wings.

Here is a ·further· possible objection to this line of thought:

Admittedly, once I have supposed that •all perfections belong to God, I must suppose that he exists, because existence is one of the perfections. But what entitles me to suppose God to have all perfections? Similarly, if I suppose that •all quadrilaterals can be inscribed in a circle, I have to conclude that a rhombus can be inscribed in a circle; but that is plainly false, which shows that the original supposition was wrong.

I agree that I don't have to think about God at all; but whenever I do choose to think of him, bringing the idea of *the first and supreme being* out of my mind's store, I *must* attribute all perfections to him, even if I don't attend to them individually straight away. This necessity ·in my thought· guarantees that, when I later realize that existence is a perfection, I am right to conclude then that the first and supreme being exists. Similarly, I don't ever have to imagine a triangle; but whenever I do wish to consider a figure with straight sides and three angles, I *must* attribute to it properties from which it follows that its three angles equal no more than 180° , even if I don't notice this at the time. When on the other hand I examine what figures can be inscribed in a circle, I am not compelled to think that this class includes all quadrilaterals. Indeed, I cannot—while thinking vividly and clearly—even *pretend* that all quadrilaterals can be inscribed in a circle. This kind of false pretence is vastly different from the true ideas that are innate in me, of which the first and chief is the idea of God. This idea isn't a fiction, a creature of my thought, but rather an image of a true and unchanging nature; and I have several indications that this is so. •God is the only thing I can think of whose existence necessarily belongs to its essence. •I can't make sense of there being two or more Gods of this kind; and after supposing that

one God exists, I plainly see that it existed from eternity and will stay •I perceive many other attributes of God, which I cannot remove or alter.

Whatever method of proof I use is brought back to the fact that nothing can be known to me except what I vividly and clearly perceive. That I vividly and clearly perceive the existence of God, that others can be learned only through demonstration, but once they are discovered are as certain as the obvious ones. (Compare the proof about right-angled triangles: 'The square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the other two sides.' The hypotenuse is opposite the largest angle, which is less obvious than the latter; but everyone believes it just as strongly.) •The idea of God is in the immediately obvious class, and I am certain that I were not swamped by preconceived ideas, and if my thoughts were not hemmed in and limited to those of things perceived by the senses, I would know God sooner and more easily than any other being exists; God, the only being whose existence, exists; what is more self-evident than that?

Although I came to see this only after a long time, I am now just as certain of it as I am of the truth of any other only that, but I see that all other certainties are dependent on one, so that without it I can't know anything else. The next two paragraphs explain why.

While I am perceiving something, I can't help believing it to be true. This is the nature of the idea. Here is another: I can't fix my attention on the same thing, so as to keep perceiving it, sometimes the arguments that led me to it slip out of my focus of attention.

conclusion itself. That threatens me with the following state of affairs, from which I am protected only by being aware of the existence of God:

In a case where I am not attending to the arguments that led me to a conclusion, my confidence in the conclusion might be undermined by arguments going the other way. When I think hard about triangles, for instance, it seems quite obvious to me—steeped as I am in the principles of geometry—that a triangle's three angles are equal to 180°; and while I am attending to the proof of this I can't help believing it. 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 ·but without now getting it clear in my mind again·, I can easily doubt its truth. So nothing is ever finally established and settled—I can have no true and certain knowledge, but only shifting and changeable opinions. For I can convince myself that I am naturally liable to go wrong sometimes in matters that I think I perceive as evidently as can be. This seems even more likely when I remember that I have often regarded as certainly true some propositions that other arguments have later led me to think false.

That is what my situation would be if I were not aware of the existence of God.

But now I have seen that God exists, and have understood that everything else depends on him and that he is not a deceiver; from which I have inferred that *everything that I vividly and clearly perceive must be true*. So even when I am no longer attending to the arguments that led me to

accept this (·i.e. the proposition a... as I remember that I vividly and... counter-arguments can make me... that I know for certain ·and in an u... That applies not only to this one pr... that I remember ever having prove... Why should I call these matters in... so built as to be prone to frequen... that when I have something in mir... way I cannot be in error about it... past regarded as certainly true man... recognized to be false? No: the th... doubt had not been vividly and cle... place: I had come to accept them... found to be unreliable, because I h... rule for establishing the truth. •Be... so that my present thoughts hav... of a person who is asleep? I put t... while ago. It doesn't change anyth... is evident to my intellect, even wh... is true.

Thus I see plainly that the c... knowledge depends strictly on m... God. So much so that until I... couldn't perfectly know anything... and certain knowledge of countless... God himself and other things wh... and also concerning the whole of... is the subject-matter of pure math...

none that I understand) between the tugging sensation and the decision to eat, or between the sensation of something causing pain and the mental distress that arises from it. It seems that *nature* taught me to make these judgments about objects of the senses, for I was making them before I had any arguments to support them.

(2) Later on, however, my experiences gradually undermined all my faith in the senses. A tower that had looked round from a distance appeared square from close up; an enormous statue standing on a high column didn't look large from the ground. In countless such cases I found that the judgments of the external senses were mistaken, and the same was true of the internal senses. What can be more internal than pain? Yet I heard that an amputee might occasionally seem to feel pain in the missing limb. So even in my own case, I had to conclude, it was not quite certain that a particular limb was hurting, even if I felt pain in it. To these reasons for doubting, I recently added two very general ones. •The first was that every sensory experience I ever thought I was having while awake I can also think of myself as having while asleep; and since I don't believe that what I seem to perceive in sleep comes from things outside me, I didn't see why I should be any more inclined to believe this of what I think I perceive while awake. •The second reason for doubt was that for all I knew to the contrary I might be so constituted that I am liable to error even in matters that seem to me most true. (I couldn't rule this out, because I did not know—or at least was pretending not to know—who made me.) And it was easy to refute the reasons for my earlier confidence about the truth of what I perceived by the senses. Since I seemed to be naturally drawn towards many things that reason told me to avoid, I reckoned that I should not place much confidence in what I was taught by nature. Also, I decided, the mere fact that the perceptions of the

senses didn't depend on my will that they came from outside me; produced by some faculty of mine

(3) But now, when I am beginning to doubt, I can't think of my maker better, although I don't accept everything I seem to have a mind for; neither do I think it should all be so

First, I know that if I have a will, something, God could have created it. This will corresponds to my thought. So the will can't clearly think of one thing apart from another, if the two things are distinct from one another; they are *two*—since they can be separated in the mind *how* they could be separated. I don't think I can judge that they are distinct. •I can't think of my mind as something from my body. Furthermore, I can't think of the following reason. I know that I exist as a thinking thing; from this it follows that my nature or essence consists in my being a thinking thing, even though I am also a body that is very closely joined to me. I can't think of •myself as something that is not a thinking thing, and one of •body as something that is not a body. I can't think. So it is certain that •I am a thinking thing and can exist without it.

Besides this, I find that I am capable of many kinds of thinking [= 'mental activity'], such as reasoning, sensory perception. Now, I can't think of •myself as a whole without thinking of •my mind; I can't understand •them without thinking of an intellectual substance for them to be in. The ability essentially involves *acts*, so I can't think of •that acts; so I see that •I differ from •myself as a thinking thing differs from •its properties.

faculties—such as those of moving around, changing shape, and so on—which also need a substance to belong to; but it must be a bodily or extended substance and not a thinking one, because a vivid and clear conception of those faculties includes extension but not thought. Now, I have a *passive* faculty of sensory perception, that is, an ability to *receive* and recognize ideas of perceptible objects; but I would have no use for this unless something—myself or something else—had an *active* faculty for *producing* those ideas in the first place. But this faculty can't be in me, since clearly it does not presuppose any thought on my part, and sensory ideas are produced without my cooperation and often even against my will. So sensory ideas must be produced by some substance other than me—a substance that actually *has* (either in a straightforward way or in a higher form) all the reality that is *represented* in the ideas that it produces. Either (a) this substance is a body, in which case it will •straightforwardly contain everything that is represented in the ideas; or else (b) it is God, or some creature more noble than a body, in which case it will contain •in a higher form whatever is to be found in the ideas. I can •reject (b), and be confident that God does not transmit sensory ideas to me either directly from himself or through some creature that does not straightforwardly contain what is represented in the ideas. God has given me no way of recognizing any such 'higher form' source for these ideas; on the contrary, he has strongly inclined me to believe that bodies produce them. So if the ideas were transmitted from a source other than corporeal things, God would be a deceiver; and he is not. So bodies exist. They may not all correspond exactly with my sensory intake of them, for much of what comes in through the senses is obscure and confused. But at least bodies have all the properties that I vividly and clearly understand, that is, all that fall within the province of pure mathematics.

•Those are the •clearly understood in the most general. What about •less clearly understood (for example light or sound or pain), and •bodies (for example the size or shape)? There is much doubt and uncertainty here. I have a sure hope that I can reach the truth. That is because God isn't a deceiver. He has given me the ability to correct errors in my opinions. Indeed, everything of 'natural nature' certainly contains some truth, and is understood in the most general way. I am part of the ordered system of created things. And my own nature is simply the truth that God has put on me by God.

As vividly as it teaches me about my body, it also teaches me that I have a body, that there is something wrong with this body when it is hungry or thirsty it needs food and drink, and I have no doubt that there is some truth in this.

Nature also teaches me, through my feelings of hunger, thirst and so on, that I (I mean merely *in my body* as a sailor is *in his ship*) are *closely joined to it*—intermingled with it so that it and I form a unit. If this were not the case, I would feel pain when the body was hurt but not when it was hurt in an intellectual way, like a sailor who knows when his ship needs repairs. And when the body needs repairs, I can intellectually understand this fact, but I cannot understand confused sensations of hunger and thirst. These are confused mental events that are intermingled, as it were—of the matter of the body.

Nature also teaches me that I can avoid things in the vicinity of my body, and that I can avoid these and avoid others. Also, I

great variety of colours, sounds, smells and tastes, as well as differences in heat, hardness and so on; from which I infer that the bodies that cause these sensory perceptions differ from one another in ways that *correspond to* the sensory differences, though perhaps they don't *resemble* them. Furthermore, some perceptions are pleasant while others are nasty, which shows that my body—or rather my whole self insofar as I am a combination of body and mind—can be affected by the various helpful or harmful bodies that surround it.

However, some of what I thought I had learned from nature really came not from nature but from a habit of rushing to conclusions; and those beliefs could be false. Here are a few examples:

- that if a region contains nothing that stimulates my senses, then it must be empty;
- that the heat in a body resembles my idea of heat;
- that the colour I perceive through my senses is also present in the body that I perceive;
- that in a body that is bitter or sweet there is the same taste that I experience, and so on;
- that stars and towers and other distant bodies have the same size and shape that they present to my senses.

To think clearly about this matter, I need to define exactly what I mean when I say that 'nature teaches me' something. I am not at this point taking 'nature' to refer to the totality of what God has given me. From that totality I am excluding things that belong to the mind alone, such as my knowledge that *what has been done can't be undone* (I know this through the natural light, without help from the body). I am also excluding things that relate to the body alone, such as the tendency bodies have to fall downwards. My sole concern here is with what God has given to me as a combination of

mind and body. My 'nature', then, indeed teach me to avoid what hurts and to seek what gives pleasure, and so on. But it is not for me to rush to conclusions about the truth without pausing to think about the truth of the truth about such things seen in nature alone, not to the combination of mind and body. A star has no more effect on my eye than my thinking of the star as no big thing. The pain does not come from any positive 'nature' of the star; it's just a habit of thought that I acquired in childhood, with no rational basis. I feel heat when I approach a fire, and if I am too near, there is no good reason to think that the fire resembles the heat, or resembles anything. I merely reason to suppose that something that causes feelings of heat or pain in a region contains nothing that stimulates the senses. It does not follow that it contains no bodies. I am guilty in these cases and many others of misusing the order of nature. I am misled by sensory perceptions that nature has given me, what is beneficial or harmful for my body. I know they are vivid and clear enough for me to take them to treat them as reliable guides to the truth of the bodies located outside me, but I am misled only very obscure and confused inferences.

I have already looked closely at these things to make false judgments, even though I know it occurs to me that there is a principle of error. I make regarding the things that nature has given me or avoid, and also regarding some of the things. Some cases of this are unproblematic, but I have been tricked into eating pleasant-tasting

concealed in it; but here nature urges the person towards the pleasant food, not towards the poison, which it doesn't know about. All this shows is that the person's nature doesn't know everything, and that is no surprise.

Other cases, however, raise problems. They are ones where nature urges us towards something that harms us and this can't be explained through nature's not knowing something. Sick people, for example, may want food or drink that is bad for them. They go wrong because they are ill—true, but the difficulty remains. A sick man is one of God's creatures just as a healthy one is, and in each case it seems a contradiction to suppose that God has given him a nature that deceives him. A badly made clock conforms to the laws of its nature in telling the wrong time, just as a well made and accurate clock does; and we might look at the human body in the same way. We could see it as a kind of machine made up of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in it, it would still move exactly as it now does in all the cases where movement isn't under the control of the will or, therefore, of the mind. If such a body suffers from dropsy [a disease in which abnormal quantities of water accumulate in the body], for example, and is affected by the dryness of the throat that normally produces in the mind a sensation of thirst, that will affect the nerves and other bodily parts in such a way as to dispose the body to take a drink, which will make the disease worse. Yet this is as *natural* as a healthy body's being stimulated by a similar dryness of the throat to take a drink that is good for it. In a way, we might say, it is *not* natural. Just as we could say that a clock that works badly is 'departing from its nature', we might say that the dropsical body that takes a harmful drink is 'departing from its nature', that is, from the pattern of movements that usually occur in human bodies. But that involves using

'nature' as a way of comparing one sick man with a healthy one, a bad accurate one—whereas I have been making comparisons but to speak of things themselves; and this usage

When we describe a dropsical body as 'ordered nature', therefore, we are not merely to compare sick with healthy, but in the mind-body complex that suffers from dropsy is not a mere matter of comparison. There is here a real, intrinsic error: the body is thirsty at a time when it is not. We have to enquire how it is that it does not prevent nature from deceiving it. This enquiry will fall into four main parts.

•There is a great difference between the mind and the body. Every body is by its nature divisible; the mind can't be divided. When I consider myself purely as a thinking thing, I understand myself within myself; I understand myself as simple and complete. The whole mind is in the whole body, but not by a uniting of parts. If a foot or arm or any other part of the body is taken away, nothing is thereby taken away from the faculties of willing, of understanding, and so on, these are not *parts* of the mind and the same mind that wills, understands. They are (I repeat) not *parts* of the mind, but *properties* or *powers* of it. By contrast, the body can easily be divided into parts. This shows me that it is really divisible. It would be enough to show me that the mind is not from the body, even if I did not allow for other considerations in (3) on page

•The mind isn't immediately affected by all parts of the body but only by the brain—or perhaps just by the small part of it which is said to contain the 'common sense'. [Descartes is referring to the pineal gland. The 'common sense' was a supposed faculty, postulated by Aristotle, whose role was to integrate the data from the five specialized senses.] The signals that reach the mind depend upon what state this part of the brain is in, irrespective of the condition of the other parts of the body. There is abundant experimental evidence for this, which I needn't review here.

•Whenever any part of the body is moved by another part that is some distance away, it can be moved in the same fashion by any of the parts that lie in between, without the more distant part doing anything. For example, in a cord ABCD, if one end D is pulled so that the other end A moves, A could have been moved in just the same way if B or C had been pulled and D had not moved at all. Similarly, when I feel a pain in my foot, this happens by means of nerves that run from the foot up to the brain. When the nerves are pulled in the foot, they pull on inner parts of the brain and make them move; and nature has laid it down that this motion should produce in the mind a sensation of *pain as though occurring in the foot*. But since these nerves stretch from the foot to the brain through the calf, the thigh, the lumbar region, the back and the neck, that same sensation of 'pain in the foot' can come about when one of the intermediate parts is pulled, even if nothing happens in the foot. This presumably holds for any other sensation.

•One kind of movement in the part of the brain that immediately affects the mind always produces just one kind of sensation; and it would be best for us if it were always the kind that would contribute the most to keeping us alive and well. Experience shows that the sensations that nature has given us are all of just such kinds; so everything about

them bears witness to the power of nature. For example, when the nerves in the foot are pulled in a violent and unusual manner, this produces a motion in the parts of the brain via the spinal cord which is a signal for having a sensation of a pain in the foot. This stimulates the mind to think of the cause of the pain, which it takes to be the foot. God could have made our nature such that the brain indicated something else when the nerves in the foot were pulled, making the mind aware of the actual cause of the pain in the brain, or in the foot, or in any of the parts in between. [Descartes is here contrasting the foot with the brain. He is contrasting a feeling of pain with a mere movement. A mere movement is occurring.] But nothing is done in the foot conducive to the continued well-being of the body in the same way, when we need drink at the throat; this moves the nerves of the throat, which move the inner parts of the brain. This produces a sensation of thirst, because the brain is made to know at this point is that we need drink to be healthy. Similarly in the other cases.

All of this makes it clear that the nature of man as a good creature, the goodness of the nature of man as a body is such that it is bound to be deceived at some time. For along the route of the nerves from the foot to the brain, or even in the brain itself, some motion produces the same motion that is produced by the foot; and then pain will be felt in the brain. This deception of the senses is natural. For any motion of motion in the brain must always produce a sensation of sensation in the mind; and, given that the motion usually originates in the foot, it is natural that it produce a sensation indicating a pain in the foot. For example, with dryness of the throat: it is natural that it produce a sensation of thirst.

mislead on the rare occasion when the person has dropsy than that it should always mislead when the body is in good health. The same holds for the other cases.

This line of thought greatly helps me to be aware of all the errors to which my nature is liable, and also to correct or avoid them. For I know that so far as bodily well-being is concerned my senses usually tell the truth. Also, I can usually employ more than one sense to investigate the same thing; and I can get further help from my memory, which connects present experiences with past ones, and from my intellect, which has by now examined all the sources of error. So I should have no more fears about the falsity of what my senses tell me every day; on the contrary, the exaggerated doubts of the last few days should be dismissed as laughable. This applies especially to the chief reason for doubt, namely my inability to distinguish dreams from waking experience. For I now notice that the two are vastly different, in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions

of life as waking experiences are. If a man were suddenly to appear to me immediately, as happens in sleep, where he had come from or where he was going, I could reasonably judge that he was a ghost rather than a real man. But if I had seen where and whence something came, I could connect my perception of it with the rest of my life without a break, then I am sure it is I who am not asleep but awake. And I have no doubt of its reality if that is unassisted by my senses as well as my memory and if I know that God isn't a deceiver it follows that I am completely free from error. But I can't always allow us to pause and reflect; it must be admitted that human life is full of particular things, and we must act according to the laws of our nature.



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