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

René Descartes

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but though it were part of 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

Descartes is following a tradition (started by Aristotle) which uses 'first philosophy' as a label
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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 us.

[The next paragraph presents a series of examples of how the senses can be deceived. It is set out here as a discussion between Descartes and his imaginary interlocutors.]

Hopeful: Yet although the sensations that I have about objects that are very small and far away do not apply to my belief that I am here, such as the belief that I am wearing a winter dressing-gown, holding a book in my hands, and so on. It seems to be clear that I have such beliefs like these, which come from the senses. For example: how can I doubt that the hands and body are mine? To doubt such things would be to doubt myself to brain-damaged madmen. How can I doubt that the kings are kings when really they are puppets? How can I doubt that the pumpkins are pumpkins when they are really dressed in purple when they are pumpkins? How can I doubt that the glass is made of glass when they are really pumpkins? Such beliefs would be thought equally mad if I had them.

Doubtful (sarcastically): What do you mean by saying that I am here? As if I were not a man who sleeps and wakes up, who has all the same experiences while asleep as when he is awake—indeed sometimes even more. For example, when I am in my dreams I am convinced of just as many things as when I am awake, such as the fact that I am sitting by the fire in my study, that I am writing, that I am reading, that I am fact I am lying undressed in bed!

Hopeful: Yet right now my eyes are open, and when I look at this piece of paper I see that it is not a dream; when I touch it I know that it is not a dream; when I rub one hand over it I know that it is not a dream; when I deliberately and know what I am doing, I know that it is not a dream. How can it happen with such clarity to someone who is sleeping?

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 in something certain and indubitable, or asleep, two plus three makes five, four sides. It seems impossible to say that these truths might be false.

However, I have for many years believed in the existence of an all-powerful God who made me, and who knows that I am. How do I know that he exists? I know that there is no earth, no sky, nothing but space, no shape, no size, no place, while in space all the things appear to me to exist? And how do I know that others go wrong even when they have the most perfect knowledge; so how do I know that I go wrong every time I add two and three together to get five, or when I draw a square? Well, you might say, I might be deceived like that, because he can make me do it. But, I reply, if God's goodness forbids him from letting me be deceived •all the time•, then he cannot stop him from allowing me to be deceived sometimes, yet clearly I sometimes *am* deceived.

Some people would deny the existence of God rather than believe that even God can be deceived. Let us grant them—for purposes of argument— that God is no God, and theology is fiction. Then I am a product of fate or chance or of the laws of cause and effect. But the *less* powerful the cause, the *more* likely it is that I should be deceived all the time—because deceived people are imperfect. Having no answer to this, I am driven back to the position that I have raised about any of my former beliefs. I have no conclusion in a flippant or casual manner, but of powerful and well thought-out reasons, I do not want to discover any certainty, I must remain in doubt.

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 this being done by God, who is source of truth. I shall think the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and merely dreams that the demon has made me believe. I shall consider myself as a body, with a mind or flesh, or blood or senses, but as though I had all these things. I shall start with a train of thought; and even if I can't do that, I shall at least do what I *can* do, which is to accept any falsehoods, so that the powerful and cunning he may be can't be in the slightest. This will be hard to do, because the natural laziness pulls me back into my old opinions. Who dreams that he is free, starts to dream that he is a dream, and wants to go on dreaming. He wakes up, so I am content to slide back into my old opinions. I fear being shaken out of them because a peaceful sleep may be followed by a bad dream, and that I shall have to struggle now to get out of the imprisoning darkness of the problem.

Second Meditation:

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

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, so that he can't stand on the bottom nor swim to the surface, nor force my way up, and try once more to get out.

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 about that *I am nothing* while *I think* after thoroughly thinking the matter this proposition, *I am, I exist*, must be true, for if I do not exist, it is impossible for me to think it or think it.

But this 'I' that must exist—I stand what it is; so I am at risk of course, thereby falling into error in the view that I maintain is the most certain. I shall be straight about what this 'I' is, I shall say more about what I believed myself to be during my meditation. I will eliminate from the discussion what could be even slightly called into question, what I have been using, which will leave me with the views that are certain and unshakable.

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 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 struc that is called a human body; non permeates the limbs—a wind, fire, imagine; for I have supposed all the ·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 not be the *I* of which I am aware? I don 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 existence 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 kn know that everything relating to the imagination· could be mere dream for me to say 'I will use my ima understanding of what I am'—as I am now awake, and see some trut 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 t 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 clear and distinct idea of bodies which I realize are doubtful, unknown and uncertain. For I have of what is truly in me, and I have not of my own self. But I see what the mistake is, and I am drawn towards that error because my mind is naturally inclined to refusing to respect the boundaries of truth. If I do this well, then; I shall let it run free for a time, and when the time comes to rein it in it won't be so easily pulled back.

Let us consider the things that we know best, and that we understand best of all, namely, the bodies in the world. I mean bodies in the sense that the thoughts are apt to be confused—such as this piece of wax, for example. It is not the same as the honeycomb; it still tastes of honey, and it smells of flowers from which the honey is derived. Its shape and size are plain to see; it is not so easily handled; it is not easily broken; if you rap it with a stick, it makes a sound. In short, it has everything that is necessary for a body to be known perfectly clearly. But if I hold the wax near to the fire, the smell and taste vanish, the colour changes, the size increases; the wax becomes liquid when it is heated, and it no longer makes a sound when you touch it, and it no longer makes a sound when you touch it. But is it still the same wax? Of course it is. So what was it about the wax that was not clearly known? Evidently it was not any of the qualities that the senses told me of; for all of them—smell, taste, sight, touch or hearing—told me that it is still the same wax.

Perhaps what I now think about the nature of bodies and its nature was all along. If that is so, then it is not the sweetness of the honey, the taste of the wax, the whiteness, the shape, or the sound that makes a body a body.

that recently presented itself to me in those ways but now appears differently. But what exactly is this thing that I am now imagining? Well, if we take away whatever doesn't belong to the wax (·that is, everything that the wax *could* be without·), what is left is merely *something extended, flexible and changeable*. What do 'flexible' and 'changeable' mean here? I can imaginatively picture this piece of wax changing from round to square, from square to triangular, and so on. But that isn't what changeability is. In knowing that the wax is changeable I understand that it can go through *endlessly many* changes of that kind, far more than I can depict in my imagination; so it isn't my imagination that gives me my grasp of the wax as flexible and changeable. Also, what does 'extended' mean? Is the wax's extension also unknown? It increases if the wax melts, and increases again if it boils; the wax can be extended in many more ways (·that is, with many more shapes·) than I will ever bring before my imagination. I am forced to conclude that the nature of this piece of wax isn't revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone. (I am speaking of •this particular piece of wax; the point is even clearer with regard to •wax in general.) This wax that is perceived by the mind alone is, of course, the same wax that I see, touch, and picture in my imagination—in short the same wax I thought it to be from the start. But although my perception of it *seemed* to be a case of vision and touch and imagination, it isn't so and it never was. Rather, it is purely a scrutiny by the mind alone—formerly an imperfect and confused one, but now vivid and clear because I am now concentrating carefully on what the wax consists in.

As I reach this conclusion I am amazed at how prone to error my mind is. For although I am thinking all this out within myself, silently, I do it with the help of words, and I am at risk of being led astray by them. When the wax is

in front of us, we say that we *see* be there from its colour or shape; think that knowledge of the wax sees rather than from the perception. This is clearly wrong, as the following look out of the window and see me I have just done, I say that I *see* as I say that I see the wax; yet do and coats that could conceal robbers. Something that I thought I saw was really grasped solely by my mind [= 'ability or capacity to make judgments']

However, someone who wants common crowd should be ashamed of ordinary ways of talking. Let us ask: *When* was my perception of perfect and clear? Was it •when I first thought I knew it through my sense? I have enquired more carefully into how it is known? It would be absurd to raise the question; for what clarity and my earlier perception of the wax? that •a lower animal couldn't have wax apart from its outward forms—speak, and consider it naked—the may still contain errors, at least I am of a sort that requires •a human mind.

But what am I to say about this? (So far, remember, I don't admit that *except* a mind.) What, I ask, is this wax so clearly? Surely, I am at a truer and more certain way than I am in a much more distinct and evident way. I think that the wax exists—namely,

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 pale

is hardly worth mentioning—wh

my mind contains *within itself* t

it distinctly.

See! With no effort I have re
wanted to be! I now know that ever
by the senses or by imagination b
not through their being touched o
being understood; and this helps
I can perceive my own mind more
can anything else. Since the grip
shake off, however, I want to pause
on this new knowledge of mine, fir
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, the pain is as stupid as that intense pain is always vivid, up-front, not shady or obscure. And for every nook and cranny of it to be vivid, is the only way of saying that it is in our sense 'clear'.]

I will now shut my eyes, block
senses. I will regard all my mental
as empty, false and worthless (if I
out of my mind altogether). I will
myself, examine myself more deeply
gradually to know myself more intimately
that thinks, i.e that doubts, affirms
some things, is ignorant of many others.
This thing also imagines and has
as I remarked before, even if the
experience and imagination don't
sensory perception and imagination
simply as *mental events*, certainly

That lists everything that I truly
thing I have, up to now, discovered.
look more carefully to see whether
facts about myself. *I am certain* that
Doesn't that tell me what it takes to
anything? In this first item of knowledge
a vivid and clear perception of what
wouldn't be enough to make me certain
ever turn out that something that I
clearly was false. So I now seem to have
general rule that *whatever I perceive
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; it seems, then I can never be quite certain.

First, if I am to proceed in an order, let me consider what thoughts may properly be said to be true or false. In so far as thoughts are images or pictures of things, as of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or the like, strictly speaking these are the only thoughts that may properly be said to be true or false. For, as I have said, thoughts of this kind are called 'ideas'. Other thoughts have no truth or falsehood, for example when I will, or am afraid, or the like. A thought represents some particular thing, or something more than merely the like, and thoughts in this category are called 'opinions', while others are called 'judgments'.

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

Among my ideas, some seem to be caused from the outside, and others by me. As I see it, my understanding of what *truth* is, and what *thought* is, is of my own nature, which means that it is not caused by noise or seeing the sun or feeling the wind outside me; and my ideas of sirens, hippocampi,

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. The *impulses* that I have been talking about, however, are opposed to *my will*, come from within me, and provide evidence that *I can cause things that are not in me*.

Finally, even if these ideas *do* depend on things located outside me, it doesn't follow that they must be like those things. Indeed, I think I have often had ideas that are very unlike my ideas of them. For example, I have had two different ideas of the sun: one based on the senses—it is a prime example of a thing that I have an external source—and it makes me think that the sun is small; the other is based on astronomical knowledge—it is based on notions that are independent of the sun, and it makes me think that the sun is very large. These ideas cannot both resemble the sun, but this convinces me that the idea that the sun is large comes not directly from the sun itself in fact but from some other source.

These considerations show that I have no reason to suppose that merely some blind impulse that I have within me causes me to think that there exist outside me things that are like the *likenesses* [= 'representations'] of themselves through the *likenesses* [= 'representations'] of other things.

Perhaps, though, there is another argument that shows that 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, in the sense that they are all produced from inside me in the same way. Ideas of different things, however, represent different things, and the ways in which they represent them differ widely. Undoubtedly, the *likenesses* [= 'representations'] of different substances amount to something more than the *likenesses* [= 'representations'] of themselves, and they are more representative of the substances that they represent than are ideas that merely represent modes [= 'qualities'] of substances. This is what gives me my understanding of the world.

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 a 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 a cause that contains at least as much reality as there is *representative* reality in the cause. For if an idea contains something that it must have got this from nothing; yet it is involved in something's being real. For an idea, though it may not be *real* in itself, is not *nothing*, and so it can't come from nothing.

It might be thought that since the reality I consider in my ideas is merely *representative*, it can't be possessed by its cause only *representatively*. That would mean that an idea, because only ideas have reality, can't originate from another, there can't be any cause of such ideas; eventually one must come from nothing, whose cause isn't an idea, and that is the archetype [= 'pattern or model, from which something is taken'] of archetypes, containing *intrinsically* all the reality of the world. For an idea contains only *representatively*. So it is clear to me that my ideas are like patterns, which easily fall short of the perfection they are taken, but which can't exist in themselves.

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

•some idea of mine has so much reality that I am sure the same reality can't be contained either straightforwardly or in a cause that I myself can't be the cause of, then, because everything must contain reality, it necessarily follows 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
or false, that is, whether my ideas
things or of non-things. Strictly speaking
can be true or false; but we can
'false' in a certain sense—we call
represents a non-thing as a thing.
heat and cold have so little clarity as
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
 - neither heat nor cold is a reality

If the right answer is that cold is not heat, the idea that represents it to be positive deserves to be called 'false', and other ideas of this kind.

Such ideas obviously don't have anything other than myself. •If they represent non-things—then they are a deficiency or lack of perfection in me. I say that they arise from nothing; I say that they are a non-thing. •If on the other hand they are real, then I say that they are such a slight reality that I can't even call them a non-thing.

With regard to the vivid and clear bodies, it appears that I could have from my idea of myself, namely *substance*, and anything else of this kind. For stone is a substance, or is a thing clearly, and I also think that I am able to conceive of myself as a thing that is, and of the stone as a thing that I think, so that the two conception

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 the infinite is in some way prior to my perception of the finite. Whenever I know that I doubt something, I understand that I *lack* something that is wholly perfect. How could I grasp the idea of a more perfect being that enables me to perceive my own defects by comparison?

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is 'merely a supposition', or 'false', and thus have come from nothing. ·I noted this a few moments ago, when I was thinking about heat and cold. On the contrary, it is utterly clear that the idea of God contains in itself more representation than any other idea; ·that is, it stands for something that is more real, more powerful, more real, than any other idea. ·That is, it is more true—less open to the suspicion of falsehood—than any other idea. This idea of a supremely perfect being is, I say, true in the highest sense of the word. ·One might imagine that such a being is nothing but a mere supposition; but I have supposed that the idea of such a being is not a mere supposition, but is unreal in the way that the idea of a centaur or a dragon is unreal. ·The idea of God is, moreover, utterly vivid and clear, ·so clear that I don't grasp the infinite, or the infinite substance, but I grasp the additional attributes of God that I have mentioned. ·I can't even *touch* in my thought; for the idea of the infinite is not to be grasped by a finite mind, but is so infinite that I *understand* the infinite, but I don't *grasp* it. ·I understand all the attributes that I clearly perceive in God, and that are some perfection—and perhaps completeness—but I don't *grasp* them, because I am ignorant—*am ignorant*—are present in God even though I don't *grasp* them. ·I understand that the infinite substance is in some higher form. This is enough to show that I have of God the truest and most perfect ideas.

·Here is a possible objection to this argument. ·Perhaps I am greater than I myself am.

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, and that will be easier for me to keep in mind when I'm concentrating..

Well, if God didn't exist, from where would I have derived my existence? It would have to come from either my parents, or from some other being that is more perfect than God, or from an unthinkably imperfect being.

If I had derived my existence from an unthinkably imperfect being, I would now doubt or want or lack anything. I would have given myself all the perfections of which an unthinkably imperfect being would be God. I mustn't suppose that it would be harder to get than the ones I now have. If I had derived my existence from a being that was not unthinkably imperfect, it would have been far more difficult to get. For it would be harder to get a thing or substance—to emerge out of nothing—than to get a potentiality to acquire knowledge of the many perfections of which an unthinkably imperfect being would be God. Because that would merely be giving me a number of accidents. If I had derived my existence from a being that was not unthinkably imperfect, it would be a greater achievement—I certainly would not be able to get it. For it would be harder to get the knowledge in question, which is the knowledge of the many perfections of which an unthinkably imperfect being would be God; for it would be harder to achieve....

Here is a thought that might occur to someone who is reading this argument. Perhaps I have always assumed that I exist. Then wouldn't it follow that there is no proof of my existence? No, it does *not* follow. For I am not divided into countless parts, each of which is dependent on the others, so that from my existence it would follow that I exist at later times, which would not be me in existence—one might say that I would not be me in each moment. Anyone who thinks this way will understand that what it takes to prove my existence is also needed to •keep it up.

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 com
I received the idea of one
attribute to God from one
another from another. Each
somewhere in the universe, b
all.

That can't be right, because God's
unity or inseparability of all his
most important of the perfections
to have. The idea of his perfect
substance couldn't have been plac
that didn't also provide me with the
themselves; for no cause could ha
that the perfections are united w
showing me what they are.

Lastly, as regards my parents, e
ever believed about them is true
who *keep* me in existence. Insofar
indeed, they did not even *make* me
about an arrangement of matter th
as containing me (that is, contain
all I now take myself to be). So
cause-of-me that I am enquiring a

Given the failure of every othe
of *cause of me and of my idea* c
infer that the only successful ca
I conclude that the mere fact tha
me an idea of a most perfect being
clear proof that God does indeed e

It remains for me only to ask *how*
God. I didn't get it from the senses
unexpectedly, as do most of the ide
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

But before examining this point, let us, in investigating other truths that may be of interest, take a few moments to pause here and spend some time in quiet contemplation, to reflect on his attributes and the beauty of his works. The adoration on the part of the angels in the presence of the Lamb, the eye of my darkened intellect cannot comprehend. I can only believe through faith that the sum of all the happiness in the universe next life consists in contemplating the works of God. Experience tells us that this same life, though it is much less perfect, provides the greatest happiness.

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 whereas the objects of sense and made of matter. Indeed, none of 'bodily] things is as distinct as my

considered purely as a thinking thing with no size or shape or other bodily characteristics. Now, when I consider the fact that I have doubts—which means that I am *incomplete and dependent*—that leads to my having a vivid and clear idea of a being who is *independent and complete*, that is, an idea of God. And from the mere fact that •I exist and have such an idea, I infer that •God exists and that every moment of my existence depends on him. This follows clearly; I am sure, indeed, that the human intellect can't know anything that is more evident or more certain. And now that I can take into account the true God, in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge lie hidden, I think I can see a way through to knowledge of other things in the universe.

To begin with, I see that it is impossible that God should ever deceive me. Only someone who has something wrong with him will engage in trickery or deception. That someone is *able* to deceive others may be a sign of his skill or power, but his *wanting* to deceive them is a sign of his malice or weakness; and those are not to be found in God.

Next, I know from experience that I have a faculty of judgment; and this, like everything else I have, was given to me by God. Since God doesn't want to deceive me, I am sure that he didn't give me a faculty of judgment that would lead me into error while I was using it correctly.

That would settle the matter, except for one difficulty: what I have just said seems to imply that I can never be in error. If everything that is in me comes from God, and he didn't equip me with a capacity for making mistakes, doesn't it follow that I can never go wrong in my beliefs? Well, I know by experience that I am greatly given to errors; but when I focus on God to the exclusion of everything else, I find in him no cause of error or falsity. In looking for the cause of my errors, I am helped by this thought: as well as having a real and positive idea of God (a being who is supremely

perfect), I also have what you might call the faculty of *nothingness* (that which is further). I realize that I am somewhere in between, or between supreme being and non-being, reality that I have been given by the nothing that could lead me astray. I make mistakes, not surprisingly, because of nothingness or non-being—that is, the supreme being, and lack count. It is not something real that depends on something negative, a lack, a deficiency, nothing positively error-producing. It is that God gave me. When I go wrong, it is the faculty of true judgment that I have, not free of all limitations, that is, the faculty of *nothingness*.

That is still not quite right. For example, Pebbles and glaciers lack knowledge, and this is a mere negation—the absence of knowledge. There is, however, no reason for them to possess knowledge. I, on the other hand, have knowledge, and this is not a mere negation such as my lack of knowledge of the multiplication of two 30-digit prime numbers. My tendency to error isn't like that. It is, that is, a lack of some knowledge that I still have. This means that I still have a problem about God. When I think hard about God, it seems that he should have given me a faculty that he does not have. The more I think about it, the more perfect the thing that he made me seem to be. I am something made by the supreme being, and I am perfect in every way. It is clear, furthermore, that he has made me in such a way that I am perfect. There is no doubt that he always makes perfect things. Does this show that my making me perfect is not a mere negation?

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

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 God has given me is extremely broad in its scope and also the cause of my mistakes. Nor is man to blame: God gave it to me, so it is in its activities; when I understand it correctly. Well, then, where do my mistakes come from? Their source is the fact that my intellect has a wider scope than my intellect has, so that I sometimes think on topics that I don't understand. I ought to, namely by restricting myself to what my understanding covers, •that is, to what I know when I am not intellectually in complete ignorance. In such cases there is nothing to stop the will from acting, or that, so it easily turns away from what it should do. That is the source of my error and of my mistakes.

Here is an example •of how (1) there is true understanding contrasted with there *isn't*. (1) A while ago I asked myself whether God in the world exists, and I came to the conclusion that my raising this question shows quite clearly that I understood this so vividly that I could not doubt that it was true. This was not the 'could' of being compelled by some external force, but rather the 'could' of just this: *a great light in the intellect, inclining the will*. I was not in any way compelled to believe that God exists, but I had a strong feeling that I could as well go one way as the other. The lack of indifference was a measure of how free my belief was. •It would have been a much stronger proof if it had come from the compulsion of the will, rather than coming from within. For if I had come to the conclusion that I exist, at least as a result of the fact that in my mind an idea of corporeal nature had come to me, whether my thinking nature—which is the will—

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 for his great generosity to me, nor because he did not give me everything.

Nor can I reasonably complain that extends more widely than a single unitary thing; its nature is such that there could be no way of taking away power, and not the great extent of my will be a sufficient reason to him who gave it to me?

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

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 me into the cause of error, has been right in my explanation of the cause my will so that I form opinions of vividly and clearly reveals, I cannot is why. Every vivid and clear perception something real and positive; so it and must come from God. He is surely be downright contradictory to suppose So the vivid and clear perception have learned not only how to avoid arrive at the truth. It is beyond question the truth if I think hard enough to perfectly understand, keeping the other matters in which my thoughts obscure. That is what I shall be reasoning 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, I have their own true and immutable nature, and I can always know them under my control. Even if there were no material objects, I could still know any triangles outside my thought, and I could always know the same triangle ·I am constrained in how I can think about them by the fact that they have a determinate nature or essence of their own, and that they are eternal, unchanging, and independent of me. I can also always know the things that I can prove about them. For example, I can always know that the angles of a triangle equal two right angles, that the exterior angle is always greater than its greatest angle, and so on. I now know all these properties of the triangle, whether or not I have ever seen one. (I didn't give them a thought when the triangle was first presented to my mind. So they can't have been caused by the triangle.)

It does not help to point out that I can only know the properties of triangles that I can perceive through my senses, so that the idea of a triangle is not an idea that I can have in my mind. (I can only know the properties of triangles that I can perceive through the senses. These properties are not *nothing*: whatever is true of triangles is not *nothing*.) The properties of triangles are true because I am constrained in how I can think about them by the fact that they have a determinate nature of their own, and that they are eternal, unchanging, and independent of me. I can also always know the things that I can prove about them. For example, I can always know that the angles of a triangle equal two right angles, that the exterior angle is always greater than its greatest angle, and so on. I now know all these properties of the triangle, whether or not I have ever seen one. (I didn't give them a thought when the triangle was first presented to my mind. So they can't have been caused by the triangle.)

·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 where there are no lowlands', but that is *obviously* not self-contradictory. From this, but Descartes may have been thinking of a *vallée*, *vallée* can mean 'valley' in our sense but can also mean the lower slopes of a mountain, or the plain at the foot of a mountain. So 'highlands'/'lowlands' has been used here to be compact and fairly close to what he presumably had in mind.

·Here is a possible objection to this argument··:

I can't think of God except as a supremely perfect being. I can't think of a river without banks, but I can think of a river without banks; though, it certainly doesn't follow that a river without banks doesn't exist. The former fact that God exists? is not settled by my thoughts about God. I can think of a winged horse even though I can attach existence to God. I can't think of God as not existing. God exists.

This involves false reasoning. From the fact that I can't think of a river without banks, it does not follow that a river without banks exists anywhere, but simply that I can't think of a river without banks. On the other hand, from the fact that I can think of a winged horse, as existing it follows that God and a winged horse exist, which is to say that God really exists. The reason I can make it so; it doesn't create necessary existence. I can think of a winged horse, but I can also think of the opposite way: the necessity of existence (that is, the fact that I can think, depriving me of the power to think of something without existence (that is, a supremely perfect being), like my freedom to fly 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 used brought back to the fact that nothing can be known of me except what I vividly and clearly perceive. That I vividly and clearly perceive others can be learned only through induction, but once they are discovered, as certain as the obvious ones. (Of course, Euclid's proof about right-angled triangles: 'The square on the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares on the legs' is less obvious than the latter; but one believes it just as strongly.) The method of proof I used in the immediately obvious class, I were not swamped by preconceived thoughts; my thoughts were not hemmed in and limited by the categories of things perceived by the senses, but I perceived them sooner and more easily than any other being exists; God, the only being whose existence is self-evident, exists; what is more self-evident than that?

Although I came to see this only I am now just as certain of it as I am only that, but I see that all other of one, so that without it I can't know next two paragraphs explain why

While I am perceiving something, I can't help believing it to be true. This is nature. Here is another: I can't fix on the same thing, so as to keep paying attention to it. Sometimes the arguments that led me to believe something 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 as I remember that I vividly and counter-arguments can make me that I know for certain—and in an That applies not only to this one that I remember ever having proved Why should I call these matters in so built as to be prone to frequent that when I have something in mind way I cannot be in error about it past regarded as certainly true many recognized to be false? No: the the doubt had not been vividly and clear place: I had come to accept them found to be unreliable, because I had rule for establishing the truth. •But so that my present thoughts have of a person who is asleep? I put this while ago. It doesn't change anything is evident to my intellect, even when is true.

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

Sixth Meditation: The existence of material things, and the real distinction between them

The remaining task is to consider whether material things exist. Insofar as they are the subject-matter of pure mathematics, I perceive [here = 'conceive'] them vividly and clearly; so I at least know that they *could* exist, because anything that I perceive in that way could be created by God. (The only reason I have ever accepted for thinking that •something could *not* be made by him is that there would be a contradiction in my perceiving •it distinctly.) My faculty of imagination, which I am aware of using when I turn my mind to material things, also suggests that they really exist. For when I think harder about what imagination is, it seems to be simply an application of •the faculty of *knowing* to •a body that is intimately present to it—and that has to be a body that exists.

To make this clear, I will first examine how •imagination differs from •pure understanding. When I imagine a triangle, for example, I don't merely •understand that it is a three-sided figure, but I also •see the three lines with my mind's eye as if they were present to me; that is what imagining is. But if I think of a chiliagon [= 'thousand-sided figure', pronounced *kill-ee-a-gon*], although I •understand quite well that it is a figure with a thousand sides, I don't •imagine the thousand sides or see them as if they were present to me. When I think of a body, I usually form some kind of image; so in thinking of a chiliagon I may construct in my mind—strictly speaking, in my imagination—a confused representation of some figure. But obviously it won't be a chiliagon, for it is the very same image that I would form if I were thinking of, say, a figure with ten thousand sides. So it wouldn't help me to recognize the properties that distinguish a chiliagon

from other many-sided figures. In the situation is different. I can •see a figure without the help of the imagination (I can understand a chiliagon); but I can only •see it by applying my mind's eye to its five sides, which I can enclose. This imagining, I find, is more vivid than understanding does; and that is why I say that imagination is different from understanding.

Being able to imagine isn't essential to understanding; for even if I had no power of imagination I would still be the same individual. It is not essential to imply that my power of imagination belongs to me, and not to other than myself; and I can easily see that it does. For it is such a thing as *my body*—that is, a certain body in such a way that it can move itself whenever it wants to—then it *might* be able to imagine corporeal things. But I can easily see that imagining differs from pure understanding in this way: •when the mind understands, it sees and inspects one of its own ideas; •when it imagines, it turns away from itself and looks at something that conforms to an idea that it sees by the mind or one perceived by the senses. I can easily see that this might be how the mind imagines a chiliagon, if the body exists; and since I can easily see that this is a good way of explaining what imagination is, I can easily see that the body exists. But this is not a proof that the body exists; after all my careful enquiry I still cannot be sure that the body exists, for I have not yet proved that the idea of corporeal nature that I have in my mind is the idea of corporeal nature that exists. I have not yet proved for sure that some body exists.

As well as the corporeal nature that is the subject-matter of pure mathematics, I am also accustomed to imagining colours, sounds, tastes, pain and so on—though not so distinctly. Now, I perceive these much better by means of the senses, which is how (helped by memory) they appear to have reached the imagination. So in order to deal with them more fully, I must attend to the senses—that is, to the kind of thinking [here = 'mental activity'] that I call 'sensory perception'. I want to know whether the things that are perceived through the senses provide me with any sure argument for the existence of bodies.

To begin with, I will (1) go back over everything that I *originally* took to be perceived by the senses, and reckoned to be true; and I will go over my reasons for thinking this. Next, I will (2) set out my reasons for *later* doubting these things. Finally, I will (3) consider what I should *now* believe about them.

(1) First of all, then, I perceived by my senses that I had a head, hands, feet and other limbs making up the body that I regarded as part of myself, or perhaps even as my whole self. I also perceived by my senses that this body was situated among many other bodies that could harm or help it; and I detected the favourable effects by a sensation of pleasure and the unfavourable ones by pain. As well as pain and pleasure, I also had sensations of hunger, thirst, and other such appetites, and also of bodily states tending towards cheerfulness, sadness, anger and similar emotions. Outside myself, besides the extension, shapes and movements of bodies, I also had sensations of their hardness and heat, and of the other qualities that can be known by touch. In addition, I had sensations of light, colours, smells, tastes and sounds, and differences amongst these enabled me to sort out the sky, the earth, the seas and other bodies from one another. All I was *immediately* aware of in each case

were my ideas, but it was reason what I was perceiving through the bodies that caused the ideas. For it came to me quite without my consent, any kind of idea of any object, even if it was not present to my sense organs, having the idea when the object was not there. Ideas that came through the sense organs were more distinct and vivid and sharp than ones that came when thinking about things, and when impressed on my memory, it seemed as if the ideas were coming from within me, but when they came from external things, the idea about these things was through the body. It was bound to occur to me that the body caused the ideas. In addition, I remembered that my senses before I ever had the body, had formed ideas that I formed were composed up of elements of sensory ideas. I had nothing at all in my intellect that I had in sensation. As for the body that I called 'mine': I had reason to think in a way that no other body did. I could never be separated from this body for this.. •I could never be separated from other bodies; •I felt all my appetites and pains on account of it; and •I was aware of ticklings in parts of this body but not in other bodies. But why should that curious sensation cause particular distress of mind; and why should a sense of delight follow on a tickling sensation? That curious tugging in the stomach told me that I should eat, or a dryness in the throat told me that I should drink, and so on? I couldn't explain this, but I could say that nature taught me so. For

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 know my maker better, although I don't accept everything I seem to have accepted, neither do I think it should all be rejected.

Besides this, I find that I am of kinds of thinking [= 'mental activity'], sensory perception. Now, I can understand •myself as a whole without I can't understand •them without intellectual substance for them to. ability essentially involves *acts*, so that acts; so I see that •I differ 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 general. What about •less clearly understood example light or sound or pain), and bodies (for example the size or shape of things). There is much doubt and uncertainty. 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 myself in my opinions. Indeed, everything in the 'natural order' certainly contains some truth which is understood in the most general way. This truth is related to the ordered system of created things. And my own nature is simply the truth which is impressed on me by God.

As vividly as it teaches me all
teaches me that I have a body, that
is something wrong with this body
or thirsty it needs food and drink,
doubt that there is some truth in this.

Nature also teaches me, through hunger, thirst and so on, that I (merely *in* my body as a sailor is *closely joined to it*—intermingled that it and I form a unit. If this were pain when the body was hurt but were in an intellectual way, like a sailor repairs. And when the body needs intellectually understand this fact confused sensations of hunger and are confused mental events that are intermingling, as it were—of the mind

Nature also teaches me that we
in the vicinity of my body, and that
of 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 human nature gives pleasure, and so on. But it also causes us to rush to conclusions about things without pausing to think about them. The idea of the truth about such things seems to come from the mind alone, not to the combination of mind and body. For example, the sight of a star has no more effect on my mind than the sight of a piece of straw. I do not think of the star as no bigger than a straw, nor do I think that my thinking of the star as no bigger than a straw does not come from any positive 'natural' cause in me. This is just a habit of thought that I have had since childhood, with no rational basis. I feel heat when I approach a fire, and if I approach it too near, there is no good reason to suppose that the fire resembles the heat, or resembles the heat in any way. There is no merely reason to suppose that some body causes feelings of heat or pain in me. For if a region contains nothing that stimulates my senses, it does not follow that it contains no body. In these cases and many others, the reason for misusing the order of nature is that I have sensory perceptions that nature gives me, and I do not know what is beneficial or harmful for my health. For if these perceptions are not vivid and clear enough for me to rely on them to treat them as reliable guides, I will be led to believe that the bodies located outside me, in the world, are only very obscure and confused images.

I have already looked closely enough at the order of nature to make false judgments, even though I do not always do it. For example, it occurs to me that there is a place where I should go to make myself healthy, or where I should not go to make myself unhealthy. It also occurs to me that there are things that I should do to make myself healthy, or avoid, and also regarding •some other things that I should do or avoid. Some cases of this are unproblematic, such as when I am tricked into eating pleasant-tasting food that is actually bad for me.

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 'ordered nature', therefore, we are merely to compare sick with healthy in the mind-body complex that suffers. It 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 we do not prevent nature from deceiving us. This enquiry will fall into four main parts:

•There is a great difference between body. Every body is by its nature, and can't be divided. When I consider myself purely as a thinking thing, I am within myself; I understand myself as being simple, true, and complete. The whole mind is not a part of the body, but a part of the whole body, but not by a uniting of parts. If a foot or arm or any other part of the body is thereby taken away from the body, the body's faculties of willing, of understanding, and so on, these are not *parts* of the body, but the same mind that wills, understands, and so on. They are (I repeat) not *parts* of the body, but properties or powers of it. By considering the body in this way, I can easily be divided into parts. This shows me that it is really divisible. It is not enough to show me that the mind is not a part of the body, even if I did not already know it from 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

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to know at this point is that we ne
healthy. Similarly in the other cas

All of this makes it clear that goodness, the nature of man as a body is such that it is bound to run time. For along the route of the nerves, in the brain, or even in the brain itself, so produces the same motion that is sent to the foot; and then pain will be felt. This deception of the senses is natural; of motion in the brain must always be of sensation in the mind; and, given that usually originates in the foot, it is to produce a sensation indicating a pain with dryness of the throat: it is manifest.

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 I were to dream that a man were suddenly to appear to me, I could not immediately, as happens in sleep, reasonably judge that he was a ghost rather than a real man. But if I have a memory of where and whence something comes, and can connect my perception of it with the rest of my life without a break, then I am sure that it is not a dream. And if I am not asleep but awake. And if I have no doubt of its reality if that is unanswerable. As far as my senses as well as my memory are concerned, I know that God isn't a deceiver it follows that I am completely free from error. But dreams don't always allow us to pause and reflect. We must be admitted that human life is not always a particular thing, and we must accept the reality of our nature.



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