Meditations on First Philosophy

RENÉ DESCARTES
1596–1650

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Meditationes de Prima Philosophia

Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited



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Translated from the Latin with AI (Claude) and edited. Reading edition, Forage, September 2026. forage.com/descartes/meditations

Latin text: Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, *Œuvres de Descartes*, vol. VII (Paris, 1904), via Latin Wikisource (la.wikisource.org/wiki/Meditationes_de_prima_philosophia_(Adam_et_Tannery)). English: translated from the Latin with AI (Claude), then edited for accuracy and consistency. Not reviewed by a human specialist. Free to reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0. The small numbers set in the text are the standard AT page references.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1641 René Descartes published, in Latin, a short book that set out to tear down everything he believed and rebuild knowledge on a foundation nothing could shake. He wrote it as six meditations, as if over six days: first doubting whatever can be doubted, then finding the one thing he cannot doubt, and building from there to God, to truth and error, and finally to the physical world and his own body.

The phrase everyone knows, "I think, therefore I am," does not appear here in that form. It comes from his earlier *Discourse on Method*. In the *Meditations* the discovery is quieter and more exact: "I am, I exist."

The book opens with a letter to the theologians of the Sorbonne, a preface, and Descartes' own synopsis. Many readers skip straight to the First Meditation.

Dedicatory Letter

To the Faculty of Theology at Paris
Descartes asks the Paris theologians to endorse his proofs of God and the soul.

[2] To the most wise and distinguished men, the Dean and Doctors of the Sacred Faculty of Theology of Paris, René Descartes sends greetings.[1]

So just a cause moves me to offer you this work, and I am confident that you too will have so just a cause for taking up its defense once you understand the plan of my undertaking, that I can recommend it here in no better way than by saying briefly what I have aimed at in it.

I have always thought that two questions, concerning God and the soul, are chief among those that ought to be demonstrated with the help of philosophy rather than of theology. For although it is enough for us who are believers to accept by faith that the human soul does not perish with the body, and that God exists, it certainly seems that unbelievers cannot be persuaded of any religion, or even of hardly any moral virtue, unless these two things are first proved to them by natural reason. And since in this life greater rewards are often held out for vices than for virtues, few would prefer what is right to what is useful if they neither feared God nor expected another life. It is entirely true that we must believe that God exists because this is taught in the Holy Scriptures, and, conversely, that we must believe the Holy Scriptures because they come from God; for since faith is a gift

1 The Faculty of Theology of the University of Paris, commonly known as the Sorbonne.

of God, the same one who gives the grace to believe everything else can also give the grace to believe that he himself exists. Yet this cannot be put before unbelievers, because they would judge it to be a circle. And indeed I have noticed not only that you and all other theologians affirm that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason, but also that it is inferred from Holy Scripture that knowledge of him is easier than much of what we know about created things, and is in fact so easy that those who lack it are to blame. This is clear from Wisdom 13, in these words: "Nor ought they to be pardoned."[2] "For if they were able to know so much that they could appraise the world, how did they not more easily find its Lord?" And in Romans, chapter 1, they are said to be "without excuse." And in the same place, by the words "What can be known of God is manifest in them," we seem to be told that everything that can be known about God can be shown by reasons drawn from no other source than our own mind. I therefore thought it not beyond my province to inquire how this comes about, and by what path God may be known more easily and more certainly than the things of the world.

As for the soul, many have judged that its nature [3] cannot easily be investigated, and some have even dared to say that human reasoning persuades us that it perishes together with the body, and that the contrary is held by faith alone. But since the Lateran Council held under Leo X, in its eighth session, condemns these people, and expressly commands Christian philosophers to refute their arguments and to prove the truth as far as they are able, I have not hesitated to undertake this as well.[3]

Further, I know that most impious people refuse to believe that God exists and that the human mind is distinct from the body for no other reason than that, as they say, no one has so far been able to demonstrate these two things. I do not agree with

2 Wisdom of Solomon 13:8–9, on those who studied the world yet failed to find its maker.

3 The Fifth Lateran Council (1512–17), whose eighth session (1513) condemned the view that the human soul is mortal.

them in the least. On the contrary, I think that nearly all the reasons which great men have brought forward on these questions have the force of demonstration when they are properly understood, and I can hardly persuade myself that any can be given which have not already been discovered by others. Nevertheless, I think nothing more useful can be accomplished in philosophy than to seek out carefully, once and for all, the best of them, and to set them forth so precisely and clearly that from now on it will be established for everyone that they are demonstrations. And finally, some people who know that I have developed a certain method for resolving any difficulties whatever in the sciences—not a new one, indeed, since nothing is older than truth, but one they have often seen me use with some success in other matters—have urgently pressed me to do this; and so I thought it my duty to make some attempt in this matter.

Whatever I have been able to accomplish is contained entirely in this treatise. Not that I have tried to collect in it all the various reasons that could be brought forward to prove the same things; that does not seem worth the effort except where no single reason is certain enough. Rather, I have pursued only the first and principal ones, and in such a way that I would now venture to put them forward as most certain and most evident demonstrations. I will add, too, that they are such that I do not think any path lies open to human ingenuity by which better ones could ever be found. For the urgency of the cause, and the glory of God, to which this whole work is directed, compel me here to speak somewhat more freely of my own work than is my custom. Yet however certain and evident I think them, I am not therefore persuaded that they are suited to everyone's grasp. In geometry there are many things written by Archimedes, Apollonius, Pappus, and others which everyone regards as evident and certain, because they contain nothing at all that is not very easy to know when considered on its own, and nothing in which what follows does not fit precisely with what precedes. Yet because they are rather long and demand a very attentive

reader, they are understood by only a very few. In the same way, although I think that the reasons I use here equal or even surpass geometrical ones in certainty and evidence, I fear that many people will be unable to perceive them adequately: partly because they too are rather long, and each depends on others; but chiefly because they require a mind entirely free of preconceived opinions, one that can easily withdraw itself from the company of the senses. And certainly there are not more people in the world suited to metaphysical studies than to geometrical ones. Moreover, [5] there is this difference. In geometry, since everyone is persuaded that nothing is usually written for which there is not a certain demonstration, the inexperienced more often go wrong by approving what is false, in their wish to seem to understand it, than by rejecting what is true. In philosophy, by contrast, since it is believed that there is nothing that cannot be argued on either side, few investigate the truth, and far more seek a reputation for ingenuity by daring to attack whatever is best.

And so, whatever my reasons may be worth, since they belong to philosophy, I do not expect to accomplish much of value with their help unless you assist me with your patronage. But the opinion of your Faculty is so deeply fixed in everyone's mind, and the name of the Sorbonne carries such authority, that not only in matters of faith has no body, after the sacred councils, ever been trusted as much as yours, but also in human philosophy nowhere is there thought to be greater insight and soundness, or greater integrity and wisdom in delivering judgments. I therefore have no doubt that if you would deign to take such care of this work—first, by correcting it (for, mindful not only of my human condition but above all of my ignorance, I do not claim that there are no errors in it); next, by seeing that whatever is missing, or not sufficiently finished, or in need of fuller explanation is added, completed, or clarified, either by you yourselves or at least by me once you have advised me; and finally, once the reasons it contains, by which it is proved that God exists and that the mind is distinct from the body, have

been brought to the clarity to which I am confident they can be brought, so [6] that they must be regarded as the most exact demonstrations, by being willing to declare this and to testify to it publicly—if this is done, I say, I have no doubt that all the errors there have ever been on these questions will soon be erased from people's minds. For the truth itself will easily lead other people of talent and learning to subscribe to your judgment; and your authority will lead the atheists, who are usually smatterers rather than people of talent or learning, to lay aside their urge to contradict, and perhaps even to defend the reasons which they know are regarded as demonstrations by all people of talent, so as not to seem not to understand them. And finally, everyone else will readily believe so many testimonies, and there will no longer be anyone in the world who dares to call into doubt either the existence of God or the real distinction of the human soul from the body. How great the benefit of this would be, you yourselves, in your singular wisdom, can judge better than anyone; nor would it befit me to commend the cause of God and religion at greater length here to you, who have always been the greatest pillar of the Catholic Church.

Preface to the Reader

Descartes answers early objections and asks readers to read the objections and replies before judging.

[7] I touched briefly on the questions of God and the human mind some time ago, in the Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, published in French in 1637. My aim there was not to treat them thoroughly, but only to give a taste of them, and to learn from readers' judgments how they should be treated afterward. For they seemed to me of such importance that I judged they ought to be dealt with more than once. And the path I follow in explaining them is so little trodden, and so far from common use, that I did not think it useful to teach it at greater length in a work written in French and to be read by everyone indiscriminately, lest those of weaker talent too might believe that they ought to set out on it.[1]

But when I had asked there that anyone who found something in my writings worthy of criticism should kindly let me know, no objections worth noting were raised against what I had touched on concerning these questions, except two. I will reply to these briefly here, before undertaking a more exact explanation of the questions themselves.

The first is this: from the fact that the human mind, when turned [8] in on itself, does not perceive itself to be anything other than a thinking thing, it does not follow that its nature or essence consists only in its being a thinking thing, in such a way that the word "only" excludes everything else that might per-

1 Descartes' Discourse on Method (1637), whose Part Four briefly sketches the arguments developed here.

haps also be said to belong to the nature of the soul. To this objection I reply that there too I did not mean to exclude those things in the order of the truth of the matter itself (which I was not then dealing with), but only in the order of my perception. The meaning was that I knew nothing at all that I knew to belong to my essence except that I was a thinking thing, or a thing having in itself the faculty of thinking. In what follows, however, I will show how, from the fact that I know nothing else to belong to my essence, it follows that nothing else in fact belongs to it.

The second is that from the fact that I have within me the idea of a thing more perfect than I am, it does not follow that the idea itself is more perfect than I am, and much less that what is represented by that idea exists. But I reply that there is an ambiguity here in the word "idea." It can be taken either materially, for an operation of the intellect, in which sense it cannot be said to be more perfect than I am; or objectively, for the thing represented by that operation, and this thing, even if it is not supposed to exist outside the intellect, can nevertheless be more perfect than I am by reason of its essence. But how, from the mere fact that there is in me the idea of a thing more perfect than I am, it follows that this thing really exists will be explained at length in what follows.

I have also seen two fairly long writings, but in them it was not so much my reasons on these matters as my conclusions that were attacked, with arguments borrowed from atheist [9] commonplaces. Arguments of that kind can have no force with those who understand my reasons; and the judgments of many people are so perverse and weak that they are more persuaded by opinions accepted first, however false and contrary to reason, than by a true and solid refutation of them heard later. So I do not wish to reply to them here, lest I should first have to report them. I will say only, in general, that everything the atheists commonly throw out to attack the existence of God always depends either on attributing human emotions to God, or on claiming for our minds so much power and wisdom that we try

to determine and comprehend what God can and ought to do. So as long as we simply remember that our minds are to be regarded as finite, and God as incomprehensible and infinite, these arguments will cause us no difficulty.

Now, having once made some trial of people's judgments, I here take up again the same questions about God and the human mind, and at the same time undertake to treat the beginnings of the whole of first philosophy—but in such a way that I expect no applause from the crowd and no great number of readers. Indeed, I advise no one to read these things except those who are able and willing to meditate seriously with me and to withdraw their minds from the senses, and at the same time from all preconceived opinions; and I know well enough that very few such people are to be found. As for those who, not caring to grasp the order and connection of my reasons, busy themselves with quibbling over individual clauses, as [10] many are in the habit of doing, they will get little profit from reading this work. Although they may perhaps find occasion for cavilling in many places, they will not easily raise any objection that is pressing or deserves a reply.

But since I do not promise even the others that I will satisfy them on every point at first sight, and I do not presume so far as to trust that I can foresee everything that will seem difficult to anyone, I will first set out in the Meditations the very thoughts by whose help I seem to myself to have reached a certain and evident knowledge of the truth, so as to find out whether I can perhaps persuade others by the same reasons that persuaded me. After that I will reply to the objections of several men outstanding in talent and learning, to whom these Meditations were sent for examination before they went to press. For they raised objections numerous and varied enough that I venture to hope that nothing, at least of any importance, will easily occur to others that they have not already touched on. And so I ask readers again and again not to pass judgment on the Meditations until they have been good enough to read through all these objections and the replies to them.

Synopsis of the Six Meditations

Descartes summarizes the aim and argument of each of the six meditations.

[12] In the First Meditation, the reasons are set out for which we can doubt all things, especially material things—so long, that is, as we have no other foundations for the sciences than those we have had until now. Although the usefulness of so extensive a doubt is not apparent at first sight, it is in fact very great: it frees us from all preconceived opinions and lays down the easiest path for withdrawing the mind from the senses; and finally, it makes it impossible for us to doubt any further the things we later discover to be true.

In the Second, the mind, using its own freedom, supposes that none of the things exist about whose existence it can have even the slightest doubt, and notices that it cannot be that it does not itself exist meanwhile. This too is of the greatest usefulness, since in this way the mind easily distinguishes what belongs to itself, that is, to an intellectual nature, and what belongs to the body. But since some people will perhaps expect arguments for the immortality of the soul in that place, I think I should warn them here [13] that I have tried to write nothing that I could not demonstrate precisely. So I could follow no order other than the one customary among geometers: namely, to set out first everything on which the proposition in question depends, before concluding anything about it. The first and chief prerequisite for knowing the immortality of the soul is that we form a conception of it that is as clear as possible and entirely distinct from every conception of body; and this has

been done there. It is further required that we know that everything we understand clearly and distinctly is true in the very way in which we understand it, which could not be proved before the Fourth Meditation; that we have a distinct conception of corporeal nature, which is formed partly in the Second itself and partly in the Fifth and Sixth; and that from these it be concluded that all things that are clearly and distinctly conceived as different substances, as mind and body are conceived, are in fact substances really distinct from one another. This is concluded in the Sixth. This is also confirmed in the same Meditation from the fact that we cannot understand any body except as divisible, and, on the other hand, any mind except as indivisible. For we cannot conceive half of any mind, as we can of any body, however small; so that their natures are recognized to be not only different but in a certain way opposed. I have not, however, dealt with this matter any further in this work. First, these points are enough to show that the destruction of the mind does not follow from the corruption of the body, and so to give mortals hope of another life. Second, the premises from which the immortality of the mind can be concluded depend on an account of the whole of physics. First, [14] it must be known that absolutely all substances—that is, things that must be created by God in order to exist—are by their nature incorruptible, and can never cease to be unless they are reduced to nothing by that same God withdrawing his concurrence from them. And then it must be noticed that body, taken in general, is a substance, and so it too never perishes.[1] But the human body, insofar as it differs from other bodies, is made up only of a certain configuration of limbs and other accidents of this kind, whereas the human mind is not made up of any accidents in this way, but is a pure substance. For even if all its accidents change—so that it understands different things, wills different things, senses different things, and so on—the mind itself does not on that account become a different mind; whereas the human body

1 "Concurrence" (concursus): God's continuing causal support, without which no created thing could go on existing.

becomes a different body merely from a change in the shape of some of its parts. From this it follows that the body can very easily perish, while the mind is by its nature immortal.

In the Third Meditation I have explained my principal argument for proving the existence of God at sufficient length, as it seems to me. However, since I wished to lead my readers' minds as far as possible away from the senses, I chose not to use any comparisons drawn from corporeal things there, and so many obscurities may perhaps remain. These, I hope, will be entirely removed later in the replies to the objections—among others, the question of how the idea of a supremely perfect being, which is in us, has so much objective reality that it cannot fail to come from a supremely perfect cause. This is illustrated there by comparison with a machine of great perfection, the idea of which is in the mind of some craftsman. For just as the objective artistry of this idea must have some cause—namely the knowledge of this craftsman, or of someone else from whom he received it—so [15] the idea of God that is in us cannot fail to have God himself as its cause.[2]

In the Fourth, it is proved that everything we perceive clearly and distinctly is true, and at the same time it is explained what the nature of falsity consists in. These things must necessarily be known, both to confirm what precedes and to understand what remains. (But it should be noted meanwhile that the discussion there is in no way about sin, or the error committed in pursuing good and evil, but only about the error that occurs in distinguishing true from false. Nor are matters considered that pertain to faith or to the conduct of life, but only speculative truths, known solely by the help of the natural light.)

In the Fifth, besides an explanation of corporeal nature taken in general, the existence of God is also demonstrated by a new argument—though here again some difficulties may perhaps arise, which will be resolved later in the reply to the objections. And finally it is shown in what sense it is true that the certainty

2 "Objective reality" is the reality a thing has as represented in an idea; "formal reality" is the reality a thing has in itself.

even of geometrical demonstrations depends on the knowledge of God.

In the Sixth, finally, understanding is separated from imagination; the marks of the distinctions are described; it is proved that the mind is really distinct from the body, and yet shown to be so closely joined to it that it forms a single thing with it; all the errors that commonly arise from the senses are surveyed; the ways in which they can be avoided are set out; and finally all the reasons from which the existence of material things can be concluded are presented. This is not because I thought them very useful for proving what they [16] prove—namely, that there really is a world, that human beings have bodies, and the like, which no one of sound mind has ever seriously doubted—but because, in considering them, one recognizes that they are neither as firm nor as clear as those by which we arrive at knowledge of our own mind and of God; so that these latter are the most certain and most evident of all that can be known by human ingenuity. The proof of this one thing is what I have set before myself as my aim in these Meditations. And so I do not list here the various other questions that are also dealt with in them as occasion arises.

First Meditation

What can be called into doubt
Descartes doubts all his former beliefs, using the senses, dreams and a deceiving demon.

[17] Some years ago now I noticed how many false things I had accepted as true in my youth, and how doubtful everything was that I had since built on them; and so I saw that once in my life everything had to be torn down completely and begun anew from the first foundations, if I ever wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. But the task seemed enormous, and I kept waiting for an age so mature that no later one would be better suited to taking up learning. For that reason I delayed so long that from now on I would be at fault if I used up in deliberating the time that remains for acting. So today, at the right moment, I have freed my mind from all [18] cares, I have secured for myself untroubled leisure, I withdraw alone, and at last I will devote myself seriously and freely to this general overthrow of my opinions.

For this, however, it will not be necessary to show that they are all false, which I might perhaps never manage. Since reason already persuades me that I should withhold assent no less carefully from things that are not entirely certain and indubitable than from those that are obviously false, it will be enough, for rejecting all of them, if I find some reason for doubt in each. Nor, for that reason, will I need to go through them one by one, which would be an endless task. Since anything built on foundations collapses of its own accord once they are undermined, I

will go straight for the principles on which everything I once believed rested.

DOUBTING THE SENSES

Descartes notes that the senses sometimes deceive but asks whether that makes everything they report doubtful.

Whatever I have accepted up to now as most true, I have received either from the senses or through the senses. But I have found that these sometimes deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.

But perhaps, although the senses sometimes deceive us about things that are very small or far away, there are many other things about which there can be no doubt at all, even though they are drawn from the same source: for example, that I am here, sitting by the fire, wearing a winter gown, handling this paper, and the like. And how could it be denied that these very hands and this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to compare myself with some madmen or other, [19] whose brains are so disordered by a stubborn vapor from black bile that they constantly insist that they are kings when they are paupers, or that they are dressed in purple when they are naked, or that they have heads made of clay, or that they are entirely gourds, or made of glass. But such people are insane, and I would seem no less mad myself if I took them as a model for myself.

THE DREAM ARGUMENT

Descartes observes that dreams can mimic waking life, though simple truths of arithmetic seem to survive.

A fine argument, to be sure—as if I were not a man who is accustomed to sleep at night and to experience in dreams all the same things as these people do when awake, or sometimes even less plausible ones! How often the quiet of the night persuades me of these ordinary things—that I am here, wearing my gown, sitting by the fire—when in fact I am lying undressed between the sheets! But now, surely, I am looking at this paper with waking

eyes; this head that I move is not asleep; I stretch out this hand deliberately and knowingly, and I feel it. Things so distinct would not happen to someone asleep. As if, of course, I did not remember having been deceived by similar thoughts in dreams at other times! When I think about this more attentively, I see so plainly that waking can never be distinguished from sleep by sure signs that I am astonished, and this very astonishment almost confirms me in the opinion that I am asleep.

Well then, suppose we are dreaming, and these particulars are not true—that we open our eyes, move our heads, stretch out our hands—and suppose that perhaps we do not even have such hands, or such a body at all. Still, it must surely be admitted that the things seen in sleep are like painted images, which could only have been fashioned in the likeness of true things; and so at least these general things—eyes, head, hands, and the whole body—exist as things that are not imaginary but true. For even when painters themselves [20] try to depict sirens and little satyrs in the most unusual forms, they cannot give them natures that are new in every respect; they merely mix together the limbs of different animals. Or if perhaps they devise something so new that nothing at all like it has ever been seen, so that it is entirely fictitious and false, still at least the colors from which they compose it must certainly be true. By similar reasoning, even if these general things—eyes, head, hands, and the like—could be imaginary, it must still necessarily be admitted that at least certain other things, simpler and more universal still, are true, from which, as from true colors, all those images of things that are in our thought, whether true or false, are formed.

Of this kind seem to be corporeal nature in general and its extension; the shape of extended things; their quantity, that is, their size and number; the place in which they exist, the time through which they endure, and the like.

So perhaps we will not be wrong to conclude from this that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other disciplines that depend on the consideration of composite things are indeed doubtful, but that arithmetic, geometry, and others of that kind,

which deal only with the simplest and most general things and care little whether these exist in nature or not, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together make five, and a square has no more than four sides; and it does not seem possible that such transparent truths should fall under suspicion of falsity.

A DECEIVING GOD

Descartes asks whether an all-powerful God might deceive him even about arithmetic and geometry.

Yet there is fixed in my mind a certain long-standing opinion that there is a God who can do everything, and by whom I was created such as I am. How do I know that he has not brought it about that there is no earth at all, no sky, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, and yet that all these things seem to me to exist just as they do now? Indeed, just as I sometimes judge that others err about things they think they know most perfectly, how do I know that he has not brought it about that I am deceived every time I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or do something even easier, if anything easier can be imagined? But perhaps God did not want me to be deceived in this way, for he is said to be supremely good. Yet if it were contrary to his goodness to have created me such that I am always deceived, it would seem equally foreign to that goodness to allow me to be deceived sometimes; and yet this last cannot be said.

There may perhaps be some who would rather deny that there is any God so powerful than believe that everything else is uncertain. But let us not argue with them, and let us grant that all this about God is fiction. Whether they suppose that I have come to be what I am by fate, or by chance, or by a continuous series of events, or in any other way, since being deceived and erring seem to be a kind of imperfection, the less powerful they make the author of my origin, the more probable it will be that I am so imperfect as to be always deceived. To these arguments I

certainly have no reply. I am finally forced to admit that there is nothing among the things I once thought true about which it is not permissible to doubt—and this not through carelessness or frivolity, but for strong and carefully considered reasons. And so, if I want to find anything certain, I must from now on [22] carefully withhold my assent from these things as well, no less than from what is obviously false.

But it is not enough to have noticed this; I must take care to remember it. For my habitual opinions keep coming back, and they take hold of my credulity, which is bound to them, as it were, by long use and the right of familiarity, almost even against my will. Nor will I ever break the habit of assenting to them and trusting them, so long as I suppose them to be what they really are: doubtful in a certain way, as has just been shown, but nonetheless highly probable, and such that it is much more reasonable to believe them than to deny them. For this reason, I think I will not do badly if I turn my will completely in the opposite direction and deceive myself, pretending for a while that they are wholly false and imaginary, until at last, with the weights of preconceived opinion balanced on both sides, as it were, no bad habit any longer twists my judgment away from the correct perception of things. For I know that no danger or error will follow from this in the meantime, and that I cannot indulge my distrust too much, since I am now concerned not with acting but only with knowing.

THE MALICIOUS DEMON

Descartes supposes a malicious demon deceives him about everything and resolves to withhold assent.

So I will suppose that not God, who is supremely good and the source of truth, but some malicious demon, supremely powerful and cunning, has devoted all his efforts to deceiving me. I will think that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things are nothing but the illusions of dreams, which he has laid as traps for my credulity. I will consider [23]

myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh, no blood, no senses at all, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. I will stay stubbornly fixed in this meditation. And so, even if it is not in my power to know anything true, I will at least do what is in my power: with a resolute mind I will guard against assenting to anything false, so that this deceiver, however powerful, however cunning, cannot impose anything on me. But this is an arduous undertaking, and a kind of laziness draws me back to my ordinary way of life. I am like a prisoner who happened to be enjoying an imaginary freedom in his sleep: when he later begins to suspect that he is asleep, he fears being woken, and goes slowly along with the pleasant illusions. In just this way I slide back of my own accord into my old opinions. I dread waking up, for fear that the laborious wakefulness that would follow this peaceful rest would have to be spent from now on not in any light, but amid the inextricable darkness of the difficulties just raised.

Second Meditation

The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than the body
Descartes finds he cannot doubt his own existence and learns he is a thinking thing.

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[24] Yesterday's meditation has thrown me into such doubts that I can no longer forget them, and yet I do not see how they are to be resolved. It is as if I had suddenly fallen into a deep whirlpool: I am so tossed about that I can neither plant my foot on the bottom nor swim up to the surface. Still, I will make the effort and try once more the same path I set out on yesterday. That is, I will set aside everything that admits even the slightest doubt, just as if I had found it to be wholly false. And I will keep going until I know something certain—or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain. Archimedes asked for nothing but one point that was firm and immovable, in order to move the whole earth from its place. So too great things are to be hoped for if I find even the least thing that is certain and unshakable.

I suppose, then, that everything I see is false. I believe that none of the things my lying memory represents to me has ever existed. I have no senses at all. Body, shape, extension, motion, and place are chimeras. What, then, will be true? Perhaps just this one thing: that nothing is certain.

But how do I know that there is not something distinct from all the things I have just listed, about which there is not even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not some God, or whatever I may call him, who puts these very thoughts into me? But why

should I think so, when I myself may perhaps be their author? Am I not, then, at least something? But I have already denied that I have any senses or any body. Still, I hesitate; for what [25] follows from that? Am I so bound to a body and senses that I cannot be without them? But I have persuaded myself that there is nothing at all in the world—no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Did I not, then, also persuade myself that I do not exist? No: surely I existed, if I persuaded myself of something. But there is some deceiver or other, supremely powerful, supremely cunning, who is deliberately deceiving me all the time.

I AM, I EXIST

Descartes concludes that "I am, I exist" is necessarily true whenever he thinks it.

Then without doubt I too exist, if he is deceiving me. Let him deceive me as much as he can; he will still never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I think that I am something. So after weighing everything more than enough, I must finally conclude that this statement, "I am, I exist," is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

But I do not yet understand well enough who this I is that now necessarily exists. So from here on I must take care not to carelessly take something else in place of myself, and so go astray even in the knowledge that I maintain is the most certain and evident of all. I will therefore meditate afresh on what I once believed myself to be, before I fell into these thoughts. From this I will then subtract whatever could be weakened even slightly by the reasons already brought forward, so that in the end precisely what is certain and unshakable, and only that, remains.

WHAT AM I?

Descartes sets aside his old beliefs about himself to find what he can be certain he is.

What, then, did I formerly think I was? A man, of course. But what is a man? Shall I say a rational animal? No, because then I

would have to ask what an animal is, and what rational is, and so from one question I would slide into several harder ones. Nor do I now have so much spare time that I would want to waste it on subtleties of that kind. Instead I will attend here to what used to occur to my thought spontaneously [26] and with nature as my guide, whenever I considered what I was. First, it occurred to me that I had a face, hands, arms, and this whole machine of limbs, such as can be seen even in a corpse, which I referred to by the name "body." It occurred to me, moreover, that I was nourished, that I walked, sensed, and thought; and these actions I attributed to the soul. But what this soul was, either I did not stop to notice, or else I imagined it as some tenuous something-or-other, like a wind, or fire, or ether, infused into my coarser parts. About body, on the other hand, I had no doubt at all; I thought I knew its nature distinctly. Had I tried to describe it as I conceived it in my mind, I would have explained it like this: by body I understand whatever is apt to be bounded by some shape and enclosed in a place, and to fill a space in such a way as to exclude every other body from it; to be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; and to be moved in many ways—not by itself, but by something else that touches it. For I judged that the power of moving itself, and likewise of sensing or thinking, in no way belonged to the nature of body. On the contrary, I was rather amazed that such faculties were found in certain bodies.

But what now, when I suppose that some deceiver, supremely powerful and, if I may say so, malicious, has deliberately deceived me in everything, as far as he could? Can I affirm that I have even the least of all the things that I have just said belong to the nature [27] of body? I attend, I think, I turn it over; nothing comes to mind. I grow tired of repeating the same things in vain. What about the things I attributed to the soul? Being nourished, or walking? Since I now have no body, these too are nothing but fictions. Sensing? This too surely does not happen without a body; and in dreams I have seemed to sense a great many things that I later realized I had not sensed. Thinking?

Here I find it: it is thought. This alone cannot be torn away from me. I am, I exist; that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For perhaps it could even happen that, if I stopped all thinking, I would at once cease to exist altogether. I am now admitting nothing that is not necessarily true. I am, then, precisely speaking, only a thinking thing—that is, a mind, or intellect, or reason: words whose meaning I did not know before. But I am a real thing, and really existing. But what kind of thing? I have said it: a thinking thing.[1]

What else? I will imagine. I am not that framework of limbs called the human body. Nor am I some thin air infused into those limbs—not a wind, not a fire, not a vapor, not a breath, not anything I invent for myself; for I have supposed that these things are nothing. The supposition stands: nevertheless I am still something. Yet might it perhaps turn out that these very things which I suppose to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in truth no different from the I that I know? I do not know; I am not arguing about that now. I can pass judgment only on things that are known to me. I know that I exist; I am asking who this I is that I know. It is quite certain that knowledge of this I, taken precisely in this way, does not depend on things that I do not yet know to exist [28] —and so not on any of the things that I invent in imagination. And this very word, "invent," reminds me of my error. For I really would be inventing if I imagined myself to be something, since imagining is nothing other than contemplating the shape, or image, of a corporeal thing. But I now know for certain that I exist, and at the same time that all these images, and in general whatever relates to the nature of body, may be nothing but dreams. Having noticed this, I seem no less foolish in saying, "I will imagine, so as to recognize more distinctly who I am," than if I were to say, "I am now awake, and I see something true; but since I do not yet see it evidently enough, I will deliberately go to sleep, so that my dreams may represent this very thing to me more truly and more evidently."

1 The Latin gives two words for mind here, mens and animus; this translation renders both as "mind."

So I recognize that none of the things I can grasp with the help of the imagination belongs to this knowledge I have of myself, and that the mind must be very carefully called away from them, so that it may perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible.

A THINKING THING

Descartes defines himself as a thinking thing that doubts, understands, wills, imagines and senses.

But what, then, am I? A thinking thing. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, and also imagines and senses.

That is certainly quite a lot, if all of it belongs to me. But why should it not? Am I not the very one who now doubts almost everything, who nonetheless understands something, who affirms that this one thing is true and denies the rest, who desires to know more, who does not want to be deceived, who imagines many things even against my will, and who also notices many things as if they came from the senses? Even if I am always asleep, [29] and even if the one who created me is deceiving me as far as he can, which of these is not just as true as that I exist? Which of them is distinct from my thought? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? For that it is I who doubt, who understand, who will, is so obvious that nothing occurs to me by which it could be explained more evidently. But I am also the same one who imagines. For even if, as I have supposed, perhaps no imagined thing at all is true, still the power of imagining itself really exists and forms part of my thought. Finally, I am the same one who senses, that is, who notices corporeal things as if through the senses. For instance, I now see light, hear a noise, feel heat. These things are false, since I am asleep. Yet I certainly seem to see, to hear, to be warmed. This cannot be false; this is what in me is properly called sensing; and this, taken precisely in this way, is nothing other than thinking.

From all this I am indeed beginning to know somewhat better who I am. But it still seems to me—and I cannot keep from thinking—that corporeal things, whose images are formed by thought and which the senses themselves explore, are known much more distinctly than this part of me, whatever it is, that does not come under the imagination. Yet it is surely strange that things I notice to be doubtful, unknown, and foreign to me should be grasped by me more distinctly than what is true, what is known—than, in short, myself. But I see what is going on: my mind enjoys wandering, and will not yet allow itself to be confined within the bounds of truth. Very well, then: let us once more give it the loosest possible [30] reins, so that when, a little later, they are drawn back at the right moment, it will more readily allow itself to be governed.

THE PIECE OF WAX

Descartes examines a piece of wax and argues bodies are known by the intellect, not the senses.

Let us consider the things that are commonly thought to be grasped most distinctly of all: namely bodies, which we touch and see. Not bodies in general, for such general perceptions tend to be somewhat more confused, but one body in particular. Take, for example, this wax. It has only just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the taste of its honey; it retains a little of the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered. Its color, shape, and size are plain to see. It is hard, it is cold, it is easy to handle, and if you tap it with your knuckle it will give off a sound. In short, it has everything that seems to be required for a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But look: while I am speaking, it is brought near the fire. What remains of the taste is purged away, the scent fades, the color changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid, it becomes hot, it can scarcely be touched, and now if you strike it, it will give off no sound. Does the same wax still remain? It must be admitted that it remains; no one denies it, no one thinks other-

wise. What was there in it, then, that was grasped so distinctly? Certainly none of the things I reached with the senses; for whatever came under taste, or smell, or sight, or touch, or hearing has now changed—yet the wax remains.

Perhaps it was what I now think: namely, that the wax itself was not that sweetness of honey, nor that fragrance of flowers, nor that whiteness, nor that shape, nor that sound, but a body that a little while ago appeared to me perceptible in those ways, and now in different ones. But what exactly is this thing that I imagine in this way? Let us attend [31] and, removing whatever does not belong to the wax, see what is left: nothing other than something extended, flexible, and changeable. But what is this "flexible" and "changeable"? Is it that I imagine that this wax can be changed from a round shape to a square one, or from that to a triangular one? Not at all. For I grasp that it is capable of countless changes of this kind, yet I cannot run through countless changes by imagining them; so this grasp is not accomplished by the faculty of imagining. What about "extended"? Is not even its extension unknown? For in melting wax it becomes greater, greater still in boiling wax, and greater again if the heat is increased. And I would not judge correctly what wax is unless I thought that it also admits more variations in extension than I have ever encompassed by imagining. It remains, then, for me to grant that I do not even imagine what this wax is, but perceive it by the mind alone. I mean this particular wax; for the point is even clearer about wax in general. But what is this wax that is perceived only by the mind? Surely the same wax that I see, that I touch, that I imagine—the same, in short, that I believed it to be from the beginning. But—and this should be noted—the perception of it is not seeing, not touching, not imagining, and never was, although it previously seemed so. It is an inspection by the mind alone, which can be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct, as it is now, depending on how much or how little I attend to the things of which the wax consists.

Meanwhile I am amazed at how prone my mind is to errors. For although I am considering these things silently within myself and without [32] speaking, I nonetheless get stuck on words themselves and am nearly deceived by ordinary ways of speaking. For we say that we see the wax itself, if it is there, not that we judge it to be there from its color or shape. From this I would at once conclude that the wax is therefore known by the eye's vision, and not by an inspection of the mind alone—had I not just now happened to look out of the window at people passing in the street. Of them, too, I say, no less customarily than of the wax, that I see them. But what do I see besides hats and coats, under which there might be automata? Yet I judge that they are people. And so what I thought I was seeing with my eyes, I in fact grasp solely by the faculty of judging, which is in my mind.

But someone who wants to be wiser than the crowd should be ashamed to have looked for grounds for doubt in the forms of speech the crowd has invented. So let us go on, and consider whether I perceived what the wax was more perfectly and more evidently when I first looked at it and believed that I knew it by the external sense itself, or at least by the common sense, as they call it—that is, by the imaginative power—or rather now, after I have investigated more carefully both what it is and how it is known. Surely it would be foolish to doubt this. For what was there in my first perception that was distinct? What was there that any animal could not apparently have had? But when I distinguish the wax from its external forms and consider it naked, as if its clothes had been stripped off, then, although there may still be error in my judgment, I really cannot perceive it in this way without a human mind. [33] [2]

But what am I to say about this mind itself, that is, about myself? For as yet I admit nothing to be in me except a mind. What, I ask, of me, who seem to perceive this wax so distinctly? Do I not know myself not only much more truly and much more certainly, but also much more distinctly and evidently? For if I

2 The "common sense" (sensus communis) was, in the scholastic psychology of the day, the inner faculty thought to combine the reports of the separate senses.

judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, it certainly follows much more evidently, from this very fact that I see it, that I myself exist. For it may be that what I see is not really wax; it may be that I do not even have eyes with which anything is seen. But it is quite impossible, when I see, or (which I am not now distinguishing) when I think I see, that I myself who am thinking should not be something. By the same reasoning, if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same thing will follow once again, namely that I exist. If I judge it from the fact that I imagine it, or for any other reason, exactly the same. And what I notice about the wax can be applied to everything else located outside me. Moreover, if my perception of the wax seemed more distinct after it became known to me not from sight or touch alone but from several causes, how much more distinctly must I admit that I now know myself! For no reasons can help toward the perception of the wax, or of any other body, without all those same reasons proving the nature of my mind still better. And besides, there are so many other things in the mind itself by which knowledge of it can be made more distinct, that the things which flow into it from the body hardly seem worth counting.

And look: at last I have come back of my own accord to where
[34] I wanted to be. For I now know that bodies themselves are perceived, properly speaking, not by the senses or by the faculty of imagining but by the intellect alone, and that they are perceived not because they are touched or seen but only because they are understood. So I plainly recognize that nothing can be perceived by me more easily or more evidently than my own mind. But since the habit of an old opinion cannot be laid aside so quickly, I would like to pause here, so that by lengthy meditation this new knowledge may be fixed more deeply in my memory.

Third Meditation

God, and that he exists
Descartes argues from his idea of an infinite, perfect being that God exists.

I will now close my eyes, stop my ears, and call away all my senses. I will even erase from my thought all images of corporeal things—or at least, since that can hardly be done, I will regard them as empty and false and count them as nothing. And by talking with myself alone and looking more deeply into myself, I will try gradually to make myself better known and more familiar to myself. I am a thinking thing: that is, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many, wills, refuses, and also imagines and senses. For as I noted before, even though the things I sense or imagine may perhaps be nothing outside me, still I am certain that those modes of thinking which I call sensations and imaginations, [35] insofar as they are simply modes of thinking, are in me.

CLEAR AND DISTINCT PERCEPTION

Descartes proposes that whatever he perceives clearly and distinctly is true and sorts his ideas by origin.

With these few words I have reviewed everything I truly know, or at least everything I have so far noticed that I know. Now I will look around more carefully to see whether there may be other things in me that I have not yet considered. I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for me to be certain of anything? In this first know-

ledge there is nothing but a certain clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. This would certainly not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever happen that something I perceived so clearly and distinctly was false. And so I now seem able to lay down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.

Yet I previously accepted as wholly certain and evident many things that I later found to be doubtful. What were these, then? The earth, the sky, the stars, and all the other things I took in through the senses. But what did I clearly perceive about them? Only that the ideas, or thoughts, of such things were present to my mind. And even now I do not deny that those ideas are in me. But there was something else that I used to affirm, and that, through the habit of believing it, I thought I perceived clearly, though in fact I did not perceive it: namely, that there were certain things outside me from which those ideas proceeded and which they wholly resembled. And this was where I was either mistaken or, at any rate, if I was judging truly, that did not come about through the strength of my perception.

What, then? When I was considering something very simple and easy in arithmetic or geometry, [36] such as that two and three added together make five, or the like, did I not at least see these things clearly enough to affirm that they were true? Indeed, the only reason I later judged that they should be doubted was that it occurred to me that some God could perhaps have given me a nature such that I was deceived even about the things that seemed most evident. But whenever this preconceived opinion about the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot help admitting that, if he wished, it would be easy for him to make me go wrong even in the things I think I see most evidently with the eyes of the mind. But whenever I turn to the very things that I think I perceive very clearly, I am so thoroughly persuaded by them that I spontaneously burst out with these words: Let whoever can deceive me; he will still never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I think that I am something; or that it should ever be true that I never existed, since it is now true that I exist;

or perhaps even that two and three added together should be more or less than five, or anything of the kind, in which I recognize an evident contradiction. And certainly, since I have no reason for thinking that some God is a deceiver, and do not yet even know well enough whether there is any God at all, a reason for doubting that depends solely on this opinion is very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical. But in order to remove even this reason, as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For as long as this is unknown, it seems I can never be fully certain of anything else.

But now order seems to require that I first [37] divide all my thoughts into definite kinds, and ask in which of them truth or falsity properly lies. Some of them are like images of things, and to these alone the name "idea" properly applies: as when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Others have certain other forms in addition. When I will, when I fear, when I affirm, when I deny, I always apprehend some thing as the subject of my thought, but I also take in with my thought something more than the likeness of that thing. Of these, some are called volitions, or emotions, and others judgments.

Now as far as ideas are concerned, if they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot, properly speaking, be false; for whether I imagine a goat or a chimera, it is no less true that I imagine the one than the other. Nor is there any falsity to fear in the will itself or in the emotions; for although I may desire wicked things, or even things that exist nowhere, it is still true that I desire them. So only judgments remain, and in them I must take care not to be deceived. Now the chief and most frequent error that can be found in them consists in my judging that the ideas in me resemble or conform to certain things located outside me. For certainly, if I considered the ideas themselves simply as certain modes of my thought, and did not refer them to anything else, they could hardly give me any material for error.

Of these ideas, some seem to me innate, some adventitious, [38] and some made by me myself. For my understanding what a thing is, what truth is, what thought is, seems to come from nowhere else than my own nature. But my now hearing a noise, seeing the sun, feeling the fire—these I have so far judged to proceed from certain things located outside me. And finally, sirens, hippogriffs, and the like are invented by me. Or perhaps I can even think that they are all adventitious, or all innate, or all made by me; for I have not yet clearly seen their true origin.[1]

But here I must chiefly ask, concerning the ideas that I consider as derived from things existing outside me, what reason leads me to think they resemble those things. Well, I seem to have been taught so by nature. And besides, I find by experience that they do not depend on my will, and hence not on me myself; for they often present themselves even against my will. Right now, for instance, whether I want to or not, I feel heat, and so I think that this sensation, or idea of heat, comes to me from a thing distinct from me, namely from the heat of the fire I am sitting by. And nothing is more obvious than for me to judge from this that the thing sends into me its own likeness rather than anything else.

Whether these reasons are firm enough, I will now see. When I say here that I have been taught so by nature, I mean only that I am carried by a certain spontaneous impulse to believe it, not that it is shown to me to be true by some natural light. These two things differ a great deal. For whatever is shown to me by the natural light—for instance, that from the fact that I doubt it follows that I exist, and the like—can in no way be doubtful, because there can be no other faculty that I trust as much as that light, and that could teach me that these things [39] are not true. But as for natural impulses, I have often judged in the past that they pushed me toward the worse side when it was a matter of choosing the good, and I do not see why I should trust them any more in any other matter.

1 "Adventitious" (adventitiae): coming to the mind from outside, as opposed to innate or self-made.

Next, even though those ideas do not depend on my will, it does not follow that they necessarily proceed from things located outside me. For just as the impulses I was speaking of a moment ago, though they are in me, nonetheless seem to be distinct from my will, so perhaps there is also some other faculty in me, not yet well enough known to me, that produces these ideas —just as it has always seemed up to now that they are formed in me while I dream, without any help from external things.

And finally, even if they did proceed from things distinct from me, it does not follow that they must resemble those things. On the contrary, in many cases I think I have often found a great discrepancy. For example, I find in myself two different ideas of the sun. One, drawn as it were from the senses, and to be counted above all among the ideas I regard as adventitious, makes the sun appear very small to me. The other, derived from the reasonings of astronomy—that is, elicited from certain notions innate in me, or made by me in some other way—shows it to be several times larger than the earth. Certainly both cannot resemble the same sun existing outside me; and reason persuades me that the one which seems to have flowed most directly from the sun itself is the one that least resembles it.

All this shows clearly enough that until now I have believed, not [40] from any certain judgment, but only from some blind impulse, that there exist certain things distinct from me which send their ideas or images into me through the sense organs or in some other way.

DEGREES OF REALITY

Descartes argues that the cause of an idea must contain at least as much reality as the idea represents.

But yet another way occurs to me of inquiring whether any of the things whose ideas are in me exist outside me. Insofar as these ideas are simply modes of thinking, I recognize no inequality among them, and they all seem to proceed from me in the same way. But insofar as one represents one thing and

another represents another, it is clear that they differ greatly from one another. For undoubtedly the ideas that present substances to me are something more and, so to speak, contain more objective reality in themselves than those that represent only modes, or accidents. And again, the idea by which I understand a supreme God—eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and creator of all things that exist besides himself—certainly has more objective reality in it than the ideas by which finite substances are presented.

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that same cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it that reality, unless it also had it? From this it follows both that something cannot come from nothing, and also that what is more perfect—that is, what contains [41] more reality in itself—cannot come from what is less perfect. And this is plainly true not only of those effects whose reality is actual or formal, but also of ideas, in which only objective reality is considered. That is to say: not only can a stone, for example, which did not exist before, not begin to exist now unless it is produced by some thing in which there is, either formally or eminently, everything that is found in the stone; and not only can heat not be brought into a subject that was not hot before except by a thing of an order at least as perfect as heat, and so on for the rest; but in addition, the idea of heat, or of a stone, cannot be in me unless it has been placed in me by some cause in which there is at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or the stone.[2] For although this cause transfers none of its actual or formal reality into my idea, I should not therefore think that the cause must be less real. Rather, the nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality other than what it borrows from my thought, of which it is a mode. But that this idea contains this or that objective reality rather than another, it must surely get from some

2 A cause contains something "formally" when it has it in the same form as the effect, and "eminently" when it has it in a higher form capable of producing it.

cause in which there is at least as much formal reality as the idea contains objective reality. For if we suppose that something is found in the idea that was not in its cause, then the idea gets this from nothing. Yet however imperfect this mode of being may be, by which a thing is objectively in the intellect through an idea, it is certainly not nothing at all, and so it cannot come from nothing.

Nor should I suspect that, since the reality I consider in my ideas is only objective, it is not [42] necessary for the same reality to be formally in the causes of those ideas, but that it is enough if it is in them objectively as well. For just as this objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas—at least to the first and principal ones—by their nature. And although one idea may perhaps arise from another, there can be no infinite regress here; eventually we must arrive at some first idea, whose cause is like an archetype, in which all the reality that is in the idea only objectively is contained formally. So it is clear to me by the natural light that the ideas in me are like images, which can indeed easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they were taken, but cannot contain anything greater or more perfect.

The longer and more carefully I examine all this, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize that it is true. But what, in the end, shall I conclude from it? This: if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is so great that I am certain it is not in me either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be the cause of that idea, then it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing, which is the cause of that idea, also exists. But if no such idea is found in me, I will have no argument at all to make me certain of the existence of any thing distinct from myself. For I have looked around most carefully, and so far I have been able to find no other.

Now among these ideas of mine, besides the one that presents me to myself, about which there can be no difficulty [43] here, there is one that represents God, others that represent corporeal

and inanimate things, others angels, others animals, and finally others that represent other human beings like myself.

As for the ideas that present other human beings, or animals, or angels, I easily understand that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of corporeal things, and of God, even if there were no human beings besides me in the world, and no animals, and no angels.

As for the ideas of corporeal things, there is nothing in them so great that it seems it could not have come from me myself. For if I look into them more deeply, and examine each one in the way I examined the idea of the wax yesterday, I notice that there are only very few things in them that I perceive clearly and distinctly: namely, size, or extension in length, breadth, and depth; shape, which arises from the bounding of that extension; position, which the various shaped things have relative to one another; and motion, or change of that position. To these can be added substance, duration, and number. But everything else—light and colors, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold, and the other tactile qualities—I think of only in a very confused and obscure way, so much so that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of things or of non-things. For although I noted a little earlier that falsity properly so called, or formal falsity, can be found only in judgments, there is certainly another kind of falsity in ideas, material falsity, when they represent what is not a thing as if it were a thing. Thus, for example, the ideas I have of heat and cold are so far from clear [44] and distinct that I cannot learn from them whether cold is merely the privation of heat, or heat the privation of cold, or whether both are real qualities, or neither. And since there can be no ideas that are not, as it were, ideas of things, if it is true that cold is nothing but the privation of heat, then the idea that represents it to me as something real and positive will rightly be called false; and so on for the rest.

For these ideas I certainly need not posit any author distinct from myself. For if they are false, that is, if they represent no things, I know by the natural light that they come from nothing

—that is, that they are in me only because something is lacking in my nature, which is not wholly perfect. If, on the other hand, they are true, then since they present so little reality to me that I cannot even distinguish it from a non-thing, I do not see why they could not come from me myself.

Of the things that are clear and distinct in the ideas of corporeal things, some I seem to have been able to borrow from the idea of myself: namely substance, duration, number, and anything else of that kind. For when I think that a stone is a substance, or a thing capable of existing by itself, and likewise that I am a substance, then although I conceive of myself as a thinking thing and not an extended one, and of the stone as an extended thing and not a thinking one, so that the two concepts differ enormously, they nevertheless seem to agree in the respect of being substance. Likewise, when I perceive that I exist now, and recall that I have also existed for some time before, and when I have various thoughts whose number I understand, I acquire [45] the ideas of duration and number, which I can then transfer to any other things whatever. But all the rest of which the ideas of corporeal things are composed—namely extension, shape, position, and motion—are not contained in me formally, since I am nothing but a thinking thing. But because they are only certain modes of a substance, and I am a substance, it seems they can be contained in me eminently.

THE IDEA OF GOD

Descartes argues that his idea of an infinite God could only have come from God himself.

So there remains only the idea of God, in which I must consider whether there is anything that could not have come from me myself. By the name "God" I understand a certain substance that is infinite, independent, supremely intelligent, supremely powerful, and by which both I myself and everything else that exists—if anything else does exist—was created. All these attributes are such that the more carefully I attend to them, the less it

seems possible that they came from me alone. And so, from what has been said, it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.

For although the idea of substance is in me by the very fact that I am a substance, it would not on that account be the idea of an infinite substance, since I am finite, unless it came from some substance that really was infinite.

Nor should I think that I perceive the infinite not through a true idea but only by negating the finite, as I perceive rest and darkness by negating motion and light. On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite is in some way prior in me to my perception of the finite —that is, my perception of God to that of myself. For how could I understand that I doubt, that I [46] desire—that is, that something is lacking in me, and that I am not wholly perfect—if there were in me no idea of a more perfect being, by comparison with which I recognized my defects?

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false, and so could come from nothing, as I noted a little earlier about the ideas of heat and cold and the like. On the contrary, since it is supremely clear and distinct, and contains more objective reality than any other, no idea is truer in itself, and none is less open to the suspicion of falsity. This idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being is, I say, supremely true. For although one might perhaps pretend that such a being does not exist, one cannot pretend that its idea presents nothing real to me, as I said earlier about the idea of cold. It is also supremely clear and distinct; for whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly that is real and true, and that implies some perfection, is wholly contained in it. Nor is it an obstacle that I do not comprehend the infinite, or that there are countless other things in God that I can in no way comprehend, or perhaps even reach in thought. For it belongs to the nature of the infinite that it is not comprehended by me, who am finite. And it is enough that I understand this very point, and judge that all the things I clearly perceive

and know to imply some perfection—and perhaps countless others of which I am ignorant—are in God either formally or eminently, so that the idea I have of him is the truest, and the most clear and distinct, of all the ideas in me.

But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand, and all the perfections I attribute to God are in some way in me potentially, even if they do not yet [47] show themselves and are not brought into actuality. For I already experience my knowledge gradually increasing; and I do not see what prevents it from increasing more and more to infinity, nor why, with my knowledge thus increased, I could not by its means acquire all the other perfections of God; nor, finally, why the potential for these perfections, if it is already in me, would not suffice to produce the idea of them.

But none of this can be so. First, even if it is true that my knowledge increases by degrees, and that there are many things in me potentially that are not yet actual, none of this pertains to the idea of God, in which there is nothing at all that is merely potential; indeed, this very fact—increasing by degrees—is the surest sign of imperfection. Moreover, even if my knowledge always increases more and more, I nevertheless understand that it will never on that account be actually infinite, because it will never reach a point where it is incapable of further increase. But I judge God to be actually infinite in such a way that nothing can be added to his perfection. And finally, I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced by merely potential being, which, properly speaking, is nothing, but only by actual or formal being.

Certainly there is nothing in all this that is not manifest by the natural light to anyone who attends carefully. But when I attend less, and the images of sensible things blind the mind's eye, I do not so easily remember why the idea of a being more perfect than I must necessarily come from some being that really is more perfect. So I would like to inquire [48] further whether I myself, who have this idea, could exist if no such being existed.

From what, then, would I derive my existence? From myself, of course, or from my parents, or from any other things less perfect than God; for nothing more perfect than God, or even as perfect, can be thought or imagined.

Yet if I derived my existence from myself, I would not doubt, or wish for anything, or lack anything at all; for I would have given myself all the perfections of which there is any idea in me, and so I would myself be God. Nor should I think that the things I lack might perhaps be harder to acquire than those already in me. On the contrary, it is plain that it would have been far harder for me—that is, a thinking thing or substance—to emerge out of nothing than to acquire knowledge of the many things I do not know, since such knowledge is only an accident of that substance. And certainly, if I had that greater thing from myself, I would not have denied myself at least the things that can be had more easily—nor, indeed, any of the others that I perceive to be contained in the idea of God, since none of them seems to me harder to achieve. And if any were harder to achieve, they would certainly also seem harder to me, if I had the rest of what I have from myself, since I would experience my power reaching its limit in them.

Nor do I escape the force of these arguments if I suppose that perhaps I have always existed as I do now, as if it followed from this that no author of my existence need be sought. For since the whole span of a life can be divided into [49] countless parts, each of which in no way depends on the others, it does not follow from the fact that I existed a little while ago that I must exist now, unless some cause as it were creates me again at this moment—that is, preserves me. For it is clear to anyone who attends to the nature of time that exactly the same power and action are needed to preserve any thing at each moment of its duration as would be needed to create it anew if it did not yet exist. So that preservation differs from creation only in the way we think of it is also one of the things that are manifest by the natural light.

So I must now ask myself whether I have some power by which I can bring it about that I, who exist now, will also exist a little while from now. For since I am nothing but a thinking thing—or at least, since I am now dealing precisely with only that part of me which is a thinking thing—if there were any such power in me, I would undoubtedly be aware of it. But I experience that there is none, and from this very fact I know most evidently that I depend on some being distinct from me.

But perhaps that being is not God, and I was produced either by my parents or by some other causes less perfect than God. No: as I have already said, it is clear that there must be at least as much in the cause as there is in the effect. And therefore, since I am a thinking thing and have in me some idea of God, whatever cause of me is finally assigned, it must be admitted that it too is a thinking thing and has the idea of all the perfections I attribute to God. And about that cause it can be asked in turn whether it derives its existence from itself or from another. If from itself, it is clear from what has been said that it is itself God; for [50] since it has the power of existing through itself, it undoubtedly also has the power of actually possessing all the perfections of which it has an idea in itself, that is, all those I conceive to be in God. If, however, it derives its existence from another, then the same question will be asked in turn about this other, whether it is from itself or from another, until we finally arrive at the ultimate cause, which will be God.

For it is clear enough that there can be no infinite regress here, especially since I am dealing here not only with the cause that once produced me, but most of all with the cause that preserves me at the present time.

Nor can it be supposed that several partial causes perhaps worked together to make me, and that I received the idea of one of the perfections I attribute to God from one cause, and the idea of another from another, so that all those perfections are indeed found somewhere in the universe, but not all joined together in some single being who would be God. On the contrary, the unity, simplicity, or inseparability of all the things that are in God is

one of the chief perfections I understand to be in him. And certainly the idea of this unity of all his perfections could not have been placed in me by any cause from which I did not also get the ideas of the other perfections; for that cause could not have made me understand them as joined together and inseparable unless it had at the same time made me recognize what they were.

Finally, as for my parents, even if everything I have ever believed about them is true, it is certainly not they who preserve me, nor did they in any way make me insofar as I am a thinking thing. They only placed certain dispositions in the matter in which I have judged that I—that is, the mind, which alone I now [51] take to be myself—reside. So there can be no difficulty about them here. Rather, it must simply be concluded that from the mere fact that I exist, and that there is in me an idea of a most perfect being, that is, of God, it is most evidently demonstrated that God also exists.

It remains only for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not draw it from the senses, nor has it ever come to me unexpectedly, as the ideas of sensible things usually do when those things strike, or seem to strike, the external organs of the senses. Nor was it made up by me, for I plainly cannot take anything away from it or add anything to it. And so it remains that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is also innate in me.

THE TRADEMARK ARGUMENT

Descartes argues God placed the idea of himself in him like a craftsman's mark and ends in contemplation.

And it is certainly not surprising that God, in creating me, put this idea in me to be like the mark of a craftsman stamped on his work. Nor is it necessary that this mark be some thing distinct from the work itself. But from this one fact, that God created me, it is highly credible that I have been made in some way in his image and likeness, and that this likeness, in which the idea of

God is contained, is perceived by me through the same faculty by which I myself am perceived by me. That is, when I turn the mind's eye upon myself, I not only understand that I am an incomplete thing, dependent on another, and a thing that aspires indefinitely to greater and greater, or better, things; I also understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has all those greater things in himself, not indefinitely and only potentially, but in reality and infinitely, and so that he is God. The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it is impossible [52] for me to exist with the nature I have—namely, having the idea of God in me—unless God really existed as well: God, I say, the very same God whose idea is in me, that is, one who has all those perfections which I cannot comprehend but can in some way reach in thought, and who is subject to no defects whatever. From this it is quite clear that he cannot be a deceiver; for it is manifest by the natural light that all fraud and deception depend on some defect.

But before I examine this more carefully, and at the same time inquire into other truths that can be gathered from it, I would like to pause here for a while in the contemplation of God himself, to weigh his attributes within myself, and to gaze upon, wonder at, and adore the beauty of this immense light, so far as the eye of my clouded ingenuity can bear it. For just as we believe by faith that the supreme happiness of the next life consists in this contemplation of the divine majesty alone, so we now experience that from this same contemplation, though far less perfect, we can derive the greatest pleasure of which we are capable in this life.

Fourth Meditation

Truth and falsity
Descartes explains how error is possible if God is no deceiver and how to avoid it.

In these past days I have so accustomed myself to withdrawing my mind from the senses, and I have so carefully observed that there are very few [53] things that are truly perceived about corporeal things, while much more is known about the human mind, and still much more about God, that I now turn my thought without any difficulty away from imaginable things to things that are purely intelligible and separated from all matter. And indeed I have a much more distinct idea of the human mind, insofar as it is a thinking thing, not extended in length, breadth, and depth, and having nothing else of body about it, than I have of any corporeal thing. And when I attend to the fact that I doubt, that is, that I am an incomplete and dependent thing, so clear and distinct an idea of an independent and complete being, that is, of God, comes to me; and from the one fact that such an idea is in me, or that I, who have this idea, exist, I conclude so plainly that God also exists, and that my whole existence depends on him at every single moment, that I am confident nothing can be known more evidently or more certainly by human ingenuity. And now I seem to see a way by which, from this contemplation of the true God, in whom all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden, we may arrive at the knowledge of other things.[1]

1 "In whom all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden" echoes Colossians 2:3.

To begin with, I recognize that it is impossible for him ever to deceive me. For in all trickery or deception some imperfection is found; and although being able to deceive may seem to be some sign of cleverness or power, wanting to deceive undoubtedly bears witness either to malice or to weakness, and so cannot apply to God.

Next, I experience that there is in me a certain faculty of judging, which, like everything else that is in me, [54] I certainly received from God. And since he does not wish to deceive me, he surely did not give me a faculty such that I could ever err while using it correctly.

No doubt would remain on this matter, except that it seems to follow that I can therefore never err. For if whatever is in me I have from God, and he has not given me any faculty of erring, it seems I can never err.

BETWEEN GOD AND NOTHINGNESS

Descartes places himself between God and nothingness and asks why God allows him to err.

And indeed, so long as I think only about God, and turn myself wholly toward him, I find no cause of error or falsity. But when I afterwards turn back to myself, I nevertheless experience that I am subject to countless errors. Looking for their cause, I notice that there is present to me not only a real and positive idea of God, or of a supremely perfect being, but also, so to speak, a certain negative idea of nothingness, or of what is supremely remote from all perfection; and that I am constituted as something intermediate between God and nothingness, or between supreme being and non-being. So insofar as I was created by the supreme being, there is nothing in me through which I might be deceived or led into error; but insofar as I also in some way participate in nothingness, or non-being—that is, insofar as I am not myself the supreme being and lack a great many things—it is not so surprising that I am deceived. And so I certainly understand that error, insofar as it is error, is not something real that

depends on God, but is merely a defect. Hence, in order to err, I do not need some faculty given me by God for that purpose; rather, I happen to err because the faculty of judging truly, which I have from him, is not infinite in me.

Yet this is still not wholly satisfactory. For error is not [55] a pure negation, but a privation, or lack, of some knowledge that ought in some way to be in me. And when I attend to the nature of God, it does not seem possible that he should have placed in me some faculty that is not perfect of its kind, or that lacks some perfection due to it. For if the more skilled the craftsman, the more perfect the works that come from him, what can have been made by that supreme maker of all things that is not complete in every respect? Nor is there any doubt that God could have created me such that I would never be deceived; nor is there any doubt that he always wills what is best. Is it better, then, that I be deceived than not?

As I weigh these things more attentively, it occurs to me first that I should not be surprised if God does some things whose reasons I do not understand; nor should I doubt his existence on the grounds that I perhaps find other things of which I do not comprehend why or how he made them. For since I now know that my nature is very weak and limited, while the nature of God is immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, I also know well enough from this that he can do countless things whose causes I do not know. And for this reason alone I consider that the whole class of causes customarily sought from the end is of no use in physical matters; for I do not think I can investigate the ends of God without rashness.[2]

It also occurs to me that whenever we inquire whether the works of God are perfect, we should consider not some single creature in isolation but the whole universe of things. For what might perhaps rightly seem very [56] imperfect if it existed alone is most perfect when regarded as having the role of a part in the world. And although, since I resolved to doubt everything, I

2 Causes "sought from the end" are final causes: explanations of a thing by the purpose it serves.

have so far known with certainty that nothing exists except myself and God, still, since I have become aware of God's immense power, I cannot deny that many other things have been made by him, or at least could be made, so that I would have the role of a part in the universe of things.

INTELLECT AND WILL

Descartes traces error to the will, which reaches further than the limited intellect.

Next, coming closer to myself and investigating what sort of thing my errors are (for they alone point to some imperfection in me), I notice that they depend on two causes working together: namely, on the faculty of knowing that is in me, and on the faculty of choosing, or freedom of choice—that is, on the intellect and at the same time on the will. For through the intellect alone I merely perceive ideas about which I can make a judgment, and in the intellect, considered precisely in this way, no error properly so called is found. For although countless things perhaps exist of which I have no ideas, I should not be said to be properly deprived of them, but only to lack them in a negative sense. This is because I can offer no reason to prove that God ought to have given me a greater faculty of knowing than he has given; and however skilled a craftsman I understand him to be, I do not therefore think he ought to have put into each of his works all the perfections he can put into some. Nor, again, can I complain that I have not received from God a will, or freedom of choice, that is sufficiently broad and perfect; for I certainly experience that it is not confined by any limits. And what seems to me especially worth noting is that there is nothing [57] else in me so perfect or so great that I do not understand that it could be still more perfect or greater. For if, for example, I consider the faculty of understanding, I immediately recognize that it is very slight and very limited in me, and at the same time I form an idea of another, much greater faculty—indeed, the greatest and infinite—and from the very fact that I can form an

idea of it, I perceive that it belongs to the nature of God. In the same way, if I examine the faculty of remembering or of imagining, or any others, I find none at all that I do not understand to be feeble and limited in me but immense in God. It is only the will, or freedom of choice, that I experience to be so great in me that I can grasp the idea of none greater; so much so that it is chiefly by reason of the will that I understand myself to bear a certain image and likeness of God. For although the will is incomparably greater in God than in me—both by reason of the knowledge and power joined to it, which make it firmer and more effective, and by reason of its object, since it extends to more things—still, considered formally and precisely in itself, it does not seem to be greater. For it consists only in this: that we are able to do or not to do the same thing (that is, to affirm or deny, to pursue or avoid). Or rather it consists only in this: that we are so moved to affirm or deny, or to pursue or avoid, what the intellect puts before us that we feel ourselves determined to it by no external force.

FREEDOM AND INDIFFERENCE

Descartes argues that freedom grows with clear reasons and that error comes from misusing the will.

For in order to be free I need not be able to be moved in both directions. On the contrary, the more I lean toward one side—whether because I evidently understand the [58] character of the true and the good in it, or because God so disposes the inmost reaches of my thought—the more freely I choose it. Neither divine grace nor natural knowledge ever diminishes freedom; rather, they increase and strengthen it. But the indifference I experience when no reason pushes me toward one side more than the other is the lowest grade of freedom. It is evidence not of any perfection in it, but only of a defect in knowledge, or a kind of negation. For if I always saw clearly what was true and good, I would never deliberate about what to judge or choose; and so, though entirely free, I could never be indifferent.

From these considerations I perceive that the cause of my errors is not the power of willing, which I have from God, considered in itself, for it is very ample and perfect of its kind. Nor is it the power of understanding: for whatever I understand, since I have from God the ability to understand it, I doubtless understand rightly, and I cannot possibly be deceived in it. Where, then, do my errors come from? Surely from this alone: that since the will extends more widely than the intellect, I do not keep it within the same limits, but extend it even to things I do not understand. Since it is indifferent to these, it easily turns aside from the true and the good; and so I both am deceived and sin.

For example, when I was examining these past days whether anything in the world existed, and noticed that from the very fact that I was examining this it evidently followed that I existed, I could not help judging that what I understood so clearly was true. Not that I was compelled to this by any [59] external force, but because a great light in the intellect was followed by a great inclination in the will; and so I believed it all the more spontaneously and freely the less indifferent I was to it. Now, however, I not only know that I exist insofar as I am a thinking thing, but an idea of corporeal nature also presents itself to me; and it happens that I doubt whether the thinking nature that is in me—or rather, that I myself am—is different from this corporeal nature, or whether the two are the same. And I suppose that no reason has yet occurred to my intellect that persuades me of one rather than the other. Certainly, from this very fact I am indifferent to affirming or denying either, or even to making no judgment on the matter at all.

Indeed, this indifference extends not only to things of which the intellect knows nothing at all, but in general to everything that the intellect does not know plainly enough at the very time when the will is deliberating about it. For however probable the conjectures that draw me in one direction, the mere knowledge that they are only conjectures, and not certain and indubitable reasons, is enough to push my assent the opposite way. I have

had ample experience of this in these past days, when I supposed to be wholly false all the things I had previously believed most firmly to be true, for this one reason: that I had found they could in some way be doubted.

But when I do not perceive clearly and distinctly enough what is true, it is clear that if I refrain from making a judgment I act rightly and am not deceived. But if I either affirm or deny, then I do not use my freedom of choice rightly. And [60] if I turn to the side that is false, I shall plainly be deceived; if I embrace the other, I shall indeed hit on the truth by chance, but I shall not on that account be free of blame, since it is manifest by the natural light that the perception of the intellect must always precede the determination of the will. And in this incorrect use of free choice lies the privation that constitutes the form of error: the privation, I say, lies in the operation itself insofar as it proceeds from me, but not in the faculty I received from God, nor even in the operation insofar as it depends on him.[3]

For I have no cause to complain that God did not give me a greater power of understanding, or a greater natural light, than he did; for it belongs to the nature of a finite intellect not to understand many things, and to the nature of a created intellect to be finite. Rather, I have reason to thank him, who never owed me anything, for what he has bestowed—not to think that he has deprived me of the things he did not give, or taken them away from me.

Nor have I cause to complain that he gave me a will that extends more widely than the intellect. For since the will consists in one thing only, as if in something indivisible, its nature does not seem to allow anything to be taken away from it. And surely the ampler it is, the greater the thanks I owe to its giver.

Nor, finally, should I complain that God concurs with me in eliciting those acts of will, or those judgments, in which I am deceived. For those acts are wholly true and good insofar as they depend on God; and there is in a way greater perfection in me in

3 "Form" is the scholastic term for what makes a thing what it is; the privation is what error essentially consists in.

being able to elicit them than if I could not. But the privation, in which alone the formal [61] character of falsity and fault consists, needs no concurrence from God, because it is not a thing; and when it is referred to him as its cause, it should be called not a privation but only a negation. For there is surely no imperfection in God in his having given me the freedom to assent or not to assent to certain things of which he did not put a clear and distinct perception in my intellect. But there is doubtless an imperfection in me in my not using that freedom well, and in my passing judgment on things I do not rightly understand. I see, however, that God could easily have brought it about that, while remaining free and of finite knowledge, I should nevertheless never err: namely, if he had either endowed my intellect with a clear and distinct perception of everything I would ever deliberate about, or simply impressed on my memory, so firmly that I could never forget it, that I must never judge anything I do not clearly and distinctly understand. And I readily understand that, considered as a kind of whole in my own right, I would have been more perfect than I am now had God made me so. But I cannot on that account deny that there is in a way greater perfection in the whole universe of things because some of its parts are not immune from errors while others are, than if all of them were exactly alike. And I have no right to complain that God has willed me to play a role in the world that is not the chief and most perfect of all.

AVOIDING ERROR

Descartes resolves to avoid error by withholding judgment whenever the truth is not clear.

Moreover, even if I cannot abstain from errors in the first way, which depends on an evident perception of everything I must deliberate about, I can still do so in the other way, which depends only [62] on my remembering to refrain from judging whenever the truth of a matter is not plain. For although I experience in myself the weakness of not being able always to keep

my attention fixed on one and the same piece of knowledge, I can nonetheless, by attentive and often repeated meditation, bring it about that I recall it whenever need requires, and so acquire a kind of habit of not erring.

Since the greatest and chief perfection of a human being consists in this, I think I have gained no small amount from today's meditation, in having investigated the cause of error and falsity. And surely there can be no cause other than the one I have explained. For whenever I restrain the will in making judgments so that it extends only to what the intellect presents to it clearly and distinctly, it is quite impossible for me to err. For every clear and distinct perception is undoubtedly something, and so cannot come from nothing, but necessarily has God as its author —God, I say, that supremely perfect being, whom it is contradictory to suppose a deceiver. Therefore it is undoubtedly true. Nor have I learned today only what to guard against so as never to be deceived, but also what to do to attain the truth. For I will surely attain it if only I attend sufficiently to everything I understand perfectly, and separate it from the rest, which I apprehend more confusedly and obscurely. And this I will diligently work at from now on.

Fifth Meditation

The essence of material things, and God's existence considered again
Descartes examines the essence of matter and offers a second proof that God exists.

63 Many things remain for me to investigate about God's attributes, and many about the nature of myself, that is, of my mind. But perhaps I will take these up again another time. Now (having noticed what to guard against and what to do to attain the truth) nothing seems more urgent than to try to emerge from the doubts into which I fell in the preceding days, and to see whether anything certain can be had concerning material things.

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

THE ESSENCE OF MATERIAL THINGS

Descartes finds that he distinctly imagines extension, shape, number and motion in material things.

Well, then: I distinctly imagine quantity—what philosophers commonly call continuous quantity—or rather the extension of this quantity, or better of the quantified thing, in length, breadth, and depth. I count various parts in it. To these parts I

assign any sizes, shapes, positions, and local motions whatever, and to these motions any durations whatever.[1]

Not only are these things, considered thus in general, plainly known and transparent to me; in addition, by attending, I perceive countless particulars about shapes, number, motion, and the like, whose truth is so evident [64] and so in accord with my nature that, when I first discover them, I seem not so much to be learning something new as to be recalling what I already knew before, or to be noticing for the first time things that had long been in me, though I had not previously turned my mind's gaze to them.

TRUE AND IMMUTABLE NATURES

Descartes argues that ideas like a triangle have true and immutable natures not invented by him.

And what I think most needs to be considered here is this: I find in myself countless ideas of certain things which, even if they perhaps exist nowhere outside me, still cannot be said to be nothing. And although in a sense I think them at will, they are not invented by me, but have their own true and immutable natures. When I imagine a triangle, for example, even if perhaps no such figure exists anywhere at all outside my thought, or ever has, there is still certainly a determinate nature of it, or essence, or form, which is immutable and eternal, not made up by me and not dependent on my mind. This is evident from the fact that various properties can be demonstrated of this triangle—namely, that its three angles are equal to two right angles, that its greatest side is subtended by its greatest angle, and the like. These I now clearly recognize, whether I will or not, even if I had not thought of them in any way before when I imagined the triangle; and hence they were not made up by me.

Nor is it to the point if I say that this idea of a triangle perhaps came to me from external things through the sense organs,

1 "Continuous quantity" is the scholastic term for magnitude, as opposed to discrete quantity, or number.

since I have sometimes seen bodies having a triangular shape. For I can think up countless other shapes of which there can be no suspicion that they ever reached me through the senses, and yet [65] I can demonstrate various properties of them, no less than of the triangle. And these are all certainly true, since I know them clearly; and therefore they are something, not merely nothing. For it is evident that whatever is true is something; and I have already amply demonstrated that everything I know clearly is true. And even if I had not demonstrated this, the nature of my mind is surely such that I could not help assenting to these things, at least as long as I perceive them clearly. And I remember that always, even before this time, when I clung as closely as possible to the objects of the senses, I regarded truths of this kind—those I evidently recognized concerning shapes, or numbers, or other things belonging to arithmetic, or geometry, or in general to pure and abstract mathematics—as the most certain of all.

THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Descartes argues that existence belongs to the essence of a supremely perfect being, so God exists.

But now, if from the mere fact that I can draw the idea of some thing from my thought it follows that everything I clearly and distinctly perceive to belong to that thing really does belong to it, can I not also derive from this an argument by which the existence of God is proved? Certainly I find the idea of him—that is, of a supremely perfect being—in me no less than the idea of any shape or number. And I understand no less clearly and distinctly that it belongs to his nature always to exist than I understand that what I demonstrate of some shape or number also belongs to the nature of that shape or number. Hence, even if not everything I have meditated on in these past days were true, the existence of God ought to stand for me at least at the same degree of certainty [66] at which mathematical truths have stood until now.

Admittedly, this is not entirely transparent at first sight, but has a certain look of a sophism. For since I am accustomed in all other things to distinguish existence from essence, I easily persuade myself that existence can also be separated from the essence of God, and so that God can be thought of as not existing. But when I attend more carefully it becomes manifest that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than the equality of its three angles to two right angles can be separated from the essence of a triangle, or the idea of a valley from the idea of a mountain. So it is no less contradictory to think of God (that is, a supremely perfect being) lacking existence (that is, lacking some perfection) than to think of a mountain lacking a valley.

And yet, even granting that I cannot think of God except as existing, just as I cannot think of a mountain without a valley, still, just as it does not follow from my thinking of a mountain with a valley that there is any mountain in the world, so it does not seem to follow from my thinking of God as existing that God exists. For my thought imposes no necessity on things; and just as I may imagine a winged horse although no horse has wings, so perhaps I can attach existence to God although no God exists.

No—this is where the sophism lies. From the fact that I cannot think of a mountain except with a valley, it does not follow that a mountain and a valley exist anywhere, but only that a mountain
67 and a valley, whether they exist or not, cannot be separated from each other. But from the fact that I cannot think of God except as existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from God, and hence that he really exists. Not that my thought brings this about, or imposes any necessity on any thing; on the contrary, the necessity of the thing itself, namely of God's existence, determines me to think this. For I am not free to think of God without existence (that is, a supremely perfect being without supreme perfection), as I am free to imagine a horse with or without wings.

Nor should it be said here that it is indeed necessary for me to posit that God exists once I have posited that he has all perfec-

tions, since existence is one of them, but that the first positing was not necessary—just as it is not necessary for me to think that all four-sided figures can be inscribed in a circle, but given that I do think this, I will have to admit that a rhombus can be inscribed in a circle, which is plainly false. For although it is not necessary that I ever come upon any thought of God, still, whenever I choose to think of a first and supreme being, and to bring forth its idea as if from the treasury of my mind, it is necessary that I attribute all perfections to it, even if I do not then enumerate them all or attend to each one. And this necessity is quite sufficient for me afterward, when I notice that existence is a perfection, to conclude rightly that a first and supreme being exists. In the same way, it is not necessary that I ever imagine any triangle; but whenever I wish to consider a rectilinear figure having only three angles, it is necessary that I attribute to it the properties from which [68] it is rightly inferred that its three angles are not greater than two right angles, even if I do not notice this at the time. But when I examine which figures can be inscribed in a circle, it is in no way necessary that I think all four-sided figures are among them. In fact, I cannot even pretend this, so long as I am willing to admit nothing except what I clearly and distinctly understand. And so there is a great difference between false suppositions of this kind and the true ideas that are innate in me, the first and chief of which is the idea of God. For indeed I understand in many ways that this idea is not something fictitious, dependent on my thought, but the image of a true and immutable nature. First, because I can think up no other thing to whose essence existence belongs, except God alone. Next, because I cannot understand two or more such Gods; and because, supposing that one exists now, I plainly see that it is necessary both that he has existed before from eternity and that he will remain for eternity. And finally, because I perceive many other things in God, none of which can be taken away or changed by me.

But whatever method of proof I use in the end, it always comes back to this: only what I perceive clearly and distinctly

fully persuades me. And indeed, of the things I perceive in this way, although some are obvious to everyone while others are discovered only by those who look more closely and investigate diligently, nevertheless once the latter have been discovered they are judged no less certain than the former. Thus, although in a right [69] triangle it is not as readily apparent that the square on the base is equal to the squares on the sides as that the base is subtended by its greatest angle, the former is no less believed once it has been seen. As for God, certainly, if I were not overwhelmed by preconceived opinions, and if the images of sensible things did not besiege my thought on every side, I would recognize nothing sooner or more easily than him. For what is more self-evident than that the supreme being exists—that is, God, to whose essence alone existence belongs?

WHY ALL KNOWLEDGE DEPENDS ON GOD

Descartes argues that the certainty of all knowledge, even mathematics, depends on knowing that God exists.

And although I needed attentive consideration to perceive this very thing, now I am not only as certain of it as of anything else that seems most certain, but I also notice that the certainty of all other things depends on it in such a way that without it nothing could ever be perfectly known.

For although I am of such a nature that, as long as I perceive something very clearly and distinctly, I cannot help believing it to be true, I am also of such a nature that I cannot always fix my mind's gaze on the same thing so as to perceive it clearly; and the memory of a judgment previously made often comes back when I am no longer attending to the reasons for which I made it. So other reasons can be brought forward which, if I did not know God, would easily dislodge me from that opinion; and so I would never have true and certain knowledge of anything, but only shifting and changeable opinions. Thus, for example, when I consider the nature of a triangle, it appears most evident to me, steeped as I am in the principles of geometry, that its three

angles are equal to two right angles; and I cannot help believing this to be true as long as I attend [70] to its demonstration. But as soon as I turn my mind's eye away from it, however well I still remember that I saw it most clearly, it can easily happen that I doubt whether it is true, if indeed I do not know God. For I can persuade myself that I was made by nature such that I am sometimes deceived in things I think I perceive most evidently—especially since I remember that I have often taken many things as true and certain that I later judged, led by other reasons, to be false.

But once I have perceived that God exists, since I have at the same time also understood that everything else depends on him and that he is not a deceiver, and have gathered from this that everything I perceive clearly and distinctly is necessarily true, then—even if I no longer attend to the reasons for which I judged it true, provided only that I remember having seen it clearly and distinctly—no contrary reason can be brought forward that would drive me to doubt it; instead, I have true and certain knowledge of it. And not only of this, but also of everything else I remember having once demonstrated, such as the truths of geometry and the like. For what will now be raised against me? That I was made such that I am often deceived? But I now know that I cannot be deceived in things I understand transparently. That at other times I took many things as true and certain that I later found to be false? But I had perceived none of those clearly and distinctly; rather, ignorant of this rule of truth, I had perhaps believed them for other reasons, which I later discovered to be less firm. What, then, will be said? That perhaps (as I recently objected to myself) I am dreaming, or that everything I am now thinking is no more true than what occurs to someone asleep? Even this changes nothing. For certainly, [71] even if I were dreaming, if something is evident to my intellect, it is wholly true.

And so I plainly see that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends on the knowledge of the true God alone, so that before I knew him I could not have known anything else per-

fectly. But now countless things can be plainly known and certain to me, both about God himself and other intellectual things, and also about the whole of that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics.

Sixth Meditation

The existence of material things, and the real distinction between mind and body
Descartes proves material things exist, argues mind and body are distinct, and explains their union.

It remains for me to examine whether material things exist. And indeed I already know at least that they can exist, insofar as they are the object of pure mathematics, since I perceive them clearly and distinctly. For there is no doubt that God is capable of bringing about everything that I am capable of perceiving in this way; and I have never judged that something could not be done by him except on the ground that it would be contradictory for me to perceive it distinctly. Further, from the faculty of imagination, which I find I use when I am occupied with these material things, it seems to follow that they exist. For when I consider more attentively what imagination is, [72] it appears to be nothing other than a certain application of the cognitive faculty to a body that is intimately present to it, and hence existing.

IMAGINATION AND PURE UNDERSTANDING

Descartes distinguishes imagination from pure understanding and reviews what the senses taught him before.

To make this plain, I first examine the difference between imagination and pure understanding. For example, when I imagine a triangle, I not only understand that it is a figure bounded by three lines, but at the same time I also look upon these three lines as present with the eye of the mind; and this is what I call

imagining. But if I want to think about a chiliagon, I certainly understand that it is a figure consisting of a thousand sides just as well as I understand that a triangle is a figure consisting of three; but I do not imagine those thousand sides in the same way, or look upon them as present.[1] And although at such a time, from the habit of always imagining something whenever I think about a corporeal thing, I may perhaps represent some figure to myself confusedly, it is clear that this is not a chiliagon, since it is in no way different from the figure I would also represent to myself if I were thinking of a myriagon, or any other figure with very many sides; nor does it help at all in recognizing the properties by which a chiliagon differs from other polygons. But if the question is about a pentagon, I can indeed understand its figure, like the figure of the chiliagon, without the help of the imagination; but I can also imagine it, namely by applying the mind's eye to its five sides and at the same time to the area they enclose. And here I clearly notice that I need a peculiar [73] effort of mind in order to imagine, which I do not use in order to understand; and this new effort of mind clearly shows the difference between imagination and pure understanding.

In addition, I consider that this power of imagining that is in me, insofar as it differs from the power of understanding, is not required for my own essence, that is, for the essence of my mind. For even if it were absent from me, I would doubtless remain the same one I now am. From this it seems to follow that it depends on some thing different from me. And I readily understand that, if some body exists to which the mind is so joined that it can apply itself at will to inspecting it, as it were, it may be that by this very means I imagine corporeal things. So this mode of thinking would differ from pure understanding only in this: that the mind, when it understands, in a way turns toward itself and looks at one of the ideas that are in it; but when it imagines, it turns toward the body and looks upon something in it that conforms to an idea either understood by

1 A chiliagon is a polygon with a thousand sides.

the mind itself or perceived by the senses. I readily understand, I say, that imagination could be brought about in this way, if indeed a body exists; and because no other equally suitable way of explaining it occurs to me, I conjecture from this that a body probably exists. But only probably; and however carefully I investigate everything, I still do not see that from the distinct idea of corporeal nature that I find in my imagination any argument can be drawn that necessarily concludes that some body exists. [74]

But I am accustomed to imagine many other things besides that corporeal nature which is the object of pure mathematics—such as colors, sounds, tastes, pain, and the like—but none so distinctly. And since I perceive these better by the senses, from which they seem to have reached the imagination with the help of memory, then in order to deal with them more conveniently I must by the same token deal with the senses as well, and see whether, from the things perceived by this mode of thinking that I call sensing, I can obtain some certain argument for the existence of corporeal things.

And first I will go back over in my mind what the things were that I previously thought were true, as perceived by the senses, and for what reasons I thought so. Next I will also weigh the reasons for which I later called these same things into doubt. And finally I will consider what I ought now to believe about them.

First, then, I sensed that I had a head, hands, feet, and the other limbs that make up that body which I regarded as a part of me, or perhaps even as the whole of me. And I sensed that this body was situated among many other bodies, by which it could be affected in various beneficial or harmful ways; and I measured the beneficial ones by a certain sensation of pleasure, and the harmful ones by a sensation of pain. Besides pain and pleasure, I also sensed in myself hunger, thirst, and other appetites of this kind; and likewise certain bodily inclinations toward cheerfulness, toward sadness, toward anger, and other similar emotions. And outside me, besides the extension of bodies, and their

shapes and [75] motions, I also sensed in them hardness and heat and other tactile qualities; and in addition light, and colors, and smells, and tastes, and sounds, by whose variety I distinguished the sky, the earth, the seas, and the other bodies from one another. Nor, surely, was it without reason that, on account of the ideas of all these qualities that presented themselves to my thought—and these ideas were all that I properly and immediately sensed—I thought I was sensing certain things quite different from my thought, namely bodies from which these ideas came. For I found that they came to me without any consent of mine, so that I could not sense any object, however much I wanted to, unless it was present to a sense organ, nor could I fail to sense it when it was present. And since the ideas perceived by the senses were much more vivid and sharp, and even in their own way more distinct, than any of those that I myself formed deliberately and knowingly in meditating, or that I noticed impressed on my memory, it seemed impossible that they should come from me myself. So the only remaining possibility was that they came to me from some other things. Since I had no knowledge of these things from any source other than these very ideas, nothing could occur to me except that the things resembled the ideas. And because I also remembered that I had used my senses before I used my reason, and saw that the ideas I formed myself were not as sharp as those I perceived by the senses, and were for the most part composed of parts of them, I easily convinced myself that I had nothing at all in my intellect that I had not previously had in the senses. It was not without reason, either, that I judged that the body which by some special right I [76] called my own belonged to me more than any other did. For I could never be separated from it, as I could from the others; I felt all my appetites and emotions in it and on its behalf; and finally, I noticed pain and the tickle of pleasure in its parts, but not in other bodies located outside it. But why some sadness of mind should follow from this sensation of pain, whatever it is, and some joy from the sensation of tickling; or why that odd twitching of the stomach that I call hunger should prompt me to

take food, and dryness of the throat to take drink, and so on—for this I really had no explanation except that nature had taught me so. For there is plainly no affinity at all (at least none that I understand) between that twitching and the will to take food, or between the sensation of the thing that causes pain and the thought of sadness that arises from that sensation. And all the other judgments I made about the objects of the senses I seemed to have learned from nature as well; for I had persuaded myself that things were so before I had weighed any arguments that might prove it.

Later, however, many experiences gradually undermined all the trust I had placed in the senses. Sometimes towers that had looked round from a distance appeared square from close up; and very large statues standing on their tops did not look large to someone viewing them from the ground. In countless other such cases I found that the judgments of the external senses were mistaken. And not only of the external senses, but of the internal [77] ones too. For what can be more internal than pain? Yet I had sometimes heard from people who had had a leg or an arm cut off that they still occasionally seemed to feel pain in the part of the body they no longer had. And so it seemed that even in my own case it was not entirely certain that a particular limb was hurting me, even though I felt pain in it. To these I recently added two very general reasons for doubt. The first was that there is nothing I have ever believed I sensed while awake that I could not also sometimes think I sense while asleep; and since I do not believe that what I seem to sense in dreams comes to me from things located outside me, I did not see why I should believe this any more of what I seem to sense while awake. The second was that, since I did not yet know the author of my origin—or at least was pretending not to know it—I saw nothing to prevent my having been so constituted by nature that I would be deceived even in what seemed to me most true. As for the reasons by which I had earlier persuaded myself of the truth of sensible things, I had no difficulty answering them. For since I seemed to be driven by nature toward many things that reason

advised against, I thought I should not place much trust in what nature teaches. And although the perceptions of the senses did not depend on my will, I did not think I should conclude from this that they came from things different from me, since there might perhaps be some faculty in me, though not yet known to me, that produced them.

But now that I am beginning to know myself and the author of my origin better, I do not think I should rashly [78] accept everything I seem to get from the senses; but neither should I call everything into doubt.

MIND AND BODY ARE REALLY DISTINCT

Descartes argues that since he can clearly conceive mind without body, the two are really distinct.

First, I know that everything I clearly and distinctly understand can be made by God just as I understand it. So it is enough that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing without another for me to be certain that the one is different from the other, since they can be separated, at least by God; and it makes no difference by what power this is done for them to be judged different. Accordingly, from the very fact that I know that I exist, and that meanwhile I notice nothing else whatever belonging to my nature or essence except this alone, that I am a thinking thing, I rightly conclude that my essence consists in this one thing: that I am a thinking thing. And it may be that I have a body (or rather, as I shall say shortly, it is certain that I do) which is very closely joined to me. Nevertheless, on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing, not an extended one; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body insofar as it is only an extended thing, not a thinking one. So it is certain that I am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.

Further, I find in myself faculties for certain special modes of thinking, namely the faculties of imagining and sensing. I can clearly and distinctly understand myself as a whole without

them, but not, conversely, them without me—that is, without an understanding substance in which they inhere. For their formal concept includes some understanding; and from this I perceive that they are distinguished from me as modes are from a thing. I also recognize certain other faculties, such as those of changing place, taking on various shapes, and the like. These, no more than the preceding ones, can be understood without [79] some substance in which they inhere, and so they cannot exist without one either. But it is evident that these, if they do exist, must inhere in a corporeal or extended substance, not an understanding one, since their clear and distinct concept contains some extension, but no understanding whatever.

MATERIAL THINGS EXIST

Descartes argues that ideas of sensible things come from bodies, so material things exist.

Now there is indeed in me a certain passive faculty of sensing, that is, of receiving and recognizing the ideas of sensible things. But I could make no use of it unless there also existed, either in me or in something else, a certain active faculty of producing or bringing about these ideas. This active faculty certainly cannot be in me myself, since it presupposes no understanding at all, and these ideas are produced without my cooperation, and often even against my will. It remains, then, that it is in some substance different from me. And since that substance must contain, either formally or eminently, all the reality that is objectively in the ideas produced by this faculty (as I noted above), this substance is either body—that is, corporeal nature, which contains formally everything that is in the ideas objectively—or else it is God, or some creature nobler than body, which contains it eminently. But since God is not a deceiver, it is entirely evident that he does not send these ideas to me either immediately by himself or by means of some creature in which their objective reality is contained not formally but only eminently. For he has given me no faculty at all for recognizing any such

source, but on the contrary a great [80] propensity to believe that the ideas are sent from corporeal things. So I do not see how he could be understood not to be a deceiver if they were sent from anywhere other than corporeal things. Therefore corporeal things exist. Yet perhaps they do not all exist exactly as I grasp them by the senses, since this sensory grasp is in many cases very obscure and confused. But at least everything that I clearly and distinctly understand is in them—that is, everything, considered in general, that falls within the object of pure mathematics.

As for the other things, which are either merely particular—for example, that the sun is of such-and-such a size or shape, and so on—or less clearly understood, such as light, sound, pain, and the like: although they are very doubtful and uncertain, still the very fact that God is not a deceiver, and that it is therefore impossible for any falsity to be found in my opinions unless there is also some faculty in me, given by God, for correcting it, offers me a sure hope of reaching the truth even in these matters. And there is certainly no doubt that everything I am taught by nature has some truth in it. For by nature, considered in general, I now understand nothing other than either God himself or the ordered system of created things established by God; and by my own nature in particular, nothing other than the totality of all the things that God has given me.

Now there is nothing that this nature teaches me more explicitly than that I have a body, which is in a bad way when I feel pain, which needs food or drink when I suffer hunger or thirst, and so on. So I ought not to doubt that there is some truth in this. [81]

THE UNION OF MIND AND BODY

Descartes explains the mind's close union with the body, why the senses sometimes mislead, and dismisses the dream doubt.

Nature also teaches me, through these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst, and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as

a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined to it and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I make up a single whole with it. For otherwise, when the body is hurt, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain on that account, but would perceive the damage by the pure intellect, as a sailor perceives by sight if anything in his ship breaks. And when the body needs food or drink, I would understand this explicitly, and would not have confused sensations of hunger and thirst. For these sensations of thirst, hunger, pain, and so on are certainly nothing but confused modes of thinking that arise from the union and, as it were, intermingling of the mind with the body.

I am also taught by nature that various other bodies exist around my body, some of which I should pursue and others avoid. And certainly, from the fact that I sense widely differing colors, sounds, smells, tastes, heat, hardness, and the like, I rightly conclude that in the bodies from which these various sense perceptions come there are some variations corresponding to them, even if perhaps not resembling them. And from the fact that some of these perceptions are pleasant to me and others unpleasant, it is entirely certain that my body—or rather, I as a whole, insofar as I am composed of body and mind—can be affected in various beneficial and harmful ways by the bodies around it. [82]

But there are many other things which, although I seem to have been taught them by nature, I have in fact received not from nature but from a certain habit of judging thoughtlessly, and so they may easily be false. For example: that any space in which there is nothing at all to stimulate my senses is empty; that in a hot body, for instance, there is something exactly like the idea of heat that is in me; that in a white or green body there is the same whiteness or greenness that I sense, and in a bitter or sweet one the same taste, and so on; that stars and towers and any other distant bodies have only the size and shape they display to my senses; and other things of this kind. But so that I do not perceive anything in this matter less than distinctly, I must

define more precisely what exactly I mean when I say that I am taught something by nature. Here I am taking nature in a narrower sense than the totality of all the things God has given me. For that totality contains many things that belong to the mind alone—such as my perceiving that what has been done cannot be undone, and everything else known by the natural light—which are not under discussion here. It also contains many things that concern the body alone, such as its tending downward, and the like, which I am not dealing with either. I am dealing only with what God has given me as a composite of mind and body. So this nature does indeed teach me to avoid what brings a sensation of pain and to pursue what brings a sensation of pleasure, and so on. But it does not appear that it also teaches us to conclude anything from these sense perceptions about things located outside us without a prior examination by the intellect, since knowing the truth about such things seems to belong [83] to the mind alone, not to the composite. Thus, although a star affects my eye no more than the flame of a small torch, there is nonetheless no real or positive propensity in it to believe that the star is no larger; I have simply judged so, without reason, since early childhood. And although I feel heat when I approach a fire, and pain when I approach it too closely, there is really no reason to persuade me that there is something in the fire resembling that heat, any more than something resembling that pain; there is reason only to think that there is something in it, whatever it may turn out to be, that produces these sensations of heat or pain in us; and although there may be nothing in some space that stimulates the senses, it does not follow that there is no body in it. But I see that in these and very many other cases I have been in the habit of perverting the order of nature. The perceptions of the senses were properly given by nature only to signal to the mind what is beneficial or harmful to the composite of which it is a part, and to that extent they are clear and distinct enough. Yet I use them as if they were reliable rules for discerning immediately the essence of bodies

located outside us—something about which they signal nothing except very obscurely and confusedly.

I have already seen well enough how, despite the goodness of God, it happens that my judgments are false. But a new difficulty arises here concerning the very things that nature presents to me as to be pursued or avoided, and also concerning the internal senses, in which I seem to have detected errors: as when someone, deceived by the pleasant taste of some food, swallows poison hidden inside it. [84] But in that case, of course, he is driven by nature only to desire the thing in which the pleasant taste lies, not the poison, of which his nature is quite ignorant. Nothing can be concluded from this except that this nature is not omniscient. And that is not surprising: since a human being is a limited thing, the only perfection that belongs to him is a limited one.

But we quite often go wrong even in the things toward which nature drives us, as when sick people desire drink or food that will harm them shortly afterward. It might perhaps be said here that they go wrong because their nature is corrupted. But this does not remove the difficulty, since a sick man is no less truly a creature of God than a healthy one; and so it seems no less contradictory that he should have a deceptive nature from God. A clock made of wheels and weights observes all the laws of nature no less exactly when it is badly made and does not tell the hours correctly than when it satisfies its maker's wishes in every respect. In the same way, I may consider the human body as a kind of machine, so fitted together and composed of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood, and skin that even if no mind existed in it, it would still have all the same motions that now occur in it not by the command of the will, and so not from the mind. Considering it so, I easily recognize that it would be just as natural for this body—if, for example, it suffers from dropsy—to undergo the dryness of the throat that usually brings the sensation of thirst to the mind, and also to have its nerves and other parts so disposed by that dryness that it takes a drink which aggravates the disease, as it is for it, when there is no such

defect in it, to be moved by a similar [85] dryness of the throat to take a drink that does it good. Now, with regard to the intended use of a clock, I might say that when it does not tell the hours correctly it departs from its nature. And in the same way, considering the machine of the human body as designed for the motions that usually occur in it, I might think that it too strays from its nature if its throat is dry when drink does not help to preserve it. Yet I see well enough that this last sense of "nature" is very different from the other. For this sense is nothing but a denomination that depends on my thought, when it compares a sick man and a badly made clock with the idea of a healthy man and a well-made clock; it is extrinsic to the things of which it is said. By the other sense, however, I understand something that is really found in things, and which therefore has some truth.[2]

And certainly, with regard to a body suffering from dropsy, it may be only an extrinsic denomination when its nature is said to be corrupted because it has a dry throat and yet does not need drink. But with regard to the composite—that is, the mind united to such a body—it is not a mere denomination but a true error of nature that it is thirsty when drink will harm it. So it remains to inquire here how the goodness of God does not prevent nature, taken in this sense, from being deceptive.

The first thing I notice here is that there is a great difference between mind and body, in that body is by its nature always divisible, whereas the mind is entirely [86] indivisible. For certainly, when I consider the mind—that is, myself insofar as I am only a thinking thing—I can distinguish no parts in myself, but understand myself to be a thing that is entirely one and whole. And although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot or an arm or any other part of the body is cut off, I know that nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. Nor can the faculties of willing, sensing, understanding, and so on be called its parts, since it is one and the same mind that wills, that senses, that understands. By contrast, I can think

2 "Extrinsic denomination" is a scholastic term: a label applied to a thing on account of something outside it, not a feature the thing itself has.

of no corporeal or extended thing that I cannot easily divide into parts in thought, and by that very fact understand to be divisible. This alone would be enough to teach me that the mind is entirely different from the body, if I did not already know it well enough from other sources.

Next I notice that the mind is not affected immediately by all parts of the body, but only by the brain, or perhaps even by just one small part of it—namely, the part in which the "common sense" is said to be. Whenever this part is disposed in the same way, it presents the same thing to the mind, even if the other parts of the body are meanwhile in various different conditions. Countless experiments prove this, and there is no need to review them here.

I notice, further, that the nature of body is such that no part of it can be moved by another part some distance away without its also being possible for it to be moved in the same way by any of the parts in between, even if the more distant part does nothing. For example, in a cord A, B, C, D, if its far end D is pulled, the first part A will move in just the same way as it could also be moved if one of the intermediate parts, B or C, were pulled and the end D stayed still. In a similar way, when I feel pain in my foot, physics has taught me that this sensation occurs by means of nerves distributed through the foot. These nerves are stretched like cords from there all the way to the brain; when they are pulled in the foot, they also pull the inner parts of the brain that they reach, and set up a certain motion in them. And this motion has been established by nature to affect the mind with a sensation of pain as if existing in the foot. But because these nerves have to pass through the shin, thigh, loins, back, and neck to get from the foot to the brain, it can happen that even if the part of them that is in the foot is not touched, but only one of the intermediate parts, exactly the same motion occurs in the brain as occurs when the foot is injured; and from this it will necessarily follow that the mind feels the same pain. And the same must be thought of any other sensation.

Finally, I notice that each of the motions that occur in the part of the brain that immediately affects the mind brings it only one particular sensation. Given this, nothing better can be devised than that it should bring the one which, of all those it could bring, is most conducive, and most often conducive, to the preservation of a healthy human being. And experience testifies that all the sensations nature has given us are of this kind; and so nothing at all is found in them that does not testify to the power and goodness of God. Thus, for example, [88] when the nerves in the foot are moved violently and unusually, their motion, passing through the spinal cord to the inner parts of the brain, gives the mind a signal there to sense something—namely, a pain as if existing in the foot. By this the mind is roused to do what it can to remove the cause, as harmful to the foot. God could, of course, have so constituted human nature that this same motion in the brain presented something else to the mind: either the motion itself, as it is in the brain, or as it is in the foot, or in one of the places in between, or anything else at all. But nothing else would have served the preservation of the body so well. In the same way, when we need drink, a certain dryness arises in the throat as a result, moving its nerves and, through them, the inner parts of the brain; and this motion affects the mind with the sensation of thirst, because in this whole affair nothing is more useful for us to know than that we need drink to preserve our health. And so on in other cases.

From all this it is entirely evident that, despite the immense goodness of God, the nature of a human being, as composed of mind and body, cannot but be deceptive at times. For suppose some cause—not in the foot, but in any of the other parts through which the nerves stretch from the foot to the brain, or even in the brain itself—sets up exactly the same motion that is usually set up when the foot is injured. Then pain will be felt as if in the foot, and the senses will naturally be deceived. For that same motion in the brain can only ever bring the same sensation to the mind; and it usually arises much more often from a cause that injures the foot than from one existing elsewhere. So

it is reasonable [89] that it should always present to the mind a pain in the foot rather than in some other part. And if dryness of the throat sometimes arises not, as it usually does, from the fact that drink would help the body's health, but from some contrary cause, as happens in someone with dropsy, it is far better that it should deceive in that case than that it should, on the contrary, always deceive when the body is in good condition. And so on in other cases.

This consideration is of the greatest help, not only for noticing all the errors to which my nature is liable, but also for being able to correct or avoid them easily. For I know that in matters concerning the body's welfare all the senses indicate what is true much more often than what is false; and I can almost always use several of them to examine the same thing, and in addition my memory, which connects present things with past ones, and my intellect, which has now seen all the causes of error. So I should no longer fear that what the senses present to me every day is false. Instead, the hyperbolic doubts of the past few days should be dismissed as laughable. Especially that chief doubt about sleep, which I could not distinguish from waking. For now I notice that there is a very great difference between the two, in that dreams are never linked by memory with all the other actions of life, as what happens to us while awake is. Certainly, if while I was awake someone suddenly appeared to me and immediately afterward disappeared, as happens in dreams, so that I saw neither where he came from nor where he went, I would not be wrong to judge him a [90] ghost, or a phantom formed in my brain, rather than a real man. But when things occur to me and I distinctly notice where they come from, where they are, and when they come to me, and I connect my perception of them with the whole rest of my life without any interruption, I am entirely certain that they are occurring to me not in sleep but while I am awake. And I ought not to have even the slightest doubt about their truth if, after I have called on all the senses, my memory, and my intellect to examine them, none of these reports to me anything that con-

flicts with the others. For from the fact that God is not a deceiver it follows that in such cases I am not deceived at all. But since the pressure of things to be done does not always allow time for so careful an examination, it must be admitted that human life is often liable to errors about particular things, and we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature.