Modern Philosophy: Short (7 page) writing assignment #1.   **Due Fri., Mar. 1**

The assignment has two parts; the first is mainly expository, and the second is partly evaluative.

First part: In the Fourth Meditation, Descartes attempts to solve the so-called "problem of error": he defends the perfection of God against the objection that no morally perfect and omnipotent God would ever allow/cause us to make errors in judgment (which we sometimes do). How does Descartes use his theory of judgment to defend divine perfection against this objection? Explain this theory of judgment in your answer. What notion of free will does he employ in his defense? From this text does it seem that Descartes' notion of free will is incompatibilist (it *does* require the ability to do otherwise), compatibilist (it *does not* require the ability to do otherwise), or 'asymmetric' (whether that ability is required depends on something else)? The most important part of the Fourth Meditation for this assignment starts at ¶8.

Second part: In his discussion of error in judgment in the *Principles of Philosophy* (1644) Descartes writes that "it is impious to suppose that we could ever do anything which was not already preordained by [God]." (*Principles*, Part I, §40). He develops this position in §§36–41 of the *Principles* Part 1—which is available on the course website.

Soon after publishing the *Principles of Philosophy* in 1644, Descartes wrote a few letters to Elisabeth of Bohemia—also available on the course website. In these letters, he seems to claim that God is the cause of everything, including human decisions. (I've highlighted the most relevant parts.)

Is Descartes's view of God's relation to our decisions consistent with the Fourth Meditation's defense of God's perfection against the objection from human error in judgment? In your answer, pay special attention to *Principles of Philosophy*, Part I, §41.

Punctuation and spelling reminder: ***Descartes*** is the man's name. You can write about ***Descartes'*** theory or about ***Descartes's*** theory, but please don't write about ***Descarte's*** theory.