THIRD MEDITATION – Excerpts from the Objections and Replies

CATERUS

'I am thinking', he says, 'therefore I exist; indeed, I am thought itself—I am a mind.' Granted. 'But in virtue of thinking, I possess within me ideas of things, and in particular an idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being.' True again. 'However I am not the cause of this idea, since I do not measure up to its objective reality; hence something more perfect than myself is its cause, and accordingly there exists something besides myself, something more perfect than I am. This is someone who is not a being in any ordinary sense but who simply and without qualification embraces the whole of being within himself, and is as it were the ultimate original cause, as Dionysius says in chapter eight of the *Divina Nomina*.'

But here I am forced to stop for a while to avoid becoming exhausted. My mind ebbs and flows like the Euripus with its violent tides: first I accept, but then I deny; I give my approval but then I withdraw it; I am unwilling to disagree with the author, but I am unable to agree with him. My question is this: what sort of cause does an idea need? Indeed, what *is* an idea? It is the thing that is thought of, in so far as it has objective being in the intellect. But what is 'objective being in the intellect'? According to what I was taught, this is simply the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object. And this is merely an extraneous label which adds nothing to the thing itself. Just as 'being seen' is nothing other than an act of vision attributable to myself, so 'being thought of', or having objective being in the intellect, is simply a thought of the mind which stops and terminates in the mind. And this can occur without any movement or change in the thing itself, and indeed without the thing in question existing at all. So why should I look for a cause of something which is not actual, and which is simply an empty label, a non-entity?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Yet will not someone ask '*Are* you clearly and distinctly aware of an infinite being? What, in that case, is the meaning of that well-worn maxim which is common knowledge: *the infinite qua infinite is unknown*?' When I think of a chiliagon, and construct for myself a confused representation of some figure, I do not distinctly imagine the chiliagon itself, since I do not distinctly see the thousand sides. And if this is so, then the question obviously arises as to how the infinite can be thought of in a distinct as opposed to a confused manner, given that the infinite perfections that make it up cannot be seen clearly 'before the eyes' as it were.

This is perhaps what St Thomas meant when he denied that the proposition 'God exists' is self-evident. He considers an objection to this put by Damascene: 'The knowledge of the existence of God is naturally implanted in all men; hence the existence of God is self-evident.' His reply is that the knowledge that God exists is naturally implanted in us only in a general sense, or 'in a confused manner', as he puts it, that is, in so far as God is the ultimate felicity of man. But this, he says, is not straightforward knowledge of the existence of God, just as to know that someone is coming is not the same as to know Peter, even though it is Peter who is coming. He is in effect saying that God is known under some general conception, as an ultimate end or as the first and most perfect being, or even under the concept of that which includes all things in a confused and general manner; but he is not known in terms of the precise concept of his own proper essence, for in essence God is infinite and so unknown to us.

[Descartes to Caterus]

Gentlemen,

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

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

Now I wrote that an idea is the thing which is thought of in so far as it has objective being in the intellect. But to give me an opportunity of explaining these words more clearly the objector pretends to understand them in quite a different way from that in which I used them. 'Objective being in the intellect', he says, 'is simply the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object, and this is merely an extraneous label which adds nothing to the thing itself.' Notice here that he is referring to the thing itself as if it were located outside the intellect, and in this sense 'objective being in the intellect' is certainly an extraneous label; but I was speaking of the idea, which is never outside the intellect, and in this sense 'objective being' simply means being in the intellect in the way in which objects are normally there. For example, if anyone asks what happens to the sun through its being objectively in my intellect, the best answer is that nothing happens to it beyond the application of an extraneous label which does indeed 'determine an act of the intellect by means of an object'. But if the question is about what the idea of the sun is, and we answer that it is the thing which is thought of, in so far as it has objective being in the intellect, no one will take this to be the sun itself with this extraneous label applied to it. 'Objective being in the intellect' will not here mean 'the determination of an act of the intellect by means of an object', but will signify the object's being in the intellect in the way in which its objects are normally there. By this I mean that the idea of the sun is the sun itself existing in the intellect—not of course formally existing, as it does in the heavens, but objectively existing, i.e. in the way in which objects normally are in the intellect. Now this mode of being is of course much less perfect than that possessed by things which exist outside the intellect; but, as I did explain, it is not therefore simply nothing.

When the learned theologian says that there is an equivocation in what I say here, he apparently means to remind me of the point I have just made, in case I should forget it. He says, first of all, that when a thing exists in the intellect by means of an idea, it is not an actual entity, that is, it is not a being located outside

the intellect; and this is quite true. Next he goes on to say that 'it is not something fictitious or a conceptual entity [*ens rationis*] but something real which is distinctly conceived'; here he concedes everything which I have assumed. But he then adds 'since it is merely conceived and is not actual'—i.e. since it is merely an idea, and not a thing located outside the intellect—'although it can be conceived it cannot in any way be caused'. This is to say that it does not require a cause enabling it to exist outside the intellect. This I accept; but it surely needs a cause enabling it to be conceived, which is the sole point at issue. Thus if someone possesses in his intellect the idea of a machine of a highly intricate design, it is perfectly fair to ask what is the cause of this idea. And it will not be an adequate reply to say that the idea is not anything outside the intellect and hence that it cannot be caused but can merely be conceived. For the precise question being raised is what is the cause of its being conceived. Nor will it suffice to say that the intellect itself is the cause of the idea, in so far as it is the cause of its own operations; for what is at issue is not this, but the cause of the objective intricacy which is in the idea. For in order for the idea of the machine to contain such and such objective intricacy, it must derive it from some cause; and what applies to the objective intricacy belonging to this idea also applies to the objective reality belonging to the idea of God. Now admittedly there could be various causes of the intricacy contained in the idea of the machine. Perhaps the cause was a real machine of this design which was seen on some previous occasion, thus producing an idea resembling the original. Or the cause might be an extensive knowledge of mechanics in the intellect of the person concerned, or perhaps a very subtle intelligence which enabled him to invent the idea without any previous knowledge. But notice that all the intricacy which is to be found merely objectively in the idea must necessarily be found, either formally or eminently, in its cause, whatever this turns out to be. And the same must apply to the objective reality in the idea of God. Yet where can the corresponding reality be found, if not in a really existing God? But my shrewd critic sees all this quite well, and he therefore concedes that we can ask why a given idea contains such and such objective reality. His answer is that, in the case of all ideas, what I wrote in connection with the idea of a triangle holds good, namely that 'even if perhaps a triangle does not exist anywhere, it still has a determinate nature or essence or form which is immutable and eternal'. And this, he says, does not require a cause. But he is well aware that this is not an adequate reply; for even if the nature of the triangle is immutable and eternal, it is still no less appropriate to ask why there is an idea of it within us. Hence he adds 'If you insist on having an explanation, the answer lies in the imperfection of our intellect', etc. In making this reply he simply means, I think, that those who have tried to take a different view from mine on this issue have no plausible reply to make. For surely to claim that the imperfection of our intellect is the cause of our having the idea of God is as implausible as claiming that lack of experience in mechanics is the cause of our imagining some very intricate machine as opposed to a more imperfect one. On the contrary, if someone possesses the idea of a machine, and contained in the idea is every imaginable intricacy of design, then the correct inference is plainly that this idea originally came from some cause in which every imaginable intricacy really did exist, even though the intricacy now has only objective existence in the idea. By the same token, since we have within us the idea of God, and contained in the idea is every perfection that can be thought of, the absolutely evident inference is that this idea depends on some cause in which all this perfection is indeed to be found, namely a really existing God. The latter inference would not present any more problems than the former, were it not the case that we all have the same ability to conceive of the idea of God, whereas everyone is not equally experienced in mechanics, and so not everyone can have an idea of a very intricate machine. Because the idea of God is implanted in the same way in the minds of all, we do not notice it coming into our minds from any external source, and so we suppose it belongs to the nature of our own intellect. This is correct enough, but we forget something else which is a most important consideration—indeed one on which the entire luminous power of the argument depends—namely that this ability to have within us the idea of God could not belong to our intellect if the intellect were simply a finite entity (as indeed it is) and did not have God as its cause. Hence I went on to inquire 'whether I could exist if God did not exist'. But my purpose here was not to produce a different proof from the preceding one, but rather to take the same proof and provide a more thorough explanation of it.

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

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

Next, in inquiring about what caused me, I was asking about myself, not in so far as I consist of mind and body, but only and precisely in so far as I am a thinking thing. This point is, I think, of considerable relevance. For such a procedure made it much easier for me to free myself from my preconceived opinions, to attend to the light of nature, to ask myself questions, and to affirm with certainty

that there can be nothing within me of which I am not in some way aware. This is plainly a quite different approach from observing that my father begot me, inferring that my grandfather begot my father, and in view of the impossibility of going on *ad infinitum* in the search for parents of parents, bringing the inquiry to a close by deciding that there is a first cause.

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

Finally, I did not say that it was impossible for something to be the efficient cause of itself. This is obviously the case when the term 'efficient' is taken to apply only to causes which are prior in time to their effects, or different from them. But such a restriction does not seem appropriate in the present context. First, it would make the question trivial, since everyone knows that something cannot be prior to, or distinct from, itself. Secondly, the natural light does not establish that the concept of an efficient cause requires that it be prior in time to its effect. On the contrary, the concept of a cause is, strictly speaking, applicable only for as long as the cause is producing its effect, and so it is not prior to it. However, the light of nature does establish that if anything exists we may always ask why it exists; that is, we may inquire into its efficient cause, or, if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not need one. Hence, if I thought that nothing could possibly have the same relation to itself as an efficient cause has to its effect, I should certainly not conclude that there was a first cause. On the contrary, I should go on to ask for the cause of the so-called 'first' cause, and thus I would never reach anything which was the first cause of everything else. However, I do readily admit that there can exist something which possesses such great and inexhaustible power that it never required the assistance of anything else in order to exist in the first place, and does not now require any assistance for its preservation, so that it is, in a sense, its own cause; and I understand God to be such a being. Now I regard the divisions of time as being separable from each other, so that the fact that I now exist does not imply that I shall continue to exist in a little while unless there is a cause which, as it were, creates me afresh at each moment of time. Hence, even if I had existed from eternity, and thus nothing had existed prior to myself, I should have no hesitation in calling the cause which preserves me an 'efficient' cause. By the same token, although God has always existed, since it is he who in fact preserves himself, it seems not too inappropriate to call him 'the cause of himself'. It should however be noted that 'preservation' here must not be understood to be the kind of preservation that comes about by the positive influence of an efficient cause; all that is implied is that the essence of God is such that he must always exist.

These considerations make it easy for me to answer the point about the ambiguity in the phrase 'from itself' which, as the learned theologian has reminded me, needs to be explained. There are some who attend only to the literal and strict meaning of the phrase 'efficient cause' and thus think it is impossible for anything to be the cause of itself. They do not see that there is any place for another kind of cause analogous to an efficient cause, and hence when they say that something derives its existence 'from itself' they normally mean simply that it has no cause. But if they would look at the facts rather than the words, they would readily observe that the negative sense of the phrase 'from itself' comes merely from the imperfection of the human intellect and has no basis in reality. But there is a positive sense of the phrase which is derived from the true nature of things, and it is this sense alone which is employed in my argument. For example, if we think that a given body derives its existence from itself, we may simply mean that it has no cause; but our claim here is not based on any positive reason, but merely arises in a negative way from our ignorance of any cause. Yet this is a kind of imperfection in us, as we will easily see if we consider the following. The separate divisions of time do not depend on each other; hence the fact that the body in question is supposed to have existed up till now 'from itself', that is, without a cause, is not sufficient to make it continue to exist in future, unless there is some power in it that as it were recreates it continuously. But when we see that no such power is to be found in the idea of a body, and immediately conclude that the body does not derive its existence from itself, we shall then be taking the phrase 'from itself' in the positive sense. Similarly, when we say that God derives his existence 'from himself', we can understand the phrase in the negative sense, in which case the meaning will simply be that he has no cause. But if we have previously inquired into the cause of God's existing or continuing to exist, and we attend to the immense and incomprehensible power that is contained within the idea of God, then we will have recognized that this power is so exceedingly great that it is plainly the cause of his continuing existence, and nothing but this can be the cause. And if we say as a result that God derives his existence from himself, we will not be using the phrase in its negative sense but in an absolutely positive sense. There is no need to say that God is the efficient cause of himself, for this might give rise to a verbal dispute. But the fact that God derives his existence from himself, or has no cause apart from himself, depends not on nothing but on the real immensity of his power; hence, when we perceive this, we are quite entitled to think that in a sense he stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause does to its effect, and hence that he derives his existence from himself in the positive sense. And each one of us may ask himself whether he derives his existence from himself in this same sense. Since he will find no power within himself which suffices to preserve him even for one moment of time, he will be right to conclude that he derives his existence from another being, and indeed that this other being derives its existence from itself (there is no possibility of an infinite regress here, since the question concerns the

present, not the past or the future). Indeed, I will now add something which I have not put down in writing before, namely that the cause we arrive at cannot merely be a secondary cause; for a cause which possesses such great power that it can preserve something situated outside itself must, *a fortiori*, preserve itself by its own power, and hence derive its existence from itself.

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

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

Now I make a distinction here between the *indefinite* and the *infinite*. I apply the term 'infinite', in the strict sense, only to that in which no limits of any kind can be found; and in this sense God alone is infinite. But in cases like the extension of imaginary space, or the set of numbers, or the divisibility of the parts of a quantity, there is merely some respect in which I do not recognize a limit; so here I use, the term 'indefinite' rather than 'infinite', because these items are not limitless in every respect. Moreover, I distinguish between the formal concept of the infinite, or 'infinity', and the thing which is infinite. In the case of infinity, even if we understand it to be positive in the highest degree, nevertheless our way of understanding it is negative, because it depends on our not noticing any limitation in the thing. But in the case of the thing itself which is infinite, although our understanding is positive, it is not adequate, that is to say, we do not have a complete grasp of everything in it that is capable of being understood. When we look at the sea, our vision does not encompass its entirety, nor do we measure out its enormous vastness; but we are still said to 'see' it. In fact if we look from a distance so that our vision almost covers the entire sea at one time, we see it only in a confused manner, just as we have a confused picture of a chiliagon when we take in all its sides at once. But if we fix our gaze on some part of the sea at close quarters, then our view can be clear and distinct, just as our picture of a chiliagon can be, if it is confined to one or two of the sides. In the same way, God cannot be taken in by the human mind, and I admit this, along with all theologians. Moreover, God cannot be distinctly known by those who look from a distance as it were, and try to make their minds encompass his entirety all at once. This is the sense in which St Thomas says, in the passage quoted, that the knowledge of God is within us 'in a somewhat confused manner'. But those who try to attend to God's individual perfections and try not so much to take hold of them as to surrender to them, using all the strength of their intellect to contemplate them, will certainly find that God provides much more ample and straightforward subject-matter for clear and distinct knowledge than does any created thing.

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

MERSENNE, ET AL.

Secondly, from the idea of a supreme being, which you maintain is quite incapable of originating from you, you venture to infer that there must necessarily exist a supreme being who alone can be the origin of this idea which appears in your mind. However, we can find simply within ourselves a sufficient basis for our ability to form the said idea, even supposing that the supreme being did not exist, or that we did not know that he exists and never thought about his existing. For surely I can see that, in so far as I think, I have some degree of perfection, and hence that others besides myself have a similar degree of perfection. And this gives me the basis for thinking of an indefinite number of degrees and thus positing higher and higher degrees of perfection up to infinity. Even if there were just one degree of heat or light, I could always imagine further degrees and continue the process of addition up to infinity. In the same way, I can surely take a given degree of being, which I perceive within myself, and add on a further

degree, and thus construct the idea of a perfect being from all the degrees which are capable of being added on. You say, however, that an effect cannot possess any degree of reality or perfection that was not previously present in the cause. But we see that flies and other animals, and also plants, are produced from sun and rain and earth, which lack life. Now life is something nobler than any merely corporeal grade of being; and hence it does happen that an effect may derive from its cause some reality which is nevertheless not present in the cause. But leaving this aside, the idea of a perfect being is nothing more than a conceptual entity [*ens rationis*], which has no more nobility than your own mind which is thinking. Moreover, if you had not grown up among educated people, but had spent your entire life alone in some deserted spot, how do you know that the idea would have come to you? You derived this idea from earlier preconceptions, or from books or from discussion with friends and so on, and not simply from your mind or from an existing supreme being. So a clearer proof needs to be provided that this idea could not be present within you if a supreme being did not exist; and when you have provided it, we shall all surrender. However, the fact that the natives of Canada, the Hurons and other primitive peoples, have no awareness of any idea of this sort seems to establish that the idea does come from previously held notions. It is even possible for you to form the idea from a previous examination of corporeal things, so that your idea would refer to nothing but this corporeal world, which includes every kind of perfection that can be thought of by you. In that case you could not infer the existence of anything beyond an utterly perfect corporeal being, unless you were to add something further which lifts us up to an incorporeal or spiritual plane. We may add that you can form the idea of an angel just as you can form the idea of a supremely perfect being; but this idea is not produced in you by an angel, although the angel is more perfect than you. But in fact you do not have the idea of God, just as you do not have the idea of an infinite number or an infinite line (even if you may have the idea, the number is still impossible). Moreover, the idea of the unity and simplicity of one perfection that includes all others arises merely from an operation of the reasoning intellect, in the same way as those universal unities which do not exist in reality but merely in the intellect (as can be seen in the case of generic unity, transcendental unity, and so on).

[Descartes to Mersenne, et al.]

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

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

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

As for your calling the idea of God which is in us a 'conceptual entity' [*ens rationis*], this is not a compelling objection. If by 'conceptual entity' is meant something which does not exist, it is not true that the idea of God is a conceptual entity in this sense. It is true only in the sense in which every operation of the intellect is a conceptual entity, that is, an entity which has its origin in thought; and indeed this entire universe can be said to be an entity originating in God's thought, that is, an entity created by a single act of the divine mind. Moreover I have already insisted in various places that I am dealing merely with the objective perfection or reality of an idea; and this, no less than the objective intricacy in the idea of a machine of very ingenious design, requires a cause which contains in reality whatever is contained merely objectively in the idea. I do not see what I can add to make it any clearer that the idea in question could not be present to my mind unless a supreme being existed. I can only say that it depends on the reader: if he attends carefully to what I have written he should be able to free himself from the preconceived opinions which may be eclipsing his natural light, and to accustom himself to believing in the primary notions, which are as evident and true as anything can be, in preference to opinions which are obscure and false, albeit fixed in the mind by long habit.

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

It is also a primary notion that 'all the reality or perfection which is present in an idea merely objectively must be present in its cause either formally or eminently'. This is the sole basis for all the beliefs we have ever had about the existence of things located outside our mind. For what could ever have led us to sus-

pect that such things exist if not the simple fact that ideas of these things reach our mind by means of the senses? Those who give the matter their careful attention and spend time meditating with me will clearly see that there is within us an idea of a supremely powerful and perfect being, and also that the objective reality of this idea cannot be found in us, either formally or eminently. I cannot force this truth on my readers if they are lazy, since it depends solely on their exercising their own powers of thought.

The very manifest conclusion from all this is that God exists. But there may be some whose natural light is so meagre that they do not see that it is a primary notion that every perfection that is present objectively in an idea must really exist in some cause of the idea. For their benefit I provided an even more straightforward demonstration of God's existence based on the fact that the mind which possesses the idea of God cannot derive its existence from itself. So I do not see what more is required to make you surrender.

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

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

The fact that I dealt only with the human mind in the Second Meditation is no drawback here. For I readily and freely confess that the idea which we have of the divine intellect, for example, does not differ from that which we have of our own intellect, except in so far as the idea of an infinite number differs from the idea of a number raised to the second or fourth power. And the same applies to the individual attributes of God of which we recognize some trace in ourselves. But in addition to this, our understanding tells us that there is in God an absolute immensity, simplicity and unity which embraces all other attributes and has no copy in us, but is, as I have said before, 'like the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work'. In virtue of this we recognize that, of all the individual attributes which, by a defect of our intellect, we assign to God in a piecemeal fashion, corresponding to the way in which we perceive them in ourselves, none belong to God and to ourselves in the same sense. Moreover, there are many indefinite particulars of which we have an idea, such as indefinite (or infinite) knowledge and power, as well as number and length and so on, that are also infinite. Now we recognize that some of these (such as knowledge and power) are contained formally in the idea of God, whereas others (such as number and length) are contained in the idea merely eminently. And this would surely not be the case if the idea of God within us were merely a figment of our minds.

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

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

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

As for those who deny that they have the idea of God, but in its place form some image etc., although they reject the name, they concede the reality. I do not myself think that the idea is of the same kind as the images of material things which are pictured in the imagination; I maintain it is simply that which we perceive with the intellect, when the intellect apprehends, or judges, or reasons. Now in my thought or intellect I can somehow come upon a perfection that is above me; thus I notice that, when I count, I cannot reach a largest number, and hence I recognize that there is something in the process of counting which exceeds my powers. And I contend that from this alone it necessarily follows, not that an infinite number exists, nor indeed that it is a contradictory notion, as you say, but that I have the power of conceiving that there is a thinkable number which is larger than any number that I can ever think of, and hence that this

power is something which I have received not from myself but from some other being which is more perfect than I am.

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

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

[…]

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

DEFINITIONS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

POSTULATES

The *first* request I make of my readers is that they should realize how feeble are the reasons that have led them to trust their senses up till now, and how uncertain are all the judgements that they have built up on the basis of the senses. I ask them to reflect long and often on this point, till they eventually acquire the habit of no longer placing too much trust in the senses. In my view this is a prerequisite for perceiving the certainty that belongs to metaphysical things.

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

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

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

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

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

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

AXIOMS OR COMMON NOTIONS

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

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

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

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

V. It follows from this that the objective reality of our ideas needs a cause which contains this reality not merely objectively but formally or eminently. It should be noted that this axiom is one which we must necessarily accept, since on it depends our knowledge of all things, whether they are perceivable through the senses or not. How do we know, for example, that the sky exists? Because we see it? But this 'seeing' does not affect the mind except in so far as it is an idea—I mean an idea which resides in the mind itself, not an image depicted in the corporeal imagination. Now the only reason why we can use this idea as a basis for the judgement that the sky exists is that every idea must have a really existing cause of its objective reality; and in this case we judge that the cause is the sky itself. And we make similar judgements in other cases.

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

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

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

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

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

[…]

PROPOSITION II

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

Demonstration

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

PROPOSITION III

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

Demonstration

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

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

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

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

HOBBES

On the Third Meditation ('The existence of God')

FIFTH OBJECTION

> Some of these [*viz*. human thoughts] are, as it were, the images of things, and it is only in these cases that the term "idea" is strictly appropriate—for example, when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God.

When I think of a man, I am aware of an idea or image made up of a certain shape and colour; and I can doubt whether this image is the likeness of a man or not. And the same applies when I think of the sky. When I think of a chimera, I am aware of an idea or an image; and I can be in doubt as to whether it is the likeness of a non-existent animal which is capable of existing, or one which may or may not have existed at some previous time.

But when I think of an angel, what comes to mind is an image, now of a flame, now of a beautiful child with wings; I feel sure that this image has no likeness to an angel, and hence that it is not the idea of an angel. But I believe that there are invisible and immaterial creatures who serve God; and we give the name 'angel' to this thing which we believe in, or suppose to exist. But the idea by means of which I imagine an angel is composed of the ideas of visible things.

In the same way we have no idea or image corresponding to the sacred name of God. And this is why we are forbidden to worship God in the form of an image; for otherwise we might think that we were conceiving of him who is incapable of being conceived.

It seems, then, that there is no idea of God in us. A man born blind, who has often approached fire and felt hot, recognizes that there is something which makes him hot; and when he hears that this is called 'fire' he concludes that fire exists. But he does not know what shape or colour fire has, and has absolutely no idea or image of fire that comes before his mind. The same applies to a man who recognizes that there must be some cause of his images or ideas, and that this cause must have a prior cause, and so on; he is finally led to the supposition of some eternal cause which never began to exist and hence cannot have a cause prior to itself, and he concludes that something eternal must necessarily exist. But he has no idea which he can say is the idea of that eternal being; he merely gives the name or label 'God' to the thing that he believes in, or acknowledges to exist.

Now from the premiss that we have an idea of God in our soul, M. Descartes proceeds to prove the theorem that God (that is, the supremely wise and powerful creator of the world) exists. But he ought to have given a better explanation of this 'idea' of God, and he should have gone on to deduce not only the existence of God but also the creation of the world.

Reply

Here my critic wants the term 'idea' to be taken to refer simply to the images of material things which are depicted in the corporeal imagination; and if this is granted, it is easy for him to prove that there can be no proper idea of an angel or of God. But I make it quite clear in several places throughout the book, and in this passage in particular, that I am taking the word 'idea' to refer to whatever is immediately perceived by the mind. For example, when I want something, or am afraid of something, I simultaneously perceive that I want, or am afraid; and this is why I count volition and fear among my ideas. I used the word 'idea' because it was the standard philosophical term used to refer to the forms of perception belonging to the divine mind, even though we recognize that God does not possess any corporeal imagination. And besides, there was not any more appropriate term at my disposal. I think I did give a full enough explanation of the idea of God to satisfy those who are prepared to attend to my meaning; I cannot possibly satisfy those who prefer to attribute a different sense to my words than the one I intended. As for the comment at the end regarding the creation of the world, this is quite irrelevant.

SIXTH OBJECTION

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

When someone wills, or is afraid, he has an image of the thing that he fears or the action that he wills; but what more does his thought include beyond this? This is not explained. Even if we grant that fear is a thought, it can only, as far as I can see, be the thought of the thing we are afraid of. For what is fear of a charging lion if not the idea of a charging lion plus the effect which this idea produces in the heart, which in turn induces in the frightened man that animal motion which we call 'flight'? Now this motion of flight is not a thought; so the upshot is that fear does not involve any thought, apart from the thought that consists in the likeness of the thing feared. And the same applies to willing.

As for affirmation and denial, these cannot be separated from language and names; thus brute beasts cannot affirm or deny, even in thought; and hence they cannot make judgements. Nevertheless the thought may be similar in man and beast. For when we assert that a man is running, our thought is no different from the thought that a dog has when he sees his master running. Hence affirmation and denial add nothing to simple thoughts except perhaps the thought that the names involved in the assertion denote the very things which the person making the assertion takes them to denote. But this is not a case of a thought's including more than a likeness of a thing; it is a case of its including the same likeness twice.

Reply

It is self-evident that seeing a lion and at the same time being afraid of it is different from simply seeing it. And seeing a man run is different from silently affirming to oneself that one sees him. I see nothing here that needs answering.

SEVENTH OBJECTION

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

If, as seems to be the case, we do not have an idea of God (and it is not proved that we do), then the whole of this argument collapses. As for the idea of myself, this arises from sight, if we are thinking of 'myself' as my body; and if we are thinking of my soul, then the soul is something of which we have no idea at all. We rationally infer that there is something within the human body which gives it the animal motion by means of which it has sensations and moves; and we call this 'something' a soul, without having an idea of it.

Reply

If we do have an idea of God—and it is manifest that we do—then this whole objection collapses. As for the further point that we do not have an idea of the soul, but rationally infer its existence, this amounts to saying that although there is no image of the soul depicted in the corporeal imagination, we nevertheless do have what I call an idea of it.

EIGHTH OBJECTION

> The other idea of the sun is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me.

It seems that there is only one idea of the sun at any one time, irrespective of whether we are looking at it with our eyes, or our reasoning gives us to understand that it is many times larger than it appears. The 'other' idea is not an idea of the sun, but is a rational inference that the idea of the sun would be many times larger if one looked at it from a much closer distance.

Certainly there can be different ideas of the sun at different times, e.g. if one looks at the sun with the naked eye and then later looks at it with a telescope. But astronomical arguments do not make the idea of the sun larger or smaller; they simply show that the idea that is acquired from the senses is deceptive.

Reply

Here again, what the objector says is not an idea of the sun, but which he nevertheless describes, is precisely what I call an idea.

NINTH OBJECTION

> Undoubtedly the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances.

I have already frequently pointed out that we do not have an idea of God, or of the soul. I will now add that we do not have an idea of substance. For substance, in so far as it is the matter which is the subject of accidental properties and of changes, is something that is established solely by reasoning; it is not something that is conceived, or that presents any idea to us. If this is true, how can one say that the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more or contain more objective reality than those which represent accidents? Moreover, M. Descartes should consider afresh what 'more reality' means. Does reality admit of more and less? Or does he think one thing can be more of a thing than another? If so, he should consider how this can be explained to us with that degree of clarity that every demonstration calls for, and which he himself has employed elsewhere.

Reply

I have frequently pointed out that I use the term 'idea' to apply to what is established by reasoning as well as anything else that is perceived in any manner whatsoever. I have also made it quite clear how reality admits of more and less. A substance is more of a thing than a mode; if there are real qualities or incomplete substances, they are things to a greater extent than modes, but to a lesser extent than complete substances; and, finally, if there is an infinite and independent substance, it is more of a thing than a finite and dependent substance. All this is completely self-evident.

TENTH OBJECTION

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

When I consider the attributes of God in order to get an idea of God and to see whether there is anything in the idea that could not have been derived from ourselves, what I find, if I am not mistaken, is this. What we think of in connection with the name 'God' does not, I agree, originate in ourselves; but it need not be derived from any source other than external objects. By the term 'God' I understand a *substance*; that is, I understand that God exists (though my understanding does not come from an idea but from reasoning). This substance, moreover, is *infinite* (that is, it is impossible for me to conceive or imagine any supposed limits or extremities without being able to imagine further limits beyond them). And it follows from this that what arises in connection with the term 'infinite' is not the idea of the infinity of God but the idea of my own boundaries or limits. In addition, the substance is *independent*; that is, I do not conceive of a cause which produced God. From this it is clear that the idea which I have in connection with the term 'independent' is simply the memory of my own ideas, which began at different times and hence are dependent.

Hence to say that God is *independent* is simply to say that God belongs to the class of things such that I cannot imagine their origin. Similarly, to say that God is *infinite* is the same as saying that he belongs to the class of things such that we do not conceive of them as having bounds. It follows that any idea of God is ruled out. For what sort of idea is it which has no origin and no limits?

God is *supremely intelligent*. What, may I ask, is the idea which enables M. Descartes to understand the operation of God's understanding?

Supremely powerful. Again, what idea enables us to understand power, which relates to future things, that is, things which do not yet exist. My own understanding of power comes from an image or memory of past actions, and I arrive at it as follows: 'if something acted, it was able to act; so if it continues to exist it will be able to act again, that is, it has the power of acting.' But these are all ideas which are capable of having arisen from external objects.

The creator of all that exists. I can construct for myself a sort of image of creation from what I have seen, e.g. a man being born or growing as it were from a single point to the size and shape which he now has. This is the only sort of idea which anyone has in connection with the term 'creator'. But our ability to imagine the world to have been created is not a sufficient proof of the creation. Hence, even if the existence of something infinite, independent, supremely powerful etc. had been demonstrated, it still would not follow that a creator exists. Unless anyone thinks that the following inference is correct: 'There exists a being whom we *believe* to have created all things; therefore, the world was *in fact* created by him at some stage'.

Moreover, when M. Descartes says that the ideas of God and of our souls are innate in us, I should like to know if the souls of people who are in a deep, dreamless sleep are thinking. If they are not, they do not have any ideas at the time. It follows that no idea is innate; for what is innate is always present.

Reply

Nothing that we attribute to God can have been derived from external objects as a copy is derived from its original, since nothing in God resembles what is to be found in external, that is corporeal, things. Now any elements in our thought which do not resemble external objects manifestly cannot have originated in external objects, but must have come from the cause which produced this diversity in our thought. And how, may I ask, does the philosopher derive his notion of God's understanding simply from external things? I can exactly explain the idea I have of God's understanding; for by an 'idea' I mean whatever is the form of a given perception. Now everyone surely perceives that there are things he understands. Hence everyone has the form or idea of understanding; and by indefinitely extending this he can form the idea of God's understanding. And a similar procedure applies to the other attributes of God.

In order to prove the existence of God, we made use of the idea of God which is in us. And such immense power is contained in this idea that we understand that, if God exists, it is a contradiction that anything else should exist which was not created by him. In view of this it clearly follows that in demonstrating the existence of God we have also demonstrated that God created the entire world, or all things which exist apart from him.

Lastly, when we say that an idea is innate in us, we do not mean that it is always there before us. This would mean that no idea was innate. We simply mean that we have within ourselves the faculty of summoning up the idea.

ELEVENTH OBJECTION

> The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have—that is, having within me the idea of God—were it not the case that God really existed. By 'God' I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me.

Since it has not been demonstrated that we have the idea of God, and since the Christian religion obliges us to believe that God cannot be conceived of (which means, in my view, that we have no idea of him), it follows that no demonstration has been given of the existence of God, let alone the creation.

Reply

When they say that God 'cannot be conceived of', this refers to conceiving in such a way as to have a fully adequate grasp of him. As for how we can have an idea of God, I have gone over this *ad nauseam*. There is absolutely nothing in this objection to invalidate my demonstrations.

ARNAULD

CONCERNING GOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But, you may reply, it is false precisely because it is not the idea of cold. No: it is your judgement that is false, if you judge that it is the idea of cold. The idea itself, within you, is completely true. In the same way, the idea of God should never be called false—not even 'materially false', even though someone may transfer it to something which is not God, as idolaters have done.

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

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

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

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

In order to derive my existence from myself, I should have to derive my existence from myself positively and, as it were, causally. Therefore it is impossible that I derive my existence from myself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now we cannot conceive of something under the concept of a cause as bestowing existence unless we conceive of it as possessing existence; for no one can give what he does not have. Hence we should be conceiving of a thing as having existence before conceiving it as having received existence; yet in the case of any receiver, the receiving precedes the possessing.

The argument can also be put as follows. No one gives what he does not have. Hence no one can give himself existence unless he already has it. But if he already has it, why should he give it to himself? Finally, the author asserts that 'it is evident by the natural light that the distinction between creation and preservation is only a conceptual one'. But it is evident by the same natural light that nothing can create itself. Therefore nothing can preserve itself.

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

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

in future, unless there is some power in it which, as it were, recreates it continuously.'

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

It manifestly follows from this that an infinite being cannot be conceived of as existing even for a moment unless it is also conceived of as having always existed and as being bound to continue to exist for eternity (the author himself establishes this elsewhere). And hence it is, pointless to ask why this being should continue in existence. Augustine, whose remarks on the subject of God are as worthwhile and sublime as any that have appeared since the time of the sacred authors, frequently explains that in God there is no past or future but only eternally present existence. This makes it even clearer that the question of why God should continue in existence cannot be asked without absurdity, since the question manifestly involves the notions of 'before' and 'after', past and future, which should be excluded from the concept of an infinite being.

Moreover, God cannot be thought of as deriving his existence 'from himself' in the positive sense, as if he had created himself in the beginning. For then he would have existed before he existed. God is thought of as deriving existence 'from himself' only (as our author frequently declares) because he does in reality keep himself in existence. But self-preservation does not apply to an infinite being any more than an original self-creation. For what, may I ask, is preservation if not a continual re-creation of something. Thus all preservation presupposes original creation. What is more, the very terms 'continuation' and 'preservation' imply some potentiality, whereas an infinite being is pure actuality, without any potentiality.

We should therefore conclude that God cannot be conceived of as deriving existence from himself in the positive sense, except through an imperfection of our intellect, which conceives of God after the fashion of created things. A further argument will make this even clearer. We look for the efficient cause of something only in respect of its existence, not in respect of its essence. For example, if I see a triangle, I may look for the efficient cause that is responsible for the existence of this triangle; but I cannot without absurdity inquire into the efficient cause of this triangle's having three angles equal to two right angles. If anyone makes such an inquiry, the correct response would be not to give an efficient cause, but to explain that this is the nature of a triangle. This is why mathematicians, who do not deal with the existence of the objects they study, never give demonstrations involving efficient or final causes. But it belongs to the essence of an infinite being that it exists, or, if you will, that it continues in existence, no less than it belongs to the essence of a triangle to have its three angles equal to two right angles. Now if anyone asks why a triangle has its three angles equal to two right angles, we should not answer in terms of an efficient cause, but should simply say that this is the eternal and immutable nature of a triangle. And similarly, if anyone asks why God exists, or continues in existence, we should not try to find either in God or outside him any efficient cause, or quasi-efficient cause (I am arguing about the reality, not the name); instead, we should confine our answer to saying that the reason lies in the nature of a supremely perfect being.

The author says that the light of nature establishes that if anything exists we may always ask why it exists—that is, we may inquire into its efficient cause, or if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not have one. To this I answer that if someone asks why God exists, we should not answer in terms of an efficient cause, but should explain that he exists simply because he is God, or an infinite being. And if someone asks for an efficient cause of God, we should reply that he does not need an efficient cause. And if the questioner goes on to ask why he does not need an efficient cause, we should answer that this is because he is an infinite being, whose existence is his essence. For the only things that require an efficient cause are those in which actual existence may be distinguished from essence.

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

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

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

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

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

Let me add something which I forgot to include earlier. The author lays it down as certain that there can be nothing in him, in so far as he is a thinking thing, of which he is not aware, but it seems to me that this is false. For by 'himself, in so far as he is a thinking thing', he means simply his mind, in so far as it is

distinct from the body. But all of us can surely see that there may be many things in our mind of which the mind is not aware. The mind of an infant in its mother's womb has the power of thought, but is not aware of it. And there are countless similar examples, which I will pass over.

[Descartes to Arnauld]

REPLY TO PART TWO, CONCERNING GOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But my critic asks what the idea of cold, which I described as materially false, represents to me. If it represents an absence, he says, it is true; and if it represents a positive entity, it is not the idea of cold. This is right; but my only reason for calling the idea 'materially false' is that, owing to the fact that it is obscure and confused; I am unable to judge whether or not what it represents to me is something positive which exists outside of my sensation. And hence I may be led to judge that it is something positive though in fact it may merely be an absence. Hence in asking what is the cause of the positive objective being which, in my view, is responsible for the idea being materially false, my critic has raised an improper question. For I do not claim that an idea's material falsity results from some positive entity; it arises solely from the obscurity of the idea—although this does have something positive as its underlying subject, namely the actual sensation involved.

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

This does not in any way violate my fundamental principles. One fear that I might have had, however, is that since I have never spent very much time reading philosophical texts, my calling ideas which I take to provide subject-matter for error 'materially false' might have involved too great a departure from standard philosophical usage. This might, I say, have worried me, had I not found the word 'materially' used in an identical sense to my own in the first philosophical author I came across, namely Suarez, in the *Metaphysical Disputations*, Part IX, Section 2, Number 4.

But let me now turn to my critic's principal complaint—though it is one which seems to me to be the least well-taken of all his objections. This concerns the passage where I said that 'we are entitled to think that in a sense God stands in the same relation to himself as an efficient cause to its effect'. M. Arnauld says that it is 'a hard saying, and indeed false' to suggest that God is the efficient cause of himself; but I actually denied that suggestion in the passage just quoted. For in saying that God 'in a sense' stands in the same relation as an efficient cause, I made it clear that I did not suppose he was the same as an efficient cause; and in using the phrase 'we are quite entitled to think' I meant that I was explaining the matter in these terms merely on account of the imperfection of the human intellect. Indeed, throughout the rest of the passage I confirmed this. Right at the beginning, having said 'if anything exists we may always inquire into its efficient cause', I immediately went on 'or, if it does not have one, we may demand why it does not need one'. These words make it quite clear that I did believe in the existence of something that does not need an efficient cause. And what could that be, but God? A little later on I said that 'there is in God such great and inexhaustible power that he never required the assistance of anything in order to exist, and does not now require any assistance for his preservation, so that he is in a sense his own cause'. Here the phrase 'his own cause' cannot possibly be taken to mean an efficient cause; it simply means that the inexhaustible power of God is the cause or reason for his not needing a cause. And since that inexhaustible power or immensity of the divine essence is as *positive* as can be, I said that the reason or cause why God needs no cause is a *positive* reason or cause. Now this cannot be said of any finite thing, even though it is quite perfect of its kind. If a finite thing is said to derive its existence 'from itself, this can only be understood in a *negative* sense, meaning that no reason can be derived from its positive nature which could enable us to understand that it does not require an efficient cause.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This syllogism can easily be turned against M. Arnauld, as follows: although we do not ask for an efficient cause with respect to something's essence, we can nevertheless ask for an efficient cause with respect to something's existence; but in the case of God, essence is not distinct from existence; hence we can ask for the efficient cause in the case of God. But to reconcile our two positions, the answer to the question why God exists should be given not in terms of an efficient cause in the strict sense, but simply in terms of the essence or formal cause of the thing. And precisely because in the case of God there is no distinction between existence and essence, the formal cause will be strongly analogous to an efficient cause, and hence can be called something close to an efficient cause.

Finally, M. Arnauld adds:

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

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

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

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

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

[…]

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

But it must be noted that, although we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds, we are not always aware of the mind's faculties or powers, except potentially. By this I mean that when we concentrate on

employing one of our faculties, then immediately, if the faculty in question resides in our mind, we become actually aware of it, and hence we may deny that it is in the mind if we are not capable of becoming aware of it.

GASSENDI

On the Third Meditation: 'The existence of God'

1. In the Third Meditation you recognize that your clear and distinct knowledge of the proposition 'I am a thing that thinks' is responsible for the certainty which you have regarding it; and you conclude from this that you can lay down the general rule 'Everything which I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.' Admittedly this may be the best rule that it was possible to find when everything was shrouded in so much darkness. But when we see that many great thinkers, who ought surely to have perceived very many things clearly and distinctly, have judged that the truth of things is hidden either in God or in a deep well, is it not reasonable to suspect that this rule may lead us astray? Moreover, given the arguments of the sceptics, of which you are aware, it seems that the only thing that we can consider as clearly and distinctly perceived and therefore infer to be true is that if something appears to anyone to be the case then it appears to be the case. I clearly and distinctly perceive the pleasant taste of a melon, and hence it is true that the taste of a melon appears to me to be of this kind. But how can I convince myself that it is therefore true that a flavour of this kind really exists in the melon? When I was a boy and in good health I took a different view and clearly and distinctly perceived quite a different taste in the melon. And I see that many people also take a different view, as do many animals that have a strong sense of taste and are in the best of health. Is one truth then inconsistent with another? Or is it not rather as follows: if something is clearly and distinctly perceived this does not mean that it is true in itself; all that is true is that it is clearly and distinctly perceived to be such and such? And the same sort of account must be given of matters concerning the mind. At one time I could have sworn that for a given quantity, we cannot go from a smaller quantity to a larger quantity without passing through a quantity equal to the original; again, I could have sworn that it is impossible that two lines should not eventually meet if they are produced to infinity. I thought I perceived these things so clearly and distinctly that I counted them among the truest and most indubitable axioms. Nevertheless, afterwards I came across arguments which convinced me that the opposite was the case and that I perceived it even more clearly and distinctly. Yet now, when I consider the nature of mathematical propositions, I am in doubt again. So it may be said to be true that I recognize that such and such propositions concerning quantities, lines and so on, are indeed just as I conceive or suppose them to be; but it cannot safely be asserted that they are therefore true in themselves. But whatever may be the case regarding mathematical matters, when it comes to the other questions which we are now dealing with, why, may I ask, do people have so many different opinions about them? Everyone thinks that he clearly and distinctly perceives the truth which he champions. In case you should say that the majority are either hesitant or insincere in their beliefs, consider that there are those who face even death for their opinions, even though they see others suffering the same fate for the opposite cause. You can hardly think that their dying words are not utterly sincere. Admittedly you yourself mention the difficulty that 'you previously accepted as wholly certain many things which you afterwards realized were doubtful'. But in this passage you neither resolve the difficulty nor confirm your rule. You merely take the opportunity to discuss the ideas which may deceive you into thinking that they represent things external to yourself, when in fact they may never have existed outside you. You also talk once again of the deceiving God who can mislead you about the propositions 'Two and three are five' and 'A square has no more than four sides'; and the implication here is that we must not expect confirmation of your rule until you have shown that there is a God who cannot be a deceiver. But if I may make a suggestion, what you ought to be working on is not so much establishing this rule, which makes it so easy for us to accept falsehoods as true, but putting forward a method to guide us and show us when we are mistaken and when not, on those occasions when we think we clearly and distinctly perceive something.

2. You next distinguish ideas (by which you mean thoughts in so far as they are like images) into three classes: innate, adventitious and made up. In the first class you put 'your understanding of what a thing is, what truth is and what thought is'. In the second class you put 'your hearing a noise, seeing the sun and feeling a fire'. And in the third class you put 'your invented idea of sirens and hippogriffs'. You add that all your ideas may perhaps be adventitious or they may all be innate or all made up, since you have not as yet clearly perceived their origin. But in case some fallacy should creep in before you have managed to perceive the origin of your ideas, I should like to go further and note that all ideas seem to be adventitious—to proceed from things which exist outside the mind and come under one of our senses. The mind has the faculty (or rather is itself the faculty) of perceiving adventitious ideas—those which it receives through the senses and which are transmitted by things; these ideas, I say, are quite unadorned and distinct, and are received just exactly as they are. But in addition to this, the mind has the faculty of putting these ideas together and separating them in various ways, of enlarging them and diminishing them, of comparing them, and so on.

Hence the third class of ideas, at any rate, is not distinct from the second. For the idea of a chimera is simply the idea of the head of a lion, the body of a goat and the tail of a serpent, out of which the mind puts together one idea, although the individual elements are adventitious. Similarly the idea of a giant, or a man supposed to be as big as a mountain or the whole world, is merely adventitious. It is the idea of a man of ordinary size which the mind enlarges at will, although the more the idea is enlarged the more confused the conception becomes. Again the idea of a pyramid, or of a town, or of something else which we have not so far seen, is simply the adventitious idea of a pyramid or town or something else which we have seen, with the form somewhat modified so that the idea is repeated and rearranged in a fairly confused way.

As for the forms which you say are innate, there do not seem to be any: whatever ideas are said to belong to this category also appear to have an external origin. You say 'I derive from my own nature my understanding of what a thing is.' I do not think you here mean the actual power of understanding, which we undoubtedly have and which is not in question; you are talking about the idea of a *thing*. Moreover you are not talking of the idea of some particular thing; for the sun, this stone, and all individual items are things, and yet you do not say that our ideas of them are innate. So you must be talking of the idea of a thing considered in general, which is virtually synonymous with 'entity', and has a similarly wide extension. But how, I ask you, can this idea be in the mind unless all the individual things exist, together with all the kinds of things from which the mind abstracts so as to form the concept which is not peculiar to any individual item but nonetheless fits them all? For surely if the idea of a thing is innate, the idea of an animal, or a plant, or a stone, or of any universal will also be innate. We shall not need to bother separating out all the particulars which lead us, after setting aside the various distinguishing characteristics, to arrive at the one element which seems common to all, or in other words the idea of a general class.

You also say that you derive from your own nature 'your understanding of what truth is', by which I take it you mean your idea of truth. But if truth is simply the conformity of a judgement with the thing which is the subject of the judgement, then truth is some sort of relation, and hence is not anything distinct from the thing and the idea which are so related. Or, which amounts to the same thing, truth is nothing distinct from the idea of the thing, in so far as the idea represents both itself and the thing as being of such and such a kind. Thus the idea of truth is simply the idea of a thing in so far as it conforms to that thing, or in so far as it represents the thing as it is; and it follows that if the idea of the thing in question is not innate but adventitious, then the idea of truth will itself also be adventitious and not innate. And since this applies to any particular truth, it can also apply to truth in general, the notion or idea of which is derived from the notions or ideas of particular things (in the way just explained with regard to the idea of a thing).

Again, you say that you derive from your own nature 'your understanding of what thought is' (by which, again, I take you to mean your idea of thought). But just as the mind can, from the idea of one town, construct the idea of another, so from the idea of one action such as seeing or tasting, it can construct the idea of another action such as thought. For there is a recognized analogy between the various cognitive faculties, so that knowledge of one easily leads to knowledge of the other. However, there is no need to labour over the idea of thought; we should reserve our attention for the idea of the mind itself, and hence the soul. For if we grant that this idea is innate, there will be no harm in admitting that the idea of thought is also innate. So we must wait until you have proved innateness in the case of the mind or the soul.

3. You seem next to call into doubt not only whether any ideas proceed from external things, but even whether there are any external things at all. Your reasoning appears to be as follows. Although you have within you ideas of things which are called 'external', the ideas do not establish that the things exist, since the ideas do not necessarily arise from the things, but could come from yourself or from some other unknown source. This, I think, is why you said earlier that you had not previously perceived the earth, the sky and the stars, but only the ideas of the earth, the sky and the stars, which might give rise to a delusion. Now if you do not yet believe that the earth, sky, stars and so on exist, why, may I ask, do you walk on the earth and move your body to look at the sun? Why do you approach the fire to feel the warmth? Why do you go to the table for a meal to satisfy your hunger? Why do you move your tongue to speak or your hand to write down these Meditations for us? Certainly your doubts can be uttered—they can be devised with great subtlety—but they do not further your enterprise. And since you are really in no doubt that the things outside you exist, let us be serious and straightforward and talk of things as they are. If, granting the existence of external objects, you think it cannot be satisfactorily demonstrated that the ideas which we have are derived from them, you will have to dispose not only of the objections raised by your arguments, but of further difficulties that can be raised.

You admit that we accept that our ideas come from external things, since 'nature has apparently taught us this and we know by experience that they do not depend on us, or on our will'. But if I may pass over these arguments and their solution, you should also have raised and answered, amongst other things, the question of why a man born blind has no idea of colour, or a man born deaf has no idea of sound. Surely this is because external objects have not been able to transmit any images of themselves to the minds of such unfortunates, because the doors have been closed since birth and there have always been barriers in place which have prevented these images from entering.

Later on you press the example of the sun, of which you have two ideas: one is derived from the senses, and this makes the sun appear small; the other is based on astronomical reasoning and gives us a conception of the sun as huge. The latter idea, you say, is truer and more closely resembles the sun, and it is not drawn from the senses but derived from innate notions or produced in some other way. But both these ideas of the sun resemble the sun and are true, or conform to the sun, though one does so more than the other. In just the same way, if we have two ideas of the same man, one transmitted from ten feet away and the other from a hundred or a thousand feet, both ideas resemble the man and are true, or conform to him, but the former idea does so more than the latter. The idea which comes from nearby is not so weakened as the one which comes from farther away. Were you not to grasp this point fully I could explain it quite briefly if you allowed me to.

Although the second, vast idea of the sun is perceived by the mind alone, it does not follow that the idea is derived from some innate notion. Since experience establishes, and reasoning based on experience confirms, that objects when distant appear smaller than they do when they are near us, the idea of the sun which comes to us through sense-perception is so amplified by the mind's own power as to correspond exactly with the agreed distance of the sun from us, so that its diameter equals so many radii of the earth.

If you want to grasp the fact that no part of this idea has been implanted in us by nature, you should inquire about the idea which a man born blind has. You will find first of all that the idea in his mind has no colour or luminosity. Next you will find that it is not even round, unless someone has told him the sun is round and he has previously held a round object in his hands. And lastly you will find that the idea is not nearly so large, unless he has amplified his previously accepted idea as a result of reasoning or the influence of some authority.

But may I interpose a question here? Do we, who have looked at the sun so often, and have so often seen its apparent diameter and reasoned about its true diameter, do we, I ask you, have any other than the ordinary image of the sun? Reasoning tells us that the sun is more than a hundred and sixty times bigger than the earth, but do we therefore have an idea of such a vast body? We certainly amplify the idea derived from the senses as much as possible, and exert our mind as much as we can. But despite this, all we succeed in constructing for ourselves is darkness and obscurity. If we wish to have a distinct idea of the sun, then our mind must always return to the image which it has received via the eye. It is enough if the mind accepts that the sun is in reality bigger, and that it would have a larger idea if the eye could move closer to the sun; but in the meantime the idea that the mind attends to is nevertheless no larger than the one it actually takes in.

4. Next, you recognize the inequality and diversity to be found among our ideas. You say:

> Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, omnipotent and the creator of all things that exist apart from him, certainly has in it more objective reality than the ideas that represent finite substances.

Here you move on at a great pace, and we must stop you for a while. I am not bothered by what you call 'objective reality'. It is commonly said that external things exist 'subjectively' or 'formally' in themselves, but exist 'objectively' or 'ideally' in the intellect; and it is enough that you appear to follow this usage and mean simply that an idea must conform to the thing of which it is an idea. Thus an idea contains representatively nothing which is not in fact in the thing itself, and the more reality the thing represented has in itself, the more representative reality the idea possesses. You do in fact immediately afterwards distinguish between objective and formal reality, where 'formal reality', as I understand it, applies to the idea itself not as it represents something but as an entity in its own right. But we agree that the idea, or its objective reality, is not to be measured by the total formal reality of the thing (i.e. the reality which the thing has in itself) but merely by that part of the thing of which the intellect has acquired knowledge (i.e. by the knowledge that the intellect has of the thing). Thus you will be said to have a perfect idea of a man if you have looked at him carefully and often from all sides; but your idea will be imperfect if you have merely seen him in passing and on one occasion and from one side. But if you have not seen the man himself, but only a mask covering his face and a set of clothes which completely cover his body, then we must say either that you do not have an idea of him at all or, if you do have one, that it is very imperfect and utterly confused.

In the light of this I claim that we do have a distinct and genuine idea of accidents, but that our idea of the unseen substance beneath them is confused and utterly fictitious. So when you say that there is more objective reality in the idea of a substance than in the idea of its accidents, first of all it has to be denied that we have a true idea or representation of a substance, and hence that this idea possesses any objective reality. And next, even if we grant that it has some objective reality, we must still deny that this is greater than the reality to be found in the idea of the accidents, since whatever reality of this sort it possesses it gets from the ideas of the accidents under which, or in the guise of which, we conceive of the substance (as I said above when I stated that a substance cannot be conceived except as something extended and having shape and colour).

As for what you add about the idea of God, since you are not yet sure whether God exists, how, may I ask, do you know that God is represented by the idea you have of him as 'supreme, eternal, infinite, omnipotent and the creator of all things'? Do you not take this from your previously conceived knowledge of God, that is, from having heard these attributes ascribed to him? If you had not previously heard anything of this sort, would you still describe God in this way? You will reply that you have introduced this just as an example, without meaning to lay down any definition at this stage. Fair enough; but watch out that you do not later take it as already established.

You claim that there is in the idea of an infinite God more objective reality than in the idea of a finite thing. But first of all, the human intellect is not capable of conceiving of infinity, and hence it neither has nor can contemplate any idea representing an infinite thing. Hence if someone calls something 'infinite' he attributes to a thing which he does not grasp a label which he does not understand. For just as the thing extends beyond any grasp of it he can have, so the negation of a limit which he attributes to its extension is not understood by him, since his intelligence is always confined within some limit.

Next, although every supreme perfection is normally attributed to God, it seems that such perfections are all taken from things which we commonly admire in ourselves, such as longevity, power, knowledge, goodness, blessedness and so on. By amplifying these things as much as we can, we assert that God is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, supremely good, supremely blessed and so on. Hence the idea representing all these things does not contain more objective reality than the finite things taken together; the idea in question is compounded and augmented from the ideas of these finite things in the manner just described. For if someone calls something 'eternal' he does not thereby embrace in his mind the entire extent of its duration—the duration which had no beginning and will never have an end. Similarly, someone who uses the term 'omnipotent' does not embrace the whole multitude of possible effects; and so on in the case of the remaining attributes.

Lastly, can anyone claim that he has a genuine idea of God, an idea which represents God as he is? What an insignificant thing God would be if he were

nothing more, and had no other attributes, than what is contained in our puny idea! Surely we must believe that there is less of a comparison between the perfections of God and man than there is between those of an elephant and a tick on its skin. If anyone, after observing the perfections of the tick, formed within himself an idea which he called 'the idea of an elephant' and said that it was an authentic idea, would he not be regarded as utterly foolish? So can we really congratulate ourselves if, after seeing the perfections of a man, we form an idea which we maintain is the idea of God and is genuinely representative of him? How, may I ask, are we to detect in God the presence of those puny perfections which we find in ourselves? And when we do recognize them, what sort of divine essence will that allow us to imagine? God is infinitely beyond anything we can grasp, and when our mind addresses itself to contemplate him, it is not only in darkness but is reduced to nothing. Hence we have no basis for claiming that we have any authentic idea which represents God; and it is more than enough if, on the analogy of our human attributes, we can derive and construct an idea of some sort for our own use—an idea which does not transcend our human grasp and which contains no reality except what we perceive in other things or as a result of encountering other things.

5. You next assume that it is 'manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much in the efficient and total cause as there is in the effect'. This enables you to infer that there must be at least as much formal reality in the cause of an idea as there is objective reality in the idea. But this is a very big step to take, and we must stop you here for a while.

First, it seems that the common maxim 'There is nothing in the effect which is not in the cause' should be taken to refer to material rather than efficient causes. An efficient cause is something external to the effect and often of a quite different nature. Although an effect is said to get its reality from its efficient cause, it does not follow that the efficient cause necessarily has this reality in itself; it may have borrowed it from elsewhere. This is transparently clear if we consider effects produced by some skill. Although a house gets all its reality from the builder, the builder does not have this reality in himself—he simply takes it from some other source and passes it on to the house. The sun does the same when it transforms inferior matter in various ways so as to produce various animals. Even a parent, who admittedly passes some sort of matter on to his offspring, derives it not from an efficient but from a material principle. Your objection that the effect must be contained in the cause 'either formally or eminently' proves nothing more than that an effect sometimes has a form which resembles the form of its cause, while sometimes it has a dissimilar and imperfect form, so that the form of its cause is eminently superior. But it does not follow that even an eminent cause bestows on the effect some of its essence (that is, that which it contains formally), or that it shares its form with the effect. This may seem to happen in the case of the begetting of living creatures from the seed, but I hardly think you will say that a father, in begetting his son, chops off a part of his rational soul and gives it to him. In a word, an efficient cause does not contain its effect except in the sense that it may shape it and produce it out of a given material.

To discuss what you say about objective reality, I will introduce the example of my own image, which I can look at either in a mirror which I hold up to my face, or in a painting. Now I myself am the cause of the image in the mirror in so far as I transmit my semblance [Lat. *species*] on to the mirror, while the painter is the cause of the image displayed on the canvas. And in just the same way, if the idea or image of me is in you or in any other intellect, one may ask whether I myself am its cause—in so far as I transmit my semblance onto the eye and via the eye through to the intellect—or whether there is some other cause which traces the image out in the intellect as if with a pen or pencil. It seems, however, that no cause other than myself is required; for although your intellect may subsequently amplify or reduce the idea of me, or may combine it with something else, or deal with it in some other way, I myself am the primary cause of all the reality which the idea contains within itself. And if this applies to me it must also be taken to apply to any external object.

Now the reality belonging to this idea is, according to your distinction, of two kinds. Its *formal* reality cannot be any other than that fine and subtle substance which flows from me, and is then received by the intellect and fashioned into an idea. (If you will not allow that the semblance proceeding from an object is a substantial effluence, then make it whatever you like, but you will only diminish its reality.) The *objective* reality, on the other hand, can be nothing but the representation or likeness of me which the idea carries, or at any rate the pattern according to which the parts of the idea are fitted together so as to represent me. Whichever way you take it, it seems to be nothing real, since it is merely a relation between the various parts and between the parts and myself; in other words, it is merely a mode of the idea's formal reality, in virtue of which it has taken on this particular form. But never mind; let us call it 'objective reality', since this is what you want.

If the example is set up in this way, it seems that you ought to compare the formal reality of the idea with my formal reality or my substance, and you should compare the objective reality of the idea with the proportion obtaining between my various parts or my external form and outline. But what you want to do is to compare the objective reality of the idea with my formal reality.

But however we analyse the axiom referred to above, it is clear not only that there is in me as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the idea of me, but also that the formal reality of the idea is virtually nothing by comparison with my formal reality or my entire substance. Hence we must grant you that 'there must be at least as much formal reality in the cause of an idea as there is objective reality in the idea'; for the entire contents of the idea are virtually nothing in comparison with its cause.

6. Your next step is as follows. If the objective reality of any one of your ideas turns out to be so great that you do not contain it within you either eminently or formally, and hence cannot yourself be its cause, it follows necessarily that something besides you exists in the world. For if this were not so, you would have no argument to convince yourself of the existence of anything else. Certainly, from what you have already said, you are not the cause of the reality of your ideas; the

cause is, rather, the things themselves which are represented through the ideas, and which send images of themselves to you as if to a mirror (though you may sometimes take these images as the basis for constructing pictures of chimeras). But whether or not you yourself are the cause, does that make you uncertain about whether anything besides you exists in the world? Please give a straight answer; for whatever turns out to be the case regarding ideas, we hardly need to look for arguments to prove that other things exist.

You then make a survey of the ideas which are in you, and besides the idea of yourself you list the ideas of God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and men. Since you say there is no problem about the idea of yourself, you are then able to infer that the ideas of men, animals and angels can be put together from the ideas which you have of yourself, of God and of corporeal things; you also infer that the ideas of corporeal things could have come from yourself. What I find strange here is how you can claim that there is no problem about the idea you are said to have of yourself (an idea which is so fertile that it enables you to derive so many other ideas from it). For in fact you either have no idea of yourself at all, or you have one which is very confused and imperfect, as we have noted when commenting on the previous Meditation. The inference which you yourself drew in that Meditation was that there was nothing which you could perceive more easily or evidently than yourself. But since you neither have nor are capable of having any idea of yourself, should we not rather say that you can perceive anything at all more easily and more evidently than yourself?

When I think about why it is that sight does not see itself and the intellect does not understand itself, it occurs to me that nothing acts on itself. Thus the hand (or the tip of the finger) does not strike itself and the foot does not kick itself. Now if we are to become aware of something, it is necessary for the thing to act on the cognitive faculty by transmitting its semblance to the faculty or by informing the faculty with its semblance. Hence it seems clear that the faculty itself, not being outside itself, cannot transmit a semblance of itself to itself, and hence cannot produce any awareness of itself or, in other words, cannot perceive itself. Why do you think that the eye can see itself in a mirror although it cannot see itself in itself? It is because there is a space between the eye and the mirror, and the eye acts on the mirror, transmitting a semblance of itself onto it, so that the mirror in turn acts on the eye by sending its own semblance back to it. Show me a mirror that you yourself can act on in this way, and I promise that, when it reflects your semblance back to you, you will finally manage to perceive yourself—though not by direct but by a reflexive kind of cognition. But since you cannot provide such a mirror, there is no hope of your knowing yourself.

I could also be awkward and ask how you are supposed to have an idea of God—unless it is the kind of idea we have been talking about and is acquired in the way just discussed. And how can you have an idea of the angels, since I take it you would never have thought of them if you had not been told about them? What about animals and other things? If they had not impinged on your senses I am practically certain you would never have had any ideas of them, just as you have no idea of countless things which you have never seen or heard of. But setting all this aside, I do admit that the ideas which we have in our minds of various things can be compounded together to give rise to many more forms of other things. But the ideas which you list do not seem adequate to account for such a great diversity of forms, or even for the distinct and determinate ideas we have of each specific thing.

However, I will pause only at the ideas of corporeal things. There is a considerable difficulty about how you can derive these from yourself or simply from the idea of yourself, when you claim to be incorporeal and consider yourself as such. For if you have knowledge only of an incorporeal substance, how can it be that you also have some grasp of corporeal substance? Is there any analogy between the latter and the former? You may say they have it in common that they are capable of existing, but this point of agreement cannot be understood unless we have some prior understanding of each of the two things which have this in common. Before we can form the common notion you make use of here, we must understand the particular items to which it applies. If the intellect can form the idea of corporeal substance from its understanding of an incorporeal substance, then there is surely no reason to doubt that a blind man, or one who has been confined in utter darkness since birth, can form in his mind the idea of light and colours. You say that you can go on to acquire the idea of extension, shape and motion and other properties common to the things which can be perceived by the senses, which is easy enough for you to say; but what surprises me is why you do not find it just as easy to derive light and colours and so on. But we must not spend too much time on these matters.

7. You then draw the following conclusion:

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

This, of course, is the result you were aiming for. But although I accept the conclusion, I do not see how it follows from your reasoning. You say that the attributes which you understand to be in God are of such a kind that they could not have originated from you alone, and you hope to show from this that they must have originated from God. First of all, it is absolutely true that they did not originate from you alone, and that you did not acquire your understanding of them from yourself or through your own efforts. But this is because they in fact originated and were derived from things, parents, teachers, professors and from the human society in which you have moved. 'But I am merely a mind', you may say; 'I am not admitting anything outside of me—not even ears to hear with or men to talk to me.' You may say this, but would you be saying it if you did not hear with your ears or if there was no one to tell you anything? Let us discuss this seriously: tell me in good faith whether you do not in fact derive all the language which you use of God from the human society in which you live. And if this is true of the words, is it not also true of the underlying notions which these words

express? Hence although these ideas do not come from you alone, it seems that they do not therefore come from God, but that they come from another source. Furthermore, in the case of all these ideas, once you have obtained them by encountering things, can you not afterwards get them from yourself? Do you really therefore comprehend something which is beyond our human grasp? Granted, if you understood the nature of God, there would be reason to think that you had learnt this from God; but all the characteristics you attribute to God are nothing other than various perfections which you have noticed in people and other things, and which the human mind has the power to understand, put together and amplify, as I have already explained several times.

You say that the idea of a substance may come from yourself, since you are a substance, but that the idea of an infinite substance could not come from you, because you are not infinite. But you do not possess the idea of an infinite substance except verbally, and in the sense in which people are said to 'grasp the infinite' (which is really not grasping it at all). Hence it is not necessary that this idea should originate from an infinite substance: it can be constructed by the process of composition and amplification which has already been explained. The early philosophers, by taking in this visible space and this single world and a few principles of this kind, got their ideas of these things; and they then took these ideas and amplified them to form ideas of an infinite universe, an infinite number of worlds and infinite principles. Do you then propose to say that they did not form such ideas by their own mental powers, but that it was an infinite universe, infinite worlds and infinite principles that made these ideas come into their minds? You insist that your perception of the infinite is arrived at by means of 'a true idea'. But if it were a true idea, it would represent the infinite as it is, and you would hence perceive its principal feature—the one we are dealing with here—namely its infinity. But in fact your thought always stops at something finite, and you call it 'infinite' only because you do not perceive what is beyond the reach of your perception; hence it is quite right to say that you perceive the infinite by a negation of the finite. It will not do to say that you 'perceive more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one'. To do this you would have to perceive an infinite reality, which you do not in fact do. Indeed, you do not really 'perceive more' at all: all you do is to amplify the finite and then imagine that what is enlarged has more reality than it does when it remains small. Or do you want to say that those early philosophers perceived more reality—a reality that really existed—when they conceived of several worlds than when they simply thought of one world? This leads me, incidentally, to point out that the reason why our mind is so much more confused when it amplifies a semblance or image is probably that it pulls this semblance away from its proper setting, destroys the distinctness of its parts, and thus so weakens the whole idea that it finally vanishes altogether. I should mention, however, that the mind is sometimes confused for precisely the opposite reason, namely when it reduces an idea too much.

You say that it does not matter that you do not grasp the infinite or everything that is in it, but that it is enough that you should understand a few of its attributes for it to be said that you have a true and completely clear and distinct idea of it. But if you do not grasp the infinite, but merely the finite, you do not have a true idea of the infinite, but only of the finite. You can at most be said to know part of the infinite; but this does not mean you know the infinite itself. A man who has never left an underground cave may be said to know part of the world, but that does not mean that he knows the world itself; he would turn out to be a fool if he thought that his idea of this tiny portion of the world was a true and authentic idea of the entire world. You say, however, that it is in the nature of the infinite not to be grasped by a finite creature like yourself. I accept this; but it is not in the nature of a true idea of an infinite thing to represent such a tiny part of it, or rather what is no part at all, since it is no fraction of the whole. You say that it is enough that you understand the few attributes which you do perceive clearly. Does this mean that if you want to have an authentic idea of a man it is enough to see the tip of one of his hairs? Would it not be a fine likeness of me if a painter merely painted one of my hairs, or only its tip? But the gap between the tip of one of my hairs and the whole of me is not just much smaller or very much smaller, but infinitely smaller than the gap between everything we know of the infinite, or God, and God himself in his entirety. In a word, the attributes that we do know prove nothing about God which they do not also prove of the infinite set of worlds mentioned in the above example. Indeed, these infinite worlds can be understood from our clear perception of this one world very much more clearly than God, or an infinite being, can be understood from your perception of your substance, whose nature you have not yet established.

8. In another passage you argue as follows: 'How could I understand that I doubted or desired—that is, lacked something—and that I was not wholly perfect, unless there were in me some idea of a more perfect being which enabled me to recognize my own defects by comparison?' But it is hardly surprising that you should be in doubt about something, or desire something or recognize that you lack something, given that you do not know everything, are not everything, and do not possess everything. Is this what makes you recognize that you are not wholly perfect? That is indeed perfectly true and can be said without any malice. But do you therefore understand that there is something more perfect than you? Surely when you desire something it is not always in some sense more perfect than you. When you desire some bread, the bread is not in any sense more perfect than you or your body; it is merely more perfect than the emptiness of your stomach. How, then, do you infer that there is something more perfect than you? Surely it is because you see the totality, which includes you and the bread and everything else; since individual parts of the whole have some perfection, and some subserve others and can come to their aid, it is easy to understand that there is more perfection in the whole than in the part; and since you are merely a part, you have to acknowledge that there is something more perfect than you. This, then, is how you may come to have the idea of a being more perfect than you, and then to recognize your defects by comparing yourself with it. I pass over the fact that various individual parts of the whole may also be more perfect than you, and that you may desire what they have and thus recognize your defects by comparing yourself with them. Thus you might have known a man who was healthier, stronger, better looking, more learned, more restrained and hence more perfect than you; if so, it would not have been difficult for you to conceive

an idea of this man and, by comparing yourself with it, to come to understand that you did not have the same degree of health, strength and the other perfections that were to be found in him.

A little later you raise a possible objection to your argument: 'But perhaps I am something greater than I myself understand, and all the perfections which I attribute to God are potentially in me, even though not yet actualized, as could happen if my knowledge were gradually increased to infinity.' But you reply: 'though it is true that there is a gradual increase in my knowledge, and that I can have many potentialities which are not yet actual, this is all quite irrelevant to the idea of God, which contains nothing that is potential; indeed, this gradual increase in knowledge is itself the surest sign of imperfection'. But although the features which you perceive in the idea actually exist in the idea, it does not follow that they actually exist in the real thing corresponding to the idea. An architect makes up an idea of a house in his mind, and this idea actually consists of the specified walls, floors, roof, windows and so on; but the house itself and its components do not yet exist in actuality but only in potentiality. Similarly, the aforementioned idea of the ancient philosophers actually contains an infinity of worlds, but you will not therefore say that this infinity of worlds actually exists. Thus whether something is potentially in you or not, it is enough that your idea or knowledge can be gradually increased or amplified; but we must not infer from this that what is known or represented by the idea actually exists. The point you next recognize—that your knowledge will never become infinite—I readily accept; but you should also recognize that you will never have a true and genuine idea of God, since there always remains much more, infinitely more, to be discovered about him—infinitely more than remains to be discovered about a man when all you have seen is the tip of one of his hairs. Indeed, even if you have not seen the whole man, you have nevertheless seen other men, and this will enable you, by comparison, to make some conjecture about him. But we have never had an opportunity to know anything which resembles God and his immensity.

You say that you 'take God to be actually infinite, so that nothing can be added to his perfection'. But you are here making a judgement about something of which you are ignorant. Your judgement is based simply on a presumption, like that of the philosophers who supposed there to be infinite worlds, infinite principles and an infinite universe so immense that nothing could be added to it. Your further comment that 'the objective being of an idea cannot come from potential being but only from actual being' can hardly be true, given what we have said about the ideas belonging to the architect and the ancient philosophers, especially when you remember that ideas of this sort are constructed from other ideas, which the intellect originally derived from actually existing causes.

9. You next ask whether, given that you possess an idea of a being more perfect than you, you could exist if no such being existed. And you say in reply, 'From whom, in that case, would I derive my existence? From myself, presumably, or from my parents, or from some other beings less perfect than God.' And you go on to prove that you do not derive your existence from yourself. But this is quite unnecessary. You then provide a reason why you have not always existed. But this too is redundant, except in so far as you want at the same time to infer that you have a cause which not only creates you but preserves you. Thus, from the fact that your lifetime has many parts, you infer that since each part is independent of the others you must be created anew in each individual part. But you should see that there is another way this problem can be understood. There are admittedly some effects that need the efficient cause which first produced them to be continuously present if they are to keep going and not give out at any given moment. The light of the sun is such an effect (though in cases of this kind it is not so much one and the same effect that continues as 'an equivalent effect', as they say in the case of the flow of water in a river). But there are other effects which we see continuing not only when the acknowledged cause is no longer active, but even, if you like, when it is destroyed and reduced to nothing. Such effects include those produced by procreation and manufacture, which are so numerous that it would be tedious to list them; it suffices for my point that you are one of them, whatever your cause may eventually turn out to be. But you say that the parts of your lifetime are 'independent of each other'. Here I am tempted to ask if we can think of anything whose parts are more inseparable from one another than your duration. Can we think of anything whose parts are more inviolably linked and connected? Is there anything whose later parts are more inevitable, or more closely tied to the earlier parts, or more dependent on them? But not to press the point, what difference does this dependence or independence of the parts of your duration make to your creation or preservation? Surely these parts are merely external—they follow on without playing any active role. They make no more difference to your creation and preservation than the flow or passage of the particles of water in a river makes to the creation and preservation of some rock past which it flows. You say that from the fact that you existed a little while ago it does not follow that you must exist now. I agree; but this is not because a cause is needed to create you anew, but because there is no guarantee that there is not some cause present which might destroy you, or that you may not have some weakness within you which may now finally bring about your demise.

You say that 'it is therefore evident by the natural light that the distinction between creation and preservation is only a conceptual one'. But how is this 'evident', if not in the case of light itself and similar effects? You add that you have no power to bring it about that you will continue to exist a short time from now, since you are not conscious of such a power, and yet you are a thinking thing. But you do have a power in virtue of which you can suppose that you will exist a short time from now, although not necessarily or indubitably, since this power or natural constitution of yours, whatever it is, does not go so far as to guard against every external or internal cause that may destroy you. So you will indeed continue to exist, not because you have some power which creates you anew, but because you have a power sufficient to ensure that you will continue unless some destructive cause intervenes. Your conclusion, that you depend on some being distinct from yourself, is in fact correct, not in the sense that you are created anew by this being, but rather in the sense that you were once created by it. You go on to say that this being is not your parents or any other such cause. But why

should it not be your parents, since it seems so evident that it was they who produced you, along with your body? This is not to mention the sun and other concurrent causes. 'But', you say, 'I am a thinking thing, and I have the idea of God in me.' But were not your parents and their minds also thinking things possessing the idea of God? Hence you should not here insist on the dictum you mentioned earlier, *viz*. 'There must be at least as much in the cause as in the effect.' You say that if the cause is something other than God we may ask whether it derives its existence from itself or from some other cause: if from itself, it will be God; if from some other cause we may repeat the question until we reach a cause which derives its existence from itself, and is God, since an infinite regress is not permissible. But if your parents were the cause of your existence, then that cause may have derived its existence not from itself but from another cause; and the same may be true of that prior cause, and so on *ad infinitum*. You cannot prove that such an infinite regress is absurd unless you also prove that the world began at some time, and hence that there must have been a first parent who had no parent. An infinite regress seems to be absurd only in the case of causes which are so linked and subordinated to each other that a cause which is lower in the chain cannot act without the motive power of one which is higher. This occurs when something is pushed by a stone, the stone by a stick, and the stick by a hand, or when the first link of a chain lifts a weight, and that link is pulled by the previous link and so on. In such cases we must eventually reach one link in the chain which is the first to move. But an infinite series does not seem to be absurd when we have causes which are arranged in such a way that if the earlier cause is destroyed the subsequent cause depending on it survives and can still act. Hence when you say 'It is clear enough that an infinite regress is impossible here', you must ask whether this was equally evident to Aristotle, who was strongly convinced that there was never any first parent. You go on as follows: nor can several partial causes have contributed to your creation, so that you received from them the ideas of the various perfections you attribute to God; for these perfections can be found only in one single God whose unity and simplicity is one of his most important perfections. But whether you had one cause or several, it is not necessary that it was these causes which implanted in you the ideas of their perfections, which you have managed to unite. And in any case you allow us to raise the question of why, given that you do not have several causes, it should not have been possible for several things to have existed such that you first admired their perfections and then went on to derive the notion of that blessed thing in whom they are all supposed to exist together. You know how the poets describe Pandora. Surely you might have admired various people's outstanding knowledge, wisdom, justice, steadfastness, power, health, beauty, felicity, longevity and so on, and then put all these things together and considered how admirable it would be if one person had all these perfections at once. Why should you not then have augmented all these perfections in various degrees, until it seemed that this person would be all the more admirable if his knowledge, power, duration and so on were unlimited, so that he was omniscient, omnipotent, eternal and so on? And when you saw that such perfections could not belong to human nature, why should you not have supposed that if they were all combined in one nature, that would be a blessed nature indeed? And why should you not then think it worth investigating whether or not such a being existed? Why should not certain arguments then be produced to make it seem more reasonable that he should exist rather than not exist? And why should you not accordingly remove all bodily attributes and other limitations which imply some imperfection? Very many people certainly seem to have proceeded in this way; but since there are various modes and degrees of reasoning, some have allowed God to remain corporeal, some have said he has human limbs, some have said he is not one but many, and others have produced other all too common accounts. As for the perfection of unity which you speak of, there is certainly no contradiction in conceiving of all the perfections which we attribute to God as being intimately connected and inseparable. But for all that, the idea which you have of these perfections was not placed in you by God but was derived by you from the things you have seen, and was then amplified in the way already explained. Thus Pandora is depicted as a goddess endowed with all gifts and perfections; and this is not the only example, since people have also conceived of the perfect republic, the perfect orator and so on. Finally, from the fact that you exist and have the idea of a perfect being within you, you conclude that you have a most evident demonstration of the existence of God. But although the conclusion that God exists is true, it is not clear from what you have said that you have provided a most evident demonstration of it.

10. 'It only remains', you say, 'for me to examine how I received this idea from God. For I did not acquire it from the senses, and it was not invented by me either (for I am plainly unable either to take anything away from it or to add anything to it). The only remaining alternative is that it is innate in me, just as the idea of myself is innate in me.' But I have already said several times that you could have partly derived it from the senses and partly made it up. When you say that you cannot add anything to it or take anything away, remember that when you first acquired it, it was not as perfect as it is now. Consider that there may be men or angels or other natures more learned than you from which you may in the future receive some information about God which you have not hitherto known. Consider also that God, at any rate, could give you such information and instruct you so clearly either in this life or the next that you would have to consider your previous knowledge of him as worthless. Whatever sort of knowledge you may finally arrive at, consider that we can ascend from the perfection of created things to knowledge of the perfections of God in such a way that we can uncover more and more perfections every day; and hence we cannot at any one moment possess a perfect idea of God, but only one that becomes more and more perfect each day. You go on as follows:

> And indeed it is no surprise that God, in creating me, should have placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work. The mark need not be anything distinct from the work itself. But the mere fact that God created me is a very strong basis for believing that I am somehow made in his image and likeness, and that I perceive that likeness, which includes the idea of God, by the same faculty which enables me to perceive myself. That is, in understanding myself I understand that I am a thing which is incomplete and dependent on another and which aspires without limit to ever greater and better things; but I al-

so understand at the same time that he on whom I depend has within him all those greater things, not just indefinitely and potentially but actually and infinitely, and hence that he is God.

All your assertions here are quite plausible, and I do not deny their truth; but how, may I ask, do you prove them? Setting aside my previous points, let me ask you this. If the idea of God is in you like the mark of a craftsman stamped on his work, how is this stamping carried out? What is the form of this 'mark' you talk of? How do you recognize it? If it is 'not distinct' from the work or the thing itself, are you yourself, then, an idea? Are you nothing else but a mode of thought? Are you both the mark which is stamped and the subject on which it is stamped? You say that it is reasonable to believe that you are made in the image and likeness of God. This is certainly believable given religious faith, but how may it be understood by natural reason, unless you are putting forward an anthropomorphic picture of God? Moreover, what can that likeness consist in? Since you are dust and ashes, can you presume that you resemble that eternal, incorporeal, immense, most perfect, most glorious and above all most invisible and incomprehensible nature? Have you known that nature face to face, that you compare yourself with it and can assert that you resemble it? The fact that he created you, you say, makes it reasonable to believe you resemble him. On the contrary, this fact makes such a resemblance utterly unlikely, since the work is not similar to the workman except when he engenders it by communicating his nature to it. But you are not begotten of God in this way: you are not his offspring, or a participator in his nature, but are merely created by him, that is, produced by him in accordance with an idea. Hence you cannot say that you resemble him any more than a house resembles a bricklayer. This objection stands even if we grant what you have not yet proved, namely that you were created by God. You say that you perceive the likeness when you understand that you are a thing which is incomplete and dependent and aspires to greater and better things. But is this not rather an argument for a dissimilarity between you and God, since God is, by contrast with you, utterly complete and independent and self-sufficient, being the greatest and best of all things? I pass over the fact that when you understand yourself to be dependent you are not immediately entitled to understand that the thing on which you depend is anything other than your parents; or if you do understand it to be something else, this does not explain why you should think you resemble it. I also pass over the fact that it is surprising that everyone else, or every other mind, should not share your understanding, especially since there is no reason why God should not be thought to have imprinted the idea of himself on them as well as on you. This one fact surely shows that there is no idea imprinted on us by God; for if there were, if one and the same idea were always imprinted on everyone, then everyone would conceive of God in terms of a similar form and image, and would give him the same attributes and have exactly the same view of him, whereas, notoriously, the opposite is true. But I have already spent too much time on this topic.

Objections raised against the Third Meditation

[Descartes to Gassendi]

1. Bravo! Here at last you produce an argument against me—something which, as far as I can see, you have at no point done up till now. You wish to prove that the rule 'Whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive is true' is not a reliable one, and you say that great thinkers, who ought surely to have perceived many things clearly and distinctly, have nevertheless judged that the truth of things is hidden in God or in a deep well. Your argument from authority is, I admit, sound enough; but, O Flesh, you certainly should not have presented it to a mind so withdrawn from corporeal things that it does not even know whether any people existed before it, and hence is not influenced by their authority. Your next point, taken from the sceptics, is a standard move, and not a bad one, but it proves nothing. Nor is anything proved by the fact that some people face death to defend opinions that are in fact false; for it can never be proved that they clearly and distinctly perceive what they so stubbornly affirm. You say at the end of this section that what we should be working on is not so much a rule to establish the truth as a method for determining whether or not we are deceived when we think we perceive something clearly. This I do not dispute; but I maintain that I carefully provided such a method in the appropriate place, where I first eliminated all preconceived opinions and afterwards listed all my principal ideas, distinguishing those which were clear from those which were obscure or confused.

2. I am amazed at the line of argument by which you try to prove that all our ideas are adventitious and that none of them are constructed by us. You say that the mind has the faculty not just of perceiving adventitious ideas but also 'of putting them together and separating them in various ways, of enlarging them and diminishing them, of comparing them and so on'. Hence you conclude that the ideas of chimeras, which the mind makes up by the process of putting together and separating etc., are not constructed by the mind but are adventitious. By this argument you could prove that Praxiteles never made any statues on the grounds that he did not get from within himself the marble from which he sculpted them; or you could prove that you did not produce these objections on the grounds that you composed them out of words which you acquired from others rather than inventing them yourself. But in fact the form of a chimera does not consist in the parts of the goat or lion, nor does the form of your objections consist in the individual words you have used; they both consist simply in the fact that the elements are put together in a certain way.

It is also surprising that you maintain that the idea of a thing cannot be in the mind unless the ideas of an animal, a plant, a stone, and all the universals are there. This is like saying that if I am to recognize myself to be a thinking thing, I must also recognize animals and plants, since I must recognize a *thing* or the nature of a thing. Your comments on the idea of truth are equally false. And at the end of the section you confine your attack to matters about which I made no assertions at all, and so you are simply beating the air.

3. Here, aiming to destroy the arguments which led me to judge that the existence of material things should be doubted, you ask why, in that case, I walk on

the earth, etc. This obviously begs the question. For you assume what had to be proved, namely that it is so certain that I walk on the earth that there can be no doubt of it.

In addition to the arguments which I put forward against myself and refuted, you suggest the following: why is there no idea of colour in a man born blind, and no idea of sound in a man born deaf? Here you show plainly that you have no telling arguments to produce. How do you know that there is no idea of colour in a man born blind? From time to time we find in our own case that even though we close our eyes, sensations of light and colour are nevertheless aroused. And even if we grant what you say, those who deny the existence of material things may just as well attribute the absence of ideas of colour in the man born blind to the fact that his mind lacks the faculty for forming them; this is just as reasonable as your claim that he does not have the ideas because he is deprived of sight.

Your next point about the two ideas of the sun proves nothing. Your taking the two ideas as one on the grounds that they are referred to only one sun is like saying that a true statement does not differ from a false one because it is asserted of the same subject. In saying that the idea we arrive at by astronomical reasoning is not in fact an idea, you are restricting the term 'idea' to images depicted in the corporeal imagination; but this goes against my explicit assumption.

4. You repeat your mistake when you deny that we have a true idea of a substance on the grounds that a substance is perceived not by the imagination but by the intellect alone. And yet, O Flesh, I have already made it clear that I will have nothing to do with those who are prepared to use only their imagination and not their intellect.

You next say that 'whatever reality the idea of a substance possesses, it gets from the ideas of the accidents under which, or in the guise of which, we conceive of the substance'. Here you prove that in fact you have no distinct idea of a substance. For a substance can never be conceived in the guise of its accidents, nor can it derive its reality from them. (On the contrary, philosophers commonly conceive of accidents in the guise of substances, since they often say that they are 'real'.) In fact no reality, i.e. no being apart from a purely modal one, can be attributed to accidents unless it is taken from the idea of a substance.

You go on to say that we have the idea of God merely as a result of having heard certain attributes being ascribed to him. Would you please explain where the first men who originally told us of these attributes got this self same idea of God? If they got it from themselves, why cannot we also derive it from ourselves? If they got it by divine revelation, then God exists.

You add: 'If someone calls something "infinite", he attributes to a thing which he does not grasp a label which he does not understand.' Here you fail to distinguish between, on the one hand, an understanding which is suited to the scale of our intellect (and each of us knows by his own experience quite well that he has this sort of understanding of the infinite) and, on the other hand, a fully adequate conception of things (and no one has this sort of conception either of the infinite or of anything else, however small it may be). Moreover, it is false that the infinite is understood through the negation of a boundary or limit; on the contrary, all limitation implies a negation of the infinite.

It is also false that the idea representing all the perfections which we attribute to God 'does not contain more objective reality than do the finite things'. You yourself admit that these perfections must be amplified by our intellect if they are to be attributed to God. So do you think that the perfections which are amplified in this way are not, as a result, greater than they would be if they were not amplified? And how could we have a faculty for amplifying all created perfections (i.e. conceiving of something greater or more ample than they are) were it not for the fact that there is in us an idea of something greater, namely God? Finally, it is again false that God would be 'a puny thing if he were no greater than our understanding of him'. For we understand God to be infinite, and there can be nothing greater than the infinite. You are confusing understanding with imagination, and are supposing that we imagine God to be like some enormous man, just as if someone who had never seen an elephant were to imagine it was like some enormous tick, which, I agree, would be extremely foolish.

5. You say a great deal here to give the appearance of contradicting me, but in fact you do not contradict me at all, since you reach exactly the same conclusion as I do. Nevertheless you include in your discussion many assertions with which I strongly disagree. You say that the axiom 'There is nothing in the effect which did not previously exist in the cause' should be taken to refer to material rather than efficient causes; but it is unintelligible that perfection of form should ever pre-exist in a material cause; it can do so only in an efficient cause. Nor do I agree that the formal reality of an idea is a substance, and so on.

6. If you had any argument to prove the existence of material things you would undoubtedly have produced it here. But all you do is to ask whether my mind is uncertain as to whether anything apart from itself exists in the world; and you pretend that there is no need to look for arguments to decide this, thus appealing simply to our preconceived opinions. Here you succeed in showing, much more clearly than if you had not said anything at all, that you cannot produce any argument to support your assertion.

None of your subsequent discussion concerning ideas needs to be answered, since you restrict the term 'idea' to images depicted in the imagination, whereas I extend it to cover any object of thought.

But I should like to ask in passing about the argument you use to prove that 'nothing acts on itself'. It is unusual for you to use arguments, but here you prove your case with the example of the finger which does not strike itself and the eye which does not see itself in itself but in a mirror. It is, however, easy to answer this by saying that it is not the eye which sees the mirror rather than itself, but the mind alone which recognizes the mirror, the eye and itself. Other counter-examples can also be cited from the realm of corporeal things: when a top turns itself round in a circle, is not the turning an action which it performs on itself?

Finally it should be noted that I did not assert that the ideas of material things are derived from the mind, as you somewhat disingenuously make out. Later on

I explicitly showed that these ideas often come to us from bodies, and that it is this that enables us to prove the existence of bodies. In the passage under discussion I simply explained that we never find so much reality in these ideas as to oblige us to conclude (given the premiss that there is nothing in the effect which did not previously exist in the cause, either formally or eminently) that they could not have originated in the mind alone. And this claim you do not attack at all.

7. Everything you say here you have said before, and has already been disposed of by me. I shall make one point about the idea of the infinite. This, you say, cannot be a true idea unless I grasp the infinite; you say that I can be said, at most, to know part of the infinite, and a very small part at that, which does not correspond to the infinite any better than a picture of one tiny hair represents the whole person to whom it belongs. My point is that, on the contrary, if I can grasp something, it would be a total contradiction for that which I grasp to be infinite. For the idea of the infinite, if it is to be a true idea, cannot be grasped at all, since the impossibility of being grasped is contained in the formal definition of the infinite. Nonetheless, it is evident that the idea which we have of the infinite does not merely represent one part of it, but really does represent the infinite in its entirety. The manner of representation, however, is the manner appropriate to a human idea; and undoubtedly God, or some other intelligent nature more perfect than a human mind, could have a much more perfect, i.e. more accurate and distinct, idea. Similarly we do not doubt that a novice at geometry has an idea of a whole triangle when he understands that it is a figure bounded by three lines, even though geometers are capable of knowing and recognizing in this idea many more properties belonging to the same triangle, of which the novice is ignorant. Just as it suffices for the possession of an idea of the whole triangle to understand that it is a figure contained within three lines, so it suffices for the possession of a true and complete idea of the infinite in its entirety if we understand that it is a thing which is bounded by no limits.

8. You repeat the same mistake in this section when you deny that we have a true idea of God. For even though we do not know everything which is in God, nonetheless all the attributes that we do recognize to be in him are truly there. You also say that if someone desires some bread, 'the bread is not more perfect than him'; and that although a feature which I perceive in an idea actually exists in the idea, 'it does not follow that it actually exists in the thing corresponding to the idea? and finally that I am 'making a judgement about something of which I am ignorant'. But these and similar comments simply show that you, O Flesh, are anxious to rush in and attack many statements whose meaning you do not follow. The fact that someone desires some bread does not imply that the bread is more perfect than he is, but merely that someone who needs bread is in a more imperfect state than when he does not need it. Again, from the fact that something exists in an idea I do not infer that it exists in reality, except when we can produce no other cause for the idea but the actual existence of the thing which it represents. And this is true, as I demonstrated, only in the case of God, and not in the case of a plurality of worlds or anything else. Again, I am not 'making a judgement about something of which I am ignorant', for I produced reasons to back up my judgement—reasons which are so solid that you have not been able to mount the slightest attack against any of them.

9. When you deny that in order to be kept in existence we need the continual action of the original cause, you are disputing something which all metaphysicians affirm as a manifest truth—although the uneducated often fail to think of it because they pay attention only to the causes of *coming into being* and not the causes of *being itself*. Thus an architect is the cause of a house and a father of his child only in the sense of being the causes of their coming into being; and hence, once the work is completed it can remain in existence quite apart from the 'cause' in this sense. But the sun is the cause of the light which it emits, and God is the cause of created things, not just in the sense that they are causes of the *coming* into being of these things, but also in the sense that they are causes of their *being*; and hence they must always continue to act on the effect in the same way in order to keep it in existence.

This can be plainly demonstrated from my explanation of the independence of the divisions of time. You try in vain to evade my argument by talking of the necessary 'connection' which exists between the divisions of time considered in the abstract. But this is not the issue: we are considering the time or duration of the thing which endures, and here you would not deny that the individual moments can be separated from those immediately preceding and succeeding them, which implies that the thing which endures may cease to be at any given moment.

You say that we have a power which is sufficient to ensure that we shall continue to exist unless some destructive cause intervenes. But here you do not realize that you are attributing to a created thing the perfection of a creator, if the created thing is able to continue in existence independently of anything else. Similarly, you are attributing to the creator the imperfection of a created thing, since you imply that the creator would have to tend towards non-being by performing a positive action whenever he wished to bring our existence to an end.

Your further contention, that it is not absurd that there should be an infinite regress, is undermined by what you yourself say later on. For you admit that an infinite regress is absurd 'in the case of causes which are so linked that a cause which is lower in the chain cannot act without one which is higher'. But it is causes of this sort, and only of this sort, that are at issue here, since we are dealing with causes of being, not causes of coming into being, such as parents. Hence you cannot set the authority of Aristotle against me here; nor does your point about Pandora undermine my position. You agree that I can gradually augment, in varying degrees, all the perfections that I observe in people, until I see that they have become the kind of perfections that cannot possibly belong to human nature; and this is quite sufficient to enable me to demonstrate the existence of God. For it is this very power of amplifying all human perfections up to the point where they are recognized as more than human which, I maintain and insist, would not have been in us unless we had been created by God. But I am not at all surprised that you cannot see that I have given an utterly evident demon-

stration of this, because there is, so far as I can see, not one of my arguments which you have so far managed to perceive correctly.

10. When you attack my statement that nothing can be added to or taken away from the idea of God, it seems that you have paid no attention to the common philosophical maxim that the essences of things are indivisible. An idea represents the essence of a thing, and if anything is added to or taken away from the essence, then the idea automatically becomes the idea of something else. This is how the ideas of Pandora and of all false Gods are formed by those who do not have a correct conception of the true God. But once the idea of the true God has been conceived, although we may detect additional perfections in him which we had not yet noticed, this does not mean that we have augmented the idea of God; we have simply made it more distinct and explicit, since, so long as we suppose that our original idea was a true one, it must have contained all these perfections. Similarly, the idea of a triangle is not augmented when we notice various properties in the triangle of which we were previously ignorant. You must also realize that the idea of God is not gradually formed by us when we amplify the perfections of his creatures; it is formed all at once and in its entirety as soon as our mind reaches an infinite being which is incapable of any amplification.

You ask how I prove that the idea of God is present in us like the mark of a craftsman stamped on his work. 'How is this stamping carried out', you ask, 'and what is the form of this "mark"?' Suppose there is a painting in which I observe so much skill that I judge that it could only have been painted by Apelles, and I say that the inimitable technique is like a kind of mark which Apelles stamped on all his pictures to distinguish them from others. The question you raise is just like asking, in this case, 'What is the form of this mark, and how is the stamping carried out?' It certainly seems that if you asked such a question you would deserve to be laughed at rather than answered.

You go on as follows: 'If the mark is not distinct from the work, are you yourself, then, an idea? Are you nothing else but a mode of thought? Are you yourself both the mark which is stamped and the subject on which it is stamped?' Here again you do not deserve an answer. Suppose I had said that the technique by which we can distinguish the paintings of Apelles from others is not anything distinct from the pictures themselves. The point you make seems just as silly as if you were to reply here that in that case the pictures are nothing but the technique, and do not consist of any material, and hence are simply a mode of painting.

You then deny that we are made in the image of God, and say that this would make God like a man; and you go on to list the ways in which human nature differs from the divine nature. Is this any cleverer than trying to deny that one of Apelles' pictures was made in the likeness of Alexander on the grounds that this would mean that Alexander was like a picture, and yet pictures are made of wood and paint, and not of flesh and bones like Alexander? It is not in the nature of an image to be identical in all respects with the thing of which it is an image, but merely to imitate it in some respects. And it is quite clear that the wholly perfect power of thought which we understand to be in God is represented by means of that less perfect faculty which we possess.

You prefer to compare the creation of God to the labour of a workman rather than to parental procreation, but you have no reason to do so. Even if the three modes of action involved here are completely different in kind, nevertheless the analogy between natural procreation and divine creation is closer than that between artificial production and divine creation. I did not say, however, that the resemblance between us and God is as close as that between children and parents. Again, it is not always true that there is no resemblance between the work of a craftsman and the craftsman himself, as is clear in the case of a sculptor who produces a statue resembling himself.

How unfairly you report my words when you pretend that I said I perceive my likeness to God in the fact that I am an incomplete and dependent thing. On the contrary, I cited these facts as evidence of a dissimilarity, to prevent anyone thinking I wished to make men equal to God. What I said was this: I not only perceive that I am in this respect inferior to God in so far as I aspire to greater things, but also that these greater things are in God; and moreover, there is in me something resembling these greater qualities, since I venture to aspire to them.

Finally, you say that it is surprising that everyone else should not share my understanding of God, since he imprinted the idea of himself on them just as he did on me. This is just like your being surprised at the fact that although everyone is aware of the idea of a triangle not everyone notices equally many properties in it and some people may draw false conclusions about it.

[…]

Your friends have noted four objections against the Third Meditation: (1) that not everyone is aware of the idea of God within himself; (2) that if I did have this idea, I should grasp it; (3) that several people have read my arguments without being convinced by them; and (4) that from the fact that I know myself to be imperfect it does not follow that God exists. But if we take the word 'idea' in the way in which I quite explicitly stated I was taking it, and do not take refuge in ambiguity, like those who restrict this term to the images of material things formed in the imagination, then we will be unable to deny that we have some idea of God. The only way of denying this would be to say that we do not understand the meaning of the phrase 'the most perfect thing which we can conceive of'; for this is what everyone calls *God*. It is indeed going to extraordinary lengths in the desire to raise objections to say that one does not understand the meaning of one of the most ordinary phrases in common use. Besides, if someone says of himself that he does not have any idea of God, in the sense in which I take the term 'idea', he is making the most impious confession he could make. He is saying not only that he does not know God by natural reason, but also that neither faith nor any other means could give him any knowledge of God. For if one has no idea, i.e. no perception which corresponds to the meaning of the word 'God', it is no use saying that one believes that *God* exists. One might as well say that

one believes that *nothing* exists, thus remaining in the abyss of impiety and the depths of ignorance.

The next point, namely that if I did have this idea I would grasp it, has no basis. Since the word 'grasp' implies some limitation, a finite mind cannot grasp God, who is infinite. But that does not prevent him having a perception of God, just as one can touch a mountain without being able to put one's arms round it.

The point about my arguments, namely that several people have read them without being convinced by them, can easily be rebutted, since there are others who have understood them and found them acceptable. If one single person honestly says that he has seen or understood something, we should believe him in preference to a thousand others who deny what he says simply because they have not been able to see or understand it. Similarly, in the case of the discovery of the antipodes, the report of a few sailors who had circumnavigated the earth was believed in preference to the views of those thousands of philosophers who did not believe the earth was round. In this connection my critics cite the *Elements* of Euclid, claiming they are easy for everyone to understand; but I beg them to consider that among those regarded as the most learned exponents of scholastic philosophy there is not one in a hundred who understands them, and there is not one in ten thousand who understands all the demonstrations of Apollonius or Archimedes, although these demonstrations are as evident and certain as those of Euclid.

Lastly, when they say that, from the fact that I recognize some imperfection in myself, it does not follow that God exists, they do not prove anything. For I did not deduce the existence of God directly from this premiss alone, but added further considerations. Here they merely remind me of the ploy of the author of the *Counter-Objections* who has the habit of truncating my arguments, and reporting only parts of them, in order to make them seem imperfect.