

account of it in a book written in French and designed to be read by all and sundry, in case weaker intellects might believe that they ought to set out on the same path.

In the *Discourse* I asked anyone who found anything worth criticizing in what I had written to be kind enough to point it out to me.¹ In the case of my remarks concerning God and the soul, only two objections worth mentioning were put to me, which I shall now briefly answer before embarking on a more precise elucidation of these topics.

The first objection is this. From the fact that the human mind, when directed towards itself, does not perceive itself to be anything other than a thinking thing, it does not follow that its nature or essence consists only in its being a thinking thing, where the word 'only' excludes everything else that could be said to belong to the nature of the soul. My answer to this objection is that in that passage it was not my intention to make those exclusions in an order corresponding to the actual truth of the matter (which I was not dealing with at that stage) but merely in an order corresponding to my own perception. So the sense of the passage was that I was aware of nothing at all that I knew belonged to my essence, except that I was a thinking thing, or a thing possessing within itself the faculty of thinking.² I shall, however, show below how it follows from the fact that I am aware of nothing else belonging to my essence, that nothing else does in fact belong to it.

The second objection is this. From the fact that I have within me an idea of a thing more perfect than myself, it does not follow that the idea itself is more perfect than me, still less that what is represented by the idea exists. My reply is that there is an ambiguity here in the word 'idea'. 'Idea' can be taken materially, as an operation of the intellect, in which case it cannot be said to be more perfect than me. Alternatively, it can be taken objectively, as the thing represented by that operation; and this thing, even if it is not regarded as existing outside the intellect, can still, in virtue of its essence, be more perfect than myself. As to how, from the mere fact that there is within me an idea of something more perfect than me, it follows that this thing really exists, this is something which will be fully explained below.

Apart from these objections, there are two fairly lengthy essays which I have looked at,³ but these did not attack my reasoning on these matters so much as my conclusions, and employed arguments lifted from the standard sources of the atheists. But arguments of this sort can carry no

¹ See *Discourse*, part 6: vol. 1, p. 149.

² See *Discourse*, part 4: vol. 1, p. 127.

³ One of the critics referred to here is Petit: see letter to Mersenne of 17 May 1638. The other is unknown.

not denying that these ideas occur within me. But there was something else which I used to assert, and which through habitual belief I thought I perceived clearly, although I did not in fact do so. This was that there were things outside me which were the sources of my ideas and which resembled them in all respects. Here was my mistake; or at any rate, if my judgement was true, it was not thanks to the strength of my perception.¹

But what about when I was considering something very simple and straightforward in arithmetic or geometry, for example that two and three added together make five, and so on? Did I not see at least these things clearly enough to affirm their truth? Indeed, the only reason for my later judgement that they were open to doubt was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God could have given me a nature such that I was deceived even in matters which seemed most evident. And whenever my preconceived belief in the supreme power of God comes to mind, I cannot but admit that it would be easy for him, if he so desired, to bring it about that I go wrong even in those matters which I think I see utterly clearly with my mind's eye. Yet when I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am so convinced by them that I spontaneously declare: let whoever can do so deceive me, he will never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something; or make it true at some future time that I have never existed, since it is now true that I exist; or bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction. And since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt which depends simply on this supposition is a very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical one. But in order to remove even this slight reason for doubt, as soon as the opportunity arises I must examine whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether he can be a deceiver. For if I do not know this, it seems that I can never be quite certain about anything else.

First, however, considerations of order appear to dictate that I now classify my thoughts into definite kinds,² and ask which of them can properly be said to be the bearers of truth and falsity. Some of my 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. Other thoughts have

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¹ '... it was not because of any knowledge I possessed' (French version).

² The opening of this sentence is greatly expanded in the French version: 'In order that I may have the opportunity of examining this without interrupting the order of meditating which I have decided upon, which is to start only from those notions which I find first of all in my mind and pass gradually to those which I may find later on, I must here divide my thoughts ...'

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.

Now as far as ideas are concerned, provided they are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false; for whether it is a goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is just as true that I imagine the former as the latter. As for the will and the emotions, here too one need not worry about falsity; for even if the things which I may desire are wicked or even non-existent, that does not make it any less true that I desire them. Thus the only remaining thoughts where I must be on my guard against making a mistake are judgements. And the chief and most common mistake which is to be found here consists in my judging that the ideas which are in me resemble, or conform to, things located outside me. Of course, if I considered just the ideas themselves simply as modes of my thought, without referring them to anything else, they could scarcely give me any material for error.

Among my ideas, some appear to be innate, some to be adventitious,¹ and others to have been invented by me. My understanding of what a thing is, what truth is, and what thought is, seems to derive simply from my own nature. But my hearing a noise, as I do now, or seeing the sun, or feeling the fire, comes from things which are located outside me, or so I have hitherto judged. Lastly, sirens, hippocrits and the like are my own invention. But perhaps all my ideas may be thought of as adventitious, or they may all be innate, or all made up; for as yet I have not clearly perceived their true origin.

But the chief question at this point concerns the ideas which I take to be derived from things existing outside me: what is my reason for thinking that they resemble these things? Nature has apparently taught me to think this. But in addition I know by experience that these ideas do not depend on my will, and hence that they do not depend simply on me. Frequently I notice them even when I do not want to: now, for example, I feel the heat whether I want to or not, and this is why I think that this sensation or idea of heat comes to me from something other than myself, namely the heat of the fire by which I am sitting. And the most obvious judgement for me to make is that the thing in question transmits to me its own likeness rather than something else.

I will now see if these arguments are strong enough. When I say 'Nature taught me to think this', all I mean is that a spontaneous impulse leads

¹ '... foreign to me and coming from outside' (French version).

me to believe it, not that its truth has been revealed to me by some natural light. There is a big difference here. Whatever is revealed to me by the natural light – for example that from the fact that I am doubting it follows that I exist, and so on – cannot in any way be open to doubt. This is because there cannot be another faculty¹ both as trustworthy as the natural light and also capable of showing me that such things are not true. But as for my natural impulses, I have often judged in the past that they were pushing me in the wrong direction when it was a question of choosing the good, and I do not see why I should place any greater confidence in them in other matters.²

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Then again, although these ideas do not depend on my will, it does not follow that they must come from things located outside me. Just as the impulses which I was speaking of a moment ago seem opposed to my will even though they are within me, so there may be some other faculty not yet fully known to me, which produces these ideas without any assistance from external things; this is, after all, just how I have always thought ideas are produced in me when I am dreaming.

And finally, even if these ideas did come from things other than myself, it would not follow that they must resemble those things. Indeed, I think I have often discovered a great disparity <between an object and its idea> in many cases. For example, there are two different ideas of the sun which I find within me. One of them, which is acquired as it were from the senses and which is a prime example of an idea which I reckon to come from an external source, makes the sun appear very small. The other idea is based on astronomical reasoning, that is, it is derived from certain notions which are innate in me (or else it is constructed by me in some other way), and this idea shows the sun to be several times larger than the earth. Obviously both these ideas cannot resemble the sun which exists outside me; and reason persuades me that the idea which seems to have emanated most directly from the sun itself has in fact no resemblance to it at all.

All these considerations are enough to establish that it is not reliable judgement but merely some blind impulse that has made me believe up till now that there exist things distinct from myself which transmit to me ideas or images of themselves through the sense organs or in some other way.

But it now occurs to me that there is another way of investigating whether some of the things of which I possess ideas exist outside me. In so far as the ideas are <considered> simply <as> modes of thought, there is no recognizable inequality among them: they all appear to come from

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¹ '... or power for distinguishing truth from falsehood' (French version).

² '... concerning truth and falsehood' (French version).

within me in the same fashion. But in so far as different ideas <are considered as images which> represent different things, it is clear that they differ widely. Undoubtedly, the ideas which represent substances to me amount to something more and, so to speak, contain within themselves more objective¹ reality than the ideas which merely represent modes or accidents. Again, the idea that gives me my understanding of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, <immutable,> 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.

Now it is manifest by the natural light that there must be at least as much <reality> in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause. For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it? It follows from this both that something cannot arise from nothing, and also that what is more perfect – that is, contains in itself more reality –

- 41 cannot arise from what is less perfect. And this is transparently true not only in the case of effects which possess <what the philosophers call> actual or formal reality, but also in the case of ideas, where one is considering only <what they call> objective reality. A stone, for example, which previously did not exist, cannot begin to exist unless it is produced by something which contains, either formally or eminently everything to be found in the stone;² similarly, heat cannot be produced in an object which was not previously hot, except by something of at least the same order <degree or kind> of perfection as heat, and so on. But it is also true that the *idea* of heat, or of a stone, cannot exist in me unless it is put there by some cause which contains at least as much reality as I conceive to be in the heat or in the stone. For although this cause does not transfer any of its actual or formal reality to my idea, it should not on that account be supposed that it must be less real.³ The nature of an idea is such that of itself it requires no formal reality except what it derives from my thought, of which it is a mode.⁴ But in order for a given idea to contain such and such objective reality, it must surely derive it from some cause which contains at least as much formal reality as there is objective reality in the

1 '... i.e. participate by representation in a higher degree of being or perfection' (added in French version). According to the scholastic distinction invoked in the paragraphs that follow, the 'formal' reality of anything is its own intrinsic reality, while the 'objective' reality of an idea is a function of its representational content. Thus if an idea *A* represents some object *X* which is *F*, then *F*-ness will be contained 'formally' in *X* but 'objectively' in *A*. See below, Second Replies pp. 74f.

2 '... i.e. it will contain in itself the same things as are in the stone or other more excellent things' (added in French version). In scholastic terminology, to possess a property 'formally' is to possess it literally, in accordance with its definition; to possess it 'eminently' is to possess it in some higher form. Cf. below, p. 201.

3 '... that this cause must be less real' (French version).

4 '... i.e. a manner or way of thinking' (added in French version).

idea. For if we suppose that an idea contains something which was not in its cause, it must have got this from nothing; yet the mode of being by which a thing exists objectively (or representatively) in the intellect by way of an idea, imperfect though it may be, is certainly not nothing, and so it cannot come from nothing.

And although the reality which I am considering in my ideas is merely objective reality, I must not on that account suppose that the same reality need not exist formally in the causes of my ideas, but that it is enough for it to be present in them objectively. For just as the objective mode of being belongs to ideas by their very nature, so the formal mode of being belongs to the causes of ideas – or at least the first and most important ones – by *their* very nature. And although one idea may perhaps originate from another, there cannot be an infinite regress here; eventually one must reach a primary idea, the cause of which will be like an archetype which contains formally (and in fact) all the reality (or perfection) which is present only objectively (or representatively) in the idea. So it is clear to me, by the natural light, that the ideas in me are like (pictures, or) images which can easily fall short of the perfection of the things from which they are taken, but which cannot contain anything greater or more perfect.

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The longer and more carefully I examine all these points, the more clearly and distinctly I recognize their truth. But what is my conclusion to be? If the objective reality of any of my ideas turns out to be so great that I am sure the same reality does not reside in me, either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be its cause, it will necessarily follow that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists. But if no such idea is to be found in me, I shall have no argument to convince me of the existence of anything apart from myself. For despite a most careful and comprehensive survey, this is the only argument I have so far been able to find.

Among my ideas, apart from the idea which gives me a representation of myself, which cannot present any difficulty in this context, there are ideas which variously represent God, corporeal and inanimate things, angels, animals and finally other men like myself.

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As far as concerns the ideas which represent other men, or animals, or angels, I have no difficulty in understanding that they could be put together from the ideas I have of myself, of corporeal things and of God, even if the world contained no men besides me, no animals and no angels.

As to my ideas of corporeal things, I can see nothing in them which is so great (or excellent) as to make it seem impossible that it originated in myself. For if I scrutinize them thoroughly and examine them one by one, in the way in which I examined the idea of the wax yesterday, I notice



that the things which I perceive clearly and distinctly in them are very few in number. The list comprises size, or extension in length, breadth and depth; shape, which is a function of the boundaries of this extension; position, which is a relation between various items possessing shape; and motion, or change in position; to these may be added substance, duration and number. But as for all the rest, including light and colours, sounds, smells, tastes, heat and cold and the other tactile qualities, I think of these only in a very confused and obscure way, to the extent that I do not even know whether they are true or false, that is, whether the ideas I have of them are ideas of real things or of non-things.¹ For although, as I have noted before, falsity in the strict sense, or formal falsity, can occur only in judgements, there is another kind of falsity, material falsity, which occurs in ideas, when they represent non-things as things. For example, the ideas
 44 which I have of heat and cold contain so little clarity and distinctness that they do not enable me to tell whether cold is merely the absence of heat or vice versa, or whether both of them are real qualities, or neither is. And since there can be no ideas which are not as it were of things,² if it is true that cold is nothing but the absence of heat, the idea which represents it to me as something real and positive deserves to be called false; and the same goes for other ideas of this kind.

Such ideas obviously do not require me to posit a source distinct from myself. For on the one hand, if they are false, that is, represent non-things, I know by the natural light that they arise from nothing – that is, they are in me only because of a deficiency and lack of perfection in my nature. If on the other hand they are true, then since the reality which they represent is so extremely slight that I cannot even distinguish it from a non-thing, I do not see why they cannot originate from myself.

With regard to the clear and distinct elements in my ideas of corporeal things, it appears that I could have borrowed some of these from my idea of myself, namely substance, duration, number and anything else of this kind. For example, I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that I am a substance. Admittedly I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is not extended, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously; but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'.³ Again, I perceive that I now exist, and remember that I have existed for some time; moreover, I have various thoughts which I can count; it is in these

¹ '... chimerical things which cannot exist' (French version).

² 'And since ideas, being like images, must in each case appear to us to represent something' (French version).

³ '... in so far as they represent substances' (French version).

ways that I acquire the ideas of duration and number which I can then transfer to other things. As for all the other elements which make up the ideas of corporeal things, namely extension, shape, position and movement, these are not formally contained in me, since I am nothing but a thinking thing; but since they are merely modes of a substance,¹ and I am a substance, it seems possible that they are contained in me eminently.

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, <eternal, immutable,> 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 they² could have originated from me alone. So from what has been said it must be concluded that God necessarily exists.

It is true that I have the idea of substance in me in virtue of the fact that I am a substance; but this would not account for my having the idea of an infinite substance, when I am finite, unless this idea proceeded from some substance which really was infinite.

And I must not think that, just as my conceptions of rest and darkness are arrived at by negating movement and light, so my perception of the infinite is arrived at not by means of a true idea but merely by negating the finite. On the contrary, I clearly understand that there is more reality in an infinite substance than in a finite one, and hence that my perception of the infinite, that is God, is in some way prior to my perception of the finite, that is myself. For 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? 46

Nor can it be said that this idea of God is perhaps materially false and so could have come from nothing,³ which is what I observed just a moment ago in the case of the ideas of heat and cold, and so on. On the contrary, it is utterly clear and distinct, and contains in itself more objective reality than any other idea; hence there is no idea which is in itself truer or less liable to be suspected of falsehood. This idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being is, I say, true in the highest degree; for although perhaps one may imagine that such a being does not exist, it cannot be supposed that the idea of such a being represents something

¹ '... and as it were the garments under which corporeal substance appears to us' (French version).

² '... that the idea I have of them' (French version).

³ '... i.e. could be in me in virtue of my imperfection' (added in French version).

AUTHOR'S REPLIES TO THE FIRST SET OF OBJECTIONS

Gentlemen,¹

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.² 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.'³ 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

1 For the addressees, see above p. 64. 2 Above pp. 66f; Cf. Med. III, above pp. 28f.

3 Above p. 67.

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 103 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.¹

When the learned theologian says that there is an equivocation in what I say here,² 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 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 104 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

¹ Med. III, above p. 29. ² Above p. 67.

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,¹ 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.² 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
 105 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

¹ See above p. 28, note 2. ² Above p. 67.

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

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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.¹

- 182 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 183 silently affirming to oneself that one sees him. I see nothing here that needs answering.

¹ Above pp. 25f.

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'.¹ 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',² 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

¹ *Ibid.* ² *Ibid.*

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.¹ 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 does 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 4.²

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'.³ 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

¹ Above p. 146. ² See note above p. 69.

³ First Replies, above p. 80; Arnauld's comments, above p. 146.

constructed idea I were to infer what I explicitly put into it when I was constructing it, I would obviously be begging the question; but it is not the same if I draw out from an innate idea something which was implicitly contained in it but which I did not at first notice in it. Thus I can draw out from the idea of a triangle that its three angles equal two right angles, and from the idea of God that he exists, etc. So far from being a begging of the question, this method of demonstration is even according to Aristotle the most perfect of all, for in it the true definition of a thing occurs as the middle term[†].

AT III

TO MERSENNE, 23 JUNE 1641

- 384 I am sending you the remainder of M. Gassendi's objections, together with my reply. In connection with which, please, if it is possible, have the said objections¹ printed before the author sees the reply I have produced. For between ourselves, I find that they contain so little good argument that I doubt if he will want to allow them to be printed, once he has seen my reply. For my part, I very much want them printed. Apart from the fact that I should be sorry to have wasted the time spent composing my reply, I have no doubt that those who believed that I would not be able to answer him would think that it was I who refused to have them published because I was unable to deal with the objections. I shall also be very happy for his name to go at the head of the objections, just as he has put it. Admittedly, should he be unwilling to allow this, he is entitled to prevent it, since the other objectors have not given their names; but he cannot prevent the objections being published. Could you please also give the publisher the same copy I have seen, for printing, so that there are no discrepancies . . .
- (388) You will see that I have done everything I could to deal with M. Gassendi in an honourable and considerate way. But he has given me so many grounds to despise him, and to point out his lack of common sense and inability to argue in any rational manner, that I should have been lackadaisical in defending my own just cause if I had said any less than I did – and I assure you that I could have said a lot more.
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AT III

TO MERSENNE, JULY 1641

- (392) . . . Is it possible that [your correspondent]² could not, as he says, understand what I mean by the idea of God, the idea of the soul, and the ideas of imperceptible things? I mean only what he must necessarily have

¹ The Fifth Set of Objections to the *Meditations*.

² The identity of the correspondent is not known; see the letter to Mersenne of 16 June 1641 (p. 183 above).

understood himself when he wrote to you that he did not understand my meaning. For he does not say that he had no conception corresponding to the expressions 'God', 'soul', 'imperceptible things'; he just says that he did not know what was to be understood by the idea of these things. But if he had any conception corresponding to these expressions, as he doubtless had, he knew at the same time what was to be understood by the ideas – namely nothing other than the conception which he himself had. For by 'idea' I do not just mean the images depicted in the imagination;¹ indeed, in so far as these images are in the corporeal imagination, I do not use that term for them at all. Instead, by the term 'idea' I mean in general everything which is in our mind when we conceive something, no matter how we conceive it.

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But I realize that he is not one of those who think they cannot conceive a thing when they cannot imagine it, as if this were the only way we have of thinking and conceiving. He clearly realized that this was not my opinion, and he showed that it was not his either, since he said himself that God cannot be conceived by the imagination. But if it is not by the imagination that God is conceived, then either one conceives nothing when one speaks of God (which would be a sign of terrible blindness) or one conceives him in another manner; but whatever way we conceive him, we have the idea of him. For we cannot express anything by our words, when we understand what we are saying, without its being certain thereby that we have in us the idea of the thing which is signified by our words.

It will be easy, then, for him to understand what I mean by the idea of God if he takes the word 'idea' in the way in which I said explicitly that I took it, and is not confused by those who restrict it to the images of material things formed in the imagination. I mean by the idea of God nothing but what all men habitually understand when they speak of him. This he must necessarily have understood himself; otherwise, how could he have said that God is infinite and incomprehensible and that he cannot be represented by our imagination? How could he affirm that these attributes belong to him, and countless others which express his greatness to us, unless he had the idea of him? It must be agreed, then, that we have the idea of God, and that we cannot fail to know what this idea is, or what must be understood by it; because without this we could not know anything at all about God. It would be no good saying that we believe that 'God exists', and that some attribute or perfection belongs to him; this would be to say nothing, because it would convey no meaning to our mind. Nothing could be more impious or impudent.

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¹ Fr. *fantaisie*, the term which Descartes frequently uses to denote the part of the brain in which the physiological processes associated with imagining take place.

In the case of the soul the matter is even clearer. As I have shown, the soul is nothing but a thing which thinks, and so it is impossible for us ever to think of anything without at the same time having the idea of our soul as a thing capable of thinking of whatever we think of. It is true that a thing of such a nature cannot be imagined, that is, cannot be represented by a corporeal image. But that is not surprising, because our imagination is capable of representing only objects of sense-perception; and since our soul has no colour or smell or taste, or anything which belongs to the body, it is not possible to imagine it or form an image of it. But that does not make it any less conceivable; on the contrary, since it is by means of it that we conceive all other things, it is itself more conceivable on its own than all other things put together.

395 Next, I must tell you that your friend has altogether missed my meaning when, in order to mark the distinction between the ideas in the imagination and those in the mind, he says that the former are expressed by terms, and the latter by propositions. It is not whether they are expressed by terms or by propositions which makes them belong to the mind or the imagination; they can both be expressed in either way. It is the manner of conceiving them which makes the difference: whatever we conceive without an image is an idea of the pure mind, and whatever we conceive with an image is an idea of the imagination. As our imagination is tightly and narrowly limited, while our mind has hardly any limits, there are very few things, even corporeal things, which we can imagine, even though we are capable of conceiving them. One might perhaps think that the entire science which considers only sizes, shapes and movements, would be most under the sway of our imagination. But those who have studied it at all deeply know that it rests not at all on the phantasms of our imagination, but only on the clear and distinct notions of our mind.

396 He infers from my writings that the idea of God must be expressed by the proposition 'God exists', and concludes that the main argument I use to prove his existence is a simple begging of the question. How can he make such an inference? He must be very sharp-eyed to see something there which I never meant to say and which never entered my mind before I saw his letter. I based the proof of the existence of God on the idea which I find in myself of a supremely perfect being, which is the ordinary notion we have of him. It is true that the simple consideration of such a being leads us so easily to the knowledge of his existence that it is almost the same thing to conceive of God and to conceive that he exists; but none the less the idea we have of God, or of a supremely perfect being, is quite different from the proposition 'God exists', so that the one can serve as a means or premiss to prove the other.

In the same way it is certain that after having come to know the nature of

our soul by the steps I used, and after having thus recognized that it is a spiritual substance – because I see that all the attributes which belong to spiritual substances belong to it – one does not have to be a great philosopher to conclude as I did that it is not corporeal. But one certainly needs to have a very open mind, and rather an extraordinary one too, to see that the conclusion does not follow from the premisses and to find some flaw in this argument. It is this that I ask him to show me, and that I hope to learn from him if he is willing to take the trouble to teach me. I for my part will not refuse him my little clarifications, if he needs them and is willing to proceed in good faith.

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TO MERSENNE, 22 JULY 1641

AT III

I am sending you the Sixth Objections with my replies; and because the objections are made up of various papers which you sent me at different times, I have copied them out in my own writing in the way it seemed they could most conveniently be combined . . .

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With regard to printers' errors, I am well aware that they are not of great importance, and I assure you that I am no less in your debt for the care you have taken to correct them than I would be if every single one had been eliminated. For I know the great trouble this has put you to, and also that it is morally¹ impossible to prevent some errors remaining none the less, particularly when dealing with someone else's writings.

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I very much approve your having pruned what I put at the end of my reply to M. Arnauld, especially if this can help us to get a formal approval for the book.² But even if we do not get it, I am sure I will not be very upset . . .

I do not understand your question whether our ideas are expressed by a simple term. Words are human inventions, so one can always use one or several to express the same thing. But I explained in my Reply to the First Objections how a triangle inscribed in a square can be taken as a single idea or as several.³ Altogether, I think that all those which involve no affirmation or negation are [†]innate[†] in us; for the sense-organs do not bring us anything which is like the idea which arises in us on the occasion of their stimulus, and so this idea must have been in us before.⁴

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¹ I.e. for all practical purposes. For Descartes' use of 'morally' in this sense, cf. *Principles*, Part IV, art. 205; AT VIIIA 327; CSM 1 289.

² See above, pp. 158f. for Descartes' hopes in this regard.

³ AT VII 118; CSM 1 84.

⁴ See *Comments on a Certain Broadsheet*: AT VIIIB 359; CSM 1 304.