

René Descartes

Meditations, Objections, and Replies

Edited and Translated by
ROGER ARIEW AND DONALD CRESS

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errors commonly arising from the senses are reviewed; an account of the ways in which these errors can be avoided is provided. Finally, all the arguments on the basis of which we may infer the existence of material things are presented—not because I believed them to be very useful for proving what they prove, namely, that there really is a world, that men have bodies, and the like (things which no one of sound mind has ever seriously doubted), but rather because, through a consideration of these arguments, one realizes that they are neither so firm nor so evident as the arguments leading us to the knowledge of our mind and of God, so that, of all the things that can be known by the human mind, these latter are the most certain and the most evident. Proving this one thing was for me the goal of these Meditations. For this reason I will not review here the various issues that are also to be treated in these Meditations as the situation arises.

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***Meditations on First Philosophy in Which the
Existence of God and the Distinction between the
Soul and the Body Are Demonstrated***

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**MEDITATION ONE: CONCERNING THOSE THINGS THAT CAN BE
CALLED INTO DOUBT**

Several years have now passed since I first realized how numerous were the false opinions that in my youth I had taken to be true, and thus how doubtful were all those that I had subsequently built upon them. And thus I realized that once in my life I had to raze everything to the ground and begin again from the original foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences. But the task seemed enormous, and I was waiting until I reached a point in my life that was so timely that no more suitable time for undertaking these plans of action would come to pass. For this reason, I procrastinated for so long that I would henceforth be at fault, were I to waste the time that remains for carrying out the project by brooding over it. Accordingly, I have today suitably freed my mind of all cares, secured for myself a period of leisurely tranquillity, and am withdrawing into solitude. At last I will apply myself earnestly and unreservedly to this general demolition of my opinions.

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Yet to bring this about I will not need to show that all my opinions are false, which is perhaps something I could never accomplish. But reason now persuades me that I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false. For this reason, it will suffice for the rejection of all of these opinions, if I find in each of them some reason for doubt. Nor

therefore need I survey each opinion individually, a task that would be endless. Rather, because undermining the foundations will cause whatever has been built upon them to crumble of its own accord, I will attack straightaway those principles which supported everything I once believed.

Surely whatever I had admitted until now as most true I received either from the senses or through the senses. However, I have noticed that the senses are sometimes deceptive; and it is a mark of prudence never to place our complete trust in those who have deceived us even once.

But perhaps, even though the senses do sometimes deceive us when it is a question of very small and distant things, still there are many other matters concerning which one simply cannot doubt, even though they are derived from the very same senses: for example, that I am sitting here next to the fire, wearing my winter dressing gown, that I am holding this sheet of paper in my hands, and the like. But on what grounds could one deny that these hands and this entire body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to the insane, whose brains are impaired by such an unrelenting vapor of black bile that they steadfastly insist that they are kings when they are utter paupers, or that they are arrayed in purple robes when they are naked, or that they have heads made of clay, or that they are gourds, or that they are made of glass. But such people are mad, and I would appear no less mad, were I to take their behavior as an example for myself.

This would all be well and good, were I not a man who is accustomed to sleeping at night, and to experiencing in my dreams the very same things, or now and then even less plausible ones, as these insane people do when they are awake. How often does my evening slumber persuade me of such ordinary things as these: that I am here, clothed in my dressing gown, seated next to the fireplace—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed! But right now my eyes are certainly wide awake when I gaze upon this sheet of paper. This head which I am shaking is not heavy with sleep. I extend this hand consciously and deliberately, and I feel it. Such things would not be so distinct for someone who is asleep. As if I did not recall having been deceived on other occasions even by similar thoughts in my dreams! As I consider these matters more carefully, I see so plainly that there are no definitive signs by which to distinguish being awake from being asleep. As a result, I am becoming quite dizzy, and this dizziness nearly convinces me that I am asleep.

Let us assume then, for the sake of argument, that we are dreaming and that such particulars as these are not true: that we are opening our eyes, moving our head, and extending our hands. Perhaps we do not even have such hands, or any such body at all. Nevertheless, it surely must be admitted that the things seen during slumber are, as it were, like painted images, which could only have been produced in the likeness of true things, and that therefore at least these general things—eyes, head, hands, and the whole

body—are not imaginary things, but are true and exist. For indeed when painters themselves wish to represent sirens and satyrs by means of especially bizarre forms, they surely cannot assign to them utterly new natures. Rather, they simply fuse together the members of various animals. Or if perhaps they concoct something so utterly novel that nothing like it has ever been seen before (and thus is something utterly fictitious and false), yet certainly at the very least the colors from which they fashion it ought to be true. And by the same token, although even these general things—eyes, head, hands and the like—could be imaginary, still one has to admit that at least certain other things that are even more simple and universal are true. It is from these components, as if from true colors, that all those images of things that are in our thought are fashioned, be they true or false.

This class of things appears to include corporeal nature in general, together with its extension; the shape of extended things; their quantity, that is, their size and number; as well as the place where they exist; the time through which they endure, and the like.

Thus it is not improper to conclude from this that physics, astronomy, medicine, and all the other disciplines that are dependent upon the consideration of composite things are doubtful, and that, on the other hand, arithmetic, geometry, and other such disciplines, which treat of nothing but the simplest and most general things and which are indifferent as to whether these things do or do not in fact exist, contain something certain and indubitable. For whether I am awake or asleep, 2 plus 3 make 5, and a square does not have more than 4 sides. It does not seem possible that such obvious truths should be subject to the suspicion of being false.

Be that as it may, there is fixed in my mind a certain opinion of long standing, namely that there exists a God who is able to do anything and by whom I, such as I am, have been created. How do I know that he did not bring it about that there is no earth at all, no heavens, no extended thing, no shape, no size, no place, and yet bringing it about that all these things appear to me to exist precisely as they do now? Moreover, since I judge that others sometimes make mistakes in matters that they believe they know most perfectly, may I not, in like fashion, be deceived every time I add 2 and 3 or count the sides of a square, or perform an even simpler operation, if that can be imagined? But perhaps God has not willed that I be deceived in this way, for he is said to be supremely good. Nonetheless, if it were repugnant to his goodness to have created me such that I be deceived all the time, it would also seem foreign to that same goodness to permit me to be deceived even occasionally. But we cannot make this last assertion.

Perhaps there are some who would rather deny so powerful a God, than believe that everything else is uncertain. Let us not oppose them; rather, let us grant that everything said here about God is fictitious. Now they suppose that I came to be what I am either by fate, or by chance, or by a connected chain

of events, or by some other way. But because deceived and being mistaken appear to be a certain imperfection, the less powerful they take the author of my origin to be, the more probable it will be that I am so imperfect that I am always deceived. I have nothing to say in response to these arguments. But eventually I am forced to admit that there is nothing among the things I once believed to be true which it is not permissible to doubt—and not out of frivolity or lack of forethought, but for valid and considered arguments. Thus I must be no less careful to withhold assent henceforth even from these beliefs than I would from those that are patently false, if I wish to find anything certain.

22 But it is not enough simply to have realized these things; I must take steps to keep myself mindful of them. For long-standing opinions keep returning, and, almost against my will, they take advantage of my credulity, as if it were bound over to them by long use and the claims of intimacy. Nor will I ever get out of the habit of assenting to them and believing in them, so long as I take them to be exactly what they are, namely, in some respects doubtful, as has just now been shown, but nevertheless highly probable, so that it is much more consonant with reason to believe them than to deny them. Hence, it seems to me I would do well to deceive myself by turning my will in completely the opposite direction and pretend for a time that these opinions are wholly false and imaginary, until finally, as if with prejudices weighing down each side equally, no bad habit should turn my judgment any further from the correct perception of things. For indeed I know that meanwhile there is no danger or error in following this procedure, and that it is impossible for me to indulge in too much distrust, since I am now concentrating only on knowledge, not on action.

Accordingly, I will suppose not a supremely good God, the source of truth, but rather an evil genius, supremely powerful and clever, who has directed his entire effort at deceiving me. I will regard the heavens, the air, the earth, colors, shapes, sounds, and all external things as nothing but the bedeviling hoaxes of my dreams, with which he lays snares for my credulity. 23 I will regard myself as not having hands, or eyes, or flesh, or blood, or any senses, but as nevertheless falsely believing that I possess all these things. I will remain resolute and steadfast in this meditation, and even if it is not within my power to know anything true, it certainly is within my power to take care resolutely to withhold my assent to what is false, lest this deceiver, however powerful, however clever he may be, have any effect on me. But this undertaking is arduous, and a certain laziness brings me back to my customary way of living. I am not unlike a prisoner who enjoyed an imaginary freedom during his sleep, but, when he later begins to suspect that he is dreaming, fears being awakened and nonchalantly conspires with these pleasant illusions. In just the same way, I fall back of my own accord into my old opinions, and dread being awakened, lest the toilsome wakefulness which

follows upon a peaceful rest must be spent thenceforward not in the light but among the inextricable shadows of the difficulties now brought forward.

MEDITATION TWO: Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That It Is Better Known than the Body

Yesterday's meditation has thrown me into such doubts that I can no longer ignore them, yet I fail to see how they are to be resolved. It is as if I had suddenly fallen into a deep whirlpool; I am so tossed about that I can neither touch bottom with my foot, nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless I will work my way up and will once again attempt the same path I entered upon yesterday. I will accomplish this by putting aside everything that admits of the least doubt, as if I had discovered it to be completely false. I will stay on this course until I know something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least know for certain that nothing is certain. Archimedes sought but one firm and immovable point in order to move the entire earth from one place to another. Just so, great things are also to be hoped for if I succeed in finding just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshaken.

Therefore I suppose that everything I see is false. I believe that none of what my deceitful memory represents ever existed. I have no senses whatever. Body, shape, extension, movement, and place are all chimeras. What then will be true? Perhaps just the single fact that nothing is certain.

But how do I know there is not something else, over and above all those things that I have just reviewed, concerning which there is not even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not some God, or by whatever name I might call him, who instills these very thoughts in me? But why would I think that, since I myself could perhaps be the author of these thoughts? Am I not then at least something? But I have already denied that I have any senses and any body. Still I hesitate; for what follows from this? Am I so tied 25 to a body and to the senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have persuaded myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world: no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Is it then the case that I too do not exist? But doubtless I did exist, if I persuaded myself of something. But there is some deceiver or other who is supremely powerful and supremely sly and who is always deliberately deceiving me. Then too there is no doubt that I exist, if he is deceiving me. And let him do his best at deception, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I shall think that I am something. Thus, after everything has been most carefully weighed, it must finally be established that this pronouncement "I am, I exist" is necessarily true every time I utter it or conceive it in my mind.

But I do not yet understand sufficiently what I am—I, who now necessarily exist. And so from this point on, I must be careful lest I unwittingly

mistake something else for myself, and thus err in that very item of knowledge that I claim to be the most certain and evident of all. Thus, I will meditate once more on what I once believed myself to be, prior to embarking upon these thoughts. For this reason, then, I will set aside whatever can be weakened even to the slightest degree by the arguments brought forward, so that eventually all that remains is precisely nothing but what is certain and unshaken.

26 What then did I formerly think I was? A man, of course. But what is a man? Might I not say a "rational animal"? No, because then I would have to inquire what "animal" and "rational" mean. And thus from one question I would slide into many more difficult ones. Nor do I now have enough free time that I want to waste it on subtleties of this sort. Instead, permit me here to focus here on what came spontaneously and naturally into my thinking whenever I pondered what I was. Now it occurred to me first that I had a face, hands, arms, and this entire mechanism of bodily members: the very same as are discerned in a corpse, and which I referred to by the name "body." It next occurred to me that I took in food, that I walked about, and that I sensed and thought various things; these actions I used to attribute to the soul. But as to what this soul might be, I either did not think about it or else I imagined it a rarefied I-know-not-what, like a wind, or a fire, or ether, which had been infused into my coarser parts. But as to the body I was not in any doubt. On the contrary, I was under the impression that I knew its nature distinctly. Were I perhaps tempted to describe this nature such as I conceived it in my mind, I would have described it thus: by "body," I understand all that is capable of being bounded by some shape, of being enclosed in a place, and of filling up a space in such a way as to exclude any other body from it; of being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell; of being moved in several ways, not, of course, by itself, but by whatever else impinges upon it. For it was my view that the power of self-motion, and likewise of sensing or of thinking, in no way belonged to the nature of the body. Indeed I used rather to marvel that such faculties were to be found in certain bodies.

27 But now what am I, when I suppose that there is some supremely powerful and, if I may be permitted to say so, malicious deceiver who deliberately tries to fool me in any way he can? Can I not affirm that I possess at least a small measure of all those things which I have already said belong to the nature of the body? I focus my attention on them, I think about them, I review them again, but nothing comes to mind. I am tired of repeating this to no purpose. But what about those things I ascribed to the soul? What about being nourished or moving about? Since I now do not have a body, these are surely nothing but fictions. What about sensing? Surely this too does not take place without a body; and I seemed to have sensed in my dreams many things that I later realized I did not sense. What about thinking? Here

I make my discovery: thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist—this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; for perhaps it could also come to pass that if I were to cease all thinking I would then utterly cease to exist. At this time I admit nothing that is not necessarily true. I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason—words of whose meanings I was previously ignorant. Yet I am a true thing and am truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thinking thing.

What else am I? I will set my imagination in motion. I am not that concatenation of members we call the human body. Neither am I even some subtle air infused into these members, nor a wind, nor a fire, nor a vapor, nor a breath, nor anything I devise for myself. For I have supposed these things to be nothing. The assumption still stands; yet nevertheless I am something. But is it perhaps the case that these very things which I take to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, nevertheless are in fact no different from that me that I know? This I do not know, and I will not quarrel about it now. I can make a judgment only about things that are known to me. I know that I exist; I ask now who is this "I" whom I know? Most certainly, in the strict sense the knowledge of this "I" does not depend upon things whose existence I do not yet know. Therefore it is not dependent upon any of those things that I simulate in my imagination. But this word "simulate" warns me of my error. For I would indeed be simulating were I to "imagine" that I was something, because imagining is merely the contemplating of the shape or image of a corporeal thing. But I now know with certainty that I am and also that all these images—and, generally, everything belonging to the nature of the body—could turn out to be nothing but dreams. Once I have realized this, I would seem to be speaking no less foolishly were I to say: "I will use my imagination in order to recognize more distinctly who I am," than were I to say: "Now I surely am awake, and I see something true; but since I do not yet see it clearly enough, I will deliberately fall asleep so that my dreams might represent it to me more truly and more clearly." Thus I realize that none of what I can grasp by means of the imagination pertains to this knowledge that I have of myself. Moreover, I realize that I must be most diligent about withdrawing my mind from these things so that it can perceive its nature as distinctly as possible.

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

Indeed it is no small matter if all of these things belong to me. But why should they not belong to me? Is it not the very same "I" who now doubts almost everything, who nevertheless understands something, who affirms that this one thing is true, who denies other things, who desires to know more, who wishes not to be deceived, who imagines many things even against

my will, who also notices many things which appear to come from the senses?
 29 What is there in all of this that is not every bit as true as the fact that I exist—even if I am always asleep or even if my creator makes every effort to mislead me? Which of these things is distinct from my thought? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? For it is so obvious that it is I who doubt, I who understand, and I who will, that there is nothing by which it could be explained more clearly. But indeed it is also the same “I” who imagines; for although perhaps, as I supposed before, absolutely nothing that I imagined is true, still the very power of imagining really does exist, and constitutes a part of my thought. Finally, it is this same “I” who senses or who is cognizant of bodily things as if through the senses. For example, I now see a light, I hear a noise, I feel heat. These things are false, since I am asleep. Yet I certainly do seem to see, hear, and feel warmth. This cannot be false. Properly speaking, this is what in me is called “sensing.” But this, precisely so taken, is nothing other than thinking.

From these considerations I am beginning to know a little better what I am. But it still seems (and I cannot resist believing) that corporeal things—whose images are formed by thought, and which the senses themselves examine—are much more distinctly known than this mysterious “I” which does not fall within the imagination. And yet it would be strange indeed were I to grasp the very things I consider to be doubtful, unknown, and foreign to me more distinctly than what is true, what is known—than, in short, myself. But I see what is happening: my mind loves to wander and does not
 30 yet permit itself to be restricted within the confines of truth. So be it then; let us just this once allow it completely free rein, so that, a little while later, when the time has come to pull in the reins, the mind may more readily permit itself to be controlled.

Let us consider those things which are commonly believed to be the most distinctly grasped of all: namely the bodies we touch and see. Not bodies in general, mind you, for these general perceptions are apt to be somewhat more confused, but one body in particular. Let us take, for instance, this piece of wax. It has been taken quite recently from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the honey flavor. It retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was collected. Its color, shape, and size are manifest. It is hard and cold; it is easy to touch. If you rap on it with your knuckle it will emit a sound. In short, everything is present in it that appears needed to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But notice that, as I am speaking, I am bringing it close to the fire. The remaining traces of the honey flavor are disappearing; the scent is vanishing; the color is changing; the original shape is disappearing. Its size is increasing; it is becoming liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it. And now, when you rap on it, it no longer emits any sound. Does the same wax still remain? I must confess that it does; no one denies it; no one thinks otherwise. So what was there in the wax that was

so distinctly grasped? Certainly none of the aspects that I reached by means of the senses. For whatever came under the senses of taste, smell, sight, touch, or hearing has now changed; and yet the wax remains.

Perhaps the wax was what I now think it is: namely, that the wax itself never really was the sweetness of the honey, nor the fragrance of the flowers, nor the whiteness, nor the shape, nor the sound, but instead was a body that a short time ago manifested itself to me in these ways, and now does so in other ways. But just what precisely is this thing that I thus imagine? Let us focus our attention on this and see what remains after we have removed everything that does not belong to the wax: only that it is something extended, flexible, and mutable. But what is it to be flexible and mutable? Is
 31 it what my imagination shows it to be: namely, that this piece of wax can change from a round to a square shape, or from the latter to a triangular shape? Not at all; for I grasp that the wax is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, even though I am incapable of running through these innumerable changes by using my imagination. Therefore this insight is not achieved by the faculty of imagination. What is it to be extended? Is this thing's extension also unknown? For it becomes greater in wax that is beginning to melt, greater in boiling wax, and greater still as the heat is increased. And I would not judge correctly what the wax is if I did not believe that it takes on an even greater variety of dimensions than I could ever grasp with the imagination. It remains then for me to concede that I do not grasp what this wax is through the imagination; rather, I perceive it through the mind alone. The point I am making refers to this particular piece of wax, for the case of wax in general is clearer still. But what is this piece of wax which is perceived only by the mind? Surely it is the same piece of wax that I see, touch, and imagine; in short it is the same piece of wax I took it to be from the very beginning. But I need to realize that the perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining. Nor has it ever been, even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone. This inspection can be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct, as it is now, depending on how closely I pay attention to the things in which the piece of wax consists.

But meanwhile I marvel at how prone my mind is to errors. For although I am considering these things within myself silently and without words,
 32 nevertheless I seize upon words themselves and I am nearly deceived by the ways in which people commonly speak. For we say that we see the wax itself, if it is present, and not that we judge it to be present from its color or shape. Whence I might conclude straightaway that I know the wax through the vision had by the eye, and not through an inspection on the part of the mind alone. But then were I perchance to look out my window and observe men crossing the square, I would ordinarily say I see the men themselves just as I say I see the wax. But what do I see aside from hats and clothes, which

could conceal automata? Yet I judge them to be men. Thus what I thought I had seen with my eyes, I actually grasped solely with the faculty of judgment, which is in my mind.

But a person who seeks to know more than the common crowd ought to be ashamed of himself for looking for doubt in common ways of speaking. Let us then go forward, inquiring on when it was that I perceived more perfectly and evidently what the piece of wax was. Was it when I first saw it and believed I knew it by the external sense, or at least by the so-called "common" sense, that is, the power of imagination? Or do I have more perfect knowledge now, when I have diligently examined both what the wax is and how it is known? Surely it is absurd to be in doubt about this matter. For what was there in my initial perception that was distinct? What was there that any animal seemed incapable of possessing? But indeed when I distinguish the wax from its external forms, as if stripping it of its clothing, and look at the wax in its nakedness, then, even though there can be still an error in my judgment, nevertheless I cannot perceive it thus without a human mind.

33 But what am I to say about this mind, that is, about myself? For as yet I admit nothing else to be in me over and above the mind. What, I ask, am I who seem to perceive this wax so distinctly? Do I not know myself not only much more truly and with greater certainty, but also much more distinctly and evidently? For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, certainly from this same fact that I see the wax it follows much more evidently that I myself exist. For it could happen that what I see is not truly wax. It could happen that I have no eyes with which to see anything. But it is utterly impossible that, while I see or think I see (I do not now distinguish these two), I who think am not something. Likewise, if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same outcome will again obtain, namely that I exist. If I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I imagine it, or for any other reason, plainly the same thing follows. But what I note regarding the wax applies to everything else that is external to me. Furthermore, if my perception of the wax seemed more distinct after it became known to me not only on account of sight or touch, but on account of many reasons, one has to admit how much more distinctly I am now known to myself. For there is not a single consideration that can aid in my perception of the wax or of any other body that fails to make even more manifest the nature of my mind. But there are still so many other things in the mind itself on the basis of which my knowledge of it can be rendered more distinct that it hardly seems worth enumerating those things which emanate to it from the body.

34 But lo and behold, I have returned on my own to where I wanted to be. For since I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone, and

that they are not perceived through their being touched or seen, but only through their being understood, I manifestly know that nothing can be perceived more easily and more evidently than my own mind. But since the tendency to hang on to long-held beliefs cannot be put aside so quickly, I want to stop here, so that by the length of my meditation this new knowledge may be more deeply impressed upon my memory.

MEDITATION THREE: Concerning God, That He Exists

I will now shut my eyes, stop up my ears, and withdraw all my senses. I will also blot out from my thoughts all images of corporeal things, or rather, since the latter is hardly possible, I will regard these images as empty, false, and worthless. And as I converse with myself alone and look more deeply into myself, I will attempt to render myself gradually better known and more familiar to myself. I am a thing that thinks, that is to say, a thing that doubts, affirms, denies, understands a few things, is ignorant of many things, wills, refrains from willing, and also imagines and senses. For as I observed earlier, even though these things that I sense or imagine may perhaps be nothing at all outside me, nevertheless I am certain that these modes of thinking, which are cases of what I call sensing and imagining, insofar as they are merely modes of thinking, do exist within me.

In these few words, I have reviewed everything I truly know, or at least what so far I have noticed that I know. Now I will ponder more carefully to see whether perhaps there may be other things belonging to me that up until now I have failed to notice. I am certain that I am a thinking thing. But do I not therefore also know what is required for me to be certain of anything? Surely in this first instance of knowledge, there is nothing but a certain clear and distinct perception of what I affirm. Yet this would hardly be enough to render me certain of the truth of a thing, if it could ever happen that something that I perceived so clearly and distinctly were false. And thus I now seem able to posit as a general rule that everything I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.

Be that as it may, I have previously admitted many things as wholly certain and evident that nevertheless I later discovered to be doubtful. What sort of things were these? Why, the earth, the sky, the stars, and all the other things I perceived by means of the senses. But what was it about these things that I clearly perceived? Surely the fact that the ideas or thoughts of these things were hovering before my mind. But even now I do not deny that these ideas are in me. Yet there was something else I used to affirm, which, owing to my habitual tendency to believe it, I used to think was something I clearly perceived, even though I actually did not perceive it all: namely, that certain things existed outside me, things from which those ideas proceeded

and which those ideas completely resembled. But on this point I was mistaken; or, rather if my judgment was a true one, it was not the result of the force of my perception.

36 But what about when I considered something very simple and easy in the areas of arithmetic or geometry, for example that 2 plus 3 make 5, and the like? Did I not intuit them at least clearly enough so as to affirm them as true? To be sure, I did decide later on that I must doubt these things, but that was only because it occurred to me that some God could perhaps have given me a nature such that I might be deceived even about matters that seemed most evident. But whenever this preconceived opinion about the supreme power of God occurs to me, I cannot help admitting that, were he to wish it, it would be easy for him to cause me to err even in those matters that I think I intuit as clearly as possible with the eyes of the mind. On the other hand, whenever I turn my attention to those very things that I think I perceive with such great clarity, I am so completely persuaded by them that I spontaneously blurt out these words: "let him who can deceive me; so long as I think that I am something, he will never bring it about that I am nothing. Nor will he one day make it true that I never existed, for it is true now that I do exist. Nor will he even bring it about that perhaps 2 plus 3 might equal more or less than 5, or similar items in which I recognize an obvious contradiction." And certainly, because I have no reason for thinking that there is a God who is a deceiver (and of course I do not yet sufficiently know whether there even is a God), the basis for doubting, depending as it does merely on the above hypothesis, is very tenuous and, so to speak, metaphysical. But in order to remove even this basis for doubt, I should at the first opportunity inquire whether there is a God, and, if there is, whether or not he can be a deceiver. For if I am ignorant of this, it appears I am never capable of being completely certain about anything else.

37 However, at this stage good order seems to demand that I first group all my thoughts into certain classes, and ask in which of them truth or falsity properly resides. Some of these thoughts are like images of things; to these alone does the word "idea" properly apply, as when I think of a man, or a chimera, or the sky, or an angel, or God. Again there are other thoughts that take different forms, for example, when I will, or fear, or affirm, or deny, there is always some thing that I grasp as the subject of my thought, yet I embrace in my thought something more than the likeness of that thing. Some of these thoughts are called volitions or affects, while others are called judgments.

Now as far as ideas are concerned, if they are considered alone and in their own right, without being referred to something else, they cannot, properly speaking, be false. For whether it is a she-goat or a chimera that I am imagining, it is no less true that I imagine the one than the other. Moreover, we need not fear that there is falsity in the will itself or in the affects, for although I can choose evil things or even things that are utterly non-

diversum] from the body, and that it is a substance. But as far as the human body is concerned, the difference between it and other bodies consists solely in the configuration of its members and other such accidents; ultimately the death of the body is completely dependent on some division or change of shape. And we have neither proof nor precedent to convince us that the death or annihilation of a substance such as the mind ought to follow from so slight a cause as a change in shape, which is merely a mode, and, then, not a mode of the mind but of the body, which is really distinct from the mind. Moreover, we have neither proof nor precedent to convince us that any substance can perish. This is sufficient to let us conclude that the mind, insofar as it can be known by natural philosophy, is immortal. 154

But if one asks regarding the absolute power of God whether perhaps God may have decreed that human souls cease to exist at the same moment when the bodies God has joined to them are destroyed, then it is for God alone to answer. And since God himself has already revealed to us that this will not happen, there obviously is no, or a very slight, occasion for doubting.

It remains for me now to thank you for seeing fit to warn me with such kindness and honesty not only of things you yourselves have noticed but also of things that could be stated by detractors or atheists. For I see nothing in what you have proposed that I have not already either solved or ruled out. (For as to what you brought forward regarding flies produced by the sun, and about the indigenous people of Canada, the Ninevites, the Turks and the like,⁷⁰ these things cannot enter the minds of those who have followed the path I have pointed out and who for a time put a distance between themselves and all they receive from the senses, so that they may observe what reason, pure and uncorrupted, teaches them. Thus I thought I had already ruled out such things. But be that as it may, I nevertheless judge that these objections of yours will be especially valuable to my project. For I anticipate that hardly any readers who will attend so carefully to what I have tried to put on paper will remember all of what went before when they reach the end of the work. And those who do not do so will easily run into some doubts which they will later see have been dealt with satisfactorily in my reply, or else my reply will at least provide the occasion for examining further the truth of the matter. 155

Finally, as to your suggestion⁷¹ that I should put forward my arguments in geometrical fashion so that the reader could perceive them, as it were, in a single intuition, it is worthwhile to indicate here how much I have already followed this suggestion and how much I think it should be followed in the future. I draw a distinction between two things in the geometrical style of writing, namely the order and the mode [*ratio*] of the demonstration.

70. AT VII, 123-6.

71. *Ibid.*

Order consists simply in putting forward as first what ought to be known without any help from what comes afterward and then in arranging all the rest in such a way that they are demonstrated solely by means of what preceded them. And I certainly did try to follow this order as carefully as possible in my Meditations. And it was owing to my observance of it that I treated the distinction between the mind and the body not in the Second Meditation but at the end in the Sixth Meditation. And it also explains why I deliberately and knowingly omitted many other things, since they required an explanation of a great many more.

But the mode [*ratio*] of an argument is of two sorts: one that proceeds by way of analysis, the other by way of synthesis.

156 Analysis shows the true way by which a thing has been discovered methodically, and, as it were, "a priori," so that were the reader willing to follow it and to pay sufficient attention to everything, he will no less perfectly understand a thing and render it his own than had he himself discovered it. However, analysis possesses nothing with which to compel belief in a less attentive or hostile reader, for if he fails to pay attention to the least thing among those that this mode [*ratio*] proposes, the necessity of its conclusions is not apparent; and it often hardly touches at all on many things that nevertheless ought to be carefully noted, since they are obvious to anyone who is sufficiently attentive.

Synthesis, on the other hand, indeed clearly demonstrates its conclusions by an opposite way, where the investigation is conducted, as it were, "a posteriori" (although it is often the case here that this proof is more "a priori" than it is in the analytic mode). And it uses a long series of definitions, postulates, axioms, theorems, and problems, so that if something in what follows is denied, this mode may at once point out that it is contained in what went before. And thus it wrests from the reader his assent, however hostile and obstinate he may be. But this mode is not as satisfactory as the other one nor does it satisfy the minds of those who desire to learn, since it does not teach the way in which the thing was discovered.

It was this mode alone that the ancient geometers were wont to use in their writings—not that they were utterly ignorant of the other mode, but rather, as I see it, they held it in such high regard that they kept it to themselves alone as a secret.

But in my Meditations I followed analysis exclusively, which is the true and best way to teach. But as to synthesis, which is undoubtedly what you are asking me about here, even though in geometry it is most suitably placed after analysis, nevertheless it cannot be so conveniently applied to these metaphysical matters.

For there is this difference: that the first notions that are presupposed for demonstrating things geometrical are readily admitted by everyone, since they accord with the use of the senses. Thus there is no difficulty there, except

157 in correctly deducing the consequences, which can be done by all sorts of people, even the less attentive, provided only that they remember what went before. And the minute differentiation of propositions was done for the purpose of making them easy to recite and thus can be committed to memory even by the recalcitrant.

But in these metaphysical matters, on the contrary, nothing is more an object of intense effort than causing its first notions to be clearly and distinctly perceived. For although they are by their nature no less known or even more known than those studied by geometers, nevertheless, because many of the prejudices of the senses (with which we have been accustomed since our infancy) are at odds with them, they are perfectly known only by those who are especially attentive and meditative and who withdraw their minds from corporeal things as much as possible. And if these first notions were put forward by themselves, they could easily be denied by those who are eager to engage in conflict.

This was why I wrote "meditations," rather than "disputations," as the philosophers do, or theorems and problems, as the geometers do: namely, so that by this very fact I might attest that the only dealings I would have were with those who, along with myself, did not refuse to consider the matter attentively and to meditate. For the very fact that someone girds himself to attack the truth renders him less suitable for perceiving it, since he is withdrawing himself from considering the arguments that attest to the truth in order to find other arguments that dissuade him of the truth.

158 But perhaps someone will object here that a person should not seek arguments for the sake of being contentious when he knows that the truth is set before him. But so long as this is in doubt, all the arguments on both sides ought to be assessed in order to know which ones are the more firm. And it would be unfair of me to want my arguments to be admitted as true before they had been scrutinized, while at the same time not allowing the consideration of opposing arguments.

This would certainly be a just criticism, if any of those things which I desire in an attentive and non-hostile reader were such that they could withdraw him from considering any other arguments in which there was the slightest hope of finding more truth than in my arguments. However, the greatest doubt is contained among the things I am proposing; moreover, there is nothing I more strongly urge than that each thing be scrutinized most diligently and that nothing is to be straightforwardly accepted except what has been so clearly and distinctly examined that we cannot but give our assent to it. On the other hand, the only matters from which I desire to divert the minds of my readers are things they have never sufficiently examined and that they derived not on the basis of a firm reason, but from the senses alone. As a consequence, I do not think anyone can believe that he will be in greater danger of error were he to consider only those things that

I propose to him than were he to withdraw his mind from them and turn it toward other things—things that are opposed to them in some way and that spread darkness—that is, toward the prejudices of the senses.

159 And thus I am right in desiring especially close attention on the part of my readers; and I have chosen the one style of writing over all the others with which I thought it can most especially be procured and from which I am convinced that readers will discern a greater profit than they would have thought, since, on the other hand, when the synthetic mode of writing is employed, people are likely to seem to themselves to have learned more than they actually did. But I also think it is fair for me straightforwardly to reject as worthless those criticisms made against me by those who have refused to meditate with me and who cling to their preformed opinions.

But I know how difficult it will be, even for those who pay close attention and earnestly search for the truth, to intuit the entire body of my Meditations and at the same time to discern its individual parts. I think both of these things ought to be done so that the full benefit may be derived from my Meditations. I shall therefore append here a few things in the synthetic style that I hope will prove somewhat helpful to my readers. Nevertheless, I wish they would take note of the fact that I did not intend to cover as much here as is found in my Meditations, otherwise I should then be more loquacious here than in the Meditations themselves; moreover, I will not explain in detail what I do include, partly out of a desire for brevity and partly to prevent anyone who thinks that my remarks here were sufficient from making a very cursory examination of the Meditations themselves, from which I am convinced that much more benefit is to be discerned.

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ARGUMENTS PROVING THE EXISTENCE OF GOD AND
THE DISTINCTION OF THE SOUL FROM THE BODY,
ARRANGED IN GEOMETRICAL FASHION

Definitions

I. By the word "thought" I include everything that is in us in such a way that we are immediately aware of it. Thus all the operations of the will, understanding, imagination, and senses are thoughts. But I added "immediately" to exclude those things that follow from these operations, such as voluntary motion, which surely has thought as its principle but nevertheless is not itself a thought.

II. By the word "idea" I understand that form of any thought through the immediate perception of which I am aware of that very same thought. Thus I could not express anything in words and understand what I am saying, without this very fact making it certain that there exists in me an idea of what is being signified by those words. And thus it is not the mere images depicted

in the corporeal imagination that I call "ideas." In point of fact, I in no way call these images "ideas," insofar as they are in the corporeal imagination, that is, insofar as they have been depicted in some part of the brain, but only insofar as they inform the mind itself that is turned toward that part of the brain. 161

III. By the "objective reality of an idea" I understand the being of the thing represented by an idea, insofar as it exists in the idea. In the same way one can speak of "objective perfection," "objective skill," and so on. For whatever we perceive to exist in the objects of our ideas exists objectively in these very ideas.

IV. The same things are said to exist "formally" in the objects of our ideas when they exist in these objects in just the way we perceive them, and to exist "eminently" in the objects of our ideas when they indeed are not in these objects in the way we perceive them, but have such an amount of perfection that they could fill the role of things existing formally.

V. Everything in which there immediately inheres, as in a subject, or through which there exists, something we perceive (that is, some property, or quality, or attribute whose real idea is in us) is called a "substance." For we have no other idea of substance itself, taken in the strict sense, except that it is a thing in which whatever we perceive or whatever is objectively in one of our ideas exists either formally or eminently, since it is evident by the light of nature that no real attribute can belong to nothing.

VI. That substance in which thought immediately resides is called "mind." However, I am speaking here of the mind rather than of the soul, since the word "soul" is equivocal and is often used for something corporeal.

VII. That substance which is the immediate subject of local extension and of the accidents that presuppose extension, such as shape, position, movement from place to place, and so on, is called "body." Whether what we call "mind" and what we call "body" are one and the same substance or two different ones, must be examined later on. 162

VIII. That substance which we understand to be supremely perfect and in which we conceive absolutely nothing that involves any defect or limitation upon its perfection is called "God."

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

X. Two substances are said to be really distinct from one another when each of them can exist without the other.

Postulates

I ask first that readers take note of how feeble are the reasons why they have up until now put their faith in their senses, and how uncertain are all

the judgments that they have constructed upon them; and that they review this within themselves for so long and so often that they finally acquire the habit of no longer placing too much faith in them. For I deem this necessary for perceiving the certainty of things metaphysical.

Second, I ask that readers ponder their own mind and all its attributes. They will discover that they cannot be in doubt about these things, even though they suppose that everything they ever received from the senses is false. And I ask them not to stop pondering this point until they have acquired for themselves the habit of perceiving it clearly and of believing that it is easier to know than anything corporeal.

163 Third, I ask that readers weigh diligently the self-evident propositions that they find within themselves, such as that the same thing cannot be and not be at the same time, that nothingness cannot be the efficient cause of anything, and the like. And thus readers may exercise the astuteness implanted in them by nature, pure and freed from the senses, but which the objects of sense are wont to cloud and obscure as much as possible. For by this means the truth of the axioms that follow will easily be known to them.

Fourth, I ask readers to examine the ideas of those natures that contain a combination of many accidents together, such as the nature of a triangle, the nature of a square, or of some other figure; and likewise the nature of the mind, the nature of the body, and, above all, the nature of God, the supremely perfect being. And I ask them to realize that all that we perceive to be contained in them truly can be affirmed of them. For example, the equality of its three angles to two right angles is contained in the nature of a triangle, and divisibility is contained in the nature of a body, that is, of an extended thing (for we can conceive of no extended thing that is so small that we could not at least divide it in thought). Such being the case, it is true to say of every triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles, and that every body is divisible.

164 Fifth, I ask readers to dwell long and earnestly in the contemplation of the nature of the supremely perfect being; and to consider, among other things, that possible existence is indeed contained in the ideas of all other things, whereas the idea of God contains not merely possible existence, but absolutely necessary existence. For from this fact alone and without any discursive reasoning they will know that God exists. And it will be no less self-evident to them than that the number two is even or that the number three is odd, and the like. For there are some things that are self-evident to some and understood by others only through discursive reasoning.

Sixth, I ask the readers to get into the habit of distinguishing things that are clearly known from things that are obscure, by carefully reviewing all the examples of clear and distinct perception, and likewise of obscure and confused perception that I have recounted in my Meditations. For this is some-

thing more easily learned from examples than from rules, and I think that therein I have either explained or at least to some extent touched upon all the examples pertaining to this subject.

Seventh, and finally, when readers perceive that they have never discovered any falsity in things they clearly perceived and that, on the other hand, they have never found truth in things they only obscurely grasped, except by chance, I ask them to consider that it is utterly irrational to call into doubt things that are clearly and distinctly perceived by the pure understanding merely on account of prejudices based on the senses or on account of hypotheses in which something unknown is contained. For thus they will easily admit the following axioms as true and indubitable. Nevertheless, many of these axioms could admittedly have been much better explained and ought to have been put forward as theorems rather than as axioms, had I wanted to be more precise.

Axioms, or Common Notions

I. Nothing exists concerning which we could not ask what the cause is of its existence. For this can be asked of God himself, not that he needs any cause in order to exist but because the very immensity of his nature is the cause or the reason why he needs no cause in order to exist. 165

II. The present time does not depend on the time immediately preceding it, and therefore no less a cause is required to preserve a thing than is initially required to produce it.

III. No thing, and no perfection of a thing actually existing in it, can have nothing, or a non-existing thing, as the cause of its existence.

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

V. Whence it also follows that the objective reality of our ideas requires a cause that contains this very same reality, and not merely objectively, but either formally or eminently. And we should note that the acceptance of this axiom is so necessary that the knowledge of all things, sensible as well as insensible, depends on it alone. For example, how is it we know that the sky exists? Because we see it? But this vision does not touch the mind except insofar as it is an idea: an idea, I say, inhering in the mind itself, not an image depicted in the corporeal imagination. And on account of this idea we are able to judge that the sky exists only because every idea must have a really existing cause of its objective reality; and we judge this cause to be the sky itself. The same holds for the rest.

VI. There are several degrees of reality or being; for a substance has more reality than an accident or a mode, and an infinite substance has more reality than a finite substance. Thus there is also more objective reality in the

166 idea of a substance than there is in the idea of an accident, and there is more objective reality in the idea of an infinite substance than there is in the idea of a finite substance.

VII. The will of a thinking thing is surely borne voluntarily and freely (for this is the essence of the will) but nonetheless infallibly toward the good that it clearly knows, and therefore, if it should know of any perfections that it lacks, it will immediately give them to itself, if they are within its power.

VIII. Whatever can make what is greater or more difficult can also make what is less.

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

X. Existence is contained in the idea or concept of everything, because we cannot conceive of something except as existing [*sub ratione existentiae*]. 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 I: The existence of God is known from the mere consideration of his nature.

Demonstration: To say that something is contained in the nature or concept of a thing is the same thing as saying that it is true of that thing 167 (Def. IX). But necessary existence is contained in the concept of God (Ax. X). Therefore it is true to say of God that necessary existence is in him, or that he exists.

And this is the syllogism I already made use of above in reply to the Sixth Objection⁷²; and its conclusion can be self-evident to those who are free of prejudices, as was stated in Postulate V. But since it is not easy to arrive at such astuteness, we will seek the same thing in other ways.

Proposition II: The existence of God is demonstrated a posteriori from the mere fact that the idea of God is in us.

Demonstration: The objective reality of any of our ideas requires a cause that contains this same reality not merely objectively but either formally or eminently (Ax. V). However, we have an idea of God (Defs. II and VII), the objective reality of which is contained in us neither formally nor eminently (Ax. VI), nor could it be contained in anything other than God (Def. VIII). Therefore this idea of God that is in us requires God as its cause, and thus God exists (Ax. III).

72. Descartes' reply to the sixth point raised in the *Second Set of Objections* discusses the criterion of clarity and distinctness and the proof of the existence of God found in Meditation Five. This reply may be found in AT VII 149–52.

Proposition III: The existence of God is also demonstrated from the fact that we ourselves who have the idea of God exist. 168

Demonstration: Had I the power to preserve myself, so much the more would I also have the power to give myself the perfections I lack (Axs. VIII and IX); for these are merely attributes of a substance, whereas I am a substance. But I do not have the power to give myself these perfections, otherwise I would already have them (Ax. VII). Therefore I do not have the power to preserve myself.

Next, I cannot exist without my being preserved during the time I exist, either by myself, if indeed I have this power, or by something else which has this power (Axs. I and II). But I do exist, and yet I do not have the power to preserve myself, as has already been proved. Therefore I am being preserved by something else.

Moreover, he who preserves me has within himself either formally or eminently all that is in me (Ax. IV). However, there is in me a perception of many of the perfections I lack, and at the same time there is in me the perception of the idea of God (Defs. II and VIII). Therefore, the perception of these same perfections is also in him who preserves me.

Finally, this same being cannot have a perception of any perfections he lacks or does not have in himself either formally or eminently (Ax. VIII), for since he has the power to preserve me, as has already been said, so much the more would he have the power to give himself those perfections were he to lack them (Axs. VIII and IX). But he has the perception of all the perfections I lack and that I conceive to be capable of existing in God alone, as has just been proved. Therefore he has these perfections within himself either formally or eminently, and thus he is God. 169

Corollary: God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them. Moreover, he can bring about all that we clearly perceive, precisely as we perceive it.

Demonstration: All these things clearly follow from the preceding proposition. For in that proposition I proved the existence of God from the fact that there must exist someone in whom either formally or eminently are all the perfections of which there is some idea in us. But there is in us an idea of such great power that the one in whom this power resides, and he alone, created the heavens and the earth and can also bring about all the other things that I understand to be possible. Thus, along with the existence of God, all these things have also been proved about him.

Proposition IV: Mind and body are really distinct.

Demonstration: Whatever we clearly perceive can be brought about by God in precisely the way we perceive it (by the preceding corollary). But we clearly perceive the mind, that is, a substance that thinks, apart from the body, that is, apart from any extended substance (Post. II); and vice versa, we 170

clearly perceive the body apart from the mind (as everyone readily admits). Therefore, at least by the divine power, the mind can exist without the body, and the body without the mind.

Now certainly, substances that can exist one without the other are really distinct (Def. X). But the mind and the body are substances (Defs. V, VI, and VII) that can exist one without the other (as has just been proved). Therefore the mind and the body are really distinct.

And we should note here that I used divine power as a means of separating mind and body, not because some extraordinary power is required to achieve this separation, but because I had dealt exclusively with God in what preceded, and thus I had nothing else I could use as a means. Nor is it of any importance what power it is that separates two things in order for us to know that they are really distinct.

171 *Third Set of Objections, by a famous English philosopher,⁷³
with the Author's Replies*

*Against Meditation I: Concerning Those Things That Can Be
Called into Doubt*

Objection: It is sufficiently obvious from what has been said in this Meditation that there is no κριτήριον [criterion] by which we may distinguish our dreams from the waking state and from true sensation; and for this reason the phantasms we have while awake and using our senses are not accidents inhering in external objects, nor do they prove that such objects do in fact exist. Therefore, if we follow our senses without any other process of reasoning, we will be justified in doubting whether anything exists. Therefore, we acknowledge the truth of this Meditation. But since Plato and other ancient philosophers have discussed this same uncertainty in sensible things, and since it is commonly observed that there is a difficulty in distinguishing waking from dreams, I would have preferred the author, so very distinguished in the realm of new speculations, not to have published these old things.

172 Reply: The reasons for doubting, which are accepted here as true by the philosopher, were proposed by me as merely probable; and I made use of them not to peddle them as something new, but partly to prepare the minds of readers for the consideration of matters geared to the understanding and for distinguishing them from corporeal things, goals for which these arguments seem to me wholly necessary; partly to respond to these same arguments in subsequent Meditations; and partly also to show how firm those

73. That is, Thomas Hobbes.