

THE PROOFS OF GOD'S EXISTENCE
IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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THE PROOFS OF GOD'S EXISTENCE IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS

by

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ABSTRACT

Descartes' Meditations have as their explicitly stated goals the proofs of the existence of God and the proof of the distinction between mind and body. A third goal, implicit in this work, is the setting of the mathematical sciences upon a firm foundation. This study endeavours to provide an account of the first of those goals, the proofs of God's existence, with a view to showing their significance both within the analytic framework Descartes adopts in the Meditations and within the context of Descartes' philosophy as a whole.

In the first chapter, a general outline of Descartes' method is presented. Within the context of this method, the particular method employed in the Meditations, i.e. analysis, is then discussed.

The proofs for God's existence in the third Meditation presuppose a level of abstraction from the world of sense perception that can only result from the doubt of the first and second Meditations. Chapter Two traces the extent of this doubt.

In order to properly understand the proofs for God's existence

in Meditation Three, several important Cartesian doctrines must be noted. Chapter Three discusses, for example, the doctrines of representative perception, of objective reality in ideas, and of degrees of reality.

In the fourth chapter, the proofs of God's existence in Meditation Three are treated. These proofs are shown to follow directly from the process of doubt and the method of analysis, and they are also shown to reduce to the same fundamental intuition, 'I exist, therefore God exists'.

The final chapter of this study opens with the proof of the truth of clear and distinct ideas consequent upon God's veracity. It is then argued that this proof underlies the a priori argument for God's existence in Meditation Five. Finally, this proof of God's existence is shown to be present in the Meditations in order to undermine the 'natural' doubt arising from the mind's reflection upon its own clear and distinct ideas. With this proof, a science of the external world becomes possible.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AT: Oeuvres de Descartes, publiées par Charles Adam et Paul Tannery, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1964.

AG: Descartes Philosophical Writings, translated and edited by E. Anscombe and P.T. Geach, London: Nelson, 1966.

CB: Descartes' Conversation With Burman, translated by John Cottingham, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

HR1, HR11: The Philosophical Works of Descartes (two vols.), translated by E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931.

NKS: Descartes Philosophical Writings, translated by N.K. Smith, London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1952.

CHAPTER ONE

Descartes' Method

This study of the proofs of God's existence in Descartes' Meditations begins, appropriately, with a discussion of what Descartes deems to be essential to the understanding of any truth whatsoever, namely the method by which truth is to be attained. Descartes' aim is, indeed truth; it is the aim of any exercise undertaken by the mind in the study of itself and all it thinks: "The aim of our studies should be that of so guiding our mental powers that they are made capable of passing sound and true judgments on all that presents itself to us." ¹ This statement begins what is considered to be Descartes' earliest philosophical endeavour ², and it is a conviction he carried with him until his death in 1649. Truth is not an impossible ideal for Descartes. Like Plato, Descartes believes that truth corresponds to 'what is' or to 'reality', but, unlike Plato, he deems truth to be in the grasp of

the existing individual. The difference between these two viewpoints is ultimately explicable only in terms of almost two thousand years of philosophical history, a difference that can only be noted here. Let it suffice to say that, for Descartes, the human mind can possess truth, truth which is known to be divinely sanctioned but nevertheless conditioned by the requirements of subjective certainty; and it is the business of Descartes' method to construct the guidelines or rules by which such knowledge of 'what is' can be attained.

Even the casual reader of Descartes' works cannot fail to be struck by the importance Descartes attaches to the method according to which the mind is supposed to approach any subject. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that, for Descartes, the method by which a truth is attained and that truth itself are inseparable. Later in this chapter, when a particular aspect of method, i.e. analysis, is examined, it will be seen how, for Descartes, truths which are the result of a deductive proof cannot be considered apart from their deductive framework. This is especially true of the arguments for God's existence. For now, however, this general overview of Descartes' method will be aided by the following passage from the Rules For the Direction of the Mind.

"So blind is the curiosity with which mortals are possessed, that they often conduct their minds along unexplored routes; having no reason to hope for success, but merely being willing to risk the experiment of finding whether the truth they seek lies there. As well might a man burning with an unintelligent desire to find treasure, continuously roam the streets, seeking to find something that a passer by might have chanced to drop. This is the way in which most Chemists, many Geometricians, and Philosophers not a few prosecute their studies. I do not deny that sometimes in these wanderings they are lucky enough to find something true. But I do not allow that this argues greater industry on their part, but only better luck. But however that may be, it were far better never to think of investigating truth at all, than to do so without a method. For it is very certain that unregulated inquiries and confused reflections of this kind only confound the natural light and blind our mental powers. Those who so become accustomed to walk in darkness weaken their eye-sight so much that afterwards they cannot bear the light of day. This is confirmed by experience; for how often do we not see that those who have never taken to letters, give a sounder and clearer decision about obvious matters than those who have spent all their time in the schools? Moreover by a method I mean certain and simple rules, such that, if a man observe them accurately, he shall never assume what is false as true, and will never spend his mental efforts to no purpose, but will always gradually increase his knowledge and so arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass his powers."

Several important issues are raised in this passage. First, the overall purpose of Descartes' philosophy, and in particular of the Meditations, is prefigured here. That purpose is the setting of the 'sciences', the sum total of human wisdom or thought⁴, upon a firm foundation. What does the notion of a 'firm foundation' imply? It implies that there can be no question of 'risk' or 'chance' in mankind's quest for truth. Descartes does not deny "that sometimes in these wanderings [after truth] they are lucky enough to find

something true." The point is, however, that in luck there is, in the end, no guarantee. What the mind discovers in its aimless wanderings may indeed be the truth, but it could not be known to be the truth. Only the guarantee of a valid method can provide this knowledge. One might say that truth, like meaning, requires a certain framework. Essentially the same point is made, albeit in a different context; when Descartes asserts that, though the mathematical reasonings of the atheist might indeed be true, the atheist cannot know them to be indubitably true. ⁵

In the above-quoted passage, a second, equally important issue is raised. In noting "how often those who have never taken to letters give a sounder and clearer decision about matters than those who have spent all their time in the schools", Descartes is suggesting not only that the mode of learning and thought expounded in the schools is both haphazard and blind, but, in contrasting this Scholastic mode with the 'natural' process of thought, he is also suggesting that the method by which truth is attained is by no means foreign to or different from the 'natural' or 'right' use of reason. One of Descartes' aims is to demonstrate how the Scholastic view of the proper procedure of reason is fundamentally untenable in terms of the nature of the mind itself. Throughout his works Descartes continually speaks of the "right use of reason" ⁶, and, in the passage immediately succeeding the above quotation, there is an unequivocal identification of method and thought itself. If man is

to possess knowledge, writes Descartes, then the mind's natural abilities must be complemented by the appropriate method.

"For, if we are without the knowledge of any of the things which we are capable of understanding, that is only because we have never perceived any way to bring us to this knowledge, or because we have fallen into the contrary error. But if our method rightly explains how our mental vision should be used, so as not to fall into the contrary error, and how deduction should be discovered in order that we may arrive at the knowledge of all things, I do not see what else is needed to make it complete..."

II.

Descartes states that his method consists of "certain and simple rules". What are these rules? The practitioner of this method will "never assume what is false is true"; how will this be insured? Finally, a "gradual increase" in knowledge is promised, such that the mind adhering to this method will "arrive at a true understanding of all that does not surpass [its] powers"; in what manner does the method facilitate this result?

The answers to these questions can only be obtained after an explicit statement of those "certain and simple rules" - actually, they were better called 'precepts', as will be seen. Descartes devotes two major works to a treatment of his method, the Rules For the Direction of the Mind and the Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason [henceforth referred to as Discourse]. For

present purposes, it would be more expedient to confine the discussion to the method as it is presented in the latter work.

There, although Descartes takes pains to assure the reader that the method he prescribes is more his own approach than an objective method for the discovery of truth⁸, it may be taken to be the method by which truth, which for Descartes is subjectively conditioned, is arrived at, precisely because it is an account of his own personal journey to this goal. Indeed, it is the subjective nature of Descartes' method, and its affinity to the natural and corresponding right use of reason that distinguishes the method outlined by the Discourse from the more formal approaches adopted by Scholastic philosophers. The following passage, cited here in full and to be taken as the summation of the Cartesian method, was originally written not in Latin but in French, "the language of Descartes' country", as if to illustrate this point.⁹

"And as a multiplicity of laws often furnishes excuses for evil-doing, and as a State is hence much better ruled when, having but very few laws, these are most strictly observed; so, instead of the great number of precepts of which Logic is composed, I believed that I should find the four which I shall state quite sufficient, provided that I adhered to a firm and constant resolve never on any single occasion to fail in their observance.

"The first of these was to accept nothing as true which I did not clearly recognise to be so: that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitation and prejudice in judgments, and to accept in them nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it.

"The second was to divide up each of the difficulties which

I examined into as many parts as possible, and as seemed requisite in order that it might be resolved in the best manner possible.

"The third was to carry on my reflections in due order, commencing with objects that were the most simple and easy to understand, in order to rise little by little, or by degrees, to knowledge of the most complex, assuming an order, even if a fictitious one, among those which do not follow a natural sequence relatively to one another.

"The last was, in all cases to make enumerations so complete and reviews so general that I should be certain of having omitted nothing." ¹⁰

Anyone expecting a strict set of guidelines constituting the right use of reason will clearly be disappointed by the rather loosely constructed precepts presented by Descartes. Nothing more than common sense seems necessary to construct such a method. Aside from the fact that the paucity of Descartes' formulation of the method, both here in the Discourse and elsewhere, has been strongly criticized by commentators of his own and the present day ¹¹, its apparent indefiniteness is indicative of a point already noted: the correct method by which reason will come to an understanding of all that is within its grasp is the method most suited to reason itself, most conducive to the way in which reason resolves or 'discovers' the solution of the problem that confronts it. The effective value of the method lies, as Descartes states, not in its complexity - for, indeed, complexity would only diminish its worth; but, rather, in the strict adherence to simple precepts. Moreover, adherence to these guidelines must be observed in all disciplines, for this method

expresses the proper mode of reasoning per se.

The two principles that method and thinking are inseparable, and that method must be closely observed, are held together by a simple rationale, as old as philosophy itself. Knowledge, or the active pursuit thereof, can be viewed as virtue - in the sense of art or techné - for Descartes¹². Knowledge must be pursued as a craftsman approaches his craft, that is, methodically, repetitively, until each step in the process of creating a product (or, in this case, of reaching a knowledge of the truth) becomes almost second nature, with the result that the product, truth, is known, as Descartes would say, intuitively. In the philosophy of Descartes, it is this most basic element of intuition, be it of the self and of God in *Metaphysics*, or of 'straightness' in *Geometry*, that comprises the starting point in all knowledge. Yet only the practiced art of thinking along the lines prescribed above, can yield such intuition. In order to see how the method accomplishes its goal, it is now necessary to examine each of the four steps of this 'art of thinking'.

The opening rule Descartes lays down for the right employment of reason appears at first sight to be ridiculously inadequate as a starting point. Descartes seems to say, rather trivially, 'accept nothing as true which one doesn't consider true'.¹³ However, in that first rule there are at least four important and closely related aspects of Descartes' general epistemological doctrine which must be mentioned if Descartes' point is to be properly understood. The

first aspect is this: it is necessary that the subject, i.e. the 'I', "accept nothing as true that isn't clearly recognised to be so". In other words, in the philosophy of Descartes, there is a direct equation of subjective certainty and truth. However another point is implicit here, and that is that the 'acceptance' of anything as true be an acceptance by the will of clear and distinct ideas of the understanding: for this reason Descartes warns against "precipitation and prejudice in judgements", which occur, as will later become evident, either when the intellect allows an admixture of sensuously based elements to enter judgement, or, when the infinite will outruns the finite understanding.¹⁴ The criterion of the mind's persuasion of a truth is the third point implied by this first rule of method, that is that the idea presented to the mind must be "clear and distinct". These qualities of clarity and distinctness constitute the subjective criteria of certainty and therefore of truth in Descartes' epistemology. These terms are psychological, pertaining to the subject, a point indicative of Descartes' belief that the unprejudiced mind, which will perceive clearly and distinctly, will at the same time also perceive what is true.

The fact that the mind is unprejudiced will ensure that the content of ideas is intelligible to the understanding in a clear and distinct manner. It is the fourth aspect of Descartes' first rule of method which brings about this unprejudiced state of mind. Through doubt Descartes purges the mind of all its unclear ideas. Particular

evidence of doubt as a means of arriving at clear and distinct ideas is, of course, found in the Meditations. There, doubt, considered as an application of method, is regarded as more essential for use in metaphysical considerations than, for example, in the mathematical disciplines.

The second precept of the Discourse requires the division of a problem into simpler elements, which may then be better understood by the mind. It has also been termed the 'rule of analysis', though in fact the term 'analysis', as Etienne Gilson states ¹⁵, may also be applied correctly to the third precept. The 'analysis', in the sense of the 'division' of a problem into simpler components, is quite distinct from the 'method of analysis' employed in the Meditations; and in this latter sense, the third precept of the Discourse may be more aptly termed the 'rule of analysis'. In any case, this second rule of method advocates the division of a problem into its simpler components. For Descartes, complex ideas admit of resolution into 'simple natures', which the mind can intuit clearly and distinctly. Analysis seeks to divide a problem up into simple natures, whose mutual connection to one another and priority in knowledge are rendered 'self-evident' and clear and distinct by this process. The doctrine of simple natures is an important aspect of Descartes' epistemology, and merits somewhat closer attention here.

Since these simple natures, which for Descartes are innate to the mind, are the most elementary, primary components of knowledge,

they also demarcate the limits of knowledge in terms of the reduction of complex problems or ideas. Beyond these simple ideas, which are known per se by an intuitive act of the mind, one cannot go. They are the simplest ideas of the mind and cannot be broken down further, so that even the most basic idea must be composed of at least one of these simple natures.¹⁶ Their essence is what is now visible to the intellect, and, given that truth and being are in the end the same in Descartes' philosophy, these essences are also the ultimate components of reality.¹⁷ Furthermore, as these primary elements of thought and reality are of the simplest nature, so is the way in which they are made present to the mind. The mode of the mind's cognition of simple natures is intuitive. The mind 'rests' upon its object, as it were, and is illumined by the 'natural light'.

"Or, what comes to the same thing, intuition is the undoubting conception of an unclouded and attentive mind, and springs from the light of reason alone; it is more certain than deduction itself, in that it is simpler, though deduction, as we have noted above, cannot by us be erroneously conducted."¹⁸

To enumerate briefly the kinds of simple ideas possessed by the mind, one need only think of the modes of knowledge (and reality) that exist in the philosophy of Descartes. There are simple ideas of an intellectual nature, such as 'mind', 'knowledge', and 'doubt'. There are simple ideas pertaining to corporeal substance, such as 'extension', 'figure', and 'motion'. There are, finally, simple notions common to both, such as 'existence', and 'duration'.

Furthermore, there exists another variety of simple natures¹⁹, equally important to the mind's knowledge of reality, and this group includes such ideas as 'unity', 'equality', 'cause', and even the idea of God, which in the epistemology of Descartes, takes absolute priority among these simple natures. Clearly, many of these terms are rather abstract in nature, and can be rendered comprehensible only in a mind unfettered by the prejudices of the senses. Such, for example, is the idea of God. As to the accessibility of other of these simple notions, "it is often easier to be aware of several of them in union with each other, than to separate one of them from the others." A triangle is thus easier to grasp than the more abstract notion of the number 'three', containing as it does the simple notions 'angle', 'line', and 'three'.²⁰

As all knowledge is either of or composed of these simple notions, it is the case that their combination or composition constitutes the limits to which knowledge may be extended. In theory at least, all such constructive knowledge should be intuitive in nature; in his Rules For the Direction of the Mind, Descartes even prescribes the constant repetition of the steps in the deduction to and from simples, in order to maintain the mind's intuitive attitude. Finally, as to the nature of this reconstruction of knowledge from the simple natures, Descartes isolates two ways in which they can be united. Their union can be either necessary or contingent. It is necessary, writes Descartes, "when one is so implied in the concept

of another in a confused sort of way that we cannot conceive either distinctly, if our thought assigns to them separateness from each other." 21

At first sight this statement appears to be a direct contradiction of the very doctrine of simple natures, which doctrine asserts precisely their independence and conceivability apart from each other. The contradiction is resolved, however, when one considers that the issue here is the union of simple natures, i.e. the mind's active combining, which is the function of the will, as opposed to its passive conceiving, which is the domain of the understanding. Thus, while figure and extension can, in the most abstract manner, be conceived apart from one another, i.e. they are ultimately two distinct notions, their union is nevertheless an inseparable union. Figure, conceived as a general abstraction, is a perfectly intelligible idea, but it is impossible to conceive of any particular existing figure lacking extension. While simple natures may be inseparably united, such that this union is necessary per se, the union is not always known as necessary quoad nos. This second kind of necessary union is what becomes apparent only in the context of the Meditations, where, from the subject's particular existence, its necessary union with an existing God is proven. This is demonstrated by the proof of the impossibility of the subject's conceiving or distinguishing its finite nature apart from the conception of God's infinite nature. As stated, the connection

revealed by this proof is not at all evident quoad nos, and requires an extraordinary attitude of mind, in the order of a meditation, to be known.

"Likewise many things are often necessarily united with one another, though most people, not noticing what their true relation is, reckon them among those that are contingently connected. As example, I give the following propositions: - 'I exist, therefore God exists': also 'I know, therefore I have a mind distinct from my body,' etc."

The second manner in which these simple ideas are combined is of a contingent nature, in that the 'bond' is not inseparable. Descartes refers to the examples of a "clothed man", or - and this is perhaps a better example, in that the terms are more easily grasped as 'simple' - an "animate body". In the case of necessary connections, it is the principle of contradiction that reigns; in the former case, this principle is absent, and there is no necessity involved. To sum up: both the necessary and the contingent relations between simple natures make up the bounds of man's knowledge, and, as will be seen, these bounds, which include a limited knowledge of God, are what are discovered by the Meditations.

Once a problem has been reduced to its simple components, the third rule of the Discourse, often referred to as the 'rule of synthesis', may be applied. In essence, this rule calls for the reconstruction of that which analysis divides up. However, the all-important issue here is how this reconstruction is to occur. According to what principle are the elements of any problem to be

reconstructed? Descartes' answer to this question is in fact a concise summary of his procedure in the Meditations. The order that determines this reconstruction is the order 'natural' to the mind, which order will proceed from what the mind deems simple to what the mind deems complex; even if this order among the various components does "not follow a natural [in the sense of 'real' or 'actual'] sequence" relative to each component. Once again the subjective nature of Descartes' method becomes evident.

Later in this chapter, it will be seen how, in the presentation of any body of knowledge, the second and third precepts of the Discourse are inseparable from one another. At this point, however, the fourth rule of the Discourse may be dealt with. To note briefly the importance of this last rule, it can be said that without sufficient enumeration of a problem's elements, i.e. if a problem were not sufficiently divided up, the mind would be hindered in its reconstruction of knowledge. Ideas would remain obscure, in other words, rendering it impossible for the mind to move from simpler to more complex ideas. By a similar token, the failure to provide a thorough enumeration of a problem's components, even if the few components enumerated were clearly and distinctly known by the mind, would result in inadequate 'data' for the construction of any intelligible order.

A more precise statement of the concepts highlighted above in connection with Descartes' method can be found in the Rules For the

Direction of the Mind. There, one is even presented with specific exercises for practice in the right use of reason. If the object of this study were the analysis and criticism of Descartes' method per se, this seminal text would feature more prominently in the discussion. However, as the particular application of the method of 'analysis' in Descartes' Meditations, and that method's bearing on his proofs for God's existence, are the more immediate concerns here, these reflections on the general purport of the Cartesian method will suffice. It remains to isolate and identify this method of 'analysis' in the context of the general method of the Discourse and Rules for the Direction of the Mind.

III.

Descartes claims that the method he employs in all branches of intellectual endeavour is the method best suited to the constitution of the understanding. It has also been noted that Descartes held his position largely in opposition to the Scholastic and Sceptical standpoints. The former standpoint is what is of interest here, in that it is mainly the Scholastic method of 'synthesis', with its rigorous adherence to the syllogism, that Descartes' method is meant to replace. The principal reason why Descartes rejects the syllogistic/synthetic method is precisely because it ignores the 'subjective' element in the mind's journey to the truth: one of the

cardinal requirements of the first precept in Descartes' method, clearness and distinctness, is neglected. The synthetic method of proof, with its initial statement of definitions, postulates, axioms and syllogisms, commands merely the formal assent of the reader.²³ It does not insure that each step of the demonstration carries with it for the reader the intuitive certainty that attends the knowledge, for example, of the simple natures which 'analysis' uncovers. Thus, the knowledge of the student who ponders over the formal proofs of the schoolmen need not necessarily be a real knowledge in which the knower actively participates, for, as Descartes puts it, "though we have mastered all the arguments of Plato and Aristotle, if yet we have not the capacity for passing a solid judgment on these matters, [neither] shall we become Philosophers; we should have acquired the knowledge not of a science, but of history."²⁴ Another problem with the synthetic method is that the very definitions, postulates and axioms in which this method traffics may themselves require deduction or analysis, and in this same degree they may lack clarity and distinctness for the mind.²⁵

There remains another objection to the synthetic method which, in the context of Descartes' philosophy as a whole, and its place in the history of philosophy, is of extraordinary consequence. This objection can only be understood in terms of Descartes' own perception of the condition into which formal learning had degenerated. Alexander Koyre, in his book Descartes und die

Scholastik²⁶, speaks of the syllogistic method as having been reduced to, at best, "unfruchtbare Spaltereien" - the fruitless splitting of hairs. The reason for this lies in the fact that, as an instrument for scientific and philosophical inquiry, Descartes considered the syllogism to be inadequate, and more appropriately confined to rhetoric and Scholastic polemics. This generally unproductive character of the syllogistic method is what is alluded to in the following passage, where Descartes informs the reader that, because the syllogism contains both universal and particular knowledge (just as species are subsumed under genera), the syllogism's conclusion offers no new knowledge, i.e. there is nothing in the conclusion of a syllogism which is not already contained in its premises. Like Kant one-hundred and fifty years later, Descartes was keenly aware that philosophy, unlike many others of the sciences of his day, had failed miserably to resolve any of the questions it had set for itself. Replacing the syllogism with the method outlined in the Discourse was one of Descartes' solutions:

"But, to say a few words more, that it may appear still more evident that this [syllogistic/synthetic] style of argument contributes nothing at all to the discovery of the truth, we must note that the Dialecticians are unable to devise any syllogism which has a true conclusion, unless they have first secured the material out of which to construct it, i.e. unless they have already ascertained the very truth which is deduced in that syllogism. Whence it is clear that from a formula of this kind they can gather nothing that is new, and hence the ordinary Dialectic is quite valueless for those who desire to investigate the truth of things, its only possible use is to serve to explain at times more easily to others the truths we have already ascertained;

hence it should be transferred from Philosophy to Rhetoric."

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What underlies this view of the syllogism is yet another aspect of the 'subjective' nature of the Cartesian method. Although the major premise of the syllogism purportedly contains universal knowledge, e.g. 'All men are mortal, for Descartes, man's mind "is so constituted that general propositions are formed out of the knowledge of particulars." 28 For this reason, Descartes rebukes anyone who would understand the statement "I think, therefore I am," as syllogistically derived from the premise, "Everything that thinks is, or exists." 29 Descartes points out that, in order for the latter statement to be known, the thinking subject must have conscious experience of its own particular existence first.

To say that the synthetic or syllogistic method is viewed by Descartes as completely inadequate, is not entirely accurate. For Descartes does admit that this method, as a method of exposition of the natural sequence or 'order of reality' 30, undoubtedly has its usefulness. The synthetic method may indeed be beneficial in the exposition of the truths already discovered by the method of analysis, which analysis, in its procedure, advances according to the 'order of the mind's own discovery' of these truths. In other words, what the synthetic method exposes is the logical and ontological order of truth, independent of all considerations of how the subject comes to discover that order. As a result of this, the synthetic

mode of exposition is inherently more didactic than its analytic counterpart, for it presents its material as a finished product of the mind's arduous labours in the actual discovery of truth. The knowledge uncovered by the analytic procedure of reasoning in the Meditations is presented in the synthetically ordered Principles of Philosophy, says Descartes, "in an order which will make it easy to teach." ³¹ Finally, this pedagogic employment of the synthetic mode of reasoning is coupled with a practical use:

"Yet we do not therefore condemn that method of philosophizing which others have already discovered and those weapons of the schoolmen, probable syllogisms, which are so well suited for polemics. They indeed give practice to the wits of youths and, producing emulation among them, act as a stimulus; and it is much better for their minds to be moulded by opinions of this sort, uncertain though they appear, as being objects of controversy among the learned, than to be left entirely to their own devices." ³²

At best, then, practice in the art of syllogizing acts as an implement for sharpening the wits, but the syllogistic/synthetic method must be soundly rejected as the method by which mankind can increase its knowledge. The break Descartes makes with this Scholastic stock in trade is summed up in the partially biographical continuation of the above-cited passage:

"We ourselves rejoice that we in earlier years experienced this scholastic training; but now, being released from that oath of allegiance which bound us to our old masters, and since, as becomes our riper years, we are no longer subject to the ferule, if we wish in earnest to establish for ourselves those rules which shall aid us in scaling the heights of human knowledge, we must admit assuredly among

the primary members of our catalogue that maxim which forbids it to abuse our leisure time as many do, who neglect all easy quests and take up their time only with difficult matters; for they, though certainly making all sorts of subtle conjectures and elaborating most plausible arguments with great ingenuity, frequently find too late that after all their labours they have only increased the multitude of their doubts, without acquiring any knowledge whatsoever."

IV.

This account of Descartes' views on method has opened the path to what is perhaps the central concern of this chapter: the analytic method - specifically, the analytic method of the Meditations. Some of its key features have already been noted: its 'subjective' nature, and, correlatively, that it is a method of discovery. What must still be expressed is both a concise statement of its nature, and the demonstration of its indispensability as the appropriate method of the Meditations, as well as its importance for a proper understanding of that work.

Before considering the precise nature of the analytic method, it would first be best to note that, in any presentation of a body of truths, be it according to the analytic or synthetic method, a certain order is followed. Simply put, this order "consists merely in putting forward those things first that should be known without the aid of what comes subsequently, and arranging all other matters so that their proof depends solely on what precedes them." ³⁴ Since

all order, even that expressed by the synthetic method, proceeds from the known to the unknown, the criticism of the syllogism's infertility arises not because it doesn't follow this order, but because it does so only after the mind has already uncovered the truths contained in its premises. The syllogism was found merely to rearrange that which was already ascertained by the subject.

Under the general category of 'order', the analytic and synthetic methods are to be subsumed. It is appropriate, as with synthesis, to consider analysis in its relation to the subject's involvement in the proof of the truths derived by that subject. Descartes contrasts 'analysis', the method of discovery, with the formal, synthetic mode of exposition, in the following manner:

"Analysis shows the true way by which a thing was methodically discovered and derived, as it were effect from cause [*tanquam a priori*], so that, if the reader care to follow it and give sufficient attention to everything, he understands the matter no less perfectly and makes it as much his own as if he had himself discovered it. But it contains nothing to incite belief in an inattentive or hostile reader; for if the very least thing brought forward escapes his notice, the necessity of the conclusions is lost..." 35

Several important points are given in this passage. First, since this method "shows the true way in which a thing was methodically discovered", in essence it charts the 'natural' course taken by the mind in its deliberations on truth. Although all method proceeds from the "more known", that is, "putting forward those things that should be known without the aid of what comes

subsequently", in analysis the mind moves solely on the basis of what is already subjectively known, or, as the Scholastics would say, on the basis of what is known quoad nos rather than per se.

Another point concerning the analytic method is that, because it maintains a greater affinity to the natural process of thought, the person who pursues this method will arrive at a knowledge "as if he had himself discovered it." Such a knowledge will be - in the case of philosophy, for example - a real knowledge, and not simply a knowledge of history. However, the practitioner of this method cannot be "inattentive or hostile". One must be willing and able to dispense with the sensuously grounded prejudices that enter and cloud the mind. For this reason, while the knowledge attained by this method may indeed be the most 'real' in terms of the subject's experience - and in this sense analysis is "the best and truest method of teaching"³⁶ - it is certainly not the most easily acquired knowledge, as it is just these prejudices of the senses that are so hard to shed.

In the second set of objections to Descartes' Meditations, Mersenne, representing a group of theologians and philosophers, requests that Descartes advance "as premises certain definitions, postulates and axioms", and thence draw the same conclusions present in the Meditations, "conducting the whole proof by the geometrical method", i.e. according to the method of synthesis.³⁷ This Descartes does, somewhat reluctantly, and he limits the subject

matter to the proofs for God's existence. In the course of his introductory comments to this appendix to his reply, Descartes discusses the proper method of proof to be employed in metaphysics. It is, he says, the method of analysis. In contrasting the two methods, Descartes notes that the subject matter of metaphysics does not readily lend itself to synthetic exposition. Geometrical truths certainly do, for "the primary notions that are the presuppositions of geometrical proofs harmonize with the use of our senses, and are readily granted by all." ³⁸ Metaphysical truths, however, in order to be comprehended, require the highest level of abstraction from the senses, for, ultimately, they are of a nature more clear and distinct, more 'intelligible', than any geometrical truth could be. In order to be grasped, therefore, the complete attention of the reader is demanded, as is, correspondingly, the mind's complete withdrawal from the sensuous realm. For Descartes, the attempt to establish the truths of metaphysics "took the form of Meditations rather than that of Philosophical Disputations or the theorems and problems of a geometer; so that hence I might by this very fact testify that I had no dealings except with those who will not shrink from joining me in giving the matter attentive care and meditation."

39

Having considered the nature of analysis and synthesis, and why Descartes said he used only analysis in the Meditations, and having further noted Descartes' view of the importance of method per se and

its inseparability from truth, one question remains. Given that method is inseparable from truth; and given that Descartes deliberately and meticulously - or so this study will attempt to show - employs a particular method in presenting his proofs in the Meditations: is it possible to correctly understand and evaluate any one of the proofs of the Meditations - for example, the proofs of God's existence in Meditation Three or the proof in Meditation Five - independent of these considerations of method? In the light of what has already been said, and on the strength of arguments in subsequent chapters, this possibility must be denied.

Much of what Descartes says in answering criticism of his Meditations is found in his Replies to the Objections and throughout his many letters. Of those replies, many take the form of rebuking the objector for taking Descartes to task on issues no one would have raised had account been taken of the order and position in which a particular 'reason' or argument appears in the Meditations. This is especially true in the case of the proofs for God's existence, and the order in which they occur. Descartes himself attributes great importance to understanding his proofs of God's existence in the order in which they are presented. Replying to the student Burman's query as to why there is more than one argument for God's existence in the Meditations, Descartes says:

"By contrast, the other argument in the Fifth Meditation proceeds a priori and does not start from some effect. In the Meditations that argument comes later than the one here;

the fact that it comes later, while the proof in this Meditation [i.e. Meditation Three] comes first, is the result of the order in which the author discovered the two proofs. In the Principles, however, he reverses the order; for the method and order of discovery is one thing, and that of exposition another."⁴⁰

Further, in a letter to Mersenne, Descartes/talks more generally about the significance of order in his philosophy.

"It should be noted that in all my writing I do not follow the order of topics [l'ordre des mati res], but the order of arguments [l'ordre des raisons]. I mean that I do not attempt to say in a single place everything about a topic, for in that way I could not give proper proofs since some of my arguments involve more distant researches than others. But in orderly reasoning from easier matters to more difficult matters I make what deductions I can, first on one topic, then on another."

V.

In recent decades, Descartes has found a sympathetic champion of his doctrine of the 'order of reasons' in the person of M. Gueroult, who, in his many works devoted to the subject ⁴², attempts, from the point of view of this doctrine of the 'order of reasons', to defend many of the arguments of Descartes' philosophy, or at least render them more intelligible. Yet, with respect to the position, function, and ultimate validity of the arguments for God's existence in the Meditations, even Gueroult's account suffers some shortcomings. Nowhere is this more clearly evidenced than in his controversy with

Henri Gouhier.⁴³ In this controversy, one of the focal points of dispute deals with the position and function of the a priori proof of God's existence, the so-called 'ontological argument', in the fifth Meditation.⁴⁴ As one would expect, Gueroult holds that this proof is really only intelligible and valid within the context of the analytic order of reasons of the Meditations, while Gouhier adheres to the independent validity of this argument. The present study is, in part at least, devoted to this question raised by the two commentators.

Besides the dispute concerning the a priori argument, however, there are several other problems, all interrelated, that will have to be dealt with if an adequate assessment of the priority, function and position not only of this proof of Meditation Five, but also of the proofs for God's existence in Meditation Three is to be undertaken. Issues such as the 'validation' of clear and distinct ideas and the alleged circularity of the first proof of God's existence, the extent to which Descartes' metaphysical doubt is employed in the Meditations, and with this the nature of the 'evil genius' hypothesis: all these issues figure prominently in the understanding of the arguments for God's existence. Each comprises a fundamental and indispensable stepping stone in the meditative exercise which carries Descartes from the one indubitable truth of his own existence to the truth of the existence of the external world and his knowledge thereof. To conclude with a statement of the goals of this study of

the Meditations: above all, an interpretation is sought that renders Descartes' proofs of God's existence intelligible and consistent with his own stated understanding of them. This will require that it be demonstrated exactly how, according to the analytic order of reasons, God's existence really is entailed by the existence of the thinking subject. Such a demonstration demands that Descartes be absolved from the charge of employing circular reasoning in the proof of God in Meditation Three. Furthermore, this study must reveal why it is that the proofs in Meditation Three are there of necessity, and why the a priori argument could not have been validly stated in their place. Finally, perhaps the most difficult task remains: to show the necessity of the presence of the a priori proof of God in Meditation Five.

CHAPTER TWO

The Limits of Doubt

9

In the first chapter of this thesis, mention was made of the appropriateness of the method of analysis for the treatment of the problems specifically raised by the Meditations. Having dealt with the nature of the analytic method, it is now necessary to inquire first into the purpose and then into the subject matter of that treatise. The intricate work of tracing the limits of Cartesian doubt from the initial standpoint of the unreflecting 'prejudiced' subject to the standpoint of the mind capable of asserting only the truth of its own unextended, thinking existence, must be undertaken here. This discussion will, in its course, touch upon several points of methodology as well as several of the more general tenets of Cartesian philosophy, for example the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, and Descartes' conception of God's creative activity. For Descartes, the expression "I think" necessarily implies the

expression "God exists", and in order to help make this connection clear, this chapter traces the process by which the former statement is discovered. The real significance of this statement for the epistemology and metaphysics of Descartes will thereby become apparent.

I.

What can be said of the purpose of Descartes' Meditations? From Descartes' own words on the subject, and indeed from the general tenets of his philosophy, several observations can be made. First of all, if reference be made to Descartes' own "Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations", it is evident that Descartes begins his enterprise by doubting material things, "at least so long as we have no other foundations for the sciences than those which we have hitherto possessed."¹ He doubts the sensuously perceived world. Given that in the sixth and final Meditation it is both the existence and veracity of this world that is re-established, and this on the basis of the most profound metaphysical considerations, one may fairly conclude that it is the science of the external world that he seeks to validate. Indeed, Descartes himself admits that his entire metaphysics is constructed precisely in order to ground his physics.² However, in the Meditations there are at least two other aims explicitly and prominently stated by Descartes.³ His primary

concerns, he relates in the title of that work, are the proofs of the distinction between mind and body (and with that the soul's immortality), and God's existence. Both are desirable ends apart from considerations of science, in that the proof of the soul's immortality should "give men the hope of another life after death,"⁴ while the proof of God's existence is a means for persuading "the infidels of any religion, we may almost say, of any moral virtue."⁵ Both these proofs are in fact necessary for the establishment of the Christian moral order and both are established philosophically rather than theologically, says Descartes, in order that they may be more accessible and comprehensible to the non-faithful.

In the Meditations, these two proofs constitute the focal points of Descartes' metaphysics, such that, in order to arrive at their conclusions, there must be a treatment "of all the first things to be discovered by philosophizing."⁶ These things are exactly what the analytical order of reasoning, i.e. the method of discovery, uncovers in the Meditations. In the previous chapter it was shown how analysis requires that the reader be divested of all formerly held conceptions in order to enter the abstract realm of metaphysics, and the method by which Descartes so purges himself is, of course, the method of doubt.

II.

Since the method of analysis seeks first to deliver the mind from the affairs and prejudices of the senses, Descartes' first task is to determine the extent to which the opinions of the mind in general can be doubted. However, as it would prove impossible to examine fully the dubitability of all and every sense perception of the mind, Descartes determines that it will suffice instead to find merely one example of a deceptive sense perception, in order that all others may be rejected. Descartes rejects the whole range of sense experience not because all sense experiences are false, but because they are dubitable; and if dubitable, then perhaps false.

The main purpose of the first Meditation is to explore the limits to which doubt may be extended. Doubt thus far encompasses the objects of sense perception, but there arises a question as to whether or not it is reasonable to doubt the existence of one's own body. A moment's reflection, however, reveals that in dreams one's physical existence is often assumed to be what and where it is not. Thus, as soon as there is the slightest possibility that extended reality is in fact only appearance, as it is in dreams, then that reality must be doubted. It is a logical possibility, Descartes is astonished to admit, that the mind is deceived about its own waking state. "And my astonishment is such that it is almost capable of persuading me that I now dream."⁷

At this point, a critical stage in Descartes' procedure of doubt has been reached, for, in one sense, Descartes has accomplished the

task he has set for himself. The initial aim of his method was to abstract his mind from affairs of the senses, from the external world, and insofar as he now admits the possibility that all he thinks about this world need not be real but only a dream, his world is now the world of ideas. However, while it is true that in Descartes' search for the indubitable in knowledge he attempts to abstract himself from the external world, the question arises whether or not the already extreme doubt directed at his sense experiences cannot further be employed to undermine other truths held by the mind, such as mathematical truths whose relation to the externally existing world is not immediately evident. In order to understand such a further application of doubt, however, it will first be necessary to discuss one of the most important and uniquely Cartesian doctrines, namely, the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths. The reason why this discussion is needed will become apparent as soon as the significance of Descartes' doubt of these truths is realized.

In Chapter One of this study, mention was made of the Cartesian doctrine of simple natures. These natures, according to Descartes, constitute the ultimate components of all man's knowledge, and, correspondingly, they are the ultimate components of reality. Of the three kinds of simple natures, those which pertain to the external, extended world, pertain to "corporeal nature in general." Any truth or idea predicated of corporeal nature will thus be composed of or reducible to this group of simple natures. Although these simple

natures are in themselves real and true, strictly speaking they are not 'science' itself, but only the simple elements or concepts of the truths of which science is comprised. The term 'science' here must be taken in a very specific sense, that is, in the sense of the mathematical disciplines of "Arithmetic, Geometry and other sciences of that kind which only treat of things that are very simple and very general, without taking great trouble to ascertain whether they are actually existent or not." ⁸ These truths of mathematics are of such simple and general natures as figure, extension, quantity and number, that they can be considered apart from the existence of any particular (and therefore dubitable) object. They are truths, but need not refer to any specific existence, and they contain, says Descartes in the Meditations, "some measure of certainty and an element of the indubitable." ⁹ In fact, they are among what Descartes elsewhere calls 'eternal truths'.

III.

The doctrine of the creation of eternal truths has particular significance in Descartes' philosophy. Essentially, this doctrine can be summed up by saying that, for Descartes, just as God created man and the world ex nihilo, so did He create the truths man might possess of that world ex nihilo. Furthermore, because God created ex nihilo, neither man nor the world, nor the truths of that world

possess a necessity of themselves. Ultimately, the truths of this world are true simply because God, in creating them, made them to be true. On the other hand, because it is God Who created them, they do possess a necessity for thought, which necessity, it will be seen, can only be questioned by means of 'hyperbolic' doubt. If God were constrained to act within the confines of principles which He Himself could not deny, then this constraint would infringe upon His all-powerful nature. But God, properly speaking, is omnipotent; therefore He Himself and not any truth existing outside Him must in the end determine what is to be subject to the principle of non-contradiction. And this is precisely what He wills it to be.

"I turn to the difficulty of conceiving how it was free and indifferent for God to make it not be true that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles, or in general that contradictories could not be true together. It is easy to dispel this difficulty by considering that the power of God cannot have any limits, and that our mind is finite and so created as to be able to conceive as possible things which God has wished to be in fact possible, but which he has in fact wished to make possible. The first consideration shows us that God cannot have been determined to make it true that contradictories cannot be true together, and therefore that he could have done the opposite. The second consideration shows us that even if this be true, we should not try to comprehend it since our nature is incapable of doing so. And even if God has willed that some truths should be necessary, this does not mean that he willed them necessarily; for it is one thing to will that they be necessary, and quite another to will them necessarily, or to be necessitated to will them. I agree that there are contradictions which are so evident, that we cannot put them before our minds without judging them entirely impossible, like the one which you suggest: that God might have made creatures independent of Him. But if we would know the immensity of his power we should not put these thoughts before our minds, nor should we conceive any

precedence or priority between his understanding and his will; for the idea which we have of God teaches us that there is in him only a single activity, entirely simple and entirely pure." 10

In this passage, it is clear that, underlying the doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths is the conception of a God whose will and intellect are one. To a large extent, this doctrine of Descartes can be viewed as a reaction against any doctrine - and in particular against the position of the Spanish Schoolman Suarez - that diminishes God's power by forcing His will and creative act to conform to a truth external to His own understanding. However, God's omnipotence requires that there be no discrepancy between what God understands and what God does. In other words, God's will cannot be constrained by His understanding because God is all-powerful, and, accordingly, His will and intellect must be viewed as identical. God's understanding is a creative understanding, of which some of the effects are the eternal truths:

"As for the eternal truths, I say once more that they are true or possible only because God knows them as true or possible. They are not known as true by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of Him. If men really understood the sense of their words they would never say without blasphemy that the truth of anything is prior to the knowledge which God has of it. In God willing and knowing are a single thing in such a way that by the very fact of willing something he knows it and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true. So we must not say that, if God did not exist nonetheless these truths would be true; for the existence of God is the first and the most eternal of all possible truths and the one from which alone all others derive." 11

With respect to Descartes' doctrine of the nature of eternal truths, his objector Gassendi noted that it is "a serious matter to set up some immutable and eternal being in addition to God." Is this what Descartes has done in saying that God created eternal truths? No; Descartes explicitly replies that God created eternal essences, not existences.¹² Mathematical truths are true independent of the existence of any particular body. The properties of a triangle, for example, are true eternally, while no one triangle could ever actually exist, unless it existed in a way which at the same time expressed these eternal properties, which, as Descartes says, delineate "the boundaries within which [extended] substance is contained."¹³ In other words, corporeal substance, whose essence is extension, must exist within the boundaries expressed and delineated by the eternal truths, which, like the substance 'body', are also created.

Before returning to the discussion of doubt in the Meditations, one further aspect of the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths remains for consideration. This aspect is central to an understanding of Descartes' metaphysics, and it is a direct result of the notion that eternal truths are created. Because these truths of the world are created ex nihilo, they are radically distinct and apart from God. There is, therefore, no ultimate reason why the sum of the three angles of a triangle equals 180 degrees; it simply does, and the mind cannot conceive it differently. Just as it is

incomprehensible to the mind that this sum were otherwise, so is it incomprehensible to the mind why God chose to create triangles in the first place. At issue here is the notion of final causality. Because the creation of the world and its truths is ex nihilo, there can be absolutely no insight possible into God's motive for creation. As a mode of explanation and understanding, final causality, and with it the Scholastic notion that substantial form (real quality) is the essence by which something's nature may be explained, is explicitly rejected by Descartes.¹⁴ Abandoned is the notion that a thing's essence can be recognized in terms of history, or its development towards a hidden end. Furthermore, the channel along which a series of causes leading to a final cause or reason is broken by the unbridgeable gulf between the infinitude of the creator, and the finitude of creation. Man's knowledge is finite and of created truths; it is not a 'participation' in the eternal truths of the divine mind. Descartes views this latter conception of man's knowledge as an unattainable ideal, almost in the way that Plato's Forms are unknowable in this life. Such a knowledge of any one of the eternal ideas, which are an inseparable part of the divine mind, would in essence presuppose an acquaintance with the divine mind. Finally, while it is the case that Descartes' doctrine of the creation of eternal truths is an unequivocal rejection of the doctrine of final causality, it is nevertheless a peculiar kind of reaffirmation of Scholastic Platonism and Aristotelianism. The

Cartesian scholar Alan Gewirth observes that, because the eternal truths only exist in extended substance, yet are at the same time eternal, "Descartes' doctrine combines the Aristotelian position that mathematical entities are modes or attributes of physical substances with the Platonic position that both mathematical entities and physical substances have their own essences even if they do not exist." 15

IV.

Having now discussed Descartes' doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, it is now necessary to examine their role in the procedure of doubt Descartes has undertaken. It will become clear that even truths created by God admit of doubt. Doubt has already reached an extreme limit with the introduction of the dream hypothesis; however, it attains 'metaphysical' or 'hyperbolic' stature once the truths of mathematics and, correspondingly, the truths of the simple notions of the external world have been doubted. What renders this doubt metaphysical is that Descartes allows for the possibility of an all-powerful, deceiving genius or demon, who "lays snares for [the mind's] credulity" 16, such that even those truths that the mind cannot without contradiction deny at the moment of its perception of them, may in fact be false. At the moment of its comprehension, Descartes writes, the mind cannot doubt that, for

example, the sum of two and three is five. Upon reflection, however, it is admitted as possible that an extraordinary deception has taken place.

"And, besides, as I sometimes imagine that others deceive themselves in the things which they think they know best, how do I know that I am not deceived every time that I add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or judge of things yet simpler, if anything simpler can be imagined?"¹⁷

This account of what Descartes considers open to even the slightest doubt has thus far remained relatively free of contention. However, what has now been posited is an all powerful deceiving genius or demon, and with this interpretation the reader may perhaps take issue. The question is: what exactly is the nature of the deceptive entity posited by Descartes? Basically, there are three choices as to the source from which the deception of the mind's grasping of truth can come. Either the evil genius is not all powerful, but simply "not less powerful than deceitful."¹⁸ On this interpretation, the existence of a veracious God is merely 'suspended', and not actually doubted. On another interpretation, the evil genius is all powerful, and actually 'takes the place' of this veracious God. Finally, the evil genius may be considered not merely one deceiving entity, but two, to be distinguished by the kind of deception practiced in each case. This final distinction is made by both Gouhier and Gueroult, and it, along with the first interpretation, are rejected by this study.

That there is room for debate, concerning the first two interpretations of the nature of the evil genius is evident upon comparison between the French and Latin versions of the Meditations. In both these texts, it appears that, initially at least, Descartes actually doubts or puts forward reason for doubting a truthful God's existence. The original French translation, which was approved by Descartes, makes this point clear:

"Mais peut-estre que Dieu n'a pas voulu que ie fusse deceu de la sorte, car il est dit souverainement bon. Toutesfois, si cela repugneroit à sa bonté, de m'avoir fait tel que ie me trompasse tousiours, cela sembleroit aussi luy estre aucunement contraire, de permettre que ie me trompe quelquefois, & neantmoins ie ne puis douter qu'il ne le permette."

The Latin version of this passage is in complete agreement with the sense of the above.²⁰ Descartes is positing a reason for doubting God's existence. Furthermore, in both versions Descartes asks his readers to "grant that all that is here said of a God is a fable." However, at this point the issue becomes somewhat confused. After first allowing that the purpose of these metaphysical reasonings is purely hypothetical and not aimed at practice or action, Descartes summarizes what he takes to be the source of his metaphysical doubt. In the French translation Descartes writes:

"Je supposeray donc qu'il y a, non point vn vray Dieu, qui est la souveraine source de verité, mais vn certain mauvais genie, non moins rusé & trompeur que puissant, qui a employé toute son industrie à me tromper."²¹

✓

If the above were mere quibbling over a poor translation of the Latin text into French, then perhaps a simple footnote would suffice. However, there appears to be a real discrepancy in the meaning of the original texts here, which must be resolved, for at stake is the extent to which deception occurs in the Meditations: the less powerful the deceiver is, the more 'autonomous' is human thought. The result of this is that not only does it become apparently easier to prove God's existence, but the charge of circular argumentation in Descartes' first proof of God's existence in the Meditations, i.e. the charge of proving the validity of clear and distinct ideas by means of clear and distinct ideas, also seems to become more plausible. What must be clarified now are the immediate ramifications of these two divergent accounts. Firstly, then, if all that is posited as a deceiver is an evil genius "not less powerful than deceitful", it is evident that neither the extent of this spirit's power, nor the extent of its deception is known. Furthermore, there is always the possibility that God, who is all-powerful - and therefore more powerful than the evil genius - and supremely good, might not permit the mind to be deceived. In other words, the positing of such an indeterminate entity does not readily convince the mind that it might be deceived. In fact, it would almost be contradictory or impossible that such deception occurs as long as God is assumed to exist. Instead, if doubt is to be given full reign, then God Himself must be dispensed with, and in His place

the evil genius must preside; and it is clear from both texts that this is precisely what Descartes has in mind. God is actually doubted, i.e. reasons are forwarded for doubting God's existence and the possibility of an all powerful deceiver is accordingly admitted. Thus the Latin version of the above-quoted passage may be accepted here, and it is rendered into English as follows:

"I will suppose, then, not that there is a supremely good God, the source of truth; but that there is an evil spirit, who is supremely powerful and intelligent, and does his utmost to deceive me." 22

The confusion surrounding the nature of the evil demon cannot be resolved until the third view, the view shared by Gouhier and Gueroult concerning the grounds for hyperbolic doubt in Descartes' doctrine, is considered. This is the position that makes out of the evil genius two distinct entities or 'functions', each entailing a different sort of deception. There is a deceiving god (le Dieu trompeur), who, being a god, is all-powerful and deceives the mind in its memory of truths perceived clearly and distinctly. On the other hand, there is the so-called evil genius (le malin génie, le mauvais génie), who contorts the mind's intuition of clear and distinct ideas. One author puts the distinction in the following manner:

"L'appel au mauvais génie, dit plus souvent malin génie (supponam...genium aliquem malignum, dit le latin), n'est pas une raison, mais un moyen de douter. M. Gouhier a, selon nous, définitivement établi qu'alors que la supposition du Dieu trompeur

est une hypothèse métaphysique, l'artifice du malin génie est un procédé méthodologique." ²³ The two deceiving entities posited here are responsible for the two kinds of deception undoubtedly practiced in the Meditations. There is deception in memory, which has more to do with deception in the knowledge of the continued existence, i.e. with the constancy of the truths of creation; and there is deception in the actual perception of a particular truth of the world. The former is, as it were, 'ontological' deception, the latter is 'epistemological'. ²⁴

In point of fact, Gouhier and Gueroult disagree as to the way in which Descartes eventually overcomes the deception practiced by these two evil entities, but it is not the task of this study to enter into this particular dispute. Nor can the reasons for 'dividing' the evil genius in the first place be entertained in any significant depth. To the present author, it is not immediately evident from the original Latin text or its later French translation, that the distinction rests on anything other than linguistic (or stylistic) considerations. In the Latin text of the Meditations, the evil genius is accorded a divine, omnipotent stature; and if recourse be taken to the French version, then it is perhaps Descartes himself who would in the end undermine this distinction, by referring his two commentators to the following:

"But how can I know there is not something different from those things that I have just considered, of which one cannot have the slightest doubt? Is there not some God, or

some other being by whatever name we call it, who puts these reflections into my mind." [my emphasis] ²⁵

From the above considerations it is also unclear how the Gouhier/Guérout distinction helps to render the argument of the Meditations more intelligible and consistent. This is especially true when one considers that, on Descartes' own principles ²⁶, the more powerful - in fact, the all-powerful - of the two evil entities is capable, without contradicting its own nature, of performing both acts of deception. This latter point allows the following conclusion to emerge: what is most important is that an all-powerful deceiver be posited at this stage of the Meditations. Descartes' methodological doubt will permit nothing less.

V.

With the introduction of the evil genius hypothesis, Descartes comes to doubt the (eternal) truths of mathematics. These are the truths pertaining to the extended world, and, since even the simplest elements of this world and its intuitively grasped truths have now been discarded, there seems little or nothing left that admits of doubt. Is this really the case, however? Before Descartes' sole indubitable truth can be discussed, there remains one further controversy that must be examined, which again has direct bearing on the question of the validity of Descartes' procedure after his

process of doubt has taken its course. At issue here is, again, the limits to which doubt can be extended. The position thus far taken here is that, with the admission of the possibility of a deceiving God, all things become suspect for Descartes (except, of course, the cogito). There are some²⁷, however, who would salvage a small measure of certainty with respect to the things that can be known, and thereby restrict the limits of doubt.

Generally speaking, these commentators on Descartes' philosophy leave two kinds of perceptions free from doubt. First, the intuition of simple natures is claimed to be indubitable. Thus, writes one author, "The evil genius is given power only over what is composite. What is genuinely simple is not susceptible to metaphysical doubt."

²⁸ Such a statement, however, does not account for Descartes' explicit denial of the external world, and the simple natures that comprise it. Certainly, it is the case that Descartes does not doubt that he perceives extension; nor in fact does he doubt the existence of any perception of the external world. "And not even now do I deny that these things are met with in me."²⁹ But Descartes does doubt the actual existence of extension itself, and correspondingly, the veracity of his perception of that simple nature. Furthermore, Descartes' denial of extension is not a result of metaphysical doubt, but simply of the dream hypothesis. Of the simple natures pertaining solely to thought, these cannot be doubted in any case, for to do so would be to doubt the existence of thinking itself, which is

impossible.³⁰ Finally, with respect to those simple natures which pertain to both extension and thought, they are dubitable in so far as they relate to the former category, but indubitable in so far as they relate to thought, for the reasons just stated.

The second way in which commentators on Descartes' philosophy generally try to limit the extent of doubt in the Meditations has once again to do with intuitive knowing. Simple mathematical truths are now included among indubitable intuitions.³¹ Descartes does indeed hold that the certainty of the sum of two and three, for example, is an intuitive certainty. However, aside from what certain authors think Descartes means, it is quite obvious that, for Descartes, even though the mind is psychologically compelled to assent to simple mathematical truths at the moment the mind apprehends them, they are nevertheless at least 'slightly' or 'metaphysically' dubitable, because God could be deceiving the mind even in its simplest intuitions. All these points are well brought out in the following passage:

"But every time that this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my thought, I am constrained to confess that it is easy to Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters in which I believe myself to have the best evidence. And, on the other hand, always when I direct my attention to things which I believe myself to perceive very clearly, I am so persuaded of their truth that I let myself break out into words, such as these: Let who will deceive me, He can never cause me to be nothing while I think that I am, or some day cause it to be true to say that I have never been, it being true to say that I am, or that two and three make more or less than five, or any such thing in which I see a manifest contradiction."³²

VI.

Thus far pains have been taken to trace the extent of Cartesian doubt. The reader may well wonder why this topic merits so much attention. An intimation of its importance is gained upon consideration of one of Descartes' chief aims in the Meditations, to put the sciences on a firm foundation. When one considers that, at the present stage of the Meditations, even the slightest mathematical truth is dubitable, it is evident that 'right thinking' or reason itself requires this firm foundation. However, if a foundation is really a foundation, i.e. is really something that insures the validity of its relation to what is external to it, and given that such a foundation exists, then on Descartes' account only the thought which is 'given up' to doubt is ultimately grounded on this foundation. In other words, only what is doubted is validated, and those elements of thought which are simply assumed to possess independent validity, though they can in fact be rendered dubitable, remain in the end ungrounded assumptions. It is precisely such ungrounded assumptions that Descartes, through doubt, attempts to purge from his mind.

Underlying this reason for extending doubt to its metaphysical limits is another reason of central importance to the Cartesian

metaphysical and epistemological view of the world. In this study, Descartes' doctrine of the creation of eternal truths as well as his doctrine that true knowledge is possible for the human mind, have been outlined. Both doctrines can be seen to adhere to the Christian view of creation; that man and the world are produced ex nihilo.

That creation occurs ex nihilo means that there is, in one sense, a radical distinction between the being of God and the being of His creation. On this account, the being and intelligibility of the world of mind and body are completely dependent upon God's creative act, and upon His continued conservation of that world. This view of creation can be contrasted with another doctrine³³, present in ancient Greek cosmology, in that it holds that matter, for example, is ultimately devoid of any 'soul' or principle of 'animation' derived from an understanding of God as a 'parent' or 'father', from whom his 'offspring' - in this case, matter - is 'generated'. This latter view underlies the position, specifically rejected by Descartes, that 'substantial forms' inhabit the world and 'move' or 'develop' towards and are intelligible in terms of final cause. In the following passage, M.B. Foster sums up the implications that each of these doctrines of creation has for the intelligibility of the world, and the mind's ability to grasp that world:

"A natural object [on the Greek view] comes into being not by manufacture but by generation. The latter method of production, while it confers upon its product a share of the efficacy by which it was produced, lacks the characteristic essential to the former, that it is governed by conscious

apprehension of its end. It is true that 'generation, like manufacture, consists in the communication of a form, and that the form can be communicated only in so far as it has been previously possessed by the author of the act; but he does not possess it in the way of making it object of his conscious reason. He possesses it as 'phusis' or nature (it is his nature), but not as 'logos'. This is shown by the fact that he cannot 'render' it as 'logos': his failure to do this shows that it is not distinguished by his reason as form from the matter of its embodiment. This difference in the manner of production is the ground of the difference in the nature of the products; that cannot be distinguished by the reason of the observer as the essence of the product which was not distinguished by the author as the end of the production." 34

What is clear from this passage is that the world is intelligible in two different ways, depending on which view of creation one assumes. The Christian and accordingly the Cartesian doctrine of creation ex nihilo holds that the world's intelligibility, just as much as its being, depends on God's conscious creation of that world. This doctrine is manifested in Descartes' philosophy by the position that God's causality is primarily to be thought of as formal and efficient in nature. Furthermore, Descartes also holds that the essence of body is extension, or "continuous quantity" 35, which, along with the (eternal) truths of this extended world, are what are doubted in the Meditations. It will now become apparent why Descartes must extend his doubt to extension and its truths, and why it is contrary to the most fundamental principles of his philosophy to permit the mind any degree of autonomy in the thinking of these truths. On Descartes' own principles, the degree to which the mind can possess truth

independently of any divine validation in the Cartesian sense (to the present exclusion of the truth of the mind's own existence), is the same degree to which the object of that truth can be said to exist independently of God's creation of that object. But nothing exists absolutely except God. If such an object were to exist, it would be accorded a divine status; for, first, insofar as the Platonic Demiurge, for example, found matter and form already enjoying an independent existence apart from his unification of them, to this extent the divine omnipotence would be diminished. The reason for this lies in the fact that, in such a case, some other entity aside from God, i.e. either body (matter) or essence (form), would possess an existence independent of God's existence. If it were corporeal substance that possessed this being independent of God, then God's being could not be said to be absolute, which it clearly is for Descartes. On the other hand, if it were essences that existed apart from God's intellect, then clearly God's power would again be diminished, in that He would not be omniscient. In each of these cases, the admission of the possibility of an existence independent of God runs counter to the Christian concept of God as the omnipotent creator of the substances 'body' and 'mind'. What is essential to note here is that, to assert that the mind possesses an indubitable truth in, for example, the equation $2+3=5$, is, effectively, to ascribe to that indubitable truth an autonomy and necessity which runs counter to the Christian concept of God. If this truth were

really indubitable, then God would be constrained to hold it; and this conclusion Descartes absolutely refuses to accept.

The above can be briefly summarized: any interpretation of Descartes' doctrine that denies the dubitability of even the simplest truth of extended body leads to the contradiction of Descartes' doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, which doctrine is inseparable from Descartes' view of God as omnipotent. In this discussion the Greek view of creation was cited in order to clarify the consequences - contrary to the fundamental tenets of Cartesian metaphysics - of ascribing to anything, be it matter or truths pertaining to matter, an existence independent of God. It should now be evident that, in the Meditations, Descartes really does intend doubt to cover the whole range of creation. For whatever purposes a commentator may want to limit the range of Cartesian doubt, such limitation, on the basis of the above, appears ill-conceived.

VII.

The limits of doubt have now been traced, and Descartes must live in continual fear that there might be divine deception afoot. Is the only certainty, he asks despairingly, the certainty that there is no certainty? Oddly enough, not even that Academic standpoint is certain; for Descartes' doubt is ultimately only hypothetical in nature. Where is that one "fixed and unmovable" point of Archimedes,

which will arrest this downward spiral into complete scepticism? The answer returns to Descartes in the echo of his own voice:

"I myself, am I not at least something? But I have already denied that I had senses and body. Yet I hesitate, for what follows from that? Am I so dependent on body and senses that I cannot exist without these? But I was persuaded that there was nothing in all the world, that there was no heaven, no earth, that there were no minds, nor any bodies: was I not then likewise persuaded that I did not exist? Not at all; of a surety I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something [or merely because I thought of something]. But there is some deceiver or other, very powerful and very cunning, who ever employs his ingenuity in deceiving me. Then without doubt I exist also if he deceives me, and let him deceive me as much as he will, he can never cause me to be nothing so long as I think I am something. So that after having reflected well and carefully examined all things, we must come to the definite conclusion that this proposition: I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it, or that I mentally conceive it." ³⁶

Descartes's method of doubt has taken him to the absolute certainty of his own existence, just as his method of analysis must now - painstakingly and under the watchful eye of the evil genius - draw out the implications of this primary subjective certainty.

The knowledge the mind has of its own existence is for Descartes an indubitable truth: the proposition 'I think' is indubitable each time it is thought, for the being of the thinker and of that thought are inseparable from the essence or meaning of that thought. There is simply no room for deception to occur between the subject's thought and the object of that thought.

Just as the statement 'I think, therefore I am' is indubitable

for Descartes every time it is thought, so also is it held to be necessarily true each time it is stated. In what does this necessity consist? It resides precisely in the fact that this statement, when affirmed, cannot be anything but true. It is impossible, in other words, that any condition could exist under which this statement would be untrue. The very possibility of such a condition is out of the question, for any attempt to deny this truth, even by means of the evil genius hypothesis, ends in its unavoidable affirmation.

VIII.

Before proceeding further to draw out the implications of Descartes' 'first truth', the necessity of the cogito must in some sense be qualified. Descartes has written that "I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time that I pronounce it", and the qualification lies in the words "each time I pronounce it". This issue of the absolute necessity of the cogito is brought more sharply into focus by the following passage:

"I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist. I do not now admit anything which is not necessarily true: to speak accurately I am not more than a thing which thinks, that is to say a mind or a soul, or an understanding, or a reason, which are terms whose significance was formerly unknown to me." 37

The nature of the necessity involved in the cogito is now clear:

Descartes, knowing full well the restrictions his method has placed upon him³⁸, refuses to admit that he exists even when he does not think. In other words, his essence is not existence, but, rather, thought, and he therefore only knows himself to exist when he thinks. The point tacitly recognized here is that, of itself, his existence possesses no absolute necessity - at least, he cannot know it to be absolutely necessary - but, in so far as he thinks, his existence is necessarily inseparable from his self-consciousness. Simply put, Descartes does "not now admit anything which is not necessarily true" of or identical to the consciousness he has of himself, and for Descartes' argument in the succeeding *Meditations* to be valid, he must adhere to this procedure. Otherwise, he will fall victim to the possibility of divine deception.

Now that it has been established that Descartes has in fact arrived at a single, indubitable truth, it might well be asked what the nature of the mind's cognition of this truth is. Surely it must differ from all other modes of knowing in some extraordinary way that enables it to escape hyperbolic doubt. It is to be argued in this study that the mode of cognition by which the subject perceives its own existence is indeed a very special mode, one which in fact occurs only twice in the entire *Meditations*: here, and in the apprehension of God's existence in Meditation Three. Looking at the first instance of this kind of cognition, then, one notices that the standard rendering of this primary truth is somewhat misleading, for

it has the appearance of being the minor premise and conclusion of a syllogism: 'I think, therefore I am'. In this syllogism, the first premise would be, 'everything that thinks is, or exists' ³⁹, and from this premise the conclusion 'I exist' can be derived via the minor premise. However, a moment's reflection reveals that this is not at all the method by which Descartes derives this conclusion in the Meditations. For one thing, the method which employs the syllogism is the synthetic method, whereas it is analysis that is used here. Descartes' consciousness of his own thought and existence is gained not by prior consideration of all other thinking beings, who are in any case assumed not to exist, but solely by reflection upon his own particular being, by reflection upon his own thought. It is not the case that, in order to derive the conclusion "I exist" it is first necessary to know that "everything that thinks is, or exists". ⁴⁰ Rather, the cogito must be viewed as an intuition in which the subject's thought and existence are indistinguishable. On the other hand, this is not to deny that the cogito can be construed as a syllogism. ⁴¹ However, if it were only a syllogistic deduction, and not primarily an intuition of the simplest kind, then, in a sense, it would be dubitable, for the hypothesis of the evil demon extends to any piece of syllogistic reasoning. More importantly, it is the very method by which Descartes has chosen to arrive at the truth of his own existence and which employs the hypothesis of deception - to the resulting exclusion of all other being but his own - that insures

that the cogito is "a simple act of mental vision".

"But the greater error here is our critic's assumption that the knowledge of particular truths is always deduced from universal propositions in consonance with the order of the sequence observed in the syllogism of dialectic. This shows that he is but little acquainted with the method by which truth should be investigated. For it is certain that in order to discover the truth we should always start with particular notions, in order to arrive at general conceptions subsequently, though we may also in the reverse way, after having discovered the universals, deduce other particulars from them." 42

The deceitfulness of the evil genius, as the above demonstrates, is checked by the absolute certainty Descartes has of his own existence. This victory over the evil genius is only momentary, however, for no sooner does Descartes uncover the indubitable truth of the cogito, than does this genius cause him to doubt not that he is, but what he is. He is, but what is he? His dilemma is summed up in the following passage:

"What then did I formerly believe myself to be? Undoubtedly I believed myself to be a man. But what is a man? Shall I say a reasonable animal? Certainly not; for then I should have to inquire what an animal is, and what is reasonable; and thus from a single question I should insensibly fall into an infinitude of others more difficult; and I should not wish to waste the little time and leisure remaining to me in trying to unravel subtleties like these." 43

The astounding feature of this passage is that Descartes questions his own rationality. He cannot define the nature of the reasonable, and this inability has profound implications for what follows in the Meditations. First, it renders the subject, i.e. the

doubting self, 'incomplete', for unless it can be determined exactly what the nature of this self's thought or "reason" is, then the complete truth of the cogito remains unknown. The remaining arguments of the Meditations may be viewed, in part at least, as Descartes' attempt to render his existence as a thinking subject intelligible to himself, to validate reason.

As can be gleaned from the cogito, Descartes in fact possesses a very general definition of his own nature. He is a 'thinking thing', for as an existing entity he is definable solely in terms of the thought of which he is conscious. The paucity of this general definition is realized, however, with Descartes' admission of the possibility that he could be any particular one of the thoughts that comprise the res cogitans. He could be a rational animal, it is possible, just as he could possess the body of a man; but, because of the nature of divine deception, the body he possesses might equally well be the body of an elephant. Such a proposition in no way breaches the dictates of reason, says Descartes, for he does not now admit that he knows what 'reasonable' is. His world is the world of the possibility or meaning possessed by his ideas ⁴⁴, and is not actual in the sense of 'what is' and 'what is not'. Its boundaries are not delineated by truth and falsity, by being and non-being: they are not determined by "the power of forming a good judgment and of distinguishing the true from the false, which is properly speaking what is called Good sense or Reason." ⁴⁵ All that is true and known

is that "I am, however, a real thing, and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks." 46

From the truth of the cogito Descartes now possesses a certain knowledge of himself. He is 'thinking thing'. And what does thinking comprise? "What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels." 47 The thought of the thinking thing is defined by any conscious activity of the mind. Doubt, imagination, etc. are all activities of which the mind is conscious; thought even includes walking or swimming, at least in so far as it is the mind's consciousness of these activities that is being referred to. That thought is his primary attribute is a result of Descartes' investigation into those things which admit of doubt: only his thinking and existence remain immune to that doubt. Even extension itself, as existing substance "apart from me and in [itself]", is dubitable. Thought and thinker are known to exist, that is certain and true; and for this reason alone the only other conclusion one can draw here is not that thought and quantitatively determined extension can exist apart from one another, but that the mind is "more easily known" than body. In body, nothing but extension can ultimately be clearly and distinctly perceived. However, it is not even known to exist, whereas thought is.

"But in proportion as we perceive more in anything, the better do we say we know it; thus we have more knowledge of those men with whom we have lived for a long time, than of

those whose face merely have seen or whose name we have heard, even though they too are not said to be absolutely unknown. It is in this sense that I think I have demonstrated that the mind, considered apart from what is customarily attributed to the body, is better known than the body viewed as separate from the mind; and this alone was what I intended to maintain." 48

IX.

In this discussion of the nature and extent of Cartesian doubt, one primary, fundamental truth has been uncovered: "I think, therefore I am". That the mind is more easily known than the body is, in a sense, to say the same thing, for all that is now known is that the mind thinks and exists. Everything else is held suspect, according to Descartes. In order to arrive at this one simple truth, however, many obstacles had to be overcome. The form which doubt may take is one of the key issues accounted for in this second chapter, as it makes no small difference if metaphysical deception come from a divine or a less powerful source. Consequently, the true extent of Descartes' doubt had to be ascertained, for it was discovered that ascribing even the smallest measure of autonomy in thought to the mind runs counter to the fundamental tenets of Descartes' philosophy.

This chapter concludes with a remark on the inseparability of Descartes' method of doubt with the truths uncovered by that method. Descartes himself summarizes the importance of doubt as a 'purging device' in the following manner:

"For although many have maintained that, in order to understand the facts of metaphysics, the mind must be abstracted from the senses, no one hitherto, so far as I know, has shown how this is to be done. The true, and in my judgment, the only way to do this is found in my Second Meditation, but such is its nature that it is not enough to have once seen how it goes; much time and many repetitions are required if we would, by forming the contrary habit of distinguishing intellectual from corporeal matters, for at least a few days, obliterate the life-long custom of confounding them."

In the philosophy of Descartes, doubt renders the mind free of all prejudices and facilitates its clear and distinct understanding of the truths of metaphysics. This method is by no means easy, and hence its steps must be repeatedly impressed upon the mind. As yet, no "facts of metaphysics" have been discovered, though it should now be evident that such discovery is in principle impossible until the mind be methodically and completely freed from all prejudice.

CHAPTER THREE

Preliminaries to the Proofs for God's Existence in Meditation III

The world into which Descartes has been immersed by his meditations is a purely mental world. It is a world which admits of no sense knowledge whatsoever. Descartes' eyes are shut, his ears are closed, his senses have been called away, and all images of corporeal things have been esteemed "vain and false".¹ Yet Descartes' aim is knowledge, both of the truths of metaphysics and the truths of physics. The latter kind of knowledge remains unattainable until the former has been gained. Such is the predicament metaphysical doubt has effected. If any progress is to be made, it must take place on the basis of an examination of the thinking thing and its ideas. Even this examination is extremely limited in scope, however, as there is no criterion of truth, not even the clarity and distinctness of ideas, by which an extra-subjective existence might be derived. The most primary

intuitions (excluding the cogito) have been shown to be dubitable; hence their employment in the proof of an extra-subjective existence would clearly be an invalid employment. In fact, the very notion that a 'proof', in any usual sense of the word, is possible from this standpoint of doubt, seems questionable. What 'objective' or valid form could such a proof assume? The following chapters will argue that the only valid form it could take is the form presented in the third Meditation. The proof of God's existence will be seen to be less a proof than an 'intuition' as primary as and actually implicit in the intuition of the self's thought and existence.

I.

That the only means at his disposal in the furthering of his knowledge is an examination of his own thinking self, is explicitly stated at the outset of the third Meditation. Descartes has defined himself as "a thing that thinks, that is to say, that doubts, affirms, denies, that knows a few things, that is ignorant of many [that loves, that hates], that wills, that desires, that also imagines and perceives." ² It would be a denial of his own self if he denied the presence to his consciousness of these modes of thought. To admit the presence of any idea is not, of course, to make any statement about that idea's truth. With regard to ideas, an idea may be clear and distinct, and its object may be clearly

perceived to exist outside the mind. However, despite the psychological compulsion to assert otherwise, clarity and distinctness cannot be equated with truth; the strength and reach of the evil genius is simply too great for this criterion of truth to be adopted with impunity.³

Clarity and distinctness in ideas are an inadequate criterion of truth. The objection is often made⁴, however, that, in order to prove God's existence, Descartes employs clear and distinct ideas, which are in turn 'guaranteed' or 'validated' by an existing God's veracity. Thus, Descartes is said to argue in a circle. If Descartes is to avoid this charge, he must operate solely within the epistemological and ontological boundaries demarcated by metaphysical doubt. The following passage is a statement of Descartes' purpose in the third Meditation, and demonstrates his awareness of his predicament:

"And, certainly, since I have no reason to believe that there is a God who is a deceiver, and as I have not yet satisfied myself that there is a God at all, the reason for doubt which depends on this opinion alone is very slight, and so to speak metaphysical. But in order to be able altogether to remove it, I must inquire whether there is a God as soon as the occasion presents itself; and if I find that there is a God, I must also inquire whether He may be a deceiver; for without a knowledge of these two truths I do not see that I can ever be certain of anything."

The revealing aspect of this passage is not its description of the doubt Descartes employs, but rather the rigour with which Descartes adheres to his method. Before he can know anything, he

says, it must first be known that God exists, and then it is to be determined whether or not God is a deceiver. If God is a deceiver, then Descartes sees no way to attain any kind of certainty; if He isn't a deceiver, then clear and distinct ideas can be known to be true. The important point here is that, in the proof of God's existence that follows in the third Meditation, Descartes does not know whether it is the existence of an all-powerful evil genius he proves, or the existence of a non-deceiving, 'good' God. God's existence will first be proven, then His nature will be determined; and His nature, that is, His veraciousness, only becomes clear after His existence is demonstrated. It might be asked here, why cannot God's deceitfulness or veracity be discovered simply by examining the idea the mind possesses of Him - and this prior to all considerations of God's existence. For several reasons, such a question betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Descartes' position. First, it was shown in the preceding chapter that Descartes does in fact doubt God's existence, and, to the same extent, the idea of God is a confused idea. Descartes does not know it with the absolute certainty of the cogito. Therefore, whether or not God is a deceiver, since his idea of God is not completely clear and distinct, to make a judgement on the basis of an idea not clearly and distinctly thought is to make a dubitable judgement.

Underlying Descartes' position here is a second point: even if the idea of God were clear and distinct, to assert that God is

veracious simply because He is clearly and distinctly perceived to be so, would be to employ a principle as yet unproven in the Meditations. That principle is, of course, that clear and distinct ideas are true. Further, a more important consequence, central to the argument of this thesis, is implied. If it is God's existence that were derived solely from the consideration of the clear and distinct idea the mind has of Him - which is the procedure of the a priori argument for God's existence of Meditation Five⁶ - then again this principle would be employed in an illicit fashion. In other words, at this stage in the Meditations, it is impossible, simply by reflecting upon the content of the idea of God, to prove God's existence. To do so would be to assume the truth of clear and distinct ideas, which is a truth known only after God's existence and veracity have already been demonstrated: it would be to argue in a circle. This does not mean, of course, that Descartes' procedure is ultimately fruitful. However, it does mean that by recognizing that he can determine neither God's existence nor His veracity simply through the analysis of the content of his idea of God, he is at this point in the Meditations adhering closely to the strictures of his method, and to this extent accusations of circularity are unfounded.

The above considerations leave one important issue unresolved. It is not at all obvious how the existence of God helps to an understanding of God's veracity, and it is equally uncertain how Descartes is to prove the existence of something whose nature is

unclear to him, as God's nature seems at the present unclear. How, in other words, is the proof of any thing's existence (as opposed to the nature or properties of an already existent being) possible, or even conceivable, unless it first be known exactly what is the nature of the thing whose existence is to be proven? This question cannot be answered properly here. For now, let it suffice to say that with the increase in Descartes' knowledge of himself comes an increase in the clarity and distinctness of the idea of God, to the extent that the only existence provable solely on the basis of Descartes' own existence, is the existence of a perfect being. Expressed differently, the proof of the existence of that initially undetermined nature 'God' is discovered to be, of necessity, the proof of a veracious God, to the absolute and necessary exclusion of a 'God' who is deceitful.

II

Although his ideas may not represent what they claim to represent, Descartes cannot doubt that at least something is represented to him by his ideas. Ideas represent, and since it is an examination of his thoughts in general that Descartes is undertaking at present, it will prove an instructive exercise to determine what precisely he means by the terms 'thought' and 'idea'. The former has already been described as all that falls within the mind's

consciousness of itself. Thus, willing, doubting and even walking and feeling - in so far as the mind is conscious of these activities - are all subsumed under the general category of thought.

"Of my thoughts some are, so to speak, images of things, and to these alone is the title 'idea' properly applied; examples are my thought of a man or of a chimera, of heaven, of an angel, or [even] of God. But other thoughts possess other forms as well. For example in willing, fearing, approving, denying, though I always perceive something as the subject of the action of my mind, yet by this action I always add something else to the idea which I have of that thing; and of the thoughts of this kind some are called volitions or affections, and others judgments."

What is important in this passage is not so much the definition of thought provided but rather the relation revealed between judgement and ideas. This is important because, in the philosophy of Descartes, the properties of truth and falsity are properly ascribable only to the mind's active pronouncement, i.e. the will's judgement concerning clear and distinct ideas, which are the intelligible contents of the understanding. Descartes states that a judgement about anything is "something else added to the idea which I have of that thing." Judgements are of ideas, and since it is an understanding of true (and false) judgements that is Descartes' final goal, an investigation into the nature of ideas is now in order.

The term 'idea' in Descartes' philosophy has a very important usage, as is evident when one considers that it is through an analysis of his ideas that Descartes concludes his first proof of the existence of God. In the passage above, Descartes defines ideas as

"images" of things. These 'things' can be either spiritual (mental) or , when pertaining to the extended world, material in nature. The term 'image', however, must be used guardedly, since, strictly speaking, an image is only one kind of idea, namely an idea of material things formed in the imagination. It is undoubtedly an idea, as it is intelligible to and conceived in the understanding, but this kind of idea is initially presented to the understanding by the imagination, which is the vehicle by which the sensuously determined world is perceived.⁸ Thus, from the above passage, it is clear that the idea of a chimera, which for Descartes is a construction of the mind, or a 'factitious' idea whose elements are derived from sense perception, is in fact a different kind of 'image' from the idea of a mathematical truth or the idea of God. In terms of their intelligible content, both kinds of ideas are equally images, but this term 'image', when applied to the second kind of idea, is somewhat of a misnomer. As Descartes puts it:

"It is in 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 a science which considers only sizes, shapes, and movements, would be most under the sway of imagination. But those who have studied it at all deeply know that it rests not at all on the phantoms of the fancy, but only on the clear and distinct notions of the mind."

While it is true that ideas, as images, may be divided into at

least two categories, i.e. corporeal and purely mental representations, what is above all important in Descartes' doctrine is that their intelligibility to the mind lies in the fact that they represent. Descartes' is a doctrine of 'representative perception'¹⁰, according to which the unextended, immaterial mind represents to itself either the ideas pertaining to itself, God, or the material, extended world. 'Meaning' or intelligibility is what is contained in a representation. Literally, the meaning or intelligibility - or even the 'essence' -- of the 'thing' or object of an idea is

're-presented' in the understanding, the faculty that 'perceives' (or, more properly, 'conceives') intelligibility. The primary function of an idea is to represent, and, if an idea does not represent anything, then it is neither an idea, nor is it in the understanding. Ideas must represent, or, as Descartes puts it, "[since ideas resemble images] there cannot be any ideas which do not appear to represent some things."¹¹ The following analogy to the understanding, though it deals specifically with ideas of the external world, is nevertheless a good indication of what Descartes means when he states that ideas, or conceptions of the understanding, are 'images' or 'representations':

"Thirdly we must believe that the common sense has a function like that of a seal, and impresses on the fancy or imagination, as though on wax, those very figures and ideas which come uncontaminated and without bodily admixture from the senses."¹²

When it is said that the understanding is like a 'seal' on which ideas are impressed, this is to regard the understanding as a passive instrument. However, this poses a problem, for in so far as the mind understands an idea, understanding seems to be more an activity: ideas are understood by the understanding. Furthermore, a corresponding problem also arises as to how representations are to be viewed. On the one hand, they may appear as particular 'seals', and in that sense passive, while on the other hand they also actively represent objects in the passive faculty of the understanding.¹ representations represent. Descartes solves this apparent ambiguity in the continuation of the above analogy:

"Finally and in the fifth place, we must think that that power by which we are properly said to know things, is purely spiritual, and not less distinct from every part of the body than blood from bone, or hand from eye. It is a single agency, whether it receives impressions from the common sense simultaneously with the fancy, or applies itself to those that are preserved in the memory, or forms new ones....In all these operations this cognitive power is at one time passive, at another active, and resembles now the seal and now the wax."

The cognitive power of the mind, spiritual in nature, has both active and passive moments. In so far as the mind thinks or 'views' its representations, i.e. in so far as the mind is self-conscious and 'apart from' its representations, it is a passive agency; but because it actively thinks those representations to itself, it is an agency. And it is still an agency, but of a different, 'active' kind, in so far as it effects its own representations. Most important, whether,

the mind's cognitive power be regarded as active or passive, in either case it is "a single agency": it is of a single mind. With this notion, the crux of Descartes' doctrine of representative perception has been reached. Descartes is asserting that, whether ideas, as intelligible representations, be of the sensuously perceived world, or of the mind's own operations, the cognitive power involved in the 'having' of these representations is at all times "one and the same agency". The intelligible nature of all ideas, or that which makes them conceivable, is grasped by a single power. This power Descartes has defined as the "power by which we are properly said to know things". In this definition the all-important distinction is made between the "we", or the subject or mind that knows, and the power by which that subject knows. Again, things are known as images, representations, or ideas which the mind, by means of its cognitive power, has and forms of them. On Descartes' account, it is the mind, or the subject, to which ideas are ultimately rendered intelligible by this cognitive power; and in this sense, the "we", or, to speak in the singular, the "I", can be separated from and be conscious of its ideas. It is self-conscious.

14

Because the mind is self-conscious, i.e. because the mind's ideas are its own, it is, on Descartes' account, substance. In his own words: "Everything in which there resides immediately, as in a subject, or by means of which there exists anything that we perceive,

i.e. any property, quality, or attribute, of which we have a real idea, is called a Substance." ¹⁵ Furthermore, since ideas are thus to be considered essential attributes of the mind, it is now evident how for Descartes it is impossible to deny that one does in fact have an idea.

Before returning to the argument of the Meditations, there remains one final and essential aspect of Descartes' doctrine of representative perception that merits close attention. Descartes separates the mind from its contents: the mind conceives its ideas. "We", or "I", conceive by means of a cognitive power whose nature is "one and the same", i.e. it refers to one and the same mind, whatever the conception may be. So much can be said for thought. A question now arises that is fundamental to Descartes' epistemology. What is it that renders the ideas of the external world intelligible and meaningful to the mind, for whose consciousness ideas represent? In Chapter Two, it was seen how, for Descartes, God created a world to which objective, eternal truths pertain. The world itself is divinely effected substantial being, and likewise possesses objective meaning and truth; and this world is (one of) the object(s) for thought. According to Descartes' doctrine, truths expressed in ideas represent this world. Thus, the question may also be expressed: how does the mind ultimately 'recognize' the meaningfulness of its representations?

The answer to this question has already been given, in part at

least, in Descartes' assertion of self-consciousness, the cogito. Thought is a pure substance, in which ideas inhere as essential attributes. ¹⁶ Expressed differently, the essence of the thinking thing, man's 'soul', is thought. This soul is of a purely rational nature ¹⁷, and, as substance, it is intelligence, or mind, with its own independent existence. The term 'independent' must be qualified, of course, for in Descartes' philosophy there exist only one truly independent substance, God, who is the creator of the 'secondary' substances thought and extension. On this doctrine, God's creation is ex nihilo. Both God's and the soul's being are indeed substantial, but, in so far as the latter is created being ¹⁸, it possesses no intrinsic necessity. Furthermore, while the distinction of God's thought, will, being, etc. is not a real distinction - in that God is one ¹⁹ - but only a distinction made by the finite, discursive understanding, it is possible to speak of God's 'thought', in particular, it is possible to inquire into the relation of God's thought or intellect to created thought or intellect. This is an essential point, for it is in this relation that the soul's ability to grasp the meaningfulness and truth of its ideas of itself and of the world lies.

The relation between the divine and created mind is presented in the Meditations as one of 'resemblance'. ²⁰ When pressed on this point by his interlocutor Burman, Descartes explains it in the following cause/effect terms:

"In this passage [of the Meditations], however, we are talking about the total cause, the cause of being itself. Anything produced by this cause must necessarily be like it. For since the cause is itself being and substance, and it brings something into being, i.e. out of nothing (a method of production which is the prerogative of God), what is produced must at the very least be being and substance. To this extent at least, it will be like God and bear his image." 21

At issue here is not so much Descartes' view of the cause/effect relation, as the notion that the created mind in some way resembles, or is an image of, the divine mind. The finite soul or intelligence is considered by Descartes an image - albeit an infinitely distant or obscure image - of divine intelligence. The underlying analogy in the terms 'representation', 'image', and 'resemblance' might usefully be compared with the Platonic analogy of 'light', as found in the Myth of the Sun. What God has created, i.e. the world or nature and those beings who would know it, He has instilled with a 'light' similar to His own 'light', which at the same time is. That light is present in extension only in so far as any extended thing that exists does so as the product of God's creative will and understanding, i.e. as an eternal truth. This light is present in (created) thought, in that it 'illuminates' and in fact is the created thinking substance. Considered as created substance, as the soul, or essence of the thinking thing, it is the "'light' of nature" (lumen naturale). 22 The most important result, however, is that, to the extent that the mind understands, this understanding is, in a sense, God's

understanding. The objects of the mind's ideas are rendered intelligible and known ultimately in terms of the divine light by which they possess intelligible existence. Taking "intuitive knowledge" to be the mind's knowledge of itself, Descartes gives these points eloquent expression in the following passage:

"Intuitive knowledge is an illumination of the mind, by which it sees in the light of God whatever it pleases Him to show by direct impress of the divine clarity on our understanding, which in this is not considered as an agent but simply a receiver of the rays of divinity." ²³

Thus far the focus of attention has been the way in which ideas represent, or how they represent; what ideas represent must now be discussed. Simply stated, the representative content of ideas is the light, or essence, or - since God's thinking or 'light' is one with His will - the reality of creation; and to an utterly limited extent, divinity itself is also represented in the idea the created subject has of itself. As Descartes puts it:

"In my view, the way to reach the love of God is to consider that He is a mind, or thinking substance; and that our soul's nature resembles His sufficiently for us to believe that it is an emanation of His supreme intelligence, a breath of divinity." ²⁴

Descartes' statement has Platonic overtones, in that the rational soul, in knowing, is said to 'love' its object, God, considered as "a mind, or thinking substance". This kind of love, as opposed to the passion of sensual or sensuous love, occurs "when our

soul perceives some present or absent good, which it judges to be fitting for itself, [and] it unites itself to it in volition, that is to say, it considers itself and the good in question as forming two parts of a single whole." ²⁵ The rational soul, as expressed above, also perceives the 'light' present in itself, God, and creation; if its knowledge now be taken as love, its object, with which it is one, is the quality of goodness, or, as Descartes also puts it, of "perfection" in being:

"Moreover, since the true object of love is perfection, when we lift up our minds to consider Him as He is, we find ourselves naturally so inclined to love Him, that we even rejoice in our afflictions at the thought that they are an expression of his will." ²⁶

There is, in a sense, a conflation of several qualitative terms when the analogies of light and love are used in illustrating Descartes' doctrine of representative perception: what ideas now represent is the 'light', the 'intelligence', the 'essence', and correspondingly the 'goodness' and the 'perfection' of Creator and creation. Ideas above all also represent the reality or being effected by God's creative intellect. As a result, their own reality as representations is termed by Descartes their 'objective' or 'representative' reality, or to use the analogy of love, their 'objective perfection'. ²⁷ Descartes provides the metaphysical basis for this doctrine with a conception of God as the supremely perfect being ²⁸, or, what amounts to the same thing, as the sum of all

possible perfections.²⁹ As the supremely perfect being, God's essence and light, and correspondingly His perfection and goodness, are identical with His being. It should also be noted that the term 'perfection' is meant here qualitatively, not quantitatively. When God is said to be the greatest being, the infinite being, and the 'most' perfect being etc., these terms are attributed essentially, i.e. qualitatively. In this respect when God's being is termed a 'perfection' in the a priori argument for God's existence of Meditation Five, the being referred to is not confined to time and space, which are divisible. Similarly, to think of God as "a corporeal being of the highest perfection", is simply to utter a contradiction.³⁰ This identification of God's essence or perfection and existence, while it underlies the a priori argument, is also relevant here in the explication of the representative nature of ideas in that it is the perfection of created beings which ideas represent. To retrieve the analogy of 'love' from Descartes' doctrine, it can be said that, in knowledge, the res cogitans loves: it knows 'essence' or 'light' of (either created or divine) being; it loves its goodness or perfection.

Finally, Descartes distinguishes one from another among his ideas as representations in terms of their representative reality or perfection, a distinction which is ultimately made in terms of qualitative degree. Ideas possess 'more' or 'less' objective reality, depending on the degree of 'light' or perfection present in

their object, and, accordingly, depending on the extent to which the mind's perception of ideas is clear and distinct. The more divine, creative light that is present in an idea, the greater the reality that is represented, and, resultingly, the more clear and distinct an idea is to the mind. Thus, for example, just as substance is said to contain a greater degree of reality than accident, so does the idea of substance contain more objective reality than the idea of accident.³¹ Moreover, it will be recalled that, among all his ideas, it is Descartes' idea of his own self that was most clear and distinct - at least, that is, within the state of metaphysical doubt. Descartes' doctrine of 'degrees' of reality and knowledge will be given further treatment in the context of the first ('causal') proof of God's existence. For now, sufficient account of the doctrine of representative perception has been given to enable the reader to return to the argument of the third Meditation.

III.

Ideas, says Descartes in his attempt to extricate himself from metaphysical doubt, can be viewed either in themselves, or as they relate to the objects they represent, i.e. in terms of the origin of their representation. Since truth, for Descartes, consists in "the conformity of thought with its object and, ... when it is attributed to things outside thought, it means only that they can be the objects

of true thought, whether in our mind's or in God's" ³². It is this origina^tive relation between representation and object which must now be considered. Furthermore, there is a sense in which Descartes is 'forced' by his method of doubt to consider his ideas in this context. Because the possibility of divine deception in all the mind's ideas (except the cogito) is what must be abolished if freedom from scepticism is to be attained, ideas must be examined precisely in so far as they can admit of deception, in order that it may be ascertained if such deception is ultimately impossible.

When considering the ideas as "similar or conformable to the things which are outside me", Descartes makes a three-fold division:

"I use the word 'idea' to mean everything which can be in our thought, and I distinguish three kinds. Some are adventitious, such as the idea we commonly have of the sun; others are constructed or factitious, in which class we can put the idea which astronomers construct of the sun by their reasoning; and others are innate, such as the idea of God, mind, body, triangle, and in general all those which represent true immutable and eternal essences." ³³

There is a fundamental problem - recognized by Descartes himself - with this grouping: it does not serve his purposes in attaining new knowledge. The reason for this is because he has already admitted the possibility of divine deception in the determination of the origin of his ideas.

"But if I now hear some sound, if I see the sun, or feel heat, I have hitherto judged that these sensations proceeded from certain things that exist outside of me; and finally it appears to me that sirens, hippogryphs, and the like, are

formed out of my own mind. But again I may possibly persuade myself that all these ideas are of the nature of those which I term adventitious, or else that they are all innate, or all fictitious: for I have not yet clearly discovered their true origin." 34

Descartes does not know, ultimately, if all his ideas are innate, factitious, or adventitious. In the actual course of the Meditations he does not, and cannot know the true origin of all his ideas until Meditation Six, when the existence of the external world and the veracity of the relation between idea and object have been proven. At present, however, ideas can only appear to be adventitious, factitious, and innate.

Clearly, if there is to be any knowledge gained aside from the knowledge of his own existence, another approach must be tried. For although Descartes' ideas inform him of the existence of things beyond his mind, there seems to be no avenue open to that extra-subjective existence. Descartes is a single reality trapped within a world made entirely of appearance. Furthermore, to say that, because one's ideas are always of something, and that they therefore presuppose a reality which they may or may not represent, and that there is in fact a world existing outside the subject - whether this argument be valid or not - it is of no relevance here. Because the veracity of ideas is dubitable, so is the existence of their objects. These objects might exist, they might not; Descartes is assured only of their appearing to do so.

The method that Descartes finally adopts of "inquiring whether

any of the objects of which I have ideas within me exist outside of me" reflects his knowledge that he must move beyond the insoluble question of the origin of his ideas, yet nevertheless also consider them as more than simply 'modes of thought'.

Taken simply as modes of thought, all ideas are uniform, and equal: they possess, says Descartes, the same "formal reality". However, "when we consider them as images, one representing one thing and the other another, it is clear that they are very different one from the other": each possesses, says Descartes, different "objective reality".³⁵ To doubt this latter difference would be to doubt that one perceives a difference in one's thoughts; it would be to doubt the very consciousness one has of one's ideas.³⁶ The thinking substance does distinguish among its ideas. The question now is what exactly this doctrine of (qualitative) 'degrees' of objective reality means. Ideas cannot represent nothing: such is the nature of representation, such is the nature of nothingness. According to the analogy of light, only light can be seen and represented, not darkness. The question can be re-phrased: can this difference between being (light) and non-being (darkness) be expressed in terms of degree? Descartes provides the answer to this question in the following manner.

"There is no doubt that those which represent to me substances are something more, and contain so to speak more objective reality within them [that is to say, by representation participate in a higher degree of being or perfection] than those that simply represent modes or

accidents; and that idea again by which I understand a supreme God, eternal, infinite, [immutable], omniscient, omnipotent, and Creator of all things which are outside of Himself, has certainly more objective reality in itself than those ideas by which finite substances are represented." 37

Clearly, Descartes intends the doctrine of degrees of reality in ideas to rest on the distinction he makes between the reality of substance and the reality of mode or accident. In other words, the doctrine of degrees of reality has less to do with a Platonic/Prophorean 'chain of being' than it has to do with the differences in degree of reality of substance and accident. For Descartes, substance contains 'more' reality than any of its attributes because, as substance, it is the 'ground of the possibility' of these attributes. Substance is everything "in which there resides immediately, as in a subject, or by means of which there exists anything that we perceive, i.e. any property, quality, or attribute, of which we have a real idea..." 38 Consider the finite substance 'body', for example. This corporeal substance is the subject of any particular material reality. No particular body or 'piece of matter' could possibly exist without residing in this subject, whereas corporeal substance need not take the mathematically quantifiable form of that body; it might, but it need not. In other words, corporeal substance is the ground of the possibility of the existence of any body whatsoever. As body, it is infinitely determinable; and for this reason it contains within itself more 'possibility' and consequently more 'light' than any particular

already determined body. Thus, it can be said that, "by representation", corporeal substance participates "in a higher degree of being or perfection" than those things, already determined, that "simply represent modes or accidents".³⁹ The same is true of thought, considered as finite substance. As subject or substance, thought is that in which all ideas inhere; and though there are many particular ideas which may never be thought by an existing mind, if these ideas are ever to exist, then they must exist in the thought of an existing subject.

Earlier in this chapter, it was noted that Descartes identifies reality and perfection. In the same sense, he is able to speak of the 'objective reality' or the 'objective perfection' of an idea. It was also noted that, as a consequence of this, the terms 'reality' or 'being' and 'perfection' are essentially qualitative terms, not quantitative. Likewise the terms 'clear' and 'distinct' are used qualitatively rather than quantitatively, in the description of the mind's knowledge of the 'light' in the world. This qualitative aspect of the mind's understanding is referred to here in the context of Descartes' doctrine of 'degrees of reality', because it is essential to a proper understanding not only of that doctrine, but also of the proofs for God's existence in Meditation III. Without it this Cartesian doctrine is fraught with difficulties, of the kind experienced by the following commentator, who views Descartes' position as one which unsuccessfully tries to reduce quantitative

degrees of extension to qualitative degrees of 'objective reality'.

"But when the essential, defining attributes of the two reals are ineradicably disparate, is it not meaningless to assert one to be more real than the other? Now the objective reality of my idea of a piece of matter has, according to Descartes, some actual piece of matter as its formal cause, i.e. the mode of matter itself has the requisite formal reality to account for the degree of objective reality in the idea. But is there any clear and distinct meaning in saying that the reality of a mode of one attribute (materiality) is equal to, or greater than, the reality of a mode of the antithetic essence (consciousness)? Indeed, is it not a mistaken view that 'the reality' of an existent is quantitative and necessarily involves reference to the amount of any quality that it possesses? But when the reals to be explained are not in pari materia the parallel suggested seems extremely dubious. Even supposing a large body were more real than a small one, there seems no reason to believe that the thought of the large body is more real than the thought of the small one!"⁴⁰

The difficulty in posing the problem in this way is that it fails to base the doctrine of 'degrees of reality' on the substance/accident relation, and instead assumes a kind of hierarchy in extended being. To counter this, it may fairly be stated of Descartes' position that the eternal truths of mathematics, which denote the relative boundaries within which any extended entity must exist, do not possess varying degrees of perfection. Indeed, in the Rules for the Direction of the Mind, it is quite clear that, by means of repetitive exercises, even the most complex mathematical proofs can be rendered as intuitively clear and distinct as the simplest mathematical propositions. Extended bodies, as extended, cannot readily be said to admit of differing degrees of objective

perfection. The created truths are all equally created. As extended, a cat cannot be said to possess 'more' reality or perfection than a plant or a stone, for example. Each is equally extended, equally a mechanism, and equally subject to the mathematically grounded laws of physics. In other words, quantitative degree in size, position, speed, etc. does not in any way 'reduce' to or imply qualitative degree of reality or perfection. All extended beings, as modes of corporeal substance, possess the same degree of objective reality.

Once it is understood that the doctrine of degrees of objective reality reduces to the substance/mode relation, then on the same basis there is, in fact, a way in which ideas of extended entities can be said to have qualitatively differing degrees of objective reality. This point has nothing to do with the quantitative degree to which an object exists in extension, i.e. it has no bearing on the particular size, shape, or speed, etc. of an object. Instead, it has to do with the degree to which an extended object is quantifiable per se, i.e. it has to do with the degree to which an object 'participates by representation' in the created 'light' of corporeal substance, as expressed in the eternal truths. This kind of degree is, as noted in this chapter, a qualitative degree. Consider the following passage, in which there is an explicit equation of 'intricacy' or 'complexity, and 'perfection':

"For, sooth to say, there is no more probability that the

imperfection of the human intellect is the cause of our possessing the idea of God, than that ignorance of mechanical science should be the cause of our imagining some machine showing highly intricate contrivance, rather than another less perfect one."

On the above account only does it seem possible to assert that the idea of a cat, for example, has 'more' objective reality than the idea of a stone; for a cat can be viewed as a more complex mechanism, more 'encompassing' of the truths of extended and quantifiable substance, and consequently, itself more 'substantial' in nature. Similarly, on this account it can be said that a triangle, for example, is less 'perfect' or 'real' than a pyramid, which is something that contains in its nature both a triangle and a square. In this case, the triangle is 'less perfect' than the square.⁴² Once again, what is fundamental to this notion that ideas of extended beings, as well as those beings themselves, possess and are distinguishable in terms of different degrees of reality, is Descartes' doctrine that substance, whether it be thought or extension (body), is more real than accident.

IV.

In the examination of his ideas, Descartes discovers that the various representations in his consciousness possess differing degrees of objective reality. It is now incumbent upon him, in the continuing search for knowledge beyond that of the self's existence,

to account in some way for the fact that these ideas differ in this manner; just as he tries - albeit unsuccessfully - to account for the fact that his ideas appear to originate either innately, adventitiously, or factitiously. It is in the context of this exposition that Descartes introduces his doctrine of causality, which doctrine underlies the proofs for God's existence in Meditation Three. Only if this doctrine is introduced and applied in a valid manner, that is, in a way which does not run counter to the evil genius hypothesis, can the proof of God's existence be considered legitimate. Descartes attempts to meet this challenge by firmly entrenching the doctrine of causality in the nature of the res cogitans, in thought itself. It is, he says, "manifest by the natural light", that is to say, according to the light by which he knows himself.

"that there must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect. For, pray, whence can the effect derive its reality, if not from its cause? And in what way can this cause communicate this reality to it, unless it possessed it in itself? And from this it follows, not only that something cannot proceed from nothing, but likewise that what is more perfect - that is to say, which has more reality within itself - cannot proceed from the less perfect. And this is not only evidently true of those effects which possess actual or formal reality, but also of the ideas in which we consider merely what is termed objective reality." 43

In order to grasp the full meaning of the doctrine of causality stated above, it is first necessary to understand how, for Descartes, such a doctrine is "manifest by the natural light"; for it is!

precisely this 'natural light' which provides the criterion for the valid employment of the causal maxim in the proof of God's existence. An insight is gained into this question upon consideration once again of the nature of the thinking thing. The essence of the thinking thing is clearly to think, and when the mind's thought is employed correctly, the mind is said to know. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, in the order of God's creation, the thinking substance is properly said to be the 'knower'; the mind knows what it thinks; it knows its ideas. In attempting to account for the varying degrees of reality among its ideas, i.e. in attempting to know better its ideas, the mind is performing its essential, self-defining function: it is attempting to know, or what for Descartes is the same thing, it is asking the question 'why'. Referring once again to the 'natural light', Descartes puts the matter in the following way:

"Moreover, the light of nature certainly tells us that nothing exists about which the question, why it exists, cannot be asked, whether we enquire for its efficient cause, or, if it does not possess one, demand why it does not have one." 44

Descartes is asserting that the mind's positing of the question 'why', its enquiry into the cause of any existence, is essential to the nature of consciousness which thinks and knows its own ideas. At the root of his claim is the identification of cause with explanation, that is, the claim that the mind comes to know through the vehicle of 'cause'. This notion is made explicit when Descartes

writes:

"Moreover, in taking the entire essence of a thing as its formal cause here, I merely follow the footsteps of Aristotle. For in Post. Anal. BK.II. ch. 11, after passing over the material cause, he names as causa primarily co-cause, or, as it is rendered in philosophical Latin, the formal cause; and he extends this to all the essential natures of all things, since at that point he is not treating of the causes of a physical compound (as neither do I in this place), but generally of the causes from which knowledge of any kind may be derived." 45

The mind, as knower, not only can, but of its own nature must inquire into the 'why' of anything presented to consciousness, if that thing is to be known by the mind. It is for this reason that Descartes states that the specific doctrine of causality he introduces is "manifest by the natural light". Having isolated this doctrine within the seat of the mind's consciousness of its ideas, it is now possible to examine exactly what Descartes means when he asserts that "there must at least be as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in its effect."

It is evident that in his statement of the causal principle, Descartes is very much assuming the presence of differing degrees of reality in every entity that exists, whether that entity exist only in the mind, or also formally, external to the mind. As outlined above, each 'thing' perceived to exist possesses and is defined in terms of a certain degree of reality. Furthermore, if the mind is to know any existent entity, that is, if it is to ask 'why' that entity exists, then it is clear that that entity or thing must be treated

as an 'effect'. This effect comprises, as an entity, a certain degree of reality by which it is distinguishable from all other entities, and for which there exists some cause or sufficient reason; and this irrespective of which aspect, be it formal, efficient, final or material, that the mind seeks to understand. Descartes' doctrine of causality asserts that within the cause, the (qualitative) degree of reality or perfection must be at least as great as, or greater than that present in the effect. The reader may well wonder why this must be the case, and Descartes provides the ground for this "first principle" of causality, in the following:

"That there is nothing in the effect, that has not existed in a similar, or in some higher form in the cause, is a first principle than which nothing clearer can be entertained. The common truth 'from nothing, nothing comes' is identical with it. For, if we allow that there is something in the effect which did not exist in the cause, we must grant also that this something has been created by nothing; again the only reason why nothing cannot be the cause of a thing, is that in such a cause there would not be the same thing as existed in the effect." 46

To a large extent, the justification of the principle ex nihilo nihil fit seems to be based upon the principle of non-contradiction, i.e. that a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time, at least insofar as that principle is applied to the ideas of consciousness. In other words, any idea, possessing a certain distinct degree of reality and considered as an effect, could not be given a sufficient reason or cause if it came from nothing; and, to the same extent, it would not be known by the mind. It would both be

an effect, about which the mind asks 'why', and not be an effect, insofar as it would have nothing for its cause. This constitutes a clear negation of the mind's initial consciousness of that idea, considered as an effect. In such a case the mind would both have and not have an idea, it would both think and not think, and this, as Descartes shows in the second Meditation, is impossible.

In the context of the argument of the third Meditation, the principle of causality here outlined is applied first and foremost to ideas. Though this principle is held to be true of any reality (either formal or objective) perceived by the mind, Descartes cannot assume that its application to any reality external to the mind will yield indubitable knowledge of that external reality. Such is the predicament metaphysical doubt effects. At this point, no external reality is known to exist indubitably; therefore inquiry into the cause of such a reality would yield only dubitable knowledge. For this reason, Descartes' use of the principle is confined to the consideration of the objective reality of his ideas, which reality is known to exist, instead of the formal reality of the objects represented by his ideas. In his own words, which are indicative of his awareness of the limits demarcated by the method of doubt:

"Again, from the fact that something exists in idea, I do not infer that it exists in the actual world, except when no other cause for that idea can be given but the thing which it represents as actually existing; and this I have shown to be true not of many worlds, nor of any other thing, save God alone." 49

In this passage the essence of Descartes' employment of the causal principle in the proof of God's existence is encapsulated. Before the proof can be adequately treated, however, something further ought to be said of the doctrine of 'representative perception'; for it is only within the context of this doctrine that the application of the causal principle to the objective reality of ideas can be rendered comprehensible. At issue here is the attempt to account for the fact that a particular idea possesses "some one certain objective reality rather than another".⁴⁸ If this issue is to be resolved, it is clear that both the representative nature of ideas, as well as the fact that they can be viewed as 'effects' with certain causes into which the mind must inquire, has to be considered. In this sense, it can be said that the Cartesian theory of meaning, as embodied in the doctrine of representative perception, and the causal principle, are intimately linked in this discussion of the objective reality of ideas.⁴⁹ For Descartes, both are essential to and inseparable from the consciousness of his own existence and the existence of his ideas.

The first point to be noted in this investigation into the specific cause of an idea's particular degree of objective reality is that, according to the causal principle, the formal reality of the cause of an idea's objective reality has to be such that that cause must, at the very least, also be an idea. The cause of an idea, which idea is here considered as an effect, must contain at least as

much reality as is contained in that effect. This cause might indeed be more than an idea, as in the case, for example, of an idea whose object possesses actual or formal reality. In such a case, the object itself would be the 'cause' of the mind's having the idea. However, on the causal principle, the formal reality of this cause could not be 'less' than the reality of effect, for, as Descartes puts it,

"...if we imagine that something is found in idea which is not found in the cause, it must then have been derived from nought; but however imperfect may be this mode of being by which a thing is objectively [or by representation] in the understanding by its idea, we cannot certainly say that this mode of being is nothing, nor, consequently, that this idea derives its origin from nothing." 30

The second point to be mentioned here comes directly from the doctrine of representative perception, according to which the mind knows its ideas, which in turn 'represent' objects either of or external to the mind. In essence, Descartes' point is that, because ideas do represent, though it may be the case that an idea may cause another idea, this process cannot be extended to infinity; at some point this regress must be arrested in the actual or formal reality of the 'thing' represented objectively in an idea. That is to say, this regress must be halted in the formal reality either of the mind, or of an entity external to the mind. The reason for this has nothing to do with the impossibility per se of an infinite regress; in point of fact, Descartes denies that this is impossible, at least

with respect to causality in created being.⁵¹ Rather, the impossibility of an infinite regress in the causes of the objective reality of ideas is grounded in the nature of representation itself. Ideas, 'images' or 'copies', must ultimately be ideas and -- in the present sense -- 'effects' of something. There must be an original, archetypal 'essence' whose 'light' is what has objective or representative reality in ideas.

"And although it may be the case that one idea gives birth to another idea, that cannot continue to be so indefinitely; for in the end we must reach an idea whose cause shall be so to speak an archetype, in which the whole reality [or perfection] which is so to speak objectively [or by representation] in these ideas is contained formally [and really]. Thus the light of nature causes me to know clearly that the ideas in me are like [pictures or] images which can, in truth, easily fall short of the perfection of the objects from which they have been derived, but which can never contain anything greater or more perfect."⁵²

In one sense, this solution appears rather formalistic, appealing as it apparently does simply to the meaning of the words 'image' and 'representation'. However, underlying his position is the profound awareness on his part that, at present, the only existence he knows to be the possible cause or 'archetype' of any of his ideas is his own existence as a thinking thing. Referring explicitly to the passage cited above, Descartes' words on this matter are clear: "...I see very clearly that there cannot be an infinite series among the ideas I possess, because I feel myself to be finite, and in the place where I wrote that, I was acknowledging

in myself nothing except what I knew there." ⁵³ As yet, Descartes cannot validly assert anything about the specific nature of the ultimate cause of any particular idea, except that this cause, as an archetype, must exist not only objectively, but formally as well. This demand is merely in accordance with the requirements delineated by the causal principle, as it applies to the objective or representative reality of ideas. This point will become more evident in the discussion of the second proof for God's existence in Meditation Three, which has as its basis the notion that the res cogitans, considered as an archetype, can be 'abstracted' from an infinite series of causes. The reason for this lies in the fact that the res cogitans can ask about itself, not so much "what was the original cause that produced me, as what it is that at present preserves me, the object of this being to disentangle myself from all question of the succession of causes." ⁵⁴ But more of this in the following chapter.

These points raised in the discussion of the objective reality of ideas, and of the causal principle Descartes introduces in Meditation Three, are drawn together in a single conclusion. This conclusion, which serves as the first premise of the proof for God's existence, is the product of Descartes' examination in the third Meditation of his own conscious existence and of the ideas that comprise his nature. Descartes writes:

"But what am I to conclude from it all in the end? It is

this, that if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognise that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea. On the other hand, had no such an idea existed in me, I should have had no sufficient argument to convince me of the existence of any being beyond myself; for I have made very careful investigation everywhere and up to the present time have been able to find no other ground." 55

V.

Before closing this chapter, it is worthwhile locating this conclusion within the context of Descartes' method of doubt. In many ways, his position here is as precarious as it is at the beginning of the third Meditation. Just as he realises there that no hope of knowledge exists unless God's existence and veracity can be demonstrated, so now he is keenly aware of the predicament in which doubt has brought him; for if no such idea, i.e. an idea whose object will 'make him recognise that it is not in him either formally or eminently', exists, then again there is no chance of knowledge of any existence beyond his own. The difference now is this, that in a very real sense the process of doubting the contents of the mind is at its most extreme limit. Unless an idea of the kind he now seeks can be found, then he could only suppose that he himself is the cause of all his ideas. Effectively there would result a solipsism. The point to be made here is that in this supposition Descartes would be merely

remaining consistent in the application of doubt: to regard himself as the ultimate cause of his ideas would be the final and perhaps most effective way of undermining the claim to objective validity made by those ideas. Furthermore, since the only formally existing reality in which representations can at present be grounded - given, that is, that all being but the thinking self is dubitable - is precisely this thinking subject; then it is clear not only that Descartes can regard himself, though perhaps only tentatively, as the cause of all his ideas, but also that he must so regard himself - at least until he is forced to admit otherwise.

This tentative location of the cause of all his ideas in his own mind can be viewed as a 'ploy' constituting the final step in Descartes' long, arduous process of doubt. Beyond this point the mind, as thinking and doubting subject, cannot go; for this limit of doubt marks the limits of and is co-extensive with the ideas that can be attributed to the self as 'cause'. Once the self recognises that, among its ideas, there is one that could not possibly have that self for its cause, then the self is 'made to recognise' that, in terms of its ability to doubt and thereby separate itself from the world, the end has been reached. That one idea, which undoubtedly is an idea and exists as such, has nowhere to go but beyond the thinking subject: it establishes itself in the external world. In the terminology of the Meditations, its objective reality convinces of its formal reality.

The search for and discovery of this one idea, which will be shown to be the idea of God - and necessarily that idea - along with the implications of that discovery, provide the subject matter for the next chapter. Once again, the doctrine of degrees of objective reality and the application of the causal principles to this doctrine figure prominently in that discussion. Thus far, Descartes must recognise only one thing: that he exists. Otherwise, there is nothing else possessing sufficient weight, clarity and distinctness that could qualify as new knowledge. To glance ahead, one might hypothesize some of the 'qualities' that comprise the nature of that one particular idea on which this new knowledge could be based. First, this idea might possibly have a relation to the thinker dissimilar to the relation to thinker of all other ideas which thus far fail to make him recognise anything. It might further be thought that this relation between thinker and thought or idea, given the nature of the primary indubitable truth of the cogito, is also perhaps an intuition. At present, however, this is pure conjecture; for on what rational basis, armed only with a knowledge of himself, could Descartes validly assert such conditions about the idea of God? Instead, he must wait and see, he must 'discover' this idea. That the idea of God is different from all other ideas of the mind, and that it is an intuition integral to and in fact more primary than self-intuition, is of course the case in the Meditations. However, it is only known to be the case in the course of the proofs for God's

existence in Meditation III.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Proofs of God's Existence in Meditation Three

The exploration of consciousness leads Descartes once again to direct his attention to the representative contents of his mind. How is he to take stock of the endless variety represented in consciousness? A similar problem confronted him, it will be recalled, in the initiation of the process of doubt in the first Meditation. There, ideas are categorized first as perceptions seeming to pertain to the external world; then as derived from his own thought, and finally as the eternal truths of mathematics. The essential difference between Descartes' approach at the outset of the Meditations and the present approach lies, as one would expect, in the categorization of ideas as representations containing varying degrees of objective reality. It is on the basis of this categorization, and in particular its relation to the principle of causality inseparable from it, that the first proof of God's

existence in Meditation Three rests.

Descartes' treatment of the causes of his ideas is rather brief, and he quickly concludes that, with the exception of the idea of God, all other ideas could be derived from the idea he possesses of himself and of God, for they contain no degree of objective reality so great as not to be contained either in the representation of himself or in an admixture of the ideas of the self and of God. Considering first the ideas of "corporeal and inanimate things", "angels", "animals", and other men, Descartes notes that the objective content of these ideas could be derived from "an admixture of the other ideas which I have of myself, of corporeal things, and of God, even although there were apart from me neither men nor animals, nor angels, in all the world." ¹

Problems arise with respect to this account, however, as it is not immediately apparent how, in particular, the representative content or objective reality of those ideas pertaining to corporeal substance can be derived either from the idea of the self or from the idea of God, or from an admixture of both. Certainly the ideas of other men and of angels lend themselves to Descartes' explanation: ideas of other men, considered in terms of their objective reality, possess no greater degree of being than the thinking subject

perceives in the idea of itself. Nor does the idea of an angel pose any significant problem in this respect. Even though Descartes admits ignorance concerning the precise nature of that entity ², it is certainly not a corporeal being ³, and, as a representation, it has as its archetype either self-consciousness or an admixture of self-consciousness and the idea of divinity. ⁴

In the investigation into the objective reality of his ideas of corporeal things, Descartes' problem is to account for the way in which the unextended mind can in some sense be the sufficient cause of its idea of extension. His first task is to separate those elements of ideas of extended bodies which are perceived clearly and distinctly from those which appear confusedly in the mind, and one need only recall the discussion of the piece of wax in Meditation Two to understand this distinction. There, the 'primary' qualities pertaining to the wax are separated from the 'secondary' qualities pertaining largely to the subjective nature of the perception of that wax. These latter sensory qualities, such as color, taste, scent, heat, cold and the other tactile qualities, are represented by the mind in such a way that Descartes cannot decide whether or not their objective or representative being is reality or illusion. They may possess, he says, "material falsity".

"For although I have before remarked that it is only in judgments that falsity, properly speaking, or formal falsity, can be met with, a certain material falsity may nevertheless be found in ideas, i.e. when these ideas represent what is nothing as though it were something. For

example, the ideas which I have of cold and heat are so far from clear and distinct that by their means I cannot tell whether cold is merely a privation of heat, or heat a privation of cold, or whether both are real qualities, or are not such."⁵

Whether or not these ideas of secondary qualities are materially false seems of little consequence. In either case their existence as representations can be accounted for, in the sense that, though for example 'cold' only be the absence of heat and not anything real itself, the objective reality of the idea of cold in fact possesses some measurable degree, namely the degree to which heat is present. In this case, it would be the mind's taking the idea of cold as the representation of something 'positive', something possessing reality to some degree, that would render that idea materially false. In such a case, this idea, says Descartes, "would be in me in so far as something is lacking to the perfection of my nature"⁶, that is, insofar as the subject misrepresents the reality it perceives. Finally, of those sensory ideas that do not possess material falsity, Descartes concludes:

"...nevertheless because they exhibit so little reality to me that I cannot even clearly distinguish the thing represented from non-being [as in the confusion over 'heat' and 'cold'], I do not see any reason why they should not be produced by myself."

Having deduced that the objective reality of any of his sensory ideas of corporeal things might indeed have its seat in the formally existing reality of the self, Descartes must now account for the

objective reality of the "pure thought" of the primary qualities he perceives in matter outside himself. It is above all in the accounting for the objective reality of the ideas pertaining to corporeal substance, i.e. 'extension', 'number', 'duration', 'figure' and 'situation', that the substance/accident (mode) distinction plays a pivotal role. As the self-conscious subject of his ideas, i.e. as thinking substance, Descartes can posit himself as the cause of the objective reality of those ideas pertaining to body. It is the consciousness of the reality or perfection of his own substantial nature, not as thinking, but as substance, that permits this conclusion. In his own words:

"For [even] when I think that a stone is a substance, or at least a thing capable of existing of itself, and that I am a substance also, although I conceive that I am a thing that thinks and not one that is extended, and that the stone on the other hand is an extended thing which does not think, and that thus there is a notable difference between the two conceptions - they seem, nevertheless, to agree in this, that both represent substances."

There are two further qualities that are directly explainable in terms of the reality the self perceives in its own existence, and these are the qualities of number and duration. Insofar as the self possesses distinct, separate ideas, these ideas admit of numerical description; and, it will be recalled, it is the mind's consciousness of time that leads Descartes to assert of his nature in the second Meditation, that it exists "[just] when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should

likewise cease altogether to exist." ⁹ Finally, it is once again his own nature as a substance that is appealed to in the grounding of what he terms the "modes of substance", namely, extension, figure, situation, and motion, which are "the vestments under which corporeal substance appears." ¹⁰ As it is clearly the case that none of these "vestments" of corporeal substance are contained formally in the existing, thinking subject, their origin, if it is to reside in thinking substance at all, must be sought elsewhere. That place, says Descartes, is in the self considered as the eminent cause of the objective reality of these ideas. ¹¹ The thinking subject by no means knows itself fully - in fact, Meditation Three can be regarded as the subject's attempt to gain further knowledge of itself, though as substance it knows itself to contain, at least eminently, a greater degree of reality or perfection than any mode of substance. Thus, Descartes can conclude: "...but because they are merely certain modes of substance [and so to speak the vestments under which corporeal substance appears to us] and because I myself am also a substance, it would seem that they might be contained in me eminently." ¹²

II.

Descartes can now say that all his ideas, with the exception of his idea of God, may possibly be grounded either in his own

substantial nature, or in an admixture of the idea of self with the idea of God. This treatment of the causes of the objective reality of ideas embraces the whole spectrum of degrees of representative reality: from those sensory ideas possessing little or - in the case of materially false ideas - no objective reality. Descartes proceeds to consider the clear and distinct ideas of corporeal substance, until that idea containing the highest degree of objective reality is examined in terms of its cause. This idea is, of course, the idea of God, and it is upon reflection on this idea, and its relation to the being and thought of the self, that the divine existence is proven. Much of the discussion to follow attempts to elucidate, as Descartes himself does, the briefly stated proof of God's existence:

"Hence there remains only the idea of God, concerning which we must consider whether it is something which cannot have proceeded from me myself. By the name God I understand a substance that is infinite [eternal, immutable], independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself and everything else, if anything else does exist, have been created. Now all these characteristics are such that the more diligently I attend to them, the less do they appear capable of proceeding from me alone; hence, from what has been already said, we must conclude that God necessarily exists." ¹³

Before examining Descartes' elucidation of this proof, something must be said with respect to the idea of God that makes him recognise the existence of this being external to his own. To this end, it will be recalled that, in the philosophy of Descartes, God is above all the 'most perfect being', or the sum of all perfections. ¹⁴ Each

of the attributes of God, i.e. all-knowing, omnipotent, etc. may be viewed as real aspects or qualities of His nature that exist in the greatest, most perfect degree. If this definition of God is to be properly understood, the term 'perfection' should also be clarified. Thus far in this study, it has largely been treated as synonymous with the expression 'highest degree of reality', or, on the analogy of love, with 'greatest degree of excellence, perfection or goodness'. However, this comparison was made in the context of the discussion of the doctrine of degrees of reality, whereas, the object of present consideration is perfection per se, that is to say, perfection unqualified by any degree. This is the perfection of God, and it is with this notion of perfection, as something 'complete', 'unlimited', 'infinite', i.e. as something in no way containing negation or non-being, that Descartes is now working. For Descartes, because it is the case that, "properly speaking, limitation is only the negation of a greater perfection"¹⁵, it is also the case that God, as the supremely perfect being, is in no way limited.¹⁶ Consequently, the representative content of the idea of God is of a substance which we understand to be supremely perfect and in which we conceive absolutely nothing involving defect or limitation of its perfection."¹⁷

The being expressed in this idea of God as the "supremely perfect" being, because it contains no trace of non-being, is purely positive in nature. Correspondingly, the terms 'infinite' and

'unlimited' must be regarded as essentially positive terms, just as it can now be said of this idea that it contains the greatest degree of objective reality or objective perfection. From this, two important consequences follow.¹⁸ First, of this idea it cannot be said that it is materially false, i.e. it does in fact possess objective reality; for, as Descartes writes:

"...as this idea [of God] is very clear and distinct and contains within it more objective reality than any other, there can be none which is of itself more true, nor any in which there can be less suspicion of falsehood. The idea, I say, of this Being who is absolutely perfect and infinite, is entirely true; for although, perhaps, we can imagine that such a Being does not exist, we cannot nevertheless imagine that His idea represents nothing real to me, as I have said of the idea of cold."¹⁹

That the idea of God contains, according to Descartes, no material falsity, is of course indicative of the positive character of the reality represented in that idea. Represented in idea is the sum total of reality and perfection, even though, it might be objected, the mind's understanding of that idea is a negative understanding. By 'infinite', for example, the mind understands 'absence of limitation', i.e. the negation of something negative. These points are best expressed by Descartes in the explanation of the nature of the mind's understanding of infinity:

"Besides that, I distinguish between the formal notion of the infinite or infinity and the thing which is infinite; for as for infinity, even though we understand it to have as much positive reality as may be, yet we understand it only in a certain negative fashion, from the fact, namely, that.

we perceive no limitation in the thing; but the thing itself which is infinite is indeed positively understood, though not adequately, i.e. we do not comprehend the whole of what is intelligible in it. But it is just as when gazing at the sea, we are said to behold it, though our sight does not cover it all nor measures its immensity..." 20

The second conclusion that follows from the positive character of the idea of God, is intimately related to the subjective nature of the proof of God's existence; for it brings to the fore the causal relation that exists between the res cogitans, as thinking substance, and the objective reality perceived by that substance in its idea of God. Earlier in this study it was noted that the doctrine of comparative degrees of objective reality in ideas rests on the substance/accident (or mode) distinction. The application of the causal principle to this doctrine permitted the conclusion that all of the ideas of the thinking substance might be, hypothetically at least, grounded in that substance. Upon encountering the idea of God, however, the relation between the thinking substance Descartes knows himself to be, and the idea(s) of that substance, undergoes a dramatic change. No longer is the relation simply between two ideas of substance, each of which possesses a similar (or equal) degree of objective reality, which is how Descartes views the relation between the objective reality of corporeal and thinking substances. 21 Rather, at issue now is the relation between the objective reality perceived in the self-consciousness of finite thinking substance, and the objective reality perceived by finite substance in the idea of

God, or infinite substance. Hand on the statement of his proof for God's existence, Descartes relates what is perhaps the central justification of his procedure:

"Nor should I imagine that I do not perceive the infinite by a true idea, but only by the negation of the finite, just as I perceive repose and darkness by the negation of movement and of light; for, on the contrary, I see that there is manifestly more reality in infinite substance than in finite, and therefore that in some way I have in me the notion of the infinite earlier than the finite - to wit, the notion of God before that of myself. For how would it be possible that I should know that I doubt and desire, that is to say, that something is lacking to me, and that I am not quite perfect, unless I had within me some idea of a Being more perfect than myself, in comparison with which I should recognise the deficiencies of my nature." 22

The importance of this passage lies in its description of the relation between the self and that self's idea of God, and, as stated, it is through an understanding of this relation that knowledge of God's existence is acquired. Descartes asserts that "more reality" is perceived in "infinite substance than in finite [substance]." The key to his proof of God's existence lies clearly in the consciousness he has of the objective reality of the idea of God. The nature of this idea has already been discussed above. Something further must be said of what Descartes now terms "finite substance", or 'incomplete' or 'limited' substance; for, though Descartes may indeed be conscious of his substantial nature, i.e. of himself as the subject in which all thoughts reside, it might well be asked in what sense can the self-conscious subject be termed 'finite

substance'. Perhaps it might even be the case that Descartes is infinite substance after all, though he does not yet know it.

The very positing of these queries, along with several other undeniable facts contained in the subject's consciousness of itself, betray the finite, limited quality of the self immersed in these Meditations. First, there is the immediate contrast between the subject's ignorance of its own nature, and the perfect knowledge represented objectively in the idea of God. The fact that Descartes also admits, at the outset of the Meditations, the possibility of deception in his thinking, is another token of his imperfection closely linked to the fallible character of his knowledge. Again, as was discussed in Chapter Two (supra, pp. 55-58), the initial definition of a thinking thing reveals not only further self-ignorance, but also the fundamental difference between the idea of the self and the idea of God. In the statement of the cogito Descartes does "not now admit anything which is not necessarily true"²³, which is to say, Descartes can only know himself to exist when he thinks. His essence is to think, and not necessarily to exist. This existence is not absolutely necessary, an insight provided the self by its consciousness of the temporal aspect of its thought: "I am, I exist, that is certain. But how often? Just when I think; for it might possibly be the case if I ceased entirely to think, that I should likewise cease altogether to exist."²⁴

For any and all of the above reasons, Descartes can legitimately

state that his nature as substance is in some way finite. Above all, this notion is inherent in the cogito. Descartes fields one last objection, however, in attempting to ground the cause of the objective reality of the idea of God in his substantial nature.

Since his knowledge has been shown, step by step, to increase - at least in the sense that he knows more and more what he does not know, perhaps it is the case that he is potentially God; and that he may consequently consider himself the eminent cause of that idea. Once again, it is the knowledge of his own actual, formal existence, which objectively he knows to be finite, that undermines this possibility.

In his own words:

"And further, although my knowledge grows more and more, nevertheless I do not for that reason believe that it can ever be actually infinite, since it can never reach a point so high that it will be unable to attain any greater increase. But I understand God to be actually infinite, so that He can add nothing to His supreme perfection. And finally I perceive that the objective being of an idea cannot be produced by a being that exists potentially only, which properly speaking is nothing, but only by a being which is formal or actual."

Having now outlined the distinction between the idea of infinite substance and the idea of finite substance, an attempt is made here to summarize Descartes' proof of God's existence, in such a way that his own characterization of it, i.e. "I exist, therefore God exists", becomes apparent. To begin, it can be said that, above all, the consciousness of his own particular existence, and from this self-consciousness the 'formal reality' of the 'objective reality' of

the idea of God is demonstrated. Expressed otherwise, the consciousness of the existing self lies at the base of this proof. The 'facts' of this consciousness are, of course, ideas, and insofar as these ideas are the ideas of an existing thinking substance, they comprise the essence of that substance. ²⁶ Furthermore, as ideas of this formally existing substance, they cannot be viewed apart from that substance's existence; they exist 'of' and 'with' that substance. Consequently, when Descartes asserts that reflection upon his own self fails to reveal, i.e. fails to 'make him recognise' the ground of the idea of God, he is not claiming, rather trivially, that the idea of God is objectively greater than all his other ideas. Rather, he is stating that the idea of God is greater, infinitely greater in whatever fashion, than himself, that is to say, than the formal and objective reality that comprise his own self as an existing res cogitans.

It is essential to grasp Descartes' meaning here. What is being asserted is that, if the self is to remain that self, a thinking thing, then the formal reality of the idea of God, because this idea is an idea possessing its own objective reality, must be admitted. In failing to find within the formal/objective reality of his own being the efficient cause or reason for the objective reality of the idea of God, Descartes, for the first time in the Meditations, is defining the limits of his own self, by going 'beyond' that self to God Himself. Descartes is not proving the existence of the idea of

God: that idea he already possesses. Instead, through the method of doubt the self is established as an existing, thinking substance. Since, therefore, it is both the existing (formal) and thinking (objective) self that are the same, it is God's formal existence that must be concluded if the self, qua thinker of the idea of God, is to account for the undeniable reality of that idea, i.e. if the self is to account for the fact that it has that idea. For Descartes, the choice is clear: in accounting for the idea of God he must either admit its formal reality, or deny that this idea exists, i.e. deny that he thinks, and thinks this idea. The latter he cannot do, therefore God exists. In other words, since the being and thought of the res cogitans are one, "I exist, therefore God exists." ²⁷ In this respect, when Descartes writes, "I see nothing in all that I have just said which by the light of nature is not manifest to anyone who desires to think attentively on the subject" ²⁸, he really is referring to the lumen naturale, to the self's consciousness of itself.

III.

In the discussion of Descartes' method in the first chapter of this study, it was noted that the two statements, 'I exist', and 'God exists' are treated as necessarily connected, even "though most people, not noticing what this true relation is, reckons [sic] them

among those that are contingently connected."²⁹ Furthermore, it was also noted that nothing less than a series of Meditations of the order presented by Descartes could make this relation clear. As a result of the difficulty of understanding this connection, in the third Meditation Descartes supplements the above proof of God's existence with a further proof, or with what he terms a "more thoroughgoing explanation of it"³⁰, meant for those "whose natural light is so exceeding small that they do not see this first principle, viz. that every perfection existing objectively in an idea must exist actually in something that causes that idea..."³¹ As is evident from Descartes' words, there is no real difference between the first and second proofs. Both, as will be seen, derive essentially from the comparison and contrast made between finite self-consciousness, and the objective reality of the idea of God possessed by the thinking subject.

In a manner of speaking, it may be argued that Descartes is indulging in the attempt to undermine his own proof for God's existence. Because he does exist, and because he does possess the idea of God, he must affirm God's existence as the efficient cause of that idea: such is the conclusion of the first proof. Now the question is, "whether I, who have this idea, can exist if no such being [i.e. God] exists."³² In other words, the present inquiry is directed towards the necessity of the causal relation between God's existence and the thinking existence of the finite subject, the

thinker of the idea of God. Perhaps, Descartes argues, the existence of finite substance might derive "from some source less perfect than God"; that existence might be self-caused, for example, or caused by "my parents". The case for further reflection on the nature of the self now becomes apparent.

The doubting self, as noted earlier in this chapter, cannot but regard itself as incomplete and limited. Consider, for example, the absence to its understanding of the "many branches of knowledge of which my nature is destitute." Yet these many branches of knowledge of which the subject is aware, but does not possess, "are only accidents of the thinking substance"³³, says Descartes, which surely that self would have bestowed upon itself, had it been the author of its own substantial existence. The underlying contrast between the reality of substance and the reality of accident or mode is revealed in this argument, for, on the causal principle, the efficient cause of substance can effect more easily any accident of that substance. Thus, Descartes argues,

"...nor should I have deprived myself of any of the things contained in the idea which I form of God, because there are none of them which seem to me specially difficult to acquire: and if there were any that were more difficult to acquire, they would certainly appear to me to be such (supposing I myself were the origin of the other things which I possess) since I should discover in them that my powers were limited."³⁴

The temporal aspect of the existence of the res cogitans is raised by Descartes, and is fundamental to the second proof for God's

existence, as it reveals most clearly the contingent nature of thinking substance's existence. This substance is "nothing but a thinking thing", and it is only thinking that in fact characterizes the existence of that subject: thought, not existence, constitutes the essence of the 'I'. At the moment this 'I' conceives its own thought, it conceives its own existence. However, as Descartes notes in the second Meditation, it cannot be known whether or not the subject exists when it does not think. Instead, each self-conscious act is a discrete act, temporally separated from yet always identical to and of the same self as all other moments of self-consciousness. It is this awareness of the temporally distinct components of the thought and existence of the res cogitans that yields the following insight:

"For all the course of my life may be divided into an infinite number of parts, none of which is in any way dependent on the other; and thus from the fact that I was in existence a short time ago it does not follow that I must be in existence now, unless some cause at this instant, so to speak, produces me anew, that is to say conserves me. It is as a matter of fact perfectly clear and evident to all those who consider with attention the nature of time, that, in order to be conserved in each moment in which it endures, a substance has need of the same power and action as would be necessary to produce and create it anew, supposing it did not yet exist, so that the light of nature shows us clearly that the distinction between creation³⁵ and conservation is solely a distinction of the reason."

As yet, Descartes is unable to discover within consciousness the ground of his own being. He understands what that ground must entail in terms of his temporal existence, for, as he further states, "what

is in question is not so much the cause which formerly created me, as that which conserves me at the present time." ³⁶ Consequently that cause must exist now, as the self exists now, and, for the same reason, in the positing of that cause, the possibility of an infinite regress - in this case, at least - must be denied. ³⁷ Descartes is seeking to discover whether or not he can be the cause of his own existence. Having once again discussed the nature of the self as revealed in methodological doubt and in its relation to time, it is now necessary to inquire into the nature of a being that is self-caused, in order to determine whether or not the self-conscious subject above described attains to such stature.

The notion of a self-caused being is fundamental to the idea of God. In fact, it is the inseparability of these ideas that leads Descartes to the conclusion that, since he is not the supremely perfect being, he is not self-caused. His objectors have trouble with this notion of God as self-caused, but, as will be seen, it is a concept that follows directly from the causal method of inquiry Descartes adopts in the third Meditation. What must be kept in mind, once again, is that Descartes is attempting, in both proofs for God's existence, to grasp the relation between the self-conscious subject and the objective reality of the idea of God contained therein. Descartes understands this relation as a causal relation; and in Chapter Three of this study, it was noted that the causal relation is grounded in the nature of the res cogitans. In the examination of

its ideas, the mind inquires into the sufficient reason, cause, or the 'why' of the thing represented in idea, and this procedure applies equally well to the mind's examination of the idea of God:

"But I think that it is manifest to all, that to consider the efficient cause is the primary and principal, not to say the only means of proving the existence of God. We shall not be able to pursue this proof with accuracy, if we do not grant our mind the liberty of asking for an efficient cause in every case, even in that of God; for with what right should we exclude God, before we have proved that He exists? Hence in every single case we must inquire whether it is derived from itself or from something else; and indeed by this means the existence of God may be inferred, although it be not expressly explained what is the meaning of anything being self-derived."

If the mind is to think at all, which it does do, it must question of or inquire into its ideas. The questioning process of the thinking subject is directed at all the contents of the mind, and on this basis, the origin of the concept of God as causa sui becomes clearer: it lies in the immensity of His being.

"Nothing exists concerning which the question may not be raised - 'what is the cause of its existence?' For this question may be asked even concerning God. Not that He requires any cause in order to exist, but because in the very immensity of His being lies the cause or reason why He needs no cause in order to exist."

Descartes states that "the very immensity of His being", i.e. God's nature as supremely perfect and infinite, is what implies that He is causa sui. This is a point repeatedly expounded by Descartes in the Replies to Objections.⁴⁰ His position is that God, as the

supremely perfect being, complete in every aspect of His being, is in no way dependent on any other being for His existence. If he were so, He would not be supremely perfect.⁴¹ Furthermore, in terms of the mind's understanding of this concept, just as the term 'infinite' is understood negatively, i.e. as the negation of the negative term 'finite', so, says Descartes in attempting to placate his objector Caterus, "when we say that God exists per se, we can indeed understand that term negatively, our whole meaning being really that He has no cause."⁴²

Since it is God Who possesses the property of self-existence, and not the finite being he knows himself to be, Descartes can only conclude that he is not the author of his own existence as a thinking thing. Does this mean, however, that God is necessarily the cause of the thinking substance's existence? Might not "some other cause less perfect than God" be the author of this being? This possibility is denied by Descartes. Whatever the nature of that cause, since the 'effect' is a thinking thing possessing the idea of God, "it must be allowed that it [i.e. the cause] is likewise a thinking thing and that it possesses in itself the idea of all the perfections which I attribute to God."⁴³ Furthermore, as the infinite regress initiated by an inquiry into the 'cause of that cause' is already known to be impossible, a cause adequate to the objective reality of the idea of God must be posited; and such a cause can only be self-caused, which only God can be.

One final objection is fielded by Descartes in the second proof of God's existence in Meditation Three. In the concept of the all-perfect being, one of the main attributes of God is "the unity, the simplicity or the inseparability of all things which are in God."

⁴⁴ Descartes sees no contradiction in this notion ⁴⁵, and since it is into the cause of this idea's presence in the mind that he is now inquiring, his conclusion - similar as it is to the previous conclusion, is that only God Himself, rather than several concurring causes, can constitute the adequate ground of this idea of the sum of all perfections. Thus, given that neither the thinking substance itself, nor any other cause containing less perfection than is represented objectively in the idea of God, nor again any mere concurrence of different causes are responsible for this idea's presence to the mind, Descartes summarizes his results: "...we must of necessity conclude from the fact alone that I exist, or that the idea of a Being supremely perfect - that is of God - is in me, that the proof of God's existence is grounded on the highest evidence." ⁴⁵ Once more, that "highest evidence" is nothing other than the existence of the thinking thing, which is the only thing, apart from God, that is known to exist.

IV.

The question posed at the outset of the second proof for God's

existence, namely "whether I, who have this idea [of God], can exist if no such being exists", has now been answered. The idea of God exists in the mind of the res cogitans not merely as a kind of Kantian 'ideal of pure speculative reason', whose existence as idea is necessary for the proper functioning of the understanding. Rather, its presence is an 'infallible token' of God's existence itself. The thinking subject thinks the idea of God, and only God's existence can account for this fact of consciousness. The subjective nature of this proof is reiterated at the close of the third Meditation:

"And the whole strength of the argument which I have here made use of to prove the existence of God consists in this, that I recognise that it is not possible that my nature should be what it is, and indeed that I should have in myself the idea of a God, if God did not veritably exist..."

It cannot be denied that the idea of God does have a function in human understanding similar to the function ascribed it in Kant's philosophy. It is, in a sense, a 'limiting' idea, and the ground of the mind's ability to formulate the ideas not only of itself, but of beings 'higher' and 'lower' than itself. Consider, for example, the following passage from Reply to Objections V:

"You allow that all the perfections I see in man can be in varying degrees so augmented that afterwards I behold them to be such as cannot fall within human nature; but this is all I want in order to prove the existence of God. For it is that very power of amplifying all human perfections to such an extent that they are apprehended as more than human;

and this, I maintain, could not have come about unless we had been created by God." 48

The essential difference between the Kantian and the Cartesian viewpoints lies, of course, in the position taken with respect to the formal existence of the objective reality represented in the idea of God. Kant denies that such existence can be known by the mind 49, whereas Descartes advances proofs to the opposite. However, it should be noted that, on Descartes' account, there are many who, in the course of their life-times, may neither think the idea of God 50, nor know of His existence. No matter; for the 'infallible token' of God's existence is revealed, upon the exercise of the mind undertaken in the Meditations, in the idea of God contained in self-consciousness. The idea of God is present innately in the mind, i.e. "it comes from no other source than myself" 51, and it is, accordingly, perceived "by means of the same faculty by which I perceive myself." To refer to the discussion of ideas in Chapter Three of this study, it can be said that the 'divine light' or intelligence is perceived to be as primary as and inseparable from the 'natural light' of self-conscious intuition. In the following summarization of these points, this 'light' of God, who is now known to be the creator of the thinking subject, is likened to "the mark of the workman imprinted on his work."

"And one certainly ought not to find it strange that God, in creating me, placed this idea within me to be like the mark of the workman imprinted on his work; and it is likewise not

essential that the mark shall be something different from the work itself. For from the sole fact that God created me it is most probable that in some way he has placed his image and similitude upon me, and that I perceive this similitude (in which the idea of God is contained) by means of the same faculty by which I perceive myself - that is to say, when I reflect on myself I not only know that I am something [imperfect], incomplete and dependent on another, which incessantly aspires after something which is better and greater than myself, but I also know that He on whom I depend possesses in Himself all the great things towards which I aspire [and the ideas of which I find within myself], and that not indefinitely or potentially alone, but really, actually and infinitely; and that thus He is God."

52

V.

A few words concerning Descartes' method in these two proofs for God's existence are in order before concluding this chapter. The analogy of the mark of the workman expresses very well one of the underlying themes prevalent in the third Meditation: the inseparability of the self's consciousness of its own finite nature from that self's apprehension of the existence of God. It is this inseparable relation that unites both the proofs of God's existence in Meditation Three; for whether it be the cause of the presence of the idea of God to consciousness that is in question, or the cause of the existence of the subject that thinks this idea, in both cases the conclusion rests on the undeniable, indubitable reality of the thinking self's consciousness of its own finite nature, and its apprehension of the being that is its creator. Both thinking

substance and that substance's idea of God are discovered to be 'effects' of the same cause, God - Who exists. Thus, writes Descartes,

"It does not make much difference whether my second proof, the one based on our own existence, is regarded as different from the first proof, or merely as an explanation of it. Just as it is an effect of God to have created me, so it is an effect of His to have put the idea of himself in me; and there is no effect coming from him, from which one cannot prove his existence. None the less, it seems to me that all these proofs based on his effects are reducible to a single one; and also that they are incomplete, if the effects are not evident to us (that is why I considered my own existence rather than that of heaven and earth, of which I am not equally certain) and if we do not add to them the idea which we have of God. For since my soul is finite, I cannot know that the order of causes is not infinite, except in so far as I have in myself that idea of the First Cause; and even if there be admitted a First Cause who keeps me in existence, I cannot say that it is God unless I truly have the idea of God." 53

The principle underlying the identification of self-consciousness and the consciousness of the idea of God can be found in Descartes' assertion that it is the presence to consciousness of the idea of God which enables the self to possess consciousness of its own finite nature. Ultimately, as the discussion of ideas in Chapter Three showed, it is 'positive' being, i.e. degree of reality, that is represented in the ideas of consciousness, and not negation. It is because the mind possesses - at least implicitly - this idea of the supreme being prior to any other idea, that the limited degree of objective reality in any other idea, even the idea of the self, can be thought. For this reason,

then, though considerations of method dictate that only through prior reflection upon the finite self can knowledge of God's existence be attained, it is, in fact, the idea of God, containing as it does the greatest degree of objective reality that is the most clear and distinct idea in the mind.⁵⁴ As stated, only strict adherence to the method most conducive to the finite character of human understanding, which method prescribes the mind's consideration first of the finite order⁵⁵, can yield knowledge of God. In the Meditations, the res cogitans 'discovers' that the idea of God is the clearest and most distinct of its ideas, and that infinite being, or being per se, precedes and is the cause of finite being. Nowhere is this contrast between the order of the mind's discovery of these truths, and their actual 'order' in reality, more concisely expressed than in the following reply Descartes makes to the student Burman:

Reply: "...Explicitly, we are able to recognize our own imperfection before we recognize the perfection of God. This is because we are able to direct our attention to ourselves before we direct our attention to God. Thus we can infer our own finiteness before we arrive at his infiniteness. Despite this, however, the knowledge of God and his perfection must implicitly always come before the knowledge of ourselves and our imperfections. For in reality the infinite perfection of God is prior to our imperfections, since our imperfection is a defect and negation of the perfection of God. And every defect and negation presupposes that which it falls short and negates."

Objection: "But in that case nothingness would have to presuppose being, would it not?"

Reply: "In Metaphysics, our understanding of nothingness derives from that of being."⁵⁶

CHAPTER FIVE

God's Veracity and the A Priori Argument

The extraordinary exercise of mind entailed by the proofs for God's existence in the third Meditation can be viewed as the groundwork Descartes lays for placing knowledge upon a firm foundation. As was discussed in the first chapter of this study, truth is the aim of Descartes' philosophical inquiry, and, given the extreme doubt into which he immerses himself in the second Meditation, it was also noted that the attainment of this goal is possible only upon a knowledge of God's existence and veracity. Descartes discovers not only that God exists, but, in the course of that discovery, it becomes evident to him that the idea of God, possessing as it does the greatest degree of objective reality, is also the mind's most clear and distinct idea. In fact, it is even the necessary condition of self-consciousness.

With the knowledge of God's existence, a significant step is made towards the 'reconstruction' of all that is doubted in the

Meditations. This final chapter traces the stages of this reconstruction as it is presented in the fourth and fifth Meditations. In this respect, it will first have to be shown that God is not a deceiver, and that, even though the mind is subject to false judgements, it can, nevertheless, obtain truth in the form of judgements based on clear and distinct ideas. Upon the establishment of the subjective and objective criteria of truth, this study then proceeds, with Descartes, to investigate the clear and distinct ideas of the mind. One of these ideas is of God's existence, which, from the standpoint of subjective certainty, i.e. the standpoint conditioned by clarity and distinctness, is known by means of the a priori argument. Finally, accounting for the presence of this argument in Meditation Five realizes the last of the goals of this study (stated in Chapter One).

Before initiating the reconstructive that follows the third Meditation, Descartes permits himself the leisure of once more examining the idea of the supreme being he now has before him. His deliberations in the proofs for God's existence occur on a level remote from sensual interference, and, in a sense, the contemplation of God that occurs on this plane may be considered the closest the mind can possibly come - in this life, at least - to enjoying the beatific vision. After proving God's existence, says Descartes,

"...it seems right to pause for a while in order to contemplate God Himself, to ponder at leisure His marvellous attributes, to consider, and admire, and adore,

the beauty of this light so resplendent, at least as far as the strength of my mind, which in some measure dazzled by the sight, will allow me to do so. For just as faith teaches us that the supreme felicity of the other life consists only in this contemplation of the Divine Majesty, so we continue to learn by experience that a similar meditation, though incomparably less perfect, causes us to enjoy the greatest satisfaction of which we are capable in this life."

Such a vision, as stated, is only possible after the long, arduous process of doubt by means of which all sensuous content is removed from the mind's eye. At the outset of the Meditations, Descartes suggests reasons for doubting not only God's existence, but also His veracity. However, in Meditation Three he argues, essentially, that to doubt God's existence is to doubt one's own thinking existence. Furthermore, close attention to the contents of the mind reveals not only that God's existence is indubitable, but that the idea of God is more clear and distinct than the indubitable idea of the self. In terms of Descartes' employment of the method of doubt, it is possible to establish a 'scale' of clarity and distinctness in ideas. This scale corresponds to the order in which doubt is extended to the contents of the mind, and Meditation Four begins with a summary of this scale.

"I have been well accustomed these past days to detach my mind from my senses, and I have accurately observed that there are very few things that one knows with certainty respecting corporeal objects, that there are many more which are known to us respecting the human mind, and yet more still regarding God Himself; so that I shall now without any difficulty abstract my thoughts from the consideration of [sensible or] imaginable objects, and carry them to those

which, being withdrawn from all contact with matter, are purely intelligible."

The clarity and distinctness of the idea of God and the knowledge of His existence ranks higher, infinitely higher, than that of any other idea. As was discussed in the previous chapter, such knowledge is contained in, as primary as, and a necessary condition of self-conscious intuition. Furthermore, the inseparability of the knowledge of God's existence from the knowledge of God as the creator and conserver of finite thinking substance is also shown by Descartes to rest on this intuition. This is an important point, for it is in the context of Descartes' knowledge of God as the creator/conserver of the res cogitans that the divine veracity is established.

Hyperbolic doubt is grounded in the possibility of divine deception, and if this possibility is still to be admitted in the Meditations, i.e. if there is no escaping doubt, then it is deception of the self by the creator of that self. Either God has created a world topsy-turvy, in which no truth or law is constant; or the faculty by which the thinking thing grasps the created world is erroneous and faulty by nature. These two kinds of deception are, of course, integrally related, and are treated by Descartes as such, for in both instances it is the constancy or the unchanging reality and veracity of created being, of either created thinking substance or the created truths by which corporeal substance is grasped, that is at issue. In any case, the question remains the same: is the God Whose existence

is demonstrated in Meditation Three a veracious or a deceitful God? God will be seen to be the former, precisely because the former God, and only that God, can exist in the manner Descartes proves Him to exist.

I.

The proof of God's veracity presented by Descartes in Meditation Four shows equally well the impossibility of divine deception in both the created being of the external world governed by the truths of mathematics, and the created faculty of the mind for understanding that world. First, Descartes denies that deception per se is possible by God, i.e. it is denied that God would desire to deceive in any way whatsoever, and it is then denied that God created deceiving mental faculties. He writes:

"For, first of all, I recognise it to be impossible that He should ever deceive me; for in all fraud and deception some imperfection is to be found, and although it may appear that the power of deception is a mark of subtilty or power, yet the desire to deceive without doubt testifies to malice or feebleness, and accordingly cannot be found in God.

"In the next place I experienced in myself a certain capacity for judging which I have doubtless received from God, like all the other things that I possess; and as He could not desire to deceive me, it is clear that He has not given me a faculty that will lead me to err if I use it aright."

In the idea of God is contained, above all, the idea of the

supremely perfect being. Present to the mind, writes Descartes, "there is a real and positive idea of God or of a Being of supreme perfection" ⁴, and it is this being's veracity that is dealt with here. In that idea there is no trace of negation or imperfection, as that being is perfection in the highest degree. What Descartes denies is not that such a being could possess the power to deceive, for the evil genius is posited in Meditation Two as all-powerful. Rather, it is the desire or will to deceive that Descartes denies of the supremely perfect being. In other words, the attribute of deceitfulness is incompatible with the nature of the supremely perfect being, a fact, Descartes writes elsewhere, which is "clearly demonstrated from the fact that the form of deception is non-existence, towards which the supreme existent cannot incline." ⁵ The reason for this lies as much in the nature of deception, as in the nature of the supremely perfect being.

In stating that "the form of deception is non-existence", what Descartes means is that, in deception, there is present the desire to make what is not, i.e. non-existence, appear to be what is, namely existence, or vice versa. Such desire must be considered apart from all questions of motive ⁶, for it is the fact of God's deception that is at issue here. Yet as the supremely perfect being, the product of God's creation is by nature existence, not non-existence; for as being, what He thinks and wills or creates, of necessity, is. By a similar token, it can in no way accord with God's goodness, which is

the same as His being -the distinction being only one of finite reason - that He should deceive. His goodness, considered as a 'function' of the exercise of His will, can only be good, and can, in other words, only incline towards existence. However, because the will of an evil genius can only incline or be directed towards non-existence, it is impossible that the evil genius and God are one and the same being. God exists; the evil genius, considered as pure negation, does not. The following discussion should make this clearer.

On the basis of this proof of the divine veracity, several points of methodology raised earlier in this study may now be clarified. In particular, it was asked how it is the case that God's veracity becomes apparent only after His existence is known. To begin, in Chapter Two it was stated that, prior to the proof of God's existence, Descartes could not be sure that it is not an evil God whose existence he searches for. The indefinite character of that entity was cited in the following passage:

"...if the objective reality of any one of my ideas is of such a nature as clearly to make me recognise that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and that consequently I cannot myself be the cause of it, it follows of necessity that I am not alone in the world, but that there is another being which exists, or which is the cause of this idea."
[my emphasis]

The third Meditation reveals that it is only the idea of God, the supremely perfect being, that can be the cause of the objective

reality of the idea possessed of Him by the finite subject. Once God is known to exist, Descartes, in accordance with the precepts of his method, duly directs his attention to the veracity of that God, for the question of divine deception still lingers.⁸ Such deception on the part of God is then ruled out entirely, and since the evil genius must possess God's all-powerful nature in order to effect the hyperbolic doubt hypothesized by Descartes, that deceitful entity's existence is rendered an impossibility.

Because the nature of deception is ultimately defective, it can in no way accord with God's perfect nature⁹, and since the deception practiced by the omnipotent evil genius of the Meditations is in some sense all-encompassing, that evil genius can, in the same sense, be said to 'incline' towards complete non-existence: the idea of an all-powerful evil genius contains within it the notion of pure negation. Insight can now be gained into how the evil genius manages to survive as long as it does in the Meditations, for there is a sense in which the idea of the omnipotent evil genius and the idea of God remain conflated - until, that is, the formal reality of God is discovered. In that both entities are all-powerful it can be said that each possesses the same degree of objective reality. However, the God who is proven to exist is the supremely perfect being, and this, as the subsequent reflection of Meditation Four reveals, the evil genius most certainly is not. It is God, and necessarily God, who is proven to exist in Meditation Three, to the ultimate and

absolute exclusion of the evil genius; and it is in this sense that it can be said that the veracity of God becomes evident after His existence is ascertained:

The reader is asked now to consider how the procedure of the Meditations would have been affected if the order of Descartes' discovery of God's existence and veracity had been reversed: if, in Meditation Three, Descartes had concluded the veracity of God, merely by examining the content of the idea of God, and this prior to the knowledge of His existence; then by the same method he could have established God's existence. In either case, Descartes would have employed a method of proof otherwise reserved for the truths of mathematics and the a priori argument of Meditation Five. However, as the employment of this method of proof, which assumes the validity of clear and distinct ideas, cannot be legitimated until after God's existence and veracity are known, such a proof would be in clear violation of the methods of doubt and of analysis used in the Meditations.

To return to the argument of the fourth Meditation, the process of reconstruction in knowledge is hindered by a problem that immediately confronts Descartes upon the discovery of God's veracity in His acts of creation. As yet, Descartes cannot allow himself to consider the clear and distinct ideas of the external world, for, apart from the divine veracity, he must admit the reality - taught him by experience - of the errors in judgements he undoubtedly

commits. Although the evil genius is now banished from the Meditations, unless the doubt raised by the fact of error can in some way be alleviated, Descartes can never know if the ideas his mind naturally holds to be true, i.e. clear and distinct ideas, really are true. Even though God is veracious, the mind is nevertheless subject to error. Furthermore, this fact of human experience cannot be dismissed simply by asserting that, insofar as God is the creator of finite thinking substance, that substance does not err, but, insofar as that substance is not God, i.e. as it is created, it is liable to error. Such a solution "does not quite satisfy" Descartes, for, as he writes,

"...error is not a pure negation [i.e. is not the simple defect or want of some perfection which ought not to be mine], but it is a lack of some knowledge which it seems that I ought to possess." 10

Must it be admitted that what God creates - in this case, the thinking substance - is not perfect, especially since that 'great artisan' God, who places the idea of Himself in the mind "like the mark of the workman imprinted on his work", is Himself, above all, perfect? As Descartes puts it, "Is it then better that I should be subject to err than that I should not?" 11

In the solution to this problem, it is worthwhile once again to reflect upon the nature of the God Descartes proves to exist in Meditation Three. God, the supremely perfect being, contains within Himself the sum total of all perfections: He is omniscient,

all-powerful and, in general, the substance in which all positive perfections reside in a single, simple unity.¹² The Divine unity was mentioned in Chapter Two in the discussion of the doctrine of the creation of eternal truths, and it was noted there that in God there is no discrepancy between will and intellect. Indeed, it is just this lack of discrepancy that enables Descartes to extend doubt to the limits he does, for resultant upon this notion of God's unity and simplicity is the conclusion that God cannot in any way be determined to act according to an indubitable principle existing independently of His existence. As a consequence of this, no insight is possible into the final causes of God's creative act. This conception of God figures here in Meditation Four in Descartes' discussion of truth and falsehood, for, by the same argument, Descartes must admit that he, as finite entity, can have no insight into the reason why God's creation of finite thinking substance takes the form it does. God's motives, of necessity, remain inscrutable.

"For, in the first place, knowing that my nature is extremely feeble and limited, and that the nature of God is on the contrary immense, incomprehensible, and infinite, I have no further difficulty in recognising that there is an infinitude of matters in His power, the causes of which transcend my knowledge; and this reason suffices to convince me that the species of cause termed final, finds no useful employment in physical [or natural] things; for it does not appear to me that I can without temerity seek to investigate the [inscrutable] ends of God."¹³

It is the consciousness of the finite character of the created self over and against the knowledge of God's infinite nature that

underlies the second argument advanced by Descartes in the solution of the problem of accounting for falsehood in judgement. He is gradually becoming aware that error must be an attribute present in the created thinking substance, yet present in a way that does not detract from the perfection of God's creation. Thus, just as it is impossible for the finite mind to comprehend the motive behind God's creation, so is it impossible for that mind to comprehend the sum total of creation itself. A comprehension of this kind would indeed presuppose an intellect equal in stature to the intellect whose identical will bestows 'light' upon creation. Furthermore, finite thinking substance, to the extent that it fails to comprehend God's creation, also fails to comprehend itself. At best, finite thinking substance can only regard itself as a part of God's perfect creation, for its knowledge is extremely limited. Finite thinking substance must temper its demands in its desire for knowledge:

"...and although, since I resolved to doubt all things, I as yet have only known certainly my own existence and that of God, nevertheless since I have recognised the infinite power of God, I cannot deny that He may have produced many other things, or at least that He has the power of producing them, so that I may obtain a place as a part of a great universe."

Evidently, further reflection about the nature of error as it is found in the res cogitans is required if this error is to be understood and avoided, and if the mind is to be able to exercise its will with complete assurance upon its clear and distinct ideas. In

the consideration of his ideas, Descartes notes in Meditation Four that, of themselves, his ideas possess no truth or falsehood. They are simply things apprehended by the mind, upon which the faculty of the will forms a judgement: ¹⁵ Ideas are contained in the understanding, and of this faculty it can be said that, though there is perhaps an infinitude of ideas not contained therein, the previous deliberations make clear that this lack need not testify to God's failure to create perfectly!

"...because in truth there is no reason to prove that God should have given me a greater faculty of knowledge than He has given me; and however skilful a workman I represent Him to be, I should not for all that consider that He was bound to have placed in each of His works all the ¹⁶perfections which He may have been able to place in some."

A comparison between the various faculties of the mind leads Descartes to conclude further that, in a sense, no faculty is as perfect as the power of free will or 'liberty of choice'. The mind's capacity to assert or deny, in fact, can be said to denote one of the principal perfections of the thinking substance, and about this faculty of judgement Descartes certainly also has no reason to complain. The faculty of understanding or comprehension encompasses only a limited number of ideas (though that number may increase), and the faculty of the imagination is severely taxed to form a figure of more than, for example, six sides. However, considered "formally and precisely in itself", that is, apart from its range when exercised upon the ideas of the understanding, the human will is like God's.

Thus, Descartes writes,

"It is free-will alone or liberty of choice which I find to be so great in me that I can conceive no other idea to be more great; it is indeed the case that it is for the most part this will that causes me to know that in some manner I bear the image and similitude of God."

For Descartes, the fact that the mind possesses the power of choice is the surest testimony of God's having endowed man with the perfection by which knowledge may be attained. The will, extended to those things the mind perceives clearly and distinctly, yields a knowledge of the "good and true". Man's perfection rests, therefore, in his conscious choice, apart from all external constraint, of the 'light' God instills in creation.

"For in order that I should be free it is not necessary that I should be indifferent as to the choice of one or the other of two contraries; but contrariwise the more I lean to the one - whether I recognise clearly that the reasons of the good and true are to be found in it, or whether God so disposes my inward thought - the more freely do I choose and embrace it. And undoubtedly both divine grace and natural knowledge, far from diminishing my liberty, rather increase it and strengthen it."

Having isolated the two faculties from which truth and falsehood stem, and at the same time treated of their respective roles in judgement, it now becomes clear to Descartes whence his errors come. That idea which the mind apprehends clearly and distinctly, "whether [because] I recognise clearly that the reasons of the good and true are to be found in it, or whether [because] God so disposes my inward

thought", is the idea which evokes true judgement by the will. In other words, since God is deceitful neither in creation of those things the mind apprehends clearly and distinctly nor in the creation of the faculty that so apprehends them, i.e. God is deceitful in neither of the two ways in which deception is postulated in the Meditations, then those judgements based on clear and distinct ideas are true. However, once the will is given reign to pronounce upon ideas not clearly and distinctly grasped, false judgements arise.

"Whence then come my errors? They come from the sole fact that since the will is much wider in its range and compass than the understanding, I do not restrain it within the same bounds, but extend it also to things which I do not understand: and as the will is of itself indifferent to these, it easily falls into error and sin, and chooses the evil for the good, or the false for the true." 19

The propensity to err on the part of finite thinking substance lies in the abuse of the faculty of the will. 20 As long as the mind follows its natural inclination to judge the ideas it perceives clearly and distinctly, it can be assured of the truth of those judgements because God, in endowing the mind with clear and distinct ideas, does not deceive. Given, however, the discursive, temporal nature of finite thought, can this solution to the problem of the origin of error be of use in the consideration of truths that the mind remembers to have perceived clearly and distinctly? This question must be answered in the affirmative, as it is the validity of clear and distinct perceptions per se that Descartes establishes

in Meditation Four. The human memory is indeed fallible, Descartes is ready to admit; and those whose memory is poor should either take notes ²¹, or, as was mentioned in Chapter One of this study, they should be prepared, by means of repeated mental exercise, to instill upon their understanding the clarity and distinctness of the truths that are so grasped and then soon forgotten. ²² In the fifth Meditation, where he gives diligent heed to those matters he understands clearly and distinctly, Descartes devotes further attention to the problem of the errant nature of finite understanding and judgement. For now, however, it suffices to note the following:

"...for although I notice a certain weakness in my nature in that I cannot continually concentrate my mind on one single thought, I can yet, by attentive and repeated meditation, impress it so forcibly on my memory that I shall never fail to recollect it whenever I have need of it, and thus acquire the habit of never going astray."

Before closing this discussion of the veracity of clear and distinct ideas and the truth of judgements based on them, a final word on the inscrutability of the reasons for God's creation may be made. For Descartes, it is entirely appropriate to the finite understanding that it should fail "to comprehend a multitude of things" ²⁴, and furthermore, that the subject has no reason to complain that the will is 'greater' than the understanding. Strictly speaking, both faculties are indivisible functions of human thought, and gratitude for the will's comprehensiveness, not ingratitude for the limited character of the understanding, is the proper response to

God's creative act.²⁵ Furthermore, insofar as the mind exercises its will, whether the resultant judgements be true or false, those acts of the will are "entirely good and true, inasmuch as they depend on God."²⁶ On the other hand, God can in no way be blamed for 'concurring' in false judgements, for such judgements are not things, but negations of things, and cannot be related to God as effect is to cause. Most important, it is to be noted that without the discrepancy between finite understanding and will, from which error results, there is a sense in which human perfection - at least within the context of the whole of creation - would be diminished. The power to choose freely implies the power to choose wrongly, and both are inseparable elements of finite thinking substance.

"And it is easy for me to understand that, in so far as I consider myself alone, and as if there were only myself in the world, I should have been much more perfect than I am, if God had created me so that I could never err. Nevertheless I cannot deny that in some sense it is a greater perfection in the whole universe that certain parts should not be exempt from error as others are than that all parts should be exactly similar. And I have no right to complain if God, having placed me in the world, has not called upon me to play a part that excels all others. In distinction and perfection."²⁷

II.

It is worthwhile to retrace the steps taken thus far in the reconstructive process that begins in Meditation Four and is

continued in the fifth and sixth Meditations. After the proofs of God's existence Descartes first determines that God is a veracious God. Because God is not a deceiver, for the first time in the Meditations Descartes is aware that, for the doubting subject, the road to knowledge lies open. At the beginning of Meditation Four, for example, Descartes writes, "And it seems to me that I now have before me a road which will lead us from the contemplation of the true God (in whom all the treasures of science and wisdom are contained) to the knowledge of the other objects of the universe." 28

The truth of clear and distinct ideas that impel the judgement of the will cannot be established until the undeniable experiential fact of error is accounted for in a way that does not conflict with God's veracity. Descartes accomplishes this by a further consideration of the nature of human error. Confinement of the exercise of the will to judgements based on clear and distinct ideas constitutes the rule by which true judgements are to be attained. It is therefore to a consideration of those ideas and the judgements based on them, and in particular the judgements about the clear and distinct ideas pertaining to the external world which is being reconstructed here 29, that Descartes proceeds in the fifth Meditation. In his own words:

"Nor have I only learned to-day what I should avoid in order that I may not err, but also how I should act in order to arrive at a knowledge of the truth; for without doubt I shall arrive at this end if I devote my attention sufficiently to those things which I perfectly understand;

and if I separate from these that which I only understand confusedly and with obscurity. To these I shall henceforth diligently give heed." ³⁰

The subtitle of the fifth Meditation reads: "Of the essence of material things, and, again, of God, that He exists." ³¹ The remainder of this study will largely be occupied with a consideration of the proof for God's existence in this Meditation, and the chief aim is to establish the reason for its presence there. Since, however, the judgements of the will concerning "the essence of material things", i.e. concerning those ideas pertaining to figure and number (which are termed broadly here 'ideas of mathematics'), are deemed by Descartes to be of the same kind as the judgement pertaining to God's existence in the a priori argument ³², the nature of the mind's procedure in the formation of mathematical judgements must first be discussed.

In order to reestablish with truth the existence of the external world that is doubted early in the Meditations, the ideas of that world must be examined in terms of their clarity and distinctness. ³³ No judgement concerning the external world can be made with impunity unless it is made on the basis of clear and distinct ideas. It will be remembered that, in Descartes' retreat from the sensuously perceived world to the sole certainty of his own existence as a single, unextended thinking subject, the evil genius hypothesis is utilized in effecting doubt of those truths pertaining to "that quantity which philosophers commonly call continuous, or the

extension in length, breadth, or depth, that is in this quantity, or rather in the object to which it is attributed." ³⁴ In doubting the piece of wax, which, when placed near heat changes its form and texture, the only truly intelligible, i.e. clear and distinct elements remaining, notes Descartes, are those elements pertaining to the extension attributed to that wax. The 'secondary' qualities, such as taste, smell, and feel, are fleeting; transitory aspects of the wax that are perceived only confusedly. Once the possibility of an evil genius is admitted, even those 'primary', clear and distinct elements become dubitable; corporeal substance, or body, the subject of these primary attributes ³⁵, is doubted. However, in the process of reconstruction, it is just these clear and distinct attributes of corporeal substance that become the initial focus of Descartes' attention in the fifth Meditation; for, in the gradual return to the world of sense perception, it is these ideas which present themselves to the mind with the greatest clarity and distinctness. ³⁶ Thus, since clarity and distinctness are the criteria of certainty, Meditation Five is very much an undertaking in which the relation between the divinely sanctioned truth of clear and distinct ideas and the subjective certainty that attends these ideas is examined.

To begin, something must be said regarding the way in which the mind apprehends these clear and distinct ideas of "numbers, figures, movements, and other such things". On Descartes' account, these ideas are innate ideas of the mind, instilled by God in the thinking

substance in a way that, he says,

"...so well accords with my nature, that when I begin to discover them, it seems to me that I learn nothing new, or recollect what I formerly knew - that is to say, that I for the first time perceive things which were already present to my mind, although I had not as yet applied my mind to them."

It is not in the least surprising, given the account of the doctrine of representative perception in Chapter Three of this study, that Descartes should term the ideas of mathematics 'innate'. The 'light' with which God imbues corporeal substance is the same light by which the thinking substance understands that nature. Considered as the purely intelligible ideas of corporeal substance, therefore, the clear and distinct ideas of mathematics are what render God's creation intelligible. At this present reconstructive stage of the Meditations, these ideas are considered apart from the possible existence of their objects in the dubitable external world³⁸; and precisely because they can be so considered, they may be termed 'innate'. In other words, these "immutable natures", from which the mind cannot add or subtract anything without thereby altering their natures³⁹, are in no way derived from experience; for, as Descartes notes, the mathematical properties of a chiliagon, for example, may be rendered as clear and distinct to the mind as the properties of a triangle.⁴⁰

The innate ideas of the mind pertaining to continuous quantity may be considered quite apart from the existence of their objects.

However, Descartes notes that, just because none of these objects may exist, i.e. just because no thousand or million sided figure exists in the world, this does not alter the fact that these ideas contain objective reality: they do have representative content, and, as clear and distinct ideas, they are true, and are of something.⁴¹ Their peculiar status as 'created essences' was noted in Chapter Two in the discussion of the doctrine of the creation of the eternal truths (supra, pp. 34-39).

Now that these properties of the clear and distinct ideas of mathematics have been noted, it is possible to consider the way in which truths about these ideas are demonstrated. Descartes employs the example of a triangle to illustrate the 'mathematical' procedure. Essentially, this procedure can be summed up by saying that, whatever is contained in the idea of - in this case - a triangle, may in truth be affirmed of that triangle:

"But if I think of the triangle or the square...then certainly whatever I recognise as being contained in the idea of the triangle, as that its angles are equal to right, etc., I shall truly affirm of the triangle; and similarly I shall affirm of the square whatsoever I find in the idea of it. For though I can think of the triangle, though stripping from it the equality of its angles to two right, yet I cannot deny that attribute of it by any clear and distinct mental operation, i.e. when I myself rightly understand what I say."⁴²

While it is true to say that, in the world of sense perception, the ideas of pure and abstract mathematics are the most clear and distinct, it is of course the case in the fifth Meditation that

Descartes has not yet returned to that world. His world is still very much a purely 'mental' world, and the only truths known are the truths of mathematics and the existence of the self and of God. The difference between his treatment of ideas in this Meditation and his treatment of them prior to the proofs for God's existence and veracity, is that in the former case ideas are considered in terms of their objective or representative reality, whereas now they are considered in terms of their clarity and distinctness. Thus, given the as yet highly abstract character of the Meditations, with reference to the clear and distinct conceptions of the mind, God's existence is at least as certain as the truths of mathematics with which Descartes deals in Meditation Five. One need only consider how Descartes introduces the a priori argument for this point to be made, clear:

"It is certain that I no less find the idea of God, that is to say, the idea of a supremely perfect Being, in me, than that of any figure or number...and I do not know any less clearly and distinctly that an [actual and] eternal existence pertains to this nature than I know that all that which I am able to demonstrate of some figure or number, and therefore...the existence of God would pass with me as at least as certain as I have ever held the truths of mathematics (which concern only numbers and figures) to be."
[my emphasis]

Before attempting to understand the reasons for the presence of this proof of God's existence in Meditation Five, it would be instructive to treat of the procedure adopted by this proof, with a view to showing the relation it bears to the procedure involved in

mathematical demonstration. From the idea of God, in which is contained His (necessary) existence, His existence may truly be asserted of that immutable nature, since existence is an essential attribute of God's nature. The notion that existence is of the essence of God is a notion with which many find great difficulty, and for this reason Descartes devotes much attention to the a priori argument in his Reply to Objections.⁴⁴ In particular, one of the clearest statements of this argument - which Descartes deliberately includes in his discussion of the procedure of mathematical demonstration - is presented in the reply to the first set of objections made by Caterus:

"My argument, however, was of the following kind - That which we clearly and distinctly understand to belong to the true and immutable nature of anything, its essence, or form, can be truly affirmed of that thing; but, after we have with sufficient accuracy investigated the nature of God, we clearly and distinctly understand that to exist belongs to His true and immutable nature; therefore we can with truth affirm of God that He exists. This is at least a legitimate conclusion. But besides this the major premise cannot be denied, because it was previously conceded that whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive is true."⁴⁵

As stated, one of the key issues of contention in this argument concerns the recognition that existence cannot be separated from God's essence.⁴⁶ Underlying this assertion is the idea that, in all created being, existence is merely possible, whereas the existence of the supremely perfect being is not only possible⁴⁷, but necessary. From the standpoint of finite certainty, i.e. from the standpoint of

the clarity and distinctness with which the mind conceives its ideas, this necessity is of the same kind as the necessity of mathematical demonstrations; for Descartes sees clearly that,

"...existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having its three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a [rectilinear] triangle, or the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley; and so there is not any less repugnance to our conceiving a God (that is, a Being supremely perfect) to whom existence is lacking (that is to say, to whom a certain perfection is lacking), than to conceive of a mountain which has no valley."

With respect to the issue of the necessity of the existence of God, it must further be noted that there is a fundamental difference between the clear and distinct notions of mathematics, from which certain properties of necessity follow, and the clear and distinct notion of God, from which His existence follows. The difference lies in the nature of the existence of the objects represented in each kind of idea. While it need not be the case that any triangle ever exist, this cannot be asserted of God: of necessity He exists. No triangle need ever exist, nor must the mind ever think the idea of a triangle; nor again, for that matter, must the mind of necessity ever think the idea of God. However, if the mind does think this innate, clear and distinct idea, the necessity of the existence contained in that idea determines the mind to assert the existence of God. In Descartes own words:

"...for from the fact that I cannot conceive a mountain

without a valley, it does not follow that there is any mountain or any valley in existence, but only that the mountain and the valley, whether they exist or do not exist, cannot in any be separated one from the other. While from the fact that I cannot conceive God without existence, it follows that existence is inseparable from Him, and hence that He really exists; not that my thought can bring this to pass, or impose any necessity on things, but, on the contrary, because the necessity which lies in the thing itself, i.e. the necessity⁴⁹ the existence of God determines me to think in this way."

That the a priori argument, like the truths of mathematics, rests on the demonstration of the veracity of clear and distinct ideas, there seems to be little doubt. In the passages cited above, and elsewhere in the works of Descartes, this point is continually reiterated. In terms of the analytic method of discovery employed by Descartes in the Meditations, it is now possible to clarify at least, one might say, the efficient cause for the a priori argument's presence in Meditation Five. After first considering the essences of mathematical things, which essences, on the level of subjective certainty, are the most clear and distinct of the mind, Descartes then proceeds to treat of the clear and distinct idea he has of God's existence. In terms of the similarity with which Descartes views the proofs of mathematics and the proof of God's existence, i.e. both demonstrations are based on the mind's disposition to assert the truth of clear and distinct ideas, it is easier to understand Descartes' answer to the question why he presents the a priori argument in this fifth Meditation rather than in the third Meditation. He writes:

1

"In the Meditations that argument [i.e. the a priori argument] comes later than the one here; the fact that it comes later, while the proof in this [third] Meditation comes first, is the result of the order in which the author discovered the two proofs. In the Principles, however, he reverses the order; for the method and order of discovery is one thing, and that of exposition another. In the Principles his purpose is exposition, and his procedure is synthetic." 50

It should be noted here that the Cartesian scholar Henri Gouhier is so far in essential disagreement with this account of the presence of the a priori argument in Meditation Five. Unlike his antagonist Gueroult and - for that matter - contrary to Descartes' explicitly stated understanding of the way in which the ontological argument is to be interpreted, Gouhier holds to the metaphysical independence of this argument. 51 For Gouhier, the a priori argument is far more certain than the truths of mathematics, and is grasped by the same intuition of mind as both the cogito and the proofs for God's existence in Meditation Three. 52 Furthermore, Gouhier attributes the presence of the a priori argument in Meditation Five to a mere 'chance association' of the demonstrations of mathematics and that proof. 53 Indeed, on this point, Gouhier's position at least appears well founded - that is, if one refers solely to the seemingly relaxed manner in which Descartes introduces this argument in Meditation Five. However, as it is not within the range of this study to deal at any sufficient length with the merits and demerits of Gouhier's position, it need only be stated that, directed against the

interpretation of the a priori argument provided by this study, which in many respects is in strong agreement with the 'champion' of Descartes' method of analysis, Gueroult, Gouhier's is a significant dissenting voice.

III.

What has thus far been established is that the mind is predisposed, in whatever way God has effected this natural inclination, to judge in the presence of clear and distinct ideas, to affirm whatever is found there as true; and, as long as its judgements are confined to these ideas, the subject possesses not only certainty, but truth. This is equally the case whether it be the judgements of "pure and abstract mathematics" or the judgement of the existence of God. In each of these cases, writes Descartes,

"...whatever proof or argument I avail myself of, we must always return to the point that it is only those things which we conceive clearly and distinctly that have the power of persuading me entirely." ⁵⁴ [my emphasis]

The knowledge of God's veracity insures that the subject's certainty, the persuasion of the mind by clear and distinct ideas, will also be a grasp of the truth. At this point, however, a form of doubt hitherto untreated presents itself to the mind. This kind of doubt is not hyperbolic doubt which follows from the evil genius hypothesis: such doubt is eliminated, as has already been noted in

this chapter, with the proof of God's veracity in His creative act. Nor is this doubt directed at the truth of clear and distinct ideas per se: to doubt in this manner would be a completely redundant exercise on Descartes' part, for such ideas are already known to be true. Instead, the doubt Descartes now entertains is of a far less pernicious kind, and is grounded in the subject's consciousness of its nature as a finite, discursively thinking thing.⁵⁵ It is summarized as follows:

"We shall also doubt of all the other things which have formerly seemed to us quite certain, even of the demonstrations of mathematics and of its principles which we formerly thought quite self-evident. One reason is that those who have fallen into error in reasoning on such matters, have held as perfectly certain and self-evident what we see to be false, but a yet more important reason is that we have been told that God who created us can do all that He desires."⁵⁵

Descartes' present concern is with the problem of the possibility of self-deception: oftentimes the clear and distinct ideas of one moment appear at least to argue against the clear and distinct ideas of another. As it is within the context of his 'defeat' of this lesser form of doubt that the a priori argument can be said to be essential to the fifth Meditation, close scrutiny of Descartes' procedure at this stage is required. What must be shown is that it is the a priori argument in particular that is employed by Descartes with a view to ridding himself of the doubt raised in Meditation Five. The original Latin version of the Meditations, used

in the Anscombe and Geach translation quoted here, provides the clearest indication as to the way in which this doubt manifests itself in that Meditation.

"I am indeed so constituted that I cannot but believe something to be true at the time of perceiving it clearly and distinctly. But I am likewise so constituted that I cannot fix my mind's eye constantly on the same object so as to perceive it clearly; and the memory of a previous judgment often comes back to me when I am no longer attending to my arguments for having made it. Consequently, other arguments might now be adduced, which would readily upset my view if I had no knowledge of God; and thus I should never have genuine and certain knowledge of anything, but only unsteady and changeable opinions. For example, when I consider the nature of a triangle, it is most evidently apparent to me, familiar as I am with geometrical principles, that its three angles are equal to two right angles; and so long as I attend to the proof, I cannot but believe this is true. But as soon as I turn my mind's eye away from the proof, I may still remember, as much as you like, that I did see it very clearly; but I may yet easily come to doubt its truth - supposing I have no knowledge of God. For I can satisfy myself that I am so constituted as to go wrong sometimes about what I think I perceive most evidently; especially when I remember that I have frequently regarded things as true and certain, and yet have later been induced, on account of other arguments, to decide that they were false." ⁵⁶

Speaking 'hyperbolically' or 'metaphysically', i.e. in terms of the possibility of deception on the part of God, there can be no doubt concerning the absolute, objective truth of clear and distinct perceptions. This is what Meditation Four establishes. With respect to the state of certainty that attends the subject's clear and distinct ideas, however, it is now admitted as possible that the mind can "go wrong sometimes about what I think I perceive most

evidently". Essentially, Descartes is entertaining the possibility that the subject deceives itself in the certainty that attends its clear and distinct ideas; and, therefore, the problem has nothing to do with the power of finite memory, which in Meditation Four Descartes admits to be limited. While it is the case that it is "only those things which we conceive clearly and distinctly that have the power of persuading me entirely", it might also be the case that the resultant persuasion or certainty becomes dubitable in the face of other (clear and distinct) ideas subsequently perceived. As self-conscious substance, the mind cannot but reflect later on its clear and distinct ideas. When the mind is conscious of clear and distinct ideas, it is assured of their veracity. However, when the mind is self-conscious and reflects upon those ideas, the immediacy of the clarity and distinctness of those ideas is absent, and it may happen that new clear and distinct (and likewise true) ideas about the same matter are perceived in immediate consciousness. Thus, due to the very nature of the mind which is both conscious and self-conscious, a 'natural' form of doubt is evoked. 57

It will be remembered from the discussion of method in Chapter One of this study, that the method by which the mind attains true knowledge is not at all foreign to the 'natural' or 'right' use of reason. What Descartes is attempting to establish in the Meditations is that, though the mind is prone to error, it is not prone to error in its clear and distinct ideas, and consequently it can have true

knowledge. However, such knowledge, once possessed by the mind, is not known the way God knows. In other words, it is not scientia intuitiva, but something more easily likened to the "health of the soul: when you have it, you think no more about it".⁵⁸ The knowledge of finite thinking substance is open to doubt of several kinds, i.e. hyperbolic and non-hyperbolic, and, as the Meditations demonstrate, this knowledge is by no means easily grounded. Only if the kind of doubt experienced by Descartes in Meditation Five can be resolved can a true science for discursive, self-conscious thought be established, which science will comprehend, in theory at least, an infinite number of demonstrations based on clear and distinct ideas.

In the passage cited above, Descartes asserts that it is the knowledge of God (i.e. of God's existence and consequent veracity) that ultimately 'rescues' him from the doubt he introduces at this reconstructive stage of the fifth Meditation. At this point, the argument of this Meditation merits close attention, for it might be asked, which knowledge of God is Descartes referring to here. Is it the knowledge of God's existence and veracity derived from the proofs of Meditations Three and Four, or is it the knowledge of God that is concluded in the proof of His existence through consideration of the mind's certainty of its clear and distinct idea of Him? Both demonstrations of God's existence prove the same thing, yet in differing ways. Examination of Descartes' precise words in Meditation Five reveal it to be the a priori argument that Descartes

has in mind, a proof whose conclusion is known from the standpoint of human certainty, i.e. whose conclusion is demonstrated through clear and distinct ideas, at which point the possibility of (non-hyperbolic) doubt is also considered. This is quite evident in the following excerpt from the fifth Meditation, in which Descartes also contrasts the two kinds of arguments for God's existence.

"For example, in the case of every right-angled triangle, although it does not so manifestly appear that the square of the base is equal to the squares of the two other sides as that this base is opposite to the greatest angle; still, when this has once been apprehended, we are just as certain of its truth as of the truth of the other. And as regards God, if my mind were not pre-occupied with prejudices, and if my thought did not find itself on all hands diverted by the continual pressure of sensible things, there would be nothing which I could know more immediately and more easily than Him. For is there anything more manifest than that there is a God, that is to say, a Supreme Being, to whose essence alone existence pertains?

"And although for a firm grasp of this truth I have need of a strenuous application of mind, at present I not only feel myself to be as assured of it as of all that I hold as most certain, but I also remark that the certainty of all other things depends on it so absolutely, that without this knowledge it is impossible ever to know anything perfectly."
[my emphasis] 59

The question has now been posed, how is it that the knowledge of God's existence as derived from the a priori argument undermines the doubt raised in Meditation Five. From the above passage it is quite evident that Descartes holds that the "certainty of all other things depends on it [i.e. God's existence as demonstrated by the a priori proof] so absolutely, that without this knowledge it is impossible

ever to know anything perfectly." In other words, it is the a priori proof that overcomes the doubt of Meditation Five; but how does this come about? How does a knowledge of God's existence, as opposed to His veracity, for example, and as concluded by means of a demonstration through clear and distinct ideas, meet the present problem of doubt? The answer to this question lies in the fact that this knowledge of God's existence is attained through clear and distinct ideas, which are already known to be true. With the knowledge of God's existence as demonstrated by the a priori argument, the mind gains assurance of the absolute truth not only of those ideas perceived clearly and distinctly in the immediacy of consciousness, but also of those clear and distinct ideas less immediately perceived in self-conscious reflection. In this sense, the a priori argument provides the mediation between the ideas of consciousness and the ideas of self-consciousness.

The arguments for God's existence presented in Meditation Three may be taken as the basis for the demonstration of God's veracity: earlier in this study it was noted how it was first necessary to prove God's existence before His veracity. The proofs of God's existence in Meditation Three, however, are not easily kept in view, especially for the mind, which, assured of the veracity of clear and distinct ideas, no longer attends to the arguments by which this veracity is proven:

"I distinguish the two [scientia and persuasio] as follows:

there is a conviction when there remains some reason which might lead us to doubt, but scientific knowledge is conviction based on an argument so strong that it can never be shaken by any stronger argument. Nobody can have the latter unless he also has knowledge of God. But a man who has once understood the arguments which prove that God exists and is not a deceiver, provided he remembers the conclusion 'God is no deceiver' whether or not he continues to attend to the arguments for it, will continue to possess not only the conviction, but real scientific knowledge of this and all the other conclusions whose premises he remembers he once clearly perceived." 60

The arguments for God's existence in Meditation Three occur on a level far more 'abstract' than the level on which the proofs of mathematics and of the a priori argument are concluded. On the latter level, Descartes writes, the mind no longer "attends to the arguments [proving God's existence] for it [i.e. God's veracity]." The fact that this is so is what - in the context of the Meditations - gives rise to the doubt raised in Meditation Five. Descartes understands that, if a true science for discursive thought is possible, i.e. a science consisting of both remembered and present clear and distinct ideas and conclusions, then the mind must proceed by assuming the veracity of those ideas and conclusions; it cannot continually return to the arguments for God's existence in the third Meditation. What is therefore required to overcome the doubt raised by the mind's consciousness of the diminished clarity and distinctness of its remembered ideas, is a proof for God's existence which, on the level of clear and distinct ideas, will be remembered. Such a demonstration is the a priori argument. This proof is true,

because clear and distinct ideas are true; and it is this kind of knowledge of God's existence that permits the mind to advance its science based on clear and distinct ideas. That this is Descartes' meaning is clear from the following:

"But, after I have recognised that there is a God - because at the same time I have also recognised that all things depend upon Him, and that He is not a deceiver, and from that have inferred that what I perceive clearly and distinctly cannot fail to be true, provided I recollect having clearly and distinctly perceived no contrary reason can be brought forward which could ever cause me to doubt its truth; and this same knowledge extends likewise to all other things which I recollect having formerly demonstrated, such as the truths of geometry and the like..." [my emphasis]

From the standpoint of human certainty, the level on which the mind is 'naturally' persuaded by clear and distinct ideas, a knowledge of God's existence is possible. Not only is it possible, in that it is provided by the a priori argument; but, precisely because it is 'natural' that the mind no longer "continues to attend to the arguments for [God's veracity]", on which veracity the truth of clear and distinct ideas is based, an argument must be advanced on whose basis the attempt to undermine the criteria of certainty through the admission of the possibility of self-deception in the recollection of truths perceived clearly and distinctly can be denied. That this is Descartes' intention is evident from the following, in which it is the certainty of the truths based on clear and distinct ideas that is at issue. Descartes refers here

explicitly to the proof of God's existence in Meditation Five:

"Thirdly, when I said that we could know nothing with certainty unless we were first aware that God existed, I announced in express terms that I referred only to the science apprehending such conclusions as can recur in memory without attending further to the proofs which led me to make them." 62

With the proof of God's existence through an examination of the mind's clear and distinct idea of Him, the question of the fallibility of the mind's memory of the clear and distinct premises of a demonstration is now resolved. God's existence, upon which His veracity is consequent, is known to be absolutely true, not only from the abstract deliberations of the third Meditation, but also from the standpoint of the finite certainty that attends the clear and distinct ideas of the mind. If one could not prove God's existence in this manner - the idea of God being an absolutely clear and distinct idea - then how, in the face of the non-hyperbolic doubt Descartes introduces in Meditation Five, could one's recollection of the certainty of any other thing be known to be the truth of that thing? As a proof employing clear and distinct ideas, the a priori argument provides the necessary link between the truth of clear and distinct ideas, which has God's veracity as its basis, and the memory of the certainty experienced by the mind in its judgements about those ideas. Without this link there would exist only "vague and vacillating opinions". The a priori argument demonstrates how God's existence, because it is known in Meditation Three, is also known by

means of the kind of proof employed in the science of discursive thought. Furthermore, from this it becomes easier to grasp why, aside from the fact that he simply discovers the a priori argument in Meditation Five, Descartes also feels that he ought not to have omitted this argument from his work. In the face of the natural doubt pertaining to self-consciousness, the a priori argument can be viewed as the means by which Descartes overcomes this final obstruction in the process of the reconstruction of the external world. If he be taken to refer to the analytic order of demonstration he employs in the Meditations, according to which the a priori argument is 'discovered' there; and if, further, his aim of reconstruction be kept in mind; then it becomes clear why Descartes "should not afterwards omit [that] proof".

"But I shall not deny that this argument [i.e. the a priori argument] is such that those who do not bethink themselves of all those considerations that go to prove it, will very readily take it for a sophism; hence at the outset I had much doubt as to whether I should use it, fearing that those who did not attain to it might be given an opportunity of cavilling about the rest. But since there are two ways only of proving the existence of God, one by means of effects due to him, the other by his essence or nature, and as I gave the former explanation in the third Meditation as well as I could, I considered that I should not afterwards omit the other proof." 63

v.

The truth and certainty of God's existence and veracity provide

Descartes with the "means of acquiring a perfect knowledge of an infinitude of things". Above all, in Meditation Five he has established the position from which the existence of the material world, "in so far as it is the object of pure mathematics" ⁶⁴, can be proven. It is largely this task that constitutes the substance of the sixth Meditation, where it is demonstrated that, because the mind is not deceived in its clear and distinct perception of the existence of the world rendered intelligible by "pure mathematics", and because corporeal objects are clearly perceived to be the causes of the mind's ideas of them, that world exists. ⁶⁵

At the outset of this study, it was stated that, of its aims, the explanation of the presence of the a priori argument both in the Meditations and in particular in Meditation Five was the most difficult of all. It can be regarded as difficult on two counts. First, close scrutiny of the dense text of the Meditations is required, if its arguments are to be isolated and properly considered. For this reason, ample references were made both to the Meditations and to other passages throughout Descartes' works that help clarify his meaning. The second and more pertinent reason behind the difficulty of ascertaining the significance of the a priori argument lies in the very nature of the analytic method employed in the Meditations. This method is highly 'subjective' in nature, in that it requires that the reader "follow it and give sufficient attention to everything", with the result that, if so

followed, the reader "understands the matter no less perfectly and makes it as much his own as if he had himself discovered it." ⁶⁶ In this respect this method is not a method of exposition appropriate for teaching "the inattentive or hostile reader", but rather a method of discovery. Consequently, the attempt to provide an exposition of a work written in the analytic mode - which is the attempt of this study - carries with it certain difficulties in assessing the significance not only of the a priori argument, but of any argument within that work. Above all there exists the danger of viewing the reconstructive process of the latter Meditations 'syllogistically', i.e. as an argument that draws its conclusions from certain premises established in the prior Meditations. Descartes does attempt to 'reconstruct' the world he doubts; but he proceeds analytically in that reconstruction, and not synthetically.

Notes for Chapter One

1. "Rules for the Guidance of Our Mental Powers" I, in Descartes' Philosophical Writings, NKS, 3.

2. Prefatory Note to Rules for the Direction of the Mind, HR1, vii.

3. Rules for the Direction of the Mind IV, HR1, 9.

4. "For since the sciences taken all together are identical with human wisdom, which always remains one and the same, however applied to different subjects, and suffers no more differentiation proceeding from them than the light of the sun experiences from the variety of the things which it illumines, there is no need for minds to be confined at all within limits; for neither does the knowing of one truth have an effect like that of the acquisition of one art and prevent us from finding out another, it rather aids us to do so." Rules For the Direction of the Mind I, HR1, 1-2.

5. "That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has been sufficiently shown..." Reply to Objections II, HR1, 39.

6. Cf., Rules for the Direction of the Mind IV, HR1, 9; Discourse VI, HR1, 129-30. Descartes' use of the term 'reason' does not have the specific connotation it does in other philosophies, such as those of Aquinas, Kant or Hegel. At various times, Descartes equates it with the "power of correct judgement", and with the power to distinguish truth from falsehood, which is also termed "Good Sense". It is also a 'natural' function of the mind. Cf., Discourse I, HR1, 81; and, Ibid. VI, HR1, 129-30.

7. Rules for the Direction of the Mind IV, HR1, 9.

8. "Thus my design is not here to teach the Method which everyone should follow in order to promote the good conduct of his Reason, but only to show in what manner I have endeavoured to conduct my own. Those who set about giving precepts must esteem themselves more skilful than those to whom they advance them, and if they fall short in the smallest matter they must of course take the blame for it. But regarding this Treatise simply as a history, or, if you prefer it, a fable in which, amongst certain things which may be imitated, there are possibly others also which it would not be right to follow, I hope that it will be of use to some without being hurtful to any, and that all will thank me for my frankness." Discourse I, HR1, 83.

9. Ibid. VI, 129-30.

10. Ibid. II, 92.

11. L.J. Beck, The Method of Descartes, London: Oxford University Press, 1952, 286-87.

12. "And inasmuch as our will impels us neither to follow after nor to flee from anything, excepting as our understanding represents it as good or evil, it is sufficient to judge wisely in order to act well, and the best judgment brings the best action - that is to say, the acquisition of all the virtues and all the other good things that it is possible to obtain." Discourse III, HR1, 98. Cf., Hiram Caton, The Origin of Subjectivity, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973, 34-35.

13. With reference to the rules of Descartes' method, Leibniz makes a similar point: "I almost feel like saying that the Cartesian rules are rather like those of some chemist or other; take what is necessary, do as you ought to do, and you will get what you wanted. Do not admit anything except what is evidently true (in other words, except what you ought admit), divide the matter into as many parts as is requisite (that is as many as you ought to), proceed in the order (in which you ought to proceed) and make a perfect enumeration (as you ought to)." Philosophische Schriften, Gerhardt edition, IV, 329; translated by L.J. Beck, The Method of Descartes, 268; as cited by Jean Laporte, Le Rationalisme de Descartes, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950, 286, n. 4.

14. Cf. Meditation Four.

15. Etienne Gilson, Discours de la Methode, texte et commentaire, Paris: 1930. pp. 189-90.

16. "For, as a matter of fact, painters, even when they study with the greatest skill to represent sirens and satyrs by forms the most strange and extraordinary, cannot give them natures which are entirely new, but merely make a certain medley of the members of different animals; or if their imagination is extravagant enough to invent something so novel that nothing similar has ever before been seen, and that then their work represents a thing purely fictitious and absolutely false, it is certain all the same that the colours of which this is composed are necessarily real." Meditations I, HRI, 146.

17. "Secondly we must note that there are but few pure and simple essences, which either our experiences or some sort of light innate in us enable us to behold as primary and existing per se, not as depending on any others. These we say should be carefully noticed, for they are just those facts which we have called the simplest in any single series." Rules for the Direction of the Mind VI, HRI, 16.

18. Rules for the Direction of the Mind III, HRI, 7.

19. Ibid. VI, 16.

20. Ibid. XII, 43.

21. Ibid., 42.

22. Ibid., 43.

23. As one author puts it: "On the other hand, the synthetic order need not be viewed in terms of the knowing subject. It may proceed on the basis of principles which have no explicit reference to the presence or absence of a finite knowing subject attending to the

demonstration." Donald Cress, "Does Descartes Have Two 'Ontological Arguments'?", in, International Studies in Philosophy, Vol. VII, Fall 1975, 160-61.

24. Rules for the Direction of the Mind III, HRi, 6. The same point is made by Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason: "Anyone, therefore, who has learnt (in the strict sense of that term) a system of philosophy, such as that of Wolff, although he may have all its principles, explanations, and proofs, together with the formal divisions of the whole body of doctrine, in his head, and, so to speak, at his finger's ends, has no more than a complete historical knowledge of the Wolffian philosophy. He has formed his mind on another's, and the imitative faculty is not itself productive. In other words, his knowledge has not in him arisen out of reason, and although, objectively considered, it is indeed knowledge due to reason, it is yet, in its subjective character, merely historical." Critique of Pure Reason, translated by N.K. Smith, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965, § 864.

25. A good example of this is found upon examination of the ninth definition of Descartes' "Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between the Soul and Body, Drawn Up in Geometrical Fashion", in his Reply to Objections II, HRii, 52-58. This definition asserts: "When we say that any attribute is contained in the nature or concept of anything, that is precisely the same as saying that it is true of that thing or can be affirmed of it." In other words, clear and distinct ideas are true. Yet it is just this truth that Descartes doubts in the Meditations, and which is only established after God has been shown to exist.

26. Alexander Koyre, Descartes und die Scholastik, Bonn: Bouvier Verlag, Herbert Grundmann, 1971, 155-56.

27. Rules for the Direction of the Mind X, HRi, 32-33.

28. Reply to Objections II, HRii, 38.

29. Ibid., 38.

30. The expression 'order of reality' refers to the order in which things actually exist, as opposed to the order in which the mind

discovers them. Essential to this order is the doctrine of 'degrees of reality', according to which some things participate in higher degrees of being than others. Cf., Chapter Three, pp. 83-87.

31. Letter to Mersenne, 31 December 1640, Philosophical Letters, 92, (AT III, 271).

32. Rules for the Direction of the Mind II, HR1, 4.

33. Ibid., HR1, 4.

34. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 48.

35. Ibid., HR11, 48-49.

36. Ibid., 49.

37. Objections II, HR11, 29.

38. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 49.

39. Ibid., HR11, 50.

40. CB #17.

41. Letter to Mersenne, 24 December 1640, Philosophical Letters, 87, (AT III, 267).

42. M. Gueroult, Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons, 2 vols., Paris: Aubier, 1953; Nouvelles réflexions sur la preuve ontologique de Descartes, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1955; Etudes sur Descartes, Spinoza, Malebranche et Leibniz, Hildesheim: Olms-Verlag, 1970.

43. H. Gouhier, "La Preuve Ontologique de Descartes (à propos d'un

livre récent)", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie VIII (1954), 295-303; "L'Ordre des Raisons Selon Descartes", in Descartes [The Proceedings of the Second Royaumont Conference of Philosophy], Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957. Both cited by Donald Cress, "Does Descartes' 'Ontological Argument' Really Stand on its Own", 128.

44. The proof of God's existence in Meditation Five is generally referred to as the 'ontological argument', an expression popularized by Kant (Critique of Pure Reason, B 619). Kant reduces all arguments for God's existence to the ontological argument. Prior to Kant, it was also referred to as the 'preuve metaphysique' in France, and, in Germany, as the 'cartesianischer Beweis' or the 'Beweis apriori' (cf., Dieter Henrich, Der Ontologische Gottesbeweis, Tuebingen, 1960, 1). However, in this study, Descartes' own name for this proof, i.e. the 'a priori' argument, will be used. The proof is so called because it proves God's existence solely through an examination of the clear and distinct idea the mind possesses of Him, and Descartes distinguishes this a priori proof from the a posteriori proofs for God's existence in Meditation Three. This study argues that, within the context of the method of the Meditations, the a priori demonstration, like the demonstrations of mathematics, can only occur in the fifth Meditation, after clear and distinct ideas have been shown to be true. Furthermore, the proof of the veracity of clear and distinct ideas has as its premise the a posteriori arguments of Meditation Three. This interpretation of the a priori argument, which consequently holds it to rest ultimately on the a posteriori demonstrations of God's existence, is clearly at odds with Kant's position, according to which the 'ontological argument' is the most fundamental of all the proofs of God's existence. Thus, within the context of this study, it is more appropriate to remain with Descartes' terminology, and to use the expression 'a priori' argument'.

Notes For Chapter Two

1. Meditations ("Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations"), HR1, 140.

2. "But I think I included [in the Meditations] many other things besides; and I may tell you, between ourselves, that these six Meditations contain all the foundations of my Physics. But please do not tell people, for that might make it harder for supporters of Aristotle to approve them. I hope that readers will gradually get used to my principles, and recognize their truth, before they notice that they destroy the principles of Aristotle." Letter to Mersenne, 28 January 1641, Philosophical Letters, 94 (AT III, 292); cf., Letter to Mersenne, 30 September 1640, AT III, 183 (Philosophical Letters, 79).

3. Letter to Dinet, HR1, 348. Cf., Meditations, HR1, 133.

4. Meditations ("Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations"), HR1, 141.

5. Ibid. ("Dedication"), 133.

6. Letter to Mersenne, 11 November 1640, Philosophical Letters, 81 (AT III, 230ff.).

7. Meditations I, HR1, 146.

8. Ibid., 147.

9. Ibid., 147.

10. Letter to Mesland, 2 May-1644, Philosophical Letters, 150-51 (AT IV, 110ff.).

11. Letter to Mersenne, May 6 1630, Philosophical Letters, 13-14 (AT I, 151). Cf., Reply to Objections I, HRi, 20.

12. Reply to Objections V, HRi, 226.

13. Ibid., 227.

14. "The first [principle] is that I do not believe there are in nature any real qualities, attached to substances and separable from them by divine power like so many little souls." Letter to Mersenne, 26 April 1643, Philosophical Letters, 15 (AT III, 648). Cf., Meditations IV, HRi, 173.

15. Alan Gewirth, "Descartes: Two Disputed Questions", in, Journal of Philosophy, 68, 1971, 290.

16. Meditations I, AG 65.

17. Meditations I, HRi, 147.

18. Ibid., 148.

19. AT IX, 16. In HRi, p. 147, translated from the French, the passage is rendered: "But possibly God has not desired that I should be thus deceived, for He is said to be supremely good. If, however, it is contrary to His goodness to have made me such that I constantly deceive myself, it would also appear to be contrary to His goodness to permit me to be sometimes deceived, and nevertheless I cannot doubt that He does permit this."

20. AG, p. 64. Translated from the Latin, this passage reads: "But perhaps it was not God's will to deceive me so; he is after all called supremely good." But if it goes against his goodness to have so created me that I am always deceived, it seems no less foreign to it to allow me to be deceived sometimes; and this result cannot be asserted."

21. AT IX, 17.

22. Meditations I, AG, 64. The original Latin text reads as follows: "Supponam igitur non optimum Deum, fontem veritatis, sed genium aliquem malignum, eundemque summe potentem & callidum, omnem suam iniquitatem in eo posuisse, ut me falleret..." AT VII, 22.

23. Ferdinand Alquié (edit.), Oeuvres Philosophiques de Descartes (II), Paris: Garnier Freres, 1967, 412n.

24. While the positing of two distinct, deceiving entities is more peculiar to the positions of Gouhier and Gueroult, the distinction between the kinds of deception actually practiced in the Meditations is generally recognised. For an excellent and detailed discussion of this distinction between the two kinds of deception in the Meditations, the reader may be referred to Jean Laporte's work, Le Rationalisme de Descartes, 158-165.

25. Meditations I, HR1, 149-50.

26. Cf., the discussion in Chapter Three of the doctrine of degrees of reality and the causal principle ex nihilo nihil fit, pp. 83ff.

27. "When Descartes says at CB #79 that in the face of extreme metaphysical doubts 'absolutely no mathematical proof could be given with certainty', he must be thinking of more complex pieces of reasoning [than, for example, $2+3=5$] which are too elaborate to be grasped by the mind in their entirety." John Cottingham (trans.), Descartes' Conversation With Burman, CB p. 118; Peter A. Schouls, "Descartes and the Autonomy of Reason", in Journal of the History of Philosophy, X, July 1972, 307-322.

28. Peter A. Schouls, op. cit., 318.

29. Meditations III, HR1, 158.

30. Principles I, x., HR1, 222.

31. John Cottingham, op. cit., 118.

32. Meditations III, HR1, 158-59.

33. The contrast between these two doctrines of creation is well defined by M. B. Foster in a series of articles that appeared in the journal Mind, and from which many of the points raised here have been taken. The articles are as follows: "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Science of Nature", in, Mind, 43, 1934, 446-468; "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I)", in, Mind, 44, 1935, 439-466; "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I)", in, Mind, 45, 1936, 1-27.

34. M.B. Foster, "Christian Theology and Modern Science of Nature (I)", 462-63.

35. Meditations V, HR1, 179.

36. Ibid. II, 150.

37. Ibid., 151-152.

38. Ibid., 152.

39. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 48.

40. Ibid., 38.

41. Reply to Objections V (Letter to Clerselier), HR11, 127.

42. Ibid., 127.

43. Meditations II, HR1, 150.

44. That Descartes equates 'unmeaning' with impossibility, is evident in the following passage: "In the first place the question [i.e. Can a thing be its own efficient cause?] would in such a case be unmeaning, for who does not know that the same thing can neither be prior to nor different from itself." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 14. Generally, Descartes says that anything that is 'not repugnant' to human thought, i.e. that is meaningful, is at the same time possible. Cf., Reply to Objections II, HR11, 45.

45. Discourse I, HR1, 81.

46. Meditations II, HR1, 152.

47. Ibid., 153.

48. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 31.

49. Ibid., 31-32.

Notes for Chapter Three

1. Meditations III, HR1, 157.

2. Ibid., 158.

3. "But every time that this preconceived opinion of the sovereign power of a God presents itself to my thought, I am constrained to confess that it is easy to Him, if He wishes it, to cause me to err, even in matters in which I believe myself to have the best evidence." Ibid., 158.

4. The charge of circularity in the proofs of God's existence in Meditation III is a long-standing issue in Cartesian scholarship. The charge was raised initially by Descartes' objector Arnauld in the following form:

"The only remaining scruple I have is an uncertainty as to how a circular reasoning is to be avoided in saying: the only secure reason we have for believing that what we clearly and distinctly perceive is true, is the fact that God exists.

"But we can be sure that God exists, only because we clearly and evidently perceive that; therefore prior to being certain that God exists, we should be certain that whatever we clearly and evidently perceive is true." Objections IV, HR11, 92. Cf., Objections II, HR11, 26.

5. Meditations III, HR1, 159.

6. Ibid. V, HR1, 180-181.

7. Ibid. III, 159.

8. "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, nor anything which belongs to 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 than all other things put together." Letter to Mersenne, July 1641, Philosophical Letters, 106 (AT III, 391ff.).

9. Letter to Mersenne, July 1641, Philosophical Letters, 106-07 (AT III, 391ff.).

10. The expression 'representative perception' is used in the present context to describe that doctrine according to which the mind knows its ideas, which in turn are said to 'represent' their objects. The author is unable to trace the origin of this expression. It is certainly used in English language works on Descartes, in particular by N.K. Smith in his book Studies in the Cartesian Philosophy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1902, 13-14), and by S.V. Keeling, who, in his book Descartes (London: Oxford University Press, 1968, 236-37), also provides a brief historical account of the doctrine of representative ideas.

11. Meditations III, HR1, 164. Descartes says here that ideas 'appear' to represent things, not because they might not represent, but because they might not represent what they claim to represent. In this passage, Descartes is still very much within the realm of hyperbolic doubt.

12. Rules for the Direction of the Mind XII, HR1, 38. While the analogy of a 'seal' on wax adequately expresses the doctrine that ideas are representations, it should also be noted that this analogy equally well expresses another way in which Descartes sometimes refers to ideas, that is, as 'forms' of thought. Cf. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 52.

13. Rules for the Direction of the Mind XII, HR1, 38-39.

14. If the subject, the "I", weren't capable of consciousness of and apart from its ideas, it is hard to imagine how any idea, taken as an intelligible representation of something other than the mind, could be known to the mind; for there would be no 'knower' distinct from the 'known'. Clearly, the idea would not be a representation in the sense it has so far been given. In order to somehow exist as a

thought which is at the same time known, the 'thing' represented could only be known to and by itself, and there would be no difference between the thing thought and the thought itself. Furthermore, to speak of more than one idea or thought would be to speak of an equal number of discrete, individual self-conscious thoughts and 'things' thought. In other words, there would be as many selves as there were thoughts. This, however, is clearly not the reality Descartes perceives in the consciousness of his own thinking existence, and, accordingly, his ideas are perceived as representations either of itself or things apart from the mind.

15. Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion."), HR11, 53.

16. "But now, for a brief explanation of the matter, -- it is certain that no thought can exist apart from a thing that thinks; no activity, no accident can be without a substance in which to exist." Reply to Objections III, HR11, 64.

17. "There is only one soul in man; the rational soul; for no actions can be reckoned human unless they depend on reason. The vegetative power and the power of moving the body, which are called the vegetative and sensitive souls in plants and animals, exist also in man; but they should not in his case be called souls, because they are not the first principle of his actions, and they belong to a totally different genus from the rational soul." Letter to Regius, May 1641, Philosophical Letters, 102 (AT III, 320ff.).

18. Letter to Reneri for Pollot, April 1638, AT II, 34ff. (Philosophical Letters, 54).

19. "On the contrary, the unity, the simplicity or the inseparability of all things which are in God is one of the principal perfections which I conceive to be in Him." Meditations III, HR1, 169.

20. "And one certainly ought not to find it strange that God, in creating me, placed this idea within me to be like the mark of the workman imprinted upon his work; and it is likewise not essential that the mark shall be something different from the work itself. For from the sole fact that God created me it is most probable that in

some way he has placed his image and similitude upon me, and that I perceive this similitude (in which the idea of God is contained) by means of the same faculty by which I perceive myself..." Ibid., 170.

21. CB #17.

22. "...for I cannot doubt that which the natural light causes me to believe to be true, as, for example, it has shown me that I am from the fact that I doubt, or other facts of the same kind." Meditations III, HR1, 160. In general, Descartes holds that "it is by means of the lumen naturale (the 'natural light', or the 'light of nature') that truth is grasped in intuition by the mind; cf., Principles I, xxx., HR1, 231; Letter to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, AT II, 587, (Philosophical Letters, 67).

23. Letter to Silhon, March 1648, Philosophical Letters, 229 (AT V, 133ff.).

24. Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647, Philosophical Letters, 229 (AT IV, 600ff.). Cf., Meditations III, HR1, 170.

25. Letter to Chanut, 1 February 1647, Philosophical Letters, 208 (AT IV, 600ff.).

26. Letter to Elizabeth, 15 September 1645, Philosophical Letters, 171 (AT IV, 287).

27. Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion"), HR11, 52-53.

28. "That substance which we understand to be supremely perfect and in which we conceive absolutely nothing involving defect or limitation of its perfection, is called God." Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion"), HR11, 53. Cf., Reply to Objections II, HR11, 37.

29. "We shall at the same time easily perceive that that

all-powerful being must comprise in himself all the other perfections that are contained in the idea of God, and hence these by their own nature and without any mental fiction are conjoined together and exist in God." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 21-22. Cf., Reply to Objections I, HR11, 12.

30. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 37.

31. Meditations III, HR1, 162.

32. Letter to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, Philosophical Letters, 65-66 (AT II, 587).

33. Letter to Mersenne, 16 June 1641, Philosophical Letters, 104 (AT III, 382).

34. Letter to Mesland, 9 February 1645, Philosophical Letters, 160 (AT IV, 218ff.).

35. Meditations III, HR1, 160.

36. "At the same time I have before received and admitted many things to be very certain and manifest, which yet I afterwards recognised as being dubious. What then were these things? They were the earth, sky, stars and all other objects which I apprehended by means of the senses. But what did I clearly [and distinctly] perceive in them? Nothing more than that the ideas or thoughts of these things were presented to my mind. And not even now do I deny that these ideas are met with in me." Ibid., 158.

37. Meditations III, HR1, 162.

38. Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn Up in Geometrical Fashion."), HR11, 53.

39. Meditations III, HR1, 162.

40. S.V. Keeling, Descartes, 269-270.

41. Reply to Objections I, HR11, 11. Cf., Reply to Objections II, HR11, 34. There, the ideas of complexity and objective reality are, implicitly at least, related to one another.

42. "...a thing can be limited in two ways, either by that which produced it not having given it more perfection, or because its nature is such that it can only receive a certain amount, as eg. in the case of the triangle, which by its nature can only have three sides." [my emphasis] Reply to Objections I, HR11, 16.

43. Meditations III, HR1, 162.

44. Reply to Objections I, HR11, 14. Cf., Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion"), HR11, 55.

45. Reply to Objections IV, HR11, 112.

46. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 34-35. The causal maxim, in that it is both grounded in the very nature of thought and consequently the chief instrument used in the proofs of God's existence in Meditation Three, is clearly one of the fundamental principles of Descartes' philosophy. This is well noted by Spinoza, who, after asserting that "the proposition cogito, or sum cogitans, is the fundamental truth of all Philosophy", further writes: "...if some one should say he is in doubt whether something can arise from nothing, he might also doubt his own existence even when he is thinking. For if I can affirm that something can exist without a cause I can, by the same right, affirm that thought may exist without a cause, and that I think although I am nothing. Since this is impossible I cannot believe that something can arise from nothing." (Benedictus de Spinoza, The Principles of Descartes' Philosophy, trans. H.H. Britan, La Salle, Illinois: Open Court Publishing Company, 1961, 24-265.)

Grounding the causal maxim in the mind's self-consciousness is, in essence, one of the ways in which Descartes avoids the charge of circularity in the proofs of God's existence; cf., CB #6. On the extreme importance Descartes attributes the causal principle, cf., Reply to Objections I, HR11, 17.

47. Reply to Objections V, HR11, 219.

48. Meditations III, HR1, 163.

49. This 'conflation' of the theory of meaning and the doctrine of causality is also noted by the commentator Mark Thomas in his article "Descartes' Proof in Meditation III", in International Studies in Philosophy, VII, Fall 1975, 69-88; specifically, pp. 82-84.

50. Meditations III, HR1, 163.

51. "For certainly, because I could not understand that, it does not follow that there must be a first cause, just as it does not follow that, because I cannot understand an infinity of divisions in a finite quantity, an ultimate atom can be arrived at, beyond which no further division is possible. The only consequence is that my intellect, which is finite, cannot comprehend the infinite. Therefore I prefer to use as the foundation of my proof my own existence, which is not dependent on any series of causes, and is so plain to my intelligence that nothing can be plainer; and about myself I do not so much ask, what was the original cause that produced me, as what it is that at present preserves me, the object of this being to disentangle myself from all question of the succession of causes." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 12-13. Cf., Letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641, AT III, 422, (Philosophical Letters, 116); Letter to Mesland, 2 May, 1644, AT IV, 110, (Philosophical Letters, 147).

52. Meditations III, HR1, 163.

53. Letter to Clerselier, 23 April 1649, Philosophical Letters, 253-54 (AT V, 352).

54. Replies to Objections I, HR11, 13.

55. Meditations III, HR1, 163.

Notes for Chapter Four

1. Meditations III, HR1, 164.
2. Letter to More, August 1649. AT V, 401, (Philosophical Letters, 256). Cf., CB #28.
3. Objections III With Replies, HR11, 67.
4. CB #28.
5. Meditations III, HR1, 164.
6. Ibid., 165.
7. Ibid., 165.
8. Ibid., 165.
9. Ibid. II, 151-52.
10. Ibid. III, 165.
11. "To exist formally is the term applied where the same thing exists in the object of an idea in such a manner that the way in which it exists in the object is exactly like what we know of it when aware of it; it exists eminently when, though not indeed of identical quality, it is yet of such amount as to be able to fulfil the function of an exact counterpart." Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion"), HR11, 53.

12. Meditations III, HRi, 165.

13. Ibid., 165.

14. It would prove a lengthy task to cite all the passages throughout the works of Descartes where God is referred to as 'the most perfect being' or 'the sum of all perfections'. Some of the more familiar passages are: Reply to Objections II, HRii, 53; Principles I, xiv., xviii., xxii., liv.

15. Reply to Objections I, HRii, 16.

16. "Neither is it true that the infinite is apprehended by a negation of boundary or limitation, since on the contrary all limitation contains a negation of the infinite." Reply to Objections V, HRii, 216

17. Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion."); HRii, 53; cf., above, note #14.

18. These conclusions, for the sake of the present exposition, are presented in an order different from that of the third Meditation.

19. Meditations III, HRi, 166.

20. Reply to Objections I, HRii, 17.

21. Cf., Principles I, lii, HRi, 240.

22. Meditations III, HRi, 166.

23. Ibid. II, 152.

24. Ibid., 151-52.

25. Ibid. III, 167.

26. Ideas are principal attributes of thought. To deny the existence of any of his ideas would be, for Descartes, to deny his own thinking existence. Of his ideas considered apart from any question of the existence of their objects, Descartes writes: "And not even now do I deny that these ideas are met with in me." Ibid., 158.

27. Rules for the Direction of the Mind XII, HR1, 43.

28. Meditations III, HR1, 167.

29. Rules for the Direction of the Mind XII, HR1, 43.

30. "...just as all are not expert mechanics, and hence cannot form the notion of a highly intricate machine, so all men might not have the same power of conceiving the idea of God; but since that idea is implanted in the same manner in the minds of all, and we perceive no source other than ourselves from which it comes, we suppose that it pertains to the nature of our mind. This indeed is not wrong; but we omit something else which principally merits consideration and on which the whole force and evidence of this argument depends, namely, that this power of having in one's self the idea of God could not belong to our intellect, if this intellect were merely a finite entity, as in fact it is, and did it not have God as the cause of its existence. Hence I have undertaken the further enquiry - whether I could exist if God did not exist - not for the purpose of adducing a proof distinct from the preceding one, but rather in order to give a more thorough-going explanation of it." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 12.

31. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 35.

32. Meditations III, HR1, 167.

33. Ibid., 168.

34. Ibid., 168.

35. Ibid., 168.

36. Ibid., HR1, 169. It is the nature of this cause, i.e. in which creation and conservation are identical, that also excludes the possibility that Descartes' parents are his cause. In no way could they be considered to 'conserve' his existence at any moment, "although all that I have ever been able to believe of them were true". Considered as cause, all Descartes' parents did was "merely to implant certain dispositions in that matter in which the self - i.e. the mind, which alone I at present identify with myself - is deemed to exist." Ibid., HR1, 170.

37. It will be remembered that Descartes does not deny the possibility of an infinite regress per se, but only with respect to ideas considered in terms of their objective reality. Because the objective and formal reality of the idea of the self are the same, allows Descartes to avoid the problem of an infinite regress in causes in the following manner:

"Therefore I prefer to use as the foundation of my proof my own existence, which is not dependent on any series of causes, and is so plain to my intelligence that nothing can be plainer; and about myself I do not so much ask, what was the original cause that produced me, as what it is that at present preserves me, the object of this being to disentangle myself from all question of the succession of causes." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 13.

38. Reply to Objections IV, HR11, 109.

39. Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion"), HR11, 55.

40. "Thus, even though God has never been non-existent, yet because He is the very Being who actually preserves Himself in existence, it seems possible to call Him without undue impropriety the cause of His own existence. But it must be noted that here I do not mean a preservation which is effected by any positive operation of causal efficiency but one due merely to this fact, that the essential nature of God is such that He cannot be otherwise than always existent." Reply to Objections I, HR11, 14. Cf., Reply to Objections IV, HR11,

111.

41. "When the statement is added that if anything is such it will give itself all the perfections of which it has any idea, if indeed it does not as yet possess them, the meaning is that it cannot fail to have in actuality all the perfections that it knows, because by the light of nature we perceive that a thing, the essence of which is so limitless that it does not stand in need of an efficient cause in order that it may exist, does not require an efficient cause either, in order to possess all the perfections of which it is aware, and that its own essential nature gives to it eminently whatever we can think that an efficient cause is able to bestow upon anything else." Reply to Objections IV, HRiI, 111.

42. Though the mind understands the term 'infinity' negatively, it will be recalled that it is in fact a 'positive' term (supra, n. 19). A similar point is made with respect to the term causa sui, in the continuation of the same passage: "But, if we have previously enquired why He is or why He continues in being, and having regard to the immense and incomprehensible power which exists in the idea of Him we recognise that it is so exceedingly great that it is clearly the cause of His continuing to be, and that there can be nothing else besides it, we say that God exists per se, no longer negatively but in the highest positive sense." Reply to Objections I, HRiI, 15.

43. Meditations III, HRi, 169.

44. Ibid., 169.

45. "By possible either you mean, as all commonly do, whatever does not disagree with human thought; and in this sense it is manifest that the nature of God, as I have described it, is possible, because I have assigned nothing to it that we did not clearly and distinctly perceive ought to belong to it, and consequently it cannot be in disagreement with our thought." Reply to Objections II, HRiI, 45. Cf., Reply to Objections I, HRiI, 21. Leibniz criticizes Descartes' a priori argument for failing to prove God's possibility (cf., "Critical Thoughts on the General Part of the Principles of Descartes", in, Philosophical Papers and Letters [2nd. ed.], translated and edited by L.E. Loemker, Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1969, 386), whereas the above-quoted passage and others like it clearly indicate that Descartes does consider the matter of God's possibility. Leibniz's criticism of Descartes'

argument seems to rest - in part, at least - on a criticism of what Descartes holds to be the criteria of possibility, namely clarity and distinctness in ideas. Cf., "Meditations on Knowledge, Truth, and Ideas", in, Philosophical Papers and Letters, 291-92.

46. Meditations III, HRi, 170.

47. Ibid., 170-71.

48. Reply to Objections V, HRii, 220.

49. In his discussion of 'The Transcendental Ideal' in the Critique of Pure Reason (N.K. Smith translation, B 605-607), Kant writes: "It is obvious that reason, in achieving its purpose, that, namely, of representing the necessary complete determination of things, does not presuppose the existence of a being that corresponds to this ideal, but only the idea of such a being, and this only for the purpose of deriving from an unconditioned totality of complete determination the conditioned totality, that is, the totality of the limited. The ideal is, therefore, the archetype (prototypon) of all things, which one and all, as imperfect copies (ectypa), derive from it the material of their possibility, and while approximating to it in varying degrees, yet always fall very far short of actually attaining it."

50. The idea of God, Descartes holds, is innate. This does not mean that the mind necessarily thinks this idea at any one time; indeed, it might never actively represent to itself its innate idea of God. It does mean, however, that it has the capacity to represent this idea to itself:

"Finally when I say that an idea is innate in us [or imprinted in our souls by nature], I do not mean that it is always present to us. This would make no idea innate. I mean merely that we possess the faculty of summoning up this idea." Objections III with Replies, HRii, 73. Cf., Letter to Hyperaspistes, August 1641, AT II, 430-31, (Philosophical Letters, 117).

51. Reply to Objections II, HRii, 33. The innate quality of the idea of God does not, of course, argue against the fact that this idea has been implanted in the mind 'like the mark of the workman upon his work'. In fact, it is precisely because God has created thought that the idea of Him is innate to the mind.

52. Meditations III; HR1, 170.

53. Letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644, Philosophical Letters, 147 (AT IV, 110). Cf., Reply to Objections I, HR11, 12.

54. "And when I consider that I doubt, that is to say, that I am an incomplete and dependent being, the idea of a being that is complete and independent, that is of God, presents itself to my mind with so much distinctness and clearness - and from the fact alone that this idea is found in me, or that I who possess this idea exist, I conclude so certainly that God exists, and that my existence depends entirely on Him in every moment of my life - that I do not think that the human mind is capable of knowing anything with more evidence and certitude." Meditations IV, HR1, 171-72.

55. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 38.

56. CB #19.

Notes for Chapter Five

1. Meditations III, HR1, 171.

2. Ibid. IV, 171.

3. Ibid., 172.

4. Ibid., 172.

5. Reply to Objections V, HR11, 245. That God is not a deceiver is the conclusion here. For God to deceive, in whatever manner, would in some sense imply the denial of his own nature: deception 'inclines towards nothingness', whereas God is being, and the truths He freely creates are the truths of created being. For created thought, these truths are absolutely necessary, and this is in accordance with the irrevocable nature of God's creation of them. Expressed otherwise, if the truths of created being were not constant, but changing, then God's nature would be changing and inconstant. At the root of this 'validation' of reason lies the nature of the God Descartes has proven to exist. Jean Laporte summarizes these points well in the following:

"Or en quoi consiste cette essence? En l'Être pur, l'Être sans aucune qualification particulière, et par là même l'Être Universel. C'est pourquoi, 'la vérité étant une même chose avec l'être', Dieu s'identifie avec la vérité absolue, bien plus, 'il comprend tout ce qu'il y a de vrai dans les choses, et ne peut avoir en soi rien de faux' (Lett. a Clerselier, 23 Avril 1649, A.T., t. V, p. 356). Pas plus donc qu'il ne peut s'empêcher d'être, et d'être la source de tout ce qui est, il ne peut empêcher le vrai d'être le vrai, ni faire qu'il équivaille au faux ou se transforme en faux. Mais le mot tromper n'a pas de sens ou il signifie la substitution du faux au vrai. En faisant de la tromperie un bien, Dieu introduirait en soi du non-être: ce qui reviendrait à s'ôter un peu de son être. Gardons-nous, par conséquent, de mettre l'essence de la tromperie sur le plan des essences mathématiques ou morales ordinaires, que Dieu a 'disposées' à sa guise. Il aurait pu accorder ensemble la qualité de circulaire et celle de carré, la somme $2 + 3$ et la somme $5 + 1$, tous termes qui se contrarient et qui sont pour nous incompatibles, mais

en soi également réels et positifs. Il ne peut accorder à moins de cesser d'être Dieu, l'être avec le néant. Etre ou néant, donc vérité ou mensonge, ont pour Dieu une signification absolue. Nous sommes donc absolument autorisés à compter que Dieu ne nous trompe pas. Et ainsi est définitivement stabilisée sur sa base la certitude de la science humaine." Jean Laporte, Le Rationalisme de Descartes, Paris, 1950, 171-72.

6. It will be recalled from the discussion of eternal truths in Chapter Two that, for Descartes, God's motives in His creation must, of necessity, remain inscrutable to the finite mind. Cf., below, n. 13.

7. Meditations III, HR1, 163.

8. Furthermore, Descartes writes: "Thus you see that, after becoming aware of the existence of God, it is incumbent on us to imagine that he is a deceiver if we wish to cast doubt upon our clear and distinct perceptions; and since we cannot imagine that he is a deceiver, we must admit them all as true and certain." Reply to Objections II, HR1i, 41.

9. "...a God, I say, whose idea is in me, i.e. who possesses all those supreme perfections of which our mind may indeed have some idea but without understanding them all, who is liable to no errors or defect [and who has none of all those marks which denote imperfection]. From this it is manifest that He cannot be a deceiver, since the light of nature teaches us that fraud and deception necessarily proceed from some defect." Meditations III, HR1, 171.

10. Ibid. IV, 173.

11. Ibid., 173.

12. "On the contrary, the unity, the simplicity or the inseparability of all things which are in God is one of the principal perfections which I conceive to be in Him." Meditations III, HR1, 169.

13. Ibid. IV, 173.

14. Ibid., 174.

15. Ibid., 174.

16. Ibid., 174.

17. Ibid., 175.

18. Ibid., 175. That God's will and intellect are one is a sure token of His absolute freedom. It is not in indifference, which for Descartes is the "lowest grade of liberty", and evinces rather "a lack or negation in knowledge than a perfection of will" (Ibid., 175), but in the unity of God's will and intellect that this freedom is said to lie.

19. Ibid., 175-76.

20. Ibid., 177.

21. "I have nothing to say on the subject of memory. Everyone should test himself to see whether he is good at remembering. If he has doubts, then he should make use of written notes and so forth to help him." CB #5.

22. Chapter One, p. 8, cf., Rules for the Direction of the Mind xii, xvii.

23. Meditations IV, MR1, 178.

24. Ibid., 177.

25. Ibid., 177.

26. Ibid., 177.

27. Ibid., 178.

28. Ibid., 172.

29. "Many other matters respecting the attributes of God and my own nature or mind remain for consideration; but I shall possibly on another occasion resume the investigation of these. Now (after first noting what must be done or avoided, in order to arrive at a knowledge of the truth) my principle task is to endeavour to emerge from the state of doubt into which I have these last days fallen, and to see whether nothing certain can be known regarding material things." Meditations V, HR1, 179.

30. Ibid. IV, 178-79.

31. Ibid. V, 179.

32. "You are plainly in error when you say that existence is not demonstrated of God, as it is demonstrated of the triangle that its three angles are equal to two right angles; for the way in which both are proved is alike, except that the demonstration proving existence in God is much simpler and clearer." Reply to Objections V, HR11, 229. Cf., Reply to Objections I, HR11, 19-22.

33. "But before examining whether any such objects as I conceive exist outside me, I must consider the ideas of them in so far as they are in my thought, and see which of them are distinct and which confused." Meditations V, HR1, 179.

34. Ibid., 179.

35. "That substance, which is the immediate subject of extension in space and of the accidents that presuppose extension, e.g. figure, situation, movement in space etc., is called Body." Reply to Objections II ("Arguments Demonstrating the Existence of God and the Distinction Between a Soul and Body, Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion."), HR11, 53.

36. Even within the domain of sense perception, Descartes notes that these ideas are the most clearly and distinctly apprehended: "And even although I had not demonstrated this, the nature of my mind is such that I could not prevent myself from holding them to be true so long as I conceive them clearly; and I recollect that even when I was still strongly attached to the objects of sense, I counted as the most certain those truths which I conceived clearly as regards figures, numbers, and the other matters which pertain to arithmetic and geometry, and, in general, to pure and abstract mathematics." Meditations V, HRI, 180.

It will be recalled from the discussion of Descartes' method in Chapter One, that the idea of God is by no means more easily grasped by the mind 'prejudiced' by the senses. In this respect only can it be said that the ideas of mathematics are more clear and distinct than the idea of God. As to the idea of the self, while no extraordinary exercise of the mind of the order of the Meditations, for example, is required to yield the intuition of the cogito, likewise it cannot be said that this manner of self-conscious reflection occurs on a 'casual' basis.

37. Meditations V, HRI, 179.

38. Ibid., 179-80.

39. "Altogether, I think that all those which involve no affirmation or negation are innate; because the sense organs do not bring us anything which is like the idea which arises in us at their stimulus; and so this idea must have been in us before." Letter to Mersenne, 22 July 1641, Philosophical Letters, 108 (AT III, 414).

40. "Nor does the objection hold good that possibly this idea of a triangle has reached my mind through the medium of my senses, since I have sometimes seen bodies triangular in shape; because I can form in my mind an infinitude of other figures regarding which we cannot have the least conception of their ever having been objects of sense, and I can nevertheless demonstrate various properties pertaining to their nature as well as to that of the triangle, and these must certainly all be true since I conceive them clearly." Meditations V, HRI, 180.

41. "And what I here find to be most important is that I discover in myself an infinitude of ideas of certain things which cannot be

esteemed as pure negations, although they may possibly have no existence outside of my thought, and which are not framed by me, although it is within my power either to think or not to think them, but which possess natures which are true and immutable." Ibid., 179-80.

42. Reply to Objections I, HRii, 20.

43. Meditations V, HRi, 180-81.

44. "In the fifth Meditation corporeal nature generally is explained, and in addition to this the existence of God is demonstrated by a new proof in which there may possibly be certain difficulties also, but the solution of these will be seen in the Replies to the Objections." Meditations ("Synopsis of the Six Following Meditations"), HRi, 142.

45. Reply to Objections I, HRii, 19.

46. "This [i.e. God's existence] indeed is not at first manifest, since it would seem to present some appearance of being a sophism. For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence, I easily persuade myself that the existence can be separated from the essence of God, and that we can thus conceive God as not actually existing." Meditations V, HRi, 181.

47. "Moreover, contradictoriness in our concepts arises merely from their obscurity and confusion; there can be none in the case of clear and distinct ideas. Hence it suffices us to understand clearly and distinctly those few things that we perceive about God, though they form a quite inadequate knowledge, and to note that among the other constituents of this idea, however inadequate it may be, necessary existence is found, in order to be able to affirm that we have examined the nature of God with sufficient precision, and to maintain that it contains no contradiction." Reply to Objections II, HRii, 46-47. Cf., n. 45 of Chapter Four.

48. Meditations V, HRi, 181.

49. Ibid., 181.

50. CB #17.

51. Henri Gouhier, "La Preuve Ontologique de Descartes", in Revue Internationale de Philosophie, VIII (1954), 295-303; as cited by Donald Cress, "Does Descartes' 'Ontological Argument' Really Stand on its Own?", 133-34.

52. H. Gouhier, "La Preuve Ontologique de Descartes", op. cit., 301.

53. Gouhier, La Pensée Métaphysique de Descartes, Paris, Vrin, 1962, p. 163; as cited by Donald Cress, "Does Descartes' 'Ontological Argument' Really Stand on its Own?", 135.

54. Meditations V, HR1, 183.

55. Principles I, v., HR1, 220.

56. Meditations V, AG, 106-107.

57. M. Gueroult's understanding of the validity of the a priori argument at the level of subjective certainty, while substantially in agreement with the present study, cannot be accepted entirely. Underlying this disagreement is a difference in the way in which the doubt present in Meditation Five is interpreted. Gueroult, for whatever reason, divides the evil genius into two, distinct, deceiving entities, namely 'le malin genie' and 'le Dieu trompeur'. On Gueroult's account, the former is banished from the Meditations by the argument for God's veracity in Meditation Four, though the latter is still free to wreak havoc on the level of finite certitude in Meditation Five. As the following indicates, Gueroult holds that the mind 'naturally' tends to ascribe deception at the reconstructive stage of Meditation Five to some super-human - in fact omnipotent - entity.

"Or, ici, cette opinion, notons-le, se forme en moi d'elle-même, en vertu de ma nature, et peut malgré moi envahir mon esprit, sous l'influence d'un certain nombre de faits psychologiques, à savoir: l'incapacité d'avoir toujours présentes dans une intuition les raisons évidentes qui nous imposent invinciblement la vérité de nos

idées claires et distinctes; la nécessité d'avoir recours la plupart du temps aux souvenirs d'une telle intuition, si bien que ces souvenirs sont à chaque instant beaucoup plus nombreux que ces intuitions mêmes; la présence en nous de souvenirs d'erreurs passées commises à propos d'idées claires et distinctes; la réflexion naturelle subséquente que, puisque je me suis déjà trompé à leur propos, je puis me tromper encore; que Dieu ne m'a point fait tel que je puisse jamais me tromper; que s'il me trompe parfois, il pourrait bien me tromper toujours; que, s'il me trompe toujours, il ne saurait être bon ni parfait, etc. Enfin, ces réflexions naturelles sont corroborées par un autre fait, à savoir que je découvre, traînant dans mes souvenirs, une vieille opinion qui m'est venue par ouï-dire, d'après laquelle il y a un Dieu qui peut tout et qui, par conséquent, aurait pu me créer tel que je me trompasse toujours. Sur ce plan de la nature, l'idée du Dieu trompeur se développe d'elle-même: elle naît naturellement en vertu de notre statut psychologique, et n'a rien d'une fiction ni d'un artifice volontaire." (Nouvelles Réflexions sur la Preuve Ontologique de Descartes, 35-36; as cited by Donald Cress, "Does Descartes' 'Ontological Argument' Really Stand on its Own?", 131).

Against this view, several observations can be made. First, this study has already shown that, in the proof of God's veracity, it is impossible that an evil genius can be omnipotent. That entity's very deceitfulness argues against this, in a way that shows that only God can possess such power. Second, and more to the point, Gueroult grounds the doubt of Meditation Five on the admission of the possibility of 'un Dieu trompeur'; but such a position equates the possibility of self-deception, which is what Descartes is dealing with in Meditation Five, and which does provoke 'natural' doubt, i.e. doubt pertaining to the self's nature, with the possibility of some kind of divine deception. This seems unaccountably at odds with Descartes' clear delineation of the kinds of doubt evoked by the possibilities of self-deception and deception from on high, and with Descartes' own words in the fifth Meditation. The doubt present in Meditation Five is natural and evoked by the self's consciousness of inability to grasp the whole of its science in one clear and distinct intuition.

58. This explains Descartes' reluctance - reflected in his repeated warnings concerning the difficulty of understanding the Meditations - to attempt to impart the philosophical reasoning that assures one of the truth of human certainty. Consider, for example, the following: "...Experience has taught me that very few people, even if they have an excellent mind and a great desire for knowledge, can take the time to enter into my thoughts; so that I have no grounds for hoping as much of a Queen who has an infinity of other occupations. Experience has also taught me that although my views are found surprising at

first, because they are so different from received opinions, once they are understood they appear so simple and so conformable to common sense, that they are no longer admired or regarded as important. For the nature of man is such that men only value things which they admire and which they do not completely possess. Health is the greatest of all the goods which concern our bodies; but it is the one we owe the least reflect upon and savour. The knowledge of truth is the health of the soul; once a man possesses it he thinks no more of it." Letter to Chanut, 31 March 1649; Philosophical Letters, 247 (AT V, 326).

59. Meditations V, HR1, 183.

60. Letter to Regius, 24 May 1640; AT III, 63 (Philosophical Letters, 73-74).

61. Meditations V, HR1, 184. Cf., supra, n. 59.

62. Reply to Objections II, HR11, 38.

63. Reply to Objections I, HR11, 22.

64. Meditations V, HR1, 185.

65. "But, since God is no deceiver, it is very manifest that He does not communicate to me these ideas immediately and by Himself, nor yet by the intervention of some creature in which their reality is not formally, but only eminently, contained. For since He has given me no faculty to recognise that this is the case, but, on the other hand, a very great inclination to believe [that they are sent to me or] that they are conveyed to me by corporeal objects, I do not see how He could be defended from the accusation of deceit if these ideas were produced by causes other than corporeal objects. Hence we must allow that corporeal things exist." Ibid. VI, HR11, 191.

66. "Analysis shows the true way by which a thing was methodically discovered and derived, as it were effect from cause, so that, if the reader care to follow it and give sufficient attention to everything, he understands the matter no less perfectly and makes it as much his own as if he had himself discovered it. But it contains nothing to

incite belief in an inattentive or hostile reader; for if the very least thing brought forward escapes his notice, the necessity of the conclusions is lost..." Reply to Objections II, HRif, 48-49.

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