

THE FUNCTIONS AND ORDERING OF THE THEISTIC
ARGUMENTS IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS

Véronique Foti

In his paper "Is the Cartesian Ontological Argument Defensible?"¹ J. William Forgie disputes Kenny's² reconstruction of the argument (which considers the first premise to be about a Meinongian "given object"), as well as any attempts to vindicate the argument by means of an application of "Anselm's principle"³ or "Descartes' principle."⁴ Forgie holds that none of these reformulations of the argument can yield a conclusion with primary existential import.

In this paper, I wish to argue that neither Kenny's interpretation nor Forgie's criticism do justice to Descartes' a priori theistic argument because they ignore a basic structure of Descartes' metaphysical thought: the equivalence of truth and being. This structure underlies the ordering of the theistic arguments of the Meditations and the theory of essences advanced in the Fifth Meditation in conjunction with the a priori theistic argument. We shall reveal this structure by investigating each of these topics.

It ought to puzzle the attentive reader that Descartes, who never tires of stressing the order of reasons over the order of topics (or the order of discovery over the order of exposition),⁵ devoted the Third Meditation to formulating complex a posteriori theistic arguments, only to come up with a simple and elegant argument in Meditation Five. Surely we cannot ascribe this peculiar ordering to accident or afterthought.⁶ We will have to accept Descartes' invitation to meditate along with him and enter into the dynamic movement of his thought.

To do so, we must begin with the problem which leads Descartes to seek for theistic arguments. In the First Meditation, Descartes reflects that there are certain simple, general, self-evident truths which, when considered in themselves, resist doubt. The propositions of mathematics are of this kind. Yet even these intrinsically indubitable truths can be doubted for an extrinsic reason:

in view of the "old opinion" that our entire being (hence our knowing) depends on an omnipotent creator. To deny this theory is to forfeit all possibility of grounding knowledge in certainty (because "this ascription of less power to the source of my being will mean that I am more likely to be so imperfect that I always go wrong").⁷ Yet the hypothesis of a creator who is good as well as omnipotent seems incompatible with the evidence that we do make mistakes.⁸ If we retain the omnipotence but deny the goodness of the creator, we are plunged into radical skepticism and must admit that we may be deceived even when we "add two and three, or count the sides of a square, or do any simpler thing that might be imagined."

Adrift in that "deep sea" of doubt, Descartes casts about desperately for any certainty to cling to; for even one indubitable certainty would invalidate the skeptical hypothesis. There is, to be sure, the consciousness of his inalienable freedom: even if he cannot know anything, he can refuse to be deceived. The deceiver seems to be less than omnipotent; and indeed, he cannot "bring it about that at the time of thinking that I am something, I am in fact nothing." The cogito not only is a truth such that it cannot be thought of without being at the same time fully present to the mind in clear and distinct apprehension; it is unique in that it is implicit in any conscious act. All consciousness involves self-consciousness.

Spontaneous and inescapable conviction, however, does not amount to absolute certainty. The certainty of the cogito is a conditioned certainty; and its methodological fruitfulness (in yielding the principle of the truth of clear and distinct perceptions) is likewise conditioned. We must, then, establish its condition, which is the existence and perfection of God.⁹

Descartes' problem thus comes into focus: it does appear that certain knowledge is possible; but we cannot establish this certainty as long as we regard the knower (who is a doubter, conscious of his imperfection), or indeed the known, as the source of their own being.

There are two necessary conditions of certain and perfect knowledge: 1. The cognitive powers of the knower must be adequate to their task, not intrinsically and irremediably out of contact with reality. 2. The known, i.e. the proper object of knowledge, must be immutable. We can have no assurance that these conditions are met unless we can establish the dependence of knower and known on a source of being and truth whose fullness of perfection includes goodness, omnipotence, and immutability.

To establish this, the conscious being must turn back upon itself and show that the existence of such a source,

and his own dependence on it are implicit in the primary certainty of the cogito, in his own self-awareness. Descartes thus turns inward and ranks his ideas according to their degree of representative reality. He realizes¹⁰ that his "conception of a supreme God, eternal, infinite, omniscient, almighty, and Creator of all that exists besides himself" transcends, in its degree of representative reality, the inherent reality of any finite being and thus must be referred to the very being it represents as its complete efficient cause.

Descartes' argument hinges on the ineluctable (although not necessarily explicit) presence of God to the human mind through the representative reality of an innate idea. This presence will be presupposed by his a priori argument.

I have no doubt that all men have in themselves at least an implicit idea of God, i.e., a potentiality of being explicitly aware of the idea; nevertheless I should not be surprised if the idea never came before their awareness or attention, even if they read my Meditations a thousand times.¹¹

Descartes' point is that the representative reality of an idea is "not nothing" and must be causally explained. The idea of God, considered objectively, is shown to be non-fictive by its independence of the finite mind. Neither can it be classed among our ideas of "given objects" because these (e.g., our ideas of mathematical objects) can all be referred to the finite mind as their total efficient cause.¹² Descartes' careful demonstration of the uniqueness of this idea prepares the ground for his a priori argument and must not be overlooked.

The idea of God, whose degree of representative reality causally implies the actuality of its object, shows itself to be the condition of possibility of the cogito; it grounds and validates the cogito which heretofore had only immediate, intuitive certainty. Our ideas of finitude and imperfection which are involved in self-awareness presuppose the ideas of infinity and perfection constitutive of our apprehension of God. The order of knowing is the order of being.¹³

Il y a donc reconnu son imperfection par la perfection de Dieu. Et bien qu'il ne l'ait pas fait explicitement, il l'a fait pourtant implicitement. Car, explicitement, nous pouvons connaître notre imperfection avant la perfection de Dieu, parce que nous pouvons faire attention à nous avant de faire attention à Dieu, et conclure à notre finitude avant de conclure à son infinitude; mais, implicitement, la connaissance de Dieu et de ses perfections doit toujours précéder la connaissance de nous-mêmes et de nos imperfections.

Car, dans la réalité, la perfection infinie de Dieu est antérieure a notre imperfection, parce que notre imperfection est défaut et négation de la perfection de Dieu; or, tout défaut, comme toute négation, présuppose la chose dont elle est un défaut et une négation.¹⁴

Far from being fictive or from representing a "given object" comprehensible to the finite mind, the apprehension of God reveals itself as the condition of possibility of our self-knowledge and, indeed, of our awareness of any finite reality whatever (as the infinite reality which it represents is the cause of all that is).

Descartes goes on to argue that God is not only the cause of the representative reality of this foundational idea, but the cause of the finite being itself which has the idea.

Descartes' argument moves from the order of knowing to the order of being, exemplifying, at the same time, the order of reasons. His argument that the finite self, even if eternal,¹⁵ must depend for its continued existence on the sustaining creativity of God, can succeed only given that we have an idea of God which enables us to infer the actuality of its object.¹⁶

When Descartes concludes his Third Meditation, he has reached a plateau of assurance and insight which calls to mind St. Anselm's exultation in the *Proslogion*.¹⁷ He acknowledges no doubt about having proved the actuality of the perfect (hence supremely good and omnipotent) God. Since the knower has been shown to depend on God for his being and knowing, his cognitive powers cannot be intrinsically deceptive but must be disclosive of reality or truth. How does Descartes conceive of truth?

Gewirth¹⁸ has argued that Descartes thinks of truth as conformity of thought to object, basing himself on a letter to Mersenne¹⁹ where Descartes writes that truth requires no definition but that we may convey the signification of the word "truth" as conformity of thought with its object. I think we must make the stronger claim that Descartes perceives an equivalence between truth and being.

Gewirth cites another text (whose compatibility with his own interpretation is doubtful): "When we say that some attribute [*quid*] is contained in the nature or concept of a thing, it is the same as if we were to say that the attribute is true of the thing or can be affirmed of it."²⁰ The clearest text is probably that of a letter to Clerselier of 1649:

La vérité consiste en l'être, et la fausseté au non-être seulement, en sorte que l'idée de l'infini, comprenant tout l'être, comprend tout ce qu'il y a de vrai dans les choses, et ne peut avoir en soi rien de faux, encore que d'ailleurs on veuille supposer qu'il n'est pas vrai que cet être infini existe.²¹

If human thought can attain truth it can attain being which is not simply the being of being thought and need not be actual. All truth is being; hence error must be explained as a privation and ascribed to the knower in his freedom and finitude. We can be shown to have access to truth in that we can be shown to depend on existent Perfection which, as fullness of being, is fullness of truth. Given this dependence, we can validate clear and distinct perception (taken objectively); "for every clear and distinct perception is something; so it cannot come from nothingness but must have God as its author; God, I say, the supremely Perfect, who it is absurd should be deceitful; therefore it is indubitably true."²² The truth or being which thought attains is the truth of essences which are the proper objects of knowledge. However, it is not enough to show that the knower can penetrate to reality and attain truth; he must be able to reach truths he can hold on to. We need perfect, not just certain knowledge which requires that the essences be stable, indeed, immutable.

Since the essences, like the knower, depend entirely on God for their reality or truth, Descartes must return to a consideration of God's being and nature. For this reason, the a priori argument of the Fifth Meditation is inseparable from the problematic of essences. We will do a brief analysis of Meditation Five to uncover the purpose, structure, and presuppositions of this argument.

The Fifth Meditation opens on a note of confidence: knowledge is possible and we know how to achieve it ("I have now observed what I must do and avoid so as to attain truth"). As soon, however, as we turn away from the self-certainty which is inseparable from our being, and from the existence of God known implicitly in that primary certainty, we have to admit to difficulties regarding the object of knowledge. Knowledge once again seems to have found a way of eluding our grasp.²³

Insofar as we know external objects, we know them in terms of their mathematical determinations of essences of which we have innate ideas. In his act of knowing, the knower reaches reality (reale aliquid) which is of the order of possibility rather than actuality.²⁴

We may note at this point that Forgie's rendering of "Descartes' principle" does not adequately express Descartes' thought on account of the parenthetical clause "though it need not exist, even in thought". The essences (or real and immutable natures) are indeed independent of existence and of our thought, but only because they are independently real, being possibles, not because they are intrinsically nonentities. They delimit the structure of possibility and are real because they are true" . . . they are something, not mere nothingness; for it is obvious that whatever is true is something; and I have already abundantly proved that whatever I clearly perceive is true."²⁵ Forgie's failure to distinguish between being or reality, actual existence, and being an object of thought clouds the transparency of Descartes' reasoning.

The very dependence of the essences on God, the source of being and truth, which allows us to have confidence in our cognitive abilities also gives rise to a problem which becomes the focus of Meditation Five, the problem of the eternal truths. If the essences are creatures and all possibility, no less than the actuality it delimits, depends wholly on the free will of an omnipotent God, we seem to have no assurance that the essences will remain as we apprehend them.²⁶ Without a guarantee of the stability of the object of knowledge, perfect knowledge is impossible.

We require, then, a full realization of the necessity involved in God's being and nature. If perfect knowledge is to be possible, the truth that God exists and is perfect (hence good, omnipotent, immutable, etc.), which was apprehended with certainty, cannot be an ontologically dependent truth like the truths of mathematics, but must be unconditionally necessary. This realization cannot be attained by a posteriori reasoning, because such reasoning is discursive and thus begs the question: it assumes that throughout the laborious process of reasoning and indefinitely thereafter (when we remember having formulated a proof without having the proof itself present to our mind) intelligible structures will remain exactly as we apprehended them.

The realization must be not only a priori but as immediate and intuitive as was the realization of the primary certainty of the cogito.²⁷ Descartes does not specify the premises or underlying principles of his a priori argument (as he did in the case of the a posteriori arguments), because this argument presents an intuitive realization.

What follows from this realization? We cannot comprehend the Divine nature, but whenever we apprehend it clearly and distinctly, as a possible, in its fullness of

reality (knowing that we are apprehending a genuine nature), we see at once that it is necessarily actual and conjoins all perfections in its unitary simplicity. The Divine decrees are immutable because, although they are free, no real distinction separates them from the necessary structure of Divine Perfection.²⁸ They are thus freely created, yet necessary and immutable. Descartes warns that this is incomprehensible to our reason.²⁹ Far from being an arch-rationalist trapped in the realm of Pure Objects, Descartes, like Anselm, avows that the truth of the fons veritatis transcends the comprehension of the created intellect.

Only now has Descartes achieved a full validation of human knowledge, so that he can take his stand against the skeptics and proclaim:

But now I have discerned that God exists, and have understood at the same time that everything else depends on him and that he is not deceitful; and from this I have gathered that whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive is necessarily true. So even if I am no longer attending to the arguments for having judged this to be true, yet, so long as I remember that I did perceive it clearly and distinctly, no contrary argument can be brought forward to induce me to doubt it; I have genuine and certain knowledge of the matter. My knowledge extends not only to this, but also to everything else that I remember I have proved--in geometry and so on.³⁰

We may now summarize and enumerate the points in which the preceding analysis differs from Forgie's.

1. Kenny's assimilation of Descartes' real and immutable natures to Meinongian "given objects" which are "beyond being and not-being" is misleading. Descartes is not anticipating "the principle of the independence of Sosein from Sein." For Meinong, every "object," in that it can be the subject of true predication, has Sosein, whether or not it has any kind of being whatever. Thus even an impossible object has Sosein. Descartes, on the other hand, equates truth with being, so that only the real can have a nature and the properties which belong to that nature. Clear and distinct perception attains truth in that it attains being.

2. In a passage cited by Forgie, Kenny writes: "A pure object can have properties whether or not it exists; but if we are inquiring about its properties, one of the most interesting questions we can ask is

'does it exist or not?'"³¹ For Descartes, in fact, that is not a question we can, in this context, ask at all, because, since he holds that the actualization of an essence leaves that essence unchanged, the existence of a thing cannot be included among its properties.³² One might think that this would invalidate his a priori theistic argument; in fact, however, it makes it clear that the argument's primary intention is not to prove the existence of God but the necessity involved in God's being and nature.³³

3. The a priori argument of Meditation Five presupposes the a posteriori arguments of the Third Meditation which establish, a. The idea of God is non-fictive (hence to ascribe the fullness of perfection to God is not to make a "primary" or "secondary" assertion about a fictive entity). b. The idea of God must be referred to the reality it represents as its total efficient cause (hence God is not an ens rationis). c. The idea of God, considered representatively, is unique, in that other essences of which we have clear and distinct ideas require no cause beyond the finite mind and, unlike the Divine essence, are comprehensible to the finite mind. Our idea of God is hence not the idea of a "given object" such as a triangle.

4. The a priori theistic argument also presupposes the following consequence of the arguments in Meditation Three: d. Since God is actual and is the fullness of reality and truth, we depend on God for our being and knowing and can, by means of our clear and distinct perception, attain reality or truth.

5. The a priori theistic argument is not, in fact, an instance of formal, deductive reasoning, but the expression in language of an immediate, intuitive insight, paralleling the insight of the cogito.

Given, then Descartes' equivalence between truth and reality, he is justified in holding that whatever we clearly and distinctly perceive to pertain to the true and immutable nature of a thing can be truly affirmed of that thing. The truths of essences delimit possibility, which is a level of reality, and to which all existence must conform. Descartes does not reason from his conception of a fictive being, a being of reason, or a "given object" to the existence of this object, but from his apprehension of the real, true, and immutable nature of God to the necessity of God's existence. His reasoning presupposes the recognition, set forth in Meditation Three, that the presence of God to the human mind through the representative reality of an idea, which is a precondition of thought, implies the Divine

actuality and allows us to assert with confidence that our clear and distinct perceptions disclose reality.

Boston College

NOTES

¹J. William Forgie, "Is the Cartesian Ontological Argument Defensible?," The New Scholasticism, Vol. L, No. 1 (Winter, 1976), pp. 96-108.

²Anthony Kenny, Descartes (New York, 1968) chap. vii. An expanded version of this text appears in Joseph Margolis, ed., Fact and Existence (Oxford, 1969), pp. 18-36.

³Forgie formulates "Anselm's principle" as follows. "If we understand a description 'D', then there is, in the understanding, something satisfying 'D.'"

⁴According to Forgie, this principle is the following. "Whatever has a nature has the properties which belong to that nature (though it need not exist, even in thought)."

⁵Cf. Descartes, Letter to Mersenne, 24 December 1640 (?), in Descartes, Oeuvres philosophiques, ed. F. Alquié, Vol. II, p. 301.

For an excellent discussion of Descartes' order of reasons, see James Collins, Interpreting Modern Philosophy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 57-71. Among other reasons, I am skeptical of Doney's interpretation of Meditation Five (William Doney, "Descartes' Conception of Perfect Knowledge," Journal of the History of Philosophy, Vol. VIII, 1970, pp. 387-403) because it is a construction which assumes that Descartes presented his conclusions but left it to his readers to figure out how he arrived at them, thus ignoring the meditative order.

⁶Descartes himself explains this ordering by the order of reasons and the inverse ordering of the Principles by the order of exposition. "L'autre preuve, dans la cinquième méditation, procède a priori et non

par considération de l'effet. Cet autre argument, dans les Méditations, suit celui dont il est ici question, parce que l'auteur les a trouvés en tel ordre que celui qu'il a exposé dans la présente méditation vient le premier, et que l'autre vient ensuite. Dans les Principes, au contraire, c'est l'autre qu'il a mis le premier parce que la voie et l'ordre ne sont pas les mêmes pour l'invention et pour l'exposition. Or, dans les Principes, il expose et agit synthétiquement." Descartes, Entretien avec Burman, In André Bridoux, ed., Descartes: Oeuvres et Lettres (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1953), p. 1364.

⁷Quotations from Descartes' works in English translation will be taken from Anscombe and Geach, eds., Descartes: Philosophical Writings (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1971), and from Haldane and Ross, eds., The Philosophical Works of Descartes (II Vols.; New York: Dover, 1955), to be referred to as AG and HR, respectively.

The Latin text has been consulted in Adam & Tannery, eds., Oeuvres de Descartes: Meditationes de Prima Philosophiae (Paris: Vrin, 1957), which will be cited as AT.

The footnoted quotation is from AG, p. 64.

⁸The problem of error is an aspect of the problem of evil. Since Descartes' concerns, in the Meditations, are strictly theoretical and speculative, he considers the problem from this restricted point of view.

⁹Compare the following text: "Well, when I was considering some very simple and easy point in arithmetic or geometry, e.g. that two and three together make five, did I perceive this clearly enough to assert its truth? My only reason for afterwards doubting such things was that it occurred to me that perhaps some God might have given me such a nature that I was deceived even about what seemed most obvious. Now whenever the preconceived view that there is a supremely powerful God occurs to me, I must admit that He could, if He wished, make me go wrong even about what I think I see most clearly in my mind's eye. But whenever I turn to the things themselves which I think I perceive very clearly, I am quite convinced by them so that I spontaneously exclaim: 'Let who will deceive me, he can never bring it about that I should be a nonentity at the time of thinking I am something . . . or other such things in which I see a manifest contradiction. . . I must examine whether there is a God, and, if so, whether He can be a deceiver; without knowing this, I seem unable to be quite certain of anything else.'" (Third Meditation, AG, pp. 78-79; AT, pp. 35-36)

¹⁰For a discussion of the "natural light" which renders the underlying causal principle evident, see John Morris, "Descartes' Natural Light," Journal of the History of Philosophy, Vol. XI, No. 2 (1973), pp. 169-186.

¹¹Descartes, Letter to ?, August, 1641 AG, p. 270). In the same letter (pp. 268-67), Descartes points out that the innate idea of God is present even in the mind of a human fetus.

¹²Descartes notes that he can refer the clear and distinct elements in his ideas of corporeal objects, i.e. the ideas of substance, duration, number, extension, shape, position, and motion to himself as their probable cause (that is, they require no other cause), whereas the idea of God alone transcends the causal capacity of any finite being (AG, pp. 84-85, AT, pp. 44-45).

¹³Cf. the following passage: ". . . it is highly worthy of belief that I am made somehow to his image and likeness, and that I perceive this likeness, which comprises the idea of God, by the same faculty as enables me to perceive myself. That is to say: when I turn my mind's eye on myself, I understand, not only that I am an incomplete being dependent on another, and indefinitely craving for greater and greater, better and better things; but also, at the same time, that he on whom I depend comprises all these greater things, not merely in an indefinite potentiality, but actually and infinitely, and therefore that he is God." (Third Meditation, AG, pp. 90-91; AT, pp. 51-52.)

¹⁴Entretien avec Burman, p. 1365.

¹⁵Descartes not only finds no difficulty with the notion of eternal created beings, but requires it for his metaphysical theory of the created eternal truths. ". . . pour moi, je ne vois pas pourquoi une créature n'aurait pu être, créée par Dieu de toute éternité. . . . Mais ainsi, les décrets de Dieux eux-mêmes ne sauraient pas être de toute éternité, si l'on pense surtout que la puissance et la création sont des actes de volonté, ainsi d'ailleurs que la création qui n'est que volonté de Dieu; si elle était autre, en effet, quelque chose de nouveau arriverait à Dieu dans la création" (Entretien avec Burman, p. 1367).

¹⁶"For since my soul is finite, I cannot know that the hierarchy of causes is not infinite, except by having in myself this idea of the First Cause; and even admitting a First Cause that preserves me, I cannot say that this is God, if I have not in point of fact the idea of God"

(Letter to Mesland, 2 May 1644, AG, p. 287; italics added).

¹⁷There is a noticeable similarity of language and imagery, especially as concerns the themes of the image of God in man (cf., Prosl. I: ". . . creasti in me hanc imaginem tuam, ut tui memor, te cogitem, te amem"), contemplation of and meditation on the Divine attributes, and the immeasurable or inaccessible light of God. There is also a similar twofold overall movement leading from initial questioning to a level of insight and assurance to renewed dissatisfaction and eventually a higher level of insight.

¹⁸Alan Gewirth, "The Cartesian Circle Reconsidered," The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. LXVII (1970), pp. 668-85.

¹⁹Descartes, Letter to Mersenne, 16 October 1639, in Adam and Tannery, Oeuvres de Descartes: Correspondence, Vol. II (Paris: Vrin, 1969), pp. 596-97.

²⁰Descartes, Arguments . . . Drawn up in Geometrical Fashion, HR II, p. 53.

²¹Descartes, Letter to Clerelier, 23 April 1649, in Adam and Milhaud, eds., Descartes: Correspondence (VIII Vols., Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), Vol. VIII, p. 224.

²²Fifth Meditation, AG p. 100 (emphasis added).

²³"Mais comprendre n'est pas comprendre si cela vient à dépendre d'un objet et n'en peut être séparé. . ." (Entretien avec Burman, p. 1372).

²⁴". . . I find within myself innumerable ideas of a kind of objects that, even if perhaps they have no existence anywhere outside me, cannot be called non-entities; my thinking of them (a me cogitentur) is in a way arbitrary, but they are no figments of mine; they have their own genuine and unchangeable natures. For example, when I imagine a triangle, it may be that no such figure exists anywhere outside my consciousness (cogitationem), or ever has existed; but there certainly exists its determinate nature (its essence, its form), which is unchangeable and eternal. This is no figment of mine and does not depend on my mind, as is clear from the following: various properties can be proved of this triangle. . . . I now clearly see them, even if I have not thought of them (cogitaverim) in any way when I have previously imagined a triangle; they cannot, then, be figments of mine." (Fifth Meditation, AG, p. 102; AT, p. 64.)

25AG, p. 102; AT, p. 65.

26 For Descartes' discussion of the dependent status of eternal truths, subsequent to the Meditations, see Replies to Objections, V and VI, HR II, pp. 182-90, 245-51. See also his Letter to Mesland of 2 May 1644 (Adam & Milhaud, VII, pp. 145-46). For his early statement of this metaphysical doctrine, see his correspondence with Mersenne, April and May 1630. See also Émile Brehier, "The Creation of the Eternal Truths in Descartes' System," in Willis Doney, ed., Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967), pp. 192-209. Cf. the following text:

"Objection. Mais d'où viennent ces idées des choses possibles, qui précèdent la volonté?"

"Réponse. Ces choses et toutes les autres dépendent de Dieu; car sa volonté n'est pas seulement la cause des choses actuelles et futures, mais aussi des choses possibles et des natures simples, et rien ne peut ou ne doit être imaginé que nous disions ne pas dépendre de Dieu."

"Tout ce qui peut être conçu clairement et distinctement dans la chimère est un être vrai, et non pas fictif, parce qu'il a une essence vraie et immuable, et cette essence vient aussi bien de Dieu que l'essence actuelle des autres choses. Mais on dit d'un être qu'il est fictif, quand nous supposons qu'il existe. C'est ainsi que toutes les démonstrations des mathématiciens portent sur des êtres et sur des objets vrais, et que l'objet tout entier des mathématiques, avec tout ce qu'elles y considèrent, est un être vrai et réel et a une vraie et réelle nature, non moins que l'objet de la physique elle-même" (Entretien avec Burman, p. 1374)

27 Three texts explaining the intuitive nature of the cogito may be found in AG, pp. 299-301.

28" . . . bien que Dieu soit indifférent à l'égard de tout, il a cependant décrété nécessairement, parce qu'il a voulu nécessairement le meilleur, bien qu'il ait fait le meilleur de sa propre volonté; il ne faudrait pas ici séparer la nécessité et l'indifférence dans les décrets de Dieu, et bien qu'il ait agi d'une manière très indifférente, il a pourtant agi d'une manière très nécessaire. D'ailleurs, même si nous concevons que ces décrets ont pu être séparés de Dieu, nous le concevons seulement par l'indication et par les démarches de la raison, ce qui introduit à la vérité une distinction mentale entre les décrets de Dieu et Dieu lui-même, mais non une distinction réelle, de telle sorte que, dans la réalité, les décrets de Dieu n'auraient pu être séparés de Dieu" (Entretien avec Burman, p. 1384)

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰AG, p. 107; AT, p. 70 (emphases added).

³¹Kenny, p. 110.

³²Gassendi takes Descartes to task for treating existence as a perfection (Objections V, HR, II, p. 186), and Descartes replies "I do not, nevertheless, deny that existence is a possible perfection in the idea of a triangle, as it is a necessary one in the idea of God; for this fact makes the idea of the triangle one of higher rank than the ideas of those chimerical things whose existence can never be supposed (Replies to Objections V, HR, II, pp. 228-29). The point is that possibility of existence as well as necessity of existence are perfections. Whether or not a possibility is actualized makes no difference to the essential structure; but what is unconditionally necessary is always actual. Hence Descartes' a priori argument is not contradicted by his conviction that "the idea represents the essence of the thing, and if something is added to or subtracted from it, it is forthwith the idea of something else" (HR, II, p. 220), which would imply that actual existence cannot be a property of essences.

³³" . . . we must distinguish between possible and necessary existence, and note that in the concept or idea of everything that is clearly and distinctly conceived, possible existence is of God alone. For I am sure that all who diligently attend to this diversity between the idea of God and that of all other things, will perceive that, even though other things are indeed conceived only as existing, yet it does not thence follow that they do exist, but only that they may exist, because we do not conceive that there is any necessity for actual existence being conjoined with their other properties; but, because we understand that actual existence is necessarily and at all times linked to God's other attributes, it follows certainly that God exists" (Replies to Objections I, HR, II, p. 20).