Greetings to the Theology Faculty of Paris

The purpose of this treatise is to raise metaphysical argumentation for God and the soul to a level of respectability sufficient to silence the atheists once and for all (a level equal to that which geometry already enjoys).

Meditation One: Concerning Those Things That Can Be Called into Doubt

Project: to doubt all that can be doubted, so as to re-establish belief on a more secure foundation.

Implicit standard: something can be doubted if I can conceive possible circumstances under which it would turn out to be false.

Order of things doubted--experience as a whole, ever more fundamental elements of experience.

1. The common facts of sensory experience--the material world, our bodies, our everyday actions: these can be doubted because we could be dreaming.

2. The general existence of entities at least of the kind we experience in daily life--human bodies, (by implication, the other general kinds of material objects): these can be doubted for the same reason.

3. The most basic components of these objects of everyday experience--corporeal nature in general, shape, size, number, place, time (what since Aristotle have been called the categories): perhaps God is deceiving me into believing in these things.

Objection: God cannot be conceived to be a deceiver.

Reply 1: Why, then, does he allow me to be deceived about anything?

Reply 2: Let us say, then, not God, but a powerful and malevolent spirit.

Meditation Two: Concerning the Nature of the Human Mind: That the Mind is More Known Than the Body.
Continuing the order of doubting ever more fundamental beliefs.]

4. God [or some powerful being] who instills my customary beliefs in me: I could have instilled them in myself.

5. My own existence as a thinking thing: this, at last, cannot be doubted.

What is my nature?

I formerly regarded myself as a being having a body and a soul--a body being what occupies space and a soul being that which thinks. But I have now rejected the existence of my body as being uncertain.

[Since my essence is what must belong to me, and cannot be conceived not to belong], and I can conceive that my body does not really exist, my body does not belong to my essence, and only those things which certainly pertain to me in this state of doubt [--namely mental acts, broadly conceived--] belong to my essence.

Objection: I comprehend bodies much more distinctly than I comprehend these mental acts.

Reply: Although I appear to comprehend bodies through the senses, in reality I comprehend them through the intellect (since bodies, such as the piece of wax, undergo transformations in which no sensible characteristic remains). But in each act of the intellect, I comprehend myself as a thinker more clearly than I comprehend the object of the mental act. Therefore, I comprehend myself as a thinking thing much more clearly than I comprehend bodies (including my own body).

Meditation Three: Concerning God, That He Exists

Is there anything else of which I can be certain?

I have thoughts which appear to be "images" of external things, and thoughts which are thoughts of internal (mental) acts.

There is no falsity in [simple] thoughts or ideas, but only in judgements. ("Ideas" is properly reserved for thoughts which appear to be images.)

(There is a sort of falsity, "material" as opposed to "formal" falsity in ideas of external things that are unreal--like
There is a distinction between the "light of nature," which is the faculty by which I perceive that I cannot conceive that I do not now exist, and the impulse of nature, by which I instinctively believe in the existence of external counterparts of many of my ideas. The "light of nature," being that whereby I perceive a contradiction in some supposition upon careful consideration, is an infallible guide, whereby the impulse of nature is not.

Is there any principle whereby I can learn through the light of nature that at least some external things exist?

Yes. The cause of anything must contain at least as much reality as the thing itself. A thing cannot come from nothing, or from anything with less reality than it.

Examples: substance has more reality than accident, infinite than finite.

This applies not only to formal (extramental) realities, but also to objective (thought-content) realities. (Because objective reality is real in some sense--it is not nothing.)

Thus each thought must have a source which has at least as much formal reality as the thought has objective reality. (The ultimate cause of anything must be a formal, not objective, reality.)

Using this standard, I can easily conceive that I myself am the source of my ideas of substance, quantity, and duration. Ideas of sensory qualities are so confused as to be easily materially false in many cases and caused by me in others.

But I have one idea, the idea of God, or infinite perfection, that has more objective reality than I have formal reality. Therefore, I cannot have caused this idea.

It can only have been caused by something having the requisite degree of formal reality itself--namely God.

Thus God exists.

Since I have the idea of God, God must create me (conserve me, for creation and conservation are essentially identical), since
only He has the requisite formal reality.

God is not a deceiver, since it does not belong to a perfect being to be such.

Notes on Meditations Continued
Meditations Four through Six

Meditation Four -- Concerning the True and the False

All that I clearly and distinctly perceive is true.

Proof:

As was shown in Meditation Three, I and all my capacities ("faculties") are from God.

My intellect is a capacity for distinguishing the true from the false.

Therefore, even though it is not perfect, since I am a limited being, nevertheless, it must not be such that it inevitably deceives. (Since God is not a deceiver.)

I cannot help assenting to what I perceive clearly and distinctly, even in a state of hyperbolic doubt.

Such a state constitutes the most effective possible employment of this capacity.

Therefore if assent in this state does not entail the truth of what is assented to, then the intellect inevitably deceives.

[Thus, all that I perceive clearly and distinctly is true.]

Thus, if I err concerning truth and falsity, I err through giving my assent or belief to what is not perceived clearly and distinctly.

This is an error in the employment of my will, not a defect in the will itself. (The will is just the ability to determine whether to act or to refrain.)

Meditation Five -- Concerning the Essence of Material Things, and
Again Concerning God, That He Exists.

Before inquiring whether material things exist, I must examine my ideas of material things to see whether they are clear and distinct.

I determine that my ideas of pure extension -- that is, my ideas of geometry, are indeed clear and distinct and not dependent on the senses.

In addition I find other such ideas, among them the idea of God.

Given that, as I now know, whatever I perceive clearly and distinctly is true, I can prove that God exists in a different way:

[This closely resembles St. Anselm's proof given in the Proslogion.]

God is by definition a being possessing all perfections.

[I have a clear and distinct idea of such a being.]

Existence is a perfection.

Therefore, God exists.

Also, whatever I have clearly and distinctly perceived about geometry is true.

This is the case even though I cannot simultaneously recall all the steps of the proofs, because as long as I once clearly and distinctly perceived them, no grounds for doubt can be raised.

[This seems to be a fallacy, unless I clearly and distinctly perceive that I once clearly and distinctly perceived them.]

Meditation Six -- Concerning the Existence of Material Things, and the Real Distinction of the Mind from the Body

I am taught by nature that the cause of the objects of sensation are things external to me which resemble the sensory objects themselves (later called "the external world").

Although I can criticize details of sensory objects, I have no
faculty for examining the existence of the external world as a whole.

Since I have no faculty for criticizing this belief, if it were not true God would have left me defenseless against error and thus be a deceiver.

Thus my belief in the external world is, in a general way, true.

I am also taught by nature to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

Since I am a limited being, this tendency can be deceptive in particular cases, leading to harm, but it is designed to be healthful in the greatest number of cases.