Aims of *Meditations* V
(as stated in the "synopsis" that prefaces the Meditations)

- "offer a general explanation of corporeal nature" (AT VII 63-65)

- "demonstrate the existence of God in a new argument" (AT VII 65-69)

- "point out in what sense it is true that the certainty of geometrical demonstrations depends upon a knowledge of God" (AT VII 69-71)

A general explanation of corporeal nature

Let's not worry for the moment about whether bodies exist outside of me.

Let's just consider what is clear and distinct and what obscure or confused in my ideas of such bodies

    (The sensible qualities I attribute to such bodies are not just confused but obscure.

    (This is because I can't tell whether or not they are ideas of real qualities in bodies or materially false.)

The extension thought to belong to bodies can be further analyzed as extension over the 3 spatial dimensions and as something capable of various modifications as a consequence of division

      "Modes" (modifications) of extension:

           number
           size
           shape
           position
           motion

While I can imagine or conceive parts of extension with any of these modes whatsoever,

     there are constraints on the way I imagine or conceive any particular mode.

     e.g., I cannot imagine a triangle with internal angles equal to more or less than two right angles

These constraints are described by the laws of arithmetic and geometry.

Since nothing cannot place constraints on the way I think of things, these ideas cannot be materially false ideas of nothing

they must be ideas that have their own reality, independently of me

even if nothing exists corresponding to them

A new demonstration of the existence of God

Just as I can demonstrate the truths of mathematics by clear and distinct perception of what is contained in my ideas of extension

  so I can demonstrate things about God by clear and distinct perception of what is contained in that idea

    what I demonstrate about extension does not go so far as to establish that anything exists corresponding to the idea

    but I can prove that God exists, just from the idea of God, in the same way that I prove mathematical truths, and with the same certainty

Previously, the existence of God was demonstrated by causal inference from the existence of something else.

Here it is demonstrated by inspection just of what is contained in the idea of God itself

The point of giving this further proof of what has already been established is to show that

even if everything that has been said before were rejected

it would still follow that the existence of God is as certain as any truth of mathematics

and obtains its certainty in the same way

so that no one who accepts the truths of mathematics could question this truth

Descartes's Ontological Argument

My idea of God is the idea of a supremely perfect idea being, just as my idea of a cube is the idea of a closed shape composed of orthogonal squares

Existence adds to the perfection of a thing, just as a closed shape composed of orthogonal squares cannot be composed of more or fewer than six squares

Existing therefore belongs to the nature of God in the same way that having six faces belongs to the nature of a cube

Objection 1: The question of whether or not something exists is a distinct question from the question of what sort of thing it is.

This is proven by the fact that existence does not serve to speciate things

existing apples do not belong to a different species from imaginary apples

so existence is not among those qualities that differentiate things into sorts or kinds and so ought not to be considered to be a "perfection"

Therefore it is impossible to draw conclusions concerning existence merely from considerations of the nature of a thing.

Reply

While this is true in all other cases,

> where the idea of a supremely perfect being is concerned, I find my will compelled by my understanding to affirm existence along with the other perfections

In this case, existence must be included, even though it is true that it is not a differentiating factor like other perfections

Objection 2: My thought imposes no necessity on things, but only on the thought itself

    e.g., because I cannot think of a mountain without a valley (an upslope without a downslope)

        it follows that where there is a thought of an upslope there must be a thought of a downslope

        but it does not follow that a mountain or any object with a sloping side must exist

Similarly, just because my idea of God includes the idea of existence it does not follow that there must be an object corresponding to this idea,

    any more than the fact that my idea of an all-perfect island includes the idea of existence establishes that there must be a perfect island

Reply: The idea of all-perfect island is incoherent

       An island is surrounded by water and so only finite in extension

       It is also insentient and unintelligent

It can't be all perfect if there are perfections that it lacks

If we abandon that silly example, and others like it, we can observe that simply because *I* add the idea of existence to another idea, it does not follow that anything must exist corresponding to that compound idea

But in this case, I do not make the addition. I *must* conceive of God as existing

       which means that the nature of the thing imposes a necessity on my thought rather than the other away around

Objection 3: Once you assume that God is an all-perfect being, it does indeed follow that God must exist, but that assumption may be unnecessary or even incoherent, just as the idea of an all-perfect island is incoherent. Perhaps having all perfections is intrinsically impossible

> e.g. if I invent the idea that all four sided figures must be inscribed in a circle, then I am necessitated to draw the false consequence that a rhombus must be inscribed in a circle

Reply: When I invent a false or inconsistent idea, my understanding does not constrain my will to conceive the idea any particular way.

But while it is up to me to think of the idea of God or not,

> when I do think of it,

I am constrained to think of it as existing, even if I may not immediately appreciate this fact.

Not only is the existence of God as certain as any truth of geometry,

the certainty of geometrical demonstrations depends on knowledge of the existence of God

When I clearly and distinctly perceive something, my understanding compels my will to accept it.

But when I turn my mind to other things, and only recall that I clearly and distinctly perceived it, my will is no longer determined by my understanding and I can doubt the thing

by (wrongly, as we now know) considering I might have made a mistake in calculation or been tricked by a deceiver

It is only because I have clearly and distinctly perceived that an all-good God exists that I have been able to see the error of this ground for doubt and so assure myself of the truth of any other geometrical demonstration

But it does not assure me that I am not now asleep and only dreaming that I repeatedly intuited the result after repeated review of the argument.

It is implausible to maintain that God would not permit me to have such dreams.

because I have had them!

Descartes's compacent reply:

Because God is no deceiver, we can be assured that he would not allow us to be deceived without giving us the resources to uncover the deception.

This may take some time and effort,

so that in the interim we are temporarily deceived.

But we can rest assured that we will eventually discover the truth.

"But because the need to get things done does not always permit us the leisure for such a careful inquiry, we must confess that the life of man is apt to commit errors regarding particular things, and we must acknowledge the infirmity of our nature."

We are not going to escape from all error.

But we have reason to believe that we can get the most fundamental things right.