

JOHANNES CATERUS

[The First Set of Objections]

[1] But here I am forced to stop for a little bit so that I do not tire myself too much. For now my ingenuity ebbs and flows in the pattern of the fluctuations of the Euripus: I assert, I deny, I approve, and again I reject; I want to not disagree with Descartes, I cannot be in agreement.

[2] For what cause, I ask, does an idea require?

[3] Or rather: What is an idea?

[4] It is the thing that is thought (*res cogitata*), insofar as it is objectively in the intellect.

[5] But what is it ‘to be objectively in the intellect’?

[6] I formerly learned [that ‘to be objectively in the intellect’] is that the act of the intellect terminates in the manner of an object. And this is, to be sure, an extrinsic denomination, and no thing at all. For just as ‘to be seen’ is nothing other than that the act of vision stretches forth in me, so too ‘to be thought’ (or ‘to be objectively in the intellect’) is that the mind’s thought ceases and terminates in itself—and this can come about while the thing [in question] is unmoved and unchanged; indeed, [this can come about] even while the thing does not exist.

[7] Therefore, what do I seek as the cause of it—[the cause of] what does not actually exist, which is a bare denomination and nothing?

[8] “Nevertheless,” that great ingenuity [Descartes] says, “the fact that this idea contains this or that objective reality rather than another—well, it assuredly ought to have this feature from some cause.”

[9] Rather, from none: ‘objective reality’ is a pure denomination, it does not actually exist. Furthermore, a cause imparts a real and actual influence; that which does not actually exist does not receive this [influence]—and thence it does not undergo an actual causal efflux and it does not need one. Therefore, I have ideas [but] I do not have a cause of them, let alone [a cause] greater than me, or infinite.

[10] “But if you, [Caterus], do not give a cause for ideas, at least set forth why this idea contains this objective reality rather than that [objective reality].”

[11] Why, of course! I am not accustomed to act sparingly with friends, but rather as liberally as possible. I say about all ideas universally what Descartes [says] elsewhere about the triangle. He says:

Although perhaps such a figure does not exist anywhere in the world outside my thought, nor ever did exist, there nevertheless is a certain determinate nature of it (or essence [of it] or immutable and eternal form [of it]).

To be sure, this is an eternal truth, which does not presuppose (*postulat*) a cause. A boat is a boat and nothing else; Davus is Davus, not Oedipus.

[12] Still, if you tenaciously demand an explanation (*rationem*)—it is the imperfection of our intellect, which is not infinite: for since it does not comprehend the totality that exists at once and for all as a single complex [object], it divides and partitions every good, and so, because it cannot bring forth the whole, conceives it little by little (or, as they also say, inadequately).

[13] [Descartes] moves onward. He says:

And yet the mode of being (*modus essendi*) by which a thing exists objectively in the intellect by means of an idea, however imperfect it may be, nevertheless is surely not nothing at all, and thence it cannot be from nothing.

[14] There is an equivocation.

[15] For if ‘nothing’ is the same as a non-actual being (*ens non actu*), it is absolutely nothing, since it does not actually exist—and so it is ‘from nothing’, *i. e.* not from any cause.

[16] But if ‘nothing’ expresses some fiction (*fictum*), which they commonly call a ‘being of reason’ (*ens rationis*), it is not “nothing” but something real that is distinctly conceived. And yet since it is only conceived and does not actually exist, it can indeed be conceived—but hardly caused!