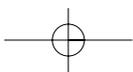
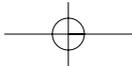
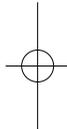
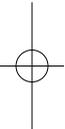
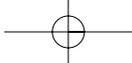


PART I

EARLY MODERN PHILOSOPHY





1

COMMENTARY ON DESCARTES

René Descartes was born in France in 1596 and died in 1650. He lived during a significant period in the transition from the medieval to the modern age: an age that saw the rise of what became the scientific method. His contemporaries were Galileo, Kepler, and Francis Bacon, and Descartes himself was an accomplished natural philosopher, writing studies of optics, mechanics, physiology, and meteorology. He is perhaps best known as the father of substance dualism, the idea that mind and body are composed of metaphysically distinct substances – a view that continues to resonate within contemporary philosophy.

Descartes has been attributed with the inception of the philosophy of the subject, but he was not the first to give a philosophical role to the “self.” Centuries earlier Augustine had drawn attention to the importance of the “*interiore homine*” or the “inner man,”¹ but it was certainly Descartes who moved subjectivity to center stage in philosophy, grounding in the first person perspective of the self-conscious “I” the traditional philosophical values of truth and certainty, and setting the terms of reference for the next 400-odd years of philosophy and cognitive science. Descartes is both fascinating and deservedly famous for the ways in which he attempts, unsuccessfully, to delineate the mental from the physical in the context of the human body, but also for the numerous ambiguities he continually uncovers in that domain. These are wonderful sources for later French philosophers of the body, notably Gabriel Marcel and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Despite Descartes’s efforts, his account is torn between what experience tells us and what reason demands – a tension that continues to characterize contemporary approaches to subjectivity and personal identity.

Descartes arrives at his views through a philosophical endeavor that was informed by a number of concerns. One was to show the limits of skepticism by establishing a system of philosophy in which indubitable first principles could be demonstrated. Another was a reaction to the oppressive dogma of scholasticism with its disdain for either critique or innovation, which Descartes found antithetical to genuine philosophy. However, central to Descartes’s work was the aim of grounding natural philosophy in principles of mechanics. Finally, Descartes is reputed to have had a series of

evocative dreams that inspired him to set out on his lifelong mission to develop a new system of philosophy.²

Descartes employs a method of doubt in order to establish one single indubitable fact from which all other truths could be determined, and which would thus provide the first principles of philosophy. This fact is the existence of the “I,” the immaterial thinking thing that is the subject of consciousness. Descartes’s famous conclusion – *cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am³ – installs subjectivity as a fully fledged concept in the heart of his philosophical system, and sets the scene for later idealism and phenomenology.

Descartes’s method in establishing the indubitability of the “I” is to call into question every single one of his beliefs, including the apparently self-evident truths of arithmetic and geometry.⁴ In *Meditation II*, Descartes sets forth a series of doubts and responses through which he unfolds the necessity and nature of the “I,” employing the thought experiment of the evil genius. He argues that even if I can call into doubt everything I perceive or believe, including my very existence, I *cannot* doubt that I am doubting. Since doubt is a form of thought, in each instance that I doubt I thereby confirm that I am thinking; hence Descartes’s goad to the evil genius to “let him deceive me as much as he will.” Any amount of doubt simply reiterates the truth that I, as a thinking thing, exist. Significantly, the truth of this exercise can be demonstrated by anyone who cares to try it out. Descartes was critical of the authoritarian dogmatism of scholasticism and sought to present philosophy as a task that each person must undertake for himself or herself. Descartes was convinced that reason could prove itself independent of the biases of institutionalized learning.⁵ For Descartes, it is in one’s reason, not one’s learning, that the principles of philosophy are to be found.

In *Meditation II*, Descartes describes the *cogito* from two different perspectives. The first is a negative characterization of the *cogito* as nonbodily, and the second is a positive characterization of it as a “thinking thing.” The first is expressed in Descartes’s argument from doubt: I can doubt that my body exists, but I cannot doubt that I exist as a thinking thing; therefore, I can safely conclude that I exist as such a being, and, with equal assurance, conclude that I cannot be a bodily being. By a process of elimination, Descartes concludes that it is thinking alone that “cannot be separated from me.” This point is restated in *Meditation VI* where he states that my “clear and distinct perception” (which, for Descartes, has a specific technical meaning)⁶ of myself as existing without my body is proof of my nonbodily existence.⁷

Having apparently proven that the “I” is nonphysical being, Descartes then introduces the second description by asking about the nature of this being. His answer is immediate and consists in a description of consciousness in terms of modes of thought: “But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.”⁸

Descartes gives a further defense of this positive characterization in *Meditation VI*, where he presents the argument from the indivisibility of consciousness. He states that it is impossible to distinguish any parts in the mind; the “I” – the *cogito* – cannot be broken down into any components, as can the body, therefore the “I” is not bodily. This is supported by the argument from clear and distinct perceptions: if “I” had parts, those parts would be clearly and distinctly perceived by me; God has guaranteed that much.

There are a number of objections to these arguments. With respect to the claim that we have an immediate and intuitive grasp of the nature of the mind, it is quite conceivable that there are many properties of mind and body of which we are unaware. We have no direct awareness of the many physiological processes of the brain involved in cognition, such as the type and level of neurotransmitters needed for conscious awareness. Although science has been able to demonstrate the role of neurotransmitters in causing explicit consciousness, one is nevertheless unaware of those chemical processes themselves as they occur. Furthermore, as this example from neuroscience shows, there are many properties that the body shares with the mind. Descartes concedes that his concept of mind may not be adequate, but nevertheless maintains that it is “complete.”⁹ It is complete because, on his view, his being explicitly aware of his conscious thoughts is sufficient for him to exist with that attribute alone, that is, as a purely thinking thing. Because Descartes takes “thinking” to be the totality of what one is explicitly conscious of thinking, any thinking will always necessarily imply, and in that sense “prove,” the existence of the “I” whose thoughts they are (as Kant would also famously argue, but with a rather different conclusion). While Descartes may well still insist that the argument from doubt shows that we can each know ourselves as thinking beings, it does not shed any light on the substantive question of *Meditation II*, which is the question of “what I am, I who am certain that I am.”¹⁰

Descartes’s view of the simple and indivisible unity of thought is also questionable. It is frequently observed that people have conflicting beliefs or goals, as well as ambivalent feelings and attitudes; for example, we talk about feeling “torn” between alternatives. Furthermore, even if the mind is unified, that unity may be predicated upon a divisible material system, such as the brain or the coordination of other bodily activities (something that Nietzsche makes much of). However, the most damning criticisms will come, initially, from Locke and Hume, then more comprehensively from Kant, as these philosophers argue for the impossibility of knowledge of the “I” as immaterial substance.

There are two basic problems of mind–body dualism known as the problem of interaction and the “mental or physical dilemma.” The interaction problem concerns the difficulty of establishing how the *cogito* – an immaterial, nonphysical being – is able to affect the physical body. This is an irresolvable problem because Descartes defines mind and body by mutually exclusive attributes. For the *cogito* to play a role in human action (as it must from the point of view of morality), it would have to have physical properties; for example, the *cogito* would have to have a spatiotemporal location because it has to be where my body is.

The problem of interaction also arises from the mutual exclusivity of mind and body. There are some attributes that do not easily fall into either category, for example, vision and hearing. As Descartes knew, vision requires physical processes: my eyes must be open, there must be light, and the parts of my eyes must move to accommodate the object of vision. At the same time, I seem to experience vision as a nonphysical phenomenon: the objects of my vision are grasped immediately and from a distance, as if by nonphysical contact. Descartes’s explanation is simply to call these “confused” modes of thought. His defense of dualism goes so far as to argue that bodily damage does not affect the mind.¹¹ This is an odd comment from Descartes because as a scientist he would have had ample evidence that bodily damage, in particular head injuries, does affect the mind.

Conceived as nonmaterial, the *cogito* cannot be fundamentally involved *in* the world; it must always be an outsider, content to observe and never to participate. The latter is precisely the fate of the Cartesian subject. Once evicted, nothing will repatriate the metaphysical subject to the world, and the rest of the history of the philosophy of the subject is the history of the attempt to resolve the unbearable tensions of a subject in exile, either through the reintegration of self and world or through the dissolution of the very concept of self.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 129.
- 2 John Cottingham, *Descartes*, 10th edn (Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998), pp. 9–10.
- 3 This particular expression is found in the *Discourse on Method*, not in the *Meditations*.
- 4 Mathematical truths could be false, Descartes reasons, simply because it is conceivable that God, being omnipotent, could cause him to err each time he makes a calculation. René Descartes: “Meditation I” in “Meditations on First Philosophy,” reprinted in *The Essential Descartes*, ed. Margaret D. Wilson (New York: Meridian, 1969), p. 168.
- 5 Hiram Caton, *The Origins of Subjectivity* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 30.
- 6 Note that for Descartes a perception is not clear and distinct simply because I regard it as obvious, but rather because it is a perception of something simple in structure which is accessible to “the attentive mind.” See Cottingham (1998), pp. 25–6.
- 7 Wilson (ed., 1969), p. 213.
- 8 Ibid, p. 174.
- 9 Cottingham (1998), p. 114.
- 10 Cottingham (1998, p. 113) notes that in comments on Meditation II, published in 1647, Descartes does concede that his argument from doubt has not proven that the mind is exclusive of anything bodily.
- 11 Wilson (ed., 1969), p. 220: “although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet if a foot or an arm or some other part, is separated from my body, I am aware that nothing has been taken away from my mind.”

Main Texts by Descartes

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- Stephen H. Voss (trans.), *The Passions of the Soul* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).
- John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (trans.), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- V. R. Miller and R. P. Miller (trans.), *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1983).

Further Reading

- Ariew, Roger, John Cottingham, and Tom Sorell (eds.), *Descartes' Meditations: Background Source Materials* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- Cottingham, John (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- Gaukroger, Stephen, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- Kenny, Anthony, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (Bristol, UK: Thoemmes Press, 1968).
- Oksenberg Rorty, Amelie (ed.), *Essays on Descartes' Meditations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).
- Sorell, Tom, *Descartes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

“MEDITATION II”

René Descartes

Of the Nature of the Human Mind; and that it is More Easily Known than the Body.

The Meditation of yesterday filled my mind with so many doubts that it is no longer in my power to forget them. And yet I do not see in what manner I can resolve them; and, just as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water, I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface. I shall nevertheless make an effort and follow anew the same path as that on which I yesterday entered, i.e. I shall proceed by setting aside all that in which the least doubt could be supposed to exist, just as if I had discovered that it was absolutely false; and I shall ever follow in this road until I have met with something which is certain, or at least, if I can do nothing else, until I have learned for certain that there is nothing in the world that is certain. Archimedes, in order that he might draw the terrestrial globe out of its place, and transport it elsewhere, demanded only that one point should be fixed and immovable; in the same way I shall have the right to conceive high hopes if I am happy enough to discover one thing only which is certain and indubitable.

I suppose, then, that all the things that I see are false; I persuade myself that nothing has ever existed of all that my fallacious memory represents to me. I consider that I possess no senses; I imagine that body, figure, extension, movement and place are but the fictions of my mind. What, then, can be esteemed as true? Perhaps nothing at all, unless that there is nothing in the world that is certain.

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? That is not necessary, for is it not possible that I am capable of producing them

myself? 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 that 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.

But I do not yet know clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am; and hence I must be careful to see that I do not imprudently take some other object in place of myself, and thus that I do not go astray in respect of this knowledge that I hold to be the most certain and most evident of all that I have formerly learned. That is why I shall now consider anew what I believed myself to be before I embarked upon these last reflections; and of my former opinions I shall withdraw all that might even in a small degree be invalidated by the reasons which I have just brought forward, in order that there may be nothing at all left beyond what is absolutely certain and indubitable.

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. But I shall rather stop here to consider the thoughts which of themselves spring up in my mind, and which were not inspired by anything beyond my own nature alone when I applied myself to the consideration of my being. In the first place, then, I considered myself as having a face, hands, arms, and all that system of members composed of bones and flesh as seen in a corpse which I designated by the name of body. In addition to this I considered that I was nourished, that I walked, that I felt, and that I thought, and I referred all these actions to the soul: but I did not stop to consider what the soul was, or if I did stop, I imagined that it was something extremely rare and subtle like a wind, a flame, or an ether, which was spread throughout my grosser parts. As to body I had no manner of doubt about its nature, but thought I had a very clear knowledge of it; and if I had desired to explain it according to the notions that I had then formed of it, I should have described it thus: By the body I understand all that which can be defined by a certain figure: something which can be confined in a certain place, and which can fill a given space in such a way that every other body will be excluded from it; which can be perceived either by touch, or by sight, or by hearing, or by taste, or by smell: which can be moved in many ways not, in truth, by itself, but by something which is foreign to it, by which it is touched [and from which it receives impressions]: for to have the power of self-movement, as also of feeling or of thinking, I did not consider to appertain to the nature of body: on the

contrary, I was rather astonished to find that faculties similar to them existed in some bodies.

But what am I, now that I suppose that there is a certain genius which is extremely powerful, and, if I may say so, malicious, who employs all his powers in deceiving me? Can I affirm that I possess the least of all those things which I have just said pertain to the nature of body? I pause to consider, I revolve all these things in my mind, and I find none of which I can say that it pertains to me. It would be tedious to stop to enumerate them. Let us pass to the attributes of soul and see if there is any one which is in me? What of nutrition or walking [the first mentioned]? But if it is so that I have no body it is also true that I can neither walk nor take nourishment. Another attribute is sensation. But one cannot feel without body, and besides I have thought I perceived many things during sleep that I recognized in my waking moments as not having been experienced at all. What of thinking? I find here that thought is an attribute that belongs to me; it alone cannot be separated from me. 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. I am, however, a real thing and really exist; but what thing? I have answered: a thing which thinks.

And what more? I shall exercise my imagination [in order to see if I am not something more]. I am not a collection of members which we call the human body: I am not a subtle air distributed through these members, I am not a wind, a fire, a vapour, a breath, nor anything at all which I can imagine or conceive; because I have assumed that all these were nothing. Without changing that supposition I find that I only leave myself certain of the fact that I am somewhat. But perhaps it is true that these same things which I supposed were non-existent because they are unknown to me, are really not different from the self which I know. I am not sure about this, I shall not dispute about it now; I can only give judgment on things that are known to me. I know that I exist, and I inquire what I am, I whom I know to exist. But it is very certain that the knowledge of my existence taken in its precise significance does not depend on things whose existence is not yet known to me; consequently it does not depend on those which I can feign in imagination. And indeed the very term *feign* in imagination¹ proves to me my error, for I really do this if I image myself a something, since to imagine is nothing else than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing. But I already know for certain that I am, and that it may be that all these images, and, speaking generally, all things that relate to the nature of body are nothing but dreams [and chimeras]. For this reason I see clearly that I have as little reason to say, 'I shall stimulate my imagination in order to know more distinctly what I am,' than if I were to say, 'I am now awake, and I perceive somewhat that is real and true: but because I do not yet perceive it distinctly enough, I shall go to sleep of express purpose, so that my dreams may represent the perception with greatest truth and evidence.' And, thus, I know for certain that nothing of all that I can understand by means of my imagination belongs to this knowledge which I have of myself, and that it is necessary to recall the mind from this mode of thought with the utmost diligence in order that it may be able to know its own nature with perfect distinctness.

But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.

Certainly it is no small matter if all these things pertain to my nature. But why should they not so pertain? Am I not that being who now doubts nearly everything, who nevertheless understands certain things, who affirms that one only is true, who denies all the others, who desires to know more, is averse from being deceived, who imagines many things, sometimes indeed despite his will, and who perceives many likewise, as by the intervention of the bodily organs? Is there nothing in all this which is as true as it is certain that I exist, even though I should always sleep and though he who has given me being employed all his ingenuity in deceiving me? Is there likewise any one of these attributes which can be distinguished from my thought, or which might be said to be separated from myself? For it is so evident of itself that it is I who doubts, who understands, and who desires, that there is no reason here to add anything to explain it. And I have certainly the power of imagining likewise; for although it may happen (as I formerly supposed) that none of the things which I imagine are true, nevertheless this power of imagining does not cease to be really in use, and it forms part of my thought. Finally, I am the same who feels, that is to say, who perceives certain things, as by the organs of sense, since in truth I see light, I hear noise, I feel heat. But it will be said that these phenomena are false and that I am dreaming. Let it be so; still it is at least quite certain that it seems to me that I see light, that I hear noise and that I feel heat. That cannot be false; properly speaking it is what is in me called feeling;² and used in this precise sense that is no other thing than thinking.

From this time I begin to know what I am with a little more clearness and distinctness than before; but nevertheless it still seems to me, and I cannot prevent myself from thinking, that corporeal things, whose images are framed by thought, which are tested by the senses, are much more distinctly known than that obscure part of me which does not come under the imagination. Although really it is very strange to say that I know and understand more distinctly these things whose existence seems to me dubious, which are unknown to me, and which do not belong to me, than others of the truth of which I am convinced, which are known to me and which pertain to my real nature, in a word, than myself. But I see clearly how the case stands: my mind loves to wander, and cannot yet suffer itself to be retained within the just limits of truth. Very good, let us once more give it the freest rein, so that, when afterwards we seize the proper occasion for pulling up, it may the more easily be regulated and controlled.

Let us begin by considering the commonest matters, those which we believe to be the most distinctly comprehended, to wit, the bodies which we touch and see; not indeed bodies in general, for these general ideas are usually a little more confused, but let us consider one body in particular. Let us take, for example, this piece of wax: it has been taken quite freshly from the hive, and it has not yet lost the sweetness of the honey which it contains; it still retains somewhat of the odour of the flowers from which it has been culled; its colour, its figure, its size are apparent; it is hard, cold, easily handled, and if you strike it with the finger, it will emit a sound. Finally all the things which are requisite to cause us distinctly to recognise a body, are met with in it. But notice

that while I speak and approach the fire what remained of the taste is exhaled, the smell evaporates, the colour alters, the figure is destroyed, the size increases, it becomes liquid, it heats, scarcely can one handle it, and when one strikes it, no sound is emitted. Does the same wax remain after this change? We must confess that it remains; none would judge otherwise. What then did I know so distinctly in this piece of wax? It could certainly be nothing of all that the senses brought to my notice, since all these things which fall under taste, smell, sight, touch, and hearing, are found to be changed, and yet the same wax remains.

Perhaps it was what I now think, viz. that this wax was not that sweetness of honey, nor that agreeable scent of flowers, nor that particular whiteness, nor that figure, nor that sound, but simply a body which a little while before appeared to me as perceptible under these forms, and which is now perceptible under others. But what, precisely, is it that I imagine when I form such conceptions? Let us attentively consider this, and, abstracting from all that does not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. Certainly nothing remains excepting a certain extended thing which is flexible and movable. But what is the meaning of flexible and movable? Is it not that I imagine that this piece of wax being round is capable of becoming square and of passing from a square to a triangular figure? No, certainly it is not that, since I imagine it admits of an infinitude of similar changes, and I nevertheless do not know how to compass the infinitude by my imagination, and consequently this conception which I have of the wax is not brought about by the faculty of imagination. What now is this extension? Is it not also unknown? For it becomes greater when the wax is melted, greater when it is boiled, and greater still when the heat increases; and I should not conceive [clearly] according to truth what wax is, if I did not think that even this piece that we are considering is capable of receiving more variations in extension than I have ever imagined. We must then grant that I could not even understand through the imagination what this piece of wax is, and that it is my mind³ alone which perceives it. I say this piece of wax in particular, for as to wax in general it is yet clearer. But what is this piece of wax which cannot be understood excepting by the [understanding or] mind? It is certainly the same that I see, touch, imagine, and finally it is the same which I have always believed it to be from the beginning. But what must particularly be observed is that its perception is neither an act of vision, nor of touch, nor of imagination, and has never been such although it may have appeared formerly to be so, but only an intuition⁴ of the mind, which may be imperfect and confused as it was formerly, or clear and distinct as it is at present, according as my attention is more or less directed to the elements which are found in it, and of which it is composed.

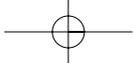
Yet in the meantime I am greatly astonished when I consider [the great feebleness of mind] and its proneness to fall [insensibly] into error; for although without giving expression to my thoughts I consider all this in my own mind, words often impede me and I am almost deceived by the terms of ordinary language. For we say that we see the same wax, if it is present, and not that we simply judge that it is the same from its having the same colour and figure. From this I should conclude that I knew the wax by means of vision and not simply by the intuition of the mind; unless by chance I remember that, when looking from a window and saying I see men who pass in the street, I really do not see them, but infer that what I see is men, just as I say that I see wax. And yet what do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover

automatic machines? Yet I judge these to be men. And similarly solely by the faculty of judgment which rests in my mind, I comprehend that which I believed I saw with my eyes.

A man who makes it his aim to raise his knowledge above the common should be ashamed to derive the occasion for doubting from the forms of speech invented by the vulgar; I prefer to pass on and consider whether I had a more evident and perfect conception of what the wax was when I first perceived it, and when I believed I knew it by means of the external senses or at least by the common sense⁵ as it is called, that is to say by the imaginative faculty, or whether my present conception is clearer now that I have most carefully examined what it is, and in what way it can be known. It would certainly be absurd to doubt as to this. For what was there in this first perception which was distinct? What was there which might not as well have been perceived by any of the animals? But when I distinguish the wax from its external forms, and when, just as if I had taken from it its vestments, I consider it quite naked, it is certain that although some error may still be found in my judgment, I can nevertheless not perceive it thus without a human mind.

But finally what shall I say of this mind, that is, of myself, for up to this point I do not admit in myself anything but mind? What then, I who seem to perceive this piece of wax so distinctly, do I not know myself, not only with much more truth and certainty, but also with much more distinctness and clearness? For if I judge that the wax is or exists from the fact that I see it, it certainly follows much more clearly that I am or that I exist myself from the fact that I see it. For it may be that what I see is not really wax, it may also be that I do not possess eyes with which to see anything; but it cannot be that when I see, or (for I no longer take account of the distinction) when I think I see, that I myself who think am nought. So if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same thing will follow, to wit, that I am; and if I judge that my imagination, or some other cause, whatever it is, persuades me that the wax exists, I shall still conclude the same. And what I have here remarked of wax may be applied to all other things which are external to me [and which are met with outside of me]. And further, if the [notion or] perception of wax has seemed to me clearer and more distinct, not only after the sight or the touch, but also after many other causes have rendered it quite manifest to me, with how much more [evidence] and distinctness must it be said that I now know myself, since all the reasons which contribute to the knowledge of wax, or any other body whatever, are yet better proofs of the nature of my mind! And there are so many other things in the mind itself which may contribute to the elucidation of its nature, that those which depend on body such as these just mentioned, hardly merit being taken into account.

But finally here I am, having insensibly reverted to the point I desired, for, since it is now manifest to me that even bodies are not properly speaking known by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the understanding only, and since they are not known from the fact that they are seen or touched, but only because they are understood, I see clearly that there is nothing which is easier for me to know than my mind. But because it is difficult to rid oneself so promptly of an opinion to which one was accustomed for so long, it will be well that I should halt a little at this point, so that by the length of my meditation I may more deeply imprint on my memory this new knowledge.



Notes

- 1 Or 'form an image' (effingo).
- 2 sentire.
- 3 entendement F, mens L.
- 4 inspectio.
- 5 sensus communis.

