SECOND MEDITATION – Excerpts from the Objections and Replies

MERSENNE, ET AL.

First, then, may we remind you that your vigorous rejection of the images of all bodies as delusive was not something you actually and really carried through, but was merely a fiction of the mind, enabling you to draw the conclusion that you were exclusively a thinking thing. We point this out in case you should perhaps suppose that it is possible to go on to draw the conclusion that you are in fact nothing more than a mind, or thought, or a thinking thing. And we make the point solely in connection with the first two Meditations, in which you clearly show that, if nothing else, it is certain that you, who are thinking, exist. But let us pause a little here. The position so far is that you recognize that you are a thinking thing, but you do not know what this thinking thing is. What if it turned out to be a body which, by its various motions and encounters, produces what we call thought? Although you think you have ruled out every kind of body, you could have been mistaken here, since you did not exclude yourself, and you may be a body. How do you demonstrate that a body is incapable of thinking, or that corporeal motions are not in fact thought? The whole system of your body, which you think you have excluded, or else some of its parts—for example those which make up the brain—may combine to produce the motions which we call thoughts. You say 'I am a thinking thing'; but how do you know that you are not corporeal motion, or a body which is in motion?

[Descartes to Mersenne, et al.]

First, you warn me to remember that my rejection of the images of bodies as delusive was not something I actually and really carried through, but was merely a fiction of the mind, enabling me to draw the conclusion that I was a thinking thing; and I should not suppose that it followed from this that I was in fact nothing more than a mind. But I already showed that I was quite well aware of this in the Second Meditation, where I said 'Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware? I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point.' Here I wanted to give the reader an express warning that at that stage I was not yet asking whether the mind is distinct from the body, but was merely examining those of its properties of which I can have certain and evident knowledge. And since I did become aware of many such properties, I cannot without qualification admit your subsequent point that 'I do not yet know what a thinking thing is.' I admit that I did not yet know whether this thinking thing is identical with the body or with something different from the body; but I do not admit that I had no knowledge of it. Surely, no one's knowledge of anything has ever reached the point where he knows that there is absolutely nothing further in the thing beyond what he is already aware of. The more attributes of a thing we perceive the better we are said to know it; thus we know people whom we have lived with for some time better than those whom we only know by sight, or have merely heard of—though even they are not said to be completely unknown to us. In this sense I think I have demonstrated that the mind, considered apart from those attributes which are normally applied to the body, is better known than the body when it is considered apart from the mind. This was my sole purpose in the passage under discussion.

But I see the suggestion you are making. Given that I wrote only six Meditations on First Philosophy, you think my readers will be surprised that the only conclusion reached in the first two Meditations is the point just mentioned; and you think that as a result they will reckon that the Meditations are extremely thin and not worth publishing. My reply is simply that I am confident that anyone who judiciously reads the rest of what I wrote will have no occasion to suspect that I was short of material. And in the case of topics which required individual attention and needed to be considered on their own, it seemed quite reasonable to deal with them separately, Meditation by Meditation.

Now the best way of achieving a firm knowledge of reality is first to accustom ourselves to doubting all things, especially corporeal things. Although I had seen many ancient writings by the Academics and Sceptics on this subject, and was reluctant to reheat and serve this precooked material, I could not avoid devoting one whole Meditation to it. And I should like my readers not just to take the short time needed to go through it, but to devote several months, or at least weeks, to considering the topics dealt with, before going on to the rest of the book. If they do this they will undoubtedly be able to derive much greater benefit from what follows.

All our ideas of what belongs to the mind have up till now been very confused and mixed up with the ideas of things that can be perceived by the senses. This is the first and most important reason for our inability to understand with sufficient clarity the customary assertions about the soul and God. So I thought I would be doing something worthwhile if I explained how the properties or qualities of the mind are to be distinguished from the qualities of the body. Admittedly, many people had previously said that in order to understand metaphysical matters the mind must be drawn away from the senses; but no one, so far as I know, had shown how this could be done. The correct, and in my view unique, method of achieving this is contained in my Second Meditation. But the nature of the method is such that scrutinizing it just once is not enough. Protracted and repeated study is required to eradicate the lifelong habit of confusing things related to the intellect with corporeal things, and to replace it with the opposite habit of distinguishing the two; this will take at least a few days to acquire. I think that was the best justification for my devoting the whole of the Second Meditation to this topic alone.

You go on to ask how I demonstrate that a body is incapable of thinking. You will forgive me if I reply that I have as yet provided no opportunity for this question to be raised. I first dealt with the matter in the Sixth Meditation where I said 'the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct', etc. And a little later on I said:

> It is true that I have a body that is very closely joined to me. But nevertheless on the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am a

thinking, non-extended thing; and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly it is certain that I (that is, the mind) am really distinct from my body and can exist without it.

From this we may easily go on to say 'whatever can think is a mind, or is called a mind; but since mind and body are in reality distinct, no body is a mind; therefore no body can think'.

I do not see what you can deny here. Do you claim that if we clearly understand one thing apart from another this is not sufficient for the recognition that the two things are really distinct? If so, you must provide a more reliable criterion for a real distinction—and I am confident that none can be provided. What will you suggest? Perhaps that there is a real distinction between two things if one can exist apart from the other? But now I will ask how you know that one thing can exist apart from another. You must be able to know this, if it is to serve as the criterion for a real distinction. You may say that you derive this knowledge from the senses, since you can see, or touch etc., the one thing when the other is not present. But the evidence of the senses is less reliable than that of the intellect: it can variously happen that one and the same thing appears under different forms or in several places or in several different ways, and so be taken for two things. And, after all, if you remember the remarks about the wax at the end of the Second Meditation you will realize that bodies are not strictly speaking perceived by the senses at all, but only by the intellect; so having a sensory perception of one thing apart from another simply amounts to our having an idea of one thing and understanding that this idea is not the same as an idea of something else. The sole possible source of such understanding is that we perceive one thing apart from another, and such understanding cannot be certain unless the idea of each thing is clear and distinct. So if the proposed criterion for a real distinction is to be reliable, it must reduce to the one which I put forward.

If there are those who claim that they do not have distinct ideas of mind and body, I can only ask them to pay careful attention to the contents of the Second Meditation. If, as may well be the case, they take the view that the formation of thoughts is due to the combined activity of parts of the brain, they should realize that this view is not based on any positive argument, but has simply arisen from the fact that, in the first place, they have never had the experience of being without a body and that, in the second place, they have frequently been obstructed by the body in their operations. It is just as if someone had had his legs permanently shackled from infancy: he would think the shackles were part of his body and that he needed them for walking.

HOBBES

On the Second Meditation ('The nature of the human mind')

SECOND OBJECTION

I am a thinking thing.

Correct. For from the fact that I think, or have an image (whether I am awake or dreaming), it can be inferred that I am thinking; for 'I think' and 'I am thinking' mean the same thing. And from the fact that I am thinking it follows that I exist, since that which thinks is not nothing. But when the author adds 'that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect or reason', a doubt arises. It does not seem to be a valid argument to say 'I am thinking, therefore I am thought' or 'I am using my intellect, hence I am an intellect.' I might just as well say 'I am walking, therefore I am a walk.' M. Descartes is identifying the thing which understands with intellection, which is an act of that which understands. Or at least he is identifying the thing which understands with the intellect, which is a power of that which understands. Yet all philosophers make a distinction between a subject and its faculties and acts, i.e. between a subject and its properties and its essences: an entity is one thing, its essence is another. Hence it may be that the thing that thinks is the subject to which mind, reason or intellect belong; and this subject may thus be something corporeal. The contrary is assumed, not proved. Yet this inference is the basis of the conclusion which M. Descartes seems to want to establish.

In the same passage we find the following: 'I know I exist; the question is, what is this "I" that I know. If the "I" is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware.'

It is quite certain that the knowledge of the proposition 'I exist' depends on the proposition 'I am thinking' as the author himself has explained to us. But how do we know the proposition 'I am thinking'? It can only be from our inability to conceive an act without its subject. We cannot conceive of jumping without a jumper, of knowing without a knower, or of thinking without a thinker.

It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal. For it seems that the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of something corporeal or in terms of matter, as the author himself shows later on his example of the wax: the wax, despite the changes in its colour, hardness, shape and other acts, is still understood to be the same thing, that is, the same matter that is the subject of all these changes. Moreover, I do not infer that I am thinking by means of another thought. For although someone may think that he *was* thinking (for this thought is simply an act of remembering), it is quite impossible for him to think that he *is* thinking, or to know that he is knowing. For then an infinite chain of questions would arise: 'How do you know that you know that you know . . . ?'

The knowledge of the proposition 'I exist' thus depends on the knowledge of the proposition 'I am thinking'; and knowledge of the latter proposition depends

on our inability to separate thought from the matter that is thinking. So it seems that the correct inference is that the thinking thing is material rather than immaterial.

Reply [Descartes to Hobbes]

When I said 'that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect or reason', what I meant by these terms was not mere faculties, but things endowed with the faculty of thought. This is what the first two terms are commonly taken to mean by everyone; and the second two are often understood in this sense. I stated this point so explicitly, and in so many places, that it seems to me there was no room for doubt.

There is no comparison here between 'a walk' and 'thought'. 'A walk' is usually taken to refer simply to the act of walking, whereas 'thought' is sometimes taken to refer to the act, sometimes to the faculty, and sometimes to the thing which possesses the faculty.

I do not say that the thing which understands is the same as intellection. Nor, indeed, do I identify the thing which understands with the intellect, if 'the intellect' is taken to refer to a faculty; they are identical only if 'the intellect' is taken to refer to the thing which understands. Now I freely admit that I used the most abstract terms I could in order to refer to the thing or substance in question, because I wanted to strip away from it everything that did not belong to it. This philosopher, by contrast, uses absolutely concrete words, namely 'subject', 'matter' and 'body', to refer to this thinking thing, because he wants to prevent its being separated from the body.

But I am not afraid that anyone will think my opponent's method is better suited to the discovery of the truth than my own; for his method lumps together a large number of different items, whereas I aim to distinguish each individual item as far as I can. But let us stop talking about terminology and discuss the issue itself.

'It may be', he says, 'that the thing that thinks is something corporeal. The contrary is assumed, not proved.' But I certainly did not assume the contrary, nor did I use it as the 'basis' of my argument. I left it quite undecided until the Sixth Meditation, where it is proved.

He is quite right in saying that 'we cannot conceive of an act without its subject'. We cannot conceive of thought without a thinking thing, since that which thinks is not nothing. But he then goes on to say, quite without any reason, and in violation of all usage and all logic: 'It seems to follow from this that a thinking thing is something corporeal.' It may be that the subject of any act can be understood only in terms of a substance (or even, if he insists, in terms of 'matter', i.e. metaphysical matter); but it does not follow that it must be understood in terms of a body.

Logicians, and people in general, normally say that some substances are spiritual and some are corporeal. All that I proved with the example of the wax was that colour, hardness and shape do not belong to the formal concept of the wax itself. I was not dealing in that passage with the formal concept of the mind or even with that of the body.

It is irrelevant for the philosopher to say that one thought cannot be the subject of another thought. For who, apart from him, ever supposed that it could be? If I may briefly explain the point at issue: it is certain that a thought cannot exist without a thing that is thinking; and in general no act or accident can exist without a substance for it to belong to. But we do not come to know a substance immediately, through being aware of the substance itself; we come to know it only through its being the subject of certain acts. Hence it is perfectly reasonable, and indeed sanctioned by usage, for us to use different names for substances which we recognize as being the subjects of quite different acts or accidents. And it is reasonable for us to leave until later the examination of whether these different names signify different things or one and the same thing. Now there are certain acts that we call 'corporeal', such as size, shape, motion and all others that cannot be thought of apart from local extension; and we use the term 'body' to refer to the substance in which they inhere. It cannot be supposed that one substance is the subject of shape, and another substance is the subject of local motion etc., since all these acts fall under the common concept of extension. There are other acts which we call 'acts of thought', such as understanding, willing, imagining, having sensory perceptions, and so on: these all fall under the common concept of thought or perception or consciousness, and we call the substance in which they inhere a 'thinking thing' or a 'mind'. We can use any other term you like, provided we do not confuse this substance with corporeal substance. For acts of thought have nothing in common with corporeal acts, and thought, which is the common concept under which they fall, is different in kind from extension, which is the common concept of corporeal acts. Once we have formed two distinct concepts of these two substances, it is easy, on the basis of what is said in the Sixth Meditation, to establish whether they are one and the same or different.

THIRD OBJECTION

[Hobbes to Descartes]

Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself?

Perhaps someone will answer this question as follows: I who am thinking am distinct from my thought; but my thought, though not separate from me, is distinct from me in the same way in which (as I have said above) jumping is distinct from the jumper. If M. Descartes is suggesting that he who understands is the same as the understanding, we shall be going back to the scholastic way of talking: the understanding understands, the sight sees, the will wills, and, by a very close analogy, the walking (or at least the faculty of walking) walks. All these expressions are obscure, improper, and quite unworthy of M. Descartes' usual clarity.

Reply [Descartes to Hobbes]

I do not deny that I, who am thinking, am distinct from my thought, in the way in which a thing is distinct from a mode. But when I ask 'Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking?', I mean this to refer to the various modes

of thinking which I have just listed, not to myself as a substance. And when I add, 'Which of them can be said to be separate from myself?', I simply mean that all these modes of thinking inhere in me. I do not see how one can pretend that there is any doubt or obscurity here.

FOURTH OBJECTION

[Hobbes to Descartes]

I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is conceived [*perceived*] by the mind alone.

There is a great difference between imagining, that is, having an idea, and conceiving in the mind, that is, using a process of reasoning to infer that something is, or exists. But M. Descartes has not explained how they differ. Even the Peripatetics of classical times taught clearly enough that a substance is not perceived by the senses but is inferred by reasoning.

Now, what shall we say if it turns out that reasoning is simply the joining together and linking of names or labels by means of the verb 'is'? It would follow that the inferences in our reasoning tell us nothing at all about the nature of things, but merely tell us about the labels applied to them; that is, all we can infer is whether or not we are combining the names of things in accordance with the arbitrary conventions which we have laid down in respect of their meaning. If this is so, as may well be the case, reasoning will depend on names, names will depend on the imagination, and imagination will depend (as I believe it does) merely on the motions of our bodily organs; and so the mind will be nothing more than motion occurring in various parts of an organic body.

Reply [Descartes to Hobbes]

I did explain the difference between imagination and a purely mental conception in this very example, where I listed the features of the wax which we imagine and those which we conceive by using the mind alone. And I also explained elsewhere how one and the same thing, say a pentagon, is understood in one way and imagined in another. As for the linking together that occurs when we reason, this is not a linking of names but of the things that are signified by the names, and I am surprised that the opposite view should occur to anyone. Who doubts that a Frenchman and a German can reason about the same things, despite the fact that the words that they think of are completely different? And surely the philosopher refutes his own position when he talks of the arbitrary conventions that we have laid down concerning the meaning of words. For if he admits that the words signify something, why will he not allow that our reasoning deals with this something which is signified, rather than merely with the words? And surely on his account, when he concludes that the mind is a motion he might just as well conclude that the earth is the sky, or anything else he likes.

ARNAULD

THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND

The first thing that I find remarkable is that our distinguished author has laid down as the basis for his entire philosophy exactly the same principle as that laid down by St Augustine—a man of the sharpest intellect and a remarkable thinker, not only on theological topics but also on philosophical ones. In Book II chapter 3 of *De Libero Arbitrio*, Alipius, when he is disputing with Euodius and is about to prove the existence of God, says the following: 'First, if we are to take as our starting point what is most evident, I ask you to tell me whether you yourself exist. Or are you perhaps afraid of making a mistake in your answer, given that, if you did not exist, it would be quite impossible for you to make a mistake?' This is like what M. Descartes says: 'But there is a deceiver of supreme power and cunning who is deliberately and constantly deceiving me. In that case I too undoubtedly exist, if he is deceiving me.' But let us go on from here and, more to the point, see how this principle can be used to derive the result that our mind is separate from our body.

I can doubt whether I have a body, and even whether there are any bodies at all in the world. Yet for all that, I may not doubt that I am or exist, so long as I am doubting or thinking.

Therefore I who am doubting and thinking am not a body. For, in that case, in having doubts about my body I should be having doubts about myself.

Indeed, even if I obstinately maintain that there are no bodies whatsoever, the proposition still stands, namely that I am something, and hence I am not a body.

This is certainly very acute. But someone is going to bring up the objection which the author raises against himself: the fact that I have doubts about the body, or deny that it exists, does not bring it about that no body exists. 'Yet may it not perhaps be the case that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing, because they are unknown to me, are in reality identical with the "I" of which I am aware? I do not know,' he says 'and for the moment I shall not argue the point. I know that I exist; the question is, what is this "I" that I know? If the "I" is understood strictly as we have been taking it, then it is quite certain that knowledge of it does not depend on things of whose existence I am as yet unaware.'

But the author admits that in the argument set out in the *Discourse on the Method* the proof excluding anything corporeal from the nature of the mind was not put forward 'in an order corresponding to the actual truth of the matter' but merely in an order corresponding to his 'own perception'. So the sense of the passage was that he was aware of nothing at all which he knew belonged to his essence except that he was a thinking thing. From this answer it is clear that the objection still stands in precisely the same form as it did before, and that the question he promised to answer still remains outstanding: How does it follow, from the fact that he is aware of nothing else belonging to his essence, that nothing else does in fact belong to it? I must confess that I am somewhat slow, but I have been unable to find anywhere in the Second Meditation an answer to this question. As far as I can gather, however, the author does attempt a proof of this claim in the Sixth Meditation[.]

[Descartes to Arnauld]

But now I must explain how the mere fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one substance apart from another is enough to make me certain that one excludes the other.

The answer is that the notion of a *substance* is just this—that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other substance. And there is no one who has ever perceived two substances by means of two different concepts without judging that they are really distinct.

Hence, had I not been looking for greater than ordinary certainty, I should have been content to have shown in the Second Meditation that the mind can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the body is attributed to it, and that, conversely, the body can be understood as a subsisting thing despite the fact that nothing belonging to the mind is attributed to it. I should have added nothing more in order to demonstrate that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, since we commonly judge that the order in which things are mutually related in our perception of them corresponds to the order in which they are related in actual reality. But one of the exaggerated doubts which I put forward in the First Meditation went so far as to make it impossible for me to be certain of this very point (namely whether things do in reality correspond to our perception of them), so long as I was supposing myself to be ignorant of the author of my being. And this is why everything I wrote on the subject of God and truth in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations contributes to the conclusion that there is a real distinction between the mind and the body, which I finally established in the Sixth Meditation.

[…]

GASSENDI

On the Second Meditation: 'The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than the body'

1. Turning to the Second Meditation, I see that you still persist with your elaborate pretence of deception, but you go on to recognize at least that you, who are the subject of this deception, exist. And thus you conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is true whenever it is put forward by you or conceived in your mind. But I do not see that you needed all this apparatus, when on other grounds you were certain, and it was true, that you existed. You could have made the same inference from any one of your other actions, since it is known by the natural light that whatever acts exists.

You add that you do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what you are. Here I agree with you in earnest and readily accept what you say; this is the point at which all the hard work begins. But it seems that you could have raised this question without all the circumlocutions and elaborate suppositions.

You next decide to meditate on what you formerly believed yourself to be, so that when the doubtful elements are removed only what is 'certain and unshakeable' may remain. Here your procedure will meet with universal approval. You now get to grips with the problem. You formerly believed you were a man; and now you ask 'What is a man?' You deliberately dismiss the common definitions and concentrate on 'the first thought that came to mind', namely that you had a face and hands and the other limbs making up what you called the body. The next thought was that you were nourished, that you moved about, and that you engaged in sense-perception and thinking—actions which you attributed to the soul. Fair enough—provided we are careful to remember your distinction between the soul and the body. You say that you did not know what the soul was, but imagined it to be merely 'something like a wind or fire or ether' which permeated the more solid parts of your body. That is worth remembering. As for the body, you had no doubt that its nature consists in its being 'capable of taking on shape and having boundaries and filling a space so as to exclude any other body from it, and in its being perceived by touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste and being moved in various ways'. But you can continue to attribute these things to bodies even now, provided you do not attribute all of them to every single body (thus wind is a body, and yet it is not perceived by sight). But you cannot exclude the other attributes you go on to mention, since wind and fire are capable of moving many things. When you go on to say that you previously denied that a body has the 'power of self-movement', it is not clear how you can still maintain this. For it would imply that every body must by its nature be immobile, and that all its movements come from some incorporeal principle, and that we cannot suppose that water flows or an animal moves without some incorporeal power of movement.

2. You go on to ask whether, now that you are supposing you are being deceived, you can still affirm that you possess any of the attributes which you believed to belong to the nature of body. And after a very careful examination you say that you can find in yourself no attributes of this kind. But in this passage you are already regarding yourself not as a whole man but as an inner or hidden component—the kind of component which you had previously considered the soul to be. I ask you then, Soul, or whatever name you want me to address you by, have you by this time corrected the thought which previously led you to imagine that you were something like a wind diffused through the parts of the body? Certainly not. So why is it not possible that you are a wind, or rather a very thin vapour, given off when the heart heats up the purest type of blood, or produced by some other source, which is diffused through the parts of the body and gives them life? May it not be this vapour which sees with the eyes and hears with the ears and thinks with the brain and performs all the other functions which are commonly ascribed to you? If this is so, why should you not have the same shape as your whole body has, just as the air takes on the same shape as the vessel that contains it? Why should you not suppose that you are enclosed within the body's skin, or in the same medium as that which surrounds the body? Why should you not occupy space, or the parts of a space which the solid body or its parts do not fill? I mean that the solid body has pores through which you may be diffused, in such a way that your own parts and the parts of the body are not to be found in the same areas, just as in a mixture of wine and water the parts of the wine are not to be found where the parts of the water are, although our sight is unable to separate out the two. Again, why should you not be able to exclude any other body from the space which you occupy, given that the spaces which you occupy cannot be occupied at the same time by the parts of the more solid body? Why should you not be in motion in many different ways? For, given that you

move many of your limbs, how could you accomplish this unless you were in motion yourself? You certainly cannot be immobile, since exertion is required when you move the limbs, nor can you be at rest if you are to produce movement in the body. If all this is so, then why do you say that you have within you 'none of the attributes which belong to the nature of the body'?

3. You go on to say that, of the attributes ascribed to the soul, neither nutrition nor movement are to be found in you. But, in the first place, something may be a body without receiving nutrition. Next, if you are the kind of body which we have described as a vapour, then given that the limbs, being more solid, are nourished by a more solid substance, why should you, being more rarefied, not also be nourished by a more rarefied substance? Moreover, when the body to which these limbs belong is growing, are not you growing also? And when the body is weak, are not you weak too? As far as movement is concerned, since it is you who cause your limbs to move, and they never assume any position unless you make them do so, how can this occur without movement on your part? You say 'since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications'. But if you are fooling with us or being fooled yourself, there is nothing to delay us here. If, however, you are speaking seriously, then you have to prove that you do not have a body which you inform, and also that your nature is not such that you are nourished and move in conjunction with the body.

You go on to say that you do not have sense-perception. But surely it is you who see colours, hear sounds etc. 'This', you say, 'does not occur without a body.' I agree. But in the first place you have a body, and you yourself are present within the eye, which obviously does not see without you. And secondly, you could be a rarefied body operating by means of the sense organs. You say 'in my dreams I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all'. Admittedly, you may be deceived when, although the eye is not in use, you seem to have sense-perception of something that cannot in fact be perceived without the eye. But this kind of falsity is not something you have experienced all the time; and indeed you have normally used your eyes in order to see and to take in the images which you may now have without the eyes being in use.

Finally, you reach the conclusion that *thinking* belongs to you. This must be accepted, but it remains for you to prove that the power of thought is something so far beyond the nature of a body that neither a vapour nor any other mobile, pure and rarefied body can be organized in such a way as would make it capable of thought. You will have to prove at the same time that the souls of the brutes are incorporeal, given that they think or are aware of something internal over and above the functions of the external senses, not only when they are awake but also when dreaming. You will also have to prove that this solid body of yours contributes nothing whatever to your thought (for you have never been without it, and have so far never had any thoughts when separated from it). You will thus have to prove that you think independently of the body in such a way that you can never be hampered by it or disturbed by the foul and dense vapours or fumes which from time to time have such a bad effect on the brain.

4. You conclude: 'I am, then, in the strict sense a thing that thinks; that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason.' Here I must admit that I had been labouring under a misapprehension. I thought that I was addressing a human soul, or the internal principle by which a man lives, has sensations, moves around and understands. Instead I find I was addressing a mind alone, which has divested itself not just of the body but also of the very soul. Are you, Sir, following the example of the ancients who, although believing that the soul was diffused through the whole body, nonetheless thought that the principal part—the ἡγεμονικὸν or 'controlling element'—had its seat in a specific part of the body, such as the brain or the heart? They did of course believe that the soul was also to be found in this part, but they thought that the mind was, as it were, added to and united with the soul that existed there, thus informing this part along with the soul. I ought to have remembered this from the discussion in your *Discourse on the Method*, where you seemed to want to say that all the functions which are attributed to the vegetative and sensitive soul do not depend on the rational soul but can be exercised before the rational soul arrives in the body, as is the case with the brutes who, on your view, possess no reason. How I forgot this I do not know, unless it was because I was still in doubt about whether you preferred not to use the word 'soul' to apply to the principle responsible for the vegetative and sensory functions in both us and the brutes, but wanted instead to say that the soul in the strict sense was our mind. But since it is the vegetative and sensitive principle that is properly speaking said to 'animate' us, the only function performed by the mind is to enable us to think—and this you do in fact assert. Since this is so, let us use the term 'mind', and let it be strictly a 'thinking thing'.

You add that thought alone cannot be separated from you. Certainly there is no reason not to grant you this, particularly if you are simply a mind, and you are not prepared to allow that your substance is distinct from the substance of the soul except conceptually. Nonetheless I want to stop here and ask whether, in saying that thought cannot be separated from you, you mean that you continue to think indefinitely, so long as you exist. This would accord with the claims of those noted philosophers who, to prove that we are immortal, assume that we are in perpetual motion or, as I interpret it, that we are perpetually thinking. But it will hardly convince those who do not see how you are able to think during deep sleep or indeed in the womb. And here I pause again and ask whether you think that you were infused into the body, or one of its parts, while still in the womb or at birth. But I do not want to press the point too insistently and ask whether you remember what you thought about in the womb or in the first few days or months or even years after you were born; nor, if you answer that you have forgotten, shall I ask why this is so. I do suggest, however, that you should bear in mind how obscure, meagre and virtually non-existent your thought must have been during those early periods of your life.

You go on to say that you are not 'that structure of limbs which is called a human body'. We must accept this, since you are considering yourself solely as a thinking thing and as a part of the whole composite that is a human being—a part that is distinct from the external and more solid part. 'I am not', you say, 'some thin vapour which permeates the limbs—a wind, fire, air, breath, or whatever I depict in my imagination; for these are things which I have supposed to be nothing. Let this supposition stand.' But stop here, O Mind, and let those 'suppositions', or rather fictions, finally depart. You say 'I am not a vapour or anything of this kind.' But if the entire soul is something of this kind, why should you, who may be thought of as the noblest part of the soul, not be regarded as being, so to speak, the flower, or the most refined and pure and active part of it? You say: 'It may be that these very things which I am supposing to be nothing

are something real, and that they are not distinct from the "I" of which I am aware. I do not know, and for the moment I shall not argue the point.' But if you do not know, if you are not arguing the point, why do you assume that you are none of these things? You say: 'I know I exist; and knowledge of this thing taken strictly cannot depend on that of which I am unaware.' Fair enough; but remember that you have not yet made certain that you are not air or a vapour or something else of this sort.

5. You next take what you call the imagination and proceed to describe what it is. You say that 'imagining is simply the contemplation of the shape or image of a corporeal thing', and you say this so that you can go on to infer that it is some form of thought other than imagination that enables you to know your nature. But since you are allowed to define imagination as you like, then if you are corporeal—and you have not yet proved the contrary—why, may I ask, cannot your contemplation of yourself involve some corporeal form or image? And when you do contemplate yourself in this way, I ask you whether you find that anything comes to mind apart from some pure, transparent, rarefied substance like a wind, which pervades the whole body or at least the brain or some other part, and which animates you and performs all your functions. 'I realize', you say, 'that none of the things that the imagination enables me to grasp is at all relevant to this knowledge of myself which I possess.' But you do not say how you recognize this. And since you had decided a little earlier that you did not yet know whether these things belonged to you, how, may I ask, do you now arrive at the conclusion just quoted?

6. You say next that 'the mind must be most carefully diverted from such things if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible'. Good advice. But after you have most carefully diverted yourself from these things, tell me, please, how distinctly you have managed to perceive your nature? In saying that you are simply 'a thing that thinks' you mention an operation of which all of us were already well aware; but you tell us nothing of the substance which performs this operation—what kind of substance it is, and what it consists of, how it organizes itself to perform so many different functions in so many different ways, and other matters of this kind, of which we have been ignorant up till now.

You say that we can perceive by the intellect what we cannot perceive by the imagination (and you identify the imagination with the 'common' sense). But, my good Mind, can you establish that there are several internal faculties and not one simple and universal one, which enables us to know whatever we know? When I see the sun with open eyes, sensory perception obviously occurs. And when I then think about the sun with my eyes closed, internal cognition obviously occurs. But how, ultimately, can I tell that I am perceiving the sun with the 'common' sense or faculty of imagination, as opposed to the mind or intellect, which implies that I can at will apprehend the sun now by means of the intellect, which is distinct from the imagination, and now by means of the imagination, which is distinct from the intellect? If, after brain damage or some injury to the imaginative faculty, the intellect remained as before, performing its proper functions all unimpaired, then we could say that the intellect was as distinct from the imagination as the imagination is distinct from the external senses. But since things do not happen this way, there is surely no ready way of establishing the distinction.

To say, as you do, that imagination occurs when we contemplate the image of some corporeal thing, surely implies that since there is no other way in which we may contemplate bodies, our knowledge of them must be derived from the imagination alone—or at any rate that no other faculty of knowing can be recognized.

You say that you cannot stop thinking that the corporeal things of which you form images in your thought, and which the senses investigate, are known with much more distinctness than this puzzling 'you' which cannot be pictured in the imagination; and thus it is surprising that you should have a more distinct knowledge and grasp of things which are doubtful and foreign to you. First of all, you are quite right in using the phrase 'this puzzling "you"'. For you really do not know what you are or what your nature is, and hence you cannot be any more confident that your nature is such as to be incapable of falling under the imagination. Next, all our knowledge appears to have its source in our senses, and although you deny the maxim 'Whatever is in the intellect must previously have existed in the senses', it seems that it is nevertheless true. For unless our knowledge enters in a single rush—*κατὰ περίπτοσιν* or 'at a stroke' as they say—it is slowly established by analogy, composition, division, extrapolation and restriction, and in other similar ways which I need not list here. So it is no surprise if the things which rush in of their own accord and strike the senses should make a more vivid impression on the mind than things which the mind itself, when the occasion arises, constructs and compounds for itself out of the material which impinges on the senses. Moreover, you call corporeal things doubtful but, if you are prepared to admit the truth, you are just as certain of the existence of the body which you inhabit and of all the objects which surround you as you are of your own existence. And if it is solely the operation called 'thought' which makes you manifest to yourself, what happens with regard to the way in which other things are manifested? They are made manifest not just by various operations but also by many very evident attributes, such as size, shape, solidity, colour, taste, etc.; and thus, although they exist outside you, it is no surprise that your knowledge and grasp of them should be more distinct than your knowledge and grasp of yourself. But as to how it is possible for you to understand something that is foreign to you better than you understand yourself, I answer that the same thing happens in the case of the eye, which sees other things but does not see itself.

7. 'But what then am I?' you ask. 'A thing that thinks. What is that? A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.' This is a long list, but I will not query each individual item. The only point I would question is your statement that you are a thing which has sensory perceptions. This is surprising, since you had previously maintained the opposite. Or did you perhaps mean that in addition to yourself there is a bodily faculty which resides in the eyes, ears and other organs? Is it perhaps this faculty that receives the forms of sensible things and thus initiates the act of sense-perception which you then complete, it being you who really sees and hears and has the other sensory perceptions? This, I think, is what makes you class both sense-perception and imagination as kinds of thought. Fair enough; but in that case you must consider whether the sense-perception which the brutes have does not also deserve to be called 'thought', since it is not dissimilar to your own. This would mean that the brutes, too, have a mind which is not unlike yours.

You may say that you occupy the citadel in your brain and there receive whatever messages are transmitted by the animal spirits which move through the nerves, and sense-perception thus occurs there, where you dwell, despite the fact that it is said to occur throughout the body. Let us accept this; but the brutes have nerves, animal spirits and a brain, and in the brain there is a principle of cognition that receives the messages from the spirits in an exactly similar fashion and thus completes the act of sense-perception. You may say that this principle in the brains of animals is simply the corporeal imagination or faculty of forming images. But in that case you must show that you who reside in the brain are something different from the corporeal imagination or the human faculty of forming images. I asked you a little while ago for a criterion which would prove that you are something different, but I do not think you will be able to supply one. You may cite operations which far surpass those performed by animals. But although man is the foremost of the animals, he still belongs to the class of animals; and similarly, though you prove yourself to be the most outstanding of imaginative faculties, you still count as one of these faculties. You may attach the special label 'mind' to yourself, but although the name may be more impressive, this does not mean that your nature is therefore different. To prove that your nature is different (that is, incorporeal, as you maintain), you ought to produce some operation which is of a quite different kind from those which the brutes perform—one which takes place outside the brain, or at least independently of the brain; and this you do not do. On the contrary, when the brain is disturbed, you are disturbed, and when the brain is overwhelmed you are overwhelmed, and if the images of things leave the brain you do not retain any trace of them. You may say that everything which occurs in animals happens by means of a blind impulse of the animal spirits and the other organs, in just the same way as motion is produced in a clock or other machine. This may be true in the case of functions like nutrition or the pulsing of the arteries, which occur in exactly similar fashion in the case of man. But can you cite any sensory acts or so-called 'passions of the soul' which are produced by a blind impulse in the case of the brutes but not in our case? A scrap of food transmits its image into the eye of a dog, and the image is then transferred to the brain and as it were hooks on to the soul, so that the soul and the entire body joined to it is drawn towards the morsel as if by the most tiny and delicate chains. And if someone aims a stone, the stone transmits its image and, like a lever, pushes the soul away and simultaneously drives off the body or forces it to flee. But does not all this occur in the case of man? Perhaps you have in mind some quite different way in which this occurs in man, in which case I should be much obliged if you would explain it.

You may say that you are free and the soul has the power of preventing a man from both fleeing and advancing. But the principle of cognition does just this in the case of an animal: a dog, despite his fear of threats and blows may rush forward to grab a morsel it has seen—and a man often does just the same sort of thing! You may say that a dog barks simply from impulse and not, as happens when a man speaks, from choice. But in the case of man, too, there are causes at work which may lead us to judge that he speaks from some impulse. What you attribute to choice occurs as a result of a stronger impulse, and indeed the brute, too, exercises choice, when one impulse is greater than another. Indeed, I have seen a dog matching his barks to the sound of a trumpet, so as to imitate all the changes in the notes, whether sharp or flat, or slow or fast. And it managed to do this even when the tempo of the notes was arbitrarily and unexpectedly speeded up, or when the notes were unexpectedly drawn out. You say that the brutes lack reason. Well, of course they lack human reason, but they do not lack their own kind of reason. So it does not seem appropriate to call them ['irrational'] except by comparison with us or with our kind of reason; and in any case or reason seems to be a general term, which can be attributed to them no less than the cognitive faculty or internal sense. You may say that animals do not employ rational argument. But although they do not reason so perfectly or about as many subjects as man, they still reason, and the difference seems to be merely one of degree. You may say they do not speak. But although they do not produce human speech (since of course they are not human beings), they still produce their own form of speech, which they employ just as we do ours. You may say that even a delirious man can still string words together to express his meaning, which even the wisest of the brutes cannot do. But surely you are not being fair if you expect the brutes to employ human language and are not prepared to consider their own kind of language. But to go into this would need a much longer discussion.

8. Next you introduce the example of the wax, and you spend some time explaining that the so-called accidents of the wax are one thing, and the wax itself, or substance of the wax, is another. You say that in order to have a distinct perception of the wax itself or its substance we need only the mind or intellect, and not sensation or imagination. But the first point is just what everyone commonly asserts, *viz*. that the concept of the wax or its substance can be abstracted from the concepts of its accidents. But does this really imply that the substance or nature of the wax is itself distinctly conceived? Besides the colour, the shape, the fact that it can melt, etc. we conceive that there is something which is the subject of the accidents and changes we observe; but what this subject is, or what its nature is, we do not know. This always eludes us; and it is only a kind of conjecture that leads us to think that there must be something underneath the accidents. So I am amazed at how you can say that once the forms have been stripped off like clothes, you perceive more perfectly and evidently what the wax is. Admittedly, you perceive that the wax or its substance must be something over and above such forms; but what this something is you do not perceive, unless you are misleading us. For this 'something' is not revealed to you in the way in which a man can be revealed when, after first of all seeing just his hat and garments, we then remove the clothes so as to find out who and what he is. Moreover, when you think you somehow perceive this underlying 'something', how, may I ask, do you do so? Do you not perceive it as something spread out and extended? For you do not conceive of it as a point, although it is the kind of thing whose extension expands and contracts. And since this kind of extension is not infinite but has limits, do you not conceive of the thing as having some kind of shape? And when you seem as it were to see it, do you not attach to it some sort of colour, albeit not a distinct one? You certainly take it to be something more solid, and so more visible, than a mere void. Hence even your 'understanding' turns out to be some sort of imagination. If you say you conceive of the wax apart from any extension, shape or colour, then you must in all honesty tell us what sort of conception you do have of it.

What you have to say about 'men whom we see, or perceive with the mind, when we make out only their hats or cloaks' does not show that it is the mind rather than the imagination that makes judgements. A dog, which you will not

allow to possess a mind like yours, certainly makes a similar kind of judgement when it sees not its master but simply his hat or clothes. Indeed, even if the master is standing or sitting or lying down or reclining or crouching down or stretched out, the dog still always recognizes the master who can exist under all these forms, even though like the wax, he does not keep the same proportions or always appear under one form rather than another. And when a dog chases a hare that is running away, and sees it first intact, then dead, and afterwards skinned and chopped up, do you suppose that he does not think it is the same hare? When you go on to say that the perception of colour and hardness and so on is 'not vision or touch but is purely mental scrutiny', I accept this, provided the mind is not taken to be really distinct from the imaginative faculty. You add that this scrutiny 'can be imperfect and confused or perfect and distinct depending on how carefully we concentrate on what the wax consists in'. But this does not show that the scrutiny made by the mind, when it examines this mysterious something that exists over and above all the forms, constitutes clear and distinct knowledge of the wax; it shows, rather, that such knowledge is constituted by the scrutiny made by the senses of all the possible accidents and changes which the wax is capable of taking on. From these we shall certainly be able to arrive at a conception and explanation of what we mean by the term 'wax'; but the alleged naked, or rather hidden, substance is something that we can neither ourselves conceive nor explain to others.

9. You now go on as follows:

> What am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, I am not admitting that there is anything else in me except a mind.) What, I ask, is this 'I' which seems to perceive the wax so distinctly? Surely my awareness of my own self is not merely much truer and more certain than my awareness of the wax, but also much more distinct and evident. For if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I see it, how much more does this prove that I exist? It is possible that what I see is not really the wax; it is possible that I do not even have eyes with which to see anything. But when I see, or think I see (I am not here distinguishing the two), it is simply not possible that I who am now thinking am not something. By the same token, if I judge that the wax exists from the fact that I touch it, the same result follows, namely that I exist. If I judge that it exists from the fact that I imagine it, or for any other reason, exactly the same thing follows. And the result that I have grasped in the case of the wax may be applied to everything else located outside me.

I give this long quotation so that you may realize that it demonstrates that you do indeed distinctly know that you exist because of the fact that you distinctly see and know that the wax and its accidents exist. But it does not prove that you therefore know, either distinctly or indistinctly, what you are or what your nature is. Such a proof would have been well worthwhile, since your existence is not in doubt. Note, however, that I do not propose to press this point, any more than I insisted on a point that arose earlier. This was that although you are not here admitting that you have anything apart from a mind, and hence you are excluding eyes, hands and the other bodily organs, you nevertheless speak of the wax and its accidents which you see and touch, etc. Yet to see these things without eyes or touch them without hands (or, as you put it, think that you see and touch them) is obviously impossible.

You proceed as follows.

> If my perception of the wax seemed more distinct after it was established not just by sight or touch but by many other considerations, it must be admitted that I know myself even more distinctly. This is because every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the wax, or of any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind.

But just as your conclusions about the wax merely establish your perception of the existence of your mind and not its nature, so all your other considerations will fail to establish any result beyond this. If you aim to deduce anything further from your perception of the substance of the wax or other things, your only valid conclusion will be that since our conception of this substance is merely a confused perception of something unknown, the same applies to our conception of the mind. Hence you may well repeat your earlier phrase 'this puzzling "I"'.

Now for your conclusion.

> I see that without any effort I have now finally got back to where I wanted. I now know that even bodies are not strictly perceived by the senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen; and hence I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else.

This is what you claim; but I do not see how you can deduce or 'know plainly' that anything more can be perceived concerning your mind beyond the fact that it exists. So what you promised in the title of this Meditation, namely that it would establish that the human mind is better known than the body, has not, so far as I can see, been achieved. Your aim was not to prove that the human mind exists, or that its existence is better known than the existence of the body, since its existence, at all events, is something which no one questions. Your intention was surely to establish that its nature is better known than the nature of the body, and this you have not managed to do. As regards the nature of the body, you have, O Mind, listed all the things we know: extension, shape, occupation of space, and so on. But what, after all your efforts, have you told us about yourself? You are not a bodily structure, you are not air, not a wind, not a thing which walks or senses, you are not this and not that. Even if we grant these results (though some of them you did in fact reject), they are not what we are waiting for. They are simply negative results; but the question is not what you are not, but what you are. And so you refer us to your principal result, that you are a thing that thinks—i.e. a thing that doubts, affirms etc. But to say first of all that you are a 'thing' is not to give any information. This is a general, imprecise and vague word which applies no more to you than it does to anything in the entire world that is not simply a nothing. You are a 'thing'; that is, you are not nothing, or, what comes to the same thing, you are something. But a stone is something and not nothing, and so is a fly, and so is everything else. When you go on to say that you are a *thinking* thing, then we know what you are saying; but we knew it already, and it was not what we were asking you to tell us. Who doubts that you are thinking? What we are unclear about, what we are looking for, is that inner substance of yours whose property is to think. Your conclusion should be related to this inquiry, and should tell us not that you are a thinking thing, but what sort of thing this 'you' who thinks really is. If we are asking about wine, and looking for the kind of knowledge which is superior to common knowledge, it will hardly be enough for you to say 'wine is a liquid thing, which is compressed from grapes, white or red, sweet, intoxicating' and so on. You will have to attempt to

investigate and somehow explain its internal substance, showing how it can be seen to be manufactured from spirits, tartar, the distillate, and other ingredients mixed together in such and such quantities and proportions. Similarly, given that you are looking for knowledge of yourself which is superior to common knowledge (that is, the kind of knowledge we have had up till now), you must see that it is certainly not enough for you to announce that you are a thing that thinks and doubts and understands etc. You should carefully scrutinize yourself and conduct a kind of chemical investigation of yourself, if you are to succeed in uncovering and explaining to us your internal substance. If you provide such an explanation, we shall ourselves doubtless be able to investigate whether or not you are better known than the body whose nature we know so much about through anatomy, chemistry, so many other sciences, so many senses and so many experiments.

[Descartes to Gassendi]

1. Here you continue to employ rhetorical tricks instead of reasoning. You pretend that I am playing a game when I am serious, and you take me to be making serious statements and genuine assertions when I am merely raising questions and putting forward commonly held views in order to inquire into them further. When I said that the entire testimony of the senses should be regarded as uncertain and even as false, I was quite serious; indeed this point is so necessary for an understanding of my *Meditations* that if anyone is unwilling or unable to accept it, he will be incapable of producing any objection that deserves a reply. However, we must note the distinction which I have insisted on in several passages, between the actions of life and the investigation of the truth. For when it is a question of organizing our life, it would, of course, be foolish not to trust the senses, and the sceptics who neglected human affairs to the point where friends had to stop them falling off precipices deserved to be laughed at. Hence I pointed out in one passage that no sane person ever seriously doubts such things. But when our inquiry concerns what can be known with complete certainty by the human intellect, it is quite unreasonable to refuse to reject these things in all seriousness as doubtful and even as false; the purpose here is to come to recognize that certain other things which cannot be rejected in this way are thereby more certain and in reality better known to us.

My statement that I did not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' who thinks is is one that you do not accept as having been made seriously and in good faith; but I did provide a full explanation of the statement. You also question my statements that I had no doubts about what the nature of the body consisted in, and that I attributed to it no power of self-movement, and that I imagined the soul to be like a wind or fire, and so on; but these were simply commonly held views which I was rehearsing so as to show in the appropriate place that they were false.

It is hardly honest to say that I refer nutrition, motion, sensation, etc. to the soul and then immediately to add 'Fair enough, provided we are careful to remember your distinction between the soul and the body.' For shortly afterwards I expressly referred nutrition to the body alone; and as for movement and sensation, I refer them to the body for the most part, and attribute nothing belonging to them to the soul, apart from the element of thought alone.

Again, what reason have you for saying that I 'did not need all this apparatus' to prove I existed? These very words of yours surely show that I have the best reason to think that I have not used enough apparatus, since I have not yet managed to make you understand the matter correctly. When you say that I 'could have made the same inference from any one of my other actions' you are far from the truth, since I am not wholly certain of any of my actions, with the sole exception of thought (in using the word 'certain' I am referring to metaphysical certainty, which is the sole issue at this point). I may not, for example, make the inference 'I am walking, therefore I exist', except in so far as the awareness of walking is a thought. The inference is certain only if applied to this awareness, and not to the movement of the body which sometimes—in the case of dreams—is not occurring at all, despite the fact that I seem to myself to be walking. Hence from the fact that I think I am walking I can very well infer the existence of a mind which has this thought, but not the existence of a body that walks. And the same applies in other cases.

2. You then adopt a droll figure of speech and pretend to interrogate me as if I were present; and you address me no longer as a whole man but as a disembodied soul. I think that you are indicating here that these objections of yours did not originate in the mind of a subtle philosopher but came from flesh alone. I ask you then, O Flesh, or whatever name you want me to address you by, have you so little to do with the mind that you were unable to notice when I corrected the common view whereby that which thinks is supposed to be like a wind or similar body? I of course corrected this view when I showed that it can be supposed that there is no wind or any other body in the world, yet nonetheless everything which enables me to recognize myself as a thinking thing still remains. Hence all your subsequent questions as to whether I might not still be a wind or occupy space or be in motion in several ways, and so on, are so fatuous as to need no reply.

3. There is no more force in your next question as to why, if I am a rarefied body, I cannot be nourished, and so on. For I deny that I am a body. Let me clear up one point once and for all. You almost always use the same style, not attacking my arguments but ignoring them as if they did not exist, or quoting them in an imperfect or truncated form; and you string together various difficulties of the sort commonly raised by philosophical novices against my conclusions or against others like them—or even unlike them. These difficulties are irrelevant, or else I have discussed and resolved them in the appropriate place. In view of this it is not worth my while to answer all your questions individually; if I did so, I should have to repeat a hundred times what I have already written. I shall simply deal briefly with the points which might possibly cause difficulty to readers who are not utterly stupid. As for readers who are impressed by the number of words employed rather than the force of the arguments, I do not value their approval so highly that I am prepared to become more verbose in order to merit it.

First of all then, let me point out that I do not accept your statement that the mind grows and becomes weak along with the body. You do not prove this by any argument. It is true that the mind does not work so perfectly when it is in the body of an infant as it does when in an adult's body, and that its actions can often be slowed down by wine and other corporeal things. But all that follows from this is that the mind, so long as it is joined to the body, uses it like an in-

strument to perform the operations which take up most of its time. It does not follow that it is made more or less perfect by the body. Your inference here is no more valid than if you were to infer from the fact that a craftsman works badly whenever he uses a faulty tool that the good condition of his tools is the source of his knowledge of his craft.

It should also be noted, O Flesh, that you seem to misunderstand completely what the use of rational argument involves. To prove that I should not suspect the trustworthiness of the senses you say that even if, when the eye is not in use, I have seemed to have sense-perception of things that cannot in fact be perceived without the eye, this kind of falsity is not something I have experienced all the time. This makes it seem as if the fact that we have discovered error on some occasions is not a sufficient reason for doubt. You also talk as if it were possible for us, whenever we make a mistake, to notice that we are mistaken; but on the contrary the error consists precisely in the fact that we do not recognize it as a case of error.

Finally, O Flesh, since you often demand arguments from me when you have none yourself and the onus of proof is on you, you should realize that in order to philosophize correctly there is no need for us to prove the falsity of everything which we do not admit because we do not know whether or not it is true. We simply have to take great care not to admit anything as true when we cannot prove it to be so. Hence, when I discover that I am a thinking substance, and form a clear and distinct concept of this thinking substance that contains none of the things that belong to the concept of corporeal substance, this is quite sufficient to enable me to assert that I, in so far as I know myself, am nothing other than a thinking thing. This is all that I asserted in the Second Meditation, which is what we are dealing with here. I did not have to admit that this thinking substance was some mobile, pure and rarefied body, since I had no convincing reason for believing this. If you have such a reason, it is your job to explain it; you should not demand that I prove the falsity of something which I refused to accept precisely because I had no knowledge of it. It is as if, when I said that I now live in Holland, you were to say that this must not be accepted unless I can prove that I am not also in China or in any other part of the world, on the grounds that it is perhaps possible, through the power of God, that the same body should exist in two different places. When you add that I will also have to prove that 'the souls of the brutes are incorporeal' and that 'this solid body contributes nothing to my thought', you show that you are ignorant both of where the onus of proof lies and of what must be proved by each party. For I do not think that the souls of the brutes are incorporeal, or that this solid body contributes nothing to our thought; it is simply that this is not at all the place to consider these topics.

4. The next question you raise concerns the obscurity arising from the ambiguity in the word 'soul'. But I took such care to eliminate this ambiguity when it arose that it is tiresome to repeat myself here. I shall say only that it is generally the ignorant who have given things their names, and so the names do not always fit the things with sufficient accuracy. Our job, however, is not to change the names after they have been adopted into ordinary usage; we may merely emend their meanings when we notice that they are misunderstood by others. Thus, primitive man probably did not distinguish between, on the one hand, the principle by which we are nourished and grow and accomplish without any thought all the other operations which we have in common with the brutes, and, on the other hand, the principle in virtue of which we think. He therefore used the single term 'soul' to apply to both; and when he subsequently noticed that thought was distinct from nutrition, he called the element which thinks 'mind', and believed it to be the principal part of the soul. I, by contrast, realizing that the principle by which we are nourished is wholly different—different in kind—from that in virtue of which we think, have said that the term 'soul', when it is used to refer to both these principles, is ambiguous. If we are to take 'soul' in its special sense, as meaning the 'first actuality' or 'principal form of man', then the term must be understood to apply only to the principle in virtue of which we think; and to avoid ambiguity I have as far as possible used the term 'mind' for this. For I consider the mind not as a part of the soul but as the thinking soul in its entirety.

You say you want to stop and ask whether I think the soul always thinks. But why should it not always think, since it is a thinking substance? It is no surprise that we do not remember the thoughts that the soul had when in the womb or in a deep sleep, since there are many other thoughts that we equally do not remember, although we know we had them when grown up, healthy and wide-awake. So long as the mind is joined to the body, then in order for it to remember thoughts which it had in the past, it is necessary for some traces of them to be imprinted on the brain; it is by turning to these, or applying itself to them, that the mind remembers. So is it really surprising if the brain of an infant, or a man in a deep sleep, is unsuited to receive these traces?

Lastly, there is the passage where I said that it may perhaps be that that of which I do not yet have knowledge (namely my body) is not distinct from the 'I' of which I am aware (namely my mind); 'I do not know', I said, 'and I shall not argue the point.' Here you object: 'If you do not know, if you are not arguing the point, why do you assume that you are none of these things?' But it is false that I assumed anything I did not know. On the contrary, since I did not know whether the body was identical with the mind or not, I did not make any assumptions on this matter, but considered only the mind; it was only afterwards, in the Sixth Meditation, that I said there was a real distinction between the mind and the body, and here I did not assume it but demonstrated it. But you, O Flesh, are utterly at fault here, because, despite having little or no rational basis for proving that the mind is not distinct from the body, you nonetheless assume this.

5. What I wrote about the imagination will be clear enough to those who study it closely, but it is not surprising if those who do not meditate on it find it very obscure. But I should point out to such people that there is no inconsistency between my assertion that certain things do not belong to the knowledge I have of myself and my previous statement that I did not know whether certain things belong to me or not. For 'belonging to me' is clearly quite different from 'belonging to the knowledge which I have of myself'.

6. The things you say here, O best of Flesh, seem to me to amount to grumblings more than objections, and so they require no answer.

7. Here again you produce a lot of grumblings, but they do not require a reply any more than the previous lot. Your questions about the brutes are not appropriate in this context since the mind, when engaged in private meditation, can experience its own thinking but cannot have any experience to establish whether the brutes think or not; it must tackle this question later on, by an *a*

posteriori investigation of their behaviour. I will not pause to disown the foolish claims which you then put into my mouth; I am content to have pointed out once that you do not report everything I say accurately. In fact I did frequently provide a criterion to establish that the mind is different from the body, namely that the whole nature of the mind consists in the fact that it thinks, while the whole nature of the body consists in its being an extended thing; and there is absolutely nothing in common between thought and extension. I also distinctly showed on many occasions that the mind can operate independently of the brain; for the brain cannot in any way be employed in pure understanding, but only in imagining or perceiving by the senses. Admittedly, when imagination or sensation is strongly active (as occurs when the brain is in a disturbed state), it is not easy for the mind to have leisure for understanding other things. But when the imagination is less intense, we often have the experience of understanding something quite apart from the imagination. When, for example, we are asleep and are aware that we are dreaming, we need imagination in order to dream, but to be aware that we are dreaming we need only the intellect.

8. Here, as frequently elsewhere, you merely show that you do not have an adequate understanding of what you are trying to criticize. I did not abstract the concept of the wax from the concept of its accidents. Rather, I wanted to show how the substance of the wax is revealed by means of its accidents, and how a reflective and distinct perception of it (the sort of perception which you, O Flesh, seem never to have had) differs from the ordinary confused perception. I do not see what argument you are relying on when you lay it down as certain that a dog makes discriminating judgements in the same way as we do. Seeing that a dog is made of flesh you perhaps think that everything which is in you also exists in the dog. But I observe no mind at all in the dog, and hence believe there is nothing to be found in a dog that resembles the things I recognize in a mind.

9. I am surprised that you should say here that all my considerations about the wax demonstrate that I distinctly know that I exist, but not that I know what I am or what my nature is; for one thing cannot be demonstrated without the other. Nor do I see what more you expect here, unless it is to be told what colour or smell or taste the human mind has, or the proportions of salt, sulphur and mercury from which it is compounded. You want us, you say, to conduct 'a kind of chemical investigation' of the mind, as we would of wine. This is indeed worthy of you, O Flesh, and of all those who have only a very confused conception of everything, and so do not know the proper questions to ask about each thing. But as for me, I have never thought that anything more is required to reveal a substance than its various attributes; thus the more attributes of a given substance we know, the more perfectly we understand its nature. Now we can distinguish many different attributes in the wax: one, that it is white; two, that it is hard; three, that it can be melted; and so on. And there are correspondingly many attributes in the mind: one, that it has the power of knowing the whiteness of the wax; two, that it has the power of knowing its hardness; three, that it has the power of knowing that it can lose its hardness (i.e. melt), and so on. (Someone can have knowledge of the hardness without thereby having knowledge of the whiteness, e.g. a man born blind; and so on in other cases.) The clear inference from this is that we know more attributes in the case of our mind than we do in the case of anything else. For no matter how many attributes we recognize in any given thing, we can always list a corresponding number of attributes in the mind which it has in virtue of knowing the attributes of the thing; and hence the nature of the mind is the one we know best of all. Finally, in this section, you make an incidental criticism as follows: although I have not admitted that I have anything apart from a mind, I nevertheless speak of the wax which I see and touch, and yet this is impossible without eyes and hands. But you should have noticed that I had carefully pointed out that I was not here dealing with sight and touch, which occur by means of bodily organs, but was concerned solely with the thought of seeing and touching, which, as we experience every day in our dreams, does not require these organs. Of course you cannot have failed to notice this—your purpose was simply to show us what absurd and unjust quibbles can be thought up by those who are more anxious to attack a position than to understand it.

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Your friends note six objections against the Second Meditation. The first is this. The author of the *Counter-Objections* [Gassendi] claims that when I say 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' I presuppose the major premiss 'Whatever thinks exists', and hence I have already adopted a preconceived opinion. Here he once more misuses the term 'preconceived opinion'. For although we can apply the term to the proposition in question when it is put forward without attention and believed to be true only because we remember that we judged it to be true previously, we cannot say that it is always a preconceived opinion. For when we examine it, it appears so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it, even though this may be the first time in our life that we have thought of it - in which case we would have no preconceived opinion about it. But the most important mistake our critic makes here is the supposition that knowledge of particular propositions must always be deduced from universal ones, following the same order as that of a syllogism in Dialectic. Here he shows how little he knows of the way in which we should search for the truth. It is certain that if we are to discover the truth we must always begin with particular notions in order to arrive at general ones later on (though we may also reverse the order and deduce other particular truths once we have discovered general ones). Thus when we teach a child the elements of geometry we will not be able to get him to understand the general proposition 'When equal quantities are taken from equal amounts the remaining amounts will be equal', or 'The whole is greater than its parts? unless we show him examples in particular cases. It is by failing to take heed of this that our author has gone astray and produced all the invalid arguments with which he has stuffed his book. He has simply made up false major premisses whenever the mood takes him, as though I had used them to deduce the truths which I expounded.

The second objection which your friends note is that in order to know that I am thinking I must know what thought is; and yet, they say, I do not know this at all, since I have denied everything. But I have denied only preconceived opinions - not notions like these, which are known without any affirmation or denial.

The third objection is that thought cannot exist without an object, e.g. the body. Here we must avoid the ambiguity in the word 'thought', which can be taken to apply both to the thing which thinks and also to the activity performed

by that thing. Now I deny that the thing which thinks needs any object apart from itself in order to exercise its activity (though it may also extend the scope of this activity to material things when it examines them).

The fourth objection is that even though I have a thought of myself, I do not know if this thought is a corporeal action, or a self-moving atom, rather than an immaterial substance. Here the ambiguity in the word 'thought' is repeated, and apart from this I can see only a question without any basis to it, rather like the following: 'You judge that you are a man because you perceive in yourself all the things which lead you to give the name "men" to those who possess them; but how do you know that you are not an elephant rather than a man, for various other reasons which you do not perceive?' Similarly, after the substance which thinks has judged that it is intellectual, because it has noticed in itself all the properties of intellectual substances, and has not been able to detect any properties belonging to a body, the objector still continues to ask how it knows that it is not a body rather than an immaterial substance.

The fifth and sixth objections are similar to this. The fifth is that even if I find no extension in my thought, it does not follow that my thought is not extended, because my thought is not the standard which determines the truth of things. The sixth is that although my thought finds a distinction between thought and body, it is possible that this distinction may be false. Now we must be particularly careful to notice the ambiguity in the phrase 'my thought is not the standard which determines the truth of things'. If the claim is that my thought must not be the standard for others, obliging them to believe something just because I think it is true, then I entirely agree. But this is quite irrelevant in the present context, since I never wanted to force anyone to follow my authority. On the contrary, I pointed out in several places that one should allow oneself to be convinced only by quite evident reasoning. Again, if we take the word 'thought' to apply indifferently to any kind of operation of the soul, it is certain that we can have many thoughts which do not provide any basis for inferring the truth about things which are outside us. But this is irrelevant in the present context, where we are dealing only with the thoughts that are clear and distinct perceptions and the judgements which each of us must make within himself as a result of these perceptions. This is why I say that, in the sense in which the phrase should be understood here, the thought of each person— i.e. the perception or knowledge which he has of something—should be for him the 'standard which determines the truth of the thing'; in other words, all the judgements he makes about this thing must conform to his perception if they are to be correct. Even with respect to the truths of faith, we should perceive some reason which convinces us that they have been revealed by God, before deciding to believe them. Although ignorant people would do well to follow the judgement of the more competent on matters which are difficult to know, it is still necessary that it be their own perception which tells them they are ignorant; they must also perceive that those whose judgement they want to follow are not as ignorant as they are, or else they would be wrong to follow them and would be behaving more like automatons or beasts than men. Thus the most absurd and grotesque mistake that a philosopher can make is to want to make judgements which do not correspond to his perception of things. Yet I fail to see how our author could be cleared of having committed this blunder in most of his objections. For he is not prepared to allow each person to abide by his own perception, but claims that we should give more credence to the opinions or fantasies which he pleases to set before us, despite our complete lack of any proper perception of them.

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For the rest, since I have my pen in my hand, I will go on to point out two ambiguities which I have found in this book of *Counter-Objections,* because they are the kinds of ambiguity which, in my view, could most easily trap the less attentive reader. My aim in dealing with them is to show you that if I had found any other point that I believed to deserve an answer, I would not have neglected to deal with it.

The first ambiguity is on page 63, and arises as follows. I said in one place that while the soul is in doubt about the existence of all material things, it knows itself *praecise tantum*—'in the strict sense only'—as an immaterial substance; and seven or eight lines further down I showed that by the words 'in the strict sense only' I do not at all mean an entire exclusion or negation, but only an abstraction from material things; for I said that in spite of this we are not sure that there is nothing corporeal in the soul, even though we do not recognize anything corporeal in it. Here my critic is so unfair to me as to try to persuade the reader that when I used the phrase 'in the strict sense only' I meant to exclude the body, and that I thus contradicted myself afterwards when I said that I did not mean to exclude it. He subsequently accuses me of committing a logical blunder in assuming something in the Sixth Meditation which I had not previously proved. But I will offer no reply to this, since it is easy to recognize the falsity of this accusation, which occurs all too often throughout his book. This sort of thing could make me suspect that the author was not acting in good faith did I not know his nature and believe that he was in fact the first to be trapped by such a false supposition.

The other ambiguity is on page 84, where he wants *distinguishing* and *abstracting* to be the same thing. But there is a great difference between the two. In *distinguishing* a substance from its accidents we must consider both the one and the other, and this is very useful in helping us to gain knowledge of a substance. But if we merely separate the substance from its accidents by *abstraction,* i.e. consider it all on its own without thinking of the accidents, this prevents our being able to gain sound knowledge of it, because it is by means of the accidents that the nature of the substance is revealed.