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René Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy

With Selections from the Objections and Replies

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Book DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139042895>

Online ISBN: 9781139042895

Hardback ISBN: 9780521191388

Chapter

Meditatio Secunda: De natura mentis humanae: quod ipsa sit notior quam
corpus pp. 32-47

Chapter DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139042895.005>

Cambridge University Press

*De natura mentis humanae: quod ipsa sit
notior quam corpus*

In tantas dubitationes hesternae meditatione conjectus sum, ut nequeam amplius earum oblivisci, nec videam tamen qua ratione
 24 solvendae sint; sed, tanquam in profundum gurgitem ex improvise delapsus, ita turbatus sum, ut nec possim in imo pedem figere, nec enatare ad summum. Enitar tamen et tentabo rursus eandem viam quam heri fueram ingressus, removendo scilicet illud omne quod vel minimum dubitationis admittit, nihilo secius quam si omnino falsum esse comperissem; pergamque porro donec aliquid certi, vel, si nihil aliud, saltem hoc ipsum pro certo, nihil esse certi, cognoscam. Nihil nisi punctum petebat Archimedes, quod esset firmum et immobile, ut integram terram loco dimoveret; magna quoque speranda sunt, si vel minimum quid invenero quod certum sit et inconcussum.

Suppono igitur omnia quae video falsa esse; credo nihil unquam extitisse eorum quae mendax memoria repraesentat; nullos plane habeo sensus; corpus, figura, extensio, motus, locusque sunt chimerae. Quid igitur erit verum? Fortassis hoc unum, nihil esse certi.

Sed unde scio nihil esse diversum ab iis omnibus quae jam jam recensui, de quo ne minima quidem occasio sit dubitandi? Nunquid est aliquis Deus, vel quocunque nomine illum vocem, qui mihi has ipsas cogitationes immittit? Quare vero hoc putem, cum forsitan ipsemet illarum author esse possim? Nunquid ergo saltem ego aliquid sum? Sed jam negavi me habere ullos sensus, et ullum
 25 corpus. Haereo tamen; nam quid inde? Sumne ita corpori sensibusque alligatus, ut sine illis esse non possim? Sed mihi persuasi nihil plane esse in mundo, nullum coelum, nullam terram, nullas mentes, nulla corpora; nonne igitur etiam me non esse? Imo

SECOND MEDITATION

The nature of the human mind, and how it is better known than the body

So serious are the doubts into which I have been thrown as a result of yesterday's meditation that I can neither put them out of my mind nor see any way of resolving them. It feels as if I have fallen unexpectedly into a deep whirlpool which tumbles me around so that I can neither stand on the bottom nor swim up to the top. Nevertheless I will make an effort and once more attempt the same path which I started on yesterday. Anything which admits of the slightest doubt I will set aside just as if I had found it to be wholly false; and I will proceed in this way until I recognize something certain, or, if nothing else, until I at least recognize for certain that there is no certainty. Archimedes used to demand just one firm and immovable point in order to shift the entire earth; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one thing, however slight, that is certain and unshakeable. 24

I will suppose, then, that everything I see is spurious. I will believe that my memory tells me lies, and that none of the things that it reports ever happened. I have no senses. Body, shape, extension, movement and place are chimeras. So what remains true? Perhaps just the one fact that nothing is certain.

Yet apart from everything I have just listed, how do I know that there is not something else which does not allow even the slightest occasion for doubt? Is there not a God, or whatever I may call him, who puts into me¹ the thoughts I am now having? But why do I think this, since I myself may perhaps be the author of these thoughts? In that case am not I, at least, something? But I have just said that I have no senses and no body. This is the sticking point: what follows from this? Am I not so bound up with a body and with senses that I cannot exist without them? But I have convinced myself that there is absolutely nothing in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Does it now follow that I too do not exist? No: 25

¹ '... puts into my mind' (French version).

certe ego eram, si quid mihi persuasi. Sed est deceptor nescio quis, summe potens, summe callidus, qui de industria me semper fallit. Haud dubie igitur ego etiam sum, si me fallit; et fallat quantum potest, nunquam tamen efficiet, ut nihil sim quamdiu me aliquid esse cogitabo. Adeo ut, omnibus satis superque pensatis, denique statuendum sit hoc pronuntiatum, *Ego sum, ego existo*, quoties a me profertur, vel mente concipitur, necessario esse verum.

Nondum vero satis intelligo, quisnam sim ego ille, qui jam necessario sum; deincepsque cavendum est ne forte quid aliud imprudenter assumam in locum mei, sicque aberrem etiam in ea cognitione, quam omnium certissimam evidentissimamque esse contendo. Quare jam denuo meditor quidnam me olim esse crediderim, priusquam in has cogitationes incidissem; ex quo deinde subducam quidquid allatis rationibus vel minimum potuit infirmari, ut ita tandem praecise remaneat illud tantum quod certum est et inconcussum.

Quidnam igitur antehac me esse putavi? Hominem scilicet. Sed quid est homo? Dicamne animal rationale? Non, quia postea quaerendum foret quidnam animal sit, et quid rationale, atque ita ex una quaestione in plures difficilioresque delaberer; nec jam mihi tantum otii est, ut illo velim inter istiusmodi subtilitates abuti. Sed hic
 26 potius attendam, quid sponte et natura duce cogitationi meae antehac occurrebat, quoties quid essem considerabam. Nempe occurrebat primo, me habere vultum, manus, brachia, totamque hanc membrorum machinam, qualis etiam in cadavere cernitur, et quam corporis nomine designabam. Occurrebat praeterea me nutriri, incedere, sentire, et cogitare: quas quidem actiones ad animam referebam. Sed quid esset haec anima, vel non advertebam, vel exiguum nescio quid imaginabar, instar venti, vel ignis, vel aetheris, quod crassioribus mei partibus esset infusum. De corpore vero ne dubitabam quidem, sed distincte me nosse arbitrabar ejus naturam, quam si forte, qualem mente concipiebam, describere tentassem, sic explicuissem: per corpus intelligo illud omne quod aptum est figura aliqua terminari, loco circumscribi, spatium sic replere, ut ex eo aliud omne corpus excludat; tactu, visu, auditu, gustu, vel odoratu percipi, necnon moveri pluribus modis, non quidem a seipso, sed ab alio

if I convinced myself of something¹ then I certainly existed. 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; and let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. So after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.

But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this 'I' is, that now necessarily exists. So I must be on my guard against carelessly taking something else to be this 'I', and so making a mistake in the very item of knowledge that I maintain is the most certain and evident of all. I will therefore go back and meditate on what I originally believed myself to be, before I embarked on this present train of thought. I will then subtract anything capable of being weakened, even minimally, by the arguments now introduced, so that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable.

What then did I formerly think I was? A man. But what is a man? Shall I say 'a rational animal'? No; for then I should have to inquire what an animal is, what rationality is, and in this way one question would lead me down the slope to other harder ones, and I do not now have the time to waste on subtleties of this kind. Instead I propose to concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used 26 to consider what I was. Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the body. The next thought was that I was nourished, that I moved about, and that I engaged in sense-perception and thinking; and these actions I attributed to the soul. But as to the nature of this soul, either I did not think about this or else I imagined it to be something tenuous, like a wind or fire or ether, which permeated my more solid parts. As to the body, however, I had no doubts about it, but thought I knew its nature distinctly. If I had tried to describe the mental conception I had of it, I would have expressed it as follows: by a body I understand whatever has a determinable shape and a definable location and can occupy a space in such a way as to exclude any other body; it can be perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell, and can be moved in various ways, not by itself but by whatever else comes into contact with it. For, according to my judgement, the power of self-movement, like the

¹ '... or thought anything at all' (French version).

quopiam a quo tangatur: namque habere vim seipsum movendi, item sentiendi, vel cogitandi, nullo pacto ad naturam corporis pertinere judicabam; quinimo mirabar potius tales facultates in quibusdam corporibus reperiri.

27 Quid autem nunc, ubi suppono deceptorem aliquem potentissimum, et, si fas est dicere, malignum, data opera in omnibus, quantum potuit, me delusisse? Possumne affirmare me habere vel minimum quid ex iis omnibus, quae jam dixi ad naturam corporis pertinere? Attendo, cogito, revolvo, nihil occurrit; fatigor eadem frustra repetere. Quid vero ex iis quae animae tribuebam? Nutriri vel incedere? Quandoquidem jam corpus non habeo, haec quoque nihil sunt nisi figmenta. Sentire? Nempe etiam hoc non fit sine corpore, et permulta sentire visus sum in somnis quae deinde animadverti me non sensisse. Cogitare? Hic invenio: cogitatio est; haec sola a me divelli nequit. Ego sum, ego existo; certum est. Quandiu autem? Nempe quandiu cogito; nam forte etiam fieri posset, si cessarem ab omni cogitatione, ut illico totus esse desinerem. Nihil nunc admitto nisi quod necessario sit verum; sum igitur praecise tantum res cogitans, id est, mens, sive animus, sive intellectus, sive ratio, voces mihi prius significationis ignotae. Sum autem res vera, et vere existens; sed qualis res? Dixi, cogitans.

Quid praeterea? Imaginabor: non sum compages illa membrorum, quae corpus humanum appellatur; non sum etiam tenuis aliquis aër istis membris infusus, non ventus, non ignis, non vapor, non halitus, non quidquid mihi fingo: supposui enim ista nihil esse. Maneat positio: nihilominus tamen ego aliquid sum. Fortassis vero contingit, ut haec ipsa, quae suppono nihil esse, quia mihi sunt ignota, tamen in rei veritate non differant ab eo me quem novi? Nescio, de hac re jam non disputo; de iis tantum quae mihi nota sunt,

power of sensation or of thought, was quite foreign to the nature of a body; indeed, it was a source of wonder to me that certain bodies were found to contain faculties of this kind.

But what shall I now say that I am, when I am supposing that there is some supremely powerful and, if it is permissible to say so, malicious deceiver, who is deliberately trying to trick me in every way he can? Can I now assert that I possess even the most insignificant of all the attributes which I have just said belong to the nature of a body? I scrutinize them, 27 think about them, go over them again, but nothing suggests itself; it is tiresome and pointless to go through the list once more. But what about the attributes I assigned to the soul? Nutrition or movement? Since now I do not have a body, these are mere fabrications. Sense-perception? This surely does not occur without a body, and besides, when asleep I have appeared to perceive through the senses many things which I afterwards realized I did not perceive through the senses at all. Thinking? At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist. At present I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks;¹ that is, I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason – words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now. But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said – a thinking thing.

What else am I? I will use my imagination.² I am not that structure of limbs which is called a human body. I am not even 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;³ for all that I am still something. And 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, since I can make judgements only about things which

¹ The word ‘only’ is most naturally taken as going with ‘a thing that thinks’, and this interpretation is followed in the French version. When discussing this passage with Gassendi, however, Descartes suggests that he meant the ‘only’ to govern ‘in the strict sense’; cf. AT IXA 215: CSM II 276.

² ‘... to see if I am not something more’ (added in French version).

³ Lat. *maneat* (‘let it stand’), first edition. The second edition has the indicative *manet*: ‘The proposition still stands, viz. that I am nonetheless something.’ The French version reads: ‘without changing this supposition, I find that I am still certain that I am something’.

judicium ferre possum. Novi me existere; quaero quis sim ego ille quem novi. Certissimum est hujus sic praecise sumpti notitiam non pendere
 28 ab iis quae existere nondum novi; non igitur ab iis ullis, quae imaginatione effingo. Atque hoc verbum, *effingo*, admonet me erroris mei: nam fingerem revera, si quid me esse imaginarer, quia nihil aliud est imaginari quam rei corporeae figuram, seu imaginem, contemplari. Jam autem certo scio me esse, simulque fieri posse ut omnes istae imagines, et generaliter quaecunque ad corporis naturam referuntur, nihil sint praeter insomnia. Quibus animadversis, non minus ineptire videor, dicendo: imaginabor, ut distinctius agnoscam quisnam sim, quam si dicerem: jam quidem sum expectatus, videoque nonnihil veri, sed quia nondum video satis evidentiter, data opera obdormiam, ut hoc ipsum mihi somnia verius evidentiusque repraesentent. Itaque cognosco nihil eorum quae possum imaginationis ope comprehendere, ad hanc quam de me habeo notitiam pertinere, mentemque ab illis diligentissime esse avocandam, ut suam ipsa naturam quam distinctissime percipiat.

Sed quid igitur sum? Res cogitans. Quid est hoc? Nempe dubitans, intelligens, affirmans, negans, volens, nolens, imaginans quoque, et sentiens.

Non pauca sane haec sunt, si cuncta ad me pertineant. Sed quidni pertinerent? Nonne ego ipse sum qui jam dubito fere de omnibus, qui nonnihil tamen intelligo, qui hoc unum verum esse affirmo, nego caetera, cupio plura nosse, nolo decipi, multa vel invitum imaginor, multa etiam tanquam a sensibus venientia animadverto?
 29 Quid est horum, quamvis semper dormiam, quamvis etiam is qui me creavit, quantum in se est, me deludat, quod non aequè verum sit ac me esse? Quid est quod a mea cogitatione distinguatur? Quid est quod a me ipso separatum dici possit? Nam quod ego sim qui dubitem, qui intelligam, qui velim, tam manifestum est, ut nihil occurrat per quod evidentius explicetur. Sed vero etiam ego idem sum qui imaginor; nam quamvis forte, ut supposui, nulla prorsus res imaginata vera sit, vis tamen ipsa imaginandi revera existit, et cogitationis meae partem facit. Idem denique ego sum qui sentio, sive qui res corporeas tanquam per sensus animadverto: videlicet

are known to me. 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; so it cannot depend on any of the things 28 which I invent in my imagination. And this very word 'invent' shows me my mistake. It would indeed be a case of fictitious invention if I used my imagination to establish that I was something or other; for imagining is simply contemplating the shape or image of a corporeal thing. Yet now I know for certain both that I exist and at the same time that all such images, and, in general, everything relating to the nature of body, could be mere dreams <and chimeras>. Once this point has been grasped, to say 'I will use my imagination to get to know more distinctly what I am' would seem to be as silly as saying 'I am now awake, and see some truth; but since my vision is not yet clear enough, I will deliberately fall asleep so that my dreams may provide a truer and clearer representation.' I thus realize that none of the things that the imagination enables me to grasp is at all relevant to this knowledge of myself which I possess, and that the mind must therefore be most carefully diverted from such things¹ if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible.

But what then am I? 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 considerable list, if everything on it belongs to me. But does it? Is it not one and the same 'I' who is now doubting almost everything, who nonetheless understands some things, who affirms that this one thing is true, denies everything else, desires to know more, is unwilling to be deceived, imagines many things even involuntarily, and is aware of many things which apparently come from the senses? Are not all these things just as true as the fact that I exist, even if I am asleep all the time, and 29 even if he who created me is doing all he can to deceive me? Which of all these activities is distinct from my thinking? Which of them can be said to be separate from myself? The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer. But it is also the case that the 'I' who imagines is the same 'I'. For even if, as I have supposed, none of the objects of imagination are real, the power of imagination is something which really exists and is part of my thinking. Lastly, it is also the same 'I' who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the senses. For example, I am

¹ '... from this manner of conceiving things' (French version).

jam lucem video, strepitum audio, calorem sentio. Falsa haec sunt, dormio enim. At certe videre videor, audire, calescere. Hoc falsum esse non potest; hoc est proprie quod in me sentire appellatur; atque hoc praecise sic sumptum nihil aliud est quam cogitare.

Ex quibus equidem aliquanto melius incipio nosse quisnam sim; sed adhuc tamen videtur, nec possum abstinere quin putem, res corporeas, quarum imagines cogitatione formantur, et quas ipsi sensus explorant, multo distinctius agnosci quam istud nescio quid mei, quod sub imaginationem non venit: quanquam profecto sit mirum, res quas animadverto esse dubias, ignotas, a me alienas, distinctius quam quod verum est, quod cognitum, quam denique me ipsum, a me comprehendi. Sed video quid sit: gaudet aberrare mens mea, necdum se patitur intra veritatis limites cohiberi.

30 Esto igitur, et adhuc semel laxissimas habenas ei permittamus, ut, illis paulo post opportune reductis, facilius se regi patiatur.

Consideremus res illas quae vulgo putantur omnium distinctissime comprehendi: corpora scilicet, quae tangimus, quae videmus; non quidem corpora in communi, generales enim istae perceptiones aliquanto magis confusae esse solent, sed unum in particulari. Sumamus, exempli causa, hanc ceram: nuperrime ex favis fuit educta; nondum amisit omnem saporem sui mellis; nonnihil retinet odoris florum ex quibus collecta est; ejus color, figura, magnitudo, manifesta sunt; dura est, frigida est, facile tangitur, ac, si articulo ferias, emittet sonum; omnia denique illi adsunt quae requiri videntur, ut corpus aliquod possit quam distinctissime cognosci. Sed ecce, dum loquor, igni admovetur: saporis reliquiae purgantur, odor expirat, color mutatur, figura tollitur, crescit magnitudo, fit liquida, fit calida, vix tangi potest, nec jam, si pulses, emittet sonum. Remanetne adhuc eadem cera? Remanere fatendum est; nemo negat, nemo aliter putat. Quid erat igitur in ea quod tam distincte comprehendebatur? Certe nihil eorum quae sensibus attingebam; nam quaecunque sub gustum, vel odoratum, vel visum, vel tactum, vel auditum veniebant, mutata jam sunt: remanet cera.

Fortassis illud erat quod nunc cogito: nempe ceram ipsam non quidem fuisse istam dulcedinem mellis, nec florum fragrantiam, nec istam albedinem, nec figuram, nec sonum, sed corpus quod mihi apparebat paulo ante modis istis conspicuum, nunc diversis. Quid est autem hoc praecise quod sic imaginor?

now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. But I am asleep, so all this is false. Yet I certainly *seem* to see, to hear, and to be warmed. This cannot be false; what is called 'having a sensory perception' is strictly just this, and in this restricted sense of the term it is simply thinking.

From all this I am beginning to have a rather better understanding of what I am. But it still appears – and I cannot stop thinking this – that the corporeal things of which images are formed in my thought, and which the senses investigate, are known with much more distinctness than this puzzling 'I' which cannot be pictured in the imagination. And yet it is surely surprising that I should have a more distinct grasp of things which I realize are doubtful, unknown and foreign to me, than I have of that which is true and known – my own self. But I see what it is: my mind enjoys wandering off and will not yet submit to being restrained within the bounds of truth. Very well then; just this once let us give it a completely 30 free rein, so that after a while, when it is time to tighten the reins, it may more readily submit to being curbed.

Let us consider the things which people commonly think they understand most distinctly of all; that is, the bodies which we touch and see. I do not mean bodies in general – for general perceptions are apt to be somewhat more confused – but one particular body. Let us take, for example, this piece of wax. It has just been taken from the honeycomb; it has not yet quite lost the taste of the honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers from which it was gathered; its colour, shape and size are plain to see; it is hard, cold and can be handled without difficulty; if you rap it with your knuckle it makes a sound. In short, it has everything which appears necessary to enable a body to be known as distinctly as possible. But even as I speak, I put the wax by the fire, and look: the residual taste is eliminated, the smell goes away, the colour changes, the shape is lost, the size increases; it becomes liquid and hot; you can hardly touch it, and if you strike it, it no longer makes a sound. But does the same wax remain? It must be admitted that it does; no one denies it, no one thinks otherwise. So what was it in the wax that I understood with such distinctness? Evidently none of the features which I arrived at by means of the senses; for whatever came under taste, smell, sight, touch or hearing has now altered – yet the wax remains.

Perhaps the answer lies in the thought which now comes to my mind; namely, the wax was not after all the sweetness of the honey, or the fragrance of the flowers, or the whiteness, or the shape, or the sound, but was rather a body which presented itself to me in these various forms a little while ago, but which now exhibits different ones. But what exactly is it that I am now

31 Attendamus, et, remotis iis quae ad ceram non pertinent, videamus quid supersit: nempe nihil aliud quam extensum quid, flexibile, mutabile. Quid vero est hoc flexibile, mutabile? An quod imaginor, hanc ceram ex figura rotunda in quadratam, vel ex hac in triangularem verti posse? Nullo modo; nam innumerabilium ejusmodi mutationum capacem eam esse comprehendo, nec possum tamen innumerabiles imaginando percurrere; nec igitur comprehensio haec ab imaginandi facultate perficitur. Quid extensum? Nunquid etiam ipsa ejus extensio est ignota? Nam in cera liquescente fit major, major in ferventi, majorque rursus, si calor augeatur; nec recte judicarem quid sit cera, nisi putarem hanc etiam plures secundum extensionem varietates admittere, quam fuerim unquam imaginando complexus. Superest igitur ut concedam, me nequidem imaginari quid sit haec cera, sed sola mente percipere; dico hanc in particulari, de cera enim in communi clarius est. Quenam vero est haec cera, quae non nisi mente percipitur? Nempe eadem quam video, quam tango, quam imaginor, eadem denique quam ab initio esse arbitrabar. Atqui, quod notandum est, ejus perceptio non visio, non tactio, non imaginatio est, nec unquam fuit, quamvis prius ita videretur, sed solius mentis inspectio, quae vel imperfecta esse potest et confusa, ut prius erat, vel clara et distincta, ut nunc est, prout minus vel magis ad illa ex quibus constat attendo.

Miror vero interim quam prona sit mea mens in errores;
 32 nam quamvis haec apud me tacitus et sine voce considerem, haereo tamen in verbis ipsis, et fere decipior ab ipso usu loquendi. Dicimus enim nos videre ceram ipsammet, si adsit, non ex colore vel figura eam adesse judicare. Unde concluderem statim: ceram ergo visione oculi, non solius mentis inspectione, cognosci; nisi jam forte respexissem ex fenestra homines in platea transeuntes, quos etiam ipsos non minus usitate quam ceram dico me videre. Quid autem video praeter pileos et vestes, sub quibus latere possent automata? Sed judico homines esse.

imagining? Let us concentrate, take away everything which does not belong 31
to the wax, and see what is left: merely something extended, flexible and
changeable. But what is meant here by 'flexible' and 'changeable'? Is it what
I picture in my imagination: that this piece of wax is capable of changing
from a round shape to a square shape, or from a square shape to a triangular
shape? Not at all; for I can grasp that the wax is capable of countless changes
of this kind, yet I am unable to run through this immeasurable number
of changes in my imagination, from which it follows that it is not the
faculty of imagination that gives me my grasp of the wax as flexible and
changeable. And what is meant by 'extended'? Is the extension of the wax
also unknown? For it increases if the wax melts, increases again if it boils,
and is greater still if the heat is increased. I would not be making a correct
judgement about the nature of wax unless I believed it capable of being
extended in many more different ways than I will ever encompass in my
imagination. I must therefore admit that the nature of this piece of wax is
in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone.
(I am speaking of this particular piece of wax; the point is even clearer
with regard to wax in general.) But what is this wax which is perceived by
the mind alone?¹ It is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch,
which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax which I thought
it to be from the start. And yet, and here is the point, the perception I have
of it² is a case not of vision or touch or imagination – nor has it ever been,
despite previous appearances – but of purely mental scrutiny; and this can
be imperfect and confused, as it was before, or clear and distinct as it is
now, depending on how carefully I concentrate on what the wax consists
in.

But as I reach this conclusion I am amazed at how <weak and> prone
to error my mind is. For although I am thinking about these matters within
myself, silently and without speaking, nonetheless the actual words bring 32
me up short, and I am almost tricked by ordinary ways of talking. We say
that we see the wax itself, if it is there before us, not that we judge it to be
there from its colour or shape; and this might lead me to conclude without
more ado that knowledge of the wax comes from what the eye sees, and not
from the scrutiny of the mind alone. But then if I look out of the window
and see men crossing the square, as I just happen to have done, I normally
say that I see the men themselves, just as I say that I see the wax. Yet do I
see any more than hats and coats which could conceal automatons? I *judge*

¹ '... which can be conceived only by the understanding or the mind' (French version).

² '... or rather the act whereby it is perceived' (added in French version).

Atque ita id quod putabam me videre oculis, sola judicandi facultate, quae in mente mea est, comprehendo.

Sed pudeat supra vulgus sapere cupientem, ex formis loquendi quas vulgus invenit dubitationem quaesivisse; pergamusque deinceps, attendendo utrum ego perfectius evidentiusque percipiebam quid esset cera, cum primum aspexi, credidique me illam ipso sensu externo, vel saltem sensu communi, ut vocant, id est potentia imaginatrice, cognoscere? an vero potius nunc, postquam diligentius investigavi tum quid ea sit, tum quomodo cognoscatur? Certe hac de re dubitare esset ineptum; nam quid fuit in prima perceptione distinctum? Quid quod non a quovis animali haberi posse videretur? At vero cum ceram ab externis formis distinguo, et tanquam vestibis detractis nudam considero, sic illam revera, quamvis adhuc error in iudicio meo esse possit, non possum tamen sine humana mente percipere.

- 33 Quid autem dicam de hac ipsa mente, sive de me ipso? Nihil dum enim aliud admitto in me esse praeter mentem. Quid, inquam, ego qui hanc ceram videor tam distincte percipere? Nunquid me ipsum non tantum multo verius, multo certius, sed etiam multo distinctius evidentiusque, cognosco? Nam, si iudico ceram existere, ex eo quod hanc videam, certe multo evidentius efficitur me ipsum etiam existere, ex eo ipso quod hanc videam. Fieri enim potest ut hoc quod video non vere sit cera; fieri potest ut ne quidem oculos habeam, quibus quidquam videatur; sed fieri plane non potest, cum videam, sive (quod jam non distinguo) cum cogitem me videre, ut ego ipse cogitans non aliquid sim. Simili ratione, si iudico ceram esse, ex eo quod hanc tangam, idem rursus efficitur, videlicet me esse. Si ex eo quod imaginer, vel quavis alia ex causa, idem plane. Sed et hoc ipsum quod de cera animadverto, ad reliqua omnia, quae sunt extra me posita, licet applicare. Porro autem, si magis distincta visa sit cerae perceptio, postquam mihi, non ex solo visu vel tactu, sed pluribus ex causis innotuit, quanto distinctius me ipsum a me nunc cognosci fatendum est, quandoquidem nullae rationes vel ad

that they are men. And so something which I thought I was seeing with my eyes is in fact grasped solely by the faculty of judgement which is in my mind.

However, one who wants to achieve knowledge above the ordinary level should feel ashamed at having taken ordinary ways of talking as a basis for doubt. So let us proceed, and consider on which occasion my perception of the nature of the wax was more perfect and evident. Was it when I first looked at it, and believed I knew it by my external senses, or at least by what they call the 'common' sense¹ – that is, the power of imagination? Or is my knowledge more perfect now, after a more careful investigation of the nature of the wax and of the means by which it is known? Any doubt on this issue would clearly be foolish; for what distinctness was there in my earlier perception? Was there anything in it which an animal could not possess? But when I distinguish the wax from its outward forms – take the clothes off, as it were, and consider it naked – then although my judgement may still contain errors, at least my perception now requires a human mind.

But what am I to say about this mind, or about myself? (So far, remember, 33 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, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also 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. Moreover, if my perception of the wax seemed more distinct² after it was established not just by sight or touch but by many other considerations, it must be admitted that I now know myself even more distinctly. This is because every consideration whatsoever which contributes to my perception of the

¹ See note p. 121 below.

² The French version has 'more clear and distinct' and, at the end of this sentence, 'more evidently, distinctly and clearly'.

cerae, vel ad cuiuspiam alterius corporis perceptionem possint juvare, quin eadem omnes mentis meae naturam melius probent! Sed et alia insuper tam multa sunt in ipsa mente, ex quibus ejus notitia distinctior reddi potest, ut ea, quae ex corpore ad illam emanant, vix numeranda videantur.

- 34 Atque ecce tandem sponte sum reversus eo quo volebam; nam cum mihi nunc notum sit ipsamet corpora, non proprie a sensibus, vel ab imaginandi facultate, sed a solo intellectu percipi, nec ex eo percipi quod tangantur aut videantur, sed tantum ex eo quod intelligantur aperte cognosco nihil facilius aut evidentius mea mente posse a me percipi. Sed quia tam cito deponi veteris opinionis consuetudo non potest, placet hic consistere, ut altius haec nova cognitio memoriae meae diuturnitate meditationis infigatur.

wax, or of any other body, cannot but establish even more effectively the nature of my own mind. But besides this, there is so much else in the mind itself which can serve to make my knowledge of it more distinct, that it scarcely seems worth going through the contributions made by considering bodily things.

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 34 senses or the faculty of imagination but by the intellect alone, and that this perception derives not from their being touched or seen but from their being understood; and in view of this I know plainly that I can achieve an easier and more evident perception of my own mind than of anything else. But since the habit of holding on to old opinions cannot be set aside so quickly, I should like to stop here and meditate for some time on this new knowledge I have gained, so as to fix it more deeply in my memory.