

believing that I have all these;\* I will obstinately cling to these thoughts, and in this way, if indeed it is not in my power to discover any truth,\* yet certainly to the best of my ability and determination I will take care not to give my assent to anything false, or to allow this deceiver, however powerful and cunning he may be, to impose upon me in any way.

But to carry out this plan requires great effort, and there is a kind of indolence that drags me back to my customary way of life. Just as a prisoner, who was perhaps enjoying an imaginary freedom in his dreams, when he then begins to suspect that he is asleep is afraid of being woken up, and lets himself sink back into his soothing illusions; so I of my own accord slip back into my former opinions, and am scared to awake, for fear that tranquil sleep will give way to laborious hours of waking, which from now on I shall have to spend not in any kind of light, but in the unrelenting darkness of the difficulties just stirred up.

## SECOND MEDITATION

OF THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN MIND; THAT IT IS  
MORE EASILY KNOWN THAN THE BODY

Yesterday's meditation has plunged me into so many doubts that I still cannot put them out of my mind, nor, on the other hand, can I see any way to resolve them; but, as if I had suddenly slipped into a deep whirlpool, I am in such difficulties that I can neither touch 24  
bottom with my foot nor swim back to the surface. Yet I will struggle on, and I will try the same path again as the one I set out on yesterday, that is to say, eliminating everything in which there is the smallest element of doubt, exactly as if I had found it to be false through and through; and I shall pursue my way until I discover something certain; or, failing that, discover that it is certain only that nothing is certain. Archimedes\* claimed, that if only he had a point that was firm and immovable, he would move the whole earth; and great things are likewise to be hoped, if I can find just one little thing that is certain and unshakeable.

I therefore suppose that all I see is false; I believe that none of those things represented by my deceitful memory has ever existed; in fact I have no senses at all; body, shape, extension in space, motion,

and place itself are all illusions. What truth then is left? Perhaps this alone, that nothing is certain.

But how do I know that there is not something different from all those things I have just listed, about which there is not the slightest room for doubt? Is there not, after all, some God, or whatever he should be called, that puts these thoughts into my mind? But why should I think that, when perhaps I myself could be the source of these thoughts? But am I at least not something, after all? But I have already denied that I have any senses or any body. Now I am at a loss,  
 25 because what follows from this? Am I so bound up with my body and senses that I cannot exist without them? But I convinced myself that there was nothing at all in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds, no bodies. Did I therefore not also convince myself that I did not exist either? No: certainly I did exist, if I convinced myself of something.—But there is some deceiver or other, supremely powerful and cunning, who is deliberately deceiving me all the time.—Beyond doubt then, I also exist, if he is deceiving me; and he can deceive me all he likes, but he will never bring it about that I should be nothing as long as I think I am something. So that, having weighed all these considerations sufficiently and more than sufficiently, I can finally decide\* that this proposition, ‘I am, I exist’, whenever it is uttered by me, or conceived in the mind, is necessarily true.

But indeed I do not yet sufficiently understand what in fact this ‘I’ is that now necessarily exists;\* so that from now on I must take care in case I should happen imprudently to take something else to be me that is not me, and thus go astray in the very knowledge [*cognitione*] that I claim to be the most certain and evident of all. Hence I shall now meditate afresh on what I once believed myself to be, before I fell into this train of thought. From this I shall then subtract whatever it has been possible to cast doubt on, even in the slightest degree, by the reasons put forward above, so that in the end there shall remain exactly and only that which is certain and unshakeable.

So what in fact did I think I was before all this? A human being, of course. But what is a human being? Shall I say, ‘a rational animal’?\* No, for then I should have to examine what exactly an animal is, and what ‘rational’ is, and hence, starting with one question, I should stumble into more and more difficult ones. Nor do I now have so much leisure that I can afford to fritter it away on subtleties of this kind. But here I shall rather direct my attention to the thoughts that

spontaneously and by nature's prompting came to my mind before-  
hand, whenever I considered what I was. The first was that I have a  
face, hands, arms, and this whole mechanism of limbs, such as we see  
even in corpses; this I referred to as the body. Next, that I took nour-  
ishment, moved, perceived with my senses, and thought: these  
actions indeed I attributed to the soul.\* What this soul was, however,  
either I never considered, or I imagined it as something very rarefied  
and subtle, like a wind, or fire, or thin air, infused into my coarser  
parts. But about the body itself, on the other hand, I had no doubts,  
but I thought I distinctly knew its nature, which, if I had attempted  
to describe how I conceived it in my mind, I would have explained as  
follows: by body I mean everything that is capable of being bounded  
by some shape, of existing in a definite place, of filling a space in such  
a way as to exclude the presence of any other body within it; of being  
perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste, or smell, and also of being  
moved in various ways, not indeed by itself, but by some other thing  
by which it is touched; for to have the power of moving itself, and  
also of perceiving by the senses or thinking, I judged could in no way  
belong to the nature of body; rather, I was puzzled by the fact that  
such capacities were found in certain bodies. 26

But what about now, when I am supposing that some deceiver,  
who is supremely powerful and, if I may venture to say so, evil, has  
been exerting all his efforts to delude me in every way? Can I affirm  
that I possess the slightest thing of all those that I have just said  
belong to the nature of body? I consider, I think, I go over it all in my  
mind: nothing comes up. It would be a waste of effort to go through  
the list again. But what about the attributes I used to ascribe to the  
soul? What about taking nourishment or moving? But since I now  
have no body, these also are nothing but illusions. What about sense-  
perception? But certainly this does not take place without a body,  
and I have seemed to perceive very many things when asleep that  
I later realized I had not perceived. What about thinking? Here I do  
find something: it is thought; this alone cannot be stripped from me.  
I am, I exist, this is certain. But for how long? Certainly only for as  
long as I am thinking; for perhaps if I were to cease from all thinking  
it might also come to pass that I might immediately cease altogether  
to exist. I am now admitting nothing except what is necessarily true:  
I am therefore, speaking precisely, only a thinking thing, that is,  
a mind, or a soul, or an intellect, or a reason—words the meaning of 27

which was previously unknown to me. I am therefore a true thing, and one that truly exists; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: one that thinks.

What comes next? I will imagine: I am not that framework of limbs that is called a human body; I am not some thin air infused into these limbs, or a wind, or a fire, or a vapour, or a breath, or whatever I can picture myself as: for I have supposed that these things do not exist. But even if I keep to this supposition, nonetheless I am still something.\*—But all the same, it is perhaps still the case that these very things I am supposing to be nothing, are nevertheless not distinct from this ‘me’ that I know\* [*novi*].—Perhaps: I don’t know. But this is not the point at issue at present. I can pass judgement only on those things that are known to me. I know [*novi*] that I exist; I am trying to find out what this ‘I’ is, whom I know [*novi*]. It is absolutely certain that this knowledge [*notitia*], in the precise sense in question  
 28 here, does not depend on things of which I do not yet know [*novi*] whether they exist; and therefore it depends on none of those things I picture in my imagination. This very word ‘imagination’ shows where I am going wrong. For I should certainly be ‘imagining things’ if I *imagined* myself to be anything, since imagining is nothing other than contemplating the shape or image of a bodily thing. Now, however, I know [*scio*] for certain that I exist; and that, at the same time, it could be the case that all these images, and in general everything that pertains to the nature of body, are nothing but illusions. Now this is clear to me, it would seem as foolish of me to say: ‘I shall use my imagination, in order to recognize more clearly what I am’, as it would be to say: ‘Now I am awake, and I see something true; but because I cannot yet see it clearly enough, I shall do my best to get back to sleep again so that my dreams can show it to me more truly and more clearly.’ And so I realize [*cognosco*] that nothing that I can grasp by means of the imagination has to do with this knowledge [*notitiam*] I have of myself, and that I need to withdraw my mind from such things as thoroughly as possible, if it is to perceive its own nature as distinctly as possible.

But what therefore am I? A thinking thing. What is that? I mean a thing that doubts, that understands, that affirms, that denies, that wishes to do this and does not wish to do that, and also that imagines and perceives by the senses.

Well, indeed, there is quite a lot there, if all these things really do belong to me. But why should they not belong to me? Is it not me who currently doubts virtually everything, who nonetheless understands something, who affirms this alone to be true, and denies the rest, who wishes to know more, and wishes not to be deceived, who imagines many things, even against his will, and is aware of many things that appear to come via the senses? Is there any of these things that is not equally true as the fact that I exist—even if I am always asleep, and even if my creator is deceiving me to the best of his ability? Is there any of them that can be distinguished from my thinking? Is there any that can be said to be separate from me? For that it is I that am doubting, understanding, wishing, is so obvious that nothing further is needed in order to explain it more clearly. But indeed it is also this same I that is imagining; for although it might be the case, as I have been supposing, that none of these imagined things is true, yet the actual power of imagining certainly does exist, and is part of my thinking. And finally it is the same I that perceives by means of the senses, or who is aware of corporeal things as if by means of the senses: for example, I am seeing a light, hearing a noise, feeling heat. — But these things are false, since I am asleep! — But certainly I *seem to* be seeing, hearing, getting hot. This cannot be false. This is what is properly meant by speaking of myself as having sensations; and, understood in this precise sense, it is nothing other than thinking.

From all of this, I am indeed beginning to know [*nosse*] rather better what I in fact am. But it still seems (and I cannot help thinking this) that the bodily things of which the images are formed in our thought, and which the senses themselves investigate, are much more distinctly recognized than that part of myself, whatever it is, that cannot be represented by the imagination. Although, indeed, it is strange that things that I realize are doubtful, unknown, unrelated to me should be more distinctly grasped by me than what is true and what is known—more distinctly grasped even than myself. But I see what is happening. My mind enjoys wandering off the track, and will not yet allow itself to be confined within the boundaries of truth. Very well, then: let us, once again, slacken its reins as far as possible— then, before too long, a tug on them at the right moment will bring it more easily back to obedience.\*

Let us consider those things which are commonly thought to be more distinctly grasped than anything else: I mean the bodies we

touch and see; but not bodies in general, for these general perceptions are usually considerably more confused, but one body in particular. Let us, for example, take this wax: it has only just been removed from the honeycomb; it has not yet lost all the flavour of its honey; it retains some of the scent of the flowers among which it was gathered; its colour, shape, and size are clearly visible; it is hard, cold, easy to touch, and if you tap it with your knuckle, it makes a sound. In short, it has all the properties that seem to be required for a given body to be known as distinctly as possible. But wait—while I am speaking, it is brought close to the fire. The remains of its flavour evaporate; the smell fades; the colour is changed, the shape is taken away, it grows in size, becomes liquid, becomes warm, it can hardly be touched, and now, if you strike it, it will give off no sound. Does the same wax still remain? We must admit it does remain: no one would say or think it does not. So what was there in it that was so distinctly grasped? Certainly, none of those qualities I apprehended by the senses: for whatever came under taste, or smell, or sight, or touch, or hearing, has now changed: but the wax remains.

Perhaps the truth of the matter was what I now think it is: namely, that the wax itself was not in fact this sweetness of the honey, or the fragrance of the flowers, or the whiteness, shape, or sonority, but the body which not long ago appeared to me as perceptible in these modes,\* but now appears in others. But what exactly is this that I am  
 31 imagining in this way? Let us consider the matter, and, thinking away those things that do not belong to the wax, let us see what remains. Something extended, flexible, mutable: certainly, that is all. But in what do this flexibility and mutability consist? Is it in the fact that I can imagine this wax being changed in shape, from a circle to a square, and from a square into a triangle? That cannot be right: for I understand that it is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, yet I cannot keep track of all these by using my imagination. Therefore my understanding of these properties is not achieved by using the faculty of imagination. What about ‘extended’? Surely I know something about the nature of its extension. For it is greater when the wax is melting, greater still when it is boiling, and greater still when the heat is further increased. And I would not be correctly judging what the wax is if I failed to see that it is capable of receiving more varieties, as regards extension, than I have ever grasped in my imagination. So I am left with no alternative, but to accept that I am

not at all *imagining* what this wax is, I am perceiving it with my mind alone: I say 'this wax' in particular, for the point is even clearer about wax in general. So then, what is this wax, which is only perceived by the mind? Certainly it is the same wax I see, touch, and imagine, and in short it is the same wax I judged it to be from the beginning. But yet—and this is important—the perception of it is not sight, touch, or imagination, and never was, although it seemed to be so at first: it is an inspection by the mind alone, which can be either imperfect and confused, as it was before in this case, or clear and distinct, as it now is, depending on the greater or lesser degree of attention I pay to what it consists of.

But in the meantime I am amazed by the proneness of my mind to error. For although I am considering all this in myself silently and without speech, yet I am still ensnared by words themselves, and all but deceived by the very ways in which we usually put things. For we say that we 'see' the wax itself, if it is present, not that we judge it to be there on the basis of its colour or shape. From this I would have immediately concluded that I therefore knew the wax by the sight of my eyes, not by the inspection of the mind alone—if I had not happened to glance out of the window at people walking along the street. Using the customary expression, I say that I 'see' them, just as I 'see' the wax. But what do I actually see other than hats and coats, which could be covering automata?\* But I judge that they are people. And therefore what I thought I saw with my eyes, I in fact grasp only by the faculty of judging that is in my mind.

But one who desires to know more than the common herd might be ashamed to have gone to the speech of the common herd to find a reason for doubting. Let us then go on where we left off by considering whether I perceived more perfectly and more evidently what the wax was, when I first encountered it, and believed that I knew [*cognoscere*] it by these external senses, or at least by what they call the 'common sense',\* that is, the imaginative power; or whether I perceive it better now, after I have more carefully investigated both what it is and how it is known [*cognoscatur*]. Certainly it would be foolish to doubt that I have a much better grasp of it now. For what, if anything, was distinct in my original perception? What was there, if anything, that seemed to go beyond the perception of the lowest animals?\* But on the other hand, when I distinguish the wax from its external forms, and, as if I had stripped off its garments, consider it in all its

nakedness, then, indeed, although there may still be error in my judgments, I cannot perceive it in this way except by the human mind.

33 But what, then, shall I say about this mind, or about myself? For I do not yet accept that there is anything in me but a mind. What, I say, am I who seem to perceive this wax so distinctly? Do I not know [*cognosco*] myself not only much more truly, much more certainly, but also much more distinctly and evidently than the wax? For, if I judge that the wax exists, for the reason that I see it, it is certainly much more evident that I myself also exist, from the very fact that I am seeing it. For it could be the case that what I am seeing is not really wax; it could be the case that I do not even have eyes with which to see anything; but it certainly cannot be the case, when I see something, or when I think I am seeing something (the difference is irrelevant for the moment), that I myself who think should not be something. By the same token, if I judge that the wax exists, for the reason that I am touching it, the same consequence follows: namely, that I exist. If I judge it exists, for the reason I am imagining it, or for any other reason, again, the same certainly applies. But what I have realized in the case of the wax, I can apply to anything that exists outside myself. Moreover, if the perception of the wax appeared more distinct after it became known to me from many sources, and not from sight or touch alone, how much more distinctly—it must be admitted—I now know [*cognosco*] myself. For there are no reasons that can enhance the perception either of the wax or of any other body at all that do not at the same time prove better to me the nature of my own mind. But there are so many things besides in the mind itself that can serve to make the knowledge [*notitia*] of it more distinct, that there seems scarcely any point in listing all the perceptions that flow into it from the body.

34 But I see now that, without realizing it, I have ended up back where I wanted to be. For since I have now learned that bodies themselves are perceived not, strictly speaking, by the senses or by the imaginative faculty, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived because they are touched or seen, but only because they are understood, I clearly realize [*cognosco*] that nothing can be perceived by me more easily or more clearly than my own mind. But since a long-held opinion is a habit that cannot so readily be laid aside, I intend to stop here for a while, in order to fix this newly acquired knowledge more deeply in my memory by long meditation.