

Descartes on Knowledge of Mind and Body

1 Knowledge of mind, again

1.1 What is the Second Meditation supposed to show?

1. I can't be deceived about my own existence. *Definitely*.
2. I know the nature of my mind, what a mind is. *Possibly*.

1.2 Evidence concerning the second point

- a. Title promises a demonstration of “the distinction of the soul from the body”
- b. “I am therefore precisely nothing but a thinking thing; that is, a mind, or intellect, or understanding, or reason — words of whose meaning I was previously ignorant” (p. 19, AT 27).
- c. “I am not that concatenation of members we call the human body” (p. 19, AT 27).
- d. “the first and principal prerequisite for knowing that the soul is immortal is that we form a concept of the soul that is as lucid as possible and utterly distinct from every concept of a body. This we have done here [in the Second Meditation]” (Synopsis, p. 8, AT13).
- e. *However*, Descartes insists in the Synopsis and elsewhere that the argument is *not* complete until the Sixth Meditation, presumably around p. 51, AT 78.
- f. *But* it's not clear that what happened between the Second and Sixth Meditations makes it easier to prove anything about the nature of the mind, in particular, that it is distinct from the body (where “body” includes the brain, by the way).

2 Knowledge of bodies

2.1 The conclusion

“... I now know that even bodies are not, properly speaking, perceived by the senses or by the faculty of imagination, but by the intellect alone, and that they are not perceived through their being touched or seen, but only through their being understood.” (p. 23, AT 34)

2.2 How did he get there?

“Does the same wax still remain? I must confess that it does; no one denies it; no one thinks otherwise.” (p. 21, AT 30)

“So what was there in the wax that was so distinctly grasped?” (p. 21, AT 30)

“Let us focus our attention on this and see what remains after we have removed everything that does not belong to the wax: only that it is something extended, flexible, and mutable.” (p. 21, AT 21)