

The Cogito: Priority of Knowledge of Soul over Knowledge of Body

1. Immediate Evidence of This Priority in Virtue of the Order. Verification by the Analysis of the Piece of Wax

I exist as a thinking thing; that is the first indubitable truth in the order of reasons. My nature is no other than pure thought and pure intelligence, exclusive of all corporeal element; that is the second truth, flowing immediately from the first truth, according to the order. I therefore know myself, my existence and my essence, while, at the same time, body, rejected as outside of knowledge, and canceled by the evil genius, remains unknown to me in its existence and essence. From this I conclude that body is less easy to know than soul, since soul is known before it in the order of reasons.¹ That is the third truth.

This third truth, resulting immediately from the order, does not need to be demonstrated further. However, there is a great difference between being *convinced* and being *persuaded*.² Further, the third truth is a truth of pure understanding to which is opposed a persuasion stemming from my “nature,” meaning from my soul united substantially with a body, experiencing through sensation that it composes a whole with it,³ and deriving, from imagination, a tendency to believe that all my knowledge comes from the senses, that the bodies I can see, touch, feel, are captured directly in this way without the least help of intelligence—that they are known first and consequently better known than soul, which, being incorporeal, cannot not be sensed, touched, or felt, but only thought.⁴ The truth therefore goes against “common sense,” meaning a set of habits I acquired from birth, for which my nature (in the strict sense) is not directly responsible, but of which it is the indirect cause. And these prejudices draw strength from the power of corporeal impressions to confuse the soul, and the capacity that sensation has to move me and touch me more deeply than pure ideas.⁵

In order to refute this opinion definitively, it is therefore expedient to deliver a verification and to set aside for now the demonstration according to the order, in virtue of the necessary requirements of all valid certainty, to “let go the reins once more” and “allow my mind to roam,” by allowing it to be situated provisionally *in the opponent’s point of view*. Consequently, we proceed to consider one of these objects that “appear to be outside.” We

examine what it is about these sensible perceptions that makes them capable, reputedly, of delivering to me, by themselves, immediately, the knowledge of one of these objects.⁶ That is the well-known analysis of the piece of wax.⁷ It constitutes an anticipation of the general verification that the success of physics will bring to the entire set of metaphysical conclusions.⁸

This verification is decisive, for when following the order of reasons, I had established that the soul is known only by intelligence, having negated body and set aside imagination; and now the analysis of the knowledge of this supposedly given external thing reveals that, far from knowing the external thing through imagination (the soul is negated by the fact that intelligence is set aside), I know it only as an idea of the understanding, meaning through pure thought, having set aside all sensations.⁹ Common sense is therefore beaten on its own ground: "That which I thought to see with my eyes I understand only through the faculty of understanding that resides in my mind. Bodies are not known insofar as they are seen or touched, but insofar as they are understood by thought."¹⁰ In this way I know that, since body is known through the intermediary of the soul, knowledge of soul precedes knowledge of body, as the immediate precedes the mediated and the condition precedes what is conditioned. We rediscover here, by another means, the conclusion obtained directly by following the genetic order of reasons.

2. Different Aspects of This Priority

But one finds it considerably enriched and strengthened. First, the privileged position that common sense gives to the knowledge of things falling under imagination is not only abolished, but reversed. Since we conceive everything through intelligence, imagination cannot be of use without intelligence; something like the soul, which is captured only through intelligence, without ever falling under the senses, is confirmed as something more conceivable than any thing else, because of its purely intellectual nature.¹¹

The fact that a thing falls under imagination and senses therefore does not constitute a virtue that renders it more easily knowable, but an imperfection that renders it infinitely less capable of being captured in the truth of its existence or essence. In fact, although the organ that allows me to know the existence of soul, namely, intelligence, gives me the soul itself, since it is not really distinct from it, in such a way that this knowledge is posited in all necessity as absolutely certain, the organ that gives me the knowledge of the existence of body, namely, imagination and sensation, not being really distinct from my thought, but from body, immediately gives me nothing more than the existence of my soul, and lets escape the body that it is supposed to allow me to know, by rejecting it outside the circle of the

known. The existence of body is therefore a priori necessarily doubtful and is therefore annulled by the evil genius.

Moreover, although the organ that gives me knowledge of the existence of soul (intelligence) is the same organ that gives me clear and distinct knowledge of its essence, the organ that gives me the (problematic) knowledge of the existence of body (imagination and sense) is incapable of giving me knowledge of its essence, which cannot be known clearly and distinctly except through intelligence. From this it results that it is impossible that I am deceived with respect to the essence of soul by the knowledge I derive immediately from its existence, through the intellect, whereas I am necessarily deceived about the essence of body by the problematic knowledge that I derive from its existence, through imagination and sense. Consequently the soul, which is immediately certain of its existence, requires no effort in order to know its essence, since, in order to attain it, it does not need to disencumber itself of the deceptive veils drawn on its true nature by the organ that revealed its existence to it. On the other hand, with respect to the essence of body, I am required through an effort of imagination to lift the sensible habits that give us its existence, but that hide its true nature from us. From this one sees that, if knowledge of soul is more easily acquired than knowledge of body, that is not only because of its priority, but also because of its intrinsic nature; it is because, in opposition to the former, even with respect to its existence, it is radically outside the grasp of sensible knowledge.

But it is also richer, and consequently, it is more distinct. In fact, the more faculties through which I know problematically the existence of bodies, and the more faculties that allow me to know immediately and in all certainty that I exist, the more faculties I can relate to my self as its own modes. The more ways I picture myself as knowing bodies, the better I know myself.

Moreover, since there are infinitely more things in me than things that serve only to know bodies, I can indubitably attribute infinitely more properties to myself than I can attribute problematically to bodies. The absolutely certain knowledge I have of myself is therefore infinitely richer than the uncertain knowledge that I have of bodies.¹² This is an argument that Cartesians will take up again under the simplified form of *Replies to Objections V*: the more attributes of a substance one knows, the more one knows the substance; there is therefore nothing of which we know more attributes than our mind, for the more one knows of other things, the more things one can count in the mind, from the fact that it knows. Thus its nature is more known, meaning more distinctly known, than the nature of any other thing.¹³

This doctrine of the primacy of spiritual knowledge over corporeal knowledge is a most central thesis, since it accomplishes the destruction of certain fundamental principles of Scholasticism: for example, that material

things are more easily known than spiritual things and known before them, that all knowledge comes from the senses, that the inference from being to knowledge is valid, and that it is better to know the *quod* before seeking to know the *quid*. By establishing that “the mind considered without the things one commonly attributes to the body is better known than the body without the mind”¹⁴ Descartes introduces at a proper level in the order of reasons the principle stated by the *Rules*: “Nothing can be known before intelligence, for the knowledge of all things depends on intelligence, and not inversely.”¹⁵ In this way the principle of mathematism is established, that “the inference from knowledge to being is valid.”¹⁶ No doubt, at this point on the chain of reasons, the principle is established only with respect to a subjectively necessary science, whose objective validity is not yet assured. But the essential is already acquired, since, in order to deny the objective validity of this principle, one would have to deny it for all possible human science at the same time. Thus, simply because of the way in which the Cogito was posited, the traditional perspectives with respect to the conditions of any science have been reversed.

However, does not the way in which the demonstration of this principle was drawn beginning with the Cogito itself constitute a surprising paradox? The thesis that soul is more easily known than body is concluded from a reflection on the conditions that allow the deduction of the knowledge of my self as pure intelligence beginning with the Cogito itself, meaning the positing of my existence; Descartes teaches that now that I know *that I am* I have to know *what I am*.¹⁷ “I do not yet know clearly enough what I am (*Quisnam sim ego ille*), I who am certain that I am (*qui jam necessario sum*).”¹⁸ In this case, we are going from the *quod* to the *quid*, in conformity with the Scholastic rule that goes from a given existence to knowledge of essence.¹⁹ Is it not paradoxical, under these conditions, to draw the inverse rule from the Cogito, a rule that prescribes always going from the *quid* to the *quod*, from knowledge to being? Or at least does not this indicate that a limit must be assigned to the range of application of the rule, not the knowledge of my mind, but the knowledge of things external to it? The rule of the scientific knowledge of external things would therefore be the inverse of the rule of the scientific knowledge of my self: the former would go from idea to thing and the latter from thing to idea.

Truly one could argue that the point of departure for the knowledge of my nature is not my existence, but an item of knowledge—the knowledge I have of my existence—and that besides, if I affirm my existence in all certainty, it is in virtue of the clear and distinct knowledge I have of it; thus the original affirmation of my existence puts into action the principle that the inference from knowledge to being is valid: “The inference from knowledge to being is valid because it is impossible for us to know something if it is not, in fact, as we know it, *that is to say, existent, if we conceive that it exists*, or that it is of this or that nature, if its nature is the only thing known.”²⁰

But this reply, which expresses the inescapable idealist character of all assertion with respect to internal or external things, does not reply to the difficulty considered here. When a scholastic asserts that the inference from being to knowledge is valid, he means that one must first *know* that something is (*quod*) in order then to know what it is (*quid*); and to suppose that I can know something only through sensible knowledge is to suppose that beginning with this knowledge and because of it I can bring myself to the intelligible knowledge of what the thing is.

The true meaning of the Cartesian formula is therefore its mathematical meaning, namely, that knowledge of existence is governed by knowledge of essence—that it is justifiable by means of it and not vice versa. That is precisely the formula that is inverted with respect to the existence and nature of soul.

This inversion is opposite to the way our knowledge of the existence of soul and body are given. From the fact that the existence of the soul is given immediately as a certain thing to my intelligence, the soul can, beginning with the knowledge of its existence, know itself in all certainty as being in essence pure intelligence; thus it seems that the inference from being to knowledge is valid. From the fact that the existence of bodies is given to me only through sensible knowledge affected by doubt, it is impossible to go from their existence, given so problematically, and attain certain knowledge of their essence as well as their existence; the inference from being to knowledge is invalid.

But the explanation of the paradox itself verifies that it is only an apparent paradox. The being given to me in the Cogito is nothing other than the light of knowledge, pure intelligence. If one knows the essence of mind beginning with its being, which seems to be given before this knowledge itself, it is because the being in question is nothing other than the essential condition of all knowledge; and it is by highlighting this ultimate condition of knowledge that I was able to posit the existence of this being. Thus, I can just as easily state, in this case, that I am going from being to knowledge, as I am going from knowledge to being, for here being and knowledge coincide, as subject and object also coincide. The certain fact of my existence has been posited only because I was thinking, and it is because I have been made aware that the positing of my existence was rendered possible by my pure thought that I was able to recognize it as the essence of my self.²¹ The Cogito therefore includes in itself a passage from knowledge to being, and the knowledge of my essence starting from its being consists in explicitly recognizing that I know that I exist because I know. That is perhaps why I would cease to exist if I ceased to think.

Another consequence of this doctrine is that rational psychology appears as the first and easiest science, and must, in principle, occur before pure mathematics. In fact, it deals with what is first known by intelligence, that is, with intelligence itself, which is the condition of knowledge of

mathematical notions. This psychology is completely different from the psychology of the soul united with the body, or psychology of passions, which deals with sensation and not clear ideas; this latter science is, in the sphere of science properly speaking, the most difficult discipline, being the last in the order of reasons and the most disconcerting for the understanding.²² The relation between these two psychologies is therefore absolutely different from the relation of pure mathematics to physics. Far from being substantially separated from one another, these two latter sciences are both based on the clear and distinct idea of extension. That is why physics attempts to be identified with pure mathematics as much as possible, by radically eliminating the sensible element to which it occasionally has recourse.²³ Concrete psychology, on the other hand, does not cease to diverge in principle from rational psychology, since, far from eliminating the sensible element that is alien to it, it is based on it as the ultimate simple nature on which everything depends, and it attempts to rid it as much as possible of everything that the understanding can add to it as a prejudice or an interpretation that would render it inauthentic.²⁴

3. Problems Raised by the Analysis of the Piece of Wax

The analysis of the piece of wax has appeared as a decisive and brilliant verification of the conclusions imposed by the order of reasons. However, this universally noted, classical, and apparently simple text is not without difficulties; it poses a certain number of problems that are more or less complicated.

a) Two Senses of the Word *difficult*

First, does not the general thesis confirmed by the analysis that soul is easier to know than body contradict the assertion, which Descartes repeats many times, that knowledge of soul, shackled by knowledge of body and sensation, because of its union with it, is at first extremely difficult? Does not the thesis also contradict the assertion that the *Meditations*, which attempts to discover this, requires a powerful effort of which few men are capable, a kind of twisting against the fold of our habits, against which will has to act in order to repel the prejudices that are occasionally caused by imagination? Is not the value of *Meditation II* to bring to philosophers, for the first time, an efficacious way to rid the idea of the soul of all the falsifications introduced to it by corporeal knowledge? Finally, is not such an effort, according to Descartes, more difficult than the effort of the mathematician and the physicist in discovering the essence of bodies and their true properties behind sensible qualities? For the mathematicians and physicists can find help in imagination while the metaphysician, who deals only with the pure ideas of the understanding, can have no dealings with it, unless he wishes to be misled.²⁵

Such questions cannot be posed unless one neglects to distinguish between the order of rational knowledge and the order of common knowledge, between the plane of science and the plane of life. When Descartes states that knowledge of soul is the easiest knowledge, he means that it is easiest of the *scientific truths*, and the first item of knowledge in the order of science. He does not mean that science is easier than common knowledge. The passage from common sense to science is, in fact, the most difficult climb there is. But what I know by common sense is not the easiest knowledge, since it is not even knowledge, but nonscience. The words *easy* and *difficult* have opposite meanings depending upon whether one is situated on the plane of life and ignorance, or on the plane of intelligence and science. Life, which assures me that the soul is united to the body and which leads me to believe, by claims influenced by prejudices, that everything comes from body and that soul is corporeal, finds an almost insurmountable difficulty in accepting what is the first and most blinding of truths for the understanding—that soul is substantially distinct from body. Inversely, the truth taught by authentic sensation, that I am substantially united with a body, is the most difficult and final truth for the understanding, since for itself it is properly inconceivable in itself. We will later rediscover the same opposition with respect to God: in itself and according to the order of pure science, it is the easiest to know; but in fact and given man's condition, it is the most difficult, for in order to conceive it, we would have to set aside everything that we derive from our human nature, meaning the sensations on which we base our life. The unavoidable difficulty with the proof, in this case, arises from this.²⁶

However, the only valid meaning of the word *difficult* is the one given to it in the *Meditations*, meaning in philosophical science. In some way it is the true or scientific meaning of the word. It concerns the truths that cannot be discovered until many others are discovered by means of their intermediaries, in virtue of more complex reasons.

b) The Impossibility of Reducing the Representation of the Wax to Sensations

Since the argument, whatever are its many consequences elsewhere, has no other aim, in this case, than to demonstrate that body is known by the intermediary of the soul, could not this aim have been met by considering imagination itself? Since body cannot be known except by perceptions, and perceptions are thoughts, is it not evident that body cannot be known except by thought? Will not Berkeley thus reduce ideas to things and things to ideas?

This path is unmanageable. In fact we have demonstrated that the soul was purely spiritual by proving that its nature was pure intelligence: we have recognized and confirmed in this way that imagination could not be explained by pure intelligence—that is, by the nature of the soul alone.

Therefore if we admitted that body is known only by imagination, we would be excluding a priori that it can only be known by pure intelligence; we would thus be upholding the opposite thesis. We deprive ourselves of the means to prove that the soul is an essence for us, in itself separate from body, exclusive of it, prior to it, and as such including the condition of its knowledge. From this one sees that it is impossible to establish that knowledge of body depends on knowledge of soul and comes after it, other than by proving that the soul is as pure intelligence exclusive of imagination, the condition of knowledge of body.

c) Understanding, the Necessary and Sufficient Condition of the Knowledge of the Nature of Body; the Necessary, but Not Sufficient Condition of the Knowledge of the Existence of Body

The idea of the understanding allows me to know *what is wax (quid)*, but does it also allow me to know that wax exists (*quod*)? If not, can I generally conclude that knowledge of soul conditions knowledge of body? Ought I not be satisfied with concluding that it conditions the knowledge of its essence by the clear and distinct idea of extension that is innate in me? By what right do I add that it also conditions the knowledge of its existence, which is given to me immediately only by imagination and senses at the time that I am conscious that I exist?

In other words, the function that the understanding assumes would only explain one part of the knowledge of body; it could not take the place of the sensible function that must be preserved as the necessary condition of the knowledge of its existence.

In fact, if it is incontestable that the sensible function cannot be assumed by the understanding, which cannot itself teach us the existence of the thing, it is no less incontestable that imagination or senses cannot exercise their function (positing the existence of body) without the understanding, while the understanding can exercise its function (knowing essence) without imagination and senses. In fact, it is impossible for me to be conscious that something corporeal exists (*quod*), if I am not first conscious of what it is (*quid*). In brief, I cannot perceive that something exists, for example, the wax, if I do not recognize it as always one and the same, under its changing sensible covering, as being the thing whose *idea* I have, if I am not conscious of this idea as being the permanent condition of the knowledge of this thing, and in addition, as entailing the existence of the thing from the fact that it is endowed with the sensible qualities imposed on it. This necessary subordination of perception to the concept explains Descartes' assertion that intelligence alone, and not sense, knows. Moreover, it already entails the principle that the inference from knowledge to being (from essence to existence) is valid, a principle that is still limited, in *Meditation II*, to the sphere of a purely subjective validity. Extension, in fact, is only posited here as *an idea of my understanding* conditioning the

possibility of *my consciousness of material object*; this is not yet in any way *an essence expressing the nature in itself of the substance* of material things and entailing the conditions of possibility of *material thing in itself*.

d) Physics and the Analysis of the Piece of Wax as Verifications

We have stated that physics constitutes a *verification* of the demonstration according to the analytic order of reasons. The analysis of the piece of wax is a similar verification since, in order to confirm the conclusions drawn from this order, it also has recourse to something physical—the piece of wax. However, there is a great difference between the two verifications. Physics brings forth a verification of the general conclusion of all the *Meditations*; it not only confirms that the idea of extension is a condition of our *knowledge of material things*, but that the nature of these things is in itself only extension; the success of pure mechanism in the explanation of the set of material phenomena verifies the fact that the soul is in itself a substance separated from corporeal substance, using a path other than the path of metaphysics, by proving that the substance of bodies excludes all spiritual element and is really separated from the substance of mind. The analysis of the piece of wax stays, on the contrary, as does all of *Meditation II*, strictly on the plane of subjective science. The object here is to confirm that soul is better known than body, that it excludes the latter from its knowledge, by establishing that the idea of extension, being a condition for *knowledge* of body as object, constitutes *for us* the essence of this object; from which it results that:

1) body, being known only through the idea of the understanding (the idea of extension), is known only through intelligence;

2) this idea, constituting *for us* the condition of possibility of the corporeal object subsisting as such, must *represent to us* extension as being its substance;

3) the sensible qualities must be excluded from *the representation that we have of substance*. But we do not yet know in this way, and we do not postulate as physics does, that extension is *in itself* the substance of bodies and that the sensible qualities are *in themselves actually excluded* from it. In fact, we do not know at this time whether the necessary conditions of our representation are essential truths at the same time, that is, conditions of the truth of things themselves.

e) The Question of Primary and Secondary Qualities

From this one sees that the analysis of the piece of wax does not have as consequence, or as object, to establish a doctrine of primary and secondary qualities, even though this doctrine is involved in it. In fact, we do not yet know whether bodies exist and whether we have the right to affirm that extension, whose idea conditions their knowledge, constitutes the essence of their substance; whether the soul is in itself really separated from body, as I

necessarily conceive it in my science; and whether, consequently, sensible qualities are in themselves really excluded from the nature of body. I only know that these conclusions are necessary for me within the science that my understanding elaborates. These assertions will be legitimate only when we will have established the objective validity of this science. All that we are able to say is that we are certain from now on that if ever we were able to establish this validity, the true reality of bodies will be geometric extension, and their true knowledge the knowledge of the geometric determinations that constitute their properties. But this alone is assured (the question of the knowledge of the existence and true nature of bodies having been set aside): that knowledge of soul is necessarily easier than knowledge of bodies, because I know its existence and essence before the existence and essence of bodies and because it is a necessary condition of all possible true knowledge of bodies. The unique object of *Meditation II* is not to determine in what the true nature consists, nor even to determine the true knowledge of body, but to determine in what consists the true knowledge of soul and its true nature, at least with respect to the necessities of our understanding; it is, consequently, to discover that this knowledge is more easy than the knowledge of bodies, once one has set aside from it the ideas of sensible things that have been wrongly included in it: "that is all I intended to prove in *Meditation II*," specifies Descartes.²⁷

f) A New Aspect of Mathematical (Geometrical) Ideas; Reduction of Knowledge to Intellection; the Rational Ideas of Extended Things as Foundations of the Representation of the Object, but Not as Foundation of the Objective Validity of Representation

When breaking up the sensible representation I have of the piece of wax, I acquired from it a clear and distinct knowledge by the "perfect inspection" of the element or fundamental idea in it that comprises the whole condition of its knowledge as object. Descartes tells us with respect to the piece of wax that "what is important to notice here is that perception is not a vision, nor a touch, nor an imagination, and has never been that, even though it formerly appeared to be so; but it is solely *an inspection of the mind*, which can be imperfect and confused as it formerly was, or clear and distinct as it is at present, according to whether I attend more or less to the things which *are in it and of which it is composed*."²⁸ The analysis of the piece of wax therefore repeats, while conferring on it a new and higher sense, the result obtained in *Meditation I* by means of the breaking up of sensible representation into its most simple elements. The mathematical notions were then conceived as indubitable—recourse to the evil genius excepted—as constitutive elements of this representation that are incapable of being broken up, for where the simple is attained, fiction is impossible. But they also held their privileged position by virtue of appearing in this way, as the *condition of possibility of every represented object*—for whether these

objects exist or not, whether I am awake or asleep, these notions subsist no less, as ultimate elements, the necessary conditions that render the objects possible.

However, insofar as these notions appear only as necessary conditions of the *content* of represented objects, and not as the formal conditions of the thought or representation of these objects, they become vulnerable to the doubt of the evil genius.

Here, on the contrary, the mathematical notion or idea of extension, which remains as a residue of the analysis of the composite,²⁹ receives its priority and its certainty from its participation with the absolute certainty (although subjective certainty) of the Cogito, as an idea of the understanding, conceived expressly as a thought of my soul. It participates in it by being perceived as assuming its part of the function that the latter assumes generally as *formal condition* of the possibility of all possible representation, the function from which the Cogito necessarily draws its indubitable character. In this way, but only in this way, the idea of extension escapes the doubt of the evil genius, for even if it is intrinsically false, that would not prevent it from necessarily governing my representation of the corporeal object and establishing its unity and permanence under the changing diversity of its sensible covering; neither would that prevent it from being known in this way prior to the sensible representation of the object, nor from investing its existence as an idea in my self with the existence of the Cogito. But the reality of extension, as essence or as existence, remains doubtful. The plane here is not the plane of *Meditation I*, but the plane of the Cogito. What is indubitable in this case is nothing more than the existence of my thought and the existence in it of a certain idea—the idea of extension.

On the other hand, the general function of the Cogito as condition of all possible knowledge is specified in the idea of extension that appears as a condition of all possible knowledge of *the external object as such*. One can regret that Descartes did not push his conclusion farther here, at least explicitly. Although the idea of extension appears here as the necessary condition of the representation of all material objects, it does not bring forth the sufficient condition of the representation of the object, wax, insofar as this object is differentiated from other material objects—wood, metal, water, etc. But it is beyond doubt that, in the same way as for the material object in general, the possibility of the representation of particular objects also requires innate ideas as foundation of their unity and permanence, which are in this case the ideas of certain geometric variations (the *figuras seu ideas* of the Rules), that allow me to recognize this or that body at each instant as being the same under the diversity of its sensible changes. What allows me to understand and recognize the particular substance of such bodies, wax, stone, etc., is that I have the idea of the subsistence of a certain mode of extension (the numerical invariant), which is in itself the

subsistence of “the same quantity of magnitude”—under the diversity of changes that it assumes under the three dimensions.³⁰

This analysis does not consist in demonstrating that the substance of bodies is pure extension—although this conclusion is included in the analysis—and this analysis does not consist in establishing simply that the idea of extension in general is a condition of pure perception of bodies. What the example aims at is what allows us to know *any* body whatsoever; wax, for example, is the idea of “something extended” (*extensum quid*) that “remains the same” under the diversity of variations of that thing, which is wax, and not wood or stone. This “something” is clearly not simply extension in general, that remains the same under the diversity of every kind of body, wax, wood, stone, etc., but a certain extended element that remains the same in the wax only, or in the wood only, etc., and that allows us to recognize the body as being always “this same wax that I knew from the beginning,” in this way, and not wood or stone. This element is precisely the geometric invariant that Descartes defined in article 64 of the first part of the *Principles*, as we have seen; and this geometric invariant, contrasting with the endless apparent variations of extension that imagination presents to me, is knowable only by my understanding.³¹

Whether or not the innate intellectual notion that renders possible knowledge of wax is nothing other than this numerical invariant, it is clear, on the other hand, that the numerical invariant is in no way necessary in order to perceive wax, to know this notion clearly and distinctly, and even less to know it as the idea of a geometric invariant and to have its mathematical formula present to the mind. If that were not true, I would have to be a physicist in order to perceive wax, since only the physicist accedes to the science of this formula. It suffices that my understanding has an obscure and confused knowledge of it. Then, although knowing wax because of its rational idea, I do not notice this idea and do not attribute to it the foundation of my knowledge; on the contrary, I place the foundation of my knowledge in the sensible images that I relate to the existing wax as their cause. That is what is produced in the common man before any philosophy. The reader of the *Meditations* has a clearer and more distinct knowledge of this idea when he perceives it clearly and distinctly as a condition of possibility of the perception of the thing. But the physicist who is not content to perceive that the idea of a certain determination of extension is a condition of the perception of wax, can discover the mathematical formula of this numerical invariant, and rise to the clearest and most distinct knowledge of this innate idea. There are therefore several distinct possible degrees in the knowledge of the idea of the understanding that conditions the perception of the thing: “Perception . . . is solely an inspection of the mind, which can be imperfect and confused as it formerly was, or clear and distinct as it is at present, according to whether I attend more or less to the things which are in it and of which it is composed.”³²

The doctrine of innateness, of the idea of extension, and of all the ideas that, as concepts of the understanding, contain the principle of unity establishing the representation of various things, is already implied here, not only in virtue of the substantial autonomy of the thought requiring that all my thoughts come from my mind alone, but because of the role assumed by these ideas as necessary conditions of the sensible representation of all existing things. The remark by which Descartes ends the analysis of the piece of wax confirms this consequence. It concerns the internal necessary condition that allows me to represent—meaning to recognize outside of me—the existence of other men on the occasion of the perception of their sensible appearances. If it is possible for me to judge that coats, hats, etc., are men and not inert machines, it is because I have in me the ideas of thinking substance and of man, which I could never draw from sensible appearances alone. Moreover, these ideas, first known by me, allow me to *recognize*, in this case, that these things are men and not machines, because their appearances are presented in such a way that their interpretation or *intellection* is possible only through these ideas.³³ They are like the rules that render possible the permanent unity of each of these objects. One understands in this way why Cartesian terminology tends to substitute the term *to comprehend* for the term *to know*: *I comprehend the piece of wax. . . .* “I comprehend (*comprehendo*) solely by the power of my mind that which I believed I saw with my eyes, etc.”³⁴ That is because we have just ascertained that the act of knowing is an act of knowing only because it is an act of intellection. It is intellection that allows me, by interpreting the sensible appearances, to perceive under the sensible appearances the idea of the known thing that is always similar to itself, in brief, *to recognize*, and thus *to comprehend*, the thing they signify. Physics, which allows me to know the universe in conformity with the true nature of things, is itself only an intellection of material objects, beginning with sensible “variations,” which are referred to these geometric “variations” that they are incapable of having us grasp by themselves.³⁵ In other words, if I can know by sensible perception itself that such a thing exists (*quod*), it is because I was able to recognize what it is (*quid*) under its appearances; and I cannot comprehend what a thing is (*quid*) except by means of intelligence:³⁶ “What is it then in this piece of wax that we comprehend with such distinctness? Certainly it cannot be anything that I attained by the senses. . . . We must therefore agree that I cannot even conceive *what this piece of wax is* through my imagination and that *only my mind perceives it*.”³⁷

To the extent that the idea of my understanding specifies as the foundation of the representation of the external object the function that the Cogito assumes, of rendering possible all representation in general, it is legitimate to establish a comparison between this idea and the Kantian category, insofar as, for Descartes, as for Kant, the concept of the understanding intervenes in order to render possible the knowledge of the

object as such by establishing its substantial unity and permanence under sensible diversity. Clearly, with the exception of this characteristic, everything else separates the two philosophies since a concept is an innate idea for Descartes and not a simple a priori; for Descartes a concept is not a form deprived by itself of intuitive content, nor an element that is heterogeneous to space, nor an activity of the mind, nor a synthesis, nor a form empty of phenomena in general, but something expressing, on the contrary, the nature of the thing such as it is in itself directly in us, etc.

However, the most interesting difference is the one related to what makes them similar, for it testifies to the radical subjectivity in which Cartesian scientific philosophy remains, at this point on the chain of reasons. If the idea of the understanding renders possible an item of knowledge by establishing the *objectivity* of sensible representation, and if it introduces in it the principle of unity and substantiality that in this representation makes me recognize, meaning comprehend—therefore know—the object, *this foundation of objectivity* is in no way ipso facto *the foundation of the objective validity* of the representation. In fact, I do not yet know whether the representation of the object I have thus obtained corresponds to the thing outside me, for not only do I not know whether this thing exists,³⁸ but I also do not know whether its essence is in itself such as I conceive it clearly and distinctly, meaning, whether it is pure extension. Only the demonstration of God's existence will allow me to resolve the question. On the other hand, in Kantian philosophy, since the reality of external things, the object of science properly speaking, is only the reality of the phenomenon, the conditions of the possibility of my representation of the thing are ipso facto the conditions of the possibility of the thing itself, and thus, in this way, they have an objective validity. No doubt these things are but phenomena and not things in themselves; but the opposition between *realitas phenomenon*, based on the structure of the transcendental subject in general (universal subject), and the empirical appearance of the phenomenon, based on the particularity of the sensibilities of individual subjects, is sufficient to establish the opposition between common knowledge, which claims to attribute to things qualities they do not have, and science properly speaking, which discovers their real properties, meaning the truth in itself of physical phenomena.³⁹ From this one sees that, in Kantian philosophy, the constitutive function of the representation of external things as objects allows the attribution of an objective validity to the conditions that render it possible, and establishes legitimately the distinction between primary qualities (which for Kant are space, movement, impenetrability, and force)⁴⁰ and secondary qualities, while the Cartesian deduction is incapable of doing so at this stage. It does not allow one to know whether the sensible qualities ought to be excluded from the essence of material things, in the same way that my science excludes them, at this stage, from the *idea* that it necessarily constructs for itself of their true nature.

The conclusions relative to the essence of bodies therefore have the same destiny as those relative to the essence of the soul. I cannot affirm that the essence of soul is in itself such that I am constrained to represent it to myself (that is, as pure intelligence) in virtue of the necessary conditions of the knowledge of my soul beginning with the Cogito (I had to posit my thought, having abstracted away the rest—imagination and body) and, in the same way, I cannot affirm that the essence of bodies is in itself such that I am constrained necessarily to represent it to myself (that is, as pure extension) when I perceive that the idea of extension, which is innate in my understanding, is a necessary condition of the representation of external things, having abstracted away sensible qualities. In each case, the foundation allowing the attribution of an objective validity (*veritas rei*) to the truths of science is wanting. I remain enclosed within a purely subjective certainty. Here and there I obtain the conditions of possibility of my knowledge, and not the conditions for things—neither a *representation* of their nature nor the certainty that this *nature* is in itself theirs effectively.

g) The Impossibility of Assigning the Substance Composed of Soul and Body as the Source of the Geometric Idea of Extension in the Soul

Since the analysis of the piece of wax has served as verification for the demonstration that, for our science, soul is essentially distinct from body, known before it and known more easily than it, one can see how aberrant is the interpretation that consists in establishing the knowledge of extension as a clear and distinct idea innate only in my understanding, in the primitive innate idea of the union of soul and body, which is alien to pure understanding, under the pretext that one explains in this way how the understanding can have in itself an idea of extension, even though the essence of extension is completely repugnant to the essence of the mind.⁴¹ In fact, if this were so, the pure idea of extension as inherent in pure intelligence would then not come before the primitive notion of the union of soul and body in the order. I would then not know the nature of body through the understanding alone, but I would know it first through the existing body itself, insofar as it is revealed to me as united to the soul. It would therefore be impossible to prove that knowledge of bodies depends on intelligence alone and that, consequently, knowledge of the soul alone precedes knowledge of body and is a condition of it.⁴² In other words, we cannot see how the primitive notion of the union of soul and body could furnish the understanding alone a pure notion of extension such that it would necessarily reject outside of it everything that comes from imagination and sense, that is, generally, everything that is sensation or related to it—it would in fact derive its principle from a union with an existing body, meaning from sensation itself. One ought not think that a notion that rests on the union of soul and body, and is unintelligible for pure understanding, can serve to prove the substantial distinction between soul

and body, which, precisely, is alone intelligible for this understanding, but is radically unthinkable from the point of view of sensation; one ought not think that the proof of the real distinction between soul and body rests on the proof of the existence of body and its union with soul, an absurdity that some commentators have not hesitated to reproach Descartes for holding, although, as we shall see, he has never committed this absurdity. Descartes has always stated, in keeping with his conception of the absolute separability of substances, that their union is incomprehensible for the understanding alone and that the understanding would never be able to know it by itself, in the same way that their separation is inconceivable for sensation, which by itself would never be able to admit it.⁴³

Such an interpretation not only destroys the internal economy of Cartesian doctrine, but also ruins the essential principle it attempts to demonstrate from start to finish, that all items of knowledge proceed from the mind and not from the things outside of it, and that the inference from knowledge to being is valid. The fact that mathematical knowledge can find support in the imagination proves that it is “in harmony with the senses,”⁴⁴ but it does not prove that it stems from the presence of body substantially united hereditarily with my mind: “One might perhaps believe that a science is most subject to imagination when it considers only magnitudes, shapes, and movements; such a science is in no way based on such phantoms, but only on the clear and distinct notions of my mind.”⁴⁵ I must conceive the myriogon by the understanding *alone* before attempting to represent it imaginatively to myself; and this attempt to render imagination concrete requires a painful prolonged effort, an effort that finally comes to nothing. It requires my understanding to turn itself, together with its idea, from within to without, toward something that, in this way, manifests itself as something alien to it.⁴⁶ The support that these ideas can find in imagination proves only that, in opposition to the notions of pure metaphysics—God, soul, etc.—they represent a reality which, actually constituting the nature of bodies, appears through the imaginative knowledge caused by the existence of these bodies and which reveals to us this nature by a “direct illustration.”⁴⁷ In this way one understands that the imagination can render them more expressive and more lively (within some “narrow and strict limits”⁴⁸ within which it allows these ideas to become concrete), while it can only be an obstacle to the clear and distinct ideas of the nature of our soul and God, since what appears through it is contrary to their nature.

Moreover, it is impossible for a *clear and distinct idea* to be *introduced* in pure understanding by the substance composed of soul and body, for there is no common measure between one and the other, nor between pure idea and sensation (which belongs to the sphere of the substantial composite).⁴⁹ Attempting to justify this interpretation as an attempt to resolve the problem of knowing how I could represent to myself something entirely repugnant to my mind by means of an idea of my mind, is to assume

a task that Descartes himself has considered as outside the grasp of all possible philosophy. The alternatives, "What the mind perceives is not extension, but then how can that represent extension? Or what it perceives is extension, but then how can that be inherent to the mind?"⁵⁰ cannot be posed for Descartes, because a first declaration of his philosophy is that the mind perceives in itself ideas that have the remarkable property of presenting themselves as reflecting in the mind what is outside it, or at least what is outside its idea. The constitutive property of the idea as such is to be *representative*, meaning to possess a content (an objective reality) by which what is outside it—meaning outside my mind—is presented to my mind in the manner of a picture.⁵¹ The mind does not see the thing, but it sees a picture that it conceives as a simple picture; that is why the mind does not become the thing itself.⁵² From this arises the necessity to seek whether what the mind sees in the picture actually corresponds with the reality of the thing. No doubt, one could ask oneself how it is that the mind perceives the picture as a copy and how a purely spiritual picture of what radically excludes the mind is possible. But these are questions that Descartes has not seen fit to ask or to resolve, because, according to him, they exceed the limits of our capabilities. This property of the idea to represent formal reality by its objective reality as a picture is the constitutive character that allows us to distinguish it immediately from other thoughts. It is a first given that is revealed to us by natural light,⁵³ before which every investigation stops. It could only be obscured by attempting a deeper explanation. It surely belongs to the set of notions so evident and so simple (such as doubting, thinking, existing, etc.) that are understood immediately by themselves, while not allowing us to know anything that exists.⁵⁴

The problem for Descartes has never been to explain how the idea is originally posited as the representation of an object,⁵⁵ but to examine in what way I can have a clear and distinct representation of this object (the problem of method), and how I can prove that such an idea has an objective validity (the problem of the critique of knowledge and metaphysics). Since it is the distinctive property of the idea to represent something that is outside it, it is evident that the idea of extension, while not being extended itself, allows us to know what is extension: "And though geometric shapes are wholly corporeal, nevertheless one ought not think that the ideas by which we conceive them are also corporeal, when they do not fall under the imagination";⁵⁶ it is by means of the knowledge of the incompatibilities between ideas that I can know, assuming that my ideas can have objective validity, that their objects are incompatible in themselves and that extension in itself excludes thought. That is precisely what we will have to prove, that the incompatibilities I perceive between the ideas of things effectively reflect things that are in themselves incompatible.

One can, if one wishes, reproach Descartes for having voluntarily stopped his inquiry with this property of reflecting an object that is

possessed by ideas, but that is not the same as to suppose that one is permitted to discover, in his philosophy, a solution to a problem that he did not pose and that is not to suppose that one can falsify this philosophy in order to attempt to resolve the problem. In *Meditation VI*, in his *Letter to Elizabeth* of 28 June 1643, and in his *Treatise on the Passions*, Descartes does not seek to conceive how pure intelligence can, in spite of its radical spirituality, receive in it the clear and distinct idea of extension, which excludes thought; he seeks to discover how these two substantial realities, which are really distinct and whose union is repugnant to the understanding, can necessarily appear to the understanding itself, under the constraint of sensation, as substantially united in my nature, in fact.

Now if we consider the texts on which an attempt to establish this interpretation has been made, we perceive that they do not concern the conditions of a priori knowledge of extended *essence* or the presence of this idea in the understanding alone, but the conditions of sensible perception of existing material extension, in brief, the conditions of knowledge of the *existence* of bodies. These texts are, in fact, all drawn from *Meditation VI* or from Part II of the *Principles* (article 1). And article 1 of Part II of the *Principles* demonstrates that God would be a deceiver if he were to lead us to believe that existing bodies cause sensations in us, "often stimulating" us to perceive clearly and distinctly material substance as existing, and to posit "external bodies" as being the "occasion" for us to form an idea of them, whereas in reality these bodies do not exist and their perception and the perception of material substance is in this case directly caused by God or by other nonextended beings. And this sensible perception of extension, by which I believe that bodies exist, has nothing to do with the knowledge of geometric essences that I perceive as true without knowing whether or not there exist bodies in nature that correspond to them. Perhaps sensation is an occasion for my mind to bring forth these innate ideas and to teach me through sensible coverings, but above all through the constraint it imposes on me, that there corresponds an existence to them in nature; but this would not prove that these ideas are innate in me because of the hereditary substantial union of this mind with a body. Otherwise, a pure mind, an angel for example, which by definition does not have in itself the primitive notion of the union of soul and body, would be radically deprived of any knowledge of extension. However Descartes teaches the contrary; for an angel, accidentally united to a human body and deprived of this notion, meaning sensation, would know clearly and distinctly the extension and movement of the body.⁵⁷

It is the same for the texts of *Meditation VI*. The cause of objective reality that Descartes seeks there is not the clear and distinct idea of extension that refers to essence, but the sensible idea that refers to existence.⁵⁸ I conceive the real difference between the substance soul and the substance body because the understanding alone gives me the clear and

distinct knowledge of the necessary incompatibility of their essences, and not because the existing body exercises a passion (sensation) on my soul that involves the action of something alien to me. That is why the concept of the real difference between the two substances does not authorize me to conclude that an extension exists outside of me; that is why God does not deceive me when, having himself implanted the clear and distinct idea of extension as exclusive of thought in my understanding, he also makes me represent to myself indefeasibly the sensible images of the existing thing as coming from the existing body itself, and not from him. For I know very well that there is a radical difference between the idea of the essences of things as eternal truths, the idea of which God is in me the immediate author, and the sensible representation of bodies existing outside me that I cannot know as such—meaning as existent—except through the causality they exercise on me. This causality and the passion that reveals it do not teach me that they are *external to me* for the understanding *by itself* is sufficient to teach me that they are so by nature. It teaches me that they *exist*, meaning that this alien power, of which my passion is the effect, *can* be attributed to them *since they are alien to me*, and *must* be attributed to them since God makes me believe it. Thus I know that *they exist*, since they act on me and do not merely stay in the realm of the possible; therefore I know in this way that they exist outside of me, since they cannot exist except in conformity with their own nature, which excludes mine.

In brief, this interpretation confuses the conditions of knowledge of the essence of bodies with the conditions of knowledge of their existence. And it is precisely this confusion that one discovers in the commentaries of those who wrongly reproach Descartes for having based his proof of the real distinction of body and soul on the existence of bodies and the substantial union of body with our soul.

h) The Order and Three Conditions of Knowledge

But these confusions have only been possible for the above commentators because they have not been attentive enough to considerations of the order. In fact, the order requires that, at three different places, three different kinds of conditions of knowledge be treated, ordered according to an irreversible relation of dependence:

1) *The condition of knowledge of the clear and distinct idea of body (Meditation II)*, the exclusion outside *the idea* of body of everything that is not extended in order to obtain a clear and distinct idea of its nature.

2) *The condition of the clear and distinct knowledge of its essence*, the certainty that our clear and distinct idea of the nature of body has an objective validity—in brief, that the essence of body is in itself such that we conceive it in ourselves. Since this condition is known, we will be allowed to exclude from the substance of body in itself what we have excluded from the clear and distinct idea we had of it. The proof of this objective validity of our

clear and distinct ideas of bodies, rendered possible by *Meditation III*, will be given at the beginning of *Meditation IV* and during *Meditation VI*.

3) *Finally, the condition of the clear and distinct knowledge of the existence of bodies*: it resides in the immediate consciousness of the passion proper to sensation, which attests indubitably, in virtue of divine veracity, to the action of an alien power, which can only be the power of body.

It is impossible to demonstrate with certainty that bodies exist, if one has not first determined the conditions that render possible the certain knowledge of their essence; it is impossible to have a certain knowledge of their essence if one has not first determined the conditions that render possible the knowledge of their clear and distinct idea. Inversely, what renders possible the knowledge of existence as such is not what renders possible the knowledge of essence as such, nor the knowledge of the clear and distinct idea as such, etc. The Cartesian demonstration assumes these strict distinctions and their subordination according to the order. To misunderstand them, to reverse the order, is to fall into confusions from which aberrant interpretations arise. And one of the most serious of these confusions, as we shall see, is the confusion between the conditions of the clear and distinct knowledge of the nature of body and the conditions of the clear and distinct knowledge of its existence as such.

Moreover, the order of the conditions is not the same with respect to knowledge of the soul as with respect to knowledge of the body. With respect to the soul, the conditions of knowledge of its existence (*Cogito, ergo sum*) allow one to determine the conditions of the clear and distinct idea of its nature within my science (*Meditation II*). The conditions of the certain knowledge of its essence—meaning what allows me to assure myself that what is necessarily valid for my clear and distinct idea is necessarily valid for the thing to which the idea refers—are realized at the same time as the conditions of the knowledge of the essence of bodies, by the proof of divine veracity (*Meditation III*) and the consequences one can draw from it (*Meditation VI*).

Thus with respect to soul, we go from the knowledge of its existence to the clear and distinct idea of its nature, then from this idea to the conception of its essence as such, while with respect to body we go from the idea to the essence and then from the essence to the existence, the latter requiring a new factor (the passion proper to sensation).

i) Intersections with *Meditation VI*

The results of the analysis of the piece of wax with respect to the conditions of the sensible representation of the existing body will be rigorously cross-checked, in *Meditation VI*, by the articulations of the proof for the existence of body. In fact, as it is necessary, in order that *I have the sensible representation of the existing body*, that I *first* have the clear and distinct idea of *extension*, which is inherent in my understanding alone,

exclusive of all sensible and imaginative element; similarly it is necessary, in order to prove that *bodies exist*, that I *first* know through the understanding alone, by a pure inspection of the mind, that *the substance of body as extension* is really distinct from the substance of soul and excludes from itself everything spiritual.⁵⁹ Thus, the knowledge of the essence of body renders possible, as *sine qua non* condition, the positing of its existence, in exactly the same fashion as the *knowledge of the clear and distinct idea* of its nature allows one to establish that this idea renders possible *the sensible representation* of its existence, in the domain of pure representation (in which one does not bother with knowing whether the body exists effectively or not). Here as there, one proceeds from the *quid* to the *quod*.

j) The Problem of the Conditions of Knowledge of the Nature of Soul and the Knowledge of the Nature of Body

The verification, toward which the analysis of the piece of wax proceeds, finally amounts to more than a simple verification, since it teaches us something above and beyond what it was supposed to confirm. Not only does it verify that the soul is pure intelligence, that it is radically distinct from body and is known before it, but it also teaches us that the knowledge of bodies consists essentially of the knowledge of the pure idea of extension—and it reveals to us the necessary conditions of the knowledge of its nature. And those conditions are exactly the same conditions that preside over the knowledge of the nature of soul, namely, the elimination of everything that comes from imagination and sense.

Because of this, one is baffled and led to a confusion that is at first difficult to resolve.

If in fact the conditions of knowledge of the nature of soul are the same as those governing the knowledge of the nature of body and if one can deduce these same conditions from the true nature of soul, must one not, since the same conditions must lead to the same consequences, conclude for body the same as we have concluded for soul? Since soul is discovered as pure intelligence, from the fact that it can only be known as intelligence, having abstracted away the imaginative and the sensible, must not the nature of body, which is known in exactly the same way, by pure intelligence, also be pure intelligence? Have we not posited this, by which body is essentially constituted for us, as a simple idea of our understanding alone? Then how can we end up at the same time in this manner with this altogether different conclusion that body is radically different from soul and is known after it?

In other words, how, after having posited the nature of body as based for me, in *an idea* of my understanding alone—as is the soul—can I conclude that the nature of body is reduced to *the extension* it represents (which in itself radically denies intelligence and idea) and is not reduced to this idea. This results in the following confusion: I posit that the nature of

body radically excludes intelligence and is pure extension because it is known only by pure intelligence as an idea that, as such, radically excludes extension. The same exclusion of imagination and sense seems to require granting two different states to the nature of body: in the first state, which excludes the sensible and imaginative, it is an idea and it excludes extension; in the second state, for the same reason, it is only pure extension and excludes ideas.

This difficulty is real for the scrupulous reader; however, it is not a real difficulty for the doctrine.

The two opposite conclusions with respect to body are equally possible and legitimate according to whether one relates the conclusions resulting from the abstraction of the sensible to the form of the idea as consciousness, or to its representative content, meaning to the object that, within this idea, is represented as such to myself. When the object and the subject are identical, and the reality of the known thing is completely reduced to the reality of the knowing subject, the conclusion of the process of abstraction cannot be dual; that is, the thing as represented is completely identified with the idea or form represented—the thing is therefore pure intelligence itself: that is the case of the soul, in which the object is reduced to the knowing subject in the Cogito. In the opposite case, in which the object revealed to us by the idea is represented by the idea itself as irreducible to the very being of the idea, to the representing entity, and as exclusive of the nature of the knowing subject, the reduction accomplished by the abstraction of the sensible bares a duality of nature: the conditions of knowledge of the thing determine only the nature of the knowledge by which we represent it to ourselves, not the nature of the known thing, which, on the contrary, must be in conformity with the clear and distinct revelation that is given to us by the idea alone and that consequently must exclude the mind in this case. Thus the paradox disappears once one refers to the original nature of the idea that natural light announces within myself as a picture referring to an object that is reflected by this idea.

However, in both cases, with respect to the nature of soul or with respect to the nature of body, the same problem remains. I do not know whether what I represent necessarily to myself as constituting these natures effectively satisfies what they are in themselves—if the idea I have of them is an essence. No doubt, in what concerns the soul, it is absolutely certain that my own thought is identified with its existence, since it is through this thought that I know that I exist indubitably; but the conclusion that I could draw from this, namely, that the essence of my soul is identical to the nature of the knowledge that has allowed me to know its existence, even though it is entirely clear, distinct, and necessary for me, is not yet valid from the point of view of the truth of the thing in itself.

That is why the demonstration of the substance of the soul as pure intelligence does not precede the demonstration of the substance of body as

pure extension in the order; the two demonstrations are one and the same consequence of one and the same truth, that what I know clearly and distinctly is such as I represent it to myself. And this truth itself results immediately from divine veracity, whose reign is attested to by the proof of the existence of God. These two demonstrations will both occur at the same place in *Meditation VI*. If, on the other hand, one is concerned with the simple knowledge of these two natures, the idea of the nature of soul must precede the idea of the nature of body in the order, for the first idea depends immediately on the first known thing, namely, the existence of my thinking self, while the second idea already assumes that I have the idea of my soul as an understanding possessing this idea.

Finally, one ought to note that if these two ideas give me the same certainty of the nature of their proper object, that is, a purely subjective certainty, one of them entails the objective certainty of the existence of its object, while the other entails its absolute ignorance. It is certain that I exist, and it is as certain that I conceive that I know body by means of the understanding alone and because of the idea that the understanding provides us as extended nature excluding intelligence; nevertheless, I am not assured in this way that its nature conforms to the idea I have of it and that body exists. I only know that I exist, since I am thinking this idea. Similarly, as certainly as I exist, I perceive that I know necessarily my soul by the understanding alone and that I know it necessarily as having a purely intellectual nature; but I am not assured by this that it has this nature in itself. Nevertheless, in opposition to what holds for body, I am assured that it exists, since my mind has been able to draw, from the indubitable knowledge of its existence, by inspecting the conditions that have rendered possible this first certainty, the certain knowledge for myself of its nature as pure intelligence.

Let us recall that what is at stake in the analysis of the piece of wax is not to seek in what the essence of body consists and even less to establish that body exists—both things that we cannot actually know—but what are the necessary conditions that render possible its representation as such. I then perceive that these conditions reside in an idea of my intellect alone, an intellect that must be posited as known first.

4. Two Modes of Segregation; Foreshadowing of the Doctrine of Composite Substance

As we have seen, one and the same process of segregation with respect to sensibles leads to different results, according to whether one relates it to the object that is identical to the knowing subject or to an object (extension) that the subject opposes as exclusive of it, in the idea that it constructs of it. In the first case we obtain the knowledge of soul as pure intelligence, and in the other, we obtain the knowledge of body as pure extension excluding intelligence.

The bifurcation of this process toward two different results shows that in fact we are dealing with two different segregations. With respect to the knowledge of the nature of soul, what is at stake is to dissociate it from the knowledge of the corporeal that has entangled itself with or substituted for the knowledge of the spiritual, which can never be anything other than intellectual. With respect to the knowledge of the nature of body, what is at stake is to eliminate from the knowledge of its essence what is related to the knowledge of its existence. The knowledge of body, unlike the knowledge of soul, is therefore not uniquely intellectual; it is intellectual only with respect to its essence—that is the only point of view that excludes the sensible. Its existence cannot be given to us by intelligence alone; it requires the senses at the same time. It is impossible to eliminate the sensible when what is at stake is the knowledge of existence. Certainly we do not yet know whether bodies have an existence and whether, consequently, the sensible allows us to know it; but we ought to think that if bodies exist, we would know them through the senses. On the other hand, intelligence alone allows us to know what the soul is and whether it exists; in what concerns the soul, the sensible must be radically eliminated from the knowledge of its essence as well as from the knowledge of its existence. That is how the superiority of the knowledge of the soul over the knowledge of the body is definitively established; that also renders its existence unproblematic. From this point of view, the radical exclusion of the sensible occurs only with respect to the soul.

But from another point of view, one can glimpse an entirely different perspective. As soon as the sensible qualities are perceived as sensations, meaning as facts of consciousness, and as soon as the faculty of sensing is perceived as a faculty of thought, the sensible recovers its place in the soul as a mode of thinking. And simultaneously, as soon as body is conceived as having a purely extended nature, meaning a nature exclusive of thought, the sensible qualities as sensations or spiritual phenomena must be radically excluded from it. Then the radical exclusion of the sensible is produced with respect to body, not with respect to soul. However, if sensible elements are attributed to the soul, they are not attributed to it as *sensible elements*, but as *representations* (ideas in general), which, while involving thought, cannot be without thought. Moreover, thought can be without them; thought is essentially intelligence, and by itself it is repugnant to the form of sensible faculty. With respect to this, *the sensible as sensible* appears to us again as radically excluded from the essence of soul, which is pure intelligence.⁶⁰

We thus obtain a twofold exclusion and a twofold attribution. The sensible, as sensible, is radically excluded from the essence of soul, while it is, as representation, radically excluded from the essence of body. At the same time it must be related to soul as a representation, which supposes thought, while as a sensible, it is related to body, sensibles alone being capable of imparting their existence to us. The sensible therefore appears as something falling in between, excluded from both soul and body, but

necessarily related to both; it is related to soul by the faculty of thinking that it entails, even though it is repugnant to its essence because of its content, and it is related to body as that without which one could never be given its existence, even though it is repugnant in itself to the nature of the latter.

One sees then that the sensible could have support only in a thing that would include both thought and extension in some way, and that at the same time would be radically excluded by both and would therefore be substantially different from them. Moreover, this thing would substantially unite on the plane of existence the form of thought with an obscure and confused content that is repugnant to its essence, that it cannot account for, and that concerns the existence of bodies.

By characterizing the thing in that way we have merely given an external and provisional definition of the substance composed of soul and body. Thus the complex relations of exclusion and attribution of the sensible with respect to both soul and body, which constitute in *Meditation II* the thread of the demonstration with respect to the primacy of knowledge of soul over knowledge of body, and the necessary nature that our science must assign to the one and the other, already seems to sketch the outlines of the theory of the substantial union of soul and body. From this we see that this conception is prepared for, and that far from being an outrageous final result of the system, as it has often been thought, on the contrary, it arises from its deepest parts. Moreover it is possible to perceive this only by following the analytic order of reasons, the order "by which the thing is discovered."

5. Content and Container of Consciousness: The Problem of the Principle of Evaluation of Contents

Even though the thinking self could only have been posited in all certainty by a process of abstraction, as condition of all possible representation, whatever is the content, it is not a formal self, but a self full of consciousness within which are all the contents. In fact, these contents are radically cut off from the external thing that has been cancelled by doubt; but, on the other hand, these contents cannot exist without consciousness itself. This conjunction is particularly favorable to the conception of the radical innateness of all the contents. In this way the self is necessarily represented to my understanding as a substantial reality whose ideas, with respect to their form and their content, are just modes—this reality being immediately captured by an intellectual intuition; this is a complete contrast to the Kantian conception of the Cogito in this respect, as we have seen.

First, the fact that the Cogito has been posited only by a process of elimination that tends to separate consciousness, as a condition of representation in general, from the contents it represents, also entails an important consideration—the possibility to distinguish in consciousness, as

will be accomplished in *Meditation III*, ideas as modes of my thought “between which I recognize no difference or inequality” and for which the Cogito is sufficient to account, for “they all seem to arise from myself in the same fashion,” and the representative contents (or objective realities) of these ideas, by which they are clearly “different from one another,”⁶¹ and of which the Cogito is not capable of being their immediate source, since it is only the condition of knowledge in general, an abstraction of these contents having been accomplished.⁶² We will then ask ourselves what is the origin of these contents: do they arise from me or from elsewhere? In order to reply to this question Descartes will appeal to the principle of causality, under the form: the minimum of the reality of the cause is equal to the reality of the effect; and he will evaluate the degree of reality or perfection of the contents and of my self itself. Since Descartes will reply to the question by showing that various contents (objective realities of the ideas), including those that may be produced by the self itself, have been introduced in reality by God himself, meaning by an external source, the scope of the substantiality of the thinking self will be somewhat reduced. It could only be maintained by the innateness that allows the content of ideas to remain as original modes of the self, even though they have been implanted in it from the outside. That is why, on the one hand, the self *is sufficient for itself*, but, on the other hand, as understanding or faculty of knowledge, it is receptive and *passive* with respect to the contents of the ideas that are imposed on it. There is an antinomy between the self-sufficiency of my substance, which leads to a spontaneity excluding all passivity and the passivity-receptivity arising from the action exercised on this substance by an external cause. That is the antinomy that Spinoza and Leibniz will attempt to resolve. But one can understand, in these conditions, why the self was able to conceive itself as substance by abstracting away its contents, and to perceive itself as subsisting and self-sufficient only as a condition of all possible representation, as “intellectual nature in general.” No doubt, the abstraction of the contents and the doubt that strikes at their objective validity does not exclude them from my consciousness. Whether they are illusory or not, they are in my consciousness and they remain there. But the self does not establish the certainty of its being by thinking these contents (by thinking of something); the self establishes the certainty of its being by the thought that *thinking is necessary for all consciousness or thinking of the contents*. The substantiality of thought is thus established for science because of the thinking of thinking, not because of the thinking of contents. In this way substantial thought has similarities with the Kantian self, even though the Kantian self is only purely formal.

Second, the evaluation of the degree of reality or perfection of the contents and of myself, which all constitute the core of the proof of the existence of God by effects, will allow another problem to surface. The Cogito, which has been posited until then only as condition of the

consciousness of the contents in general, meaning of their verification in me or their presence for me, has not been posited as the standard by which I can measure the degree of perfection of these contents and of the self itself. If this standard must be sought outside the self, how can one do this, and where can one find it? If it is only legitimate to discover it in the self, how can the Cogito, posited until now as simply the condition of consciousness in general, having abstracted away the contents, transform itself into a principle of the evaluation of the reality and perfection of these contents and of its own being at the same time? The task of the subsequent linkage of reasons will be to resolve this problem.