

## On the Mind and Movement and the Question of the Self in Descartes' *Meditations*

In his example of the possibility that the men on the street may be automatons, Descartes in the *Meditations* exclaims that he judges these to be men. Descartes does not say, discarding the example as vulgar, that *they may be automatons anyway*. With this paranoiac example in the context of the Second Meditation, Descartes avoids addressing the real issue of self-movement, which he nevertheless clearly articulates elsewhere in his writings, reflecting on automatons. Since Aristotle, the observation of self-motion has challenged the idea of the soul as the animating principle of the body. In this vein, in his other works, Descartes adopts the notion of "animal spirits" distributing the movement in the body. The example of the automaton in the *Meditations* is displaced from its proper place in Descartes' other discourses, and this, as I will discuss it, is significant for his notion of the mind going beyond the scholastic context of the *Meditations*.

Does Descartes use the example of the automatons in the Second Meditation to initiate a critique of judgement, without, however, going all the way? Taking this example further, I want to discuss the implicit issue, namely, *that the automaton animates the mind*. Here, Descartes seems to offer a notion of the mind at a zero level, reversing the Aristotelian unmoved mover: the movement animates the unmoved mind.

Are we dealing with an extension of Descartes' notion of mind, the function of which is only to think (*res cogitans*)? Withdrawing the mind from the senses, the meditator is indeed journeying without moving, eventually enjoying the blissful vision of the divine light. Movement is practically absent in the *Meditations*, except for the examples of what we may call static movement, in the examples of the neurological communication between the pain in the foot and the brain.

Moreover, from the example of automatons in the *Meditations* and Descartes' reflections on the automatons elsewhere, what is the status of the mind in relation to the experience of being embodied in the world? What consequences would that imply for the notion of self as an embodied notion? Following the logic of the mind animated by the internal and external (self-)movement, can we speak of *the absence of the self* at the level of the mind in Descartes?