

## René Descartes (1596-1650)

In his *Meditations* Descartes asks: ***But what am I? A thinking being. What is a thinking being? It is a being which doubts, which understands (or conceives), which affirms, which denies, which wills, which rejects, which imagines also, and which perceives.***

Was there a time before humans were able to invent and use works like think, decide, imagine and will? According to Julian Jaynes—to be discussed later—at circa 1200BC there were people who were just beginning to exhibit the behaviours that Descartes lists. Doubting everything and starting from scratch, he discovered a powerful conclusion. Even the thoughtful act of doubting requires the existence of a mind to do that thinking. “Cogito, ergo sum.” I think, therefore I am. This led into the unfortunate side-track that separated mind from body, but I am not bothered by that. Thank God I am a country boy. I have never perceived any such separation.

I expect that Descartes thought of his **thinking-doubting being** as a physical machine-like, clock-like structure—a physical unit located in his head that originated and managed his thoughts. This conception was/is based on perceptions of other thinking beings of the common physical model, i. e. Humans. The mechanical appearance of the human body suggests that the thinker is another machine inside. Sense organs in the head—eyes, ears, nose and mouth—suggests that the mind is in there, too. The head is where the action is. However, the next thinker—William James—did not buy into the machine-like concept. He was more inclined to eddies and currents than gears and levers.

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Source: Descartes, René (1951). *Meditations*, Library of Liberal Arts, New York.