

RE-READING DESCARTES' COGITO: A STUDY

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The issues and problems surrounding the Cogito have fascinated humans for many centuries. It has influenced all kinds of modern philosophy, as well as literature, art, social science, and religion. It was introduced first by Descartes in his Discourse on Method which was published in French as Je pense, donc je suis (1637) and later appeared in Latin as Cogito, Ergo Sum in his Principles of Philosophy. (1644) Husserl took up Descartes' Cogito to give the form of transcendental; Heidegger directly assaulted it as an isolated subject that even fail to address the metaphysical question of subject itself; Sartre's existential philosophy however was founded on a different version of Cogito whose certainty was never clear and distinct; Lacan's, on the other hand, gave an obsessional psychoanalytical reading of modern subject in terms of the truth of Descartes' Cogito. There is also the (in)famous debate between Foucault and Derrida on the idea of Cogito and Madness, at the end of the twentieth century, that drifted apart the two thinkers. The Cogito has also been a topic of interest among other thinkers like Ryle, Wittgenstein, Russell, Willaims, and many more. The paper seeks to bring out the most complicated debates of Descartes' Cogito, which otherwise is also taken to be very simple, clear, and distinct. It is divided into three sections. First, is the preamble to the 'Cogito' in terms of 'a thinking thing'. Second, seeks to re-read Descartes' Cogito as opening the era of the modern subject, or the Cartesian subject. Third, is an attempt to give some insight on the contemporary debate centering around the same. The crux of the paper is to give an appraisal of the various readings of Descartes' Cogito.

Key Words: Descartes, Cogito, Cartesian/ Subject, Heidegger, Derrida, Lacan

* All quotations on Descartes' are from *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Trans. Cottingham. J. Stoothoff. R and Murdoch .D. Cambridge University Press. The work is abbreviated as PWD.

I

Preamble to Descartes' Cogito

After going through the rigorous process of doubting everything Descartes was left with nothing. He asked if there is anything that can be known to be true, and that can survive the process of doubt. It is here that he conceived that whereas there was nothing in all the world, no heaven, no earth, no minds, nor any bodies; I myself did exist since I persuaded myself of something, or merely because I thought of something. And, whereas there can be some deceiver or other, who is very powerful and very cunning, and who even employs his ingenuity in deceiving me, I still exist without doubt, if he deceives me. So, Descartes in his *Meditation II* writes,

“..let him deceive me as much as he can, he will never bring it about that I am nothing so long as I think that I am something. (WDP: 17)

This reflection brings the doubt to a halt for the first time. He thus discovered that there was one thing that could never be doubted, namely the fact that he was doubting or thinking. And 'I exist' as something who is doubting or thinking so much so that it can be said that 'in order to doubt, one must exist.'

Descartes also added,

“ that this proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.” (WDP:17)

In the *Discourse*, Descartes already conceived that the 'I' is not a body but a substance whose essence or nature is 'to think.' This 'I' for Descartes is the 'soul', the existence of which does not need any place, nor does it depend on many material things. In his *Discourse*, Descartes writes,

“this 'I'-that is, the soul by which I am what I am - is entirely distinct from the body, and indeed is easier to know than the body, and would not fail to be whatever it is, even if the body did not exist.” (WDP: 127)

Descartes also noted that the 'I' even though it assures him of having made a true assertion, 'I think, therefore I am,' was nevertheless not quite perfect. He argues that the 'I' lacks perfection because 'the I know some perfection which I did not possess.' To quote Descartes,

“..that since I knew of some perfection that I did not possess, I was not the only being which existed, but there had of necessity to be some other, more perfect being on which I depended and from which I had acquired all that I possessed.” (WDP: 128)

Descartes admitted that 'I' is imperfect and went on to prove the existence of the perfect Being, which was God, in his *Third* and *Fifth Meditation*. However, it was only in the *Second Meditation* that the formulation of the Cogito as the necessary truth to the claim that 'I am, I exist,' was most implicitly set out. The *Meditation* (especially *II*) was a claim that adds to the more familiar formulation of the Cogito as given in the *Discourse*. So, whereas in the *Discourse*, the Cogito is offered as something of which he is certain and also the ground that assures his existence; in the *Meditations*, Descartes moves towards the ontological aim of doubt. Here the focus of attention was not on the Cogito as something of which he is certain. In the *Meditation* Descartes also dropped the copula 'therefore' and instead writes, 'I am, I exist' (although it is implicit that the 'I am' is connected to

‘I doubt’ or ‘I think’). So, Ricoeur in his essay, *The Crisis of the ‘Cogito,’* asserts that the statement must be read as “in order to doubt, one must exist.” (1996: 60)

Again, Bernard Williams in his work *Descartes The Project of Pure Enquiry* argued that the focus of Descartes’ attention in the *Meditation* was primarily to express the nature of the Cogito. He claims that Descartes was more concerned with displaying the accurate meaning of the Cogito itself. Hence, the question that Descartes raises after the certainty of Cogito’s existence in ‘I am, I exist,’ is about ‘what I am.’ Now, this question of ‘what I am’ is also the question of whereas I am conscious that I exist, the I who knows that I exist, inquire into ‘what I am’. And, Descartes writes,

“But I do not yet have a sufficient understanding of what this ‘I’ is, that now necessarily exists.” (WDP: 17)

It is observed that here Descartes makes a shift from the question ‘who is the Cogito,’ to the ‘what is the Cogito.’ It is also a shift from the absolute use of the term Cogito as, ‘I am, I exist,’ to the predicative use of the same as ‘I am something.’

But what something? The first reply that Descartes gave was ‘to be a man.’ He further asked “But what is a man?” (WDP: 17)) He refuses to go with the Aristotelian answer of a ‘reasonable animal’ for this demands furthermore inquire about other questions like ‘what is an animal,’ and ‘what is reasonable,’ and so on. In other words, Descartes refuses to designate the ‘I’ to the nature of the body, but to the ‘thoughts’ (*cogitatio*) that spring up in his mind/ soul. ‘Thought’ according to Descartes is an attribute that belongs to the thinker. To quote him,

“thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist- that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist.” (WDP: 18)

He continues,

“I am not admitting anything except what is necessarily true. I am, then, in the strict sense only a thing that thinks; that is I am a mind, or intelligence, or intellect, or reason- words whose meaning I have been ignorant of until now.” (WDP: 18)

He concluded that,

“ But for all that I am a thing which is real and which truly exists. But what kind of a thing? As I have just said- a thinking thing.” (WDP: 18)

Hence, the ‘I’ receives the status of a thinking thing. So, the next question is, what then is [this] thinking thing? In other words, what is a thing which thinks? To this Descartes replies,

“ A thing that doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions.” (WDP:19)

Since it is my being the ‘I’ who is now doubting everything, who also understands certain things, and who affirms as well as denies things, and who also desires, and imagines many things, who is averse from being deceived, and sometimes despite his will, and who also perceives many likewise, etc., even in sleep and thought; Descartes, argued that it is ‘I’ who imagines, even if none of the things that I imagine is true, the ‘I’ still has the power of imagination. And this power of imagination really exists and forms part of my thought. Hence, it is the ‘I’ who has sensations, and who is also aware of objects as though by the senses, since indeed it is the same I, who feels and perceives certain things. As Descartes writes,

“Lastly, it is also the same ‘I; who has sensory perceptions, or is aware of bodily things as it were through the sense.” For example, I am now seeing light, hearing a noise, feeling heat.” (WDP: 19)

But since, all these phenomena can be false, as in dreams, (I see light, I hear noise, and I feel heat even in dreams) they are *cogitation* (or act of thinking) in so far as Descartes identifies them as the purely mental element of the experience. In the *Principles*, Descartes reduces all forms of consciousness or conscious experience into two general kinds namely one of cognition (*perceptio*), and the other is volition. The former is the operation of the intellect; the latter is the operation of the will. Descartes in his *Principles*, Part I, also noted that sensation, imagination, and pure intellect are just various forms of cognition; and desires, aversion, assertion, denial, doubt, are various forms of volition.

In other words, all these are a variety of mental operations that are actually inseparable from the ‘I’, who experience them. Taken this way, the Cogito as a ‘thinking thing’ (*res cogitans*) is not different from *cogitatio* (my thoughts). Here,

it may be noted that the *cogitatio* (in Latin, from the verb *cogitare*) and *pensée* (the French verb *penser*) have a wider significance than the English translation, *think* and *thought*. Whereas in English such terms are connected only with cognitive process, for Descartes it includes any sort of conscious state or activity whatsoever. As Bernard Williams noted that ‘it is also a sensation in its purely psychological aspects’ or ‘an act of will, as judgment or belief or intellectual questioning.’ (2005:62)

It follows that, what Descartes has doubted earlier, specific propositions that presuppose the existence of the body and the physical world, like, ‘I am denying that I have a body’, or ‘it seems to me as though I can feel heat’ and others that are ruled out by the doubt, are now accepted as types of *cogitatio* in so far as these are experiences that exist merely as a mental phenomenon. All these kinds of *cogitatio*, (although they are referred to, only after Descartes proved his own existence) are bound up with the ‘thinking thing’ of the Cogito. Hence, these *cogitationes* argue Williams is part of Descartes’ Cogito that is considered as certain and self-evident, whenever he says that the existence of his thought is also certain and self-evident. (2005: 64)

This enumeration of the Cogito as ‘I am thinking,’ and also ‘I feel cheerful,’ or ‘I believe what you say,’ and so on, that is, in short Descartes’ Cogito with the ‘I’ as the first person starting point, posits the question of the subject in modern philosophy. Following is an account of reading Descartes’ Cogito in terms of the modern subject.

II

[Reading] Descartes’ Cogito and the Question of Cartesian Subject

Modern philosophy has postulated Cogito as a Cartesian subject that is capable of making free and rational decisions. It addresses the position of the philosopher who is going through his hypothesis and doubts. It is a philosophical subject that remains constant in the statement, whoever occupies that place. The ‘I’ in Descartes’ ‘I think’ does not work the moment it is replaced by ‘Descartes thinks, therefore he is.’ That is, whereas the writing of Descartes’ *Meditations* is autobiographical, they are purely fictional because the ‘I’ occupies the slot of demonstration. That is, the Cogito is the Cartesian subject of demonstrative ‘I’ which is nonetheless difficult to define. This idea of the Cogito in terms of the demonstrative ‘I’ was also discussed by A.J. Ayer in his essay, *Cogito, Ergo Sum* published in 1953.

Descartes resorted to the example of wax argument to answer the nature of 'I' which he referred to as 'something I know not what,' but that which does not fall under imagination. After examining a piece of wax, he exclaimed,

"for if I judge that wax exists from the fact that I see it, clearly this same fact entails much more evidently that I myself also exist." (WDP: 22)

Thereafter Descartes postulates the Cogito as a subject of the thinking thing, imbued with soul and capable of thought and rational deliberation. It is a non-material substance that is without any material existence. It is a thinking substance, that is, the *res cogitans* (thinking thing) that is different from the *res extensa* (extended thing). The latter comprises the material part of the body. Descartes considered animals to be automata, composed completely of *res extensa* and operating only on the basis of automatic reflexes. It follows that the Cartesian Cogito are also humans or rather human subjects who are endowed with the *res cogitans*, the immaterial substance which is commonly referred to as the 'I'.

Following Descartes' line of inquiry, it is observed that Descartes never actually questioned the existence of a metaphysical substratum for consciousness, or the elusive 'self'. The grammatical use of the term 'I' was never put into the spectrum of metaphysical 'I'. In fact, it was Hume who first questioned the existence of the metaphysical, self-conscious self. Hume argues that the state of consciousness is not indicative of its metaphysical substratum. In his *A Treatise of Human Nature*, (1739-40) Hume noted that conscious states exist separately from each other and have no need of a substratum. Hume rejected the existence of a metaphysical self and defined 'self' as nothing but a collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations. He assumes that we only *feel* a connection between different conscious states, that are always about thoughts in the past. This is because, for Hume, I cannot, no matter how hard I try, think of something and, at one and the same time, think that I am thinking of that something. For Hume, it is only the present conscious state that we are aware of, and it is only in this present state that we are also aware of past conscious states which are relegated to memory. Hence, it is not a series of conscious states that is aware of itself, but a present conscious state, also known as 'memory state.' Hume concluded that it is this experience of the memory that gives the feeling of 'self'. Hence, the demonstrative 'I' of Cartesian Cogito or Descartes' metaphysical subject of consciousness 'I' is devoid of descriptive content. It is used merely for

grammatical convenience. This is because the 'self' cannot have a logical construct. Ayer in his *Metaphysics and Common Sense* also revised the Cogito proposition to 'there is a thought now'. This has its own epistemological problems. (1971:166-8)

The Cartesian Cogito and its nature of self or 'I' was also challenged by the German philosopher Kant. The Cartesian 'I' according to Kant is not a 'thing' in the world either as material or immaterial. Kant explains it as that aspect of experiences that combines a diverse range of sensory inputs into a point of time. That is, the thinking subject, (in the capacity of a subject as the 'I', 'ego', or 'self') creates a meaningful world of experience by unifying all its perceptions according to the categories of human understanding. The 'I' then is not a potential object of experience, it can be known only as it appears to human observation (as a phenomenon), and not as it is in itself; that is, it is a presupposition of experience, that is a structural feature of our consciousness. It is what he called the *Transcendental Unity of Apperception*.

Now, Hegel took over the idea of 'I' as a structural feature of the mind's operation. He however added that it is constituted by the process of reflectively mediating itself with itself. In his preface to *Phenomenology of Spirit*, (1809) Hegel argues that the 'I' or self is a subject that is derived from the Aristotelian physics of 'the unmoved which is also self-moving.' That is, the subject has a *prima facie* case for subjectivity, that which is not moved by an outside force, but which propels itself. Hegel further identifies this power to move, this subject as pure negativity. This subjective self-motion comes not from any pure or simple kernel of authentic individuality, but from what Hegel calls the bifurcation of the simple; the doubling which sets up the opposition, and then again, the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its anti-thesis. Hence, the subject for Hegel is *modus operandi*, that, which cuts, splits, and introduces distinctions by injecting negation into the flow of sense-perceptions. Following this, subjectivity is a kind of structural effect of diffusion and refraction that occurs around a field of negativity. In this sense, it is a second-order effect, that is, 'the negation of the negation.' The subject experiences itself as a unity only by purposively negating the very diversity it itself had produced.

However, it was the phenomenology of the twentieth century that gave a radical turn to the Cartesian Cogito. Husserl in his aim to achieve knowledge of 'apodictic certainty' through his phenomenological method, criticizes Descartes

for his failure to make the transcendental turn. He asserts that far from being pure, the Cartesian Cogito is none other than a psychological apperception with an empirical component that still needs phenomenological reduction. Husserl in his book *Cartesian Mediation* noted in the first meditation that Descartes stands on the threshold of the greatest of all discoveries; yet he does not grasp its proper sense; the sense namely of transcendental subjectivity.

Following Husserl's orientation towards the question of origin, Heidegger readdresses the question of Cartesian Cogito. Heidegger interpreted the subject of Cartesian Cogito as the 'ego,' the 'I' or '*res cogitans*' that is beyond doubt. According to Heidegger, the Cartesian Cogito is a thing, where doubts begin, but that which itself cannot be doubted. It is the thinking substance that can doubt anything but cannot be doubted itself. It can doubt anything, but not its own thinking. That is, the Cogito with its thoughts is the Cogito with its own cognitive images, with its own contents (of the worldly things) that are beyond doubt. Here, the 'ego' as a subject has its predicates in a cognizing way, such that the 'I' know about the predicates that the 'I have,' in a way that I know myself. It is the first true being, that also has priority over all other beings. It is the knower, who knows the object as it is represented in the mind/soul. Hence, Heidegger in his work, *The Basic Problem of Phenomenology*, noted that the Cogito's as '*res cogitans*' also means '*cogitat se cogitare*.'" (1982: 126) So, whereas Descartes has liberated philosophy from theology when he grounded his notion of subject, (the ego, the I, *res cogitans*) and subjectivity on his epistemology; Heidegger argues that the subject who thinks, represents, perceives, judges, agree, loves, hates, strives, etc. is a *res cogitans* whose realities are always representations. (1982: 126)

The phenomenological analysis of *Dasein* in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) raises the question of Being, who must be disclosed in its Being. It also raises the question of the primordial sense of Being that is different from all other beings. The latter is the Cartesian model of the 'idea of man' or things that can be understood in terms of the concept '*res extensa*'. That is, in terms of its physical and mechanical dimensions of being. Heidegger reformulated the fundamental problem of ontology (from the ontological constitution of the ego, subject in terms of self-consciousness) to the *Dasein* modes of being in terms of its authentic existence. He argues that *Dasein* as 'Being-in-the-world,' is always involved in a world in such a way that 'I' or the subject in the everyday interpretation of the self has a tendency to understand itself in terms of the world

with which it is concerned. Following this, what is significant in the question of subject (of Being) is the *Dasein modes of existence*, instead of *subject as self-consciousness*. Heidegger maintains that the self or the subject is an understanding determined by mood and not pure consciousness. With the point of departure from pure consciousness, the self or subject in Heidegger lies in *Dasein's* 'facticity' which is given in the unity of 'thrownness' and 'projection,' and in moodiness and understanding. Hence, Heidegger redefined the Cartesian sense of subject or *subjectum* in terms of the primordial, existential, and ontological basis of *Dasein*. In other words, the essence of *Dasein* lies in its existence. Hence, the I-hood and selfhood of *Dasein* is always given existentially and understood existentially and ontologically, rather than existentially and ontically in its own Being as Being-in-the-world. Heidegger thereby concluded that the Cartesian understating of the notion of the 'ego' or the 'self' or the 'Cogito' is a mere epistemological principle that has failed to address the most primordial question of Being. And insofar as the Cartesian Cogito is *res cogitans* or a representation or a substance, that is always given as present-at-hand, it has remained an isolated subject.

This notion of the Cogito as an isolated Cartesian subject is as good as saying that the Cogito is not a subject. A similar viewpoint could be retrieved when Spinoza relegates in his *Ethics*, (1677) that the discourse of infinite substance alone deserves to be a foundation. The Cogito if it is separated from the consciousness of God makes a clean break from the order of reason, and loses the value of a foundation. It also denatured the image of the self. And, in so far as the true Cogito is the Cogito attached to God, either it has the value of a foundation, or it is founded on its finite condition of the idea of perfection. As Ricoeur writes,

“ A cogito seems open to us here: either the Cogito has the value of a foundation, but then it is a sterile truth which can not be pursued without a break in the order of reasons; or it is founded on its finite condition of the idea of perfection and the first truth loses its halo of first foundation.” (1996: 65)

Ricoeur thereby noted that going by the Spinozian account of the transmutation of the Cogito from the *Second* to the *Third Meditation*, it is observed that the Cartesian Cogito is no more than an abstract, truncated truth, that is stripped of all its prestige. (1996:66)

The academic line of Western philosophy has succeeded to a large extent in decentering the status quo of the Cartesian Cogito. It has decentralized the subject

of Cartesian Cogito. Freud's discovery of unconsciousness as the subject of the self plays havoc with the rational account of Descartes' philosophy. And there is the structuralist de Saussure's account of subjectivity that is embedded not in our language and cultural system. Whereas thinkers like Ricoeur strive to retrieve the destruction of Cartesian Cogito in terms of the hermeneutic description of the 'I am'; there are other thinkers like Lacan who have put forward arguments to rehabilitate the Cartesian Cogito. What follows is an attempt to map Descartes' cogito and the notion of the modern subject from a somewhat different trajectory in the history of modern philosophy.

III

De-Centering Descartes' Cogito and the Modern Subject

The story of Descartes' Cogito is instituted as the origin of a sense that holds a privileged position and presents itself as a coherent legacy of unity and legitimate narratives. It became the new site of the production of meaning. It is the point of orientation, a fixed position, a geometric zero point. It is the only principle to withstand the assaults of the devil, arises in the division between sense and non-sense, at the exclusion of nonsense, which has become to be designated as among other things, madness. In the *First Meditation*, Descartes asked whether only a madman is capable of doubting the facts of our everyday existence. He writes,

“..how could it be denied that these hands or this whole body are mine? Unless perhaps I were to liken myself to madmen, whose brains are so damaged by the persistent vapours of melancholia that they firmly maintain they are kings when they are paupers.....But such people are insane, and I would be thought equally mad if I took anything from them as a model for myself.” (WDP: 13)

Foucault and Derrida have extensively debated over Cartesian 'madness' and attempts to advance both sides have been made over the years. In a nutshell, whereas Foucault marks from the above passage the ascendancy of reason in the designation of madness as unreason, and the exclusion of madness as an avenue of rational philosophical doubting; Derrida did not find any effective exclusion of madness. Derrida in his essay *Cogito and the History of madness* (1963) writes,

“my point of departure might appear slight and artificial. In this 673-page book, Michel Foucault devotes three pages....to a certain passage from the first pf Descartes' meditations. In this passage madness, folly, dementia, insanity seem, I emphasis seem, dismissed, excluded and ostracized from the circle of philosophical dignity, denied entry to the philosopher's city, denied the right to

philosophical consideration, ordered away from the bench as soon as summoned to it by Descartes- this last tribunal of a Cogito that, by its essence, *could not possibly* be mad.” (2016:30)

He also argues that,

“ ...to repeat once more, on the site of this division between reason and madness of which Foucault speaks so well, the meaning, a meaning of the Cogito or (plural) Cogitos (for the Cogito of the Cartesian variety is neither the first nor the last form of Cogito).” (2016:31)

He continues that,

“ ..to determine that what is in question here is an experience which, at its furthest reaches, us perhaps no less adventurous, perilous, nocturnal and pathetic than the experience, and is, I believe, much less adverse to and accusatory of madness, that is, accusative and objectifying of it, than Foucault seems to think.” (2016 : 31)

The point of argument is that whereas Foucault exemplified the disqualification of madness, from the realm of rationality, Derrida suggests that this exclusion is only apparent, and it prepares the way for a total madness, in the form of the evil genius into the realm of the Cogito. That is, the Cartesian madness argues Derrida is part and parcel of Descartes’ rational movement. Foucault finds the position of Derrida absurd. Foucault argues (against Derrida) that the Cogito is established in perfect safety since the evil genius is admitted only after the effective exclusion of madness and is a simulacrum of madness, that is a controlled exercise for a subject that is already firmly rational.

The phenomena of madness in Descartes’ Cogito is best reconstituted by psychoanalyst Lacan in his *Seminars*. Lacan has remarkably worked on the Cogito and even writes that “ I think that it would not be superfluous to call for a return to Descartes.’ (2006:133) According to Lacan, one needs to re-consider the Cartesian madness in the context of the latter’s relation to the question of truth and belief, as it is experienced by the subject. That is, whereas the subject of madness stands in delusional belief who fails to recognize the production of one’s own thoughts, Lacan argues that the point is to figure out what he knows about himself without recognizing himself in it. In other words, Lacan draws our

attention to the point that ‘madness is experienced entirely within the register of meaning.’ (2006:135) According to Lacan, the madman is personally targeted by his delusional beliefs that ‘ they split him, talk back to him, echo him, and read in him, just as he identifies them, questions them, provokes them and deciphers them.’ (2006: 135) He continues that ‘when all means of experiencing them fail him, his perplexity still manifests to us a questioning gap in him.’ (2006: 135)

Following Freud's psychoanalytic model of the subject as unconscious, and Saussure linguistic insight of the algorithm of the signifier (S) and signified (s), Lacan built upon the constitution of the ‘split-subject’ that is double bind. In his essay, *The Mirror Stage* Lacan states that the experience that is conceptualized in the mirror stage and its bearing upon the ‘I’ function, ‘sets us at odds with any philosophy directly stemming from the *cogito*.’ (2006: 75) Lacan also worked on the reformulation or subversion of the Cartesian Cogito. He was critical of the idea of the subject as an autonomous ego that has the essence of consciousness. Lacan also seeks to retain the concept of subject and worked extensively for the extension for the Cogito. Lacan argued that the Cogito contains within itself the seeds of its own subversion. It does so, by putting forward a concept of subjectivity that undermines the modern concept of the ego. Lacan refers to this concept of subjectivity as ‘the subject of science’, that is a subject who is denied all intuitive access to knowledge and is thus left with ‘reason’ as the only path to knowledge. Lacan thereafter proposes that the subject of the Cartesian Cogito is the same as the subject of the unconscious. The only difference is that, whereas the Cartesian method advances from doubt to certainty, Lacan’s psychoanalysis starts from affirming ‘it thinks’ and not from the statement ‘ I think.’ Lacan even went on to rewrite Descartes’s phrase like ‘ I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.’ That is, for Lacan, ‘ I am thinking where I am not, therefore I am where I am not thinking.’ So, Lacan claims that only by ceasing to think can I glimpse that I am. It is this line of thought that Lacan explores extensively at a later stage. In *Seminar II*, one could for instance, even find Lacan’s de-centered subject in the margin of the fundamental Cartesian intuition of ‘I think therefore I am’, with Descartes deceiving god. So, whereas Descartes' dialectic was governed by the aim of demonstrating the existence of God, Lacan claims that it is in arbitrarily isolating the Cogito that gives it a fundamental, existential, decisive, value. And whereas phenomenologists and existentialist thinkers grasp consciousness by a through itself, Lacan insists that there is no privileged status in

the subject's apprehension of itself. This is because, for Lacan, the true subject is to be found in the unconscious.

Lacan observes that Descartes' 'I think' is a mere point of fading, because he saw in this point the beginning of knowledge rather than its annihilation, and proceeded to rebuild the field of knowledge through 'the subject supposed to know', namely, God. (1977: 224) Whereas in Descartes, the subject immediately coincides with itself in and for the duration of the reflective act, the psychoanalytic experience of Lacan's split subject, must go in search of itself if it is to return home to the unconscious. Lacan revealed the veil of alienation in the constituents of the dialectic of the subject. The Lacanian Cogito is not the modern subject that is caught in the structure of alienation. It cannot find its being in its thought. It is rather found in the repressed part of thought (the unconsciousness) that comes constantly to haunt and dislocate it. And it is maintained only through this repression. In *Seminar XII*, Lacan marked the beginning of a radical reevaluation of Descartes' Cogito, centered upon the Heideggerian issue of the 'question of Being.' He reformulated the Cogito as "*je pense: donc je suis*", "*je suis celui qui pense : donc je suis*" (I am, therefore I think). This formulation indicates the split between the 'Je suis' (of meaning sense) and then '*je suis* (of being), a split which poses, the problem of truth. The split here is between the 'I' of enunciation and the 'I' of the enunciated. In *Seminar XI*, Lacan emphasized that the Cartesian subject is constituted in the search for certainty. He also states that Descartes' Cogito has not given an essential institution of being. The subject is what is missing in knowledge.

Again, in *Seminar XIV*, Lacan brings yet another revision to the Cogito. He states that the best translation of the Cogito is, 'either I am not thinking or I am not', 'is a point of crystallization for the subject of the unconsciousness.' Descartes' Cogito thereby serves as the 'pivot' around which Lacan will make the necessary return to the origin of the subject. Lacan emphasizes the origins of the Cogito in *desire*. Lacan reduces the Cartesian subject to be the presuppositions of Freudian unconsciousness, thus a foundation for psychoanalysis. Hence, the Cartesian Cogito replaces the philosophical question surrounding the relation between thinking and being to the being of the 'I', which for Lacan and Heidegger also involves a refusal of the question of being.' Lacan emphasizes that what is at issue in the Cogito is not epistemological but metaphysical. In other words, Lacan developed the Cogito in terms of a linguistic act. He argues that the point is not to

know whether 'I speak of myself' in a way that I conform to 'what I am,' but rather to know whether when 'I speak of myself' 'I am' the same as the self of which I speak. That is, if I resolve to be only what I am, how can I escape here from the obvious fact that I am in this very act?' And, if I seek to become what I am, how can I doubt that even if I lose myself there, I am still there? Lacan reduces this riddle to the linguistic question which can be put as: is the place I occupy as subject of the signifier concentric or eccentric in relation to the place I occupy as subject of the signified?

Conclusion:

Keeping in view the above discussion it may be concluded that the logic and the grammar of the Cogito demands a continued reading and rewriting of the Cogito that does not nevertheless enact a subversion of the same. It could be reverted first and foremost as a grammatical construction, the product of an inertially persistent system of syntax, that even questioned this system, but reaffirms it in the initial moments of its self-reflection. It is an arrangement of inscriptions tied together to produce a certain sense, that also raises the possibility of nonsense, only to exclude such a possibility. (Melehy: 1997:141) Hence, the fundamental axioms involved in the inscription of the Cogito, started by raising hypothetical doubts would not have been different from those of a madman (that they are laughable) until the hyperbolic doubt, where the philosopher allows a certain madness into the core of his own thought that disrupt his own ostensibly contained and unified subject. (1997: 141) That is, Descartes' hyperbolic doubt invokes his excessive attempt to completely disrupt the signification (in order to ensure the system's form grounding). There are two extreme readings that have come out of this. One is the phenomenologist Husserl who has always noted that Descartes has started rightly by putting everything into doubt but committed a mistake in confusing his Cogito with pure I. The other is the psychoanalyst Lacan who has reverted Descartes' Cogito, from 'I think, I am' to 'I am, I think.' Others include Heidegger and Sartre, and even in analytic trends like Ryle, Wittgenstein, etc. So, drawing our attention to the various examination of Descartes' Cogito, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that, it is possible if not easily actualized, to say that the cogito is discovered in the limit between the two realms, the realm of madness and the realm of rationality, such that it is not a unified subject anymore. In other words, the Cartesian text may be read in an aspect that unravels the system in which the *oeuvre* is produced. (1997: 142) As Melehy writes, "such

reading does not betray Descartes, but rather participates in the cogito as the cogito is presented: a pure explosion of possibilities of signification- whose very force is nonetheless directed to foreclose on these possibilities.” (1997: 142)

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