

## ‘I’M THINKING’

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### *Abstract*

This paper aims to show that the ‘I’m thinking’, to really be the awareness of an act of thought, must refer to or indicate particular thought-contents that are not actually being focused on in the consciousness. A consequence of this is that the ‘I’m thinking’ lacks the absolute incorrigibility necessary to justify its role as a premise for the *cogito*.

My first purpose in this paper is to investigate what a person might mean when judging or saying that he or she is thinking. This investigation will show some unexpected features of this kind of judgment that have consequences for the evaluation of the supposed self-verifying character of the ‘I’m thinking’ and, further, for our analysis of the claims of certainty of the Cartesian *cogito*. I begin by considering some possible concrete situations in which one could say, ‘I’m thinking’.

### **I. An Ordinary Language Approach of ‘I’m thinking’**

Consider the following examples:

- (i) Meg and her husband Carl have planned to take a small trip by bicycle. As Meg is preparing to go out, Carl leans out of the window and remains there. Seeing her husband’s passivity, Meg asks him, somewhat bored, ‘What are you doing now?’ His answer is, ‘I’m just thinking. . .’ Hearing this, Meg asks, ‘And what are you thinking about?’ He answers, ‘I’ve been thinking that it might be better to go by car, since it seems that the weather will change’.
- (ii) A theoretical physicist presents a problem to a colleague. His colleague remains in silence and looks down, visibly thinking about the problem. After some moments, as if to justify his silence, he says, ‘I’m thinking. . . I believe I can find the right answer’. After a while, he smiles and gives his colleague the solution he was seeking.

Examples in which a person says to himself that he is thinking are less frequent. However, there are situations in which it also occurs. Consider the following:

- (iii) Mary is a student preparing an oral exposition on the medieval arguments for the existence of God. As she is remembering Gaunilo's first objection to Anselm's argument, she is distracted by the sound of a telephone ringing in her neighbour's room. Trying to find again the thread of her thoughts, she asks to herself, 'Now, what am I thinking about?' Then, as she finds what she was seeking, she says to herself, 'Yes, I'm thinking that. . .' and continues the sequence of the argument.

What I wish to point out is that these three examples, along with other concrete examples of the self-attribution of thinking, generally share a *common pattern*, which requires closer exploration.

The first thing to be noticed is that when a person thinks that he is thinking, he can always ask, 'What am I thinking *about?*' and, in principle and more reasonably, another person would also be entitled to ask him, 'What are you thinking *about?*' In the first of our examples, this question was posed by Meg, and in the third, Mary asked herself the question; in the second example, the question was not asked, but it *could* obviously have been asked. Also remarkable is the kind of answer we give to such questions. In the first example, the answer consisted of pointing to a thought that Carl *had thought* a moment before, namely, the thought that the weather could change. In the second, if the first physicist had asked his colleague, 'What are you thinking about?' he would probably have answered, 'Wait a moment; let me finish my reasoning. . .' And later he could say: 'I was thinking that. . .' followed by the description of his thoughts. In the third case, the more extended answer would be 'I'm thinking that. . . and I am trying to come to the conclusion that. . .' In what follows, I will analyse the common pattern of the self-attribution of thinking, using such answers as a heuristic clue.

Considering such answers, I will argue that the thought 'I'm thinking' can be generally analysed as 'I have thought that *p*', a point that mainly for expository reasons I divide in the two following claims:

- (a) *'I am thinking' generally means 'I am thinking that p'*,

and

- (b) *'I'm thinking that p' generally means 'I have thought that p'*.

Let us begin with (a). In standard cases at least (since we will later see that there is a conceivable exception), the question of what a person is thinking leads when fully answered, to the presentation of *another* thought or thoughts, which may complete the occurrence of 'I'm thinking' by describing *about what* the person is thinking. In other words, in concrete situations, to the question 'What are you (or what am I) thinking?' the answers given usually have the form 'I'm thinking that  $p$ ', where  $p$  stands for one or more thoughts (or propositions) that the person is thinking. In some cases,  $p$  stands for only one thought; for example, if Carl had said 'I'm thinking that the garden needs to be watered'. But  $p$  often stands for a complete chain of thoughts. So, if the physicist in the second example were later asked to reproduce what he was thinking, he would say something like: 'I have thought that  $q$ ,  $r$ ,  $s$  . . ., which has led me to the conclusion  $v$ '.

That what is thought is at least a complete thought (or proposition) seems to be necessary: it doesn't make sense to say that one thinks *part* of a thought or a mental event that is not a thought. It is true that I can say, for example, that I was thinking *about* the Golden Gate Bridge. But the word 'about' already makes it clear that I'm not referring to the meaning of this name, and still less the image of this bridge, but to the thoughts that accompanied this image or idea. Finally, it is valuable to note that to the question 'What are you thinking about?' one could also give the unsatisfactory answer: 'I'm thinking something' (or 'I'm thinking  $\xi$ ', where  $\xi$  means 'some thought'), letting  $p$  remain unspecified. In other words: 'I'm thinking that  $p$ ' can be shortened to 'I'm thinking something', which can be shortened to 'I'm thinking'; though they have different linguistic meanings, what is *meant* by all three phrases is better explained by 'I'm thinking that  $p$ '.

Now suppose that, when Meg asked, 'What are you thinking about?' Carl had answered, 'I'm thinking about nothing' or 'I'm thinking about this thought'. Meg, being no philosopher, would have in such cases a good reason to be angry, since these answers are devoid of sense. One can't say 'I'm thinking' meaningfully without intending that this expression be complemented with a thought-content. If I say to myself 'I'm thinking' without reference to a thought-content, then I've not thought, but only spelt those words in my mind. With this, I'm not proposing that there is no mental occurrence, or that I'm not conscious of it, but rather that it is not the real experience of thought. When I spell out silently in my mind the combination of words 'I-am-thinking',

I'm not having the awareness of thinking, but only the awareness of what we could call a *syntactic* occurrence in my mind, namely, of my inwardly spelling 'I-am-thinking', recognizable as a linguistically correct sentence etc. This syntactic occurrence is as devoid of content as the expression of an impossible thought like 'The round square is round'. In sum: it is not possible to judge that I am thinking without intending to refer to a complementary thought-content that gives a basis for this judgment.

This point is made more compelling when we compare 'I'm thinking' with other verbs expressing propositional attitudes, such as 'I hope', 'I wish', 'I believe' or 'I doubt'. They can't really constitute wishes, hopes, beliefs or doubts without their objects. If, for example, I say to myself 'I hope' without something to hope, it is not true that I am hoping. They are mental occurrences of symbols and I am obviously aware of them; but they are not accompanied by a real occurrence of hoping etc. And the same applies when I say to myself 'I'm thinking' without intending a certain thought. Or suppose Carl says to Meg, 'I promise you. . . .' and, when Meg asks, 'Well, what are you promising?' Carl answers, 'I promise you, and that is all'. In this case, Carl's utterance fails to make sense, since without referring to the propositional content of a promise, it is a void speech-act and not really a promise. Something similar can be said about 'I'm thinking'. As 'I promise' without reference to the content of the promise does not amount to a real promise, 'I'm thinking' without reference to a thought-content does not amount to a real thought.

Suppose now that Meg asks Carl 'What are you thinking about?' and Carl responds, 'I'm thinking that I'm thinking, and that is all', or 'I'm thinking my own thought that I'm thinking'. Does this make any sense? Suppose Carl says to Meg, 'I promise that I promise and that is all', or 'I promise my own act of promising', or that he says to himself 'I hope my own hope' without anything to hope. Certainly, just as no promise is made and no hope is hoped, no thought is thought. This shows that in 'I'm thinking that *p*', *p* can't be replaced by 'I'm thinking' in order to complement the sentence. Putting it in a more general form: it is not possible to judge 'I'm thinking that *p*' where *p* is constituted only by 'I'm thinking' or by reiterations of 'I'm thinking'. (The adverb 'only' is important here, since if *p* were replaced by some other thought containing 'I'm thinking' as part of it, the whole answer would regain sense. If Carl had answered, 'I'm thinking that I'm thinking that the weather will change. . . .' the whole sentence would not be meaningless.)

Now we turn to the claim (b): What we mean by 'I'm thinking that *p*' can be generally analysed as 'I have thought that *p*'. When a person thinks, 'I'm thinking that *p*', what the person really means is always 'I have thought that *p*'. Consider our examples again. Carl says to Meg: 'I'm thinking that the weather will change and that it is better to go by car'. But what Carl really means is not that he is thinking those things at the same time he is answering Meg's question, as the present-tense of the verb 'to think' misleadingly suggests; what he means is, more precisely stated, 'I have thought that the weather will change and. . .' Again, when the physicist says, 'I'm thinking. . . I believe I can find the right answer', he doesn't pretend that the contents of his thoughts are occurring in his mind at the same time he is uttering this sentence; what he means, more precisely stated, is, 'I have thought some thoughts. . . and I expect, following those thoughts, to come to the right answer'. Finally, when Mary says to herself, 'Yes, I'm thinking that. . .' what she means is, 'Yes, I have thought that. . .' Therefore, it is clear that in the usual cases, 'I'm thinking' is just an imprecise way to say 'I have thought' or 'I was just thinking'. The thought or thoughts referred by the 'I'm thinking' are *always* in the past. Even if, in a referred chain of thoughts, reference to future thoughts, to conclusions of a process of reasoning, are made, those are intended thoughts that were already thought in the past. It is because those thoughts were thought in the *very recent past* that our ordinary language misleadingly allows one to say 'I *am* thinking' instead of 'I have thought'. Were the ordinary language fastidiously accurate, we would never say 'I'm thinking'. I conclude, therefore, that the most precise general form of 'I'm thinking' is 'I have thought (I was thinking) that *p*'.

One could ask: Why is this so? The answer is easy: *our consciousness is incapable of entertaining or focusing on more than one cognitive act at the same time*. I can't think a thought at the same time as I think that I'm thinking that thought. I must finish the thought I'm thinking in order to think that I have thought this thought, which demands that this thinking must necessarily refer to a thought *already* focused in my consciousness. One could object that it is possible for a person to say to himself 'I'm thinking that  $12 \times 12 = 144$ ', without reference to the past thought that  $12 \times 12 = 144$ , simply by thinking it. This sounds linguistically awkward, different from the usual cases we have considered, but it can be made meaningful when paraphrased by the statement, 'Now I will think something; here it is:  $12 \times 12 = 144$ '. However, this shows

again that the two occurrences, of the thought and the awareness that it will be thought, are not simultaneous, though in reverse order.

Against the idea that the two mental occurrences – the 'I think' as awareness of a thought, and the thought that is the object of that awareness – can't be simultaneously focused on in the consciousness, one might object that in some cases one can think the thought 'I'm thinking *p*' while still maintaining the thought of *p* in the consciousness. But this is somewhat misleading. It leaves out the difference between *focus* and *fringes* in what may be called the *diachronic* (temporal) unity of consciousness.<sup>1</sup> To think 37 + 51, a person could think 30 + 50, to achieve 80 and then 7 and 1 to obtain 88. When the person is thinking the thought that 7 + 1 = 8, he still retains in the fringes of his consciousness the result 80 and how he achieved it, but this does not mean that the two mental acts are being jointly focused on in the consciousness, or that they can be thought at the same time. While the consciousness is focusing on a present thought, it *retains*, through short-term memory, a thought that was already finished, in order to bind the process of thought into a continuous unity, but what is not being focused on is not, in a relevant way, in consciousness, and is also not so certain, as our frequent arithmetic mistakes make clear.

We should also consider the possibility that the thought of *p* is contemporaneously accompanied by a nearly conscious, pre-conscious or unconscious thought that one is thinking *p* in what we could call the *synchronic* (contemporaneous) unity of consciousness. I believe that this does occur, but since the prior thought is not being focused on or entertained in the consciousness, it is not the kind of thing we are considering here and will have no relevance to our conclusions.

Some might still object that independently of this, we still have the *self-reflexive consciousness* that we are thinking. This suggests something like (i) that when I think *p*, I simultaneously have an equally conscious second-order thought about it, namely, 'I'm thinking *p*', or (ii) that when I think *p*, *p* always appears as part of

<sup>1</sup> Similar distinctions can be found in W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, (Dover: New York [1890]), vol. I, chap. 9 (distinction between *focus* and *fringes* of consciousness), and J. R. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society: Philosophy in the Real World* (Basic Books: New York 1998), pp. 74–5 (distinction between what he calls *vertical* and *horizontal* unities of consciousness, which I prefer to call respectively *synchronic* and *diachronic* unities of consciousness).

the thought 'I'm thinking that *p*'. But our analysis denies (i), and (ii) lacks any intuitive evidence.

Nevertheless, there is a way in which it is plainly possible to have second-order thoughts and to think that we are thinking, namely, by *retrospection*. I can think that I thought in the same sense that Carl thinks that he has thought that the weather would change. 'I'm thinking' can occur as a *part of p* in the 'I'm thinking that *p*'; and in this way I really can have thoughts about my thinking-occurrences: by *remembering* that a process of thinking something has occurred, has passed through my mind.

Until now, we have analysed the standard case of 'I'm thinking'. However, there is at least one conceivable non-standard case, which deserves to be considered:

- (iv) During a conversation with some friends, Mary gets an idea to add to the paper she is writing. At this moment, someone interrupts her thought with a question. After she answers the question, she asks herself: 'What was I thinking about?' and no answer comes to her mind. She knows she had some idea for the paper, but she is unable to remember it. She can only say to herself 'I was thinking about something, but I don't know what'.

This is a rather frequent experience: one can remember *that* one was thinking but not *what* one was thinking. However, this kind of episode is ordinarily verbalized as 'I *was* thinking' and not as 'I *am* thinking'. The explicit use of 'was' in the example shows that it concerns thoughts thought in the more or less recent past rather than thoughts someone has immediately finished thinking, since this delay depends on something external or internal that distracts us from our own course of thought. Nevertheless, since I don't wish to exclude any possibility, I will also admit this case as a conceivable analysis of a (linguistically awkward) 'I'm thinking'. In this case, the form of 'I'm thinking' will not be the usual 'I've thought *p*', but rather 'I've thought something (a thought or thoughts), though I don't remember what'. More briefly, 'I've thought  $\xi$ ', where  $\xi$  doesn't mean a particular thought, like *p*, but indicates some proposition in an indeterminate manner.

It is valuable to remark that this is a derivative case, dependent on the standard one. If Mary answers herself in the form 'I've thought  $\xi$ ', one is still entitled to ask: 'Why are you so sure that you really had a thought, if you can't remember it? Why are you

so sure that it was not an illusion?' A natural answer could be, 'Because I had other experiences like this, and have later come to remember what I thought'. If she never could remember the thoughts she had the impression she had thought, she would have no reason to be sure that she really thought some thought, instead of having the mere illusory impressions of having thought it.

Now I believe that we have learned enough about the pragmatic and phenomenological grammar of the 'I am thinking' to consider how it has been misunderstood in philosophy.

## II. Some Philosophical consequences of the proposed analysis

The first consequence of our conclusions is that 'I am thinking' is no longer a self-verifying judgment that can't be denied without inconsistency.

Discussing the Cartesian *cogito*, there is a general agreement that the 'I am' or 'I exist' is a self-verifying, certain, incorrigible judgment, since one must exist in order to be conscious of his existence. This is shown by the fact that the negative of 'I exist' – 'I don't exist' – is, if not senseless, at least a *necessarily false* judgment. And authors like A. J. Ayer and J. Hintikka have quite naturally extended this conclusion to 'I'm thinking'.<sup>2</sup> The latter is also a self-verifying judgment, since its denial – 'I am not thinking' – is also a necessarily false judgment, for if I judge that I'm thinking, how could I possibly not be thinking?<sup>3</sup>

I agree with the interpretation of the 'I exist' as a self-verifying, incorrigible judgment, since 'I don't exist' (in the sense of 'I am not existing now') is necessarily false. But the extension of this conclusion to 'I'm thinking' is a mistake. Although a very certain judgment, what we mean by 'I'm thinking' is not a self-verifying, undeniable certainty. Since the thought or judgment that I'm thinking really means that I have thought that *p* or that I've thought  $\xi$ , it is in principle always possible that the judgment that I'm thinking is a mistake.

<sup>2</sup> See A. J. Ayer: 'I Think, Therefore I Am' in W. Doney (ed.), *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Doubleday 1967), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> As A. J. Ayer writes, 'The sense in which I cannot doubt the statement that I think is just that my doubting it entails its truth: and in the same sense I cannot doubt that I exist' ('I Think, Therefore I Am', p. 81). Though arguing for differences, J. Hintikka also admits a similar identification (Cf. 'Cogito ergo sum: Inference or Performance?' in W. Doney (ed.), *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 133, 139.)

To see this, suppose that Carl is suffering from a serious kind of mental confusion, misidentifying his own memories. As Meg asks what he is doing, he answers, expressing the thought  $r$  by saying that he is thinking (has thought) that 'the flowers in the garden are in need of water'. Nevertheless, in fact he has thought  $s$ : 'Someone must cut the grass'. We can also suppose that Carl hasn't thought anything: he may have been in a state that neurologists call *absence*. In the first case, the judgment 'I am (was) thinking' in the sense of 'I am (was) thinking something' or 'I am (was) thinking  $\xi$ ' is true, though the more determined judgment 'I am (was) thinking that  $r$ ' is false, since what he was thinking was  $s$  and not  $r$ . In the second case, not only the whole judgment 'I am (was) thinking that  $r$ ' is false, since  $r$  was not thought, but even the judgment 'I am (was) thinking something' is false, since there was no thought at all. For the judgment that I'm thinking to be true, a thought must be thought, even if it is not the right one. (A similar point can be made in many other cases. When I say 'I have promised  $r$ ' and in fact I have promised  $s$ , the statement 'I have promised  $r$ ' is false, though not the statement 'I have promised'; but when I say 'I have promised  $r$ ' and I didn't promise anything, both statements, 'I have promised  $r$ ' and 'I have promised', are false.)

The same applies to the adventitious case in which 'I'm thinking' means the same as 'I've thought a thought (or thoughts), but I can't remember what' or 'I've thought  $\xi$ ', where  $\xi$  means 'some thought'. In this case, 'I'm thinking' will be true if there is (was) a certain thought to replace  $\xi$ , otherwise it will be false. Considering that it is possible that someone thinks mistakenly that he has thought *some* thought, while he or she hasn't thought anything, 'I'm thinking' in the sense of 'I've thought  $\xi$ ' can be false, which means that, like 'I'm thinking that  $p$ ', it is not self-verifying.

Now I will consider the consequences of our analysis for the Cartesian *cogito*, the well-known judgment standardly expressed in the sentence 'I'm thinking, therefore I am'. An orthodox way of interpreting the *cogito* is by reconstructing it as a kind of inference.<sup>4</sup> So, if we use the proposition 'If a thing has an attribute, then this thing exists' as a rule of inference, we can interpret the *cogito* as expressing the following immediate inference:

<sup>4</sup> See A. Kenny: *Descartes* (New York, 1968), cap. 3. See also B. Williams, 'The Certainty of the *Cogito*' in W. Doney (ed.), *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 88–107.

1. 'I am (a thing having the attribute of being) *thinking*'
  2. 'I am (an existing thing)'
- (Rule applied to 1: if a thing has an attribute, then this thing exists.)

A reconstruction more or less similar to this is accepted by many interpreters as capable of producing the kind of certainty Descartes was seeking, and there are good reasons to believe that this is the best way to make sense of Descartes' own intentions, even if his texts show that he also had other possibilities in mind.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, if the conclusions derived from our analysis of the real self-attribution of thinking are correct, then all reconstructions of the *cogito* as argument are, under a heuristic, systematic point of view, destined to failure. For the 'I'm thinking' to be a thought of something, it must be understood as 'I've thought that *p*' (or, derivatively, as 'I've thought  $\xi$ '). But 'I've thought that *p*' (like 'I've thought  $\xi$ ') is a corrigible, uncertain thought, which means that it renders an uncertain premise when put into an argument. But if the premise of the *cogito*-inference is uncertain, then the conclusion of the inference – the 'I exist' – must be *at least as uncertain as the premise*, which is a very useless result, since the conclusion – the 'I am' – is already known to be certain by simple inspection.<sup>6</sup> Even the reverse argument, 'I exist, therefore I think', would be more compelling, since to have the consciousness that I exist, I must at least be thinking.

Descartes' hypothesis of the *malign genie* only makes the matter worse; though the *malign genie* can't make me think that I am when I am not, he can without difficulty make me think that I have thought *p*, or that I have thought something, even if I had no thought at all. And this must be very easy for him, since he is capable of misleading us in the most simple reasoning demanding short-term memory, as in the case of the four arithmetic operations (see our previous remarks about focus and fringes of consciousness).

<sup>5</sup> The main course of Descartes' argument seems to find a synthesis in the formula: 'To be doubting, I must be thinking; to be thinking, I must be existing'. But it is difficult to see how the last and essential move could be made without some kind of inference. Descartes recognizes explicitly the necessity of some kind of inference in Miller, V. R. and R. P. (eds.), *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Reidel 1983), Part I, § 10.

<sup>6</sup> If the 'I'm thinking' in the *cogito* is conceived as having the form 'I've thought  $\xi$ ', this form being *derivative*, it could be eventually true *only* under the presupposition of the previous truth of thoughts of the form 'I've thought that *p*'.

Defending the inferential way of interpreting the *cogito*, one could argue that I am using the proposition 'I think' in a sense that Descartes never intended. For he aimed to use this proposition in a self-reflexive, philosophical sense, a sense in which there is no need to refer to a complementary thought-content; the 'I'm thinking' must have the form 'I'm thinking this thought itself'.<sup>7</sup> However, our more precise consideration of the structure of 'I'm thinking' in the first part of this paper has already ruled out this suggestion as illusory; the reflexive use of 'I'm thinking' seems to be an old philosophical fancy.

Yet, one could argue that it is undeniable that 'I'm thinking' without a complement is at least a syntactic mental occurrence, and that I am immediately conscious of this syntactic mental occurrence when it occurs in my mind. This is true, as we have already seen. And it is true that I'm conscious of existing through having such experiences. But it is not enough to assure that 'I'm thinking', since the consciousness of a syntactic occurrence is not the consciousness of what is at stake, namely, what is to be *thought* by means of the syntactic occurrence.

Finally, one could consider what Descartes himself would possibly answer, when pressed by these considerations. Maybe he would give an answer like the one he gave to Burman's remark that we are unable to attain our attention to more than one thought at once while we are reasoning. Descartes' answer was that, though we can't grasp many things, we can grasp more than one: 'For example: I *grasp* and I *think* now that I speak and that I eat simultaneously' (my italics).<sup>8</sup> Transposed to the 'I'm thinking', this kind of answer would mean: although it doesn't seem so, I'm really able to think 'I'm thinking' and its content '*p*' simultaneously, and this guarantees the certainty of the 'I'm thinking'.

My response to this is that the distinction between synchronic and diachronic unities of consciousness, jointly with the distinction between its focus and fringes, show that Descartes takes in his answer to Burman an equivocal view, confounding mere awareness with conscious thought. When I'm writing these words, for example, I'm also aware of the light of the lamp-shade on my side,

<sup>7</sup> C. F. Costa: 'Über den Gewissheitsanspruch im cartesischen *cogito*', *Prima Philosophia*, n. 4, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>8</sup> 'Quod mens non possit nisi unam rem simul concipere, verum non est; non potest quidem simul multa concipere, sed potest tamen plura quam unum; e.g. jam ego concipio et cogito simul me loqui et me adere.' Adam & Tannery (ed.), *Oeuvres de Descartes*, (Paris: Vrin/CNRS, 1964–1976), V, pp. 148–149.

I'm hearing the sound of the air-conditioner, I'm feeling my fingers touching the keyboard, I'm aware of the position of my body etc. All of these things are in the fringes of the synchronic unity of my consciousness. It is correct to say that I'm *aware* of all these things, that I'm in a certain sense *grasping* all of them (if the air-conditioner stops, I will direct my attention to it). However, it is certainly not right to say that I'm *thinking* all or even some of these things, as Descartes would be forced to suggest. The only thing I'm consciously thinking are the words I'm writing, which are passing through the focus of my consciousness to lose themselves in the temporal extension of its diachronic unity. Consequently, Descartes give us a bogus example, which would be right only if he could show that we are in fact able to think simultaneously more than one thought in the sense of articulating these thoughts simultaneously in the focus or centre of our attention, when in fact we aren't able to do so.<sup>9</sup>

In conclusion, our analysis of the 'I'm thinking' favours the non-orthodox view of the Cartesian insight, which concentrates the analysis on the 'I exist' as a self-verifying, incorrigible, undeniable truth.<sup>10</sup> Even if this view fails to give us the most adequate textual interpretation, it reflects, I believe, the truth about the matter.

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<sup>9</sup> By this I'm not rejecting the possibility that we may have unconscious or pre-conscious thoughts accompanying the thoughts that are being focused on in our consciousness, as psychoanalysts have suggested. Notwithstanding this, the point is that the *malign genie* would always be able to confuse the relationship between what is focused on in the consciousness (what is clearly and distinctively experienced by us) and what is not. What is not focused, what is only object of secondary awareness, may be always eventual object of misleading.

<sup>10</sup> This view is to be found in different versions in A. J. Ayer (see W. Doney (ed.): *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, pp. 80–87), J. Hintikka (W. Doney (ed.), *op. cit.* pp. 108–139), and H. Frankfurt (in his *Demons, Dreamers and Madmen*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill 1970), p. 102 f.).