

[Draft]
Bringing an End to the Interpretative Dispute on Descartes's
Cogito: the *Cogito* as *Vérité*, *Cognitio*, *Propositio*, and *Conclusio*

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The aim of this paper is to bring an end to the interpretative dispute on Descartes's *cogito*: is the *cogito* known by intuition or by inference? There have been several studies based on both analytical and historical approaches to the dispute, and it seems that we have exhausted all interpretations. Nevertheless, I wish to revisit this dispute, as it appears that the previous studies have overlooked Descartes's use of words and phrases, which is the most significant for understanding his various discourses on the *cogito* consistently. In this paper, I focus on the terms which Descartes uses to indicate the varied status of the *cogito*, such as '*haec cognitio, ego cogito, ergo sum*', '*hanc propositionem, ego cogito, ergo sum*', '*hanc conclusionem: cogito, ergo sum*', and so on; Descartes changes carefully the terms in each of the *cogito* arguments. By focusing on these terms, I try to interpret Descartes's explanations consistently.

Keywords: René Descartes, *Cogito*, Inference, Intuition, Experience, *Discourse on Method*, *Principles of Philosophy*, *Conversation with Burman*

INTRODUCTION

This paper seeks to bring an end to the interpretative dispute on Descartes's *cogito*: is the *cogito* known by intuition or by inference? There have been several studies based on both analytical and historical approaches to the dispute, and it seems that we have exhausted all interpretations. Nevertheless, I wish to revisit this dispute, as it appears that the previous studies have overlooked Descartes's use of words and phrases, which is the most significant for understanding his various discourses on the *cogito* consistently.

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After what is termed the methodological doubt, which denies the reliability of the sense, the existence of the external world, and the certainty of the mathematical knowledge, Descartes¹

¹ In accordance with current practice, I use the following abbreviation for the standard edition of Descartes's works:

AT: René DESCARTES, *Œuvres de Descartes*, 11 vols., edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1964-74).

states ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’² (the *cogito*). For him, the *cogito* is ‘the first and most certain of all’ and ‘the first principle of the philosophy’ (*D.M.*, CSM-I, 195); its certainty cannot depend on any general proposition, for if it depended on a general proposition, such as ‘Everything which thinks exists’, that should have been stated as the first principle; therefore, the *cogito* cannot depend on any general proposition. Descartes writes:

When someone says, ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss ‘Everything which thinks is, or exists’; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. It is in the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones. (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140–41; CSM-II, 100)

On the other hand, there are some explanations that seem to admit that the *cogito* has a premise. For example, *Discourse on Method* states: ‘[T]here is nothing at all in the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ to assure me that I am speaking the truth, except that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist’ (*D.M.*, AT-VI, 33; CSM-I, 127). Some commentators believe that this passage admits that the certainty of the *cogito* depends on the general proposition ‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’.³ If so, it follows that this is contrary to the passages which state that the *cogito* is a primary notion *not* derived by means of any syllogism (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140–141; CSM-II, 100/*Letter to Clerselier*, AT-IX, 205; CSM-II, 271).

Based on these contradictions, many commentators have admitted that there is an inconsistency in Descartes’s explanation about the *cogito*; however, I would like to argue that there is no inconsistency. In order to do this, I focus on the terms which Descartes uses to indicate the varied status of the *cogito*, such as ‘*haec cognitio, ego cogito, ergo sum*’ (AT-VIII, 7), ‘*hanc propositionem, ego cogito, ergo sum*’ (*ibid.*, 8), ‘*hanc conclusionem: cogito, ergo sum*’ (AT-V, 147), and so on; Descartes carefully changes the terms in each of the *cogito* arguments. Focusing on these terms,

I refer to the following translations:

CSM: René DESCARTES, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1–2, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

CSMK: René DESCARTES, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 3, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

² ‘I am, I exist’ in *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

³ Martial GUEROULT, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1953), 310; Bernard WILLIAMS, ‘The Certainty of the *Cogito*’, in *Descartes: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Willis Doney (London; Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968), 91–92.

I try to consistently interpret Descartes's explanations, which may appear inconsistent at a glance.

A Line of Interpretation

This paper takes a historical, philological approach; that is, it tries to clarify the thoughts on the *cogito* presented by Descartes himself and does not deal with any analytical argument.

1. Texts

There are only two passages in all the works by Descartes himself (that is, in all but *Conversation with Burman*), which suggest that the *cogito* is a logical conclusion deduced from some kind of universal knowledge: in *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*.⁴ In each of them (A: *Discourse*; B: *Principles*), the statement 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' appears twice (in A1/A2; B1/B2), as cited below:

A1: But immediately I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this *vérité* 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking. (*D.M.*, AT-VI, 32; CSM-I, 127)

A2: After this I considered in general what is required of a **proposition** in order for it to be true and certain; for since I had just found **one [proposition]** that I knew to be such, I thought that I ought also to know what this certainty consists in. I observed that there is nothing at all in the **proposition** 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' to assure me that I am speaking the truth, except that I see very clearly that **in order to think it is necessary to exist**. (*ibid.*, AT-VI, 33; CSM-I, 127)

B1: In rejecting [...] everything which we can in any way doubt, it is easy for us to suppose that there is no God and no heaven, and that there are no bodies, and even that we ourselves have no hands or feet, or indeed any body at all. But we cannot for all that suppose that we, who are having such thoughts, are nothing. For it is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not, at the very time when it is thinking, exist. Accordingly, this *cognitio* 'I am thinking, therefore I exist' is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way. (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 7; CSM-I, 195)

⁴ Descartes writes in *Search for Truth*, "this *inference [hujus ratiocinii]*, 'I am doubting, therefore I exist', or what amounts to the same thing, 'I am thinking, therefore I exist'" (*R.V.*, AT-X, 523; CSM-II, 417), but does not show any premise of this inference.

B2: And when I said that the *propositio* ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way, I did not in saying that deny that one must first know **what thought, existence and certainty are, and that it is impossible that that which thinks should not exist, and so forth.** (*ibid.*, AT-VIII, 8; CSM-I, 196)

It is significant here that he never sets a logical premise to the *cogito* without calling it ‘proposition’, and *vice versa*. Moreover, when he refers to the *cogito* for the first time, he terms it *vérité* or *cognitio* and shows no antecedents of it (A1/B1)⁵; on the other hand, when he refers to the *cogito* for the second time, he calls it *proposition/propositio* and shows its logical premise (A2/B2).⁶ In addition, the passages in the Second Reply and a letter to Clerselier suggest that Descartes is reluctant to consider ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ to be a proposition:

When someone says ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. This is clear from the fact that if he were deducing it by means of a syllogism, he would have to have had previous knowledge of the major premiss ‘Everything which thinks is, or exists’; yet in fact he learns it from experiencing in his own case that it is impossible that he should think without existing. It is in the nature of our mind to construct general propositions on the basis of our knowledge of particular ones [*Ea enim est natura nostrae mentis, ut generales propositiones ex particularium cognitione efformet*]. (*2ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 140–41; CSM-II, 100)

Your friends note six objections against the Second Meditation. The first is this. The author of the *Counter-Objections* claims that when I say ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ I presuppose the

⁵ Wilson considers ‘it is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not, at the very time when it is thinking, exist’ (B1) as a premise to deduce the *cogito*. See: M. D. WILSON, *Descartes* (London; Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982 [c1978]), 56. In my reading, however, this is not universal knowledge. We must note that *Principles* is written in the first-person plural perspective as a textbook; considering this point, ‘it is a contradiction to suppose that *what thinks* does not, at the very time when *it* is thinking, exist’ corresponds to ‘I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something’ (*D.M.*, CSM-I, 127), which is written in the first-person perspective, and “[someone who says ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or I exist’] learns it from experiencing in *his* own case that it is impossible that *he* should think without existing” (*2ae Resp.*, CSM-II, 100), which is written in the third-person perspective.

⁶ Some commentators classify the descriptions of the *cogito* by writing (the *cogito* in *Discourse*, the *cogito* in *Meditations*, the *cogito* in *Principles*, and so on); for example, Marion distinguishes the *cogito* in *Meditations* (‘I am, I exist’) from the *cogito* in the other writings (‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’). See: J.-L. MARION, *Questions cartésiennes* (Paris: P. U. F., 1996), 16–19. However, according to the circumstances I mentioned in the text, this seems insufficient; we need to further classify them *by the context* in every work.

major premiss ‘Whatever thinks exists’, and hence I have already adopted a preconceived opinion. [...] But the most important mistake our critic makes here is supposition that knowledge of particular propositions must always be deduced from universal ones [la **connaissance des propositions particulières** doit toujours être déduite des **universelles**], following the same order as that of a syllogism in dialectics. (*Letter to Clerselier* [12 Jan. 1646], AT-IX, 205; CSM-II, 271)

These passages suggest an asymmetry between ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ and ‘Everything which thinks is, or exists/Whatever thinks exists’. Descartes calls ‘Everything which thinks is, or exists/Whatever thinks exists’ a general *proposition*, but does not state that the *cogito* is a particular *proposition*; he terms it *knowledge of a particular thing* or *knowledge of a particular proposition*; this means that Descartes carefully avoids using the term ‘proposition’ for the *cogito*. Why does Descartes refer to the *cogito* as a proposition in A2 and B2? In the subsequent section, I negotiate this problem by considering the difference between *the cogito as vérité/cognitio* and the *cogito as proposition/propositio*.

In addition, we must take into consideration the passage in *Conversation with Burman*, which suggests that the *cogito* has an antecedent:

Before this inference, ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’, the major ‘**whatever thinks exists**’ can be known; for it is in reality prior to my inference, and my inference depends on it. This is why the author says in the *Principles* that the major premiss comes first, namely because implicitly it is always presupposed and prior. (*Ent. Burm.*, AT-V, 147; CSMK-III, 333)

Of course, the fact that *Conversation* is not written by Descartes himself is not a sufficient reason for disregarding it; I deal with this in the concluding section.

2. The *Cogito as Vérité/Cognitio* and *Cogito as Proposition/Propositio*

In this section, I examine *Discourse on Method* and *Principles of Philosophy*, referring to some other texts.

Discourse on Method

I have already mentioned that the statement ‘I am thinking, therefore I am’ appears twice in *Discourse*; let us analyze the construction of the argument in the text:

A1: But immediately I noticed that while I was trying thus to think everything false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics

were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking. Next I examined attentively what I was. I saw that while I could pretend that I had no body and that there was no world and no place for me to be in, I could not for all that pretend that I did not exist. I saw on the contrary that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed; whereas if I had merely ceased thinking, even if everything else I had ever imagined had been true, I should have had no reason to believe that I existed. From this I knew I was a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think, and which does not require any place, or depend on any material thing, in order to exist. (*D.M.*, AT-VI, 32; CSM-I, 127)

A2: After this I considered in general what is required of a proposition in order for it to be true and certain; for since I had just found one [proposition] that I knew to be such, I thought that I ought also to know what this certainty consists in. I observed that there is nothing at all in the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ to assure me that I am speaking the truth, except that I see very clearly that in order to think it is necessary to exist. (*ibid.*, AT-VI, 33; CSM-I, 127)

In A1, Descartes finds “this truth ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’” and determines the ‘I’ as ‘a substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think’. We must note that A1 is fully sufficient to explain the essence of the *cogito*, which is presented in the following works: (1) that even if one can doubt everything, one cannot doubt the existence of the ‘I’ who doubts everything, and (2) that the ‘I’ is a substance whose nature is simply to think and does not depend on any material things (*Med.*, CSM-II, 16-19; *P.Pb.*, CSM-I, 194-196); that is, Descartes has already finished the *cogito* argument in A1. The problem, then, is how we should read A2.

At first glance, it seems that in A2 Descartes reconsiders the *cogito*, which he found in A1, and attaches to it the premise ‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’.⁷ Strangely, however, while he considers the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ to be certain, Descartes admits that he does not know what this certainty consists in. Can one consider something to be the truth or the first principle without knowing what its certainty consists in? If not, it follows that the *cogito* in A1 and the *cogito* in A2 are not the same, although they have the same expression.⁸ In fact, Descartes calls the former *vérité* and the latter *proposition*. Here, we must pay attention to the passage in A2 that ‘I considered *in general* what is required of a proposition in order for it to be true and certain’. This means that the aim of A2 is not to analyze reflectively what the certainty of the *cogito* consists in, but

⁷ Gueroult distinguishes ‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’ from ‘Everything which thinks exists’ and regards the former to be a *condition préalable* or *principe de la pensée* which makes the relationship between ‘I think’ and ‘I exist’ necessary. See: Martial GUEROUULT, *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*, vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1953), 310.

⁸ Accordingly, my reading, if valid, will reject Priente’s hypothesis that ‘all of the versions of the *cogito* are equivalent’. See: Jean-Claude PARIENTE, ‘Le première personne et sa fonction dans le *Cogito*’, in *Descartes et la question du sujet*, ed. Kim Sang Ong-Van-Cung (Paris: P. U. F., 1999), 16.

to consider *in general* the requirement for some kind of proposition being true and certain; moreover, the phrase ‘in general’ suggests that Descartes does not intend to consider the methodological doubt in A2; that is, the ‘I’ of the *cogito* in A2 is *not* the subject who performs the methodological doubt and notices that while one is trying to think everything false, it is necessary that the ‘I’, who is thinking this, is something, but just a grammatical subject.⁹ In other words, in A2 Descartes separates the *cogito* from the metaphysical process of the methodological doubt and deals with it not in the metaphysical context but *in general*; this is because he needs to introduce a general rule ‘that the things we conceive very clearly and very distinctly are all true’. In brief, the general proposition ‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’ is needed to introduce this general rule, but not essential to acquire the *vérité* of the *cogito*.

Furthermore, Descartes himself realized that the description in A2 was misleading; in fact, he rephrased it and never used universal knowledge to introduce the same rule in *Meditations*:

I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required for my being certain about anything? In this first item of knowledge, there is simply a clear and distinct perception of what I am asserting; this would not be enough to make me certain of the truth of the matter if it could ever turn out that something which I perceived with such clarity and distinctness was false. So I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true. (*Med.*, CSM-II, 24)

Based on this, it seems impossible to sustain the deep-rooted interpretation that Descartes admits in *Discourse* that the general proposition ‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’ is needed as a principle of thought to acquire the *cogito*. We must not confuse the argument on the *cogito* itself (A1) with the argument on the general rule of clear and distinct cognition (A2); in the former Descartes does not suggest general propositions to acquire the *cogito*.

Principles of Philosophy

Similar to *Discourse*, the *cogito* statement appears twice (in B1 and B2) in *Principles*:

B1: **(Art. VII)** In rejecting [...] everything which we can in any way doubt, it is easy for us to suppose that there is no God and no heaven, and that there are no bodies, and even that we ourselves have no hands or feet, or indeed any body at all. But we cannot for all that suppose that we, who are having such thoughts, are nothing. For it is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not, at the very time when it is thinking, exist. Accordingly, this piece of knowledge ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who

⁹ Rosenthal writes, ‘[U]nderstanding some propositional content does not typically pin down the reference of whatever token-reflexive components are involved. Understanding ‘Theaetetus is sitting’ does not determine the time that the present tense refers to; understanding ‘He gives it to her’ does not suffice to pick out any particular people or gift’. See: David M. ROSENTHAL, ‘Will and the Theory of Judgment’, in *Essays on Descartes’ Meditations*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 422.

philosophizes in an orderly way. (**Art. VIII**) This is the best way to discover the nature of the mind and the distinction between the mind and the body. For if we, who are supposing that everything which is distinct from us is false, examine what we are, we see very clearly that neither extension nor shape nor local motion, nor anything of this kind which is attributable to a body, belongs to our nature, but that thought alone belongs to it. (*P.Ph.*, AT-VIII, 7; CSM-I, 195)

B2: (**Art. X**) And when I said that the proposition ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way, I did not in saying that deny that one must first know what thought, existence and certainty are, and that it is impossible that that which thinks should not exist, and so forth. But because these are very simple notions, and ones which on their own provide us with no knowledge of anything that exists, I did not think they needed to be listed. (*ibid.*, AT-VIII, 8; CSM-I, 196)

The construction of the *cogito* argument in *Principles* is the same as the one in *Discourse*, which I have examined above. In B1 Descartes acquires “the piece of knowledge ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’” (art. VII), and determines the ‘I’ as that which the thought alone belongs to (art. VIII); that is, B1 is fully sufficient to explain the essence of the *cogito* (that even if one can doubt everything, one cannot doubt the existence of the ‘I’, who doubts everything, and that the ‘I’ is a substance whose nature is simply to think and does not depend on any material things). The problem, then, is how we should read B2.

We must note that the present tense is generally used in *Principles*, but the past tense is used in B2. It is in his reply to the Sixth Objection that Descartes ‘*did* not [...] deny that one must first know what thought, existence and certainty are, and that it is impossible that that which thinks should not exist, and so forth’. The Sixth Objection states:

[F]rom the fact that we are thinking it does not seem to be entirely certain that we exist. For in order to be certain that you are thinking you must know what thought or thinking is, and what your existence is; but since you do not yet know what these things are, how can you know that you are thinking or that you exist? Thus, neither when you say ‘I am thinking’ nor when you add ‘therefore, I exist’ do you really know what you are saying. (*6ae Obj.*, AT-VII, 413; CSM-II, 278)

Descartes counters:

It is true that no one can be certain that he is thinking or that he exists unless he knows what thought is and what existence is. But this does not require reflective knowledge, or the kind of knowledge that is acquired by means of demonstrations[...]. It is quite sufficient that we should know it by that internal awareness which always precedes reflective knowledge. This inner awareness of one’s thought and existence is so innate in all men that, although we may pretend that we do not have it if we are overwhelmed by preconceived opinions and pay more attention to words than to their meanings, we cannot in fact fail to have it. Thus when anyone notices that

he is thinking and that it follows from this that he exists, even though he may never before have asked what thought is or what existence is, he still cannot fail to have sufficient knowledge of them both to satisfy himself in this regard. (*6ae Resp.*, AT-VII, 422; CSM-II, 285)

Clearly B2 is based on these replies. Considering this, we can see that Descartes expected a similar objection to be made to *Principles* and intended to respond it *in advance*; that is, B2 is not essential to the *cogito* argument (let us recall that B1 is sufficient to explain the essence of the *cogito*), but is an additional explanation that Descartes provided—before knowing the *cogito* one must know the premise ‘it is impossible that that which thinks should not exist’—fearing that ‘philosophers [who] make the mistake of employing logical definitions in an attempt to explain what was already very simple and self-evident’ (AT-VIII, 8; CSM-I, 195-196) would not understand his argument. However, Descartes did not completely concede; he does not admit the precedence of the general notions and proposition as the ground of the certainty of the *cogito*; he just clarifies that he *did not deny* it. Thus, there are two steps in the *cogito* argument in *Principles*: to show the *cogito* as *cognitio*, which cannot be acquired until one goes through the methodological doubt proper to Descartes’s system of philosophy (B1), and to show the general notions and proposition that are not essential to acquire the *cogito* as *cognitio*, but useful to persuade those who abide by a stubbornly scholastic way (B2).

3. The *Cogito* as *Conclusio*: Reread *Conversation with Burman*

Finally, I deal with the passage in *Conversation with Burman*, whose manuscript is believed to be a copy of a text by Johannes Clauberg made by an anonymous hand¹⁰:

[C1] Before this inference, ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’, the major ‘whatever thinks exists’ can be known; for it is in reality prior to my inference, and my **inference** [*conclusio*] depends on it. This is why the author says in the *Principles* that the major premiss comes first, namely because implicitly it is always presupposed and prior. [C2] But it does not follow that I am always expressly and explicitly aware of its priority, or that I know it before my **inference** [*conclusio*]. This is because I am attending only to what I experience within myself—for example, I am thinking, therefore I exist’. I do not pay attention in the same way to the general notion ‘whatever thinks exists’. As I have explained before, we do not separate out these general propositions from the particular instances; rather, it is in the particular instances that we think of them. (*Ent. Burm.*, AT-V, 147; CSMK-III, 333)

This passage is often read as a compromise that arbitrates between the claims that the *cogito* is

¹⁰ Lawrence NOLAN, ed., *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 154.

acquired by itself and that one must know in advance some general notions. In my reading, however, it evidently claims that the *cogito* is acquired by itself.

Here, we focus on the term ‘inference [*conclusio*]’, which appears twice (C1/C2). Although it is impossible for us to inspect whether or not the term was used by Descartes himself, there seems to be a great possibility that the phrase ‘my inference’, which is used for the first time (C1) has a different meaning from the one that is used for the second time (C2). On the one hand, ‘my inference’ in C1 indicates a conclusion of deductive reasoning, for the explanation in C1 is concerned with B2, where Descartes states that one must know in advance some general notions before acquiring the *cogito as propositio* (“This is why the author [Descartes] says in the *Principles* [...]”). In brief, B2 provides an additional explanation to B1 for those who abide by a stubbornly scholastic way, and C1 further explains B2. On the other hand, ‘my inference’ in C2 indicates a conclusion or result of a series of metaphysical processes: that one tries to think everything false and withdraw one’s mind from the senses and from all preconceived opinions (*cf.* A1/*Med.*, CSM-II, 8/*P.Ph.*, CSM-I, 193-194), and notes by doing so that one is thinking and that it follows from this that one exists, even though one may never before have asked what thought is or what existence is (*cf.* A1/*6ae Resp.*, CSM-II, 285/B1). It is important here that the claim that the *cogito* is ‘what I *experience* within myself’ (C2) corresponds to the one that one acquires the *cogito* by ‘*experiencing* in [one’s] own case that it is impossible that [one] should think without existing’ in the Second Reply (AT-VII, 140–141). Thus, C2 provides an additional explanation for the Second Reply, where the *cogito* is said to be something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind, not something deduced by means of a syllogism. Moreover, at the end of C2 Descartes calls ‘Whatever thinks exists’ a general *proposition* and ‘I am thinking, therefore I exist’ a particular *instance* (not a particular *proposition*); that is, the asymmetry between the *cogito* (*knowledge of* particular thing, *knowledge of* particular proposition, or particular *instance*) and the premise (a general *proposition*) is consistent in the Second Reply (1641), the letter to Clerselier (1646), and *Conversation with Burman* (1648).

CONCLUSION

The following table summarizes the text analysis provided above:

A1	A2	2ae Resp.	B1
<i>Cogito</i> Argument	NON- <i>Cogito</i> Argument	<i>Cogito</i> Argument	<i>Cogito</i> Argument
No general propositions	‘In order to think it is necessary to exist’	No general proposition	No general proposition
B2	To Clerselier	C1	C2
<i>Cogito</i> Argument	<i>Cogito</i> Argument	Supplement to B2	<i>Cogito</i> Argument
‘It is impossible that that which thinks should not exist’	No general propositions	‘Whatever thinks exists’	No general propositions

It is evident from the text analysis in this paper that Descartes *completely* and *consistently* considers the *cogito* as what is known by itself (by a simple intuition of the mind or by experience) in the corpus of his works, except in A2, B2, and C1. Substantially, however, it is only in B2 that Descartes suggests a premise for the *cogito*; A2 does not deal with the *cogito* itself but introduces the general rule that the things one conceives very clearly and very distinctly are all true (In the Second Meditation he rephrases the misleading description in A2 and introduces the same rule without relying on any general proposition); C1 is a supplement to B2, and the main claim in the passage in *Conversation* is that the *cogito* is ‘what I experience within myself’ (C2), which corresponds to the Second Reply, which states that the *cogito* is known by *experiencing* in one’s own case that it is impossible that one should think without existing. Further, B2 has a strategic consideration for *philosophers* who conform to a stubbornly scholastic way and ‘make the mistake of employing logical definitions in an attempt to explain what was already very simple and self-evident’. In B2 Descartes sets a premise to the *cogito* to persuade them, and calls it *propositio* to distinguish it from the *cogito as cognitio* in B1, which is known in one’s own case.

Considering these arguments, we can no longer find inconsistencies in Descartes’s explanation about the *cogito*.

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