



## WE COULD BE CANNIBALS AFTER ALL. DESCARTES AND HIS HISTORY OF THE SELF-DISCOVERY

*Iwona Krupecka*

University of Gdańsk, Poland

В свете современных дискуссий о европейской философии как инструменте колониального господства необходимость переосмысления истории философии не вызывает сомнений. Обзор историографии современной философии показывает, что наиболее типичным способом ее представления по-прежнему является нахождение некоей внутренней логики, ведущей к появлению конкретных теорий (картезианской, кантианской и т.д.), вне зависимости от внешних, т.е. исторических, обстоятельств. Между тем, с латиноамериканской точки зрения, которая берется за оправданную в этой статье, «открытие», или «изобретение» (Э. О'Горман), Америки стало одним из важных факторов, определяющих в последнее время развитие европейской философии, прежде всего в контексте истолкования рациональности, субъективности и современности. В статье анализируется философия Декарта с позиции историко-ориентированного подхода, но в то же время автор стремится избежать трактовок Декарта как теоретика колониализма. Например, в самом центре картезианского проекта самости обнаруживается принципиальное сомнение, которое может разрешиться только в акте *повествования*, посредством которого самосознающий субъект конституирует себя. Таким образом, тезис *cogito ergo sum* можно истолковать не столько как *ego conquiro* (как это делают, например, Э. Дуссель и его последователи), но, скорее, как проявление полной утраты уверенности в себе, которую можно восстановить только практически, но не теоретически. Эта внутренняя амбивалентность картезианской философии является действительным результатом воздействия открытия Америки на мировоззрение Декарта.

*Ключевые слова:* история современной философии, Америка, Декарт.

In the light of contemporary discussions on the European philosophy as an instrument of colonial domination, the necessity of redefinition and redescription of the history of philosophy is beyond any doubt. A brief review of the historiography on modern philosophy shows that the most typical manner to present it is still to find some inner logic that would determine the appearance and development of the particular theories (Cartesian, or Kantian, etc.), without any reference to the external, that is historical, social, cultural etc., circumstances. Meanwhile, from the Latin American point of view, which the author of the article takes as a starting point in this paper, the “discovery” of America – or the “invention” of America (Edmundo O’Gorman) – was one of the most important factors in the latter history of European philosophy, which exerted influence on a number of concepts including the pattern of rationality, subjectivity, modernity etc. In this paper the author focuses on the philosophy of Descartes and rethinks it from this history-oriented approach. While doing this, the author also tries to avoid a new form of exaggeration: turning Descartes into a theoretician of colonialism. For example, in the very center of Cartesian project of the self one can find the unavoidable doubt that can be covered only by the act of *narration* in which the self-conscious individual subject constitutes itself. Descartes’ “*cogito ergo sum*” can be interpreted, thus, not so much as *ego conquiro* (as it is often presented by Enrique Dussel and his continuators), but rather as a manifestation of the total loss of certainty which can not be restituted in a dialectical, but only practical way. This internal ambivalence of the Cartesian philosophy is, the author concludes, the actual trace of the impact of the discovery of America on his thought.

*Keywords:* history of modern philosophy, America, Descartes.

*Some introductory banalities:  
the history of philosophy in question*

In the light of contemporary discussion on the European philosophy as an expression and instrument of colonial domination, the necessity of reinterpretation and redescription of the history of philosophy is beyond any doubt. From the Latin American point of view, which I am going to take as a starting point in this article<sup>1</sup>, the “discovery” of America – or rather the “invention” of America – was one of the most important factors in the modern history of European thinking, including such questions as the pattern of rationality, subjectivity, modernity etc. Although many post-colonial and decolonial projects and critiques of the European philosophy were made from the Latin American loci of enunciation (Dussel, Mignolo, Fornet-Betancourt, Andrade amongst others), and many critiques and redefinitions were made from the European or, more general, Western point of view within the frame of the mainstream philosophy (Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, Toulmin), it is still necessary to continue rewriting its history, taking into account the colonial domination of Europe and its impact on the principle categories of our thinking. In other words, if Europe is also the victim of its own domination, it needs to be “liberated” from its own “occidentalism” in the area of philosophy.

The brief review of the historiography of modern philosophy shows that the most typical manner to present it, still, is to find some inner logic that determines the appearance of the particular theories (Cartesian, or Kantian, etc.), without any reference to the discovery of the New World or even its existence. In effect, contemporary philosophical historiography presents the particular thinkers or their theories almost completely without external context and in that way reduces these theories to purely abstractive thoughts that have no reference to the historical reality. In fact, in the monumental history of philosophy written by Frederic Copleston (which has become the basic academic textbook), in the erudite works of Etienne Gilson, in the famous historiographical narrations of Arthur O. Lovejoy or Stefan Swieżawski [6; 11; 17; 31], just to mention few of the most outstanding Twentieth-Century works, what we do notice is the continuous transmission of some fundamental ideas, the complex system of influences and resemblances between the philosophers or thinkers, or theories, the process of discovering and developing new philosophical paths based on quite coherent original tradition. The famous words of Alfred Whitehead: “All of Western philosophy is but a footnote to Plato”, are in fact a perfect expression of that attitude towards the history of philosophy which tends to

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<sup>1</sup> I am perfectly aware of the critiques made from other “locus of enunciation” [2; 19] and of the different epistemological perspectives that are inscribed in them. For that reason, I don’t want to create any apparently homogenous image of the postcolonial studies on the history of occidental philosophy, what would be more than naive in the light of the real diversity of the theories and postures, but as a starting point I will take the general considerations of Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo and Raúl Fornet-Betancourt as the representatives of the Latin American “intercultural philosophy”.

narrate it by reconstructing the inner logic that determines the appearance and decline of main ideas and theories without putting them in the external, extra-philosophical context.

On the other hand, within the frame of the Western philosophy there is a distinct and maybe dominant in the second half of the twentieth century movement, represented by such intellectuals as Adorno, Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, or Toulmin – of course, having in mind all theoretical differences between them in as much as they originate from totally different traditions – which basic attempt is to bring the philosophy back to the external – social, economic, political – context and to present it as determined, at least to some extent, by the extra-philosophical structures, or to discover the inner discontinuity and contingency of the history of philosophy. For the purpose of this article, the book by Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis. The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* [33], seems to be the most relevant one since it is dedicated to describe that moment in the history of Western thought in which the Cartesian-Newtonian way of thinking became the principal pattern of European self-definition and modernity as well. As Toulmin states, the traditional image of the modernity – as it is transmitted in the philosophical historiography – shows Descartes as the one who gave the foundation to the epistemological project which is located in the very center of the modernity and includes such elements like objectivism, rationalism, unconditioned cognition of the reality etc. “He carried the analysis – Toulmin writes – back to primitive elements in experience that were, in principle, available to reflective thinkers in any culture, and at all times. As a result, philosophy became a field of ‘pure’ inquiry, open to all clear-headed, reflective, self-critical thinkers” [33, p. 14]<sup>1</sup>. In Toulmin’s opinion, Seventeenth-Century philosophy was in fact a kind of counter-renaissance: “There is a shift from a style of philosophy that keeps equally in view issues of local, timebound practice, and universal, timeless theory, to one that accepts matters of universal, timeless theory as being entitled to an exclusive place on the agenda of ‘philosophy’” [33, p. 24]. The crucial point of Toulmin’s analysis is the recovery of the humanist movement<sup>2</sup>, with the outstanding figure of Michel de Montaigne, as equally significant and proper to the modernity and to the European philosophical tradition as the Cartesian one, although as a result of *external* conditions, especially the experience of Thirty Year’s War, the latter was identified with the modernity and the former put on a margin of the philosophical mainstream. At first sight, we could interpret Toulmin’s study as another example of simple opposition

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<sup>1</sup> The great critique and “deconstruction” of the Cartesian idea of the cognition as representation and of his idea of subject one can find in [29; 3].

<sup>2</sup> I can not raise the problem of humanist movement and of the Renaissance in general for debate here, but it is obvious that any homogenous notion of “humanism” is possible [15, p. 17–32, 161–170], although we can find some very influential and prevailing ideas that were in use or on debate by the most intellectuals of the time. As Stefan Swieżawski points out, it was for example the interest in the concrete moral problems and situations, a kind of “realism” focused on the particular conditions of practice, or “anti-dialectic front” [31, p. 9–78].

between two quite abstractive patterns: Cartesian modernity (with its search for certainty) vs. Montaigne's modernity (with its tolerance and skepticism), but the meaning of this project is different. Toulmin suggests, firstly, that what modernity really needs is to become more humanist, and secondly, that the image of Descartes as alienated from the reality is completely false. The *Discourse on Method* is, then, not only the moment of establishing the point of certainty within the reflexive subject but also the reflection of the fears and obsessions of the real embodied subject immersed in the world in change.

By describing the discovery/invention of America as the crucial point in the history of Western thought, Latin American philosophers and those researchers who try to introduce the question of colonialism into the history of European philosophy (as e.g. Eduardo O'Gorman or Anthony Pagden) make that image more complete and demonstrate the necessity, firstly, to recognize the colonial practices and "encounters" with other cultures as the extra-philosophical context of the history of European philosophy, and secondly, to implement into a philosophical historiography what Walter Dignolo calls "pluritopical heremenutics". My intention is not to transgress my own locus of enunciation: I speak from Poland (Eastern Europe), my discipline is the history of Western/European modern philosophy. What I do intend is to reinterpret that tradition which I consider "mine" in the light of its image created from other – Latin American – perspective and in that way to re-discover it or, in other words, to bring it back to its own reality. It is an attempt to decentralize the history of European philosophy a little bit more and, in that way, make it closer to the human life in its concreteness. As Ra'el Fernet-Betancourt wrote: "We must start from our own cultural tradition, but knowing and living it not as an absolute installation but as a transit and bridge for inter-communication. In this way, our culture would be something like the bridge that we cannot jump, but must cross if we want to reach the other shore" [10, p. 31].

### *European philosophy and the discovery of America*

In the history of modern philosophy there is a villain: Ren  Descartes. Guilty of complete decontextualization of philosophical inquiry, guilty of reducing the subject to self-transparent consciousness, guilty of throwing the humanistic studies out of the field of science. With his ideal of certainty, of the philosopher as uncommitted observer, able to distance himself from his own cultural context and physical conditions, Descartes could establish his *cogito ergo sum* as the starting point of every inquiry and introduce the evidence – granted by intellectual intuition – as criterion of truth.

Enrique Dussel, one of the most severe critics of Cartesian philosophy, interprets *cogito ergo sum* as the final expression of the "*ego conquiro*", which was the real foundation of the European self-definition and arose from the practice of the conquest and colonization. The period from 1492 to 1636 is, according to Dussel, crucial to the constitution of the modern subjectivity and is closely related to, or even based on the experience of constituting the Other as dominated one, of the "periphery" under power of Europe as the "center". As Dussel affirms, it was precisely the gesture of

locating itself in the center of the world that made European “I conquer” the foundation of the myth of modernity, because it made possible the extension of the particular, European horizon into the universal one, in the way that European subject became the basic model of subjectivity opposed not to another model of some non-European one but to non-ego, deprived of those features that determine the autonomous and rational subject. “The ‘I colonize’ – as Dussel writes – the Other, the woman, the defeated man, in alienating eroticism, in capitalist economy, is in between ‘I conquer’ and the modern ‘ego cogito’. The ‘civilization’, the ‘modernization’ begins its ambiguous course: rationality against mythical ‘primitive’ explanations, but at the end – the myth covers the sacrificing violence to the Other” [8, p. 53]. The myth of Modernity includes, then, two basic moments: first, the definition of European culture as more developed, civilized or “cultured” one, and second, the definition of other cultures as inferior ones, barbarian or immature, what leads to believe that the domination over the Other is in fact his emancipation from barbarity, his benefit since he can civilize himself and grow to rationality [8, p. 70]. The year 1492 was, then, the founding one, because for the first time in its history Europe could get an effective idea of its superiority (based especially on the military effectiveness and symbolized by Hernón Cortés), meanwhile, until then the feeling of inferiority to the Arabic or Asian cultures was dominant [18, p. 19–22; 12]. With his depersonalized self, transparent and purified of every doubt and every cultural contamination, Descartes is obviously constituting an apparently objective, supramundane, almost divine point of view. After all, the list of his opponents begins with the Seventeenth century libertines<sup>1</sup>, includes Nietzsche, Unamuno, James, and ends with Pierre Bourdieu, just to mention some of them. What Dussel and other Latin American intellectuals affirm is that in the process of the constitution of the modern subjectivity the most significant factor was the experience of domination and violence to the Other, and more precisely, to the American Indian as the paradigmatic Other living in the first periphery of Europe, in America.

The explicit and concise expression of this attitude towards the European modern philosophy was made by Walter Mignolo, when he indicated the year 1492 as the moment of appearance of the transcendent macronarratives in the human thought: “For the first time in the history of humankind the entire globe was drawn and observed from one single point of view. And that point of view, a sort of ‘cero-point’ [...], was not just geographic but epistemic: the entire sphere of knowledge, of modern knowledge, was constituted assuming a ‘cero-point’ and an epistemic privilege that materialized in philosophy and, above all, in science” [20, p. 455]<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. a monumental and detailed analysis of the seventeenth century opposition to Cartesian philosophy [25].

<sup>2</sup> The critics of Cartesian subject as a depersonalized, divine “point of view” or the “cero-point” are common in the European tradition as well, cf. for example very similar considerations of Pierre Bourdieu [4], although usually there is no reference to the conquest of America.

Taking these general statements into consideration, I want to underline three questions related to the discovery and conquest of America which, in my opinion, are of the greatest importance to the reinterpretation of Descartes philosophy:

1. *The question of empirical knowledge.* As John Elliott noticed, one of the most significant facts is that the European reaction to the discovery of America was very slow: there was no vivid interest in society although since Columbus's letters were published and circulated in public, the sense of the important change was more and more common. It was like the idea of America – as the fourth part of the world – was breaking the barriers of understanding of that time, just like for the Middle Ages the Islam was almost inconceivable inasmuch as an attempt to understand the other community requires reflexive distance to the proper one [9, p. 21–28]. Searching for the explanation of this fact, Elliott emphasized the Renaissance attachment to the ancient authorities: as the new information was incompatible with the ancient one, it could not be accepted as true. Edmundo O'Gorman, on the other hand, stressed the role of medieval theological tradition, among others, that divided the world into three parts – with all religious symbolism of the number “three” – and left no place for the fourth, unknown by the Christian authorities and never mentioned in the Holy Scripture part [23, p. 21–26]. Therefore, the change of the perspective, that happened in the second half of the sixteenth century, was in fact the change of the model of knowledge, although the first who put the practice above the theory was Amñrico Vespuccio, who *a posteriori* – on the foundation of experience – denied the Asiatic nature of America [23, p. 61–75; 27]. About halfway through the sixteenth century the traditional way of justifying the knowledge by (textual) authority, typical of both medieval and humanist thought, was replaced with a new one, with the observation and experiment as the basic sources of knowledge. As Anthony Pagden wrote: “The discovery of America also intersected with another powerful tradition in European thought. This was the dependence of all knowledge upon textual interpretation and exegesis. In this tradition all that could be known had to be made compatible with all that had once been said by a recognized canon of sacred and ancient authors” [24, p. 12; 9, p. 41–55]. As none of the sacred texts had mentioned about America, as none of the ancient authors had had an idea of the American reality, as even Philosopher – Aristotle – had proposed some geographical thesis clearly contradictories with the reality experienced by eyewitnesses, it became obvious that it was impossible to continue the purely theoretical/textual inquiries of the predecessors.

Although I don't want to suggest that the discovery of America was the only reason for denying the speculative model of knowledge in favor of the empirical one, because in the history of the European philosophy, at least from the beginning of the Fifteenth century, we can notice the important empirical inclinations, related especially to the Oxford Calculators and to the University of Paris, there is no doubt that the impact of the American experience was crucial at least in two ways. On one hand, the travel literature created the figure of eyewitness as a privileged knowing subject, who established his own authority on the basis of personal experience [24, p. 51–

59; 1, p. 210–215], on the other – at the same moment it challenged this authority by showing the traveler as conditioned by his language and customs. The ambiguity of eyewitness was clearly shown by Michel de Montaigne in his *Of Cannibals*: while in the initial passages of the essay Montaigne referred to someone who “lived ten or twelve years in the New World”, and upon the relation of this eyewitness – “This man that I had was a plain ignorant fellow, and therefore the more likely to tell truth” – he created the utopian vision of the natives as living by the rules of nature, in other passage he casted doubt on the very possibility of cognition of the otherness: “we have no other level of truth and reason than the example and idea of the opinions and customs of the place wherein we live: there is always the perfect religion, there the perfect government, there the most exact and accomplished usage of all things” [22]. In other words, the empirical evidence, granted by the eyewitness, may be enough to gather some isolated descriptions or impressions, but every attempt at interpreting and judging the reality ends with misunderstanding.

2. *The problem of cultural mediation.* One of the greatest questions related to the discovery and conquest of America is the problem of cultural patterns through which the European subject could come into contact with the “new” continent and its reality. Within the fundamental European and eurocentric attitude, which consisted in reducing the Otherness to the Sameness [8, p. 30–37], we can find some basic strategies of using the known patterns of interpretation to capture new facts: first one, the use of the literary images, especially the fantastic ones, taken from the medieval imaginary stories of knights and monsters [28; 30]; second one, the use of the theological terms as “pagans”, “idolatry”, “earthly paradise” etc., which gave foundation both to the language of military Christianity and, together with the humanist image of Arcadia, to the utopian vision of primitive humankind inclined naturally to the Christian faith [14, p. 101–116; 21, p. 171–196]; third one, the recognition of the American present time as the European past, as for example in the image of “noble savage” [35, p. 121–135]. With the works of Jean de Léry or Michel de Montaigne in France and Bartolomé de Las Casas in Spain, the consciousness of the cultural differences – and later, as its result, the use of the word “culture” in plural – became the important argument for skeptical attitude towards the possibility of understanding other, non-European, realities. However, this skepticism did not appear *ex nihilo*, but the impact of the “encounter” with the “New World” intensified some tendencies crucial to the humanist movement. Here I want to stress two of them: the anti-dialectical turn and the discovery of the historicity. The first one was closely connected with the pedagogical project of the humanists (from Leonardo Bruni at the beginning of the 15-th century to Luis Vives in the 16-th) and with their vision of the man as psycho-physical unity which could not be reduced to the pure intellect and, therefore, needed to be stimulated by the rhetorical instead of dialectical forms of expression. The second one, even more important in the light of Cartesian idea of philosophy, was related to the historical methods of inquiry, typical to humanists, what had important philosophical implications: the discovery of historicity of the ideas, of their contextuality and, then, changeability, lead almost directly to epistemological

perspectivism and methodological pluralism. From the revolutionary statements of Lorenzo Valla, who discredited the Donation of Constantine, to the modern skepticism of Montaigne, the historicity of human knowledge was playing the role of an instrument of rebellion against the established authorities and axioms. As a result of these “discoveries” a new vision of the human subject appeared on the philosophical stage: existing within the culture of determined space and time, embodied, limited to his/her own perspective, always contingent, but reflexive enough to recognize his/her impossibility of achieving certainty.

3. *The problem of human nature.* In 1511 a Dominican friar, Antonio de Montesinos, raised a fundamental question: are the Indians human beings? Do they have souls? For Montesinos those questions were rhetorical ones and served him to accuse the *encomenderos* of their crimes, but the debate on the human nature of the Indians continued both in literature and philosophy and, what is the most significant, was closely connected to the question of Spanish imperial domination over America. In 1550/1551 the famous Valladolid debate took place and in some way recapitulated the arguments formulated up till now [13]. In the light of this article, the main question of this debate was the intellectual capacity of the Indians or, in other words, the question of the unity of humankind based on the rational nature. It is common knowledge that the arguments based on the natural slavery or intellectual immaturity of the Indians served as an instrument of establishing colonial domination of allegedly “civilized” Spaniards over the natives “for their benefit”. On that basis Dussel could consider the European modern subjectivity as “ego conquiro”, I conquer, whose identity was determined by the experience of domination over the Other. On the other hand, in the same Valladolid debate, in the 12. rejoinder, an idea appeared – thanks to Bartolomé de Las Casas – of the unity of human reason, derived from the Thomistic tradition, that did not cancel the differences, although at the cost of reducing this unity to the most general principles as “good is to be done and evil avoided” [16]. For the future Cartesian philosophy, the most important thing was just putting the question of the potential sameness of human intellectual capacities having in mind the experienced diversity of cultural patterns.

### *Descartes and the experience of cultural diversity*

One of my students, after reading Descartes’ *Discourse on Method*, affirmed, completely against those who connect Cartesian philosophy exclusively with the principle of certainty, that Descartes must have been “very confused man”. At first, this statement surprised me, but then I realized that someone who was just starting his adventure with philosophy, thanks to his unprejudiced attitude, could discover what was hidden for many professionals. Not without reason Georges Poulet described Descartes’ thought as “indeterminate” one, showing that the more he was trying to define what was definable, the more present was the zone of what was indeterminate and unclear at the margins of his thought [26, p. 65–66]. To understand the Cartesian philosophy by referring it to the experience of the discovery and conquest of America means, in my opinion, to recognize an unavoidable un-



certainty that forms its basis and was never canceled or forgotten by Descartes, although many times he was trying to purify his ideal self of every unconsciousness. Contrary to Dussel, I do not find the experience of domination the basis of this philosophy, but rather the experience of complete loss of orientation. First two chapters of *Discourse on Method* show clearly that instead of “I conquer” the Cartesian *cogito* can be understood as the self whose principal motivation was to find what had been lost.

While interpreting Cartesian philosophy, we have to be aware of important incompatibility between the experienced diversity of truths (moral and metaphysical ones) and the correspondence conception of truth assumed by him and transmitted from the Antiquity. When Descartes claims that “as the truth on any particular point is one whoever apprehends the truth, knows all that on that point can be known” [7], he affirms that the true cognition consists in having representations accurate to external reality by which the objects can present themselves to human mind. On the other hand, first two chapters of *Discourse...* are dedicated to report the experience of traveling through time and space with no possibility of distinguishing an accurate representation from the “false” one. His initial universalism – “Good sense is, of all things among men, the most equally distributed; for every one thinks himself so abundantly provided with it, that those even who are the most difficult to satisfy in everything else, do not usually desire a larger measure of this quality than they already possess” [7] – is therefore an expression of intuitive objectivism and a confession of philosophical faith in the classical theory of truth, which is the only one that can give new orientation to the lost subjectivity. Good sense – “power of judging aright and of distinguishing truth from error” [7] – is one the most significant expressions of Descartes, because it locates us directly in the practical, and not theoretical sphere of human existence. What Descartes needs above all is not, then, a theoretical certainty of pure cognition, but the practical guidelines.

As Georges Van Den Abbeele pointed out, in *Discourse...* Descartes made use of travel metaphors – having in that way a dialogue with Montaigne, his principal predecessor – by comparing an act of reading to an act of travelling. Wandering becomes equivalent to an error and the main philosophical task is to find the right path. I want to stress an important factor indicated by Abbeele, that is, a contingency inscribed in Cartesian philosophical inquiry on his path to establishing *ego cogito*: “Descartes has merely had the good luck, or *bonheur*, to find himself on certain paths and not others, in certain ways of thinking and not others” [34, p. 49]. There is, then, a kind of particular duality of 1) *cogito* as yet established as an area of certainty, and 2) as the way leading to that *cogito* which is marked with contingency and existential exceptionality of every human life<sup>1</sup>.

The problem of cultural diversity was explicitly pointed out by Descartes as one of the basic questions that led him to search for a new method in philosophy: “I took into account also the very different character which a

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<sup>1</sup> This existential dimension of Cartesian inquiry was a basis of interpretation made by Stanisław Cichowicz, who emphasized its personal and incomparable character [5, p. 155–187].

person brought up from infancy in France or Germany exhibits, from that which, with the same mind originally, this individual would have possessed had he lived always among the Chinese or with savages [*canibales*], and the circumstance that in dress itself the fashion which pleased us ten years ago, and which may again, perhaps, be received into favor before ten years have gone, appears to us at this moment extravagant and ridiculous. I was thus led to infer that the ground of our opinions is far more custom and example than any certain knowledge" [7].

In fact, we find here the same question that was basic for Las Casas, when he was trying to determine the universal principles of thinking in the face of the experience of different cultural patterns. Las Casas could refer to the Thomistic tradition and to the concept of *sinderesis*, but to Descartes this theory was no longer an instrument of constructing the universality since he decided to cast doubt on every speculative knowledge, even the most "evident" one. In this passage it is difficult to find an eurocentric blindness or reduction of the Otherness to the Sameness. On the contrary, Cartesian point of view is, on one hand, an extra-cultural one, but on the other, there is no divine objectiveness that could help him to distinguish the truth from error. This passage could be written by Montaigne as well. The path that Descartes chose was the personal and narrative one, the only possible in the existential situation of the loss of faith in truth, in a way that through narration – and not deduction – Descartes established his certain "cero-point".

The problem of narration, of the history or fiction, was mentioned by Descartes many times; he was determined to throw humanities out of the scientific area because of the probability and relativism of its thesis. In the first part of *Discourse...* there is a significant ambiguity, if not contradiction. Firstly, the "histories and fables" are useful for an individual, because they are the best way to realize the diversity of possible rules of thinking and acting. Without them, an individual could not get any distance to his/her own cultural patterns and would live in a kind of naive universalism. But, secondly, there is a serious risk, because "when too much time is occupied in traveling, we become strangers to our native country" [7], that is, it is possible to lose an orientation completely and to deny any universality at all, falling into relativism. Thirdly, although we need stories, every story is partly false, because even the most faithful author "misrepresents the matters" at least by choosing the events that are to be described. And fourthly, there is always a danger of becoming Don Quixote, the one who read too much and was taking the fiction for the truth. Yet in this passage, Descartes shows the problematic situation of the wandering *ego*: the process of understanding the world has to be connected with reading and creating the stories, but at the same time these stories (histories and fictions) always lead to misunderstanding. Narration becomes, then, for Descartes a form of Plato's/Derrida's *farmakon*: it is both necessary and dangerous, a medicine and a poison. At this point Descartes expressed the very heart of humanists historicism enriched by Montaigne's cultural relativism and Cervantes' perspectivism. But what did he exactly offer in return for narration?

He offered his own narration: "But as this tract is put forth merely as a history, or, if you will, as a tale, in which, amid some examples worthy of

imitation, there will be found, perhaps, as many more which it were advisable not to follow, I hope it will prove useful to some without being hurtful to any, and that my openness will find some favor with all” [7]. Although, at the end of the way there is a deductive/intuitive certainty waiting, the only possibility to begin the journey is to tell stories. Therefore, Descartes did not start from the experience of domination, but, on the contrary, he was obsessed by an unbearable sense of the lack of center (metaphysical, moral, cosmological etc.). Reading Cartesian philosophy from intercultural point of view can lead us not only to “I conquer”, but rather to the discovery of the very intimate, human and existential origin of this thought – the fear. In his sincere history, Descartes uncovered the mechanics of establishing the universality: by manipulating of the events, choosing particular facts, writing histories that are always misrepresentations of reality, a “zero-point” of philosophical inquiry appears. And its final justification was something completely contextual: a living individual.

*Mundus fabula est.*

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