

Beyond Cartesian Philosophy of Essentialism, and the Quest for Intercultural Discourse: Some Examples

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Abstract

Rene Descartes is believed to be the founder of modern philosophy that exalts closure, singularity and monologue in the making of philosophical meanings. He sees mankind's diverse horizons as virtually closed monads; undermines the possibility of openness, mutuality and dialogue. Accordingly, for Descartes, mankind has no common world to refer to, no common vision to live for; the world is essentially uncommunicative and windowless. The purpose of this article is to critically challenge this picture of humanity while trying to identify lessons that need to be critically attended towards forming a world of possibilities in which meaning is discovered rather through the acts of openness, mutuality, and dialogue. I take inspiration from intercultural philosophy that promotes an image of humanity that is an antithesis to the one maintained by Descartes. I will argue that mankind is not only capable of and optimistic to forming a world of better meanings through the revealing power of dialogue, perhaps mankind is a subject endowed with the capacity to dialogically break supposedly unbreakable boundaries. I urge on the need to celebrate the objectivity of an underlying truth of commonness amidst diversities. As will be defended, this last is not a merely speculative attribution of mankind for, indeed, there are concrete historical moments that could offer grounds for meaningful philosophical discernment. While one such example is Ethiopian, others are international which, I believe, could reveal an immense capacity to making the world become converse to and richer in meaning than the mutually isolating effects of Cartesian Either/Or and its world of windowlessness.

Keywords: mankind, horizons, intercultural, openness, mutuality, discourse, windowlessness

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Introduction

The problems I deal with critically in this article include the Cartesian estimation of philosophy, truth, knowledge, humanity and the world at large while at the same time I also assess the empirically nonconforming elements of Descartes' project of modernity against the historically grounded variants of philosophy such as particularly, intercultural philosophy, and hermeneutic philosophy. I will also try to identify what the philosophy of Descartes was dedicated to promote as I call off its immediate implications against existential life. Dealt with are also problems such as the role of philosophical discussions in the process of meaning-making, the question whether truth could ever be established at all and if so, whether it could be entirely free from the forces of history and discovered through individual fantasies rather than by way of conversational acts. Not least, quite against the heavily idealistic endorsement of Cartesian metaphysics, I will enquire into whether man² as a worldly-element is a mere mode possessing no quality of relevance as opposed to a world-forming subject endowed with the capacity to intentionality; that is to say, to discuss, to agree/disagree, to choose, to act, to produce, and capable of making the world become a better place. These are among the main issues to be discussed in this paper while I endeavor to critically challenge the anti-human and anti-world implications of Cartesian metaphysics, which is bad-metaphysics³.

The article contains five sections which ultimately attempt to raise a common agenda dealing through with the issues indicated above. More specifically, the first section, brief as it is, contests the received image of Descartes as builder of an original philosophy, and it calls on the need to thus re-examine this image. Against the Cartesian theses of *certitude* and *unfaltering directness*, the second section advances the thesis that *fallibilism* is rather the norm of genuine philosophical inquiry. The third section argues that Descartes's act of doubting, which seemed

² Hereafter, I use "man" to generically refer to "mankind" without the trademark of the male sex. For reasons of convenience, it can be read simply as "woman". It follows that, when the pronouns "he", "him", "his", and "himself", designate "man" in different ways, thus qualified is not only the male sex as the pronouns can also be read according to the female sex: "she", "her", and "herself".

³ I here say "Cartesian metaphysics" (in fact modern metaphysics as a whole) is bad-metaphysics chiefly because it is a philosophy that stands at odds with questions relating to *man in the flesh*; it is oblivious to the basic questions of life, as it is ideally detouring rather than existentially encountering.

promising at the beginning (for doubt is, as it should be, the spirit of genuine philosophizing), rather concluded with entirely dispossessing implications against humanity. Whereas, examining Descartes's exaltation of *singularity* and his denial of *existential causality*, the fourth section identifies what these Cartesian theses mean vis-à-vis the human-subject which, as a reality-in-existence, is so uncharitably negated by Descartes's system of idealist philosophy to the end of sanctioning the necessity of idea and God thus to make way for an oppressive scheme of double-metaphysics (ideality and divinity) that cumbrously stand against the essence and existence of humanity. This section also identifies lessons that must be attended toward forming a world of possibilities in which meaning is discovered rather through the acts of openness, mutuality, critical-alliances, and through a unity-in-diversity of human horizons such as histories, cultures, philosophies, religions, and texts, thus to defying the Cartesian picture of worldly-elements as essentially windowless and uncommunicative.

Building on these discussions, the last section seeks to prove that, in defiance to Descartes' belittling estimation, mankind is not merely capable of and optimistic toward forming a world of better meanings, but perhaps mankind is a possibility richly endowed with the capacity to break supposedly unbreakable boundaries. This can only be done through recounting the revealing power of intercultural communications, as well as through celebrating the underlying objectivity of the sense of love, solidarity, and commonness among otherwise historically diverse elements of humanity—a fundamental fact to which Cartesian metaphysics gave but little endorsement. As will be shown, this last is not a merely speculative attribution of humanity; indeed, there are great historical moments to substantiate it. To give readers a fore-grasp of this incredible quality of mankind, the historical moments I will pick-up and out of which I try to make sense of real philosophical significance are cases involving the great coming to stage of figures such as the late Nelson Mandela, President Barack Obama, Pope Francis and, perhaps, Premier Hailemariam Desalegn of Ethiopia whose coming to power could also offer an invitation to philosophical analysis. I will argue that ascending to prominence each of these figures respectively emerged by defeating tighter traditional boundaries. I also believe that these cases, if looked at seriously, could be grounds for meaningful philosophical discernment as they surely inspire to envision the phenomenon of mankind's greater revitalization, thus, making the world of humanity become converse to and richer in meaning than the Cartesian world of solitude, windowlessness, and inactivity.

Rethinking Descartes

Having pictured tradition after an old house which is planned disproportionally, built with patchy hands and erected on shaky grounds, Descartes sought to aggressively demolish it in order to revolutionize a new beginning on which philosophy could be installed scientifically and with solitary hands. Hence, as if to turn all up-side-down, Descartes declared himself to be an architect of a new project, the completion of which should require a meditative effort undisturbed by the holler of men. And by this, Descartes is not only trying to demolish tradition, he is also clearly undermining the merit of the old method of discussions. Accordingly, many have, right through to this day, elevated Descartes to the rank of an original thinker who, without charge to past authors, devised a new philosophy hereafter called “modern philosophy.” Nevertheless, on the other hand, there is no shortage of critical endeavors countering this image of Descartes. Indeed history of ideas can prove to us that, no revolution came into prominence without it also having adversaries.

Philosophers such as Etienne Gilson (1937), John Cottingham (1993), and Theo Verbeek (1993), to name only a few, are among those who made microscopic investigations into how independent Descartes was from past authors and from tradition in general. Doing their investigations with extreme attention to details, these philosophers settled with an almost unanimous judgment that questioned the originality claims of Descartes. They commented that, far from being original, Descartes only vacillated between the “old” (particularly Aristotelian and Scholasticism) and the “new” philosophical programs, and that his ideas had already been anticipated by philosophers before him. As much as this, Descartes’ project, which he sought to build upon the demise of tradition proved a merely incomplete revolution (Cottingham *ibid*). An even more serious scrutiny would expose that Descartes, little like his claims of neatness, was clearly an opportunist and his writings were excessively schematic. Because, while on the one hand Descartes beat the drum for the newness of his design, he was also equally tactful, just as he found the circumstance more suited to furthering his propaganda and to advertise himself as adhering to the “best traditions of the past” (*ibid*: 148), or even to declare “that his philosophy is ‘the oldest of all’” (Theo Verbeek, *ibid*:170)—a strategy which Descartes believed that it would put him at peace with the *status quo*, especially with the church.

Despite all this, there is no denying the fact that Descartes made the best he could in order to establish a new order of philosophy that is claimed to be universal, purely mathematical, ahistorical and orderly, as opposed to the

qualitative, dialectical, historical, and the step-by-step nature of doing philosophy as it had long been pursued by his predecessors.

Said here above are preliminary comments intended to give to readers an impression at this opening stage that, Descartes has been reputed for what he actually did not achieve, hence, his status requires revision. Be this as it may, as I have mentioned it already, I shall focus mainly on exposing some aspects of Cartesian metaphysics that devitalize humanity - a task to be done in the hope of identifying lessons from which, I believe, humanity could thus get the benefit of learning.

Fallibilism: Characteristic Norm of Genuine Philosophizing

It is argued here that the search for truth is a never ending process, and genuine philosophizing is little about perfection as much about striving towards exploring new horizons of meanings. As Immanuel Kant noted, humans cannot live in an enlightened age but in an age of enlightenment; this implying accordingly that, a true reform in human enlightenment cannot be accomplished by revolution but by progressive efforts (Foucault, 2007: 31-35). If anything, truth should be perceived, ipso facto, as being a historical possibility, and the search for it must inevitably require exercises that need to be examined over and over again as we always pass around a course of history. This is so; because, human beings are essentially bound to history, a fact which makes it exigent that truth is ever in the process of *becoming* as it is revealed through the happenings of indefinite turns and twists of history. As much as this, there is no assignment of life to be resolved once and for all, and life such that it goes on in this wonderful balance of surety and doubt. Likewise, because philosophizing could be none other than a human activity, and since human beings are short and finite, there could be no final proposition to be sought and no adjudication to be made in matters human. Philosophy is this enterprise in which humans continually endeavor to overcome their existential finitude, to better understand their place in the world and to invigorate their practical reason, hence to widen their horizons. It is therefore least expected for the philosophical activity of meaning-making and for human progress in general to be relentless, but piecemeal, self-critical, and tentative.

To make the thesis clear, I here metaphorically present the philosophical search for meaning in the manner of a perpetual war in which victory is dangerously lacking in security, a war in which fighters need to be tirelessly watchful, always sticking at the triggers and hunting down enemies after enemies, for they know well that victory is ever precarious. Correspondingly, the whole point of philosophical inquiry, unlike what Descartes said, is not and should not be

one of discovering a final reality and put all doubts to rest, but one of tirelessly trying to make sense of a certain spatiotemporal presence as we go along. William Luijpen is brought to attention here who, elaborating on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential analysis of man, commented that:

Man makes history not in the way a force sets a process into motion but as subject, as contingent, as the free co-source of meaning. For this reason nothing is guaranteed to man. He cannot base his hope upon any destiny, not even on any good fortune, but only on [a historical possibility]. Progress does not occur of necessity. It is not even impossible that mankind will fail midway "like a sentence that remains unfinished." For man is not a "strength" but a "weakness" in the heart of thing like nature; he is not a cosmological factor, but the locus where all cosmological factors change meaning and become history... (quoted in Luijpen, 1965: 42-43).

Man should thus be marked out rightly in such a way that neither he nor any of his activities could be a force of necessity; this in turn implying that, the claim for a final truth is quite imprudent. Moreover, philosophy is a turbulent undertaking and, quite characteristically, there is nothing in it that may be set as a Holy Writ and no position is immune to criticism. As such, it is the mark of the genuine thinker that he should not refuse to allow the possibility of critical therapies to his thoughts in as much as he is conscious of the tentative spirit that gives life to his thoughts; the genuine thinker is neat from any modernist malady attributable to Descartes who so pretentiously exalted the unwavering stead of philosophy toward the service of complete knowledge. Indeed, diffidence is such an important virtue that we may benefit learning from thinkers within the critical tradition who are rather cautious to making so bold an announcement as discovering the master key to all the problems of philosophy.

In case of being pretentious, we must assume the risk of staining ourselves with the same modernist outrage that we may wish to suppress, as we also instantly forfeit membership to any variants of critical/practical philosophy (viz., philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, intercultural philosophy, existentialism and so forth) which, being closer to the existential calls of humanity, are, I believe, more meaningful than the charge of Cartesian metaphysics which is ideally detouring rather than existentially encountering. Moreover, in being pretentious, we must also see ourselves rather repeating the sin of those thinkers in history who had greatly deceived themselves of reaching the highest point above

an observer's horizon like Descartes himself; or, more fittingly, any of those whom John of Salisbury had, as early as the twelfth-century, called detainees of dialectics, openness, and good sense. Having returned to England from Paris where he had completed his studies, English humanist, John of Salisbury, made a bang on his old associates whom he found victims of the same old defective thoughts of trying to solve philosophical problems with the principles of pure logic, divine order, and systems of universal knowledge which, presumed to be fail-safe, had only detained people in the hold of developmental disability. The following is therefore what John of Salisbury said to his old associates whom he had found as unchanged:

as before, and where they were before; they did not appear to have advanced an inch in setting the old questions, nor had they added a single proposition. The aims that since inspired them, inspired them still; they had progressed in one point only: they had unlearned moderation, they knew not modesty; and that to such an extent that one might despair of their recovery... (Gilson, *ibid*: 29).

Speaking in a Platonic spirit, it is not always difficult to understand and sympathize when children are afraid of darkness, but it is incomprehensible when adults are afraid of the brightness of the light. Philosophizing, I argue, is such an activity in which the possibility of failure should not be a frightening prospect but an inspiring one that gives the power of reflexivity, propelling us toward the hope of seeing as much light as we may also seek to overcome as much darkness. Also, because the philosophical exploration of light (truth, knowledge, and enlightenment) is attainable only through a gradual step of overcoming darkness, it follows that our experience of the new possibility, that is, the brightness unveiled, is never going to be so dazzling unlike, for example, the experience of one who comes out of a Platonic cave to have his prior world instantly turning otherwise. Moreover, because it is no secret that humans are far from perfect, and since our understandings are contextually embedded, philosophical judgments should accordingly require the humor of tentativity rather than the Cartesian spirit of unfaltering directness.

Because he believed his philosophy to be self-evident, Descartes prided as well that anyone who might question his teaching "is simply mistaken" (Theo Verbeek, *ibid*: 171); he thus uncharitably evaded otherwise pertinent challenges to

his arguments.⁴ Descartes was also against the merit of philosophical discussions which, according to him, are not only factors that falter us from embracing truth when it discloses but also that discussions “are only a waste of time” (Theo Verbeek, *ibid*:174, foot note 26. Also see *ibid*: 171-72). Accordingly, he advertised that his philosophy would have no room for discussions. In this wise, it should be hopeless for anyone to engage in a genuine discussion with a man as unnaturally proud as Descartes was. Perhaps as Merleau-Ponty insightfully remarked:

it is impossible to engage in a genuine dialogue with the Christian [as ardent as Descartes was who] believes that he possesses this Truth in faith and thinks that he can look at man, at the world and history in the light of this Truth. [Thus,] the Christian is not a man among men, because he enjoys a divine guarantee (quoted in Luijpen, *ibid*: 45).

As a matter of fact, there is nothing in the natural world that could escape the force of history. Hence, I believe, it shall not be argued too forcefully that truth is approximate rather than absolute. And this is so because, as we philosophize and turn a new page of history, we can only come closer to an indefinite truth without us ever reaching *the* truth, for, there is no such a thing as *the* truth. Martin Heidegger is quoted here for whom, in the activity of philosophy, there is no ease, and no security but:

turbulence, the turbulence into which man is spun truth...constantly remains in the perilous neighborhood of uncertainty. No knower necessarily stands so close to the verge of error at every moment as the one who philosophizes. Whoever has not yet grasped this has never yet had any intimation of what philosophizing means.... (1995:19).

Adding to this point Heidegger also argued that, impossible as much as odd, the attainment of an absolute truth would imply the relocation of humanity to the infinite, that is, as if humans were becoming like God, in which case, the activity of philosophy would then become a throwaway (*ibid*:5-20).

⁴ As an example to this, we can see at how Descartes reacted to an otherwise relevant question raised by Gassendi to which Descartes responded rather with a typically modernist arrogance, saying: “At no place do you bring an objection to my arguments.” (See, for example, Gilson, *ibid*: 199).

Now, because man could only bear a historical truth, philosophy as a human enterprise should accordingly be bound to judicious maneuvers, as its doings must also be pursued unhurriedly. In other words, if the search for truth was to bear fruit than not, it is fundamental for our philosophizing to be historically grounded and methodically interpretive. Indeed the great wisdom we can learn from several forms of critical theories is how not to be pretentious, judgmental and overly forward, because these are no shorter routes to the possibility of the disclosure of meaning. To give an example, there is much difference between the claim “God exists, or God does not exist” and the claim “I think God exists, or I think God does not exist” that, while the first excludes any chance for counter claims, the latter is typical of an approach that is willing to debate as it also doubts its own opinions. The latter is a claim advanced on a provisional basis keeping itself open to possibilities; it is greased with the moral virtue of diffidence, it exhibits practical wisdom and reflects the spirit of critical philosophies that appreciate the values of contexts, the virtue of moderation, and the power of discussions. As Descartes claimed in the very first paragraph of the *Discourse*, it is not untrue that everyone by nature usually entertains the idea that he is no less endowed with good sense as the next person; in spite of this, however, Etienne Gilson pronounces that, “[a] well-made mind is never fully convinced of its opinions, and therefore doubting is the highest mark of wisdom. “Not “I know,” or even “I don’t know,” but “What do I know?” [Is the question that exhibits greater wisdom]” (ibid: 128).

This work is mindful of a great deal of lessons learned from history of philosophy that, demise as big as the fall of modernism⁵ is proportional to its

⁵ Has modernism failed yet? Without being too pessimistic about modernism, if we say modernism has failed, then it is because of the truth that several forms of theories have long taken reflexive turns and become increasingly appealing to the extent that references to grand metaphysical schemes seem outdated and intellectually abnormal. From the beginning of the twentieth century on, discourses that have gained prominence are those with a hermeneutic spirit extolling the primacy of contexts, discussions, and interpretations; the common vocabularies have thus become as normatively and practically disposed as nearness, engagement, meaning, solidarity, mutual understandings, and diffidence—vocabularies that stand up against the schematic authority of modernist expressions. On the other hand, if we say modernism has not failed yet, then it is because of an alarm for legitimate suspicion (in some cases it is manifest and beyond mere suspicion) that, not all critical social discourses are genuinely critical (including some “postmodern” voices such as Foucault’s, for example), because some of them are grounded in rhetorically circumventing strategies seeking to tacitly enlarge upon modernist pattern of thought. (For more on this point see, for example, V.Y. Mudimbe (1988); Johannes Fabian (1983); G. E. Marcus and M. J. Fischer (1999); T. H. Eriksen and F. S. Nielsen (2001). Let

massive outrages and lack of sincerity. Genuine reflection does not pretend to be relentlessly forward but it is necessarily judicious, open, and realistic; else, the purpose for which it is due will be lacking in any sense of uprightness quite reminiscent of Descartes' shocking destiny. After so much had been praised of Descartes's genius in the Continent regarding the appeal of certainty his new method was believed to offer, it was nevertheless only a moment of time before the scheme he had built would crumble under the heavy impact of its excessive pretension and unnaturalness. It was not so long a time after the death of Descartes when a whole philosophical tradition under British orientation found his ideas a *passé* while at the same time identifying his ambitious project more a fantasy than a philosophy deserving any credit (Gilson, *ibid*: 125-220). It was the more unfortunate when, as a result of this, the Continental genius was finally branded as a "dreamer" (*ibid*: 164). At least, according to Gilson, this was true of Voltaire's shocking experience during a visit to London where he was presented with the surprise of the Descartes-led-Continent turning on its head.

As it were, Voltaire found London to be, just at one time, the grave site of French Mind and the birth place of British Body; he observed that it was then time in London when, instead of Descartes' metaphysical idealism, reflection was inspired and led by John Locke's metaphysical empiricism and its new-found world of philosophical meanings. So much was the risk for a Cartesian during those days that it prompts Etienne Gilson to go as far as advertising Descartes' untimely-death⁶ as "merciful" (*ibid*: 148) and rightly so. Because, I believe that by making such a claim Gilson is trying to be charitable to Descartes rather than mocking his death. In other words, I would say, Gilson seems to desire that Descartes died one death rather than two, because if Descartes had lived as long as to witness the submission of the French eighteenth century and a significant part of the Continent to a reigning British philosophical orthodoxy under the command of body-man John Locke, it would have been worse a destiny for Descartes who, after all, had believed to be the only one entrusted by God with the work of bringing human knowledge into completion (Gilson, *ibid*: 139).

Be all as it may, it must be noted also that, the death of Descartes and the coming to an end of his reign by the materialism of Locke would never herald the

it be noted therefore that, the claim here on the fall of modernism shall be understood not so much in its daring voice but in its sobriety that, modernism has been challenged, it is being challenged, and will continue to be challenged until thinking comes back to fully understanding the sense of the human.

⁶ Descartes died at the age of 54 - pretty short a life for such a man who was still full of his dreams.

effective end of the philosophy that Descartes had laid down. Europe still had Fathers and Bishops of Christian-metaphysics who would bless the Cartesian legacy for resurrection. As it were, great idealist metaphysicians as Leibniz, Spinoza, Father Malebranche and, later, Bishop Berkeley, would come to form ultimate membership to a Cartesian dynasty in spite of having differences between them; thus, like their master, these men prided as well that, through their respective philosophical systems final truth would be served (Gilson, *ibid*: 176-220).

I believe, fairly enough has been said to help recall Descartes's modernist arrogance and, by invalidation of this arrogance, to suggest that the character of moderation should be the last thing to escape our thinking if we aim at coming closer to exploring a world of greater possibilities in which fallibilism is more a virtue than a mark of deterioration in the face of ever new horizons of meaning looming. Perhaps, it is to our own existential advantage that, while philosophizing, we go hermeneutical, be diffident, be historically grounded, and maintain optimism, as we look forward to dialogically opening up new territories in which man is more and better in terms of vitality. As such, I argue, no philosophical project could have any meaningful path without it beginning from an initial acceptance and, of course, appreciation of fallibilism as a fundamental aspect of our being humans. Recalling Martine Heidegger once again, "No knower necessarily stands so close to the verge of error at every moment as the one who philosophizes [and] whoever has not yet grasped this has never yet had any intimation of what philosophizing means..."(1995: 19). Perhaps, as we probably have already learned about it, there has been a new development from the twentieth century on that the majority of reflections have taken a course away from modernity's pretension of certitude and come to an appreciation of fallibilism as essential feature of meaning-making - a fact, observation of which accordingly prompted Richard Bernstein to comment that, just as it should be, "the dominant temper of our age is fallibilistic" (Bernstein, 1983: 12).

Now, just as it were, if on the other hand the modern project was animated with the odd claim for universal necessity, and if Descartes failed to appreciate the value of philosophical discussions and the approximate nature of truth, just the way Peter Abailard once claimed "Dialectics has made [him] hateful to the world" because of his logism in which he believed there was not any mystery unsolvable through the principles of logic (Gilson, *ibid*: 6), then on the contrary, this writing urges on the need to celebrate the dialectical spirit of philosophical inquiry and the characteristic norm of meaning-making as unavoidably fallible. Man cannot be otherwise than what he is —that is, a fundamentally historical subject, hence inevitably fallible. Acknowledging this could actually make us rather hopeful to the world, transforming us to a new horizon of meanings that are revealed

historically based on mutual efforts between the one and the other. In concluding this section, let me reiterate that in view of what has been said so far, I believe it would not be too harsh a judgment on Descartes if I say, as a metaphysical idealist, he made no efforts at all to devise any meaningful world for humans in which they not only appreciate the fact of fallibilism and maintain that approximate truth is all what we may hope to ever achieve, but also a world in which mutuality, philosophical disputations, discussions and intercultural communications are the praised norms.

Descartes' Act of Doubt: Promising at Beginning, Humanely Dispossessing at Last

By the initial step of configuring his deductive method, Descartes assumed that the only thing he knew for certain is his being a thing that *doubts*. Had he maintained this assumption to the end of empowering humanity by, for example, trying to understand the fundamental meaning of the being of man as well as pointing at possibilities of its revitalization, then his could have been a project to impress thinkers like Heidegger for whom the exercise of doubt is an essential property of philosophizing. However, quite contrarily, Descartes's entry was merely strategic to the end of glorifying divinity, which would be achieved through divesting the essence of man and keeping mankind from the kingdom of efficacy.

It can be argued as well that, although the *Discourse* has so long been dominantly referred to be a standard metaphysical text, closer scrutiny would show that Descartes did not intend it to be so - to solve metaphysical problems, because the *Discourse* was rather schematically arranged to serve purpose for a philosophical defense of Christian divinity. As evidence to this, not only is Descartes' analysis of corporeality finished in one of the shortest sections of the *Discourse*, part IV, but also that conclusions on the status of corporeality were reached hastily based on a rather lame premise that, previously accepted beliefs can be suppressed with little ado (Cottingham *ibid*: 151-158). This again easily sanctions the necessity of the "I think therefore I am" as the first principle of rational thinking which could only be bestowed on us by a being so perfect and infallible, God. After all, as Gilson (*ibid*) noted not only had Descartes studied at La Fleche which was a prominent center for Christian education, he would also remain a devout Catholic-Christian all his age. Also see in Gilson, *ibid*). Such was the reason why Descartes, from the start, designed a scheme that would culminate in defending the God of Christianity while, along the way, suppressing anything that is not clear and distinct.

Yet, as long as Descartes had not taken the shift to the subject, he had only doubted corporeality while abstaining, at least temporarily, from denying its facticity; for, otherwise, there was nowhere else than the material world from which the thinking subject, the “I”, could drive its contents. Descartes’s method of deduction proceeded in such a manner that, the fact that corporeality is doubtable implies the necessity of a thing which, by the very act of doubting, conditions the existence of matter. Such is how mind was accordingly proved as well as delineated to be clear and distinct. Also, because doubt implies lack of perfection, the very act of doubting should presuppose the “idea of perfection” which, as an idea, could not have come from any source other than a being that is in itself perfect. This in turn must point to the God of Christianity, the creator of all there “is” to whom alone absolute existence pertains. And God is thus “proved” accordingly (see Rene Descartes, 1637: 28-29; also refer to Book III of the *Meditations*: 95-110).

Now, once the necessity of ideality (the mind) and divinity (God) is firmly put in place, whatever could be said concerning the final status of corporeality seemed to bother Descartes for whom the only existence conceivable as constituting the material world outside of the mind is nothing beyond extension (see in Gilson, *ibid*: 199-200). This again required it be that, “we shall then have to remove from the idea of matter all the so-called “qualities”” (R.M. Eaton, 1927). Indeed, according to Gilson, because Cartesian philosophy was mathematical in method, and since mathematics only proceeds from ideas to facts, it was necessary that judgments about corporeality followed from the proof of ideas (Gilson, *ibid*: 152-3). Accordingly, proved was “the mind first, God next, then, and only then, the external world” (*Ibid*: 181).

As such, if mind was thus proved by way of effortlessly suspending corporeality; worse still, God was proved and glorified by entirely devitalizing corporeality which is judged to be no more than “pure extension.” Also, since whatever is pure extension is inert, it is eternally subject to action without itself responding or initiating action in return, hence entirely meaningless. Besides, corporeality was “proved” (or even better to say, it was *allowed* to exist-extended) in order that it could offer the service of being the singular agent accounted for causing bad inclinations that might cross the mind such as, for example, the inclination that God might be a deceiver. To this, Descartes said, “I do not see how He [God] could be defended against the accusations of deceit, if these ideas were produced by causes other than corporeal objects. Hence we *must allow* that corporeal things exist” (Eaton, *ibid*: 154. *Emphasis added*).

Now, speaking in some ultimate sense, such pitiless measure of corporeality is not without having disastrous implications on the status of man as an existent-

reality of the world. Doubting, Descartes saw the being of man as a given, as a present at hand and as being immediately discernible; he nevertheless failed to question whether man could as well be such a meaning-laden and a mysterious possibility concealed as lying deeper than what is obvious. Indeed the essence of a thing lies deeper than what is obvious; why, therefore, it is called *essence*. However, having everydayness as its horizon, ordinary metaphysics is never capable of going sufficiently deeper as to take hold of the grounding essences that condition the possibility of meaning in general. Such is a reason why, for Cartesian metaphysics, there is no aspect of man that escapes the obviousness of corporeality and, as a result, man-as-existent-subject is ascertainable only in its dubitable presence, so in its ultimate nothingness. Whereas, on the other hand, making what is deeper becomes manifest is the task for which fundamental philosophy is designated. Thus, according to Heidegger, especially regarding the question of the what-being of man, any understanding is ordinary if it “concludes that man is present at hand in the nothing [that], man has nothing and consequently is himself nothing. [Moreover] any philosophy which ascertains such a thing is [not just ordinary and shallow, but it is also] pure nihilism and the enemy of all culture” (1995: 299).

Moreover, judgments made about the material world have implications on the status of man as a historical subject. Accordingly, Descartes’s metaphysical treatment of the material world can surely be read also as a reflection on mankind, for, I believe, it makes little sense otherwise to speak of one without also implying the other. In this wise, I argue that, in addition to divesting the essence of man, Cartesian metaphysical treatment of the world has actually implied even much more negativity on the status of mankind. It needs to be noted here that Descartes’s negation of the material world is *essential* (having to do with the essence, or fundamental meaning of the world as in itself), but not like the Christian worldview towards the material world, or earthly life, just as mundane (which is clearly a moral negation than essential). As was shown, Descartes’s project has schematically imposed on the material world the necessity of two-level metaphysical orders: mind and God, and this again consequentially allowed a heavy burden of double-metaphysics to ultimately rest on man who, as a worldly-element, is not only denied the capacity for historical consciousness, but man is also excluded from the realm of positive causality. Descartes uttered then, saying: “by its nature” the world “is exclusive of causality [and as such] when God created the world, the world itself stood for nothing in its own creation, it simply was “being created”” (Gilson, *ibid*: 213-4). Perhaps, Cartesian metaphysics maintained:

a hierarchical realm of categories, a chain of being, in which substances [with efficacy] occupy a higher place than mere modes....A substance, being higher in the hierarchy of being, can be said to contain 'eminently' items such as modes even when it does not actually have anything in common with them (Cottingham, *ibid*: 162-3).

Now, let me reiterate at this point that, having been completely forgotten, dispossessed and buried under blanket weight of twofold metaphysics, humanity has reasons to cry loud and be saddened at Descartes's modernist design about which humanity should never remain shut up. Perhaps, humanity has legitimate allegations to forward to the court of genuine philosophy in which justice is delivered when reflection comes into existential mindedness of the being of man; that is, when thinking repatriates to its basic element - the human. Here is therefore mankind's allegation against Cartesian metaphysics that, because of its capital blunder, dead is the world twice, and dead is therefore man twice! And, because this should be an evidential allegation rather than mere slander of the Cartesian project, it shall be advanced based on the following forensics which, on its turn mankind stipulates as "clear and distinct." That is, whereas first death happened to man-as-existent-subject when the deductive method of Descartes was initiated by effortlessly *doubting* material existence and subsequently imposing the necessary existence of the mind as a thinking substance; second death (indeed blanket death) befallen man and his world when, having "proved" God, the method ultimately closed by denying any element of vitality to the existential subjectivity of man which was judged to be nothing but "pure extension", so "pure passivity." Overly excessive is therefore the anti-humanism of Descartes's design, Gilson finds it to be an enigmatic "blindness" that would always remain to elude our understanding of how it could ever come from such a genius as Descartes (1937: 199). Perhaps, it is absurd in the first place that the world be denied, or even be "proved." De Waelhens concurred, saying:

Even the most intelligent men...would not know what they are speaking about if [they] ultimately are not supposed to speak about the world in which the sun rises and sets,...a world in which there are lovely girls and handsome young fellows, a world in which I can get to know what the sea, rivers and mountains are by simply going to them during my holidays (quoted in Luijpen, *ibid*: 60-1).

For the greater part of its history, European modernity, inspired by the Cartesian spirit of essentialist metaphysics, little exalts man. Modernity is reputed for, among other things, being heavily idealist while keeping oblivious towards the problem of life; it was ideally detouring rather than existentially encountering; man was not given primacy as a deserving subject of philosophy. In conclusion, having been argued that man as a phenomenological subject was metaphysically destined for such total meaninglessness, it was therefore only un-serving and ambiguous that Descartes initially assumed his very humanness to be a doubting being. That is to say, Descartes's method of doubt which otherwise seemed promising at the beginning (because any meaningful philosophizing worth the name should be as doubtful and methodically tentative as starting from grounds that are non-Holy Write) ended rather purposeless and dispossessing when particularly measured from the view point of its ultimate beneficial factors to humanity which, I believe, is the measure of the economy of reflection in general. Heidegger argued thus:

It is no accident that with the advent of the increased and explicit tendency to raise philosophy to the rank of an absolute science in Descartes, a peculiar ambiguity of philosophy simultaneously works itself out in a special way. Descartes' fundamental tendency was to make philosophy into absolute knowledge. Precisely with him we see something remarkable. Here philosophizing begins with *doubt*, and it seems as though everything is put into question. Yet it only seems so, Dasein, the I (the ego), is not put into question at all. This illusion and this ambiguity of a critical stance runs right through the whole of modern philosophy up to the most recent present (1995: 20).

Descartes' Reverence for Singularity (Monologue): What This Implies for the Activity of Philosophical Meaning-Making?

Conceived as mathematical in method and dealing with distinct ideas, Cartesian scheme implied as if philosophy "should therefore proceed...always not only from thought to existence, but from distinct thoughts to distinct existences...each containing everything that comes under its definition and nothing more" (Gilson: *ibid*, 153-4). Descartes accordingly established that mind and body are mutually exclusive, and any causal connection that seems to exist between the two proceeds only from God. It is therefore inconceivable that there exists any intentional causality in the world between the one and the other unless it comes from God. Besides, arguing for the universality of mathematical knowledge Descartes

maintained as if there was no problem unsolvable by the new method, and he was doubtless the new method would be accepted “even among the Turks [among women]” (Cottingham, *ibid*: 153). Descartes also pronounced that, for truth to be served, philosophy should require meditations in seclusion rather than pluralist discussions as it fell on his mind in those days of solitude when the power of meditation revealed him that “there is seldom so much perfection in works ... upon which different hands had been employed, as in those completed by a single master” (Rene Descartes, *ibid*: 10). As an example, Descartes mentioned that the reason why Sparta was so superior during its period of greatest popularity was due only to its laws being “originated by a single individual” (*ibid*: 11). Meditating, Descartes sensed within himself the supposed force of this “single master” as he would later insist that the loner he performed a work single-handedly, the more suitable it be and the greater the possibility of its perfection. Accordingly, he declared, less perfect are works “carried out by the hands of various masters; than ... those ... which one individual alone has worked” (Gilson, *ibid*: 138-9). He went on adding to this claim, saying: “a plurality of suffrages is no guarantee of truth where it is at all of difficult discovery, as in such cases it is much more likely that it will be found by one than by many” (Rene Descartes, *ibid*: 14).

Descartes’s modernist outrage would not end at this; believing that he was the discoverer of mathematical reasoning, it was yet to be announced that he was the one man holding “the key to a rational explanation of reality” (Gilson, *ibid*: 137-8). Yet more to his conceitedness, Descartes also claimed to be a God chosen individual who alone, enjoying the independence of thought, is capable of making right what is wrong as well as capable of reforming his own opinions and planting it on grounds that are solely his own—an undertaking which not many men are capable of, because, according to Descartes, only few men are endowed with such quality by God (Veitch, *ibid*: 13-14).

It is clear now that rebelling at tradition Descartes chose a passage that required *soloistic* virtuosity. It was not in the vision of Descartes for the activity of philosophical meaning-making to ever be transactional. He persistently maintained that truth could only be revealed through meditative acts of an organism in its exhaustive seclusion and he thus annulled any picture of truth as pluralist and historical. In other words, Descartes was so extrovert, he failed to see that philosophical truth and perhaps anything that comes after its name could at best be expressed through historically provoked interplays between conscious actors from diverse horizons. If I may portray the activity of philosophical meaning-making after an artistic play such as a dance, then it can be said that, for Descartes, either *tango* is little a work of art which he might probably find so patchy and unsuitable to perform, or, if performed, it is merely a waste of time, worthless a bandwagon

as least entertaining. Hence, in *club-Descartes*, the rule should require it be that Solo is the best and the only known dance as should Monologue be the drama, God the ultimate player-actor, and Descartes the escort; whereas, the world as the fallen-other is not just latent, it is a modality too frozen to shake a leg and entirely inactive to make any rhythmic movements whatsoever, hence deducted. On the other hand, against anything in club-Descartes, intercultural thinking to which this writing appeals is like a popular club where the more entertaining performance should be Tango-like being played mutually between the one and the other. Even more entertaining is it if played by as many actors/players as possible when, for example, it is open and public.

If the aforementioned metaphor helped to somehow grasp Descartes's philosophical problems and the approaches he pursued, it was then in such isolated fashion that he embarked upon designing a new metaphysical carpentry and sought to single handedly build a structure that was to shelter an emerging universal philosophy, modern philosophy. Perhaps it is not entirely impossible that one could build a structure such as a house quite alone; rather impossible and entirely unbecoming is if one pursued to configure a house that has no any material aspects and no physical pillars to support it. Descartes had actually presumed that his metaphysical carpentry got a pillar in the "Cogito ergo Sum" and an anchor in God which would provide security for the whole system; however, the whole structure was never supposed to be corporeal. Descartes also declared as if the pillar for his structure was characteristically resistant to quakes of any magnitude; that is, the "I think, therefore, I exist" principle was deductively established not just as a self-evident truth, but also as being necessarily beyond dispute and resistant to philosophical controversies. From some ultimate sense, it appears that Descartes' carpentry had thus little to serve humanity. Because, I argue, presumed to be ideal and historically ungrounded, it was not in the supposed interest of the entire project to understand, explain, and promote any worldly cause; it was rather a project directed toward ultimately glorifying and defending the God of Christianity; thus, from the very beginning it was alienated from the human world.

I believe, quite sufficient has been said to comment that, because Descartes's design reflects no aspect of human phenomenology, it must therefore be judged a philosophical misemploy; for, what worth, if any, could otherwise be said of a project if, at least in some ultimate apprehension, it was never interested to benefit man, the historical subject? What could even be said about the will of God if it was never to be revealed historically? Thomas M. Lennon commented, saying: "Despite his denigration of it, history is highly relevant to Descartes' system, for only in history [could] God's will [be] revealed" (1993: 203).

Drawing from these discussions, it seems to me that, according to Descartes, to be man is to be *less* or to be *nothing*. Descartes took pride at seeing himself more like a “Pentecost”⁷ than just a human being, because claiming to discover absolute truth, he thought as if he was an exceptionally gifted mind capable of seeing pure light to which none but he alone was the sure guide, the escort. Nevertheless, it was only an illusion that Descartes might think he was such. Indeed pitiful! As a matter of fact, Descartes was at the end of the day a man like us, a member of the human race, earthling, and mortal. That is to say, despite being prideful at seeing himself more like a Pentecost, Descartes could not be other than what he really was - a human being liable to the existential anxieties of life, all but subject to death. What a pity then, Descartes would not even live as long as fifty-five. “When he died, on February 11, 1650, Descartes was but fifty-four years old” (Gilson, *ibid*: 148).

Notwithstanding, dead was only Descartes the man, not the system he had devised, which would continue burgeoning thanks to a chain of philosophical traditions that would commit to serve the same old purpose of devitalizing man while simultaneously forfeiting everything to God to the extent of making God become like a Hobbesian Leviathan than the Holly Father. As I have pointed out earlier, the death of Descartes did not necessarily imply the coming into effective end of Cartesian thinking. As such, Europe was never short of men who would take the queue from Descartes and, one way or another, promote the despotism of Christian metaphysical idealism. For example, despite initial postures to seem to grant material body certain property as sensation, save Berkeley in this particular case, and thereby to modify Descartes’s account that corporeality, as pure extension, is pure passivity, such men as Father Malebranche, Leibniz, Spinoza, and Bishop Berkeley, worked toward ultimately keeping corporeality from the realm of intentional causality and as such they found themselves standing on a path as steep as Descartes’s was (Gilson, *ibid*: 125-220). Accordingly, if Descartes had said the only thing he could conceive external to his mind is nothing but matter as pure extension, and if he had said God is to Whom alone existence pertains, then father Malebranche argued that either there is no possibility whereby one object acts upon another, or even when this seems to be so (for we have an idea of material causality), it is only an impression occasioned upon our mind by God. Spinoza on his part argued that bodies do not act other than appearing as “modes”

⁷Having seen that Descartes had too high an opinion for himself as he thought he was the only one holding the key to rationally uncover the mystery of reality, so to discover complete knowledge, Gilson mockingly described Descartes as “the Pentecost of mathematical reasoning”. (Gilson, *ibid*: 138).

through which the action of God is expressed. Then, Leibnitz said things of the world are just “windowless monads” that are devoid of self-initiated causality. Finally, Berkeley would come to annihilate matter as anything but nonexistent.

If there was anything that the Cartesian tradition reserved for the world at large and particularly for humanity, it is total meaninglessness and absolute reduction. The world, to which mankind is the born citizen and from which man could never alienate himself even if pretending to be spiritual, finds itself overburdened by the scheme of divine metaphysics which, I argue, is the non-existential other of the existential-human-world. Karl Marx thus astutely warned that, “the more man puts into God, the less he retains in himself” (Denise, White & Peterfreund 2008: 192).

Now, admittedly, it is not for anyone of us to judge who is sinful and who is pure; for, in that case we would only interfere in the business of God for which we are powerless. Nonetheless, it is not implausible to form an opinion that the commitment to glorify the unrestricted power of God and to deny that anything in God is communicable to His creatures is impiously irreverent and an unchristian act marked by contempt to what is otherwise really sacred. Because, in addition to being anti-human and perpetrating entertained murder against God’s noble creature, such unchristian deed also betrays God the creator, contradicting His Holiness and making Him appear rather despotic. If it is accepted that God is the creator of all there “is”, it should not be insisted too forcefully that there must be something of God’s nature already communicated to His creatures, it would otherwise be plain inconsistent. For anyone who believes in the Holy Bible, there it says that not even Christ took all away from man, the creature in God’s image. Christ demanded only what was due for Him while leaving to Caesar what belonged to Caesar - an evident sign that Christ allowed to Caesar a degree of authority by which the latter’s existential vitality could thus be expressed. Corresponding to this, John Locke suggested that, to characterize God this way is impolite as to:

set very narrow bounds to [His...] power and, by pretending to extend it, [we only take] it away. ...but perhaps it would be better become us, to acknowledge our ignorance, than to talk such things boldly of the Holy One of Israel, and condemn others for not daring to be as unmannerly as ourselves (Gilson, *ibid*: 215-6).

In spite of all the outrages of the Cartesian system and its disarming implications against mankind and the world, we cannot, however, say that Descartes as a philosopher is wholly unpardonable. As Gilson commented, perhaps

“there is more than one excuse for being a Descartes, [though] there is no excuse whatsoever for being a Cartesian” (ibid: 7). That is to say, by criticizing Descartes’s philosophy, we cannot forget the genius that made him a great thinker, and no amount of critique should mean to entirely disapproving that Descartes saw anything important at all. In fact there is no denying that Descartes inspired a long line of generations even if by provocation. As William Luijpen observed, “the contemporary philosopher has every reason to be disturbed if he were to notice that his philosophy does not contain anything at all of the philosophical inspiration which the past called “metaphysical”” (1965: 51). Also, disputing an almost universally accepted characterization of Descartes as “founder of modern philosophy’, John Cottingham forcefully argued that, let alone demolishing tradition and starting anew, most of what Descartes said had already been said by his predecessors. In spite of this, Cottingham is also charitable enough to concede that, “Descartes’ greatness...remains immune from serious challenge, even though he was only one of the many *accoucheurs* at the long parturition of the modern age” (1993: 166).

From the view point of moral reasoning, I also argue that it is never better of us, perhaps only a mediocrity if we wholly overlook the genius in Descartes in spite of him devising a system that grossly offended the world to which mankind is the born citizen. There is little gain if we choose to fight fire with fire or haughtiness with haughtiness; accordingly, if it was an unnatural pride that animated Cartesian philosophy, it is better on our part to be rather diffident as we look toward exploring better and greater meanings for which we need to be willing to listen to the other as much as we may want to speak to the other. Only upon this could we aspire to do a more meaningful philosophy and make the world become a better place. As it were, Descartes might propose ideas that are entirely unappealing, as he might also be uncharacteristically proud though pride did not make him any better than he *should* be. Regardless, the fact that Descartes was no less a historical subject than any man of the world is quite a reason sufficient to pardon him, as a human being himself, Descartes could never be clean from committing errors. In light of this, if we give him no amnesty, we are never better off as we will also be in the same hold of essentialism.

On the other hand, why there should be no excuse for being a Cartesian is, at least a few reasons, because to be a Cartesian means to wholly undermine anything that is not clear and distinct, to doubt the world as it is while submitting to ideality, to be existentially oblivious, to annul the morality of tentativeness, to undermine the revealing power of discussions, thus to make man become ultimately homeless in the world. Also, a Cartesian is one who is unwilling to see the world from other than a grand Either/Or bifurcation which reduces thinking into the dead options of

either an unvarying universalism/objectivism, or, if this was not to be so, then the curse of radical relativism/subjectivism. Put otherwise, Either the Cartesian method of deduction be accepted as *the* universal method and the truth it uncovers as *the* objective truth, Or all is doomed to windowlessness, then making the world entirely hopeless. Whatever is so must surely be convicted rather than be excused, more so now from the twentieth century on when, as we might have witnessed, the emerging scenario is something beyond the grand dilemma of modernity, or something in-between the Cartesian Either/Or. That is to say, the majority of philosophical reflections are increasingly appearing to gain a degree of liberation from maladies typical to modernism as they come to embrace the indispensable values of fallibilism. Richard Bernstein (ibid) called the emerging scenario a “beyond”; that is to say, beyond *absolute universalism* and *radical relativism* in which the dominant norms are openness, pluralist discussions, mutuality, praxis, diffidence, and contingency as opposed to the Cartesian norms of certitude, solitariness, ideality, windowlessness, and so forth. If Descartes disregarded the merit of discussions just as he did, Theo Verbeek stressed on the other hand, saying: “discussion” is indeed “our only chance to come nearer to truth, which we can never fully attain” (1993: 172). Likewise, despite himself a Cartesian, Heereboord admitted that philosophical discussion, as opposed to individual meditation, “is the sieve and...the whetstone of truth, it enhances the mind, it sharpens judgment ... it improves memory and furthers the freedom of speech. And as fire comes from the contact of two flints, truth arises from disputations” (see in Theo Verbeek, ibid: 188).

As has been already commented, Cartesian metaphysics was ultimately committed to offer homage to the God of Christianity; and for this purpose, it did not just sacrifice the historical subjectivity of man. Worse than this was actually inflicted upon mankind which, as civilian of the material world, was not only doubted but it was in the end declared meaningless. Indeed, I argue, it is little satisfying to convict the Cartesian project merely of the “sacrifice” of mankind; because, what it implied is much more trivial and damaging than the morality of sacrifice. Sacrifice implies the forfeiture of something highly valued for the sake of another considered to have greater value; however, this is what the Cartesian system never accomplished vis-à-vis the subjectivity of man. As much as this, it is plausible to thus convict the Cartesian project for the sin of reducing man and his materiality to the status of an entirely meaningless modality; and in this regard, there is no invalidity of Gilson’s verdict that, to be a Cartesian is accordingly never excusable. It is also fitting to invoke a corresponding comment by Luijpen that, metaphysical thinking which eternally dwells in “forgetfulness of being” while shunning away from the human world “is without remedy” (1965: 107).

By way of conclusion, it is suggested here that, unlike Descartes, the genuine philosopher should take on the assignment of being hermeneutically disposed as he may seek to repatriate thinking to its phenomenological elements and, thus, to relocate man in the world - world which man as a fundamentally historical subject and in intentional association with other fellow men could form. I very much doubt if, in fact unaccepting that, thoughts uncommunicated with the other but solely undertaken in solitude could serve any purpose at the human level or any section of it. If philosophy was solely a private enterprise as Descartes believed it is so, then there would be no point in talking about philosophical meaning making, or anything that comes by such name. Because philosophical meaning making is, I argue, possible only in transactions, in dialogical encounters, rather than in solitude and monological efforts which are only for the monks who choose to retreat to monasteries and do prayers in private in order that their souls may be saved. Philosophy has to have its home rather in the streets as open and public rather than in the cages in solitude, and this is in fact one of the greatest things we can learn from Socrates. In point of view, I therefore argue, the Cartesian project has made man poor and hopeless in the world since man as an existential subject is urged to forfeit all that he values and pledge it to the ideal, the divine, God, while retaining to himself passivity and non-efficacy. Thus, the Cartesian project and the spirit that it fosters is one that has to be withered.

In the following section, I will identify a few extraordinary moments in mankind's contemporary history which, I believe, defy the Cartesian estimation of life and the world; moments that inject into man the hope for the possibility of an ever better world in which the more viable rules are those of openness, intentionality, discussions, mutuality, compromise, and so forth, as opposed to the Cartesian world of mutual exclusion and non-causality.

Wither Cartesian Principles of Singularity and Mutual Exclusion: Happenings that Disprove the Cartesian Picture of Mankind and the World

What does it mean to be human? Following Martin Heidegger, I argue that philosophizing could find ultimate expression only returning to the question of understanding the *being* of man. Heidegger identified worldliness, finitude, and solitude to be the basic metaphysical possibilities that together interactively give ultimate expression to the question of the what-being of man; thus, the title of his book: *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, and Solitude*, according to which, to be man is to simultaneously and unavoidably be solitary (individuated), finite (historically relative) and world-forming (universal). Thus,

man as a historical subject is *that* very dimension or possibility in which solitude, finitude, and worldliness interactively converge through historical transformations. As such the essence of man is suspended by this tripartite web of ontological possibilities that occur in their undifferentiated plurality rather than in their isolation. Likewise, truth or meaning happens not in its unvarying expressions or, as Descartes said, in its absolute universality (in its “Either”) nor in its exclusively varying expressions (in its “Or”), but in the mix of its varying-unvarying historical transformations; that is, in its undifferentiated plurality. Having said this let me pass on to elaborating a few extraordinary happenings in contemporary human history so that we can witness man’s capacity to overcoming essentialism and forming a better world through the acts of openness and communications.

Applying an intercultural reading into the Cartesian project, it can be said without much furor that Descartes’s thesis of mutual exclusion has only made man hopeless in the world and delineated the lowest level to which humanity was reduced. Not only was man denied the capacity for existential causality, but one man-as-corporeal was presumed to be wholly excluded from other men-as-corporeal. This again clearly implies as if there was no any possibility whereby different human horizons could enter into intentional and reciprocal relations through which they could better understand themselves, the other, as well as the world at large. Assuming the Creator God was a Descartes, the design would have been such that human horizons remained closed monads for as long as eternity, having no possibility for self-initiated transactions between them. It can be inferred also that, the Cartesian exaltation of singularity implies as if mankind was utterly incapable of envisioning, let alone forming, a world of unity-in-diversity in which meanings are revealed through the acts of communications between conscious subjects.

However, as I said earlier, in spite of Descartes’ denigration, mankind is not merely optimistic about the possibility of forming a better world; in fact, man is richly gifted with, among other qualities, the capacity to make good out of bad and to overcome windowlessness as well as to create a better world through the revealing power of discussions, through the sense of love, and solidarity. It should be underlined also that, the mention that man is such a potent being is not a merely speculative attribution; there are in fact great historical moments that could prove this attribution while at the same time disproving Descartes’s distortion of man and the world. Anyone with a Cartesian orientation who might doubt the rich capacity of mankind to form a world of greater meanings should just look at the following extraordinary examples that can offer ample meanings for philosophical discernment.

Let us carefully look at what happened in South Africa two decades or so back from now, 2016. In the aftermath of Apartheid when it was feared by many that black South Africans would take instant revenge against European white settlers, everything turned out to be completely different. With the acts of compassion and mercy, Nelson Mandela called it time for the beginning of a new history and time to define a new territory of relations between blacks and whites -two horizons but not as entirely distinct as the Cartesian Either/Or. Some might argue that Mandela was pragmatist at best; saying, the easier option he actually had was to call upon reconciliation rather than to take retaliation. I shall beg for attention here that, the spirit which this work refers to is not political, but humanistic; accordingly, this work does not look at Mandela's act from the view point of mere political pragmatism, it rather appreciates the positive power of discussions and the superiority of love to enmity. Indeed, given the horror of Apartheid, it seems to me that practically more difficult an option for Mandela who spent an incredible twenty seven years in jail should have been not to take retaliation. As a matter of fact, the acts of love, mercy, dialogue, and solidarity are something pretty much difficult, even unthinkable especially when the game is between the sheep and the wolf, the weak and the powerful, or in this case between black South Africans and Apartheidists. Thus, through an extraordinary act of love and mercy, Nelson Mandela and black South Africans have in fact proved to the whole world that there is always a possibility that through discussions X and Y horizons could come to mutuality, which is an evidential sign that love survives even amidst bloody human encounters and, as such, humanity is better off as it keeps its optimism alive and looking forward to a dialogical unfolding of greater possibilities. Proved wrong are those whose heads might be deeply drowned into the Cartesian Either/Or, exalting an absolute disjunction between human horizons. This writing is not interested at what has actually happened to the majority of black South Africans in post-Apartheid era which, no doubt, is more unpleasant, particularly speaking about economic benefits.

Humanity's glimmers of hope would not end at this. There are other equally inspiring happenings that could prove the immense capacity of humanity to come to an advanced stage of history and to exhibit greater vitality. One such example is that, unlike in past century realities, it is no longer merely probable or improbable

but actual that a man of color could now become president of the United States of America, the most powerful nation on the globe. The incumbent president of the USA, Barack Hussien Obama, as a great historical revelation himself, defies a volume of traditional oddities and transgresses deeply divisive boundaries on the way to becoming the 44th president. Not only is president Obama traceable to black Africa by his father but, much to the defeat of tighter Christian boundaries, he is also a man with Muslim background. Indeed, the best to describe Obama is that, he is a man at the cross-roads; he is black, he is white, he is follower of Christianity, and he partly has a Muslim background. Thus, there is only one condition upon which this event could mean little and that is, if we failed to appreciate the causes of the civil rights movements and, of course, if we refused to celebrate the calls for which Martin Luther King sacrificed his life as several thousands of African Americans did.

Another equally remarkably moment in contemporary human history is one that happened in 2013 when Pope Francis was made the spiritual head of the Holly Roman Catholic Church. Especially remarkable in this is the fact that, in Francis becoming a Pope, it was actually a person outside the normative boundary of proper Europe becoming a Pope. Even more remarkable, it happened for the first time in the entire history of Christianity. Pope Francis is originally from Argentina. Back in the old ages, only few could have imagined this possibility coming in the remote future. Perhaps, to appreciate the meaning of this event even more, all we need to know is that there was time in the past when the pontiff allowed Christian missionaries every right to dispossess what “the Other” might have, both material and spiritual. For example, in the fifteenth century, Pope Alexander VI explicitly ordered through the “principle of terra-nullius (nobody’s land)” that non-Christian natives such as black peoples, Muslims, and pagans be dispossessed, eternally enslaved, and denied any right whatsoever to ownership as well as to “autonomous political existence” (Mudimbe, 1988).

A phenomenon which I believe, hermeneutically speaking, is not insufficient in worth for a philosophical discernment is a recent political development in Ethiopia that has transgressed several traditional boundaries in spite of the fact that, when it happened, it unfortunately happened more by political accident and due to *force majeure* rather than by the sheer dictate of enlightenment. At any rate, Ethiopia is currently ruled under the premiership of Hailemariam Desalegn whom fate has made break a great deal of normative frontiers. Not only is the premier an Apostolic Christian ruling over a country considered in the past as a “Coptic

Christian island,”⁸ he is also from an ethnic group, Wolaita that is demographic minority which, like most minorities in Ethiopia, has been far removed from the traditional palace geography - Abyssinia.

Also transgressed in our contemporary period is sex-boundary. It is becoming more interesting nowadays rather than shocking when women assume state leadership. Countries such as England (Theresa May), Germany (Angela Merkel), Liberia (Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf), Lithuania (Dalia Grybauskaitė), Argentina (Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner), Poland (Ewa Kopacz), Chile (Michelle Bachelet), Senegal (Aminata Touré), Namibia (Saara Kuugongelwa-Amadhila), to mention some, are currently led by feminine heads; something that needs to be highly valued.

Despite the proceedings leading to the four illustrative cases mentioned above being significantly different, the fact that we have witnessed these events unfolding against tighter traditional boundaries is surely extraordinary and something to be cherished (of course, not denying that the events need to be outcomes of enlightened communications and fair decision making processes). While on the one hand, these events could be said to defeat the mutually isolating effects of Cartesian Either/Or and its presumed windowlessness; on the other hand, the events also surely prove the historical possibility for, let me say, the communicative *schengening*⁹ of distancing human boundaries; that is, for the coming into a unity-in-diversity or into a federation of meanings, or to borrow from Hans-Georg Gadamer, the coming into a dialogical “fusion of horizons” (1975).

However, if there are those who might feel unhappy about the fact that these events have happened as they happened; for example, if there are those white Americans who might feel sorry about the coming to presidency of Barack Obama

⁸ It is not in the interest of this writing to comment on whether or not Ethiopia ever was an Island of Coptic Christianity. I shall rather leave this matter to historians of interest. But I can tell that when Ethiopia was the size of medieval Abyssinia, the overwhelming majority of its peoples were followers of Coptic Christianity, and official statistics can prove even to this day that the significant majority of the Ethiopian population is follower of the same religion, to be more specific, Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity.

⁹ I borrowed this word from the *Schengen Agreement* between members of the European Union for loose border control so that people can move freely without needing to show their passports. I have adopted the word and used it to refer to a communicative blurring of human distancing boundaries. Through the praxes of openness, mutuality, and intercultural communications, I believe that human horizons can reach mutual understanding, which again leads to the possibility of the *schengening* of boundaries en route to achieving a federalist fusion of horizons and transformation of the human spirit into greater vitality.

on the mere ground that he carries some supposedly traditionally deviant elements and if, on the other hand, they got relieved at knowing that Obama is not all black and all Muslim because he is also the normative color and the normative religion by his mother, then to blame is no one but these peoples' own dwarfism in progressive thinking and their lack of worldliness; these should be peoples who are not yet liberated from the restricting effect of Cartesian Either/Or. Similarly, if there are those Catholic Christians who might feel morose by the papacy of Pope Francis just because he is from a supposedly distant geography and if they look to ease their unhappiness by claiming that the Pope is parentally traceable to Europe,¹⁰ then these long-faced peoples could have no reasonable alibi ---they, too, must be victims of Cartesian essentialism, one way or another. By the same logic, I continue to say that, if there are those Ethiopians who might feel less comfortable to embrace the phenomenon of Hailemariam becoming premier on the *mere* ground that he is both ethnically and religiously at odds with the traditionally dominant palace norm, then these individuals must be victims of a pathological condition of arrested growth in positive thinking. Indeed, such thwarting prejudices are what must be overcome if humanity is to land onto a territory of greater meanings and vitalities. Humanity should seek for the continual bleeding of divisive boundaries if that means to dialogically overcome essentialism (be it philosophical, ethnic, religious, geographic, color, sex, and so forth) and to pave the way toward the communicative *schengenning* of horizons and to create a world in which a federation of meanings might be successfully installed. Perhaps, it should be expected that Hailemariam would live up to the bill of a fit premier in a democracy for, otherwise, anything less would definitely see him steadily descending down the historical height that he has already chanced up on. Once again, it has to be seriously noted that the cases illustrated above are worthy for philosophical discernment only as long as we do not miss the *imperative* that the events be outcomes of genuine dialogical efforts and of democratic proceedings rather than mere political maneuvers and tactical exercises which are common in the political world of power relations.

¹⁰ There was an instant debate on the internet whether the pontiff is originally a Latino or not. Some people claimed that, parentally the Pope is from Italy. See Jesse Washington. 2013. "New pope revives question: What is a 'Latino?'" Available at: <http://www.amren.com/news/2013/03/new-pope-revives-question-what-is-a-latino/>.

Concluding Remarks

As such, because it does not recognize the value of communications, Cartesian metaphysics and its modernist spirit betrays the humanist purpose of philosophical approaches such as philosophic hermeneutics, intercultural philosophy, existentialism, phenomenology, to mention only some, that exalt the praxes of openness, self-reflexivity and dialogue forward to the possibility of greater enlightenment. Ram Adhar Mall remarks that there is little prospect for enlightenment in a life-world exemplar of the “proverbial Chinese well-frog”, perhaps well-frogs in general, which mistakes the vastness of the sky for the narrowness of the spectacle it has of it from within the well (2000: 47). Also, we learn from Plato’s *Republic* by an allegory that, it is when one gets his way up through the Cave¹¹ and unchains himself from deception that one could become worldly and be able to distinguish truth from mere appearance.

In terms of fundamental nature humans are not like well-frogs; why else should man be defined as rational subject if rationality was not a property to liberate him from the hold of essentialism? More importantly, rationality should mean such as, among other qualities, the capacity to distinguish between good and bad as well as to commit to goodness, the openness to commit to human solidarity than to divisive centrism, the strive to be worldly rather than to reside within windowlessness thus to exalt the act of dialogue over monologue, the capacity to overcome factors that deter us from thinking things in terms of unity as much as our thinking does not betray the value of diversity, as well as the willingness to recognize the other and to commit to converse with the other in the hope of attaining mutual understanding. Rationality should thus primarily mean nothing but these and so forth things. As Martin Heidegger astutely remarked, “...reason is by its essence unity-forming” (1995: 318).

It might be helping to imagine what would have now happened to our world if truth had been sought and established along a modernist line of thought; if, for example, all our philosophies, our cultures, and our institutions wholly subscribed to the teachings of Cartesian metaphysics that promote closure over openness, solitariness over mutuality, monologue over discussion or dialogue, and so forth. Had it been so, human beings could have no common world to refer to, and no common vision to live for. As I mentioned at the beginning, this writing draws inspiration from humanely inclined variants of philosophy such particularly as

¹¹ Platonic Cave is a parable for chain of ignorance in which deception is the tutelage. In our case also, the Cave stands as a parable for thwarting finitude in which horizontal absolutism (i.e., cultural or historical fundamentalism) is the tutelage allowing no possibility of communicative praxes.

philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology, existentialism, and intercultural philosophy, because I believe that these philosophies promise to humanity the possibility of positive transformation and greater vitality. Also, the historical moments which I have mentioned above are surely extraordinary and I believe that, relatively speaking, because of these moments humanity has landed onto a more advanced position of history. However, regardless of what idealists maintained, because history has no particular point of ending, and since human progress has no any definite stage of culmination, it must be noted that the examples mentioned, though surely great and tending to motivate, are only rudimentary when especially considered against the endless potentials of humanity. Hence, contrary to the Cartesian world of closed monads, it is for us human beings to keep our optimism alive that, through the praxes of openness, mutuality, and intercultural discussions, yet greater transformations of the spirit of Homo sapiens are at the door.

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