to and avenues for Derridean scholarship, but leaves it at that. Perhaps this is the exact effect Crockett seeks: motivating students and scholars alike to (re)approach Derrida in a new light.

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_Ego Sum_, Jean-Luc Nancy’s most sustained engagement with Descartes, was first published in France in 1979, though its three central chapters were separately published in English translations by Ian McLeod and Daniel E. Brewer in 1977 and 1978. Finally having the whole of the book translated, especially so elegantly by Marie-Eve Morin, is a good thing. First, as Morin explains in her introduction, Nancy made significant changes to the texts when it was published in France. These have a noticeable and positive effect on comprehension of those central chapters. More important and helpful is having the book in English as a single work, especially its opening chapter, ‘_Ego Sum: Opening,_’ which establishes Nancy’s reasons for taking up Descartes. Having the whole text in hand makes the movement of Nancy’s thought more coherent and fluid than disparate and partial articles by more than one translator, and a number of obscure moments in the earlier translations are clarified thanks to their placement in relation to the rest of the book.

Morin’s introduction helpfully places _Ego Sum_ in the rest of Nancy’s corpus. Appearing when it did, it stands approximately halfway between the appearance of earlier books like _La Remarque spéculative_ (1973) and _Le Discours de la syncope_ (1976), the latter of which _Ego Sum_ references, and later works like ‘Le “retrait” du politique’ (1981) and _La Communauté désœuvrée_ (1983). Themes appearing here that he will continue to develop include the mouth (in its first appearance in Nancy’s oeuvre), the body, community, exposition, and frankness. Yet this book, she says, ‘occupies somewhat of a unique place in Nancy’s early works’ because he has so rarely focused on Descartes.

So why did he write it? And why then? To the first question, we get slightly different answers from Nancy himself, depending on when he is writing. To begin with, in his ‘Preface to the English Edition,’ both the
transitivity of being and the interpretation of the subject as a thing are present in saying, ‘Ego sum.’ As a result, he had,

to come to understand that the thinking substance is only substance insofar as one can recognize it as having various attributions . . . . But these attributions are not attributes of a subjectum or of a suppositum. They consist in the actions of an I, actions that only act insofar as I . . . doubt, for example, and then affirm, and so forth . . . . Yet, the agent is not the acting subject: it is the acting insofar as it acts.

In other words, thinking about being, especially in its state as a transitive verb, opened him up to thoughts concerning the Cartesian subject—the (modern) subject as such—and, consequently, all existence (vegetal, animal, and mineral) is to be thought through acting, exposed and expositing itself by its being. Thus, ‘one does not leave Descartes behind’ since to speak or say, ‘Ego sum,’ is the locus of that awareness.

Both the similarity and the difference between this response to the first question and another offered in Ego Sum give evidence for the importance of the full translation after forty years, despite seeming out of place in Nancy’s corpus or out of step with its trajectory over time. Responding to the question somewhat differently in ‘Opening,’ he says that there was renewed interest in the subject in what was contemporary in ‘our current situation [l’actualité]’ of academic fashion through ‘a forgetting and a return . . . of something that we call “philosophy”’. At that time, a general anthropology had been availing itself of an ever-expanding list of ‘non-philosophical’ positivist discourses (e.g., Foucault on episteme) to comment on the subject without inquiring into its being. Even the Lacanian deconstitution of the master-subject, in addressing ‘the gap between the “real” and “discourse”, . . . posit[s] itself as the identification (the reduction) of this gap (or as its subject)’. This actualité demands a philosophical response ‘to show how the anthropological profusion of the subject covers over and muffles the question . . . of someone: this someone, neither a subject nor the Subject, will not be named, but this book would like to let it call itself: ego’. While the Preface makes it seem Nancy had been thinking about the question concerning being and found himself in dialogue with Descartes, ‘Opening’ situates its urgency in contemporaneous discourse on the death of the subject as demanding a return to and of its birth. If this was not a fashionable move at the time, Nancy suggests that that unfashionability demanded it. As Morin puts it: ‘What Ego Sum teaches us is that we should not be too hasty in declaring the death of the Subject’. To which I would add, ‘Ever’.
Given this context from the time, what must be chosen is ‘the obstinate metaphysical reconstruction of analytical discourse . . . as the ground . . . of our current situation’ insofar as that ground, to be a ground, is actually undecidable. What must be returned to is the certainty of saying or being compelled to say, or the certainty of the decision to say, ‘Ego cogito’, in whatever form that takes. Such forms as ‘subject-history, subject-language, subject-machine, subject-text, subject-body, or subject-desire . . . have so far only produced the aggravation . . . of the status of the Subject,’ giving in their different ways ‘the proper substance of a new “cogito”’, as if the cogito in its apodictic and undecided or undecidable certainty was gotten beyond by discovering or choosing a new source for the (deconstituted) ego. This is the forgetting and return of the subject, forever marked by Descartes’ certainty, and what must be reconstructed or analyzed, something Descartes refuses to do in his certainty.

However, Nancy also encourages neither awe before nor acceptance of this certainty ‘since doubt suspends exactly such an assent’. As a result, he seeks to approach the gesture of the ‘Ego sum’ in its certainty and concealing of certainty, a search that demands ‘experiencing and putting to the test how the Cartesian Subject is posited and is not posited’. In this way, Ego Sum is neither ‘a book of history’ nor ‘a general and systematic theory of Cartesianism’, but rather a ‘going back to the instant of a foundation’. As much as it concerns Descartes, it is not a discourse about him, but a philosophical engagement with the question of the subject through him.

Thus, after ‘Opening’, each chapter in Ego Sum focuses on a different Cartesian text, taking their titles from his writing. In their order of appearance, ‘Dum Scribo’ focuses on the Rules for the Direction of the Mind; ‘Larvatus pro Deo’ on the Discourse on Method, though also on the notebooks called Cogitationes privatae by Adam and Tannery; ‘Mundus Est Fabula’ on the Discourse again as well as a late portrait of Descartes by Jan Baptist Weenix and the early, unfinished work, The World; and ‘Unum Quid’ on the Meditations on First Philosophy. While I cannot do justice to their depth and nuance here, I will try to give a sense of the flow of Nancy’s thought throughout these pieces.

In Rule Twelve of the Rules, Descartes writes about how, while he is writing (dum scribo), his pen’s movements occur throughout it, instantly tracing the letters in air at the end opposite from the nib. His interest in writing is not in the flow of either the ink or the act of writing by hand in cursive, but in the instant, ‘which is not a chronological measure’ Nancy notes, of the appearance of a single letter or figure. Through
the transfer of motion throughout the pen, the figure is transferred to
the mind such that ‘the figures of things have instantly become ideas’,
allowing Descartes to ‘have spirited away the material cloak of figures
without having to demonstrate anything about this operation’. The
instant of writing, then, as an instantaneous transfer between world,
body, and mind, allows oneself to understand what one is: ‘I collect
myself [Je me recueille] in writing’. Such an instant of self-awareness
or -discovery is what Descartes seeks, as always, to instigate in his
readers, who ‘figure yourselves’ in the writing of themselves that occurs
by reading Descartes’ words on the instantaneous transfer of motion
and understanding from hand to pen to eye to mind. Reading the act
whereby Descartes understands himself is a moment of intuition, ‘a pure
vision of the mind’ – but one that requires the machinery of imagination,
sense-perception, and memory – so ‘[t]he subject is not a pure mind: It is
the pure mind that puts to work, within itself, the machine’. In putting
to work the machinery of these impure aspects of the mind so as to
intuit the subject in its purity of figuring through instantaneous transfer
of motion, ‘[w]e forge, we feign, we fiction: fingimus, we figure and we
figure ourselves out’.

Such feigning is the focus of ‘Larvatus pro Deo’. Playing on a
line from the Cogitationes privatae where Descartes declares he will
come forward masked (larvatus prodeo), the piece quickly turns to the
Discourse and its argument for a method based on ‘authorship,’ not
authority. The picture Descartes gives of his philosophy is faithful, but
given anonymously. As such, the author is masked, but the feint of
the dissimulation is avowed, as a feint. This circumstance leads to two
characteristics of the Discourse. First, the anonymity ‘declares explicitly
that it is a false semblance, and in the same stroke . . . it proclaims that
there is an author, . . . an author whose unique and irreducible example
will be depicted for us’, so unique that even accidents like a name are
removed and it is ‘presented in its substance as subject’, sheer identity
with itself. Second, it allows the Discourse to be measured against the
method rather than the author. The author is author here only insofar
as he is the author of the method whereby the subject is exposed, devoid
of content. The author can only remove the mask of anonymity once it
is clear that he has, by exposing himself anonymously, exposed the sheer
subject of identity, the truth of which cannot be feigned. This is not the
subject as a fiction, but rather as exposed to the natural light by means
of speculations, through anonymity, feints, and fictions, the only way it
can be so exposed since the subject is ‘identity itself’, and so ‘resembles
nothing’. In that the identity at work here ‘presents and represents itself

at once’, a fictive, though not imaginary, viewer is necessary as that to which the subject can expose itself as a being of self-conception, as being.

But there is another feint at work in the Discourse, that of The World. In the former’s summary of the latter, Descartes describes The World as dealing with God and the soul, which it does not. Rather, it presents a fable of a physical world’s creation from out of primordial, material chaos. This world matches onto the one we experience, but remains a fable. As such, its chaos is ‘the point at which we can no longer feign because the feint is authenticated as truth,’ meaning it ‘occupies the same structural position as the cogito’. As Nancy explains in ‘Mundus Est Fabula’, chaos and the cogito are exposed at the point of fiction where it cannot be feigned since ‘the fable’s truth . . . lies in its invention’ and, ‘[t]rue or feigned, an invented world remains the invention of a world’. This structure Nancy calls ‘chaogito’. However, while the fable of The World functions as ‘an ornament’ to the story of the invention of a world out of chaos, the Discourse as a fable pushes the fable and feigning ‘to the point of ontology’ and gives us ‘Descartes’s very identity’ since ‘[t]he subject of true knowledge must be the inventor of his own fable’. It accomplishes this through the very stating or uttering (l’énoncer) of ‘Ego sum’, that performance of ‘a unique event’ whereby the ego uttering it is ‘coextensive with this performation’ as a truly known being that is ‘identical to being-true’. ‘L’énoncer’ makes the infinitive a substantive, and so ‘[t]he Subject of metaphysics will have constituted itself, substantially, as speaking subject’. The uniqueness of saying, ‘Ego sum,’ is an original moment of uttering ‘that anyone can produce . . . but that no one can reproduce’ because the reproduction of the uttering is the production of the unique instant once again, and once again as unique, as substantivizing the infinite.

In the Meditations, as read in ‘Unum Quid’, this substantivization is one part of a double operation, the first of which superimposes upon and hides, thus giving the appearance of support to, the second. First, following Heidegger, the ego is ‘permanent subject of representation’, always presupposing itself as the substrate of all representation. Second, by saying, ‘Ego’, Descartes produces ‘the distinction from every thing’, none of which at that instant are certain, thereby ‘establishing it as substance’ and ‘nothing else or nothing more than distinction itself’. For this reason, what the subject is must be distinguished from that by which it is: the separation of soul and body. However, this separation ‘cannot be reduced to that between being and having’ since what I am (thinking substance) is what it is by the body. The subject as distinction itself, then, is able to join the utterly distinct substances of mind and body in and
through their distinctness from each other because ‘the subject is also distinct from the distinction between the two substances’. Yet, since the ego-subject collects itself in and as distinction between the thinking and corporeal substances, it is incomplete, and so a contradictory substance. Its substantiality is in its relationality to these other substances. Thus, the subject withdraws as substance at the moment of its appearance. The cogito of the ego that utters, ‘Ego cogito’, draws this distinction of relationality between the thinking and corporeal substances around itself to hide in its appearance, to be in the form of an incomplete substance. As a result, the thinking of the subject ‘will only have been his convulsion’. In short, there is a chaos within the ego that says, ‘Ego cogito’, ‘Ego sum’, ‘Ego existo’, or just ‘Ego’, because in the instant of uttering ‘Ego’ in any context, ‘nothing can be discerned’. The subject as convulsion is what has not been engaged since Descartes and all the positivisms and critiques of positivisms that have appeared since have been violent refusals of it, certain as they have been of themselves.

Again, Nancy repeatedly says Ego Sum is not a discourse on Descartes, but takes the philosophical risk of thinking through him. As a result, there are scholarly debates on his reading to be had, though some are more philosophically interesting than others. As one example, Nancy does not focus on the importance for Descartes of disappointed expectations as leading to the doubt that results in certainty. Perhaps doing so would have given that much more credence to the resources for, among other things, the deconstituted subject already available in Descartes. As another, his reading of the intellect’s capacity as indicating that it is a ‘receptacle’ is wrong. Descartes consistently distinguishes what he is engaged in from Scholastic pedagogical approaches precisely on the point that they treat the minds of students and readers as empty vessels to be filled with syllogistic formulas, and so on. However, this critique should only make more acceptable Nancy’s overall point about the formation of the subject as not a discovery of a substance already existing, but rather its production. In addition, his discussion of the thinking substance as the only thing that ‘remains without figure’ in the midst of his discussion of the necessity of a fictive viewer seems to ignore the importance of the evil genius, even if the focus there is on the Discourse. The evil genius, as that which has all of God’s perfections save non-deception, is necessarily without figure as well. When Nancy does discuss it in the next chapter, the evil genius is the fictive reverse of the cogito’s non-demonstrative exposure. But perhaps the evil genius is better considered as a fictive viewer of giving the truth to the feint that produces the ego. Finally, and more problematically for his reading,
Nancy likens the chaos of *The World* to that ‘invented by poets’, but Descartes distinguishes these two kinds of chaos in that poetic chaos is an orderly disordering of the world’s order, whereas his chaos is the primordial foundation of order. If the chaos of *The World* is unlike the poets’, then it does not occupy the same structural position as the cogito and Nancy’s claims to a chaogito are ill-founded. Here again, though, this is not precisely a critique of Nancy’s thinking, but a wish for a closer reading.

Beyond its place in Nancy’s own corpus as it shifted from studies of specific thinkers to more overtly political topics, even if *Ego Sum* is not precisely on Descartes it can be seen as part of a strand of phenomenologically inflected French readings of Descartes. It bears similarities to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Le visible et l’invisible* (1964); its mark can be felt in Jean-Pierre Cavaillé’s *Descartes: la fable du monde* (1991); and similar, more scholarly readings are found in Jean-Luc Marion’s ‘Le statut responsorial des *Meditations*’ (1996). Let us hope that its translation will open English-language philosophy onto a scholarly uncertainty of engagement with Descartes’s thinking, beyond its historical importance or curiosity. *Ego Sum* is the most risky, and therefore most philosophically interesting, book concerning Descartes in the last forty years. Like Descartes’s own philosophy, it remains contemporary.

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