Lichtenberg's Point

Forthcoming in Grazer Philosophische Studien

Boris Hennig
Ryerson University, Toronto

Abstract

I argue that when Lichtenberg recommends saying “It is thinking” instead of “I am thinking”, he is not suggesting that thought might be a subjectless occurrence. His point is, rather, that we are often the passive subject or medium of our thoughts. I further argue that Descartes’ cogito argument is not affected by this point, because Descartes does not claim that we must be the active subject of all our thoughts. Moreover, I suggest that the cogito argument operates with the notion of a qua-object: It consists in the move from “I am thinking” to “I-qua-thinking am”. Seen in this way, the cogito argument by itself leaves entirely open what might be true of me insofar as I am not thinking.

Keywords

Descartes, Lichtenberg, cogito argument, res cogitans