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## RENÉ DESCARTES' CONCEPTION OF CERTAINTY: From the Infallibility of human mind to its Reliability

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**ABSTRACT:** This article describes the Cartesian conception of certainty in its epistemological approach. Its main question is: "Can we really know with certainty?" On the one hand, René Descartes says that we can know with certainty if we respectively doubt our former knowledge, the senses, dreams, evil genius and even the mathematical truths. On the other hand, he argues that we can know with certainty if and only if we rely on the following four epistemological requirements: "evidence" about reality; "division" that deals with the various parts of the same reality; "order" helps to move from simple ideas to the complex ones; and enumeration dealing with the relevant and holistic ideas about reality. In his epistemological approach of certainty, Descartes affirms that human reason/mind is both infallible and reliable. However, this article also aims at showing and even proving that human reason is reliable without being infallible. Since we can partially know something about the whole reality, our new epistemological approach deals with "probability" instead of dealing with certainty.

### I. INTRODUCTION

René Descartes is widely known as the "the father of modern philosophy"<sup>1</sup> and also as the "founder of Epistemology". In terms of epistemology (or theory of knowledge), Descartes is the major figure in the philosophical movement known as rationalism. In fact, rationalism was at the center of the Enlightenment during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that revolutionized the Western world.<sup>2</sup>

After the revelation he experienced on November 10, 1619, René Descartes undertook his own intellectual rebirth. His plan was to throw out everything he thought he knew. In this act of demolishing and then reconstructing his former knowledge, he doubted everything in order to attain a certain knowledge. As he says, this certain knowledge can be acquired by means of the strict application of reason to all problems.

In this article, we are going to talk about: The Cartesian doubt, Descartes' conception of certainty and the objections against the Cartesian conception of certainty. At the end of this article, we shall show that human reason is reliable without being infallible since our new epistemology deals with probability instead dealing with certainty.

### II. THE CARTESIAN DOUBT

#### 2.1. Doubting his former knowledge

René Descartes (1596-1650) was educated at the Jesuit College (*La Flèche*), where he studied Aristotelian logic, Mathematics and Philosophy. In fact, Descartes speaks of the Jesuits of *La Flèche* with affection and respect, and he regards their education as greatly superior to what was provided in most other pedagogical institutions. He even considers that he had been given the best education available with the framework of tradition.

However, Descartes' attitude toward the education he received at *La Flèche* was somehow ambivalent. On the one hand, he later wrote that the college was "one of the best schools in Europe." On the other hand, he acknowledges that the philosophy he had learned there, "despite being cultivated for many centuries by the best minds, contained some uncertainties, disputes and disagreements."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1998, 244.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/descartes/context/>

<sup>3</sup> John Cottingham (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 3.

At this second level, Descartes came to the conclusion that this traditional learning, in some of its branches, was not based on any solid foundation<sup>4</sup>. For instance, he remarks that “philosophy” taught him to speak with an “appearance of truth” about all things, while mathematics delighted him because of its certainty. This is why he wanted to demolish and reconstruct philosophy so that it may be certain like mathematics<sup>5</sup>.

According to Descartes, mathematical truths are certain, while philosophy is full of confusion, disagreements and disputes concerning the knowledge of things. For him, philosophy is not founded on a solid foundation, but on a weak foundation. At this level, he uses the mathematical method in order to attain a solid foundation of philosophy, which should become certain knowledge like mathematical truths.

Since philosophy is full of confusion, René Descartes wants to demolish and reconstruct it on a solid foundation, that is, the foundation of certain knowledge. In fact, this demolition-reconstruction consists in doubting everything he ever knew, especially doubting everything he learned at the Jesuit College.

Although he was educated at one of the most celebrated schools in Europe, still Descartes was embarrassed with many doubts. He was chiefly concerned with the intellectual certainty<sup>6</sup>. As he argues: “From the time I became aware of this, I realized that for once I had to raze everything in my life, down to the very bottom, so as to begin again from the first foundations, if I wanted to establish anything firm and lasting in the sciences.”<sup>7</sup>

In fact, Descartes broke with the past in order to give philosophy a fresh start. He would no longer rely on previous philosophers for his ideas, nor would he accept any idea as true only because it was expressed by someone with authority. Descartes was determined to discover the basis of intellectual certainty in his own reason<sup>8</sup>. He therefore used only those truths he could know through his own powers.

In order to build up the foundation for all certain knowledge, René Descartes used the methodic doubt. He tried to doubt everything because, as he says:

I wished to give myself entirely to the search after truth, I thought it was necessary for me to reject as absolutely false everything concerning which I could imagine the least ground of doubt. I also wished to sweep away all my former opinions, so that they might later on be replaced either by others which were better, or by the same, when I had made them conform to the uniformity of a rational scheme.<sup>9</sup>

After doubting his former knowledge at the Jesuit College, René Descartes is determined to reject everything based on a weak foundation. This is why he respectively doubts the senses, dreams, evil genius and even the mathematical truths<sup>10</sup>.

## 2.2 Doubting the senses, dreams, evil genius and even the mathematical truths

René Descartes doubts the senses, dreams and the evil genius since they are deceptive and unreliable. First, Descartes doubts our senses because he writes: “Whatever I had admitted until now as most true I took in either from the senses or through the senses; however, I noticed that they sometimes deceived me. And it is a mark of prudence never to trust wholly in those things which have once deceived us.”<sup>11</sup>

Since the senses are deceptive and then not reliable, we need to detach from them and then look at them critically. From the point of view of Descartes as a rationalist, the beliefs imposed on all of us by un-criticized sense experiences are uncertain. In fact, Descartes’ concern is to use the reason or mind in order to critically direct, guide and control our senses that often lead us to doubts and errors.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Copleston, sj. *A History of Philosophy*, Volume 4. *Descartes to Leibniz*. New York: A Division of Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1960, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph I. Omoregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*. University of Lagos: Joja Education Research and Publishers Limited, 1998, 80.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, 245.

<sup>7</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated by John Cottingham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, 246.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, 250.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph I. Omoregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, 81.

<sup>11</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, 14.

<sup>12</sup> Margaret Daulet Wilson. *Descartes. Cogito ergo sum*. New York: The Arguments of the Philosophers, 1978, 6.

Second, René Descartes doubts the dreams. As he says, by dreaming, every human being seems to deal with the “real object.” This is why Descartes reacts: “As I consider these cases more intently I see so plainly that there are no definite signs to distinguish *being awake* from *being asleep* that I am quite astonished and this astonishment almost convinces me that I am sleeping.”<sup>13</sup>

According to Descartes, “Someone who sleeps and dreams, cannot join and assemble, perfectly and with truth, his dreams with the ideas of past things... But after, when awake, he will easily know his error.”<sup>14</sup> At this level, he warns us by saying: “Whether we are awake or we are asleep, we should never allow ourselves to be persuaded by dreams, except by the evidence of our reason.”<sup>15</sup>

Third, Descartes considers that God is supremely good because He cannot lead him to error. However, he supposes that an evil genius (i.e. evil demon, malign spirit or *malin génie*) can falsely interfere with our thought. As he says: “I will suppose not a supremely good God, the source of truth, but rather an evil genius, as clever and deceitful as he is powerful, who has directed his entire effort to misleading me.”<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen above, René Descartes sets aside the hypothesis that God is a deceiver, but he instead postulates a “certain malign spirit” (*malin génie*). As Descartes writes: “I will suppose, therefore, not the optimum God, the fountain of truth, but a certain malign spirit, maximally powerful and clever, has employed all his industry so that I am deceived.”<sup>17</sup>

Fourth, Descartes doubts the mathematical truths because the evil genius<sup>18</sup> (i.e. evil demon) can mislead me by saying, for example, that  $2+3=4$ , instead of saying  $2+3=5$ . The same evil genius can also mislead me by saying, for example, that  $2 \times 3=5$ , instead of  $2 \times 3=6$ . This evil genius is able to put a dichotomy between what is in my mind and what I pronounce. For example, the word “Paul” can be in my mind, while I speak of “Saul.”

Being a Catholic Priest, I know very well that “Paul was an Apostle of Jesus” and that “Saul was a Persecutor of the Church.” But during preaching, an evil genius can put an error in my mind so that I may say to the audience: “Saul was an Apostle of Jesus.” The relevant question is: “What is the real source of our intellectual mistakes?” In fact, the evil genius can mislead us because of the limitation of the human mind.

### III. DESCARTES' CONCEPTION OF CERTAINTY

#### 3.1 The “*Cogito ergo sum*”

In the doubting process, Descartes came to realize that he was thinking, and when he tried to doubt this, he found it was impossible to do so. In other words, to doubt that I am thinking is impossible because the very act of doubting is a confirmation that I am really thinking.<sup>19</sup> Also, “to doubt is to think, and to think is to exist” because his doubting showed that he was thinking, and his thinking showed that he was existing.

For Descartes, the “*Cogito ergo sum*” is a new, solid foundation and reconstructed philosophical edifice. This “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am) is a clear, certain and indisputable truth. Since everything perceived (intuitive perception, but not sense perception) in the light of reason is certain, the proposition, *I am, I exist*, is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind.<sup>20</sup>

From the Cartesian “*Cogito ergo sum*” (I think, therefore I am), the question is: “Am I what?” According to Descartes, “I am a thinking being,” “a thinking substance,” or “a thinking thing” (*Res cogitans*), instead of an “extended thing” (*Res extensa*). In his epistemological approach, Man (or human being) is essentially a thinking substance, whose essential nature is to think<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (ed.). *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Volumes 1 and 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, 78.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>16</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (ed.). *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, 147.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Craig (ed.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume 3. New York: Routledge, 1998, 7.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph I. Omoregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, 81.

<sup>20</sup> Edward Craig (ed.). *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Volume 3, 8b.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph I. Omoregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, 83.

However, later on René Descartes perceived clearly and distinctly that he was performing certain activities which required a body, defined as “an extended substance.”<sup>22</sup> He therefore concluded that he had *a body*, though not as part of his nature or essence as a thinking being. Thus the body, for him, is not an essential part of man’s nature because man is essentially a “thinking being” (i.e. essentially a reason or mind).

But Descartes still asks, “What then am I? A thing that thinks, a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses and which also imagines and feels.”<sup>23</sup> In this way, he states that: “I am therefore precisely only a thing that thinks; that is, a mind, or soul, or intellect, or reason. Now, I am a true thing, and truly existing; but what kind of thing? I have said it already: a thing that thinks.”<sup>24</sup>

### 3.2 The criterion of certainty

René Descartes’ criterion of certainty rests on reason/mind so as to attain a clear and distinct knowledge of reality (human beings, the material world and God). In order to attain this certainty, he wants a necessary condition of establishing something firm and lasting. As he says:

It has already been some years since I noticed how many false things I accepted as true when I was young, and how doubtful is whatever I erected afterwards on these, and thus that once in my life everything ought to be overturned completely, and begun again from the first foundations, if I desire to establish anything firm and enduring [*firum et mansurum*] in the sciences.<sup>25</sup>

Descartes relies so much on reason, which is a guarantee of what he knows. According to him, reason is infallible and it cannot deceive us because God (a Perfect-Absolute-Infinite-Good Being) gave it to human beings. What is the guarantee that my reason is not deceiving me? To answer this question,

“Descartes resorted to God, the absolutely Perfect Being, who gave me reason. Such a Perfect Being cannot give me something that would be deceiving me. I can therefore trust the reason He gave me because I trust Him. I trust Him because He is an infinitely Perfect Being.”<sup>26</sup>

For Descartes, human reason is a gift from God. Human reason is a guarantee of what we know because it is infallible and reliable. Since God is a Perfect Being, He cannot mislead me. This is why human reason (or Good sense) can know with certainty. And since my Good sense was given to me by God, Descartes argues that:

Good sense is the most fairly distributed thing in the world; for everyone thinks himself so well supplied with it, that even those who are hardest to satisfy in every other way do not usually desire more of it than they already have... the power of judging well and distinguishing truth from falsehood, which is what we properly mean by good sense or reason, is naturally equal in all men; and furthermore, the diversity of our opinions does not arise because some men are more rational than others, but only because we direct our thoughts along different ways.<sup>27</sup>

In terms of the criterion of certainty, René Descartes concludes that God is an Infinitely Perfect Being and an Absolutely Good Being (the Giver of human reason/the Creator of human reason)<sup>28</sup>. Since human reason/mind is a gift from God, Descartes considers reason as infallible and reliable. For him, our reason helps to know with certainty. The main question is: “How to know reality with certainty?”

### 3.3 How to know with certainty?

#### A. Avoid any precipitate conclusions and pre-conceptions:

We need *evidence* (i.e. proof/fact) about the knowledge of reality (i.e. human being, the world and God). For example, let us consider the case of “*Makumatt Junction Company*” in Nairobi/Kenya:

<sup>22</sup> Joseph I. Omeregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, 251.

<sup>23</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> René Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (ed.). *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Volume 1, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph I. Omeregbe. *Epistemology (Theory of Knowledge). A Systematic and Historic Study*, 82.

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach (ed.). *Descartes. Philosophical Writings*, Introduction by Alexander Koyré. New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc, 1971, 7.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Enoch Stumpf. *Socrates to Sartre. A History of Philosophy*, 254.

*Precipitate conclusions and pre-conceptions:* Weak management of the Company and lack of money. Some people may think that the “*Makumatt Junction Company*” is financially in trouble because perhaps its Managers are not performing. Other people may think of an inner financial crisis.

*Evidence:* But after consulting some workers at “*Makumatt Junction Company*”, I have the proof or fact that this Company is in the process of being transferred to Saudi Arabia. In fact, the Businessmen of this Company have relevant reasons of transferring the Company to Saudi Arabia. First, these Businessmen pay more taxes in Kenya than in Saudi Arabia. Second, since the owners of the Company are from India, it is should be better to invest in Asia in order to avoid the expenses of transportation. Third, since 2013 Kenya has a lot of companies competing with the “*Makumatt Junction Company*.”

***B. Avoid considering reality as a whole, but in its various parts:***

We need *division* of the whole reality into its “various parts” in order to understand it better. Let us take the case of “*Africa*”:

*Africa as a whole* is a continent. At this level, Africa can only be differentiated from other continents such as: Europe, Asia, America, Australia, and Antarctica.

*Africa in its various parts:* It has 53 official states; it has 9 democratic countries (Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, Ghana, Lesotho, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, and Tunisia); it has many dictators and thieves who are presidents; it has some lakes (Nakuru in Kenya, Victoria in Uganda, Kivu/Albert in DR Congo, Tanganyika in Tanzania...); it has many animals (lions, elephants, zebras, antelopes, rhinoceros, etc.).

***C. Avoid any disorder in our ideas:***

We need *order* in our ideas by beginning with the *simplest and most easily* known objects in order to ascend little by little to the knowledge of the *most complex*. Let us consider the case of the identity of “*Jesus Christ*”:

*Simple and easy* ideas about Jesus: He was the son of Joseph and Mary; He was born in Bethlehem; He was teaching in various temples and synagogues; He was sometimes praying in the mountains; He was healing the sick; He was casting out demons; He was feeding the crowds; He was forgiving the sins of the people; He was having some discussions with the Scribes and Pharisees; He died on the cross.

*Complex* ideas about Jesus: He rose up from the tomb after three days; He is son of God; He is the Savior and Redeemer of the world; He is seated at the right hand of God in heaven; He will come on the last day in order to judge the living and the dead.

***D. Avoid any relativism in our ideas:***

We need *enumeration* of all our ideas, that is, an enumeration that is at the same time relevant and complete. This enumeration must be *relevant* (meaningful or essential) to the reality and it must also be *complete* (i.e. giving holistic ideas) to the same reality. Let us take the reality of a *Christian*:

A Christian (*meaning or sense*) is a follower/servant of Christ on earth.

A Christian (*holistic ideas*) is a disciple of Jesus or apostle of Christ; he is a person of prayer, love, forgiveness, peace, unity, etc; he preaches by his words and deeds; he helps the poor, the orphans, the widows and the strangers; he pays visit to the sick, the homeless and the prisoners; he regularly attends Holy Mass; he frequently confesses his sins; he reads the Bible and then lives accordingly, etc.

In short, how can we know reality (human being, the world and God) with “certainty”? According to René Descartes, we need these four important epistemological aspects: *evidence* (i.e. proof/fact about reality); *division* (i.e. various parts of the same reality); *order* (i.e. simple and complex ideas about reality); and *enumeration* (i.e. relevant and holistic ideas about reality).

#### IV. OBJECTIONS AGAINST DESCARTES’ RATIONALISM:

##### 4.1 Objection against “Descartes’ conception of the infallibility of human mind”

My objection is that René Descartes exaggerates some of his arguments. I know that it is better to doubt the senses, dreams and the evil genius. In fact, this Cartesian doubt can help us to have a solid foundation in order to attain certain knowledge. By using our reason, we can somehow reach a clear and distinct knowledge. However, the main question should be: “Is human reason infallible?”



Descartes considers human reason/mind as infallible since it is a gift from God who is a Perfect/Absolute/Infinite/Good Being. But, some sad events push us to question the “infallibility” of our reason, such as: the “First World War,” the “Second World War,” the “Economic War in D. R. Congo,” the “Genocide in Rwanda,” the “Dictatorship in some African countries,” “Wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria.”

#### 4.2 Objection against “Descartes’ conception of the innate idea of God”

René Descartes says that the mind always thinks because it has the innate idea of God. In fact, Descartes defines man as a mind whose nature is essentially to think. However, John Locke argues that:

If the mind (soul) always thinks, then it has pure native thoughts (i.e. pure innate intellectual ideas) either before its union with the body or immediately following its union before the action of body on mind. If the mind has such pure native thoughts, then it will remember such thoughts. But the mind does not remember pure native thoughts. Therefore, the mind does not always think.<sup>29</sup>

On this note, John Locke considers the human mind a *tabula rasa* or a blank slate. Locke argues that the mind is, at birth, a “white paper, without any ideas.” For him, “if there were innate ideas, they should have been known to children as well as to idiots.”

In this way, John Locke is aware of the fact that children and idiots do not have any experience of innate ideas because their souls are not aware of a certain truth in them. For Locke, people who believe in innate ideas are lazy, because they avoid the effort of searching for these ideas. He even defines an idea as “Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of Perception, Thought or Understanding.”<sup>30</sup>

#### 4.3 Objection against “Descartes’ doubt of the senses and the former knowledge”

From my point of view, doubting everything can lead to a kind of “*pessimism*” (despair, hopelessness or discouragement). But, the Cartesian doubt remains important for each philosopher who must use well his/her reason in order to *control* his/her feelings and appetites. As a student in the philosophy department, I should use the “Methodic doubt” by recognizing the importance of our senses and our former knowledge.

In my viewpoint, our senses are important because they constitute the *first step* of knowledge since perception (or *sensation*) deals with seeing, touching, hearing, tasting, and smelling, which affect our mind (i.e. *reflection*). Also, reflection constitutes the second step/level of knowledge because it deals with thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, and willing.<sup>31</sup>

As we have seen, Descartes doubted/razed everything he learned at the Jesuit College (*La Flèche*). From my point of view, the former knowledge can help us today to understand better. I cannot sweep (put between brackets or let aside) all my former knowledge about reality. For instance, the former knowledge (during my master’s degree) is inspiring in selecting the theme of my dissertation. As Oriare Nyarwath says:

The old knowledge has to continuously be interrogated and analyzed for appropriateness. This means that some parts or aspects of the old knowledge may be abandoned, modified or refined to bring it to currency so that it responds efficiently and effectively to the needs and demands of time.<sup>32</sup>

The objection against doubting the former knowledge means that I should rely on some aspects of the historical and cultural background of my research. In this way, Masolo points out the inevitable contextual basis of knowledge because he emphasizes the specific historical and cultural background of knowledge.<sup>33</sup> In other words, there should be some aspects of the former knowledge that fundamentally remain relevant to the present knowledge.

<sup>29</sup>Nicolas Jolley. *Locke’s Touchy Subjects. Materialism and Immortality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 22.

<sup>30</sup>Peter H. Nidditch (ed.). *John Locke. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 19.

<sup>31</sup>John Locke. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, 105.

<sup>32</sup>Oriare Nyarwath, “Knowledge Production in Africa,” Stephen Okello (ed.), *The Role of Philosophy in the African Context: Traditions, Challenges and Perspectives*, 242.

<sup>33</sup>Masolo, D. A., *Self and Community in a Changing World* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010), 34.

#### 4.4 Objection against “Descartes’ Conception of Certainty”

Descartes’ criterion of certainty rests on human reason/mind in order to attain a clear and distinct knowledge of reality. Since reason is a gift from God, he says that every human being should attain a certain (clear and distinct) knowledge. In this way, he considers human reason as a necessary condition of establishing something firm and lasting. However, an American philosopher Peter Kreeft asks himself “Whether certain knowledge is possible?”<sup>34</sup>

According to Kreeft, to reach a certain knowledge is impossible because we can only have a probable knowledge. In fact, he has the belief that we know the truth only with probability and not with certainty<sup>35</sup>. For him, the probable knowledge is sufficient to guarantee our knowledge for all practical purposes. For example, there is a probable knowledge, which is sufficient for medicine, agriculture and education. In other words, there is a probable knowledge, which is necessary for physicians, farmers and educators.

Indeed, Kreeft says that this probable knowledge is necessary in practice in order to prevent us from closed-mindedness and dogmatism. Keeping in mind that “vast parts of our knowledge are only probable, but not certain,”<sup>36</sup> this probable knowledge is both sufficient to various disciplines and necessary to different people.

### V. CONCLUSION

In this article, I have been speaking of the following points:

1. The Cartesian doubt, whereby Descartes decides to demolish and reconstruct philosophy on a new and solid foundation. Within this process of the “demolished and reconstructed” education, he first doubts his former knowledge. Also, he doubts the senses, dreams, evil genius and even the mathematical truths. After doubting everything, he is able to attain a certain knowledge.
2. Descartes’ conception of certainty is respectively about the “*Cogito ergo sum*,” the criterion for certainty and how to know with certainty. First, his “*Cogito ergo sum*” becomes a clear, certain and indisputable truth because he comes to realize that “to doubt is to think, and to think is to exist.” Second, Descartes’ criterion of certainty rests on human reason/mind, which is a gift from God (a Perfect-Absolute-Infinite-Good Being). Third, he asks the question: “how to know reality with certainty?” According to René Descartes, we need “evidence” or proof/fact about reality; “division” that deals with the various parts of the same reality; “order” that allows us to move from the simple to complex ideas; and “enumeration” dealing with relevant and holistic ideas about reality.
3. There are four fundamental objections against Descartes’ rationalism: (i) objection against Descartes’ conception of the infallibility of human mind/reason”; (ii) objection against “Descartes’ conception of the innate idea of God”; (iii) objection against Descartes’ doubt of the senses and the former knowledge”; (iv) objection against Descartes’ conception of certainty.”

With the last objection, our question is: ‘Can we really know with certainty?’ At the end of this article, I would like to support Peter Kreeft’s viewpoint by saying that: “All knowledge is probable.” In this way, human reason is reliable without being infallible because human mind helps us to know something about the reality. In this way, any “contemporary” epistemological approach should be an epistemology of “probability,” but not that of certainty. Indeed, in the process of knowledge, we need to move from the infallibility of human mind to its reliability.

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<sup>34</sup> Peter Kreeft. *Summa Philosophica*. South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2012, 144.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Kreeft. *Summa Philosophica*, 145.

<sup>36</sup> Peter Kreeft. *Summa Philosophica*, 146.

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