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An Inquiry Into the Universality of Descartes' Doubt

Joseph Mary Casimir Osuch

Loyola University Chicago

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AN INQUIRY INTO THE UNIVERSALITY OF
DESCARTES' DOUBT.

by

Joseph M. C. Osuch, S. J.

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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VITA AUCTORIS

Joseph Mary Casimir Osuch, the son of Joseph Osuch and Hedwige Krasiewska, was born February 18, 1916, in Jackson, Michigan, where he attended St. Joseph's parochial school, and, from 1928-29, St. Mary's high school. From 1929-32 he was a student at St. Mary's high school, and from 1932-34 of St. Mary's College, at Orchard Lake, Michigan. In 1934 he entered the Society of Jesus and was enrolled in Xavier University, Cincinnati, from which he received the degree of Bachelor of Literature in 1938. In that year he came to West Baden, and was entered in the graduate school of Loyola University, in the department of philosophy.
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PURPOSE

W as Descartes' doubt universal? was it real? What kind of doubt was it? The chief aim of this thesis is to answer the first of these questions, that is, to examine the scope or extension of Descartes' doubt. Incidentally, it glances at some other aspects of the doubt. The solution given is based on a study of the philosopher's methodological works. These are:

Discours de la Méthode
Meditationes de Prima Philosophia
Principia Philosophiae
Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii
Rêcherche de la Vérité

In addition, the chief passages dealing with doubt in the letters of Descartes, and in the Objectiones cum Responsis nibus Authoris, are also cited.

Before one can understand with some degree of fullness anything at all, one must see that thing in relation to its milieu. Accordingly, the opening chapter of this thesis aims to furnish the background, necessary to the examination of our problem: the universality of Descartes' doubt. This "background" chapter will be followed by a chapter on terms which includes a note on the critical problem. Chapters three and four will contain the evidence for and against the universality of Descartes' doubt. And since the question of the reality of the doubt spontaneously flows out of that of its universality, the evidence for and against the reality
of the doubt will also be briefly indicated. This is followed by a word about the "metaphysical" quality of the doubt.

The conclusion of this thesis is that Descartes' doubt was metaphysical and real. That it was metaphysical is certain, as it is almost certain that it was real. Concerning the central problem under investigation, the results of this thesis lead us to the conclusion that Descartes was illogical and inconsistent: at times he calls his doubt universal; at other times, and more frequently, he asserts that it is not universal.

REASON FOR THESIS

If reason be sought for studying the question of the universality of Descartes' doubt, perhaps the best reason is the importance of the man who used that doubt as a philosophical instrument. Descartes has been in the past, and very likely will continue to be in the future, the centre of much attention in the world of philosophy. He has had ardent followers and even more ardent enemies. To him belongs the honour (or dishonour) of fathering modern philosophy. His followers make him "le libérateur de la philosophie jusque là esclave." His enemies blame him with originating practically all the evils and "isms" which have plagued the world since his day. Whatever one's attitude towards Descartes, one cannot deny his supreme moment in the history of modern thought, and
consequently, of modern civilization. Whether, then, Descartes is considered as one of the greatest enemies or as one of the greatest benefactors of our modern world, surely it is useful to seek as accurate an understanding as possible of the doubt which played a paramount role in the scientific and philosophical enquiries of a man of such stature.3
1. Maritain, p. 40

2. ib., passim, viz., pp. 247-288. M. Maritain, for example, charges Descartes with destroying theology, and preparing the destruction of metaphysics. He calls Descartes the father of rationalism, pragmatism, naturalism, agnosticism, mechanism, materialism, etc.

CHAPTER I

PRELIMINARY NOTIONS.

THE TIMES Liberator of the human spirit! That phrase indicates the atmosphere of the times in which Descartes lived. His was an age of revolt against authority, a revolt, in the field of philosophy, inspired in part by the failing condition of scholasticism. Descartes' age, moreover, witnessed a general confusion of minds caused by the lack of solid philosophical traditions. Besides this, Descartes' age was one of scepticism. This current of scepticism was strong enough to launch Descartes upon his critical studies. It is not hard to see how, living in such an age, Descartes would himself revolt against tradition, such as it was, and doubt all of its findings. This is not to say that Descartes' was a sceptical doubt. Far from being that, its very purpose was, as we shall see directly, to refute scepticism.

Keeping in mind the mood of the times in which Descartes grew to manhood, we see how reasonable is the genesis of Descartes' method given by M. Chevalier:

Descartes nous indique nettement les trois étapes par lesquelles a passé la formation de son esprit. Il a d'abord étudié dans les livres; mais ils sont trop éloignés de l'usage commun. Puis il a étudié dans le grand livre du monde; mais l'expérience instruit, et ne dirige pas. Enfin il s'est résolu à s'étudier lui-même, pour y chercher le fondement de certitude ...

Descartes doubted all the knowledge discovered to his day;

1· The

2· The

3· The

4· The
he doubted his own experience; and it was only in reflection upon himself that he finally found, or at least felt, certitude.

PURPOSE

We have remarked above that Descartes' purpose in doubting was not scepticism. It was quite the reverse:

... le doute méthodique de Descartes ... est pour ce grand raisonnable, quelque chose d'analogue à la Vie purgativa des mystiques, à cette 'nuit obscure de l'âme' dont parle saint Jean de la Croix, par laquelle il faut passer pour parvenir à la lumière éternelle du vrai.5

Descartes doubted in order to reach certitude.

Descartes himself tells us that his doubt was not sceptical but methodical, that is, having certitude as its goal:

... pour toutes les opinions que j'avais reçues jusques alors en ma créance, je ne pouvais mieux faire que d'entreprendre, une bonne fois, de les en oster, afin d'y en remettre par après, ou d'autres meilleures, ou bien les mêmes, lorsque je les aurais ajustées au niveau de la raison.6

Descartes' doubt was, then, a methodical doubt.

But it was more than that:

... méthodique. Cela ne signifie pas seulement qu'il est appliqué méthodiquement à toutes les opinions, et aux fondements mêmes de ces opinions, ce qui concerne plutôt son universalité; mais beaucoup plus profondément cela signifie qu'il est la condition de la découverte de la vérité. L'adjectif méthodique doit être pris au sens strict: le doute est la méthode même permettant de trouver un jugement absolument certain.7

M. Verneaux thinks there was a gradual
evolution of Descartes' method, a transition from reflexive analysis (in the Regulae), by way of evidence (in the Discours), to methodical doubt (in the Meditationes). To us this does not seem to be the case. It seems more likely that Descartes got his method all at once. It appears to have come to him the night of his famous dream in the November of 1519.

... ie demeurois tout le jour enfermé seul dans un poësle, ou i'avois tout le loysir de m'entre­tenir de mes pensées ... ie me persuaday ... que pour toutes les opinions que i'auois recettes jusques alors en ma creance, ie ne pouuois mieux faire que d'entreprendre une bonne fois de les en oster, affin d'y en remettre par après, ou d'autres meilleures, ou bien les mesmes ...

In this passage from the Discours, Descartes tells us that the idea of his methodical doubt had come to him, already fully developed, in 1619. Now the works in which M. Verneaux traces an evolution of Descartes' method (viz., the Regulae, Discours, and Meditationes) were all published many years after 1619. Therefore there seems to have been no substantial change in the method: Descartes had already come upon it, all at once, during his dream of November, 1619.

TWO ELEMENTS Whereas Descartes' method underwent no essential change, it consisted, as M. Verneaux aptly points out, of two elements, analysis and doubt:

Notanda autem hic sunt duo haec: nihil nimirum falsum pro vero supponere, et ad omnium cognitio­nenem pervenire.
As these passages imply, Descartes' method was not a bald doubt. Rather it was a cycle of analysis-doubt-analysis. If analysis revealed anything dubitable in a matter, Descartes doubted. If further analysis removed all dubious elements, he, of course, ceased doubting.

OBSCURITY

We should like to conclude this preliminary chapter with a few words concerning the difficulty of definitely determining the nature of Descartes' doubt. The reason for this is Descartes' lack of clarity, and his illogicality and vacillation when he speaks of his method. As M. Maritain points out, the distinguishing characteristic of Descartes' philosophy is the multitude of contradictions it contains, contradictions which Descartes in no way attempted to solve. The same ambiguity and vagueness which surrounds the other writings of this French poet-philosopher also clouds his explanations of his doubt. As a result, even in Descartes' day there was disagreement as to the kind of doubt Descartes held. As we shall see, the same difference of opinion prevails today.

Some of the difficulty in grasping the exact purport of Descartes' doubt may also be due to the fact of its gradual change. For if there was no essential change of
Descartes' method, there do seem to have been fluctuations within that method. The extension of the doubt may have varied in the course of years. Now it seems to include more, now less. In truth, by its very nature Descartes' doubt was bound gradually to change. He himself says as much:

... et faisant particulièrement réflexion, en chaque matière, sur ce qui la pouvoit rendre suspecte, et nous donner occasion de nous mesprendre, ie déracinois cependant de mon esprit toutes les erreurs qui s'y estoient pû glisser auparavant.14

These words show that Descartes did not rid himself of all his opinions at once, but that he set about this task quite gradually, rejecting only those opinions whose examination had failed to supply him with clear evidence of their truth. This can give some plausibility to Verneaux's opinion that Descartes' method went thru a gradual evolution. However we believe it more true to say that the method was unchanged but was applied to a broadening field.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER I.

1. Veitch, Introduction, pp. 9-10

2. ib., p. 11

3. Maréchal, p. 37

4. Chevalier, p. 40

5. ib., p. 212

6. AT, 6.13

7. Archives, Verneaux, pp. 25-26

8. ib., pp. 18-24

9. AT, 6.11-13

10. This point is disputed. Some say that during his famous "songe" Descartes discovered his analytical geometry, and not his methodical doubt.

11. AT, 10.372

12. AT, 10.369

13. Maritain, pp. 54-59

14. AT, 6.28
CHAPTER II.
DEFINITION OF TERMS.

The general background of Descartes' doubt has been sketched in the preceding chapter. Before taking up the study proper of the doubt, it is necessary to define the chief terms which will recur again and again on almost every page of this thesis. These terms are concerned with the two states of the mind known as doubt and certitude.

STATES OF MIND

The understanding of the various kinds of doubt and certitude, as these words are used in the following pages, will be aided by briefly outlining the chief states of the mind. Thus it will appear what sort of mental state the present writer conceives doubt in general and certitude in general to be.

There are, then, five states of the mind: ignorance, doubt, suspicion, opinion, and certitude. This division has for its basis that complex act of the mind known as a judgment. In the first three states, ignorance, doubt, and suspicion, there is no act of judgment, that is, there is no assent of the mind, actual or implicit, to the known objective identity or diversity of two ideas. In opinion, the mind does assent, but its assent is uncertain, the motives calling for assent are mere suasive or probable motives. In certitude, the mind grants its assent, and its certain assent, because the motives inclining it to assent
are certain motives.\(^1\)

A more precise definition of doubt and certitude is now in place. Doubt is a "suspending of the mind (assent) between both parts of a contradiction." In the state of doubt, the mind is afraid that it may be in error. Certitude may be defined as "the firm adhesion of the mind to one part of a contradiction, without any fear of error."\(^2\)

In other words, in the state of doubt and in that of certitude the mind wants to pass a judgment on some object. But in the state of doubt the mind either does not see that object clearly enough, or for the moment turns itself away from that object. That is the reason why a doubting mind hesitates to pass judgment on an object. The reverse is true in the state of certitude. Here too the mind wishes to make a judgment concerning an object. And here the object appears so clearly to the mind that it cannot but judge correctly of that object.

KINDS OF DOUBT

Next, may be given the various kinds or divisions of doubt. Doubt can be divided into three classes. If one looks at the reason for the suspension of assent, doubt is called positive doubt, when the "suspension is the result of an apparent equality of motives."\(^3\) It is called negative doubt, when the "suspension is the result of lack of motives." If one considers the way in which the doubt takes place, it is called either real doubt or
fictitious doubt. A real doubt is had when the mind truly assents to some truth, but acts as though it were suspending its assent. If one focuses ones attention on the end for which one doubts, the doubt may be either methodical or sceptical. A methodical doubt is "any suspension which is used according to a definite plan in order to acquire knowledge." In other words a doubt is methodical when it is used as a means to the finding of truth. A sceptical doubt, on the other hand, is a doubt "which is cherished as a definite state of mind with a view to the possession or retention of truth." For example, I have a definite and certain view about something; this causes me to regard every other view with the eye of a sceptic. Or it may be that my view is not certain; but I do not wish to change it, as this might involve a change in my life, my attitude towards things: I employ scepticism towards all views different from my own, as a defense against surrendering my view.

ABSTRACTION A word may be inserted here about "abstraction." This state of mind is often called a doubt; but to call "abstraction" a doubt is to misunderstand the meaning of the word. "Abstraction" refers to one of the various methods used in solving the critical problem, the problem of the validity of human cognition. The philosopher who thus "abstracts" retains all the certitudes,
natural and philosophical, which he possesses at the time. The point to note here is that thus "to abstract" is not in any way, not even fictitiously, to doubt. This same method of abstraction is sometimes expressed in the formula employed by St. Augustine:

Quaerendum est quasi omnia essent incerta.5

"Abstraction," then, is a "determinatio voluntatis paratae ad inquirendum eodem modo ac inquirit realiter dubitans de objecto particulari, verbi gratia, de immortalitate animae ..."6

KINDS OF CERTITUDE

We may now briefly enumerate the chief divisions of certitude. To begin with, certitudes may be explicit or implicit. By means of an explicit certitude I know a thing "in actu signato;" in such a certitude there is direct and explicit attention of the mind to the thing which is known as true. But certitudes may also be implicit. Indeed, in every explicit certitude are contained other implicit certitudes, chief among which is the cognition of my mind's aptitude for truth. By an implicit certitude I know a thing "in actu exercito;" in such a certitude the mind does not directly nor in the first place, but only secondarily, attend to the truth known in that implicit certitude.7

Certitude is also divided into purely subjective certitude and objective certitude. Purely subjective certi-
tude is no certitude at all; for it merely signifies "ipse assensus firmus sine formidine errandi." This assent, however, is not elicited by certain motives; and for this reason purely subjective certitude often proves erroneous. Objective, or formal, legitimate, real, perfect, absolute certitude, is

... assensus firmus in veritatem ex moto infallibili (excludente possibilitatem erroris) ... clara cognitio, sive exercite sive signate, (adest) huius infallibilitatis ...

Now follows a very important division of certitude. Certitude may be metaphysical, physical, or moral. This division of certitude corresponds to a like division of universality, necessity, possibility, impossibility, repugnance. To understand this division of certitude, it will be helpful first briefly to define the various kinds of necessity, metaphysical, physical, and moral. The definitions are taken from Father Frick:

Metaphysice necessarium est quod in ipsis rerum ideis seu essentiis fundatur ita, ut ne per divinam quidem omnipotentiam aliter esse seu fieri possit ...

Physice necessarium ... est quod in rerum natura ita fundatur ut per solam Dei omnipotentiam aliter esse seu fieri possit ...

Moraliter necessarium ... est, quod ita nititur in constantibus rationis naturae moribus, inclinationibus, ut contradictorium, licet physice possibile sit seu physicas hominis vires non excedat, tamen propter oppositionem vel incongruitatem cum natura rationali non fiat.
Using "necessity" as a basis, Father Frick gives the following concise definitions of the various kinds of objective certitude, metaphysical, physical, and moral:

Necessitas haec (metaphysica) objectiva alicui menti manifesta est certitudo metaphysica objectiva.

Necessitas physica objectiva alicui menti manifesta est certitudo physica objectiva.

Necessitas moralis objectiva alicui menti manifesta est certitudo moralis objectiva.¹⁰

Metaphysical certitude is absolute certitude; physical and moral certitude constitute hypothetical certitude. But hypothetical certitude is no less truly certitude than is absolute certitude. Both fulfil all the requirements of true and perfect certitude.

***

A NOTE ON THE CRITICAL PROBLEM.

Descartes' doubt takes much of its importance from the fact that it played so important a role at the birth of the critical problem, the core problem, today, of that branch of philosophy known variously as Major Logic, Critica, or the Theory of Cognition. To solve this central critical problem, Descartes employed his doubt.

Accordingly, to see the bearing and significance of Descartes' doubt in clearer perspective, it is necessary briefly to describe the nature of the critical problem and to outline the chief methods used in solving that problem.
Thus it will be easier to see the position of Descartes' doubt in the history of the science of Critica.

DEFINITION What, then, is the critical problem? In a larger sense, the term is used to include the threefold problem of scepticism, relativism and idealism. In a stricter sense, however, the critical problem is concerned only with the sceptical problem. Taken in this stricter sense, the critical problem deals with an inquiry into the mind's aptitude for truth and certitude. "Is the human mind apt for true and certain knowledge?"—this question may be called the critical problem.

VARIOUS SOLUTIONS Many ways have been proposed of solving this problem of the mind's aptitude for truth. These various solutions may be classified into those that deny the mind's aptness for truth, and those that affirm it. The denial of the mind's aptitude is the solution of the sceptic. Those who affirm the validity of human knowledge fall into those who claim that there is no possible way of showing or proving this validity; and those who say we can prove the validity of human knowledge. To the first class belong the exaggerated dogmatists, for example the fideists and voluntarists.

Those who assert that the objectivity of human knowledge can be demonstrated, again separate into those who employ some sort of doubt to arrive at this demonstration
and those who employ other methods.

Descartes, who is generally considered the first in modern times seriously to have examined the critical problem, belongs to those who employ a doubt. Descartes' doubt was, it is said, a real, positive doubt. A positive doubt is one in which the "ratio suspensionis est propter apparentem aequalitatem motivorum." A negative doubt, on the other hand, is one in which the "ratio suspensionis est defectus motivorum." A real negative doubt was the solution offered by Sentroul, Jeannière, S. J., Picard, S. J., and Maréchal, S. J. Cardinal Mercier, Donat, S. J., and Gény, S. J., held a fictitious doubt to be the correct solution.

In greatest favor today are those who claim to demonstrate the validity of the mind by other methods than doubt. The chief names in this class are Bonnet, S. J., (who employs "abstraction"), Naber, S. J. (who employs "reflection"), and a group including Mattiusi, S. J., De Tonquédec, S. J., Maritain, Boyer, S. J., Calcagno, S. J., who, to use the words of one of them, solve the mind's aptitude by a

formalis perceptio aptitudinis, non in actu signato, sed in actu exercito.10

It is well to note that the word "demonstrate," as applied to this last group, does not refer to a strict, syllogistic demonstration. This obviously would involve a "petitio
principii." But "demonstrare aptitudinem mentis" here rather means "monstrare": to show the mind's reliability by seeing that reliability in the act of reflection.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II.

1. Frick, pp. 38 ff.; pp. 128-130

2. ib., pp. 128-130. n. For a lengthier discussion of the nature of certitude, the reader may consult Frick, pp. 130 ff.

3. St. Thomas, 14.1. "Motive," as it is used in this discussion, is merely a synonym for "object," which appears to the mind more or less clearly, or with equal clarity from several aspects.

4. Naber, p. 98

5. St. Augustine, Lib. 2, c. 3

6. Bonnet, pp. 28-30

7. Frick, p. 109; Boyer, pp. 175-176

8. ib., pp. 130-132

9. ib., pp. 139-140

10. For a further discussion of the various solutions of the critical problem, consult Bonnet's Critica, pp. 22-78; Naber's Theoria Cognitionis Critica, pp. 93-109; and Maréchal's Point du Départ de la Métaphysique, vol. 5, pp. 38-53.
ARGUMENTS FOR A UNIVERSAL DOUBT.

We are now ready to take up our problem proper. In the present chapter we give the reasons which have led many to the conclusion that Descartes' doubt was universal.

If we read through Descartes' works, we shall find a good many statements which argue the universality of his doubt. For example, in the Discours, he says,

... commençant dès lors a ne conter pour rien les miennes propres (opinions), a cause que je les voulais remettre toutes a l'examen ...

( Yet, a closer examination of that very passage shows that Descartes is certain that he has four maxims of morality which may guide him during his doubt. More about these later.)

In the Meditationes we discover another seeming proof of a universal doubt:

In prima (Meditatione), causae exponuntur propter quas de rebus omnibus, praeertim materialibus, possimus dubitare ...

Similarly are these words, occurring a few pages further on:

Animadverti jam ante aliquot annos quam multa, ineunte aetate, falsa pro veris admiserim, et quam dubia sint quaecumque istis postea superextruxi, ac proinde funditus omnia semel in vita esse evertenda atque a primis fundamentis denuo inchoandum ... opportune igitur hodie mentem curis omnibus
exsolvi, securum mihi otium procuravi, solus secedo, serio tandem et libere generali huic mearum opinionum eversioni vacabo. 3

The "universal" doubt seems to have extended at least to all sense knowledge:

Cernis equidem, de omnibus rebus quarum cognitio non nisi ope sensuum ad te pervenit, cum ratione dubitare te posse ... 4

But here Descartes' doubt was only an apparent and illusory doubt. For the validity of sense perception is a self-evident truth, that is, one which we cannot in actual fact doubt. In view of this, we should already have to say that Descartes' doubt was at most apparently universal, an illusory universal doubt.

But let us suppose for a moment that the doubt was truly universal; immediately we shall have to qualify the adjective "universal." Certainly Descartes did not start out by at once doubting every one of his certitudes with a separate, individual doubt. As we have seen, he set about gradually to rid himself of all dubious opinions. But, as he himself says, when he came to the opinion "I think," it was impossible for him to doubt his existence. So that he never doubted at least the one truth of his own existence. If, then, one insists on calling Descartes' doubt universal, one can call it a universal doubt only in the sense that Descartes set out to examine all of his opinions. In this view universal would mean not that all the opinions
were considered doubtful, but that they were all subjected to analysis, in order to discover those particular truths of which a metaphysical doubt could not be had.

TESTIMONY OF OTHERS

Thus far we have seen only what Descartes himself says about the universality of his doubt.

There are some authors who hold that the doubt was in fact universal. We quote the statements of two writers who cling to this opinion, M. Verneaux and Mr. Sewall. The former says:

Le doute est universel ... tel que Descartes le présente en maint passage, il est clair que rien n'est excepté de cette "abdication."\(^5\)

Sewall writes:

What has given Descartes a unique hold upon the thought of modern times is his making the mind's position of universal doubt the proper starting place in philosophy ...\(^6\)

AN INSTANT? Let us grant that the authors who claim that Descartes' doubt was universal are right. How long, in that case, did Descartes' universal doubt last? Descartes himself answers this question:

... ie me resolu de feindre que toutes les choses qui m'estoient iamais entrées en l'esprit, n'estoient non plus vrayes que les illusions de mes songes. Mais, aussitost après, ie pris garde que, pendant que ie voulois ainsi penser que tout estoit faux, il falloit necessairement que moi, qui le pensois, fusse quelque chose. Et remarquant que cete verité: ie pense, donc ie suis, estoit si ferme et si assurée, que toutes les plus extravagantes suppositions des sceptiques n'estoient pas capables de l'esbransler ...\(^7\)
If Descartes' doubt was truly universal, that universal doubt -- even in the manner in which we have just qualified the word "universal" -- lasted but an instant.

AN ABSTRACTION? By way of comment on these arguments for the universality of Descartes' doubt, we venture the theory that Descartes' "universal" doubt was more of an "abstraction" than a doubt. This view seems to be supported by one of the most famous passages in Descartes' works:

Utar hic exemplo valde familiar, ad facti mei rationem ipsi explicandam ... Si forte haberet corbem pomis plenam, et vereretur ne aliqua ex pomis istis essent putrida, velletque ipsa auferre, ne reliqua corrumpent, quo pacto id faceret? An non in primis omnia omnino ex corbe rejiceret? ac deinde singula ordine perlustrans, ea sola, quae agnosceret non esse corrupta, resumeret, atque in corbem reponeret, aliis relictis.8

The application is, of course, that in a similar way a man examines all his judgments in order to reject the false and retain the true. Surely, no man who has a basket of apples, fears that they are all bad. Descartes himself says that a man may suspect "some" of the fruit is spoilt, that is, he may suspect or know that some of the apples are really bad. But what does he do? He examines all of the apples, good and bad alike. He does this, not because he fears that all are spoilt -- in that case he would not examine the fruit to find out which was spoilt, but rather to find out which was sound. The reason, then, for the examination is to find out which of the apples are spoilt.
Of course, the man examines all the apples, one by one. He looks over the good apples as if they might be spoilt too. In this sense, he treats all the apples alike. Yet not for a moment does he really think all of the apples might be bad. In like manner, Descartes did not for a moment really think that all his judgments were uncertain. But like the man with the basket of fruit, he was afraid some of his judgments might be bad, in this case, uncertain. To find out which were the uncertain judgments, Descartes proceeded to examine all of his judgments, one by one, good as well as bad. For a moment he acted in regard to all of his judgments as though they might be false; but not even for a moment did he think that they were all uncertain. This, at any rate, appears to be a likely explanation of his "universal" doubt. In so far as the doubt was "universal," it was not a doubt at all, but an abstraction, in the sense in which we have explained that term in Chapter 2.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER III.

1. AT, 6.23
2. ib., 7.12
3. ib., 7.17-18
4. ib., 10.514
5. Archives, Verneaux, p. 25
6. Veitch, *Special Introduction*, p. IX
7. AT, 6.32
8. ib., 7.481
CHAPTER IV
ARGUMENTS FOR A NON-UNIVERSAL DOUBT.

If there are quite a few statements in Descartes' works that seem to bespeak a universal doubt, there are equally as many, indeed, there are far more numerous passages in Descartes which argue a non-universal doubt. We may begin this chapter by selecting from Descartes' writings some more or less general affirmations of the non-universality of his doubt.

DESCARTES' TESTIMONY

In the Regulae Descartes implicitly denies the possibility of an universal doubt:

... si Socrates dicit se dubitare de omnibus, hinc necessario sequitur: ergo hoc saltem intelligit, quod dubitat; item, ergo cognoscit aliquid posse esse verum vel falsum, etc., ista enim naturae dubitationis necessario annexa sunt.

In the Discours he says he aimed to reject (doubt) only unreasoned opinions:

... ie ne voulu point commencer a rejeter tout a fait aucune des opinions, qui s'estoient pu glisser autrefois en ma creance sans y avoir esté introduites par la raison ...

A few pages further on in the Discours, Descartes lays a similar restriction on his doubt. He says that the doubt takes in only those opinions which can be suspected of not being entirely certain.

... ie pensay qu'il faloit que ie fisse tout le contraire, et que ie rejetasse, comme absolu­lument faux, tout ce en quoy ie pourrois ima­giner le moindre doute ...
In the *Meditationes* we are again told that the doubt extends only to matters which contain some dubitable element:

... *jam ratio persuadet, non minus accurate ab iis quae non plane certa sunt atque indubitata, quam ab falsis assensionem esse cohibendam* ...\(^4\)

On another page we find this certitude:

... *si hoc ejus (Dei) bonitati repugnaret, talem me creasse ut semper fallar, ab eadem etiam videtur esse alienum permettere ut interdum fallar; quod ultimum tamen non potest dici* ...\(^5\)

If Descartes has only this one certitude, he obviously does not doubt all things.

In the *Recherche*, simultaneously with the declaration of his universal doubt, Descartes tells us of yet another certitude he possesses:

... *adactum me videam ad confitendum, nihil cum aliquae certitudine me scire, sed de omnibus dubitare, et in nulla re certum esse* ...\(^6\)

In the same little essay, Descartes limits his doubt to inexact knowledge:

... *il faudroit aussy que chaque homme ... se resolust une bonne fois d'oster de sa fantaisie toutes les idées imparfaites qui y ont esté tracées iusqu'alors* ...\(^7\)

The *Objectiones cum Responsionibus* provide us with a rather insistently repeated denial of the possibility of a universal doubt.

Ex his autem (quae clare ab intellectu perciipientur) quaedam sunt tam perspicua, simulque tam simplicia,
ut numquam possimus de iis cogitare, quin vera esse credamus: ut quod ego, dum cogito, existam; quod ea quae semel facta sunt, infecta esse non possint, et talia, de quibus manifestum est hanc certitudinem haberi. Non possimus enim de iis dubitare, nisi de ipsis cogitemus; sed non possumus de iisdem cogitare, quin simul credamus vera esse, ut assumptum est; ergo non possimus de iis dubitare, quin simul credamus vera esse, hoc est, non possimus unquam dubitare.8

In the Principia we again see that Descartes' doubt was not universal. For example, in this passage, we find Descartes asserting the certain fact of free will:

Libertatem arbitrii esse per se notam: Quod autem sit in nostra voluntate libertas, et multis ad arbitrium vel assentiri vel non assentiri possimus, adeo manifestum est, ut inter primas et maxime communes notiones, quae nobis sunt innatae, sit recensendum. Patuitque maxime paulo ante, cum de omnibus dubitare studentes, eo usque sumus progressi, ut fingeremus aliquem potissimum nostrae originis authorem modis omnibus nos fallere conari; nihilominus enim hance in nobis libertatem esse experiemur, ut possemus ab iis credendis abstinere, quae non plane certa erant et explorata. Nec ulla magis per se nota et perspecta esse possunt, quam quae tunc temporis non dubia videbantur.9

In another part of the Principia Descartes can once again be heard denying the universality of his doubt:

Praeter caetera autem, memoriae nostrae pro summa regula est infigendum, ea quae nobis a Deo revelata sunt, ut omnium certissima credenda.10

In the Principia, too, Descartes tells us what he means when he uses the expression "we must doubt all things." "All" is not as universal as we might think. This is proved by the wording and explanation of the first two
principles:

I. Veritatem inquirenti, semel in vita de omnibus, quantum fieri potest, esse dubitandum.\[11

Follows the explanation of principle one:

... de iis omnibus studeamus dubitare, in quibus vel minimam incertitudinis suspicionem reperiemus.

From this is is clear that we are to doubt only those things about which a doubt is possible, only those that are not certain.

In the explanation of principle two, also, we are told that all things does not have a universal extension:

Quin et illa etiam, de quibus dubitabimus, utile erit habere pro falsis, ut tanto clarius, quidnam certissimum et cognitum facillimum sit, inveni­amus.\[12

Surely the "illa" implies that we will by no means doubt everything, that we have some opinions which are indubitable.

Lastly, there is among the annotations to the Principia a statement in which we are explicitly told that we must not include all things in our doubt. The doubt is to be employed only when we have good reasons for using it. The writer tells us that there are cases where such reasons do not exist:

Cum habetur positiva ratio quae aliquid persuadet, non esse metaphysicas illas dubitationes in contrarium admittendas, quae nulla prorsus ratione fultae ponuntur: ut an forte Deus voluerit mentem annihilare, quoties destructur ejus corpus.\[13

TESTIMONY

OF OTHERS

Enough for what Descartes more or less
directly tells us about the non-universality of his doubt. We shall now glance at a few opinions that others hold concerning this same point. One of the best known students of Descartes of our day, M. Chevalier, holds the non-universality of the doubt:

Ce doute, d'abord n'est pas un doute universel ... Descartes commence par soustraire au doute la pratique et ses principes.14

Keeling, a leading English writer on Descartes, voices a similar view:

He (Descartes) is going to test all manner of common beliefs ... all in fact except those concerning morals and religion ... methodical doubt is thus the general decision to doubt 'on principle' any particular belief or class of beliefs that can be doubted.15

Veitch, who above asserted the universality of the doubt, implicitly agrees with Chevalier and Keeling:

Descartes was led to seek for an ultimate ground of certitude ... in what commended itself to him as self-verifying and therefore ultimate in knowledge -- in other words, a limit to doubt, a criterion of certainty ...16

From the quotations here given, it seems very likely that Descartes' doubt was not universal. Indeed the whole point of doubting with Descartes was to get to something which he would be unable to doubt, so as to make this indubitable thing the basis of his philosophy. Moreover, the conclusion that Descartes' doubt was not universal is richly supported by the countless individual explicit and implicit
certitudes contained in those very pages of Descartes where he explains his doubt. We shall now take up, first, some of these explicit certitudes; then we shall look at some of the implicit certitudes.

DESCARTES' EXPLICIT CERTITUDES Among the various explicit certitudes which accompany Descartes' explanations of his doubt, we discover, to begin with, that Descartes seems to have had many certitudes about non-existing things (his doubt was chiefly concerned with things that existed):

Atque ubi dixi hanc propositionem, ego cogito, ergo sum, esse omnium primam et certissimam, quae cuilibet ordine philosophanti occurrat, non ideo negavi quin ante ipsam scire oporteat, quid sit cogitatio, quid existentia, quid certitudo; item, quod fieri non possit, ut id quod cogitet non existat, et talia; sed quia nae sunt simplissimae notiones, et quae solae nullius rei existentis notitiam praebent, idcirco non censui esse numerandas.17

Descartes never denied the certitude of dozens of truths which did not involve existence.

In the Discours, in the very breath in which Descartes says he must doubt, he tells us of several particular certitudes he possesses. I select one:

... il n'y a eu que les seuls Mathematiciens qui ont pu trouver quelques demonstrations, c'est a dire quelques raisons certaines et evidentes ...

This brings us to a very interesting class of certitudes concerning knowledge or certitude itself. The Regulae are full of these certitudes. In Rule VII, for
example, Descartes is sure that there is such a thing as certitude:

Eorum, quae hic proponuntur, observatio necessaria est ad illas veritates inter certas admittendas ...solius enumerationis auxilio fieri potest, ut ad quamcumque (questionem) animam applicemus, de illa semper feramus iudicium verum et certum...19

... si tamen vel minimum quid omittamus, catena rupta est, et tota conclusionis labitur certitudine.20

In Rule IX we find that Descartes is sure of the existence of knowledge and truth:

... atqui notandum est illos, qui vere sciant ... facilitate dignoscere veritatem ...21

Descartes is certain, moreover, about the existence of and distinction between truth and falsity. On the very first page of the Regulae, Descartes assures us of the existence of science, that is, truth:

Nam cum scientiae omnes nihil aliud sint quam humana sapientia, quae semper una et eadem manet ...22

And, as we have already seen, Descartes is sure that the ancients reached truth:

... eodem mentis lumine ... Philosophiae etiam et Matheseos veras ideas agnoverint ...23

Again, Descartes tells us that we should go about our search for truth, separating truth from falsity:

... qualis de qualibet re cognitio vera esse possit aut falsa, distinguatis.24

Having already received this piece of advice from Descartes,
we are not surprised to hear, a moment later:

Intelligimus autem per quæstionem, illa omnia in quibus reperitur verum vel falsum ...\textsuperscript{25}

Further on in the \textit{Regulae}, Descartes has certitude that there are what he calls "purely intellectual" (pure intellectuales) objects of knowledge.\textsuperscript{26} He is sure, too, of the existence of "simple natures" and of their self-evidence.\textsuperscript{27} He is also certain that some people may err:

... evidentis est nos falli, si quando aliquam ex naturis istis simplicibus a nobis totam non cognosci judicemus ...\textsuperscript{28}

Closely related to these certitudes about the existence of knowledge, true and false, is the certitude that other people have certitude. That Descartes was certain of this already appears in some of the quotations just cited. Here we give a few more statements on this point:

... quoties aliquid certum et evidens feliciter invenerunt (scriptores), nunquam exhibent nisi variis ambagibus involutum ...\textsuperscript{29}

... eodem mentis lumine, quo virtutem voluptati, honestumque utili præferendum esse videbant (veteres), etsi, quare hoc ita esset, ignoraent, Philosophiae étiam et Matheseos veras ideas agnoverunt ...\textsuperscript{30}

Since Descartes was certain of the possibility and existence of knowledge, one would naturally also expect him to be certain about the existence of faculties of knowledge. And so it is:

In nobis quattuor sunt facultates tantum quibus ad hoc (rerum cognitionem) uti possimus ...\textsuperscript{31}
However, the doubting Descartes goes far beyond the assurance that we have four faculties. He possesses certitude regarding the trustworthiness of these faculties: of his ideas, intuitions, his reasoning, his memory, his senses. In a word, he has no doubt about the aptitude of the mind for truth.

It is useful to examine separately Descartes' certitude about each of the faculties we have mentioned.

First, there are ideas. Does Descartes doubt them? We have hinted that Descartes excluded from the scope of his doubt self-evident, indubitable judgments. From this it follows that he cherished no doubt about ideas; for judgments are made of ideas. Chevalier confirms this view:

Le doute méthodique s'étend donc à tous les jugements, mais non pas aux idées en tant qu'idées.32

Père LeBlond offers us further testimony of this exclusion from the doubt, of ideas:

... certes Descartes ne doute nullement que les choses ne répondent aux idées ...33

Just as Descartes is certain of the validity of his ideas, so too is he certain of the validity of his intuitions:

... hic recensentur omnes intellectus nostri actiones per quas ad rerum cognitionem absque ullo deceptionis metu possimus pervenire:
admittunturque tantum duae, intuitus scilicet et inductio.\textsuperscript{34}

The same thought occurs in this passage:

Postquam aliquot propositiones simplices sumus intuiti ... ad mentis intuitum duo requirimus: nempe ut propositio clare et distincte ... intelligatur.\textsuperscript{35}

M. Chevalier likewise believes that Descartes did not doubt the certitude of his intuitions:

Ce contact de son esprit avec la source de toute vérité, qui constitue son intuition première ... La connaissance intuitive est une ... connaissance première, gratuite, certaine ...\textsuperscript{36}

In his Descartes, Chevalier again expresses the same opinion:

... pensée, certitude, existence, et que pour penser il faut être (which is an intuitive judgment), et autres choses semblables ne auraient être mises ici en compte (that is, cannot be included within the scope of the doubt) ...\textsuperscript{37}

Certain of the objectivity of his ideas and intuitions, Descartes also seems not to doubt the validity of his reasoning faculty. Thus in the Regulae we find many statements of Descartes' certitude on this point. Here are some examples:

Notandum insuper, experientias rerum saepe esse fallaces, deductionem vero, sive illationem puram unius ab altero ... numquam male fieri ab intellectu vel minimo rationali ... hic recensentur omnes intellectus nostri actiones, per quae rerum cognitionem absque ullo deceptionis metu possimus pervenire: admittunturque tantum duae, intuitus scilicet et inductio.\textsuperscript{38}

*ad
Eorum quae hic proponuntur observatio necessaria est ad illas veritates inter certas admittendas, quas supra diximus a primis et per se notis principiis non immediate deduci.39

For other proofs that Descartes was certain of the validity of deduction, the reader is referred to AT, 10.390, 400, 411, 444.

Concerning the memory, we find an indication that Descartes was certain about the workings of this faculty also, for he says of it:

... memoria, a qua pendere dictum est certitudinem conclusionum, quae plura complectuntur quam uno intuitu capere possimus ...40

Finally, it seems that Descartes was even certain, at bottom, about the validity of his senses. As proof of this may be cited these passages:

Dicimus sexto, naturas illas, quas compositas appellamus, a nobis cognosci ... quia experimur quales sint ... Experimur quiquid sensu per­cipimus, quidquid ex aliis audimus, et genera­liter quae­cumque ad intellectum nostrum, vel aliunde perveniunt, vel ex sui ipsius contem­platione reflexa. Ubi notandum est, intellectum a nullo umquam experimento decipi posse, si praecise tantum intueatur rem sibi objectam ...41

Nemo enim tam hebeti ingenio est, qui non per­cipiat se, dum sedet, aliquo modo gifferre a se ipso, dum pedibus insistit ...42

Quis autem unquam dubitavit (certainly Descartes never did), quin corpora moveantur, variasque habeant magnitudines et figuras ...43

From these excerpts it would seem that though Descartes often asserted the need of doubting all sense knowledge,
he did not, in fact, doubt the trustworthiness of his senses.

What conclusion is one to draw from the foregoing affirmations of certitude about the various individual faculties? It seems to me that the obvious and logical deduction is that Descartes was, in actual fact, and quite consciously, certain of the aptitude for truth of his faculties of knowledge. And indeed, to be logical, Descartes had to admit the validity of his powers of cognition. For, as we shall see, he excluded self-evident truths from his doubt. Now the validity of our faculties is precisely a self-evident truth. So, if he were consistent and accurate, Descartes could not, of course, entertain any doubt about his faculties.

We come now to another and quite important group of opinions about which Descartes never had any doubt. First in this group is Descartes' certitude about self-evident truths. Descartes asserts that even the simplest peasants perceive these truths:

... saepe litterati tam ingeniosi esse solent, ut invenerint modum caecutiendi etiam in illis quae per se evidentia sunt atque a rusticis nunquam ignorantur ...44

He also tells us:

Nihilque supponam ex istis disciplinis, nisi forte quaedam per se nota et unicuique obvia ...45

It may be well to give here a few examples of the self-evident truths perceived by the doubting Descartes
himself. Chief of his self-evident certitudes is the one on which he builds his philosophy, the certitude of his existence. We have seen instances of this certitude already. In Descartes' correspondence we find repeated affirmations of this basic certitude. He tells us that though we may doubt all the things of sense, we can in no way doubt about our own existence:

... puis montrer que celuy qui doute ainsi de tout ce qui est materiel, ne peut aucunement pour cela douter de sa propre existence; d'où il suit que celuy-là, c'est à dire l'âme ... est la premiere chose qu'on puisse connoistre certainement ...

In another letter, Descartes expresses his astonishment that anyone should consider the fact that he thinks as on the same level with the things that we may doubt:

Pour le Docteur qui dit que nous pouuons douter si nous pensons ou non, aussi bien que de toute autre chose, il choque si fort la Lumiere Natu­relle, que ie m'assure que personne, qui pensera à ce qu'il dit, ne sera de son opinion.

In yet another letter, Descartes affirms at some length the impossibility of doubting the fact of thought:

Mais si l'on veut conclure son existence du sen­timent ou de l'opinion qu'on a qu'on respire, en sorte qu'encore mesme que cette opinion ne fust pas vraye, on iuge toutesfois qu'il est impossible qu'on l'eust, si on n'existoit, on conclut fort bien; à cause que cette pensée de respirer se presente alors à nostre esprit avant celle de notre existence, et que nous ne pouuons douter que nous ne l'ayons pendant que nous l'auons ... Et ce n'est autre chose à dire en ce sens-là _le respire, donc je suis_, sinon _le pense, donc_
Finally, in one of his letters where he briefly sketches the development of his philosophy, Descartes once again asserts the certainty he possesses about the existence of his soul.

Or je prouve aysemment qu'ils (the first principles of Descartes' philosophy) sont tres-clairs: premierement, par la facon dont je les ay trouuez, a sauoir en rejettant toutes les choses aus- quelles je pouuois rencontrer la moindre occasion de douter; car il est certain que celles qui n'ont pa, en cette facon estre rejettées, lorsqu'on s'est appliqué à les considerer, sont les plus evidentes et les plus claires que l'esprit humain puisse connaistre. Ainsi, en considerant que celui qui veut douter de tout, ne peut toutefois douter qu'il ne soit, pendant qu'il doute, et que ce qui raisonne ainsi, en ne pouuant douter de soy-mesme et doutant neantmoins de tout le reste, n'est pas ce que nous disons estre nostre corps, mais ce que nous appelions nostre ame ou nostre pensée, j'ai pris l'estre ou l'existence de cette pensée pour le premier Principe, duquel j'ai deduit tres-clairement les suivans: a sauoir qu'il y a un Dieu, qui est authur de tout ce qui est au monde, et qui, estant la source de toute verité, n'a point crée nostre entendement de telle nature qu'il se puisse tromper au jugement qu'il fait des choses dont il a une perception fort claire et fort dis- tincte. Ce sont la tous les Principes dont je me sers touchant les choses immaterielles ou Metaphysiques, desquels je déduits tres-claire- ment ceux des choses corporelles ou Physiques ... 49

Descartes is sure, furthermore:

... quid sit cogitatio, quid existentia, quid certitudo; item, quod fieri non possit, ut id quod cogitet non existat, et talia ... 50
Emphatically, Descartes asserts the indubitability and self-evidence of the fact of free will:

... nihilominus enim hanc in nobis libertatem esse experiebamur, ut possemus ab iis credendis abstinere, quae non plane certa erant et explomata. Nec ulla magis per se nota et perspecta esse possunt, quam quae tunc temporis non dubia videbantur ...51

Descartes' certitude about mathematics is, at the most, only a shade less decided than his certitude about self-evident truths. A few quotations may bring this out.

... tantummodo rectum veritatis iter quaerentes circa nullum objectum debere occupari, de quo non possint habere certitudinem Arithmetica et Geometrica demonstrationibus aequalem.52

Cum enim nihil in illis (Arithmetica, Geometria, etc.) maneat occultum, et tota cognitionis humanae capacitate aptentur...53

In the passage we are about to give next, Descartes almost appears to give the mathematicians an exclusive monopoly on certitude:

... il n'y a eu que les seuls Mathematiciens qui ont pu trouver quelques demonstrations, c'est a dire quelques raisons certaines et evidentes ...54

Almost as strong are these words:

... atqui Arithmeti, Geometriam, alias ejusmodi ... aliquid certi atque indubitati continere. Nam sive vigilem, sive dormiam, duo et tria simul juncta sunt quinque, quadratumque non plura habet latera quam quattuor; nec fieri posse videtur ut tam perspicuae veritates in suspicionem falsitatis incurrant.55

Then there is Descartes' certitude about faith and
morals. His words about these matters are quite unequivocal. There are many passages like the following, in which Descartes calls our certitude about faith the strongest of all certitudes:

\[
... quod tamen non impedit quominus illa, quae divinitus revelata sunt, omni cognitione certiora credamus ...
\] 56

Another familiar thought of Descartes concerning revealed truth is this one, in which he plainly removes revelation from the touch of his doubt:

\[
... ayant apris ... que les veritez revelées, qui y (to heaven) conduisissent, sont au dessus de nostre intelligence, ie n'eusse osé les soumettre à la foiblesse de mes raisonnemens ...
\] 57

This same thought recurs a few pages later on, where Descartes' well known maxims of morality are put in the same class with revelation:

After mastering thus assured of these maxims, and having set them apart with the truths of the faith, which have always been the first in my belief, I judge that for the rest of my opinions, I should freely undertake to get rid of them. 58

In this same passage Descartes tells us of at least four concrete truths which he has no intention to rid himself of, or in other words, which he does not mean to doubt. These four truths are his four maxims of morality, which we enumerate here:

La premiere estoit d'obéir aux lois et aux coutumes de mon pays, retenant constamment la
religion en laquelle Dieu m'a fait la grace d'estre instruit des mon enfance, et me gouvernant, en toute autre chose, suivant les opinions les plus moderées, et les plus esloignées de l'excès, qui fussent communément recelles en pratique par les mieux sensez de ceux avec lesquels i'aurois à vieure.

Ma seconde maxime estoit d'estre le plus ferme et le plus resolu en mes actions que ie pourrois, et de ne suiure pas moins constamment les opinions les plus douteuses, lorsque ie m'y serois une fois determiné, que si elles eussent esté tres assurées.

Ma troisieme maxime estoit de tascher tousjours plutost a me vaincre que la fortune, et a changer mes desirs que l'ordre du monde; et generalement, de m'accoustumer a croire qu'il n'y a rien qui soit entierement en nostre pouuoir, que nos pensées, en sorte qu'apres que nous ayons fait nostre mieux, touchant les choses qui nous sont exterieures, tout ce qui manque de nous reussir est, au regard de nous, absolument impossible.

Enfin, pour conclusion de cette Morale, ie m'ausyay de faire une reeuë sur les diverse occupations qu'ont les hommes en cette vie, pour tascher a faire choix de la meilleure; et sans que ie vueille rien dire de celles des autres, ie pensay que ie ne pouuois mieux que de continuerer en celle la mesme ou ie me trouuois, c'est a dire, que d'em­ployer toute ma vie a cultiver ma raison, et m'auancer, autant que ie pourrois, en la connoi­sance de la verité, suivant la Methode que ie m'estoys prescrite. 59

In these four maxims of morality we have at least four definite truths which Descartes explicitly withholds from his doubt.

Less important explicit certitudes, but still deserv­ing mention, are those Descartes had concerning the efficacy of the method of Doubt and the futility of Dialectics.
In the same breath in which he bids his reader to doubt, he claims that he has proven to the reader with certitude, therefore indubitably, the fruitfulness of the method he proposes:

Ex quibus omnibus colligitur primo, distincte... nos exposuisse... nullas vias hominibus patere ad cognitionem certam veritatis, praeter evidentem intuitum, et necessariam deductionem; item etiam, quid sint naturae illae simplices...

Of course, Descartes himself was certain of the value of his method. Thus, in the Discours, he tells us that as he was about to put his method into practice,

...par elle, i'estois assuré d'user en tout de ma raison, sinon parfaitement, au moins le mieux qui fust en mon pouvoir.

Complementary to his confidence in his own method, is his certainty about the futility of Dialectics:

Atqui ut adhuc evidentius apparet, illam disserendi artem nihil omnino conferre ad cognitionem veritatis...

We shall conclude this section on the explicit certitudes that surround Descartes' doubt with several other examples. In the Discours Descartes assures us that at the time when he was thinking of adopting his method of doubt,

Je savois que les langues qu'on y apprent, sont nécessaires pour l'intelligence des livres anciens; que la gentillesse des fables resueille l'esprit; que les actions memorable des histoires le releuent, et qu'estant luees avec discretion, elles aydent à former le jugement; que la lecture...
des bons livres est comme une conversation avec les plus honnêtes gens des siècles passés ... et même une conversation estimée, en laquelle ils ne nous découvrent que les meilleures de leurs pensées; que l'Eloquence a des forces et des beautés incomparables; que la Poésie a des delicatesse et des douceurs tres ravissantes ... que la Jurisprudence, la Medecine et les autres sciences appor tent des honneurs et des richesses à ceux qui les cultivent ... 63

In a similar strain, Descartes expresses his certain views on the nature of Poetry and Rhetoric, and on the involved nature of Philosophy.64 How could Descartes doubt any of these things? Were they not made clear to him by his own certain intuitions or deductions?

It is well to pause for a moment and look at the consistency, or lack of it, in Descartes' stand. Even as he bade us to doubt, we have seen him expressing his certitude about the existence of knowledge, about the trustworthiness of the faculties of knowledge, about the excellence of his method, about the nature of the various subjects studied in school. On the other hand, he seems to have considered his doubt universal (cf. Ch. 3), in the sense in which we speak today of a universal doubt as an attempted solution of the critical problem. In the one case, he holds a non-universal, in the other, a universal doubt. Manifestly, such a position is illogical and inconsistent; but it seems to have been the position of Descartes: at times he called his doubt universal; at other
times, he was equally clear, if not more so, in considerably restricting its scope.

DESCARTES' With these remarks we may close the consi-
IMPLICIT CERTITUDES deration of those certitudes which Descartes held or affirmed more or less explicitly. Mingled with these "explicit" certitudes, are found many implicit certi-
tudes. Some of these are too important to pass over with-
out mention. In the next section, therefore, we shall exa-
mine a few of the more important of these implicit certi-
tudes.

As our first instance, we may take this passage from the Regulae:

Expositis duabus intellectus nostri operationibus, intuitu et deductione, quibus solis ad scientias addiscendas utendum esse diximus ...

Even a cursory examination of this sentence will reveal a host of implicit certitudes: Descartes is certain that he has a personality, that he has been writing, that his writing took some time, that there is such a thing as time, that he is now in the present, that he has more than two faculties, that the understanding seeks truth, that he has a mind, etc., etc. In like manner one could take every page of Descartes' writings concerning his doubt, and one would discover on each page innumerable implied certitudes such as those we have just seen.

It should be remarked here, that implicit certitudes
of the type just enumerated do not express Descartes' own attitude towards certitude. On the contrary, he objectively denied such implicit certitudes, that is, he considered himself as doubting them; but logically, he necessarily implied these certitudes. In the light of this fact, such implicit certitudes merely show concretely the psychological impossibility of a universal doubt. Descartes tried to convince himself that he doubted things about which he really possessed certitude. Again, an illogical position.

Also calling for a word or two of comment are Descartes' implicit statements of certitude about the efficacy of his method, about knowledge, about the aptitude of the mind, and about the impossibility of doubting what is self-evident. We have already seen Descartes explicitly affirm his belief in his method. We find the same certitude implied in his works. He is sure, for example, of the usefulness of the directions he gives:

Sed insuper advertendum est, maximam hujus regulae utilitatem in eo consistere ...

The statement of Rule XI also implies the same certitude:

Regula XI: Postquam aliquot propositiones simplices sumus intuiti, si ex illis aliquid aliud consequamus, utile est easdem continuo et nullibi interrupto cogitationis motu percurrere, ad mutuos illorum respectus reflectere, et plura simul, quantum fieri potest, distincte concipere: ita enim et cognitio nostra longe certior fit, et maxime augetur ingenii capacitas.

Similarly, the existence of knowledge, affirmed by
Descartes more or less explicitly, as we have seen, is constantly implied by him, as, e.g., in this passage:

... quisque firmiter sibi persuadeat, non ex magnis et obscuris rebus, sed facilibus tantum et magis obviis, scientias quantumlibet occultas esse deducendas.68

Or in this one:

... hoc in loco, ubi qua ratione aptiores red­damur ad veritates unas ab aliis deducendas, inquirimus ...69

The aptitude of the mind, a certitude likewise explicitly stated, is also implied in various places; for instance, in these lines of the Meditationes:

... ex quo de omnibus volui dubitare, nihil adhuc praeter me et Deum existere certo cog­novi ...70

Nor is it difficult to read the implications of the mind's aptitude found in the following words:

... opera e pretium esse dicimus, illa omnia, quae in propositione data sunt, ordine per­lustrare, rejiciendo illa, quae ad rem non facere aperte videbimus ...71

It appears that the mind is capable of recognizing what "order" is, what "data" are, what a "proposition" is, what "everything" is, what is "immaterial." Other similar implications of the validity of our cognitive faculty are scattered everywhere in Descartes' methodological works; so Descartes "did not in practice doubt the ability of his reason to arrive at truth and certainty ..."72
No; nor, it appears, did he doubt this in theory, either, at least at times.

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In the preceding section we have examined some of the more important explicit and implicit certitudes that were present in the mind of the doubting Descartes. We have seen that Descartes' explanations of his own doubt contain countless certitudes. It is rather important to note here that these certitudes were, in almost every case, of a speculative order: their objects were, for example, the existence of truth, certitude, science; the aptitude for truth, of our individual faculties; the efficacy of Descartes' method of doubt; the futility of Dialectics; the certitude of self-evident and of indubitable truths. This point should be borne in mind when we come to say a word or two about the metaphysical nature of Descartes' doubt.

EXTENSION OF DOUBT

Descartes, then, had, even at the very time of his doubt, many, many certitudes. But if so many things were, at least at times, consciously excluded by him from his doubt, we may ask what, in Descartes' mind, did the doubt include? Descartes certainly meant it to take in doubtful things, those things "in quibus vel minimam incertitudinis suspicionem reperiemus." And among these dubitable things, it seems that he included, at least later on, Mathematics. For in the Principia, Descartes
tells us that having now freed ourselves of our supreme doubt,

\[ \text{Non enim amplius Mathematicae veritates nobis suspectae esse debent, quia sunt maxime persevera.} \]

In the Meditationes, (AT, 7.70), Descartes likewise tells us that whereas in his supreme doubt he doubted the truths of Geometry and the like, "after I have recognized that there is a God," these truths are beyond doubt.

Besides "dubitable" things, and Mathematics, Geometry, and the like, it seems that Descartes also extended his doubt to the existence of his mind and body. This is indicated by these words:

\[ \ldots \text{statim post} \ldots \text{non amplius dubitare potui quin mens existeret; ut etiam post sextam Meditationem, in qua corporis existentiam cognovi, non amplius de ipsa potui dubitare.} \]

Lastly, Descartes, as we have seen, evidently meant his doubt to take in all sense knowledge (cf. AT, 10.514).

**CONCLUSION** By way of a final note to these arguments for and against the universality of Descartes' doubt, we should like to remark the quite obvious fact that there is a case for both sides of this question. At one time Descartes seems to hold a universal doubt; at another time, his doubt appears to be very restricted in scope. To us it seems that Descartes tried hard to hold on to a universal doubt, but found this impossible. Consequently,
he vacillated back and forth between a universal and a non-universal doubt. In a word, he was illogical and inconsistent.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER IV.

1. AT, 10.421
2. ib., 6.17
3. ib., 6.31
4. ib., 7.18
5. ib., 7.21
6. ib., 10.514
7. ib., 10.508
8. ib., 7.145
9. ib., 8.19
10. ib., 8.39
11. ib., 8.5
12. ib., 8.5
13. ib., 11.654. Although the authorship of these annotations is not certain, they were very likely written by Descartes himself.
14. Chevalier, p. 201
15. Keeling, pp. 80-81
16. Veitch, Introduction, p. 11
17. AT, 8.8
18. ib., 6.19
19. ib., 10.387-388
20. ib., 10.389-390
21. ib., 10.401
22. ib., 10.360
23. ib., 10.376
24. AT, 10.417
25. ib., 10.432
26. ib., 10.419
27. ib., 10.420
28. ib., 10.420
29. ib., 10.366-367
30. ib., 10.376
31. ib., 10.411
32. Chevalier, p. 205
33. Archives, Le Blond, p. 165
34. AT, 10.368
35. ib., 10.407
36. Études Cartésiennes, vol. 1, Chevalier, pp. 20-21
37. Chevalier, p. 205
38. AT, 10.364-368
39. ib., 10.387
40. ib., 10.408
41. ib., 10.422-423
42. ib., 10.425
43. ib., 8.323
44. ib., 10.426
45. ib., 10.442
46. ib., 1.353
47. ib., 3.360-361
48. ib., 2.37-38
49. *AT*, 9B.9-10. Descartes does not seem to consider the aptitude of the mind a veritas per se evidens, primitiva; consequently, his solution of the critical problem is logically invalid. It involves a *petitio principii*.

50. *ib.*, 8.8

51. *ib.*, 8.20

52. *ib.*, 10.366

53. *ib.*, 10.404

54. *ib.*, 6.19

55. *ib.*, 7.20. Cf., however, *AT*, 6.20-21, where Mathematics are included within the scope of the doubt.

56. *ib.*, 10.370

57. *ib.*, 6.8

58. *ib.*, 6.28

59. *ib.*, 6.22-27. For further evidence of Descartes' attitude about the absolute indubitability of revelation, cf. also *AT*, 9B.5; 8.39.

60. *ib.*, 10.425

61. *ib.*, 6.21

62. *ib.*, 10.406

63. *ib.*, 6.5-6

64. *ib.*, *ib.*

65. *ib.*, 10.400

66. *ib.*, 10.409

67. *ib.*, 10.407

68. *ib.*, 10.402

69. *ib.*, 10.405
70. AT, 7.56
71. ib., 10.438
72. Mahony, p. 40
73. AT., 8.5
74. ib., 8.17
75. ib., 7.525
CHAPTER V.
OTHER ASPECTS OF DESCARTES' DOUBT.

FICTITIOUS DOUBT?
Having examined the problem of its universality, we may now briefly inquire into the reality of Descartes' doubt. First, let us examine the evidence for the fictitiousness of the doubt. About the strongest argument is this statement in the Meditationes:

... revera esse aliquem mundum, et homines habere corpora, et similia, de quibus nemo umquam sanae mentis serio dubitavit ...

Yet, as we have seen (cf. supra, p. 43), Descartes has put these things within the pale of his doubt. This might suggest that Descartes' doubt was feigned. In the Objectiones cum Responsionibus we do find this view of Descartes' doubt:

Quicquid dixeris, nemo erit, qui persuadeatur te esse persuasum, nihil esse verum ex iis omnibus quae cognoveris ...

These are the strongest texts we have found for the unreality of Descartes' doubt.

REAL DOUBT?
Much more numerous are the indications that Descartes' doubt was a real doubt. First, there is Descartes' own testimony regarding this matter. Surely he cannot be speaking of a feigned doubt in this passage:

... sed tandem cogor fateri nihil esse ex iis quae olim vera putabam, de quo non liceat dubitare, idque non per inconsiderantiam vel levisatem, sed propter validas et meditatas rationes; ideoque etiam ab iisdem, non minus quam ab aperte
falsis, accurate deinceps assensionem esse cohibendam, si quid certi velim invenire. 

And one can see a real doubt in the attitude expressed by this sentence:

... ibi tantum agebatur de summa illa dubitatione, quam saepe metaphysicam, hyperbolicam, atque ad usum vitæ nullo modo transferendam esse inculcavi ...

What Descartes says is quite true: he insisted on his doubt at great length. Again and again he writes of it, and tries -- not with much success -- to define its nature. Throughout his works he is defending the legality and validity of this doubt. Now surely, this ceaseless explaining, this repeated defending of his doubt is a strong indication that the doubt was a real doubt. For had it been merely fictitious, Descartes could have, almost certainly would have, stated this fact in a simple, single bald sentence; and there would have been no need for him to devote so many and such cautiously worded pages to the exposition and defence of his doubt.

Speaking of his doubt often and at no little length, most of the time Descartes testifies to its realness. He tells us, for example, that

... etiamsi præceptores mei nihil me certi edocuerint ... gratias ipsis habere debo, easque nunc profecto temporis, quoniam omne id quod me docuerunt adeo dubium fuit, majores, quam si magis rationi consentaneum fuisset ...

We might quote other passages (e.g., AT, 7.263,264;
6.33) which point to a real doubt. We shall content ourselves with just two more. The serious tone of the words that follow can stand only for a very real doubt:

Animadverti ... omnia semel in vita esse ever-tenda, atque a primis fundamentis denuo incho-andum ... opportune igitur Hodie ... serio tandem et libere generali huic mearam opinionum eversioni vacabo.6

Finally, in one of his letters Descartes tells us indirectly that his doubt was real. He compares his doubt to the doubt of the sceptics, which is a real doubt. In thus placing his doubt in the same category with the doubt of the Pyrrhonic school, Descartes lets us know that he considered his own doubt as real as the doubt of the sceptics:

Bien que les Pyrrhoniiens n'ayent rien conclu de certain en suite de leurs doutes, ce n'est pas à dire qu'on ne le puisse. Et je tassererais ici de faire voir comment on s'en peut servir pour prouver l'existence de Dieu ...7

So far we have seen the Philosopher's own testimony to the reality of his doubt. Most present day writers on Descartes that we have examined seem not to touch this aspect of the doubt at all. Those that do are all for a real doubt. M. Verneaux is especially clear upon this matter:

... si le doute a pour fonction de combattre une habitude invétérée (the habit of relying on the senses), il s'ensuit qu'il est une démarche volontaire et psychologiquement réelle ... Le temps donné à la première Méditation ... 'manebo ob-stinate in hac meditatione defixus' (AT, 7.23);
ce qui ne se comprend que si le doute doit réelle-
s'imposer à l'esprit, "balancer" les anciens
préjugés (ib., 7.22) et désaccoutumer d'y donner
créance.

Il n'y a donc pas lieu, selon nous, d'opposer son
caractère méthodique et son caractère réelle ...
Le Discours, destiné au grand public, peut bien
en quelques endroits laisser entendre que Des-
cartes se contente d'un doute fictif, mais l'en-
semble des explications données coupe court à
cette alternative ...

Father Mahony very plainly asserts the reality of the
doubt:

All his previous knowledge, he ... doubted,
not merely by a negative, but by a real, posi-
tive doubt ...

One more indication of the reality of the doubt may
be given. As every one knows, Descartes was very careful
to form for himself a provisional code of morals:

... affin que ie ne demeurasse point irresolu
en mes actions, pendant que la raison m'obli-
geroit de l'estre en mes iugemens ; ie me
formay une morale par prouision ...

If Descartes' doubt had been fictitious, what need had he
to draw up rules of conduct? Besides, when a man indulges
in a fictitious doubt, he can scarcely be said "to be
irresolute in his judgments!"

Since it would seem that Descartes' doubt was a real
doubt, it, of course, follows that he should have excluded
from it all self-evident truths, -- consequently the apti-
tude for truth of the mind and of our faculties of knowing:
of the senses, of our reasoning power, our immediate
analytic judgments, our consciousness.

In the case of a real doubt, Descartes should also have refrained from ever including in it all those countless derived certitudes for which he possessed objective evidence. Such derived certitudes he did have about the usefulness of a classical education, for instance, or about the existence of certitude in others, or about mathematics, geometry, and like subjects. If Descartes did at any time include any such self-evident or derived certitudes in his doubt, as he seems to have done, his "real" doubt in regard to these things was no more than illusory. For one cannot really doubt that which one sees to be so.

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METAPHYSICAL DOUBT

We have shown that very probably Descartes' doubt was not universal, and that it seems to have been real. It remains to explain its metaphysical nature. Descartes himself affirms this quality of the doubt:

... clare patet, me ibi tantum loquutum esse de morali sciendi modo, qui sufficit ad vitam regendum, et quem a Metaphysico illo, de quo hic questio est, plurimum differre saepe inculcavi ...11

... studiose omnia quae ad pietatem, ac generaliter ad mores spectant, ab hac abdicatione, exceperim ...12

M. Verneaux throws considerable light on the meaning of this adjective "metaphysical," as Descartes uses it of his
This third meaning of metaphysical is further distinguished in a two-fold manner:

En tant même que "métaphysique," il a une double fonction: l'une, générale, concerne la certitude des principes et des facultés de connaissance; l'autre, spéciale, concerne l'existence d'un être pouvant servir de principe à la connaissance du réel ... Méthode pour assurer les fondements de notre connaissance du vrai et de notre connaissance de l'existence, le doute est également dans les deux cas métaphysique.14

To tell the truth, although Descartes claims that he has spoken at great length of his metaphysical doubt, he never clearly tells us just what he himself understands by a metaphysical doubt. From his use of the term, it seems that he mistakenly believed there was but one true kind of certitude, absolute or metaphysical certitude (cf. Chapter 1). This, of course, is untrue. Hypothetical certitude is as truly certitude as absolute certitude. Psychologically there is little difference between the two.

From this it follows that if I am morally certain of something, I cannot doubt that thing, not even with a metaphysical doubt, whatever that term may be taken to
mean. At the most, I can examine that moral certitude, to see whether it may not indeed be a metaphysical certitude. To do this, however, is not to doubt the fact which forms the content of my moral certitude; it is at most to doubt whether the moral certitude may not be metaphysical. If, then, by metaphysical doubt Descartes understood an actual doubt concerning the contents of his moral certitudes, he was illogical. One cannot doubt that of which one is certain, though that certitude be merely moral. Descartes, it seems, was guilty of precisely this error.
FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER V.

1. AT, 7.16
2. ib., 7.258
3. ib., 7.21-22
4. ib., 7.460
5. ib., 10.516
6. ib., 7.17-18
7. ib., 2.38-39
8. Archives, Verneaux, pp. 28-30
9. Mahony, p. 31
10. AT, 6.22
11. ib., 7.475
12. ib., 7.476
13. Archives, Verneaux, p. 26
14. ib., p. 27
CONCLUSION.

In our Introduction we hinted at the obscurity which surrounds Descartes' doubt. The extension and nature of this doubt is one of Descartes' contradictory ambiguities -- ambiguities he makes no clean-cut effort to reconcile.

By way of conclusion, we should like briefly to sum up the evidence on each side of the question this thesis set out to answer: Was Descartes' doubt universal?

We found many statements in Descartes himself which seemed to indicate a universal doubt. Descartes tells us (cf. p. 17, supra) that he wished "to examine all his opinions;" for, he says, we may doubt about "all things." Certainly he seems to have doubted at least all the knowledge that came to him through his senses. However, as far as sense knowledge is concerned, we saw that Descartes' doubt could at most have been but illusory. Such was Descartes' own testimony for a universal doubt.

As for the testimony of others, we saw that M. Verneaux and Mr. Sewall held the universality of the doubt.

Finally, we ventured the opinion that Descartes' "universal" doubt, in so far as it was "universal" was not a doubt, but an "abstraction." This seemed to be the import of the well known example of the barrel and apples.

Numerous as were the statements favouring a universal doubt, those indicating a non-universal doubt were far
more numerous. To begin with, we heard Descartes denying the possibility of a universal doubt. We heard him say that he aimed to reject only dubitable, uncertain, unreasoned opinions. When he spoke of doubting "all things," Descartes sometimes quite apparently meant only "all dubitable things." But in this he was illogical; for it was impossible to doubt some of the things he considered "dubitable."

We saw, further, that M. Chevalier, and Mr. Keeling, both considered Descartes' doubt as non-universal.

Such was the general testimony backing the non-universality of the doubt. The particular evidence also supporting this view was very copious. First there were the many explicit certitudes accompanying Descartes' explanations of his doubt. Chief of these certitudes were those concerning non-existing things and mathematics. Then there were the certitudes dealing with certitude itself, and with the existence of truth and falsity. Moreover, we found Descartes to be sure of the existence of four faculties of knowledge, and of the trustworthiness of these faculties. Besides this, Descartes doubted neither self-evident judgments nor ideas. He was certain of the aptitude of his cognitive faculties to attain truth. And we must not omit to mention the capital certitude on which Descartes built his philosophy, the certitude of his own
existence. Indeed, that truth was the "limit to his doubt." Then there were the important certitudes dealing with faith and with morality. Likewise worthy of mention, are the certitudes concerning the efficacy of his method and the futility of dialectics. Last among the explicit certitudes were those concerning the study of Language, of Poetry, Rhetoric, Medicine, etc.

Mingled with these explicit certitudes we also discovered countless implicit certitudes. We found Descartes not merely explicitly, but also implicitly certain of the efficacy of his method, of the existence of knowledge, of the aptitude of the mind, of the indubitability of self-evident truths.

Such is the evidence for and against the universality of the doubt. The reader is free to embrace whatever side of the question he prefers. To us it seems that the hodgepodge of doubts and certitudes which we have examined shows Descartes' inconsistency and lack of logic. He wanted "to doubt all;" he tried to persuade himself he did and built his system as if he did -- but found he could not. As a result, his writings show illogicality, strife, vacillation. At times he calls his doubt universal; at other times, and far more frequently, he tells us that it is not universal.
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L.D.S.
The thesis, "An Inquiry into the Universality of Descartes' Doubt", written by Joseph M. C. Osuch, S.J., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Father Lefebvre  
September 19, 1940

Father Byrne  
October 8, 1940