

METHOD AND JUSTIFICATION IN DESCARTES' MEDITATIONS

MÉTODO E JUSTIFICAÇÃO NAS MEDITAÇÕES DE DESCARTES

Luis Fernando BIASOLI

Doutorado em Filosofia PUCRS (2011). Pós-Doutorado em Filosofia do século XVII (Descartes-Espinosa) 2018 (PUCRS). Professor de Bioética da Faculdade Fátima e da Universidade de Caxias do Sul (UCS).
E-mail: luisbiasoli@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The great concern of Cartesian epistemology is to ground the certainty of truth in a clear and distinct way. To do so, the author uses the skeptical resource to conquer truths that are immune to doubt and can be considered as undoubted. Our article aims to present what Descartes meant by method and how it ascended from the mathematical field; and, moreover, how the method implied the discovery and ultimate foundation of metaphysics. Through an analytical-critical exploratory conceptual investigation, we seek to present a defense of the centrality of the Cartesian method as *a conditio sine qua non*, to understand the main philosophical-epistemological theses advocated in the *Meditations on First Philosophy*. As a result of the work, it is concluded that the method is not a minor issue within Cartesianism, but only from its follow-up and the correct observance of the order of discovery it is possible to substantiate, undoubtedly, all the ultimate truths, both of metaphysics and of the sciences.

KEYWORDS: Method. Truth. Descartes. Certainty. Order. Justification

RESUMO:

A grande preocupação da epistemologia cartesiana é fundamentar a certeza da verdade de uma forma clara e distinta. Para tanto, o autor vale-se do recurso cético, para conquistar verdades que sejam imunes à dúvida e possam ser consideradas como indubitáveis. Nosso artigo objetiva apresentar o que Descartes entendia por método e como este ascendia do campo matemático; e, ademais, como o método implicava à descoberta e à fundamentação última da metafísica. Por meio de uma investigação conceitual exploratória analítico-crítico, busca-se apresentar uma defesa da centralidade do método cartesiano como *conditio sine qua non*, para se entender as principais teses filosófico-epistemológicas advogadas nas *Meditações Metafísicas*. Como desfecho do trabalho, conclui-se que o método não é uma questão menor dentro do cartesianismo, mas unicamente de seu seguimento e da observância correta da ordem da descoberta é possível fundamentar, indubitavelmente, todas as verdades últimas, tanto da metafísica como das ciências.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Método. Verdade. Descartes. Certeza. Ordem. Justificação.

INTRODUCTION

One of the great legacies and one of the strongest epistemological theses defended by Descartes¹ and also of the best known, is the defense of method as a *sine qua non* condition of doing philosophy or justifying truth undoubtedly. Developing a method that could be accepted without question as a generator of scientific-metaphysical truths was one of the scopes of the French thinker and mathematician who inscribed his name in the history of Western ideas. Even though his theory can be questioned, because it was influenced by geometry and mathematics, its fruits and derivations are still very salient and resist time, even though almost four centuries have passed since the publication and production of his work.

The objective of this article is to present what Cartesian thought defends as a method and its indispensability for the discovery of new truths. It can be seen that there are many comments and interpretations on the Cartesian method based only on the work *Discourse of the Method*, of 1637; but what one must really pay attention to in order to understand his thought is the method he uses to develop and present the certainty of metaphysical truths in his masterpiece *Meditations on First Philosophy*² of 1641. This work strictly follows the method of the analytical way, in which truths are discovered by those who follow the meditative path through a solitary reflection that cannot be confused with solipsism.

The methodology that we will follow, to accomplish our objective, will be the analytical-critical, through which a presentation of the Cartesian ideas on the topic will be made, separating the theoretical points into the smallest possible explanatory divisions, and, from this, the reader will have the opportunity to understand the whole path of discovery of the certainty of the first truths presented. To this end, primary sources are used, that is, we reference our positions, through the author's own thought with quotations extracted from *Meditations on First Philosophy*, the *Objections and Answers*, as well as the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*; in addition to reviewing the literature of the author's main commentators and debating them.

¹ The Descartes references are taken from the edition by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, cited as AT, being the standard edition of Descartes' complete works and the standard reference in the research community.

² The *Meditations on First Philosophy* is referred to using the first and original edition of the work published in 1641. While still alive, Descartes authorised a new publication and edition of the work that came to public attention in 1647. This is a translation into French made by the Duke of Luynes, however, this work presents some controversies and conceptual differences, which is not the purpose here to discuss, and will not be used in this article.

The work will be divided into three sections. In the first, the reader will have a panoramic presentation of the method advocated by Descartes and how his approach allows the overcoming of skepticism for the establishment of epistemologically undoubted truths. The path or discovery of clear and distinct knowledge is presented as follows: from the simplest to the complex, *the facilioribus ad difficiliora*. Then, it is evident the centrality of the method to the justification of clear and distinct truths and how from this certainty can be created scientific theories that are based on the paradigmatic model of the mathematical sciences. It will be explained that the Cartesian method can be presented or exercised in two epistemological ways, that is, through a double way of demonstrating: the analytical way and the synthetic way. The two modes of demonstration differ not so much by what is demonstrated; but, above all, by the manner of making the demonstration. It will be held that the object of order is to express a general and necessary condition, from which he who seeks to demonstrate the right knowledge, justifiably, must satisfy.

In the third section, we will analyze the correlation that exists between the discovery through the method of the first truth, that is, of certainty as a thought of one's own existence, that is, as a thought and the possibility of the discovery of new truths. The following question will also be confronted, among other relevant points of the conceptual imbrications between method and certainty of truth: why does the first certainty of the truth about one's own existence not refer to another existence, but has to be limited to the meditator who walks the path of the discovery of knowledge? At the end of the work, some concluding notes are presented, which, without the pretension of exhausting the theme, seek to contribute to a better interpretation of the importance of the method as a centrality and hard core in Cartesian thought.

1 OVERCOMING SKEPTICISM AND THE METHOD

It is known that *Meditations on First Philosophy* represent the best and most mature philosophical work of Descartes – his intellectual apex -, either by the ability to develop, methodically, a stage of acquisition of new truths, to justify metaphysics, through a rigorous and well-designed mathematical-geometric model of discoveries of the certainty of the founding and structuring truths of science. It is important to point out that he was born at a stage of his personal life in which he faced serious adversity and many turbulences and vicissitudes: such as the astonishing and terrifying fear in the contemporary scientific community of him, in the seventeenth century, occasioned by the condemnation of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), because of his revolutionary theories.

The demonstration of the first truths, that is, that the subjects of metaphysics cannot be truly exposed outside a set or an order, otherwise they would already be doomed beforehand to epistemological failure and fallacious discourse represents one of its main metaphysical-scientific legacies. There is nothing more important, according to the author of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* of 1641, philosophically, than to be able to present the demonstrations of a mathematical form for metaphysics, according to a letter to Mersenne, dated October 30, 1640 (Descartes, AT, III, p. 173). In the search for the path of metaphysical justification of truth, Descartes teaches

paradigmatically that one should not occupy oneself with any object about which one cannot acquire such a great certainty as that of the demonstrations of Arithmetic and Geometry (Descartes, AT, X, p. 365).

The justification of a clear and distinct truth does not depend on the number of arguments that are listed; but, above all, it is correlated with the precise and necessary order in which these are presented and demonstrated in the chain of reasons for the discovery of truth. Thus, truth does not necessarily derive from a quantitative factor; but it depends, first and genuinely, on a qualitative aspect, namely, on the exact precision as to the place in the order of the reasons for the discovery of the indubitability of metaphysical truths on which rests the ultimate argument for the justification of a truth.

M. Gueroult (1953) warns that - *nexus* or *series rationum* - does not possess the vital hermeneutic importance for most commentators on Descartes. Even in interpreters like Hamelin (1949), who seem to follow the order of the discovery of truths; however, they see in it only a biographical succession and not a rational chain with importance or *conditio sine qua non* to the realization of the indubitability of clear and distinct truth. Most studies deal in a watertight and disconnected way with the themes that form the hard set of ideas presented by the French philosopher: Freedom according to Descartes; God according to Descartes, The Vocation of Descartes (Gueroult, 1953, p. 13). To corroborate this assertion that these commentators are not interpreting the author of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* to their satisfaction, Descartes himself is quoted in a letter to Mersenne of December 24, 1640, in which he expounds what could be considered one of the central elements to understand his entire philosophy:

It is to be noted in all this that I have written that I did not follow the order of the matters, but only that of the reasons, that is, I did not seek to say in the same place all that belongs to a matter, because it would be impossible for me to prove it well and having some reasons that must be taken from much further away from each other, but reasoning in order, a *facilioribus ad difficiliora*, I have deduced that I can, both by one matter and another, that which is, in my view, the true way to find and explain the truth well (Descartes, AT, III, p. 266).

Thus, to know, for Descartes, implies being aware that one knows, in which certainty is a state proper to one who is before a knowledge, that is, a property not of the things or of the subjects that are known; but, rather, it is a characteristic epistemic state which concerns the subject who knows and who possesses the certainty of truth, undoubtedly. Therefore, there is only certainty, because there is an ontological subject that has a very specific and peculiar epistemological relation to things that can be known, as the finite mind possesses. When subject and object are in this relationship that forms the act of knowing, one can ask: what are the implications arising for both that are born from this epistemological symbiosis?

All knowledge, it can be said, is reduced to intuition, to the immediate vision of essences or simple natures, where deduction - a form of constructive reasoning admitted by the philosopher - consists in connecting, connecting to each other, the various intuitions under the condition that the relationship between each one is perceived, also, intuitively as true. The certainty of the truth that the sciences remain united in their origin - despite

all their apparent diversity - only justifies, by itself, their intelligibility in the gnosiologic field. In this way, Descartes effected the transition from the unity of science to the exclusive assumption of certainty as the only permissible epistemological modality. Therefore, the unity of science is established in the unification of the modalities (Marion, 1997, p. 48).

For Gueroult (1953), on the other hand, the conditions enabling the certain knowledge of metaphysical truths are different from the criteria that in themselves allow external bodies to be known with certainty. Thus, the chain of right and true knowledge is not the same as the knowledge of the reality of the outer bodies. Supported by the Rules for the Direction of the Mind, Rule XVII (Descartes, AT, X, p. 418), Descartes holds that known objects, in order, must be considered differently, according to the order in which they are known or the order of the real external existence of things or bodies.

In this way, by following the analytical order, one starts from the certain knowledge of my self that - as the first truth for the subject - is, for me, the first principle. For Descartes, it is impossible that one can think of anything or something without having, at the same time, the idea of our soul or finite mind as a thing capable of thinking about all that one thinks (Descartes, Letter to Mersenne, July, 1641; AT, III, p. 394). This first undoubted knowledge makes possible, by following the order of the discoveries, the knowledge of the certainty of the truth of the existence of God with clear and distinct criteria, that is, the knowledge that the idea of the perfect has an objective value, and then, in its limits, the knowledge of the objective value of clear and distinct ideas and, also, of the objective value of obscure and confused ideas. Thus, the path of knowledge always goes from the simple to the complex, *the facillioribus ad difficiliora* (Gueroult, 1953, p. 26).

The known object does not pass inert to the determinations that the subject imprints on the known thing. This was one of the great innovations introduced by Cartesian thought, because the known object is never fully embraced or understood in its ontological integrality by the act of knowing. It is noteworthy that the Cartesian epistemological thesis is even stronger; for divine foreordination governs all the laws of the universe, and therefore of human knowledge. There is no order, no law, no reason of goodness and truth that does not depend on divine omnipotence, otherwise God would not be at all indifferent in creating things (Descartes, AT, IX, 235).

The possibility of knowing is inscribed in the epistemological subject and is conditioned by the potentialities that the creator has determined. Thus, things are true because they were established by God and not the other way around; therefore, the truth absolutely depends on God (Descartes, AT, I, 149). Divine omnipotence governs all the principles of the intelligibility of the real as the principle of non-contradiction, the true and the good (Descartes, AT, V, p. 224). Descartes explains:

Now experience leads us to know that all the feelings which nature has given us are such as I have just said; and therefore nothing is found in them which does not make evident the power and goodness of God, who produced them (Descartes, AT IX, p. 70).

Metaphysical truth, for the Father of Modernity, implies to excel in the primary concern of all philosophy, that is, to place oneself far from knowledge that is not legitimized by an intellectual source *a solo intellectu percipi* (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 34, l. 3). It may seem, initially, that the Meditations advocate an apology for the christian faith, that is, a book that defends the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. This is partly true, but it is not consistent with all the truth and intention of the author, for the work advances, and unfolds in a step forward into the field of epistemology; for what is first certain and undoubted are the ontologies of ideas. So where is the new in the matter of metaphysics in Cartesianism? Are the subjects that are in the subtitle of the work? (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 13).

The novelty in the *corpus* of Cartesian philosophy lies in the methodical way of grounding the certainty of metaphysical truths, by means of the criterion of clarity and distinction which it proposes, in order to distinguish obscure and confused knowledge from clear and distinct truth. Descartes sought the unquestionable foundations of knowledge, to establish something firm and constant in the sciences, that is, "*si quid aliquando firmum & mansarum cupiam in scienciis stabilire*" (Descartes, AT, VII, p. 17, l. 6-7). Thus, right and true knowledge is the goal of speculation of the Cartesian system; the more secure the founding metaphysical points, the greater will be the epistemological achievements arising from the certainty or indubitability of knowledge of the outer physical world.

To arrive at such certainty, Descartes needs to distinguish the types of knowledge into three categories: incomplete knowledge, complete knowledge, and perfect knowledge.

For there is much difference between having an entirely perfect knowledge, of which people could never be assured, if God Himself has not revealed it to them, and having a perfect knowledge to this point that we know that it is not represented imperfect by some abstraction of our spirit. So when I said that he failed to fully conceive of a thing, it was not my intention to say that our conception should be whole and perfect, but only that it should be very distinct, to know that this thing was complete (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 172).

In this way, the human being can therefore conceive completely, conceive himself distinctly. For Descartes, perfect knowledge is the knowledge that only God can have. Finite creatures have access to full knowledge. Human knowledge that is finite, without being certain of attaining the totality of the properties of a thing, can be certain of the distinction between one thing and another. It is sufficient for this that one conceives of each of these things as complete, that is, that the idea of one thing has nothing of the other. Incomplete knowledge may be clear, but it entails the abstraction of mind that the other two kinds of knowledge do not, as he explains in a letter addressed to Gibief on January 19, 1642 (Descartes, AT, III, p. 475).

The certain knowledge of truth, in clear and distinct criteria, is not an epistemological qualification among other possible ones, as if there were a deceptive or contingent knowledge of phenomena; but it is the only way to know that allows us to achieve science. Thus, it becomes impossible to assume another modality of scientific discourse that does not have certainty as a determining criterion. The homogeneity of the object of science and its modality – homogeneity that presupposes the very imbalance of its relation – entails the reduction of truth to the

psychological experience of certainty. Marion (1997, p. 51) interprets this fact, through a psychological reading of the importance of certainty in the phenomenon of knowledge, differently from what Descartes intended to be a metaphysical certainty.

Cottingham maintains that philosophical knowledge, held by Descartes, has three main characteristics that can be synthesized into: unity, purity, and certainty. The great controversial issue was the rejection, on the part of Cartesianism, of the scholastic conception of science as a set of separate and isolated disciplines with their own methods and levels of rigor. It is never too much to remember that Galileo Galilei was criticized by the Italian scholastics for having used mathematical reasoning in the natural sciences (1989, p. 41).

While Gilson (1984, p. 176) argues, regarding the relationship of physics with Cartesian metaphysics, that one risks making a serious mistake, if in Descartes one forgets that one cannot think of the possibility of this separation. The author of *Meditations on First Philosophy* could not start from sensible effects, to substantiate clarity and distinction; because, at this point in their metaphysics, the existence of the body itself and the sensible outer world are still the object of doubt. It would, however, be improper to maintain that if Descartes leaves aside the sensible effects and part of the need to seek the cause of the content of an idea, he does so because he is not left with a different alternative (Teixeira, 1980, p. 76-7).

Knowledge implies, therefore, by its sole characteristic and criterion, that it does not involve any abstraction of the mind. The separation, introduced thanks to the modal distinction, is that of the principal attribute (by which the essence of the substance is known) and of its particular modes. As for the distinction between the principal attribute and the substance, it is only of pure reason, and does not confer upon the thought substance anything that can be defined otherwise than by thought.

The main attribute is only that which in the complete substance is marked as the *substratum* of the modes. It is the very thought that is substance and manifests as such since I know it as being part of it. Thus, substance is the main attribute in your being itself. Between thought and substance there is no real difference. Thus, they are in themselves entirely identical and correspond to two different ways of perceiving the same thing, whether referring to what is thought or to what is thought with thought (Gueroult, p. 56). Descartes differentiates between distinguishing and abstracting:

There is a great difference (between distinguishing and abstracting); for in distinguishing a substance from its accidents, we must consider one and the other, which serves much to know the substance; whereas if we separate only by abstraction this substance from its accidents, that is, if we consider all without thinking only of the accidents, this prevents us from knowing it well, for it is by accidents that the nature of the substance is manifested (Descartes, IX, p. 216).

Knowledge is thus complete for us as long as no abstraction of spirit is made and one can reason from complete knowledge, after divine truthfulness has been assured. Human knowledge is limited, for it knows completely, but it does not know all the properties of things. One can, therefore, know a thing as complete without being assured of knowing it perfectly (Alquié, 1999, p. 661). In order to be able to advance in the justification of knowledge, in order to show how things are known, it is necessary to follow a method, as has been seen, otherwise one does not conquer the clear and distinct truth about things. The importance of method in Cartesian philosophy is a thought-provoking theme that already challenged the first commentators and, even today, causes controversy in the circles of Cartesian interpretation. The method gains centrality in Cartesian thought, that is, the questions arise: is the method **a sine qua non condition**, in order to understand the metaphysical project of Descartes? Is there truth in the Metaphysical Meditations that is not within an order that justifies it? This will be the scope of the next section.

2 THE CENTRALITY OF METHOD

Without a doubt, the rescue of method is one of the most fundamental traits in Cartesian work and one that has greatly divided commentators. For Gueroult (1953), certainly, he wrote his name in the history of criticism and interpretation of Cartesian thought, because no commentator took to such a high level of rigor the demands of the method, developing a brilliant thesis, whether we agree with it or not, on Cartesianism.

In his classic work *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons* (1953) there is a new and paradigmatic stage in the exegesis of Cartesian texts, because from it all later theses on Descartes need to be confronted with the detailed exposition of thought that defends the epistemological supremacy of the methodical order (order of reasons), in order to have ensured the certainty of metaphysical truths. One can agree or disagree with the Gueroultine thesis, but not be indifferent to it.

M. Gueroult (1953) starts from the principle: if the analytic order is the only one, to prove the valid demonstration of the metaphysical truths of philosophy, and if the Metaphysical Meditations - which are rigorously developed according to this order - allow only to understand at once the whole of the doctrine; Then there is no other means of understanding the work than to bring to light this order by which it alone can effectively demonstrate the truth.

Thus, the thought of the Father of Modernity can only be understood within the order of reasons and Cartesian philosophy is seen as a rigid and well-constructed monobloc that leaves no room for another form of justification of truth. The Cartesian system can be generated by deduction from evident truths and the method followed is that of Euclid in his Elements of Geometry. However, Alquié

does not agree that Cartesian thought forms a rigid and singular system, since there is a development of Descartes' theses by subjects (Alquié, 1950, p. 5).

Z. Loparic (1997) argues that many elements of Descartes' philosophy are established by mere analogy to empirical models; thus, they are in no way deduced from evident first principles. Several elements of cartesian doctrine are accepted, essentially, for pragmatic reasons. However, Descartes is forceful in several Letters to his interlocutors, defending the primacy of order as a necessary condition for the edification of knowledge; for, by means of order, one could know a priori all the various forms of the essences of the outer bodies, for without order one would have to be content to guess them a posteriori and by their effects, as Descartes explains in a letter to Mersenne of May 10, 1632 (Descartes, AT, I, 250-252).

Another controversial aspect is whether the method used in the Meditations was really the analytical one, as followed by Euclid. However, all historians of mathematics agree that the method used by Euclid is synthetic. Therefore, M. Gueroult would be mistaken about the nature of the method followed by Descartes in his greatest work. (LOPARIC, 1977, p. 12). However, the former student of La Flèche states that all his opinions are so united and are so united and so much together and dependent on each other that it would not be possible to appropriate one without having the knowledge of all (Descartes, AT, I, p. 562).

Descartes constructs a new philosophy that is based on method, following an order. But what does he himself mean by order? Here's the answer,

Order consists only in that the things proposed first must be known without the aid of the following, and that the following things must be arranged in such a way that they are demonstrated only by the things that precede them. And I certainly endeavored, as much as I could, to follow this order in my Meditations. And it is what led me not to deal in the Second with the distinction between the spirit and the body, but only in the Sixth, and to omit many things in this whole treatise, because they presupposed the explanation of many others (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 121).

The concept of order is not the only one for the total understanding of the Cartesian method. He also distinguishes a double way of demonstrating: the analytical way and the synthetic way. The two modes of demonstration differ not so much by what is demonstrated; but, above all, by the way of demonstrating. The purpose of the order is to express a general condition, from which all methods that seek to demonstrate knowledge must satisfy (Landim Filho, 1992, p. 28). However, the method is not limited to order, it is subdivided into analysis and synthesis.

This double concern is in the Cartesian scope, as he writes and develops his works and his thought. The exposition of his ideas is not dictated solely by the concern to put the evidence in order, that is, in a chain of reasons. But, moreover, for the purpose of ensuring their communication and their teaching to other people. Therefore, the order of exposition must take into account these two aspects:

the logical chaining of ideas and the psychology of the people who will make the journey of knowledge (Gouhier, 1962, p. 104). But why does Descartes follow the analytical path in his most important work? Because the analytical way demonstrates how the judgment was discovered, that is, by using this method, the reader can recognize that the judgment is true, and, above all, what makes it true and, moreover, how one has access to the truth of the judgment (Landim Filho, 1992, p. 28). Descartes maintains that the way to demonstrate is twofold. One way is done by analysis or resolution and the other by synthesis or composition,

The analysis shows the true way in which a thing has been methodically discovered, and reveals how the effects depend on the causes, so that if the reader wishes to follow it and cast his eyes carefully upon all that it contains, he will understand the thing thus demonstrated no less perfectly, and will not make it any less his own than if he himself had discovered it (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 121).

In an analytic proof not only is each step of demonstration justified, but this occurs in synthetic proofs; But it is also indicated the way to produce each stage of the test. (Landim Filho, 1992, p. 28). To understand the analysis, one needs a more refined mind, freed from the disturbances of sensitivity. Readers who are not very fond of a more attentive reading or little attentive and let themselves slip easily, can not reach the necessary conclusions.

If the analytic order is the only one to prove the valid demonstration of philosophy, and if the meditations, which are rigorously developed according to this order, allow us to understand the Cartesian corpus with certainty; then there is no other method to understand the Metaphysical Meditations, but to highlight the order in which they demonstrate their truths (Gueroult, 1953, p. 24).

Following the analytical order, one starts from the certain knowledge of myself which, as the first truth for the subject, is the first principle. This first knowledge then makes possible that of the existence of God, that is, the knowledge that certainty of the truth of the idea of the perfect has an objective value. Thus, the knowledge of the existence of God provides the knowledge of the objective value of clear and distinct ideas and after that of the objective value of obscure and confused ideas.

Descartes justifies the truth *a facilioribus ad difficiliora*. Knowledge about God is just a cog in a wheel like other knowledge in this chain of well-linked relationships that goes back from condition to condition gradually exhausting the content of our soul, legitimizing, each time, a new kind of knowledge and determining what are the limits, if they exist, of human knowledge (Gueroult, 1953, p. 26).

Marion (1997) argues that the methodical constitution of knowledge implies a universal reference to the ego, that is, even before the thing to be known has been determined, it depends on the primordial relationship it maintains with the ego. In this way, all things can only access their essential truth by submitting to the conditions

of the method itself. In response to the unity of science, it is necessary to affirm the finitude of the world, not the finitude of the world as a physical universe, but the finitude of the world as the sum of objects subjected to the conditions of intellection (Marion, 199, p. 208-10).

Moreover, the former student of La Flèche states that it is necessary to treat the subjects that should be considered, separately, in his specific Meditation (AT, III, 226-7). It is sufficient, therefore, to examine the questions grouped together in each Meditation to know immediately that they are inseparable and are all situated together and in the same place in the chain of reasons. One should be able to explain why such a question is dealt with before or after a given theme. For example, one should answer the following questions: why is the problem of error treated after the proof by effects and before the ontological proof? (Guerout, 1953, p. 21). Should one first know the certainty of God's existence or the certainty of the truth of our existence? How does Descartes reach the certainty of the truth of the existence of the *res cogitans*? Can the existence of the self be affirmed in time or is it a limited truth dependent on the instant? This is what will be investigated in the following questions.

3 THE CERTAINTY OF THE EXISTENCE OF *RES COGITANS*

For Descartes, the certainty of the truth of the existence of the knowing subject is the simplest of all knowledge, for it is the first knowledge acquired and bears the mark of indubitability. The certainty of the truth of one's own existence precedes all other knowledge, of whatever order and nature. The certainty of the truth about existence is not the certainty of the truth about any existence external to the subject who knows, extrinsic to him; but the indubitable knowledge of the subject who knows himself *ego sum, ego existo* (Descartes, AT, VII, p. 25, l. 12).

Why can the first certainty of the truth about existence not refer to another existence, but has to be limited to the meditator who walks the path of the discovery of knowledge? Because certainty is a state that concerns the one who knows, solely and exclusively, and can only be an attribution of someone who is in act knowing himself, while existing, every time he enunciates it or conceives it quod a me profertur, vel mente concipitur (Descartes, AT, VII, p. 25, l. 12-13). There is no other certainty involved in this first knowledge, because it does not depend on any other type of knowledge, it is self-sufficient, that is, in itself, there is the criterion that guarantees the certainty of its truth.

If the being who knows could derive the certainty of the first truth from knowledge other than itself, the knowledge of this certainty would be of a different order of justification. For Descartes (AT, VII, p. 14), the legitimacy of knowing about one's own existence is not defining what the essence of something is until this moment of meditation, because it is only assuming the thesis that while conceiving oneself, one is undoubtedly assured of knowledge about one's existence. Descartes states:

Certainly not, I existed without a doubt, if I persuaded myself, or merely thought something. But there is some, I do not know which, very powerful and very cunning deceiver who uses all his

industry to deceive me all the time. So there is no doubt that I am, if he deceives me; and however much he deceives me, he can never make me anything as long as I think I am something. So that, after having thought about it enough and having carefully examined all things, I must finally conclude and have as constant that this proposition, I am I exist, is necessarily true every time I say it or conceive it in my spirit (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 19).

This certainty, however, is very limited in its temporality. A certainty marked by instantaneity, as expressed by Descartes to Elizabeth in a letter of May 21, 1643 (Descartes, AT, III, p. 665). Thus, it cannot be extended to the recognition of other truths. The recognition of truth remains enclosed within the limits of temporal fugacity, that is, within the limits of the permanence of the while *quandiu* is perceived (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 25, 1.9). Outside this time, there are still no conditions to ensure the certainty of the truth of any type of knowledge.

Therefore, if the cogito were a model of truth recognition that could be used for all situations, one could not know the world or external objects, because the certainty of the cogito is still very tenuous and precarious, preventing it from spreading to other fields and epistemic domains such as the truths of medicine and morality, restricting itself only to the scope of internal knowledge.

The epistemic problem for Descartes was never to explain how the idea originally posited itself as a representation of an object; but rather to examine how I can have a clear and distinct representation of the object (problem of method) and how I prove that such an idea has objective value (gnosiological and metaphysical problem). The famous Cartesian analysis of the piece of wax indicating that the idea of the understanding is a necessary condition of the representation of things is a first step in this journey, but the initial position of the idea as a representation of an object remains a "primitive fact" (as Reinhold), and which Descartes calls the "first notion" (Gueroult, p. 1953, p. 141).

The simplicity of the meditator's knowledge of existence is opposed to the certainty of true knowledge about God; because, while it is intuited, nothing can shake it, as Descartes explains in a letter to Gibief on January 19, 1642 (Descartes, AT, III, pp. 475-476). This can also be referenced through Cartesian analyzes on the epistemological substance of the self in the works *Answers to the I Objections* (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 95) and in the *IV Objections* (Descartes, AT, IX, 174-175). That is, its certainty is justified by itself, and does not need any deduction or any other intellectual resource.

It is essential in the progress of Cartesian metaphysics that the first certainty reaches only a limited and contingent thought and not, at first, already a universal thought, capable of sustaining itself, as the system of truths. Therefore, the necessity that is imposed on reason is primarily a fact of consciousness, as Rodis-Lewis (1971, p. 252) argues; and not a truth of law that can be used as a criterion for recognizing truth at all moments of time. The certainty of the truth of the proposition I am, I exist manages to break in the ephemerality of the instant itself the hyperbolic doubt and the doubt

of the evil genius. It is a certainty that shatters the skepticism that befalls the universe of the justification of knowledge, but it is incapable of establishing a knowledge that lasts in time or that has a guarantee of certainty in each of the moments or instants that constitute time.

Thought, before being a thought of something, is a thought about itself. In Cartesian metaphysics, the knowledge of self-consciousness precedes the certainty of the truth of the knowledge of things. Thus, I know things only after I know myself as a thinking subject. Awareness of things is a mode of self-knowledge or self-consciousness. In Cartesianism, all thought is self-consciousness, for it is a necessary condition for knowing the world and things that I first know myself as a thinking subject. The certainty of the first truth is the knowledge of ipseity. This abstract being is a real being, and, in its own kind, the most real there is, because pure intelligence involves and conditions all thinking modes and is found in it all modes - regardless of their complexity. If the cogito were immediately for myself the most abstract and the most universal being, it would not even be the most real, much less the simplest, and would therefore be incapable of founding science (Gueroult, 1953, p. 58).

Even if the thoughts that the finite mind possesses of the external world have no correspondence or connection with any reality, there is one certainty that resists any doubt: the certainty of its existence as a thinking subject that does not know any thought or possess any idea. The true idea it has of itself as existing is the only attribute that cannot be separated from its ontological structure. Doubt, as to what its existence is, cannot shake the certainty of its own existence.

But I do not yet know clearly enough what I am, I who am certain that I am; so that henceforth it is necessary for me to watch with all care, lest I imprudently take something else for myself, and so not to err in this knowledge which I claim to be more certain and more evident than those I have hitherto had (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 19-20).

The knowledge of the human soul is metaphysical par excellence, insofar as it is a knowledge of the thinking substance as such, that is, of the subject of the act of thinking that refers to the unity of its operations. The knowledge of the thinking substance is autonomous in relation to the body, thus a substance complete in itself that has its existence known distinctly and separately from the body and, finally, the knowledge that mind and body are distinct not only formally but also actually. In this way, there is no epistemological impediment that prohibits affirming the immortality of the soul as autonomous and self-existent (Rosenfield, 1996, p. 114). Moreover, according to this Brazilian commentator, thanks to the distinction between mind and body, it opens the way for nature to be read mathematically. The approach to natural phenomena can henceforth capture them in their constitutive laws, that is, laws that are established by God, so that the mind - which is the domain of the purely intelligible - can apprehend, a priori, by an act of reason the laws that govern natural knowledge.

In the medieval period (Aquino, 1980), there was a confusion between the corporeal substance and the thinking substance that was the source of the whole theory of substantial forms, fatal to physics that can only be

undone, through methodical doubt, by a tenacious effort of the mind, of the will that applies itself in removing the illusions of the senses, the prejudices acquired in childhood and in imagining or creating hypotheses, such as that of the evil genius. Not only the arbitrary constructions of the imagination are attributed to the will, but also depends mainly on the will, the perception of things that are only intelligible and not imaginable, as when the mind sets out to consider its own nature. (Teixeira, 1980, p. 45).

For Hobbes, the knowledge of this proposition: I exist depends on the knowledge of this: I think; and the knowledge of this, that we cannot separate thought from a matter that thinks (AT, IX, p. 135). According to the English philosopher, it must be inferred that a thing that thinks is more material than immaterial, which is in no way accepted by Descartes. For him, spirit, soul, an understanding, a reason are not understood by these names only intellectual faculties, but also the things endowed with the faculty of thinking, by making it clear that there is a difference between the *res cogitans* and the *res extensa*.

The order of reasons therefore authorizes Descartes to draw from the Second Meditation, starting from the thinking self affirmed as substance, all the consequences necessary for the march of the science of science. The concept of substance must be understood in the epistemological sense without giving it an ontological sense which can only be given to it, subsequently, by the divine veracity which has the privilege of investing clear and distinct ideas with an objective value, that is, when clear and distinct ideas have a real correspondence in the world.

The first truth discovered, which is the simplest and most general we are forced to accept, proves that the reality it involves is not that of a concrete thinking self, but that of the thinking self in general as the universal condition of all possible knowledge (Gueroult, 1953, p. 54). If, on the one hand, we learn that we are, therefore, a thinking thing that excludes any material reality; on the other hand, we understand what the nature of the mind is, that is, that it is essentially an intelligence that excludes imagination and the senses. In Cartesian thought, the faculties of understanding and imagining do not differ merely according to more or less, but as two entirely different ways of acting. They are modes of the soul (Descartes, AT, VII, p. 385).

Descartes states that by spirit, soul, understanding or reason he does not understand by these names the only faculties, but the things endowed with the faculty of thinking (Descartes, AT, IX, p. 135). When he argues that the *cogito* is not a reasoning, he opposes the classical syllogism that starts from a major premise - Everything that thinks is. The realization of the first truth is a unique achievement of the metaphysical journey in search of truth and therefore does not result from any syllogism in the Aristotelian manner (Descartes, AT, IX, pp. 95-6; AT, IX, p. 104).

CONCLUSION

From Cartesian thought, it can be concluded that the rule that all clear and distinct ideas are true has a double aspect. First, it indicates the conditions that an evidence must satisfy in order to be considered certain and

true. If a perception is self-evident, then because it is self-evident and while it is self-evident, it cannot but be assumed to be indubitably true. Not to accept this reasoning would imply denying the possibility of taking the knowledge generated by reason as true; for the clarity and distinctness of a perception are the most general and universal fundamental criteria that reason finds in order to justify knowledge indubitably.

The search for the recognition of truth is a metaphysical journey made up of advances and setbacks, but when Descartes is forced to retreat from a truth that had been accepted, incontestably, as true, he is thinking of his greater objective of justifying the knowledge of judgments, in order to be able to establish the domain of science. For this, it was necessary to find a criterion that can separate a true knowledge from a false knowledge, that is, after having gone through the stages of doubt, having explained his method and found a first proposition that can no longer be doubted.

Furthermore, it is concluded that the Cartesian method that allows the attainment of indubitable truths is not a minor thing or has a secondary function, but it is a necessary condition, in order to be able to reach the ultimate certainty of both metaphysical and scientific truths. Descartes, with his method, was not looking for a nominal definition of truth, for he accepts truth as adequacy; but he was primarily focused on finding a grounding for it, that is, the legitimacy of the sciences could no longer derive from criteria of the sensible world or the existence of external bodies, or even from dubitable assumptions of a supposed metaphysical truth without question, but should come from a paradigm of science that seemed to him quite certain.

By following a model that he had imported and absorbed from mathematics through which he sought to highlight and spread to all epistemological dimensions of philosophy, Descartes aimed to overcome the contradictions and limitations in which ancient-medieval philosophy was trapped. To this end, he first and foremost primed and developed a method that was not something external or imposed by the theological-philosophical tradition; but that reveals itself, proves effective and capable as it manages to generate new and certain clear and distinct metaphysical truths indubitably. To begin with the epistemic solidity of the simplest truths that present themselves certainly seemed to him the path to the sure science that his metaphysical meditations made possible.

REFERENCES

ALQUIÉ, Ferdinand. *La Découvert métaphysique de l'homme chez Descartes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.

AQUINO, Thomas. *Suma contra os Gentios*. Porto Alegre: EST-Sulinas-UCS, 1990.

- COTTINGHAM, John. *A Filosofia de Descartes*. Lisboa: Lisboa 70, 1989.
- DESCARTES, René. *Oeuvres Philosophiques de Descartes*. Coleção “Classiques Garnier”. TOMO I, II, III. Org. Ferdinand Alquié. Paris: Classiques Garnier, 1999.
- DESCARTES, René. *Oeuvres de Descartes; publiées par Charles Adam e Paul Tannery*. Paris: Vrin/CNRC, 1971-1974, 13 v.
- DESCARTES, René. *Discurso do Método; As paixões da Alma; Meditações; Objeções e Respostas; Cartas*. Introdução de Gilles-Gaston Granger; Prefácio e Notas de Gérard Lebrun; Tradução de J. Guinsburg e Bento Prado Júnior. 4 ed. São Paulo: Nova Cultural (Coleção Os Pensadores), 1987-1988, 2 v.
- GILSON, Etienne. *Études sur le rôle de la pensée médiévale dans la formation du système cartésien*. 5. Paris: J. Vrin, 1984.
- GUEROULT, Martial. *Descartes selon l'ordre des raisons*. Paris: Aubier/Montaigne, 1953. 2 v.
- HAMELIM, Octave. *El sistema de Descartes*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1949.
- LANDIM, Raul. *Evidência e Verdade no Sistema Cartesiano*. São Paulo: /Loyola, 1992.
- LAPORTE, Jean. *Le rationalisme de Descartes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1945.
- MARION, Jean-Luc. *Sobre a ontologia cinzenta de Descartes*. Lisboa: Instituto Piaget, 1997.
- LOPARIC, Zeljko. *Descartes heurístico*. Campinas, SP: UNICAMP, Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas, 1997. (Trajetória, 5)
- ROSENFELD, Denis. *Descartes e as peripécias da razão*. São Paulo: Iluminuras, 1996.
- TEIXEIRA, Lívio. *Ensaio sobre a moral de Descartes*. São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1980.



BIASOLI, Luis Fernando. MÉTODO E JUSTIFICAÇÃO NAS MEDITAÇÕES DE DESCARTES. *Kalagatos*, Fortaleza, vol. 20, n.3, 2023, eK23052, p. 01-16.

Recebido: 07/2023

Aprovado: 08/2023