A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF RENÉ DESCARTES' 'MEDITATION ONE'

By

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Abstract

The problem of certain and indubitable knowledge has preoccupied Western philosophy from the pre-Socratics through the medieval era to the dawn of modernity. The renaissance era inaugurated a decisive shift from the theocentricism of medieval thinkers to the anthropocentrism of the modern man, generating competing methodological frameworks — the Baconian empirical-inductive and the Galilean mathematical-deductive methods — whose controversy gave rise to a renewed general scepticism. This paper critically examines René Descartes' 'Meditation One', assessing both the philosophical significance and the internal limitations of his method of radical doubt as a response to epistemological scepticism. The study employs philosophical textual analysis and critical exegesis, involving close reading of Descartes' primary text, contextualisation within the history of epistemology, and systematic evaluation of his arguments against the positions of selected critics. Descartes' quest for knowledge led him to doubt everything around him. This skepticism formed the foundation of a new theory of knowledge known as rationalism. This foundation was occasioned by the rise of science during the renaissance era. The attempt to place philosophy side by side with science saw the emergence of two methods: the Baconian empirical-inductive and the Galilean mathematical-deductive. The issue of method in the sciences resulted in controversy as to which is the correct method. It is out of these controversies and general scepticism that René Descartes emerged to search for certain and indubitable knowledge. Despite the fact that Descartes, through his doubt, gave philosophy a new method and solid foundation, he is found wanting in some of his postulations. This study concludes that, despite the loopholes inherent in his arguments, Descartes made a significant contribution to epistemology. This work challenges the extremity of his method and maintains that once one begins to doubt things thoroughly, one will never again be able to argue one's way back to certainty.

Keywords: Descartes; Meditation One; Methodic Doubt; Rationalism; Epistemology; Scepticism; Cogito; Cartesian Philosophy

Introduction

All men by nature, according to Aristotle in his *Metaphysics*, desire to know. Philosophy is an outstanding way that man fulfils this natural desire. However, the debate as to whether certain and indubitable knowledge is a possibility has continued to be a substantive philosophical problem in the contemporary era. The controversy that surrounds the question of the certainty of knowledge remains unresolved. These schools of thought, with their different methods, either support the argument that certainty in knowledge is possible, while others hold otherwise. In the course of this, two methods emerged: the Baconian inductive and the Galilean deductive methods.

Consequently, the above quest became the concern of Descartes, who set out to resolve this controversy and scepticism in philosophy; thus, the search for a method that would determine the objectivity and certainty of knowledge once and for all, with 'clarity' and 'distinctness' as his criteria. To achieve this, Descartes examines Francis Bacon's inductive method and finds that it cannot be relied on, since it is based on experience. He goes further to examine the Galilean mathematical method; observing its certainty, he draws from it. For him, these are axiomatic truths — self-evident. Descartes became inclined to search for this certainty of knowledge having observed such in the sciences, especially mathematics (Anosike, 2007, pp. 58–59). He becomes a sceptic, thereby using scepticism to contradict scepticism. He doubts everything he sees reason to doubt. All this he does in the attempt to find something he cannot doubt, on which he could build his philosophical foundation. To arrive at this indubitable certain knowledge, Descartes sets out four guiding principles: first, never to accept anything as true which he does not clearly know to be true; second, to divide the problem under consideration into as many parts as necessary for an adequate solution; third, to build up from the simplest and easiest to the more complex; and fourth, to make his enumerations so complete and reviews so general that there is assurance that nothing is left (Kinyongo, 1999, p. 29). Descartes began his doubt, treating as illusory and uncertain all ideas he previously held; yet he found that even if he doubted everything, he could not doubt that he was doubting.

Descartes' views in his 'Meditation One' have attracted substantial criticism, reaction, and counter-reaction from subsequent thinkers, owing to the provocative nature of some of his postulations. The present paper addresses a gap in the critical literature by providing a sustained philosophical analysis of both the merits and the internal inconsistencies of Descartes' method as presented in 'Meditation One.' It argues specifically that Descartes' method, while constituting a genuine philosophical breakthrough, is internally inconsistent in three principal respects: it is not genuinely radical in its scope of doubt; it relies on the very sensory evidence it claims to reject; and the introduction of the evil genius creates a problem the method cannot itself resolve. Using philosophical textual analysis and critical exegesis, this work proceeds as follows: it first provides a historical antecedence to Descartes' 'Meditation One,' then critically exposes and analyses his arguments and conclusions, and finally synthesises the findings in the conclusion.

Methodology

This study employs philosophical textual analysis and critical exegesis as its primary methodological framework. Philosophical textual analysis involves close and systematic reading of a primary source with attention to the internal logic, structure, and implications of the arguments advanced. Critical exegesis extends this by subjecting the text's claims to evaluative scrutiny against both the internal standards set by the author and the external critiques advanced by subsequent philosophers.

The primary source is Descartes' 'Meditation One,' as contained in the Lafleur translation (Descartes, 1956). Secondary sources have been selected to provide historical context for the epistemological debates preceding Descartes and to represent key critical responses to his method of doubt. The evaluative framework applied in the critical analysis section is principally concerned with internal consistency, logical validity, and philosophical adequacy — that is, whether the method achieves its stated goal of establishing certain and indubitable knowledge.

Historical Antecedence to Descartes' Meditations on First Philosophy

The survey of the question of knowledge begins from the pre-Socratic philosophers. However, what knowledge is did not really perturb them; nature and its attendant perplexity was the focus of philosophy. They were primarily concerned with the stuff or material out of which the universe is made. In line with this, they question, *ex qua materiale constituti mundi*. This view, Steenburghen (1949) captures vividly when he observes:

> The first thinkers of Greece, the so-called physiologists did not concern themselves with knowledge as such, nor with the knowing subject. Their attention was rather drifted to objects, that is to nature whose secret they tried to discover. (p. 52)

However, it would be unfair to affirm that they were totally unconcerned with the whole quest for the nature and meaning of knowledge. Heraclitus emphasises the use of senses in acquiring knowledge; Parmenides, on the other hand, stresses the role of reason. But neither of them doubts the possibility of knowledge of reality. In the 5th century B.C., a renewed interest in knowledge was inaugurated with the emergence of the Sophists. The Sophists became discontented with the many contradictory theories of their predecessors and contested the assumption of the possibility and certainty of knowledge, such that the question was whether we have knowledge of nature as it really is. With this, the question of relativism and scepticism was born in philosophy. Protagoras, representing the Sophist position, argues in his relativism *homo est mensura* — "that man is the measure of all things" (Omoregbe, 1998, p. 60). This means that it is man who decides for himself what exists and what does not exist. The scepticism of the Sophists is seen in its extreme form in Gorgias, who argues "that nothing exists, that even if anything exists, it cannot be communicated to others" (Omoregbe, 1998, p. 6). From this, one can deduce that with the emergence of the Sophists, the shift in the main focus of western philosophy from cosmological speculation to questions of man and society began.

From this confusion, there arose an epochal transformation by Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, who rejected the relativism and scepticism of the Sophists. They upheld the possibility of certain, objective, and universal knowledge. Socrates sought to elaborate and examine the claim of authentic human knowledge and to establish its possibility. For Socrates, the possession of knowledge was virtuous. He sees knowledge as the practical application of a well-disciplined moral standard. Thus, according to Socrates, knowledge and virtue are interwoven. Plato, in agreement with Socrates and with his theory of the world of forms, holds that objects of opinion and of sense perception are particular individual things; but he adds that objects of knowledge are not particular, concrete, individual things found in this world. For Plato, the objects of true knowledge are the essences of things — the ideal things. For him, knowledge consists of acquaintance with the supra-sensory world of ideas, which alone are the true realities. With this, he holds that the senses cannot yield any genuine knowledge. Aristotle, unlike Plato, was more of a realist. He disagrees with Plato and holds that the physical world is real and that knowledge of it is knowledge as such. In his theory of knowledge, sensible knowledge is knowledge; he goes on to present levels of cognitional processes in his degrees of abstraction.

The medieval era is the time of the confluence of philosophy and theology. God in this era became and is seen as the source of all intellectuality and the enabler of all intellectualization. The philosophers of this era were oriented towards God. This influenced their method of philosophizing greatly. Unsurprisingly, in this era philosophy was widely regarded as a handmaid to theology — *ancilla theologiae*. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas made efforts to contribute to the problem of knowledge. Augustine sees Plato's world of forms as the mind of God (Omoregbe, 1998, p. 71). For him, the truth of human knowledge and its certitude could be seen only in the light of divine revelation. He argues that it is the divine light that enables the human mind to acquire knowledge by illuminating it. Aquinas, in line with Aristotle, maintains that there are no innate ideas and that "there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses" (Stumpf, 1971, p. 195). Aristotle holds that the senses only apprehend particular objects, not universal ideas; through the process of abstraction, however, universal ideas are formed from objects of sense perception. In this era, much refuge was taken in divine revelation.

The renaissance era is marked with the emergence of modernism. Philosophy in this era became divorced from the theocentricism of the medieval thinkers to the anthropocentrism of the modern man. The rise of science during this era contributed to the rebirth of scepticism, which once again raised doubts about the possibility of knowledge, thus ushering in the search for a method that would determine objectivity once and for all. The attempt to place philosophy side by side with the sciences saw the emergence of two distinct scientific methods — the Baconian empirical-inductive method and the Galilean mathematical-deductive method. For Bacon, knowledge must be based on experience; he lays emphasis on observation, experimentation, and inductive generalisation. On the other hand, Galileo holds that genuine knowledge could be attained through mathematical and logical application (Omoregbe, 1998, p. 78). Hence, there arose the controversy as to which method — inductive or deductive — is the method of science. Indeed, some philosophers held that neither is the method of science. This view thus leads to a general scepticism. It is therefore out of these

controversies and general scepticism that Descartes emerged to search for certain and indubitable knowledge.

Descartes' Meditation One

René Descartes in his 'Meditation One,' entitled "Of things of which we may doubt" (Descartes, 1956, p. 10), begins with the resolution to doubt all his previously held beliefs until he finds a first premise that is beyond doubt, from which he can establish other truths. Hence, in the opening of 'Meditation One' he states:

> Several years have now elapsed since I first became aware that I had accepted even from my youth, many false opinions for true, and that consequently what I afterward based on such principles was highly doubtful; and from that time, I was convinced of the necessity of undertaking once in my life to rid myself of all the opinions I had adopted, and of commencing anew the work of building from the foundation, if I desired to establish a firm and abiding super structure in the sciences. (Descartes, 1956, p. 10)

In order for him to build a new system of belief and eliminate all his false beliefs, Descartes resolves to doubt everything that he believes. He wrote that the proposition "I think, therefore I am" was so certain and of such evidence that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by sceptics capable of shaking it, and that he concluded he might accept it as the first principle of the philosophy for which he was searching (Osuagwu, 1999, p. 19). He goes on to assert: "I will at length apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions" (Descartes, 1956, p. 10). Here he hopes to eliminate all previous views without prejudice or bias. However, he also adds that not all his previously held beliefs are necessarily false, stating: "but to this end, it will not be necessary for me to show that the whole of these is false — a point, perhaps, which I shall never reach" (Descartes, 1956, p. 10). It is important to note that Descartes, who claims to have set aside all his previous beliefs, did not completely do so in this statement. He also recognises that pursuing each belief individually would be a wild goose chase; as such, unnecessary. He argues:

> Nor for this purpose will it be necessary even to deal with each belief individually, which would be truly an endless labour; but, as the removal from below of the foundation necessarily involves the downfall of the whole edifice, I will at once approach the criticism of the principles on which all my former beliefs rested. (Descartes, 1956, p. 10)

According to the above statement, Descartes aims to attack the foundation of the edifice — the platform on which his previous beliefs rest — since it will be unnecessary to pursue them one by one.

In setting out, he first examines the predominant philosophies; he discovers that the Baconian method is fallacious, that the senses are deceptive and cannot be trusted. He thus argues that despite our reliance on the senses, it is nevertheless possible that we could be deceived or misled by them. However, Descartes also gives credence to the senses, using himself as an example to illustrate his

point. He argues that there are some things that, when one doubts them, one could be termed insane. He holds:

> But it may be said perhaps, that although the senses occasionally mislead us respecting minute objects, and such are so far removed from us as to be beyond the reach of close observation, there are yet many other of their informations (presentations), of the truth of which it is manifestly impossible to doubt; as for example, that I am in this place, seated by the fire, clothed in a winter dressing gown, that I hold in my hands this piece of paper, with other intimations of the same nature. But how could I deny that I possess these hands and this body, and withal escape being classed with persons in a state of insanity, whose brains are so disordered and clouded by dark bilious vapors as to cause them pertinaciously to assert that they are monarchs when they are in the greatest poverty; or clothed in gold and purple when destitute of any covering; ... I should certainly be not less insane than they, were I to regulate my procedure according to examples so extravagant. (Descartes, 1956, p. 10)

From this argument, Descartes tries to defend the knowledge of his existence as evidenced by the senses. This act, in this first meditation, calls into question the whole of his endeavour and thought — constituting a contradiction of what he stands for. He does this entirely in the effort to doubt all that can be doubted. He sets out to prove the existence of the self with reason, only to invoke the senses from the outset.

Descartes continues in his radical doubt to a more obvious sphere. He wonders whether he could possibly be dreaming all of his experience, for in a dream it is possible that everything can still seem perfectly real as if one were actually awake. He argues:

> I must nevertheless here consider that I am a man, and that, consequently, I am in the habit of sleeping, and representing to myself in dreams those same things, or even sometimes others less probable, which the insane think is presented to them in their waking moments. How often have I dreamt that I was in these familiar circumstances, that I was dressed and occupied this place by the fire, when I was lying undressed in bed? At the present moment, however, I certainly look upon this paper with eyes wide awake; the head which I now move is not asleep; I extend this head consciously and with express purpose, and I perceive it; the occurrences in sleep are not so distinct as all this. But I cannot forget that at other times I have been deceived in sleep by similar illusions; and, attentively considering those cases, I perceive so clearly that there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can ever be distinguished from sleep, that I feel greatly astonished and in amazement I almost persuade myself that I am now dreaming. (Descartes, 1956, p. 11)

From the above, Descartes brings himself to the point where he doubts the existence of the whole of nature and even of his own body. For him, there is nothing that cannot be presented to us in a dream. It is therefore possible, following his strict method of doubt, to wonder whether one indeed

has a body, since there exist no certain marks by which the state of waking can be distinguished from sleep. This confused state is paralleled by Chuang Tzu, who holds the same view when he states:

> Once upon a time, I, Chuang-Tzu, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was conscious only of following my fancies as a butterfly and was unconscious of my individuality as a man. Suddenly, I woke and there I lay myself again. Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly or whether I am now a butterfly dreaming I am a man. (Solomon, 1977, p. 131)

Descartes, having doubted the existence of the body and its parts, goes further to doubt even the fields that study them. He draws a logical inference, positing:

> But will not, therefore, perhaps reason illegitimately if we conclude from this that Physics, Astronomy, Medicine and all the other sciences that have for their end the consideration of composite objects, are indeed of a doubtful character? (Descartes, 1956, p. 11)

After a critical survey of Galileo's method, Descartes finds a certain methodology that could be relied upon. He arrives at the opinion that the mathematical method contains elements of certainty. He admits:

> But that Arithmetic, Geometry and the other sciences of the same class, which regard merely the simplest and most general objects, and scarcely inquire whether or not these are really existent, contain somewhat that is certain and indubitable. (Descartes, 1956, p. 11)

It is worthy of note, however, that Descartes does not stop there; he extends his radical doubt even to this sphere of knowledge. He gives the example of the possibility of these spheres of knowledge, arguing that:

> For whether I am awake or dreaming, it remains true that two and three make five, and that a square has but four sides; nor does it seem possible that truths so apparent can ever fall under a suspicion of falsity or incertitude. (Descartes, 1956, p. 11)

But Descartes still believes these can be doubted. He turns his attention to God, asking whether God might be able to deceive him even about these apparently certain principles. He writes:

> Nevertheless, the belief that there is a God who is all powerful, and who created, such as I am, has, for a long time, obtained steady possession of my mind. How, then, do I know that he has not arranged that there should be neither earth, nor sky, nor any extended thing, nor figure, nor magnitude, nor place, providing at the same time, however, for the rise in me of the perceptions of all these objects, and the persuasion that these do not exist otherwise than as I perceive them? And further, as I sometimes think that others are in error respecting matters of which they believe themselves to possess a perfect knowledge, how do I know that I am not also

> deceived each time I add together two and three, or number the sides of a square, or form some judgment still more simple, if more simple indeed can be imagined? But perhaps Deity has not been willing that I should be thus deceived, for he is said to be supremely good. If, however, it were repugnant to the goodness of Deity to have created me subject to constant deception, it would seem likewise to be contrary to his goodness to allow me to be occasionally deceived; and yet it is clear that this is permitted. (Descartes, 1956, p. 12)

With the above, Descartes doubts the principles of arithmetic, geometry, and the omnipotence and existence of God. He further contends that it is even easier for some to deny the existence of God than to believe that all other things are uncertain. He concurs with this view and extends his doubt to God, all in the effort to overcome doubt. He comments:

> Some, indeed, might perhaps be found who would be disposed rather to deny the existence of a Being so powerful than to believe that there is nothing certain. But let us for the present refrain from opposing this opinion, and grant that all which is here said of a Deity is fabulous; nevertheless, in whatever way it be supposed that I reach the state in which I exist, whether by fate, or chance, or by an endless series of antecedents and consequents, or by any other means, it is clear (since to be deceived and to err is a certain defect) that the probability of my being so imperfect as to be the constant victim of deception, will be increased exactly in proportion as the power possessed by the cause, to which they assign my origin, is lessened. To these reasonings I have assuredly nothing to reply, but am constrained at last to avow that there is nothing of all that I formerly believed to be true of which it is impossible to doubt, and that not through thoughtlessness or levity, but from cogent and maturely considered reasons; so that henceforward, if I desire to discover anything certain, I ought not the less carefully to refrain from assenting to those same opinions than to what might be shown to be manifestly false. (Descartes, 1956, p. 12)

In the last paragraph of 'Meditation One,' Descartes, in order to bring his method to its extreme conclusion, introduces a drastic postulation. He holds that it is not a good God that is responsible for the deceptions, but rather an evil genius — a malicious demon — that is constantly deceiving him about those things of which he seems most certain. He puts it thus:

> I will suppose, then, not that Deity, who is sovereignly good and the fountain of truth, but that some malignant demon, who is at once exceedingly potent and deceitful, has employed all his artifice to deceive me; I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity; I will consider myself as without hands, eyes, flesh, blood, or any of the senses, and as falsely believing that I am possessed of these; I will continue resolutely fixed in this belief, and if indeed by this means it be not in my power to arrive at the knowledge of truth, I shall at least do what is in my power, viz., suspend my judgment, and guard with settled purpose against giving my assent to what is

> false, and being imposed upon by this deceiver, whatever be his power and artifice. (Descartes, 1956, p. 13)

Here Descartes underscores that, despite the deceiver's antics and power restraining him from arriving at certain and indubitable truth, he will do what is in his power to do. He will suspend his judgment — that is, he will doubt even certain principles. Here he takes his doubt as far as he can possibly go, doubting everything, until he finds the one principle that is beyond doubt and perfectly certain.

Critical Analysis of Descartes' 'Meditation One'

Descartes' 'Meditation One' at a glance appears to have settled the problem of knowledge through his methodic doubt process. It appears, on a first reading, difficult to give a constructive criticism of his thought, given the novelty and systematic character of his approach. At any rate, due to the provocative nature of 'Meditation One,' it has spurred reactions from philosophers who have subjected it to rigorous critical scrutiny. Despite the fact that Descartes, through his doubt, gave the field of philosophy a new method and solid foundation, he is found wanting in some of his postulations. On this ground, philosophers including John Locke, George Wilhelm Berkeley, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Gilbert Ryle, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Richard Rorty, Edmund Husserl, and more recently Catherine Malabou, Thomas Metzinger, Andy Clark, and others have challenged the extremity of Descartes' method, arguing that once one begins to doubt things thoroughly, one will never again be able to argue one's way back to certainty. The criticisms that follow represent the principal objections advanced against Descartes' position in 'Meditation One.'

The introduction of an evil genius by Descartes as the deceiver has been criticised and rejected. Critics including Baruch Spinoza, Antoine Arnauld, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Brian Weatherson, among others, have asked: how can Descartes possibly dispose of an evil genius who is deceiving him about everything, once he has introduced this possibility? Indeed, the supposition of an evil genius in Descartes' postulation is so extreme that even Descartes himself, in the years that followed the publication and many disputes about his *Meditations*, reportedly insisted that no one should take his arguments too seriously. Furthermore, Descartes' argument that there is no clear mark by which dreaming can be distinguished from waking has not been well received by critics, who hold that it is unacceptable. Critics maintain that in dreaming we are not conscious of the fact that we are dreaming, whereas in being awake we are conscious. Hence, critics argue that this analogy by Descartes is misplaced.

Another significant limitation inherent in Descartes' argument is that his radical doubt ends in solipsism. Unsurprisingly, Georg Lichtenberg, objecting to this consequence, submits:

> Rather than supposing an entity that is thinking, Descartes should have said there is some thinking going on; that is, whatever the force of the *cogito*, Descartes draws too much from it — the existence of a thinking thing. The reference of the 'I' is more than the *cogito* can justify. (Watson, 1966, p. 116)

That is, for Lichtenberg, Descartes goes too far in positing the existence of a thinking thing — the 'I' — which, according to Lichtenberg, the *cogito* cannot justify. The *cogito*, properly understood,

establishes only that thinking is occurring; it does not by itself establish that there is a substantial, unified self that is the author of that thinking. To infer a persisting thinking substance from the mere occurrence of doubt is, for Lichtenberg, an unwarranted metaphysical leap. Descartes' claim of carrying out a radical and methodic doubt has also been criticised as not being genuinely radical. He claims to doubt everything that can be doubted, but critics, after a critical analysis of 'Meditation One,' particularly the statement that "I will at length apply myself earnestly and freely to the general overthrow of all my former opinions. But, to this end, it will not be necessary for me to show that the whole of these is false — a point, perhaps, which I shall never reach" (Descartes, 1956, p. 10), observe a fundamental tension.

Lichtenberg further observes:

> Notice here that Descartes from the above could be termed inconsistent in his thought. Critics hold that Descartes did not really doubt everything as he claims. He was still biased and not objective in his endeavour. Another instance where his inconsistency can be observed is his giving credence to the senses and refusing to doubt them. He contradicts his attempt to prove things with the use of reason when he argues that, although the senses occasionally mislead us respecting minute objects... there are yet many other of their informations (presentations) of the truth of which it is manifestly impossible to doubt. (Descartes, 1956, p. 10)

Consequently, Descartes gives the reason why he accepts sense perception: any attempt to deny that he possesses hands, a body, and so on, would lead to his being classified as insane. It is therefore clear that he contradicts his claim of radical doubt and rejection of sense-experience, precisely as he articulates it in his own thought.

Conclusion

In conclusion, from the above analysis and evaluation, this study affirms that Descartes' methodic doubt, as observed in his 'Meditation One,' is a novel contribution to the problem of certainty of knowledge. The shortcomings inherent in Descartes' thought, however serious, do not diminish the fact that he made a significant stride in philosophy. These shortcomings serve to substantiate the perennial nature of the question of knowledge. In other words, these limitations are not intended to disqualify Descartes' hallmark achievements, but to strengthen them by revealing the enduring difficulty of the epistemological problem. It is precisely because Descartes pushed the demand for certainty to its outermost limit that he was able to expose, more clearly than any predecessor, the magnitude of the philosophical challenge that certainty of knowledge presents.

Generally speaking, Descartes in his originality is credited with giving to philosophy a new and definitive method. This philosophical method is also intended to be a method for science. His concern with scepticism in all its forms is therefore directed not only at religious scepticism, but at epistemological scepticism in general. According to Descartes' own account, he became a sceptic only in order to overcome scepticism. As such, this method did influence the scientific revolution as observed in the 17th and 18th centuries. Descartes' relevance cannot be overstated. His impact on philosophy is revolutionary and would remain a model for posterity, as long as this field of

intellectual inquiry endures. He thus lifts philosophy from the sceptical era to one characterised by philosophical insight, situating it on a firm, certain, unshakable, and indubitable foundation by demolishing its previous structure and building it anew. Consequently, the history of thought remains deficient without Descartes. But insofar as philosophy, as an academic enterprise, endures, the question of certainty of knowledge will continue to challenge the human mind.

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