FIRST MEDITATION – Excerpts from the Objections and Replies

HOBBES

On the First Meditation ('What can be called into doubt')

FIRST OBJECTION

From what is said in this Meditation it is clear enough that there is no criterion enabling us to distinguish our dreams from the waking state and from veridical sensations. And hence the images we have when we are awake and having sensations are not accidents that inhere in external objects, and are no proof that any such external object exists at all. So if we follow our senses, without exercising our reason in any way, we shall be justified in doubting whether anything exists. I acknowledge the correctness of this Meditation. But since Plato and other ancient philosophers discussed this uncertainty in the objects of the senses, and since the difficulty of distinguishing the waking state from dreams is commonly pointed out, I am sorry that the author, who is so outstanding in the field of original speculations, should be publishing this ancient material.

Reply

[Descartes to Hobbes]

The arguments for doubting, which the philosopher here accepts as valid, are ones that I was presenting as merely plausible. I was not trying to sell them as novelties, but had a threefold aim in mind when I used them. Partly I wanted to prepare my readers' minds for the study of the things which are related to the intellect, and help them to distinguish these things from corporeal things; and such arguments seem to be wholly necessary for this purpose. Partly I introduced the arguments so that I could reply to them in the subsequent Meditations. And partly I wanted to show the firmness of the truths which I propound later on, in the light of the fact that they cannot be shaken by these metaphysical doubts. Thus I was not looking for praise when I set out these arguments; but I think I could not have left them out, any more than a medical writer can leave out the description of a disease when he wants to explain how it can be cured.

ARNAULD

First, I am afraid that the author's somewhat free style of philosophizing, which calls everything into doubt, may cause offence to some people. He himself admits in the *Discourse on the Method* that this approach is dangerous for those of only moderate intelligence; but I agree that the risk of offence is somewhat reduced in the Synopsis.

Nevertheless, I rather think that the First Meditation should be furnished with a brief preface which explains that there is no serious doubt cast on these matters but that the purpose is to isolate temporarily those matters which leave room for even the 'slightest' and most 'exaggerated' doubt (as the author himself puts it elsewhere); it should be explained that this is to facilitate the discovery of something so firm and stable that not even the most perverse sceptic will have even the slightest scope for doubt. Following on from this point, where we find the clause 'since I did not know the author of my being', I would suggest a substitution of the clause 'since I was pretending that I did not know…' [Descartes adopted Arnauld's advice and inserted a qualifying phrase in brackets.]

REPLY TO THE POINTS WHICH MAY CAUSE DIFFICULTY TO THEOLOGIANS

[Descartes to Arnauld]

[…]

I completely concede, then, that the contents of the First Meditation, and indeed the others, are not suitable to be grasped by every mind. I have stated this whenever the opportunity arose, and I shall continue to do so. This was the sole reason why I did not deal with these matters in the *Discourse on the Method*, which was written in French, but reserved them instead for the *Meditations*, which I warned should be studied only by very intelligent and well-educated readers. No one should object that I would have done better to avoid writing on matters which a large number of people ought to avoid reading about; for I regard these matters as so crucial that I am convinced that without them no firm or stable results can ever be established in philosophy. Although fire and knives cannot safely be handled by careless people or children, no one thinks that this is a reason for doing without them altogether, since they are so useful for human life.

GASSENDI

On the First Meditation: 'What can be called into doubt'

In the case of the First Meditation, there is very little for me to pause over, for I approve of your project for freeing your mind from all preconceived opinions. There is just one point I am not clear about, namely why you did not make a simple and brief statement to the effect that you were regarding your previous knowledge as uncertain so that you could later single out what you found to be true. Why instead did you consider everything as false, which seems more like adopting a new prejudice than relinquishing an old one? This strategy made it necessary for you to convince yourself by imagining a deceiving God or some evil demon who tricks us, whereas it would surely have been sufficient to cite the darkness of the human mind or the weakness of our nature. Furthermore, in order to call everything into doubt you pretend that you are asleep and consider that everything which occurs is an illusion. But can you thereby compel yourself to believe you are not awake, and to consider as false and uncertain whatever is going on around you? Whatever you say, no one will believe that you have really convinced yourself that not one thing you formerly knew is true, or that your senses, or God, or an evil demon, have managed to deceive you all the time. Would it not have been more in accord with philosophical honesty and the love

of truth simply to state the facts candidly and straightforwardly, rather than, as some critics might put it, to resort to artifice, sleight of hand and circumlocution? But since you have decided to take this route, I do not wish to press the point any further.

Objections raised against the First Meditation

[Descartes to Gassendi]

You say that you approve of my project for freeing my mind from preconceived opinions; and indeed no one can pretend that such a project should not be approved of. But you would have preferred me to have carried it out by making a 'simple and brief statement'—that is, only in a perfunctory fashion. Is it really so easy to free ourselves from all the errors which we have soaked up since our infancy? Can we really be too careful in carrying out a project which everyone agrees should be performed? But no doubt you wanted to point out that most people, although verbally admitting that we should escape from preconceived opinions, never do so in fact, because they do not spend any care or effort on the task and they reckon that nothing they have once accepted as true should be regarded as a preconceived opinion. You act the part of such people here, and do it very well, omitting none of the points they might raise. But none of the points you bring forward seems reminiscent of what a philosopher might say. For when you say that there is no need to imagine that God is a deceiver or that we are dreaming and so on, a philosopher would have supposed that he had to supply a reason why these matters should not be called into doubt; or if he had no such reason—and in fact none exists—then he would not have made the remark. Nor would a philosopher have added that in this context 'it would be sufficient to cite the darkness of the human mind or the weakness of our nature'. It is no help in correcting our errors to say that we make mistakes because our mind is in darkness or our nature is weak; this is just like saying that we make mistakes because we are prone to error. It is more helpful to pay attention, as I did, to all the circumstances where we may happen to go wrong, to prevent our heedlessly giving assent in such cases. Again, a philosopher would not have said that 'considering everything as false is more like adopting a new prejudice than relinquishing an old one'; or at least he would have first tried to prove that such a supposition might give rise to the risk of some deception. But you, on the contrary, assert a little later that I cannot 'compel myself to regard what I supposed to be false as being in fact uncertain and false'—i.e. to adopt the new prejudice which you feared I might adopt. A philosopher would be no more surprised at such suppositions of falsity than he would be if, in order to straighten out a curved stick, we bent it round in the opposite direction. The philosopher knows that it is often useful to assume falsehoods instead of truths in this way in order to shed light on the truth, e.g. when astronomers imagine the equator, the zodiac, or other circles in the sky, or when geometers add new lines to given figures. Philosophers frequently do the same. If someone calls this 'having recourse to artifice, sleight of hand and circumlocution' and says it is unworthy of 'philosophical honesty and the love of truth' then he certainly shows that he himself, so far from being philosophically honest or being prepared to employ any argument at all, simply wants to indulge in rhetorical display.

[…]

[Those who have summarized Gassendi's additional counter-objections] note three criticisms made against the First Meditation: (1) that I am asking for something impossible in wanting us to give up every kind of preconceived opinion; (2) that in thinking we have given up our preconceived opinions we are in fact adopting other even more harmful preconceptions; and (3) that the method of universal doubt which I have proposed cannot help us to discover any truths at all.

The first of these objections is based on the fact that the author of this book has not realized that the term 'preconceived opinion' applies not to all the notions which are in our mind (which I admit it is impossible for us to get rid of) but only to all the opinions which we have continued to accept as a result of previous judgements that we have made. And since making or not making a judgement is an act of will (as I have explained in the appropriate place) it is evident that it is something in our power. For, after all, in order to get rid of every kind of preconceived opinion, all we need to do is resolve not to affirm or deny anything which we have previously affirmed or denied until we have examined it afresh. But this does not entail that we cease to retain all the same notions in our memory. Nevertheless, I did say that there was some difficulty in expelling from our belief everything we have previously accepted. One reason for this is that before we can decide to doubt, we need some reason for doubting; and that is why in my First Meditation I put forward the principal reasons for doubt. Another reason is that no matter how much we have resolved not to assert or deny anything, we easily forget our resolution afterwards if we have not strongly impressed it on our memory; and this is why I suggested that we should think about it very carefully.

The second objection involves a supposition which is manifestly false. For although I said that we should go so far as to force ourselves to deny the things which we had previously affirmed with too much confidence, I expressly stipulated that we should do so only during the period when our attention was occupied in looking for something more certain than whatever might be denied in this way. And it is evident that during this period one could not possibly adopt any preconceptions that might be harmful.

The third objection is mere carping. Although it is true that doubt does not on its own suffice to establish any truth, it is still useful to prepare the mind in order to establish the truth at a later date; and this was my sole aim in employing it.

BOURDIN

First question:
whether things that are doubtful should be regarded as false, and if so, how

Your first question is about the legitimacy of your rule for investigating the truth, *viz*. 'that we should regard as false whatever contains even a minimal element of doubt'. If I am to reply, I must ask you some questions:

(1) What is the 'minimal element of doubt' you refer to?

(2) What is meant by 'regarding something as false'?

(3) To what extent should we 'regard something as false'?

1. *What is the 'minimal element of doubt'?*

As far as doubt is concerned, what is the 'minimal element' you speak of? 'I can answer briefly', you may say. 'Firstly, if there is anything whose existence or whose nature I can doubt, not rashly but for powerful reasons, then it contains some element of doubt. But, secondly, there is also an element of doubt in things concerning which, though they may seem dear to me, some evil demon may deceive me; for he may wish to trick me and bring it about by his cunning devices that something may appear clear and certain though it is in fact false. Now items in the first category contain a considerable element of doubt, whereas those in the second contain a small element of doubt which although "minimal" is sufficient to justify the label "doubtful" and to make the doubt a real one. If you want an example, then the existence of the earth, and the sky, and of colours, and the belief that you have a head and eyes and a body and a mind, are matters which are doubtful in terms of the first category of doubt; while to the second category belong such beliefs as that two and three make five, or that the whole is greater than one of its parts, and so on.'

Brilliant! But if this is so, what, may I ask, will there be that is left free of doubt? What will be immune from the fear with which that crafty demon threatens us? 'Nothing', you may reply, 'absolutely nothing, until we have established for certain, on the basis of the most solid metaphysical principles, that God exists and cannot be a deceiver; for the one rule here is that if I lack knowledge of whether God exists and whether, if he exists, he can be a deceiver, I do not see that I can ever be wholly certain of anything.' But let me make my meaning thoroughly clear to you. Until I know that God exists, and is a truthful God who will curb that evil demon, then I can—and indeed should—continue to fear that the demon is tricking me and is forcing what is false on to me under the guise of truth, as though it were clear and certain. But when I have gained a thorough understanding that God exists and can neither be deceived nor deceive, I know he will necessarily prevent the demon imposing on me concerning things which I clearly and distinctly understand. And I shall then be able to say that if there are any such things, if I do perceive anything clearly and distinctly, then these things are true and certain. And so I will have my rule of truth and certainty, *viz*. that everything which I very clearly and distinctly perceive is true.' I have no further questions to raise here, and so I come to the second point.

2. *What is meant by 'regarding something as false'?*

Since on your view it is doubtful whether you have eyes, a head or a body, and you must therefore consider all this as false, I should like to know exactly what you mean by this. Is it a matter of saying and believing 'it is false that I have eyes, a head and a body'? Must I 'turn my will in completely the opposite direction', believing and saying 'I do not have eyes, a head, or a body'? In a word, must I say, believe and maintain the opposite of that which is doubtful? 'Exactly', you reply. Fine. But I still need some answers. Is it not certain that two and three make five? And should I therefore believe and maintain that two and three do not make five? 'Yes, you must believe it and maintain it', you reply. But I now go further. It is not certain that while I speak these words, I am awake and not dreaming. Should I therefore say and believe that while I am speaking, I am not awake but dreaming? 'Yes', you say, 'believe it and say it.' To avoid being tedious, let me finally come to the point. If someone doubts whether he is awake or asleep, it is not certain that what appears clear and certain to him is in fact clear and certain. Should I therefore say and believe that if something appears clear and certain to one who doubts whether he is awake or asleep, then it is not clear and certain, but obscure and false? Why do you hesitate? You cannot possibly go too far in your distrustful attitude. Has it never happened to you, as it has to many people, that things seemed clear and certain to you while you were dreaming, but that afterwards you discovered that they were doubtful or false? It is indeed 'prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived you even once'. 'But', you reply, 'matters of the utmost certainty are quite different. They are such that they cannot appear doubtful even to those who are dreaming or mad.' But are you really serious in what you say? Can you pretend that matters of the utmost certainty cannot appear doubtful even to dreamers or madmen? What are these utterly certain matters? If things which are ridiculous or absurd sometimes appear certain, even utterly certain, to people who are asleep or insane, then why should not things which are certain, even utterly certain, appear false and doubtful? I know a man who once, when falling asleep, heard the clock strike four, and counted the strokes as 'one, one, one, one'. It then seemed to him that there was something absurd about this, and he shouted out: 'That clock must be going mad; it has struck one o'clock four times!' Is there really anything so absurd or irrational that it could not come into the mind of someone who is asleep or raving? There are no limits to what a dreamer may not 'prove' or believe, and indeed congratulate himself on, as if he had managed to invent some splendid thought. But to avoid fighting you on many fronts at once, let me come to your maxim 'If something appears certain to someone who is in doubt whether he is dreaming or awake, then it is certain—indeed so certain that it can be laid down as a basic principle of a scientific and metaphysical system of the highest certainty and exactness.' You have not at any point managed to make me consider this maxim to be as certain as the proposition that two and three make five; you have not shown it to be so certain that no one can possibly have any kind of doubt about it, or be deceived about it by an evil demon. And if I persist in this view, I have no fear that anyone will regard me as obstinate. So on the basis of your rule, I reach the following result: it is not certain that what appears as cer-

tain to a person who is in doubt whether he is awake or asleep, is in fact certain; and hence what appears certain to someone who is in doubt whether he is awake or asleep can and should be regarded as entirely false. Alternatively, if you have some other special rule which you have devised, please communicate it to me. I now come to my third question.

3. *To what extent should we 'regard something as false'?*

Since it does not seem certain that two and three make five, and since the above rule obliges me to say and believe that two and three do not make five, may I ask whether I should constantly believe this, to the extent of convincing myself that it is certain and cannot be otherwise? You are amazed at my question. This is not surprising to me, since I am amazed at it myself. But you must still answer it, if you expect me to answer in turn. Do you mean to regard it as certain that two and three do not make five? Do you mean this to be certain, and to appear as certain to everyone—so certain that it is safe even from the tricks of the evil demon?

You laugh and say 'How could any sane man arrive at that idea?' But what is the alternative? Will our statement be doubtful and uncertain, just like the statement that two and three do make five? If so, if the statement that two and three do not make five is doubtful, then following your rule I will believe and state that it is false and I will assert the opposite: I will assert that two and three do make five. I shall behave in the same way when it comes to my other beliefs; and since it does not seem to be certain that any body exists, I shall say 'No body exists'; and since the statement that no body exists is not certain, I shall then turn my will in completely the opposite direction and say 'Bodies do exist'. And so bodies will both exist and not exist at the same time.

'That is right', you say. 'Doubting is just this—going round in a circle, advancing and retreating, affirming and denying, banging in the nail and then pulling it out to bang it in again.'

Splendid. But what am I to do when it comes to making use of those statements which were doubtful? What shall I do concerning the statement that two and three make five, or the statement that bodies do exist? Shall I affirm them, or deny them?

'Neither affirm, nor deny them', you say. 'Employ neither statement, but regard them both as false; and do not expect such shaky propositions to yield anything which is not itself shaky, doubtful and uncertain.'

Since there is nothing left for me to ask, I shall now answer in my turn by providing a brief summary of your position.

(1) We can doubt all things, especially material things, so long as we have no foundations for the sciences other than those we have had up till now.

(2) To consider something as false is to withhold our assent from it as if it were an evident falsehood, and to turn our will in completely the opposite direction, adopting an opinion of it that is appropriate to something false and imaginary.

(3) What is doubtful should be regarded as false to the extent of regarding its opposite as being equally doubtful and false.

COMMENTS

[Descartes on Bourdin]

It would be embarrassing for me to be over-zealous and produce an extended commentary on all these claims; for although they are expressed virtually in my own words, I do not recognize them as mine. I will merely ask my readers to recall what I wrote in the First Meditation, at the start of the Second and Third Meditations and in the Synopsis. If they do this, they will recognize that my critic has lifted almost everything which is included above from these sources, but that he has so mixed up and distorted and misinterpreted the material that although everything in the original is very rational, this version makes it seem for the most part to be quite absurd.

'For powerful reasons'. I said at the end of the First Meditation that we may doubt all those things which we have not yet perceived with sufficient clarity, since our doubt is based on 'powerful and well thought-out reasons'. But I said this because at that point I was dealing merely with the kind of extreme doubt which, as I frequently stressed, is metaphysical and exaggerated and in no way to be transferred to practical life. It was doubt of this type to which I was referring when I said that everything that could give rise to the slightest suspicion should be regarded as a sound reason for doubt. But my friendly and ingenuous critic here puts forward as an example of the things that I said we could doubt 'for powerful reasons' the question of whether there is an earth, or whether I have a body, and so on; the effect is that the reader, if he knows nothing of my 'metaphysical' doubt and refers the doubt to practical life, may think that I am not of sound mind.

'"Nothing," you reply, "absolutely nothing".' I have explained, in several places, the sense in which this 'nothing' is to be understood. It is this. So long as we attend to a truth which we perceive very clearly, we cannot doubt it. But when, as often happens, we are not attending to any truth in this way, then even though we remember that we have previously perceived many things very clearly, nevertheless there will be nothing which we may not justly doubt so long as we do not know that whatever we clearly perceive is true. But my careful critic here takes 'nothing' quite differently. From the fact that at one point I said that there was nothing that we might not doubt—namely in the First Meditation, in which I was supposing that I was not attending to anything that I clearly perceived—he draws the conclusion that I am unable to know anything certain, even in the following Meditations. This is to suggest that the reasons which may from time to time give us cause to doubt something are not legitimate or sound unless they prove that the same thing must be permanently in doubt.

'Must I say, believe, and maintain the opposite of what is doubtful?' When I said that doubtful matters should for a time be treated as false, or rejected as false, I merely meant that when investigating the truths that have metaphysical certainty we should regard doubtful matters as not having any more basis than those which are quite false. I made this so clear that I do not think anyone of

sound mind could interpret what I said in any other way; surely only someone who would not blush to be called a quibbler could pretend that it was my intention to believe the opposite of what is doubtful, let alone to believe this 'to the extent of convincing myself that it is certain and cannot be otherwise'. And although my critic does not go so far as to insist on the interpretation just quoted, but merely raises it in the form of a question, I am surprised that a man of such sanctity has been willing to imitate those disgraceful detractors who often try to slander an author with impunity by giving an account of his work which they intend others to believe and then adding that they 'do not believe it themselves'.

'But matters of the utmost certainty are quite different. They are such that they cannot appear doubtful even to those who are dreaming or mad.' I do not know what kind of analysis has enabled my supremely subtle critic to deduce this from my writings, for I do not remember ever having had any such thought, even in a dream. Admittedly he might have inferred from what I wrote that everything that anyone clearly and distinctly perceives is true, although the person in question may from time to time doubt whether he is dreaming or awake, and may even, if you like, be dreaming or mad. For no matter who the perceiver is, nothing can be clearly and distinctly perceived without its being just as we perceive it to be, i.e. without being true. But because it requires some care to make a proper distinction between what is clearly and distinctly perceived and what merely seems or appears to be, I am not surprised that my worthy critic should here mistake the one for the other.

'Doubting is just this, going round in a circle' etc. What I said was that doubtful items should not be regarded as having any more basis than those which are wholly false; but this was so as to enable us to dismiss them completely from our thought, and not so as to allow us to affirm first one thing and then its opposite. But my critic has seized every possible opportunity to quibble. Incidentally, it is worth noting that at the end, when he says he is providing a brief summary of my position, he does not attribute to me any of the doctrines which he criticizes or ridicules either in his earlier comments or in what follows. This is presumably to let us know that he has foisted these doctrines on me merely as a joke, without seriously believing that I held them.

REPLY

[Bourdin to Descartes, continued]

Reply 1. Consider the rule that in the investigation of the truth, whatever contains even a minimal element of doubt should be regarded as false. If this means that when we try to find what is certain we should not in any way rely on those things which are not certain or which contain any element of doubt, then the rule is a valid one; indeed, it is widely accepted and extremely common among philosophers of all kinds.

Reply 2. The said rule might be interpreted as follows. When we are trying to find what is certain, we should reject things which are not certain, or which are in any way doubtful, to the extent of not making any use of them and considering them as non-existent—or rather not considering them at all but completely dismissing them from our mind. This rule, too, is a valid and reliable one; indeed, it is a well-worn maxim even among beginners, and is so closely related to the preceding rule that it scarcely differs from it.

Reply 3. Suppose the said rule is taken as follows. When we are trying to find what is certain we should reject whatever is doubtful in the sense of supposing that it is in fact non-existent and that its opposite really obtains; and we should employ this supposition as a firm basis for our inquiry, treating the doubtful items as non-existent and relying on their non-existence. Now this rule is an invalid and fallacious one which conflicts with sound philosophy. For in order to find out what is true and certain, it makes a supposition which is doubtful and uncertain; or it supposes as certain that which may in fact be wholly otherwise, by treating doubtful items as not really existing when it is possible that they do exist.

Reply 4. If anyone were to understand the rule in the sense just described and wanted to use it in order to discover what is true and certain, he would be wasting his time and effort and would be working without any reward, since he would no more achieve his goal than its opposite. Do you want an example? Suppose someone is inquiring whether it is possible that he is a body, or is corporeal, and he makes use, among other things, of the following principle: 'It is not certain that any body exists; therefore, in accordance with the rule just adopted, I shall maintain and assert that no body exists.' He will then go on as follows. 'No body exists; but I am and exist, as has been properly established from other sources; therefore I cannot be a body.' A splendid argument; but see how the same initial premiss will enable him to derive the opposite conclusion. 'It is not certain', he says, 'that any body exists; hence, in accordance with the rule I shall maintain and assert that no body exists. But what sort of claim is the statement that no body exists? It is surely a doubtful and uncertain one, for who can establish its truth, or on what basis? The result is clear. The statement that no body exists is doubtful; hence in accordance with the rule I shall say "Some body exists." For I am and exist; hence I may possibly be a body if nothing else rules this out.' So you see I can be a body and I cannot be a body. Have I satisfied you? Only too well, I fear, if I may judge from the questions that follow. And so I will come to your second question.

COMMENTS

[Descartes on Bourdin, continued]

In his first two replies here, my critic gives his approval to all the views, whether explicitly stated in my writings or derivable from them, which I hold concerning the topic under discussion. But he adds that my position is 'extremely common and well-worn even among beginners'. In his third and fourth replies, however, he criticizes a view which he wants people to think I hold, even though it is so absurd that it could not possibly enter the mind of a sane man. This is very clever of him: his aim is to impose on those who have either not read my *Meditations* or else not read them attentively enough to have accurate knowledge of their contents, and influence them by his authority into thinking I hold ridiculous views. And in the case of any others who do not believe this, he hopes at least to convince them that I have not produced anything which is not 'extremely com-

mon and well-worn even among beginners'. I would certainly not argue with the last statement. For I have never sought any praise for the novelty of my opinions. On the contrary, I consider my opinions to be the oldest opinions of all, since they are the truest. My principal aim has always been to draw attention to certain very simple truths which are innate in our minds, so that as soon as they are pointed out to others, they will consider that they have always known them. It is easy to recognize that my critic is attacking my views precisely because he thinks they are sound and original; for if he really believed that they were as absurd as he pretends, he would surely have judged them worthy of contempt and silence rather than such a lengthy and contrived refutation.

'Therefore, in accordance with the rule just adopted, I shall maintain and assert the opposite.' I should like to know when and in what statutes my critic found this law written down. He has certainly laid quite enough stress on it in his remarks above, but equally, in my comments on the sentence 'Must I say, believe and maintain the opposite of what is doubtful?',' I have made it clear enough that the rule is not my own. Moreover, I do not think he will be able to go on maintaining that the rule is mine if he is questioned on the matter. Under heading (3) above, he presented me as saying with regard to things which are doubtful, that we should 'neither affirm nor deny them; employ neither statement but regard them both as false'. But a little later, in his summary of my position, he has it that we should 'withhold our assent from something doubtful as if it were an evident falsehood, and turn our will in completely the opposite direction, adopting an opinion of it that is appropriate to something false and imaginary'. Now this is quite different from 'maintaining and saying the opposite' in the sense of regarding the opposite as true in the way he supposes me to be doing here. When in the First Meditation I said that I wanted for a time to try to convince myself of the opposite of the views which I had rashly held before, I immediately added that my reason for wanting to do this was as it were to counter-balance the weight of preconceived opinion so that I should not incline to one side more than the other. I did not mean that I should regard either side as true, or set this principle up as the basis of a system of supremely certain knowledge, as my critic elsewhere unfairly maintains. So I should like to know what purpose he had in mind in introducing this law of his. If it was to foist it on to me, then his honesty leaves something to be desired; for it is clear from what he himself says that he is quite well aware that the rule is not mine. No one could possibly think that both alternatives should be regarded as false (which he said was my view), and at the same time maintain and assert that one of the two opposites was true (as this rule of his has it). But if he merely introduced the rule to amuse himself, so as to have something to attack, then I am amazed that his ingenuity has been unable to devise anything more plausible or subtle. I am also amazed that he has the leisure to produce such a verbose refutation of an opinion which is so absurd that it would not even strike a seven year old child as plausible; for we must remember that up till now his attacks have been limited to this foolish rule. Lastly, I am amazed at the power of his imagination; for even though he is doing battle only with a totally empty mirage which his own brain has produced, he has throughout adopted the same attitude, and used the same words, as if I myself had been his adversary, and he had seen me fighting him face to face.

Second question: whether renouncing everything that is doubtful is a good method of philosophizing

[Bourdin to Descartes, continued]

Your second question is whether it is a good method of philosophizing to renounce everything which is in any way doubtful. Unless you disclose your method at greater length, you have no reason to expect an answer from me. But you do in fact expound the method as follows.

'In order to philosophize', you say, 'in order to examine whether there is anything certain, or supremely certain, and if so what, I proceed as follows. Since everything I have previously believed or known is doubtful and uncertain, I consider it as false and completely reject it. I convince myself that there exists neither earth, nor sky, nor any of the things which I previously believed to be in the world; indeed, I suppose that there is not a world at all, or any body or mind—in a word, that there is nothing. Then, after completing this general dismissal of my beliefs and declaring that there is nothing, I embark in earnest on my own philosophy; using it as a guide, I follow the trail of truth and certainty with care and caution, just as if there were some supremely powerful and cunning demon who wished to lead me into error. To avoid being deceived I look round carefully and decide to accept only things of the kind which provide no possible scope whatever for that rascally demon to impose on me, no matter how hard he tries—the kinds of fact that not even I can make myself refuse to acknowledge, or bring myself to deny. So I reflect and turn things over and over in my mind until some fact of this sort occurs to me; and when I come across it I use it as an Archimedean point on which to construct other truths, and in this way I arrive step by step at further facts that are wholly certain and thoroughly scrutinized.''

This is quite excellent, and I might easily reply that on the surface the method seems to me to be an outstandingly brilliant one; but since you expect me to give a careful reply, and I cannot give one until I have tried and tested this method of yours by actual practice, let us set out on this safe and well-trodden road ourselves, and discover where it eventually leads us. Since you know every bend and defile and detour on the way, and have for a long time trained yourself to follow it, I ask you to be my guide. You now have either a companion or a pupil ready to accompany you, so tell me please, what are your orders? Although for me the road is new and frightening, since I am not accustomed to the darkness, I am happy to set out because the prospect of the truth is a powerful lure. I hear you: you command me to do whatever I see you doing, and to tread in your footsteps. This is a splendid way of giving your orders and guidance, and I am delighted with your response. I am all ears.

§I. AN APPROACH TO THE METHOD IS REVEALED

'First of all', you say, 'after going over my previous opinions, I am finally compelled to admit that there is not one of my former beliefs about which a doubt may not properly be raised; and this is not a flippant or ill-considered conclusion but is based on powerful and well thought-out reasons. So in future I must withhold my assent from these former beliefs just as carefully as I would from obvi-

ous falsehoods if I want to discover any certainty. In view of this I think it will be a good plan to turn my will in completely the opposite direction and deceive myself by pretending for a time that these former opinions are utterly false and imaginary. I shall do this until the weight of preconceived opinion is counterbalanced and the distorting influence of habit no longer prevents my judgement from perceiving things correctly. I will suppose therefore, that some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall convince myself that there is nothing at all in the world, no sky, no earth, no minds or bodies. I repeat: no minds, and no bodies; this is the chief point here. I shall consider myself as having no hands, no eyes, no flesh or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things. I shall stubbornly and firmly persist in this meditation.'

Here, with your permission, let us pause a little to gather our strength afresh. The novelty of your enterprise disturbs me somewhat. Are you telling me to renounce all my former beliefs?

'Yes I am', you say, 'All of them'.

All of them? This implies no exceptions.

'All of them', you repeat.

I am reluctant to obey and yet I will. But it is extremely hard, and, to tell the truth, I have some scruples in complying; and unless you remove my scruples I fear that we shall not succeed in making our planned entry into your method. You acknowledge that all your former beliefs are doubtful, and you claim that you are compelled to admit this. But why not let me feel the same constraints so that I am compelled to admit it too? What compels you, may I ask? I heard you say just now that you had 'powerful and well thought-out reasons'. But what are they? And if they are powerful, why renounce them? Why not keep them? If, on the other hand, they are doubtful and completely suspect, how have they managed to force or compel you?

'Here they are, out in the open', you say. 'I make a habit of sending them out in front like skirmishers to begin the battle. The senses sometimes deceive us; we sometimes dream. Some people periodically go mad and think they see things which they really are not seeing at all and which exist nowhere.'

Is that all? When you promised me 'powerful and well thought-out reasons', I expected ones which were certain and free from all doubt reasons of the kind which are demanded by this little pamphlet of yours which we are examining, since it invokes such a high standard of care as to rule out the faintest shadow of doubt. But are your reasons of this sort? Are they any more than hesitant suspicions? 'The senses sometimes deceive us', 'Sometimes we dream', 'Some people go mad.' How do you establish these claims beyond any doubt with the kind of certainty demanded by that rule of yours which you continue to brandish—'we must take great care not to admit anything as true which we cannot prove to be so'? Has there been a time when you were able to make any of the following statements with certainty: 'At this moment the senses are indubitably deceiving me; this I know for sure'; 'Now I am dreaming'; 'I was dreaming a moment ago'; 'This man is delirious and quite sincerely thinks he sees things which he is not seeing at all'? If you say that there have been such occasions, make sure to prove it; make sure that the evil demon which you referred to was not perhaps tricking you. There is a serious risk that even while you are saying 'The senses sometimes deceive us', even though you regard this as a powerful and well thought-out consideration, the rascal of a demon is cocking a snook at you because he has tricked you all along. If, on the other hand, you say that there have not been any such occasions, why do you assert with such confidence that we sometimes dream? Why not follow your first law and reason as follows: 'It is not wholly certain that the senses have sometimes deceived us, or that we have sometimes dreamed, or that people have sometimes gone mad; hence I will assert and insist that the senses never deceive us, we never dream and no one goes mad.'

'But I suspect that these things do happen', you reply.

Here is my worry. Wherever I have trodden, I have found these 'powerful reasons' of yours to be feeble and to resemble fleeting suspicions, and this is why I have been reluctant to press on. In short, I am suspicious.

'But I am just as suspicious myself', you reply. 'Mere suspicion is all that is needed here. It is enough to say "I do not know whether I am awake or asleep", or "I do not know whether the senses are deceiving me or not".' If I may say so, it is not enough for me. I just do not see how you move from 'I do not know whether I am awake or dreaming' to 'I sometimes dream.' What if I never dream? What if I always do? What if you are not even capable of dreaming, and the demon is hooting with laughter because he has managed to persuade you that you sometimes dream and are deceived, when this in fact never happens? Believe me: since bringing that demon into the argument, since reducing your 'powerful and well thought-out reasons' to a mere 'perhaps', you have conjured up an evil which has produced no benefits for you at all. What if the cunning demon is presenting all these matters to you as doubtful and shaky when in fact they are firm and certain? What if he intends thereby to drive you into a pit, once you have stripped yourself by renouncing all these beliefs? Would it not be more sensible if, before divesting yourself, you were to put forward a reliable rule to ensure that the beliefs which you do renounce are ones which you are right to renounce? This general renunciation of all former beliefs is surely a considerable enterprise and one of the greatest importance, and if you take my advice you will first summon your thoughts to the council chamber for a serious discussion.

'No', you reply. 'I cannot possibly go too far in my distrustful attitude, and I know that no danger or error will result from my plan.'

What are you saying? You *know*? Is this certain and beyond all doubt? Is this the sole surviving timber from the great shipwreck that is to be hung up as an offering in the temple of truth? Or, since you are opening a new school of philosophy and thinking of your disciples, is it that you want this inscription to be placed over the door in gold letters: 'I cannot go too far in my distrustful attitude'? Will the students who enter your precincts be told to lay aside the old belief that 'Two and three make five', but to retain the maxim 'I cannot go too far in my distrustful attitude'? But what will you say if one of your new students happens to complain? What if it sticks in his throat when he is ordered to aban-

don the old belief that two and three make five, which no one has ever called into doubt, just because it is possible that some demon may be deceiving him, and yet he is ordered to retain this doubtful maxim that is full of flaws—'I cannot go too far in my distrustful attitude'—as if this was something which gave the demon no scope for imposing on him? What is your answer here? Will you guarantee that I need have no fear or apprehension or worry about the evil demon? Even if you give me every possible reassurance I shall still be very afraid of overdoing my distrustful attitude if I renounce and forswear as false such long-standing and virtually innate beliefs as 'A syllogism in Barbara has a valid conclusion', or 'I am something composed of body and mind.' And to judge by your expression and your voice, not even you, who are leading the way and offering yourself as a guide for the rest of us, are immune from fear. Come then; tell me straightforwardly and honestly, as is your custom. Do you really have no scruples about renouncing such long-standing beliefs as the following: 'I have a clear and distinct idea of God'; 'Everything that I clearly and distinctly perceive is true'; or 'Thinking, nutrition and sensation do not in any way belong to the body but belong to the mind'? I could list a hundred other such questions. My inquiries here are quite serious and I ask you to reply. In leaving the old philosophy and embarking on the new, can you sincerely shake off, reject and forswear these beliefs? Can you assert and maintain the opposite, viz. 'Now I do not have a clear and distinct idea of God'; 'I have been wrong to believe up till now that thinking, sensation and nutrition belong to the mind and not in any way to the body'? But what have I done? How quickly I have forgotten what I promised! At the beginning I pledged myself to you entirely as your companion and disciple, and yet here I am hesitating at the very start of our journey, full of scruples and obstinacy. Forgive me; I have sinned greatly, and have merely displayed my weakness of mind. I should have left all fear aside and plunged intrepidly into the darkness of renunciation; but I have hesitated and drawn back. If you show forbearance, I will make amends and will wipe out my evil deeds by a full and free rejection of all my former beliefs. I renounce and forswear all my former opinions. Excuse me for not calling the heavens and earth to witness my vow, since you claim that they do not exist. Nothing exists, then, absolutely nothing. Lead the way and I shall follow. You are an easy guide to follow, for you readily agree to go first.

COMMENTS

[Descartes on Bourdin, continued]

'Since what I have previously known is doubtful'. Here my critic has put 'known' instead of 'thought I knew'. The statement 'I knew' is incompatible with the statement 'It is doubtful', though he has undoubtedly failed to notice this. We must not attribute this to malice, for if malice had been involved he would not have touched on the point so briefly but would have pretended that the contradiction was of my making and would have produced a prolonged torrent of criticism.

'I repeat, no minds and no bodies'. He says this to enable him to indulge in a protracted piece of quibbling later on. At the outset, when I was supposing that I had not yet sufficiently perceived the nature of the mind, I included it in the list of doubtful things; but later on, when I realized that a thing that thinks cannot but exist, I used the term 'mind' to refer to this thinking thing, and said that the mind existed. But my critic proceeds as if I had forgotten my earlier denial of all this (when I was taking the mind to be something unknown to me); he talks as if I had taken the view that what I denied at the earlier stage (because I found it doubtful), must be denied for ever, as if it was impossible that such beliefs could be rendered certain and evident to me. It should be noted that throughout he treats doubt and certainty not as relations of our thought to objects, but as properties of the objects which inhere in them for all time. This means that if we have once realized that something is doubtful, it can never be rendered certain. But we should attribute all this to his good nature, and not to malice.

'All of them'. Here he is indulging in a fatuous quibble about the word 'all', just as he did earlier with the word 'nothing'.

'You are compelled to admit this'. Here this is an equally fatuous play on the word 'compelled'. There may be reasons which are strong enough to compel us to doubt, even though these reasons are themselves doubtful, and hence are not to be retained later on, as I have just pointed out. The reasons are strong so long as we have no others which produce certainty by removing the doubt. Now since I found no such countervailing reasons in the First Meditation, despite meditating and searching for them, I therefore said that the reasons for doubt which I had found were 'powerful and well thought-out'. But this is beyond the grasp of our critic, for he goes on to say 'When you promised me powerful reasons, I expected certain ones, ones of the kind demanded by this little pamphlet of yours'—as if the imaginary pamphlet he has put together can be related to what I said in the First Meditation. A little later on he says, 'Has there been a time when you were able to say with certainty that at this moment the senses are indubitably deceiving me, and I know this for sure?' But he does not see that here again he has produced a contradiction, by talking of regarding a thing as indubitable and at the same time doubting it. What a good fellow he is!

'Why do you assert with such confidence that we sometimes dream?' Here again he goes astray, though without any malicious intent. There is nothing at all that I asserted 'with confidence' in the First Meditation: it is full of doubt throughout. Yet it is the sole source for all the statements he discusses. He might just as well have found there the statements 'We never dream' and 'We sometimes dream.' When, shortly afterwards, he says 'I just do not see how you move from "I do not know whether I am awake or dreaming" to "I sometimes dream",' he is foisting on me, good-natured fellow that he is, a piece of reasoning that is worthy of himself alone.

'What if the cunning demon is presenting all these matters to you as doubtful and shaky when in fact they are firm and certain?' This remark makes it quite clear that, as I have pointed out above, my critic regards doubt and certainty as being in the objects rather than our thought. Otherwise, how could he pretend that things are being presented to me as doubtful even though they are not doubtful but certain? For the mere fact that something is presented as doubtful automatically makes it doubtful. But perhaps the demon prevented him seeing the contradiction in his words. It is regrettable that the demon so often interferes with his thought processes.

'This general renunciation of all former beliefs is surely a considerable enterprise and one of the greatest importance.' I myself made this point emphatically enough at the end of my reply to the Fourth Set of Objections and in the Preface to the *Meditations*, and for this very reason I suggested that they should be read only by those of a fairly robust intellect. I also made the point quite explicitly on pages 16 and 17 of the *Discourse on the Method*, published in French in 1637, where I described two types of intellect; I said that those in either of the two categories should at all costs avoid the general renunciation of beliefs. If my critic happens to fall into one of these categories, he should not impute his own mistakes to me.

'What are you saying? You *know*,' etc. When I said 'I knew' that there was no danger in my renouncing my beliefs I added 'because the task now in hand does not involve action but merely the acquisition of knowledge'. This makes it clear that in that passage I was merely speaking of 'knowing' in the practical sense which suffices for the conduct of life. I frequently stressed that there is a very great difference between this type of knowledge and the metaphysical knowledge that we are dealing with here—indeed I made the point so clear that I think only my critic could fail to see it.

'This doubtful maxim that is full of flaws—"I cannot go too far in my distrustful attitude".' Here again there is a contradiction in what my critic says. For everyone knows that a distrustful person, as long as he remains in a state of distrust, and therefore does not affirm or deny anything, cannot be led into error even by an evil demon. But a man who adds two and three together can be deceived by such a demon, as is shown by the example my critic himself has produced concerning the man who counted one o'clock four times.

'I shall still be very afraid of overdoing my distrustful attitude if I renounce these long-standing beliefs.' Although my critic here attempts at length to convince us that we should not carry our distrust too far, it is worth noting that he does not produce even the smallest hint of an argument to prove this, beyond his fear or distrust of the maxim that we should distrust everything. But here once again there is a contradiction. For from the fact that he is so afraid, but does not know for certain that he should not distrust himself, it follows that he should indeed distrust himself.

'Do you really have no scruples about renouncing such long-standing beliefs as "I have a clear and distinct idea of God" or "Whatever I clearly and distinctly believe is true"?' My critic calls these beliefs 'longstanding' because he is afraid that they may be taken to be original ideas that I was the first to notice. But I am prepared to let that go. He also wants to introduce a doubt concerning God, but only in passing; his aim here is perhaps to avoid being accused of slandering me by those who know that when renouncing my former beliefs I was especially careful to make an exception of all matters concerning faith, and morals in general. Finally, he fails to see that the renunciation of beliefs applies only to those who have not yet perceived anything clearly and distinctly. The sceptics, for example, for whom such a renunciation is commonplace, have never, *qua* sceptics, perceived anything clearly. For the very fact that they had perceived something clearly would mean that they had ceased to doubt it, and so ceased to be sceptics. As far as everyone else is concerned. until making such a renunciation there is virtually no one who ever perceives anything clearly, i.e. with the clarity which is required for metaphysical certainty; and for this reason the renunciation of beliefs is of great value to those who are capable of such clear knowledge and yet do not yet possess it. But as has become clear in the event, our critic will not find the exercise to be of such value—indeed I think he should studiously avoid it.

'Or will you renounce the belief that "thinking, nutrition and sensation do not in any way belong to the body but belong to the mind"?' My critic reports this belief as if it were mine, and implies at the same time that it is so certain that it could not possibly be called into doubt by anyone. But one of the most notable points in my *Meditations* is that I refer nutrition to the body alone, not to the mind or to that part of man which thinks. This one error proves three things clearly: first, my critic wholly fails to understand the *Meditations*, although he has undertaken to refute them; second, he has been confused by the fact that in the Second Meditation I referred nutrition to the soul in the course of quoting the common opinion; and in the third place he himself regards as indubitable many beliefs which should not be accepted without examination. At the end, however, he finally reaches a conclusion which is wholly true when he says that in all these matters he has 'merely displayed his weakness of mind'.

§2. WE PREPARE TO FIND THE WAY INTO THE METHOD

[Bourdin to Descartes, continued]

'After renouncing all my former beliefs', you say, 'I begin to philosophize as follows: I am; I am thinking. I am, so long as I am thinking. This proposition, "I exist", is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind."

This is excellent, my distinguished friend! You have found your 'Archimedean point', and without doubt you can now move the world if you so wish. Look: the whole earth is already shaking. But since, I gather, you are cutting everything back to the bone, so that your method may include only what fits and is coherent and necessary, may I ask why you refer to the *mind* (I mean in the phrase 'whenever it is conceived in my mind')? Did you not banish both mind and body? But perhaps this phrase slipped in by accident. And if it is so hard, even for an expert, to forget altogether the things we have been accustomed to accept since childhood, then even a raw beginner like myself need not despair, should I happen to stumble. But please continue.

'I will therefore go back', you say, 'and meditate on what I originally believed myself to be, before I embarked on this present train of thought. I will then subtract anything capable of being weakened, even minimally, by the arguments now introduced, so that what is left at the end may be exactly and only what is certain and unshakeable.

Before you proceed, shall I venture to ask you a question? Since you have solemnly renounced all your former beliefs as doubtful and false, why do you want to look at them again, as if you hoped to salvage something certain from the rags and tatters? What if your 'original beliefs about yourself' were wrong? Indeed, given that everything which you recently abjured was doubtful and uncertain (otherwise why did you abjure it?), how can it be that these beliefs should

now cease to be doubtful and uncertain—unless your renunciation of your beliefs was like Circe's drug or some cleansing solution? But I prefer to admire and respect your plan. People who show their friends round palaces and castles often enter through a private side-door rather than the main entrance. So I shall follow you even through underground passages, so long as I can hope to reach the truth eventually.

'What then did I formerly think I was?', you ask. 'A man'.

Permit me here to admire your skill once again. In order to discover what is certain, you make use of what is doubtful. To bring us out into the light, you order us down into the darkness. Do you want me to reflect on what I originally believed myself to be? Do you want me to put on once more the ragged old cloak which I renounced some time ago, and say again 'I am a man'? But what if Pythagoras or one of his disciples were present, and told you that he used to be a cockerel? This is not to mention madmen, fanatics or other sorts of raving or deranged people. However, you are a skilled and experienced guide who knows all the twists and turns of the way, and so I shall not despair.

'What is a man?', you go on to ask.

If you want me to answer, let me first ask a question. Which man are you asking about, and what exactly are you asking when you ask what a man is? Do you mean the man I formerly imagined I was and believed myself to be—the man I now maintain I am not, since renouncing my beliefs, thanks to you? If this is the man you are asking about, the man whom I used to have such a mistaken conception of, then he is some kind of compound of soul and body. Is my answer adequate? I think so, in view of your next question.

COMMENTS

[Descartes on Bourdin, continued]

'I begin to philosophize as follows: "I am; I am thinking. I am, so long as I am thinking".' Note that my critic here admits that I have made my first step in philosophizing, and for the first time established a proposition as firm, by recognizing my own existence. This shows that when he elsewhere pretends that my first step was a positive or definite renunciation of all my beliefs, he is saying the opposite of what he really believes. I will not comment further on the subtlety with which he portrays me as beginning to philosophize with the words 'I am; I am thinking etc.' For even if I say nothing, his sincerity can be recognized throughout.

'Why do you refer to the mind (in the phrase "whenever it is conceived in my mind")? Did you not banish both mind and body?' I have already pointed out how my critic seizes on the word 'mind' to construct his quibbles. But 'it is conceived in the mind' here means simply 'it is thought of'; and hence he is incorrect in supposing that I am referring to the 'mind' *qua* part of man. Moreover, even though I have previously rejected body and mind, together with everything else, as being doubtful or not yet clearly perceived by me, this does not prevent my re-adopting these items later on, if it happens that I perceive them clearly. But our critic does not grasp this, since he thinks that doubt is something that inheres in the object doubted, and is inseparable from it. For shortly afterwards he asks 'How can it be that these same beliefs' (i.e. those which were previously doubtful) 'should now cease to be doubtful and uncertain?' He wants me solemnly to forswear these beliefs and he 'admires my skill in making use of what is doubtful in order to discover what is certain', etc. This is to suggest that I made it a basic principle of my philosophy that everything doubtful should be regarded as false for all time.

'Do you want me to reflect on what I originally believed myself to be? Do you want me to put on once more the ragged cloak', etc.? Here I shall employ an everyday example to explain to my critic the rationale for my procedure, so as to prevent him misunderstanding it, or having the gall to pretend he does not understand it, in future. Suppose he had a basket full of apples and, being worried that some of the apples were rotten, wanted to take out the rotten ones to prevent the rot spreading. How would he proceed? Would he not begin by tipping the whole lot out of the basket? And would not the next step be to cast his eye over each apple in turn, and pick up and put back in the basket only those he saw to be sound, leaving the others? In just the same way, those who have never philosophized correctly have various opinions in their minds which they have begun to store up since childhood, and which they therefore have reason to believe may in many cases be false. They then attempt to separate the false beliefs from the others, so as to prevent their contaminating the rest and making the whole lot uncertain. Now the best way they can accomplish this is to reject all their beliefs together in one go, as if they were all uncertain and false. They can then go over each belief in turn and re-adopt only those which they recognize to be true and indubitable. Thus I was right to begin by rejecting all my beliefs; and later on, noticing that there was nothing which I could know more certainly or more evidently than that I existed so long as I was thinking, I was right to make this my first assertion. Finally, I was right to go on to ask what I had originally believed myself to be; my purpose was not to continue to believe all my former opinions concerning myself, but to re-adopt any beliefs which I perceived to be true, reject any that were false, and reserve for subsequent examination any that were uncertain. This makes it clear that my critic's remarks about my 'skill' in making what is uncertain yield certainties and my 'method of dreaming' (as he calls it below) are quite beside the point. And what he goes on to say about Pythagoras and the cockerel, and facetious comments in the two following paragraphs concerning other people's views on the nature of the body and soul, are similarly quite irrelevant. It was not my intention to make a survey of all the views anyone else had ever held on these matters, nor was there any reason why I should have done so. I confined myself to what I had originally believed quite spontaneously and with nature as my guide, and to the commonly held views of others, irrespective of truth or falsity; for my purpose in making the survey was not to adopt these beliefs, but merely to examine them.

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Throughout my writings I have made it clear that my method imitates that of the architect. When an architect wants to build a house which is stable on ground where there is a sandy topsoil over underlying rock, or clay, or some other firm base, he begins by digging out a set of trenches from which he removes the sand, and anything resting on or mixed in with the sand, so that he can lay his foundations on firm soil. In the same way, I began by taking everything that was doubtful and throwing it out, like sand; and then, when I noticed that it is impossible to doubt that a doubting or thinking substance exists, I took this as the bedrock on which I could lay the foundations of my philosophy. My critic, by contrast, is like a jobbing bricklayer who, because he wants to be regarded as a professional expert in his town, has a grudge against an architect who happens to be building a chapel there, and looks for every opportunity to criticize his work. But being so ignorant that he cannot grasp the point of anything the architect does, he only dares to attack the first and most obvious stages of the work. Thus he notices that the architect started by digging a trench, and removing not just the sand and loose soil but bits of wood and stone and anything else that is mixed up with the sand, so that he could get down to a firm base on which to lay the foundations of the chapel. He has also heard the architect answering questions about the reason for digging trenches and explaining that the topsoil on which we stand is not always firm enough to bear the weight of a large building; sand, he went on to explain, is particularly unstable because it not only sinks when a heavy weight is placed on it, but is also quite often shifted by running water, which leads to the unexpected collapse of anything built on top of it; and finally, when this kind of subsidence occurs in mines, the miners often say that it is caused by goblins or demons who dwell underground. Hearing all this, the envious bricklayer seizes the opportunity to pretend that the architect believes that digging out a trench is all there is to building a chapel: 'He thinks that building a chapel consists in digging a trench', he cries, 'or in uncovering the bedrock at the base of the trench, or in building something over the trench in such a way that the trench stays empty!' And he goes on to suggest that the architect is so foolish as to fear that the earth he stands on will give way under his feet or be undermined by goblins. Now he may manage to convince a few children or others who are so ignorant of architecture that they think that digging trenches in order to lay the foundations of a building is something new and strange. Such people may be ready to listen to someone whom they know and whom they regard as an honest man who knows his job, and they may believe what he says about an architect whom they do not know and who, so far as they have heard, has only dug trenches and never actually built anything. After convincing a few people in this way, the poor fellow becomes so delighted with his story that he hopes he will persuade the whole world of it. By now the architect has filled all the trenches with stones, and built his chapel securely on a base of very solid material, so that it stands there for everyone to see; but our critic still sticks to his plan and hopes to persuade everyone of his absurd story. To this end he stands in the high street every day and presents a comic account of the architect's doings for the benefit of the passing crowd. This is how it goes.

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