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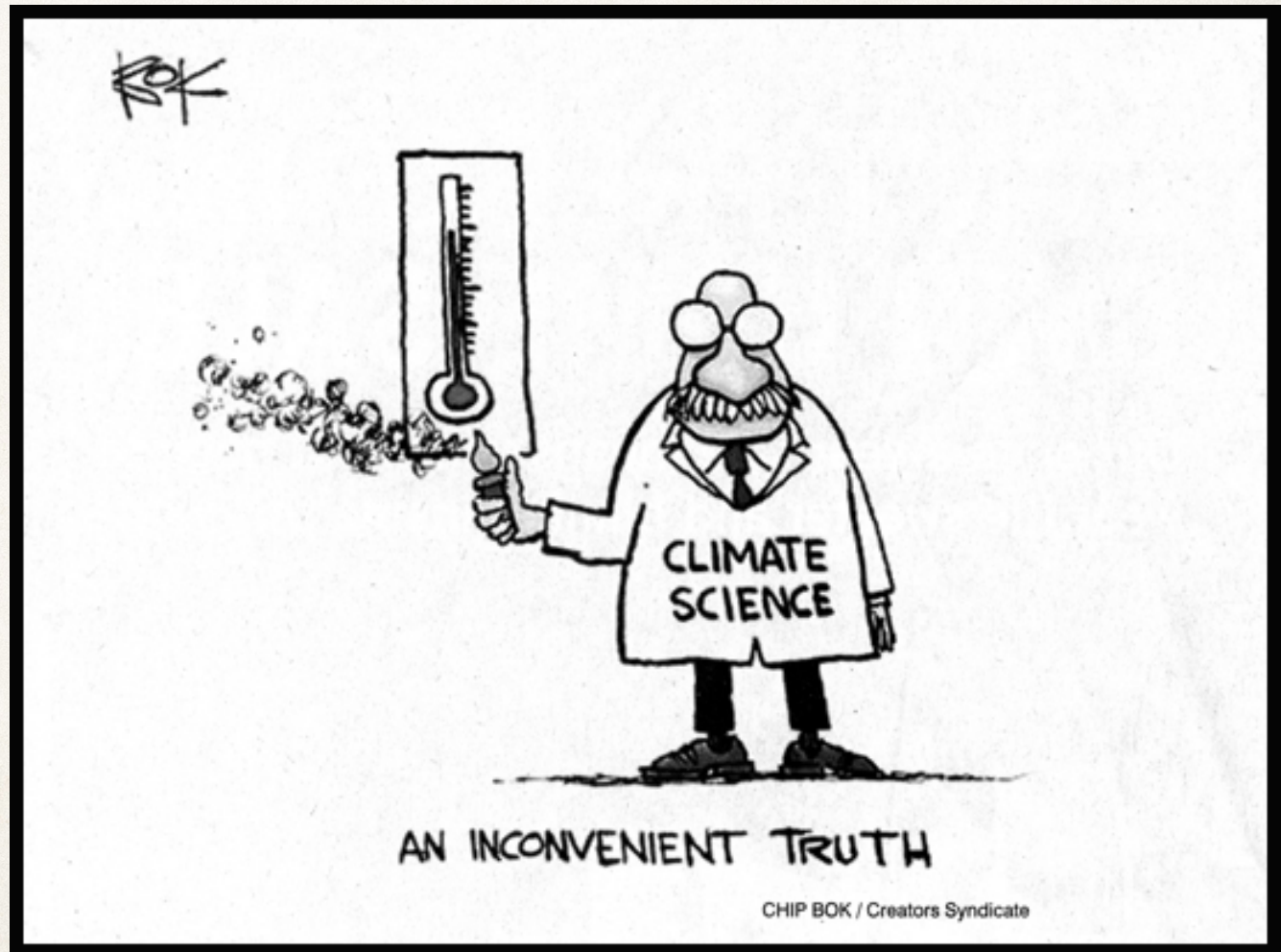
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Wittgenstein's Answer to Skepticism

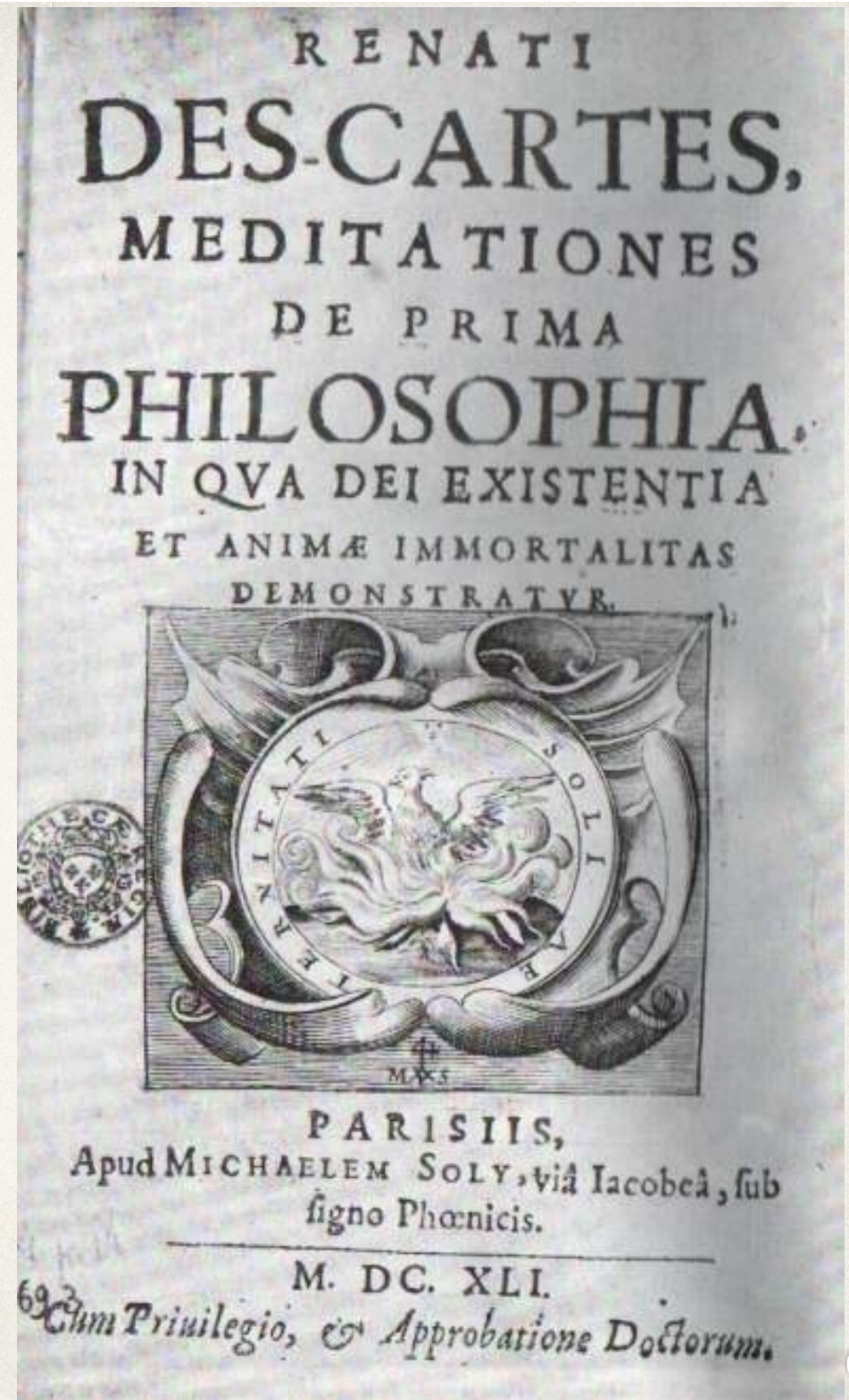
Beliefs, Justification and Skepticism

How do we
justify our beliefs?

Can everything
we believe be
false?



Descartes' Answer to Skepticism

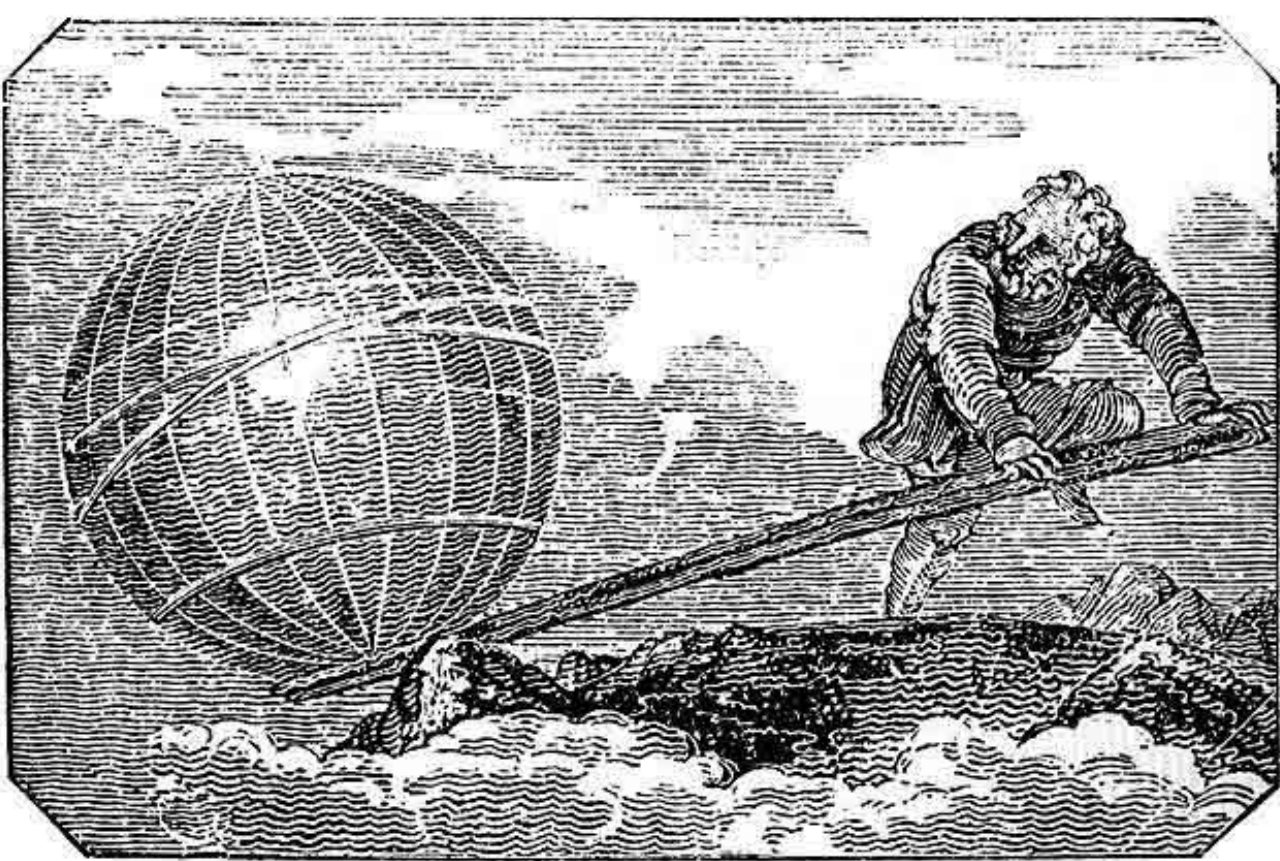


I (You, We) Can Doubt As Much As I Like, But There Is One Thing I cannot Doubt— *That I Exist*

But how is “I exist” an answer to skepticism? The skeptic can still doubt many other things.

The indubitable nature of “I exist” is the first step against skepticism

“I think” Is the Archimedean Point



“Archimedes said that if he had one firm and immovable point he could lift the world with a long enough lever; so I too can hope for great things if I manage to find just one little thing that is certain.”

Descartes' Large Philosophical Project in the Meditations

- **Med I:** Everything is being doubted
- **Med II:** First certainty—that *I exist* and *I am a thinking thing*
- **Med III:** Second certainty — that “God exists and is good”
- **Med IV-V:** Third Certainty — that we are deceived only when our free will trespasses its limits
- **Med VI:** Final certainty — that the external world exists

Descartes' Foundationalism

- Begin by justifying with absolute certainty some basic beliefs, for example “I exist” and “I am a thinking thing”
- Next, justify other more complex beliefs, for example, “God exists”, on the basis of the basic beliefs.
- Next, justify more and more complex beliefs on the basis of beliefs previously justified.
- And so on...



Is Descartes' Foundationalism Successful as an Answer to Skepticism?

Objections to the “I Exist” Argument

- If I am deceived, then I exist. (*why?*)
 - If I’m deceived, there is something being deceived, namely myself.
 - If there is something being deceived, namely myself, I must exist.
 - So, If I am deceived, then I exist.

Grammar v. Reality

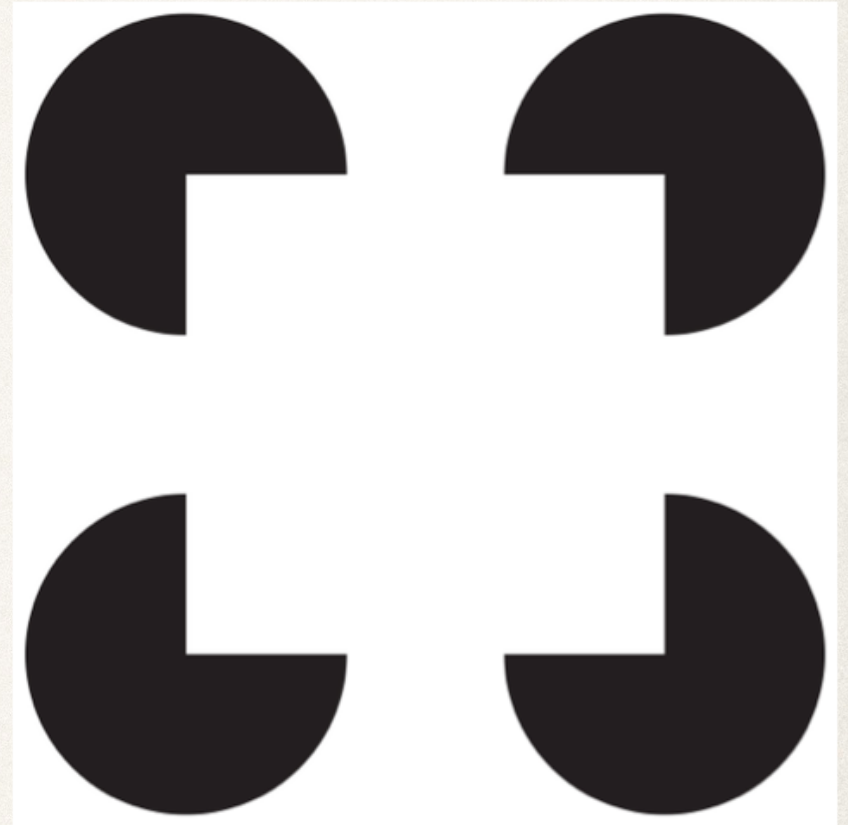
“What, from Descartes’ own point of view, he should profess to know is not ‘I think/I exist,’ but ‘there is thinking/there is existence/there is something’ . . . **Descartes was justified in feeling sure that there was a certain occurrence, concerning which doubt was impossible; but he was not justified in bringing in the word ‘I’ in describing this occurrence.**”

“Descartes ... thought that there could not be . . . thinking unless someone thought. No doubt most people would still hold this view; but in fact it springs from a **notion—usually unconscious—that the categories of grammar are the categories of reality.**”

Bertrand Russell, *An Outline of Philosophy* (1927)

The “I” Isn’t Certain at All

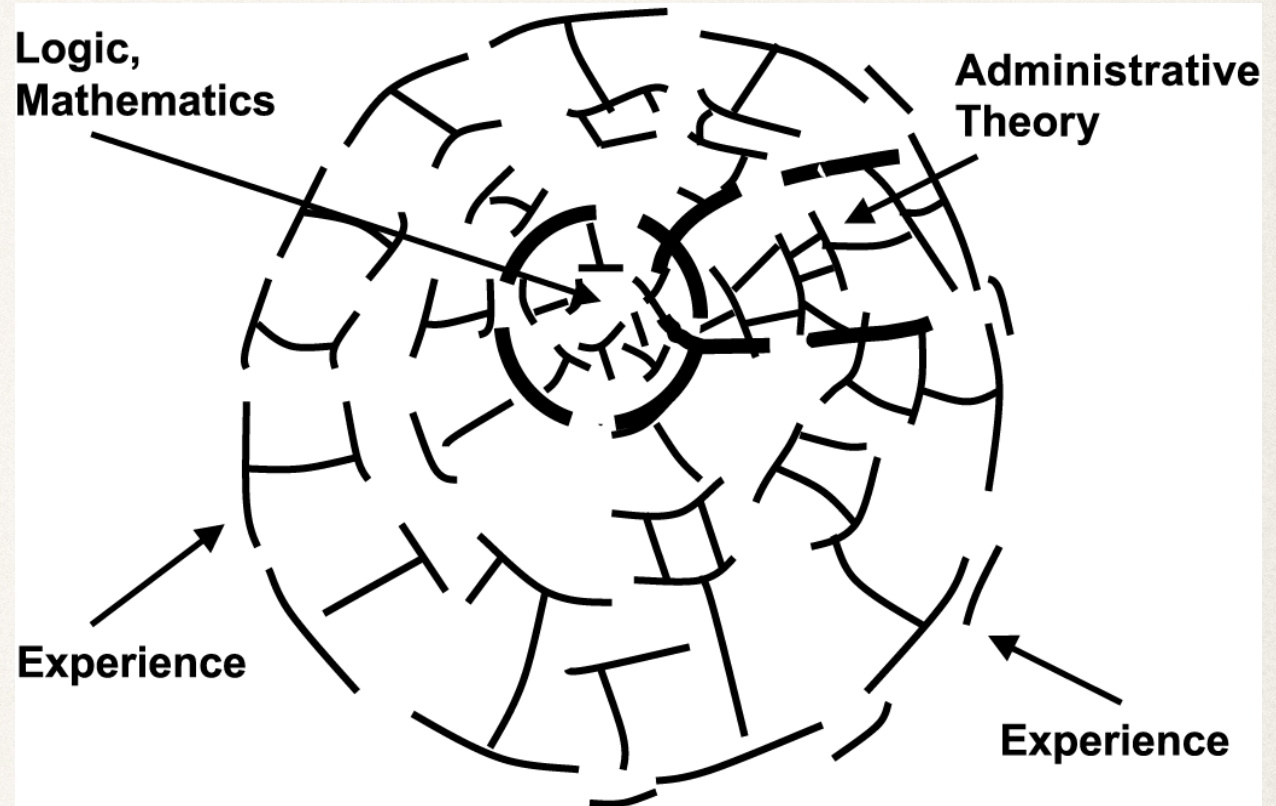
“. . . that it is I who think, that there must necessarily be something that thinks, that thinking is an activity and operation on the part of a being who is thought of as a cause, that there is an “ego” . . . In short, **the assertion ‘I think/I exist’ assumes that I compare my state at the present moment with other states of myself which I know, in order to determine what it is; thus, the assertion ‘I think/I exist’ has no immediate certainty for me.**”



Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Finding One Proposition Which
Cannot Be Doubted Is Hard

from Foundationalism *to* the “Web of Beliefs”



Web of Beliefs: There is no sure/certain proposition on which everything else rests. Rather, our beliefs are connected with one another as a web, without any of them being certain. It is the “working together” of different beliefs that makes them justified.

Ludwig
Wittgenstein
(1889-1951)



Can One Be Wrong About Everything?

“67. Could we imagine a man who keeps on making mistakes where we regard a mistake as ruled out, and in fact never encounter one? E.g. he says he lives in such and such a place, is so and so old, comes from such and such a city, and he speaks with the same certainty (giving all the tokens of it) as I do, but he is wrong. But what is his relation to this error? What am I to suppose?

69. I should like to say: “If I am wrong about this, I have no guarantee that anything I say is true.””

—Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Wait — What Does it Mean to Be Wrong in The First Place?

“75. Would this be correct: If I merely believed wrongly that there is a table here in front of me, this might still be a mistake; but if I believe wrongly that I have seen this table, or one like it, every day for several months past, and have regularly used it, that isn't a mistake?”

—Wittgenstein, On Certainty

There Are Some Statements For Which It Makes No Sense for Me to Be Wrong

“79. That I am a man and not a woman can be verified, but if I were to say I was a woman, and then tried to explain the error by saying I hadn’t checked the statement, the explanation would not be accepted.

80. The truth of my statements is the test of my understanding of these statements.

81. That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.”

–Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Certainty Is Needed for Doubt

“114. If you are not certain of any fact, you cannot be certain of the meaning of your words either.

115. If you tried to doubt everything, you would not get as far as doubting anything. The game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.”

—Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Understanding, Meaning and Doubting

“26. I am not more certain of the meaning of my words than I am of certain judgments. Can I doubt that this colour is called “blue”?
(My) doubts form a system.

127. For how do I know that someone is in doubt? How do I know that he uses the words “I doubt it” as I do?

”

–Wittgenstein, On Certainty

The Groundless of Our Beliefs

“Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to an end; but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of seeing on our part; it is our acting.

205. If the true is what is grounded, then the ground is not true, not yet false.”

–Wittgenstein, On Certainty

Can You Meaningfully Assert or Even
Conceive of Being a Brain in a Vat?



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