

# A TRIVIAL DISCUSSION BETWEEN SOCRATES, BERKELEY AND DESCARTES REGARDING THE NATURE OF REALITY

*recorded by Aristocles*

*in the spring of 2016 in the Elysian Fields, "where the good receive a life free from toil"*

*Bishop Berkeley and Socrates are in the Elysian Fields, enjoying wine and charcuterie at a sidewalk bistro outdoors one sunny spring afternoon, when Socrates catches a glimpse of Descartes walking by.*

SOCRATES: *(Calling out to him)* Descartes, my dear fellow! Long time no see! Won't you join us?  
*(Calls out to the waitress)* *Ma chérie, une verre pour mon vieux ami, et une assiette aussi!* *(Turning to Descartes)* Have you met Bishop Berkeley of the Anglican Church?

DESCARTES: I have not yet had the pleasure. *(Bows deferentially)* My Lord. *(Seeing Berkeley beginning to remonstrate, asks)* Is that not how one addresses an Anglican Bishop?

BERKELEY: *(Rising and shaking the other's hand firmly in the conventional manner)* My dear sir, none of that! Please let us dispense with formalities – especially since all of us are long since dead and buried; I am no more a Bishop here in these Elysian Fields than your good self, or Socrates! We are all on informal terms here: just call me "Berkeley". (I hesitate to say "Just call me George", because then people might confuse me with my fellow Irishman, George Bernard Shaw!) And may I add that it's a privilege for me to meet one of the first – and in my own view at least, one of the best – philosophers of the post-Classical era. "The father of modern philosophy", as many have called you! *(Pours wine for Descartes.)*

DESCARTES: You honour me, Berkeley. *(He pronounces the name correctly: more or less as "Barkly".)* I have of course read a great deal of what *you* have written, and am most intrigued by it.

SOCRATES: Indeed. Berkeley and I had just been discussing the nature of reality when you walked in.

DESCARTES: It's something that hugely interests me too, I must confess – boring though the subject seems to be for many others, absorbed as they are with more mundane matters. Though I have to say that here in this incorporeal realm, mundane matters seem to have lost much of the compelling weight they had on Earth, since none of us has to worry about finances. *(Raising his glass)* Of course that doesn't mean I don't hugely enjoy this wonderful wine and delicious charcuterie and baguette! And your wonderful company.

SOCRATES: *(Raising his glass and toasting Descartes)* Here's to you, then, my old friend! *(Berkeley raises his glass also.)* What I like about you, my dear fellow, is that you are ready to jettison everything – all your previously-held beliefs – and start your philosophy from *scratch*. Back to basics!

BERKELEY: Indeed, that's one of the *best* things any philosopher can do ... and do again and again. Unless one builds one's philosophy on the bedrock of some *absolutely indisputable* truth – or truths – how can one be *sure* of one's conclusions?

SOCRATES: Indeed – and that's one reason why I don't even *have* a philosophy. Indeed, I claimed while alive that the one thing I knew was that I knew nothing! *(Smiles)*. Admittedly I realize now, since talking to Aristotle after my death, that such a statement entails a contra-

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diction, and therefore it must be false – for had I known even *one* thing I could not have, strictly speaking, known *nothing* – so nowadays I only claim to know very little. But as when I was alive, I am always willing to learn from others, all of whom I consider to be considerably wiser than my insignificant self ... and that includes the two of you!

DESCARTES: (*Turning to face Socrates*) *Mon cher ami*, I've told you time and again that you are too hard on yourself. I've always admired your keen sense of ferreting out falsehoods, and especially of finding out the logical flaws in other people's arguments. Your "Socratic method" or *elengkhos* is to this day the primary way of finding out the truth, especially in courts of law. You should be proud of yourself for having invented it!

SOCRATES: Well, I didn't actually *invent* it, you know. As I once said to Prof. Einstein, I may have *used* it more than anyone else – *perhaps* – but I did not *invent* it as such. And anyway it was Flatface who made my dialogues famous; without him no one would have even *known* about my so-called "method". Really, I'd be a nobody without Flatface.

BERKELEY: "Flatface?"

SOCRATES: That's what we used to call him. No one used his real name. We all called him "Flatface" – *Plátōn* in Greek. Not that his face was *actually* flat – though he did have a broad forehead (and broad shoulders too, I might add) – but that *was* his nick-name.

BERKELEY: You're talking about Plato? That was his *nick*-name? Not his real name? Seriously?

SOCRATES: Yeah. I liked the young fellow, I really did. He had a fun side to him: once, when we were at a symposium, he got rip-roaring drunk and tore off all his clothes and started to ... well, never mind: it's an entertaining story but not relevant to us, and he'd probably not want it told anyway; but he *was* plastered. *Quite* blotto! But yes, I do claim that the unexamined life is not worth living. Examine all things, I say, and hold fast that which is true!

BERKELEY: You know, I do think Descartes is right about your "Socratic method". I myself used something very similar to it, and to Plato's dialogues, when writing my own *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*.

DESCARTES: Come to think of it, Socrates, what if your "Socratic" method were applied to a discussion about reality – the discussion you two were having before I walked in, and which I'd be most interested in joining ... if you will have me of course? It wouldn't strictly speaking be a "*dialogue*", seeing that there are *three* of us engaged in it. We could call it a "trivial" discussion instead, however ... seeing as how our modern word "trivial" is derived from the Latin word TRIVIA meaning "three ways".

SOCRATES: (*Laughs*) That's hilarious! It would be a most *non-trivial* trivial discussion, if I may so put it – especially since it would be a discussion about the bedrock of absolutely *everything*.

BERKELEY: You know, I think that's a *splendid* idea! Let's start from the basics, *assuming we know nothing at all about the nature of reality*, and see where it leads us. And Descartes, I think we should use your method of "Cartesian doubts" also: doubting everything that *can* be doubted, and accepting as definitely true only that which *cannot possibly* be doubted, like your COGITO ERGO SUM. All else should be a definite "maybe", if not altogether a "no-no".

SOCRATES: I agree. Let's start from absolutely *indubitable* truths, and let's see where they lead us.

DESCARTES: I also agree, and wholeheartedly. ... Well, *of course* I agree, seeing that it was *I* who originally came up with the idea of "Cartesian doubts"! (*Smiles.*)

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- SOCRATES: Yes, indeed, Descartes. Did you not initially doubt the existence of everything other than your own self, including such things as rocks and trees and houses and horses – and even space and time – saying that our beliefs in them might be the results of demons deceiving us, or an unsound mind, or dreams, or hallucinations, or the like? But, I gather, you later *accepted* their existence, did you not? May I ask, why?
- DESCARTES: I did so, for I argued that God, being good, would not deceive us as to their existence.
- SOCRATES: But did you not doubt the existence of God Himself, to begin with?
- DESCARTES: Yes, initially I did; but I was eventually convinced that it would be erroneous to doubt His existence, for I argued that our idea of God is of a perfect being, and it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, and therefore God *must* exist.
- SOCRATES: But that rather depends on whether our idea of God as a perfect being is *true* or not, doesn't it? What if it isn't? I mean, it's not as if *all* our ideas are true, is it. What if our idea of God as a perfect being is simply not *true*? How can we be *in no doubt whatsoever* that our idea of God is actually *true*?
- BERKELEY: Well-argued, Socrates. If, Descartes, you're going to doubt *everything* that cannot be firmly established as *absolutely* true, why not doubt the *truth* of your *idea* of God? You yourself have admitted that many of your ideas were demonstrated, in retrospect, to have been false; so why not this one? Why must *this* one be *indubitably* true?
- SOCRATES: My point exactly. Though I am quite surprised at *you*, Berkeley, doubting the existence of God, you having been a Bishop and all ... or do you *really* doubt His existence?
- BERKELEY: No, not at all; I have given my own proof for God's existence elsewhere; but I'd require any proof of the existence of God to be absolutely *indubitable* ... as I am sure Descartes would too. Besides, Descartes, (*turning towards the latter*), I think I see another flaw in your argument. It is surely more perfect to have a body than *not* to have one, or to have a full set of teeth than *not* to have a full set of teeth, or to have two eyes than to have only *one* eye, or *none* ... but can we conclude therefrom that God *must* have a body, or a full set of teeth, or two eyes? Surely you will agree that we cannot!
- SOCRATES: And thinking about it even further, if your argument is about our *idea* of God, then should not the argument go thus: "Our idea of God is of a perfect being, and it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, therefore our *idea* of God must exist"? Which, of course, it does. I mean, isn't your argument about our *idea* of God, rather than about God Himself?
- DESCARTES: No, it's intended to be about God *Himself!* Not just about our *idea* of God.
- SOCRATES: But then should you not express it to *reflect* that intention? For if you were to make the argument about God *Himself* rather than our *idea* of God, then surely the argument should be worded thus: "God is a perfect being, and it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, and therefore God *must* exist" ... shouldn't it?
- BERKELEY: Yes, it should, Descartes; and moreover, I feel certain that you also *know* it should.
- DESCARTES: Hmmm. (*Thinks long and hard, and sips on his wine, but doesn't say anything.*)
- SOCRATES: And if so, wouldn't such an argument be begging the question? Assuming God to exist in the very first premise of the argument, *before* His existence has been proven? Assuming the truth of the conclusion *before* the conclusion has been established to be true, in fact?

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DESCARTES: How so?

SOCRATES: Well, in the premise of that argument, namely “God is a perfect being”, isn’t there already an implicit – indeed, an almost *explicit* – assumption that God *is* ... or in other words, that God *exists*? If He *didn’t* exist, He *couldn’t* be perfect, could He? Indeed, if He didn’t exist, He couldn’t be *either* perfect *or* imperfect, could He?

BERKELEY: Quite so. And Descartes – and no disrespect is intended here, I hope you understand – but I don’t think you could logically draw the conclusion that God *must* exist from your original argument, *even* if you did not doubt the truth of your idea of God as a perfect being. How exactly would it *follow* from the premise, that our idea of God is of a perfect being – and even if we were to grant that it is more perfect to exist than not to exist – that God must exist? How would you formulate a *syllogism* to reach such a conclusion?

SOCRATES: (*Turning to Berkeley*) What do you mean, Berkeley?

BERKELEY: (*Turning now towards Socrates*) Well, what I mean is, surely in order to draw a valid conclusion in *logic*, there must be a logically *valid* chain of reasoning. Such as, to give a well-known example: (1) All men are mortal; (2) Socrates is a man; (3) Therefore Socrates is mortal. If propositions (1) and (2) are true, then the conclusion, proposition (3), *must* be true. By the way, Socrates, you can’t argue from your very existence in these Elysian Fields that you’re *not* mortal, because *here* you technically aren’t a *man*, but a “thought-being” (if I may so express it). Can you, Descartes (*turning now towards the latter*), put your *original* argument in such a *syllogistic* form? I don’t think you can.

DESCARTES: Well, off the top of my head ... I admit I can’t think of such a syllogism right at this moment, but if you were to give me some time ... Perhaps something like this: (1) It is more perfect to exist than not to exist; (2) God is the most perfect of all beings; (3) therefore God must exist.

SOCRATES: But isn’t this the same as your earlier argument, namely “God is a perfect being, and it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, and therefore God *must* exist”? Which, as we saw, begs the question – or in other words, assumes the truth of the conclusion in advance – for it implicitly assumes, in one of its two initial premises, that God exists, *before* proving in the conclusion that He does. But even more to the point, your syllogism doesn’t bring up the *idea* of God, does it? What Berkeley had asked was, that *even* if you did not doubt the truth of your idea of God as a perfect being, you couldn’t logically draw the conclusion, from your *original* first premise, that God must exist.

DESCARTES: (*Despondent*) But then must we doubt *everything*, including God Himself? I mean, where would that leave us?

SOCRATES: But my *dear* fellow! Wasn’t it you yourself who promoted the idea of doubting everything and starting from scratch? Wasn’t it you yourself who wrote – and I am quoting from memory, so forgive me if I get some of the words wrong – “It’s been some years now since I found out how many were the false beliefs which I had mistakenly thought in my youth were true”? Did you not thereupon seek to cast doubt upon absolutely *everything*, taking as true only that which was *absolutely, indubitably true* ... which according to you was only your COGITO?

DESCARTES: I *had* so written, indeed. Thank you for reminding me. It gives me heart to know that we can put our faith in the *truth*, even if we cannot in God ... or in gods.

SOCRATES: What you say reminds me of something my good Indian friend Mohandas Gandhi once

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said to me here in these Elysian Fields. “To me”, he said, “Truth *is* God”. He’s not an atheist, mind you, but to him there’s nothing more perfect – or even more *divine* – than the Truth ... and which, as a matter of fact, *can* be proven to exist.

BERKELEY: Proven? How so? I am most intrigued.

SOCRATES: Well, if we follow strict logic, the proof of the existence of truth goes something like the following REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM. Let us first *assume* that truth *doesn't* exist. We can enunciate such a claim thus: “truth doesn’t exist”. Simple words, eh? But then, it cannot be *true* that truth doesn’t exist! Because if it *were* true that truth doesn’t exist, then there would exist at least *one* truth, namely the truth we have just claimed: “truth doesn’t exist”. Such a claim results in a self-contradiction, you see – just like my original claim that the only thing I know is that I know nothing, which as Aristotle subsequently pointed out to me, contradicted itself, and was therefore clearly false.

BERKELEY: Your friend Gandhi makes a good point here, Socrates. However, I think I can say without fear of contradiction that all three of us – and, most probably, the majority of other people as well – are completely convinced of the existence of truth; and such a proof, although interesting, is rather redundant to us. Preaching to the choir, one might say!

SOCRATES: Yes, but don’t you see, if Gandhi is right, and Truth *is* God – and that statement of his, in my own personal view at least, is his greatest contribution to philosophy – then *right there* he has a proof, an *iron-clad, indubitable* proof, for the existence of God!

DESCARTES: True enough ... *if* he’s right about his first premise, namely “Truth is God”! But what if he *isn't*? Then his “proof” falls flat, doesn’t it? But you know, Socrates, all your statements have taken me back to those early – and euphoric – days when I first started writing my *Meditations*, especially my *First Meditation*. It was then that I decided, finally, “Enough with all the crap; *I want the Truth!*” And there was no one around who could say to me (*imitating Jack Nicholson*) “You can’t *handle* the truth!” ... forgive me, but that was a great one-liner in a movie I saw recently, and I couldn’t resist bringing it up. But when I was writing my *First Meditation* – that was a most euphoric time for me, I assure you!

BERKELEY: (*Astonished*) You have *movies* here in the afterlife???

SOCRATES: Well of *course!* These are the *Champs Elysées*, old boy! The best of all possible worlds! Look around you! *Everything* first-rate and fine – and fun – is available to all! Haven’t you ever visited the Amphitheatre at Delphi for an open-air screening? It seats five *thousand* spectators!

BERKELEY: I’ve been there, naturally, but only to see Greek plays ... which are wonderful, of course: better than Shakespeare’s in my view. But I didn’t know they showed *movies* there!

SOCRATES: Oh, *sure* they do. At night, of course: after dark. But if you haven’t seen *2001: A Space Odyssey* in high definition on the *BIG* screen, you’ve been missing something!

BERKELEY: I shall definitely try it out!

DESCARTES: You most definitely *should*. But coming back to our discussions: what is *your* proof for the existence of God, Berkeley?

BERKELEY: Well, it’s rather an involved process. To begin with, I establish the *non-existence* of matter ... or more correctly, I try to establish that material objects *in the way they are believed by us to exist* do not *necessarily* so exist. I mean – and to clarify – the *perceptions* certainly

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do exist, but there *need not* be anything “solid” – as it were – or *material*, behind these perceptions.

SOCRATES: Yes, you were talking to me about it just before Descartes joined us.

BERKELEY: You see, my point is that we never *actually* perceive anything that’s altogether *material*. When we say “We see a chair”, for example, do we see the chair *itself*? No; even modern science, materialist as it is in all its basic assumptions, tells us that we see the *light* from the chair, not the chair *itself*. Indeed, science teaches that we do not see even the *light* – instead, the light causes some cells in our retinas to send electro-chemical *signals* to our brains – and in fact we don’t even see those *signals*, for our brain in turn *interprets* those signals, and causes a perception, which we call “vision”, to arise in our *minds*. So we *never* see chairs or tables, rocks or trees as they *themselves* are – in fact, we don’t even see *brains, retinas, or neurons ... or electrical signals in them!* No one – even according to *science* – has ever seen an *actual* brain with neurons in it giving off electrical signals: that is to say, a brain *itself*. All we *can* see are the *visual perceptions* that arise in our minds; and exactly *how* they arise, no one has been able to explain with any degree of certainty. They can only say something like “Our brains give rise to our perceptions” ... but when pressed they admit that they haven’t the faintest clue *how* this happens – or at least the honest ones admit it: most others change the subject at this juncture! (*Smiles*). And the same sort of argument applies to all our other senses: those of hearing, touch, taste, smell, proprioception, balance, pain and all the rest – the list differs in length depending on whom we ask, but the same sort of argument applies to all of them. In other words, the idea that *matter* exists “out there” is based on *nothing more than assumption*. There is absolutely *no* proof – why, there’s not even any *evidence* – for the existence of any matter *behind* our perceptions. On the other hand, our perceptions *themselves* are *directly* perceived by us, and are therefore *indubitable!* Much like your COGITO, Descartes.

DESCARTES: Yes; I was talking to a Prussian fellow called Kant some time back, and he said much the same thing. He referred to things-in-themselves as “noumena”, meaning, roughly, “things that can be thought about” – the word derives from the Greek word *noûs* meaning “mind” – and argued that we can never actually *perceive* noumena, though we *can* think *about* them and *discuss* them ... which is *why* he calls them “noumena”. However, we only *perceive* “phenomena”, which is to say, *observable* events; things capable of being *observed* by us. That’s what they are called, from the Greek *phainomenon* meaning “thing appearing to view”, which is itself based on the Greek word *phainein*, “to show”.

SOCRATES: I have to admit that all this does make sense to me. Or to be more accurate, I can’t think up a counter-argument to it right at this moment ... and as you all know very well, it’s *counter-arguments* and *rebuttals* that are my forte. But when I *can’t* think up a counter-argument, I make it a point, as a matter of courtesy, to *agree* with my interlocutor – and not, instead, say “I can’t think up a counter-argument to your ideas right at this moment, but I shall work hard on the subject and get back to you when I’ve got a solid rebuttal”!

BERKELEY: (*Smiling*) Quite. And it’s very good of you to keep all your debates civil and courteous, Socrates. I wish your fellow Athenians had *appreciated* your approach before they condemned you to death! Not that it mattered much, of course, because by doing so they just sent you to an even better place – namely, the Elysian Fields, with all these delightful restaurants and bistros and delicious food and wine here ... and *movies*. (Not to forget movies: who knew?) But to return to our point: this fellow Kant (I met him too some time ago) argues that things-in-themselves – chairs, tables, rocks, and so on – *must* exist, but are not perceivable ... or, as he puts it, are not *knowable*. I however argue that if something is truly and utterly *unknowable*, then how can we even know that it *exists* at all?

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- SOCRATES: Why does *Kant* think that things-in-themselves do exist, then?
- DESCARTES: He gave me a small book of his in which he outlined some of his main ideas. (*Pulls a booklet out of his satchel and thumbs through it*). Here. He writes, and I quote him verbatim: "... though we cannot know these objects as things in themselves, we must yet be in a position at least to think them as things in themselves; otherwise we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears."
- BERKELEY: Yes, I know this argument. Basically he is saying, if there is an appearance – or a perception – it must be an appearance, or a perception, *of* something. But I don't see why. What if we were to consider the *appearances* – or *perceptions* – *themselves* as "things-in-themselves", and therefore not appearances – or perceptions – *of* anything?
- SOCRATES: How can that be?
- BERKELEY: Well, take for instance the perception of pain. Sometimes there exists what is called "phantom pain". An amputee, for instance, feels pain in feet which aren't actually there: his legs have been amputated! So it's not a pain *of* something, it's just a *pain*.
- DESCARTES: I see your point. Just as in dreams we see things which aren't visual perceptions *of* anything – they're just visual perceptions, without anything that they are perceptions *of*.
- SOCRATES: Yes, but that's when *dreaming*. We readily distinguish between dreams and reality after we wake up, saying "Those monsters in our nightmares weren't *really* there after all!"
- DESCARTES: True, but what if the state we call our "wakeful" reality is *also* a dream, or akin to a dream – just a more *regular* sort of dream; more regular than the dreams we dream when we are asleep? What if, in other words, there are different "levels" of dreaming, as it were, with some dreams being more "dreamy" than others? What if we were to wake up even from *this* dream we call reality, and see things as they *really* are, and they *are* really very different from the way we perceive them in this, our "waking dream" – if so I may put it? I argued something like this in my *First Meditation*.
- SOCRATES: Yes, good point. I remember reading that bit, now that you mention it. I don't read a lot, normally, since I don't think I am clever enough to grasp the subtleties of the arguments of clever people like you, Descartes, but I do remember reading that bit. It casts doubt upon the entire idea that our perceptions are *of* real things. Or, indeed, *of* anything at all!
- BERKELEY: Precisely. We have perceptions, true enough, but they need not be *of* anything. Kant's "things-in-themselves", separate from "phenomena", aren't *necessary*. There *can* be "appearances without anything that appears", to rebut Kant's own words – or to express it another way, there *can* be appearances without those appearances being *of* anything. It's *not* – to re-rebut Kant – an "absurd conclusion that there can be appearance without anything that appears." We *do* experience such things in dreams, and in phantom pain.
- SOCRATES: All right; I'd be willing to accept that, at least provisionally. But then we are left with *only* appearances, aren't we? In other words, all there are, are *perceptions* or *appearances*. Is *that* what you claim, Berkeley?
- BERKELEY: Indeed. That's indeed what I claim; and I support my claim with a *great* many arguments. And, Descartes, isn't that more or less what you too argue: that the *only* thing that's *completely* undoubtable is your COGITO, ERGO SUM?
- DESCARTES: Yes, I do so argue. "I think, therefore I am." For if I were *not*, I could not possibly *think!*

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- BERKELEY: But what makes you so sure that you *do* think? (I ask just to make sure you understand *me* and *my* arguments.)
- DESCARTES: Well, obviously I *know* that I think by *direct* experience! I *experience* myself thinking, so I *cannot* doubt it.
- BERKELEY: *Quite so!* That's *precisely* the point I am making. *Experiences* are indubitable! For suppose you were to experience pain – and the more intense, the better! – *could* you doubt your pain? Would it even *matter* whether it was “real” or “illusory”? Is, for example, an illusory toothache any less painful or bothersome than a real toothache? Aren't both *equally* indubitable? Assuming of course that the *degree* of pain is equal in both cases. What I mean to say is, if there is a sensation or experience, that *sensation* or *experience* exists without a *shadow* of a doubt. I ask *you*: doesn't it?
- SOCRATES: Are you arguing, Berkeley, that *all* experiences are indubitable?
- BERKELEY: Well, yes, I suppose I am. Surely even when we are dreaming, or under a hallucination, we are sure *that* we are having experiences, dream-like or hallucinatory though these experiences may be. Even in cases of phantom pain, the *pain itself* is real, even though the foot from which the phantom pain is *imagined* to emanate may have been amputated!
- DESCARTES: Yes, I think one may safely admit that whenever we *experience* anything, that experience *itself* cannot possibly be non-existent. It would be utterly absurd to say that an *experience which one has oneself* does not exist!
- SOCRATES: I think I see what you are saying – experiences can't *not* exist. Chairs, tables, houses and horses – and indeed the entire physical universe itself – *may* be non-existent (there is no *guarantee* that it *is* non-existent, but it *may* be) ... but there is not a single *experience* that can ever be argued *not* to exist. Am I right in so understanding your position?
- BERKELEY: Quite so, old chap. But I should add a caveat here: an experience is indubitable *only to the experienter*. If *you* have an experience, *you* cannot doubt that it exists; but *I* surely can! And so can anyone else. The *experienter* cannot doubt his – or her – *own* experience; but that does not make it indubitable as far as anyone *else* is concerned.
- SOCRATES: Ah. No one else can know where *your* shoe pinches! Or indeed, even *whether* your shoe pinches. Only *you* can know that. Experience *is* reality!
- BERKELEY: Indeed. Or, as I expressed it in writing once, ESSE is PERCIPI ... or to express it in simple English, “to be is to be perceived”.
- DESCARTES: Surely you meant to write ESSE *EST* PERCIPI ... ? I mean, “is” is an English word, while “ESSE” and “PERCIPI” are Latin words, right?
- BERKELEY: Well, what I *meant* to write was “ESSE” is “PERCIPI” (*making signs of quote marks in the air with the index and middle fingers of both hands*), but when I wrote it originally, I – absent-mindedly – left out the inverted commas, so it came out as ESSE is PERCIPI. Typographical error! But ESSE *EST* PERCIPI would do just as well – indeed, perhaps better.
- SOCRATES: Ah. I see. But surely “to experience” and “to perceive” are two different things ... no?
- BERKELEY: No, not really. When I experience love – for instance – I also *perceive* that I experience it, don't I. When I experience pain, I also *perceive* that I experience it. If I did *not* perceive whatever I experienced, I'd hardly *be* experiencing it, would I?

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SOCRATES: Yes, I get it. So: as I put it earlier, “Experience *is* reality”. Indubitable, unquestionable, *undeniable* reality. That’s what you claim, right, Berkeley? If so, I’m inclined to agree.

BERKELEY: Indeed I do so claim. And thank you for your agreement!

DESCARTES: You know, Berkeley, you might have hit the nail on the head. Yes, I really do think you have. When I wrote that I cannot doubt my own *existence* because I think, I should have also said that I cannot doubt that I *think*, either, because I *experience* myself thinking!

SOCRATES: I can find no counter-argument against the notion that all *experiences* are indubitable to the experiencer. But surely *it goes against common sense* – and even everyday life – to claim that chairs and tables, houses and horses, and this excellent wine we are drinking, and these delicious cheeses and meats and terrines we are eating, don’t exist at all ... ?

DESCARTES: Well, yes. It does seem so, at least to me. *Utterly* contrary to common sense!

BERKELEY: Not really, no. They *do* exist, but they exist as *perceptions*, not as *things-in-themselves*. So all we have to do is re-word our statements to reflect this. Instead of saying “I am sitting on a chair”, I should say, “I have a perception which I call ‘a body’, and which I associate with myself, which in turn is perceived by me to be sitting upon something else I perceive, which I call ‘a chair’.” It’s *cumbersome* to speak thus, no doubt – and I imagine that that’s so because all our languages arose at a time when everyone assumed that chairs and tables, rocks and trees, and all the other things we perceive, are “out there” apart from our perceptions. But we “empiricist” philosophers – I count my good friend David Hume among them – have decided to start our philosophy with *clear and indubitable observations*; and when we clearly observe *ourselves while we are observing something else* – for example, a chair – we observe that we aren’t *actually* observing a chair at all, we are just observing a *perception*, and we call that *perception* “a chair”.

DESCARTES: Hmm. Perhaps. But I am still not convinced. If fire – for example – doesn’t exist, why do I feel its heat in my hand when I put my hand in the flame ... or even just *near* it?

BERKELEY: Well, your hand has no more an existence on its own than does the flame!

DESCARTES: Then why don’t I feel *no* heat? Surely if there *is* no hand *and* no flame, there should be no *heat* either ... ?

BERKELEY: But as I explained a minute ago, I do not claim that there *is* no hand and no flame *at all* – I only claim that they do not exist *on their own*; or to put it more accurately, they do not exist as *material* things. They are not *material* things, but *perceptions*. They are, in other words, *mental* objects, not *material* ones. They don’t exist *on their own*; but as *perceptions in the mind*, they certainly *do* exist!

DESCARTES: I don’t get it. *Do* they exist, or do they *not*? At one time it seems that you doubt their existence, and at others it seems that you find their existence indubitable! Which *is* it?

BERKELEY: Let me explain. (*Pulls out his own book from his satchel, thumbs through it and opens it at a particular page*). This is what I wrote: “I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflection. That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny, is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance. And in doing of this, there is no damage done to the rest of mankind, who, I dare say, will never miss it.”

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DESCARTES: My dear Berkeley, no disrespect intended, but you are making me even more confused than before. Plain English, please, *je vous en prie*, with “plain” being the operative word! Even though English isn’t my first language, at least I understand it better than the stuff you just quoted.

BERKELEY: But what I just quoted *was* English! ... Oh, I see what you mean; it’s not English the way English is spoken *now*, and *that’s* why you didn’t get it. But if I might be permitted ...

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) If I may interject, I think I may have grasped what Berkeley is trying to say. The problem, I believe, lies in the question “Does X exist?” Such a question doesn’t allow a clear and unambiguous answer – at least, not *as it stands*: not until we ask and answer the further question, “Exist *as what?*” Let me explain by giving an analogy. Consider a fictional character – say, Hamlet. Of course Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, doesn’t exist *in the sense in which living, breathing, corporeal people on Earth exist* – like the current Crown Prince of Denmark, namely Frederik André Henrik Christian, the elder son of Queen Margrethe II of Denmark, and of Henrik, her husband the Prince Consort ... and, indeed, Hamlet *never* existed in *that* sense. But *as a fictional character*, Hamlet certainly *does* exist! So if we were to ask, “Does Hamlet exist?” we’d be asking a question that cannot be answered *unambiguously* – at least, not *as it stands*. But if we were to ask, “Does Hamlet exist *as a fictional character* in a play by Shakespeare?” then the answer would become a resounding and unambiguous “Yes”, wouldn’t it?

DESCARTES: Ah. I see. So rocks and fire and air and water and animals and plants – and living, breathing human beings on Earth, too – *do* exist, but they exist *as perceptions*; they do *not* exist as anything *other than* perceptions; in other words, they do not exist as *material objects*. Is that what you are claiming, Berkeley?

BERKELEY: Thank you both. You’ve put it better than I ever did. Yes, that’s indeed what I am claiming.

DESCARTES: I see. So we can drink this excellent wine, and eat these delicious cheeses and cold cuts and terrines and baguette, because they *do* exist ... and, indeed, exist *without any doubt whatsoever*; but they exist *as perceptions*, not *as material objects*. In just the same way that Hamlet *does* exist, but *not* as a living, breathing, corporeal Prince of Denmark on Earth: rather, as a *fictional character* in a play by Shakespeare. Is that right, Berkeley?

BERKELEY: Indeed it is.

SOCRATES: But if I may interject, don’t our perceptions often *deceive* us? For instance – and we Greeks used to discuss this when I was alive – when we put a straight stick in clear water, we perceive it bent, but when we pull it out of the water we perceive it straight ... which leads us to conclude that it wasn’t bent at all, even when it was *in* the water.

DESCARTES: Yes, Berkeley. You will admit, surely, that at times appearances are *mere* appearances, and not reality at all ... won’t you?

BERKELEY: Certainly. But we can easily tell when appearances are *mere* appearances from when they aren’t. To do so we *check* whether one of our senses has deceived us or not, by using some *other* sense, or by using the *same* sense but in *different ways*. For example, if while the stick that appears bent is in the water, we put our *hand* in the water and *touch* the stick all over to check whether it is bent or not, we perceive it to be straight by *another* of our senses: the sense of *touch*.

DESCARTES: Ah. So we *do* have a way to tell whether an appearance – or a perception – is a *mere* appearance or perception, and *not* a reality, or whether it is indeed a reality itself, as im-

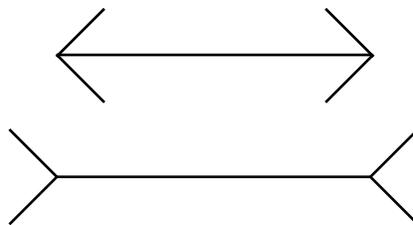
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plied by your phrase ESSE is PERCIPI, or “to be is to be perceived” ... yes?

BERKELEY: Indeed we do. When *all* our perceptions as to something agree – or at least when they don’t *disagree* among themselves – we consider the perception as something genuine; while if they disagree, we make further inquiries to *check* what’s what.

SOCRATES: Could you give us an example?

BERKELEY: Certainly. Consider an optical illusion – say, the simple one in which two lines of equal length appear to be of different lengths. You know, one that looks somewhat like this: (*Pulls out a pencil and paper from his satchel, and using the cover of his book as a straight edge, draws a rough diagram similar to the following*):



BERKELEY: (*Continuing*) The two horizontal lines are exactly the same length, but the upper horizontal line *appears* shorter than the lower line. But it’s a simple thing to *check* whether they are of different lengths or not, by simply folding the paper so as to bring the two horizontal lines together, so that their lengths can be compared directly!

DESCARTES: But what if we *can’t* check? For example, in astronomical observations, where we can’t go to the stars to check whether they lie in a straight line or merely appear to do so; or in cases of things too small for us to measure, where our instruments do not have the necessary accuracy? For instance, the above two lines *could* be of differing lengths, but the difference could be too small for us to measure ... yes?

SOCRATES: Well, in such cases, my personal approach has always been to simply admit my ignorance. I mean, it’s no shame for me to say honestly “I don’t know”, when really I don’t! Why should one claim to know what one in actual fact doesn’t? Indeed, is not your own Jesus Christ reputed to have said, “Let thy yea be yea and thy nay be nay”? I’ve been reading up about him, and I must say that everything I have read of his own statements makes me think rather highly of him. Though I was recently talking to a German chappie called Dr. Dr. Dr. Dr. Albert Schweitzer (I wasn’t stuttering – that’s how they indicate it in German – the guy has *four* doctorates, no less, and Germans insist on making that fact well-known!) ... and Schweitzer assured me that Jesus was no more “real” than Hamlet; that Jesus was – and, in fact, always has been – a *fictional* character made up by the writers of the Gospels, and refined by later “editors” of their words. Schweitzer said he had done a lot of research into the subject, and assured me that his research was very thorough; and since one of his doctorates is actually in theology, I am inclined to accept such a claim. He’s a devout Christian, mind you, and doesn’t deny Jesus’ importance as a spiritual Master; but he writes something like “It is not the historical Jesus, but the spiritual Jesus, who is significant; it is not the historical Jesus, but His spirit, which overcomes the world.” Personally, however, I am keeping an open mind on the subject ... as

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indeed I do with regard to all claims I can't disprove, and sometimes even with regard to those I *can* disprove – for what if my “disproof” isn't logically sound?

DESCARTES: *Very wise of you, Socrates; very wise of you indeed. But regarding “Let thy yea be yea and thy nay be nay” – yes, that was my own approach too when starting out with my own Discourse on the Method for Rightly Directing One's Reason and Searching for Truth in the Sciences. (I know, I know, it's too long a title: my publisher even told me so, but I wouldn't listen. If I had to do it all over again, though, I'd make it snappy and just call it my Method.) But as I was saying, when we don't actually know something – that is to say, know it beyond even a scintilla of doubt – we should be sceptics, and acknowledge our doubts. Of course it's also no shame for anyone to say, “Such-and-such is my best guess, even though I don't know it for certain”.*

SOCRATES: Well, most of our life is based on such guesses, isn't it. I have never been to California, so I am not *one hundred per cent certain* it exists, but it's a pretty good guess on my part that it does! Of course I have never been to Narnia either ... but I'm guessing it doesn't.

DESCARTES: But then you'd be *wrong*, my dear Socrates! It *does* exist – it's a small hill-town in Italy. I've been there! It's called “Narni” nowadays, but its earlier, medieval name was “Narnia”. It's about half-way between Assisi and Rome. Nice little medieval town, with cobbled streets and all! And it's almost at the precise geographical centre of Italy – there's a stone on the exact spot outside the town, with a sign saying so in ten languages.

SOCRATES: Seriously? Narnia *does* exist?

DESCARTES: It does indeed – and this time, as both a fictional place *and* a real place. Though admittedly the real place is nothing like the fictional place. C.S. Lewis, who wrote the “Narnia” books, chose the name of this Italian hill-town for the name of his mythical and magical realm simply because he saw the town in an atlas, and liked the sound of the name. The real place has been there for donkey's years – in fact it goes back to the stone age, as attested by finds in some nearby caves. It was already an ancient place even when the Romans conquered it in 399 BC – the same year you drank the hemlock, Socrates!

SOCRATES: Wow. You live and learn, don't you. Or rather, here in the post-mortal realm I should say, “you die and learn”!

DESCARTES: Indeed you do. But returning to your comment about California: could not the same sort of argument be made for the existence of material objects like chairs and rocks, though? We may not be *one hundred per cent certain* they exist, but can't it be a *very good guess* on our part that they do exist ... just like California?

BERKELEY: But *certainly* such so-called “material” objects exist: I never said they *didn't*! They *do* exist, but *as perceptions*. In other words, a so-called “material” object, like a chair, exists as a *mental* object. Just like California!

SOCRATES: Hmm. Are you saying, then, that your *idea* of California is the same thing as California *itself*? Wouldn't that re-validate Descartes' original argument for the existence of God: namely, our idea of God is that of a perfect being, and it is more perfect to exist than not to exist, so God must exist?

BERKELEY: No. Our *idea* of California is indeed a mental object, and so is California itself; but they are two *different* mental objects – they are not the *same* mental object! Our *idea* of California is not *California* itself. Likewise, our *idea* of God is indeed a mental object, but our *idea* of God isn't God *Himself*! They *are* both ideas, but *different* ideas.

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SOCRATES: By the way, Berkeley, you haven't yet given us *your* proof of the existence of God. What is it?

BERKELEY: Yes indeed – I got distracted. Yes. Here goes. It's in several parts. Firstly, I argue that our perceptions must have a *cause*. Secondly, I have shown that they cannot be caused by matter (or material objects), as is commonly thought to be the case, since as we have seen, matter is never *actually* observed: *ever*. In addition, they cannot be caused by our *thoughts*, since no matter how much we try, we cannot *cause* perceptions to appear to us. For instance, we may try to think of a chair, and imagine it strongly, but that doesn't cause a chair to come into being in front of us, does it? In fact, they cannot be caused by *any* of our other mental faculties whatsoever. We don't seem to have any *control* over what we perceive, as long as the perceptions from one of our senses can be checked against the perceptions of our other senses. But since we have established that there is no evidence of any *material* cause of our sense perceptions, the only other choice is that our sense perceptions are caused by some other *mind*. And this must be a *very* powerful mind, one which is capable of causing sense-perceptions in all of us in such a manner that they all substantially agree. Moreover, despite their infinite variety and complexity, these perceptions are ordered in such exquisite detail that the most detailed scientific investigations demonstrate complete consistency. This mind – or if I may so express it, this *Mind*, written, or imagined to be uttered, using a capital "M" – must be benevolent: It *never* deceives us. This Mind, then, must be unimaginably powerful and benevolent. This *Mind* is what I call God.

SOCRATES: Hmm. I think you may have serious logical problems with such a "proof", Berkeley, my old friend. In the first place, do you not *assume* – without proof, I may add – that perceptions *must* have a cause?

BERKELEY: Well, mustn't *everything*? I mean, how do we account for *anything*, then, if we assume that things can arise *without* any cause? Isn't causality at the root of *all* science?

SOCRATES: Do we *have* to assume causality as an *indisputable* fact? I was discussing the notion of causality with your fellow-empiricist David Hume a while ago, and he insisted that he could not find any good reason to consider causality to be an *indisputable* fact. He said – and we talked quite a while ago, so I may be mistaken in some respects as to what he claims, but bear with me – he said, essentially, let's suppose a Martian – or better still, an "alien" from another kind of reality entirely, an alien *not* acquainted with *our* reality – were to come to *our* reality and see, for example, a moving billiard ball striking a second, motionless billiard ball, and the latter subsequently moving away. Such an "alien" might *not* draw the conclusion that it was the first billiard ball striking the second which *caused* the second ball to move! Hume argued – and in my opinion, rather convincingly – that if we were to put ourselves in the mindset of someone seeing such an event *for the first time ever*, without remembering any of our *past experiences*, we too would not necessarily think that this was cause-and-effect. Where, he asked, is the *necessity* that the second billiard ball *must* move away when the first ball strikes it? Certainly we don't perceive such a *necessity*! And since there is no evidence whatsoever for such *necessity*, how can we *distinguish* between causation and correlation? How can we be *sure* that the second billiard ball moving away was actually *caused* by the first billiard ball striking it?

DESCARTES: Well, what *else* could the second billiard ball do?

SOCRATES: Yes, that's what I asked Hume also. And his reply was most illuminating. He said – and again I am not quoting him verbatim, but merely paraphrasing – that had we *never* seen such an occurrence before, or anything even remotely like it, even *we* would be very reluctant to wager all *our* money on the second ball moving when the first ball struck it!

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In the *absence* of any life-experience in such regard, we could *never* have guessed what would happen: the first ball might go right *through* the second, or *merge* with the second ball and become a bigger ball, or even just *disappear!* We could not have *known for sure*, you see, what would happen, because we'd never have *seen* such an occurrence before. We merely *assume* that it's cause-and-effect because we have *seen* such things happen many times before, and *invariably* the second hard ball – or the second *hard object*, if we haven't seen *billiard balls* before – moved when struck by the first such ball or hard object which was originally moving. We have never seen anything *else* happen in the *past*, so we assume it will *always* happen in the *future*. But that's as erroneous as assuming that *all crows must* be black simply because we've never seen a crow that was *not* black!

DESCARTES: I begin to see Hume's point: it's not utterly and completely *indubitable* that something specific *causes* something else. Again, we are back to asking whether what we *think* we know is indeed knowledge, or merely guess-work: even *excellent* and *reliable* guess-work, but *guess-work* all the same. That was the entire point of my *Method*. Begin by renouncing any belief that can be doubted; accept as true only what is *indubitable!*

SOCRATES: Precisely. *Correlation* is guess-work, and therefore susceptible to doubt ... but *causation* should not be so!

DESCARTES: But – to be the Devil's advocate for once – where does such an approach leave us, if we also renounce *causality* because it's dubitable? I mean – as Berkeley said also – isn't *all* science founded on *causality* – on the idea that *all* physical events *must* be caused?

SOCRATES: Certainly *science* assumes that; but as Prof. Karl Popper and I discussed at length some time ago – and eventually came to an agreement – science cannot prove anything *true!* In other words, there is not a *single* conclusion of science that is *absolutely indubitable*. As Prof. Popper points out – and he definitely changed *my* mind about this – science suffers from the same problem that causality itself suffers from: *the problem of induction*. There is no guarantee that from a *finite* number of *past* observations of something we must be led to the *indubitable* conclusion that *all* such observations *must* result in the *same* thing being observed in the *future*. For instance, just because we have seen the Sun come up every morning doesn't guarantee that it will *always* do so! In other words, science guarantees *nothing* – nothing *at all*.

DESCARTES: So must we renounce *science* also? This seems to me to be *much* too unreasonable!

SOCRATES: Well, we don't really have to *renounce* science. For one thing, as you yourself pointed out earlier, it's no shame to say "Such-and-such is my best guess, even though I don't know it for certain". Science works on our "best guesses". These guesses are definitely *good* ones; indeed, they are the *best* we have up to now. That means they are not entirely *worthless!* Besides, if what you want is the *Truth* – and, like Tom Cruise, can *handle* it! (*smiles*) – you both must surely remember from the days when you yourself lived on Earth, that what we now call "science" was called "natural philosophy". It is *philosophy* that is the search for truth; science, at best, can be only a search for *falsehoods*. As Prof. Popper points out, a scientific "law" (*makes the sign of quote marks in the air with the index and middle fingers of both hands*) can certainly be proved *false* – a single counter-example is sufficient to *disprove* a scientific "law". For instance, a single observation of a non-white swan would be sufficient to disprove a "law" that claimed "all swans are white". No scientific "law" is really a *law* in the true sense: namely, a principle which can be shown to be absolutely and indubitably *true*; however, every scientific "law" can be shown to be *false* – it can be, as Popper terms it, *falsified*. (Personally I have some problems with this term of Popper's, "falsified"; it used to mean in the past – and indeed still does,

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most of the time – to “alter information or evidence so as to mislead”; but now, by making it *also* mean “prove a statement or theory to be false”, the good Professor has rendered it ambiguous, and thus capable of ... ah, *misleading*. But never mind that for now.)

BERKELEY: I think you may have hit the nail on the head, Socrates. *Philosophy* is where it's at; not science; *philosophy* is what we all ought to concentrate upon, because *philosophy* is the search for truth, not *science*. (*Turning to Descartes*) My dear Descartes, that's where *you* shine, isn't it? (*Putting on an African-American accent*) You da man!

DESCARTES: (*Smiles hugely, and Socrates busts out laughing loudly*) My dear Bish- er, Berkeley, you're much too generous with your compliments!

SOCRATES: (*Wiping his tears*) That was good, Berkeley! I didn't know you could do impressions too. But my dear friend, in addition to the causation problem – which by the way you haven't been able to overcome, I might remind you – I have yet further problems with your proof of the existence of God. If, as you claim, “to be is to be perceived” – or ESSE IS PERCIPI – then each perception must surely stand on its own ... right? I mean, it's not as if a perception must be a perception *of* something, is it. *Your* perception “of” a chair (*makes the sign of quote marks in the air with his fingers*) is never exactly the same as *my* perception “of” the chair, is it? And even my perception “of” a chair can change from moment to moment. It is only for the sake of – as you expressed it – avoiding cumbersome wording, that we say that we are looking at the “same” chair. In actual fact we are *not* looking at the *same* chair, are we? Not if our *perceptions* are assumed to be the *only* reality, and there *is* no chair “out there” giving “rise” to the perceptions. Instead, I'd be having *my* perception, and you'd be having *yours* – and they are two *distinct* perceptions, aren't they. My *viewpoint* is different compared with yours, for one thing: I am sitting *here*, and you are sitting *there*. And also, as you pointed out, only the *experiencer* knows his or her experience with *absolute certainty*. My perception, the one I call “this chair”, is known to *me* with absolute certainty, but *your* perception of the “same” chair *isn't* known to *me* with the same degree of certainty, is it? So that disproves your claim that we *don't* have any control over what we perceive, right? I can certainly shift my body, and thereby my viewpoint, and as a consequence *change* my perception ... the perception which I call “the chair”. I have, in point of fact, a *great deal* of control over my perceptions: I can for example shut my eyes and thereby *not* perceive “the chair” at all – at least, not with my sense of vision! Or I could go to the countryside, and as a result not perceive any “chairs” at all, with *any* of my senses. What I mean to ask, therefore, is that in your argument for the existence of God, aren't you implicitly *assuming* that which you yourself strongly *reject*, namely that there *is* any material chair “out there” *of* which you have a perception?

DESCARTES: I think you make a very good point, Socrates. Berkeley, should you not be consistent? Either ESSE *is* PERCIPI, or ESSE *isn't* PERCIPI; and if it *is*, then we *do* seem to have at least *some* measure of control over our perceptions, and from that, over our experiences ... and therefore – at least if Socrates is right in re-wording your thesis ESSE IS PERCIPI as “Experience is reality” – over reality itself!

BERKELEY: But seriously, we *can't* make a chair come into existence by simply *willing* it to come into existence – or even by thinking very, *very* hard about it – can we?

SOCRATES: Hmm. *Can't I?* Maybe I can! I think you are mixing up two different *meanings* of the term of “chair”. If, as you yourself claim, what we call “a chair” is just a *perception* – and a *subjective* perception to boot – then I certainly *can* cause such a perception to come into existence: for instance, I can go from a room that has *no* chair into a room that *has* a chair, and – hey presto! – a chair will come into my field of view, and I shall perceive it!

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- BERKELEY: But *that* chair existed *before* it came into your field of view, didn't it. You didn't cause it to come into *existence* by simply *perceiving* it!
- SOCRATES: *Didn't I?* I think I *did!* What you say would only be the case if you adhere to the *meaning* of the term "chair" in the conventional – or what one might call the "materialist" or "physicist" – sense: namely as something that exists-in-itself, as something *material* or *physical* ... which is to say, as what Kant calls a "noumenon". But you *agree* with Kant, don't you, that a noumenon can *never be perceived*? Don't you assert that what *is* perceived is only a *phenomenon*, or what you call a "perception" (as in ESSE IS PERCIPI, or "to be is to be perceived" – your *own* words!) ... eh? And moreover, isn't it true that a perception – according not just to you but everyone else as well – is indubitable *only* when it is entirely *subjective*? What *you* perceive is indubitable to *you*, but not to *me* or to anyone else; and VICE VERSA. Am I not correct in so interpreting your earlier words? And if I am, then didn't I create – *indubitably* create – a *perception* which I call "a chair" in my mind, by simply walking into a room with a chair and doing what I do best: VIDELICET, perceiving?
- DESCARTES: You know, Socrates, I do believe you have caught on to something of great importance. Berkeley, (*turning to the latter*), despite Socrates' pretentious use of the term "VIDELICET", I think he's right. It's very important that we establish what we *mean* by such terms as "chair", "apple" or "rock" before we discuss whether such things can be created by our own minds or not. Implied in the *ordinary* meaning of "chair" is the idea of something that *continues to exist* whether it is perceived by us or not. That's part of your argument in favour of the existence of God, isn't it, Berkeley? You say that things like rocks and chairs and tables must exist as perceptions in a Supreme Mind, even when we mere mortals do not perceive it. Not that we are "mere mortals" here, but for the sake of argument let's call ourselves "mere *immortals*" in that case, eh? (*Smiles*). But ...
- SOCRATES: (*Interrupts Descartes and interjects eagerly*) But that's "assuming facts not in evidence", as lawyers say in court! What is the *reason* for assuming that a "chair" *continues to exist* when it is not perceived? In the absence of proof – or even *evidence* – of material objects like chairs existing "out there somewhere", *I see no reason at all to assume that!* Why can we not simply assume that what we call "a chair" comes *into* existence when a perception of "it" arises, and goes *out* of existence when perception of "it" ceases? Just like the "things" we *dream* about come *into* existence when we dream about them, and go *out* of existence when we *cease* to dream about them – or even dream about something *else*?
- BERKELEY: But surely once we awake from our slumber we can be sure that the "objects" we perceived while asleep were dream objects and not real ones ... am I not right?
- SOCRATES: Oh dear. Don't tell me you haven't heard of Chuang-Tzø's "Butterfly" parable?
- BERKELEY: Whose *what*?
- SOCRATES: Chuang-Tzø's "Butterfly" parable. Chuang-Tzø was a Chinese chappie who lived shortly after my time on Earth – I never met him, but I read one of his parables a long time ago. Very striking! He wrote, and I am paraphrasing of course because I don't know Chinese: "Once upon a time I dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly. I was totally conscious of my existence as a butterfly, and was quite unconscious of my existence as a man – it was a most vivid dream, the vividest possible. Then I awoke, and there I lay in my bed, myself again. Now I am not quite certain that I was *then* a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or I am *now* a butterfly dreaming I am a man!"
- DESCARTES: Yes, I remember making such a point in one of my *Meditations* – though not nearly as poetically and well-phrased as the parable you just recounted. I wrote, and I am quoting

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from memory so I may get a word or two wrong, but here is the gist of it: “(1) I often have *dream* experiences very much like the experiences I have while I am *awake*. (2) There is no *definite* and *infallible* way to distinguish my dream experiences from my waking experiences. Therefore, (3) it is *possible* that I am dreaming *right now* – and indeed *every* time I *think* I am awake – and consequently, that all my ‘waking’ perceptions are false.”

BERKELEY: Not *false*, Descartes – they’re *true*, but they’re *perceptions!* Your dream experience *also* contains perceptions, but they are not *false*; they are just not “of” anything. And that’s the case with our waking experiences too! Or at least, we can’t *prove for sure* that the two experiences are *different*. Yes, *now* I get what you mean, Socrates. Just as a dream “chair” does not continue to exist once we stop dreaming it, neither does a “real” chair *have* to do so! This consideration does put a bit of a kybosh on my proof for God, though, doesn’t it. But what about my *other* argument regarding our wakeful perceptions: that despite their infinite variety and complexity, these perceptions are ordered in such exquisite detail that the most detailed scientific investigations demonstrate complete consistency?

SOCRATES: Are you telling me that our dream perceptions *don’t* demonstrate consistency?

BERKELEY: Of course I am! We observe *many* inconsistencies when we examine our dreams!

SOCRATES: Yes, we do – but only *after* we wake up! But *while* dreaming, do any of us observe any inconsistencies in our dreams? *I* certainly don’t!

BERKELEY: Well, what about *lucid* dreaming? You know about lucid dreaming, of course? It’s about having *conscious awareness* of the dream state *while* one is dreaming – which is often even more intense than waking reality, in its own way. I myself have very lucid dreams. I can float above a dream city, say, and observe hundreds of dream characters in the streets below, going about their business. I can passively observe the dream itself while allowing complex plots to unravel on their own, while still playing a central character in my own dream-drama. In a *fully* lucid dream I have *no doubt whatsoever* that I am *in* the mental construct of my dream-world; I understand profoundly that everything I see and sense in my dream is the *creation of my own mind*, and that I can manipulate any element of my dream *at will*. A person can’t do that while awake, can they? And many lucid dreams are completely consistent, just like our “reality” ... (*trails off, deep in thought*) ... hmm ... maybe I was wrong about my “consistency” argument also ...

SOCRATES: Well, I for one can’t control my dreams *at all*, any more than I can my “reality”. Perhaps we are ignoring the fact that different people have different *abilities* ... ? Some people seem to have greater abilities than others. Sometimes *much* greater! I mean, one of the things that struck me while reading up on Jesus, was his statement that if one had faith as much as a grain of mustard seed, one could tell a mountain to move, and it would *move* – on command, as it were! Maybe I just don’t have faith “as much as a grain of mustard seed” (however much – or little – *that* is!), and maybe *that’s* why I can’t do it.

DESCARTES: I have my – er, *Cartesian* – doubts regarding the *literal* truth of that statement of Jesus’s.

SOCRATES: But *can* you doubt the word of your Lord Jesus Christ? I mean, aren’t you a Christian?

DESCARTES: As far as I am *able* to be, yes. And I do *try* to be. But that doesn’t mean I have *no* doubts whatsoever. Why, I’m the King of Doubts in the pack of humanity, if one might so put it – or “the Doubter”, as opposed to “the Joker”! Perhaps to my own detriment as a Christian, but that’s what I am.

BERKELEY: But that’s not always a *bad* thing, in my opinion – even for a Christian. Sometimes – as

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my German theologian colleague Paul Tillich puts it – doubt is not the *opposite* of faith; it is an *element* of faith. It means we are *thinking something through*. We are *grappling* with it; we are trying to *process* and *understand* it. And sometimes we have to *go through* doubt to enter into certainty – as you yourself did, Descartes, right? Doubting *PER SE* is not a problem; it is deliberate *rejection* that's a problem. Doubt is a matter of the *intellect*, while *deliberate rejection* is a matter of the *will*. When one is in doubt one says, "I *don't* get it; I need help to understand this; work with me through this." But a *rejectionist* says, "I *get* it; but I don't *like* it; so I *reject* it."

SOCRATES: (*Closing his eyes and repeating as if from memory*) "Accept what is acceptable, but don't reject what is not acceptable."

BERKELEY: Is that your own saying, Socrates, or someone else's? Sounded like someone else's.

SOCRATES: Yes. I recently met someone who transitioned here from the Earthly realm just a short while ago. His name is Dr. Dinshah Mehta. He was a naturopath, and a very spiritually-minded person. He and Gandhi know each other – in fact he was Gandhi's personal naturopathic physician, and it was Gandhi who introduced me to him. "My good friend Dinshah – he's pure gold", Gandhi said to me when introducing him and his wife to me. (Mind you, Gandhi might have said the same sort of thing about Hitler and Stalin too – he's that kind of person, always speaking well of everyone, and calling them "friend". In fact Gandhi did write a couple of letters to Hitler in which he addressed Hitler as "friend".) Both Dinshah and his wife knew Gandhi for many years while on Earth. When we first met, Dinshah uttered the sentence I just quoted, and it struck me as something very wise. Dinshah also told me that he himself, while alive on Earth, could make things happen by simply *willing* them to happen. "Thoughts just *manifest*, when one is in tune with the Source of all sources", he said when we met. Much like what Jesus is reputed to have said about a mustard-seed's-worth of faith being able to move mountains. Again, I have to admit that I don't know, so I am keeping an open mind on the subject; I can't *disprove* what Dinshah said, or what Jesus is reputed to have said. I accept what's acceptable, but I don't reject what's not acceptable.

BERKELEY: As one who used to be a man of the cloth while alive, your recent statements have given me a *lot* to think about. What if many of the "miracles" mentioned in the Bible – the Old Testament as well as the New – aren't intended to be taken metaphorically, but *literally*? I mean, what if Joshua *did* cause the Sun to stand still upon Gibeon? "So the Sun stood still in the midst of heaven, and hasted not to go down about a whole day." Eh? Did it *actually* happen, or is it a *metaphor* for some higher spiritual truth or truths?

DESCARTES: As I said, I have my doubts about it *actually* having happened.

SOCRATES: I, on the other hand, neither doubt it nor *not* doubt it: I keep an open mind on the subject. Jesus – and Dinshah – aren't the only people to have claimed such abilities; nor is the Bible the only source of statements that illustrate such abilities. Pythagoras once told me that when he travelled to India – I don't know if he really *did* travel to India or not; maybe he just travelled to a place where lots of Indians lived, and mistook it for India, but that's beside the point – he had heard speak of an Indian King called Vishwāmitra (I hope I'm pronouncing his name right!) who, having practised for many years what they call "yoga" down there, acquired the ability, not just to move mountains, but to *create an entirely new Universe*, complete with all its thirty-three-thousand gods and goddesses (that's how many they have, in India)! Now that's *epic*. If it's true, of course! But who am I to judge? I personally don't have any ability to do calculus – or indeed, even to understand what calculus *is* – but I don't doubt *other* people's ability to understand it, and to do it!

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DESCARTES: Did you say “calcu-lust”? What’s that, then?

SOCRATES: Oh, that’s something else entirely – Pythagoras told me about that too. It’s part of something called “tantric yoga” which they also have in India. As I understand it – though admittedly I don’t understand it very well – it’s a way to get into heaven by having orgasms. It sounds silly, but it did make some sense, at least when Pythagoras explained it to me in detail. Orgasms are quite a wonderful experience, and were I a poet, I might even call them “heavenly”! But that’s not what I was talking about; I was talking about what Newton invented: *calculus*, not *calculust*. I don’t understand it, but I know Newton invented it. Though Leibniz challenges that claim.

BERKELEY: Oh yes, I know about all that. “Fluxions”, Newton called them. I took him to task about them, in my book *The Analyst*.

SOCRATES: Yes, I tried reading it, old chum, but couldn’t make head or tail of it. Not that Newton – or Leibniz – made any sense to me either. At mathematics I am a dullard, and I’d probably never have been admitted to Flatface’s “Academy”, over the gate of which he had erected a sign saying, in essence, “Let no one unskilled in geometry enter here”. I was talking to Prof. Einstein just the other day, and we both agreed that neither of us would have made it into the Academy. Einstein told me, at the start of our conversation, “Don’t you worry about your difficulties with mathematics; I assure you that mine are much greater.” Or words to that effect. But that’s precisely the point I was making. I personally am not skilled at mathematics, nor at controlling my dreams; but you (*looking at Descartes*) are skilled at mathematics, while you (*turning to Berkeley*) are skilled at controlling your dreams. How do we know, then, what *other* people might or might not be skilled at? If Jesus said that using faith “as much as a grain of mustard-seed” one could move mountains, how do we *know* it can’t be done? I *must* keep an open mind about it! I mean, lots of *other* things Jesus said resonate with me, and I find it hard to believe he was lying. That is, if he actually did exist on Earth at some time as a living, breathing, flesh-and-blood person – like you and I did. About which, as I said, I *also* keep an open mind.

DESCARTES: But surely there must be *limits* to the kinds of skill one can acquire. I mean, it’s quite unreasonable to think that one could acquire the skills to fly like Superman ... isn’t it?

BERKELEY: I’m pretty sure Nietzsche didn’t intend the Superman to actually *fly*. I was talking to him the other day (despite his craziness there’s something fascinating about the way he talks, I have to admit), but he never mentioned anything about the Superman having such a skill. It would, in fact, be a most *trivial* kind of skill for the Superman – I am using the word “trivial” in its ordinary sense here – for if he wanted to fly he could simply get on a plane!

DESCARTES: I’m not talking about Nietzsche’s Superman, but Siegel’s and Shuster’s Superman. You know, the Justice League Superman.

BERKELEY: Justice League?

DESCARTES: Yeah – you know, Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, The Flash, Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Cyborg ... those guys.

BERKELEY: (*Raises his eyebrows questioningly*) ???

SOCRATES: Seriously? You don’t know about the Justice League? Where *have* you been all these years? Didn’t you see *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*? ... no, of course you didn’t: you didn’t even know until a short while ago that they *showed* movies here. Trust me, it’s *well* worth seeing. The action is *really* well done, even though much of it is CGI – but CGI

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has come a *long* way since *The Matrix* (where it was *also* rather well done, I have to say). And the Batmobile is fantastic-looking. Though mind you, it's the guy playing Lex Luthor who steals the show, with his superb acting. The movie is even available in IMAX-3D! Though personally I prefer to see it *without* the 3D, because it's a dark movie – more in terms of lighting, I mean, than in terms of mood – and when viewed in 3D it tends to become even darker, due to the polarized glasses. By the way, Berkeley, you *must* see *The Matrix*. It's right up your alley, portraying something like your "idealist" view of reality.

BERKELEY: I see I have a *lot* of catching up to do. Comes from my moving in the wrong circles, I suppose – namely, members of the clergy.

DESCARTES: I wouldn't call members of the clergy the "wrong circles", Berkeley. You guys believe – *seriously* believe – in miracles, don't you? And isn't the ability to perform miracles the same thing as having superpowers? I mean, moving mountains using faith is in almost the same league as having the Green Lantern's powers!

SOCRATES: More like the Scarlet Witch's powers, Descartes. Wrong omniverse! Not DC, but Marvel.

BERKELEY: My God! You even have a whole *jargon* for this, don't you? It'll take me *years* to catch up!

SOCRATES: Yeah, but what's mere years in an eternity? (*Singing*) "A thousand ages in Thy sight / Are like an evening gone" ... yes?

BERKELEY: Good point. (And I didn't know you could sing from the Anglican hymnbook, Socrates!) But we of the clergy are more prone to consider miracles to be *metaphorical* illuminations of *spiritual* truths, rather than as *literal* truths – *worldly* truths which can be applied to our own reality: and in this case I'm talking about what our reality was when we were *incarnated on Earth*, not now when we're discarnate here in these Elysian Fields.

SOCRATES: Sadly, we of the comic-con take a similar dim view of our superheroes' superpowers: most of us consider them mere entertainment, rather than as applicable to the real world. But your "idealist" philosophy, I venture to think, opens up the door to make such things as miracles and superpowers applicable to *reality*: and, just like you, I'm talking about everyday, *Earthy* reality! And it is *this* possibility that has got me really, *really* excited.

DESCARTES: How exactly does it become a possibility?

SOCRATES: (*Turning to Descartes*) Well, if Berkeley is right, and *every* object is a mental object: meaning, if *every* object is either a perception, or a thought, or an emotion, or something similar ... basically, that everything is *inside the mind* (that is to say, *everything* is what Berkeley calls an "idea" – hence the phrase "idealist philosophy" normally applied to his way of thinking; it doesn't mean he's an "idealist" as opposed to a "realist", mind you; he's just as much a realist as anyone else, it's just that he claims that *all of reality* is made up of what he calls "ideas" ... admittedly there's room for some ambiguity here, and that's why I normally avoid the term "idealist" as applied to him, but never mind that for now) – as I was saying, if *every* object is a mental object, then since we *know* that the mind *can* control *some* of what's in it, why can't it control *more and more*, provided of course that one learns the right *techniques* for doing so? I mean, consider Neo in *The Matrix* ... and especially *The Matrix Reloaded*, where he does "his Superman thing".

DESCARTES: (*In a very pensive mood*). You know, I'm still not convinced that there simply *isn't* any material world whatsoever. I mean, you've made a lot of very good arguments, Berkeley, and, moreover, they seem to be quite valid and even sound ... but come *on!!!* The whole idea is preposterous in the extreme. Arguments are one thing, but to be convinced of

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something – *really* convinced – one must be convinced to the *core* of one’s being, and I have to maintain that I for one am not. And besides, as I said earlier, I am *the* doubter – *par excellence*, so to speak – so I doubt your philosophy too ... simply because I’m *me*. And (*turning to Socrates*) you’ve got to admit that *The Matrix* is fiction. You can’t refer to a work of *fiction* to bolster your claim that the sort of things that are portrayed in it can also be done in real life! I mean, consider *Doctor Who*.

BERKELEY: Dr. who? You mean Dr. Schweitzer? Shouldn’t you say “Dr. Dr. Dr. Dr. Schweitzer”, then? And what’s *he* got to do with anything we were talking about right now?

DESCARTES: No; I meant *Doctor Who*. Oh yeah – you don’t know about movies and suchlike. Never mind for now: we’ll get to all that stuff later on.

BERKELEY: All right; though clearly I’ll have to catch up on all your arcane knowledge in due course. But I know what you’re feeling, Descartes; I really do. I – and my arguments – have never managed to convince more than a few philosophers, at least in the West. (Although I am given to understand that in the East, and especially in India, my viewpoint has been accepted as totally true for millennia – but I am also given to understand that it’s mostly been accepted as true for *dogmatic* reasons, not for *logical* ones, and I really can’t be in favour of *that*.) But even in the 250 years after my death I haven’t managed to convince many westerners – my Londoner fan Peter B. Lloyd being one notable exception. While I was alive my ideas were largely received with ridicule, even by those – such as Samuel Clarke and William Whiston – who said I had an “extraordinary genius” (quote-unquote). Why, I hardly even managed to convince *myself*, let alone others! I lived my entire life on Earth as if it made no difference whether reality was at its foundation material or mental.

SOCRATES: But that’s just it. People are not convinced by logic or by arguments, but by *feelings*. I think that you, Descartes, have an *emotional* attachment to the materialist – or more accurately, in your case, the dualist – viewpoint, and *that’s* why you aren’t convinced by Berkeley’s arguments, valid and even sound though you admit them to be. You find some sort of *comfort* – possibly a *subconscious* sort of comfort – in believing in dualism. Even you, Berkeley, lived your life – you just admitted it – as if it didn’t matter in the least whether your “idealist” philosophy were true or not, because deep down in your heart of hearts you didn’t *want* to overthrow the “scientific” viewpoint in which you as a youngster – like pretty much all educated people in relatively recent times – were raised. Over one’s lifetime one gets into a particular *habit of thought*, and breaking that habit is often *painful*. When I was talking with Dinshah he called it “The pain of new thought”, and the phrase struck me as very apt indeed. I myself never managed to convince the numerous interlocutors I challenged in the streets of Athens while I was alive on Earth – indeed, that’s one reason I was tried for “the moral corruption of Athenian youth”, and sentenced to death! They didn’t *like* what I was doing, you see, and found my doing it *painful*. If one doesn’t *like* some ideas, or finds them *painful*, one is likely to look for – and eventually find, or at least *think* one has found – every reason *not* to embrace those ideas!

DESCARTES: But surely we *philosophers* are different? I mean, why did we *become* philosophers, if not to seek the truth, and then – obviously – to change our minds in the light of the truth?

SOCRATES: Yes, but it’s still *painful* to do so. After all, we may be philosophers, but we are *human* too! And *as* humans, we tend to *avoid* pain whenever possible, don’t we.

DESCARTES: Not always. What about people such as mountaineers, and athletes competing for the *Tour de France* or the *Ironman*? They put themselves through a *lot* of pain in order to reach the top of the mountain or to win the prize! And they aren’t the only ones. Lots of

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explorers go exploring despite the painful nature of their expeditions. Like those who went to the Poles! Some of them even risk death doing it.

BERKELEY: Yes, but they do it for the *payoff*. If there's no payoff, why would they do it?

SOCRATES: You make a good point, Berkeley. And this gives me an idea. What if there were a *payoff* from changing one's mind from the materialist – or dualist – philosophy to your "idealist" philosophy? What if one were to point out that embracing the idea that *everything* is in the mind gives us – at least potentially – the ability to *control our reality*?

DESCARTES: But we *already* control our reality, don't we, even when we hold the view that there *is* in fact a material world out there, outside ourselves – outside our own minds. We do it through *technology*! Just because we accept the material world as a given, doesn't mean we have no *control* over it, does it. Technology is controlling the world all the time!

SOCRATES: Yes, but such control is *indirect*. It's not *direct* control – the way you, Berkeley, claim to control your lucid dreams – is it? Wouldn't you prefer to have *that* sort of control over the so-called "material" world, rather than the control we exercise over it via technology?

DESCARTES: But *can* we have such control? I mean, we *know* we can have control over the material world via technology: we see evidence of it every day. But I for one haven't seen *any* evidence of someone's ability to control the material world *directly*, in the manner in which Berkeley claims to be able to control his dreams!

BERKELEY: (*Getting excited now himself*) I see what you mean, Socrates! You know, Descartes, maybe we don't see too many people controlling their reality directly – the way I control my lucid dreams – simply because most people haven't even *tried*! I mean, who's going to even *try* to do it, if they don't believe – or even *suspect* – that it *can* be done? And just like in every other activity, even if some people *have* tried it, they may not have tried it *effectively*, and as a result, failed; and their failure might have discouraged others. And hasn't it been much the same with technology? You Greeks (*turning to Socrates*) might have been able to develop modern industrial technology two thousand years ago – you certainly had clever people among you who could have thought up ways of doing so – but you *didn't*, and that was perhaps because modern industrial production requires a lot of *co-operation* among large numbers of people, and – pardon me for saying so, Socrates, but you know I speak the truth – you Classical Greeks were always squabbling among yourselves ... isn't that so? Do you not think I might be right?

SOCRATES: You *are* right, Berkeley, about us: we Classical Greeks were a squabbling lot all right – and, in fact, that's the case even now in Greece – and maybe *that's* why we couldn't get technological development off the ground in my day (and aren't able to reach German-level technological development even today) ... even though we had, and still have, quite enough clever and intelligent *individuals* capable of devising ways of doing so. Technological development requires, as you say, a lot of *co-operation*, and sadly we Greeks aren't very co-operative. But Descartes, I have another argument against what you said: I think we *do* have reports of people controlling their reality directly, the way Berkeley controls his dreams ... but we simply *refuse to believe these reports*! I mean, what else are all the reports of "miracles" in the scriptures? And they're not *only* in scriptures. A few decades ago I read a very fascinating series of books written by an anthropology research student at UCLA describing his apprenticeship with a Mexican – or more properly, a Yaqui or Toltec – shaman, or "Man of Knowledge", whom he called "Don Juan". The student's name was Carlos Castaneda. He wrote three books, entitled *The Teachings of Don Juan, A Separate Reality*, and *Journey to Ixtlan*, and was awarded his bachelor's and doctoral degrees based on his work as described in these books. This was *serious*

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research, done by a student at a *very* reputable university! In his research, Castaneda narrates his first-person knowledge of this Yaqui or Toltec shaman (whose *real* name remains a secret to this day, because, as Castaneda claims, “Don Juan” forbade him to reveal it). Castaneda also says that “Don Juan” bequeathed to him – Castaneda – the position of *nagual*, or “leader of a party of seers”. Don Juan also used the term “*nagual*” to signify a part of perception which is in the realm of the unfamiliar-yet-still-reachable-by-humans, implying that, for his “party of seers”, Don Juan was a link in some way to that unfamiliar realm. Castaneda often referred to this unfamiliar realm as “non-ordinary reality”, and claimed that according to Don Juan’s teachings, details of it could not actually be observed unless the observer had done a lot of inner, *subjective* preparation first. Much of the bulk of Castaneda’s first book – and, indeed, of his other books as well – is dedicated to this inner preparation which he underwent as an apprentice of Don Juan’s. Mind you, he did claim that once one *had* undergone this inner preparation, this up-to-that-point-unfamiliar reality *could* be known.

DESCARTES: But should we not *doubt* everything that’s not one-hundred-per-cent certain? After all, how, otherwise, can we prevent ourselves from falling into the quagmire of untruth? That was, if you remember, my very goal when I started my *Meditations*. And I thought you both agreed with me that reaching the indubitable truth while avoiding possible untruths was indeed the first and most important goal of philosophy! Was I wrong? Why should we *not* doubt reports of “miracles”, even those written by serious students of anthropology?

BERKELEY: (*Now rather excited*) But Descartes, didn’t you yourself end up by saying that the *only* thing you found to be indubitable was your COGITO? And isn’t your COGITO a statement of the *certain* truth of *subjective* reality? You doubted every kind of *objective* “reality” first, didn’t you, by arguing that maybe it’s not reality at all, and that maybe we are mistaken in believing in it, for various reasons? Didn’t you yourself argue – and, I might add, most *convincingly* argue – *against* objective reality, as being *not* altogether certain?

SOCRATES: Don Juan’s – and Castaneda’s – point exactly. In fact, in the very introduction to his second book, *A Separate Reality*, Castaneda addresses the “incomprehensible” nature of his experiences as an apprentice of Don Juan’s, as only being able to be understood in the context of the non-ordinary system of *perception* from which they arose, suggesting that his books are by their very nature contradictory and incomprehensible, and not really susceptible to scientific criticism, since all science is based on the *assumed* truth of *objective* reality – an assumption that you yourself, Descartes, have called into question!

BERKELEY: Quite. That’s why I said – earlier – that perceptions are indubitable only to *the perceiver!* To everyone *else*, they are certainly open to doubt. *Subjective* reality is where it’s at, Descartes – even you yourself at least *implicitly* admit that, with your COGITO. What most people call “objective reality” is open to *lots* of doubts!

DESCARTES: Reluctantly, I must admit that. *Most* reluctantly, because then *all of science* is called into question; but my own work, and especially my COGITO, forces me to admit what you say. But surely, as I was saying earlier, all this is highly *unreasonable*? It may not be *illogical*, mind you, but you’ll surely admit that it’s highly *unreasonable*. And I think *most* people will also agree with me in my saying so.

SOCRATES: I have two answers to this. The first is actually a question (but isn’t it always so with me?) – “Unreasonable *to whom?*” What’s unreasonable to *us* might have been *very* reasonable to, say, the disciples of Jesus. They would probably have many of taken Jesus’ teachings – such as “turn the other cheek” – quite literally, simply because they believed he was the Messiah! That is, *if* the stories about Jesus are true, of course. But even if they’re not, what about the early Christians? For quite a few centuries, even while Christianity was a

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mere cult, and had only small numbers of followers, lots of them were willing to suffer, and even die, for their beliefs. So to *them*, I am pretty sure that what we'd call "miracles" would *not* have seemed unreasonable; in fact, I rather think that to *them*, it would have been a world *without* miracles that would have seemed unreasonable!

BERKELEY: You make a good point, Socrates. If I put myself in the mindset of those early Christians, I can see myself *expecting* miracles at every turn, for "Christ is risen, Hallelujah!"

SOCRATES: (*In a Southern U.S. accent*) A-men, brrrotherrr! (*Smiles*). And my second answer to you, Descartes, is again (of course!) a question: namely, if you *had* to choose, what would *you* choose – that which is logical but unreasonable over that which is reasonable but illogical, or *vice versa*? Surely *your* choice would be that which is logical but unreasonable over that which is reasonable but illogical ... or wouldn't it?

DESCARTES: Yes, I admit it would be so, as far as I *personally* am concerned. But that's just *me*. What about *most* people? I rather venture to think they'd choose that which is reasonable but illogical over that which is logical but unreasonable!

SOCRATES: Perhaps. But then again, perhaps not! After all, *lots* of people are fans of Sherlock Holmes, and accept his statement that "Once you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth" – don't they?

DESCARTES: Hmm. Yes, they do: I have to admit it. Still, not everyone is aware of the difference between "logical" and "reasonable" – most people, I venture to think, believe they mean the same thing. For instance, most people believe that Sherlock Holmes used logic and deduction to solve his crimes – in fact his author, Conan Doyle, *says* so in the Holmes stories. But *logicians* know that he didn't use deduction; he used what they nowadays call "abduction", or in other words, *reasonable guess-work*. It's also called "inference to the best explanation". This type of thinking is frequently employed, in some form or other, both in everyday "rationality" and in science. In the Sherlock Homes short story *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Holmes meets Watson for the first time, Holmes says to Watson: "You have come from Afghanistan, I observe". Or words to that effect. When Watson later asks Holmes to explain how he came to that conclusion, Holmes says something like this: "I saw a military type of gentleman, exhibiting a medical air as well. An army doctor, then. He must have just arrived in England from some sunny place, for his face is tanned. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his run-down appearance indicates. His left arm must have been injured, for he holds it stiffly and in an unnatural way. Where in a sunny place could an English army doctor have been ill and got his arm injured recently? Only in Afghanistan!" The fact is, however, *none* of the conclusions follow *logically* from Holmes's observations; they are only "the best explanation" for them. And perhaps *not even* the best! Watson could, conceivably, have come from India, Africa, or Australia, where he could have been on secondment from the army, where he could have been injured in a hunting accident, and could in addition have caught malaria or some other disease! Such circumstances could *also* account for Holmes's observations.

BERKELEY: So I'm guessing that according to *you*, abduction is not part of logic?

SOCRATES: Of course it isn't – it's something aliens do before they anal-probe you! ... Okay, okay, I was just kidding, I was just kidding.

DESCARTES: (*Rolling his eyes*) Yeah, right. But to be serious: in logic, *strictly* speaking – or at least in *deduction* – the truth of the conclusion is *guaranteed* by the truth of any premises to which is applied the correct method of reasoning. For example, as you yourself had illustrated earlier: (1) all men are mortal; (2) Socrates is a man; (3) therefore Socrates is mor-

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tal. The conclusion, (3), is *guaranteed* if premises (1) and (2) are true. But *loosely* speaking, induction and abduction *are* considered to be parts of “logic”. Personally *I* don’t like to consider them so, because then logic loses much of its strength and potency. It can’t then be used to reach *absolute* truths, only *reasonable* ones. And I myself, as the doubter *par excellence*, am interested in *absolute* truths, *indubitable* truths: nothing less!

SOCRATES: But you seem to be vacillating in this regard, don’t you? I mean, just a short while ago you said that you couldn’t bring yourself to question the existence of material objects because to do so would seem to you most unreasonable ... despite your having admitted that Berkeley’s arguments were completely logical! Didn’t you say something like “I’m still not sure that there simply *isn’t* any material world ‘out there’ at all; the *arguments* made in favour of there *not* being a material world ‘out there’ seem to be good, valid and sound, but the whole idea of a world without matter is just crazy”?

DESCARTES: Yes, I confess it; I do vacillate. It’s a weakness of mine, which I am trying to correct even after all these centuries. I discovered how prone I am to this sort of vacillation after I died and re-read my own *Meditations*; in all the later *Meditations* I seem to have utterly *disregarded* my original idea that I would only seek – and use in arguments – the *indubitable* truth. But the *only* indubitable truth I came up with was my COGITO, and I never actually *used* it in any subsequent argument! I confess it; MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA.

BERKELEY: (*Imitating a Catholic priest and making the sign of the cross over Descartes*) Say twenty PATER NOSTERS in penance, my son, and come back to confession after a week.

SOCRATES: You jest, Berkeley, but I am not sure that confessing his errors – and maybe even saying twenty PATER NOSTERS on top of that – would not be a *very* good thing for Descartes to do in order to get over his vacillation! Those who *acknowledge* their errors are more likely to rectify them than those who do not. Moreover, as Pythagoras told me, another thing he had learned in India – or wherever he had gone and *thought* was India – was the power of what they call down there the “mantra”. As explained to me by Pythagoras, a “mantra” is literally “something held in the mind” or “something focussed upon by the mind”. When the mind *focusses* upon some thought, and especially when it *repeatedly* focusses on some *singular* thought, the thought that is focussed upon becomes *very* powerful. Don’t all great artists know that? Greek sculptors used to focus very strongly upon the image they wanted to carve out of the block of marble before them, until that image almost came alive in their mind ... and then all they had to do was lift up the chisel and mallet, and with virtually no effort on their part, and in no time flat – or so it would seem to them – the statue would emerge out of the block of stone. I know: they used to tell me so when I was alive ... and Michelangelo told me much the same thing 2,000 years later, after I died. Mozart also once told me that he did something similar with his music; he would let the project stew in his mind until it was ready to be written down, and then the writing down of the piece came extremely easily. The mind is *very* powerful, especially creatively!

BERKELEY: (*Again getting excited*) You know, what you say about sculptors and artists and musicians makes me suspect that I might have stopped with my “idealist” philosophy at a premature stage. What if we don’t just *perceive* reality, but actually *create* it? Of course, clearly we *do* perceive it, but what if *in addition* to perceiving it we also *create* what we perceive? We are all agreed, aren’t we, that the *only* reality that is indubitable is *subjective* reality. Your COGITO, Descartes, demonstrates this fact beyond *all* doubt – heck, you yourself couldn’t bring yourself to doubt it, and when the King of Doubts himself has failed, what can we “mere immortals” do? (*Smiles*). So – building upon this truth – we can say that each one has their *own* reality! Everyone’s reality is his or her *own*, and can *never* be observed by anyone else ... right? Not only can you not know where *my* shoe pinches, but you cannot even know what *my* perception “of” a chair is. To repeat: truth that is *in-*

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*dubitable* is entirely *subjective*. Well then, consider the sculptor. When a sculptor has in mind the image of a statue *before* the statue has “emerged” out of the marble, *the sculptor’s reality* is not perceivable by anyone else – right? I mean, *not at all*. It’s *only* in the sculptor’s *own* mind! It is only when the statue has *emerged* out of the stone that it is perceivable by others – and even then, not in the same *indubitable* way for everyone. And you cannot say that the statue was *not* a reality until it emerged out of the stone, because the sculptor’s reality *did* contain at least the *image* of the statue, so it *did* exist at least as a *mental* object ... and as a *material* object the statue *never* exists, *even* after it emerges out of the stone; both the stone and the statue are, as I have argued, only *perceptions* (crazy though this conclusion seems to many, and even at times to Descartes).

DESCARTES: (*Getting excited in turn*) You know, you might be on to something here, Berkeley. I said earlier, didn’t I, that the time of writing my *First Meditation* was a very euphoric time for me? What you say about artists, Socrates, makes me think it’s not just them, but writers and philosophers too, who have this sort of experience! I think I might have been in much the same kind of state of mind when I was writing my *First Meditation* – the ideas had been jelling in my mind for some time even *before* I even dipped my quill into the inkwell. My books were not a reality before I wrote them – if we take the word “reality” to mean what most people mean by it, namely *physical* reality – but *after* I wrote them, they were! So I *created* at least *this* part of reality, didn’t I? And when I extend this reasoning to most of the other things around us – all the buildings and furniture and streets and vehicles, and indeed *all* artificial things whatsoever – all those were also *created* by someone, weren’t they? It’s not as if they had *always* existed. Someone had an *idea* first, and eventually that *idea* became the so-called “reality”. So we *do* create at least *part* of our reality, using our own thoughts – especially if by “we”, we mean *all* of us rather than *each* of us!

BERKELEY: Yes, I agree with regard to *artificial* things. But what about *natural* things like the air and rocks and water and planets and stars? Don’t these comprise the vast *majority* of the things we perceive? My argument that God *must* exist is based on the existence of *these* kinds of things – perceptions we *didn’t* create, and couldn’t possibly have. Since they must be *mental* objects – since, as I showed, they *couldn’t* be material objects – they must be mental objects created by an *immensely powerful Mind*, which I call God!

SOCRATES: But old boy, aren’t you forgetting something? Two things, actually? In the first place, according to what you yourself argue (and argue very cogently, I might add), all these things – all the rocks and planets and stars – are only *perceptions*, aren’t they? They are not *material* objects, but *mental* objects. And secondly, as you yourself added early on in our discussion, they are all *subjective*, aren’t they? Now if there’s one property of subjective mental objects, it’s that they are constantly *in flux*! They are *never* fixed and immutable, are they. Perceptions, and especially *subjective* perceptions, never last for any long period of time! If you look away from, say, this spacious avenue, it is *no longer* a part of your subjective perception! Of course when you look at the avenue again, it *returns* to become part of your subjective perception – but then you must surely ask yourself: is it the *same* avenue that returns, or is it an altogether *different* one, which simply *looks* like the avenue you perceived earlier? If the first time you perceived “it”, “it” was *only* a perception, then the second time you perceive “it”, “it” is, surely, *another* perception! It may look exactly *like* the earlier perception, but it very clearly isn’t the *same* perception. If one could give a time-stamp to one’s perceptions, the first would have a different – earlier – time-stamp than the second. Am I not right? I mean, since even before my time we Greeks used to argue that one cannot step into the same river twice, because the river is in flux! *Pánta rhei*, we used to say: “*everything flows*”. Aren’t our perceptions also in flux? Aren’t they, as I was saying, *always changing*? And if so, aren’t they perpetually being created and re-created? Do we – *can* we – ever have the *same* perception twice ... any more than we can step into the *same* river twice? It seems to me that we definitely *cannot*!

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DESCARTES: But such a conclusion sounds weird to me. Are you telling me that the *things we perceive* are simply *not* there when we don't perceive them? ... And that therefore, by the very act of perceiving them, we *bring* them into existence – that we *create* them?

BERKELEY: (*Remonstrating*) Er ... Socrates, that's not what *I* have argued! You're coming up with a philosophy very different from *mine*. I argued that the things we perceive *do* exist even when we *don't* perceive them; and that's why an "All-Perceiving Mind" is needed to account for their existence when they are not being perceived by *us*. That's *also* part of my argument for the existence of God! *God* perceives them when *we're* not doing so.

SOCRATES: But that's a mere *assumption*, isn't it? I mean, aren't you *assuming* that something that's not perceived by us – or by any sentient beings at all – *continues* to exist as a perception while it's not being perceived? With what *justification* do you make such an assumption?

BERKELEY: Well, for one thing, I certainly don't have any experience of *creating* my perceptions. Most of my perceptions simply *happen* to me; I don't have any *creative* control over them!

SOCRATES: Well, right at *this* stage I'm not arguing for their *creation*, only for their *coming into* and *going out of* existence. Or to be more accurate, I am arguing for their *changing* nature. Our perceptions *do* change pretty much all the time, don't they? I mean, observe yourself *perceiving*, especially while you change your point of view. Don't you observe your perceptions *changing* as you change your point of view? Just observe the *change* in your perceptions during a whole day. For example, think about *today*, from the time you woke up from bed. Didn't your perceptions *change* during all the hours since you woke up? First your perceptions were, presumably, of your bedroom, and then they changed to perceptions of your bathroom where you had your shower or bath or brushed your teeth, then they changed again to your breakfast room where you ate, or at least had your morning coffee, then they again changed, I suppose, to the street you walked down, and then in the afternoon they again changed to this lovely bistro, and this wine and food ... eh? I mean, surely you *must* admit that all your perceptions are in a stage of *flux*?

DESCARTES: They way you put it ... yes, upon reflection, I must admit that what you say is correct.

BERKELEY: Yes, I too have to admit that you're right, Socrates. But surely it's a *huge* step from that, to saying that I create the *entirety* of my reality, including such things as rocks and water and air and sunlight! *Such* creations are surely *waaaaaay* beyond our abilities ... no?

SOCRATES: I am getting to that. My argument hinges upon the approach that we should put aside all our pre-conceived ideas and start our philosophy from scratch ... just as you did in your *Method*, Descartes. Now one of the pre-conceived ideas I'd like to demolish is the idea that *when* we perceive what we think of as a thing, we perceive *all* of it. For instance, if we are looking at a mountain, we think of the mountain as being a material object of a mass of millions – or even billions – of tons, consisting mainly of gigantic rocks, and we think it's immovable and immense ... among other things. But a *perception* of a mountain is not *that*, is it? At any given time we perceive only *one side* of it! And if, as you affirm, Berkeley, ESSE IS PERCIPI, or "to be is to be perceived", then, since we perceive only the side of the mountain that is facing us, we can hardly affirm with *complete* certainty that its other side – or even its interior – actually *exists*, can we? We don't perceive *those*, nor do we perceive its mass, nor all the rocks we imagine it to be made up of – or even, for that matter, its immovability. What we *actually* think of as "the mountain" is *not* what we perceive, but a *mental image* we create from *all* our perceptions "of" it, and "of" other similar mountains and hills. It's akin to a *model* we generate in our minds, much like the way we generate a model of an *atom* in our minds, imagining a nucleus at its centre, with X number of protons and neutrons in it (the number X depending on the element and isotope of

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which this is intended to be an atom), and a “cloud” of electrons, equal in number to the protons, surrounding the nucleus. Nobody has ever actually *observed* such a thing as an electron, have they? It’s all *imagined*. Likewise, nobody ever *observes* the entire mountain with all those huge rocks *inside* it; nor do they observe its mass and immovability. The mountain too is *imagined*, though admittedly not *entirely* imagined, the way an atom is, because at least *part* of it is perceived. But *most* of what we think of as “the mountain” is actually *not* perceived; it is an *imaginary* object! The mountain we *think* of as Olympus, in other words, is almost as imaginary as Mount Doom from *The Lord of the Rings*.

DESCARTES: (*Exasperated*) Now is that crazy or is that crazy? I mean, how ludicrous can one be?

BERKELEY: “Ludicrous?”

DESCARTES: It’s a “portmanteau word”, like some of the words made up by the character Humpty Dumpty in the book *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. It combines the meanings of both “ludicrous” and “ridiculous”. I learned that trick from the Rev. Dodgson, the author of that book, whom I once met during my travels in Elysium. He’s an avid photographer, and took a photograph of me in my discarnate state, but unfortunately it didn’t turn out. It was over-exposed or something – or that’s what he said – for it just looked like a white blob.

BERKELEY: Oh yes; I met him too. He was an Anglican clergyman like me, but lived well after my time on Earth. He does have quite crazy ideas. But, I must say, most entertaining ones.

SOCRATES: No “crazier” than yours, old chum! And yours are no less entertaining either, at least to anyone who thinks about them in depth; for as I was trying to explain, they open up the door to what one might call “magic”. Not that there is *truly* any such thing as magic, for once one knows *how* something is done, it isn’t magical any more – indeed, as my good friend Arthur C. Clarke, the sci-fi writer, once said, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” Why, most Greeks in my time would have considered a telephone – even a land line, let alone a cell phone – to be “magical”! But what I meant was, your “idealist” philosophy – as I said earlier, I thoroughly dislike that term, but I use it because others use it, and it has become part of the lexicon – your philosophy, as I was saying, opens up the door to what many people might *call* “magic”, because they wouldn’t understand *how* it was done. And by “it” I mean, controlling everyday, waking reality the same way you control your lucid dreams!

BERKELEY: To be quite honest, even *I* don’t totally understand how I control my lucid dreams! All I know is that I *do* control them. Exactly *how* I do it, I just don’t *know*.

SOCRATES: But that’s par for the course with virtually any *téchnē* – any “ability to do something” – isn’t it? I mean, does a chef, say, *totally* understand how his dishes turn out so delicious? He does know how to *cook* them, but he doesn’t understand the cooking process *totally*. He certainly doesn’t understand exactly what part of his method of cooking imparts to his dishes that “Wow!” factor which he wants – even expects – to evoke from his customers. His customers may call it “magic”, but he himself, perhaps not – unless of course he wants to brag (admittedly that’s not uncommon among chefs). Why, I myself don’t *totally* understand exactly how I even lift my little finger! It *is* kind of magical, upon reflection – I must admit that. But it also *isn’t* – not in the way *most* people use the word “magic”.

BERKELEY: Meaning?

SOCRATES: Well, the word “magic” in the way it’s *normally* understood must also have something of the unexpected, the fantastic, the *extraordinary*, about it – yes? True, all of *existence* is “magic” in a sense, because we can’t explain it fully; but it’s *expected*, it’s *commonplace*,

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it's *ordinary*. It's not what most people *mean* when they say something is "magic". They mean, instead, something like a wizard whacking his staff down on the ground and shock waves spreading out from the spot where he whacked it down, so that an entire enemy army falls off their horses. They mean X-ray vision, they mean walking through walls, they mean waving a wand and turning a pumpkin into a Porsche! They mean raising the dead and parting the Red Sea. (I am, as you can see, using the terms "magic" and "miracles" to mean much the same thing.) Now you, Berkeley, say that you can do such things in your lucid dreams; I am just suggesting that – given much greater skill than yours, of course – one might be able to do things like them in what we call "real life", which as you yourself have argued – *cogently* argued – consists *only* of perceptions ... just as a dream is made up *only* of perceptions!

DESCARTES: (*Skeptical in the extreme*) Again, as I said, how ludicrous can one be?

SOCRATES: But why *not*? Aren't you the doubter *par excellence*? If so, should you not also doubt the *impossibility* of doing such things? Skepticism cuts *both* ways, Descartes! I mean, there's good reason to doubt anyone who says such-and-such a thing is *impossible*. How many times has it been demonstrated that something thought to have been impossible has eventually turned out to be *possible*? Was it not once believed – *strongly* believed – that humans could never fly? Yet flying is the order of the day now: anyone who can afford to buy an airline ticket – or even have it paid for by someone else – can fly! Once upon a time the atom was thought of as un-splittable – indeed, that's *why* it was called an "atom", from the Greek *átomos*, "un-cut-able". But now we can split the atom and not even bat an eyelid! How did we do all this? We did it by *figuring out* ways to do so! Agreed, we can't fly *like Superman* – that is to say, *without* a contrivance that helps us do so, like an aircraft of some sort. (Sorry, Berkeley, I know this is outside your field of expertise, but we'll explain Siegel's and Shuster's Superman to you later, when we have more time.) To anyone who says "We can't fly like Superman", I might retort, "Not *yet!*" Who knows what tomorrow might bring? Isn't what we *can* do only a matter of our *skills* ... while what we *can't* do is only a matter of *logic*? I mean, it would *truly* be impossible, even for God – or for an Omnipotent Being – to draw a square circle, or to create a rock so heavy that He Himself couldn't lift it, because *logically* those things can't be done – for they would result in contradictions of the sort Aristotle's logic designates as "{Not [A and not-A]}"; or in plain language, a thing must then be something and *not* be that same thing *simultaneously* ... and it's only such a *contradiction* that would make things like these impossible. For instance – to take the first example – to draw a square circle, the drawn shape would have to *be* a circle and *not* be a circle simultaneously: for a square is not a circle! At least not if we define the terms "square" and "circle" to mean what these terms are *commonly* understood to mean. (If they are defined otherwise, then it may become possible, of course; but in a *logical* argument, that would be a definite no-no, because ambiguous terms – terms with more than one meaning – can lead to erroneous conclusions! And ambiguity would be the *inevitable* end result of defining ordinarily-understood terms otherwise, because one can never get *rid* of the ordinarily-understood definitions ... right?) But in the *absence* of any contradiction, what *logical* reason is there for thinking that something – such as flying like Superman – *can't* be done? Doesn't it then boil down to a matter of the necessary *skill*? And *if* it is only a matter of skill – or in other words, of *ability* – then how do we know for sure *what* limits our skills can have, especially if we make up our minds to acquire them? It's one thing to *claim* something to be impossible, but it's quite another to *prove* it so. Do you have a *proof* that we will *never* be able to control everyday, waking reality in more or less the way Berkeley claims to control his lucid dreams? Even if *all* of us won't be able to, can you *guarantee* that it will *never* be possible to do so – not *ever*, not by *anyone*? By which I mean, can you guarantee it using *logic*? The way it can be proven that it will *never* be possible to draw a square circle?

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DESCARTES: (*Reluctantly*) When you put it that way ... no, I suppose I can't do *that*. (*Brightening up*) Actually, what you said about skepticism cutting both ways resonates with me. Yes, I can doubt that a thing *can* be done, but similarly I can also doubt that a thing *can't* be done. And, given the lack of proof either way, I can doubt both of them *equally*. In other words, your words are cause for *optimism!* Or at least, for as *much* optimism as pessimism. And then if one asks oneself what's more *reasonable*, then since as you point out, lots of things that were once considered impossible *have* been done, and so the balance of probabilities shifts in favour of *possibility*. Yes, I see that now. But there's still a huge question in my mind: pretty much all those once-thought-impossible things were rendered possible by *technology*. They were *not* rendered possible by controlling reality by "magic", or in the manner in which Berkeley claims to control his lucid dreams!

SOCRATES: That's why I introduced the term *téchnē* a short while ago. In Greek, as you both know – having been Classically educated, both of you – the word *téchnē* means "the ability to do something", or "the principles or methods employed in making something or attaining an objective". The word "technology" is in fact *derived* from it. The term *téchnē* can be applied to anything – even to controlling our lucid dreams. *Technically* – another word derived from it – doing *anything* well requires some *téchnē*: for without employing some *technique* (yet another word derived from it!) it can't be done. It's akin to a term they have in India, which Pythagoras also told me about – a concept highly regarded by Indians of the Buddhist persuasion – which to me is unpronounceable but which is often translated as "skill-in-means". For instance, riding a bicycle requires "skill-in-means", or *téchnē*. So does playing the violin, or cooking, or gardening. Hairdressing requires *téchnē*, massage requires *téchnē*, even opening a beer bottle requires *téchnē* (though admittedly a rather low level of *téchnē*.) To Indians of the Buddhist temperament, Pythagoras said, even becoming smarter and smarter – or what they call "attaining enlightenment" – requires "skill-in-means" ... which is to say, *téchnē*. It's a broader term than "technology", for it applies to pretty much *any* action a person may undertake in order to attain a specific goal. (Please excuse me. I am not trying to *teach* you all this, for I am sure they taught you Greek properly at University; but I am *reminding* you in case you may have forgotten.)

BERKELEY: You are *very* right to do so, Socrates. To those of us whose first language isn't Greek ... well, it's all Greek to us! We *need* reminding what Greek words mean, from time to time.

SOCRATES: I am *so* glad you're not offended: I feared I might have done so. But to continue our discussion: what if to perform what most people would call "magic", one simply needs the proper *téchnē*? Remember, there are *many* different kinds of *téchnē*. The *téchnē* required for playing the piano, for instance, is *entirely* different from that required to ride a bicycle! There's virtually *nothing* in common between them, except that both of them are *téchnē* (of different kinds), and both require the *téchnē* to be *applied*. So I figured: what if the *téchnē* required to perform what would normally be called "magic" or "miracles" is *entirely different* from the *téchnē* required to do most other things? To the person *performing* them, of course, it would not appear "magical" or "miraculous", because they'd know that they are simply employing the right *téchnē*. A *téchnē*, I imagine, ends in the appropriate result – the result it's *supposed* to end in – when it is *correctly* applied ... and that too, in most if not all cases, regardless of *who* applies it. Doesn't that make sense?

BERKELEY: I confess it does to me. As a clergyman, I should trust the word of my Lord Jesus Christ and believe on him; and if He says "Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, 'Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea', and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass, he shall have whatsoever he saith", who am I to judge His word, or to say "No, it most definitely can't be done"? I know that I *myself* don't have such a great degree of faith, for I am weak; but as a Christian, I *should*. And what you say, Socrates, about the results being the same regardless of *who* applies

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the appropriate *téchnē*, that too is supported by scripture, for Christ also said: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

DESCARTES: (*Pretending to be extraordinarily afraid, as of a demon*) You can quote *scripture*???

BERKELEY: Of course I can – I used to be a Bishop, after all!

DESCARTES: (*Deliberately putting on an air of being terrified, rising, and making the sign of the cross*): Angels and ministers of grace defend us! *Demon!!!* The one Being I *know* who can quote scripture is the Devil – the Prince of Darkness, Mephistopheles! If you can quote scripture, you must be Lucifer! *Get thee behind me, Satan!*

BERKELEY: (*Scandalized, and rising in turn*) *Sir!!!*

DESCARTES: (*Bursting out laughing*) Had you going for a while there, *mon ami*, didn't I?

BERKELEY: *What?* That was all an act?

DESCARTES: Of course it was – I've always wanted to make my “demon” argument to an *audience ... !* (*Smiles.*) Besides, you two aren't the only ones who can do impressions and the like.

SOCRATES: (*Laughing*) You had *me* going for a while there as well, old chap! You're not just “The Doubter” in the pack of humanity, you're “The Joker” too! (*Socrates and Berkeley both clap and applaud his performance.*) But hopefully, not Batman's “Joker”.

DESCARTES: (*Bowing, and imitating Robin Williams as the Genie in “Aladdin” after having sung “Friend Like Me”*): Thank you, thank you! But to return to what you were saying, Berkeley: as a devout Christian, though not a clergyman, I *should* trust the word of my Lord Jesus Christ and believe on him also, as you do ... but as the King of Doubts, I still have my – er – *doubts*. At least I have my doubts about it being an absolute *certainty* that anyone could perform miracles – or magic – if they just apply the right *téchnē*. And I should like to point out, Socrates, that you haven't proved that it *must* be possible; all you've proved is that it *may* be possible! I can doubt the certainty of it being *impossible*, but then again, I can also doubt the certainty of it being *possible*. Right?

SOCRATES: Maybe we're using the words “possible” and “impossible” with two different meanings. Strictly speaking – *logically* speaking – something can't be both possible *and* impossible simultaneously, right? And “once we have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, *must* be the truth” ... right? So if you *doubt* that something's *impossible*, doesn't that very doubt open up its *possibility*? In other words, doesn't the phrase “I doubt that this-or-that is *impossible*” in fact *imply* that “Therefore it *could* be possible”? If a thing isn't *definitely* impossible, doesn't that make its *possibility* a definite “maybe”?

DESCARTES: That sounds like sophistry to me, Socrates. It sounds like you're twisting the meanings of words to fit your argument!

SOCRATES: Well, while I was alive, Aristophanes did accuse me of sophistry, but I denied it then, as I do now. You see, I am much too *stupid* to be a sophist! I used to think highly of sophists while I was alive, and even sent one of my own students to study under one of them: they were, in opinion, better teachers than I was. (For all I know, they still are!) But as to your charge of me twisting the meanings of my words, that's another thing entirely. Can you show me exactly *how* I am twisting the meanings of my words to fit my argument?

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DESCARTES: When I say it's possible to do something, I mean that it *could* be done *or* it *couldn't*.

SOCRATES: But not *both* it could be done *and* it couldn't be done, right? It could be done *or* it couldn't be done, but not *both*.

DESCARTES: No, of course not.

SOCRATES: So when you have doubts about something being *impossible*, it means that you doubt that it *couldn't* be done, right?

DESCARTES: Of course.

SOCRATES: And doesn't that, in turn, mean that it *could* be done? Not that it *can* be done, just that it *could* be done?

DESCARTES: No; it only means that *maybe* it could be done.

SOCRATES: Isn't the word "maybe" redundant when we say "It *could* be done"? If something *could* be done – not, mind you, that it *can* be done, just if it *could* be done, with the word "could" being the operative one – isn't it at least *implied* that *maybe* it could be done? Isn't the word "could" used to *indicate* possibility? If you say, for example, "I could have been an actor for Disney", doesn't it mean that being an actor would have been *possible* for you?

DESCARTES: You're giving me a headache, Socrates! I'm not surprised they condemned you to death.

SOCRATES: (*Smiling*) Well, I'd be satisfied if I convinced any rational person – like you – that what most people call magic and miracles *could* be done. Have I convinced you of that, or not? (Though having seen you do a Robin Williams impersonation, I have begun to have my own doubts about your being a rational person – or a "man of reason" as you put it!)

DESCARTES: (*Smiling in turn*) Well, you *have* convinced me that *maybe* magic and miracles could be done. You haven't convinced me that they *definitely* can be done!

SOCRATES: I didn't intend to convince anyone that they *definitely* can be done – at least, not as yet. All I intended to do up till now was to convince rational people that magic and miracles *could* be done – or, as you say, that *maybe* they could be done. (I'll accept both phrases as essentially meaning the same thing.) But what you say makes me wonder: what *would* convince you that miracles and magic actually *can* be done? Not *could*, but *can*?

DESCARTES: Well, I'd have to *witness* someone actually *doing* something miraculous or magical!

BERKELEY: (*Interjecting*) I don't think so, Descartes! You being *you*, you'd doubt even the testimony of your own eyesight ... as indeed you did in your *Meditations*, saying that it could be – ah, a *demon* deceiving you, or that you might be suffering from hallucinations or insanity! (And having seen you actually *make* your "demon" argument earlier, I wouldn't be at all surprised to find out that you *are* both hallucinating *and* insane!)

DESCARTES: (*Smiling*). Ah. Yes. True. (*Pauses*). Okay: I'd have to do such things *myself*, in that case! I mean, when I say "I think, therefore I am", I don't doubt that I *think*; so when I *myself* do something, I can accept it as being something that *can* be done – beyond *all* doubt.

BERKELEY: But what if *you* couldn't do it, but someone *else* could? I mean, you *personally* can't fly a jet airliner, can you? But surely you accept the idea that others, properly trained, can.

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DESCARTES: When you put it like that ... (*thinking*). No: upon further reflection, I think you're mistaken. I *wouldn't* accept such an idea, because it's *also* susceptible to being knocked down by my "demon" argument, or my "insanity" argument or "hallucination" argument or "dream" argument ... or even some other such argument, one which I haven't yet thought of!

BERKELEY: Well, I mean, isn't pretty much *everything* knock-down-able by your arguments? Everything except your COGITO?

DESCARTES: (*Proudly*) Yes! Yes indeed. Thank you again.

BERKELEY: But that's hardly something to be *proud* of, is it? I mean, how can one live one's *life* that way? That is to say, relying *only* on indubitable, unquestionable truths?

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) Well, it's not that hard, actually. After I read Descartes works – and especially after I actually *met* him – I figured it out for myself. Most daily decisions are based on *dubitable* "truths", right? But when we base our decisions on dubitable "truths", we can know *for sure* that we are basing them on dubitable "truths"! There is no question *that* we base our actions on questionable "truths" ... or more accurately, on questionable *facts*. I distinguish between "facts" and "truths", because I think that what we call "truths" should be, as Descartes says, *indubitable* ... and also *permanent*. Facts, on the other hand, are at a lower level than hard truths, at least in my opinion; and so I consider them *separate* from truths – and even *different* in nature, ontologically. Now, since there is *no doubt that* we base our actions on questionable facts, *that* becomes a *truth*: a hard, *unquestionable*, indubitable truth! All we have to do, then, is *bear in mind* that we are using questionable facts to make most of our decisions. Then we are living our life based on the unquestionable *truth* that we are basing our decisions on questionable *facts*!

DESCARTES: It seems a bit convoluted to me. I shall have to think about it a bit before I give this idea my own stamp of approval.

SOCRATES: Let me explain further. You yourself say, Descartes, that *most* statements can be knocked down by your various arguments – your "demon" argument, or your "insanity" argument, or your "hallucination" argument or your "dream" argument or any of the other arguments you made to knock down most statements you *used* to believe in – right? If so, you can't *possibly* insist on dignifying such statements by the appellation "truths", can you now. Wouldn't that be irrational? Wouldn't you be calling by the term "truth", something which you have *proven* is questionable, and therefore, not *necessarily* a genuine truth at all?

DESCARTES: Well, if you put it that way ... yes, I can see what you're getting at. Truths *must* be indubitable: I agree. Therefore any statement that is dubitable *can't* be called a "truth", and so – if we are to be strictly logical – should be described using some other term (so as not to fall into the trap called the "fallacy of ambiguity", also called equivocation.) And it seems reasonable to call questionable statements "facts" rather than "truths". But to think on it further, isn't a "fact" that's questionable, not a fact at all? At least not a *genuine* fact?

SOCRATES: I think most people intend what they call "facts" to be only beyond *reasonable* doubt – not beyond *all* doubt, they way you, Descartes, insist on referring to "truths". I suppose most people would say that the affirmation "California exists" denotes a *fact*, because it's definitely beyond *reasonable* doubt. But it's not beyond *all* doubt!

DESCARTES: So I suppose you'd like to call anything beyond *all* doubt a "truth", while if it's only beyond *reasonable* doubt but not beyond *all* doubt, you'd like to call it a "fact"?

SOCRATES: Yes; at least *provisionally* I'd like to do that, and see where it leads us.

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BERKELEY: (*Pensively*) You know, upon reflection, I am even *more* interested in examining the idea we brought up some time ago, that perceptions are the *only* reality – or perhaps more accurately, *experiences* are the *only* reality. We already came to the conclusion, didn't we, that our ideas of what we consider to be "material" objects are composite "models" in our minds which we make up from *numerous* perceptions, plus from a large number of *assumptions* not *even* based on perceptions or observations (such as, for example, that a mountain has an "inside", one which is not always *actually* perceived or observed). Not that these models are altogether unrealistic, but they are not *necessarily* correct. Of course we do experience this *model* of the mountain; and to the extent that we do, it *is* a reality ... but *as* a model only. But what if, as I said, experiences are the *only* reality? What if Socrates is right in saying that one can never perceive the same mountain twice, any more than one can step into the same river twice? When we observe ourselves *experiencing*, don't we observe our experiences changing from moment to moment? What if we're mistaken in thinking that reality must be *permanent*, and accept *change* as the only thing that's *genuinely* permanent? What if we adjust our *attitude*, and accept the notion that, for example, we three have *never met before*? Indeed, that we never even walked down this avenue from our homes to this bistro earlier today, because the avenue that was there *then* isn't the same one that's perceptible to us *now*? I mean, should we not start our philosophy from scratch *every time*, and ask ourselves "What the [*bleep*] do we know?" What if when we are perceiving what we think of as "reality", we also say to ourselves "I am perceiving all this reality for the first time, and will *never* perceive it again in the future"? What if *every* reality is a "one-time" reality only, so to speak? What if every breath we take, every mouthful we eat, every word we say is the very *first* – and *last* – breath, mouthful, or word of ours: one which *never was before* and *never will be again*?

DESCARTES: Now it is *you* who are making me confused, Berkeley! I feel like I've stepped right through Alice's *Looking Glass* now, and am conversing with Tweedledum and Tweedledee.

SOCRATES: *Tweedledumb* – that's me! (*Grins like an idiot.*)

BERKELEY: No, but *listen* to me! I'm not kidding now. We agreed, didn't we, that a subjective experience *can't* be doubted? Then it satisfies the criteria that you, Descartes, have set up for your COGITO, doesn't it? You *experience* it, and so all doubts come to an end; for even if you *were* to doubt the experience, you'd *still* be experiencing it. Am I not right in so interpreting your COGITO? You think, therefore you are – so you claim. But does it matter *which* thought you're thinking? You may be thinking at one time thoughts about dinner; at another, thoughts about your friends; and yet another time, thoughts about philosophy ... but regardless of *which* thought you're thinking, the point is that you're *thinking*, and so you *are*! In other words, the fact that you *experience* something puts an end to *all* doubts. Then that which you experience becomes an indubitable *reality* – or more accurately, *your* indubitable reality. Doesn't it? But now observe your experiences *themselves*! They are extremely *transitory*, aren't they? They change from *moment to moment*, don't they? Indeed, they don't even last a whole *second*, let alone a whole hour, day or year. So don't we arrive at the conclusion that *indubitable* reality is *impermanent*?

SOCRATES: You know, what you say reminds me of a story I was reading about a fictitious character called "Wen the Eternally Surprised". It's by the philosopher Pratchett, who transitioned over from the Earthly realm recently. The story starts out something like this: this zen master Wen meets his apprentice, Deadpool, just after Wen has attained "realization" in a cave and is stepping out of it on the first day of the rest of his life. Wen looks surprised out of his wits, and exclaims something like "What the [*bleep*] is that?" And the apprentice, Deadpool – yeah, weird name, right? like it's right out of some comic book – this apprentice says, "It's the Sun, master! Remember? It was there yesterday, and many days and years before that!" And when Wen says something like "But there *was* no yesterday!"

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Deadpool retorts: “Er ... I think there *was*, master! I remember it clearly!” And Wen replies: “I *remember* yesterday, but it’s just a *memory*. I don’t *perceive* it, at least not *now*! Was yesterday *real*? Or is the *memory* real? I wasn’t born yesterday, you know!” By which he means ...

BERKELEY: Yes! *YES!!!* I *get* it! And he’s right! There *is* no past, there *is* no future; there *is* only the *present*. And all of reality is *in the present*, and nowhere else. All the past is in the present *as a memory*, and as a *memory* it exists; but as a *past*, it doesn’t! And the future – *all* of it – is in the present too ... as an *expectation*. We *expect* the future to arrive, and so it arrives! But *until* it arrives, it’s only *as an expectation* that it exists. Remember Socrates’ arguments about Hamlet? Hamlet doesn’t exist as a flesh-and-blood person like today’s Crown Prince of Denmark, who is alive and well in Copenhagen right at this moment, but Hamlet *does* exist as a fictional character in a play. *Indubitable* reality is *only* what’s being experienced *right now* – and *only* right now! And it’s indubitable *only* to the experiencer. Anyone who is an experiencer is in touch – in *intimate, indubitable* touch – with his or her reality! And it changes, and changes, and changes ... for ever! Look at this broad cobbled avenue, and this wide sidewalk, and at that monumental arch there at the end – you’re *seeing all of this for the first time, EVER!!!* You’ve *never* seen it before and you’ll *never* see it again! Not if what you want to see is *indubitable* reality. And you’ve never seen *dubitable* reality either, because dubitable “reality” is not indubitably *real* in the first place!

SOCRATES: (*Getting excited himself, now*) And so you’d *always* be seeing reality for the first time: it’s *all* a surprise! And when you are *eternally* surprised like Wen the Eternally Surprised, *everything* becomes a miracle, *everything* becomes magical. Remember, as we said earlier, a miracle, or magic, must have something of the *extraordinary* or the *unexpected* about it – right? When *everything* in one’s life – everything one ever *experiences* – is unexpected and extraordinary, then one’s *entire life* becomes miraculous and magical, doesn’t it? Then this moment, this “now”, lasts forever, *undoubtedly* ... because *truly* it does! It’s not a mere fact, it’s the *truth*. The *absolute* truth, the *indubitable* truth, the kind of truth that *you* searched for, Descartes! The problem is, most of us can’t *handle* the truth, because most of us *can’t* tell ourselves all the time “This reality which I am perceiving now, *this* reality is – and indeed *must* be – the *only* true and indubitable reality, and I’m perceiving it for the first time ever, *and* for the last time ever; what’s happening now will *never* happen again ... and has *never* happened before, either!” Indeed, *even* when we tell ourselves that, we don’t *always* *believe* it. And much of the time we don’t *even* tell ourselves that: most of the time we’re thinking of something we *have done* or we’re *going* to do: of the *past* or the *future*. Hardly ever do we observe what’s happening *now*, and as a result, hardly ever do we tell ourselves that our “*now*” is the only reality: the only true, *undoubtable, unquestionable* reality. But as *philosophers*, don’t we impose an obligation upon ourselves to *always* believe that which we have *proven beyond all doubt* to be *absolutely* true, *regardless* of our personal preferences or wishes or preconceptions or habits or prejudices or training or ... or pretty much *everything*? And even more than that: don’t we impose an obligation upon ourselves to *live* by the absolute truth? Don’t we take philosophy – *the love of wisdom* – to be the most important pursuit of all?

BERKELEY: You are right, Socrates, on both counts: when you say that we philosophers have an obligation to live by the truth, and *also* when you say that most of us can’t *handle* the truth. Even *I* couldn’t, at least not while alive! In those days, I tacitly assumed that life in an idealist universe – or, as you put it, in an “idealist” universe, with the word “idealist” in inverted commas – would be no different from life in an ordinary, run-of-the-mill dualist or materialist universe, but I was wrong: I see that now quite clearly. The assumptions we make about reality in a dualist-slash-materialist universe (*makes the sign of a slash with his right index finger*) about reality are simply not applicable in an idealist – sorry, “idealist” (*makes the sign of quote marks with the index and middle fingers of both hands*) –

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universe. When ESSE becomes PERCIPI, *things change* ... and when I say “change”, I mean things change *continuously!* When ESSE becomes PERCIPI, *ESSE must take on the properties of PERCIPI*. No longer can things last forever, or even for a longish time, because *perceptions* cannot last forever, or for a longish time! Rocks can’t be as ancient as the hills – indeed, even *hills* can’t be as ancient as the hills. Permanence becomes a thing of the past, for nothing lasts longer than the perception “thereof” (quote-unquote). Why, even *people* can’t last a long time! The “Berkeley” you see before you now isn’t the same “Berkeley” who a couple of weeks ago was emerging from church on Good Friday. The philosopher Pratchett is right when he says, through his character Wen the Eternally Surprised, “I wasn’t born yesterday.” *None* of us were – we were all born (or more correctly, we all came into existence) *this very instant!* The “Berkeley” who wrote the books *The Analyst* and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* – among others – isn’t the same “Berkeley” who sits before you *now* ... and is also not the same “Berkeley” after whom they named a famous and academically-excellent University in the San Francisco Bay Area! (It was *most* kind of them to do so, I must say: I was, in fact, quite flattered at the time, even though they don’t pronounce my name properly, but in the American way: “Burrklee”.) But even as I speak, I catch myself falling into the very error I am trying to point out, so great is my habit of assuming the misconceptions of the dualist-slash-materialist viewpoint: I say it’s *me* they named this University after, instead of speaking *correctly* and saying that the person they named it after wasn’t *me* at all, but someone else entirely: a different “me” of yesteryear! We *really* can’t handle the truth: the truth being that none of us have any permanent “I” to speak of; *no one* does.

DESCARTES: But wait a minute now! How can you say that none of us has an “I”? Speaking for myself, I certainly *experience* my own existence! That makes my existence indubitable ... doesn’t it? In my *own* view at least, it certainly does! What about my COGITO ERGO SUM?

SOCRATES: Yes, Berkeley: wouldn’t your claim put a bit of a kybosh on Descartes’ COGITO ERGO SUM? I mean, when he claims that he thinks, and therefore he is, but you claim that there *is* no “he” that thinks ... how would he – or you – reach an *indubitable* conclusion in such a case? Or more correctly, if there is no “he” nor “you” to begin with, as “you” seem to argue, then the question surely arises: how would an indubitable conclusion *be reached* in that case? Come to that, how can “you” make any argument at all, if “you” don’t exist?

BERKELEY: Note that I didn’t say that none of us has an “I”; I said none of us has any *permanent* “I”. This “I” changes continually, doesn’t it? I mean, we all *experience* the change. I am not the same person I was when I was three years old – isn’t that very evident? But likewise, I am also not the same person I was three *minutes* ago, though the difference is now much less than when I was three years old. But there still *is* a difference, isn’t there? And likewise, Descartes’s COGITO ERGO SUM *doesn’t* get overthrown, because he didn’t say, “I think, therefore I am *eternal*”, or “I think, therefore I *am*, was and shall *forever* be”, did he? He just said, “I think, therefore I *am*”. He’s just arguing that he *is*. Right *now* only. If he were to stop thinking, he wouldn’t *be* any more, right? He’d pop right out of existence, and right into *nonexistence*. So his COGITO still seems to be quite valid. The point is that “I” do exist, but “I” am continually *changing*, and therefore there is no *unchanging* “I” here: nothing *permanent* upon which one can hang one’s hat, so to speak. But then again, *nothing* is permanent: not even one’s hat! The hat “I” put on yesterday isn’t the *same* hat “I” shall put on later today ... that is, if “I” put a hat on at all. As you can see, the implications of my “immaterialist” philosophy are far-reaching, and very difficult to get used to: I understand this truth more than ever now, after sitting here at this sidewalk table and watching all the wine and food gradually disappear. *Impermanence* is – er – *permanent!* In fact, it’s the *only* thing that’s permanent. Isn’t that so? Certainly food and wine aren’t!

SOCRATES: Thank you for drawing my attention to this almost-empty wine bottle, and almost equally-

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empty charcuterie board! (*Calls out to the waitress*) *Ma chérie, peut-on obtenir une autre bouteille de votre meilleur vin, et un autre conseil de charcuterie? Merci!* You know, Berkeley, what you say again reminds me of the story of Wen the Eternally Surprised. There's a passage in it that goes something like this – and I am quoting from memory so I may get one or two words wrong – actually, many more than one or two – but it's so interesting that I tried to remember it as best I could: "The first question people ask when they look into the life of Wen the Eternally Surprised is: 'Why was he eternally surprised?' And the answer is: 'He understood the *true* nature of time, and saw that a new universe is created *moment by moment*. Therefore there is in truth no past, only a *memory* of the past. Blink your eyes, and the world you'll see next did not exist when you closed them. Therefore the only proper state of the mind is surprise; and the only proper state of the heart is joy. The sky you see *now*, you have *never* seen before – and that goes for everything you see or hear or smell or taste or touch as well. The perfect moment is *now*; indeed, there *is* no other moment. Rejoice, therefore, and be exceeding glad!" (*The waitress brings the wine and charcuterie board.*) And indeed I *am* rejoicing and being exceeding glad upon seeing these goodies appear – for I never saw them before!

BERKELEY: (*Laughing*) And neither did I, and am glad of it as well. (*Pouring wine for all, and then raising his own glass*) Cheers! You know, I should like to meet this philosopher Pratchett. Sounds like someone I might get along with ... indeed, like a house on fire!

SOCRATES: I can introduce you to him some time. But I must warn you that if you meet him a *second* time *after* that, he won't remember having met you the *first* time. He has Alzheimer's, you see; indeed, that's what he "died" of. (Not that one can seriously argue, though, that anyone *actually* dies, if they continue their existence after "death", can one? I mean, death is supposed to be *permanent*, isn't it? Given the fact that Elysium exists – and the proof is, *we're* here! – what people call "death" is just a *transition* from one state of existence to another, innit.) And although *normally* people who transition here from the Earthly realm leave their illnesses behind, he personally *chose* not to do so – or rather, he doesn't consider Alzheimer's to *be* an illness. He thinks that continually forgetting everything that happened a few moments ago makes him more like Wen the Eternally Surprised, and helps him to meet everyone for the first time, even if he *has* met them before. With him, one *does* get a second chance of making a first impression ... and a third, and a fourth and a fifth and a sixth, *ad infinitum*. And he also figures that if his Alzheimer's kills him a second time, he'll just "come alive" again – and again, and again! I mean, it's happened once, so why can't it happen again? Or so he figures. But as you say, you'll get along with him like a house on fire. There's another passage from his story which goes more or less like this: "Where there is suitable country for grain, people grow grain. Where there is suitable country for steel, people make steel. There is, similarly, coal country, beef country, and so on. In many countries, *one* thing shapes the land and the people. And in the high valleys around the hub of the world, there is *enlightenment* country. Here are people who *know* that there *is* no steel, there is only the *idea* of steel." Your "idealist" philosophy, almost verbatim!

BERKELEY: (*Unconsciously imitating Mr. Spock*) Fascinating. (*Encouraged by this news*) So there *is* someone else I may have managed to convince ... ?

SOCRATES: Maybe. However, the philosopher Pratchett also doesn't take most things too seriously. I get the feeling that he believes humour and laughter to be at least as important as the truth, if not even more so. In that he is more like Aristotle, who considers Happiness to be *much* more important than the Truth, than like my friend Gandhi, to whom Truth is God. To Pratchett, what's important is that existence be fun, *fun*, *FUN!!!* – and hang the truth. Or more accurately, pun, *pun*, *PUN!!!* And indeed it's hard to argue *against* such a stance, except from a literary point of view – and maybe not even from that. I myself can't

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think of a rebuttal or counter-argument; and when I can't do so, I find it difficult to believe anyone else can. And as usual for me, I keep an open mind on the subject: he may be right, for all I know! I am myself much too dumb to figure it out, anyway. All I know is that I know nothing. As a matter of fact I didn't even know *that*, because, as Aristotle pointed out to me after I died (he took me aside and did it in private, so as not to embarrass me, I imagine), I ought to have said "All I know is that I know *next to* nothing." But Descartes, you've been awfully silent of late? You haven't said much for a while. Wazzup?

DESCARTES: (*Who has been very pensive up to now, sipping his wine between thoughts*) You know, I have always tried to live in the real world. I mean, I am a philosopher, true enough, but I also have to *live*, right? Even now that I'm dead I still have to *live* – well, I have to *exist*. I mean, when I'm driving my *Veyron* I still stop at a red light, even though with the *Veyron*'s speed I could easily cross the intersection before any car coming at right angles to me hits me. (Socrates knows I'm an avid piston-head, Berkeley, and *love* to drive fast. I've lapped the Nürburgring in 8 minutes! In fact, I personally know race car driver Pierre Veyron, after whom my car is named; he gave me some really good driving tips.) Yes, as I was saying, I stop at red lights, because I live in the *real* world. Or at least I've been *trying* to, up till now. What you've been saying makes me start to think that in actual fact I *haven't* been living in the real world at all! That there *is* no red light, there *is* no *Veyron* ... and in fact there's no *Veyron* either! And the problem is compounded by the fact that everything you say sounds very, *very* logical and correct, and *deucedly* hard to refute. (*Loudly*) THAT'S A FRICKIN' *L O T* TO DIGEST!!! – Sorry. Too much wine, I guess.

SOCRATES: I understand, old chap. Yes, it all sounds most preposterous. I don't think it's the wine, for you've also been nibbling on the cheeses and cold cuts; I think it's the *newness* of it all. But what if it's *true*? I mean, consider the *implications!* Maybe one can change the red light to green while one is crossing the intersection! Maybe one can even change the *Veyron* to the Batmobile, so that even if another car hits it, hardly any damage will result. (To the Batmobile, I mean, not to the other car of course: *that* car will totally be totalled.) Maybe *Veyron* – Pierre Veyron, I mean this time – *really* doesn't exist ... or maybe he does, but only as a *part* of you! I mean – and this thought occurred to me just now, just as I was speaking – have you ever considered the possibility that none of us are *independent* of each other, but that I perceive you and Berkeley, and you perceive Berkeley and me, and Berkeley perceives the two of us ... and each of us is just a *perception* inside another *perceiver's* mind? I mean, if ESSE *is* PERCIPI, then what's to make this supposition false? If as we all reasoned earlier, all *indubitable* reality must be *subjective* – and cannot possibly be *objective*: I mean even *you* argue "*I* think, therefore *I* am", and not "*You* think, therefore *you* are", nor "*He* thinks, therefore *he* is", right? – then ...

BERKELEY: (*Interrupting, excited*) Yes, Socrates, I see what you mean! I perceive the two of you; and *those* perceptions are real to me: *indubitably* real to me. So: are you two in actual fact *in* my perceptions? At least partially, yes! – or to be more accurate, at least as far as *I* am concerned. Of course if I were to stop perceiving you, you wouldn't pop *out* of existence, because *you* perceive yourselves too, and *your* perceptions of you are indubitable to *you*. But *my* perceptions of you two are indubitable to *me*, and therefore you two must be at least *partially* inside my own mind ... eh? If ESSE *is* PERCIPI, then the reverse must be true too; or in other words, PERCIPI must be ESSE as well, mustn't it? I mean, is there a dichotomy between perceiver and perceived? The perceiver *is* – as demonstrated by your COGITO, Descartes – and the perception *is*, if "to be is to be perceived"! If both perceiver and perceived *are*, then can't we say that they kind of blend into each other?

SOCRATES: You mean like when you look at yourself in a mirror? The image you see isn't *you*, of course; it's just a *reflection* of you. But most of the time you *think* of it as being *you*. "There I am in the mirror", you say to yourself. When looking at yourself shaving in the

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mirror – not that I personally do any shaving, of course, but you two do – you say, or at least think to yourself: “I’m shaving myself.” You don’t say “My *reflection* is shaving *itself*”, do you? You confuse the perceiver – that’s you – with the perceived: your reflection. You and your reflection kind of “blend into each other”, as Berkeley just said. Isn’t that the case? You’re not very discriminating in daily life, and so ...

BERKELEY: (*Again interrupting*) Yes! YES!!! The reality is that *all* of us are in fact perceptions. *Everybody* is a perception! Not just *everything*, but *everybody* as well. And building upon your argument about Hamlet, Socrates – I mean, when you say that it’s ambiguous to ask whether Hamlet exists, and to make it unambiguous you have to ask “Exist *as what?*” – then can’t we also say that *all of us* are just as fictional as Hamlet, and *always were*? So Schweitzer’s claim that Jesus is as fictional as Hamlet would just induce us to retort, “So *what?* It’s not like Schweitzer *himself* is any less fictional, is it.” ... (*Pauses to think*) And in addition, I’d *also* say that everybody is an *indubitable* perception only to *themselves*. To ask whether something is indubitable or not is asking a question that allows for an ambiguous answer; to make the answer unambiguous you have to further ask, “indubitable *to whom?*” It’s not sufficient to say that something is indubitable; it has to be indubitable *to somebody*. Your COGITO ERGO SUM, Descartes, is indubitable only to *you* – or in other words, when *you* perceive yourself thinking, and conclude that therefore *you* are, that *conclusion* is indubitable only to *you!* Others, including even your closest friends like me, have no way of knowing the *indubitability* of that answer.

SOCRATES: But there’s more to it than that. What you say, Berkeley, is true as far as it goes, but it doesn’t go far *enough!* Not only do you exist indubitably only for *you*, but you exist indubitably for you only at the *instant* you perceive yourself existing indubitably. You are being created anew each instant, and therefore the “I” that you thought you were, Descartes, when you formulated your COGITO, isn’t the same “I” that sits before us today eating and drinking merrily! That *past* “I” is dead and gone; indeed it died the *instant* you realized that it existed – and, indeed, existed *indubitably*. And that goes for everyone else too. Reality is *recreated* anew every instant, with every perception; and all of that reality is totally *subjective*. That’s the *only* logical conclusion that follows if one accepts your notion that “to be is to be perceived”! *Perception* is subjective, so *existence* must be subjective. And *perception* is constantly in flux, so *existence* must be constantly in flux, like a river! *Pánta rhei*, as we used to say in ancient Greece: “everything flows”. One can never experience the same *reality* twice, just as one can never step into the same *river* twice. I know, I know, I am repeating myself; but it *bears* repeating! *That’s* the real world, Descartes – the *real* real world, the one you *ought* to be living in. That’s *real* rationality; that’s *logic!*

DESCARTES: But then why doesn’t it *feel* like the real world? Maybe – just *maybe* – even *logic* isn’t all it’s cracked up to be. (Look at me now – *I*, the rationalist, beginning to have my doubts about rationality itself!) But if what you say is true, and the red light at the intersection is real only for an instant – and only for *me* who is perceiving it – then why do *others* also seem to perceive it, and why can’t I change it the next instant to a green light, so that I can drive right through without stopping? And also, *what* – or *who* – “recreates” reality anew every instant? Or is it just something that *happens*, without any deliberate creation on anyone’s past? If so, don’t you think it’s important to ask *why* it happens?

SOCRATES: Well, as for why a red light – and pretty much everything else other than lightning flashes – seem to persist for *much* longer than the blink of an eye, I can think of an easy answer: maybe they *don’t*, and a *new* red light, or tree, or mountain, or whatever, is created every instant! Like in a movie, where every subsequent frame shows the red light, the tree or the mountain in exactly the same spot on the screen where the previous frame showed it. Or like a river, the water of which is flowing all the time, so that one can never step into the same river twice. So maybe one never actually sees the *same* red light twice, either!

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As I said, *maybe*. I can't be sure, of course. It's just a guess on my part. But as to what *makes* it happen, or *why* it happens, I have, unfortunately, *absolutely* no knowledge ... and I don't even have a good *guess*. But as I said, me being a total idiot – and proud of it! (*smiles*) – I am never ashamed to admit my ignorance when I truly *don't* know something (which is most of the time): and this, like many, *many* others, is one of those cases.

BERKELEY: That's why I said that God is necessary. It's *God* that makes it happen!

DESCARTES: You know, Berkeley, in this case I can actually bring myself to believe that. Surprise, eh? But I've been thinking while you were talking. Maybe my own original proof for the existence of God is flawed logically, but yours does seem to carry some weight ... at least in my own mind now. Let me explain. To begin with, I really can't get rid of the feeling that things that happen must be *caused* to happen. Things don't happen just randomly, and the non-randomness of them happening makes me think that events *must* have causes. But I am also persuaded by your friend Hume's argument that a billiard ball, for instance, cannot cause another billiard ball to move: for in order to do that, the first billiard ball must have some *power* to cause things to happen; and what power can a billiard ball – or *any* inanimate object – have? So I ask myself: what caused the *first* billiard ball to move? I mean, what is the *original* cause of movement? And I was thinking, maybe the original cause is *free will*! I mean, the problem of the "first cause" would persist in any reasoning about *physical* causes for physical events. *Without* a first cause there would be an infinite regression, you see; and so there must be an admission that at least the *first* cause was itself *uncaused*! And if even *one* event can be uncaused, then why not others? But if we assume that *free will* is the first cause in every case, then things do make sense. Free will *itself* must be *uncaused*, for if it were caused, then it wouldn't be *free*; we'd be living *deterministically*, where *nothing* could be *known to be true*! We'd simply be believing or thinking things because we were *caused* to believe or think them; we'd even believe them to be *true* because we'd be *caused* to believe they were true. In other words, we could never *know* anything to be true. But as Socrates proved around the beginning of our conversation when talking about his friend Gandhi, truth *must* exist, because to assume it *not* to exist would entail a contradiction. Therefore the answer *can't* be "Nothing is true"; or in other words, *something* must be true. Which in turn means – if we follow the logic of our present argument – that *free will* cannot be caused. Therefore it must be *uncaused*, and as a result, *free will* can be the first cause in any chain of causation! And since *we* weren't around at the very beginning of the Universe, that will must be God's will, not ours.

SOCRATES: I can believe that *will* must be the first cause. But why should it be *God's* will? Indeed, how *can* it be God's will? How can *another* being's will, even God's will, cause something to come into existence in *my* experience? I can understand that God's will can make something come into existence in *God's* experience. But as you yourself have proved, Descartes, all *indubitable* reality must be entirely *subjective*! I can make something come into existence in *my* experience, but not in *yours* or *Berkeley's*. Likewise, I presume that God can make something come into existence in *His* experience, but hardly in mine or yours, right? I mean, God may be all-powerful, but there are things even an all-powerful being can't do, right? For example, even God couldn't create a square circle, using the words "square" and "circle" with their commonly-understood meanings. Or, to give another example, Descartes, even God would not be able to convince you that you *don't* think, right? Your COGITO is incapable of being overthrown by your "demon" argument – namely, that an all-powerful demon might cause you believe that you are thinking when you actually are not thinking at all (and your COGITO argument is demon-proof because even if the demon truly does cause you to believe you're not thinking, you'd still be believing it, or in other words, *thinking* it!) – and as a result, your COGITO is also *God-proof*. So how can *God's* will cause something to come into existence in *your* experience, or in mine, or in Berkeley's? *Unless* ... okay, a radical thought just occurred to me ... unless I *am* God!

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Come to think of it, it isn't so radical a thought after all; Pythagoras told me that in India lots of people think that way; I had just forgotten that he'd told me so. Yes, by Jove, I think I've got it! I *myself* must be God, and that's the *reason* I can cause things to come into my experience – into my own subjective reality – when I perceive them. And you both must be God too, because *you too* can cause things to come into *your* own experience.

DESCARTES: But that's *preposterous!* I don't care what people in *India* think: *scripture* certainly doesn't seem to accept such a idea, does it. Blasphemous! Think of Moses parting the Red Sea or Joshua making the Sun stand still. It was *God's* almighty power that enabled them to do so, right? It wasn't Moses's or Joshua's *own* puny human power.

BERKELEY: I am not so sure about that, Descartes. As a clergyman I have often had occasion to ask myself what Christ *means* in the Lord's Prayer, when he begins it by saying "*Our* father who art in heaven". Does he not clearly imply that *we ourselves* are God's children? And it's not just in the Lord's Prayer that he implies this – he even says so outright, when for example he says "call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven". Or when he replies to the Jews who are stoning him – let me quote from the Book of John, Chapter 10 (*pulls out his pocket Bible and reads*): "Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?" (*Looking up from his Bible.*) Clearly, even in the Old Testament – as Christ Himself has pointed out here – it is *accepted* and even *asserted* that *we* are God. Actually, the original Hebrew passage that Christ is referring to – Psalm 82, verse 6 – reads *Elohim atem*, which can also be translated as "ye are *God*", and not *only* as "ye are *gods*" as is done in the King James Version, because the Hebrew word *Elohim* means both "God" and "gods". (Yes, I did study Hebrew! Though I am a bit rusty nowadays, I have to admit. But with regard to this being a *possible* translation, I'm definitely not wrong: I remember checking.) Christ *Himself* seems to have given His stamp to the idea that *we* – *all* of us – are God.

DESCARTES: Then why don't I *experience* myself as all-powerful? Why can't *I* part the Red Sea, or raise the dead? Or cure lepers (I mean, *without* drugs)? Surely my inability to do such things gives the lie to the assertion that *I* am God, doesn't it?

BERKELEY: Maybe not. As Christ also said, when his disciples asked him why they could not cure a lunatic boy – when they asked Christ, in effect, "Why could not we cast this demon out?" – he answered: "Because of your unbelief: for I say unto you, If ye have as much faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, move, and it shall move; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Note especially the last bit: "*Nothing* shall be impossible unto you", with the emphasis on "*nothing*". Mind you, I am paraphrasing now, I am not quoting exactly. But we can check ... (*starts to open his pocket Bible*)

DESCARTES: (*Interrupting*) Never mind, you are right: I remember the passage – it's very well-known; indeed, we ourselves referred to it earlier. So what you're saying is, *we are* all-powerful – for "nothing should be impossible unto us" – but we don't *believe* that *we* are, and *that's* why we don't experience ourselves possessing (*imitating Robin Williams*) "phenomenal cosmic powers" ... as Aladdin's Genie puts it?

BERKELEY: (*Raising his eyebrows*) "Phenomenal cosmic powers"???

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- DESCARTES: Oh yes – I forgot. Again. No movies. *Eh bien*. Just saying: we aren't *aware* that we're God, or that we have God-like powers of creation, because we don't *believe* that we are, nor do we believe that we *do* in fact have such powers. Is that how you want to put it?
- BERKELEY: Yes, pretty much! The Bible teaches us – indeed, *Christ* teaches us – that we are ourselves capable of *anything* God is capable of. We just have to *believe* it!
- DESCARTES: Hmm. But then surely the question arises: *Why* should we believe it?
- BERKELEY: Well, because our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded us to do so!
- DESCARTES: *Has* he?
- BERKELEY: Of course. In the Book of John, Chapter 6, Christ's disciples ask him: "What shall we do, that we might work the works of God?" And He answers, "This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent." That's *all* you have to do! When you believe, God's power flows through you.
- DESCARTES: But then I am just a *conduit* for God's power, am I not? I am not God *Himself*.
- BERKELEY: Haven't you been paying attention? Psalm 82's *Elohim atem* means "Ye *are* God", not "Ye are conduits for God's power"! Or so it can validly be translated. Perhaps I misspoke, however, when I said God's power *flows through* you. I was thinking of St. Francis of Assisi, who reputedly said "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace, so that where there is doubt I may bring faith, where there is hatred I may bring love", and so on. In fact, maybe St. Francis never *actually* said it, for there is no record of this prayer prior to 1912. Be that as it may, however. What I *should* have said was, "Then God's power *is in* you." When we say DOMINUS VOBISCUM, we surely mean *that*, don't we? And this salutation, derived as it is from Ruth, Chapter 2, where the original Hebrew is *Adonai imachem*, "the LORD be with you", shows that this *is* scripturally supported. You just have to *believe*.
- DESCARTES: As the King of Doubts, I have to admit that believing statements that don't have any proof – or at least *evidence* – is *very* difficult for me. And *trying* to believe something when one *doesn't* believe it, I think, isn't very useful. It reminds me of Alice in the book *Through the Looking Glass*, where the White Queen says to Alice, "I am one hundred and one years old, six weeks and a day. Exactly." Or something like that. And Alice says "I can't believe that!" To which the White Queen replies: "Can't you? Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and try again." Alice bursts out laughing and says something like "That's silly – one *can't* believe impossible things, no matter how much one tries!" To which the White Queen has an equally silly reply: "Oh yes one can. All one needs is practice. When I was your age, I practised believing a lot. Indeed, at times I could believe as many as six impossible things before breakfast!" Or words to that effect: I was paraphrasing, I don't remember the exact passage.
- BERKELEY: But it's not a *silly* reply, my dear Descartes: it's a most *Christian* reply. Not surprisingly, given that the author, the Rev. Dodgson, was a clergyman like me. I myself also think that practising believing is important! Every *new* accomplishment requires the belief that it can be accomplished *before* it is actually accomplished, doesn't it. I mean, it's never been accomplished before, so one must first of all come to *believe* that it can be accomplished! Otherwise why would one even try? "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief". Mark, Ch. 9.
- DESCARTES: But *how* does one *believe* something? Are our *beliefs* under our control? I don't think so!
- BERKELEY: Well, I think I agree with Socrates when he says that skepticism cuts both ways. If you

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doubt that something *can* be done, it's equally possible for you to doubt that something *can't* be done! Unless you have an actual *proof* that something can't be done, how can you be *sure* it can't? You *must* doubt the impossibility. (*Turning to Socrates*) Isn't that right? It seems to me that *doubting one's doubt* is a SINE QUA NON for a *true* doubter! I think that's also what my friend Paul Tillich had in mind when he said "Doubt is not the *opposite* of faith, it is an *element* of faith".

DESCARTES: But you aren't addressing my *question*, Berkeley. *Are* our beliefs under *our own* control? Or in other words, just *how* can one change one's beliefs, *consciously*?

BERKELEY: By *doubting* them, of course! I *am* addressing your question, don't you see? And for *you*, the King of Doubts – well, doubting your own beliefs should be a cinch! All you'd have to do is ask yourself, regarding any particular belief you have: "*Is* this belief doubtable?" And in most cases you'll find it *is*. So then you'd begin to *doubt* it, just as you did in your *Meditations*! You'd list all the reasons why it *couldn't* be true, just as in your *Meditations*, and as a result, your doubts about it would increase, until you are very *sure* that you *do* doubt it. You can, in fact, be as sure about your *doubt* of any particular belief you have, as you are about your COGITO! Isn't that so? And then you're home free – or at least, you open up the door to a belief which is the exact *opposite* of the belief you have just doubted. Of course, that opposite belief could itself be doubtable, but then ...

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) Yes! Yes!! For then you reach *my* state, namely, that of saying "All I know is that I know nothing ... or, if not *altogether* nothing, at least nothing about *this* subject". Then you have an *open mind*! A mind capable of believing anything that's not *one hundred per cent proven* to be false. If something *isn't* proven false, then it *could* be true! Not that it necessarily *is* true, of course, but at least it *could* be. Of course anything that's proven *true* is easily believed. But on second thoughts, the word "believed" is perhaps not required for those things that are *proven* true; the word "knowledge" is more appropriate, isn't it? I mean, you don't *believe* your COGITO, Descartes; you *know* it to be true. The word "belief" is more properly used about things one *doesn't* know to be true ... or false. So: begin by doubting *every single one* of your beliefs, and you can then *change* them!

DESCARTES: O ... M ... G ... *mon* ... *Dieu*: you're *right*! As a professional doubter, I have in my mental arsenal everything I need to change my beliefs regarding *most* things! As long as they are not *known* to be either indubitably true or false, I *can* change my beliefs about them. I can acquire the heart of the true believer simply by becoming the ultimate *doubter*!

SOCRATES: I never – ah, *doubted* – it for a second, old chum! Of course, *I'm* not a professional doubter – though I *may* call myself a "professional *questioner*" – so I don't actually *doubt* much ... if anything, in fact. Come to think of it, that's probably *why* I never doubted it for a second, what? But as for myself, when I am sure of something I say I'm sure of it, and when I'm not, I simply say "I don't know"! I believe an honest man can do no less.

BERKELEY: But isn't saying "I don't know" about something, the same as doubting it? Or at least doubting the *truth* of it? Which, of course, is the same thing as doubting *it*?

SOCRATES: (*Thinking a bit*). Maybe. Or maybe the word "doubt" is a bit ambiguous. Eh? Does it have the same *meaning* every time we use it? The way *you* use it, you are saying that unless something is *indubitably* true, it's *doubtable* ... and of course it is: indeed, by definition. But very often when people say "I doubt such-and-such" – like when someone says, for instance, "I doubt that you can eat a ten-pound turkey in one sitting" – they mean that the likelihood of it is much lower than its *unlikelihood*. ¿Eh? (I mean, is "unlikelihood" a real word?) What I want to say is, often what people mean when they say that they doubt something, is that the balance of probabilities is *against* it being true: that it's *more* likely

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that it's false than that it's true. That's *another* way of using the word "doubt". So perhaps the word "doubt" should be replaced by some other, less ambiguous word ... eh? The problem is, I *personally* can't think of a suitable word. Can *you*? Or *you*, Descartes?

DESCARTES: (*Thinking a bit*) What about "uncertainty"?

SOCRATES: (*Repeats*) "Uncertainty". (*Thinks.*) Maybe. But "doubt" is both a noun *and* a verb, isn't it? I can say "There is some doubt about such-and-such in my mind" – using the word "doubt" as a noun – or I can say "I doubt such-and-such", using it as a verb. "Uncertainty" is perhaps a good replacement for the word "doubt" when used as a noun, but what about the word "doubt" when used as a *verb*?

BERKELEY: Oh, never *mind*; we should be able to make ourselves *understood* as long as we *are clear among ourselves* what we mean, even if we use the word "doubt". As I once wrote, the important thing in a proper discussion is that all parties should have in their *minds* the same *ideas*, and not that all of them should use the same *words*. Words by themselves – especially *abstract* words – can be *very* detrimental to a discussion. I've written a whole section in one of my books regarding the problems that arise when one uses abstract terms. But we can always stop our discussion and *clarify what we mean* when we get stuck in a quagmire because of ambiguity. Come to think of it, that's one *huge* advantage of a *discussion* over an essay, article or book, where the author is simply setting forth his or her *own* ideas, and not listening to anyone *else* set forth *their* ideas. Isn't it?

SOCRATES: Quite so: I agree totally. That's also another reason why I never wrote anything myself! Of course the *main* reason is that I'm a blithering idiot ... (*Seeing Descartes beginning to remonstrate*) Okay, Descartes, okay: I know *you* think highly of me, particularly after we met here in the afterlife – though for the life of me (or actually I should say, for the *death* of me!) I can't figure out *why* – and though I appreciate of your kind words, I'm personally not *convinced* that I'm as clever as I'm made out to be by you ... and even by others. Why, I haven't yet proven *anything* to be true, even after almost two and half *millennia*!

DESCARTES: But you *have*, *mon vieux*! Remember that whenever you prove something – let's call it X – to be *false*, you IPSO FACTO also prove something else *true*: ID EST, you prove a truth – let's call it Y – and that truth, Y, being that it's *true* that X is false! Falsehood *entails* truth; for nothing can be *proven* false without *also* proving that it's *true* that it's false.

SOCRATES: Good point, I have to admit. (I dunno about the ID EST, though: rather pretentious, innit?) But that's a round-about way of proving something true, isn't it? And also, it's a rather *trivial* kind of truth (using the word "trivial" in its ordinarily-understood sense), isn't it.

DESCARTES: Round-about way, yes – as in a REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM. But that doesn't render a truth proved *that* way any less valid than a truth proved any *other* way! And as for "trivial", I'd hardly call it that either. Remember Popper's arguments about "falsifiability": science can only prove things *false* ... but that doesn't render science *trivial*, now does it? Using the word "trivial" in its ordinarily-understood sense. ... And as for ID EST, you *started* it, with your VIDELICET! Remember, a while back, you said ...

SOCRATES: Well, would you have preferred *viz.*? And moreover, what about your IPSO FATSO? That surely was a jibe at me, if ever there was one! I *have* put on weight, I admit ... but blame that on the good food and wine here in these *Champs Elysées*! But I go walking every day ... okay, sometimes every *other* day, but after two thousand years I'm getting *old*!

DESCARTES: I *didn't* say IPSO FATSO, you ... *f - f - f - f - fatso*! I said IPSO FACTO, and if you can't tell the difference ...

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SOCRATES: No you didn't *say* it, but you *wanted* to say it! I could *tell*, from the way you hesitated for a fraction of a second before saying FACTO!

BERKELEY: (*Interrupting to stop the flame war from getting out of control*) Gentlemen! *Gentlemen!!!* We're all adults here! Let's behave like ... (*trails off and pauses to muse for a minute*) ... or *are* we adults here? Is a dead person a child or an adult? ... are such distinctions even *relevant* post-mortally? (*Throwing up his hands*) I shall have to consult the library of Alexandria about this one; and I do hope there's an answer *there*, otherwise I shan't know whom to ask!

SOCRATES: You could always ask Imhotep: I mean, the inventor of the pillar and the pyramid (among many other things). Greeks of my time think he's the bee's knees and the cat's whiskers. He even *has* a cat, actually – *with* whiskers – whose name is "Mao".

BERKELEY: Mao Tze-Tung?

SOCRATES: No, just "Mao". It was the cat itself who told Imhotep what its name was, you see, when they met. Imhotep asked the cat, "What's your name?" and the cat said, introducing itself: "Mao". Imhotep said in return, introducing himself: "Imhotep" – which in his language means "I come in peace". He's cool that way.

BERKELEY: He and St. Francis of Assisi would get along well together, I imagine. St. Francis has a friend whom he calls "Brother Wolf". He's *actually* a wolf, you see; hence the name.

SOCRATES: Ah, yes; of course. The scientist Schrödinger has a cat too, which he keeps in a box. As long as Schrödinger doesn't open the box, the cat can't be dead. Nor can it be alive, to be sure, but that's irrelevant, because the *relevant* thing is, *it can't be dead*. He can keep the box closed for millions of years, and as long as he doesn't open the box the cat will definitely *not be dead!* Schrödinger's friend Charlie Brown assures him that that's a *fact*, mathematically *proven* by the formulae of quantum mechanics. It's all there in the *Peanuts* comic strips. Charlie Brown thinks Schrödinger's box is the secret to defeating death. Just put people in a box, and as long as the box is never *opened*, they simply *can't* be dead. Brown thinks that what applies to cats also applies to people; the formulae of quantum mechanics surely prove it! And many modern scientists think he's quite right. Imhotep, on the other hand, has his doubts about quantum mechanics. And his doubts *count!* He's a mechanic himself, you see. Or more correctly, an engineer: it was he who invented construction using cut stones, at least in our part of the world. (Of course, someone else must have invented it in South and Central America, and maybe even in China and India and South Asia.) Imhotep also devised special irrigation systems to bring the Nile's waters to the fields even when the level of the river was low: the King himself had asked him to devise such systems. That was, of course, due to Imhotep's intimate friendship with the King, with whom he used to hang out in their home town, Memphis. When the King died it was Imhotep himself who put him in a box (made, naturally, out of cut stone); but he was pretty sure the King was dead when he did so. Plus, he also invented the stethoscope, so he could *tell* when something – or someone – with a heart was dead or not. That's *why* he has his doubts about quantum mechanics. I myself, I keep an open mind about it all ... as I do about everything. I said that before too, didn't I.

DESCARTES: But isn't there something missing in your account of Schrödinger's cat? I mean, isn't there a radiation source, a poison capsule and a geiger counter – among other things – involved in it somewhere? I seem to remember reading something along those lines.

SOCRATES: Yes, but Charlie Brown argues – and most convincingly – that these are *irrelevant* to the crux of the argument. According to quantum theory, *until* the box is opened, the cat *can't* be dead. (Nor alive, but as I said, that's not relevant.) The *cause* of death is immaterial!

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The cat simply *can't be dead* until the box is opened, you see: whether of a heart attack, or cancer, or choking on a fish bone, or *anything* – even poison. In fact, *as soon as the box is closed* it becomes impossible for the cat to be dead! That renders the geiger counter and the poison capsule – and *everything* else – *irrelevant* to the argument, right? There could also be a ball of wool in there, or a toy mouse, or catnip, but those things would *also* be irrelevant. It's the *opening of the box* that's the essence of the argument!

DESCARTES: Sometimes I don't know whether you're joking or serious, Socrates. Which is it this time?

SOCRATES: Well, read *any* account of Schrödinger's cat; you'll see that it won't matter if you change the parameters by introducing, say, poisoned catnip into the argument! What if the cat eats the poisoned catnip and dies? How will you know it's dead without opening the box? What's the guarantee that it *will* eat the poisoned catnip at all? What's the guarantee that it'll die even if it does eat the poisoned catnip? What if it just becomes very, very ill? What if the poison capsule does break as per schedule, but the cat dies moments before of a heart attack? And in *every* case, how will you *know* it's dead *unless* you open the box? (Or if you have X-ray vision or some such ability, of course.) The crucial thing is *opening the box and looking inside* – or checking in some other manner, like shaking the box hard and hearing the cat screech with annoyance as a result. Everything else is *irrelevant* – everything else just *confuses* the issue!

DESCARTES: But surely if we wait a million years the cat will die of starvation, or at least of old age ... !

SOCRATES: I am *most* surprised to hear *you* say that, Descartes! *You*, who are willing to doubt even the testimony of your own senses! Why, I almost expected you to say that even if we *do* open the box we won't be able to be 100% sure the cat's dead! And now you seem to be rooting for the *opposite* team, the *anti-Cartesian* team! What's *happened* to you? *Jeez!*

DESCARTES: *Touché*. But I mean, as men of reason, should we not be – ah – *reasonable* ... ? Yes, I know, I know, the terms "reason" and "reasonable" are not necessarily synonymous or interconnected; we spoke about that earlier; but I mean to say ... (*trails off, thinking*)

BERKELEY: (*Interrupting*) You know, Socrates, what you said just now has got me thinking. If ESSE *is* indeed PERCIPI, then surely until someone *perceives* the dead cat after the box is opened, the cat *truly* can't be dead, as Schrödinger claims! So maybe his friend Charlie Brown *is* right, and putting people in a box and closing the lid *is* the way to defeating death! I mean, let's think *outside* the box for a minute – or rather, let's think *inside* the box ...

SOCRATES: Yes, let's. Wouldn't the guy *inside* the box *perceive for himself* whether he's dead or not? Surely he doesn't need anyone *else* to open the lid and peek inside to know if he's dead or not dead, does he? He can perceive for himself what's what.

BERKELEY: Not really. There's two alternatives, right? Either quantum theory is *correct*, and he's *not* dead, or quantum theory is *wrong*, and he *is* dead. Now if he *is* dead, he can't possibly *perceive* it ... right? I mean, to perceive *anything*, surely the perceiver must *not be dead*. Not being dead is a SINE QUA NON for perceiving – yes? And if he's *not* dead, it doesn't *matter* to him that he's not! He perceives *that*, and says, "Hurray, I'm not dead! ... *Yet!*"

SOCRATES: But that would be the case whether he's inside the box *or* outside it, right? I mean, it seems to me that we can think both *inside* the box *and* outside it! Can't we?

BERKELEY: (*Thinking about it for a while*) You're *right!* So even the *box* is irrelevant, as is the poison capsule and the geiger counter. We can just let the guy go about his business, and he will either be dead or alive, and it won't matter one little bit either way! If he *isn't* dead he'll be

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happy he isn't; while if he *is* dead he'll never *know* it – millions of years can go by, but he'd *never know* that he's dead. Truly Brown is right, and this *is* the way to defeat death! Three cheers for quantum mechanics ... whatever it might be!

- SOCRATES: Come to think, of what relevance to this argument is *quantum mechanics*, even? I mean, suppose we leave quantum mechanics out of the argument: what changes? It seems to me, *nothing!* We don't need the poison capsule or the geiger counter, we don't need the box, and now, it seems to me, we don't even need quantum mechanics, to defeat death! "Death, where is thy sting? Thy victory, O grave?" I vaguely remember thinking thoughts like this when I was about to drink the hemlock ... of course it was a long time ago ...
- DESCARTES: Upon thinking about it, something just occurred to me. Don't you think all this is *irrelevant*, at least here in Elysium? I mean, aren't *we ourselves* living proof that there's no death?
- BERKELEY: *Living proof?*
- DESCARTES: Let me rephrase. Doesn't our own existence here demonstrate that it's a *dead certainty* that there's no death? And indeed, since there are no taxes here in Elysium either ...
- SOCRATES: Well, perhaps what we need to do at this stage is to *define* "death". We all know that we *died*, but we didn't stop *existing* as a result. Right? But what if we *had* stopped existing?
- DESCARTES: Then clearly we wouldn't be *discussing* it here – or indeed *anywhere* – would we, now? (*Smiles.*)
- SOCRATES: My point exactly. The way "death" is talked about most of the time, it's considered to be equivalent to *popping out of existence*, innit. But any person who has *truly* popped out of existence would never *know* it! Suppose – just *suppose* – that one day *we* too will pop out of existence. (And who knows for *certain* that we won't?) So suppose we do: that would be "death" even for us "mere immortals". But what would it *matter* to us if we do? Even if we do pop out of existence, we'd never *know* it, so it *wouldn't* matter, would it. In fact, *nothing* can matter to someone who has popped out of existence – not until (or unless) they *pop back* into existence! If I remember aright, I made something like this argument during my own execution, more than two-thousand-four-hundred years ago. Of course, it was a *very* long time ago, and here in these Elysian Fields death was never much of a concern for me, so the argument had slipped my mind until now ...
- BERKELEY: Yes, I remember reading this argument of yours when I was alive. If I remember aright, you argued that after dying there are two possibilities: either one exists or one doesn't. "To be or not to be", as Hamlet said! And if one doesn't even *exist*, it would be a bit like a *very* deep sleep: a sleep undisturbed even by dreams – am I not right in so interpreting your argument? According to you, "in that sleep of death" no dreams *can possibly* come – right? ... because if any dreams *did* come, one couldn't actually *be* dead!
- SOCRATES: Yes, that's more or less what I argued at that time ... but then upon further reflection now, maybe I hadn't taken my argument as far as I might have. For it seems to me that one simply cannot *not be!* I mean, can anyone actually affirm truthfully, "I do not exist"? Surely even to *do* so they'd *have* to exist, wouldn't they? Is it possible for anyone to affirm *anything* while *not* existing? Surely not! So what *is* the question? I mean, *Is* the question "to be or not to be" at all? I mean, how can anyone *not be*? It appears to me that to say of anyone that they are *in a state of non-existence*, entails a contradiction in terms! Or what I mean to say is, doesn't the verb "to be" *imply* "to exist"? Actually, aren't they *definitions* of each other? What *else* can the verb "to be" *mean*, if not "to exist"? Can *anyone* actually *be* in a "state of non-existence" at all? Is that even *possible*? Surely *not!*

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DESCARTES: So are you arguing that “‘To be or not to be’ is *not* the question; it’s always going to have to be ‘to be’”? (*Smiles, and makes signs of single and double quote marks in the air.*)

BERKELEY: Come again?

DESCARTES: Oh, never mind: it’s too complicated to say clearly with single *and* double quote marks. Besides, our French quote marks are different from your English ones. What I meant to say is, Socrates seems to be arguing for the *impossibility* of anything *not* existing. Yes?

SOCRATES: No, not *anything*: just *anyone*. But yes, at least *provisionally* I am so arguing.

DESCARTES: Why just *anyone*, and not also *anything*?

SOCRATES: Well, we *were* discussing *death*, weren’t we? *Things* don’t die, *people* do!

DESCARTES: No: we were discussing *non-existence*, not just *death*. Things *also* pop out of existence, don’t they. Like the Roman Empire, for example. Well, “pop out of existence” is perhaps not *le terme juste* for the Roman Empire; “fizzle out of existence” might be a better term. But one day even the Sun is going to fizzle out, *n’est-ce pas* ...

BERKELEY: (*Interrupting*) I think I get what Socrates is trying to say. If ESSE is indeed PERCIPI, then nothing actually exists *except* as a *perception*; and surely any *perception* requires a *perceiver*. So *things* can certainly “pop out of existence” – or cease to be perceived – but no *perceiver* can! Or more accurately, *if* a perceiver pops out of existence, he or she can’t *perceive* any more, and thus won’t actually exist in *any* manner whatsoever: *even* as a perception. No *perceiver* can perceive *himself* – or *herself* – in “a state of non existence”!

DESCARTES: But what if ESSE *isn’t* PERCIPI? What *then*?

BERKELEY: The same argument would apply, at least for the perceiver. ESSE doesn’t *have* to be PERCIPI for a non-existent *perceiver* not to be able to perceive himself as non-existent!

DESCARTES: But *someone else* could perceive the erstwhile perceiver, who now *is* non-existent, as *being* non-existent ... right? I mean, if *you* were to pop out of existence *tout d’un coup*, Socrates and I – and others – *could* perceive you as not existing any more: right?

SOCRATES: That depends on what you mean by “exists”. As I argued earlier, to say “X exists” is an *ambiguous* statement; and so is the statement “X doesn’t exist” – whatever X may be. Such statements don’t become unambiguous until one specifies *as* what this thing we call X exists or doesn’t. As we agreed earlier, Hamlet exists *as a fictional character*, right? Likewise Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy both *do* exist as made-up – or fictional – personages: made up by adults for the purposes of beguiling children. Indeed, now that you bring it to my attention, *everything* that can be named *must* exist ... *at least as a name!* Why, everything that can even be *thought about* must exist, at least as a thought. For example, even a *square circle* exists ... at least as a topic for discussion. There is simply *nothing* that *doesn’t* exist! If it can be named, thought about, mentioned, imagined, dreamed, or even merely *suspected* to exist, it *must* exist ... at least as a *name*, a *thought*, a *mentioned thing*, an *imagined thing*, a *dreamed thing*, or a *suspected thing*.

DESCARTES: So then are you arguing that a thing can *never* “pop out of existence”?

SOCRATES: Yes; strictly speaking, it can’t. It can only change its *mode* of existence (if I may so put it). For instance, if a balloon pops, it still exists *as a memory*, doesn’t it? Even if it popped so long ago that no one remembers when it popped, it still exists as a topic for discussion, or

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as a question in the minds of those who might be wondering about it ever having popped. Why, even if *no* one is wondering about it, it still exists as a topic of discussion *here and now*, among *us*! And even if we *won't* be discussing it tomorrow – and I don't see why we would: do you? – it would still exist as a *potential* topic of discussion for us, if any of us were to bring up the subject at some future time. It seems to me that it would be quite *impossible* for anything *not* to exist in *some* manner, or in *some* mode of existence; for no matter how nebulous something may be in our minds, or even in any *one* person's mind, it would nevertheless – indeed, *IPSO FACTO* (*looks at Descartes sternly*) not *IPSO FATSO!!!* – exist as that nebulous whatever-it-was in at least that *one* person's mind.

- DESCARTES: (*Conciliatory now*) My dear friend, I do apologize. (*Raising his glass and pushing the charcuterie board towards Socrates*) Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we ... well, obviously we don't *die*, so let me say instead: for tomorrow is another day, and we can then do it all over again one more time! (*Digging in himself*) I have to say the charcuterie here is *delicious*. What *is* this smoked cheese? And this terrine with truffles is just ...
- BERKELEY: (*Turning to Socrates*) Are you then arguing, Socrates, that even *potential* things exist? I understand they'd exist only as *potentials*, but nevertheless I'm wondering ... *do* things exist as potentials – and *only* as potentials – at all?
- SOCRATES: Well, *don't* they? Did not aircraft exist as *potential* inventions even in my time on Earth? Did not the *iPhone* exist as a *potential* even *before* Steve Jobs returned to *Apple*? Do not *future* inventions exist as *potentials* today?
- BERKELEY: It seems to me that you're pushing the meaning of the word "exist" way beyond how it's commonly understood.
- SOCRATES: Surely *not*! Ask anyone the question, "Was there any potential in the twentieth century for the *iPhone* to be invented in the twenty-first?" and they'd surely reply "Of course" ... eh?
- BERKELEY: But where is the word "exist" in your question?
- SOCRATES: Let's rephrase the question, then: "Did there *exist* any potential in the twentieth century for the *iPhone* to be invented in the twenty-first?" What do you think people would say?
- BERKELEY: (*Pondering a bit about it*) Yes, I do think you're right: they'd say "Of course it did".
- SOCRATES: *Right!* Because if that potential *didn't* exist in the twentieth century, they'd have a hard time explaining just *how* there happen to be so many *iPhones* around *today!*
- BERKELEY: Yes, okay. I admit. But then *everything* must exist, by that argument! Or in other words, *nothing* can be non-existent.
- SOCRATES: Yes. Nothing *can* indeed be non-existent. That's the *only* thing that can be non-existent! Pythagoras told me that that's the way lots of people think in India; especially those of what he calls the Buddhist persuasion. Apparently they discovered nothing. *Nothing at all!* That, at least according to Pythagoras, was one the greatest achievements of all time.
- DESCARTES: *Huh?!?*
- BERKELEY: (*Interrupting*) But Socrates, you said that *nothing* can be non-existent, didn't you?
- SOCRATES: Indeed; that's exactly what I said. Nothing *can* be non-existent! It's the *only* thing that *can* be non-existent, in fact! I said that too, didn't I?

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- BERKELEY: You're infuriatingly confusing! If even *one* thing can be non-existent – even if it's the *only* thing that can be non-existent – then to say that *nothing* can be non-existent is clearly *false!*
- SOCRATES: No, of course not! Let me rephrase. *Not a single thing can be non-existent!* Does *that* satisfy you?
- BERKELEY: But that's not exactly what you said. *Can* nothing be non-existent, or *can't* it? You said it *can* be, but now you seem to be saying it *can't!*
- SOCRATES: Oh ... I see your point. If one says "Nothing can be non-existent" it can either mean that there isn't anything that can be non-existent, or it can mean that what we call Nothing – "Nothing" with a capital N – can be non-existent.
- DESCARTES: I agree with Berkeley, Socrates – you *are* infuriatingly confusing. Have you ever thought of acting as The Riddler in one of the TV shows DC is producing these days?
- SOCRATES: Okay. Let me try to explain. Is Nothing *itself* – let's call it "Nothing" with a capital N – is Nothing *something*, or is it not? If it *is*, then when we say "Nothing can be non-existent", we'd mean that this something which we call "Nothing" can be non-existent. On the other hand, if Nothing is actually *not* something but instead is nothing *at all* – that is, if it doesn't exist at all – then of *course* it's non-existent ... it being nothing at all in the first place! In either case, both nothing *and* Nothing *can* be non-existent! Indeed, if it's nothing *at all*, it *must* be non-existent. ... (*Shaking his head*) I'm doing a lousy job of explaining, aren't I?
- BOTH: (*Together, loudly*) Yes, you *are!*
- SOCRATES: It seems that nothing is harder to talk about than nothing. (*Seeing the others beginning to remonstrate*) Let me – once again! – rephrase: there *isn't anything* harder to talk about than a nothing that doesn't exist *at all*. If it doesn't exist *at all*, then *what* the [*bleep*] are we talking about in the first place? If *are* talking about it, it must exist at *least* as a subject of discussion among us, right? But if we *don't* talk about it, we can't discuss it, and we'd be getting nowhere! Actually, a *genuine* nothing – a nothing that *totally* doesn't exist, in *any* manner whatsoever – can't even be *think* about, even by a *single* person, because if it were, it would at the very *least* be the subject of that person's *thoughts*. So if there's even a *thought* about something ... why, even a *suspicion*, even the *whiff* of a suspicion – heck, even a *potential* whiff of a suspicion! – then it can't be a *genuine* nothing! In fact even *we* aren't talking about a *genuine* nothing-at-all, *at all!* We *couldn't* be talking about nothing-at-all, because if we *were* talking about nothing-at-all, it would *exist* as a subject of our discussion, and thus would *not be* a totally non-existent *nothing-at-all*. So nothing-at-all is *impossible* to talk about ... in fact, even to *say* that it's impossible to talk about is false, because if it were true, we'd be talking about it, and so it would be false anyway!
- DESCARTES: That boggles the mind. So what you're saying is, not only is nothing-at-all impossible to talk about, but that it's false even to *say* that it's impossible to talk about it ... but that, IPSO FACTO (*FACTO!* Not *FATSO!*), doesn't imply that it *is* possible to talk about it either. It's neither *possible* to talk about it nor *impossible* to talk about it; to say that it *is* possible to talk about it is just as false as to say that it's *not* possible to talk about it. It would appear that even the law of non-contradiction doesn't apply to the *absolute* nothing, then ... ?
- SOCRATES: Well, of *course* it doesn't, because if it can't be *talked* about, it also can't be *contradicted* ... right? Besides, how can *anything* apply to something that doesn't exist at all? Actually I misspoke: I said it was something, but of course it isn't, it's nothing, so I should have

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said, how can *anything* apply to *nothing* that doesn't exist ... *Jeez!* Does that sentence even make any *sense*? It is impossible to talk about nothing – and even *that* is false!

BERKELEY: In that case, going back to our discussion about death, if we equate death with “popping out of existence”, as you put it, Socrates, then it should be impossible to talk about death also ... right? And even what I just said must be false! ... It's truly mind-boggling.

SOCRATES: Well, perhaps not. It may be possible to talk about someone *else* being dead, because those doing the talking aren't dead themselves. But it would be impossible for someone who *is* dead to talk about their *own* death ... well of *course* it would be so, since it would be impossible for someone who is dead to talk about *anything!*

BERKELEY: So essentially you are saying that death has no existence *for the dead* ... yes? If you're dead – by which I mean, *genuinely* dead, *definitely* dead, dead as a doornail, dead to rights (well, maybe not dead to rights, but you know what I mean) – you'd never know it ... right? And so it couldn't *matter* to you. Well, not to *you* you, since you'd not exist any more, but you know what I mean ... come to think of it, actually, what *do* I mean?

SOCRATES: Like I said: non-existence is really, *really* hard to talk about. Indeed, *impossible!* So impossible, in fact, that even *what I just said is false.*

DESCARTES: When I said “It boggles the mind”, I was actually putting it mildly. Normally what boggles the mind is the immensity of the Universe, or Batman taking on Darkseid all by himself. This is *waaaaaaay* beyond merely boggling the mind! I need some more wine – a *lot* more wine – to clear my mind ... (*pours himself what remains in the bottle and calls out to the waitress*) *Ma chérie, une autre bouteille, s'il vous plait!*

BERKELEY: But then the ability to raise the dead seems to lose much of its appeal, doesn't it? I mean, if the dead are quite okay being dead – indeed if they don't even *know* that they're dead – why raise them at all? Why not just leave them be? It's not like their being dead is doing anything *to* them, is it. Come to think of it, I'd much rather *not* be raised from the dead: I wouldn't have the benefit of your company then! Nor would I be able to enjoy ...

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) But you're not *really* dead, Berkeley. You're *fake* dead, *ersatz* dead! You're alive, just not on Earth, that's all; you're alive *here* instead, in Elysium. Yes, you *think* of yourself as being dead, but you're not *dead* dead, if you get my drift. Come to think of it, even Christian “death” isn't *real* death, for you expect to go to heaven, right? Which is probably not too different from these Elysian Fields: unless you're obliged to put on white robes and sing the LORD's praises continually, which would make heaven not altogether heavenly, at least in *my* estimation; I myself, at any rate, prefer these *Champs Élysées* to *that* sort of heaven. Actually, a *proper* heaven should be like the *tantric* heaven described to me by Pythagoras, where one has orgasms non-stop. At least that's what Pythagoras said Indians of the tantric persuasion believe. Your Christian heaven is wishy-washy by comparison. Or else you Christians go to hell, which admittedly is a fate worse than death – by which I mean, worse even than *real* death – but still, being in hell is not *real* death, it's *fake* death. You're alive, just in hell: a *living* hell! Though I can't imagine just *why* the Good LORD would send *anyone* there: it seems *most* uncalled-for. Unless of course they *wanted* to be in hell. I was talking to your fellow-Irishman Bernard Shaw the other day, and he thinks the Devil actually *prefers* hell to heaven, and *that's* why hell got created: to give the Devil his due. I think that Shaw was just playing the Devil's advocate, but it's all there, he said, in his play *Man and Superman* ... and by the way, he was not talking about Siegel's and Shuster's Superman *or* Nietzsche's Superman, but his own home-grown Superman. But as I was saying, Greek death is *fake* death, for we end up here, in Elysium; and Christian death is *also* fake death, for you guys end up in heaven – or hell.

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If you want *real* death you've got to have *Jewish* death, à la Solomon, a.k.a. Ecclesiastes!  
"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device,  
nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest."

- DESCARTES: So I guess what you're arguing is that only Jews can be killed. I mean *properly* killed; killed *dead*. Christians and Greeks can't *really* be killed, because they don't *really* die; they just *transition!* They're more like werewolves ... well, not really, werewolves don't *transition*, they just don't *die* ... unless shot with silver bullets, of course ... (*trails off*)
- BERKELEY: But what about atheistic Jews who don't believe in the Hebrew Bible or what it says?
- DESCARTES: Yes, Socrates: what about *them*? Can *they* be killed, or not? I'm asking from a completely theoretical point of view, you understand; I mean, it's not my intention to kill anybody, or even to have them killed. (*Muttering under his breath*) Though now that you bring it up, I can think of a few people ... oh, never mind, never mind; not very Christian of me to think this way ...
- SOCRATES: Well, if someone *really* didn't believe in the Hebrew Bible, how could they call themselves Jewish at all? I mean, to be Jewish, don't you at least have to accept the notion that there wouldn't *be* any Jews were it not for the Hebrew Bible?
- BERKELEY: Well, they may accept the fact that their parents and fore-parents were Jews, but they don't accept the notion that *they* are Jews. Oh, I see what you mean: if they don't accept the notion that *they* are Jews, they can't be calling themselves Jewish at all, can they. While if they call themselves Jews at all, they must be accepting at least *some* part of what the Hebrew Bible says. Those who, like my friend Karl Marx, were born of Jewish parents but don't accept the Hebrew Bible *at all*, simply *don't* call themselves Jewish.
- DESCARTES: You're friends with *Marx*? And you call yourself a Bishop?
- BERKELEY: Yes, I am: and no, I don't. Call myself a Bishop, I mean. I am no more a Bishop here than you are. (I said that earlier too, didn't I?) As for Marx, his ideas on communism are *very* similar to Christ's. In fact, I would argue that the early Christians were *very* communistic! Not that Marx and I agree on *everything*, of course, but we are in general agreement about communism. Sadly, communism has almost never *actually* been put into practice. Except, as I said, by the early Christians, and by other small communities here and there – including some Jewish communities. Anyway, Socrates, as I was asking, can *atheists* be killed, or can't they? We agree that *Christians* and *Greeks* can't be. But can *atheists*?
- SOCRATES: Of course they can be *killed*. Anyone can be *killed*. But they can't *die*. Let me rephrase: they can't *be dead*. No one can *be dead*! To "be dead" implies that they *are* and *aren't* simultaneously, doesn't it? That's just not possible, is it? Whether they come alive after being killed – as we Christians and Greeks do – or they don't, is irrelevant. Even atheists can't *be dead*. Except, of course, as far as everyone *else* is concerned. But as far as the killed atheists *themselves* are concerned, of *course* they can't be dead: in fact they can't be *anything!* If you're *anything* after being killed, you can't be *dead*; and if you're *nothing* after being killed, you can't be dead either, because if you're a *genuine* nothing, you simply can *be* ... in other words, you can't be *anything!* Essentially, *being dead* is quite impossible, whether one comes "alive" again after being killed, or not.
- DESCARTES: Are you *seriously* arguing that there is in reality no such thing as death, *for anyone* ... whether, as you say, they come "alive" again after being killed, or they don't?
- SOCRATES: Well, can you come up with a decent, *rational* counter-argument to show I am wrong?

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DESCARTES: But – but – but it's totally contrary to common sense!

BERKELEY: Er ... Descartes, may I point out that doubting the testimony of your own senses – as you do in your *Meditations* – is *also* contrary to common sense ... ? And so is my “idealist” viewpoint about ESSE being PERCIPI. At least as far as the two of *us* are concerned, *we ourselves* are contrary to common sense! As for Socrates ...

DESCARTES: Socrates doesn't give a *rip* about common sense. As long as he can come up with a counter-argument to *any* proposition, he will ... and *revel* in doing so! Yes, you're right: there's no point in arguing in favour of common sense: as a matter of fact, had I done so myself when I began my career as a philosopher, I'd never have come up with either my *Meditations* or my *Method*. But I keep wondering, why is it that we are still attached to common sense, even when our own philosophy goes so much against it? For instance, why do people – even philosophers – fear death? *You* didn't, Socrates, when push came to shove; but you're a rare exception. Why do the rest of us? And how did *you* manage it?

SOCRATES: My guess is that it's something akin to a biological imperative. We don't *think* about it; we just *do* it. It's a knee-jerk reaction; similar to not wanting to have a root canal done, even when we *know* it will make us feel better later. I say this because of my observations of animals: they too seem to fear death: even the stupidest of them. So it doesn't seem to be a matter of *intelligence* at all, does it? It seems to be a matter of something we're all *hard-wired* to do. We don't *think* about it; we just *do* it. It's got nothing to do with the *mind*, but the *body*. To be quite frank – something I can afford to be now that I'm dead – I didn't actually *want* to drink the hemlock. Despite all my arguments, my body was screaming at me “No!!! No!!!! Don't drink it!!!” It was all I could do to quell this urge within me. Luckily for me – or maybe *unluckily* for me! – those around me were more interested in my arguments than in my inner discomfort, which in any case I tried to hide as best I could. Besides, I was convinced in those days that rationality could overcome bodily urges. Or maybe my body wasn't screaming at me *as loudly* as most people's might have done, and maybe *that's* why I was able to go through with it. Mind you, I was almost seventy years old at the time; a young person's body might have screamed much louder. Perhaps when a person gets old the body itself isn't as gung-ho about living on as it used to be. Some people say that when it's a body's time to die, it doesn't *strongly* object to dying. Whatever. It all turned out fine for me in the end, and that's what matters, I suppose. But as I was saying, fear of death is much like needing to pee after having drunk too much wine, as I have to do right now: we simply can't help ourselves! (*Rises to go to the toilet.*)

BERKELEY: (*To Descartes*) I think Socrates is right. Common sense also calls for a belief – at least an *unconscious* belief – in material things like earth, water, air and fire (*especially* fire!) because such a belief, whether it be conscious or unconscious, aids in our very *survival*. Likewise, I suppose belief in death also aids in survival. It doesn't have to be a *conscious* belief, however: it can be *unconscious* ... as I suppose it is in animals. What Socrates said explains why even we philosophers have a tendency to revert to belief in ideas we actually *know* to be false. Our minds are not *always* working at their best, and when they're not, we revert to our lower levels of thought: habits of thought we got into from our upbringing in childhood. We were brought up to believe that material things exist by our parents, who knew no better. And when almost *everybody* around us thinks in one way, we tend to *follow* their way of thinking: a practice which, I suppose, *also* aids in survival. That explains, I think, why I myself lived all my life as if it didn't matter whether my “idealist” philosophy was correct or not. (I am beginning to see that the word “idealist” is ill-chosen: as Socrates said, I am not an idealist, I am as much a realist as anyone else.) Actually, come to think of it, it's my friend Karl Marx, the avowed “dialectical materialist”, who is much more of an idealist than I am: talking about a utopian communist world in which “the state shall wither away”! Of course I agree with Marx that that would be a *good* thing;

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but I don't think it's going to come about any time soon. On Earth I mean. Here in Elysium it's already come to pass, of course. But that's because we're *all* good guys here, since the very *definition* of Elysium is "where the good receive a life free from toil". Even bad guys eventually become good here, at least after a bit of *time* spent here: what's the point of stealing anything from others, when one already *has* everything one wants? And as for killing someone, that's actually *impossible* here. When killing and stealing – two principal kinds of crime – are gone, what sort of crime is left? Maybe crimes of passion: but what's the point in having an *exclusive* wife or husband or sweetheart for a lifetime, when one's lifetime lasts an entire *eternity*? What's the point of jealousy, then? What's the point of *committing* a crime of passion? (*Socrates returns from the toilet at this juncture.*) Ah, Socrates. We were just talking about good and evil. I was arguing that there's no point in anyone being bad here in Elysium, because there's no *payoff* from being bad!

SOCRATES: (*Sitting down*) Well, Flatface and his followers argue that there's *never* a payoff from being bad. Being bad is just ... *bad!* I mean it's bad *for the person being bad*. Of course it's bad for others too, but Flatface and his followers argue that it's *also* bad for the person being bad. The argument is, in essence, that one is successful in life only to the extent that one co-operates with others. And co-operation with others is impossible when one is nasty to them! I mean, who wants to co-operate with someone who's being *bad* to them? Of course it's true that to be successful in *some* activities, co-operation isn't necessary. Like for instance in literature, art or sculpture. One can write something, or sculpt a statue, or paint a picture, all on one's own. But what *then*? If you're nasty to people, they're not likely to *want* what you create, are they?

DESCARTES: Yes, but a nasty person can be nasty to *some* people while being nice to *others*. Like Steve Jobs, for instance: he could be extremely nasty to his *employees* while being very nice to his *customers!*

SOCRATES: Yes, indeed; but Flatface and his followers – especially his follower Boethius – argue that an employer like that is likely to eventually fail in competition against *another* employer who is nice to *both* his employees *and* to his customers. If people *like* working for you, they are likely to give of their best, as opposed to people who *hate* working for you! So you'll end up *more* successful. *Other things being equal*, of course; that wasn't the case, however, with *Apple*. Besides, I forgot another part of their argument: a nasty person is not in harmony *with themselves*. I mean, they have a kind of war going on *within* them, between parts of their *own* personalities. Some parts of them want to be nice and others want to be nasty, so they are not as *effective* as a person who's *altogether* nice would be. They aren't co-operating *internally*. And as a result, they certainly can't be very *happy*; or at least that's what *I* think. Parts of themselves are probably not being nice to *other* parts. Maybe *that's* why Jobs got cancer: his body fought *itself*. Who knows? And who knows, also, what's in another person's mind? *I* certainly don't. Heck, sometimes I wonder if some people even *have* minds. Lots of people seem to be going about their business quite mindlessly! "The unexamined life is not worth living", I always say. But to look at most people, that seems to be exactly how they are living their lives: unexaminedly! *Is* their life worth living, then? Maybe *that's* what made Jobs so mad about his employees.

DESCARTES: Yes, but not *all* people do that, surely. Look at us! Are *we* living our lives unexaminedly? (Actually, is "unexaminedly" even a proper word? Shouldn't we examine the very word "unexaminedly"?) ... Well, admittedly *sometimes* we are. Living unexaminedly, I mean (and that too, only *if* "unexaminedly" is a proper word that means what it seems to mean; otherwise, no.) But we aren't doing so *all* the time, surely.

BERKELEY: (*Thinking deeply.*) You know, Socrates, what you said about wondering whether some people have minds at all made me think: how do we *know* that other people *do* have any

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minds? I mean, it's much like my argument against the existence of matter, isn't it: we have no way to *know* that there's anything material "behind" our perceptions – all of which are clearly *mental*. In fact, we don't even have any *evidence* that there's anything material "out there" so to speak: there's nothing to make us even *suspect* that there's any "thing-as-such" behind any of our perceptions. I mean, what evidence is there that there's a *material* glass of wine in my hands, and that I'm drinking it? There is *none at all*; all the evidence that exists, only points to the notion that I have a great many *perceptions*. I may *conclude* from those perceptions that there's a *material* glass of wine here, but when asked to *justify* this conclusion logically, I *can't*. All I can say is, "Well, it's common sense!" ... but as we saw earlier, that's not a *reliable* conclusion, for many things we believe as a result of common sense are clearly *mistaken*. As Kant pointed out – and I think very correctly – a noumenon can't be known at all; only a phenomenon can be known. But then, what about other *minds*? I mean, minds other than our own. How do we know *they* exist? The point is, we *don't!* What guarantee do *I* have that *you* have a mind? Or that gentleman there walking down the sidewalk has a mind? Or even our delightful and gracious waitress? *Each person* may have a guarantee that *they* exist, but no one *else* can have such a guarantee! Even your COGITO only proves to *you* indubitably that *you* exist, but not that *I* exist, or that Socrates exists. Other than as perceptions in *your* mind, that is to say. Right? I mean *you* can't be sure that Socrates or I have *minds of our own*, can you. So apply your doubting skills, which are – ah, *undoubtedly* – great, to the notion that *other* minds exist; and where do they leave you ... I mean, where do your *doubting skills* leave you? Undoubtedly in a state of doubt that there *are any other minds at all!* Am I not right?

DESCARTES: Are you now telling me that you *don't* have a mind of your own! *Seriously???*

BERKELEY: No, that's not what I am telling you; I'm simply saying that *you* don't know for *certain* that I *do* have a mind of my own. *I* am certain of it, but *you* can't be. But then again, *I'm* not certain that *you* have a mind of *your* own. I mean, just *how* can I be certain? I don't have access to *your* mind, do I. I only have access to mine. I'm not saying you're lying, mind you, when you say you think, and therefore you are, but ... well, yes, maybe you *are* lying – or more accurately, what I'm saying is that you *could* be lying. Or better said, not *even* lying, because if you're *totally* mindless you could hardly be *lying*, as such, could you. In fact you might even have validly argued, instead of your COGITO: "I lie, therefore I am"! Because if you *know* you're lying, you *must* exist. Just as when you *know* you're thinking, you *know* you exist. But if *you* didn't know you were lying, even if what you said were in fact quite false, you could hardly conclude from that alone that you actually *exist*, could you? Am I making any sense? Maybe not. But I think I am on to something. I *assume* you have a mind, because I am conversing with you, and what you say makes sense to me. But that's hardly any *guarantee*, is it, that what you are saying is generated by a *conscious* mind? I guess the key term here is "conscious". What I mean is, how can I know that you are *conscious*? You may *say* you are, but I wouldn't be able to *know* that. Again, maybe I'm not being sufficiently clear; but as I also said, I think I'm on to something.

SOCRATES: Yes, Berkeley, I think you are. We know, by *direct* perception, our *own* mental state: as when *we're* in pain, for example, or in love; but we often can't tell when someone *else* is. If they tell us, then we are faced with the sometimes difficult choice of whether to believe them or not. As I said a while ago, only *I* can know where my shoe pinches, or even *if* it pinches at all. Of course we all know that *I* don't wear shoes, I go barefoot everywhere ... but we agreed, didn't we, that truth that is *undoubtable* is *entirely subjective*? And why? Because *objective* truth is *doubtable*: objective truth requires *agreement* with other minds, and such agreement is *always* open to doubt. There can be, quite simply, *no* truth that's both indubitable *and* objective! There is, in other words, *absolutely nothing* upon which *everybody* can agree *totally*. Not *even*, as we saw, upon *absolutely nothing!* I mean, people can't even agree upon *nothing at all*.

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- DESCARTES: How *could* they, if even *talking* about absolutely nothing is quite impossible? Any such agreement would be quite out of the question, right? – because none of them could be *saying* anything *upon* which to agree! Indeed, none of them could be saying anything that's true even *to the speaker*; so even the speaker couldn't agree with *himself*! As I said, absolutely *nothing* is absolutely *mind-boggling* ... and that's putting it *mildly*.
- SOCRATES: Quite so. In fact, come to think of it, even if one were to have the power of telepathy – and thus be able to directly perceive another mind – even *that* would not establish the existence of that other mind beyond *all* doubt; for all those perceptions of “the other's mind” would then be inside one's *own* mind! Or in other words, one could never know whether our power of telepathy was *infallibly* transmitting to us the *exact* contents of the *other* mind. Or indeed whether there *is* any transmission happening at all! Therefore it doesn't seem to be possible to *directly* perceive another mind, any more than it seems possible to *directly* perceive an object in the “material” world. As you said, yourself, Berkeley, there is simply no *warrant* for believing in a material world, and therefore you posit that everything must be a perception – for which there *is* a warrant, namely *direct experience*; or in other words, everything must be in the *mind*. But now we also come to the realization that not only is everything *material* in the mind, but also every other *mind* is also in the – ah – *mind*! I mean, it would appear that there is no warrant for assuming that there is a *multiplicity* of minds, any more than there is for believing that there is any material substance, or matter. Of course as you also pointed out, there *may* be matter, but we'd never *know* it, and so it wouldn't – ah – *matter* to us if there were. Unless of course there were some way to perceive it *directly*, the way we perceive our *experiences*. But we can't seem to figure out what *that* way might be. Well, much the same sort of argument seems to apply to other minds. How can I know that *you* have a mind? Or Descartes has one? Even he admits that that's so, at least implicitly, when he says “*I* think, therefore *I* am”; he is *very* careful not to say “*You* think, therefore *you* are”, or even “*He* thinks, therefore *he* is”! (We talked about this earlier also, didn't we.) He has no way of knowing beyond *all* doubt that *you* think, or anyone *else* thinks. He can only know it from a *first*-person point of view, never from a *second*- or *third*-person point of view.
- BERKELEY: So are you arguing for the notion there's only *one* mind – namely, *one's own*?
- SOCRATES: Well, I'm not actually arguing *for* anything; I'm just trying to examine some ideas that are arising in my mind as we speak. Though come to think of it, I now remember Pythagoras telling me that Indians of the Buddhist persuasion do believe that there's only one mind. He called it their “One Mind” theory, and said he had half a mind to actually believe in it. Well, I myself might be willing provide the other half; it does seem rather compelling the way I laid it out earlier ... though I say so myself.
- BERKELEY: But does this “One Mind” theory not *only* take it as a given that there is only one mind, but *also* that this one mind is *one's own*? If so, how is it any different from solipsism? And isn't solipsism untenable? I mean, why would you even be bothering to talk to *us* if you *truly* believed that you're the only mind in the universe, and our minds don't exist at all? Wouldn't that be a “performance contradiction” – that is, *acting* as if one doesn't *really* believe in what one *claims* to believe? So how is the “One Mind” theory *not* solipsism?
- SOCRATES: Well, as Pythagoras put it, it's “*Buddhist* solipsism”. By which he meant, he added, that it doesn't imply – for instance – that no one else feels any pain, and only I do, but just that no one else *indubitably* feels any pain. Indubitably, that is, as far as *I* am concerned, or anyone *else* is concerned. One can feel compassion, therefore, for others, and attempt to relieve them of their pain and suffering, while at the same time acknowledging that there is absolutely *no certainty* that they *are* in an pain, or *are* suffering: or even if they have *any* inner experiences at all. On the off chance that they *could be* in pain or suffering, one

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should at least *try* to help them. Pythagoras said that that's the essence of what these Buddhists call the "Bodhisattva's vow", which goes something like this: "I vow to relieve the suffering of all sentient beings, however many of them there are, and however much time it takes me". That being said, though, they also acknowledge that there may not *be* any other sentient beings that are suffering! Yet, such a combination of beliefs doesn't make their approach a "performance contradiction" – that is, it does make *rational* sense for them to hold both these beliefs – because they don't *know with certainty* that there aren't any other sentient beings at all, but they *do* know with certainty that *they* exist. So "Buddhist solipsism" isn't an *ego-centric* solipsism, but rather a *compassionate* solipsism. As I understand it, Buddhists acknowledge that other minds *may* exist, but they also acknowledge that the existence of other minds – their existence, that is, *independently* of one's own – is not *certain*. Maybe I'm wrong about what *Buddhists* believe – after all, I got all this information second-hand, from Pythagoras, and not from Buddhists – but the as *I've* explained it, it does make sense to *me*. Does it not to both of *you*?

DESCARTES: Well, I do have to admit that the *logical* implications of my own COGITO lead to the same conclusion. And you, Socrates, seem to be supporting it, by saying that no one knows where *your* shoe pinches, or even *whether* it pinches at all. Of course we also know you go barefoot and don't wear any shoes ... by the way, I never asked you *why* you do so?

SOCRATES: Oh, that was something I did in imitation of Pythagoras. Did you know he coined the very term "philosophy"? He also used to go about barefoot. In time I grew accustomed to it, and the soles of my feet grew calloused, and I didn't feel any pain going around barefoot. I just keep it up here in Elysium out of habit, and because it's my "signature" thing to do. But I don't go unwashed any more, because there's no need to do so: one can get one's cloak dry-cleaned very easily here, and there's plenty of hot water for my daily shower. And going unwashed and in dirty clothes is offensive to *others*, and I don't wish to offend. Actually there's no need for me to go about barefoot either, but then again, what need is there for *shoes* in Elysium? It's *you* guys who are demonstrating a kind of "performance contradiction" here in Elysium, by *wearing* shoes! Besides, as I said, shoes sometimes *pinch*, and by going barefoot I avoid *that* discomfort. In fact, after coming here to Elysium I came to realize that deliberately being uncomfortable, the way I used to be while on Earth, has no more of a payoff here than does bad behaviour, so I dropped most of my erstwhile austerity. Pointless! As a matter of fact, that's why I've put on so much weight. Rationality and truth trump *everything*. Except maybe happiness, as Aristotle argues. What I mean is, I dropped all those habits *except* going around barefoot, which, as I said, doesn't bother me, and in fact makes me stand out. Which I kind of like, I admit. In other words, it makes me *happy*. As does eating well. And sex. (So *there*, Aristotle!)

BERKELEY: (*Deep in thought, not having paid any attention to the preceding*) So what you're saying is, that there's a difference between knowing that one's mind *does* exist and other minds *don't*, and knowing that one's mind *does* exist and other minds *may or may not* exist ... ? I mean, the very definition of "solipsism" is the doctrine that, in principle, *only* I exist and *no one else* does; *and*, moreover, that that's a *sure* thing. Your COGITO, Descartes, can't prove *that*; it can only prove that you know yourself as existing *for sure*, but not that you are *also* sure that others *don't* exist. So you aren't a *genuine* solipsist, because a *genuine* solipsist would have to prove *beyond all doubt*, not only his or her *own* existence, but also the *non-existence* of other minds. Right? So just as I can't prove that matter *doesn't* exist, I can only prove that perceptions *do* exist and so there's no *need* to invoke the existence of matter to explain the world – and I even wrote so in one of my books: I said, more or less, that if there actually *is* any such thing as matter, neither the nature nor the existence of it is known for certain. So the existence of matter, as a matter of fact, doesn't *matter*! And I should have added, that it's not even known for certain that it will *never* be known for certain that matter exists. How can *I* know what will or will not be known in the *future*?

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I mean, no *contradiction* arises from positing the existence of matter, does it now. Likewise, no contradiction arises from positing the existence of other minds. It's just that we don't know *for certain* – and *as of date* – that other minds exist!

SOCRATES: I think we're forgetting one important fact, although we *have* discussed it before – more than once – namely, that statements like “X exists” or “Y doesn't exist” are *ambiguous*. Eh? Until we ask “As what does X exist?” or “As what does Y not exist?” we cannot answer such questions *definitively*. Clearly, matter exists *at least* as a subject of our discussion. So do other minds. But *as what else* can matter and other minds exist? Clearly they can *also* both exist as *thoughts* inside *my* mind. Or at least as *potential* thoughts inside my mind. Remember your COGITO, Descartes! “I think, therefore I am” implies that you think *of* something, doesn't it? You can't be thinking if you're not thinking *of* anything, can you now. At least it makes no sense to *me* to say “I'm thinking, but I'm not thinking *of* anything.” If it makes any sense to either of *you*, I'm open to arguments! (*Both the others indicate negation by shaking their heads.*) Right. So then: is there *anything* that I *can't* think of – or at least *potentially* think of? Yes, okay, there *is* one thing: the absolute nothing. But no; on second thoughts, that's *not* true, because it's not “one thing” at all, it's *nothing* at all, so even *that's* a false statement. So *as a thought in my mind*, whether potential or actual, *everything* must exist. Or in other words, there isn't *anything* that can be *totally* independent of my mind! Not even other minds. Mind you, this idea has only just *now* occurred to me; I shall have to think about it a bit more to be sure ... but it seems to me, at least as things stand, that other minds independent of *my* mind don't exist *for certain*; *my* mind is the *only* mind that I can be *sure* exists independently. And matter doesn't exist *independently* of my mind either. But both minds and matter *do* exist *within* my own mind. They are *dependent* on my mind. At least as things stand right now, that's my thinking.

DESCARTES: Interesting. My COGITO does seem to have quite fascinating ramifications!

SOCRATES: It sure does! But on second – actually, now third – thoughts, perhaps not even my *own* mind can exist *altogether* independently; for instance, can it exist independently of all *thought*? Or independently of *consciousness*? I mean, can a mind exist with no *content*? Does it even make *sense* to say that I have a mind, but it is totally unconscious, totally without thought or emotion or ideas or notions or beliefs or theories or *any* other kind of mental state or content? Can such an “empty” mind even be *imagined*? A mind empty of *all* mental content? I'm having a hard time imagining any such thing, to be quite honest. How can one say that a mind without any content exists at all? Except, of course, as a subject for discussion: admittedly a most *interesting* discussion. But can it exist as an actual *thing*, something *independently* existing, rather than as a subject for discussion? It seems that even my *own* mind can't exist *altogether* independently!

BERKELEY: But one can say that about *anything*, can't we. *Everything* is in some sense dependent on other things: at least upon abstract things. Even if – hypothetically – only *one* thing were to exist, it would nevertheless be dependent upon *existence*, wouldn't it? I'm just throwing this idea out for consideration: not trying to claim that I *know* it to be true.

SOCRATES: I think you're right. So *nothing* can exist altogether independently. *Oh no!* I again fell into the trap of discussing *nothing*, which as we saw earlier is impossible. Let me rephrase, then: there isn't *anything* that can exist independently. So although it's true to say that there isn't anything that can exist altogether independently of the *mind*, it's *also* true to say that there isn't anything that can exist altogether independently of anything *else*.

DESCARTES: (*Deep in thought*) But then – going back to the idea that there isn't anything that can be altogether independent of the mind – then there *can* be only *one* mind, right? I mean, it implies, does it not, that even other *minds* can't be independent of *the* mind. Or in other

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words, *minds*, plural, are also dependent upon *mind*, singular. So in *that* sense at least, doesn't it make sense to say that all minds are in actual fact just One Mind? Maybe *that's* a proof for God: this One Mind is what we call "God". It's not *solipsism*, but rather an understanding that although there *are* multiple minds, they are all *part* of One Mind. That seems to be a logically valid "One Mind" theory, doesn't it? Come to think of it, I have half a mind to believe in it *myself*, now! Of course in that case, adding my half to Pythagoras's half and your half, Socrates, that makes it a "One-and-a-half Mind" theory, but ...

SOCRATES: But if so, then "God" must be a sort of "hive mind", mustn't it? I mean, it's *One* Mind that consists of *all* minds. Isn't that so?

BERKELEY: You know, I do think you're on to something. It accounts for the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*. This happens to be a *plural* word, even when used as denoting the *One* God. It's the *only* word in the Hebrew Bible that is *often* – though not *always*, as I said – used to denote a *singular* entity, though grammatically *plural* in construction. And it isn't *always* used to denote a singular entity: it's *ambiguous*. As we saw, it is sometimes used in the Hebrew Bible to mean *either* "God" or "gods" – as in Psalm 82. This too is an exceptional instance of such use. And in the Book of Genesis, God also refers to *Himself* as "we": (*pulls out his pocket Bible and rummages through it to find the appropriate passages*) "Then God said, Let *us* make man in *our* image, in *our* likeness", Genesis 1:26; (*again rummages through the Bible*) "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of *us*, to know good and evil", Genesis 3:22. There are other passages in the Bible where God refers to Himself using plural constructions; I can't remember where they are right at this moment, but I am sure I can find them given enough time. They're normally interpreted as God using the "Royal 'we'" – as it were – when referring to Himself, but your argument puts an entirely *different* spin on it. Maybe it was *always* intended to hint at the "hive-mind-like" character of God's Mind. It makes sense too; after all, if God had a mind like ours, even with omniscience He couldn't rule over the whole *Universe*, could He? He could only pay attention to a *few* things at a time, like we do. He couldn't know what was happening *everywhere*, and thus be able to deal with a humongous number of problems *simultaneously*, as He'd have to do, to be the King of kings ... of kings!

SOCRATES: This brings to my mind a conversation I was having with Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, also known as Maimonides: personal physician to Saladin, the Sultan of Egypt. He explained to me that, in his estimation, in the Jewish daily prayer, "Hear O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one", the word "one" is not to be interpreted as a numeral – that is, as being the *number* one which is contrasted with the numbers two, three, four and so on – but rather as a *non-numerical* "one", a *non-mathematical* "one"; or, as one might put it, a "one *without* a second". He tried to explain it to me this way: let's consider the entire Universe. If we define "Universe" as "The sum total of everything that exists, has existed and will exist in any manner whatsoever", then there can be only *one* Universe, right? After all, if two or more Universes existed, a contradiction would arise, because according to our definition of the word "Universe", there couldn't be *anything* outside it. This is a clear REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM, demonstrating beyond *any* possibility of doubt that only *one* Universe can exist: at least under *such* a definition of the word "Universe". According to Maimonides, the same sort of argument should be applied to God. God is "one" in the same sense that the Universe is one: there cannot *be* another. To bolster his argument he quoted Isaiah, Chapter 45, where the LORD says, addressing Cyrus, King of kings of Persia and founder of the first Persian Empire: "I *am* the LORD, and *there is* none else." God is One *without* a second. It's not *false* to say that God is one, but the *meaning* of "one" in such a proposition isn't the same as its meaning when *counting* things. Or in other words, God's "One Mind" *includes* all other minds. As you therefore point out, the distinction between "I" – singular – and "we" – plural – disappears, or is at the very least blurred, when one considers that the word "one" is not being used in a mathematical

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sense but in a non-mathematical sense. Maimonides told me that when he broached the subject with his patron, the Sultan Saladin, the Sultan agreed, saying that in the Koran, the holy scripture to which he, the Sultan, subscribes, God *often* refers to Himself as “we” – in the plural, as it were. And yet the Koran also states very clearly that God is One. “We are One”, his God might say! But the Sultan also advised Maimonides to keep the notion to himself, because he feared what some less sophisticated or less philosophical people in his realm might think about such an interpretation: they might consider it blasphemy. Indeed, as Maimonides told me, he later got into quite a bit of trouble with some Jews about interpreting the Jewish scriptures thus. But that trouble blew over in time.

DESCARTES: Yes, I should think so. Come to think of it, that would apply to the Universe also, *n'est-ce pas?* I mean, there can be only *one* Universe, as you cleverly demonstrated, Socrates; but *within* this Universe *all* other things exist. Just as within the “One Mind” of God all other minds must exist. *If* this “One Mind” theory is correct, of course. But, as I said, I myself, like you, Socrates, have at least half a mind to think it is. But if so, what separates one mind from another? The fact that we can have *some* exchange of ideas, the way we’re doing now, seems to indicate that no mind can be *totally* separate from another. There *does* seem to be a separation, true enough – I can’t know where your shoe pinches, for instance – but I *can* know *some* of the ideas that are in your mind: the ones you *tell* me honestly. And I can *check* if you’ve been honest – to see if I have *correctly* received at least *some* of the ideas; for instance, if you tell me your *Netflix* password, I can *check* whether you have told me the correct password or not, by simply trying it out. (Yes, Berkeley, I know you’ve never heard of *Netflix*; but don’t worry, we’ll explain later.) So, separation between different minds is *blurred* to a significant degree. Truly, no man is an island! But that made me think: is even an *island* an island, “entire of itself”? I mean, isn’t even an island a “piece of the continent, a part of the main”? At least if you take the land mass *under* the sea as connecting *all* islands and *all* continents. I was surfing the internet the other day, just to while away the time, and I came across an interesting piece asking, “How big is the Sun?” And the answer is surprising: it depends on what one includes as *part* of the Sun! The *visible* part of the Sun is not the *entire* Sun, of course: we know these days that the Sun emits cosmic rays – essentially, alpha and beta particles – which are the “atmosphere”, as it were, of the Sun. So if one includes all the cosmic rays the Sun emits – that is to say, if we include its “atmosphere” – the Sun is many, *many* times larger than just the visible part. But we also know that the Sun emits *light* (well, of *course* we know that). But then should not that light *also* be included as part of the Sun? I mean, the source of that light is *only* the Sun, isn’t it? It’s not some *other* star. So if we include all the *light* that’s ever been emitted by the Sun in the approximately five billion years it’s been around, then the “size” of the Sun is a sphere having a diameter of something like *ten billion light-years!* So depending on how one looks at it, the Sun *includes* all the other planets of the Solar system, and then some – in fact, it includes all the other *stars* in the entire Milky Way galaxy, and *then* some, including all the nearby galaxies like the Andromeda! What I mean to say is, it’s as hard to separate *objects* in the Universe from one another, as to separate *minds* from one another. The Universe *appears* to contain many different things, but as we see from a consideration of the Sun, they aren’t really *different* – that is, they aren’t truly *separate*. But then, why do we differentiate them at all? Why not simply consider the Universe as being One, in the sense of “One *without* a second” – as you eloquently put it, Socrates – and leave it at that? Because the number of things in the Universe would have to change, wouldn’t they, depending upon what we *include* as part of each such object. If we include all the stars in the Milky Way galaxy as part of the Sun – and the Sun itself as part of each of the other stars in the Milky Way galaxy (the same reasoning applies), then how many objects *are* there in the Milky Way galaxy? It all depends on how one looks at the question, isn’t it? It’s like asking, “How many parts does a thundercloud have?” It all depends on what one *includes* as part of the thundercloud. Does each raindrop count? Does each lightning flash? Does each oxygen molecule?

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How about the cosmic rays passing through it at any given moment? The number is not actually *determinable*, is it? I'm sorry, that was rather long-winded – I got carried away; and besides, I've got to go pee myself ... (*rises to go to the toilet*).

SOCRATES: (*Loudly, as Descartes is walking away*) You're *right!* (*To Berkeley*) He *is*, I do think he is. Come to think of it, we can't even tell if two *rocks* are totally separate from each other, because they each emit a gravitational field that affects the other. No doubt minimally in the case of small rocks, but in *principle* it must exist. Isn't that so? I mean, yes, rocks are only *perceptions* – or at least we don't *know for sure* if there's any matter "behind" them – but that doesn't negate the *perception* of gravity, does it. There simply isn't *anything*, whether mental or "material", *totally* separate from anything else. So strictly speaking one would have to say that only *one* thing *actually* exists, and the number of *parts* of that one thing is dependent upon some *arbitrary* way of separating them in one's mind for the sake of referring to them as separate things! To say, for example, that the Universe contains of *N* number of parts – *whatever* the number *N* may be – is quite an *arbitrary* statement. But it's *not* arbitrary to say that there is only *one* Universe, at least if the *meaning* of the word Universe is as we said earlier. So it would seem that a "one without a second" is much more *definite* than a *counting* "one", which is distinguished from a "two" or a "three" or a "four", because such distinctions are quite *arbitrary*, while the "one without a second" *isn't*. (*Descartes returns from the toilet.*) Descartes, I was just arguing that counting numbers are entirely arbitrary, while the non-counting "one" is clearly not. What do *you* think, you being a mathematician and all? Do you think that it makes sense to think so?

DESCARTES: Well, maybe. But then again, maybe not: maybe only the *way* in which we distinguish things from one another is arbitrary, while the *numbers* used to count the things so distinguished arbitrarily, aren't *themselves* arbitrary. In any case, I find it difficult to imagine how the sequence of counting numbers can *itself* be arbitrary. If it were, wouldn't it be just as correct to say that the sequence of counting numbers is, for instance, one, three, five, two, eight, *etc.*, instead of one, two, three, four, five, *etc.*? The former sequence seems arbitrary while the latter seems to be non-arbitrary. Numbers are not like the letters of the alphabet, whose sequence is purely arbitrary: there's no reason why B should come immediately after A, or C after B, or D after C, and so on. But the sequence of numbers is clearly defined as a series in which each number is one greater than the preceding number. The number three is one greater than two, and four is one greater than three, and so on. But in one sense I do agree, in that the number *one* seems to have a more *important* place among the counting numbers than any of the others. It's not just the smallest counting number, but also the number determining the *sequence* of counting numbers. Though some people argue that *zero* is the smallest counting number. Maybe it is. Debatable! By the way, Berkeley, do you think *numbers* exist, or *don't* you? I mean, numbers *as such* aren't perceived, are they? We may perceive two *apples*, but that's not the same thing as perceiving the *number* two. Certainly a number that has never been *thought of* before will not have been *perceived* up till the moment when it is enunciated, or at least imagined or thought of. If you say that numbers do exist, then ESSE *isn't* PERCIPI, right? This seems to prove that there *are* things, like numbers, that can exist *without* being perceived. Come to think of it, we were discussing potentials a while back. Are *potentials* perceived at all? Okay, sometimes they are, in the sense that they are at least perceived in the *imagination*. But was the *iPhone* not a potential in the time of Imhotep, and only became a potential in the time of Steve Jobs? *That* doesn't seem to be to make sense. But in the time of Imhotep, even the *potential* for an *iPhone* to exist could hardly have been perceived: that is to say, *imagined*. Imhotep, however brilliant an engineer he was, *couldn't* have imagined an *iPhone* in his day! Heck: it couldn't have been imagined even when *I* was alive. Or, for that matter, when either of *you* were alive. If "to be is to be perceived", Berkeley, as you claim, then you would seem to be arguing that if something *isn't* perceived, it simply can't *exist*. Is that what you are arguing?

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BERKELEY: (*Thinking about it a bit*) Well, no; I have said many times during this very conversation that I can't prove that matter *doesn't* exist; all I can prove is that even *if* it does, it doesn't *matter*. But now that you mention it, I may have jumped the gun a bit with my ESSE is PERCIPI. Maybe what I should have written instead is PERCIPI is ESSE. By that I mean, that if I *perceive* something, that perception surely and undoubtedly *exists*. Even if I perceive it in a dream or a hallucination, it is undoubtedly true that I *am* perceiving it ... though, agreed, *in* a dream or a hallucination. But remember, at the time I was writing "ESSE is PERCIPI", I was just trying to make my point about *matter*. I wasn't thinking about numbers or potentials or any other thing that isn't *material*. But now that you've raised the point, I do admit that the phrase "ESSE is PERCIPI" can be misinterpreted, especially when taken out of context – separate from the *thrust* of my argument. Come to think of it, no *wonder* I've been able to convince so few people! My phrase "ESSE is PERCIPI" is clearly *wrong*, as you point out, when talking about such things as potentials of inventions that have not yet even been imagined. As we were arguing, potentials – or possibilities (after all, the word "potentials" is derived from the Latin word POTERE meaning "to be possible") – *must* exist, otherwise we'd have a hard time explaining how there are so many things around us that were never even *imagined* before. If something is *possible*, then that *possibility* exists: indeed, the very *meaning* of a phrase such as "X is possible" is that the possibility of X *exists*, whatever X may be. But when I was writing my books I never considered the – ah, *possibility* – that my words could be challenged this way! Of course it was *always* a possibility, but I hadn't *imagined* that possibility. Thus *at the time* such a possibility *wasn't* perceived, even though it existed. *Touché!* ESSE is not PERCIPI; rather, PERCIPI is ESSE.

SOCRATES: Then are you saying that you've been mistaken – or at least, *possibly* mistaken – all along? That matter *may* exist in exactly the way most people think it does?

BERKELEY: Yes. But I've never actually *denied* that possibility! If memory serves, I wrote in my book *Principles of Human Knowledge* a passage somewhat along the lines of the following: "... whenever we attribute a '*real*' existence to unperceived things, *distinct* from their being perceived, it is not only *impossible* for us to know – with knowledge supported by *evidence* – *how* or *what* they are, but even *that* they exist at all. For how can we say that a thing even *exists*, when we acknowledge that we know *absolutely nothing* about it at all?" I am quoting from memory so I may have got a few words wrong, but that's the gist of it. The point is, even though I was thinking about so-called "material" things when I wrote this, not ephemeral things such as possibilities, but even then, note carefully that I don't actually *deny* that so-called "material" things *may* exist – only that as yet we have no way of knowing *how* they may exist, or even *if* they exist at all. It's a statement about what we *know*, and not about what *is!* It is, in philosophical jargon – which, however, I try to avoid, because it's just confusing – an *epistemological* statement, and not an *ontological* one. But now that you point it out, possibilities *must* exist, even though they are often not perceived. However, I *don't* think you can make an equally compelling argument to show that so-called *matter* also *must* exist, even though it's not perceived. *Can* you?

DESCARTES: (*After thinking for a while*) No, I'm afraid *I* for one can't make any such argument; at least not right now. Perhaps however if I were to spend some time pondering it ...

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) But Descartes, you surely have noted that Berkeley doesn't deny the *possibility* of so-called "matter" existing ... oh dear, here I go again, mixing up "possibility" which *does* exist with "matter" which *may* exist, and confusing the issue once more ... sorry, *sorry, s o r r y !*

DESCARTES: Okay *mon ami*, I get it, I truly do. What Berkeley is saying is not very different from my own COGITO: I *may* be deceived about many things, but I *can't* be deceived about the fact that I *think*. It doesn't mean that I *am* deceived about everything else, only that I *may* be.

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Likewise, Berkeley is saying that one *can't* be deceived about the reality of *perceptions*, but *may* be deceived in thinking that there's anything of a *material* nature "behind" them. Not that he's *sure* that there *isn't* anything behind them! There *may* be, he's just in no position to *know* anything about *what* it might be, or even *whether* it might be there at all. And there's no good argument from a *rational* point of view in favour of the claim that there *must* be something behind them. Except, of course, an appeal to "common sense", which is what Bertrand Russell – one of the best-known modern materialist philosophers – resorts to. I read some of his books some time ago, and admittedly he has a way with words, and writes very well (he did get the Noble Prize for Literature), but essentially that's what all his arguments in favour of the existence of matter boil down to. But you have both been very convincing in your arguments *against* common sense; and indeed, common sense would collapse before everything *I myself* have argued in my *First Meditation*. I have, therefore, accepted – reluctantly – that common sense is *not* reliable, and so I shan't be resorting to it any more in our discussions. Well, it's been known for centuries that common sense is not reliable, otherwise we'd all be believing in a flat Earth!

SOCRATES: Yes, that seems to be it. But Berkeley, if as you say the statement PERCIPI IS ESSE is about what we *know* and not about what *is*, then are you saying that knowledge must trump existence? It doesn't seem very logical to say that, does it?

BERKELEY: (*Thinking for a while*) You raise a very interesting issue, Socrates. I am inclined to say, at an admittedly preliminary perusal of your question, that knowledge *does* trump existence. I ask myself: can something be *truly* said to exist if its existence can *never* be known at all? I am reminded by your question of a discussion I was having with Dr. Johnson – you know, Dr. Samuel Johnson who compiled his famous "Dictionary" (from which he deliberately left out the word "anus", despite having used it in two definitions!) That was before I "died" and came to the Elysian Fields, but I remember our conversation vividly. We were both walking along discussing my theory of "idealism" – yes, yes, I know it's a misleading term, but unfortunately that's what I called it at the time – and Dr. Johnson was accusing me of sophistry (he didn't mean what *you* mean by that term, Socrates, rather he meant that I was tricking him by using fine-sounding words which actually didn't mean much, or meant something different to the listener than to the speaker). In fact he said that he could refute my theory *easily*, and had in fact done so already when discussing it with his famous biographer, Boswell. I asked, "Well, Dr. Johnson, *how* exactly do you refute it?" – or words to such effect. There happened to be a large rock near where we were walking, and he kicked it hard, saying vehemently "I refute it *thus!*" I was a little taken aback, because I didn't quite see how his kicking the rock would *actually* refute my position; after all, my theory doesn't deny the existence of the rock as a *perception*, but only the existence of any material substance "behind" the perception, as it were, "of" the rock; but upon reflection I thought, never mind, I'll play his game for a while; let's see how it goes if I assume what *he's* evidently assuming: namely that if there *is* a rock there, it doesn't matter whether I perceive it or not; my foot *would* be stopped by the mere *existence* of the rock, regardless of whether I *perceived* it or not. So I launched a kick in front of me, saying with a vehemence equal to his own: "I refute *you* thus!" *He* was now taken aback, asking "And how exactly do you refute me by kicking the *air*?" I answered, "That was not *air* I kicked, my dear Dr. Johnson, but a *rock!* You just didn't *perceive* the rock; what you *perceived* was only air – or more accurately, you perceived only empty space, but you have convinced yourself that there's air in that empty space. But it was a *rock* that was there, even though you didn't perceive it ... and neither did I. So the rock was *there*, but because it remained altogether *unperceived*, my foot went right *through* it!" He was completely nonplussed, and said hardly a word for a full five minutes, after which he changed the subject. My guess is that he was reminded at that moment of the statement of my friend David Hume, that although my "idealist" philosophy is hard to refute, it's even harder to accept ... at least with any degree of *conviction!* (And Hume was *right*: indeed,

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I myself, as I said, lived my life as if it didn't matter whether my philosophy is true or not.) But I mention the argument I had with Dr. Johnson only to show that if we cannot *know* the existence of something, we can hardly claim a *genuine* existence for it. However, I must add, that we must *truly* not be able to know its existence; and by that I mean, not be able to know it using *every* means at our disposal of attaining such knowledge. If for instance I walk along in the dark and stumble upon a large rock which I don't perceive with my *eyes*, my stumbling as a result doesn't mean that my perception of the rock *wasn't* there at all, but only that my *visual* perception of the rock was not there. Its *tactile* perception was evidently there in full, otherwise I wouldn't have stumbled!

DESCARTES: Yes, Berkeley, I also think that knowledge trumps existence. In fact, that was the starting point of my *Meditations*, wasn't it. I wanted to *know* what was true, *indisputably* true – or more correctly, *indubitably* true. Knowledge *does* trump existence: at least it trumps any *unknown* existence. It occurs to me as I speak these words, that unless what exists can be *known* to exist, what would be the *point* of claiming or affirming – or even *suspecting* – that it exists? For instance, imagine a hypothetical Universe that exists, but can never be *known* to exist. (And we shall use the word “Universe” as we defined it earlier: “‘Universe’ means ‘all that existed, exists and will exist in any manner whatsoever’”, so that there can be only *one* Universe, and there cannot be *anything* – or any *other* Universe – *outside* it. Of course, *we*, the people imagining that it exists, *are* outside this hypothetical “other” Universe, which is different from our own, and that results in a clear contradiction; but we shall ignore this contradiction for the moment – but *only* for the moment, mind you.) As I said: let's imagine that there isn't *anything* in this “other”, hypothetical, Universe that can ever be *known* to exist. In that case I would have to ask: in what *sense* can it be said to exist *at all*? Surely when we say that something *exists*, we mean that it is actually *known* to exist. Or – more accurately – that its existence *knowable*. Even if its existence isn't known *at present*, it should at least be *knowable* in the future. Can something that can *never* be known to exist, *actually* have any *real* existence ... at least in a truly *meaningful* sense? (Of course, due to the contradiction we spoke of earlier, such a Universe can't exist even *hypothetically*, because it would be “outside” the *only* Universe that can – and does – exist. I only tried to illustrate a point using a metaphor – a “parable” of sorts.)

SOCRATES: I think I understand what you mean: any “existence” that's utterly and totally *unknowable* can't really be called “existence” in a *meaningful* sense. But then the question arises, surely: what's *truly* unknowable? Just because *right now* we have no way of knowing – for example – of what nature any “matter” behind our perceptions may be, or even *whether* it exists at all, doesn't *necessarily* mean that it's altogether *unknowable*, does it? Does a *contradiction*, for example, arise from postulating the ability of knowing the existence of matter at some *future* date – even if it be some very *remote* future date?

BERKELEY: Well, I for one say that the *only* way we have of knowing anything is by *direct* perception or – as Socrates has put it – by *experience*. Or more correctly, the only way of knowing anything *without the least scintilla of doubt* is by direct perception or experience. (And really, any knowledge that isn't utterly *indubitable* can hardly be called *true* knowledge, can it? It may in that case be called just a *supposition*, or a *good guess*: such as “I have a *very good guess* that the Sun will rise tomorrow.” I don't *know* it; to claim that I *know* it would clearly be *false*!) So true *knowledge* would have to be *indubitable*. In which case, all *true* knowledge, as we saw, must be *subjective*. In fact, I think we've just *proven* that there's no such thing as “objective knowledge”! Haven't we? Because all *your* arguments, Descartes – your “dream” argument or “demon” argument or “insanity” argument and all the rest of your arguments – demonstrate *indubitably* that knowing anything of an *objective* nature *indubitably* leads nowhere. (*Pauses for a while, deep in thought*). But maybe, on second thoughts ... maybe I've just disproved myself ... any rational *argument* that demonstrates anything *indubitably*, must do so *objectively* ... (*trails off, thinking*)

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DESCARTES: Speaking as a rationalist, I think you *have* disproved yourself. What about the laws of *logic*? Do *they* not also lead to indubitable conclusions? I mean, how else do we know – *indubitably* know – that we can never draw, or even imagine, a square circle – *whether now or in the future*? We know it with such clarity that we can say with *confidence* that even an Omnipotent Being – even *God Himself* – could not draw such a thing ... *ever!* (Thereby, of course, proving that God is *not* omnipotent – but that’s another discussion). Of course, we assume here that the terms “square” and “circle” are taken to mean what they are *commonly* taken to mean. But if those *are* the meanings ascribed to them, then it seems quite false to say that we know that it’s impossible to draw a square circle *only* by direct perception of our inability to imagine such a thing; we know it *also* by the fact that it would entail a *contradiction*. And, as Aristotle himself pointed out, it’s *impossible* to deny the validity of the law of non-contradiction – at least using any *rational* argument – without surreptitiously *using* the law of non-contradiction; that is, by assuming that it *is* valid even while trying to prove that it’s not. The only way to deny the law of non-contradiction is to simply *assert* that it’s invalid; and we all know from direct experience that merely *asserting* anything hardly proves the *truth* of what’s being asserted. I mean, the laws of logic seem to be an equally good method of knowing something *indubitably*. Admittedly in these modern days people who like to call themselves “logicians” – shame on them! – often assert that *all* logic is based on unproven axioms, without even being aware of how silly they sound when they say it: for if logic were *truly* based on unproven axioms, then all *conclusions* from those unproven axioms would *also* be unproven, and therefore *dubitable!* In other words, these logicians must be implying that their *own profession* is a total waste of time, which is a *huge* performance contradiction. Anyway, although *I* for one *am* a rationalist, I am not in favour of “logic” as it is taught in universities *these* days. But that’s a side issue; I shan’t be discussing the silliness of modern logicians any more. As I said, Berkeley, you *did* disprove yourself. Remember what I had said to Socrates, when he was sad because according to him, he had never proved a single thing in almost two and a half millennia? Remember that I replied that he *had*, because whenever he proved anything *false*, he was *IPSO* – er, *FACTO* – proving something *true* as well: namely, that it was *true* that the statement he had just disproved *was* in fact false? Remember that? But exactly *how* was Socrates proving anything *false*? Obviously, using *reason!* (I might even call it “logic”, because although Aristotle hadn’t yet *codified* the laws of logic while Socrates was alive, those laws *were* being used by Socrates – at least implicitly – when arguing with the citizens of Athens and proving many of their assertions false.) In addition, as Popper has pointed out, it *is* possible to prove a scientific theory *false*. This shows, does it not, that there *are* truths that can be *indubitably* proven by logic. And they are *objective!* I mean the truth that these falsehoods *are* falsehoods, as proven by logic – and by Socrates – are *objective* truths. Aren’t they?

SOCRATES: So according to you it *is* possible to prove objective truths using logic – the only problem being that those truths are *about falsehoods* ... is that what you’re arguing?

DESCARTES: *Most* of them are, but not *all* by any means; consider the “square circle” argument.

SOCRATES: Okay, let me rephrase. Rationality is very good at proving thing *impossible*, but not at proving them *possible*. Is that better said?

DESCARTES: Perhaps. I’d need to think about it a bit more to be certain. But it does seem to be so. If some things are *possible*, the only way I can see of proving their possibility *indubitably* is by *doing* them. That is, if someone says they can travel faster than light, or invent a perpetual motion machine, the only *indubitable* way they can prove it – even if only to themselves – is by *doing* it. Just because something *seems* possible doesn’t mean it *is*. We may not be able to *see* the impossibility, and *that* could be the reason it *seems* possible. But when we can *prove*, using logic, that it’s *impossible*, then it *is* impossible – like the

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impossibility of drawing, or even imagining, a square circle. Or the impossibility of *actually* talking about an *absolute* nothing: that is to say, a nothing that doesn't exist in *any manner whatsoever*. In other words, when one says that it doesn't exist in *any* manner whatsoever, it should not even exist as a topic of *discussion* ... or indeed, even as the subject of one's own private *thoughts* about it.

SOCRATES: It occurs to me, however, that there is a serious drawback about using logic to get at indubitable truths, as opposed to direct experience. What if one doesn't *understand* the logic behind an argument? What I mean to say is, one doesn't have to be highly intelligent to realize the indubitable nature of a *direct experience*: why, I imagine even animals have that ability. But to realize that a *logical argument* has proven its conclusion beyond *all* doubt requires a certain level of *intelligence*, does it not? Logical arguments cannot prove the indubitability of their conclusions to *everybody*, but only to those who can actually *understand* the logic behind them. Isn't that correct?

DESCARTES: But Socrates, you surely appreciate that the *same* difficulty applies to direct experiences. For example, dogs can smell things that humans can't. So to *humans* those smells *can't* be direct experiences, while to dogs they *can* be! Or consider echolocation by bats. They probably experience *directly* their ability to do echolocation, while humans don't. However, come to think of it, I did see a *YouTube* video of a guy – a human – who *could* do echolocation. He's completely blind – in fact he doesn't have eyes as such: the "eyes" in his head are prosthetic, and there for purely cosmetic reasons – but he gets around, and even rides a bicycle, using echolocation. Well, *most* humans certainly can't do that, can they? So *this* human has a skill at *directly experiencing* something which many other humans don't have. There are also people who can hear *frequencies of sound* that many, or even most, other people can't hear. They too have an ability to directly experience what others can't. So I think the difference between *logic* as a way to reach indubitable conclusions isn't very different from *direct experience* as a way to reach indubitable conclusions, is it now. Some people *have* the ability to do so, while others simply *don't*.

SOCRATES: *Touché*. But that makes me think: what if there are people – or if not people, then sentient beings on other planets, or in other non-physical realms like this Elysium – who might have the skill of knowing things indubitably in yet *another* way? I mean, *other* than via direct experience *or* via logic. Pythagoras told me that in India there are people who believe that as a result of practising something they call "yoga" down there, they are able to attain a *supreme* degree of joy, ecstasy or bliss, and *as a consequence*, that they can *know* things that others simply *can't*. He said, for example, that they claim they can *know* that good and evil are both the same, and that there's no difference between the two; and as a result, they "fear naught, in this world or the next" (to quote from one of their poems). It's hard for me, frankly, to think of good and evil as exactly the same, but Pythagoras looked quite serious when he told me this, and didn't display by the slightest hint – like a twinkle in his eye, or a twitch at a corner of his mouth – that he was trying to pull my leg, so I do believe him. I mean, that is, that I believe his word *that* there are people in India who believe that good and evil are both exactly the same, and *that* they can indubitably know it to be so, as a result of attaining some supreme level of ecstasy or bliss. I didn't mean to say, of course, that I believe that they are *right* in believing what they believe. I personally don't *know* if they are, but I also have no way of knowing that they're *wrong* in their beliefs; so, in line with my general habits, and with the principle of accepting what is acceptable but not rejecting what's not – which was enunciated to me by Gandhi's friend Dinshah (I told you about him) – I keep an open mind on the subject.

DESCARTES: But if good and evil are both the same, wouldn't that put a distinct kybosh on all morality? Or let me ask *you*: do *you*, Socrates, believe that there's no such thing as good and evil?

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- BERKELEY: (*Interjecting*) As an ex-clergyman, I *must* protest! It seems *most* far-fetched to me to say that there's no such thing as good and evil, or to say that good and evil are alike – which seem to amount to the same thing. What would be the *point*, then, of doing the right thing and avoiding doing the wrong thing? What would be point of morality or ethics *at all*?
- SOCRATES: Well, as Pythagoras explained it to me, these Indians believe that the *right* thing to do is to first *attain* this supreme level of ecstasy or bliss; and *then*, once one has attained *that*, everything one does *will* be right – that is, *definitely* right. They claim that no one who is *completely* joyous or happy – that is, without being the *least bit* unhappy – will *ever* do anything *but* the right thing. And in that state, they will also *know* that they are doing the right thing, without the *least possibility of doubt*: that is, they will attain *indubitable* knowledge regarding the rightness of what they are doing – an indubitability as great as that of your COGITO, Descartes. That's what *they* believe, mind you; it's not what *I* believe; I myself, as I said, keep an open mind on the subject, not having attained anything even close to a “supreme level of joy, bliss or ecstasy”. But I *should* like to remind you both that no one seems to have yet found a *logical proof* for morality or ethics: that is, no one has been able to *prove beyond all doubt* that what they claim is right is *actually* right, or what they claim is wrong is *actually* wrong!
- BERKELEY: Well, doing the wrong thing is clearly *wrong*! How could it *not* be so?
- SOCRATES: Yes, of course; that's almost *definitionally* correct; but the question is, is any *given* action right or wrong? How can one *tell*?
- BERKELEY: Well, to give a simple example, doing *harm* – whether to oneself or to others: *especially* to others – is *clearly* wrong. Wouldn't you agree?
- SOCRATES: Yes, *I* might agree with you; and so, I imagine, might Descartes, and indeed *most* others; but can you *prove* it? By that I mean, how can we know that that's a *true* statement: its truth established beyond *all* doubt, and not just beyond *reasonable* doubt?
- BERKELEY: But surely it's *self-evident*!
- DESCARTES: (*Interjecting*) *No*, my dear Bish – er, Berkeley, it certainly *isn't*! Why, such a claim would fall down flat under *many* of my arguments: for example, my “demon” argument or my “insanity” argument ... or even my “stupidity” argument or my “forgetfulness” argument (had I actually *made* them, and not *stupidly forgotten* to make them due to my own – ah – stupidity and forgetfulness at the time!) Its truth is definitely not *indubitable*.
- BERKELEY: (*Thinking about it*) Ah, I see. It's true beyond all *reasonable* doubt, but not beyond *all* doubt whatsoever. But how could one *live one's life* – I mean from a *practical* point of view – without assuming that one must choose between what's right and what's wrong with regard to almost everything one does? Surely everyone makes such a choice *every* day, and indeed, *many times* in the day? Indeed, I myself shall have to choose soon: to pee or not to pee (for *that's* the question); I'm *very strongly* leaning towards “to pee” ...
- SOCRATES: People certainly *do* make moral choices every day, as you rightly say, Berkeley; but what guarantee is there that one always chooses *correctly*?
- BERKELEY: Ah. I see. Yes. Each person does what *they* think is right, but there's no guarantee that what they *think* is right is *actually* right. Yes, of course. But that's why we have ethics, or morality: to *teach* them from an early age to do what's *actually* right! That's what Sunday School is for, isn't it. (*Squirming uncomfortably in his chair due to his almost full bladder.*)

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- SOCRATES: But what guarantee is there that what's taught in Sunday School is *actually* right, and not mere guess-work masquerading as incontrovertible truth?
- BERKELEY: Well, surely if it agrees with the Word of God then it *must* be the truth. Surely *God* knows what's *actually* right and what's not! (*Squirming again in his chair.*)
- DESCARTES: Yes, I quite agree. And Berkeley, if you've got to go, just *go!*
- SOCRATES: (*Paying no attention to Berkeley's discomfort*) But how do we know what *is* the Word of God? Much of what one takes to be the "Word of God" – as for instance the holy scriptures of one's religion, or indeed of *any* religion – is *also* susceptible to your arguments, Descartes: isn't it? How do we know that those words *are* indeed God's?
- BERKELEY: Well, we have God's word for it! (*Squirming a lot in his chair.*) And I don't want to go just yet because you both are talking such a load of tosh and *someone* has to ...
- SOCRATES: My dear Berkley, come *on*. Such an argument wouldn't even stand up in a *court of law*, for – er, *God's* – sake! Let alone in a philosophical discussion. Can't you see how *circular* it is, to say that if something *claims* to be the Word of God, it must *be* the Word of God?
- DESCARTES: Ah. Yes. Berkeley, Socrates is right. What *proof* do we have that what's written in the scriptures *is* in fact the Word of God? And by "proof" I mean, *indisputable* proof, *in-dubitable* proof; not merely proof beyond *reasonable* doubt. Remember, that's what we started out our "trivial" discussion trying to seek! ... But just *go*, for God's sake!
- SOCRATES: (*Still paying no attention to Berkeley's squirming*) And as Pythagoras explained this Indian philosophy to me, its adherents believe that the *only* way to know what God knows is to *be* God. Or, at least, to be *in tune with* the Mind of God. But since many of them are also adherents of the "One Mind" theory, both *being* God and getting *in tune with* the Mind of God amount to much the same thing. Rationally it does make sense. Unless, of course, there's no such thing as God, or the Mind of God. About which I keep an open – ah, *mind*. But as you, Descartes, argue with your COGITO, one can't deny the existence of *mind* – indeed, of at least *one* mind, namely one's own – so as I also said earlier, I do have half a mind to believe all this.
- BERKELEY: Well, all this is making me *very* confused – I mean, as an ex-minister what am I supposed to think? Maybe it's because I have *got* to go pee and I've been holding it in because the discussion is so demanding but I really *must* go to the toilet ... (*gets up and goes off.*)
- SOCRATES: But Descartes, surely *you* agree that we don't have a proof for ethics? Maybe we *will* some day, but we don't have one *yet*.
- DESCARTES: Yes, reluctantly I must agree. I say "reluctantly", because I am somewhat at a loss to decide how one should behave from a day-to-day, *practical* point of view. But I suppose we must muddle through somehow with our *guesses* as to what's right or wrong, because we don't have anything *else* on which to base our actions. We shall just have to accept the notion that a lot of the things we have done may well turn out to have been wrong, even though we *sincerely* thought they were right when we did them!
- SOCRATES: Perhaps. But surely you'll agree that any *genuine* proof for ethics *must* be based on *metaphysics*? For instance, surely you'd agree that if after death one *always* ends up in Elysium – or in some other, equally pleasant, place or state of existence – then surely it no longer becomes *absolutely* wrong to kill people ... ? Maybe only a *teeny bit* wrong, because you might be depriving them of whatever happiness they might have planned or

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hoped for in their future, but not *altogether* wrong: that is, not as wrong as is *usually* made out to be. Surely you'd agree about *that*, you being a rationalist and all?

DESCARTES: When you put it like that ... yes, it does sound *most* unreasonable, and yet *very* rational! As a rationalist I am *forced* to agree. Reluctantly.

BERKELEY: (*Returns, and joins in*) Ahhhhh, that feels *soooooo* much better. *Now* I can actually *pay attention* to what you both were saying. So what were you talking about?

SOCRATES: I was arguing that any proof for ethics or morality must be based on a *genuine* knowledge of metaphysics. By which I mean, *even* if we accept your argument, Berkeley, that it's wrong to do harm, unless we know for *sure* that some action of ours *actually* does harm, how could we *know* it's wrong? As I was pointing out, if by killing someone we only send them to a better place – like to Elysium; or to heaven, for you Christians – who is to say that killing them is *actually* wrong? For instance, you must have been a very *good* person while alive, I'm sure, having been a Bishop and all; so you were surely destined to go to heaven and *not* to hell. So if someone *had* killed you, you'd have ended up in a *better* place, right? In actual fact you came to Elysium, which *is* a better place than Earth. So the person who killed you would have been doing you a *favour*, for which he should have been *rewarded* rather than punished! In fact, killing *good* people is *better* than killing *bad* people, by this argument; good people end up in a *better* place than the wicked.

BERKELEY: Well, now that I'm dead – and *especially* now that I've emptied my bladder – I feel *quite* comfortable with such a thought. Indeed, it's a very *Christian* thought, I have to admit! *Completely* along the lines of “turn the other cheek” and “love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute you”. Yes, my would-be murderer *would* have done me a favour, for which he *should* have been rewarded; as a Christian I can say *nothing less*. Not only should I *forgive* him, but in proper Christian spirit, actually *love* him, *bless* him, and do *good* to him! My Lord Jesus Christ does *indeed* say that I should do so. You know, Socrates, your argument puts an entirely different spin on those words of Christ's: indeed, it's a much *better* interpretation than the one I had thought was the right one up to now. Our murderers do us a *favour* by killing us! I now understand why murderers – even mass murderers like Stalin and Hitler and George W. Bush – *should* be forgiven their sins, and why God's infinite love showers down even upon *them*: indeed, perhaps *more* on them than on *us*! It may sound callous to many atheists to hear me say this, but as a devout Christian I can say no less.

SOCRATES: Well, as an agnostic I can at least *imagine* what atheists might say, and I would argue that even if God truly *doesn't* exist – something atheists can't actually *prove*, mind you: which is *why* I am an agnostic – atheists wouldn't have much of a leg to stand on. We talked about this earlier, remember? Even if what atheists believe *is* true, and the dead after death have *no* existence whatsoever, *even then* their being killed would not have done them any actual *harm*: so *why* would it be wrong to have killed them? I mean, only *rationally* speaking of course – for it is impossible to appeal to anything other than rationality when arguing with atheists. But unfortunately an appeal to rationality in *this* matter *won't* satisfy most atheists: which then begs the question, what *will* satisfy them?

BERKELEY: You know, now that I am no longer uncomfortable I find myself thinking far more clearly than when I was squirming in my seat dying to pee. Which makes me suspect that what you said about those Indians Pythagoras told you about, Socrates, is not altogether far off the mark: that one who is in a supreme state of bliss or happiness – without the slightest degree of unhappiness intermixed with it – is also in a supreme state of *clarity*! Certainly my own clarity of thought has improved greatly after having relieved myself.

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SOCRATES: Yes, there's much to be said for this attitude. *First* be happy, and then all will be well! Of course such a statement is almost tautological, for the only reason anyone does anything – as Aristotle pointed out – is because they think they'll feel better, or be happier, thereby. But there's more; it seems quite clear that one who is uncomfortable doesn't *think* clearly – or in other words, has less *clarity* – than one who is *not* uncomfortable; so it stands to reason that one who is even *more* comfortable than just being not *uncomfortable* – or in other words, whose level of comfort rises to a state of actual *happiness* rather than just a state of mild *contentment* – might have even *greater* clarity, and one who is even *more* joyful might have *even* greater clarity, and so on up the emotional scale. This reminds me of a book I was reading just recently: it's called *The Vortex*, and purports to be words spoken by discarnate entities who collectively call themselves "Abraham" (but the book is at pains to point out that they are not the "Abraham" mentioned in the Bible.) The book is actually in the form of questions and answers, the questions mostly being asked by a person called Jerry Hicks, and sometimes by other, unnamed persons. These "Abraham" speak – although the name is singular, the claim is that they are a *group* of non-physical entities, and so we refer to "them", in the plural – through the mouth of Jerry's wife, Esther; but they speak with a single voice, as if they were all agreed upon what they say. (Of course *we* have no problem accepting them as non-physical entities: why, *we ourselves* are non-physical entities, and in fact your own works, Berkeley, argue that there *is* no such thing as truly "physical" or material entities anyway, even on Earth; but *physicalists* might have some problems accepting "Abraham" as "non-physical entities". I just mention this to get this small issue out of the way.) Now "Abraham" seem to agree with what I am arguing here, namely that getting happier and happier leads to greater and greater clarity: and they seem to agree also with the Indians about whom Pythagoras was talking, when these latter say that the highest degree of *clarity* – or knowledge – comes as a result of attaining the highest degree of *happiness*. So clearly it isn't something only people on the eastern side of planet Earth believe; it seems to be corroborated by others ... even others who claim they *aren't* on planet Earth at all. I must say that reading this book *The Vortex* has made me re-think many of my previously-held beliefs. For example, "Abraham" think like you, Berkeley, that all so-called physical manifestations are in actual fact just thoughts, or as you originally called them, "ideas". And "Abraham" agree with you, Descartes, that we should have actual *knowledge* – that is, *in-dubitable* knowledge, and not simply guess-work – before we act. They differ from you, Berkeley, however, in that they claim that we *create* our physical manifestations, while you claim that we only *perceive* them. This puts a whole new twist on the question of existence, doesn't it? I mean, if things exist, not because they have *always* existed, or because *God* brought them into existence, but because it is *we* who bring them into existence by our thoughts, then surely knowledge *does* trump existence. Eh? I mean, consider what might exist in the future! There are things that might exist in the future which today we cannot even *imagine*. Of course, as we argued, the *potential* for their existence exists today. But we don't *know* exactly what that potential is! Or to put it another way ...

DESCARTES: (*Interrupting*) But if the potential *exists* while you don't *know* what the potential is, then surely it is *existence* that trumps knowledge, and not the other way round: *n'est-ce pas?*

SOCRATES: Ah. Yes. Okay, never mind what trumps what: knowledge or existence. Maybe each trumps the other in different ways: in the same manner that both Goodness and Truth trump each other. I was discussing this with Flatface, who argued that clearly Goodness trumps Truth, in that Goodness is an end in itself while Truth is only a *means* to that end, while I in turn argued that Truth trumps Goodness, in that his very claim "Goodness trumps Truth" – like, in fact, *all* claims – stands or falls by its own Truth ... or the lack of it! (I wonder if he ever wrote that argument down in any of his "Socratic" dialogues. Maybe he didn't; maybe he was too embarrassed by the – ah – *truth* of my counter-argument.) But as I said, never mind what trumps what; maybe each trumps the other; the point

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I was trying to make is ... well, what *was* the point I was trying to make? Sorry, after two-and-a-half millennia my attention span isn't what it used to be ... sorry, sorry ...

BERKELEY: You were talking about this group of people who weirdly call themselves "Abraham".

SOCRATES: *Raaaaight*. Yes. Not "people", though: they call themselves "non-physical entities". They say – yes, now I remember. They say that the most important thing – the *best* thing, even from a moral point of view – is to first *be happy*. They claim that no action carried out from a place of unhappiness can be supremely right; the *only* supremely right action is action carried out when one is in a place of supreme happiness. But they go further than that: they also claim that there just *isn't* any such thing as "wrong action"! They seem to *imply*, at least, that *all* actions are right. One thing they say often is "You can never get it wrong". They say "No rules or taboos come from your Inner Being, which some of you call God." They say "You were not born holding a memory of lists of right and wrong because those lists do not exist." They say that Source – which is another of their alternative words for God: they don't like to use the *actual* word "God" very much – is "eternally expanding", and as a consequence, our own "understanding, perspective, intentions and knowledge of Source is eternally expanding as well"; and as a result, "there cannot *be* a static list of right and wrong or good and evil to measure your experience against." They don't just say that good and evil are the *same*, they say that there *is* only good, and evil is only a name we give to a partial *lack* of good. Indeed, they even say that good can never be *totally* lacking, it can only be *partially* lacking – and even then, only in a very *small* part. Mind you, this is not altogether a new idea; Flatface's follower Boethius says pretty much the same thing, arguing that a *complete* lack of goodness can't even *exist*. But "Abraham" seem to have a much more *recent* take on the same thing.

BERKELEY: This is *most* intriguing. *Finally* someone – or *somemany*, if I may so put it – who take my "idealist" philosophy seriously, and consider all the *implications* of it! And in *modern* times, at that! Well, what else do they say?

SOCRATES: They say that each of us is essentially *creating* our own experiences by focussing our thoughts. This seems to be going even farther than you, Berkeley, in that they do not merely say that all so-called "things" are perceptions, but also that these "things" cannot even *be* our perceptions until we *create* them ... or as they sometimes say, "invite" them into our experience. It is *our* thoughts that eventually become our experiences, according to them. When one focusses upon a thought, it gathers momentum, and by what Abraham call "The Law of Attraction", which according to them is extraordinarily powerful, these thoughts attract other thoughts, and all these thoughts eventually become a "swirling Vortex of Creation", as they put it. I suppose they are speaking metaphorically, and not literally, because any *literal* vortex I know of is of a *material* nature, and they are referring to a *mental* vortex; a vortex of *thoughts*. Or, as they call it, a vortex of *vibrations*. I think they must be talking metaphorically because I see no way how a *literal* vortex or vibration can exist in anything that's not material in nature. But maybe I'm wrong; maybe I – being a blithering idiot – am not able to reason all this out properly; but you, Berkeley, have convinced me that even *matter* is not really material, so *everything* is actually mental: even a vortex like a tornado or a whirlpool, and even a vibration like that of a tuning fork or a harp string; so maybe they *are* speaking literally rather than metaphorically. Whatever. The point is that "Abraham" claim that *vibrations of like nature attract each other*. The "Law of Attraction", according to them, states "That which is like unto itself, is drawn". And since they say that everything is thought, or vibration, this must mean that similar *thoughts* – or similar *vibrations* – are drawn to each other. So whenever one is thinking thoughts that have a certain vibration, by this "Law of Attraction", other thoughts that have similar vibrations immediately get attracted to them, and then the group of thoughts thus gathered attracts even more such thoughts, until finally a very powerful

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“vortex of creation” develops. Eventually, these thoughts become manifested *things* – which, of course, as you yourself demonstrate, Berkeley, are only perceptions, or in other words, ideas, because matter *as such* doesn’t exist; or more accurately, *if* anything like “matter” *does* exist, we don’t *know* its nature, or even *if* it exists at all. In any case, according to both you and “Abraham”, *everything* is a thought anyway, even *after* so-called “manifestation”. So I guess the “Law of Attraction” refers only to *thoughts*. Or maybe to “vibrations”, but what this word *means* when “Abraham” use it, I am not exactly sure.

DESCARTES: But then are they claiming that we *created* our entire *Universe*? That it is *we* who have created all that was, is and will be, everywhere, even light-years away in space, and millennia away in time? Doesn’t that sound *extremely* far-fetched?

SOCRATES: Well, yes; but they *clarify*, saying that what they mean by saying so is that “we” are not the limited physical beings we *believe* we are, but that within each of us there is a larger, more powerful part of us also – what Abraham call our “Inner Beings”. They claim that our own belief of who or what we are is not the *totality* of who we *really* are. In *reality* “we” are what Abraham call “extensions of Source Energy”, which as I said is one of the ways they refer to what most people call “God”. Essentially Abraham are saying that we *are* what most people would call “God”, although Abraham themselves don’t like to use this word very much because, they explain, it means so many different things to different people.

BERKELEY: Yes, we discussed this earlier, remember? It’s an idea *entirely* supported by scripture: both by the words of Christ Himself, and by Psalm 82 from the Old Testament.

DESCARTES: But just because a statement is supported by scripture doesn’t necessarily make it *true*, does it now.

SOCRATES: Quite. But Abraham say that each of us can *prove to ourselves* that what they say is true, by simply getting in tune with our own “Inner Being”. They say that if we follow what they call our “Guidance System”, we can *get in tune* with this “God Force” within ourselves. And by “Guidance System” they mean, our *emotions*. They explain that every time we experience *any* negative emotion, it’s an indication that we are *not* in tune with our own Inner Being; and the *worse* we feel, the *greater* the separation between us and our Inner Being. So the way to get in tune with our Inner Being is to *continually reach for a better-feeling thought*. If we focus our attention upon a thought that feels *better* than the thoughts we are thinking at any given moment, we will attract more and more thoughts that *match* that initial better-feeling thought, and eventually our minds will be filled with good-feeling thoughts ... and then we will be “tuned in, tapped in, turned on”, as Abraham express it, and feel the delight that our Inner Being is continually feeling. I highly recommend their book *The Vortex*. You can purchase it from their website; google “The Vortex” and “Abraham” and you should be able to find it quite easily. It’s available from *Amazon*, *Chapters-Indigo*, and even *Audible* (yes, there’s an audio version). And yes, Berkeley, I shall show you later how to get good with the google. You’re going to like it!

DESCARTES: But these ideas don’t seem resonate in my mind. For example, how can *we* have created the most distant galaxies ... or even, for that matter, our own galaxy? And just with our *thoughts*? I have to say that these ideas sound altogether *too* far-fetched, at least to *me*.

SOCRATES: Yes they do, at first blush. But have you ever considered the possibility that there are more things in heaven and Earth, Descartes, than are dreamt of in your philosophy? Surely it must have occurred to you that you can’t possibly have thought of *everything*. (Or if it hasn’t, it’s about time it did!) That’s one more reason why I keep an open mind. There are also lots of *YouTube* videos and audio recordings with “Abraham” doing the talking. I’ve listened to a few, though by no means to all. What occurred to me most while

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reading their book and listening to them talk was that maybe we ourselves *create* our own experiences, by focussing our thoughts. And that our thoughts attract other, similar thoughts. If that's the case, then maybe our beliefs *reinforce* themselves! Let me give you an example. Let's say we believe something – say, the theory of humours, very popular when I was alive. You know, the idea that an excess or deficiency of any of four distinct bodily fluids in a person – known as “humours” – directly influences that person's mental temperament and physical health. Hippocrates used to think that way, and subsequently, this theory was adopted by physicians of old all over Greece and the Middle East, and was also the most commonly-held view of the human body among European physicians until the nineteenth century. The people who believed in this theory were *very* smart, as I'm sure you will agree: one can hardly claim that people have got *all* that much smarter now than in ancient times, right? I myself can vouch for the fact that many of them *were* very smart; indeed I've personally met some, Flatface and his student Aristotle being just two examples. Of course lots of them were also *not* that smart, as I also had occasion to point out during my questioning of them in the streets of Athens. But that's beside the point: which is, that the theory of humours was indeed widely believed in my time; and yet it's hardly at all believed in nowadays. But assume for a moment that “Abraham” are right, and any ideas that are believed in and focussed upon strongly, *attract* other ideas that are similar to them. Then in all the centuries from Hippocrates' time – basically my own days on Earth – till the 1800s, one might conclude that all these very smart people who believed in the “humours” theory believed in it for *good* reasons: for their belief in this theory would – by this “Law of Attraction” that Abraham are referring to – have attracted plenty of *evidence* supporting it, and therefore they would have believed in the theory for very *legitimate* reasons! Or in other words, it may not be as stupid to believe in this theory as it is made out to be by the modern medical community. I just mention this “theory of humours” as a *small example*, to illustrate my *main* point that if “Abraham” are right about this “Law of Attraction” they keep talking about, then maybe *everything* we believe in is due to the fact that we have focussed upon certain ideas which we *accept* and *believe in* ... and our having done this, *those ideas we believe in* have attracted more and more evidence that *support* those very beliefs. I mean, philosophy is all about *beliefs*, isn't it? As Aristotle pointed out, *everyone* is a philosopher: for even if someone believes that philosophy is total crap, well, that's *their* philosophy! There can't be *any* philosophy that *doesn't* have *some* belief at its core. Even *mine*, which is, basically, that I know next to nothing, does have, at its core, the belief that the truth *can* be attained via a series of keenly probing questions and answers. This core belief is not enunciated *outright*, I know, but it's certainly *implied*. And in *all* philosophy up till now, it seems to be implied quite *heavily* that whatever is observed by us can't be changed – at least not by *us*. I mean, even you, Berkeley, believe that those *perceptions* which you call rocks and seas and mountains can't be changed by *you*, right? That's *why* you invoke God, isn't it? But what if Abraham are *right*, and it is *we* who create *everything* we observe? What if the *evidence* and the *observations* we use to base our philosophy upon are actually *created* by us instead of *discovered* by us? What if the very *observations* on which our philosophy is *based* are *created* by us: what *then*? I mean, if the very *starting points* we use in even *formulating* our philosophy are actually *created* by us, *where* does that leave us as philosophers? I mean, doesn't this come deucedly close to overthrowing pretty much *all* philosophy? Well, pretty much all philosophy except Abraham's.

DESCARTES: *Blah, blah, blah.* My own life experience doesn't support anything like this philosophy!

SOCRATES: But my dear fellow, don't you see that this philosophy of Abraham's *accounts* for that? Assume for a moment that they *are* right. That's how we prove *anything* via a REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM, right? We first of all *assume* it as correct, and then see the *implications* of doing so. So: let's assume that “Abraham” are *right* about this “Law of Attraction” stuff. Then the very “Law of Attraction” explains why you *don't* believe in the “Law of Attraction”!

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If the “Law of Attraction” is correct, then your very *disbelief* in it *attracts* all the evidence you need to bolster your *disbelief* in it! Do you get what I am saying? If you assume the truth of the “Law of Attraction” for the sake of demonstrating that it’s *not* true, you end up by actually finding a very good explanation for why it may *be* true. Instead, that is, of reaching a REDUCTIO AD ABSURDUM, you end up with a REDUCTIO AD PERSUASIO, or a REDUCTIO AD CONFIDENTIA! In other words, you actually get more and more persuaded, or confident, that it’s *true* rather than that it’s *false*. If “Abraham” are *right*, and the “Law of Attraction” is *true*, then your life experience should be whatever you have attracted by your own thoughts. And if one of your strongly-held thoughts – or beliefs: as “Abraham” say, “A belief is just a thought you keep thinking” – if one of the thoughts you keep thinking is that your life experience *doesn’t* support a belief in the “Law of Attraction”, then your very *disbelief* in the “Law of Attraction” will attract all kinds of thoughts which support you in your *disbelief* of it! As a result of this argument, any *deep*-thinking person (as you definitely *are*) should be convinced that the “Law of Attraction” is *true*! In other words, your very *disbelief* in it should convince you – deep thinker and “man of reason” that you are – that you *should* believe in it; and the *stronger* your disbelief in it, due to the overwhelming amount of evidence you have *against* it, the stronger – at least if you are going to be *rational* – should your *belief* in it be! ... Am I making myself clear? Maybe not.

BERKELEY: There *is* a bit of confusion in what you say, Socrates, but I think I get it. If this “Law of Attraction” is true – and let’s just *assume* for the nonce that it is, at least as a working hypothesis, in order to discover its *implications* – then it should, over time, *amplify* any beliefs one has, by *attracting* other beliefs like itself, which would then become evidence to support it! So if we *doubt* the Law of Attraction, it would attract all the evidence we need to *support our very doubts* about it: till eventually our doubts would be great enough to form a firm belief in our minds that it’s *not* true. Isn’t that what you’re trying to say?

SOCRATES: Yes. Well expressed, Berkeley. But the point I was trying to make is ... what I mean is, don’t you see how this complicates philosophy *enormously*? For if the Law of Attraction *is* true, then *everyone’s* philosophy would be *amply* supported by evidence, which would have been attracted into that person’s thoughts by that very Law of Attraction!

BERKELEY: But note that although there would be plenty of *evidence* attracted to support any belief, there would not necessarily be an *iron-clad proof* for that belief. By which I mean, there would not necessarily be a proof that proves any such belief *indubitably* true. Such as your COGITO, Descartes.

DESCARTES: Hmm. Yes, on second thoughts, I see how that might be the case. My initial approach was, that I would not believe anything that I could not prove to be *indubitably* true. As a result, the *only* thing I can actually believe as part of my philosophy is my COGITO. You have shown me that my belief in God, or in a material world “behind” my perceptions, is open to much the same doubts as the philosophies I initially doubted before I came up with my COGITO. But then, is not this “Law of Attraction” *also* open to the same doubts?

SOCRATES: But Descartes – and Berkeley, you too – don’t seem to acknowledge that just because something is *dubitable* doesn’t render it *false*! Remember that doubt cuts *both* ways – we talked about that. If something is dubitable, it means that its *negation* is dubitable also. Specifically, in the context of what I was saying a bit earlier, there doesn’t seem to be anything to prove that the Law of Attraction *isn’t* true. So there’s no reason to *reject* it. “Accept what is acceptable, but don’t reject what is not acceptable”, as Dinshah said.

DESCARTES: Hmm. This *is* a valuable insight. My *First Meditation* doesn’t prove that those things which can be doubted are actually *false*, but only that they are not *necessarily* true. They *could*

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be true, it's just that they are not *necessarily* so. But Berkeley, doesn't that apply to your "immaterialism" also?

BERKELEY: Yes, I do admit that – but then, I never denied it. Again I must remind you that I did admit that matter, or material substance, *may* exist. All I said is that we have no way of *knowing* that it does. And our discussions today have convinced me that I should have added, that there *may* be a way of knowing it in the *future*, but at *present* I see no way of knowing it.

SOCRATES: Yes. But to get back to what I was saying, *if* the Law of Attraction is true – and there's no actual *proof* that it isn't – then doesn't it stand to reason that pretty much *all* philosophies that are not indubitable are, essentially, *worthless*, irregardless of whether they are or aren't supported by evidence? I mean, if the Law of Attraction *is* in fact true, wouldn't it make it possible for virtually *all* philosophies to have mountains of supporting evidence *even* if they are *provably false*?

BERKELEY: "*Irregardless*"? Really, Socrates?

SOCRATES: (*Defensively*) Well, what's wrong with "irregardless"?

DESCARTES: Is that even a word?

SOCRATES: Of *course* it is! I just used it, didn't I? Used it in speech? If I use something in speech, doesn't that make it a word? Especially if my *meaning* is quite clear? Isn't that what you yourself have argued in the past, Berkeley, with your diatribe against "abstract words"?

BERKELEY: Good *heavens*, Socrates! You're quite the iconoclast. So according to you there's no such thing as good grammar?

SOCRATES: There *is* such a thing, but who's to say whether the use of "irregardless" is *bad* grammar?

BERKELEY: Well, *I* don't like it.

SOCRATES: Then don't use it yourself! But what's the problem with *others* using it?

BERKELEY: It's inelegant.

DESCARTES: Yes, that's what I feel, too.

SOCRATES: Yes, but so is "Fuck off", isn't it? But there's a time and place to say "Fuck off", isn't there?

BERKELEY: *Is* there? As a clergyman – or rather as a *late* clergyman – I'd say ...

DESCARTES: Ah, here, *mon ami*, I agree with Socrates. There's a time and place to say *merde* also, as we in France are pretty much all agreed. And *putain*, or *fils d'un putain*. *Touché*, Socrates. But why are we talking about inconsequential things like inelegant speech?

SOCRATES: You know, Descartes, I don't think such things *are* inconsequential. Not only does it seem that the Law of Attraction, if true, could throw all philosophy up in the air, but also ... let me put it this way: just *why* are we philosophers at all? *Why* do we love wisdom? What is the *point* of it all? I personally think we do it – and here I agree with Aristotle – because we think we would be the *happier* for it ... or, as Flatface might put it, the *better off* for it. Isn't that so? Would either of you disagree?

BERKELEY: I would say, because we would be the closer to God for it.

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SOCRATES: Then I would have to ask, why would you want to be *closer to God*, if not because you thought you'd be the better off for *that*?

DESCARTES: I think I get what Socrates is trying to say. I used to think that being "a man of reason" was an end in itself, but I was clearly wrong; reason is only valuable because it gets us to the truth. Getting to the truth was *why* I started writing my *Meditations* and my *Method*. But *now* I am convinced – as Socrates is – that even getting to the truth is not the *deepest* reason why I do philosophy: I do it because I am *happy* doing it. As I pointed out earlier, the time when I started writing my *Meditations* was a most *euphoric* time for me. It appears that I am of such a temperament that seeking the truth *gives me joy*, and *that's* why I do it. Perhaps – indeed most probably – it's different for different people; what makes someone *else* happy, or makes them feel good, or gives them joy, might be something entirely different. You, Socrates, said that the philosopher Pratchett values *fun* above the truth, and I can see how someone could be of *that* temperament. But the only reason *anyone* does philosophy – or, indeed, the only reason anyone does *anything at all* – is to reach that *something* which they value most. Some people value *love* the most, others *happiness*, others *goodness*, and yet others *fun*, but whatever it is, each of us aims at *that which we value most*, when we do anything at all. Sometimes it is hard to separate one thing from another – for instance, we may *think* we value *love* the most, when in fact our experience of love gives us an experience of *joy* or *satisfaction* or *comfort* which comes so hard on the heels of love that we confuse love with that joy or satisfaction or comfort; but whatever it is, we value most that which each of us *considers* to be the aim or goal or purpose of our existence. For some people that goal or purpose may be power, for others it may be harmony with all-that-is, and for yet others – such as artists – it may be beauty or aesthetics; but in a *loose* way we may call it the goodness or happiness or joy which is a *result* of anything we do. *We* three value philosophy, while lots of other people don't; but that's because *we* happen to obtain a great deal of delight, happiness and even euphoria when we are engaged in it, while for many others, philosophy is dull and boring. Even you, Berkeley, value being close to God only because, as Socrates rightly says, you think you'd be the *better off* for it. And we all have *other* things that make us feel good also: indeed, all these cold cuts and cheeses and wine we have consumed – and the delightful springtime atmosphere of this open-air bistro in these *Champs Elysées* – *also* serve to enhance the experience of our "trivial" conversation, don't they?

SOCRATES: My point exactly. That's why I was saying, that even such discussions as to whether one should or should not use the word "irregardless" are *not* inconsequential!

BERKELEY: Ah. I see. What you two are saying is, that *anything* that makes our existence better is valuable, and therefore *should* be part of our philosophy. Is that it?

DESCARTES: Yes, indeed. But even more than that ...

SOCRATES: (*Interrupting*) It's *much* more than that: it's the *ultimate* philosophy! *All* other philosophies – ontology, epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, logic, metaphysics, even teleology – are subservient to it. The question we need to ask is, "What's the *point* of it all?" The point of it all is to *feel* good, to have the *experience* of goodness. Isn't it? Even teleology, or the study of the *purpose* of existence, doesn't take us to an *experience* of that purpose; it only takes us to a *discussion* of it. What counts is what we *feel*, what we *experience*: what we *actually* feel or experience, and not what we *discuss*! But there's *even* more. What struck me most in this regard was thinking about the *implications* of the "Law of Attraction". If this Law *is* true – that is to say, if similar thoughts and emotions *do* attract each other – then surely goodness should attract more goodness, and happiness should attract more happiness ... eh? But if so, then being happy, or feeling good, is not merely an *end* in itself, it is also the *means* to even *greater* happiness, even *greater* goodness!

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Doesn't that mean the "the point of it all" is *to feel good*? Doesn't it mean that *nothing is more important*? Absolutely *nothing*? In other words, that it's the *ultimate philosophy*?

DESCARTES: It seems to me that you are advocating what you have described as the "tantric heaven", eh, Socrates? Where you have orgasms non-stop? (*Smiles.*)

SOCRATES: Well, now that you mention it ... yes, I suppose I am. Of course that applies only if one actually *enjoys* orgasms. I am given to understand that there *are* people who don't. There aren't too many of them, but they do exist. Masters and Johnson, two sex therapists from California, coined a term for them in the '90s: "antisexuals". (By the way, these sex *therapists* aren't the sex *researchers* of the '60s *also* called Masters and Johnson, but a quite different couple.) Antisexuals are actually turned *off* by sex, in any of its forms, and are turned *on* by *denouncing* sex. But yes, I do think that anything that gets one turned on is good; and if orgasms turn you on, then I'd say, by all means go for them! I myself see absolutely *no reason* why you shouldn't. You moderns seem to have a *lot* of hangups about sex. We Greeks weren't like you. Diogenes even used to wank off in public, and he didn't give a rat's arse who saw him do so. Admittedly many Greeks did think Diogenes went too far, and indeed Flatface once described him as "Socrates gone mad". But personally I thought highly of Diogenes – and he thought highly of me too, and shared my love of virtue and indifference to wealth. As for our Greek approach to nudity, well, you all know about the Olympics; the *original* Olympics. As also our gymnasias, where we all went to school. In the nude. The "modern" world still has a long way to go to catch up with what we *were*, two thousand and more years ago! Even among the most so-called "broad-minded" people of the modern world – even among *philosophers*, for God's sake! – there's *so* much body-shame today, *so* much antisexuality: at least in some measure. We Greeks were not just *unashamed* to be seen naked, we were *proud* of it, especially our athletes and young people! As our best sculptors have more than amply illustrated. And our older people weren't too far behind either in this respect. I have to admit that Rodin outdid even *our* sculptors with his nude statues of Victor Hugo and Balzac, and his "*Celle qui fût la belle Heaulmière*", but he's an exception. These days, in my view at least, the only people who are *actually* respectable – by which I mean, worth *respecting*, at least as regards being proud of how they look and act naked – are producers of what most people call pornography! Certainly *amateur* porn stars are *most* admirable: those who are doing it just for the *fun* of it, not for money. And I think Rodin would agree too.

DESCARTES: As a Frenchman I can only applaud you here, Socrates. I have never understood the anglophone reluctance to consider sex as one of the great pleasures of existence. As, indeed, I have never understood the anglophone reluctance to consider good *food* as one of the great pleasures of existence! I do have to admit that English roast beef, served with all the trimmings, Yorkshire pudding and horseradish, is absolutely *superb*, but that's just *one* dish. Where's the anglophone equivalent of even a good charcuterie board? Let alone a *canard à la presse*. Or even an *oeuf au plat* according to Fernand Point's recipe: a fresh egg poached *slowly* in *ample* butter, and eaten with a baguette and *fleur-de-sel*.

BERKELEY: Well, speaking for myself, a good pint of stout accompanied by crispy fish-and-chips freshly fried in lard or beef drippings, with mushy peas on the side, is all I need.

DESCARTES: *My point exactly!!!*

SOCRATES: Ah, yes. As food goes, although we Greeks were not quite as *refined* as you Frenchmen, Descartes, I think we could outdo almost everyone in *abundance*: a good *hecatombe* – especially in the days of Homer – might have been something to behold! One *hundred* oxen roasted on the spit – enough to feed all of Sparta, with plenty left over for the rest of the week. More roast beef than would be needed to satisfy a whole English village!

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- BERKELEY: Hmm. Let's see: a big ox is about two thousand pounds in weight, of which maybe half is skin, bones and organs; so that leaves about a thousand pounds of meat and fat per ox. Assuming, generously, one to two pounds of meat per person (depending on the person), plus some organ-meat, a single ox could feed *well* over 500 people, and a hundred oxen could feed well over 50,000! Maybe even *twice* that many. Egads: that's not just a *village*, that's a *town*! Even Oxford has only 150,000 inhabitants. And in Homer's time the "oxen" which were roasted on the spit could even have been aurochs – ancestors of our domesticated cattle, now extinct – which might have been even larger than today's oxen.
- SOCRATES: Yes indeed; I myself remember seeing some of them when I was alive: they were *big*! But I was talking about sex and food and all the other good things in life *to drive home a point*: and my point was, that basically, isn't philosophy, in the ultimate analysis, *all about making our existence better*? Otherwise why indulge in it? So then: is not the *ultimate* philosophy, one which makes our existence better ... and better, and better, *ad infinitum*?
- DESCARTES: Well, when you put it like that ... I certainly can't see any counter-argument to this thesis.
- BERKELEY: Neither can I. At least, not *yet*!
- SOCRATES: And neither can I. And it puts me in mind of something I've been ruminating upon for a while now, without being able to pin it down in precise thoughts or words ... as *yet*. What I mean is ... well, now I am going to try and pin it down as best I can: what if there's something like a philosophy of *philosophy*? I mean, there's a philosophy of *science*, and a philosophy of *mathematics*, and a philosophy of *ethics*, and a philosophy of *politics*, and so on; so shouldn't there be, in like manner, a philosophy of *philosophy*? And by the term "philosophy of philosophy" I don't mean *how* philosophy is conducted, or what *is* philosophy, or what *should* be the point of philosophy: in other words, I don't mean what is called in technical jargon "metaphilosophy" – because *that* has already been discussed, and at length, by plenty of others – but rather ... um, what I mean is, do we ever wonder what the thinking *underlying* or *behind* philosophy is? And by that I mean, behind *every* philosophy. Much of the thinking *underlying* philosophy is unspoken and implied, but it's clearly *there*. There are *many* philosophies; but I think you'll agree with me that behind them *all* is an unspoken or implied desire – or a will, or a wish, or a hope, or something *like* that – to feel *better*. Even Nietzsche's philosophy of the Superman – to quote his own words, "Man is a thing to be transcended" – seems to be enunciated with the unexpressed idea *underlying* it, that when man is transcended, it will be somehow *better*. This idea isn't *expressed*, but isn't it at least *implied*? Isn't it implied by Gandhi's philosophy that "Truth is God"? Or by the Christian concept of heaven? Or by the Buddhist concept of "Nirvana"? Or the idea, which I understand is prevalent in China and Japan and other parts of the Far East, that the supreme good is *Harmony*? Isn't the underlying idea behind Marx's Communism, that it will be *better* if it is attained? Indeed, isn't it also the underlying idea behind its arch-rival, Capitalism? Has there been *any* philosophy which doesn't at least implicitly aim at making existence *better*, at least for a single individual? And when I say "better", I mean "better" in a very *broad* way; in *whatever* way the person expressing that philosophy imagines *is* better. Is there *any* philosophy, no matter *how* silly, which aims at making it *worse* for everyone, *including* the one expounding the philosophy in question? Even The Joker's philosophy – I mean Batman's "Joker" – crazy as it is, seems clearly based on the underlying belief on the part of The Joker that he will somehow be *better off* for being crazy, and by acting as crazily as he does. Isn't that at least *implied*?
- DESCARTES: (*Thinking*) What you say, Socrates, certainly does sound very *plausible*, at the very least.
- BERKELEY: (*Also thinking for a while*) Yes, I think so too. *Provisionally* at least, I think I'd have to agree. I have *no* idea, however, who this "Joker" is you're talking about.

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SOCRATES: (*Smiles.*) No, of course you don't, of *course* you don't. But – if I may be so bold as to so put it – a philosophy *behind* philosophy ought to be acceptable to *every* philosopher ... wouldn't you say so? It doesn't matter *what* one's philosophy is; *underlying* it must be *some* ideas – at least *tacitly* held or implied; and among those ideas *must* be the idea that the entire *point* of philosophy is to somehow get to – *experience* – something *better* ... using the word “better” in the *broadest* sense possible, as I said earlier. I am just throwing this idea out for your consideration – not saying I know for certain that this is so. But even if what I am saying *isn't* true, it still would be valuable, don't you think, to *find out* what the philosophy of philosophy actually *is*? What is it that *underlies* every philosophy; what is at the *basis* of every philosophy. Surely there must be something – some deeper philosophy – underlying *all* of what is considered philosophy: behind *every* philosophy. And if there is, wouldn't it be extremely valuable *to find it out*? Even supposing that *all* we have discussed during this “trivial” discussion of ours turns out to be unfounded, doesn't it still seem that at least *inquiring* about the basis of it all is the most worthwhile intellectual endeavour of all? Would it not take philosophy beyond where it has hitherto gone? Would it not be – in other words – the very *best* thing we could do as philosophers?

*(A deep and fairly long silence follows. Then:)*

DESCARTES: The way you have expressed it ... *I* certainly can't find any fault with what you have said. Yes; at least *provisionally* I too, like Berkeley, think that I'd have to agree.

BERKELEY: Yes, I concur. Thank you, Socrates, for suggesting this line of inquiry. Upon reflection I do think that you are on to something. This may indeed be an advance in philosophy that has not been attempted before. (*Rising*) Well, it's almost sunset, and we've been talking for *hours*. I must say that it's been a *most* fruitful discussion. I can't say I've come to any *definite* conclusions about anything during the discussion, but it's given me *much* to think about, especially as to how I might actually *act* as if my “idealist” philosophy is true. As also what might be the *limits* of my “idealist” philosophy.

DESCARTES: Yes, it has given *me* much to think about regarding my COGITO as well, and how I may expand upon it and develop a much more *ample* philosophy based on it. After all, it was my deepest insight, and yet I never *used* it in the *rest* of my philosophy! As I said before, MEA CULPA, MEA CULPA. Yes, I shall say those twenty PATER NOSTERS, Berkeley, and come back to see you – and hopefully Socrates too – after a week. Indeed, why not make it less than a week? Unless you two have anything pressing to attend to in the meanwhile.

SOCRATES: Yes, let's do that. I need to check my calendar to see what days are free, so let's keep in touch via *FaceTime* or text, and play it by ear. How about we meet next time in Tuscany? I know a lovely restaurant overlooking the Chianti countryside near San Gimignano ... Oh yes: I forgot, Berkeley, that you're not online. I shall come by your place later with my *MacBook* and show you how to surf the 'net and *Netflix* and texting and sexting and everything, including porn sites: *Abby Winters* and *Girls Out West* are *really* good. People do say that that half the internet is porn; and *I* say to that, “Three cheers for the internet!” We'll go online by tethering my *iPhone*; you can get internet service for yourself later. Trust me, you're in for a treat! (*Berkeley for his part doesn't seem too thrilled, especially after Socrates mentions porn.*)

DESCARTES: Yes, meeting in Tuscany is a *splendid* idea. And the following day we can visit Florence.

BERKELEY: Oh, that *would* be nice! I'd *love* to visit it again; *that* would certainly be a treat for me.

SOCRATES: Yes of *course*; lots of nudes there too. Good choice; *good* choice. (*Rising*) Well, *au revoir!*

A TRIVIAL DISCUSSION BETWEEN SOCRATES, BERKELEY AND DESCARTES  
REGARDING THE NATURE OF REALITY

- DESCARTES: *(Also rising) Au revoir, Socrates. And Berkeley, slán agus beannacht leat!*
- BERKELEY: You speak Gaelic?
- DESCARTES: Well, we Frenchmen were Gauls at one time, weren't we? Basically cousins of you Irish! *(Smiles).*
- BERKELEY: Ah, yes. However, I must inform you that my ancestors were English; as a matter of fact, English aristocrats.
- DESCARTES: Oh dear. Well then, I'd better translate my Gaelic words, and say "Goodbye, and may God bless you"! *(Smiles).*
- BERKELEY: Oh, I know the meaning of the phrase; I was just surprised to hear it coming from you.
- SOCRATES: *(Looking around)* Oh my gods and goddesses! Look who's there! *Flatface!* Sitting there all by himself in the corner! And, if I'm not mistaken, writing down every word we've been saying, just as he used to do when we both were alive! *(Raising his voice)* Flatface!!! What in the name of Olympus are you up to now? Come here, young fellow, and let me introduce you. *(Plato rises from his seat and comes towards the three.)* Flatface, this is Gul Descartes: you surely must have heard of him – he's a Cardassian ... er, Cartesian. And this is my good friend Berkeley, from Ireland; he's an idealist, much like you. Well, *not* much like you, but in a different way. Well, ... oh, never mind, I suppose you already grasped what his philosophy is while you were writing it all down as we were speaking ...
- PLATO: Pleased to met you both. Yes, I *have* indeed been writing down your "trivial" discussion; I have developed a special shorthand for the purpose. And, of course, I intend to have it published. In fact, I have a posthumous deal with this publishing house on Earth ...
- SOCRATES: *Posthumous deal? On Earth?*
- PLATO: Yes; I hope to carry on the good work I had started in Athens, for the benefit of humanity. After all, what does it matter that I'm dead if I'm not *really* dead: if I'm only *ersatz* dead? Well, since these words I'm saying will now also have to be part of the discussion, I had better write them down before I forget them ... *(writes them down.)*
- SOCRATES: You should have used the recording function of your *iPhone*, Flatface! You could then have transcribed the words later, at your leisure. *And* you'd have been sure of not having missed anything.
- PLATO: *Fuck!* Why didn't I think of *that*?