

Cartesian Doubt Renewed

by Fiona Steinkamp

Can an indubitable foundation for philosophy be found and, if so, what would it be?¹ These are to be my guiding questions. But before I can answer them, I must decide on a method. Descartes, who had the same aim, approached the matter by trying to determine whether there was anything which he could not doubt.² But what does it mean to say that there is something which one cannot doubt? The following remarks will serve as a preliminary guide; a more detailed description of the indubitability sought will follow later. Firstly, then, something cannot be doubted because I myself cannot do so (even if someone else can). Secondly, something cannot be doubted, because it is logically impossible for it ever to be doubted. If something is to be entirely indubitable, then it must be something which cannot be doubted either by me or in any logically conceivable situation at all. And, like Descartes, I too want a foundation which is *entirely* indubitable. However, since I know what I generally do not doubt, but do not know whether it is logically impossible to doubt my beliefs which to me seem so certain, I will have

¹ Perhaps it would be prudent to clarify more precisely the aim of these questions. I am interested in whether an *indubitable* foundation for philosophy can be found. If this paper ends with a conclusion which cannot be doubted—in the strongest sense possible of indubitability—I will consider my search to have been successful. I am not positively asserting anything about that which *can* be doubted, for that which *can* be doubted is not my field of concern. My concern is with the *indubitable*. Of course, I do not expect these comments to quell the discomfort of those who radically disagree with any Cartesian-style skepticism. Rather, my point is that the issue of what can be doubted is the subject of a different inquiry from the one in which I am engaged here. Although the two inquiries are intimately connected, I believe my paper can stand or fall on the basis of what it does or does not *achieve*. This latter is my chief aim and interest. The test of the pudding lies in the eating, i.e., the true test lies in the indubitability of any result I achieve.

² See René Descartes, "Meditations" in *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, trans. F. E. Sutcliffe (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1983), Meditations 1 and 2.

to test my beliefs to see whether or not it is logically impossible to doubt them. Like Descartes, if there is "the slightest ground for doubt," I will have to dismiss that belief, for it will not be something which is *entirely* "certain and indubitable."

But is this the best way in which to proceed? Isn't systematic doubt a rather laborious process? Surely I can just withhold judgment? I do not need to *test* my beliefs; I must simply not let them interfere in my inquiry. In fact, Descartes begins precisely by claiming that he must simply "avoid believing things which are not entirely certain."³ Nevertheless, he soon reforms his method to one which Husserl terms "universal negation." Instead of merely "avoiding" certain beliefs, Descartes decides to pretend that anything that can be doubted does not even exist.⁴ He claims, moreover, that this process of universal negation is a "more prudent" course to take. He fears that if he merely *avoids* "believing things which are not entirely certain," he will not sufficiently doubt their existence and will thereby be tempted to return to his customary belief in them.⁵ Is Descartes' fear justified? Will withholding judgment really cause me to accept as certain those things which in truth are not? Which method is best for obtaining an indubitable foundation?

It will be helpful to consider Husserl's method of *epoché*—of bracketing out the world judged as existent—as a paradigm case of withholding judgment. If I find that Husserl's method fails to provide an indubitable foundation, Descartes' fears will be justified.⁶ What, then, is Husserl's method? Husserl obtains the sphere of pure phenomena by bracketing out any positing of the world as existent; he thereby remains with the stream of subjective processes. In parenthesesizing the existence of the world, he does not *doubt* it as such; it just plays no part in his investigation. He claims for instance that, although we may doubt the actual existence of a table, a table-experience is something that is undeniably self-evident. He consequently withholds any judgment about whether or not the table really exists,⁷ for even if it is merely an hallucination, our experience of it essentially remains the same. He then uncovers the structure underlying experience to find a sphere that is apodictic. Even if any particular experience is contingent, its underlying structure will always stay unchanged. Nevertheless, is this realm

of pure phenomena an *indubitable* sphere? I shall proceed by examining the approach in Husserl's *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phemonenological Philosophy. First Book*.⁸ This exposition will be particularly important for future investigations. A further analysis of Husserl's method will then reveal that the stream of subjective processes is not, in fact, entirely beyond doubt.

In the *Ideas*, then, the method of phenomenological *epoché* is established by an analysis of the attempt to doubt something's existence.⁹ Husserl claims that before we attempt to doubt something, we originally accept the object as something that really does exist. If, however, we are to doubt this object, we cannot remain so certain about its existence. Consequently, before we can even *attempt* to doubt it, we must first refrain from positing it as something that is certainly there. It is this restraint in positing which Husserl takes as the basis of his inquiry. The object remains as pure phenomenon. But if we merely refrain from positing something as certainly existing, does it really follow that it is consequently quite beyond doubt? Husserl argues that when we refrain from positing the object as something that exists, we are not yet *doubting* it, because this restraint is *prior* to our act of doubt.¹⁰ Consequently, the resultant object-phenomenon is established primarily as something which we do not doubt, rather than as something which is necessarily intrinsically indubitable. We refrain from positing it as existent and we do not yet enact doubt. Husserl thus merely shows how the phenomenal sphere is that which we do not doubt. Since I have decided that what I seek must not only be that which I do not doubt, but also that which it is logically impossible to doubt, it remains to be seen whether Husserl can establish the realm of pure experience as something which is in itself beyond doubt, as something which is intrinsically indubitable. In the following arguments I will contend that the sphere of phenomena is, in fact, questionable and that it is questionable precisely because of the way in which it is obtained. If I am successful in showing both that Husserl's method cannot guarantee that its results will be entirely indubitable and that the sphere of phenomena can itself be called into questions, then I will have to return to the method of universal negation.

I wish to argue, then, that Husserl's method—namely, that of suspending judgment about whether anything really does exist—will not provide us with a foundation which is entirely beyond doubt. Indeed, in merely withholding judgment about something's existence, Husserl cannot secure a basis which is quite certain, for what he thereby

³ *Ibid.*, 95.

⁴ See *Ibid.*, end of First Meditation, 100.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

⁶ It is, of course, a matter of contention whether Husserl thought that withholding judgment provided a foundation which was *entirely* indubitable. I am inclined to think that he did not. My aim here, however, is simply to show that withholding judgment does not leave us in a sphere which is entirely indubitable, even though one might be tempted to think that it does.

⁷ Cf. Edmund Husserl, *The Idea of Phenomenology*, trans. William P. Alston and George Nakhnikian (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), 35.

⁸ Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phemonenological Philosophy. First Book*, trans. F. Kersten (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983).

⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

brackets out is not what might or might not exist, or what can be doubted, but effectively the *question* of what exists and thereby the *question* of what can be doubted. In merely leaving aside the *question* of what can be doubted, he leaves open the possibility of what can be doubted entering into his inquiries. I will clarify this point by making an analogy with a situation in which I am considering applicants for a job. If, then, in selecting candidates for interview, I leave aside the question of whether or not they are married, I will end up considering both married and unmarried applicants. Similarly, in leaving the *question* of existence or non-existence to one side by suspending judgment, Husserl will allow what can be doubted to enter into the investigation (for the question of what can be doubted has not been entertained). If Husserl does not even consider the question of what can be doubted, he cannot in all certainty claim to procure an indubitable foundation.

Furthermore, it is not just that Husserl's method does not *guarantee* that the realm of immediate experience is indubitable, for the realm of pure phenomena is, in fact, itself questionable. It is questionable because if immediate experience is to be an *indubitable* sphere, it must not be dependent on the world's existence or non-existence in any way. If the phenomena were at all dependent on the world, they would be open to doubt because the existence of the world is itself questionable. And the world is itself questionable because even if the way in which I am *presupposes* that there is a world,¹¹ I still do not know whether this necessity for a world is a necessity derived purely from the way in which I am or whether the world necessarily exists of itself. And if I discover that the world must exist purely through an analysis of the way in which I am, then the world cannot be found to be *independent* of me at all and its *actual* existence remains in doubt. And I am seeking not merely that which it is impossible for me to doubt, but that which simply *cannot* be doubted. Husserl, however, does not even consider the question of whether or not the world exists or whether it has any relation to the phenomenal sphere. Consequently, he cannot be sure that the realm of pure experience is entirely independent of the world and that it is thus quite beyond any skeptical doubt. Hence, the realm of self-evident experience is itself questionable. The sphere of phenomena is, therefore, not entirely beyond doubt.

In analyzing Husserl's method, then, I have discovered that immediate experience is questionable on two accounts. Firstly, it is something which I myself do not doubt, but which might nevertheless be intrinsically dubitable, and secondly, it is something which is open to

¹¹ This idea that the way in which I am presupposes that there is a world already is the line of argument which Heidegger takes in *Being and Time* (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1987)). See especially §43a, 246-49.

doubt, since I do not know whether it really depends on an external world to be as it is and since I cannot know for certain that an external world exists, the content of the phenomenal sphere must remain open to doubt. I will not clarify better to what extent we can doubt immediate experience and why we are tempted to think of it as that which is indubitable. This clarification will lead me to make a distinction between weak and strict indubitability, which will in turn elucidate the goal of my quest.

Immediate experience, then, is that experience which I can doubt *retrospectively*; it is only in so far as it is precisely an *immediate* experience that I *do not*. Consequently I cannot doubt immediate experience only because my doubt of it would change it from being an *immediate* experience to being that upon which I reflect; the experience would as a result no longer be an *immediate* experience. Thus I cannot doubt the phenomenal sphere only in so far as I *do not* doubt it. I have, however, shown from the arguments above that, although I do not doubt it, the realm of pure experience might be questionable in itself and that this possibility is intrinsic to the phenomenal sphere, for I do not know upon what it may be founded. It is because I am not considering whether or not the experience is questionable that it is precisely immediate experience and it is because immediate experience is that experience which I do not question that it appears indubitable. This indubitability, however, is a weak one, for it is that which I cannot doubt only in so far as I do not doubt it. Although I do not doubt it, it is still possible that my immediate experience might be intrinsically questionable. A stricter indubitability, on the other hand, would require precisely the reverse—namely that I do not doubt something only because I *cannot*. This latter indubitability would require something that would in itself exclude any possibility of doubting it. I am maintaining, then, that weak indubitability is that which I cannot doubt because I do not doubt it and strict indubitability is that which I do not doubt because I *cannot*.

This distinction between weak and strict indubitability is important. I can, perhaps, best illustrate the difference between them by contrasting the weak statement of "he cannot be married because he is a bachelor" to the stronger statement of "he is a bachelor because he cannot be married." In the first, weak instance the bachelor cannot be married, because otherwise he would not be a *bachelor*. Likewise immediate experience cannot be doubted, for then it would not be an *immediate* experience. Moreover, the possibility is still left open for the bachelor subsequently to become married; similarly, it is possible for immediate experience subsequently to become doubtful. The sphere of pure experience is, therefore, the sphere of weak indubitability. It is consequently not *entirely* beyond question. In the second, stronger case, however, it is not possible for the bachelor to become married, for he is a bachelor in the first place only because he *cannot* be married (e.g., because he is first and foremost a monk). If, then, I am to find something which is entirely certain, it is the strict indubitability corresponding to

this latter case which I must seek—an indubitability which will not leave open the possibility of it ever being doubted.

These considerations, therefore, have given me a clearer understanding of what an indubitable foundation entails and the method by which it is to be obtained. Withholding judgment provides a basis which is indubitable only in the weak sense. Since I require a foundation which is *entirely* indubitable, I must discover if there is anything which it is logically impossible to doubt. I must, therefore, pursue the Cartesian method of universal negation. Moreover, it is necessary to stress that the method of universal negation is preferable precisely because it is pursued primarily as a *method*, independently of my own concerns and experiences. My aim is to discover not merely what I cannot doubt, but that which is necessarily indubitable. If I am to avoid slipping back into my own beliefs, the negation must be applied universally, irrespective of whether or not I really do doubt it. Thus, the method of universal negation sets out as a transcendental doubt, independent of my own beliefs and capacities. If I merely doubted only that which I am capable of doubting, or merely refrained from positing anything which I do not regard as absolutely certain, the resultant indubitability would be one which would apply only to me and this is not the aim of inquiry. Universal negation is a method of doubt which is quite independent of what I myself am able to doubt. To obtain a purely indubitable foundation I must apply a method independently of my own beliefs, for just because I myself do not really doubt the existence of the world, the world's existence may nevertheless still be something which can be doubted from another viewpoint. The method of transcendental universal negation—that is, a method which is pursued independently of my own beliefs—thus seems to be the most appropriate one for my purposes. I will consequently now embark on this renewed and more closely-defined method in the way in which Descartes at least thought to implement it in his Second Meditation; namely I will suppose that anything to which a doubt can be applied does not actually exist.¹² This is indeed the safest way in which to proceed.

I begin, then, like Descartes, to doubt anything that is given to me by my senses, for there have been times when, for example, a mirror caused me to think the room was larger than it really is or when thought I saw something and then realized that nothing was there. Like Descartes, I ask myself whether this paper is real or just part of a dream. I have been deceived in the past and could be mistaken now. Yet the method I am pursuing is that of universal negation; consequently, unlike Descartes, but nevertheless remaining with the spirit of his initial intention, I do not merely remain in doubt about whether these things exist, but instead deny their very existence *tout court*. Thus, this

¹² See *Meditations*, 102.

room in which I am sitting does not exist, I see no paper before my eyes and there is no ink with which I write. Nor, for that matter, is there a chair upon which I am sitting and my body does not exist at all. There is no body, no chair, no room. . . . But surely mathematical truths and the like are beyond doubt? Yet, like Descartes, I too deny the truths of mathematics—not because I believe there may be a malicious demon deceiving me, but because I do not know how I came to procure this knowledge and upon what it may be founded, and it is therefore just conceivable that I could be mistaken even in this.

But if the whole of life as I now perceive it does not really exist, can anything remain? Is there anything that I cannot doubt? Perhaps, though, someone would like to contend that the illusion itself still persists; it is still as if I see this paper before my eyes. They say that this, at least, I surely cannot doubt? Nevertheless, if I am not to slip into my old beliefs, I must apply the method of universal negation as thoroughly as possible. Thus, I do not just wonder about the existence of this piece of paper before my eyes—rather it does not exist *at all*. I pretend that I have no conscious experience of it, that it does not form part of my conscious sphere. My experience is, therefore, contentless.

"But," someone may claim, "although I can doubt *what* I see or *what* I hear; *that* I see and *that* I hear surely cannot be doubted? If, for example, I think I hear a noise, I might doubt what I hear, but I do not doubt the hearing process." My opponent, however, is mistaken, for if I doubt what I hear and dismiss this entirely from my realm of experience (as my method dictates), the question arises as to whether there was a hearing process at all. I may, for instance, doubt that I really heard a noise and ascribe it to a trick of the mind in my anxious state. But if it was simply a trick of the *mind*, then it was not a *hearing* process at all, for there was, in fact, nothing for me to hear. The hearing process as precisely a *hearing* process is thus also open to doubt. Moreover, even if the experience is described as being "as if" it were a hearing process, this presupposes that there are such things as hearing processes to which to compare it. Yet it is precisely that there are such things as hearing processes which is currently in doubt. I can, therefore, doubt that there is a hearing process at all. A hearing process can be distinguished as a *hearing* process only by virtue of its object and our organs. When both of these are in doubt, so too is the process as a *hearing* process. I consequently dismiss any *particular* subjective process from the investigation.

Another person might question whether all processes are distinguishable only via their objects. They remark, for instance, that if I contrast my *thinking* about this chair in front of me with my *doubting* of it, I normally think that it is the same object in both instances. And they point out that if it is the same object in both instances, then some processes must be inherently distinguishable, rather than distinguishable by their objects alone. Thus these processes which are inherently distinguishable will still remain, even when we have dismissed their

objects. Nevertheless, this line of thought is mistaken. It is mistaken because, in their example above, the object "chair" is *not* the same in both instances. The object chair when I think about it is the chair just as it is there presented to me, whereas the object chair in doubt differs, for it is the chair which only *appears* to be there. Although this difference in objects may be attributed to the difference in the processes involved, the differentiation between the processes can come about only if there is an object in the first place. If no object existed at all, no such differentiation in the processes could come about, for there would be nothing upon which the processes could act and consequently nothing through which they could differentiate themselves. It therefore still holds that if there is no objectivity, the distinction between various mental processes falls away.

Another opponent, however, may argue that not all processes necessarily require objects. They ask me to consider, for example, feeling happy or sad. I can feel happy without directing my happiness towards anything. They conclude, therefore, that it is not only through objectivity that processes can differentiate themselves. Perhaps they would even challenge me yet further and try to force me to admit that various processes do not become *indistinguishable* from each other after universal negation, but that, in fact, they disappear altogether. My antagonists would say, for instance, that I can be mistaken about my happiness—I could be deluding myself. My happiness is, therefore, open to doubt. They observe that, according to the method of universal negation, I must consequently completely dismiss the idea that I am feeling happy. They will then contend that since the subjective process in this case is not distinguished by objectivity, it must be the *whole* subjective process which is dismissed. What, therefore, results from universal negation is a total void. The method, in fact, they say, fails to produce any result at all.

But my antagonists have misunderstood what is constituted by feeling "happy." "Happiness" is not itself a process, but something that is ascribed to one; that is, the process has already become externalized and *objective* (describable). It is only because the process has become objective (taking objective in a very wide sense) that it can be described as *anything*. It is consequently the *objectivity* of the process that is dubitable. It is not the *whole* process which is doubted, but the process as it is objectively described. To illustrate what I mean by this, in the current example it is the very act of ascribing happiness which remains, rather than the process to which happiness is ascribed. It is, moreover, not really the *ascribing* process which remains either, since this necessitates something to which something can be ascribed. Since all objectivity has been dismissed in carrying out the method of universal negation, there is nothing to which anything can be ascribed. Consequently there is nothing to distinguish *ascribing* from any other process, although the actual act still remains. I thus retain the claim that it is via objectivity that processes can be differentiated. If all objectivity is

eliminated the processes become quite indistinguishable from one another.

I have argued that it is not the *whole* process which is negated, but only its object and thereby the process as a *particular* process. Indeed, even doubt can no longer remain as a particular process, for doubt too requires an object. If there is no object, there can be no doubt. What, however, remains, if doubting itself can be doubted? If the very act of doubting (as a particular process) can itself be doubted, then even the Cartesian claim that I cannot doubt that I am doubting will not hold. Indeed, it would be paradoxical to claim that I *cannot* doubt that I am doubting *and* that my act of *doubting* proves it, for I am thereby maintaining at one and the same time both that I *cannot* doubt *and* that I can. The indubitability which results from universal negation is, in fact, not that I am *doubting* as such, but rather that I cannot *doubt*—that I cannot fulfill the doubt as a *particular* process. Thus, in pursuing the method of universal *negation* or of universal *doubt*, the very method itself—the negating itself, or the doubting itself—is negated. The method negates even the presupposition of itself. Indeed, the method of universal negation does not even presuppose that there is something to negate, for the method negates itself along with that which it negates. It peels back the layers of presuppositions, including the presupposition of itself and thus, since it can negate no more, it cannot presuppose that there is anything to negate either. The result of universal negation, then, is not that it is the *negating* itself that is indubitable; rather the result is that I cannot *fulfill* this act of doubt, this act of negation.

What I *cannot* doubt, therefore, is my *attempt* to doubt—or my *attempt* to think—and this attempt fails as *doubt* because it has no object through which to differentiate itself. Thus, after universal negation I find that I cannot *doubt*, but I still retain my *attempt* to doubt. I *start* to doubt, but cannot. This commencement is not yet a commencement of any *particular* process, but the potential commencement of *any* process. It is this that remains after universal negation. As soon as we *start* to doubt (feel, perceive, etc.) the *possibility* of any process is already there. What I cannot doubt, therefore, is the *possibility* of thought. Moreover, understanding the inability to doubt as an inability to doubt the *possibility* of thinking avoids the problem of circularity. It is no longer the case that thinking (doubt) is used to show that *thinking* occurs, for thinking is now used to show that thinking is *possible* and this is quite distinct from thinking itself. What *remains* from the method of doubt is the *possibility* of thought and this possibility is *not* dependent on *doubt* (a *particular* process) to be as it is. Thus, even if we have to employ a method (i.e., we actually have to doubt) before we can *understand* the possibility of thought, the possibility of thought does not arise solely because of the method. In fact, the method (doubt) can arise in the first place only if there is the possibility of thought, for the

possibility of thought precedes thought or doubt itself. In order to doubt, the possibility of thought is first necessary.

The indubitability of the possibility of thought has, furthermore, precisely the strong indubitability which I sought. The possibility of thought can *never* be doubted (like the person who for some reason can never be married) and this will never change. To try to *doubt* it will already affirm it. The possibility of thought sets a rigid condition for any subjective process, just as the fact that someone cannot be married sets a rigid condition for their marital status. It is not something that simply is not doubted; it *cannot* be doubted, because doubt itself first requires it. However, it may appear that although we cannot doubt the possibility of thought, it is nevertheless too weak to serve as a meaningful basic for philosophy. We can affirm its indubitability, but other than that nothing more can be said.

Does this criticism hold? It certainly appears that is a rather empty foundation to have. There is neither world, nor content, and the possibility of thought occurs in such a way that it is not distinguishable as any particular process. But if we eliminated both world and content, we have a problem, for the possibility of thought nevertheless *occurs*. And if the possibility of thought occurs, it must do so either actively or passively. But since we cannot presuppose any objectivity, the possibility of thought cannot be active, for if it acted upon something, it would become a *particular*, and thereby distinguishable, process and this exceeds the foundation. Indeed, since the end result was a *failure* to doubt (for there was no objectivity for it to doubt), the possibility must by its very nature *fail* to act upon anything. However, it appears equally impossible for us to maintain that the occurrence is passive. If the occurrence were passive, it would have to be acted upon by something and yet there is nothing which *could* activate it.

But still we cannot deny that the possibility of thought does *occur* and it must surely do so either actively or passively. Consequently, there must be an element missing in our current investigation. We need to go back and retrace our steps. I will argue that this missing element is that of which we are not aware. I will begin by claiming that although the occurrence is certainly not active, there still remains the *possibility* that is passive. We may have doubted everything of which we are aware, but we have not doubted, and indeed *cannot* doubt, that of which we are *not* aware. I will demonstrate and clarify this in two ways. Firstly, I will show how it is just not possible to doubt of that of which we are not aware and secondly, I will illustrate that even if it were possible, the result would be a self-contradiction.

Firstly, then, we do not doubt that of which we are not aware, because we would have to be aware of it before we could attempt to doubt it. In other words, if we did try to doubt that of which we are not aware, we would first (i.e., *before* doubting it) have to claim that there is such a thing. But if we claim that there is something of which we are not aware we will result in contradicting ourselves, for we would effectively have

to maintain that we are aware of something of which we are *not* aware. Since we do not posit that of which we are not aware, we do not attempt to doubt it either. Doubt always requires an object; and, if we are not aware of something, we do not direct doubt towards it. Someone may argue, of course, that in stating that there is something of which we are not aware, we are not really contradicting ourselves, because it is understood that we do not know (are not aware) *what* it is. However, my point is not that we cannot state this, but rather that we do not doubt it. Consequently, if we attempt to doubt the above statement, we must either give that of which we are not aware some objectivity and thereby contradict ourselves as above or else we admit that we cannot doubt it because we do not know what it is there is to doubt. However, another opponent may argue that if there is something which we have not doubted because we are not aware of it, we must, for safety, assume that it too is dubitable. But my opponent is in this case presupposing that, whatever it is of which we are not aware, it is dubitable. We *will* thereby be aware of it as something of this nature (i.e., as dubitable); and, if we are so aware of it, it is no longer something of which we are quite unaware.

Nevertheless, these arguments show the indubitability of that of which we are not aware only to a limited extent. Although I have argued that we do not doubt that of which we are not aware, this does not necessarily entail that there actually is something of which we are not aware. Moreover, we do not doubt it only because we do not posit it. We are unable to doubt that of which we are not aware, then, only in so far as we do not doubt it. This does not entail that, *could* we posit that of which we are not aware, we would *still* be unable to doubt it. It is something which we *do not* doubt, rather than something which we necessarily *cannot* doubt. I hope, therefore, to show from the second set of arguments below that that of which we are not aware is not doubted because it *cannot* be and that it is consequently something which is indeed strictly indubitable.

Thus, in this second set of arguments I will contend that if someone should somehow argue that we *can* doubt that of which we are not aware, the ensuing result will be a contradiction. I first wish to note by way of a corollary that if someone does doubt that there is something of which they are not aware, then they are implicitly claiming that they are aware of everything. However, if they are aware of everything, they cannot *doubt* that there is something of which they are not aware, for there simply is no such thing. Thus in a trivial sense such a person cannot doubt that there is something of which they are not aware, because for a person who is aware of everything, doubt is never even a *possibility*. If someone maintains they are aware of everything, they cannot doubt *at all*. It makes no sense for them to say that something is either dubitable or indubitable, for this dichotomy does not arise and *will never* arise. Moreover, this person who cannot doubt is not a person to whom these arguments (or indeed *any* arguments) can be addressed. Since

they cannot and do not doubt at all, they will not, indeed *cannot*, pursue the method of doubt. This will, for them, be superfluous. My arguments are not for such a person. My argument, my very *method*, already presupposes that we do not know everything, that we are not such a person. Yet this is not presupposed by this method alone, for it is the very condition upon which philosophy is based.

Indeed, philosophy would not be possible—it would not even come about—if this assumption was not made; for if we *did* know everything there would be no philosophical problems to tackle, no questions and no need for philosophy. Philosophy itself must at least start with the assumption that at present we do not know everything, that there is something of which we are not aware. However, although the method of doubt presupposes that we are not aware of *everything*, it also leaves open the possibility that there may, in fact, be nothing. In the method of doubt, we *do not* doubt that of which we are not aware, but this neither entails that there actually is something of which we are unaware nor does it yet entail that that of which we are not aware *cannot* be doubted. I must still show that we simply *cannot* doubt that of which we are not aware. Having now established some preliminary arguments, I hope that the following will illustrate that that of which we are not aware is indeed strictly indubitable.

If, then, someone *does* try to doubt that of which they are not aware, then in order to do so they must suspend their positing of it. This is clear from the Husserlian analysis of the attempt to doubt. However, even in this very act of suspension alone there is at least one thing of which they are not (fully) aware—one thing which they do not posit with absolute certainty. Consequently, in the very act of negating, doubting (in whatever sense) or even suspension, it is impossible for them to say that they are aware of everything. In the very act of doubting they will contradict themselves, they will become unaware of something, just as I contradict myself if I try to doubt the possibility of thought, because doubt will already require it. We thus *do not* doubt that of which we are not aware because we simply *cannot*. My very act of doubt will already affirm that there is something of which I am not aware. That of which we are not aware is, therefore, strictly indubitable. This is epistemologically important, for although we cannot doubt that of which we are not aware, this does not in itself entail that there actually is something of which we are not aware. Indubitability alone is, therefore, not necessarily a sufficient condition for knowledge.

Yet I wish to maintain not only that we cannot doubt that of which we are not aware, but also that there is something of which we are unaware. If we now return to the possibility of thought, I argued that this possibility must occur either actively or passively. I have argued that the former alternative is out of the question. If the possibility were active, there would have to be something upon which it could act. But if it acted upon something it would already be more than just a commencement. It would, be a *distinguishable* process. This, however, goes

beyond what is given by the inquiry alone. Consequently, if the possibility of thought cannot occur actively, it must occur passively. Passivity, however, requires the possibility of thought to be acted upon by something external to it. But it seemed previously that there was nothing which *could* activate it. We have nevertheless now discovered that we cannot doubt that of which we are not aware. There must, therefore, actually be something of which we are not aware, for only this could activate the possibility of thought.

Someone, however, may argue that not all activity requires an object. And if not all activity requires an object, they say, then the living commencement could be active in this new sense. My opponent explains that the possibility of thought could, for instance, be active in the sense that a shimmering light over the horizon is active. A shimmering light, they explain, does not reach out to anything, but is active within its own confines. My antagonist may then claim that I cannot argue either that the living commencement is passive or that there really is something of which we are not aware, for the middle path between passivity and activity still remains open. Nevertheless, I believe my opponent to be mistaken. If, for example, we consider the living commencement of thought as a shimmering light, as suggested, then for it to dispel, just as we know of no object upon which the living commencement can act. And if it is indeed a *shimmering* light, then at times darkness must pervade through unawares, causing the light to change, just the living commencement must be affected by something of which it is unaware. Consequently, the shimmering light is simply a light at the mercy of darkness and the commencement; it can only bend to that force unknown.

Since, then, the possibility of thought cannot be active and since, if it is passive, there still needs to be something which can act upon it, we can only conclude that it must be acted upon by that of which we are not aware. I conclude, therefore, that the possibility of thought occurs passively and that is acted upon by that of which we are not aware. This is what is for philosophy indubitable.¹³

University of Dundee
Dundee, Great Britain

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