

senses. We admit that the operation of the senses produces in us strong convictions of reality ; but we deny that this conviction amounts to knowledge in the absolute sense of the word, for knowledge, so-called, received through the senses is mediate knowledge and therefore liable to doubt. It will be clear, then, that the senses afford no rule or criterion of certainty—and in order to refute the doctrine of the sceptics we must find such a rule and show that all our knowledge is justified by it. To vindicate, in a measure, the philosophical validity of the sceptic's ground, let us examine as many such standards of certainty as we can find to see whether they prove sufficient.

With the essential validity of sense-testimony refuted the popular criterion of certainty is gone and we must seek elsewhere for such. The Pre Socratic philosophers took for granted the absolute reliability of the testimony of the senses and instead of seeking a universal ground of certainty they sought a principle to explain those natural phenomena that were evident to their senses. Consequently we need not search here for our criterion. The Sophists appear to have been the first to demand a subjective standard of truth and as none was forthcoming they themselves became sceptics. Socrates found his sphere in practical ethics and we should hardly expect to find our standard in his philosophy as he held speculation in light esteem. But he appears to have such a standard in his *conceptions* or *ideas* ; this, however, was merely a basis of dialectic and not a criterion of reality. Thus in arguing concerning justice he would start from a proper conception of justice itself which he would derive by the abstraction of the common element from a large number of evident cases. We see no principle yet such as we seek. And from Socrates to the dawn of modern philosophy men have dealt more in the field of ethics than in that of metaphysics.

Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* now comes in view and here at first sight we seem to have struck solid bottom. Our perception of the fact of our own existence is so immediate in its nature that the possibility of doubt is excluded and here the mind seems to reach a knowledge which even the sceptics must accept. This then is the universal criterion of truth ; what we perceive to be true as clearly and distinctly as we perceive the fact of our own existence, is true.

Granting the truth of the *cogito ergo sum* we have in it, doubtless, a means of arriving at knowledge. But this criterion must now be subjected to a critical and merciless examination and I conceive that even it may be doubted. It simply states in its most conclusive form that our perception of the fact of our own existence is so immediate upon our thought that we cannot doubt it. For to doubt that we exist is to doubt that we think ; but doubting is thinking and granting our doubt is granting our thought, consequently we cannot