

# Descartes, a Photograph and Truth

by Phillip W. Weiss

Below is attached a pic of New York City. I am certain that this pic shows what I observed. But Descartes would admonish me to beware of my Evil Demon who wants to fool me into believing that what I saw when I took that pic is something other than what I saw and not to trust my own senses. I listen to Descartes and now I have doubt. Now I need to find some way of confirming that what I observed is what I observed. That is easier said than done. I have attached the pic as proof of what I believe I saw. But that's not constitute proof. The pic is merely an image of something that may or may not exactly be what I saw. It may closely approximate what I saw but during the split second between the time I clicked the shutter till the image uploaded into the camera, the composition of what I saw may have changed. I do not believe that to be the case. In fact, I am certain that the pic is an accurate and truthful image of what I saw. But no one else can confirm the truthfulness of what I believe I saw. No two persons can see the world in the exact same way. Everyone has inside them the Evil Demon. But if I listen to my Evil Demon, I will be doubting everything except the fact of my own existence, which is the only thing about me which is immune to doubt. If it weren't, I could not function. I would be totally preoccupied in proving to myself that I am alive. The Evil Demon will continue to tease me until I am so confounded that I don't know what to believe. I will doubt everything I have been taught. This will incur the wrath of society that demands conformity to its rules that govern every facet of my life. If I blame my oppositional attitude on the Evil Demon, and

further explain that the Evil Demon is merely a literary device to help me frame my thoughts, the authorities will take that as evidence that I am dangerously disturbed and take measures to protect society from me. Having thus sowed the seeds of doubt, the Evil Demon, which is real but wants me to believe that it is a mere figment of my imagination just to further confuse me and protect itself, can gloat in the knowledge that it has again thwarted mankind's quest to arrive at the truth, in this case the truth contained inside a photograph. If I deny the existence of the Evil Demon, I risk losing my mind because only a god can possess the Truth, and I am not a god, or so says the Evil Demon, who is really me, except I don't know that. I look at the pic again and wonder why I took the pic in the first place, not realizing that the Evil Demon was playing with me. The Evil Demon is cruel. He makes me want to question everything. There is nothing I can do to stop him. Or is he a she? Or an it? despair. I'm not sure if one and one equals two or if night follows day (or is it day that follows night?) I am vexed. I must verify everything. The Evil Demon won't stop vexing me. The Ten Commandments lose their power, religion is mere prattle, the Lord's Prayer a mere poem, and all of history is mired in doubt. What I believe to be bad may not be bad and what I believe to be good may not be good. Badness and goodness merge. The pic of New York City takes on a new role. It is no longer a work of art, but a weapon through which the Evil Demon can instill doubt, which what humans abhor the most. Doubt is the stuff that compels us to act, to explore, to argue and even to fight, all in the name of the pursuit of the Truth, that can be approached but never attained. Those who dare to come near it do so at their own peril. Columbus was

brought back in chains, Socrates was forced to die, Oppenheimer was denounced. Dreyfus was condemned. Trotsky was assassinated. Jesus was crucified. They fought the Evil Demon and lost. If this narration seems confused, that is the work of the Evil Demon too. The Evil Demon makes humans transform the simple into the complex and obscures what is clear and makes seem clear what is obscure. Simple passages take on complex meanings, and complex meanings mushroom into bodies of knowledge. This proliferation of words soon clutters our minds and libraries, and sucks away our life force, leaving us with a feeling of emptiness which can be filled only by more doubt, and the struggle to crush doubt continues ad infinitum, while the Evil Demon convulses in laughter and thumbs his or her or its nose at us as we crave for the Truth in order to become gods.



photograph by Phillip W. Weiss