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“To doubt everything or to believe everything are two equally convenient solutions; both dispense with the necessity of reflection.

Instead of a summary condemnation we should examine with the utmost care the role of hypothesis; we shall then recognise not only that it is necessary, but that in most cases it is legitimate.”

(Henri Poincaré: Science and Hypothesis, 1905, tr. Judd Larmor)

In dissecting this citation, I shall focus on the following propositions:

- What does it mean to doubt everything?
- What does it mean to believe everything?
- Does both really dispense with the necessity of reflection?

In making an assertion, it is essential that one has the correct axioms. Thus, I shall try to find accurate definitions of the two main terms in question: doubt and belief. Firstly, what does it mean to doubt? It is to question whether something is really true. Consider, for instance, when one doubts the existence of God. One could easily say: I question whether it really is true that God exists, and the meaning would be the same.

When it comes to doubting **everything**, it is actually quite difficult; in fact, it is impossible. You may doubt that I really ate pancakes this morning, but you don't doubt that your doubt is valid. Thus, if you were to doubt **everything**, you would have to doubt your doubts, and so on, ad infinitum. It only makes sense, then, that we must make some restriction to avoid this infinite regression. The simplest definition, I think, of a doubt in **everything**, is, firstly, to consider propositions as models that intends to predict and explain observations. To have doubt in all models, in accordance with this definition, means that you suspect there to be **inconsistency** between observations and the models.

It should be noted that, since not all observations that **could** have been made **are** being made, the absence of evidence is a reason for doubt.

What, then, does it mean to believe? I think belief is best defined as 'thinking something is true, despite insufficient evidence'. Some might argue that such a definition would entail that every proposition is some kind of belief. After all, can you really be certain that your hand is real, that your entire life isn't just a computer simulation? I think it is important that we then look at what it means to have sufficient evidence.

Sufficient evidence does not mean that we have unlimited evidence that all point to the same truth, as one gets the impression of from the question mentioned above. Rather, to have sufficient evidence means that you can construct a model that not only explains prior observations, but is also able to predict future ones. If my 'model of hand' is correct, then a letter should appear on the

screen when I push this button. And indeed it does! As long as all observations that relate to 'hands' are consistent with my 'model of hand', I consider that to be sufficient evidence.

Therefore, it follows that a belief is a model of the world that is not quite consistent with the available observations; either because the model is false, or because it relies on observations that could only be made with futuristic equipment. Let us then consider what it means to believe in everything. In accordance with the definitions above, we have defined it as 'the position that all models are correct, even the ones that are inconsistent with observations'.

Now that we have defined our central terms, we can examine whether it really is true that both of these really dispenses the necessity of reflection. First, how necessary is reflection in 'suspecting there to be **inconsistency** between observations and the models'. In order to have a suspicion that a model is inconsistent with observation, one must have done some reflection on the model. However, to say that **all** models are inconsistent with observation is not quite the same. Still, it might be possible that a reasonable doubt in a central model, on which all or most other models are built upon, would entail that the rest are subject to the same suspicion. Such a central model could be the 'model of observation', for instance.

What about belief in everything? Since a belief in everything is just pertaining that all models are correct, it most certainly excludes the necessity of reflection; there is no standard for accepting a model as true or false. The belief in everything remains a position that is entirely unreasonable.

Thus, I think we can conclude that a doubt is of a different nature than belief, and therefore we must say that belief in everything is different from doubt in everything, and that the author is mistaken in concluding that both necessitates the exclusion of reflection.