

# Doubting Thomas and Contemporary Education

JOVINO DE GUZMAN MIROY

ATENEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

## **Abstract**

This paper aims to discuss what kind of training in doubt Filipino students require in the twenty-first century. To answer this question, the study alludes to the figure of Thomas the Doubter. Students often have a great deal of difficulty accepting the need to learn the skills of doubt and inquiry, making them more vulnerable to what Stuart Sim calls “empires of belief.” This essay discusses how reading Sacred Scriptures may lead to improved understanding of the dynamic relationships among inquiry, doubt, and belief. After explaining what doubt and skepticism mean, skepticism in the New Testament will be discussed. It will also interpret the story of Thomas the Doubter showing how doubt is dynamically related to belief. The paper concludes by discussing the kind of training in doubt and skepticism that is crucial today.

**Keywords:** *doubt, skepticism, belief, Thomas the Apostle, twenty-first century education*

In the last decades we have seen the proliferation of fantasy and magic television shows as well as vigorous interest in the existence of ghosts, mediums, unexplained phenomena, and alien sightings. Take *Harry Potter* (1997), *Stranger Things* (2016), *Shadow Hunters* (2016), and *The Order* (2019) that are fantasy/horror stories set in so-called “schools for magic.” These shows place magic within a school setting either to reveal that the mundane world of the school can be magical or to convey that an enchanted realm exists parallel to the world of the students. Creators of this genre want the audience to set aside doubt; they are *asking for the suspension of disbelief*. The viewer is being enjoined to put aside doubt and enter into the world of make-belief. Perhaps, however, these shows are also insinuating that doubt will not lead to enjoyment and pleasure. To enter into the fictive world, they make belief necessary, thus proving that credence is more pleasurable and entertaining than critical analysis. At the same time, however, these shows make the audience ask questions about power and identity. In placing the audience in an agnostic state that questions the validity of dominant religions, they allow the viewers to believe in the force of magic—for, as *Shadow Hunters* asks, “what could be worse than a world without magic?”

Without magic, these young people will be easy prey to the power centers of “real life,” namely, business interests and religious fundamentalists. Instead of mainstream religion, the young should draw their power from myths more ancient than the ancient (i. e., pagan myths). *Shadow Hunters* would have its viewers believe that “All the legends are true.” The experience of binge watching these shows testifies to the dialectical relationship between doubt and belief. More than validating religion, these shows have gained popularity because audiences have become incredulous toward traditional institutions. These genres, while demanding skepticism toward dominant religion, make viewers “doubt the doubt” toward the magical world. This indicates that the writers of these shows do not wish to completely set aside skepticism.

## Age of Skepticism

Some people have remarked that we are living in the age of skepticism.<sup>1</sup> Contemporary skepticism differs from skepticism of the last century, which sought for secularization and exercised unbelief toward God’s existence and institutional religion. Today we see a resurgence of

---

<sup>1</sup> Joel Achenbach, “Why Do Many Reasonable People Doubt Science?” *National Geographic Magazine*, March 2015, <https://nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/science-doubters-climate-change-vaccinations-gmos>.

religiosity verging on fundamentalism.<sup>2</sup> Distrust in the enlightenment project, rationalism, and science complement a culture of post-truth and fake news.

Vis-à-vis skepticism against science is naturally the exhortation to give unqualified belief. We hear religious leaders railing against skepticism, branding it as sinful. Arguing in a circular manner, they say that skepticism and doubt are forms of weakness in faith. To those who express misgivings, religious leaders would readily shout, “Ye who are weak in faith.” We have often met students who do not only exercise horror against the exhortation to religious doubt but also feel they are being told to do something wicked. The same students, however, distrust other people’s beliefs rather than their own. After all, the doubter has the reputation of being an infidel, an unbeliever. Ironically, while it is sinful to distrust religion, it is not sinful to suspect science, reason, and the truth. We are already living in the post-truth era where facts are being distorted and people exercise all kinds of methods of suspicion toward forms of rationalism.<sup>3</sup> What we see is that it is wrong to question belief, while it is good to question reason. To their mind, piety requires exercising caution against reason and science.

---

<sup>2</sup> David Zeidan, *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourse* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Robert W. Hefner, “Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (November 2010): 1031-1047.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth S. Goodstein, “Money, Relativism, and the Post-Truth Political Imaginary,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 50, no. 4 (2017): 483-508.

Like most people, students often hold a strong fissure between reason and faith. There is a general tendency among them to think that doubt is wrong; but only doubting of a specific kind—that is mistrust toward religious belief; on the other hand, it is encouraged to suspect reason, science, and philosophy. At the start of a discussion on skepticism, students immediately suspect whether doubt can be abused, whether the teacher is leading them to a dead end, and whether there is such a thing as asking too many questions. For this reason, it becomes imperative to probe whether philosophers and educators should reflect on how they can train students once again to doubt without doubting reason itself.

Suspensions toward doubt give us even more reason to guide students regarding how to exercise it properly. Nevertheless, the notion of methodic doubt might also raise alarm bells for it would smack of Cartesianism.<sup>4</sup> Are we proposing a return to Cartesianism and a rationalism that have led to the dualism between subject and object and dualism between body and intellect? They might ask whether we are advocating monadism and individualism and privileging the categories of time and space; ideas that have become the hallmarks of Enlightenment skepticism that led to the demise of religion. We shall address these objections below.

---

<sup>4</sup> Rene Descartes, *Rene Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. and ed. John Cottingham (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

## **Doubt and Twenty-First Century Learning**

Educators certainly do not want to advocate fideism, which allows people to believe in anything they want (even if it is fundamentalist and irrational), and rationalism that seeks to annihilate religious belief completely. We want to understand the education that fits the twenty-first century, an education cognizant of the volatility, unpredictability and uncertainty, and complexity and ambiguity of human life and history. We need to ask if students are getting an education adapted to the needs of the times when technology keeps on threatening labor. Human life persists to battle contemporary evils such as climate change, intensifying inequality, and pandemics. This study also aims to know if learning is about specific skills and competences or about meta-learning, that is, giving them the skills “to learn to learn.” Are we equipping them to meet the challenges of a world that is largely uncertain and unpredictable?

This paper, however, proposes that twenty-first century learning and education should include instruction in doubt and skepticism. Such schooling avoids the pitfalls of modernism, while making students think that education is not solely about acquiring practical skills and competences but is also about inquiry. Furthermore, this training in the skeptical arts would also emphasize seeking the truth, using both reason and faith, utilizing science and religion. This study recognizes doubt and inquiry as competences needed by students. If this education involves learning to learn,

dubiety enables students and teachers to become flexible and agile learners, capable of investigating which concepts, mindsets, and theories are applicable or not in an ever-changing world.

For this reason, we proffer to include the doubt of Thomas the Apostle in the conversation. Intended for a general readership but also addressing readers who are familiar with Sacred Scriptures and those who wish to cultivate a mature intelligent faith, we want to know whether reading the Bible can be a take off point for genuine philosophical training. We proffer a doubt that does not only lead to the modernism of Descartes or the agnosticism of the Enlightenment, but concurrently one not leveled against reason and science. We need a skepticism that does not head toward the dualism of Cartesianism and the “agnosticism” of existential skepticism. Instead, we choose a skepticism that enables students to find the agency they will need to transform themselves and society.

## **What We Do When We Doubt**

If we are going to educate students in the art of dubiousness, we need to ask the basic question of what it is to doubt. If doubt and skepticism will have a place in the education of our young, especially in religious schools, it would depend on how we define them.

What is doubt? The dictionary defines it as: “a feeling of uncertainty, an undecided state of mind; an inclination to

disbelieve; an uncertain state of things; a lack of full proof or clear indication (benefit of the doubt); hesitate to believe or truth; call in question.”<sup>5</sup> It is possible that we have not even begun to understand what it means to doubt. It is important to clarify its meaning for each philosopher has defined it differently.

We doubt when a) we question (Who, what, where, when, why, and how?); b) when we search for alternative answers or alternative points of view or frameworks (Is there another way of answering this question?); c) when we distance ourselves from what we already know; when we are opening ourselves to learning (Can we reflect on the way we address the same question?); d) when we are curious (Is there more to this question than we previously thought?); e) when we create or produce ambivalence and vacillation (Is there more to this than black and white? or left and right?). When we doubt, we do not accept what is presented to us hook line and sinker. As persons, we are not fish who get baited. Doubt enables us to pause and recollect instead of reacting immediately. Instead of moving mindlessly, we survey the field first. For this reason, human beings might have an innate tendency toward doubt, and this skill might even be part of our survival mechanism. If people did not have this tendency to hesitate and suspect, they would act rashly, throwing caution to the wind, meeting an untimely demise.

---

<sup>5</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 9th ed., s.v. “doubt.”



Needless to say, defining doubt non-univocally is necessary to build diversity and plurality. Charles Sanders Peirce indicates that he uses “doubt” “to designate the starting point of any question, no matter how small or great,” and “belief” “to designate the resolution of it.”<sup>6</sup> For others, doubt is usually initiated by meeting various and conflicting truths. “Doubt is a consequence of our hearing differing, contradictory truths.”<sup>7</sup> For example, people hear that vaccines are both efficacious and detrimental; or they hear that liberal democracy is both good and bad. To doubt also means finding flaws and contradictions in an argument. We do it when hearing a government policy, we ask basic questions about justifications and rationalization, and check if they add up. We exercise it when people ask whether they should wear a face mask/shield or not and when people want a solution to the pandemic, but they do not want to get vaccinated. Seeing contradictions leads to doubt.<sup>8</sup>

Epistemologists also note that one cannot doubt without presupposing any form of certainty. In other words, to

---

<sup>6</sup> Karen Locke, Karen Golden-Biddle, and Martha S. Feldman, “Making Doubt Generative: Rethinking the Role of Doubt in the Research Process,” *Organization Science* 19, no. 6 (November-December 2008): 908.

<sup>7</sup> James Alexander, “The Four Points of the Compass,” *Philosophy* 87, no. 339 (January 2012): 92.

<sup>8</sup> Locke, Golden-Biddle, and Feldman, “Making Doubt Generative,” 908. “Methodological doubt is the systematic, disciplined, and conscious effort to find flaws or contradictions”; Shelly Sheats Harkness, “Social Constructivism and the Believing Game: A Mathematics Teacher’s Practice and Its Implications,” *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 70, no. 3 (April 2009): 245.

doubt is also to express surety. For example, people doubt what a populist and authoritarian leader says mainly because they are convinced that historically autocrats were not completely cognizant of their actions. Secularists have reservations about a religious institution because they are certain that the institution has been hypocritical. An exercise can be done in the classroom to analyze expressions of doubt and infer from that what is held as certain. For example, a student who doubts the efficacy of prayer may be holding on to the certitude of being responsible for one's actions. For this reason, Ludwig Wittgenstein thought that doubt was simply arising from unchecked certitudes. "The most important of these principles is that doubt postulates certainty. Wittgenstein stated, 'If you tried to doubt everything, you would not get as far as doubting everything—the game of doubting itself presupposes certainty.'"<sup>9</sup>

## **Reasons to Doubt**

Furthermore, why do people doubt? Is there a need to do it at all? Theories of doubt also realize that this cognitive act has a function or utility. It is not an end in itself (we do not question for the sake of asking questions). We also need to deliberate its uses. First, without doubtfulness, people will not reach for knowledge at all. Uncertainty is the beginning of the quest for knowledge. One wills to know in the very act of not

---

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, "The Four Points of the Compass," 93.

believing. Philosophers often begin their quest for knowledge with a question or questioning or with a willful act not to believe. Thus, to inquire often leads to knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Second, to doubt is to understand more incisively the subject of inquiry; it allows one to clarify what is being investigated, questioned, and inquired into. For example, in one tragic case of a person dying after a night of New Year's revelry, the family mistrusted the initial results reported by the medico legal that the cause of death was an aneurysm. Doubt enabled them to highlight what was not credible in the report; thus forcing the NBI to further verify its validity. Doubt allows clarification of the problems the inquirers actually need to solve. It is not enough for students to ask questions willy-nilly. They are also obliged to inquire so that real solutions to problems will be found. For example, doubt would enable students to define their questions in terms of a specific discipline (e.g., biology or psychology), and these can be further clarified when they ask about method, applicability, evidence, etc.

To doubt is thus to put a frame around the subject under inquiry. In other words, doubting is the framing of a subject of the question. In the sphere of the arts, framing is carried out by the hands of the artist in his or her attempt to frame

---

<sup>10</sup> David Swartz, "Critique of Doubt: Questioning the Questioning Method as a Means of Obtaining Knowledge," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 40-52.

the eyes of the beholder, or spectator, which, in the first instance, is the artist him- or herself.<sup>11</sup>

Third, to understand the method of doubt, one also requires asking why we ought not to readily believe. What is the *telos* of our inquisition? Without students and teachers articulating an end, their disbelief will be impractical and indefensible; for it might mean going through an interminable process.

To speak about the end of doubt is thus to speak about doubt's ultimate motive, its *telos*, its drive to expel falsehood, as well as to its ultimate death, when doubting is no longer possible. In fact, it appears that doubt itself desires its own death, wants to be expelled, eradicated.<sup>12</sup>

## Religious Doubt

One has hardly met anyone who has not experienced doubt, especially religious doubt. To ask whether God exists or not is part of human experience. While children readily trust, they also have a natural tendency to be skeptical. Their natural propensity is to wonder and ask the why question. It is an understatement to say that they can be very obstinate. For this reason, adults often resort to scaring them about the bogeyman or the *aswang* to control their behavior.

---

<sup>11</sup> Swartz, "Critique of Doubt," 43.

<sup>12</sup> Swartz, 43.

Religious doubt is also something that human beings do quite early.<sup>13</sup> In an activity asking students to recount experiences of doubting God's existence or their church, most recount that they experienced uncertainty about God's existence since high school. There are probably instances when it starts early for those who live in extreme poverty or have experienced abuse and loss.

Psychologists would even think that religious doubt is necessary for development.<sup>14</sup> If an adolescent does not question their religious convictions, their development will be delayed. This is because capacity for inquiry arises from a sense of autonomy and independence. The aptitude to investigate commences when young people recognize they have their own mind and that they do not have to rely on others to do the thinking for them. We see this in grade school students who realize that while asking elders to help them with their assignments is helpful, repeating what they say verbatim will also not be beneficial to them. Thus, they often exercise a lot of reluctance toward what the consultant tells them.

---

<sup>13</sup> For data on when children start testing reality, cf. Ansley Tullos and Jacqueline D. Woolley, "The Development of Children's Ability to Use Evidence to Infer Reality Status," *Child Development* 80, no. 1 (January-February 2009): 101-114.

<sup>14</sup> Neal Krause and Christopher G. Ellison, "The Doubting Process: A Longitudinal Study of the Precipitants and Consequences of Religious Doubt in Older Adults," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (June 2009): 293-312.

Even more crucially, people mature when they are jolted from the normalcy of their lives, which in truth is not completely realistic. Francis Reilly, SJ said that the basic philosophical and spiritual problem was: “How do you know that the world you perceive is real?”<sup>15</sup> He elaborated that growth in consciousness transpires when there is acceptance of the need to correct one’s perception of reality. Hinduism calls the world we perceive *maya* or “illusion.” At some point, however, reality bites the person. For Francis Reilly SJ, “reality” is that which one discovers much later in the story; insofar as the beginning of the story seduces and lures the person by false promises. To get to reality there must be commitment and willingness to experience until the very end: *Ad fundum!* Awakening to the tragic sense of life is necessary for people who are overly attached to their own perception of the world. We have heard of people who refuse to move out of a flood prone area. They do not believe that it is possible for this to happen to them again (and again). Their perception could only be certain if they actually did something to solve the flooding in the first place. Some nations that have been through authoritarian regimes (from colonialism to martial law) forget about the bitterness of unfreedom and look back nostalgically to the era of the dictatorship—like the Israelites who hungered for

---

<sup>15</sup> These ideas are found in class notes of Francis Reilly, SJ; his works on inquiry and inquiry on God’s existence are: *God’s Questionable Existence* (National Bookstore, 1984); *A Quiet God* (St. Paul Publications, 1987); *Yearning to Learn* (Anvil, 1995).

the garlic of Egypt where they were slaves. In other words, people's perceptions of reality often leave too much room for improvement.

At some point, people will feel a sense of betrayal even by God himself. When prayers are not answered or when things do not happen according to plan, we begin to have misgivings about God's loving nature. Our first impressions of the Holy begin to give way to the real. When God shatters our made-up images of the holy, this too can be tragic.

Conversely, a highway toward painful reality exists, which is the art and skill of doubt. Neuropsychologists also know that something is always hidden from our eyes and that we have blind spots.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, awakening to the tragic sense of life through doubt can jolt us out of the illusions of belief, especially dysfunctional ones. For this reason, we cannot take for granted what is presented to us or what we are seeing. Disbelief enables us to accept not just what is presented to us. We can think of unbelief as the loss of innocence; but to a great extent it is also a recovery of wonder, enabling us to observe reality with fresh eyes.

## **Skepticism and Sacred Scriptures**

Having clarified what doubting means and having described the experience and action of doubt, we now ask if the figure of Thomas the Apostle can help us teach our

---

<sup>16</sup> Bruno G. Breitmeyer, *Blindspots: The Many Ways We Cannot See* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

students how to doubt. We refer to the famous doubt of Thomas Didymus in the Gospel of John. Here is the pericope in full (John 20: 24–31):

But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came.

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe.

And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you.

Then saith He to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.

Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen Me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.



And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book:

But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through His name.

How may we interpret this passage? We propose that as we plumb through this portion of the New Testament, we keep the history of skepticism in mind. There is new evidence of how Hellenic skepticism might have been influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism divulging the philosophico-spiritual character of this school of thought.<sup>17</sup> Historians of ideas have also pointed out a skepticism specific to Judaism.<sup>18</sup> They explained that the books of Ecclesiastes and of Job were examples of Jewish skepticism.<sup>19</sup> To truly appreciate Thomas's doubt one needs to consider it within the whole history of skepticism, each stage of which developed and improved the idea of doubt itself.

---

<sup>17</sup> Christopher I. Beckwith, *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Giuseppe Veltri, *Alienated Wisdom: Enquiry Into Jewish Philosophy and Scepticism* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018); Guido Bartolucci, "Jewish Scepticism in Christian Eyes: Jacob F. Reimann and the Transformation of Jewish Philosophy, in *Yearbook of the Mainonides Centre For Advanced Studies*, ed. Bill Rebigier (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018), 145-163.

<sup>19</sup> Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (New York, New York: T&T Clark, 2012).

## Inquiry in the New Testament

Nevertheless, whether there is a Skeptical tradition in Sacred Scriptures or not will not matter so much unless we ask how conscious believers may read scriptures today. Can we read Sacred Scriptures and not end up with fideism that casts doubt on reasoning and science? Can construing Sacred Scriptures lead to an understanding of the link between skepticism and belief?

How may we read scriptures that will reveal to us its uses for inquiry? For this reason, we begin to listen not only to the sayings of Jesus of Nazareth but also to his questions. We are not here suggesting a completely radical or alternative way of reading scriptures, but simply study it with fresh eyes, that is, with a renewed mind (Roman 12: 2). This time we want to zero in on the questions both Jesus and his interlocutors bandy to each other.

This whole problem redounds to how we shall philosophically engage the Bible, especially the New Testament. Intellectual and rational engagement with the stories of the Bible is what produced Medieval Philosophy.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this paper, our study proposes a

---

<sup>20</sup> “Medieval thought is born of the confrontation between the claims of a divine revelation and of human reason to truth. I take this assertion to be uncontroversial. It is a topic that has been explored in countless books, articles, and monographs.” Robert J. Dobie, *Thinking Through Revelation: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of American Press, 2019).

method of textual analysis mindful of what can be dubbed as the questioning or inquiring spirit—a spirit that takes delight in asking questions, in answering them through lively debate and uninterrupted discussions. Reveling in the Bible’s atmosphere of inquiry and conversation might present it as less an imposing truth and more as guide to reflection.

We see in the New Testament the enthusiastic scholarly life of the Jews. Right from his early life, Jesus was spotted chatting with scholars in the temple: “And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions” (Luke 2: 46). The scene does not depict the doctors asking the child, but the child hearing them; more importantly, the adolescent Jesus is seen asking the teachers questions (*eperatao*<sup>21</sup>). The passage also says that the teachers were “astonished”<sup>22</sup> at his understanding and answers. He also considered this act of inquiry as part of being in his Father’s house: “And he said unto them, How

---

<sup>21</sup> “*eperōtāō* (from *epi*, “on, fitting” intensifying *erōtāō*, “inquire, ask”) – properly, ask appropriately (aptly), done by someone on “preferred footing” who makes a request from a “preferred position.” *Erōtāō* (“ask pointedly”) is the regular word Jesus used for making requests to the Father (Jn 14:16, 16:26, 17:9, 15, 20),” *Bible Hub*, s.v. “*eperōtāō*,” <https://bibleapps.com/greek/1905.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> “*existanto eksistēmi* (from *ek*, “out of,” and *histēmi*, “to stand”) – literally, “to remove from a standing (fixed) position,” put out of place; i.e. “beside oneself,” showing someone as flabbergasted (completely stupefied); at a total loss to explain or account for something; overwhelmed, astonished (amazed),” *Bible Hub*, s.v. “*existēmi*,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/1839.htm>.

is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"<sup>23</sup>

We can discern from every page of scriptures Jesus's questioning spirit, that is, a way of putting questions and answering those lobbied toward him. When we say questioning spirit, we mean perceiving the impetus behind the questions posed in the biblical narrative. Moreover, we can also observe the questioning spirit of the Pharisees. In another passage, the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign (Mark 8:11–13). For better or worse, the Pharisees were compelled to cross-examine Jesus for him to prove that he was the Messiah. In this instance, Jesus pointed to what was lacking in their scrutinizing: their hearts were hardened, they had an inability to see and hear, and were incapable of remembering. For this reason, they refused to believe in Jesus, either as a teacher or a prophet. They could not properly detect that the origin of his teaching and healing was divine.

In light of this (and we can refer to many others), we may begin to appreciate more deeply and not express huge shock at the questions of Thomas the Apostle, whose inquiring spirit was unique and true. In another passage before this Thomas already sharply asked Jesus: "How can we know the way if we do not know where you are going?" (John 14:

---

<sup>23</sup> The passage ends with Mary continuing the intellectual conversation in her heart.

5).<sup>24</sup> Some readers have considered Thomas perhaps as a tad impudent. Others thought he was “obtuse” for not readily believing that Jesus rose from the dead. We, however, propose that our understanding of character and the doubt and skepticism of Thomas the Apostle would be deeper when considered in the light not only of the modernist skepticism of Rene Descartes but also of the whole history of skepticism itself.

## Previous Readings

Before this study’s interpretation is presented, let us engage the way contemporary scholars have understood the character of Thomas. In his *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John’s Christological Narrative*, William Bonney has an extensive discussion of how other scholars have read Thomas’s doubt today.<sup>25</sup> The reading of Thomas the Apostle has been varied and inconsistent (even if it is found in the same work), which can be attributed to the absence of a solid definition of doubt and insufficient knowledge of skepticism and its history.

---

<sup>24</sup> The question of how the figure of Thomas in the Gospel of John relates to the one in the Gospel of Thomas may also be relevant here: “John’s text is lacunary, the Apocrypha supply what seems to be missing, but create new gaps in the very act of filling old ones.” Glenn W. Most, *Doubting Thomas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007), 122-123.

<sup>25</sup> William Bonney, “Enabler of Faith (Jesus and Thomas: The Gospel’s Climax),” in *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John’s Christological Narrative* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 131-174.

- a. Thomas was understood as part of the whole process of the revelation of Jesus. Mainly, Thomas's doubt was a way for the evangelist to reveal the real identity of Jesus. This means that his so-called doubt was necessary for the revelation to be complete. "Thomas' confession came as the climax of a progressive revelation of the Lord's identity."<sup>26</sup> The appearance of the Risen Jesus to the Apostles and to Mary Magdalen were not enough. One can add that the resurrection narrative also required the skepticism of Thomas.
- b. Thomas was understood as a doubter. "The doubter, too, is part of this plan."<sup>27</sup> "Against the backdrop of Thomas' doubt, John most effectively displays the nature of belief."<sup>28</sup> "With the encounter between Jesus and Thomas, John gives his readers much more than a critique of a faith that demands miraculous demonstrations or a proof of the physicality of the risen Lord's body."<sup>29</sup> Bonney, however, never explained how he defined and understood the act of doubting.
- c. Thomas was understood as someone who judged from an earthbound perspective, that is, from an empirical and materialist point of view. "Thomas

---

<sup>26</sup> Bonney, "Enabler of Faith," 163.

<sup>27</sup> Bonney, 142.

<sup>28</sup> Bonney, 169.

<sup>29</sup> Bonney, 158.

appears before 20:24–29, John consistently portrays him as one who judges his relationship to Jesus from an earth-bound point of view.”<sup>30</sup> “It is incorrect, however, to hold him up as an example of struggling faith. What John clearly emphasizes is Thomas’s failure to see beyond his this-worldly perspective.”<sup>31</sup> To read doubt as belonging to earth bound consciousness may not be completely accurate when we refer to the Ancient skepticism, which looked to doubt as opening the doubter to transcendent dimensions.<sup>32</sup>

- d. Thomas was understood as a skeptic, as someone reasonable but sarcastic. This means, the skeptic is considered as a comic character who would not get the complete sympathy of the audience or reader. The sarcasm could also have produced a comic effect on the part of the readers (who had familiarity with the actual Thomas).<sup>33</sup> His questioning spirit, here understood as skepticism, is considered by this

---

<sup>30</sup> Bonney, “Enabler of Faith,” 137.

<sup>31</sup> Bonney, 138.

<sup>32</sup> Pyrrho, for example, thought that skepticism was necessary to achieve *ataraxia*, or peace. “According to Diogenes, Pyrrho found himself on a ship once during a violent tempest. Remaining calm, he urged the frightened passengers around him to take notice of the pig sleeping peacefully in the corner, “telling them that such was the unperturbed state in which the wise man should keep himself.” Brian Cope, “The Hellenic Origins of Unamuno’s Skepticism and Niebla’s Skeptical Parody of Cartesianism,” *Hispanic Review* 77, no. 4 (Autumn 2009): 471–493.

This story might bring to mind the time when Jesus, wishing to teach wisdom, himself slept calmly during a storm (Matthew 8:23–27).

<sup>33</sup> Bonney, “Enabler of Faith,” 139.

reader as mocking or satirical. The Gospel writer used him as a foil to the grave figure of the Christ. The reader explains this skepticism and sarcasm as betraying a worldly spirit (not yet converted). This characterization is consistent with the Thomas in John 14:5: "Thomas hears Jesus' words from a worldly point of view and fails to comprehend the truth of which Jesus speaks." He judges with a skepticism that from the world's point of view can only be called reasonable . . . The sarcastically confident tone of his words only serves to emphasize how solidly he stands (or thinks he stands) upon the foundation of worldly reason."<sup>34</sup>

- e. Thomas was understood as possessing an acerbic tongue.<sup>35</sup> We can see why his expression of doubt revealed his bitterness; after all, he and his companions witnessed the brutal execution of their leader. For many a harsh experience could lead to serious doubt. Referring to Thomas as possessing a bitter tongue, however, might have unwittingly placed Thomas in the long line of ancient skeptics. Socrates himself was put to death for his "questioning style of teaching."<sup>36</sup> Since ancient times, Socrates was the

---

<sup>34</sup> Bonney, "Enabler of Faith," 139.

<sup>35</sup> Bonney, 159.

<sup>36</sup> David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates: Plato's Apology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).



model for the need for articulating one's doubt and, more importantly, seeking answers to them.

- f. Thomas was understood as one who expressed a common human attitude. Part of this reading is to take Thomas as not unique; for human beings are worldly by nature. We, however, think of Thomas as a literary character who may have reminded the reader of the philosophical and comical Jew, a figure that is often found in the whole of the Jewish Bible (not to mention in Hollywood, cf. Woody Allen and Fran Lebowitz). Thomas, however, is often read as resembling contemporary humans who are either agnostic or unbelieving, either because they belong to a different religion or have serious objections to religious adherence: "Although Thomas' somewhat brash attitude might be unique, his point of view is not. The worldly reasoning exhibited by the one who comes to be known as a "doubter" is shared by humanity in general."<sup>37</sup> We agree that the human being today is typically unbelieving, but perhaps we need to be careful to equate Thomas's with

---

<sup>37</sup> Bonnie, "Enabler of Faith," 141. Cf. note 29: "J. Kremer notes that, in Chapter 20, John does not wish Thomas' doubt to be seen as unique. It represents the doubt that all disciples share before they come to believe ("«Nimm deine Hand und lege sie in meine Seite!» Exegetische, hermeneutische und bibeltheologische Überlegungen zu Joh. 20:24–29," in *The Four Gospels 1992: Festschrift Frans Neirynck*, Vol. III, eds. F. Van Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, J. Verheyden (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1992), 2176–2177).

contemporary unbelief. It is to be emphasized that Thomas was not engaged in a methodic doubt. He was, however, like any serious Jew, engaged in inquiry with the religious authority of his time about God's word.

- g. Thomas was understood as a realist. "What the reader has seen of Thomas to this point in the gospel is that a 'realist' is known to express an acute sense of the way of the world."<sup>38</sup> He is a realist (or an empiricist) because he demanded physical proof. If one thinks about it, however, if to doubt the testimony of the Apostles about Jesus's resurrection is to be a realist, then it will mean that doing the opposite is to be unrealistic or idealistic.
- h. Thomas was understood as an empiricist. "An almost universal presupposition made by commentators regarding Thomas' statement in [John] 20:25 is that it is a demand for physical proof of the resurrection."<sup>39</sup> Thomas says, "Unless I see . . . I will not believe" (from scriptures). As such, he was judged as "Obtuse."<sup>40</sup> Do we characterize Thomas as obtuse (dull-witted or thick-headed) because he did not readily believe the report of the Lord's resurrection?

---

<sup>38</sup> Bonnie, "Enabler of Faith," 158.

<sup>39</sup> Bonnie, 159.

<sup>40</sup> Brenadan Byrne, *Life Abounding A Reading of John's Gospel* (Philippines: St. Paul's, 2015), 336.

Or was it because he was judging it as an empiricist? Teachers, however, must be careful not to call students' questions obtuse. We must respond to their questions and encourage them to seek answers themselves. The caution against this reading arises from the fact that people today, rightly or wrong, will demand proof of the resurrection. Moreover, while Jesus tells him to believe rather than not believe, the Master nevertheless deigned to fulfill the student's desire to see by appearing (especially) to him.

Be that as it may, the caution against seeing versus not seeing has to be understood in the whole context of Christianity as a religion that made the Holy visible. Indeed, the whole problem of transcendent and earthly consciousness does bring up the question of the visible and the invisible. Wasn't the whole point of the Incarnation to save the visible? The whole import of the Gospels, on the other hand, is belief. Often too, the tirade against Thomas's empiricism is an implied caution against modernism. We need to underline that the long history of skepticism before and after Cartesianism, however, would prove that skepticism must not be equated with modernism. Miguel de Unamuno's skepticism, which was heavily influenced by Hellenic skepticism, provides a systematic critique of Cartesianism.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Cope, "The Hellenic Origins of Unamuno's Skepticism."

- i. Thomas was understood as someone who demanded the marvelous. "In both cases John wishes to criticize those who demand demonstrations of the marvelous."<sup>42</sup> Notice that this view contradicts the idea that he was a realist. To doubt is not necessarily to demand the marvelous or for the spectacle of a miracle. It may simply be human. But this characterization is strange for the text belongs to religious literature where what is expected is suspension of disbelief in the marvelous.

## **The Relationship between Doubt and Belief**

Obviously, readers have understood Thomas and his doubt in diverse and contradictory ways. We do not intend to give a genealogical analysis of each of the interpretations. Contemporary theologians, however, have often used Thomas as a cautionary tale. The kindest view of Thomas to date is that his doubt was necessary for the complete revelation of the identity of Jesus. Be that as it may, commonplace interpretations betray less Thomas's character and more of the reader's understanding of the relationship between doubt and belief. It is imperative that this study itself becomes conscious that its understanding of Thomas reveals the author's own understanding more than that of the Gospel writer.

---

<sup>42</sup> Bonney, *Caused to Believe*, 160. Many of the contemporary theologians seemed to have understood Thomas this way: Cf. footnote 82.

Definitely, our proposed interpretation would not set out to denigrate doubt. We propose to read this episode as revealing the vital relationship between doubt and belief and how the doubt of Thomas was not necessarily an impediment to belief. To be clear, we do not mean to assert that Thomas's doubt necessarily and logically led to belief, which ultimately is born as a gift from the Father himself.

### **Method of Interpretation**

First, our proposal is to analyze and appreciate Thomas's questioning spirit and to suspend judgment whether he was a skeptic or an empiricist and refrain from using words like sarcastic and obtuse to describe him. As life confronts us, each person responds through his own unique inquiring spirit. (The teacher would profit to keep in mind that each student possesses his or her own unique questioning spirit. This way the instructor would not manifest horror at questions arising from agnosticism or atheism.) Thomas the Apostle was no different. Our reading of Scriptures changes once we recognize that each of the evangelical narratives is a dialogue beginning with question/s, a mark of any spiritual text designed for meditation and reflection.

Second, if we do decide to think of Thomas as a skeptic or someone who doubts, it is still incumbent upon us to ask, what is the nature of his doubt? What is the nature of his skepticism? This is because each doubt is unique unto itself. Each philosopher has defined doubt and skepticism in many

different and plural ways. The education in doubt this study proposes aims to allow the student to articulate their own understanding of doubt.

Third, our reading is deepened by knowledge of the history of Jewish skepticism as well as of all the other skepticisms in the entire history of ideas.

Fourth, as every reader of scripture has proved, our reading can never exhaust the meaning of this passage or the characters in the passage. Other readers may express objections to the interpretation presented here. Our own reading can have a great deal of open-endedness and readiness to engage other inquirers.

### **The Heart of Thomas's Skepticism**

How do we read this passage and the figure of Thomas without making a cleavage between reason and faith; between the unfounded certitude of fideism and the productive process of empirical inquiry; between spiritualism and the need to touch and feel the wounds of Christ?

Was Thomas's questioning spirit the same as that of the Pharisees? Was his unbelief the same as that of the Pharisees?<sup>43</sup> We realize that the skepticism of Thomas is not from a hardened heart. The suffering and death of Jesus was very clear to him who was disconsolate that Jesus was crucified and died. He was isolated and felt alone for he was

---

<sup>43</sup> cf. above in the section on Inquiry into the New Testament, pg. 10.

grieving the suffering and death of his Master too much. Unlike the Pharisees who put Jesus to death, Thomas did not have a hardened heart (rather than a heart of stone he had a heart of flesh). At the same time, he was not one without the ability to see and hear. He was not detached from the body and the senses. As we saw above, some theologians considered him too materialistic and this-worldly in his mindset.

The danger would be to read Thomas's demand to put his fingers in the wounds of Jesus in light of modern empiricism. The Apostle was surely not engaged in any form of systematic doubt akin to a cartesian methodic doubt. He was also not a monad who grew indifferent to the suffering of people by reducing experience to clear and distinct ideas. While there is no law against reading the passage in the light of modernism, we cannot over emphasize that there is no imperative that we do so as well. Instead, we can see this demand to see and touch in consideration of the motivation behind his inquiry.

While the text would prevent us from stating that Thomas was performing a systematic analysis, we could, however, be justified in stating that Thomas's doubt was rational. He was engaged in a personal inquiry where the inquirer wanted to see for himself. He did not want to accept the truth based on mere hearsay. His inquiry, nonetheless, was non-dualistic which led to a split between the mind and the body. Thomas desired to be able to touch

the wounds of Christ. The inquiry remained embodied. For this reason, it was not a doubt that headed only to clear and distinct ideas. Thomas's doubt is willing to become messy with the wounds.

If people said someone had risen from the dead, his questions about their claim would be valid. Was he asking his friends: "How would you know that such a bold claim was true? Wouldn't you also say: "You might have seen someone, but was he the one crucified by Pontius Pilate? I, myself, would like to probe into his wounds first before believing your claims."

Did Thomas have an inability to remember? There was nothing in the passage that would tell us that he was remembering anything or forgetting something. If we, however, set this resurrection narrative against the Walk to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35), we might see that there Jesus reminded the characters of the whole of scriptures and the many times it spoke of the Death and Resurrection of the Messiah: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

However, was Thomas like the Pharisees looking for a sign? One may say so, but more than wanting to find evidence of the resurrection, ironically, he wanted to see and touch the wounds of the crucifixion. The apostle experienced the brutality and injustice of it all. He was quite aware of the tragic sense of life. Understandably, anyone



who witnessed what he did will have the same doubts and anguish. We know how volatile those days were. At the start of the week, Jesus entered triumphantly into Jerusalem; by the end, he was crucified between two thieves. After burying him in a borrowed tomb, his friends were saying that he had come back from the dead. Nothing made sense to Thomas. Perhaps he was trying to find meaning in the events, a literal resurrection was the last thing on his mind.<sup>44</sup>

This story, however, does not end with Thomas's doubt or meditation on the death of Jesus. Unlike the unbelief of the Pharisees, instead of producing stasis, his skepticism had movement. His skepticism was not such that it prevented him from believing in the resurrection of Jesus. Thomas exercised a skepticism that did not impede a dynamic confession of the divinity and lordship of Jesus. We do not mean to say that his doubt has led him to believe. From the textual evidence, what can be stated is that Thomas did not think that doubt and belief were opposed and unconnected—that the doubter could not believe and the believer could not doubt.

His doubt also did not keep him from forging relationships and community. What is clear is that his skepticism has a radical openness, not only to new ideas

---

<sup>44</sup> It is to be noted that as a form of spiritual exercise Ancient Greek Philosophy included reflections on the death of Socrates; Christians eventually reflected on the death of Jesus. Pierre Hadot, "Philosophy as a Way of Life," in *What is Ancient Philosophy?* trans. Michael Chase (England: The Valknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 55–76.

and to correction<sup>45</sup> but to a relationship. It did not close him off from establishing dynamic relationships not only with a truth system but with the person he loves and the community. Thomas in seeing Jesus was not led to confession of the truth of the resurrection but to a declaration of his relationship with him: “My Lord and my God.”

Furthermore, Thomas’s doubt was not too inflamed and was assuaged by the idea of blessedness: “Blessed are those who believe without seeing.”<sup>46</sup> Nothing can sum up the notion of being depressed than someone completely shutting out any possibility of resurrection (capacity to come out of the dark and find happiness). For the reality of the wounds and death cannot be denied. Thomas himself brings forth the idea of doubt as movement. The Gospel recounts how Thomas fell on his knees and jumped from his unbelief toward belief. He was not fixed. In fact, he was not all rigid and inflexible; for as an inquirer, he was indeed in motion. Agnosticism, which vacillates, can provide this space of movement. But it is dizzying as one negotiates the tug of

---

<sup>45</sup> cf. scientific doubt

<sup>46</sup> “makários (from mak-, “become long, large”) – properly, when God extends His benefits (the advantages He confers); blessed. Makários (“blessed”) describes a believer in enviable (“fortunate”) position from receiving God’s provisions (favor) – which (literally) extend (“make long, large”) His grace (benefits). This happens with receiving (obeying) the Lord’s in birthings of faith. Hence, faith (pístis) and makários are closely associated (Romans 4:5–7, 14:22, 23; Revelation 14:12, 13),” *Bible Hub*, s.v. “makarios,” <https://biblehub.com/greek/3107.htm>.

war of the either/or. It has no fixed point. Thomas provides a skepticism that can move but with form—as in a dance.

We realize that taking seriously the skepticism of Thomas the Apostle is fruitful rather than sterile. In other words, it is a doubt that wanted to seek happiness. It is a doubt that meditates on the mystery and the possibility (no matter how remote) of the Resurrection.

### **Skepticism and Twenty-First Century Education**

Let us close our study by discussing the kind of training in doubt we desire for education in the twenty-first century. Students need to be trained in skepticism because the first two decades of this century have been marked by a great deal of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. They will require a training in inquiry that battles, for example, with the volatility of climate change, uncertainty of employment, complexity of morality, and ambiguity of global politics.

At this point of our discussion, it cannot be over emphasized that this paper does not wish to privilege a univocal type of skepticism in this discussion. Instead, the training being proposed would mean that both learner and teacher dialogue with the whole history of skepticism. Its history has demonstrated that skepticism is not just an epistemic and cognitive act but is also a spiritual practice. This way the student will be able to develop their own process and system of doubting and inquiry based on personal experience and goals. This training in doubt is

toward an articulation of a process of doubt that expresses openness to the various forms of skepticism found in the history of ideas.

In his paper entitled “Doubt, Despair, and Hope in Western Thought: Unamuno and the Promise of Education,” Peter Roberts states that the doubt that is valuable for education is not the modernist skepticism of Descartes that results in dualism between the subject and object and the body and mind.<sup>47</sup> Referring to Unamuno’s existentialism, Roberts explains that a good education will enable the student to confront the tragic sense of life. We will discover that Miguel de Unamuno (1864–1936) was basically writing in a context very similar to ours. Unamuno lived through the Spanish flu epidemic and saw the rise and fall of the Spanish Republic.<sup>48</sup> For this reason, Roberts opts for an education that addresses the ambiguity and

---

<sup>47</sup> Peter Roberts, “Doubt, Despair and Hope in Western Thought: Unamuno and the Promise of Education,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 11 (2015): 1198–1210. Cf also: Peter Roberts, “Happiness, Despair and Education,” *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32, no. 5 (2013): 463–475; “Chapter Four: Paulo Freire and the Idea of Openness,” *Counterpoints*, 500 (2015); 79–91. Christopher Cowley, “Education, Despair and Morality: A Reply to Roberts,” *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 51, no. 1 (2017): 298–309; Peter Roberts, *Education, Literacy, and Humanization: Exploring the Work of Paulo Freire*, ed. Henry A. Giroux (Westport Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 2000); James Reveley, “Embracing the Humanistic Vision: Recurrent Themes in Peter Roberts’ Recent Writings,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 3 (2018): 312–321.

<sup>48</sup> Mary Lyndon Shanley, “Miguel de Unamuno: Death & Politics in the Work of a Twentieth-Century Philosopher,” *Polity* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 257–278; Rafael Chabran, “Unamuno’s Early Salamanca Years,” *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos* 11, no. 2: 243–256.

uncertainty of life, allowing the student to struggle in the same way Unamuno confronted the tragic sense of his age. On the one hand, education is not the erasure of the catastrophic; it is about the search for meaning amidst all the absurdities of life, such as, pandemics, climate change, systemic inequality, race discrimination, etc. Roberts's humanistic philosophy of education would imply that as the student reflected on and struggles with life's tragic sense, the less they would agonize for they would have learned to navigate life's vagaries with ease and equanimity.

Roberts questions whether education is simply about the student having fun and not being challenged and that learning design must be oriented toward fun and games.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, for Roberts, education is also not just about the skills needed for employability. We, however, posit that the capacity to doubt and to inquire are learning outcomes and competences. One of the truly employable skills is "learning to learn."<sup>50</sup> As technology rapidly changes and as the workplace becomes increasingly unpredictable, workers need to learn on the job. The student, therefore, has to realize that he or she learns by responding to problems and challenges—and not just by sheer memorization. Doubt may aid in learning to learn as it will enable the student to distance themselves from the received and accepted knowledge and be able to seek alternative solutions and answers.

---

<sup>49</sup> Roberts, *Unamuno*, 1205.

<sup>50</sup> Dai Hounsell, "Learning to Learn: Research and Development in Student Learning," *Higher Education* 8 (July 1979): 453-469.

Going beyond Roberts's notion of struggle with absurdity of existence, twenty-first century education is likewise about creativity and innovation. The human person's search for meaning ultimately depends on their ability to give meaning to their experience—which will enable them to hope and not choose destructiveness. This is why we must say that while life has a tragic sense, the student must also marshal the wisdom and hope not to judge life to be a tragedy. We can only judge a story to be a tragedy or a comedy when we have read the whole narrative. Stating life was a tragedy as we went through it would be to pre-empt the story and not allow the story to unfold. We would not know if our life were a tragedy until we had lived it until the last second. Moreover, as the story of artists like Johann Sebastian Bach or Vincent van Gogh or figures like Lapu-Lapu or Apolinario Mabini proved, it might take centuries before the full significance of one's life and work could be fairly appraised. Thus, in embracing what cannot be fully explained, we can choose to respond through innovation and creativity.

This education in hopefulness is found in Roberts's philosophy of education itself, for he said that doubt is movement.<sup>51</sup> Disbelief may lead to the never-ending search for what comes next. From Socrates to Unamuno, we realize that this is what doubt and inquiry do. If, however, the doubt of Thomas the Apostle is included in the

---

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *Unamuno*, 1205.

conversation, we will see that doubt does not have to mean living in isolation and anxious individualism. We can be a doubter concerned for the brokenness of both students and teachers.

Blending Thomas's doubt with Unamuno's, we can draw up a training in doubt which is a movement that leads to relationship and community. We require a training in inquiry that does not remain in agnosticism<sup>52</sup> but is fueled by desire to find out the truth together. It is an inquiry within a specific community of learners. One's doubt, however, must lead not just to conviction but also to the other steps in knowing, such as a) verification (Is my method of inquiry valid and tenable?); b) confirmation (Is my method of inquiry repeatable?); and c) correction (Is my method of inquiry open to falsification and able to correct itself?). These other steps do not isolate the doubter but paves the way for them to become a member of the community of (meta-)learners.<sup>53</sup>

Our suggestion is that the figure of Thomas the Apostle is the paradigm of the New Evangelization.<sup>54</sup> When the

---

<sup>52</sup> Roberts, *Unamuno*, 1208.

<sup>53</sup> Joanne M. McInnerney and Tim S. Roberts, "Online Learning: Social Interaction and the Creation of a Sense of Community," *Educational Technology & Society* 7, no. 3 (July 2004): 73–81. It is also to be noted that Descartes himself has a developed philosophy of action. Peter Machamer, Review of Descartes's Theory of Action, by Anne Ashley Davenport, *ISIS* 99, no.1 (2008): 178–179.

<sup>54</sup> This is not to suggest that Thomas's doubt effected belief, the nature of which arises from the action of the Resurrected Christ himself.

message that Jesus is Messiah is proclaimed, the hearer is enjoined to undergo the grueling practice of doubt. This process itself is what may pave the way to genuine confession. A person who is unable to doubt will not really be able to bring the good news, for then, how will one face the misgivings and hesitations of the unconverted? More importantly, a person who does not know how to doubt is not really engaged with the question about the Risen Lord, which as mystery is never held with absolute certainty. The person who knows how to doubt well will be able to confess the true identity of Jesus.

## **Doubt and Agency**

Lastly, we need a training in doubt and skepticism that opens up the student and inculcates a beginner's mind.<sup>55</sup> Doubt does not allow for the temptation to consider oneself as the source and origin of knowledge; instead, it brings the doubter to a position of the *incipiens*. Young people despair when they are convinced that struggle will not lead to fruition. Thus, students have rightly asked, "Why exercise doubt if it leads to greater ambiguity?" We must take care not to let inquiry simply produce the indecision of agnosticism.

---

<sup>55</sup> William A. Reinsmith, "Beginner's Mind," *College Teaching*, 48, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 12-14.



Genuine inquiry and research empower and give a sense of agency or the capacity to set and reach goals.<sup>56</sup>

A training in doubt will not just stimulate awareness of life's precarity, but it will also ask what remains in the time of great randomness. While the future cannot be predicted, life remains basically the same despite radical changes: "The more things change, the more they stay the same." Workers can expect to deal with people and solve problems. Professions will constantly entail the engagement by workers of the world. The training in doubt and skepticism must ask what it is for; it must have a *telos* beyond itself. Genuine doubt, as movement, leads beyond itself—that is, it must produce action. We do not want to train students to inquire only to be paralyzed by their own issues and concerns and wallowing in the angst about the tragic sense of life. Rather than agency, analysis of personal and social conditions might inculcate learned helplessness. Future study obliges us to designate concretely how inquiry itself may not lead to enhanced anxiety but to capacity to help oneself and others.

We have understood that the belief of Thomas the Apostle was not a fideism that adhered to any belief without rhyme or reason.<sup>57</sup> In fact, in and through his doubt (and

---

<sup>56</sup> Eric Alden Smith, "Agency and Adaptation: New Directions in Evolutionary Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 103–12.

<sup>57</sup> Unamuno, on the other hand, did not think it right to give logical proofs for religious belief (as Scholasticism did), for he thought that belief based purely on reason often gave way to unbelief; Unamuno remained largely agnostic; cf. Roberts 2015, 1202.

not despite), Thomas also learned to believe and to trust without eschewing reason and freedom. This is what makes it different from climate change deniers or those who work to overturn democratic gains whose doubts limit rather than liberate capacity to undertake and effect personal and social transformation. Their skepticism is a refusal to transform oneself and raise one's consciousness. It repudiates alteration, while genuine doubt steers toward transformation.

Reading the narrative of Thomas the Doubter, one cannot help but feel the weight of heaviness in the heart of St. Thomas; he was definitely immersed in the tragic sense of life. Palpable from the text is the misery that fuels his doubt. When students can feel their sorrow, education is paying off. This means their questions have become rooted in their own awesome stories. Their sorrow will demand to know and see and touch. If our students press to caress the wounds of people, would anyone dare berate them? When this happens, the youth's capacity for doubt and inquiry have become agency and power.

## Bibliography

- Achenbach, Joel. "Why Do Many Reasonable People Doubt Science?" *National Geographic Magazine*, March 2015. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/article/science-doubters-climate-change-vaccinations-gmos>.
- Alexander, James. "The Four Points of the Compass." *Philosophy* 87, no. 339 (January 2012): 79–107.
- Bartolucci, Guido. "Jewish Scepticism in Christian Eyes: Jacob F. Reimmann and the Transformation of Jewish Philosophy." In *Yearbook of the Maimonides Centre for Advanced Studies*, edited by Bill Rebigier. 145–163. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2018.
- Beckwith, Christopher I. *Greek Buddha: Pyrrho's Encounter with Early Buddhism in Central Asia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015.
- Bonney, William. "Enabler of Faith (Jesus and Thomas: The Gospel's Climax)." In *Caused to Believe: The Doubting Thomas Story at the Climax of John's Christological Narrative*, 131–174. Leiden: Brill, 2002.
- Breitmeyer, Bruno G. *Blindspots: The Many Ways We Cannot See*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Byrne, Brendan. *Life Abounding A Reading of John's Gospel*. Philippines: St. Paul's, 2015.
- Chabran, Rafael. "Unamuno's Early Salamanca Years." *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos Invierno* 11, no. 2 (1987): 243–256.
- Cope, Brian. "The Hellenic Origins of Unamuno's Skepticism and Niebla's Skeptical Parody of Cartesianism." *Hispanic Review* 77, no.4 (Autumn 2009): 471–493.
- Cowley, Christopher. "Education, Despair and Morality: A Reply to Roberts." *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 51, no. 1 (2017): 298–309.

- Descartes, Rene. *Rene Descartes: Meditations on First Philosophy: With Selections from the Objections and Replies*. Translated and edited by John Cottingham. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Dobie, Robert J. *Thinking Through Revelation: Islamic, Jewish, and Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2019.
- Goodstein, Elizabeth S. "Money, Relativism, and the Post-Truth Political Imaginary." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 50, no. 4 (2017): 483–508.
- Hadot, Pierre. "Philosophy as a Way of Life." In *What is Ancient Philosophy?* Translated by Michael Chase. England: The Valknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Harkness, Shelly Sheats. "Social Constructivism and the Believing Game: A Mathematics Teacher's Practice and Its Implications." *Educational Studies in Mathematics* 70, no. 3 (April 2009): 243–258.
- Hefner, Robert W. "Religious Resurgence in Contemporary Asia: Southeast Asian Perspectives on Capitalism, the State, and the New Piety." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 4 (November 2010): 1031–1047.
- Hounsell, Dai. "Learning to Learn: Research and Development in Student Learning." *Higher Education* 8(July 1979): 453–469.
- Krause, Neal and Christopher G. Ellison. "The Doubting Process: A Longitudinal Study of the Precipitants and Consequences of Religious Doubt in Older Adults." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 48, no. 2 (June 2009): 293–312.
- Leibowitz, David. *The Ironic Defense of Socrates: Plato's Apology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Locke, Karen, Karen Golden-Biddle, and Martha S. Feldman. "Making Doubt Generative: Rethinking the Role of Doubt in the Research Process." *Organization Science* 19, no. 6 (November–December 2008): 907–918.

- Machamer, Peter. Review of *Descartes's Theory of Action*, by Anne Ashley Davenport. *ISIS* 99, no. 1 (2008): 178–179.
- McInnerney, Joanne M., and Tim S Roberts. "Online Learning: Social Interaction and the Creation of a Sense of Community." *Educational Technology & Society* 7, no. 3 (July 2004): 73–81.
- Most, Glenn W. *Doubling Thomas*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Peirce, Charles Saunders. *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Volume 1 to 8. Edited by C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss, A. Burks. Harvard, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1931–1958.
- Reilly, Francis SJ. *God's Questionable Existence*. National Bookstore, 1984.
- . *A Quiet God*. St. Paul Publications, 1987
- . *Yearning to Learn*. Anvil, 1995.
- Reismith, William A. "Beginner's Mind." *College Teaching* 48, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 12–14.
- Reveley, James. "Embracing the Humanistic Vision: Recurrent Themes in Peter Roberts' Recent Writings." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 50, no. 3 (2018): 312–321.
- Roberts, Peter. *Education, Literacy, and Humanization: Exploring the Work of Paulo Freire*. Edited by Henry A. Giroux. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing, 2000.
- . "Doubt, Despair and Hope in Western Thought: Unamuno and the Promise of Education." *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 11 (2015): 1198–1210.
- . "Happiness, Despair, and Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 32, no. 5 (2013):463–475.
- . "Chapter Four: Paulo Freire and the Idea of Openness." *Counterpoints* 500 (2015): 79–91.

- Shanley, Mary Lyndon. "Miguel de Unamuno: Death & Politics in the Work of a Twentieth-Century Philosopher." *Polity* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 257–278.
- Swartz, David. "A Critique of Doubt: Questioning the Questioning Method as a Means of Obtaining Knowledge." *The Journal of Aesthetic Education* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 40–52.
- Sim, Stuart. *Empires of Belief: Why We Need More Scepticism and Doubt in the Twenty-first Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Smith, Eric Alden. "Agency and Adaptation: New Directions in Evolutionary Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (October 2013): 103–12.
- Tullos, Ansley, and Jacqueline D. Woolley. "The Development of Children's Ability to Use Evidence to Infer Reality Status." *Child Development* 80, no. 1 (January–February 2009): 101–114.
- Veltri, Giuseppe. *Alienated Wisdom: Enquiry into Jewish Philosophy and Scepticism*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018.
- Weeks, Stuart. *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism*. New York, New York: T&T Clark, 2012.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *On Certainty*. Edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.K. von Wright. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1996.
- Zeidan, David. *The Resurgence of Religion: A Comparative Study of Selected Themes in Christian and Islamic Fundamentalist Discourse*. Leiden: Brill, 2003.