THE CARTESIAN KENNEL

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The Cartesian kennel was sombre that day,
As glumness took hold of young spaniel, René.
His favourite pastime he even eschewed --
Brushing his marvellous Charles the First 'do.

Frustrated, his Mama asked, 'What is it, then?
Those nasty empiricists at you again?'
'Not this time', said Descartes, his ears all adroop,
Refusing a bowl of his favourite soup.

'I'm sick of this nonsense,' his Papa chimed in.
'When I was a pup, well! Sloth was a sin!'
'It's simply not sloth, Dad,' the spaniel replied.
'Intellectual crises cannot be denied.'

'Oh I'll give you a crisis all right, young René.
Have you emptied the dishwasher so far today?'
'But how can I do that?' the teenager sniffed.
'I'm not even sure that the blighter exists.'

René didn't see, as he stared into space,
But his father grew steadily redder of face.
'I'll tell you, you rascal, what really exists:
The dishwasher's real, and so are my fists!'

'Hush now, my darling,' Mama intervened.
'There's simply no reason for making a scene.
You know what they're like! Young people, these days.
This yen for philosophy's surely a phase...'

She turned to her son, and she gave him a wink.
'You need some fresh air, dear. Well, that's what I think.
Go let off some steam with a good noisy bark,
Or dig up those bones that you hid in the park.'

The neighbourhood park was just heaving that day,
It being a glorious evening in May.
Nietzsche, the schnauzer, was crouched on a bench,
Muttering something like 'der Übermensch'.

'What have you got there?' inquired René.
'Is that the new Superman, just out today?
It's the talk of the town, or at least, so it seems.
It's even spawned numerous Internet memes.'

Nietzsche's eyes flashing, he leapt up and growled.
'This is no comic!' he snarled with a scowl.
'Superman?! Really! Completely absurd.
I tell you, I'd never – hmph! - follow the herd.'

Crumpling the page, Nietzsche scampered away,
Leaving behind a bewildered René,
When out from behind an azalea plant
Stepped the wily old goat named Immanuel Kant.

'Don't worry 'bout Nietzsche,' he said, with a grin,
Shaking some leaves from his whiskery chin.
'You look out of sorts, though, René, I might add.
What is it that's eating you? Tell me, my lad.'

Descartes then heaved the most world-weary sigh.
'Something is up, Kant. I'm not going to lie.
Try as I might, I just can't figure out:
What in the world is not subject to doubt?

'I could be dreaming, or, still more insane,
A villainous imp could be driving my brain…
If knowledge is ever to get off the ground
A stable foundation just *has* to be found!'

'You do have a point, there,' conceded the goat,
Dislodging a gnat with a twitch of his coat.
'But I myself think that the world cannot be
So free from our minds as we'd like to believe.

'I reckon our concepts and categories serve
To structure this glorious world we observe.
But come now, me laddie! Don't look so dismayed!
Let's go chew the cud, or just snooze in the shade.'

Descartes declined, with a shake of his head.
'I think I'll just go dig a hole in that bed.
You can come if you like. It's a bit overgrown.
You might help me find where I buried that bone.'

The old goat agreed to be part of the crew,
Having spotted a nice rhododendron to chew.
The spaniel Descartes took a quick look around,
Before starting in earnest to paw at the ground.

'I know it's here somewhere,' he panted, anon.
'I don't understand where the devil it's gone.
I know that I *thought* it was here; even so,
I guess all that I know is… wait, *all* that I know…'

Such was the speed with which Descartes took flight
That the poor ageing goat got a terrible fright.
He burst from the bed like a breaching blue whale
And he stood all aquiver, from muzzle to tail.

'By God, Kant! I've got it! I've figured it out!
I've found the one thing that I simply can't doubt!
This is the ticket. This one's the grand slam.
I know that I think – and that, therefore, I am!'

Kant shook his head. 'Well, my boy, ain't that grand.
I'd give you applause if I only had hands.
But, listen, young lad, and I'll tell you the truth.
A thought's just no good 'til you've published the brute!'

Quick as a flash, Descartes fished in his bag,
Retrieving his iPhone, tail starting to wag.
'Blogging it now. As to title?' He hummed.
'Let's see. How about, *"Cogito, ergo sum"*.'

A click and a swipe and a paw of the screen,
And lo! It was published. 'My! Well done, old bean.
Publishing… oh, it was tough, in my day.
I bet it goes viral. Right? That's what they say?'

It didn't take long for the server to crash.
'If only ideas were paid for in cash,'
The goat observed, wistful, eyes starting to pop
As the hit counter started to spin like a top.

'Thousands of hits!' cried René. 'Well, I'll be!'
And they leapt and they barked and they bleated with glee.
'Let's go to the pub!' yelled the goat. 'It's on me!
Since I know you're eighteen,' he said, mischievously.

They set off together for ale and good cheer,
Enthused by the promise of Descartes' career.
'The progress I'll make to the truth. Oh, what bliss!
That geometry stuff is a cinch after this!'

Sipping his pint, René started to doodle,
And soon his geometry showed up on Google.
'Boy, that was quick,' slurred the elderly goat.
'I worked like a dog on the things that I wrote.'

The Bichon Frise barmaid came over to chat,
With her eye on René; oh, no doubt about that.
She gave him a smile that would make your heart break,
And he cursed all his paws as they started to shake.

'It's you! You're that guy from my favourite blog!
Who knew that you'd be such a good-looking dog.'
She smiled, and he blushed. 'Today's post was fab.
An autograph? Please? I'll take care of your tab.'

Though modesty said that he had to protest it,
The spaniel most graciously signed as requested.
'That Dogito thing? Like, it's really not bad.
But Cartesian geometry's totally rad.'

'Cartesian geometry? Lord!' Kant exclaimed.
'Don't you have to be dead for your work to be named?
I like to imagine my stuff's not pathetic,
But nobody talks about Kantian ethics.'

The goat sighed. 'A website!' suggested the pup.
'You can't be without one. You have to keep up.'
The goat gave the spaniel a bleary-eyed look,
Before sinking his lager. 'I'll stick to the books.'

Later that evening, they staggered away,
The elderly goat and the spaniel, René.
He crept through the door with a delicate tread,
But Papa Descartes hadn't yet gone to bed.

'So, I hear you've secured the foundations of knowledge.
I'm guessing we don't have to send you to college?'
His father guffawed. 'It'll save us a packet.
Philosophy, though? It's a bit of a racket.'

'There's jobs in philosophy!' Descartes shot back.
'Oh yeah?' said his Pa. 'Well, you're not tenure-track!
I know this for sure, though: there's dust on that shelf,
And that dishwasher, son? It won't empty itself.'

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