There have been many whose zeal for controversy was such that they even scoffed at geometrical proof. Sextus Empiricus and other Sceptics whom you quote say that it is false that the whole is greater than its part, and they pass similar judgment on other axioms.

However, leaving aside and granting the fact that in default of proof we must be content with the probable, I say that a probable proof must be such that, although open to doubt, it cannot be contradicted; for that which can be contradicted is akin, not to truth, but to falsehood. If, for example, I say that Peter is alive because I saw him yesterday in good health, this is indeed probable in so far as nobody is able to contradict me. But if somebody else says that yesterday he saw Peter unconscious, and that he believes that since then Peter has died, he makes my statement seem false. That your conjecture regarding spectres and ghosts seems false and has not even a show of truth, I have demonstrated so clearly that I find nothing in your reply worthy of consideration.

To your question as to whether I have as clear an idea of God as of a triangle, I reply in the affirmative. But if you ask me whether I have as clear a mental image of God as of a triangle, I reply in the negative. We cannot imagine God, but we can apprehend him by the intellect. Here it should also be observed that I do not claim to have complete knowledge of God, but that I do understand some of his attributes—not indeed all of them, or the greater part—and it is certain that my ignorance of very many attributes does not prevent me from having knowledge of some of them. When I was studying Euclid's Elements, I understood early on that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, and I clearly perceived this property of a triangle although I was ignorant of many others.

As regards spectres or ghosts, I have not as yet heard of any intelligible property of theirs; I have heard only of fantasies beyond anyone's understanding. In saying that spectres or ghosts here below (I follow your usage of words, though I do not know why matter here below should be inferior to matter above) are made of very tenuous, rarefied and subtle substance, you seem to be speaking of spiders' webs, airy, or mist. To say that they are invisible is, in my view, tantamount to saying not what they are, but what they are not. But perhaps you wish to indicate that they render themselves visible or invisible as and when they please, and that our imagination will find no more difficulty in this than in other impossibilities.

The authority of Plato, Aristotle and Socrates carries little weight with me. I should have been surprised if you had produced Epicurus, Democritus, Lucretius or one of the Atomists or defenders of the atom. It is not surprising that those who have thought up occult qualities, intentional species, substantial forms and a thousand more bits of nonsense should have devised spectres and ghosts, and given credence to old wives' tales with view to disparaging the authority of Democritus, whose high reputation they so envied that they burned all the books which he had published amidst so much acclaim. If you are minded to put your trust in such people, what reason have you to deny the miracles of the Holy Virgin and all the saints? These have been reported by so many renowned philosophers, theologians and historians that I could produce a hundred of these latter to scarcely one of the former.

In conclusions, most esteemed Sir, I find that I have gone further than I intended, and I will trouble you no longer with matters which I know you will not concede, your first principles being far different from my own, etc.

278. The inventory of Spinoza's library contains a Latin translation of the complete works of Aristotle, but nothing whatever by Plato.
279. Epicurus (341-271 B.C.), Democritus (460-370 B.C.), and Lucretius (99-55 B.C.) all supported the atomic theory, and were accordingly held in favour by seventeenth-century scientists.
280. The terms 'intentional species' and 'substantial forms' are medieaval. They were widely criticized in the seventeenth century as involving an appeal to unknown and unknowable ('occult') qualities of things which explain nothing. This is the same accusation which the Cartesians (and Leibniz) were to make against Newton's theory of gravitation as a vis inertia.
281. The story comes from Diogenes Laertes, Lives of the Philosophers.