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## The rebirth of Descartes

Zijlstra, Christiaan Peter

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# THE REBIRTH OF DESCARTES

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THE REBIRTH OF DESCARTES

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France and Germany*

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Prof. dr. M.R.M ter Hark

Beoordelingscommissie: Prof. dr. H.-P. Schütt  
Prof. dr. H.G.C. Hillenaar  
Prof. dr. A.J. Vanderjagt

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## INTRODUCTION

Although the name of Descartes is familiar to anyone with the slightest affinity for philosophy and his ideas have become commonplace to philosophers, it is not generally known, even amongst historians of philosophy, that his fame is actually the result of his revival in the nineteenth century.

René Descartes (1596-1650) provided the bridge between the analytic knowledge of scholasticism and the synthetic knowledge of modern philosophy by creating a method which was inextricably bound to all the fundamental thoughts of his philosophy. The central theme of his works is the acquisition of indubitable knowledge and the grasping of all things in a system based on simple principles. However, the attainment of indubitable knowledge was not a goal for Descartes in itself, but such a basis was required if he was to fulfil his ambition of changing the whole scientific conception of the world. His quest for an indubitable metaphysical foundation led him to the *cogito, ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am). Relying on this foundation he tried to obtain clear and distinct knowledge of the outside world by appealing to his doctrine of innate ideas and the proof for the existence of God. These elements: the *cogito*, the proofs of the existence of God, and the doctrine of innate ideas characterize the Cartesian system and are nowadays immediately associated with Descartes.

However, during the eighteenth century these metaphysical themes were neglected, misunderstood and sometimes ridiculed. Throughout this period, Descartes was at most moderately appreciated as a mathematician and a physicist, while his metaphysics, which in the present day we regard as essential to his philosophy, had fallen into oblivion. In an era that was dominated by sensualism, Descartes's philosophy simply appeared to be erroneous. This general view that philosophers had of Descartes was prejudiced and highly incorrect, and was further exacerbated by the absence of a sound historiography of philosophy.

Despite his detractors, in the course of the nineteenth century Descartes made a spectacular comeback. Philosophers of the most diverse movements began to acclaim him for a great variety of reasons. In France, the nineteenth-century reinstatement of Descartes's philosophy can be understood as the result of a desire to start philosophy from a fresh beginning. Descartes's metaphysics was thought to fulfil this wish for a stable basis for philosophy and for establishing something constant in a period characterized by cultural and scientific dynamism. After the defeat of Napoleon, the ideology of the Enlightenment was reconsidered and problematized. It is remarkable to observe that this tendency took as its starting point the thought of René Descartes, considering that it had barely been appreciated in the eighteenth century. This movement, which continued for more than a hundred years in both France and Germany, is the subject of our research. The goal of this research is to discuss both the cultural-historical and the epistemological aspects of the reevaluation of Descartes.

German philosophers continued the reassessment of Descartes's philosophy which had begun in France, especially in relation to his epistemology. In most cases he was reconsidered in relation to the doctrine of Kant, which was firmly

established in intellectual Germany. To some, Kant's doctrine formed a new point of departure, yet others found it to be seriously flawed. System builders like Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were dissatisfied with Kant's philosophy because they considered that 'the philosophical system' would perish as a result. Furthermore, they found the discord of Kant's 'Architektonik' unacceptable and on this basis, to put it briefly, absolute idealism and its later critics resolved that Kant must be overcome.

Halfway through the nineteenth century, attempts to counteract materialism and absolute idealism arose. One of the movements that reacted against the claims of absolutist philosophy, but still strove after the ideal of philosophy as system, was that of the Marburg School. Departing from the transcendental method, they aimed to construct a 'logical' system which incorporated all scientific knowledge.

Just as Descartes seemed to fulfil the need for stability and offer a graspable basis for philosophy in France, he appeared to provide the principle of evidence needed by German philosophers. However, Descartes's principle of certainty was grounded in his theory of innate ideas, and more specifically, in the innate idea of God. How German philosophers interpreted this constitutive element, missing in Kant's doctrine, without appealing to the notion of God, is a significant issue.

In investigating such issues, this thesis elaborates on Hans-Peter Schütt's study *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«. Studien zu einem Gemeinplatz der Ideengeschichte* (1998). Schütt's aim is to examine the various episodes – from Voltaire to Heidegger – of the influence of Descartes on European philosophy from the perspective of the title 'father of modern philosophy'. One of the conclusions Schütt draws is that in the course of the nineteenth century professional philosophy, which had established disciplinary self-awareness of the famous 'Erkenntnisproblem', needed a 'proper' philosophy orientated by this problem. Such a philosophy had to understand itself as a science in its own right which, both in its claims and method, is strictly distinct from the individual sciences. The problem of knowledge was thus projected onto Cartesian philosophy and as a result, in order to make this projection plausible, Descartes was raised to the status of the 'father of modern philosophy'.<sup>1</sup>

In distinction to Schütt, our study is limited mainly to the nineteenth-century reappraisal of Descartes in France and Germany. Furthermore, instead of using a leitmotiv which is somewhat external to philosophy – such as the phrase 'father of modern philosophy' – we focus on three philosophical themes which, as we have said, play a crucial role in the Cartesian system. These themes, the *cogito*, the proofs of the existence of God, and the theory of innate ideas, which were neglected, ridiculed and misunderstood before making a sudden comeback during the nineteenth century, form the systematic framework of our discussion of the reinstatement of Descartes in the nineteenth century.

'I think, therefore I am' is one of the most famous statements in philosophy. For Descartes it was the first indubitable certainty established by his method of doubt. It is no surprise that countless books and articles have been written on this subject as it attempts to resolve such crucial philosophical problems as certainty,

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<sup>1</sup> See H.-P. Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), p. 184.

self-consciousness and knowledge. Our thesis is that the philosophical value ascribed to the *cogito* stems from the nineteenth century. The domination of eighteenth-century French philosophy by sensualism led to an inability to see the importance of the *cogito* and as a result scarcely any attention was paid to it. Meanwhile, in Germany, while it appeared that the Cartesian *cogito* was appreciated by Kant who took it as the original synthetic unity of apperception, closer reading reveals that the Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian ‘ich denke’ are two entirely different concepts. On the basis of his criticism of Descartes, we can even doubt that Kant actually had first-hand knowledge of Descartes’s works.

The ontological<sup>2</sup> proof for the existence of God has stunned philosophers and is one of the most criticized subjects in philosophy. The most famous criticism came from Kant but clearly the French Enlightenment was severely critical as well. Although we shall not claim that this proof was restored during the nineteenth century, the fact remains that correct representations of the Cartesian version of this proof stem from the nineteenth century. Furthermore, generally speaking, nineteenth-century philosophy sometimes displayed the tendency to reconcile itself with religion, leading to the question of whether the reevaluation of the doctrine of innate ideas led to the acceptance of the most important innate idea in the Cartesian system – the idea of God – albeit in a different form.

The doctrine of innate ideas is our clearest example of the reinstatement of Descartes in the nineteenth century. Reviled during the eighteenth century by nearly all philosophers, its comeback was especially remarkable in Germany. Descartes’s theory of innate ideas formed the backbone of the Cartesian system as it rendered possible clear and distinct knowledge of the outside world. Hence, it is surprising that there has not been more research done on this subject in contemporary philosophy.

Although to some extent we discuss the political background which played a role in the reinstatement of Descartes in France, we expressly refer to the recent study of François Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* (2002) in which the relation between Descartes and France is discussed from a socio-political point of view.

It is not our intention to give a complete account of the influence of Descartes in the nineteenth century, but to find out in what ways his thinking became an important factor for various philosophical views. Our methodology distinguishes four levels which on a sliding scale move from general to specific. The first level is that of the history of ideas in which we simply take Descartes as our subject. The second level is more specific to the extent that we discuss the reception of Descartes in the nineteenth century. On this level it is not our intention to make a systematic comparison of Descartes with later philosophers, but to outline their view of Descartes in so far as they made explicit statements about him. This approach strongly determines the selection of our source texts. The third level is

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘ontological’ in this context stems from Kant. In Kant’s view, there were only three possible ways of proving the existence of God by means of speculative reason, and one of these ways he called the ontological way in which people ‘... abstract from all experience, and argue completely *a priori*, from mere concepts, to the existence of a supreme cause’, KrV B 619. In chapter 2.2 we will discuss Kant’s criticism of this proof and in chapter 11.3 we will discuss Schelling’s criticism of Kant’s criticism.

that of the history of philosophical problems (Problemgeschichte). On this level we do not strive for completeness but focus on three systematic themes. This necessitates a fourth, ‘conceptual historical level’, in which we discuss the various ways in which these Cartesian themes underwent ‘begriffsgeschichtliche’ alterations and were then reused. An example of the latter is the transformation of innate ideas into a priori principles.

It goes without saying that we cannot apply all four levels to every author we discuss to an equal extent. Nineteenth-century historiographical texts, for example, are clearly set at the second level, whereas systematic texts address issues at the third and fourth levels. A consequence of our historical approach together with the fact that we also concentrate on philosophers who are not very well known is that we remain close to the texts of these philosophers.<sup>3</sup>

The first part discusses the eighteenth-century view of Descartes on the basis of the Encyclopaedists and Kant as they are more widely considered to be the most influential for the following period in the two different philosophical traditions of France and Germany respectively. The reason why our study does not begin immediately after Descartes’s death, a period in which Cartesianism flourished, is that we do not wish to examine the Cartesians, whose range of ideas sometimes diverged far from their master. To separate Descartes’s thought from that of the Cartesians would be a study in itself and certainly exceeds the scope of the present study. Instead our aim is to demonstrate that during the eighteenth century most philosophers had no sound idea of Descartes’s philosophy, and notwithstanding a moderate esteem for his geometry and his application of algebra to geometry, mistakenly neglected or misinterpreted, and sometimes even ridiculed his metaphysics.<sup>4</sup>

Parts II and III discuss the reinstatement of Descartes in France during the nineteenth century. In order to show the breadth of reasons for Descartes’s return, we discuss a wide range of philosophical texts. The reasons why traditionalists, who opposed the socio-political results of the Revolution, reappraised Descartes or Cartesianism, differ from those of historiographers who did not have a political agenda. We also consider that the psychological direction Maine de Biran gave to philosophy played a part in the reassessment of Descartes, while in the works of Royer-Collard and Victor Cousin who both held high political functions, we find patriotic reasons for the reinstatement of Descartes in France during the first half of the nineteenth century. Leaving the detailed discussion of the political environment to the above-mentioned Azouvi, we shall only discuss the political background in relation to the patriotism which was involved in the reinstatement of Descartes in France. By the end of Part III we shall have discussed religious, historiographical,

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<sup>3</sup> Most quotes will be given in their original language (mostly French and German) but occasionally we have translated passages into English. Quotes from the texts of Descartes are mainly given in French but on locations where more clarity was required we also use the Latin and English editions.

<sup>4</sup> Short after the completion of this study appeared *Descartes im Licht der französischen Aufklärung. Studien zum Descartes-Bild Frankreichs im 18. Jahrhundert* (2003) by Tanja Thern. Despite some minor overlaps her study wonderfully completes ours in that it underlines the thesis that the contemporary view of Descartes stems from the early nineteenth century, and, on the basis of a widely varied corpus of texts, gives a very precise impression of the French eighteenth-century view of Descartes.

psychological, political, and patriotic reasons for the reinstatement within France. As well, throughout our study we shall discuss the mutual influences between French and German philosophers, examining as much as the textual evidence and the anecdotal accounts of intercultural observers allows.

Parts IV and V focus on the question of which elements of Descartes's philosophy interested philosophers in Germany during the nineteenth century. A simple explanation for the interest in Descartes was the rise of the historiography of philosophy. Scholars started to read Descartes in the original and interpret the actual source material, in contrast to the eighteenth-century philosophers who were satisfied with second or third-hand opinions.

Against the background of the relation between Descartes and Kant, we focus specifically on the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. This doctrine interested many German philosophers as they thought it explained the Kantian notion of the a priori. Descartes was seen as the father of modern philosophy and German philosophers wanted to connect him with Kant. As a result Descartes was considered to be the predecessor of Kant; in Part V we discuss how this involved a change of interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a synopsis of this study see Zijlstra, 'The Appropriation of Descartes in Nineteenth-Century Philosophy', in MacDonald and Huussen (eds.), *Scholarly Environments* (2004).



## I

### **Eighteenth-Century Views of Descartes: Avoidance, Misconception, and Misreading**

Before discussing the nineteenth-century reinstatement of Descartes, we have to have a clear idea of some important developments that took place during the eighteenth century. As the title of this part indicates, the eighteenth-century view of Descartes can be characterized by avoidance, misconception and misreading. On the basis of a study of the encyclopaedists, we will show that Descartes was considered to be a merely mediocre mathematician and physicist, and that a full consideration of his metaphysics was avoided. When his theory of innate ideas or his *cogito* argument appears in these works, we immediately detect misconceptions, misreading and sometimes ridicule. As well, Kant's representation of Descartes's ontological proof for the existence of God could be called a misconception, his '*ich denke*' differs fundamentally from the Cartesian *cogito*, and we will see that he encountered great difficulties in his rejection of innate ideas.

D'Alembert and Kant each dealt in a different way with Anglo-Saxon sensualism, either adopting it or conjoining it to the rationalist tendencies of continental thought. Although it is not our intention to establish a link between both philosophers, we will see that there are some general similarities in thought between them. Notwithstanding these similarities, for example, the schedule of the sciences based on the human faculties inspired by Francis Bacon,<sup>6</sup> we will show that they approach Descartes in quite different ways. By focusing specifically on these eighteenth-century philosophers, we not only obtain a philosophically and culturally diversified view of Descartes, but we also gain a better insight into the reason why there was an apparent need to return to Cartesianism and to re-interpret it in the following century.

Aram Vartanian, in his work, *Diderot and Descartes* (1953), claims that Descartes's philosophy 'concealed the incipient germs of modern naturalism'.<sup>7</sup> Although at first his claim seems to contradict our claim that Descartes did not play any significant role in eighteenth-century philosophy, Vartanian admits that Cartesian philosophy and Cartesians are two different matters. With respect to Descartes's natural philosophy and its instigation of the trend towards scientific naturalism à la Diderot, Vartanian seems to be more concerned with the Cartesians than with Cartesian philosophy. It is in this context that we should read his following claim:

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<sup>6</sup> See d'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie*, in *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire et de philosophie* (1762), vol. I, p. 250.

<sup>7</sup> Aram Vartanian, *Diderot and Descartes. A Study of Scientific Naturalism in the Enlightenment* (1953), p. 3



Present-day scholarship [1953] has but imperfectly freed itself from the belief that it was mainly the introduction of Locke and Newton into France which, by some alchemy of ideas whose formula has, however, remained inadequate, there produced naturalistic science. (...) Without questioning that Locke and Newton, in the respective spheres of empiricist psychology and experimental science, were in effect the masters of the age of *lumières*, our purpose will be to show, by establishing the necessary ties between Descartes and scientific naturalism, that English philosophy was at best secondary to Cartesian precept in prompting and molding a major segment of Enlightenment thought.<sup>8</sup>

Vartanian's study does not reveal any revaluation of Descartes during the eighteenth century, it only shows that some elements of Cartesian physics – whether or not thoroughly transformed – were appropriated by the philosophes. His study does not clash with ours, as we are concerned with Descartes's metaphysics. Vartanian opposes the thesis that eighteenth-century France was mainly inspired by Locke and Newton. He may be right to claim that the materialists carried the mechanistic aspects of Descartes's doctrine to their ultimate conclusion, but we can hardly call this a revaluation of Descartes. In fact, their point of departure is sensualistic, not Cartesian. Thus, we do not agree with Vartanian's claim that the eighteenth-century naturalism and materialism are a continuation or inheritance of original Cartesian thought. In fact, les philosophes, let alone the materialists *pur sang*, expressly claimed that they had turned Descartes's own weapons against him.

In distinction to Vartanian, our study is not concerned with the materialist consequences of Cartesianism, but with its idealistic elements. We focus primarily on three topics: the *cogito*; the theory of innate ideas (the best example of the eighteenth-century rejection of Descartes, even by his eulogist Antoine Léonard Thomas); and the ontological proof for the existence of God. Sensualists, encyclopaedists, materialists, and transcendental idealists did not appreciate any of these topics. Yet, these three topics determine the core of Descartes's metaphysics, upon which his physics is based. Because they are interconnected, one cannot eliminate any one of these topics and still speak of an inherited influence of Descartes.

The first chapter of this part discusses the encyclopaedists' view of Descartes, beginning with the establishment of their general view and the scope and goal of the *Encyclopédie*. We will then focus on the above mentioned topics that illustrate their criticisms. In relation to the theme of innate ideas, we will also make some excursions, considering an attempt to reconcile Descartes and Locke as well as Hume's analysis of their thought.

After our discussion of the encyclopaedists' view of Descartes, we turn to Immanuel Kant. The extreme scarcity of references to Descartes in Kant's work make it difficult to determine his exact opinion. In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* we can hardly find any references at all, but in general it could be said that Kant is trying to refute Descartes's 'problematic or material idealism' along with

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 8-9.

Berkeley's 'dogmatic material idealism'.<sup>9</sup> The 'problematic' about Descartes's idealism, according to Kant, is that it claims that the things outside the mind are dubitable and unprovable, while holding the *cogito* to be indubitable and certain. We will show how relatively easily Kant solves Descartes's 'problematic idealism' with his doctrine of space and time as '*reine Anschauungsformen*' from which it follows that self-consciousness as well as consciousness of things external to the mind share the same origin. We will also discuss some difficulties that arise when comparing the Cartesian *cogito* and the Kantian *ich denke*.

Apart from the *cogito*, we will also discuss Kant's criticism of the ontological proof for the existence of God and his opinion on the innate ideas.

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<sup>9</sup> See KrV B 274 ff.

## 1 THE ENCYCLOPAEDISTS ON DESCARTES

The ‘Encyclopaedists’ were a group of French philosophers and men of letters who collaborated in the production of the famous *Encyclopédie*. The main editor was Denis Diderot, who proclaimed it as *L’Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une Société de Gens de lettres*. The general idea was to treat, in alphabetical order, the whole field of human knowledge from the perspective of the ‘Enlightenment’. The *Encyclopédie* numbers 72,000 articles written by 140 collaborators. Some of the authors were eminent philosophers of the eighteenth century, such as d’Holbach, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rousseau, Turgot, and Condorcet. The most important collaborator, being involved on equal terms with Diderot, was d’Alembert.

The first volume appeared in 1751 with about 4,000 copies being printed. The second, appearing in the following January, aroused almost immediate hostility from both clerics and conservatives. Consequently, the Council suppressed the two volumes on February 12, 1752, on the grounds of undermining the authority of the King and religion. This meant that the following volume was delayed for about a year and a half, however, from 1753 to 1757, publication went on without interruption. When the seventh volume was published, conservatives again launched attacks, but, this time the sale of the printed volumes and the printing of new volumes was forbidden. Diderot wanted to continue to prepare the remaining volumes privately, and because d’Alembert withdrew, he finished the remaining work alone.

The *Encyclopédie* was the largest collection of its time for general as well as useful information, containing articles of both an educational and a polemical nature. The impact of the *Encyclopédie* was enormous, not only in its original form, but also in the form of various smaller reprints and later adaptations. The work was seen as the total sum of modern knowledge and as a monument to the progress of reason in the eighteenth century.

The influence of Locke is immediately evident in some of the sensualistic articles of the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*, for example, the articles entitled ‘Abstraction’ and ‘Adjectif’ written by Du Marsais, and the article entitled ‘Beau’ by Diderot. As Schøsler shows, the importance of Locke for the *Encyclopédie* is also apparent in the programme d’Alembert wrote for it under the title *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*.<sup>10</sup>

For this reason, we will first say something about Locke’s doctrine of ideas before we go on to discuss the encyclopaedists. Locke describes all the objects of the understanding as ideas, and ideas are described as being in the mind.<sup>11</sup> His initial task is therefore to discover the origin of ideas, and the ways in which the understanding operates upon them, in order to determine what knowledge is and what its boundaries are. When Locke uses the term ‘idea’ we should not confuse it with the Platonic meaning. The reason that he uses it is because it is a familiar word both in ordinary discourse and in the language of philosophers. As a result,

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<sup>10</sup> Jørn Schøsler, *John Locke et les philosophes français* (1997).

<sup>11</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] Bk. II, Ch. viii, §8.

the meaning of the word becomes confused. In its everyday use the word ‘idea’ suggests a contrast with reality, in Locke’s use, however, this is not suggested.

The reason Locke starts with his theory of ideas is that he wants to avoid any presuppositions about either matter, mind, or their relation. He is very commonsensical about ideas. He suggests that everyone is conscious of their own ideas and looking at the words and actions of other human beings, it is clear that they also possessed ideas. According to Locke, all our ideas come from experience, except for moral ideas, which are innate. The faculties of the mind are also innate. The mind perceives, remembers and combines the ideas that come to it from without. It also desires, deliberates and wills, with these mental activities themselves being the source of a new class of ideas. Thus, Locke considers experience in a twofold fashion. On the one hand, he finds that we can observe external sensory objects there, and on the other, we can see the inner operations of the mind. The former source Locke calls ‘sensation’, because it depends wholly upon our senses; and most of our ideas stem from this source. The latter he calls ‘reflection’, a source of ideas that ‘every man has wholly in himself’, and which can also be called an ‘inner sense’.<sup>12</sup>

Although Locke does not admit innate ideas (except moral ones), he does not think the impressions of the senses are the only source of knowledge.

*External Objects furnish the Mind with the Ideas of sensible qualities, which are all those different perceptions they produce in us: And the Mind furnishes the Understanding with Ideas of its own Operations.*<sup>13</sup>

When we ignore the confusingly synonymous use of the terms ‘mind’ and ‘understanding’, the above quote means that when the mind acts, it also has an idea of its action. Consequently, it is self-conscious and as such it is an original source of knowledge. Both sources of knowledge are related as follows. The ideas provided by sensation are simple and unmixed. In order to become knowledge, the mind needs to link them into complex unities. The complex ideas, for instance, those of substance, modes and relation are the result of the combining and abstracting activity of the mind that operates upon simple ideas. Reflection and sensation are mutually dependent. Without sensation the mind would have nothing to work with, while without reflection no work can be done with sensation.

Accordingly, the *tabula rasa* metaphor – the mind is an empty slate when it receives sensations for the first time – should not be interpreted in the light of the primacy of experience over the mind as regards knowledge. Knowledge involves connections and complex ideas, which are products of the mind. In the following sections, we will see that the encyclopaedists borrowed several elements from the Lockean theory of ideas, and in Sections 1.3 and 1.4 we shall return to the question of innate ideas.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Bk. II, Ch. I, §4.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Bk. II, Ch. I, §5.

### 1.1 *Esprit de système and esprit systématique*

The lemma ‘Cartésianisme’ in the *Encyclopédie* is semi-biographical, but at the same time, it is an historical as well as methodological article on Descartes, allegedly written by Abbot Pestré.<sup>14</sup> He starts by claiming that eighteenth-century science is much indebted to Descartes and puts him on par with several famous scientists.

Quoique Galilée, Toricelli, Pascal & Boyle, soient proprement les peres de la Physique moderne, Descartes, par la hardiesse & par l’éclat mérité qu’a eu sa Philosophie, est peut-être celui de tous les savans du dernier siecle à qui nous ayons le plus d’obligation.<sup>15</sup>

As we can see, Pestré thinks Descartes is perhaps the father of the scientists of the seventeenth century. However, he later assigns an exemplary role for future scientists to Bacon, as did d’Alembert in his *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*.<sup>16</sup> However, when they praise the ‘philosophy’ of Descartes, we have to bear in mind that they do not mean his geometry, nor its application to the optics, but the Cartesian method.<sup>17</sup> Although Pestré praises this method, he claims that it is wrong to start with definitions and then to consider these definitions to be proper principles through which attributes can be discovered. According to Pestré and all the other encyclopaedists, one has to begin the other way around. We can clearly see the influence of Locke when he explains this with the use of the notion of *simple ideas*.<sup>18</sup>

Il paroît au contraire qu’il faut commencer par chercher les propriétés; car, si les notions que nous sommes capables d’acquérir, ne sont, comme il paroît évident, que différentes collections d’idées simples que l’expérience nous a fait rassembler sous certains noms, il est bien plus naturel de les former, en cherchant les idées dans le même ordre que l’expérience les donne, que de commencer par des définitions, pour en déduire ensuite les différentes propriétés des choses.<sup>19</sup>

Pestré chooses his words carefully. He says that *if* our notions are nothing but different collections of ideas, *then it would be more natural* to form them into the same order that experience gives them. The argument that it is more natural for something to take place in this or that order is apparently an objection to the ‘unnatural’ Cartesian method of doubt. Whatever the case may be, the argument that it is ‘more natural’ to form collections of ideas in the same order as experience

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<sup>14</sup> It is not clear how much and what exactly d’Alembert added to this article. Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), p. 37 says the following about this: ‘d’Alembert selbst fügte dem Artikel »Cartésianisme«, den ein Abbé Pestré mit wohlwollend-uninspirierten Inhaltsangaben von Descartes’ Hauptschriften gefüllt hatte, in einem Nachtrag eine ausdrückliche Warnung vor der Cartesischen Physik hinzu’.

<sup>15</sup> *Encyclopédie ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (*Encyc.*), vol. II (1751), p. 717. By ‘Toricelli’ Pestré means Torricelli.

<sup>16</sup> Not only the eulogy illustrates this, but also the ‘système figuré des connoissances humaines’ in *Mélanges de littérature, d’histoire et de philosophie* (1767) vol. I, p. 250.

<sup>17</sup> *Encyc.* II, 718ff.

<sup>18</sup> In § 1.4 the influence of Locke on d’Alembert is treated more closer.

<sup>19</sup> *Encyc.* II, 719.

gives them is as irrelevant as the question of whether or not it is ‘natural’ for human beings to have clear and distinct knowledge. The ‘natural argument’ opens up a central theme in eighteenth-century philosophy, which is linked with the name of J.-J. Rousseau. According to Rousseau, every progression of the mind, the will, communal life, in short, the general order of things, occurs in a natural way. About a century later, the *cogito* argument was taken as a serious attempt to found certain knowledge in what was then believed to be a ‘natural’ way.

The article has a certain *ad hominem* character which becomes clear when Pestré illustrates his argument with biographical remarks on Descartes’s death. He says that if Descartes had not so stubbornly held to his principles, he would not have died of the pleurisy which he mistook for a common cold.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Pestré evaluates Descartes’s *Meditations* quite positively. He considers that they contain the basis of his doctrine and are a very exact praxis of his method. He praises this work because it not only arrives at the distinction of mind and body through analysis,<sup>21</sup> but it also shows how Descartes proceeded.

In contrast to his opinion of the *Meditations*, Pestré does not appreciate the *Traité de la Lumière*. His conclusion sums up this interpretation: ‘La lumière de Descartes n’est donc pas la lumière du monde’<sup>22</sup>. Although he thinks Descartes enriched science and philosophy with a new art of reasoning and gave the exactitude of geometry to the other sciences, we have to ‘feel the inconvenience of biased systems to which the impatience of the human mind adapts itself far too well, and, once they are established, oppose occurring truths’.<sup>23</sup>

These mixed feelings about Descartes, are also found in d’Alembert’s *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie*, which distinguishes a twofold view of Descartes.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: ‘On peut juger de la nature de ses connoissances à cet égard par les traits suivants. Il prit pour un rhumatisme la pleurésie dont il est mort, & il crut se délivrer de la fièvre en buvant un demi-verre d’eau-de-vie: parce qu’il n’avoit pas eu besoin de la saignée dans l’espace de 40 ans, il s’opiniâtra à refuser ce secours qui étoit le plus spécifique pour son mal: il y consentit trop tard, lorsque son délire fut calmé & dissipé. Mais alors, dans le plein usage de sa raison, il voulut qu’on lui infusât du tabac dans du vin pour le prendre intérieurement; ce qui détermina son medecin à l’abandonner. Le neuvieme jour de sa fièvre, qui fut l’avant-dernier de sa vie, il demanda de sang froid des panais, & les mangea par précaution, de crainte que ses boyeaux ne se retrécissent s’il continuoit à ne prendre que des bouillons. On voit ici la distance qu’il y a du Géometre au Physicien.’

<sup>21</sup> Although not written by d’Alembert but by Yvon, the article ‘Analyse’ in *Encyc.* I, 400 defines ‘analysis’ as follows: ‘L’ANALYSE en Logique, c’est ce qu’on appelle dans les écoles la méthode qu’on suit pour découvrir la vérité; on la nomme autrement la méthode de résolution. Par cette méthode, on passe du plus composé au plus simple; au lieu que dans la sinthese, on va du plus simple au plus composé. Comme cette définition n’est pas des plus exactes, on nous permettra d’en substituer une autre. L’analyse consiste à remonter à l’origine de nos idées, à en développer la génération & à en faire différentes compositions ou décompositions pour les comparer par tous les côtés qui peuvent en montrer les rapports.’

<sup>22</sup> *Encyc.* II, 723. Note that this quotation can be read in a double ambiguous way. ‘La lumière du monde’ could refer to his *Le Monde, ou Traité de la Lumière*, also known as *Le Monde de Mr Descartes; ou, Traité de la Lumière* which was only partly published after his death out of fear after the condemnation of Galileo. However, bearing in mind that Descartes also uses the term ‘lumière naturelle’ to indicate reason, the quotation can be interpreted as an accusation of solipsism.

<sup>23</sup> *Encyc.* II, 724, Pestré quotes Fontenelle: ‘l’inconvénient des systèmes précipités, dont l’impatience de l’esprit humain ne s’accomode que trop bien, & qui étant une fois établis, s’opposent aux vérités qui surviennent’.

On peut considérer Descartes comme géomètre ou comme philosophe. Les mathématiques, dont il semble avoir fait assez peu de cas, font néanmoins aujourd'hui la partie la plus solide et la moins contestée de sa gloire. . . . Mais ce qui a surtout immortalisé le nom de ce grand homme, c'est l'application qu'il a su faire de l'algèbre à la géométrie, idée des plus vastes et des plus heureuses que l'esprit humain ait jamais eues, et qui sera toujours la clef des plus profondes recherches, non seulement dans la géométrie sublime, mais dans toutes les sciences physico-mathématiques<sup>24</sup>

The compliments that d'Alembert makes about Descartes refer to his application of algebra to geometry. However, he clearly esteems the Cartesian philosophy considerably less than his geometry.

Comme philosophe, il a peut-être été aussi grand, mais il n'a pas été si heureux.<sup>25</sup>

We have to make a distinction between what d'Alembert calls Descartes's philosophy, by which he means 'physics', and his metaphysics. However, even given this distinction, nowhere in d'Alembert's writings can we find praise for Cartesian epistemology, that is, for the aspects of his work for which we now honour Descartes.<sup>26</sup> Although d'Alembert and the other encyclopaedists reject the contents of the Cartesian philosophy, they do not reject the way in which Descartes thought. They attack, to put it briefly, the 'system spirit' (*esprit de système*) which refers to the closed manner of Cartesian philosophizing, but they never reject the systematical spirit (*esprit systématique*) which we find in Descartes, by which they mean his sceptical and critical method.<sup>27</sup> Although this distinction seems very plausible, we have to admit that the textual evidence we have for it is weak, only consisting of the following remarkable sentence:

S'il a fini par croire tout expliquer, il a du moins commencé par douter de tout; et les armes dont nous nous servons pour le combattre ne lui en appartiennent pas moins, parce que nous le tournons contre lui.<sup>28</sup>

Part of the answer to the question concerning what the encyclopaedists take from Descartes, and what they reject, can be found in the differences between Francis Bacon and Descartes. Notwithstanding the many similarities between *Discours de la Méthode* and *Novum Organum*, *De Dignitate*, and *Instauratio magna*,<sup>29</sup> we can

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<sup>24</sup> D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'encyclopédie* [1763], p. 96-97.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> See H.-P. Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), p. 37: 'Die Stichwörter, die uns zur Bezeichnung des epochalen Beitrages der Cartesischen Philosophie so vertraut sind, sucht man in d'Alemberts Laudatio vergeblich'.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Hagemann, *Descartes in der Auffassung durch die Historiker der Philosophie* (1955), p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'encyclopédie* [1763], p. 99.

<sup>29</sup> See Lalande, 'Sur quelques textes de Bacon et de Descartes', in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, n° 3- 1911, pp. 296-311. It is possible that Descartes knew some of the works of Bacon, see Lalande, *Théories de l'induction et de l'expérimentation* (1929) and Milhaud, *Descartes Savant* (1921). Descartes himself mentions Bacon (Verulam) in a letter to Mersenne from January 1630, *Corr.*, AT I, 109: 'Je vous remercie de la qualité que vous avez tirées d'Aristote; j'en avois desia fait une autre plus grande liste, partie tirée de Verulamio, partie de ma teste, & c'est une des premières

say that, basically, their ideas differ on the issue of the basis of science. Whereas Bacon chooses the method of induction, Descartes thinks certainty can only be obtained by deductions drawn from *a priori* truths. As far as the classification of the sciences is concerned, the encyclopaedists follow Bacon. However, some of their alterations to Bacon's scheme also reveal a Cartesian influence. As we saw above, Pestré praises Descartes, but at the same time also makes a severe criticism. He does not think there is anything much wrong with founding rationalism on intellectual evidence, but he finds that Descartes fell for the excesses of *l'esprit de système* when he tried to reduce all knowledge to the evidence of geometry. The interpretation of René Hubert is that Pestré only mirrors and exaggerates the opinion of d'Alembert. The latter finds that eighteenth-century philosophy is greatly indebted to Bacon *and* Descartes, as we saw above.

Hubert blames the disciples of Descartes for the decline (and fall) of Cartesianism and says that 'd'Alembert a bien raison de penser que c'est l'esprit cartésien qui a ruiné le cartésianisme.'<sup>30</sup> The encyclopaedists reject the doctrine of innateness, the physics of the *tourbillons*, the substantialist metaphysics and especially *l'esprit de système* of Cartesianism. However, they pragmatically adopt its principle of evidence, the scientific method, and the concept of the universal primacy of reason. In short, d'Alembert rejects *l'esprit de système*, but not *l'esprit systématique*. Precisely what he means by this distinction we find in his *Discours préliminaire*, where he speaks of the reduction of a large number of phenomena to a single one that can be seen as its principle.

In d'Alembert's view, the fewer principles we allow, the more extended they will become. Because the parameters of a science are necessarily determined, the principles applied to these parameters will be more productive when they are fewer. According to d'Alembert, this reduction which makes these principles easier to grasp

... constitue le véritable esprit systématique, qu'il faut bien se garder de prendre pour l'esprit de système avec il ne se rencontre pas toujours.<sup>31</sup>

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choses que ie tâcheray d'expliquer, & cela ne sera pas si difficile qu'on pourroit croire; car les fondemens estant posez, elles suivent d'elles-mêmes'. Later on in the same year (December?) he writes to Mersenne, who had asked him if he knew a means to make useful experiments, *Corr.*, AT I, 195-196: 'A cela ie n'ay rien à dire, après ce que Verulamius en a écrit, sinon que sans estre trop curieux à rechercher toutes les petites particularitez touchant vne matiere, il faudroit principalement faire de Receuils generaux de toutes les choses les plus communes, & qui sont tres-certaines, & qui peuuent sçauoir sans dépense...'

<sup>30</sup> Hubert, 'Descartes et l'Encyclopédie', in *Revue de synthèse*, vol. XIV, № 1 (1937), p. 42.

<sup>31</sup> D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'encyclopédie* [1763], p. 30. A clear explanation of the distinction between both is given by Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der Aufklärung* [1932] in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 15 (2003), p. 7: 'Die Beobachtung ist das »Datum«; das Prinzip und das Gesetz das »Quaesitum«. Diese neue methodische Rangordnung ist es, die dem gesamten Denken des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts sein Gepräge gegeben hat. Der »esprit systématique« wird keineswegs geringgeschätzt oder beiseite geschoben; aber er wird aufs schärfste vom bloßen »esprit de système« geschieden. Die gesamte Erkenntnistheorie des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts bemüht sich um die Feststellung dieses Unterschieds. D'Alemberts »Einleitung zur Enzyklopädie« rückt ihn in den Mittelpunkt der Untersuchung, und Condillacs »Traité des systèmes« gibt dem Gedanken seine explizite Form und Begründung. Hier wird an den großen Systemen des siebzehnten Jahrhunderts die historische Kritik zu vollziehen gesucht. Es wird zu zeigen gesucht, wie jedes von ihnen daran



The primacy of reason, which the encyclopaedists draw from Cartesianism, must be read, however, in the sense Diderot gave to it. This means that reason is a faculty with which to seize truth and not the entire system of laws of the universe. The difference comes down to the principle of evidence, which Descartes connects with intellectual intuition and which the encyclopaedists, as we will see in the article entitled 'Evidence', associate with sensation.

The *esprit systématique* is the encyclopaedic order of the sciences. In this the sciences are not only considered theoretically, but also practically. Descartes considered the sciences as one system, while the systematic character the encyclopaedists gave to the sciences was of a very different order. We have to note that Diderot understands the terms '*esprit systématique*' and '*esprit de système*' quite differently from d'Alembert. In his article 'Philosophie' in the *Encyclopédie*, he says that two things stand in the way of the development of philosophy: authority and systematical spirit (*esprit systématique*). As far as authority is concerned, he thinks that people tend to appreciate the Ancients just because they are old, far away and because they wrote in a strange language. Aristotle, Plato, and others are not considered to be beings like us, but almost as gods. This suggests that contemporary thinkers could never reach the heights of the Ancients. Diderot thinks this is nonsense because humanity does not degenerate. He wants to cure us of these ridiculous prejudices. If our reason, which maintains the truth that is natural to it, is not capable of removing this attitude towards authority, experience will convince us that excessive admiration for the Ancients halts progress and limits minds. Because of the devotion to Aristotle, according to Fontenelle, who is regularly quoted in the *Encyclopédie*, people have only looked for truth in his writings and not in nature. Philosophy not only stagnates, but falls into the abyss of nonsense and unintelligible ideas from which it will take painstaking efforts to escape. To Diderot, the study of Aristotle has never produced a real philosopher, but he stifled many who might have become such. Even worse is that once such a fantasy has become established in thinking, it will remain there for a long time with people returning to it centuries after it has become obvious that the notion is ridiculous. Moreover, he adds:

Si l'on alloit s'entêter un jour de Descartes, & le mettre à la place d'Aristote, ce seroit à-peu-près le même inconvénient.<sup>32</sup>

The systematic spirit is as harmful to the progress of truth as is authority. By the term '*esprit systématique*', Diderot does not mean that which links the truths amongst themselves in order to perform demonstrations, for this is the true philosophical spirit. Rather, he means thinkers who first construct plans and form systems which describe the universe and then arrange phenomena in any way which will match the plan.

Ce qui rend donc l'esprit systématique si contraire au progrès de la vérité, c'est qu'il n'est plus possible de détromper ceux qui ont imaginé un système qui a quelque vraisemblance. Ils conservent & retiennent

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gescheitert ist, daß es, statt sich rein an die Fakta zu halten und die Begriffe an ihnen sich bilden zu lassen, irgendeinen Einzelbegriff einseitig zum Dogma erhob.'

<sup>32</sup> *Encyc.* XII, 514.

très-chèrement toutes les choses qui peuvent servir en quelque manière à le confirmer; & au contraire ils n'apperçoivent pas presque toutes les objections qui lui sont opposées, ou bien ils s'en défont par quelque distinction frivole. Ils se plaisent intérieurement dans la vûe de leur ouvrage & de l'estime qu'ils esperent en recevoir. Ils ne s'appliquent qu'à considérer l'image de la vérité que portent leurs opinions vraisemblables. Ils arrêtent cette image fixe devant leurs yeux, mais ils ne regardent jamais d'une vûe arrêtée les autres faces de leurs sentimens, lesquelles leur en découvriraient la fausseté.<sup>33</sup>

Although Diderot mentions Descartes as an example of someone who could possibly become an authority, it is unclear whether he thinks that Descartes is also an example of the systematical spirit, as d'Alembert thought using the term *esprit de système*. It does seem that with the term, 'systematical spirit', Diderot illustrates exactly what d'Alembert meant by 'system spirit'.

Our preliminary conclusion with reference to the role of Descartes in the eighteenth century in general is that he was at least underestimated and misunderstood. According to some, it was d'Holbach amongst others who was responsible for this.<sup>34</sup> Although it would be difficult to show that the French friends and followers of Hobbes and Locke were not able to understand the content of Descartes's doctrine, in particular his conception of innate ideas, it is safe to say that they ignored Descartes. We have to make an exception for d'Alembert, who, as we saw, thought Descartes could not have come up with a better foundation for physics at the time. He also thought that it was necessary to develop a basis in the Cartesian theory of the *tourbillons* as a preparation for an understanding of Newton's world system.

Von Brockdorff sees a formulation of a dialectical process in the history of thought in d'Alembert's idea. He thinks that the polemical violence against Descartes can be explained by the spiritual tendencies of the eighteenth century. Whereas Descartes is a typical representative of the Latin spirit, or at least the French mentality, the roots of eighteenth-century intellectual France are British. In Part III we will see a complete change in this mentality. In his nineteenth-century search for the French roots of modern philosophy, Victor Cousin re-launches Descartes thought in order to glorify France.<sup>35</sup>

The roots of French eighteenth-century thought can be found in Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Hobbes and Newton. The general idea that must have appealed to the French is that of unity. French thinkers borrowed Lord Herbert's conceptions of 'natural religion', 'natural right' and 'natural reason' which all have their origin in the essence of each human being. We clearly see the influence of Lord Herbert in the ideas of J.-J. Rousseau, who agrees with him that the heart of a human being is the essential witness of truth, rather than truth arising through general conceptions. The influence of Hobbes is reflected in their ideas concerning French civil

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>34</sup> See Baron Cay von Brockdorff, 'Descartes et les lumières', in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1937), p. 305-324.

<sup>35</sup> We can still see this patriotism in the work of Charles Adam, when he says that the philosophy of Descartes fully meets the instincts of the French race, again see Part III.

education and politics. They connect his methodological and linguistic conceptions with the Lockean doctrine of ideas. From Newton they take over the theory of nature, which destroys the Cartesian theory of motion, resulting in the mockery of Cartesian physics.

Thus, we can see that, in so far as the French Enlightenment is characterized by a desire for the unity of human nature, unity of the people, unity of thought and unity of nature, it is opposed to Cartesian thought which is based in duality (or actually triality, as God is the 'third substance'). For Descartes, the essence of consciousness is completely separated from the essence of the external world. Consequently, the language of physics remains inapplicable to that of rational psychology.

## 1.2 The encyclopaedists on the *cogito*

Setting aside the general disregard for Descartes, we will try to develop the specific criticism directed at the philosopher in two anonymously published articles in the *Encyclopédie*, 'Evidence' and 'Existence', both from 1756. These articles display a Lockean influence and a complete rejection of the Cartesian *cogito*.<sup>36</sup> The rejection of this argument goes hand in hand with the rejection of innate ideas, on which we will concentrate in Sections 1.3 and 1.4. As the notions of existence and evidence are key notions in the Cartesian method and system, the discussion of these articles should reveal the basis of the encyclopaedists' criticism of Descartes.

The article 'Existence', most probably written by Turgot, takes as its starting point Descartes's sentence: '*je pense, donc je suis*'. According to Turgot, however, this seemingly simple proposition can never be a foundation, because it presupposes the very abstract notions of thought and existence. Turgot is convinced that all ideas come from the senses and that there are no notions in the mind that have not first been in the senses, 'as Locke has taught us'.<sup>37</sup> Consequently, he considers human beings to be only equipped with the use of their five senses. He clearly does not want to consider humanity from the first instant of its being and discuss the transformations of sensations into ideas.

Je n'ai pas besoin de ces recherches: si l'homme à cet égard a quelque chemin à faire, il est tout fait long-tems avant qu'il songe à se former la notion abstraite de l'*existence*; & je puis bien le supposer arrivé à un point que les brutes mêmes ont certainement atteint, si nous avons droit de juger qu'elles ont un ame. (...) Il est au moins incontestable que l'homme a sù voir avant que d'apprendre à raisonner & à parler; & c'est à cette époque certaine que je commence à le considérer.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> The reason why they are anonymous is not clear. In the 'Avertissement' of vol. VI there is a scarce remark: 'Quatre Personnes que nous regrettons fort de ne pouvoir nommer, mais qui ont exigé de nous cette condition, nous ont donné différents articles.' (p. vj). The names of the authors can be found in Jørn Schøsler, *John Locke et les philosophes français* (1997), p. 79, who declares that both articles 'constitute an important moment in the history of French sensualism'.

<sup>37</sup> *Encyc.* VI, 261.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, Turgot starts to abstract the notion of ‘existence’ based on simple sensation. In his opinion, although human beings are at first assaulted by a mass of sensations and images, two types of sensations can be distinguished: those of the exterior sensorial world and those that are more penetrating and establish an ‘intimate’ relation with the body. The latter reveal an interior touch (*tact intérieur*) or sixth sense (*sixième sens*). By this he does not mean a psychic capacity or something similar, but an emotion that accompanies all our feelings. Turgot calmly remarks that in describing the emotion he is still far from a notion of ‘existence’, but that, in any case, it must be a purely passive impression. He continues his article, defining the notion of ‘*moi*’ in a rather laborious way using only sensualist vocabulary.

Although he does not mention Descartes here, Turgot shows that we cannot conclude the notion of ‘existence’ from the sensation which he calls the ‘*sentiment du moi*’. This sensation, which is reduced to pleasure and pain, has a special status compared to all other sentiments because of its continuous presence. Consequently, the ‘*sentiment du moi*’ becomes the necessary term with which we compare all sensations. It always accompanies the perception of sensations.<sup>39</sup> This simultaneous perception establishes a relation of presence between the perceived sentiments and the object that is called ‘me’. It thereby gives to both terms of this relation, the *moi* and the exterior object, all the reality that consciousness assures to the ‘*sentiment du moi*’. However:

Cette conscience de la présence des objets n’est point encore la notion de l’existence, & n’est pas même celle de présence; car nous verrons dans la suite que tous les objets de la sensation ne sont pas pour cela regardés comme présents.<sup>40</sup>

From here Turgot skirts around the notion of presence and existence. As the quote shows, the objects of sensation are not seen as being present. The reason he gives for this is that the objects, whose proximity and movement we observe around our body, interest us through the effect they seem to produce on our body. This effect is the pleasure or pain that accompanies their movement or proximity.

The notion of existence is founded on the consciousness of our own sensation and the sentiment of the self (*moi*) which results from this consciousness. The necessary relation between the perceiving being and the perceived object, considered outside the self, supposes the same reality in both terms. It is habit that allows sensorial objects to reappear after being absent for some time.

Nous donnons, si j’ose ainsi parler, notre aveu à l’imagination qui nous peint ces objets de la sensation passé avec les mêmes couleurs que ceux de la sensation présente, & qui leur assigne, comme celle-ci, un lieu dans l’espace dont nous nous voyons environnés; & nous reconnoissons par conséquent entre ces objets imaginés & nous, les mêmes rapports de

<sup>39</sup> This resembles what Kant says concerning the original synthetic unity of apperception, KrV B 132: ‘Das: Ich denke, muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können; denn sonst würde etwas in mir vorgestellt werden, was gar nicht gedacht werden könnte, welches eben soviel heißt, als die Vorstellung würde entweder unmöglich, oder wenigstens für mich nichts sein.’

<sup>40</sup> *Encyc.* VI, 262.

distance & d'action mutuelle que nous observons entre les objets actuels de la sensation.<sup>41</sup>

The concept of existence is therefore completely arbitrary, because the mind may connect it with the objects of distance and activity which imagination presents to us, just as it does those of sensation. In quite verbose and complex arguments, Turgot's explanation of what existence is comes down to a question of semantics. What remains is that consciousness of the self is the only source of the notion of existence. However, it is so abstract that it has no other sign other than the word 'existence' itself, and this word does not correspond to either an idea of the senses or the imagination. The notion of existence is composed of nothing but the particular idea of the consciousness of the self. This idea, which is necessarily simple, is applicable to all beings without exception. It can therefore not be defined. Schøsler's conclusion, with which we agree, is that 'it goes without saying that Turgot's sensualism relies on a mystery that has never been clarified, viz. the origin of 'consciousness' is supposed to be identical with passive sensation'.<sup>42</sup>

Another article from the *Encyclopédie* displays a similar criticism of the *cogito* and the innate ideas. This is the article entitled 'Evidence', which is supposedly written by Quesnay and which Schøsler classifies as a 'véritable petit traité sensualiste'. After having preliminarily described evidence as 'a certainty which is so clear and manifest by itself, that the mind cannot deny it',<sup>43</sup> Quesnay distinguishes it from faith. Faith deals with truths that can only be known through 'the lights of reason', whereas evidence is bound to natural knowledge. Faith cannot be without evidence, but faith is not needed for evidence. Faith teaches us truths that cannot be known by reason, whereas evidence is limited to natural knowledge. Faith is, however, always connected to evidence because without evidence we would not know the 'motives of credibility' and as such would not be able to be instructed by supernatural truth. Quesnay proves to be a radical sensualist, as he claims that even faith is taught us by means of the senses, as we need ideas (which are equated with sensations, as is the case for Locke) of sensory objects. It is evidence that provides us with certainty, truth and even faith. However, evidence is not faith, although the truths of faith are inseparable from that of evident knowledge. Faith can, therefore, not contradict the certainty of evidence and vice versa.

According to Quesnay, evidence necessarily results from the intimate observation of our sensations. As he wants to bring the term 'sensation' into the definition of evidence at all costs, he defines it as: 'a certainty which is as impossible for us to deny as it is for us impossible to ignore our actual sensations'.<sup>44</sup> This definition alone suffices, he thinks, to show that pyrrhonism is a bad faith.

Quesnay distinguishes between affective sensations and representative sensations. Affective sensations are: odour, sound, taste, warmth, cold, pleasure,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>42</sup> Jørn Schøsler, *John Locke et les philosophes français* (1997), p. 81.

<sup>43</sup> *Encyc.* VI, 146.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.: 'Ainsi j'entens par *évidence*, une certitude à laquelle il nous est aussi impossible de nous refuser, qu'il nous est impossible d'ignorer nos sensations actuelles.'

pain, light, colour, and the sensation of resistance. ‘Representative’ means representative of objects, by which he means those sensations that make us perceive magnitude, form, figure, movement, and rest. Representative sensations are always connected with affective sensations. The distinction he makes seems to be futile when he claims that representative sensations are in fact affective, but united and placed in such an order that they form the sensations of continuity or extension.<sup>45</sup>

As we have already mentioned, Quesnay uses the term ‘idea’ in the same sense as Locke, but he goes one step further and finds that representative ideas are composed only of affective sensations that cause all particular sensations at the same time in the subject. A representative idea is the collection of all particular affective sensations which are brought close together and are felt separately from each other in such a way that they seem to form a kind of continuity. Thus the idea is formed, and Quesnay seems to admit that an idea is not the same as a sensation.

Quesnay’s criticism of Descartes remains implicit. Sensations of extension, which are nothing but our affections, are not the same as real extension. His argument for this is that ‘we clearly know this’. He concludes from this that it is not the nature of the extended sensitive mode to be really extended. The idea that I have of a room represented in a mirror is the same as the real thing, because both only give me the appearance of extension. The same goes for representative ideas of extension given in such things as dreams or madness. We do not see these objects in themselves, we only perceive our ideas or sensations.<sup>46</sup> The reason why he stresses the idea of extension so much is that from it the representative ideas of shape, magnitude, form, situation, place, proximity, distance, measure, number, movement, rest, succession, time, permanence, change and relation may follow.

These two kinds of sensation (affective and representative) form all our affections, thoughts and evident knowledge. However, the sensitive being (*l’être sensitif*) cannot in itself cause any sensation. This immediately refutes the Cartesian theory of ideas and the basis for the cosmological proof for the existence of God. To Quesnay, the sensitive being does not produce any ideas in itself including those it remembers, because the sensitive being only has sensations through which it is actually, sensitively, affected. Quesnay concludes that there could be no innate ideas in the sensitive being that subsist in an actual oblivion, because to suggest the oblivion of a sensation or idea is to suggest its nothingness (*néant*). This notion is opposed to memory which involves the reproduction of ideas. The concept of memory is introduced out of the blue, however, it will play a very important role in what follows, as we will see. Concerning innate ideas, although it seems that Quesnay simply denies their existence, he later claims that they do not give evidence. May we conclude from this that he acknowledges their existence?

Whatever the case may be, Quesnay locates the foundation of knowledge in the senses and thereby considers the objects of sensation as objects of knowledge. The role he ascribes to memory is that of an intermediary between our sensations

<sup>45</sup> Apparently, Quesnay first distinguishes things in order to subsequently show that they are connected, whether it is a strategy or just a case of poor style is not clear.

<sup>46</sup> Note the similarities with what Kant claims 25 years later, especially with reference to the terms ‘appearance’ and ‘things-in-themselves’.

and the real objects. The conception and combination of ideas that affect the mind and which interest the mind in order to focus its attention on one thing rather than another, is nothing but a simultaneous remembering. It seems that Quesnay subordinates memory to the senses, because its reliability is checked by the senses.

En effet nous éprouvons continuellement, par l'exercice alternatif des sens & de la mémoire sur les mêmes objets, que la mémoire ne nous trompe pas, lorsque nous nous ressouvenons que ces objets nous sont connus par la voie des sens. (...) Mes sens m'assurent donc alors de la fidélité de ma mémoire, & il n'y a réellement que l'exercice de mes sens qui puisse m'en assurer: ainsi l'exercice de nos sens est le principe de toute certitude, & le fondement de toutes nos connoissances. (...) Ainsi les causes sensibles qui agissent sur nos sens, & qui sont les objets de nos sensations, sont eux-mêmes les objets de nos connoissances, & la source de notre intelligence, puisque ce sont eux qui nous procurent les sensations par lesquelles nous sommes assurés de l'existence & de la durée de notre être sensitif, & de l'évidence de nos raisonnemens. En effet, c'est par la mémoire que nous connoissons notre existence successive; & c'est par le retour des sensations que nous procurent les objets sensibles, par l'exercice actuel des sens, que nous sommes assurés de la fidélité de notre mémoire.<sup>47</sup>

Dreams, delirium, madness and imbecility are nothing but a malfunctioning of the memory. People who are in such a state are merely exhibiting an absence of intermediary ideas because the mechanism of the memory does not regularly provide them. Moral derangement, which Quesnay understands as 'some kind of madness', can be explained similarly. In the latter case, the mechanism of the senses and the memory causes some affections which are so dominant that they form passions and habits that subdue reason. As a result, they only seek to satisfy these passions.

With this 'theory' of memory he implicitly criticizes the Cartesian method of doubt and the *cogito, ergo sum*. Without memory, he says, the sensitive being would only have actual sensations:

(...) il ne pourroit tirer de cette sensation la conviction de sa propre existence; car il ne pourroit pas développer les rapports de cette suite d'idées, *je pense, donc je suis*. Il sentiroit, mais il ne connoitroit rien; parce que sans la mémoire il ne pourroit réunir le premier commencement avec le premier progrès d'une sensation; il seroit dans un état de stupidité, qui excluroit toute attention, tout discernement, tout jugement, toute intelligence, toute *évidence* de vérités réelles, il ne pourroit ni s'instruire, ni s'assurer, ni douter de son existence, ni de l'existence de ses sensations, puisqu'il ne pourroit rien observer, rien démêler, rien reconnoître (...)<sup>48</sup>

Implicitly, this means that Descartes could never have come to his *cogito, ergo sum*, because he could not doubt anything after having dismissed his senses as unreliable sources of knowledge. However, what about the dream argument and the

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<sup>47</sup> *Encyc.* VI, 150.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

hypothesis of the evil genius?<sup>49</sup> His first answer is simple: it is impossible to maintain the truth of such things, because they presuppose not only an actual relation between our sensations and ourselves, but also a successive relation between our ideas. To the objection that sometimes there is no relation between my senses and the sensory objects, for instance in our dreams, he replies that this objection is self-refuting.

Comment savez-vous que vos sensations vous ont trompé dans les rêves? N'est-ce pas par la mémoire? Or la mémoire vous assure aussi que vos sensations ne vous ont point trompé relativement à la réalité des objets, puisqu'elles ne vous ont représenté que des objets qui vous ont auparavant procuré ces mêmes sensations par la voie des sens. S'il n'y a pas de rapport essentiel entre les objets & les sensations, les connoissances que la mémoire vous rappelle, vous assurent au moins que dans notre état actuel il y a un rapport conditionnel & nécessaire.<sup>50</sup>

Finally, we want to note that, to modern readers, Quesnay makes a surprising turn concerning the role of God. According to Quesnay, our evident knowledge is not sufficient for self-knowledge. We need faith to teach us that 'the supreme wisdom is the light itself that enlightens all people that come into the world'. It is not reason and evidence that separate us from beasts, because there are people 'who are more stupid, more ferocious, and more insensitive than beasts'. Man is not a simple being, but composed of body and soul. Like Descartes, Quesnay says that these two substances cannot act upon one another. At this point he brings God into play, because he needs an entity that continually produces every affective, sensorial and intellectual form.

L'homme reçoit ces sensations par l'entremise des organes du corps, mais ses sensations elles-mêmes & sa raison sont l'effet immédiat de l'action de Dieu sur l'ame; ainsi c'est dans cette action sur l'ame que consiste la forme essentielle de l'animal raisonnable: l'organisation du corps est la cause conditionnelle ou instrumentale des sensations, & les sensations sont les motifs ou les causes déterminantes de la raison & la volonté décisive.<sup>51</sup>

The intervention of God in Quesnay's article strikes us as an occasionalistic turn in a sensualistic treaty. It is, however, the only way that he can explain our free will. Intelligence is the result of our sensations, which are in turn the immediate effect of God, and as such, is opposed to animal and spontaneous determinations. The motivation to do the right thing and avoid the wrong has supernatural assistance.

### 1.3 Views on the Cartesian notion of God and the innate ideas

Descartes's descent into oblivion during the eighteenth century did not go entirely unnoticed. None other than the *Académie Française* felt that something had to be

<sup>49</sup> Quesnay does not actually use these terms, but what he says amounts to the same, *ibid.*: 'Mon ame (...) ne peut-elle pas être toujours dans un état de pure illusion, où elle seroit réduite à des sensations représentatives d'objets qui n'existent pas?'

<sup>50</sup> *Encyc.* VI, 154.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.



done, and they chose a solemn homage to Descartes as the subject for the prize of eloquence. From the thirty-six competitors, the winner was Antoine Léonard Thomas with his *Éloge de René Descartes* (1765).<sup>52</sup> Another contestant was Louis-Sébastien Mercier, to whom we will return in Part II.

At the time of the *Encyclopédie*, the whole scientific world rejected the doctrine of the innate ideas. It is one of the most lively examples of eighteenth-century criticism of Descartes. Throughout this time the doctrine was not only rejected, but also faced considerable ridicule,<sup>53</sup> due to the influence of Anglo-Saxon philosophy, as discussed above. Even Thomas' prize-winning essay, which, to put it mildly, is an exaggerated appraisal of the philosopher, does not defend this doctrine, but merely tries to explain why it was adopted. Thomas only gives a quasi-sociological explanation for Descartes's 'mistake'. He suggests that, like the botanist amongst the plants he collects, or the chemist amongst the substances he analyses, Descartes lived amongst his innate ideas. It is suggested that we should not hold this error against him, because he was used to living in deep meditation, far beyond the boundaries of the senses. Thus, Lockean sensualism, mainly introduced into France by Voltaire, prevailed even in this eulogy of Descartes.

In the following, we will try to determine exactly what d'Alembert's view of innate ideas was and how he understood Descartes's notion of God. However, firstly, in order to avoid developing more misconceptions about the Cartesian innate ideas, we will let Descartes speak for himself.

In his *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, Descartes discerns three kinds of ideas: those with which we seem to be born (*innatae/ nées avec moy*), those which are alien, coming from outside (*adventitiae/étrangeres & venir de dehors*), and those which are created by the self (*a me ipso factae mihi videntur/estre faites & inuentées par moy-mesme*).<sup>54</sup> Descartes states that the existence of God could be demonstrated through the fact that I exist and that the idea of God – which he defines as a sovereignly perfect being – is within me. When asked exactly how he obtained the idea of God, he reasons:

Superest tantùm ut examinem quâ ratione ideam istam a Deo accepi;  
neque enim illam sensibus hausì, nec unquam non expectanti mihi  
advenit, ut solent rerum sensibilium ideæ, cùm istæ res externis sensuum  
organism occurunt, vel occurrere videntur; nec etiam a me efficta est, nam  
nihil ab illâ detrahère, nihil illi superaddere plane possum; ac proinde

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas, *Éloge de René Descartes* [1765], p. 29: 'Feraì-je voir ce grand Homme, malgré la circonspection de sa marche, s'égarant dans la métaphysique, & créant son système des idées innées? Mais cette erreur même tenoit à la grandeur de son génie. Accoutumé à des méditations profondes, habitué à vivre loin des bornes des sens, à chercher dans l'intérieur de l'ame ou dans l'essence de Dieu, l'origine, l'ordre & le fil de ses connoissances, pouvoit-il soupçonner que l'ame fût entièrement dépendante des sens pour les idées? N'étoit-il pas trop avilissant pour elle qu'elle ne fût occupée qu'à errer sur le monde physique pour y ramasser les matériaux de ses connoissances, comme le Botaniste qui cueille ses végétaux, ou à extraire des principes de ses sensations, comme le Chymiste qui analyse des corps? D'ailleurs, peut-être que Descartes vit dans les idées innées, un point de communication entre l'ame & la matière?'

<sup>53</sup> In Part V, which discusses the neo-Kantian view of Descartes, we will show that it is possible to read Descartes in a Kantian way and to read Kant in a Cartesian way.

<sup>54</sup> *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 37-38; *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 29.

superest ut mihi sit innata, quemadmodum etiam mihi est innata idea meâ ipsius.<sup>55</sup>

The French translation, by Mr. le Duc de Luynes<sup>56</sup> (first edition 1647) reads:

Il me reste seulement à examiner de quelle façon i'ay acquis cette idée. Car ie ne l'ay pas receuë par les sens, & iamais elle ne s'est offerte à moy contre mon attente, ainsi que font les idées des choses sensibles, lorsque ces choses se presentent ou semblent se presenter aux organes exterieurs de mes sens. Elle n'est pas aussi vne pure production ou fiction de mon esprit; car il n'est pas en mon pouuoir d'y diminuer ny d'y adiouster aucune chose. Et par consequent il ne reste plus autre chose à dire, sinon que, comme l'idée de moy-mesme, elle est née & produite avec moy dès lors que i'ay esté crée.<sup>57</sup>

This is one passage in which Descartes gives an argument *ex negativo* for the existence of innate ideas. Descartes's clearest notion of innate ideas is found in his remarks to Regius, known as *Notæ in programma quoddam*, written in December 1647. According to Regius, the mind is not in need of innate ideas, notions or axioms, as the mere existence of the faculty of thinking suffices for it to exercise its actions. The reaction of Descartes was as follows:<sup>58</sup>

I have never written or taken the view that the mind requires innate ideas which are something distinct from its own faculty of thinking. I did, however, observe that there were certain thoughts within me which neither came to me from external objects nor were determined by my will, but which came solely from the power of thinking within me; so I applied the term 'innate' to the ideas or notions which are the forms of these thoughts in order to distinguish them from others, which I called 'adventitious' or 'made up'. This is the same sense as that in which we

<sup>55</sup> *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 51.

<sup>56</sup> There were three editions in the seventeenth century, 1647, 1661 and 1673. Descartes himself altered and checked the first translation made by Louis Charles d'Albert Duc de Luynes. The *Objections and Replies to the Meditations* were translated by Claude Clerselier.

<sup>57</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 40-41.

<sup>58</sup> *Notæ*, AT VIII-2, 357-358: 'Non enim unquam scripsi vel iudicavi, mentem indigere ideis innatis, quæ sint aliquid diversum ab ejus facultate cogitandi; sed cum adverterem, quasdam in me esse cogitationes, quæ non ab objectis externis, nec à voluntatis meæ determinatione procedebant, sed à solâ cogitandi facultate, quæ in me est, ut ideas sive notiones, quæ sunt istarum cogitationum formæ, ab aliis *adventitiis* aut *factis* distinguerem, illas *innatas* vocavi. Eodem sensu, quo dicimus, generositatem esse quibusdam familiis innatam, aliis verò quosdam morbos, ut podagram, vel calculum: non quòd ideo istarum familiarum infantes morbis istis in utero matris laborent, sed quòd nascantur cum quâdam dispositione sive facultate ad illos contrahendos.' In *Cous.* X, 94 (lettre 99) it reads: 'Car je n'ai jamais écrit ni jugé que l'esprit ait besoin d'idées naturelles qui soient quelque chose de différent de la faculté qu'il a de penser: mais bien est-il vrai que, reconnaissant qu'il y avoit certaines pensées qui ne procédoient ni des objets du dehors, ni de la détermination de ma volonté, mais seulement de la faculté que j'ai de penser, pour établir quelque différence entre les idées ou les notions qui sont les formes de ces pensées, et les distinguer des autres qu'on peut appeler *étrangères*, ou *faites à plaisir*, je les ai nommées *naturelles*; mais je l'ai dit au même sens que nous disons que la générosité, par exemple, est naturelle à certaines familles, ou que certaines maladies, comme la goutte ou la gravelle, sont naturelles à d'autres, non pas que les enfants qui prennent naissance dans ces familles soient travaillés de ces maladies aux ventres de leurs mères, mais parce qu'ils naissent avec la disposition ou la faculté de les contracter.'

say that generosity is ‘innate’ in certain families, or that certain diseases such as gout or stones are innate in others: it is not so much that the babies of such families suffer from these diseases in their mother’s womb, but simply that they are born with a certain ‘faculty’ or tendency to contract them.<sup>59</sup>

Remarkably, Descartes brings innate ideas very close to the faculty of thought. He considers that the ideas that proceed solely from the faculty of thought are innate as this is the only possible explanation for the existence of certain ideas which do not arise from external objects or from a decision of the will. In *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes describes these innate ideas as ‘seeds of truth’ in the context of an attempt to establish the principles or first causes of all things through the contemplation of nothing but God and ‘certaines semences de vérités qui sont naturellement en nos âmes’.<sup>60</sup>

The reason why Descartes accuses Regius of having misread him is that Regius concluded, from the proposition that the mind is not in need of innate ideas, that all common notions (*communes notiones*), which are engraved (*insculptæ*) on the mind, have their origin in the observation of things or in tradition.<sup>61</sup> However, according to Descartes, this would imply that the mind’s faculty of thought cannot produce anything by itself. If we admit this, all a priori knowledge, in Cartesian terms or in terms of ‘the school’,<sup>62</sup> such as knowing effects from their causes, is lost. However, a priori knowledge must be necessary, for Descartes, and this means explaining effects from their causes and not vice versa.<sup>63</sup>

If one bears in mind the scope of the senses and what it is exactly (*præcise*) that reaches the faculty of thinking by way of them, we must admit that the ideas of things are never presented to us by the senses in the way that we form them in our thinking.<sup>64</sup> According to Descartes, everything in our ideas or faculty of thinking is innate, except for the circumstances that relate to immediate experience, in which the idea we have immediately before our mind refers to a certain thing which is outside us. We will return to this passage in Part V, returning now to d’Alembert.

In the fourth volume of *Mélanges de littérature, d’histoire et de philosophie* (1767) d’Alembert treats the question of religion and philosophy. In this volume, we find a treatise entitled *De l’abus de la critique en matière de Religion* in which he defends the philosophers who have been accused of impiety. He suggests that

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<sup>59</sup> CSM I, 303-304.

<sup>60</sup> *Disc. (G)*, 64.

<sup>61</sup> Note the difference between *innata* and *insculpta*, which Cousin translates with ‘naturellement imprimées’ and ‘empreintes’.

<sup>62</sup> See *Le Monde*, AT XI, 47.

<sup>63</sup> See *Principes* III (§4), AT IX-2, 105.

<sup>64</sup> The Latin and French texts are not quite clear: *Notae*, AT VIII-2, 358: ‘Quod adeò falsum est, ut è contra, quisquis recte advertit, quousque sensus nostri se extendant, & quidnam sit præcise, quod ab illis ad nostram cogitandi facultatem potest pervenire, debeat fateri, nullarum rerum ideas, quales eas cogitatione formamus, nobis ab illis exhiberi.’ Cous. X, 95: ‘Ce qui est tellement faux, que quiconque a bien compris jusqu’où s’étendent nos sens, et ce que ce peut être précisément qui est porté par eux jusqu’à la faculté de nous avons de penser, doit avouer au contraire qu’aucunes idées des choses ne nous sont représentées par eux telles que nous les formons par la pensée’. The English translation used in the text above offers an unambiguous alternative.

they were often wrongly charged due to the twisting of their words and opinions. In this treatise, amongst others, he defends Descartes, especially praising the quotation: ‘Donnez-moi de la matière & du mouvement, & je ferai un monde’.<sup>65</sup> Remarkably, this quote illustrates exactly what Voltaire found problematical in Descartes. In his *Éléments de la philosophie de Newton*, Voltaire ironically claimed that the so-called physical principles of Descartes lead the mind to knowledge of its Creator. He then fiercely attacks Descartes and accuses him of underestimating God.

A Dieu ne plaise que par une calomnie horrible j'accuse ce grand homme d'avoir méconnu la suprême intelligence à laquelle il devait tant, et qui l'avait élevé au-dessus de presque tous les hommes de son siècle! je dis seulement que l'abus qu'il a fait quelquefois de son esprit a conduit ses disciples à des précipices, dont le maître était fort éloigné; je dis que le système cartésien a produit celui de Spinoza; je dis que j'ai connu beaucoup de personnes que le cartésianisme a conduites à n'admettre d'autre Dieu que l'immensité des choses, et que je n'ai vu au contraire aucun newtonien qui ne fût théiste dans le sens le plus rigoureux.

Dès qu'on s'est persuadé, avec Descartes, qu'il est impossible que le monde soit fini, que le mouvement est toujours dans la même quantité; dès qu'on ose dire: Donnez-moi du mouvement et de la matière, et je vais faire un monde; alors, il le faut avouer, ces idées semblent exclure, par des conséquences trop justes, l'idée d'un être seul infini, seul auteur du mouvement, seul auteur de l'organisation des substances.<sup>66</sup>

In opposition to Voltaire, d'Alembert is quite pleased with the claim ‘give me matter and movement, and I shall build a world’. He thinks that it:

... est peut-être ce que la Philosophie a jamais dit de plus relevé à la gloire de l'Être suprême; une pensée si profonde & si grande n'a pu partir que d'un génie vaste, qui d'un côté sentoit la nécessité d'une Intelligence toute-puissante pour donner l'existence & l'impulsion à la matière, & qui appercevoit de l'autre la simplicité & la fécondité non moins admirable des lois du mouvement; lois en vertu desquelles le Créateur a renfermée tous le événemens dans le premier comme dans

<sup>65</sup> D'Alembert probably has the second part Descartes's *Principia Philosophiae* in mind. Kant also mentions this passage, but finds this assertion a daring and risky enterprise see *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte und Theorie des Himmels, oder Versuch von der Verfassung und dem mechanischen Ursprunge des ganzen Weltgebäudes nach Newtonischen Grundätzen abgehandelt* [1755], AA I, 229; Kant leaves out the word ‘mouvement’ and says: ‘Gebt mir nur Materie, ich will euch eine Welt daraus bauen’, but he does not say that it stems from Descartes. As we will see in part IV, Buhle also mentions this proposition. Hegel also mentions the same passage, but according to Garniron and Jaeschke it does not correspond to the Cartesian position, see *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* ed. Garniron and Jaeschke (1986), vol. 4, p. 300: ‘Descartes setzt vielmehr Ausdehnung und Materie in eins und unterscheidet als deren Bestimmungen Gestalt und Bewegung’, cf. *Principes* II, AT IX-2, 75 ff.

<sup>66</sup> Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 22, p. 404. In Part II, Voltaire will return in the parliamentary discussion about who deserved a place in the Panthéon. We shall see that Voltaire's place was secured, but Descartes's certainly not.

leur germe, & n'a eu besoin pour les produire que *d'une parole*, selon l'expression si sublime de l'Écriture.<sup>67</sup>

Here, it seems that d'Alembert does not criticize Descartes's notion of God. However, what does he think about the innate aspect of this notion? For centuries, people had thought that all ideas arise through the senses. According to d'Alembert, this was defended so violently that anyone who taught another doctrine risked death. He finds capital punishment in these cases 'a bit harsh', but remarks that it serves to show the religious connotation that our forebears attached to the ancient opinion that sensations are the basis of all knowledge. He then puts Descartes onto the stage:

Descartes vint & dit: »l'ame est spirituelle; or qu'est-ce qu'un être spirituel sans idées? l'ame a donc des idées innées«.<sup>68</sup>

The objections that d'Alembert raises against the doctrine of innate ideas come from both a religious and an epistemological point of view. From the religious position, the problem with innate ideas, for d'Alembert, is that if a newborn or even an unborn child has an innate idea of God, it also has an obligation towards God. However, this is against the first principles of religion. Moreover, the claim that the idea of God exists in infants, without being developed, raises puzzling questions, such as, what are ideas if they are not conscious thoughts?, and, how can someone have an obligation to learn these ideas without ever having consciously known them?

His epistemological objection to innate ideas departs from the Lockean distinction between direct knowledge and reflected knowledge.<sup>69</sup> Despite the distinction, d'Alembert considered that reflected knowledge can be reduced to direct knowledge, and direct knowledge can be reduced to knowledge obtained by the senses. Therefore, all our ideas come from our sensations. D'Alembert continues with a complementary commonsensical question: 'Why suppose that we have purely intellectual notions in advance, when all we need in order to form them is reflection over our sensations?'.<sup>70</sup> He thinks that the first thing sensation teaches us is that we exist, and our first reflected ideas follow from this. What he refers to here is the principle of thought that constitutes our nature, which is 'nothing else than ourselves'.<sup>71</sup> The second aspect of knowledge that we obtain from sensations is that of the existence of external objects.

The question concerning whether we have innate ideas or whether all our ideas come from the senses can be reduced to that of the difference between Descartes and Locke. However, are they as opposed to each other as is often thought? There is an interesting eighteenth-century attempt to reconcile them, which can be found in the archives of the Academy of Berlin. Here we find an interesting text called *Descartes & Locke conciliés* written by a certain Castillon in

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<sup>67</sup> D'Alembert, De l'abus de la critique en matière de Religion, in *Mélanges de littérature, d'histoire et de philosophie* (1767), vol IV, p. 330.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>69</sup> D'Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l'Encyclopédie* [1763], p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 14.

1770.<sup>72</sup> In the footsteps of Beguelin, who reconciled Leibniz and Newton a year earlier, Castillon wanted to reconcile Descartes and Locke. To resolve the difference of opinions in the matter of the origin of our ideas, Castillon thought that displaying the ‘true sentiments’ of both philosophers would suffice to show that, in themselves, Descartes and Locke were not opposed to each other. He suggests that the alleged opposition between them is caused by ‘quelques adversaires infideles’ and ‘quelques disciples plus zélés que prudens’, who have altered and corrupted the thoughts of both.<sup>73</sup>

The core of his argument is the establishment of a distinction between the Cartesian notion of innate ideas and the notion of innate ideas that had been refuted by Locke. The latter defines innate ideas as:

... some primary Notions, κοινὰ ἔννοια, Characters, as it were stamped upon the Mind of Man, which the Soul receives in its very first Being; and brings into the World with it.<sup>74</sup>

The innate ideas that Descartes is referring to do not come from the senses, but are formed due to a faculty that allows this. Castillon thinks that when Descartes says they are *innate* he means this in the same sense as being born with a certain disposition or a predisposition to incur a certain disease. However, whereas Descartes discerns three categories of ideas, as mentioned above, Locke discerns only two sources from which ideas arise. The first source is the result of our senses being ‘touched’ by external objects, while the second is the perception of the operations of our own minds on the ideas it has received from the senses. These operations are the object of reflection and in this way produce ideas. With regard to this latter form of ideas Castillon asks:

Et quelles sont ces idées? 1°. Celles de ce qu’on appelle apercevoir, penser, douter, croire raisonner, connoître, vouloir, & toutes les différentes actions de nos ames... Ou je me trompe fort, ou ce sont-là les idées innées de Descartes.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, Castillon considers that the Lockean ‘ideas’ which are the product of reflection, are none other than those which Descartes denoted as ‘innate ideas’. Does this mean that the problem is solved? Are Descartes and Locke reconciled? With reference to the passage from *Notae* which we quoted earlier,<sup>76</sup> he poses the following question:

<sup>72</sup> The text is printed in *Mémoires de l’Académie de Berlin 1770*. Nouveaux mémoires de l’académie royale des sciences et belles-lettres, année MDCCLXX, avec l’histoire pour la même année (Berlin 1772), pp. 277-282. Henceforth: Descartes & Locke conciliés.

<sup>73</sup> Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 277.

<sup>74</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] Bk. I, Ch. ii, § 1.

<sup>75</sup> Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 279. See also Locke’s *Essay*, Bk. II, Ch. i, § 4.

<sup>76</sup> Castillon could probably be the first to have quoted from *Notae in programma quoddam*. See *Notae*, AT VIII-2, p. 357-358; Cous., X, (Lettre 99), p. 94; Clerselier, C. & Descartes, R., *Lettres de Mr Descartes qui traittent de plusieurs belles questions concernant la Morale, la Physique, la Medecine, & les Mathematiques*, Nouvelle Edition de figures en taille-douce, vol. 2 (1724), p. 463-464.

Pouvoit-il désavouer plus clairement ces *principes innés, ces notions primitives, empreintes & gravées dans notre ame, qui les reçoit dès le premier moment de son existence, & les apporte au monde avec elle, contre lesquelles Locke tourne toute la force de son raisonnement?*<sup>77</sup>

Castillon claims to have proven that the innate ideas, which were the subject of Locke's refutation, are not the same as those of Descartes. He then attempts to show to what extent they differ. According to Castillon, the main difference between Locke and Descartes can be found in the aim of their respective questioning. Whereas Descartes only wanted to classify ideas to show where truth and falsity lay, Locke was concerned with the origin of ideas. This means that Descartes distinguished ideas according to their class and not according to their source. The names he gave to the second and third classes of ideas, *adventitiae* and *a me ipso factæ mihi videntur*, correspond to the Lockean distinction between those ideas that we acquire through the senses and those that we form ourselves respectively. However, what about the ideas Locke calls 'the Perception of the Operations of our own Minds within us, as it is employ'd about the Ideas it has got'?<sup>78</sup> Do they correspond with the Cartesian innate ideas? In arguing that they do correspond, Castillon claims that the word *inné* is ambiguous:

Le mot *inné* peut signifier né dedans, ou né avec. Les disciples de Descartes ont saisi ce dernier sens, & oubliant la déclaration expresse de leur maître, de ses idées naturelles ils en ont fait des idées empreintes & gravées dans notre ame, qui les reçoit au premier moment de son existence & les apporte au monde avec elle.<sup>79</sup>

Descartes probably did not see this ambiguity himself, for he writes in the Third Meditation on the idea of God that it is 'comme l'idée de moy-mesme . . . est née & produite avec moy dès lors que i'ay esté créée'.<sup>80</sup> Even if the word was ambiguous, it seems that, in any case, the disciples of Descartes chose the right sense. Nonetheless, the difference between 'né dedans' and 'né avec' that Castillon is trying to uphold gives him an opportunity to emphasise the faculty-like character of the innate ideas.

According to Castillon, the disciples of Locke are guilty of misreading their teacher as well as Descartes. He considers that they held that all the operations of the mind can be reduced to physical sensibility and that even our faculties are acquired through the senses. However, this is to misread the passage where Locke speaks of the second origin of our ideas in reflection, which is to say, the

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<sup>77</sup> Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 278.

<sup>78</sup> Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, Ch. i, § 4.

<sup>79</sup> Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 282.

<sup>80</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 41 (my italics), also see p. 29. The most synonyms for the term 'innate idea' are mainly found in the *Principles*, where he cautiously wanted to avoid this term as it was considerably criticized in the Objections to his *Meditations*. Here we find the terms 'communes notions', *Principes* I, (§13), AT IX-2, 30; 'notions generalles' *Principes* I (§48), AT IX-2, 45; 'vne certaine verité eternelle qui a son siege en nostre pensée, & que l'on nomme vne notion commune ou vne maxime', *Principes* I, (§ 49), AT IX-2, 46 and 'simplicissimis & maximè notis principiis, quorum cognitio mentibus nostris à natura indita est', *Princ.* IV, (§203), VIII-1, 326 only in the Latin edition, in the French it is omitted.

perception of the operations of our minds. Locke clearly states that reflection is also a source and it would therefore be wrong to say that it can be reduced to sensation. To do so, Castillon says, is as contrary to Locke's opinion as it is false and dangerous because of the consequences that can follow from it.

Somewhat of an exception to the general rejection of the doctrine of innate ideas in the eighteenth century was J.-J. Rousseau. He accepted the Cartesian doctrines of God and substantiality, and, consequently, he affirmed Cartesian dualism. In Rousseau's philosophy, the mind is the active power that elevates the body, the latter being liable to exhaustion or weakness. Even though Rousseau teaches a doctrine of 'perfectibility', he does not integrate this into a theory of evolution. He felt quite antipathetic towards the doctrine of the unity of humanity and animals: his conviction about the immortality of the soul forced him to adopt a radical separation between the possibilities of human and animal evolution. Rousseau replaces the doctrine of innate ideas with that of innate sentiments, which he subdivides into individual sentiments and social sentiments. This means that *l'amour de soi*, the fear of pain, the horror of death and the wish for well-being are, according to Rousseau, all innate feelings.<sup>81</sup> Sentiment, in this sense, is part of the deepest essence of man. Nature has engraved it into the heart. Compared to the inner sentiment, ideas and reason are merely secondary derivatives. Whereas Descartes finds his propositions by means of reason and proof, Rousseau proves the impression of inner sentiment in itself. Cartesian logic is opposed to Rousseau's 'voice of the heart'.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> See Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation*, bk.4, in *Œuvres complètes* ed. M. Launay, vol. 3, p. 201.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, *Mémoire présenté à M. de Mably*, in *Œuvres complètes* ed. M. Launay, vol. 2, p. 33.



#### 1.4 Hume on innate ideas

It seems that the question concerning whether human beings have innate ideas or not was not answered satisfactorily during the eighteenth century. The attempts to reconcile proponents and opponents by arguing that the whole issue is based on differences in definition, apparently failed, which indicates that there was perhaps more to the problem than mere language issues. Nevertheless, the language issue was the main reason for David Hume to ‘entertain [...] any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea [...]’.<sup>83</sup>

What did Hume think about innate ideas? In *An abstract of a book lately published entitled A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.* (1740), Hume attacks Locke, arguing that we do have innate ideas. He writes:

Only it may be observed, as an inaccuracy of that famous philosopher, that he comprehends all our perceptions under the term of idea, in which sense it is false, that we have no innate ideas. For it is evident our stronger perceptions or impressions are innate, and that natural affection, love or virtue, resentment, and all the other passions, arise immediately from nature.<sup>84</sup>

It seems that, by innate in the above, Hume simply means ‘immediately arising from nature’. In his *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, however, he explains what else can be understood by this term. In this work, Hume only needed a single footnote to deal with the issue of innate ideas. In that note he distinguishes three possible meanings of the term ‘innate’.

In the first definition, innate is meant as ‘equivalent to natural’; ‘natural’ is meant here as opposite of uncommon, artificial or miraculous. In this sense all our perceptions and ideas of the mind are innate or natural. The second definition treats innate as ‘contemporary to our birth’, which he considers makes the dispute frivolous: ‘nor [...] worth while to enquire at what time thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth’. The third possibility is to see innate as equivalent to ‘original’, meaning ‘copied from no precedent perception’, in which case ‘we may assert that all our impressions are innate, and our ideas not innate’.<sup>85</sup>

We also have to bear in mind Hume’s twofold definition of ‘idea’. In the broad sense ‘idea’ stands for ‘any of our perceptions, our sensations and passions, as well as thoughts’. In the narrow sense ‘idea’ is equivalent to ‘copy of an impression’ with an impression being ‘a more lively perception’ in contrast to ‘idea’, which is a ‘less forcible and lively perception’.<sup>86</sup>

The authors of the *Encyclopédie* agree with Hume’s point of view that the terms ‘innate’ and ‘idea’ ‘were not chosen with such caution, nor were so precisely

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<sup>83</sup> *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* [1748], in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford <sup>1</sup>1888, <sup>2</sup>1902, <sup>3</sup>1975), section II, §17, p. 22. Henceforth: *Enquiry*.

<sup>84</sup> We have borrowed the text from the English/German edition trans. by Jens Kulenkampff (1980), p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> *Enquiry*, p. 22.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

defined, as to prevent all mistakes about their doctrine'.<sup>87</sup> In the lemma 'Idée', written by the Abbot Yvon in 1765 we read:

Recourir aux idées innées, ou avancer que notre ame a été créée avec toutes ses idées, c'est se servir de termes vagues qui ne signifient rien; c'est anéantir en quelque sorte toutes nos sensations, ce qui est bien contraire à l'expérience; c'est confondre ce qui peut être vrai à certains égards, des principes, avec ce qui ne l'est pas des idées dont il est ici question; & c'est renouveler des disputes qui ont été amplement discutées dans l'excellent ouvrage sur l'entendement humain [i.e. Locke].<sup>88</sup>

It was Descartes himself who caused this lack of clarity. Not only did he use the term *innatae*, but *ingenitae* and *insitae* as well. Also, in his *Principia*, he speaks of ideas that are in our mind, or ideas that are in us. Furthermore, the term 'idea' is far from unambiguous in Descartes's works. In the Third Meditation we find something like a definition when he says: 'Entre mes pensées, quelques-vnes sont comme les images des choses, & c'est à celles-là seules que conuient proprement le nom d'idée: comme lorsque ie me represente vn homme, ou vne Chimere, ou le Ciel, ou vn Ange, ou Dieu mesme'.<sup>89</sup> It is only in the responses to the second objections that Descartes finally defines 'idea':

Par le nom d'*idée*, i'entens cette forme de chacune de nos pensées, par la perception immédiate de laquelle nous auons connoissance de ces mesmes pensées. En telle sorte que ie ne puis rien exprimer par des paroles, lorsque i'entens ce que ie dis, que cela mesme il ne soit certain que i'ay en moy l'idée de la chose qui est signifiée par mes paroles. Et ainsi ie n'appelle pas du nom d'idée les seules images qui sont dépeintes en la fantaisie; au contraire, ie ne les appelle point icy de ce nom, en tant qu'elles sont en la fantaisie corporelle, c'est à dire en tant qu'elles sont dépeintes en quelques parties du cerueau, mais seulement en tant qu'elles informent l'esprit mesme, qui s'applique à cette partie du cerueau.<sup>90</sup>

An idea is that which gives form to the mind itself, when it is directed towards that part of the brain on which a certain image is depicted. An idea is not merely a picture in the corporeal fantasy, it becomes an idea only after the image has been comprehended by thinking. The innate idea of God is not a pictorial image, but a representation that the mind deduces. In this way, innate ideas become innate notions (*notionibus mihi innatis*). Descartes gives an example: I have two different ideas of the sun, one originates from the senses, the other is developed from

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> *Encyc.* VIII, 490.

<sup>89</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 29.

<sup>90</sup> *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 124.

astronomical evidence based on certain notions with which he was born. The latter idea, which is based on innate notions, is the true idea, or, negatively formulated, is the idea that immediately stems from its appearance and 'est celle qui luy est le plus dissemblable'.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Med. III (F)*, AT IX-1, 31. For further reading on the French eighteenth-century view of Descartes see T. Thorn, *Descartes im Licht der französischen Aufklärung* (2003).

## 2 KANT'S VIEW OF DESCARTES

### 2.1 Kant's notion of the history and progress of philosophy

In order to place Kant's interpretation, evaluation and criticism of Descartes in a broader perspective, we will begin by giving a short impression of Kant's view of the history of philosophy. This can be reconstructed on the basis of two texts: *Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik*<sup>92</sup> and *Preisschrift über die Fortschritte der Metaphysik* (1791), which is also known under the longer title *Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnizens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?*<sup>93</sup>

In the latter work Kant discerns three stages in the history of philosophy: dogmatism, scepticism and criticism of pure reason (*Kritizism der reinen Vernunft*), or as Fülleborn classifies them according to their methods: 'Behaupten, Bezweifeln und Untersuchen'.<sup>94</sup> We have to note that Kant did not see these distinctions as chronological stages, but as established in the nature of human understanding.<sup>95</sup>

Kant characterizes the first stage, dogmatism, as a complete faith in human reason, because of the success it had in mathematics. The problem he has with this stage is that it failed to make a distinction between analytic knowledge in which reason itself constructs its concepts, and philosophical knowledge in which an augmentation (*Erweiterung*) of knowledge takes place through concepts alone. In this stage, metaphysics was concerned with the final goal (*Endzweck*) of reason which Kant comprehends under the notion of 'the supersensible' (*das Übersinnliche*). Metaphysicians kept faith in reason, and although their insights could not be verified through experience, neither could they be refuted.

The second stage is scepticism, which Kant calls a regression that was advantageous for metaphysics. This is probably one of the stages where we can locate Descartes, although Kant states that it is almost as old as the previous stage. Kant asks the question: 'by what do we recognise the failures of metaphysics?', and answers it directly:

. . . es sind beabsichtigte und vermeynte Eroberungen im Felde des Übersinnlichen, wo vom absoluten Naturganzen, was kein Sinn fasset,

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<sup>92</sup> *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, AA XX, Dritte Abteilung (Handschriftlicher Nachlaß) vol. VII (pp. 333-351), henceforth: *Lose Blätter*.

<sup>93</sup> In *ibid.* pp. 253-332, henceforth: *Fortschritte*. By 'Wolf' Kant means Wolff.

<sup>94</sup> Fülleborn, 'Was heißt den Geist einer Philosophie darstellen' [1791], in *Beyträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I, 4. Stück, p. 194.

<sup>95</sup> 'Diese Zeitordnung ist in der Natur des menschlichen Erkenntnißvermögens gegründet', *Fortschritte*, p. 264. A more political illustration of these stages we find in the Preface to the first edition of *KrV A X*: 'Anfänglich war ihre Herrschaft, unter der Verwaltung der Dogmatiker, despotisch. Allein, weil die Gesetzgebung noch die Spur der alten Barbarei an sich hatte, so artete sie durch innere Kriege nach und nach in völlige Anarchie aus und die Skeptiker, eine Art Nomaden, die allen beständigen Anbau des Bodens verabscheuen, zertrenneten von Zeit zu Zeit die bürgerliche Vereinigung.'

imgleichen von Gott, Freyheit und Unsterblichkeit die Frage ist, die hauptsächlich die letztern drey Gegenstände betrifft, daran die Vernunft ein praktisches Interesse nimmt, in Ansehung deren nun alle Versuche der Erweiterung scheitern, welches man aber nicht etwa daran sieht, daß uns eine tiefere Erkenntnis des Übersinnlichen, als höhere Metaphysik, etwa das Gegentheil jener Meynungen lehre, denn mit dem können wir diese nicht vergleichen, weil wir sie als überschwenglich nicht kennen, sondern weil in unserer Vernunft Prinzipien liegen, welche jedem erweiternden Satz über diese Gegenstände einen, dem Ansehen nach, eben so gründlichen Gegensatz entgegen stellen, und die Vernunft ihre Versuche selbst zernichtet.<sup>96</sup>

In short, as Kant had illustrated earlier with the antinomies of pure reason in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, he shows that it is pointless to say anything about events that cannot be given in a possible experience, because the contrary could also be said about them. To solve this problem he introduces, as the third stage, his own philosophy, which we will discuss more extensively below.

## 2.2 The place of Descartes in the works of Kant

In which stage should we locate Descartes? As we said above, it is difficult to say something about the place of Descartes in Kant's works, because he very rarely refers to him or his texts. One of the few places where he mentions Descartes is in his *Logik*, where it reads:

Ein nicht geringes Verdienst um dieselbe [the amelioration of speculative philosophy] erwarb sich Descartes, indem er viel dazu beytrug, dem Denken Deutlichkeit zu geben, durch sein aufgestelltes Criterium der Wahrheit, das er in die Klarheit und Evidenz der Erkenntniß setzte.<sup>97</sup>

It may seem that what Kant has to say about Descartes is very concise, but when we take into account that he treats the whole history of philosophy, from Thales to Newton, in a mere five pages, it is a wonder that he mentions him at all. The reason why he mentions Descartes in his *Logik* is odd; as it seems that Kant thinks Descartes did nothing new in philosophy. Although he praises Descartes's criterion for truth, he does not mention its foundation in the *cogito*. The first and most important researcher of nature according to Kant is Bacon (Baco von Verulamio). As the greatest and most meritorious 'Reformatoren der Philosophie' of the modern age, Kant mentions Leibniz and Locke. He praises Locke, because he tried to show what powers and operations of the soul belong to what kind of knowledge.

What he holds against Descartes, can be found in his *Prolegomena*, where he formulates a severe criticism in the process of distinguishing his own idealism from that of Berkeley and Descartes.

Denn daß ich selbst dieser meiner Theorie den Namen eines transscendentalen Idealisms gegeben habe, kann keinen berechtigen, ihn

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<sup>96</sup> *Fortschritte*, 263.

<sup>97</sup> *Logik*, AA IX 32.

mit dem empirischen Idealismus des Cartes (wiewohl dieser nur eine Aufgabe war, wegen deren Unauflöslichkeit es, nach Cartesens Meinung, jedermann frei stand, die Existenz der körperlichen Welt zu verneinen, weil sie niemals genugtuend beantwortet werden könnte,) oder mit dem mystischen und schwärmerischen des Berkeley (wowider und andre ähnliche Hirngespinnste unsre Kritik vielmehr das eigentliche Gegenmittel enthält) zu verwechseln.<sup>98</sup>

Kant did not think Descartes had solved the problem of scepticism. According to Schütt, Descartes is not the sceptical opponent of empirical realism as Kant depicts him, but is rather in competition with Kant to provide a better rejection of scepticism.<sup>99</sup> Further objections to both Cartesian and Berkeleyan idealism, can be found in the Preface to the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* where he states:

Der Idealismus mag in Ansehung der wesentlichen Zwecke der Metaphysik für noch so unschuldig gehalten werden (das er in der That nicht ist), so bleibt es immer ein Skandal der Philosophie und allgemeinen Menschenvernunft, das Dasein der Dinge außer uns (von denen wir doch den ganzen Stoff zu Erkenntnissen selbst für unsern inneren Sinn her haben) bloß auf *Glauben* annehmen zu müssen, und, wenn es jemand einfällt, es zu bezweifeln, ihm keinen genugthuenden Beweis entgegenstellen zu können.<sup>100</sup>

If Kant has Descartes in mind here, we can assume that with ‘Glauben’ he means the Cartesian idea of God. In order to fully understand Kant’s criticism, we will now take a closer look at the passages where Descartes explains this idea.

Descartes required the idea of a God who is not a deceiver in order to disprove the hypothesis of the evil genius. When we look at the places in Descartes’s texts where the possible intervention of an evil genius appears in the domain of clear and distinct ideas, and consequently, where the necessity arises for divine veracity in order to found the truth of these ideas, it seems that there are two different theses. On the one hand, the fourth part of *Discours de la méthode*<sup>101</sup> and the third of the *Meditations*<sup>102</sup> seem to subordinate all clear and distinct ideas to the demonstration of the existence of a non-deceiving God. On the other hand, the fifth of the *Meditations*,<sup>103</sup> the Replies to the Second and Fourth Set of Objections,<sup>104</sup> the letter to Clerselier,<sup>105</sup> §13 of *Principles of Philosophy*,<sup>106</sup> and *Entretien avec Burman*,<sup>107</sup> seem to establish a distinction between the intuitive truths and the truths in which memory intervenes. The former are sufficient in themselves, the latter need a

<sup>98</sup> *Proleg.*, AA IV, 293.

<sup>99</sup> Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), p. 64.

<sup>100</sup> KrV B XXXIXn, (AA III, 23).

<sup>101</sup> *Disc.*, AT VI, 37 ff.; *Disc.* (G), 31 ff.

<sup>102</sup> *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 35-36; *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 28.

<sup>103</sup> *Med.* V (L), AT VII, 69-71; *Med.* V (F), AT IX-1, 55-56.

<sup>104</sup> *Resp.* II, AT VII, 140 ff.; *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 110 ff. *Resp.* IV, AT VII, 245-246; *Rep.* IV, AT IX-1, 189-190.

<sup>105</sup> *Corr.*, AT V, 178.

<sup>106</sup> *Princ.* I, AT VIII-1, 9-10; *Principes* I, AT IX-2, 30-31; CSM I, 197.

<sup>107</sup> *Entretien*, AT V, 178, see also *Gespräch mit Burman* (1982), transl. and ed. H. W. Arndt, p. 114-117.

guarantee. When we take a closer look at §13 of *Principles*, we see that this guarantee depends on the following remark:

. . . que cependant elle pense que l'Auteur de son estre auroit peu la créer de telle nature qu'elle se méprit... en tout ce qui luy semble tres-évident, elle voit bien qu'elle a vn juste sujet de se défier de la verité de tout ce qu'elle n'apperçoit pas distinctement, & qu'elle ne sçauroit auoir aucune science certaine, jusques à ce qu'elle ait connu celuy qui l'a créée.

Philosophically, this is a very weak guarantee, because it is only an assumption based on the qualities commonly ascribed to God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the opinion of Descartes, however, there was no problem in linking religious qualities with philosophical arguments, because he based both on clear and distinct ideas. We have to distinguish between the philosophical proof for the existence of God and the religious one. Whereas the philosophical proof claims the existence of an infinite substance, which, theoretically could be the evil genius, the religious proof implies the qualities of benevolence and veracity.

For the modern reader, the gap between religion and philosophy cannot be bridged, because in religion, faith will always be a necessary condition. Descartes tried to bridge the gap between the two just as he tried to combine ontology and epistemology into one system. Unfortunately, he did not succeed in this and, consequently, we can distinguish two systems: the epistemological system, which is founded on the *cogito* and the ontological system, which is founded on the idea of God. Kant was only interested in the proof of the existence of the outside world. As we saw above, he claims that anyone can doubt the existence of the outside world. It follows then that he does not accept the Cartesian proof of God.

We discover what Kant considers to be the problem with the ontological proof in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. According to Kant, the idea of an absolutely necessary being is a pure concept of reason. The content of this concept or idea, which he calls its objective reality,<sup>108</sup> is not proven by the fact that reason is in need of this idea. He thinks the ontological proof illegitimately exchanges a logical predicate for a real predicate. The ontological proof takes 'being' as a predicate, to which Kant remarks:

Sein ist offenbar kein reales Prädicat, d.i. ein Begriff von irgend etwas, was zu dem Begriffe eines Dinges hinzukommen könne. Es ist bloß die Position eines Dinges, oder gewisser Bestimmungen an sich selbst. In logischen Gebrauche ist es lediglich die Copula eines Urtheils. Der Satz: Gott ist allmächtig, enthält zwei Begriffe, die ihre Objecte haben: Gott und Allmacht; das Wörtchen: ist, ist nicht noch ein Prädicat obenein, sondern nur das, was das Prädicat beziehungsweise aufs Subject setzt. Nehme ich nun das Subject (Gott) mit allen seinen Prädicaten (worunter

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<sup>108</sup> Descartes defines the term 'objective reality' in *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 124: 'Par la réalité objectiue d'une idée, i'entens l'entité ou l'estre de la chose représentée par l'idée, en tant que cette entité est dans l'idée; & de la mesme façon, on peut dire vne perfection objectiue, ou vn artifice objectif, &c. Car tout ce que nous conceuons comme estant dans les objets des idées, tout cela est objectiuement, ou par representation, dans les idées mesmes'. And 'réalité formelle', *ibid.*: 'Les mesmes choses sont dites estre formellement dans les objets des idées, quand elles sont en eux telles que nous les conceuons'.

auch die Allmacht gehört) zusammen und sage: Gott ist, oder es ist ein Gott, so setze ich kein neues Prädicat zum Begriffe von Gott, sondern nur das Subject an sich selbst mit allen seinen Prädicaten und zwar den Gegenstand in Beziehung auf meinen Begriff.<sup>109</sup>

Kant asserts that a real thing does not contain anything more than a possible thing; a real God does not contain more than a possible God. The real thing refers to the object and its position in itself, the possible thing refers to the concept. If the concept could contain more than the real thing, the concept would not express the whole thing, so it would not be the proper concept of the thing. The difference between a real thing and a possible thing is that the real thing is not merely analytically contained in my concept, but it is synthetically added to my concept. However, the thing that is thought is not in the least increased by its existence outside my concept. When we think of something, we think, for instance, that this thing is red, soft, round and so forth, but to further claim or think that 'it is', does not add anything to the thing we have in mind. If it were the case that something was added, the thing-in-itself would be something more than that which was contained in the original concept of the thing. As such, I cannot claim that the exact object of my concept exists. This holds for the idea of God too:

Denke ich mir nun ein Wesen als die höchste Realität (ohne Mangel), so bleibt noch immer die Frage, ob es existire, oder nicht. Denn, obgleich an meinem Begriffe, von dem möglichen realen Inhalte eines Dinges überhaupt, nichts fehlt, so fehlt doch noch etwas an dem Verhältnisse zu meinem ganzen Zustande des Denkens, nämlich daß die Erkenntnis jenes Objekts auch a posteriori möglich sei.<sup>110</sup>

Kant concludes his criticism of Descartes's ontological proof for the existence of God with the remark that all the effort and work has been in vain. According to Kant, man is as rich in insights from mere ideas, as a salesman who adds a few noughts in his account books in order to improve his situation.<sup>111</sup>

Kant thought he could refute sceptical idealism with his thesis of the ideality of outer appearances (*Erscheinungen*). In order to explain this, we have to clarify a few distinctions Kant makes between some philosophical positions. As far as the relation with the external world is concerned, Kant distinguishes between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism on the one hand, and on the other between empirical realism and empirical idealism.

Transcendental idealism is the position that holds that all appearances (*Erscheinungen*) are merely representations (*Vorstellungen*) and not things-in-themselves (*Dinge an sich*), consequently space and time are only sensorial forms of our intuition (*Anschauung*) and not given determinations in themselves, or conditions of objects as things-in-themselves.

Transcendental realism is the position that holds that outer appearances (*äußere Erscheinungen*) are things-in-themselves that exist independently of us and

<sup>109</sup> KrV B 626-627 (AA III, 401).

<sup>110</sup> KrV B 628 (AA III, 402).

<sup>111</sup> In Section 4.3, we will return to Kant's criticism of the ontological proof with respect to Schelling's criticism of Kant in this regard.



of our sensibility. However, the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist; this position can also be called dualism. In other words, transcendental idealism allows for the existence of matter, thus, it can assume more than the mere certainty of the representations in the mind, and it is in this context that Kant mentions the *cogito, ergo sum*. From the dualist point of view, the existence of matter and even its inner possibility, cannot be separated from sensibility. Consequently sensibility is regarded as a kind of external intuition which relates perceptions to a space in which everything is outside, while the concept of space itself remains within thought.

Having made these distinctions, the important difference between Kant and Descartes regarding the existence of the outside world becomes clear. Whereas Descartes needed a mediatory device in the form of a proof, Kant speaks of an immediate observation (*unmittelbare Wahrnehmung*) of matter as an appearance. Transcendental realism claims that the objects of our outer senses are distinct from the senses and it considers appearances as autonomous beings outside our mind. However, it is not certain that if the representation exists, then the corresponding object also exists. In Kant's system of transcendental idealism, external objects are merely phenomena, that is, they are representations in thought and, as such, we are immediately conscious of their reality.

### 2.3 The *cogito* and the 'ich denke'

In a certain sense we can say that Kant broadens the philosophy of Descartes with his own instruments. We therefore agree with Schütt when he says that Descartes is not Kant's opponent but his competitor, as mentioned above.<sup>112</sup> The Cartesian first indubitable truth is not a deductive argument, but immediate consciousness. Kant expands the validity of the Cartesian *cogito* from the first person to phenomena in general. This is illustrated in his alteration of the Cartesian 'I think, therefore I am,' to the sentence 'I, as a thinking being, am'. By 'thinking' Descartes meant everything that arises in us in such a way that we immediately perceive it by ourselves, for example, to understand, to want, to imagine, but also to feel,<sup>113</sup> in short, any conscious state or idea. Kant, on the other hand, obviously included more in the notion of 'thinking' than Descartes, including precisely that which can be contained in the sentence 'therefore I am'.

Kant's view of the famous Cartesian proposition 'I think, therefore I am' shows us the fundamental differences between his and the Cartesian conception of the self. Whereas Descartes more or less defines the self as a *res cogitans*, Kant, in his critical period, does not find that the *sum* follows from the *cogito*, he finds that *cogito* means *sum cogitans*.<sup>114</sup> The question is: did Descartes mean the proposition

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<sup>112</sup> H.-P. Schütt, 'Kant, Cartesius und der „sceptische Idealist“', in *Descartes nachgedacht* (1996) ed. A. Kemmerling and H.-P. Schütt, pp. 170-199.

<sup>113</sup> *Principes* I ( §9), AT IX-2, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Kant's claim that 'I think, therefore I am' is equal to 'I am thinking' is not new, Leibniz had already said this in his *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*, ed. Gerhardt, vol. 5, p. 391: 'Et de dire *je pense donc je suis*, ce n'est pas prouver proprement l'existence par la pensée, puisque penser et être pensant, est la même chose; et dire, *je suis pensant*, est déjà dire, *je suis*'. In Chapter 9, we will see that Cousin denies that it should be read as a deductive argument. Although it looks like

‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ as an argument? If he did, the syllogism has to be preceded by the *maior*: ‘all that thinks, exists’. An answer to this question is given by Descartes himself when he explicitly rejects this reading in a reaction to the following objection of Hobbes:

. . . Je pense & ie suis pensant, *signifient la mesme chose. De ce que ie suis pensant, il s’ensuit que ie suis, parce que ce qui pense n’est pas rien. Mais où nostre auteur adjouste: c’est à dire vn esprit, vne ame, vn entendement, vne raison, de là naist vn doute. Car raisonnement ne me semble pas bien deduit, de dire: ie suis pensant, donc ie suis vne pensée; ou bien ie suis intelligent, donc ie suis vn entendement. Car de la mesme façon ie pourois dire: ie suis promenant, donc ie suis vne promenade.*<sup>115</sup>

To which Descartes responds, saying:

Où i’ay dit: c’est à dire vn esprit, vne ame, vn entendement, vne raison, &c., ie n’ay point entendu par ces noms les seules facultez, mais les choses doués de la faculté de penser, comme par les deux premiers on a coutume d’entendre, & assez souuent aussi par les deux derniers: ce que i’ay si souuent expliqué, & en termes si exprés, que ie ne voy pas qu’il y ait lieu d’en douter. Et il n’y a point icy de raport ou de conuenance entre la promenade & de la pensée, parce que la promenade n’est iamais prise autrement que pour l’action mesme; mais la pensée se prend quelquefois pour la chose en laquelle reside cette faculté.<sup>116</sup>

In his *Meditations*, Descartes clearly distinguishes himself from the reading of *cogito, ergo sum* as a syllogism. He declares that it is a ‘first notion’ which is not drawn from any syllogism, so when someone says:

. . . Je pense, donc ie suis, ou i’existe, il ne conclut pas son existence de sa pensée comme par la force de quelque syllogisme, mais comme vne chose connuë de soy; il la void par vne simple inspection de l’esprit. Comme il paroist de ce que, s’il la deduisoit par le syllogisme, il auroit deu auparauant connoistre cette maieure: *Tout ce qui pense, est ou existe.* Mais, au contraire, elle lui est enseignée de ce qu’il sent en luy-mesme qu’il ne se peut pas faire qu’il pense, s’il n’existe. Car c’est le propre de nostre esprit, de former les propositions generales de la connoissance des particulieres.<sup>117</sup>

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the ‘*donc*’ or ‘*ergo*’ might suggest that we are dealing with a syllogism, it is not a matter of any deduction, but the ‘simple apperception of the natural connection, which binds the thought to the thinking subject. According to him, Descartes did not arrive at the thinking subject by an argument, and the ‘*ergo*’ only expresses a first and intuitive evidence, which is hidden under the appearance of deduction, see Cousin, *Hist. gén.* p. 393-394.

<sup>115</sup> *Obj.* III (F), AT IX-1, 134.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>117</sup> *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 110-111. For the sake of completeness, we also give the Latin passage *Resp.* II, AT VII, 140-141: ‘*Cùm autem advertimus nos esse res cogitantes, prima quædam notio est, quæ ex nullo syllogismo concluditur; neque etiam cùm quis dicit, ego cogito, ergo sum, sive existo, existentiam ex cogitatione per syllogismum deducit, sed tanquam rem per se notam simplici mentis intuitu agnoscit, ut patet ex eo quòd, si eam per syllogismum deduceret, novisse prius debuisset istam majorem, illud omne, quod cogitat, est sive existit; atqui profecto ipsam potius discit, ex eo quòd apud*

On the basis of the *Meditations*, we can safely conclude that we should not see an argument (syllogism or enthymeme) here, but an immediate intellectual certainty, whereby the existence of the thinking self is ‘seen by a simple inspection of the mind’. However, in *Discours de la méthode* and in *Principia*, Descartes uses different formulations, which allow a reading of *cogito, ergo sum* as an argument. Firstly, in the *Discours*, he allows the axiom: ‘pour penser, il faut être’,<sup>118</sup> which functions as a *maior*. In the *Principia* too, Descartes seems to allow this axiom when he says he does not want to explain once again that there are notions which are very clear, with which we must be born. He does not think that amongst his readers there are those who are ‘so stupid that they could not understand themselves what these terms signify’.<sup>119</sup> One of these notions, which one has to know first in order to say ‘I think, therefore I am’ is ‘que pour penser, il faut être’.

Klaus Düsing does not find a problem in the fact that Kant took *cogito, ergo sum* as an argument (enthymeme), but does find a problem with Kant’s breaking down of the first certainty provided by the Cartesian ‘I think therefore I am’. In claiming that Kant had copies of the third edition of *Meditations* and *Principia*, he suggests – but does not say – that Kant was aware of both readings of this famous proposition.<sup>120</sup> This interpretation, based in the schism in meaning of Descartes’s first certainty, is implicit in Düsing’s analysis of Kant’s criticism of Descartes’s doctrine of the self. The first meaning, the immediate certainty that I am, leads to the problem of what I am. From the method of doubt, the claim results that certainty of the existence of the self is only guaranteed by thinking.

Denken ist also Wasbestimmtheit, die dem Zweifel standhält. – Das zunächst unbestimmte *Dasein* des Ich oder dessen Seinsart legt Descartes wieder unter Rückgriff auf traditionelle ontologische Begriffe als Sache (res) und genauer als *Substanz* aus.<sup>121</sup>

Düsing finds that a fundamental problem for Descartes is that he presupposes traditional ontology. For a radical new beginning it would have been more appropriate to develop his own ontology from his new foundation. The problem Düsing notices is that when we take the *cogito, ergo sum* as an argument, the certainty of the existence of the self is not original but deductive. Clearly, Descartes was aware of this problem, as we saw in earlier quotations. However, according to Düsing, he did not solve the problem that the first certainty depends on the existence of all thinking beings and ‘I think’ as certain premises. How the first certainty ‘I am’ can have premises and how the *maior* ‘All thinking beings exist’ can make a validity claim, is not cleared up.

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se experiatur, fieri non posse ut cogitet, nisi existat. Ea enim est natura nostræ mentis, ut generales propositiones ex particularium cognitione efformet’.

<sup>118</sup> *Disc.* (G), 33: ‘Et ayant remarqué qu’il n’y a rien du tout en ceci: *je pense, donc je suis*, qui m’assure que je dis la vérité, sinon que je vois très clairement que, pour penser, il faut être...’.

<sup>119</sup> *Principes* I (§10), AT IX-2, 28-29.

<sup>120</sup> Düsing, ‘Cogito, ergo sum?’, in *Wiener Jahrbuch für Philosophie*, vol. XIX (1987), pp. 95-106. Düsing does not give any further reference that proves that Kant had these copies, but again, he does not claim that Kant had read them.

<sup>121</sup> Düsing (1987), p. 97.

Kant's criticism, as Düsing shows, is found in the context of his criticism of rational psychology. As we said earlier in relation to Schütt, Düsing also does not see Kant as an opponent to Descartes, but as a successor. It is in the 'Ich denke' that he finds the metaphysical notion of the soul, along with its substantiality, simplicity, indestructibility and immortality. Kant's criticism of the *cogito, ergo sum*, concerns its deductive form, which he finds redundant.

Das Ich denke ist, wie schon gesagt, ein empirischer Satz, und hält den Satz, Ich existiere, in sich. Ich kann aber nicht sagen: alles, was denkt, existiert; denn da würde die Eigenschaft des Denkens alle Wesen, die sie besitzen, zu notwendigen Wesen machen. Daher kann meine Existenz auch nicht aus dem Satze, Ich denke, als gefolgert angesehen werden, wie Cartesius dafür hielt (weil sonst der Obersatz: alles, was denkt, existiert, vorausgehen müßte), sondern ist mit ihm identisch. Er drückt eine unbestimmte empirische Anschauung, d.i. Wahrnehmung, aus (mithin beweiset er doch, daß schon Empfindung, die folglich zur Sinnlichkeit gehört, diesem Existentialsatz zum Grunde liege), geht aber vor der Erfahrung vorher, die das Objekt der Wahrnehmung durch die Kategorie in Ansehung der Zeit bestimmen soll, und die Existenz ist hier noch keine Kategorie, als welche nicht auf ein unbestimmt gegebenes Objekt, sondern nur ein solches, davon man einen Begriff hat, und wovon man wissen will, ob es auch außer diesem Begriffe gesetzt sei oder nicht, Beziehung hat.<sup>122</sup>

According to Düsing, this criticism could mean that Kant favours the reading of the *Meditations* which stresses the immediately evident certainty of the Cartesian proposition. However, he also thinks that other passages in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* allow for a reading of the *cogito, ergo sum* as an indeterminate inner observation (*Wahrnehmung*), by which Kant means that the certainty of existence involved is not an intellectual intuition. This is considerably less than Descartes allows, because what is 'observed' according to Kant is merely the existence of the mental-spiritual 'I' in time. Kant's 'I' therefore can never be understood as a substance, namely as an autonomous, independent existing being.

The important difference lies in the epistemological value of the 'I'. For Descartes, the mind is the single source of knowledge, and sensorial ideas do not have any autonomous value. For Kant, however, knowledge is the result of the structural co-operation of mind and sensation. Because this holds for the 'I' as well, it knows itself and its being only as appearance (*Erscheinung*). Düsing concludes therefore:

Obwohl Kant also wesentliche Teile der Cartesischen Theorie bestreitet, nämlich die intellektuelle Selbstanschauung, die ontologische Erkenntnis des Ich als Substanz, den Anspruch, daß das Denken als dessen wesentliches Attribut erkennbar sei, sowie allgemein den Intellektualismus in der Lehre von der Erkenntnis, hält er doch an der ursprünglichen Gewißheit des Ich fest, das seiner selbst im Denken gewahr wird und das darin unmittelbar, nicht vermittelt durch einen Schluß, sein Dasein in Evidenz erblickt. In seiner eigenen Theorie spaltet

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<sup>122</sup> KrV B 422-423n.

er aber diese cartesianische erste Gewißheit auf, und zwar in ein intellektuelles Selbstbewußtsein des reinen Ich und eine unmittelbare Daseinsgewißheit des empirischen, zeitlichen Ich.<sup>123</sup>

As we can see, Düsing considers that Kant divides the Cartesian first certainty into pure intellectual apperception and the self-certainty of the empirical thinking 'I'. Although Düsing also thinks that the pure 'I' is, for Kant, merely the principle of formal logic<sup>124</sup>, we have to note that it is more for Kant. Kant transforms the *cogito* into what he calls the 'ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption'. What he means by this, we find in §16 of the transcendental analytic, where he writes the famous passage:

Das: Ich denke, muß alle meine Vorstellungen begleiten können; denn sonst würde etwas in mir vorgestellt werden, was gar nicht gedacht werden könnte, welches eben so viel heißt, als die Vorstellung würde entweder unmöglich, oder wenigstens für mich nichts sein. Diejenige Vorstellung, die vor allem Denken gegeben sein kann, heißt Anschauung. Also hat alles Mannigfaltige der Anschauung eine notwendige Beziehung auf das: Ich denke, in demselben Subjekt, darin dieses Mannigfaltige angetroffen wird. Diese Vorstellung aber ist ein Actus der Spontanität, d.i. sie kann nicht als zur Sinnlichkeit gehörig angesehen werde.<sup>125</sup>

We can see that the 'I think' is important for Kant and he persists with calling it pure or original apperception in distinction to empirical apperception. The term 'apperception' is meant to indicate a concern with that form of self-consciousness, which by producing the 'I think', has to accompany every idea (*Vorstellung*). From the fact that apperception remains the same in all those ideas, Kant concludes that it is also the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, by which he means to indicate that apperception provides the possibility of producing a priori knowledge.

According to Düsing, Kant's double characterization of the pure and logical self – as an intellectual and uniform synthesis of given manifold data *and* as consciousness of this synthesis – renders the relation of these determinations questionable. Furthermore, he argues that the fact that Kant reverts to the categories in their logical meaning when he analyses the meaning of the pure thinking self, is problematic too. These logical determinations should be developed from the pure self.

In relation to the question of the meaning of the self's immediately certain *Dasein*, Düsing shows that Kant can only determine it as the subject of the act of thinking, never as substance, not even as the category of existence. This *Dasein* is neither appearance (a determined object in time), nor *Ding an sich* (a noumenon), however what it actually is, remains undetermined.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Düsing (1987), p. 101.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 102.

<sup>125</sup> KrV B 132.

<sup>126</sup> In »*Cogito ergo sum*«. *Interpretationen von Kant bis Nietzsche* (1982), Hartmut Brands gives a rational reconstruction of how Kant (and others) could have understood the Cartesian *cogito* argument. His conclusions regarding the Kantian reconstruction are very cautious. He concludes that Kant took the argument as an analytical judgement; that the elements '*cogito*' and '*sum*' are

Natorp, in *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* (1882) shows that Kant is not only wrong in his conception of the *cogito, ergo sum* as a syllogism, but that he also makes more of the 'Ich denke' than did Descartes. Notwithstanding this view on Kant's misconceptions, Natorp shows that both philosophers are intimately in accordance with each other. In Part V, we will return to elaborate Natorp's reinstatement of Descartes and also return to the question of Descartes's relation to Kant.

#### 2.4 Kant on the notion of innate ideas

Although at first sight, the notion of innate ideas looks similar to that of a priori principles, Kant emphasizes that they are distinct. We find this distinction in the transcendental analytic of his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.<sup>127</sup> Kant proves here that a priori knowledge is only possible concerning objects (*Gegenstände*) of possible experience. This implies that not all knowledge is derived from experience, for there are elements of knowledge, which are found in us a priori, namely pure intuitions (*reine Anschauungen*) and pure concepts of the mind (*reine Verstandesbegriffe*).

If we were to ask how to understand the phrase 'in uns angetroffen', Kant would explain it with the term 'epigenesis of pure reason'. What he means is 'that the categories from the side of the mind (*Verstand*) contain the possibility of any experience at all', and thereby he dismisses the empirical explanation for knowledge, the *generatio aequivoca*, and the teleological 'system of preformation' of pure reason. According to Kant, epigenesis could be the only reasonable explanation because these a priori elements are not accomplished by a system of 'Präformation' nor are they 'subjektive, uns mit unserer Existenz zugleich eingepflanzte Anlagen zum Denken'.<sup>128</sup> To put it briefly, the argument in favour of epigenesis is that the categories must be a priori and the argument against a system of preformation (that is, against Leibniz) is that they are essentially necessary.<sup>129</sup>

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empirical; that the *psychologia rationalis* as part of *metaphysica specialis* does not produce knowledge that justify its claims; that the subject of '*cogito*' and '*sum*' can therefore only be the object of empirical psychology; that the 'I' cannot be thought as independent from the existence of the outside world. He continues his conclusion by saying that Descartes would never agree with this (i.e. Brands' reconstruction of Kant's conclusion) and that therefore we should understand Kant's interpretation as a rational reconstruction with strong critical-constructive tendencies which are in compliance with what is sensible and are adapted to the new standard of philosophizing as set in his *Prolegomena*. In sum, Kant's understanding of the *cogito*-argument has definitely to be classified as modern. We cannot explore his study any further for two reasons. Firstly, it is not our intention to give a rational reconstruction of the themes we discuss. We want to give an historical account in which we clarify the motives why these themes were ignored and then reappeared. Secondly, a rational reconstruction like Brands' does not help us much further because there are so many ifs and buts, that we can hardly gain any new information.

<sup>127</sup> See KrV B 167.

<sup>128</sup> Although, in KrV B 91 it reads: 'Wir werden also die reinen Begriffe bis zu ihren ersten Keimen und Anlagen im menschlichen Verstande verfolgen, in denen sie vorbereitet liegen'.

<sup>129</sup> In KU B 376 (§ 81), Kant says that the system of epigenesis can also be called the system of generic preformation, 'weil das produktive Vermögen der Zeugenden doch nach den innerern

It seems that, in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant rejects the notion of an innate idea or principle. However, in *Über eine Entdeckung, nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll* (1790),<sup>130</sup> we find a different view. This work is a reaction to J. A. Eberhard's *Philosophisches Magazin*,<sup>131</sup> in which this author severely criticized Kant's transcendental idealism. When Eberhard asks how the intuitions of space and time 'come into the soul', he considers that Kant should have said that they are innate, because we do not obtain them through the senses.

Das, was der kritische Idealismus reine Anschauungen nennt, ist der menschliche Seele nur in ihren Gründen angeboren. Eine Anschauung, die ihr auf eine andere Art angeboren wäre, würde gerade eine solche *qualitas occulta* sein, als ursprüngliche vegetative Kraft, Sympathie und Antipathie gewisser Körper und dergleichen. . . .

Raum und Zeit sind sinnliche Bilder; wenn die uns also angeboren sein sollen, so kann man das nicht anders verstehen, als, wir haben ihre Gründe, d.i. die Bestimmungen, welche ihre Merkmale ausmachen, von dem ersten Augenblicke unserer Wirklichkeit in uns.<sup>132</sup>

In his reaction, Kant explains what is and what is not innate and makes a distinction between acquired (*erworben*) and innate, claiming that the latter can never be applied to ideas (*Vorstellungen*). The form of things in the intuitions of space and time and the synthetic unity of the manifold in concepts are produced a priori. However, there must be a ground for this in the subject by which the ideas are produced in this way. Subsequently, Kant admits that this ground is innate. We should keep in mind, though, that Kant only asserts that the formal ground, for example, the possibility of the intuition of space, is innate. By this he means that mere receptivity (*bloße Receptivität*) is innate. To sum up, Kant does not stop at the point of the original acquired idea, the 'ursprünglich erworbene Vorstellung', he goes one step further and claims that it has to have an innate ground, as the following quote explains:

Die Kritik erlaubt schlechterdings keine anerschaffene oder angeborne Vorstellungen; alle insgesamt, sie mögen zur Anschauung oder zu Verstandesbegriffen gehören, nimmt sie als erworben an. Es gibt aber auch eine ursprüngliche Erwerbung, (wie die Lehrer des Naturrechts sich ausdrücken) folglich auch dessen, was vorher gar noch nicht existiert, mithin keiner Sache vor dieser Handlung angehört hat. Dergleichen ist, wie die Kritik behauptet, erstlich die Form der Dinge im Raum und der Zeit, zweitens die synthetische Einheit des Mannigfaltigen in Begriffen; denn keine von beiden nimmt unser Erkenntnisvermögen von den Objekten, als in ihnen an sich selbst gegeben, her, sondern bringt sie aus sich selbst *a priori* zu Stande. Es muß aber doch ein Grund dazu im Subjekt sein, der es möglich macht, daß die gedachten Vorstellungen so

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zweckmäßigen Anlagen, die ihrem Stamme zu Teil wurden, also die spezifische Form virtualiter präformiert war?.

<sup>130</sup> In Immanuel Kant, *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard*, (1998) ed. M. Lauschke and M. Zahn (AA VIII, 185-252).

<sup>131</sup> In *ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> J. A. Eberhard, in *ibid.*, p. 96-97.

und nicht anders entstehen und noch dazu auf Objekte, die noch nicht gegeben sind, bezogen werden können, und dieser Grund wenigstens ist angeboren.<sup>133</sup>

Here Kant admits that the formal ground, the possibility to intuit space alone is innate, but not the idea (*Vorstellung*) of space itself. Although the ground of the formal intuition is innate, the concepts of things are acquired (*acquisitio derivativa*), because these concepts presuppose universal transcendental concepts of the mind which are not innate.<sup>134</sup>

The notions of *generatio aequivoca*, epigenesis and preformation are derived from the field of biology and Kant uses them in an analogous sense in order to apply them to epistemology. The notion of *generatio aequivoca* (spontaneous generation) refers to the position of radical empiricism (ultimately leading to scepticism). This position empirically justifies the categories as generalizations from experience or psychological principles of association. The second notion represents Kant's position of transcendental idealism, which we discussed earlier. The notion of preformation refers to the position of dogmatic rationalism (ultimately leading to dogmatism). This position justifies the categories by reference to a transcendent source beyond possible experience, such as innate ideas constituting the structure of individual minds. Implicitly, Descartes belongs to the preformationist position, which is also known as the position of the pre-established harmony.<sup>135</sup>

However, Descartes's *Notae in programma quoddam* and Rules VI, VIII and XII of *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* give rise to an interpretation of his notion of innate ideas in the light of an epigenesis. As we saw in his reaction to Regius, Descartes shows that innate ideas have to be understood to be something like a faculty. By means of the above mentioned rules he reduces things to the knowing mind and says that nothing can be known prior to the intellect. With regard to this, we can agree with Paul Natorp who argues that Kant is very close to Descartes concerning method.<sup>136</sup> Both are concerned with the question of the ground of knowledge and, what is more, they almost use the same words. Where Descartes

<sup>133</sup> Kant, in *ibid.* p. 151.

<sup>134</sup> Kant refers to Hißmann, who in *Der Teutschen Merkur* from October 1777, wrote an article on the innate notions of Plato, Descartes, and Leibniz. Hißmann compares Plato, Descartes and Leibniz with regard to their theories of innate ideas and concludes that they are in no case the same. He places Descartes closer to Plato than Leibniz, because they both think that the divinity placed ready made and developed ideas in the human soul. Leibniz considers innate ideas as 'Grundstriche' in the soul, which have to be developed and illuminated by the mind. Leibniz gives more power to the human soul than Descartes, because he does not consider the soul merely as the source of these ideas, but also as the only 'Ideenbildende Kraft' (p. 51). See *Der Teutsche Merkur*, ed. Christoph Martin Wieland, Weimar 1777, vol. 4, p. 22-52 ([www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/diglib/aufkl/teutmerk/](http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/diglib/aufkl/teutmerk/)).

<sup>135</sup> In favour of this view, we find Victor Delbos, 'L'idéalisme et le réalisme dans la philosophie de Descartes', in *L'Année philosophique*, (1911), p. 49: 'L'innéité lui vient donc de ce qu'elle a été imprimée par Dieu en moi; mon esprit la reçue, mais ne l'a pas lui-même produite. Conception en accord avec ce que dit Descartes de la nature éternelle et immuable de certaines idées, laquelle implique évidemment une préexistence de la réalité objective de ces idées par rapport à nos âmes.' This comes very close to the preformation theory. This article is also relevant because it is a rejection of Natorp's Neo-Kantian interpretation.

<sup>136</sup> In Chapter 14, we shall discuss Natorp's claim in more detail.



speaks in Regula IV of *prima veritatem semina* and *prima rationis humanæ rudimenta*, Kant speaks of ‘ersten Keimen und Anlagen im menschlichen Verstande . . . in denen sie vorbereitet liegen.’<sup>137</sup>

Some passages from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Regulae*<sup>138</sup> demonstrate that Kant and Descartes have a reasonably similar view on the question of the formation of knowledge. Both suppose that all knowledge originates (note that this does not mean ‘begins’<sup>139</sup>) in the human intellect, in which ‘the seeds of truth’ reside. Speaking *à la rigueur métaphysique*, however, neither Descartes nor Kant are clear in their explication of how knowledge is formed from innate ideas, nor how these ideas arrive in the human mind.

In Part V we will focus on the reinstatement of the theory of innate ideas in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century. Among other issues, we shall pay special attention to a comparison between Cartesian innate ideas and Kantian a priori representations (*Vorstellungen*).

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<sup>137</sup> KrV B 90-91.

<sup>138</sup> See KrV B 166-167 and Rule VIII of Descartes’s *Regulae*.

<sup>139</sup> We can find this distinction in KrV B 1, where it reads: ‘Wenn aber gleich alle unsere Erkenntnis mit der Erfahrung anhebt, so entspringt sie darum doch nicht eben alle aus der Erfahrung.’

## II

### The Situation in France (1790-1800)

In this part we will first discuss the farcical manner in which the post-Revolutionary French government dealt with the question of what was to be done with Descartes. Here we will introduce the figures who play a major role and we shall elaborate on their positions in Part III.

MEMORIAE RENATI DESCARTES  
RECONDITORIS DOCTRINAS  
LAVDE  
ET INGENII SVBTILITAT  
PRAECELLENTISSIMI  
QVI PRIMVS  
A RENOVATIS IN EVROPA  
BONARVM LITTERARVM STVDIIS  
RATIONIS HVMANAE  
IVRA  
SALVA FIDEI CHRISTIANAE  
AVTORITATE  
VINDICAVIT ET ASSERVIT  
NVNC  
VERITATIS  
QVAM VNICE COLVIT  
CONSPECTV  
FRVITVR<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Epitaph of on the stone of Descartes's grave in the chapel of the small church of Saint-Germain-des-Prés: 'In memory of René Descartes, famous through the praise of a better founded science and the sharpness of his mind. He was the first, since the European renovation of sound scientific efforts, to vindicate and defend the right of human reason and the authority of Christian faith unrelentingly. Now he relishes the sight of truth which he only honoured.' The translation is based on Rainer Specht, *Descartes* (1998), p. 147.

### 3 DESCARTES: *GRAND HOMME* OR CHARLATAN?

One of the things the post-Revolutionary government had to deal with, was the question of what France should do with what was left of Descartes. By ‘what was left of Descartes’ we literally mean his worm-eaten remains.

The occasion that raised this matter, quite paradoxically, involved a fervent enemy of Descartes, Voltaire. In November 1790, the Marquis de Vilette proposed to the Club des Jacobins that the body of Voltaire should be placed in the Sainte-Geneviève Church, which at the time was being transformed into a mausoleum dedicated to national glory, and *en passant* he mentioned Descartes.<sup>141</sup> What followed can only be described as an unceremonious fooling around with Descartes’s remains.

On 2 April, it had been declared that this new church was going to be a ‘temple de la patrie’ in which great men would find their last resting place. Although the decree of 4 April announced that it would be reserved for ‘the great men that date from the era of our liberty’, exceptions were made for three: Descartes, Voltaire and Rousseau. The whole idea of the mausoleum came about in a more or less casual and coincidental way. One of the members of the ‘directoire du département de Paris’, Honoré Riquetti-Mirabeau, had died and the Assembly wanted to honour him in the way ‘une nation voisine’ would do (Vilette had mentioned the English and their Westminster, see footnote 141). The proposition put to the Assemblée nationale consisted of five points:

- 1° Que le nouvel édifice de Sainte-Geneviève soit destiné à recevoir les cendres des grands hommes, à dater de l’époque de notre liberté;
- 2° Que l’Assemblée nationale seule puisse juger à quels hommes cet honneur sera décerné;
- 3° Qu’Honoré Riquetti-Mirabeau en est jugé digne;
- 4° Que les exceptions qui pourront avoir lieu pour quelques grands hommes morts avant la révolution, tels que Descartes, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, ne puissent être faites que par l’Assemblée nationale;
- 5° Que le directoire du département de Paris soit chargé de mettre promptement l’édifice de Sainte-Geneviève en état de remplir sa nouvelle destination, et fasse graver au-dessous du fronton ces mots  
«AUX GRANDS HOMMES,  
«LA PATRIE RECONNAISSANTE.»<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> It was through the work of François Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* (2002), that we came across the *Chronique de Paris*. In the *Chronique* of Friday 12 November 1790, on pp. 1261-1262 we find the ‘Discours’ of Vilette in which he says: ‘si les Anglais ont réuni leurs grands hommes dans Westminster, pourquoi hésiterons-nous à placer le cercueil de Voltaire dans le plus beau de nos temples, dans la nouvelle Sainte-Geneviève, en face du mausolée de Descartes que l’on alla chercher de même à Stockholm seize ans après sa mort? C’est là que j’offre de lui élever un monument à mes frais.’

<sup>142</sup> *Archives Parlementaires* (1787-1799), vol. XXIV, p. 537. The rest of the inscription reads ‘Fait à Paris, en directoire, le 2 avril 1791. Signé: La Rochefoucauld, président; Sieyès, Germain Garnier, Dutremblay, Anson, vice-présidents; Pastoret, procureur général syndic; Blondel, secrétaire.’

On 4 April 1791, Mirabeau's coffin was transferred to Sainte-Geneviève in anticipation of the completion of the new edifice, that is, the Panthéon. On 12 April, the grand-nephew of Descartes, M. le Prestre de Chateaugiron<sup>143</sup>, read a petition written by Condorcet to the Assemblée nationale in which he requested that his grand-uncle be placed 'dans le Temple que l'Assemblée nationale a consacré aux Manes de nos grands hommes.'<sup>144</sup> The argument, and especially its formulation, for placing Descartes in the Panthéon are extraordinarily interesting for our study. It reads that someone who 'avoit rétabli la raison humaine dans ses droits' must be placed amongst public schools where people strive to educate the rising generations. Descartes had waited a very long time for this sort of rehabilitation, but the delay could be duly compensated:

... celui qui, en brisant les fers de l'esprit humain, préparoit de loin l'éternelle destruction de la servitude politique, sembloit mériter de n'être honoré qu'au nom d'une nation libre; et le sort l'a servi d'une manière digne de lui, en le préservant des honneurs que l'orgueil du despotisme auroit souillés.<sup>145</sup>

The reaction of the Assemblée nationale is not only very interesting because of its enthusiasm, but also because of the description it gave of Descartes. We find this description in the abstract of the session in *Chronique de Paris*,<sup>146</sup> 13 April 1791, which reads:

L'Assemblée a applaudi à cette pétition; elle alloit y faire droit, lorsqu'un membre a fait la motion de la renvoyer au comité de constitution; afin de rendre sur son rapport un décret plus authentique qui témoigne la haute estime qu'a la nation française pour le précurseur de Newton. Cette motion a prévalu sur le premier mouvement.

Not only was Descartes seen as a genius, but also as the precursor of Newton. Two years later<sup>147</sup> this petition was apparently granted, and although the Assemblée made the following declaration, his body was never 'panthéonised'.

DÉCRETS DE LA CONVENTION NATIONALE

Des 2 et 4 octobre 1793, l'an second de la République Française une et indivisible, qui accordent à René Descartes les honneurs dûs aux grands

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<sup>143</sup> This is what Adam says, but in *Chronique de Paris* of Wednesday 13 April 1791 it reads that the letter came from a certain 'M. Grez, habitant de Château-Chinon, petit neveu de Descartes.' The reason why Adam is probably not talking nonsense is that he clearly traced the descendants of Descartes, see his supplement to the edition of the works of Descartes (AT XII), *Vie & Œuvres de Descartes, Étude historique* (1910), p. 11-12 note *b*. The reason for this divergence is still not clear. In Cousin's edition of the works of Descartes appears the name of M. le marquis de Château-Giron. This man was the closest of Descartes's descendants and he provided Cousin with an autographical note from Descartes, see Cous., XI, vij.

<sup>144</sup> See AT XII, 609.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* (2002), p. 330 remarks that this text is slightly different from the one in *Journal de Paris*, 13 April 1791.

<sup>146</sup> N<sup>o</sup> 103, p. 412.

<sup>147</sup> It remains unclear why it took the Assembly two years to decide upon this case.

‘Grand homme’ or charlatan?

Hommes, et ordonnent de transférer au Panthéon François son corps, et sa Statue faite par le célèbre Pajou.<sup>148</sup>

What happened? As Adam pointed out, it were ‘the grave political events’ that made the legislature forget to execute its order.<sup>149</sup> When the Convention had eventually served its time, the date on which Descartes should receive the honour of national recognition had still not been set.

In the mean time, Condorcet (1743-1794) wrote *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* (An III), in which he finds the roots of the Revolution in the thought of Descartes.<sup>150</sup> Condorcet mentions Descartes when explaining why the principles on which the constitution and laws of France are based are purer, more precise and more profound than those that regulate the American Constitution.<sup>151</sup>

Depuis le moment où le génie de Descartes imprima aux esprits cette impulsion générale, premier principe d’une révolution dans les destinées de l’espèce humaine, jusqu’à l’époque heureuse de l’entière et pure liberté sociale, où l’homme n’a pu remplacer son indépendance naturelle, qu’après avoir passé par une longue suite de siècles d’esclavage et de malheur, le tableau du progrès des sciences mathématiques et physiques nous présente un horizon immense, dont il faut distribuer et ordonner les diverses parties, si l’on veut en bien saisir l’ensemble, en bien observer les rapports.<sup>152</sup>

According to Condorcet, the period from the invention of printing to the time when science and philosophy freed themselves from the yoke of authority is marked by ‘trois grands hommes’: Bacon, Galileo and Descartes. In a short comparison of the first two with the latter he says:

Si dans les sciences physiques, sa marche [namely Descartes’s] est moins sûre que celle de Galilée, si sa philosophie est moins sage que celle de Bacon, si on peut lui reprocher de n’avoir pas assez appris par les leçons de l’un, par l’exemple de l’autre, à se défier de son imagination, à n’interroger la nature que par des expériences, à ne croire qu’au calcul, à observer l’univers, au lieu de le construire, à étudier

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<sup>148</sup> AT XII, 610.

<sup>149</sup> Most probably Adam means the period known as the ‘Terreur’ (1793-1794) during which approximately 17,000 people were guillotined and another 23,000 were assassinated without sentence.

<sup>150</sup> *Esquisse d’un tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain*. Ouvrage posthume de Condorcet, Paris, l’an III [1795-1795] de la République, une et indivisible. Henceforth: *Esquisse*. The edition of 1822 (Masson et fils) is followed by *Réflexions sur l’esclavage des nègres*, but for the rest remained unchanged. Condorcet wrote most of this work when he was hiding in the house of Mme Vernet. On 3 October 1793 he was accused of criticizing the project of the Constitution presented by Hérault de Séchelles. He left his safe house on 25 March 1794 and two days later he was arrested. The next day (or two days later) he was found dead in the prison of Bourg-l’Égalité (Bourg-la-Reine). According to some sources, he poisoned himself, in any case, we can call him a victim of the ‘Terreur’.

<sup>151</sup> Condorcet also shows why the French constitution and laws, in contradistinction to the American, completely escaped the influence of all kinds of prejudices; how equal rights in France, in opposition to those in America, have nowhere been replaced with self-interest, of which it is nothing but a weak and hypocritical supplement. *Esquisse*, 277-278, (ed. Masson, p. 222).

<sup>152</sup> *Esquisse*, 278-279 (ed. Masson, p. 225).

l'homme, au lieu de le deviner; l'audace même de ses erreurs servit aux progrès de l'espèce humaine. Il agita les esprits, que la sagesse de ses rivaux n'avoit pu réveiller. Il dit aux hommes de secouer le joug de l'autorité, de ne plus reconnoître que celle qui seroit avouée par leur raison; et il fut obéi, parce qu'il subjugoit par sa hardiesse, qu'il entraînoit par son enthousiasme.<sup>153</sup>

On 10 pluviôse An IV (30 January 1796) session of the Conseil des Cinq-Cents, a letter from the Institut national was read in which it proposed to proceed with the transfer of the remains of Descartes to the Panthéon. Marie-Joseph Chénier (1764-1811), officer, poet, dramatist and politician had proposed this in 1793, and he adds:

Je crois digne du corps législatif de reconnaître par un éclatant témoignage, les éminens services rendus à la France et à l'Europe par René Descartes, qui, le premier, a ouvert le sentier de la vraie philosophie.<sup>154</sup>

Chénier knew that the season was not suitable and that the ceremony should be postponed until spring. In the meantime, a commission was to be established which should produce a report on the subject. Chénier's proposition was adopted. On 18 floréal An IV (7 May 1796) the report was discussed in the Conseil des Cinq-Cents. Chénier only wanted the approval on the date of the transfer, namely, 10 prairial, the 'jour de la fête de la Reconnaissance.'<sup>155</sup> In his address, Chénier claimed that Descartes, who he calls 'le premier des philosophes' and 'l'ornement de sa Patrie opprimée', paved the way for Locke and Condillac in metaphysics. His mathematics lead Newton, Leibniz, Euler and Lagrange to new discoveries. He connects the French people, who became republican, to 'la gloire de ce profond penseur qui a posé un flambeau sur la route des siècles, dont les rêveries mêmes ont marqué les progrès de la raison'.<sup>156</sup> For Chénier, without Descartes, France would not be as great as it had become (1796), both literally and figuratively.<sup>157</sup> Chénier had the whole ceremony planned, which indicates that he did not expect any opposition.

Nothing was further from the truth, because the proposition was fiercely attacked by one of the representatives, Mercier. He rhetorically states that he 'understands' Chénier, because he himself had made a youthful lapse, as the opening phrase of his address shows.

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<sup>153</sup> *Esquisse*, 231 (ed. Masson, p. 185).

<sup>154</sup> *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*, N° 135. Quintidi, 15 pluviôse, l'an 4 de la République Française une et indivisible (Thursday, 4 February 1796), p. 539. Henceforth : *Gazette*.

<sup>155</sup> This celebration consisted of a long military parade and some patriotic speeches by the authorities.

<sup>156</sup> *Gazette*, N° 234, Quartidi, 24 floréal, l'an 4 de la République Française une et indivisible (Friday, 13 May 1796), p. 936.

<sup>157</sup> He mentions that it is for extending the borders of free Europe as well as the benefits for science that Descartes must be accredited.

‘Grand homme’ or charlatan?

Et moi aussi, j’ai dans ma jeunesse fait l’éloge de Descartes.  
L’expérience ne m’avait pas encore appris que les plus grands charlatans  
du monde ont souvent passé pour les plus grands hommes.<sup>158</sup>

The attentive reader may remember Mercier from Section 1.3, where we briefly discussed Thomas’ prize-winning *Éloge de Descartes* and mentioned that a certain Mercier had also contributed. However, Louis-Sébastien Mercier now apparently made a philosophical U-turn, arguing that Descartes had caused his country a ‘mal profond’.

In order to illustrate his change of heart it suffices to take a random quote from his earlier *Éloge*:

Heureux celui qui fut appelée aux hautes destinées d’éclairer le monde!  
Heureux le Génie que le Créateur a doué d’une ame propre à lire tous les  
traits de sa puissance! O DESCARTES! quand mon œil observe la  
sublimité de ton vol, je conçois un nouveau respect pour la profondeur  
de l’esprit humain.<sup>159</sup>

Twenty eight years later, Mercier is of the opinion that Descartes has ‘slowed down the progress of the Enlightenment through the long tyranny of his errors’. According to Mercier, the absurd Cartesian system had held back physics for about a century. Hence his rhetorical question:

Citoyens, au moment où la physique dégagée du ridicule système des  
tourbillons se relève par des découvertes utiles, et fait chaque jour des  
pas hardis et des progrès certains, porterez-vous au Panthéon les cendres  
d’un visionnaire dont le système n’est qu’un délire d’un esprit fanatique  
et romanesque qui, loin d’embrasser la nature, n’en a pas saisi le premier  
trait?<sup>160</sup>

Mercier thought that the only merit of Descartes was that he applied algebra to geometry, however, to be overexcited or become overly nationalistic because of this would be disastrous for humanity. He found that Galileo, for instance, deserved more credit, as he had applied geometry to nature. Mercier not only rejected Cartesian physics, but also his metaphysics, which he thought had led the human race into irreligious and immoral behaviour. After more disapproving words for Descartes, Mercier came to the point, exclaiming:

Le Panthéon Français est le temple des Républicains: réservez-le pour  
les héros et les martyrs de la révolution. Laissons-là les livres, leurs  
auteurs, laissons le pays des chimères; attachons-nous aux vertus  
républicaines, elles seules ont un fondement solide et durable . . .

Gardons-nous surtout de prostituer ces honneurs et d’être obligés de  
les retenir après les avoir inconsidérément accordés. Nos devanciers en  
eussent agi plus sagement que nous; ils n’eussent pas accordé les

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<sup>158</sup> *Gazette*, N° 234, Quartidi, 24 floréal, l’an 4 de la République Française une et indivisible (Friday, 13 May 1796), p. 936.

<sup>159</sup> Mercier, *Éloge de René Descartes* (1765), p. 5. The entire eulogy is written in this style; the quote is not an exception.

<sup>160</sup> *Gazette*, N° 234, Quartidi, 24 floréal, l’an 4 de la République Française une et indivisible (Friday, 13 May 1796), p. 936.

honneurs du Panthéon à ce grand corrupteur de l'espèce humaine, à ce flatteur des rois et des princes qui se montre leur esclave . . .<sup>161</sup>

It seems that Mercier found the weak spot in Chénier's discourse and wanted to make the Conseil des Anciens realize that it was not a 'corps académique'. The Conseil des Anciens should not debate the necessity of elevating Descartes merely in order to oppose him to Newton, who was buried in Westminster. Mercier was against the performance of any new 'canonizations'. Furthermore, he thought it of no interest to the Conseil whether Descartes was a novelist or a great genius. He wanted to stop the efforts to determine the limits of his fame. His conclusion is a typical *argumentum ad populum*:

Le peuple a-t-il entendu prononcer souvent le nom de Descartes? Est-il dans cette commune trente personnes qui aient lu Descartes? Non, sans doute. Je ne crains pas de l'affirmer, la cérémonie de la translation de ces cendres au Panthéon serait regardée du Peuple à peu-près comme la procession du grand lama. Je me résume et demande qu'on laisse la réputation de Descartes vivre ou mourir dans ses ouvrages.<sup>162</sup>

When Mercier was asked to produce a written version of his discourse a part of the audience began murmuring loudly. Another representative asked for an adjournment in anticipation of this printed version. Chénier, of course, was not amused with this development and found that the 'corps législatif se couvrirait d'ignominie', whereupon the audience again erupted into violent murmurs. Chénier ardently defended Descartes and attacked Mercier, asking why Descartes should be denied access to the Panthéon, when Voltaire had already been placed there. Finally, he gave some ground saying:

Je ne m'oppose cependant pas à l'ajournement; mais si le projet est attaqué une seconde fois, je demande qu'on ne prononce rien sans avoir entendu ceux qui, à cette tribune, voudront défendre les lumières et la philosophie.<sup>163</sup>

The discussion was closed, Chénier's project was adjourned and Descartes's remains never arrived at the Panthéon. Mercier even went further and attempted to have the antique porphyry sarcophagus in which Descartes was lying emptied of the remains, because he did not find it suitable for a geometer. In 1799, the 'Élysée' was created in the Jardin des Petits-Augustins in which the sarcophagus (obviously more important than its inhabitant) was given a place. When the sarcophagus was required to be given back to the Louvre, Lenoir had a new one made, which he described as follows:

N°. 507. Sarcophage, en pierre dure, et creusé dans son intérieur, contenant les restes de René Descartes, mort en Suède en 1650, supporté sur des griffons, animal astronomique, composé de l'aigle et du lion, tous deux consacrés à Jupiter, et l'emblème du soleil dont ils représentent le domicile. Des peupliers, dont la cime monte jusqu'aux

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 937.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.



‘Grand homme’ or charlatan?

nues, des ifs et des fleurs ombragent ce monument, érigé au père de la philosophie, à celui qui le premier nous apprit à penser.<sup>164</sup>

What is most interesting is that Descartes is accredited with the title ‘père de la philosophie’ and is even honoured as the man ‘who first taught us to think’. The naming of Descartes as ‘father of philosophy’ is perhaps a bit exaggerated, one is inclined to add ‘française’ or ‘moderne’. The first edition of Lenoir’s *Description* dates back to the ninth year of the Republic, that is, to 1803, though the terms he uses to qualify Descartes may of course be older, as it is not clear whether Lenoir borrowed these appellations or thought them up himself.<sup>165</sup>

In spite of Lenoir’s efforts, the administration during the Restoration had different plans and Descartes had to be moved again. On 26 February 1819, the remains of Descartes together with those of Mabillon and Montfaucon were brought to the closest church, Saint-Germain-des-Prés, and placed in its chapel.

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<sup>164</sup> Alexandre Lenoir, *Description historique et chronologique des monumens de sculpture réunis au musée des monumens français* (1806), p. 243.

<sup>165</sup> See Adam, *Vie et Œuvres de Descartes* (1910) and also Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* (2002). As Schütt shows, the earliest mention of the father metaphor was, notably, from Mercier in his *Éloge de Descartes* (1765) on p. 81 called Descartes ‘père de la Philosophie moderne’, see Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«*, p. 97<sup>n</sup>. Schütt also brought to our attention that Tanja Thern found an even older use of this metaphor, see Thern, *Descartes im Licht der französischen Aufklärung. Studien zum Descartes-Bild Frankreichs im 18. Jahrhundert* (2003) p. 334 ff. She shows that the jesuit Antoine Guénard in his *Discours sur l’esprit philosophique* from 1755 called Descartes ‘le père de la Philosophie pensante’ indicating that Descartes said to the people that, in order to be a philosopher, it did not suffice to believe but that he should think. She also shows that in the 1942 edition of this discourse ‘pensante’ remarkably changed into ‘présente’ which, of course, comes very close to ‘moderne’, cf. p. 337.

#### 4 THE ROLE OF DESCARTES IN THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

In our histories of philosophy, the year 1824 is marked by two facts: the death of Maine de Biran and, under the title *Système de politique positive*, the publication of the ‘opuscule fondamental’, as Auguste Comte called it, which offered the first exposition of the law of three states and its supplement, the classification of the sciences. Let us now imagine a speaker who, at the end of this same year 1824, had taken up the subject ‘View on the contemporary philosophy in France’.

He first would have saluted the respectable Destutt de Tracy who just turned seventy, the eldest survivor of the Ideology and, besides that, the inventor of this word which designates the French school which followed Condillac. Next to him, hardly any younger, we would have seen M. Laromiguière, whose *Leçons de philosophie* are regularly re-edited, an unforgettable example of self-critical Condillacism. According to chronological order, our speaker would discretely have regretted that after his course of 1811 at the Sorbonne, M. Royer-Collard had sacrificed philosophy to administration and politics and thus interrupted his dialogue with the Scots. He would not have neglected to recall the works of Baron Degérando, his excellent *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* in particular. Finally, in order to amply make room for the younger people, he undoubtedly would barely have mentioned the philosophy of language of Vicomte de Bonald in order to have time to dwell longer on Professor Victor Cousin, who had already made a name at the École normale and the Faculty of Arts and had been unemployed since the assassination of the Duc de Berry, now occupied with the translation of Plato and the edition of Proclus [and Descartes (cz)] . . .

As to Maine de Biran, our speaker surely would have pronounced some words of affection in order to deplore the loss of a thinker of the highest rank, who passed away too early, without doing justice to himself in a work worthy of his genius.<sup>166</sup>

We owe this excellent introduction of the philosophers mentioned above to Henri Gouhier. In this section we abandon our philosophical focus on the revaluation of Descartes in order to briefly introduce and outline the political views and functions of de Maistre, de Bonald, Maine de Biran, Royer-Collard and Cousin. We only discuss them here with reference to this specific point, their philosophical views will be discussed in Part III.

##### 4.1 Traditionalism and ultramontanism

Traditionalists regarded the French Revolution as a highly negative event that had both destroyed French traditions and threatened to religion. The writings of de Maistre and de Bonald were reactions against the irrelegiosity and amorality they thought the Revolution had brought about. The leading traditionalists were Joseph

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<sup>166</sup> Gouhier, *Maine de Biran par lui-même* (1970), pp. 4-5, transl. cz.

de Maistre (1753-1821), Louis de Bonald (1754-1840), Benjamin Constant (1767-1830) and Félicité de Lamennais (1782-1854). Traditionalists or ultramontanists<sup>167</sup> were fierce defenders of the Catholic faith. During the eighteenth century, Catholicism had been under constant attack, first by Voltaire and Rousseau, and later when d'Alembert, Diderot and the whole army of Encyclopaedists overwhelmed it again. It can be said that during this period no person or theory defended Catholicism, as a result it was abandoned until the beginning of the nineteenth century when de Maistre *c.s.* defended it.

#### 4.1.1 De Maistre

Joseph de Maistre has been described as a 'ferocious absolutist, fanatic theocrat, intransigent legitimist, apostle of a monstrous trinity of pope, king and hangman, in all affairs partisan of the most austere, most narrow-minded and most inflexible dogmas, gloomy figure of the Middle Ages of which he was the doctor, the inquisitor and the executioner'.<sup>168</sup> If, among catholics, there is a category which can be classified as 'very catholic', de Maistre belongs to it. His *Du Pape* (1817), for instance, is a plea for the restoration of a Medieval style of Roman Catholic theocracy. The reason why most of his writings are polemics aimed against the Revolution in general and against Rousseau, Bacon, Locke, Voltaire and Diderot in particular, can be found in his religious views.

To de Maistre, the Revolution was leading the people and not vice versa. Like a cyclone it was destroying everything that got in its way.<sup>169</sup> He even thought that there was a 'satanic character' in the French Revolution which 'distinguishes it from everything we have ever seen and perhaps will ever see'.<sup>170</sup> From the beginning, de Maistre attacked every revolutionary movement, probably not only for ideological reasons.

Born into a family of magistrates who were very loyal to the king, and educated by Jesuits at the University of Turin, he became a member of the Senate of Savoy in 1788. When the Revolution came and its effects became felt in Savoy, his fortune was lost, his career destroyed and he was forced to live in exile in Lausanne. He stayed there for three years during which time he wrote his *Considérations sur la France* (1796). He was then summoned to Turin by the king and appointed Sardinian Minister Plenipotentiary to St. Petersburg where he stayed

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<sup>167</sup> From *ultramontanus*, 'beyond the mountains', as the northern members of the Catholic church regularly looked southward beyond the Alps (that is, to Rome) for guidance.

<sup>168</sup> Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle* (1891), p. 2. This was what people thought about de Maistre around 1830. At the time of the appearance of his posthumous writings, however, he was found 'charming', 'friendly', 'a delightful friend', 'an adorable father', 'a gentleman from the eighteenth century' as Faguet remarks.

<sup>169</sup> See De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France* [1797], in *Œuvres* I, ch. I, p. 66.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 109. Here de Maistre has Robespierre's discourse against priesthood in mind, and he goes on 'l'apostasie solennelle des prêtres, la profanation des objets du culte, l'inauguration de la déesse Raison, et cette foule de scènes inouïes où les provinces tâcheroient de surpasser Paris; tout cela sort du cercle ordinaire des crimes, et semble appartenir à un autre monde.' According to de Maistre, the time has come for another divine explosion for the sake of human kind. The heresy of the sixteenth century (the Reformation) has cut Christian Europe in half and both halves were suffering from scepticism and indifference. The omens are clear to him: civil revolts, all sorts of epidemics and endless wars that divide us.

for 14 years. While there he wrote his *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, which was not published until the year of his death, 1821.

In *Considérations sur la France* (1796), de Maistre not only reveals his fiercely critical opinion of the Revolution, but also his view that history is a display of the operation of divine providence. He finds that the constitution developed by revolutionary Jacobinism relies on an abstract and imaginary anthropology:

La philosophie moderne est tout à la fois trop matérielle et trop présomptueuse pour apercevoir les véritables ressorts du monde politique. Une de ses folies est de croire qu'une assemblée peut constituer une nation; qu'une constitution, c'est-à-dire, l'ensemble des lois fondamentales qui conviennent à une nation, et qui doivent lui donner telle ou telle forme de gouvernement, est un ouvrage comme un autre qui n'exige que de l'esprit, des connoissances et de l'exercice...<sup>171</sup>

By the term 'modern philosophy' in the above quote, we assume that he basically means mainstream eighteenth-century philosophy. As to his philosophical stance, we do not detect an actual rehabilitation of Descartes in his works, but his anti-Lockean attitude and defence of innate ideas make it worthwhile to examine the issue further in Part III.

#### 4.1.2 De Bonald

Louis-Gabriel-Ambroise de Bonald (1754-1840) was a contemporary of de Maistre with a similar background. He also fought against eighteenth-century liberal and materialist doctrines. De Bonald, born into a noble family, joined the royal musketeers, became mayor of Milhau (near his place of birth Monna) at the age of twenty two and later became a member and president of the Assembly of Aveyron. However, when he was no longer permitted to recognize the civil constitution of the clergy, he emigrated and joined the army of Condé<sup>172</sup> against France.

According to de Bonald, the world had fallen into heresy and this human arrogance had resulted in the French Revolution. However, in 1802, 'le *tour du monde social est fait*'.<sup>173</sup> It was obvious to him that after the experiment of popular authority, there would be a return to authority and religion. The Social Contract à la Rousseau was thought to be a moral impossibility and the destructive passions which had surfaced could only be reformed by a social power that was both external and superior to the powers of individuals. De Bonald's philosophy fully depends on his social philosophy, which is nothing but a critical reflection on what he calls 'this experiment'.

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>172</sup> Louis-Joseph, 8<sup>e</sup> Prince de Condé, Duc de Bourbon (1736-1818) was one of the first princes who emigrated after the fall of the Bastille in 1789. He established himself at Worms in 1791 where he raised an army of emigrants (the so-called 'army of Condé'), which took part in the anti-revolutionary campaigns of 1792-1796.

<sup>173</sup> De Bonald, *Législation primitive, considérée dans les derniers temps par les seules lumières de la raison* [1802], vol. 1, in *Œuvres*, vol. II, p. 132. The rest of the sentence reads: 'il ne reste plus de terres à découvrir, et le moment est venu d'offrir à l'homme la carte de l'univers moral, et la théorie de la société.'

Quoting Degérando's *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie* throughout his *Recherches philosophiques* (1818-1826), de Bonald directly attacks philosophy itself. The main argument for this is that philosophers are not always on a par with each other, therefore philosophy itself is inconsistent and lacks authority. As a result, it is useless. He remarks that philosophy has never contributed to the stability and flourishing of nations, using the examples of the Spartans and Jews who simply maintained the beliefs of their ancestors rather than indulging themselves in idle, sterile discussions. The only criterion de Bonald seems to consider is whether philosophers were useful to society.

La diversité des doctrines n'a fait, siècle en siècle, que s'accroître avec le nombre des maîtres et les progrès des connaissances; et l'Europe, qui possède aujourd'hui des bibliothèques entières d'écrits philosophiques, et qui compte presque autant de philosophes que d'écrivains, pauvre au milieu de tant de richesses, et incertaine de sa route avec tant de guides; l'Europe, le centre et le foyer de toutes les lumières du monde, attend encore une *philosophie*.<sup>174</sup>

We shall discuss his stance towards Descartes and the innate ideas in the next part.

#### 4.2 Idéologie

Following Condillac, the movement known as 'Idéologie' was in many ways a counterpart to the traditionalists. Its propagators were Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) and Cabanis (1757-1808). In opposition to the traditionalists, the 'Idéologues' were proponents of the ideals of the French Revolution and played an important role in post-revolutionary politics. Moreover, they were particularly hostile towards the religious restoration. During the Convention (1792-1795) they were on the moderate side, and during the Terror (1793-1794) they too were under threat. Their most important activities were the restoration of order in the different agencies of the educational system and the organization of the French Institute, its three academies and the Academie des sciences morales et politiques. Because they believed that a critical mind is essential in the arts and sciences, their role was suspended by Napoleon when he 'reorganized' the Institute in 1803.

The term 'Idéologie' stems from Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836), who, in his *Projet d'éléments d'idéologie*, described it as the science that could form true ideas, express them with exactitude and combine them appropriately.

Cette science peut s'appeler idéologie, si l'on ne fait attention qu'au sujet, grammaire générale, si l'on n'a égard qu'au moyen; et logique, si l'on ne considère que le but. Quelque nom qu'on lui donne, elle renferme nécessairement ces trois parties; car on ne peut en traiter une raisonnablement sans traiter les deux autres. Idéologie me paraît le terme générique, parceque la science des idées renferme celle de leur expression, et celle de leur combinaison.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> De Bonald, *Recherches philosophiques*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, part 3, p. 2. Henceforth: *Recherches*.

<sup>175</sup> Destutt de Tracy, *Projet d'éléments d'idéologie* [1800-1801], pp. 19-20.

Antoine-Louis-Claude Destutt de Tracy was born in Paris in 1754. On his deathbed, his father, a brave soldier, made him promise to follow a military career. This he duly did, first in Strasbourg, then with the musketeers of the royal house. At the age of twenty-two he was a colonel second class of a regiment of the royal cavalry which he became the commander of two years later. As a deputy of the Estates General he proved himself attached to the principles of the Revolution. In 1789, the Estates General were called to meet and he joined the Third Estate, although he had come from an aristocratic family. He was soon elected to the Constituent Assembly. By 1792, he became disgusted with the extreme revolutionaries and retired from politics. During the Terror he was imprisoned for a year, which enabled him to study Condillac and Locke, resulting in his 'Idéologie'. In 1796 he was made a member of the Institut national, in the field of Moral and Political Sciences.

Although they initially supported Bonaparte, around 1803 the Idéologues realized that he was not the liberal successor of the Revolution that they had hoped for. Napoleon found them hostile to his project of creating a law that would deal with crimes against state security and he excluded them from the Tribunal and suppressed the Académie des sciences morales. Furthermore, the decrees that founded the Imperial University were prepared by the opponents of the Idéologues: Fontanes, Cardinal de Bausset and de Bonald. Destutt de Tracy was still active in educational reform in the sense that he wanted to create a national system of education. Because of his membership of the Senate during the Consulate and Empire, he had the opportunity to oppose to Napoleon's non-liberal administration. In 1814 he called for the removal of the Emperor for which he was rewarded with the restoration of his noble title by Louis XVIII in that same year. However, he still supported the liberal opposition during the Restoration of Louis XVIII and Charles X, who he had helped bring to power during the July Revolution of 1830.

Although the Ideology is strictly speaking an analysis of the human faculties on the basis of Condillac, it has a completely different inspiration. Unlike Condillac, Destutt de Tracy is not interested in the origin and genesis of the faculties. He even reproaches Condillac for having made distinctions where he should have united concepts and vice versa. Ideology is the analysis of ideas which breaks them down into the sensory elements of which they are composed. This new science would replace classic logic, according to Destutt de Tracy, and separate ideas that are founded in experience from those that are groundless. According to Destutt de Tracy, all ideas are physiologically determined, hence the question that was asked by the Second Class of the Institut national on 6 October 1799 concerning the influence of habit on judgement. As we will see in the next section, it was Maine de Biran who won this contest with his *Mémoires sur l'influence de l'habitude* in 1802.

#### **4.3 Maine de Biran**

François-Pierre Gonthier de Biran was born in Bergerac in 1766 (the name 'Maine' did not appear on his birth certificate, but was just a family tradition which was followed on the paternal side of the family). He was educated at Périgeux where he

followed classes managed by the ‘doctrinaires’. At the age of eighteen he went to Paris where he joined the royal guard. He was injured in a mob uprising in 1789 while defending the king and a few years later, after both his parents and two of his brothers had died, he retired to the castle of Grateloup near his birthplace. Maine de Biran stayed in this lovely place throughout the Terror.

During his life he published very little: *L'influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser* (1802) for which he won a prize from the Institut de France, *Examen des leçons de philosophie de M. Laromiguière* (1817) and in 1819 an article on Leibniz for the *Biographie universelle*. He only published the last article in his own name, but he also participated anonymously in the essay competition of the Academy of Berlin of 1805, resulting in his *De l'aperception immédiate*. In the same year he won a prize from the Institut for his *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée*, on the basis of which he was made a member of the Institut. In 1812 he also won a prize from the Academy of Copenhagen for his *Mémoire sur les rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*.

As for his political career, he was administrator of the Dordogne from 1795 to 1797, member of the Conseil des Cinq-Cents from 1797 to 1798, sous-préfet of Bergerac from 1806 to 1812, questeur à la Chambre in 1815, Conseiller d'État in 1816 and deputy of Bergerac from 1818 until his death in 1824.

In the next part we discuss the philosophy of Maine de Biran in detail and show the role Descartes plays in the foundations of de Biran's psychology.

#### **4.4 Royer-Collard**

Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845) was born in Sompuis, into a devout Jansenist family who sent him to the Collège des Doctrinaires of Chaumont. When he left this congregation, there being no vow, he chose a career in law. The Revolution of 1789, however, pushed him into the foreground of politics. He was elected a member of the City Council of Paris and later became a secretary of the Commune where he met Danton and Condorcet. Refusing to participate in the excesses of the Revolution, he left the Commune. However, he did not give up the cause of liberty and a few days after the outlawing of the deputies of la Gironde, he presented a petition to the Convention in which he pleaded for the rights that had thus far been suppressed. After this he had to flee, seeking refuge in his home town. In 1796 he protested against the directory of the department of Marne which he alleged had made illegal demands. In 1797 he was elected a deputy of the Cinq-Cents, but due to the Fructidor coup d'état on 4 September 1797, he was forced to resign from his position. He became a royalist and a leading figure in a small committee in Paris that tried to propagate the Restoration.

When the Consulate was established, however, the hope of a monarchy was lost and Royer-Collard devoted himself entirely to philosophy. During the Empire he was preoccupied with Scottish philosophy, especially that of Thomas Reid who had always interested him, and, more generally, with attacks on eighteenth-century philosophy. For this task he used Descartes and his followers, and the Fathers of Port-Royal with whom he had already been acquainted in his youth. Most

biographers, and especially Cousin,<sup>176</sup> say that he did not know much about philosophy, yet from 1811 to 1814 he lectured at the Sorbonne. During this relatively short period he was the first holding a French chair to rehabilitate Descartes, if we are to believe Victor Cousin. Although Royer-Collard had no liking for Napoleon, the latter highly approved of his inaugural lecture, which we discuss in the next part.

As we saw in the opening quote of this chapter, Royer-Collard was only briefly active as a professor of philosophy. From 1814 he became involved in government after the Bourbon Restoration, sitting in the chamber of deputies almost continuously from 1815 to 1839. From 1815 to 1820 he was president of the commission for public instruction. Royer-Collard was a leader of the Doctrinaires, a middle-of-the-road group that included François Guizot, Camille Jordan, Charles de Rémusat, and Madame de Staël's daughter, the Duchesse de Broglie.<sup>177</sup>

#### 4.5 Cousin

Victor Cousin was born into a poor working class family in 1792. He was raised in abject poverty until 1803. On an October afternoon of that year, the pupils of the Lycée Charlemagne noisily chased one of their comrades who was wearing what in their eyes was a ridiculous gown. While they were beating this poor child, a rascal who was playing in the gutter suddenly threw himself into the middle of the scuffle and dispersed the gang by administering a torrent of blows. That night the mother of the rescued child learned about this act of heroism and also that he belonged to a family of working people. She offered to pay for the tuition of this hero, and Victor Cousin had started his career.

Attending two classes a year and winning every prize in the general competitions, his studies at the Lycée went well. In 1810 Cousin entered the École normale during which he took his first course of philosophy. In his *Fragments philosophiques*, Cousin writes:

Il est resté et restera toujours dans ma mémoire, avec une émotion reconnaissante, le jour où, pour la première fois en 1810, élève de l'École normale, destiné à l'enseignement des lettres, j'entendis M. Laromiguière. Ce jour décida de toute ma vie; il m'enleva à mes premières études . . .<sup>178</sup>

The state of philosophy was very poor in those days. There was no philosophical education in the lycées and the faculties were just coming into existence. The

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<sup>176</sup> See Simon, *Victor Cousin* (1891), p. 12: 'M. Royer-Collard, ancien greffier de la Commune de Paris, ancien membre du conseil des Cinq-Cents, avocat, nullement philosophe, fut nommé professeur de philosophie en 1809. Or il faut qu'un professeur de philosophie enseigne la philosophie; pour l'enseigner, il faut la savoir. M. Royer-Collard, qui ne la savait pas, se promenait sur les quais à la recherche d'un maître. Il le trouva dans l'étalage d'un bouquiniste. Un volume dépareillé des *Essais de philosophie* de Reid fut pour lui ce qu'avait été Descartes pour Malebranche, ce qu'était, presque au même moment, La Romiguière pour Victor Cousin.'

<sup>177</sup> See Royer-Collard, *Les fragments philosophiques*, p. LIV ff.

<sup>178</sup> Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques* (preface to the second ed. 1833), in *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 70. Also see Simon, *Victor Cousin* (1891), p. 12.



Idéologues had almost been forgotten and the history of philosophy only went as far as Condillac.

In 1812, at the age of twenty, Cousin became Professor of Greek Literature. The next year, he was charged with the task of overseeing the philosophy courses at the Faculty of Arts not so much in the role of professor, as in that of co-ordinator. In 1815, Royer-Collard chose him as his replacement and in the same year Cousin became 'active' in politics as well. He joined the royalist volunteers, an act which, in his case, consisted only of a trip to Vincennes from which he returned the next day.

As he was almost totally unprepared when he began his career in public education, he initially followed in the footsteps of Laromiguière and Royer-Collard, but also followed Maine de Biran. Simon summarizes this as follows: 'Il apprit de La Romiguière à étudier la sensation, de Royer-Collard à étudier l'intelligence, et de Maine de Biran à étudier la volonté'.<sup>179</sup> His lectures in philosophy during the first year were almost entirely focused on Scottish philosophy, but from 1816 he became more and more interested in German philosophy. He started to learn German, though, even according to his biographer Simon, he never knew it well. At the end of 1817 he thought he had surpassed Kant and wanted to study the new German philosophy, namely Schelling's philosophy of nature. He decided to visit Schelling in Heidelberg, but did not find him. Instead he found Hegel 'par hasard'.<sup>180</sup>

In 1820 the Duc de Berry, nephew of the former king Louis XVIII and son of the Comte d'Artois, the future Charles X, was assassinated and a violent reaction ensued. The government was terrified and decided to limit the electoral law, the freedom of the press and even individual freedom. The three courses of Guizot, Cousin and Villemain, which were highly popular and always drew large crowds, suddenly became suspect. The constitutional party was divided. One side chose the reactionaries, while the other, which included Royer-Collard, remained loyal to the Constitution. In the chamber of deputies the Doctrinaires had voted against the minister, and de Serre, who was on the reactionary side, was forced to break with his old allies. This meant that Camille Jordan, Royer-Collard and Guizot were all dismissed from the state council. The effect of these events was even felt at the Sorbonne and resulted in Cousin being asked to leave his chair which remained vacant during the following eight years. Cousin still gave his courses at the École normale, but in 1822, even this school was closed down. 'Tel était le libéralisme de la Restauration, que, par une illusion rétrospective, on se plaît quelquefois à rappeler comme l'âge d'or du régime parlementaire', as Janet put it.<sup>181</sup> During his country retreat, Cousin started his studies and publication of the manuscripts of Proclus (6 vols., 1820-1827). He also published the complete works of Descartes (11 vols., 1824-1826) and translated Plato (13 vols. 1822-1840).

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 16.

<sup>180</sup> Cousin, *Œuvres* (1844) vol. 2, (*Cours d'histoire de la philosophie morale, fragments philosophiques*), preface to the second edition, p. 20. In Chapter 9 we will return to Cousin's relation with Schelling and Hegel.

<sup>181</sup> Janet, *Victor Cousin et son œuvre* (1885), p. 161.

In 1824 he was charged with the task of accompanying his pupil, the son of the Duc de Montebello, to check on a young lady who this pupil was planning to marry, the daughter of Madame de Gerebzoff, a Russian noble who lived in Dresden. This suited Cousin well, as he had been waiting for some time for an opportunity to meet Hegel again. Things did not go according to plan, however, as Cousin was suddenly arrested by the Prussian police in Dresden and sent to Berlin. He was suspected of preaching Carbonarism,<sup>182</sup> according to Simon, but according to Janet, he was suspected of preaching Jacobinism and engaging in espionage. The exact accusation remained unclear as the procedure was secret and the official documents were not presented to him. Cousin stayed in prison for six months until Hegel was able to have him released.<sup>183</sup> During his time in prison he studied German and read the works of Kant, Fichte, Jacobi and Hegel.<sup>184</sup> He also tried to translate some verses of Goethe whom he had visited in Weimar. After his release, Cousin stayed with Hegel and some of his students (Gans, Hotho, Henning, Michelet) for a while, and they maintained correspondence thereafter.

When he returned to France, the enthusiasm surrounding him was even greater, as people saw him as a hero. His only aspiration was to finish his translation of Plato, but due to his popularity he was given back his assistant professorship in 1828 by the Martinac ministry. The Revolution of 1830 brought Cousin closer to politics, but he strongly disapproved of the violence. During the July monarchy he became a member of the Conseil royal de l'Instruction publique (1830) and in the following years he became a member of the Académie française and the Académie des sciences morales et politiques. He became the director of the

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<sup>182</sup> The derivation of this word is unclear and there are many fantastic stories about it. Most probably the Carbonari were some kind of derivative of the Freemasons. The movement started in southern Italy and, to put it briefly, it strove for freedom and independence. In France Carbonarism took root around 1820, Cousin's part in it is not clear.

<sup>183</sup> In his edition of *Œuvres de Platon*, vol. 3 (1826), Cousin thanks Hegel. In the preface it reads: 'Hegel, il y a dix ans que vous me reçûtes à Heydelberg comme un frère, et que dès le premier moment nos âmes se comprirent et s'aimèrent. L'absence et le silence ne refroidirent pas votre amitié; et quant dans ces derniers temps, voyageant de nouveau en Allemagne, une police extravagante, dirigée à son insu par une politique odieuse, osa attenter à ma liberté, me charger des accusations les plus atroces, et me déclarer d'avance convaincu et condamné, vous accourûtes spontanément vous présenter devant mes juges, leur dire que j'étais votre ami, et engager votre parole pour la mienne'.

<sup>184</sup> These are his own words, in the next chapter we will see that although he 'read' these works, he did not understand much of them.

The role of Descartes in the political context

Ecole normale in 1834, and even became the Minister of Education in the cabinet of Thiers in 1840.

When Louis Napoleon came to power in 1848, Cousin's glorydays came to an end as, in his defence of secular education, he had taken the part of the university against the clergy. After the coup d'état of 1851 he retired and spent the rest of his life studying and writing. He died in Cannes 13 January 1867.

### III

## The Reinstatement of Descartes in French Philosophy 1800-1850

This part discusses the ways in which and the reasons why Descartes was rehabilitated and reinstated into philosophy in France during the first half of the nineteenth century. We will see that these reasons vary throughout the different domains to which philosophy is related.

Firstly, there are the traditional or religious grounds on which de Maistre and de Bonald reinstate the Cartesian school, and Malebranche in particular, rather than Descartes as such. With a severe anti-eighteenth-century attitude de Maistre attacks almost every philosopher significant to his era. Together with de Bonald, he defends the theory of innate ideas and pleads for a strictly observed restoration of Christian morals.

Secondly, Descartes is rehabilitated simply because of the historiographical developments of the time, which we shall also see in Part IV. Especially through the efforts of Degérando and, to a lesser extent, Laromiguière, Descartes was interpreted simply through the close reading of his works.

Thirdly, there are epistemological grounds as to why Descartes started to play a leading role in the rise and foundation of psychology. On the basis of the works of Maine de Biran, we can see how Descartes was reinstated as the founder of the 'method of reflection'.

Fourthly, there are what we can call 'reorganizational' grounds for Descartes's reinstatement into philosophy, which can be shown on the basis of the few texts of Royer-Collard. As a politician, Royer-Collard proposed a restructuring of philosophy and it is within this process that he rehabilitates Descartes. His professional activities may have been the reason for some of his patriotic remarks concerning Descartes.

Finally, there are Cousin's philosophical reasons for reinstating Descartes, which in the end turn out to be of a spiritualistic nature. Furthermore, the eclecticism that he develops and combines with his political conviction, lays the ground for rekindling esteem for Descartes. Cousin's history of philosophy is also accompanied by patriotism, which provides another reason for Descartes's rehabilitation.

On a more thematic level, we shall discuss the defence and reinstatement, or at least the reconsideration, of the theory of innate ideas; the reassessment of the *cogito*-argument and its role in psychology; and views on the proofs of the existence of God.

### 5.1 De Maistre's criticism of sensualism

De Maistre considered that eighteenth-century philosophers had overrated human reason immensely and he saw the ridiculous results of this embodied in the French Revolution. He found that governments that had implemented the social contract in the form of a constitution, had shown that choice and deliberation produced more arbitrary and haphazard results than did hereditary monarchies. This is why he concluded that democracy can only result in fiasco and that philosophers who advocate democracy have simply not taken the perversions of humanity into account.

L'homme, en sa qualité d'être à la fois moral et corrompu, juste dans son intelligence et pervers dans sa volonté, doit nécessairement être gouverné; autrement il séroit à la fois sociable et insociable, et la société séroit à la fois nécessaire et impossible. . . .

L'homme étant donc nécessairement associé et nécessairement gouverné, sa volonté n'est pour rien dans l'établissement d'un gouvernement; car dès que les peuples n'ont pas le choix et que la souveraineté résulte directement de la nature humaine, les souverains n'existent plus par la grâce des peuples; la souveraineté n'étant pas plus le résultat de leur volonté, la société même.<sup>185</sup>

We will leave his views on politics and society aside and focus on his view of philosophy, especially the theory of innate ideas.

According to de Maistre, the natural sciences have cost man dearly. They had led to the denial of the supernatural in such a way that religious life had become practically extinct.<sup>186</sup> For this, he blames Bacon and Locke and their French readers Voltaire and Diderot. Rousseau does not fare any better, as, for de Maistre, he is nothing but a sophist. What is remarkable and also interesting for our study is that he opposes Cartesian innateness to the empiricism of the natural sciences. The following quotes illustrate his fierce dislike of Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as well as de Maistre's polemic style.

Il est des livres dont on dit: montrez-moi le défaut qui s'y trouve! Quant à l'*Essai*, je puis bien vous dire: *Montrez-moi celui qui ne s'y trouve pas*. Nommez-moi celui que vous voudrez, parmi ceux que vous jugerez les plus capables de déprécier un livre, et je me charge de vous en citer sur-le-champ un exemple, *sans le chercher*; la préface même est choquante au-delà de toute expression.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>185</sup> De Maistre, *Du Pape* (1830), vol. 1, bk. II, ch. I, p. 207 and pp. 208-209.

<sup>186</sup> See de Maistre, *Les soirées de Saint-Petersbourg ou entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la providence* (1822), vol. 1. Henceforth *Soirées*. De Maistre was the Savoy ambassador to the court in St. Petersburg from 1803 to 1817, hence the title. On *ibid.* p. 383 he exclaims: 'Ah! que les sciences naturelles ont coûté cher à l'homme!'

<sup>187</sup> *Soirées* I, 450.

De Maistre thinks that the Lockean theory of ideas is blind, ridiculous and highly unrefined. The passage quoted above is quite polemical, the following even more so.

Aveuglé néanmoins par son prétendu *respect pour la vérité*, qui n'est cependant, dans ces sortes de cas, qu'un délit public déguisé sous un beau nom, Locke, dans le premier livre de son triste *Essai*, écume l'histoire et les voyages pour faire rougir l'humanité. Il cite des dogmes et les usages les plus honteux; il s'oublie au point d'exhumer d'un livre inconnu une histoire qui fait vomir; et il a soin de nous dire que le livre étant rare, il a jugé à propos de nous réciter l'anecdote dans les propres termes de l'auteur [Baumgarten], et tout cela pour établir *qu'il n'y a point de morale innée*. C'est dommage qu'il ait oublié de produire une *nosologie* pour démontrer qu'il n'y a point de santé.<sup>188</sup>

Locke's arguments and the reasoning by which he attempts to prove that there are no innate ideas are not found to be very convincing. According to de Maistre, if Locke had shown more cleverness, attentiveness and good faith, he would have said that an idea is innate to everyone who possesses it, rather than saying that an idea is not innate because it does not occur in the minds of some people:

. . . car c'est une preuve que si elle ne préexiste pas, jamais les sens ne lui donneront naissance, puisque la nation qui en est privée a bien cinq sens comme les autres; et il auroit recherché comment et pourquoi telle ou telle idée a pu être détruite ou dénaturée dans l'esprit d'une telle famille humaine.<sup>189</sup>

To Locke, one sole atheist in the universe would suffice to legitimately deny that the idea of God is innate.<sup>190</sup> To say that innateness implies universality is, to de Maistre, an 'erreur énorme!'. It would be the same as saying that a child born without eyes proves that sight is not natural. De Maistre draws opposite conclusions from Lockean arguments: an Indian woman who sacrifices her newborn child to her goddess would prove to Locke that there is no innate morality. On the contrary, de Maistre says, it proves that it is innate, because the idea of duty is so strong in this unfortunate mother that she would sacrifice what is dearest to her. He even draws a parallel between the Indian woman and Abraham, however, as a 'good Catholic', he adds:

L'un [Abraham], pliant sous l'autorité divine qui ne vouloit que l'éprouver, obéissoit à un ordre sacré et direct; l'autre, aveuglée par une superstition déplorable, obéit à un ordre imaginaire; mais de part et d'autre, l'idée primitive est la même: c'est celle du devoir, portée au plus haut degré d'élévation.<sup>191</sup>

The essence of an innate idea has absolutely nothing to do with the errors that are made when applying them. If we make an error in daily life, for example, in our

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid., pp. 492-493.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., pp. 494-495.

<sup>190</sup> De Maistre bases this on Locke's *Essay*, Bk. I, ch. 4, §8, fifth ed. (1706) in which a quotation from the 'Third Letter to the Bishop of Worcester' is added in a footnote.

<sup>191</sup> *Soirées* I, 497.

calculations, it does not prove that we do not possess the idea of number. From here, de Maistre concludes that the idea of number is innate, for if it were not, we would not be able to acquire it nor would we be able to make mistakes. The same can be said for other ideas, and de Maistre moves the discussion to a more general level by saying that every rational doctrine is founded on earlier knowledge. From this point onwards, his criticism seems to be founded on naïve Platonism. For example, he thinks that when we observe an actual triangle, the idea of a general triangle or ‘triangularity’ is already given. If we refuse to admit these primary ideas, no demonstration whatsoever is possible as there would not be any principles from which they could be derived.

Concerning the influence of Locke in France, de Maistre blames the ‘génération futile’ for having made Locke their oracle and says that they are ‘Locked in’ error by the vain authority associated with his name. Moreover, he blames the French for having abandoned, forgotten, and outraged the Christian Plato who had been born amongst them.<sup>192</sup> Locke’s followers had corrupted faith and his work had become the false God of the eighteenth century. In his accusation, he appeals to patriotic sentiments, as the following quotation shows:

Les Français, ainsi dégradés par de vils instituteurs qui leurs apprennent à ne plus croire à la France, donnoient l’idée d’un millionnaire assis sur un coffre-fort qu’il refuse d’ouvrir, et de là tendant une main ignoble à l’étranger qui sourit.<sup>193</sup>

Another reason why he defends innate ideas concerns his idea that all creatures remain in their own sphere. To de Maistre, no living creature can have knowledge other than that which constitutes its essence and that which is relative to the place it occupies in the universe. He thinks that this proves that there are innate ideas, for if there were not innate ideas for every intelligent being, it would ‘sortir son cercle’, by which he means that it would leave or surpass its class or species.<sup>194</sup> The same external objects stimulate the senses of different kinds of beings, but the ideas they make of them are completely different. Therefore, they are intellectually constituted in a completely different manner. This intellectual constitution consists in certain predispositions to conceive things differently, also known as innate ideas.

He illustrates this curious proof with an example of the dog who accompanies his master to an execution (of course not an arbitrary example). Although the dog sees the same things: the crowd, the sad procession, the officers, the scaffold, the condemned person, the executioner and others, what does he understand? The dog might shiver at the sight of blood, but this might be just as he does in the butcher shop. All these signs would not mean anything if the idea did not pre-exist. For de

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<sup>192</sup> It is not quite clear who de Maistre means by the Christian Plato, the term only appears once in the entire text. We can only speculate that he means Malebranche, as it seems that he means a Frenchman and Malebranche is mentioned quite often. Another possibility is that he does not mean a person, but the movement that ‘christianized’ Plato from the early Renaissance until the eighteenth century.

<sup>193</sup> *Soirées* I, 513.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356: ‘s’il n’y avoit pas des idées de ce genre pour tout être qui connoît, chacun d’eux, tenant ses idées des chances de l’expérience, pourroit sortir de son cercle et troubler l’univers; or c’est ce qui n’arrivera jamais.’

Maistre this is a proof that there are innate ideas, because ‘chaque être actif exerce son action dans le cercle qui lui est tracé, sans pouvoir jamais en sortir.’<sup>195</sup>

Although we have seen the more or less epistemological reasons why de Maistre defends innate ideas, his real reason is religious or theological. Though it could be asked why de Maistre would care at all for some endless debate concerning the origins of human knowledge, when he sees the end of the world drawing near? His priority is to save religion and tradition from the threats and disturbances of the natural sciences. These sciences do not help humanity, as for de Maistre, a prayer is equally as effective against a bolt of lightning as is a lightning conductor. To the philosophical objection that there is a difference between laws of nature and prayers, he replies that if it is a law that thunder produces this or that havoc, it is a law too that prayer, scattered on the heavenly fire, extinguishes or diverts it.<sup>196</sup> Remarkably, he earlier used Malebranche’s *De la recherche de la vérité* (1688) to support his arguments. However, it is precisely the distinction between the mysteries of faith and those of nature which Malebranche makes there.<sup>197</sup>

## 5.2 The anti-philosophical attitude of De Bonald

De Bonald takes a straightforwardly hostile position against philosophy in general. His *Législation primitive*<sup>198</sup> begins with a description of the history of philosophy in less than thirty pages, starting with the differences between the Hebrews and Greeks. De Bonald does not think highly of the Greeks. He finds them to have been ‘disputeurs subtils, comme tous les esprits foibles’.<sup>199</sup> One could say that he blames the Greeks for everything that, in his eyes, went wrong with philosophy. From the fifteenth century onwards the Greeks entered ‘our’ society. He suggests that their ‘subtilités . . . dans l’examen de nos dogmes, d’idées renouvelées des Grecs dans nos gouvernemens, de modèles grecs dans nos arts, produisait cette philosophie d’abord religieuse ou plutôt théologique, depuis si irrégulière’.<sup>200</sup> Here de Bonald is talking about ‘modern philosophy’, which he considers to be a term of abuse because, in relation to morality, every doctrine that is not equally as old as humanity is in error.<sup>201</sup> Modern philosophy is worse than the thought of heathens in ignoring God, as well as in its poor knowledge of human beings, not to mention society.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>197</sup> Malebranche, *De la recherche de la vérité* [1688], vol. I, ch. III §ii, p. 22 : ‘. . . Dieu ne nous a donné des idées, que selon les besoins que nous en avons pour nous conduire dans l’ordre naturel des choses, selon lequel il nous a créés. De sorte que les mystères de la foi étant d’un ordre surnaturel, il ne faut pas s’étonner si nous n’en avons pas même d’idées: parce que nos ames sont créées en vertu du decret général, par lequel nous avons toutes les notions, qui nous sont nécessaires, & les mysteres de la foi n’ont été établis que par l’ordre de la grace, qui selon nôtre manière ordinaire de concevoir, est un decret postérieur à cet ordre de la nature.’

<sup>198</sup> De Bonald, *Législation primitive considérée dans les derniers temps par les seules lumières de la raison, suivie de divers traités et discours politiques* [1802], in *Œuvres*, vol. II.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 27.



Ainsi la philosophie moderne confond, dans l'homme, l'esprit avec ses organes; dans la société, le souverain avec les sujets; dans l'univers, Dieu même avec la nature, partout la cause avec ses effets, et elle détruit tout ordre général et particulier en ôtant tout pouvoir réel à l'homme sur lui-même, aux chefs des Etats sur le peuple, à Dieu même sur l'univers.<sup>202</sup>

Concerning the theory of innate ideas, de Bonald is convinced that the opponents and proponents never came to an agreement. He brings the question of innate ideas to a religious level and seems to draw an analogy between innate ideas and the word received by God. He poses the question as follows: if God engraved these ideas onto our minds, how does man put them into effect? How can it be that the child of idolatrous parents is born with the distinct notion of one unique God, just like a Christian child, whilst its parents believe in a multitude of gods? These and similar questions were never answered satisfactorily. The doctrine of innate ideas was so feebly defended because the solution to the problem was sought in regions that are inaccessible to the pure intellect.

Although de Bonald finds the philosophical explanations of innate ideas by Malebranche and Condillac to have been far from sufficient, he highly favours that of Malebranche, who he elsewhere calls 'le philosophe le plus méditatif de l'école cartésienne'.<sup>203</sup> His problem with Malebranche, however, is that he went beyond the solution of the problem by seeking it in the direct communication with eternal reason. Condillac, on the other hand, failed for the opposite reason. Neither realized that God, the supreme intelligence, is only knowable through his Word (*Verbe*), which is the expression of his substance. De Bonald thinks that it is evident that man is only known through his words (*parole*), as the expression of his mind, which means that the thinking being is explained by the speaking being. Language, however, is not found in individual beings but in society, therefore the knowledge of truths is not innate to individuals but to society.

De Bonald thought he had dealt with the problem of innate ideas by comparing the notion with the distinction between natural religion and revealed religion. We will not go any further into his exposition as it has little or nothing to do with the philosophical problem. In another text, however, we find de Bonald stating that the question of the origin of ideas, and along with this the theme of innate ideas, is the sole important theme in philosophy, as it points to the principles of philosophy.<sup>204</sup>

In this, although De Bonald's point of departure is Degérando's *Histoire comparée*, which we will discuss below, he arrives at the opposite conclusion. Whereas Degérando is quite hopeful that some day philosophers will discover the principle of human knowledge, de Bonald thinks most philosophical systems are a waste of effort. He considers that we are still asking the same questions that had been asked by Plato so many centuries ago: what is science, what is knowledge?

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>203</sup> De Bonald, *Recherches philosophiques sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales* [1818-1826] (*Recherches*), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, p. 19.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

Philosophy lacks authority because it speaks in the name of individual reason instead of that of God.

Although de Bonald completely distrusts philosophy, he is willing to make an exception for Descartes. In the general opinion regarding the history of philosophy there are three reformers of philosophy, Bacon, Descartes and Leibniz. However, de Bonald thinks that only Descartes deserves the title of reformer. Bacon may have reformed the ‘barbaric language of Scholasticism’ but he did not change the ‘spirit of the schools in which Aristotle ruled’. Bacon still agrees with Aristotle concerning the origin of ideas, and can therefore be called a second Aristotle.

Descartes, en détrônant Aristote, réforma donc Bacon, et il ne fut pas lui-même réformé par Leibnitz, qui fit son système indépendant de celui de Descartes, et ne fut ni son antagoniste ni son disciple . . .<sup>205</sup>

Although we see a moderate appreciation of Descartes, de Bonald does not find the Cartesian system complete. There are too many flaws in it and, as a result, it ‘degenerated into idealism’. Like de Maistre, de Bonald favours Malebranche because he was able to embellish the most implausible metaphysics. He appreciates Malebranche’s efforts to fully implement the doctrine of innate ideas and also that he saw God in everything. Malebranche succeeded far better in this than Spinoza, that ‘penseur opiniâtre plutôt que profond’, who made his God everything. Descartes himself surely would have disapproved of such a consequence.<sup>206</sup>

La *philosophie*, issue d’une maison autrefois souveraine, et qui avait régné longtemps dans la Grèce, était tombée dans l’indigence et le mépris, pour s’être livrée à de vaines et fausses spéculations; et encore pendant la première moitié du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, elle était, dans les collèges, au service d’un certain *Aristote*, occupée à montrer aux enfants, comme une *curiosité*, les *universaux* et les *catégories*, à traduire, en un latin inintelligible, ce que son maître disait en grec, et qui n’était pas plus clair.

La raison, qui s’était rencontrée quelquefois avec elle chez son maître, eut pitié de cette reine déchuë du trône, dont il avait fait son esclave, qu’il nourrissait de subtilités et habillait de ridicules; elle la tira de la poussière des classes, et la plaça à l’école de Descartes, qui lui apprit à penser avec justesse, à s’exprimer avec clarté, et lui enseigna à affirmer de grandes vérités qu’elle n’avait connues qu’imparfaitement, et à douter prudemment de ce qu’elle affirmait sans le connaître.<sup>207</sup>

The followers and successors of Descartes, however, taught reason to think with more profundity because they were more occupied with religion. De Bonald is of the opinion that philosophy should have been conserved in this form. Unfortunately it became influenced by literature and was seduced by the pleasures of style. As a result philosophy became detached from religion, which did not want to change the nature of its language.

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>206</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>207</sup> De Bonald, *La philosophie et la révolution*. (Anecdote, 28 July 1810), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3, part 3, pp. 535-536.

La littérature l'entraîna [viz. philosophy] bientôt dans la nouvelle école que Voltaire ouvrit au commencement du siècle, et qui, par une succession peu apperçue, avait remplacé, sous un nouveau nom et des formes plus séduisantes, d'autres écoles qu'on avait crues fermées. La philosophie y trouva le bel esprit, qui cherchait à s'introduire chez la littérature, et même à y dominer.<sup>208</sup>

From that moment on things became even worse, the 'bel esprit' gathered strength, became opulent, consorted with pleasure, was received into the academies and was finally caught in the nets of impiety.

L'impiété, encore fort ignorée dans le monde, pour se donner un peu de considération, attira chez elle la philosophie, qui y trouva mauvaise compagnie, et, en particulier, l'athéisme, sujet dangereux, qui n'osait se produire, et vivait à Paris sous un nom emprunté . . .

Enfin le terme fatal arrive, et la philosophie, un beau jour, mit au monde . . . la révolution.<sup>209</sup>

It is unclear how seriously we should take this anecdotal 'history' of philosophy by de Bonald, if at all. It is strongly influenced, as we have made abundantly clear, by such things as his stance towards the revolution and his opinion of the decay of philosophy.

### 5.3 The Traditionalists on Kant

In general, one can say that the introduction and reception of Kant in France in the early nineteenth century occurred as a severe criticism accompanied by the reinstatement of Descartes. That the reinstatement of Descartes was not everywhere accompanied by criticism of Kant, but quite the contrary, will be shown in Part V, where we discuss the view Descartes in neo-Kantianism.

De Maistre and de Bonald make some severe criticisms of Kant. According to de Bonald, 'Kant a tué la philosophie'. Although Degérando and Maine de Biran seem to approve of his philosophy, they are also critical, and Cousin, who saw him as a psychologist, could not find the same intimacy of consciousness in the Kantian theory, which he certainly found in the Cartesian system.

In *Observations sur le prospectus disciplinarum* (1811), de Maistre calls Kant's principal work 'le fameux livre publiée sous le titre excessivement ridicule de *Critique de la pure raison* et qui n'en est pas moins devenu, pendant un demi siècle, la bible des écoles Allemandes'.<sup>210</sup> Surprisingly, in a quick survey of Kant's project he states that:

Kant voit dans nous des idées de deux sortes, qui produisent deux genres de certitude différents: des idées innées et des idées acquises. Il se garde bien de prononcer les mots d'idées innées, car il aurait l'air de répéter ce

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., p. 537.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., p. 538.

<sup>210</sup> De Maistre, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 8, p. 240. The half century he mentions is strange, because the article was written in 1811 and the first edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* appeared in 1781, both facts of which de Maistre is aware.

qu'on dit d'autres philosophes, ce que son inconcevable orgueil évite par-dessus tout; mais la chose n'est pas moins certaine.<sup>211</sup>

It is highly doubtful that de Maistre had actually read Kant, as from his references it is clear that, in this case, he merely used Villers' *Philosophie de Kant*. Although, that he had read this work is also doubtful, as he spells Villers' name incorrectly. In any case, what de Maistre says about the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, suggests that he did not understand it. In so far as his criticism of Kant makes any sense at all, it mainly concerns the idea or knowledge of God and faith. De Maistre could not tolerate the thought that, with Kant, the proofs of the existence of God, and all concepts that are not given in a possible experience, disappear from philosophy.

Or il faut savoir, sans creuser davantage ces opinions, que l'existence de Dieu est, selon Kant, une vérité *à Priori*, et qu'il est impossible de prouver par le raisonnement. Ainsi, l'on est sûr que Dieu *est*, car ce mot est pris pour une expression *objective*; mais on ne l'est point du tout *qu'il existe*, parce que cette dernière expression est attribuée à l'élément *subjectif* qui est trompeur, et Villiers dans l'ouvrage cité tout à l'heure, s'étonne *que Fichte ait été déclaré athée par les théologiens de Dresde, uniquement pour avoir dit que Dieu n'existe pas*. En effet c'est une grande injustice!<sup>212</sup>

The polemical style that de Maistre often uses is perhaps the cause of the great lack of exactitude and profundity in his work. In his criticism of Kant, de Maistre refers to *The Edinburgh Review* in which Villers' book was discussed.<sup>213</sup> As the authors of the article in the *Review* excuse themselves from any misrepresentation of Kant,<sup>214</sup> it is de Maistre who is to blame for this gross misconception. Kant's objection, as we saw earlier, is that being cannot be used as a predicate, and that the ontological argument for the existence of God is false for this reason. Contrary to de Maistre's interpretation, Kant does not make a distinction between being and existing.

De Bonald scornfully remarked that the announcement that a total revolution in philosophy was imminent was a brilliant way of advertising one's work, especially in Germany. De Bonald left aside the matter of whether Kant was a systematical genius or not, but found that this announcement proved that he had a lot of wit and was an excellent judge of character. 'This Prussian', as he called him, started his philosophy by rejecting, as erroneous or insufficient, everything that had been

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<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 242. By 'Villiers' de Maistre means 'Villers'.

<sup>213</sup> De Maistre refers to the wrong page numbers.

<sup>214</sup> *The Edinburgh Review* can be excused first of all because it discusses Villers' book and not Kant's, secondly, the author clearly states: 'We shall now proceed to give a short view of the opinions of this celebrated theorist [viz. Kant]; at the same time premising, that we are unacquainted with his original works, and that the justness of our sketch, and consequently of our own objections, must therefore depend wholly on the fidelity of his expositor', in *The Edinburgh Review*, January 1803, No II, pp. 256-257.

taught over three thousand years. He promised to establish the reign of pure reason and transcendental philosophy on the debris of all previous systems.<sup>215</sup>

De Bonald describes the account of this new doctrine as something that ‘to us, Frenchmen’ looks like a pleasantry, but which in ‘lettered Germany’ had become the object of a universal enthusiasm. Kant was declared to be the oracle of reason, the interpreter of nature, and the promised Messiah of philosophy. He adds that not since Luther had there been an example of such fanaticism.<sup>216</sup>

His philosophy, however, was so hard to understand that divisions immediately arose amongst the disciples of Kant. These disagreements did not concern the error or truth of opinions, but were more about the intellectual quality of the disciples’ treatises. Examining all these commentaries, sound minds started to suspect that their impenetrable obscurity was designed to disguise the emptiness of the ideas. Kant’s system, tormented and disfigured in a thousand ways, became even more obscure as a result of the multitude of commentaries some of which transformed it into a completely opposite system. Thus, the situation in the 1820s allowed de Bonald to claim that Kant’s work had brought about the end of philosophy.

On compte à peine en Allemagne quelques *kantiens* purs, mais beaucoup de *demi-kantiens* ou d’*anti-kantiens*, et de sectateurs d’autres systèmes formés des débris de celui de Kant. Le criticisme de ce philosophe annoncé avec emphase, reçu avec fanatisme, débattu avec fureur, après avoir achevé de ruiner la doctrine de Leibnitz et de Wolff, n’a produit, pour dernier résultat, que des divisions ou même des haines, et un dégoût général de toute doctrine; et, s’il faut le dire, il a tué la philosophie, et peut-être tout nouveau système est désormais impossible.<sup>217</sup>

It is remarkable that de Bonald should claim that Kant had killed philosophy, perhaps making any new system impossible, without making the slightest reference to any philosophical proposition whatsoever. He comes to this view on the basis of the variety of philosophical systems that had supposedly resulted from Kant’s philosophy. His criticism remains external to the texts, and is even anti-German at times. The miraculous multiplicity of details in Kant’s philosophy, the novelty of definitions, the oddity of terms, and the difficulty of results are ‘choses qui sont un succès chez les Allemands, lesquels ont plus de simplicité dans le caractère que dans les idées’.<sup>218</sup> He considers Kant’s philosophy to be an unknown land which can only be penetrated with the help of a ‘langue inintelligible, un immense édifice où l’architecte vous égarait dans les distributions intérieures, sans jamais vous permettre de saisir l’ensemble’.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> See *Recherches*, p. 21.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23. De Bonald must have been amused to learn that in his old age another form of Kantianism became influential: neo-Kantianism.

<sup>218</sup> The English do not fare any better. According to de Bonald, philosophy in England did not have any effect on society, either good or bad. ‘Au fond, les Anglais sont . . . le moins philosophes des peuples, parce qu’ils sont le plus commerçant des peuples, et qu’une nation mercantile ne s’échauffe guère sur des questions philosophiques, et n’a pas à redouter les abus ou les excès de l’esprit. Les Anglais ont donc cultivé la philosophie, mais sans chaleur et sans enthousiasme’, *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

Although we cannot claim that the traditionalists, de Maistre and de Bonald, actually reinstated Descartes, they did appreciate the Cartesian school, especially Malebranche. Their polemical attacks on eighteenth-century philosophy in general and sensualism in particular may have inspired others to do the same. However, due to their anti-philosophical attitude and their simplistic, excessive view of the importance of religion and theology, their ideas were not very fruitful for 'real' philosophers, nor to our study.

The Cartesian theory of innate ideas is not intended to serve a theological goal but to serve as the criterion of truth as clear and distinct ideas. Even the most important innate idea, the idea of God, serves this goal. In Part V, we will return to the more serious rehabilitation of this theory.

The traditionalists' criticism of Kant concerns, not surprisingly, the fact that, with Kant, faith disappears from philosophy along with all objects that are not given in possible experience. Although their criticism remained very superficial and polemical, it may unintentionally have touched upon problems which played a role in the reception of Kantian philosophy.

### 6.1 Degérando

The writings of Joseph-Marie Baron de Gérando (1772-1842) (also known as de Gérando, De Gerando or Degérando) are comparable with the efforts of his German colleague Tennemann. In his *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*,<sup>220</sup> we learn that the beginning of the nineteenth century inaugurated a new period in the development of philosophy. According to the publisher, Degérando announced the beginning of this revolution. There are two further testimonies which suggest that this was the case. The first one comes from Tennemann, ‘auteur lui même de la meilleure histoire de la philosophie publiée jusqu’à ce jour en Allemagne, et qui s’est empressé de donner à sa patrie une traduction de l’ouvrage de M. de Gerando.’<sup>221</sup> It appears that Tennemann is an advocate of the philosophy and the doctrine as expounded in the above-mentioned book. The other testimony comes from Monsieur du Guald Stewart (Dugald Stewart), who also praised Degérando in his *Essais*.<sup>222</sup>

At the beginning of his *Histoire comparée*, Degérando mentions that one of the vows that Bacon had made in his quest to advance the human sciences, was to write a complete and universal literary history.<sup>223</sup> In order to complete such a task, Degérando finds that we first have to examine the relation between the human mind and the objects of its knowledge. This means that we first have to know what founds the capacity to judge, which is proper to the mind. Only consequently, can we know what constitutes the reality, the extent and the legitimate guarantee of knowledge itself. According to Degérando, this is the ‘first philosophy’ of which Bacon and Descartes speak. It contains the essence and the constitutive elements of all philosophy, because the universal principles of all sciences can only dwell in the nature of science itself. Before determining the concepts of God, the universe, and man, which are the great subjects of every philosophical doctrine, we first have to examine the basis on which decisions are made about such concepts.

Degérando’s *Histoire comparée* is a characteristic example of systematical historical research. The first part only encompasses the last period of Scholasticism, although it also contains the following quote:

Cependant un vaste génie a compris que ces tentatives sont incomplètes, que la réformation doit être portée dans les fondemens mêmes de la science. Bacon a embrassé le système entier des connaissances

<sup>220</sup> There are two parts, the first part contains 4 vols. and treats the history of philosophy up to and including Scholasticism. The first edition appeared in 1804, the second, from 1822 is revised, corrected and augmented. We use the latter. The second part also contains 4. vols. and covers the period up until the nineteenth century. We use the revised, corrected and augmented second edition of 1847. The first part we abbreviate as HC I, vol. etc., the second as HC II, vol. etc.

<sup>221</sup> HC I, vol. 1, iij.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. v.

<sup>223</sup> Degérando refers to *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, lib. II, cap. IV, see Bacon, *Works* I, vol. 1.

humaines; il a signalé la route, les écueils. Mais Bacon n'est point encore compris de son siècle; il faut que les découvertes des sciences physiques viennent servir de commentaire et de preuve au grand code qu'il a tracé. Alors même que Bacon aura obtenu des disciples à ceux de Socrate, ils n'auront point hérité d'une doctrine donnée; mais ils seront capables de la créer à leur tour.

Descartes, Locke, Leibnitz, viennent presque à la fois imprimer une direction nouvelle aux méditations philosophiques. Le premier s'élève au milieu des obstacles, fait éclore d'ardentes controverses, inspire un vif enthousiasme à ses disciples.<sup>224</sup>

Dégérando classifies Descartes's time as one in which philosophers attempted to define the principle of human knowledge solely in logical formulas. He calls it the artefact of propositions: 'l'argumentation usurpe la place de la méditation; c'est le règne des axiomes'.<sup>225</sup>

According to Geldsetzer, with whom we agree, Dégérando belongs to the class of historians who believed in the ideal of a 'vernünftige' science, towards which the development of the history of philosophy tends. They believed, furthermore, in the progress of knowledge, the broadening of understanding and the faculties of the mind as performing powers. To this end, a sound collection of material and a demonstrative exposition and discussion is required.<sup>226</sup> With the second part of the *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, which deals with the history of philosophy from the Renaissance up to and including the end of the eighteenth century, we can count Dégérando among the group of thinkers and historians who reinstated Descartes at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

### 6.1.1 Bacon and Descartes compared

Dégérando starts his discussion of Descartes by comparing him with Bacon. As we saw in Part I, the encyclopaedists and Kant both found that Bacon played a more important role in history than Descartes. In Part II we saw a gradual change of this opinion in favour of Descartes. Dégérando first sums up the similarities between Bacon and Descartes as follows. Both:

- felt the need to reconstruct science on the basis of its first principles rejecting the established 'science'
- opposed the independence of reason to the authority of tradition
- thought that they had to start this reconstruction by reforming the methods used
- came up with a new method for establishing truth
- borrowed from the new sciences the procedures with which they wanted to equip philosophy
- criticized the syllogism

Apart from this, he continues, the two have nothing in common except their starting point and their goal. He sums up the differences:

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<sup>224</sup> HC I, vol. 1, 77-78.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>226</sup> L. Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (1968), p. 55.



Bacon	Descartes
takes examples from natural sciences	takes examples from mathematics
experimental method	method of rational deduction
appeals to facts and observation	appeals to intuitive evidence
genius in extent	genius in perseverance
oriented towards positive knowledge	oriented towards meditation
believed in the testimony of the senses	did not trust the senses
only set up the framework	created a complete corpus of philosophy

Degérando limits himself to the exposition of these similarities and differences without making a normative claim. By referring to passages where Descartes mentions Galileo, Torricelli and Bacon, Degérando corrects Voltaire's erroneous claims that Descartes never spoke of them.<sup>227</sup> However, he does not think that either Galileo or Bacon exercised any influence on Descartes. Degérando also claims that Descartes was wrongfully accused of lacking erudition, arguing that it was just that he did not like the style that makes use of a quotation apparatus. He also suggests that Descartes paid little attention to the authority of the classical or ancient philosophers and although, for instance, he intended to methodically refute scholastic philosophy, he never did.<sup>228</sup>

### 6.1.2 *The originality of Descartes*

Concerning the innovative elements that Descartes contributed to philosophy, Degérando's comments seem ambiguous. On the one hand he claims that the principal characteristics of the philosophy of Descartes can be found in Plato,<sup>229</sup> while on the other hand, he suggests that: 'Descartes n'a point suivi les mêmes voies, il n'a consulté que lui-même'.<sup>230</sup> Something similar can be said about his relation to Montaigne, who must have exerted some influence on Descartes. Notwithstanding their differences – even their methods and results are contrary – we encounter between them 'une certaine consanguinité'<sup>231</sup>, by which Degérando means that both used a method which consisted in only consulting their own

<sup>227</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, vol. II ('Cartésianisme'), in *Œuvres* (ed. Beuchot) vol. 27, pp. 457-458. On p. 461 he claims that by substituting the chaos of Aristotle for his own chaos, 'il retarda de plus de cinquante ans les progrès de l'esprit humain', which, in itself, is at least quite a curious remark.

<sup>228</sup> See *Corr.* AT III, 183 ff. (CSM III, 153 ff.; *Cous.* VIII, 346 ff.) where, in a letter to Mersenne 30 September 1640, Descartes asks whether there is an abstract of the whole of scholastic philosophy, as it would save him the time needed to read their huge tomes. On 22 December 1641 he writes to Mersenne that he no longer intends to refute this philosophy 'car je vois qu'elle est si absolument et si clairement détruite par le seul établissement de la mienne, qu'il n'est pas besoin d'autre réfutation', as he scornfully and arrogantly puts it, *Cous.* VIII, 561.

<sup>229</sup> He mentions the mistrust in the testimony of the senses, the exclusive authority of reason, the appeal to mathematics to serve as an introduction to philosophy, and the role of natural theology as a sanctioning guide. Both support the argument that innate ideas are placed in our understanding by God; both think that the way from cause to effect, from general notions to particular facts, is the only legitimate way.

<sup>230</sup> HC II, vol. 2, 159.

<sup>231</sup> In Chapter 9 we will see that Cousin brings the consanguinity to a patriotic level, when he compares Abélard with Descartes.

thought. By this means, each developed an accessible philosophy by using a personal approach: a form of philosophy ‘qui est devenue la physionomie caractéristique de l’école française’.

What makes Descartes original is that his personality is mirrored in his philosophy. The exposition of his method is the story of his life and his doctrine is the result of the procedure. However, notwithstanding this advance, Degérando still thinks that Descartes’s greatest achievement is his method of doubt.

C’est un mérite éminent de Descartes, mérite qui suffirait pour rendre à jamais son nom immortel, que d’avoir appelé le doute à l’entrée même de la philosophie, comme un moyen de préparation et d’épreuve pour les adeptes, d’avoir assigné ainsi au doute sa vraie place, sa vraie fonction, sa vraie utilité, d’avoir admis enfin, non le doute déterminé, mais le doute suspensif.<sup>232</sup>

Despite the above, it is suggested that we do not have to take this doubt too seriously as Descartes may have secretly retained some dogmatic doctrines. As well, while methodical doubt was initially used to avoid prejudice and retain caution in thinking, it turned out to be an active principle, in fact the pivot on which an entirely positive philosophy should revolve. According to Degérando, in taking his method too far, Descartes committed ‘une erreur grave, en trahissant son dessein secret’.<sup>233</sup>

### 6.1.3 *Degérando’s rejection of the proofs of God*

Degérando’s reasons for rejecting Descartes’s ontological proof for the existence of God are technically similar to Kant’s. The important difference between them, however, is that Kant proved the impossibility of any proof for the existence of God, whereas Degérando thinks that such a proof is possible. Although Kant labels it an antinomy of pure reason, Degérando calls it a paralogism<sup>234</sup> and he is unpleasantly surprised that the proof has apparently seduced or at least embarrassed ‘quelques bons esprits’. In his short explanation of what is wrong with this proof, he states that real existence or positive reality can of course be conceived in a purely hypothetical manner, but existence thus acquired can never escape the realm of hypothesis. The fact that existence is understood in terms of perfection and that in the imagination every kind of perfection is attributed to some being, does not make an escape or withdrawal from this hypothetical realm any more plausible.

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<sup>232</sup> HC II, vol. 2, 164.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>234</sup> Cf. KrV B 399. The difference between an antinomy and a paralogism is that the latter consists of an error in an argument. A transcendental paralogism according to Kant, has its origin in the nature of human reason and brings on an unavoidable, though not insoluble, illusion. Paralogisms are fallacies of rational psychology, which confuses the mere formal, transcendental-logical unity of consciousness with an ‘Anschauung’ on which it subsequently applies the category of substance. As a result this unity is taken as substantial, simple, immaterial soul. Antinomies concern rational cosmology and are conflicts of the laws of pure reason, more specifically, contradictions in which reason necessarily becomes entangled in its pursuit to think the unconditioned. In some cases reason contradicts itself.

C'est absolument la même opération de l'esprit, avec la seule différence que, dans le premier cas, j'ai employé une expression intermédiaire, celle de perfection, pour attribuer l'existence à l'être. En concevant l'idée de l'être parfait, autant du moins qu'il nous est permis de la concevoir, et aussi longtemps que nous nous bornons à la concevoir, cette idée et celle de ses perfections ne sont encore qu'hypothétiques; celle de son existence, si, par une acception de langage toute particulière, on veut comprendre l'existence parmi les perfections, n'aura rien à conclure dans le domaine des réalités positives.<sup>235</sup>

Dégérando reproaches Descartes for stubbornly holding onto his own conceptions and blindly rejecting everything that appeared unfamiliar. As well, he takes serious offence at Descartes's proof for the existence of God, which he finds a 'fâcheux exemple d'un superbe dédain pour la preuve de l'existence de Dieu tirée de la contemplation de la création'.<sup>236</sup> According to Dégérando, the proof removed the possibility of having a reasonable and legitimate conviction about the most important truth. He hopes that one day this possibility will be rehabilitated in the name of philosophy.<sup>237</sup>

As far as the cosmological (causal) proof is concerned, Dégérando thinks Descartes is inconsistent, even contradictory. He shows that Descartes fulminates against the use of teleological arguments, but at the same time he audaciously uses final causes in order to explain a priori the laws of the universe in accordance with the plans he attributes to the Creator. He finds an inconsistency when Descartes claims to use analysis in the *Meditations*, for, taking his own existence as the starting point from which to attain, in effect, knowledge of God as cause, is clearly synthetic. This criticism sounds Kantian, as does Dégérando's division of the Cartesian system into two principles: one metaphysical, which he calls 'générateur', and the other logical, which he calls 'régulateur'. The metaphysical generative principle is the famous *je pense, donc je suis*, the second is expressed by the maxim: *All that is contained in the idea of a thing, can be affirmed of that thing*. According to Dégérando, these two principles should have been independent of each other, or at least the first should be subordinated to the second, because the first is legitimated by the second. To Descartes, however, it was the other way around: from the first, he extracts the second. From this second principle, which only has purely logical value, he makes 'un régulateur universel'.

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<sup>235</sup> HC II, vol. 2, 207-208.

<sup>236</sup> Although the term 'creation' might suggest that Dégérando has the causal proof for the existence of God in mind, he nevertheless is dealing with the ontological proof.

<sup>237</sup> Dégérando seems to exceed the domain of historiography here and becomes quite personal. We can explain his attitude towards the proof for the existence of God biographically. When he was sixteen he fell seriously ill and wrote: 'O Dieu, je ne vous demande qu'un peu de temps. Je ne vous demande pas pour jouir de la vie. Je ne vous le demande que pour faire du bien, que pour me rendre digne de paraître devant vous, que pour vous aimer davantage', see, p. 12 borrowed from Wilhelm Köster, *Joseph Marie Dégérando als Philosoph*, Paderborn 1933. As a young man Dégérando was determined to become a priest and therefore wanted to move from the seminar of Saint-Irénée to that of Saint-Magloire in Paris. However, the decrees of the Constituante abolished the Orders, so he had to do something else with his life.

Dès lors, il prête à une maxime qui peut régir seulement les combinaisons intérieures de nos idées une puissance qui s'étend sur le monde réel. Aussi n'hésite-t-il pas à penser que l'esprit humain peut, a priori, déterminer toutes les propriétés de la matière.

Ainsi, c'est d'une vérité de fait, *je pense*, que Descartes tire la règle des vérités de l'ordre rationnel, et c'est de cette règle simplement logique qu'il fera sortir, par la suite, de nouveaux corollaires dans l'ordre des connaissances réelles et positives.<sup>238</sup>

According to Degérando, Descartes could only cross the barrier between fact and reason by making them identical. He refers to a letter Descartes wrote to Clerselier in July 1646. Degérando quotes: 'Le vrai est le réel; la vérité, c'est l'être', which is a brief version of the actual quote that reads:

La vérité consiste en l'*estre*, & la fausseté ou *non-estre* seulement, en sorte que l'idée de l'infini, comprenant tout l'*estre*, comprend tout ce qu'il y a de vrai dans les choses, & ne peut avoir en soy rien de faux, encore que d'ailleurs on veuille supposer qu'il n'est pas vrai que cet *estre* infini existe.<sup>239</sup>

Degérando finds that Descartes confused two classes of knowledge when he makes fact and reason identical. Although Descartes must have been aware of the distinction between abstract principles and principles that express a fact, he was only concerned with the second class of principles.

## 6.2 Degérando and Laromiguière on innate ideas

In addition to the observation that Descartes's definition of 'idea' – everything that is in the mind when we conceive of a thing – is a bit vague, Degérando also notices that in Descartes's works the term 'innate idea' has two different meanings. Firstly, it can mean an idea with which we are born; which is literally placed in us by God. Secondly, it can mean the faculty to produce ideas or the faculty of thinking itself. Setting aside the issue of ambiguity, Degérando is not satisfied with the latter interpretation of innate ideas, arguing that to say that we possess innate ideas as a faculty means nothing if one does not show how this faculty comes into operation. To demonstrate his point, Degérando refers to Laromiguière's *Leçons de philosophie*,<sup>240</sup> into which we now make an excursion. Bréhier tells us that the influence of Laromiguière (1756-1837) only consisted in his course of philosophy of which his *Leçons* are the result. They were first published between 1815 and 1818, but the third edition from 1823 is generally used. This edition was not

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<sup>238</sup> HC II, vol. 2, 180-181.

<sup>239</sup> *Corr.*, AT V, 365. With this remark Descartes meant to clarify a passage from the Third Meditation. In the English edition, it reads: 'This idea of a supremely perfect and infinite being is, I say, true in the highest degree; for although perhaps one may imagine that such a being does not exist, it cannot be supposed that the idea of such a being represents something unreal, as I said with regard to the idea of the cold. The idea is, moreover, utterly clear and distinct; for whatever I clearly and distinctly perceive as being real and true, and implying any perfection, is wholly contained in it.'

CSM II, 31-32.

<sup>240</sup> Laromiguière, *Leçons de philosophie ou essai sur les facultés de l'âme* (henceforth: *Leçons*), we use the third ed. of 1823.

available until the Restoration, as one of the most reactionary ministers of the regime, Frayssinous,<sup>241</sup> appealed to Laromiguière to withhold it.

In the ninth lesson of the second volume of his *Leçons de philosophie*, Laromiguière discusses innate ideas and in advance warns his audience that they will encounter history, polemics and errors of fact. He considers that there are two opinions concerning the origin of ideas. According to the first position, our ideas come from the senses or sensations. The proponents of this position have the motto: *nihil est in intellectu quod priùs non fuerit in sensu*, and its representatives are Democritus, Hippocrates, Aristotle, Epicurus and Lucretius in antiquity, the Scholastics in the Middle Ages, and in modern times Bacon, Gassendi, Hobbes, Locke and Condillac. According to the second position, at least some ideas are independent of the senses and sensations, and the above mentioned motto is rejected as a manifest error. Representatives of this view are Plato and his disciples, the Alexandrian school, the first Church Fathers, and during the renewal of the sciences, some Italian philosophers, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and all the authors of Port-Royal.

Thus far, there is nothing controversial in Laromiguière's exposition of this dilemma. The first position is that all ideas come directly from the senses. That which appears to be an idea, but which does not come immediately from the senses, is instead a mere word that do not correspond to any reality. Laromiguière finds this claim unworthy of discussion, as it is evidently false. Concerning the position held by the majority, who think with Locke that the senses only give us simple ideas and that complex ideas (intellectual and moral) are the product of reflection being applied to these sense-based ideas, he thinks that it remains to be proven that every idea in our intellect comes from the senses. He considers that these efforts are bound to fail:

. . . car le génie ne peut pas changer la nature des choses, il ne fera pas qu'il n'y ait qu'une origine d'idées, quand la nature a voulu qu'il y eût quatre origines.<sup>242</sup>

Laromiguière had already determined that there are four origins and three causes of our ideas. These origins are: the 'sentiment-sensation' caused by attention; the 'sentiment de l'action des facultés de l'âme' also caused by attention; the 'sentiment-rapport' caused by attention and comparison; and the 'sentiment-moral' caused by either attention, comparison, reasoning, or the united action of all the faculties of the understanding. In order to solve the problem, some philosophers

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<sup>241</sup> Denis-Antoine-Luc Frayssinous (1765-1841) was consecrated Bishop of Hermopolis in 1822. In 1800 he became Professor of Dogmatic Theology in Saint-Sulpice and although Napoleon compelled him to interrupt his preaching in 1809, he was made Inspecteur général de l'Instruction publique. In 1817 he preached Advent to the court, which resulted in his title as Vicaire de Paris. As the chaplain to the king he was appointed the Bishop of Hermopolis in April 1822, member of the Chambre des Pairs and Grand Maître of the university in June, elected to the third chair of the Académie française. As minister of ecclesiastic affairs, he suspended the course of Cousin and closed the École normale in 1822, and appealed to Laromiguière which Bréhier explains by 'il craignait moins les idéologues, ennemis de Kant et des Écossais, que les nouveaux spiritualistes', *Histoire de la philosophie* vol. III/XIXe-Xxe siècles, nouv. éd. Paris 1981, p. 571.

<sup>242</sup> Laromiguière, *Leçons*, vol. 2, p. 236.

have shown how all ideas came from the senses and others have shown the link that connects the material substance with the immaterial one. Within this framework Laromiguière rejects many of the solutions that philosophers have produced, amongst others, the system of *influxus physicus*, Euler's version of the problem; the system of occasional causes; and Leibniz' and Wolff's pre-established harmony.

Probably out of respect and homage, Laromiguière makes an enormous effort to show that Descartes never admitted innate ideas. Laromiguière tries to prove his point using quotations where Descartes indeed said that when he called an idea 'innate' he only meant it in the sense that we have an innate faculty to produce ideas. Next, he tries to strengthen his point by showing that Descartes had been misread. Remarkably enough, he argues that we should blame the misreading on Leibniz, according to whom, he suggests, ideas are within the soul before sensations or before external objects affect our senses. Leibniz' answer to the claim that nothing is in the mind that had not been previously in the senses, was that the mind itself should be excepted: *Nihil est in intellectu quod non fuerit in sensu, excipe, nisi ipse intellectus*. To this answer, Laromiguière mockingly replies:

L'entendement est dans l'entendement! l'entendement est inné à l'entendement! Quel langage!<sup>243</sup>

His criticism is that Leibniz used the term 'entendement' in two different senses. Moreover, he finds that Leibniz confused the faculties of the soul, its dispositions, and its habits, with the *ideas* of all these things. To Laromiguière, Leibniz' inconsistent use of language led him to many erroneous views: taking the faculties of the soul for ideas, ideas for sensations, and sensations for impressions of the brain.<sup>244</sup>

It cannot be denied that Descartes had said that the idea of God is placed into us by God, but he only called those ideas 'innate' in order to distinguish them from ideas that stem from the senses and from ideas that are the product of the imagination. However, despite the passages that show that, with innate ideas, Descartes only meant the faculty to produce ideas, the fact remains that other passages unambiguously point to the other meaning. Laromiguière also saw this problem. In order to solve it, he generously applied the 'principle of charity'. He finds that there may be passages where Descartes said that some ideas are born with the soul, or that the idea of God can only be placed in us by God, but he argues that Descartes knew best what he had meant.<sup>245</sup>

Whether or not Laromiguière is right in adopting this interpretation of Cartesian innate ideas, we have to admit that Descartes repeatedly addressed the criticism of his opponents on this matter, which might be taken as a rectification of his earlier words. To Laromiguière the problem is solved: Descartes was decisive enough when he said that he did not admit innate ideas. It is clear to him that Descartes certainly did not want to be engaged in a 'fatras d'entités scolastiques',

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 257: 'qui peut mieux connaître que lui-même le sens de ses paroles?'

and as innate ideas are part of this scholastic mishmash, we have to conclude that Descartes rejected innate ideas.

Whether or not Laromiguière was historiographically correct to reduce the two different views of innate ideas that we find in Descartes's works to one, the fact remains that it is true that Descartes revised his view on innate ideas. His response to Hobbes<sup>246</sup> and his reply to Regius<sup>247</sup> in *Notæ in programma* were in fact corrections and clarifications of earlier statements. The problem with the latter text, however, is that Descartes, instead of admitting his 'slips of the pen', flatly denies that he had ever written or taken the view that innate ideas were anything other than the faculty of thinking.<sup>248</sup>

The reason why Laromiguière finds Descartes eligible for the principle of charity is that he is 'un homme de génie', and he reminds his readers that he is one of those who have contributed to the formation our notion of reason by teaching us to think. He therefore thinks it is not permissible to condemn Descartes when it is impossible to do justice to him: 'Les esprits médiocres, et la foule des écrivains vulgaires, ne méritent pas tant de déférence'.<sup>249</sup> Although Laromiguière argues that Descartes should be read more carefully, his explanation as to why he averred that the idea of God did not come from the senses is certainly not obvious in the text.

Que l'idée de Dieu vienne des sens, soit immédiatement, soit médiatement, l'ouvrage [viz. the Meditations] porte à faux; et le travail de dix années est perdu.<sup>250</sup>

According to Laromiguière all ideas stem from what he calls 'le sentiment', because they are caused by the acts of the faculties of the mind. He clearly means something quite different from 'senses'. For him, there is no ambiguity or obscurity in this claim. He even goes so far as to say that this claim, once established, refutes the systems that render original ideas into mere sensations, as well as the systems that are known under the name of innate ideas.<sup>251</sup>

Concerning the term 'spiritual ideas', a term invented to contrast 'corporal ideas' and to replace 'innate ideas', Laromiguière says the following:

On a été induit à cet absurde langage d'idées spirituelles, de quelques idées spirituelles, parce qu'on a cru qu'il y avait des idées corporelles; et

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<sup>246</sup> *Obj.* III, AT IX-1, 147: 'Enfin, lorsque ie dis que quelque idée est née avec nous, ou qu'elle est naturellement empreinte en nos ames, ie n'entens pas qu'elle se presente toujours à nostre pensée, car ainsi il n'y en auroit aucune; mais seulement, que nous auons en nous-mesmes la faculté de la produire.'

<sup>247</sup> For the historical context of the relation between Descartes and Regius see Theo Verbeek (ed.), *Descartes et Regius. Autour de l'Explication de l'esprit humain* (1993).

<sup>248</sup> Although Laromiguière quotes from *Lettres de Mr Descartes* (1724), vol. 2, p. 463: 'Car je n'ai jamais écrit, ni jugé que l'esprit ait besoin d'idées d'idées naturelles, qui soient quelque chose de différent de la faculté qu'il a de penser', he changes 'idées naturelles' into 'idées innées'. Cousin (Cous. X, 94) follows the above mentioned edition and translates 'ideæ innatæ' with 'idées naturelles'. In Part V we will discuss these terms and their differences in detail based on an analysis of various late nineteenth-century German texts that are concerned with precisely this matter.

<sup>249</sup> Laromiguière, *Leçons*, vol. 2, p. 258.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

l'on a cru ainsi, parce qu'on a confondu les idées sensibles avec les sensations, après avoir confondu les impressions faites sur les organes.

On se contente donc de vanter Descartes sans le lire; car, en le lisant, on eût appris que la sensation appartient exclusivement à l'âme, de même que la pensée.<sup>252</sup>

Laromiguière rejects innate ideas. The claim that thinking, seen as the essence of the soul, is innate, is found to be an equivocation and a misunderstanding. The term 'la pensée' means both the faculty of thought and the idea we obtain through its exercise. The idea is not the essence of the soul and it is not the first thing the soul perceives, because an idea presupposes sentiment and action. Nor is the faculty of thought the essence of the soul, because it has already been shown that the soul is by nature equipped with two equally essential attributes: activity and sensibility. Therefore, activity, which is the faculty of thought, does not constitute its own essence. Even if the faculty of thinking was the essence of the soul, this would merely lead to the trivial conclusion concerning innate ideas that the faculty of thinking or thought is innate, which nobody has ever denied.

As to the question of whether the soul, at the first moment of its existence, is a *tabula rasa*, Laromiguière answers:

Oui, et non. Voulez-vous parler des idées, des connaissances? l'âme peut être comparée à une table rase. Parlez-vous des facultés, des capacités, des dispositions? La comparaison ne saurait avoir lieu; elle est fausse. L'âme a été créée sensible et active. La faculté d'agir ou de penser, et la capacité de sentir, sont innées. Les idées, au contraire, sont toutes acquises; car, les premières idées qui éclairent l'esprit supposent les sensations, qui elles mêmes sont acquises.<sup>253</sup>

Laromiguière is not pleased with the conclusion that there are no innate ideas and regrets that it apparently pleased God that we could not bring any ideas with us when we came into the world. Nature has ordained things in such a way that, with the exception of some ideas that are necessary for preservation, we must extract all the other ideas from it with violence.

Degérando is aware of the explanation that Descartes had given of innate ideas that Laromiguière wishes to emphasize, but he does not draw the same conclusion. It is clear that Descartes did not understand innate ideas as being constant and explicitly present to the mind. However, Degérando regards the third class of ideas that Descartes had brought into play quite differently from Laromiguière. According to Degérando, Descartes must have supposed that such ideas are the direct result of the divine intellect, because they are created with us. This means that these ideas are completely formed and given to the human mind. The argument Degérando gives for this is quite interesting and goes beyond the question of whether innate ideas should be regarded as the faculty of thought or not.

Degérando is not impressed by Descartes's clarification of what he really meant by 'innate idea'. According to him, Descartes ignored the problem rather

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<sup>252</sup> Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., p. 277.



than trying to solve it. He argues that there is no doubt that we have a faculty of thinking with respect to the other classes of ideas as well. Ideas that come from outside and ideas that are fabricated by ourselves are also virtually and potentially in us. Explaining innate ideas by merely saying that they are nothing but our faculty to produce them, would mean that they do not differ from the other classes of ideas. Descartes neglected to explain how, in the case of innate ideas, this potentiality realizes itself; how this faculty exercises itself; or how an implicit idea becomes explicit. In the case of the other ideas it is clear: the presence of external objects produces adventitious ideas, the operations of our mind produce ideas invented by ourselves. However, in the case of the third class of ideas, we can neither say that they come from outside, nor that our mind produces them. Descartes never explained how they came into being.

### 7.1 Descartes as the father of reflective science

The most important elements of Maine de Biran's theory coincide precisely with our study. We can summarize these elements, which play a crucial role throughout his philosophy and rational psychology, using the terms 'immediate apperception', 'primitive facts' (*faits primitifs*) and 'willed effort' (*effort voulu*). In the following sections, we will show how these notions relate to the Cartesian *cogito* and the theory of innate ideas.

Although in his early works<sup>254</sup> Maine de Biran supported sensualism, his major works have a rationalistic character. In what is generally considered to be his main work, *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie* (ca. 1812), his appreciation of Descartes is quite apparent.

Ce grand homme est devenu vraiment le créateur ou le père d'une science qui sous un titre quelconque doit se fonder sur l'observation intérieure, en apprenant à l'esprit humain à se replier sur lui-même, à ne chercher qu'en lui les vrais principes de la science; en montrant par l'exemple autant que par le précepte que la connaissance propre du moi, le fait de conscience, est distincte et séparée de la représentation de tout objet; que tout ce qui est conçu ainsi par l'imagination ou à l'aide des sens externes est étranger à cette connaissance immédiate et évidente par elle-même; enfin en prouvant ainsi, je ne dis pas la séparation absolue des substances, mais la distinction essentielle qui existe entre les phénomènes externes et internes, ou entre les facultés spécialement appropriées aux uns et aux autres.

Sous ce dernier point de vue, le seul qui se rapporte clairement aux faits primitifs, la philosophie de Descartes doit être considérée comme la véritable doctrine-mère en tant qu'elle tend à donner à la science des principes la seule base qu'elle puisse avoir dans le fait primitif de sens intime.<sup>255</sup>

What follows from this quote is that Descartes plays an important role within Maine de Biran's thought, especially with regard to the notions of 'primitive fact' and the 'science of principles'. To Maine de Biran, Descartes is the father of reflective science and his philosophy forms the foundational doctrine of this science. In the following, we shall discover what he means by this and what role it plays in his rejection of sensualism.

One reason why Maine de Biran rejects sensualism concerns his understanding of innate ideas. In *Écrits sur la physiologie* (ca. 1823), he says that

<sup>254</sup> We use the edition published by Vrin, Paris 1963-2001, various editors. Cousin also produced an edition of his works, which according to Ph. Hallie 'is incomplete and should be avoided, except by those who wish to account for the gross misunderstandings of Maine de Biran's thought that were current in the nineteenth century', see lemma 'Maine de Biran', in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 5, p. 137.

<sup>255</sup> EFP, MB VII-1, 81.

Locke and his followers only attacked the doctrine of innate ideas externally. By this he means that they only attacked its applications or consequences. According to Maine de Biran, Locke and others who rejected innate ideas would have been forced to recognize the legitimacy of the notion if they had only understood its principle. He thinks that they would never have dreamt of attacking the underlying principle of the doctrine of innate ideas, as it remains entirely within the doctrine of the original ideas of sensation. He admits, however, that the latter doctrine ignores the descent of ideas. The following quote illustrates how highly Maine de Biran assesses the importance of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas.

Quel autre génie que celui de Descartes, père de toute notre métaphysique moderne, pouvait concevoir le fondement réel de toute la science humaine sur le fait primitif de conscience ou de l'existence du moi pensant, comme sur sa base unique, la seule vraie et solide; quel autre pouvait reconnaître le caractère de l'évidence, ce *criterium* de toute certitude, dans un petit nombre d'idées premières, élémentaires et simples, données à l'âme humaine comme une lumière qui l'éclaire d'abord sur elle-même, avant de lui révéler les autres existences?<sup>256</sup>

Where Maine de Biran compares Descartes with Locke, he finds that Locke did not reach the same heights. According to Maine de Biran, Locke's *Essay* falls short in its plan, system and unity of view. He considers that the way in which Locke attacked innate ideas shows that he was a wise man, but he was lacking in true philosophical talent and was thus never able to penetrate into the true sense of the doctrine of innate ideas or even Descartes's underlying principle of this doctrine.

In the following sections we shall begin by briefly discussing Maine de Biran's early work. This reveals his physiologically oriented approach, his sensualist background and his criticism of Descartes. We then continue with his view on the Cartesian *cogito* in *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée* and *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie* in the light of his 'science des principes' and his notions of 'faits primitifs' and 'effort voulu'. Finally, we will focus on Maine de Biran's position regarding innate ideas on the basis of the position he takes in his *De l'aperception immédiate*.

## 7.2 Descartes in Maine de Biran's early work

In his early years, around 1793, Maine de Biran's opinion of Descartes did not differ greatly from the average eighteenth-century philosopher.<sup>257</sup> In his prize-winning essay, *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser* (1802), he took a more or less sensualist position and did not speak highly of Descartes. In his discussion of the principle according to which our ideas come from the senses, he

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<sup>256</sup> EP, MB IX, 108.

<sup>257</sup> While later he focuses more on the subjective philosophy of Descartes, in his early writing he only mentions Descartes in relation to his erroneous system of tourbillons. Descartes, rebuilding human understanding after 'un doute absolu le plus philosophique', looked for the material for this edifice in his imagination instead of in nature. Nevertheless, he calls Descartes an 'homme de génie', a 'sublime architecte' and a 'profond mathématicien'. See EJ, MB I, 67-68.

stated that ‘the school buried it under a heap of dreaminess and absurdities with which Descartes had the misfortune to confuse it’.<sup>258</sup>

Maine de Biran referred to d’Alembert as ‘un grand homme’ who saw metaphysics emerging from a chaotic state and becoming a real science: ‘une sorte de physique expérimentale de l’âme’.<sup>259</sup> D’Alembert indeed considered metaphysics as the basis of our knowledge and regretted that it had been abused in the support of erroneous and dangerous opinions. As we have seen already in Section 1.1, d’Alembert praised Locke, who he thought had ‘created metaphysics just as Newton had created physics’ and ‘reduced metaphysics to the experimental physics of the soul’.<sup>260</sup>

Although at one point, Maine de Biran considered Locke to be the creator of the science of the understanding, he thought that Locke overlooked many facts in his inner observations. In order to know ‘le mécanisme des idées’, as he called it, a number of experiments must be carried out. The use of the term ‘mechanism’ can be explained by the fact that Maine de Biran thought that the science of human understanding should be a joint venture of physiologists and the ‘Idéologues’.<sup>261</sup> At this stage Maine de Biran did not give priority to ideology over physiology. This explains his mechanistic terminology, illustrated by the following quote.

Ayant à traiter de l’influence des habitudes, je prendrai l’hypothèse la plus probable sur la manière dont les impressions de tout genre peuvent se propager au cerveau ou affecter quelqu’un des centres sensibles. Conformément au principe que j’adopterai, j’examinerai ensuite si les fibres ébranlées ne doivent pas acquérir des déterminations nouvelles et une tendance à se mouvoir de la manière et dans le sens qui leur a été imprimé, ce qui me donnera une idée de la manière dont l’habitude se forme en général. Ensuite j’examinerai les différents mouvements de l’organe de la pensée qui peuvent correspondre aux modes de l’exercice

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<sup>258</sup> IHP, MB II, 6. He started the work in 1799 when the Institut de France put forward a question on the influence of habit on thinking. The prize was not awarded and the question was posed again for the competition of 1801. The jury charged with the examination of the presented works urged him to adapt his text which he did and for which he obtained the price of the Institut in July 1802. Maine de Biran published it in December.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> D’Alembert, *Discours préliminaire de l’Encyclopédie* [1763], pp. 103-104.

<sup>261</sup> See IHP, MB II, 1. In NCRP, MB IX we find the terms ‘mécanique’ and ‘mécaniciens’ with respect to the origin of physiology. Maine de Biran was aware of the fact that the system of entirely mechanical physiology was practised in the eighteenth century by illustrious Doctors of Medicine who were said to form a sect called ‘mécaniciens’. In *Encyc.* X, 220 (‘Mécanicien’), we read: ‘On appelle de ce nom ceux d’entre les médecins modernes qui, après la découverte de la circulation du sang et l’établissement de la philosophie de Descartes, ayant secoué le joug de l’autorité, ont adopté la méthode des géomètres dans les recherches qu’ils ont faites sur tout ce qui a rapport à l’économie animale’. Maine de Biran was also aware of the influence that Cartesianism had on physiological doctrines. The sharp demarcation line drawn by Descartes, between the material attributes that pertain to the body and the attributes of the soul that pertain to a thinking substance, is a fundamental distinction by which he deserves the title of creator and father of true metaphysics. NCRP, MB IX, 17: ‘L’auteur des *Méditations* me semble surtout justifier ce titre, lorsqu’il applique à la science de l’âme ou à l’exploration des faits intérieurs, le seul organe pour ainsi dire approprié à cet ordre de faits, savoir une méthode toute réflexive, au moyen de laquelle l’âme pensante, qui se dit moi, devient à la fois le sujet et l’objet de sa vue intérieure, de son aperception immédiate.’

de cette pensée, modes dont nous pouvons acquérir la connaissance en réfléchissant sur ce que nous éprouvons intérieurement, ou plutôt je me servirai des mouvements supposés comme d'un *symbole* ou d'une représentation matérielle des effets cachés que je dois exprimer.<sup>262</sup>

The terms 'sensitive centres', 'moved fibres', and especially 'organ of thought', clearly indicate the physiological approach of this work. Maine de Biran thought that the language of physiology, permitted his ideas and expressions to be clearer and their meaning unambiguous. Even at this stage, however, he admitted that there are sentiments or operations which could not completely be represented by physical movements, but which must refer to something else.

It is not quite clear who Maine de Biran thought had begun the science of human understanding. Although he initially credited Locke with this, just a few pages later he says that it was Bacon who identified the science of the human faculties<sup>263</sup> and that for the most part its extent was developed by Hobbes. Whether it was Locke or Bacon who initiated this science, Maine de Biran certainly did not consider it was Descartes's role at this time. At this stage, he thought that Descartes was entangled in the habits of imagination, and it is hard to imagine that he would later see him as the father of reflective science.

According to the early Maine de Biran, the sciences of reflection had degenerated, but he held out hope for their revival. He was convinced that sooner or later other political circumstances, other people directing public education, and a changed disposition in the minds of scholars in general, would encourage the reflective sciences. He found it hard to believe that scholars would persist for too long in the nonsensical and fanciful subjects that had influenced the ingenuity of such brilliant minds as Descartes, Malebranche, Pascal, and Locke so profoundly.<sup>264</sup>

Summarizing the above, we can say that Maine de Biran's physiologically oriented philosophical views in his early work did not allow him to even moderately appreciate Descartes. The next sections will show how his opinion changed to the extent that Descartes's role became that of the 'creator of reflective science'.

### 7.3 Criticism and assessment of the *cogito*

In *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée* (1805)<sup>265</sup> Maine de Biran still called Locke 'le plus sage peut-être des philosophes',<sup>266</sup> but by this time he had grown

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<sup>262</sup> IHP, MB II, 2.

<sup>263</sup> Maine de Biran takes 'science' here in the sense of physical positive science.

<sup>264</sup> For a study of the changes in the thought of Maine de Biran see Henri Gouhier, *Les conversions de Maine de Biran* (1947). Gouhier follows the course of the formation of 'biranisme' throughout Maine de Biran's dialogues: first with Rousseau; then Condillac and Bonnet; then Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy, until the *idéologie* became too subjective; with Descartes, Kant and Leibniz when psychology reached the absolute; then with the stoics, Pascal and Fénelon.

<sup>265</sup> In October 1802 the Institut (again classe Sciences morales et politiques) sponsored an essay contest with the assignment: 'Déterminer comment doit décomposer la faculté de penser et quelles sont les facultés élémentaires qu'on doit y reconnaître'. In January 1803, however, the Institut reorganized and Maine de Biran did not know which class his jury would be in. As he did not want to

much more appreciative of Descartes who he now called ‘le créateur de la methode pure de réflexion’. Descartes, he claims in this work, was the first to establish a method that taught us that there is a ‘passage’ from our sentiments<sup>267</sup> to the knowledge, or representation, of objective qualities and even to the reality of these objects. This passage, he observed, is ‘very difficult and delicate to cross’. Moreover, he thought it was connected to all the problems with which philosophers in Maine de Biran’s time were concerned. Maine de Biran actually reinstated Descartes with the claim that while people had not seen the significance of this ‘passage’ in Descartes’s own time, now they, or, at least, he, can recognize its significance.

Another method that Maine de Biran wanted to discuss dates back to Bacon: ‘qui a créé le véritable art d’observer et de connaître ce qui est hors de nous’.<sup>268</sup> Although he called Descartes the ‘père de la métaphysique’, he found Bacon to be the ‘réformateur et le père de la saine physique’.<sup>269</sup> It seems that Maine de Biran did not favour one method over the other, as he stressed that the two different methods have two entirely different goals and should never be confused with one another. The Cartesian method teaches an *inspectio mentis* and Bacon’s method aims at the real nature of the outside world.

The third method mentioned by Maine de Biran, is the physiological one. He described this method as the one that considers the human faculties to be functions or the results of organs. The aim of this method is to classify these functions in order to understand how they result in different kinds of sensations. As the analogy suggests, the physiological method takes place beyond the limits of the sensitive being, whereas the method of reflection is mainly concerned with the interior constitution of the thinking being.

Maine de Biran urges us to take the Cartesian method, and the role the *cogito* plays in it, seriously. He says that in order to appreciate and fully understand the value of the principle ‘je pense, donc je suis’, we have to place ourselves in the position of the most intimate reflection.<sup>270</sup> Philosophers, especially Gassendi and Hobbes, had not always done this, being too focused on the object of thought, when they should have been focusing on the intimate sentiment of the act which constitutes thinking. According to Maine de Biran, we find the apperception or sentiment of personal existence in the most simple act of thinking.

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be judged by a jury that did not understand science he did not submit his work. However, none of the ten works sent were approved and in March 1804 the question was posed for the competition once again. In December he sent his essay to the Institut and in March 1805 he won the prize. See the introduction to MDP, MB III.

<sup>266</sup> In *De l’aperception immédiate* (1807), Maine de Biran’s esteem for Locke seems to have faded. He says there that Locke could never have found the origin of all knowledge and therefore never attain a science of principles, firstly because of his overly strict distinction between sensation and reflection; secondly because he admitted too much to the external senses and too little to the origin of our knowledge and ideas. To both he ascribed an equal perceptive faculty as well as a general and completely passive one.

<sup>267</sup> The actual term he uses is ‘sentiment de nos propres modifications’.

<sup>268</sup> MDP, MB III, 49.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 335.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

Un être purement sensitif, pourrait être impressionné et affecté dans son organisation et exister sous telle modification, pour des êtres intelligents qui le jugeraient du dehors, sans qu'il aperçut intérieurement sa propre existence ou qu'il pût être dit exister pour lui-même. Descartes indiquait là, à mon avis, une distinction trop méconnue depuis. L'identité que ce philosophe admet, comme signe caractéristique de l'évidence, n'est pas seulement une identité logique, elle est de plus dans l'ordre réel des faits de réflexion, ou d'observation intérieure. Mais il ne fallait pas étendre la loi de la réflexion aux faits qui s'objectivent hors de nous; il ne fallait croire qu'ils eussent un type égal en nous-mêmes.<sup>271</sup>

Although Maine de Biran finds the Cartesian method of reflection to be fruitful for the study of our mental faculties, he warns us not to apply it to physics. However, his warning can also be reversed: we should not try to apply the physical method to the study of our faculties. He therefore proposes to demarcate the kind of objects to which both methods can be applied. Maine de Biran thinks we can only do this by describing the domain and limits of our various faculties up to and including their origin.

We will set aside Maine de Biran's description of the above mentioned demarcation of objects and focus on 'l'identité que ce philosophe admet' from the previous quote. The identity involved here is that of thinking and existence. According to Maine de Biran, we should not consider it as a merely logical identity, because it also concerns a real identity. However, in the adapted version of the same work (in 'a certain note B'<sup>272</sup>) he seems to have a different view of the 'je pense, donc je suis'. In this note, he says that the form in which Descartes formulates this principle is *only* a logical expression of the connection that is established in the order of inner facts between the real exercise of thinking and the sentiment of individual existence. He accepts Descartes's starting point in the

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid., 73-74.

<sup>272</sup> This is how Gouhier refers to it, cf. *Les conversions de Maine de Biran* (1947), p. 273. In the edition by Tisserand, vol. 3, pp. 138-139, it is called (B), in MDP, MB III, 364 we find it in the 'Version remaniée'. The note continues with: 'L'être apercevant ou pensant peut seul, en effet, se reconnaître et se dire existant pour *lui-même*, par la seule raison qu'il aperçoit ou pense: l'être purement sensitif ou affecté dans son organisation, peut bien être dit ou jugé *existant* de telle manière, par une intelligence qui le contemple du dehors, sans *savoir* qu'il existe. Mais en partant de la réflexion, Descartes n'observa pas assez, peut-être, que ce *moi* qui se replie ainsi pour s'affirmer son existence et en conclure la réalité absolue, exerce par là même une *action*, fait un *effort*; or, toute action ne suppose-t-elle pas essentiellement et dans la réalité un *sujet* et un *terme*? peut-on considérer l'*effort* comme *absolu* et sans *résistance*? Assurément ce génie méditatif se faisait illusion quand il croyait être plus assuré de l'existence de son *âme* que celle de son *corps*; car il ne pouvait penser ni être *lui*, sans avoir le sentiment intérieur continu (je ne dis pas l'idée *objective* ou l'image) de cette *co-existence* du corps. Il n'a manqué à Descartes que de lier la pensée à l'action, comme l'existence à la pensée; et s'eût fait, sa métaphysique eût pris une autre direction. D'ailleurs, si d'une part la pensée et le sentiment d'existence sont indivisiblement liés et affirmés l'un de l'autre par l'application logique du principe d'identité; et si, d'autre part, *nous ne pouvons affirmer d'un sujet que ce qui se trouve compris dans l'idée que nous en avons*, sur quel fondement Descartes pouvait-il attribuer la pensée actuelle permanente à un être qui n'a pas les conditions du sentiment de l'existence, ou qui s'en trouve momentanément privé? Que devient alors ce dogme que l'âme pense toujours avant la naissance, comme dans le sommeil, dans la léthargie, etc.? Ici on voit l'esprit systématique et les considérations *a priori*, l'emporter sur un principe positif donné par la réflexion, et sur les conséquences légitimes qui pouvaient en être déduites.'

*Meditations* – that of the ‘most intimate reflection’ – and he disagrees with the superficial criticism made by Gassendi and Hobbes. He even defends Descartes when he says that philosophers have focused too much on the object of thinking rather than on the ‘intimate sentiment of the act’ that constitutes thinking. The problem for Maine de Biran lies in the fact that for Descartes the formation of knowledge takes place without any activity or force. He disagrees with the Cartesian subject, because it is entirely without self-efficiency and is somehow caused by a strange supreme force. He therefore proposes to replace ‘je pense’ with ‘je veux’ as we see in the following quote from 1824.

Si Descartes crut poser le premier principe de toute science, la première vérité évidente par elle-même, en disant: je *pense*, donc je *suis* (chose ou substance *pensante*), nous dirons mieux, [d’une manière] plus déterminée, et cette fois avec l’évidence irrécusable du sens intime: j’*agis*, je *veux* ou je *pense* l’action, donc je me sens *cause*, donc je *suis* ou j’existe réellement à titre de cause ou de force. C’est sous ce rapport, très précisément, que ma pensée intérieure est l’expression ou la conception et la production de mon existence *réelle*, en même temps que la manifestation première et l’enfantement du *moi*, qui naît pour lui-même en commençant à se connaître.

Ici et dans ce cas seulement (exclusivement à celui où l’être pensant est identifié avec la substance ou chose pensante, modifiable à l’infini), l’on est fondé à dire avec Bacon: *ratio essendi et ratio cognoscendi idem sunt et non magis a se invicem differunt quam radius directus et radius reflexus*.<sup>273</sup>

Provided this replacement – ‘je veux’ for ‘je pense’ – is made, Maine de Biran is willing to adopt the Cartesian foundation of the sciences. Nevertheless, his criticism concerning the substantiality of the soul still remains. This criticism is that Descartes, in the sentence ‘je pense, donc je suis’, switches from an ‘être pour soi’, a phenomenal self, to an ‘être en soi’, a noumenal self.<sup>274</sup> This switch can be described as follows:

- The first step Descartes takes is ‘I think’. However, this ‘I think’ is identical to a certain ‘I am’, namely the ‘I am for myself’ (pour soi) of self-consciousness. The ‘I’ of this ‘I think’ is defined by this ‘I am for myself’ and therefore it is the subject of psychological existence.
- The second step Descartes takes is to claim that everything which thinks (or knows that it exists) exists absolutely as substance (or thinking thing), outside thinking.

<sup>273</sup> DPEA, MB X-2, 77. This is a quote from Bacon’s *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, in *Works* I, vol. 1, p. 455 we read a slightly different version: ‘*Nam veritas essendi et veritas cognoscendi idem sunt; nec plus a se invicem differunt, quam radius directus et reflectus*’. In the English edition (1879, 2 vols. ed. *n.n.*), it reads on p. 10: ‘For the third vice or disease of learning, which concerneth deceit or untruth, it is of all the rest the foulest; as that which doth destroy the essential form of knowledge, which is nothing but a representation of truth; for the truth of being and the truth of knowing are one, differing no more than the direct beam and the beam reflected’.

<sup>274</sup> Gouhier points out that these terms, and Maine de Biran’s criticism of the *cogito*, are not derived from Kant but are entirely ‘biranien’, *Les conversions de Maine de Biran* (1947), p. 276.



- Descartes then concludes: Therefore 'I am/exist' substantially. However, the 'I' of this 'I am' is no longer the 'I' of the initial 'I think'. The psychological subject in which existence coincided with consciousness is substituted for a substantial subject whose existence is independent of self-consciousness. The argument is therefore circular.<sup>275</sup>

We will continue the discussion of Maine de Biran's view of the Cartesian *cogito* by turning to the discussion of his main work: *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie*.<sup>276</sup> In this work he reiterates the philosophy of existence of the two prize winning essays. It is therefore not a great step in our exposition to move from his *Mémoire* to his *Essai*.

Maine de Biran saw the Cartesian principle: 'I think, therefore I am' as the first psychological axiom or the first intuitive judgement of personal existence. In his *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie* he formulated it as: 'Un être n'existe pour lui-même qu'autant qu'il le sait ou qu'il le pense'.<sup>277</sup> Maine de Biran considers the *cogito* to be a primitive fact which is the origin of all knowledge, both subjective and objective. Moreover, because the *cogito* is a psychological experience, he designated psychology as the fundamental science.

What he thought had gone wrong in the analysis of the facts that are produced by the inner sense, is that philosophers had established a nominal or logical distinction between a sensorial, variable and multiple impression (considered as matter) and a sensorial, undivided and identical apperception (considered as form). In other words, they had taken the primitive perception or sensation as a simple mode that the mind can consider from two different points of view: one with respect to the object the mind represents; the other with respect to the subject that feels or perceives. The problem with both views, Maine de Biran thought, is that they do not consider the intrinsic composition of the mind. According to him, all modern philosophers have presupposed that the mind is similar to a mathematical object that maintains its simplicity, although this may be transformed in infinitely different ways.

Not only did he reproach Leibniz and Locke for having such a conception of the mind, he also found Descartes to be guilty. Maine de Biran also tried to discover what Kant meant by the notion of matter being active in sensation and never being without form, and what is meant by form where this has no reality without matter. It seemed to Maine de Biran that it was impossible to conceive in any idea, sensitive or reflected, a single one of these elements as being distinct and separated from each other. He therefore thought that Kant had only dealt with a logical distinction that operates between purely abstract elements.

While Maine de Biran criticized all these philosophers, he seems to make an exception for Descartes, for he began his analysis of the facts of the inner sense on the basis of Descartes's principle.

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<sup>275</sup> We owe this summary of Maine de Biran's argument to Gouhier, *ibid.*, p. 277.

<sup>276</sup> Most if not all commentators consider it to be his main work ever since its first publication by Ernest Naville (who continued the work of his father François) in 1859.

<sup>277</sup> EFP, MB VII-2, Appendice XXXIX, p. 517.

Pour procéder régulièrement à cette analyse, je reprends le principe de Descartes *je pense, j'existe*, et descendant en moi-même, je cherche à caractériser plus expressément quelle est cette pensée primitive substantielle qui est censée constituer toute mon existence individuelle, et je la trouve identifiée dans sa source avec le sentiment d'une action ou d'un *effort voulu*. Cet effort sera donc pour moi le fait primitif, ou le mode fondamental que je cherche, et dont je suis appelé à analyser les caractères ou les signes.<sup>278</sup>

However, we have to admit that Maine de Biran did not take up the Cartesian principle as such, but only did so in connection with the theories of Schelling and Fichte. He considered these theories to be more closely related to his 'better version' of the Cartesian principle, in which the will plays the leading part. As the above quote shows, he identifies the *cogito* with 'willed effort', which he considers to be the expression of consciousness, just as these metaphysicians had already recognized.

Schelling maintained that the 'I' (*moi*) obtains consciousness of its actions only by the will. Hence, the expression of the will is the first condition of self-consciousness.<sup>279</sup> According to Fichte, the first act that poses the 'I' and constitutes science is voluntary or free and we do not have to find a principle other than this will, which is contained in itself. Maine de Biran does not only defend and strengthen his theory by reference to the works of German philosophers. In France he found that both Destutt de Tracy and Cabanis had adopted these expressions to describe the fact of consciousness. Maine de Biran thought that consciousness of the sensorial self, recognized as distinct from other existences, is nothing but 'willed effort' (*effort voulu*).

Maine de Biran criticizes the 'Idéologues' on the ground that they understood the fact of sensation as a primitive fact. He thinks we cannot yet call a simple sensation a fact. For Maine de Biran, we can only speak of a fact when sensation is united with the personal individuality of the self. He therefore thought that the origin of primitive facts had to be found somewhere else, and that this was the subject of research yet to be carried out. To say that the primitive fact originates in consciousness shifts the problem to the origin of consciousness itself. According to Maine de Biran, up until now philosophers have supposed that consciousness is established by its own nature, which means they believed that consciousness was innate to the self. However, Maine de Biran rejects this position, but he never precisely demonstrated another source of the primitive fact. The inner sense which he considers to be primitive, does not seem to be susceptible to a proof developed by a series of logical-empirical arguments.

Although Maine de Biran takes offence at the fact that Descartes confused personal existence (the 'moi') with the substantial soul, he does not seem to deny that there are many analogies between the Cartesian position and his own. This does not mean that both take methodical doubt as their point of departure. Maine

<sup>278</sup> EFP, MB VII-1, 117.

<sup>279</sup> For his knowledge of Fichte and Schelling, Maine de Biran used Degérando's HC II. As far as Schelling is concerned, Degérando refers to *Philosophisches Journal*, vol. 6, bk. 2, p. 200; *Zeitschrift für speculative Physik*, vol. II, sect. 1, § 1; and *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*.

de Biran thinks that it is not necessary, even impossible, to doubt everything. In his *Commentaire sur les Méditations Métaphysiques de Descartes*, he writes:

En supposant qu'on pouvait douter de ces relations et vérités nécessaires, et n'admettre que la première comme évidente, Descartes a méconnu l'autorité des lois primitives, inhérentes à l'esprit humain. Il n'a pas vu que s'il était possible de mettre en doute un seul instant les vérités nécessaires, il ne pourrait plus y avoir rien de vrai, ni de certain pour notre esprit. Rien ne saurait être établi par le raisonnement, car ce raisonnement doit s'appuyer d'abord sur des choses dont il ne soit pas possible de douter. Or il s'agit de distinguer, d'abord, quelles sont ces choses. Si l'on en trouve une seule, par exemple notre existence à titre d'êtres pensants, il s'ensuivra qu'il y en a d'autres qui, étant inséparables de cette existence, ne comportent pas plus qu'elle le moindre doute. En effet, la certitude que j'ai de mon existence n'est pas celle d'un être abstrait, mais d'un individu qui se sent modifié dans un corps étendu, inerte, organisé sur lequel il agit. La certitude de l'existence de ce corps étendu fait donc partie essentielle de celle que j'ai de mon être.<sup>280</sup>

Apparently, Maine de Biran took the Cartesian method of doubt more seriously than Descartes himself, as he claimed that Descartes underestimated the authority of primitive laws that are inherent to the human mind. It is not only the method of doubt that Maine de Biran criticizes, but also the Cartesian certainty of the existence of the self. As the above quote shows, Maine de Biran tries to connect thought and extension by stressing that the certainty involved in personal existence concerns that of an individual and not some abstract being.

Although Maine de Biran and Descartes have quite different points of view, their research objectives coincide, as they both want to determine the fundamental primitive fact. For Descartes this is the act of thinking which gives us the certainty of our personal existence. To Maine de Biran, the primitive fact is more complex; summarized by Vancourt: 'it is the free act that develops itself into a term of organic resistance'.<sup>281</sup>

Maine de Biran's criticism and assessment of the Cartesian *cogito* is an example of how the revaluation of Descartes took place in a systematical discipline of philosophy. In his discussion of the Cartesian system, we find him saying that he was not sure whether the antagonists of Descartes 'have entered the profundity' of the *je pense, donc je suis*. However, he agrees with the antagonists on the point that the logical form of this principle can only have the same value as the inner sense. This means that the only being that can say *moi* and give meaning to this word is the being equipped with the faculty of thought or inner apperception.

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<sup>280</sup> *Commentaire sur les Méditations Métaphysiques de Descartes* [1813], in *Nouvelles œuvres inédites de Maine de Biran (Science et psychologie)*, ed. Bertrand, Paris 1887, p. 74. This passage is omitted in CM17, MB XI-1.

<sup>281</sup> Vancourt, *La théorie de la connaissance chez Maine de Biran* (1941), p. 66: 'c'est l'action libre se développant sur un terme de résistance organique'.

Il y a donc *identité absolue* entre les deux termes dont se compose l'enthymème. Le fait est affirmé de lui-même, ou reproduit sous deux expressions différentes, et il n'y a de raisonnement que dans la forme.<sup>282</sup>

The connection between the *moi* and thinking or apperception, however, is given immediately in the fact of the inner sense. On this basis, Maine de Biran thinks, therefore, that the form of the reasoning that aims to establish this is 'not only superfluous but illusory in that it represents as a deduction a truly primitive fact that is anterior to all, from which everything derives, which does not conclude anything'.<sup>283</sup>

#### 7.4 Maine de Biran's criticism of sensualism

In 1805 the 'speculative philosophy department' of the Academy of Berlin (also called 'Académie des sciences et belles-lettres de Prusse') announced a competition with a prize to be awarded in 1807. The Academy remarked that research into the origin and reality of human knowledge has neglected the 'primitive facts of the inner sense on which the science of principles relies, and which are the only things that can serve as the basis for research in reason'.<sup>284</sup>

In the *Mémoires* of the Berlin Academy<sup>285</sup> of 1804 we read that half of the funds for the prize were provided by a certain M. de Milozewski, an old officer of the infantry in Köpenick, approximately 15 kilometres south-east of Berlin, who had retired and left the Academy 'un fonds inaliénable de mille écus'. It was his wish that the Academy use the fund to propose an additional essay contest in the field of speculative philosophy as well as the regular one held every fourth year. This donation meant that, in the field of philosophy, a prize could be offered every two years and that every four years it would be on the subject of speculative philosophy. The Academy was pleasantly surprised and remarked that donations in the field of speculative philosophy were rare, especially from a former soldier.<sup>286</sup>

The following year, 1805, the question for the competition for 1807 was formulated:

Giebt es eine unmittelbare innere Wahrnehmung, und worin ist diese von der innern Anschauung und von der blossen Abstraction der Regeln unsers Denkens und Empfindens durch wiederholte Beobachtung und dem innern Gefühl verschieden?

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<sup>282</sup> EFP, MB VII-1, 77.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> See *Gazette*, N° 39, 9 brumaire An 14 (31 October 1805), p. 147. It would be interesting to find out what the Academy's stance toward Kant was at that time; whether they were aware of Kant's transcendental enterprise in this field, and if so whether they just did not accept or understand it.

<sup>285</sup> *Mémoires de l'Académie royale des sciences et belles-lettres depuis l'avènement de Frédéric Guillaume 2*, year 1804, p. 10.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid. 'Plus il est rare que dans un siècle où l'on affecte peu-être un peu trop de déprimer la Philosophie spéculative, quelqu'un, & surtout un ancien militaire, fasse un établissement pour en favoriser l'avancement...'. Apparently, speculative philosophy was already discouraged in the nineteenth century.

In welcher Beziehung stehen diese Handlungen oder Lagen des Gemüths mit den Begriffen und Ideen?<sup>287</sup>

It is not clear whether it was originally formulated in German, if it was, it would be interesting to know how the term ‘fait primitif’ would have been translated. Whatever the case may be, the French version, to which Maine de Biran responded, appeared in the *Gazette nationale ou le Moniteur universel* of 31 October 1805.

L’Académie a remarqué que dans la recherche de l’origine et de la réalité des connaissances humaines, on négligeait les faits primitifs du sens intime, sur lesquels repose la science des principes, et qui peuvent seuls servir de base au travail de la raison, ou que du moins on ne les avait pas observés, distingués, approfondis avec soin, et qu’autant on se montrait difficile sur les objets de l’expérience, autant on était facile à admettre la certitude de certaines formes de nos connaissances; en conséquence, l’Académie a cru que plus de précision dans l’examen et l’énoncé des faits primitifs, contrubuerait aux progrès de la science. La classe de Philosophie spéculative propose donc à la discussion de l’Europe savante, pour sujet du prix ordinaire<sup>288</sup> qu’elle doit adjuger en 1807, la question suivante:

*Y a-t-il des apperceptions internes immédiates?*

Bien entendu qu’on n’appelle pas ainsi ni l’observation répétée, ni l’abstraction des règles de la faculté de sentir et de penser.

*En quoi l’apperception interne immédiate diffère-t-elle de l’intuition interne?*

*Quelle différence y a-t-il entre l’intuition, la sensation et le sentiment?*

*Enfin, quels sont les rapports de ces actes ou de ces états de l’ame avec les notions et les idées?*<sup>289</sup>

Philosophers who attempted to answer these questions were also requested not to use as a point of departure any theory or system, but to begin from the ‘usual terms’. Apparently these were the terms ‘faits primitifs’, ‘sens intime’, and ‘science des principes’ used by the Academy. As to the forbidden use of any theory or system, it could be that they sought an answer to Kant, but we simply do not know.

On 8 August 1807, the results came in and there was a winner: David Theodor August Suabedissen with a treatise called *Verum index sui*.<sup>290</sup> An honourable mention was given to another treatise written in French sent from southern France. Because it had no epigraph and was anonymous, the Academy regretfully could not award a prize. It requested that the author give his name and print his treatise or

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<sup>287</sup> *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin 1804-1811*, p. 4.

<sup>288</sup> That is, not the one funded by the veteran.

<sup>289</sup> *Gazette*, № 39, 9 brumaire An 14 (31 October 1805), p. 147.

<sup>290</sup> Later published under the title: *Resultate der philosophischen Forschungen über die Natur der menschlichen Erkenntniß von Plato bis Kant* (Marburg 1805). The jury was far from unanimous in its verdict. Ancillon sr. was completely against awarding Suabedissen and did not even want to give it an honourable mention, he favoured the essay of Maine de Biran. His son proposed that both could share the prize, but apparently the majority of the jury favoured Suabedissen, see AI, MB IV, xv.

allow the Academy to print it. ‘Herr Maine Biran, Präfect zu Tarn, hat sich späterhin als Verfasser namhaft gemacht’.<sup>291</sup>

In search of a method to address the questions of the Academy, Maine de Biran doubted whether the experimental method initiated by Bacon would be appropriate. He asked himself whether metaphysics can or should be submitted to experimental science, in which case it has to accept sensorial data from phenomena. In his own words, he asked:

. . . si la métaphysique, considérée comme science des facultés propre au sujet pensant, ne constitue pas une science distincte de celle de l’emploi pratique et surtout de l’objet de [ces] facultés, développées et appliquées aux objets externes, c’est-à-dire distincte de la logique et de la physique, comme de tout système de connaissances que des modernes français peuvent avoir compris, en dernier lieu, sous le titre trop général d’Idéologie, et, dans ce cas, si cette science propre des facultés ou opérations premières de l’intelligence peut ou doit être exclusivement soumise aux procédés des autres sciences expérimentales, et assujetti[e] à prendre, comme elles, ses données premières dans les apparences sensibles d’un monde phénoménal.<sup>292</sup>

However, he did not want to rule out the possibility that behind the sensory objects there is a hypersensorial world which is only manifest to a particular inner sense. It is for this reason that he doubted whether Bacon’s method would be appropriate for reaching the extreme limits of a truly first philosophy. As far as the analyses of Locke, Condillac and their disciples were concerned, Maine de Biran did not think that these would lead to the ‘first ring of the chain that frames all knowledge, operations and ideas of human understanding from the beginning’.<sup>293</sup>

Maine de Biran’s goal was to establish a science of principles, which turns out to be a description of the ‘faits primitifs’. Why did he want it to be based on primitive facts and not on sensations? His answer would be that sensations, as Locke understood them, enter objective experience as integrated parts of a composition. However, Maine de Biran wanted to start his analysis earlier, namely with the primitive facts. Maine de Biran described these primitive facts as the formal elements by which the correlation between the parts of an experience is determined. The primitive facts imprint the form of a sensorial image onto an experience. We could understand it as the mould which itself is not part of the matter which takes its shape or receives its imprint from it.

Si l’on avait une fois réellement distingué ou circonscrit ces faits primitifs avec une précision suffisante, si l’on était parvenu à les rattache[r] à des signes fixes univoques, en un mot, à déterminer avec certitude le sens propre des terme[s] qui entrent dans l’énoncé du problème, et prépar[er], sinon compléter ainsi sa solution exacte, alors

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<sup>291</sup> *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin*, 1804-1811, Realschul Buchhandlung, Berlin 1815, p. 8.

<sup>292</sup> AI, MB IV, 8.

<sup>293</sup> See *ibid.*, 8-9.

peut-être se trouverait jugé le procès fait depuis longtemps à la métaphysique.<sup>294</sup>

With regard to how philosophers have dealt with this issue, Maine de Biran distinguished between two doctrines. The first doctrine concentrates on the interior of the thinking subject and mainly attempts to penetrate through the facts of consciousness. The second is founded on the relations that the passive, that is, strictly sensitive, being maintains with the external objects on which it depends for its affective impressions.

Maine de Biran's aim was to show that the doctrine which is entirely founded on the inner sense is true. However, firstly he wanted to determine the value of the terms within the context of the question proposed by the Academy. One may consider the terms 'apperception', 'perception', 'intuition', 'sensation' as categories, by which he means constructions made purely by the mind in order to classify data.<sup>295</sup> However, they can also be seen as primitive facts (realities) given in a world of completely inner phenomena. If we take these terms in the latter sense, we should study and observe them in their native simplicity without transforming, composing or decomposing them like artificial ideas.

How the science of principles is understood depends on which systematic point of view we take: do we take these principles as categories or as primitive facts? In other words, is there an external, which is to say, logical or categorical basis or an inner, real basis of these principles? This means that there are two possibilities:

- 1) we either recognize an immediate inner apperception distinct from intuition or sensation, or
- 2) we deny that there is a real foundation of intuition and sensation, and only admit these principles as categories reason establishes in order to co-ordinate the system of various ideas.

Maine de Biran chooses the first possibility – we will now explain why. As we said in the previous section, Maine de Biran thinks that the *cogito, ergo sum* only logically expresses the connection between thinking and existing. We can explain this in the context of the important distinction he makes between logical and reflective abstraction in *De l'aperception immédiate*. For an explanation of the concept of abstraction, Maine de Biran refers to Kant's thesis *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (1770). As we saw earlier, the science of principles should be composed of the so-called 'faits primitifs'. When asked whether they are to be considered as abstractions, Maine de Biran refers to Kant's distinction between 'abstracting', which Kant found to be more proper, and 'abstract'. By 'abstracting' he means that 'when we consider a concept we do not take into account anything else no matter how it may be connected to it'. By 'abstract' he means that the notion 'is given *in concreto* in such a way that it is separated from that to which it is conjoined'. At first consideration this may sound

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>295</sup> See *ibid.*, 11: 'purs ouvrages de l'entendement travaillant à classer les matériaux qu'il s'est donnés'.

like scholastic pedantry, but the application to pure and empirical concepts is important.

That is why the intellectual concept (*conceptus intellectualis/Verstandesbegriff*) abstracts from all sensorial things and is not abstracted from them, and perhaps one should call it more rightly abstracting (*abstrahens/abstrahierend*) than abstract (*abstractus/abstrakt*). Therefore, it is wiser to call the intellectual concepts ‘pure ideas’ (*ideae purae/reine Vorstellungen*) and the concepts that are only given empirically ‘abstract’.<sup>296</sup>

Maine de Biran adopts this distinction and applies it to the ‘faits primitifs’ and to the way in which they manifest themselves to our inner sense. The self is not abstracted from sensations, which would mean that there would be something universal in them, but the self abstracts itself, or separates itself, from material impressions and the sensory objects by which they are caused. The self constituted in this way, in the inner and immediate apperception, can truly be said to be ‘*abstrahens*’ (or *se abstrahens*) rather than ‘*abstractus*’.<sup>297</sup>

Maine de Biran reproaches metaphysicians for talking about general ideas such as substance, existence and unity as if they were already structured in categories. They stop at this point rather than investigating the source of these ideas. For Maine de Biran, it is precisely this source that provides these ideas with their natural basis, namely the inner sense, and it therefore gives them the character of evidence and necessity which is real (and not virtual). The signs which are structured into categories (Maine de Biran also calls them ‘*idées mères*’) are purely logical in their combinations or in the continuous application of them by the mind. The only certainty Maine de Biran ascribes to logical abstractions is that involved in the quiescence of the mind when it clearly perceives that its own conventions are fulfilled by the use of the signs, of which it had determined the value without crossing the boundary of its own ideas.

At this point we can say something more about the distinction between logical and reflective abstractions. According to Maine de Biran, reflective abstractions have the character of immediate evidence, which he thought was the only real source of all evidence. For him, reflective abstractions were the way to the primitive fact. He considered them to be purified, by which he meant that they have freed themselves from the material compounds with which they were intimately associated.

Logical abstractions, on the other hand, are ‘deprived of the light that is proper to the mind’. As they are not ‘purified’, they are prone to deception by an imagination which applies them indiscriminately. Maine de Biran criticizes all philosophers who:

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<sup>296</sup> *De mundi*, AA II, §6 ‘Hinc conceptus intellectualis abstrahit ab omni sensitivo, non abstrahitur a sensitivis et forsitan rectius diceretur abstrahens quam abstractus. Quare intellectuales consultius est Ideas puras, qui autem empirice tantum dantur conceptus, abstractos nominare.’

<sup>297</sup> AI, MB IV, 22.



. . . se sont donc laissés entraîner au torrent des habitudes de l'imagination . . . ramenant tous les éléments de la science à des abstractions logiques ou physiques, ont cru pouvoir faire ressortir les principes de nos connaissances d'une décomposition ou résolution artificielle des impressions ou des images sensibles donné[e]s par l'expérience, en croyant aussi pouvoir, et devoir même, analyser, décomposer les principes réels.<sup>298</sup>

When the means of a method can only be derived from the external senses and when the exclusive object of this method consists of phenomena that are outside the self, the method cannot have any grasp of the primitive facts, because they can only be grasped by the inner sense. The methods that Maine de Biran points to here, comprise all the empirical methods from Condillac onwards. He also criticizes the use of analogy as the means by which these methods attempted to grasp the primitive facts. He suggests that once we have taken an external point of view it is not possible to return to the inner domain in which the thinking being attends to its own operations. He therefore concludes that the classifications and laws produced by the natural sciences through the observation of facts, are of no use in the knowledge of the employment of the primitive fact, or in its immediately derived truths occurring in sensation (*vérités de sentiment*).<sup>299</sup>

Another problem for Maine de Biran was the use of the principle of causality in the experimental method. He thought that it rendered the experimental method useless for a true science of principles. The objects of the physical sciences are sensible phenomena that are already isolated. These phenomena are analysed, compared with each other, and classified according to the order of their successions or analogies, which is an abstraction of the productive real cause. However, for Maine de Biran the proper and necessary idea which corresponds to this cause cannot be grasped by the senses or by imagination. It does not enter into the calculation of experience, remaining hidden under the sensorial form of the effect.

In contrast to the objects of physical science, the objects of reflective science are the acts and conditions of the thinking subject which are themselves given as facts of the inner sense. In Maine de Biran's opinion, these acts cannot be comprehended apart from the inner sentiment (*sentiment intime*) of its productive cause while this is being generated. The reason for this is that this cause is nothing other than the self, or subject, which only exists for itself in so far as it knows itself, and it only knows itself in so far as it acts.<sup>300</sup> For Maine de Biran this is a truth or fact of the inner sense which does not require a proof. The following quote explains how the subject, which manifests itself in an active mode, is its own cause.

Or, je dis que le sentiment intime de la cause ou force productive du mouvement – qui est le *moi* même, identifié avec son effort – et la sensation particulière (*sui generis*) qui correspond, dans l'ordre naturel, à

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>300</sup> Something can be said in favour of a comparison with Fichte's 'Tathandlung'. Maine de Biran was acquainted with Fichte's system and also that of Schelling and Bouterwek, as we also saw in EFP, by means of Degérando's HC II, vol. 4 p. 342 ff.

la contraction de l'organe musculaire peuvent être considérés comme deux éléments d'un mode total, où la cause et l'effet (*l'effort aperçu* et la contraction sentie en *résultat*) sont liés l'un à l'autre, dans la même conscience, d'une manière si indivisible et sous un rapport de causalité si nécessaire qu'on ne saurait absolument faire abstraction de la force [ou *cause*], sans changer ou dénaturer même entièrement l'idée de son effet. Et vraiment, la sensation musculaire, cessant d'être accompagnée d'efforts ou causée par le vouloir (*moi*), ne serait plus alors qu'une affection purement organique, ou demeurerait obscure et inaperçue, comme ces mouvements vitaux qui s'accomplissent dans l'intérieur du corps, hors des limites du vouloir et, par suite, de l'*aperception* qui en dépend (comme nous le verrons dans la suite), ou enfin, ne serait plus qu'une impression complètement passive, comme le sont les battements du cœur ou les mouvements convulsifs, que nous sentons sans les produire.<sup>301</sup>

Maine de Biran's point is that, in the analysis of inner phenomena, the elimination of the cause is not permitted, and is in fact impossible. This cause has the same evidence as a fact of sensation, because it is of the same kind as its effect. The effect in its turn could only become perception in and through this cause. The conclusion Maine de Biran draws with regard to the science of principles is that it is no longer permitted to hide the real name of the cause under that of the generated effect. In order to determine the idea that corresponds to the cause, to establish the precise concept and to reduce it to its primal, individual and real source, it does not suffice to just give it a name.

### 7.5 Maine de Biran's view of innate ideas

In his discussion of the primary condition of the origin of intelligence, Maine de Biran comes to the issue of innate ideas. In *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée* he criticized Ancillon and Degérando by saying that in their research into the origin and basis of intelligence they had neglected to find out whether there is or is not a primary condition of existence.<sup>302</sup> They began their research by explaining how an external object, to which certain modifications relate as qualities, can be constituted as the self. For Maine de Biran, however, this was not a sufficient basis for research into the roots of an apperceptive faculty. Along with philosophers who rely on experience, philosophers who assumed a system of innate ideas have presupposed 'un moi qui existe intérieurement ou pour lui-même' for the sole reason that from the start there is some proven affection in the living organism.

The error that Maine de Biran considered supporters of the theory of innate ideas to have made, was that they admitted personal knowledge only within the defined limits of the relation between the 'I' and the object. By doing so, they considered the 'fait primitif' of consciousness to be something that consists of precisely this relation. To illustrate his view of innate ideas, we turn to his

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<sup>301</sup> AI, MB IV, 26-27.

<sup>302</sup> Cf. MDP, MB III, 220 ff.

discussion of the metaphysical systems of Descartes and Leibniz, which we find in *De l'aperception immédiate*.

The advantage of the abstract metaphysical systems, he thought, was that they demonstrated the goal of the science of principles. However, the problem was that they exceeded this goal. The main systems in metaphysics tried to penetrate into the essence of the faculties of the soul. The defect in the Cartesian system, Maine de Biran claimed, was that it did not distinguish the faculties from their corresponding ideas.

Il les considère en cette dernière qualité, sous le titre d'idées innées, comme infuses dans l'âme humaine au moment de sa création, inséparables d'elle, formant ses attributs essentiels ou son essence même, indépendamment de son union avec le corps, et, par suite, de tout commerce avec une nature matérielle.<sup>303</sup>

Descartes placed inner and formal thinking beyond matter and did not believe that it could be separated from the soul because an attribute cannot be separated from the substance in which and by which it is understood. As a result, he did not need to attribute any faculty to this soul which was not already similar to a positive innate idea. Maine de Biran therefore concluded that these innate ideas are received by the soul in the same way that it has received its existence, namely without any active force or effective quality. The problem in the Cartesian 'psychology', according to Maine de Biran, is that the soul can in no case contribute to its own production.<sup>304</sup> He therefore favours Leibniz, according to whom innate dispositions do not entirely consist of receptive capacities. The human soul – which Maine de Biran calls 'monade par excellence' – in Leibniz' system is essentially active and only its products alone can effectuate clear representations, true perceptions or, as Locke puts it, ideas of sensation.

Maine de Biran places Kant between these two positions. The pure intuitions (*reine Anschauungsformen*) and pure concepts of the mind (*reine Verstandesbegriffe*)<sup>305</sup> seem to dwell in the thinking subject as essential attributes of a passive substance. In their pre-existence, Maine de Biran thinks that they greatly resemble the innate ideas of Descartes. However, there is one important difference: Kant only attributes the value of knowledge to these pre-existing forms, in so far as they are united with some sort of matter provided by sensorial objects. With regard to this, Kant is closer to Leibniz. In Part V we will return to the question of whether Kant admits innate ideas or principles or not.

Maine de Biran's criticism of the systems of Descartes and Leibniz<sup>306</sup> is that both are preoccupied with certain 'logical' results. What he finds lacking in them is

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<sup>303</sup> AI, MB IV, 46.

<sup>304</sup> Cf. AI, MB IV, 48. The passages Maine de Biran aims at are *Principes* I, AT IX-2, 48 and *Obj.* III, AT IX-1, 147.

<sup>305</sup> Maine de Biran calls them 'les formes qu'il [Kant] attribue au sujet pensant hors de l'expérience et antérieurement à toute impression sensible', AI 49. Maine de Biran did not read German and based his reading of Kant on Kinker's *Essai d'un exposition succincte de la Critique de la Raison Pure* (1801) and Villers' *Philosophie de Kant ou principes fondamentaux de la philosophie transcendante* (1801) as Radrizzani points out in AI, MB IV, 218n.

<sup>306</sup> It is not clear whether Kant's system is also meant here.

that they do not take into account the real force that can formulate or transform sensation. They both equally confuse the workman with his work; and the work with the matter employed in the work. They rob the first of its force, the second of its reality. It seems that the thinking which produces the result that Maine de Biran calls 'logical' has a certain negative connotation and may be similar to the thinking that Kant refers to as the 'dogmatic' approach to metaphysics.

Now that we know the context in which Maine de Biran places the theory of innate ideas, let us focus on Maine de Biran's stance towards this issue. In his *Commentaire sur les Méditations métaphysiques de Descartes* (ca. 1813) Maine de Biran claims that the majority of the opponents of the system of innate ideas have taken the wrong sense of the word 'idea'. He distinguishes two definitions of idea: in the first sense an idea is the virtual state of an external object in our mind. In the second sense an idea is taken to be a notion that our mind produces by its own action or by reflection upon itself without the cooperation of any external object, cause or other influence.

According to Maine de Biran, it is in this second sense of 'idea' that we have to understand 'innate idea'. He therefore thinks that philosophers who claimed that we have innate ideas have never considered that these were actual, effective ideas representing external objects. He further defends them by saying that they have always neatly distinguished between ideas that are the pure result of the mind's own activity and those that depend on an outside influence. According to him they called the former 'innate' in the sense that the natural activity of the mind suffices for them to be produced.

Et c'est ainsi que le système entier des idées distinguées par Locke sous le titre d'*idées simples de la réflexion* est dit *inné* dans l'acception de Descartes; c'est ainsi qu'avant tout, l'idée ou le sentiment du *moi* est inné, et que l'idée d'un Dieu, d'une cause suprême ou d'une force intelligente qui meut l'univers, peut aussi être dite innée, en tant que pour former cette idée nous prenons un modèle dans notre force, notre causalité, notre intelligence propres, transportées avec une extension illimitée aux phénomènes de la nature.<sup>307</sup>

Descartes considered the ideas of God and that of the self to be innate, and Maine de Biran thinks we should take this to refer to the virtual sense of innate. Surely, we have an actual idea or sensation of the self before we form the idea of an infinitely perfect being, however, we can only come to such a notion in so far as the reflection we make on our own powers provides us with this notion.

Maine de Biran admits that there is a sense, though, in which we can actually conceive of the idea of the infinite or God present in our soul before conceiving the idea of the finite or the self. This is so when we conceive of the virtual ideas that direct and determine us, without clearly and distinctly knowing them. In this case we have a vague idea, which according to Maine de Biran is connected with doubt and desire. When we doubt, we have a vague desire and make some effort to find truth. We have then, within ourselves, the idea of some kind of need; something that we lack, namely, a confused yet determined idea of a truth. However, he thinks

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<sup>307</sup> *Notes sur les Méditations de Descartes* [1813 ?], CM17, MB XI-1, 91.

that this vague and instinctive feeling should not be called an 'idea'. We could understand these last remarks as a criticism of a very important element of the Cartesian system, the clear and distinct idea of God,<sup>308</sup> which is deduced from this vague feeling.

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<sup>308</sup> Cf. *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 46-47; *Med.* III (F) AT IX-1, 36 ; CSM II, 31-32

## 8 DESCARTES BETWEEN EMPIRE AND RESTORATION: ROYER-COLLARD

Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845) was the most important inspirational force for Cousin, who thanked him for rehabilitating Descartes, as we will see in the next chapter. However, Royer-Collard actually preferred Bacon's method and regretted that it had not been adopted by Descartes. Another interesting feature of his philosophical activities is that he introduced the Scottish School to France, especially the philosophy of Thomas Reid. Due to his political activities he suspended his dialogue with the Scots, leaving this to his pupil Cousin. His philosophical position can be briefly described as being opposed to the sensationalism of Condillac.

Although he did not produce any substantial philosophical works, he has left us his inaugural lecture *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie, le 4 décembre 1811*. The date is especially memorable, as the day was filled with preparations for war, being the eve of the largest invasion of the modern world, prior to the world wars. In respect of the text, it might be argued that it was so influential that it represents French academic philosophy in the nineteenth century.

### 8.1 Royer-Collard's discourse of 4 December 1811

In this discourse Royer-Collard outlined his philosophical position, discussing what philosophy was and what it should do. His point of departure was a radical distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal domains. Situated between these two domains was the faculty of imagination which was found to have the audacious tendency to exceed the limits of both, without being able to accomplish this. However, the status Royer-Collard attributed to imagination becomes less clear when he says that there are no intermediary links between mind (*esprit*) and matter. Nevertheless, he remarked:

Cependant il n'y a point de véritable analogie entre les lois de la pensée et celles de la matière; les similitudes que l'imagination se plaît à créer charment l'esprit dans les ouvrages du poète et de l'orateur; mais, transportées dans la langue philosophique, elles y sont une continuelle erreur.<sup>309</sup>

Royer-Collard defines philosophy as the research into the laws that govern the succession of phenomena in both the moral and physical order. He finds that it is a natural impulse of the human mind to interpret the events it observes. The proper way of doing this, he continues, is by establishing the causes of events. In making this judgement, reason uses two principles: causality and induction. This brings us to his view of Bacon, whose greatness, he thought, along with Newton's, consisted in introducing the maxim of 'bon sens' into philosophy. This notion is equivalent to the concept of induction.

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<sup>309</sup> Disc. 1811, in Royer-Collard, *Les fragments philosophiques*, p. 7.

Les faits seuls expliquent les faits: assigner la cause d'un fait, ou d'une classe entière de faits semblables, c'est donc indiquer le fait, qui les précède constamment et dont ils dépendent. Celui-ci se résout à son tour dans un fait plus général encore, et l'interprétation n'est épuisée que quand elle a rencontré le fait primitif et insoluble, qui est une loi de la nature et la limite de notre analyse.<sup>310</sup>

Royer-Collard goes further, however, and claims that in the chain of causes there is a 'first cause' which is free from necessity and acts only through the free decisions of its sovereign will. He explains that this first cause is the sole reason of all things, because it is effective by itself. Although the phenomena of thinking and the physical world are entirely distinct, it is through a unitary reason that the same principles govern natural philosophy and the philosophy of mind.

Notwithstanding the use of the same principles, Royer-Collard is forced to conclude that the methods derived from them gave natural philosophy a certain foundation and enriched it with many discoveries, whereas the philosophy of mind was left in such a state of imperfection that one could even doubt its scientific status. He explained the inequality of the two, firstly, by saying that the strict procedures of philosophical investigation were not adequately observed in the study of intellectual phenomena. Secondly, he found that the method of induction, when applied to the mind, had as yet no fixed rules. The most important reason, however, is that the study of intellectual phenomena is full of obscurities and difficulties from which natural philosophy is exempt.

Unlike the determined and isolated objects studied in physics, the domain of the mind is immense. Also, as human beings are morally and socially active, the mind becomes even harder to analyse. Another complication observed by Royer-Collard is that the constitution of human beings cannot be separated from the faculties which are distinguished by the various philosophical methods. He concludes that the activities of our faculties multiply and complicate intellectual phenomena to an infinite degree, yet we are required to understand them all. The instrument required to grasp the principles hidden in the infinity of these phenomena is reflection. To Royer-Collard, the use of this instrument is not straightforward, he even claims that the use of reflection is an act of violence against nature and our most inveterate habits.

La réflexion est l'art de distribuer les forces de l'esprit de telle sorte qu'il agisse et soit en même temps spectateur de son action; elle divise l'attention sans l'affaiblir et lui imprime à la fois des directions qui semblent contraires.<sup>311</sup>

It is obvious that Royer-Collard thought that the mysteries of thinking were more difficult to penetrate than those of nature. One, perhaps impossible, obstacle for the philosopher to overcome was found to be the falsehood inherent in language. He considers that thought occurs as words, and that humanity began the development of thinking by applying names to the objects external to the mind. Gradually, reflection developed as human beings began to ask questions of themselves.

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

However, as reflection is weak and uncertain, it searches for analogous characteristics in objects outside itself and uses these to explain the mind. In so doing, it borrows its laws from the material world and its words from common language. As a result, the language of philosophy is completely figurative and the terms philosophy uses retain the traces of their origin. The point is, however, that there is no real analogy between the laws of thinking and those of matter. The attempts by the imagination to create similitudes may very well be charming to a poetic mind, but their use in philosophy has led to error and absurdity.

The goal of every philosophical system, Royer-Collard states, is to discover the intellectual causes, which he also calls the primitive facts, that are the laws of the mind. His opinion is that a system is exact when these causes are indubitable facts which also contain the synthetic explication of more complicated phenomena. The system remains exact, but is incomplete, when it derives these causes. For Royer-Collard, when the existence of the causes is not demonstrated or when they do not determine all the effects that are ascribed to them, a system is inadmissible.

Royer-Collard criticizes ancient and modern philosophy from this point of view. He finds that ancient philosophy was wrong to seek the causes for mental events in material analogies. By so doing it filled intelligence with chimera. Although modern philosophy, since Descartes, had more exact methods and based most of its systems on certain facts, Royer-Collard thought its plan of reducing the complexity of human beings to a single, unique fact was far too ambitious. To achieve this reduction, modern philosophy had to exaggerate the power of the causes and limit the rigor of its explication of phenomena that are beyond reach. Notwithstanding this criticism, Royer-Collard praises Descartes, as the following quote illustrates.

Il suffit sans doute à la gloire de la nation française qu'on ait pu dire avec vérité que toute la philosophie n'est que l'esprit de Descartes. En effet, cet esprit devant lequel ont fui les ténèbres du péripatétisme, devant lequel est tombée la toute-puissance des mots, qui a soumis à jamais l'autorité à la raison, fut une création bien plus importante que ne peut l'être aucune théorie particulière.

La révolution qu'il a opérée, et qui ne périra point, est peut-être le service le plus éminent qui ait été rendu à l'esprit humain. Descartes a renouvelé tous les principes de la philosophie; il en a banni sans retour le raisonnement analogique des anciens; il a séparé pour la première fois les phénomènes intellectuels des phénomènes sensibles.<sup>312</sup>

It is mysterious that Royer-Collard claims that every philosophy is merely a development of the spirit of Descartes, while at the same time he apparently propagates a common sense philosophy. It is plausible, however, to place these somewhat patriotic remarks in the light of his political position and assume that he was trying to advance the reputation of his country. In the next chapter, where we shall deal with Cousin, we will pay special attention to the role patriotism played in the revaluation of Descartes in France.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid., p. 8.



Although France may well be proud of Descartes, Royer-Collard regrets that Descartes did not realize that the true instrument of discovery had already been found by Bacon. Instead of gradually ascending to the causes through the patient observation of effects, Descartes tried to seize knowledge of causes through thinking alone. According to Royer-Collard, he assessed the course of supreme wisdom with the concepts of human reason. He finds it problematic that Descartes simply supposed that in both the intellectual world and in the sensorial world one single cause could provide the explanation for the whole series of phenomena.

Although Royer-Collard thought that the Cartesian attempt to raise the entire edifice of science onto the unique basis of pure thinking had failed, he did not automatically agree with sensualism. He thought that the French disciples of Locke, who he thought had initially imitated Descartes but had later diverged from him, were wrong as well. Following the Cartesian example, which proposes to extract all phenomena of thinking from one single fact, they also did not ascend to this fact by analysis, but descended from it by synthesis. The problem, for Royer-Collard, is that they assumed an image of humanity instead of developing one through analysis. In short, for Royer-Collard, sensation is not adequate to explain every region of intelligence and sentiment. Although sensation precedes the exercise of faculties, this does not mean that the faculties are any less original or that they are not endowed with their own energy. Sensation by itself does not sense, perceive or judge, nor can morals be based entirely on sensation.

Royer-Collard reproached sensualists for having ruled out reason. He thought that hypothesising was not a philosophical method, as beings are self-identical and should not be the product of imagination. The unity which is given to all beings by divine wisdom can only be discovered by analysis.<sup>313</sup> He proposes that we should study the mind according Bacon's plan which suggests that the mind contains two distinct parts: the facts, and induction, which generalizes these facts. In the history of philosophy, the facts are doctrines and it is to these doctrines themselves that we need to apply induction to assess their worth. It is in this light that we should read his following remark on the historiography of philosophy.

Les travaux d'un Brucker, d'un Tiedemann, d'un Buhle, méritent beaucoup de reconnaissance; ils ont répandu une vive lumière sur les ténèbres de l'antiquité et du moyen-âge; mais ils ne nous dispensent pas de nous y engager nous-mêmes et de reconnaître les signaux que ces savants hommes y ont élevés. – Où finit la critique philosophique, l'analyse commence.<sup>314</sup>

Royer-Collard tried to explain the history of humanity on the basis of the development of reason: 'le sens commun, la raison, instruite par l'expérience'. The sciences, the arts, the methods, and all truths necessary for the happiness of humanity are a result of the legitimate exercise of the faculties. In order to establish the results of the history of philosophy he proposes to approach and compare the systems of philosophy analogously. Therefore he pleads for a historiographical

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<sup>313</sup> It is not surprising that under Royer-Collard's supervision Cousin wrote his thesis entitled *De methodo sive analysi* (1813).

<sup>314</sup> Disc. 1811, p. 11.

method that founds the order of the systems on the division of the faculties of the mind. According to Royer-Collard, it would save us much repetition and lengthy discourse if the exposition of all types of systems was enlightened by a concise theory of the faculty to which it belonged. As such, the history of philosophy would be a philosophy in itself, in which historical analysis plays an important role.<sup>315</sup>

## 8.2 Innate ideas in Royer-Collard's common sense philosophy

In his *Fragments historiques*,<sup>316</sup> Royer-Collard gave an exposition of the theory of ideas in the light of his claim that modern philosophy is sceptical about the existence of the external world. The issue of innate ideas arises within this theory of ideas. However, to avoid any misconception, it should be mentioned beforehand that Royer-Collard did not think that there are ideas in the sense held by Locke and Descartes at all, let alone that there were innate ideas. In the following we will explain why he thought that this was the case.

To Royer-Collard, most philosophers have made two errors. Firstly, they invented entities which were supposed to represent bodies and called them 'ideas'. Secondly, they reduced all cognitive and perceptive faculties to consciousness. In the following, we will concentrate on what he considered to be Descartes's contribution to these errors, but firstly we will focus on his explanation of why so many philosophers attacked the universal belief in the external world.

Royer-Collard defined sensation as a change of state entailing an inner modification, and perception as the knowledge of an external object. Starting from a strict distinction between sensation and perception, Royer-Collard criticized what he calls the 'hypothesis of ideas' which according to him was a result of the human mind's pretension to explain everything. He reproached philosophers who made a habit of transposing the laws of physics into the intellectual world. When a certain perception follows a certain sensation, we should not assume a causal connection between them. For Royer-Collard, there is only a relation of succession.

Nous percevons les objets, parce que nous avons reçu la faculté de percevoir, non parce qu'ils agissent sur nos organes. Nous ne percevons rien qui n'agisse sur nos organes, parce que notre faculté de percevoir est limité par certaines lois adaptés au rang que nous occupons dans l'univers. La perception est donc un mystère qui suffirait pour nous convaincre que l'homme se connaît bien peu lui-même, et que la nature de sa constitution intellectuelle lui est impénétrable.<sup>317</sup>

According to Royer-Collard there is no necessary connection between the impressions resulting from perception that we obtain from external objects, and knowledge of these objects. In other words, there is no necessary connection between matter and movement on the one hand and thinking on the other. He considered that all theories of perception rely on the assumption that a fact has

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<sup>315</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>316</sup> In Royer-Collard, *Les Fragments philosophiques*, p. 195 ff.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

been accounted for when it is subsumed under a law of impulse. Furthermore, philosophers had always seen the transfer of motion by impact as the only phenomenon which needed no explanation. Royer-Collard, on the other hand, thought that if we attempt to subsume an impression under a perception, we must deal with the contact between the mind and the object in order to prove that in the perception, the object makes an impression on the mind. The problem philosophers now faced was to establish whether the mind finds the object or the object finds the mind.

Comment donc le contact s'opérera-t-il? A défaut d'un contact immédiat, qui eût produit la connaissance immédiate, on se contentera d'un contact médiat, qui ne produira qu'une connaissance médiante. La communication entre l'esprit et l'objet se fera par une image, une représentation, une espèce, une forme, une idée: tous ces termes sont synonymes. Il émane donc, à chaque instant, de tous les objets, des images qui arrivent jusqu'à l'esprit et qui mettent en contact, sinon avec l'objet lui-même, du moins avec quelque chose qui lui ressemble. C'est la théorie des espèces sensibles, inventée dans la philosophie ancienne, perfectionnée par les scolastiques et conservée en grande partie par les philosophes modernes; c'est, en un mot, l'origine de l'hypothèse des idées.<sup>318</sup>

For modern philosophers, a theory of the emanation of ideas was inadmissible, but at the same time they had to account for the resemblance between the object and the idea. Their solution was to suppose that either impressions produced by the brain are themselves images of the object or that impressions are formed in the mind from these images. This means that ideas are either in the brain or in the mind. However, in Royer-Collard's opinion, the philosophical systems of Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke and Condillac had not succeeded in refuting the theory of the emanation of ideas.

C'est qu'il est extrêmement difficile de séparer la *présence des images dans l'esprit*, de l'*introduction des images par le canal des sens*. La philosophie ancienne en faisait une seule et même hypothèse; mais la philosophie moderne ayant maintenu la présence des images dans l'esprit, en même temps qu'elle combattait l'émission et l'introduction des espèces par les sens, il est résulté de cette mutilation de l'hypothèse péripatéticienne que la partie conservée et la partie séparée se rapellent sans cesse et font effort pour se rejoindre.<sup>319</sup>

Royer-Collard found the term 'idea', in philosophical language, to be a pure hypothesis because it refers to an object represented in the mind or brain by some sort of image which is the only object that the mind contemplates. In his opinion, 'idea' taken in this sense, has no more authority for science than poetry has, because it is not given in any observation, but is arrived at by reasoning: 'elle n'est pas une vérité de fait, mais une vérité de déduction'. The philosophical hypothesis of ideas also consists in an assessment of their representative quality. Royer-

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<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid., p. 204.

Collard therefore makes the very strong demand that ideas are to be understood as images which perfectly resemble the things that they represent.

Il faut donc, pour sauver l'hypothèse, rejeter les raffinements par lesquels Malebranche a spiritualisé les idées, et si on veut les maintenir dans l'emploi qui leur a été assigné et pour lequel seules elles ont été créées, il faut leur restituer la nature corporelle que Descartes leur avait attribuée, *opus est species sit verum corpus*, et les concevoir à l'exemple de Locke et de tant d'autres, comme des traces ou des impressions dans le cerveau.<sup>320</sup>

Royer-Collard noticed that there were three underlying suppositions concerning ideas which are highly questionable: firstly, that the mind is in the brain; secondly, that images of all sensory objects are formed in the brain; and thirdly, that the mind perceives them there immediately, and only through them perceives the objects that they represent.

Concerning the first supposition, Royer-Collard did not see how it could serve as a basis for a system. To claim that the mind has a place in the brain raises more problems than it solves. To the second supposition, he objected that it is impossible to prove that there are images of sensory objects in the brain, let alone how they are produced. What would an image of warmth or cold look like? The third supposition, that the mind only perceives images of objects in the brain and never the objects themselves, Royer-Collard found to be as questionable as the existence of images. The objects of our perceptions cannot be in the brain but must be outside us, otherwise our faculties would be deceiving us. According to him, we do not perceive images in the brain, we do not even perceive the brain. In fact, we would not even know that we had a brain, if we had not been taught this by anatomy.

Royer-Collard concluded that the assumptions concerning the nature of ideas originated in the belief that the object has to be present to the mind in order for it to be perceived. The means of confronting the mind with the object, namely by comparing it with an image, originates in the sense of vision.

Si le genre humain était aveugle-né, sa condition dans l'univers serait bien au-dessous de ce qu'elle est: mais sa métaphysique serait bien plus saine. Effacez des livres des philosophes toutes les métaphores empruntées des phénomènes de la vision, vous changerez la face de la philosophie moderne.<sup>321</sup>

The question of innate ideas, Royer-Collard thought, is thereby also solved. There are no ideas in the sense that Locke and Descartes had taken there to be, so there are no innate ideas. The entire enterprise of the origin of ideas can be reduced to the search for the events that give rise to the simple notions by which the nature of all our thoughts can be determined. The result of these investigations will decide whether or not all notions are derived from the exercise of the senses. However, observation is the only guide that can be followed in this research.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

Unfortunately Royer-Collard did not propose an answer or a solution to the problem, he merely wanted to point to the obstacles facing the development of these hypotheses. He claimed that the philosophical notion of ideas leads to scepticism and thought that the history of philosophy supported this claim. The philosophy of mind is a science of facts. If we introduced some arbitrary hypothesis as Descartes, Malebranche, Locke and Berkeley had done, instead of observing the facts, we can only be led into error and contradiction.

Although it is questionable whether we can actually speak of a revaluation or rehabilitation of Descartes in the thought of Royer-Collard, it was Cousin who expressly claimed this. In the following chapter we shall try to determine why Cousin thought Descartes should be rehabilitated.

9 *POUR DIEU ET LA PATRIE:*  
COUSIN'S APPROPRIATION OF DESCARTES

This final section shows how and why Descartes was reinstated, re-evaluated or, perhaps, appropriated in Victor Cousin's history of philosophy. There are philosophical, political and patriotic reasons why Cousin rehabilitated Descartes.

Cousin named Descartes the father of modern philosophy because he had found that reflection was the only instrument of philosophy. Cousin rejected sensualism and, within his eclectic philosophy, found a psychological foundation of philosophy in Descartes's reflective method, based in the *cogito*. As eclecticism is based on a profound knowledge of the history of philosophy, Cousin's philosophy can be said to be as historiographical as it is systematical. He uses eclecticism as an instrument to extract the useful aspects of philosophical systems, for example, a theory of self-consciousness.

As to political theory, Descartes is regarded as the father of constitutional monarchy, the system which formed the basis of Cousin's own political conviction. Descartes was seen to be a sensible, safe political guide, who, according to Cousin, did not rebel against authority, but recognized the evident necessity of religion and state. Descartes, he said, submitted to these authorities within the limits of reason, a basis for political action which separates modern time from the Middle Ages. For Cousin this has led 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté, constitutionnelle' as far from servility as it has led the mind to subordination.<sup>322</sup> Again he uses eclecticism, but in this case to join philosophy with politics.

Finally, Cousin stresses Descartes's 'profoundly French' character. Possibly as a result of mixing philosophy with politics, Cousin establishes patriotic reasons for reinstating Descartes into French philosophy. His anti-sensualism combined with what he learned from Hegel's concept of objective reason, stole the ultramontanist's thunder.<sup>323</sup> France was in need of a national hero and Cousin presented it with Descartes, in an attempt to give French philosophy a sound historical basis. Although Cousin did not consider his view of Descartes to be patriotic,<sup>324</sup> we will show that this really was the case.

### 9.1 Cousin's position in his early work

Although in his first philosophical period Cousin was, curiously enough, completely in line with Condillac,<sup>325</sup> he later became a fervent enemy of sensualism. In his later work, he called it a 'déplorable philosophie' and said that he had often pointed out the root of the 'maux de la patrie'.<sup>326</sup> We will now briefly outline his initial position.

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<sup>322</sup> Cf. *Hist. gén.*, p. 373.

<sup>323</sup> Cf. Windelband, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1935), p. 549.

<sup>324</sup> Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* [1853], p. 2.

<sup>325</sup> His thesis in Latin, *De Methodo sive de Analyti* [1813] is proof of this. In his opening discourse of December 7, 1815, he wanted to show that Condillac was on the same path as Descartes but had gone further; see Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 10.

<sup>326</sup> See Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. ix.

By the time of his *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne* which he delivered on December 7, 1815, Cousin was barely twenty-four years old. Because it was not possible to have a thorough understanding of all the philosophical systems in the history of philosophy, he proposed to focus on just one question. The most important question, which Cousin thought had divided philosophers and contributed to the formation of different schools, was the question of external perception. It concerns the knowledge that we have, or think we have, of the existence of a world outside consciousness.

Cousin agreed with Royer-Collard that the question of whether we can legitimately believe that there is an external world had occupied modern philosophy since the seventeenth century. In this context he found that modern philosophy, as 'fille de Descartes et mère de Hume', did not believe, or did not have the right to believe, in the existence of an external world.<sup>327</sup> Although this means that he finds that Descartes qualifies as the father of modern philosophy, the context in which he claims this is not very flattering to Descartes. According to Cousin, there is an 'extravagance' to his thought which stems from the pretension to explain everything, which is pushed to the point of madness. In his opinion, this extremity is reached when everything is considered to be explainable using one single principle, namely that of consciousness.

C'est Descartes qui imprima à la philosophie moderne ce caractère systématique et audacieux, et qui la jeta d'abord dans une direction sceptique, en attribuant à la conscience l'autorité suprême.<sup>328</sup>

Clearly, Cousin did not rehabilitate Descartes into French philosophy at all at the beginning of his teaching, as he later claimed.<sup>329</sup> In fact, he even stated that Descartes had given philosophy a sceptical direction and as with Royer-Collard, Cousin considered scepticism to be one of the gravest dangers for philosophy. Unlike Royer-Collard, however, Cousin thought that Descartes had prepared the way for Hume.

In his early years Cousin preferred Condillac to Descartes. Condillac, he thought, in going further along the path that Descartes had chosen, had simplified the Cartesian system. Descartes needed consciousness, aided by reason, in order to define humanity. In other words, he needed to discover both an elemental aspect and an instrumental aspect of human beings. Cousin thought that this detracted from the unity of humanity, and it is for this reason that he favoured Condillac, who he considered to have discovered a more perfect unity by combining the elemental and the instrumental into one single principle.

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<sup>327</sup> Another example of an early father metaphor, though generically deduced.

<sup>328</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>329</sup> In the last footnote to his lesson 'Vrai sens de l'enthymème cartésien', which was added in the second or third edition, Cousin proudly claims that from the beginning of his teaching he had not rehabilitated the entire system of Descartes, but its principle alone, which was underestimated by both adherents and adversaries. This is not true, as is shown in his opening discourse. In retrospect, he lessens the claims about the discourse by saying that he developed and clarified these first views in 1819 and 1820 and made a new and complete edition of 'ce père de la vraie philosophie française' in 1824.

La sensation de Condillac comprend dans son vaste sein tous les faits intellectuels, toutes les connaissances de l'homme, même toutes ses facultés, parmi lesquelles se trouvent et la réflexion de Locke et le raisonnement de Descartes. Elle est à la fois le fondement de l'édifice, l'édifice et l'architecte; elle se fournit à elle-même les matériaux qu'elle doit mettre en œuvre; elle a la merveilleuse propriété de s'apercevoir, de se prêter une attention sérieuse pour se comparer avec elle-même, et déduire, toujours d'elle-même, en raisonnant avec justesse et sagacité, toutes les vérités dont elle a été douée, et entre autres celle de l'existence du monde.<sup>330</sup>

In order to cover over this discrepancy in the account of his early views, Cousin added a footnote in his later texts which said that these views on Descartes had been borrowed from Reid and Royer-Collard and that he had abandoned them with disapproval in the same year.<sup>331</sup>

Cousin's problem with Malebranche, Berkeley, and Hume, all of whom he labelled followers of Descartes, was that they considered consciousness to be passive. In Cousin's opinion, they proved consciousness to be a witness and not a judge, and that sensation was nothing but an inner modification. Consequently, he held that the 'sensed' universe and consciousness are phantasm.

Oui, Messieurs, si Descartes a posé le vrai principe, les conséquences de Hume, de Berkeley et de Malebranche sont irrésistibles; si la conscience ou la sensation, aidée du raisonnement, peut seule se donner le monde, il y faut renoncer et en désespérer à jamais; nous sommes condamnés sans retour à l'égoïsme le plus absolu.<sup>332</sup>

From the fact that neither consciousness nor reasoning can account for external reality, it does not follow that belief in the external world is undermined. According to Cousin we merely have to appeal to a different principle, namely one that constitutes human nature. This principle is perception. Cousin rejected materialism and spiritualism, because he thought neither of them dealt adequately with perception. According to him, the representative qualities of the material idea and the spiritual idea are chimera. If we want an idea, either spiritual or material, to represent a body along with its qualities, we would first have to know this body in order to judge that the idea of it represented it faithfully. Cousin seems to agree with the criticism Royer-Collard made on what he called the 'hypothesis of the idea'. The solution Cousin proposes is to turn the theory of ideas around so that it reveals the world, and in this, supports perception instead of destroying it. The philosopher who Cousin thought had undermined the prestige of 'illusory representation', and destroyed the hypothesis of the idea, was Reid. By doing so, Reid had rendered an enormous service to science:

Reid est le premier qui ait dégagé la perception de la sensation qui l'enveloppe, et qui l'ait placée au rang de nos facultés primitives. Le

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<sup>330</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 11.

<sup>331</sup> The footnote dates from 1855 and it is doubtful that Cousin could have judged his early work objectively, that is, without seeing it in the light of his 'developed' philosophy.

<sup>332</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 12.



règne de Descartes finit à Reid; je dis son règne, non sa gloire, qui est immortelle. Reid commence une ère nouvelle; il est le père de cette école célèbre, qui, libre du joug de tout système, ne reconnaît et ne suit d'autres lois que celles du sens commun et de l'expérience, où la sévérité des méthodes, le génie de l'observation intellectuelle, l'élévation des principes et des caractères, semblent héréditaires depuis Hutcheson, Smith et Reid, qui se présentent les premiers, suivis de Beattie et de Ferguson, jusqu'au métaphysicien illustre qui soutient aujourd'hui si dignement la haute réputation de leurs talents et de leurs doctrines, M. Dugald Stewart.<sup>333</sup>

Cousin proved to be a loyal follower of the Scottish common sense philosophy which Royer-Collard had introduced into France. As he found it pointless to discuss the ideas of space, time, substance, and cause, he put them aside. Instead, he tried to outline these ideas on the basis of perception. The idea of space, he explained, is based on the perception of extension given by the sense of touch. Although, as such, it is limited and contingent, Cousin claims that it is impossible not to conceive of an immense extension in which all objects which the senses perceive and imagination gives form to are situated. Content with the notion of space thus formed, Cousin claims furthermore that perception assures us that objects exist in the moment in which they are being considered. Furthermore, it is entirely unproblematic for Cousin to suppose 'avec la plus grande assurance' that they exist before and after we consider them. He even claimed that we conceive of an unlimited extension, and within this, we conceive of a limited one, and applied the same arguments to duration.

Cousin explained that we obtain the notion of the self because the senses 'suggest' the notion of a subject or substance, although they merely seize the

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 15. In *Philosophie écossaise* [1840] Cousin discussed the distinction between the inductive method and the reflective method. He brings to our attention that, in his discussion of the reflective method, Reid did not quote much from Bacon and Newton, but instead invoked the name of Descartes who was almost forgotten. According to Reid, Descartes was the founder of the reflective method and in this light he called him the father of the new philosophy. Cousin praised Reid for being so courageous in the middle of the eighteenth century. Cf. Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* [1764] p. 225: 'It does not appear that the notions of the ancient philosophers, with regard to the nature of the soul, were much more refined than those of the vulgar, or that they were formed in any other way. We shall distinguish the philosophy that regards our subject into the old and the new. The old reached down to Des Cartes, who gave it a fatal blow, of which it has been gradually expiring ever since, and is now almost extinct. Des Cartes is the father of the new philosophy that relates to this subject; but it hath been gradually improving since his time, upon the principles laid down by him. The old philosophy seems to have been purely analogical: the new is more derived from reflection, but still with a very considerable mixture of the old analogical notions'. Although in Cousin's opinion Reid exaggerated when he said that ancient philosophers only knew the way of analogy and that modern philosophy was the first to enter the way of reflection, he appreciates Reid's characterization of Descartes. In *Philosophie écossaise*, p. 305-306 it reads: 'Il ne se contente pas de célébrer notre immortel compatriote comme ayant brisé l'autorité en philosophie, mais comme ayant véritablement émancipé l'esprit humain en l'arrachant au joug des apparences, des faux-semblants, des analogies péripatéticiennes et scholastiques, qui, en offusquant le caractère propre de ses opérations, l'empêchaient de parvenir à la vraie connaissance lui-même; il rapporte à Descartes l'honneur d'avoir le premier démontré que nous avons de l'esprit, par la perception de ses opérations, une connaissance plus certaine et plus immédiate que nous n'en avons des objets extérieurs par le secours de nos organes et de nos sens'.

variable modifications of bodies, or objects. In a similar manner, Cousin explained how we gain the notion of cause: although the senses only show objects to be adjacent and successive, we judge that they interact and act upon us and therefore we ascribe to them the role of being the causes of most of the effects that we experience.

Je les conçois doués de certaines forces actives, qui produisent tous les changements qui arrivent dans l'univers, qui renouvellent et animent la nature entière. Quand l'expérience et la réflexion m'apprennent qu'elles ne sont point inhérentes aux corps, l'application change, le principe demeure, et je ne les ôte à tous les corps particuliers que pour les transporter à un être suprême, principe de toute force, de tout mouvement, de toute existence. Telle est la puissance de principe de causalité: il élève l'homme jusqu'à l'Être des êtres.<sup>334</sup>

Because we already have the notions of substance, cause, and duration before we attribute them to something, Cousin concludes that we obtain these notions from ourselves and subsequently apply them to external objects. This may seem quite plausible, but the next step is quite obscure. Cousin says that we apply these notions to external objects by means of an induction that does not draw the existence of duration and external causes from our duration, but which moves from internal to external without the intervention of reasoning. Cousin is hardly intelligible at this point, something that he blames on the constraints of his discourse.

Although Cousin maintained that one should not pretend to have the capacity to reveal the nature of extension, space, time, substance and cause, he is in some way sure that there are traces of these concepts in the mind. On this point Cousin criticizes the philosophy of sensation, because it cannot explain the concepts that are in the mind. He even thought that sensationalism destroyed the possibility of all physical and moral realities. He suggests that if man's faculties are reduced to sensations, then the only principle left to guide human existence is to avoid pain and seek pleasure. In that case, reason can at best provide advice concerning prudence, because it is unable to construct ethical rules on the basis of sensationalist principles.

At this point, Cousin almost desperately implores his audience:

C'est à ceux de vous dont l'âge se rapproche du mien [24] que j'ose m'adresser en ce moment; à vous, qui formerez la génération qui s'avance; à vous, l'unique soutien, la dernière espérance de notre cher et malheureux pays. Messieurs, vous aimez ardemment la patrie; si vous voulez la sauver, embrassez nos belles doctrines. Assez longtemps nous avons poursuivi la liberté à travers les voies de la servitude. Nous voulions être libres avec la morale des esclaves. Non, la statue de la liberté n'a point l'intérêt pour base, et ce n'est pas à la philosophie de la sensation et à ses petites maximes qu'il appartient de faire les grands peuples. Soutenons la liberté française encore mal assurée, et chancelante au milieu des tombeaux et des débris qui nous environnent, par une morale qui l'affermisse à jamais; et cette morale, demandons-la à

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<sup>334</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, pp. 18-19.

cette philosophie généreuse, si honorable à l'humanité, qui, professant les plus nobles maximes, les trouve dans notre propre nature, qui nous appelle à l'honneur par la voix du simple bon sens, qui ne redoute pour la vertu que les hypothèses, et qui, pour élever l'homme, ne veut que l'empêcher de cesser d'être lui-même.<sup>335</sup>

The conclusion of Cousin's opening discourse states that we should begin philosophy with the question of the nature of external perception. After some research, however, Cousin realized that this could not be the first question of philosophy. As a result, he changed the question to that of the self or personal existence.

This preliminary overview of Cousin reveals something of a philosophical opportunist with patriotic tendencies. His apparent need for a French father of modern philosophy led him initially to Condillac. However, when Condillac did not suit the cause anymore, due to Cousin's rejection of sensualism, the only Frenchman left was Descartes. We will return to the part that patriotism plays in Cousin's rehabilitation of Descartes in Section 11.4.

## 9.2 Reflection and spontaneity: encounters with German Idealists

It must have been between the time of his opening discourse and the beginning of his actual lectures that Cousin rediscovered Descartes. As he decided that the issue of personal existence should be first in the curriculum, he saw an occasion to discuss the 'true sense' of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*. Through the work of Dugald Stewart he came across the claim that Descartes had not meant to establish any logical connection between thinking and existence when he expressed his famous enthymeme. However, it was Royer-Collard who first encouraged Cousin to continue the alliance with the Scottish School, thus leading him to Dugald Stewart. So it was quite indirectly, if not coincidentally, that Cousin began his studies of Descartes's famous statement. Dugald Stewart comments on the *cogito* in his *Philosophical Essays* (1810):

. . . the celebrated enthymeme of Descartes, *Cogito, ergo sum*, does not deserve *all* the ridicule bestowed on it by those writers who have represented the author as attempting to demonstrate his own existence by a process of reasoning. To me it seems more probable, that he meant chiefly to direct the attention of his readers to a circumstance which must be allowed to be not unworthy of notice in the history of the Human Mind; – the impossibility of our ever having learned the fact of our own existence, without some sensation being excited in the mind, to awaken the faculty of our thinking.<sup>336</sup>

Cousin did not pay attention to the qualification added by Stewart in a footnote, which stated that, after looking into the *Meditations* again, he doubted if he had not taken his apology for Descartes a little further than Descartes's own words would justify. In Dugald Stewart's work we find some elements of a defence of Descartes,

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>336</sup> Stewart, *Collected works*, vol. 5, (*Philosophical Essays*), pp. 58-59.

but they are too fragmented to make it possible to speak of a reinstatement of Descartes. We will therefore not go into Stewart's work beyond the above quoted defence of the Cartesian enthymeme.

Cousin had a number of reasons for claiming that *cogito, ergo sum* should not be taken as a syllogism. He considered that the intellectual process which reveals personal existence is not a process of reasoning, but one of the conceptions that, a century after Descartes, had made Reid and Kant famous through the introduction of the terms 'constitutive principles of the human mind' and 'categories of the understanding'.<sup>337</sup> In order to reinforce his argument, he quotes the Objections and Replies to the *Meditations*. In order to show how Cousin 'adapts' Descartes, we will compare his interpretation with the original texts. Cousin's first quote reads:

Je soutiens que cette proposition: je pense, donc j'existe, est une vérité particulière, qui s'introduit dans l'esprit sans le secours d'une autre plus générale, et indépendamment de toute déduction logique. Ce n'est pas un préjugé, mais une vérité naturelle, qui frappe d'abord et irrésistiblement l'intelligence.<sup>338</sup>

What Descartes said, precisely, was that *cogito, ergo sum* is not a preconceived opinion, when we put it forward with attention. When we examine it, it appears so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it. Furthermore, Descartes says, in order to discover truth we must always begin with particular notions in order to arrive at general ones. In the above, we can see that Cousin thus smuggles in the term 'vérité naturelle' to describe that which firstly and irresistibly strikes the intellect.<sup>339</sup>

The second passage that he 'quotes' – from the Reply to the Second Objection – shows that Cousin conveniently changes the Cartesian 'première notion' into a 'notion primitive', and the Cartesian 'inspection de l'esprit' (*inspectio mentis*) into 'intuition'. Cousin describes the third passage as follows:

Après avoir montré qu'elle ne peut être l'ouvrage du raisonnement, il ajoute qu'il ne faut pas non plus l'attribuer à la réflexion, mais à une opération antérieure à la réflexion, opération dont on peut bien renier des lèvres le résultat, mais sans pouvoir l'arracher de son entendement et de sa croyance.<sup>340</sup>

To be more precise, Descartes said that in order to know what thinking and existence are we do not need reflective knowledge (*science réfléchi/scientia reflexa*), or knowledge acquired by demonstration, and even less do we need knowledge of reflective knowledge by which one knows that one knows that one knows and so on *ad infinitum*, making it impossible to have any knowledge of this kind. It suffices, Descartes says, to know this by the inner awareness (*connaissance intérieure/cognitio interna*) that always precedes reflective knowledge.<sup>341</sup> Although

<sup>337</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 29.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>339</sup> Appendix to Fifth Objections and Replies, CSM II, 271; Lettre de Monsievr Des-Cartes à Monsievr C.L.R., AT IX-1, 206.

<sup>340</sup> Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 31.

<sup>341</sup> *Rep.* VI, AT IX-1, 225; CSM II, 285.

Cousin is close to the original text here, he distinguishes between reasoning and reflection, a distinction Descartes did not make. Also, it is here that the beginning of the important distinction that Cousin later makes between reflection and spontaneity is to be found, a distinction which forms the core of his criticism of Fichte, as we will see below.

According to Cousin, Descartes did not give an exposition of this 'interesting theory' in his *Meditations* because his goal was to provide philosophy with a scientific starting point based on an unshakable principle. This foundation is personal existence, or the existence of the soul. Cousin calls the certainty of personal existence 'primitive' as it is revealed to us in the relation between thinking and the thinking being.

To Cousin, Descartes does not logically deduce existence from thinking. Instead, the certainty of existence is contained in the certainty of thinking. The *Meditations* demonstrate with geometric rigor that the spirituality of the soul and the existence of God are indisputable truths, because they rely on our personal existence, the certainty of which is beyond all the efforts of scepticism to undermine it. Descartes did not intend to start a discussion on the way that we acquire knowledge of our own existence, because he only needed to show the certainty of personal existence, from which all his principles follow.

It is clear by now that, according to Cousin, the kind of knowledge involved in the Cartesian *cogito* 'argument' is not reflection. In his *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, we find this initial criticism of Descartes developed into a distinction between spontaneous knowledge and reflected knowledge. Cousin finds spontaneous knowledge, which precedes reflected knowledge, to be the work of nature. Reflected knowledge he considers to be artificial and, unlike spontaneous knowledge, not available to all.

La connaissance spontanée a été donnée à l'humanité tout entière; la réflexion appartient à quelques hommes, qui entreprennent de se rendre compte du savoir commun, et en rêvent un autre plus hasardeux mais plus relevé, qu'ils ne prétendent pas posséder, mais qu'ils aiment et qu'ils cherchent, et c'est pour cela qu'on les appelle philosophes.

Ainsi la philosophie n'est pas autre chose, comme tant de fois nous vous l'avons dit, que la réflexion travaillant sur la connaissance naturelle et poursuivant à travers les siècles un idéal qui s'agrandit sans cesse devant elle.<sup>342</sup>

Cousin compares the relation between reflection and consciousness with that between a microscope and sight: the former does not change the observed objects, it examines them more precisely. Cousin names analysis the 'instrument of reflection'. Reflection applies analysis to the mass of ideas that stem from all faculties, with the aim of creating new syntheses. The danger of reflection and its analysis, Cousin warns, is that the part is taken for the whole. This results in an incomplete psychology which in turn brings along a defective metaphysics

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<sup>342</sup> *Hist. gén.* p. 7.

occurring as particular and exclusive systems. This is a fatal danger, Cousin says, but it is almost impossible for reflection to avoid it.<sup>343</sup>

In Section 11.1, we shall see in more detail that J.G. Fichte was one of the first philosophers to take the Cartesian *cogito* seriously in the sense of a ‘Grundsatz’ in which the ‘I’ posits itself. Cousin criticized Fichte’s view of the self, because he thought that a self-positing ‘I’ ended up positing the world and even God. According to Cousin, the ‘I’ in Fichte’s system is posited as the primitive and permanent cause of everything. What he found even more problematic was that it posits the world as the simple negation of itself, and posits God as the ‘I’ taken in an absolute sense.

Le MOI absolu, voilà le dernier degré de tout subjectivité, le terme extrême et nécessaire du système de Kant, et en même temps sa réfutation. Le bon sens fait justice de cette conséquence extravagante; mais il appartient à la philosophie de détruire la conséquence dans son principe, et ce principe c’est la subjectivité et la personnalité de la raison. C’est là l’erreur radicale, erreur psychologique q’un psychologie sévère doit dissiper. Tout mon effort a donc été de démontrer que la personnalité, le MOI est éminemment l’activité volontaire et libre; que là est le vrai sujet, et que la raison est aussi distincte de ce sujet que la sensation et les impressions organiques.<sup>344</sup>

Cousin criticizes Fichte on precisely the point which Maine de Biran had praised him. According to Maine de Biran, Fichte showed that the first act which posits the self and constitutes science is voluntary or free and that we do not have to look for a principle other than the will, which is contained in the self. In a *Fragment* entitled *Du premier et du dernier fait de conscience ou de la spontanéité et de la réflexion*<sup>345</sup> we find Cousin’s opinion on this issue.

Cousin distinguishes between knowledge examined from the point of view of origin, which he also calls its ‘primitive character’, and knowledge examined from the point of view of its development, which he calls its ‘actual character’. As all primitive knowledge is spontaneous and all developed knowledge is reflected, it follows that primitive knowledge is positive, indistinct and obscure, while developed knowledge is negative, distinct and clear. For this reason something else has to be the starting point and basis of philosophy. If philosophy does not want to renounce itself, it has to start from reflection. If, on the other hand, philosophy wants to accomplish an understanding of everything, it has to assume a basis which is anterior to reflection and therefore necessarily obscure.

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<sup>343</sup> It is comparable with what Kant calls the unavoidable transcendental ‘Schein’ of reason, KrV B 354: ‘Die transzendente Dialektik wird also sich damit begnügen, den Schein transzendenter Urteile aufzudecken, und zugleich zu verhüten, daß er nicht betriege; daß er aber auch (wie der logische Schein) sogar verschwinde, und ein Schein zu sein aufhöre, das kann sie niemals bewerkstelligen. Denn wir haben es mit einer natürlichen und unvermeidlichen Illusion zu tun, die selbst auf subjektiven Grundsätzen beruht, und sie als objektive unterschreibt, anstatt daß die logische Dialektik in Auflösung der Trugschlüsse es nur mit einem Fehler, in Befolgung der Grundsätze, oder mit einem gekünstelten Scheine, in Nachahmung derselben, zu tun hat’.

<sup>344</sup> *Fragments philosophiques*, in Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 14.

<sup>345</sup> In Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol.2, pp. 118-121.

According to Cousin, the Fichtean principle in which the 'I' posits itself, cannot be the first act of consciousness, because the reflective moment is preceded by a spontaneous moment. He maintained that Fichte did not see that there were two moments in the development of the self (*moi*): the moment of reflection and the spontaneous moment. When Fichte claimed that the 'I' posits itself and posits the 'non-I', he dealt only with the reflected 'I'. In reflection, the 'I' takes possession of itself and can thus be said to be positing itself. As far as it opposes itself to the 'non-I', Cousin follows Fichte in claiming that it posits the 'non-I'. Cousin stresses that before the 'I' posits itself by an act of reflection, it first finds itself by a spontaneous act. The same can be said of the 'non-I': before the 'non-I' is posited through the struggle of the 'I' against itself, the 'I' first has to perceive the 'non-I' without positing it. This means that, although Fichte was right in observing this fact, it is not the first fact of consciousness.

Cousin claims that when we perceive a phenomenon, which is relative, variable, contingent and finite, at the same time we necessarily perceive its counterpart: the infinite, for example. The infinite, which he calls 'l'être par excellence' potentially contains the primitive duality of 'I' and 'non-I'. According to Cousin, reflection upon this duality somehow produces the unity of consciousness, which in turn becomes the unity of knowledge, which finally becomes the unity of proposition. Cousin states this simply and we can hardly make it more intelligible.

Cousin wants to take the so-called 'vue spontané' as his point of departure, but the difficulty is that if we try to grasp it, it escapes us because we reflect upon it and it is destroyed. In order to try to solve the problem, Cousin had to take some strange twists and turns, as the following quote shows:

Selon moi, on ne peut saisir le point de vue spontané qu'en le prenant pour ainsi dire sur le fait, sous le point de vue réflexif, à l'aurore de la réflexion, au moment presque indivisible où le primitif fait place à l'actuel, où la spontanéité expire dans la réflexion. Ne pouvant point le considérer à plein et tout à notre aise, il faut le saisir d'un coup d'œil rapide, et pour ainsi dire, de profil dans des actes de la vie ordinaire qui se redoublent naturellement dans la conscience et se laissent apercevoir sans qu'on cherche à les apercevoir. C'est cette conscience naturelle qu'il faut surprendre en soi et décrire fidèlement. Or je pense que la conscience primitive présente les mêmes éléments, les mêmes faits que la réflexion, avec cette seule différence que dans la seconde ils sont précis et distincts, et que dans la première ils sont obscurs et indéterminés.<sup>346</sup>

It is in this way that Cousin thinks primitive consciousness becomes aware of the self and non-self, without being able to tell what the two correlating phenomena are. Primitive consciousness does not seize the self and non-self in an opposition that necessarily limits them. To Cousin, it perceives them both in a natural limitation. As far as the Infinite Being is concerned, primitive consciousness does not display the act of reflected reason to us, which poses this Being as infinite,

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid.

absolute and necessary. However, it does display the spontaneous activity of reason which first perceives it through a pure and simple apperception without seeing its limits; dwelling in this mode without looking for or conceiving of anything beyond it.

Exactly how Cousin came across the distinction between spontaneous and reflected knowledge is not clear. According to Janet, this distinction, while already having been made by Aristotle in terms of act and potency, had escaped the attention of all modern schools.<sup>347</sup> The point of view of spontaneity is missing from the philosophy of Condillac and hardly appears in the philosophy of Descartes. However, Fichte also preferred the spontaneous over the reflected point of view and in the school of Schelling it was restored, and although Cousin had only a superficial knowledge of Schelling's system, he seemed to feel great affinity with it. On the other hand, his contact with Hegel was more intense, as we can show on the basis of their correspondence.<sup>348</sup>

As we said in the previous part when we introduced our characters, Cousin decided to visit Schelling in Heidelberg, but 'par hasard' he met Hegel instead. We find the following remark in his *Fragments philosophiques* concerning his encounter with Hegel:

Il avait publiés des livres qu'on avait peu lus; son enseignement commençait à peine à le faire connaître davantage. L'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques* paraissait en ce moment, et j'en eus un des premiers exemplaires. C'était un livre tout hérissé de formules d'une apparence assez scolastique, et écrit dans un langage très-peu lucide, surtout pour moi. Hegel ne savait pas beaucoup plus le français que je ne savais l'allemand, et, enfoncé dans ses études, mal sûr encore de lui-même et de sa renommée, il ne voyait presque personne, et, pour tout dire, il n'était pas d'une amabilité extrême. Je ne puis comprendre comment un jeune homme obscur parvint à l'intéresser; mais au bout d'une heure il fut à moi comme je fus à lui, et jusqu'au dernier moment notre amitié, plus d'une fois éprouvée, ne s'est pas démentie. Dès la première conversation, je le devinai, je compris toute sa portée, je me sentis en présence d'un homme supérieur; et quand d'Heidelberg je continuai ma course en Allemagne, je l'annonçai partout, je le prophétisai en quelque sorte; et à mon retour en France, je dis à mes amis: Messieurs, j'ai vu un homme de génie. L'impression que m'avait laissée Hegel était profonde, mais confuse. L'année suivante j'allai chercher à Munich l'auteur même du système [viz. Schelling]. On ne peut pas se moins ressembler que le disciple et le maître. Hegel laisse à peine tomber de rares et profondes paroles, quelque peu énigmatiques; sa diction forte, mais embarrassée, son visage immobile, son front couvert de nuages, semblent l'image de la pensée qui se développe; son langage est, comme son regard, plein d'éclat et de vie: il est naturellement éloquent. J'ai passé un mois entier avec lui et Jacobi à Munich, en 1818,

<sup>347</sup> Janet, *Victor Cousin et son œuvre* (1885), p. 85.

<sup>348</sup> See Hoffmeister (ed.), *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1977-1981); Espagne/Werner (eds.), *Lettres d'Allemagne. Victor Cousin et les hégéliens* (1990).



et c'est là que j'ai commencé à voir un peu plus clair dans la *philosophie de la nature*.<sup>349</sup>

Gotthard Oswald Marbach (1818-1890) reacted to Cousin's encounter with Hegel in 1835 (the preface above was first published in 1833), and as we will see, he was quite stunned. Marbach exclaims polemically that Cousin may well think that Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* is a book loaded with formulae, but his own philosophical thoughts fall apart in bon mots.

Cousin hat Hegel in Deutschland prophezeit, – noch dazu ohne ihn verstanden zu haben, wie er selbst sagt, – aber nachdem er doch in einer Stunde den ganzen Umfang seines Geistes begriffen! – was die Deutschen damals nicht konnten, welche doch Hegels Bücher vor Augen hatten und wenigstens hinsichtlich der Sprache Hegel näher standen, was noch jetzt viele Deutsche nicht können, nachdem Jahrzehnte jene Bücher vorliegen, nachdem Hegel ein berühmter Mann geworden – das kann der scharfblickende Franzose nach einer Stunde Unterhaltung in halbfranzösischer und halbdeutscher Sprache: den ganzen Umfang von Hegels Geiste begreifen. Wie mögen die deutschen Gelehrten damals erstaunt sein, als Cousin mit dem Evangelium durch Deutschland überall hin reiste und die französischen als er sie traf und sagte: Meine Herren, ich habe einen Mann von Genie gefunden.<sup>350</sup>

According to Marbach, many people are currently suffering from an egotistical self-love that is stunning in its audacity, and this especially applies to Cousin. After reading Cousin's *Fragments philosophiques*,<sup>351</sup> Marbach says he could not help feeling that it was a thorough product of vanity. However, it is not only Cousin's vanity that disturbed Marbach, what really concerned him was that Schelling had written the foreword to the second edition of the German translation of this work.<sup>352</sup> Marbach is amazed that a 'suchlike would-be philosophical text' is prefaced with an introduction recommending the work by someone like Schelling, even if, as Marbach claims, Schelling's praise for Cousin does not extend to the contents of the book at all.

Schelling praises Cousin because he was the first, after the Revolution, to have brought German literature and science to the attention of the French. According to Schelling, German philosophy had become quite isolated and therefore it was praiseworthy that Cousin attempted to make a connection between German and French philosophy. On the question of Cousin's own philosophy, Schelling firstly indicated that it consisted of two 'essentially different' parts.

Der erste hält sich ganz im Kreise der Psychologie und in so fern des Subjectiven, und findet im Bewußtseyn erst das Vermögen für jene allgemeinen Principien, mit deren Hülfe dann ein zweiter in's Objective

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<sup>349</sup> Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 20.

<sup>350</sup> Marbach, *Schelling, Hegel, Cousin und Krug. Erörterungen auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie* (1835), p. 22.

<sup>351</sup> The introduction of the *Fragments philosophiques* appeared in German under the title *Einleitung zu den philosophischen Fragmenten von V. Cousin*, in Carové (ed.), *Philosophie in Frankreich* (1827) pp. 59-148.

<sup>352</sup> Cousin, *Über französische und deutsche Philosophie* (1834).

fortschreitender und dogmatischer Theil die Existenz der äußeren Welt, unserer eignen Persönlichkeit und Gottes beweisen soll.<sup>353</sup>

Schelling remarks that although Cousin acknowledged that psychology is founded in ontology, he maintained that the means of discovering this is by starting from psychology. Cousin's claim that we cannot philosophize without experience is redundant in Schelling's opinion, Kant having already shown this in the first sentence of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Concerning the beginning of philosophy, Schelling briefly expounds his own theory of positive and negative philosophy, which we will not discuss here. Instead, we focus on what Schelling had to say about the transition of psychology to ontology, Cousin's eclecticism and the relation between French and German philosophy.

Concerning the transition of psychology to ontology in Cousin's work, Schelling pointed out that, in the transition from the passivity of sensibility to activity, the concept of cause is already involved. This has to do with Maine de Biran – an obvious influence on Cousin – who thought it was one of the most fertile concepts founding metaphysics. According to Maine de Biran the concept of cause is immediately given through the observation of our own activity. As we saw in our discussion of Maine de Biran above, the concept of cause is understood in a primitive fact, or an act of the will. According to Schelling, Cousin distinguishes himself from the sensualists in that he does not search for the source of ontological concepts in sensation, but posits it in reason. However:

Das bloße Nicht-abhängig-seyn der Vernunft von Sinnlichkeit und Persönlichkeit (damit glaubt Cousin Alles gewonnen) gibt ihr noch lange nicht die Objectivität, die er ihr selbst zuschreibt; Kant läßt sie weder von dem Willen noch von der Sinnlichkeit abhängig seyn, und doch hat sie ihm, wie der Verf. bemerkt, keine über das Subject hinausgehende Gültigkeit. Die Vernunft ist dem Verfasser nichts Subjectives (nämlich aus der Persönlichkeit Stammendes), aber sie ist ihm doch nur im Subject (in uns); als solche eben bedarf sie der Erklärung, wenn ihr zugleich wahre Objectivität (nicht bloß im Kantischen Sinne) zugestanden wird. Diese Erklärung kann, wie leicht zu sehen, nur darin gefunden werden, daß sie selbst vom Object abstammt, freilich nicht durch Vermittlung der Sinnlichkeit, die einzige Art, wie man dieß bis jetzt zu denken gewußt hat, sondern, daß sie nur das subjectiv gesetzte, aus der Objectivität in die ursprüngliche Priorität und Subjectivität wiederhergestellte Prius selbst ist.<sup>354</sup>

Schelling finds that it is not clear how Cousin can reach objectivity without supposing the entire process of philosophy. Cousin simply lets reason impose necessity upon consciousness and moves from the limited causes – the 'I' and the 'non-I' – to the unlimited real and true cause. By defining God under the title of cause, Cousin thought to distinguish his idea of God from pantheism. However, as the God of Cousin's system is essentially cause, it cannot create, and on this point it does not differ from Spinoza's God.

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<sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. xxv.

Concerning Cousin's history of philosophy, Schelling was more positive. He found that everything Cousin had said about the history of philosophy is 'quite excellent and carries the stamp of profound knowledge, as one might expect from the spirited translator of Plato and the editor of Proclus'.<sup>355</sup> Marbach is particularly annoyed by this remark, which he finds to be 'the simple unfounded judgement of Schelling', because Cousin proved to have understood little or nothing of Hegel. According to Marbach, Cousin's eclecticism takes one piece of the object while neglecting the relation with all the other parts.

Der Gegenstand ist aber nichts anderes als die Einheit aller seiner sich gegenseitig ausschließenden Seiten. Von einem Abschneiden des unvernünftigen Endes der einzelnen Philosophien, um die vernünftigen Enden in der Hand zu behalten, ist nirgends bei Hegel und kann nicht die Rede sein. Was etwa in einer von einem Philosophen geschriebenen Schrift Falsches steht, ist eben gar nicht Philosophie. Der Cousinsche Eklekticism enthält, wie er sich da hingestellt, übrigens auch den Widerspruch in sich selbst, nämlich einmal soll die eklektische Philosophie ein Resultat sein, des Verfahrens des Abscheidens, dann aber muß sie auch, um überhaupt abscheiden zu können, schon im Voraus da sein, weil sie sonst nicht im Stande ist, das in jeder Philosophie enthaltene Wahre und Falsche zu unterscheiden. Nach Cousin greift der Philosoph ins Unbestimmte hinaus und ergreift stets zufällig ein Stück Wahrheit, „denn, sagt Cousin, man kann sich nicht soweit von dem allen Menschen verliehenen Gemeinsinne entfernen, um in Irrthümer, die völlig von der Wahrheit entblößt sind, zu verfallen.“ Dieser letzte Satz kann für eine Verseichung des Satzes genommen werden: daß alle Menschen durch den Geist selbst beherrscht werden, und im Dienste der Wahrheit stehen die einen als Freie, die andern als Sklaven; wie er aber dort ausgesprochen, gibt er jeder, ja geflissentlich der allerschlechtesten Meinung, die Berechtigung sich für Philosophie auszugeben.<sup>356</sup>

Marbach has a similar criticism of the way in which Cousin thought to attain objectivity in the manner of Schelling. Marbach was able to be so harsh on Cousin, as he did not share Schelling's opinion that German philosophy was isolated. Schelling's complaint was that the Germans had philosophized amongst each other for such a long time that their thoughts and words had developed a distance from what was commonly understandable.

Wie Familien, die vom allgemeinen Umgang sich absondernd, bloß unter sich leben, zuletzt außer andern abstoßenden Eigenheiten auch eigne, nur ihnen verständliche Ausdrücke unter sich annehmen; so war es den Deutschen in der Philosophie ergangen, und je mehr sie nach einigen mißlungenen Versuchen, die Kantische Philosophie außer Deutschland zu verbreiten, darauf verzichteten, sich andern Völkern verständlich zu machen, desto mehr sahen sie die Philosophie als etwas für sich allein gleichsam Daseyendes an, ohne zu bedenken, daß die ursprüngliche,

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<sup>355</sup> Ibid., p. xxvi.

<sup>356</sup> Marbach, *Schelling, Hegel, Cousin und Krug. Erörterungen auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie* (1835), p. 24.

wenn auch oft verfehlte, doch nie aufzugebende Absicht aller Philosophie eben auf allgemeine Verständigung gehe.<sup>357</sup>

Marbach found Schelling's reproach to be a myth created for the benefit of the other nations. He maintained that thinking is of a universal nature, and those who want to philosophize in private are fools, and in fact do not philosophize at all. In this matter, he quotes Hegel who maintained that philosophy in other nations had vanished, and only in the German nation had it been conserved as a characteristic property. The Germans, by nature, maintained the high profession of the keepers of this holy fire. Somewhat patriotically, Marbach concludes that when, one day, the desire for philosophy is reawakened in other nations, it will not be too hard for them to learn the German language, and German philosophical values will prove not to be such a well kept secret.

### 9.3 Cousin's history of philosophy

This section discusses how Cousin saw Descartes as the inventor of the reflective method and, consequently, as the father of modern philosophy. Cousin's *Histoire générale de la philosophie* is a compilation of the various lectures he gave in the history of philosophy. His *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* can be regarded as a summary of his own philosophy. On the basis of both texts we will distil the philosophical reasons for his reinstatement of Descartes in French philosophy.

In the first lecture of *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, Cousin outlines the philosophical systems and concludes that because all of them have flaws or errors we should adopt an eclectic method. We will discuss Cousin's political eclecticism later, focusing now on the role Descartes plays in Cousin's philosophy. This role becomes clear when he makes the general remark that the father of all philosophical systems is the human mind, and that it is also the necessary instrument of all philosophy.

L'étude de l'esprit humain s'appelle scientifiquement la psychologie. Nous voilà donc ramené par une autre voie à ce principe qui est l'âme de tous nos travaux, qui constitue le caractère propre et aussi le caractère national de notre philosophie, la rattache à Descartes et la sépare de toute philosophie étrangère, à savoir, que la psychologie est le point de départ nécessaire, la suprême condition, la méthode unique de toute saine philosophie, qu'elle seule introduit légitimement dans le sanctuaire de la métaphysique et qu'elle fournit même à l'histoire sa plus sûre lumière.<sup>358</sup>

As we saw earlier, Cousin thought that reflection was preceded by spontaneity and he wanted to take the latter as his starting point. Here he calls it 'l'énergie naturelle' with which our intelligence is gifted and by which it is activated. However, in order to show that the systems of both sensualism and idealism are incomplete, and that they compel reflection into error, Cousin also has to take reflection as his point of departure. It is through the engagement of reflection with the sensorial part of consciousness that it arrives at sensualism, and through the

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<sup>357</sup> Cousin, *Über französische und deutsche Philosophie*, p. iv-v.

<sup>358</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 6.

engagement with the intellectual part that it arrives at idealism. According to Cousin, sensualism leads to fatalism, materialism, and atheism; while idealism, with its abstractions and hypotheses, leads to prejudice. Reflection arrives at scepticism when it returns to itself, to its own powers and employment, and to the two systems it has produced.

Mais il y a quelque chose encore dans la conscience qu'elle [reflection] n'a pas songé à aborder; c'est le fait que je vous ai si souvent signalé, et que je vous rappelais tout à l'heure, le fait de la connaissance naturelle et spontanée, ouvrage de cette puissance merveilleuse, antérieure à la réflexion, qui produit toutes les croyances mêlées et confuses, il est vrai, mais au fond solides, sur lesquelles vit et dans lesquelles se repose le genre humain. La spontanéité avait jusqu'ici échappé à la réflexion par sa profondeur, par son intimité même; c'est à la spontanéité que dans son désespoir la réflexion finit par s'attacher.<sup>359</sup>

The main characteristic of what Cousin calls 'natural knowledge' or 'spontaneous intuition', which are synonymous terms, appears to be that it is anterior to reflection, and marks the return of thinking to itself. We have already seen that it is obscure because it is primitive. Cousin calls the system which is founded on the primitive fact, excluding all other facts, mysticism. The reason that he gives to explain why mysticism cannot end up as scepticism is that it is accompanied by a boundless faith. However, the inspiration that mysticism needs, only works without the influence of reasoning. In order to find primitive inspiration, we have to suspend the activity of our other faculties. Mysticism ignores the world, virtue and science in order to meditate and contemplate and, thus, it leads to quietism.

In this way, Cousin distinguishes four systems through which he thinks he can comprehend the entire history of philosophy: sensualism, idealism, scepticism and mysticism. Of course, in reality they appear in combined forms.

. . . les deux systèmes qui se montrent d'abord sont le sensualisme et l'idéalisme: ce sont là les deux dogmatismes qui remplissent le premier plan de toute grande époque philosophique. Il est clair que le scepticisme ne peut venir qu'après, et il est tout aussi clair que le mysticisme (j'entends comme système philosophique) vient le dernier; car le mysticisme n'est pas autre chose qu'un acte de désespoir de la raison humaine, qui, forcée de renoncer au dogmatisme, et ne pouvant se résigner au scepticisme, croit se sauver en renonçant à elle-même.<sup>360</sup>

In themselves, all four systems have their strengths and weaknesses. On this basis, Cousin attempts to combine them so that they keep each other in balance. If we reduce everything to sensualism, we fall into the three above mentioned dangers of fatalism, materialism and atheism. Sensualism therefore needs idealism to counter these consequences. In turn, sensualism and idealism need scepticism to prevent dogmatism. However, pure scepticism with its aggressive dialectics, reduces sensations and ideas to nothing, thus leading to the universal mockery of

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<sup>359</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

philosophy. In order to keep the balance, we need mysticism, which allows us to enjoy the sacred rights of inspiration and enthusiasm.

Although Cousin's own position in this exposition of the four systems is impartial, he is not indifferent and he has some preferences over others, as the following quote illustrates.

. . . nous préférons l'esprit aux sens, quelque utiles que les sens nous paraissent, et la croyance est, à nos yeux, meilleure que le doute. Aussi nous ne défendons pas d'une sympathie déclarée pour tous les systèmes qui mettent l'esprit audessus des sens, et ne s'arrêtent point à la négation et au scepticisme. Nous sommes hautement spiritualiste dans l'histoire de la philosophie, tout autant que dans la philosophie elle-même.<sup>361</sup>

Cousin's description of the origin and classification of the philosophical systems, leads to the position he describes as eclecticism, which he calls 'the art that discerns the true in all the different systems'. This position enables him, without hiding his preferences for some over others, not to condemn and proscribe solutions for their inevitable errors, but to correct and to justify them before giving them a place in philosophy.

Now that we have sketched Cousin's philosophical eclecticism, we can show how Descartes is incorporated. Cousin calls Descartes 'le véritable père de la philosophie moderne' and he is quite specific about the actual beginning of modern philosophy. According to Cousin, we can accurately date the beginning of modern philosophy, just as we can point out the exact date of the beginning of Greek philosophy. Modern philosophy can even be dated in more detail, because it began with the appearance of *Discours de la Méthode* in 1637.<sup>362</sup>

There are several reasons why Cousin thinks Descartes, rather than Bacon, is the father of modern philosophy. The first reason is that the *Discours* was not written in a dead language, but 'dans un langage vivant réservé aux générations futures'. Like Degérando, Cousin compares Bacon with Descartes, but in Cousin's comparison, we see a clear preference for Descartes. According to Cousin, Bacon made many magnificent promises, but they were only fulfilled by Descartes. In relation to their methods, Cousin remarks that Bacon borrowed his method from the Italians and that it was primarily applicable to physics, and that it had not proved itself in practice. Descartes, on the other hand, invented the most general method, and this gave authority to a multitude of discoveries that had been generated as a result. Cousin therefore concludes: 'Bacon est le prophète de la science moderne, Descartes en est le fondateur'.<sup>363</sup> Cousin condescendingly maintains, in the preface of *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne*, that whatever they say in England, it is not Bacon, but Descartes who is the father of modern philosophy.

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>362</sup> Cousin, *Cours de philosophie* [1828], in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 42.

<sup>363</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 368.

Bacon est assurément un très-grand esprit; mais c'est plutôt encore un incomparable amateur de métaphysique qu'un métaphysicien, à proprement parler.<sup>364</sup>

Cousin also compares Bacon and Descartes by imagining the consequences had either never existed. Remove Descartes from his time, he says, and the pattern of the seventeenth century would not just be disrupted, it would have been dismembered. According to Cousin, the systems of Malebranche, Arnauld, Fénelon, Bossuet, Spinoza, Leibniz and even Locke would not have been possible without the work of Descartes. They all bear obvious witness to the influence of Descartes. On the other hand, if we remove Bacon, there is no discernible change, as he exerted no obvious influence on anyone.

A more general reason why Cousin called Descartes the father of modern philosophy was mentioned at the beginning of this section: as all philosophical systems stem from the human mind, the human mind is the subject and necessary instrument of every philosophy. So in order to find the root of various systems we have to look at the mind. Descartes approached psychology, the study of the human mind, in his own peculiar way, founding it on completely new evidence that gave it eternal authority. Hence, Descartes, as the inventor of psychology, is also the father of modern philosophy.

La philosophie moderne, en effet, date du jour où la réflexion a été son instrument reconnu, et la psychologie son fondement.<sup>365</sup>

Cousin goes so far as to say that if one studied the philosophy, sciences and literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, one would agree that Descartes is more than just the father of modern philosophy. According to Cousin, from the moment the *Discours de la méthode* appeared, Descartes was the greatest metaphysician of his time; the greatest mathematician since Viète, until Fermat; the greatest physiologist after Harvey; and the greatest prosaist, prior to Pascal.<sup>366</sup>

In Section 1.1 we saw that even d'Alembert praised Descartes for his application of algebra to geometry. Cousin exaggerated this point by saying that without this application it would have been impossible to formulate the differential calculus. In physics, Cousin gave Descartes the credit for making celestial mechanics possible. Cousin attributed all these successes to Descartes's method. Even the first rule of the Cartesian method is described by Cousin as a revolution in thinking, not only because it can be applied to all aspects of thought, but also because it emancipates the mind and brings it to a harmonious independence. The importance of the first rule lies especially in the evidence it puts forward. According to Cousin, its general claim addresses mathematicians as well as physicists, because it states the criterion for evidence. In the English edition the first rule of the Cartesian method reads:

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions

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<sup>364</sup> Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), p. vii.

<sup>365</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 385.

<sup>366</sup> Cf. *Hist. gén.*, p. 368.

and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgements than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it.<sup>367</sup>

The precept that evidence can only be found in clear and distinct ideas is described by Cousin as a ‘vast and unexpected light that breathed new life in and rejoiced the human mind’. Although there are conditions to be met, such as methodical doubt, the Cartesian principle of evidence is its own criterion and guarantee. This means that there is no need for a higher authority, as the principle only recognizes its own authority. According to Cousin, in this way Descartes eliminated the dominatory influence of all temporal authorities over religion and science.

Le précepte de ne se rendre qu’à l’évidence est donc un précepte de liberté: il affranchit l’esprit humain dans tous les ordres de connaissance, et celui qui l’a proclamé le premier a pu être justement appelé le libérateur de la raison humaine.<sup>368</sup>

He adds, however, that Descartes did not revolt against the authority of religion and state. We will return to this point in the next section. Cousin pays hardly any attention to the other three rules, not even recognizing the third rule,<sup>369</sup> because he thinks it was only applicable to mathematics. He considers that in real life, deduction is combined with observation and induction. This does not mean that Cousin believed that Descartes was a poor observer, on the contrary, he thought he was one of the most dedicated and attentive observers in the history of thought. His criticism of Descartes concerns the mathematical form of the demonstration by which he expressed the truths that he had discovered.

Les mathématiques sont le mauvais génie de Descartes en métaphysique; son bon génie est l’expérience appliquée aux choses de l’âme, c’est-à-dire la réflexion.<sup>370</sup>

Cousin distinguishes two ‘spirits’ in the Cartesian system, which are constantly combating one other: the mathematical spirit and the spirit of reflection. Unlike Descartes, Cousin claimed that the mathematical spirit has no place in the inner world of thinking, or the soul. He considers that, in Descartes’s conception of the relation, the mathematical spirit transforms real and living truth, which is provided by the spirit of reflection as abstract truth, and seeks to deduce the living truth from the abstract in spite of their nature. In their constant combat, each spirit in turn takes the upper hand. Cousin considers that Descartes sought the same kind of evidence in metaphysics that he had already found in mathematics. Although Descartes used the method of doubt, he avoided absolute scepticism by acknowledging that he cannot doubt that he doubts, thus arriving at his famous

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<sup>367</sup> CSM I, 120.

<sup>368</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 378.

<sup>369</sup> CSM I, 120: ‘The third, to direct my thoughts in an orderly manner, by beginning with the simplest and most easily known objects in order to ascend little by little, step by step, to knowledge of the most complex, and by supposing some order even among objects that have no natural order of precedence.’

<sup>370</sup> *Hist. gén.* p. 380.



principle. The following quote illustrates how, according to Cousin, *cogito, ergo sum* forms the foundation of philosophy.

Cette intuition primitive et immédiate qui, sans nul appareil dialectique et géométrique, nous découvre, avec une parfaite évidence et une autorité souveraine, l'existence du sujet pensant dans celle de la pensée elle-même, est un fait attesté à tous les hommes par la conscience, et au philosophe par cette seconde conscience, plus savante que la première, qu'on appelle la réflexion. L'opération employée par Descartes n'est donc pas autre chose que la réflexion appliquée à l'étude de la pensée et de ses divers phénomènes. Un de ces phénomènes, le doute, contenait et révélait infailliblement la pensée, et la pensée contient et révèle infailliblement l'existence du sujet pensant.

L'étude de la pensée à l'aide de la réflexion, c'est, en langage moderne, la psychologie. Ainsi il est incontestable que Descartes a mis au monde la psychologie, il s'agit ici de la chose et non du mot, et qu'en obtenant par elle, et par elle seule, le premier principe de sa métaphysique, il l'a par là reconnue et établie comme le point de départ nécessaire de toute saine philosophie.<sup>371</sup>

The greatest merit of Descartes, to Cousin, is the creation of psychology which, as mentioned above, he found to be an even greater discovery than Descartes's method. Cousin thinks it is unfortunate that Descartes substituted the natural process of the human mind for an artificial one, namely, the geometric model. This makes it extremely difficult for the historian to discern the right proportion between the purely methodological exposition of Cartesian metaphysics and the psychological one.

Concerning what Cousin calls the 'ontological' proof for the existence of God, he remarks that it is common sense that, from the awareness of one's own imperfections, it follows that one is not the principle of one's own being. Cousin simply states that it is impossible to avoid conceiving of an infinite and perfect being which would be the principle of its being: 'Pour entendre une pareille métaphysique, il suffit de s'interroger soi-même et de se rendre compte de ce qu'on pense.' The historical consequences that Cousin deduces from this point are even more curious. He finds that a doctrine which finds everything in human beings themselves had to, and actually did, make an immense conquest.

Devant elle reculèrent le scepticisme, le matérialisme, et l'athéisme, qui s'étaient si fort répandus en France et en Europe à la suite des guerres civiles et religieuses, dans le vide qu'avaient laissé dans les esprits et dans les âmes, en tombant successivement les uns sur les autres, les chimériques systèmes de la Renaissance. Au dix-huitième siècle, la philosophie de Descartes n'a pas été seulement un très-grand progrès dans la science: elle a été un bienfait pour l'humanité.<sup>372</sup>

In *Philosophie de Kant* Cousin discusses Kant's criticism of the ontological proof for the existence of God. Kant's criticism has already been discussed in Section 2.2, and in Section 11.3 we shall discuss Schelling's criticism of Kant on this point.

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<sup>371</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 384.

<sup>372</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 390.

Cousin thought that Kant's criticism of the 'old method' – a term Kant did not use<sup>373</sup> – is itself a fallacy (*sophisme*). According to Cousin, Kant presented a proof or thesis that was far too artificial and in which a contradiction is already present, after which it was easily shown that the fallacy was insoluble. Kant attacked the Cartesian ontological proof as it was transmitted by Leibniz, who wanted to fortify Descartes's proof by considering it as a syllogism, but in doing so, compromised it. According to Cousin we should not take the ontological proof for the existence of God to be a syllogism, but as a 'simple enthymème irréductible à un syllogisme'.<sup>374</sup>

There is a strong analogy between Cousin's interpretation of the ontological proof and his earlier exposition of the 'true sense' of the *cogito, ergo sum*. Cousin takes the most perfect being, not as some kind of abstraction, but as a real being that I, as a real being as well, can conceive of. In Cousin's opinion, the ontological proof rests on the *cogito* and also on the cosmological proof. This means that from the fact that I conceive the imperfection of my being, I can conceive the existence of a perfect being. The way in which this conception takes place and consequently, how we should take this 'proof' (whether we can speak of a proof, we will soon see), has to do with Cousin's distinction between spontaneity and reflection. According to Cousin, it is the 'natural conception of the perfect being, principle of my imperfect being that reason spontaneously provides and which later, when it is abstracted and generalized, engenders formula which reason accepts because it recognizes itself in it and retrieves its primitive and legitimate action in it'.<sup>375</sup>

In the preface to the third edition of his book on Kant, Cousin announced his criticism of Kant concerning the Cartesian proof. He claimed that consciousness is not a sensitive, empirical and uncertain faculty, but the essential form of intelligence which brings absolute certainty. To undermine this certainty means to ruin all other certainty and to condemn philosophy to scepticism.

Qui admet au contraire la certitude de la conscience, doutât-il un moment de tout le reste, peut, ce point seul subsistant, reconquérir successivement toutes les grandes croyances nécessaires à l'homme, d'abord la foi à sa propre existence, puis à toutes les autres existences, à celle de Dieu et à celle du monde.

Voilà ce que l'auteur du *Discours de la méthode* et des *Méditations* pensait avoir établi à jamais. D'un trait de plume Kant a renversé le rempart élevé par Descartes contre le scepticisme.<sup>376</sup>

Cousin explains that we should understand Descartes's ontological proof through psychology. Psychology provides natural theology with the ontological proof for the existence of God. This a priori proof is, for Cousin, very solid when we understand it from its true point of view and when we reconstruct it on its true basis. Kant presented the ontological proof in its logical form, but according to Cousin 'his arguments are not at all valid any more against the true Cartesian

<sup>373</sup> Within many of his lengthy quotations from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, which he mostly translates quite correctly, crucial passages are omitted and sometimes invented.

<sup>374</sup> Cousin, *Philosophie de Kant*, p. 204.

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>376</sup> *Ibid.*, p. vii.

proof'. Cousin immunizes the ontological proof against criticism by saying that it cannot be attacked by any argument, because it does not depend on an argument.<sup>377</sup> His reconstruction of the 'true Cartesian proof' can be found in his *Philosophie écossaise*.

Cousin had roughly the same criticism of Hutcheson and Locke concerning their presentation and rejection of the Cartesian proof. Although Hutcheson gave an inductive proof for the existence of God, he did not want to use the Cartesian proof as he found it to be 'manifestly faulty'. According to Cousin, Hutcheson, like Kant, only considered the abstract propositions in the Cartesian proof. He defends Descartes by saying that the propositions were not abstract and general propositions, but were particular in that they expressed intellectual facts. Having established that we are dealing with facts, Cousin stresses that they should be without any logical apparatus, because logic does not dispute or defend facts.

Dans les *Méditations*, Descartes ne représente pas un homme d'école, mais un homme naturel parvenant à toutes les grandes vérités de l'ordre naturel, à l'aide de ses facultés, qui se développent successivement. Cet homme pense: dès là qu'il pense, il juge qu'il existe. Il n'y a point là de raisonnement, de syllogisme; il y a une intuition directe de l'esprit, et l'exercice spontané et immédiat de notre pouvoir de juger et de connaître. Dès que cet homme sait qu'il existe, dès qu'il se connaît, il se trouve un être imparfait, limité, fini; et en même temps qu'il sent ses imperfections et ses bornes, il conçoit un être infini et parfait. Il ne s'agit pas plus ici d'un être infini abstrait que d'un être fini abstrait. Nous ne sommes pas encore dans l'abstraction et dans la logique; nous sommes dans la réalité et dans la psychologie.<sup>378</sup>

The possibility that the idea of God might be incomprehensible was solved by Cousin by saying that, as God is the cause of this universe, we know him through his effects, as the Psalmist and St. Paul had already indicated. Apart from this biblical argument, Cousin produced another equally weak argument which states that God is comprehensible because all the nations have talked about God from the beginning of intellectual life. Cousin clearly crosses the boundary between philosophy and religion here, although he pleaded fiercely for the maintenance of the distinction between the two domains, as we will see in the next section.

According to Cousin, Descartes was not a sceptic concerning the external world: he is precisely concerned with attempting to demonstrate it. The hypothesis of a malignant genius is destroyed by the proof for the existence of God and his attributes of infinite power, wisdom and veracity, that is, by the infinitely perfect being. Due to God's veracity, there can be no question of deception, hence, what appears to exist, exists. Unlike others, Cousin did not investigate whether Descartes committed a paralogism (namely a circular argument) here. Instead, he remarked that Descartes made an error in the form of an anachronism in the history of human knowledge. Cousin found it problematic that Descartes did not place the belief in the existence of the world at the same level as that of the soul and God, but that the

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>378</sup> Cousin, *Philosophie écossaise*, p. 52.

existence of the world follows from a reasoning, which, as a foundation, has the veracity of God.

Because Cousin had already shown that the perception of the external world is given earlier than that of the self, he could follow Descartes on this point. Cousin thought Descartes had opened the gates to idealism here: ‘on voit déjà venir Malebranche’. Nevertheless, he fiercely denied that this route leads to pantheism, as Leibniz had claimed. According to Cousin, Leibniz was not generous enough to Descartes and was obviously jealous. Furthermore, he found the accusation of pantheism to be also anachronistic, as the next quote shows.

Or il ne s’agissait pas encore de panthéisme au temps de Descartes; c’est bien plus tard, et longtemps après sa mort, que la redoutable question surgit; et alors les ennemis de Descartes ont été chercher dans ses écrits, pour diminuer sa gloire, des passages médiocrement réfléchis qu’il a laissé échapper pour ainsi dire dans l’innocence de sa pensée, qu’il aurait expliqués, disons mieux, qu’il a expliqués lui-même, quand on les lui a signalés.<sup>379</sup>

Cousin took the defence of Descartes concerning the accusation of pantheism seriously. This accusation is connected with the will and freedom, the role of continuous creation, final causes, the finality of the universe and his equivocal definition of substance. Cousin defended Descartes on all these points. He especially stressed that the God of Descartes is certainly not that of Spinoza. According to him, the differences between Descartes and Spinoza on this point are so great that there could be no kinship between them.

#### 9.4 Eclecticism, politics and patriotism

We discover the reason why Cousin made an edition of the works of Descartes in its *Prospectus*. Unfortunately the original is lost, with Janet claiming that he had searched thoroughly but could not find it in any library, including Cousin’s.<sup>380</sup> The only ‘original’ fragment that is left we owe to Feuerbach who quoted from it in his history of modern philosophy.<sup>381</sup>

However, the text of the *Prospectus* was translated into German, appearing under the title ‘Über Descartes und sein Verhältniß zur Philosophie in Frankreich’ in the second volume of *Religion und Philosophie in Frankreich, eine Folge von Abhandlungen*, which was translated and published in 1827 by F. W. Carové in Göttingen. A comparison of this edition with the ‘original’ fragment from Feuerbach tells us that it is a correct and adequate translation.

In this text, Cousin said that Descartes broke through the logical and grammatical framework that scholasticism had constructed around the human mind. He did this by reducing thinking to consciousness, that is, he began all philosophical investigations with thinking itself. When Cousin called Descartes the father of modern philosophy, he meant Descartes had given a new spirit and

<sup>379</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 395.

<sup>380</sup> Janet, *Victor Cousin et son œuvre* (1885), p. 197n.

<sup>381</sup> Feuerbach, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza* [1833<sup>1</sup>, 1844<sup>2</sup>, 1847<sup>3</sup>], in FW II, 234-235.

method which together had revived and strengthened philosophy, proving its entire modern content.<sup>382</sup> Descartes was more than the initiator of a school, he brought about a complete change in the history of thinking. We can detect the patriotism in this small text, as, according to Cousin, when ignorant and hateful minds say that the French spirit is not suitable for the study of metaphysics, France needs only to answer that it gave Europe and humanity Descartes.

Cousin regretted the period in which France had forgotten Descartes and when the philosophy of Hobbes, which was taken up by Locke and developed by Voltaire and Condillac, became dominant. In Cousin's opinion, a serious and profound system was replaced by a frivolous and narrow-minded system. The latter limited human intelligence to sensation and thereby robbed it of its noblest faculty. According to Cousin, in the entire history of philosophy there is no example in which a system has triumphed so easily, without a single battle, as had sensualism. He therefore sees it as his duty to defend this great man who was condemned without a hearing, and to organize a new edition of the works of Descartes.<sup>383</sup>

Although Cousin credited himself with having rehabilitated Descartes and with being the first in a century to make a 'complete' edition of his works, he pointed out that Maine de Biran was the first to have rehabilitated 'the glory' of Descartes. In his *Introduction aux œuvres posthumes de M. Maine de Biran* [1834],<sup>384</sup> Cousin had some kind words to say about Maine de Biran's theory.

M. de Biran est le premier en France qui ait réhabilité la gloire de Descartes, presque supprimée par le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et qui osé regarder en face celle de Bacon. Le précepte fondamental de Bacon est de faire abstraction des causes et de s'en tenir à la recherche des faits et à l'induction des lois; et cela suffit ou peut suffire jusqu'à un certain point dans les sciences physiques; mais, en philosophie, négliger les causes, c'est négliger les êtres; c'est, par exemple, dans l'étude de l'homme, faire abstraction du fond même de la nature humaine, de la racine de toute réalité, du MOI, sujet propre de toutes les facultés qu'ils s'agit de reconnaître, parce qu'il est la cause de tous les actes dont ces facultés ne sont que la généralisation.<sup>385</sup>

Descartes is, for Maine de Biran, the creator of true philosophy, and Cousin adds that the sentence, *je pense, donc je suis*, is always the point of departure for every reasonable philosophical investigation. Cousin thought Maine de Biran had shown that thinking, in the sense the Cartesian *cogito* has given it, is what we now call consciousness. In Maine de Biran's theory, Cousin claims, it becomes clear that Descartes has shown that only consciousness clarifies existence and reveals to us our personality.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Cousin, *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du cours, le 4 décembre 1817*, in *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, p. 2: 'Oui, la philosophie moderne tout entière est l'œuvre de ce grand homme: car elle lui doit l'esprit qui l'anime et la méthode qui fait sa puissance'.

<sup>383</sup> From *Prospectus* to the *Œuvres de Descartes*, cf. Carové (ed.), *Philosophie in Frankreich* (1827), p. 10.

<sup>384</sup> In Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, pp. 148-160.

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

Not only is Maine de Biran to be thanked. In the first volume of Cousin's edition of the works of Descartes, we also find a dedication to Royer-Collard:

À M. Royer-Collard, professeur de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne à la faculté des lettres de l'académie de Paris, qui le premier, dans une chaire française, combattit la philosophie des sens, et réhabilita Descartes, témoignage de ma vive reconnaissance pour ses leçons, ses conseils et son amitié.<sup>387</sup>

This dedication shows that Cousin, like Royer-Collard, combated sensualism. Still, we cannot concur with the claim that Royer-Collard rehabilitated Descartes. As we saw in the previous chapter, nowhere in Royer-Collard's works can we find a claim that would amount to a rehabilitation of Descartes. Nevertheless, Cousin placed Royer-Collard alongside himself at the end of a line which begins with Socrates, and includes Plato, the Gospel and Descartes, as we see in *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, which reads:

L'éclectisme est une des applications les plus importantes et les plus utiles de la philosophie que nous professons, mais il n'en est pas le principe.

Notre vraie doctrine, notre vrai drapeau est le spiritualisme, cette philosophie aussi solide que généreuse, qui commence avec Socrate et Platon, que l'Évangile a répandue dans le monde, que Descartes a mise sous les formes sévères du génie et des forces de la patrie, qui a péri avec la grandeur nationale au XVIII<sup>e</sup>, et qu'au commencement de celui-ci M. Royer-Collard est venu réhabiliter dans l'enseignement public, pendant que M. de Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, M. Quatremère de Quincy la transportaient dans la littérature et dans les arts.<sup>388</sup>

Although Cousin thanks Maine de Biran and Royer-Collard for rehabilitating Descartes, there is someone who he has forgotten to mention. In the preface to the eleventh volume (1826) of his Descartes edition, Cousin had complained about the lack of historical research in *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* and *Recherche de la vérité par les lumières naturelles*, saying:

. . . ces deux monuments admirables n'ont pas même été aperçus d'un seul historien de la philosophie, et restoient ensevelis dans des *Opera posthuma Cartesii*, qui parurent à Amsterdam en 1701, cinquantes ans après la mort de Descartes.<sup>389</sup>

This is not true, as one of the few historiographers of philosophy in France had most certainly noticed these works. In a note from the second part of *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*,<sup>390</sup> Degérando responded to Cousin's complaint by saying: 'Si l'éditeur (he earlier called him 'savant') avait lu le chapitre sur le cartésianisme, dans la première édition de l'*Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, publiée à Paris en 1804, tome 2, il y aurait vu cités ces écrits de Descartes'.

<sup>387</sup> See Cous. I.

<sup>388</sup> Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, preface, p. iii.

<sup>389</sup> Cous. XI, p. ij.

<sup>390</sup> HC II, vol. 2, 204 ('Note A').

Apart from the above quoted passage, and the one following, which is a remark on the entire enterprise of the edition of the works of Descartes, we will set aside Cousin's edition of Descartes's works as it is not relevant to our study.

Ce onzième volume est le dernier. Notre travail est terminé, et la France a enfin une édition française des Œuvres complètes de celui qui a tant fait pour sa gloire. Puisse ce monument, consacré à Descartes et à la France, servir à rappeler mes compatriotes à l'étude de la vraie philosophie, de cette philosophie dont Descartes a été, dans l'humanité, un des plus illustres interprètes, qui, sévère et hardie en même temps, sans sortir des limites de l'observation et de l'induction, atteint si haut et si loin, et qui partant de la conscience de l'homme, c'est-à-dire de la pensée, ne l'abandonne plus et la retrouve partout, dans la nature comme dans l'âme, dans les moindres détails comme dans les plus grands phénomènes de l'existence universelle: Je pense, donc je suis.<sup>391</sup>

We will return to these striking remarks, which stress the relation between Descartes and France, after our discussion of Cousin's political eclecticism.

In the opening lecture of the course of 1817,<sup>392</sup> Cousin's eclecticism first became apparent when he discussed the distinction between subject and object. Cousin began by remarking that no one prior to Descartes had posed the philosophical problem of the distinction between subject and object clearly. Before Descartes, it was seen as a mere grammatical distinction from which nothing more followed than principles of the same grammatical nature.

Descartes lui-même, malgré la vigueur de son esprit, ne pénétra point toute la portée de cette distinction; sa gloire est de l'avoir faite, et d'avoir placé le vrai point de départ des recherches philosophiques dans la pensée ou le moi; mais il ne fut pas frappé, comme il devait l'être, de l'abîme qui sépare le sujet et l'objet; et après avoir posé le problème, ce grand homme le résolut trop facilement.<sup>393</sup>

According to Cousin, the schools of Locke, Kant and Reid had all tried to deal with this problem, first recognized by Descartes, but they each focused on different aspects. In Cousin's opinion, all philosophical questions with regard to the object can be reduced to the absoluteness and the reality of beings; and with regard to the subject, they can be reduced to the actual and primitive state of our knowledge. Locke was concerned with the origin of human knowledge; the Scottish School investigated the actual state of our knowledge; and Kant was only occupied with the legitimacy of the transition from subject to object. On the basis of this parallel division of questions and schools, Cousin considers the history of philosophy 'under a new aspect', as he calls it. All three schools are limited and incomplete in themselves, but when considered along side one another they form a whole. Cousin proudly announces that this is how his eclecticism came into being.

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<sup>391</sup> Cous. XI, p. vij-viii.

<sup>392</sup> Held on 5 December 1816, in Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 214 ff.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.

Nous n'avons pas emprunté l'éclectisme à personne. Il est né spontanément en notre esprit du spectacle des luttes éclatantes et de l'harmonie cachée des trois grandes écoles du dix-huitième siècle.<sup>394</sup>

This approach apparently worked, because after he had applied it to these three schools, he applied it to other systems at other times. As a result of its success he considered the method to have become the 'light of history'. He adds remarkably: 'L'éclectisme est donc une doctrine toute française, et qui nous est propre'.

According to Cornelius,<sup>395</sup> Cousin used German philosophy, especially that of Hegel, and his own eclectic theory, to justify constitutional monarchy. We have to say, however, that Hegel never intended to use his dialectical principle of reason in the service of liberalism. Also, Schelling applauded Cousin's retreat from politics in 1819. Nevertheless, we still find some remarks in Cousin's works that indicate an appropriation of Descartes in order to give a French foundation to his own fervent political convictions regarding constitutional monarchy.

Ajoutons bien vite que Descartes est un homme du dix-septième siècle et non du seizième: il ne s'insurge pas contre toute autorité; loin de là, il se plaît à reconnaître toutes les autorités dont la nécessité lui est évidente, celle de la religion et celle de l'État; mais il commence cette soumission dans les limites de la raison, qui sépare les temps modernes du moyen âge, et devait amener notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle, aussi éloignée de la servilité que l'esprit d'insubordination.<sup>396</sup>

The fact that Descartes did not rebel against the authorities of state and church is reason enough for Cousin to make Descartes – already the father of modern philosophy – the father of our 'noble and glorious constitutional liberty'.<sup>397</sup>

Although it may seem unlikely that Cousin's reasons for rehabilitating Descartes were political, it cannot be denied that his eclecticism has a political aspect. Cousin does not consider his eclecticism to be some uncertain equilibrium between all systems or, on the other hand, some kind of cowardly impartiality. Cousin finds that eclecticism chooses between systems, preferring some over others because of their principles or their consequences. Cousin says he does not want to conceal his opinions, which are well determined and well known in relation to both philosophy and politics.

En politique, nous sommes ouvertement pour les principes de la révolution française. Sa cause est la nôtre; nous l'avons servie, et nous la servirons jusqu'au bout avec une fidélité inébranlable. Nous n'entendons certes pas qu'il faille jeter au vent les traditions qui perpétuent les nations comme les familles, et encore bien moins sacrifier l'ordre à la liberté qui serait ici la première victime. Mais enfin, dans la grande querelle qui divise aujourd'hui la France, l'Europe et le monde, nous sommes du parti libéral en France, en Europe et dans le monde. Nous faisons profession de croire que depuis 1789 le seul vrai gouvernement

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<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>395</sup> See Cornelius, *Die Geschichtslehre Victor Cousins unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Hegelschen Einflusses* (1958).

<sup>396</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 373.

<sup>397</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 378.



pour tous les peuples civilisés est la monarchie constitutionnelle. Cette forme de gouvernement est celle qui assure le mieux la liberté; c'est par là qu'elle nous est chère; car la liberté c'est la vie; et sans elle peuples et individus languissent comme dans les ombres de la mort. Nos vœux et notre cœur sont donc partout où on l'invoque, où l'on combat, où l'on souffre pour elle.

In philosophy it is the same, Cousin is the proponent of every system which upholds the spirituality of the soul, the liberty and responsibilities of our actions, the fundamental distinction between right and wrong, the impartiality of virtuousness, and God as creator and regulator of the world. This set of beliefs and opinions he thinks is best fulfilled by the system developed by Descartes.

Nous respectons, nous chérissons la liberté philosophique, mais nous sommes convaincus que son meilleur emploi est dans l'école cartésienne. Cette école est à nos yeux bien au-dessus de toutes les écoles rivales par sa méthode qui est la vraie, par son esprit indépendant et modéré qui est le véritable esprit philosophique, par ce caractère de spiritualisme à la fois sobre et élevé qui doit toujours être le nôtre, par la grandeur et la beauté morale de ses principes en tout genre, enfin parce qu'elle est essentiellement française et qu'elle a répandu sur la nation une gloire immense qu'il n'est pas bon de répudier; car, après la vérité, la gloire n'est-elle pas aussi quelque chose de sacré? C'est ce dernier titre en quelque sorte patriotique du cartésianisme que nous rappellerons brièvement: nous avons cent fois exposé et développé les autres.<sup>398</sup>

In these two quotations we can find all of Cousin's reasons for reinstating Descartes: spiritualism in philosophy, constitutional monarchy in politics, completed with an element of patriotism.

In a recent study, Vermeren shows that while Cousin had first elaborated his philosophy before applying it to politics, both domains are intimately connected in Cousin's thought from the beginning.<sup>399</sup> As to Cousin's eclecticism, he distinguishes two periods. The first he situates at the time of his journeys to Germany (1817-1824) when he had to be cautious and so turned to historical studies in order to confirm the correctness of his philosophy. By the time of the Trois Glorieuses (27, 28, and 29 July 1830), that led to the fall of Charles X and the accession of Louis-Philippe I, Cousin's reputation had been moulded by the legend of the philosopher who faced persecution in the pursuit of liberty. What was more, he believed that he already had a solid philosophical system. His eclecticism thus led him to political liberalism and the support of the July monarchy.

The second period of his eclecticism occurred during the time in which a philosophical institute was being developed in the service of the state. In his political function of the Minister of Education, Cousin may have wanted philosophy to take over the educational role that religion already played. As the Church obviously was not pleased with this intention, it sought to accuse Cousin of pantheism. As a consequence, Cousin 'sacrificed' Pascal in order to rescue Descartes. He showed that Pascal's philosophy leads to scepticism once the

<sup>398</sup> Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), pp. v-vii.

<sup>399</sup> Vermeren, *Victor Cousin. Le jeu de la philosophie et de l'état* (1995), p. 53.

revelation, on which his proof for the existence of God depends, is excluded. Pascal does not arrive at God through reason, and therefore he did not see that religion, as an alliance between reason and the heart, could be the pinnacle of philosophy.

Cousin summarizes his entire philosophy as having a deep faith in liberty, which he understands as the responsibility and spirituality of the human soul. He also believes in a morality founded on the eternal distinction between good and bad; just and unjust, rather than on the unstable calculations of interest, an irritating mysticism, or an inapplicable stoicism. In short, Cousin stands for a philosophy that is radically opposed to the philosophy of sensation.

En même temps que nous rompons avec cette déplorable philosophie, où tant de fois nous avons signalé la racine des malheurs de la patrie, parce qu'en répandant de proche en proche, pendant de longues années, dans toutes les classes de la société française, le scepticisme et le matérialisme, elle a ôté d'avance les fondements nécessaires de la vraie liberté, nous ne donnons point à la philosophie nouvelle des guides étrangers, fût-ce même le sage Reid ou le profond et vertueux philosophe de Kœnigsberg: de bonne heure nous l'avons placée sous l'invocation de Descartes.<sup>400</sup>

As this quote shows, for Cousin there is a clear connection between philosophy and society or domestic politics. This is why, not wanting to have a foreign guide to 'the new philosophy', he promotes Descartes as its patron. We have to bear in mind, though, that this was written almost forty years after his opening discourse, during which time his political engagement had become enmeshed with his philosophical activities.

The invocation of Descartes has the effect that, after careful study of the *Meditations*, we will discover the true sense of the famous *cogito, ergo sum*, as we have already seen. Cousin says that the new sense given to this enthymeme will one day clarify all modern philosophy as well as his own enterprise. We saw that it took some time to realize this, as he had initially wanted philosophy to begin with the question of external perception. Now he conjoins Descartes and Plato:

Ces deux grand noms, depuis si longtemps oubliés en France, reparurent avec honneur dans la nouvelle école, et la philosophie française du dix-neuvième siècle rentra dans la voie de cette grande et immortelle philosophie spiritualiste . . .<sup>401</sup>

Cousin uses the reinstatement of both philosophers to underline the relation between his spiritualist philosophy and Christianity. Although there is an obvious alliance between this philosophy and religion, Cousin also wants to make a clear distinction. Philosophy should not be a religion, as it is concerned with natural truths and only raises 'la lumière naturelle', while religion is concerned with the supernatural dogmas and appeals to a supernatural authority. The philosophy of sensation destroys freedom and the spirituality of the soul, and thereby destroys the subject to which Christianity is extended. In distinction to this, Cousin sees his

<sup>400</sup> Preface to the third ed. of *Premiers Essais* (1855), p. ix.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

philosophy as perfectly compatible with faith, as he does not address the doctrines of faith. He refuses to consider God as the cause and substance from which everything is derived, because this results in deism. Christianity needs a living and intelligent God, the principle and model of the good and just.

Au contraire, l'alliance peut être sérieuse et sincère entre la philosophie spiritualiste et le christianisme, parce que cette philosophie laisse au christianisme la place de ses dogmes, et toutes ses prises sur l'humanité. Elle lui offre une âme à la fois pleine de misère et de grandeur, pour y asseoir ses enseignements sublimes; une morale généreuse, pour la couronner de ses divines espérances; un Dieu qui est une personne comme la personne humaine, avec l'infinité de plus, et peut ainsi porter la trinité chrétienne.<sup>402</sup>

Cousin says he would not dream of replacing Christianity with philosophy, but just as in politics we start from the love for liberty in order to defend the monarchy and the aristocracy, we have to start from philosophy in order to honour and love Christianity. We see here that Cousin places not only Plato but also Descartes within a theological history while maintaining a strict distinction between religion and philosophy.

In a recent study, Schneider explains Cousin's eclecticism with respect to both his opinion on religion and his politics.<sup>403</sup> The rhetoric, Schneider claims, which corresponds with the thesis of an all-understanding and all-explaining eclecticism, was Cousin's instrument for explaining the historical situation to his audience and to convince them of the task philosophy has for mankind. According to him, Cousin saw philosophy as the medium in which ideas and doctrines are discussed. He used his position to articulate goals and produce various orientations. Schneider distinguishes a narrow and a broad sense of Cousin's political goals. The narrow sense emphasized the place of French philosophy over that of German philosophy. For example, Cousin thought it was 'a French duty' to provide the 'German inclination towards systems' with an eclectic answer. In the general sense, he saw his exposition of philosophy as a task for mankind in the present.

Now that we have shown the, more or less, political reasons why Cousin rehabilitated Descartes, we would like to focus on the purely patriotic reasons. In the discourse at the opening of the course on December 1817,<sup>404</sup> Cousin says that his rehabilitation of Descartes is not an act of patriotism:

Ce n'est pas le patriotisme, c'est le sentiment profond de la vérité et de la justice qui nous fait placer toute la philosophie aujourd'hui répandue dans le monde sous l'invocation du nom de Descartes. Oui, la philosophie moderne tout entière est l'œuvre de ce grand homme: car elle lui doit l'esprit qui anime et la méthode qui fait sa puissance.

However, in his *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), he seems to have changed his mind. Cousin, in the preface of this work, places the Cartesian school

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>403</sup> Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität. Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (1998), p. 180 ff.

<sup>404</sup> In Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, p. 2.

above all others and mentions various reasons for this. Its method is the true one; its spirit is the true philosophical one because it is independent and moderate; it has the character of spiritualism, being at the same time sober and elevated; and it contains principles of all kinds that are of moral greatness and beauty. He then provides another reason of a different kind. He finds that the Cartesian school is the best:

. . . parce qu'elle est essentiellement française et qu'elle a répandue sur la nation une gloire immense qu'il n'est pas bon de répudier; car, après la vérité, la gloire n'est-elle pas aussi quelque chose de sacré? C'est ce dernier titre en quelque sorte patriotique du cartésianisme que nous rappellerons brièvement: nous avons cent fois exposé et développé les autres.<sup>405</sup>

There are clear patriotic reasons for Cousin's rehabilitation of Descartes. The mere fact that Descartes was French had been decisive in making him the father of modern philosophy. There are further passages where we notice the remarkable place of the 'French spirit' in Cousin's history of philosophy. In the long introduction to his edition of the works of Abélard, for instance, he says that Abélard and Descartes derive their greatness from the 'esprit français'. The characteristics of this 'esprit' display a clarity of language which stems from the sharpness and precision of its ideas. Cousin explains the genius of Abélard and Descartes by saying that they were not only both French, they also came from the same district, Brittany, whose inhabitants distinguish themselves by a vivid feeling of independence and a very strong personality.<sup>406</sup> In *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, we find a similar remark about Brittany. He says that Descartes was born 'par hazard' in La Haye in Touraine, but originated from Rennes, 'dans cette Bretagne qui semble avoir mis sur lui sa marque, une assez forte personnalité, une sincérité un peu hautaine, une sorte d'indocilité innée à se plier au goût et à l'opinion des autres, avec une assez grande assurance en soi-même'.<sup>407</sup>

Cousin often talks about the 'caractère national de notre philosophie',<sup>408</sup> which he finds connects 'us' with Descartes and separates 'us' from all 'foreign' philosophy. By this, he means the psychological foundation of philosophy, which he thinks to be the point of departure of every sound philosophy. Descartes is the liberator of the human mind, but, as mentioned above, this did not mean that he rebelled against all authority. He was willing to recognize authority where its necessity was evident, namely that of religion and state. However, it was within the limits of reason that Descartes recognized these authorities, thus, as we have said, marking the separation between modern times and the Middle Ages that had led to 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle'.

Schelling also thinks that the freedom of philosophy, which originated in the removal of all authority, was realized by the famous *cogito, ergo sum*. Remarkably

<sup>405</sup> Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), p. vii.

<sup>406</sup> Cf. Cousin (ed.), *Ouvrages inédites d'Abélard* (1836), p. iv.

<sup>407</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 361.

<sup>408</sup> See *Hist. gén.*, p. 6; in his *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, vol. 1, p. x (Avertissement) he even speaks of 'un caractère . . . d'être profondément française'.

enough, Schelling also claims the beginning of free philosophy for his nation, because Descartes was in Bavaria when he formulated the first ideas of his philosophy. Although Schelling does not develop the idea of a national character of philosophy, he stresses that both Descartes and Spinoza had their patrons and patronesses in Pfalz.<sup>409</sup>

Cousin apparently was not concerned with being a historian and a patriot at the same time. As an historian he had found that various schools and systems in England, Scotland and Germany had all been inspired by Descartes. As a patriot he would therefore search and gather, for France, the truths that are scattered in the great European philosophies: 'il appartient à la France de tout connaître et de tout juger'.<sup>410</sup>

These forms of historiographical patriotism did not end with Cousin, but continued to develop in the twentieth century. Even in the standard edition of the works of Descartes, we encounter nationalistic remarks. In 1910, Charles Adam proudly writes:

Jamais le génie de la France n'avait encore plané si haut, projetant une vive lumière, non pas sur toutes choses, mais sur quelques-unes au moins de celles qu'il choisit pour objet, et on eut l'illusion de croire que c'était tout l'univers. D'autres grands esprits se sont élevés à des hauteurs non moindres, ou plutôt ont atteint aussi des sommets d'où ils ont illuminé d'autres domaines de la pensée. Mais Descartes leur avait montré l'exemple, et demeurait leur précurseur et leur maître. Sa philosophie à la française fut la première qui répondit pleinement aux instincts de notre race. Philosophie des idées claires et distinctes, fortement enchaînées entre elles, et qui s'adressaient à tout le genre humain: ne prétendait-il pas être compris des Turcs eux-mêmes?<sup>411</sup>

With this last remark Adam refers to the *Conversation with Burman* [1648] where Descartes said: 'I have written my philosophy in such a way as to make it acceptable anywhere – even among the Turks – and to avoid giving the slightest offence to anyone'.<sup>412</sup> Coming from Adam, who is clearly quite patriotic, this reference has an ironic sense, especially when we take into account the tense, if not hostile relation between France and Turkey in those days.

The political instability during the period between the French Revolution and the Third Republic in which Cousin lived – from An I of the first republic to the second empire – caused a need for law and order. Because the philosophy of Descartes has its conservative and its modern sides, it seemed to fulfill this need. In his *Histoire générale de la philosophie* Cousin calls Descartes 'le libérateur de la raison humaine', because he appealed to evidence only. At the same time Cousin claims Descartes did not defy authority but recognized those of religion and state. This combination, he thinks, has led to 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle'.<sup>413</sup>

<sup>409</sup> Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 5, pp. 78-79<sup>fn</sup>.

<sup>410</sup> *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, vol. 1, p. xi.

<sup>411</sup> Adam, *Vie & Oeuvres de Descartes* (1910), AT XII, 559.

<sup>412</sup> *Corr.*, AT V, 159; CSM III, 342.

<sup>413</sup> *Hist. gén.*, p. 384.

But there were more than the socio-political reasons alone why Cousin reinstated Descartes. Cousin, along with Hegel and Erdmann, was one of the first philosophers to see Descartes as philosopher of the subject and father of modern philosophy. The construction of the Cartesian system is considered by Hegel, as we shall see in Part IV, as ‘the resumption of philosophy’, and Cousin shares this view with him. We saw how Cousin saw the famous Cartesian *cogito*, by which he thought psychology (i.e. epistemology) was brought into the world. According to Cousin, it was through this psychology alone that Descartes obtained the first principles of his metaphysics, thus establishing the necessary point of departure of every sane philosophy.



## IV

### **Descartes in Historiography and German Idealism**

This part aims to give a concise account of the reinstatement of Descartes by German historiographers and by a number of German Idealists during the first half of the nineteenth century. In order to gain an overview of the changes in the reception of Descartes we will proceed both historically and thematically. This means that we will distinguish between texts that give the Cartesian philosophy, in general, a place in the history of philosophy, such as handbooks and courses in the history of philosophy, and texts that systematically depart from or discuss specific themes in Cartesian philosophy. As an interaction between historiography and the systematic disciplines of philosophy is difficult if not impossible to determine, for the time being we will not assume that the rise of German historiography *caused* the appropriation of Descartes in nineteenth-century philosophy.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, we will discuss both domains in parallel.

Firstly, in Chapter 10, we shall examine the various reasons why Descartes suddenly obtained a special place in the historiography of philosophy. In discussing these reasons we will focus on how Cartesian philosophy was described, what elements were thought to be praiseworthy and to what extent, according to the historiographers, Descartes had influenced other philosophers.

The aim of Chapter 11 is not merely to show that Cartesian themes were again on the philosophical agenda, but also to explain why this was so. In order to give an account of the appropriation of Cartesian themes we need to consider two problems. Firstly, there are not always direct references to Descartes, which means that we have to distance ourselves from the texts. Secondly, the intention of systematical texts is not, in the first instance, aimed at a reinstatement of Descartes. In order to deal with these problems, we will isolate those themes which were elaborated by Descartes himself and ignored or ridiculed during the eighteenth century. In order to maintain unity and order in this study, we will focus on the theory of innate ideas in particular. There are also systematical reasons for focusing our attention on this theme.

An extrinsic reason for this focus on the theory of innate ideas is that the appearance of this theme is a very clear and distinct indication of a change in thought in general, and of a reinstatement of Descartes in particular. With hardly any exception, eighteenth-century philosophers agreed that there were no innate ideas. As Descartes, and only derivatively, Leibniz, were the last philosophers to explicitly 'prove' and use innate ideas, it seems obvious to connect Descartes with the revival of the doctrine of innate ideas.

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<sup>414</sup> The argument would be that because historiography mentioned Descartes earlier, it *caused* his reinstatement in systematical philosophy, which is clearly fallacious (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*).



Secondly, the theme of innate ideas is closely connected to the other core themes in Cartesianism: the *cogito* and the idea of God. This means that when we discuss this particular theme, the other themes will logically follow. As we saw in the first part, this theme was an easy target of mockery for most philosophers. In the fourth and fifth parts we will see that innate ideas did not lose their value as an important addition to some philosophical systems, for example, neo-Kantianism.

## 10 THE RISE OF GERMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

German historiography of philosophy started with the appearance of Johann Jakob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-1744, second edition 1766-1767). As it is beyond the historical scope of this study (the fourth volume, in which he discusses Descartes dates from 1744), we do not consider this work in detail,<sup>415</sup> but merely note that many authoritative witnesses, for example, Buhle,<sup>416</sup> Goethe,<sup>417</sup> Kant,<sup>418</sup> Hegel,<sup>419</sup> Schopenhauer,<sup>420</sup> Degérando,<sup>421</sup> and Cousin<sup>422</sup> knew, used and admired this impressive work.

The rise of German historiography can be characterized by a vast quantity of thorough, scholarly research in the history of philosophy which aimed at describing the whole history of philosophy from the beginning to the present day. Whether or not the historiographical interest was aroused by Brucker (1696-1770), many historiographers wanted to improve on his work by writing a history of philosophy that was more critical and always based on source texts, yet less extensive and perhaps, by writing in the vernacular, more popular. What we can call 'the rise of German historiography of philosophy' is not only characterized by the large quantity of authors and works, but also by the authors' tendency to thoroughness and completeness.

Although nineteenth-century historiography classified the beginning of modern philosophy as a distinct period, we cannot say it intended to reinstate Descartes. However, there were certain historiographers like Tennemann, Buhle, Tiedemann or Erdmann who went further than mere historical claims when they discussed Descartes. The reasons for this were methodological and super-historical, which either means that they were not just historiographers, or that historiography went further than giving a historical account. This suggests that the question of the

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<sup>415</sup> For an excellent discussion of his work see Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, (1973), p. 131-150.

<sup>416</sup> See his *Geschichte des philosophierenden menschlichen Verstandes* (1793) and his *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie, seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften* (1800-1805).

<sup>417</sup> Goethe seems to base his knowledge of the history of philosophy on Brucker, see *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, II, 6, in *Sämtliche Werke* (1986), vol. 14, p. 243.

<sup>418</sup> For his knowledge of Plato (see e.g. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B 372), the theory of atoms (see e.g. *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, AA I, 266 and possibly for his knowledge of Descartes, Kant used Brucker. The latter hypothesis makes Schütt, see 'Kant, Cartesius und der „Descartes nachgedacht“, in *Descartes nachgedacht*, p. 177.

<sup>419</sup> Hegel frequently used Brucker throughout his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Glockner, vol. 19.

<sup>420</sup> Schopenhauer praises Brucker's work, see *Parerga und Paralipomena* I, SSW V, 36, and uses it, see e.g. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I, SSW II, 476 and *Parerga und Paralipomena* I, SSW V, 6.

<sup>421</sup> Degérando, in HC I, vol. I, p. 146 calls Brucker 'le véritable créateur dans cet ordre de recherches [i.e. the historiography of philosophy], en considérant l'ensemble et l'étendue qu'il a su leur donner. Il y a compris toutes les branches de la philosophie, toutes les périodes de son développement, tous les pays où elle a germé, même les temps et les contrées où elle était à peine élevée au-dessus des simples traditions vulgaires...'. His eulogy continues for several pages.

<sup>422</sup> According to Cousin, Brucker is 'le père de l'histoire de la philosophie', see *Manuel de l'histoire de la philosophie traduit de l'allemand de Tennemann par V. Cousin* (1829), vol. 1, Preface p. XX.

importance of Descartes for philosophy and the history of philosophy is not a purely historical one. In the following sections we will see whether or not it was the historiographers of philosophy who claimed that the period of modern philosophy began with Descartes, thus giving him the status of the ‘father of modern philosophy’.

### 10.1 Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763-1821)

In *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften* (1800-05),<sup>423</sup> Buhle intended to emulate the work of his colleagues, only doing this more concisely. Nevertheless it took him eight volumes to do so. Although the major works of Tennemann and others<sup>424</sup> all appeared around the same time, this did not deter Buhle from writing another history of philosophy. His reason for this was not that these works were lacking, but rather:

Sie soll das, was jene Werke in mehrern Bänden weitläufiger und mit mancherley für die besonderen Zwecke derselben sehr lehrreichen und nützlichen Nebenuntersuchungen verbunden enthalten, gedrängter darstellen, ohne in die Kürze und Trockenheit eines Compendiums auszuarten, das gerade bey der Geschichte der Philosophie nicht leicht etwas mehr als Nomenclatur seyn kann . . .<sup>425</sup>

In the first volume (1800) he states that in order to define modern philosophy one must have a precise historical knowledge of ancient philosophy. As a result of this approach, Buhle does not think that Descartes should be seen as the founder of an original philosophical system in modern times, or that modern philosophy begins with Descartes. Also, according to Buhle, Descartes was not the first modern founder of an original philosophical system, as the sixteenth century had already produced several equally original thinkers. Buhle even questions the originality of Descartes, for looking at his nearest predecessors and at the Greek systems, we can see, for example, how his scepticism relies on these works.<sup>426</sup> Thus, Buhle suggests that in order to properly understand Cartesian philosophy we have to study the philosophy which preceded it and consider its relation to Descartes.

In the preface to the third volume (1801), however, he seems to have changed his opinion.

Allerdings hat Des Cartes das Verdienst, zuerst unter den neuern Weltweisen ein unabhängiges Philosophiren nicht nur als Methode

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<sup>423</sup> Henceforth GPEW.

<sup>424</sup> Of the many great historiographers of philosophy we want to mention Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) and his major work *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom* (1781-1782) and Dieterich Tiedemann (1748-1803) and his major work, *Geist der speculativen Philosophie* (1791-1797). For a discussion of most historiographers and their works see Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes. Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (1990), Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (1968) and Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1973). For a short and clear overview see the article of John Passmore ‘Historiography of Philosophy’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edwards, vol 6, pp. 226-230.

<sup>425</sup> GPEW I, ix.

<sup>426</sup> GPEW I, vii.

empfohlen, sondern auch, wenn gleich kein in jeder Hinsicht nachahmungswürdiges Muster, doch durch die Originalität seiner Entdeckungen, und die philosophische Revolution, welche dieselben bewirken, ein merkwürdiges und zur Nacheiferung anreizendes Beyspiel desselben gegeben zu haben.<sup>427</sup>

A possible but weak explanation for this change could be that the third volume appeared a year later than the first, and in preparing for this volume Buhle had probably studied Descartes more thoroughly.

In contrast to the common attitude towards Descartes during the eighteenth century, Buhle distinguishes between Cartesian mathematics, physics, astronomy and cosmology on the one hand, and his philosophy on the other. In writing the history of philosophy, Buhle is not focusing, and does not want to focus, on the former topics. He only remarks that Descartes's cosmophysics and astronomy did not amount to anything because his axioms were arbitrary hypotheses based on one-sided or even false observations. According to Buhle, the reputation of Cartesian philosophy had been contaminated by its association with his false physics and cosmophysics through the scientific interest of readers.

However, when he comes to speak about the 'eigentliche' Cartesian philosophy, Descartes does not fare much better. With reference to the four rules of the *Discours de la méthode*, which Buhle calls the 'praktische Logik des Des Cartes', he says that Descartes has neither understood them nor used them properly. In particular, he considers that Descartes's views concerning the evidence and succinctness of knowledge were false or undeveloped.<sup>428</sup>

Buhle undermines Descartes's arguments and rejects the most important theories in the Cartesian system. His reasoning is as follows. Firstly, Descartes obtained the criterion of truth, finding that which is clear and distinct to be true, through the notion of the clarity and immediate intuitiveness of thinking. However, as there was still a possibility of error, he needed the ontological proof to conclude the existence of the most Perfect Being. This led him to conclude, from the uncertain criterion of truth, the proposition 'God exists' as apodictically certain, and with its help he retracted the former's uncertainty. In this manner, according to Buhle, Descartes clearly smuggled certainty into his system.

Wenn die Deutlichkeit des Denkens an und für sich noch ein unsicheres Kriterium des Wahren ist, so ist auch die Existenz Gottes unsicher, sofern sie bloß auf eine deutliche Idee des vollkommensten Wesens sich stützt; und ist diese unsicher, so kann aus ihr nimmermehr auf die Existenz einer gewissen Wahrheit überhaupt, die von Gott der Seele unmittelbar mitgetheilt wäre, geschlossen werden.<sup>429</sup>

Buhle does not seem to make any distinction between Descartes's ontological argument and his cosmological argument for the existence of God. The cosmological argument, by definition, relies on the principle of causality. In the

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<sup>427</sup> GPEW III, vi.

<sup>428</sup> GPEW III, 12.

<sup>429</sup> GPEW III, 16-17.

Third Meditation, Descartes explains that the idea of God cannot come from the self (we quote the first French translation from 1647):

Par le nom de Dieu i'entens vne substance infinie, eternelle, immuable, independante, toute connoissante, toute puissante, & par laquelle moy-mesme, & toutes les autres choses qui sont (s'il est vray qu'il y en ait qui existent) ont esté creées & produites. Or ces auantages sont si grands & si eminens, que plus attentiuement ie les considere, & moins ie me persuade que l'idée que i'en ay puisse tirer son origine de moy seul. Et par consequent il faut necessairement conclure de tout ce que i'ay dit auparauant, que Dieu existe; car, encore que l'idée de la substance soit en moy, de cela mesme que ie suis vne substance, ie n'aurois pas neantmoins l'idée d'une substance infinie, moy qui suis vn estre finy, si elle n'auoit esté mise en moy par quelque substance qui fust veritablement infinie.<sup>430</sup>

As we can see, Descartes makes use of the principle of causality, which states that the cause of something is greater or more pure than its effect, together with the idea of perfection which suggests that something perfect cannot result from something less perfect. In this case he applies these notions to infinity leading to the conclusion that something finite cannot be the cause of something infinite.

The certainty that Buhle mentions, appears in the Fifth Meditation where Descartes produces an ontological argument for the existence of God.

Or maintenant, si de cela seul que ie puis tirer de ma pensée l'idée de quelque chose, il s'ensuit que tout ce que ie reconnois clairement & distinctement appartenir à cette chose, luy appartient en effect, ne puis-je pas tirer de cecy vn argument & vne preuve demonstratiue de l'existence de Dieu? Il est certain que ie ne trouue pas moins en moy son idée, c'est à dire l'idée d'un estre souuerainement parfait, que celle de quelque figure ou de quelque nombre que ce soit. Et ie ne connois pas moins clairement & distinctement qu'une actuelle & eternelle existence appartient à sa nature, que ie connois que tout ce que ie puis demonstrier de quelque figure ou de quelque nombre, appartient veritablement à la nature de cette figure ou de cet nombre.<sup>431</sup>

Descartes connects the notion of 'un être souverainement parfait' with certain knowledge, in the sense that God cannot be a deceiver, since deception is an imperfection. In the cosmological argument, however, the concept of perfection does not play a role, as it is focused instead on the concept of infinity.

The Cartesian theory of innate ideas is also criticized in Buhle's exposition. After having explained what innate ideas are, he states that it is clear that the criterion for the notion of the innate ideas is highly undetermined and unstable. It is remarkable, however, that Buhle determines the use of innate ideas themselves as a criterion; and unfortunately, he does not explain how he arrived at this interpretation.<sup>432</sup> According to him, the criterion for the existence of innate ideas is

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<sup>430</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 35-36.

<sup>431</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 52.

<sup>432</sup> In Part V we shall return in detail to the interpretation of innate idea as criterion with reference to Hermann Cohen.

based on the subjective clarity (*Klarheit*) of consciousness and a ‘conviction’ which is never the same for different people at different times. He therefore thinks that the criterion is exposed to the errors, fantasy and feelings involved. Moreover, it is impossible to completely determine the number of innate ideas according to this criterion.<sup>433</sup>

Buhle’s most severe criticism concerns the Cartesian method and the system in general. According to Buhle, Descartes made a major mistake (*Hauptfehler*) in abandoning all preceding philosophy along with most of its principles, some of which were undeniable. Instead, he only trusted the facts of his own consciousness. It is highly probable that Buhle thinks that Descartes denied the history of philosophy as a result of this method. For while, in order to discover new methods and directions in philosophy, independent thinking is required, if one takes into account the older systems one might prevent errors. Moreover, reference to preceding works enables testing or confirmation of this new way of forming ideas.<sup>434</sup>

The Cartesian principle of truth, though appreciated by Kant as we saw in the previous part, is, for Buhle, the reason why the Cartesian system as a whole went wrong. According to Buhle, Descartes confused:

... die ideale Wirklichkeit mit der realen, wie sich das bey seinen Sätzen von der Seele als denkenden Substanz, bey seinem Beweise vom Dasein Gottes u.w. zeigte.<sup>435</sup>

Notwithstanding this difference of opinion between Buhle and Kant, Buhle’s terminology is quite Kantian, as the following quotation illustrates.

Darauf dachte Descartes nicht einmal, die Grundprincipien der geistigen Vermögen des Menschen rein aufzunehmen und systematisch zusammenzustellen, diesen ihr eigentümliches Gebiet anzuweisen, und die Grenzen ihrer Anwendung zu bestimmen; sondern er gieng gleich daran, ein neues philosophisches System selbst aus dem unmittelbaren Bewußtsein aufzuführen, ohne vorher die Natur dieses Bewußtseins, die Merkmale von Klarheit, Deutlichkeit, Evidenz, auf die er sich doch so sehr stützte, genauer zu entwickeln und zu bestimmen.<sup>436</sup>

In other words, Buhle expected Descartes to perform a kind of ‘Kritik der reinen Vernunft’, before building his philosophical system, which is a quite anachronistic demand.

Despite his criticism of almost every theme in Descartes, including the theory of innate ideas, Buhle still thinks that without Descartes, Locke and Leibniz would not have developed their theories of knowledge. Descartes showed that philosophy did not have to be the dry pursuit that it had become within Scholasticism. On the contrary, it could be a highly fruitful discipline when applied to nature and mankind. The Cartesian system proved to be favourable to the improvement of

<sup>433</sup> See GPEW III, 24. In Part V it shall become clear that this kind of rejection of innate ideas changes in the course of the nineteenth century.

<sup>434</sup> Conf. GPEW III, 41.

<sup>435</sup> GPEW III, 42.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

philosophy, because it awakened the ‘Geist des philosophischen Selbstdenkens’. Descartes showed that it was possible to create a new system from one’s own consciousness without depending on existing philosophical systems. When Buhle compares Descartes with Bacon, he remarks that although Bacon rejected all speculations based on concepts, he did not solve the problems situated in the essence of the mind. In this sense Descartes wanted to address these problems in an original way. This caused much emulation of Descartes. At the same time, Descartes’s reasonable hypotheses impelled examination, which could only be beneficial to philosophy. The course of his entire speculation, which Buhle calls ‘die Genesis seines Systems’, led his opponents, if only in order to dispute and refute the system, to a more precise study of human understanding (*Erkenntnisvermögen*).

## 10.2 Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761-1819)

### 10.2.1 Tennemann’s conception of the history of philosophy

We will start our discussion of Tennemann by first determining his view of the historiography of philosophy, and follow this with his description of Descartes.

In the first volume of his *Geschichte der Philosophie*<sup>437</sup> (1798), Tennemann not only tries to give a full overview of the history of philosophy, but also explains how research in the history of philosophy should be done. Despite the considerable number of books that had been written in this field, he considers the majority to be miserable and utterly useless and others to be mediocre, while a few works come close to excellence. According to Tennemann, the history of philosophy should not be the history of philosophers or philosophical theories, but the account of the formation and development of philosophy as science.<sup>438</sup>

This means that everything, that is, the division into periods, the selection and composition of single facts, the account of the single systems, and the short biographical description of the philosopher, should all serve the goal of historically accounting for the course of philosophy as science. Tennemann defines ‘historical

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<sup>437</sup> Henceforth GdP. In *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 10 Schneider describes Tennemann’s work as follows: ‘... die Entstehung des geistesgeschichtlichen Denkens am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bedeutet für die Philosophie (aber sicher nicht nur für sie) eine Revolution, deren Folgen heute praktisch wirksam sind und zugleich vergessen machen, daß es auch zu dieser Revolution eine Geschichte gibt. Im Zentrum dieser grundlegenden Veränderung des Umgangs mit der Philosophie steht beispielsweise das Werk von Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann. Tennemann ist Autor einer *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Und eben dieses Genre der Literatur markiert in bezeichnender Weise das Interesse, das im späten 18. Jahrhunderts zu einem ganz neuen Begriff des Philosophischen führt. Es ist das historische Interesse.’

<sup>438</sup> Tennemann probably did not mean ‘science’ in the very strict sense Kant gave it. Kant understands science (*Wissenschaft*) only as pure mathematics and pure physics, see *Proleg.*, AA IV, p. 279 (§5): ‘... wir [können] uns nur auf zwei Wissenschaften der theoretischen Erkenntniß . . . berufen, nämlich reine Mathematik und reine Naturwissenschaft.’ In *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*, AA IV, 468, Kant seems to go even further: ‘Eigentliche Wissenschaft kann nur diejenige genannt werden, deren Gewißheit apodiktisch ist; Erkenntniß, die bloß empirische Gewißheit enthalten kann, ist ein nur uneigentlich so genanntes Wissen.’ This means that chemistry, for instance, is for Kant not a science but merely a ‘systematische Kunst’.

account' as a 'complete representation from facts' and the historiographer obtains such a representation when he draws everything from the sources himself. Consequently, Tennemann remains sceptical about using earlier historiographers without checking the sources himself. Although much work had been done and even though there was an abundance of material in the history of philosophy, most of it had the character of a collection and very little was reliable or proven.

In order to overcome these problems, Tennemann creates a method for producing the history of philosophy, in which he dictates the rules and the plan. First of all, a concept of the history of philosophy is needed. This is obtained by determining the concept of history followed by the concept of the history of science. The concept 'history of philosophy', however, cannot be the same as the concept of the history of science, because the latter limits the contents of philosophy. A history of science would exclude errors and failed attempts, and in this way, we would make the same mistake that Grohmann<sup>439</sup> had made:

Indem er von dem Begriff der Philosophie als Wissenschaft ausgehet, und dadurch sowohl den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie als ihren Inhalt und Form bestimmt, kommt er auf das Resultat, daß sie eine systematische Darstellung der nothwendigen Systeme sey, aus welcher alles Zufällige, Veränderliche, selbst die Zeitfolge ausgeschlossen sey – Bestimmungen, nach welchen keine Geschichte der Philosophie mehr denkbar ist. Und wohin würde endlich diese Methode führen, wenn sie nach der strengsten Consequenz verfolgt würde? Denn dann würde nicht von nothwendigen Systemen, sondern nur von einem die Rede seyn können.<sup>440</sup>

In the broad sense, 'history' is the narrative of what happened at a certain time. In the narrow sense, it is the narrative of a series of events that make up a whole. In this latter sense, it is not sufficient to consider these events as chronologically succeeding or accompanying each other, they would also have to be similar in respect to their connection to an object.

As any further analysis of Tennemann's method of the historiography would be a study in itself, which is not relevant to our study, we will not go into it any further. Instead, we will focus on what he has to say about Descartes.

### 10.2.2 Tennemann on Descartes

In the tenth volume<sup>441</sup> of *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tennemann discusses the philosophy of Descartes. It can be said that he expresses a rather reserved opinion. He writes that although Descartes neither succeeded in drawing up a complete and perfect system of philosophy, nor invented a whole new method, nevertheless, he managed to acquire a permanent value for philosophy taking it in a new direction.

<sup>439</sup> In GdP 1, LXXVIII Tennemann mentions Grohmann's work *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1797). We find this work together with *Was heisst Geschichte der Philosophie?* in *Neue Beiträge zur kritischen Philosophie und insbesondere zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I (1798).

<sup>440</sup> GdP 1, ix.

<sup>441</sup> The tenth volume appeared in 1817, nineteen years after the first. For that reason we have chronologically placed Tennemann after Buhle, who published his *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* from 1800 to 1805.



His reservation turns to criticism when discussing the four rules of the *Discours de la méthode*. He finds that the fact that these rules are so imperfect and are not expressed with logical precision can be excused by the lack of thorough research in thinking in the early modern period. However, they do not give rise to great expectations concerning the edifice which they would have to found.

Concerning the method of doubt, which is explained quite thoroughly, Tennemann claims that it contains many mental leaps and arbitrary poetics. He thinks that if every thought could be turned into a counterargument against the truth, then everything could easily be made doubtful. This doubt, however, is meaningless and can hardly be called philosophical, as this must at least be in accordance with reason. According to Tennemann the Cartesian doubt is ‘nur eine philosophische Maschinerie’ he used ‘um seiner Philosophie mehr Glanz und Schein zu geben’.<sup>442</sup> Tennemann obviously does not interpret Descartes’s doubt as *methodological* doubt, which explains why he says that he does not understand how Descartes could switch so quickly from scepticism to dogmatism. He thinks that the certainty which Descartes puts in place of doubt is totally unfounded, and that the argument is circular:

Denn wenn es kein Unterscheidungsmerkmal des Wachens von dem Träumen gibt, so ist und bleibt es also zweifelhaft, ob Gottes Daseyn und Wahrhaftigkeit, wovon zuletzt alle Wahrheit der Erfahrung abhängig gemacht wird, nicht ebenfalls erträumt, und so alles in einen Wahnglauben verschlungen sey. Nie hätte also Cartesius sich aus diesem Abgrunde des Zweifels retten können, wenn er nicht bei allem Schein des Zweifels etwas Wahres und ursprüngliche Gesetze desselben vorausgesetzt hätte.<sup>443</sup>

As far as the *cogito* is concerned, Tennemann states that it is not clear whether Descartes meant it as a deductive argument or as an immediate fact of consciousness. From the writings of Descartes it is not clear which of the options we should take.<sup>444</sup> We will see that on this point historiographers of philosophy differ.<sup>445</sup>

Tennemann does not discuss the Cartesian physics extensively, because Descartes himself declared this system to be a mere hypothesis, or even a false assumption.<sup>446</sup> Omitting Descartes’s physics for this reason appears rather unprofessional. To many, a historiographer should, in the first place, describe and not judge. Nevertheless, it illustrates Tennemann’s systematical intentions.

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<sup>442</sup> GdP 10, 226.

<sup>443</sup> GdP 10, 227.

<sup>444</sup> In *Principes* I (§10), AT IX-2, 28-29, Descartes did not deny that we have to know what thinking, existence and certainty are, but he finds them to be very simple notions that do not provide us with any knowledge of anything that exists.

<sup>445</sup> Erdmann, for instance, explicitly states that ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ cannot be seen as the conclusion of a syllogism, see *Darstellung und Kritik der Philosophie des Cartesius* (1834), p. 158. Cousin, who translated Tennemann’s *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1812) under the title *Manuel de l’histoire de la philosophie* (1829), too claims this in *Histoire générale de la philosophie* p. 393-394 and his *Fragments Philosophiques* (in *Œuvres*, vol. 2) p. 112.

<sup>446</sup> Cf. *Principes* III, AT IX-2, 123ff.

In his description of the role of innate ideas in the Cartesian system we not only notice his inclination towards systematical philosophy, but also that he is highly critical:

Er hielt sich allein an das Denken und hoffte durch Begriffe, vorzüglich angeborne, worin aber schon eine grundlose Hypothese lag, den übrigen philosophischen Gehalt der Erkenntniß in Schlüssen herausbringen zu können. Da er also etwas ursprünglich Gewisses in den angebornen Begriffen und Grundsätzen voraussetzte, und alle andere Wahrheiten durch Schlüsse demonstirte, so kam alles darauf an, das Angeborne, nachdem es als solches erwiesen, nicht beliebig, sondern nach einem Grundsätze vollständig aufzustellen, und die übrigen Wahrheiten der Vernunft durch dasselbe bündig herzuleiten. In beiden Rücksichten ist die Philosophie des Cartesius sehr unvollkommen, kein System, sondern ein Aggregat und eine reihe kühner, blendender Schlüsse, welche vielfältig gegen die logische Form verstoßen.<sup>447</sup>

Like Buhle, Tennemann's remarks sound rather Kantian, the difference being that Tennemann most certainly did read the works of Descartes, whereas Kant probably did not.<sup>448</sup>

As to the Objections to the *Meditations*, Tennemann elaborately discusses Gassendi's remarks in the Fifth set of Objections. In contrast to Descartes's distinction of classes of ideas, Gassendi thought that all ideas are adventitious, proceeding from things which exist outside the mind and arising through the senses. The mind, then, is the faculty of perceiving these ideas, which Gassendi thinks are quite distinct and are received exactly as they are thought. According to Gassendi there are no innate ideas, for he thinks that every example that Descartes gave can be shown to have an external origin.

As for the forms which you say are innate, there do not seem to be any: whatever ideas are said to belong to this category also appear to have an external origin. You say 'I derive from my own nature my understanding of what a thing is'. I do not think you here mean the actual power of understanding, which we undoubtedly have and which is not in question; you are talking about the idea of a thing. Moreover you are not talking of the idea of some particular thing; for the sun, this stone, and all individual items are things, and yet you do not say that our ideas of them are innate. So you must be talking of the idea of a thing considered in general, which is virtually synonymous with 'entity', and has a similarly wide extension. But how, I ask you, can this idea be in the mind unless all the individual things exist, together with all the kinds of things from which the mind abstracts so as to form the concept which is not peculiar to any individual item but nonetheless fits them all? For surely if the idea

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<sup>447</sup> GdP 10, 265.

<sup>448</sup> On the 'critical' position of Tennemann, which meant to redefine historiography in the light of the achievements of the critical philosophy, we can say that its task is to describe the reality of 'becoming' (*Werden*) instead of constructing a system of possibilities. The idea of system is not entirely abandoned, but it plays a different role, viz. that of the target of the movement of history. We have to keep in mind, though, that this movement itself is not a system. Cf. Schneider (1990), p. 297 ff.

of a thing is innate, the idea of an animal, or a plant, or a stone, or of any universal will also be innate.<sup>449</sup>

Tennemann declares that Descartes's replies are highly unsatisfactory. Descartes merely renders Gassendi's argument *ad absurdum* by saying that in this way we could also prove that neither did Praxiteles produce any sculptures, as he did not obtain the marble from within himself, nor did Gassendi raise this objection, because it uses words which were not invented by him, being borrowed from others.<sup>450</sup> Tennemann's main objection is that it is of no consequence to maintain the existence of God as the principle of certainty, because in order to prove God's existence we need some propositions that are certain in advance. He thinks that Descartes replied very poorly to the objection that, if one cannot be certain of anything before the existence of God is certainly known, then one cannot be sure that one is a thinking being either:

Cartesius beantwortete diesen Einwurf gar nicht befriedigend, durch die Bemerkung: nur allein die apodictische Gewißheit der Schlußsätze, welche wiederkehren können, ohne daß man auf ihre Gründe noch die gehörige Aufmerksamkeit wendet, werde durch die gewisse Erkenntniß von Gottes Daseyn bedingt. In dem Satze: ich denke, also bin ich, werde aber die Existenz nicht durch Schlüsse abgeleitet, sondern durch unmittelbare Anschauung wahrgenommen. Sollte dieser Satz auf einem Schluß beruhen, so müßte der allgemeine Satz: alles was denket, existiret, vorausgehen, der aber nur aus dem einzelnen: ich denke, also bin ich, gefolgert sey. Denn die Natur unseres Verstandes bringe es mit sich, daß er aus besonderen Sätzen erst die allgemeinen bildet.<sup>451</sup>

According to Tennemann, we cannot deny that Descartes is responsible for some excellent achievements in mathematics, physics and philosophy, in ways which only bore fruit in later times.<sup>452</sup> Cartesian philosophy had many adversaries in his time and led to many quarrels and controversies. As well, due to unfortunate religious controversies, it was dangerous to publicly declare oneself to be a Cartesian. After these quarrels were resolved, people managed to obtain a more precise view of the content and value of Cartesian philosophy. This reassessment of Descartes, as we saw and will see, played various roles in French and German philosophical movements or positions; while in England and Italy it was merely a temporary distraction.

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<sup>449</sup> *Obj.* V, CSM II, 195-196.

<sup>450</sup> CSM, II, 250.

<sup>451</sup> GdP 10, 278-279.

<sup>452</sup> GdP 10, 284.

## 11 THE REVIVAL OF CARTESIAN THEMES IN GERMAN IDEALISM

### 11.1 Fichte and the *cogito*

As we saw in the previous part, during the eighteenth century the Cartesian foundation for certain knowledge (*cogito, ergo sum*) was considered to be more of a philosophical joke than a serious attempt to found knowledge. In this section, we will show that the Cartesian foundation was restored by Fichte, in the sense that he found a fundamental role for it.

The task that Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) sets for philosophy, in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), is similar to Descartes's attempt to found and structure science. Fichte was probably the first thinker to take the Cartesian foundation of knowledge seriously, attempting to systematically establish the basis of knowledge in self-consciousness.

In order to work with self-consciousness as the foundation of all sciences, Fichte attempted to develop this concept more critically than his predecessors. According to Fichte, the concept of self-consciousness can only be thought under conditions that philosophy had not observed since Descartes. For Fichte, thinking only thinks in so far as it thinks a certain state of affairs. As such, self-consciousness is the only case in which the act of thinking and that which is thought (the intention and the intended) are not different from one another. Furthermore, this unity cannot be shown beforehand, rather, one can only be conscious of oneself during the act itself. The 'I' is not an object, but an act. It is always possible as an act of 'self-positing', by which the 'I' calls itself 'I'; or in other words, as an act by which the 'I' has itself as the theme of its knowing. Without this act, there is no 'I'. Wherever the 'I' is, one also finds this duality of the subject and the subject as object for-itself. It follows then that one can never know the subject solely for-itself. Whenever we think it, we have already presumed that it is the thinking subject in this thought.

There are a number of similarities between Descartes and Fichte. Firstly, both establish the foundation of the sciences by way of reflexivity. Secondly, this foundation appears to be an act of knowledge itself. Thirdly, both consider that the certainty gained is similar to mathematical certainty. However, Fichte goes further by solving the problems arising from the Cartesian understanding of reflexive thinking. In the Cartesian development of the foundation of certain knowledge, reflexivity still presupposes the 'I' as the object of reflection. Fichte overcomes this by claiming that the 'I' 'setzt' (poses) itself, thereby focusing not, like Descartes, on the act of reflection, but on the act of identification. This identification is taken as an act which constitutes the members of this relationship in their identification with one another. This only works for the concept of the 'I', that is, the relation of identity interpreted ontologically as 'I am I'. This is what Fichte calls a 'Tathandlung'. The 'positing' (*setzen*) of the 'I' by itself is its pure activity (*Tätigkeit*). At the same time it is both the act (*das Handelnde*) and the product of

this act, the doing (*das Tätige*) and that which is produced by the deed. Act and deed are one and the same, and therefore the ‘I am I’ is the expression of a deed-act (*Tathandlung*).

The founding idea of the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794 is the proposition: ‘the I primarily and directly posits its own being’.<sup>453</sup> With this notion, he is the first to fully understand and think through Descartes’s basic idea while at the same time broadening its scope. Descartes’s proof of the existence of the self through the reflexivity of the *cogito* resisted the dream-argument and the hypothesis of the evil genius. In order to found all other certain knowledge, however, he had to assume a series of innate, clear and distinct ideas and, last but not least, a proof for the existence of God. Fichte offers a more considered implementation of the principle of the self, arguing that only the ‘I’ can be the highest principle.

Auf unsern Satz, als absoluten Grundsatz alles Wissens hat gedeutet Kant in seiner Deduktion der Kategorien; er hat ihn aber nie *als* Grundsatz bestimmt aufgestellt. Vor ihm hat Kartes einen ähnlichen angegeben: cogito, ergo sum, welches nicht eben der Untersatz, und die Schlußfolge eines Syllogism seyn muß, dessen Obersatz hieße: quodcunque cogitat, est: sondern welches er auch sehr wohl als unmittelbare Thatsache des Bewußtseyns betrachtet haben kann. Dann hieße es soviel, als cogitans sum, ergo sum (wie wir sagen würden, sum, ergo sum). Aber dann ist der Zusatz cogitans völlig überflüssig; man denkt nicht nothwendig, wenn man ist, aber man ist nothwendig, wenn man denkt. Das Denken ist gar nicht das Wesen, sondern nur eine besondere Bestimmung des Seyns; und es gibt ausser jener noch manche andere Bestimmungen unsers Seyns.<sup>454</sup>

In Section 2.3 we compared the Cartesian *cogito* with the Kantian ‘Ich denke’ and saw that, though he had probably not read him, Kant had the same objection as Hobbes. This concerned the Second Meditation in which Descartes discovers the one certain proposition ‘I exist, therefore I am’, but then asks himself what the ‘I’ is:

Je suis, i'existe: cela est certain; mais combien de temps? A sçavoir, autant de temps que ie pense; car peut-estre se pouroit-il faire, si ie cessois de penser, que ie cesserois en mesme temps d'estre ou d'exister. Je n'admets maintenant rien qui ne soit necessairement vray: ie ne suis donc, precisement parlant, qu'une chose qui pense, c'est à dire vn esprit, vn entendement ou vne raison, qui sont des termes dont la signification m'estoit auparavant inconnuë. Or ie suis vne chose vraye, & vrayment existante; mais quelle chose? Je l'ay dit: vne chose qui pense.<sup>455</sup>

Whereas for Descartes the certainty of his being lies in his thinking, Fichte reduces this duality to a faculty of positing something directly at all (*etwas schlechthin zu setzen*). This positing, for example, A=A, is done in and by the ‘I’. Fichte claims to have further reduced the Cartesian foundation, but has he? What is left of Fichte’s ‘Grundsatz’ without the faculty of positing something ‘schlechthin’? Is the ‘I’ that

<sup>453</sup> Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [1794], GA I/2, 261: ‘Das Ich setzt ursprünglich schlechthin sein eigenes Seyn’, henceforth: GWL.

<sup>454</sup> GWL, GA I/2, 262.

<sup>455</sup> *Med. II* (F), AT IX-1, 21.

posits itself something fundamentally different from the *ego cogitans*? The important difference between the Cartesian and the Fichtian *ego* is that the former has an epistemological status and the latter an ontological one.<sup>456</sup> We have to add, however, that Fichte's *ego* is also a formal principle in the transcendental sense. The double function of 'setzen' is that it is constitutive and factual ('Tat' is the result and 'Handlung' the activity). We also find this double function in Descartes's *dubitare*, the activity of which the *res cogitans* is the result.

In *Eigene Meditationen über Elementar Philosophie* (which can be considered as the *Wissenschaftslehre in statu nascendi*),<sup>457</sup> we see that Fichte subtly but radically changes the Cartesian proposition. Instead of *cogito, ergo sum*, he says *pono me existentem, ergo existo*. This clearly shows where Fichte found<sup>458</sup> his 'absolut-ersten, schlechthin unbedingten Grundsatz alles menschlichen Wissens'. Since it was impossible to found knowledge through a proof – and the *cogito, ergo sum* should not be interpreted as one – philosophy falls short in this quest. Sometimes when philosophy falls short, however, the history of philosophy completes its quest.

In our discussion of the reinstatement of Descartes in French philosophy during the first half of the nineteenth century, we will see that Maine de Biran and Cousin appealed to Fichte in their designation of psychology as the fundamental science.

## 11.2 Hegel on the 'originator of modern philosophy'

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) view of Descartes can be found in three different texts of his history of philosophy and also in his *Enzyklopädie*.<sup>459</sup> Of the three texts concerning his history of philosophy, the first has two distinct versions and editions. The edition of Hoffmeister, which contains Hegel's *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, cannot be considered to be a critical one, because the manuscript on which it was based, consisting of the lecture notes by K. Weltrich, was burnt during the war. Instead, we will use the new edition of Walter Jaeschke (Meiner 1993), which is an excellent critical edition based on various sources. The second text, found in Glockner's edition of Hegel's *Sämtliche Werke* contains *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, a compilation of the lecture notes of various students over a number of years. This edition is the most extensive, but is not preferred as it is uncertain which parts of it are written by students and which by editors. Finally, there is the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, which is based on the lectures from the Wintersemester 1825/26 held at the Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin. This

<sup>456</sup> The following quote supports our claim, GWL, GA I/2, 260: 'Zur Erläuterung! Man hört wohl die Frage aufwerfen; was war ich wohl, ehe ich zum Selbstbewußtseyn kam? Die natürliche Antwort darauf ist: *ich* war gar nicht; denn ich war nicht Ich. Das Ich ist nur insofern, inwiefern es sich seiner bewußt ist.'

<sup>457</sup> See GA II/3, p. 19 (preface from the editors R. Lauth and H. Jacob).

<sup>458</sup> We have to say 'find', because '*Beweisen, oder bestimmen* läßt er sich nicht . . .', as the opening sentence of GWL reads, GA I/2, 255.

<sup>459</sup> We will use *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* [1830] ed. W. Bonsiepen and H.-Ch. Lucas, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (GW) vol. 20.

edition, by Garniron and Jaeschke, takes this particular year because it is substantiated by the lecture notes of five different students.<sup>460</sup> In the following, we will base Hegel's view on this edition, and where we need additional information we will use the Glockner edition, bearing in mind the possible corruption.

In addition to what Hegel writes on Descartes in both editions of *Geschichte der Philosophie*, and *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hegel also declares Descartes to be the 'founder of modern philosophy' in a letter he wrote to Cousin dated 5 April 1826. Here he also praises Cousin's edition of the works of Descartes:

Votre édition de Descartes nous présente non seulement le point de départ de la philos. moderne, mais le tableau aussi des efforts savans de son tems dans toute leur étendue.<sup>461</sup>

The term 'modern' is meant to indicate that philosophy became autonomous, no longer depending on anything but reason, having realized that self-consciousness is the essential moment of truth. According to Hegel, Descartes had started the project of philosophy over again by constituting its basis anew. Hegel refers to the method of doubt, by which Descartes wanted to eliminate any assumption or bias. He did this by suggesting that if we are to begin with thinking itself, we cannot assume anything is independent of thinking, because the assumed thing would not then be posited by thinking, nor would thinking be in-itself. By systematically doubting everything, Descartes reached another level, the immediate certainty of thinking, thus founding modern philosophy.

In the *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hegel gives a clear account of Cartesian philosophy as a whole (this account is considerably shorter in the Garniron/Jaeschke edition). We can safely assume that the general account Hegel gives is correct, we will therefore mainly discuss his super-historical remarks and criticism. Since Hegel himself seems to abandon the distinction between historiography of philosophy and systematic philosophy, we should not have too much trouble in filtering out these super-historical remarks.

As we have seen, the main reason that Descartes is the true initiator of modern philosophy is that subsequent to his philosophy, thinking itself became a principle in philosophy. By going back to the basis of thinking, Descartes re-constituted the foundations of philosophy. Starting from very simple propositions and refraining from any assumptions, he reduced the content of these propositions to thought and extension (or being). Hegel calls the period of philosophy that begins with Descartes, the period in which philosophy proceeded formally.<sup>462</sup> With Descartes, thinking started to become self-reflective, as is characterized by the words '*cogito*,

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<sup>460</sup> See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (1986), Teil 4 ed. Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke, p. ix. Henceforth: *Vorlesungen*.

<sup>461</sup> M. Espagne and M. Werner (eds.), *Lettres d'Allemagne, Victor Cousin et les hégéliens* (1990), p. 72. This letter is also published in *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1952-1960) ed. Hoffmeister, vol. III, pp. 107-111 (№ 508).

<sup>462</sup> *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (Einleitung)*, ed. Jaeschke (1993), p. 203: 'Die dritte Periode ist die der förmlichen Auftretung der Philosophie; sie beginnt mit dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg oder Cartesius'. The disjunction in this quote illustrates an unsolved twist of Hegelian thought which apparently justifies a comparison between Descartes and the Thirty Years' War.

*ergo sum*'. To Hegel, these words are defining for modern philosophy.<sup>463</sup> Being a dialectician, Hegel considered that the preceding period, which focused on the substantial truth of God, would be followed by a period of 'fermentation' in which an understanding of the opposite of the thinking which was focused on substantial truth would develop. Like the fermentation of beer, the fermentation of this thought resulted in 'ein klares Bewußtsein des Denkens über sich selbst'. In other words, the focus of philosophy turned to the determination of the nature of thinking itself, determining the freedom of thinking in such a way that thinking begins from nothing, 'Das ist die Philosophie, die mit Descartes anfängt, welcher der Begründer der neueren Philosophie ist'.<sup>464</sup>

In *Einleitung*, Hegel criticizes Descartes's mechanistic view. He suggests that although it is the task of every philosopher to understand the entire universe, abstract thoughts only relate to external nature. Atomistic and Cartesian philosophy do not go further than merely mechanistic concepts.<sup>465</sup> According to Hegel, the Cartesian understanding of thinking is founded on mechanism. While Hegel does not reject mechanism as such, he considers that its general application in philosophy would seriously restrict its endeavour. It does not suffice to apply mechanism to the world, because the mind (*Geist*), which according to Hegel is the essence of life, can hardly be considered mechanistically.<sup>466</sup> To consider and understand organic life, we need a much more concrete principle, a concept that is more 'self-reflected' (*mehr in sich vertieft*) than the principle of mechanism.<sup>467</sup>

One of the important characteristics of modernity is the changing relation of church and state. At the time of the Thirty-Years War the different churches became settled institutions, which led to a separation between church and state. According to Hegel, it was only then that the state became autonomous. It was at that point that Descartes formulated the idea of the determination of thinking and being which was later more thoroughly thought out by Spinoza. The unity of thinking and being took shape in the form of the absolute substance, which Hegel calls 'die moderne Idee überhaupt'.<sup>468</sup>

Although Hegel credits Descartes with the basic principles of modern thought – concerning which he considers him to be a hero – he repeatedly calls him 'naive'. He writes: 'Unter seinen philosophischen Schriften haben besonders diejenigen, welche die Grundlage enthalten, in ihrer Darstellung etwas sehr Populares und Naives ...'.<sup>469</sup> Hegel is not very positive concerning *Principia Philosophiae* I, § 43,<sup>470</sup> where Descartes claims that propositions that are clear and distinct are true

<sup>463</sup> *Einleitung*, 203.

<sup>464</sup> *Einleitung*, 349.

<sup>465</sup> *Einleitung*, 53-54.

<sup>466</sup> *Einleitung*, 156.

<sup>467</sup> *Einleitung*, 233 ff.

<sup>468</sup> *Einleitung*, 107.

<sup>469</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (SW) ed. H. Glockner, vol. 19, p. 334.

<sup>470</sup> *Princ.* I, AT VIII-1, 21: 'Certum autem est, nihil nos unquam falsum pro vero admissuros, si tantum iis assensum præbreamus quæ clarè & distinctè percipiemus. Certum, inquam, quia, cum Deus non sit fallax, facultas percipiendi quam nobis dedit, non potest tendere in falsum; ut neque etiam facultas assentiendi, cum tantum ad ea quæ clarè percipiuntur se extendit. Et quamvis hoc nullâ



because God is not a deceiver, and that our faculty of knowledge and even our faculty of will is infallible in so far as we do not apply it to that which is beyond our knowledge:

Dieß Alles ist höchst naiv und schlicht hererzählt, aber unbestimmt; es bleibt formell, ohne Tiefe, – es ist eben so.<sup>471</sup>

Also, in another letter to Victor Cousin, who had enthusiastically sent him his edition of Descartes, Hegel mentions the ‘naiveté de sa marche’.<sup>472</sup>

### 11.2.1 Hegel on innate ideas

Descartes claimed that the eternal truths are innate because they are not made or invented by us. In *Vorlesungen*, Hegel says the term ‘innate’ is a bad expression because it indicates a natural way, which he thinks is not appropriate to the spirit (*Geist*). It is only in relation to eternal truths that he mentions this. Also, in the Glockner edition Hegel is critical of the use of the term, ‘innate ideas’, because it suggests a way in which ideas are formed that is not appropriate for the mind because of its physical birth. Instead of saying that an idea is innate, Hegel would rather say it is founded in the nature, or the essence, of the mind. In its activity, the mind behaves in a certain way. The foundation of this behaviour, however, is nothing but its freedom. To prove that this is so, we would have to deduce it as a necessary product of the mind. The ‘logical’ laws such as, ‘from nothing comes nothing’, and ‘something cannot at the same time be and not be’, are facts of consciousness. To Hegel, however, it is not clear what status innate ideas have in Descartes’s system.<sup>473</sup>

In order to determine whether Hegel thinks there are innate ideas (despite his dislike of the term), it is instructive to look at his discussion of Locke. As we indicated in Part I, Locke was a fervent adversary of the theory of innate ideas. We also saw that part of the controversy was based on different interpretations of the terms ‘innate’ and ‘idea’. According to Hegel, Locke did not think of innate ideas as essential determinations of human beings, but as concepts which exist in us, just as arms and legs belong to a body.

In *Vorlesungen*, we find an argument against Locke’s objection to innate ideas. For Locke, we do not encounter innate ideas in children or in many adult people. Hegel thinks that this is a very poor objection, because innate ideas are interpreted as immediately ready-made ideas that are within human consciousness from birth, comparable with the physical features with which they are born.

Aber die Entwicklung im Bewußtsein ist etwas anderes als das Ansich der Vernunft ist, und so ist der Ausdruck ›angeborene Idee‹ allerdings ganz schief.<sup>474</sup>

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ratione probaretur, ita omnium animis à naturâ impressum est, ut quoties aliquid clarè percipimus, ei sponte assentiamur, & nullo modo possimus dubitare quin sit verum.’

<sup>471</sup> SW 19, 353.

<sup>472</sup> *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1952-1960), vol. III, p. 170 (№ 547).

<sup>473</sup> SW 19, 356.

<sup>474</sup> *Vorlesungen*, 119.

In order to understand the difference between the ‘development in consciousness’ and the ‘Ansich der Vernunft’ we have to compare this passage with the Glockner edition.

Der Ausdruck »angeborene Begriffe« war gewöhnlich damals, und es ist von den angeborenen Begriffen zum Teil so kraß gesprochen worden. Aber ihre wahrhafte Bedeutung ist, daß sie an sich sind, wesentliche Momente in der Natur des Denkens, Eigenschaften eines Keims, die noch nicht existieren. Insofern liegt etwas Wichtiges in der Lockeschen Bemerkung; als verschiedene wesentliche bestimmte Begriffe sind sie nur dadurch legitimiert, daß von ihnen gezeigt wird, daß sie in dem Wesen des Denkens liegen. Aber wie die Sätze, die als Axiome gelten, und Begriffe, die als bestimmte in den Definitionen unmittelbar aufgenommen werden, so haben sie allerdings die Form von vorhandenen, angeborenen. Sie sollen an und für sich gelten, so wie sie eingesehen werden; dies ist eine bloße Versicherung. Oder von der anderen Seite ist die Frage, woher sie kommen, seicht. Der Geist ist allerdings an sich bestimmt, der für sich existierende Begriff; seine Entwicklung ist, zum Bewußtsein zu kommen. Diese Bestimmungen, die er aus sich hervorbringt, kann man nicht angeboren nennen. Diese Entwicklung muß veranlaßt werden durch ein Äußerliches, die Tätigkeit des Geistes ist zunächst Reaktion; erst so wird er sich seines Wesens bewußt.<sup>475</sup>

Summarizing the above, we find that although Hegel rejects the term ‘innate idea’, he certainly does not reject its meaning. This has to do with Hegel’s concept of ‘Geist’, which in his philosophy, is neither human nor divine, but comes close to the concept of *logos*. It is therefore not possible to compare his concept of mind with Descartes, and consequently it is hard to explain how he stands in relation to Cartesian innate ideas.

In the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), Hegel comes to the theme of innate ideas when he discusses immediate knowledge (*unmittelbares Wissen*). He reacts here against Jacobi, who, in his disapproval of all rationalism, supported some kind of direct knowledge, which is not clearly different from revealed knowledge. The object of immediate knowledge is infinity, eternity, and God. In contradiction to Jacobi, Hegel also finds that the proposition ‘on which all interest of modern philosophy focuses’<sup>476</sup> – the *cogito, ergo sum* – is also a form of immediate knowledge.

Da Descartes weiß, was zu einem Schlusse gehört, so fügt er hinzu, daß, wenn bei jenem Satz eine Ableitung durch einen Schluß Statt finden sollte, so gehörte hiezu der Obersatz: *illud omne, quod cogitat, est sive existit*. Dieser letztere Satz sey aber ein solcher, den man erst aus jenem ersten Satze vielmehr ableite.

Die Ausdrücke Descartes über den Satz der Unzertrennlichkeit meiner als Denkenden vom Seyn, daß in der einfachen Anschauung des Bewußtseyns dieser Zusammenhang enthalten und angegeben, daß

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<sup>475</sup> SW 19, 425-426.

<sup>476</sup> GW 20, 105.

dieser Zusammenhang schlechthin Erstes, Princip, das Gewisseste und Evidenteste sey, so daß kein Skepticismus so enorm vorgestellt werden könne, um diß nicht zuzulassen, – sind so sprechend und bestimmt, daß die modernen Sätze Jacobi's und anderer über diese unmittelbare Verknüpfung nur für überflüssige Wiederholungen gelten können.<sup>477</sup>

However, as far as the immediate knowledge of God, righteousness, or morality is concerned, education and development are required in order to allow these concepts to emerge.<sup>478</sup> Against the claim of innate ideas, the empirical objection is made that if this were so everybody would have to have these ideas, the principle of contradiction, for example, within their consciousness.

Man kann diesem Einwurf einen Misverstand zuschreiben, in sofern die gemeyneten Bestimmungen als angeborne darum nicht auch schon in der Form von Ideen, Vorstellungen von Gewußtem seyn sollen. Aber gegen das unmittelbare Wissen ist dieser Einwurf ganz treffend, denn es behauptet ausdrücklich seine Bestimmungen in sofern als sie im Bewußtseyn seyen.<sup>479</sup>

Hegel defends the Cartesian *cogito* against the interpretation of it as a syllogism and also maintains that it is a form of immediate knowledge. Furthermore, as mentioned above, he defends Descartes's theory of innate ideas as it stands historically, despite disliking the expression. Hegel historically reinstates Descartes by saying that Cartesian philosophy proceeded from unproven and unprovable assumptions (the *cogito* and God) to more developed knowledge. In doing so, Hegel says, Descartes has provided the basis for modern sciences.<sup>480</sup> Although philosophy after Kant realizes that infinity cannot be reached with finite means and only allows an idea of God in so far it remains a highly abstract faith, it has not altered the method of scientific knowledge initiated by Descartes. On the other hand, Hegel says, contemporary philosophy rejects every method whose object is infinite, hence also the Cartesian.

### 11.3 Schelling on the ontological proof for the existence of God

As did Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) states that modern philosophy begins with Descartes. The reason for this, according to Schelling, is that Descartes refuted Scholasticism, rejecting everything that even science had accomplished until then, and beginning again. Remarkably enough, Schelling appropriates the beginning of this liberal philosophy for his own nation by virtue of

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<sup>477</sup> GW 20, 106.

<sup>478</sup> GW 20, 108: '... und hieher fallen auch die sonstigen Bestimmungen von Instinkt, eingepflanzten, angeborenen Ideen, Gemeinsinn, von natürlicher Vernunft u.s.f. – welche Form man dieser Ursprünglichkeit gebe, so ist die allgemeine Erfahrung, daß, damit das, was darin enthalten ist, zum Bewußtseyn gebracht werde, wesentlich Erziehung, Entwicklung, (auch zur Platonschen Erinnerung) erforderlich sey; – (die christliche Taufe, obgleich ein Sacrament, enthält selbst die fernere Verpflichtung einer christlichen Erziehung) d.i. daß Religion, Sittlichkeit, so sehr sie ein Glauben, unmittelbares Wissen sind, schlechthin bedingt durch die Vermittlung seyen, welche Entwicklung, Erziehung, Bildung heißt.'

<sup>479</sup> GW 20, 109.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. GW 20, 116.

the fact that Descartes was in Bavaria at the time he formulated the first ideas of his philosophy. Although Schelling does not mention a national character of philosophy, he stresses that both Descartes and Spinoza had their patrons and patronesses in Pfalz.<sup>481</sup> As we saw, this kind of speculation is more the style of Victor Cousin.

Schelling thinks that the ontological proof for the existence of God plays a crucial role in the Cartesian system. It functions as a *metábasis* (transition, change) from the subjective to the objective domain in the Cartesian system. Descartes escapes the erroneous subjective domain by way of the innate ideas, which are objective, clear and distinct because they originate in God. In order to show that this is so, however, he first has to prove the existence of God. Schelling focuses on both the erroneous and correct interpretations of this argument.

The ontological argument for the existence of God was first propounded by Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109). The core of Anselm's proof reads:

Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. (...) Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality. (...) And You, Lord our God, are this being. You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist.<sup>482</sup>

Anselm's argument was rejected by Aquinas, who came up with an alternative proof known as the Cosmological Argument. Consequently, the ontological argument was not given any further attention until Descartes. Just as famous as Anselm's proof for the existence of God, is Kant's criticism of this proof. As we saw in Chapter 2, the core of Kant's criticism is that being is obviously not a real predicate.

Sein ist offenbar kein reales Prädikat, d.i. ein Begriff von irgend etwas, was zu dem Begriffe eines Dinges hinzukommen könnte. Es ist bloß die

<sup>481</sup> Cf. *Schellings Werke*, ed. Manfred Schröter, vol. 5 (1965) pp. 78-79<sup>fn</sup>. Henceforth: Schelling 5.

<sup>482</sup> *Proslogion*, cap. II, III: 'Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest. (...) Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc cum audit intelligit, et quicquid intelligitur in intellectu est. Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re, quod maius est. Si ergo id quo maius cogitari non potest, est in solo intellectu: id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est quo maius cogitari potest. Sed certe hoc esse non potest. Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re. (...) Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster. Sic ergo vere es, domine deus meus, ut nec cogitari possis non esse.' Text and translation borrowed from M.J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's PROSLOGION* (1979), pp. 116-119.

Position eines Dinges, oder gewisser Bestimmungen an sich selbst. Im logischen Gebrauche ist es lediglich die Kopula eines Urteils.<sup>483</sup>

According to Kant, a contradiction already occurs in forming a concept of something where the concept includes the notion of its own existence. Every concept is possible in so far as it does not contradict itself. However, a concept can still have no content if the objective reality of the synthesis, by which the concept is generated, is not expounded in particular. This objective reality is based on principles of possible experience and not on the axiom of analysis, that is, the thesis of contradiction. Kant explicitly warns us not to deduce the possibility of things from the possibility of concepts, that is, not to make deductions in the real domain based on those established in the logical domain.<sup>484</sup>

Before we continue our discussion of Schelling's view of the ontological proof and Kant's criticism of it, we shall first, for clarity's sake, outline the Cartesian form of this argument. We find the clearest formulation in the second set of Responses to the Objections made to his Meditations.

To say that something is contained in the nature or concept of a thing is the same as saying that it is true of that thing. But necessary existence is contained in the concept of God. Therefore it may be truly affirmed of God that necessary existence belongs to him, or that he exists.<sup>485</sup>

We shall soon return to the use of the word 'or' in the concluding sentence of the above. Firstly, we have to consider this argument – 'disposée d'une façon géométrique' – in the light of the axioms and definitions upon which it is based. The first premise of the argument is basically a repetition of the 'ninth definition', which leaves us nothing to discuss. The second premise is based on the 'tenth axiom', as Descartes himself indicates, but also on the 'eighth definition', which is that of 'God'. In the tenth axiom, Descartes had already secured an important step in the argument, by saying that the idea or concept of a thing contains its existence. What is more, he distinguishes between the idea of a limited thing, which only contains its possible or contingent existence, and the concept of 'un être souverainement parfait' (basically the eighth definition), which contains its perfect and necessary existence.

In *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1827),<sup>486</sup> Schelling is very clear about the Cartesian ontological proof for the existence of God. According to Schelling, until the present (1827), the Cartesian proof has been misunderstood. He

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<sup>483</sup> KrV B 626.

<sup>484</sup> See KrV B 624ff.

<sup>485</sup> CSM II, 117. In the French edition, Rep. II, AT IX-1, 129 it reads: 'Dire que quelque attribut est contenu dans la nature ou dans le concept d'une chose, c'est le mesme que de dire que cet attribut est vray de cette chose, & qu'on peut assurer qu'il est en elle (par la définition neuvième) [which said the exact same thing]. Or est-il que l'existence nécessaire est contenuë dans la nature ou dans le concept de Dieu (par l'axiome dixième) [which said that in the idea or concept of every thing, its existence is included, because we can only conceive things under the form of a thing that exists. There is a difference between limited things, whose concept merely contains possible or contingent existence, and the concept of a supremely perfect being, which contains perfect and necessary existence.] Doncques il est vray de dire que l'existence nécessaire est en Dieu, ou bien que Dieu existe.'

<sup>486</sup> Also known as *Münchener Vorlesungen*, in Schelling 5.

thinks that philosophy is still engaged in disentangling and explaining the misunderstandings to which this argument gave rise.<sup>487</sup> Schelling does not agree with Kant's criticism of this proof and thinks that Kant did not study the Cartesian formulation carefully enough. As suggested above, according to Kant, the error of the argument is that it takes 'existence' as a predicate. He humorously dismisses the argument by saying:

Es ist also an dem so berühmten ontologischen (Cartesianischen) Beweise, vom Dasein eines höchsten Wesens, aus Begriffen, alle Mühe und Arbeit verloren, und ein Mensch möchte wohl eben so wenig aus bloßen Ideen an Einsichten reicher werden, als ein Kaufmann an Vermögen, wenn er, um seinen Zustand zu verbessern, seinem Kassenbestand einige Nullen anhängen wollte.<sup>488</sup>

However, this is not what Descartes had done. The error Descartes made is that he 'smuggles' the existence of God into the conclusion, rather than drawing the conclusion: 'if God exists, he exists necessarily'. The argument does not prove the existence of God, but merely states that either God does not exist at all, or, if He exists, He always exists or necessarily exists. There is nothing wrong with this syllogism:

The Supreme Being cannot exist contingently; as a result it can exist only necessarily (*maior*).  
 God is the Supreme Being (*minor*).  
 Hence, He can exist only necessarily (*conclusion*).

However, Descartes drew a different conclusion, namely:

Hence, he exists necessarily.

There is an enormous difference between both conclusions, as Schelling points out. In the *maior*, Descartes expresses a kind of existence, in the conclusion, however, it is not a matter of a kind of existence, but of existence itself (*Existenz überhaupt*). So the fallacy is that the conclusion contains more than the premises, because of the word 'or'. Although the existence of God is not proven, his necessary existence is, and, according to Schelling, it is this concept that was determinative for the subsequent development of philosophy. If we want to prove that God exists, we first have to ask the question whether the concept of a necessarily existing being is identical to the concept of God.

Necessary existence means impossible non-existence. However, something that exists necessarily, cannot also exist as a possibility, because every possibility that something exists, implies the possibility that it does not yet exist. Consequently, that for which it is impossible that it does not exist, will never merely exist as a possibility. Thus, existence, or reality, is prior to possibility.<sup>489</sup> To

<sup>487</sup> Schelling 5, 84: 'Man kann sagen: die Philosophie ist noch jetzt damit beschäftigt, die Mißverständnisse, zu denen dieses Argument Veranlassung gab, zu entwirren und auseinanderzusetzen'.

<sup>488</sup> KrV B 630. We wonder what Kant would say in the case of someone hacking into the bank and adding some noughts to their account.

<sup>489</sup> Schelling 5, 89.

Schelling, the concept of God that Descartes defined as ‘un être souverainement parfait’, means the essence of being or being itself (*ipsum Ens*).

Ist nun Gott nur als das Seyende selbst, und ist das, was das Seyende selbst ist, nur zu bestimmen als das nicht nicht seyn könnende, als das, dem es unmöglich ist nicht zu seyn, so ist Gott entschieden und ohne allen Zweifel das nothwendig Existierende: – dieses ist nun der höchste Sinn, in welchem das eigentliche ontologische Argument zu nehmen ist; auf dieses kommt jener sogenannte Beweis des Anselm zurück.<sup>490</sup>

However, to identify God as a necessarily existing being brings about a rather troubling problem. Schelling sees the concept of necessary being as ‘blindly’ being: it is, without concerning itself as a possibility.<sup>491</sup> Such a necessarily existing being, prior to possibility or impossibility, would be ‘absolut unfrei’. If God was to be the necessarily existing being, he could only be determined as a rigid, immobile, completely ‘unfree’ being, without freedom of action, who cannot constitute a progression and cannot depart from himself. This can hardly be a satisfactory idea of God, moreover, we could never attribute an emanating power to this notion of ‘God’ (or what is left of the notion). Put briefly:

Der bloße Begriff des nothwendig Seyenden würde also nicht auf den lebendigen sondern auf den todten Gott führen.<sup>492</sup>

This problem can only be solved independently of philosophy, namely in general faith.

Schelling shows us that Descartes had been misread or misunderstood, and at the same time he reveals the mistake that Descartes had made. Of course this does not make him a follower of Descartes. In fact, he is severely critical at times. He suggests that Descartes’s scepticism was not speculative, but merely empirical; that the philosophy of Descartes is a regressive philosophy; that Descartes starts from the immediately known, which is his own thinking, and that this self is somehow a being, *cogito, ergo sum*, which suggests that philosophy has an apparently empirical beginning. In the end he manages to attain the idea of God, but in such a way that the Highest is not the beginning, but the end of philosophy.

In the case of Schelling, we cannot speak of a reevaluation of Descartes, but of a critical reading which clears up earlier misreadings. Schelling was probably the first to take the ontological proof seriously and actually read the formulation that had been produced by Descartes. In doing so, he corrects the analysis of Kant, whose proof of the impossibility of the ontological proof is equally famous, but as we have seen, has nothing to do with Descartes.

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<sup>490</sup> Schelling 5, 90.

<sup>491</sup> As an example, Schelling says: ‘Ich handle z.B. blind, wenn ich etwas thue, ohne mir vorher seine Möglichkeit vorgestellt zu haben’, Schelling 5, 89.

<sup>492</sup> Schelling 5, 92.

#### 11.4 Feuerbach's interpretation of Descartes

Alle Menschen, die sich nicht im Zustande des Blödsinns oder der tiefsten Roheit befinden, sind darum, die meisten aber wider Willen und Wissen, Fichtianer und Cartesianer.

In this section we will determine the 'darum' in this bold statement from Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872).

Once more the distinction between historiographical and systematical texts proves to be inadequate when we examine Feuerbach's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza*.<sup>493</sup> The reason why Feuerbach becomes involved in the history of philosophy is that he wanted to clarify the central ideas of the most important philosophical systems of the modern era. In discussing Feuerbach we will focus on his opinion of the founder of modern philosophy and his view of innate ideas in the Cartesian system.

According to Feuerbach, modern philosophy is characterized by the terms 'autonomy' and 'free self-consciousness', which presume that authority and the belief in authority have been undermined. In short, it is characterized by scepticism. The possibility of such a liberation of thinking is the reason why the initiators of modern philosophy, Bacon and Descartes, started their systems with scepticism.

... jener, [Bacon] indem er zur Bedingung der Naturerkenntnis die Abstraktion von allen Vorurteilen und vorgefaßten Meinungen macht, dieser [Descartes] in seiner Forderung, daß man im Anfange an allem zweifeln müsse.<sup>494</sup>

Elsewhere Feuerbach said that modern philosophy begins with neither Descartes nor Bacon, but in Italy with Bruno. The true, solemn principle of modern philosophy, according to Feuerbach, is the principle 'della coincidenza de contrarii'.<sup>495</sup> We find this remark in a double review of Erdmann's book on the history of modern philosophy and Hock's work on Descartes and his adversaries.<sup>496</sup> According to Feuerbach, this is the principle of life itself and by this principle modern philosophy distinguishes itself from the stagnating Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, which had as its principle and measure the dry law of formal identity. Although, in this review, Feuerbach is willing to assign Descartes the rank of an originator of the new philosophy in so far as he approached scientific knowledge on the basis of the concept of distinction, it is only in a very limited sense that he calls Descartes the originator of modern philosophy. In this matter, Feuerbach disagrees with not only Erdmann, but almost every historiographer of that time.

<sup>493</sup> In Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke* (FW) vol. 2.

<sup>494</sup> FW 2, 35. The first ed. of *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza* appeared in 1833, the second in 1844 and the third in 1847. FW is a critical edition based on all three editions.

<sup>495</sup> FW 8, 133.

<sup>496</sup> Hock, *Cartesius und seine Gegner, ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der philosophischen Bestrebungen unserer Zeit* (1835).



It is difficult to reconcile Feuerbach's different and apparently contradictory opinions concerning the beginning of modern philosophy from a mere textual point of view. Perhaps as a historiographer, Feuerbach takes a different stance from that taken when he writes a review. In any case, he applies himself rather enthusiastically to the review.

In the following we will focus in more detail on some themes of Feuerbach's interpretation of Descartes's thought. Beginning with the famous Cartesian method of doubt, we find that it is given a remarkable sense by Feuerbach in that he thinks that it poses the unity of thinking and being.

Denn indem ich an der Existenz alles dessen, was ich nur immer von mir unterscheide und in diesem Unterscheiden als ein Entgegengesetztes von mir erkenne, zweifle, indem ich annehme, daß nichts außer mir existiert, und daher die Realität des mir Entgegengesetzten aufhebe, so beziehe ich gerade dadurch mich auf mich selbst, so setzte ich ebendamit die Realität meiner selbst; das *Verneinen* der *Realität* des von mir Absonderbaren, des mir *Entgegengesetzten* ist *meine Position*. Dieses Absondern und dieses Verneinen des Gegenständlichen, des mir Entgegengesetzten ist aber Zweifeln und als Zweifeln Denken; *ich denke, ich bin* ist also *eins*, ist die *erste Gewißheit*, das *Prinzip der Philosophie*.<sup>497</sup>

Feuerbach stresses that Cartesian doubt means a 'self-distinguishing' of the mind. To consider that which is distinct from us as false (*Fürfalschhalten*), to claim that it 'is not', is the same act as distinguishing oneself from something else. To distinguish between the mind and sensory objects is not the same as distinguishing between two things that have the same value and reality, because:

... was der im Zweifeln an allem seine Existenz nicht bezweifeln könnende Geist, in diesem Zweifeln und Unterscheiden seiner selbst und seiner Realität gewisse Geist von sich unterscheidet, das setzt er als ein Nichtiges, Unreelles; denn was vom Gewissesten unterschieden ist, das ist doch wohl ungewiß, was vom Reellsten, unreell?<sup>498</sup>

To doubt the existence of sensory objects means to distinguish and abstract oneself from those objects and to perceive oneself as a real thing. That is, in the distinction from other things 'I' am certain of my reality. This certainty, which is to say, the certainty of the *cogito, ergo sum*, is immediate knowledge. Feuerbach mentions the arguments Descartes had used and also develops an argument himself that, if '*cogito, ergo sum*' was to be a syllogism, then it should have a middle term (*terminus medius*). Middle terms are found in syllogisms that consist of a particular function or act, and being. In order to deduce being from a particular act, a middle term is required which indicates the essence of this act. However, there is no third party between essence and being. They are not united by a middle term, yet they do possess unity through themselves, that is they are immediate and one.

The awareness of absolute reality is at one with self-awareness. Only according to the appearance of external form and realization is it mediated through

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<sup>497</sup> FW 2, 243

<sup>498</sup> FW 2, 245

an argument.<sup>499</sup> According to Feuerbach, this is a very poor theory of the mind, because it means that the mind itself is actually nothing more than this self-consciousness, which he brusquely explains as follows:

Freilich ist die Idee des Geistes bei C[artesianus] nur ein Blitz, der sich sogleich wieder verliert in dem Dunkel begriffsloser Vorstellungen; er unterscheidet den Geist nicht vom Individuum – ein Unterschied, den erst die Fichtesche Philosophie bestimmt hervorhebt.<sup>500</sup>

Feuerbach agrees with the common reading of Cartesian doubt that finds it to be methodical. However, he suggests that the true reasons behind Descartes's doubt are not the reasons that Descartes mentions, for example, that sensorial information is sometimes wrong. Rather, he considers it to be the founding act of Cartesian philosophy itself. It is only through doubt that the mind comprehends itself.

On the topic of innate ideas, Feuerbach thinks that Descartes was justified to assume innate ideas when he was distinguishing classes of ideas,<sup>501</sup> in so far as he was merely searching for a reliable principle of certainty.

Feuerbach thinks it is highly unphilosophical,<sup>502</sup> however, to move from self-consciousness to the consciousness of God and his existence. Instead of showing how thinking, which in this instance is only self-certainty, becomes 'thing involved' (*gegenständliches Denken*), Descartes takes the position of observation and perception in which he finds the idea of God in the class of innate ideas.

Insofern ist allerdings C. [Cartesianus] hierin zu entschuldigen, ja, gerechtfertigt, als er nichts weiter überhaupt wollte und suchte als ein zuverlässiges Prinzip der Gewißheit und es daher ihm außer dem Wege lag, solche Schwierigkeiten, wie der Zusammenhang und die Genesis der Ideen mit und aus dem selbstgewissen Denken ist, zu lösen. Unverzeihlich ist aber diese Inkonsequenz und Nachlässigkeit von ihm, daß er in diesem Teile seiner Philosophie auf den Geist, dessen Sein unmittelbar eins ist mit seinem Denken, die Vorstellung der *Erschaffung* anwendet, von bei der Erschaffung ihm eingedrückt und eingepflanzten, von angeborenen Ideen spricht und dem Zweifel, der anfangs eins mit der Selbstgewißheit und Realität des Geistes, die Affirmation selbst desselben ist, die triviale Bedeutung eines Beweises, daß er ein abhängiges und unvollständiges Wesen sei (Medit. IV), substituiert, kurz, den Geist oder das Selbst als Geist mit dem *empirischen* einzelnen, sinnlichen Individuum oder *Subjekte* identifiziert.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Cf. FW 8, 132.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> As we saw earlier, Descartes distinguished three classes of ideas namely those with which I am born, those that come from outside, and those made and invented by myself, see *Med.* III, AT IX-1, 29.

<sup>502</sup> This is the second time that he mentions the 'unphilosophical' method of Descartes, the first time was concerning the method of doubt: 'die Art und Weise, wie C. seine Zweifel ausdrückt und vorstellt, ist sehr unphilosophisch, und seine Zweifelsgründe sind allerdings höchst schwach', see FW 2, 237.

<sup>503</sup> FW 2, 269.

Clearly, Feuerbach does not value the theory of innate ideas highly. This could be because he seems to accept the interpretation of innate ideas as being ‘implanted by God’. Accordingly, he discusses the most important innate idea, namely that of God. Feuerbach suggests that Descartes put a lot of effort into trying to prove that the idea of God cannot originate in man. However, Feuerbach shows that a remark in the fourth part of *Discours de la méthode* gives away its human origin and meaning. He refers to the following:

Car, suivant les raisonnements que je viens de faire, pour connaître la nature de Dieu, autant que la mienne en était capable, je n’avis qu’à considérer de toutes les choses dont je trouvais en moi quelque idée, si c’était perfection, ou non, de les posséder, et j’étais assuré qu’aucune de celles qui marquaient quelque imperfection n’était en lui, mais que toutes les autres y étaient. Comme je voyais que le doute l’inconstance, la tristesse, et choses semblables, n’y pouvaient être, vu que j’eusse été moi-même bien aise d’en être exempt.<sup>504</sup>

In response to this passage, Feuerbach asks if the same does not apply to every other predicate – we would love to be free from dependence, mortality, finiteness. The infinite being is nothing else than this *moi-même* in the last line of the above, without all the limitations of which the ‘I’ would gladly be exempt.<sup>505</sup>

Cartesian certainty is based on the *res cogitans*, a concept which Feuerbach considers to actually achieve nothing more than an ostrich does in thinking it is invisible when it puts its head in the sand when in danger. The ostrich, like Descartes, believes that with the elimination of the consciousness of danger, the actual danger is also eliminated.<sup>506</sup> Nonetheless, despite all his cynical remarks, Feuerbach still thinks Cartesian philosophy has brought about progress in philosophy as it took the essence of the mind to be in the act of consciousness. However:

... wenn nun C. diesen Akt sogleich wieder als ein Wesen verselbständigt, zu einer von der Gattung der sinnlichen Wesen unterschiednen Gattung macht, beweist er damit, daß er selbst noch auf den Boden des phantastischen Spiritualismus steht; denn dem Begriff des Dings oder Wesens, der Substanz unterstellt sich notwendig – notwendig, denn er ist ja nur von der Anschauung abgezogen – das Bild einer sinnlichen Substanz, was schon daraus deutlich erhellt, daß, C. den Begriff des Wesens ebensogut auf die Ausdehnung anwendet als auf das Denken.<sup>507</sup>

Another highly important progression in the history of the human mind is the shift from the basic proposition of Christianity – ‘God is a spirit’ – to the modern proposition: ‘I am spirit’. Comparing Christianity with Cartesianism, he says:

... wenn das Christentum mit der Abstraktion der Welt beginnt, ein Wesen an die Spitze stellt, welches war, als nichts war, welches die Welt

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<sup>504</sup> *Disc.* (G), 35.

<sup>505</sup> FW 2, 271.

<sup>506</sup> FW 2, 304.

<sup>507</sup> FW 2, 306.

aus nichts schafft und ins Nichts verstößt, so beginnt C. mit derselben Fiktion, aber dieses das Nichtsein der Welt fingierende, ihr Dasein aufhebende Wesen bin ich, der Geist, der Denker.<sup>508</sup>

The only 'error' is that the term 'God' has to be replaced with the term 'I' or 'self'. The God that is a spirit who produces everything by means of will and mind and whose thoughts are the essence of all things, is nothing other than the essence of Idealism, for these predicates of God now refer to nothing other than the human mind. Feuerbach thinks that, in Descartes's works, concrete (*gegenständlich*) divine idealism is already subjective, human idealism.

In C. ist im „Gottesbewußtsein“ das Selbstbewußtsein, im Gottvertrauen das Selbstvertrauen des Menschen erwacht.<sup>509</sup>

For Feuerbach, Cartesian philosophy deserves to be credited with giving humanity self-confidence and a confidence in the power of reason, during a time in which the Christian faith enforced a despotic authority. The Cartesian school claimed that evidence could demand as much obedience from people as faith demanded. Idealism, however, was never focused on nature, as the objects of the senses are nothing to the idealist. Feuerbach then quotes Clauberg who held that if one considers the nature of the mind, which is similar to that of God, then one would find it to be below the dignity of humanity to focus on bodily and earthly things.<sup>510</sup> Leibniz said about Clauberg that he claimed to know how to describe the nature of the mind, but he did not want to say what this was. In thought he often fell into ecstasy and he died in such a state. To which Feuerbach in turn says, 'Wahrlich, eine echt cartesianische Todesart! Die Scheidung der Seele vom Leibe, der Tod, ist ja das Prinzip der Cartesischen, der idealistischen Philosophie überhaupt.'<sup>511</sup>

Although we have seen that Feuerbach was considerably critical of Descartes, his relation to the thinker is still ambiguous, for, as we saw at the beginning of this section, despite criticizing almost every essential Cartesian element, he still admits that:

Alle Menschen, die sich nicht im Zustande des Blödsinns oder der tiefsten Roheit befinden, sind darum, die meisten aber wider Willen und Wissen, *Fichtianer* und *Cartesianer*. Alle bestätigen im stillen die Wahrheit des Satzes „Cogito ergo sum“: Ich denke, darum bin ich. Alle wollen lieber tot als Narren sein, fühlen also, daß die Vernunft ihr höchstes Gut ist, daß, wer sie verliert, *sich selbst* verliert. Das Denken ist also das dem (denkenden) Subjekte Vorausgesetzte, denn es ist nur durch das Denken Subjekt, es ist die *Substanz* desselben, so daß ich wohl das Denken ohne Subjekt denken und für sich selbst zum Prinzip machen kann und muß, aber nicht umgekehrt das Subjekt ohne das Denken, denn das denkende Subjekt ist nichts außer dem Denken, es ist nichts andres

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<sup>508</sup> FW 2, 307.

<sup>509</sup> FW 2, 308.

<sup>510</sup> For further reading on this subject see Verbeek (ed.), *Johannes Clauberg and Cartesian philosophy in the seventeenth Century* (1999).

<sup>511</sup> FW 2, 309.

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als das Denken selbst, als wirklicher, gegenwärtiger actus [Tätigkeit, Wirksamkeit].<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> FW 8, 110.

## V

### **The Revaluation of the Cartesian Theory of Innate Ideas in Germany 1850-1900**

This part focuses on the revival of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas in Germany during the second half of the nineteenth century. By focusing on the theme of innate ideas we will necessarily engage with two other important themes that lie at the heart of the Cartesian system: the ontological proof for the existence of God and the *cogito*.

Our discussion begins with Trendelenburg who, in his work *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre* (1846), made a sharp distinction between ‘innate’ and ‘a priori’. With this distinction in mind we continue our discussion with a consideration of a number of studies which deal with Descartes’s doctrine of innate ideas. A great many of these studies take the doctrine as a point of departure for a comparison between Kant and Descartes. The obvious reason for discussing these studies is their extreme relevance for our thesis. Of additional importance is for the most part these studies are not known to historians.

The first of these studies is Eduard Grimm’s *Descartes’ Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen* (1873). This argues that the theory of innate ideas forms the focal point of the Cartesian system. Although Grimm does not venture into a comparison between Descartes and Kant, he attempts to demonstrate that Descartes is the prophet of critical philosophy. Another study which does make a full comparison of Descartes and Kant is Berthold Gutzeit’s *Descartes’ angeborene Ideen verglichen mit Kants Anschauungs- und Denkformen a priori* (1883).

We shall also examine studies that emphasize the relation between innate ideas and what Descartes called the *lumen naturale*. These studies, which are also little known amongst historians, are Bernhard Klöpel’s *Das lumen naturale bei Descartes* (1896), Georg Geil’s *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke’s von Descartes* (1887) and Fritz Otto Rose’s *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke* (1901).

Chapter 13 and 14 discuss the relation between Descartes and Kant in the Marburg School. We shall concentrate on the role of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas in neo-Kantian epistemology using the work of Cohen and Natorp. Whereas Cohen, in *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (first edition 1871), tries to transform innate ideas into a priori principles, Natorp in *Descartes’ Erkenntnistheorie* (1882) attempts to establish the critical character of Descartes’s philosophy as a whole *despite* this highly uncritical doctrine.

## 12 INNATENESS AND APRIORICITY

Can we compare Descartes's innate ideas with Kant's a priori concepts? According to Trendelenburg, the innate could not (or should not) be compared to the a priori, nor did he think that categories should be thought of as innate. Grimm, on the other hand, thought that there are at least some similarities between Kant and Descartes on this point. For example, the status of *imaginatio* in the Cartesian system closely approximates Kant's notion of 'reine Anschauung'. Grimm therefore supported the thesis that Descartes is at least the prophet of critical philosophy. Gutzeit went even further, comparing innate ideas and a priori intuitions as forms of knowledge. He found not only the status of *imaginatio* of comparative interest, but also considered that the hierarchy among innate ideas could be compared with the Kantian 'hierarchy' of sensibility, understanding and the pure principles.

In contrast to studies that bring Descartes closer to Kant, we also want to pay attention to studies that argue the opposite and attempt to align Descartes with scholasticism. According to Klöpel, Grimm was wrong to consider that the term *lumen naturale*, which Descartes often used, as well as many other terms and formulae, could be explained solely within the Cartesian system. By placing Descartes in the context of scholasticism, Klöpel diminishes Descartes's originality to a significant extent.<sup>513</sup>

### 12.1 The difference between 'innate' and 'a priori'

The reassessment of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas in Germany involved the question of whether they can be compared with the categories, which, according to Kant, have an a priori status. One answer to this question comes from Friedrich Adolf Trendelenburg (1802-1872), 'a perfect stranger in the history of philosophy of the nineteenth century' according to Köhnke.<sup>514</sup> This is surprising because he influenced many important philosophers who will enter our discussion later in this part.<sup>515</sup> In so far as he is known, it is mainly through his attacks on Hegel and the stimulus he gave to the study of Aristotle.<sup>516</sup> According to Köhnke, however, we should consider him to be an independent systematical philosopher and an architect of a new post-idealist understanding of philosophy, which historically mediated between Kant and neo-Kantianism.

Trendelenburg, who was gifted with a talent for brevity, is quite certain that in the Cartesian system the categories or general concepts are not innate. In the first

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<sup>513</sup> We will not go any further into this as we maintain that there is a sharp distinction between Descartes's epistemological enterprise and his 'self-protective' religious remarks. Moreover, if we were to take into account all the 'lights' Descartes mentions, we would find ourselves on scholastic quicksand. In the end the *lumen naturale*, the *lumen fides*, the *lumen gratiae*, and the *lumen interna* all overrule the light of reason. This means that we would leave philosophy and enter theology.

<sup>514</sup> Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (1986), p. 23.

<sup>515</sup> Köhnke mentions Brentano, Cohen, Dilthey, Dühring, Eucken, Prantl, Laas, Paulsen, Willmann, Von Hertling and Kierkegaard.

<sup>516</sup> Cf. Windelband, *Geschichte der Philosophie* (1892), p. 494.

part of *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie* entitled *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre*, he writes:

Bei Cartesius findet sich keine eigentliche Kategorienlehre, keine eingehende Untersuchung der Grundbegriffe. Sein System ruht zwar auf Bestimmungen, in welchen gewisse Elemente aus den aristotelischen Kategorien leicht zu erkennen sind, wie z.B. den Bestimmungen der *substantia*, *modus*, *accidens*. Aber sie werden nur als metaphysische Grundlage verwandt und zu dem Ende schärfer bezeichnet. Eine Frage darf nicht übergangen werden. Cartesius setzt angeborene Vorstellungen und bezeichnet z.B. in den Meditationen Gott als eine *idea innata*. Es ist ein wesentlicher Punkt, der bei Cartesius mehr angenommen als ausgeführt ist, und daher Spätere, wie z.B. Locke, zu neuen Untersuchungen antrieb. Gehören nun dem Cartesius die Prädicamenta zu diesen angeborenen Vorstellungen? Wer an das *a priori* bei Kant denkt, möchte es meinen, aber er würde sich irren. Cartesius lässt, wie ein Nominalist, das Allgemeine aus der Vorstellung des Individuellen hervorgehen, und behauptet dies namentlich von den 5 Prädicabilien (*genus*, *species*, *differentia*, *proprium*, *accidens*); aber es sind gewisse ewige Wahrheiten, welche dem Geiste einwohnen, z.B. dass Gott ist, dass aus nichts nichts wird u.s.w. Man vermisst an dieser Stelle des Systems die Entwicklung, sowie den Zusammenhang der angeborenen und der empfangenen Vorstellungen (*idea innata* und *adventitia*).<sup>517</sup>

Trendelenburg thought himself justified in treating Descartes so summarily – just as he also treated Spinoza, Locke and Leibniz – because strictly speaking they did not deal with a doctrine of categories. The interesting point in the passage quoted above is that Trendelenburg clearly separates Descartes's doctrine of innate ideas from Kant's conception of the *a priori*. According to Trendelenburg, the Cartesian system is dominated by a consideration of God arising from Augustinian theology. The innate ideas, which dominate his system, stem directly from God. Descartes simply sees the will of God as the ground of all 'eternal truths'. For this reason Trendelenburg distinguishes Descartes the physicist from Descartes the philosopher.<sup>518</sup>

Trendelenburg refers to Section 75 of the first part of *Principia Philosophiae* in which Descartes made several observations concerning how to philosophize well. The passage reads as follows:

In order to philosophize seriously and search out the truth about all the things that are capable of being known, we must first of all lay aside all our preconceived opinions, or at least we must take the greatest care not to put our trust in any of the opinions accepted by us in the past until we have first scrutinized them afresh and confirmed their truth. Next, we must give our attention in an orderly way to the notions that we have within us, and we must judge to be true all and only those whose truth we clearly and distinctly recognize when we attend to them in this way.

<sup>517</sup> Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre* [1846], in *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol I., p. 262-263.

<sup>518</sup> Cf. Trendelenburg, *Vermischte Abhandlungen* (1855) in *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol. II, p. 15.



When we do this we shall realize, first of all, that we exist in so far as our nature consists in thinking; and we shall simultaneously realize both that there is a God, and that we depend on him, and also that a consideration of his attributes enables us to investigate the truth of other things, since he is their cause. Finally we will see that besides the notions of God and of our mind, we have within us knowledge of many propositions which are eternally true, such as 'Nothing comes from nothing'. We shall also find that we have knowledge both of a corporeal or extended nature which is divisible, moveable, and so on, and also of certain sensations which affect us, such as the sensations of pain, colours, tastes and so on (though we do not yet know the cause of our being affected in this way). When we contrast all this knowledge with the confused thoughts we had before, we will acquire the habit of forming clear and distinct concepts of all the things that can be known. These few instructions seem to me to contain the most important principles of human knowledge.<sup>519</sup>

Trendelenburg simply left us with this quote and continued his history of the doctrine of the categories. In Section 12.3, we will see that Trendelenburg's remark is one-sided at the very least and that his conclusion is wrong. We will show how one should read the passage from the *Principles of Philosophy* in the context of other passages. Furthermore it will become clear that Descartes is not a nominalist in the Trendelenburgian sense, and that there is a development in the Cartesian system of the relation between innate and adventitious ideas.

Trendelenburg's claims were supported by Rudolf Eucken. He demonstrated that the term 'a priori' dates back to the Aristotelian habit of calling general notions 'earlier' and particular ones 'later'. During the Middle Ages the terms 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' became widely accepted. In the early modern period, especially with Leibniz, the terms were applied to the question of the origin of knowledge: a priori meant stemming from reason, a posteriori meant stemming from experience. This distinction was made absolute by Lambert and Kant, for whom a priori came to signify that which does not stem from experience at all. In short we can say that there are scholastic, Leibnizian, Wolffian and Kantian meanings for these terms. According to Eucken, the Wolffian meaning was most commonly used, but the scholastic sense sometimes echoed in it, and the Kantian sense was forced upon it at times.

To equate a priori and innate is, according to Eucken, to obscure the main philosophical problem.

Denn beim Angeborensein handelt es sich um die besondere Art, welche sich innerhalb des allgemeinen Rahmens unserer geistigen und intellektuellen Organisation entwickelt, um die Eigenschaften, welche Individuen von Individuen unterscheiden. Daß hier der Einzelne vom Ganzen seiner Art bis in kleinste Züge hinein, und zwar auch in seinen Bewegungen und Handlungen, in hohem Grade von der bis zu ihm abgelaufene Kette abhängig ist, das gilt mit Recht für ein wichtiges Ergebnis der neuere Wissenschaft. Aber das a priori Kants besagte etwas

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<sup>519</sup> CSM I, 221.

anderes. Hier handelte es sich um die allgemeinsten, jeder individuellen Besonderheit überlegenen Grundformen unseres Erkennens in Anschauung und Denken.<sup>520</sup>

Kant indeed said that his *Kritik* did not admit innate ideas and in Chapter 13 we shall return to this issue. In the following sections we will discuss texts which do allow a comparison between a priori and innate and for that reason disagree with Trendelenburg.

## 12.2 Innate ideas as the prophecy of critical philosophy

In 1873, Eduard Grimm (1848-1935) published a study called *Descartes' Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen*. Grimm believed that the theory of innate ideas in the Cartesian system was not merely a side issue but that it formed the central part of his system, and what is more he thought that, without the theory of innate ideas, the Cartesian system had no value nor could be understood at all. With this study, Grimm cleared the way for a comparison between Cartesian innate ideas and Kantian a priori forms of knowledge. He was probably the first to indicate the importance of Descartes's theory of innate ideas. Although Grimm pays little attention to references to, or comparisons with, Kant, one of his conclusions is that Descartes can be seen as the prophet of critical philosophy. In later sections we will deal with the consequences of this conclusion.

According to Grimm, innate ideas, considered as formal principles of knowledge, are distinct from the 'natural light' which he considers to be a separate source of knowledge. He defined the natural light as 'the faculty to know clearly and distinctly without prejudice'.<sup>521</sup> Although Grimm acknowledged that Descartes borrowed this term from scholasticism, he did not think it was necessary to explain in what sense we should understand this source of knowledge. He thought the Cartesian system to be independent of scholasticism, and that Descartes's notion of the natural light should be understood on the basis of Descartes's texts alone. In Section 12.4, we will see that on this point Klöpel and Rose disagree with Grimm.

In Grimm's view Descartes distinguished between knowledge that relates to a real object and knowledge that lacks this relation. Examples of this latter kind of knowledge are axioms or eternal truths. They merely function as a general rule which regulates the search for objective knowledge. It is in this sense that we can call them 'principles', but we have to bear in mind that Descartes understood this word in two ways. An example of a principle in the first sense is that it is impossible that something at the same time is and is not. This principle can be useful, but not in order to find out whether something exists or not. An example of a principle in the second sense is that our soul exists, because nothing is more known to us than the existence of our soul. Grimm calls a principle in the first sense a formal principle, and in the second sense, a material principle.

Da sonach das natürliche Licht als das Vermögen, ohne Voraussetzungen klar und deutlich zu erkennen, sowohl formale, wie

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<sup>520</sup> Eucken, *Die Grundbegriffe der Gegenwart* [1878], pp. 100-101.

<sup>521</sup> Grimm, *Descartes' Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen*, p. 13.

materiale Principien darbietet, so werden wir die Wahrheiten dieses natürlichen Lichts als die allgemeine Gattung, jene formalen Principien aber als eine Art dieser Gattung hinstellen haben, und nur soweit diese Letzteren in's Spiel kommen, haben wir es hier mit dem natürlichen Lichte zu thun.<sup>522</sup>

Grimm explains the fact that Descartes called these principles 'ideas', on the basis of Descartes's imprecise use of language. That they are innate he finds to be obvious for Descartes. However, innate ideas as formal principles of knowledge did not offer the knowledge of objects which Descartes sought. The solution was to establish the possibility of innate ideas as representations of real objects, which according to Grimm are the 'eigentlichen Untersuchungen' of Descartes.

In order to determine whether an idea is innate, Descartes initially used two criteria. The first criterion is that the idea is independent of sense perception and the second that it is not invented. If these criteria are met, the ideas which are left have a true, eternal and unchangeable nature. If we recognize these elements in an idea, we can say that this idea is true and innate. Moreover, it means that the object that it represents exists in us and that this representation is given to our mind from nature. This brings Grimm to the next subdivision: between innate ideas whose object exists in us, and those whose object exists outside us.

Descartes believed that the first knowledge he had arrived at was that of the self, contained in the proposition 'I think, therefore I am'. He thought that this knowledge was certain in itself because it was beyond the uncertainty of sensation and the arbitrariness of will. For these reasons he characterized the idea of the self as the first innate idea. The idea of the self provides us not only with the idea of thought, but also with the character of truth in general, because it offers the foundation on which we can test the truth of other ideas. Propositions about other objects therefore are not immediately deduced, but are mediated.

At this stage, Descartes still lacked the point from which the existence of other objects could be proved in a systematical order. Although he had established a foundation, the order in which he tested the ideas in relation to this foundation remained arbitrary. Through what we can perhaps call a diversion, he proved the existence of God by first considering the hypothesis of the evil genius – the assumption of an almighty being that might deceive us, making it impossible to determine the character of all truth.

Fortunately, Descartes showed that we have the idea of God, which is a true idea because it is innate. Grimm showed that Descartes's real proof for the existence of God rested on the application of a proposition that stems from the natural light, this being that the *causa efficiens* must contain as much reality as the effect of this cause. From here Descartes could easily prove God's existence. It is in this context that we learn another crucial point about Descartes's meaning of the word 'innate', namely that it cannot be equated with 'supernatural'.

Stammt aber einmal die Idee Gottes von diesem Gotte selbst her, so muss sie uns auch angeboren, d.h. von Natur aus unsrem Geiste eingepägt sein; denn die Frage, ob dieselbe nicht einmal auf

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

übernatürliche Weise unsrem Geiste enthüllt worden sei, existirt für den Philosophen Descartes nicht.<sup>523</sup>

Apart from the idea of the self and that of God, the ideas of pure mathematics were also eligible to be called innate. First of all they are universal, in that they apply to all quantifiable objects of sensation, and without them these objects could not even be thought. Secondly, they are clearly and distinctly known in themselves and for themselves by pure thought. From here follows the third characteristic: they are independent of external experience and maintain their validity even if the object of this idea does not exist outside us. All these ideas should therefore be called innate, however Descartes did not actually demonstrate this for any idea in particular.

According to Grimm, the geometrical shapes in our minds are also innate because they too have their own, true and unchangeable nature, although it has to be said that Descartes did not claim that they are therefore independent of sensation or will. In the case of geometrical shapes, Descartes argued the other way: from the analysis of the nature of sensation and of the ideas which we have formed ourselves, he demonstrated that the origin of geometrical shapes lay elsewhere.

In Grimm's opinion the geometrical shapes are comparable to the ideas of the self and God in that they all have an unchangeable nature. The difference is that the idea of the self is independent of external experience and the arbitrariness of our thinking. The idea of God and the other innate ideas are not received from outside. However, the reason why the idea of God does not originate in external experience differs from the reason why the other innate ideas do not come from outside. Because of its contents the idea of God can not possibly come from outside, nor can it be invented; it can only be imprinted on our minds by God.

Descartes claimed that geometrical shapes are determined in accordance with the laws of nature, but he did not explore the grounds for this any further. According to Grimm the reason for this is that Descartes only wanted to confirm his fundamental proposition: that what we clearly and distinctly know to belong to a thing, really belongs to this thing. This fundamental proposition supports his ontological proof for the existence of God. The goal Descartes had with in developing the argument concerning geometrical shapes was not self-serving, but was needed to confirm other, more important areas of knowledge.

We can also say something about innate ideas on the basis of the distinction between thinking and intuition (*Anschauung*). According to Descartes, geometrical shapes cannot only be thought but can also be imagined, whereas the ideas of the self and of God can only be thought. Grimm thinks that Descartes's notion of *imaginatio* closely approaches Kant's notion of 'reine Anschauung'. Descartes understood 'body' as extended substance, which means that the character of extension determines the notion of body. We arrive at the properties of bodies by perception, however, perception cannot constitute the essential nature of bodies which are independent of us. The only element independent of perception is the character of extension itself. In this way the notion of body as extension is gained by pure thought, independent of sense perception.

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<sup>523</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

We gather this from a letter to Henry More from 5 February 1649. According to More, Descartes's definition of body as extended substance was too broad, because God, or an angel, or any other self-subsistent thing is extended. Descartes reacts to this as follows:

It is not my custom to argue about words, and so if someone wants to say that God is in a sense extended, since he is everywhere, I have no objection. But I deny that true extension as commonly conceived is to be found in God or in angels or in our mind or in any substance which is not a body. Commonly when people talk of an extended being, they mean something imaginable.<sup>524</sup> In this being – I leave on one side the question whether it is conceptual or real – they can distinguish by the imagination various parts of determinate size and shape, each non-identical with the others. Some of these parts can be imagined as transferred to the place of others, but no two can be imagined simultaneously in one and the same place. Nothing of this kind can be said about God or about the mind; they cannot be apprehended by the imagination, but only by the intellect; nor can they be distinguished into parts, and certainly not into parts which have determinate sizes and shapes. Again, we easily understand that the human mind and God and several angels can all be at the same time in one and the same place. So we clearly conclude that no incorporeal substances are in any strict sense extended. I conceive them as sorts of powers or forces, which although they can act upon extended things, are not themselves extended – just as fire is in white-hot iron without itself being iron. Some people indeed do confuse the notion of substance with that of extended thing. This is because of the false preconceived opinion which makes them believe that nothing can exist or be intelligible without also being imaginable, and because it is indeed true that nothing falls within the scope of the imagination<sup>525</sup> without being in some way extended. Now just as we can say that health belongs only to human beings, though by analogy medicine and a temperature climate and many other things also are called healthy, so too I call extended only what is imaginable as having parts within parts, each of determinate size and shape – although other things may also be called extended by analogy.<sup>526</sup>

Grimm thought this explanation by Descartes was important for two reasons. Firstly Descartes ascribed an essential capability for all extended things, namely that of being imagined. Secondly, he deduced the particular characteristics of extended objects, such as divisibility, size and shape from this capability. Claiming that imaginability is an essential property of extension as such, had two consequences. Firstly, the faculty of imagination was elevated above all dependence on our sensorial perception. Secondly, a determinate distinguishing mark was found by which the notion of extension and all notions deduced from it were distinguished from pure notions of thinking. Furthermore, when all particular properties of extended objects were not deduced from the notion of extension but

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<sup>524</sup> *Corr.*, AT V, 270: 'imaginabile'; Cous. XI, 196: 'qui tombe sous l'imagination'.

<sup>525</sup> *Corr.*, AT V, p. 270: 'sub imaginationem cadit'.

<sup>526</sup> CSM III, 360 ff.

from imagination, imagination apparently had the power to produce knowledge independent from our thinking and sensorial perception. We have to add, however, that this letter to More contains the only passage in which we find Descartes drawing these consequences with reference to imagination. In his major works imagination plays a significantly less important role, as we see in the examples that he gives of geometrical shapes. In the *Meditations*, for instance, we read that a chiliagon cannot be imagined. It is clearly and distinctly perceived by pure understanding (*intellectio pura*).<sup>527</sup> According to Grimm, the Cartesian faculty of imagination does not belong to our own nature but depends on something else. In Section 12.3 we will return to the status of imagination in the Cartesian system in the context of a comparison with the status of the 'Einbildungskraft' in the Kantian system.

Grimm claimed that the imagination has no value for our knowledge. If our thinking consists only of ideas, it does not deal with shapes but only with the ideas of shapes. The nature of geometrical shapes can only be known through pure thought. This means, we know their nature not through their property as shape, but as an idea we have of this shape. As such, as ideas, the shapes are innate. The role of imagination only consists in applying innate notions to corresponding bodily forms.<sup>528</sup>

The other innate ideas: thinking, substance, duration, number, truth, perfection and order, for example, were only mentioned casually by Descartes. These do not belong to the class of innate ideas which are the formal aids for our knowledge of objects, but to the class that represent real objects. In order to show this in the case of the notion of substance, for example, Descartes gives it an attribute to which it is inseparably connected in such a way that we cannot have a clear and distinct idea of substance without that of the corresponding attribute. This means that when Descartes claims that substance is intelligible, he does not mean that is a pure concept of thinking without a real object, but that substance in connection with its corresponding attribute signifies an object which can only be grasped by our thinking and does not need to be imaginable.

It can be objected that there are no innate ideas. *Either* our mind always thinks, so innate ideas must always be thought; must be conscious, however, experience teaches us, for example, that little children do not have the slightest knowledge of God. *Or* the mind does not always think, it only has the faculty of thought; in that case none of our ideas are innate though the mind does have the faculty to obtain them.

Descartes claimed that the human mind is always conscious. However, according to Grimm, Descartes did not mean by this that consciousness should be

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<sup>527</sup> See Pätzold, 'Imagination in Descartes's *Meditations*', in *Imagination in the Later Middle Ages and Early Modern Times* (2004), p. 165. See also Sepper, *Descartes's Imagination: proportion, images, and the activity of thinking* (1996).

<sup>528</sup> Pätzold would disagree with Grimm on this point when he points at the scientific role imagination plays. Although pure understanding remains superior to the imagination, Pätzold claims, *ibid.*, p. 167: 'Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that – at least in the example given by Descartes in the sixth Meditation – an understanding of the properties of simple and pictorially conceivable geometrical figures (triangle and circle) suffices in order to get the mathematical equation that gives the size of the angle of any (regular) polygon'.

seen as some general being that contains every single state of consciousness. Grimm described it as a 'particular being to which the particular representation joins thus arousing a certain state of this consciousness'.<sup>529</sup> Consciousness as such always remains the same. The objects that enter consciousness are different:

Diese Gegenstände und soweit auch die Zustände des Bewusstseins werden namentlich je nach dem Grade, in dem sich die Entwicklung des Menschen befindet, entweder höhere oder niedere sein.<sup>530</sup>

Having said this, we can add something more about the relation between innate ideas, and consciousness and knowledge. Just as the faculty of knowledge lies in us before the activity of consciousness effectuated this faculty, certain objects of knowledge which arise from nature and are imprinted on the mind are only clearly and distinctly grasped after consciousness has brought itself into connection with the faculty of knowledge. According to Grimm, we may conclude that when Descartes claimed that the mind always thinks or is always conscious, he did not mean that the innate ideas are always *in actu* but that they were potentially in our thinking or consciousness. Consciousness, which is always active, renders these ideas into actual existing ideas.

In relation to the question of how it is that innate ideas can possibly be transformed from an unconscious state into a state of consciousness and come into existence, Grimm considers it necessary to distinguish two kinds of cause. Firstly, the nearest and original cause without which these ideas could not even exist, and secondly, the distant and accidental cause which enables the nearest cause to produce its effect at one particular point in time rather than at any other. When an innate idea is known, the nearest cause of this knowledge is the idea which is potentially present in our thinking. The distant cause is the event which brings to our attention the idea lying dormant within us. For example, tradition or the observation of things is the distant cause which invites us to focus on the dormant idea of God.

In order to test whether an innate idea is fully known we have to look at its true and unchangeable nature. If we know an innate idea in such a way that we cannot add or take away anything from this idea, we fully know it. In order to avoid adding to it or removing anything from it, we have to try not to transmit anything from one idea to the other. With reference to innate ideas, all true knowledge consists in distinguishing these ideas from each other; all error consists in mixing them together.

It seems that the term 'innate' is synonymous with 'imprinted from nature' in Descartes's works. If we ask: imprinted by *whom*? the answer regarding the idea of God is simple: by God himself. However, with reference to the other ideas, the question is left unsolved. They may also be imprinted by God, in which case we enter the 'theology' of Descartes, but for Descartes the philosopher, it sufficed to have explained the origin of these ideas from their own nature.

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<sup>529</sup> Grimm, pp. 50-51.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

Demnach haben wir die Bezeichnungen „angeboren“ oder „von Natur aus eingegeben“ nicht als streng wissenschaftliche Ausdrücke zu fassen, als ob dieselben den transscendenten Ursprung dieser Begriffe andeuten sollten, sondern vielmehr als dichterische Ausdrücke, die ihrer Kürze wegen am bequemsten das bezeichnen, was für Descartes und seine Freunde kaum einer Auseinandersetzung bedürfte.<sup>531</sup>

Interestingly, Grimm considers the issue of innate ideas with respect to the problem of knowledge. In fact, he connects the entire Cartesian epistemological enterprise to innate ideas. For Descartes a clear and distinct perception was present to the mind and sharply different from all other perceptions.<sup>532</sup> It cannot come from outside which would make it prone to error, but had to have its origin within us. The characteristics of a clear and distinct idea are the same as those of an innate idea. The way in which Descartes maintained his fundamental proposition that the clear and distinctly known is true was by admitting that the innate ideas were the only true ideas.

Da nun aber jener Grundsatz alle Untersuchungen Descartes' völlig beherrscht, so dürfen wir auch behaupten, dass die Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen nicht eine nebensächliche Bedeutung für sein System hat, sondern dass ihr vielmehr die vorzüglichste Stelle in diesem System gebührt. Wir können daher eben so gut behaupten, dass ohne die Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen das System des Descartes überhaupt nicht verstanden werden könne.<sup>533</sup>

Grimm claims daringly that it cannot be proven that the objects of innate ideas are outside us, except for the idea of God. He thinks that for this reason, the idea of God has a different foundation to the other innate ideas. Whereas other innate ideas presuppose a certain ability of our mind to form these ideas in accordance with the laws of nature as their first and immediate cause, the idea of God has, as first and immediate ground, a transcendent cause. The ability of our mind is merely the instrument, a means by which this first cause performs its effect upon us.

In contrast to the other innate ideas, the idea of God does not presuppose the fundamental proposition that everything is true which is clearly and distinctly known. Rather, this proposition at most follows from the idea of God. However, because Descartes deduces all knowledge from this proposition, Grimm concludes that there is some fault in the Cartesian proof for the existence of God when it is directly related to the solution of the 'Erkenntnisproblem'.

The error Grimm finds lies in the circularity of the proof of God. For this proof, Descartes relied on the clear and distinct proposition of sufficient reason. However, God merely served to show that what is clearly and distinctly known is

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<sup>531</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>532</sup> *Principes* I (§ 45), AT IX-2, 44: 'l'appelle claire celle qui est presente & manifeste à vn esprit attentif: de mesme que nous disons voir clairement les objets, lors qu'estant presents ils agissent assez fort . . . & que nos yeux sont disposés à les regarder. Et distincte, celle qui . . . est tellement precise & differente de toutes les autres, qu'elle ne comprend en soy que ce qui paroist manifestement à celuy qui la considere comme il faut.'

<sup>533</sup> Grimm, p. 63.



true, as Descartes admitted that without a non-deceiving God the most clearly perceived can easily be false.

Descartes tried to avoid the objection of circularity by saying that the possibility of a supernatural deception does not appeal to a *notitia principiorum*, but to the *scientia*. In other words, it does not appeal to immediately certain knowledge but to that which is known as true after deduction from certain presuppositions. From Descartes's reply it follows that all truths which are certain in themselves, and consequently all innate ideas, are excluded from the evil genius hypothesis. The problem is that Descartes could not have intended this, because he drew up this hypothesis precisely to attack the truth of innate ideas, for example, the ideas of mathematics. The hypothesis is therefore to be applied to all knowledge and the circularity of the argument remains.

According to Grimm, there are two ways in which the Cartesian system can be cleared of this circularity. Either we place the notion of God at the top and deduce the character of all truth from there, or, the most immediate way is to assume that everything we clearly and distinctly recognize is true. When in the course of this second way we find a proof for the existence of God, we can adopt it, but it can have no value for our knowledge. Rather than choosing one or other of these ways Descartes chose both.

The first way devalues our faculty of perceiving clearly and distinctly. The existence of the objects of our ideas is proved by the omnipotence of God rather than by the true and unchangeable nature of our ideas. The correspondence between our ideas and external objects is simply effectuated by God. Innate ideas are now only a higher form, no longer the sole form of knowledge. Grimm puts it as follows:

Der Umstand, dass hier unter dem Lichte, welches die Dazwischenkunft Gottes in unsre Erkenntniss wirft, die angeborenen Ideen nothwendig verbleichen, und dass diese Darstellungsweise gerade in den Hauptschriften Descartes' sich findet, mag der Grund gewesen sein, warum in den Darstellungen der cartesianischen Philosophie den angeborenen Ideen gar häufig nur eine beiläufige Erwähnung geworden ist. Ebendaraus ist auch die Behandlung erklärlich, welche die angeborenen Ideen bei denen gefunden haben, die das System Descartes' weiter zu bilden suchten.<sup>534</sup>

In this instance, there is no reason to make any further distinctions between our ideas, because all knowledge stems from God in any case. After Descartes, some thinkers have followed this reasoning through and come to the conclusion that either all ideas are innate – given by God – or no idea is innate, as all ideas are evoked by God when they enter consciousness.

The second way in which to resolve the problem of circularity starts from the proposition that everything we clearly and distinctly know is true. Grimm claimed that if Descartes had not striven for absolute truth in following this proposition, he would not have had to fear the possibility of supernatural deception. For even in deception, we may encounter a certain 'lawfulness' (*Gesetzmäßigkeit*) on the basis

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<sup>534</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

of which we can form knowledge. Whether this knowledge is then called deception or truth does not matter, because the clear and distinct perception of an idea consists in the knowledge of its 'lawfully' determined nature. As our innate ideas have such a nature, we can hold them to be true.

However, Descartes *did* strive for absolute truth and so the possibility of a supernatural deception remained. Trying to eliminate this possibility by appealing to the notion of God, only reintroduces the problem of circularity. Grimm's solution reads:

Versteht er aber unter wahrer Erkenntniss nichts weiter als eine Erkenntniss, die nach den Gesetzen unsres Denkens richtig vor gegangen ist, so vermag auch jene Möglichkeit einer Täuschung ihn in seinen Resultaten nicht irre zu machen. Daher ist es ihm, bei dieser Auffassung der Wahrheit, gestattet, unmittelbar von dem Kennzeichen der Wahrheit aus seine angeborenen Ideen aufzustellen und trotz des Zirkelschlusses bleibt die Geltung derselben fest bestehen.<sup>535</sup>

However, when God, as the only idea that indicates that there is something outside us, is removed, the horror of solipsism presents itself. The only prominent innate ideas we are left with are those of thinking and extension. They have nothing in common except that they are both within us. That means that we form the connection between them ourselves. From this, the higher idea of the connection between body and soul results. In order for this idea to be true it must also be innate. This explains why Descartes replaced this idea with the idea of God.

However, following Grimm's interpretation, it would seem that Descartes could not possibly bridge the gap between the inside and outside world. In the absence of an external mediator such as God, we can only obtain knowledge of external things through the senses. Descartes saw this problem and explained it in the following crucial passage which, for the sake of clarity, we quote first in Latin and then in English.<sup>536</sup> Descartes reacted to Regius, who claimed that the mind does not need innate ideas, because its own power of thinking is sufficient. According to Regius, all our common notions originate from the observation of things or from tradition. Descartes responded:

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<sup>535</sup> Ibid., p. 70. Grimm finds the proof for this interpretation of knowledge in Descartes's letter to Hyperaspistes (July or August 1641), who claimed that Descartes could not be sure that he would always think as he now thought, because of the lack of eternal experience. Descartes then replied that 'when we say we always do something, we do not usually mean that we do it eternally but only that we do it whenever the occasion presents itself', CSM III, 194; *Corr.*, AT III, 431.

<sup>536</sup> The Latin and French texts are not quite clear, cf. Cous. X, 95-96: 'Ce qui est tellement faux, que quiconque a bien compris jusqu'où s'étendent nos sens, et ce que ce peut être précisément qui est porté par eux jusqu'à la faculté de nous avons de penser, doit avouer au contraire qu'aucunes idées des choses ne nous sont représentées par eux telles que nous les formons par la pensée; en sorte qu'il n'y a rien dans nos idées qui ne soit naturel à l'esprit, ou à la faculté qu'il a de penser; si seulement on excepte certaines circonstances qui n'appartiennent qu'à l'expérience. Par exemple, c'est la seule expérience qui fait que nous jugeons que telles ou telles idées, que nous avons maintenant présentes à l'esprit, se rapportent à quelques choses qui sont hors de nous; non pas, à la vérité, que ces choses les aient transmises en notre esprit par les organes des sens telles que nous les sentons, mais à cause qu'elles ont transmis quelque chose qui a donné occasion à notre esprit, par la faculté naturelle qu'il en a, de les former en ce temps-là plutôt qu'en un autre.'

Quod adeò falsum est, ut è contra, quisquis recte advertit, quousque sensus nostri se extendant, & quidnam sit præcise, quod ab illis ad nostram cogitandi facultatem potest pervenire, debeat fateri, nullarum rerum ideas, quales eas cogitatione formamus, nobis ab illis exhiberi. Adeò ut nihil sit in nostris ideis, quod menti, sive cogitandi facultati, non fuerit innatum, solis iis circumstantiis exceptis, quæ ad experientiam spectant: quòd nempe judicemus, has vel illas ideas, quas nunc habemus cogitationi nostræ præsentis, ad res quasdam extra nos positas referri: non quia istæ res illas ipsas nostræ menti per organa sensuum immiserunt, sed quia tamen aliquid immiserunt, quod ei dedit occasionem ad ipsas, per innatam sibi facultatem, hoc tempore potiùs quàm alio, efformandas.<sup>537</sup>

The same passage in the English edition reads:

But this is so far from being true that, on the contrary, if we bear well in mind the scope of the senses and what it is exactly that reaches our faculty of thinking by way of them, we must admit that in no case are the ideas of things presented to us by the senses just as we form them in our thinking. So much so that there is nothing in our ideas which is not innate to the mind or the faculty of thinking, with the sole exception of those circumstances which relate to experience, such as the fact that we judge that this or that idea which we now have immediately before our mind refers to a certain thing situated outside us. We make such a judgement not because these things transmit the ideas to our mind through the sense organs, but because they transmit something which, at exactly that moment, gives the mind occasion to form these ideas by means of the faculty innate to it.<sup>538</sup>

This means that the things outside us produce an event that urges the mind to form ideas. According to Descartes, this causal effect consists of corporeal motions. However, because we do not conceive of these corporeal motions nor the figures that arise from them in exactly the same way that they occur in the sense organs, Descartes concluded that the ideas of motion and figure are innate to us.

The ideas of pain, colours, sounds and the like must be all the more innate if, on the occasion of certain corporeal motions, our mind is to be capable of representing them to itself, for there is no similarity between these ideas and the corporeal motions.<sup>539</sup>

Descartes earlier contrasted ideas that arise from thinking – innate ideas, – with those that are supplied to us by the senses, adventitious ideas. Later he claimed that the latter are innate as well, although he contrasts them with sensory impressions which are not ideas but do give rise to ideas.

Although Descartes did not explain this change of mind, Grimm maintained that this consequence already follows from Descartes's first principles of knowledge. He found that the *cogito* contains every activity of our mind in so far as it is conscious. To say 'I am conscious of the fact that I think' therefore does not

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<sup>537</sup> *Notae*, AT VIII-2, 358-359.

<sup>538</sup> CSM I, p. 304.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*

differ from saying 'I am conscious of the fact that I perceive'. The latter proposition means that if this perception exists in my consciousness, then the object of this perception must exist as well, at least in my consciousness. In Grimm's view Descartes first interpreted all our ideas in this form, that is, as being in our consciousness, and he then tested whether they represented real objects.

This means that in order to represent a real object, an idea has to be certain in itself and independent of experience so that the represented object can appear to the originally discovered 'I'. That is why Descartes 'stripped' the ideas clean of everything that originates in the senses or in the arbitrariness of our will. What remains is the bare core, concepts that represent real objects and have an original nature which is determined according to the laws of nature and thereby are independent of experience. As they are grasped by pure thought they are innate to thinking.

The question of where our ideas stem from has only been partially solved. Clearly, innate ideas originate in our thinking, but there are countless ideas in our consciousness that do not have an autonomous and unchangeable nature. Their origin is explained by the influence of an external cause that awakens our faculty of idea formation. However, this cause itself cannot be known, and so there is not the least knowledge of things outside us. In the following quote Grimm explains what we do know at this stage.

Alle Vorstellungen, die wir auf einen äusseren Anlass hin bilden, kommen als Vorstellungen aus unsrem Innern her, und da jene Vorstellungen durch sich selbst auch gegen unsren Willen sich aufzwingen, so kann ihre Ursache nicht in diesem Willen liegen, daher sind sie angeboren, d.h. dem Keime nach in unsrem Denken enthalten.<sup>540</sup>

Grimm concluded that Descartes had started his inquiry by doubting the existence of external objects and ended up by denying that we can know these objects. Descartes could only claim to know of the existence of the object of the first idea, his own self, and all ideas in him existed only through this self-consciousness. In other words, he discovered that these ideas were already in us, innate. In this context, experience means nothing other than the bringing to light of these innate ideas.

Some of these innate ideas possess an invariable and eternal nature, others are variable, confused and influenced by our mental faculties. In order to solve the problem of how both can be said to be innate, Grimm wanted to return to the contradiction which we examined earlier whereby Descartes firstly defined innate ideas as ideas which have a determination in accordance with the laws of nature, and later calls ideas which lack this accord innate as well. To solve this contradiction Grimm explained that we *either* deny altogether that there is any determination in accordance with the laws of nature, in which case there can be no innate ideas, *or* we accept this determination for all ideas. Descartes would certainly not choose the first possibility. In the latter case, the determination in accordance with the laws of nature that is given before all experience, is found in every single idea.

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<sup>540</sup> Grimm, p. 75.

Dass Descartes für den einen Theil unserer Vorstellungen eine gewisse, vor aller Erfahrung gegebene Anlage behauptet, ohne doch deren innere Bestimmtheit anzuerkennen, dies mag durch den mehr divinatorischen Character erklärt werden, den diese letzten Ausführungen an sich tragen. Dass er aber an einem anderen Theile unserer Vorstellungen diese vor aller Erfahrung gegebene gesetzmässige Bestimmtheit nachweist, darin liegt mehr als Divinatorisches. Und wollten wir Descartes auch nur als einen Propheten der kritischen Philosophie gelten lassen, so müssen wir doch gestehen: er war ein Prophet, der, wenn nicht der Zeit, so doch dem Geiste nach seinem Meister unmittelbar voranging.<sup>541</sup>

With this conclusion, which finds Descartes to be the predecessor to Kant's critical philosophy, Grimm ended his discussion of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. We shall now turn to a new discussion in the following section which focuses on a comparison between Cartesian innate ideas and Kantian a priori 'Vorstellungen'.

### 12.3 Innate ideas and a priori representations compared

As we briefly indicated in the introduction to Part V, a number of texts which are relevant to our study are unknown to many historians. The text that we shall discuss next is one of them. There is nothing known about the author Berthold Gutzeit except that he probably wrote this study as a doctoral dissertation for the University of Bromberg (now Bydgoszcz, Poland). The text is relevant to us for two reasons. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. Secondly, it compares these innate ideas with Kant's a priori forms. Thus, Gutzeit goes further than Eduard Grimm, as we shall see in the following discussion.

According to Gutzeit, Descartes's innate ideas and what Kant called a priori forms of thinking and intuition can well be compared. In his treatise entitled *Descartes' angeborene Ideen verglichen mit Kants Anschauungs- und Denkformen a priori* (1883), Gutzeit shows that the theory of innate ideas in the specific Cartesian form bears a great resemblance to the Kantian system. Although Descartes saw knowledge as interpreting real objects through thinking and Kant showed that the objects of our knowledge are our own creations, there are several passages where Descartes seems to acknowledge that perhaps all we know are appearances (*Erscheinungen*). In particular, the passage where Descartes seems to resign himself to the idea that God may deceive him about the existence of things, gives rise to such an interpretation.

Gutzeit found many similarities between Descartes and Kant, but he also pointed out serious differences between them. According to Kant, all the objects of possible experience, are mere representations given by the thinking and representing subject. As a result, it is impossible to gain knowledge of metaphysical objects. We can only gain knowledge by understanding the world of appearances. This seems incompatible with Descartes, who proved the existence of God through thinking; that the mind as a thinking substance is imperishable; and that thinking and the bodily world are mutually exclusive substances. For this

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<sup>541</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

reason, Gutzeit claimed, Descartes could not understand the processes of knowledge although he tried to do so by assuming innate ideas. Gutzeit thought that this was not a solution because the problem concerning how the non-extended mind can have an idea of an extended body remained. We will later show how Descartes tried to deal with this problem on the basis of his notion of *imaginatio*.

Another difference between Descartes and Kant, according to Gutzeit, is that Kant acknowledged two a priori elements of knowledge, intuition (*Anschauung*) and concepts (*Begriffe*), whereas Descartes claimed that thinking is independent of the body and that sensation is purely material. Hence, Descartes only acknowledged one element of knowledge, thinking, which is in some cases accompanied by imagination. Within his broader notion of thinking Descartes distinguished between imagination and pure thinking. In order to bridge this gap, he proved the existence of God which enabled him to claim that our ideas correspond to real objects of knowledge. Along with Grimm, Gutzeit claimed that for Descartes innate ideas became the essential element of the mind and a necessary condition for knowledge. However, Gutzeit went much further than Grimm by comparing these innate ideas with Kant's a priori forms of knowledge.

According to Gutzeit, Descartes and Kant both considered the thinking subject to be immediately certain. They both found the means of attaining knowledge in the subject, but neither of them were able to leave consciousness and its contents. Kant was trapped in the subject because he limited knowledge to appearances. Descartes was also trapped because he took the ideas he found in his consciousness to be images of the true essence of real objects.

The Cartesian definition of 'idea' contained not only all representations, based on observation or fantasy, but also acts of the will, feelings, and even judgements. In doing so, Descartes equated the inner conditions of the heart (Gutzeit uses the term 'Gemüt'), the objects of the inner sense, and the objects of the external sense. All these things became 'ideas' from the moment the mind observes and becomes aware of them. He not only considered observations and representations to be ideas, but found concepts to be ideas as well.

Amongst our ideas Descartes considered some to be innate (*ingenitae, innatae*) or implanted (*insitae*), or as he called them in *Principles*, ideas which are in our mind, or which we have in us.<sup>542</sup> In the Third Meditation Descartes said that ideas in general are mental images of things. May we conclude that he also saw innate ideas as mental images of real existent beings? This is what his opponents concluded and what Descartes was forced to explain. As a result he said that the idea of God is not just the image of a corporeal fantasy, but that it becomes an idea when it is grasped by thought. For Hobbes, Descartes had said that the idea of God is concluded to by reason. Gutzeit considers that this is why we should take Descartes's innate ideas to be concepts.

Auch der gefolgerte neue Begriff, der, wie wir später zeigen werden, eine angeborene Idee ist, entsteht zwar erst im Geiste aus dem vorhandenen, aber nach Descartes' Ansicht kommt er doch nur zum Bewusstsein, wir erinnern uns seiner als eines Wissens, das längst in uns

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<sup>542</sup> See *Princ.* I, AT VIII-1, 39; *Principes* I, AT IX-2, 61; CSM I, 221.

lag. Denn der Geist hat alles, was er braucht, in sich, und wenn er sich seines Inhalts nicht bewusst ist, so kommt dies daher, dass zur Erinnerung körperliche Spuren im Gehirn nötig sind, dass aber das Gehirn wie der ganze Körper in weniger vollkommenem Zustande ein mangelhaft wirkendes Werkzeug ist.<sup>543</sup>

An innate idea is something complete to which we cannot add or remove anything, for if we did, the idea of something else would arise. For instance, the idea of God is not formed by successive extension, but all at once and in its entirety as soon as we grasp the infinite being in our mind.<sup>544</sup> This does not mean that we cannot discover new, that is, not yet observed, perfections of this idea. Gutzeit concluded from this that the idea of God is materially unchangeable. From the fact that neither this idea, nor its constitutive parts, is always in our consciousness, he concluded that it has the ability to come into being, that is, become conscious.

Descartes said that innate ideas are given by our Creator when we are first created, which according to Gutzeit means that they are the essential element of our mind. However, as an essential element they cannot be a mere *modus* of the substance called 'mind'. That is why Descartes considered the innate ideas to be a lasting attribute of this substance. However, we are still confronted with the problem that the thinking substance, which excludes extension, cannot produce a correct idea of bodies.<sup>545</sup> Furthermore, because innate ideas are something finished and fixed, it is unclear how the act of thinking activates them.

Gutzeit held that the development of Descartes's innate ideas led to the destruction of his own system. As we saw, innate ideas are the constitutive element or attribute of the thinking substance. This comes down to thinking itself, something which Descartes also claimed in his reaction to Regius. In Gutzeit's words, innate ideas turn from 'Gedankendinge' to 'activities'. His objection to this is that if they lose the status of 'Gedankendinge', we cannot speak of a proper content of the idea.

Nun beweist aber bekanntlich Descartes aus dem Inhalt der Gottesidee die Existenz Gottes, und diese ist die Grundlage für alle Gewissheit seiner Erkenntnis; fällt nun die Idee als Gedankending mit bestimmtem Inhalt, so fällt damit sein Beweis vom Dasein Gottes und damit die Grundlage seines Systems. Wir finden also hier den Punkt, wo die Weiterentwicklung seiner Ansicht über die angeborenen Ideen sein ursprüngliches System durchbricht.<sup>546</sup>

In his Reply to the Fifth Objection, Descartes showed that an idea is potentially, but not actually, in our mind. Gutzeit found this very vague and traced the vagueness back to Descartes's use of the term *modus cogitandi*. Descartes used this term to indicate two things: the single idea as content of consciousness at that time, and a quality of the activity of thinking. In doing so, he could call the functions of thinking – such as the acts of the will, perceiving, feeling, and remembering –

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<sup>543</sup> Gutzeit, p. 6.

<sup>544</sup> Cf. CSM II, p. 256.

<sup>545</sup> Gutzeit forgets to add that according to Descartes we can of course have a clear and distinct notion of extension.

<sup>546</sup> Gutzeit, p. 7.

‘modes of thinking’. The varying sense of this term is clearly related to the double sense Descartes gave to the word ‘thinking’, which signifies both the thinking subject as substance as well as the activity of thinking.

Descartes’s remarks from *Notae in programma*, which we quoted earlier, show that innate ideas are only potentially in our mind. According to Gutzeit, the lack of distinction between an actual idea and a potential one led to a terrible contradiction which had disastrous consequences for Descartes’s proof for the existence of God. Gutzeit’s claim was that if Descartes wanted to prove that a highest and most perfect being exists on the basis of the ‘objective reality’ of the idea of God, this idea must be actually thought in the mind. His reason for this was that if this idea was only potentially in the mind, it would lack the necessary cogency. The textual evidence was found by Gutzeit in the passage from the Second Set of Replies. In this passage Descartes said that it is possible to form the idea of God even when we suppose that we do not know that the supreme being exists, but that it is impossible to do so when we suppose that it does not exist. According to Descartes, ‘the whole force of the argument lies in the fact that it would be impossible for me to have the power of forming this idea unless I were created by God’.<sup>547</sup> However, according to Gutzeit, we read something quite different in the Third Meditation to which Descartes appeals, namely:

The whole force of the argument lies in this: I recognize that it would be impossible for me to exist with the kind of nature I have – that is, having within me the idea of God – were it not the case that God really existed.<sup>548</sup>

Apparently Descartes was not aware that this passage dealt with the actual content of the idea, whereas the former passage dealt with a quality of mind.

On the basis of what we have said so far, we shall now sum up the differences and similarities between Descartes and Kant. Whereas Descartes thought that we can know the essence of things, Kant’s question as to how synthetic judgements a priori are possible dealt with the issue of how our thoughts correspond to the objects of experience. Kant did not pretend to fathom the real essence of things, but that of the relation between the thinking subject and the thought object. Unlike Descartes, he did not analyse the degree of certainty of our knowledge using the classes of true, false and obscure. He analysed our knowledge on the basis of its elements and found that these were intuitions (*Anschauungen*) and concepts (*Begriffe*). Both elements must work together in order to render knowledge possible because the understanding cannot exceed intuition and intuition can only become knowledge when grasped by the understanding. The important difference with Descartes which follows from this is that truth only exists for us.

To Kant it was clear that we have the possibility of forming knowledge from thinking (pure reason) alone in combination with pure intuitions. This meant that it was possible for us to form synthetic judgements a priori. As examples Kant mentioned pure mathematics and pure physics which are a priori because their

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<sup>547</sup> CSM II, p. 96.

<sup>548</sup> CSM II, p. 35.



apodicticity and universality are not given in experience by sense perception (*Wahrnehmung*).

On this point Gutzeit saw a parallel with Descartes's own acknowledgment of the certainty of mathematical knowledge and sought the same kind of certainty in all other research. For Kant this kind of knowledge was the starting point of his search to establish the relation between the knowing subject and the object of experience, which for him was the condition of all knowledge.

In order to show on which points Gutzeit thought a comparison between Descartes and Kant was possible, we have to say a few words about the Kantian doctrine. In Kant's view some concepts are formed a priori, for example, size and cause, but they still need to be combined with an intuition without which they are empty of content. From concepts alone we can only form analytic judgements which do not increase our knowledge. Intuition synthetically enriches our analytic judgements with new predicates. However, empirical intuition cannot form universally valid and apodictic judgements. If intuitions were a priori and pure, we could form necessary and universally valid judgements, that is, objective and true knowledge. The only way in which we can intuit a priori is by intuition preceding the reality of the object as a priori knowledge.

Gutzeit concluded from this:

Es ist nur also eine einzige Art möglich, dass meine Anschauung vor der Wirklichkeit des Gegenstandes vorhergehe und als Erkenntnis a priori statfinde, wenn sie nämlich nichts anderes enthält als die Form der Sinnlichkeit, die in meinem Subjekt vor allen wirklichen Eindrücken vorhergeht, dadurch ich von Gegenständen affiziert werde.<sup>549</sup>

The only thing we cannot know in this way is the nature of the objects in themselves – we can only know how they appear for us.

The intuitions on which mathematical knowledge is founded are space and time. Geometry is founded on the pure intuition of space, arithmetic on that of time. Gutzeit interpreted this Kantian doctrine in such a way that space and time are merely the empty forms of our sensibility that obtain a determinate content after an empirical intuition.<sup>550</sup> As forms they are the necessary conditions of our consciousness, by which we can perceive empirical objects. This is why Kant claimed that all external objects appear to us in space and time. However, intuition is not yet knowledge. Even when many intuitions are gathered together in an act of consciousness we only have what Kant calls a 'Wahrnehmungsurteil', which lacks the necessity and objective validity of an 'Erfahrungsurteil'. In Kant's view we can only properly speak of knowledge when the perception is subsumed under certain a priori concepts that lift it out of the contingent and subjective sphere and make it universal – both objectively valid and necessary. This is where the categories come into play.

Das Mannigfaltige in einer sinnlichen Anschauung Gegebene gehört notwendig unter die ursprüngliche synthetische Einheit der

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<sup>549</sup> Gutzeit, p. 11.

<sup>550</sup> Kant did not claim that they are empty but pure. In Section 13.2 we shall return to the status of the intuitions with reference to the controversy between Trendelenburg and Fischer.

Apperzeption, weil durch diese die Einheit der Anschauung allein möglich ist. Diejenige Handlung des Verstandes aber, durch die das Mannigfaltige gegebener Vorstellungen (sie mögen Anschauungen oder Begriffe sein) unter eine Apperzeption überhaupt gebracht wird, ist die logische Funktion der Urteile. Also ist alles Mannigfaltige, so fern es in Einer empirischen Anschauung gegeben ist, in Ansehung einer der logischen Funktionen zu urteilen bestimmt, durch die es nämlich zu einem Bewußtsein überhaupt gebracht wird. Nun sind aber die Kategorien nichts andres, als eben diese Funktionen zu urteilen, so fern das Mannigfaltige einer gegebenen Anschauung in Ansehung ihrer bestimmt ist. Also steht auch das Mannigfaltige in einer gegebenen Anschauung notwendig unter Kategorien.<sup>551</sup>

As we said earlier, Descartes distinguished true, false, and doubtful ideas. Ideas which are formed through sensation or through our will are not considered, as they are doubtful. Therefore, he could only work with ideas that were independent of sensation and the arbitrariness of will. In order to be certain of the truth, or objective validity, of these ideas, he assumed they were innate, that is, implanted by the highest being whose existence was indubitable, and which because of its goodness and veracity, does not deceive us. According to Gutzeit, the problem with this hypothesis was that it led Descartes to claim that these ideas are potentially and not actually in consciousness.

Dadurch nähern sie sich allerdings den Erkenntnisformen Kants; doch besteht immer noch ein Unterschied zwischen beiden: Nach Descartes liefern die Sinne nicht wie nach Kant die Materie der Anschauung, so dass ohne die Sinne überhaupt keine Anschauung und also kein Erkennen zu stande käme; nach Descartes geben die apriorischen Elemente nicht wie nach Kant die reine Form, welche erst im Zusammenwirken mit dem von den Sinnen gebotenen Empfindungsstoff Erfahrung d.h. Erkenntnis hervorbringt; sondern Descartes lässt die im Bewusstsein schlummernden Vorstellungen plötzlich und ihrem ganzen Inhalt nach emporsteigen, ohne aus dem Sinneseindruck etwas anderes als den blossen Anlass zu ihrer Erweckung herzunehmen.<sup>552</sup>

In Gutzeit's view Descartes did not explain the necessary correspondence between our thinking and its object. If we transpose this problem to Kant's doctrine, there are only two possibilities: either the laws of experience are taken from nature; or nature is deduced from the laws of the possibility of experience. The following quote shows Kant's position towards these two possibilities.

Das erstere widerspricht sich selbst, denn die allgemeinen Naturgesetze können und müssen a priori (d.i. unabhängig von aller Erfahrung) erkannt, und allem empirischen Gebrauche des Verstandes zum Grunde gelegt werden, also bleibt nur das zweite übrig.<sup>553</sup>

In a footnote Kant added:

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<sup>551</sup> KrV B 143.

<sup>552</sup> Gutzeit, p. 13.

<sup>553</sup> *Proleg.*, AA IV, 112 (§ 36).

Crusius allein wußte einen Mittelweg: daß nämlich ein Geist, der nicht irren noch betrügen kann, uns diese Naturgesetze ursprünglich eingepflanzt habe. Allein, da sich doch oft auch trügliche Grundsätze einmischen, wovon das System dieses Mannes selbst nicht wenig Beispiele gibt, so sieht es bei dem Mangel sicherer Kriterien, den echten Ursprung von dem unechten zu unterscheiden, mit dem Gebrauche eines solchen Grundsatzes sehr mißlich aus, indem man niemals sicher wissen kann, was der Geist der Wahrheit oder der Vater der Lügen uns eingeflößt haben möge.<sup>554</sup>

We will return later to the corresponding passage from *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.<sup>555</sup> As to the above quote, Gutzeit correctly claimed that Kant could have said the same of Descartes as he said of Crusius. We can now summarize the differences between Descartes and Kant. Firstly, Descartes thought the essence of things to be the idea, whereas Kant thought that the essence of things was unknowable. Secondly, Descartes thought space was the essence of bodies,<sup>556</sup> whereas for Kant space is one of the forms of pure intuition. Finally, Descartes did not consider inner intuition as a form, as he claimed that the 'I' is immediately aware of itself, whereas Kant did acknowledge it as a form and saw the 'I' as a mere appearance. Descartes's theory of innate ideas, however, forms the basis on which we can demonstrate the similarities between Descartes and Kant.

In the Fifth Meditation Descartes distinguished two elements in our ideas of bodily things: an innate and true element, and an element that stems from the senses which cannot be clearly and distinctly known. Gutzeit thought that this distinction was comparable to Kant's analysis of appearances as objects of experience. In this Kant distinguished between a priori elements which are brought into the appearances by the representing subject, and elements that flow from the things-in-themselves which arouse a sensation (*Empfindung*).

Diese Ähnlichkeit tritt besonders hervor, wenn wir die angeborenen Ideen nur als Potenzen fassen, als die Eigentümlichkeit unseres Geistes solche Vorstellungen bei Gelegenheit gewisser Sinnesaffectionen zu produzieren.<sup>557</sup>

In Descartes's view the elements of our ideas of bodily things which we can clearly perceive are continuous size or extension in length, width and depth. Within these elements, he continued, we distinguish many parts and within these parts certain magnitudes, figures, positions and spatial movements, and within these movements duration. Not only are all these ideas completely clear to him, he also maintained that their particularities, such as figure, number and movement, are so true and

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<sup>554</sup> Ibid.

<sup>555</sup> In Chapter 13 we deal with Cohen's transformation of innate ideas into a priori principles and we return to this passage from the KrV where Kant denies that the categories are implanted capacities to think. He considers this possibility to be a system of preformation which is mid way between his own position called 'epigenesis' and 'generatio aequivoca'.

<sup>556</sup> Descartes claimed that all the qualities that we experience in things are their ways of affecting us and that all qualities of bodies stem from movement or obstruction of movement. Because all these properties presuppose space, and because extension is the real essence of things, these properties belong to the things-in-themselves.

<sup>557</sup> Gutzeit, p. 16.

proper to our nature that when we come to know them, we do not believe ourselves to be learning anything new, but thinking that we are remembering something previously known, we are actually attending to something which has been within us for a long time. In other words, these ideas are innate.

This means that the ideas of space (extension), time (duration), quantity (size), substance (thing) and the concepts deduced from these ideas – movement, number, position and figure – are innate. In other words, these concepts form the essence of things-in-themselves. For Descartes, in contrast to Kant, this essence formed the object of experience. In Gutzeit's opinion, however, we can interpret these concepts as forming the conditions of the possibility of knowledge because they are naturally in the mind and correspond to the real essence of objects. As a result, he could equate what Kant called the knowledge of pure mathematics and pure physics with what Descartes called innate ideas. We have to bear in mind, though, that we are not dealing with universal concepts, but with an entire science of innate knowledge.

In his explanation of how extended geometrical shapes lie in our non-extended mind, Descartes claimed that their image is produced with the help of the brain, which in turn is stimulated by conceptual thinking. In other words, the thinking of a concept produces corporeal traces in the brain as material substance, thus offering the mind a graphical representation. Gutzeit interpreted this in such a way that the innateness of geometrical shapes only extends to the concepts. In his view, the actual intuition comes from the unity of the mind with the body and is therefore a priori but essentially distinct from the proper ideas or concepts.

Mit der Anerkennung des apriorischen Charakters der mathematischen Erkenntnisse hat Descartes eigentlich auf das aktuelle Vorhandensein der angeborenen Ideen im Geiste verzichtet; denn eine ganze Wissenschaft ist doch nur der Möglichkeit nach, weil ihr Streben ins Unendliche geht.<sup>558</sup>

Gutzeit based his interpretation on *Notae in programma*, in which Descartes also added the ideas that stem from the senses to the class of innate ideas. According to Gutzeit, Descartes was entirely in line with Kant on this point. Gutzeit even thought that Descartes assumed something of an 'innere Sinn', because he claimed that pain can be added to sensation in such a way that its idea remains qualitatively different from the sensation itself. In this case, the states of the self have to be seen as appearances, as Kant did.

On the basis of this text, Gutzeit equated the terms *notiones communes* and 'allgemeine Grundsätze' because in both cases judgements are made in accordance with them and as such they can be said to constitute the essence of the mind. Having established this, Gutzeit could also claim that Descartes would have agreed with Kant on the issue of not having knowledge of the things-in-themselves. In Gutzeit's view, Descartes admitted that representations only contain a priori elements which do not represent the essence of things, but only their relations with our senses.

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

Damit aber hat Descartes den ursprünglichen Boden seines Systems vollständig aufgegeben. Nun giebt es keine wahren und unwahren Vorstellungen mehr, sondern alle sind ihrem grösseren Inhalte nach subjektiv und haben mit den Dingen an sich gar keine Ähnlichkeit mehr.<sup>559</sup>

In order to generalize his argument, Gutzeit claimed that the passages from *Notae in programma* are not some isolated remnants of the fully developed Cartesian system, but that they are already contained in Descartes point of departure. The conclusion Gutzeit drew is that Descartes's notion of 'innate' corresponds entirely with Kant's notion of 'a priori'.

Gutzeit deals with a possible objection to his interpretation in order to strengthen his argument. However, one could object to Gutzeit that Descartes had abandoned his theory of innate ideas by the time of the *Principles of Philosophy*, in which he did not use the term 'innate idea'. Gutzeit's explanation is as follows: the *Principles* appeared in 1644, three years after the *Meditations* with its Objections and Replies. The Objections were especially directed against the innate ideas. Descartes addressed the entire issue of innate ideas thoroughly in *Notae in programma* (1647). The reason why the *Principles* left the issue of the origin of our ideas out of consideration, Gutzeit thought, is that it was not an analytically but a synthetically formulated exposition of the Cartesian system.<sup>560</sup>

Interestingly, Gutzeit reacts to Trendelenburg who, as we saw, denied that the universal notions which Descartes mentioned were innate ideas. In *Notae in programma*, it seemed that Descartes counted all particular representations and, on a general level, the *praedicabilia* as belonging to the class of innate ideas. According to Gutzeit, we can safely assume that Descartes also took this position in his earliest works. Trendelenburg only appealed to the passage from the *Principles* I, § 59, where Descartes said that universals are formed when we think all individuals that are alike through one idea. When we see two stones, for instance, and only pay attention to the fact that they are two and ignore their essential character, we form the idea of two. When we later see two birds or two trees, and only consider that they are two, we repeat the same idea, which is therefore universal in the same way as we designate this number with the same, universal name: 'two'. On the basis of this example Trendelenburg qualified Descartes as a nominalist. Gutzeit, on the other hand, stressed that we have to recall what Descartes meant when he said 'we form an idea'. For Descartes this meant that on the occasion of an impression of the senses, we reproduce in our memory, from the treasure of our consciousness, an innate idea. Descartes treated universals in the same way as the innate ideas of number and of a triangle.

Explicit counter evidence against Trendelenburg is found by Gutzeit in Descartes's replies to Hobbes. Here Descartes said that in deduction a connection

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<sup>559</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>560</sup> Apart from the fact that Gutzeit's argument is not very convincing, he overlooked the fact that in the French translation of the *Principles* (1647) we find a passage where Descartes used the term 'innate notions', see *Principes* I (§ 10), AT IX-2, 28: 'Qu'il y a des notions d'elles mesmes si claires qu'on les obscurcit en les voulant definir à la façon de l'escole, & qu'elles ne s'acquierent point par estude, mais, naissent avec nous'.

takes place not between names but between things that are signified through names.<sup>561</sup> Here Descartes stated clearly here that the ideas in us are not borrowed from particular things.

Furthermore, in a letter to Voetius in May 1643, Descartes wrote:

But notice that all those things whose knowledge is said to be naturally implanted in us are not for that reason expressly known by us; they are merely such that we come to know them by the power of our own native intelligence, without any sensory experience. All geometrical truths are of this sort – not just the most obvious ones, but all the others, however abstruse they may appear.<sup>562</sup>

According to Gutzeit, this quote illustrates that by the time of the draft of the *Principles*, Descartes already considered the innateness of ideas in the same way that he did when he wrote *Notae in programma* (1647).

Now that we have seen that Trendelenburg was wrong to claim that the *preadicabilia* cannot be seen as innate ideas, we are left with the question of whether innate ideas can be read as a priori representations in the Kantian sense.

Kant faced a number of problems. He had to explain how categories could be applied to sensibility; how they were filled with the contents of intuition. How can the empirical content be subsumed under the form of the concepts of understanding when they have nothing in common? How does thinking move from its empty concepts to concrete experience? How do empirical concepts come into being? The Cartesian dualism between the inner and outer world did not face these questions. According to Descartes, innate ideas are, all at once and in their entirety, awakened in consciousness due the effect of the corresponding impulse of the senses. The fact that they correspond to the real essence of objects is the result of the veracious, benevolent Creator, who created minds with the faculty to produce true ideas.

Kant tried to solve these problems and also wanted to overcome the dualism, on the basis of what he called ‘the transcendental schema’.<sup>563</sup> He used this schema as a mediator between the objects of experience and representations: he considered that on the one hand it is similar to appearance, and on the other hand it is similar to the categories. He found this double character in the pure intuition of time. We should not interpret the schema as an image, because it is a rule of the synthesis of the imagination in respect to pure figures in space. An image, on the other hand, is a product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination, whereas the schema of complete ideas is a product and a sign of pure, a priori imagination through which images are rendered possible. An image is the individual representation of a determinate object in the imagination, without the presence of this object, but presenting it as if it were so. A schema is the general pictorial

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<sup>561</sup> Obj. III, AT IX-1, 139; CSM II, 126.

<sup>562</sup> CSM III, 222.

<sup>563</sup> See KrV B 180: ‘Wir wollen diese formale und reine Bedingung der Sinnlichkeit, auf welche der Verstandesbegriff in seinem Gebrauch restingiert ist, das Schema dieses Verstandesbegriffs, und das Verfahren des Verstandes mit diesen Schematen den Schematismus des reinen Verstandes nennen. Das Schema ist an sich selbst jederzeit nur ein Produkt der Einbildungskraft; aber indem die Synthesis der letzteren keine einzelne Anschauung, sondern die Einheit in der Bestimmung der Sinnlichkeit allein zur Absicht hat, so ist das Schema hier doch vom Bilde zu unterscheiden.’

representation in the imagination which abstains from everything individual. A 'sensible concept' is the material of intuition offered by the schema in so far as it is grasped by the understanding in thinking form, without being an image, because image and schema have distilled and spiritualized the contents of empirical intuition and moulded this into the forms of pure intuition and subsumed it under the categories.

Gutzeit, like Grimm, as we saw in Section 12.2, claimed that Kant's schematism, which is based on the faculty of imagination, is very close to Descartes's notion of imagination, or the faculty to imagine figuratively.

. . . so entspricht die species Descartes' ganz dem Schema Kants, wenn man berücksichtigt, dass nach Descartes die Ausdehnung das Attribut der körperlichen Substanz, also objectiv ist, und dass darum auch die imaginatio ihren Sitz im körperlichen Gehirn hat; darum ist ihm die species auch ein wahrhafter Körper, verum corpus. Aber sofern das Denken sich anschauend zu diesem körperlichen Bilde wendet, wird letzteres ein modus des Denkens. So erhalten wir zwischen Descartes' angeborenen Ideen in der Gestalt ihrer letzten Entwicklung und den Vorstellungen a priori bei Kant eine auffallende Übereinstimmung.<sup>564</sup>

In our opinion, Gutzeit carried the comparison between innate ideas and a priori representations too far. He assumed that there is a certain hierarchy in the Cartesian innate ideas. Gutzeit placed the sense perceptions on the first level in so far as they are modes of thinking. According to Gutzeit, they are called innate because they are qualitatively distinct from the purely mechanical movements of our organs on the basis of which the innate ideas arise. This is the case for the ideas that stem from inner sense as well as for those that stem from external senses. On the second level he placed the figurative (*bildliche*) ideas which the mind forms without the presence of real objects, either by its own activity or through traces in the brain. These are, according to Gutzeit, innate to a higher degree. On the third level are the general ideas, which are even closer to pure thinking, while on the highest level we find the concepts that are only proper to the mind.

After having established this overdetermined hierarchy, it was easy for Gutzeit to claim a similarity with Kant. The a priori form of intuition already lies in sensation (*Empfindung*) and perception (*Wahrnehmung*) (level 1). In the figurative idea, sensation is replaced by imagination. Because the schema contains the a priori element of universality and the concept, subsumed under a category, presupposes an act of the mind, namely, this subsuming, in the judgement, we can speak of a higher level (level 2). The Kantian categories find their correlate in Descartes's general notions (level 3). On the highest level we find the a priori forms of judgement, the proper functions of the mind.<sup>565</sup>

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<sup>564</sup> Gutzeit, p. 26.

<sup>565</sup> Cf. KrV B 191. The 'oberste Grundsatz' of all analytic judgements, according to Kant, is the principle of contradiction. What the highest principle of synthetic judgements is, we read on KrV B 197: 'ein jeder Gegenstand steht unter den notwendigen Bedingungen der synthetischen Einheit des Mannigfaltigen der Anschauung in einer möglichen Erfahrung'.

Finally, Gutzeit compared Descartes's and Kant's ideas of the self.<sup>566</sup> As we know by now, the first, immediately known certainty for Descartes is the *cogito, ergo sum*. We also know that Descartes takes 'thinking' to be thinking substance, that is, a substance whose constituent attribute is thinking. To substance belong *modi*, and the *modi* here are innate ideas.<sup>567</sup> If the 'I', or the self, is essentially thinking substance, it cannot not think, although we might not always remember our thoughts or be aware that we think. From this Gutzeit concluded that Descartes claimed that there is a consciousness we do not know. He connected this with Descartes's claim, in the Fifth Set of Replies, against Gassendi, that all knowledge of external objects also contributes to our knowledge of the self. On this basis Gutzeit took a somewhat Fichtean view of Descartes by saying:

. . . nun liegt der Schluss nahe, dass wir also im ersten Erkenntnisakt, d.h. im ersten Denkakt mit der ersten Wahrnehmung eines Objekts auch die erste Wahrnehmung unsres Ich machten, so dass der erste Denkakt für uns ein Subjekt und ein Objekt setzte. Das würde im Sinne Descartes' heissen: In dem Moment, da wir ein Objekt wahrnehmen, erwacht die demselben entsprechende, unbewusst im Geiste schlummernde Idee.<sup>568</sup>

Gutzeit's explanation of why Descartes assumed an 'I' is that he wanted to avoid the notion that ideas lead an independent existence. In such a case there would be as many minds as there are objects of knowledge. It is therefore convenient to see ideas simply as modes of thinking which are bundled in the thinking substance called the 'I'. On the basis of this explanation Gutzeit claimed that for Descartes ideas were the means to escape from the subject. He therefore concluded that the Cartesian 'I' can be seen as the representation of the unity of the subject in relation to the manifold of the perceived objects. In this way Gutzeit has completely Kantianized Descartes.

Wenn also ein äusseres Objekt durch Vermittelung des Reizes in den Sinnesorganen eine Idee zum Bewusstsein bringt, so wird uns zugleich die von ihrem modus untrennbare denkende Substanz bewusst, d.h. die Idee des Ich tritt aus der blossen Potenzialität heraus und wird aktuell, indem sie sich bethätigt, d.h. denkt. Die Idee des Denkens würde nun insofern mit der Idee des Ich zusammenfallen, als sie in diesem Zusammenhange die Fähigkeit oder die Eigentümlichkeit unsres Geistes bedeuten würde, der Vielheit der Objekte gegenüber ein einheitliches Ich als Beziehungscentrum zu setzen, d.h. als die Fähigkeit des Geistes oder des Ich sich in der Bethätigung seiner selbst zu verwirklichen.<sup>569</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> The most important ideas in the Cartesian system are those of the self, God, thinking, and truth. Clearly the idea of God is the most important as it provides Descartes with the criterion for truth. Gutzeit elegantly avoids a discussion of the Cartesian notion of God by saying he 'does not intend to criticize his system'.

<sup>567</sup> If we adopt Descartes' explanation of innate ideas from *Notae*, we may assume that all our ideas are in fact innate.

<sup>568</sup> Gutzeit, p. 28.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.



From here it was easy for Gutzeit to compare Descartes's idea of the self with that of Kant. For Kant the 'I', the synthetic unity of apperception, was seen as an act of spontaneity of the understanding to which, as representation of the identical self, the manifold of intuition relates. According to Gutzeit, Kant could not consider the self as a category, because categories were founded on logical functions in judgement and presupposed a unity of given concepts. He therefore interpreted the categories as the forms in which the self relates the manifold of the intuitions to the unity of itself. According to Gutzeit, this can be compared with what Descartes called the *modi* of the thinking substance, through which the self relates to the objects that correspond to these ideas and thus knows them. In this way Gutzeit has Cartesianized Kant.

In summary, after having demonstrated the differences between Descartes and Kant, Gutzeit made a severe criticism of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. He considered that Descartes was unable to 'escape' thinking by appealing to innate ideas. Moreover, Gutzeit showed that this doctrine could lead to the destruction of Descartes's own system. However, if we take the Cartesian innate ideas as being potentially in our mind, a comparison with Kant's a priori forms becomes quite possible.

Accordingly, Descartes distinction between an innate and a sensible element of our ideas can be compared with Kant's distinction between the a priori element and the sensible element of knowledge. Gutzeit showed that Descartes's ideas of space, time and quantity, for example, are comparable with pure mathematics and pure physics in the Kantian sense. The reason why Descartes claimed that ideas stemming from sensation can also be counted as innate ideas, compares with the Kantian notion of the inner sense. As we have seen, Gutzeit's comparison reached the point of maintaining an agreement between Descartes and Kant concerning the impossibility of knowledge of the things-in-themselves. Finally, Gutzeit compared Kant's transcendental schema with the Cartesian notion of imagination.

On some points Gutzeit's analysis and comparisons are quite convincing. However, we have also shown the points on which Gutzeit Kantianized Descartes and Cartesianized Kant by carrying his comparison too far.

#### **12.4 *Lumen naturale* and innate ideas**

In the previous sections we have seen that the doctrine of innate ideas was considered to be a key element of the Cartesian system, and to what extent innate ideas can be compared with Kant's a priori representations. Possibly due to the rise of German historiography, philosophers started to study their sources more thoroughly. As a result, it was not only the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas which gained in interest but also the faculty that Descartes called 'the natural light'. With respect to this issue we shall discuss three texts which demonstrate that the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas should be understood from the perspective of his notion of the natural light. The authors we shall discuss are Bernhard Klöpel, Georg Geil, and Fritz Otto Rose.

In contrast to Grimm, Klöpel, in his dissertation entitled *Das lumen naturale bei Descartes*, claimed that the Cartesian system was still under the influence of

scholasticism in the use of the term *lumen naturale*.<sup>570</sup> He considered that Grimm was wrong because, although acknowledging that Descartes intended to become independent of scholasticism, Klöpel considered that he was unsuccessful in the attempt to free himself from its influence. One of the main concepts that Descartes borrowed from scholasticism was that of the natural light. The concept of natural light played an important role during the period in which scholasticism flourished, represented by the works of Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, and in the period after the Reformation, represented by Suárez.

Klöpel explained the role of the natural light in the works of the Catholic theologian Suárez and the Protestant theologian and humanist Melanchton, and also in the works of Descartes.<sup>571</sup> In his view, it cannot be disputed that Descartes borrowed many technical terms from scholasticism and even entire formulae. According to Klöpel, the entire part of the Third Meditation which deals with the possibility of knowing God is scholastic in form and content. Descartes adopted the distinction between *lumen naturale* and *lumen fides* which, speaking generally, meant that we can doubt God's existence in our mind, and at the same time remain a devout Christian. In the Second Set of Replies, Descartes explained that clear and distinct ideas can stem from both the natural light as well as from the *gratia divina*, which he also called the *lumen internum*.<sup>572</sup> Concerning the relation between the natural light and revelation, the Second Set of Replies reads:

Now although it is commonly said that faith concerns matters which are obscure, this refers solely to the thing or subject-matter to which our faith relates; it does not imply that the formal reason which leads us to assent to matters of faith is obscure. On the contrary, this formal reason consists in a certain inner light which comes from God, and when we are supernaturally illumined by it we are confident that what is put forward for us to believe has been revealed by God himself. And it is quite impossible for him to lie; this is more certain than any natural light, and is often even more evident because of the light of grace.<sup>573</sup>

According to Klöpel, this quote showed that in the Cartesian system the mind remained defined by the faith of the church. However, we shall not consider the relation between Descartes and scholasticism any further as it would lead us away from the discussion of the reinstatement of Descartes during the nineteenth century. Instead we continue our discussion of the role of the natural light in the Cartesian system on the basis of Georg Geil's study entitled *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes* (1887).

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<sup>570</sup> Klöpel, *Das lumen naturale bei Descartes* (1896), p. 1.

<sup>571</sup> Cf. Klöpel, *Das lumen naturale bei Descartes* (1896) p. 11 ff. Suárez distinguished between *lumen naturale* and *lumen supernaturale*. But as both are God given, they have their source in the *lumen divinum*. Melanchton had a different opinion of the natural light, which is in line with Cicero and his followers. Cicero connected the natural light closely to Aristotle's doctrine of principles, but he exceeded its merely logical and metaphysical signification and also included ethical principles or *koinai ennoiai* (general notions) and *prolepseis* (the faculty to grasp in advance). Melanchton contrasted himself to scholasticism, which for theological grounds did not accept ethical principles deduced from the natural light.

<sup>572</sup> Cf. *ibid.* p. 14.

<sup>573</sup> CSM II, 105.

In a reaction to a certain Kirchmann, who translated and commented on the *Meditations*, Geil wanted to demonstrate what Descartes meant by the notion of ‘natural light’. Kirchmann, so it seemed, claimed that Descartes’s natural light was introduced without argument, and as a new source of knowledge without any clarification. In Kirchmann’s view, Descartes merely stated that it was the highest source of knowledge. Geil entirely disagreed with this view and said:

Ich kann mir aus dem Geiste des cartesianischen Systems heraus nicht klar machen, was Kirchmann unter einer «neuen Quelle der Wahrheit» versteht. Descartes hat eben nur eine Quelle der Wahrheit, und das ist das lumen naturale.<sup>574</sup>

In contrast to Kirchmann, Geil found Grimm more ‘im Sinne Descartes’. In Section 12.2 we saw that Grimm did not attach much value to the natural light, but although Geil seems to agree with Grimm’s description of Descartes’s natural light, he considered that Grimm should have discussed innate ideas in relation to the natural light. Geil held that the innate ideas and the idea of the self only become clear and distinct through the natural light. However, he thought that Grimm had created a dilemma for himself when he referred to the passage from *Notae in programma*. As we saw, it follows from the passage that the ideas of pain, colour and sound, for example, are all innate. On the basis of this, Geil drew the following consequence for Grimm:

Wenn Grimm das lumen naturale als den Kardinalpunkt in Descartes’ System gefasst hätte, wie es zu fassen ist, würde es ihm die Schwierigkeiten nicht veranlasst haben, die diesen Satz mit dem Systeme Descartes’, worin immer auf’s strikteste, zwischen aus dem Denken hervorgegangenen Ideen, die angeboren sind, und den durch die Sinne gelieferten, oft als verworren bezeichneten, in Einklang zu bringen. Dann ist nicht «der vor aller Erfahrung in uns enthaltene Keim» die eigentliche Ursache der Bildung der in obiger Stelle erwähnten Ideen, sondern das lumen naturale, was uns diese Vorstellungen bilden und klar und deutlich erkennen lässt, indem dabei eine äussere Ursache durch Stoss auf uns wirkt.<sup>575</sup>

According to Geil, Grimm’s definition of Cartesian innate ideas, which considers that the mind carries the faculty to produce such ideas in itself, can only be applied to the natural light. As a result of this definition, Grimm had to assume that the innate ideas determine the entire order of all ideas. However, in Geil’s view, only the natural light has the ability to produce ideas which are necessary for the progress of our knowledge. Geil thought that the natural light was the most important notion in the Cartesian system, rather than the doctrine of innate ideas. In his view, it was the first and only source of knowledge, delivering all original, innate ideas and axioms.

Because the term ‘lumen naturale’ was a frequently used technical term in philosophy in the seventeenth century, Descartes did not see the need to explain it. Furthermore, when we look at the passages where Descartes used the term it

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<sup>574</sup> Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke’s von Descartes*, p. 21.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

becomes clear enough what he means. For instance in a letter to Mersenne on 21 January 1641, it becomes clear that by the ‘natural light’ Descartes means the first and only source of knowledge:

Assurez-vous qu’il n’y a rien, en ma Metaphysique, que ie ne croye estre vel lumine naturali notissimum, vel accuratè demonstratum; & que ie me fais fort de le faire entendre à ceux qui voudront & pourront y mediter.<sup>576</sup>

The passages where Descartes used the notion of the natural light are numerous, in the synopsis of the Fourth Meditation, for example, Descartes contrasted knowledge that flows from the natural light with moral and religious convictions. The natural light in this passage occurred as the authoritative intellectual factor, the principle of theoretical philosophy. Concerning the relation between knowledge from the natural light and truths from revelations, Geil remarked:

. . . dass er nicht, wie dies wohl behauptet wurde, sich nur den Rücken gegen die Kirche decken will. Ich will damit sagen, dass er der Kirche nicht manches zu Liebe gethan hätte, wie z.B. dass er seinem Hauptwerk den Titel gab: Meditationes de prima philosophia, ubi de Dei existentia et anima immortalitate etc., was doch ein sonderbarer Titel für ein solches Werk ist.<sup>577</sup>

In the Third Meditation, Descartes contrasted the natural light with a *doctum a natura esse*, or a *spontaneus quidam impetus* or an *impetus naturalis*. What he meant by this was a logical unfounded drive which takes possession of the human mind in order to believe something or to do something on the basis of motives which are not mediated by insight. In this respect, the natural light turned out to be the deepest, unshakable foundation of knowledge. Descartes also used the veracity of God in order to claim that what is known clearly and distinctly with the help of the natural light, is true. Geil showed that Descartes only did this in order to remove a self-made obstruction to knowledge: that of the malignant genius able to affect the truths arising from the natural light. In so doing, he proved the existence of God, but because this was achieved with the help of the natural light, he ended up with a circular argument. Again in the Third Meditation, Descartes used the natural light in order to support the principle of causality. It may seem that Descartes demonstrated this principle with the following syllogism:

Everything which can be deduced from the natural light is true, because it is clear and distinct.  
The principle of causality can clearly and distinctly be deduced from the natural light.  
Hence, the clear and distinctly deduced principle of causality is true.

However, according to Geil it is incorrect to interpret the natural light in this way. In his opinion, Descartes nowhere logically deduced the truths of the natural light.

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<sup>576</sup> *Corr.*, AT III, 284.

<sup>577</sup> Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes*, p. 24.

Instead these were intuited as immediately true. He also thought that the *cogito, ergo sum* should be interpreted in this way, not as a syllogism but as intuitive knowledge deriving from the natural light. Descartes was very brief in his explanation of the notion of the natural light, something which Geil thought was due to the fact that it was never placed at the beginning of his major works.<sup>578</sup> As a result it looked as though it was surreptitiously introduced after the fact and in such a way that later commentators took it for a new unexplained source of knowledge.

According to Geil, in the Fourth Meditation Descartes adequately explained what he meant by natural light, namely the *magna lux in intellectu* that enables the philosopher to find the first truth. Why Geil thought that this explained the term is not clear. However, on the basis of Descartes's works Geil offered the following description of the natural light:

Es ist das Erkenntnisvermögen, das konstitutive Merkmal des Geistes, durch das wir die eingeborenen Ideen, d.h. sowohl einzelne Vorstellungen z.B. Gott, Raum, Ich, als auch die Axiome z.B. das Kausalitätsgesetz, den Satz des Widerspruches u.s.w. erkennen können.<sup>579</sup>

In Section 10 of the *Principles* Descartes seemed to acknowledge that something precedes the foundation of all knowledge expressed in the *cogito, ergo sum*. In order to acknowledge this foundation, we have to know what thinking, existence and certainty are, and that something which thinks, exists. In this case, the *cogito, ergo sum* is not first knowledge. Geil considered that this problem could be solved with the notion of the 'natural light'. According to Geil, Descartes did not claim that the *cogito* was the first truth, but that it was the first concrete (*gegenständliche*) truth at which the natural light arrived with the help of notions and axioms (innate ideas) which were clear through the same natural light.

Der Philosoph muss vor der Erkenntnis seines cogito ergo sum drei Begriffe und ein Axiom nach dem lumen naturale klar und deutlich erkannt haben, die nicht definiert oder bewiesen, sondern nur intuitiv erkannt werden können. Zumal aber der Satz, in welchem diese Begriffe zur realen Erkenntnis verknüpft sind, ist nicht logisch aus ihnen zu demonstrieren, sondern wird erst wiederum durch die unmittelbare Intuition des lumen naturale genommen. Hierin besteht eine gewisse Ähnlichkeit zwischen Descartes' lumen naturale und Kant's Synthesis a priori.<sup>580</sup>

From this point it becomes clear that Geil also saw Descartes as a predecessor of Kant, but on the basis of this notion of the natural light and not that of innate ideas. Geil showed that there were many more passages which indicated the importance of the term for Descartes, which we will not quote here. On the basis of these

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<sup>578</sup> On this point Geil seems to contradict himself as it turns out that he equated the natural light with Descartes's notion of *le bon sens*. We only need to remind the reader that the first words of *Discours de la méthode* are 'Le bon sens est la chose du monde la mieux partagée, car chacun pense en être si bien pourvu, que ceux même qui sont les plus difficiles à contenter en toute autre chose, n'ont point coutume d'en désirer plus qu'ils en ont.', *Disc.* (G), p. 1.

<sup>579</sup> Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes*, p. 30.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

passages Geil thought he could give a definition of the natural light that was in accordance with Descartes.

Descartes versteht unter lumen naturale im weiteren Sinn die theoretische Erkenntniskraft des Menschen überhaupt, im engeren Sinn aber, gegenüber den demonstrativen Ableitungen, das Vermögen unmittelbar intuitiver Erkenntnis, welches aus dem Ich, dem selbstbewussten, denkenden Ich die Ideen gewinnt, die zu dem Aufbau seines Systems nöthig sind, welche Ideen, weil mit Hilfe des lumen naturale in dem Ich konstatiert, er eingeboren nennt. Sie sind uns durch Intuition unmittelbar gewiss, wir können diese auf intuitivem Wege gewonnenen Ideen nicht anders verbinden, als wir sie eben verbinden.<sup>581</sup>

In this definition, the natural light involves a strict accordance with the laws of nature. The connection of ideas mentioned by Geil, becomes necessary to the extent that Descartes can call the axioms innate. Because the regulative principles, by which Geil meant the maxims of our actions, are deduced from the natural light, it follows that they are as clear and as necessary as the connection of concepts which are contained in the natural light. Having said this, Geil thought he could solve Grimm's problem, which was to explain how Descartes could claim that the idea of 'white', for example, is innate. Geil's solution was that the ideas generated in us through sensation and the perception of external objects are strictly in accordance with the laws of nature as well. From here Geil gave Descartes a Kantian turn:

Die methodologische Strenge und die scharfe Kritik der die Erkenntnisse nicht nur, sondern auch die Erkenntniskräfte unterworfen werden, können uns zu der Ueberzeugung führen, dass wir an der Schwelle des Criticismus stehen.<sup>582</sup>

By now we can establish that both on the basis of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas and his notion of the natural light, Descartes was seen as the predecessor of Kant. With regard to the natural light it is remarkable that apparently only Geil considered Descartes's *Recherche de la vérité par les lumières naturelles*, which obviously deals with the natural light, and in which Descartes places the notion at the beginning of his system. On the basis of this fragment<sup>583</sup> Geil corroborated his claims and hypotheses, which consider that the natural light can be understood as an 'intuitive Anschauung'.

The *Recherche* is a dialogue between Eudoxe, the main figure representing Descartes, Polyandre, a man of common sense, and Epistemon, an elitist scholar educated in all disciplines. Descartes uses a number of synonymous terms for 'lumière naturelle', namely 'bon sens', 'lumière de la raison', and 'sens droit'.<sup>584</sup> According to Geil, however, we should not confuse this term with any term from the Enlightenment.

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>583</sup> See CSM II, 399.

<sup>584</sup> Cf. Cous. XI, 365; CSM II, 415; *Rech.*, AT X, 521.

Wir dürfen in Descartes hier nicht einen Begriff der Aufklärungsperiode hinein interpretieren, der erst später in dem Sinn geprägt wurde, in dem wir ihn verwenden, ich meine den Begriff des «gesunden Menschenverstandes». Es handelt sich hier für Descartes um eine voraussetzungslose Erkenntnis durch das natürliche Licht, für ein Denken, das bloss des Ich mit seinen Denkformen bedarf, um mit Hilfe des *lumen naturale* aus der Tiefe dieses Ich Erkenntnisse von absoluter Giltigkeit zu Tage zu fördern.<sup>585</sup>

It seems that in this dialogue Descartes deduces all knowledge from the natural light. This leads to the question of why in his *Meditations* he would have wanted to construct a system based on something else. The hypothesis of the malignant evil genius does not appear in *Recherche*. According to Geil, this means that Descartes did not have to found the natural light on the veracity of God. It is therefore possible that Descartes wanted to separate theology from his philosophy, but it is also possible that the work was never meant to be published. Whatever the case may be, in *Recherche de la vérité*, Descartes only operated with the natural light.

The concepts and truths which according to Descartes are known through the natural light are closely interrelated. For Geil this is reason enough to speak of a 'gesetzmässig nothwendige Verbindung'.<sup>586</sup> He thought this necessity to be founded in the constitution of our mind; our faculty of knowledge. This means that what we know according to this faculty, has to be true, not because God cannot deceive us but because we know it as necessary; because we have known it clearly and distinctly. Geil found Descartes to be the great teacher and founder of the subsequent systems because he liberated philosophy from the prejudices enrooted in scholasticism. He thought that because of the clarity of his method and because he showed the means of attaining the indubitable knowledge which lies within us, Descartes was the founder of modern philosophy.

The discussion concerning how Descartes's doctrine of innate ideas and his faculty of the natural light should be understood, continued into the twentieth century. The study by Fritz Otto Rose entitled *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Apriori* (1901) is one example which we shall discuss. The reason for this is that Rose considered the *lumen naturale* and innate ideas to be one and the same source of knowledge considered from two different points of view: an epistemological and a psychological position. Apart from the fact that this is an interesting interpretation, it is also a helpful preparation for the later discussion of Part V.

According to Rose, the fact that Descartes composed his doctrine of innate ideas without any consideration of psychology, indicates that it is not the central issue of the Cartesian system – as Grimm claimed – nor is it merely a side issue compared to the doctrine of the natural light. In Rose's view, the theory of innate ideas forms the essential transition and connection between the natural faculty of knowledge and God, the two pillars of Cartesian speculation.

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<sup>585</sup> Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes*, p. 39-40.

<sup>586</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Rose thought Grimm was wrong to distinguish formal or logical principles from material or metaphysical ones.<sup>587</sup> The natural light does not grant any principles of actual events nor any knowledge of external objects, it grants only logical and not metaphysical principles. Textual evidence for the logical nature of the natural light is found in *Principles* I, § 48, which states that the eternal truths do not have an existence outside our thinking. In *Principles* I, § 30, Descartes stated that the faculty of knowledge, the natural light, never perceives any object which is not true, that is, not clear and distinct. In the Second Set of Replies, a passage already discussed, Descartes said that ‘this formal reason consists in a certain inner light which comes from God, and when we are supernaturally illumined by it we are confident that what is put forward for us to believe has been revealed by God himself’.<sup>588</sup>

Descartes himself distinguished two kinds of principles of the natural light. In a letter to Clerselier in June or July 1646, he explained it as follows:

L’adioute seulement que le mot de *principe* se peut prendre en diuers sens, & que c’est autre chose de chercher *vne notion commune*, qui soit si claire & si generale qu’elle puisse seruir de principe pour prouuer l’existence de tous les Estres, les *Entia*, qu’on connoistra par apres; & autre chose de chercher *vn Estre*, l’existence duquel nous soit plus connuë que celle d’aucuns autres, en sorte qu’elle nous puisse seruir de *principe* pour les connoistre

Au premier sens, on peut dire que *impossible est idem simul esse & non esse* est vn principe, & qu’il peut generalement seruir, non pas proprement à faire connoistre l’existence d’aucune chose, mais seulement à faire que, lors qu’on la connoist, on en confirme la verité par vn tel raisonnement: *Il est impossible que ce qui est ne soit pas; or ie connois que telle chose est; donc ie connois qu’il est impossible qu’elle ne soit pas*. Ce qui est de bien peu d’importance, & ne nous rend de rien plus sçauans.

En l’autre sens, le premier principe est *que nostre Ame existe*, à cause qu’il n’y a rien dont l’existence nous soit plus notoire.<sup>589</sup>

However, Rose thought the latter principle only meant the *cogito, ergo sum*, which should not be seen as a principle but as an innate idea. He accused Descartes of having confused logical and psychological terms by calling representations ‘principles’. Rose thus reacted to Klöpel, who also thought that the idea of God and the *liberum arbitrium* were material principles of the natural light. Rose claimed that this is impossible because the natural light is a gift from God. Moreover, the propositions deriving from the natural light were so certain that not even God could shake their validity. According to him, God should not be considered as a principle but as an innate idea. Nor should the freedom of the will be considered as a principle of the natural light as it was described as an act of judgement. In an act of will or judgement a decision is not entirely free, but attached to presuppositions. It then becomes quite difficult to see this act and its presuppositions as principles.

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<sup>587</sup> See Rose, *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke* (1901), p. 17.

<sup>588</sup> CSM II, 105.

<sup>589</sup> *Corr.*, AT IV, 444.



The point Rose made is that the innateness of principles should not be seen in a psychological sense but be considered as a priori. Descartes himself had made this error when he spoke of innate principles or innate notions. When Descartes said they are naturally implanted (*a natura indita*) he meant that they can be known through the power of the intellect itself (*propriis ingenii viribus cognoscere posse*). Thus, although the principles are located in the mind, they are not innate but ‘naturally connected with the mind’,<sup>590</sup> or a priori.

The propositions of the natural light were gained by intuition and demonstration, which together formed meditation. According to Rose, the material principles (*Erweiterungssätze*) were found by *intuitio*, and the formal principles (*Erläuterungssätze*) were found by *demonstratio*. He thought that the natural light should not be seen as a special faculty, but as a collective noun for all principles. In Rose’s view, the *facultas intelligendi* is nothing but *intelligere* itself which he thought to be synonymous with the *facultas cognoscendi*. Descartes also called the latter *naturalis cognitio* or *magna lux in intellectu*. Therefore, Rose concluded, the natural light and its principles form the logical and original condition of all demonstrative knowledge. However, one distinction should be taken into account:

Vom l.n. [lumen naturale] als der facultas cognoscendi oder intelligendi ist wohl zu unterscheiden die mens oder facultas cogitandi. Jenes bezeichnet die logische oder Urteilsfähigkeit, diese die psychologische oder Vorstellungsfähigkeit. Descartes macht den Kardinalfehler des englischen Empirismus nicht mit, der seit Bacon zwischen Urteilsfähigkeit und Denkfähigkeit nicht zu unterscheiden verstand.<sup>591</sup>

Taken as an epistemological doctrine, Rose dismissed the comparison of Descartes’s use of the natural light with the scholastic use of this term, simply because the latter did not distinguish between psychology and epistemology. According to Rose, Descartes developed the doctrine of the natural light into the belief in the power of reason. Like all rationalism, this belief is founded on the certainty of method which, according to Rose, can be seen as Descartes’s rejection of sensualism. Because the principle of the natural light is *cogito, ergo sum*, Rose thought that Descartes’s natural light anticipated the Kantian doctrine of pure apperception. We shall return to this issue in our discussion of Natorp’s view of Cartesian epistemology.

In the above, we have seen that Rose’s interpretation of the natural light allows a comparison with Kant, but does the same apply to the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas? Although Descartes did not give an unambiguous account of what he meant by ‘innate idea’, we can say that his later comments allow for an interpretation in which ‘innate’ is interpreted as ‘a priori’. We have already seen that the cause which gave rise to this class of ideas was the notion of God. Besides the idea of God, we saw that the idea of the self or soul, the ideas of mathematics, and later, even the ideas of pain, colour and sound were added to the innate ideas.

<sup>590</sup> The term Rose uses is ‘*σύνφοροι*, im Geiste angelegt’, which he borrowed from Grotius, see *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke*, p. 18.

<sup>591</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In fact, everything which is in the mind turned out to be innate ‘with the sole exception of those circumstances which relate to experience’.<sup>592</sup>

Rose disagreed with Grimm on the point that the *cogito, ergo sum* is an innate idea because, in his *Principles*, Descartes expressly claimed that it is a proposition.<sup>593</sup> Nor did he think that what Descartes called ‘simple notions’ should be interpreted as innate. In his opinion, these notions cannot be considered to be knowledge as they are immediately given by inner experience. This means that they do not emerge from the intuition of the natural light, as Klöpel thought. The idea of the connection between soul and body should probably also be interpreted as a simple notion.

Rose did not think that Descartes interpreted ‘*ideæ innatæ*’ as actual, inborn ideas. His arguments are based on passages with which we are already familiar. From the passage from *Notæ in programma*, it follows that we cannot speak of an actual consciousness of innate ideas. Furthermore, there is the fact that the number of innate ideas grew to such an extent that it is impossible to characterize them by a ‘*Fertigbensein*’.<sup>594</sup> Further evidence can be found in the Third Set of Replies, where Descartes said that by innate he did not mean that an idea is always there before us, and indicated the faculty of summoning up the idea.<sup>595</sup> In the Fourth Set of Replies, he continued this argument,<sup>596</sup> and brought it up again when he reacted to Gassendi’s sensualist objection that all our ideas are adventitious, even those of chimeras.<sup>597</sup>

According to Rose, there is a distinction between the insights of the natural light and innate ideas. In his view, the former are immediate, whereas the latter are grasped with the aid of the natural light. With this distinction in mind, Rose described them in the following way:

Wir schöpfen die *ideæ innatæ* aus uns, sie sind nicht von Natur gegeben, aber sie werden vom Geist als nötig erkannt, wenn Gelegenheit kommt über sie zu denken. Die *ideæ innatæ* bezeichnen nicht das Vermögen zu erkennen überhaupt, sondern ein von Natur auf bestimmte Inhalte gerichtetes Vermögen. Der Geist hat die Anlage zu einem gewissen Vorstellungs- und Erkenntnisinhalt, der sich allmählich entwickelt und bewusst wird.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> CSM I, 304.

<sup>593</sup> Cf. *Principes* I (§ 10), AT IX-2, 28.

<sup>594</sup> Rose, *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke*, p. 23.

<sup>595</sup> CSM II, 132.

<sup>596</sup> CSM II, 172: ‘But it must be noted that, although we are always actually aware of the acts or operations of our minds, we are not always aware of the mind’s faculties or powers, except potentially. By this I mean that when we concentrate on employing one of our faculties, then immediately, if the faculty in question resides in our mind, we become actually aware of it, and hence we may deny that it is in the mind if we are not capable of becoming aware of it’.

<sup>597</sup> To which Descartes replies, CSM II, 250: ‘By this argument you could prove that Praxiteles never made any statues on the grounds that he did not get from within himself the marble from which he sculpted them; or you could prove that you did not produce these objections on the grounds that you composed them out of words which you acquired from others rather than inventing them yourself’.

<sup>598</sup> Rose, p. 25.

Rose considered several possible motives behind Descartes's assumption of the innateness of ideas. Firstly, there was his rationalistic character and aversion to sensualism, although he did not refute knowledge from the senses entirely. Secondly, there was his esteem, perhaps overestimation, of mathematical thought. According to Rose, Descartes wanted to show, strictly speaking, that such notions as substance, space and time are necessary, in contrast to those of colour and hardness, for example. Understood in this manner, Rose could explain the doctrine of innate ideas as a psychologically treated doctrine of a priori elements in the mind. A result of this psychological treatment, Rose thought, was that the theory of innate ideas became exposed to attacks from 'apriorism' as well as empiricism. In Rose's view, if ideas are innate, they cannot gain necessity, and vice versa: the psychological fact cannot be gained from the necessity of thinking.

One of the conclusions we can now draw is that no one thought of Cartesian innate ideas as ready-made, implanted ideas. German philosophers understood them in a more a priori, Kantian sense. Although we saw that some of the comparisons between Descartes and Kant were quite far-fetched, we can establish that on the basis of the similarities between Cartesian innate ideas and Kantian a priori representations, Descartes was actually reinstated. At some points Descartes was Kantianized, but perhaps we can also say that Kant was Cartesianized. In order to establish that Descartes was seen as the predecessor of Kant by many neo-Kantians, we shall now show to what extent Descartes was seen as a critical philosopher. We shall see in the next chapters whether the apparently 'uncritical' issues – the *cogito*, God, and innate ideas – can be transformed into regulative principles in the critical sense.

## 13 THE REINSTATEMENT OF DESCARTES BY THE MARBURG SCHOOL

The previous chapter showed how Descartes was reinstated into the history of philosophy on the basis of his theory of innate ideas and as the predecessor of Kant. In this and the following chapter we show that the neo-Kantians reappraised Descartes *despite* his theory of innate ideas. Hermann Cohen, for example, tried to excuse the theory by arguing that it was a necessary metaphysical stage required on the path to critical philosophy. Paul Natorp resolutely rejected Descartes's metaphysics, but he still thought that Descartes was the predecessor of critical philosophy.

We have already mentioned the emergence of an anti-psychological attitude favouring epistemology in Section 12.4 in the context of a discussion of the *lumen naturale*. An important difference between the early nineteenth-century French tradition and late nineteenth-century German philosophy is that the latter did not want to found philosophy on psychology. As we briefly indicated in the previous chapter, the distinction between the domain of psychology and that of philosophy became an important issue, especially with respect to method. A clear example of this development is the Marburg School, which only considered the transcendental method valid, opposing it to a metaphysical, a merely logical, or a psychological method.<sup>599</sup>

This chapter firstly outlines the philosophical and scientific-historical point of view of the Marburg School. We shall then discuss Cohen's position with respect to the controversy between Trendelenburg and Fischer,<sup>600</sup> a position which resulted in his first major work *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1871). Following this, we focus on Cohen's view of the comparison of Kantian a priori principles and Descartes's doctrine of innate ideas. In Chapter 14 we shall focus on Paul Natorp (1854-1924). On the basis of *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* (1882) in particular, we shall discuss how Natorp interpreted Descartes in the manner of critical philosophy by examining the Cartesian system in the light of *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*.

### 13.1 Descartes as predecessor of Kant

In the middle of the nineteenth century, philosophers at German universities felt that if philosophy were to have a legitimate task, a return to Kant was necessary. For many, absolute idealism had been refuted and Hegel's philosophy specifically, had been discredited. As a trend to become occupied with earlier systems had developed, Kant came to be seen as a stable figure to whom philosophers could appeal. At the University of Marburg, neo-Kantianism was introduced through the

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<sup>599</sup> See, for example, Paul Natorp, 'Kant und die Marburger Schule', in *Kant-Studien*, vol. 17, 1912, p. 196 f.

<sup>600</sup> 'Zur Controverse zwischen Trendelenburg und Kuno Fischer', in *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, vol. 7 (1871), pp. 249-296, also in Cohen, *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (1928), vol. 1, pp. 229-275. We use the latter.

efforts of Friedrich Albert Lange (1828-1875),<sup>601</sup> whose major work is the two volume *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1866). In the first volume he gave an account of the history of materialist worldviews up to Kant, and in the second volume he tried to found his own philosophical views.

Lange opposed both speculative idealism and unreflective materialism. As a result he found himself somewhere in the middle, which led him to Kant. What he appreciated about Kant was that he showed that even the most simple sensations require logical elements. Lange found the idea that space and time are forms of pure intuition which give the mind the objects of experience, to be as ‘bold and excellent’ an assumption as that which suggests that all appearances are merely representations of a purely spiritual being. He called the latter position ‘material idealism’ with reference to Leibniz and Wolff. The former was the Kantian position which he referred to as ‘formal idealism’. The great advantage of the Kantian position, according to Lange, was that it ‘opens just one glimpse into the abysses of metaphysics but does not drift away from experimental science’.<sup>602</sup> In this respect, Lange claimed that Kant had overcome the doctrine of innate ideas.

Denn nach Kant sind jene vor der Erfahrung bestehende Formen unserer Erkenntniss nur durch die Erfahrung fähig uns Erkenntniss zu liefern, während sie jenseits des Kreises unsrer Erfahrung alle und jede Bedeutung verlieren. Die Lehre von den „angeborenen Vorstellungen“ wird nirgends vollständiger überwunden als eben hier; denn während nach der alten Metaphysik die angeborenen Vorstellungen gleichsam Zeugen sind aus einer übersinnlichen Welt, und fähig, ja recht eigentlich dazu bestimmt, auf Uebersinnliches angewandt zu werden, dienen die apriorischen Elemente der Erkenntniss nach Kant ausschliesslich zum Erfahrungsgebrauch.<sup>603</sup>

In the context of this sympathetic reading of Kant the main figure and founder of what became known as ‘the Marburg School’ emerged – Hermann Cohen (1842-1918). His career had a difficult start when he was denied his doctorate (*Habilitation*) twice in Berlin. Fortunately, he had drawn Lange’s attention and in 1873 he came to Marburg where under the protection of Lange his doctoral thesis (*Habilitationsschrift*) was accepted. The thesis was entitled *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* and to this he added a manuscript: ‘Die systematischen Begriffe in Kants vorkritischen Schriften nach ihrem Verhältniß zum kritischen Idealismus’.<sup>604</sup> Antisemitism blocked his appointment as a professor for several years. However, when Lange died in 1875, the Marburg professors felt that they had to maintain his inheritance, and arranged for Cohen to obtain the chair of his mentor. In March 1876, Cohen took up his position as a full professor.

It was through Cohen’s interpretation of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* that Lange became convinced that the Kantian a priori should not be interpreted in a psycho-physiological way but in a transcendental sense. In Cohen’s view the point

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<sup>601</sup> Cf. Sieg, *Die Geschichte der Philosophie an der Universität Marburg von 1527 bis 1970* (1988).

<sup>602</sup> Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1908), vol. 2, p. 34.

<sup>603</sup> Ibid.

<sup>604</sup> See Holzhey, *Cohen und Natorp* (1986), vol. 1, p. 2.

of departure of every transcendental investigation should be the possibility of experience, not the psycho-physiological make-up of the human species.<sup>605</sup>

Generally speaking, the Marburg School took philosophy to be the theory of the exact sciences. Departing from Kant's transcendental deduction, they sought to clarify the logical conditions of the natural sciences and mathematics. As mentioned, Cohen was the founder of the school, but Paul Natorp (1854-1924) also played an important part. Other figures who are counted among the 'Marburgers' are Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), Karl Vorländer (1860-1928), Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945), Arthur Liebert (1878-1946), and the early work of Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950).

Cohen wrote the epilogue of Lange's *Geschichte des Materialismus*<sup>606</sup> in which he claimed that there was a direct link from Descartes to Leibniz. According to Cohen, Leibniz should be seen as the head of German philosophy making him comparable with Descartes in France and even Newton in England. Although Newton and Leibniz were both obvious exemplars for Kant, Cohen emphasized the connection between Kant and Leibniz because Leibniz had done more philosophical work.

In Cohen's works, which we shall discuss below, we find the first neo-Kantian study of Descartes. However, it was only with Natorp that exclusive studies of Descartes appeared in neo-Kantianism. In 1881 Natorp submitted his application for his doctoral thesis (*Habilitationsschrift*) entitled *Die Philosophie Descartes' dargestellt aus dem Gesichtspunkt der Erkenntnistheorie* which later appeared under the title *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie. Eine Studie zur Vorgeschichte des Kriticismus*. Julius Bergmann<sup>607</sup> objected that the main results of Natorp's research were intentionally contrasted to existing expositions of the Cartesian doctrine. The issues that Bergmann raised concerned: the comparison between the *cogito* and pure apperception; the ontological proof for the existence of God; and the interpretation of substance as appearance. Bergmann thought Natorp's results were highly disputable.

So soll das Ich in dem Cogito ergo sum dasjenige sein, welches Kant als den Gegenstand der reinen Apperception bezeichnet und von dem empirischen unterscheidet. Der ontologische Beweis für das Dasein Gottes, sofern darunter derjenige verstanden wird, der in dem Schlusse aus dem bloßen Begriffe Gottes auf das Dasein desselben besteht, soll sich bei Cartesius nicht mehr finden, dieser vielmehr einen richtigen Beweis aufgestellt haben, der durch Kants Lehre von der Existenz als bloß logischen Prädicate nicht getroffen werde. Die Seelen und die

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<sup>605</sup> KTE A 208: 'Darin steckt der Grund von Lange's Irrthum, dass er die Apriorität in die „psychisch-physische Organisation des Menschen“ setzt, und nicht die Möglichkeit der Erfahrung als Springpunkt der transscendentalen Untersuchung erkennt.'

<sup>606</sup> Cohen, in Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, vol. 1, pp. 437-535.

<sup>607</sup> Although it was Bergmann who was made professor and not Cohen due to antisemitic objections by A. Wiegand in 1874, their collaboration was not ruined, see Holzhey, *Cohen und Natorp* (1986), vol. 1, p. 3.

Körper soll Cartesius wie später Kant bloß für ‘Substanzen in der Erscheinung’, also nicht für Dinge an sich gehalten haben.<sup>608</sup>

How Natorp reached these conclusions, shall be discussed in Section 13.5. Before we continue our discussion of the specific value of Descartes for the Marburg School, we shall first explain why he was seen as the predecessor of Kant.

According to Cohen, all the philosophers of the seventeenth century who contributed to the construction of mathematical physics should be considered as predecessors of Kant.<sup>609</sup> The merit of Descartes, he found, was that he connected philosophy to mathematics and made the certainty of this science the real problem of philosophical investigation.<sup>610</sup>

In the epilogue to Lange’s *Geschichte des Materialismus*, Cohen wrote that Kant was a highpoint in the tradition that began with Plato and led to Descartes and Leibniz.<sup>611</sup> When philosophy was compared to mathematics as the fundamental method of the physical sciences, Cohen found that Plato, Descartes, and Leibniz were its leaders. He also thought that, in this context, Kant ranked alongside these philosophers. We can also see that in an early work Cohen called Plato ‘the early ancestor of transcendental idealism’.<sup>612</sup>

Sokrates hat das Wesen, den Begriff als das Seiende erklärt, aber die Frage offen gelassen: Wie erkennen wir dieses Wesen, diesen Begriff? Platon beantwortet diese Frage, indem er das Schauen als die eigentliche Tätigkeit des Denkers wie des Künstlers, als den Grund alles Schaffens, des niedrigen wie des hohen, mit der bedingten Originalität eines Entdeckers bezeichnet, und so ist er der frühe Ahnherr der intellektuellen Anschauung, des transzendentalen Idealismus.<sup>613</sup>

The relation between philosophy and its historiography appears somewhat strained when we ask the bold question: who has the better understanding of Kant’s project, Kant himself or his historiographer? In Cohen’s view, the latter can attain a higher level of understanding than the former. In the relation between the historiographer and the subject, the former has the advantage of learning from the subject’s creation. He therefore did not see the history of philosophy as a philological, literary history, which duplicated the work of the subject, but as the history of the ideal of knowledge that was co-authored by philosophy itself. The works of the subject of the history of philosophy, Kant’s philosophy in this case, were, for Kant, the personal realization of his efforts. For the historiographer, however, his philosophy appears in the light of its truth because it is possible to examine it as an

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<sup>608</sup> Quoted from *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>609</sup> Cohen, KTE C 35. We abbreviate *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* to KTE followed by the edition A, B, and C which stand for the first edition of 1871, the second of 1885 and the third of 1918 respectively. This passage is added in the second and third edition.

<sup>610</sup> KTE C 39. Cohen mentions Nicholas of Cusa as predecessor of Descartes, although his claim that Cusanus departed from mathematics as the only certainty and reduced mathematics to the self or the self-consciousness of the mind is too strong, in our opinion.

<sup>611</sup> Cf. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1908) vol.1, p. 474.

<sup>612</sup> Cohen, *Die platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch entwickelt* [1866], in *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (1928), p. 53.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*

historical product. In examining it, the historiographer can identify the connections between this work and other works. Consequently, it is possible to comprehend the scientific-historical relations, which a mere literary history could never achieve.<sup>614</sup>

In so far as Descartes contributed to the preparation of the Kantian problem, Cohen saw Descartes as the predecessor of Kant. In order to make him historiographically his predecessor, however, Cohen needed to adjust the biased dominant view of Descartes. With regard to this, Cohen was obliged to deal with the doctrine of innate ideas. In the following section, we will see that in distinguishing between the metaphysical and the transcendental meaning of a priori, he put the theme of innate ideas back onto the agenda. Following this distinction he was able to place Descartes and Kant in an historical and systematical sequence.

In the second and third editions of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Cohen added some insights into the historical context and related Kant to 'the big thinkers'. Here Cohen maintained that Descartes and Malebranche did not appeal to Kant because:

... die Methode Descartes's war eben noch nicht aufgeleuchtet.<sup>615</sup>

Unfortunately Cohen used the passive voice here and leaves us in the dark about how he saw the rediscovery of the Cartesian method. This remark suggests, however, that Cohen, for whom Descartes apparently *had* been illuminating, could and wanted to address the lack of understanding of the Cartesian method in the Kantian 'Architektonik'. Cohen informed us that we should not interpret this 'lack of understanding' in the philological way by trying to find references to Descartes in the work of Kant because that would only limit the complete historical understanding.<sup>616</sup>

Cohen wanted to create an historical representation of Kant in terms of philosophy's co-production of the ideal of history. Cohen's notion of the history of philosophy cannot be distinguished from philosophy and education, and as an historian he took a super-historical position which enabled him to connect one thinker with another. It is for this reason that he thought Hegel had been mistaken.

Nicht in dem Wurf des Gedankens liegt der Fehler Hegels, sondern in der begrifflichen Bestimmung desselben, und demgemäss in der Ausführung der Methode. Nicht von der mythischen Macht der philosophischen Idee werden die geschichtlichen Figuren geschoben,

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<sup>614</sup> Cf. KTE C 7-8.

<sup>615</sup> KTE C 6.

<sup>616</sup> In Natorp's *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* [1882] we do find this kind of philological labour as shown in a note on p. 173: 'Dass Kant übrigens bei der Bekämpfung des »so berühmten cartesianischen Beweises« [KrV B 630] Descartes' Schriften, wenigstens die Meditationen nicht vor Augen gehabt hat, folgt zwingend daraus, dass er eine Reihe von Einwänden erhebt, die schon von Descartes selbst oder seinen Gegnern aufgestellt und von ihm zurückgewiesen worden sind'. There are other passages that make us at least doubt whether Kant had direct knowledge of Descartes's works. Schelling, in his early years, even claimed that it can be historically proven that Kant had never studied philosophy in its original forms and that he was only acquainted with the big thinkers through 'Schulmetaphysik' stemming from Wolffians. See Schelling, 'Notiz von Herrn Villers Versuchen, die Kantische Philosophie in Frankreich einzuführen' in Hegel, *Hauptwerke in sechs Bänden* (1999), vol. 1, p. 299.



sondern nach unserem von unserer Methode der Philosophie bedingten Ideal geschichtlicher Erkenntnis derselben wird alles Einzelne einer Gesamtheit eingeordnet, die nichtsdestoweniger im Einzelnen genau und unbefangen zu ermitteln ist.<sup>617</sup>

The ‘ideal’ that Cohen mentions here is the ideal of all knowledge being produced by the history of scientific reason. For Cohen, the history of science was the ground in which the history of philosophy, as the history of reason, was rooted. Not entirely without irony, he said:

Die Wissenschaft ist der Leitfaden des Weltgeistes geworden. Ein solches Gängelband hatte Hegel verschmäht. Die geschichtliche Autorität Newtons hatte er verworfen, und mit ihr alle Autorität der Wissenschaft für die Philosophie. Daher konnte die Geschichte der Philosophie ihm nicht zu einem Ideal, zu einem Problem der geschichtlichen Vernunft werden. Nur im Zusammendenken von Wissenschaft und Philosophie entsteht der geschichtliche Begriff der wissenschaftlichen Vernunft.<sup>618</sup>

This quote illustrates Cohen’s view of what the history of philosophy should be. This line of thought, which was characteristic of the Marburg School, was continued by Paul Natorp. Natorp, as we indicated earlier, conducted an entire study to show how Descartes was the predecessor of Kant, which we will expound in Section 13.5. We shall now discuss his general view of the Marburg School in relation to Kant.

In the article from his later period entitled ‘Kant und die Marburger Schule’ (1912),<sup>619</sup> Natorp explained the point of departure of Marburg philosophy. Here Natorp considers that Cohen’s interpretation of the transcendental method as the core of Kant’s philosophy was its fundamental starting point. He found that the goal of Cohen’s three books on Kant’s theory of experience, ethics, and aesthetics was to show the transcendental method as the moving, progressing, creative power of Kant’s thought. For Natorp, Cohen placed Kant’s philosophy in the spiritual family which he traces back to Plato and Parmenides and in modern times not only encompasses Descartes and Leibniz, but also Galileo, Huygens, Newton, and Euler. He regarded all the efforts of the Marburg School to be the fruit of Cohen’s inspiration.

Seine Arbeit an Plato reicht literarisch selbst hinter die an Kant zurück, die Spezialstudie über das Infinitesimalprinzip aber verriet in einem einzelnen Durchblick, bis zu welcher Tiefe die Geschichte der exacten Wissenschaft nach der philosophischen Seite ihn fort und fort beschäftigte; meine Studien an Galilei, Descartes u.s.f., Cassirers Leibnizbuch und seine ganze grosse Arbeit über das Erkenntnisproblem von Nicolaus Cusanus bis auf Kant herab, wie noch so manches, was in

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<sup>617</sup> KTE C 8.

<sup>618</sup> KTE C 10.

<sup>619</sup> In *Kant-Studien*, vol. 17 (1912), pp. 193-221.

unserer Schule zur Geschichte und Kritik der Wissenschaften seither ist beigetragen worden – es war die Frucht Cohenscher Anregungen . . .<sup>620</sup>

With regard to the Marburgian interpretation of the ‘transcendental method’, Natorp remarked that the term ‘transcendental’ was meant to distinguish it from a psychological, a metaphysical, and a merely logical method.<sup>621</sup> The demand by the Marburg School for a transcendental foundation or justification of philosophy was applied to two domains. Firstly, it was applied to the relevant, historically exposable facts of science, morality, art, and religion. The Marburg School held that philosophy needed to be rooted in the totality of its cultural forms: in its theoretical and scientific forms; in the practical forms of social orders; in its aesthetic forms; and in its religious forms.

In relation to the second domain, Natorp was quite vague. This domain was concerned with demonstrating the possibility of the transcendental method as a fact. In order to achieve this, Natorp explained, the law – *logos*, or ratio – had to be found within the creating act of culture. The reason for this, he said, was that although the act of formation is primary, this does not guarantee that its creations are formed in accordance with the laws of nature. The method is strictly aimed at the creative act of forming objects, however, because it can only produce knowledge in the form of its pure ‘Gesetzesgrunde’, it raises itself beyond this act of creation. In this methodical sense it can be said to ‘transcend’ and thus it appears that the transcendental method contrasts with the immanence of the real point of view of experience. However, according to Natorp this is not the case at all, instead, the transcendental method:

. . . will nicht von aussen her der Tat der Erfahrung Gesetze aufzwingen, nicht vorgreifend ihr die Geleise legen, in denen sie zu laufen habe, sondern nur eben das Gesetz, durch das sie überhaupt, selbst als Aufgabe, „allein möglich“ ist, in seiner Reinheit herausstellen, um im sicheren Bewusstsein dieses ihres eigenen Gesetzes sie auch für ihren weiteren Fortgang gerade in ihrer Selbstständigkeit zu sichern und vor fremder Ablenkung zu bewahren. So wird die transzendente Methode zur „kritischen“: kritisch gegen metaphysische Übergriffe, kritisch auch gegen einen gesetzlosen, gesetzflüchtigen Empirismus . . .<sup>622</sup>

According to Natorp, the transcendental method was in fact an immanent method which finds the law of objective ‘design’ (*Gestaltung*) only in this design itself. This design should not be considered as a closed or completed creation of culture but as being always in formation. That is how it keeps its strictly objective character and avoids psychologisms. This occurs through the first demand of a transcendental method, which, as we saw, requires a return to the concrete life of consciousness, science and philosophy to avoid the charge of absolutism. In

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid. p. 195.

<sup>621</sup> By ‘logical’ Natorp means in both the old Aristotelian and Wolffian sense and in the sense of the modern ‘Logistik’. According to him, the latter is essentially not far away from the old logic as it departs from final, non-deductible concepts or propositions which cannot or need not be proved and on this basis alone wants to progress in purely identical judgements.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid. pp. 197-198. In the final section of this chapter we shall return to Natorp’s view on method in relation to Descartes.

Natorp's view, absolutism 'manages' the infinite flow of life with a fixed number of conceptual elements. However, in doing so, absolutism violates the infinite flow of life.

It is in this context that we can interpret Natorp's work on Descartes. Philosophy, he thought, searches for the ultimate and fundamental principles of knowledge which also have to be found in the becoming and growth of human knowledge. As a result, the history of philosophy, which wants to show the unity and continuity in the development of philosophical knowledge, should not do so by the 'Hegelian construction of history' (*Geschichtsconstruction*), but by 'historical inquiry' (*Geschichtsuntersuchung*) which is guided by the awareness of the systematic task of philosophy'.<sup>623</sup>

Although we shall not discuss Ernst Cassirer's view of Descartes in the following sections, we want to mention here that, like Natorp, he was also inspired by Cohen to investigate Descartes. Subsequently, he wrote a dissertation entitled *Descartes' Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* (1899). In this work, Cassirer praised the efforts Descartes had made to connect philosophy with mathematics and science.<sup>624</sup> He saw Descartes as the predecessor of Kant for precisely this reason.

Die Verbindung von Philosophie und Wissenschaft, die hier vollzogen ist, darf nicht als ein bloßes Nebeneinander aufgefaßt werden. Es muß versucht werden, die Gedanken, die hier geschichtlich in der persönlichen Einheit des Genies zusammengefaßt sind, zugleich in einer gemeinsamen sachlichen Grundlage zu erkennen. Die Ableitung aus dieser Grundlage entscheidet über den systematischen Wert der einzelnen Gedanken. Zugleich bildet sie die Voraussetzung für die Erkenntnis der tieferen geschichtlichen Function des Systems, indem sie zur Betrachtung des Zusammenhangs führt, der zwischen der Begründung des erkenntniskritischen Idealismus in Descartes und seiner Fortführung und Durchbildung in Leibniz und Kant besteht.<sup>625</sup>

Another passage which shows that Cassirer saw Descartes as the predecessor of Kant, is concerned with the use of the term 'a priori'. In the posthumously reconstructed treatise *Le Monde*, Descartes said that, apart from the laws he had just explained, he could only assume laws which 'follow inevitably from the eternal truths on which mathematicians have usually based their most certain and most evident demonstrations'.<sup>626</sup> For Descartes it was clear that all things are arranged by God in accordance with these truths. As we saw earlier, Descartes considered that the knowledge of these truths was innate, and we also saw that

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<sup>623</sup> *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* [1882], p. iv, Natorp continues 'das ist das klare Ziel der Geschichte dieser Wissenschaft, welche nicht bloss der Befriedigung antiquarischer Neugier, sondern dem Fortgange der Erkenntnis selbst dienen soll'. Schütt remarks with regard to this that it is unclear how this 'progress' stands out in comparison to the 'satisfaction of antiquarian curiosity', see Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), pp. 134-135.

<sup>624</sup> According to Cassirer, Descartes's discovery of analytical geometry founded the modern way of thinking which finds its mature expression in the infinitesimal calculus.

<sup>625</sup> Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* [1899], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (1998), p. 3.

<sup>626</sup> CSM I, 97.

when they are distinctly conceived this meant that we cannot be mistaken. He concluded that: ‘Thus those who are able to examine sufficiently the consequences of these truths and of our rules will be able to recognize effects by their causes. To express myself in scholastic terms, they will [be] able to have *a priori* demonstrations of everything that can be produced in this new world’.<sup>627</sup> Cassirer interpreted this as follows:

Die Geltung der »ewigen Wahrheiten« soll hier auf der einen Seite zwar durch ihre Verwirklichung in ihrer Schöpfung der Existenzen durch Gott gesichert sein; unmittelbar darauf aber wird der Grund dieser Geltung in der Art ihrer Erkenntnis im Bewußtsein gesucht. Interessant ist, wie hier der Aristotelische Begriff des Apriori beginnt, die spezifisch moderne Bedeutung anzunehmen, in der er schließlich bei Kant auftritt: Das Apriori bezeichnet nicht mehr die Ursache im Sein, sondern die Bedingungen und Grundlagen des Wissens, aus denen sich die Erfahrung als Konsequenz ergibt.<sup>628</sup>

In this quote Cassirer summarizes the issues we shall discuss in the following sections. We shall do so, however, on the basis of Cohen’s analysis and leave Cassirer at this point. In the following sections we shall focus on Cohen’s view of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas in relation to the Kantian *a priori* and on Natorp’s discussion of the critical character of Cartesian epistemology.

### 13.2 Cohen’s view of the *a priori*

In *Zur Kontroverse zwischen Trendelenburg und Kuno Fischer* (1871),<sup>629</sup> Cohen maintained that the question of the meaning of the Kantian doctrine of space and time was equivalent to the question of the principles of knowledge. He thought that if the philosophers of his time wanted to investigate the simple original act of consciousness, they had to do so in relation to Kant.

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<sup>627</sup> Ibid.

<sup>628</sup> Cassirer, *Descartes’ Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* [1899] in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Leibniz’ System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (1998), p. 26.

<sup>629</sup> We use the version in *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (1928), vol. 1, pp. 229-275. The first version in *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, No. 7 (1871) pp. 249-296 has the old spelling ‘Controverse’. Cohen’s biographer, Walter Kinkel, describes the controversy by placing it in an interesting relation to innate faculties. He writes in *Hermann Cohen* (1924), p. 48. ‘Trendelenburg nämlich hatte einen alten Vorwurf wieder aufgenommen, den schon am Ende des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts manche Denker, wie z.B. Tiedemann, Brastberger u.a., gegen Kants Lehre von Raum und Zeit gerichtet hatten. Sie behaupteten nämlich, es läge eine Lücke in der Beweisführung Kants vor. Nach Kant sind Raum und Zeit Formen der Sinnlichkeit, reine Anschauungsformen, welche in Verbindung mit den Kategorien die wissenschaftliche Erfahrung erst ermöglichen. Solche Bedingungen der wissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis, solche geistige Elemente, ohne welche man das System der Wissenschaft gar nicht aufbauen kann, zeichnet Kant mit dem Beiwort *a priori* aus. Er bedient sich zuweilen auch des irreführenden Ausdruckes: Raum und Zeit und die Kategorien seien subjektive Formen der Erkenntnis. Die Gegner faßten daraufhin den Begriff des *a priori* so auf, als ob damit die angeborenen Fähigkeiten des Geistes bezeichnet sein sollten’. In *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Cohen settles the quarrel by taking into account the methodological difference between a psychological classification of space and time among innate ideas and the Kantian transcendental theory of the *a priori* conditions of the possibility of experience.

Man redet noch heute wie im Anfang von Empfinden und Vorstellen, von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand, von physiologischen und psychischen Vorgängen. Man forscht nach einem einfachen, ursprünglichen Akte des Bewußtseins. In allen diesen Fragen hängen wir im Innersten durch mannigfache Bindeglieder von Kant ab, mit Kant zusammen. Das eigene Vorwärts-Denken muß in alle Wege seinen Ausgang von der scharfen Grenzlinie nehmen, die Kant aller künftigen Metaphysik, und damit aller Psychologie gezogen hat.<sup>630</sup>

The controversy between Fischer and Trendelenburg was concerned with the question of how Kant's transcendental aesthetic – his doctrine of space and time – should be understood. Should it be taken as a realistic or idealistic theory of experience? Trendelenburg, in his *Logische Untersuchungen* (1840), claimed that Kant only considered two out of three possibilities: either space and time are objective, or they are subjective. According to Trendelenburg, the third possibility – that space and time are both subjective and objective – was not considered. Fischer rejected Trendelenburg's claim in the second edition of his *System der Logik und Metaphysik* (1865) in reply to which Trendelenburg examined the issue anew in his *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie* (1867). To this work Trendelenburg added a treatise entitled 'Über eine Lücke in Kants Beweis der ausschließenden Subjektivität des Raumes und der Zeit, ein kritisches und antikritisches Blatt', in which he considered Fischer's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1860) and claimed that Fischer's exposition of the Kantian doctrine was not true to Kant. Fischer responded to this in the second edition of his *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1869) to which Trendelenburg again reacted with a polemic entitled 'Kuno Fischer und sein Kant' (1869). Fischer replied to this with a further pamphlet entitled 'Anti-Trendelenburg' (1870).

Cohen summarized the controversy by posing two main questions: Did Trendelenburg prove that there are some lacunae in Kant's demonstrations of the exclusive subjectivity of space and time? Did Trendelenburg prove that, in his exposition of the Kantian doctrine, Kuno Fischer's method had been un-Kantian? He also posed the corollary: Did Fischer prove that the lacunae claimed by Trendelenburg do not exist in the Kantian demonstrations?<sup>631</sup> In the paper in question, however, Cohen only answers the second question, leaving the first for his *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* which also appeared in 1871.

Before examining the second question, we shall first explain some of the technical terms which were used in the controversy. Trendelenburg distinguished between the pure and the exclusive (*ausschließende*) subjectivity of space and time. By saying that space and time are pure subjective intuitions, Trendelenburg meant that they precede all experience. By the exclusive subjectivity of space and time, he

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<sup>630</sup> Cohen, *Kontroverse*, p. 229.

<sup>631</sup> Köhnke, in *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (1986), p. 259, says that reducing the controversy to these questions was a smart move by Cohen: 'Wer sich heute der Mühe unterzieht, die einigen 50 Broschüren, Abhandlungen und Rezensionen dieser Debatte zu lesen, der tut gut daran, entweder in der Nachfolge Cohens die reinen Sachfragen herauszulösen und all die persönlichen, richtungsgeprägten und sonstigen Ausschmückungen beiseite zu lassen, oder aber er geht der Frage nach – und dies soll hier geschehen –, was denn eigentlich daran gelegen haben mochte, ob diese Fragen [viz. Cohen's questions] so oder so entschieden würden.'

meant that the intuitions are not merely pure, in so far as they precede experience, but that they only occur as internally operating modifications of our sensibility.

Trendelenburg thought that if Kant had demonstrated the exclusive subjectivity of space and time, then he has led us into transcendental idealism. If Kant had not demonstrated this, Trendelenburg claimed, it is possible that the representation of space and time is also valid for things outside us. In this second case, it is possible to verify the ideal in the real, which was Trendelenburg's intention. If the pure subjectivity of space and time does not mean that they only occur and are exclusively real in us, it is possible that there is something real outside our subjectivity; that there is something objectively independent of our subjectivity, such as the Cartesian 'res extensa'. Pure objectivity excludes an a priori form of knowledge. Exclusive (or *bloße*) objectivity on the other hand tolerates a priori knowledge. Concerning this exclusive objectivity Cohen remarked as follows:

Die bloße Trendelenburgsche Objektivität rettet einen Grund und Boden, auf den die apriorische Anschauung sich beziehen könne; sie bietet eine Objektivität dar, welche die Dinge davor bewahrt, in den Abgrund der Erscheinungen zu fallen; sie will die Weltansicht schützen, daß sie nicht zum transzendentalen Idealismus „verflüchtigt“ werde.<sup>632</sup>

In Cohen's view, the core of the argument concerned the notion of the 'a priori'. The question of how pure subjective intuition can grasp the merely objective thing, he thought, had a hidden implication, namely that there is only exclusive subjectivity. Trendelenburg claimed that if Kant had admitted a mere objectivity next to his proven pure subjectivity, he would have made a false disjunction by drawing idealist consequences from his determination of space and time as pure intuitions. According to Trendelenburg, the subjective and the objective were merely relations that can be conjoined. In his view, a disjunctive judgement is incomplete when we say, for instance, that the concept of a triangle is either subjective or objective. It is incomplete because the third possibility, that it is both subjective and objective, is not considered.

Wenn uns z.B. durch die innere Bewegung oder Imagination die Vorstellung des Raumes entsteht (subjektiv), so ist dadurch der Raum, den die entsprechende Bewegung draußen erzeugt, nicht gehindert, objektiv zu sein.<sup>633</sup>

Cohen concluded from this that Trendelenburg, along with Kant, had rejected empiricism, which holds that space and time are purely objective intuitions. Furthermore, he considered that Trendelenburg had claimed, along with Kant, that space and time are only pure subjective intuitions. However, when he held that space and time were exclusively subjective, he was no longer in accord with Kant. According to Trendelenburg, there were three possibilities: that space and time are only objective, as real objects of experience; that they are only subjective, as

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<sup>632</sup> Cohen, *Kontroverse*, p. 235.

<sup>633</sup> Trendelenburg, *Vermischte Abhandlungen*, in *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol. 3 (1867), p. 222.

necessary forms in our mind; or that they are subjective and objective at the same time, necessary for representation, and real in the things. Trendelenburg claimed that Kant did not take this third possibility into account. Cohen held that on this point Fischer did not refute Trendelenburg's claim.

Cohen did not agree with Trendelenburg's exposition and criticism of Kant. In his view, when transcendental research abstracts from the things, this does not mean, as Trendelenburg thought, that it rejects these things. Cohen held that Trendelenburg's claim that the subjective form can at the same time be an objective form, can only have a metaphorical sense.<sup>634</sup> He therefore found that we cannot hold this claim against Kant. Instead, he added, we should ask how Kant could assume an external intuition to be an a priori form of knowledge. Kant himself answered this by saying that external intuition (*äußere Anschauung*) is a formal state of sensibility. According to Cohen, Kant thus showed that external intuition is implied in the inner sense, namely as the awareness of the order of our representations.<sup>635</sup>

### 13.3 Cohen's transformation of innate ideas into a priori principles

In Section 2.4 of Part I we discussed Kant's view of innate ideas. We saw there that in the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant explained the a priori elements of knowledge which are 'found in us' with the term 'epigenesis' and rejected the notion of innate ideas or principles. We also saw that in a later work he admitted that, although the form of things in the intuitions of space and time together with the synthetic unity of the manifold in concepts are given a priori, the ground for this in the subject is innate.<sup>636</sup> Kant rejected a so-called *generatio aequivoca*, which would mean that a priori notions originate from experience. He also rejected a system of preformation, which justified the categories using a transcendent source, namely innate ideas. We may assume that Kant would have interpreted Descartes's theory of innate ideas as a system of preformation.

However, we also saw that Descartes's explanations of innate ideas in *Notae in programma quoddam* and in *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* gave rise to interpretations of his notion of innate ideas in the light of an epigenesis. By means of the Rules VI, VIII, and XII of the *Regulae*, he reduced things to knowledge in the mind and maintained that nothing can be known prior to the intellect.

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<sup>634</sup> KTE, A 67.

<sup>635</sup> For more details on the debate see Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (1986). On p. 261 Köhnke places the debate in historical perspective with the following analogy: 'Und so zeichnet sich an diesem Punkte denn schon anlässlich der Fischer-Trendelenburg-Debatte eine Aufteilung der Bewegung in zwei grundsätzlich verschiedene Richtungen ab, deren ältere in der Tradition Fichtes, Schopenhauers und Fischers steht und deren jüngere durch die Schule Trendelenburgs repräsentiert wird, die sich teils in Cohens Szientismus, teils aber auch im realistischen Neukantianismus Riehls und Paulsens fortsetzte. Wie in Berlin-Charlottenburg zwei Parallelstraßen, eine Kuno Fischer- und eine Trendelenburgstraße, auf die Neue Kantstraße führen, so führten die Wege zum Neukantianismus auch entweder durch die Schule Fischers oder durch die Trendelenburgs. Der Streit der beiden Giganten tat dabei ein übriges, jede neue Interpretation Kants zuerst darauf zu verpflichten, sich der einen oder anderen Seite zuschlagen zu müssen'.

<sup>636</sup> Kant, *Entdeckung* [1790], in *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard* (1998), p. 151; *Entdeckung*, AA VIII, 222.

Moreover, from his reaction to Regius we learned that he understood innate ideas in a faculty-like way.

Some passages from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Regulae*<sup>637</sup> showed that Kant and Descartes had reasonably similar views on the formation of knowledge. Both supposed that all knowledge originates in the human intellect, in which ‘the seeds of truth’ are nestled. Speaking *à la rigueur métaphysique*, however, neither Descartes nor Kant were clear in their explication of how knowledge is formed from innate ideas, nor how these ideas ended up in the human mind. On the basis of Cohen’s view on these issues we shall now attempt to clarify these obscurities.<sup>638</sup>

In the first edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1871), Cohen demonstrated the importance of Kant’s transcendental aesthetic. On the basis of his description of the development of the notion of the ‘a priori’ we shall show how he connected this notion with that of innate ideas. Even in the first sentence of this work Cohen places the Kantian enterprise in the context of the issue concerning whether our representations should be considered as being innate or acquired. Cohen emphasized that the importance of this question was that it involved the origin and validity of knowledge. Notwithstanding their disagreements, all thinkers agreed on the point that our truths, judgements, and concepts had to have an origin. However, Cohen signalled a problem in the metaphysical question concerning the certainty of our thinking. This problem, to which we shall soon return, was that the question of whether our representations are innate or acquired also had a psychological interpretation.

Referring to Herbart (1776-1841), Kant’s successor in Königsberg, Cohen remarked that Descartes understood innate ideas in a restricted sense. He found the evidence for this in the passage from *Notae in programma* which we discussed extensively in Chapter 12. In the second edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, Cohen added an historical analysis of the terms ‘innate’ and ‘a priori’. In the following quote we can see Cohen’s short ‘Begriffsgeschichte’ of these terms.

Euklid nannte die Axiome, indem er vom Platonismus absprang und der herrschenden Stoa das Wort entlehnte, notiones communes oder insitae (ἔννοιαι κοιναί oder φυσικαί). Man sieht, wir haben hier die angeborenen Begriffe, die so viel Staub in der Geschichte der Philosophie und der Wissenschaft aufgewirbelt haben. Plato hatte keine Schuld an dieser Art von Beglaubigung der Axiome durch die Geburt und Vererbung. Da diese Grundsätze den Lehrsätzen voraufgehen, so konnte sich der von anderer Seite herkommende Ausdruck, dass sie ein Prius bedeuten, um so bequemer damit verbinden. So entstand die Verknüpfung der Begriffe Angeboren und Apriori. Auch an dieser Art von Apriorismus hat Plato keine Schuld.<sup>639</sup>

<sup>637</sup> See KrV B 166-167 and *Regulae* VIII, ed. Heffernan p. 112 ff.

<sup>638</sup> Cf. Zijlstra, ‘Cohen’s transformation of the Cartesian innate ideas to the Kantian a priori principles’, in Pätzold and Krijnen (eds.) *Der Neukantianismus und das Erbe des deutschen Idealismus: die philosophische Methode* (2002).

<sup>639</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 449.



According to Cohen, Descartes returned to the methods of Platonism. He did so by reducing philosophical speculation to mathematics, a form of knowledge which he preferred and which he required for his ‘science universelle’. Cohen saw a similarity between Plato and Descartes on the point that both ‘located’ the certainty of knowledge in ideas. However, Cohen thought that Descartes’s use of the term ‘innate’ was ‘ill-chosen’.

Im Zusammenhang seiner Erörterung sollte man eigentlich daran nicht irre werden können, dass er nur die prärogative Geltung der Grundlagen bezeichnen, keineswegs aber einen Geburtsadel für den Begriff des Triangels etwa feststellen wollte. Der Triangel aber ist vornehmlich sein wissenschaftliches Beispiel einer eingeborenen Idee. Und auch sonst lässt Descartes es nicht an einer Mannigfaltigkeit von Ausdrücken fehlen, theils der Scholastik entnommen, theils modernen, neugeprägten, durch welche er den zweideutigen Ausdruck des Eingeborenen erläutert und besser bestimmt. Auch den Platonischen Begriff des reinen Denken erneuert er.<sup>640</sup>

After the second edition of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung* (1885), Cohen took the innate ideas of Descartes as the criteria of knowledge. With reference to this, he said that ideas are innate when they liberate us from the appearance and errors of sensorial observation and guarantee the certainty of knowledge. Cohen stressed that the mathematical ideas specifically guarantee this certainty and that they obtain their validity when they are methodically implemented as the criteria of knowledge. This is of course a very charitable reading, when we bear in mind that Cohen himself obviously rejected the hypothesis of innate ideas.<sup>641</sup> At the same time, however, it should be noted that Cohen’s interpretation of the innate as a criterion of knowledge was an implicit criticism of Locke.

Cohen was able to interpret innate ideas as the criteria of knowledge through reference to Descartes’s *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (1628/29). Notably, he equated these ‘Rules’ to the ‘règle générale’ from the *Discours de la Méthode*, which reads:

Et ayant remarqué qu’il n’y a rien du tout en ceci: *je pense, donc je suis*, qui m’assure que je dis la vérité, sinon que je vois très clairement que, pour penser, il faut être: je jugai que je pouvais prendre pour règle générale, que les choses que nous concevons fort clairement et fort distinctement sont toutes vraies . . .<sup>642</sup>

In our view, it is problematic to link this general rule, which can be seen as an addition to the preceding four rules, to any rule from the *Regulae*.<sup>643</sup> Cohen may have been right to see the *Regulae* as a methodological prolegomena to later works,

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<sup>640</sup> Ibid., p. 451.

<sup>641</sup> See both KTE (precise references are given later in this section) and *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (LrE), B 47.

<sup>642</sup> *Disc.* (G) p. 33.

<sup>643</sup> As we will see, Natorp also does this without concern. It was almost certainly Natorp’s *Descartes’ Erkenntnistheorie* [1882] which brought the importance of the *Regulae* to Cohen’s attention. This explains why this work is not mentioned in the first edition of KTE (1871), whereas it is in the second (1885) and third (1918).

in which the *one* rule and principle is found, but the goal and scope of the *Regulae* are of a very different kind to the rules of the *Discours*. Cohen himself thought that when Descartes generalized the rule by way of the *cogito, ergo sum*, he had led himself into error. According to Cohen, it was dangerous to objectify the rule in self-consciousness, because then the geometrical, arithmetical and all other ideas would come from the same source. As a result, the distinction between geometrical thought and all other forms would become unclear.

According to Cohen, the lack of distinction between the geometrical way of thinking and other forms led Descartes to assume that space was given in pure thinking. By doing so, Descartes neglected the fact that geometrical entities are presented in a different way to pure inner thought. Cohen thought that because, for Descartes, scientific knowledge is produced only through pure thought, sensory experience and other forms of experience are neglected as a source of knowledge. Put briefly, 'Der Fehler liegt in dem Verhältnis des Denkens zum Raume, zur Geometrie.'<sup>644</sup>

Descartes neglected, if not rejected, imagination, and only admitted the pure intellect as a basis for knowledge. As a result, sensory experience and imagination became secondary to the pure intellect. The problem Cohen concluded from this was that the unity of knowledge in the critical sense was lost. According to Cohen, the Cartesian definition of thinking was too broad and the lack of distinction between pure intellect and the other forms of experience underdetermined the notion of self-consciousness.

Cohen aimed to solve these problems on the basis of Kant's doctrine. Because Kant wanted to maintain spatial sensations and empirical intuitions of space, he had to acknowledge the form of space as the orderly principle. However, it remained unclear how we should conceive of this form. According to Cohen, this was a result of the fact that Kant was not sure whether he should involve the criterion of the innate.

Das Kriterium des Angeborenen ist jedoch in der transszendentalen Ästhetik gänzlich verschwunden; während in der transszendentalen Logik jener berühmten Streitfrage Erwähnung geschieht, und später gegen Eberhard, auch in Bezug auf Raum und Zeit diese Erwägung in einer Klarheit nachgeholt wird, die nichts vermissen lässt.<sup>645</sup>

Clearly, Kant could not make up his mind concerning the issue of innateness. Cohen pointed out that the reason for this was that Kant did not properly distinguish the *a priori* from the innate.<sup>646</sup> At the same time, Cohen seemed to admit that this distinction did not matter too much anyway, claiming that, if we consider the proper sense of the *a priori*, that is, take it as the formal or constitutive conditions of experience, then we are 'beyond' this issue. This sounds odd, because he had repeatedly stressed the distinction between the metaphysical and the

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<sup>644</sup> KTE C 48.

<sup>645</sup> KTE C 211.

<sup>646</sup> See KTE C 327-328. Cf. KTE A 103. Note that Cohen has already discussed the issue of the innate already in the first edition, although at this time he did not describe Cartesian innate ideas as criteria of knowledge.

transcendental notion of the a priori, an issue which we will return to shortly. For the moment, we shall discuss Cohen's unambiguous question: 'Was würde der Leser auf die Frage antworten: Sind Raum und Zeit nach Kant angeboren?'<sup>647</sup> In order to clarify the relation between the terms 'a priori' and 'innate' Cohen conducted a short history of the a priori:

Schon bei Platon findet sich das *euthùs genómenoi*. Descartes hat den scholastischen Terminus des *lumen naturale* als einen vergleichsweise modernen mit dem Angeborenen verbunden, das Letztere vielmehr durch das Erstere erläuternd und zur *règle générale* bestimmend. Leibniz vermeidet in der Hauptsache diesen psychologischen Ausdruck, indem er in den *vérités éternelles* den sachlichen Kern geltend macht.<sup>648</sup>

With this brief 'Begriffsgeschichte' of the three stages of the a priori, Cohen showed that Kant overcame the pre-critical disjunction of 'innate or acquired'. It is in the third stage, where aprioricity means that space and time are constitutive determinations of experience, that the a priori could no longer be confused with innate. With the term 'constitutive determination' Cohen meant that it is a source of experience, which is not itself an experience. In this interpretation, the distinction between a priori and innate roughly corresponds to the distinction between formal and concrete.

The question concerning why Kant was so uncertain and unclear about the acceptance of innate ideas or principles still remains. As mentioned above, Cohen tried to explain and solve this problem by means of the crucial distinction between the metaphysical and transcendental a priori.<sup>649</sup> According to Cohen, in its metaphysical meaning, space and time and the categories were taken as the original elements of consciousness. This conception was concerned with the unity of consciousness as the unity of the individual consciousness. In the transcendental meaning of a priori, however, the unity of consciousness was taken as the principle of the unity of knowledge.

Cohen thought that Kant did not make this distinction explicitly because he was not always concerned with the unity of categories and principles (*Grundsätze*) and their constitutive validity for the form of experience. In Cohen's view, if we consider a category from the perspective of its origin, in which sense it names the synthetic unity that 'knits together' the manifold, we merely take it in its metaphysical meaning. Cohen called consciousness, considered from the perspective of its origin, 'Bewußtheit', and with this term he indicated the old

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<sup>647</sup> KTE C 255.

<sup>648</sup> KTE C 255-256. However, the evidence of the mathematical truths is not the first in the Cartesian philosophical order, the truth of the *cogito* and, strictly speaking, the truth of God precedes it. See *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 36-37: 'Nunc autem ordo videtur exigere, ut prius omnes meas cogitationes in certa genera distribuam, & in quibusnam ex illis veritas aut falsitas proprie consistat, inquirem.' Cf. *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 29: 'Et afin que ie puisse auoir occasion d'examiner cela sans interrompre l'ordre de mediter que ie me suis proposé, qui est de passer par degrez des notions que ie trouueray les premieres en mon esprit à celles que i'y pouray trouuer par après, il faut icy que ie diuise toutes mes pensées en certains genres, & que ie considere dans lesquels de ces genres il y a proprement de la vérité ou de l'erreur'.

<sup>649</sup> Note that Cohen did not make this distinction until the third edition (1918) of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*.

metaphysical possibilities of the qualitative determinations of consciousness, which were concerned with the question of the nature of consciousness. This consideration, Cohen thought, enabled psychology to demonstrate how the unity of experience constructs itself as a unity of consciousness. In order to show this, psychology needed sensations and, beyond sensations, the representations of space and time. Psychology brought about the distinction between sensation (*Empfindung*) and representation (*Vorstellung*), but according to Cohen, it was still in need of transcendental inquiry.

Denn die Psychologie kann sichs freilich nicht erklären, warum sie nicht fragen dürfe, wie es zugehe, dass wir Raum haben. Sie kann es ebensowenig sich erklären, wie es zugehe, dass wir Empfindungen haben. Aber sie hat nicht die Befugnis, das Recht zu solchen Fragen selbst sich abzuschneiden. Die Erkenntniskritik allein vermag die Bestimmtheiten zu fixieren, in denen die Bewusstheit sich darlegt.

Woher jedoch nimmt die Erkenntniskritik dieses Recht? Schaltet sie etwa, ohne es Wort haben zu wollen, in diesen Feststellungen als alte Metaphysik, die der Psychologie die Seelenvermögen und andere Kraftquellen des Bewusstseins überwies? Indem wir dieser Frage ins Auge blicken, können wir die Bedeutung des a priori, gerade wo dasselbe psychologisch sich zu verflüchtigen bedroht ist, in seiner erkenntniskritischen Schärfe erkennen. Und damit führen wir das a priori von seiner „metaphysischen“ Bedeutung zur „transzendentalen“ hinüber.<sup>650</sup>

The importance of the distinction between the transcendental and metaphysical conceptions of a priori emerges at the end of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*.<sup>651</sup> At this stage Cohen informs us that the very concept of the transcendental method is produced through this distinction.

Having seen all the relevant interpretations of the a priori and of the innate, we shall now discuss how Cohen saw the mutual relation between the two. Put briefly, the distinction between the two comes down to a difference of perspective. Whereas the innate is concerned with personal and psychological consciousness, the a priori is a neutral and scientific point of view of the same thing. In Cohen's view, the former had therefore lost its relevance because the transcendental method taught that nature is given as science of nature, or as physics.

We can conclude that the question of whether space and time are innate ideas is a different question to that concerning whether the categories, as formal conditions of experience, can be regarded as innate. The answer to the first remains undetermined in as much as Cohen thought it was irrelevant. However, in his criticism of Helmholtz, he said it was false to consider space and time to be innate. Cohen strictly upheld the distinction between thinking and intuition. Intuition should, in Cohen's view, be seen as the transcendental a priori condition of knowledge, not a metaphysical condition. Let us, for the sake of the argument, assume that space and time are not innate.

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<sup>650</sup> KTE C 271-272

<sup>651</sup> See KTE C 738 ff.

This leaves us with the question of whether the categories can be considered to be innate principles. According to Kant, the categories were founded on forms of judgement, but he did not show how these forms were obtained. Cohen rejected the hypothesis that they are innate forms of the human mind because it proved to be redundant and empty in the case of the ‘Anschauungsformen’. The same held for the merely analytic forms of judgement. Cohen considered the categories as ways to unify, and contrary to the forms of intuition, this unity is not given, but thought. Cohen explained that the reason why Kant, in his reaction against Eberhard, admitted that the formal ground of the intuition of space was innate, was that he had been trying to protect himself from sensualistic psychology and dogmatic metaphysics.

By distinguishing between the metaphysical and transcendental a priori, Cohen made the question of ‘innate or not’ irrelevant. He considered the innate as a necessary first level and pre-condition of transcendental knowledge. A priori forms first had to be considered as original (*ein Ursprüngliches*) in order to defend them against being deduced from psychological experience. To understand this perspective, Cohen claimed, is the first condition of transcendental knowledge, without this insight one can never know anything a priori.<sup>652</sup>

Cohen thought that if we consider the metaphysical notion of the a priori – in which it can be interpreted as innate – as a preparation for the transcendental notion, we can avoid the danger of psychologisms and unmethodical caricatures of ‘the organization of the mind’. The value of a priori forms for philosophy is not their meaning as ‘elements of consciousness’, but their function as the foundations of knowledge. By transforming the innate into the a priori, Cohen detached it from its anthropomorphous connotation and focused the issue on method and knowledge.

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<sup>652</sup> KTE C 325.

## 14 NATORP: THE CRITICAL CHARACTER OF DESCARTES

As we have seen in previous chapters, the reinstatement of Descartes into the history of philosophy centred around the key issues of the Cartesian system: the *cogito*, the notion of God, and the theory of innate ideas. In contrast, this chapter shows that Descartes was also reappraised and his place restored *despite* these metaphysical themes. Natorp demonstrated that, in spite of the metaphysics developed in the major works, it was possible to read Descartes positively on the basis of his early work, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, which he found to be in accordance with critical philosophy.

The fact that Natorp read Descartes in the light of Kantian philosophy was already apparent from the subtitle of his *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie*: 'Eine Studie zur Vorgeschichte des Kriticismus'. We have to note, though, that by 'Erkenntnistheorie' Natorp did not mean that Descartes developed an epistemology in the strict sense of Kant's transcendental philosophy. Instead he suggests that Descartes had grasped the idea of such a science.<sup>653</sup>

### 14.1 The emphasis on *Regulae*

Paul Natorp was perhaps the first philosopher to acknowledge and demonstrate the importance of Descartes's early work *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*. Of course, Natorp was aware of the difference between Descartes's main works – *Discours*, *Meditations*, *Principia* – which began from a metaphysical point of view, and the *Regulae* in which the notion of a science of human intelligence, as well as the foundation of this science, were established. However, he did not think that this meant that Descartes's philosophy should be considered dogmatic, a position which Kant also strongly condemned. Most noteworthy were the Rules I, IV, VIII, and XII which according to Natorp demonstrated the critical character of Cartesian philosophy.

Es ist nicht allein das Ausgehen von der formalen Frage: „was ist Erkenntnis“? worin sich die tiefe Verwandtschaft mit dem Kriticismus kundgiebt, sondern es ist dies, dass die universitas der Dinge sich reducirt auf die universitas des erkennenden Geistes, dessen „Grenzen“ sich darum voraus, vor allen „gegebenen“ Gegenständen bestimmen lassen müssen, weil wir in uns selbst das Bewusstsein von ihm haben.<sup>654</sup>

Natorp wanted to remove the metaphysics from Cartesian philosophy in order to bring Descartes closer to Kant. It is in this respect that we should understand the emphasis he placed on the *Regulae*. In Section 13.1 we saw how Descartes was already seen as the predecessor of Kant, however, Natorp went a step further and said that to compare Descartes with Kant was the highest honour that a German

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<sup>653</sup> *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* (DE) [1882], iii.

<sup>654</sup> Natorp, 'Die Entwicklung Descartes' von den „Regeln“ bis zu den „Meditationen“ (Entw.), in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. X, (1897), pp. 10-28, p. 15. The article first appeared in French, in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 4, (July 1896) pp. 416-432.

could offer to the first philosopher of the French nation.<sup>655</sup> He thought it was entirely possible to read Descartes in terms of the critical philosophy. If it were not for the power of the Church, he continued, Descartes would have formed a critical system himself. In order to show this, Natorp wanted to do more than just give an historical account of Descartes's philosophical system. By going beyond an exposition of the character of the system, its temporal genesis, and its temporal effects, Natorp thought he would be able to understand the philosopher's train of thought at the level of its innermost intentions and to clarify the elements that connect Descartes's philosophy with Kant's 'critical idealism'.<sup>656</sup>

According to Natorp, Descartes had outlined a science of human reason both in Rule I, which defined science and its goal,<sup>657</sup> and in Rule VIII, which proposed a definition of human knowledge and its limits.<sup>658</sup>

Bis ins Einzelne stimmt die Vorstellung Descartes' zu dem kantischen Begriff einer Grenzbestimmung der Vernunft durch ihre Selbsterkenntnis, welche mit absoluter Gewissheit und Vollständigkeit muss erreicht werden können, weil die Vernunft eine vollkommene Einheit ist, und weil es sich hier nicht um die Natur der Dinge, welche unerschöpflich ist, sondern um den Verstand handelt, der über die Natur der Dinge urtheilt; dessen Vorrath, weil wir ihn doch nicht auswärtig suchen dürfen, uns nicht verborgen bleiben kann, sondern fähig ist, vollständig aufgenommen, nach seinem Werthe oder Unwerthe beurtheilt und unter richtige Schätzung gebracht zu werden. Für Descartes wie für Kant ist dies die erste menschliche Erkenntnis, von der alle andere und die selbst von keiner abhängt.<sup>659</sup>

In Rules IX and XI Descartes argued that we should focus on the smallest and simplest things and not move on to more difficult insights until we understand all of the conditions leading to them. In Natorp's view, these rules showed the critical meaning of the epistemological principle whose fundamental idea was that the criterion for all knowledge lies in the mind itself. Natorp understood the Cartesian sense of the 'mind' as 'das Denken, in seiner ursprünglichen, allein ihm selbst eigenen Gesetzlichkeit'.<sup>660</sup> According to Natorp, 'mind' only meant the method or original lawfulness in which the elements are rooted. The textual evidence that

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<sup>655</sup> Entw. p.11: 'Die Vergleichung Descartes' mit Kant kann und darf freilich nicht unterbleiben. Es ist zugleich die beste Huldigung, die ein Deutscher dem ersten Philosophen französischer Nation darbringen kann, dass er ihn mit dem Manne in Parallele stellt, in dem wenigstens das Ausland stets die bestimmteste Ausprägung der deutschen Art des Philosophirens anerkannt hat'.

<sup>656</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>657</sup> *Regulae* I, (H), 65: 'The goal of studies should be the direction of the natural intelligence toward the formation of solid and true judgements about all the things that occur to it.'

<sup>658</sup> *Regulae*, VIII, (H), 117: 'If someone were to propose to himself, as a question, to examine all the truths for the knowledge of which human reason suffices – which, it seems to me, anyone who is seriously striving for a good mind has to do once in life – then he will indeed discover, by means of the given rules, that nothing can be known prior to the intellect, since the knowledge of all other things depends on it, and not vice versa'. See Schütt, *Die Adoption des »Vaters der modernen Philosophie«* (1998), p. 136 ff. for Fischer's interpretation of this passage as well as a comparison between Fischer and Natorp on this point.

<sup>659</sup> DE 5.

<sup>660</sup> Entw., p. 15.

permits these elements to be interpreted in accordance with the Kantian sense of the a priori can be found in Rule IV, which states:

For one cannot also extend the method so far as to teach one how one is to perform these operations themselves, because they are the simplest of all and primary, so much so, that, unless our intellect were already able to make use of them beforehand, it would not comprehend any precepts of the method itself, however easy.<sup>661</sup>

Descartes described arithmetic and geometry as ‘the spontaneous fruits which have sprung from the innate principles of this method’.<sup>662</sup> Furthermore, he claimed that there are ‘certain primary seeds of truths implanted by nature in human natural intelligence’.<sup>663</sup> This immediately reminds us of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas, but Natorp interpreted this as a priori knowledge, which is also how he thought we should understand what Descartes called ‘intuition’ in Rule III.<sup>664</sup>

Natorp pointed out that Descartes understood the essential, pure objective sense of the unity of the intellect as the deductive chain of the totality of human knowledge. According to him, Descartes’s actual merit was that he showed that this can be obtained from primary, simple elements. He also thought that we can see this line of thought in Leibniz’ philosophy and that Kant’s categories and principles (*Grundsätze*) can be considered to be ‘the fully grown fruit of this long preliminary work’.<sup>665</sup> In this way Natorp showed, on the basis of the *Regulae*, that Descartes was a predecessor of Kant.

In Rule XII, however, Natorp detected that Descartes ‘branches off from the “critical” enquiry’.<sup>666</sup> Here Descartes sharply emphasized the pure spirituality of the intellect, and the more he did so, the harder it became for him to understand the body. Nevertheless, Descartes held on to sensorial experience as a source of

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<sup>661</sup> *Regulae*, IV (H), 87.

<sup>662</sup> *Regulae*, IV (H), 88: ‘Atque haec duo nihil aliud sunt, quam spontaneae fruges ex ingenitis hujus methodi principii natae . . .’.

<sup>663</sup> *Regulae*, IV (H), 93, the whole passage reads: ‘However, I am convinced that certain primary seeds of truths implanted by nature in human natural intelligence [*prima quaedam veritatum semina humanis ingeniis a natura insita*] – seeds which we have stifled in us through our daily reading and through our hearing so many different errors – had so great powers in that primitive and pure antiquity that – by means of the same light of the mind [*ut eodem mentis lumine*] by means of which they saw that virtue is to be preferred to pleasure, and the good, to the useful, even if they did not know why this were thus – the first discoverers also recognized the true ideas of philosophy and mathematics, although they were not yet able to grasp these sciences perfectly.’

<sup>664</sup> *Regulae* II (H), 79-81: ‘By ‘intuition’ I understand, neither the fluctuating testimony of the senses nor the deceptive judgement of an imagination which composes things badly, but rather the conceptual act of the pure and attentive mind, a conceptual act so easy and so distinct that no doubt whatsoever can remain about what we are understanding. Alternatively, it amounts to the same thing to say that by ‘intuition’ I understand the indubitable conceptual act of the pure and attentive mind, which conceptual act springs from the light of reason alone. Because this act is simpler, it is more certain, than deduction, which, however, as we have noted above, a human being also cannot perform wrongly. Thus everyone can mentally intuit that he exists, that he is thinking, that a triangle is bounded by only three lines, that a sphere is bounded by a single surface, and similar things, which are more numerous than the most might realize, since they disdain to turn their minds to such easy matters’.

<sup>665</sup> Entw., p. 16.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid., p. 17.



knowledge apart from the pure mind. What Natorp wanted to show was that Descartes could only maintain the unity of knowledge by assuming an a priori synthesis. Natorp thought he could do this by interpreting Descartes's theory of perception and pure thinking, which was introduced in Rule XII, as hypothetical. According to Natorp, Descartes's view of the pure mind should not be seen as merely conceptual thinking (*begriffliches Denken*) in the sense Kant gave to it when he distinguished between concept (*Begriff*) and intuition (*Anschauung*). Certainly, Descartes acknowledged intuition in mathematics, but he did not distinguish mathematical from purely logical insights. Nevertheless, Natorp thought that Descartes was very close to reaching an a priori synthesis through mathematics, and from there it was a small step to reach the Kantian notion of pure intuitions of space and number.<sup>667</sup>

On this same point, however, Natorp located the greatest difference between Descartes and Kant. He considered that the notion of experience in Cartesian epistemology never attained the importance that it had for Kant. Nevertheless, Natorp thought that the Cartesian 'intuition' of the pure mind was in no way opposed to Kantian 'reine Anschauung'. Intuition in the Cartesian sense can be described as the connection of concepts with which we deal in a judgement. Such a connection is either necessary or contingent. For Descartes, the judgement '4+3=7' involved a necessary connection, as the number 7 cannot be distinctly conceived without including the numbers 3 and 4, although he acknowledged that the way in which the latter numbers are included are *confuse*. The fact that Descartes claimed that in the case of a necessary connection, one concept is included within another one, may give rise to the idea that he held all necessary connections to be what Kant would call analytic. However, Natorp did not interpret Descartes in this way.

Natorp understood Descartes's necessary connections as synthetic. He found evidence for this in Rule XIV where Descartes distinguished three expressions which he explained using the example of extension: 'extension occupies a place'; 'body possesses extension'; and 'extension is not body'. According to Natorp, the second expression showed that Descartes found that analysis was impossible without prior synthesis. Descartes claimed that, although in the second expression 'extension' signifies something other than 'body', we do not form two distinct ideas. We merely form the single idea of extended body, and thus according to Natorp we can speak of an a priori synthesis.

So far as the fact of the matter is concerned, it is no different from if I said, 'body is extended', or, better, 'that which is extended is extended'. This is peculiar to those entities which exist only in something else, and which are really distinguishable from their subjects. For, if I said, for example, 'Peter has wealth', then the idea of Peter is completely different from the idea of wealth. Once again, if I said, 'Paul is wealthy', then I would be imagining something completely different from what I would be if I said, 'the wealthy man is wealthy'. Many, not making this distinction and not recognizing this difference, are of the false opinion

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<sup>667</sup> Note that 'intuition' (*intuitum*) for Descartes does not mean 'intuition' (*Anschauung*) in the Kantian sense.

that extension contains something distinct from that which is extended, just as Paul's wealth is something different from Paul.<sup>668</sup>

In Natorp's view, this quote from Rule XIV showed that Descartes took intuition to be an a priori synthesis, just as Kant had done. Moreover, intuition for Descartes indicated the most original function of knowledge which ultimately determines the validity and limits of knowledge. 'Synthesis a priori' was the most crucial notion in the Kantian doctrine as it formed the basis for those primary judgements on which true knowledge rests.<sup>669</sup> According to Natorp, Descartes's concept of a necessary connection was the central issue to which Hume directed his scepticism, and from which Kant advanced to a new solution to the problem of knowledge.<sup>670</sup> Although Descartes did not show how synthesis a priori is possible, he saw that it was the origin of all certain knowledge and that it had its basis in pure understanding.

The way in which Natorp emphasized the *Regulae* enabled him to bring Descartes very close to Kant. Natorp showed that Descartes was only one step away from the Kantian solution to the problem of knowledge. In Kant's view, the laws of pure intuition and pure mind deduce their validity for the objects of experience by relating the representation (*Vorstellung*) to the object. Descartes was not far from this when he acknowledged that the pure mind is active in all experience and that in this lies the foundation for the certainty of experience itself. For this reason, Natorp thought that the *Regulae* provided the first elements of a stable foundation for epistemological, rather than ontological, rationalism.

## 14.2 The *cogito* as a priori synthesis

The foundation of all knowledge, which Descartes assumed in his metaphysics, must be interpreted, according to Natorp, in relation to the insights attained in the *Regulae*. This also holds for the methodical doubt which Descartes applied to all that was only probable. The *Regulae* showed that the Cartesian method consisted of intuition and deduction. According to Natorp, Descartes generalized this method in *Discours de la méthode*, in order to apply it to all forms of knowledge, including the metaphysical forms.

As early as the *Regulae* Descartes had expressed the notion that knowledge of ignorance presupposed a concept of truth, and claimed that this knowledge had to be independent of metaphysics.<sup>671</sup> Natorp considered this to be an early version of

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<sup>668</sup> *Regulae* XIV (H), 185.

<sup>669</sup> Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements can be found in KrV B11: 'In allen Urteilen, worinnen das Verhältniss eines Subjekts zum Prädikat gedacht wird (wenn ich nur die bejahende erwäge, denn auf die verneinende ist nachher die Anwendung leicht), ist dieses Verhältnis auf zweierlei Art möglich. Entweder das Prädikat B gehört zum Subjekt A als etwas, was in diesem Begriffe A (versteckter Weise) enthalten ist; oder B liegt ganz außer dem Begriff A, ob es zwar mit demselben in Verknüpfung steht. Im ersten Fall nenne ich das Urteil analytisch, in dem andern synthetisch. Analytische Urteile (die bejahende) sind also diejenige, in welchen die Verknüpfung des Prädikats mit dem Subjekt durch Identität, diejenige aber, in denen diese Verknüpfung ohne Identität gedacht wird, sollen synthetische Urteile heißen.'

<sup>670</sup> DE 19-20.

<sup>671</sup> *Regulae* XII (H), 153: 'For example, if Socrates says that he doubts everything, then it necessarily follows from this that he understands at least this, to wit, that he is doubting, and hence that he knows

methodical doubt, and thought that it already demonstrated the rational and strictly critical character of the Cartesian principle of knowledge. However, the clearest sense in which the *cogito, ergo sum* showed that the self was the only indubitable, real thing was, for Natorp, to be found in *Recherche de la vérité*. Whereas in *Recherche* it is stated that ‘I am a thinking thing’,<sup>672</sup> the *Discours de la méthode* replaced this expression with: ‘substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think’.<sup>673</sup> Natorp placed these texts alongside one another in order to show how this proposition changed from a mere statement of method into a metaphysical expression.

Die Eigenthümlichkeit, welche unsern Satz von einem bloss methodischen unterscheidet und zu einem metaphysischen macht, liegt ohne Zweifel darin, dass er Existenz behauptet, nach Kants Ausdruck Existentialsatz ist. Worauf beruht dieser Existentialsatz? vor Allem, ist er, nach Descartes’ Meinung, für analytisch oder synthetisch anzusehn?<sup>674</sup>

In answer to Natorp’s question, if we only look at the form of the expression, we are inclined to say it is analytic because from the hypothesis ‘I think’ we cannot arrive at the thesis ‘I am’ synthetically by inference, as the latter is already included in the former. Natorp argued, however, that *cogito, ergo sum* is an a priori synthetic statement. In his view, Descartes concluded from actual thinking to the existence of the thinker – if there is thinking, then there is a thinker. He thought that this inference could only be made through a synthesis because from the general concept of thinking we cannot prove the existence of a thinker by analysis. According to Natorp, the reality of thinking is necessarily knotted together with the reality of the thinker, not with the reality of that which is thought. According to Natorp, the *cogito* expressed the notion that all thinking always has an immediate and necessary relation with an ‘I’ that exists, while the relation with an existing ‘something’ which corresponds to the contents of our thoughts can be doubted in each particular case and first requires another kind of foundation to overcome his doubt.

Natorp found the textual evidence for this view in the Second Set of Replies which we discussed in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. We saw there that Descartes clearly stated that the *cogito* should not be taken as a syllogism but as ‘une simple inspection de l’esprit (*intuitus mentis*)’. According to Natorp, this *intuitus mentis* directly referred to the ‘intuition’ of the *Regulae* which, as we saw, he interpreted as an a priori synthesis. In addition, he thought, *Recherche de la vérité* showed that knowledge of the existence of the ‘I’ was founded on an immediate experience.<sup>675</sup>

For this reason, Natorp thought that Kant’s interpretation of the Cartesian *cogito*, which we also discussed in Section 2.3, was wrong. In his view, Kant was mistaken to think that existence could be deduced from the mere notion of thought

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that something can be true or false, et cetera. For these matters are necessarily connected with the nature of doubt.’

<sup>672</sup> CSM II, 415; *Rech.*, AT X, 521.

<sup>673</sup> CSM I, p. 127; *Disc.* (G), p. 33.

<sup>674</sup> DE 33. The word ‘anzusehn’ is misspelled as ‘ansusehn’.

<sup>675</sup> See CSM II, pp. 417-418.

by means of a syllogism, the method rejected by Descartes. Moreover, Natorp thought that Kant did not interpret '*cogito, ergo sum*' in the same sense as Descartes, taking it to be an immediate expression of apperception, as the following quote suggests:

Aber die Einfachheit meiner selbst (als Seele) wird auch wirklich nicht aus dem Satze: Ich denke, geschlossen, sondern der erstere liegt schon in jedem Gedanken selbst. Der Satz: Ich bin einfach, muß als ein unmittelbarer Ausdruck der Apperzeption angesehen werden, so wie der vermeintliche kartesianische Schluß, *cogito, ergo sum*, in der Tat tautologisch ist, indem das *cogito* (*sum cogitans*) die Wirklichkeit unmittelbar aussagt. Ich bin einfach, bedeutet aber nichts mehr, als daß diese Vorstellung: Ich, nicht die mindeste Mannigfaltigkeit in sich fasse, und daß sie absolute (obzwar bloß logische) Einheit sei.<sup>676</sup>

According to Kant, the *cogito* expressed an indefinite empirical intuition, and he took the 'I' in it as a mere intellectual representation. In Kant's opinion, the propositions 'I think' and 'I exist thinking' were synonymous. As a result, he saw the Cartesian *cogito* as having a merely logical function. Moreover, he saw it as a determiner of the subject, which, as an appearance of the inner sense, becomes an object itself. Taken as such, Kant could claim that the *cogito* consisted of both the spontaneity of thinking, or apperception, as well as the receptivity of intuition, or apprehension.

Natorp thought that this interpretation clearly found far more in the premise 'I think' than Descartes intended, namely everything which the conclusion 'therefore, I am' could possibly contain.<sup>677</sup> According to Natorp, by 'I' Descartes could only have meant the 'I' which Kant called pure, transcendental apperception. However, Natorp doubted that Kant realized this.

Allerdings setzt Descartes, nachdem er die Existenz des Ich festgestellt hat, das »Wesen« desselben ohne Weiteres in das Denken; »bestimmt« also, nach Kants Ausdruck, den blossen Gedanken des Ich durch die Prädicate des innern Sinns. Aber auch nach Kant ist ja das Subject, von dessen Dasein ich durch die blosse Apperzeption »Ich denke« unmittelbare Gewissheit habe, allein bestimmbar durch die Prädicate des innern Sinns, ohne dass darum die Gewissheit der Existenz selbst mit der Bestimmung dieser Existenz verwechselt würde. Dass auch Descartes diese Verwechslung (wenigstens ursprünglich) nicht begangen hat, geht daraus hervor, dass er erst eines neuen Schrittes bedarf, um von dem Satze »Ich bin« zu dem ferneren »Ich bin denkend« zu gelangen.<sup>678</sup>

It was clear to Descartes that the 'I' could only be determined as *res cogitans* in so far as it was known through thinking. In *Recherche de la vérité* we read that in so far as I am doubting, that which I am is certainly not my body.<sup>679</sup> According to Natorp, this corresponded entirely with Kant when he said that he had proved that the thinking subject is not corporeal. What Kant meant by this was that because it

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<sup>676</sup> KrV A 355.

<sup>677</sup> DE 36-37.

<sup>678</sup> DE 168.

<sup>679</sup> *Rech.*, AT X, 518; CSM II, 412.

is represented by us as an object of inner sense, it cannot, in so far as it thinks, be an object of outer sense or an appearance in space.<sup>680</sup> Natorp concluded that Kant and Descartes shared the same views, but that Kant did not see this because he had misinterpreted Descartes on several points.

Notwithstanding his strong defence of Descartes against the misreading of Kant, as well as that of Leibniz,<sup>681</sup> Natorp suggested that the semi-idealism of the *cogito, ergo sum* was the main reason for Descartes's wandering (*Abirrung*) from the path of critical philosophy.

War einmal die Frage nach der Begründung von Existenz als eine ganz besondere, auf dem gewöhnlichen Wege der Vernunftseinsicht nicht lösbare angenommen, so erschien begreiflich nur die, unmittelbar mit der Thatsache des Bewusstseins selbst gegebene Existenz des Ich schlechthin unbezweifelbar, jede andre erst einer eigenen Begründung bedürftig. Dass das Universum der Dinge nur das Universum des Verstandes sein könne, geriet in Vergessenheit; ein anderweitiger Stützpunkt wurde notwendig, und ein solcher schien sich darzubieten in der ursprünglichen Realität des vollkommensten Wesens, dessen Essenz die Existenz einschliesst. Damit ist genau das, wonach gefragt war, vorausgesetzt.<sup>682</sup>

In this way, Natorp showed that God began to play the leading part in the system, replacing the self and the mind. The ideas of the mind now became imprints of the divine mind. Notwithstanding this criticism, Natorp thought a critical reading of the Cartesian doctrine written after the *Regulae* was still possible.

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<sup>680</sup> KrV A 358: 'Wir haben in der transzendentalen Ästhetik unleugbar bewiesen: daß Körper bloße Erscheinungen unseres äußeren Sinnes, und nicht Dinge an sich selbst sind. Diesem gemäß können wir mit Recht sagen: daß unser denkendes Subjekt nicht körperlich sei, das heißt: daß, da es als Gegenstand des inneren Sinnes von uns vorgestellt wird, es, in so fern als es denkt, kein Gegenstand äußerer Sinne, d.i. keine Erscheinung im Raume sein könne'.

<sup>681</sup> Leibniz said about the *cogito*: 'Et de dire: je pense, donc je suis, ce n'est pas prouver proprement l'existence par la pensée, puisque penser et estre pensant est la même chose; et dire: je suis pensant, est déjà dire: je suis. Cependant vous pouvez exclure cette proposition du nombre des Axiomes avec quelque raison, car c'est une proposition de fait, fondée sur une experience immediate et ce n'est pas une proposition necessaire, dont on voye la necessité dans la convenance immediate des idées', *Nouveaux Essais sur l'Entendement Humain*, in *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. Gerhardt, vol. 5, pp. 391-392. According to Natorp, Leibniz was right in seeing that the proposition cannot be deduced from general concepts, but wrong to equate it with a 'proposition de fait' whose truth is only contingent. The meaning of the *cogito* is certainly not to give the empirical individual a means to ascertain its contingent existence. For Natorp it is clear that its meaning is that, in thinking an object, the consciousness of oneself is the first, simply necessary condition of every knowledge of an existence, DE 167: 'Solange ich blosser Ideen auf ihre Uebereinstimmung und Nichtübereinstimmung prüfe, kann ich von dem begleitenden »Ich denke« allenfalls absehen, aber sobald es sich um Existenz, um die objective Realität der Ideen handelt, muss ich schon auf das Gesetz der Einheit im Bewusstsein zurückgehen. Recht verstanden lässt sich sehr wohl behaupten, dass zwischen den Begriffen »Ich« und »Existenz« eine nothwendige Verknüpfung ist, und nicht bloss eine solche, deren Grund, wie L.[eibniz] sagt, »nur Gott sieht«. L.[eibniz] übersieht aber ganz und gar, dass der Satz seiner Absicht nach nicht metaphysisch (ontologisch), sondern erkenntnistheoretisch ist'. This passage again illustrates Natorp's claim that Descartes's intention is epistemological and not metaphysical or ontological.

<sup>682</sup> Entw., p. 26.

From the first indubitable knowledge, ‘I think, therefore I am’, Descartes deduced the general criterion for certainty. The fact that I have indubitable knowledge means that I also know what its certainty consists of: clear and distinct intellectual insight. The problem, however, was the move from intellectual insight to the existence of that which is represented. We have already shown how Descartes solved this problem by founding the actual reality of our representations on the existence of God, who he considered to be the sum total of all reality and the last ground of all truth. Natorp was little troubled by this, as in his view, the most important foundation of the Cartesian proof still stood. Although every connection between a representation and its object, including the ideas of space and time, were dubitable, the relation to something real was not affected by doubt. For Natorp, this was as unquestionable as the existence of the thinking being and its representations.

Denn mit dem Bewusstsein um unsre Vorstellungen, durch das sie Ideen heißen, ist es unmittelbar gegeben, nicht nur dass sie Vorstellungen unsres Subjects, sondern auch dass sie Vorstellungen von Etwas sind, dass sie eine Sache repräsentiren. Allein nach dieser Beziehung auf eine Sache sind sie wahr oder falsch, allein diese Beziehung meint auch aller Zweifel, und setzt somit ihre Gewissheit an sich mit Nothwendigkeit voraus; er würde selbst allen Sinn und Inhalt verlieren, wenn er auch sie in Frage stellen wollte. Es gelten also nothwendig in allem Wissen um unsre Vorstellungen, folglich in aller Erkenntniss, die Vorstellungen nicht als etwas Ursprüngliches und an sich selbst Gegebenes, sondern als abgeleitet von und bezogen auf Etwas, was existirt – darum aber freilich nicht nothwendig so existirt, wie wir es vorstellen.<sup>683</sup>

At this stage, Descartes introduced the term ‘objective reality’ – he adopted as an axiom the notion that a thing should contain as much formal or actual reality as is given objectively to the idea.<sup>684</sup> Representations that relate to existence rely on this causal law. Natorp interpreted this as a necessary law, because in his view, without it the relation to the object – which is unavoidably included in every judgement and every consciousness of our representations – would be completely impossible. According to Natorp, our thinking does not somehow impose necessity on things, rather the necessity of things determines our thinking in this way. In Natorp’s view, this necessity is in accordance with itself and with things in such a way that our relation to the object, along with all the notions through which we think it, can only be immanent to our knowledge. As a result, Natorp concluded, necessity only means something within the laws of our knowledge and cannot have any value outside it.

Thus interpreted, Natorp claimed that no objection can possibly be made to this Cartesian axiom. He interpreted Descartes’s term ‘objective reality’ as the immanent relation ideas have with the thing in question. Obviously, these ideas have to correspond with the formal or actual reality of the thing, because we do not have anything other than our ideas by which to make judgements about things. This

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<sup>683</sup> DE 55.

<sup>684</sup> See *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 32; CSM II, 28.

enabled Natorp to read the Cartesian axiom in the light of the Kantian doctrine of space and time. According to Kant, the fact that our representations of space and time are never complete, demonstrated the mere conditional and relative truth of all empirical knowledge of objects. In the Second Set of Replies, where Descartes discussed the idea of God, Natorp found a similar remark. Descartes did not treat the idea of God in the same manner as he did the ideas of material things which are pictured in the imagination. Descartes said that he perceived the idea of God with the intellect. The way in which he arrived at this object in his mind was compared with an attempt to count to the highest number, something which can never be reached. From this he concluded that he knew that there was something in the nature of counting that exceeded his powers and from which, again, it necessarily followed:

. . . not that an infinite number exists, nor indeed that it is a contradictory notion, as you say, but that I have the power of conceiving that there is a thinkable number which is larger than any number that I can think of, and hence that this power is something which I have received not from myself but from some other being which is more perfect than I am.<sup>685</sup>

Kant's criticism of 'the famous ontological argument of Descartes'<sup>686</sup> had little affect on Natorp's view of Descartes as he was quite convinced that Kant had not read the *Meditations*. The reason for claiming this was that Kant raised a series of objections which had already been dealt with by Descartes.<sup>687</sup> Nor did Natorp think that Kant had correctly represented the proof. When he attacked it in *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes* (1763) he was clearly addressing an account of the proof originating from the Leibniz-Wolffian School.<sup>688</sup> In *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* and *Fortschritte der Metaphysik* Kant mentioned the Cartesian ontological proof, but in each case he also represented it in the Leibnizian form. Why did Kant make so little effort to understand the opponent he was attacking? The only explanation Natorp could arrive at was that Kant considered that the proof had long been refuted.

Kant indeed thought he had refuted the ontological proof for the existence of God. However, when he undertook to remove the 'dialectical illusion'<sup>689</sup> of all

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<sup>685</sup> CSM II, 99-100; *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 110: ' . . . non pas à la vérité qu'un nombre infiny existe, ny aussi que son existence implique contradiction, comme vous dites, mais que cette puissance que j'ay de comprendre qu'il y a tousiours quelque chose de plus à concevoir, dans le plus grand des nombres, que ie ne puis iamais concevoir, ne me vient pas de moy-mesme, & que ie l'ay receuë de quelque autre estre qui est plus parfait que ie ne suis'.

<sup>686</sup> KrV B 630

<sup>687</sup> See Section 2.3.

<sup>688</sup> In AA II, 156 ff. We find this misrepresentation already in his *Principiorum cognitionis metaphysicae* [1755], in AA I, 385-416.

<sup>689</sup> KrV B 641 ff. Kant asks himself: 'Was ist nun in diesen transzendentalen Beweisen die Ursache des dialektischen, aber natürlichen Scheins, welcher die Begriffe der Notwendigkeit und höchsten Realität verknüpft, und dasjenige, was doch nur Idee sein kann, realisiert und hypostasiert? Was ist die Unvermeidlichkeit, etwas als an sich notwendig unter den existierenden Dingen anzunehmen, und doch zugleich vor dem Dasein eines solchen Wesens als einem Abgrunde zurückzubeugen, und wie fängt man es an, daß sich die Vernunft hierüber selbst verstehe, und, aus dem schwankenden Zustande eines schüchternen, und immer wiederum zurückgenommenen Beifalls, zur ruhigen Einsicht gelange?'

transcendental proofs of a necessary being, he admitted that we have to think something necessary in order to think existing things, although he added that nothing is entitled to think itself as necessary. In Kant's view, necessity and contingency do not concern the things themselves, but are concepts with a merely subjective meaning, which only serve the formal interests of reason.<sup>690</sup> From this, Kant drew the following conclusion:

Es folgt hieraus, daß ihr das Absolutnotwendige außerhalb der Welt annehmen müßt; weil es nur zu einem Prinzip der größtmöglichen Einheit der Erscheinungen, als deren oberster Grund, dienen soll, und ihr in der Welt niemals dahin gelangen könnt, weil die zweite Regel euch gebietet, alle empirische Ursachen der Einheit jederzeit als abgeleitet anzusehen.<sup>691</sup>

Perhaps in his attempt to connect Descartes with Kant's critical idealism, Natorp committed an *ad hominem* fallacy of the type *tu quoque*. Fortunately, he did not pursue the argument any further. It sufficed for Natorp that Kant admitted that necessary existence has to be thought. It did not trouble him that this necessity of thinking is merely subjective, as according to Natorp, all necessity is subjective in so far as it has to be thought and only exists in thought. From the mere fact that the thought of some existence is necessary, we can conclude whatever we want. According to Natorp, Descartes did not intend any other necessity than the one which the 'interest of reason' prescribes.<sup>692</sup> He therefore thought that it did not matter to Descartes that the idea of God could only be called an *ens rationis*. We have to note that Descartes understood this term in the sense in which every operation of the intellect was an *ens rationis*, meaning that it stems from reason.<sup>693</sup>

In Natorp's view, Descartes had made only one mistake: he did not make a sharp enough distinction between epistemology on the one hand, and morality and religion on the other. We have shown that it is through the correction of this mistake that Natorp was able to reinstate Descartes by literally 'criticizing' him – making his thinking critical in bringing him closer to Kant.

### 14.3 Natorp's view of the Cartesian method

According to the Marburg School, that which makes a science scientific cannot be founded on a set of fixed principles in the way that mathematics is founded on axioms. They thought that the 'essence' of science was determined by its method alone. As this essence of science was, furthermore, considered by them to be equivalent to objectivity and 'Gesetzlichkeit', the Marburg School considered it the

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<sup>690</sup> KrV B 644.

<sup>691</sup> KrV B 645.

<sup>692</sup> DE 71.

<sup>693</sup> *Resp.* II, AT VII, 134: 'Non magis urget, quòd ideam Dei, quæ in nobis est, ens rationis appelletis. Neque enim hoc eo sensu verum est, que per ens rationis intelligitur id quod non est, sed eo tantùm quo omnis operatio intellectûs ens rationis, hoc est ens a ratione profectum; atque etiam totus hic mundus ens ratione divinæ, hoc est ens per simplicem actum mentis divinæ creatum, dici potest.' In the French edition 'ens rationis' is translated by 'estre de raison', *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 106; in the English edition it is translated by 'conceptual entity', CSM II, 96.



task of the transcendental critique to determine the relation between this 'Gesetzlichkeit' and method.

In Section 13.1 we briefly indicated Natorp's view of the transcendental method. According to Natorp, the transcendental method became a 'critical method' in its struggle against metaphysical dominion and 'lawless empiricism'.<sup>694</sup> We also saw that he interpreted it as an immanent method, which means that it is immanent to the point of view of experience. With regard to this, psychology was positioned somewhere between science and philosophy: Natorp did not simply want to restrict it to empiricism, but at the same time he maintained that neither could it function as a basis of philosophy. We also saw that he wanted to safeguard science and philosophy against the claim of absolutism.<sup>695</sup> By 'method' Natorp did not mean something apart from philosophy itself. This is clear from the following quote.

In diesem Grundgedanken also der Philosophie als Methode, und zwar Methode einer unendlichen, schöpferischen Entwicklung, glauben wir den Kern, den unzerstörlichen Grundgehalt der „transzendentalen Methode“ als der Methode des Idealismus, und somit den unzerstörlichen Grundgehalt der Philosophie Kants, festzuhalten und erst zur reinen Durchführung zu bringen.<sup>696</sup>

This did not mean that he proposed to indiscriminately take over Kant's method. Natorp realized that Kant required correction on some important points. For instance, he found the dualism between the receptivity of the subject and the spontaneity of thinking which forms the 'entry of the critique' to be intolerable. We shall not go into Natorp's efforts to address what is lacking in Kant, but it is in this context that we should consider his view of the Cartesian method.

Natorp claimed that the Cartesian method was already complete in the *Regulae*, Descartes's early work, and did not undergo significant alterations during the later periods. This claim makes it clear that Natorp wanted to separate Descartes's method from his later metaphysics.

Es ist nur der Triumph der Methode, dass durch sie auch die Metaphysik und damit das Ganze der menschlichen Erkenntnis, wenigstens der theoretischen, ein neues Fundament erhält. Um so wichtiger ist es zu betonen: in dem Grundgedanken der Methode Descartes' ist, was man mit Fug seinen Idealismus nennen kann, völlig enthalten; er liegt darin sogar in einer reineren Gestalt als in seiner entwickelten Metaphysik.<sup>697</sup>

Natorp stressed that from the beginning and throughout his works, Descartes's true philosophical drive consisted in finding a 'centre of knowledge'. According to him,

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<sup>694</sup> Cf. Natorp, 'Kant und die Marburger Schule' (1912), in *Kant-Studien* 17, p. 198.

<sup>695</sup> Natorp's dynamic view of method is opposed to Hegel's as he explains in the above mentioned article: 'Denn freilich richtungslos darf der „Gang“ der Erfahrung auch in seiner Unendlichkeit nicht gedacht werden. In dem Wort „Methode“, im *μετιέναι*, liegt nicht bloss überhaupt ein „Gehen“, ein Sichfortbewegen; auch nicht, wie Hegel meint, ein blosses Mit- und Nebenhergehen; sondern es bedeutet Gehen nach einem Ziele hin, oder jedenfalls in sicherer Richtung: „Nachgehen“, Ibid., pp. 199-200.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>697</sup> Entw., p. 12.

Descartes did not find this in some primordial existence but in the primordial laws of knowledge, namely the laws of method. Obviously, Natorp preferred this to his later metaphysics because it showed a kinship with Kant. As we saw earlier in our discussion of Rule IV, Descartes described the method as containing the most simple and primary mental operations. For that reason, it can be referred to as the source of knowledge, and as we have already shown, Natorp argued that this demonstrated the critical character of Descartes's philosophy.

Notwithstanding this 'critical character', the problem remained that Descartes could not explain the nature of embodied entities through the purely spiritual mind. As a result, he could not provide an account of the possibility of grounding experience in the a priori sense, as Kant was able to do. Natorp described experience for Descartes as an incomprehensible remainder that was incommensurable with a method which was supposed to be universally valid.<sup>698</sup> According to Natorp, Descartes could not escape the naïve, preconceived notion that the object in itself was present and able to be known. Nevertheless, Natorp was convinced that this did not harm the principle elements of his method.

Die Grundsätze der Methode sind von dieser Metaphysik unabhängig, und bleiben es. So ist das Verhältnis selbst im Discours. Andererseits glaubt sich Descartes offenbar im Besitz entscheidender Gründe für seine „Hypothesen“, die er nur noch nicht vorzulegen sich getraut, weil er sie noch überzeugungskräftiger zu gestalten hofft, und weil er sie nicht anders als bis an die Zähne gewappnet – der kirchlichen Theologie entgegenzustellen wagt.<sup>699</sup>

Although Natorp claimed that the principles of the Cartesian method were independent of his metaphysics, he had to acknowledge that Descartes had said they were *per se nota*. The same objection could be made with respect to Kant's claim that propositions which are necessary and universally valid are a priori. However, Natorp could forgive Kant for this, because this error was 'solved at the height of his system'. The error Descartes made was more serious because at 'the height of the development of the philosopher his metaphysics became hardened into a system'.<sup>700</sup>

We have already seen that in order to make Descartes the predecessor of Kant, Natorp had to deal with some serious obstacles: the *cogito* was shown to be a synthesis a priori; the ontological proof for the existence of God, when interpreted in the light of the 'dialectical illusion of reason' and in the context of the Church, was not nearly so uncritical. However, Natorp did not seem to see any possibility of understanding Descartes's doctrine of innate ideas from a critical point of view. To assume that our Creator has implanted ideas in us, was in Natorp's eyes, the greatest possible denial of critical philosophy, as the following quote shows:

Damit geht dann endlich auch die Selbständigkeit der kritischen Grundlegung der Erkenntnis verloren. Die Wahrheit des Intellekts, die erst ganz auf sich selbst stand, wird abhängig von der „Wahrhaftigkeit

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<sup>698</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>699</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>700</sup> Ibid.

Gottes“, und wenn die Gesetze des Verstandes „exact beobachtet sind in allem, was ist und geschieht“, so ist es, weil sie von seinem Urheber, der zugleich der Urheber alles Seins und Geschehens ist, ihm eingepflanzt sind. Das ist die denkbar weiteste Abirrung vom kritischen Princip.<sup>701</sup>

Considering what Descartes had said in the *Regulae*, Natorp was stunned that eight years later he was talking about innate ideas in his *Discours de la méthode*. The explanation Natorp gave for this discrepancy was that Descartes was no longer satisfied with a mere method because his aim was now focused on a ‘higher science’, namely his metaphysics. Natorp considered the term ‘*lumière naturelle*’ to be as uncritical as ‘innate ideas’, although it is unclear whether or not he saw both terms as being synonymous. According to Natorp, when the earlier term *intuitus* was replaced by *lumen naturale*, it became the ‘magic word’ – when uttered, Descartes was able to shake a few principles from his sleeves.<sup>702</sup> In *Descartes’ Erkenntnistheorie*, Natorp seemed to avoid the issue of innate ideas, using the term ‘*ursprünglich*’ instead.

Kein Zweifel, dass wir mit solchen Verstandesbegriffen von graden Linien und Dreiecken nicht auf die Welt kommen, sondern dass sie sich aus empirischen Anlässen nach psychischen Gesetzen in uns erzeugt haben müssen: aber um diese Erzeugung handelt es sich schon für Descartes zunächst nicht bei dem Gegensatz von a priori und a posteriori, sondern darum, ob die Idee des Verstandes ihre Wahrheit aus den Wahrnehmungen der Sinne entlehnt, oder ob umgekehrt die Wahrheit der Sinneswahrnehmungen allein erreicht wird auf Grund von Ideen des Verstandes, die insofern ursprünglich genannt werden müssen, als sie, nicht vor der Sinneswahrnehmung gegeben, aber aus der Sinneswahrnehmung unableitbar sind, wie es Descartes an der angeführten Stelle klar gesehen hat.<sup>703</sup>

Natorp wrote just a single note on the term ‘innate idea’ and in this he only mentioned the passages where the term appeared in Descartes’s works. By using the term ‘*ursprünglich*’ instead of ‘innate’, Natorp could steer the discussion in the direction of the distinction between *imaginatio* and *intellectio*. With regard to this, Natorp claimed that Descartes distinguished these two notions but did not fully separate them. In his view, Descartes’s position would be entirely untenable if he claimed that the representation of geometrical objects in the mind was separated from that of sensible objects. We find the textual evidence which reveals that Descartes distinguished imagination from intellect in the Sixth Meditation.

De plus, la faculté d’imaginer qui est en moy, & de laquelle ie voy par experience que ie me sers lorsque ie m’applique à la consideration des choses materielles, est capable de me persuader leur existence: car quant ie considere attentivement ce que c’est que l’imagination, ie trouue qu’elle n’est autre chose qu’une certaine application de la faculté qui connoist, au corps qui luy est intimement present, & partant qui existe.

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<sup>701</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>702</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>703</sup> DE 93.

Et pour rendre cela tres-manifeste, ie remarque premierement la difference qui est entre l'imagination & la pure intellection ou conception.<sup>704</sup>

Descartes then demonstrated the distinction on the basis of the well-known and already mentioned example of the triangle and the chiliagon. Descartes concluded:

Ainsi ie connois clairement que i'ay besoin d'une particuliere contention d'esprit pour imaginer, de laquelle ie ne me sers point pour concevoir; & cette particuliere contention d'esprit montre éuidemment la difference qui est entre l'imagination & l'intellection ou conception pure.<sup>705</sup>

In Natorp's opinion, this explicit differentiation should not lead us to assume that Descartes separated the imagination from the intellect. In order to prove this, Natorp was unable to provide more explicit textual evidence but argued that it was necessary to look at the 'inner consequence' of the Cartesian system. Natorp's purpose was to bring Descartes's foundation of empirical reality into line with Kant's. He therefore claimed that in both Descartes's and Kant's view, only the senses and imagination allowed for spatial objects to be represented as immediately present, and existing. Both held that the insights of the mind or intellect cannot prove the existence of anything outside us. The textual evidence that supports this claim is found in the fourth part of the *Discours de la méthode*, where Descartes considers the objects of geometers. Concerning their most simple demonstrations, Descartes wrote the following:

Et ayant pris garde que cette grande certitude, que tout le monde leur attribue, n'est fondée que sur ce qu'on les conçoit éuidemment, suivant la règle que j'ai tantôt dite, je pris garde aussi qu'il n'y avait rien du tout en elles qui m'assurât de l'existence de leur objet.<sup>706</sup>

According to Natorp, this demonstrated that for Descartes the sensible intuition of space was the only basis for the objective validity of mathematics, as well as its application to the objects of experience, and hence, the reality of the corporeal world. Descartes showed that the sensible intuition of spatial objects had the character of making these objects appear to be something different from the self. For Descartes it would be unproblematic to think these objects as corresponding to the representations of the senses if it were not for the fact that the senses often deceive us. Descartes's methodical doubt as expressed in the Sixth Meditation taught us not to accept everything acquired from the senses. This argument, together with that which he maintained in the Third Meditation, that everything which is represented by the senses must have a certain degree of truth, allowed Descartes to draw the following conclusion:

Et partant il faut confesser qu'il y a des choses corporelles qui existent.  
Toutefois elles ne sont peut-estre pas entierement telles que nous les aperceurons par les sens, car cette perception des sens est fort obscure & confuse en plusieurs choses; mais au moins faut-il auoüer que toutes les

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<sup>704</sup> *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 57.

<sup>705</sup> *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 58.

<sup>706</sup> *Disc.* (G), p. 36.

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choses que i'y conçoÿ clairement & distinctement, c'est à dire toutes les choses, generalement parlant, qui sont comprises dans l'objet de la Geometrie speculatiue, s'y retrouuent veritablement.<sup>707</sup>

The reason why Descartes could claim that these objects exist was because they have a cause separate from us. In Natorp's conception, the relation between this cause and our sensible representations should be considered as a matter of judgement whose rule was that of clear and distinct perception. Natorp therefore called this the 'unity of experience', which was the highest law governing the relation of the representations of the outer senses with their object. Natorp found the evidence to formulate it in such a Kantian sense in a passage from the fifth part of the *Discours de la methode*, where Descartes wrote:

. . . mais aussi que j'ai remarqué certaines lois, que Dieu a tellement établies en la nature, et dont il a imprimé de telles notions en nos âmes, qu'après y avoir fait assez de réflexion, nous ne saurions douter qu'elles ne soient exactement observées, en tout ce qui est ou qui se fait dans le monde.<sup>708</sup>

Natorp concluded from this that Descartes had considered the law of the mind to be the law of the experience of nature. Natorp thought that this Kantian inference could be found everywhere in Descartes's works, although Descartes himself, of course, did not make such an inference. Descartes first applied the mathematical concepts and the uniform conceivable relations of measure and number to the objects of the senses. This enabled him to conceive the reality of sense-based objects in a strictly mathematical manner. For this reason, Natorp explained, Descartes considered the qualitative distinctions of sense perception merely as a secondary reality. Furthermore, this also explained why Descartes thought everything in nature worked mechanically. The final conclusion Natorp wanted to reach was that Descartes's foundation of empirical reality amounted to the Kantian claim: that the real is that which is coherent with experience in accordance with empirical laws.

It almost seems as if Natorp tried to 'repair' the weakness of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas by stressing its independence from the method. He explained Descartes's 'incredible uncritical metaphysical turn' by saying that Descartes simply wanted more than a mere method. According to Natorp, the criterion of clear and distinct perception became more and more entangled with Platonic psychology which emphasized the distinction between imagination and intellect. As a result, his 'spirit' was elevated from the material things, and in this movement, Descartes turned to the 'Perfect Being'. Instead of determining the laws of the intellect, the question regarding the existence of things became prominent. Nevertheless, Natorp thought that the door from the old ontology to an analytic of pure understanding had been opened by Descartes. The concept of substance in the *Meditations*, for instance, can almost be interpreted as a Kantian category. The substance of wax, as investigated in the Second Meditation, was not as we sense it,

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<sup>707</sup> *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 63. The English edition, CSM II, p. 55, based on the Latin ed. is slightly divergent.

<sup>708</sup> *Disc.* (G), p. 41.

but could only be determined with an *inspectio mentis*. To ‘see’ substance, in Natorp’s view, is equivalent to Kantian ‘judging’.

We have seen various interpretations of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas which sought to bring Descartes closer to the philosophy of Kant. On some points we found that interpretations had wandered too far from their source, but we agree with Natorp concerning the task of historiography. In his view, it is better to offer an interpretation of Descartes which may perhaps appear ‘uncartesian’ but which is nevertheless in the line of his thought, than to provide just another ‘simple reproduction’ of his philosophy.

Vielleicht scheint es, als ob eine solche Deutung der Lehren Descartes’, wie sie hier durchgeführt wurde, sich allzuweit von der wirklichen Meinung des Philosophen entferne. Doch wird man nicht leugnen können, dass sie in der Consequenz dessen liegt, was Descartes zuerst in den »Regeln« als die Aufgabe einer »Wissenschaft der menschlichen Intelligenz«, die die Grundlage alles übrigen Wissens sein müsse, bezeichnet, dann aber in allen seinen Schriften immer wieder als seinen letzten Gesichtspunkt ausgesprochen hat: die Nothwendigkeit unsrer Begriffe allein zur Norm der Wahrheit unsres Denkens zu machen, deswegen weil dies der einzige unerschütterlich feste Boden der Gewissheit ist, der uns gegeben ist, und wir sonst genöthigt sind, ganz ohne Fundament zu bauen. Ist also, was hier gegeben wurde, vielleicht nicht so sehr eine einfache Wiedergabe als eine Umdeutung der Lehren Descartes’, so ist es wenigstens eine Umdeutung im Sinne seiner eignen Consequenz, und zwar aus dem fruchtbarsten, und von ihm selbst in seiner Fruchtbarkeit bestimmt erkannten Gesichtspunkte. Ist es Aufgabe der Geschichte, zumal der philosophischen, das Vergangene nicht bloss darstellend zu wiederholen, sondern seine Gesetzmässigkeit zu begreifen, und was darin dauernd werthvoll ist, vom Zufälligen und Werthlosen zu sondern, so wird sich der hier unternommene Versuch einer Darstellung Descartes’ aus dem kritischen Gesichtspunkte gewiss auch im Sinne der historischen Forschung rechtfertigen lassen.<sup>709</sup>

Natorp was certainly aware of the fact that his interpretation of Descartes may strike us as a bit forced and to some may not seem to concur with Descartes’s actual words at all times. Perhaps, concerning his view of historiography, Natorp followed his old master Hermann Cohen who, as we saw earlier, claimed that the historiographer stands on a higher plane than his historical subject. We think that Natorp’s preference for a new interpretation, over a representation or a simple reproduction, can best be understood as an attempt to uncover Descartes’s intended thought and to rediscover the Cartesian method for ourselves.

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<sup>709</sup> DE 120-121.



## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The French Enlightenment, characterized by a desire for the unity of thought and nature through human freedom, was opposed to Cartesian thought with its basis in duality, or even 'trinality'. For Descartes, the essence of consciousness is completely separated from the essence of the external world, and both are distinct from the third substance, which is God. Sensualistic eighteenth-century French philosophy, which tried to apply the language of physics to that of rational psychology, saw Cartesian duality as highly problematic.

The encyclopaedists' notions of existence and evidence – key notions of the Cartesian method and system – proved to be incompatible with those of Descartes. Their rejection of the Cartesian *cogito* went hand in hand with the rejection of innate ideas, the religious consequences of which contradicted their views on freedom and nature. They furthermore shared Locke's epistemological objections to innate ideas and agreed with Hume that the term was vague and empty.

Kant showed that it is pointless to say anything about events that could not be given in possible experience. Against any claim about such events he maintained that the contrary could also be claimed with equal validity. With this in mind, he labelled Descartes a 'sceptical idealist'. The main difference between Kant's notion of the 'ich denke' and Descartes's *cogito* is that Kant denied that the *cogito* provides the first certainty. In the case of the ontological proof of God, Kant's stance hardly needs any explanation as his criticism of it is perhaps more famous than the proof itself. Finally, in *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant rejected the doctrine of innate ideas. However, he later admitted that there must be a foundation in the subject by virtue of which representations originate as they do, and that this foundation must be innate.

By the end of the eighteenth century Descartes was still fairly unpopular in France as illustrated by the political debates regarding the question of what to do with the philosopher's remains. Possibly due to his being seen as a representative of the ancien régime, Descartes was not reinstated into French philosophical history until the Restoration. Due to the double function of the philosopher-statesmen the reinstatement of Descartes was accelerated at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The wide range of philosophers who tried to use Descartes's work illustrates the grand scale of his comeback. Religious motives, historiographical merits, psychological discoveries, and patriotism all provided reasons leading to the reinstatement of Descartes in France during the nineteenth century.

Part of the traditionalists' motivation for preferring the Cartesian school over the philosophical movements of their own time lies in their hostility towards sensualism. Although their anti-philosophical attitude isolated them from the philosophical discourse of the day, their religious views, which lay behind this attitude, may have inspired the discussion about the relation between philosophy and religion.

It is difficult to prove that the historiographical efforts of Degérando and Laromiguière urged French philosophers to engage with the philosophy of



Descartes. It is clear, however, that Degérando's *Histoire comparée* was frequently consulted by almost all French philosophers, including the traditionalists, and that for many it was a stepping stone for research into the thought of Descartes. Unlike the traditionalists, Degérando did not let his religious convictions interfere with his philosophical work as is illustrated by his criticism of Descartes's ontological proof.

Maine de Biran was one of the first French philosophers to take the Cartesian method seriously and to apply it to his own philosophical views. In his philosophy, which was at first sensualist, Descartes later played an important role, being considered by Biran to be the father of what he called 'reflective science'. In search of the primitive facts of consciousness, he was led to reconsider the Cartesian *cogito*, which became for him the first psychological axiom. With regard to the theory of innate ideas, he criticized both Descartes and his adversaries, but nevertheless he adopted the theory, with some modifications which emphasized the activity of the soul.

Royer-Collard sought to diplomatically reconcile the major differences between Anglo-Saxon and continental philosophy by appealing to common sense. The role Descartes played in his philosophical views had a political connotation which is not surprising if we bear in mind that the larger part of his life was occupied with administrative functions. The political instability during the period between the French Revolution and the Third Republic, in which Royer-Collard and Cousin lived, caused concern for law and order. Because the philosophy of Descartes had its conservative and its modern elements, it seemed to answer this concern. According to Cousin, Descartes was the liberator of human reason because he appealed to evidence alone. At the same time, Cousin held that Descartes did not defy authority, recognizing that of both religion and state. This combination, he thought, had led to France's constitutional freedom. The emphasis he placed on the psychological point of departure of Descartes's philosophy can be considered to be an elaboration of the thought of Maine de Biran. At the same time both his historically oriented and his systematical works reveal straightforwardly patriotic reasons for reinstating Descartes.

In Germany the rise of the historiography of philosophy also contributed to the growing acquaintance with the works of Descartes among philosophers. Not only did these works offer relatively accurate representations of Descartes's philosophy, they also discussed key elements of the Cartesian system thematically. Although the opinions of Buhle and Tennemann did not immediately point to a reinstatement of Descartes, their critical and elaborate discussions certainly set the tone for the German reappraisal of Descartes's philosophy.

The position allotted to Descartes in German Idealism can best be described as the point of departure for their own systems. The philosophy of Descartes served as an example for Fichte or at least inspired him to found and structure science. For Hegel it indicated the beginning of modern philosophy because it realized that self-consciousness was the essential moment of truth. Schelling also maintained that modern philosophy started with Descartes and at the same time showed that Descartes had been misrepresented and misunderstood. According to Feuerbach, we are all Cartesians because we all have to recognize the *cogito*.

The revaluation of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas in Germany gradually revealed Descartes as the predecessor of Kant. In this respect, philosophers criticized Kant's view of Descartes and some even doubted whether he had actually read the *Meditations*. On the basis of a comparison between innate ideas and a priori principles, Cartesian philosophy became eligible to be considered as an early form of critical philosophy. According to Trendelenburg, the general concepts of the Cartesian system could not be considered as innate in the Kantian sense of the a priori. He held that Descartes was similar to a nominalist in that he allowed general notions to ensue from individual representations and that by doing so he was unable to explain the development and the coherence of these innate ideas. Grimm and Gutzeit on the other hand, believed that they could show the development and coherence of the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas. As a result, they found that it was justified to compare this doctrine with Kant's notion of apriority.

Neo-Kantians went further than this drawing of comparisons, as they sought to understand Descartes from the point of view of transcendental philosophy. The Marburg School saw philosophy as the theory of the exact sciences and they based this theory on Kant's transcendental philosophy. In their search for the logical conditions of natural science and mathematics, they reconsidered the philosophy of Descartes and brought it into relation with the Kantian doctrine. As a result, the metaphysics of Cartesian philosophy was transformed and interpreted in the Kantian transcendental sense. We might add that it was also taken in a meta-transcendental sense as they found the transcendental conditions for Kant's doctrine in the philosophy of Descartes. The special interest Cohen took in Kant's notion of apriority led him to the age-old question of whether our representations are innate or acquired. By interpreting Cartesian innate ideas as the criteria of knowledge, Cohen tried to resolve Kant's ambiguous position regarding innate ideas. The critical character of Cartesian philosophy was most extensively demonstrated by Paul Natorp. On the basis of the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, Natorp demonstrated that Descartes already laid a foundation for epistemological rationalism in his early period. Furthermore, he claimed that Descartes had not abandoned this early critical intention in his later works. By interpreting the *cogito* as an a priori synthesis, Natorp could avoid its metaphysical connotation and its relation to the notion of God. Concerning the latter, Natorp showed the shortcomings of Kant's criticism of Descartes's ontological proof of God. Although Natorp maintained that Descartes had not distinguished between epistemology and religion sharply enough, he did not see a problem in assuming the idea of God as an *ens rationis*. Natorp's analysis of Descartes's theory of knowledge brought forward its critical character and revealed an interesting view of historiography in which the line of thought, the immanent consequences of this theory, are preferred over adequate representations.

On the level of the history of ideas we have examined the changes in the view of Descartes from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. On the level of the historical reception we have discussed the variety of reasons why philosophers reappraised Descartes. Finally, we once again focus on the *cogito*, the notion and

proofs of the existence of God, and the theory of innate ideas for our conclusion at the ‘problemhistorische’ and conceptual historical level.

Concerning the *cogito*, eighteenth-century sensualism and the unfamiliarity with the works of Descartes stand in contrast with idealism, the rise of psychology, and the rise of historiography that characterize the nineteenth century. After having been represented and understood in an historically accurate manner, the *cogito* offered nineteenth-century philosophers something positive to work with. In various ways and from different perspectives it was seen as the point of departure for the foundation of science. This is explicitly the case for Fichte and Maine de Biran, but is also true for a wide range of nineteenth-century historians of philosophy.

With regard to the notion and proofs of God, eighteenth-century Enlightenment stands opposed to nineteenth-century Romanticism and Traditionalism. With Voltaire, Hume, and Kant the notion of God and its possible functions in philosophical systems were banished from theoretical philosophy. However, during the nineteenth century various movements sought to restore the notion. French traditionalists such as de Maistre and de Bonald supported the supremacy of religion over society and philosophy. In the thought of Cousin, the notion of God plays a crucial role, borrowed from German Idealism. The emphasis that German Idealism places on such notions as ‘necessary existence’ and the ‘absolute’ tempt us to say that the notion of God returned to philosophy in an altered form. Kant’s attempt to prove the impossibility of Descartes’s ontological proof was taken up by Schelling and Natorp who demonstrated the inaccuracy of Kant’s representation.

The nineteenth-century interest in the Cartesian doctrine of innate ideas is a clear example of the conceptual historical reinstatement of Descartes. This theory, which was widely rejected throughout the eighteenth century was recovered, transformed, and reused by many nineteenth-century philosophers. In order to avoid psychologisms – the reduction of logical entities, such as propositions universals, and numbers, to mental states or mental activities, – philosophers compared innate ideas with a priori principles. This resulted in the most charitable reading of Descartes’s theory of innate ideas, namely that the theory was a precursor to the Kantian doctrine of a priori forms.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Descartes  
AT [I ff.] *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Adam & Tannery.  
Cous. [I ff.] *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Victor Cousin.  
Corr. *Correspondance*, in AT I-V, AT VIII-2, AT X.  
CSM [I-III] *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, ed. Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch, (and Kenny CSM III)  
*Disc.* *Discours de la méthode*, in AT VI.  
*Disc. (G)* *Discours de la méthode*, ed. Étienne Gilson.  
*Entretien* *Entretien avec Burman*, in AT V; CSM III.  
*Med. (F)* *Les meditations metaphysiques de René Des-Cartes*, touchant la premiere philosophie, dans lesquelles l'existence de Dieu, & la distinction réelle entre l'ame & le corps de l'homme, sont démontrées. Traduites du Latin de l'Auteur par M<sup>r</sup> le D.D.L.N.S. Et les Objections [*Obj.* I-VI] faites contre ces Meditations par diuerses personnes tres-doctes, avec les réponses [*Rep.* I-VI] de l'Auteur. Traduites par M<sup>r</sup> C.L.R., in AT IX-1.  
*Med. (L)* *Meditationes de prima philosophia*. His adjunctæ sunt variæ objectiones [*Obj.* (L) I-VII] doctorum vivorum in istas de Deo & anima demonstrationes cum responsionibus [*Resp.* I-VII] authoris, in AT VII.  
*Notae* *Notae in Programma quoddam*, in AT VIII-2; CSM I; Cous. X.  
*Princ.* *Principia philosophiæ*, in AT VIII-1.  
*Principes* *Principes de la philosophie*, in AT IX-2.  
*Rech.* *La Recherche de la Vérité par la lumière naturelle*, in AT X; CSM II.  
*Regulae (H)* *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii*, ed. Heffernan.
- Hegel  
*Einleitung* *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie, Einleitung, Orientalische Philosophie*.  
GW *Gesammelte Werke*.  
*Vorlesungen* *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (vol. 9).  
SW *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. H. Glockner.
- Kant  
AA [I ff.] *Werke*, hrsg. von d. Königl. Preuß. Akad. d. Wissenschaften.  
*De mundi* *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis*, in AA II.  
*Entdeckung* *Über eine Entdeckung nach der alle neue Kritik der reinen Vernunft durch eine ältere entbehrlich gemacht werden soll*, in AA VIII and in *Der Streit mit Johann August Eberhard*, ed. Lauschke and Zahn.  
*Fortschritte* *Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik seit Leibnitzens und Wolf's Zeiten in Deutschland gemacht hat?*, in AA XX.  
KrV *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in AA III/IV.  
KU *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in AA V.  
*Proleg.* *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*, in AA IV.

## Abbreviations

### Maine de Biran

- MB [I ff.] *Œuvres*, (1963-2001)  
 AI *De l'aperception immédiate (Mémoire de Berlin 1807)* ed. I. Radrizzani (1995), in MB IV.  
 CM17 *Commentaires et Marginalia: dix-septième siècle*, ed. C. Frémont (1990), in MB XI-1.  
 DPEA *Dernière philosophie: existence et anthropologie*, ed. B. Baertschi (1989), in MB X-2.  
 EFP *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie*, ed. F.C.T. Moore (2001), in MB VII-1/VII-2.  
 EJ *Écrits de jeunesse 1792-1798*, ed. B. Baertschi (1998), in MB I.  
 EP *Écrits sur la physiologie*, ed. B. Baertschi (1990), in MB IX.  
 IHP *Influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser*, ed. Gilbert Romeyer-Dherby (1987), in MB II.  
 NCRP *Nouvelles considérations sur les rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, ed. B. Baertschi (1990), in MB IX.  
 MDP *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée*, ed. F. Azouvi (1988), in MB III.

### Others

- DE Natorp, *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie*.  
 Entw. Natorp, 'Die Entwicklung Descartes' von den „Regeln“ bis zu den „Meditationen“  
 Disc. 1811 Royer-Collard, 'Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie, le 4 décembre 1811', in *Les fragments philosophiques*.  
 Encyc. Diderot et al., *L'Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*.  
 Esquisse Condorcet, *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain*.  
 FW Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke*.  
 GA Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*.  
 GWL Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [1794] in GA I/2.  
 Gazette *Gazette Nationale, ou Le Moniteur Universel*.  
 GPEW Buhle, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften*.  
 Geil Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes. Eine philosophiegeschichtliche Studie*.  
 Grimm Grimm, *Descartes' Lehre von den angeborenen Ideen*.  
 Gutzeit Gutzeit, *Descartes' angeborene Ideen verglichen mit Kants Anschauungs- und Denkformen a priori*.  
 HC I Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, part 1.  
 HC II Degérando, *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie considérés relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines*, part 2.  
 Hist. gén. Cousin, *Histoire générale de la philosophie depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'à la fin du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*.  
 Kontroverse Cohen, *Zur Kontroverse zwischen Trendelenburg und Kuno Fischer*, in *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (1928), vol. 1 pp. 229-275.  
 KTE Cohen, *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung in Werke* 1.1. The letters A, B, and C stand for the first, second, and third edition.  
 Leçons Laromiguière, *Leçons de philosophie ou essai sur les facultés de l'âme*.  
 Recherches Bonald, *Recherches philosophiques sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales, Œuvres complètes*, vol. 3.

Rose	Rose, <i>Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Apriori.</i>
Schelling	Schelling, <i>Werke</i> , ed. M. Schröter.
Soirées	De Maistre, <i>Les soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg ou entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la providence.</i>
SSW	Schopenhauer, <i>Sämtliche Werke</i> , ed. A. Hübscher.



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## SUMMARY IN DUTCH

René Descartes is zonder twijfel één van de beroemdste en belangrijkste westerse filosofen van de moderne tijd. Dit is zo vanzelfsprekend dat er zelfs onder historici voorbijgegaan wordt aan het feit dat deze roem toegeschreven moet worden aan de herwaardering van zijn filosofie in de negentiende eeuw. Gedurende de achttiende eeuw was wat wij nu de filosofie van Descartes noemen – dat wil zeggen zijn metafysica in vergetelheid geraakt. Uitgeremd in Frankrijk werd Descartes miskend en zelfs geridiculiseerd. In deze periode werd Descartes hoogstens nog in herinnering gebracht als middelmatig wiskundige, maar altijd in de schaduw van zijn voorganger Francis Bacon en op natuurwetenschappelijk gebied in de schaduw van zijn opvolger Isaac Newton.

Vanaf het eind van de achttiende eeuw, in diverse filosofische bewegingen, maakt Descartes een spectaculaire rentree steeds om andere redenen. Dit proefschrift behandelt deze redenen aan de hand van drie kernthema's uit de cartesiaanse metafysica: het *cogito*, de bewijzen voor het bestaan van God en de theorie van aangeboren ideeën. Het onderzoek richt zich op de herwaardering van Descartes in Frankrijk en Duitsland gedurende de 'lange' negentiende eeuw. Methodologisch gezien wordt dit onderzoek op vier niveaus benaderd. Op ideeënhistorisch niveau gaat het om de veranderingen in de waardering van Descartes, op receptiehistorisch niveau om de diversiteit aan redenen hiervoor. De bespreking van de kernthema's behoort tot het probleemhistorisch niveau. Tenslotte wordt op conceptueel historisch niveau aangegeven hoe deze cartesiaanse thema's 'begriffsgeschiedliche' veranderingen ondergingen en opnieuw in zwang raakten.

Om te laten zien dat het achttiende eeuwse beeld van Descartes in schril contrast staat met dat van de negentiende eeuw, schetst deel I hoe de Encyclopedisten en Kant tegen Descartes aankeken. In het pre-revolutionaire Frankrijk dat hoofdzakelijk gedomineerd werd door het Anglo-Saksisch sensualisme was weinig animo voor Descartes. De sensualistische opvatting van het subject ondermijnt het *cogito*-argument als fundament. Naast Descartes' hypothese van de zogeheten 'tourbillons' is zijn theorie van aangeboren ideeën een van de meest expliciet verworpen en geridiculiseerde theorieën uit de geschiedenis van de filosofie. Zelfs in het hoogst dweperige *Éloge de Descartes* (1765) door Thomas, is hiervoor geen verdediging te vinden.

In Kant's filosofie speelt Descartes geen belangrijke rol. Al doet het kantiaanse 'ich denke' als de oorspronkelijke synthetische eenheid van apperceptie denken aan het cartesiaanse *cogito*, ze verschillen fundamenteel. Volgens Kant is de grootste verdienste van Descartes dat hij de kenleer heeft verbeterd, maar tegelijkertijd staat hij juist bekend om zijn kritiek op het 'cartesiaanse, ontologische' godsbewijs. Ook verwerpt hij in eerste instantie de theorie van aangeboren ideeën.

Deel II laat zien hoe het eerherstel van Descartes een kwestie van nationaal belang werd in het post-revolutionaire Frankrijk. Bijna hilarisch is het om te zien hoe de politieke verdeeldheid in deze periode werd uitgespeeld over het lijk van

Descartes. Pas vanaf de Restauration (1814-1830) kunnen we spreken van de herwaardering van Descartes. Na de val van het napoleontische keizerrijk vond een herbezinning op en een problematisering van de Verlichting plaats. De wens om stabiliteit en houvast te vinden in een periode die gekenmerkt werd door politieke, culturele en wetenschappelijke dynamiek, zag menigeeen vervuld door Descartes.

De achtergronden en redenen voor de herwaardering van Descartes gedurende de eerste helft van de negentiende eeuw lopen opmerkelijk genoeg nogal uiteen. Deel III laat zien hoe traditionalisten als De Maistre en De Bonald in hun anti-filosofische houding een uitzondering maken voor Malebranche en daarmee ook voor Descartes. Dit kan verklaard worden door hun Middeleeuwse opvatting van de christelijke moraal die zij hoog boven de filosofie plaatsen, waar zij hun lezing van Descartes op afstemmen. Tegelijkertijd zorgen historiografen van de wijsbegeerte als Degérando en Laromiguière ervoor dat – misschien voor het eerst – Franse intellectuelen bekend raakten met de oorspronkelijke teksten van Descartes. Eén van de geleerden die dankbaar gebruik maakte van Degérando's werken over de geschiedenis van de filosofie was Maine de Biran. Maine de Biran's vroege gedachtegoed ligt in de lijn van Locke en Condillac. Gaandeweg ontwikkelde hij echter een kentheorie waarvoor het externe sensualisme van deze denkers niet langer toereikend was. Opvallend is dat Maine de Biran in zijn analyse van het mentale en zijn onderzoek naar de fundamentele van de psychologie teruggreep op het *cogito* van Descartes. Volgens hem is Descartes de ware vader van de reflexieve wetenschap. Evenals De Maistre, De Bonald, Maine de Biran waren Royer-Collard en Cousin naast filosofen ook politici. Royer-Collard was de eerste die Descartes de rol van nationale filosoof toedichtte. Hij poogde een consensus te vinden tussen het sensualisme en het (religieus) traditionalisme. Bij Victor Cousin vinden we een voortzetting van politiek getinte motieven om Descartes te herwaarderen. Zo benadrukt hij het 'diep franse karakter' van Descartes' werk dat volgens hem de toon heeft gezet voor de moderne filosofie. Volgens hem is de Franse constitutionele vrijheid uiteindelijk te danken aan Descartes. In de filosofie van Descartes vindt de conservatief Cousin een verdediging voor de spiritualiteit van de ziel, de vrijheid en verantwoordelijkheid voor ons handelen en God als schepper van de wereld.

Deel IV bespreekt eerst de rol van de Duitse geschiedschrijvers van de filosofie. Het is opvallend dat een uitgebreide, brontekstgetrouwe presentatie van Descartes' gedachtegoed in vele geschiedenisboeken voorafging aan zijn opleving in de systematische disciplines van de filosofie. In navolging van Brucker, maar nu geïnspireerd door Kant, trachtten Buhle en Tennemann te komen tot kritische, soms al te kritische, geschiedschrijving.

Binnen de bespreking van de herwaardering van Descartes door de Duitse Idealisten, is Fichte de eerste die het cartesiaanse *cogito au sérieux* nam. De opvatting van het *cogito* als onmiddellijke bewustzijnsact en niet als syllogisme staat aan de basis van de fundamentele idee van zijn *Wissenschaftslehre*. Bij Hegel krijgt Descartes een ereplaats als initiator van de moderne filosofie. In Hegeliaanse termen wil dit zeggen dat de filosofie bij Descartes autonoom werd doordat zij inzag dat zelfbewustzijn het essentiële moment van waarheid is. Bij Schelling vinden we een verdediging van de cartesiaanse versie van het ontologisch

godsbewijs en een verwerping van Kant's kritiek hierop. Hiermee heeft Schelling een belangrijke misinterpretatie aan het licht gebracht. Ondanks het feit dat Feuerbach het begin van de moderne filosofie bij Bruno plaatst, prijst hij Descartes' methodische twijfel en moeten volgens hem alle redelijke mensen de waarheid van het *cogito* bevestigen.

Het vijfde en laatste deel richt zich op de herwaardering van Descartes' theorie van aangeboren ideeën in Duitsland in de tweede helft van de negentiende eeuw. Tegelijk met de ontwikkeling van de op kantiaanse leest geschoeide kentheorie, vinden we in deze periode toenemende aandacht voor Descartes' theorie van aangeboren ideeën. Met uitzondering van Trendelenburg die het verschil tussen 'aangeboren' en 'a priori' benadrukt, tonen een aantal dissertaties aan dat beide begrippen met elkaar te vergelijken zijn. Aangezien de aangeboren ideeën in het cartesische systeem nauw verbonden zijn met het *cogito* en het godsbegrip, komen ook deze thema's aan de orde.

De neo-kantianen Cohen en Natorp gingen verder dan alleen Descartes' theorie van aangeboren ideeën te vergelijken met Kant's a priori vormen. Het neo-kantianisme bezint zich, na de val van het absoluut idealisme van Hegel, op het wetenschappelijk karakter van de filosofie. De transcendentale filosofie van Kant leek hiervoor het juiste aanknopingspunt. Wat zij echter misten in de kantiaanse 'Architektonik' was de systeemidee, die zij bij Descartes vinden. Zij beschouwen Descartes dan ook als de voorloper van het criticisme. Hiervoor was het echter wel noodzakelijk om de hoofdthema's uit de traditionele lezing te halen en opnieuw in een kritisch licht te beschouwen. Met name bij Paul Natorp, met wie dit proefschrift afsluit, wordt het kritische karakter van de (vroeg) cartesische kentheorie benadrukt en in een interessant historiografisch kader geplaatst.



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