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The rebirth of Descartes

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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.⁵¹³

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.⁵¹⁴ This is surprising because he influenced many important philosophers who will enter our discussion later in this part.⁵¹⁵ 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.⁵¹⁶ 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

⁵¹³ 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.

⁵¹⁴ Köhnke, *Entstehung und Aufstieg des Neukantianismus* (1986), p. 23.

⁵¹⁵ Köhnke mentions Brentano, Cohen, Dilthey, Dühring, Eucken, Prantl, Laas, Paulsen, Willmann, Von Hertling and Kierkegaard.

⁵¹⁶ 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*).⁵¹⁷

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.⁵¹⁸

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.

⁵¹⁷ Trendelenburg, *Geschichte der Kategorienlehre* [1846], in *Historische Beiträge zur Philosophie*, vol I., p. 262-263.

⁵¹⁸ 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.⁵¹⁹

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

⁵¹⁹ CSM I, 221.

anderes. Hier handelte es sich um die allgemeinsten, jeder individuellen Besonderheit überlegenen Grundformen unseres Erkennens in Anschauung und Denken.⁵²⁰

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'.⁵²¹ 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

⁵²⁰ Eucken, *Die Grundbegriffe der Gegenwart* [1878], pp. 100-101.

⁵²¹ 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.⁵²²

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

⁵²² Ibid., p. 15.

übernatürliche Weise unsrem Geiste enthüllt worden sei, existirt für den Philosophen Descartes nicht.⁵²³

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.

⁵²³ 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.⁵²⁴ 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 imagination⁵²⁵ 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.⁵²⁶

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

⁵²⁴ *Corr.*, AT V, 270: 'imaginabile'; Cous. XI, 196: 'qui tombe sous l'imagination'.

⁵²⁵ *Corr.*, AT V, p. 270: 'sub imaginationem cadit'.

⁵²⁶ 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*).⁵²⁷ 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.⁵²⁸

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

⁵²⁷ 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).

⁵²⁸ 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'.⁵²⁹ 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.⁵³⁰

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.

⁵²⁹ Grimm, pp. 50-51.

⁵³⁰ *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.⁵³¹

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.⁵³² 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.⁵³³

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

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵³² *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.'

⁵³³ 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.⁵³⁴

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

⁵³⁴ 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.⁵³⁵

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.⁵³⁶ 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:

⁵³⁵ 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.

⁵³⁶ 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.⁵³⁷

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.⁵³⁸

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.⁵³⁹

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

⁵³⁷ *Notae*, AT VIII-2, 358-359.

⁵³⁸ CSM I, p. 304.

⁵³⁹ *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.⁵⁴⁰

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.

⁵⁴⁰ 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.⁵⁴¹

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

⁵⁴¹ 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.⁵⁴² 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

⁵⁴² 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.⁵⁴³

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.⁵⁴⁴ 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.⁵⁴⁵ 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.⁵⁴⁶

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 –

⁵⁴³ Gutzeit, p. 6.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. CSM II, p. 256.

⁵⁴⁵ Gutzeit forgets to add that according to Descartes we can of course have a clear and distinct notion of extension.

⁵⁴⁶ 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’.⁵⁴⁷ 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.⁵⁴⁸

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

⁵⁴⁷ CSM II, p. 96.

⁵⁴⁸ 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.⁵⁴⁹

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.⁵⁵⁰ 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

⁵⁴⁹ Gutzeit, p. 11.

⁵⁵⁰ 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.⁵⁵¹

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.⁵⁵²

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.⁵⁵³

In a footnote Kant added:

⁵⁵¹ KrV B 143.

⁵⁵² Gutzeit, p. 13.

⁵⁵³ *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.⁵⁵⁴

We will return later to the corresponding passage from *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*.⁵⁵⁵ 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,⁵⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁵⁷

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

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁵ 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'.

⁵⁵⁶ 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.

⁵⁵⁷ 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.⁵⁵⁸

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.

⁵⁵⁸ 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.⁵⁵⁹

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.⁵⁶⁰

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

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁵⁶⁰ 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.⁵⁶¹ 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.⁵⁶²

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’.⁵⁶³ 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

⁵⁶¹ Obj. III, AT IX-1, 139; CSM II, 126.

⁵⁶² CSM III, 222.

⁵⁶³ 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.⁵⁶⁴

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.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁴ Gutzeit, p. 26.

⁵⁶⁵ 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.⁵⁶⁶ 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.⁵⁶⁷ 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.⁵⁶⁸

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 unsers Geistes bedeuten würde, der Vielheit der Objekte gegenüber ein einheitliches Ich als Beziehungszentrum zu setzen, d.h. als die Fähigkeit des Geistes oder des Ich sich in der Bethätigung seiner selbst zu verwirklichen.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁶ 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'.

⁵⁶⁷ If we adopt Descartes' explanation of innate ideas from *Notae*, we may assume that all our ideas are in fact innate.

⁵⁶⁸ Gutzeit, p. 28.

⁵⁶⁹ *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*.⁵⁷⁰ 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.⁵⁷¹ 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*.⁵⁷² 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.⁵⁷³

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).

⁵⁷⁰ Klöpel, *Das lumen naturale bei Descartes* (1896), p. 1.

⁵⁷¹ 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.

⁵⁷² Cf. *ibid.* p. 14.

⁵⁷³ 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.⁵⁷⁴

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.⁵⁷⁵

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

⁵⁷⁴ Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke’s von Descartes*, p. 21.

⁵⁷⁵ *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.⁵⁷⁶

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.⁵⁷⁷

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.

⁵⁷⁶ *Corr.*, AT III, 284.

⁵⁷⁷ 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.⁵⁷⁸ 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.⁵⁷⁹

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.⁵⁸⁰

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

⁵⁷⁸ 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.

⁵⁷⁹ Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes*, p. 30.

⁵⁸⁰ *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.⁵⁸¹

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.⁵⁸²

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 fragment⁵⁸³ 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'.⁵⁸⁴ According to Geil, however, we should not confuse this term with any term from the Enlightenment.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁵⁸² Ibid., p. 36.

⁵⁸³ See CSM II, 399.

⁵⁸⁴ 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 Gültigkeit zu Tage zu fördern.⁵⁸⁵

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'.⁵⁸⁶ 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.

⁵⁸⁵ Geil, *Ueber die Abhängigkeit Locke's von Descartes*, p. 39-40.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

Rose thought Grimm was wrong to distinguish formal or logical principles from material or metaphysical ones.⁵⁸⁷ 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’.⁵⁸⁸

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.⁵⁸⁹

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.

⁵⁸⁷ See Rose, *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke* (1901), p. 17.

⁵⁸⁸ CSM II, 105.

⁵⁸⁹ *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’,⁵⁹⁰ 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.⁵⁹¹

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.

⁵⁹⁰ The term Rose uses is ‘*σύνφροντοι*, im Geiste angelegt’, which he borrowed from Grotius, see *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke*, p. 18.

⁵⁹¹ *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’.⁵⁹²

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.⁵⁹³ 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*’.⁵⁹⁴ 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.⁵⁹⁵ In the Fourth Set of Replies, he continued this argument,⁵⁹⁶ and brought it up again when he reacted to Gassendi’s sensualist objection that all our ideas are adventitious, even those of chimeras.⁵⁹⁷

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.⁵⁹⁸

⁵⁹² CSM I, 304.

⁵⁹³ Cf. *Principes* I (§ 10), AT IX-2, 28.

⁵⁹⁴ Rose, *Die Lehre von den eingeborenen Ideen bei Descartes und Locke*, p. 23.

⁵⁹⁵ CSM II, 132.

⁵⁹⁶ 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’.

⁵⁹⁷ 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’.

⁵⁹⁸ 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.⁵⁹⁹

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,⁶⁰⁰ 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

⁵⁹⁹ See, for example, Paul Natorp, 'Kant und die Marburger Schule', in *Kant-Studien*, vol. 17, 1912, p. 196 f.

⁶⁰⁰ '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),⁶⁰¹ 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’.⁶⁰² 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.⁶⁰³

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’.⁶⁰⁴ 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

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Sieg, *Die Geschichte der Philosophie an der Universität Marburg von 1527 bis 1970* (1988).

⁶⁰² Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1908), vol. 2, p. 34.

⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁴ 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.⁶⁰⁵

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*⁶⁰⁶ 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 Bergmann⁶⁰⁷ 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

⁶⁰⁵ 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.'

⁶⁰⁶ Cohen, in Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus*, vol. 1, pp. 437-535.

⁶⁰⁷ 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.⁶⁰⁸

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.⁶⁰⁹ 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.⁶¹⁰

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.⁶¹¹ 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’.⁶¹²

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.⁶¹³

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

⁶⁰⁸ Quoted from *ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁶⁰⁹ 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.

⁶¹⁰ 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.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Lange, *Geschichte des Materialismus* (1908) vol.1, p. 474.

⁶¹² Cohen, *Die platonische Ideenlehre psychologisch entwickelt* [1866], in *Schriften zur Philosophie und Zeitgeschichte* (1928), p. 53.

⁶¹³ *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.⁶¹⁴

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.⁶¹⁵

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.⁶¹⁶

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,

⁶¹⁴ Cf. KTE C 7-8.

⁶¹⁵ KTE C 6.

⁶¹⁶ 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.⁶¹⁷

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.⁶¹⁸

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),⁶¹⁹ 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

⁶¹⁷ KTE C 8.

⁶¹⁸ KTE C 10.

⁶¹⁹ 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 . . .⁶²⁰

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.⁶²¹ 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 . . .⁶²²

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

⁶²⁰ Ibid. p. 195.

⁶²¹ 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.

⁶²² 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'.⁶²³

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.⁶²⁴ 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.⁶²⁵

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'.⁶²⁶ 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

⁶²³ *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.

⁶²⁴ According to Cassirer, Descartes's discovery of analytical geometry founded the modern way of thinking which finds its mature expression in the infinitesimal calculus.

⁶²⁵ Cassirer, *Descartes' Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* [1899], in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Leibniz' System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (1998), p. 3.

⁶²⁶ 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’.⁶²⁷ 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.⁶²⁸

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),⁶²⁹ 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.

⁶²⁷ Ibid.

⁶²⁸ Cassirer, *Descartes’ Kritik der mathematischen und naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis* [1899] in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, *Leibniz’ System in seinen wissenschaftlichen Grundlagen* (1998), p. 26.

⁶²⁹ 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.⁶³⁰

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?⁶³¹ 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

⁶³⁰ Cohen, *Kontroverse*, p. 229.

⁶³¹ 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.⁶³²

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.⁶³³

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

⁶³² Cohen, *Kontroverse*, p. 235.

⁶³³ 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.⁶³⁴ 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.⁶³⁵

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.⁶³⁶ 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.

⁶³⁴ KTE, A 67.

⁶³⁵ 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'.

⁶³⁶ 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*⁶³⁷ 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.⁶³⁸

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.⁶³⁹

⁶³⁷ See KrV B 166-167 and *Regulae* VIII, ed. Heffernan p. 112 ff.

⁶³⁸ 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).

⁶³⁹ *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.⁶⁴⁰

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.⁶⁴¹ 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 . . .⁶⁴²

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*.⁶⁴³ Cohen may have been right to see the *Regulae* as a methodological prolegomena to later works,

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 451.

⁶⁴¹ See both KTE (precise references are given later in this section) and *Logik der reinen Erkenntnis* (LrE), B 47.

⁶⁴² *Disc.* (G) p. 33.

⁶⁴³ 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.'⁶⁴⁴

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.⁶⁴⁵

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.⁶⁴⁶ 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

⁶⁴⁴ KTE C 48.

⁶⁴⁵ KTE C 211.

⁶⁴⁶ 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?'⁶⁴⁷ 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.⁶⁴⁸

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.⁶⁴⁹ 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

⁶⁴⁷ KTE C 255.

⁶⁴⁸ 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'.

⁶⁴⁹ 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.⁶⁵⁰

The importance of the distinction between the transcendental and metaphysical conceptions of a priori emerges at the end of *Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*.⁶⁵¹ 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.

⁶⁵⁰ KTE C 271-272

⁶⁵¹ 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.⁶⁵²

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.

⁶⁵² 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.⁶⁵³

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.⁶⁵⁴

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

⁶⁵³ *Descartes' Erkenntnistheorie* (DE) [1882], iii.

⁶⁵⁴ 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.⁶⁵⁵ 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'.⁶⁵⁶

According to Natorp, Descartes had outlined a science of human reason both in Rule I, which defined science and its goal,⁶⁵⁷ and in Rule VIII, which proposed a definition of human knowledge and its limits.⁶⁵⁸

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.⁶⁵⁹

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'.⁶⁶⁰ According to Natorp, 'mind' only meant the method or original lawfulness in which the elements are rooted. The textual evidence that

⁶⁵⁵ 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'.

⁶⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁵⁷ *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.'

⁶⁵⁸ *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.

⁶⁵⁹ DE 5.

⁶⁶⁰ 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.⁶⁶¹

Descartes described arithmetic and geometry as ‘the spontaneous fruits which have sprung from the innate principles of this method’.⁶⁶² Furthermore, he claimed that there are ‘certain primary seeds of truths implanted by nature in human natural intelligence’.⁶⁶³ 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.⁶⁶⁴

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’.⁶⁶⁵ 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’.⁶⁶⁶ 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

⁶⁶¹ *Regulae*, IV (H), 87.

⁶⁶² *Regulae*, IV (H), 88: ‘Atque haec duo nihil aliud sunt, quam spontaneae fruges ex ingenitis hujus methodi principii natae . . .’.

⁶⁶³ *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.’

⁶⁶⁴ *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’.

⁶⁶⁵ Entw., p. 16.

⁶⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁶⁷

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

⁶⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁶⁸

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.⁶⁶⁹ 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.⁶⁷⁰ 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.⁶⁷¹ Natorp considered this to be an early version of

⁶⁶⁸ *Regulae* XIV (H), 185.

⁶⁶⁹ 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.'

⁶⁷⁰ DE 19-20.

⁶⁷¹ *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’,⁶⁷² the *Discours de la méthode* replaced this expression with: ‘substance whose whole essence or nature is simply to think’.⁶⁷³ 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?⁶⁷⁴

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.⁶⁷⁵

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

that something can be true or false, et cetera. For these matters are necessarily connected with the nature of doubt.’

⁶⁷² CSM II, 415; *Rech.*, AT X, 521.

⁶⁷³ CSM I, p. 127; *Disc.* (G), p. 33.

⁶⁷⁴ DE 33. The word ‘anzusehn’ is misspelled as ‘ansusehn’.

⁶⁷⁵ 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.⁶⁷⁶

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.⁶⁷⁷ 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.⁶⁷⁸

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.⁶⁷⁹ 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

⁶⁷⁶ KrV A 355.

⁶⁷⁷ DE 36-37.

⁶⁷⁸ DE 168.

⁶⁷⁹ *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.⁶⁸⁰ 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,⁶⁸¹ 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.⁶⁸²

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.

⁶⁸⁰ 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'.

⁶⁸¹ 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.

⁶⁸² 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 Gegebnes, sondern als abgeleitet von und bezogen auf Etwas, was existirt – darum aber freilich nicht nothwendig so existirt, wie wir es vorstellen.⁶⁸³

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.⁶⁸⁴ 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

⁶⁸³ DE 55.

⁶⁸⁴ 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.⁶⁸⁵

Kant's criticism of 'the famous ontological argument of Descartes'⁶⁸⁶ 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.⁶⁸⁷ 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.⁶⁸⁸ 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'⁶⁸⁹ of all

⁶⁸⁵ 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'.

⁶⁸⁶ KrV B 630

⁶⁸⁷ See Section 2.3.

⁶⁸⁸ In AA II, 156 ff. We find this misrepresentation already in his *Principiorum cognitionis metaphysicae* [1755], in AA I, 385-416.

⁶⁸⁹ 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.⁶⁹⁰ 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.⁶⁹¹

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.⁶⁹² 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.⁶⁹³

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

⁶⁹⁰ KrV B 644.

⁶⁹¹ KrV B 645.

⁶⁹² DE 71.

⁶⁹³ *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'.⁶⁹⁴ 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.⁶⁹⁵ 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.⁶⁹⁶

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.⁶⁹⁷

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,

⁶⁹⁴ Cf. Natorp, 'Kant und die Marburger Schule' (1912), in *Kant-Studien* 17, p. 198.

⁶⁹⁵ 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.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 200.

⁶⁹⁷ 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.⁶⁹⁸ 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.⁶⁹⁹

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'.⁷⁰⁰

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

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 19.

⁷⁰⁰ 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.⁷⁰¹

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.⁷⁰² 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.⁷⁰³

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.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁷⁰² Ibid., p. 20.

⁷⁰³ DE 93.

Et pour rendre cela tres-manifeste, ie remarque premierement la difference qui est entre l'imagination & la pure intellection ou conception.⁷⁰⁴

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.⁷⁰⁵

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.⁷⁰⁶

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

⁷⁰⁴ *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 57.

⁷⁰⁵ *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 58.

⁷⁰⁶ *Disc.* (G), p. 36.

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choses que i'y conçois clairement & distinctement, c'est à dire toutes les choses, généralement parlant, qui sont comprises dans l'objet de la Geometrie speculatiue, s'y retrouuent véritablement.⁷⁰⁷

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 méthode*, 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.⁷⁰⁸

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,

⁷⁰⁷ *Med.* VI (F), AT IX-1, 63. The English edition, CSM II, p. 55, based on the Latin ed. is slightly divergent.

⁷⁰⁸ *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.⁷⁰⁹

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.

⁷⁰⁹ DE 120-121.

