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The rebirth of Descartes

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Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2005

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Zijlstra, C. P. (2005). *The rebirth of Descartes: The nineteenth-century reinstatement of cartesian metaphysics in France and Germany*. [Thesis fully internal (DIV), University of Groningen]. [S.n.].

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III

The Reinstatement of Descartes in French Philosophy 1800-1850

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.1 De Maistre's criticism of sensualism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸⁷ *Soirées* I, 450.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 492-493.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 494-495.

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

¹⁹¹ *Soirées* I, 497.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹³ *Soirées* I, 513.

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

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

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

5.2 The anti-philosophical attitude of De Bonald

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

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 358.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 377.

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

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

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 27.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁰² Ibid., p. 31.

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

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 23.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 19.

²⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 20.

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.3 The Traditionalists on Kant

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

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

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

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

²⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 537.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 538.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., p. 242. By 'Villiers' de Maistre means 'Villers'.

²¹³ De Maistre refers to the wrong page numbers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²¹⁵ See *Recherches*, p. 21.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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

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

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

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

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

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

6.1 Degérando

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

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

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

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

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

²²¹ HC I, vol. 1, iij.

²²² Ibid., p. v.

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

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

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

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

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

6.1.1 Bacon and Descartes compared

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

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

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

²²⁴ HC I, vol. 1, 77-78.

²²⁵ Ibid., p. 81.

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

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

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

6.1.2 *The originality of Descartes*

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

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

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

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

²³⁰ HC II, vol. 2, 159.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Degérando’s reasons for rejecting Descartes’s ontological proof for the existence of God are technically similar to Kant’s. The important difference between them, however, is that Kant proved the impossibility of any proof for the existence of God, whereas Degérando thinks that such a proof is possible. Although Kant labels it an antinomy of pure reason, Degérando calls it a paralogism²³⁴ and he is unpleasantly surprised that the proof has apparently seduced or at least embarrassed ‘quelques bons esprits’. In his short explanation of what is wrong with this proof, he states that real existence or positive reality can of course be conceived in a purely hypothetical manner, but existence thus acquired can never escape the realm of hypothesis. The fact that existence is understood in terms of perfection and that in the imagination every kind of perfection is attributed to some being, does not make an escape or withdrawal from this hypothetical realm any more plausible.

²³² HC II, vol. 2, 164.

²³³ Ibid., 165.

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

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

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

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

²³⁵ HC II, vol. 2, 207-208.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2 Degérando and Laromiguière on innate ideas

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

²³⁸ HC II, vol. 2, 180-181.

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

CSM II, 31-32.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴² Laromiguière, *Leçons*, vol. 2, p. 236.

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

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

L'entendement est dans l'entendement! l'entendement est inné à l'entendement! Quel langage!²⁴³

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

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

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

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 250.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 252.

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

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

Whether or not Laromiguière was historiographically correct to reduce the two different views of innate ideas that we find in Descartes's works to one, the fact remains that it is true that Descartes revised his view on innate ideas. His response to Hobbes²⁴⁶ and his reply to Regius²⁴⁷ in *Notæ in programma* were in fact corrections and clarifications of earlier statements. The problem with the latter text, however, is that Descartes, instead of admitting his 'slips of the pen', flatly denies that he had ever written or taken the view that innate ideas were anything other than the faculty of thinking.²⁴⁸

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁴⁹ Laromiguière, *Leçons*, vol. 2, p. 258.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵² Ibid., p. 271.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 277.

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

7.1 Descartes as the father of reflective science

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

Although in his early works²⁵⁴ Maine de Biran supported sensualism, his major works have a rationalistic character. In what is generally considered to be his main work, *Essai sur les fondements de la psychologie* (ca. 1812), his appreciation of Descartes is quite apparent.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵⁵ EFP, MB VII-1, 81.

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

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

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

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

7.2 Descartes in Maine de Biran's early work

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

²⁵⁶ EP, MB IX, 108.

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

It is not quite clear who Maine de Biran thought had begun the science of human understanding. Although he initially credited Locke with this, just a few pages later he says that it was Bacon who identified the science of the human faculties²⁶³ and that for the most part its extent was developed by Hobbes. Whether it was Locke or Bacon who initiated this science, Maine de Biran certainly did not consider it was Descartes's role at this time. At this stage, he thought that Descartes was entangled in the habits of imagination, and it is hard to imagine that he would later see him as the father of reflective science.

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

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

7.3 Criticism and assessment of the *cogito*

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

²⁶² IHP, MB II, 2.

²⁶³ Maine de Biran takes 'science' here in the sense of physical positive science.

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

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

much more appreciative of Descartes who he now called ‘le créateur de la methode pure de réflexion’. Descartes, he claims in this work, was the first to establish a method that taught us that there is a ‘passage’ from our sentiments²⁶⁷ to the knowledge, or representation, of objective qualities and even to the reality of these objects. This passage, he observed, is ‘very difficult and delicate to cross’. Moreover, he thought it was connected to all the problems with which philosophers in Maine de Biran’s time were concerned. Maine de Biran actually reinstated Descartes with the claim that while people had not seen the significance of this ‘passage’ in Descartes’s own time, now they, or, at least, he, can recognize its significance.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁶⁷ The actual term he uses is ‘sentiment de nos propres modifications’.

²⁶⁸ MDP, MB III, 49.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 335.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

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

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

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

²⁷¹ Ibid., 73-74.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷⁷ EFP, MB VII-2, Appendice XXXIX, p. 517.

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

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

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

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

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

²⁷⁸ EFP, MB VII-1, 117.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.4 Maine de Biran's criticism of sensualism

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

In the *Mémoires* of the Berlin Academy²⁸⁵ of 1804 we read that half of the funds for the prize were provided by a certain M. de Milozewski, an old officer of the infantry in Köpenick, approximately 15 kilometres south-east of Berlin, who had retired and left the Academy 'un fonds inaliénable de mille écus'. It was his wish that the Academy use the fund to propose an additional essay contest in the field of speculative philosophy as well as the regular one held every fourth year. This donation meant that, in the field of philosophy, a prize could be offered every two years and that every four years it would be on the subject of speculative philosophy. The Academy was pleasantly surprised and remarked that donations in the field of speculative philosophy were rare, especially from a former soldier.²⁸⁶

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

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

²⁸² EFP, MB VII-1, 77.

²⁸³ Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

L’Académie a remarqué que dans la recherche de l’origine et de la réalité des connaissances humaines, on négligeait les faits primitifs du sens intime, sur lesquels repose la science des principes, et qui peuvent seuls servir de base au travail de la raison, ou que du moins on ne les avait pas observés, distingués, approfondis avec soin, et qu’autant on se montrait difficile sur les objets de l’expérience, autant on était facile à admettre la certitude de certaines formes de nos connaissances; en conséquence, l’Académie a cru que plus de précision dans l’examen et l’énoncé des faits primitifs, contrubuerait aux progrès de la science. La classe de Philosophie spéculative propose donc à la discussion de l’Europe savante, pour sujet du prix ordinaire²⁸⁸ qu’elle doit adjuger en 1807, la question suivante:

Y a-t-il des apperceptions internes immédiates?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁸⁸ That is, not the one funded by the veteran.

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

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

allow the Academy to print it. ‘Herr Maine Biran, Präfect zu Tarn, hat sich späterhin als Verfasser namhaft gemacht’.²⁹¹

In search of a method to address the questions of the Academy, Maine de Biran doubted whether the experimental method initiated by Bacon would be appropriate. He asked himself whether metaphysics can or should be submitted to experimental science, in which case it has to accept sensorial data from phenomena. In his own words, he asked:

. . . si la métaphysique, considérée comme science des facultés propre au sujet pensant, ne constitue pas une science distincte de celle de l’emploi pratique et surtout de l’objet de [ces] facultés, développées et appliquées aux objets externes, c’est-à-dire distincte de la logique et de la physique, comme de tout système de connaissances que des modernes français peuvent avoir compris, en dernier lieu, sous le titre trop général d’Idéologie, et, dans ce cas, si cette science propre des facultés ou opérations premières de l’intelligence peut ou doit être exclusivement soumise aux procédés des autres sciences expérimentales, et assujetti[e] à prendre, comme elles, ses données premières dans les apparences sensibles d’un monde phénoménal.²⁹²

However, he did not want to rule out the possibility that behind the sensory objects there is a hypersensorial world which is only manifest to a particular inner sense. It is for this reason that he doubted whether Bacon’s method would be appropriate for reaching the extreme limits of a truly first philosophy. As far as the analyses of Locke, Condillac and their disciples were concerned, Maine de Biran did not think that these would lead to the ‘first ring of the chain that frames all knowledge, operations and ideas of human understanding from the beginning’.²⁹³

Maine de Biran’s goal was to establish a science of principles, which turns out to be a description of the ‘faits primitifs’. Why did he want it to be based on primitive facts and not on sensations? His answer would be that sensations, as Locke understood them, enter objective experience as integrated parts of a composition. However, Maine de Biran wanted to start his analysis earlier, namely with the primitive facts. Maine de Biran described these primitive facts as the formal elements by which the correlation between the parts of an experience is determined. The primitive facts imprint the form of a sensorial image onto an experience. We could understand it as the mould which itself is not part of the matter which takes its shape or receives its imprint from it.

Si l’on avait une fois réellement distingué ou circonscrit ces faits primitifs avec une précision suffisante, si l’on était parvenu à les rattache[r] à des signes fixes univoques, en un mot, à déterminer avec certitude le sens propre des terme[s] qui entrent dans l’énoncé du problème, et prépar[er], sinon compléter ainsi sa solution exacte, alors

²⁹¹ *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften in Berlin, 1804-1811, Realschul Buchhandlung, Berlin 1815, p. 8.*

²⁹² AI, MB IV, 8.

²⁹³ See *ibid.*, 8-9.

peut-être se trouverait jugé le procès fait depuis longtemps à la métaphysique.²⁹⁴

With regard to how philosophers have dealt with this issue, Maine de Biran distinguished between two doctrines. The first doctrine concentrates on the interior of the thinking subject and mainly attempts to penetrate through the facts of consciousness. The second is founded on the relations that the passive, that is, strictly sensitive, being maintains with the external objects on which it depends for its affective impressions.

Maine de Biran's aim was to show that the doctrine which is entirely founded on the inner sense is true. However, firstly he wanted to determine the value of the terms within the context of the question proposed by the Academy. One may consider the terms 'apperception', 'perception', 'intuition', 'sensation' as categories, by which he means constructions made purely by the mind in order to classify data.²⁹⁵ However, they can also be seen as primitive facts (realities) given in a world of completely inner phenomena. If we take these terms in the latter sense, we should study and observe them in their native simplicity without transforming, composing or decomposing them like artificial ideas.

How the science of principles is understood depends on which systematic point of view we take: do we take these principles as categories or as primitive facts? In other words, is there an external, which is to say, logical or categorical basis or an inner, real basis of these principles? This means that there are two possibilities:

- 1) we either recognize an immediate inner apperception distinct from intuition or sensation, or
- 2) we deny that there is a real foundation of intuition and sensation, and only admit these principles as categories reason establishes in order to co-ordinate the system of various ideas.

Maine de Biran chooses the first possibility – we will now explain why. As we said in the previous section, Maine de Biran thinks that the *cogito, ergo sum* only logically expresses the connection between thinking and existing. We can explain this in the context of the important distinction he makes between logical and reflective abstraction in *De l'aperception immédiate*. For an explanation of the concept of abstraction, Maine de Biran refers to Kant's thesis *De mundi sensibilis atque intelligibilis forma et principiis* (1770). As we saw earlier, the science of principles should be composed of the so-called 'faits primitifs'. When asked whether they are to be considered as abstractions, Maine de Biran refers to Kant's distinction between 'abstracting', which Kant found to be more proper, and 'abstract'. By 'abstracting' he means that 'when we consider a concept we do not take into account anything else no matter how it may be connected to it'. By 'abstract' he means that the notion 'is given *in concreto* in such a way that it is separated from that to which it is conjoined'. At first consideration this may sound

²⁹⁴ Ibid., 9.

²⁹⁵ See *ibid.*, 11: 'purs ouvrages de l'entendement travaillant à classer les matériaux qu'il s'est donnés'.

like scholastic pedantry, but the application to pure and empirical concepts is important.

That is why the intellectual concept (*conceptus intellectualis/Verstandesbegriff*) abstracts from all sensorial things and is not abstracted from them, and perhaps one should call it more rightly abstracting (*abstrahens/abstrahierend*) than abstract (*abstractus/abstrakt*). Therefore, it is wiser to call the intellectual concepts ‘pure ideas’ (*ideae purae/reine Vorstellungen*) and the concepts that are only given empirically ‘abstract’.²⁹⁶

Maine de Biran adopts this distinction and applies it to the ‘faits primitifs’ and to the way in which they manifest themselves to our inner sense. The self is not abstracted from sensations, which would mean that there would be something universal in them, but the self abstracts itself, or separates itself, from material impressions and the sensory objects by which they are caused. The self constituted in this way, in the inner and immediate apperception, can truly be said to be ‘*abstrahens*’ (or *se abstrahens*) rather than ‘*abstractus*’.²⁹⁷

Maine de Biran reproaches metaphysicians for talking about general ideas such as substance, existence and unity as if they were already structured in categories. They stop at this point rather than investigating the source of these ideas. For Maine de Biran, it is precisely this source that provides these ideas with their natural basis, namely the inner sense, and it therefore gives them the character of evidence and necessity which is real (and not virtual). The signs which are structured into categories (Maine de Biran also calls them ‘*idées mères*’) are purely logical in their combinations or in the continuous application of them by the mind. The only certainty Maine de Biran ascribes to logical abstractions is that involved in the quiescence of the mind when it clearly perceives that its own conventions are fulfilled by the use of the signs, of which it had determined the value without crossing the boundary of its own ideas.

At this point we can say something more about the distinction between logical and reflective abstractions. According to Maine de Biran, reflective abstractions have the character of immediate evidence, which he thought was the only real source of all evidence. For him, reflective abstractions were the way to the primitive fact. He considered them to be purified, by which he meant that they have freed themselves from the material compounds with which they were intimately associated.

Logical abstractions, on the other hand, are ‘deprived of the light that is proper to the mind’. As they are not ‘purified’, they are prone to deception by an imagination which applies them indiscriminately. Maine de Biran criticizes all philosophers who:

²⁹⁶ *De mundi*, AA II, §6 ‘Hinc conceptus intellectualis abstrahit ab omni sensitivo, non abstrahitur a sensitivis et forsitan rectius diceretur abstrahens quam abstractus. Quare intellectuales consultius est Ideas puras, qui autem empirice tantum dantur conceptus, abstractos nominare.’

²⁹⁷ AI, MB IV, 22.

. . . se sont donc laissés entraîner au torrent des habitudes de l'imagination . . . ramenant tous les éléments de la science à des abstractions logiques ou physiques, ont cru pouvoir faire ressortir les principes de nos connaissances d'une décomposition ou résolution artificielle des impressions ou des images sensibles donné[e]s par l'expérience, en croyant aussi pouvoir, et devoir même, analyser, décomposer les principes réels.²⁹⁸

When the means of a method can only be derived from the external senses and when the exclusive object of this method consists of phenomena that are outside the self, the method cannot have any grasp of the primitive facts, because they can only be grasped by the inner sense. The methods that Maine de Biran points to here, comprise all the empirical methods from Condillac onwards. He also criticizes the use of analogy as the means by which these methods attempted to grasp the primitive facts. He suggests that once we have taken an external point of view it is not possible to return to the inner domain in which the thinking being attends to its own operations. He therefore concludes that the classifications and laws produced by the natural sciences through the observation of facts, are of no use in the knowledge of the employment of the primitive fact, or in its immediately derived truths occurring in sensation (*vérités de sentiment*).²⁹⁹

Another problem for Maine de Biran was the use of the principle of causality in the experimental method. He thought that it rendered the experimental method useless for a true science of principles. The objects of the physical sciences are sensible phenomena that are already isolated. These phenomena are analysed, compared with each other, and classified according to the order of their successions or analogies, which is an abstraction of the productive real cause. However, for Maine de Biran the proper and necessary idea which corresponds to this cause cannot be grasped by the senses or by imagination. It does not enter into the calculation of experience, remaining hidden under the sensorial form of the effect.

In contrast to the objects of physical science, the objects of reflective science are the acts and conditions of the thinking subject which are themselves given as facts of the inner sense. In Maine de Biran's opinion, these acts cannot be comprehended apart from the inner sentiment (*sentiment intime*) of its productive cause while this is being generated. The reason for this is that this cause is nothing other than the self, or subject, which only exists for itself in so far as it knows itself, and it only knows itself in so far as it acts.³⁰⁰ For Maine de Biran this is a truth or fact of the inner sense which does not require a proof. The following quote explains how the subject, which manifests itself in an active mode, is its own cause.

Or, je dis que le sentiment intime de la cause ou force productive du mouvement – qui est le *moi* même, identifié avec son effort – et la sensation particulière (*sui generis*) qui correspond, dans l'ordre naturel, à

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 24.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 25.

³⁰⁰ Something can be said in favour of a comparison with Fichte's 'Tathandlung'. Maine de Biran was acquainted with Fichte's system and also that of Schelling and Bouterwek, as we also saw in EFP, by means of Degérando's HC II, vol. 4 p. 342 ff.

la contraction de l'organe musculaire peuvent être considérés comme deux éléments d'un mode total, où la cause et l'effet (*l'effort aperçu* et la contraction sentie en *résultat*) sont liés l'un à l'autre, dans la même conscience, d'une manière si indivisible et sous un rapport de causalité si nécessaire qu'on ne saurait absolument faire abstraction de la force [ou *cause*], sans changer ou dénaturer même entièrement l'idée de son effet. Et vraiment, la sensation musculaire, cessant d'être accompagnée d'efforts ou causée par le vouloir (*moi*), ne serait plus alors qu'une affection purement organique, ou demeurerait obscure et inaperçue, comme ces mouvements vitaux qui s'accomplissent dans l'intérieur du corps, hors des limites du vouloir et, par suite, de *l'aperception* qui en dépend (comme nous le verrons dans la suite), ou enfin, ne serait plus qu'une impression complètement passive, comme le sont les battements du cœur ou les mouvements convulsifs, que nous sentons sans les produire.³⁰¹

Maine de Biran's point is that, in the analysis of inner phenomena, the elimination of the cause is not permitted, and is in fact impossible. This cause has the same evidence as a fact of sensation, because it is of the same kind as its effect. The effect in its turn could only become perception in and through this cause. The conclusion Maine de Biran draws with regard to the science of principles is that it is no longer permitted to hide the real name of the cause under that of the generated effect. In order to determine the idea that corresponds to the cause, to establish the precise concept and to reduce it to its primal, individual and real source, it does not suffice to just give it a name.

7.5 Maine de Biran's view of innate ideas

In his discussion of the primary condition of the origin of intelligence, Maine de Biran comes to the issue of innate ideas. In *Mémoire sur la décomposition de la pensée* he criticized Ancillon and Degérando by saying that in their research into the origin and basis of intelligence they had neglected to find out whether there is or is not a primary condition of existence.³⁰² They began their research by explaining how an external object, to which certain modifications relate as qualities, can be constituted as the self. For Maine de Biran, however, this was not a sufficient basis for research into the roots of an apperceptive faculty. Along with philosophers who rely on experience, philosophers who assumed a system of innate ideas have presupposed 'un moi qui existe intérieurement ou pour lui-même' for the sole reason that from the start there is some proven affection in the living organism.

The error that Maine de Biran considered supporters of the theory of innate ideas to have made, was that they admitted personal knowledge only within the defined limits of the relation between the 'I' and the object. By doing so, they considered the 'fait primitif' of consciousness to be something that consists of precisely this relation. To illustrate his view of innate ideas, we turn to his

³⁰¹ AI, MB IV, 26-27.

³⁰² Cf. MDP, MB III, 220 ff.

discussion of the metaphysical systems of Descartes and Leibniz, which we find in *De l'aperception immédiate*.

The advantage of the abstract metaphysical systems, he thought, was that they demonstrated the goal of the science of principles. However, the problem was that they exceeded this goal. The main systems in metaphysics tried to penetrate into the essence of the faculties of the soul. The defect in the Cartesian system, Maine de Biran claimed, was that it did not distinguish the faculties from their corresponding ideas.

Il les considère en cette dernière qualité, sous le titre d'idées innées, comme infuses dans l'âme humaine au moment de sa création, inséparables d'elle, formant ses attributs essentiels ou son essence même, indépendamment de son union avec le corps, et, par suite, de tout commerce avec une nature matérielle.³⁰³

Descartes placed inner and formal thinking beyond matter and did not believe that it could be separated from the soul because an attribute cannot be separated from the substance in which and by which it is understood. As a result, he did not need to attribute any faculty to this soul which was not already similar to a positive innate idea. Maine de Biran therefore concluded that these innate ideas are received by the soul in the same way that it has received its existence, namely without any active force or effective quality. The problem in the Cartesian 'psychology', according to Maine de Biran, is that the soul can in no case contribute to its own production.³⁰⁴ He therefore favours Leibniz, according to whom innate dispositions do not entirely consist of receptive capacities. The human soul – which Maine de Biran calls 'monade par excellence' – in Leibniz' system is essentially active and only its products alone can effectuate clear representations, true perceptions or, as Locke puts it, ideas of sensation.

Maine de Biran places Kant between these two positions. The pure intuitions (*reine Anschauungsformen*) and pure concepts of the mind (*reine Verstandesbegriffe*)³⁰⁵ seem to dwell in the thinking subject as essential attributes of a passive substance. In their pre-existence, Maine de Biran thinks that they greatly resemble the innate ideas of Descartes. However, there is one important difference: Kant only attributes the value of knowledge to these pre-existing forms, in so far as they are united with some sort of matter provided by sensorial objects. With regard to this, Kant is closer to Leibniz. In Part V we will return to the question of whether Kant admits innate ideas or principles or not.

Maine de Biran's criticism of the systems of Descartes and Leibniz³⁰⁶ is that both are preoccupied with certain 'logical' results. What he finds lacking in them is

³⁰³ AI, MB IV, 46.

³⁰⁴ Cf. AI, MB IV, 48. The passages Maine de Biran aims at are *Principes* I, AT IX-2, 48 and *Obj.* III, AT IX-1, 147.

³⁰⁵ Maine de Biran calls them 'les formes qu'il [Kant] attribue au sujet pensant hors de l'expérience et antérieurement à toute impression sensible', AI 49. Maine de Biran did not read German and based his reading of Kant on Kinker's *Essai d'un exposition succincte de la Critique de la Raison Pure* (1801) and Villers' *Philosophie de Kant ou principes fondamentaux de la philosophie transcendante* (1801) as Radrizzani points out in AI, MB IV, 218n.

³⁰⁶ It is not clear whether Kant's system is also meant here.

that they do not take into account the real force that can formulate or transform sensation. They both equally confuse the workman with his work; and the work with the matter employed in the work. They rob the first of its force, the second of its reality. It seems that the thinking which produces the result that Maine de Biran calls 'logical' has a certain negative connotation and may be similar to the thinking that Kant refers to as the 'dogmatic' approach to metaphysics.

Now that we know the context in which Maine de Biran places the theory of innate ideas, let us focus on Maine de Biran's stance towards this issue. In his *Commentaire sur les Méditations métaphysiques de Descartes* (ca. 1813) Maine de Biran claims that the majority of the opponents of the system of innate ideas have taken the wrong sense of the word 'idea'. He distinguishes two definitions of idea: in the first sense an idea is the virtual state of an external object in our mind. In the second sense an idea is taken to be a notion that our mind produces by its own action or by reflection upon itself without the cooperation of any external object, cause or other influence.

According to Maine de Biran, it is in this second sense of 'idea' that we have to understand 'innate idea'. He therefore thinks that philosophers who claimed that we have innate ideas have never considered that these were actual, effective ideas representing external objects. He further defends them by saying that they have always neatly distinguished between ideas that are the pure result of the mind's own activity and those that depend on an outside influence. According to him they called the former 'innate' in the sense that the natural activity of the mind suffices for them to be produced.

Et c'est ainsi que le système entier des idées distinguées par Locke sous le titre d'*idées simples de la réflexion* est dit *inné* dans l'acception de Descartes; c'est ainsi qu'avant tout, l'idée ou le sentiment du *moi* est inné, et que l'idée d'un Dieu, d'une cause suprême ou d'une force intelligente qui meut l'univers, peut aussi être dite innée, en tant que pour former cette idée nous prenons un modèle dans notre force, notre causalité, notre intelligence propres, transportées avec une extension illimitée aux phénomènes de la nature.³⁰⁷

Descartes considered the ideas of God and that of the self to be innate, and Maine de Biran thinks we should take this to refer to the virtual sense of innate. Surely, we have an actual idea or sensation of the self before we form the idea of an infinitely perfect being, however, we can only come to such a notion in so far as the reflection we make on our own powers provides us with this notion.

Maine de Biran admits that there is a sense, though, in which we can actually conceive of the idea of the infinite or God present in our soul before conceiving the idea of the finite or the self. This is so when we conceive of the virtual ideas that direct and determine us, without clearly and distinctly knowing them. In this case we have a vague idea, which according to Maine de Biran is connected with doubt and desire. When we doubt, we have a vague desire and make some effort to find truth. We have then, within ourselves, the idea of some kind of need; something that we lack, namely, a confused yet determined idea of a truth. However, he thinks

³⁰⁷ *Notes sur les Méditations de Descartes* [1813 ?], CM17, MB XI-1, 91.

that this vague and instinctive feeling should not be called an 'idea'. We could understand these last remarks as a criticism of a very important element of the Cartesian system, the clear and distinct idea of God,³⁰⁸ which is deduced from this vague feeling.

³⁰⁸ Cf. *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 46-47; *Med.* III (F) AT IX-1, 36 ; CSM II, 31-32

8 DESCARTES BETWEEN EMPIRE AND RESTORATION: ROYER-COLLARD

Pierre-Paul Royer-Collard (1763-1845) was the most important inspirational force for Cousin, who thanked him for rehabilitating Descartes, as we will see in the next chapter. However, Royer-Collard actually preferred Bacon's method and regretted that it had not been adopted by Descartes. Another interesting feature of his philosophical activities is that he introduced the Scottish School to France, especially the philosophy of Thomas Reid. Due to his political activities he suspended his dialogue with the Scots, leaving this to his pupil Cousin. His philosophical position can be briefly described as being opposed to the sensationalism of Condillac.

Although he did not produce any substantial philosophical works, he has left us his inaugural lecture *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du Cours de l'histoire de la philosophie, le 4 décembre 1811*. The date is especially memorable, as the day was filled with preparations for war, being the eve of the largest invasion of the modern world, prior to the world wars. In respect of the text, it might be argued that it was so influential that it represents French academic philosophy in the nineteenth century.

8.1 Royer-Collard's discourse of 4 December 1811

In this discourse Royer-Collard outlined his philosophical position, discussing what philosophy was and what it should do. His point of departure was a radical distinction between the spiritual and the corporeal domains. Situated between these two domains was the faculty of imagination which was found to have the audacious tendency to exceed the limits of both, without being able to accomplish this. However, the status Royer-Collard attributed to imagination becomes less clear when he says that there are no intermediary links between mind (*esprit*) and matter. Nevertheless, he remarked:

Cependant il n'y a point de véritable analogie entre les lois de la pensée et celles de la matière; les similitudes que l'imagination se plaît à créer charment l'esprit dans les ouvrages du poète et de l'orateur; mais, transportées dans la langue philosophique, elles y sont une continuelle erreur.³⁰⁹

Royer-Collard defines philosophy as the research into the laws that govern the succession of phenomena in both the moral and physical order. He finds that it is a natural impulse of the human mind to interpret the events it observes. The proper way of doing this, he continues, is by establishing the causes of events. In making this judgement, reason uses two principles: causality and induction. This brings us to his view of Bacon, whose greatness, he thought, along with Newton's, consisted in introducing the maxim of 'bon sens' into philosophy. This notion is equivalent to the concept of induction.

³⁰⁹ Disc. 1811, in Royer-Collard, *Les fragments philosophiques*, p. 7.

Les faits seuls expliquent les faits: assigner la cause d'un fait, ou d'une classe entière de faits semblables, c'est donc indiquer le fait, qui les précède constamment et dont ils dépendent. Celui-ci se résout à son tour dans un fait plus général encore, et l'interprétation n'est épuisée que quand elle a rencontré le fait primitif et insoluble, qui est une loi de la nature et la limite de notre analyse.³¹⁰

Royer-Collard goes further, however, and claims that in the chain of causes there is a 'first cause' which is free from necessity and acts only through the free decisions of its sovereign will. He explains that this first cause is the sole reason of all things, because it is effective by itself. Although the phenomena of thinking and the physical world are entirely distinct, it is through a unitary reason that the same principles govern natural philosophy and the philosophy of mind.

Notwithstanding the use of the same principles, Royer-Collard is forced to conclude that the methods derived from them gave natural philosophy a certain foundation and enriched it with many discoveries, whereas the philosophy of mind was left in such a state of imperfection that one could even doubt its scientific status. He explained the inequality of the two, firstly, by saying that the strict procedures of philosophical investigation were not adequately observed in the study of intellectual phenomena. Secondly, he found that the method of induction, when applied to the mind, had as yet no fixed rules. The most important reason, however, is that the study of intellectual phenomena is full of obscurities and difficulties from which natural philosophy is exempt.

Unlike the determined and isolated objects studied in physics, the domain of the mind is immense. Also, as human beings are morally and socially active, the mind becomes even harder to analyse. Another complication observed by Royer-Collard is that the constitution of human beings cannot be separated from the faculties which are distinguished by the various philosophical methods. He concludes that the activities of our faculties multiply and complicate intellectual phenomena to an infinite degree, yet we are required to understand them all. The instrument required to grasp the principles hidden in the infinity of these phenomena is reflection. To Royer-Collard, the use of this instrument is not straightforward, he even claims that the use of reflection is an act of violence against nature and our most inveterate habits.

La réflexion est l'art de distribuer les forces de l'esprit de telle sorte qu'il agisse et soit en même temps spectateur de son action; elle divise l'attention sans l'affaiblir et lui imprime à la fois des directions qui semblent contraires.³¹¹

It is obvious that Royer-Collard thought that the mysteries of thinking were more difficult to penetrate than those of nature. One, perhaps impossible, obstacle for the philosopher to overcome was found to be the falsehood inherent in language. He considers that thought occurs as words, and that humanity began the development of thinking by applying names to the objects external to the mind. Gradually, reflection developed as human beings began to ask questions of themselves.

³¹⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 6.

However, as reflection is weak and uncertain, it searches for analogous characteristics in objects outside itself and uses these to explain the mind. In so doing, it borrows its laws from the material world and its words from common language. As a result, the language of philosophy is completely figurative and the terms philosophy uses retain the traces of their origin. The point is, however, that there is no real analogy between the laws of thinking and those of matter. The attempts by the imagination to create similitudes may very well be charming to a poetic mind, but their use in philosophy has led to error and absurdity.

The goal of every philosophical system, Royer-Collard states, is to discover the intellectual causes, which he also calls the primitive facts, that are the laws of the mind. His opinion is that a system is exact when these causes are indubitable facts which also contain the synthetic explication of more complicated phenomena. The system remains exact, but is incomplete, when it derives these causes. For Royer-Collard, when the existence of the causes is not demonstrated or when they do not determine all the effects that are ascribed to them, a system is inadmissible.

Royer-Collard criticizes ancient and modern philosophy from this point of view. He finds that ancient philosophy was wrong to seek the causes for mental events in material analogies. By so doing it filled intelligence with chimera. Although modern philosophy, since Descartes, had more exact methods and based most of its systems on certain facts, Royer-Collard thought its plan of reducing the complexity of human beings to a single, unique fact was far too ambitious. To achieve this reduction, modern philosophy had to exaggerate the power of the causes and limit the rigor of its explication of phenomena that are beyond reach. Notwithstanding this criticism, Royer-Collard praises Descartes, as the following quote illustrates.

Il suffit sans doute à la gloire de la nation française qu'on ait pu dire avec vérité que toute la philosophie n'est que l'esprit de Descartes. En effet, cet esprit devant lequel ont fui les ténèbres du péripatétisme, devant lequel est tombée la toute-puissance des mots, qui a soumis à jamais l'autorité à la raison, fut une création bien plus importante que ne peut l'être aucune théorie particulière.

La révolution qu'il a opérée, et qui ne périra point, est peut-être le service le plus éminent qui ait été rendu à l'esprit humain. Descartes a renouvelé tous les principes de la philosophie; il en a banni sans retour le raisonnement analogique des anciens; il a séparé pour la première fois les phénomènes intellectuels des phénomènes sensibles.³¹²

It is mysterious that Royer-Collard claims that every philosophy is merely a development of the spirit of Descartes, while at the same time he apparently propagates a common sense philosophy. It is plausible, however, to place these somewhat patriotic remarks in the light of his political position and assume that he was trying to advance the reputation of his country. In the next chapter, where we shall deal with Cousin, we will pay special attention to the role patriotism played in the revaluation of Descartes in France.

³¹² Ibid., p. 8.

Although France may well be proud of Descartes, Royer-Collard regrets that Descartes did not realize that the true instrument of discovery had already been found by Bacon. Instead of gradually ascending to the causes through the patient observation of effects, Descartes tried to seize knowledge of causes through thinking alone. According to Royer-Collard, he assessed the course of supreme wisdom with the concepts of human reason. He finds it problematic that Descartes simply supposed that in both the intellectual world and in the sensorial world one single cause could provide the explanation for the whole series of phenomena.

Although Royer-Collard thought that the Cartesian attempt to raise the entire edifice of science onto the unique basis of pure thinking had failed, he did not automatically agree with sensualism. He thought that the French disciples of Locke, who he thought had initially imitated Descartes but had later diverged from him, were wrong as well. Following the Cartesian example, which proposes to extract all phenomena of thinking from one single fact, they also did not ascend to this fact by analysis, but descended from it by synthesis. The problem, for Royer-Collard, is that they assumed an image of humanity instead of developing one through analysis. In short, for Royer-Collard, sensation is not adequate to explain every region of intelligence and sentiment. Although sensation precedes the exercise of faculties, this does not mean that the faculties are any less original or that they are not endowed with their own energy. Sensation by itself does not sense, perceive or judge, nor can morals be based entirely on sensation.

Royer-Collard reproached sensualists for having ruled out reason. He thought that hypothesising was not a philosophical method, as beings are self-identical and should not be the product of imagination. The unity which is given to all beings by divine wisdom can only be discovered by analysis.³¹³ He proposes that we should study the mind according to Bacon's plan which suggests that the mind contains two distinct parts: the facts, and induction, which generalizes these facts. In the history of philosophy, the facts are doctrines and it is to these doctrines themselves that we need to apply induction to assess their worth. It is in this light that we should read his following remark on the historiography of philosophy.

Les travaux d'un Brucker, d'un Tiedemann, d'un Buhle, méritent beaucoup de reconnaissance; ils ont répandu une vive lumière sur les ténèbres de l'antiquité et du moyen-âge; mais ils ne nous dispensent pas de nous y engager nous-mêmes et de reconnaître les signaux que ces savants hommes y ont élevés. – Où finit la critique philosophique, l'analyse commence.³¹⁴

Royer-Collard tried to explain the history of humanity on the basis of the development of reason: 'le sens commun, la raison, instruite par l'expérience'. The sciences, the arts, the methods, and all truths necessary for the happiness of humanity are a result of the legitimate exercise of the faculties. In order to establish the results of the history of philosophy he proposes to approach and compare the systems of philosophy analogously. Therefore he pleads for a historiographical

³¹³ It is not surprising that under Royer-Collard's supervision Cousin wrote his thesis entitled *De methodo sive analysi* (1813).

³¹⁴ Disc. 1811, p. 11.

method that founds the order of the systems on the division of the faculties of the mind. According to Royer-Collard, it would save us much repetition and lengthy discourse if the exposition of all types of systems was enlightened by a concise theory of the faculty to which it belonged. As such, the history of philosophy would be a philosophy in itself, in which historical analysis plays an important role.³¹⁵

8.2 Innate ideas in Royer-Collard's common sense philosophy

In his *Fragments historiques*,³¹⁶ Royer-Collard gave an exposition of the theory of ideas in the light of his claim that modern philosophy is sceptical about the existence of the external world. The issue of innate ideas arises within this theory of ideas. However, to avoid any misconception, it should be mentioned beforehand that Royer-Collard did not think that there are ideas in the sense held by Locke and Descartes at all, let alone that there were innate ideas. In the following we will explain why he thought that this was the case.

To Royer-Collard, most philosophers have made two errors. Firstly, they invented entities which were supposed to represent bodies and called them 'ideas'. Secondly, they reduced all cognitive and perceptive faculties to consciousness. In the following, we will concentrate on what he considered to be Descartes's contribution to these errors, but firstly we will focus on his explanation of why so many philosophers attacked the universal belief in the external world.

Royer-Collard defined sensation as a change of state entailing an inner modification, and perception as the knowledge of an external object. Starting from a strict distinction between sensation and perception, Royer-Collard criticized what he calls the 'hypothesis of ideas' which according to him was a result of the human mind's pretension to explain everything. He reproached philosophers who made a habit of transposing the laws of physics into the intellectual world. When a certain perception follows a certain sensation, we should not assume a causal connection between them. For Royer-Collard, there is only a relation of succession.

Nous percevons les objets, parce que nous avons reçu la faculté de percevoir, non parce qu'ils agissent sur nos organes. Nous ne percevons rien qui n'agisse sur nos organes, parce que notre faculté de percevoir est limité par certaines lois adaptés au rang que nous occupons dans l'univers. La perception est donc un mystère qui suffirait pour nous convaincre que l'homme se connaît bien peu lui-même, et que la nature de sa constitution intellectuelle lui est impénétrable.³¹⁷

According to Royer-Collard there is no necessary connection between the impressions resulting from perception that we obtain from external objects, and knowledge of these objects. In other words, there is no necessary connection between matter and movement on the one hand and thinking on the other. He considered that all theories of perception rely on the assumption that a fact has

³¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 13.

³¹⁶ In Royer-Collard, *Les Fragments philosophiques*, p. 195 ff.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

been accounted for when it is subsumed under a law of impulse. Furthermore, philosophers had always seen the transfer of motion by impact as the only phenomenon which needed no explanation. Royer-Collard, on the other hand, thought that if we attempt to subsume an impression under a perception, we must deal with the contact between the mind and the object in order to prove that in the perception, the object makes an impression on the mind. The problem philosophers now faced was to establish whether the mind finds the object or the object finds the mind.

Comment donc le contact s'opérera-t-il? A défaut d'un contact immédiat, qui eût produit la connaissance immédiate, on se contentera d'un contact médiat, qui ne produira qu'une connaissance médiante. La communication entre l'esprit et l'objet se fera par une image, une représentation, une espèce, une forme, une idée: tous ces termes sont synonymes. Il émane donc, à chaque instant, de tous les objets, des images qui arrivent jusqu'à l'esprit et qui mettent en contact, sinon avec l'objet lui-même, du moins avec quelque chose qui lui ressemble. C'est la théorie des espèces sensibles, inventée dans la philosophie ancienne, perfectionnée par les scolastiques et conservée en grande partie par les philosophes modernes; c'est, en un mot, l'origine de l'hypothèse des idées.³¹⁸

For modern philosophers, a theory of the emanation of ideas was inadmissible, but at the same time they had to account for the resemblance between the object and the idea. Their solution was to suppose that either impressions produced by the brain are themselves images of the object or that impressions are formed in the mind from these images. This means that ideas are either in the brain or in the mind. However, in Royer-Collard's opinion, the philosophical systems of Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke and Condillac had not succeeded in refuting the theory of the emanation of ideas.

C'est qu'il est extrêmement difficile de séparer la *présence des images dans l'esprit*, de l'*introduction des images par le canal des sens*. La philosophie ancienne en faisait une seule et même hypothèse; mais la philosophie moderne ayant maintenu la présence des images dans l'esprit, en même temps qu'elle combattait l'émission et l'introduction des espèces par les sens, il est résulté de cette mutilation de l'hypothèse péripatéticienne que la partie conservée et la partie séparée se rapellent sans cesse et font effort pour se rejoindre.³¹⁹

Royer-Collard found the term 'idea', in philosophical language, to be a pure hypothesis because it refers to an object represented in the mind or brain by some sort of image which is the only object that the mind contemplates. In his opinion, 'idea' taken in this sense, has no more authority for science than poetry has, because it is not given in any observation, but is arrived at by reasoning: 'elle n'est pas une vérité de fait, mais une vérité de déduction'. The philosophical hypothesis of ideas also consists in an assessment of their representative quality. Royer-

³¹⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 204.

Collard therefore makes the very strong demand that ideas are to be understood as images which perfectly resemble the things that they represent.

Il faut donc, pour sauver l'hypothèse, rejeter les raffinements par lesquels Malebranche a spiritualisé les idées, et si on veut les maintenir dans l'emploi qui leur a été assigné et pour lequel seules elles ont été créées, il faut leur restituer la nature corporelle que Descartes leur avait attribuée, *opus est species sit verum corpus*, et les concevoir à l'exemple de Locke et de tant d'autres, comme des traces ou des impressions dans le cerveau.³²⁰

Royer-Collard noticed that there were three underlying suppositions concerning ideas which are highly questionable: firstly, that the mind is in the brain; secondly, that images of all sensory objects are formed in the brain; and thirdly, that the mind perceives them there immediately, and only through them perceives the objects that they represent.

Concerning the first supposition, Royer-Collard did not see how it could serve as a basis for a system. To claim that the mind has a place in the brain raises more problems than it solves. To the second supposition, he objected that it is impossible to prove that there are images of sensory objects in the brain, let alone how they are produced. What would an image of warmth or cold look like? The third supposition, that the mind only perceives images of objects in the brain and never the objects themselves, Royer-Collard found to be as questionable as the existence of images. The objects of our perceptions cannot be in the brain but must be outside us, otherwise our faculties would be deceiving us. According to him, we do not perceive images in the brain, we do not even perceive the brain. In fact, we would not even know that we had a brain, if we had not been taught this by anatomy.

Royer-Collard concluded that the assumptions concerning the nature of ideas originated in the belief that the object has to be present to the mind in order for it to be perceived. The means of confronting the mind with the object, namely by comparing it with an image, originates in the sense of vision.

Si le genre humain était aveugle-né, sa condition dans l'univers serait bien au-dessous de ce qu'elle est: mais sa métaphysique serait bien plus saine. Effacez des livres des philosophes toutes les métaphores empruntées des phénomènes de la vision, vous changerez la face de la philosophie moderne.³²¹

The question of innate ideas, Royer-Collard thought, is thereby also solved. There are no ideas in the sense that Locke and Descartes had taken there to be, so there are no innate ideas. The entire enterprise of the origin of ideas can be reduced to the search for the events that give rise to the simple notions by which the nature of all our thoughts can be determined. The result of these investigations will decide whether or not all notions are derived from the exercise of the senses. However, observation is the only guide that can be followed in this research.

³²⁰ Ibid., p. 206.

³²¹ Ibid., p. 209.

Unfortunately Royer-Collard did not propose an answer or a solution to the problem, he merely wanted to point to the obstacles facing the development of these hypotheses. He claimed that the philosophical notion of ideas leads to scepticism and thought that the history of philosophy supported this claim. The philosophy of mind is a science of facts. If we introduced some arbitrary hypothesis as Descartes, Malebranche, Locke and Berkeley had done, instead of observing the facts, we can only be led into error and contradiction.

Although it is questionable whether we can actually speak of a revaluation or rehabilitation of Descartes in the thought of Royer-Collard, it was Cousin who expressly claimed this. In the following chapter we shall try to determine why Cousin thought Descartes should be rehabilitated.

9 *POUR DIEU ET LA PATRIE:*
COUSIN'S APPROPRIATION OF DESCARTES

This final section shows how and why Descartes was reinstated, re-evaluated or, perhaps, appropriated in Victor Cousin's history of philosophy. There are philosophical, political and patriotic reasons why Cousin rehabilitated Descartes.

Cousin named Descartes the father of modern philosophy because he had found that reflection was the only instrument of philosophy. Cousin rejected sensualism and, within his eclectic philosophy, found a psychological foundation of philosophy in Descartes's reflective method, based in the *cogito*. As eclecticism is based on a profound knowledge of the history of philosophy, Cousin's philosophy can be said to be as historiographical as it is systematical. He uses eclecticism as an instrument to extract the useful aspects of philosophical systems, for example, a theory of self-consciousness.

As to political theory, Descartes is regarded as the father of constitutional monarchy, the system which formed the basis of Cousin's own political conviction. Descartes was seen to be a sensible, safe political guide, who, according to Cousin, did not rebel against authority, but recognized the evident necessity of religion and state. Descartes, he said, submitted to these authorities within the limits of reason, a basis for political action which separates modern time from the Middle Ages. For Cousin this has led 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté, constitutionnelle' as far from servility as it has led the mind to subordination.³²² Again he uses eclecticism, but in this case to join philosophy with politics.

Finally, Cousin stresses Descartes's 'profoundly French' character. Possibly as a result of mixing philosophy with politics, Cousin establishes patriotic reasons for reinstating Descartes into French philosophy. His anti-sensualism combined with what he learned from Hegel's concept of objective reason, stole the ultramontanist's thunder.³²³ France was in need of a national hero and Cousin presented it with Descartes, in an attempt to give French philosophy a sound historical basis. Although Cousin did not consider his view of Descartes to be patriotic,³²⁴ we will show that this really was the case.

9.1 Cousin's position in his early work

Although in his first philosophical period Cousin was, curiously enough, completely in line with Condillac,³²⁵ he later became a fervent enemy of sensualism. In his later work, he called it a 'déplorable philosophie' and said that he had often pointed out the root of the 'maux de la patrie'.³²⁶ We will now briefly outline his initial position.

³²² Cf. *Hist. gén.*, p. 373.

³²³ Cf. Windelband, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1935), p. 549.

³²⁴ Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* [1853], p. 2.

³²⁵ His thesis in Latin, *De Methodo sive de Analyti* [1813] is proof of this. In his opening discourse of December 7, 1815, he wanted to show that Condillac was on the same path as Descartes but had gone further; see Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 10.

³²⁶ See Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. ix.

By the time of his *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du cours de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne* which he delivered on December 7, 1815, Cousin was barely twenty-four years old. Because it was not possible to have a thorough understanding of all the philosophical systems in the history of philosophy, he proposed to focus on just one question. The most important question, which Cousin thought had divided philosophers and contributed to the formation of different schools, was the question of external perception. It concerns the knowledge that we have, or think we have, of the existence of a world outside consciousness.

Cousin agreed with Royer-Collard that the question of whether we can legitimately believe that there is an external world had occupied modern philosophy since the seventeenth century. In this context he found that modern philosophy, as 'fille de Descartes et mère de Hume', did not believe, or did not have the right to believe, in the existence of an external world.³²⁷ Although this means that he finds that Descartes qualifies as the father of modern philosophy, the context in which he claims this is not very flattering to Descartes. According to Cousin, there is an 'extravagance' to his thought which stems from the pretension to explain everything, which is pushed to the point of madness. In his opinion, this extremity is reached when everything is considered to be explainable using one single principle, namely that of consciousness.

C'est Descartes qui imprima à la philosophie moderne ce caractère systématique et audacieux, et qui la jeta d'abord dans une direction sceptique, en attribuant à la conscience l'autorité suprême.³²⁸

Clearly, Cousin did not rehabilitate Descartes into French philosophy at all at the beginning of his teaching, as he later claimed.³²⁹ In fact, he even stated that Descartes had given philosophy a sceptical direction and as with Royer-Collard, Cousin considered scepticism to be one of the gravest dangers for philosophy. Unlike Royer-Collard, however, Cousin thought that Descartes had prepared the way for Hume.

In his early years Cousin preferred Condillac to Descartes. Condillac, he thought, in going further along the path that Descartes had chosen, had simplified the Cartesian system. Descartes needed consciousness, aided by reason, in order to define humanity. In other words, he needed to discover both an elemental aspect and an instrumental aspect of human beings. Cousin thought that this detracted from the unity of humanity, and it is for this reason that he favoured Condillac, who he considered to have discovered a more perfect unity by combining the elemental and the instrumental into one single principle.

³²⁷ Another example of an early father metaphor, though generically deduced.

³²⁸ Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, pp. 9-10.

³²⁹ In the last footnote to his lesson 'Vrai sens de l'enthymème cartésien', which was added in the second or third edition, Cousin proudly claims that from the beginning of his teaching he had not rehabilitated the entire system of Descartes, but its principle alone, which was underestimated by both adherents and adversaries. This is not true, as is shown in his opening discourse. In retrospect, he lessens the claims about the discourse by saying that he developed and clarified these first views in 1819 and 1820 and made a new and complete edition of 'ce père de la vraie philosophie française' in 1824.

La sensation de Condillac comprend dans son vaste sein tous les faits intellectuels, toutes les connaissances de l'homme, même toutes ses facultés, parmi lesquelles se trouvent et la réflexion de Locke et le raisonnement de Descartes. Elle est à la fois le fondement de l'édifice, l'édifice et l'architecte; elle se fournit à elle-même les matériaux qu'elle doit mettre en œuvre; elle a la merveilleuse propriété de s'apercevoir, de se prêter une attention sérieuse pour se comparer avec elle-même, et déduire, toujours d'elle-même, en raisonnant avec justesse et sagacité, toutes les vérités dont elle a été douée, et entre autres celle de l'existence du monde.³³⁰

In order to cover over this discrepancy in the account of his early views, Cousin added a footnote in his later texts which said that these views on Descartes had been borrowed from Reid and Royer-Collard and that he had abandoned them with disapproval in the same year.³³¹

Cousin's problem with Malebranche, Berkeley, and Hume, all of whom he labelled followers of Descartes, was that they considered consciousness to be passive. In Cousin's opinion, they proved consciousness to be a witness and not a judge, and that sensation was nothing but an inner modification. Consequently, he held that the 'sensed' universe and consciousness are phantasm.

Oui, Messieurs, si Descartes a posé le vrai principe, les conséquences de Hume, de Berkeley et de Malebranche sont irrésistibles; si la conscience ou la sensation, aidée du raisonnement, peut seule se donner le monde, il y faut renoncer et en désespérer à jamais; nous sommes condamnés sans retour à l'égoïsme le plus absolu.³³²

From the fact that neither consciousness nor reasoning can account for external reality, it does not follow that belief in the external world is undermined. According to Cousin we merely have to appeal to a different principle, namely one that constitutes human nature. This principle is perception. Cousin rejected materialism and spiritualism, because he thought neither of them dealt adequately with perception. According to him, the representative qualities of the material idea and the spiritual idea are chimera. If we want an idea, either spiritual or material, to represent a body along with its qualities, we would first have to know this body in order to judge that the idea of it represented it faithfully. Cousin seems to agree with the criticism Royer-Collard made on what he called the 'hypothesis of the idea'. The solution Cousin proposes is to turn the theory of ideas around so that it reveals the world, and in this, supports perception instead of destroying it. The philosopher who Cousin thought had undermined the prestige of 'illusory representation', and destroyed the hypothesis of the idea, was Reid. By doing so, Reid had rendered an enormous service to science:

Reid est le premier qui ait dégagé la perception de la sensation qui l'enveloppe, et qui l'ait placée au rang de nos facultés primitives. Le

³³⁰ Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 11.

³³¹ The footnote dates from 1855 and it is doubtful that Cousin could have judged his early work objectively, that is, without seeing it in the light of his 'developed' philosophy.

³³² Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 12.

règne de Descartes finit à Reid; je dis son règne, non sa gloire, qui est immortelle. Reid commence une ère nouvelle; il est le père de cette école célèbre, qui, libre du joug de tout système, ne reconnaît et ne suit d'autres lois que celles du sens commun et de l'expérience, où la sévérité des méthodes, le génie de l'observation intellectuelle, l'élévation des principes et des caractères, semblent héréditaires depuis Hutcheson, Smith et Reid, qui se présentent les premiers, suivis de Beattie et de Ferguson, jusqu'au métaphysicien illustre qui soutient aujourd'hui si dignement la haute réputation de leurs talents et de leurs doctrines, M. Dugald Stewart.³³³

Cousin proved to be a loyal follower of the Scottish common sense philosophy which Royer-Collard had introduced into France. As he found it pointless to discuss the ideas of space, time, substance, and cause, he put them aside. Instead, he tried to outline these ideas on the basis of perception. The idea of space, he explained, is based on the perception of extension given by the sense of touch. Although, as such, it is limited and contingent, Cousin claims that it is impossible not to conceive of an immense extension in which all objects which the senses perceive and imagination gives form to are situated. Content with the notion of space thus formed, Cousin claims furthermore that perception assures us that objects exist in the moment in which they are being considered. Furthermore, it is entirely unproblematic for Cousin to suppose 'avec la plus grande assurance' that they exist before and after we consider them. He even claimed that we conceive of an unlimited extension, and within this, we conceive of a limited one, and applied the same arguments to duration.

Cousin explained that we obtain the notion of the self because the senses 'suggest' the notion of a subject or substance, although they merely seize the

³³³ Ibid., p. 15. In *Philosophie écossaise* [1840] Cousin discussed the distinction between the inductive method and the reflective method. He brings to our attention that, in his discussion of the reflective method, Reid did not quote much from Bacon and Newton, but instead invoked the name of Descartes who was almost forgotten. According to Reid, Descartes was the founder of the reflective method and in this light he called him the father of the new philosophy. Cousin praised Reid for being so courageous in the middle of the eighteenth century. Cf. Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* [1764] p. 225: 'It does not appear that the notions of the ancient philosophers, with regard to the nature of the soul, were much more refined than those of the vulgar, or that they were formed in any other way. We shall distinguish the philosophy that regards our subject into the old and the new. The old reached down to Des Cartes, who gave it a fatal blow, of which it has been gradually expiring ever since, and is now almost extinct. Des Cartes is the father of the new philosophy that relates to this subject; but it hath been gradually improving since his time, upon the principles laid down by him. The old philosophy seems to have been purely analogical: the new is more derived from reflection, but still with a very considerable mixture of the old analogical notions'. Although in Cousin's opinion Reid exaggerated when he said that ancient philosophers only knew the way of analogy and that modern philosophy was the first to enter the way of reflection, he appreciates Reid's characterization of Descartes. In *Philosophie écossaise*, p. 305-306 it reads: 'Il ne se contente pas de célébrer notre immortel compatriote comme ayant brisé l'autorité en philosophie, mais comme ayant véritablement émancipé l'esprit humain en l'arrachant au joug des apparences, des faux-semblants, des analogies péripatéticiennes et scholastiques, qui, en offusquant le caractère propre de ses opérations, l'empêchaient de parvenir à la vraie connaissance lui-même; il rapporte à Descartes l'honneur d'avoir le premier démontré que nous avons de l'esprit, par la perception de ses opérations, une connaissance plus certaine et plus immédiate que nous n'en avons des objets extérieurs par le secours de nos organes et de nos sens'.

variable modifications of bodies, or objects. In a similar manner, Cousin explained how we gain the notion of cause: although the senses only show objects to be adjacent and successive, we judge that they interact and act upon us and therefore we ascribe to them the role of being the causes of most of the effects that we experience.

Je les conçois doués de certaines forces actives, qui produisent tous les changements qui arrivent dans l'univers, qui renouvellent et animent la nature entière. Quand l'expérience et la réflexion m'apprennent qu'elles ne sont point inhérentes aux corps, l'application change, le principe demeure, et je ne les ôte à tous les corps particuliers que pour les transporter à un être suprême, principe de toute force, de tout mouvement, de toute existence. Telle est la puissance de principe de causalité: il élève l'homme jusqu'à l'Être des êtres.³³⁴

Because we already have the notions of substance, cause, and duration before we attribute them to something, Cousin concludes that we obtain these notions from ourselves and subsequently apply them to external objects. This may seem quite plausible, but the next step is quite obscure. Cousin says that we apply these notions to external objects by means of an induction that does not draw the existence of duration and external causes from our duration, but which moves from internal to external without the intervention of reasoning. Cousin is hardly intelligible at this point, something that he blames on the constraints of his discourse.

Although Cousin maintained that one should not pretend to have the capacity to reveal the nature of extension, space, time, substance and cause, he is in some way sure that there are traces of these concepts in the mind. On this point Cousin criticizes the philosophy of sensation, because it cannot explain the concepts that are in the mind. He even thought that sensationalism destroyed the possibility of all physical and moral realities. He suggests that if man's faculties are reduced to sensations, then the only principle left to guide human existence is to avoid pain and seek pleasure. In that case, reason can at best provide advice concerning prudence, because it is unable to construct ethical rules on the basis of sensationalist principles.

At this point, Cousin almost desperately implores his audience:

C'est à ceux de vous dont l'âge se rapproche du mien [24] que j'ose m'adresser en ce moment; à vous, qui formerez la génération qui s'avance; à vous, l'unique soutien, la dernière espérance de notre cher et malheureux pays. Messieurs, vous aimez ardemment la patrie; si vous voulez la sauver, embrassez nos belles doctrines. Assez longtemps nous avons poursuivi la liberté à travers les voies de la servitude. Nous voulions être libres avec la morale des esclaves. Non, la statue de la liberté n'a point l'intérêt pour base, et ce n'est pas à la philosophie de la sensation et à ses petites maximes qu'il appartient de faire les grands peuples. Soutenons la liberté française encore mal assurée, et chancelante au milieu des tombeaux et des débris qui nous environnent, par une morale qui l'affermisse à jamais; et cette morale, demandons-la à

³³⁴ Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, pp. 18-19.

cette philosophie généreuse, si honorable à l'humanité, qui, professant les plus nobles maximes, les trouve dans notre propre nature, qui nous appelle à l'honneur par la voix du simple bon sens, qui ne redoute pour la vertu que les hypothèses, et qui, pour élever l'homme, ne veut que l'empêcher de cesser d'être lui-même.³³⁵

The conclusion of Cousin's opening discourse states that we should begin philosophy with the question of the nature of external perception. After some research, however, Cousin realized that this could not be the first question of philosophy. As a result, he changed the question to that of the self or personal existence.

This preliminary overview of Cousin reveals something of a philosophical opportunist with patriotic tendencies. His apparent need for a French father of modern philosophy led him initially to Condillac. However, when Condillac did not suit the cause anymore, due to Cousin's rejection of sensualism, the only Frenchman left was Descartes. We will return to the part that patriotism plays in Cousin's rehabilitation of Descartes in Section 11.4.

9.2 Reflection and spontaneity: encounters with German Idealists

It must have been between the time of his opening discourse and the beginning of his actual lectures that Cousin rediscovered Descartes. As he decided that the issue of personal existence should be first in the curriculum, he saw an occasion to discuss the 'true sense' of the Cartesian *cogito, ergo sum*. Through the work of Dugald Stewart he came across the claim that Descartes had not meant to establish any logical connection between thinking and existence when he expressed his famous enthymeme. However, it was Royer-Collard who first encouraged Cousin to continue the alliance with the Scottish School, thus leading him to Dugald Stewart. So it was quite indirectly, if not coincidentally, that Cousin began his studies of Descartes's famous statement. Dugald Stewart comments on the *cogito* in his *Philosophical Essays* (1810):

. . . the celebrated enthymeme of Descartes, *Cogito, ergo sum*, does not deserve *all* the ridicule bestowed on it by those writers who have represented the author as attempting to demonstrate his own existence by a process of reasoning. To me it seems more probable, that he meant chiefly to direct the attention of his readers to a circumstance which must be allowed to be not unworthy of notice in the history of the Human Mind; – the impossibility of our ever having learned the fact of our own existence, without some sensation being excited in the mind, to awaken the faculty of our thinking.³³⁶

Cousin did not pay attention to the qualification added by Stewart in a footnote, which stated that, after looking into the *Meditations* again, he doubted if he had not taken his apology for Descartes a little further than Descartes's own words would justify. In Dugald Stewart's work we find some elements of a defence of Descartes,

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

³³⁶ Stewart, *Collected works*, vol. 5, (*Philosophical Essays*), pp. 58-59.

but they are too fragmented to make it possible to speak of a reinstatement of Descartes. We will therefore not go into Stewart's work beyond the above quoted defence of the Cartesian enthymeme.

Cousin had a number of reasons for claiming that *cogito, ergo sum* should not be taken as a syllogism. He considered that the intellectual process which reveals personal existence is not a process of reasoning, but one of the conceptions that, a century after Descartes, had made Reid and Kant famous through the introduction of the terms 'constitutive principles of the human mind' and 'categories of the understanding'.³³⁷ In order to reinforce his argument, he quotes the Objections and Replies to the *Meditations*. In order to show how Cousin 'adapts' Descartes, we will compare his interpretation with the original texts. Cousin's first quote reads:

Je soutiens que cette proposition: je pense, donc j'existe, est une vérité particulière, qui s'introduit dans l'esprit sans le secours d'une autre plus générale, et indépendamment de toute déduction logique. Ce n'est pas un préjugé, mais une vérité naturelle, qui frappe d'abord et irrésistiblement l'intelligence.³³⁸

What Descartes said, precisely, was that *cogito, ergo sum* is not a preconceived opinion, when we put it forward with attention. When we examine it, it appears so evident to the understanding that we cannot but believe it. Furthermore, Descartes says, in order to discover truth we must always begin with particular notions in order to arrive at general ones. In the above, we can see that Cousin thus smuggles in the term 'vérité naturelle' to describe that which firstly and irresistibly strikes the intellect.³³⁹

The second passage that he 'quotes' – from the Reply to the Second Objection – shows that Cousin conveniently changes the Cartesian 'première notion' into a 'notion primitive', and the Cartesian 'inspection de l'esprit' (*inspectio mentis*) into 'intuition'. Cousin describes the third passage as follows:

Après avoir montré qu'elle ne peut être l'ouvrage du raisonnement, il ajoute qu'il ne faut pas non plus l'attribuer à la réflexion, mais à une opération antérieure à la réflexion, opération dont on peut bien renier des lèvres le résultat, mais sans pouvoir l'arracher de son entendement et de sa croyance.³⁴⁰

To be more precise, Descartes said that in order to know what thinking and existence are we do not need reflective knowledge (*science réfléchi/scientia reflexa*), or knowledge acquired by demonstration, and even less do we need knowledge of reflective knowledge by which one knows that one knows that one knows and so on *ad infinitum*, making it impossible to have any knowledge of this kind. It suffices, Descartes says, to know this by the inner awareness (*connaissance intérieure/cognitio interna*) that always precedes reflective knowledge.³⁴¹ Although

³³⁷ Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 29.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³³⁹ Appendix to Fifth Objections and Replies, CSM II, 271; Lettre de Monsievr Des-Cartes à Monsievr C.L.R., AT IX-1, 206.

³⁴⁰ Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 31.

³⁴¹ *Rep.* VI, AT IX-1, 225; CSM II, 285.

Cousin is close to the original text here, he distinguishes between reasoning and reflection, a distinction Descartes did not make. Also, it is here that the beginning of the important distinction that Cousin later makes between reflection and spontaneity is to be found, a distinction which forms the core of his criticism of Fichte, as we will see below.

According to Cousin, Descartes did not give an exposition of this 'interesting theory' in his *Meditations* because his goal was to provide philosophy with a scientific starting point based on an unshakable principle. This foundation is personal existence, or the existence of the soul. Cousin calls the certainty of personal existence 'primitive' as it is revealed to us in the relation between thinking and the thinking being.

To Cousin, Descartes does not logically deduce existence from thinking. Instead, the certainty of existence is contained in the certainty of thinking. The *Meditations* demonstrate with geometric rigor that the spirituality of the soul and the existence of God are indisputable truths, because they rely on our personal existence, the certainty of which is beyond all the efforts of scepticism to undermine it. Descartes did not intend to start a discussion on the way that we acquire knowledge of our own existence, because he only needed to show the certainty of personal existence, from which all his principles follow.

It is clear by now that, according to Cousin, the kind of knowledge involved in the Cartesian *cogito* 'argument' is not reflection. In his *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, we find this initial criticism of Descartes developed into a distinction between spontaneous knowledge and reflected knowledge. Cousin finds spontaneous knowledge, which precedes reflected knowledge, to be the work of nature. Reflected knowledge he considers to be artificial and, unlike spontaneous knowledge, not available to all.

La connaissance spontanée a été donnée à l'humanité tout entière; la réflexion appartient à quelques hommes, qui entreprennent de se rendre compte du savoir commun, et en rêvent un autre plus hasardeux mais plus relevé, qu'ils ne prétendent pas posséder, mais qu'ils aiment et qu'ils cherchent, et c'est pour cela qu'on les appelle philosophes.

Ainsi la philosophie n'est pas autre chose, comme tant de fois nous vous l'avons dit, que la réflexion travaillant sur la connaissance naturelle et poursuivant à travers les siècles un idéal qui s'agrandit sans cesse devant elle.³⁴²

Cousin compares the relation between reflection and consciousness with that between a microscope and sight: the former does not change the observed objects, it examines them more precisely. Cousin names analysis the 'instrument of reflection'. Reflection applies analysis to the mass of ideas that stem from all faculties, with the aim of creating new syntheses. The danger of reflection and its analysis, Cousin warns, is that the part is taken for the whole. This results in an incomplete psychology which in turn brings along a defective metaphysics

³⁴² *Hist. gén.* p. 7.

occurring as particular and exclusive systems. This is a fatal danger, Cousin says, but it is almost impossible for reflection to avoid it.³⁴³

In Section 11.1, we shall see in more detail that J.G. Fichte was one of the first philosophers to take the Cartesian *cogito* seriously in the sense of a ‘Grundsatz’ in which the ‘I’ posits itself. Cousin criticized Fichte’s view of the self, because he thought that a self-positing ‘I’ ended up positing the world and even God. According to Cousin, the ‘I’ in Fichte’s system is posited as the primitive and permanent cause of everything. What he found even more problematic was that it posits the world as the simple negation of itself, and posits God as the ‘I’ taken in an absolute sense.

Le MOI absolu, voilà le dernier degré de tout subjectivité, le terme extrême et nécessaire du système de Kant, et en même temps sa réfutation. Le bon sens fait justice de cette conséquence extravagante; mais il appartient à la philosophie de détruire la conséquence dans son principe, et ce principe c’est la subjectivité et la personnalité de la raison. C’est là l’erreur radicale, erreur psychologique q’un psychologie sévère doit dissiper. Tout mon effort a donc été de démontrer que la personnalité, le MOI est éminemment l’activité volontaire et libre; que là est le vrai sujet, et que la raison est aussi distincte de ce sujet que la sensation et les impressions organiques.³⁴⁴

Cousin criticizes Fichte on precisely the point which Maine de Biran had praised him. According to Maine de Biran, Fichte showed that the first act which posits the self and constitutes science is voluntary or free and that we do not have to look for a principle other than the will, which is contained in the self. In a *Fragment* entitled *Du premier et du dernier fait de conscience ou de la spontanéité et de la réflexion*³⁴⁵ we find Cousin’s opinion on this issue.

Cousin distinguishes between knowledge examined from the point of view of origin, which he also calls its ‘primitive character’, and knowledge examined from the point of view of its development, which he calls its ‘actual character’. As all primitive knowledge is spontaneous and all developed knowledge is reflected, it follows that primitive knowledge is positive, indistinct and obscure, while developed knowledge is negative, distinct and clear. For this reason something else has to be the starting point and basis of philosophy. If philosophy does not want to renounce itself, it has to start from reflection. If, on the other hand, philosophy wants to accomplish an understanding of everything, it has to assume a basis which is anterior to reflection and therefore necessarily obscure.

³⁴³ It is comparable with what Kant calls the unavoidable transcendental ‘Schein’ of reason, KrV B 354: ‘Die transzendente Dialektik wird also sich damit begnügen, den Schein transzendenter Urteile aufzudecken, und zugleich zu verhüten, daß er nicht betriege; daß er aber auch (wie der logische Schein) sogar verschwinde, und ein Schein zu sein aufhöre, das kann sie niemals bewerkstelligen. Denn wir haben es mit einer natürlichen und unvermeidlichen Illusion zu tun, die selbst auf subjektiven Grundsätzen beruht, und sie als objektive unterschreibt, anstatt daß die logische Dialektik in Auflösung der Trugschlüsse es nur mit einem Fehler, in Befolgung der Grundsätze, oder mit einem gekünstelten Scheine, in Nachahmung derselben, zu tun hat’.

³⁴⁴ *Fragments philosophiques*, in Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 14.

³⁴⁵ In Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol.2, pp. 118-121.

According to Cousin, the Fichtean principle in which the 'I' posits itself, cannot be the first act of consciousness, because the reflective moment is preceded by a spontaneous moment. He maintained that Fichte did not see that there were two moments in the development of the self (*moi*): the moment of reflection and the spontaneous moment. When Fichte claimed that the 'I' posits itself and posits the 'non-I', he dealt only with the reflected 'I'. In reflection, the 'I' takes possession of itself and can thus be said to be positing itself. As far as it opposes itself to the 'non-I', Cousin follows Fichte in claiming that it posits the 'non-I'. Cousin stresses that before the 'I' posits itself by an act of reflection, it first finds itself by a spontaneous act. The same can be said of the 'non-I': before the 'non-I' is posited through the struggle of the 'I' against itself, the 'I' first has to perceive the 'non-I' without positing it. This means that, although Fichte was right in observing this fact, it is not the first fact of consciousness.

Cousin claims that when we perceive a phenomenon, which is relative, variable, contingent and finite, at the same time we necessarily perceive its counterpart: the infinite, for example. The infinite, which he calls 'l'être par excellence' potentially contains the primitive duality of 'I' and 'non-I'. According to Cousin, reflection upon this duality somehow produces the unity of consciousness, which in turn becomes the unity of knowledge, which finally becomes the unity of proposition. Cousin states this simply and we can hardly make it more intelligible.

Cousin wants to take the so-called 'vue spontané' as his point of departure, but the difficulty is that if we try to grasp it, it escapes us because we reflect upon it and it is destroyed. In order to try to solve the problem, Cousin had to take some strange twists and turns, as the following quote shows:

Selon moi, on ne peut saisir le point de vue spontané qu'en le prenant pour ainsi dire sur le fait, sous le point de vue réflexif, à l'aurore de la réflexion, au moment presque indivisible où le primitif fait place à l'actuel, où la spontanéité expire dans la réflexion. Ne pouvant point le considérer à plein et tout à notre aise, il faut le saisir d'un coup d'œil rapide, et pour ainsi dire, de profil dans des actes de la vie ordinaire qui se redoublent naturellement dans la conscience et se laissent apercevoir sans qu'on cherche à les apercevoir. C'est cette conscience naturelle qu'il faut surprendre en soi et décrire fidèlement. Or je pense que la conscience primitive présente les mêmes éléments, les mêmes faits que la réflexion, avec cette seule différence que dans la seconde ils sont précis et distincts, et que dans la première ils sont obscurs et indéterminés.³⁴⁶

It is in this way that Cousin thinks primitive consciousness becomes aware of the self and non-self, without being able to tell what the two correlating phenomena are. Primitive consciousness does not seize the self and non-self in an opposition that necessarily limits them. To Cousin, it perceives them both in a natural limitation. As far as the Infinite Being is concerned, primitive consciousness does not display the act of reflected reason to us, which poses this Being as infinite,

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

absolute and necessary. However, it does display the spontaneous activity of reason which first perceives it through a pure and simple apperception without seeing its limits; dwelling in this mode without looking for or conceiving of anything beyond it.

Exactly how Cousin came across the distinction between spontaneous and reflected knowledge is not clear. According to Janet, this distinction, while already having been made by Aristotle in terms of act and potency, had escaped the attention of all modern schools.³⁴⁷ The point of view of spontaneity is missing from the philosophy of Condillac and hardly appears in the philosophy of Descartes. However, Fichte also preferred the spontaneous over the reflected point of view and in the school of Schelling it was restored, and although Cousin had only a superficial knowledge of Schelling's system, he seemed to feel great affinity with it. On the other hand, his contact with Hegel was more intense, as we can show on the basis of their correspondence.³⁴⁸

As we said in the previous part when we introduced our characters, Cousin decided to visit Schelling in Heidelberg, but 'par hasard' he met Hegel instead. We find the following remark in his *Fragments philosophiques* concerning his encounter with Hegel:

Il avait publiés des livres qu'on avait peu lus; son enseignement commençait à peine à le faire connaître davantage. L'*Encyclopédie des sciences philosophiques* paraissait en ce moment, et j'en eus un des premiers exemplaires. C'était un livre tout hérissé de formules d'une apparence assez scolastique, et écrit dans un langage très-peu lucide, surtout pour moi. Hegel ne savait pas beaucoup plus le français que je ne savais l'allemand, et, enfoncé dans ses études, mal sûr encore de lui-même et de sa renommée, il ne voyait presque personne, et, pour tout dire, il n'était pas d'une amabilité extrême. Je ne puis comprendre comment un jeune homme obscur parvint à l'intéresser; mais au bout d'une heure il fut à moi comme je fus à lui, et jusqu'au dernier moment notre amitié, plus d'une fois éprouvée, ne s'est pas démentie. Dès la première conversation, je le devinai, je compris toute sa portée, je me sentis en présence d'un homme supérieur; et quand d'Heidelberg je continuai ma course en Allemagne, je l'annonçai partout, je le prophétisai en quelque sorte; et à mon retour en France, je dis à mes amis: Messieurs, j'ai vu un homme de génie. L'impression que m'avait laissée Hegel était profonde, mais confuse. L'année suivante j'allai chercher à Munich l'auteur même du système [viz. Schelling]. On ne peut pas se moins ressembler que le disciple et le maître. Hegel laisse à peine tomber de rares et profondes paroles, quelque peu énigmatiques; sa diction forte, mais embarrassée, son visage immobile, son front couvert de nuages, semblent l'image de la pensée qui se développe; son langage est, comme son regard, plein d'éclat et de vie: il est naturellement éloquent. J'ai passé un mois entier avec lui et Jacobi à Munich, en 1818,

³⁴⁷ Janet, *Victor Cousin et son œuvre* (1885), p. 85.

³⁴⁸ See Hoffmeister (ed.), *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1977-1981); Espagne/Werner (eds.), *Lettres d'Allemagne. Victor Cousin et les hégéliens* (1990).

et c'est là que j'ai commencé à voir un peu plus clair dans la *philosophie de la nature*.³⁴⁹

Gotthard Oswald Marbach (1818-1890) reacted to Cousin's encounter with Hegel in 1835 (the preface above was first published in 1833), and as we will see, he was quite stunned. Marbach exclaims polemically that Cousin may well think that Hegel's *Encyclopaedia* is a book loaded with formulae, but his own philosophical thoughts fall apart in bon mots.

Cousin hat Hegel in Deutschland prophezeit, – noch dazu ohne ihn verstanden zu haben, wie er selbst sagt, – aber nachdem er doch in einer Stunde den ganzen Umfang seines Geistes begriffen! – was die Deutschen damals nicht konnten, welche doch Hegels Bücher vor Augen hatten und wenigstens hinsichtlich der Sprache Hegel näher standen, was noch jetzt viele Deutsche nicht können, nachdem Jahrzehnte jene Bücher vorliegen, nachdem Hegel ein berühmter Mann geworden – das kann der scharfblickende Franzose nach einer Stunde Unterhaltung in halbfranzösischer und halbdeutscher Sprache: den ganzen Umfang von Hegels Geiste begreifen. Wie mögen die deutschen Gelehrten damals erstaunt sein, als Cousin mit dem Evangelium durch Deutschland überall hin reiste und die französischen als er sie traf und sagte: Meine Herren, ich habe einen Mann von Genie gefunden.³⁵⁰

According to Marbach, many people are currently suffering from an egotistical self-love that is stunning in its audacity, and this especially applies to Cousin. After reading Cousin's *Fragments philosophiques*,³⁵¹ Marbach says he could not help feeling that it was a thorough product of vanity. However, it is not only Cousin's vanity that disturbed Marbach, what really concerned him was that Schelling had written the foreword to the second edition of the German translation of this work.³⁵² Marbach is amazed that a 'suchlike would-be philosophical text' is prefaced with an introduction recommending the work by someone like Schelling, even if, as Marbach claims, Schelling's praise for Cousin does not extend to the contents of the book at all.

Schelling praises Cousin because he was the first, after the Revolution, to have brought German literature and science to the attention of the French. According to Schelling, German philosophy had become quite isolated and therefore it was praiseworthy that Cousin attempted to make a connection between German and French philosophy. On the question of Cousin's own philosophy, Schelling firstly indicated that it consisted of two 'essentially different' parts.

Der erste hält sich ganz im Kreise der Psychologie und in so fern des Subjectiven, und findet im Bewußtseyn erst das Vermögen für jene allgemeinen Principien, mit deren Hülfe dann ein zweiter in's Objective

³⁴⁹ Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, p. 20.

³⁵⁰ Marbach, *Schelling, Hegel, Cousin und Krug. Erörterungen auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie* (1835), p. 22.

³⁵¹ The introduction of the *Fragments philosophiques* appeared in German under the title *Einleitung zu den philosophischen Fragmenten von V. Cousin*, in Carové (ed.), *Philosophie in Frankreich* (1827) pp. 59-148.

³⁵² Cousin, *Über französische und deutsche Philosophie* (1834).

fortschreitender und dogmatischer Theil die Existenz der äußeren Welt, unserer eignen Persönlichkeit und Gottes beweisen soll.³⁵³

Schelling remarks that although Cousin acknowledged that psychology is founded in ontology, he maintained that the means of discovering this is by starting from psychology. Cousin's claim that we cannot philosophize without experience is redundant in Schelling's opinion, Kant having already shown this in the first sentence of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Concerning the beginning of philosophy, Schelling briefly expounds his own theory of positive and negative philosophy, which we will not discuss here. Instead, we focus on what Schelling had to say about the transition of psychology to ontology, Cousin's eclecticism and the relation between French and German philosophy.

Concerning the transition of psychology to ontology in Cousin's work, Schelling pointed out that, in the transition from the passivity of sensibility to activity, the concept of cause is already involved. This has to do with Maine de Biran – an obvious influence on Cousin – who thought it was one of the most fertile concepts founding metaphysics. According to Maine de Biran the concept of cause is immediately given through the observation of our own activity. As we saw in our discussion of Maine de Biran above, the concept of cause is understood in a primitive fact, or an act of the will. According to Schelling, Cousin distinguishes himself from the sensualists in that he does not search for the source of ontological concepts in sensation, but posits it in reason. However:

Das bloße Nicht-abhängig-seyn der Vernunft von Sinnlichkeit und Persönlichkeit (damit glaubt Cousin Alles gewonnen) gibt ihr noch lange nicht die Objectivität, die er ihr selbst zuschreibt; Kant läßt sie weder von dem Willen noch von der Sinnlichkeit abhängig seyn, und doch hat sie ihm, wie der Verf. bemerkt, keine über das Subject hinausgehende Gültigkeit. Die Vernunft ist dem Verfasser nichts Subjectives (nämlich aus der Persönlichkeit Stammendes), aber sie ist ihm doch nur im Subject (in uns); als solche eben bedarf sie der Erklärung, wenn ihr zugleich wahre Objectivität (nicht bloß im Kantischen Sinne) zugestanden wird. Diese Erklärung kann, wie leicht zu sehen, nur darin gefunden werden, daß sie selbst vom Object abstammt, freilich nicht durch Vermittlung der Sinnlichkeit, die einzige Art, wie man dieß bis jetzt zu denken gewußt hat, sondern, daß sie nur das subjectiv gesetzte, aus der Objectivität in die ursprüngliche Priorität und Subjectivität wiederhergestellte Prius selbst ist.³⁵⁴

Schelling finds that it is not clear how Cousin can reach objectivity without supposing the entire process of philosophy. Cousin simply lets reason impose necessity upon consciousness and moves from the limited causes – the 'I' and the 'non-I' – to the unlimited real and true cause. By defining God under the title of cause, Cousin thought to distinguish his idea of God from pantheism. However, as the God of Cousin's system is essentially cause, it cannot create, and on this point it does not differ from Spinoza's God.

³⁵³ Ibid., p. x.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. xxv.

Concerning Cousin's history of philosophy, Schelling was more positive. He found that everything Cousin had said about the history of philosophy is 'quite excellent and carries the stamp of profound knowledge, as one might expect from the spirited translator of Plato and the editor of Proclus'.³⁵⁵ Marbach is particularly annoyed by this remark, which he finds to be 'the simple unfounded judgement of Schelling', because Cousin proved to have understood little or nothing of Hegel. According to Marbach, Cousin's eclecticism takes one piece of the object while neglecting the relation with all the other parts.

Der Gegenstand ist aber nichts anderes als die Einheit aller seiner sich gegenseitig ausschließenden Seiten. Von einem Abschneiden des unvernünftigen Endes der einzelnen Philosophien, um die vernünftigen Enden in der Hand zu behalten, ist nirgends bei Hegel und kann nicht die Rede sein. Was etwa in einer von einem Philosophen geschriebenen Schrift Falsches steht, ist eben gar nicht Philosophie. Der Cousinsche Eklekticismus enthält, wie er sich da hingestellt, übrigens auch den Widerspruch in sich selbst, nämlich einmal soll die eklektische Philosophie ein Resultat sein, des Verfahrens des Abscheidens, dann aber muß sie auch, um überhaupt abscheiden zu können, schon im Voraus da sein, weil sie sonst nicht im Stande ist, das in jeder Philosophie enthaltene Wahre und Falsche zu unterscheiden. Nach Cousin greift der Philosoph ins Unbestimmte hinaus und ergreift stets zufällig ein Stück Wahrheit, „denn, sagt Cousin, man kann sich nicht soweit von dem allen Menschen verliehenen Gemeinsinne entfernen, um in Irrthümer, die völlig von der Wahrheit entblößt sind, zu verfallen.“ Dieser letzte Satz kann für eine Verseichung des Satzes genommen werden: daß alle Menschen durch den Geist selbst beherrscht werden, und im Dienste der Wahrheit stehen die einen als Freie, die andern als Sklaven; wie er aber dort ausgesprochen, gibt er jeder, ja geflissentlich der allerschlechtesten Meinung, die Berechtigung sich für Philosophie auszugeben.³⁵⁶

Marbach has a similar criticism of the way in which Cousin thought to attain objectivity in the manner of Schelling. Marbach was able to be so harsh on Cousin, as he did not share Schelling's opinion that German philosophy was isolated. Schelling's complaint was that the Germans had philosophized amongst each other for such a long time that their thoughts and words had developed a distance from what was commonly understandable.

Wie Familien, die vom allgemeinen Umgang sich absondernd, bloß unter sich leben, zuletzt außer andern abstoßenden Eigenheiten auch eigne, nur ihnen verständliche Ausdrücke unter sich annehmen; so war es den Deutschen in der Philosophie ergangen, und je mehr sie nach einigen mißlungenen Versuchen, die Kantische Philosophie außer Deutschland zu verbreiten, darauf verzichteten, sich andern Völkern verständlich zu machen, desto mehr sahen sie die Philosophie als etwas für sich allein gleichsam Daseyendes an, ohne zu bedenken, daß die ursprüngliche,

³⁵⁵ Ibid., p. xxvi.

³⁵⁶ Marbach, *Schelling, Hegel, Cousin und Krug. Erörterungen auf dem Gebiete der Philosophie* (1835), p. 24.

wenn auch oft verfehlte, doch nie aufzugebende Absicht aller Philosophie eben auf allgemeine Verständigung gehe.³⁵⁷

Marbach found Schelling's reproach to be a myth created for the benefit of the other nations. He maintained that thinking is of a universal nature, and those who want to philosophize in private are fools, and in fact do not philosophize at all. In this matter, he quotes Hegel who maintained that philosophy in other nations had vanished, and only in the German nation had it been conserved as a characteristic property. The Germans, by nature, maintained the high profession of the keepers of this holy fire. Somewhat patriotically, Marbach concludes that when, one day, the desire for philosophy is reawakened in other nations, it will not be too hard for them to learn the German language, and German philosophical values will prove not to be such a well kept secret.

9.3 Cousin's history of philosophy

This section discusses how Cousin saw Descartes as the inventor of the reflective method and, consequently, as the father of modern philosophy. Cousin's *Histoire générale de la philosophie* is a compilation of the various lectures he gave in the history of philosophy. His *Du vrai, du beau et du bien* can be regarded as a summary of his own philosophy. On the basis of both texts we will distil the philosophical reasons for his reinstatement of Descartes in French philosophy.

In the first lecture of *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, Cousin outlines the philosophical systems and concludes that because all of them have flaws or errors we should adopt an eclectic method. We will discuss Cousin's political eclecticism later, focusing now on the role Descartes plays in Cousin's philosophy. This role becomes clear when he makes the general remark that the father of all philosophical systems is the human mind, and that it is also the necessary instrument of all philosophy.

L'étude de l'esprit humain s'appelle scientifiquement la psychologie. Nous voilà donc ramené par une autre voie à ce principe qui est l'âme de tous nos travaux, qui constitue le caractère propre et aussi le caractère national de notre philosophie, la rattache à Descartes et la sépare de toute philosophie étrangère, à savoir, que la psychologie est le point de départ nécessaire, la suprême condition, la méthode unique de toute saine philosophie, qu'elle seule introduit légitimement dans le sanctuaire de la métaphysique et qu'elle fournit même à l'histoire sa plus sûre lumière.³⁵⁸

As we saw earlier, Cousin thought that reflection was preceded by spontaneity and he wanted to take the latter as his starting point. Here he calls it 'l'énergie naturelle' with which our intelligence is gifted and by which it is activated. However, in order to show that the systems of both sensualism and idealism are incomplete, and that they compel reflection into error, Cousin also has to take reflection as his point of departure. It is through the engagement of reflection with the sensorial part of consciousness that it arrives at sensualism, and through the

³⁵⁷ Cousin, *Über französische und deutsche Philosophie*, p. iv-v.

³⁵⁸ *Hist. gén.*, p. 6.

engagement with the intellectual part that it arrives at idealism. According to Cousin, sensualism leads to fatalism, materialism, and atheism; while idealism, with its abstractions and hypotheses, leads to prejudice. Reflection arrives at scepticism when it returns to itself, to its own powers and employment, and to the two systems it has produced.

Mais il y a quelque chose encore dans la conscience qu'elle [reflection] n'a pas songé à aborder; c'est le fait que je vous ai si souvent signalé, et que je vous rappelais tout à l'heure, le fait de la connaissance naturelle et spontanée, ouvrage de cette puissance merveilleuse, antérieure à la réflexion, qui produit toutes les croyances mêlées et confuses, il est vrai, mais au fond solides, sur lesquelles vit et dans lesquelles se repose le genre humain. La spontanéité avait jusqu'ici échappé à la réflexion par sa profondeur, par son intimité même; c'est à la spontanéité que dans son désespoir la réflexion finit par s'attacher.³⁵⁹

The main characteristic of what Cousin calls 'natural knowledge' or 'spontaneous intuition', which are synonymous terms, appears to be that it is anterior to reflection, and marks the return of thinking to itself. We have already seen that it is obscure because it is primitive. Cousin calls the system which is founded on the primitive fact, excluding all other facts, mysticism. The reason that he gives to explain why mysticism cannot end up as scepticism is that it is accompanied by a boundless faith. However, the inspiration that mysticism needs, only works without the influence of reasoning. In order to find primitive inspiration, we have to suspend the activity of our other faculties. Mysticism ignores the world, virtue and science in order to meditate and contemplate and, thus, it leads to quietism.

In this way, Cousin distinguishes four systems through which he thinks he can comprehend the entire history of philosophy: sensualism, idealism, scepticism and mysticism. Of course, in reality they appear in combined forms.

. . . les deux systèmes qui se montrent d'abord sont le sensualisme et l'idéalisme: ce sont là les deux dogmatismes qui remplissent le premier plan de toute grande époque philosophique. Il est clair que le scepticisme ne peut venir qu'après, et il est tout aussi clair que le mysticisme (j'entends comme système philosophique) vient le dernier; car le mysticisme n'est pas autre chose qu'un acte de désespoir de la raison humaine, qui, forcée de renoncer au dogmatisme, et ne pouvant se résigner au scepticisme, croit se sauver en renonçant à elle-même.³⁶⁰

In themselves, all four systems have their strengths and weaknesses. On this basis, Cousin attempts to combine them so that they keep each other in balance. If we reduce everything to sensualism, we fall into the three above mentioned dangers of fatalism, materialism and atheism. Sensualism therefore needs idealism to counter these consequences. In turn, sensualism and idealism need scepticism to prevent dogmatism. However, pure scepticism with its aggressive dialectics, reduces sensations and ideas to nothing, thus leading to the universal mockery of

³⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 25.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

philosophy. In order to keep the balance, we need mysticism, which allows us to enjoy the sacred rights of inspiration and enthusiasm.

Although Cousin's own position in this exposition of the four systems is impartial, he is not indifferent and he has some preferences over others, as the following quote illustrates.

. . . nous préférons l'esprit aux sens, quelque utiles que les sens nous paraissent, et la croyance est, à nos yeux, meilleure que le doute. Aussi nous ne défendons pas d'une sympathie déclarée pour tous les systèmes qui mettent l'esprit audessus des sens, et ne s'arrêtent point à la négation et au scepticisme. Nous sommes hautement spiritualiste dans l'histoire de la philosophie, tout autant que dans la philosophie elle-même.³⁶¹

Cousin's description of the origin and classification of the philosophical systems, leads to the position he describes as eclecticism, which he calls 'the art that discerns the true in all the different systems'. This position enables him, without hiding his preferences for some over others, not to condemn and proscribe solutions for their inevitable errors, but to correct and to justify them before giving them a place in philosophy.

Now that we have sketched Cousin's philosophical eclecticism, we can show how Descartes is incorporated. Cousin calls Descartes 'le véritable père de la philosophie moderne' and he is quite specific about the actual beginning of modern philosophy. According to Cousin, we can accurately date the beginning of modern philosophy, just as we can point out the exact date of the beginning of Greek philosophy. Modern philosophy can even be dated in more detail, because it began with the appearance of *Discours de la Méthode* in 1637.³⁶²

There are several reasons why Cousin thinks Descartes, rather than Bacon, is the father of modern philosophy. The first reason is that the *Discours* was not written in a dead language, but 'dans un langage vivant réservé aux générations futures'. Like Degérando, Cousin compares Bacon with Descartes, but in Cousin's comparison, we see a clear preference for Descartes. According to Cousin, Bacon made many magnificent promises, but they were only fulfilled by Descartes. In relation to their methods, Cousin remarks that Bacon borrowed his method from the Italians and that it was primarily applicable to physics, and that it had not proved itself in practice. Descartes, on the other hand, invented the most general method, and this gave authority to a multitude of discoveries that had been generated as a result. Cousin therefore concludes: 'Bacon est le prophète de la science moderne, Descartes en est le fondateur'.³⁶³ Cousin condescendingly maintains, in the preface of *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne*, that whatever they say in England, it is not Bacon, but Descartes who is the father of modern philosophy.

³⁶¹ Ibid., p. 33.

³⁶² Cousin, *Cours de philosophie* [1828], in *Œuvres*, vol. 1, p. 42.

³⁶³ *Hist. gén.*, p. 368.

Bacon est assurément un très-grand esprit; mais c'est plutôt encore un incomparable amateur de métaphysique qu'un métaphysicien, à proprement parler.³⁶⁴

Cousin also compares Bacon and Descartes by imagining the consequences had either never existed. Remove Descartes from his time, he says, and the pattern of the seventeenth century would not just be disrupted, it would have been dismembered. According to Cousin, the systems of Malebranche, Arnauld, Fénelon, Bossuet, Spinoza, Leibniz and even Locke would not have been possible without the work of Descartes. They all bear obvious witness to the influence of Descartes. On the other hand, if we remove Bacon, there is no discernible change, as he exerted no obvious influence on anyone.

A more general reason why Cousin called Descartes the father of modern philosophy was mentioned at the beginning of this section: as all philosophical systems stem from the human mind, the human mind is the subject and necessary instrument of every philosophy. So in order to find the root of various systems we have to look at the mind. Descartes approached psychology, the study of the human mind, in his own peculiar way, founding it on completely new evidence that gave it eternal authority. Hence, Descartes, as the inventor of psychology, is also the father of modern philosophy.

La philosophie moderne, en effet, date du jour où la réflexion a été son instrument reconnu, et la psychologie son fondement.³⁶⁵

Cousin goes so far as to say that if one studied the philosophy, sciences and literature of the first half of the seventeenth century, one would agree that Descartes is more than just the father of modern philosophy. According to Cousin, from the moment the *Discours de la méthode* appeared, Descartes was the greatest metaphysician of his time; the greatest mathematician since Viète, until Fermat; the greatest physiologist after Harvey; and the greatest prosaist, prior to Pascal.³⁶⁶

In Section 1.1 we saw that even d'Alembert praised Descartes for his application of algebra to geometry. Cousin exaggerated this point by saying that without this application it would have been impossible to formulate the differential calculus. In physics, Cousin gave Descartes the credit for making celestial mechanics possible. Cousin attributed all these successes to Descartes's method. Even the first rule of the Cartesian method is described by Cousin as a revolution in thinking, not only because it can be applied to all aspects of thought, but also because it emancipates the mind and brings it to a harmonious independence. The importance of the first rule lies especially in the evidence it puts forward. According to Cousin, its general claim addresses mathematicians as well as physicists, because it states the criterion for evidence. In the English edition the first rule of the Cartesian method reads:

The first was never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions

³⁶⁴ Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), p. vii.

³⁶⁵ *Hist. gén.*, p. 385.

³⁶⁶ Cf. *Hist. gén.*, p. 368.

and preconceptions, and to include nothing more in my judgements than what presented itself to my mind so clearly and so distinctly that I had no occasion to doubt it.³⁶⁷

The precept that evidence can only be found in clear and distinct ideas is described by Cousin as a 'vast and unexpected light that breathed new life in and rejoiced the human mind'. Although there are conditions to be met, such as methodical doubt, the Cartesian principle of evidence is its own criterion and guarantee. This means that there is no need for a higher authority, as the principle only recognizes its own authority. According to Cousin, in this way Descartes eliminated the dominatory influence of all temporal authorities over religion and science.

Le précepte de ne se rendre qu'à l'évidence est donc un précepte de liberté: il affranchit l'esprit humain dans tous les ordres de connaissance, et celui qui l'a proclamé le premier a pu être justement appelé le libérateur de la raison humaine.³⁶⁸

He adds, however, that Descartes did not revolt against the authority of religion and state. We will return to this point in the next section. Cousin pays hardly any attention to the other three rules, not even recognizing the third rule,³⁶⁹ because he thinks it was only applicable to mathematics. He considers that in real life, deduction is combined with observation and induction. This does not mean that Cousin believed that Descartes was a poor observer, on the contrary, he thought he was one of the most dedicated and attentive observers in the history of thought. His criticism of Descartes concerns the mathematical form of the demonstration by which he expressed the truths that he had discovered.

Les mathématiques sont le mauvais génie de Descartes en métaphysique; son bon génie est l'expérience appliquée aux choses de l'âme, c'est-à-dire la réflexion.³⁷⁰

Cousin distinguishes two 'spirits' in the Cartesian system, which are constantly combating one other: the mathematical spirit and the spirit of reflection. Unlike Descartes, Cousin claimed that the mathematical spirit has no place in the inner world of thinking, or the soul. He considers that, in Descartes's conception of the relation, the mathematical spirit transforms real and living truth, which is provided by the spirit of reflection as abstract truth, and seeks to deduce the living truth from the abstract in spite of their nature. In their constant combat, each spirit in turn takes the upper hand. Cousin considers that Descartes sought the same kind of evidence in metaphysics that he had already found in mathematics. Although Descartes used the method of doubt, he avoided absolute scepticism by acknowledging that he cannot doubt that he doubts, thus arriving at his famous

³⁶⁷ CSM I, 120.

³⁶⁸ *Hist. gén.*, p. 378.

³⁶⁹ CSM I, 120: 'The third, to direct my thoughts in an orderly manner, by beginning with the simplest and most easily known objects in order to ascend little by little, step by step, to knowledge of the most complex, and by supposing some order even among objects that have no natural order of precedence.'

³⁷⁰ *Hist. gén.* p. 380.

principle. The following quote illustrates how, according to Cousin, *cogito, ergo sum* forms the foundation of philosophy.

Cette intuition primitive et immédiate qui, sans nul appareil dialectique et géométrique, nous découvre, avec une parfaite évidence et une autorité souveraine, l'existence du sujet pensant dans celle de la pensée elle-même, est un fait attesté à tous les hommes par la conscience, et au philosophe par cette seconde conscience, plus savante que la première, qu'on appelle la réflexion. L'opération employée par Descartes n'est donc pas autre chose que la réflexion appliquée à l'étude de la pensée et de ses divers phénomènes. Un de ces phénomènes, le doute, contenait et révélait infailliblement la pensée, et la pensée contient et révèle infailliblement l'existence du sujet pensant.

L'étude de la pensée à l'aide de la réflexion, c'est, en langage moderne, la psychologie. Ainsi il est incontestable que Descartes a mis au monde la psychologie, il s'agit ici de la chose et non du mot, et qu'en obtenant par elle, et par elle seule, le premier principe de sa métaphysique, il l'a par là reconnue et établie comme le point de départ nécessaire de toute saine philosophie.³⁷¹

The greatest merit of Descartes, to Cousin, is the creation of psychology which, as mentioned above, he found to be an even greater discovery than Descartes's method. Cousin thinks it is unfortunate that Descartes substituted the natural process of the human mind for an artificial one, namely, the geometric model. This makes it extremely difficult for the historian to discern the right proportion between the purely methodological exposition of Cartesian metaphysics and the psychological one.

Concerning what Cousin calls the 'ontological' proof for the existence of God, he remarks that it is common sense that, from the awareness of one's own imperfections, it follows that one is not the principle of one's own being. Cousin simply states that it is impossible to avoid conceiving of an infinite and perfect being which would be the principle of its being: 'Pour entendre une pareille métaphysique, il suffit de s'interroger soi-même et de se rendre compte de ce qu'on pense.' The historical consequences that Cousin deduces from this point are even more curious. He finds that a doctrine which finds everything in human beings themselves had to, and actually did, make an immense conquest.

Devant elle reculèrent le scepticisme, le matérialisme, et l'athéisme, qui s'étaient si fort répandus en France et en Europe à la suite des guerres civiles et religieuses, dans le vide qu'avaient laissé dans les esprits et dans les âmes, en tombant successivement les uns sur les autres, les chimériques systèmes de la Renaissance. Au dix-huitième siècle, la philosophie de Descartes n'a pas été seulement un très-grand progrès dans la science: elle a été un bienfait pour l'humanité.³⁷²

In *Philosophie de Kant* Cousin discusses Kant's criticism of the ontological proof for the existence of God. Kant's criticism has already been discussed in Section 2.2, and in Section 11.3 we shall discuss Schelling's criticism of Kant on this point.

³⁷¹ *Hist. gén.*, p. 384.

³⁷² *Hist. gén.*, p. 390.

Cousin thought that Kant's criticism of the 'old method' – a term Kant did not use³⁷³ – is itself a fallacy (*sophisme*). According to Cousin, Kant presented a proof or thesis that was far too artificial and in which a contradiction is already present, after which it was easily shown that the fallacy was insoluble. Kant attacked the Cartesian ontological proof as it was transmitted by Leibniz, who wanted to fortify Descartes's proof by considering it as a syllogism, but in doing so, compromised it. According to Cousin we should not take the ontological proof for the existence of God to be a syllogism, but as a 'simple enthymème irréductible à un syllogisme'.³⁷⁴

There is a strong analogy between Cousin's interpretation of the ontological proof and his earlier exposition of the 'true sense' of the *cogito, ergo sum*. Cousin takes the most perfect being, not as some kind of abstraction, but as a real being that I, as a real being as well, can conceive of. In Cousin's opinion, the ontological proof rests on the *cogito* and also on the cosmological proof. This means that from the fact that I conceive the imperfection of my being, I can conceive the existence of a perfect being. The way in which this conception takes place and consequently, how we should take this 'proof' (whether we can speak of a proof, we will soon see), has to do with Cousin's distinction between spontaneity and reflection. According to Cousin, it is the 'natural conception of the perfect being, principle of my imperfect being that reason spontaneously provides and which later, when it is abstracted and generalized, engenders formula which reason accepts because it recognizes itself in it and retrieves its primitive and legitimate action in it'.³⁷⁵

In the preface to the third edition of his book on Kant, Cousin announced his criticism of Kant concerning the Cartesian proof. He claimed that consciousness is not a sensitive, empirical and uncertain faculty, but the essential form of intelligence which brings absolute certainty. To undermine this certainty means to ruin all other certainty and to condemn philosophy to scepticism.

Qui admet au contraire la certitude de la conscience, doutât-il un moment de tout le reste, peut, ce point seul subsistant, reconquérir successivement toutes les grandes croyances nécessaires à l'homme, d'abord la foi à sa propre existence, puis à toutes les autres existences, à celle de Dieu et à celle du monde.

Voilà ce que l'auteur du *Discours de la méthode* et des *Méditations* pensait avoir établi à jamais. D'un trait de plume Kant a renversé le rempart élevé par Descartes contre le scepticisme.³⁷⁶

Cousin explains that we should understand Descartes's ontological proof through psychology. Psychology provides natural theology with the ontological proof for the existence of God. This a priori proof is, for Cousin, very solid when we understand it from its true point of view and when we reconstruct it on its true basis. Kant presented the ontological proof in its logical form, but according to Cousin 'his arguments are not at all valid any more against the true Cartesian

³⁷³ Within many of his lengthy quotations from the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, which he mostly translates quite correctly, crucial passages are omitted and sometimes invented.

³⁷⁴ Cousin, *Philosophie de Kant*, p. 204.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. vii.

proof'. Cousin immunizes the ontological proof against criticism by saying that it cannot be attacked by any argument, because it does not depend on an argument.³⁷⁷ His reconstruction of the 'true Cartesian proof' can be found in his *Philosophie écossaise*.

Cousin had roughly the same criticism of Hutcheson and Locke concerning their presentation and rejection of the Cartesian proof. Although Hutcheson gave an inductive proof for the existence of God, he did not want to use the Cartesian proof as he found it to be 'manifestly faulty'. According to Cousin, Hutcheson, like Kant, only considered the abstract propositions in the Cartesian proof. He defends Descartes by saying that the propositions were not abstract and general propositions, but were particular in that they expressed intellectual facts. Having established that we are dealing with facts, Cousin stresses that they should be without any logical apparatus, because logic does not dispute or defend facts.

Dans les *Méditations*, Descartes ne représente pas un homme d'école, mais un homme naturel parvenant à toutes les grandes vérités de l'ordre naturel, à l'aide de ses facultés, qui se développent successivement. Cet homme pense: dès là qu'il pense, il juge qu'il existe. Il n'y a point là de raisonnement, de syllogisme; il y a une intuition directe de l'esprit, et l'exercice spontané et immédiat de notre pouvoir de juger et de connaître. Dès que cet homme sait qu'il existe, dès qu'il se connaît, il se trouve un être imparfait, limité, fini; et en même temps qu'il sent ses imperfections et ses bornes, il conçoit un être infini et parfait. Il ne s'agit pas plus ici d'un être infini abstrait que d'un être fini abstrait. Nous ne sommes pas encore dans l'abstraction et dans la logique; nous sommes dans la réalité et dans la psychologie.³⁷⁸

The possibility that the idea of God might be incomprehensible was solved by Cousin by saying that, as God is the cause of this universe, we know him through his effects, as the Psalmist and St. Paul had already indicated. Apart from this biblical argument, Cousin produced another equally weak argument which states that God is comprehensible because all the nations have talked about God from the beginning of intellectual life. Cousin clearly crosses the boundary between philosophy and religion here, although he pleaded fiercely for the maintenance of the distinction between the two domains, as we will see in the next section.

According to Cousin, Descartes was not a sceptic concerning the external world: he is precisely concerned with attempting to demonstrate it. The hypothesis of a malignant genius is destroyed by the proof for the existence of God and his attributes of infinite power, wisdom and veracity, that is, by the infinitely perfect being. Due to God's veracity, there can be no question of deception, hence, what appears to exist, exists. Unlike others, Cousin did not investigate whether Descartes committed a paralogism (namely a circular argument) here. Instead, he remarked that Descartes made an error in the form of an anachronism in the history of human knowledge. Cousin found it problematic that Descartes did not place the belief in the existence of the world at the same level as that of the soul and God, but that the

³⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 207.

³⁷⁸ Cousin, *Philosophie écossaise*, p. 52.

existence of the world follows from a reasoning, which, as a foundation, has the veracity of God.

Because Cousin had already shown that the perception of the external world is given earlier than that of the self, he could follow Descartes on this point. Cousin thought Descartes had opened the gates to idealism here: ‘on voit déjà venir Malebranche’. Nevertheless, he fiercely denied that this route leads to pantheism, as Leibniz had claimed. According to Cousin, Leibniz was not generous enough to Descartes and was obviously jealous. Furthermore, he found the accusation of pantheism to be also anachronistic, as the next quote shows.

Or il ne s’agissait pas encore de panthéisme au temps de Descartes; c’est bien plus tard, et longtemps après sa mort, que la redoutable question surgit; et alors les ennemis de Descartes ont été chercher dans ses écrits, pour diminuer sa gloire, des passages médiocrement réfléchis qu’il a laissé échapper pour ainsi dire dans l’innocence de sa pensée, qu’il aurait expliqués, disons mieux, qu’il a expliqués lui-même, quand on les lui a signalés.³⁷⁹

Cousin took the defence of Descartes concerning the accusation of pantheism seriously. This accusation is connected with the will and freedom, the role of continuous creation, final causes, the finality of the universe and his equivocal definition of substance. Cousin defended Descartes on all these points. He especially stressed that the God of Descartes is certainly not that of Spinoza. According to him, the differences between Descartes and Spinoza on this point are so great that there could be no kinship between them.

9.4 Eclecticism, politics and patriotism

We discover the reason why Cousin made an edition of the works of Descartes in its *Prospectus*. Unfortunately the original is lost, with Janet claiming that he had searched thoroughly but could not find it in any library, including Cousin’s.³⁸⁰ The only ‘original’ fragment that is left we owe to Feuerbach who quoted from it in his history of modern philosophy.³⁸¹

However, the text of the *Prospectus* was translated into German, appearing under the title ‘Über Descartes und sein Verhältniß zur Philosophie in Frankreich’ in the second volume of *Religion und Philosophie in Frankreich, eine Folge von Abhandlungen*, which was translated and published in 1827 by F. W. Carové in Göttingen. A comparison of this edition with the ‘original’ fragment from Feuerbach tells us that it is a correct and adequate translation.

In this text, Cousin said that Descartes broke through the logical and grammatical framework that scholasticism had constructed around the human mind. He did this by reducing thinking to consciousness, that is, he began all philosophical investigations with thinking itself. When Cousin called Descartes the father of modern philosophy, he meant Descartes had given a new spirit and

³⁷⁹ *Hist. gén.*, p. 395.

³⁸⁰ Janet, *Victor Cousin et son œuvre* (1885), p. 197n.

³⁸¹ Feuerbach, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza* [1833¹, 1844², 1847³], in FW II, 234-235.

method which together had revived and strengthened philosophy, proving its entire modern content.³⁸² Descartes was more than the initiator of a school, he brought about a complete change in the history of thinking. We can detect the patriotism in this small text, as, according to Cousin, when ignorant and hateful minds say that the French spirit is not suitable for the study of metaphysics, France needs only to answer that it gave Europe and humanity Descartes.

Cousin regretted the period in which France had forgotten Descartes and when the philosophy of Hobbes, which was taken up by Locke and developed by Voltaire and Condillac, became dominant. In Cousin's opinion, a serious and profound system was replaced by a frivolous and narrow-minded system. The latter limited human intelligence to sensation and thereby robbed it of its noblest faculty. According to Cousin, in the entire history of philosophy there is no example in which a system has triumphed so easily, without a single battle, as had sensualism. He therefore sees it as his duty to defend this great man who was condemned without a hearing, and to organize a new edition of the works of Descartes.³⁸³

Although Cousin credited himself with having rehabilitated Descartes and with being the first in a century to make a 'complete' edition of his works, he pointed out that Maine de Biran was the first to have rehabilitated 'the glory' of Descartes. In his *Introduction aux œuvres posthumes de M. Maine de Biran* [1834],³⁸⁴ Cousin had some kind words to say about Maine de Biran's theory.

M. de Biran est le premier en France qui ait réhabilité la gloire de Descartes, presque supprimée par le XVIII^e siècle, et qui osé regarder en face celle de Bacon. Le précepte fondamental de Bacon est de faire abstraction des causes et de s'en tenir à la recherche des faits et à l'induction des lois; et cela suffit ou peut suffire jusqu'à un certain point dans les sciences physiques; mais, en philosophie, négliger les causes, c'est négliger les êtres; c'est, par exemple, dans l'étude de l'homme, faire abstraction du fond même de la nature humaine, de la racine de toute réalité, du MOI, sujet propre de toutes les facultés qu'ils s'agit de reconnaître, parce qu'il est la cause de tous les actes dont ces facultés ne sont que la généralisation.³⁸⁵

Descartes is, for Maine de Biran, the creator of true philosophy, and Cousin adds that the sentence, *je pense, donc je suis*, is always the point of departure for every reasonable philosophical investigation. Cousin thought Maine de Biran had shown that thinking, in the sense the Cartesian *cogito* has given it, is what we now call consciousness. In Maine de Biran's theory, Cousin claims, it becomes clear that Descartes has shown that only consciousness clarifies existence and reveals to us our personality.³⁸⁶

³⁸² Cousin, *Discours prononcé à l'ouverture du cours, le 4 décembre 1817*, in *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, p. 2: 'Oui, la philosophie moderne tout entière est l'œuvre de ce grand homme: car elle lui doit l'esprit qui l'anime et la méthode qui fait sa puissance'.

³⁸³ From *Prospectus* to the *Œuvres de Descartes*, cf. Carové (ed.), *Philosophie in Frankreich* (1827), p. 10.

³⁸⁴ In Cousin, *Œuvres*, vol. 2, pp. 148-160.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Not only is Maine de Biran to be thanked. In the first volume of Cousin's edition of the works of Descartes, we also find a dedication to Royer-Collard:

À M. Royer-Collard, professeur de l'histoire de la philosophie moderne à la faculté des lettres de l'académie de Paris, qui le premier, dans une chaire française, combattit la philosophie des sens, et réhabilita Descartes, témoignage de ma vive reconnaissance pour ses leçons, ses conseils et son amitié.³⁸⁷

This dedication shows that Cousin, like Royer-Collard, combated sensualism. Still, we cannot concur with the claim that Royer-Collard rehabilitated Descartes. As we saw in the previous chapter, nowhere in Royer-Collard's works can we find a claim that would amount to a rehabilitation of Descartes. Nevertheless, Cousin placed Royer-Collard alongside himself at the end of a line which begins with Socrates, and includes Plato, the Gospel and Descartes, as we see in *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, which reads:

L'éclectisme est une des applications les plus importantes et les plus utiles de la philosophie que nous professons, mais il n'en est pas le principe.

Notre vraie doctrine, notre vrai drapeau est le spiritualisme, cette philosophie aussi solide que généreuse, qui commence avec Socrate et Platon, que l'Évangile a répandue dans le monde, que Descartes a mise sous les formes sévères du génie et des forces de la patrie, qui a péri avec la grandeur nationale au XVIII^e, et qu'au commencement de celui-ci M. Royer-Collard est venu réhabiliter dans l'enseignement public, pendant que M. de Chateaubriand, Mme de Staël, M. Quatremère de Quincy la transportaient dans la littérature et dans les arts.³⁸⁸

Although Cousin thanks Maine de Biran and Royer-Collard for rehabilitating Descartes, there is someone who he has forgotten to mention. In the preface to the eleventh volume (1826) of his Descartes edition, Cousin had complained about the lack of historical research in *Règles pour la direction de l'esprit* and *Recherche de la vérité par les lumières naturelles*, saying:

. . . ces deux monuments admirables n'ont pas même été aperçus d'un seul historien de la philosophie, et restoient ensevelis dans des *Opera posthuma Cartesii*, qui parurent à Amsterdam en 1701, cinquantes ans après la mort de Descartes.³⁸⁹

This is not true, as one of the few historiographers of philosophy in France had most certainly noticed these works. In a note from the second part of *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*,³⁹⁰ Degérando responded to Cousin's complaint by saying: 'Si l'éditeur (he earlier called him 'savant') avait lu le chapitre sur le cartésianisme, dans la première édition de l'*Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, publiée à Paris en 1804, tome 2, il y aurait vu cités ces écrits de Descartes'.

³⁸⁷ See Cous. I.

³⁸⁸ Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, preface, p. iii.

³⁸⁹ Cous. XI, p. ij.

³⁹⁰ HC II, vol. 2, 204 ('Note A').

Apart from the above quoted passage, and the one following, which is a remark on the entire enterprise of the edition of the works of Descartes, we will set aside Cousin's edition of Descartes's works as it is not relevant to our study.

Ce onzième volume est le dernier. Notre travail est terminé, et la France a enfin une édition française des Œuvres complètes de celui qui a tant fait pour sa gloire. Puisse ce monument, consacré à Descartes et à la France, servir à rappeler mes compatriotes à l'étude de la vraie philosophie, de cette philosophie dont Descartes a été, dans l'humanité, un des plus illustres interprètes, qui, sévère et hardie en même temps, sans sortir des limites de l'observation et de l'induction, atteint si haut et si loin, et qui partant de la conscience de l'homme, c'est-à-dire de la pensée, ne l'abandonne plus et la retrouve partout, dans la nature comme dans l'âme, dans les moindres détails comme dans les plus grands phénomènes de l'existence universelle: Je pense, donc je suis.³⁹¹

We will return to these striking remarks, which stress the relation between Descartes and France, after our discussion of Cousin's political eclecticism.

In the opening lecture of the course of 1817,³⁹² Cousin's eclecticism first became apparent when he discussed the distinction between subject and object. Cousin began by remarking that no one prior to Descartes had posed the philosophical problem of the distinction between subject and object clearly. Before Descartes, it was seen as a mere grammatical distinction from which nothing more followed than principles of the same grammatical nature.

Descartes lui-même, malgré la vigueur de son esprit, ne pénétra point toute la portée de cette distinction; sa gloire est de l'avoir faite, et d'avoir placé le vrai point de départ des recherches philosophiques dans la pensée ou le moi; mais il ne fut pas frappé, comme il devait l'être, de l'abîme qui sépare le sujet et l'objet; et après avoir posé le problème, ce grand homme le résolut trop facilement.³⁹³

According to Cousin, the schools of Locke, Kant and Reid had all tried to deal with this problem, first recognized by Descartes, but they each focused on different aspects. In Cousin's opinion, all philosophical questions with regard to the object can be reduced to the absoluteness and the reality of beings; and with regard to the subject, they can be reduced to the actual and primitive state of our knowledge. Locke was concerned with the origin of human knowledge; the Scottish School investigated the actual state of our knowledge; and Kant was only occupied with the legitimacy of the transition from subject to object. On the basis of this parallel division of questions and schools, Cousin considers the history of philosophy 'under a new aspect', as he calls it. All three schools are limited and incomplete in themselves, but when considered along side one another they form a whole. Cousin proudly announces that this is how his eclecticism came into being.

³⁹¹ Cous. XI, p. vij-viii.

³⁹² Held on 5 December 1816, in Cousin, *Premiers essais de philosophie*, p. 214 ff.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

Nous n'avons pas emprunté l'éclectisme à personne. Il est né spontanément en notre esprit du spectacle des luttes éclatantes et de l'harmonie cachée des trois grandes écoles du dix-huitième siècle.³⁹⁴

This approach apparently worked, because after he had applied it to these three schools, he applied it to other systems at other times. As a result of its success he considered the method to have become the 'light of history'. He adds remarkably: 'L'éclectisme est donc une doctrine toute française, et qui nous est propre'.

According to Cornelius,³⁹⁵ Cousin used German philosophy, especially that of Hegel, and his own eclectic theory, to justify constitutional monarchy. We have to say, however, that Hegel never intended to use his dialectical principle of reason in the service of liberalism. Also, Schelling applauded Cousin's retreat from politics in 1819. Nevertheless, we still find some remarks in Cousin's works that indicate an appropriation of Descartes in order to give a French foundation to his own fervent political convictions regarding constitutional monarchy.

Ajoutons bien vite que Descartes est un homme du dix-septième siècle et non du seizième: il ne s'insurge pas contre toute autorité; loin de là, il se plaît à reconnaître toutes les autorités dont la nécessité lui est évidente, celle de la religion et celle de l'État; mais il commence cette soumission dans les limites de la raison, qui sépare les temps modernes du moyen âge, et devait amener notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle, aussi éloignée de la servilité que l'esprit d'insubordination.³⁹⁶

The fact that Descartes did not rebel against the authorities of state and church is reason enough for Cousin to make Descartes – already the father of modern philosophy – the father of our 'noble and glorious constitutional liberty'.³⁹⁷

Although it may seem unlikely that Cousin's reasons for rehabilitating Descartes were political, it cannot be denied that his eclecticism has a political aspect. Cousin does not consider his eclecticism to be some uncertain equilibrium between all systems or, on the other hand, some kind of cowardly impartiality. Cousin finds that eclecticism chooses between systems, preferring some over others because of their principles or their consequences. Cousin says he does not want to conceal his opinions, which are well determined and well known in relation to both philosophy and politics.

En politique, nous sommes ouvertement pour les principes de la révolution française. Sa cause est la nôtre; nous l'avons servie, et nous la servirons jusqu'au bout avec une fidélité inébranlable. Nous n'entendons certes pas qu'il faille jeter au vent les traditions qui perpétuent les nations comme les familles, et encore bien moins sacrifier l'ordre à la liberté qui serait ici la première victime. Mais enfin, dans la grande querelle qui divise aujourd'hui la France, l'Europe et le monde, nous sommes du parti libéral en France, en Europe et dans le monde. Nous faisons profession de croire que depuis 1789 le seul vrai gouvernement

³⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 227.

³⁹⁵ See Cornelius, *Die Geschichtslehre Victor Cousins unter besonderer Berücksichtigung des Hegelschen Einflusses* (1958).

³⁹⁶ *Hist. gén.*, p. 373.

³⁹⁷ *Hist. gén.*, p. 378.

pour tous les peuples civilisés est la monarchie constitutionnelle. Cette forme de gouvernement est celle qui assure le mieux la liberté; c'est par là qu'elle nous est chère; car la liberté c'est la vie; et sans elle peuples et individus languissent comme dans les ombres de la mort. Nos vœux et notre cœur sont donc partout où on l'invoque, où l'on combat, où l'on souffre pour elle.

In philosophy it is the same, Cousin is the proponent of every system which upholds the spirituality of the soul, the liberty and responsibilities of our actions, the fundamental distinction between right and wrong, the impartiality of virtuousness, and God as creator and regulator of the world. This set of beliefs and opinions he thinks is best fulfilled by the system developed by Descartes.

Nous respectons, nous chérissons la liberté philosophique, mais nous sommes convaincus que son meilleur emploi est dans l'école cartésienne. Cette école est à nos yeux bien au-dessus de toutes les écoles rivales par sa méthode qui est la vraie, par son esprit indépendant et modéré qui est le véritable esprit philosophique, par ce caractère de spiritualisme à la fois sobre et élevé qui doit toujours être le nôtre, par la grandeur et la beauté morale de ses principes en tout genre, enfin parce qu'elle est essentiellement française et qu'elle a répandu sur la nation une gloire immense qu'il n'est pas bon de répudier; car, après la vérité, la gloire n'est-elle pas aussi quelque chose de sacré? C'est ce dernier titre en quelque sorte patriotique du cartésianisme que nous rappellerons brièvement: nous avons cent fois exposé et développé les autres.³⁹⁸

In these two quotations we can find all of Cousin's reasons for reinstating Descartes: spiritualism in philosophy, constitutional monarchy in politics, completed with an element of patriotism.

In a recent study, Vermeren shows that while Cousin had first elaborated his philosophy before applying it to politics, both domains are intimately connected in Cousin's thought from the beginning.³⁹⁹ As to Cousin's eclecticism, he distinguishes two periods. The first he situates at the time of his journeys to Germany (1817-1824) when he had to be cautious and so turned to historical studies in order to confirm the correctness of his philosophy. By the time of the Trois Glorieuses (27, 28, and 29 July 1830), that led to the fall of Charles X and the accession of Louis-Philippe I, Cousin's reputation had been moulded by the legend of the philosopher who faced persecution in the pursuit of liberty. What was more, he believed that he already had a solid philosophical system. His eclecticism thus led him to political liberalism and the support of the July monarchy.

The second period of his eclecticism occurred during the time in which a philosophical institute was being developed in the service of the state. In his political function of the Minister of Education, Cousin may have wanted philosophy to take over the educational role that religion already played. As the Church obviously was not pleased with this intention, it sought to accuse Cousin of pantheism. As a consequence, Cousin 'sacrificed' Pascal in order to rescue Descartes. He showed that Pascal's philosophy leads to scepticism once the

³⁹⁸ Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), pp. v-vii.

³⁹⁹ Vermeren, *Victor Cousin. Le jeu de la philosophie et de l'état* (1995), p. 53.

revelation, on which his proof for the existence of God depends, is excluded. Pascal does not arrive at God through reason, and therefore he did not see that religion, as an alliance between reason and the heart, could be the pinnacle of philosophy.

Cousin summarizes his entire philosophy as having a deep faith in liberty, which he understands as the responsibility and spirituality of the human soul. He also believes in a morality founded on the eternal distinction between good and bad; just and unjust, rather than on the unstable calculations of interest, an irritating mysticism, or an inapplicable stoicism. In short, Cousin stands for a philosophy that is radically opposed to the philosophy of sensation.

En même temps que nous rompons avec cette déplorable philosophie, où tant de fois nous avons signalé la racine des malheurs de la patrie, parce qu'en répandant de proche en proche, pendant de longues années, dans toutes les classes de la société française, le scepticisme et le matérialisme, elle a ôté d'avance les fondements nécessaires de la vraie liberté, nous ne donnons point à la philosophie nouvelle des guides étrangers, fût-ce même le sage Reid ou le profond et vertueux philosophe de Kœnigsberg: de bonne heure nous l'avons placée sous l'invocation de Descartes.⁴⁰⁰

As this quote shows, for Cousin there is a clear connection between philosophy and society or domestic politics. This is why, not wanting to have a foreign guide to 'the new philosophy', he promotes Descartes as its patron. We have to bear in mind, though, that this was written almost forty years after his opening discourse, during which time his political engagement had become enmeshed with his philosophical activities.

The invocation of Descartes has the effect that, after careful study of the *Meditations*, we will discover the true sense of the famous *cogito, ergo sum*, as we have already seen. Cousin says that the new sense given to this enthymeme will one day clarify all modern philosophy as well as his own enterprise. We saw that it took some time to realize this, as he had initially wanted philosophy to begin with the question of external perception. Now he conjoins Descartes and Plato:

Ces deux grand noms, depuis si longtemps oubliés en France, reparurent avec honneur dans la nouvelle école, et la philosophie française du dix-neuvième siècle rentra dans la voie de cette grande et immortelle philosophie spiritualiste . . .⁴⁰¹

Cousin uses the reinstatement of both philosophers to underline the relation between his spiritualist philosophy and Christianity. Although there is an obvious alliance between this philosophy and religion, Cousin also wants to make a clear distinction. Philosophy should not be a religion, as it is concerned with natural truths and only raises 'la lumière naturelle', while religion is concerned with the supernatural dogmas and appeals to a supernatural authority. The philosophy of sensation destroys freedom and the spirituality of the soul, and thereby destroys the subject to which Christianity is extended. In distinction to this, Cousin sees his

⁴⁰⁰ Preface to the third ed. of *Premiers Essais* (1855), p. ix.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. x.

philosophy as perfectly compatible with faith, as he does not address the doctrines of faith. He refuses to consider God as the cause and substance from which everything is derived, because this results in deism. Christianity needs a living and intelligent God, the principle and model of the good and just.

Au contraire, l'alliance peut être sérieuse et sincère entre la philosophie spiritualiste et le christianisme, parce que cette philosophie laisse au christianisme la place de ses dogmes, et toutes ses prises sur l'humanité. Elle lui offre une âme à la fois pleine de misère et de grandeur, pour y asseoir ses enseignements sublimes; une morale généreuse, pour la couronner de ses divines espérances; un Dieu qui est une personne comme la personne humaine, avec l'infinité de plus, et peut ainsi porter la trinité chrétienne.⁴⁰²

Cousin says he would not dream of replacing Christianity with philosophy, but just as in politics we start from the love for liberty in order to defend the monarchy and the aristocracy, we have to start from philosophy in order to honour and love Christianity. We see here that Cousin places not only Plato but also Descartes within a theological history while maintaining a strict distinction between religion and philosophy.

In a recent study, Schneider explains Cousin's eclecticism with respect to both his opinion on religion and his politics.⁴⁰³ The rhetoric, Schneider claims, which corresponds with the thesis of an all-understanding and all-explaining eclecticism, was Cousin's instrument for explaining the historical situation to his audience and to convince them of the task philosophy has for mankind. According to him, Cousin saw philosophy as the medium in which ideas and doctrines are discussed. He used his position to articulate goals and produce various orientations. Schneider distinguishes a narrow and a broad sense of Cousin's political goals. The narrow sense emphasized the place of French philosophy over that of German philosophy. For example, Cousin thought it was 'a French duty' to provide the 'German inclination towards systems' with an eclectic answer. In the general sense, he saw his exposition of philosophy as a task for mankind in the present.

Now that we have shown the, more or less, political reasons why Cousin rehabilitated Descartes, we would like to focus on the purely patriotic reasons. In the discourse at the opening of the course on December 1817,⁴⁰⁴ Cousin says that his rehabilitation of Descartes is not an act of patriotism:

Ce n'est pas le patriotisme, c'est le sentiment profond de la vérité et de la justice qui nous fait placer toute la philosophie aujourd'hui répandue dans le monde sous l'invocation du nom de Descartes. Oui, la philosophie moderne tout entière est l'œuvre de ce grand homme: car elle lui doit l'esprit qui anime et la méthode qui fait sa puissance.

However, in his *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), he seems to have changed his mind. Cousin, in the preface of this work, places the Cartesian school

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. xiii.

⁴⁰³ Schneider, *Philosophie und Universität. Historisierung der Vernunft im 19. Jahrhundert* (1998), p. 180 ff.

⁴⁰⁴ In Cousin, *Du vrai, du beau et du bien*, p. 2.

above all others and mentions various reasons for this. Its method is the true one; its spirit is the true philosophical one because it is independent and moderate; it has the character of spiritualism, being at the same time sober and elevated; and it contains principles of all kinds that are of moral greatness and beauty. He then provides another reason of a different kind. He finds that the Cartesian school is the best:

. . . parce qu'elle est essentiellement française et qu'elle a répandue sur la nation une gloire immense qu'il n'est pas bon de répudier; car, après la vérité, la gloire n'est-elle pas aussi quelque chose de sacré? C'est ce dernier titre en quelque sorte patriotique du cartésianisme que nous rappellerons brièvement: nous avons cent fois exposé et développé les autres.⁴⁰⁵

There are clear patriotic reasons for Cousin's rehabilitation of Descartes. The mere fact that Descartes was French had been decisive in making him the father of modern philosophy. There are further passages where we notice the remarkable place of the 'French spirit' in Cousin's history of philosophy. In the long introduction to his edition of the works of Abélard, for instance, he says that Abélard and Descartes derive their greatness from the 'esprit français'. The characteristics of this 'esprit' display a clarity of language which stems from the sharpness and precision of its ideas. Cousin explains the genius of Abélard and Descartes by saying that they were not only both French, they also came from the same district, Brittany, whose inhabitants distinguish themselves by a vivid feeling of independence and a very strong personality.⁴⁰⁶ In *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, we find a similar remark about Brittany. He says that Descartes was born 'par hazard' in La Haye in Touraine, but originated from Rennes, 'dans cette Bretagne qui semble avoir mis sur lui sa marque, une assez forte personnalité, une sincérité un peu hautaine, une sorte d'indocilité innée à se plier au goût et à l'opinion des autres, avec une assez grande assurance en soi-même'.⁴⁰⁷

Cousin often talks about the 'caractère national de notre philosophie',⁴⁰⁸ which he finds connects 'us' with Descartes and separates 'us' from all 'foreign' philosophy. By this, he means the psychological foundation of philosophy, which he thinks to be the point of departure of every sound philosophy. Descartes is the liberator of the human mind, but, as mentioned above, this did not mean that he rebelled against all authority. He was willing to recognize authority where its necessity was evident, namely that of religion and state. However, it was within the limits of reason that Descartes recognized these authorities, thus, as we have said, marking the separation between modern times and the Middle Ages that had led to 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle'.

Schelling also thinks that the freedom of philosophy, which originated in the removal of all authority, was realized by the famous *cogito, ergo sum*. Remarkably

⁴⁰⁵ Cousin, *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (1845), p. vii.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Cousin (ed.), *Ouvrages inédites d'Abélard* (1836), p. iv.

⁴⁰⁷ *Hist. gén.*, p. 361.

⁴⁰⁸ See *Hist. gén.*, p. 6; in his *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, vol. 1, p. x (Avertissement) he even speaks of 'un caractère . . . d'être profondément française'.

enough, Schelling also claims the beginning of free philosophy for his nation, because Descartes was in Bavaria when he formulated the first ideas of his philosophy. Although Schelling does not develop the idea of a national character of philosophy, he stresses that both Descartes and Spinoza had their patrons and patronesses in Pfalz.⁴⁰⁹

Cousin apparently was not concerned with being a historian and a patriot at the same time. As an historian he had found that various schools and systems in England, Scotland and Germany had all been inspired by Descartes. As a patriot he would therefore search and gather, for France, the truths that are scattered in the great European philosophies: 'il appartient à la France de tout connaître et de tout juger'.⁴¹⁰

These forms of historiographical patriotism did not end with Cousin, but continued to develop in the twentieth century. Even in the standard edition of the works of Descartes, we encounter nationalistic remarks. In 1910, Charles Adam proudly writes:

Jamais le génie de la France n'avait encore plané si haut, projetant une vive lumière, non pas sur toutes choses, mais sur quelques-unes au moins de celles qu'il choisit pour objet, et on eut l'illusion de croire que c'était tout l'univers. D'autres grands esprits se sont élevés à des hauteurs non moindres, ou plutôt ont atteint aussi des sommets d'où ils ont illuminé d'autres domaines de la pensée. Mais Descartes leur avait montré l'exemple, et demeurait leur précurseur et leur maître. Sa philosophie à la française fut la première qui répondit pleinement aux instincts de notre race. Philosophie des idées claires et distinctes, fortement enchaînées entre elles, et qui s'adressaient à tout le genre humain: ne prétendait-il pas être compris des Turcs eux-mêmes?⁴¹¹

With this last remark Adam refers to the *Conversation with Burman* [1648] where Descartes said: 'I have written my philosophy in such a way as to make it acceptable anywhere – even among the Turks – and to avoid giving the slightest offence to anyone'.⁴¹² Coming from Adam, who is clearly quite patriotic, this reference has an ironic sense, especially when we take into account the tense, if not hostile relation between France and Turkey in those days.

The political instability during the period between the French Revolution and the Third Republic in which Cousin lived – from An I of the first republic to the second empire – caused a need for law and order. Because the philosophy of Descartes has its conservative and its modern sides, it seemed to fulfill this need. In his *Histoire générale de la philosophie* Cousin calls Descartes 'le libérateur de la raison humaine', because he appealed to evidence only. At the same time Cousin claims Descartes did not defy authority but recognized those of religion and state. This combination, he thinks, has led to 'notre noble, notre glorieuse liberté constitutionnelle'.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Schelling, *Werke*, vol. 5, pp. 78-79^{fn}.

⁴¹⁰ *Cours d'histoire de la philosophie moderne*, vol. 1, p. xi.

⁴¹¹ Adam, *Vie & Oeuvres de Descartes* (1910), AT XII, 559.

⁴¹² *Corr.*, AT V, 159; CSM III, 342.

⁴¹³ *Hist. gén.*, p. 384.

But there were more than the socio-political reasons alone why Cousin reinstated Descartes. Cousin, along with Hegel and Erdmann, was one of the first philosophers to see Descartes as philosopher of the subject and father of modern philosophy. The construction of the Cartesian system is considered by Hegel, as we shall see in Part IV, as ‘the resumption of philosophy’, and Cousin shares this view with him. We saw how Cousin saw the famous Cartesian *cogito*, by which he thought psychology (i.e. epistemology) was brought into the world. According to Cousin, it was through this psychology alone that Descartes obtained the first principles of his metaphysics, thus establishing the necessary point of departure of every sane philosophy.

