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## The rebirth of Descartes

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## IV

### **Descartes in Historiography and German Idealism**

This part aims to give a concise account of the reinstatement of Descartes by German historiographers and by a number of German Idealists during the first half of the nineteenth century. In order to gain an overview of the changes in the reception of Descartes we will proceed both historically and thematically. This means that we will distinguish between texts that give the Cartesian philosophy, in general, a place in the history of philosophy, such as handbooks and courses in the history of philosophy, and texts that systematically depart from or discuss specific themes in Cartesian philosophy. As an interaction between historiography and the systematic disciplines of philosophy is difficult if not impossible to determine, for the time being we will not assume that the rise of German historiography *caused* the appropriation of Descartes in nineteenth-century philosophy.<sup>414</sup> Therefore, we will discuss both domains in parallel.

Firstly, in Chapter 10, we shall examine the various reasons why Descartes suddenly obtained a special place in the historiography of philosophy. In discussing these reasons we will focus on how Cartesian philosophy was described, what elements were thought to be praiseworthy and to what extent, according to the historiographers, Descartes had influenced other philosophers.

The aim of Chapter 11 is not merely to show that Cartesian themes were again on the philosophical agenda, but also to explain why this was so. In order to give an account of the appropriation of Cartesian themes we need to consider two problems. Firstly, there are not always direct references to Descartes, which means that we have to distance ourselves from the texts. Secondly, the intention of systematical texts is not, in the first instance, aimed at a reinstatement of Descartes. In order to deal with these problems, we will isolate those themes which were elaborated by Descartes himself and ignored or ridiculed during the eighteenth century. In order to maintain unity and order in this study, we will focus on the theory of innate ideas in particular. There are also systematical reasons for focusing our attention on this theme.

An extrinsic reason for this focus on the theory of innate ideas is that the appearance of this theme is a very clear and distinct indication of a change in thought in general, and of a reinstatement of Descartes in particular. With hardly any exception, eighteenth-century philosophers agreed that there were no innate ideas. As Descartes, and only derivatively, Leibniz, were the last philosophers to explicitly 'prove' and use innate ideas, it seems obvious to connect Descartes with the revival of the doctrine of innate ideas.

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<sup>414</sup> The argument would be that because historiography mentioned Descartes earlier, it *caused* his reinstatement in systematical philosophy, which is clearly fallacious (*post hoc ergo propter hoc*).

Secondly, the theme of innate ideas is closely connected to the other core themes in Cartesianism: the *cogito* and the idea of God. This means that when we discuss this particular theme, the other themes will logically follow. As we saw in the first part, this theme was an easy target of mockery for most philosophers. In the fourth and fifth parts we will see that innate ideas did not lose their value as an important addition to some philosophical systems, for example, neo-Kantianism.

## 10 THE RISE OF GERMAN HISTORIOGRAPHY OF PHILOSOPHY

German historiography of philosophy started with the appearance of Johann Jakob Brucker's *Historia critica philosophiae* (1742-1744, second edition 1766-1767). As it is beyond the historical scope of this study (the fourth volume, in which he discusses Descartes dates from 1744), we do not consider this work in detail,<sup>415</sup> but merely note that many authoritative witnesses, for example, Buhle,<sup>416</sup> Goethe,<sup>417</sup> Kant,<sup>418</sup> Hegel,<sup>419</sup> Schopenhauer,<sup>420</sup> Degérando,<sup>421</sup> and Cousin<sup>422</sup> knew, used and admired this impressive work.

The rise of German historiography can be characterized by a vast quantity of thorough, scholarly research in the history of philosophy which aimed at describing the whole history of philosophy from the beginning to the present day. Whether or not the historiographical interest was aroused by Brucker (1696-1770), many historiographers wanted to improve on his work by writing a history of philosophy that was more critical and always based on source texts, yet less extensive and perhaps, by writing in the vernacular, more popular. What we can call 'the rise of German historiography of philosophy' is not only characterized by the large quantity of authors and works, but also by the authors' tendency to thoroughness and completeness.

Although nineteenth-century historiography classified the beginning of modern philosophy as a distinct period, we cannot say it intended to reinstate Descartes. However, there were certain historiographers like Tennemann, Buhle, Tiedemann or Erdmann who went further than mere historical claims when they discussed Descartes. The reasons for this were methodological and super-historical, which either means that they were not just historiographers, or that historiography went further than giving a historical account. This suggests that the question of the

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<sup>415</sup> For an excellent discussion of his work see Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, (1973), p. 131-150.

<sup>416</sup> See his *Geschichte des philosophierenden menschlichen Verstandes* (1793) and his *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie, seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften* (1800-1805).

<sup>417</sup> Goethe seems to base his knowledge of the history of philosophy on Brucker, see *Aus meinem Leben. Dichtung und Wahrheit*, II, 6, in *Sämtliche Werke* (1986), vol. 14, p. 243.

<sup>418</sup> For his knowledge of Plato (see e.g. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* B 372), the theory of atoms (see e.g. *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, AA I, 266 and possibly for his knowledge of Descartes, Kant used Brucker. The latter hypothesis makes Schütt, see 'Kant, Cartesius und der „deutsche Idealist“', in *Descartes nachgedacht*, p. 177.

<sup>419</sup> Hegel frequently used Brucker throughout his *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Glockner, vol. 19.

<sup>420</sup> Schopenhauer praises Brucker's work, see *Parerga und Paralipomena* I, SSW V, 36, and uses it, see e.g. *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* I, SSW II, 476 and *Parerga und Paralipomena* I, SSW V, 6.

<sup>421</sup> Degérando, in HC I, vol. I, p. 146 calls Brucker 'le véritable créateur dans cet ordre de recherches [i.e. the historiography of philosophy], en considérant l'ensemble et l'étendue qu'il a su leur donner. Il y a compris toutes les branches de la philosophie, toutes les périodes de son développement, tous les pays où elle a germé, même les temps et les contrées où elle était à peine élevée au-dessus des simples traditions vulgaires...'. His eulogy continues for several pages.

<sup>422</sup> According to Cousin, Brucker is 'le père de l'histoire de la philosophie', see *Manuel de l'histoire de la philosophie traduit de l'allemand de Tennemann par V. Cousin* (1829), vol. 1, Preface p. XX.

importance of Descartes for philosophy and the history of philosophy is not a purely historical one. In the following sections we will see whether or not it was the historiographers of philosophy who claimed that the period of modern philosophy began with Descartes, thus giving him the status of the ‘father of modern philosophy’.

### 10.1 Johann Gottlieb Buhle (1763-1821)

In *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie seit der Epoche der Wiederherstellung der Wissenschaften* (1800-05),<sup>423</sup> Buhle intended to emulate the work of his colleagues, only doing this more concisely. Nevertheless it took him eight volumes to do so. Although the major works of Tennemann and others<sup>424</sup> all appeared around the same time, this did not deter Buhle from writing another history of philosophy. His reason for this was not that these works were lacking, but rather:

Sie soll das, was jene Werke in mehrern Bänden weitläufiger und mit mancherley für die besonderen Zwecke derselben sehr lehrreichen und nützlichen Nebenuntersuchungen verbunden enthalten, gedrängter darstellen, ohne in die Kürze und Trockenheit eines Compendiums auszuarten, das gerade bey der Geschichte der Philosophie nicht leicht etwas mehr als Nomenclatur seyn kann . . .<sup>425</sup>

In the first volume (1800) he states that in order to define modern philosophy one must have a precise historical knowledge of ancient philosophy. As a result of this approach, Buhle does not think that Descartes should be seen as the founder of an original philosophical system in modern times, or that modern philosophy begins with Descartes. Also, according to Buhle, Descartes was not the first modern founder of an original philosophical system, as the sixteenth century had already produced several equally original thinkers. Buhle even questions the originality of Descartes, for looking at his nearest predecessors and at the Greek systems, we can see, for example, how his scepticism relies on these works.<sup>426</sup> Thus, Buhle suggests that in order to properly understand Cartesian philosophy we have to study the philosophy which preceded it and consider its relation to Descartes.

In the preface to the third volume (1801), however, he seems to have changed his opinion.

Allerdings hat Des Cartes das Verdienst, zuerst unter den neuern Weltweisen ein unabhängiges Philosophiren nicht nur als Methode

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<sup>423</sup> Henceforth GPEW.

<sup>424</sup> Of the many great historiographers of philosophy we want to mention Christoph Meiners (1747-1810) and his major work *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs und Verfalls der Wissenschaften in Griechenland und Rom* (1781-1782) and Dieterich Tiedemann (1748-1803) and his major work, *Geist der speculativen Philosophie* (1791-1797). For a discussion of most historiographers and their works see Ulrich Johannes Schneider, *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes. Eine Archäologie der Philosophiegeschichte* (1990), Lutz Geldsetzer, *Die Philosophie der Philosophiegeschichte im 19. Jahrhundert* (1968) and Lucien Braun, *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie* (1973). For a short and clear overview see the article of John Passmore ‘Historiography of Philosophy’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edwards, vol 6, pp. 226-230.

<sup>425</sup> GPEW I, ix.

<sup>426</sup> GPEW I, vii.

empfohlen, sondern auch, wenn gleich kein in jeder Hinsicht nachahmungswürdiges Muster, doch durch die Originalität seiner Entdeckungen, und die philosophische Revolution, welche dieselben bewirken, ein merkwürdiges und zur Nacheiferung anreizendes Beyspiel desselben gegeben zu haben.<sup>427</sup>

A possible but weak explanation for this change could be that the third volume appeared a year later than the first, and in preparing for this volume Buhle had probably studied Descartes more thoroughly.

In contrast to the common attitude towards Descartes during the eighteenth century, Buhle distinguishes between Cartesian mathematics, physics, astronomy and cosmology on the one hand, and his philosophy on the other. In writing the history of philosophy, Buhle is not focusing, and does not want to focus, on the former topics. He only remarks that Descartes's cosmophysics and astronomy did not amount to anything because his axioms were arbitrary hypotheses based on one-sided or even false observations. According to Buhle, the reputation of Cartesian philosophy had been contaminated by its association with his false physics and cosmophysics through the scientific interest of readers.

However, when he comes to speak about the 'eigentliche' Cartesian philosophy, Descartes does not fare much better. With reference to the four rules of the *Discours de la méthode*, which Buhle calls the 'praktische Logik des Des Cartes', he says that Descartes has neither understood them nor used them properly. In particular, he considers that Descartes's views concerning the evidence and succinctness of knowledge were false or undeveloped.<sup>428</sup>

Buhle undermines Descartes's arguments and rejects the most important theories in the Cartesian system. His reasoning is as follows. Firstly, Descartes obtained the criterion of truth, finding that which is clear and distinct to be true, through the notion of the clarity and immediate intuitiveness of thinking. However, as there was still a possibility of error, he needed the ontological proof to conclude the existence of the most Perfect Being. This led him to conclude, from the uncertain criterion of truth, the proposition 'God exists' as apodictically certain, and with its help he retracted the former's uncertainty. In this manner, according to Buhle, Descartes clearly smuggled certainty into his system.

Wenn die Deutlichkeit des Denkens an und für sich noch ein unsicheres Kriterium des Wahren ist, so ist auch die Existenz Gottes unsicher, sofern sie bloß auf eine deutliche Idee des vollkommensten Wesens sich stützt; und ist diese unsicher, so kann aus ihr nimmermehr auf die Existenz einer gewissen Wahrheit überhaupt, die von Gott der Seele unmittelbar mitgetheilt wäre, geschlossen werden.<sup>429</sup>

Buhle does not seem to make any distinction between Descartes's ontological argument and his cosmological argument for the existence of God. The cosmological argument, by definition, relies on the principle of causality. In the

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<sup>427</sup> GPEW III, vi.

<sup>428</sup> GPEW III, 12.

<sup>429</sup> GPEW III, 16-17.

Third Meditation, Descartes explains that the idea of God cannot come from the self (we quote the first French translation from 1647):

Par le nom de Dieu i'entens vne substance infinie, eternelle, immuable, independante, toute connoissante, toute puissante, & par laquelle moy-mesme, & toutes les autres choses qui sont (s'il est vray qu'il y en ait qui existent) ont esté creées & produites. Or ces auantages sont si grands & si eminens, que plus attentiuement ie les considere, & moins ie me persuade que l'idée que i'en ay puisse tirer son origine de moy seul. Et par consequent il faut necessairement conclure de tout ce que i'ay dit auparauant, que Dieu existe; car, encore que l'idée de la substance soit en moy, de cela mesme que ie suis vne substance, ie n'aurois pas neantmoins l'idée d'une substance infinie, moy qui suis vn estre finy, si elle n'auroit esté mise en moy par quelque substance qui fust veritablement infinie.<sup>430</sup>

As we can see, Descartes makes use of the principle of causality, which states that the cause of something is greater or more pure than its effect, together with the idea of perfection which suggests that something perfect cannot result from something less perfect. In this case he applies these notions to infinity leading to the conclusion that something finite cannot be the cause of something infinite.

The certainty that Buhle mentions, appears in the Fifth Meditation where Descartes produces an ontological argument for the existence of God.

Or maintenant, si de cela seul que ie puis tirer de ma pensée l'idée de quelque chose, il s'ensuit que tout ce que ie reconnois clairement & distinctement appartenir à cette chose, luy appartient en effect, ne puis-je pas tirer de cecy vn argument & vne preuve demonstratiue de l'existence de Dieu? Il est certain que ie ne trouue pas moins en moy son idée, c'est à dire l'idée d'un estre souuerainement parfait, que celle de quelque figure ou de quelque nombre que ce soit. Et ie ne connois pas moins clairement & distinctement qu'une actuelle & eternelle existence appartient à sa nature, que ie connois que tout ce que ie puis demonstrier de quelque figure ou de quelque nombre, appartient veritablement à la nature de cette figure ou de cet nombre.<sup>431</sup>

Descartes connects the notion of 'un être souverainement parfait' with certain knowledge, in the sense that God cannot be a deceiver, since deception is an imperfection. In the cosmological argument, however, the concept of perfection does not play a role, as it is focused instead on the concept of infinity.

The Cartesian theory of innate ideas is also criticized in Buhle's exposition. After having explained what innate ideas are, he states that it is clear that the criterion for the notion of the innate ideas is highly undetermined and unstable. It is remarkable, however, that Buhle determines the use of innate ideas themselves as a criterion; and unfortunately, he does not explain how he arrived at this interpretation.<sup>432</sup> According to him, the criterion for the existence of innate ideas is

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<sup>430</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 35-36.

<sup>431</sup> *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 52.

<sup>432</sup> In Part V we shall return in detail to the interpretation of innate idea as criterion with reference to Hermann Cohen.

based on the subjective clarity (*Klarheit*) of consciousness and a ‘conviction’ which is never the same for different people at different times. He therefore thinks that the criterion is exposed to the errors, fantasy and feelings involved. Moreover, it is impossible to completely determine the number of innate ideas according to this criterion.<sup>433</sup>

Buhle’s most severe criticism concerns the Cartesian method and the system in general. According to Buhle, Descartes made a major mistake (*Hauptfehler*) in abandoning all preceding philosophy along with most of its principles, some of which were undeniable. Instead, he only trusted the facts of his own consciousness. It is highly probable that Buhle thinks that Descartes denied the history of philosophy as a result of this method. For while, in order to discover new methods and directions in philosophy, independent thinking is required, if one takes into account the older systems one might prevent errors. Moreover, reference to preceding works enables testing or confirmation of this new way of forming ideas.<sup>434</sup>

The Cartesian principle of truth, though appreciated by Kant as we saw in the previous part, is, for Buhle, the reason why the Cartesian system as a whole went wrong. According to Buhle, Descartes confused:

... die ideale Wirklichkeit mit der realen, wie sich das bey seinen Sätzen von der Seele als denkenden Substanz, bey seinem Beweise vom Dasein Gottes u.w. zeigte.<sup>435</sup>

Notwithstanding this difference of opinion between Buhle and Kant, Buhle’s terminology is quite Kantian, as the following quotation illustrates.

Darauf dachte Descartes nicht einmal, die Grundprincipien der geistigen Vermögen des Menschen rein aufzunehmen und systematisch zusammenzustellen, diesen ihr eigentümliches Gebiet anzuweisen, und die Grenzen ihrer Anwendung zu bestimmen; sondern er gieng gleich daran, ein neues philosophisches System selbst aus dem unmittelbaren Bewußtsein aufzuführen, ohne vorher die Natur dieses Bewußtseins, die Merkmale von Klarheit, Deutlichkeit, Evidenz, auf die er sich doch so sehr stützte, genauer zu entwickeln und zu bestimmen.<sup>436</sup>

In other words, Buhle expected Descartes to perform a kind of ‘Kritik der reinen Vernunft’, before building his philosophical system, which is a quite anachronistic demand.

Despite his criticism of almost every theme in Descartes, including the theory of innate ideas, Buhle still thinks that without Descartes, Locke and Leibniz would not have developed their theories of knowledge. Descartes showed that philosophy did not have to be the dry pursuit that it had become within Scholasticism. On the contrary, it could be a highly fruitful discipline when applied to nature and mankind. The Cartesian system proved to be favourable to the improvement of

<sup>433</sup> See GPEW III, 24. In Part V it shall become clear that this kind of rejection of innate ideas changes in the course of the nineteenth century.

<sup>434</sup> Conf. GPEW III, 41.

<sup>435</sup> GPEW III, 42.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.



philosophy, because it awakened the ‘Geist des philosophischen Selbstdenkens’. Descartes showed that it was possible to create a new system from one’s own consciousness without depending on existing philosophical systems. When Buhle compares Descartes with Bacon, he remarks that although Bacon rejected all speculations based on concepts, he did not solve the problems situated in the essence of the mind. In this sense Descartes wanted to address these problems in an original way. This caused much emulation of Descartes. At the same time, Descartes’s reasonable hypotheses impelled examination, which could only be beneficial to philosophy. The course of his entire speculation, which Buhle calls ‘die Genesis seines Systems’, led his opponents, if only in order to dispute and refute the system, to a more precise study of human understanding (*Erkenntnisvermögen*).

## 10.2 Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761-1819)

### 10.2.1 Tennemann’s conception of the history of philosophy

We will start our discussion of Tennemann by first determining his view of the historiography of philosophy, and follow this with his description of Descartes.

In the first volume of his *Geschichte der Philosophie*<sup>437</sup> (1798), Tennemann not only tries to give a full overview of the history of philosophy, but also explains how research in the history of philosophy should be done. Despite the considerable number of books that had been written in this field, he considers the majority to be miserable and utterly useless and others to be mediocre, while a few works come close to excellence. According to Tennemann, the history of philosophy should not be the history of philosophers or philosophical theories, but the account of the formation and development of philosophy as science.<sup>438</sup>

This means that everything, that is, the division into periods, the selection and composition of single facts, the account of the single systems, and the short biographical description of the philosopher, should all serve the goal of historically accounting for the course of philosophy as science. Tennemann defines ‘historical

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<sup>437</sup> Henceforth GdP. In *Die Vergangenheit des Geistes*, p. 10 Schneider describes Tennemann’s work as follows: ‘... die Entstehung des geistesgeschichtlichen Denkens am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts bedeutet für die Philosophie (aber sicher nicht nur für sie) eine Revolution, deren Folgen heute praktisch wirksam sind und zugleich vergessen machen, daß es auch zu dieser Revolution eine Geschichte gibt. Im Zentrum dieser grundlegenden Veränderung des Umgangs mit der Philosophie steht beispielsweise das Werk von Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann. Tennemann ist Autor einer *Geschichte der Philosophie*. Und eben dieses Genre der Literatur markiert in bezeichnender Weise das Interesse, das im späten 18. Jahrhunderts zu einem ganz neuen Begriff des Philosophischen führt. Es ist das historische Interesse.’

<sup>438</sup> Tennemann probably did not mean ‘science’ in the very strict sense Kant gave it. Kant understands science (*Wissenschaft*) only as pure mathematics and pure physics, see *Proleg.*, AA IV, p. 279 (§5): ‘... wir [können] uns nur auf zwei Wissenschaften der theoretischen Erkenntniß . . . berufen, nämlich reine Mathematik und reine Naturwissenschaft.’ In *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaften*, AA IV, 468, Kant seems to go even further: ‘Eigentliche Wissenschaft kann nur diejenige genannt werden, deren Gewißheit apodiktisch ist; Erkenntniß, die bloß empirische Gewißheit enthalten kann, ist ein nur uneigentlich so genanntes Wissen.’ This means that chemistry, for instance, is for Kant not a science but merely a ‘systematische Kunst’.

account' as a 'complete representation from facts' and the historiographer obtains such a representation when he draws everything from the sources himself. Consequently, Tennemann remains sceptical about using earlier historiographers without checking the sources himself. Although much work had been done and even though there was an abundance of material in the history of philosophy, most of it had the character of a collection and very little was reliable or proven.

In order to overcome these problems, Tennemann creates a method for producing the history of philosophy, in which he dictates the rules and the plan. First of all, a concept of the history of philosophy is needed. This is obtained by determining the concept of history followed by the concept of the history of science. The concept 'history of philosophy', however, cannot be the same as the concept of the history of science, because the latter limits the contents of philosophy. A history of science would exclude errors and failed attempts, and in this way, we would make the same mistake that Grohmann<sup>439</sup> had made:

Indem er von dem Begriff der Philosophie als Wissenschaft ausgehet, und dadurch sowohl den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie als ihren Inhalt und Form bestimmt, kommt er auf das Resultat, daß sie eine systematische Darstellung der nothwendigen Systeme sey, aus welcher alles Zufällige, Veränderliche, selbst die Zeitfolge ausgeschlossen sey – Bestimmungen, nach welchen keine Geschichte der Philosophie mehr denkbar ist. Und wohin würde endlich diese Methode führen, wenn sie nach der strengsten Consequenz verfolgt würde? Denn dann würde nicht von nothwendigen Systemen, sondern nur von einem die Rede seyn können.<sup>440</sup>

In the broad sense, 'history' is the narrative of what happened at a certain time. In the narrow sense, it is the narrative of a series of events that make up a whole. In this latter sense, it is not sufficient to consider these events as chronologically succeeding or accompanying each other, they would also have to be similar in respect to their connection to an object.

As any further analysis of Tennemann's method of the historiography would be a study in itself, which is not relevant to our study, we will not go into it any further. Instead, we will focus on what he has to say about Descartes.

### 10.2.2 Tennemann on Descartes

In the tenth volume<sup>441</sup> of *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Tennemann discusses the philosophy of Descartes. It can be said that he expresses a rather reserved opinion. He writes that although Descartes neither succeeded in drawing up a complete and perfect system of philosophy, nor invented a whole new method, nevertheless, he managed to acquire a permanent value for philosophy taking it in a new direction.

<sup>439</sup> In GdP 1, LXXVIII Tennemann mentions Grohmann's work *Über den Begriff der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1797). We find this work together with *Was heisst Geschichte der Philosophie?* in *Neue Beiträge zur kritischen Philosophie und insbesondere zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. I (1798).

<sup>440</sup> GdP 1, ix.

<sup>441</sup> The tenth volume appeared in 1817, nineteen years after the first. For that reason we have chronologically placed Tennemann after Buhle, who published his *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* from 1800 to 1805.

His reservation turns to criticism when discussing the four rules of the *Discours de la méthode*. He finds that the fact that these rules are so imperfect and are not expressed with logical precision can be excused by the lack of thorough research in thinking in the early modern period. However, they do not give rise to great expectations concerning the edifice which they would have to found.

Concerning the method of doubt, which is explained quite thoroughly, Tennemann claims that it contains many mental leaps and arbitrary poetics. He thinks that if every thought could be turned into a counterargument against the truth, then everything could easily be made doubtful. This doubt, however, is meaningless and can hardly be called philosophical, as this must at least be in accordance with reason. According to Tennemann the Cartesian doubt is ‘nur eine philosophische Maschinerie’ he used ‘um seiner Philosophie mehr Glanz und Schein zu geben’.<sup>442</sup> Tennemann obviously does not interpret Descartes’s doubt as *methodological* doubt, which explains why he says that he does not understand how Descartes could switch so quickly from scepticism to dogmatism. He thinks that the certainty which Descartes puts in place of doubt is totally unfounded, and that the argument is circular:

Denn wenn es kein Unterscheidungsmerkmal des Wachens von dem Träumen gibt, so ist und bleibt es also zweifelhaft, ob Gottes Daseyn und Wahrhaftigkeit, wovon zuletzt alle Wahrheit der Erfahrung abhängig gemacht wird, nicht ebenfalls erträumt, und so alles in einen Wahnglauben verschlungen sey. Nie hätte also Cartesius sich aus diesem Abgrunde des Zweifels retten können, wenn er nicht bei allem Schein des Zweifels etwas Wahres und ursprüngliche Gesetze desselben vorausgesetzt hätte.<sup>443</sup>

As far as the *cogito* is concerned, Tennemann states that it is not clear whether Descartes meant it as a deductive argument or as an immediate fact of consciousness. From the writings of Descartes it is not clear which of the options we should take.<sup>444</sup> We will see that on this point historiographers of philosophy differ.<sup>445</sup>

Tennemann does not discuss the Cartesian physics extensively, because Descartes himself declared this system to be a mere hypothesis, or even a false assumption.<sup>446</sup> Omitting Descartes’s physics for this reason appears rather unprofessional. To many, a historiographer should, in the first place, describe and not judge. Nevertheless, it illustrates Tennemann’s systematical intentions.

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<sup>442</sup> GdP 10, 226.

<sup>443</sup> GdP 10, 227.

<sup>444</sup> In *Principes* I (§10), AT IX-2, 28-29, Descartes did not deny that we have to know what thinking, existence and certainty are, but he finds them to be very simple notions that do not provide us with any knowledge of anything that exists.

<sup>445</sup> Erdmann, for instance, explicitly states that ‘*cogito, ergo sum*’ cannot be seen as the conclusion of a syllogism, see *Darstellung und Kritik der Philosophie des Cartesius* (1834), p. 158. Cousin, who translated Tennemann’s *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie* (1812) under the title *Manuel de l’histoire de la philosophie* (1829), too claims this in *Histoire générale de la philosophie* p. 393-394 and his *Fragments Philosophiques* (in *Œuvres*, vol. 2) p. 112.

<sup>446</sup> Cf. *Principes* III, AT IX-2, 123ff.

In his description of the role of innate ideas in the Cartesian system we not only notice his inclination towards systematical philosophy, but also that he is highly critical:

Er hielt sich allein an das Denken und hoffte durch Begriffe, vorzüglich angeborne, worin aber schon eine grundlose Hypothese lag, den übrigen philosophischen Gehalt der Erkenntniß in Schlüssen herausbringen zu können. Da er also etwas ursprünglich Gewisses in den angeborenen Begriffen und Grundsätzen voraussetzte, und alle andere Wahrheiten durch Schlüsse demonstirte, so kam alles darauf an, das Angeborne, nachdem es als solches erwiesen, nicht beliebig, sondern nach einem Grundsätze vollständig aufzustellen, und die übrigen Wahrheiten der Vernunft durch dasselbe bündig herzuleiten. In beiden Rücksichten ist die Philosophie des Cartesius sehr unvollkommen, kein System, sondern ein Aggregat und eine reihe kühner, blendender Schlüsse, welche vielfältig gegen die logische Form verstoßen.<sup>447</sup>

Like Buhle, Tennemann's remarks sound rather Kantian, the difference being that Tennemann most certainly did read the works of Descartes, whereas Kant probably did not.<sup>448</sup>

As to the Objections to the *Meditations*, Tennemann elaborately discusses Gassendi's remarks in the Fifth set of Objections. In contrast to Descartes's distinction of classes of ideas, Gassendi thought that all ideas are adventitious, proceeding from things which exist outside the mind and arising through the senses. The mind, then, is the faculty of perceiving these ideas, which Gassendi thinks are quite distinct and are received exactly as they are thought. According to Gassendi there are no innate ideas, for he thinks that every example that Descartes gave can be shown to have an external origin.

As for the forms which you say are innate, there do not seem to be any: whatever ideas are said to belong to this category also appear to have an external origin. You say 'I derive from my own nature my understanding of what a thing is'. I do not think you here mean the actual power of understanding, which we undoubtedly have and which is not in question; you are talking about the idea of a thing. Moreover you are not talking of the idea of some particular thing; for the sun, this stone, and all individual items are things, and yet you do not say that our ideas of them are innate. So you must be talking of the idea of a thing considered in general, which is virtually synonymous with 'entity', and has a similarly wide extension. But how, I ask you, can this idea be in the mind unless all the individual things exist, together with all the kinds of things from which the mind abstracts so as to form the concept which is not peculiar to any individual item but nonetheless fits them all? For surely if the idea

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<sup>447</sup> GdP 10, 265.

<sup>448</sup> On the 'critical' position of Tennemann, which meant to redefine historiography in the light of the achievements of the critical philosophy, we can say that its task is to describe the reality of 'becoming' (*Werden*) instead of constructing a system of possibilities. The idea of system is not entirely abandoned, but it plays a different role, viz. that of the target of the movement of history. We have to keep in mind, though, that this movement itself is not a system. Cf. Schneider (1990), p. 297 ff.

of a thing is innate, the idea of an animal, or a plant, or a stone, or of any universal will also be innate.<sup>449</sup>

Tennemann declares that Descartes's replies are highly unsatisfactory. Descartes merely renders Gassendi's argument *ad absurdum* by saying that in this way we could also prove that neither did Praxiteles produce any sculptures, as he did not obtain the marble from within himself, nor did Gassendi raise this objection, because it uses words which were not invented by him, being borrowed from others.<sup>450</sup> Tennemann's main objection is that it is of no consequence to maintain the existence of God as the principle of certainty, because in order to prove God's existence we need some propositions that are certain in advance. He thinks that Descartes replied very poorly to the objection that, if one cannot be certain of anything before the existence of God is certainly known, then one cannot be sure that one is a thinking being either:

Cartesius beantwortete diesen Einwurf gar nicht befriedigend, durch die Bemerkung: nur allein die apodictische Gewißheit der Schlußsätze, welche wiederkehren können, ohne daß man auf ihre Gründe noch die gehörige Aufmerksamkeit wendet, werde durch die gewisse Erkenntniß von Gottes Daseyn bedingt. In dem Satze: ich denke, also bin ich, werde aber die Existenz nicht durch Schlüsse abgeleitet, sondern durch unmittelbare Anschauung wahrgenommen. Sollte dieser Satz auf einem Schluß beruhen, so müßte der allgemeine Satz: alles was denket, existiret, vorausgehen, der aber nur aus dem einzelnen: ich denke, also bin ich, gefolgert sey. Denn die Natur unseres Verstandes bringe es mit sich, daß er aus besonderen Sätzen erst die allgemeinen bildet.<sup>451</sup>

According to Tennemann, we cannot deny that Descartes is responsible for some excellent achievements in mathematics, physics and philosophy, in ways which only bore fruit in later times.<sup>452</sup> Cartesian philosophy had many adversaries in his time and led to many quarrels and controversies. As well, due to unfortunate religious controversies, it was dangerous to publicly declare oneself to be a Cartesian. After these quarrels were resolved, people managed to obtain a more precise view of the content and value of Cartesian philosophy. This reassessment of Descartes, as we saw and will see, played various roles in French and German philosophical movements or positions; while in England and Italy it was merely a temporary distraction.

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<sup>449</sup> *Obj.* V, CSM II, 195-196.

<sup>450</sup> CSM, II, 250.

<sup>451</sup> GdP 10, 278-279.

<sup>452</sup> GdP 10, 284.

## 11 THE REVIVAL OF CARTESIAN THEMES IN GERMAN IDEALISM

### 11.1 Fichte and the *cogito*

As we saw in the previous part, during the eighteenth century the Cartesian foundation for certain knowledge (*cogito, ergo sum*) was considered to be more of a philosophical joke than a serious attempt to found knowledge. In this section, we will show that the Cartesian foundation was restored by Fichte, in the sense that he found a fundamental role for it.

The task that Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) sets for philosophy, in his *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794), is similar to Descartes's attempt to found and structure science. Fichte was probably the first thinker to take the Cartesian foundation of knowledge seriously, attempting to systematically establish the basis of knowledge in self-consciousness.

In order to work with self-consciousness as the foundation of all sciences, Fichte attempted to develop this concept more critically than his predecessors. According to Fichte, the concept of self-consciousness can only be thought under conditions that philosophy had not observed since Descartes. For Fichte, thinking only thinks in so far as it thinks a certain state of affairs. As such, self-consciousness is the only case in which the act of thinking and that which is thought (the intention and the intended) are not different from one another. Furthermore, this unity cannot be shown beforehand, rather, one can only be conscious of oneself during the act itself. The 'I' is not an object, but an act. It is always possible as an act of 'self-positing', by which the 'I' calls itself 'I'; or in other words, as an act by which the 'I' has itself as the theme of its knowing. Without this act, there is no 'I'. Wherever the 'I' is, one also finds this duality of the subject and the subject as object for-itself. It follows then that one can never know the subject solely for-itself. Whenever we think it, we have already presumed that it is the thinking subject in this thought.

There are a number of similarities between Descartes and Fichte. Firstly, both establish the foundation of the sciences by way of reflexivity. Secondly, this foundation appears to be an act of knowledge itself. Thirdly, both consider that the certainty gained is similar to mathematical certainty. However, Fichte goes further by solving the problems arising from the Cartesian understanding of reflexive thinking. In the Cartesian development of the foundation of certain knowledge, reflexivity still presupposes the 'I' as the object of reflection. Fichte overcomes this by claiming that the 'I' 'setzt' (poses) itself, thereby focusing not, like Descartes, on the act of reflection, but on the act of identification. This identification is taken as an act which constitutes the members of this relationship in their identification with one another. This only works for the concept of the 'I', that is, the relation of identity interpreted ontologically as 'I am I'. This is what Fichte calls a 'Tathandlung'. The 'positing' (*setzen*) of the 'I' by itself is its pure activity (*Tätigkeit*). At the same time it is both the act (*das Handelnde*) and the product of

this act, the doing (*das Tätige*) and that which is produced by the deed. Act and deed are one and the same, and therefore the ‘I am I’ is the expression of a deed-act (*Tathandlung*).

The founding idea of the *Wissenschaftslehre* from 1794 is the proposition: ‘the I primarily and directly posits its own being’.<sup>453</sup> With this notion, he is the first to fully understand and think through Descartes’s basic idea while at the same time broadening its scope. Descartes’s proof of the existence of the self through the reflexivity of the *cogito* resisted the dream-argument and the hypothesis of the evil genius. In order to found all other certain knowledge, however, he had to assume a series of innate, clear and distinct ideas and, last but not least, a proof for the existence of God. Fichte offers a more considered implementation of the principle of the self, arguing that only the ‘I’ can be the highest principle.

Auf unsern Satz, als absoluten Grundsatz alles Wissens hat gedeutet Kant in seiner Deduktion der Kategorien; er hat ihn aber nie als Grundsatz bestimmt aufgestellt. Vor ihm hat Kartes einen ähnlichen angegeben: cogito, ergo sum, welches nicht eben der Untersatz, und die Schlußfolge eines Syllogism seyn muß, dessen Obersatz hieße: quodcunque cogitat, est: sondern welches er auch sehr wohl als unmittelbare Thatsache des Bewußtseyns betrachtet haben kann. Dann hieße es soviel, als cogitans sum, ergo sum (wie wir sagen würden, sum, ergo sum). Aber dann ist der Zusatz cogitans völlig überflüssig; man denkt nicht nothwendig, wenn man ist, aber man ist nothwendig, wenn man denkt. Das Denken ist gar nicht das Wesen, sondern nur eine besondere Bestimmung des Seyns; und es gibt ausser jener noch manche andere Bestimmungen unsers Seyns.<sup>454</sup>

In Section 2.3 we compared the Cartesian *cogito* with the Kantian ‘Ich denke’ and saw that, though he had probably not read him, Kant had the same objection as Hobbes. This concerned the Second Meditation in which Descartes discovers the one certain proposition ‘I exist, therefore I am’, but then asks himself what the ‘I’ is:

Je suis, i'existe: cela est certain; mais combien de temps? A sçavoir, autant de temps que ie pense; car peut-estre se pouroit-il faire, si ie cessois de penser, que ie cesserois en mesme temps d'estre ou d'exister. Je n'admets maintenant rien qui ne soit necessairement vray: ie ne suis donc, precisement parlant, qu'une chose qui pense, c'est à dire vn esprit, vn entendement ou vne raison, qui sont des termes dont la signification m'estoit auparavant inconnuë. Or ie suis vne chose vraye, & vrayment existante; mais quelle chose? Je l'ay dit: vne chose qui pense.<sup>455</sup>

Whereas for Descartes the certainty of his being lies in his thinking, Fichte reduces this duality to a faculty of positing something directly at all (*etwas schlechthin zu setzen*). This positing, for example, A=A, is done in and by the ‘I’. Fichte claims to have further reduced the Cartesian foundation, but has he? What is left of Fichte’s ‘Grundsatz’ without the faculty of positing something ‘schlechthin’? Is the ‘I’ that

<sup>453</sup> Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* [1794], GA I/2, 261: ‘Das Ich setzt ursprünglich schlechthin sein eigenes Seyn’, henceforth: GWL.

<sup>454</sup> GWL, GA I/2, 262.

<sup>455</sup> *Med. II* (F), AT IX-1, 21.

posits itself something fundamentally different from the *ego cogitans*? The important difference between the Cartesian and the Fichtian *ego* is that the former has an epistemological status and the latter an ontological one.<sup>456</sup> We have to add, however, that Fichte's *ego* is also a formal principle in the transcendental sense. The double function of 'setzen' is that it is constitutive and factual ('Tat' is the result and 'Handlung' the activity). We also find this double function in Descartes's *dubitare*, the activity of which the *res cogitans* is the result.

In *Eigne Meditationen über Elementar Philosophie* (which can be considered as the *Wissenschaftslehre in statu nascendi*),<sup>457</sup> we see that Fichte subtly but radically changes the Cartesian proposition. Instead of *cogito, ergo sum*, he says *pono me existentem, ergo existo*. This clearly shows where Fichte found<sup>458</sup> his 'absolut-ersten, schlechthin unbedingten Grundsatz alles menschlichen Wissens'. Since it was impossible to found knowledge through a proof – and the *cogito, ergo sum* should not be interpreted as one – philosophy falls short in this quest. Sometimes when philosophy falls short, however, the history of philosophy completes its quest.

In our discussion of the reinstatement of Descartes in French philosophy during the first half of the nineteenth century, we will see that Maine de Biran and Cousin appealed to Fichte in their designation of psychology as the fundamental science.

## 11.2 Hegel on the 'originator of modern philosophy'

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's (1770-1831) view of Descartes can be found in three different texts of his history of philosophy and also in his *Enzyklopädie*.<sup>459</sup> Of the three texts concerning his history of philosophy, the first has two distinct versions and editions. The edition of Hoffmeister, which contains Hegel's *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, cannot be considered to be a critical one, because the manuscript on which it was based, consisting of the lecture notes by K. Weltrich, was burnt during the war. Instead, we will use the new edition of Walter Jaeschke (Meiner 1993), which is an excellent critical edition based on various sources. The second text, found in Glockner's edition of Hegel's *Sämtliche Werke* contains *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, a compilation of the lecture notes of various students over a number of years. This edition is the most extensive, but is not preferred as it is uncertain which parts of it are written by students and which by editors. Finally, there is the *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, which is based on the lectures from the Wintersemester 1825/26 held at the Friedrich Wilhelms-Universität in Berlin. This

<sup>456</sup> The following quote supports our claim, GWL, GA I/2, 260: 'Zur Erläuterung! Man hört wohl die Frage aufwerfen; was war ich wohl, ehe ich zum Selbstbewußtseyn kam? Die natürliche Antwort darauf ist: *ich* war gar nicht; denn ich war nicht Ich. Das Ich ist nur insofern, inwiefern es sich seiner bewußt ist.'

<sup>457</sup> See GA II/3, p. 19 (preface from the editors R. Lauth and H. Jacob).

<sup>458</sup> We have to say 'find', because '*Beweisen, oder bestimmen* läßt er sich nicht . . .', as the opening sentence of GWL reads, GA I/2, 255.

<sup>459</sup> We will use *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* [1830] ed. W. Bonsiepen and H.-Ch. Lucas, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke* (GW) vol. 20.



edition, by Garniron and Jaeschke, takes this particular year because it is substantiated by the lecture notes of five different students.<sup>460</sup> In the following, we will base Hegel's view on this edition, and where we need additional information we will use the Glockner edition, bearing in mind the possible corruption.

In addition to what Hegel writes on Descartes in both editions of *Geschichte der Philosophie*, and *Einleitung in die Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hegel also declares Descartes to be the 'founder of modern philosophy' in a letter he wrote to Cousin dated 5 April 1826. Here he also praises Cousin's edition of the works of Descartes:

Votre édition de Descartes nous présente non seulement le point de départ de la philos. moderne, mais le tableau aussi des efforts savans de son tems dans toute leur étendue.<sup>461</sup>

The term 'modern' is meant to indicate that philosophy became autonomous, no longer depending on anything but reason, having realized that self-consciousness is the essential moment of truth. According to Hegel, Descartes had started the project of philosophy over again by constituting its basis anew. Hegel refers to the method of doubt, by which Descartes wanted to eliminate any assumption or bias. He did this by suggesting that if we are to begin with thinking itself, we cannot assume anything is independent of thinking, because the assumed thing would not then be posited by thinking, nor would thinking be in-itself. By systematically doubting everything, Descartes reached another level, the immediate certainty of thinking, thus founding modern philosophy.

In the *Geschichte der Philosophie*, Hegel gives a clear account of Cartesian philosophy as a whole (this account is considerably shorter in the Garniron/Jaeschke edition). We can safely assume that the general account Hegel gives is correct, we will therefore mainly discuss his super-historical remarks and criticism. Since Hegel himself seems to abandon the distinction between historiography of philosophy and systematic philosophy, we should not have too much trouble in filtering out these super-historical remarks.

As we have seen, the main reason that Descartes is the true initiator of modern philosophy is that subsequent to his philosophy, thinking itself became a principle in philosophy. By going back to the basis of thinking, Descartes re-constituted the foundations of philosophy. Starting from very simple propositions and refraining from any assumptions, he reduced the content of these propositions to thought and extension (or being). Hegel calls the period of philosophy that begins with Descartes, the period in which philosophy proceeded formally.<sup>462</sup> With Descartes, thinking started to become self-reflective, as is characterized by the words '*cogito*,

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<sup>460</sup> See Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (1986), Teil 4 ed. Pierre Garniron and Walter Jaeschke, p. ix. Henceforth: *Vorlesungen*.

<sup>461</sup> M. Espagne and M. Werner (eds.), *Lettres d'Allemagne, Victor Cousin et les hégéliens* (1990), p. 72. This letter is also published in *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1952-1960) ed. Hoffmeister, vol. III, pp. 107-111 (№ 508).

<sup>462</sup> *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie (Einleitung)*, ed. Jaeschke (1993), p. 203: 'Die dritte Periode ist die der förmlichen Auftretung der Philosophie; sie beginnt mit dem Dreißigjährigen Krieg oder Cartesius'. The disjunction in this quote illustrates an unsolved twist of Hegelian thought which apparently justifies a comparison between Descartes and the Thirty Years' War.

*ergo sum*'. To Hegel, these words are defining for modern philosophy.<sup>463</sup> Being a dialectician, Hegel considered that the preceding period, which focused on the substantial truth of God, would be followed by a period of 'fermentation' in which an understanding of the opposite of the thinking which was focused on substantial truth would develop. Like the fermentation of beer, the fermentation of this thought resulted in 'ein klares Bewußtsein des Denkens über sich selbst'. In other words, the focus of philosophy turned to the determination of the nature of thinking itself, determining the freedom of thinking in such a way that thinking begins from nothing, 'Das ist die Philosophie, die mit Descartes anfängt, welcher der Begründer der neueren Philosophie ist'.<sup>464</sup>

In *Einleitung*, Hegel criticizes Descartes's mechanistic view. He suggests that although it is the task of every philosopher to understand the entire universe, abstract thoughts only relate to external nature. Atomistic and Cartesian philosophy do not go further than merely mechanistic concepts.<sup>465</sup> According to Hegel, the Cartesian understanding of thinking is founded on mechanism. While Hegel does not reject mechanism as such, he considers that its general application in philosophy would seriously restrict its endeavour. It does not suffice to apply mechanism to the world, because the mind (*Geist*), which according to Hegel is the essence of life, can hardly be considered mechanistically.<sup>466</sup> To consider and understand organic life, we need a much more concrete principle, a concept that is more 'self-reflected' (*mehr in sich vertieft*) than the principle of mechanism.<sup>467</sup>

One of the important characteristics of modernity is the changing relation of church and state. At the time of the Thirty-Years War the different churches became settled institutions, which led to a separation between church and state. According to Hegel, it was only then that the state became autonomous. It was at that point that Descartes formulated the idea of the determination of thinking and being which was later more thoroughly thought out by Spinoza. The unity of thinking and being took shape in the form of the absolute substance, which Hegel calls 'die moderne Idee überhaupt'.<sup>468</sup>

Although Hegel credits Descartes with the basic principles of modern thought – concerning which he considers him to be a hero – he repeatedly calls him 'naive'. He writes: 'Unter seinen philosophischen Schriften haben besonders diejenigen, welche die Grundlage enthalten, in ihrer Darstellung etwas sehr Populares und Naives ...'.<sup>469</sup> Hegel is not very positive concerning *Principia Philosophiae* I, § 43,<sup>470</sup> where Descartes claims that propositions that are clear and distinct are true

<sup>463</sup> *Einleitung*, 203.

<sup>464</sup> *Einleitung*, 349.

<sup>465</sup> *Einleitung*, 53-54.

<sup>466</sup> *Einleitung*, 156.

<sup>467</sup> *Einleitung*, 233 ff.

<sup>468</sup> *Einleitung*, 107.

<sup>469</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (SW) ed. H. Glockner, vol. 19, p. 334.

<sup>470</sup> *Princ.* I, AT VIII-1, 21: 'Certum autem est, nihil nos unquam falsum pro vero admissuros, si tantum iis assensum præbreamus quæ clarè & distinctè percipiemus. Certum, inquam, quia, cum Deus non sit fallax, facultas percipiendi quam nobis dedit, non potest tendere in falsum; ut neque etiam facultas assentiendi, cum tantum ad ea quæ clarè percipiuntur se extendit. Et quamvis hoc nullâ

because God is not a deceiver, and that our faculty of knowledge and even our faculty of will is infallible in so far as we do not apply it to that which is beyond our knowledge:

Dieß Alles ist höchst naiv und schlicht hererzählt, aber unbestimmt; es bleibt formell, ohne Tiefe, – es ist eben so.<sup>471</sup>

Also, in another letter to Victor Cousin, who had enthusiastically sent him his edition of Descartes, Hegel mentions the ‘naiveté de sa marche’.<sup>472</sup>

### 11.2.1 Hegel on innate ideas

Descartes claimed that the eternal truths are innate because they are not made or invented by us. In *Vorlesungen*, Hegel says the term ‘innate’ is a bad expression because it indicates a natural way, which he thinks is not appropriate to the spirit (*Geist*). It is only in relation to eternal truths that he mentions this. Also, in the Glockner edition Hegel is critical of the use of the term, ‘innate ideas’, because it suggests a way in which ideas are formed that is not appropriate for the mind because of its physical birth. Instead of saying that an idea is innate, Hegel would rather say it is founded in the nature, or the essence, of the mind. In its activity, the mind behaves in a certain way. The foundation of this behaviour, however, is nothing but its freedom. To prove that this is so, we would have to deduce it as a necessary product of the mind. The ‘logical’ laws such as, ‘from nothing comes nothing’, and ‘something cannot at the same time be and not be’, are facts of consciousness. To Hegel, however, it is not clear what status innate ideas have in Descartes’s system.<sup>473</sup>

In order to determine whether Hegel thinks there are innate ideas (despite his dislike of the term), it is instructive to look at his discussion of Locke. As we indicated in Part I, Locke was a fervent adversary of the theory of innate ideas. We also saw that part of the controversy was based on different interpretations of the terms ‘innate’ and ‘idea’. According to Hegel, Locke did not think of innate ideas as essential determinations of human beings, but as concepts which exist in us, just as arms and legs belong to a body.

In *Vorlesungen*, we find an argument against Locke’s objection to innate ideas. For Locke, we do not encounter innate ideas in children or in many adult people. Hegel thinks that this is a very poor objection, because innate ideas are interpreted as immediately ready-made ideas that are within human consciousness from birth, comparable with the physical features with which they are born.

Aber die Entwicklung im Bewußtsein ist etwas anderes als das Ansich der Vernunft ist, und so ist der Ausdruck ›angeborene Idee‹ allerdings ganz schief.<sup>474</sup>

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ratione probaretur, ita omnium animis à naturâ impressum est, ut quoties aliquid clarè percipimus, ei sponte assentiamur, & nullo modo possimus dubitare quin sit verum.’

<sup>471</sup> SW 19, 353.

<sup>472</sup> *Briefe von und an Hegel* (1952-1960), vol. III, p. 170 (№ 547).

<sup>473</sup> SW 19, 356.

<sup>474</sup> *Vorlesungen*, 119.

In order to understand the difference between the ‘development in consciousness’ and the ‘Ansich der Vernunft’ we have to compare this passage with the Glockner edition.

Der Ausdruck »angeborene Begriffe« war gewöhnlich damals, und es ist von den angeborenen Begriffen zum Teil so kraß gesprochen worden. Aber ihre wahrhafte Bedeutung ist, daß sie an sich sind, wesentliche Momente in der Natur des Denkens, Eigenschaften eines Keims, die noch nicht existieren. Insofern liegt etwas Wichtiges in der Lockeschen Bemerkung; als verschiedene wesentliche bestimmte Begriffe sind sie nur dadurch legitimiert, daß von ihnen gezeigt wird, daß sie in dem Wesen des Denkens liegen. Aber wie die Sätze, die als Axiome gelten, und Begriffe, die als bestimmte in den Definitionen unmittelbar aufgenommen werden, so haben sie allerdings die Form von vorhandenen, angeborenen. Sie sollen an und für sich gelten, so wie sie eingesehen werden; dies ist eine bloße Versicherung. Oder von der anderen Seite ist die Frage, woher sie kommen, seicht. Der Geist ist allerdings an sich bestimmt, der für sich existierende Begriff; seine Entwicklung ist, zum Bewußtsein zu kommen. Diese Bestimmungen, die er aus sich hervorbringt, kann man nicht angeboren nennen. Diese Entwicklung muß veranlaßt werden durch ein Äußerliches, die Tätigkeit des Geistes ist zunächst Reaktion; erst so wird er sich seines Wesens bewußt.<sup>475</sup>

Summarizing the above, we find that although Hegel rejects the term ‘innate idea’, he certainly does not reject its meaning. This has to do with Hegel’s concept of ‘Geist’, which in his philosophy, is neither human nor divine, but comes close to the concept of *logos*. It is therefore not possible to compare his concept of mind with Descartes, and consequently it is hard to explain how he stands in relation to Cartesian innate ideas.

In the *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1830), Hegel comes to the theme of innate ideas when he discusses immediate knowledge (*unmittelbares Wissen*). He reacts here against Jacobi, who, in his disapproval of all rationalism, supported some kind of direct knowledge, which is not clearly different from revealed knowledge. The object of immediate knowledge is infinity, eternity, and God. In contradiction to Jacobi, Hegel also finds that the proposition ‘on which all interest of modern philosophy focuses’<sup>476</sup> – the *cogito, ergo sum* – is also a form of immediate knowledge.

Da Descartes weiß, was zu einem Schlusse gehört, so fügt er hinzu, daß, wenn bei jenem Satz eine Ableitung durch einen Schluß Statt finden sollte, so gehörte hiezu der Obersatz: *illud omne, quod cogitat, est sive existit*. Dieser letztere Satz sey aber ein solcher, den man erst aus jenem ersten Satze vielmehr ableite.

Die Ausdrücke Descartes über den Satz der Unzertrennlichkeit meiner als Denkenden vom Seyn, daß in der einfachen Anschauung des Bewußtseyns dieser Zusammenhang enthalten und angegeben, daß

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<sup>475</sup> SW 19, 425-426.

<sup>476</sup> GW 20, 105.

dieser Zusammenhang schlechthin Erstes, Princip, das Gewisseste und Evidenteste sey, so daß kein Skepticismus so enorm vorgestellt werden könne, um diß nicht zuzulassen, – sind so sprechend und bestimmt, daß die modernen Sätze Jacobi's und anderer über diese unmittelbare Verknüpfung nur für überflüssige Wiederholungen gelten können.<sup>477</sup>

However, as far as the immediate knowledge of God, righteousness, or morality is concerned, education and development are required in order to allow these concepts to emerge.<sup>478</sup> Against the claim of innate ideas, the empirical objection is made that if this were so everybody would have to have these ideas, the principle of contradiction, for example, within their consciousness.

Man kann diesem Einwurf einen Misverstand zuschreiben, in sofern die gemeyneten Bestimmungen als angeborne darum nicht auch schon in der Form von Ideen, Vorstellungen von Gewußtem seyn sollen. Aber gegen das unmittelbare Wissen ist dieser Einwurf ganz treffend, denn es behauptet ausdrücklich seine Bestimmungen in sofern als sie im Bewußtseyn seyen.<sup>479</sup>

Hegel defends the Cartesian *cogito* against the interpretation of it as a syllogism and also maintains that it is a form of immediate knowledge. Furthermore, as mentioned above, he defends Descartes's theory of innate ideas as it stands historically, despite disliking the expression. Hegel historically reinstates Descartes by saying that Cartesian philosophy proceeded from unproven and unprovable assumptions (the *cogito* and God) to more developed knowledge. In doing so, Hegel says, Descartes has provided the basis for modern sciences.<sup>480</sup> Although philosophy after Kant realizes that infinity cannot be reached with finite means and only allows an idea of God in so far it remains a highly abstract faith, it has not altered the method of scientific knowledge initiated by Descartes. On the other hand, Hegel says, contemporary philosophy rejects every method whose object is infinite, hence also the Cartesian.

### 11.3 Schelling on the ontological proof for the existence of God

As did Hegel, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854) states that modern philosophy begins with Descartes. The reason for this, according to Schelling, is that Descartes refuted Scholasticism, rejecting everything that even science had accomplished until then, and beginning again. Remarkably enough, Schelling appropriates the beginning of this liberal philosophy for his own nation by virtue of

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<sup>477</sup> GW 20, 106.

<sup>478</sup> GW 20, 108: '... und hieher fallen auch die sonstigen Bestimmungen von Instinkt, eingepflanzten, angeborenen Ideen, Gemeinsinn, von natürlicher Vernunft u.s.f. – welche Form man dieser Ursprünglichkeit gebe, so ist die allgemeine Erfahrung, daß, damit das, was darin enthalten ist, zum Bewußtseyn gebracht werde, wesentlich Erziehung, Entwicklung, (auch zur Platonschen Erinnerung) erforderlich sey; – (die christliche Taufe, obgleich ein Sacrament, enthält selbst die fernere Verpflichtung einer christlichen Erziehung) d.i. daß Religion, Sittlichkeit, so sehr sie ein Glauben, unmittelbares Wissen sind, schlechthin bedingt durch die Vermittlung seyen, welche Entwicklung, Erziehung, Bildung heißt.'

<sup>479</sup> GW 20, 109.

<sup>480</sup> Cf. GW 20, 116.

the fact that Descartes was in Bavaria at the time he formulated the first ideas of his philosophy. Although Schelling does not mention a national character of philosophy, he stresses that both Descartes and Spinoza had their patrons and patronesses in Pfalz.<sup>481</sup> As we saw, this kind of speculation is more the style of Victor Cousin.

Schelling thinks that the ontological proof for the existence of God plays a crucial role in the Cartesian system. It functions as a *metábasis* (transition, change) from the subjective to the objective domain in the Cartesian system. Descartes escapes the erroneous subjective domain by way of the innate ideas, which are objective, clear and distinct because they originate in God. In order to show that this is so, however, he first has to prove the existence of God. Schelling focuses on both the erroneous and correct interpretations of this argument.

The ontological argument for the existence of God was first propounded by Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109). The core of Anselm's proof reads:

Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. (...) Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality. (...) And You, Lord our God, are this being. You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist.<sup>482</sup>

Anselm's argument was rejected by Aquinas, who came up with an alternative proof known as the Cosmological Argument. Consequently, the ontological argument was not given any further attention until Descartes. Just as famous as Anselm's proof for the existence of God, is Kant's criticism of this proof. As we saw in Chapter 2, the core of Kant's criticism is that being is obviously not a real predicate.

Sein ist offenbar kein reales Prädikat, d.i. ein Begriff von irgend etwas, was zu dem Begriffe eines Dinges hinzukommen könnte. Es ist bloß die

<sup>481</sup> Cf. *Schellings Werke*, ed. Manfred Schröter, vol. 5 (1965) pp. 78-79<sup>fn</sup>. Henceforth: Schelling 5.

<sup>482</sup> *Proslogion*, cap. II, III: 'Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest. (...) Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc cum audit intelligit, et quidquid intelligitur in intellectu est. Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re, quod maius est. Si ergo id quo maius cogitari non potest, est in solo intellectu: id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est quo maius cogitari potest. Sed certe hoc esse non potest. Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re. (...) Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster. Sic ergo vere es, domine deus meus, ut nec cogitari possis non esse.' Text and translation borrowed from M.J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's PROSLOGION* (1979), pp. 116-119.

Position eines Dinges, oder gewisser Bestimmungen an sich selbst. Im logischen Gebrauche ist es lediglich die Kopula eines Urteils.<sup>483</sup>

According to Kant, a contradiction already occurs in forming a concept of something where the concept includes the notion of its own existence. Every concept is possible in so far as it does not contradict itself. However, a concept can still have no content if the objective reality of the synthesis, by which the concept is generated, is not expounded in particular. This objective reality is based on principles of possible experience and not on the axiom of analysis, that is, the thesis of contradiction. Kant explicitly warns us not to deduce the possibility of things from the possibility of concepts, that is, not to make deductions in the real domain based on those established in the logical domain.<sup>484</sup>

Before we continue our discussion of Schelling's view of the ontological proof and Kant's criticism of it, we shall first, for clarity's sake, outline the Cartesian form of this argument. We find the clearest formulation in the second set of Responses to the Objections made to his Meditations.

To say that something is contained in the nature or concept of a thing is the same as saying that it is true of that thing. But necessary existence is contained in the concept of God. Therefore it may be truly affirmed of God that necessary existence belongs to him, or that he exists.<sup>485</sup>

We shall soon return to the use of the word 'or' in the concluding sentence of the above. Firstly, we have to consider this argument – 'disposée d'une façon géométrique' – in the light of the axioms and definitions upon which it is based. The first premise of the argument is basically a repetition of the 'ninth definition', which leaves us nothing to discuss. The second premise is based on the 'tenth axiom', as Descartes himself indicates, but also on the 'eighth definition', which is that of 'God'. In the tenth axiom, Descartes had already secured an important step in the argument, by saying that the idea or concept of a thing contains its existence. What is more, he distinguishes between the idea of a limited thing, which only contains its possible or contingent existence, and the concept of 'un être souverainement parfait' (basically the eighth definition), which contains its perfect and necessary existence.

In *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie* (1827),<sup>486</sup> Schelling is very clear about the Cartesian ontological proof for the existence of God. According to Schelling, until the present (1827), the Cartesian proof has been misunderstood. He

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<sup>483</sup> KrV B 626.

<sup>484</sup> See KrV B 624ff.

<sup>485</sup> CSM II, 117. In the French edition, Rep. II, AT IX-1, 129 it reads: 'Dire que quelque attribut est contenu dans la nature ou dans le concept d'une chose, c'est le mesme que de dire que cet attribut est vray de cette chose, & qu'on peut assurer qu'il est en elle (par la définition neuvième) [which said the exact same thing]. Or est-il que l'existence nécessaire est contenuë dans la nature ou dans le concept de Dieu (par l'axiome dixième) [which said that in the idea or concept of every thing, its existence is included, because we can only conceive things under the form of a thing that exists. There is a difference between limited things, whose concept merely contains possible or contingent existence, and the concept of a supremely perfect being, which contains perfect and necessary existence.] Doncques il est vray de dire que l'existence nécessaire est en Dieu, ou bien que Dieu existe.'

<sup>486</sup> Also known as *Münchener Vorlesungen*, in Schelling 5.

thinks that philosophy is still engaged in disentangling and explaining the misunderstandings to which this argument gave rise.<sup>487</sup> Schelling does not agree with Kant's criticism of this proof and thinks that Kant did not study the Cartesian formulation carefully enough. As suggested above, according to Kant, the error of the argument is that it takes 'existence' as a predicate. He humorously dismisses the argument by saying:

Es ist also an dem so berühmten ontologischen (Cartesianischen) Beweise, vom Dasein eines höchsten Wesens, aus Begriffen, alle Mühe und Arbeit verloren, und ein Mensch möchte wohl eben so wenig aus bloßen Ideen an Einsichten reicher werden, als ein Kaufmann an Vermögen, wenn er, um seinen Zustand zu verbessern, seinem Kassenbestand einige Nullen anhängen wollte.<sup>488</sup>

However, this is not what Descartes had done. The error Descartes made is that he 'smuggles' the existence of God into the conclusion, rather than drawing the conclusion: 'if God exists, he exists necessarily'. The argument does not prove the existence of God, but merely states that either God does not exist at all, or, if He exists, He always exists or necessarily exists. There is nothing wrong with this syllogism:

The Supreme Being cannot exist contingently; as a result it can exist only necessarily (*maior*).  
 God is the Supreme Being (*minor*).  
 Hence, He can exist only necessarily (*conclusion*).

However, Descartes drew a different conclusion, namely:

Hence, he exists necessarily.

There is an enormous difference between both conclusions, as Schelling points out. In the *maior*, Descartes expresses a kind of existence, in the conclusion, however, it is not a matter of a kind of existence, but of existence itself (*Existenz überhaupt*). So the fallacy is that the conclusion contains more than the premises, because of the word 'or'. Although the existence of God is not proven, his necessary existence is, and, according to Schelling, it is this concept that was determinative for the subsequent development of philosophy. If we want to prove that God exists, we first have to ask the question whether the concept of a necessarily existing being is identical to the concept of God.

Necessary existence means impossible non-existence. However, something that exists necessarily, cannot also exist as a possibility, because every possibility that something exists, implies the possibility that it does not yet exist. Consequently, that for which it is impossible that it does not exist, will never merely exist as a possibility. Thus, existence, or reality, is prior to possibility.<sup>489</sup> To

<sup>487</sup> Schelling 5, 84: 'Man kann sagen: die Philosophie ist noch jetzt damit beschäftigt, die Mißverständnisse, zu denen dieses Argument Veranlassung gab, zu entwirren und auseinanderzusetzen'.

<sup>488</sup> KrV B 630. We wonder what Kant would say in the case of someone hacking into the bank and adding some noughts to their account.

<sup>489</sup> Schelling 5, 89.



Schelling, the concept of God that Descartes defined as ‘un être souverainement parfait’, means the essence of being or being itself (*ipsum Ens*).

Ist nun Gott nur als das Seyende selbst, und ist das, was das Seyende selbst ist, nur zu bestimmen als das nicht nicht seyn könnende, als das, dem es unmöglich ist nicht zu seyn, so ist Gott entschieden und ohne allen Zweifel das nothwendig Existierende: – dieses ist nun der höchste Sinn, in welchem das eigentliche ontologische Argument zu nehmen ist; auf dieses kommt jener sogenannte Beweis des Anselm zurück.<sup>490</sup>

However, to identify God as a necessarily existing being brings about a rather troubling problem. Schelling sees the concept of necessary being as ‘blindly’ being: it is, without concerning itself as a possibility.<sup>491</sup> Such a necessarily existing being, prior to possibility or impossibility, would be ‘absolut unfrei’. If God was to be the necessarily existing being, he could only be determined as a rigid, immobile, completely ‘unfree’ being, without freedom of action, who cannot constitute a progression and cannot depart from himself. This can hardly be a satisfactory idea of God, moreover, we could never attribute an emanating power to this notion of ‘God’ (or what is left of the notion). Put briefly:

Der bloße Begriff des nothwendig Seyenden würde also nicht auf den lebendigen sondern auf den todten Gott führen.<sup>492</sup>

This problem can only be solved independently of philosophy, namely in general faith.

Schelling shows us that Descartes had been misread or misunderstood, and at the same time he reveals the mistake that Descartes had made. Of course this does not make him a follower of Descartes. In fact, he is severely critical at times. He suggests that Descartes’s scepticism was not speculative, but merely empirical; that the philosophy of Descartes is a regressive philosophy; that Descartes starts from the immediately known, which is his own thinking, and that this self is somehow a being, *cogito, ergo sum*, which suggests that philosophy has an apparently empirical beginning. In the end he manages to attain the idea of God, but in such a way that the Highest is not the beginning, but the end of philosophy.

In the case of Schelling, we cannot speak of a reevaluation of Descartes, but of a critical reading which clears up earlier misreadings. Schelling was probably the first to take the ontological proof seriously and actually read the formulation that had been produced by Descartes. In doing so, he corrects the analysis of Kant, whose proof of the impossibility of the ontological proof is equally famous, but as we have seen, has nothing to do with Descartes.

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<sup>490</sup> Schelling 5, 90.

<sup>491</sup> As an example, Schelling says: ‘Ich handle z.B. blind, wenn ich etwas thue, ohne mir vorher seine Möglichkeit vorgestellt zu haben’, Schelling 5, 89.

<sup>492</sup> Schelling 5, 92.

#### 11.4 Feuerbach's interpretation of Descartes

Alle Menschen, die sich nicht im Zustande des Blödsinns oder der tiefsten Roheit befinden, sind darum, die meisten aber wider Willen und Wissen, Fichtianer und Cartesianer.

In this section we will determine the 'darum' in this bold statement from Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872).

Once more the distinction between historiographical and systematical texts proves to be inadequate when we examine Feuerbach's *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza*.<sup>493</sup> The reason why Feuerbach becomes involved in the history of philosophy is that he wanted to clarify the central ideas of the most important philosophical systems of the modern era. In discussing Feuerbach we will focus on his opinion of the founder of modern philosophy and his view of innate ideas in the Cartesian system.

According to Feuerbach, modern philosophy is characterized by the terms 'autonomy' and 'free self-consciousness', which presume that authority and the belief in authority have been undermined. In short, it is characterized by scepticism. The possibility of such a liberation of thinking is the reason why the initiators of modern philosophy, Bacon and Descartes, started their systems with scepticism.

... jener, [Bacon] indem er zur Bedingung der Naturerkenntnis die Abstraktion von allen Vorurteilen und vorgefaßten Meinungen macht, dieser [Descartes] in seiner Forderung, daß man im Anfange an allem zweifeln müsse.<sup>494</sup>

Elsewhere Feuerbach said that modern philosophy begins with neither Descartes nor Bacon, but in Italy with Bruno. The true, solemn principle of modern philosophy, according to Feuerbach, is the principle 'della coincidenza de contrarii'.<sup>495</sup> We find this remark in a double review of Erdmann's book on the history of modern philosophy and Hock's work on Descartes and his adversaries.<sup>496</sup> According to Feuerbach, this is the principle of life itself and by this principle modern philosophy distinguishes itself from the stagnating Scholasticism of the Middle Ages, which had as its principle and measure the dry law of formal identity. Although, in this review, Feuerbach is willing to assign Descartes the rank of an originator of the new philosophy in so far as he approached scientific knowledge on the basis of the concept of distinction, it is only in a very limited sense that he calls Descartes the originator of modern philosophy. In this matter, Feuerbach disagrees with not only Erdmann, but almost every historiographer of that time.

<sup>493</sup> In Feuerbach, *Gesammelte Werke* (FW) vol. 2.

<sup>494</sup> FW 2, 35. The first ed. of *Geschichte der neueren Philosophie von Bacon von Verulam bis Benedikt Spinoza* appeared in 1833, the second in 1844 and the third in 1847. FW is a critical edition based on all three editions.

<sup>495</sup> FW 8, 133.

<sup>496</sup> Hock, *Cartesius und seine Gegner, ein Beitrag zur Charakteristik der philosophischen Bestrebungen unserer Zeit* (1835).

It is difficult to reconcile Feuerbach's different and apparently contradictory opinions concerning the beginning of modern philosophy from a mere textual point of view. Perhaps as a historiographer, Feuerbach takes a different stance from that taken when he writes a review. In any case, he applies himself rather enthusiastically to the review.

In the following we will focus in more detail on some themes of Feuerbach's interpretation of Descartes's thought. Beginning with the famous Cartesian method of doubt, we find that it is given a remarkable sense by Feuerbach in that he thinks that it poses the unity of thinking and being.

Denn indem ich an der Existenz alles dessen, was ich nur immer von mir unterscheide und in diesem Unterscheiden als ein Entgegengesetztes von mir erkenne, zweifle, indem ich annehme, daß nichts außer mir existiert, und daher die Realität des mir Entgegengesetzten aufhebe, so beziehe ich gerade dadurch mich auf mich selbst, so setzte ich ebendamit die Realität meiner selbst; das *Verneinen* der *Realität* des von mir Absonderbaren, des mir *Entgegengesetzten* ist *meine Position*. Dieses Absondern und dieses Verneinen des Gegenständlichen, des mir Entgegengesetzten ist aber Zweifeln und als Zweifeln Denken; *ich denke, ich bin* ist also *eins*, ist die *erste Gewißheit*, das *Prinzip der Philosophie*.<sup>497</sup>

Feuerbach stresses that Cartesian doubt means a 'self-distinguishing' of the mind. To consider that which is distinct from us as false (*Fürfalschhalten*), to claim that it 'is not', is the same act as distinguishing oneself from something else. To distinguish between the mind and sensory objects is not the same as distinguishing between two things that have the same value and reality, because:

... was der im Zweifeln an allem seine Existenz nicht bezweifeln könnende Geist, in diesem Zweifeln und Unterscheiden seiner selbst und seiner Realität gewisse Geist von sich unterscheidet, das setzt er als ein Nichtiges, Unreelles; denn was vom Gewissesten unterschieden ist, das ist doch wohl ungewiß, was vom Reellsten, unreell?<sup>498</sup>

To doubt the existence of sensory objects means to distinguish and abstract oneself from those objects and to perceive oneself as a real thing. That is, in the distinction from other things 'I' am certain of my reality. This certainty, which is to say, the certainty of the *cogito, ergo sum*, is immediate knowledge. Feuerbach mentions the arguments Descartes had used and also develops an argument himself that, if '*cogito, ergo sum*' was to be a syllogism, then it should have a middle term (*terminus medius*). Middle terms are found in syllogisms that consist of a particular function or act, and being. In order to deduce being from a particular act, a middle term is required which indicates the essence of this act. However, there is no third party between essence and being. They are not united by a middle term, yet they do possess unity through themselves, that is they are immediate and one.

The awareness of absolute reality is at one with self-awareness. Only according to the appearance of external form and realization is it mediated through

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<sup>497</sup> FW 2, 243

<sup>498</sup> FW 2, 245

an argument.<sup>499</sup> According to Feuerbach, this is a very poor theory of the mind, because it means that the mind itself is actually nothing more than this self-consciousness, which he brusquely explains as follows:

Freilich ist die Idee des Geistes bei C[artesianus] nur ein Blitz, der sich sogleich wieder verliert in dem Dunkel begriffsloser Vorstellungen; er unterscheidet den Geist nicht vom Individuum – ein Unterschied, den erst die Fichtesche Philosophie bestimmt hervorhebt.<sup>500</sup>

Feuerbach agrees with the common reading of Cartesian doubt that finds it to be methodical. However, he suggests that the true reasons behind Descartes's doubt are not the reasons that Descartes mentions, for example, that sensorial information is sometimes wrong. Rather, he considers it to be the founding act of Cartesian philosophy itself. It is only through doubt that the mind comprehends itself.

On the topic of innate ideas, Feuerbach thinks that Descartes was justified to assume innate ideas when he was distinguishing classes of ideas,<sup>501</sup> in so far as he was merely searching for a reliable principle of certainty.

Feuerbach thinks it is highly unphilosophical,<sup>502</sup> however, to move from self-consciousness to the consciousness of God and his existence. Instead of showing how thinking, which in this instance is only self-certainty, becomes 'thing involved' (*gegenständliches Denken*), Descartes takes the position of observation and perception in which he finds the idea of God in the class of innate ideas.

Insofern ist allerdings C. [Cartesianus] hierin zu entschuldigen, ja, gerechtfertigt, als er nichts weiter überhaupt wollte und suchte als ein zuverlässiges Prinzip der Gewißheit und es daher ihm außer dem Wege lag, solche Schwierigkeiten, wie der Zusammenhang und die Genesis der Ideen mit und aus dem selbstgewissen Denken ist, zu lösen. Unverzeihlich ist aber diese Inkonsequenz und Nachlässigkeit von ihm, daß er in diesem Teile seiner Philosophie auf den Geist, dessen Sein unmittelbar eins ist mit seinem Denken, die Vorstellung der *Erschaffung* anwendet, von bei der Erschaffung ihm eingedrückt und eingepflanzten, von angeborenen Ideen spricht und dem Zweifel, der anfangs eins mit der Selbstgewißheit und Realität des Geistes, die Affirmation selbst desselben ist, die triviale Bedeutung eines Beweises, daß er ein abhängiges und unvollständiges Wesen sei (Medit. IV), substituiert, kurz, den Geist oder das Selbst als Geist mit dem *empirischen* einzelnen, sinnlichen Individuum oder *Subjekte* identifiziert.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Cf. FW 8, 132.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> As we saw earlier, Descartes distinguished three classes of ideas namely those with which I am born, those that come from outside, and those made and invented by myself, see *Med.* III, AT IX-1, 29.

<sup>502</sup> This is the second time that he mentions the 'unphilosophical' method of Descartes, the first time was concerning the method of doubt: 'die Art und Weise, wie C. seine Zweifel ausdrückt und vorstellt, ist sehr unphilosophisch, und seine Zweifelsgründe sind allerdings höchst schwach', see FW 2, 237.

<sup>503</sup> FW 2, 269.

Clearly, Feuerbach does not value the theory of innate ideas highly. This could be because he seems to accept the interpretation of innate ideas as being ‘implanted by God’. Accordingly, he discusses the most important innate idea, namely that of God. Feuerbach suggests that Descartes put a lot of effort into trying to prove that the idea of God cannot originate in man. However, Feuerbach shows that a remark in the fourth part of *Discours de la méthode* gives away its human origin and meaning. He refers to the following:

Car, suivant les raisonnements que je viens de faire, pour connaître la nature de Dieu, autant que la mienne en était capable, je n’avis qu’à considérer de toutes les choses dont je trouvais en moi quelque idée, si c’était perfection, ou non, de les posséder, et j’étais assuré qu’aucune de celles qui marquaient quelque imperfection n’était en lui, mais que toutes les autres y étaient. Comme je voyais que le doute l’inconstance, la tristesse, et choses semblables, n’y pouvaient être, vu que j’eusse été moi-même bien aise d’en être exempt.<sup>504</sup>

In response to this passage, Feuerbach asks if the same does not apply to every other predicate – we would love to be free from dependence, mortality, finiteness. The infinite being is nothing else than this *moi-même* in the last line of the above, without all the limitations of which the ‘I’ would gladly be exempt.<sup>505</sup>

Cartesian certainty is based on the *res cogitans*, a concept which Feuerbach considers to actually achieve nothing more than an ostrich does in thinking it is invisible when it puts its head in the sand when in danger. The ostrich, like Descartes, believes that with the elimination of the consciousness of danger, the actual danger is also eliminated.<sup>506</sup> Nonetheless, despite all his cynical remarks, Feuerbach still thinks Cartesian philosophy has brought about progress in philosophy as it took the essence of the mind to be in the act of consciousness. However:

... wenn nun C. diesen Akt sogleich wieder als ein Wesen verselbständigt, zu einer von der Gattung der sinnlichen Wesen unterschiednen Gattung macht, beweist er damit, daß er selbst noch auf den Boden des phantastischen Spiritualismus steht; denn dem Begriff des Dings oder Wesens, der Substanz unterstellt sich notwendig – notwendig, denn er ist ja nur von der Anschauung abgezogen – das Bild einer sinnlichen Substanz, was schon daraus deutlich erhellt, daß, C. den Begriff des Wesens ebensogut auf die Ausdehnung anwendet als auf das Denken.<sup>507</sup>

Another highly important progression in the history of the human mind is the shift from the basic proposition of Christianity – ‘God is a spirit’ – to the modern proposition: ‘I am spirit’. Comparing Christianity with Cartesianism, he says:

... wenn das Christentum mit der Abstraktion der Welt beginnt, ein Wesen an die Spitze stellt, welches war, als nichts war, welches die Welt

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<sup>504</sup> *Disc.* (G), 35.

<sup>505</sup> FW 2, 271.

<sup>506</sup> FW 2, 304.

<sup>507</sup> FW 2, 306.

aus nichts schafft und ins Nichts verstößt, so beginnt C. mit derselben Fiktion, aber dieses das Nichtsein der Welt fingierende, ihr Dasein aufhebende Wesen bin ich, der Geist, der Denker.<sup>508</sup>

The only 'error' is that the term 'God' has to be replaced with the term 'I' or 'self'. The God that is a spirit who produces everything by means of will and mind and whose thoughts are the essence of all things, is nothing other than the essence of Idealism, for these predicates of God now refer to nothing other than the human mind. Feuerbach thinks that, in Descartes's works, concrete (*gegenständlich*) divine idealism is already subjective, human idealism.

In C. ist im „Gottesbewußtsein“ das Selbstbewußtsein, im Gottvertrauen das Selbstvertrauen des Menschen erwacht.<sup>509</sup>

For Feuerbach, Cartesian philosophy deserves to be credited with giving humanity self-confidence and a confidence in the power of reason, during a time in which the Christian faith enforced a despotic authority. The Cartesian school claimed that evidence could demand as much obedience from people as faith demanded. Idealism, however, was never focused on nature, as the objects of the senses are nothing to the idealist. Feuerbach then quotes Clauberg who held that if one considers the nature of the mind, which is similar to that of God, then one would find it to be below the dignity of humanity to focus on bodily and earthly things.<sup>510</sup> Leibniz said about Clauberg that he claimed to know how to describe the nature of the mind, but he did not want to say what this was. In thought he often fell into ecstasy and he died in such a state. To which Feuerbach in turn says, 'Wahrlich, eine echt cartesianische Todesart! Die Scheidung der Seele vom Leibe, der Tod, ist ja das Prinzip der Cartesischen, der idealistischen Philosophie überhaupt.'<sup>511</sup>

Although we have seen that Feuerbach was considerably critical of Descartes, his relation to the thinker is still ambiguous, for, as we saw at the beginning of this section, despite criticizing almost every essential Cartesian element, he still admits that:

Alle Menschen, die sich nicht im Zustande des Blödsinns oder der tiefsten Roheit befinden, sind darum, die meisten aber wider Willen und Wissen, *Fichtianer* und *Cartesianer*. Alle bestätigen im stillen die Wahrheit des Satzes „Cogito ergo sum“: Ich denke, darum bin ich. Alle wollen lieber tot als Narren sein, fühlen also, daß die Vernunft ihr höchstes Gut ist, daß, wer sie verliert, *sich selbst* verliert. Das Denken ist also das dem (denkenden) Subjekte Vorausgesetzte, denn es ist nur durch das Denken Subjekt, es ist die *Substanz* desselben, so daß ich wohl das Denken ohne Subjekt denken und für sich selbst zum Prinzip machen kann und muß, aber nicht umgekehrt das Subjekt ohne das Denken, denn das denkende Subjekt ist nichts außer dem Denken, es ist nichts andres

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<sup>508</sup> FW 2, 307.

<sup>509</sup> FW 2, 308.

<sup>510</sup> For further reading on this subject see Verbeek (ed.), *Johannes Clauberg and Cartesian philosophy in the seventeenth Century* (1999).

<sup>511</sup> FW 2, 309.

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als das Denken selbst, als wirklicher, gegenwärtiger actus [Tätigkeit, Wirksamkeit].<sup>512</sup>

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<sup>512</sup> FW 8, 110.