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The rebirth of Descartes

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I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸ Ibid., p. 8-9.

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

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

⁹ See KrV B 274 ff.

1 THE ENCYCLOPAEDISTS ON DESCARTES

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰ Jørn Schøsler, *John Locke et les philosophes français* (1997).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² Ibid., Bk. II, Ch. I, §4.

¹³ Ibid., Bk. II, Ch. I, §5.

1.1 *Esprit de système and esprit systématique*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁷ Encyc. II, 718ff.

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

¹⁹ Encyc. II, 719.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On peut considérer Descartes comme géomètre ou comme philosophe. Les mathématiques, dont il semble avoir fait assez peu de cas, font néanmoins aujourd'hui la partie la plus solide et la moins contestée de sa gloire. . . . Mais ce qui a surtout immortalisé le nom de ce grand homme, c'est l'application qu'il a su faire de l'algèbre à la géométrie, idée des plus vastes et des plus heureuses que l'esprit humain ait jamais eues, et qui sera toujours la clef des plus profondes recherches, non seulement dans la géométrie sublime, mais dans toutes les sciences physico-mathématiques²⁴

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

³² *Encyc.* XII, 514.

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

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

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

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

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

³³ Ibid., 515.

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

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

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

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

1.2 The encyclopaedists on the *cogito*

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

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

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

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

³⁷ *Encyc.* VI, 261.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁰ *Encyc.* VI, 262.

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

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

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

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

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

⁴¹ Ibid., 263.

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

⁴³ *Encyc.* VI, 146.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁴⁷ *Encyc.* VI, 150.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁰ *Encyc.* VI, 154.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

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

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

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

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

Superest tantum ut examinem quâ ratione ideam istam a Deo accepi; neque enim illam sensibus hausî, nec unquam non expectanti mihi advenit, ut solent rerum sensibilium ideæ, cum istæ res externis sensuum organis occurrunt, vel occurrere videntur; nec etiam a me efficta est, nam nihil ab illâ detrahere, nihil illi superaddere plane possum; ac proinde

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

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

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

superest ut mihi sit innata, quemadmodum etiam mihi est innata idea meâ ipsius.⁵⁵

The French translation, by Mr. le Duc de Luynes⁵⁶ (first edition 1647) reads:

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

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

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

⁵⁵ *Med.* III (L), AT VII, 51.

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

⁵⁷ *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 40-41.

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁵⁹ CSM I, 303-304.

⁶⁰ *Disc. (G)*, 64.

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

⁶² See *Le Monde*, AT XI, 47.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 340.

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

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 14.

1770.⁷² In the footsteps of Beguelin, who reconciled Leibniz and Newton a year earlier, Castillon wanted to reconcile Descartes and Locke. To resolve the difference of opinions in the matter of the origin of our ideas, Castillon thought that displaying the ‘true sentiments’ of both philosophers would suffice to show that, in themselves, Descartes and Locke were not opposed to each other. He suggests that the alleged opposition between them is caused by ‘quelques adversaires infideles’ and ‘quelques disciples plus zélés que prudens’, who have altered and corrupted the thoughts of both.⁷³

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷³ Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 277.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁷⁷ Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 278.

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

⁷⁹ Descartes & Locke conciliés, p. 282.

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

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

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

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

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

1.4 Hume on innate ideas

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁸³ *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* [1748], in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford ¹1888, ²1902, ³1975), section II, §17, p. 22. Henceforth: *Enquiry*.

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

⁸⁵ *Enquiry*, p. 22.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

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

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

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

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

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

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *Encyc.* VIII, 490.

⁸⁹ *Med.* III (F), AT IX-1, 29.

⁹⁰ *Rep.* II, AT IX-1, 124.

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

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

2 KANT'S VIEW OF DESCARTES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 The place of Descartes in the works of Kant

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁶ *Fortschritte*, 263.

⁹⁷ *Logik*, AA IX 32.

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

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

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

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

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

⁹⁸ *Proleg.*, AA IV, 293.

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

¹⁰⁰ KrV B XXXIXn, (AA III, 23).

¹⁰¹ *Disc.*, AT VI, 37 ff.; *Disc.* (G), 31 ff.

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

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

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

¹⁰⁵ *Corr.*, AT V, 178.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁰⁹ KrV B 626-627 (AA III, 401).

¹¹⁰ KrV B 628 (AA III, 402).

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

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

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

2.3 The *cogito* and the 'ich denke'

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

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

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

¹¹³ *Principes* I (§9), AT IX-2, 28.

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

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

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

To which Descartes responds, saying:

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁵ *Obj.* III (F), AT IX-1, 134.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹²¹ Düsing (1987), p. 97.

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

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

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

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

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

¹²² KrV B 422-423n.

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

As we can see, Düsing considers that Kant divides the Cartesian first certainty into pure intellectual apperception and the self-certainty of the empirical thinking 'I'. Although Düsing also thinks that the pure 'I' is, for Kant, merely the principle of formal logic¹²⁴, we have to note that it is more for Kant. Kant transforms the *cogito* into what he calls the 'ursprünglich-synthetische Einheit der Apperzeption'. What he means by this, we find in §16 of the transcendental analytic, where he writes the famous passage:

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

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

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

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

¹²³ Düsing (1987), p. 101.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 102.

¹²⁵ KrV B 132.

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

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

2.4 Kant on the notion of innate ideas

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

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

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

¹²⁷ See KrV B 167.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³¹ In *ibid.*

¹³² J. A. Eberhard, in *ibid.*, p. 96-97.

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

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

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

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

¹³³ Kant, in *ibid.* p. 151.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹³⁷ KrV B 90-91.

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

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