

To Replant and Unroot. Typologie of the Cartesian Tree of Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century French Histories of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

The relations between metaphysics and physics in Cartesianism is a question of crucial importance for 19th century French histories of philosophy. Hence, in its institutionally dominant version, incarnated by Victor Cousin, this philosophy was understood as a spiritualism concerned with the founding of a psychology relying on a rationalist interpretation of the *cogito*. In order to achieve this, such a psychology must distinguish itself from the empirical method of psychology inherited from the so-called *ideologues*. And this required, in turn, that metaphysics must return to its place at the roots of the tree of knowledge, in opposition to a Baconian interpretation considering the history of the mind in prolongation of the natural sciences, and according to the same model. If this ambition proved to be both theoretically and objectively constraining for the « Cousinians », it was, however, not a unique enterprise in the 19th century. Other, alternative trees of knowledge were envisaged, defining other possible readings of the Cartesian philosophy,

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notably by opening up alleys toward empiricist interpretations. In this paper, I propose a typology of these alternative trees. The aim is to gain a better understanding of the complexity and the tensions between physics and metaphysics in Descartes on the one hand, and, on the other, to stress the decisive importance of 19th century French historiography for our current understanding of these relations.

KEYWORDS

Physics, Metaphysics, Psychology, Spiritualism, Empiricism, Materialism.

INTRODUCTION

From the 1820s and, more or less markedly, until the death of Victor Cousin¹ in 1867, French spiritualism was characterized by a strong return of metaphysics, directed by a triple reaction.

1. A reaction to the sensualist and sceptic philosophy of Locke and his circle and, therefore, also to Bacon, Hobbes, Gassendi and Condillac.

2. A reaction to the “scientist” and “positivist” ideology – particularly in its physiological dimension – as revived in the works of Broussais and Comte.²

3. A reaction to another type of spiritualism: the theological spiritualism represented by de Maistre or de Bonald,³ in particular.

This triple reaction had double implications. On the one hand, the criticisms of these adversaries of rational spiritualism had to be addressed; namely the accusations of abstraction and musings far removed from the empirical data of natural philosophy. On the other hand, in response to theological spiritualism, it was necessary to make short work of the criticisms of the

extravagant claims of rationality to display a certainty which only revelation could bestow. It also implied that the nascent history of philosophy should be structured upon the basis of a system enabling metaphysics to be protected from these various assaults.

Cousin found the solution in Descartes and an empirical-rational interpretation of the *cogito*.⁴ In so doing, he redefined metaphysics both in opposition to the natural sciences while adopting their methods of observation, and in opposition to theology while re-focusing on psychology.

My objective is to rapidly review this framework, which is still present today,⁵ in order to reveal certain boundary issues and displacements which testify to the complex relationships existing between metaphysics and physics in Cartesianism for Cousin himself. I will then use two successive prisms to turn my attention to the papers submitted for the 1839 competition concerning the history of Cartesianism organized by the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques.

The first prism will be the report about these papers written by Jean-Philibert Damiron.⁶ Here they will be examined from the perspective of the “official” or “dominant” philosophy. This official character was proven by the publication of Damiron's report in its entirety as an introduction to his *Essai sur l'histoire de la philosophie en France au XVII^e siècle*, in 1846.

The second prism will be the actual content of the competition entries. We will see the historiography of Cartesianism shift according to how major elements were jointly taken into consideration in order to renew and reinforce metaphysics understood as being the study of the soul. These elements were: the subversive power of physics, on the one hand, and the need to account for its progress, on the other.

In all, seven papers were in competition, one of which arrived after the deadline. In addition to the prize-winning paper submitted by Jean-Baptiste Bordas Demoulin, two other entries, written by Charles Renouvier and Francisque Bouillier,⁷ respectively, were recognized as being worthy of the accolade: “*très honorable*” i.e. most honourable. In all, however, four entries were published since, in 1843, Jean-André Rochoux, independently published, in unmodified form, his subversive *Épicure opposé à Descartes*. These four texts will provide us with our privileged area of investigation into the roots and main body of Cartesian philosophy. They typologize different ways to update cartesian philosophy in a restrictive Cousinian context.

My intention here is not only to inquire into the “dominant” conception of the relationships between metaphysics and physics in these histories of philosophy, but also to question the reasons for which the form of heterodoxy, which I wish to highlight, took so long to acquire legitimacy in Cartesian studies. If, today, we have stopped or almost stopped mentioning Renouvier, Bordas-Demoulin, Bouillier or Rochoux⁸ and if we tend to level Cousin’s position towards a plain and simple refusal of the problematics linked to physics, this is undoubtedly not merely because Descartes, himself, chose to harden his positions along these lines in the polemical texts. This is also because we are still reluctant to grant all their meaning to objective facts such as the contextualization provided by the *Querelle d’Utrecht*, to the “Lettre-Préface” to the *Principes de la Philosophie*, and thus to the metaphor of the tree of knowledge. From this point of view, a detour via the 19th century can prove fruitful and even necessary in order to focus or re-focus upon the multiple potentialities of the Cartesian text. In the 18th century, Mariafranca Spallanzani painted a contrasted picture of these potentialities while the followers of Cousin later strove to caricature them and relegate them to the darkest shadows.

IS THERE A POROSITY OF FRONTIERS BETWEEN PHYSICS AND METAPHYSICS IN THE WRITINGS OF VICTOR COUSIN?

The position of Cousin was characterized by the identification of philosophy with metaphysics and the progressive relegation of everything pertaining to physics to an area outside philosophy. To revisit the 18th century, we can refer to this extract of the *Fragments de philosophie cartésienne* (Pour faire suite aux *Fragments philosophiques*⁹):

Let us dare to speak the truth: the 18th century in France [which has been] so rich in great men, has not produced a single one in philosophy, if at least by philosophy we mean metaphysics.

However, even if we cannot return to every text Cousin wrote on the subject, there are three other points which must be underlined: 1. the claim to responsibility for importing the methods of physics into metaphysics reconceived as psychology; 2. the redefinition by Cousin and his followers of physics as a subject which was “spiritualist without knowing it,” which, for all that, did not identify itself with a hylomorphic projection which had been definitively defeated by Cartesianism; and 3. the contrasted treatment of boundary objects or subjects. Particularly those borrowed from physiology, echoes of which could be found in spiritualist doctors and which, in turn, were reflected in Cousin’s re-writings of his lessons.

I will rapidly examine these three points which show that, even in Cousin’s very own writings, the position of the problem of the relationship between the trunk and the roots of the tree of knowledge is not as Manichaeic as it is sometimes made out to be.

1) The importation of the methods of physics into metaphysics, reconceived as psychology

Cousin set himself the objective of re-qualifying metaphysics as the set of facts of internal observation and rational facts by means of an adaptation of the method of observation practised in physics since Bacon to the objects sacrificed by this latter. This favoured metaphysics at the core of which philosophy enabled the finding of what natural science had sought to dismiss: namely, ontology. Experience applied to the consciousness revealed substantial activity which was both anterior and superior to any phenomenal activity, and specific to the thinking substance. This rooted force on the side of spirituality.

2) As a result of this, far from physics dictating its laws to psychology, physics was spiritualist without knowing it:

[...] if it is undeniable, if modern physics is concerned exclusively with forces and laws, I would rigorously conclude that physics, whether it knows it or not, is not materialist, and that it becomes spiritualist the day it rejects all other methods except observation and induction, which can only lead to forces and laws; for what material is there in forces and laws? The physical sciences themselves, therefore, have gone down the path of spiritualism properly understood, and all that is left for them to do is march resolutely onward and broaden their forces and laws ever more, so as to generalize them more widely.

Only – and this included the work of the man Cousin called “the first French metaphysician of his time,” Maine de Biran¹⁰ – the Cartesian critique of the hylomorphic

projection had to remain an intangible line of conduct. Just as one did not import exteriority into the soul, one did not export one's interiority into the physical universe. In Cousin's work, thinking about the relationships between physics and metaphysics remained profoundly dualist and activity remained within the sphere of the thinking substance.

3) However, one area resisted this dualism. This area was physiology, which Biran defined as being situated i.e. "between the dynamics of the bodies and the dynamics of the spirits."¹¹

Thus:

The study of medicine supposes that of the physical and natural sciences; it develops the taste and the talent for observation and, in this respect, it may be said that the study of medicine is an excellent preparation for metaphysics; but, it must be added for a well-formed mind, for when we are continually surveying phenomena of organic life, it is easy, it is natural to be surprised and carried away by the appearance, and to confound with these phenomena other phenomena which are very different; and I pray you not to forget that, in fact, in the review which I have presented to you of all the philosophical schools we have seen sensualism and empiricism as well as skepticism often proceed from schools of natural philosophers and physicians.¹²

The shifting of activity towards the area of the bodies lead to a belief in the uselessness even the falseness of a different spiritual principle likely to engender thoughts. One possible solution consisted in recalling that, to be exact, this Leibnitzian debate was "not born at the time of Descartes" and only appeared towards 1691 or 1694.¹³

Conversely, however, the reduction of matter, and living matter in particular, to pure extension threw the door wide open to a Spinozist and Malebranchist interpretation of Cartesian physics and to its potential degeneration into pantheist animism.¹⁴ In order to avoid proving the Leibnizian objections right, the only alternative was thus to re-inject metaphysics into Cartesian physiology, while simultaneously maintaining the banishment of final causes from the remainder of physics as thematized in article 28 of the first part of the *Principes de la philosophie*.

In this extremely astute way, Cousin succeeded by inserting another prism between Descartes and Leibniz. This prism took the form of Claude Clerselier and the division into paragraphs which he proposed for the posthumous editions of *L'Homme* and *De la description du corps humain* in 1664 and 1677, editions in which he replaced the Cartesian lexicon of the “description” of the parts and functions with the finalist vocabulary of their “use.” This subterfuge enabled Cousin to conclude that “the determination of the end of a phenomenon is necessary for knowledge, the seeking of the final causes is an integral part of science and should not be referred to a foreign science.”¹⁵

Therefore, for Cousin, physics, and particularly physiology, could be recovered once the materialist and pantheist risk had been foiled by the revealing of the primacy of the method and principles of psychology over those of natural philosophy. In the history of ideas, metaphysical theories have always been applied to the sciences, in general, and to physiology, in particular, no matter how pertinent or not the predominant philosophy in the period under consideration might be.

Let us revisit the 18th century example by Condillac below:

Just as in metaphysics the ego or the soul is simply the sum of our sensations, so in physiology, life is simply the sum of functions without unity. If that is the case, then the harmony of these functions is strange; but people jumped with both feet right over all these difficulties and medicine had its totally empirical philosophy.

At the beginning of my presentation of this section devoted to Cousin, I evoked the various returns and inflections of this conception of the relationships between physics and metaphysics among spiritualist doctors. I shall take one example here, a quite unknown today doctor from Montpellier,¹⁶ Alphonse Jaumes, who, in a paper entitled *De l'influence des doctrines philosophiques de Descartes et de Bacon sur les Progrès de la Médecine* (1850), defended what he called “medical metaphysics.” One of the most interesting elements of his line of argument consisted in his use of the Cartesian theory of innate ideas, which he considered to be metaphysically false and which lay at the centre of the dispute between the followers of the Ideologists and Cousin. He used this concept to demonstrate how it could nevertheless serve in the understanding of true vital anthropology. As presented in the *Notae in Programma quoddam* (1648) in response to the dutch doctor Henricus Regius, in particular, and by analogy with

hereditary family illnesses, innatism provided the model of an active force “which has its attributes without which it would be impossible to conceive it.” This enabled one to use Descartes to conceive what Descartes himself never thought and which some of his successors also forbade themselves from thinking: namely, a materialist vitalist dynamism:

The doctrine of innate ideas, which is the basis of Cartesianism and has been given an irresistible proof, can, if applied with the discernment required by the different nature of the subject, be extremely conducive to the progress of the medical sciences.

In the present case, false metaphysical dynamism was therefore recovered in order to conceive true physical dynamics. Undoubtedly this contained an extension of the Cartesian gesture which consisted in exhibiting, in false scholastic physics, that which could be reinvested in the adequate conception of the force which the soul possesses to set the body in motion.

The example of Jaumes is interesting because he went further than Cousin, by assuming the sometimes erroneous but always heuristic nature of Cartesian psychology. However, in this case the principles of a renewal of physics were again to be found in metaphysics; in the return in force of that which Descartes himself had excluded from it in the work of Cousin and by a contamination of Baconism in the writings of Jaumes.

The analysis of the 1839 competition entries about Cartesianism will enable us to envisage other possible displacements which will be situated in the field of actual Cartesian physics. They bear witness to a clear awareness of the need for spiritualism to address the issues pertaining to natural philosophy, for it to confront Cartesianism with its Epicurean and Newtonian counterparts in order to dismiss it (for Rochoux) or, on the contrary, in order to reinforce it. So it is that

metaphysical issues progressively shifted from the thinking substance towards the material substance, opening new perspectives and revealing new complexities within material substance.

I shall first examine how Damiron's report perceived these shifts and strove to invert their course; then, how, while taking Damiron's remarks into consideration (while sometimes persisting in their initial choices), the works published diverged on these different points.

THE 1839 PAPERS SEEN THROUGH THE PRISM OF "OFFICIAL" PHILOSOPHY: DAMIRON'S REPORT

I will limit my remarks to the sections of the report dealing with the four competition entries mentioned at the start of this presentation (the other two submitted within the deadline were never published and gave rise to no significant remarks in the report).

The first paper, some 95 pages long, was written by Rochoux. Damiron criticized the author for being partisan in nature, conducting a Gassendi-like resurrection of Epicurean philosophy and his almost total silence concerning what should have constituted the core of his argument: metaphysical considerations. According to this representative of institutional spiritualism, Rochoux was wrong in saying nothing about the nature and origin of the various ideas on the soul or about free-will considered as the faculty of judgement and action. In short, he couldn't win the prize because he said nothing about the fundamental issues of Descartes' metaphysics, without which nothing worthwhile could be said about physics: "This is a major omission, everything which should be there is not there." Moreover, according to the author of the competition entry, Cartesianism was dead in the sense that in his *Censura philosophia cartesianae*, the sceptic, Pierre-Daniel Huet, distinguished two men in Descartes: on the one

hand, the physician and the geometer, the experimenter unsurpassed by any modern, and, on the other hand, the philosopher [who was] much less fortunate in metaphysical speculations.

In the work submitted by Rochoux, the Académie, as represented by Damiron, rejected the specific form of “exclusivity” which consisted in identifying philosophy with the natural sciences and in excluding from it the principal issues pertaining to metaphysics. Since Cartesianism and its different receptions constituted the competition subject, this refusal manifested itself in a denunciation of the relevance of such a point of view in the writings of Descartes himself. The treatment of metaphysics was not only a prerequisite but also a prime requirement for whosoever wished to stem the deleterious effects of the Gassendi prism upon the interpretation of the philosophy of Descartes.

In one way, the procedure concerning Charles Renouvier is even more remarkable. For Damiron attributed to Descartes himself Cousin’s preference for Descartes the metaphysician over Descartes the physician. Renouvier was therefore immediately corrected by a very clear formulation of the official institutional line:

[...] the author inadvertently lets slip judgements that are not always made with the strictest accuracy; for instance, he asserts several times that Descartes aspired to do natural philosophy. Yet clearly nothing is less Descartes’ intention, as evinced by his *Meditations* and his *Discourse on the Method*; and there moreover are statements made by him on this subject that leave no doubt as to his real opinion. He therefore considered himself above all a metaphysicist; the physicist and geometrist hold a subordinate position in his eyes.

Once that had been established, Renouvier enabled it to be understood that the “immoderate extension” of certain theses present in the writings of Descartes had engendered the philosophies of the adversaries. As Cousin had already highlighted in his *Philosophie de Locke* (1828) physiology constituted the most eloquent example of this:

With respect to physiology, he remarks that if, as in physics, he has the vice of resorting too hastily to hypotheses, it should not be forgotten that beyond his merits for explaining and popularizing the discovery of the circulation of blood, his theory of man was so convincing that besides the Cartesian school, which adopted it as its own doctrine, it also became, with a few modifications, that of the opposing school, which adopting Descartes’ organic mechanism merely changed the pineal gland into the cerebral centre and animal spirits into the senses and moreover extended these principles immoderately.

If, according to Damiron, this passage was “one of the most remarkable” of this paper, this was for two reasons. It enabled one to comply with this type of posterity of Cartesianism, and, secondly, to exclude posterities which were receivable or in accordance with the original text, which remained well-founded in dualist metaphysics. Renouvier’s paper could thus receive an accolade because it could both indicate the dangers of certain physics-oriented readings of Descartes, and circumvent them.

As for Francisque Bouillier, the starting point of his competition entry was a clear Cousin-inspired separation between Bacon, the natural philosopher, and Descartes, the metaphysician or promoter of grand ideas impregnating every system. However, according to Damiron, this entrant could also under-estimate the importance of such decisive metaphysical issues as the proof of the

existence of God, final causes or innate ideas. The watchword remained unchanged and was theorized in the *Essai sur l'histoire de la philosophie au XVII^e siècle*, when dealing with the physician of the Cartesian school, Jacques Rohault: “In the school of Descartes, one is not a physician without being a metaphysician and reciprocally.”¹⁷ “Deserters” from Cartesianism, such as Regius, had to be hunted down for they believed they could remain faithful to the master while re-investing some of his physical propositions and thwarting prime philosophy.

Jean-Baptiste Bordas-Demoulin stands out from the others given the importance granted to physical issues and the insistence upon mathematics. In the name of the “tendencies” of the work of Descartes, he underlined the lack of comprehension of the activity of both bodily and spiritual substance and the uncertainty of Cartesian formulations concerning innate ideas, which gave rise to contrasted posterities of unequal legitimacy. However, in the eyes of Damiron, this entry was above all a chance to underline other non naturalist excesses: those of an “over-marked theological character,” particularly concerning considerations of the effects of original sin: “*ces matières n'appartiennent ni à la philosophie de Descartes, ni à la philosophie proprement dite,*” or, in English: “these matters belong neither to the philosophy of Descartes, nor to philosophy itself.”

Thus physical considerations always corrected and founded metaphysics re-conceived as psychology and distinct from theology. The reference to what was supposed to occur in the work of Descartes served as the standard against which to elaborate the entire history of philosophy.

Four possible avenues are implicit in Damiron’s reading:

1. The direction taken by Rochoux, who dismissed both Cartesian metaphysics and Cartesian physics by promoting an Epicurean style of materialism.
2. The direction taken by Renouvier, who opened the way for a materialist-medical interpretation of Descartes himself, by underlining the importance of Spinoza and by promoting vitalism.
3. The direction taken by Bouillier, who defined a new Leibnitz-inspired animism, challenging both the duo-dynamism of the Montpellier School and the organic vitalism of the Paris School.
4. The direction taken by Bordas-Demoulin, who laid the foundations for a new general pathology studying the effects of the original Fall upon the body and soul, while claiming Malebranche to be his inspiration.

I shall rapidly examine these four points, considering them from the perspective of the published works. I shall indicate the later evolutions of these points, whenever applicable.

THE CONTENT AND ACTUAL DISPLACEMENTS OF THE PAPERS

Rochoux's paper was published in 1843, entitled: *Épicure opposé à Descartes*. It had a strong polemical presentation, "against the secret thinking of the commission;" this "secret thinking" was favourable not only to Descartes but above all to Descartes as institutionalized by Cousin. For whosoever intended to criticize this official Descartes and thus untie the knot linking psychology and the natural sciences in the whole of philosophy, the only alternative was to dismiss Descartes himself for internal contradiction or contradiction of experience. This was what Rochoux called "judging Cartesianism only by the words of the master" and not by what others say of them.

The first argumentative movement extracted what could serve Rochoux's project from Epicurean philosophy, as rehabilitated by Gassendi. The most important passage concerned physics and more precisely the sum of activity and spontaneous movement contained in the atom. This conception of the activity of matter enabled the establishment of a link with La Mettrie and Haller and the criticism of contemporary scientists, such as Claude Servais Mathias Pouillet in his *Éléments de physique expérimentale et de météorologie* (1829), who posed a problem: the claim for a force of inertia by virtue of which matter was supposed to be equally indifferent to rest and movement. Yet the machine was never at rest:

[...] every situation in which so many men have believed they saw inertia, matter at rest, is merely cases of equilibrium produced by the balance of opposed forces, so that this alleged inertia is actually a highly active struggle [...] a single principle, that of an atom endowed with motion or active matter, suffices to explain all natural phenomena. [...] every phenomenon of any kind constantly shows us force and matter indissolubly joined and always acting in unison.¹⁸

It could thus be expected that Rochoux would present Cartesianism as the reverse model of this philosophy of activity or material force. However, this did not happen exactly like that. Descartes did sow the seeds of truth in physics. But they were in contradiction with the metaphysical principles they were supposed to serve, particularly the theory of continuous creation. Therefore metaphysics, as praised by Cousin and his followers, contaminated the very physics of activity which they condemned in the works of the adversaries of Descartes:

Thus the supreme intelligence is obliged to pay attention incessantly to every individual particle of matter. There is no way to dispute it if one denies matter all force of its own. Descartes seems to have foreseen this objection: but he was able to anticipate it with one of the frequent contradictions for which Huet criticizes him so bitterly. Essentially, after stating that motion imparted by God is always in a straight line, he explains the changes of direction it is subject to with reference to the influence of matter. Does not matter therefore have some force of its own, if it can produce such a result? Thus the hypothesis of the inertia of bodies is overturned by the same man who until then had been forced to defend it.¹⁹

The particularity of Rochoux's work was thus the displacement of the debate from metaphysics to physics and the drawing of attention to the seeds of truth specific to the natural philosophy of Descartes, once it had been rid of the metaphysical principles which invalidated it. Rochoux was obliged to reject Descartes' lock, stock and barrel because the dominant interpretation of the master's work rejected any form of activity for matter and because that was where truth was to be found.

Another strategy consisted in taking seriously – within the writings of Descartes – the possibility of conceiving this activity within a philosophy which remained spiritualist. This was Renouvier's choice.

In the preface to his *Manuel de philosophie moderne*, Renouvier defined his approach as being an application of philosophy to those particular sciences called natural sciences, or as being a “natural philosophy” conceived out of²⁰ hitherto ignored Cartesian physics. To this, he added a

thematization of the difference between spiritualism and materialism based upon the categories of activity and passivity with inertia on the side of matter. He also noted the danger of a naturalist approach which granted a form of autonomy to bodily substance. He responded to Damiron by inserting metaphysics into the Cartesian tree of knowledge. However, metaphysical issues, such as that of “pure notions” for instance, were never thematized for their own sakes. They were always approached from the relationship with physics.

Moreover, although he agreed with Cousin in recognizing that “Bacon can be considered neither as a philosopher nor as a metaphysician” and that Bacon wished to “call the physician a philosopher and the metaphysician a physician,” he immediately went on to assert that Descartes himself deals with neither theology nor pneumatology, unless it is furtively, in some letters or in replying to objections and always to his great regret. By these means, Renouvier validated his thesis of a dissociation – for Descartes himself – between true science and the problematics which Bacon imputed to “metaphysics.” By redefining the philosophical categories and by refusing the bridges between Bacon and Descartes, Renouvier upturned Damiron’s reading, a reading which Damiron claimed to have based upon the Cartesian texts themselves. The text of the *Manuel de philosophie moderne* thus contained the recognition of another Descartes, different to the one found in the history of the Cousin school alongside the claim for another philosophy arising out of the work of Descartes but not present as such within this work: namely, a form of vitalism.

Renouvier was visibly fascinated by what he called “the creative power with which Descartes himself endowed matter.” According to Olivier Bloch, such an attribution to Descartes of the thesis of a material dynamism is, to say the least, “risky” if not paradoxical.²¹ However, a restitution of the entire line of argument enables this situation to be understood.

The assertion of the *Principes de la philosophie* III, 47, according to which matter could take any form should at some stage be posed in clear metaphysical terms or otherwise forever be a potentially fruitful but “gratuitous” hypothesis. It allowed the recovering of Cartesian physics to serve the cause of vitalism. In answer to the question of the pre-eminence between metaphysics and physics, Renouvier replied with the question of the supremacy of real or concrete physics over general or theoretical physics. The external hierarchy between metaphysics and physics was displaced towards an internal hierarchy between two varieties of “physics,” the “special” one allowing dynamics.

This raised the issue of what might become of this recovering of the activity of matter in a spiritualism in which theology was dominant. In his *Cartésianisme ou la véritable rénovation des sciences* (1843),²² Bordas-Demoulin surprisingly proposed to turn to Malebranche rather than Descartes or even Leibniz. For the notion of intelligible extent was applicable to any force: God enabled it to be understood that no true activity could be conceived without quantity. And, contrary to what the dominant spiritualism thought, this quantity was in no way nullifying. On the contrary, it was at the base of the definition of any substance endowed with force. Therefore, crude bodies undoubtedly excluded any spontaneity. However, they did not exclude all manifestations of force. Bordas-Demoulin’s solution thus consisted in breaking the excessive alternative between pure mechanism and pure dynamism by distinguishing, for extension, the two meanings of life which spiritualism had no difficulty in accepting. The single condition required to be able to found a “true spiritualism” was the uniting of quantity and force.

Just as Renouvier had displaced an external opposition (between metaphysics and physics) towards an internal dissociation (between real and abstract physics), so Bordas-Demoulin responded by rooting the activity of the soul itself in its “quantity” or “extent.”

Finally, Bouillier’s starting point was indeed the definition of Descartes as the “creator and father of true metaphysics.”²³ But only to underline that his ignorance of the nature of created substances had directly lead Descartes down the slope of a phenomenalization of the thoughts of the soul. Rochoux concluded from the inactivity of matter that, in order to account for experience, one had to have recourse to continued creation while deliberately reversing the order of the tree of knowledge and turning metaphysics into a default solution or a concealing make-do. Conversely, Bouillier asserted that, if one wished to be rational, the pre-supposition of continued creation implied the removal of all activity from creatures. Since metaphysics had primacy, the Malebranche reading of the second philosophy of Descartes was the only one possible. And so the consequences of Rochoux’s reasoning could be extended to the human soul itself.

In a later work entitled: *Du principe vital ou de l’âme pensante*²⁴ Bouillier proposed to correct Descartes on this point using Leibniz. In true dynamics psychology not mechanics or physics had to designate the “prime science of force.” The false notion of the soul accredited by Descartes had to leave the field of narrow rationality and open up to animism in order to save spiritualism. The vitalist or duo-dynamist pseudo-solutions were thus overcome by a re-integration of organic activity within psychology.

CONCLUSION

Whatever the differences between the spiritualists may have been,²⁵ the redefinition of philosophy, which was identified with metaphysics, which itself was reduced to psychology, transited via the proof of its clear distinction from the sciences. But this distinction was not the only thing to matter. There was also the recourse to lexicons, such as that of “particularity,” in order to designate these sciences. For each time philosophers attempted to dominate the sciences and refuse their specific consistency, they employed this type of terminology. This terminology let it be understood that there existed a general, universal thought (a role which philosophy obviously assumed). It also let it be understood that the pre-eminence of this general, universal thought was sufficient to discredit “particular sciences” which could thus be assimilated to mere techniques.

One of the conclusions to be drawn from this state of affairs is that, in order to re-integrate the sciences into the tree of philosophy, one must either completely reject metaphysics or accept its redefinition through a confrontation with the concrete data of experience.

20th century Cartesian historiography would provide several examples along these lines. But the least that can be said is that Cartesian historiography left a much deeper impression upon minds than the historiography of its contradictors or detractors.²⁶

¹ Victor Cousin (1792-1867) entered the French Academy and the State Council in 1830. In 1832, he became a member of the council of Public Instruction where he was charge of philosophy. He was elected a member of the newly created *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* and appointed director of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. In 1840, under the government of Thiers, he was minister of public instruction for some eight months. He presided over the *concours d'agrégation* – an essential exam for anyone wishing to enter academia – for 27 years. During the

period we are concerned with, he possessed all the means necessary to fulfil his intellectual and political ambitions.

But for this very reason, he was also strongly criticized.

² François Joseph Victor Broussais (1772-1838) was a student of Bichat and Pinel, head of the hospital *Val de Grâce* in Paris, professor at the medical faculty and inspector of public health. He was a member of the *Académie de médecine* founded in 1823 and of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques* from 1832 onwards. He wrote extensively on the relation between the history of philosophy and the history of medicine. He had an influence comparable to Cousin's whom he was constantly challenging in public. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) is generally presented as the founder of French positivism and sociology. He strongly criticized Cousin's spiritualism, by mobilizing the now famous argument that in psychology, the observer modifies what is observed. So psychology can by no way be an experimental science.

³ Joseph de Maistre (1753-1821) and Louis Gabriel Amboise (1754-1840) were both fiercest opponents of French Revolution. De Maistre was a Freemason tilted towards esotericism ; De Bonald was a defender of a return to the monarchy and to Catholic Church principles.

⁴ On the Cousinian interpretation of Descartes and the alternative propositions of the "Cousinians," see Delphine Antoine-Mahut, "The Leibniz-Stahl Controversy and the Renewal of French Spiritualism," in *Hegel and Schelling in Early Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Kirill Chepurin, Adi Efal-Lautenschläger, Daniel Whistler and Ayse Yuva (Springer, International Archives for the History of Ideas, forthcoming); "Experimental method and the spiritualist soul. The Case of Victor Cousin », in *The Philosophy of experience in 19th Century in France and Germany. Contextes, Methods, Problems*, ed. by Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Silvia Manzo, special issue of *Perspectives on Science*, forthcoming; "Maine de Biran's places in French Spiritualism: occultation, reduction and demarcation," in *Edition and English Translation of Maine de Biran, Rapport du physique et du moral chez l'homme*, with various Studies of Maine de Biran's Philosophy, eds Darian Meacham and Joseph Spadola (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 33-46; "Cartésianisme dominant et cartésianismes subversifs. Le cas de l'infirmier de Bicêtre Jean-André Rochoux," in *La mer retentissante. Lectures de Descartes et Leibniz au XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Lucie Rey, *Corpus* 68 (2016), 25-56 (see also Lucie Rey's excellent Introduction to this volume); "La fabrique du cartésianisme néerlandais dans les histoires de la philosophie française au XIX^e siècle," in *Les Pays-Bas aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, ed. by Catherine Secretan and Delphine Antoine-Mahut (Paris: Champion, 2015), 107-124; "Reviving Spiritualism with Monads. Francisque Bouillier's impossible mission (1839-1864)," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 23, no. 8

(2015): 1106-1127; and “Is the History of Philosophy a Family Affair? The examples of Locke and Malebranche in the Cousinian School,” in *Philosophy and its History. New Essays on the Methods and Aims of Research in the History of Philosophy*, ed. by Eric Schliesser, Justin Smith and Mogens Laerke (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 159-177.

⁵ On the Cartesian framework of these various receptions, see Delphine Antoine-Mahut, *Descartes radical. Historicité d'un canon philosophique* (Paris: Vrin, forthcoming).

⁶ Jean-Philibert Damiron (1794-1862) became a member of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques in 1836 and obtained a chair in modern history at the Sorbonne in 1838. Victor Cousin put him in charge of writing up the reports on the dissertations presented at the 1839 competition. Damiron was the author of an *Essai d'histoire de la philosophie en France au dix-neuvième siècle* (1828, last edition in 1838) and of an *Essai sur l'histoire de la philosophie en France au dix-septième siècle* (1846).

⁷ Jean-Baptiste Bordas-Desmoulin (1798-1859) is the author of a memoir valorizing Descartes' contribution to the scientific revolution, particularly in its mathematical dimension. Charles Renouvier (1815-1903) devoted his contribution to the physical dimension of the cartesian contribution, and to the various links between physics and metaphysics in Descartes and its ulterior receptions. Jean-André Rochoux was a nurse at the Bicêtre Hospital. His memoir is dedicated to Broussais and is openly intended to take the counter of the dominant spiritualism. That is why Rochoux explains he does not apply to win a prize. That is also why he published himself his book in 1843.

⁸ With a shade for Bouillier's work on cartesianism, which is still a reference today in Cartesian studies. And if we mention Renouvier today, it is not for his cartesian contribution, but as a neo-Kantian, a contributor to personalism or one of the promotor of French laicism.

⁹ Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Charpentier, 1845), Avant-propos, VIII.

¹⁰ *Œuvres philosophiques de Maine de Biran*, 3 vols., ed. by Victor Cousin (Paris: Ladrance, 1834-1841), 66. The first edition was published in 1834.

¹¹ Maine de Biran and Marie François Pierre Gontier, *Exposition de la doctrine philosophique de Leibniz* (Paris: L-G. Michaud, 1819), 19, left column.

¹² *Philosophie de Locke* (4th edition, Paris : Didier, 1861), 46.

¹³ Victor Cousin, *Histoire générale de la philosophie depuis les temps les plus anciens jusqu'au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Didier, 1867), 390.

¹⁴ On this link between Spinoza and pantheism, see Pierre-François Moreau, “Spinoza et Victor Cousin,” *Archivio di filosofia* 1 (1978): 327-31; “Spinozisme et matérialisme au XIX^e siècle,” in *Raison présente* 51 (1979): 85-94; “Trois polémiques contre Victor Cousin,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 4 (1983): 542-548 and “Les enjeux de la publication en France des papiers de Leibniz sur Spinoza,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 2 (1988): 215-232; « ‘In naturalismo’. Leibniz, Spinoza et les spiritualistes français », in Pierre-François Moreau, Raphaële Andrault and Mogens Laerke eds., *Spinoza/Leibniz. Rencontres, controverses, réceptions* (Paris: Presses de l’Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2014) : 325-344.

¹⁵ Cousin, *Histoire générale de la philosophie*, 384, note 1. The passage is translated from the *Fragments de philosophie moderne*.

¹⁶ Alphonse Jaumes was Associate and Curator of collections at the Faculty of Medicine in Montpellier. *De l’influence* is a thesis presented to apply to the “Chaire de Pathologie et de Thérapeutique générales.”

¹⁷ Jean-Philibert Damiron, *Essai sur l’histoire de la philosophie en France au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1846), t. II, L. IV, ch. V, 127.

¹⁸ Jean-André Rochoux, *Épicure opposé à Descartes* (Paris: Joubert, 1843), 11.

¹⁹ Jean-André Rochoux, *Épicure opposé à Descartes* (Paris: Joubert, 1843), 53.

²⁰ Charles Renouvier, *Manuel de philosophie moderne* (Paris: Paulin, 1842), 6.

²¹ Olivier René Bloch, “Marx, Renouvier et l’histoire du matérialisme,” in *Matières à histoires* (Paris: Vrin, 1997), 342.

²² *Le cartésianisme, ou La véritable rénovation des sciences : ouvrage couronné par l’Institut, suivi de la théorie de la substance et de celle de l’infini*, Volume 1. Précédé d’un *Discours sur la réformation de la philosophie au dix-neuvième siècle, pour servir d’introduction générale*, par François Huet (Paris: J. Hetzel, Libraire-Éditeur, 1843).

²³ Francisque Bouillier, *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne* (Paris: Durand/Lyon, Brun et Cie, 1854), t. 1, 57.

²⁴ Francisque Bouillier, *Du principe vital et de l’âme pensante, ou Examen des diverses doctrines médicales et psychologiques sur les rapports de l’âme et de la vie* (Paris: J-B. Baillière et Fils, Londres et Madrid, 1862).

²⁵ On this point, see Delphine Antoine-Mahut, *L’esprit du spiritualisme français* (Paris: Vrin, forthcoming).

²⁶ See this volume, *Introduction*.