

CUPIDITAS VERI VIDENDI:
PIERRE DE VILLEMANDY'S DOGMATIC
VS. CICERO'S SCEPTICAL INTERPRETATION
OF 'MAN'S DESIRE TO KNOW'

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'Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas'
Virgil, *Georgica* II. 490

INTRODUCTION

When Franciscus Sanchez opened his sceptical treatise *Quod Nihil Scitur* by remarking that 'Innatum homini velle scire: paucis concessum scire velle: paucioribus scire. Nec mihi ab aliis diversa fortuna successit'¹ not only was he replying with a bit of irony to the famous *incipit* of Aristotle's *Metaphysics* ('all men by nature desire to know' I.i, 908^a 21), he was also making explicit a constant feature of the enduring debate between scepticism and dogmatism, since generally dogmatists and sceptics of various branches had been all inclined to agree on the description of man as a 'filaletes zoon' – a 'truth-loving animal' as Sextus Empiricus² had defined him – on the fact that 'the desire to know is innate in man' and on interpreting this as the ideal force inspiring the search for knowledge.

The two parties have always dissented considerably about the consequences to be drawn from such a vision of man as a knowledge-seeker. The initial acceptance of an intellectualistic

¹ Franciscus Sanchez, *De Multum Nobili Prima Universali Scientia Quod Nihil Scitur* . . . Francofurti, Sumptibus Joannis Berneri Bibliopolae, 1614, first page, not numbered, of the Preface to the reader. See now *That nothing is known*, ed. by Elaine Limbrick, Eng. Trans. by Douglas F. S. Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988).

² *Against the Logicians* tr. by R. G. Bury (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard U.P., 1976): I, 27.

picture of human nature has never led the sceptic to draw any epistemologically reassuring conclusion. According to him knowledge remains impossible quite independently of the fact that man desires it. On the other hand, the refusal of such a sharp dichotomy between the anthropological description and its epistemological consequences has frequently characterized the dogmatist perspective, more inclined to endorse the idea that the desire to know governing the search for knowledge is a fundamental *conatus*, naturally inborn in man, which it would be unreasonable to suppose intrinsically unfulfillable. Thus Thomas Aquinas thought that 'the natural desire to know cannot be fruitless (*vanum*)'³ and Albert the Great, to offer another prominent example, spelt out the significance of such an unquestioned assumption by entitling the chapter commenting on Aristotle's statement 'on the first principle of the genesis of knowledge from our side'.⁴ From Plato to Aristotle up to Descartes, the simple inference from the naturalness of (the desire, thus the search for) knowledge to the knowability of nature has often provided the dogmatic party with an optimistic background for the development of a constructive philosophy of knowledge.

In order to clarify the discrepancies occurring between the sceptical and the dogmatic understanding of man's *epistemophilic*⁵ impulse, in the following pages I have elected as paradigmatic cases the metaphysical argument *ex communi omnium sciendi desiderio* proposed by Pierre de Villemandy in his *Scepticismus Debellatus*, and then Cicero's more sceptical and purely anthropological reading of the characterization of man as a knowledge-seeker, as this is suggested above all in the *Academica*. Villemandy is a disregarded seventeenth-century philosopher who deserves more attention than he has gained in the past. Since his formulation of the metaphysical argument is well articulated, it will give me the opportunity to focus on several interesting aspects of the issue. The presentation of Cicero as a moderate

³ Thomas Aquinas, *In Metaphysicam Aristotelis Commentaria*, I, I, 4. The same position, almost *verbatim*, is already present in Albert the Great, *Metaphysica Libri Quinque Priores*: I, I, 4, 20-25.

⁴ Albert the Great, *op. cit.*: I, I, chap. 4.

⁵ Epistemophilia or 'love of episteme' is the expression suggested by Jonathan Lear in *Aristotle, The Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1988): 3, 7 in order to explain Aristotle's *Metaphysics* I. I. 908a. 21. He adapts it from M. Klein's *Love, Guilt and Reparation* (London: Hogarth Press, 1981).

representative of the sceptical party is due to the fact that, in the course of his argumentation, Villemandy quotes, somewhat misleadingly, an expressive description of man's desire to know given by Cicero himself in the *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum*. Both Villemandy and Cicero were eclectics, although of quite different varieties. This carries with it the further, desirable consequence that, by discussing their composite and articulate interpretations of man's epistemophilic nature, I shall be able to capture a sufficiently wide assortment of salient features that in different times and manners have characterized the philosophical debate on the topic.

I. THE BEGINNING: PIERRE DE VILLEMANDY AND HIS *SCEPTICISMUS DEBELLATUS*

On the 7th of March 1697, in a letter probably addressed to l'abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos,⁶ Pierre Bayle wrote: 'I have only one more new book to inform you about. Its title is *Scepticismus Debellatus* [here he adds a footnote with the correct bibliographical data⁷]. It is a work by Mr. De Villemandi [sometimes Bayle writes also 'Villemandy'], who was Professor of philosophy at Saumur when the Edict of Nantes was revoked, and who is at the moment in Leiden, as Director of the Wallon College. In this work he shows some erudition and presents quite good arguments. Both P. Malebranche and Mr. Poiret are attacked.'⁸ Bayle knew Villemandy's work fairly well (for more information about the identity of Bayle's 'Mr. Villemandi' see the Appendix). We find him mentioning Villemandy as early as 1679, when in another letter he informed his brother⁹ that Villemandy was sending him

⁶ See Elisabeth Labrousse, *Inventaire critique de la correspondance de P. Bayle* (Paris: Vrin, 1961): 254.

⁷ Petrus Villemandinus, *Scepticismus Deballatus . . . Lugdumi Batavorum apud Cornelium Boutesteyn*, 1697. Richard Popkin has kindly informed me that the copy in Paris, (Bibliothèque Nationale [R. 2820]) belonged to Huet's library.

⁸ Pierre Bayle, *Oeuvres Diverses* (henceforth OD), ed. by Elisabeth Labrousse, (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964, 4 vols. This is a re-publication of the 1737 edition, the collection was first edited in 1727, La Haye): IV, 732b.

⁹ P. Bayle, *Letter to Jacob*, 11 Jan. 1679, in OD² IB p. 113^b, cf. E. Labrousse, *Pierre Bayle* (Martinus Nijhoff: La Haye, 1964): II, p. 144, note 61, E. Labrousse, *Inventaire critique de la correspondance de P. Bayle* (Paris: Vrin 1961): 100, 254 and 403, and Cowdrick, *The Early Reading of Pierre Bayle* (Scottsdale Pens.: Mennonite P.C., 1939): 81-88.

‘un cours très curieux qui sera un perpetuel parallele des trois sectes d’Aristote, d’Epicure et de Gassendi’. Later on, between 1685 and 1686, he published two very positive reviews of Villemandy’s *Manuductio*¹⁰ and of *Traité de l’efficace des causes secondes*.¹¹

Philosophically, Villemandy belonged to the old guard, which was bound to fade in later textbooks of the history of philosophy.¹² He did not seriously oppose the new Cartesian philosophy, like Voetius, nor fully understand its innovative importance, like Locke. Like many others in the second half of the seventeenth century, he tried to reconcile the traditional Aristotelian-scholastic philosophy with the new Cartesian method of clear and distinct ideas. His eclecticism, consisting in an appreciation of the logical method of evidence connected to ‘outdated’ philosophical contents, has generally offered a basis for an explanation of his initial failure in attaining the professorship in Saumur. The competition was won by the young Jean-Robert Chouet and since the latter was the first Cartesian to be appointed professor in France, following the influential interpretation of the events given by Francisque Bouillier this episode has been commonly regarded as a turning-point in the history of French modern philosophy, and easily emphasized as the victory of Descartes over Aristotle. An interesting side-effect has been that the history of the events has

¹⁰ This is *Philosophiae Aristotelae, Epicureae et Cartesianae, parallelismus, . . . Operi praefixa est manuductio*, Salmurii, apud H. Desbordes, 1678 (the date reported by the *National Union Catalogue*, i.e. 1687 is a misprint). In fact this work consists only in the *Manuductio*. The book reviewed by Bayle was the first part – that is the *Manuductio ad philosophiae Aristotelae, Epicurae et Cartesianae parallelismum . . . – of Philosophiae veteris ac novae parallelismus, in quo ex perpetuo Aristotelae, Epicurae ac Cartesianae doctrinae parallelo et conciliatione, quid in unaquaque re statuendum sit, deducitur. Volumen primum, logicam, metaphysicam generalem et pneumatologiam complectens. . . . Operi praefixa est manuductio*. Amstelaedami, typis H. Westenii, 1679. The work was meant to consist of two parts but the *Manuductio* of the 1678 represents only the first and despite the title the volume lacks the *Metaphysica generalis* and the *Pneumatologia*. For Bayle’s review and his comment on the absence of the second part cf. *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres*, 1685, art. IX, the ‘Eloge de l’Auteur’ now in OD I, p. 399^{a-b}.

¹¹ This is the *Traité de l’efficace des causes secondes* . . . (Leyde: C. Jordan, 1686). Bayle’s review is in *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres*, 1686, art. VI, now in OD I, p. 622^b–623^b.

¹² Francisque Bouillier refers briefly to Villemandy in connection to Chouet in his *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Culture and Civilization, 1969, a rep. of the 3rd edn, 1868): 500, note 2–4.

ended by being written *a posteriori*, from the point of view of the victors. Scholars have preferred to focus on Chouet and information about Villemandy has been limited to few quotations of his name as 'the other candidate'.

In fact, in a recent work¹³ Michael Heyd has convincingly shown that both Villemandy's eclecticism and Chouet's initially very cautious Cartesianism rendered the event much less 'revolutionary' than it has been generally portrayed. An echo of what was the reaction provoked by Villemandy's first failure to win the professorship can be found in a letter written by Jacob Bayle to his father on the 7th of April 1665: 'Un jeune professeur en philosophie [i.e. Chouet], partisan de Monsieur Amyraut, a été mis à l'Exclusion d'un ministre qui en étoit cru plus digne [i.e. Villemandy]'.¹⁴ Moïse Amyraut was a collaborator of John Cameron and like him a supporter of rational and illuminated tolerance in religious matters. In 1669 his former pupil Louis Tronchin offered to Chouet a professorship in Geneva. Chouet accepted it and the year after Pierre Bayle could attend their lectures on Cartesian philosophy in the city of Calvin,¹⁵ while Villemandy replaced Chouet at Saumur. This protestant academy, placed on the border of a strictly Hugonot region, was the most important in France. Since 1598, the Edict of Nantes had granted an acceptable standard of religious tolerance. When it was revoked, in 1685, Villemandy became one of the ca. 200,000 French Huguenots who left the country illegally and with many risks in order to escape from persecution.¹⁶ He went to Leiden, the university which, together with that of Utrecht, had been one of

¹³ *Between Orthodoxy and the Enlightenment - Jean-Robert Chouet and the Introduction of Cartesian Science in the Academy of Geneva* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1982): 24-37. More in line with the precedent, 'revolutionary' interpretation is Walter Rex's *Essays on Pierre Bayle and Religious Controversy* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965): 123-125.

¹⁴ I am following Elisabeth Labrousse (*Bayle*: I, p. 57, note 26) according to whom Ruth Elisabeth Cowdrick (*op. cit.*: 162) is wrong in attributing the letter to Pierre.

¹⁵ See Henry Kamen *The Iron Century, Social Change in Counter-Reformation Europe 1550-1600* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971): chap. 7. The date for Chouet's appointment in the Italian translation of the book (*Il Secolo di Ferro*, Roma-Bari: Laterza 1982), i.e. 1644 is a misprint for 1664.

¹⁶ The importance of the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in the history of France and French culture has been investigated by E. Labrousse in 'Une foi, une loi, un roi?' *La révocation de l'édit de Nantes* (Paris: Payot 1985). See also *The Huguenot Connection: The Edict of Nantes, its revocation and Early French Migration to South Carolina* edited by R.M. Golden (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1988).

the most important centres for Cartesian studies in Holland,¹⁷ but even there he did not find a more favourable context for his studies. Although on the 29th of October 1685 the academic senate had suggested his nomination to a chair of philosophy, on the 8th November of the same year the political body of control of the university refused to ratify such a decision.¹⁸ Exactly three years after having been denied a place at Leiden, on the 8th of November 1688, Vиллеманды was elected as the fifth and last Director of the College Wallon,¹⁹ a declining institution which having been previously deprived of financial supports was definitively closed in 1699. He died in the same city on the 6th of March 1703.

Unlucky in his lifetime, Vиллеманды has not received much better treatment in the following centuries. Although *Scepticismus Debellatus* was commonly read and acquired some reputation during the first half of the eighteenth century, Vиллеманды has been largely ignored by scholars of Dutch philosophy, of the history of Cartesianism and of modern scepticism.²⁰ His gradual 'vanishing' is a paradigmatic case history worthy of some attention, since it is possible to ascertain the various *loci* in which information about

¹⁷ See Gustave Cohen *Ecrivains françois en Hollande dans la première moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Champion 1920): esp. chapters 15, 16 and 26. On the first phase of Cartesianism in Holland see now Theodorus H. M. Verbeek *Descartes and the Dutch: early Reactions to Cartesian Philosophy 1637-1650* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U.P., 1992).

¹⁸ Cf. P. C. Molhuysen, *Bronnen tot de geschiedenis der Leidsche Universiteit*, 7 volumes, (La Haye: 1913): vol. IV, (1920), 34 and 39.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*: 61. See also G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes, *Geschiedenis van het Waalse College te Leiden 1606-1699* (Leiden: Leiden U.P., 1975).

²⁰ Although fundamental for a detailed understanding of the period in which Vиллеманды lived and wrote, none of the following works on the history of Cartesianism and scepticism in Holland pays much attention to our philosopher: Charles M. Weiss, *Histoire des Réfugiés Protestants de France depuis la Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes*, 2 vols. (Paris: Charpentier, 1853), esp. chap. 5 'Les Réfugiés en Hollande'; *Descartes et le cartésianisme hollandais, Etudes et Documents* ed. by E. J. Dijksterhuis, Cornelia Serrurier, Paul Dibon and Hendrik J. Pos (Paris-Amsterdam: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950), see esp. Paul Dibon's 'Notes Bibliographiques sur Les Cartésiens Hollandais', pp. 261-300 for an updating of Bouillier's *Histoire*; Door C. Louise Thijssen-Shoute *Nederlands Cartesianisme* (Amsterdam: Noord-Hollandsche, 1954), now re-edited with a new bibliography by Th. Verbeek, (Utrecht: Hes, 1989) and finally Paul Dibon 'Scepticisme et orthodoxie réformé dans la Hollande du Siècle d'Or' in *Scepticism from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment, Proceedings of the Conference held at Herzog August Bibliothek*, 22-5 February 1984, ed. by Richard H. Popkin and Charles B. Schmitt (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1987): 55-82. For an exception see Richard Popkin's *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (rev. ed. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979): 213, note 54.

him and his work disappeared progressively. Immediately after its publication, *Scepticismus Debellatus* was presented by Joachimus Henricus Engelbrecht as the last answer against 'modern sceptics'.²¹ In 1718 we find Gottlieb Stolle considering *Scepticismus Debellatus* 'for many aspects a good and useful book' even if, according to him, it did not fully answer the sceptical attack on the problem of the *diallelus*.²² Some time later, in 1744, Jacob Brucker still mentioned Villemandy, praising *Scepticismus Debellatus* as a good reading on the nature and value of Cartesian doubt,²³ and in the same year John Laurence Mosheim could refer to the second chapter of *Scepticismus Debellatus* (esp. p. 9) in order to support his and Cudworth's negative attitude towards the problem of the Cartesian circle.²⁴ Already in 1746, however, the *Grosses Universal Lexicon* (Leipzig und Halle), while giving reliable information about Villemandy, reported that 'it is unknown when and where he was born' (vol. 48, col. 1429–30). By the time Carl Fridrich Staublin published his history of scepticism,²⁵ in 1794, Villemandy had become such an unknown philosopher as to be even considered a 'Niederländer'.

Villemandy's Cartesian eclecticism may be seen as the origin both of the successive oblivion in which his work sank and of Bayle's interest. Especially in the first review of the *Manuductio* Bayle expressed a very positive opinion of his work, stressing Villemandy's erudition, precision, elegance and experience in different philosophical fields. When Bayle stopped writing the *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres*, in 1687, his activity was carried on by Henri Basnage who, with the help of Bayle

²¹ *Dissertatio philosophica de scepticismo morali* praes. J. F. Buddeo Halae Magdeburgicae 1698. I hope to turn to a close study of this work in the future.

²² *Anleitung zur Historie der Gelahrheit* [. . .] (Jena: J. Meyers Seel. Witwe, 1718¹-1724²): 431; see also the appendix 'Neue Zusake und Verbesserung', p. 51 which is critical on Villemandy's interpretation of Gassendi's fideism, and p. 58 about Villemandy vs. Samuel Parker[us]. There is no entry for Villemandy in the index.

²³ *Historia Critica Philosophiae* (Lipsiae: apud Bernh. Cristoph. Breitkopf, 1744, 5 vols.): IV pars altera, p. 289, note e and p. 292.

²⁴ See the translation from the Latin edition of Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London: 1845): vol. 3, p. 31, note 5. This edition was made following Mosheim's edition (the work was first published in 1678, London and again in 1733). See also *Institutiones Historiae Christianae Recentioris* (Helmstadii: Crist. Frid. Weygand, 1741): 410, where Mosheim quotes *Scepticismus Debellatus*, cap. IV, p. 32 in connection with Franciscus Sanchez.

²⁵ *Geschichte und Geist des Skepticismus* (Leipzig: Siegfred Lebrecht Crusius, 1794, 2 vols.): vol. II, 125.

himself, started editing a new periodical, the *Histoire des ouvrages des savants*, from 1687 to 1709 (he died the year after). The link between Henri Basnage and Villemandy was granted not only by their common acquaintance and friend Bayle, but also by Jacques Basnage de Beauval,²⁶ the elder brother of Henri who was a close friend of Bayle and had been one of Villemandy's students in Saumur. It is therefore understandable that in 1697 Jacques Basnage published a positive review of *Scepticismus Debellatus* in his journal.²⁷ Although it is more a summary of the work than a critical presentation, and sometimes it may sound slightly ironical, the brief article is in tune with the general commendation of Villemandy's work already expressed by Bayle. Villemandy's philosophy is recognized to be the outcome of both a Cartesian and a scholastic-erudite tendency. Traces of such a combination of common sense, Cartesian requirements for clear and distinct ideas and a learned eclecticism are to be found in the presentation of the metaphysical argument I am now going to introduce.

II. VILLEMANDY'S DOGMATIC ECLECTICISM: THE ANTI-SCEPTICAL ARGUMENT EX COMMUNI OMNIUM SCIENDI DESIDERIO

Scepticismus Debellatus has both a strong religious orientation and a pedagogic aim. Throughout the text the author shows considerable familiarity with both Cicero's and Sextus Empiricus' works: passages from the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* and from *Adversus Mathematicos* are quoted at length also in the original Greek, which had been published in 1621. The first part summarizes the history of the sceptical tradition and its main 'tropoi'. Assuming what was at the time a rather common perspective, Villemandy includes under the label of 'scepticism' the sophists and all those authors who have indirectly encouraged any form of disbelief, from Machiavelli to Spinoza. The second part of the book is devoted partially to what Villemandy considers the final confutation of scepticism, partially to the presentation of other epistemological issues such as problems concerning perceptual

²⁶ Cf. Labrousse, *Bayle*: I, p. 100, note 22.

²⁷ Cf. *Histoire des ouvrages des savants*, Mois de Fevrier 1697, art. IX, pp. 240-50.

knowledge. As for the arguments against scepticism, moral execration and the accusation of atheism are so recurrent themes that Josef Bohatec presented the fourth chapter of *Scepticismus Debellatus* as a paradigmatic example of the tendency, in the seventeenth century, to connect scepticism and religious disbelief.²⁸ Other anti-sceptical attacks are based on the logic of self-reference, both in the sense of the unoriginal charge of self contradiction and in the sense of the positive counter-argument hinging on the Cartesian *ego cogito*, which Villemandy is inclined to connect to St Augustine's version of the *dubito*.²⁹

The more original and interesting argument, based on the natural desire to know, occurs rather late, in Chapter Twelve. This bears the subtitle 'Scepticism is finally confuted by means of arguments based on the common desire to know shared by everybody, on the innate nature of the human mind and on the obvious, whole experience' (p. 62). The three arguments are developed in less than five pages.

[p. 62] The first argument derives from that universal desire to know [cupiditate sciendi] which governs all men [. . .]. That passion [affectus] is so common that there is no one who is provided with a spark of reasonableness [scintilla rationis] whose soul is not permeated by it. It is so sharp and alert [vivax] that it never dies. It is so extensive and diffused that it drives [men] to know anything in detail [pernoscendum]. Certainly, its origin is not other than anyone's own nature, or better the Very Sapient Creator of the Natural Universe, who impressed in all men such a vivid and sharp desire that they see really in depth his Supreme Majesty which shines in all things that appear to them; for if they cannot reach a deep knowledge from the view of their appearances, obscured by some darkness, they shall proceed always further towards him, restlessly, until they will enjoy his immediate contemplation. If the greatness of such a desire is so ample that it cannot be limited by the perfection [plenitudo] of any finite object; if its fluctuation [mobilitas] is such that it is not attenuated by the splendour of anything even if this is the most bright, but it tends always further, until [p. 63] it reaches the highest origin of such a light, precisely the Highest Numen, in whom it may rest, how could it [an potest] be satisfied by the image of any of the most

²⁸ J. Bohatec *Die cartesianische Scholastik in der Philosophie und reformierten Dogmatik des 17. Jahrhunderts*, (Leipzig 1912, rep. Hildesheim: G. Olms V. 1966): 104, note 6. I have been made aware by Theo Verbeek that such a connection was rather diffused among Calvinist thinkers, see now his article 'From "Learned Ignorance" to Scepticism: Descartes and Calvinist Orthodoxy' in R. H. Popkin and A. J. Vanderjagt (eds.) *Scepticism and irreligion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994).

²⁹ On the history of the various versions of the *cogito* cf. Bruno Nardi *La Crisi del Rinascimento e il Dubbio Cartesiano*, (Roma: La Goliardica, 1950/51): 84 and ff.

superficial things? How could this desire feed on similarity and appearance of futile [levi] truth so much as to require nothing else further? Maybe in this way it can feed on appearances temporarily; yet, since it is well known that not very far from the shadow there is the light itself and moreover that what is true [verum ipsum] can be scented from what is truthlike [ex verisimilitudine] by the taste of this vain [inanis] food man is urged to the research of the much more acute [acrius] flavour of truth itself; a research which he does not abandon until he has obtained the truth and satisfied his own appetite. Every man has experienced this in himself. Indeed, all educated men [eruditiores] declare this plainly. 'So great is our innate love of learning and of knowledge – says Cicero in *De Finibus* 5 – that no one can doubt that man's nature is attracted by these things even without the lure of any profit. Do we notice how children cannot be deterred even by punishment from studying and inquiring into the world around them? . . . [dots in the original text]. Again, take persons who delight in the liberal arts and studies, do we not see them careless of health or business, patiently enduring any inconveniences when under the spell of learning and of science [here the original text continues but Villemandy adds no dots]? . . . [dots in the original text]. A passion for miscellaneous omniscience no doubt stamps a man as a mere dilettante; but it must be deemed the mark of a superior mind to be led by the contemplation of high matters to a passionate love of knowledge.' [. . .] The desire to know everything is typical to curious people, as it is to elevated men the desire to know the most important things. Is this feeling a passion for what is verisimilar? Is such a heavy effort finalized to obtaining dim appearances of things? And finally, could it be that all grave philosophers submit themselves to such great efforts in order to reach just some vacillating suppositions about topics which are the most noble and plainly important for our life? Certainly, one is very silly who employs all his capacities, all his time and health in such vain images of things and never [addresses his] mind to more serene things [. . .]

In this long passage Villemandy attempts to combine two distinguishable and not easily reconcilable lines of thought, a 'lay' and a 'religious' component. The lay component (see below, p. 43 for a discussion of the religious side of the argument) is less evident, but it can be located in the reference to the naturalness of the desire to know and in the long quotation from Cicero. To the sceptical doubts raised in relation to the knowability of the world, Villemandy answers by pointing out that the presence of such a desire at the ontological level, i.e. the very fact that nature makes man eager to know, warrants *a priori* and in principle the success of the cognitive enterprise at the epistemological level by requiring, again at the ontological level, the total intelligibility of the universe. Although this interpretation of the argument relies on a strongly teleological picture of the universe, so formulated it offers a thoroughly immanent picture, a naturalistic finalism which could

well go with Villemandy's extant Aristotelianism. The desire to know is the other side of the intelligibility of the universe, and the aim of such a desire is that of entering into an epistemically harmonious relation with the rest of the world, not yet that of transcending it in search of its author. The possible dissatisfaction implicit in the endless search for knowledge is not so much motivated by the qualitative, as it were, defects inherent in what one already knows, as by the quantitative limits of one's knowledge, the latter being always inferior if compared both to the unsatisfiable desire and to the amount of what is knowable. The 'lay' desire to know is an horizontal movement driving man towards the overcoming of intellectual boundaries and the attainment of still new knowledge, not yet a vertical climbing, an ascending towards the *ratio essendi* of the universe. Man's 'full membership' in the set of natural events is the necessary ontological guarantor of the actual knowability of the world. God himself may be a *causa efficiens*, but he is not (logically speaking 'not yet') a *causa finalis*. The appeal to the naturalness of the desire to know is the metaphysical condition of possibility that warrants *a priori* and in principle the success of the epistemic investigation within the universe which does not include chance, disorder, chaos or irreconcilable dichotomies among its first ontological principles. With a modern terminology we may say that the natural desire for knowledge and its satisfiability arise as the transcendental conditions of possibility for human knowledge.

Cartesianism is among the sources of Villemandy's epistemological optimism and 'lay' faith in the intelligibility of the universe. The argument *ex communi omnium sciendi desiderio* is a reminder, even stylistically, of a very similar point of view expressed by Descartes himself at the beginning of the *Search for Truth by means of the Natural Light*,³⁰ where we can read the following dialogue:

³⁰ See *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Eng. ed. by J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1984): II, 400-20. On the various attempts from Baillet to Cassirer to date the dialogue cf. now Arrigo Bortolotti 'Sulla Datazione della "Recherche de la Verité de Descartes"' *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia* 36 (1981): 343-378. For Descartes' faith in reason cf. Henri Gouhier, *Essays sur Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1949): IV, section 4 'Scepticisme et Pessimisme', 143-196. In his *Index Scholasticus Cartesianus* Gilson does not mention the passage from the *Search for Truth* but the latter bears such obvious Scholastic and Aristotelian traits that despite all the anti-Scholasticism manifested by Descartes in this work, its incipit might be added to the *Index*.

Epistemon [to Polyander]: [. . .] *the desire for knowledge, which is common to all men*, is an illness which cannot be cured, for curiosity grows with learning. [. . .]. /Eudoxus [i.e. Descartes]: It is possible, Epistemon, that you, with all your learning are persuaded that *nature can contain a malady so universal without also providing a remedy for it?* For my part, just as I think that each land has enough fruits and rivers to satisfy the hunger and thirst of all its inhabitants, so too I think that enough truth can be known in each subject to satisfy amply the curiosity of orderly souls. [my italics].

Although Villemandy could not have known the Cartesian dialogue, which was first published only in 1701, out of a Leibnizian manuscript, he might have been influenced very easily by other Cartesian writings. As the difficulties in dating the *Search for Truth* have shown throughout the years, the philosophical assertions there made represent constant threads in Descartes' thought, and the satisfiability of intellectual curiosity reflects his invariable, rationalist optimism regarding the power of reason. A quick check of the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, *The Discourse on the Method* and *The Principles of Philosophy*³¹ could easily confirm this.

If we turn now to the content of the passage, Descartes' equation 'hunger [of the digestive apparatus]: food = curiosity [of the intellect]: knowledge' is such a common rhetorical device in epistemology³² that it would not be worth all our attention if it were not for the fact that it renders explicit another important and universal feature of the 'metaphysical argument', one shared by Villemandy's version as well. The dogmatic party has usually tended to interpret the desire to know, the search for and the elaboration of knowledge as expressions, or explications, of a natural function of the intellect. Correspondingly, the sceptical party has had the propensity to criticize such a perspective by endorsing a more generic, teleological interpretation of the desire to know – the search for knowledge is only a purposeful but not a functional activity – within a wider and more general approach to the relevant epistemological matters. According to the sceptic, man aims at the attainment of knowledge in the same intentional way as, for example, he may aim at the attainment of social prestige. The sceptic endorses this equation for the obvious reason that a generically purposeful behaviour implies a

³¹ See for example *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I, p. 207.

³² At least since Plato, *Phaed.* 248-8.

series of intentional actions which may be very easily conceived without their successful end, and could be joined even to a logically impossible aim. Such an impossibility will not affect their 'teleological nature', since aiming at an impossible target is no less a purposeful action than aiming at a possible one. Anthropologically, man is recognized by the sceptic to be a knowledge-seeker; from an epistemological point of view the 'desire to know' is nevertheless qualified by the sceptic as an intentional, yet superfluous and artificial attitude, a source of vain attempts, something man could and would well do without. Thus in Christian, anti-intellectualist philosophy it is easily assimilated to the sin of mere curiosity and interpreted as showing only the religiously blameable pride of man. The intentional and purposeful tendency of the epistemic enterprise is conceived as the final upshot of the search for an unobtainable omniscience. This is made explicit by Montaigne in the *Apology of Raimond Sebond*, where the 'desire to know' is discussed in terms of a detrimental curiosity, not as a phenomenon connected to a basic and natural function of the intellect. It turns out that such an epistemic yearning can be estimated to be as little 'natural' – and therefore as little inevitable, fulfillable and morally neutral – as any other possible mental corruption. It is because Montaigne the sceptic considers the search for knowledge an intentional activity connected to a necessary failure that he may agree with St Augustine the theologian and consider the 'desire to know' a deleterious 'experienti noscendique libido'.³³

The position of the dogmatist is quite different. For him desiring and searching for knowledge are not so much options for, as explications of, a normal and natural exigency of a healthy mind. As a proper functional aspect of the intellectual activity itself, the epistemic *conatus* is as much fulfillable as any other basic,

³³ *Confessions* X.35, 55 in *Corp. Christ. ser. lat.*, (Turnholm: Brepols, 1981): vol. XXVII, Pars I, 1, 184–8. Cf. also the introduction to *La Curiosité à la Renaissance*, acts réunis par Jean Céard (Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1986), esp. p. 9 and E. Peters 'Libertas Inquirendi and Vitium Curiositatis in Medieval Thought' in *La notion de liberté au Moyen Age, Islam Byzance Occident*, ed. by G. Makdisi (Paris, 1985). I have dealt with some aspects of the religious interpretation of the search for knowledge during the Renaissance in my article 'The Grafted Branches of the Sceptical Tree: *Noli altum sapere* and Henri Estienne's Latin Edition of *Sexti Empirici Pyrrhonianarum Hypotyposeon libri III*' *Nouvelles de la République des Lettres*, 11 (1992): 127–166.

common, natural and instinctive desire instilled by nature into man's mind and body. In Christian dogmatic philosophy this can become even a corollary of the limited yet still divine nature of man. The contrast with the sceptical picture is noteworthy. When something is finalized at a certain end in the sense of having a specific function to perform a definite action, it cannot be said to have such a function without the latter being described in terms of a purposeful activity which has in itself its own 'satisfiability'. Contrary to what can happen in the attribution of a certain aim, attributing to x a function F and stating at the same time that it is in fact impossible for x to perform such a function F is a *contradictio in adiecto*. To give a simple example, it cannot be the case that there is at the same time a certain instrument which in fact has the function of calculating the square of a circle if such a calculation is logically impossible. Certainly we can attribute to x a function F *de dicto*, but once we discover that this is not the case we say that *de facto* x could not and therefore did not have the function F.

The distinction just drawn between a *functional* and an *intentional* orientation of the more generally teleological interpretation of the 'desire to know' accounts for the fact that the dogmatist is inclined to discuss the topic of the 'desire to know' and cognate issues by concentrating in most cases on examples of perceptual activities, a phase of the process of knowing in which epistemic desire and functionality of such a desire, through the search for knowledge, have a far less controversial nature. Aristotle is a classic example: he begins explaining *Metaphysics* I.1, 908^a 21 by talking of the pleasure we take in our visual 'faculty' and its function, a reasoning sketched also in the Ciceronian passage reported by Vilemandy to which I shall turn again in a moment. Once the dogmatist has ensured the 'functionalist' interpretation of the 'desire to know', he can reinforce his position by arguing that it must also be conceded that in normal conditions the possibility of knowledge is a matter of fact. In the same way as the heart has the function of pumping the blood, and such a function is 'possible' not only logically but also factually, that is granted a sort of natural state, so the intellect desires to know because it has the function to search for, and elaborate knowledge. The explication of such a function – which can be eventually justified on theological bases, as we shall see in a moment – must be logically and, in normal

conditions also factually, granted as possible. The sceptic, on the other hand, considers the desire and the search for knowledge under the light of intellectual curiosity, which may be easily conceived without its necessary positive end. So even when he distinguishes between curiosity and love for truth, as in Hume,³⁴ he concentrates less on perception and more on large-scale issues such as the justification of a teleological vision of the universe, the fallibility of human knowledge, the dualism between reality in itself and phenomenal knowledge of it, or man's overall rational behaviour.

I said above that there is also a religious component in Villemandy's argument. We find in it traces of Villemandy's interpretation of scepticism as a dangerous source of atheism. This is more than a mere reference to Descartes' metaphysics with its veridical God. The finalistic picture acquires now an important theological dimension. According to Villemandy the lack of faith springs out of sceptical doubts, and the desire to know has been implanted by God in the human soul precisely in order to drive it towards Himself. The vehicle of such a theological finalism is an obvious Neoplatonic element which requires a careful analysis.

The meaning of an intellectualistic ascent towards God, the idea of a *theological telos*, can be adequately explained only if we consider that Villemandy had two logical alternatives in order to place his attack within the theological dimension of anti-scepticism as anti-atheism. The 'epistemic driving force' can be so powerful as to let man grasp the nature of the divine entity which lies beyond the world if and only if a disequilibrium is presupposed in favour either of the desire to know or of its 'ontological satisfiability'. In the former case, man is supposed to be so strongly motivated by his search for knowledge as to be led to realise that this world is insufficient to satisfy it, and therefore that there must be 'another kind of food' for his eager mind, that is God. In the latter case, it may be suggested that the divine plan has implanted in man an epistemic thrust because as soon as he will become conscious of the perfection of the world he will also be able to discern *vestigia Dei in mundo* and so presuppose the existence, and appreciate the greatness of the divine

³⁴ *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967): Book II, Part III, section 10 entitled 'Of curiosity, or the love of truth'. Hume's treatment of curiosity and the love of knowledge is mainly psychological. I should like to stress here that he does draw a clear distinction between the two phenomena, despite what I wrote in 'Scepticism and the Search for Knowledge', *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society* 30 (1994), 543-72.

Architect. It was by adopting this more optimistic perspective that Walter Charleton had been able to claim that God has a principal regard to man and that this is 'deducible' from the fact that '[man's] intellectuals, or cogitative essence [are], by a genial verticity, or spontaneous progression, qualified to admire, in admiration to speculate, in speculation to acknowledge, in acknowledgement to land to Goodness, Wisdom and Power of the World's Creator'.³⁵

These two routes to the existence of God are not mutually exclusive, but as far as the epistemological aspect of the issue is concerned they differ in this: while in the latter case man's knowledge of the world is maximally exalted because it acquires a further value as the mirror of God's greatness, in the former case we can perceive an inevitable tendency to devalue man's secular and lay knowledge in favour of a metaphorically higher or deeper vision of God, the most real of all realities, the original source which is so much more important than its mundane effects. The mind does not reach God in terms of secondary reflection about the perfection of the creation, but through a direct dissatisfaction of the limits of the world, which is intrinsically incapable of satisfying man's epistemic yearning. Man's knowledge of the world – or of *appearances*, as Vиллеманды is by the end forced to say – becomes a mere step toward the sky. It turns out that if for a philosopher such as Charleton the maximum degree of epistemophilic impulse could correspond to the maximum degree of its ontological satisfiability, for Vиллеманды the fact that he proposes to give an epistemological confutation of scepticism leads him to accept a maximum degree of epistemic desire in order to infer the intelligibility of nature, but his purpose of connecting his anti-scepticism to the defence of religious faith makes him take the route of the unsatisfiability of the desire in order to require an overcoming of the 'horizontal' dimension in favour of the 'vertical' one. The possibility of reaching a perfect satisfaction of the epistemic *conatus* in this world would not yet provide him with an anti-atheist instrument, at least not so directly as the argument of the 'holy food for the eager mind' does. But by combining the traditional 'lay' faith in reason – and in its capabilities of reaching a finally true picture of the world which may be totally satisfying –

³⁵ W. Charleton *The Darkness of Atheism Dispelled by the Light of Nature* . . . (London: 1652): chap. 3 'Why God created the World Rationally', quotation from p. 87.

to the 'religious' interpretation of the desire to know as a transcending driving force Villemandy lapses into the awkward position of endorsing the 'lay' inference 'from desire to intelligibility' – and thus affirming all the importance and fruitfulness of man's immanent knowledge – while accepting the idea that man is driven towards God by the desire to know because he is *at the same time* intrinsically dissatisfied by the knowledge already acquired, which he finds limited, superficial or insufficient to explain the essence of the universe. In order to stress the *vertical* climbing towards God Villemandy had to diminish at the same time the value of precisely that immanent knowledge whose possibility in principle he had just attempted to grant by the appeal to the lay side of the argument.

III. CICERO'S SCEPTICAL ECLECTICISM: THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL ACCEPTANCE OF THE 'CUPIDITAS COGNITIONIS'

Villemandy's quotation from *De Finibus Bonorum et Malorum* was a fine selection. It comes from the fifth book, section XVIII, 48–49 and Paul MacKendrick has recently remarked that precisely these lines with their 'appeal to intellectual discovery, a veritable Sirens' song'³⁶ present one of the most attractive positions taken not only in that book but in the whole work. It is worth noticing, however, that the author of the long praise of the human desire to know is not Cicero himself but Pupius Piso Calpurnianus, who is made to speak by Cicero in defence of the Old Academy's ethical theory. It is only from par. 76 to par. 94 that Cicero starts talking in the first person and precisely in order to rebut Piso's position and advocate a more sceptical view. Things being so, one may wonder whether Villemandy, with implicit coherence, was really subscribing to a view which in fact Cicero merely attributed to another dogmatist. What was Cicero's own position with respect to the 'desire for knowledge'?

Many passages in Cicero's philosophical works display his faith in man's intrinsically philosophical nature. In the third book of *De Finibus* (pars. 17 and 49), for example, we find Cato the Younger,

³⁶ *The Philosophical Books of Cicero* (London: Duckworth, 1989): 147.

the speaker for Stoic ethics, defending and celebrating the human love for knowledge and truth arguing that 'cognitionem comprehensionesque rerum appetitionem movent'. Although in the fourth book Cicero casts radical doubts on Cato's Stoic philosophy, in the course of his refutation he explicitly accepts the dogmatic point of view about 'the desire to know' and admits that 'the study of natural philosophy also affords the inexhaustible pleasure of acquiring knowledge, the sole pursuit of which can afford an honourable and elevated occupation *for the hours of leisure left when business has been finished* [my italics]'.³⁷ Cicero had already maintained in his critique of Epicurean ethics that 'nature has also engendered in mankind the desire of contemplating truth [cupiditas veri videndi]'.³⁸ The fact that he shared with the other dogmatic philosophers of his time an intellectualistic interpretation of human nature explains why, despite the length of Piso's tribute to the 'desire to know' (from par. 48 to par. 54 but see also par. 73 on Aristotle's and Theophrastus' praise of knowledge for its own sake), in his expressive series of counter-arguments Cicero does not even touch upon, let alone rebut, any statement made on the special topic of the 'desire to know'. On the contrary, Cicero knew how to be very convincing when portraying the dogmatic confidence in man's epistemophilic nature. A clear example is given by the *Tusculanae Disputationes* I, 44 where by talking about Plato's theory of the soul and its immortality he ends by committing himself to the idea that 'nature has planted in our minds an insatiable longing to see truth [cupiditas veri videndi]'.

It turns out that Villemandy was not thoroughly misunderstanding Cicero's position. There is, however, an obvious logical gap between the characterization of man's nature as 'epistemophilic' and the acceptance of the metaphysical argument which puts a sharp limit to the extent to which Cicero's and Villemandy's position may further converge. Cicero accepted the description of man as eager to know and nonetheless he did not subscribe to the metaphysical argument. The most appropriate place to search for evidence for such a refusal is obviously the *Academica*, although the relevant passages require a few preliminary considerations.

³⁷ *De Finibus* IV, 1-12, quotation from IV, 12.

³⁸ *De Finibus* II, 46.

Among the fourteen extant fragments of the third book of the *Academica Posteriora* there is one which is very interesting for our investigation: 'in tanta animantium varietate, homini ut soli cupiditas ingeneraretur cognitionis et scientiae'.³⁹ James S. Reid commented on the passage as follows: 'the passion for knowledge implanted in the human heart was no doubt used by Varro as an argument to show that absolute knowledge must be obtainable'.⁴⁰ In the third book of the *Academica Posteriora* Varro played the role of the dogmatist, so once again we are on Vellemandy's side. Although Cicero's rejoinder in the fourth book of the *Academica Posteriora* has been lost, luckily enough we can turn for this purpose to the parallel passages in the *Academica Priora* II, the *Lucullus*.

In the *Academica Posteriora*, a second version of the text rearranged by Cicero himself, it is very likely that Varro was advancing a version of the metaphysical argument similar to that which Lucullus puts forward in the *Academica Priora* II, X, 30-2.⁴¹ In this section Lucullus glorifies the craftsman-like ability shown by nature in the construction of man, with his powerful mind and cognitively very well adapted senses. Human search for knowledge leads to philosophy and science, hence to rational behaviour and the acquisition of virtue. Those who deny man's cognitive powers, like the sceptics, undermine the most important basis for his moral development. Lucullus claims further that scepticism leads to inaction, an issue which will re-acquire great importance in Hume's abandonment of a scepticism which cannot be lived. According to him 'the mind itself . . . has a natural force which it directs to the things by which it is moved . . . [and it is] supremely well adapted for the knowledge of things . . . it embraces information very readily, and your *catalepsis*, which as I said we will express by a literal translation as 'grasp', is loved by the mind both for itself (for nothing is dearer to the mind than the light of truth [veritatis luce]) and also for the sake of utility'.

³⁹ Nonii Marcelli *De Compendiosa Doctrina Libros II*, 3 vols. ed. by Wallace M. Lindsay (Lipsia: Teubner, 1903): vol. 1, 2 under 'i', p. 177 from 1 to 5.

⁴⁰ M. T. Ciceronis *Academica* ed. by J. S. Reid (London: Macmillan, 1874, 1885, and now Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1984): 164, note 14.

⁴¹ In the comment on Nonnius' fragment quoted in the previous footnote Reid writes that 'the same line is taken in II, 31; *Fin.* 3, 17 and elsewhere'. See also Marian Plezia 'De Ciceronis Academicis dissertationes tres' *Eos* 37 (1936): 425-49, 38 (1937): 10-30 and 169-186.

In Lucullus' speech we can appreciate the strict cohesion between the functional nature of the epistemic *conatus* – with a reference to perceptual knowledge, – the moral import of the epistemophilic picture of man – which is a sort of Hellenistic, ethical equivalent of Villemandy's theological apprehension – and the teleological vision of the universe and of the role of man's knowledge within it. A new aspect of the issue introduced by Lucullus is the characterization of the 'appeal to nature' in terms of the naturalness of the process of knowing. Within Hellenistic epistemology⁴² nature was often invoked with the anti-sceptical aim of arguing that man, living in a world which is seen as jointly responsible for the success of his epistemic progression, was affected by it in a way which led to a cognitive outcome that was 'metaphysically trustworthy', as it were. Whether the mind was seen as disposed or forced to assent to the informative input coming from the senses, human knowledge was to be justified in the long run on an epistemological de-responsibilization of the knowing subject, or co-responsibilization of the knowing subject and the known object (if one could adopt *ante litteram* such a radical dichotomy). On the basis of *the naturalness of the process of knowing* Lucullus presents an interpretation of the causal/epistemic connections occurring between facts or objects and beliefs to the effect that the mind is naturally constituted in such a way as to grant the validity of its knowledge of reality. On the basis of *the natural desire to know* Villemandy attempts to conclude 'transcendentally' that nature is intrinsically knowable and the sceptic is bound to be unsuccessful in his attack. Apparently, Villemandy's 'transcendental argument' is more general, investing the possibility itself of a metatheoretical rule – nature is in principle fully intelligible to man – such that it may exclude *a priori* any radical form of scepticism. And nonetheless, as it has recently emerged in two renewed attempts to refute scepticism,⁴³ there is no radical

⁴² On the hypothesis that Cicero relied to a great extent on Greek sources cf. Reid, *op. cit.*: 5 esp. p. 24. Antonio Russo is critical on what he considers Reid's too extreme position, in his *Scettici Antichi* (Torino: UTET, 1978): 426.

⁴³ Nicholas Rescher, *Scepticism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980) and A. C. Grayling *The Refutation of Scepticism* (London: Duckworth, 1985). Both authors reconstruct the sceptical theses following more closely Wittgenstein, Moore and Hume than Sextus Empiricus. This enables them to adopt both a linguistic-transcendental translation of Wittgenstein's rejection of scepticism (introduced in *On Certainty*) and a 'naturalization' of Hume's abandon of scepticism.

dichotomy between the *externalist* and the *transcendental* appeals to nature, for their disparity can be traced back to a different utilization of the same functional interpretation of the process of knowing at two different theoretical levels. The original premises reduced to only one: man's curiosity, his perceptual capacities and the pleasure he takes in sensation are phenomena which show that he is destined to develop a detailed, reliable and adequate description of the world. Given the functional interpretation of man's cognitive activities, a radical scepticism is unjustified both at the level of perceptual knowledge (externalist argument: naturality of the process requires its faithfulness and reliability) and at the level of reflection on the very possibility of knowledge *tout court* (transcendental argument: naturality of the origin of the process requires its satisfiability). Thus both arguments belong to the same anti-sceptical strategy based on the defence of a harmonic relationship occurring between the natural function of man's intellectual capacities and a thoroughly intelligible world. They both contrast the possibility, stated as a fact by Montaigne, that there is no contact between mind and being. The naturality of the cognitive process, the intelligibility of nature and man's 'desire to know' are all parts of the most complex topic of the ends of human life. This is the way Cicero treats them in *De Natura Deorum* where Lucius Balbus praises man's desire and search for knowledge together, within the stoic finalistic vision of man and his relationship with nature in optimistic and functionalist terms.⁴⁴

The strict interconnection between the 'externalist' and the 'transcendental' level *within* the teleological and ethical debate of man's cognitive activity allows us to understand more accurately why Cicero's reply to Lucullus' 'epistemological optimism' is articulated in terms of a strong rejection of any form of 'epistemological functional finalism'. Like Montaigne centuries later, Cicero is even ready to accept the functional framework within which Lucullus has developed his praise of man's knowledge. But taking as a perspicuous example the well-functioning of sight, Cicero replies: 'If a god, you say, were to inquire of you whether, given healthy and sound senses, you want

⁴⁴ *De Natura Deorum* II, 133-168. Quotation from 148, page 265. Balbus defends the providential organization of the world in 73-153 and the care of providence for man in 154-168. Cotta's corresponding replies in Book III are lost.

anything more, what would you reply? Indeed I wish he would make the inquiry! He would be told how badly he was dealing with us! . . . I should boldly answer that deity of your friends that I am by no means satisfied with the eyes that I have got'.⁴⁵ Lucullus is not allowed to make strong assumptions on the general architecture of the universe: 'Can you even assert this, Lucullus, that there is some force, united I suppose with providence, and design, that has moulded or, to use your word, fabricated a human being? What sort of workmanship is that? Where was it applied? When? Why? How? . . . let us grant that they [these things said by Lucullus] *appear*, only provided they are not affirmed.'⁴⁶ *A fortiori*, without a general teleology Lucullus is not justified in his 'epistemological finalism'. According to Cicero: 'No faculty of knowing absolute limits has been bestowed upon us by the nature of things to enable us to fix exactly how far to go in any matter.'⁴⁷ Cicero accepts the anthropological description of man as a knowledge-seeker – one may notice that he actually presents himself as endowed with such a true desire for knowledge in section XX of the *Lucullus* itself⁴⁸ – but cannot endorse, or allow the dogmatist to draw any epistemological conclusion on its basis and in terms of an epistemological finalism. If we cannot rely even on our senses how can we dare to go so far as to suppose that the universe has been created according to man's intellectual request or in order to satisfy his epistemic ambition? From a theoretical point of view any teleological picture of the universe is the result of our knowledge of the world, so the dogmatist cannot argue on its basis in favour of the validity of knowledge without already begging the question. Cicero is ready to acknowledge that 'in primis hominis est propria veri inquistitio atque investigatio'⁴⁹ provided we do not try to join this tenet to any over-optimistic philosophy of knowledge. Indeed, as far as the epistemophilic impulse has been conceived as part of man's nature, i.e. in so far as it has been seen as the background condition for the search for a moral life and practical wisdom, few other philosophers have been more eloquent

⁴⁵ *Academica* II, (*Lucullus*): XXV, 80–81.

⁴⁶ *Academica* II, (*Lucullus*): XXVII, 87.

⁴⁷ 'Rerum natura nullam nobis dedit cognitionem finium ut ulla in re statuere possimus quatenus' *Academica* II, (*Lucullus*): XXIX, 93.

⁴⁸ *Academica* II, (*Lucullus*) XX, 64–66.

⁴⁹ *De Officiis* I, 13–19; the quotation is from 13 'above all, the search after truth and its eager pursuit are peculiar to man'.

than Cicero in glorifying it. Nevertheless, passages from both the *De Officiis* and the *De Re Publica* remind us that, although man is a knowledge-seeker, his epistemophilic impulse is important not for its epistemological outcome but as a condition for 'bene vivendi recteque faciendi', that is for its pragmatic function, to which it is subordinated. For Cicero, as for the sceptical party in general, in the world there is place for ethical action and philosophical reflection, but at most only for probable knowledge. It is because he cannot accept any conclusive theory on the anthropologically orientated purposefulness of the universe that he does not subscribe to the inference 'from desire to intelligibility'. The universe cannot be said to have been constructed for the sake of man's knowledge.⁵⁰

IV. CONCLUSION: FINALISM AND SCEPTICISM

Cicero's position shows clearly enough that Villemandy was too optimistic when he thought that scepticism could be 'finally confuted by means of arguments based on the common desire to know shared by everybody'. What looks like internal consistency within the dogmatist picture of the world – natural desire to know and intelligibility of nature *conventuntur* – for a Pyrrhonian like Sextus Empiricus is a mere *petitio principii*. One may object that 'nature made the senses commensurate with the objects of sense', but the sceptic can always reply 'what kind of nature?', and how can we be certain about such a fundamental fact?⁵¹

But this is not all. Villemandy was also too optimistic about the force of an argument which thoroughly relied on what at the time was still a largely uncontested teleological and theological picture of the universe. The phenomenal, anti-functional, slightly Academic approach will have a more fruitful development in the following centuries. United to the Aristotelian and Scholastic rationalism, a mechanical world view and then a behaviouristic description of man will finally replace the teleological picture of the world. Correspondingly, the positions in the debate about man's epistemophilic nature will all be slightly rearranged. Within

⁵⁰ *De Natura Deorum* II. 133.

⁵¹ *Outlines*, I, 98–99.

Hume's 'minimalist metaphysics' not only is the desire to know distinguished from the naturality of the process of knowing: it is also considered very plausible that the most extreme requests of such a desire may be intrinsically unfulfillable, after all. Considerations about the epistemic nature of man acquire a new feature: Villemandy started from *the naturality of knowledge* and so could reach epistemologically optimistic conclusions, whereas Hume adopted a more economic hypothesis about *the unnaturalness of a radical doubt* and hence was able to maintain at most that the sceptic cannot live his scepticism. According to Hume 'though a man in a flush of humour, after intense reflection on the many contradictions and imperfections of human reason, may entirely renounce all belief and opinion; it is impossible for him to persevere in this total scepticism . . . External objects press in upon him: Passions solicit him: his philosophical melancholy dissipates; and even the utmost violence upon his own temper will not be able, during any time, to preserve the poor appearance of scepticism'.⁵² We have shifted from 'nature justifies us in believing that p' to 'nature makes it impossible for us not to believe that p'. After Hume ground is left at most for conceding that nature makes man dogmatic. Whether the picture of the world resulting from such a dogmatism has some correspondence to the actual state of the universe is at least a doubtful question, which should probably be answered negatively, but which, above all, has started to lose interest as a well formulated issue. The more sceptical party can now endorse pragmatic considerations about the function of the desire to know because the latter turns out to be interpretable naturalistically, later on in evolutionary terms, no longer metaphysically and theologically, in terms of fulfillability of epistemological realism. Without an external guarantor – whether Nature or God it does not matter – there is no longer a strict identity between reliability and ontological faithfulness of knowledge. Science works. How things are in themselves becomes an increasingly less interesting question. The gradual downfall of teleological and theological explanations in modern epistemology influenced the dogmatic party as well. At the end of such a process Kant could at most accept a purely methodological reading of the

⁵² *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, a new edition ed. and int. by Stanley Tweyman (London: Routledge, 1991): 99.

desire to know, of that desire which drives man to attempt to overstep the limits of his intellectual boundaries. When Kant asserts that 'everything that has its basis in the nature of our [cognitive] powers must be appropriate to, and consistent with, their right employment' (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A642-3, B670-1) he has transformed the epistemological issue of the naturalness of the process of knowing from an externalist question of relationship between human intellectual needs and natural responses into an internalist question of balance and assessment of rational capacities and intellectual claims. The unrestrained power of the epistemic *conatus* is no longer taken as a proof of the luminous, ontological destiny of man's epistemic projects, but condemned as an intellectual demand which can only lead to scientifically empty conclusions. After Kant the fruits of the attempts to know reality as it is in itself are to be taken as the outcome of a spontaneous, indefatigable and unrestrainable *cupiditas veri videndi* which can and must have only a regulative function. The concrete outcome of such a tendency, the ideas of reason, may orientate the search for knowledge, they do not and cannot warrant its metaphysical success. There could be only one road to the re-acquisition of the harmony between *cupiditas cognoscendi* and external world: rejecting the Kantian dualism by interpreting the intellectual activity of the ego as the constitutive force of what is ontologically real. One of the merits of German idealism will be that of taking seriously this post-Kantian, speculative possibility.⁵³

V. APPENDIX

When Bayle speaks about 'Mr. De Villemandi' he appears to have in mind always the same person. However, serious doubts and warnings have been put forward about the identity of this philosopher:

1) Eugene and Emile Haag, *La France Protestante*, 10 vols. (Paris-Geneve: J. Cherbuliez, 1846-59; rep. Geneve: Slatkine Reprints, 1966): IX, 506-7 specify that there were two persons called Pierre

⁵³ For a discussion of the desire for knowledge from a Kantian perspective see my 'Scepticism and the Search for Knowledge: a Peirceish Answer to a Kantian Doubt' *art. cit.*

de Villemandy at Saumur. The first VILLEMANDY was born in Rochefoucauld (we are not told when), studied theology at Montauban with André Martel (who had succeeded in 1653 to Antoine Garrisoles), graduated with a thesis entitled *De Lege et Evangelio*, became minister at Saintonge and then, thanks to Huisseau, professor of philosophy at Saumur in 1676, when he succeeded Chouet who had been preferred to him during the previous competition in 1664. The other Pierre de Villemandy was 'sieur de la Mesniere' and enrolled as a student at Saumur three years later, in 1679. The Haags believe that VILLEMANDY was certainly the author of the *Introductio ad Philosophiae Aristotelicae Epicureae et Cartesianae parallelismum* which, according to them, was published in Paris in 1679 and reprinted in Amsterdam in 1683. Although they say that VILLEMANDY might be a bit too old to be easily identified with the director of the Wallon College of Leiden (who was, nevertheless, certainly the author of the *Traité* and of *Scepticismus*) the Haags suggest that the fact that the elder VILLEMANDY definitely went to Holland makes him the most likely candidate.

The reconstruction provided by the Haags is problematic because (a) they do not take into full account the information provided on VILLEMANDY by Bayle himself who, although he does not distinguish between the two Villemandys, attributes to him (i.e. VILLEMANDY) all the three works without uncertainties. Note that, contrary to the Haags, Elisabeth Labrousse writes that Bayle's VILLEMANDY was also 'sieur de la Mesniere' cf. *Bayle*: II, 212, note 105. Like Bayle she does not distinguish between the two Villemandy; (b) their bibliographical indications (followed also by Elisabeth Labrousse in *Bayle*: II, 43, note 21) do not correspond to those given by the *Catalogue Général* for the specified works and (c) unfortunately also the other Villemandy went to Holland.

2) In his doctoral thesis entitled *Etude sur les Academies Protestantes en France au XVI^e et au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Grassart, 1882) (see esp. pp. 273-77 and also 422-4) Pierre-Daniel Bourchenin published 'un spécimen de la nature des thèses que les candidats à la maîtrise soutenaient publiquement en 1681, dans le temple de Saumeur' (p. 273). The document (consulted also by the Haags) is entitled *Assertiones ex variis philosophiae partibus*

selectae [Archives Nationales TT 239] and shows that while PIERRE DE VILLEMANDY [sic] (i.e. the antagonist of Chouet and Bayle's philosopher) was professor of philosophy at Saumur he had as a student a 'Petrus de Villemandi [sic] de la Mesniere. Rupelf.[olcaldensis]'. From this document it seems that it was the student i.e. Villemandy to be born in La Rochefoucauld, not the philosopher, i.e. VILLEMANDY.

3) In the *Biografisch lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het nederlandse protestantisme* (Vitvegersmaatschappij, J. H. Kok Kampen, 1983, 3 vols.): I, 398-9 Posthumous Meyjes has warned that Bayle's philosopher – who also according to him was born in La Rochefoucauld in 1636 – should not be confused with another Pierre De Villemandy who was in Leiden in 1692 and after having passed the Wallon examination became vicar of Turin. The article is in perfect agreement with Matthijs Siegenbeek, *Geschiedenis der Leidsche Hoogeschool* (Leiden: S. en J. Luchtmans, 1829-1832, 2 vols.): II, 291-2.

4) The *Album Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae 1575-1876* (Hague Comitum apud Martinus Nijhoff, 1875) reports under 'Nomina Studiosorum Academiae Lugduno Batavae' (pp. 773-7) that while Jacobus Granovius [1645-1716] was rector of the University of Leiden, the 16th of Ottobre 1703 a 'Petrus Jacobus de Villemandy Salmurio-Gallus, 22 J. [i.e. 'Juris Studiosus']' was registered. The same name occurs in the *Catalogus Promotorum* of the same University two years later (cf. Molhuysen, *op. cit.*: vol. IV, 1920, Appendix: p. 239*): the 18th of December a Petrus Jacobus de Villemandy 'Salmuriensis' graduated in 'Jura' with a thesis entitled *De Contractibus in genere*.

A possible way of putting together all these data is by relying on Bayle's scarce indications and suppose that:

(Bayle's) PIERRE DE VILLEMANDY the philosopher was born in La Rochefoucauld [?] in 1636; studied theology at Montauban with André Martel; graduated with a thesis entitled *De Lege et Evangelio*; became minister at Saintonge; lost the competition for a professorship against Chouet in 1664; was professor of philosophy at Saumur from 1676 to 1683 (when the Academy was close); in 1676 was rector of the Academy; in 1688 became the director of the Wallon College of Leiden. On the basis

of Bayle's information we can be rather certain that he was the author of the *Introductio ad Philosophiae Aristotelicae Epicureae et Cartesianae parallelismum*, the *Traité* and *Scepticismus Debellatus*.

On the other hand, *Pierre Jacob de Villemandy* the student was born in La Rochefoucault; was 'sieur de la Mesniere'; enrolled as a student at Saumur in 1679; graduated at Saumur in 1681; studied Law between 1703 and 1705 in Leiden and later became vicar of Turin.⁵⁴

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