

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

---

# Varieties of Modern Academic Skepticism: Pierre-Daniel Huet and Simon Foucher

MICHAEL W. HICKSON

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Thanks in large part to decades of research by Richard H. Popkin, it is now beyond doubt that there was a revival of ancient skepticism in the early modern period. However, current historians have begun to doubt Popkin's claim that the skeptical problem in early modernity was "more aptly described as a *crise pyrrhonienne* than as a *crise academicienne*" (Popkin 2003: xx). Following Popkin, the literature on the history of skepticism in the early modern period was for decades almost exclusively focused on the revival of ancient Pyrrhonism as it is outlined by Sextus Empiricus. Whether ancient Academic skepticism—that of Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Cicero for example—influenced the writings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century skeptics was mostly ignored. While Charles B. Schmitt (1972) demonstrated that Cicero's *Academica* was the focus of scholarly interest up to the Renaissance, it was not until the work of José R. Maia Neto (1997) that historians of skepticism took seriously the idea that early modern skepticism was much indebted to the ancient Academics. There may have been a *crise academicienne* after all.

In a recent book, Maia Neto (2014) offers a broad interpretation of early seventeenth-century philosophy that, like Popkin's work (2003), focuses on the importance of skepticism, but this time Academic skepticism. The unifying thread is Pierre Charron's 1601 work, *De la sagesse*, which lays out a skeptical account of wisdom, which Charron describes as the highest excellence achievable by human beings, but one which "does not presuppose the attainment of certain knowledge as the dogmatist would claim, but only full accomplishment of its integrity" (Maia Neto 2014: 26). Charron understands integrity in the way expressed in the *Academica*,

where Cicero suggests that Academics “are more free and untrammelled in that [they] possess [their] power of judgment uncurtailed [*integra nobis est iudicandi potestas*]” (Cicero 1979: 475; Maia Neto 2014: 25). Maia Neto argues that Charronian skeptical wisdom was a central concern of philosophers in the early seventeenth century, some of whom defended the concept (La Mothe Le Vayer and Gassendi), others of whom attempted to go beyond mere integrity to the possession of certain knowledge (Pascal and Descartes). Maia Neto’s groundbreaking article continues this interpretation into the late seventeenth century, when “Academic skepticism had a spectacular comeback . . . with some of the major anti-Cartesians of the period” (1997: 203). Other scholars (Lennon 2003a, 2008; Charles 2013a, b) have added support to Maia Neto’s claims that Pierre-Daniel Huet and Simon Foucher, in particular, were greatly influenced by Academic skepticism. Even Popkin, in the last edition of his magnum opus, concedes that Foucher is better understood as an Academic than as a Pyrrhonist (Popkin 2003: 275).

Classifying past philosophers with labels such as “skeptical,” “Pyrrhonist,” or “Academic” is little more than a game, however, unless the labels highlight similarities between those philosophers’ texts and ultimately help us to understand the texts better. So in this chapter I ask whether labeling Huet and Foucher Academic skeptics helps us to identify important similarities shared by these philosophers. In good skeptical fashion, I will argue “yes and no.” Both Huet and Foucher can meaningfully be called Academic skeptics. The label “Academic” applies to Huet and Foucher because both wrote histories of the ancient Academics and both tried to revive core aspects of Academic skepticism. Moreover, the common label focuses our attention on a common goal of the philosophers: to undermine dogmatic aspects of Cartesianism by means of self-styled Academic arguments. However, matters quickly become complicated because Huet and Foucher had radically different conceptions of Academic philosophy, and both explicitly rejected the label of “Academic skepticism” for their works. Moreover, while both Huet and Foucher principally attacked Descartes, Huet’s attack is complete and unrelenting, undermining Cartesian epistemology and metaphysics, while Foucher’s attack is limited to Cartesian metaphysics and, ironically, is based firmly on Descartes’s epistemology, which Foucher even sought to defend against the radical sort of skepticism advanced by Huet.

In what follows, I give overviews of the lives and works of Huet and Foucher, and I present and analyze each philosopher’s interpretation of Academic philosophy. The theme of skepticism in the writings of these two figures is too broad to treat exhaustively in this chapter, so I limit my attention to the skeptical attacks of each thinker on the philosophy of Descartes, and in particular to the views of Huet and Foucher on Descartes’s criterion of truth. These are the topics that best expose the similarities, but also the differences, between these Academic skeptics.

## 2 PIERRE-DANIEL HUET: LIFE AND WORKS

Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721) was a quintessential citizen of the Republic of Letters—erudite and eloquent, well-connected and well-traveled, polymath,

polyglot, and prolific.<sup>1</sup> From his pen we have an edition and Latin translation of Origen's biblical commentaries; a spin-off treatise on translation; scores of Latin and French poems on subjects as diverse as the reign of Louis XIV and the chemical nature of salt; a refutation of Descartes's philosophy (Huet 1689, 1694/2003); a satirical story about the Cartesians; a novel, as well as a history of the genre of novels; a treatise on the location of the Garden of Eden; and a work that could have been called *Summa skeptica* but was instead entitled *A Philosophical Treatise on the Weakness of the Human Mind* (Huet 1723; henceforth, *Treatise*).<sup>2</sup>

Huet was born in the village of Caen, France, to noble parents, both of whom he lost by the age of six. The gloomy tone of Huet's *Memoirs* becomes much cheerier once Huet begins his study of *belles lettres* and philosophy at the Jesuit College in Caen, which he later fondly remembered as his "second parent and foster mother" (Huet 1810: vol. 1, 57). A scholarly career was launched that would quickly gain the attention of Europe's greatest minds, as well as its most renowned monarchs. Queen Christina beckoned Huet numerous times to join her in Sweden, and King Louis XIV made Huet, along with Bossuet, one of the Dauphin's preceptors. Huet's prestige increased in 1674 with his election to the *Académie française*, and then again in 1692 when he was consecrated bishop of Avranches.

Precisely how, when, and why Huet became a fierce opponent of Cartesianism and a skeptic is debated (see Lennon 2008: 6–29). From Huet's *Memoirs* we learn the following relevant details. Shortly after completing his study of philosophy with the Jesuits in Caen (in the mid-1640s), Huet reports that he learned about Descartes's new system of philosophy, and that he "could not rest till I had procured and thoroughly perused his book; and I cannot easily express the admiration which this new mode of philosophizing excited in my young mind, when, from the simplest and plainest principles, I saw so many dazzling wonders brought forth" (Huet 1810: vol. 1, 29). But Huet would not remain Cartesian forever:

I was for many years closely engaged in the study of Cartesianism . . . and I long wandered in the mazes of this reasoning delirium, till mature years, and a full examination of the system from its foundations, compelled me to renounce it, as I obtained demonstrative proof that it was a baseless structure, and tottered from the very ground. (Huet 1810: vol. 1, 30)

To understand why Huet ultimately rejected Descartes, we need another piece of Huet's intellectual biography. Around the time he discovered Descartes, Huet also discovered the study of ancient "Oriental" languages and literatures through his friendship with Samuel Bochart (see Shelford 2007: 35–39). The war of influence between Bochart's antiquarianism and Descartes's modernism in Huet's young mind was unstable and ultimately forced Huet to take a side. Huet's rejection of Cartesian philosophy likely dates to 1674, when he read Malebranche's *Search after Truth* (1674/1997), parts of which attack the kind of erudite learning that Bochart helped Huet to appreciate and cultivate (see Lennon 2008: 21–29). Huet sided with antiquity.

Not surprisingly, Huet later found himself, as a member of the *Académie française*, in the midst of the Battle of the Ancients and Moderns (officially begun

in 1687). Huet discusses the Battle several times in his *Memoirs* and indicates that those like Marets and Perrault who championed the moderns did so because of arrogance, ignorance, lack of taste, insanity, and to their “perpetual disgrace” (see Huet 1810: vol. 2, 2, 186, 189). Arrogance and ignorance are again the cardinal vices Huet identifies in Malebranche’s *Search after Truth* (see Lennon 2008: 23). The Cartesians are obsessed with appearing novel, yet—and this is what irks Huet more than anything else—they rarely advance beyond the ancient philosophers, and they plagiarize their best arguments (Huet 1694/2003: 214–229). Fifteen years elapsed between Huet’s reading of Malebranche and the publication of his first anti-Cartesian work. The impetus finally to make his objections to Descartes and the Cartesians public may have been Foucher, whose anti-Cartesian works discussed below demonstrated to Huet that Cartesianism was not only misguided but also dangerous to Christianity (see Lennon 2003a: 122–128; 2008: 32–41; Rapetti 2003: 111–142).

The weapon ultimately employed by Huet against the Cartesians was skepticism, which, ironically, Huet first encountered in the writings of Descartes (see Maia Neto 2008b for the Cartesian roots of Huet’s skepticism). Huet knew only the name of Sextus Empiricus until around 1660, when he met Louis de Cormis, a former president of the Parliament of Aix, who became Huet’s close friend and who spoke of little else besides the ancient philosophers. It was Cormis who first urged Huet to peruse the works of Sextus. Later, in the 1680s, Huet recounts that he immersed himself again in the study of ancient philosophy, this time with Diogenes Laertius as his guide, along with the commentary on Diogenes by Huet’s friend, Gilles Menage. As we learn from the posthumous *Treatise*, Huet found through his careful study of the ancients proof after proof that “the truth cannot be known by human understanding, by means of reason, with perfect and complete certainty” (Huet 1723: xxix).

Huet’s most skeptical writings—the *Treatise*<sup>3</sup> (Huet 1723), *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* (Huet 1689; Huet 1694/2003), and *Alnetanae Quaestiones* (Huet 1690), all composed between 1680 and 1690—were meant to be parts of a single treatise with the sections corresponding roughly to the works just given in the order just given (see Maia Neto 2008a: 167–172). Huet’s system would establish the limits and the correct use of reason in supporting the Catholic faith. For a variety of reasons (see Maia Neto 2008a: 164), Huet abandoned the larger, unified project and the works were published separately. Together, these works elaborate a claim that Huet made at the outset of his earlier *Demonstratio evangelica* (Huet 1679), namely that skepticism, which renders doubtful and uncertain everything that we know by reason and the senses, is not opposed to religion (Huet 1679: 5).

Still, Huet did not wish to urge an irrational faith upon his readers. It was his contention that the careful study of antiquity—the languages, culture, times, and places when the Hebrew and Christian Revelations were given—was the best preparation for the faith, though this preparation could only ever achieve probability. However, since the time of Descartes, philosophers and even some theologians were pleased with the use of reason in the preambles of faith only if reason attained the highest degree of certainty—clarity and distinctness—as it allegedly did in

Descartes's proofs for the existence of God. But in Huet's view, reason at its best never attains such a pitch of certainty, so if the bar is set this high, reason's real, but humble, achievements in support of faith will be disdained. So Huet had to correct his readers' expectations and show the value of the correct antiquarian path that reason paves toward the faith (see Quantin 1994). The *Treatise* deals with reason along with its limits, weaknesses, and need for the faith. The *Censura* is an application of the *Treatise*, refuting the Cartesian view of reason while attempting to repair the damage done by it to the faith. The *Almetanae Quaestiones* finally treat the proper accord of faith and reason, while attempting to prove that the study of antiquity leads to the faith. There is much to say about these three works, but in what follows I limit myself to important aspects of the *Treatise* and *Censura* that clarify Huet's relation to Academic skepticism and to Foucher.

### 3 HUET'S INTERPRETATION AND PRAISE OF ACADEMIC SKEPTICISM

Book one of Huet's *Treatise* is devoted to proving that the "truth cannot be known by the human understanding, by means of reason, with perfect and complete certainty" (Huet 1723: xxix). Huet opens the book with twelve philosophical arguments for this conclusion, derived mainly from classical skeptical tropes, such as the lack of a criterion of truth, the unreliability of the senses, and the changing nature of things. The thirteenth argument is historical and takes up the rest of book one. It involves a sweeping history of philosophy, from Pythagoras to Maimonides, which demonstrates that the inaccessibility of the truth by human reason has always been acknowledged to varying extents by the best writers. The bulk of this thirteenth argument is a lengthy treatment of the various ancient Academies, their evolution, and their relation to Pyrrhonian skepticism. Huet's conclusion is that only the Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics, who constitute a single sect in Huet's view, fully appreciated the inaccessibility of absolute certainty in the human and divine sciences.

From the outset of his history of the Academy, it is clear that Huet associates the school primarily with doubt and the profession of ignorance: "From [Socrates] there emerged several sects of philosophers, of which the most famous, the Academy, followed the wise method of doubting everything, and even augmented and brought this method to its fullest perfection" (Huet 1723: 107). The Academy evolved over time, but each instantiation was just another branch of a single tree, whose trunk was "this first principle, posited by Socrates, that man knows nothing" (Huet 1723: 132). After surveying historical rival attempts to enumerate ancient Academies, Huet settles on the following division: "We must agree, therefore, that properly speaking there were two Academies: the old [*l'ancien*] Academy, that of Socrates and Antiochus, and the new Academy, that of Arcesilaus, Carneades, and Philo; and I maintain that the new Academy was nothing other than Pyrrhonian philosophy" (Huet 1723: 138).

The method of the old Academy involved doubt and the constant refutation of the views of others. It led, however, to a positive assertion that brought consolation,

namely, that a very limited wisdom is available through the recognition that “all that I can know is that I know nothing.” The new Academy followed but greatly extended the method of doubt and disagreement of the old Academy, even to the point of renouncing Socrates’s famous adage just quoted: we cannot even know that we know nothing. It was Arcesilaus who brought the Academy to this skeptical extreme: “We must consider [Arcesilaus], therefore, as not only the restorer, but also as the reformer of the doctrine of Socrates and of the old Academy. He is the one who gave birth to the new Academy, which is based on a more solid foundation than the old” (Huet 1723: 111). Arcesilaus was converted to his way of thinking by Pyrrho, and though he retained the name of the Academy, Arcesilaus turned it into a Pyrrhonian school. Although the views of the next head of the Academy, Carneades, differed from those of Arcesilaus in the particulars, fundamentally the two were of like mind because they denied the existence of any criterion of scientific truth. Huet’s only remark about the next head, Philo, is that he too taught that we cannot understand anything completely by means of reason.

The new Academics were therefore all Pyrrhonian skeptics, who, according to Huet, were characterized by the facts that “they acknowledged no truth rule, no reasoning, no mark for recognizing the truth; they affirmed nothing, defined nothing, judged nothing; they did not even believe that a thing was more this than that” (Huet 1723: 125). Like the Pyrrhonists, the Academic skeptics were *zetetics*; the work of their philosophy involved searching for the truth, but never settling on anything in particular as The Truth, not even the assertion that the truth is unattainable. Huet considers numerous possible differences between the Academic and Pyrrhonian skeptics, but he refutes all of them, reducing the differences to mere language (Huet 1723: 139–150).

Huet devotes so much attention to Academic skepticism in his *Treatise* that the reader is led to believe that the author of this work must himself be an Academic skeptic. But in book two of the *Treatise*, which is an exposition of the “surest and most legitimate way of philosophizing,” Huet denies very explicitly that he belongs to the sect of Academic skepticism, or to any sect for that matter: “Let us be especially careful never to become attached to the opinions of any particular author, or to become members of any sect” (Huet 1723: 213). True philosophers must instead follow their own philosophies, taking whatever seems best from all sects and all authors. The way to determine what is best among the competing views is to “weigh all things in the balance of our mind, reserving at all times a complete liberty to think and to speak on every philosophical subject” (Huet 1723: 213).

Yet this disavowal of every sect is in fact a strong argument for interpreting Huet as an Academic skeptic, and for recognizing a distinction in Huet’s mind (*malgré lui*) between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism. According to Cicero (*Acad.* II 8, in Cicero 1979: 475), it is part of the nature of Academic skepticism to uphold the freedom of one’s judgment and consequently to refrain from settling in any camp and from accepting any label for one’s views: Academic skeptics must always deny that they are members of any school, including that of Academic skepticism. Sextus Empiricus, on the other hand, permitted at least a tentative commitment to the school of Pyrrhonism (*PH* I.16–17; Sextus Empiricus 2000: 7).

After refusing to pledge allegiance to any philosophy, Huet tellingly justifies this practice by citing a number of authors who were likewise fiercely independent thinkers: Arcesilaus, Carneades, Philo, and Antiochus (Huet 1723: 213–214)—all Academics!

That said, it is important always to recall that Huet’s revival of Academic skepticism is in many ways indistinguishable from a revival of Pyrrhonian skepticism. We will see this most clearly in the next section when we consider Huet’s skeptical objections to Descartes which are largely based on Pyrrhonian skeptical tropes. However, Huet’s great interest in Academic skepticism, evidenced by his lengthy history of it that was given pride of place in his *Treatise*; his emphasis on the Academic goal of complete freedom of judgment (noted in the paragraph above); his clear preference for the title “Academic” rather than “Pyrrhonist” based on the long list of distinguished philosophers who held the former (Huet 1723: 150); and his very explicit rejection of the goal of *ataraxia* for his philosophy (Huet 1723: 215), give us reasons to follow Maia Neto in classing Huet among the Academic, rather than Pyrrhonian, skeptics. Moreover, as we will see below, one of Huet’s contemporaries, Foucher, considered Huet part of a revival of the ancient Academy. Nevertheless, the ambiguity between Academic and Pyrrhonian skepticism in Huet’s works is one of the chief reasons for my own skepticism, noted in the Introduction above, about the use of the term “Academic” to denote the spirit of the French anti-Cartesians of the late seventeenth century.

#### 4 HUET’S OBJECTIONS TO DESCARTES’S CRITERIA OF TRUTH

Huet put his skepticism to work against the Cartesians, who claimed to possess not only some part of wisdom, but more importantly the very foundation of all wisdom: the criteria of truth. All eighteen sections of the second chapter of the *Censura* are devoted to undermining Descartes’s criteria of truth—*criteria*, not *criterion*, since Huet begins by observing that there are at least three criteria that Descartes employs in his philosophical works: the natural light, clarity-and-distinctness, and evidence [*évidence*]<sup>4</sup> (Huet 1694/2003: 120). Huet observes that some Cartesians treat *I think, therefore, I am* as if it were itself a criterion, but Huet considers this view absurd since propositions, their truth, and the mark of their truth must be distinct things (Huet 1694/2003: 115). Thus the skeptical objections to Descartes’s criteria will focus on the natural light, clarity-and-distinctness, and evidence. Objections to criteria of truth are central to Huet’s Academic skepticism, for in his view “it is one of the main points of skeptical teaching that nothing is evident” (Huet 1694/2003: 111).

Huet attempts to give some order to the three separate criteria before undermining them:

[Descartes] plainly distinguishes [the natural light and clarity-and-distinctness] when he asserts that the natural light does not attain anything that is not true, in so far as it is attained by the natural light, that is, in so far as it is clearly and

distinctly perceived [see Descartes, *Principles* I 30; AT VIII A 16; CSM I 203]. It thus follows that the natural light is what attains the object of perception, and that a clear and distinct perception is the action with which a thing is attained by the natural light. It is as if the natural light were the criterion through which [*per quod*], and clear and distinct perception the criterion according to which [*secundum quid*]. (Huet 1694/2003: 120–121)

Huet's interpretation of *Principles* I 30 is plausible, since Descartes refers to the natural light there as “the faculty of knowledge” itself; so it is the thing that actually grasps objects of perception, while clear and distinct perception is that faculty's activity by means of which those objects are perceived. Huet then interprets Cartesian evidence to be a more general criterion:

[Descartes] seems to take evidence to be something general that ought to be in everything we perceive that deserves to be regarded as true, whether it is perceived through the natural light, or through clear and distinct perception, or through reasoning, or through the senses, or in some other way. (Huet 1694/2003: 121)

Huet's objection to the natural light is that it is too general a criterion:

Descartes defines the natural light as “the faculty of knowing given to us by God” [Descartes, *Principles* I 30; AT VIII A 16; CSM I 203]. From this it follows that whatever we know through a faculty of knowing given to us by God is known to us by the natural light. But whatever we know is something that we know through a faculty of knowing that is given to us by God. Whatever we know, therefore, is known by the natural light, which is clearly absurd. (Huet 1694/2003: 121)

As Huet sees it, the problem that a criterion of truth is supposed to resolve is how to distinguish genuine knowledge from merely apparent knowledge. Our faculty of knowledge is therefore being called into question. To appeal to that very faculty of knowledge to resolve this issue—which is what we do by appealing to the natural light—is to beg the question, not to resolve it.

Huet employs a battery of arguments against the criterion of clear-and-distinct perception, but his strongest objections are his applications of the skeptical modes of Agrippa outlined by Sextus. Huet observes that clarity-and-distinctness is a *relative* concept (the third mode of Agrippa): one and the same idea can appear clear and distinct to one person, but not to another. This phenomenon gives rise to interminable rational disagreements (the first mode of Agrippa): “The Cartesians also disagree among themselves and, using the same standard of truth, maintain opposite and contradictory views” (Huet 1694/2003: 127). Either these disputing Cartesians will simply assert that their own perceptions (and not their opponents') are clear and distinct, in which case they will fall prey to the Agrippan mode of *hypothesis* (the fourth mode); or they will bring in something other than clarity-and-distinctness to decide these disputes, which demonstrates that clarity-and-distinctness cannot be the ultimate criterion of truth. But whatever additional criterion they appeal to in order to decide the dispute will then be questioned, and the dispute will either



go on *ad infinitum* (the second mode), with each further criterion being bolstered by yet another criterion, or the dispute will be *circular* (the fifth mode), since the disputants will support the further criterion by means of criteria posited earlier in the dispute (Huet 1694/2003: 128–129).

In the *Censura*, the criterion of evidence gets little further attention, since Huet considers the forgoing arguments sufficient for refuting this criterion:

If the senses, the mind, and the operations of the mind, the clear and distinct perceptions of things, and the natural light are all deceptive means of knowing the truth, however great the evidence attached to them, then they will not in the least be certain. (Huet 1694/2003: 129)

Once the faculty of reason itself, the natural light, has been called into question, all additional criteria of truth are undermined, including evidence. However, in the *Treatise* Huet offers several pages of additional objections to evidence, most of which are based on Pyrrhonian skeptical tropes. One novel objection, however, is Huet's neurological objection to evidence. All ideas and images in the understanding, Huet claims earlier (Huet 1723: 49–50), are formed by impulses on the brain and movements of nerve fibers and animal spirits. Since evidence is just a quality or modification of ideas and images, it follows that the causes of evidence are the same as the causes of ideas and images—brain impulses and various other internal motions. Once reduced to brain and other bodily activity, it is possible that evidence is accidentally caused by some physical aspect of the knower, rather than by the truth of the matter in question.

In Huet's mind, these rejections of Descartes's criteria of truth are an indispensable preamble to receiving the faith, since they humble reason and demonstrate its need for faith. They are Huet's most fundamental Academic skeptical exercise. I have dwelt so long on these objections because they distinguish Huet's Academic skepticism from that of Foucher, who not only did not attack the foundations of Descartes's epistemology, but who even tried to defend those foundations against skeptical arguments like those just outlined.

## 5 SIMON FOUCHER: LIFE AND WORKS

Simon Foucher (1644–1696) was a historian, apologist, and systematizer of the philosophy of the ancient Academics, as well as a critic of Cartesian philosophy. His stated goal was to do for the ancient Academy what Sextus had done for Pyrrhonism and what Pierre Gassendi had done for Epicureanism (Foucher 1693: 2). Foucher's interest in Academic philosophy was not merely exegetical; he modernized and applied that philosophy to critique the main ideas of leading philosophers of his time, especially Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz.

Foucher was born in Dijon in 1644, received Holy Orders early in life, became the honorary canon of the Holy Chapel in Dijon shortly thereafter, then soon left any work this position entailed (but not the title) to study in the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne, after which he never left Paris. Besides these few points

and the general fact that Foucher was early on a well-connected intellectual with wide-ranging literary, philosophical, and scientific interests and abilities, most of the details of Foucher's early life have been lost. The latter half of Foucher's biography is indistinguishable from his bibliography. He is said to have died from exhaustion from studying and writing.<sup>5</sup>

Adrien Baillet, in his biography of Descartes, alleges that, when Descartes's remains were returned to Paris in 1667, the notable Cartesian, Jacques Rohault, asked Foucher to deliver the funeral oration. The truth of this claim has been questioned (see Rabbe 1867: 4–5; Watson 1987: 33–34). Whether or not Foucher was given the honor early in life of eulogizing Descartes, we know beyond any doubt that Foucher's later life was spent burying Descartes's and his followers' metaphysics deep in the ground. Foucher is remembered most of all for his polemic with Malebranche, which began with a coincidence. In 1673, Foucher began circulating among his closest friends several copies of a short treatise of his entitled *Dissertation on the Search after Truth, or on the Logic of the Academics*. The coincidence is that in the following year Malebranche published the first volume of his best-known work with a very similar title, *On the Search after Truth*. Foucher believed that Malebranche published his work as a response to Foucher's call for fellow laborers in the search after truth (Watson 1987: 35), and so he felt obliged to correct Malebranche's errors. A decades-long debate surrounding foundational elements of Cartesianism followed the publication of Foucher's 1675 *Critique of the Search after Truth* (Watson and Greene 1995: 13–57).

The debate with Malebranche established Foucher as one of the foremost critics of Cartesianism and brought him into dialogue and debate with a number of leading philosophers. First to respond to Foucher was the Benedictine monk and defender of Cartesianism, Dom Robert Desgabets, who published his *Critique of the Critique of the Search after Truth*, also in 1675. This work forced Foucher to clarify his understanding of and relation to ancient Academic skepticism, which Foucher did in his 1687 *Apology on Behalf of the Academics* and in his 1693 *History and Principles of the Academics*, which are the best sources for Foucher's own philosophical ideas. Other orthodox Cartesians, including Louis de la Forge, Pierre-Sylvain Régis, and Antoine Arnauld, were moved by Foucher's objections to Malebranche to revise core doctrines of Cartesianism, especially relating to the nature of ideas and their capacity to represent objects external to the mind (Watson 1987: 79–100). Foucher was also a close friend and frequent correspondent of Leibniz and was the first to publish criticisms of Leibniz's monadology and theory of pre-established harmony (Watson 1987: 131–147).

Richard A. Watson's *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* (Watson 1987, in which Watson 1966 is reprinted) is the authoritative study of Foucher's critiques of Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, and will remain so for many years. There is still much work to be done on Foucher, however, especially in relation to skepticism. In particular, there are three areas of research that deserve further attention and that will be treated below: Foucher's interpretation of the ancient Academics; the nature and extent of Foucher's metaphysical skepticism; and Foucher's anti-skeptical defense of the criteria of truth attacked by Huet.

## 6 FOUCHER'S CARTESIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE ANCIENT ACADEMY

Foucher's philosophical career is unified by his systematization and application of ancient Academic philosophy. A brief look at the titles of Foucher's works (especially 1675, 1687, and 1693) demonstrates that he was interested in being recognized as the modern champion of the Academy, and this desire of his was not lost on contemporaries like Baillet and Leibniz, who gave Foucher the title of "restorer of the Academy" (Rabbe 1867: 22, Appendix VIII).

Some of Foucher's contemporaries, like Desgabets, saw in Foucher's *Critique* of 1675 only the spirit of the most skeptical Academics. Desgabets accused Foucher of filling his mind and his book with the "old arguments" of the Academics who desired "to suspend their judgment on all things" (Desgabets 1675: 6), who claimed "not to know either body or soul, first principles or their consequences, or even the foundations of mathematics" (Desgabets 1675: 15–16), and who "made a trophy of their ignorance by banishing from the world all true knowledge" (Desgabets 1675: 27). However, other contemporaries closer to Foucher, including Huet, saw little trace of Academic skepticism in Foucher's writings. According to Huet, who met with Foucher on a regular basis for many years, "[Foucher] hardly knew the names of Arcesilaus and Carneades, let alone anything about Pyrrhonism" (Letter to Nicaise 19 April 1697; quoted from Rabbe 1867: Appendix X). In Huet's judgment, Foucher intended to rehabilitate Platonic philosophy, not Academic skepticism.

Foucher's last writings strike a balance between Desgabets's and Huet's assessments. Huet was certainly right that Plato's Academy was the one Foucher was most interested in reviving; Desgabets was also right, however, that in Foucher's view the Academy had an important skeptical dimension from the outset. In the opening pages of his last work, Foucher refers to himself as "*Academico-Platonicus*," and vows to follow Plato, not blindly and by the letter, but in his method (1693: 2). Foucher distinguishes two kinds of followers of Plato: "The first followers make Plato affirm a number of things, while the others view Plato as continuing to doubt and to search for the truth" (1693: 2). The first followers are Platonists, while the latter followers are the Academics to which Foucher claims to belong.

We must be careful when referring to Foucher as an "Academic skeptic" as many recent writers have done, not only because Foucher never used that term to describe himself, but more importantly because he considered the term confused. Foucher clarified the similarities and differences between Academic philosophy and skepticism. There are three kinds of philosophers: Skeptics, who search for the truth but who claim not to have found any truths; Academics, who search for the truth and who claim to have found many important truths; and Dogmatists, who claim to have found all the truth they were seeking (Foucher 1687: 4, 28–30; 1693: 239). Foucher's Academics differ from Skeptics, therefore, in that they confidently assert that their search for truth has been successful; they differ from Dogmatists in that they claim that their search for truth has been only partly successful.

Foucher neither claimed to be, nor wanted to be, the restorer of Academic *skepticism*, *pace* Popkin (2003: 275). Foucher was aware of earlier attempts to revive

Academic skepticism and showed disdain for them. For example, Foucher names Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494) as a proponent of the Academics, but he condemns Pico's portrayal of the Academics as skeptics (1693: 71). But as we will see in the next section, there is still good reason to call Foucher an Academic skeptic, at least in the realm of metaphysics, since he offered one of the most powerful and influential skeptical objections to the existence of the external physical world and did so from a self-styled Academic standpoint. In the rest of this section, I will show how Foucher's interpretation of Academic philosophy is like a Trojan horse, carefully constructed to lure in the Cartesians so that it would be easier to destroy their philosophy on Foucher's ground.

Foucher's *Apology* (1687) and *History* (1693) are not presented as rediscoveries of the Academics presented to the uninitiated; they are instead presented as original and carefully constructed interpretations of the Academics presented to those who already know much about that school. Foucher's goal is not like that of the Renaissance commentators, to uncover the original spirit of the ancient Academy through painstaking exegeses of Cicero or Diogenes Laertius; his goal is to build upon key ideas first discovered by Plato and his successors in order to make use of them in critiquing the works of his contemporaries. The key to understanding Foucher's interpretation of the Academics therefore does not lie in any author of the ancient Academy itself, but rather in the modern period, in particular in the writings of Descartes. Foucher's Academic philosophy is not predominantly Platonic or Carneadean or Ciceronian; it is anachronistically Cartesian (see Maia Neto 1997, 2003; Charles 2013a).

Foucher's tendency to interpret the ancient Academics as proto-Cartesians has already been noted in the literature. Maia Neto (2003: 78–79) has shown that the role of doubt in Foucher's philosophy is like the role given to doubt by Descartes in the first Meditation. Doubt is not the end of Academic philosophizing, but it is essential “[b]ecause it is necessary to remain as if at one's post, which provides cover from preconceptions and errors, until evident truth forces one to leave” (Foucher 1693: 136). A second Cartesian element of Foucher's reading of the Academics is his reduction of the Academic way of philosophizing to five laws,<sup>6</sup> which were unmistakably inspired by Descartes's rules in the *Discourse on Method* (CSM I 120; AT VI 18–19). Especially Descartes's first law, “never to accept anything as true if I did not have evident knowledge of its truth: that is, carefully to avoid precipitate conclusions and preconceptions,” which is essentially Foucher's first law, can be found everywhere in Foucher's writings, including in the passage quoted immediately above (Foucher 1693: 136).

But the most striking example of Foucher's Cartesian reading of the Academics has yet to be noted in the literature. It occurs in the first chapter of the 1693 *History* in which Foucher claims to be writing as a disinterested historian of the ancient Academy. Yet if one reads Descartes's *Discourse on Method* and *Meditations*, and then turns to Foucher's “History of the Academics” (Foucher 1693: 1–72), it is striking how often and carefully Foucher maps the progress of Descartes's thought onto the history of the Academy, from Socrates to Antiochus. Though Foucher never explicitly says so, each Academic is for him the personification of a stage of Descartes's progress toward truth.

According to Foucher, Socrates was the first to realize that, in order to give some order to philosophy, it was necessary to undermine the foundations of the reigning disorder, which were presumption and preconceptions. Destroying preconceived opinions was the only thing that Socrates could do in the absence of a criterion of truth (Foucher 1693: 12). The parallels with *Discourse* One and Two, and with the project of *Meditations* One, are evident here. Socrates takes us into the second Meditation as well, since it turns out that he discovered the *cogito* two millennia earlier than Descartes: “When [Socrates] said that he knew one thing, namely that he knew nothing, he was acknowledging that he was thinking, and that he knew he was thinking because he was doubting all other things” (Foucher 1687: 111). Plato’s method was simply that of Socrates, which Foucher suggestively describes as “meditations on first principles” (Foucher 1693: 15). These meditations led Plato to discover some basic starting points, foremost of which were that the “senses are not the proper judges of the truth of things that are outside of us,” that what we perceive by the senses are merely “modifications of our soul,” and that our souls, though initially unknown to us, are “nevertheless better known to us than our own bodies and any other bodies external to us” (1693: 16–17). In other words, Plato discovered the highlights of the second Meditation wax example.

The immediate successors of Plato—Speusippus, Xenocrates, Polemon, Crates, and Crantor—strayed from the method of Socrates and Plato and rendered the Academy dogmatic. They remind us of the primary intellectual vice identified in the first Meditation: “My habitual opinions keep coming back” (CSM II 15; AT VII 22). Arcesilaus was therefore faced with the task of renewing the Academy, which he did by imitating Socrates by undermining precipitous judgments through doubt (Foucher 1693: 31). Carneades then realized that for the Academics “a *provisional morality* was necessary to guide their lives until they arrived at the knowledge they were seeking” (Foucher 1693: 43, emphasis mine). Like Descartes in the third Discourse (CSM II 122; AT VI 22–23), Carneades realized that, in the absence of certain moral knowledge and faced with the necessity of acting, we must follow the available probable guides, such as laws, customs, and religion.

Philo of Larissa set the Academy again on the search after scientific truth. He gave the Academics hope that despite the doubts of Arcesilaus, some truths about ourselves and the external world might be discovered by reason and understanding (Foucher 1693: 54). Philo inspired his successor Antiochus to work on establishing certain truths. Antiochus’s main contribution was to establish a rational criterion of truth, which Foucher, like Descartes, calls *évidence* (Foucher 1687: 111). Antiochus takes the Academy into the early third Meditation. This is where the ancient Academy comes to a close in Foucher’s view. Not surprisingly, Foucher thinks that Descartes begins to go astray in the rest of the third Meditation.<sup>7</sup>

Foucher’s history of the Academics provides a historical basis for the argumentative strategy that he consistently used against Descartes’s philosophy:

Eager to defend antiquity against the disdain of innovators, [Foucher] believed that it would suffice to convict the reigning philosophy of plagiarism, and to find in that same antiquity antecedents of the new philosophy. . . . Whatever Descartes

taught that was rigorous and solid was borrowed from others; if Descartes ever showed any originality, it was only to distance himself from the path of truth. (Rabbe 1867: 21)

Descartes took the essentials of his first through early third Meditations from the Academics; afterwards, he went astray so that now “we must bring Descartes back to the Academy, rather than leave the Academy to join Descartes” (Foucher 1693: 113).

Foucher’s history also demonstrates that Academic skepticism is just one humble part of the Academic philosophy that Foucher wished to rehabilitate. The doubts of Socrates and Arcesilaus, and the probabilism of Carneades, play a role in Foucher’s method, but doubt is not the end of his philosophy, nor does Foucher resist affirming numerous truths with the greatest certainty: “It is true that the Academics must doubt a great number of things, but this is because these things are doubtful. Nevertheless, the Academics know the principal truths, such that their doubts concern only scientific matters and dogmatic propositions about subjects of pure human speculation” (Foucher 1687: ix).

## 7 FOUCHER’S CRITIQUE OF DESCARTES

Popkin blurs important differences between Huet and Foucher when he writes that “Huet and Foucher . . . destroyed Cartesianism at its epistemological heart” (Popkin 2003: 282). In this section and the next, I will argue that Foucher, unlike Huet, was not interested in destroying the heart of Cartesian epistemology, but in fact assumed that foundation in his skeptical writings. Foucher’s Academic skepticism is limited to the realm of metaphysics, while Huet’s Academic skepticism is all-encompassing. In this section, I give an overview of Foucher’s skeptical critique of Cartesian metaphysics, while in the next I argue that Foucher’s 1693 *History* can be read in part as a Cartesian defense of reason against the skepticism of Huet.

Foucher acknowledges that his Academic philosophy shares much in common with Descartes’s philosophy, especially relating to method. In particular, there are three important similarities: (1) “they begin to philosophize by means of doubting things in general, and by the universal examination of our judgments”; (2) “they agree that we must consider the senses incapable of judging by themselves the truth of things outside of us”; and (3) “they agree in following approximately the same method of philosophizing” (Foucher 1693: 187–188). Contained in the third similarity, that of basic method, is the shared criterion of rational evidence, which is the basis of the first law of both Descartes and of Foucher’s Academics.

On the basis of this commitment to an initial position of doubt, mistrust of the senses, and a basic method of philosophizing that primarily involves assenting only to what is most evident, Foucher launches a skeptical attack on Descartes’s philosophy (though Malebranche was the occasional cause of Foucher’s objections, Foucher is clear that Descartes is his target—see Foucher 1675: 3). The skeptical argument in general is that, if Descartes had remained committed to the three points above (doubt, mistrust of the senses, method), then he would have realized that he never

attained any certain knowledge of an external, physical world. Moreover, as long as Descartes remained committed to his ontological dualism, he could never hope to attain knowledge of the external world. Foucher's main skeptical accomplishment is to have shown more rigorously than anyone before him that ontological dualism entails external world skepticism.

Foucher's skeptical strategy in particular is to break down the primary-secondary quality distinction of which Descartes made extensive use.<sup>8</sup> The aim of Foucher's strategy was to force Cartesians to regard the primary quality of extension, which they considered the essence of the material world, in the same way they regarded sensible secondary qualities like color, smell, and taste, namely, as mere modes of the mind that represent nothing real outside the mind. Foucher's goal was to restrict knowledge to the mind's ideas.

According to Descartes's ontological dualism, there are two created substances: mind, which is thinking, non-extended substance, and body, which is non-thinking, extended substance. The mind is immediately aware only of its own modes—ideas, sensations, imaginings, memories, judgments. Consequently, if the mind is to become aware of bodies, then it can do so only by the indirect way of its ideas and sensations of bodies. Cartesian philosophy of mind distinguished ideas from sensations by claiming that the former modes of the mind represent real external objects, while the latter modes are merely effects of those objects on the sense organs and ultimately on the mind (see Watson 1987: 47–53 for a concise summary of orthodox Cartesianism in Foucher's time). It is with this distinction between ideas and sensations that Foucher begins his main attack against Descartes:

These two sorts of ideas belong equally to us and are, properly speaking, nothing other than our soul disposed in such-and-such a manner. But it is always our soul, and since the soul [according to Descartes's dualism] has nothing in itself which resembles matter and extended beings, it is difficult to conceive how it could represent anything other than its own ideas. (Foucher 1675: 45)

Two important implicit premises do much of the work in Foucher's objection: (1) that in order to represent an object, an idea must resemble the object, and (2) if ideas are essentially distinct from bodies (as Cartesian dualism posits), then ideas cannot resemble, and therefore cannot represent, bodies. Foucher defends (1) by arguing that “we understand nothing else by *representing* than rendering a thing *present* to us” (Foucher 1675: 52). Foucher is clear that no modification of our soul can make a body present to us: “It is necessary, in order to represent [bodies] as they are in themselves, for our ideas to dispose us exactly as if these things were actually in us and present to us *immediately*” (Foucher 1675: 53). But the Cartesian way of ideas, in conjunction with ontological dualism, renders such immediate access to physical objects impossible, since only extensionless thoughts can be immediately present to the mind. Foucher continues:

All that we know by the senses [according to Descartes] are merely modes of our soul that belong entirely to us and that do not resemble anything in material objects. But we know extension also by means of sensation, from which we must

conclude that extension is nothing but a mode of our soul, and that there is nothing similar to extension in material objects. (1675: 65)

Foucher reports that he first put this objection to Rohault in 1667 and that Rohault's response was to deny that we know extension by means of sensation. Foucher claims that he was baffled by this response, which he refuted by the following argument: "When I see a red square, for example, I simultaneously perceive its shape and color, on the one hand, and its extension on the other, since I judge its size; consequently, we know the square's extension doubly by means of sensation: for we know it by sight and by touch, whereas we know colors only by the eyes" (Foucher 1675: 66). With extension relegated to the realm of sensible qualities along with color, the real mind-independent existence of the extended world becomes as doubtful as that of colors.

Rohault's attempt to evade Foucher's argument was just one of many that contemporary Cartesians advanced. Malebranche denied that ideas are modes of the human mind and argued instead that we perceive ideas in the mind of God, which Foucher considered to be a very pious, but hardly a very evident position to espouse (Foucher 1675: 116). More orthodox Cartesians tried to save Descartes by developing sophisticated accounts of how ideas can represent material objects without resembling them in essence (Watson 1987: 89–99).

## 8 FOUCHER'S DEFENSE OF DESCARTES'S CRITERIA OF TRUTH

In his *Apology*, Foucher identifies Huet as another philosopher who believed that the Academic philosophy was the most solid and most compatible with Christianity (Foucher 1687: 36). In this same passage, Foucher expresses his hope that Huet will soon publish a book on Academic doubt. There is also an extant letter written in 1685 by Foucher, urging Huet to publish on the Academics (see Lennon 2008: 34–37). The work that would ultimately satisfy Foucher's requests, Huet's *Treatise*, would never be published in Foucher's or Huet's lifetime.

Foucher would not have been happy with the *Treatise* had he read it. We can be sure of this because Foucher must have been disturbed by Huet's earlier anti-Cartesian work, the *Censura*, which first appeared in 1689, between the publication dates of the last part of Foucher's *Apology* and the first part of Foucher's *History*. Foucher read the *Censura* (see Foucher 1693: 92), and though he never criticizes Huet by name, Foucher was clearly opposed to the radical nature of Huet's skepticism. In Foucher's *History*, there is an extended refutation of anti-Cartesian skeptical arguments that had been elaborated by Huet in the *Censura* and that would be offered again in the *Treatise*. These skeptical arguments target the foundation of both Descartes's and Foucher's epistemology, the natural light of reason, and the general criterion of evidence.

As we have seen, Huet reduced evidence to a mere psychological phenomenon, an appearance that can be as deceptive as any sensory appearance (see Huet 1694/2003: 130; 1723: 76). There is no infallible evidence for Huet; there is only the varying



subject-relative appearances of evidence. When Foucher begins to combat skeptics who are opposed to the criterion of evidence, he identifies their principal strategy as the relegation of evidence to mere persuasion (Foucher 1693: 141). Foucher describes these skeptics as “animals that trouble the world,” “rebels against the light,” “beasts,” “condemned by God and man,” “incurably sick,” “unwilling to open their eyes” (1693: 120–121).

Foucher begins his response to this skepticism by noting that nobody would deny that the proposition “two plus two equals four” *appears* to be necessarily true. But if the skeptic can recognize the appearance of necessary truth, then the skeptic must possess a general idea of truth: “In order to know whether some proposition seems to be true, it is necessary for us to know at least in one instance what it is to be true” (Foucher 1693: 134). Ironically, the Academic Foucher takes this classic anti-skeptical argument from the anti-Academic, Augustine. Foucher believes that, if the skeptic meditates on this initial idea of truth, he will see that it contains a general criterion of truth, namely, evidence (1693: 83–88, 133, 208).

The skeptic will respond to Foucher by claiming that there is a difference between “true evidence” and “apparent evidence” and that we need a further criterion in order to distinguish these things (1693: 140–141). In the absence of such a criterion for the criterion, we are left merely with degrees of persuasion, from weak persuasion up to invincible persuasion, but without any guarantee that the highest degree of persuasion corresponds with the possession of truth. Foucher does concede that we lack a precise definition of the criterion of truth and an advanced art of teaching others to recognize the criterion (1693: 133–134); the first goal of Academic logic is to establish that art. But to search for a separate criterion beyond the perception of evidence would be misguided in Foucher’s view: “It would be like searching to clarify light itself” (1693: 133). Foucher apparently wants his reader to find absurd the idea of clarifying light by means of another light; however, Huet (1723: 83) demanded just that. It was probably with the obstinate skepticism of Huet in mind that Foucher attempted the task of shedding light on the criterion of evidence.

Foucher does so by giving some further criteria by which to guarantee evident truths, and these criteria are not further qualities of the mind’s ideas but rather are rational capacities and incapacities. We are in possession of the “highest degree of evidence”—a state that Huet argued we cannot achieve—when we cannot conceive of a thing in any other way than we presently do (Foucher 1693: 142); when we do not hesitate in the conception that we have of the thing (1693: 142); when the conception we have is “incontestable,” that is, cannot be doubted (1693: 81, 213); when we are determined, whether against our will or in conformity with it, to believe in our conception by the evidence that we have for it (1693: 137); when we cannot even conceive that the contrary of our belief is true (1693: 141). Most of Foucher’s examples of evident truths are mathematical, such as “two plus two equals four.”

The skeptic might object, however, that “two plus two equals four” can be doubted by means of the omnipotent God objection from Descartes’s first Meditation and that consequently the proposition does not count as an evident truth on Foucher’s account. But Foucher responds by arguing that Descartes’s

appeal to the omnipotence of God to cast into doubt common notions of mathematics is an example of excessive, not reasonable, doubt that ultimately undermines Descartes's system:

We should not think that piety requires us to speak in this way of divine power. For it serves only to overturn all the certainty that we can have concerning God, and to destroy not only theology, but also religion. That is what the Cartesians need to consider, they who take their master at his word rather than interpreting him charitably. (1693: 201)

Foucher's skepticism clearly has both epistemological and theological limits.

Foucher's defense of rational evidence ultimately rests on the distinction and connections between three species of reason: there is *reason in itself*, or *divine reason*, which is immutable, eternal, infallible, and necessary; there is *right reason*, which is reason in itself as shared by all human beings, and which is, like divine reason, infallible; and there is *our reason* or *particular reason*, which is a mode of the human mind, and is subject to error because of the interference of preconceptions and bad habits (1693: 195–199; 1687: 16). Foucher argues that right reason must be infallible using what he calls an a posteriori argument. Right reason must be infallible or else we could not explain the constancy, the accuracy, and the stability of the technical arts and sciences that are based in right reason. Buildings which outlast their architects, the invention of scientific instruments, and algebraic formulae all point to the infallibility of right reason (1693: 197–198). The unity and infallibility of right reason are the guarantors of mathematical truths: "It is true that the same Reason enlightens all men and extends to every mind in which it produces ideas that are perfectly similar. . . . It is certain that this unity of species [of reason] suffices to support the most solid demonstrations of the mathematicians" (1693: 207).

Foucher's argument against Huet's skepticism is that human reason is based in divine reason. Moreover, evidence is more than invincible persuasion; it is the root of the fruitfulness of the sciences, which could be witnessed every day in Foucher's time. This is also Foucher's answer to dogmatists who complain that his insistence on contemplating basic evident truths will not get us very far:

We easily perceive that if two triangles have two sides and one angle equal to each other, then they are congruent. Many people scorn this truth as if it had no importance. Yet it is by means of this truth that we discovered the art of measuring inaccessible places, of judging the sizes of the stars and their distances from the earth. (1693: 85)

The experience of evident truths is, as Huet alleges, primarily psychological: evidence is perceived by individuals as an inner "torch in the fog" (Foucher 1693: 205). The goal of philosophy is to clear away the fog of preconceived notions and precipitous judgments in order to render the light of evidence even brighter. But in addition to the subjective experience of evidence, which Huet is right to criticize as potentially deceptive, there are also the incontestable triumphs of science and technology, which are based on these evident truths, and which ought to convince us that there is more to evidence than the modes of our minds. Foucher's a posteriori

argument for the infallibility of reason anticipates our own contemporary trust in reason that stems from the successes of science and technology.

## 9 CONCLUSION

Both Huet and Foucher are notable among later seventeenth-century philosophers for their extensive interest in the ancient Academy. They each wrote a history of the Academy, carefully noting its differences from and superiority to other ancient sects. They each paid close attention, in particular, to the nature and extent of the skepticism of the Academy, and they employed skeptical arguments against their common foe, the Cartesians, whom they ultimately defeated by means of their skepticism.<sup>9</sup> There is good reason, therefore, to consider Huet and Foucher Academic skeptics, and the label “modern Academic skepticism” is useful for referring to the skeptical revival of the late seventeenth century that undermined the system of one of Western philosophy’s greatest thinkers, Descartes.

However, modern Academic skepticism was not a unified movement, which may be partly responsible for its success. Huet’s Academic skepticism aimed primarily at Cartesian epistemology, while Foucher’s aimed primarily at Cartesian metaphysics. Because of their fundamental differences, Huet and Foucher never did, and they never could, harmonize their versions of Academic philosophy or co-author a single anti-Cartesian treatise. But this did not prevent readers familiar with the works of both authors from deriving a single conclusion from them: Descartes’s philosophy is fundamentally and fatally flawed.

If Popkin is right that the seventeenth century began with a *crise pyrrhonienne*, should we say that the century ended with a *crise académicienne*? If we mean by this a rise of skepticism that took its inspiration from a careful study of the ancient Academics, then yes, we can say that the century ended with an Academic crisis. On the other hand, to Huet and Foucher, as well as to many of their contemporaries, Academic skepticism was not the problem, let alone a crisis: it was a solution. The real crisis to which Academic skepticism was the remedy was the *crise cartésienne*, which Huet and Foucher could agree was the twofold problem of the improper use of reason in supporting the Christian faith and of the infiltration of the Christian faith into philosophy. Malebranche’s *Search after Truth* epitomized this crisis in the minds of both Huet and Foucher, and herein lies the greatest source of unity in modern Academic skepticism. It is not a common ancient Academic source, or common Academic skeptical trope, but a common target that makes ‘modern Academic skepticism’ a meaningful label worth preserving in our histories of skepticism.

## NOTES

1. Huet was aware that he was a representative of the Republic of Letters; he justified the *prima facie* vain project of his autobiography by arguing that he was not writing about himself alone, but primarily about the history of the time in which he lived (see Shelford 2007: 17).

2. For a complete bibliography of Huet's works, along with English summaries, see Huet (1810: vol. 2, 465–490).
3. For the reasons that led Huet not to publish the *Treatise* in his lifetime, see Shelford (2007: 140–141).
4. It is common, though not uncontroversial, in the English secondary literature on Huet and Foucher to translate “*évidence*” as “evidence,” which is sensible considering that it was the English word used in the seventeenth century to translate the French term “*évidence*”. A good alternative would be “evidentness,” but I have not seen the term used in works earlier than the nineteenth century, so it is not ideal for translating seventeenth-century works. “Self-evidence” has advantages, but whereas Huet and Foucher (and others, like Bayle) speak of degrees of *évidence*, it does not seem natural to speak of degrees of self-evidence. A final plausible alternative to “evidence” would simply be “clarity,” but this would make it impossible to distinguish, as Huet does, “*évidence*” and “*clarté*.”
5. For a complete bibliography of Foucher's works, see Watson (1969: xxxviii–xlii).
6. (1) Proceed only by means of demonstration in philosophy; (2) do not consider questions that clearly cannot be decided; (3) admit that you do not know that of which you are ignorant; (4) distinguish the things you know from the things that you do not know; (5) always search for new truths (Foucher 1687: 5–9).
7. Descartes's first error, however, occurs in the second Meditation when he declares that he is a thinking thing. In Foucher's view, it is correct to acknowledge that the mind thinks, but it is precipitous to declare that the essence of the mind is thinking (Foucher 1675: 14–15).
8. In doing so, Foucher anticipates, if not provides, the foundation of George Berkeley's idealism. Berkeley probably would have learned of Foucher's attack on the primary-secondary quality distinction from Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, in the article “Pyrrhon,” remark C. Some see Foucher's arguments as tending, not toward metaphysical skepticism, but toward idealism (see Armour 2003).
9. See Watson (1987) for the case that Foucher is primarily responsible for the downfall of Cartesianism; see Lennon (2003a, 2008) for the case that Huet is mainly responsible.

## REFERENCES

- Armour, Leslie. 2003. “Simon Foucher, Knowledge and Idealism: Philo of Larissa and the Enigmas of a French ‘Skeptic’.” In Thomas M. Lennon (ed.), *Cartesian Views: Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson*, 96–116. Leiden: Brill.
- Charles, Sébastien. 2013a. “Entre réhabilitation du scepticisme et critique du cartésianisme: Foucher lecteur du scepticisme académique.” In S. Giocanti (ed.), *La réception des Académiques à l'Âge moderne*. Special issue of *Astérior* 11 (online): <http://asterion.revues.org/2382> (last consulted 4 July 2014).
- Charles, Sébastien. 2013b. “On the Uses of Scepticism against a Certain Philosophical Arrogance: Huet as a Critic of Cartesian Logic and Metaphysics.” *Science et esprit* 65: 299–309.
- Charron, Pierre. 1601/1986. *De la sagesse*, edited by B. de Negroni. Paris: Fayard.

- Cicero, Marcus Tullius. 1979. *Academica and De Natura Deorum*, translated by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Desgabets, Dom Robert. 1675. *Critique de la Critique de la Recherche de la Vérité, où l'on découvre le chemin qui conduit aux connaissances solides, pour servir de réponse à la lettre d'un Académicien*. Paris: Jean du Puis.
- Foucher, Simon. 1673. *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité, ou sur la logique des académiciens*. Dijon: Publisher unknown.
- Foucher, Simon. 1675. *Critique de la Recherche de la vérité où l'on examine en même-tems une partie des Principes de Mr Descartes. Lettre par un Académicien*. Paris: Martin Coustelier.
- Foucher, Simon. 1687. *Dissertation sur la recherche de la vérité, contenant l'apologie des académiciens, où l'on fait voir que leur manière de philosopher est la plus utile pour la religion, et la plus conforme au bon sens, pour servir de Réponse à la Critique de la Critique, etc., avec plusieurs remarques sur les erreurs des sens et sur l'origine de la philosophie de Monsieur Descartes*. Paris: Estienne Michallet.
- Foucher, Simon. 1693. *Dissertations sur la recherche de la vérité, contenant l'histoire et les principes de la philosophie des académiciens. Avec plusieurs réflexions sur les sentimens de M. Descartes*. Paris: Jean Anisson.
- Guellouz, Suzanne (ed.). 1994. *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721): Actes du Colloque de Caen*. Biblio 17. Paris, Seattle and Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature.
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 1679. *Demonstratio evangelica*. Paris.
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*. Paris: Daniel Horthemels.
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 1690. *Alnetanae quaestiones de concordia rationis et fidei*. Caen and Paris.
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 1694/2003. *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, edited, translated, annotated, and introduced by T. M. Lennon. Amherst, NY : Humanity Books. (The first English translation of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*. The translation is of the revised 1694 edition.)
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 1723. *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain*. Amsterdam: Henri Sauzet.
- Huet, Pierre-Daniel. 1810. *Memoirs of the Life of Peter Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches*. 2 volumes, translated by John Aikin. M. D. London. (An English translation of Huet's *Commentarius de rebus ad eum pertinentibus*. The Hague: 1718.)
- Lennon, Thomas M. 2003a. "Foucher, Huet, and the Downfall of Cartesianism." In Thomas M. Lennon (ed.), *Cartesian Views: Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson*, 117–128. Leiden: Brill.
- Lennon, Thomas M. (ed.) 2003b. *Cartesian Views: Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson*. Leiden: Brill.
- Lennon, Thomas M. 2008. *The Plain Truth: Descartes, Huet, and Skepticism*. Brill Studies in Intellectual History 170. Leiden and Boston: Brill
- Maia Neto, José R. 1997. "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58: 199–220.
- Maia Neto, José R. 2003. "Foucher's Academic Cartesianism." In Thomas M. Lennon (ed.), *Cartesian Views: Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson*, 71–95. Leiden: Brill.

- Maia Neto, José R. 2008a. "Charron and Huet: Two Unexplored Legacies of Popkin's Scholarship on Early Modern Skepticism." In J. D. Popkin (ed.), *The Legacies of Richard Popkin*, 155–172. International Archives of the History of Ideas 198. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Maia Neto, José R. 2008b. "Huet sceptique cartésien," *Philosophiques* 35: 223–239.
- Maia Neto, José R. 2008c. "Huet n'est pas un sceptique chrétien." *Les Études Philosophiques* 2 (85): 209–222.
- Maia Neto, José R. 2014. *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy: The Charronian Legacy, 1601–1662*. International Archives of the History of Ideas 215. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Malebranche, Nicolas. 1674/1997. *The Search after Truth*, translated and edited by T. Lennon and P. Olscamp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Malbreil, Germain. 1994. "Le Traité Philosophique de la Foiblesse de l'Esprit Humain, de Feu Monsieur Huet, ancien Evêque d'Avranches." In Suzanne Guellouz (ed.), *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721): Actes du Colloque de Caen*. Biblio 17. Paris, Seattle and Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature.
- Popkin, Richard H. 2003. *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Quantin, Jean-Louis. 1994. "La Raison, la Certitude, la Foi: quelques remarques sur les préliminaires de l'acte de foi selon Huet." In Suzanne Guellouz (ed.), *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630–1721): Actes du Colloque de Caen*. Biblio 17, 83–98. Paris, Seattle and Tübingen: Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature.
- Rabbe, Felix. 1867. *Étude Philosophique. L'Abbé Simon Foucher Chanoine de la Sainte Chapelle de Dijon*. Paris: Didier et Cie.
- Rapetti, Elena. 2003. *Percorsi anticartesiani nelle lettere a Pierre-Daniel Huet*. Florence: Leo S. Olschki.
- Schmitt, Charles B. 1972. *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academics in the Renaissance*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Sextus Empiricus. 2000. *Outlines of Scepticism*, edited by Julia Annas and Jonathan Barnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shelford, April G. 2007. *Transforming the Republic of Letters: Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650-1720*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Watson, Richard A. 1966. *The Downfall of Cartesianism, 1673–1712: A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late 17<sup>th</sup> Century Cartesianism*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Watson, Richard A. 1969. "Introduction." In *Simon Foucher, Critique de la Recherche de la vérité*, v–xlix. New York and London: Johnson Reprint Corporation.
- Watson, Richard A. 1987. *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics*. Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett.
- Watson, Richard A., and Marjorie Grene. 1995. *Malebranche's First and Last Critics: Simon Foucher and Dortous de Mairan*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.