

# **“The only, the true French metaphysician of the 18<sup>th</sup> century’: Condillac, Cousin and the ‘French school’”**

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## **Introduction**

The philosophical project of Victor Cousin (1792-1867)<sup>1</sup> is explicitly defined as “French”. It manifests the intention of distinguishing itself from, on the one hand, a “British empiricism” rooting all knowledge in the senses while granting a minor role, if at all, to reflection. The figures of Bacon, Locke and Reid are repudiated while the benefit of the experimental approach is reinvested and successively applied to the study of nature and the mind. On the other hand, it also distinguishes itself from a “German idealism” which misunderstands the abilities of human reason and postulates ontology instead of arriving at it by means of reflection rooted in inner experience. Cousin targets Kant as well as his successors such as Fichte and Schelling. Given this, the “French philosophy” being sought adopts the figurehead of a Descartes<sup>2</sup> as psychologist promoting the epistemological virtues of both inner

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<sup>1</sup> In France, Cousin occupied numerous positions: the Chair in history of modern philosophy at the Sorbonne; director of the Ecole Normale, rue d’Ulm; State counsellor; Pair de France (peer); member of the Académie Française; director of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques; Minister for Public Instruction; and president of the Agrégation jury charged with the nomination and inspection of teachers of philosophy throughout France. As such, he was the key actor in the process of institutionalising the philosophical canon which—in France and in continuity with what began a little earlier in Germany—would reach its apogee in the mid 19th century.

<sup>2</sup> On this point, see; *L’autorité d’un canon philosophique. Le cas Descartes* (Antoine-Mahut, 2021) chapters IX on Cousin, VIII on Destutt de Tracy and X on Renouvier, pp. 243-346; and “Figures de Descartes dans l’historiographie française au XIXe siècle” (Antoine-Mahut, 2022).

experience and a human reason of clearly circumscribed scope and limits.

The claim to a “French” identity of this eclectic spiritualism is also manifested in Franco-French demarcations, differentiating it from those other Spiritualists, labeled as “theologians”<sup>3</sup> and retrospectively designated as “anti-moderns” and “reactionaries” (Joseph De Maistre, 1753-1821; Louis De Bonald, 1754-1840; Félicité de Lammenais (1782-1854); Pierre-Simon Ballanche, 1776-1847; or Louis Eugène Marie Bautain, 1796-1867). And, above all, in the aftermath of the epistemological, moral and political disaster of the French Revolution, the intent is to refute the dominant philosophy, the “sensualisms” of every type, reinvested by the Ideologists, such as Pierre Jean Georges Cabanis (1757-1808) and Antoine Destutt de Tracy (1754-1836) and their contemporary descendants, such as the famous Physician François Broussais (1772-1838).

However, the place given by Cousin to the figure of Condillac in such a project seems eminently paradoxical. On the one hand, Condillac is designated as one of the main representatives of this specifically 18th century sensualism resulting from the regrettable acclimatisation, on French soil<sup>4</sup>, of seeds from across the English Channel. By distinguishing “two sorts of metaphysics”—one with the ambition “to pierce all the mysteries; the nature [and] the essence of beings, the most hidden causes”, and the other which “knows how to contain itself within the limits traced for it”<sup>5</sup>—Condillac made Descartes into the main representative of the first sort and disqualified metaphysics as a whole. He can thus be swept aside in Cousin’s global condemnation of the century of the Encyclopaedists:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> On the constitution and role of these labels, within the Cousin clan, see: “Politiques de l’éclectisme en situation de crise” (Barancy, 2019)

<sup>4</sup> According to Cousin, Voltaire is the principle figure who “turned the philosophy of the 18th century against Cartesianism” (Cousin, 1845, viii-ix). Just think of the famous 14th letter of the *Lettres anglaises* (Voltaire, 1734) which opposes the Cartesian “novel of the soul” to its true “history” undertaken by Locke.

<sup>5</sup> Condillac, 1746, pp. 59-60. Nigel Briggs’s translation.

<sup>6</sup> Existing studies focus on this “deliberate occultation [...] of which the work of Victor Cousin is undoubtedly the centre” (Bloch, 1979, 39 and Bloch, 1997, third part). This occultation process targets materialism in all its forms. See, in particular: Vermeren, 1996; Daled, 2006 and, on Diderot, 2009; and Rey, 2015. On Helvetius,

Let us dare to speak the truth; the 18th century in France, so rich in great men, did not produce a single one in philosophy, if, at least, by philosophy we understand metaphysics. (Cousin, 1845, viii)

But the most important point is not so much this metaphysical error but its practical consequences. Thus, Cousin does not hesitate to assert that, on the political and moral plane of its applications,<sup>7</sup> Condillac's metaphysics, systematised by a Helvetius nourished by the ideas of Hobbes and Spinoza, "necessarily" engendered "despotism" (Cousin, 1820, 31).

However, despite his severe criticism, Cousin recognises that in Condillac "the metaphysician dominates" (Cousin, 1829-1861, 29). What is more, he does not hesitate to present Condillac as "the only, the true French metaphysician of the 18th century" (Cousin, 1829-1866, 47-48). Alongside Anne Robert Jacques Turgot "this universal and profound mind which penetrated all human knowledge, and which wrote the best piece of metaphysics published in that century, the author of the article *Existence* [in Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie*]; and in opposition to Diderot "who was neither metaphysician, nor moralist, nor politician" (*Archives philosophiques*, 1817, in Cousin, 1826, 68); Condillac, as a metaphysician-psychologist, and thus as a philosopher, is likely to constitute a positive reference for the French philosophical school which Cousin presumes to lead.

We can thus identify a third network of demarcations among the actors sharing the concern to promote such a school. In this respect, the work of Jean Saphary (1797-1865) appears to be the most interesting. Like Cousin, Saphary criticises materialism, atheism and the influence of the Jesuits in the clergy. But this is only to better denounce the personification of philosophy teaching at the university by this very same Cousin. The main form of this conflict is the

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about whom Cousin wrote that he « contains in abridged [form] all the metaphysics of Condillac » (Cousin, 1820, 111), see: "'Cette équitable distinction' : Damiron lecteur d'Helvétius" (Moreau, 2022).

<sup>7</sup> On the Condillacian method of analysis as political instrument of the French Revolution, see: W.R. Albury, 1986.

diffusion—first in the *lycée* then at the Ecole Normale Supérieure where he lectures—of the philosophy of the editor of Condillac: Pierre Laromiguière (1756-1837)<sup>8</sup>. His main weapon is the denouncing and correcting of the disastrous disfigurations of Condillac undertaken by Cousin:

Venerated until now, Condillac is associated [...] with Mandeville and Collins, graciously flanked by Holbach and Laméttrie, and, for the effect of the tableau, followed by bloodthirsty hordes armed and unleashed by his perverse principles. One might believe one was seeing his disfigured statue presiding over the revolutionary saturnalia [...]. The name of Condillac, before which the darkness of philosophy seemed to have fled for ever, and with it so many abuses and prejudices, this name so great and so pure cannot be pronounced today without raising slanderous accusations. What a spirit of vertigo has thus blown on our century! (Saphary, 1844, 33-35)

The paradoxical dimension of Cousin's relationship to Condillac can be clarified in the light of contemporary issues. Condillac *versus* Descartes is the filter which allows not only the establishment—by means of contrast of the outlines of this “State philosophy”<sup>9</sup>, also labeled “French”—but also the designation of oneself as the absolute monarch<sup>10</sup> of this philosophy. To rectify Cousin's philosophical interpretation of Condillac and, with it, the dominant historiography in its entirety is thus, at the same time, to propose another philosophy, another moral and political project and a master other than Cousin for the “French

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<sup>8</sup> In the *Essai analytique d'une métaphysique qui comprendrait les principes, la formation, la certitude de nos connaissances dans le plan de M. Laromiguière, dont on a résumé les leçons* (initially published in two volumes, in 1815-1818, republished in 1820, 4th edition in 1826), and which he dedicated to his master, Saphary successively examines the principle of our knowledge, its formation and certitude. On Laromiguière and Condillac, see the contribution by Pierre Brouillet, in this volume.

<sup>9</sup> Saphary's complete expression is: “a State philosophy which parodies the State religion” (quoted by Picavet, 1891, 563).

<sup>10</sup> On this royalty metaphor, see: “The empowered King of French Philosophy: Théodore Jouffroy (1792-1842)” (Antoine-Mahut, 2020a).

school”: in this case, Pierre Laromiguière.<sup>11</sup>

So as to describe the decisive and complex role attributed to the figure of Condillac in the attempts to found a “French school”<sup>12</sup> of philosophy in the first half of the 19th century, I will distinguish five moments in the argumentation. Each is centred on a text exemplifying a phase of this same debate.

The first three moments correspond to successive phases of Cousin’s own philosophy. By first focusing on two very rarely studied texts—his 1813 thesis in Latin and the 1820 *cours de morale*—and then his famous 1829 *Cours* and its reformulations in various editions, I will show how Cousin’s work on the figure of Condillac can be described both as a reinvesting of the philosophical project of the Ideologists (in particular, the link with Laromiguière) and as a demarcation, striving to recover the legacy of the Ideologists for his sole benefit. Depending upon the period and the interlocutor, the emphasis is skilfully placed on one aspect or another. The fourth moment corresponds to the public and explicit criticism of Cousin’s eclecticism by the “justification” of Laromiguière’s Condillac in *L’École éclectique et l’école française* by Saphary (1844). The fifth and final moment is articulated in relation to two texts: the one provided as an annex to his work by Saphary—the report by Joseph-Marie Degérando (1772-1842) concerning the papers received for the *appréciation de la philosophie de Laromiguière* competition; and the treatment of the reference to Condillac in the posthumous edition of the *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, edited by Degérando’s son in 1847.<sup>13</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> In this contribution, for reasons of space and clarity, I will leave to one side the complex and intersecting relationships between Cousin, Laromiguière, Maine de Biran and Pierre Paul Royer-Collard (1773-1845). On Cousin and Maine de Biran, see: “Maine de Biran’s places in French Spiritualism: occultation, reduction and demarcation”, (Antoine-Mahut, 2016); “L’éclectisme de Victor Cousin : une philosophie *française* sans philosophie française” (Antoine-Mahut, 2019b); and the contribution by Anne Devarieux in this volume. On Royer-Collard, see: Cotten 1992 and 2007 and (on Cousin and Scottish philosophy), Etchegaray and Malherbe, 2007. On Royer-Collard, Cousin and Théodore Jouffroy, see: Chignola, 2011. For a global presentation of Royer-Collard, see: Doria, 2018, 119-156 for his philosophical thinking.

<sup>12</sup> The expression is used on numerous occasions by both the Cousin clan and his adversaries. On the different possible meanings of the term “école” and what is meant by “Penser par école”, see Orain, P. and Marcel, J.-C., ed., 2018.

<sup>13</sup> On the complexity of Degérando, see: Chappey, Christen and Moullier, 2014; on his relationship to

latter text is entirely devoted to the history of modern philosophy<sup>14</sup>, and particularly the 18th century. It is interesting in that it shows how a philosopher—often presented as Cousin’s inconsistent righthand man, nevertheless trained in Ideology and nourished by the criticisms of university eclecticism—mobilises a figure of Condillac, which is very close to Saphary’s, to defend a spiritualism which is designated as both French and more inclusive than Cousin’s.

By this means, we hope to convince our readers of the importance of the figure of Condillac, in the laborious shaping of a “French philosophy” that attempts to unite an institutionally disfigured Cartesian legacy with a well-founded empiricist legacy.

## **1. The first Cousin and the first Condillac: method and application**

The *Dissertatio philosophica de methodo sive de analysi, quam ad publicam disceptationem proponit ac doctoris gradum promovendus Victor Cousin, die julii decima nona* (The doctoral thesis in philosophy “on method or analysis”, publicly defended by Victor Cousin, then a student at the Ecole normale, and a graduate of the Faculté des Lettres, on 19th July 1813, from noon to two o'clock–Paris, Imprimerie de Fain, 1813), has never been translated or studied for itself.<sup>15</sup> This might be because this text of some twenty pages is embarrassing. It is, indeed, a very academic, highly standardised exercise presented at a time when the philosophy of Condillac is at the height of its glory and when Cousin is greatly influenced by the teaching of Pierre Laromiguière at the Faculté des Lettres of Paris.<sup>16</sup> We

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empiricism, see: Manzo, 2016; and on his comparatism, see: Lézé, 2019. On the different uses of the figure of Descartes in the Cousin and Degérando historiographies, see: Antoine-Mahut, 2020b.

<sup>14</sup> The complete reference is: *Histoire de la philosophie moderne, à partir de la renaissance des lettres jusqu'à la fin du XVIIIe siècle*. Paris : Ladrangé, 4 vol., 1847.

<sup>15</sup> I thank Jean-Pierre Cotten, a major specialist in this first Cousin, for providing me with the unpublished French translation of this work.

<sup>16</sup> In the second preface to the *Fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Ladrangé, 1833, xxxiii-xxxiv), Cousin designated the day when he first heard Laromiguière, as the day which decided his whole life. For Laromiguière

may thus be surprised by the difference in form and content between this first Cousin and the rhetorician who, at the summit of his later academic glory, attacks every possible form of sensualism, referring to Condillac in particular. In short, nourished on secondary literature focusing on this second Cousin, we might find it difficult to find a meaning for what is unquestionably a eulogy of Condillac:

If Condillac had not been snatched from us at the moment when he planned to write all his works again and to carry into the realm of philosophy that beautiful simplicity which he had shown in renewing, as it were, the elements of arithmetic and algebra, perhaps the vain quarrels and the darkness in which metaphysics is still shrouded today would have vanished, finally driven away and put to flight, by the torch of this new language which he had just forged [...]. Perhaps it will not seem out of place to praise Condillac so briefly, nor, principally in this out of season thesis, a thesis in which there is nothing that has not been drawn and taken from him [...] this man whose name and the name of method can in no way be disjoined.

This eulogy formalises at least three essential modalisations. First, Condillac did not write the work or works which Cousin and his contemporaries need to put an end to the quarrels of metaphysics and enable its progress. Condillac merely endows his successors with “scattered and dispersed [as it were]” materials. So the philosophers of Cousin’s time are left “to gather together all the elements by uniting them in a single body,” or to write that book “to discover new things.” Second, what is worth retaining is not the totality of Condillac’s philosophy but rather his method, which the rest of the thesis specifies as the method of analysis. From this

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taught the philosophy of Locke and Condillac while intelligently modifying them on certain points, with a clarity and grace which, at least in appearance (undoubtedly the decisive point!), made the difficulties disappear, and with a charm and spiritual *bonhomie* which could not fail to persuade. On Cousin, Laromiguière and Maine de Biran, see: Biran, 1817 and Cousin and Biran, 1829.

point of view, Condillac is inscribed in the illustrious lineage of Bacon, Descartes, Malebranche and Locke, but “augmenting” and “amplifying” its discoveries. Third, the as yet unwritten Condillac discourse on the method is specified as a particular (“as it were” in the quoted extract) application of the algebra and geometry of philosophy.

In detail, Cousin’s philosophical reasoning, reconstructed from the materials provided by Condillac, comprises four phases. The first makes “obvious” knowledge the model and basis of all our certain knowledge. The second takes the famous example from the *Traité des Sensations*—the statue—to promote “a method of resolution’ of the whole in its parts followed by a return to unity directed by attention. The third explicitly reduces the operations of this method from four<sup>17</sup> to two, so as to redefine analysis as the “mixing” and “agreement” of the “method of decomposition” and the “synthetic method”. The fourth and final phase defines the true meaning of philosophy as the seeking of how things are engendered, where they come from, or as the “science of relationships and principles”, without examining in depth the link between these two characteristics *per se*. Finally, Cousin emphasises that this ordering will allow philosophers of the present to progress in metaphysics and thus also in morals, similar to how they progressed in the sciences of nature.

This *Dissertatio philosophica*... thus appears to be a curious mixture. On the one hand, it is inscribed in the perfect continuity of the explicit project of the Ideologists, who considered metaphysics as a science of the methods to be applied to physics, the sciences of morals and the arts, to perfect instruction, and who reasserted the value of the senses (the term retains its general meaning here) as the principle of knowledge. At this same time, this project is also promoted by Joseph-Marie Degérando. However, on the other hand, this text bears the clear

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<sup>17</sup> There were, of course, already four in the work of Descartes (evidence, analysis, synthesise and enumeration). But Cousin also found them in his present, and in the work of his interlocutors as influential as Cabanis. See, in particular, the four types of analysis (description, composition and decomposition, historical, and deductive) contained in the *Coup d’œil sur les révolutions et sur les réformes de la médecine*, 1804. On the method of analysis of the Ideologists, see: Clauzade, 1998.



and specific mark of the man who, in his teaching of Condillac, would rehabilitate attention, reduce the rules of the analytical method to two, and claim to commence with research into the origin of ideas rather than their nature: Pierre Laromiguière.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the *Dissertatio philosophica...* illustrates the ambiguity of those alternatively designated as the old Ideologists or the new spiritualists, and the particular aptitude of Condillac's philosophy to reconcile these paradoxes.

The “climacteric years”<sup>19</sup> which follow, in which Cousin becomes professor and fills the Sorbonne amphitheatres, witness the first inflexions. These are manifested in an exemplary fashion in the 1820 *cours de Philosophie morale*, which was never published as such by Cousin, but, as recently demonstrated by Renzo Ragghianti and Patrice Vermeren (2019, Introduction), promoted a new philosophy; one that drew on another new work on the figure of Condillac.

The *cours* of 1820: psychological method and experimental philosophy

The 1820 *cours* reuses and accentuates two essential characteristics of the *Dissertatio philosophica...* namely: the definition of philosophy “in its entirety” by its method and “the severity with which it follows it” (127),<sup>20</sup> on the one hand; and the decisive importance of the “practical” or “applied” dimension of this same philosophy, that is, the passage from the “abstract” to the “concrete”, “external things” or “real”<sup>21</sup>, on the other hand.

However, Cousin significantly specifies these characteristics. Reason is identified as the active principle of these “mixed [forms] which are foreign to it”, in which it recognises itself but as if “disfigured” (241), and which manifests philosophy in the practical state. Observation becomes the method it implements, an observation which defines the spirit of

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<sup>18</sup> See the contribution by Pierre Brouillet in this volume.

<sup>19</sup> To use the expression of Paul Dubois, 1904, 39.

<sup>20</sup> See also p. 133 and p. 150.

<sup>21</sup> See, especially, p. 186. In this *cours*, Cousin envisages, in particular, the field of natural, civil and political law.

modern philosophy. The historiography of modernity will thus be ruled by the question of knowing which philosopher has best used this method (90-91).

This is where we return to Condillac. In mid 18th century France, marked by what Cousin now designates as “sensualism”, the man whose metaphysics is situated in the *Traité des sensations* becomes the origin of the morals and politics of self-esteem and interest later developed by Helvetius, Saint Lambert and the publicists. Condillac becomes the philosopher lacking a complete theory of the human mind because he finally absorbed free activity into sensitivity (99, 110 and 111). He missed “man in his entirety”, understood as a “free force, limited and modified by sensitivity and reason”, or as consciousness and “coaction of these three characterization of Condillac allows two new specifications of the type of observation and experimental philosophy envisaged by Cousin.<sup>22</sup> Observation is defined as both “all internal” or psychological (127) and complex and obscure, because the subject observed is also the observing subject. Returning to the origin or principle by the psychological method is defined as “more philosophical” (113) when it starts out from the present or actual rather than simply postulating this origin. And this “adjourning”<sup>23</sup>, but not the negation, of the knowledge of what rises above the limits of the actual, defines the truly experimental nature of the philosophy proposed, which is unlike a philosophy that would be, and only can be, transcendental (149-150).

Thus, in the 1820 *cours*, Cousin proposes nothing less than a *tour de force*. This consists in mobilising the analytical method of decomposition and composition promoted by Condillac and differently applied by his heirs to accede, at the price of a temporary adjourning, to ontological knowledge; a form of knowledge which Condillac defined most exactly as the renegade metaphysics which was being combatted.

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<sup>22</sup> On this point, see: Antoine-Mahut, 2019a.

<sup>23</sup> On this adjourning of ontology, see: Moreau, 2013.

The outlines of this second Cousin, born out of a close interaction with the Condillac of the *Traité des sensations*, become clear in the *Cours* of 1829 and its different editions.

## **2. The *Cours* of 1829: the second Cousin and the two Condillacs**

Unlike the two previous texts, this *Cours* dealing with 18th century sensualist philosophy was published. Its successive modifications in the subsequent editions consolidate an official doctrine in both the public and prescriptive sense. This is the bold and clear proclamation of “the true method” which has become the experimental method for “healthy psychology” and against “sensualism”.

To this end, Cousin makes explicit the homology between this experimental psychological method and that recognised in physics or natural history. In each of these cases, the effect is observed to deduce the cause, rather than the cause being supposed to deduce the effect. No rigorous psychology can descend hypothetically from the origin of ideas to the ideas themselves; it must always progress from the ideas to their origin (p. 8 and 9). Here, one must be attentive to the difference in formulation compared to the 1820 *cours*. For, here, the terms “cause”, “ideas” and “origin” refer to an ontological dimension. They authorise, both upstream (after the “adjourning”) and downstream (at the very moment of observation), the innatist theory. They attest to the resolute progression of Cousin, *cogito* in tow, towards that same abstract metaphysics which he claimed to surpass when recovering the virtues of a well understood Condillac.

Once more, this tension is particularly manifest in how he deals with Condillac. Cousin distinguishes two periods in Condillac’s work: that of the *Essai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines* and that of the *Traité des sensations*.

For us, in this first period, in which, in a certain way, Condillac merely reproduces Locke, the most interesting point is the distinction Cousin draws between the spirit and the letter of the *Essai*. The more one progresses through the text, the more the distinction between the materials provided by sensations and the power working upon them (reflection) disappears. Yet this essential activity of the mind remains present beneath the surface. Thus the first Condillac provides everything needed to found a healthy and true psychology. However, he already moves dangerously towards the *Traité des sensations*.

The *Traité des systèmes* is the turning point between the two Condillacs. Cousin emphasises how much Descartes is attacked and “openly sacrificed to Locke” (65) in this work; this makes the *Traité des systèmes* into a “manifesto of the school of Locke and pits the philosophy of the 18th century against the philosophy of the 17th century” (67). This intermediate Condillac is designated as abandoning experience and succumbing to abstraction. The Condillaquian principle of “the necessity of observation and experience” can now become “our arm against himself”.

Condillac “is finally himself” (69) in the *Traité des sensations*. He makes abusive use of hypotheses in precisely the sense which he himself denounced in the *Traité des systèmes*. He dreams about a primitive human nature of man, because he does not know how to observe his current nature (73).<sup>24</sup> In short, he “completely ignores the spirit of experimental philosophy” (51). Reflection, with which Locke saved the activity of the soul, and what remained of it in the writing of the first Condillac, is here but one of the numerous transformations (in the sense of effect) of the kind of sensation experienced by this fictitious and abstract man represented by the statue.

Here, Cousin contrasts at length the passivity, fatality and involuntary character of

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<sup>24</sup> On this point, see: Antoine-Mahut, 2021, 276-277. Royer Collard is the source of the attribution to Condillac of a form of idealism, the principle of which was supposedly posited by Descartes.

sensation, on the one hand, with the activity, liberty and voluntary character of ambition, on the other. He emphasises that sensation itself requires an active consciousness from within man. Finally, the previous distinction between the spirit and the letter of Condillac's doctrine, between his "admitted method" and what he really does, is intensified by a particular insistence on the disfigurations of Condillac by those who later claimed his lineage. This time, Cousin no longer refers to the body of the *Traité des sensations*, but to its appendix. For in this marginal text, Condillac recognises the existence of liberty, and, without a shadow of a doubt, he recognises it "sincerely". Nevertheless, his inheritors ignored this text; and a text which is not read, commented, reinvested, applied... is, in effect, a text which does not exist. So this appendix must be counted "for nothing" in the Condillac system. And the sensualists, particularly Helvetius and Saint Lambert, must take responsibility for this.

The 1829 *Cours* thus proposes a complex position on the philosophical and historiographical planes. In it, Cousin recovers activity and liberty from the Condillac of the appendix. However, one can no longer take this Condillac into account because those who presently lay claim to his lineage have disfigured him to the extent of making him unrecognisable. The confrontation of this text to the *Dissertatio philosophica*... and the 1820 *cours* does not allow us to talk of authentic reversals. But it certainly attests to the crucial importance of the identification of the true philosophical lineage between the new French school and Condillac in the first decades of the 19th century.

The examination of the contributions of Saphary and Degérando will allow us to finish by describing two of the most interesting intertextualities on this point.

### ***3. L'École éclectique et l'école française (1844). Saphary, the "true" Condillac and the "true" French school***

*L'École éclectique et l'école française* (1844)<sup>25</sup> opens with a rebuttal in the form of an almost term by term response. In it, Saphary denounces Cousin's "scholarly staging", his invention of a "disfigured sensualism" and an "as fantastic as monstrous creation which exists only in the heads of its false interpreters" (p. VIII). In order to return to the true Descartes and the true Condillac, as well as correct Cousin's "false patronage" (xxiv), one must remember that the criticisms of Condillac by Cousin—spirit of system and a tendency to idealism and abstraction—are precisely those which make Cousin a disciple of Descartes. One should turn against academic eclecticism "the weapons [which it has] used against French philosophy!" (38-39).

The main effect of this reversal consists in the promotion of Laromiguière against Cousin to the rank of master of this French school. For he attributes to Laromiguière the honour of having attacked Condillac's system as being elaborated on a false basis—sensation, the passive principle of his nature—and having replaced it with an active principle—attention—to found a "philosophy of the sentiment" or "the philosophy of the heart". Laromiguière is the true contemporary disciple of the "French metaphysician", of the new and "true philosophy", the "totally practical" philosophy, articulating the rights of reason and the obligations of faith, the liberties of the country and the religion of our fathers (37, 45-46).

To "show both the *intimate thinking* of Condillac and the *secret thinking* of those who, with scholarly traps, have rendered necessary the rehabilitation of his memory", Saphary proposes a long "justification" (47-61, my emphasis). In several instances, he addresses, without naming him, that "serious philosopher" or "noble thinker" who all recognise as Cousin. As for the "gradually animated and illuminated" statue of the *Traité des sensations*, which we found as a conducting thread from the *Dissertatio philosophica...* to the 1829 *Cours*, Saphary plays the "personal reason" of Condillac against Cousin's impersonal reason. If "the most delicate

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<sup>25</sup> The work opens with the following dedication: "To the memory of Laromiguière, my illustrious master and my true friend".

reader can recognise himself and say: *De te fabula narratur*”—whereas the critic, upending the problem, makes a statue of the man (56)—this is because, in the work of Condillac, sentiment not caricatured sensation constitutes the true source of knowledge.

The second part of the volume is thus free to return to the content of the “true French philosophy”, the “daughter of Locke, richly endowed by Condillac”, “rectified”, “enriched” and “perfected” by Laromiguière (72-74). Saphary compares “these two metaphysicians” on the decisive issues of the method and the origin of our ideas, so as to show what decisive corrections Laromiguière has made to the philosophy of Condillac in order to perfect it.

First, Laromiguière has shown that Condillac moved away from the method which he had taught. For Condillac’s analysis is only applied to the observations and not the reasoning. Consequently, Laromiguière has distinguished the *analysis of reasoning*, dealing with a single object, from *descriptive analysis*, dealing with the relationship between objects. Second, Condillac maintained a confusion between the sensation and the act of the mind characterising thought, by talking of the *generation* or *transformation* of the one by the other. Laromiguière has shown that there is but a relationship of succession between the two (93-94). Third, Laromiguière has explained that, in their principle, all the human soul’s manners of acting are but attention. His greatest philosophical achievement is thus having returned to the soul its true activity, and having replaced sensitivity by activity, designating the former as the ability to sense rather than as a faculty. Finally, between sensation and the interpretation of the acts of our peers, Laromiguière has placed the sentiment of our faculties and the moral sentiment. In so doing he connects with the French tradition arising out of Vauvenargues and Rousseau, Malebranche and Fenelon.

However, the most important point is how the issue of the origin of ideas is dealt with. Saphary returns to the objection of Cousin to Condillac and Laromiguière (as well as the publicists), according to which one cannot rule on the origin and the generation of ideas

before establishing a “severe classification” of them (156). Saphary provides two types of answer, of different nature, to this objection. On the one hand, one may justify the method without actually justifying all its mistaken applications (169). But, on the other hand and above all (for on the first point, Cousin would not have disagreed), it is difficult to see how civil justice could be founded without recognising a justice anterior to civil societies: “one must therefore study man in man, before considering him in the citizen, subject or magistrate”. The rational hypothesis of the state of nature and of a social pact is the rational origin of society. To found the new philosophy, it is thus necessary to return to the origin of ideas (173). A position which, this time, the later Cousin was not far from adopting.

Finally, Laromiguière has shown the decisive importance of liberty, understood as “power to want or not want after deliberation” (189). Thus, with him, metaphysics has become an analysis of sentiment, understanding and liberty. Something which is very different to its Cousinian identification with psychology, which does not include the entire intellectual and moral life of man.

What is at stake in this struggle, mobilising large doses of the constructed figure of Condillac, is nothing less than the definition of the new metaphysics which is to command true morals and found a truly free State.

#### **4. The Rapport sur le concours sur la philosophie de Laromiguière and the *Histoire comparée* (1847) by Degérando: Descartes and Condillac reconciled.**

The Laromiguière philosophy competition report closes with the formulation of the wish that:

the competitors show themselves more just in favour of the philosophers of



the French school whose traces Laromiguière followed, by rectifying their errors; that they better note the misunderstandings to which the unfortunate use Condillac made of sensation gave rise; that they reconstitute their true character to the doctrines of the French school worthy of this name, by separating it from the grave deviations of the sectarians who usurped its language (250).

However, before the competition is reopened, the report's author, Degérando, dies and he is replaced by Joseph Droz (1773-1850). In the new report (251-252), Droz, in his turn, also reminds us of the two essential reforms of Condillac's philosophy driven by Laromiguière: adding to sensation other sources of knowledge so as to found morals not solely dictated by interest; and opposing the passivity of sensation with the activity of attention so as to return to the bases of human dignity based on liberty. He underlines that it is above all this second point which leaves a "profound trace" upon those who, according to him, have held the "sceptre of philosophy".

The posthumous edition of the *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, published by Degérando's son in 1847 (particularly chapters XIX and XX), returns to the criteria for the identification of this new French eclectic philosophy, in the light of these debates. And here, once again, the figure of Condillac plays an essential role.

In a very Cartesian way, Degérando starts by reminding us that the "value of the word philosophy" derives from its applications, or resides in the concern to cultivate the "useful truths" (234). But not all applications are of equal worth. On the philosophical plane, the only admissible ones are those rooted<sup>26</sup> in the science of prime truths, the study of man and his faculties, the art of methods and what teaches how to live well. The other applications, which

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<sup>26</sup> This is the sense of the image of the tree of philosophy proposed by Descartes in the Letter-preface to the *Principes de la philosophie*, in the French edition of 1647.

indeed proliferated in the 18th century, pertain to “a colour of opinion”, a “personal conviction”, “a certain turn of mind” (302) or even the passions (238). This produces an immediate effect: it enables Cartesianism to be found in that very century which until then had been said to have abandoned it. The continuity between 17th and 18th centuries is thus re-established through the highlighting of these original “transplantations” of this Cartesian philosophy, in the theory of Beauty by the Jesuit father, Yves-Marie André, or in jurisprudence by Henri François d'Aguesseau. In the 18th century, Degérando rehabilitates a Cartesianism which one has every right to qualify as empirical or, at the very least, as an exemplar of this “philosophy of experience” which he intends to promote.

The second part of his argumentation more specifically concerns Condillac. The intent is to show that if the true French philosophical school combines Locke and Descartes, nobody achieved this combination better than Condillac. Degérando accentuates the extent of the Condillaquian disfiguration regarding Locke, in particular for “the very ones who re-established the true doctrine of Locke and have persevered in admitting the inexact idea which was given credit using that of Condillac” (318). He shows that this disfiguration comes from the “imagination” of a new term, “*sensualism*” (239 and 316, in italics in the text), as if Condillac’s philosophy attributed the empire of man to the senses (317), and as if Condillac was confused with Helvetius, d’Alembert and Diderot. Then he refers to Laromiguière as the person who worked at rectifying this image. In short, he uses certain arguments from Cousin and their reversal by Saphary. Attempting to circumscribe, in the present, the kind of philosophy which France needs involves, first, correcting certain “vices of expression” with which, Condillac, as it were, made a rod for his own back, as exemplified by his use of sensation for sentiment (323); and second restoring to its place “the effort of the internal activity of the soul” (318).

In a final stage, this enables him to specify the difference between mere syncretism and

true eclecticism<sup>27</sup>. The challenge is to found “another metaphysics”, that is, a metaphysics distinct from both that of the “sensualists”—the abstract metaphysics so justly criticised by Condillac—and that which consists in juxtaposing them.

One final time, Degérando returns to Condillac. The initial contradiction lies in Condillac wishing, like Bacon and Locke, to provide observation and experience as guides to philosophy, and, like Descartes, to only conceive truth and method according to the type of purely speculative notions. This is why these two doctrines are not truly associated in his; but rather juxtaposed in it to incessantly fight each other. In this sense, we are dealing with a syncretism rather than a true eclecticism. And this is what is commonly designated as the “paradoxes” of Condillac and explains, without justifying it, how it has been possible to alternately make him a materialist and an idealist. As for the true eclecticism, it should define a “true” or “healthy” metaphysics, that is, an “experimental metaphysics”. Degérando reinvests Turgot’s example (341-346), which attempts to embrace the primal philosophy not by dealing with ontology, but by dealing with the *existence of the “I”* (345-346). But this is Cousin as refracted and reconfigured in Saphary’s criticisms.

## Conclusion

In the philosophically laborious period in France that is the first part of the 19th century, the figure of Condillac plays a central role in the founding of a new metaphysics, which must distinguish itself from both that of the adversaries of Condillac and that of a Condillac often disfigured, even by his most zealous inheritors.

The paradoxical dimension of Condillac’s philosophy, reinvested with different accents, at different moments by the different actors of this period, is thus found in the empirical nature

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<sup>27</sup> On the different meanings of this term and its criticisms in the 19th century, see: Antoine-Mahut, (forthcoming).

and the eminently practical vocation of this metaphysics, which must enable the founding of a new psychology, other morals and other politics. Yet this curious alliance of metaphysics and empiricism can only appear paradoxical to a mind convinced of the opposition between a metaphysics understood as *a priori* or pure (and, generally, Descartes is the figure who represents this type of metaphysics) and no metaphysics at all, or the rejection of any metaphysics.

The shedding of light on the Cousin-Saphary-Degérando intertextuality thus reveals two essential effects of the laborious shaping of this metaphysics. On the one hand, the Descartes-Condillac-Cousin lineage was unquestionably considered as the origin of a national philosophy, characterised by its “spirit of method and analysis”, for which “the sharpness, precision, clarity and perfect liaison are a need”, and which, consequently, can adequately analyse the facts of consciousness. On the other side of the Rhine, it was even designated as “the French spirit *par excellence*”<sup>28</sup>. Yet, on the other hand, it was eminently contested in France, even within the spiritualist camp, because it masked a return to an unwanted abstract metaphysics, and because this exclusivity was manifested in abusive institutional power. From Saphary who wished “that, in philosophy as in geometry, there would be neither French, nor Scottish, nor German” (17, note 1); to Degérando who turned his focus from the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques to a place of international exchange, the Berlin Academy; from the starting point of Condillac, everything converges towards the rethinking of a French *philosophy* which would not be *French*, in the sense of its dominant institutional incarnation and which would shatter the philosophical dualisms and antagonisms structuring the official historiography of modernity.

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<sup>28</sup> To use the expression of J. Willm, in his “Essai sur la nationalité des philosophes”, provided as an introduction to his translation of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Von Schelling's *Sur la philosophie de M. Cousin* in 1835, (our emphasis). Willm also qualifies the collaboration between Schelling and Cousin as that of the “successor to Kant and Fichte” and the “successor to Descartes and Condillac”. For the preceding analyses, see, in particular, p. 37. On the analysis by Willm of this concept of nationality, see: Bernard-Granger, (forthcoming).

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