

Roger Ariew's new book, *Descartes and the First Cartesians* – hereafter *DFC* –, will not be a methodological surprise for those who already read his previous opus, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics*,¹ as well as its expanded version, *Descartes among the Scholastics*² – hereafter, I will refer only to the second of these books and call it *DAS*. Right at the beginning of *DAS*, Ariew justified the title of this book in the following way: “A philosophical system cannot be studied adequately apart from the intellectual context in which it is situated. Philosophers do not usually utter propositions in a vacuum, but accept, modify or reject doctrines whose meaning and significance are given in a particular culture. Thus Cartesian philosophy should be regarded ... as a reaction against, as well as an indebtedness to, the scholastic philosophy that still dominated the intellectual climate....” (*DAS*, p. 1). Moreover, it is not sufficient for the historian to compare Descartes' doctrines with the Aristotelian doctrines; rather, she should “grasp the reasons behind the various opinions” and “beyond that ... understand the intellectual milieu in which these reasons played a role” (*ibid.*) In *DFC*, Ariew expresses again the same methodological commitment: “we should not approach Descartes as a solitary, virtually autistic thinker, but as a philosopher who constructs a dialogue with his contemporaries, so as to engage them and various elements of his society in his philosophical enterprise” (*DFC*, p. ix).

To approach Descartes' contemporaries not only in as much as they could have been intellectual sources of his thought, but as his peers and colleagues with whom it was not only possible, but also inevitable, that he engaged intellectual discussions has wide consequences. *Minores* – those “mostly unknown, bizarre-sounding scholastics and Cartesians” (*DFC*, p. vi) – are to be studied for their own sake. The historian has to read the heavy repetitive volumes that they wrote, or rather, reading these books, she learns to see differences where she previously saw only boring repetitions of one and the same doctrine. Let us remind that Ariew was one of the firsts to insist on the differences

¹ Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999.

² Roger Ariew, *Descartes Among the Scholastics*, Leiden: Brill Academic, 2011.

between Scotism and Thomism during the early modern period, and *DFC* presents new arguments to support the thesis that, at the beginning of the 17th century, French, or at least Parisian, scholastics were more Scotist than we used to think since Étienne Gilson first published his *Index scolastico-cartésien* in 1913 (*DAS*, p. 45; *DFC*, p. 4–13, p. 15–17).

But *DFC* is not only revisiting interesting stuff, it is also presenting new materials and presenting these new materials in a new way. To put it bluntly, it seems to me that there are at least two novelties in *DFC*. First, it takes into account not only scholastics, but as the very title of the book indicates, “First Cartesians,” Ariew’s heroes being here Jacques Du Roure, Antoine Le Grand, and Pierre-Sylvain Régis. At this point however, one might object that there were other Cartesians around in the second half of the 17th century – without taking into account luminaries like Spinoza, Huygens or Leibniz, who were too singular to be merely categorized as Cartesians, and admitting that “Cartesian” was in this period an actor’s category, Géraud de Cordemoy, Jacques Rohault, Nicolas Poisson, Louis de la Forge, Jean-Baptiste Denis or Bernard Lamy were obviously identified as Cartesians both by Cartesians themselves and by their scholastic enemies. Ariew discusses them occasionally. Still, although they were among the first Cartesians from a chronological point of view, they are not at the center of Ariew’s story in the same way as the triumvirate that Jacques Du Roure, Antoine Le Grand, and Pierre-Sylvain Régis compose.

And this is because of the second novelty of *DFC*, which amounts to grant great importance to the idea that philosophy should be presented in textbooks, that is, as *summae quadripartitae*. Because of this idea, Ariew applies the category “First Cartesians” not so much to the Cartesians who were the first to follow Descartes’ doctrine from a chronological point of view, than to those who were the first to carry out Descartes’ unfinished project of writing a textbook in Latin.³ As it is well known, by the end of 1640, Descartes formulated the project of presenting his philosophy in such a way that it could be taught. Before renouncing this project, Descartes had the time of formulating it in slightly different ways.⁴ But he always insisted that, in order to be

³ Martine Pécharman introduced the opposition between two meanings of « first » in the title *Descartes and The First Cartesians* during her presentation of Roger’s book at Séminaire Descartes, January 2016.

⁴ See Descartes’ letters to Mersenne, 11 November 1640, AT III, p. 233; To Mersenne, [December 1640], AT III p. 259; To Mersenne, 31 December 1640, AT III, p. 276; To Huygens, 21 January 1642, AT III, p. 782.

taught, his philosophy should be shortened and presented in order⁵; and, even if he considered once the possibility of calling his textbook *summa philosophiae*, there is no evidence that he ever wanted to extend it farther than metaphysics and physics: on the contrary, he presents it as a Latinized version of *Le monde*.⁶ But, Ariew argues, the book that resulted from this project – *Principia philosophiae* – was inadequate for teaching philosophy: because it did not include logic and ethics, it was incomplete when compared to regular scholastic textbooks. Hence, the task of the “First Cartesians,” would have been to write the Cartesian textbook that Descartes had not written and to write it in a form acceptable for their scholastic contemporaries, that is, to write a *summa quadripartita* (*DFC*, p. ix-xi, *passim*). Desmond Clarke once captured the tendency of Cartesians to behave as sectarians who follow an intellectual Master rather than the truth by speaking of “Scholastic Cartesianism.”⁷ According to Ariew, Cartesians are not scholastic because of their obedience to Descartes; on the contrary they would have introduced some variations and innovations with respect to Descartes’ doctrine (*DFC*, p. 206–209, *passim*). But they are scholastics because they wrote books that belong to the genre of *summa quadripartita*.

Summa quadripartita as a genre indeed shapes the construction of *DFC*. *DAS* was a collection of papers that were all written with similar methodological commitments, but that were thematically independent one from the other. On the contrary, *DFC* is quite systematically constructed as a succession of different *summae quadripartitae*. After a first introducing chapter that contrasts Thomism and Scotism, asks the question of what was taught by the different Orders in France, and presents Descartes’ changing attitudes to the Jesuits, the Oratorians and the Doctrinaires, each of the three following

⁵ “... écrire par ordre tout un Cours de ma Philosophie” (AT III, p. 233) “... faire un Abregé, où je mettray tout le cours par ordre” (AT III, p. 259); “... écrire ma Philosophie en tel ordre qu’elle puisse estre aisément enseignée” (AT III, p. 276).

⁶ “Mon Monde se fera bientost voir au monde, & je croy que ce seroit des à present, sinon que je veux auparavant luy faire aprendre à parler latin; & je je le feray nommer summa Philosophiae, affin qu’il s’introduyse plus aysement en la conversation des gens de l’escole...” (AT III, p. 782).

⁷ Desmond M. Clarke, *Occult Powers and Hypotheses. Cartesian Natural Philosophy under Louis XIV*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 222–244. This criticism of Cartesians was a topos by the end of 17th century. See the notes that Baillet’s *Vie de Monsieur Descartes* inspired to Huygens and his letters to Meier, 26 March 1691 and June 1691, in *Œuvres complètes de Christian Huygens*, ed. Société Hollandaise des Sciences, 22 vols, La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1888–1950, X, p. 54, p. 104, p. 404–405. See also Leibniz to Huygens, 20 February 1691, in *id.*, p. 52 ; to Pelisson, 18 March 1692, in *Leibniz. Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe, Preussische*, ed. (Deutsche) Akademie der Wissenschaften, Darmstadt (Leipzig, Berlin), 1923, I–7, p. 292; Leibniz to Claude Nicaise, *Journal des scavants*, 13 April 1693, p. 163–164.

chapters is devoted to the different doctrines that appeared in different texts: the early seventeenth century French Aristotelian textbooks in the second chapter, Descartes' tree in the third chapter, and, finally, Cartesian systems in the fourth chapter.⁸ Each of these three chapters being divided according to the four canonical parts of *summae quadripartitae* — logic, metaphysics, physics and ethics, albeit obviously with a different order, whether one is a scholastic or a Cartesian (*DFC*, p. xiv, p. xix, n. 19) —, *DFC* can be read either doctrine after doctrine, or rather, domain by domain.

Regardless of the manner in which one chooses to read it, it is quite precious to can count on a tool that helps us to compare systematically Descartes, the scholastics and the Cartesians. One of the many stimulating aspects of *DFC* has nothing to do with systematicity though: it is that, at almost every page, we get a glimpse at small figures previously unmentioned – so that, instead of contemplating from afar only a few unapproachable peaks that would tower above a flat desert, we stroll about in a region full of higher and lower hills, deeper and larger valleys. To say it in less poetical terms, *DFC* includes a lot of information about the circulation of Descartes's texts and about the construction of Descartes' doctrine as a canonical doctrine, but also about less known philosophers, about the doctrines that they hold, about the editions of the books that they published. One of the interesting points that Ariew makes concerning logic is that, by the end of the century, Cartesians and Scholastics converged to write quadripartite logic based on conception, judgment, consequence and method (*DFC*, p. 165). Being not myself a metaphysician by nature, I learned a lot about univocity and equivocity (*DFC*, p. 51, p. 57, p. 100–102, p. 117–120, p. 177–179) and about the different early modern theories of distinctions (*DFC*, p. 101–102, p. 113–122, p. 165–166, p. 177–178). Many fascinating points would be worth pursuing. Before coming to broader issues, I would like to pick up and discuss two minor claims, the one concerning physics, the other concerning ethics.

In the section devoted to Descartes' physics, Ariew rightly argues this physics has little to do with the discourses about the mathematization of the world-picture that were fashionable in Alexandre Koyré's and Edwin Arthur's Burt times (*DFC*, p. 131–137,

⁸ “Descartes' tree” is a strange expression here: Ariew argues that it was not Descartes' exclusive property; contrary to Descartes' own presentation (AT IX-2, p. 14), for the sake of symmetry with the preceding chapter and with the following, he includes logic in this tree, but excludes from it medicine and mechanics (*DFC*, p. 106–107).

187–190). However, I would like to qualify one of the three claims defended in the section “Hypotheses and Moral Certainty” of the third chapter. Here are these claims: “(1) Descartes frequently used the concept [of moral certainty] before his formal definition if it in the Principles.... (2) Descartes borrowed the concept from the Schoolmen.... And (3) against most commentators, despite what could be inferred from Descartes’ examples of code-breaking and of knowing where Rome is, moral certainty should not be equated with high probability” (DFC, p. 144). I completely agree with the two first claims, but I would like to qualify the third one. If I understood well, Ariew’s main argument in favor of this claim is not conceptual, but historical. Conceptually, one could believe that the examples brought out by Descartes in *Principia philosophiae* IV 205 -- believing that a code was broken and that there is a city called Roma in Italy – admit of degrees of certainty, the probability that such beliefs are true being larger if a longer code was broken or if we dispose of more numerous testimonies that Roma is an Italian city. But, says Ariew, moral certainty does not admit of degrees: it would have been, for Descartes as for the Scholastics, an absolute entity, since certainty and probability were separated as demonstrative science and probable opinion. It is true that the distinction between certitude and probability was such a strong distinction that Descartes and the Cartesians never felt free to admit that they were advancing only probable hypotheses.⁹ However, as it has been established by Sven K. Knebel, in the context of post-Tridentine theology, Jesuits from the early 17th century proposed a distinction between three types of possible, which was quickly applied to other notions, such as causality, freedom, indifference, evidence and certainty.¹⁰ The 13th century had established a distinction between, on the one hand, the *possibile physice*, physical power, and, on the other, the *possibile metaphysice, logice* or *mathematice*, defined by the conceivability or at least the non-contradiction of the terms of the proposition at stake. A second distinction was added to this one in the early 17th century, the distinction between *possibile physice* and *possibile morale*, the first one being the power which a

⁹ This is a leading fad in the first book written in English about the natural philosophy of French Cartesians, Desmond M. Clarke, *Occult Powers and Hypotheses. Cartesian Natural Philosophy under Louis XIV*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, see in particular p. 183–200, 229–232, 243–244.

¹⁰ Sven K. Knebel, *Wille, Würfel und Wahrscheinlichkeit Wille, Würfel und Wahrscheinlichkeit. Das System der moralischen Notwendigkeit in der Jesuitenscholastik 1500-1700*, Hambourg: F. Meiner, 2000. See also *id.*, « The Renaissance of Statistical Modalities in Early Modern Scholasticism », *The Medieval Heritage in Early Modern Metaphysics and Modal Theory, 1400-1700*, R. L. Friedman and L. O. Nielsen eds., Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003, p. 231-251.

being has in general to do or not to do something, the second one being that power in as far as it can be associated with extrinsic circumstances that favor its actualization or, on the contrary, hinder it, in other words, that power in as far as it is sometimes actualized. Where it becomes interesting for us is that, insofar as the moral possibility is sometimes actualized, but sometimes not, it is capable of some quantification, the analogy with a dice game being in these Jesuit texts a pregnant analogy to illustrate the difference between what is physically possible (all the possible outcomes) and what is morally possible (the outcome that finally obtained when the dices were rolled). As such, this distinction would demonstrate the reestablishment of a statistical conception of modalities, which would constitute the conceptual womb in which the theory of probabilities developed.¹¹ To say it a word, Knebel established that the distinction between moral certainty and physical certainty was formed in a context where the analogy with dice games implied a certain quantification. In this sense, Ariew's claim that, historically, moral certainty admits no degree and should not be equated with a high probability should be qualified.

Ariew shows quite convincingly the role that Claude Clerselier's edition of Descartes' letters played in the elaboration of a Cartesian ethics (*DFC*, p. 153–156). But I would like to discuss the claim that “the Cartesians created a Neo-Stoic ethics” (*DFC*, p. 206–207, p. 209). Descartes himself entertained subtle relations to stoic ethics, which indeed underwent a striking revival in the 17th century (*DFC*, p. 150–151).¹² It has been noted long ago that the second maxim of *Discourse on Method* has a stoic allure and that Descartes recommended Élisabeth to read Seneca's *De vita beata*.¹³ But we also know that, at the same time, Descartes criticizes the stoics because “they do not adequately explain how to recognize a virtue, and often what they call by this fine name is nothing but a case of callousness, or vanity, or desperation, or parricide”.¹⁴ If Descartes is

¹¹ Sven K. Knebel, *Wille, Würfel und Wahrscheinlichkeit*, p. 148-156. If I may refer to my own work, *L'Essai de logique de Mariotte. Archéologie des idées d'un savant ordinaire*, Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2011, p. 95–98, analyses how Mariotte adapted the distinction between three kinds of possible to physics.

¹² See also Jacqueline Lagrée, *Juste Lipse et la restauration du stoïcisme: Étude et traduction des traités stoïciens De la constance, Manuel de philosophie stoïcienne, Physique des stoïciens*, Paris: Vrin, 1994; *Id.*, *Le néostoïcisme. Une philosophie par gros temps*, Paris: Vrin, 2010.

¹³ Descartes to Élisabeth, 21 July, 4 August, 18 August 1645, AT IV, p. 253, p. 263–268, p. 277; *Discours de la méthode*, AT VI, p. 129. See the references and comments given by Étienne Gilson in his edition of *Discours de la méthode*, Paris: Vrin, 1925.

¹⁴ *Discours de la méthode*, AT VI, p. 129.

always debatable, it is Le Grand that I would like to discuss more closely. Before his conversion to Cartesianism, he wrote two ethics books in French, *Le Sage des Stoïques* and *L'Épicure spirituel*.¹⁵ The first and most popular of these books, *Le Sage des Stoïques*, defended the theses that wise men can live without passions, that passions are not natural to human beings and that they do not help them to develop their virtues. After his conversion to Cartesianism however, Le Grand changed his mind on passions and he explicitly distanced himself from his former book: "I confess my self formerly to have pleaded their Cause [that is, the cause of the Stoics] in my Discourse entitled, *L'Homme sans Passions*, and not only to have maintained SENECA's Opinion, but also according to my slender Ability, endeavour'd to advance and exalt it. But forasmuch as I now follow the sentiments of DES CARTES, and my business is not to explain the *Opinions* of others, but only to lay open *Truth*, no understanding man will reproach me of Lightness or Inconstancy, for going about to unfold the usefulness of the *Passions*, and leaving the *Stoicks*, consider *Man*, not as translated amongst the *Glorified Saints* in *Heaven*, but as placed amongst his *Mortal Brethren* here on *Earth*."¹⁶ My point is obvious: if Le Grand thought that his former stoic beliefs and his more recent Cartesian beliefs on passions were not compatible, can we really call his doctrine "neo-stoic"?

I may have qualifications to make and questions to ask, but they are obviously dependent of the many things that Ariew learnt me to see and understand. Now, in the following, I would like to put *DFC*, or at least its last chapter on Cartesians, in a somewhat broader perspective. It can not be denied that there were some Cartesians who wrote books organized as *summae quadripartitae* and that some of these books were intended for teaching. One should be grateful to Ariew for having explored in such details these books, as well as other books written by Cartesians. However, it seems to me that Ariew's scholastic perspective leads him to entangle teaching Cartesianism and writing *summae*, writing *summae* and writing systems. In my discussion, I would like to disentangle these different elements and ask the two following questions: First, what did presenting philosophy as a system imply in the second half of the 17th century? Second, what did teaching philosophy mean for Descartes and his followers?

¹⁵ *Le Sage des Stoïques, ou l'homme sans passions, selon les sentiments de Sénèque*, The Hague: Samuel Broune and Jean L'Escluse, 1662; *L'Épicure spirituel, ou, L'empire de la volupté sur les vertus*, Paris: Pierre de La Forge, 1669. There were many republications of these books, some of them with slightly different titles.

¹⁶ Antoine Le Grand, *An Entire Body of Philosophy, The Institution*, London, Blome, Part X, chap. 13, § 1, p. 367-368.

It is to be noted that it is precisely in the second half of the 17th century that our notion of a system was elaborated. The term “system” is attested in French since 1552; however, until the mid-17th century, it referred, as its Latin equivalent “systema,” to the cosmological order of the planets, or, more rarely, in music, to a sequence of intervals.¹⁷ However, during the second half of the 17th century, its use spread and it began to designate any kind of order and disposition. As Bouhours noted in 1675: “Il y a quelques années, que ce mot n’estoit connu en notre langue que des philosophes et des mathématiciens; c’était un mot d’art en quelque sorte, le *système du monde*, le *système de Copernic*. Depuis que M. de la Chambre a fait le *système de l’âme*, on s’est accoutumé à ce mot, & comme il signifie proprement constitution & situation, on s’en est servi dans le figuré, pour exprimer bien des choses.”¹⁸ Furetière, after mentioning the use of “système” in astronomy, notes that it is also used in physics and in medicine: “On appelle aussi en Physique le *système* des sens, du mouvement, de la nourriture, &c., la manière dont on suppose & on conçoit que ces organes sont disposés. Entre les Medecins il y en a qui suivent le *système* des saveurs; l’autre qui suivent le *système* des quatre qualités, d’autre le *système* des acides et des alcalis. Ce Medecin fait un nouveau *système* des fièvres.”¹⁹ Régis himself, in the dictionary that he inserted at the end of the first volume of his *Physique*, has an entry “physics”, where he gives a general definition of a system: “ce qui fait qu’une chose agit d’une certaine manière en vertu de sa composition et des dispositions qui font sa nature,” then he mentions not only the systems of the world, but also, as Furetière, the systems of the senses, of motion, of food.

Interestingly enough though, Régis ended up his entry with a comparison between a hypothesis and a system, which implies that the word “system” does not only

¹⁷ Ulrich Ricken, “Quelques aspects de l’évolution du champ notionnel Ordre-Système au XVII^e siècle,” in *Ordo. Atti del II. Colloquio Internazionale del Lessico Intelletuale Europeo (Roma, 7-9 gennaio 1977)*, M. Fattori and M. Bianchi eds., Roma: Edizioni dell’Ateneo e Bizzarri, 1979, p. 471-487.

¹⁸ Dominique Bouhours, *Remarques nouvelles sur la Langue française*, Paris: Sébastien Mabre-Cramoisy, 1675, p. 57-58. Cureau de la Chambre, *Système de l’Ame*, Paris: Jacques d’Allin, 1664, Préface, justified indeed the title of this book in the following way: “Je n’ai pû trouver de terme qui expliquast bien mon dessein, que le mot de Systeme. Car de luy donner pour titre *Discours de la Nature de l’Ame*, il est esté trop vague.... De luy donner aussi celui des *Actions de l’Ame*, il eust esté trop resseré..... De sorte que apres avoir remarqué que les Astronomes en faisant le Systeme du Monde, qui n’est autre chose que l’ordre & la disposition qu’ils donnent à tous les corps dont le Monde est composé, n’examinent point la nature de ces corps-là, et ne cherchent que leur situation, leur figure, leur grandeur & leurs mouvemens, j’ai creû que je pouvois emprunter d’eux ce terme-là, puisque j’avois les mêmes visées pour le regard de l’Ame.”

¹⁹ Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel*, Paris: A. and R. Leers, 1690, article “système”.

refer to the structure and composition of things, but, also, to propositions that are ordered in such a way that they compose a coherent whole: “L’Hypothèse est un Système plus particulier, et le Système une Hypothèse plus générale, ou, pour mieux dire, le Système n’est qu’un composé de plusieurs Hypothèses.”²⁰ It is however in the *Avertissement* that opens his *Physique* that Régis gives the most precise definition of this new meaning of “système”: “Nous entendons par SYSTÈME non une seule hypothèse, mais un amas de plusieurs hypothèses, dépendantes les unes des autres et tellement liées avec les premières vérités qu’elles en soient comme des suites et des dépendances nécessaires.”²¹ Here, Régis could have taken inspiration from Descartes: there are several passages where Descartes, as a duelist who would challenge his enemy, exclaimed that if this or that proposition is false, then, the whole of his philosophy is false. Though Descartes may have borrowed the image of a tree to Abra de Raconis and transport it from physics to the whole of philosophy, I am not sure that Abra de Raconis stressed the coherence of his propositions in this way.

To sum up, the word “système,” which was used mainly in reference to the disposition of the planets, began to designate the disposition of anything, including, in the case of a Cartesian like Régis, the order and disposition of propositions in a book. Ariew is not concerned with such new meanings. And this, because he does not believe that his heroes formulated systems in the sense of consistent sets of propositions depending on a few basic tenets. With a fully British sense of understatement, Ariew notes that “in his 1654 *Philosophy*, Du Roure tries to follow an order sketched by Descartes, though he does not integrate all the materials completely” (*DFC*, p. 161), that “despite his enthusiasm... Du Roure’s *Morale*, like his *Logique*, gives the impression of something that has not fully come together” (*DFC*, p. 195), or, still, that Régis’ *Système général* “is a very odd work... [which] does not seem very systematic” (*DFC*, p. xii). I could not find any similar quotations concerning Le Grand, but it is not better. Still, the fact that Du Roure, Régis and Le Grand failed to be systematic does not imply that they had not the intention of being systematic, to wit, of proposing a coherent set of hypotheses depending on a few basic tenets. In the case of Régis at least, this was quite important, since he thought –it is immaterial here to know if he was justified to think so

²⁰ Régis, article “système,” in [Dictionnaire inséré à la fin de la *Physique*], *Système de Philosophie*, Paris: Anisson, Posuel, Rigaud, 1690, vol. I, n.p.

²¹ *Avertissement*, *La Physique*, in *id.*, vol. I, p. 275-276.

– that the difference between the arbitrary hypotheses advanced by Claude Perrault in his *Essays de physique* and his own true hypotheses in physics was precisely that his hypotheses were organized in a system. The Avertissement I already quoted goes on in the following way: “Ce qui [that is that all the hypotheses are like necessary consequences of first truths] ne sauroit convenir aux hypotheses purement arbitraires, telles que sont celles de la plus-part des Philosophes modernes. Il n’y a rien de plus commun que les hypotheses arbitraires.... Il n’en est pas de meme des systèmes que des hypotheses arbitraires.... Nous nous servons donc comme les autres, du droit de faire des hypotheses... Mais pour n’en établir que d’exactes, nous ferons ensorte qu’elles dependent absolument des premières verités.”²² Thus, Régis’ *Système général* can be seen as a *summa quadripartita*, but it can also be read as a system of hypotheses that are presented as true because they depend from first truths and form a coherent whole. It consequently seems to me that we could conjecture that the first Cartesians contributed to forge our notion of a system, not so much because they wrote *summae quadripartitae*, than because they tried both to establish the supremacy of their works on works like Perrault’s *Essays* and to answer the criticism of framing hypotheses that was addressed to them.

Studying scholastic textbooks and Cartesian systems should not make us forget that Descartes and his followers raised wide-ranging questions about the teaching of philosophy – namely, where, how, by whom and to whom was philosophy to be taught?

First, let us come back to Descartes himself. As I already recalled, Ariew’s project finds its origins in the letters where, by the end of 1640, Descartes formulated the project of presenting his philosophy in such a way that it could be taught in the Schools, which implied to shorten it, to order it differently, and to put it in Latin. These are important letters to understand the genesis of Descartes’ *Principia philosophiae*. However, these are not the only things that Descartes wrote about how his philosophy could be taught; he seems to have been especially careful to delineate the kind of students whom he was addressing himself to.

On the one hand, he asserted that his writings might be studied virtually by everybody. Thus, in a letter to Vatier, Descartes explained that in *Discours de la méthode*,

²² *Ibid.* The relation between hypothesis and system is discussed in Desmond M. Clarke, *Occult Powers and Hypotheses. Cartesian Natural Philosophy under Louis XIV*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 215–221.

he did not dare to explain in details why our beliefs concerning material beings can be put in doubt, because “these thoughts did not seem to me suitable for inclusion in a book which I wished to be intelligible in part even to women.”²³ On the other hand, he insisted that his readers should not be excessively learned. For example, at the very beginning of *La recherche de la vérité*, he explained that an *honnête homme* “is not required to have read absolutely every book or diligently mastered everything that is taught in the Schools. It would, indeed, be a kind of defect in his education if he had spent too much time in book-learning (*en l’exercice des lettres*)”.²⁴ In other words, Descartes was at the same time encouraging those who may have hesitated to approach his writings because they were uneducated and insisting by those who were well educated that all their learning was not enough. The condition *sine qua non* was in both cases to be ready to spend time, care and attention enough to Descartes’ books. In the Lettre-Préface to *Principes de la philosophie*, he recapitulated indeed: “I should like to assure those who are over-diffident about their powers that there is nothing in my writings which they are not capable of completely understanding provided that they the trouble to examine them. I would, however, also like to warn the others that even the most excellent minds will need a great deal of time and attention in order to look at all the things which I set myself to include”.²⁵

My point is not to play Descartes the *honnête homme* against Descartes the scholastic. Being not a Martin Schoock *rediviva*, neither it is not to pretend that Descartes wanted us to stop reading books. (According to Schoock’s *Admiranda Methodus*, Descartes required from his disciples to forget all the books and the whole tradition of learning in order to submit themselves to Descartes as to their master.²⁶ But, in fact, if Descartes condemned those who spend too much time studying books, he did not condemn for that reading books in general.) But I think that Descartes’ description of his ideal readers may have contributed to make it possible that philosophy reached other publics than the captive audience of boisterous students and that French Cartesians realized this possibility.

²³ Descartes to Vatier, 22 February 1638, AT I, p. 560, transl. CSM III, p. 86.

²⁴ *La recherche de la vérité*, AT X, p. 495, transl. CSM II, p. 400, to be compared with the criticism of those who spent all their time in schools (*Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, AT X, p. 371).

²⁵ Lettre-Préface, *Principes de la philosophie*, AT IX-B, p. 13

²⁶ *La Querelle d’Utrecht*, Théo Verbeek ed., Paris: Les impressions nouvelles, 1988, p. 189, p. 197, *passim*.

Among Cartesians, they were not only professors, but also authors and monitors, as Malebranche would have said, worldly experimentalists like Jacques Rohault, or still, polished conversationalists like Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle.²⁷ Many testimonies indicate that, from the sixties on, the teaching of Cartesian philosophy in France was not confined to the regular teaching institutions that *collèges de plein exercice* and universities were. Rather, Cartesian philosophy was taught in *conférences* or private academies and discussed in salons. The description that the Cartesian Clerselier gives of the audience of Rohault's Mercredis -- "people of all stations and conditions, prelates, abbots, courtesans, doctors, physicians, philosophers, geometers, regents, schoolboys, provincials, foreigners, artisans, in a word, people of all ages, sex and profession"²⁸ -- concords with one of the many reproaches that the Doctrinaire Jean Vincent made to Toulouse's Cartesians, among which the most famous one was Pierre-Sylvain Régis: "they divulge to all kind of human beings, kids, adults, men, women, the doctrine that in the Schools used to be diffused to only a few men."²⁹ The only difference between Clerselier and Vincent is that the first one gives credit to this kind of mixed and motley audience, while the second one would have wished to discredit it completely.

Thus, in the late 17th century France, *honnêtes gens*, among whom some women, learned but not specialized, able to read short philosophy books but not ready to spend time on heavy *summae*, good Christians but not furious theologians, were the ones to be convinced.³⁰ It seems to me that, by focusing on the genre of *summae quadripartitae* and, thus, implicitly, on the official teaching of philosophy that took place in *collèges de plein exercice* and universities, Ariew sometimes misses what he himself called in *DAS* the "intellectual milieu" in which controversies continuously emerged between Cartesians, Scholastics and even other species of philosophers in France by the end of the 17th

²⁷ For a study of the various social figures of the philosopher, see Dinah Ribard, "Philosophe ou écrivain? Problèmes de délimitation entre histoire littéraire et histoire de la philosophie en France, 1650-1850," *Annales HSS*, 2 (2000), p. 355-388.

²⁸ Claude Clerselier, Préface, *Œuvres posthumes de Rohault*, ed. Claude Clerselier, Paris: Guillaume Desprez, 1682, unpaginated. Other sources attest to the fact that a certain number of persons of quality, young students (for example Pierre-Sylvain Régis) and women (for example Madame de Bonneveaux or Madame de Guerderville) attended these lectures

²⁹ Jean Vincent, *Discussio peripatetica in qua philosophiae cartesianae principia ... dilicude examinantur*, Toulouse: Colome and Posuel, 1677, IV, sect. 526, p. 521. Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, *Éloge de M. Régis*, in *Œuvres complètes. Tome VI*. Paris: Fayard, 1994, pp. 143-144, explains that Régis' success was such that the magistrates of the city awarded him a pension.

³⁰ It is one of the things that I tried to show in Sophie Roux, "A French Partition of the Empire of Natural Philosophy (1670–1690)", in *The Mechanisation of Natural Philosophy*, eds. Daniel Garber and Sophie Roux, New York, Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2012, p. 55–98.

century, an “intellectual milieu” which, some fifty years afterwards, was already different from the intellectual milieu in which Descartes himself worked. To say it more precisely, if Ariew’s point is to describe the variety of Cartesian doctrines at the end of the 17th century, especially in as much as they paradoxically appeared in the scholastic form of a *summa*, I can not but repeat that I admire without any reserve the fine-grained description that he succeeded to give of such a doctrinal variety in such a short volume. But, when Ariew implies that the success of Cartesianism in France at this period is to be explained by the Cartesian textbooks that Du Roure, Régis and Le Grand wrote, I can not agree.³¹ If this is the *explanandum*, one should go beyond the genre of the *summa* and admit that other social forces were at stake.

This is all the more true that the books taken by Ariew as typical for this genre, the books from Du Roure, Le Grand and Régis, although the three of them were organized as *summae*, did not have the same audience from a quantitative point of view, did not play the same role in the reception of Descartes’ philosophy in France, and did not contribute in the same way to shape French Cartesianism. I launched a systematic search in *Catalogue collectif de France*: I retrieved less than 20 copies of Le Grand’ *Institutio philosophiae secundum Renati Descartes nova methoda adornata et explicata*,³² 20 copies also of all the books written by Du Roure, about 60 copies of Régis’ *Système général*, 75 copies of Fontenelle’s *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes* and, finally 120 copies of Rohault’s *Traité de physique*. Du Roure seems to have printed his books in his own house, which was no more a good sign in that time that it is now, and I have almost never seen him mentioned in the exchanges of the late 17th century. The only known Cartesian to have exchanged with Du Roure may have been Johann Clauberg. Du Roure met Clauberg in Paris 1648; in a compilation of Cartesian papers published in Amsterdam in 1683 under the title *Cartesiaanse reddden-konst: met het onderscheid tusschen de Cartesiaanse en schoolse philoosophie*, Dutch translations of Clauberg, Dilly and Du Roure are to be found.³³ It is moreover to be noted that at the end of his *Initiatio*

³¹ *DFC*, p. 203–205: “Thus the Cartesians were able to replace the Aristotelians in the Schools. How exactly did they accomplish that? Well, they tried to supplant the Aristotelians by producing Cartesian textbooks that would teach the whole collegiate curriculum... in a Cartesian mode. They attempted a revolution across all aspects of the curriculum, not just in the sciences and metaphysics.”

³² The *Historia naturae, variis experimentis et ratiociniis elucidata, secundum principia stabilita in Institutione philosophiae*, which, before being published as the third part of *An Entire Body of Philosophy*, was much more popular than the *Institutio*.

³³ *DFC*, p. 191, n. 138,

philosophi, Clauberg quotes a letter that Du Roure sent him after reading the *Defensio*; in this letter, Du Roure suggested to dub those who follow Descartes “rational philosophers (*Philosophes Raisonnables*)” because the foundation of Descartes’ philosophy would have been to accept “only what we conceive and what Reason can teach us”.³⁴ Le Grand was more important than Du Roure. Perhaps because his *Institutio philosophiae* had been the object of a quite brief notice in *Journal des scavants* on 20 February 1679, he was known by Pierre Bayle, Antoine Arnauld and the Jesuit Louis Le Valois.³⁵ But what these authors write when they mention him seems to indicate that they had not really read him, except perhaps for Bayle, and that it was simply difficult to know exactly who he was. His audience was not French, but English: he lived in England from the age of 27 to his death; except for the three books that he published in French before his conversion to Cartesianism, he published in Latin or English; he dedicated the different editions of his *Institutio* to the *Academici Cantabrigiensis universitatis*; finally it is to be noted that he engaged controversies only with English philosophers, to wit Samuel Parker and John Sergeant. As for Régis, he was indeed quite important, even if not as important as Rohault. But although he had a long career of public teacher and personal preceptor, contrary to Le Grand who wrote the *Institutio* “*in usum juventutis Academicae*”, he does not seem to have published his *Système général* for students, and in any case he was never studied in *collèges* or universities.

In a word, studying Du Roure, Le Grand and Régis is interesting in itself and challenging as such. But, “beyond that,” understanding the[ir] “intellectual milieu” would imply to differentiate the French context of the forties, in which Descartes himself made his works known, from the French context of the fifties and early sixties, in which Du Roure published some of his books in his own house, those two contexts being different

³⁴ Johann Clauberg, *Initiatio philosophiae cartesianae sive Dubitatio cartesiana, ad metaphysicam certitudinem viam aperiens*, Leiden, A. Wyngaerden, 1655, p. 436-437. I thank Domenico Collacciani for this reference.

³⁵ Pierre Bayle to Jacob Bayle, April or May 1679, at <http://bayle-correspondance.univ-st-etienne.fr/?Lettre-168-Pierre-Bayle-a-Jacob>; in the article “Rorarius,” *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, Rotterdam, 1715, p. 442, Le Grand’s *Dissertatio de carentia sensus & cognitionis in brutis* is mentioned among other Cartesian publications concerning animal machines; *Système abrégé de philosophie*, in *Œuvres diverses de M. Pierre Bayle*, La Haye: La Compagnie des Libraires, 1737, IV, p. 426, alludes to Le Grand’s physics. Antoine Arnauld, *Lettres au Père Malebranche*, in *Œuvres complètes de Messire Antoine Arnauld*, Paris: S. d’Arnay, 1775-1783, XXXIX, p. 150: “Vous pouvez voir ce qu’en dit dans sa philosophie cartésienne le Père Antoine le Grand, que j’apprends être un religieux de Saint François”. Louis Le Valois, *Sentimens de M. Descartes touchant l’essence et les propriétés des corps corps, opposez à la doctrine de l’Eglise, et conforme aux erreurs de Calvin, sur le sujet de l’Eucharistie*, Paris: Étienne Michallet, 1680, I, chap. 4, p. 84.

from the French context of the eighties and nineties, in which Régis published a Cartesian textbook while the *Académie des sciences* was flourishing, and, finally those three contexts from the English context, where, thanks to Recusant families, a Catholic missionary like Le Grand could survive in an overtly anti-Catholic England.

Ariew concludes his introduction with the following words: “Much work remains to be done; as Descartes would have said: “I leave this task to my nephews – and to my nieces too, of course.” I just hope to have provided an initial path into these complex materials.” (*DFC*, p. xix). He may be wrong in these last words: he did much more than “providing an initial path,” he opened many new paths for us all. But he is definitively right when he underlines that much work remains to be done to understand the complex reception of Descartes in France and elsewhere.