

# The Plain Truth

Descartes, Huet, and Skepticism

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## CHAPTER ONE

### PEOPLE

To put it naively, books get written for many kinds of reasons. Sometimes, though certainly not always, motivating reasons are important to an understanding of what gets written. Such is the case with Huet and his *Censura*, driven by a moral failing he perceives at the core of Cartesianism. The issue of this failing especially illuminates the very concerns that make Huet most of interest to us. The aim in this first chapter is to show how Huet could have seen Descartes and his followers in such terms, and how he was led to his criticism of them.

#### 1. *Who was Huet?*

Pierre-Daniel Huet was an erudite. He was also many other things: a cleric, an ecclesiastical administrator, a teacher, an experimental scientist, a poet, a novelist, a literary theorist, a geographer, an historian of commerce and trade, and, of course, a philosopher. But the key to his polymathic personality and interests lies in the sort of learning that can be had only from the study of old books.<sup>1</sup> The knowledge that he prized and famously acquired of ancient history and literature, for example, gotten from reading dead languages, contrasted dramatically to the new kind of knowledge on offer from Descartes and his followers, who viewed what Huet was doing as nothing more than contemptible antiquarianism. When the Cartesians, one in particular, used such language and worse, to describe his interests, clearly identifying him as the target, Huet was led, ultimately, to publish his *Censura*; for he perceived his entire life, and more besides, to be under attack.

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<sup>1</sup> There are several ways to focus Huet in a single picture. Tolmer's picture, for example, indicated by the subtitle of his work, is not a false one: Huet the humanist and natural philosopher. But it is not the one most useful for understanding Huet's attack on Cartesianism in the *Censura*, which in this book of over 700 pages receives a scant half-dozen of discussion. Tolmer, Huet. A more relevant context is expressed by another subtitle: erudition, philosophy, apologetics. Rapetti, Huet. However, no attempt will be made here, except incidentally, to refer Huet's critique of Cartesianism to the larger context of a Christian apologetic that involved Spinoza, Hobbes, and La Peyrère. Cf. *ibid.* p.16. See also Alberti, "Scetticismo apologetico."

Huet was born in the old Norman city of Caen, to a Catholic mother and a father who was a Huguenot convert to Catholicism. For much of his adult life, Huet spent alternating periods in Paris and Normandy. One exception was a year-long trip to Sweden in the company of Samuel Bochart and Isaac Vossius to the court of Queen Christina, not long after the death of Descartes there. Christina wanted him to remain, or after his departure to return, but life there was not to Huet's liking. The trip was nonetheless important to Huet, as a general experience of intellectual tourism that enabled him to make a pilgrimage to Tycho's Uraniburg, for example, and for specific contacts that he made in the Republic of Letters, for example with Menasseh ben Israel in Amsterdam, whose work was the initial inspiration for Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679), written in part to answer Spinoza's *Tractatus theologico-politicus*. Perhaps the most decisive event of this trip, however, was his discovery in Sweden of rare texts of Origen, which led to his translation and commentary on this Church Father (1668), and also to his work on translation (1661).

In 1668, the Duke de Montausier was placed in charge of the seven-year-old Dauphin, and for his education soon engaged Bossuet and Huet as *précepteur* and *sous-précepteur*. One result was the sort of court connections that led to Huet's election in 1674, despite his little-credible expression of resistance, to the French Academy. This was an important event because it was an occasion for his implication in the gathering *querelle*, between the ancients and moderns, the debate between those who thought that everything of value had already been produced in the ancient world and those who thought that nothing had. This event, as will be seen in the next section, is also the earliest to which Huet's disenchantment with Cartesianism can be documented.

After a retreat at La Flèche in the 1650s, Huet sought to join the society of the Jesuits, by whom he was educated and among whom he was to spend his last years, but his confessor dissuaded him from doing so. Although he early on determined to enter orders, Huet rather slid into the priesthood over a long period and was ordained finally at forty-six. Two years after his ordination, Huet was favored with the Abbey of Aunay. There he spent his summers until the completion of the Dauphin's education, and then was there full time for the next decade, which was to be the most enjoyable, and certainly the most productive period of his life. He celebrated the physical beauty of the place in poetry written from the heart. It is not surprising that he was at that time led to produce his work on the location of the Garden of Eden (which Huet may have felt he was in, but which he in fact placed between the Persian Gulf and the junction

of the Tigris and Euphrates). At this point he gave up his idea of producing the complete works of Origen, for want of manuscripts and because he was “deterred by the magnitude of the task. ” But no less determined to the “ornament or defense of the Christian religion,” he therefore conceived that “a new path might be struck out, different from the trodden ones, but certain, plain, and direct, leading to a demonstration of that truth, not less clear and indubitable than the argumentative processes of the geometri- cians, who boast that they do not persuade, but compel conviction.”<sup>2</sup> This new path took the form of a dialogue, the “Questions” named after Aunay (1690). The *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* grew out of this work.

While at Aunay, Huet also recorded astronomical observations and took measurements of air pressure and temperature. Especially earlier in his life, Huet was interested in the sciences. He founded an important academy of sciences in his native Caen in 1662, which was so successful as to come to enjoy financial support from the king, and later he corresponded with Henry Oldenburg about the activities of the Royal Society. He was led to the study of astronomy by Huygens’s work, and did calculations of the comet of 1664 that he claimed were later confirmed by Auzout. He was also interested in anatomy, and (because he himself was very myopic) especially that of the eye, dissecting hundreds of specimens. Chemistry, “the breviary of nature,” was another interest, although Huet’s most notable result in this area was a rather Paracelsan 122-hexameter Latin poem on salt (presented to Montausier in 1670).

Huet’s idyll at Aunay was interrupted when in 1685 he was named bishop of Soissons. Because of troubles between Paris and Rome, however, his consecration was delayed. Eventually, in what was an exchange for posts in their home provinces, the bishop of Avranches proposed a swap of sees, and Huet was consecrated bishop of Avranches in 1692. Estimates of how well Huet served as bishop vary, but they are generally favorable. Ever the erudite, Huet’s administration of his diocese was based on early church models, but temperamentally he was unsuited to a life that kept him so long from his study. He was allowed to abdicate in 1699, and was given the Abbey of Fontenay instead. He then moved to the house of the Jesuits in Paris where he lived out his days.

Despite his bitter polemic with Cartesianism, which was not the only occasion on which his sensibilities were offended, Huet’s attitude was generally one of open conciliation and even of toleration. Like his friend and

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<sup>2</sup> Huet, *Memoirs*, II, pp.156–57.

correspondent Leibniz, another great erudite and polymath, and like Bossuet too, Huet was interested in the re-unification of Christendom. One has the sense that he was more like Leibniz in this domain, seeking common ground between the disagreeing parties, and less like Bossuet, who seems to have seen reconciliation to consist entirely in the other side coming over to his own.

Because of his Protestant friends and forebears, Huet's efforts in reconciling Christianity may have been viewed with some suspicion. The differences between Catholics and Protestants, he thought, can be overcome "if both parties were to proceed sincerely, without bias and self-interest;" instead, "they are so impassioned that they attack no less forcefully their own co-religionists who seek reconciliation." Huet's own treatment of his co-religionists is perhaps revealed by an incident he reports of when he was bishop of Avranches. There the parlement of Rouen sent to him for his opinion a woman bearing the anesthetic, bloodless Devil's mark that indicated her as a witch. "I candidly replied that the credulity and chastity of some simple women had been abused, to whom no criminal or injurious practices were otherwise imputable, and I earnestly entreated them to exercise their clemency towards the ignorant vulgar; which request was liberally granted me."<sup>3</sup>

The life of Huet intersects with that of Montausier at a number of documented points: the appointment to instruct the Dauphin, the treatise on salt, and most importantly, the *Censura*. Not only is the *Censura* dedicated to Montausier, but it was also published, according to Huet, in response to Montausier's insistent arguments for doing so. The dedication smacks of typical seventeenth-century sycophancy, but there may be a great deal more to it that is important to an understanding of the work itself, so something should be said here of that person. Charles de Sainte-Maur, Duc de Montausier (1610–90) was born a Huguenot and spent time at the Protestant academy at Sedan, but abjured sometime before 1645. He was loyal to the king during the Fronde, and retired after a distinguished military career following near-fatal wounds. He was placed in charge of Normandy (1663), which is around when Huet first met him. He was named duke and peer (1664) for his role in papal negotiations. He was noted for his candor, even in dealing with the royal family. One example is of particular relevance. To a dauphin excessively taken with reading dedicatory epistles to him, Montausier pointed out that they praised him for

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<sup>3</sup> *Huetiana*, 46 ff; *Memoirs*, II 359–60.

just the qualities he lacked. The funeral orations upon his death draw attention to his philosophical abilities, so the apparently exaggerated claims in the Foreword to the *Censura* about his role in the genesis of the work might in fact have some basis.

In his autobiography, Huet relates that in his younger years he was an enthusiastic student of Cartesianism. The French version of this work, usually quoted in the literature, has it that he “belonged body and soul to Cartesianism.” What Huet actually said is thereby rather exaggerated, but the original in fact indicates more than a dispassionate curiosity. When Descartes published the *Principles*, Huet says,

I could not rest until 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, which was ignorant of the ancient sects, [*et veterum Sectarum rudis*], when, from the simplest and plainest principles, I saw so many dazzling wonders brought forth, and the whole fabric of the world and the nature of things, as it were, spontaneously springing into existence. In fact, I was for many years closely engaged in the study of Cartesianism,<sup>4</sup> and especially when I beheld so many grave and learned men in Holland and Germany attached to it as if by a kind of fascination; 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.

This account was written, and certainly was published, many years after the events related here, but in manuscript material from an earlier period, Huet indicates much the same relation to Cartesianism by saying that he was an impassioned partisan, and that he was disabused of Cartesianism “only when age, study and reflection yielded maturity of mind.”<sup>5</sup>

Neither of the above accounts indicates what the full examination of a mature mind found so problematic as to bring about such a dramatic aversion from Cartesianism. (We know at great length what he ultimately found problematic, for he published it as the *Censura*.) It is also important to know when the aversion took place, since certain otherwise plausible explanations of it are ruled out depending on how early it occurred. A related question that is less obvious than it first appears is why Huet wrote the

<sup>4</sup> Ac per multos certe annos actissime [read: artissime] devinctum me tenuit Cartesianae factionis studium. The standard French translation rather overstates Huet's devotion to Cartesianism at this point: “Durant plusieurs années, j'appartins corps et ame au cartésianisme...” Huet, *Mémoires*, p.23.

<sup>5</sup> *Commentarius* II, 182-83; *Mémoires* II, 23; *Censure de la Réponse*, p.3 The context for the last comment is, as will be seen below, Regis's statement at the outset of the *Réponse*



*Censura*, and related to it is the question of why he waited so long, as he appeared to do, before actually publishing it. These may all be questions beyond biographical details, bearing on the philosophical interpretation and significance generally of the *Censura*.

An omnibus answer to these questions is that Huet was a courtly careerist. One very unflattering account in the period comes from Mme. de Sévigné, who thought that Huet attacked Descartes only to please Montausier, and that he did not understand what he was attacking. In the nineteenth century, Pelissier supposes that the rejection of learning by the Cartesians was but a pretext, and that Huet, “who always had a courtly mentality,” gave up Cartesianism because it would have been an obstacle to the advancement of his career. Pelissier’s thesis is supported to some extent by Huet’s own correspondence. To Bossuet on 5 April 1692 he wrote, “knowing that the king did not want the doctrine of Descartes spreading in his realm, I took myself to be acting in accord with his intentions in writing a book three years ago that clearly shows the basic defects and pernicious consequences of this doctrine.”<sup>6</sup> But acting in accord with the king’s intentions, and acting only because of them are not the same, and such venal sacrifice of intellectual values to narrow self-interest is hard to attribute to Huet. In his autobiography, Huet observes, in passing, that “from early youth it had been a principal object with me to become personally acquainted with all whom I heard mentioned as eminent for genius and learning.” The rest of this work is a long illustration of how exclusively Huet sought the favor, not of the politically connected, but of the learned, and that he did so as a step to increasing his own learning. The only evidence of courtly self-promotion was his throwing a chess match to the Duke de Longueville, governor of Normandy, who did not like to lose. Charity alone suggests charity as at least as likely an explanation of this little episode. Moreover, there is a great deal of evidence of pursuing studies, contrary to his courtly interests. In 1662, Huet rejected the offer of the position of counselor in Rouen because it would take time from his studies, and later, when instructing the Dauphin during the day at Versailles, he spent nights in the libraries in Paris. Huet, who referred to the “fetters of the court,” was no mere courtier. A more

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that like all extraordinary works, those of Descartes were initially rejected, but then gained adherents. Huet contested this claim on all counts, eventually pointing to his own case. The key question will be what it was about Cartesianism that Huet came to realize with his maturity of mind acquired by age, study, and reflection.

<sup>6</sup> Bossuet, *Correspondence*, V, p.107 ff

plausible, and more favorable, account of the *Censura's* genesis will be offered in the next section below.

The *Censura* first appeared in 1689. In it, Huet attacks Descartes on a number of key points, beginning with his method of doubt, and moving on to the criterion of truth, his view of the human mind, proofs for the existence of God, and so on. Citing chapter and verse from his works, Huet clearly has the eponymous founder of Cartesianism as his principal target. Yet he also aims at the Cartesians, most especially Malebranche. Among them, only Henricus Regius is actually named; but when, in cataloguing the “stains on the Cartesian philosophy,” Huet says that Descartes himself was far more modest than his followers, he has Malebranche in mind. (ch.8, sec.3) Descartes feigned ignorance, according to Huet, but in fact borrowed practically all he wrote; his followers also make a show of their ignorance, which in their case is real. Chapter and verse are not cited from Malebranche, but his *Search After Truth* is clearly the text that Huet has in mind for his attack.

Because it was not only Descartes but his followers who were attacked, and not in kindly terms, a response to the *Censura* was assured, especially since the work was quickly and widely read (it went through four further editions in less than five years). The response that Huet describes in his foreword to the '94 *Censura* was international; it came from Eberhard Schweling, professor at Bremen, Johannes Schotanus, professor at Franeker, Andreas Petermann, professor at Leipzig, Burchard De Volder, professor at Leiden, and others. The step-by-step refutation of the *Censura*, or the attempt thereat, even was used as a student exercise at the University of Leiden.<sup>7</sup> Whether by default or by election, Pierre-Sylvain Regis, whom Huet dubbed the “Prince of the Cartesians,” was the principal voice responding among the French Cartesians. Pasquier Quesnel took his *Système* (1690) to be, in part, a response to Huet. But Regis's main rebuttal, obviously, was the *Réponse*, which appeared in 1691. This is an exceedingly important document in the history of Cartesianism, since in it Regis purports to reply not just in defense of Descartes, but of the Cartesians.

Regis was the main French defender of Cartesianism, but he was not the only one. In what opened up a complicated, multi-cornered struggle in 1694, a disciple of Malebranche, Henri Lelevel, defended his master not only against Huet, but also to some extent against the Parisian professor Jean Du Hamel, who had attacked Regis as well. But Lelevel was responding

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<sup>7</sup> For more on De Volder's defense of Descartes, see Lodge, “Burchard De Volder.”

primarily to Regis's attack on Malebranche in his *Système*. The intervention by Lelevel was an instance of the attempt to claim the pure line of Cartesianism, an intramural struggle contested by the Cartesians more openly and with greater venom than any of their extramural battles. In any case, Lelevel's intervention was likely not the whole explanation of why Malebranche himself did not engage the battle with Huet.

Not all of the reaction to the '89 *Censura* was negative. Most notably, Leibniz, after reading what must have been a manuscript of De Volder's reply to Huet, thought so highly of the *Censura* that in a letter to Huet of 1692 he proposed adding some of his own criticisms to a future edition. Four years later, in a letter to Nicaise, Leibniz still had the same thought.<sup>8</sup> Pellison (-Fontanier) was another who liked the work, and his response is an indication of the sectarian flavor of the Cartesian wars. Soon after beginning the *Censura*, Pellison wrote to Huet as follows: "It is not that I do not admire Descartes's intelligence in many things; it is just that I don't want to worship him, and that is enough to be completely excommunicated from this sect.... I have a more modest view of things, saying only that it might be so, unlike his proponents who say, it must be so and cannot be otherwise."<sup>9</sup>

Although other churchmen found the *Censura* to their liking, Bossuet, who had always been something of a Cartesian fellow-traveler, was disturbed by it. Arnauld, of course, despised the work, calling it a "puny book." "I don't know of anything good to be found in Huet's book against Descartes except its Latin.... To exaggerate Pyrrhonism as he does overturns religion; for faith is based on religion, of which we can be sure through knowledge of certain facts. If there are no human facts of which we can be certain, then there will be nothing on which faith might be based."<sup>10</sup> It seems that Huet approached both Bossuet and Arnauld about a reply to Regis and was hurt when neither of them encouraged him to make one. However, if an initial reply from the Cartesians was assured, a subsequent reply to them was no less so, despite Huet's claim that he never replied. Of Schweling he said, "it would have been easy to confute him, and many other minute philosophers, partakers of the same delusion;

<sup>8</sup> *Sämtliche Schriften* I Reihe, VI (1957) let. 127, pp. 270–72, let. 259, pp. 455–58; VII (1964) let. 158, p. 328; *Journal des sçavans*, April 1693, pp. 122–24. Cousin, *Fragments*, vol. 4, pp. 142–44.

<sup>9</sup> Pelissier, *les papiers de Huet*, pp. 58–60. Pelisson, the author of a work advocating toleration, was also led to observe that Huet's dealing with the Cartesians was more timely than attacking atheists, pagans, Jews, and infidels.

<sup>10</sup> Arnauld, *Oeuvres* III, p. 425.

but what limit could be set to this disputation? The two great pillars of this sect, Rohault and Clerselier, from the latter of whom I have received some marks of friendship, patiently suffered their opinions to be contraverted. For my own part, having been accustomed to reap other fruits from philosophy than the art of contending by disparagement and abuse, I easily despised the sarcasms thrown out against me, and revenged them by silence; nor did I ever deign a reply to vain and futile reasonings raked up from the dust of the schools.”<sup>11</sup> The fact is that Huet, far from remaining silent, did reply to Regis, in whom he found the same pride, arrogance, and vanity that he had come to despise in Descartes. In his preface to the *Réponse*, Regis says that the objections Descartes solicited to his *Meditations* were such that all that has been objected since has been more of the same, or that if there has been something new, it deserves more pity than reply. Huet commented in the *Censure de la Réponse*: “This proud and dismissive treatment is typical of their treatment of everything opposed to their doctrine.” He continued that “it was with this dismissive tone that Descartes often eluded the attacks of his adversaries, and his disciples imitate his vanity.” (p.3)

The form that Huet’s reply took is rather complicated. His procedure was to interleave and annotate his copies of the ’89 *Censure* and the *Réponse*, and then to use this material for the long additions he made in the ’94 *Censura*. Although he never produced an edition of the *Censura* beyond the ’94 edition, he interleaved and went on annotating his copy of the ’94 *Censura* as late as 1713, mainly with additional references to a heterogeneous group of authors: among others, Plato, Apuleius, Hermes Trismegistus, Aquinas, Leibniz, and especially Augustine. Huet also left an unpublished manuscript entitled *Censure de la Réponse...*, from which the additions to the ’94 *Censura* may have been derived, although the reverse derivation seems more likely. This *Censure de la Réponse à la Censure* is a 125-page text that was likely intended by Huet to be a complete work, and, at some point, to be published as such. It contains an extensive index, a stylized title-page with pseudonym, as well as a letter, in Huet’s hand, from the “publisher” of the work, which states that, when he was sent the work from France, he was not informed as to why the work was incomplete.

The *Censure de la Réponse* is “incomplete” in exactly the sense in which the additional material in the ’94 *Censura* is incomplete as a response to Regis, and in which Huet’s annotations to the *Réponse* and the ’89 *Censura*

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<sup>11</sup> Huet, *Memoirs* II, pp. 352–53.

are incomplete as preparations for a response to Regis. In all these instances, Huet left off responding to Regis at almost exactly the same point, section three of chapter two. The *Censure de la Réponse* ends at this point, the additions to the '94 *Censura* essentially end at this point, and the extensive underlining and annotations to the *Réponse* end at this point. This is not to say that Huet gave up his reading of the *Réponse*, or that his reading was anything less than serious. For there are, right to the end, bits of underlining, a few grammatical corrections, and even an occasional argument. For example, in section two of chapter four, Huet writes that, according to Descartes, the idea of God as something set before the mind is the image of an infinite and supremely perfect thing. Regis objects that the idea of God is not the image of the perfect thing, but the perfect thing itself. Huet comments, "from this it follows that God is an idea." (More on this in chapter seven below.) And, of course, Huet was still annotating his copy of the '94 *Censura* at least as late as 1713. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Huet's attitude in responding underwent a dramatic change, a change for which there is no strictly philosophical explanation whatsoever. There is no difference in the importance of the material beyond section three of book two, or in the quality of Regis's criticism of it, for example. A different kind of explanation therefore seems called for; it lies not in the *Censura* itself, but in an altogether different kind of work.

Huet's *Nouveaux mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du cartésianisme* was written during the winter of 1691–92, thus not long after the appearance of the *Réponse*. It is dedicated to Regis, "the Prince of the Cartesians," who is said to be "known in the streets and the salons as the protector of subtle matter, the patron of globules and the defender of vortices." The ironic tone of the dedication is appropriate to the work. The premise of the *Nouveaux mémoires* is that, reports to the contrary notwithstanding, Descartes is alive and is teaching philosophy in Lapland, where he passes for a Lapp because of his small stature, dark beard, and swarthy complexion. Jokes aside, Huet quotes Baillet's recently published biography of Descartes in claiming that Descartes quit Holland for Sweden because of the "onerous quality of being humankind's oracle." In addition, Huet has Descartes say that his proof for the existence of God is taken from Anselm, and that he found it in Aquinas's *Summa*, but did not disclose this fact lest his reputation suffer. Huet has Descartes further relate that even though he knows that the cogito is an argument involving three terms, he says that it is a simple proposition with only two in order to avoid objections.

What is to be made of this "naughty philosophical burlesque"? For one thing, it was not well received, at least not in certain quarters. D'Alembert

must have been speaking for many Cartesians and non-Cartesians alike, in his *éloge* for Huet. “Despite his best efforts, the bishop of Avranches was unable to ridicule Descartes, something that is not easily done to such a great man; if someone was ridiculed [by this work], I regret to say, it was not him.”<sup>12</sup> Generally, it has been regarded as something of an embarrassment. Why did Huet write it?

In his letter to Bossuet of 5 April 1692, Huet explains:

Regis, the great defender of the [Cartesian] sect, published a reply to my [*Censura*]...in which I am maligned although I had mistreated neither him nor his person. I nevertheless ignored this insult; but, this winter, with an eye-problem keeping me from study, I amused myself by writing a little story roughly like Daniel’s *Voyage [dans la lune]*. The aim of this work was to ridicule the Cartesian philosophy, but with no intention on my part of publishing it. But five or six Jesuits, upon my reading it to them, liked it more than I could have hoped for, and, assuring me that it would harm the Cartesian side more than all the Christian and dogmatic texts appearing daily, strongly urged me to publish it.<sup>13</sup>

Huet seems to have been prepared to trade insult for insult. But beyond this pettiness, he may have perceived that the source of his mistreatment by Regis was the pride, arrogance, and vanity of Cartesianism itself. (Of this theme, much more below.) If this was his perception, then perhaps the explanation of his dramatic change in attitude was the realization that the only response to the Cartesian ridicule of his humanistic antiquarian values was ridicule. Amusement would hardly have been the motive for writing the *Nouveaux mémoires*, and his determination to publish, despite initial failure to receive royal approbation for it, indicates that he was not merely responding to the encouragement of his Jesuit friends. The work was first published under a pseudonym in the *Mercurie Gallant* of September 1692. Moreover, Huet continued annotating ‘94 *Censura*, and he also annotated the *Nouveaux Mémoires* and saw it through three editions beyond the ‘94 *Censura*. This work was not the mere bagatelle that Huet tried to portray it as, and it required no less eyesight than work on the *Censura*.

The question then becomes why he published ‘94 *Censura* at all. In the foreword to that edition, he complains of the lack of respect for his work and person as the reason why he could not endure in silence Regis’s reply on behalf of the Cartesians. But he also says that he restricts his attention

<sup>12</sup> D’Alembert, *Histoire* III, p. 481.

<sup>13</sup> Bossuet, *Correspondence*, V, p. 107 ff.

to the first chapter, since it contains the foundation of the Cartesian system, such that its downfall spells the downfall of the whole. In short, even with his change of attitude, a philosophical refutation of Cartesianism for him was still a valid response to its pride, arrogance, and vanity.<sup>14</sup>

## 2. *The Censura: Why and When?*

Why did Huet write the *Censura*? A related question is, why did he publish it? This is a different question, of some significance, for Huet wrote works, related to the topic of the *Censura*, that he did not publish. A good example is the *Traité*, which, when published posthumously, proved to have an importance of the magnitude of the *Censure* itself. Another example is the *Censure de la réponse à la censure*, Huet's reply to Regis's defense of Cartesianism against the *Censura*. The extant ms of this work was left in a regrettably deplorable state of illegibility that now makes publication of it unfeasible, but Huet himself could have overcome that obstacle. That he was inclined to respond to Regis in print is beyond question, since he in fact did so in the '94 *Censura*. Finally, there is the related question of why Huet published the *Censura* when he did, which is related to the additional question of when he arrived at the views expressed in it. That he published the work only in 1689 is on the face of it rather surprising, coming rather late in the history of Cartesianism and Huet's relation to it. The latter three questions, obviously, depend to a large extent on the answer to the first one.

So, why did Huet write the *Censura* in the first place? There seem to be two interesting sorts of answer, beyond the unlikely one of venal self-interest.<sup>15</sup> One is that he took the *Censura* to be a defense of the Catholic faith against what he perceived—correctly as the contingencies of later history would have it—as a major threat to it. (Whether Cartesianism in fact necessarily poses a threat in the sense that the correct interpretation of its views makes it incompatible with Catholicism is an altogether different question from the historical question of the use to which it was actually put. The same distinction in question needs to be drawn, of course, with respect to other major figures of the period. The later influence of Locke, Spinoza, Bayle

<sup>14</sup> For more on Huet's life and works, see the editor's introduction to ACP.

<sup>15</sup> See Rapetti, *Huet*, who sees a multiplicity of reasons, of two sorts: external or extrinsic reasons of the sort related by Mme de Sevigné, viz. the effort to please Montausier, or just the Jesuits; and internal reasons of the sort discussed below.

and others might well have appeared abhorrent to them.) A second kind of answer is that Huet felt the need to defend himself, specifically against the Cartesians. Once again the questions are related, for as will be seen below, in defending himself, Huet would have taken himself to be defending the Catholic faith.

The defense of Catholicism emerges, explicitly, as a reason for writing and publishing in the preface of the work, which, though largely a kowtowing dedication to Montausier, also reveals Huet's motivations. He explains that from the probing conversations he had with him, Montausier came to agree with his view that despite Descartes's initial display of doubt, he emerged as a dogmatist, and that Descartes's dogmatism was of a very dangerous sort. For "although [Descartes] teaches that philosophy, which is a product of the human mind, should submit to faith, which comes from God, he in fact adjusted the faith to the principles of his philosophy" (ACP, 64). The danger, or actual catastrophe as Huet saw it, is that Descartes's philosophy is either groundless or demonstrably false. Thus, in the interest of the true religion, Montausier urged Huet to publish his views.

Huet's account goes as follows. Montausier elicits from him the reasons for his apparent disapproval of Cartesianism. Persuaded that Cartesianism is both defective and dangerous, Montausier urges Huet to publish his arguments. Huet resists on two grounds, that it would be both imprudent and inappropriate to do so: in the first instance, that there would be a hornet's nest of Cartesians stirred against him, and that he had competing responsibilities in the second. In rebuttal of the first, Montausier provided what might have been an epigraph for the *Censura* itself: "for him who perceives the truth, the power and number of adversaries is not to be feared." (ACP, 65) Huet's account of the second ground of his resistance is not entirely clear. One reading is that at the time of the initial conversations, his "recently imposed" duties as *précepteur* to the Dauphin kept him from responding; then later his status as a cleric made it inappropriate to do so. Another is that the problem all along was his clerical status. In any case, Montausier responded to the latter with two arguments: first, that a man of the cloth is best in a position to defend the Church; second, that such polemic was undertaken by clerics as early as the Church Fathers against pagan philosophers with no standing that posed a danger to the faith. All the more reason, he said, why Huet should take up the standard against "a Christian whose teaching is opposed to the tenets of Christ, his influence and example portending complete disaster for posterity . . ." (ACP, 64) Montausier might have had in mind such polemics as that waged by Augustine against the Manichees; but even intramural polemic had never



been absent from clerical life, as spectacular cases such as the debate between Abelard and William of Champeaux had shown, and as that between Malebranche and Arnauld was soon to show again. In any case, for these and “many more” arguments, Huet gave in to Montausier’s entreaties and produced the *Censura*.

When these conversations between Huet and Montausier took place is not entirely clear. They could have taken place as early as 1668, when Montausier was named governor of the dauphin and enlisted Huet as *sous-précepteur* soon thereafter, or even earlier in the decade when Montausier was placed in military charge of Normandy. And they could have come at any time up to the publication of the 89 *Censura*, since Montausier did not die until 1690; but the likelihood is that the relevant conversations had occurred at least five years earlier.

Searching for Latin versions of the posthumous *Traité de la foiblesse de l’esprit humain*, Maia Neto discovered one as a part of the much larger work that Huet planned to publish, in five parts, under the title *Quaestionarum Alnetarum*.<sup>16</sup> He dates the ms to between 1680, when Huet finishes as *sous-précepteur*, and 1685, when there is extant correspondence with the Jesuit Charles de La Rue apparently discussing the work.<sup>17</sup> The ms begins with a syllabus that gives what later turns out to be the titles of the books and chapter headings, not only of the posthumous *Traité*, which was to have been the first part, but of what later is published as the *Censura*, right up to half of the fourth part. Huet received advice in correspondence, recently published,<sup>18</sup> to publish separately only the work against the Cartesians (i.e. the *Censura*) and the fourth part, comparing Christian and pagan doctrines. In the event, Huet in 1690 published, as a single work under the title *Alnetanae Quaestiones*, the third part (on the agreement of faith and reason), the fourth part, and the originally planned fifth part (comparing Christian and pagan morals). As originally planned, the *Censura* was to be “a kind of empirical corroboration, as Maia Neto puts it, “of the thesis argued for in the *Traité*, that man cannot attain truth with certainty.” Maia Neto argues that since the part that it was supposed to corroborate had been suppressed, the *Censura* could only be published separately. But with the suppression, the question remained open why he

<sup>16</sup> Maia Neto, “Charron and Huet.”

<sup>17</sup> Rapetti also dates the *Censura* to the early 1680s, partly on the basis of dates inscribed in Huet’s copies of Descartes’s works that, as was his custom, he underlined and annotated in preparation for the work. Rapetti, *Huet*, p.87, and n.23 *ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> In particular from the Jesuit De la Rue, Rapetti, *Huet*, p.84

should accede to de La Rue's advice and publish it at all. For with the *Traité* suppressed, it would still be empirical confirmation of a thesis that Huet had not published. An explanation is to be found in the last section (5) below.

In addition to the duty to defend Catholicism, shared by so many others, there was another defense to be mounted, more specific and closer to home. For the Cartesians were not content to propose views that were perceived as inimical to Catholicism, but in the person of Malebranche they attacked Huet himself. As he was later to confess, Huet was not one to let such an attack pass. Huet comments in a foreword to the '94 *Censura* on the brouhaha that had been stirred by the '89 *Censura*, that included attacks on him "... in conversation, in schools, in public pronouncements by the learned and statements from magistrates, in speeches, letters and celebrated poems. Indeed, even wise men in this group, old friends of mine, did not restrain themselves lest they be distracted by our friendship, preferring to forswear a friend rather than their opinion." (ACP, 46)<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, Huet reports, he was able to ignore all this as beyond his purpose in writing. But the situation changed with the *Réponse* from Regis. "I would have in fact endured [this public rebuttal] without complaint if he had shown proper respect for my position and person, and had not, beyond all politeness and even human decency, hurled at me things worthier of legal action than any response from me." (Ibid.) Huet might have put his complaint in just this language because a reviewer of Regis's work for the *Journal des Scavants* had claimed that "[Regis's] reply will be all the better received in that, while defending Descartes's doctrine, he has tried to respect entirely the person and dignity of [Huet]."<sup>20</sup> Thus far, Huet's defense of himself, even insofar as that defense represented a defense of Catholicism, could have been motivated only the '94 *Censura*. A nearly identical set of concerns with respect to the '89 *Censura* are to be found a decade earlier.

On 13 August 1674, Pierre-Daniel Huet was inducted into the French Academy. Then forty-three years of age, he later said that he was a reluctant initiate, perceiving involvement with the Academy as inimical to his scholarly pursuits, and agreeing to join only because of the support of his friends, most notably of Bossuet, with whom he was at that point *sous-précepteur* to the Dauphin.<sup>21</sup> Huet had by then published three works of note: the work

<sup>19</sup> The Cartesian Pierre Cally was the old friend. Huet, *Memoirs*, vol.2, pp.351–52.

<sup>20</sup> *Journal des Scavants*, 21 May 1691, p.213.

<sup>21</sup> Huet, *Memoirs*, vol. 2, pp. 182–83.

on the art of translating, discussing both how it is best done and also specific translations, especially of Scripture, involving Arabic, Hebrew, Syriac, and Greek, as well as Latin and French of course. A second work comprised his life and works of Origen, along with annotation and commentary. The third work, appearing prefixed to Mme. de La Fayette's *Zayde* in 1670, was a history of the novel, which in Huet's view was transmitted through ancient Greece from the East. With such interests as these, it is not surprising that Huet used the occasion of his induction to insinuate what would become the "quarrel of the ancients and moderns."<sup>22</sup> Discussing his only credential for admission to the Academy, he bemoaned the disappearance of ancient literature, "which in this century is little valued, is banished from refined society, and is relegated to the dust and obscurity of a few carrels." Implicated in this unwarranted neglect of antiquity are the Cartesians, especially in so far as they impugn the value of memory.<sup>22</sup> That the Cartesians should be faulted in this regard is not at all surprising if one looks ahead fifteen years to the *Censura*. What is surprising is that Huet should ever have been favorably inclined toward Cartesianism. For Descartes's disparagement of antiquarian values and memory<sup>23</sup> as the faculty of their apprehension are not hidden in his work. So the question remains open as to what led Huet from the early "admiration which this new mode of philosophy excited in [his] young mind" to his view of it as a "reasoning delirium," a "baseless structure tottering from the very ground."

What was it, then, that converted Huet from an enthusiastic student of Cartesianism to its bitterest, most outspoken critic? Quite apart from the maturation of which he speaks, what occasioned Huet's re-examination and consequent re-evaluation of Descartes, and specifically on the pernicious role his philosophy was perceived to play in the emerging *querelle*? Huet himself, alas, does not tell us, at least not in the *Memoirs*, or in any other published work. Even the *Censure de la Réponse*, in which he says he was "an impassioned partisan, and was disabused of Cartesianism only when age, study, and reflection yielded maturity of mind," was written no earlier than eighteen years after his induction into the Academy, and in any case does not tell us what his mature mind found problematic about Cartesianism, or in what works he first found it, or exactly when he first

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<sup>22</sup> Huet, *Discours*, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> That is, of corporal memory. The issue of intellectual memory is a rather different case. See Schouls, *Descartes and The Possibility of Science*; Gonzalez, *Descartes*, ch.2.

did so.<sup>24</sup> The classic works on Huet of Avenel, Bartholmess, Flottes and Tolmer are not of much direct help in answering these questions.<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps there is a definitive answer to be found in the mass of his unpublished correspondence, which begs for attention for so many other reasons as well. Meanwhile, one might naturally look beyond Descartes's own corpus to the works of his followers, especially in so far as they might have impugned the value of memory and thereby of antiquarian values. Except for the single work discussed below, there seems to be nothing of relevance. So, for example, Gerould de Cordemoy has a *Discours physique sur la parole* of 1668, an exercise in empirical linguistics, or cognitive science as we might say; but there is nothing there to offend. Indeed, he discusses memory, but only in an effort to *improve* it and thereby enable it to serve eloquence.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Louis de LaForge in his *Traité de l'esprit de l'homme* of 1666 treats of memory, as well as imagination, but his too is a clinically anodyne account, as befits the work of a physician, and he too aims to advance the cause of eloquence based on these faculties.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps, then, some personal contact with the Cartesians, at the more or less formal *conférences* proliferating in Paris, or with Cordemoy, who from March 1673 was also involved with the Dauphin's instruction, or with Bossuet himself, whom Huet recognized as a Cartesian sympathizer? Perhaps so, but Huet himself traces no such complaint in his *Memoirs*, where, having mentioned all these possible sources without implicating them, he implicitly indicates that they were not in fact sources.

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<sup>24</sup> The context is Regis's comment at the outset of his preface that like all extraordinary works, those of Descartes were initially rejected, but then gradually gained adherents. Huet contests this claim on all counts, pointing to the abandonment of important principles of Descartes's by Rohault, Cordemoy and even Regis himself (according to the third page of his preface). The last example of the failure of the Cartesian tide claimed by Regis is Huet himself *Censure de la Réponse*, P.3, renumbered 20.

<sup>25</sup> Bartholmess, does, however, offer the following. "Thirty years before the publication of the *Censura*, on 14 August 1659, Vossius had written to Huet: 'I do not dispute Descartes's genius or refinement. Nevertheless, what is the refinement of a man who in his works never remembers those from whom he has most copied? And with respect to genius, my admiration for it ends when it is preferred to truth.' One is tempted to believe that it was these words that converted Huet; at a minimum, the *Censura* is but a commentary and justification for them. Descartes is there accused of these two things: what is of value in his teaching comes from others, and what there is of originality is at the expense of truth." Bartholmess, *Huet*, p.10. Vossius remarkably adumbrates what is attacked in the *Censura*, but it is hard to believe that this letter by itself could have converted Huet. On the other hand, if Huet's conversations with Montausier took place *before* 1674 and the publication of Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, then the significance of Vossius's possible role in Huet's aversion from Cartesianism needs to be taken more seriously.

<sup>26</sup> Cordemoy, *Oeuvres*, p.245.

<sup>27</sup> LaForge, *Oeuvres*, p.270.

One important event, in any case, which was identified as such by Huet himself, was his introduction to the work of Sextus Empiricus. Around 1662, Louis de Cormis, who had been banished from his post as president of the parlement of Aix (Provence), arrived in Caen bearing an introductory letter to Huet from Mme. de Rambouillet. He and Huet talked a great deal over some period of time, especially about ancient philosophy. Cormis was a skeptic, and he led Huet to a careful study of Sextus Empiricus, whose works might have already been known to him from Cicero's *De Academica* and Diogenes Laertius's *Lives*.<sup>28</sup> Later, Huet was to attribute the content of the pseudonymous, posthumous *Traité* to Cormis. But such an introduction need not have been a conversion to skepticism, and might well have reinforced such Cartesian views as Huet then held, both with arguments against the reliability of the senses, and with the sort of uncertainty that might be surmountable only with the cogito and Cartesian method generally. What is needed is an explanation of Huet's dissatisfaction with Cartesianism and what might have been a return to Sextus with a very different attitude.

A crucial event, in any case, was Huet's encounter with Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, which may have precipitated Huet's dramatic volte-face.<sup>29</sup> We may never know for sure; what is sure, however, is that if Malebranche's great work did not initiate Huet's negative view of Cartesianism, it at the very least confirmed that view. Moreover, Huet's reaction to the *Search After Truth* gives a sense of what was at stake in this, and perhaps every, instance of skepticism. It is worth beginning with this last issue, for it motivates the Huet–Malebranche connection as something of more than merely antiquarian interest.

### 3. *The Birth of Skepticism*

What, if anything, can be known? On the face of it, the issue raised by skepticism should be a straightforwardly decidable factual question. Whether it is known, for example, that gold dissolves in aqua regia can be answered, if an answer is needed, by going through the procedure of placing an amount of gold in aqua regia. Moreover, the knowledge is datable in the sense that we can ascertain, at least in principle, when it was first

<sup>28</sup> Maia Neto, "Huet cartésien," n.11.

<sup>29</sup> Robinet has noted the Huet–Malebranche connection. According to him, "the *Search After Truth*, whose first three books had appeared the previous May, is certainly included in

known whether gold dissolves in aqua regia, and now we even have an explanation of what we have long claimed to know in this case. Or, to take another example, if someone doubts that I know how to construct the golden section, I can demonstrate the relevant theorem from Euclid, step by step from definitions, axioms and postulates, the knowledge of which one is hard-pressed to deny. Again just *prima facie*, it would seem paradoxical not to accept that in the end one properly knows how to divide a line so that the shorter segment stands to the longer as the longer segment stands to the whole. At a very minimum, the burden of proof would seem to lie with those questioning these instances of putative knowledge. Yet it is obvious, both historically and on the contemporary epistemological scene, that there is no straightforward resolution of the issue of skepticism, which is debated from positions of apparently equal antecedent plausibility. The *defense* of skepticism is no less frequent a topic than the *rebuttal* of skepticism. This suggests, of course, that the issue is not a factual question at all, but a conceptual one, involving what is meant by knowledge. Nor did we need to await Wittgenstein for this insight. Not incidentally, when in the *Search* Malebranche described the Academic skeptics as by their own admission the most ignorant of all men, Huet commented that this was a “false argument turning on the ambiguity of the word ‘know’...[for it is not as if] the Academics, when they say that they know nothing, allow that other men do know something.”<sup>30</sup> But what kind of conceptual issue is it? Might it even be a relatively trivial lexicographical issue, as Huet’s comment might suggest?

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this Academic censure [that is, the *Discours* delivered by Huet at his induction into the Academy] which precedes the *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* of 1689.” Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p.30. A main part of the thesis here is in support of Robinet, but it is advanced with less certainty. First, Rodis-Lewis has since argued that Huet’s annotations to his copy of the *Search*, which is the evidence on which Robinet relies, were made over a period of time at least up to 1687. What’s not clear is how much of the work Huet had read, and with what effect on him, before August of 1674. Robinet himself realizes that an important fly-leaf annotation could not have been written until after Huet saw the second volume of the *Search* (1675). (In what must be a *coquille* from the future general editor of Malebranche’s *Oeuvres complètes*, Robinet states that Huet was inducted in 1673, which would have made it impossible for Huet to have read any of the *Search*, which dates from 1674. Huet was in fact inducted in the latter year. Avenel, *Histoire*, p.174. fn 2. Also, Huet, *Discours*.) Second, Robinet’s footnote reference is defective, and while the quotation above from Huet can be verified, the subsequent implication of the Cartesians is not obvious. It is clearly not in the published version of Huet’s speech. But no matter; the concern here is that Huet’s condemnation of the Cartesians not come *before* he read Malebranche.

<sup>30</sup> Popkin, “Bishop Huet’s Remarks,” p.15. Rodis-Lewis, “Huet lecteur de Malebranche,” p.174. The rest of Huet’s comment is also of relevance here. When Malebranche attributes the Academics’ motivation to their wanting to appear independently-minded [*pour se faire*

There is a large body of literature dealing with skepticism that might be summarized by the title of one notable contribution to it, "Can the skeptic live his skepticism?" According to Myles Burnyeat, the title of whose paper was just cited, the skeptic's distinction between appearance, which may be accepted, and reality, which involves belief and truth, applies not just to sensory experience, but also, as we might say, to argument as well. So, for example, that skeptic might legitimately find himself accepting on the basis of his sensory experience honey as sweet, but also accepting on the basis of an argument the conclusion that contrary claims have equal strength, but without believing what is really and truly the case in either instance. The upshot, however, is that the skeptic cannot live his skepticism precisely at the point that he defines his position in terms of such philosophical conclusions. The issue is not the commonly raised practical one of whether he can negotiate through life by accepting only such appearances as honey seeming to be sweet. Instead, it is a logical one of whether he can accept the philosophical appearance that contrary claims have equal strength. The first case does not pose the problem because the appearance is a state different from, or at least logically independent of the assent to it. But the philosophical appearance, according to Burnyeat, just is the assent to the argument, which is to say, assent to it as true. And it is at this point that the skeptic fails to live his skepticism.

Even if judgment is suspended here about the merit of Burnyeat's argument, he nonetheless insinuates an element that incidentally resonates with Descartes's views on acceptance, discussed below, namely that the issue of skepticism is a fundamentally moral one. "If the skeptic does insist [that he does not assent to the conclusion as true], if he refuses to identify with his assent, he is as it were detaching himself from the person (namely, himself) who was convinced by the argument, and he is treating his own thought as if it were the thought of someone else, someone thinking thoughts within him. He is saying, in effect, 'It is thought within me that *p*, but *I* do not believe it'."<sup>31</sup> In short, he abdicates responsibility for the view.

The issue thus construed is, however, wrong-way around on two counts. First of all, no one would be converted to skepticism, or from it, on the

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*passer pour esprits forts*] Huet responded that therefore Descartes was open to the same attribution when he advocated his universal doubt. *Search*, p.189. This apparently puerile tit-for-tat is in fact an instance of the deep disagreement between Huet and the Cartesians over the nature and significance of epistemic disagreement itself.

<sup>31</sup> Burnyeat, "Can the skeptic live his skepticism?" p.140.

basis of an answer, and arguments for it, to the question, what if anything can be known. Now, this claim requires an account about how views, in particular philosophical views, come to be formed. Later, Descartes's account and Huet's objections to it will be examined in detail. Meanwhile, we can see why arguments are not relevant if the issue of skepticism is not logical, or even epistemological, but moral. Whatever the content of Huet's conversations with Cormis, for example, if the line to be followed here is sound, the persuasive arguments had less to do with the deployment of epistemological arguments based on relativity of sense perception, for example, than considerations on behalf of a certain non-dogmatic outlook. In short, Huet was led to reject the pride, vanity, and arrogance that skeptics have always perceived as the invariant attitude of dogmatists—of those who because they know are entitled, both intellectually and morally, to dictate to others. This is the issue that drives the perennial battle that Plato described in the *Sophist* between the friends of the Forms (the gods) and the materialists (the giants), although for him, of course, the dictatorial attitude of the dogmatist is justified by perception of the Good.<sup>32</sup> The question from the skeptical perspective, then, is how can the dogmatist live his dogmatism? That is, with what possible justification might he do so? Certainly, recognition of this pragmatic dimension of the skeptic program is nothing new; skepticism is widely recognized as a *modus vivendi*, rather than a *modus credendi*—a life-style, as we call it, rather than a philosophical system. If there is something new to be added here, it is the reorientation of the pragmatic dimension from the goal to be achieved to the force driving the process whereby the goal is achieved, from final to efficient cause as it were. To be sure, *ataraxia* remains the Pyrrhonian goal, but the threat to it is the source of the dialectic of *epoche*. To recast Hume's terminology, *ataraxia* must be understood as no less a part of antecedent than of consequent skepticism. Here, then, is the second count on which the logical question whether the skeptic can live his skepticism is mistaken: a certain life-style is intended to precede skeptical argument, rather than to be entailed by it, as per the logical question.

This sketch might well be an account of the birth of skepticism in every period. At a minimum, it is a plausible account of the genesis of Huet's skeptical anti-Cartesianism. For, as it will now be argued, it is the pride, vanity and arrogance of Malebranche, and, as Huet thereby came to

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<sup>32</sup> The seventeenth-century chapter of this struggle is detailed in Lennon, *Battle of the Gods and Giants*.



perceive, of Descartes also, that gave birth to the *Censura*. For it was with this perceived dogmatist attitude that Malebranche had ridiculed the humanist values that were dearest to Huet's antiquarian psyche: history, geography, dead languages, etc. (To this extent, Huet's attack on the Cartesians is an episode in the seventeenth-century chapter of Plato's battle of the gods and giants.) Malebranche's denunciation of such exotericism is the source of the animus driving the composition of the *Censura*; it is the source of the venom that converts an otherwise highly technical and abstract critique of Cartesianism into a bitter personal statement.

Nor were the values dogmatically rejected by Malebranche mere idiosyncracies on Huet's part. That is, it was not just bad luck that the Cartesians happened to offend the personal tastes of Huet. The values under attack were precisely the resources that the Pyrrhonian skeptic would rely upon in the absence of the knowledge he sees the dogmatist as incapable of delivering. What happens when we cannot know? We rely on history, tradition, hearsay, the agreement of all peoples (*consensus gentium*). Most of all we rely on authority, especially in matters of faith, which by definition are beyond human rational capacities. In responding as he did to Malebranche, Huet was in this respect doing no more than Erasmus had done in response to Luther, whom he took to be sacrificing traditional authority in favor of individual inspiration, which did not essentially differ from the Cartesian notion of reason. Both rely on the individual's ability to arrive at truth independently of the authority of tradition. Nor, for the same reason, was it an accident that these values of Huet were attacked by Malebranche. As will be seen below, the whole thrust of Cartesian epistemology lay in the direction of establishing, contrary to the skeptic's abdication above, individual responsibility and autonomy, even in matters of faith.

The discussion of philosophical topics in the *Censura*, which comprises most of the work, is even by modern standards of very high caliber. The discussion of the *cogito* in particular is unsurpassed, certainly in length, until the twentieth-century work of Gouhier and Gueroult. Moreover, the treatment is for the most part almost clinically dispassionate. Only in the eighth chapter, on the Cartesian philosophy in general, does Huet indicate his deepest concerns. After introductory praise for Descartes and his philosophy, Huet turns to a catalogue of his faults which leads to a re-evaluation, if not re-interpretation, of all that precedes. For it is here that Malebranche makes his appearance. But this is to get ahead of our story, for we first want to know about Huet's aversion from Cartesianism, which seems to have occurred not later than the summer of 1674.

The work of Malebranche's that would have turned Huet is his first, longest and most important, the *Search After Truth*. On the assumption that Huet's anti-Cartesianism was in place at the time of his induction into the Academy, however, it can only have been the first three books of the *Search* that played this role, for the *achevé d'imprimer* of the second volume, containing the last three books, is 28 September 1675, thus over a year after Huet's induction. The *achevé d'imprimer* of the first volume is 12 May 1674, thus four months before the induction. There is no question but that Huet read this work, for he made annotations in his copy of it, beginning with a long comment on the flyleaf that provides very strong evidence for the role just assigned to Malebranche. "Great insight in this work, great discernment, great meditation and reflection. An eloquence that is masculine, rich, lively and noble. But all that is ruined by too much pride, vanity and arrogance."<sup>33</sup> The condemnation of Malebranche then becomes ferocious. He is said to scorn sciences he himself lacks, to advance as truths wild hypotheses and visions far less certain than the so-called prejudices he rejects, which is the insulting description he gives to everything he disagrees with. And so on.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Quoted by Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p. 31, fn.4; Popkin, "Bishop... Huet's remarks," p.11.

<sup>34</sup> For an excellent account of the aspects of Malebranche's *Search* that Huet would have found problematic, see Dini, "Anticartesianismo," pp.225–29: "The emphasis with which Malebranche had underlined the dangers of erudition, the clear distinction between knowledge depending on memory and knowledge depending on reason, and finally the thesis that truth belongs to no particular time all revealed, in Huet's view, total incomprehension of the meaning and importance of *studia humanitatis*." P.227. Huet's marginal annotations to the *Search After Truth* have been transcribed, with useful commentary, by Rodis-Lewis. She points out that "contempt for history and erudition gets even greater emphasis in the work of Malebranche than in the work of Descartes." "Huet lecteur...", p.178. A concern of her paper is how well Huet actually understood Malebranche and his differences from Descartes, since in her view Huet might not have fully appreciated the originality or nuance of the Oratorian's work. Ibid. pp.177, 179. That Huet should have regarded Descartes and all his followers as of a piece in fact comports with the thesis pursued here with respect to the genesis of Huet's anti-Cartesianism. Finally, a version of Huet's annotations was published by Popkin. His view, however, seems to be that Huet was already an anti-Cartesian by the time he first read the *Search*. "Huet's remarks...", p.20. Dini also thinks that Huet's anti-Cartesianism predates his reading of Malebranche. "When he moved to Paris in 1670 with the position of *sous précepteur* to the Dauphin, the break with Cartesianism was certainly complete." "Anticartesianismo," p.236. But the evidence cited for this claim is not convincing: the conversations with Cormis, well before the 1670 move to Paris, that led to a careful reading of Sextus Empiricus. Although the text of the *Memoirs* is not without a certain ambiguity, there is no mention of any conversion to skepticism, much less of a rejection of Cartesianism. Huet, *Commentarius*, pp.229–30; *Memoirs*, vol.2, pp. 229–30. If there is disagreement here with Dini's dating of Huet's rejection of Cartesianism, this is not to say that there is any objection at all to his reading of Huet's later works in terms of an erudite Christian apologetic whose philosophical basis lay in skepticism. Of this, more below.

It should be noted, however, that this important comment cannot have been written until after the appearance of the second volume, for it refers to Malebranche's reply to Foucher's critique of the first volume, which appeared in a preface to the second. Still, it is not likely, as will be argued below, that Huet's views would have changed from reading one volume to the next, for the relevant views of Malebranche are consistent across both volumes, the second of which would have only confirmed for Huet what he had already seen in the first. But when did Huet first read that initial volume? At present there is no way of saying other than by pointing out that his reading of it prior to 13 August 1674 is a priori not unlikely<sup>35</sup> and that his having done so is the best explanation of what he said on that date.<sup>36</sup> What evidence is there that Huet's complaints against Malebranche led him to the views expressed in the *Censura*? The argument here is that Huet criticizes both Descartes and Malebranche in the terms of pride, vanity and arrogance that are found mentioned in the fly-leaf comment, and that it is this that led Huet to his rejection of the whole of Cartesianism.

The title of Huet's one great philosophical work is multiply ambiguous, beginning with its first word. Like the cognate verb *censere*, and the Roman office referred to by the same word, *censura* can convey a range of meaning from neutral mere judgment to outright condemnation. In the case of Huet's work, the meaning is rather toward the latter end of the range of negativity.<sup>37</sup> But the ambiguity of greater interest here concerns what it is that is being condemned. The condemnation of *philosophia cartesiana* can refer to the philosophy of Descartes in particular, or to some philosophy originated and upheld by Descartes, but upheld and developed by others

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<sup>35</sup> Robinet, *Malebranche et Leibniz*, p.31, fn.4.

<sup>36</sup> The precise dating of Huet's reading of the *Search* is far from obvious. For example, Rodis-Lewis draws attention to the back fly-leaf of Huet's copy, which, typical of Huet, gives an index (of nine items) from the work, followed by a blank space and then three sets of references, distinguished by the darkness of the ink (or perhaps more likely, the sharpness of the pen). She takes the darker (or less fine) references to have been added after the index. But the latest work referred to dates, as she points out, from 1687; it is written in light ink. Thus, Huet would have been changing from light to dark and back again, so that the ink, or fineness, is no general indication of date. The marginal annotations in fact seem written in the finer, lighter ink, and, moreover, with the same handwriting as that of the index. On the other hand, the very first annotation makes reference to vol. 3, which places it no earlier than 1678. Rodis-Lewis herself is not particularly interested in the dating question, but she does offer this comment. "Huet knew only the first edition of the *Search*, it seems, even if his annotations are posterior to the second edition, of 1675, and probably, at least for a good part of them, to the third and fourth editions of 1678." P.179.

<sup>37</sup> But cf. Malbreil, "Descartes censuré," p.315, who cites ms. evidence that Huet meant by the term no more than an examination.

as well. To be sure, it is the work of Descartes which comes in for by far the greatest criticism, explicitly and as such. When Huet attacks the *cogito*, the role of clarity and distinctness, proofs for the existence of God, etc., he cites chapter and verse from Descartes's works. But even in the first edition of the *Censura*, before the reply of Regis, he frequently aims his darts at the *Cartesiani*, the Cartesians.

At the end of the work, having dealt with specific topics in the seven preceding chapters, Huet turns to the Cartesian philosophy in general. He praises Descartes on several grounds, but then turns to a catalogue of his faults, beginning with his "excessive self-regard and false confidence," in short his pride. Because of this fault, "he would have his opinions taken for geometrical axioms, and he judged that such was their truth that they could not conflict with the dogmas of theology, ... and that any disagreement with him would be out of ignorance and madness."<sup>38</sup> This pride is the source of many errors in Descartes's philosophy, according to Huet, for example the doctrine of created eternal truth. When Descartes saw that his philosophy contradicted the faith, he concluded not that it was false, but that it was nonetheless true because all truth depends on God's will, who thus could bring about what is contradictory.

But why make the connection specifically with Malebranche, fifteen years after the fly-leaf comments on the *Search*? One fault of Descartes's is picked out from the catalogue for special treatment on its own. This is his feigned ignorance, motivated by the vain desire to appear to be a novel thinker. The fact was, however, that he had read a great deal, from which he borrowed virtually all he wrote. To disguise this borrowing, he feigned ignorance. "Most of his followers have maintained this ignorance, not falsely as he did, but genuinely" Here, and for the rest of the section, Huet discusses not Descartes, but "his followers." The passage deserves to be quoted at length, because it is important to be aware of not just Huet's complaints, but the vehemence with which he expresses them.

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<sup>38</sup> The text continues: "Therefore he grew hot with anyone contradicting him, even his friends, and he repeatedly fought them with curses and insults. He dared to assert to them that once his views were accepted, all philosophical and theological dispute would cease. Cicero relates that the first philosophers likewise thought that philosophy had been brought to perfection by their genius and that for this reason they were accused of pride and foolishness by Aristotle, who, because of the improvement he brought to philosophy, himself also hoped that it would soon be complete, without noticing that he had succumbed to the same fault he had found in others. With the names changed, the same story would be true of Descartes." *ACP*, pp.210-11.

It is remarkable that some from this faction have recently followed the perverse example of the Epicureans and have dared to declare war, not only on literature, but also on abstract scholarship, except for what seemed known to them, as if wishing to return us to that boorish and wild barbarity so struggled against by the studious efforts of the centuries. For what more monstrous and barbarous voice could there be than that expressed to their eternal ignominy in their books, that it would be small loss if everywhere everything of the pagan philosophers and poets were consumed by fire?... Until the shadows produced these innovators who corrected men's lives, eradicated their errors and enlightened their minds, who tore from our hands very fine authors whom they had never read, and destroyed learning only superficially known to them, so that afterward only they would be the proper masters of belief and behavior, we would have that certain rule of truth that they dream of in the silence of their passions and affections of the mind (for they everywhere love to speak in this way), and only Descartes's philosophy would flourish. They forbid the study of Eastern languages and the reading of the rabbis, of whose great usefulness to the understanding of sacred scripture they are ignorant. They would have it that ...it is foolish and useless to discuss the animals mentioned in sacred scripture—as if knowledge of any part of God's oracles were superfluous, as if it is up to men who are...less than cultivated in every kind of learning to judge the works of Bochart, a great man with a deserved reputation in literary matters, whom they publicly criticize. I remember having so greatly enjoyed the acquaintance of Bochart, as if I then foresaw what I now realize, that with him gone I would never have anyone like him from whom to learn. They condemn knowledge of astronomy, without which there cannot be any knowledge of the seasons, any art of navigation, or any agriculture. ... They proscribe ancient and foreign history. I am not fabricating or making up anything. The books containing these remarkable precepts and statements of their pure doctrine are in everyone's hands. They prove these things with the remarkable argument that he who is not thoroughly acquainted with recent and domestic things wastes his effort in the knowledge of ancient and foreign things. Therefore Villalpandus ought to have counted all the stones of his house before describing the shape of Solomon's temple. Therefore I should have circled and measured the entire earth before turning my eyes and mind to the sun. Before undertaking this study of the earth, I needed to pass through all the squares, narrow streets and islands of Paris. On the other hand, I would be foolish if I sought to know Paris before knowing myself. And so I shall properly begin the knowledge of anything with myself. Let honest men decide whether these things are absurd. [The Cartesians] inadvertently betray themselves as so ignorant and unschooled that they scarcely allow writing in any language other than the vulgar, and no Latin that is not simple, unadorned and easy, lest of course they more frequently need a translator when reading. Therefore we now deserve derision from the Cartesians because we are learned. Such are the changes in things following the introduction of this flame of life and truth; now ignorance is praised, and learning despised, now it is not knowledge that puffs us up, as the Apostle says, but ignorance.” (ACP, pp.215–17)

And so on. There may be no more important a text for understanding why Huet wrote the *Censura*.

Huet speaks throughout of the “followers” of Descartes, in the plural. The name of neither Malebranche nor any other Cartesian except, in passing, Henricus Regius, is mentioned, here or anywhere else in the work. But, clearly, it is primarily, and perhaps even exclusively, Malebranche who is the target of Huet’s observations. The most obvious indication is Huet’s citation of the phrase “silence of the passions,” which is, of course, a signature expression of the Oratorian. (Huet’s very first annotation to the *Search* (literally) underlines this theme as it occurs in the preface to the *Search* (unpaginated) and draws attention to eleven other occurrences of it in the work.) In fact, the text can be tied, point by point, to texts in Malebranche, two in particular. First, perhaps most shocking to Huet is the view that consigning the works of the pagan philosophers to the flames would be no great loss. Yet, this is precisely what Malebranche allows himself to say. Book four of the *Search* investigates the inclinations as a source of error; chapter six discusses one such inclination, the desire for knowledge that magnifies our image in the eyes of others. The result is that we fail to distinguish the sciences, like mathematics, that are morally important from those that are not. He thus exhorts the virtuous to “condemn to the flames the pagan poets, the rabbis, certain historians, and a large number of authors who are responsible for the glory and erudition of certain learned men; we will be hardly troubled by it.”<sup>39</sup>

Most relevant in terms of the motivation for the *Censura* is the series of complaints following the signature phrase through to the end of the passage. They are based entirely on the following chapter of book four of the *Search*, entitled “the desire for knowledge, and the judgment of counterfeit scholars [*faux savants*].” Here it is the very desire for knowledge itself as the means to happiness and grandeur that is held to mislead us into useless efforts. It is worth citing the text, again at length, in order to verify it as Huet’s source, but also to convey the arrogantly hostile, acerbically ironic tone to which he objected.

How is it that there are people who spend their entire lives reading the Rabbis and other corrupt books written in foreign, obscure languages...It is for the same reason that astronomers spend their time and wealth to get a precise knowledge of what is not only useless but impossible to know...They have composed a *Selenography*, or geography of the moon, as if men planned to go there...If [these counterfeit scholars] read Sacred Scripture, it is not in order

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<sup>39</sup> *The Search After Truth*, 292.

to learn religion and piety; points of chronology, geography, and the difficulties of grammar completely occupy them; they desire the knowledge of these things with greater ardor than they do the knowledge of the salutary truths of the Gospel... The rarest and most ancient histories are the ones that they glory in knowing. They do not know the genealogy of currently reigning princes, but they carefully research those of men who have been dead for four thousand years. They neglect to learn the most common histories of their own time. But they seek a perfect understanding of the fables and fictions of poets... The animals of their own countries are hardly known to them, yet they have no fear in taking many years to compose great volumes about the animals of the Bible, in order to appear better than others as having divined what unknown terms signify. Such a book delights its author and the scholars who read it, because being laced with Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, etc., passages and quotations from the rabbis, and other obscure authors, it satisfies the vanity of its author and the silly curiosity of those who fancy themselves more learned when they can proudly say that there are six different words in the Scripture signifying lion, or some such thing... The map of their country, or even of their own city, is often unknown to them, but they are studying the maps of ancient Greece, Italy, Gaul during the time of Julius Caesar, or the streets of ancient Rome... In short they want to know all rare things, all the extraordinary and irrelevant things, that others do not know, because through a subversion of the mind they have attached the idea of learning to these things, and because it is sufficient to be esteemed as learned to know what others do not know, even when one is ignorant of the most necessary and beautiful truths.<sup>40</sup>

The points of contact with Huet are all there: the rabbis, the languages, the astronomy, the ancient history, the geography, etc., so obvious as not to require comment. There is one point, however, that cements the connection and that is the allusion to the work of Bochart, which Malebranche ridicules both here and later on in the *Eclaircissements*.<sup>41</sup> Samuel Bochart (1599–1667) was the author of a *Hierozyicon* (1663), claiming to give an account of the animals mentioned in sacred scripture.<sup>42</sup> Previously he had published a “Sacred Geography,” which Huet credits with having turned his attention to ancient literature. As it happened, Bochart lived in Caen, where he was a Protestant minister, and he became a mentor and intimate of Huet, to the point that when he was summoned to Sweden by Christina soon after Descartes’s death there, he brought Huet with him. Later the two had an unfortunate, but perhaps inevitable,

<sup>40</sup> *Search*, pp. 295–98.

<sup>41</sup> *Search*, pp. 590–92.

<sup>42</sup> Of this work, Aikin says that it “would have been a better work had he been better acquainted with natural history.” Huet, *Memoirs*, vol. 1, p. 83.

falling out,<sup>43</sup> although Huet was present at his sudden death, in the Academy of Caen, during a numismatics dispute.<sup>44</sup> Even in publishing his *Memoires*, fifty years after the death of Bochart, Huet was generous in acknowledging the debt to his mentor. It can only have been painful to him to read Malebranche's denigration of the interests and values they shared. For the Oratorian not only ridiculed what he saw as mere antiquarianism, but condemned it as inimical to genuine piety. The counterfeit scholar was perhaps also a counterfeit Christian.

#### 4. Malebranche's Surprising Silence

Given all this resentment, the question as to why Huet waited as he did until 1689 to publish the *Censura* becomes even more perplexing. Before turning to it, however, there is another question that is better answered here: why was it that Malebranche never responded to Huet's counter-attack? He certainly never mentioned Huet's name anywhere, either in his published work or his correspondence. Nor did he ever so much as allude to Huet after the publication of the *Censura*. This lack of reaction is surprising in one who on many other occasions was only too willing to engage in polemic.<sup>45</sup> Most remarkably, the point on which Huet focussed his criticism is one that Malebranche himself is supposed to have been incapable of ignoring. Discussing the degree to which Malebranche revealed himself, his biographer Adry reports Malebranche as having said, "I do not have sufficient modesty to allow anyone to accuse me of pride."<sup>46</sup>

Huet's *Censura* was not the only attack initiated against Malebranche at his point. In 1690 Régis opened hostilities with him, at least as Malebranche saw it, with his *Cours entière de philosophie* (*Système de philosophie*, 1691). To this work Malebranche did reply, but only when publication of the response prepared by his disciple Henri Lelevel was delayed. Did Malebranche postpone response to Huet, thinking that Lelevel would defend him against Huet as well? Maybe so; for in the event, Lelevel's

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<sup>43</sup> See Shelford, "Amitié..." Bochart criticized Huet for misrepresenting a text of Origen's on the Eucharist. The bottom line: "Throughout his entire life, Huet was unable to tolerate the least criticism." p.106.

<sup>44</sup> Aikin vol.2, pp.39–40.

<sup>45</sup> The great debate with Arnauld was only one from many such contests. Malebranche's first work was not even entirely published when his first polemic began with Foucher, and the end of his life, with him ill and reading only with great difficulty, saw him debating with his former student Dortous de Mairan.

<sup>46</sup> Malebranche, *Oeuvres complètes*, 20: pp.362–63.



*La vraye et la fausse méta physique* of 1694 did engage Huet and Huet's close friend Du Hamel in addition to Regis. But Regis is the real target there, and the issues pursued by Lelevel are not the poisonous ones on which Huet had attacked, but antiseptic issues of metaphysics such as the *cogito*. Moreover, on this hypothesis, Malebranche's impatience should have gotten the better of him since the need to respond to Huet had arisen a year before Regis's perceived critique. His expectation of Lelevel's reply, therefore, is not a likely explanation of Malebranche's failure to respond to Huet.

So the puzzle remains, in answer to which there can only be speculation. A plausible speculation is the following. When Malebranche engaged Regis, as he had Foucher and Arnauld, and was to engage Dourtous de Mairan, he may have done so with contempt for them, but not for the issues themselves. He was reduced to exchanging petty *ad hominem* arguments with Arnauld, for example, but the issue with respect to the nature of ideas that they were debating held for Malebranche the key to his theory of grace. Arnauld might have been contemptible in Malebranche's eyes, but the topic was as important to him as any could be. In the case of Huet, however, he had contempt even for the issues and thus, despite the report of Adry, haughtily chose to remain silent. Malebranche was prepared to debate *ad nauseam* the nature of ideas with Arnauld, but it was unthinkable for him to enter a debate with Huet over the value of antiquarianism. From his perspective, the debate in the one case concerns the results of applying the natural light, in the other the debate concerns whether the natural light should be applied at all. The debate with Arnauld has a *prima facie* rationality that the other would lack.

Regis, of course, figures as part of the story of why Malebranche did not respond to Huet. For, unlike Malebranche, he did not remain silent in the face of the *Censura*. As noted above, Regis replied on behalf of the Cartesians, in 1691, with his *Réponse au livre... Censura*. It may have been that Malebranche thought Regis's work a sufficient reply to Huet, especially in so far as it addressed only the issues that Malebranche himself would have addressed if the hypothesis above is correct that the animus behind Huet's attack concerned issues that Malebranche regarded as beyond rational debate. For Regis's reply ended in Chapter eight of the *Censura*, at precisely the point at which Huet turned to the perceived catalogue of Descartes's faults. Regis simply breaks off with the laconic comment that since this matter "does not concern the basis of Descartes's doctrine, which alone is what I undertook to defend, I shall not respond

to it at all.”<sup>47</sup> Regis and Malebranche would have been of one mind as to what in the *Censura* deserved reply, even if they differed on exactly what the reply should be.

There is more evidence for this interpretation of the Cartesian reply to Huet, and certainly for the interpretation of what motivated Huet’s attack in the first place. Huet began a rebuttal of Regis’s reply with annotations to the *Réponse* that found their way into the greatly expanded edition of the *Censura* of 1694. But these annotations end, as does the manuscript response that Huet began writing, abruptly in chapter two of the *Censura*. It may be that Huet at that point came to realize that the detailed philosophical response he was preparing was an inappropriate way to serve his primary motivation. At any rate, in 1692 he published his *Nouveaux mémoires*, the notorious spoof of Cartesianism whose premise is that, reports of his death notwithstanding, Descartes was alive and teaching philosophy in Lapland. The pride, arrogance and vanity that he saw as characterizing the dogmatism of Cartesianism would seem better attacked by skeptical ridicule than by philosophical argument.

Ironically, then, Huet and Malebranche were in agreement about the irrelevance of reason to the ultimate concerns of the *Censura*. But if, contrary to fact, he had acted on this premise, the Orationist would have restricted his activities to the narrow range of cognitive issues addressed by Regis. Though like Malebranche a priest, Huet was also involved in the political struggles at the interface of the court, the church and the Republic of Letters. Moreover, he understood better than Malebranche the sort of argument that carried in such a setting, and was therefore ready to resort to tactics that Malebranche would have decried as beneath his dignity as an intellectual, especially of the Cartesian stripe. Such at least are the terms in which the contestants would have seen their disagreement. From our point of view, the situation can be seen as more complicated. Although as a good Cartesian Malebranche forswore all appeal to the imagination and the senses, and to stylistics based on them, he nonetheless and in spite of himself engaged, rather effectively, in the very practices he condemned.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> P.331. At one point, however, Regis dips into another kind of criticism. Discussing Huet’s mixture of praise and blame for Descartes, he says that “these contradictions are so obvious that I cannot believe that the author fell into them through oversight; I prefer to believe that when he criticized Descartes and his doctrine, he was driven by some passion of interest or honor, which having ceased when he wrote this article freed him to follow the proper dictates of his conscience that led him to this appropriate and magnificent praise for Descartes.” *Réponse*, p. 330.

<sup>48</sup> For more on this topic, Lennon, “The Contagious Communication...”.

For if Huet was praised for his Latin style, Malebranche was no less so for his in French, the very choice of which furthered his cause as had Descartes's against a similar opponent, Gassendi. Nor, on the other side, did Huet's turn to propaganda, ridicule and literary pyrotechnics mean that he was above, insensitive to, or incapable of serious and sophisticated philosophical argument. For even if his additions in reply to Regis in the '94 *Censura* cease at a certain point, Huet still saw fit to publish the work after the philosophical burlesque of his *Nouveaux mémoires pour servir à l'histoire du cartésianisme*.

### 5. *The Downfall of Cartesianism*

The main thread of the account so far proposes the following as a likely chronology: 1674—a dramatic confirmation if not commencement of Huet's aversion from Cartesianism as a result of his encounter with Malebranche's *Search After Truth*; late 1670s—conversations between Huet and Montausier, with a determination to publish a critique of Cartesianism; late 1670's, early 1680's—composition of the *Censura*;<sup>49</sup> 1689—publication of the *Censura*. Why the delay in its publication? One possibility is that having been persuaded not to publish the *Traité*, Huet naturally forwent publication of the text which was supposed to be the empirical confirmation of its thesis that man cannot achieve truth with certainty. What was needed was a prompt for Huet to publish the *Censura* as a separate work.

In his classic work, Richard A. Watson also points to the year 1674 as a crossroad in the history of Cartesianism because of a skeptical attack. But for him it came from a different skeptic, and with catastrophic results for Cartesianism. In that year, Cartesianism was doomed when the skeptic Simon Foucher showed that there was an ineliminable inconsistency among fundamental Cartesian positions.<sup>50</sup> Attacking Malebranche's *Search After Truth*, the first three books of which had just appeared, Foucher argued that the Cartesian likeness principles, that a cause must be like its effect and that an idea must be like what it represents, are incompatible with Cartesian dualism, according to which minds and bodies are essentially different, the one thinking and

<sup>49</sup> Perhaps no later than 9 December 1688, when Montausier writes with thanks for the copy of the preface that had been sent to him. Cited Rapetti, *Huet*, p.95. But that it was only the preface leaves open the question.

<sup>50</sup> The case was first set out in *The Downfall of Cartesianism*, and then in *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics*.

unextended, the other extended and unthinking. Or, more precisely, that both sets of views cannot be maintained if it is also held, as the Cartesians wanted to hold, that minds can know bodies and causally interact with them. The thesis is clear, historically documented, and philosophically attractive.

A disadvantage of Watson's role for Foucher is that he just was not well enough known, or widely enough read, to have had the effect ascribed to him. Malebranche himself did not take Foucher seriously.<sup>51</sup> The interest in Foucher shown by Desgabets, Leibniz and Bayle was hardly seen anywhere else, and the use of him by all three did not add up to a downfall. The first two in fact sought to rebut his critique of Cartesianism, and did so with some facility, and the appeal to Foucher's arguments in Bayle's *Dictionary* article on Pyrrho is not in propria persona. To be sure, Foucher's arguments are there, with attribution, ready for cooptation by Berkeley and others. But they are employed in Bayle's text by a Catholic priest for purposes that Bayle cannot have entirely shared.

Nor should this failure of Foucher to be much noticed cause any surprise. For in terms of doctrinal analysis, the answers to Foucher's critique are rather obvious. For example, the Cartesians simply did not hold any causal likeness principle. To do so would make not only interaction between minds and bodies impossible given their dualism, but also creation of the world by God, or any effect of God in the material world thereafter. Nor did the Cartesians resort to occasionalism to account ad hoc for the mind-body connections that would otherwise have been impossible. They held that only God could be real cause upon occasion of mental and physical events for reasons independent of the alleged difficulties, and had to defend it by showing that the connections were not a counter-example to occasionalism.

With Huet, the situation is very different. He was far more prominent, and his *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* (1689) quickly went through five editions in as many years. While Foucher's work became hard to find because it fell into oblivion, Huet's work became hard to find because it was being bought up. The contrast between the negative reactions to their work is also instructive. Foucher was dismissed and ignored. Huet was jumped upon by the professorial elite. The very scope and fury of the reaction to Huet's

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<sup>51</sup> Because Foucher inadvertently based his *Critique* on only the first three books of the *Search*, which appeared as a separate volume in 1674, Malebranche was led to observe that when criticizing a work, the critic ought at least to have read it. Unlike his interminable polemic with Arnauld, Malebranche's dispute with Foucher ended quickly.

attack show how effective it in fact was. Certainly, the perceived threat represented by the attack is thereby evidenced.

Huet's *Censura* was far more extensive, and more devastating, than Foucher's *Critique*. Huet expresses worries of the sort that exercised Foucher over the inability of the Cartesian theory of ideas to deliver knowledge of an external world. But the work is far more comprehensive than that, dealing with the method of doubt, the criteria of clarity and distinctness, the nature of the human mind, proofs for the existence of God, and so on, all discussed with insight and competence. (As will be seen below, the discussion of the cogito is particularly sophisticated and of great heuristic value.) So it is Huet who has a greater proprietary claim to the downfall of Cartesianism.

Yet there is still a role for Foucher in the story. Foucher contributed to the downfall less by noticing an alleged internal inconsistency in the Cartesian principles than by bringing Huet to believe, or at least by reinforcing his belief, that Cartesianism represented a threat to religion, and in particular that the danger was Descartes's failure to adhere to his own (perfectly acceptable) principles. In particular, he would have led Huet to include an attack on Cartesianism as an independent part of the defense of Catholicism on which he was then working, (the completion of which being a promise that Foucher had identified in the *Demonstratio*).

Preserved in the "Carteggio Huet" of the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence are three unpublished letters of Foucher, dated 13 June 1685, 13 July 1685 and 23 September 1690.<sup>52</sup> They are not explicitly addressed to Huet, but it is clear that he was the addressee. The first of the letters contains what purports to be a copy of (at least a draft of) his *Apologie des Académiciens*, "which concerns you personally. I would ask that you let me know if it pleases you. I write this apology in the form of a letter with the epistolary style, which seems to me appropriate for saying a great deal in few words, and without affectation or constraint." That Huet is the addressee is clear from Foucher's urging him to make good on the promise made in the *Demonstratio Evangelica*. What Foucher took the promise to be is not obvious from his letter, or from the *Demonstratio*. The promise would seem to be the one he mentions at the end of the first book of the *Apologie*. There he tells us that "in his famous book *Demonstratio Evangelica*, an illustrious author has declared himself in favor of [the Academic] manner of philosophizing. I hope that he very soon makes good on the promise

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<sup>52</sup> See Pelissier, Léon-G., *Inventaire*.

he has made to show that the sects of philosophy that show how to doubt accord better than others with Christianity.”<sup>53</sup> Foucher’s hope would seem to be that Huet would show Descartes’s philosophy to be detrimental to Christianity just to the extent that it departs from what Foucher took to be the principles of Academic skepticism. In any case, Huet is asked to be the judge of the dispute between Foucher and Robert Desgabets (unnamed, but clearly intended) launched by Foucher’s critique of Malebranche’s *Search After Truth*.<sup>54</sup> It looks as if Foucher at this point was offering, or asking, to dedicate the work to Huet, placing it under his protection in the fashion of seventeenth-century protocols. In the event, the *Apologie* appeared without a dedication or the epistolary form, and significantly altered in wording from the draft of this letter.

The second letter contains a draft of the conclusion of the *Apologie*, which makes it clear that Huet is the addressee. The Academic philosophy best serves the faith, as the *Demonstratio* showed, by removing fallacies, equivocations, etc. The third letter congratulates Huet on having shown in *De concordia rationis et fidei* (the first part of what in 1690 would be published as the *Alnetanae Quaestiones*) how well the views of Plato agree with Christianity, especially on the Trinity and the divine word. Reason and philosophy lead to faith, as Huet shows; reason without religion leads to libertinage, religion without reason leads to superstition.

Foucher’s first letter says that with the *Apologie* he was making good on a debt of ten years’ standing. This is a reference to the dispute that Foucher mentions with Desgabets, who had replied to Foucher’s *Critique* of Malebranche with his own *Critique de la critique*.<sup>55</sup> But, according to Watson, although Foucher had to wait four years till a publisher for it was found, he had written a *Réponse* to Desgabets immediately upon the appearance of Desgabets’s *Critique de la critique*.<sup>56</sup> Why, then, did Foucher write a second reply to Desgabets?

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<sup>53</sup> *Apologie*, p.36. The text continues: “His experience and his profound erudition lead me to expect great things [from him]. Moreover, he is right to have chosen the Academics’ manner of philosophizing; demonstrations should be valid for every kind of philosopher, and not just for Aristotelians, Cartesians, or some other sort of dogmatist whose particular views serve to divide minds rather than unifying them.”

<sup>54</sup> For more on the Desgabets-Foucher exchange, see *Breakdown*, pp. 79 ff.

<sup>55</sup> Not that the effort was welcomed by Malebranche, who commented, “it seems to me that those who involve themselves in attacking or defending others should read their works with some care in order fully to understand their views.” *Oeuvres complètes* II, p.500.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* p.82.

His preface to the *Apologie* explains that while the work is an occasional piece, in response to Desgabets, it also stands on its own. He had already responded point by point to Desgabets, and here he focuses only on the Academics. “It is of no little importance to show that their way of philosophizing comports with religion, because, as it conforms with common sense, it is also attractive to decent and intelligent people,” especially at a time when “the contrariness of dogmatists was stirring up trouble for people with their opinions.” It is not unlikely that Foucher here was referring to the bitter debate between Malebranche and Arnauld over the nature of ideas that had erupted in the early 1680’s. This preface thus gives the intended substance of the work and the occasion for its production. But it does not explain how a defense of the Academics counts as a reply to Desgabets or is in any way related to his defense of Cartesianism.

The philosophical objections that came from Desgabets concerning the likeness principle were satisfactorily addressed by Foucher, certainly according to Watson. But Desgabets also saw theological difficulties stemming from these objections that had not been fully answered. If, as Foucher holds, ideas of extension are, like sensations, modifications of the mind, and, if, as he also holds, resemblance is required for representation, then since, according to Desgabets’s fundamental principle of all knowledge,<sup>57</sup> ideas do represent, the mind must be extended, with horrendous consequences for the immortality of the soul. Moreover, if as Foucher holds, we do not know the essence either of the mind or of the body, then for all we know, the essence of both might be the same, and that essence might be material—again with horrendous consequences for immortality. Now, Foucher’s reply in 1679 seems not to have fully addressed the theological worries of Desgabets, as perhaps he should have (both were priests, as was Malebranche, of course, who occasioned the whole exchange). He then saw as the only danger dogmatic pronouncements of the sort that Desgabets was apparently making, and which he avoided by pointedly not asserting materialism.<sup>58</sup> That is, the consequences that worried Desgabets do not follow because for a skeptic such as Foucher nothing follows. More than

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<sup>57</sup> This is the principle, whose importance cannot be overestimated, that “all our simple ideas always have a real object outside the understanding which is in itself such as it is represented.” Cited by Watson, p.80. Watson’s work on Desgabets was not the least of his contributions. Before the *Studia Cartesiana* publication of Desgabets’s philosophical works, he saw precisely what was important in Lemaire’s *Le cartésianisme chez les Bénédictins* (1901) for understanding Desgabets’s defense of Cartesianism, in particular his principle of intentionality.

<sup>58</sup> *Breakdown*, pp. 81–83.

this was needed, however, and someone with Huet's ecclesiastical standing would be the one to decide whether it had been supplied. In addition, he would be likely to favor the Academic skepticism that Foucher was proposing as an answer to the theological concerns of Desgabets.

Watson cites from Foucher the "great maxim" of the Academics as follows: "they recognize as a rule only evident truth, and faith when it is lacking, *in fide et veritate*."<sup>59</sup> To be sure, Watson earlier had said that he would not question Foucher's interpretations of Academic skepticism "beyond remarking that they are somewhat free, perhaps because one of [Foucher's] intents is to show that Academic principles are most fitted to lead one to Christianity."<sup>60</sup> The whole context in which Watson places this "maxim," however, rather obscures the significance that Foucher assigns to it. Foucher's *only* intent in citing it is theological. It comes at the end of his apology for the wise man of the Academics, who "does not conduct himself on the basis of mere opinions." The obvious problem is that such a stance seems on the face of it to preclude anything based on faith. Consider Cicero:

While there are many things in philosophy whose explanation is sufficient, the question of the nature of the gods, which both yields very nice thoughts about the soul and is also necessary for directing religion, is...highly difficult and obscure. So different and divergent are the opinions of the most learned that the Academics were prudent in withholding assent...for what is more scandalous than rashness [*temeritate*]? Or what is as rash or unworthy of the gravity and steadfastness of a wise man as entertaining what is false or defending what has been insufficiently explored and known without any doubts?<sup>61</sup>

To answer the difficulty, Foucher distinguishes between opinion and faith, citing Augustine's *De utilitate credendi*. "Faith is laudable when it is based on reasonable motives; but opinion is never legitimate and must always be rejected...because opinion excludes the search for truth by assuming as known what in fact is not known." By contrast, "the Academics conduct themselves on the basis of understanding or faith, whether human or divine, not opinion."<sup>62</sup> Opinion is a source of mischief, both in philosophy and theology. Because it varies over time and from one person to another, it produces heresy and discord.

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<sup>59</sup> *Breakdown*, p.37.

<sup>60</sup> *Breakdown*, p.36.

<sup>61</sup> Cicero, *De natura deorum*, I, 1.

<sup>62</sup> Foucher, *L'apologie*, p.55.



All legitimate faith agrees with truth and evidence; and although we might believe things that are not evident, it is nonetheless evident that we should believe it if God orders us to do so. And if we must not always follow our individual reason, this is because it is not always reasonable to do so; now, it is not reasonable to follow reason in things that we do not understand; we should not form a particular judgment on these things.<sup>63</sup>

It is precisely at this point that Foucher cites the great maxim of the Academics.<sup>64</sup>

While Foucher draws attention to Augustine for the faith-opinion distinction, he does not cite chapter and verse. The full citation is to be found, however, in the *Objections to the Meditations* from Arnauld, who certainly knew his Augustine and who might well have been Foucher's source.<sup>65</sup> Arnauld cited the distinction in raising the objection against Descartes that Foucher defended the Academic against, viz. that the proscription of opinion, or the acceptance only of what is clearly and distinctly perceived to be true, was prejudicial to the faith. Now Descartes's reply to Arnauld would have confirmed for Foucher, and certainly for Huet, exactly the worries that Arnauld was raising. For although Descartes basically does what Arnauld invited him to do, he simply makes an exception to his clarity rule for "matters which belong to faith and the conduct of life."<sup>66</sup> In response to Arnauld, he adds a sentence to the Synopsis that does just this.<sup>67</sup>

The rest of the *Apologie* is, like the great maxim of the Academics, focused on theology. It is an apology for the Academics in that it shows how "their philosophy is most useful to religion," which is the title of the first of its four parts, the first article being that the Fathers of the Church were Academics. The second part argues that despite the title of his *Against*

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.56. See also pp.102–04, where Foucher defends the Academic's relation to opinion on rather different, though not necessarily incompatible grounds. The Academic bases his actions on opinion, he says, only for matters in the *forum externum*, where there is no other choice given the diversity of men's views. But in the *forum internum* of conscience, judgment should be suspended and the truth sought.

<sup>64</sup> Foucher also cites St. Leo and Paul's epistle to the Colossians, thus making the religious context fully clear, which is the main point here.

<sup>65</sup> CSM II, 151–52.

<sup>66</sup> CSM II, 172.

<sup>67</sup> Descartes also draws attention to *Replies II*, however, where he answered a similar worry from Mersenne, and did so in terms that should have satisfied both Foucher and Huet. CSM II, 195–96. Mersenne had raised the problem of the Turk who embraces the true religion for the wrong reasons. Descartes replies by asserting the necessity and sufficiency of conscience. Although the faith may be obscure, indeed is obscurity itself there are reasons for accepting it, he says, that must be accepted in good faith. See also the letter to Clerselier, CSM II, 272–3. For more on this topic, see chapter eight, section 27 below.

*the Academics*, Augustine was actually in favor of the Academics. The third part tries to accord the Academic philosophy with common sense. It is here that Foucher attempts to show that Descartes initially bases his philosophy on the principles of the Academics, but then goes astray when he relinquishes those principles. Finally, the fourth part tries to show that the Academic manner of philosophizing leads to important principles and truths, such as the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, Providence and the faith itself.

The question might now be answered as to why Huet finally publishes the *Censura* in 1689. If he was prompted by Foucher, it is because he came to see that Cartesianism is a threat to religion, and because he saw what the prophylactic was to that danger. By 1674 Huet had turned away from Cartesianism because of the pride, arrogance, and vanity that led its adherents to reject humanist values, particularly the importance of tradition and authority, that were relied upon by Catholicism. Now Huet comes to see that the threat is so great that a publication is warranted, and that their pride, arrogance and vanity, which lead to a rejection of tradition and authority, also lead to another kind of failure. Foucher claims that the Cartesians fail to adhere to their own principles. As will be seen below, Huet picks up this charge and elaborates it such that Descartes is accused of outright dishonesty. When at the beginning of the *Meditations*, for example, Descartes tells he doubted, he really did doubt, and he did so for very good reasons. But then he found that he could not overcome those doubts. So as not to appear a failure, according to Huet, Descartes claimed that he really did not doubt, he only pretended or feigned to do so. He feigned to feign doubt because he saw that he could not overcome the doubt that he had raised. Of this, a great deal more below. Meanwhile, the philosophical response to such behavior is to insist upon the principles that were abandoned, and, ultimately, to ridicule the abandon of them in what can be seen as an exercise of moral chastisement. In these terms, the downfall of Cartesianism occurs not when its positions are refuted, but when they are made to seem ridiculous or outrageous—just as Aristotelian scholasticism, for example, dies not with Descartes but with Molière.<sup>68</sup>

After seven chapters of unrelenting, devastating, and detailed philosophical criticism, Huet in the eighth chapter of the *Censura* turns to a “general evaluation of the Cartesian philosophy.” He expresses some praise

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<sup>68</sup> Nor was Huet the only one to make this shift in dealing with Cartesianism. The Jesuit Daniel had already made it with his *Voyage de Descartes* of 1690.

for it (genuine, it would seem) and explains why it has enjoyed the success it has. Before turning to the virtues and faults of Descartes himself, he sets out “a list of stains on the Cartesian philosophy.” There are five such, four of them philosophical: it is inconsistent, is based on falsehoods, involves faulty causal inferences, and uses a faulty method. The greatest blemish, certainly the one developed at far greatest length, is that it “offends the faith.” How so?

The short of the story is that Huet foresaw that Descartes helped open the way to what later would be called deism: what can be known at all can be known on the basis of reason; faith is in principle superfluous and dispensable; while God might exist He is the God of the philosophers, not the God of Abraham and Isaac, etc. This deistic drift is apparent to Huet in Descartes’s arrogant view that since his philosophical views are true, and since truth never conflicts with truth, the truths of the faith are not opposed to them. It was because he saw that in fact the truths of faith were in conflict with what he took to be the dictates of reason that Descartes was led to his bizarre view that all truth depends on the divine will, that as a result God can do what is impossible and self-contradictory. (Huet’s own view is that faith and reason are never in conflict, and that when they appear to be, we are mistaken in what we take to be the dictate of reason). Thinking that he was thereby extending the power of God, Descartes did not realize that he was in fact restricting it. Following the Lateran Council, Descartes should have seen, for example, that since his view that nothing can be made from nothing was contrary to the faith, it was false.

Descartes’s followers “have been no more modest than their leader.” They place reason above faith in everything and restrict the relevance of Scripture to the Jews.

Everywhere do the Cartesians weigh things of the Faith on the scales of reason, and they seek explanations of God’s decrees. Others from this sect confidently assert that whatever Christ established among the people concerning the darkness, fire, and punishment of hell was figurative language designed to terrify and cause dread in them....Some of Descartes’s circle have come right out and said openly that the decrees of the Faith do not come to us other than by analogy. And one of them has written that the idea of matter does not require creation, and that nothing can be created.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> ACP, pp.203–04. Huet may be reading Noel Aubert de Versé and Spinoza as Cartesians. For more on them with respect to the creation issue, see Lennon, “The Cartesian Dialectic of Creation,” pp. 340–41. He may also be intending L. Meyer, B. Bekker and others; see Bouillier, *Histoire*, vol.1, pp.309 ff.

The Spinozist drift of Cartesianism is underlined as Huet goes on to criticize Descartes for eliminating consideration of final causes, which makes the notion of Providence useless or unintelligible, for introducing an instrumentalist view of moral commands, for proposing a doctrine of body incompatible with the Eucharist, and for making the world infinite. Huet's motivation for publicly attacking Cartesianism could not be stronger or more obvious.

Beyond its explanation of why Huet (perhaps wrote and then) published the *Censura* and then the *Nouveaux mémoires*, the Foucher-Huet connection might also shed light on the nature of Huet's skepticism. Huet is generally taken to be a skeptic of the Pyrrhonian sort. If he is influenced by Foucher, he is rather an Academic skeptic. In addition, if as Foucher and Huet claim, Descartes goes astray when he departs from his own (Academic) principles, then the downfall of Cartesianism is a collapse from within, not a demise brought about by extramural attack.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Given the putative importance of the connection, it needs to be asked whether Huet read or even looked at Foucher's *Apologie*, since the proffered dedication of it to him never materialized. That Huet at least looked at the *Apologie* is beyond doubt. We have his copy of the work, complete with his coat of arms (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, R.2231). What we do not have, alas, is the set of annotations that should have appeared in that copy if he did a detailed study of the work. Another connection on which further information might shed light goes back to the beginning of the story, in the year of 1674, when Malebranche published the first three books of the *Search*. That took place on 13 May; Foucher's *Critique* was dated 30 November, with the *permis d'imprimer* on 10 December, and the actual appearance of the book at the beginning of 1675. Huet was inducted into the Academy on 13 August of 1674. So any connection here would have been private, and in any case not on the basis of Foucher's published work.