

Ignorantia inflat
Leibniz, Huet, and the Critique of the Cartesian Spirit

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Abstract

This article explores the relations between Leibniz and the French erudite Pierre-Daniel Huet in the context of their shared anti-Cartesianism. After an introductory survey of the available commentaries and primary texts, I focus on a publication by Leibniz in the *Journal des sçavans* from 1693, where he fully endorses the critique of Descartes developed by Huet in his 1689 *Censura philosophiae cartesianae*. Next, I provide some indications as to Leibniz's motivations behind this public approval of Huet. First, I show how Leibniz throughout the 1690s was attempting to have his 1692 *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum* and other anti-Cartesian items annexed to a reedition of Huet's *Censura*. I finally show how these attempts to team up with Huet were prompted by Leibniz's dislike of certain German Cartesians, in particular J. E. Schweling, and by his fear that orthodox Cartesianism might do irremediable damage to the intellectual ethics of the Republic of Letters.

1. Introduction

The personal and philosophical relations between Leibniz and French erudite Pierre-Daniel Huet have only been scarcely studied. We can summarize the available secondary resources as follows. There is a short chapter entitled "Leibniz und Huet" in a fairly obscure work entitled *Pierre-Daniel Huet als Philosoph*, published in Vienna by a certain Karl Sigmund Barach in 1862¹. André Robinet has dedicated a few pages to the personal relations between Leibniz and Huet in his 1955 *Malebranche et Leibniz. Relations personnelles*, to accompany some excerpts from Leibniz's correspondence with Gabriel Wagner and Henry Oldenburg about Huet.² In 1966, Richard Popkin published an article, "Leibniz and the French Sceptics," where, without however going into any detail, he noted the curious fact that Leibniz, a reputed rationalist, was a personal friend of all three major French skeptics in the late seventeenth century, namely Simon Foucher, Pierre Bayle, and Pierre-Daniel Huet.³ Next, in the most detailed discussion currently available,

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Elena Rapetti has dedicated about a dozen pages to Huet and Leibniz in her *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica* from 1999.⁴ More recently, in the introduction to *The Art of Controversies* from 2006, Marcelo Dascal has offered a couple of fairly dense pages on the importance of Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679) for Leibniz's conception of theological demonstration,⁵ a theme I have myself pursued in some detail in an article on Leibniz, Huet, and Spinoza published in *XVIIIe Siècle*.⁶

That's it. While this may not seem a negligible amount of materiel, when taking into account what a towering intellectual figure Huet was in late seventeenth intellectual life, and considering the hundreds and hundreds of pages of commentary dedicated over the years to the relations between Leibniz and Spinoza, Leibniz and Bayle, Leibniz and Arnauld, Leibniz and Malebranche, etc., it is evident that the relation between Leibniz and Huet remains comparatively unexplored. There are, I believe, several reasons for this.

First, Huet figures nowhere in the texts that for contemporary readers habitually count as the most emblematic expressions of his philosophy, including the *Discours de métaphysique*, the *Système nouveau de la nature et la communication des substances*, the *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, the *Principes de la nature et de la grâce*, or the so-called *Monadologie*. Huet is not even mentioned in the *Essais de théodicée*, a book largely focused on a question—the relations between faith and reason—that was at the heart of Huet's philosophical preoccupations and about which he had written extensively, including an entire book, the *Alnetanae quaestiones de concordia rationis et fidei* from 1690.⁷ However, that Huet's name does not appear in the current canon of Leibniz texts does obviously not imply that Huet was a minor figure for Leibniz. After all, that canon is ours and not his, and when one begins to look into the less well known texts, fragments and correspondences, the references to the French erudite begin to proliferate.

Second, and more important, Huet has not always received the philosophical recognition he deserves.⁸ Still often considered in France as a relatively obscure representative of the Counter-Enlightenment, an embittered anti-Cartesian with little philosophical interest, his work has been largely ignored by a French historiography of philosophy eager to construct the seventeenth century as a radiant Cartesian one. Martial Gueroult's philosophical pounding of Huet in his *Dianoématique* is in this respect symptomatic. Huet's work is declared nothing less than “the negation of philosophy,” and Huet himself unsympathetically described as a “reactionary skeptic nostalgically turned towards the past” and dismissed as “mediocre.”⁹ The

inevitable conclusion is: “Placed in his own time [...] Huet’s defense stands out as the victorious counter-proof from the Cartesian viewpoint.”¹⁰ Surely, this provides all the justification needed to leave Huet be in his backwards conservatism and simply ignore his texts when writing the true Cartesian history of philosophy of *l’âge classique*.

Huet’s bad philosophical reputation goes a long way back. In fact, it already began to take shape in the texts of his direct adversaries, in remarks made by a deist like John Toland¹¹ or a Cartesian like Pierre-Sylvain Regis.¹² Voltaire did his part to perpetuate the conception of Huet as a mediocre philosopher when implying that the argument of Huet’s *Demonstratio evangelica* was a prime example of the very same “weakness of human reason” to which Huet dedicated his *Traité sur la foiblesse de l’esprit humain* (posth. 1722).¹³ I suspect, however, that the main culprits are nineteenth-century French university professors, followers of Victor Cousin who felt a particular need to bash Huet in order to better glorify their newly minted national philosopher, Descartes.¹⁴ Scattered publications over the last forty years on Huet as a philosopher, including those by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, Antony McKenna, Germain Malbreil, and the contributors to a volume of conference papers edited by Suzanne Guellouz, have done some work in putting Huet back on the philosophical map.¹⁵ But there is still a considerable way to go. The last monograph on Huet published in France was *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), humaniste-physicien* by the French cleric Léon Tolmer.¹⁶ It appeared in 1949.

Outside France, however, Huet has over the last couple of decades attracted more philosophical interest. April Shelford has dedicated two very substantial articles to Huet’s *Demonstratio evangelica* and written an excellent monograph about Huet as an intellectual, focusing in particular on his production of Latin poems.¹⁷ In *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica*, Elena Rapetti provides a thorough survey of Huet’s career, presenting a considerably stronger image of him than the “anti-philosopher” depicted by Gueroult. From another angle, Gregoria Piaia et Giovanni Santinello, in their *History of the History of Philosophy*, dedicate a very instructive chapter to the rudimentary history of philosophy that Huet outlines in his *Traité sur la foiblesse de l’esprit humain*,¹⁸ acknowledging his role in the birth of the historiography of philosophy as a discipline. Most importantly, however, in the English-speaking world, Huet has recently acquired a small place in the pantheon of great seventeenth century philosophers as a result of the work done by Richard Popkin, José R. Maia Neto, Tad Schmaltz, and, most importantly, Thomas Lennon who, along with a host of articles, has published a translation and an important

study of Huet's *Censura philosophiae cartesianae*.¹⁹

While these various recent Anglophone studies have explored Huet's relations with Descartes, Régis, Malebranche, and others, none of them has really touched upon his relations with Leibniz. In the following, I only begin filling this lacuna. I do not to provide an exhaustive account of Leibniz's reading of Huet's philosophical texts. I explore only some of the biographical, historical and textual resources available for undertaking this task. In particular, I focus on the relations between Leibniz and Huet in the context of their common anti-Cartesianism, that is to say, and on Leibniz's evaluation of Huet's *Censura philosophia cartesianae*. This focus in particular requires that I leave to one side Leibniz's involvement in, and subsequent appreciation of, Huet's *Demonstatio evangelica*. The main aim of the survey is to show how Leibniz repeatedly attempted to establish a strong anti-Cartesian alliance with Huet and to explore the motivations behind those attempts. I show in particular how this anti-Cartesian alliance was partly triggered by Leibniz's repugnance for certain German orthodox Cartesians and by the serious menace that he felt their contemptuous, sectarian and self-glorifying intellectual attitude represented for the existence of a proper work ethic in the Republic of Letters.

2. Huet and Leibniz: Personal Relations

Leibniz and Huet were, if not good friends, at least bound to each other by a sense of tremendous mutual respect. Leibniz first met Huet shortly after his arrival in Paris, maybe at Henri Justel's residence, a important meeting place for *savants* in Paris at the time.²⁰ At first, Leibniz hoped Huet—who was the second tutor, after Bishop Bossuet, to the *dauphin*, the son of Louis XIV—could help him gain access to the King so that he could present the political project he, as the diplomatic envoy from the the Court of Maintz, had come to Paris to promote: the famous *Consilium Aegyptiacum*.²¹ Leibniz never got an audience and the project never came to anything. Huet, however, realized the enormous potential of the young German diplomat and quickly enrolled him in his editing project *ad usum Delphini*, a sort of huge reader's digest including all the classical literature that Huet deemed a well-educated nobleman (or future king, hence the title) should be familiar with.²² Leibniz was entrusted with gathering material for an editon of Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis philologiae et mercuri*.²³

From 1673 to 1695, Leibniz and Huet pursued a somewhat irregular correspondence. Most of it has been available since the mid-eighteenth century.²⁴ It

opens with five letters (two from Huet, three from Leibniz) written between January and May 1673. Next, some five years later, there are three letters from Leibniz to Huet, written between October 1678 and August 1679. In the period in between, until October 1675 when Leibniz left Paris, epistolary exchange was rendered unnecessary by the fact that the two men could, and did, meet in person.²⁵ Letters up to this point are mainly concerned with the *Demonstratio evangelica*, a huge work of Christian apologetic and erudite biblical exegesis that Huet completed around 1675 but which, for complicated reasons including a surprising amount of trouble getting the work approved by the Royal censors, was only published in 1679.²⁶ The *Ritterkatalog* then indicates a letter from Huet to Leibniz from January 1693 that unfortunately is not extant.²⁷ The published correspondence ends with a letter from Leibniz to Huet, written much later, in April 1695.²⁸ There are, it seems, no direct exchanges between Leibniz and Huet between 1679 and 1693.²⁹ During that period Leibniz did however remain in indirect contact with Huet through other correspondents, most importantly the Father Claude Nicaise, via whom they regularly communicated polite greetings, but also texts and comments that are not all without philosophical interest. Finally, F. Chambon has published a letter from Leibniz to Huet from 27 February 1702 that mainly contains a recommendation for Thomas Burnett and some intellectual news.³⁰

To these various direct and indirect exchanges between Leibniz and Huet, we should add a great number of letters in Leibniz's correspondence with other intellectuals where Huet's work is discussed. Leibniz thus had exchanges about Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* with Hermann Conring, Johann Georg Graevius, Ludwig Veit von Seckendorff, John Toland, Gabriel Wagner and Thomas Burnett. His correspondence with Henri Basnage de Beauval, Claude Nicaise, Simon Foucher, Paul Pellisson-Fontanier, Antonio Magliabechi, and Gerhard Meier includes discussions of the *Censura philosophiae cartesianae*.

3. The Anti-Cartesian Alliance

In April 1693, Leibniz published an excerpt from a letter to Claude Nicaise in the *Journal des sçavans*. The text discussed Pierre-Daniel Huet's anti-Cartesian treatise *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* and some Cartesian reactions to it. I translate below the complete text published in the *Journal de sçavans*. It differs in a few points from the original letter. The significant differences are indicated in the footnotes:

I have infinite esteem for the Bishop of Avranches, and I pray you, Sir, to

assure him of this when an occasion presents itself. One of my friends from Bremen sent me the book written by Mr. Schweling (who is a professor there) against the critique [*la censure*] by this illustrious prelate, in order to get my sentiment about it. I replied that the best answer the Cartesian gentlemen could give would be to profit from the opinion of Mr. d'Avranches; to rid themselves of the spirit of sects which is always contrary to the progress of the sciences; to supplement the reading of Mr. Descartes's excellent works with those of some other great men, both ancient and modern; not to despise antiquity, from where Mr. Descartes has taken a good part of his best thoughts; to apply themselves to experiments and demonstrations instead of those general reflections that serve only to maintain idleness and cover up ignorance; to work on taking a few steps forward and not content themselves with paraphrasing their master; not to neglect and despise anatomy, history, language, critique, out of failure to realize their importance and worth; not to imagine that one knows everything that one needs to; and finally to be modest and studious, in order not to call upon themselves this witty sentence: *Ignorantia inflat* [Puffed up by ignorance]. I would add that I ignore how, by the influence of some star opposed to all [sects],³¹ it has come about that the Cartesian Gentlemen have achieved almost nothing and that almost all discoveries have been made by people who are not [Cartesian]. All that I am aware of are Rohault's little tubes which hardly merit being called the discovery of a Cartesian. It appears that those who are attached to a single master lower themselves³² by this kind of slavery, and they conceive almost nothing except by following him. I am certain that if Mr. Descartes had lived longer, he would have given us infinitely many important things. And this makes us see, either that it was his genius and not his method that led him to discoveries, or that he has not published his method. In fact, I remember having read in one of his letters that he only wanted to write a discourse on his method and to give some samples, but that his intention was not to publish it. Thus, the Cartesians who think they have their master's method are very much mistaken. However, I imagine that this method was not quite as perfect as we are led to believe.³³ I judge it from the geometry; this was doubtless his strong point. Nonetheless, we know today that it is a far cry from getting to the point that it should and that he said it did. The most important problems are in need of a new kind of analysis completely different from his and of which I have myself given some samples. It seems to me that Mr. Descartes had not sufficiently penetrated Kepler's important

astronomical discoveries, subsequently confirmed by the passing of time. His “man” is extremely different from a real man, as Mr. Steno and others have shown. The knowledge he had of salts and chemistry was very thin indeed; which is the reason why the things he says about those topics, as also what he says about minerals, is mediocre.³⁴ Even though it has some beautiful features, the metaphysics of this author is mixed up with major paralogsms and is at places very feeble indeed. I have discovered the source of his errors regarding the rules of movement, and although I have the most extreme esteem for his physics, it is not because I consider it to be true, except when it comes to a few particular matters, but because I consider it to be an admirable model and a sample of what one could and should now erect³⁵ on [the basis of] the more solid principles that experience has provided us with since then. In a word, I have infinite esteem for Mr. Descartes, but very often I cannot allow myself to follow him. I have on some other occasion written some comments on the first and the second part of his principles, where I in most cases was obliged to take my distances. The following parts go into the details of nature that are not yet so easy to clarify. This is why I have not yet touched upon those. But I do not know how I have been imperceptibly brought to entertain you for so long on this matter.³⁶

It was very likely this text that Pierre-Sylvain Régis had in mind when, a few years later during a public dispute with Leibniz in the *Journal des sçavants* provoked by the publication of yet another anti-Cartesian letter to Nicaise, Pierre-Sylvain Régis expressed his surprise that “not a single disciple of Monsieur Descartes has taken it upon himself to defend his master” against Leibniz’s onslaughts.³⁷ The 1693 text is a very violent attack on the Cartesians and expresses complete support of Huet and his anti-Cartesian campaign.

The first edition of Huet’s *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* was published in Paris in 1689. Rapidly sold out, it was subsequently reedited several times. In 1691, the arch-Cartesian Pierre-Sylvain Régis published his *Réponse au livre*, which came to count as the official response to Huet from the French Cartesians.³⁸ Leibniz was kept informed about these various developments mainly by Simon Foucher.³⁹ In 1694, Huet published an emended edition of the *Censura*, adding to it substantial amounts of material, mainly rejoinders to Régis’ *Réponse*.⁴⁰ We will return to that re-edition below. The publication of Leibniz’s letter to Nicaise in April 1693 surely was considered on the French side of the border to be a contribution to this controversy between Huet and Régis.

It is in this context worth noting how Leibniz's text circulated in the French networks from the time it was originally sent as letter to Nicaise in June 1693 until it was published in April 1693. At the end of October 1692, Nicaise thus wrote to Leibniz: "Sir, I did not want to put your beautiful and just criticism of Monsieur Descartes' works in the *Journal des sçavans* before having shown it to Mr. the Bishop of Avranches. Here you have, Sir, the letter he has written to on the subject."⁴¹ Huet's letter contained the following:

Sir, you have obliged me considerably by sending me the excerpt from Mr. Leibniz's letter on the Cartesian philosophy. I had already read some of the things he had written to you, in the letter he has written to Mr. de Pellisson. It is for me no small cause of joy and glory to see that the judgment I have passed on Mr. Descartes and his doctrine being confirmed by a man as excellent as Leibniz. For I do no less applaud, and I do no less esteem him than Mr. Leibniz does. But all this esteem has not blinded me to such an extent that I have not recognized several flaws in his method and philosophy. If more important matters did not divert me from these studies, I would take pleasure in making a show of the poverty and weakness of the responses that have been made against my *Censure*. Mr. Leibniz could do it better than I, and you would do the Republic of Letters a great service, if you could induce him to.⁴²

Leibniz was thrilled, obviously, but responded with appropriate (false) modesty: "You do my trifles too much honor by showing them to Mr. d'Avranches, and I have made too much of them by addressing them to you."⁴³ In fact, Nicaise had done Leibniz good service in sending the text to Huet beforehand, for the text is as much a homage to Huet as a critique of the Cartesians, and Leibniz was undoubtedly addressing himself as much to the French erudit as to the Cartesians when allowing it to circulate and to be published.

4. Plans for a Joint Publication

Leibniz's motivations behind his courtship of Huet relate to a very complex intellectual strategy with both concrete and more idealistic aims.

On the concrete level, Leibniz was seeking an appropriate place to publish a text, namely the text he mentions in passing towards the end of the April 1693 publication, the *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, a detailed point-by-point commentary on the first two parts of Descartes's *Principia philosophia* that Leibniz wrote some time during the first half of 1692.⁴⁴ At some

point, Leibniz sent this text to Henri Basnage de Beauval in Rotterdam in order to get feedback from the Dutch.⁴⁵ Basnage de Beauval, in turn, forwarded the text to Christiaan Huygens who responded to Leibniz in July 1692. Huygens, however, did not comment on the content of the text, but simply gave some suggestions as to its possible publication:

From what Mr. de Beauval has told me, you wanted to append your remarks to some new edition of Descartes' *Principles*; something which I doubt the publishers will agree to do, since it would not serve at all to commend this philosophy or its author. They would fit better with the *Voyage de Des Cartes* that you have surely read⁴⁶, or with Mr. Huet's *Examination [= Censura philosophiae cartesianae]*. You could also very well have them printed separately, if you added a title and a bit of preface. Or if you wanted to have a larger volume, you could simply examine in the same way the third and fourth parts in which there is at least as much to criticize or otherwise the *Meteors*.⁴⁷

Originally, then, the idea to have the *Animadversiones* published as an appendix to an edition of Huet's *Censura* came from Leibniz's former math teacher. However, on this occasion, Leibniz was fishing for something more than advice about a possible publication outlet: "Now that you have taken the pains to take a look at them [i.e. the *Animadversiones*], I would have liked it if you had pointed to the places where you do not agree."⁴⁸ Huygens's comments, as also those from the other Dutch, were however slow in coming. A year after, in October 1693, Leibniz once again solicited Huygens in order to get some more detailed comments: "I would like to see what you had to note about my anti-Cartesian animadversions that you did not deem completely inept."⁴⁹ Notwithstanding, already a few months earlier, probably encouraged by Huet's laudatory remarks on the letter to Nicaise, Leibniz wanted to submit his *Animadversiones* to Huet's scrutiny. The lines of communication between France and Northern Europe were however very perturbed because of the war (i.e. the Nine-Years War, or the War of the League of Augsburg, 1688-1697).⁵⁰ And then, while waiting for the Dutch to finally respond and the lines of communication to France to reopen, Leibniz ended up missing the occasion. The emended edition of the *Censura* was published late 1693 (dated 1694) before Leibniz had the occasion to show his text to Huet and propose that it be included as an appendix. In December 1693, Leibniz wrote a letter to Basnage de Beauval where he implicitly reproached the latter for having dragged things out, while still envisaging a future possibility of a joint publication:

Mr. the Bishop of Avranches has published a second edition of his *Censure*

Cartesienne. If you had managed to get some reflections from some able Cartesians in Holland on my *Animadversiones*, these could have been added to a reprinting of the second edition of Mr. Huet's *Censure*.⁵¹

Indeed, having missed the occasion with the 1994 French re-edition, Leibniz did not abandon the idea, now hoping that there might also be a new edition of the *Censura* in Germany.⁵²

Then, a couple of years later, in 1695, Leibniz read carefully the refutation of the *Censura* attributed to the Dutch Cartesian Burchard de Volder, the *Exercitationes academicae* published in Amsterdam the same year. (As Paul Lodge notes, the book in fact contains a series of disputations that De Volder held with his students at the University of Leiden around 1690-1693 and which it seems were published without De Volder's permission.)⁵³ Leibniz's 1695 letter to Huet, the last of their published correspondence, is mainly concerned with this refutation.⁵⁴ According to Leibniz, De Volder, to his merit, did not appear in the *Exercitationes academicae* as an orthodox follower of Descartes, but often "abandons him when he appears to defend him."⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Leibniz did not consider that De Volder had succeeded in rebutting Huet and the *Censura*. On the occasion, Leibniz even wrote up a critical commentary on the *Exercitationes academicae* which he thought sufficiently valuable to also be annexed to a re-edition of the *Censura*, along with the earlier *Animadversiones*. Thus, in April 1695, he wrote to Foucher:

A famous professor in Leiden named Mr. Volder published at the end of last year a response to the Bishop of Avranches' criticism. A friend brought it to me and asked me to give my opinion. While reading it I made some remarks, since it did not appear to me sufficiently satisfactory. One day that could be joined to the other animadversions on the philosophy of Mr. Descartes that I have written, especially if yet another edition of Mr. d'Avranches' *Censure* was projected.⁵⁶

When Leibniz wrote Huet, also in April 1695, it was exactly in order to suggest such a re-edition of the *Censura* including Leibniz's two anti-Cartesian (and pro-Huetian) pieces.⁵⁷ Huet, as far as we know, did not respond.

Trying yet another time to engage Huet in an anti-Cartesian collaboration, Leibniz finally contacted Huet a year after, in April 1696, using Nicaise as an intermediary, this time proposing to contribute to a new edition of the *Censura* some items in addition to Huet's already long list of accusations against Descartes for having pillaged previous philosophers without acknowledgment:

If Mr. d'Avranches decides one day to reprint his *Censure* on Cartesian

philosophy, I could communicate some interesting pieces to him to supplement it, among others, a remark made by the late Mr. Huygens, who had discovered that the foundations of what Mr. Descartes has written on the rainbow going beyond Markantun de Dominis has been taken from a text by the incomparable Kepler.⁵⁸

Huet responded politely a few months later, in October:

I cannot tell you how touched I am by the marks of attention that Leibniz gives me through you. Everyone must praise him for the loftiness of his spirit; but I would add to this praise that of the best heart in the world. I accept with all my heart his offer to indicate the place in Kepler that Descartes draws upon in his remarks on the rainbow. I discovered long ago that he has pillaged this author a lot. I have indicated in my *Censure* that he has taken his vortexes from him. I will most willingly take advantage of Mr. Leibniz's lights for the next edition to be made of my book [...].⁵⁹

That seemed promising enough as a reply, but nothing ever came of Leibniz's attempts to team up with the French bishop. While Huet continued to work on the *Censura* after 1694,⁶⁰ no further augmented re-edition ever appeared. Leibniz's comments on De Volder's *Exercitationes* remain to my knowledge unpublished to this day. Huygens's remarks on Descartes and Kepler were never mentioned outside Leibniz's correspondences. As for the *Animadversiones* on Decartes, they remained unknown and in manuscript form until 1844 when they were finally published by G. E. Guhrauer.⁶¹

5. Leibniz, Huet, and the German Cartesians

It is not unfair to say that Leibniz was obsessive about the idea of a joint publication with Huet. But why did he want so desperately to have his own anti-Cartesian remarks associated so closely and so concretely to Huet's *Censura*? After all, Leibniz was on fairly good terms with some of the most prominent French Cartesians – Malebranche in particular – and it did not seem a very good way of cultivating these Cartesian relations, which he surely valued, to hook up with the most virulent and uncompromising anti-Cartesian in France.⁶² Indeed, some remarks made by Pierre-Sylvain Régis in June 1697 prove that Leibniz was in fact doing damage to those relations:

It has been clear for a long time that Monsieur Leibniz wants to build his reputation on the ruins of that of Mr. Descartes; the fragments that he from

time to time has placed in the French Journal [= *Journal des sçavans*] is a great proof of this; and the particular bonds he has tied with the enemies of that philosopher, who are in great number here, remove all doubt about this.⁶³ Why would Leibniz take the risk of turning the entire French community of Cartesians against himself in order to back Huet?

Let us return to the letter published in the *Journal* in 1693, and in particular to the first couple of lines where Leibniz recounts what prompted him to write it:

One of my friends from Bremen sent me the book written by Mr. Schweling (who is a professor there) against the critique [*la censure*] by this illustrious prelate, in order to have my sentiment about it.⁶⁴

As it appears, the explicit target of Leibniz's anti-Cartesian polemics was not so much *French* as it was some *German* Cartesians. In 1690, Leibniz read the refutation of the *Censura* published the same year by Johann Eberhard Schweling, professor in Bremen, entitled *Exercitationes cathedrariae in Petr. Huetii censuram philosophiae Cartesianae*.⁶⁵ He also received reports in 1690 and 1691 concerning the refutation of the *Censura* by Andreas Petermann, the *Philosophiae Cartesianae adversus Censuram Petri Danielis Huetii Vindicatio* (Leipzig 1690) and the *Exetatis Censurae, qua Petrus Daniel Huetius... philosophiam Cartesianam inique vexabit* (Franker 1691) by Johannis Schotanus.⁶⁶ Leibniz was not impressed. In May 1691, he wrote to Huygens:

I had hoped that some able Cartesian would respond to the *Censure* of Mr. the Bishop of Avranches, but those I have heard of, by Peterman in Leipzig, Schweling in Bremen, and Schotanus in your country, fly very low indeed to my mind, and say only common things. It seems to me that the Cartesians have proven most disappointing and that there are not too many able people among them.⁶⁷

Schweling's rebuttal of Huet, the one among these various texts that Leibniz knew best, laboriously follows the *Censura*, quoting the book *in extenso*, while at each step proposing critical remarks. Already in October 1690, in a letter to Gerhard Meier — the friend in Bremen who had first sent Leibniz the *Exercitationes cathedrariae* asking for an opinion — Leibniz commented on what he considered an exceedingly mediocre book, providing a series of general remarks, but also some detailed criticism of Schweling's various arguments.⁶⁸ Many of Leibniz's objections to Schweling are familiar from his 1684 *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis*, a text of his own that he also alludes to in the letter to Meier. He objects for example that the Cartesian truth criterion, i.e. clearness and distinctness, is too

subjective, since some people affirm that they see their dreams clearly. Moreover, the Cartesians do not agree among themselves about which conceptions are in fact clear and distinct. For example, contrary to Descartes, Malebranche admits that he does not clearly see the separation between mind and body, while yet other Cartesians doubt whether they have a distinct idea of the body.⁶⁹ A few months later, Leibniz also wrote up a summary of that letter, to be communicated to Schweling himself it appears. Leibniz ended this shorter commentary as follows, already here using some of the phrases we find in his future publication in the *Journal des sçavants*:

As for the *Censura* that the reverend Father Schweling is attacking, it seems to me that its warning is not without merit. And while I do not deny that [Schweling] defends Descartes justly on some points, the most efficient way of responding [to Huet] would be to listen to his advice, to let go of his empty and silly opinion that causes nothing but disputes and to abandon this avid sectarianism that often is dangerous to the Republic [of letters] and rather join Descartes' inventions to the excellent meditations of the ancient and the moderns.⁷⁰

The sentence Leibniz passed upon Schweling is extraordinarily harsh for a thinker reputed to cultivate a conciliatory attitude. After all, according to Leibniz, "what is most to blame in men is not their opinions, but their temerarious judgments blaming others,"⁷¹ and yet Leibniz's own treatment of Schweling testifies to no little blame. That the Bremen professor unsuccessfully tried to defend Descartes' truth criterion was hardly sufficient reason for decrying him as an avid sectarian. The problem was rather that, against his stated intentions, Schweling failed to show the appropriate respect for the "great man" that his adversary was. Hence, throughout his refutation, Schweling accused Huet of exaggerating, of being careless, illogical, even nonsensical, but also of namedropping and speaking of authors whose doctrines he ignored, in a series of *ad hominem* attacks of which Leibniz provides a list in his October 1690 letter to Meier.⁷² It was this intellectual behavior, I believe, that triggered Leibniz's strong disapproval.

6. The Present State of Erudition

Leibniz, like Huet,⁷³ feared that the Republic of Letters should return to a state of barbarity: "I even fear that after having exhausted uselessly our curiosity without deriving from our research any mentionable profit for our felicity, people will be disgusted with the sciences, and by fatal despair mankind will fall back into

barbarity”⁷⁴; “if we go on like this, it is to be feared that an irremediable damage will be caused, and barbarian times would return due to the tediousness of scholarship.”⁷⁵ Leibniz even recommended to the Emperor Leopold that intellectuals should be put “under administration,” since “most scholars do not care about augmenting human knowledge,” but are like mercenaries who “work for money or out of vanity for their own glory and not with good intentions for the glory of God and the common good.”⁷⁶ Even worse, Leibniz complained, the Republic of Letters was becoming dominated by lazy and poorly educated amateur philosophers searching to build a reputation by slandering true hardworking erudites and university professors. Thus drowning in amateurs (*semidocti*) seeking a reputation and libertines (*esprits forts*) making fun of everything,⁷⁷ the Republic of letter was losing itself in a confusion of disputes, constantly destroying what had just been built, but without ever progressing: “Instead of holding hands to guide each other and to assure we are on the right track, we run around haphazardly and in all directions and we run into each other, rather than help and support each other”⁷⁸ and “with their heads full of empty subtleties without demonstration, and fighting out of caprice and passion, people miserably lose the precious time they could have used to advance solid knowledge.”⁷⁹

Nonetheless, Leibniz wrote reassuringly, “even though I do fear a return to barbarity for many reasons, I do nonetheless also hope for the contrary for other very good reasons.”⁸⁰ The primary reason for hope was, for Leibniz, the omnipresence of confusedly expressed truth in the intellectual productions of mankind from all times:

[...] the truth is more widespread than one might think; but it is very often disguised and also very often covered up, even weakened, mutilated, corrupted by additions that spoil it and make it less useful. By noticing these traces of truth in the Ancients, or to speak more generally, in the previous [thinkers], one could extract gold from the sludge, the diamond from its mine, and light from the shadows; and this would indeed be *perennis quaedam Philosophia*.⁸¹

However, Leibniz wrote in 1680, “I admit that this enterprise is beyond the reach of a single man. The knowledgeable men of a whole society would all have to get involved by a higher ordinance, all following the same, commonly organized project.”⁸² Combining the scientific ambitions of Francis Bacon⁸³ with a work ethic not far removed from that of the Society of Jesus,⁸⁴ Leibniz thus envisaged an intellectual community where each member would contribute his modest part to the collective production of something useful, for the common good, the advantage

of mankind, and the glory of God. We thus read in the *Mémoire pour des personnes éclairées et de bonne intention* from around 1692:

Even though particular [men] have merits, and that good intention can afford us some very beautiful and useful things, it is nonetheless true that they would do infinitely better, and more, and sooner, if there was much more understanding and communication among them [...] A thousand things could be done by two or more [men] who get along that would never be done, or never be done well, if they worked without communicating.⁸⁵

This new work ethic, as Leibniz announced in a memoir prepared for an audience with the Emperor Leopold in 1688, would eventually allow us to establish a great encyclopedic system of the sciences, a *Thesaurus Humani Generis*, a “hymn to God” which would be the final product of the “divine labor of knowledgeable people.”⁸⁶ It was these *gelehrter Leut* Leibniz tried to mobilize in his 1692 memoir when addressing himself to the “enlightened people with good intentions.”⁸⁷ Such people are those who sincerely search for truth, contrary to those who only search for glory⁸⁸; people who moreover are willing to “open themselves to others,”⁸⁹ contrary to those who are governed by “singularity” and the “spirit of sects.”⁹⁰

However, the contempt for erudition, the glorification of scholarly ignorance, and the sectarian admiration for Descartes that according to Leibniz made up the physiognomy of the orthodox Cartesian, threatened this intellectual ethos of enlightenment and good intentions. Leibniz wrote to Huet in March 1679:

[...] one can simply observe that since that time the study of antiquity and solid erudition has everywhere become the object of contempt, indeed to the point where there is no shame in not crediting any authority, whether this is to appear not to have profited from someone else’s talent or to provide a pretext for one’s own laziness.⁹¹

This is exactly the kind of philosophical attitude—contemptuous and lazy—that Huet denounces in the *Censura* but that Leibniz also chastises in his comments on Schweling.⁹² Indeed, nothing corresponds better to the German Cartesians than Huet’s “witty sentence” (*beau mot*) on the Cartesians that Leibniz delights in citing, the pun on Saint Paul: *Ignorantia inflat*.⁹³

These Cartesians “puffed up by ignorance” represent a considerable danger for the Republic of Letters mainly because they constitute a bad example for young scholars. There is an important issue regarding public education involved, which is no small matter for a Leibniz to whom “the main point is the restoration of education.”⁹⁴ Hence, in 1693, Leibniz wrote to Georg Franck von Franckenau about

the Cartesians, here described as disdainful, ignorant and lazy, that “there is hardly any sin more dangerous than to believe in a Descartes who has invented everything, while ridiculing the Ancients.” Indeed, he continues, there is no doctrine more inept that one can transmit to “young people” (*juventus*)⁹⁵. Such cautioning against the harmful effects of the Cartesian spirit on young, easily impressed intellectuals is a recurrent theme. For example, in a passage of *De la philosophie cartesienne*, Leibniz wrote:

It is certain that the abuse of the new philosophy does much harm to piety, especially in some countries where these new dogmas are well-known not only by scholars, but generally by everyone who takes pride in a bit of wit and curiosity. For, as they provide uneducated people with the means to talk about all sorts of matters and to despise the professional teachers and doctors who have spent their life meditating and teaching, one sees a great many people, and in particular young people, getting involved in this business.⁹⁶

Leibniz’s virulent anti-Cartesian and pro-Huet campaign in the 1690s thus boils down to a question of education and intellectual ethics. When intervening in the debates provoked by Huet’s book in Germany, and when trying very hard to associate himself concretely with the French Bishop all the way throughout the 1690s, it was for Leibniz an attempt to curb the harmful influence that orthodox Cartesians exercised when taking advantage of “the inclination, in young people in particular, towards discourse and judgments with no weight.”⁹⁷ Leibniz’s campaign was part of an attempt to put these “young bright people who want to play a little at being freethinkers”⁹⁸ back on the right track.⁹⁹

7. Conclusion

For Leibniz, the Bishop of Avranches was first of all a true erudite. He was a man who “knows marvelously how to make use of the erudition of the profane for sacred purposes; after Grotius and Bochat, there are only a few people who have known how to do this, and I do not know if there are anyone else who knows how to do it like he does.”¹⁰⁰ Now, according to Leibniz, an erudite is someone who takes an interest in truths of fact. In contrast to the philosopher, he only explores the domain of that which actually happened, and how these various experiences and events have been transmitted to us, the *historiae rerum gestarum*.¹⁰¹ He does not inquire about the principles behind the apparition of the phenomena in the world, but applies himself to the “inspection of the things themselves and the narrations

of men.”¹⁰² He registers all the things that have taken place by studying the traces they have left in human discourse,¹⁰³ thus writing “that novel of human life which is the universal history of mankind.”¹⁰⁴ To Leibniz, Huet was a bastion, maybe the last, of such true erudition in France, *primum Galliae literatae ornamentum et hodie pene unicum*.¹⁰⁵

Leibniz, however, did not only admire Huet for his vast historical and philological knowledge. For, according to Leibniz, erudition was not only about being knowledgeable, but also a way of knowing, a *cultus mentis* that served to orient the mind towards the contemplation of man’s perfection and the *scientia felicitatis*.¹⁰⁶ Erudition was also an intellectual attitude, a « spirit » (*esprit*) as Leibniz would call it, that is to say, an attitude towards oneself and the knowledge one possesses. True erudition was the kind of enlightened, modest, and well-intentioned spirit that could only be learned through the deep study of universal history, through the emulation and imitation of illustrious men and the immersion in their texts.¹⁰⁷ However, Descartes, by his feigned ignorance of the philosophical tradition, his contempt for his adversaries,¹⁰⁸ and ambitions to be the leader of a sect,¹⁰⁹ had given rise to a horde of orthodox Cartesians, whose ignorance was no longer feigned but real,¹¹⁰ and whose sectarian spirit made them immune to improvement: “The poor Cartesians do nothing but copy and paraphrase eternally the thoughts of their master. But when it comes to going beyond what he said, nothing new comes out. This is the fruit of the sectarian spirit.”¹¹¹ Surely, as Leibniz stressed when writing to Nicaise, rejecting such orthodox Cartesianism was not a question of rejecting Descartes’ work, but “let us be happy about the good things he has said without getting stuck in his system and in the spirit of sects, [and] let us first of all work on imitating him by making discoveries. This is the true way of following great men and to take part in their glory without taking anything away from them.”¹¹² Cartesians like Schweling had adopted a “spirit” that had nothing to do with Descartes’ “genius” as Leibniz called it in the 1693 publication in the *Journal*, by which he meant Descartes’ inventiveness. Nothing good would ever come from the “Cartesian spirit.” Consequently, by Leibniz’s lights, all that was left to do for the “Cartesian gentlemen” was to “profit from Mr. Avranches’ opinion” and learn to be “modest and studious.”*

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Notes

¹ See K. S. Barach, *Pierre-Daniel Huet als Philosoph* (Wien et Leipzig: L. C. Zamarski & C. Dittmarsch, 1862), chap IV: “Huet und Leibniz,” 30-38.

² See A. Robinet (ed.), *Malebranche et Leibniz. Relations personnelles* (Paris: Vrin, 1955), 30-31, 69-70.

³ See R. H. Popkin, “Leibniz and the French Sceptics,” in *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 76-77 (1966), 228-248.

⁴ See E. Rapetti, *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica* (Milan: Vita et Pensiero, 1999), in particular 137-148.

⁵ See M. Dascal, “Introductory Essay,” in G. W. Leibniz, *The Art of Controversies* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), xl-xli.

⁶ See M. Lærke, “À la recherche d’un homme égal à Spinoza. G. W. Leibniz et la *Demonstratio evangelica* de Pierre-Daniel Huet,” in *XVIIe siècle* 232 (2006), 388-410.

⁷ Leibniz knew about the existence of the *Alnetanae quaestiones* but may never have read the work. He experienced trouble in obtaining it from the German booksellers (see Leibniz to Larroque, 21 (31) July 1691, A VI, i, 587; on this see also Foucher to Leibniz, 26 May 1689, A II, ii, 291; Huygens to Leibniz, 21 April 1691, A III, v, 105; Leibniz to Huygens, 17 (27) May 1691, A III, v, 114; and Leibniz to Ernst von Hessen-Rheinfals, 7 (17) June 1691. A I, vi, 216.

⁸ See J. R. Maia Neto, “Charron and Huet: Two Unexplored Legacies of Popkin’s Scholarship on Early Modern Skepticism,” in J. D. Popkin (ed.), *The Legacies of Richard Popkin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 155.

⁹ M. Gueroult, *Dianoématique. Histoire de l’histoire de la philosophie I: En occident, des origines jusqu’à Condillac* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1984), 207-223, here 208-209. His assessment is grounded in passages such as the following one, drawn from P.-D. Huet, *Traité philosophique sur la foiblesse de l’esprit humain* (London: Jean Nourse, 1741), III, xii, 260: “*Il nous importe peu que vous refusiez à notre doctrine, le titre de Secte et de Philosophie: car pourvu que la chose subsiste, nous ne nous mettons guère en peine du nom qu’on lui voudra donner. Ne l’appellez point Secte, mais le balai de toutes les Sectes; appelez-là la philosophie de ne point philosopher, comme quelques-uns l’ont appelée, j’y consens. Nous aurions mauvaise grâce d’usurper le titre de Secte, lorsque nous le refusons aux autres, puisque nous ne connaissons pas mieux qu’eux la Vérité dont l’ignorance nous leur fait refuser ce titre.*”

¹⁰ Gueroult, *Dianoématique*, op. cit., 222.

¹¹ For Toland, see his letter to Leibniz on the *Demonstratio evangelica*, 15 February 1710, AI, [transcript. 1710], 42: “[...] his very title of Demonstration ought to have remov’d a farr off every thing y^t was not of y^e utmost accuracy. But the truth of it is, that whatever I may with you or others ascribe to his learning, there runs a large vein of priest-craft throughout y^e tedious work, which yet has not charms enough to make an infidel read it: and you, who have no superior in the Mathematical sciences, well know, that the very arrangement of his Propositions (to say nothing of what he alledges for proof of ‘em) is farr from being exact; besides that many of his axioms are disputable, and his postulates sometimes the greatest uncertainties in y^e world.” John Toland attacked Huet’s *Demonstratio evangelica* in the *Adeisidaemon* and the *Origines judaica* from 1709. A scandalized Huet remembered the affair with bitterness. See P.-D. Huet, *Mémoires de Daniel Huet*, trad. C. Nisard (Paris: Hachette, 1853), 245-246.

¹² Pierre-Sylvain Régis responded to the *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* in

his *Réponse au livre qui a pour titre P. Danielis Huetii, Episcopi Suessionensis designati, Censura philosophiae cartesianae* (Paris: Jean Cusson, 1691).

¹³ Voltaire, *La Philosophie de l'histoire* (Amsterdam, 1765), chap. XXVIII, 104: “Voilà ce que Huet appelle démonstration. Elle n'est pas à la vérité géométrique. Il est à croire qu'il en rougit les dernières années de sa vie, et qu'il se souvenait de sa démonstration, quand il fit son traité de la faiblesse de l'esprit humain, et de l'incertitude de ses connaissances.”

¹⁴ For a text that has done particular damage to Huet's reputation, see Fransique Bouillier's *Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne*. Bouillier writes for example about the *Censura* that “the tone of of [Huet's] polemics is inappropriate and without weight. It is a mixture of scholastic subtleties, satire, irony, and rude insolence” (*Histoire de la philosophie cartésienne* (Paris: Ch. Delagrave, 1868), vol. I, chap. XXVIII, 592-607, here 595). The amount of pro-Cousinian politics involved in such evaluations is maybe best measured by noting how, today, someone like Thomas Lennon does not hesitate to describe the *Censura* as “the most comprehensive, unrelenting, and devastating critique of Descartes ever published” (P.-D. Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, transl. T. M. Lennon (New York: Humanity Books, 2003, Backcover).

¹⁵ See G. Rodis-Lewis, “Huet lecteur de Malebranche,” in *XVIIIe siècle* 147 (1985), 169-198; A. McKenna, “Pascal et Huet,” in *XVIIIe siècle* 147 (1985), 135-142; G. Malbreil, “Descartes censuré par Huet,” in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 3 (1991), 311-328; S. Guellouz (ed.), *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721)* (Paris/Seattle/Tübingen: Biblio 17, 1994).

¹⁶ See L. Tolmer, *Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), humaniste-physicien* (Bayeux: Colas, 1949). Older works French work on Huet include: C. Bartholomess, *Huet, Évêque d'Avranches, ou Le Scepticisme théologique* (Paris: Franck, 1850), Abbé Flottes, *Étude sur Daniel Huet, Évêque d'Avranches* (Montpellier: Félix Séguin/Avignon: Séguin Ainé, 1857), and A. Dupront, *Pierre-Daniel Huet et l'exégèse comparatiste au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris : Libr. Ernest Leroux, 1930).

¹⁷ See A. Shelford, “Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica*,” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63:4 (2002), 599-617; “Of Scepters and Censors. Biblical interpretation and censorship in seventeenth-century France,” in *French History* 20:2 (2006), 161-181; and *Transforming the Republic of Letters. Pierre-Daniel Huet and European Intellectual Life, 1650-1720* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007). See also the excellent thesis that formed the first basis for all this work: *Faith and Glory: Pierre-Daniel Huet and the Making*

of the *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679), Doctoral Thesis, History Department, Princeton University 1997.

¹⁸ See G. Piaia and G. Santinello, *Models of the History of Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), 139-147.

¹⁹ For Lennon's work, see *The Plain Truth. Descartes, Huet, and Scepticism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); P.-D. Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy*, op. cit; and numerous articles: A. Larivière et T. M. Lennon, "True believers: the reception of Descartes' meditations by Malebranche and Huet," in *Kriterion* 106 (2002), 89-107; T. M. Lennon, "Huet, Descartes, and the Objection of Objections," in J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin (ed.), *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Book, 2004), 123-142; T. M. Lennon, "Huet, Malebranche and the birth of skepticism," in G. Paganini (ed.), *The Return of Scepticism. From Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), 149-166; "Foucher, Huet, and the Downfall of Cartesianism," in T. M. Lennon (ed.), *Cartesian Views. Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 97-116; "The skepticism of Huet's *Traité philosophique de la faiblesse de l'esprit humain*," in M.-A. Bernier and S. Charles (ed.), *Scepticisme et modernité* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005), 65-75. For other recent work on Huet in English, see R. H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003), 277-284; J. R. Maia Neto, "Charron and Huet: Two Unexplored Legacies of Popkin's Scholarship on Early Modern Skepticism," in J. D. Popkin (ed.), *The Legacies of Richard Popkin* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2008), 155-172; R. Ariew, "Critiques scolastiques de Descartes: le *cogito*," in *Laval théologique et philosophique* 53:3 (1997), 587-603; J. R. Maia Neto et R. H. Popkin, "Bishop Pierre-Daniel Huet's Remarks on Pascal," in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 3:1 (1995), 147-160; T. Schmaltz, *Radical Cartesianism. The French Reception of Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004), 217-236; J.-R. Armogathe, "Early German Reactions to Huet's *Censura*," in J. R. Maia Neto, G. Paganini, et J. C. Laursen (ed.), *Skepticism in the Modern Age. Building on the Work of Richard Popkin* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 297-308. We finally note some pages by Jonathan Israel placing Huet in relation to Spinozism and the "Radical Enlightenment" in *Radical Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 453-455 and 487-488.

²⁰ See Huet, *Mémoires*, op. cit., 131.

²¹ See Leibniz to Boineburg, 25 November 1672, A I, i, 289.

²² On this project, see C. Volpilhac-Augier, *La Collection Ad Usum Delphini*.

L'Antiquité au miroir du grand siècle (Grenoble: ELLUG, 2000).

²³ See Leibniz to Biel, 29 October 1715, A I, [transcript. 1715], 472. See also L. Davillé, *Leibniz Historien. Essai sur l'activité et la méthode historiques de Leibniz* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1909), 20-21, and E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990), 38.

²⁴ Most of the correspondence was published in Winckler's *Anecdota* in 1757. It became widely available in 1768 in vol. V of the Dutens edition, and, in 1887, in GP III. Two letters were not published until 1924 by Groethuysen. A French clergyman, Jacques-André Emery, translated portions of the correspondence into French in his 1772 *Esprit de Leibniz*, a collection of excerpts and translations very frequently reedited until the end of the nineteenth century (under the title *Pensées de Leibniz* in 1803, 1819, 1838, 1870 and 1880). For the original edition, see Leibniz, *Esprit de Leibniz, ou recueil de pensées choisies, sur la religion, la morale, l'histoire, la philosophie, etc.*, ed. J.-A. Emery (Lyon: J.-M. Bruyset, 1772), 89-106. C. Volpilhac-Augier translates the letter to Huet from 15 April 1673 in the appendices of *La Collection Ad Usam Delphini*, op. cit.

²⁵ See Leibniz to Huet, March 1679, A II, i, 695. See also Huet, *Mémoires*, 180-181: “[...] je fis venir tous les bons lettrés, et généralement tous les hommes rompus à la lecture des anciens auteurs, que je connaissais soit personnellement, soit de réputation. Je leur expliquai le but qu'on se proposait et les exhortai à remplir envers le Dauphin des devoirs auxquels ils étaient d'ailleurs assez bien disposés. Ils accédèrent volontiers à tout ce que je demandais. J'ajoutai qu'ils se missent à l'œuvre sans prendre un moment. Je venais donc à Paris tous les quinze jours; on se rassemblait chez moi à une heure fixe et chacun me montrait ce qu'il avait fait, pour que j'en puisse connaissance, que je l'examinasse et le jugeasse.” To the extent that Leibniz was part of the team associated with this project, he presumably also assisted at least occasionally in these biweekly meetings.

²⁶ Shelford, “Of Scepters and Censors,” op. cit., 161-181.

²⁷ Ritter N° 45557.

²⁸ The published correspondance with Huet schematically:

[i] Huet to Leibniz, Early January 1673, A II, i, N. 110, 356-357; Leibniz à Huet, 20 March 1673, A II, i, N. 111, 357-358; Leibniz to Huet, 15 April 1673, N. 114, 362-365; Huet to Leibniz, 19 April 1673, N. 115, 366-367; Leibniz à Huet, 10 May 1673, N. 116, 367-369.

[ii] Leibniz to Huet, 18 (28) October 1678, N. 185a, A II, i, 640-43; Leibniz to Huet, [March 1679], N. 203, A II, i, 694-699; Leibniz to Huet, 1 (11) August

1679, N. 209, A II, i, 735-737.

[iii] Leibniz to Huet, April 1695, G III, 19-20 [= A II, iii [ve], N. 17, 7814-7816]

²⁹ In the beginning of the 1695 letter, Leibniz speaks of a long interruption: “*Interpellandi novitas tot annorum cultum silentio [...]*” (A II, iii [ve], 7814).

³⁰ LBr 96 Bl. 16, Ritter N° 4744, et Ritter N° 41936 Paris BN Coll. Victor Cousin; partial edition in F. Chambon, *Lettres inédites de Leibniz* (Paris: N. Charavay, 1903), 156-157.

³¹ The text in the *Journal* here has “*secrets*,” while the original letter has “*sectes*.” The original is clearly the correct one, so in this case I correct the text in the *Journal*.

³² Orig. “lower their minds.”

³³ Orig. “as he happily made people think.”

³⁴ Orig. “is very mediocre and not very solid.”

³⁵ Orig. “build now.”

³⁶ Leibniz, “Extrait d’une Lettre de M. de Leibniz à M. l’Abbé Nicaise, sur la philosophie de M. Descartes,” in *Journal des sçavans* 15, 13 April 1693, 163-A65. The original letter is dated 5 June 1692 (A II, ii, 532-538 = GP II, 534-535).

³⁷ P.-S. Régis, “Réflexions sur une lettre de Monsieur Leibniz, écrite à Monsieur l’abbé Nicaise dans laquelle il pretend faire voir que les principes de la filosofie de Monsieur Descartes, renferment des consequences contraires à la religion & à la piété,” in *Journal de sçavans* 23, 17 June 1687, 273-76 [= GP IV, 333-336].

³⁸ P.-S. Régis, *Reponse au livre*, op. cit. For commentaries, see Rapetti, *Pierre-Daniel Huet*, op. cit., 118-129; Lennon, “La réponse de Régis à Huet,” op. cit., 241-260; Schmalz, *Radical Cartesianism*, op. cit., 215-260.

³⁹ Foucher to Leibniz, 30 May 1691, A II, ii, 421-422.

⁴⁰ See P. D. Huet, *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* (Paris: Joannem Anisson, 1694). Regarding the additions and the genesis of this second edition, see Lennon, *The Plain Truth*, op. cit., 9-10.

⁴¹ Nicaise to Leibniz, 25 October 1692, A II, ii, 600. See also Nicaise to Huet, 29 July 1692, in V. Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, in *Œuvres*, vol. II (Bruxelles: Société Belge de Librairie, 1841), 198: “*Je reçus d’Hanovre, deux jours avant mon départ de Paris une belle et grande lettre de M. de Leibniz où il y a des compliments très particuliers pour votre grandeur et une critique abrégée très exacte et très recherchée des ouvrages de M. Descartes. On la jugea digne d’être mise dans le recueil des Sçavans: mais j’ai cru, monseigneur, qu’il fallait auparavant vous en faire part. Tout ce qui vient de M. Leibniz fait honneur à la république des lettres,*

et mérite de vous être communiqué.”

⁴² Huet to Nicaise, 12 September 1692 (forwarded to Leibniz on 25 October 1692), A II, ii, 604.

⁴³ Leibniz to Nicaise, 9 (19) January 1693, A II, ii, 651.

⁴⁴ Leibniz, *Animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesianorum*, 1692, in GP IV, 350-392.

⁴⁵ Leibniz to Nicaise, 9 (19) January 1693, A II, ii, 651-652: “[...] je les [i.e. the *Animadversiones*] ai envoyés en Hollande pour être vues avant l’impression par des habiles gens, tant Cartésiens qu’autre, pour profiter de leur avis.” See also Leibniz to Huygens, 16 (26) September 1692, A II, ii, 583: “Je n’ai point d’empressement à donner au public les remarques sur la partie générale de la Philosophie de Des Cartes. Mons. de Beauval semblaît s’offrir de les porter avec soi en Hollande.”

⁴⁶ Huygen alludes to G. Daniel, *Voiage du monde de Descartes*, Paris 1690.

⁴⁷ Huygens to Leibniz, 11 July 1692, A III, v, 341.

⁴⁸ Leibniz to Huygens, 16 (26) September 1692, A II, ii, 583.

⁴⁹ Leibniz to Huygens, 1 (11) October 1693, A II, ii, 742.

⁵⁰ Leibniz to Nicaise, 9 (12) January 1693, A II, ii, 651-652: “J’avais fait quelques remarques sur la 1^{re} et la 2^e partie des Principes de M. Descartes, qui comprennent la partie générale de sa philosophie [...]. A distance des lieux et la difficulté des temps m’a empêché de les envoyer en France où j’aurais voulu les soumettre au jugement incomparable de Mons. d’Avranches [...].” On this, see also Huet à Nicaise, 19 July 1691, in Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, op. cit., 195: “Je suis très aise que cet excellent homme [Leibniz] pense à moi, et qu’il entre dans mes sentiments sur le Sujet du Cartésianisme. M. Huygens m’en écrit à peu près aux mêmes termes. Ce n’est pas une mauvaise marque, mais l’interruption du commerce qui me prive du plaisir de voir tous ces libelles. Car hormis l’écrit de Mr. Régis et une thèse disputée à Leyde contre moi, je n’ai rien vu du tout, pas même le Journal des sçavans [...].”

⁵¹ Leibniz to Basnage de Beauval, December 1693, A II, ii, 757. See also Leibniz to Von Franckenau, 27 December 1693 (6 January 1694), A II, ii, 778.: “Si scivissem mature satis illustrissimum Episcopum Abrincensem novam et auctiorem Censurae Cartesianae editionem moliri, suppeditassem ei paralipomena non pauca.”

⁵² See Leibniz to Von Franckenau, 27 December 1693 (6 January 1694), A II, ii, 778: “Et fortasse cum illa aliquando recudetur in Germania, poterunt accedere meae animadversiones in partem generalem Principiorum Cartesii [...].”

⁵³ See Leibniz to Bouvet, 15 February 1701, A I, xix, 411: “Un des plus célèbres

professeurs de Hollande nommé Mons. Volder [...] était un grand hyperaspiste de la philosophie de Des Cartes, jusqu'à avoir écrit fortement contre la censure de M. l'Évêque d'Avranches [...]." Regarding the circumstances of the publication of the *Exercitationes*, see P. Lodge, "Introduction," in *The Leibniz-De Volder Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2013), xxiv-xxv.

⁵⁴ See Leibniz to Huet, April 1695, A II, iii [ve], 7815 (= GP III, 19).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Leibniz to Foucher, 6 (16) April 1695, A II, iii, [ve], 7806 (= GP I, 420-421).

⁵⁷ Leibniz to Huet, avril 1695, A II, iii [ve], 7815-16 (= GP III, 19-20).

⁵⁸ Leibniz to Nicaise, 30 April (?) 1696, A II, iii [ve], 7957 (= GP II, 558). See also Leibniz to Nicaise, 7 September 1696, A II, iii [ve], 7996 (= GP II, 559). On Descartes' alleged plagiarism, see also Leibniz to Malebranche, 22 June (2 July) 1679, A II, i, 776-777; *Remarques sur la doctrine cartésienne*, 1689, A IV, iv, 2047 et 2051. For a list, see *Notata quaedam G. G. L. circa vitam et doctrinam Cartesii*, A VI iv, 2047-2050.

⁵⁹ Huet to Nicaise, 23 October 1696, forwarded to Leibniz on 28 November 1696, in A II, iii, 7990-7992, here 7990.

⁶⁰ There are annotations in Huet's own copy of the 1694 edition dating as late as 1713. See Lennon, *The Plain Truth*, op. cit., 9.

⁶¹ See *Leibnitz's Animadversiones ad Cartesii principia philosophiae*, ed. G. E. Guhrauer (Bonn: Adolph Marens, 1844).

⁶² However, when writing about Huet's *Censura* to Gabriel Wagner in 1697, Leibniz notes: "[...] though Father Malebranche is otherwise my good friend, I have never been able to approve his efforts to rule out, first, the critical study of Greek and Roman antiquities, then the reading of the rabbinical and Arabic literature, then the industry of the astronomers, and then something else, for after all, these things all have their usefulness, and it is good that there are people working at them, who must therefore be encouraged through praise further to pursue their great work, which they often carry out without reward, instead of being frightened away from it through contempt" (Leibniz to Wagner, 27 February 1697, GP VIII, 515, trad. in Leibniz, *The Art of Controversies*, ed. M. Dascal, Dordrecht: Springer 2006, 375).

⁶³ P.-S. Régis, "Réflexions sur une lettre de Monsieur Leibniz," op. cit., 273 (= GP IV, 333).

⁶⁴ Op. cit.

⁶⁵ J. E. Schweling, *Exercitationes cathedrae etc.*, Breae: Typis Hermanni Brauer 1690. For a short commentary, see J.-R. Armogathe, "Early German Reactions to

Huet's *Censura*," op. cit., 297-230.

⁶⁶ Mencke to Leibniz, 29 June (9 July) 1690, A I, v, 607; Löffler to Leibniz, 12 (22) December 1694, A II, ii, 867; Leibniz to Huygens, 17 (27) May 1691, A III, v, 114; Löffler to Leibniz, 12 October 1703, A, I, xxii, 611.

⁶⁷ Leibniz to Huygens, 17 (27) May 1691, A III, v, 114.

⁶⁸ Leibniz to Gerhard Meier, January 1691, A II, ii, 372-378.

⁶⁹ Leibniz to Meier (for Schweling), January 1690, 379-380. See also Leibniz to Meier, January 1690, 375-376. Cf. *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis*, 1684, A VI, iv, 585-592. Leibniz is specifically commenting on Schweling, *Exercitationes cathedrae*, "Præmittitur Cartesii sententia de criterio veritatis," § 1, 55.

⁷⁰ Leibniz to Gerhard Meier (for Johann Eberhard Schweling), January 1691, A II, ii, 379-381, here 381.

⁷¹ Leibniz, *Nouveaux essais sur l'entendement humain*, 1703-1705, IV, xvi, § 4, A VI, vi, 461.

⁷² Leibniz to Gerhard Meier, January 1691, A II, ii, 373: "*Cl^{mo} Suelingio id propositum video, ut verbis absteineat quae Adversarium, virum magnum, offendere merito possint. Quod institutum plerumque tenuit. Excidere tamen aliqua non cogitanti, quae mutata fuisse mallet, vel ideo ut exteri intelligant, etiam in Germania viros eruditos scribere in alios posse, gratis non invitis. Ut cum p. 384 egregium philosophum vocat, qui manifesta ignoret, et asylum ignorantiae amplexetur, et p. 380 [rhetoricari] ait ingenioque esse hyperbolico; [p. 397] temerario iudicio Geometriam Cartesii physicae praeferre, p. 430 nugari, p. 434 soloecismum logicum committere, et p. 449 in os Cartesii et Cartesianorum expuisse; qualia nemo liberaliter educatus praesens praesenti dicat.*"

⁷³ See Huet, *Censura*, 1694, op. cit., VIII, § 7, 238-239.

⁷⁴ Leibniz, *Recommandation pour instituer la science générale*, April-October 1686, A VI, iv, 698.

⁷⁵ Leibniz, *Consilium de encyclopaedia nova conscribenda methodo inventoria*, June 1679, A VI, iv, 339, trad. in *The Art of Controversies*, op. cit., 130.

⁷⁶ Leibniz, *Aufzeichnung für die Audienz bei Kaiser Leopold I*, August-September 1688, A IV, iv, 22.

⁷⁷ Leibniz, *Mémoire pour des personnes éclairées et de bonne intention*, approx. 1692, A IV, iv, 614: "[...] se contentant de mener un train de vie aisé [ces esprits] se moquent de tout, et laissent aller les choses."

⁷⁸ Leibniz, *Recommandation*, op. cit. A VI, iv, 694.

- ⁷⁹ Leibniz, *De la philosophie cartésienne*, 1683-1685 (?), A VI, iv, 1482.
- ⁸⁰ Leibniz, *Recommandation*, op. cit., A VI, iv, 699.
- ⁸¹ Leibniz to [?], 26 August 1714, GP III, 624-625.
- ⁸² Leibniz to [De la Chaise], April-May 1680, A III, iii, 192. See also Leibniz to Placcius, 27 March (6 April) 1696, A II, iii [ve], 7927, and Leibniz to Meier, May 1693, A II, ii, 701.
- ⁸³ On Leibniz's admiration for Bacon, see for example *De republica literaria*, May 1681, A VI, iv, 430.
- ⁸⁴ On this point, see J. Baruzi, *Leibniz et l'organisation religieuse de la terre* (Paris: Félix Alcan 1907), 46-105; L. Couturat, *La Logique de Leibniz* (Paris: Félix Alcan 1901), 506-507, 513-515; H. Knecht, *La Logique chez Leibniz* (Lausanne: L'Âge d'homme 1981), 264.
- ⁸⁵ Leibniz, *Mémoire*, op. cit., A IV, iv, 618-19.
- ⁸⁶ Leibniz, *Aufzeichnung*, op. cit., A IV, iv, 21-22.
- ⁸⁷ Leibniz, *Mémoire*, op. cit., A IV, iv, 612-621.
- ⁸⁸ See Leibniz to Foucher, End 1688, A II, ii, 284: “*On fait assez souvent profession de n’aimer que la vérité et de ne demander que d’être éclairci, mais souvent un peu de fausse gloire s’oppose à beaucoup de bonne intention, sans qu’on y prenne garde.*”
- ⁸⁹ *Recommandation*, op. cit., A VI, iv, 692-693. For the notion of “good intentioned people,” see also Leibniz to Jean Gallois, End October 1682, A II, i, 833-834: “[...] *je ne perd pas encore l’espérance de la pouvoir un jour exécuter en me servant d’une méthode faite pour avancer nos connaissances, et en même temps si aisément faisable, pour peu qu’on soit assisté, que je me sens souvent tenté de la démontrer, et de m’adresser à des personnes bien intentionnées pour l’exécution.*” See also Leibniz, *Remarques sur les entretiens de la politique de la clergé de France*, April 1681, A IV, iii, 217-18; Leibniz to Morell, 10 December 1696, Grua, 105; *Réponse aux reflexions*, 1696, GP IV, 339.
- ⁹⁰ For the notion of “singularity,” see Leibniz, *Mémoire*, op. cit., A IV, iv, 620. For the notion of the “spirit of sects,” see for example Leibniz to Justel, 10 (20) October 1690, A II, ii, 351; Leibniz to Pellisson-Fontanier, 18 (28) March 1692, 511; Leibniz to Nicaise, 5 June 1692, A II, ii, 534.
- ⁹¹ Leibniz to Huet, Mars 1679, A II, i, 698.
- ⁹² See P. D. Huet, *Huetiana, ou Pensées diverses de M. Huet*, ed. P. Olivet (Paris: Jacques Estienne, 1722), 2: “They have taken it upon them to make a merit of their incapacity, to ridicule erudition, to treat science as nitpicking [...] In order

to decry the study of antiquity, they have decried the merits of the ancients whom they do not know, and have preferred over them the merits of the moderns, that is to say, their own.”

⁹³ See Leibniz to Pellisson, 19 November 1691, A II, ii, 465; Nicaise to Leibniz, 1 May 1692, A II, ii, 519; Leibniz to Nicaise, 5 June 1692, A II, ii, 534. For Huet, see *Censura*, 1694, op. cit., VIII, § 7, 217: “[...] *jam ergo ludibrium debemus Cartesianis, quod eruditi sumus. Ita conversæ sunt rerum vices, postquam exorta est fax illa vitæ & veri; nunc laudi imperitia est, dedecori eruditio: nunc non scientia inflat, quod dictum Apostoli, sed inscitia.*” For Saint Paul, see 1 Cor 8:1: “*De his autem quæ idolis sacrificantur scimus quia omnes scientiam habemus scientia inflat caritas vero aedificat.*”

⁹⁴ Leibniz, *Mémoire*, op. cit., A IV, 4, 615.

⁹⁵ Leibniz to Von Franckenau, 27 December 1693 (6 January 1694), A II, ii, 778: “*Operæ scilicet pretium est viam rectam et mediam hic teneri, ne vel Cartesii aut similibus labores plane spernamus, neve contrario peccato pene magis pernicioso in uno Cartesio omnia invenire credamus, veteribus irrisis, quo nihil est ineptius, nihil quod juventutem inflat magis inani opinione doctrinae, ubi juncta ignavia ignorantiae sibi superciliose blanditur.*”

⁹⁶ Leibniz, *De la philosophie cartésienne*, 1683-1684/85, A VI, iv, 1480.

⁹⁷ Leibniz, *Contemplatio de historia literaria*, op. cit., A VI, iv, 458.

⁹⁸ Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, 1710, Preface, GP VI, 32.

⁹⁹ There is an element of reconstructed personal experience involved. As is well known, Leibniz frequently provides autobiographical accounts of his own intellectual development. Regardless of whether these various autobiographical texts are reliable guides to Leibniz’s actual biography or not, they clearly are a part of his self-image and express an important dimension of the Leibnizian spirit. In a letter to Gabriel Wagner, in the context of a discussion of Huet’s critique of the Cartesians, Leibniz presents such an autobiographical sketch: “From my own viewpoint, I confess that in my early youth I was inclined to reject much of what was accepted in the learned world. But with growing years and a closer insight I discovered the usefulness of many things which I had before considered trivial, and I learned *not to condemn anything too easily*. I consider this rule better and safer than that taught by certain Stoic lovers of wisdom and after them by Horace—*not to wonder at anything*. I have made this clear to the so-called Cartesians in France and elsewhere and have warned them that by deriding the Schools, they are helping neither themselves nor scholarship but are merely making learned men more bitter

toward new ideas, however good. To some extent this proved to be useful, as the not entirely undeserved criticism [of Cartesianism] by the learned Huet, Bishop of Avranches, proves.” (Leibniz to Wagner, 27 February 1697, GP VIII, 515, trad. in Leibniz, *The Art of Controversies*, op. cit., 375). Leibniz here clearly portrays himself as a former youth who became wiser.

¹⁰⁰ Leibniz to Nicaise, 29 September (5 October) 1693, GP II, 545. See also Leibniz to Von Limbach, 4 (14) May 1699, A I, xvii, 182: “*Was politioem literaturam anbelanget, welche ins gemein vornehmlich auff die Histori und Sprachen ankomt, so weiss ich niemand jezo in Franckreich, der dem Herrn Bischof von Avranches, so unter Huetii nahmen bekand, und sich zu Paris anjezo insgemein aufhält, in antiqua Historia et linguis eruditorum sonderlich Graeca et Romana vorgehe. Ich habe mit ihm von langer Zeit hehr Kundschaft [...]*.” See finally Leibniz to Huet, March 1679, A II, i, 696, and Leibniz to Von Seckendorff, 11 June 1683, A II, i, 840-841.

¹⁰¹ Leibniz to Huet, March 1679, A II, i, 696.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ See M. Fichant, “Postface: *Plus ultra*,” in G. W. Leibniz, *De l’horizon de la doctrine humaine*, ed. M. Fichant (Paris: Vrin, 1991), 169-171.

¹⁰⁴ Leibniz, *Essais de théodicée*, § 149, GP VI, 198.

¹⁰⁵ Leibniz to Spanheim, 25 August (4 September), A I, xiii, 234: “*Lorsque vous l’appellez primum Galliae literatae ornamentum, j’ai eu bien de la peine à m’empêcher de ne pas ajouter, et hodie pene unicum. Tant il est vrai que l’érudition décline en France d’une étrange manière.*”

¹⁰⁶ Leibniz, *Studia ad felicitatem dirigenda*, 1678/79 (?), A VI, iv 137; “*Sapientiam nihil aliud esse arbitror, quam Scientiam foelicitatis, et veram eruditionem tanquam apparatus ad sapientiam esse habitum animi plurimis ad bene beateque vivendum notitiis instructi.*”

¹⁰⁷ For detail on this point, see Lærke, “Leibniz, the Encyclopedia, and the Natural Order of Thinking,” forthcoming in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and “*More mathematico demonstrata, ordine naturali exposita*. Leibniz sur l’organisation de l’encyclopédie,” forthcoming in A. Pelletier (ed.), *Leibniz et l’expérience* (= *Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft*), Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

¹⁰⁸ Leibniz, *Animadversiones*, op. cit., GP IV, 375.

¹⁰⁹ Leibniz, *De republica literaria*, op. cit., A VI iv, 431.

¹¹⁰ See Huet, *Traité philosophique*, op. cit., III, x, 249: “*Pour Descartes, quoiqu’il eût étudié avec soin les Anciens Philosophes, et plusieurs des modernes, il affectait cependant de paraître les ignorer, pour être cru l’unique inventeur de sa Doctrine.*”

MOGENS LÆRKE

En quoi plusieurs de ses Disciples l'ont trop suivi; car ils ont imité sa feinte ignorance par une ignorance véritable."

¹¹¹ Leibniz to Justel, 10 (20) October 1690, A II, ii, 352.

¹¹² Leibniz, *Remarques sur la doctrine cartésienne*, 1689, A IV, iv, 2052.