

10. CHARRON AND HUET: TWO UNEXPLORED LEGACIES OF POPKIN'S SCHOLARSHIP ON EARLY MODERN SKEPTICISM

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Introduction

Richard Popkin's work on the role of ancient skepticism in modern philosophy is quite influential in the fields of the history of philosophy, ideas, science and literature. But when it comes to the particular philosophers he enrolled in the history of early modern skepticism, the reception and fortune of his work has been more diverse. His view that Descartes's philosophy is a response to the skeptical challenge of his time is extremely influential.¹ Other philosophers related to the early modern skeptical tradition such as Bayle, who was little studied before Popkin, now receive much more attention from scholars.² The two philosophers examined in this paper, Charron and Huet, still receive, however, very little attention in relation to their importance.

There are a number of coincidences concerning Charron and Huet which shed light on Popkin's interest in them. Both were French skeptics who became

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¹See Thomas Lennon, "Descartes, Huet and the Objection of the Objections" in J. R. Maia Neto and R. H. Popkin (eds.) *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), p. 124: "It is difficult for us at this stage of history to appreciate just how much [Popkin's] reading of Descartes has become the standard interpretation. We take it in with our mother's milk, and it is just assumed in virtually all literature."

²Among the recent studies on Bayle from the viewpoint of skepticism which were influenced by Popkin's scholarship—even if in some cases disagreeing with some aspects of his interpretation, see Gianni Paganini, *Analise della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1980); Frédéric Brahami, *Le Travail du Scepticisme: Montaigne, Bayle, Hume* (Paris: PUF, 2001) and Jose Maia Neto, "Bayle's Academic Skepticism" in James E. Force and David S. Katz (eds.) *Everything Connects: In Conference with Richard H. Popkin. Essays in His Honor* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 263–276.

priests at a relatively old age: Charron in 1576 at the age of 35, Huet exactly 100 years later, in 1676, at the age of 46. Both had their Christian faith put on doubt (though Charron's much more than Huet's). Both were key figures in the history of early modern skepticism, very influential at their time, but both were later overshadowed by two greater contemporary skeptics whom they personally knew: Charron by Montaigne and Huet by Bayle.³ Both flourished at key moments of the history of early modern skepticism, the first at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, the second at its end. Between them was the major early modern philosopher who made the most decisive contribution to the fate of modern skepticism: René Descartes. The first edition of Popkin's *History of Scepticism*⁴ ended with Descartes because the central event of this history was how Descartes used the skeptical doubt of his time for his own philosophical purposes and how this use immediately led to the perception that instead of refuting skepticism, Descartes's philosophy strengthened it. The last edition of Popkin's *History of Scepticism* published in 2003 carries this history to Bayle.⁵ The new chapters 11 (on Pascal and More), 13 (on Wilkins, Boyle and Glanvill), 16 (on Malebranche, Locke and Leibniz), 17 (on Foucher and Huet) and 18 (on Bayle) show how Descartes is crucial in late-seventeenth-century skepticism. Popkin called attention to the relevance of Charron in pre-Cartesian and of Huet in post-Cartesian early modern skepticism. Recent research has shown that their role is even greater than the pages dedicated to them in the *History of Scepticism* indicate.

³Charron was a follower of Montaigne but developed a kind of skepticism different from the skepticism held by the author of the *Essays*. See José R. Maia Neto, "Charron's Academic Skeptical Wisdom," forthcoming in Gianni Paganini and José Maia Neto (eds.) *Renaissance Scepticisms*. Huet met Bayle at one occasion. In a letter discovered by Popkin, Bayle expressed to Mme Blondel de Tilly his great admiration for Huet. Huet did not value much Bayle's *Dictionnaire* as a scholarly work and, as Popkin indicates, apparently did not perceive the strength and originality of its skepticism. See R. H. Popkin, "An unpublished letter of Pierre Bayle," *Nouvelles de la République de Lettres* (1981–1982), 193–197. However, J. Avenel, J. Avenel cites a letter from Huet to Gravius where he speaks favorably of Bayle's *Dictionnaire*: "multa in eo sunt solerter excogitata, scripta eleganter, erudite collecta" (J. Avenel, *Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de Pierre-Daniel Huet évêque d'Avranches*. Mortain: A. Lebel, 1853, p. 241).

⁴Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960).

⁵Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The following quotes from Popkin's classic work are from this edition.

Pierre Charron

Pierre Charron was an extremely influential philosopher in the first part of the seventeenth century.⁶ But from the mid-seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century, Charron's influence progressively decreased because of his scholastic style and, above all, the growing conviction that his main work, *Of Wisdom*, was plagiarized from Montaigne's *Essais*.⁷ Popkin was one of the first to undo this historical injustice by pointing out that although he was a disciple of Montaigne, Charron introduced at least one modification in the standard skeptical position of the time that turned out to be crucial in modern philosophy. The article "Charron and Descartes: the fruits of systematic doubt," published in 1954, is in my opinion one of Popkin's masterpieces.⁸ It exhibits one of the strongest aspects of Popkin's historiography of philosophy: his ability to open new research programs. He sheds light on the birth of modern philosophy by showing that Cartesian methodic doubt is much closer to Charron's use of skepticism to achieve human wisdom than to ancient skepticism or that of Montaigne. Montaigne remains to this day the main reference of Cartesian scholars discussing the historical background of Cartesian doubt.⁹ But Popkin shows that Descartes takes from Charron not only the conception of a methodical doubt but also his provisional morality, for it is a morality employed during the exercise of doubt, despite the different goals they pursue through doubt. Gianni Paganini has recognized the importance of Popkin's

⁶Michel Adam, *Etudes sur Pierre Charron* (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1991), pp. 198–202 reckoned 34 editions of *De la Sagesse* at the Bibliothèque Nationale in the period from 1618 to 1634.

⁷Bayle cites Sorel (*Bibliothèque française*, p. 92) claiming that "Charron a pris beaucoup de sentences philosophiques mot pour mot des *Essais* de Montaigne" (*Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, article Charron, note O).

⁸Popkin's main works on Charron is the article "Charron and Descartes: the fruits of systematic doubt," *Journal of Philosophy* 51 (1954), 831–837, and chapter 3 of the first edition of his *History of Skepticism from Erasmus to Descartes* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1960). The articles and books on Charron arguing for his originality vis-à-vis Montaigne were published after these two Popkin's works: Jean Charron, "Did Charron plagiarize Montaigne?," *French Review* 34 (1961), 344–351; Renée Kogel, *Pierre Charron* (Genève: Droz, 1972); Françoise Kaye, *Montaigne et Charron: du plagiat à l'originalité* (Ottawa: Éditions de l'Université d'Ottawa, 1982) and Michel Adam, "Charron a-t-il copié Montaigne de façon délibérée?," *Revue française de l'histoire du livre* 62–63 (1989), 273–293.

⁹Leon Brunschvig, *Descartes et Pascal lecteurs de Montaigne* (New York: Brentano's, 1944); Edwin Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), 1–20; and—in the case of ancient skepticism—Janet Broughton, *Descartes's Method of Doubt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 78–82.

discovery, developing the contrast between ancient and modern (Cartesian) doubt, whose voluntary character was first introduced by Charron.¹⁰

Popkin pointed out the direction and a new discovery and additional research has confirmed his view of the influence of Charron on Descartes's methodic doubt and carried it to the point that even the basic difference he saw between them does not seem to hold.¹¹ The new discovery was that of an exemplar of Charron's *Wisdom* dedicated to Descartes by a certain Jesuit named Molitor in the German winter of 1619, that is, at the time of Descartes's discovery of the "fundamentum inventi mirabilis."¹² This finding plus the verification that Descartes's provisional morals match exactly some of the general rules of Wisdom proposed by Charron,¹³ lead G. Rodis-Lewis to take seriously Descartes's claim in the *Discourse* that everything he says there in parts II and III was actually thought out during this famous night.¹⁴ My own research shows that not only Descartes's methodic doubt and provisional morals come from Charron, but most of the content of parts I, II and III of the *Discourse*: the diagnosis of philosophical *diaphonia*, the separation of philosophy from theology, the criticism of the pseudo-sciences and of pedantic education, the criticism of authority in philosophical investigation, the recommendation to doubt everything, the restriction of this doubt to inward thoughts, the recommendation that the method of doubt be not followed by scholastic pedants and vulgar men, and the first methodic rule to avoid preconceptions and rashness.

Two other early unfinished philosophical works of Descartes also reveal Charron's influence on him. In the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, the most important subject of investigation – on which the method is most required – is "the problem of investigating every truth for the knowledge of which human

¹⁰ Gianni Paganini, *Scepsi Moderna: interpretazioni dello scetticismo da Charron a Hume* (Cosenza: Busento, 1991), pp. 27–32.

¹¹ Popkin opened research fields which, once pursued, in some cases lead to conclusions different from some of his own, what pleased him, for one aspect of his own skepticism was that he was not attached to his own views but more interested in furthering new research. "Skeptic" etymologically means "inquirer".

¹² Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. M. Adam and P. Tannery, 11 vols. (Paris: J. Vrin, 1996), vol. X, p. 216.

¹³ In the same context of his remark on the discovery of the wonderful invention, Descartes says that "dicta sapientum ad paucissimas quasdam regulas generales possunt reduci" (AT, X, 217). The title of book II of Charron's *Wisdom* is "Instructions et Regles Générales de Sagesse."

¹⁴ See note by F. de Buzon in the *Archives de Philosophie* 57 (1992), 1–3, and G. Rodis-Lewis, "Descartes et Charron," *Archives de Philosophie* 59 (1994), 4–9 and her book *Descartes* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1995), pp. 71–76.

reason is adequate – and this, I think, is something everyone who earnestly strive after good sense should do once in his life – he will indeed discover by means of the Rules we have proposed that nothing can be known prior to the intellect.”¹⁵ Charron gives as the basic rule for those who strive to achieve wisdom – and in the *Rules* Descartes identifies *bona mentis* with *sapientia* (AT, X, 360; CSM, I, 9) – to examine everything which falls within the scope of natural reason, an examination which, according to Charron, will lead to the discovery of the only certain thing that truly belongs to the wise man, namely, his own intellectual integrity.¹⁶

Charron’s *Sagesse* is the source of the opening paragraph of Descartes’s *Recherche de la Vérité*, a passage which has puzzled Descartes’s editors.¹⁷ This dialogue of Descartes was highly appreciated by Popkin since it presents a lively picture of an Aristotelian being confronted with the new methodic doubt and taking it as completely skeptical. And perhaps because the dialogue is unfinished, only the part of Cartesian philosophy concerning doubt and the *cogito* is present in the text, although the text announces a much broader presentation of Cartesianism. The absence of the metaphysical doctrines proper to Descartes makes the text superficially similar to the skeptical texts in the period, in particular La Mothe Le Vayer’s skeptical dialogues. Its similarity of form to La Mothe’s “De la philosophie sceptique” (the names of the characters are quite similar) led Popkin to agree with Pintard’s view that La Mothe was the main source of Descartes, a view recently challenged by Edouard Mehl.¹⁸ Whatever the case, if La Mothe was not the original source, the philosopher who according to Popkin most influenced La Mothe, namely Charron, is certainly a major source. Descartes’s dialogue opens with the claim that to recover the integrity of reason one

¹⁵Descartes, René. *The Philosophical Writings*, 2 vols., translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Vol. 1, p. 30. “Si quis pro quaestione sibi proponat, examinare veritates omnes, ad quarum cognitionem humana ratio sufficiat (quod mihi videtur semel in vita faciendum esse ab ijs omnibus, qui serio student ad bonam mentem pervenire), ille profecto per regulas datas inveniet nihil prius cognosci posse quam intellectum” (AT, X, 395).

¹⁶Charron, *De la Sagesse* (Paris: Fayard, 1986), book II, chapter 2, pp. 389–405.

¹⁷In his edition of Descartes’ philosophical works, F. Alquié finds “curieux qu’en ce texte [the opening paragraph of *Recherche*] la mise en jeu de celle-ci [the recovery of the integrity of the natural light] soit attribué a un grand naturel ou aux instructions de quelque sage” (Descartes, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, Paris: Bordas, 1992, 2: 1106n2).

¹⁸See R. Pintard, “Descartes et Gassendi,” *Travaux du IXe. congrès internationale de philosophie*, II, part ii, 1937, pp. 115–122; Popkin, *History*, p. 344n26, and E. Mehl, “Le méchant livre de 1630” in A. Mckenna and P-F Moreau (eds.) *Libertinage et philosophie au XVIIe. Siècle* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l’Université de Saint-Étienne, 1996), pp. 53–67.

must possess “un grand naturel ou les instructions de quelque sage, tant pour se défaire des mauvaises doctrines dont il est préoccupé, que pour jeter les fondements d’une science solide.”¹⁹ The source of this passage is either the preface to *De la Sagesse* or book I, chapter 43. In the preface Charron says that there are two means to achieve wisdom: “le naturel” (the means of those who were born naturally disposed to wisdom) and “l’acquis,” acquired through philosophy. In chapter 43 he specifies that this acquisition is made through universal doubt.²⁰ Note that according to Descartes, Charron’s rules of wisdom are necessary not only to get rid of all previous beliefs – and this unequivocally proves Popkin’s view that Charron’s skepticism is the source of Descartes’s doubt – but also to introduce the foundation of the new philosophy, the *cogito* itself. Indeed, my study of Charron has pointed out that methodic doubt is not provisional for Charron, a doubt maintained only while the philosopher is deprived of supernatural truth, but the mean by which the philosopher recovers his own moral and intellectual integrity. Descartes perceived this and found in Charron’s doubt the way to construe a new philosophy immune from the skeptical problems that haunted all previous dogmatic philosophies. Through the hyperbolic skeptical arguments (absent from Charron) that put in doubt the existence of an external material world, including the body of the philosopher, Descartes gives a metaphysical turn to Charron’s moral skeptical sage, depriving him of his practical trust and turning him into a disembodied mind.

The more I read Descartes with Charron’s *De la Sagesse* in the back of my mind, the more I see how fruitful Popkin’s article “Charron and Descartes” was.

¹⁹AT, X, 496. “must have very great natural talent, or else the instruction of a wise teacher, in order to get rid himself of the bad doctrines that have filled his mind, to lay the foundations for a solid science” (CSM, II, 400). Note the English translators’ additions to Descartes’ text which reveal their effort to solve the puzzle: they take “great natural” as an adjective to “talent,” word which is not at all in the text, and they take “wise” as an adjective to “teacher,” which, again, is not only absent from the text but contrary to its meaning. “Wise” is Charron’s wise man and “natural” is one of the ways according to Charron to achieve wisdom.

²⁰J. R. Maia Neto, “Charron’s *epoché* and Descartes’ *cogito*. The skeptical base of Descartes’ refutation of skepticism,” in G. Paganini (ed.) *The Return of Skepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003), pp. 81–113. This chapter of Charron’s also appears in Rule XII when Descartes says that two kinds of people do not see that there is no difference of grades of obscurity in things, those who “proclaim their own conjectures as true demonstrations” (which correspond to Charron’s pedant ones) and those “more modest” who “refrain from investigating many matters ... simply because they deem themselves unequal to the task” (Charron’s vulgar) (CSM, I, 50, AT, X, 428). This same passage also appears in the second part of the *Discourse*: these are the two sorts of people who shall not endeavor Descartes’s universal doubt (CSM, I, 118; AT, VI, 15).

The full extent of Charron's influence on early modern philosophy still waits to be discovered. I have established elsewhere that Pascal's apology for the Christian religion has Charron's wisdom as its his main target,²¹ Gianni Paganini has shown the importance of Charron to Bayle,²² and I am convinced that one can show his strong influence on another major early modern philosopher: Locke.

Pierre-Daniel Huet

I turn now to the second figure in Popkin's *History of Scepticism* addressed in this paper. While Popkin's contribution to the understanding of Charron's importance is more philosophical, his legacy concerning Huet is more historical. Popkin's work on Huet exemplifies his tremendous ability to plunge into the manuscript collections of libraries all over the world and come out with new and important discoveries. The first thing of great value concerning Huet is Popkin's discovery of the intellectual richness of Huet's vast correspondence, preserved in the Ashburnham collection at the Laurenziana Library in Florence.

In the chapter on Foucher and Huet included in the 2003 edition of the *History of Scepticism*, Popkin writes that "[a] vast amount of [Huet's] writing and correspondence still remains unpublished. It shows that he was a central figure in the republic of letters of the time, one who deserves much more attention than he has been given" (p. 281). Popkin's work on Huet has had more continuity than his work on Charron. Thomas Lennon published an English translation of Huet's *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*, in which he takes into account the manuscript notes added by Huet in his copy. He has also published a number of articles on Huet's skepticism and is currently working on a book on Huet's criticisms of Descartes.²³ April Shelford,

²¹"Sagesse Chrétienne chez Pascal versus sagesse sceptique chez Charron", paper presented at the conference "Pyrrhonien, géomètre, chrétien. Pascal, le scepticisme et l'honnêteté", Caen, 26/27 February 2004.

²²Paganini, Gianni. *Analisi della fede e critica della ragione nella filosofia di Pierre Bayle* (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1980).

²³Pierre-Daniel Huet, *Against Cartesian Philosophy* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003). Lennon has published the following articles concerning Huet: "Foucher, Huet, and the Downfall of Cartesianism" in Thomas M. Lennon (ed.) *Cartesian Views. Papers Presented to Richard A. Watson* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. 117–128; "Huet, Malebranche and the birth of skepticism" in Gianni Paganini (ed.) *The Return of Scepticism from Hobbes and Descartes to Bayle* (Kluwer: Dordrecht, 2003), pp. 149–165; "Huet, Descartes, and the Objection of the Objections" in José R. Maia Neto and Richard Popkin (eds.) *Skepticism in Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Thought: New Interpretations* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2004), pp. 123–142, and "The Skepticism of Huet's *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain*" in Marc André Bernier et Sébastien Charles (eds.) *Scepticisme et Modernité* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005), pp. 65–75.

who received part of Popkin's research notes on Huet's correspondence, has published an article on Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica* in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.²⁴ Elena Rapetti has published a book on Huet and, more recently, another one based on some important letters to Huet by critics of Descartes preserved in the Huet collection at the Laurenziana.²⁵ Rapetti's last book is the first systematic use of an archive whose importance was first pointed out by Popkin. Jean-Robert Armogathe's and Julia Belgioioso's recent researches on the downfall of Cartesianism, to cite the title of Richard Watson's first book based on a dissertation directed by Popkin,²⁶ have pointed out that Huet's influence was considerable during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in German universities and in non-academic philosophical French and Italian circles.²⁷ Sébastien Charles is currently working on the Regis/Huet debate, working on some unpublished manuscripts of Huet's, and I myself have been working on the *Traité* for the last several years.²⁸

Popkin collaborated with my research on Huet, first, through e-mail, helping me to find my way out through Huet's manuscript materials at the Bibliothèque National in Paris, and then by sending me his research notes concerning Huet. This personal legacy I received in 2004 in a box containing: (a) his personal dispersed annotations, on scraps of paper; (b) photocopies of some of Huet's

²⁴April Shelford, "Thinking Geometrically in Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Demonstratio evangelica* (1679)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63:4 (2002), 599–617.

²⁵Elena Rapetti, *Pierre-Daniel Huet: erudizione, filosofia, apologetica* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 1999) and *Percorsi anticartesiani nelle lettere a Pierre-Daniel Huet* (Firenze: Leo S. Olschki, 2003).

²⁶Richard A. Watson. *The Downfall of Cartesianism 1672–1712. A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late Seventeenth Century Cartesianism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), revised edition *The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanity Books, 1987).

²⁷See Julia Belgioioso, *La variata imagine di Descartes: gli itinerari della metafisica tra Parigi e Napoli* (Lecce: Milella, 1999). J-R Armogathe has done research on the reception of Descartes in German universities during this same period and has indicated the role of Huet in this reception. See also Carlo Borghero, "Discussioni sullo scetticismo di Descartes (1650–1712)," *Gionarle critico della filosofia italiana*, 6^a. serie, vol. 18, ano 77(79), 1998, pp. 1–25.

²⁸Another important publication on Huet is the proceedings of the Colloque de Caen (12–13 Novembre 1993), edited by Suzanne Guellouz, in *Biblio 17, Papers on French Seventeenth Century Literature* (Paris, Seattle: Tübingen, 1994).

correspondence; (c) annotations of part of Huet's marginalia²⁹; (d) Popkin's careful annotations of his second major discovery concerning Huet, viz. an autograph manuscript copy of the *Traité philosophique* he discovered in Rotterdam; and (e) an unpublished introduction to this manuscript.³⁰ A letter by the late Polish Huet scholar Mme Dambaska to Popkin which also came in the box indicates that Popkin's presentation of the manuscript was designed for publication in a volume on Huet's *Traité*, intended to for publication in the International Archives of the History of Ideas series (founded by Popkin and Paul Dibon), containing a study of Huet's *Traité* and a critical edition of the text by him and Mme. Dambaska.³¹ In what follows I quote from this unpublished introduction of Popkin's. (I add some further information to Popkin's footnotes in square brackets.)

The sole French manuscript of Pierre-Daniel Huet's *Traité sur la Faiblesse de l'Esprit Humain* that has come to the light so far is in the collection of the Remonstrantskerk of Rotterdam, housed since the bombing of Rotterdam in the Municipal Library there. Although it is listed in the printed catalogue, there is no indication given that it is by Huet.³² In fact, the manuscript is in his own hand. I came across it by accident in the winter of 1957–58, while a Fullbright research scholar at the University of Utrecht, and because I had

²⁹“In the books that [Huet] donated [to the Parisian Jesuits] there are many, many marginalia by Huet; some, like his notes on Pascal and Malebranche, have genuine historical, philosophical interest. Jose Maia Neto and I have published these items, but there are a grate many others still to be brought to light, as well as many drafts of Huet's own writings, which he kept revising.” (Popkin, *History*, p. 374n13).

³⁰Popkin's work on Huet had three major moments. (1) a research project on the *marginalia* of Huet's books at the Bibliothèque National de France, in Paris, in 1956, supported by a grant from the American Philosophical Society (R. Popkin, “Report on Grant No. 144—Johnson Fund, the marginalia and correspondence of Pierre-Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches in the late seventeenth century,” *Year Book of the American Philosophical Society* for 1957: 364–366, 1958); (2) a research project on Huet's papers (mostly correspondence) in Florence (Biblioteca Laurenziana), Paris (Bibliothèque National), Caen (City Library) and Holland, where he found the French manuscript of the *Traité* in the city library of Rotterdam (he published a report of this research in the *Year Book of the APA*, 1959, pp. 449–453); and (3) the incorporation of Huet into the 2003 edition of *The History of Scepticism*.

³¹In the report of the 1958 research (published in 1959 in the *Year Book of the American Philosophical Society*), Popkin says that “the grantee intends to prepare a note for publication on this manuscript of the *Traité*” (p. 450).

³²*Catalogus van Handschriften op de Bibliotheek des Remonstrantsch-Gereformeerde Gemeente te Rotterdam* (Amsterdam, 1869). The entry on p. 49 for item 530 lists “Pluvignac, Théocrite de, gentilhomme de Quercy, Traité de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain et de la verité de la foy”, 121 pages, 40 from the seventeenth century.

been working previously on Huet's papers in France, could easily identify the handwriting. Neither the catalogue nor the document itself give any clues as to its provenance. Apparently there were at least four original manuscripts of the work, probably in both French and Latin.³³ The correspondence with the censor Pirot in 1692 indicates that a French manuscript of it was then examined, [apparently because Huet at that time intended to publish it]³⁴ as a continuation of the *Questiones Alnetanea*.³⁵ Pirot's strong reaction, and his denunciation of it as a "jeu d'esprit" seems to have discouraged Huet.³⁶ Huet, in his defense against Pirot's comments, began by reminding Pirot that he, Huet, had told him that "je n'avois nul dessein de le rendre public, prevoyant bien qu'on en pourroit abuser, et en tirer de mauvaises consequences, quoy que mal livrées."³⁷ He then tried to defend his skepticism and fideism against Pirot's objections. In a letter of August 19, 1715, Huet explained that if the work were printed, it might have dangerous consequences with superficial people.³⁸ Some indications in his correspondence are that a copy or copies were in circulation among his friends.³⁹ When, after his death, the

³³ Cf. the article on the *Apologie de M. l'Abbé d'Olivet* in the *Bibliothèque française*, Tome VIII (1726), p. 69, which states that there were at least four manuscript copies when Huet was alive.

³⁴ This section in square brackets is crossed out in Popkin's manuscript.

³⁵ Pirot letters of May 2 and May 8, 1692 in the Carteggio Huet, Ashburham Collection, Ms. 1866, items 1965 and 1966, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence. I am grateful to the American Philosophical Society for having enabled me to examine this rich collection of over 3,000 items of Huetiana.

³⁶ Carteggio Huet, item 1970, undated and unsigned, is Pirot's 7 page report on to Huet. At the end Pirot said, "je sçais que ce livre que vous aviés intitulé comme le 4^e des questions d'Aulnet n'est qu'un jeu d'esprit que vous ne l' avés jamais voulu publier, et que vous n'y avés travaillé que pour essayer sur la matiere, voyant bien que, si l'estoit publié, les consequences en seroient à craindre, et qu'on en pourroit abuser." This letter of Pirot also appears in the copies of some of Huet's correspondence at Caen, Ms. In-40., 206, Tome II, and is printed from the copy in the Abbé Leon Tolmer's *Pierre-Daniel Huet, 1630–1721, Humaniste-Physicien* (Bayeux, 1949), pp. 552–553. [I found another copy of this letter at the BN, Ms FR 15189. In this copy the letter is dated: 1 May 1692.]

³⁷ The Carteggio Huet, # 1967, first page. This three page document is unsigned and undated, except for "Mercredy matin." It is apparently Huet's copy. Pirot had been difficult about approving Huet's *Demonstratio Evangelica* in 1677, but approved and praised Huet's *Censura philosophiae cartesianae* and *Concordia rationes et fidei* in 1689. Cf. Carteggio Huet, items 1961–1963.

³⁸ *Bibliothèque française*, VIII (1726), p. 69.

³⁹ See, for instance Carteggio Huet, items 281 and 3033. The latter, a letter to Huet, 1 April 1712 discusses the *Traité* and expresses doubts about printing it. The letter is unsigned. [This letter was published by Pélissier, *Documents annotés V. A Travers les papiers de Huet* (Paris: Librairie Léon Técheiner, 1889), pp. 45–46. The letter is signed by a Jesuit from Lyon named Brossette.]

Traité appeared, his nephew, Charsigné insisted that he did not possess the work, and that he was not responsible for its publication.⁴⁰ The discussion with the Jesuits at Trévoux revealed that the Abbé d'Olivet and De Sallengre were responsible for the publication, and that they possessed the holograph Latin manuscript, now in the Bibliothèque Nationale (and described above by Madame Dambaska).⁴¹ Nothing in their statements seems to throw any light on the source of the Rotterdam manuscript.

... The major difference between it and the printed text is in the title and the opening paragraph, where it says, first in the title “*Traité de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain et de la vérité de la Foy*,” and in the first sentence “touchant la nature de l'esprit humain, et de la raison, *et de la vérité de la foy*” (italicized phrase not in the printed text. The italics are mine). ...

The variants of the Rotterdam manuscript have been incorporated in the text printed in this volume. Most of them are very minor. The difference in title is the most interesting one. Some of the other clearly suggests that the manuscript was copied from another, when for instance “l'orsque” appears instead of “lorsque,” or when a line or two is missing. Occasionally the manuscript has been corrected, usually so that it conforms to the text that was published.

It would be of some interest to know when and why Huet changed the title. Perhaps the phrase “et de la vérité de la Foy” was added solely in the Rotterdam manuscript because of its original recipient, or maybe (though there is no indication in the discussion with Pirot of this), it was part of the original title and was then dropped. If someday the enormous correspondence of Huet is edited, it may be possible to ascertain the history of the various manuscripts of the *Traité* during his lifetime.

My main goal when I arrived in Paris in January 2004 was to find a second of these “three or four” manuscripts of the French version of the *Traité*. I did not find it, either at the Bibliothèque National or in the catalogues of any other French library. As Popkin indicates, our main source concerning the originals and the context of the publication of the *Traité* is Father Olivet, a friend of Huet's involved in the posthumous publication of the work. He was charged with forgery by the *Journal de Trévoux*, which claimed that the awful skeptical treatise was not by the bishop.⁴² One of the arguments was that there was no copy of the manuscript or reference to it among the papers Huet left in Paris

⁴⁰ Letter of Charsigné to Father Tourmenine, July 15, 1724, quoted in Tolmer, *Huet*, pp. 549–550.

⁴¹ Tolmer, *op. cit.*, pp. 550–552.

⁴² *Journal de Trévoux* 25 (1725), 989–1021, reprinted by Slatkine Reprints, 1968, pp. 250–258.

when he died. Olivet replied to this arguing that the manuscript was not in Paris with the Jesuits because it was sent to Amsterdam before Huet's death.⁴³ He claimed that "two of the three or four copies of the manuscript were from Huet's hands" and that Huet showed it to some intimate friends (he names the Jesuit Fathers De la Rue and Martin), who "had the leisure to read the work both in Latin and in French." There are letters from De la Rue to Huet dealing with the *Traité* but all of them indicate that De la Rue read a Latin manuscript.⁴⁴ Rapetti published two other important letters by two other friends of Huet's – the fathers Du Hamel and Le Valois – with detailed criticism of the work. These letters are from the same period, 1685–1689, when the first version of the work was finished.⁴⁵ There is another much later letter (1712) by another Jesuit, Father Brossette who had in Lyon a copy of the French manuscript. Perhaps there is, besides the Rotterdam manuscript discovered by Popkin, some copy of the French manuscript in France, maybe in Lyon in some library or private collection but not at the Bibliothèque National.

So I did not find what I was looking for, but whereas I expected to find at the Bibliothèque National only one manuscript copy of the Latin version of the *Traité*, the one autograph which was donated to the Royal Library by Father Olivet after the polemic concerning the authenticity of the work, I found another manuscript of the Latin version of the *Traité*, probably copied by some monk of the Aulnai convent of which Huet was abbé at the time he wrote the work. This copy was unknown to nineteenth-century Huet scholars, such as Péllissier, Baudement, Flottes, and Bartholness, and to contemporary Huet scholars. The reason is that it is listed in the BN catalogue as a partial copy of Huet's *Quaestiones Alnetanae*, which it really was, as I explain below. It is an earlier finished version of the *Traité*, probably the first one prepared for publication. This copy was the main finding of my research in Paris. By taking into account Huet's correspondence and by comparing this early copy with (a) the later autograph Latin manuscript owned by Olivet, (b) the published French text, and (c) the autograph French manuscript discovered by Popkin, we can outline in broad lines what Popkin had hoped to discover, namely, "the history of the various manuscripts of the *Traité* during Huet's lifetime."⁴⁶

⁴³"Apologie de M. l'Abbé Olivet de l'Académie Française," *Bibliothèque des livres nouveaux*, July 1726, pp. 44ff.

⁴⁴BN, Ms Fr 15188. Four other letters were published by Rapetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–85.

⁴⁵Rapetti, *op. cit.*, pp. 73–78 and pp. 172–196. More on this below.

⁴⁶Some details and some dates may be either corrected or specified through the examination of letters, which I have not been able to examine yet, from and to Huet by people who were aware of the manuscript and which were written during the years when Huet was working on the various versions of the text.

Huet wrote the first version of the *Traité* (it did not have this title at the time) between 1680, when, after finishing his tutoring of the king, he took possession of the abbey of Aulnai, and 1685.⁴⁷ This earlier version that I found is presented as the first book of a larger work in Latin, titled *Quaestionarum Alnetarum*. The manuscript begins with a Syllabus of this work. Five books were planned. The first is “That man cannot attain the truth with certainty” (the text of which is the base of what will become much later the *Traité*); the second, “That man cannot attain the truth with certainty, an example from Descartes’s Philosophy” (a text which is published in 1689 under the title of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae*); book III: “agreement of reason and faith;” book IV: “comparison of Christian and pagan doctrines;” and book V: “comparison of Christian and pagan morals.” The Syllabus gives not only the titles of the books but also of the chapters of each book and of the sections of each chapter. It also gives the page numbers of each section up to half of book IV, which suggests that that was the part of the work already written by Huet at the occasion the Syllabus was made.⁴⁸ In his *Memoires*, Huet refers to a “plus grand ouvrage que j’avais le dessein d’écrire.”⁴⁹ Huet considered this his *opera magna*, to be published after the successful *Demonstratio Evangelica* (1679). By the time the Syllabus was made, Huet showed it, together with the already written parts, to some friends: the Jesuit fathers De la Rue and Le Valois (Olivet also mentions Martin but, unlike the others, there is no letter confirming this),⁵⁰ and the former Oratorian, a close friend of Huet who was also from Caen, Jean-Baptiste Du Hamel. Father De la Rue, although claiming to be a disciple of Huet, urged him not to publish what Huet called his “system.” Huet would do better to abandon philosophy and concentrate on his erudite

⁴⁷ See Pierre-Daniel Huet’s *Memoires* (Toulouse: Société de Littératures Classiques, 1993), book V, p. 124 and De la Rue’s letter mentioning the work in 1685 published by Rapetti, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

⁴⁸ This also corresponds to what is commented by Du Hamel and Le Valois, which indicates they read the parts specified with page numbers in the syllabus.

⁴⁹ Huet, *Memoires*, Livre V, p. 125. See also the editor of *Huetiana* (whose source is Olivet) who “nous apprend, que le *Traité Philosophique de la Foiblesse de l’Esprit Humain* a été composé par Mr. Huet, dans le même tems que ces *Quaestiones Alnetanae*, qui parurent à Caen en 1690.” (Avertissement du libraire [Du Sauzet] in the first publication of the *Traité* (1723), p. vii.)

⁵⁰ I went through a volume containing part of the Huet-Martin correspondence and found no reference to the *Traité*. *Correspondance Inédite avec le père Martin* (S.L.: S. N., 1898, publication of the *Revue Catholique de Normandie*), BN MFICHE 8-Z-15675. Of course this does not mean that Martin did not know the work. Much later, in 1712, a Jesuit named Brossette refers, in a letter to Huet, to the fact that a Jesuit had read the text in Latin at Aulnai.

studies of the Bible and the Church Fathers. If he did not want to ruin his reputation as a great scholar and learned Church man, he should publish only the book against the Cartesians (that is, book II) and the comparison of Christian and Pagan *dogmata* (book IV) as two separate works, that is, excluding books I (the *Traité philosophique*) and III (the agreement of reason and faith).⁵¹ Huet largely followed his friend's advice. He first published book II, which was already ready, as a separate work under the title of *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* in 1689 (the titles of chapters and sections in the Syllabus match exactly the published text).⁵² He then wrote the originally planned book V (the moral comparison), which was probably not yet written at the time the Syllabus was made (it is not detailed in the syllabus and none of the letters of his friends refer to it), and published *Alnetaneas Quaestiones* in 1690 with three books, the first on the *concordia ratio et fidei* (the book III of the earlier version of the work), the second containing the *dogmata comparatio* (former book IV) and the third the moral *comparatio* (the planned book V).⁵³ The autograph manuscript of *Alnetarum Questionarum* at the Bibliothèque Nationale clearly shows the alterations of the work due to Huet's decision to exclude its original first book (that which much later becomes the *Traité*). "PRIMUS" and "SECUNDOS" in the running heads of the manuscript are written above the crossed words "TERTIUS" and "QUARTUS" respectively. The manuscript shows that these two first books plus the introduction are extensively corrected by Huet, whereas the third one contains almost no correction. The reason is that the first and most of the second books were already written when *Alnetarum Questionarum* was drastically cut from the originally planned five books to three, with the exclusion of the *Traité* and the *Censura*, which was published separately as suggested by Father De la Rue. Indeed, the book against Cartesianism had to be published separately because it could only cohere with the others that make up *Alnetarum Questionarum* if the original book I (the *Traité*) was not excluded, for it is a kind of empirical corroboration of the thesis argued for in the *Traité*, that man cannot attain truth with certainty. However, Huet did not follow De la Rue's advice entirely, since he included the former book III on the agreement of reason and faith, a book that exhibits clearly enough the author's skepticism, as was remarked by some of Huet's readers at the time.⁵⁴ This solves three controversies concerning the *Traité*: (1) It was the last published but the first written of the three philosophical

⁵¹ BN Ms. Fr. 15188.

⁵² *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (Paris: 1689).

⁵³ *Alnetanae Quaestiones* (Paris: Moette, 1690).

⁵⁴ Popkin indicates that Arnauld, for instance, immediately compares the book with La Mothe Le Vayer's openly skeptical essays. *History*, p. 280.

works of Huet's; (2) it was first written in Latin (Flottes had already proved this)⁵⁵; (3) it was considered by Huet the most important part (book I), containing his own philosophical system, the ground of both his rejection of Cartesianism and of his apology for the Christian religion, of what would be – if it had not been amputated of its most important part – his most important work (*Alnetarum Questionarum* in five books).

Although he removed it from *Alnetarum Questionarum*, Huet did not yet give up the project of publishing what would become the *Traité*. After publishing the *Alnetarum Questionarum* in only three books in 1690, he attempted to publish its former book I as an independent work titled “Fourth Alnetanea Question” (still in Latin). He wrote a preface in which he relates the work to his previous ones and sets the context of a conversation in the gardens of his abbey in Aulnai between him, his former Jesuit teacher Galtruchius, and his friend Father Du Hamel (the same man who commented on Huet's original version of the *Traité*).⁵⁶ The skeptical system of the book is then presented as a report by Du Hamel of the system held by an *érudit* exiled in Caen with whom he, Du Hamel, had conducted philosophical conversations. In the French manuscript sent to the publisher in Amsterdam, a Théocrite de Pluvignac, Seigneur de la Roche, reports the views of an *érudit* exiled in Padua. The editor of the book (Du Sauzet) has a note saying that this *érudit* is Louis de Cormis, whom Huet says in his autobiography led him to study the works of Sextus, who until then he knew only by name.⁵⁷ This Cormis was an important political figure from Aix-en-Provence, who was exiled in Caen in 1661. He most certainly learned about Sextus and ancient skepticism from studying with Gassendi, who was teaching his skeptical anti-Aristotelian course there – an experience that generated Gassendi's first published book, the *Exercitationes* – at the same time Cormis was studying law.⁵⁸ This story,

⁵⁵ Flottes, J-B-M, *Etude sur Daniel Huet* (Montpellier et Avignon: Seguin, 1857), pp. 263–264, denied Du Sauzet's claim that Huet wrote the work first in French and then translated it to Latin. Du Sauzet is the Dutch editor of the two versions of the *Traité*. There also is a French version of the *Censura* which Thomas Lennon, who has been working on this text, thinks is more likely to be the original. The Syllabus suggests the contrary.

⁵⁶ This preface was published in the *Continuation des mémoires de littérature et d'histoire de M. De Salengre*, Tome II, partie (Paris: Simart, 1726), pp. 485–493.

⁵⁷ Huet, *Mémoires*, Livre IV, pp. 90–91. Huet writes from Caen to Ménage in Paris in 15 April 1662: “Mais a propos des pirrhoniens, M. du Perier sçait il bien que M. Le président de Cormis est à Paris? Donnez-lui en avis, s'il ne le sçait pas. C'est un homme de merite, grand sceptique, & je voudrais que vous le connussiez.” (*Ménage*, Gilles). *Lettres inédites à Pierre-Danile Huet* (Napoli: Liguori Editore, 1993, p.106)).

⁵⁸ See Gassendi's introduction to his *Exercitationes adversus aristoteleos* in Bernard Rochot's bi-lingual edition (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959). Gassendi extensively used Sextus's works in this course.

related in the *Traité*, is therefore at least partially true. Some of the skeptical views presented in the *Traité* may actually have been held by Louis de Cormis. 1661 is therefore the year of birth of the embryo of a philosophy which could be published only 62 years later, in 1723.

Huet thus prepared this independent version of the *Traité* and tried to get it published. He finished this slightly modified version of former book I of the originally planned *Quaestionum Alnetanarum* in 1691. This was the occasion on which he showed the manuscript to Edme Pirot, a censor of the Sorbonne, doubtless in order to test the chances of its' being published. Pirot's very negative reaction is related by Popkin in the text above. Huet then decided not to publish the work under his name.

At least seventeen years later – the Latin autograph manuscript allows us to specify that it was after 1708 – Huet once again revises the text, suppressing all the references and passages that could reveal its real author. We can see these modifications in the Latin autograph manuscript conserved at the Bibliothèque National.⁵⁹ In this second revision of the text, Huet makes more substantial modifications than he did when he originally adapted the first book of *Alnetarum Questionarum* to make it an independent work. He includes, for instance, the objection raised by Pirot concerning the “Theological Conclusions,”⁶⁰ and adds a whole new chapter in book II, titled that “faith renders certain what is not so by reason,” clearly replying to Pirot and all those who, like him, doubted that “qu’après avoir oté toute la certitude de la raison, il y ait lieu pour celle de la foi.”⁶¹ This chapter exhibits Huet's effort to make stronger – by citing Aquinas and Augustine – his view that skepticism, unlike the dogmatic philosophies, is compatible with the Christian religion.

This revision of the Latin text was not completed by Huet (at least in the manuscript at the Bibliothèque National). I think that he soon decided to translate the work into French and publish it only in that language. The translation was the occasion of the fourth revision of the text. In his letter from 1712 to Huet, Father Brossette says that while it is true that the style of the earlier Latin version might disclose the author, this was not the case with the new French version. However, Huet did not want to take the risk and sent the French manuscript to a Dutch publisher, Sallengre, under the pseudonym

⁵⁹ BN Ms Lat 6682.

⁶⁰ Conclusions that reason derive from revelation. Pirot argues that Huet's attack on reason destroys these conclusions and therefore faith itself. (Ms Fr. 15189, fols 406–410).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* See in Rapetti, op. cit., similar objections raised by Le Valois (p. 77) and Du Hamel (pp. 173–174).

of Pluvignac, asking that it be published only after his death.⁶² This may have happened around 1718 when this same printer published Huet's autobiography, the *Commentarius de rebus ad eam pertinentibus*. Huet died in 1721 and since Sallengre had died too, the manuscript was taken by another Dutch printer, Du Sauzet, who did not respect Huet's wish for anonymity and published the French text under Huet's name in 1723, causing the previously mentioned scandal.

To sum up, there were at least four versions of the *Traité*. The first dates from 1685/1686, the second from 1691, the third from around 1708/1710, and the fourth, in French, from around 1709/1712. As he moves from one to the next, we see Huet elaborating further some sensitive topics and making a greater effort to conceal the identity of the real author. In the first version Huet himself exposes his system; in the second Du Hamel exposes the view of Cormis in Caen, and in the third and fourth a pseudonymous author exposes the view of a supposed *érudit* from Padua. But contrary to what is usually the case in clandestine libertine works, the modifications Huet made in the text aimed at making his point of the compatibility between skepticism and Christianity stronger. Each version improves on the earlier ones, so that in a sense it is true that the original manuscript (in the sense of the most elaborated version by the author) is the one published in French. The obstacles Huet encountered when he sought to publish the work gave him the incentive to improve it. All this suggests that the autograph copy found by Popkin whose title is not only *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse de l'esprit humain* but also *de la vérité de la foy* may well be the very last version of the text, when Huet puts in the title the main point he had emphasized more strongly in each of the various revisions of the text, in response to the criticism of readers and because the text was now separated from the other books of the planned greater work which developed the relationship between reason and faith and Huet's own historical/philological Christian apologetics. Indeed, the description of the planned work in Huet's autobiography attests to the adequacy of the title of the Rotterdam manuscript. He writes there that (I cite from the English nineteenth century translation) "as [philosophy] is boundless, wandering into immensity beyond the limits of time and creation, whilst the human mind, cooped within narrow bounds, depressed to earth, and involved in thick darkness, attempts by the aid of its reason to break for into the light, and to seize upon the arduous summits of truth, I proposed

⁶² "Je n'y [in the manuscript] d'autre changement que de mettre le nom de Mr. Huet, à la place du nom supposé de Théocrite de Pluvignac, Seigneur de la Roche, Gentil-homme de Perigord, sous lequel il vouloit se cacher" Avertissement du Libraire [Du Sauzet] to the *Traité philosophique*. The pseudonym Pluvignac was first used by Huet when he wrote a non published reply to Regis' attack on the Censura.

to enquire how high it could raise itself by its own powers, *and what aids were to be sought for it from faith* [emphasis added].”⁶³

Conclusion

I conclude by returning to the history of early modern skepticism. The confirmation that the *Traité* and the *Censura* were originally parts of a single work is important, for it shows how Descartes was influential, both positively and negatively, in Huet’s skeptical philosophy. The *Traité* is a most interesting piece of philosophical skepticism above all because of the extent to which Descartes’s life and doctrines are present in it, albeit reinterpreted to support skepticism.⁶⁴ In the 2003 edition of the *History of Scepticism*, Popkin refers to my interpretation of Huet: “In a most interesting article, “Academic Scepticism in Early Modern Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58:2 (1997), pp. 199–220, José Maia Neto tries to show that Foucher and Huet still admired the methodological contribution of Descartes, although they strove to destroy the ontological dogmatism he had presented. They thought the skeptical method, which Descartes started with, was an important part of philosophical study.”⁶⁵ My interpretation of Huet fits well in Popkin’s view of early modern skepticism, which I will dare to summarize in three points. First, Montaigne, Charron and other Renaissance skeptics overthrow Aristotelian dogmatism. Then comes Descartes who radicalizes this Renaissance skepticism in order to refute it. Finally, at the end of the seventeenth century, Bayle, Foucher and Huet refute the new Cartesian dogmatism and thus renovate skepticism by preserving and developing some aspects of Cartesian doubt. What I would state more explicitly and emphasize is that the dialectically most accomplished triad in this history is Charron – Descartes – Huet.

⁶³ Huet, P-D. *Memoirs of the Life of Peter Daniel Huet, Bishop of Avranches*. 2 Vols. Translated from the original Latin by John Aikin (London: Longman, 1810), pp. 204–205.

⁶⁴ Some of Huet’s most important skeptical arguments are Cartesian: the veil of ideas (chapter 3), the dream argument (chapter 9), and the deceiver (chapter 10).

⁶⁵ Popkin, *History*, pp. 374–375n23.