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Abstract

The skepticism of Michel de Montaigne is often conceived of as a precedent to René Descartes' experiments in hyperbolic doubt, contributing to the emergence of rationalism in seventeenth-century France. This study proposes a different reading of Montaigne's thought and legacy, and a fundamentally different intellectual relationship between Montaigne and Cartesian thought. It asserts that Montaigne's *Essais* did not promote or practice a hyperbolic or rationalist skepticism in which no empirical knowledge can be constructed, but a form of skeptical empiricism in which both sense perception and the reasoning mind serve as tools which remain highly fallible, yet serve as a means of constructing provisional hypotheses to form knowledge. This skeptical empiricism is opposed to the totalizing doubt of Descartes, and his method of forming fully certain *a priori* rationalist principles as a consequence of his rationalist skepticism.

In addition, this study traces the history of the skeptical empiricism of Montaigne and its influence over French seventeenth-century philosophy and philosophical fiction, asserting that contrary to serving as an antecedent to Descartes, Montaigne's skeptical empiricist thought gave rise to an intellectual tradition which would fundamentally oppose Cartesian rationalism throughout the seventeenth century. These skeptical empiricists, from Charron to the anti-Cartesian satirist Gabriel Daniel, combat Cartesianism by reserving philosophical inquiry to the mind's interactions with sensory phenomena and asserting the impossibility of understanding the essences of God, the mind, and things in the world. Like Montaigne, they also pose critiques of rationalist philosophical method—in which *a priori* principles are contemplated without reference to prior philosophical traditions—by promoting and practicing maximally eclectic interactions with other philosophies in order to produce new provisional theories about the nature of reality, improving judgement by exercising it on various philosophical texts and views.

Introduction

Michel de Montaigne's *Essais* are often thought of as the culmination of sixteenth

century skepticism, and a text of extreme and hyperbolic doubt produced in a world where

religious conflict, exploration of continents unseen by Europeans, and the unearthing of ancient

skeptical texts paved way for the radical experiments of doubt. What is more, scholars have

equated Montaigne's skepticism with the experiments of hyperbolic doubt of René Descartes.

Any claim of a direct axis of influence between Montaigne and Descartes implicitly contains two

claims: that Montaigne promoted a totalizing skepticism in which sense perception and logical

reasoning cannot produce any knowledge of the world, and that Descartes, through his

rationalism, had found a new way to begin philosophical inquiry under these conditions and built

his rationalism atop the total and neutralizing skepticism of Montaigne.[1]

This study proposes a different reading of Montaigne's thought and legacy, and a

fundamentally different intellectual relationship between Montaigne, his readers, and Cartesian

thought, both in terms of the epistemological claims they make and the formal and literary

qualities of these works. It asserts that Montaigne's epistemology does not promote total

equipollent[2] suspension of judgement about any claim of knowledge that can be made, as in

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[1] Sources which make this claim include E.M. Curley, *Descartes Against the Skeptics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978); John D. Lyons, *Before Imagination: Embodied Thought from Montaigne to Rousseau* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 32; Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savoranola to Bayle* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), 50-56; and Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 309-321. Marjorie Greene provides a useful account of the Descartes's experiments in hyperbolic doubt, and their lack of any particular response or direct relationship with the skepticism of Montaigne, in "Descartes and Skepticism." *The Review of Metaphysics* 52, no. 3 (1999): 553–71. Another source relevant to the origins of Cartesian hyperbolic doubt is the claim that Descartes draws his experiment of the Deceiver from Francisco Sanchez, for which there are more convincing textual parallels. See John Cottingham, *Cartesian Reflections: Essays on Descartes's Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 57-58.

[2] *Equipollence* is the term used in Pyrrhonist skepticism to refer to suspension of judgement in cases where all claims are regarded to be equally true. This is opposed to forms of skepticism where, for example, judgement regarding the absolute truth or falsity is suspended, but some claims are regarded as more probable or likely to be true than others. For an excellent introduction to equipollence in Pyrrhonist skepticism see the introduction, written

Descartes' hyperbolic experiment of doubt. Instead, in a mode quite opposed to Cartesianism, Montaigne reserves full skepticism and equipollent suspension of judgement only to the realm of metaphysics, including the nature of God and the soul. By reserving philosophical inquiry to the mind's interactions with sensory phenomena and asserting the impossibility of understanding the essences of God, the mind, and things in the world, Montaigne establishes a skeptical empiricist tradition which came to oppose Cartesian thought in the seventeenth century, and will be the object of this study. As a skeptical empiricist, Montaigne uses what he takes to be the two highly fallible tools of sense perception and reason in concert with each other in order to make claims about the nature of reality. Instead of beginning with rationalist *a priori* principles and the clear and distinct ideas of Descartes, which can only be fully true or fully false, Montaigne's epistemological method directly opposes it with its use of hypothesis formation and provisional certainty. That is, Montaigne's thought supports the idea that no claim can be said to be fully true or false, but claims can be thought of as more or less probable; in this way, if a thinker collects more data or perspectives regarding a claim, it is possible to revise one's hypothesis about the most probable claim, or the one which seems to be the truest.

Through both the form and content of the *Essais,* Montaigne produced a philosophical methodology which also fundamentally opposed the Cartesian idea of building a philosophy on *a priori* first principles, one that we will refer to as Montaigne's eclecticism. While Descartes insisted on building a new philosophy atop his hyperbolic skepticism,[3] Montaigne did not clear away or dissolve prior philosophical traditions, but combined constructive philosophical practice

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by editors Jonathan Barnes and Julia Annas, to *Sextus Empiricus: Outlines of Scepticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), xxi.

[3] Descartes notes, for example, in *Discours de la méthode*: "... je quittai entièrement l'étude des lettres. Et me résolvant de ne chercher plus d'autre science que celle qui se pourrait trouver en moi-même." Quoted from *Œuvres et lettres*, ed. A. Bridoux (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1953), 131.

with skepticism in a kind of constant interaction with prior philosophical schools and traditions. While maintaining that reasoning is a weak tool and fundamentally tied with the imagination, Montaigne exposed himself to as many prior philosophical traditions, historical anecdotes, and experiences as possible in order to collect more data regarding probable claims about the world. His textuality also encourages this approach by exposing the reader to a high density of philosophical citations, ideas, and problems, often in random order.

In order to examine the legacy of Montaigne's thought and its interactions with Cartesianism, we will study a series of skeptical empiricists who were influenced in different ways by Montaigne's thought, or by the intellectual tradition he established. After examining the way in which Charron disseminated Montaigne's epistemology into seventeenth-century thought, we will show how it came to influence figures like the philosopher and scientific chronicler Pierre Gassendi in addition to two authors of epistemological satire whose writings promote and formally practice skeptical empiricism: Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel.

Although a plethora of French seventeenth-century thinkers are relevant to debates about Cartesianism and what Thomas M. Lennon outlines as the battle between "gods" and "giants" or rationalists and empiricists,[4] this study proposes to codify a particular intellectual tradition referred to as "skeptical empiricism" throughout, which bears distinct epistemological claims and formal qualities which attest to a strong affinity and axis of influence between Montaigne's thought and that of the thinkers listed above. These figures have been selected not only for these common textual and literary qualities, which we will examine below, but also because philological evidence, correspondences, and biographical details examined in the introduction of

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[4] For a completist outlook on the epistemological landscape of seventeenth-century France involving all of its major and minor philosophical protagonists, see Thomas M. Lennon, *The Battle of Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655-1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

each chapter suggest a strong axis of influence among these thinkers. The establishment of such an axis of influence also provides a sampling of anti-Cartesian thought in the seventeenth century including its earliest decade with Charron, the emergence of Cartesianism in the 1640s and its relationship with Charron critics like Chanet in addition to Gassendi's responses to Descartes, a middle period of Cyrano's text established in the 1650s and also largely transmitted in the 1660s, and the final decade of the seventeenth century with Gabriel Daniel's popular *Voyage du monde de Descartes*. Through its analysis of seventeenth-century anti-Cartesians, the study seeks to understand and reevaluate the philosophical legacy of Montaigne as a precursor to skeptical empiricist criticisms of rationalism, as opposed to a thinker whose hyperbolic skepticism inspired Cartesian experiments of doubt.

Thus, this study's goal is to identify a unique intellectual tradition on the basis of common and distinctive philosophical claims about the nature of knowledge and criteria of judgement within these authors, and on the basis of distinct formal and literary qualities which characterize their work. Throughout this examination of the French skeptical empiricist tradition, the methodologies, stock arguments, and literary qualities of all of these figures will be seen to pose similar objections to rationalism from the late sixteenth century France through the seventeenth. All of these figures, for example, draw on stock arguments about the indefinability and incomprehensibility of the soul by accumulating lists of beliefs about the soul in order to make all such arguments seem unlikely (in a Pyrrhonist listing strategy described by the verb *anarein*). These figures also universally employ optical illusions drawn from ancient philosophical traditions to emphasize the empiricist claim that the mind's interaction with sensory phenomena serves as the locus of knowledge formation. They all draw on the vocabulary of *vray-semblance* to convey the idea of probabilism, suggesting a philosophy of hypothesis

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formation and provisional certainty largely rooted in Montaigne's readings of Academic

Skepticism. Within their expressions of the meaning of this probabilism or *vray-semblance*, all

of these authors not only attempt to crystallize the most probable arguments they can find, but

also explore incorporating highly unlikely, strange, or fantastic claims within their work as a

means of exercising judgement.

All of these figures also experiment with philosophies of judgement which are doubled.

They attempt both to reveal the philosopher-agent's subjectivity and the imperfections of

philosophical discourse (from Montaigne's rambling about his own foibles to the odd

philosopher figures encountered in Cyrano and Daniel), and also to practice and exercise

unbiased judgements to the extent that they can. Each of these thinkers makes use of the

Academic Skeptic and Socratic trope of the "sage" as the philosopher that is conscious of their

own subjectivity and the knowledge that full (as opposed to probabilistic) certainty is impossible.

From Montaigne's persona of intellectual humility to Gassendi's repeated use of the Latin

expression *videtur* and Daniel's use of Aristotle's intellectual humility as a foil for the rigidity of

Cartesian rationalism, they all use literary tropes of the "sage" to insist on this model of

probabilism in their philosophy. Finally, they are all characterized by a quality referred to in this

study as "eclecticism." In opposition to Descartes' rationalist method, in which not only prior

sense perception, but prior exposure to philosophical traditions and concepts is dispensed with in

order to construct a philosophy based on *a priori* principles, these figures advocate and employ

formal qualities in their texts which maximize exposure to an eclectic array of philosophical

traditions. In all of these thinkers, this eclecticism both allows for the accumulation of more data

and opinions given the fallibility of both reason and sense perception, and emphasizes the

encounter of the subjective philosopher's mind with philosophical traditions in a manner which

underscores the ineluctable relationship between reasoning and imagination or bias in these thinkers.

By drawing attention to these unifying ideas in the works of Charron, Gassendi, Cyrano, and Daniel, the entire study will illustrate the arc of this particular tradition of French skeptical empiricist thought, finding its origins in the writing of Montaigne. The primary aim of the study is to examine the legacy of Montaigne's "epistemology," a term used here to denote the pure philosophical methodologies and criteria by which thinkers distinguish the status of truth claims and the methods by which they can deemed to be true, false, probable, or can be understood to constitute forms of opinion. The study closely examines philological evidence of axes of influence between members of the skeptical empiricist tradition which it codifies, and employs evidence of textual and biographical transmission to strengthen its claims about the skeptical empiricist tradition.

However, the study does not propose a detailed examination of the relationship between the philosophical methodologies related to truth claims in the skeptical empiricist tradition and the social and political contexts in which they were formed. Although these undoubtedly shape the formation and transmission of philosophical and epistemological ideas,[5] as is clear, for example, in this study's claim that Montaigne's increased focus on epistemic and skeptical themes in Hellenistic thought is more related to the Wars of Religion than the transmission of Pyrrhonist philosophical texts in France, the study is more interested in the philosophical and

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[5] For an approach which contextualizes the "moments sceptiques" in Montaigne's thought from 1560–1580, and which opposes a unified, synthetic, and purely philosophical understanding of Montaigne's skepticism, see Philippe Desan, "Qu'est-ce qu'être sceptique dans les années 1560–1580 ?," in *Montaigne : penser le social* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2018). For an overview of different scholarly approaches to Montaigne's skepticism and its political and religious affiliations, from Catholic Pyrrhonism to crypto-Protestantism, see Richard Popkin, "Skepticism and the Counter-Reformation in France," *Archive for Reformation History* 51 (1960): 58-87.

literary connections between the skeptical empiricist figures under study than in the political and social contexts of skeptical empiricism.

In the first portion of this study's examination of the skeptical empiricist tradition, we will show how Montaigne developed an original epistemology and discourse of skeptical empiricism through his eclectic readings of ancient skepticism, especially philosophies of the Hellenistic period including Epicureanism, Stoicism, and Academic Skepticism. It will explore how Montaigne's originality came from his ability to analyze ancient philosophy with an exegesis emphasizing epistemological rigor in an era when these texts had not previously been read for their epistemological content, due to their exotic and heretical nature. Even as Gassendi wrote in the midst of the seventeenth century, he felt a strong need to adapt and rebrand Epicurean and Academic Skepticism to Christian Europe,[6] and thus Montaigne's serious recovery of various ancient epistemologies was new for its time, serving to generate the skeptical empiricist tradition which would become prominent in the seventeenth-century French thinkers in this study.

As we will emphasize, it is the epistemological rigor and eclecticism of Montaigne's analyses of ancient texts that are relevant to the originality and impact of his epistemology. This reading contrasts with other common scholarly accounts of Montaigne as the French Pyrrho, and of the radical skepticism of Sextus Empiricus as a new hyperbolic skepticism[7] which entered

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[6] Tom Sorell, *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension Between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 143.

[7] In contemporary Classical scholarship, the epistemological claims of the Hellenistic schools are almost universally considered as best understood as existing in dialogue with each other, and as being subtly adapted to absorb aspects of each other's claims as they become more refined. Articles which make this point in a sustained way include Myles Burnyeat, "The Sceptic in his Place and Time," in *Philosophy in History,* ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Pierre Coussin, "The Stoicism of the New Academy," in *The Skeptical Tradition*, ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); John Glucker, "Cicero's Philosophical Affiliations," in *The Question of "Eclecticism": Studies in Later Greek Philosophy,* ed. J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988); Charlotte Stough, *Greek Skepticism. A Study in Epistemology* (Berkeley: University of California Press,

French thought through Montaigne, and whose hyperbolic nature led Descartes to construct a

new rationalist philosophy which starts in the Pyrrhonist space of hyperbolic doubt.[8] We will

show that the publication of new Pyrrhonist texts in Montaigne's time did not directly lead to a

new hyperbolic skepticism in Montaigne or in French thought. In addition, we will show that

Montaigne's newly rigorous treatment of Academic Skeptic and Epicurean texts, which had been

around for decades or centuries, was how he left his mark in the realm of epistemology.

Montaigne's new epistemological rigor and his eclectic synthesis of ancient philosophical

schools thus generated the skeptical empiricist tradition, which would oppose Cartesian

experiments in Pyrrhonist and hyperbolic doubt. The key epistemological ideas and formal

qualities of Montaigne's *Essais* which would influence the anti-Cartesian and French skeptical

empiricist tradition will be presented in their context in Chapter 1.

      This study will also propose an examination of key moments in the reception of

Montaigne's methodology and practice of skeptical empiricism and eclecticism, especially as it

applies to criticism of Cartesian rationalism throughout the seventeenth century. Charron

rearticulated and provided a new epistemological emphasis on Montaigne's thought especially

important to Gassendi's empiricist critiques of Descartes in the mid-seventeenth century. In

Chapter 2, this study will examine both Charron and Gassendi's use of Montaigne to produce a

skeptical empiricist philosophy which would oppose Cartesianism. This mid-seventeenth century

period is characterized by the relatively minor but nonetheless important status of these skeptical

empiricists, who placed emphasis on Montaigne's anti-rationalist arguments on the indefinability

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1969); Gisela Striker, *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996). Given the relatedness of epistemological claims in Hellenistic schools and the early transmission of texts on Academic Skeptic, Stoic, and Epicurean texts discussing various epistemological claims in sixteenth century France, it would be strange if the reception of Henri Estienne's Sextus Empiricus lead to a markedly different form of skepticism in this period.

[8] Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 56.

of God, emphasizing the fallibility of *a priori* philosophical principles and circularity in logic to attack Cartesianism. They also wielded eclectic philosophical epistemic traditions like Epicureanism and Academic Skepticism to promote a kind of humanistic probabilism. Charron and Gassendi are also notable for carrying over a kind of Renaissance spirit of humanism and eclecticism from Montaigne's writings into the seventeenth century, and Chapter 2 will examine the formal and philosophical mechanisms which Charron and Gassendi employ in order to advocate for and practice an eclectic maximization of engagement with prior philosophical traditions. This eclecticism works constructively with the epistemology of provisional certainty which subtends the thought of the skeptical empiricist tradition; a fallibilist epistemic framework dependent on collecting and revising hypotheses encourages the accumulation of eclectic information and philosophical traditions in order to collect new knowledge while refining and practicing judgement.

In Chapter 3, we examine Cyrano de Bergerac, a likely acquaintance and perhaps student of Gassendi, and the skeptical empiricist qualities of his philosophical lunar adventure, *L'autre monde.* The chapter will examine explicit biographical and textual evidence of an axis of influence between figures in the skeptical empiricist tradition and Cyrano. We will observe Cyrano's unmitigated skepticism and mockery with regard to metaphysical claims and the way in which he encourages an epistemic approach which combines weak criteria of sense perception and reasoning to arrive at hypotheses, such as his support for heliocentrism. The study will show that his lunar realm is a space encouraging dialogic probabilism and intellectual humility, especially in accordance with the traditions of Montaigne and Gassendi's thought.

Finally, we enter the late seventeenth century, when Cartesianism expanded into various Cartesianisms, and various partial and full-fledged criticisms of Cartesian rationalism emerged in

France.[9] In particular, we will examine a work which is not often studied today but represents a high point for the French skeptical empiricist tradition: Gabriel Daniel's Anti-Cartesian satire *Le Voyage du Monde de Descartes*, a best-selling work appearing in over a dozen editions and several translated versions.[10] Chapter 4 will establish direct connections and evidence for Daniel's engagement with Gassendi and Cyrano in particular, while drawing parallels between Daniel and the skeptical empiricist tradition more generally. Daniel's adventure story contains a lunar world of philosophers promoting a skeptical empiricism which is modeled on Cyrano's, and places it in sharp relief against a kind of impossible, solipsistic, faux Cartesian world of pure first principles. In this final chapter, we will show that Daniel draws from the skeptical empiricist tradition by comparing the skeptical empiricist lunar world of eclectic philosophical interaction, epistemic humility, and hypothesis formation against the Cartesian world of the "troisième ciel", which he portrays as the unintuitive and impossible rationalist realm in which Descartes rejects eclecticism and interaction with other philosophers.

The figures outlined in the above chapters, who form this French skeptical empiricist tradition, had varied impacts on the thought of eighteenth-century French and British empiricism and Enlightenment thought. As Cartesianism changed from a central ideology to a fractured and debated tradition in late seventeenth century France, Daniel's urbane anti-Cartesian satire and skeptical empiricism disseminated widely, among skeptics like Bayle, eighteenth century English and French empiricists, and satirists like Jonathan Swift. Thus, our conclusion will briefly examine the fate of his Gabriel Daniel's text and of the seventeenth-century French skeptical empiricist tradition as a whole in the eighteenth century, and the various skepticisms and

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[9] R. A. Watson, *The Downfall of Cartesianism 1673–1712: A Study of Epistemological Issues in Late seventeenth Century Cartesianism* (The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 2012).

[10] Yasmin Annabel Haskell, *Loyola's Bees: Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry* (Kiribati: Oxford University Press, 2003), 167.

empiricisms that drew on its different claims and qualities, from its antirationalist criticism of Cartesian circular arguments to its use of dialogic philosophical interactions to underscore a particular vision of intellectual humility (a quality of the *conte philosophique*).[11] As the skeptical empiricist tradition acquired more readers and interpreters in late seventeenth-century France and England, it became a formative influence on a wide array of new epistemological satires, philosophical dialogues, and expressions of new kinds of skepticism and empiricism that flowered in eighteenth-century thought.

We now turn to the origins of this anti-Cartesian skeptical empiricism and philosophical eclecticism, which takes us to late sixteenth-century France. Montaigne's *Essais,* as we will show, are filled with ideas which would fuel anti-Cartesian thought, writings, and literature in the seventeenth century. For Montaigne, the locus of epistemology is the subjective consciousness interacting with appearances alone, the essences of God and the self are wholly unknown or absent, and epistemological claims are not made with fully rational certainty but fallibilistic judgements. To understand Montaigne's importance to seventeenth century anti-Cartesian thought, however, it is necessary to first understand the nature of the intellectual progress he made in his own time with regard to these ideas, and show that these concepts are not simply commonplaces, and were not widely expressed even in earlier sixteenth century French humanistic thought.

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[11] Brain Stableford, "Science Fiction Before the Genre," in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Chapter 1: Michel de Montaigne's Skeptical Empiricism: The Rise of an Eclectic, Anti-Rationalist Epistemology in Late Sixteenth-Century France

1.1   Montaigne's Skepticism in Context: Epistemology over Rhetoric in Late Sixteenth-Century France

Montaigne was an influential figure in recovering, manipulating, and reusing previously ignored empiricist epistemological concepts from ancient schools of thought, especially from Hellenistic philosophy. This recovery and reuse of ancient epistemology emerged as Montaigne's response to the late sixteenth century's intellectual climate of intense religious conflict and skepticism, and its radical questioning of scholastic and rationalist models of the universe and human knowledge. Montaigne's new exegesis of ancient philosophical texts, especially from the Hellenistic period, placed new emphasis on their epistemological content as opposed to their literary qualities, and combined them in eclectic ways to create a skeptical empiricist epistemology that is unique to the *Essais*. We will show that Montaigne's epistemological rigor, eclecticism, and philosophy of hypothesis formation impacted a tradition of literary and philosophical authors who gave rise to the skeptical empiricist tradition which would oppose (and pre-empt opposition to) Cartesianism in France, including Charron, Pierre Gassendi, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Gabriel Daniel.

As this chapter examines the influence of ancient thought and skepticism on Montaigne's anti-essentialism and fallibilistic epistemology, it also serves as an opportunity to understand the place he holds in the history of ancient skepticism and its reception in late sixteenth century

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France. Before we examine Montaigne's eclectic use of Hellenistic philosophy and ancient

skepticism to form a philosophy of skeptical empiricism, we will briefly view it in this context.

Much speculation about the reception of ancient skepticism and Hellenistic philosophy in

late sixteenth century France, and in the *Essais,* seeks to emphasize the relative importance of

one kind of Hellenistic philosophy, arguing for the prominence of one or the other. Debates

emerge about Montaigne's allegiance to Academic Skepticism versus Pyrrhonism, and, for

example, a scholar like Zachary S. Schiffman will go at length to claim that Montaigne's

skepticism's primary influences have little to do with textual influence from Sextus Empiricus at

all, even when textual parallels are clearly shown in key moments like the wheel argument, and

comments about human and animal sense perception.

Other scholars[1] place a great deal of emphasis on the recovery of Sextus Empiricus and

thus the importance of Pyrrho's philosophy in unleashing a new era of skeptical thought.[2] In both

cases, the skepticism of late sixteenth century France is conceived of as a philological

skepticism, and scholars emphasize the availability and popularity of different kinds of

philosophical texts as being the primary drivers of a skeptical movement in this period. However,

it is possible to see the profound influence of all these schools of thought emerge in Montaigne's

eclectic text, and it is more important to know that all the texts were treated with a new deep new

passion about their epistemological claims in Montaigne's time.

Thus, we would like to suggest that much of the originality of Montaigne's

epistemological claims, and his sensitivity to issues about sense perception, the essence of

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[1] Zachary S. Schiffman, "Montaigne and the Rise of Skepticism in Early Modern Europe: A Reappraisal," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 4 (1984): 499-516. For Montaigne's uses of Sextus Empiricus see David Hiley, *Philosophy in Question: Essays on a Pyrrhonian Theme* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Craig B. Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966).
[2] Charles B. Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus: A Study of the Influence of the Academica in the Renaissance* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1972), 11; Donald M. Frame, *Montaigne's Discovery of Man: The Humanization of a Humanist* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Popkin, *The History of Scepticism,* 56.

divinity, and provisional certainty or fallibilism, were not new because of the rise of Pyrrhonism, but were more importantly nourished in a historical environment of deep religious conflict in which there was an increased sensitivity to epistemological issues in ancient philosophy. Indeed, many of the texts that Montaigne and others were not newly available, but a new method of reading previously available ancient philosophical texts, with a strong emphasis on epistemological rigor as opposed to formal and aesthetic qualities, had begun to take shape. Cicero's descriptions of Hellenistic thought in the *Academica* and other late dialogues had been well-known and read throughout the Middle Ages and through Montaigne's time.[3] Lactantius and Saint Augustine were also enduring and well-known sources for ancient skepticism centuries before Montaigne scrutinized them.

It is possible to observe this discontinuity in reading method, and an increased emphasis on epistemological questions such as the nature of sense perception and hypothesis formation, in the reception of various Hellenistic philosophical schools starting in the 1560s. We will take the time to focus on two schools of thought, Academic Skepticism and Epicureanism, which did not suddenly reemerge in this period and which started to receive more attention for their epistemological claims, particularly within the French context and in the 1560s (and notably much less so in Italy at this precise moment for example). This undermines the view of Pyrrhonism, or any kind of purely textual skepticism, emerging from a vacuum and serving as the primary source of a skeptical crisis in this period. Rather, these texts receive radically different treatment depending on their context. Having established the new and historically grounded readings Montaigne and others were bringing to these texts in his time, we will be able to understand their originality and importance for seventeenth century skeptical empiricist and

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[3] José R. Maia Neto, "Academic Skepticism in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58, no. 2 (1997): 199-200.

anti-Cartesian thought. In particular, we will see that Montaigne's recovery of epistemologically rigorous approaches to authors like Lucretius and Cicero, and his eclectic use of various philosophical texts in concert to construct a skeptical empiricist philosophy, deeply informed the thought of Charron, Gassendi, Cyrano, and Gabriel Daniel.

The reception of Academic skepticism in France is an interesting case, since it is a philosophical school which lends itself particularly well to varied interpretations from rhetoricians and philosophers. The word "*probabile*" used in Ciceronian discourse about the criterion of belief in Academic skepticism comes from "*probare"*, a verb which can mean "to approve/to declare something well done" or "to judge." Thus, its meaning lends itself to connoting the approval of well-formed arguments or the judgement of ones that appear the most accurate or probable. Interestingly, it is used by the rhetorical Cicero of the *Tusculanae Disputationes* and by the philosophical Cicero of the *Academica* in both of these senses, and we will see that the middle sixteenth century emphasizes rhetorical *probabile* while the late sixteenth century sees *probabile* as a more rational criterion of judgement.[4]

In the middle third of the sixteenth century, Petrus Ramus steeped his own educational reforms and methods in the notion that scholasticism should be replaced with well-formed civic discourse, and communicated this argument in his *Ciceronianus,* in which Academic skeptic texts receive notable analysis in the name of this cause.[5] In this, Ramus was a disciple of earlier humanism and especially Lorenzo Valla, who summarized the method of Cicero's *De divinatione* and *De natura deorum* as a form of *oratio,* in which the argument which is most *probabile* is decided through a form of argument *in utramque partem.* As Lisa Jardine observes,

[4] Christina Hoenig, *Plato's Timaeus and the Latin Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 60-64.
[5] Judith Rice Henderson, "Ramus in the Ciceronian Controversy," in *Rhetorica Movet: Studies in Historical and Modern Rhetoric in Honor of Heinrich F. Plett*, ed. Bernhard F. Scholz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 53.

Valla saw "ample textual evidence to show that in Cicero's scheme of things, Orator and Academic share a common purpose and pursue the most probable point of view using an identical method."[6]

Ramus praised the Academic skeptics in his *Ciceronianus* because they best married rhetoric and philosophy in this way, and criticized the Stoics for their separation of philosophical and rhetorical discourse.[7] In his description of the development and philosophy behind his educational reforms, he refers to Cicero's *Topica* as source inspiring his dialectic method, in which his ultimate goal was to provide a *usus* to educational discourse by making it into a means of practicing *eruditio* in civic life.[8] Ciceronian rhetoric's search to articulate the argument which is *probabile,* or that one assents to, is the critical practice that Ramus extracts from the philosophical texts of Cicero.

Thus, the humanism that Ramus popularized, which competed with scholasticism and purely syllogistic reasoning, was deeply interested in Hellenistic philosophy, but placed emphasis on the intersections between this branch of thought and forms of rhetorical discourse with civic applications. French intellectuals and writers followed in his interest in eloquence, and members of the Pléiade scrupulously translated segments of Latin poetry which Ramus excerpted in the *Institutiones Dialecticae* to incorporate them into their own work as an exercise of infusing the French language with what they perceived as the eloquence of Latin.[9]

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[6] Lisa Jardine, "Lorenzo Valla: Academic Skepticism and the New Humanist Dialectic," in *The Skeptical Tradition,* ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 262.
[7] Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, 80.
[8] Walter J. Ong, *Ramus: Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 41-42.
[9] Grahame Castor, *Pléiade Poetics: A Study in Sixteenth-century Thought and Terminology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964), 128.

It is not until the second half of the sixteenth century that more epistemological debates within Academic skepticism crept into French thought and letters.[10] In the 1550s, when French Protestants began greatly increasing in number and power, a whiff of interest in ancient skepticism and a developing fideism began to take shape. Guy de Brués, who frequented Ramist and Pléiade circles, wrote his *Dialogues* in which the character of Jean-Antoine de Baïf assembles an accumulation of arguments about contrary opinions among theologians and natural philosophers. This passage bears some resemblance to the passage in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* in which Montaigne accumulates a large list of metaphysical theories of the constitution of matter and the universe, from Democritan atomism to beliefs in solar deities, referring to the list as a "tantamarre de tante de cevelles philosophiques" (II, 12, 516). The final conclusion in both cases is that only weak claims about appearances may be true, and that absolute truth is to be fideistically accepted as it is presented in scripture.[11]

We see gestating in Baïf's text the uses that Catholics like Montaigne would sometimes make for ancient skepticism as a means of insisting on conservation of Catholicism as a religious and political custom in order to maintain the social order, despite one's inability to understand the nature of divine essence. With this example it is clear that this kind of argumentation is occurring in France even before Sextus became popular among French thinkers in order to provide a clearer model for this kind of skepticism. The epistemological question of reasoning about essences that the Academic skeptics posed, in this instance, began to acquire a new urgency and vigor as Protestantism encouraged individualistic speculation about such issues. Serious doctrinal dispute also ushered in an era when skeptical tactics would be utilized with more fervor and precision by both Protestants and Catholics, in a time when honing argument *in*

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[10] Schmitt, *Cicero Scepticus*, 45.
[11] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 31.

utramque partem did not have a purely civic or rhetorical end. The skeptical tool of fideism became amplified and better understood when it was applied in supporting or destroying the strengthening ideologies of Catholicism and Protestantism.[12]

Montaigne, in his religious and political preoccupation with the inscrutability of God's essence, and his fallibilistic reasoning about appearances according to judged probabilities (instead of scholastic syllogism or humanistic rhetoric), is the next step in this progression towards underscoring the epistemological claims of Academic skepticism, and we will explore his use of Academic skepticism in the sections to follow. Presently, we will touch upon Montaigne's epistemological usage of another Hellenistic school, Epicureanism, which involves a similar historical progression as skepticism, attesting to a rise of interest in otherwise heretical or skeptical epistemological claims in the climate of 1560s France.

In the earlier sixteenth century, Lucretius's *De rerum natura* was considered interesting as a document summarizing the distant and unconvincing pagan philosophy of Epicureanism. As Alan Kors notes, Lucretius was publishable "because the erudite knew [Epicureanism] to have been an essential school of ancient philosophy and because learned orthodoxy believed it to be essentially noninfectious".[13] The result of this attitude towards Lucretius gave the poet-philosopher an interesting reception in the Renaissance as a writer whose works were never

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[12] Indeed, Guy de Brués's text emerged in a reactionary spirit to what was perceived as an increased skepticism in youth about current religious institutions: "Or voyant que les opinions que nous avons conceües, nous rendent amys ou bien ennemys de la verité, qui est le vray but de toutes sçiences, j'ay mis peine en ces miens dialogues de prevenir la jeunesse, et la destourner de croire ceux qui disent que toutes les choses consistent en la seule opinion, s'efforçans par mesme moien d'abolir et mettre à mespris la religion, l'honneur de Dieu, la puissance de nos superieurs, l'autorité de la justice, ensemble toutes les sciences et disciplines.*" The Dialogues of Guy de Brués. A Critical Edition with a study in Renaissance Skepticism and Relativism,* ed. Panos Paul Morphos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953), 88.

[13] Alan Charles Kors, *Epicureans and Atheists in France, 1650-1729* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 7.

banned by the Catholic Church,[14] but whose ideas had to be treated with utmost care by any rare

thinker wishing to take them seriously. Given this context, in the mid-sixteenth century *De rerum*

natura was often solely touted as an example of the beauty of classical poetry, and only select

themes of Lucretius were discussed in classrooms and openly defended in scholarship. As we

will see, Montaigne's interests in Epicurean epistemology and materialism do not count among

these limited ideas of Lucretius which were usually discussed and used in this period.

    During the sixteenth century in France, it was typical only to teach select passages of

Lucretius related to the adoration of Venus and the theme of shipwrecks, since these sections

allowed for an appreciation of the aesthetic virtues of Lucretius' poetry without touching upon

heretical Epicurean materialist concepts.[15] For example, the Jesuit Antonio Possevino advocated

using Lucretius in education, only on the condition that he was understood for the beauty of his

poetry and his treatment of themes related to the observation of nature.[16] In this context,

Possevino associates poetic beauty with the virtues and grandiosity of natural studies. This

attitude of appreciating Lucretius primarily for the aesthetic merits of the poetry, as Greenblatt

notes, was a common strategy for arguing for the work's merit.[17]

    The tradition of conceptualizing Lucretius as a figure to be judged by his sublime poetic

merit alone has its roots in Lactantius' evaluation of the Roman author as a great but insane poet

who was a slavish copier of Epicurus' unsavory materialist thought. This idea would also be

reinforced by Jerome's account of Lucretius being driven insane by a love potion. This strain of

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[14] David Butterfield, "Lucretius in the Early Modern Period: Texts and Contexts," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern,* ed. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 55.
[15] Rafal B. Krazek, "Montaigne et la philosophie du plaisir : Pour une lecture épicurienne des Essais," PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2007. 60-61.
[16] Kors, *Atheism in France*, 8.
[17] Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), 256.

thought about Lucretius, which defends the sublime poetic sections as separate from its supposedly weak philosophical content derivative of Epicurus, was greatly influential throughout sixteenth century thought and would only later face some resistance in Lambin and Montaigne's interpretations of *De rerum natura,* which would more clearly assess Lucretius' philosophical legacy. Baptista Pius' 1514 edition of Lucretius refers to the beginning of Lactantius' sixth chapter of *De opificio dei* to make the point that Lucretius' philosophical madness was wholly copied from Epicurus and should not receive critical attention. Pius' note directly transcribes the following statement from Lactantius: *illius [Epicuri] sunt omnia quae delirat Lucretius.*[18]

In addition, this 1514 Pius edition published in Paris and widely used in France before Lambin's 1563 edition was preceded by a letter by Nicolas Bérault which justified reading *De rerum natura* based on aesthetic poetic qualities alone, paired with some humanistic justifications of the importance of classical rhetoric. As Howard Jones shows, uses of Lucretius' natural philosophical passages in mid-sixteenth century French poetry were often limited to a few restricted tropes that are primarily poetic in nature have little epistemological interest, like the treatment of primordial humanity in book V of Lucretius used in Scève and Pelletier.[19] Lambin's 1563 edition attests to a shift in these values, since Lambin directly invites his reader to find concepts which they are critical of within the text and distinguish them from concepts which are useful or valuable.[20] Although Lambin does emphasize Lucretius' sublime style, he wants the reader to be attentive to the true intentions and epistemic claims of classical writers, and he indicates points of tension between Epicureanism and Christianity in a way which

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[18] "All the things that Lucretius raved about came from him [Epicurus]." Baptista Pius quoting Lactantius in Lucretius, *De rerum natura.* f. 9v.

[19] Howard Jones, *The Epicurean Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[20] Simone Fraisse, *L'influence de Lucrèce en France au seizième siècle: une conquête du rationalisme* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1962), 57.

encourages a robust understanding of both views of the world, even if he fully advocates the latter.

Montaigne, like Lambin, is interested in both the sublime poetic Lucretius and the philosophical Lucretius.[21] He is clearly not content to appreciate Lucretius for the sheer aesthetic beauty of his thought alone, and even engages in a direct critical engagement with this tendency when he quotes a passage from Lucretius in *Sur des vers de Virgile* and follows with the subsequent remark:

> Quand je rumine ce *rejicit, pascit, inhians, molli, fovet, medullas, labefacta, pendet, percurrit,* et cette noble *circunfunsa,* mere du gentil *infusus…*Quand je vois ces braves formes s'expliquer, si vifves, si profondes, je ne dicts pas que c'est bien dire, je dicts que c'est bien penser. (III.5, 872)[22]

As Wes Williams notes, Montaigne's admiration for the density of action words here, and his qualification of Lucretius' poetry with the words "*bien penser*" instead of "*bien dire*", places emphasis on the work's ability to convey content instead of admiring the work's rhetorical flourishes for their own sake.[23] Montaigne, a critic of the rhetorical Cicero and an intense reader of his late philosophical dialogues, admires the density of ideas in Lucretius and speaks explicitly of his interest in the substance of his work, despite the common strategy of focusing upon questions of style and philological accuracy in earlier annotated manuscripts of Lucretius. In addition, he displays an interest in the Epicurean conception of the physical universe and its

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[21] Denis Lambin did justify reading Lucretius based on the aesthetic merits of his poetry as noted by Greenblatt (256), but he was also important in beginning to provide justifications and defenses of Lucretius' *De rerum natura* based on the philosophical content of the text. For example, Lambin often likened Lucretius' ideas to those of Plato and Aristote, more familiar and comfortable for his audience in sixteenth-century France. See Tatiana Tsakiropoulou-Summers, "Lambin's Edition of Lucretius: Using Plato and Aristotle in Defense of *De Rerum Natura*," *Classical and Modern Literature* 21, no. 2 (2001): 45-70.

[22] Our citations from Montaigne come from the Villey-Saulnier edition, published by the *Presses Universitaires de France.*

[23] Wes Williams, "'Well said/well thought': How Montaigne Read his Lucretius," in *Lucretius and the Early Modern,* ed. David Norbrook, Stephen Harrison, and Philip Hardie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 152.

relationship to the human mind, an interest which is attested in Lambin's edition and was stoked by the skeptical intellectual climate of France in the 1560s.[24]

In this case, we see that another Hellenistic philosophical school fully separate from Pyrrhonism, with well-worn and annotated editions in France in 1514, would be the object of much more attentive epistemological study in the 1560s in France. We will see that Montaigne's attentive reflections about the epistemological methods of certainty and sense perception in Epicureanism in debate with other schools, and reflections about the essence and nature of the soul, emerge freshly in this context and inspire the tendencies in his thought that would inspire seventeenth century anti-Cartesian thinkers.

Montaigne's importance in our study, thus, is his emphasis on epistemology over rhetoric in the Hellenistic schools, and his rich interaction with them which caused him to articulate the ideas which would inspire anti-Cartesians in the seventeenth century. The anti-Cartesian idea of a world in which essences and first causes are inaccessible to the human mind, in which the locus of epistemology is the mind's interaction with phenomena, and in which one struggles fallibilistically to make provisional and revised judgements which are never verified as fully true or false, are deeply inspired by Montaigne's interactions with Hellenistic philosophy. We might say that these ideas cohere most closely with Academic skepticism,[25] but before we delve into

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[24] Ada Palmer, *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 214.

[25] There is a growing current of Montaigne scholarship which sees his epistemology as primarily Academic skeptic in nature. See for example José R. Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy: The Charronian Legacy, 1601-1662* (New York: Springer, 2014); José R. Maia Neto, "Le probabilisme académicien dans le scepticisme français de Montaigne à Descartes," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 203, no. 4 (2013): 467-84; Nicola Panichi, "*Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism That Conquers the Mind,*" in *Renaissance Skepticisms,* ed. Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009); Sébastien Prat, "La réception des *Académiques* dans les *Essais* : une manière voisine et inavouée de faire usage du doute sceptique," in *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy,* ed. Plínio Janqueira Smith and Sébastien Charles (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017).

them, our final introductory comment must be to insist both on Montaigne's eclecticism and on the originality with which he treats these sources.

Montaigne's text is too freewheeling and eclectic for us to place him in a box with a school of ancient philosophers, and we should take him at his word when he insists that he is not a philosopher at all. To give one example, Montaigne's skepticism is primarily a fallibilistic one in which he constantly engages in a search for knowledge about the appearances of the world, practicing probabilistic but never fully certain judgement with an indefatigable curiosity until he runs out of ink and paper to write with. However, are we to characterize him as an Academic skeptic like the aforementioned scholars,[26] or a Pyrrhonian who placed great emphasis on *zetetic* skeptical searching as André Tournon suggests?[27] Even if we establish this as a predominant tendency and make the tendentious judgement that Montaigne's skepticism is Academic, it is clear that Montaigne enjoys having both the tools of total neutralizing and ataraxic *epoché* at his disposal in addition to his practice of searching for knowledge using the more typically Academic probabilistic criterion of belief. Montaigne is also at times critical of the tendency in Academic skepticism to assume that humans cannot have knowledge, and in these moments emphasizes the importance of Pyrrhonist zetetic searching for humankind's epistemic status. However, it can be clearly said that Montaigne typically (but not always) prefers the probabilistic criterion of belief over Pyrrhonist equipollence, which asserts that all claims have an equal probability of being true.

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[26] A number of scholars have claimed that Montaigne is not a pyrrhonist because his ethical goal is not ataraxic *epoché*: Charles Larmore. "Un scepticisme sans tranquillité : Montaigne et ses modèles antiques" in *Montaigne : scepticisme, métaphysique, théologie*, ed. V. Carraud and J. L. Marion (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004); Prat, "La réception des *Académiques* dans les *Essais*."

[27] André Tournon, "*Suspense* philosophique et ironie: La zététique de l'essai," *Montaigne Studies* 12 (2000): 45-62.

In addition, Montaigne lets the ethical frame of his epistemology switch back and forth from Academic political wisdom to Pyrrhonist ataraxic ignorance: one moment, he allows himself to become enflamed by the ethical stakes of judgement in the contexts of witch trials, in another, Montaigne relishes in moving in investigative circles, producing a text ridden with gleeful red herrings and which has a Pyrrhonist therapeutic goal. At some rarer moments he even stops to admire a kind of lack of judgement (although this is not his own disposition): in the simple religious folk in *Des vaines subtilitez*, the laborers at Montaigne, and in his own interpretation of the lives of Indigenous peoples. He even once mocked Carneades for his anxious knowledge-seeking, and in many moments discusses the fact that knowledge cannot provide happiness to human beings, for example in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*. In this way, Montaigne wields these approaches according to his disposition and need at each moment he writes, and these idiosyncrasies of what it means to write an *essai* override any school of thought that appears in his work.

He manifests this attitude in his constant appropriation of texts, fitting them into new contexts and at times drawing arguments from them in a way that contradicts the school from which they were derived with savage irony. Montaigne uses the key Academic term "vraysemblable" to laud Pyrrhonists, calls Pyrrho someone who, in a positive sense "bastit de l'ignorance une si plaisante science" and who held epoché as a "sacrament" (II, 29, 705). In his wheel argument inspired by Pyrrhonism he speaks of an "instrument judicatoire" which evokes Academic skepticism. At any moment, one is liable to see Montaigne cut out an argument from Lucretius to ironically argue for the fallibility of sensory perception, or encounter this examination of the tensions between probabilism in Academic skepticism and its assertion that human knowledge is not possible (II, 12, 561):

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> Les Academiciens recevoyent quelque inclination de jugement, et trouvoyent trop crud de dire qu'il n'estoit pas plus vray-semblable que la nege fust blanche que noire, et que nous ne fussions non plus asseurez du mouvement d'une pierre qui part de nostre main, que de celui de la huictiesme sphere. Et pour éviter cette difficulté et estrangeté, qui ne peut à la verité loger en nostre imagination que malaiséement, quoy qu'ils establissent que nous n'estions aucunement capables de sçavoir, et que la verité est engoufrée dans des profonds abysmes où la veuë humaine ne peut penetrer, si advouoint ils les unes choses plus vray-semblables que les autres et recevoyent en leur jugement cette faculté de se pouvoir incliner plustost à une apparence qu'à un'autre: ils luy permettoyent cette propension, luy defandant toute resolution. L'advis des Pyrrhoniens est plus hardy, et, quant et quant, plus vraysemblable.

Montaigne's epistemological world is strange enough for us to notice him using the skeptical strategy of irony to pit skeptical schools against each other and mix them up, and to tape Epicurean speculations about the possibility of a plurality of worlds on the side.

It is this spirit of humanistic eclecticism which distinguishes the textual and epistemological approach of the skeptical empiricist tradition, from Montaigne to Charron, Gassendi, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Gabriel Daniel. In opposition to Cartesian thought, in which a *tabula rasa* is established, and a totalizing skepticism more akin to Pyrrhonism neutralizes all forms of inquiry (and therefore the use of any other philosopher's ideas) before Descartes engages in pure rationalism, the skeptical empiricist tradition maximizes interaction to prior philosophical texts and ideas. This tradition insists that both sense perception and logical reasoning are weak tools for knowledge formation, but maximizing their use, and using them in concert with one another, causes the knowledge seeker to arrive at theories of the world that are more probable and reflective of the nature of reality. Thus, this study will also show that Montaigne's eclecticism, and his idea that maximizing interactions with prior philosophical traditions improves our imperfect knowledge of the world, is a distinct quality of Montaigne's thought in opposition to Cartesian rationalism and of great importance for the skeptical empiricist tradition.

1.2   Pyrrhonism, Essence, and First Causes: Montaigne's Epistemology of Appearances

Montaigne's eclectic interaction with Hellenistic thought is especially important in his understanding of the difference between phenomenal appearances and essences of things, and of the question of the first causes of things. If scholasticism presumed rational argumentation could tell us about these things, and the rhetorizing humanistic reception of Hellenistic thought didn't do much to change this, the late sixteenth century would see a rich examination and profoundly skeptical scrutiny of the question which would become strikingly fruitful for anti-Cartesian writers of seventeenth century France. While Cartesian method's hyperbolic doubt pertains to matters of appearances and essences alike, and is escaped by means of logical neo-scholastic discourse purely about the essence or nature of God, perception, and matter, Montaigne's skepticism primarily restricts Pyrrhonian equipollence to precisely these matters of essence and maintains fallibilism in the realm of appearances, where the locus of epistemology is the subjective mind's interaction with objects and matter (an epistemological model opposed to Descartes'). Here, we will show that Montaigne's most unrestricted hyperbolic skepticism is primarily reserved for questions about essence, such as the essence of God's nature, of the soul or mind, and of substances in the world. This underwrites an entire worldview, essential in anti-Cartesian thought, in which humankind is alone to form imperfect ethical judgements and overcome bias in its phenomenological relationship with a fully secular reality.

A number of scholars have remarked in restricted ways upon Montaigne's tendency to reserve pyrrhonist skepticism and methods for questions about God's nature and essence, especially as they appear in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond.*[28] As Popkin notes, Montaigne's

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[28] See Floyd Gray, "Montaigne's Pyrrhonism," in *O un amy! Essays on Montaigne in Honor of Donald M. Frame,* ed. Raymond C. La Charité (Lexington: French Forum Publishers, 1977), 124; Ann Hartle, *Montaigne: Accidental*

Pyrrhonism was deeply political and he would become a source of choice for a set of Catholic apologists, the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* of the Counter-Reformation.[29] Indeed, the strategy of pyrrhonist annihilation of belief (in reason) as a means of paradoxically establishing belief in the divine puts God in a strangely exterior and contradictory place, opposed to associating God with abstraction and logic in a Cartesian mode, and making belief in God seem tepid or politically motivated.[30]

Here, we will emphasize that Montaigne's moments of hyperbolic and radical doubt not only participate in this political Pyrrhonism (which remains a true and crucial point), but reflect a broader worldview in which all kinds of thinking about the essential qualities, the future crux of Cartesian thought, are radically removed from the sphere of human epistemology to leave human judgement constantly in touch with phenomena.

Montaigne's "tintamarre de…cervelles philosophiques" passage at the heart of the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* is the most commonly known apex of Montaigne's imitation of Sextus Empiricus' discourse and style; like Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne uses enumeration to accumulate thoughts and do away with them through an equipollent suspension of judgement (Empiricus uses the term "*anairein*" to describe this act of disposal or removal of argument).[31] Montaigne's fascination with pyrrhonism is centered around its formal and linguistic qualities, and Montaigne focuses on the image of the emetic which disposes of the argument and its own

Philosopher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 16 ; José R. Maia Neto, "Le probabilisme académicien dans le scepticisme français," 475; Craig Walton, "Montaigne and the Art of Judgement: The Trial of Montaigne," in *The Sceptical Mode in Modern Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Richard H. Popkin,* ed. Richard A. Watson and James E. Force (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1988), 94.

[29] Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 66-87. See also Susan Schreiner, "Appearances and Reality in Luther, Montaigne, and Shakespeare," *The Journal of Religion* 83, no. 3 (2003): 366-367.

[30] Terence Penelhum, "Skepticism and Fideism," in *The Skeptical Tradition,* ed. Myles Burnyeat (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

[31] Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Logicians,* ed. Richard Bett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), xxiv.

self, in addition of the strange paradoxes of pyrrhonist rhetoric which make new demands on human language (II, 12, 527).

This method of epistemological annihilation is not limited, however, to this sole passage of the *Essais,* which does attract attention for its dramatic length and constant focus on contradicting theories about the nature of God or gods. Indeed, Montaigne will apply this Pyrrhonist method to questions about the essence of the soul, of animation or life, and of substances.

Montaigne's investigation of the soul and human reason is particularly important because his discussion about it is preoccupied with the question of understanding essences. Montaigne locates his epistemology squarely in the ineluctable phenomenological encounter between this soul or human reason and appearances, and maintains that the inability to make conclusions about the nature or essence of this consciousness makes it impossible to understand essences of things (II, 12, 541):

> Par où la voulons nous mieux esprouver que par elle mesme ? S'il ne la faut croire parlant de soy, à peine sera-elle propre à juger des choses estrangers ; si elle connoit quelque chose, aumoins sera ce son estre et son domicile. Elle est en l'ame, et partie ou effect d'icelle : car la vraye raison et essentielle, de qui nous desrobons le nom à fauces enseignes, elle loge dans le sein de Dieu…

With all of this stake, Montaigne follows with a devastatingly skeptical accumulation of contradictory philosophical statements about the soul, pitting Plato, Thales, Asclepiades, Herod, Anaximander, Parmenides, and many others against each other. Another skeptical accumulation follows about the location of the soul.

In another passage particularly representative of Montaigne's deviously skeptical ironic style and eclecticism, he uses Lucretius to sew another skeptical accumulation of theories about the soul within the *Essais,* without explaining to his reader that this passage arrives at a moment

when Lucretius is articulating the unfortunate inability of the public to understand the true mortal

nature of the soul (II.12, 542):

> *Ignoratur enim quae sit natura animaï,*
> *Nata sit, an contra nascentibus insinuetur,*
> *Et simul intereat nobiscum morte dirempta,*
> *An tenebras orci visat vastasque lacunas,*
> *An percudes alias divinitus insinuet se.*
>
> [For there is ignorance what is the nature of the soul, whether it be born or on the contrary
> find its way into men at birth, and whether it perish together with us when broken up by
> death, or whether it visit the gloom of Orcus and his vasty chasms, or by divine ordinance
> find its way into animals in our stead.][32]

In Montaigne's text, the *ignoratur* seems to refer to a lack of knowledge about the nature of the

soul itself in an epistemological sense, whereas Lucretius is emphasizing an ignorance on the

part of the public that can be ameliorated by Epicurean philosophy. The sense of *ignoratur* may

also be interpreted differently: in the case of Lucretius *ignoratur* may be more likely interpreted

as "it is ignored" whereas in the case of Montaigne, it should be read as "it is not known". Here,

a series of strange and contradictory philosophies are enumerated here about possibilities for the

nature of the soul, how it may or may not leave and enter earth, how it could dwell among

different creatures or in different realms. The citation of one author against their own theory,

which in this case implies certainty about the soul's physical fate and dissolution after death, is

also a typically skeptical technique among Pyrrhonists and Academics, and Montaigne seeks use

these methods to fully neutralize and purge any kind of epistemological statement which could

be made about the essence and nature of the soul. We will see that Charron engages in a similar

Pyrrhonist practice of *anarein* or accumulation of arguments from various philosophical

traditions about the soul to diminish the verisimilitude of any single argument (I, 7, 100-101).

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[32] Translation by W. H. D. Rouse from Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 13 (1.112-116).

The use of a polyphony of voices on the nature of the soul in heavily dialogic literary texts also serves a similar function in the works of Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel.[33]

Montaigne is deeply embedded in an epistemological space of judgement, of a subjective consciousness which ineluctably treats apparent things (including its apparent self) as an object of thought, and in this mode, all purely objective first principles are impossible. In this space without first principles, cognitive bias is ineluctable, and Montaigne plunges into a critique of the soul's own wishful thinking, imagining itself to be immortal, before bringing Varro, Chrysippus, Plato, Pindar, and others into the fray for more skeptical accumulations of theories about the fate of the soul (II, 12, 554).

Finally, Montaigne also employs this method in a discussion of medicine when speaking about the distinction between individual experience in judging empirical effects of substances on the body versus general principles which form a "science"[34] of medicine about the essential nature and causes of disease (II, 37, 765-66). Montaigne is deeply suspicious about abstract principles or theories of medicine, praising the Egyptians for cutting medicine into many small practices relating to different parts of the body, conditions, or sorts of patients. He criticizes abstract theories about the cause of disease with a strategy of skeptical accumulation (II, 37, 771):

> Voulons nous un exemple de l'ancien debat de la medcine ? Hierophilus loge la cause originelle des maladies aux humeurs ; Erasistratus, au sang des arteres ; Asclepiades, aux atoms invisibles s'escoulants en nos pores ; Alcmaeon, en l'exuperance ou defaut des forces corporelles ; Diocles, en l'inqualité des elemens du corps et en la qualité de l'air que nous repirons ; Strato, en l'abondance, crudité et corruption de l'aliment que nous prenons ; Hippocrates la loge aux esprits.

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[33] One passage of Cyrano de Bergarc's *L'autre monde* illustrates this particularly well: a series of faulty arguments about the nature of the soul articulated by a government of birds when questioning the sharp Cartesian distinction between human and animal souls. These arguments are well catalogued in Henri Busson, *La pensée religieuse française de Charron à Pascal* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1933), 500.

[34] Later in this study, we will examine Montaigne's usages of the word "science" and its relationship with "jugement."

For Montaigne, any *science* or pre-established theory of "la cause originelle" of diseases is treated with the same hyperbolic, pyrrhonizing skepticism as a theory about the nature of God. Associating the cause of curative properties with the essences or secondary qualities of medicines, Montaigne places human knowledge in a realm where only apparent properties are known in the physical universe and in medicine (II, 37, 781):

> La plus part, et, ce croy-je, plus des deux tiers des vertus medecinales, consistent en la quinte essence ou proprieté occulte des simples, de laquelle nous ne pouvons avoir autre instruction que l'usage, car quinte essence n'est autre chose qu'une qualité de laquelle par nostre raison nous ne sçavons trouver la cause.

Thus, for Montaigne apparent qualities interact with the mind, but fundamental essences and causes cannot be known. We have seen that he has given the strategy of hyperbolic skepticism a particular epistemological use: it is applied to questions of essence or first causes to restrict human knowledge to the mind's phenomenal encounters with, and fallibilistic judgements about, perceived phenomena.

Montaigne clearly associates first causes, origins, and essences of things with each other, and places their knowledge outside the human epistemological sphere (III, 11, 1026):[35]

> La cognoissance des causes appartient seulement à celuy qui a la conduite des choses, non à nous qui n'en avons que la souffrance, et qui en avons l'usage parfaictement plein, selon nostre nature, sans en penetrer l'origine et l'essence.

Montaigne often warns against forms of causal reasoning that do not have a basis in appearances and observed phenomena. Much of the *Essais* are also focused on errors of making assumptions about causes of events based on a kind of pure reasoning or seeming logic, and he introduces this crucial concept in the very first chapter of the *Essais*.[36] For Montaigne, it may be possible to

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[35] Montaigne paraphrases the same idea elsewhere (1, 32, 215); (II, 12, 541)
[36] This concept is printed all over the *Essais,* but is captured succinctly here: "Torquato Tasso, en la comparaison qu'il faict de la France à l'Italie, dict avoir remarqué cela, que nous avons les jambes plus greles que les gentils-hommes Italiens, et en attribue la cause à ce que nous sommes continuellement à cheval ; qui est celle-mesmes de la

acquire a kind of imperfect judgement with deep and long attentive exposure to the mind's interaction with phenomena, but discourse about divine causality and even causality in general is highly suspect and unknown.

Montaigne's tendency to place the question of essence, God, and divine causes in a realm fully outside of human reasoning and epistemology allows him to implement methods and language drawn from the pyrrhonist tradition to fully neutralize and suspend judgement about these issues. Although pyrrhonism itself has something to do with the point of departure for Cartesian reasoning, Montaigne's restricted use of pyrrhonism is focused determinedly on questions of essences and first causes (as opposed to all aspects of knowledge), and thus the point of departure for Montaigne's epistemology is a noisy and flawed consciousness which is ineluctably in contact with appearances of phenomena whose essences remain unknown. We will now explore how, stripped of essences, Montaigne's epistemic model involves the judgement of a subjective consciousness of appearances in a manner which may only establish likely or probable truths, never the wholesale certainty that deductive methods offer.

1.3   Judgment and Appearances: Montaigne's Uses of Academic Skepticism

Both Carneades and Pyrrho have been at times lauded and at times chided by Montaigne, but there is indeed a strong Academic skeptic current in Montaigne's thought, and, although we maintain Montaigne's eclecticism, especially due to his vacillating ethical goals for skepticism, Montaigne does tend towards judging in terms of fallibilistic possibilities and probabilities in

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quelle Suetone tire une toute contraire conclusion : car il dict au rebours que Germanicus avoit grossi les siennes par continuation de ce mesme exercice" (III, 11, 1034).

many instances, and this is a predominant mode of his thought which will inspire seventeenth century anti-Cartesians to critique epistemological models of deduction which leave little room for provisional certainty, blocking rational claims from an understanding of the emotional, subjective, and corporeal aspect of the mind's judgement of apparent phenomena.

If for Descartes, using Pyrrhonist hyperbolic judgement with regard to appearances served as an important starting point, for Montaigne, escaping this hyperbolic skepticism with regard to appearances constitutes a crucial step away from rationalism and towards understanding the mind's messy relationship to things in the world. In fact, in one passage Montaigne gives pyrrhonists as an example of those whose purely logical understanding of the world lies in tension with the observed nature of things (II, 12, 571):

> Or ce sont choses [les effets et la raison] qui se choquent souvent…les Pyrrhoniens ne se servent de leurs argumens et de leur raison que pour ruiner l'apparence de l'experience ; et est merveille jusques où la soupplesse de nostre raison les a suivis à ce dessein de combattre l'evidence des effects : car ils verifient que nous ne mouvons pas, que nous ne parlons pas, qu'il n'y a point de poisant ou de chaut, avecques une pareille force d'argumentations que nous verifions les choses les plus vray-semblables.

Here, reasoning about the probable and the "vray-semblable" is an escape from the overbearing logic of equipollence in Pyrrhonism, allowing forms of judgement about appearances.[37]

Here, Montaigne associates himself, and a kind of common mode of reasoning in everyday circumstances, with the Academic skeptic idea of what he calls the "vray-semblable." This term, which renders *probabile* in French with the idea of verisimilitude or the most apparently likely hypothesis (given the current state of accumulated data and theories), is central to all of the skeptical empiricists in our study. The term, here in Montaigne and throughout this study, opens up a space where probabilistic and fallibilistic judgement is possible.

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[37] Frédéric Brahami has some somewhat similar arguments about Montaigne as an anti-rationalist who escaped from an implicit idea of "conceptions claires" found in pyrrhonism. See Frédéric Brahami, *Le scepticisme de Montaigne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1997), 106-107.

Even after a key moment in which Montaigne describes Pyrrhonism, and also draws on

the difference Sextus Empiricus elucidates between Academic knowledge of ignorance and

Pyrrhonist continued searching for their epistemological status, he nonetheless remains firm

about the importance of the Academic skeptic tradition of probabilistic judgement.[38] Montaigne

draws on Cicero in a passage maintaining the importance of the idea of *judicandi potestas* in

Academic skepticism (II, 12, 503-4):

> Et, où les autres sont portez, ou par la coustume de leur païs, ou par l'institution des
> parens, ou par rencontre, comme par une tempeste, sans jugement et sans chois, voire le
> plus souvent avant l'aage de discretion, à telle ou telle opinion, à la secte ou Stoïque ou
> Epicurienne, à laquelle ils se treuvent hippothequez, asserviz et collez comme à une prise
> qu'ils ne peuvent desmordre : « *ad quamcunque disciplinam velut tempestate delati, ad
> eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt* » - pourquoy à ceux cy ne sera il pareillement
> concedé de maintenir leur liberté, et considerer les choses sans obligation et servitude ?
> « *Hoc liberiores et solutiores quod integra illis est judicandi potestas* » N'est ce pas
> quelque avantage de se trouver desengagé de la necessite qui bride les autres ? Vaut il pas
> mieux demeurer en suspens que de s'infrasquer en tant d'erreurs que l'humaine fantaisie
> a produictes ? Vaut il pas mieux suspendre sa persuasion que de se mesler à ces divisions
> seditieuses et quereleuses ? Qu'iray-je choisir ? Ce qu'il vous plaira, pourveu que vous
> choisissez ! Voilà une sotte responce, à laquelle pourtant il semble que tout le
> dogmatisme arrive, par qui il ne nous est pas permis d'ignorer ce que nous ignorons.

Here, Montaigne advocates for an epistemological space which stands in opposition to rationalist

tendencies both within Pyrrhonism and dogmatism, leaving room for fallibilistic judgement in a

space where truths and principles which seem self-evident are suspended, and fully certain

logical principles are not understood as attainable. This space of uncertain judgement and

provisional certainty, in the concrete world of appearances, is the primary epistemological locus

of the *Essais.*

In his usages of Cicero and Academic skeptic thought, Montaigne notes that pure

rationalism is often used as a crutch for statements and claims that cannot be fully verified, only

carefully judged: "Nostre discours est capable d'estoffer cent autres mondes et d'en trouver les

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[38] Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-century French Philosophy*, 25.

principes et la contexture. Il ne luy faut ny matière ny baze; laissez le courir : il bastit aussi bien

sur le vuide que sur le plain, et de l'inanité que de matiere" (III, 11, 1027). Montaigne soon

brings in Cicero's *Academica* to make the point that in opposing this rationalist discourse of pure

truth or falsehood, it is important to understand that the two are not distinguished clearly by

judgement, leaving us with probabilistic judgement.[39] Montaigne also makes the point by again

invoking the notion of the "vray-semblable": "On me faict hayr les choses vray-semblables

quand on me les plante pour infallibles" (III, 11, 1030). Soon after, Montaigne gives us another

Ciceronian quote involving the probabilistic criterion of belief, this time opposing the idea of

judging those accused of witchcraft with overly rash certainty (III, 11, 1031).

This idea of a probabilistic criterion leaving room for fallibilistic and uncertain

judgement is indeed an idea within Academic skepticism which is held in esteem by Montaigne.

In the throes of the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*'s most moralizing judgements about

humanity's lack of knowledge, a sympathetic portrait of Cicero is painted as a man tired of

letters, but only practicing them to arrive at probabilistic judgement (II, 12, 501). Montaigne

described the kind of suspension of judgement that Carneades engaged in as nothing less than

Herculean (III, 11, 1035), has a well-documented esteem for Socrates, and uses the word

"judgement" no less than 212 times in the *Essais*.[40]

It is fruitful to note that Montaigne has a doubled understanding of judgment which is

particularly inspired by Academic skeptical thought*:* in one usage of the term, it is thought of as

a kind of ineluctable and amateur process, since for Montaigne there is always a judging mind in

touch with the phenomena of the world, and in the other sense judgment is conceived of as a

conscious and more controlled process that takes place when the mind is aware of the

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[39] "Ita finitima sunt falsa veris, ut in praecipitem locum non debeat se sapiens committere" (Cic., *Acad.* II, XXI).
[40] Raymond C. La Charité, *The Concept of Judgment in Montaigne* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 2.

distortedness and imperfections of its own process of judging. In "De Democritus et Heraclitus" (I, 50) Montaigne introduces the former concept of judgment as an ineluctable process: "Le jugement est un util à tous subjects, et se mesle par tout" (301).[41] Montaigne follows with statements about his constant process of judgment in the *Essais,* sometimes about subjects he knows well and other times at ones he knows poorly. He also notes that the mind is constantly judging and manipulating the phenomena it interacts with, and is always subject to its current bias, mood, or condition: "Les choses à part elles ont peut estre leurs poids et mesures et conditions ; mais au dedans, en nous, elle [l'ame] les leur taille comme elle l'entend" (302).

Montaigne further emphasizes this point that the mind's conditions and biases always reshape perceived sensory phenomena, in various stories throughout his essay *De la force de l'imagination* including the following (I, 21, 104):

> Une femme, pensant avoir avalé un'esplingue avec son pain, crioit et se tourmentoit comme ayant une douleur insupportable au gosier, où elle pensoit la sentir arrestée ; mais par ce qu'il n'y avoit ny enfleure ny alteration par le dehors, un habil'homme, ayant jugé ce n'estoit que fantasie et opinion, prise de quelque morceau de pain qui l'avoit piquée en passant, la fit vomir et jetta à la desrobée dans ce qu'elle rendit, une esplingue tortue. Cette femme, cuidant l'avoir rendue, se sentit soudain deschargée de sa douleur.

The mere story or idea that this woman held in her mind, that she had swallowed a pin, fundamentally shaped the way that she experienced sensory phenomena, in this case, the simple act of swallowing bread. This is evident in the fact that, when this narrative is rendered impossible to her mind via the trick of the man, her relationship to that sense phenomenon was completely different. Montaigne emphasizes these encounters, in which moods, ideas, and biases fundamentally color the phenomenological encounter between the mind holding these beliefs and

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[41] Charron also uses the idea of a judgement or "esprit…[qui] se mesle par tout" to describe the constant and ineluctable action of the mind upon all kinds of objects of thought and perception (I, 14, 135).

things in the world, whether they be objects, sensory phenomena, or the texts and citations that

Montaigne constantly responds to in the *Essais* themselves.

In a similar way, Charron, Gassendi, Cyrano, and Daniel often emphasize the point that

the reasoning mind and the imagination are not separate processes, and that subjective judgement

is ineluctably an aspect of thinking.[42] Charron notes that "entendement, memoire, &

imagination" are inseparable and fundamentally linked (I, 13, 125), while Gassendi makes this

observation using concrete examples; he notes that we perceive bread in a different way

depending on our level of hunger.[43] Cyrano and Daniel will support this idea by creating lunar

landscapes in which philosophers maintain different biases depending on their ideologies,

moods, and dispositions.

This quality of the skeptical empiricist tradition is also related to their borrowings from

Academic skepticism. In the *Academica,* Cicero offers many confessional statements (which are

also reminiscent of Socrates) about the amateurish and subjective nature of his judgment.[44] In his

discussion of the sage, Cicero identifies himself precisely not as a sage, but as a holder of

opinions, and indeed begins to describe the action of his mind as a kind of wandering evocative

of Montaigne (II, XX, 66).

The idea of judgment as a faculty, and an ability to suspend initial opinions in order to

provisionally judge a view as most probable, is also inspired by Academic skepticism and

frequently employed in the *Essais.* For Montaigne, *jugement* is often spoken of as a faculty

giving a kind of weak epistemic footing in the world, when it is tempting to make dogmatic

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[42] Laurence Rauline, "Les Lettres de Cyrano de Bergerac ou la pratique de la déraison volontaire," *Libertinage et Philosophie au XVIIe Siècle* 11 (2009): 199.

[43] Pierre Gassendi, *Selected Works,* trans. Craig Brush (New York: Johnson Reprints, 1972), 92.

[44] Prat, "La réception des *Académiques* dans les *Essais*," 35.

assumptions about pre-given and rational principles, or what Montaigne often refers to as *science.* This relationship between *iudicandi potestas* and *scientia* is an important theme in Academic skepticism, and in several places, like his discussion of first principles and *scientia* in skilled work and crafts (II, XLVII, 144-146), geometry (II, XXXIII, 106), and ethical principles of the highest good (II, XLI, 129), Cicero contrasts *scientia* with the process of fallibilistic judgement based on the probabilistic criterion of belief.

In Montaigne, there are a great many instances in which *science* is unfavorably compared to *jugement* in the same way.[45] He articulates this principle succinctly when he states that "la verité…du sçavoir est moins prisable que celle du jugement" (II, 10, 388). Passages expressing Montaigne's well-known admiration for Socrates[46] also express the idea that a kind of natural practice of judgment is more important than the acquisition of *science* understood as a set of established practices or facts within a discipline of knowledge. Speaking of what Montaigne admires in Socratic discourse, he writes: "il n'y a rien d'emprunté de l'art et des sciences" and begins to emphasize judgement as a universal human faculty (III, 12, 1038).

In these passages where *science* and *jugement* are compared, Montaigne also speaks of the necessity of suspending judgment in order to evaluate facts, since without careful judgment *science* can serve as a dangerous tool for justifying the broader claims which one seeks to advance for biased reasons. Montaigne's idea of *science* as established knowledge is particularly interesting when he speaks of philosophers in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond,* and notes that in

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[45] In all of the following instances, "*science*" is seen as rash and inaccurate when it is fully established as a rational principle without a form of "*judgement*", "*entendement*", or "*conscience*": (I, 21, 106), (I, 25, 136), (I, 25, 140), (I, 26, 150), (I, 26, 160-168), (II, 10, 409), (II, 10, 418), (II, 12, 506), (II, 12, 540), (II, 12, 545), (II, 12, 582), (III, 8, 928), (III, 11, 1030), (III, 12, 1056), (III, 13, 1075)
[46] See for example: Elaine Limbrick, "Montaigne and Socrates," *Renaissance and Reformation* 9 (1973): 46-57; Floyd Gray, "Montaigne and the 'Memorabilia,'" *Studies in Philology* 58, no. 2 (1961): 130-39.

his view, when philosophers establish arguments and create forms of *science,* they are really

doing this in a light way, in order to play with ideas or engage in debate (II, 12, 545):

> Moy, j'ayme mieux croire qu'ils ont traité la science casuellement, ainsi qu'un jouet à toutes mains, et se sont esbatus de la raison comme d'un instrument vain et frivole, mettant en avant toutes sortes d'inventions et de fantasies, tantost plus tendues, tantost plus láches.

The danger of *science* lies in situations when one takes these postulates and established

principles and regards them as certain, and as the core of one's epistemology, since as

constructed principles, they can be formed to suit one's biases if not subject to a careful process

of judgment (II, 12, 540):

> Il est bien aisé, sur des fondemens avouez, de bastir ce qu'on veut : car, selon la loy et ordonnance de ce commencement, le reste des pieces du bastiment se conduit ayséement, sans se démentir. Par cette voye nous trouvons nostre raison bien fondée, et discourons à boule veue : car nos maistres praeoccupent et gaignent avant main autant de lieu en nostre creance qu'il leur en faut pour conclurre apres ce qu'ils veulent, à la mode des Geometriens, par leurs demandes avouées : le consentement et approbation que nous leur prestons leur donnant dequoy nous trainer à gauche et à dextre, et nous pyroueter à leur volonté…Car chasque science a ses principes presupposez par où le jugement humain est bridé de toutes parts.

The danger here is precisely one posed by pure rationalism and logical principles when they are

established and formed before judgment takes place. Reason and *science* can be an instrument to

confirm a view as opposed to examining its validity, in the same way that Montaigne claims that

doctors can find arguments to prescribe completely contrary behaviors according to their wishes

(II, 37, 775). As Ian MacLean observes,[47] Montaigne shares Bacon's view that reason is "an

instrument of lead and of wax, stretchable, pliable and adaptable to all biases and all

measures."[48] The idea that logical reasoning can be used to defend and support pre-determined

theories as opposed to using hypothesis formation and provisional certainty to seek out and

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[47] Ian MacLean, "Montaigne and the Truth of the Schools," in *The Cambridge Companion to Montaigne,* ed. Ulrich Langer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 147.
[48] Francis Bacon, *Novum organum*, ed. Thomas Fowler (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878), 210–11.

change hypotheses based on pre-determined data is a crucial idea for Charron, Gassendi, Cyrano, and Gabriel Daniel. For example, Charron militates against using reason to support "les opinions anticipées," Gassendi employed such arguments to criticize the circularity he saw in Cartesian logic, and Cyrano would include the idea in *Contre les sorciers* and accuse Aristotle of this error in *L'autre monde*.[49]

Montaigne moves far away from this kind of logical reasoning, and pre-formed logical constructions in an abstracted realm of the mind, by employing his conception of judgement, the probabilistic criterion, and hypothesis formation as central aspects of his epistemology. This space of constant judgment about appearances does not take the hyperbolically skeptical rationalism of Pyrrhonian skepticism as a starting point in the way that Descartes does. It seeks to fallibilistically reduce cognitive bias through the careful suspension of judgment, and sees human epistemology as intimately linked with the mind's subjectivity and connection to the physical universe. Finally, it also holds that rationalism must always be nested in a context where the mind's biases and relationship to things is understood. In this way, Montaigne, and his use of Academic skepticism, inspired the skeptical empiricist tradition and seventeenth century critics of Cartesian rationalistic hyperbolic doubt.

1.4   Reading Lucretius and Cicero Side-by-Side: The Probabilistic Criterion of Verified Sense Perception

As an eclectic reader of various Hellenistic epistemological traditions and debates, Montaigne also developed his personal views on human knowledge by engaging with debates

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[49] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Lettres satiriques et amoreuses, précédées des Lettres diverses,* ed. J.-C. Darmon and A. Mothu (Paris: Desjonquères, 1999), 86; Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'Autre monde ou les États et empires de la Lune,* ed. Frédéric Lachèvre (Paris: Garnier, 1932), 69.

between Hellenistic schools. In this section, we will focus on Montaigne's readings of Epicureanism, and the critique of the idea of infallible sense perception by the Academic skeptics. We will see that as Montaigne reads these debates, he arrives at the claim that logical principles cannot inform us whether the senses provide accurate information about the world. Once again, there is no assumed rational experiment of hyperbolic skepticism regarding this matter, nor is there any possible rational assumption that one can make which would tell us that sense perception is reliable. Instead, on a case-by-case basis, appearances must be understood by the mind, and a process of judgment must take place in which the reasoning mind comes to understand which kind of appearance in the world is the most probable one.

Montaigne's annotations, readings, and use of Denis Lambin's Lucretius and commentary (1563) were thus an important manner of incorporating Academic skeptic probabilistic ideas within his thought. Especially regarding the question of sensory perception, Lambin was a scrupulous reader of epistemological debates within Hellenistic philosophy and pointed to disagreements between the Epicureans and the Academic Skeptics. Montaigne often follows his lead and makes use of these points of tension in his notes and in the *Essais*.

The debates between Academic Skepticism and Epicureanism in Montaigne's thought, and Montaigne's tendency to prefer Academic skeptic views in these instances, showcase Montaigne's emphasis on the interaction between a reasoning mind and sensory objects as the locus of his epistemology, in addition to his fallibilism and speculative hypothesis-formation about the nature of reality based on these judgements about the senses. These views are brought into especially sharp relief when he opposes Lucretian ideas about the infallibility of sense perception with Academic skeptic views emphasizing the judging relationship between the mind and sensory perception or appearances (which should not be understood as true for any prior or

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self-evident logical reason). Montaigne also emphasizes the view that in this relationship, the mind should hypothesize which sense impressions are more likely (*probabile*) to represent reality, in opposition to a black-and-white view that sense perception is reliable or unreliable.

These views will become essential to anti-Cartesian seventeenth century thinkers from Gassendi to Daniel, who emphasize the necessity of using both sense perception and logical reasoning, despite the weakness of these tools, in order to formulate more probable (and not fully accurate or inaccurate) hypotheses about the nature of the world. These figures also use the same stock examples from Hellenistic philosophy in order to make these points. In this section, we will see that Montaigne grapples with the dogmatic Epicurean idea that sense perception is always accurate, which is a kind of rationalism, and counters with the idea of verified sense perception; that is, that one should combine logical reasoning with sense perception in order to make provisional, but not fully accurate conclusions about the nature of the world. In the analysis to follow, Montaigne counters rationalism by studying optical illusions (later used by Gassendi against Descartes) which show that it is necessary to combine reasoning with sense perception, such as the illusion of a square tower seeming rounded (but probably not actually *being* rounded) from a distance.[50] Cyrano's discussion of heliocentrism is also very similar to Montaigne's criticism of Epicurean views on the appearance and size of the Sun, in that it wields these optical illusions from Hellenistic philosophy in order to challenge a hypothesis that does not combine both sense perception and reasoning, but rather defers solely to the authority of the senses.[51]

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[50] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 88.
[51] Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'autre monde*, 13.

With this in mind, we will precede with an analysis of Montaigne's readings of Lucretius, and especially questions related to the reliability of sense perception. Montaigne's discussion and notes on the senses are among the places where we see his most intense and deliberate study of Lucretian material and Lambin's commentaries. These notes are particularly prolific and detailed: Montaigne marks lines which he will later cite in the *Essais* with pen-strokes, in three places he writes page numbers to repeated lines which are then cross-referenced on those pages[52], he writes headings which label topics and engage with Lucretius' ideas, creates indices of organized subjects including a large one on the *simulacra,* and writes dots next to detailed commentaries of Lambin related to these issues.[53]

In his attentive notes on the senses in Epicureanism, Montaigne is, as we have mentioned, particularly interested in combatting the idea of the infallibility of sense perception,[54] opposed by Cicero in the *Lucullus,* according to which the sensory faculties are fully reliable, and any inconsistency about the information they provide is due to faulty reasoning. For example, Lucretius contends that *simulacra* (the atoms which are apprehended as visual perceptions) emerging from fire are not diminished over any distance or blocked by other atoms because of their speed and smallness, and the Sun is at least roughly the size that it appears to us (*DRN* V, 577; IV, 380-387). In his Latin notes on the flyleaves of his edition of Lucretius, Montaigne carefully summarizes this Lucretian argument about sensory perception which he rejects:

> Cum uidentur falli sensus ut nauigantibus terra moueri   & similia
> non sensus falluntur sed animus 300 qui id fiat Lamb. 302

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[52] Montaigne often does not include cross-references for repeated lines, so this detail indicates Montaigne's interest in this subject.

[53] See M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius* (Geneva: Droz, 1998), 328-343.

[54] Different passages of Lucretius frame the question of infallible sensory perception in differing ways. We will address other positions Lucretius takes on this question later in this chapter.

> When the senses seem to be deceived, as when, to those aboard ship, the land appears to move, and similar things, it is not the senses which are deceived but the *animus.* 300. How Lambinus deals with that, 302.[55]

Here, Montaigne summarizes the Epicurean idea of infallible sensory perception. As is clear in Montaigne's note, in the commented passage Lucretius discusses optical illusions. For example, he provides the canonical example of a tower which appears to have a square top from close up but a rounded one from a distance.

In addition, this passage (as Montaigne discusses in the note) claims that the mind erroneously reasons that it truly perceives phenomena which are not actually perceived by the senses. Here, we understand that this perceived phenomenon constitutes, for example, an interpretation which convinces the mind that from a distance, we are truly seeing a square tower manipulated by faulty senses into resembling a round one (IV, 462-6).[56] This is a slippery argument requiring interpretation,[57] but Lucretius clearly explains later on that he means that it is better to trust each individually sensed phenomenon of a square tower and a round tower, and that reasoning that the tower is truly square would cause a person to question sensory perception in a way which would lead to unacceptable skepticism. Thus, we take Lucretius to mean that the mind brings a faulty opinion to sensory phenomena when it concludes that the tower is truly square and that the impression of a rounded tower is an illusion communicated by the senses, and that all of this is comprehensible by means of reasoning about sensory impressions (IV, 500-513). In any case, this is clearly Montaigne's reading of Lucretius at this point in the text, as will be shown below.

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[55] Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, 146.

[56] Titus Carus Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things,* ed. W. H. D. Rouse (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 313.

[57] In one place, Lucretius seems to suggest that the mind might be responsible for a kind of hallucination which creates the false impression of a rounded tower. We will address other interpretations of Lucretius' argument later, but as we will see Montaigne does not seem to be responding to this kind of hallucination argument in his annotations of Lucretius, nor does he respond to this argument directly in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond.*

In his manuscript, Montaigne links this passage on optical illusions to a note on page 302 in his edition in which Lambin recommends comparing this Epicurean argument to those in Cicero's Academic text *Lucullus* xxv, 79-80.[58] On this page in his notes comparing Epicureanism and Academic skepticism, Lambin reveals that he is sympathetic to the Academic argument that it is possible to reason that fallible sensory appearances often do not correspond with the reality which they seem to represent. Lambin opposes this view to the Epicurean argument defending wholly infallible sense perception and fallible intellect.[59] The passage of Cicero recommended by Lambin and noted by Montaigne pointedly critiques the Epicurean view of infallible sensory perception for a few reasons. Firstly, Cicero criticizes the idea that one can persist in fully and uncritically trusting appearances and fully blame optical illusions on the *animus*. Secondly, Cicero critiques the assumption that admitting one error of sensory perception would necessarily cause full disbelief in sensory perception instead of a fallibilistic partial skepticism about the probable veracity of some forms of sense perception and their relationship to reality.[60]

Informed by his epistemological readings of Lucretius alongside Cicero, Montaigne's notes in French in the margins of the manuscript show a continued willingness to read Lucretian thought about optical illusions in conjunction with Ciceronian skeptical critiques of infallible sensory perception. Tellingly, Montaigne makes the following note as Lucretius enumerates different forms of optical illusions:

> Examples des diuer
> ses tromperies

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[58] We have used the convention of referring to the surviving second book of two in the first edition of Cicero's *Academica* as "*Lucullus.*" Note that in other texts it may be referred to as *Acad. II* or *Academica Prioria.*

[59] David K. Glidden, "*Sensus* and Sense Perception in the *De rerum natura*," *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 12 (1979): 173.

[60] *Lucullus* xxv, 79-80. This study cites from the Loeb edition of Lucretius: *De natura deorum; Academica* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 567-570.

que les yeux reçoi
uent

Here, Montaigne is making notes about these optical illusions in a way which extracts them from this particular argument in Epicurean philosophy, which sees them as examples of the fallibility of the mind's reasoning and the infallibility of sensory perception. Here, we can see that Montaigne is thinking of Academic skeptic critiques of Epicurean infallible sensory perception while he is reading the storehouse of examples provided by Lucretius, because he appropriates the Lucretian list of optical illusions to show that the eyes, and the sensory organs themselves, have an imperfect ability to represent reality. Thus, Montaigne's note makes the assumption that it is possible to reason about a fallible relationship between organs of sensory perception and the nature of real things.

Montaigne's side-by-side readings of Lucretius with Academic skeptical critiques of sensory perception are also visible in his use of quotations of Lucretius and Cicero in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond.* In this chapter of the *Essais,* Montaigne makes use of the same passage of Cicero recommended by Lambin on page 302 to oppose the Lucretian idea of the infallibility of sense perception, and he places the Ciceronian critique next to Lucretian quotations about optical illusions. Thus, Montaigne is directly following Lambin's cue by bringing his recommended passage of Cicero into dialogue with the passage on optical illusions where his note appears. Thus, in both the *Apologie* and his notes about Lucretius, Epicurean and Academic skeptical views of sensory perception are placed next to each other and the Academic view prevails.

In his use of Cicero in the *Apologie,* Montaigne draws heavily from Lambin's suggested passage of *Lucullus* (xxv, 79-80). In his Ciceronian critique of the problem of the Epicurean views regarding the infallibility of sense perception, Montaigne takes the example of the

Epicurean thinker Timagoras from Cicero's text. Timagoras insisted that even pressing and manipulating his eyes did not yield the doubled image of a flame to him via sensory perception, but that his mind had produced that illusion. Montaigne's passage, which criticizes the view that there is no cause-effect relationship between a clear act of manipulating sensory organs and the creation of optical illusions, is drawn from Cicero's skeptical critiques of Epicureanism and is likely guided by his reading of Lambin.

Similarly, Montaigne later makes a statement resembling Cicero's in the same passage of *Lucullus* stating that the mind has a clear ability to judge that manipulated sense organs can cause these kinds of optical illusions. Montaigne writes: "que les sens soyent maintesfois maistres du discours, et le contraignent de recevoir des impressions qu'il sçait et juge estre fauces, il se void à tous coups" (592). This is comparable to Cicero's passage in which he writes that he is able to use his intellect to judge that what he senses in the case of a bent oar dipped in water is false: "*in remo sentio non esse id quod videatur"* (*Lucullus* xxv 79). In these cases, Montaigne's critique of Epicurean infallible sense perception is guided by the side-by-side readings of Academic skepticism and Epicureanism encouraged by Lambin.

Montaigne also performs another operation in the *Apologie* which mirrors his notes in Lambin's Lucretius: he violently inserts an Academic interpretation of the senses as fallible within Lucretian discourse about optical illusions, showing that "les yeux reçoivent" what Montaigne calls the "tromperies" of sense impression. As Gérard Ferreyroles notes, Montaigne seems to show internal contradictions in Lucretius' thought when he quotes Lucretius both to

articulate his Epicurean view regarding the infallibility of the senses, and to refute that view using Lucretius' examples of ways in which the senses appear to deceive us.[61]

By using the practice of citation to cut away the important Epicurean principle that the mind deceives us in the case of optical illusions, Montaigne appears to demonstrate how Lucretius' view about the infallibility of the senses does not accord with his own observations. In this way, as in his notes in his copy of Lambin, Montaigne specifically frames Lucretius' examples as providing explicit evidence for the fallibility of the senses (592):

> Quant à l'erreur et incertitude de l'operation des sens, chacun s'en peut fournir autant d'exemples qu'il luy plaira, tant les fautes et tromperies qu'ils nous font, sont ordinaires. Au retantir d'un valon, le son d'une trompette semble venir devant nous, qui vient d'une lieue derriere…

Montaigne then follows with the citations from Lucretius about sensory illusions that we have mentioned, similar to Montaigne's example of the reverberating sound of a trumpet which seems to come from in front when its source is actually from behind. This strategy not only strengthens Montaigne's conviction that the senses are often deceptive, but they also serve as a skeptical tool allowing Montaigne to apply the methods of the Academics, attributing this view to Lucretius in a way which shows that his own concept of the infallibility of the senses constitutes an inconsistency in his thought.

In fact, before we make a final remark about the importance of this fallibilistic Academic skeptic epistemology in Montaigne, we need to clear up some contradictions about the Epicurean view regarding infallible sense impression which Montaigne is implicitly pointing to here. In our analysis of Montaigne's readings of Cicero and Lambin against Epicurean epistemology, we have shown that there is opposition to *one type* of Epicurean view articulated by Lucretius about

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[61] Gérard Ferreyroles, "Les citations de Lucrèce dans l'Apologie de Raymond Sebond," *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Montaigne* 16 (1975): 57.

infallible sense impression, according to which each impression received by the eye should be considered as accurate, and that the mind is at fault when it considers that objects do not change in size when the viewer moves for example. However, there is another view about infallible sense impression articulated by Lucretius which is in tension with this view and is not directly addressed by Montaigne or Cicero. According to this view, "eyes cannot recognize the nature of things"[62] and should not be blamed for the intellect's faults if it is unable to reason that the tower is truly square or not. Here, we have a different view articulated by Lucretius, related to the impressions of phenomena by the *simulacra* or small atoms which enter the eyes, which accords with the idea of carefully verified sense perception.

It is important to openly remark that this creates a strange and difficult tension in Epicurean thought and that different contradictory explanations are provided in Lucretius for the thesis that sensory perception is accurate. Certainly, these tensions or ambiguous statements in Epicurean thought have led to debates about what Lucretius means when he notes that the Sun cannot appear much different from its actual size. Since the principle that sense perception is infallible is such an important dogmatic principle for Epicurean ethics, and since Epicureanism allows for multiple explanations or contrary epistemological accounts in some cases, these tensions are also invited by a rich philosophical tradition which uses ethics to justify epistemology more than the converse.

Thus, in this second and different theory as part of the Epicurean tradition, according to which the senses are not to be blamed for the mind's faults, Lucretius concedes that the eyes are unable to recognize the nature of reality and thus reaches a conclusion about sense perception

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[62] "Nec possunt oculi naturam noscere rerum" IV, 385. We cite from *De rerum natura* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

which is consistent with Montaigne's idea of verified sense perception (namely, that sensory information does not accord with the true nature of things, and the mind must be involved to come to an understanding of the true nature of phenomena). What is important for our argument above all is that Montaigne, by reading Lambin and Cicero, reaches the conclusion that sense perception is fallible and needs to be checked by reason in a way which is critical of the first Lucretian argument discussed in this paper, according to which sense perception is fully infallible. However, it is interesting to note that Montaigne's critique strangely seems to accord well with this second Epicurean theory which lies in tension with other aspects of Epicurean thought and openly recognizes the fallibility of the senses and the need to correct this fallibility with reasoning. Montaigne's notes about optical illusions which pit Lucretius against himself implicitly point to this second theory and how it may contradict the idea of fully infallible sense perception discussed earlier in this chapter.

Such critiques of Epicurean views on sense perception, and their tensions with Academic skeptic readings of Cicero suggested by Lambin, rigorously emphasize the fallibility of the senses, and thus the necessity of considering how the mind perceives and judges which sense perceptions are most likely to be accurate. In this way, Montaigne brings up many principles which will shape anti-Cartesian thought in the seventeenth century. These include the principle that the accuracy of sense perception cannot be rationally concluded wholesale as a property of the universe, and that judgements only occur in the interaction between the mind and sense perception. All of the figures in this study, from Charron to Gabriel Daniel, will take Montaigne's lead in using ancient philosophical examples of optical illusions to advance a philosophy of verified sense perception, whether it involves Gassendi proposing an antipodal vision of the Cartesian wax argument, or Cyrano's protagonist in *L'autre monde* using optical

illusions to espouse verified sense perception and skeptical empiricist vision in order to defend heliocentrism as a probable astronomical model.

Like these figures that will follow his lead, Montaigne, in his interactions with Epicureanism and Academic Skepticism, defends the principle that the mind must judge what constitutes the most probable (*probabile*) appearance, but does not deduce fully, in a total and logical sense, whether sense perception is accurate or inaccurate. These views of Montaigne, filtered through and emphasized by Charron, will arrive in the seventeenth century to oppose Cartesian thought and its view that essences and logical principles, and not appearances and provisional hypotheses, provide knowledge about the world.

1.5 Eclecticism, Skeptical Empiricism, and the Form of the *Essais*

Montaigne not only discussed skeptical empiricist ideas in his work, but also emphasized a methodological approach of eclecticism which both informs his statements about how knowledge should be obtained, and influences the formal structure of his own text, which itself constitutes a space of knowledge formation. This eclecticism, which emphasizes maximizing the knowledge searcher's interaction with prior philosophical texts, arguments, and experience in the form of historical accounts, anecdotes, and personal experience, is central to the form and function of the *Essais* and of the skeptical empiricist tradition.

In the seventeenth century, especially among figures like Gassendi, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Gabriel Daniel, this Montaignian eclecticism came to assume great philosophical and literary significance as an alternative methodology and a means of critiquing the dominant tradition of Cartesian rationalism. The predominant idea of skeptical empiricism, that both sense perception

and logical argumentation are weak but usable tools for arriving at probable hypotheses, underscores the importance of maximizing one's interaction with an eclectic array of experiences and philosophical arguments; in this way, the inquirer acquires more opportunities to exercise judgement and accumulate hypotheses about the nature of reality in order to judge which one is most probable. This methodology strictly opposes Cartesian rationalism, which involves a purging of both sensory experience and of all prior philosophical traditions in order to engage in rationalist argumentation.

Montaigne's *Essais* themselves formally exemplify this eclecticism, which constitutes a *praxis* of skeptical empiricist epistemology. Both Charron and Gassendi are influenced by Montaigne's statements about the need to engage in a humanist project of interacting with and judging an eclectic body of authors, especially different ancient philosophical traditions, and this study will examine their eclectic Montaignian philosophical preoccupations with schools like Epicureanism and Academic Skepticism. Eclecticism, its formal qualities, and the skeptical empiricist idea of enlarging exposure to texts, theories, and experiences is especially important to Cyrano de Bergerac and his readers including Gabriel Daniel. In our examination of these authors, we will show their preoccupation with enlarging and even randomizing exposure to texts and experiences as a means augmenting the knowledge one can attain via the weak tools of sense perception and logical reasoning.

Montaigne, like Cyrano, advocates maximal exposure to texts and experiences due to the premise that the universe is prodigious, complex, and may even contain multiple worlds with various physical laws. Montaigne affirms that the prodigious variety of the universe, and the weakness of reason and sense perception to understand natural philosophy, make the hypothesis of multiple worlds a probable one:

Ta raison n'a en aucune autre chose plus de verisimilitude et de fondement qu'en ce qu'elle te persuade la pluralité des mondes :

Terramque, et solem, lunam, mare, caetera quae sunt
Non esse unica, sed numero magis innumerali.

[Sky and earth, sun, moon, sea and all else that exists, are not unique, but rather of number inumerable][63]

…s'il y a plusieurs mondes, comme Democrtius, Epicurus et presque toute la philosophie a pensé, que sçavons nous si les principes et les regles de cettuy touchent pareillement les autres ? Ils ont à l'avanture autre visage et autre police. Epicurus les imagine ou semblables ou dissemblables. (524)

It is important to note that Montaigne avoids the dogmatism of Epicureanism in this passage; he does not assert that a plurality of worlds exists, but discusses the "verisimilitude" of the hypothesis, employing the vocabulary related to his use of "vray-semblable", which we have already seen him use to treat the idea of probabilism in Academic Skepticism.

In fact, this Epicurean idea of a plurality of worlds has two effects in the thought of Montaigne: it sets Montaigne's thought in a prodigious and complex universe with the weak tools of sense perception and logic, and it creates the need for prodigious and rambling intellectual exploration of the world in order acquire more data, produce more theories, and try (while mostly failing) to understand the world to some extent. P. J. Hendrick has remarked upon the connection between the hypothesis of a plurality of worlds and the breadth and length of Montaigne's *Essais* and his rhetorical style, which tries to grasp at as many experiences and theories as possible.[64] Montaigne himself alludes to the connection between an abundance of atoms in the universe of Epicurus and the prodigiousness of the *Essais* (III, 13, 1067):

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[63] Translation by W. H. D. Rouse from Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 179 (2.1085).

[64] P. J. Hendrick, "Montaigne, Lucretius and Scepticism: An Interpretation of the 'Apologie De Raymond Sebond,'" *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* 79 (1979), 151. See also Eric MacPhail, "Montaigne's New Epicureanism," *Montaigne Studies* 12 (2000): 91-103.

> Nous ouvrons la matiere et l'espandons en la destrempant; d'un subject nous en faisons mille, et retombons, en multipliant et subdivisant, à l'infinie des atomes d'Epicurus.

The process of subdivision, and the idea of the macrocosmic fecundity of the parts of the universe like bodies, which can be continuously broken down into new studies and concepts, is a particularly important idea in Cyrano de Bergerac and likely bears Montaigne's influence.

Given the fecundity and incomprehensibility of the universe, in Montaigne's text, accumulating eclectic quotes, ideas, anecdotes, sensory experiences, and logical arguments is a worthwhile enterprise for arriving at ideas that, while they may not be strictly true or even knowable, are more likely to be true. Continuing his engagement with Epicurean thought, Montaigne wields the idea of multiple explanations in order to illustrate this idea and its relationship with causation (899):

> Nous ne pouvons nous asseurer de la maistresse cause; nous en entassons plusieurs, voir si par rencontre elle se trouvera en ce nombre :
>
> *namque unam dicere causam*
> *Non satis est, verum plures, unde una tamen sit.*

In this section at the beginning of *Des Coches,* not only does Montaigne attribute this practice to "grands auteurs," but provides examples of it from Plutarch, a figure who is not only parallel to Montaigne as a practitioner of Academic Skepticism and hypothesis formation,[65] but also for the way in which he densely accumulates theories and anecdotes in ways that allow readers maximally exercise their judgement and update their hypotheses.[66] As Montaigne notes in *Des Coches*, accumulating multiple potential causal explanations, especially when full rationalist certainty of the "maistresse cause" is not possible, serves as a means of searching for such knowledge.

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[65] Panichi, "Montaigne and Plutarch: A Scepticism That Conquers the Mind," 209-210.
[66] Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 271.

In *Des Coustumes Anciennes* (I, 49), Montaigne approaches the titular subject with a similar approach to maximizing dense objects of study as means of exercising judgement and arriving at a better yet imperfect means of understanding the world (297):

> Je veux icy entasser aucunes façons anciennes que j'ay en memoire, les unes de mesme les nostres, les autres differentes, afin qu'ayant en l'imagination cette continuelle variation des choses humaines, nous en ayons le jugement plus esclaircy et plus ferme.

Often, Montaigne accumulates dense passages of human testimony and examples ranging from the banal and credible to the fantastic. Examples include Montaigne's prodigious list on animal intelligence in the *Apologie* to the reams of historical, contemporaneous, and occasional anecdotal examples he uses to explore precepts which give titles to essays like "*Que le Goust des Biens et des Maux Depend en Bonne Partie de l'Opinion que Nous en Avons*" (I, 14), or "*Comme Nous Pleurons et Rions d'une Mesme Chose*" (I, 38), among many others.

In these cases, Montaigne displays a great degree of confidence in the idea that exposure to historical testimony and experiences improves our ability to produce knowledge about the world and obtain a "jugement plus esclaircy." Montaigne's skepticism is thus an empiricist skepticism; instead of a cynical skepticism which does away with prior thought and writings in the Cartesian mode (before disposing of this cynicism and skepticism with rationalism), Montaigne's is a credulous skepticism which seeks to maximize and stack up examples and exercise judgement with the hope of attaining a somewhat less imperfect understanding of the world. This drive to maximize objects of judgement in the *Essais* is evident when he notes that he stacks up "les testes" (and not the full bodies) of ideas and materials in the *Essais,* with the hope they may produce a maximal number of judgements and criticisms on the part of the reader (even ones "hors de mon propos" as Montaigne notes) (I, 40, 251). As with Hume, a philosopher largely classifiable as a skeptical empiricist, Montaigne holds that human reasoning and sense

perception, and thus human testimony, is indeed weak, but even imperfect testimony from historians, anecdotes, himself, and his reader are important in order to enlarge exposure to texts and theories and therefore improve our imperfect knowledge of the world.[67]

Montaigne errs towards including too many examples, some of them rather far-fetched or unbelievable, such as the praying elephants of the *Apologie,* or Herodotus' account of humans who wake and sleep every half-year.[68] This tendency is related to the Academic Skeptic idea of forming hypotheses with imperfect tools, and with certain knowledge that provisional hypotheses are not fully accurate truths. As Gassendi would put it in a retort to Descartes, the skeptical empiricist tradition considers it unhelpful to refrain from eating altogether even if one food has made a person sick;[69] it is better to continue maximizing exposure to histories and prior philosophical judgements and exercise judgement on them even if we have some awareness that they may be harmful. In chapters to follow, we will see that Montaigne's skeptical empiricist humanism, maximizing dialogues between and reader interactions with eclectic philosophical schools, informed the dense humanism of Charron and Gassendi and the vast, dialogic expanse of philosophical interactions in Cyrano and Gabriel Daniel.

1.6 Montaigne's Skeptical Empiricism in Review

In this chapter, we have seen that Montaigne's eclectic use of Hellenistic philosophical schools was part of a historical shift towards epistemological rigor about questions of essence, rationality, and sense perception which slowly started to assert itself in the 1550s and came into

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[67] Hartle, *Michel de Montaigne: Accidental Philosopher*, 22.
[68] Montaigne is self-conscious about his credulous and open inclusion of possible but unlikely ideas in the *Essais*: "Les temoignages fabuleux, porveu qu'ils soient possible, servent [dans les *Essais*] comme les vrais" (I, 21, 105).
[69] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 326.

full force in the 1560s. Montaigne's emphasis on approaching epistemological questions in ancient thought, and his methodology of combining them in an eclectic way to develop a philosophy of skeptical empiricism, would inform a series of authors who would produce philosophical, literary, and satirical responses to Cartesianism in the seventeenth century. The eclecticism of Montaigne's approach, and its use of ancient texts in order to exercise judgement and maximize engagement with prior philosophical traditions, would also be seminal in the creation of an anti-Cartesian tradition which rejects Descartes' purported methodology of rationalist originality and working from first principles. Montaigne's epistemology itself, and especially his practice of Pyrrhonism with regard to metaphysics, fully neutralized speculation about questions of divine essence, the soul, and the essence of substances, and would also prefigure criticisms of Cartesian rationalist method that would emerge in the 17th century.

Montaigne's use of Academic skeptic thought emphasized fallibilistic judgment of appearances in the world, as opposed to syllogism, rationality, and codified *science* as the entry point into human knowledge. This faculty of judgment also emphasized a probabilistic epistemology in which full certainty about a conclusion is not achieved, but rather knowledge comes from forms of hypothesis formation in which there is always the possibility of falsehood. Finally, interactions between Academic skepticism and Epicureanism inspired Montaigne to show that rational argumentation cannot bring wholesale knowledge about the accuracy of sensory perception, and each appearance must be judged by the mind for the probability of its accuracy. We will now turn to ways in which these arguments came to form a rich tradition of anti-Cartesian critiques in literary and philosophical texts, beginning with Charron's distillation of ideas which would become particularly anti-Cartesian, and the reception of Montaigne and

Charron among writers from Cyrano de Bergerac, a popularizer of much of Gassendi's thought, to the satirical writings of Gabriel Daniel.

Chapter 2: Charron, Gassendi, and the Transmission of Montaigne's Epistemology into Seventeenth-Century French Thought

2.1   Transmitting Montaigne's Thought: Charron and Gassendi's Skeptical Empiricist Epistemologies in Context

In our first chapter, we have reviewed the features of Montaigne's thought which would fundamentally influence the Gassendist, or anti-Cartesian writers of seventeenth century France. Montaigne's epistemology is thoroughly agnostic about questions of divine and physical essences, rejects rationalism to place knowledge in the realm of the mind's judgements on apparent phenomena, functions within a framework of provisional certainty, and maximizes eclectic textual and phenomenal interaction as a means of essaying the mind's judgement of things in the world. In this second chapter, we will see how these aspects of Montaigne's thought are extracted and emphasized as dominant in Charron, and how both Montaigne and Charron figure centrally in the work of Gassendi, who develops the most crucial criticisms of Cartesian thought in seventeenth century France and fundamentally shaped the anti-Cartesian fictional explorations of Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel.

As we turn to Charron as a source for Gassendi, and a crucial transmitter of Montaigne's epistemology into seventeenth century thought, it is important to understand the extent of his influence in the early- to mid-seventeenth century France. As readers who are likely to approach Charron with a Montaigne scholar's interest in his status as a disciple of Montaigne, we should reverse our perspective and understand that a seventeenth-century reader would have appreciated Charron first, reading Montaigne secondarily through the lens of a Charron enthusiast and not the other way around. Charron's work received several editions well into the 1640s and 50s and was a source of inspiration, debate, and salon discussions in the period, influencing thinkers from

Pascal and Bayle to La Rochefoucauld, and inspiring a popular polemical work by Pierre Chanet.[1] As Montaigne was being reduced down and moralized from the mid-seventeenth century onward to later face a period of obscurity,[2] Charron's work was widely read and discussed.

As we have noted, our chapter will show that the features of Montaigne's work which would serve as the backbone for anti-Cartesian fiction and satire are emphasized, extracted, and clarified in Charron's writings. The fact that the dominant lens for understanding Montaigne in the mid-to-late seventeenth century was a Charronian one has the effect of emphasizing these anti-Cartesian features in Montaigne for authors which would make extensive use of Montaigne, Charron, and the Gassendist tradition in their epistemological texts exploring and criticizing Descartes.

Charron criticism thus far has remarked upon a kind of epistemological focus of Charron's borrowings from Montaigne. In her quantitative analysis of Charron's usages of Montaigne, Françoise Kaye notes that a large percentage of Charron's borrowings do come from the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond*.[3] Thierry Gontier more closely examines how these themes from the skeptical crux of Montaigne's *Essais* are borne out in Charron, whose thought on the incomprehensibility of God and divine essence, profound anti-scholasticism, and philosophy of judgement form the core of *De la sagesse*.[4] Floyd Gray has noted that the epistemic status of humankind versus animals, in addition to questions related to judgement, memory, education,

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[1] Renée Kogel, *Pierre Charron* (Geneva: Droz, 1972), 163.
[2] Philippe Desan, "Petite histoire des réinventions et des récupérations de Montaigne au cours des siècles," *AFJS* 52 no. 3 (2015): 233.
[3] Françoise Kaye, *Charron et Montaigne. Du plagiat à l'originalité* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1982).
[4] Thierry Gontier, "Charron face à Montaigne : stratégies du scepticisme," in *Montaigne et la question de l'homme,* ed. M.-L. Demonet (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1999).

and pedantry, are the bread and butter of Charron's more pedagogical and structured take on

Montaignian themes.[5] José R. Maia Neto focuses on Charron as a figure who emphasizes the

influence of Montaigne's Academic Skepticism, and uses Montaigne to develop philosophy

based upon probabilistic judgements as opposed to full dogmatism.[6] In all of these cases, we

notice that Charron is deeply interested in the fallibilistic epistemology sketched out by

Montaigne, in which divine essences are fully gapped from human judgement, which is

probabilistic and focused on apparent phenomena.

These remarks corroborate Alexander Roose's claim that for Charron, the epistemic

questions which Montaigne highlighted in opposition to rhetorizing late sixteenth-century

humanism would be even more central, and the question of humankind's attainment of

knowledge was one of Charron's primary preoccupations in an unalloyed sense, even detached

from psychological questions about human knowledge and the almost proto-Nietzschean gay

science which characterizes Montaigne's concerns with epistemology. In an almost Aristotelian

sense, the pursuit of human knowledge for its own sake is important for Charron, whereas

Montaigne is interested in it when it is linked with the health of the body or with psychological

states.[7] It is easy to forget some of the lesser-known passages in Charron which try to tease out

questions about the constitution of matter, the universe, human anatomy, the humors, and other

such epistemological questions that figure less prominently (although indeed to some extent) in

Montaigne, and are much more important to Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel. However,

it is important to briefly note that in a broader sense, they attest to Charron's deeper interest in

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[5] Floyd Gray, "Reflections on Charron's Debt to Montaigne," *The French Review* 35, no. 4 (1962): 379.
[6] José R. Maia Neto, "Charron's Academic Sceptical Wisdom," in *Renaissance Skepticisms,* ed. Gianni Paganini and José R. Maia Neto (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009).
[7] Alexander Roose, "La curiosité de Pierre Charron," *Corpus: Revue de philosophie* 55 (2008): 157-168.

the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, which would further broaden the applications of Montaigne's epistemology so that it could be applied to later challenges of Cartesian thought.

In this way, what we have in Charron is an accumulation of all the ingredients of a philosophy that would come to challenge Descartes, and we will now turn in a more detailed manner to these elements which we have seen in Montaigne, and will be further emphasized and clarified in Charron. Among these themes, we will begin with the gapping of questions related to the essences of divinity and matter, and will continue with Charron's epistemology of judging appearances, anti-rationalism, provisional certainty, and eclecticism.

2.1 Charron, Divine Essence, and Dispute with Proto-Cartesian Views

Charron clarifies his separation of divine and worldly themes by announcing at the outset that his own anti-rationalist text, *Les trois verités,* is wholly separate from *De la sagesse,* and thus his central work on human wisdom becomes a text which fully restricts judgement to worldly and apparent phenomena (*Préface,* 28-29).[8] In *Les trois vertiés,* Charron's justification for putting aside any rationalistic consideration of God's essence or nature is perhaps even more squarely opposed to Cartesian epistemology than in Montaigne, since it precisely conceives of the infinite and the perfect as not participating in a realm of human logical definitions, in that particular sense of comprehensibility. Charron specifically speaks of the infinity of God making God undefinable, and unable to be grasped by the instruments of human reason:

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[8] We have used Barbara de Negroni's 1986 edition of *De la sagesse,* which contains text from multiple editions of Charron's original publications of the book. We will draw from the text of the latest edition principally used in the text unless noted.

Or Dieu de sa part est incognoissable, car il est infiny : L'inifinité est du tout incognoissable : & si elle pouvuit estre cognue, ce ne seroit plus infinité. Tout ce qui est cognu est finy, & ne pourroit estre cognu, s'il estoit finy.

Cognoistre une chose c'est la definir, la borner, sçaouir ses confrontations, son estendue, ses causes, ses fins, ses commencemens, son milieu, sa fin, son fonement, son bord : Or n'y a il rien plus contraire a l'infiny que d'estre cognu. Il faudroit estre infiny, & estre Dieu pour congnoistre Dieu.[9]

This anti-rationalism even brings up the questions definability and causality which are central to Cartesian reasoning, anticipating critiques that Gassendi would make about the mind's inability to define or comprehend things which are not within the scope of perceived things in the world. In a passage of *De la sagesse* similarly prescient to Cartesian debates, Charron notes that adjectives used to qualify God as infinite and perfect are to be understood as purely verbal but not understood by the mind, and that "Tout ce qui est enfermé dedens ce monde fini, est fini, limité en vertu et en substance" (I, 7, 80). In this way, God and the perfect triangle are not understood as participating the immanent universe and forming part of comprehensible sensory perception to the human mind. They are only understood through negative theological faith, or in the case of the triangle, forms of abstract reasoning which, as in nominalist philosophy, do not strictly adhere to the nature of any particular (even nearly triangular) thing in the world.

While some of these thoughts do seem to emerge from a more particular and Charronian concern about the inability to find a concrete definition or immanent cause for God, much of his discourse is also Montaignian in its emphasis on fallibilism and its resolve to modestly dwell on earthly appearances. As Maia Neto notes, Charron takes Montaigne as a source when he states that true and "essentielle" reason is lodged "dans le sein de Dieu."[10] Soon after this moment in Charron, neatly categorized in his work on the nature of the human mind and judgement, there is

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[9] Pierre Charron, *Les trois vertiez* (S. Millanges: Bordeaux, 1595), 18.
[10] José R. Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-century French Philosophy*, 58.

a sustained reflection on the kind of fallibilism typical of Montaigne in works like his essay *De l'experience,* in which the reasoning mind's fallible relationship with earthly apparent phenomena is explored. Charron notes for example that "Les moyens que [l'esprit] emploie pour descouvrir [la verité] sont raison et experience, tous deux tres-foibles, incertains, divers, ondoyans." (I, 14, 138). This idea, that sense perception and reason are weak but necessary tools, is at the core of the skeptical empiricism of literary authors opposed to Cartesian rationalism like Cyrano, who insists on sense perception as a form of "première connaissance" but points to its many flaws, and who expounds on the need to verify sense perceptions with imperfect logical reasoning.[11]

In his introductory remarks about the scope of *De la sagesse,* and in his work on the nature and scope of the mind and of judgement, Charron is especially clear about the inaccessibility of divine essence and the essence of matter to judgement and reason, which only have the fallible input of the senses to work with. Charron's fallibilism is one of the features which is most clearly inspired by Montaigne, and he notes that it would be "absurde" to understand the "viles et caduques" sensory faculties as capturing something about divine essence, or even "les formes, natures, [et] essences des choses" (1, 13, 128).

Reflecting and giving momentum to a tradition that began with Montaigne, Charron's strict silence about God's essence and apparent fideism are even extreme enough to make belief in God to feel like a tepid issue to many of his readers, and his totalizing anti-rationalism can feel explicitly designed to make his text invulnerable to censorship. Charron is even willing to explicitly discuss the way in which his form of skepticism can never be considered blasphemous,

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[11] Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'Autre monde ou les États et empires de la Lune,* 13.

because it cannot be faulty in its estimation of the nature or essence of God if it elects to suspend

judgement on these matters to leave them to faith alone (405). Indeed, this suspension of the

question of God's nature and essence is so total that commentators such as Marin Mersenne, the

Marquies de Sourdis, and Pierre Chanet would be suspicious about the motivations behind

Charron's apparently devout text.

Mersenne's comments reflect what he feels to be the unintended consequences of

radically gapping questions about God in order to avoid error: "ces livres de la Sagesse ont fait

plus de mal que de bien et on fait égarer de la vraie religion un plus grand nombre de personnes

qu'ils n'en ont tiré de l'erreur."[12] For Mersenne, the text's exclusive focus on appearances and

secular judgement of things occurring within the realm of sensory perception caused more

readers to wander away from theology, and this effect was stronger than any skeptical corrective

it had on faulty rationalist arguments. The Marquis de Sourdis, against whom La Rochefoucauld

would defend Charron, also largely based his critiques of Charron on the idea that he left all

forms of conscious judgement to the senses and to nature alone, [13] radically disconnecting

concerns about God's nature from the ability to engage in moral reasoning.[14] Critiques of

Charron by Pierre Chanet pre-empt those to be made by Descartes, especially when he notes that

"Nous ne conaissons Dieu qu'en raissonnant" and that "la faculté de connoistre Dieu nous

distingue des bestes."[15] In this way, a polemic around strategies of anti-rationalism, and

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[12] Mersenne text cited in Guy Thuillier, "Politiques du XVIe siècle : La "Sagesse" de Pierre Charron," *La Revue Administrative* 15, no. 85 (1962): 21-30.
[13] Kogel, *Pierre Charron*, 164.
[14] Ira O. Wade argues that one of Charron's principal innovations which would become crucial for Enlightenment thought and empiricism was the development of a wholly secular conception of moral virtue, working with concepts like "prudence" without recourse to theology. See *The Intellectual Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 175.
[15] Pierre Chanet, *Considérations sur "la Sagesse" de Charron* (Paris: Charles Fosset, 1662), 136.

philosophies of judgement about immanent secular appearances, place Charron squarely in opposition to Cartesian epistemology.

In this way, Charron was also distinctly fallibilistic on the nature of the rational mind and soul and its limited ability for judgement, and was additionally wholly fideistic about the immortal, Christian soul. In fact, Charron extends the idea of fideism to the immortal soul in a quite literal way in an original statement qualifying it as being akin to a "petit Dieu", unable to be comprehended by reason. It is also worth noting that in this formulation, the lower reasoning soul which forms judgements is material and located in the brain (I, 2, 55). In a conspicuously anthropological and secular way, Charron moves into an eclectic discourse about the fate and afterlife of the soul and lists a series of non-theological opinions of Pythagoreans, Stoics, Egyptians, and others, and then tells his reader to consult theological texts since the fate of the soul after death is not the subject of his book (I, 7, 100-101). When speaking of the soul's animation of the body, Charron is clear that we can understand "l'effect et l'action de l'ame et non l'ame" (I, 7, 77). Charron is also similar to Montaigne in his use of skeptical techniques from Sextus Empiricus to accumulate reams of arguments and disagreements about the nature of the soul, leaving them fully unresolved in suspended equipollence (I, 7, 86-88). This fideism which extends to the realm of the soul makes Charron stand in controversial opposition to the Cartesian notion of a reasoning mind which has some kind of essential understanding of its nature.

Perhaps even more explicitly than in Montaigne, when Charron notes that essential truth is lodged "dans le sein de Dieu", he relegates the human epistemic sphere to an imperfect mind reasoning about fallible sensory phenomena: "l'homme [tournoye et tatonne] à l'entour des apparences" (I, 14, 138). The locus of epistemology is a fallible mind contemplating apparent

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phenomena. As with Montaigne, Charron observes that the senses are the "commencement et la fin de tout" (I, 10, 109), and that we are left to understand not "la vraye et interne nature des choses, mais seulement la face et forme externe" (I, 18, 156). For Charron, all judgements, such as the idea that a lion is strong, come from the mind's conclusions about observed behaviors and reasoning about probable or consistent features among sensory phenomena (I, 13, 130). Charron's concise rendering of Montaigne's statements on the inability of humans to comprehend divine essence also parallel the statements that Cyrano makes in in his *Fragment de Physique* about the incomprehensibility of the "secrets de Dieu" because of the relegation of human epistemology to apparent phenomena as opposed to a "connaissance certaine et évidente des choses dans leurs causes."[16]

2.2   Anti-rationalism and Epistemological Method in Charron

Thus, we have established that as with Montaigne, Charron's epistemology restricts human knowledge to the domain of apparent phenomena, postulating that knowledge about God, the soul, and transcendent or divine phenomena is inaccessible. The restriction of epistemology to these domains has consequences not only for the kinds of objects subject to human knowledge according to Charron, but also for the methodology that subtends his theories of knowledge. We will see here that, as with Montaigne, restricting epistemology to the mind's interactions with apparent phenomena causes him to reject rationalistic theories of knowledge that rely upon *a priori* claims and pure logical deduction, favoring an empirical method of probabilism and provisional certainty.

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[16] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Oeuvres Complètes,* ed. Madeleine Alcover (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 360.

In Charron's own statements and arguments against rationalism, it is even possible to observe the seeds of Gassendi's own rejection of Cartesian thought. For example, Charron notes:

> …si l'on dit que l'ame estant sçavant par nature, et sans les sens, tous les hommes seroyent sçavans, et tousjours, entendroyent et raisonneroyent de mesmes (I, 13, 129).

This observation prefigures Gassendi's critique of the Cartesian idea of the *cogito* as a clear and distinct idea.[17] Like Gassendi, Charron draws attention to the fact that if some kind of purely rational intellectual perception like a Cartesian clear and distinct idea were to exist, we would observe universal intellectual capacity and agreement about such principles, when the very existence of a dispute about such matters betrays how *a priori* principles are not universally assented to or somehow given as reliable. Gassendi directs criticism against the English diplomat, poet, and rationalist philosopher Edward Herbert by posing this same argument, namely that self-evident *a priori* notions about God cannot be said to be universally held given the extraordinary variety of opinions about metaphysics in different religions and cultures around the world.[18] Later, we will see that Gabriel Daniel bears the influence of this argument from Charron and Gassendi, particularly when he criticizes what he observes to be a hypocrisy in the reception of Cartesianism, namely that the intellectual heirs of Descartes ironically have differing views about rationalist clear and distinct ideas of God and soul, contradicting the idea of such ideas' precise clarity and distinctiveness.[19]

Charron's other primary concern with pure rationalism based on *a priori* principles is the objection that such methods can be used to lend authority to views which one seeks to favor in advance, instead of deliberating about probable theories or exploring new ones. In a passage that

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[17] For more on this critique see: Antonia LoLordo, "'Descartes's One Rule of Logic': Gassendi's Critique of the Doctrine of Clear and Distinct Perception," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13 no. 1 (2005): 51-72.

[18] René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit,* 482.

[19] Jean-Luc Solère, "Un récit de philosophie-fiction: Le *Voyage du Monde de Descartes du Père Gabriel Daniel,*" *Uranie. Mythes et littératures* 4 (1994): 160.

would have easily belonged in the *Essais,* Charron notes that what he calls *la science* is "un tresbon et utile bastion, qui ne se laisse pas manier à toutes mains" (38). Charron's concern with *la science* is that "elle enfle, apporte de la presomption et temerité, et preste armes pour soustenir et defendre les opinions anticipées, elle acheve du tout de former la folie, et la rendre incurable" (38). In Charron's programmatic attempt to create a philosophy of human judgement, *la science* is a kind of bias detrimental to judgement, since it constitutes an Aristotelian or Scholastic method which proposes some idea, or a resolving of contradictions, that is already given as preferred and rendered authoritative by means of logical defenses. According to this argument, the rigidity of defending an *a priori* notion does not allow for an authentic engagement with, or revision of, different potential theories which may be shown to be more or less probable over time. When Charron notes that "L'esprit foible ne sait pas posseder la science, s'en escrimer, et s'en servir comme il faut" (38), he insists on a kind of constant struggle with knowledge and rational explanations of the world, and a process of constantly adapting and replacing these models. This argument that logical argumentation and can lead to bad faith and false certainty occurs throughout the skeptical empiricist tradition: Montaigne notes that knowledge should not be a "jouet à toutes mains" (II, 12, 545) and Cyrano warns of the dangers of according "les principes à la philosophie" instead of "[la] philosophie aux principes."[20] Gabriel Daniel also borrows from the idea of syllogism as a weapon to defend preconceived ideas (as in Charron's quote which uses the phrase "preste armes"), describing a satirical battle of syllogisms between rationalists of both Aristotelian and Cartesian persuasion.[21]

This kind of rationalism is criticized in Charron not only because it reinforces already approved theories, but because its methodology forms absolute statements about an argument's

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[20] Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'Autre monde*, 69.
[21] Gabriel Daniel, *Voyage du Monde de Descartes* (La Haye: Pierre Gosse, 1739), 102.

validity or invalidity and does not allow for revisions about more and less probable theories. This is seen in the complex way in which Charron treats the concept of *la science,* sometimes as a detriment to unbiased judgement and sometimes as a means of attaining it.

Although Charron, in his text and its frontispiece, points to *la science* as one of the potential biases preventing the stability of judgement needed to attain *la sagesse*, [22] this critique applies to a particular form of rationalist method in which a logical model is assented to and defended in its entirety, without the ability to re-examine and revise judgements. A depiction of *la science,* when it is presented as an obstacle to wisdom in the frontispiece of *De la sagesse,* carries a book containing the words "ouy" and "non," and these options represent a restriction on the deliberative and probabilistic process of judgement.

Nonetheless, the status of *la science* itself is complex in Charron, since it can represent a bias when wielded in this kind of purely rationalistic form, but he flatly asserts the importance of it when used to form provisional models of the world which are logically coherent and should be compared with each other in the process of judgement and education.[23] Thus, Charron calls for a kind of reforming of how *la science* is used in education and how it is assented to by the mind. In this way, Charron's use of *la science* as both a potential enemy or route to *la sagesse* is not a rejection of the pursuit of knowledge in general, but specifically involves a critique of a rationalist *a priori* approach to knowledge. In addition, Charron's pitting of a certain variety of Aristotelian *science* against *jugement* also bears resemblance to Montaigne's own usage of these words, which we have surveyed in chapter one.

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[22] Some readers of Charron assert that a more wholesale rejection of *la science* takes place in his works, a view that we reject here. For an example see: Eugene Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 180-184.

[23] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Pierre Charron's View of the Source of Wisdom," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9, no. 4 (1971): 456.

Rationalist method, as we have seen in Montaigne's case, is also often rejected in Charron in favor of probabilism and provisional certainty in the tradition of Academic Skepticism:

> …je permets de consenter et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable, tousjours prest et attendant à recevoir mieux s'il se presente (PTS, 858).

This condensed articulation of the idea of probabilism or provisional certainty in the *Petit Traité de la Sagesse* reflects the centrality of the concept in Charron, who emphasizes it in similar ways throughout *De la sagesse*.[24]

Furthermore, Charron's borrowing and usage of the concept of probabilism clarifies both its Academic origin and its inspiration from Montaigne's thought. In a preface to *De la sagesse* referring to the reception of its first edition, Charron notes that many objections to his ideas result from the fact that critics took for "resolution et determination" what had been proposed "problematiquement et academiquement" (S, 43). Charron's idea of wisdom is presented as specifically Academic in book 2 (2, 404, 410) and in an explication of provisional certainty in which "Academiques" are treated as "sages" for their rejection of dogmatism (404).

In addition, several articulations of probabilism within the tradition of Academic Skepticism are paired with Montaignian ideas and borrowings. In one example, Charron pairs an articulation of probabilism with a borrowing from a passage of Montaigne in which he muses on the possibility that dogmatic philosophers like Epicureans may not, in practice, have fully believed in the absolute certainty of their principles, but may be tacitly probabilistic in practice (400). In these ways, Charron's clear articulations of Academic probabilism reveal their

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[24] Pierre Charron, *De la Sagesse*, ed. Barbara de Negroni (Paris: Fayard, 1986). See for example: 128, 149, 386, 400. See also: Fernando Bahr, "*La sagesse* de Pierre Charron et le scepticisme académique," in *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy,* ed. Plínio Janqueira Smith and Sébastien Charles (Dordrecht: Springer, 2017); José R. Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-century French Philosophy*; José R. Maia Neto, "Le probabilisme académicien dans le scepticisme français," 467–484.

genealogy in Montaigne's thought, and also clarify and sharpen the importance of provisional certainty and probabilism as anti-rationalistic philosophical methods in the *Essais*.

The idea of Charron's usage and amplification of a specifically Montaignian probabilism is reinforced by several other elements of his epistemology which we have seen in chapter one, including fallibilism and the rejection of pyrrhonist rationalism, which Charron shares with Montaigne. Since Charron's more direct relationship with Academic skepticism is well documented, we will briefly turn to these specifically Montaignian interpretations of Academic probabilism in Charron.

Firstly, Charron's probabilism bears the mark of Montaignian fallibilism, which suggests that the task of judging or producing the most probable theories and understandings about the nature of reality is extremely difficult, even practically unattainable, but worth attempting (or "essaying"). Many scholars have suggested that Charron's thought is characterized by greater confidence in the capacities of human judgement than Montaigne's, or that his "didactic" approach suggests greater confidence in the ability of human thought to overcome forms of bias and produce a more certain form of provisional certainty or empiricism than the highly fallibilistic or "weak" empiricism found in Montaigne.[25] Our study will instead suggest the continuity of Charron's thought with the fallibilistic provisional certainty or skeptical empiricism of Montaigne, and will suggest that this fallibilism characterizes the anti-Cartesian tradition of French thought and letters in the seventeenth century.

We have already noted Charron's own frustration with readers who do not understand the degree to which provisional claims in *De la sagesse* are made "problematiquement et

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[25] For views on Charron's epistemic optimism compared with Montaigne, see: José R. Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-century French Philosophy*, 35; Kogel, *Pierre Charron*, 67, 74; Paul F. Grendler, "Pierre Charron: Precursor to Hobbes," *The Review of Politics* 25, no. 2 (1963): 218.

academiquement." The full thrust such fallibilism in Charron is even more evident in a metaphor in *De la sagesse,* in which he compares human judgement to a form of political organization in which "*entendement*" is sovereign, a form of "puissance estimative et imaginative" serves as its magistrate, and this magistrate makes use of sensory data in order to produce judgements about the nature of reality (156-157). Of course, this schema reflects the broader empiricism we've already discussed, in which "*entendement*" (a more common Charronian term for what we may broadly understand as "judgement") is dependent upon the mind's interaction with sensory phenomena. Importantly for our purposes here, Charron is deeply pessimistic both about the mind's ability to produce judgements and the veracity of sensory phenomena, producing a form of weak or deeply fallibilistic empiricism reminiscent of the wheel argument in Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond.* For Charron, the mind or the "puissance estimative et imaginative…se laisse la pluspart du temps corrompre ou tromper…et nous remplit de trouble et d'inquietude" (156). The senses themselves, as Charron continues, may provide an impression or even a "*prejugé*" to this reasoning faculty, but this does not correspond to the true nature or essence of things in the world, and can also provide contradictory data or fool our faculty of reason (156-7). Here, epistemology takes place in a deeply flawed interaction between the unreliable reasoning mind's faculties and equally unreliable sensory phenomena.

We see fallibilism not only in the implicit use of the wheel argument by Charron, but in his own insistence on two other tropes in Montaigne's thought: the rarity, or practical inexistence of the "sage" (38) and the concept of fallibility of the philosophical text *De la sagesse* itself, which Charron even invites his readers to criticize for its "impertinence et folie" (43). Charron fundamentally shares with Montaigne the paradoxical quest of creating a philosophical text

which places epistemic modesty and human fallibility at its center, but implies the importance of searching after the truth despite the near impossibility of the task:

> L'homme ne sçait et n'entend rien à droict, au pur et au vray comme il faut, tournoyant tousjours et tatonnant à l'entour des apparences, qui se trouvent par tout aussi bein au faux qu'au vray : nous sommes nais à quester la vérité : la posséder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance (S, I, 14, 138).

The fallibilism of Charron, like that of Montaigne, insists here on fallibility both of the reasoning mind and of sensory phenomena, and nevertheless emphasizes the importance of the endeavor of seeking truth in a weak empiricist philosophical mode.

Charron's fallibilism and similarities to Montaigne are also clear in his understanding of the nature of judgement. He is liberal in borrowing the trope of the force of the imagination from Montaigne (I, 16, 147), and thinks of biases in the imagination and imperfect memory as necessarily linked with acts of judgement and perception. When speaking about "entendement" and achieving understanding based on sensory perception and judgement, Charron notes that "L'imagination est active, bruyante, c'est elle qui remue tout" (I, 13, 125). He notes that "entendement, memoire, & imagination" are not separate faculties, but ineluctably and messily linked together, creating the challenge of overcoming biases in judgement and perception outside of a realm of pure rationalism (I, 13, 121).[26] This preoccupation with judgement and imperfect memories as intertwined forms of intellection will be especially prescient for Gassendi's criticisms of clear and distinct ideas.[27] Even physical conditions such as weather and heat, as with the Montaignian mind of *De l'experience,* can alter judgement and perception (I, 13, 129), and as we will see, in Gassendi the body's state always manipulates objects of perception, such

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[26] Charron also thinks of memory as highly fallible, since it creates a period of time in which the imagination can manipulate sense experiences (I, 12, 119).
[27] This is especially clear in Gassendi's *Disquisitio* (36, 279 b).

as the way bread is perceived in a fasted or fed state.[28] The inherent bias of cognitive processes, subject to physical conditions and prejudices, will also be a central theme in the fictions of Cyrano and Daniel.

Charron's fallibilism, and its deep parallels with thought in the *Essais*, is not the only characteristic which allows *De la sagesse* to transmit a distinctly Montaignian interpretation of Academic skepticism to seventeenth century anti-Cartesian thinkers. Charron clarifies and amplifies an opposition to pyrrhonism when interpreted as a form of rationalism, and this view would become crucial in the generation of views critical of Descartes in the seventeenth century.

In one of the primary articulations of his Academic skeptic probabilism, Charron's use of the metaphor of balancing the weight of arguments favors an Academic approach, in which provisional truth claims are continuously evaluated for their weight, but do not carry equal merit in a Pyrrhonist relationship of equipollence. Charron insists on the constant and individual activity of the judgement: "c'est examiner, peser, balancer les raisons et contreraisons de toutes parts, le poids et merite d'icelles, et ainsi quester la verité" (386). This constant evaluation of the understanding of the weight of arguments, which are variable depending on one's epistemic stance and thus not in a relationship of Pyrrhonist equipollence, is also articulated directly before one of Charron's key articulations of the idea of the "*vray semblable*," a term in French to denote the distinctly Academic probabilistic criterion or "*probabile*" (387), and employed by Montaigne, Cyrano, and Gabriel Daniel.

This probabilism endorsed by Charron also clearly involves a kind of assertion of *epoché* in the Academic sense, or of humanity's inability to fully verify the truth or falsehood of any

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[28] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 92.

proposition. This tendency in his thought emphasizes a weak empiricist, individual process of provisionally weighing the merit of arguments and searching after the truth, as opposed to the Pyrrhonist zetetic search (which is more rationalist and concerned with human cogitation) to examine whether *epoché* is applicable to human thought. Charron, like the Academic skeptics, positively insists on human lack of knowledge and suspension of knowledge, and he insists in several places that "la plus seure assiette" for the mind is *epoché* (S, II, 2, 404; S, II 2, 399-400).[29] While Charron is certain about human inability to attain certain truth in a rationalist sense, leaving him to insist on an individual process of searching and revising true statements based on sensory data, as we examine later, Descartes's skepticism engages in a rationalist (and more Pyrrhonist or zetetic) experiment, in which he undertakes to understand whether humans are capable of possessing knowledge or not. Charron's antirationalist approach to the zetetic and pyrrhonist question of humanity's epistemic status is shared both by Montaigne and the anti-Cartesian thinkers we will examine in subsequent chapters.

Charron's opposition to the rationalist skepticism of Pyrrhonists, his skeptical empiricism and probabilism in the Academic skeptic tradition, his eclectic use of Hellenistic epistemology to comment on the mind's biases and fallible perception of sensory objects, and his complete omission of theology (and its political relegation to the authority of the Church) reflect not only the distinctive features of Montaignian thought, but, as we will see, also form the crux of Gassendist epistemology. This continuity already illustrates how the Montaignian intellectual tradition is properly thought of as at the antipodes of Cartesian thought. Before examining Charron's eclecticism and turning to how Montaigne and Charron lead to the formation of the criticisms of Descartes present in Gassendi, we will briefly turn to the question of the proper way

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[29] José R Maia Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy*, 114.

of conceiving of Montaigne and Charron's influences on Cartesian thought, and argue against the view that Montaigne's skepticism was a primary influence for Cartesian doubt.

Popkin asserts this view, for example, when he states that, against the backdrop of the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus and Montaigne (which, we have seen, are not equivalent), Charron "sets forth his method for avoiding error, the embryonic form of the Cartesian method of systematic doubt."[30] Of course, our view is that this may be a relatively accurate assessment when it comes to a kind of Cartesian reception of Pyrrhonism, but we have taken care to show that the Montaignian tradition precisely rejects the rationalism involved in the equipollent suspension of judgement in Pyrrhonist thought, and in this way does not provide the necessary tools for Cartesian systematic doubt.

Another interpretation of Charron's foundational influence on Descartes would not involve a Pyrrhonizing of Charron and Montaigne, but would rather place Cartesian thought closer within the spectrum of the Academic Skeptic tradition which Charron borrows from in ways which we have just examined. All of these interpretations point invariably to a small but influential passage near the very beginning of *Discours de la méthode,* in which Descartes discusses both his skeptical outlook on textual authority, and the necessity of traveling and interacting with multiple cultures in order to question one's own cultural biases. Indeed, Genevieve Rodis-Lewis points to a number of textual similarities with Montaigne and Charron in these passages.[31]

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[30] Richard Popkin, "Charron and Descartes: The Fruits of Systematic Doubt," *The Journal of Philosophy* 51, no. 25 (1954): 832.

[31] Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, "Doute pratique et doute spéculatif chez Montaigne et Descartes," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 182, no. 4 (1992): 439-49.

The best way of understanding Charron's influence on Descartes is that to some extent, as Michel Adam argues, Charron was influential in promoting the idea of setting aside the epistemological criterion of textual authority, and Descartes made use of literary tropes within the tradition to dispense with Scholasticism.[32] Although Charron was a kind of literary tool for leaving Scholasticism behind, this would simply leave room for a new epistemological battle between empiricism and rationalism to characterize seventeenth-century thought. In many ways, although the initial passages of *Discours de la méthode* have a Charronian flavor, Descartes significantly makes use of the motifs of intellectual freedom and anti-Aristotelianism to serve his own very different epistemology and experiments in systematic doubt. Although Montaigne and Descartes seem similar when they speak of their experiences of boredom and a lack of critical engagement in classrooms, Montaigne would come to advocate a kind of humanist critical engagement with texts, under a kind of phenomenological model where the fallible reasoning mind is engaged with fallible texts, involving some slight amount of progress in forming judgement and developing weak probabilistic views. Descartes would do away with the humanism and eclecticism altogether, completely dispensing of prior "actions et enterprises de la philosophie" which should be dispensed of as "vaines et inutiles" in order to engage in a total and equipollent suspension of judgement.[33] Of course, after having presumably disposed of philosophical tradition in a rationalist experiment of doubt, Descartes develops an equally rationalist method for combatting skepticism. The difference between Descartes and Charron is even clearer with regard to the idea of the pursuit of knowledge in itself, and is evidenced for example by Descartes's own use of the word "*sagesse.*" In Descartes, in most of its uses, it is not a fallibilist or Socratic form of knowledge, but it is called in the *Principes de la philosophie* "une

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[32] Michel Adam, *Études sur Pierre Charron* (Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1991), 473.
[33] René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode* (Manchester: University of Manchester Editions, 1941), 4.

parfaite connaissance" of the subjects useful to humanity, and philosophizing involves the study of "principes" and "premières causes."[34]

Thus, if a kind of literary flavor of Charronian free-thinking emerges in Descartes, it occurs only in a fleeting moment in his corpus not only to challenge Aristotelianism in a humanist sense, but in order to engage in a new radical and rationalist experiment of doubt which clearly dispenses with Charron and the empiricist tradition itself. Having articulated the cleavage between Charron and Descartes, and having discussed the distinct features of Montaigne and Charron's own empiricist skepticism, we will turn to a reflection on Charron's eclecticism before discussing Gassendi, who takes on this tradition to directly combat Cartesian thought.

2.3   Cosmopolitanism, Eclecticism, and the Charronian "Esprit universel"

Charron's gapping of theological questions, anti-rationalism, and insistence on the weakness but usability of sense perception and reason as tools of knowledge formation emphasize and transmit a Montaignian skeptical empiricist epistemology in French seventeenth-century thought. One final aspect of his work which distinguishes the skeptical empiricist tradition in France is Charron's eclecticism and its relationship to his epistemology and philosophy of judgement. Charron, like Montaigne and the French skeptical empiricist literary tradition from Cyrano to Gabriel Daniel, insists on a philosophical method in which provisional and highly fallible theories about the nature of reality are formed on the basis of exposure to both experiences and reason or philosophical ideas. Within this schema, Charron insists that in order to improve one's judgements and hypotheses about the world, it is necessary to expose oneself to

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[34] René Descartes, *Les principes de la philosophie,* in *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: CNRS-Vrin, 1989), IX, 2.

maximal amount of philosophical literature and theories; exposure to more ideas and data

provides more opportunities to hone judgement and to replace old provisional theories with new

and better ones. Thus, the process of philosophizing is a humanistic endeavor which involves an

eclectic and maximal interaction with prior philosophical literature, a view that will come to

stand in stark opposition to Cartesian philosophical method and its cleansing of prior

philosophical traditions with hyperbolic skepticism and a purportedly new rationalist method.

At many moments of *De la sagesse,* Charron insists on the idea of judgement as a

ruminative process in which the philosopher repeatedly is exposed to different philosophical

theories and texts, with the idea that maximizing this exposure provides more grist for the mill in

order to exercise judgement. Notably, Charron claims that judgement itself constitutes a kind of

rumination and repetitive exposure to ideas in the following passage (132):

> La repetition, et cette action de ruminer, recuire, repasser par l'estamine de la raison, et encores plus eslabourer, pour en faire faire une resolution plus solide, c'est le jugement.

After providing this definition of judgement as a form of repetitive rumination, and exposure of

things and ideas through the filter of the reasoning mind, Charron insists on judgement's

universal action upon all kinds of eclectic objects of thought (135):

> Il est aussi universel qui se mesle par tout, il n'a point de subject ny de ressort limité ; il n'y a chose ou il ne puisse jouer son roolle, aussi bien aux subjects vains et de neant, comme aux nobles et de poids, et en ceux que nous pouvons entendre, que ceux que nous n'entendons…

This idea of judgement which "se mesle par tout" borrows directly from the same phrase used by

Montaigne in "De Democritus et Heraclitus" (I, 50, 301). In this passage, Charron both insists on

the repetitive and ruminative qualities of judgement and on its applicability in all kinds of subject

matter and objects of thought, referring to it as "universel."

The idea and vocabulary of a universal judgement which mixes itself in all subject matter is a trope which Charron draws upon continuously when thinking of the meaning of judgement and what he conceives of as the ideal philosophical process. Charron's portrait of the "sage" produces the potent image of an idealized cosmopolitan mind, exposing itself to a multitude of philosophies and cultures. He notes that "le sage jette sa veuë et consideration sur tout l'univers" and that "Les plus beaux et plus grands esprits sont les plus universels" (406).

Charron's "esprit universel" avoids being "esclave" to the "anticipation d'opinions" of its home country and culture (406). Like Montaigne, the Gassendist travel writer François Bernier, and the intrepid philosophical explorer-narrators of Cyrano and Daniel, Charron advocates exposure to a multitude of customs, historical testimonies, and philosophical schools. Charron touches on the importance of this in a passage key to understanding his eclecticism, in which he explains the various modalities of the "esprit universel," or the constitutive factors that allow for it to improve its philosophical process through maximizing exposure to customs and ideas. Charron suggests that, among these are (407):

> La grande diversité des loix, coustumes, meurs, religions, opinions, usances…
> Les diversess opinions, raisons, dires des Philosophes touchant l'unité et pluralité, l'eternité et temporalité, le commencement et fin, la durée et continuation, les ages, états, changemens, vicissitudes du monde et de ses partyes….

Charron follows this reflection with an accumulation of philosophical schools and authors from which to draw ideas about temporality and the constitution of the universe, from Herodotus to the Chaldeans, from Cicero to Zoroaster, and finally with a suggestion that Indigenous knowledge can be a new source to supplement ideas already accumulated from Asia, Africa, and Europe (407-409).

This eclecticism is clearly a central concern for Charron, as he allows his text to balloon and accumulate encyclopedic lists of commonplaces and ideas in a relatively more Montaignian

fashion here, communicating the importance of diversifying one's sources of knowledge through the form of his text. Charron's writings, although typically cooler and more concise, do make a point to occasionally parallel Montaigne's practice of accumulating prodigious lists of laws, customs, and ideas in varied religious and historical contexts. The list of philosophical schools and religions discussed in the above passage on the "esprit universel" and the list of religious approaches to the soul which Charron accumulates and suspends in judgement in the previous section are not the only examples. Charron also accumulates a vast list religious customs and views in the *Trois Veritez*, and devotes a section of *De la Sagesse* (I.42.285) to the way in which differing views emerge in religions and social formations due to factors like the climate and country in which one is born, begetting a diversity of thought among humans which should be examined by Charron's "sage."[35]

Not only does this eclectic accumulation of varied philosophical perspectives regarding metaphysics encourage a philosophy of maximal interaction with differing philosophical views, but it also anticipates Gassendist critiques of rationalism and of Descartes' clear and distinct ideas on the basis of the eclecticism of religious views regarding the nature of the divine. This kind of thinking anticipates, for example, Gassendi's criticism of Edward Herbert, in which he rejects purportedly self-evident *a priori* principles on the basis that it is impossible to bring forward any view in philosophy, especially within metaphysics, upon which *all* philosophers agree.[36] As Charron's text suggests before the articulation of this Gassendist critique, there is no singular clear and distinct rationalist conception of such religious questions, but rather a plethora

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[35] Natasha Constantinidou, *Responses to Religious Division, 1580-1620: Public and Private, Divine and Temporal* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 110.
[36] René Pintard, *Le Libertinage érudit,* 482.

of religious traditions and cultural practices which serve as a testament to the variety and inconsistency of human conceptions of God.

Charron equates the ideal process of judgement with a vocabulary of universality, or a judgement of all things, in several passages throughout *De la sagesse*. Charron promotes the act which he terms "juger de tout" or "juger de toutes choses" in most of these cases (33, 41, 387-9, 390, 392, 398-399, 406-407). He even suggests, as Montaigne does in his statement on including fantastic or unlikely stories in his *Essais* (I, 21, 105), that examining faulty untrue stories or contradictory reasoning can serve as a method for honing the process of judgement (or "exercer cet office de juger") (399). In fact, Charron goes so far as to suggest that "La sagesse et la folie sont fort voisines" since the Charronian sage seeks to "examiner tout, et juger la pluspart des choses plausiblement recuës du monde, ridicules et absurdes" (140).

Finally, it is important to note that as a formal quality within his text, Charron certainly constitutes a practitioner of eclecticism, drawing from renaissance, medieval, and ancient writings in large patchworks of direct borrowings and translations that are sewn together in *De la sagesse*.[37] Renée Kogel places Charron within the camp of "French moralists" of the seventeenth century who were "unabashedly eclectic" and "felt free to choose their sources at will and mesh them together according to their personal preferences."[38] Between relativistic lists and passages on divergent religious and cultural practices in the style of Montaigne, Charron drew in swaths of quotations, ideas, and direct borrowings from Stoicism, Academic Skepticism, Du Vair, Bodin, Lipsius, contemporary criticisms of Scholasticism, and of course from Montaigne's own eclectic lists and ramblings. In this way, Charron sought to be practitioner of eclecticism and humanism

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[37] Maryanne Cline Horowitz, "Natural Law as the Foundation for an Autonomous Ethic: Pierre Charron's De La Sagesse," *Studies in the Renaissance* 21 (1974): 207.
[38] Kogel, *Pierre Charron*, 52.

in the manner of the "esprit universel" that he invokes in *De la sagesse* and elsewhere in his thought.

In his goal of producing an "esprit universel" and a form of judgement which is deliberative, ruminative, and judges all things, Charron advocates maximizing interaction with different philosophies and forms of thought as opposed to reasoning on one's own or according to accepted customs and traditions. Charron asks why he would limit himself to one culture or one philosophical tradition in the prodigious task of determining the "meilleure, plus vraye" and "raisonnable" among opinions (note the calculated use of the superlative; Charron is discussing the best and most true provisional theory and not a certain one) (391). In this way, Charron advocates for an eclecticism and a maximal interaction with philosophical schools and texts and also practices this philosophical approach: accumulating, as we have seen, arguments from various schools to skeptically accumulate arguments about the soul, construct an epistemic framework for his thought, reflect on the constitution of matter and the humors, and much more besides.

2.4   Pierre Gassendi and the Transmission of Montaigne and Charron's Epistemology

As we turn to the legacy of Montaigne and Charron in Pierre Gassendi's thought, we reach the point at which the primarily sixteenth-century epistemological thinkers we have discussed influence a significant contemporary and intellectual rival of Descartes. Now that we have seen how Charron sharpens and formalizes Montaigne's skeptical empiricism to prepare it for early seventeenth-century audiences, we will turn to the reception of this intellectual tradition, beginning with Pierre Gassendi, an indefatigable and influential scholar whose treatises, salons, and correspondences directly influenced and generated the anti-Cartesian

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tradition of seventeenth century France, including authors like Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel.

Before we begin our discussion of Gassendi's epistemological uses of Montaigne and Charron, it is important to situate the place of this tradition of skeptical empiricism in early-to-mid seventeenth-century thought. We have previously seen that Montaigne's role as a progenitor of this tradition (later continued by Charron) consisted largely in the epistemological rigor with which Montaigne interpreted various schools of Hellenistic philosophy, and the emergence of epistemological as opposed to rhetorical interpretations of notions such as probabilism in Academic skepticism. As we move further into the seventeenth century in France, scholasticism and its Aristotelian forms become less prominent, and are largely relegated to conservative university textbooks.[39] Minor figures in the advancement of Aristotelianism justified their thought by means of its academic and institutional authority, such as Jean-Baptiste de La Grange, who defended his Aristotelian attacks on Cartesianism by appealing to Louis XIV's 1671 decree banning its teaching,[40] and complained of the decline of philosophy written in Latin and the dearth of Aristotelian authors in his time.[41]

This decline in Aristotelianism, and even most forms of Scholastic thought in general in late seventeenth century France, meant that it was time for a Montaignian epistemology of weak empiricism, which had already begun to develop and crystallize critiques of rationalism by recovering debates within Hellenistic philosophy, to confront the rationalism of Descartes. This

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[39] John Trentman, "Scholasticism in the Seventeenth Century," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy,* ed. Norman Kretzman, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 834.
[40] Jean-Luc Solère, "La Grange, Jean-Baptiste de (ca. 1641 – after 1680)," in *The Cambridge Descartes Lexicon,* ed. Lawrence Nolan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 430-32.
[41] Jean-Baptiste de la Grange, *Les principes contre les nouveaux philosophes* (Paris: Georges Josse, 1675), 43.

also had formal and literary implications, since older forms of rhetorical exercise were no longer revered, nor did they participate in Scholastic exercises in rendering Biblical passages and Aristotelian thought part of a coherent philosophical system. As a term, rhetoric was more likely to be understood instead as an obstacle, and in the *Disquisitio Metaphysica* both Descartes and Gassendi used the appellation "rhéteur" for the other in the form of a barbed critique.[42] Descartes was liable to attack Gassendi's dusty humanism and eclectic reliance on ancient thought, while Gassendi sought to unveil the hidden convolutedness and circularity of Descartes' rationalism. We shall see that this emerging approach to rhetoric in seventeenth century French thought marked the start of a new debate between empiricism and rationalism. In addition, the Gassendist attempt to unveil circularity and complex knots in Cartesian reasoning would be dramatized in literary form by the rambling satirical mockery of Cartesian discourse present in Cyrano and Daniel.[43]

Of course, this confrontation between Cartesian rationalism and Gassendist empiricism resulted in the relative prominence of the former, especially within France itself, throughout the seventeenth century. Especially after Gassendi's death, Cartesianism had asserted enough dominance in France such that *Logique de Port-Royal*, containing a both a summary and a severe critique of Gassendi's epistemological claims, was likely the most widely distributed and well-known source for Gassendi in France.[44] Cartesians were receiving honors from the Académie Française far more than empiricists or Newtonians even through the 1720s.[45]

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[42] Jean-Charles Darmon, "Remarques sur la rhétorique 'probabiliste' de Gassendi : ses enjeux et ses effets dans l'histoire de la République des Lettres," *Dix-septième siècle* 4, no. 233 (2006): 698-99.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Emily Michael and Fred S. Michael, "The Theory of Ideas in Gassendi and Locke," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 3 (1990): 381.
[45] Thomas M. Lennon, *The Battle of Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655-1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 34.

Despite this prominence of Cartesian thought, the French empiricist tradition of the seventeenth century became an influential intellectual movement of its time, especially in its production of an important epistemological literary tradition, and for its influence on British thought and therefore subsequently on the French Enlightenment. The movement's literary impact had much to do with Gassendi's eclectic promotion of empiricist epistemological methods in both scientific and literary communities, through several prominent publications, salons, and even publicized experiments. This made him the key transmitter of Montaigne and Charron's skeptical empiricism for authors who would engage in anti-Cartesian satire and epistemological fiction in the seventeenth century. His activities in salons such as those of Mme. Deshoulières and Ninon de Lenclos connected Gassendi to a series of pupils including François Bernier, Cyrano de Bergerac, and Molière,[46] and through his association with Marin Mersenne he even developed an important intellectual friendship with Thomas Hobbes.[47] The following chapter of this study will examine Gassendi's relationship with Cyrano de Bergerac in more detail, but it suffices to mention here that there are at least two likely connections between the two skeptical empiricists: their connection to the Royal college and their mutual friendship with Chapelle.

Gassendi, who positioned himself as an opponent of Descartes in the *Disquisitio Metaphysica* and who served as an influence to Cartesian literary satire and epistemological fiction, was steeped in humanistic study of Charron, Montaigne, and their accounts of ancient skepticism, and he explicitly transmitted the skeptical empiricism of these authors into his work. In a 1621 correspondence, and in his preface to the *Exercitationes,* Gassendi lists Montaigne and

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[46] Lennon, *The Battle of Gods and Giants*, 21.
[47] Paul F. Grendler, "Pierre Charron: Precursor to Hobbes," 221.

Charron as among his favorite writers.[48] His friend Samuel Sorbière also attests to Gassendi's

great admiration for them and willingness to defend their thought.[49] Gassendi shows particular

admiration for Montaigne and Charron's texts as introductions to ancient skepticism in the

Exercitationes,[50] and admires what he describes as a kind of free-thought which pervades their

work and makes it wholly agreeable to him in his correspondence with Faur de Pibrac.[51]

In many ways, Gassendi's *Exercitationes* in its epistemological method (and rejection of

Aristotelianism) not only begins with an homage to Montaigne and Charron, but bears their

influence as proponents of a fideist take on ancient skepticism, including ideas such as

akatalepsis and its emphasis on observed apparent phenomena as the sole locus of

epistemology.[52] Gassendi is influenced both by the substance and the methodology of Montaigne

and Charron's eclectic and humanist uses of ancient skeptical texts. As Rochot notes speaking of

the *Exercitationes* and the extent of its influences from sixteenth century French humanism:

"Rien de plus éclectique que le choix de Gassendi parmi les grands auteurs classiques, et rien de

plus éloigné de l'esprit de système."[53] As we will see, like Montaigne and Charron, Gassendi

constructed a weak empiricist philosophy by stitching together an eclectic patchwork of ideas

and debates from Hellenistic philosophy.

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[48] Antonia LoLordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 63.

[49] "L'estime qu'il avoit conçuë d'eux [Charron et Montaigne] étoit si grande, qu'il ne pouvoit pas souffrir que Chanet, Médecin de la Rochele, eût parlé contre eux dans le Livre, qu'il avoit fait contre Monsieur de la Chambre, du raisonnement des animaux…" Samuel Sorbière, *Sorberiana* (Toulouse: 1694).

[50] Thierry Bedouelle, "L'Unité de la science et son objet – Descartes et Gassendi: Deux critiques de l'aristotélisme," *Les Études Philosophiques* 1/2 (1996): 56-7.

[51] Henri Berr, *Du scepticisme de Gassendi,* trans. Bernard Rochot (Paris: Albin Michel, 1960), 39-40.

[52] Howard Jones, *Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655): An Intellectual Biography* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 108.

[53] Bernard Rochot, "Gassendi, sa place dans la pensée du XVIème siècle," *Revue de Synthèse* 60 (1940-1945): 37. See also Lisa T. Sarasohn, *Gassendi's Ethics: Freedom in a Mechanistic Universe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 19.

Having examined some of the most explicit evidence of an axis of influence from

Montaigne to Charron to Gassendi, we will survey the main features of the skeptical empiricism

of Gassendi as part of this tradition, and their use in forms of debate against Cartesian thought

which would become crucial for Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel. We will begin

Gassendi's gapping of essences, leaving only appearances to the realm of epistemology, then

continue with anti-rationalist probabilism, and finally examine Gassendi's philosophy of

fallibilistic judgement and overcoming cognitive bias, in addition to his eclecticism.

As Jean-Charles Darmon notes, Gassendi is indebted to Montaigne and Charron in his

own conception of the incomprehensibility and protean quality of human nature or essence, and

of essence as broadly incomprehensible in an epistemological or nominalist sense.[54] In fact,

when Gassendi lauds Montaigne and Charron, and speaks of their influence on his own thought,

he notes that they encouraged him to discover various philosophical schools which lead him to

believe that "of all the opinions, none ever pleased me so much as the *akatalêpsia* extolled by the

Academics and the Pyrrhonists."[55] We have previously seen that in Montaigne's case, the single

most important idea in Pyrrhonism relates to sensory perception and the idea of *akatalepsis*

which it shares with Academic skepticism, and more specifically arguments contained in Sextus

Empiricus's ten modes of Pyrrhonism. Gassendi's characterization of this insight about ancient

skepticism relating to Montaigne and Charron is an accurate one, and in several passages he uses

the ten modes like Montaigne and Charron to relativize apparent knowledge and problematize its

relationship with the essence of things, as in the classic examples from ancient skepticism of

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[54] Jean-Charles Darmon, *Philosophie épicurienne et littérature au XVIIè siècle en France : Études sur Gassendi, Cyrano de Bergerac, La Fontaine, Saint-Evremond* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), 47.
[55] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 19.

honey tasting less sweet to a sick person, or a tower looking rounded from a distance.[56] Like

Montaigne and Charron, he is fascinated enough with the idea to develop his own original

examples, and discusses the possibility that his friend with exophthalmia, a protrusion of the

eyes, may be able to read small handwriting or books in the dark with more facility.[57] In the

chapter to follow, we will also see Cyrano's use of similar optical illusions including his own

example of the illusion of stillness on a moving boat. We will also see that these illusions allow

Cyrano to articulate ideas of empiricist verified sense perception at the core of his defense of

heliocentrism.

As with Montaigne and Charron, the ten modes of Pyrrhonism and the *akatalepsis* of the

Academic skeptics are understood in a fallibilistic sense. That is, they do not leave the epistemic

status of humanity in doubt in a more Pyrrhonist sense, but they affirm humanity's inability to

confirm the relationship between appearances and essences. In a similar vein as Montaigne and

Charron, the idea of *akatalepsis* is interpreted as an ever-present problem related to the human

condition, in which the subject's almost phenomenological relationship to sensory objects and its

fallibilistic judgement, constantly frustrate its ability to perceive objects in a consistent way or

understand their nature:

> Do you not realize that even the astutest of men will be so divided by the diversity of his
> judgements that he will not be able to pronounce what sort of thing anything is according
> to its nature? Assume that he has the healthiest of bodies and the sharpest of minds; still,
> whether he wants to or not, he will be constituted of organs of his body that will represent
> the same object in different ways to him; still he cannot help having certain conditions, at
> the very least as a result of his age, which will represent the same thing variously. What
> conclusion then will he reach concerning the object that has been represented in more
> ways than one? How will he be able to determine that it is one thing rather than the
> other?...won't he be able, at best, to say that millet bread seems to agree with him if he is
> very hungry when he eats and seems tasteless when he is full, and that he is far from

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[56] There is a large series of explications of such examples in Gassendi, and in the *Exercitationes* in particular. See
Ibid. 88, 92 96, and 305-12.
[57] Ibid. 88.

being able to say that considered absolutely and according to itself it is entirely tasteful or tasteless? From this it follows that what we call the properties or effects of things do not seem to have been placed there by nature so much as attributed to them from outside because of their effect upon us.[58]

In this passage, the skeptical issue of *akatalepsis* is given an expansive reading and understood as an aspect of human perception, and the subject's age, level of satiety, and mood ineluctably influence how apparent phenomena are perceived. Gassendi's fallibilism and Academic skeptic views restricting sensory perception to apparent phenomena are consistent with these strains of Montaigne and Charron's thought. Here, Gassendi advances the idea that the object of perception (bread in his example) cannot be understood in terms of its essence, but in terms of its secondary qualities and the conditions of its apprehension, such as the sensation of tastefulness or tastelessness depending on context. These ideas are in close parallel with Montaigne's and later Cyrano's use of Pyrrhonist modes, and with their practice of an impressionistic and eclectic writing of experience, which seeks to maximize the conditions under which objects are perceived and understood in order to arrive at likely (but not demonstrably fully true or false) theories about their true essence or nature.

In other passages similar to the bread example, Gassendi maintains the fallibility of logical reasoning by insisting, as Montaigne does in our first chapter's analysis of *De la force de l'imagination* (I, 21), on the constant and ineluctable activity of subjective human consciousness on the process of judgement. Gassendi relates what he refers to as the *kriterion* for acquiring knowledge as *iudicium*, drawing on Academic Skepticism (*Acad.* II, 142) to show that this mental process always mediates the acquisition of knowledge.[59]

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[58] Ibid. 92.
[59] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 290.

Notably, Gassendi advances this position in his criticism of Cartesian rationalism, in particular Descartes' claims about the possibility of clear and distinct ideas which are both accessible to the mind and unmediated by bias; or ones which do not require a process of judgement and are given as evident to the mind. He notes the following in an objection to Descartes in the *Disquisitio* with regard to the constant interplay between subjective or faulty memories and the judging mind (36, 279 b):[60]

> …[V]ous supposez premièrement que "l'esprit humain puisse être libéré de tout préjugé" : mais la chose paraît impossible. D'abord parce que la mémoire, étant comme le trésor des jugements que nous avons formulés auparavant et qui sont déposés en elle, ne peut être à votre gré effacée…
>
> …Il est certain qu'un jugement une fois formulé persiste si bien dans notre manière d'être et, à la façon d'un cachet, demeure imprimé de telle sorte, qu'il n'est point en notre pouvoir de l'effacer ou de le détruire à volonté.

As in Montaigne's *Des menteurs*, where memories manipulate and confuse fictional and true narratives,[61] and as with Charron, who notes that memory allows the imagination to manipulate sense experiences which are preserved in one's thoughts (I, 12, 119), Gassendi suggests that human memories create a repository of potentially flawed judgements and ideas which are constantly imprinted on the mind (they "demeure imprimé"). He also draws on an example from Cicero of Themistocles, who wished that he could be rid of his memories, as a means of demonstrating the impossibility of this task (from Cicero's *De oratore,* II, lxxiv, 299).[62] In this example, Gassendi sets up his argument, which he will soon expand upon further, that the process of intellection (in this case memory) is constantly active and introduces bias in the process of knowledge formation.

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[60] *Disquisitio Metaphysica*, trans. Bernard Rochot. Paris: J. Vrin, 1962. 36.
[61] Kyle Pivetti, *Of Memory and Literary Form: Making the Early Modern English Nation* (Wilmington: University of Delaware Press, 2015), 167.
[62] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 165.

Here, Gassendi is directly wielding this idea of the memory's constant impact on the

process of judgement against Descartes' view that rationalist principles can be clear and distinct,

and that *préjugés* can be wholly eliminated from the process of judgement in a particular *a priori*

state of philosophizing. These views contrast with Cartesian views regarding memory to a rather

large degree, especially since Descartes even occasionally uses memory as a metaphor to

communicate the degree to which *a priori* principles do appear to him clearly and objectively.

That is to say, the resemblance of these principles to memory is seen as an endorsement of their

clarity, and not the opposite, of their ability to be manipulated by the inconsistencies of human

judgement. Descartes emphasizes this in the fifth portion of the *Meditations*, in which he

discusses the clarity and distinctness of his understanding of the idea of extended space and its

qualities:

> Et je ne connois pas seulement ces choses avec distinction, lorsque je les considère ainsi
> en général ; mais aussi, pour peu que j'y applique mon attention, je viens à connoître une
> infinité de particularités touchant les nombres, les figures, les mouvements, et autres
> choses semblables, dont la vérité se fait paroître avec tant d'évidence et s'accorde si bien
> avec ma nature, que lorsque je commence à les découvrir, il ne me semble pas que
> j'apprenne rien de nouveau, mais plutôt que je me ressouviens de ce que je savoirs déjà
> auparavant, c'est-à-dire que j'aperçois des choses qui étoient déjà dans mon esprit,
> quoique je n'eusse pas encore tourné ma pensée vers elles.[63]

Whether or not this passage reflects the influence of Platonic idea of reminiscence in rationalist

works like *Meno*, as Thomas M. Lennon suggests,[64] the passage clearly draws on memory as a

metaphor to convey the inherent clarity, familiarity, and presentiment of a philosophical

principle in stark opposition to Gassendi's fallibilist conception of memory.

This philosophical confrontation between two vastly opposed visions of memory and

their relationship to the process of judgement and philosophizing is a central concern for

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[63] Descartes, René. *Méditations métaphysiques* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1824), 310.
[64] *The Battle of Gods and Giants*, 336.

Gassendi. For Gassendi, however, such an idea of presentiment of philosophical ideas would not be possible without a mind in contact with objects and things in the world, and without the mediation of a process of judgement.

Thus, directly following his criticism of the possibility of unbiased judgement based on the biases of memory, Gassendi also emphasizes his view that such an idea of unbiased judgement is paradoxical or impossible; if an idea is clear and distinct, the mind is a passive recipient of the idea and it does not constitute judgement.[65] This somewhat circular view does emphasize Gassendi's commitment to the idea of the judgement's ineluctably biased action upon objects of thought in a skeptical empiricist mode. For Gassendi, as for Montaigne and Charron, the judging agent is constantly and unescapably in contact with forms of cognitive bias and the manipulations of memory, mood, and bodily conditions.

This point is also emphasized in a variety of sections of the *Institutio Logica,* in which Gassendi lists various forms of cognitive bias which, in his fallibilist skeptical empiricist epistemology, inherently render human judgement at least partially unreliable. Following the text's discussion of verified sense perception and optical illusions in Canon XI (another example of a moment where Gassendi accumulates ancient skeptical examples such as the bent stick in water and the round tower), Gassendi discusses factors such as mood, intellectual disposition, predetermined opinions, and textual authority as factors which distort judgement.[66]

Gassendi's views on various forms of fallibility of judgement and its action on exclusively apparent phenomena is a constant in his work, and he also uses these ideas to emphasize the inability of humans to perceive the essences of objects in the world. For example, Gassendi wields the previously mentioned argument about different means of perceiving bread

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[65] Jones, *Pierre Gassendi,* 143.
[66] *Institutio Logica* (Canons XII, XIII, XIV).

(depending on one's level of hunger) specifically against the Cartesian argument that essences of things can be understood in the form of extension. Directly after his passage on differing perceptions of bread, Gassendi articulates an argument which resembles an antipodal alternative to the Cartesian wax argument. Since silver appears white in lump form but black when powdered, it is not possible to perceive or understand its essential nature and since "in one state things have one appearance and in another state another appearance…it is not clear what should be considered their actual nature."[67] As with Montaigne and Charron, various forms of sensory perception attributed to one object (perceived differently or undergoing different states, as in two of the ten skeptical tropes) ineluctably place the perceiver in a state of being unable to apprehend the essence of that object, and within this tradition of thought, this question is both an argument for fallibilism and a fascinating trope to be expanded upon with original examples (as with Montaigne's trumpet, Charron's lion, Gassendi's silver, and Gassendi's purportedly visually acute friend).

Gassendi's views about essences are equally inspired by Montaigne and Charron's views on theological matters. Like Montaigne and Charron, Gassendi specifically separates questions of God's divine essence or nature from his own work, problematically reserving their study for a class of theologians (in a response to church censorship) while asserting quite clearly that knowledge about divine essence is strictly impossible, and that one can only speculate about the relationship between accidents and actions directly apparent to humans and their relationship to God's will. Gassendi's fideist views exhibit clear parallels with the political pyrrhonism of Montaigne and Charron, since Gassendi exhibits their same kind of Pyrrhonist equipollence and radical doubt when concerned with the question of God and the soul's essence, and even belief in

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[67] Ibid. 93. For more of Gassendi's direct attacks on Descartes's wax argument, refer to pages 198 and 223.

these entities is conspicuously treated as more important for their political than spiritual resonance. We will now turn briefly to Gassendi's thought on the incomprehensibility of the essence of God, and then discuss the political Pyrrhonist ideology which give his views the mark of a distinct influence from Montaigne and Charron.

If Cartesian thought developed theories about clear and distinct perception of physical essences and applied this to distinct rational knowledge of God, Gassendi insisted that fallible human inquiry and perception begins and ends in physical apparent phenomena, and did not draw analogical parallels between physical inquiry, which is probabilistic in nature, and divine knowledge (wholly shrouded by a form of doubt resembling Pyrrhonism). In the following passage from the *Disquisitio Metaphysica,* Gassendi advances a critique of Descartes in which seeks to rupture any connection between the epistemologies of physical and theological reasoning:

> There is a paralogism which took hold the moment when you proceeded from the first part of this Meditation, on the essence of material things, to the second, on the existence of God. You made the transition thusly: "Now if through my thinking alone I can extract the Idea of something, and the result is that all that I perceive clearly and distinctly as belonging to a thing indeed does so, can I not then obtain from this an argument to prove the existence of God?"[68]

Even as Gassendi disagrees with the Cartesian argument about the ability to perceive the essences of real things, Gassendi specifically makes the point to criticize the way in which this transition moves from what is "existing itself" to that which is exists as an "idea", and he clearly establishes a cleavage between these realms as subject to different forms of epistemology.

Furthermore, this kind of separation is explicit in Gassendi's repeated contention that God as an idea of a perfect or infinite being strictly cannot be conceived of or perceived in the

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[68] Pierre Gassendi, *Disquisitio Metaphysica* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1962), 501. My translation.

same way as apparent physical phenomena, making use of Charronian arguments we have seen earlier. The intellect cannot be said to possess an idea of an infinite thing, nor is it likely that God's attributes are simply human attributes in an "extended" or perfect form; God as an exceptional being is much more likely unrepresentable or inconceivable in human terms.[69]

In addition, Gassendi's strange fideist account of God's relationship with causality, and the way in which it strongly hints at the unlikelihood of God's interference with the physical world while asserting the importance of belief in God's theoretical ability to do so,[70] bears a strong resemblance to Montaigne and Charron's thought on the matter. Like Montaigne, Gassendi clearly asserts that God's disposition is fully occult when it comes to responding to miracles and prayers, and also argues that God is unlikely to have a direct relationship with the imperfect substances and qualities of the physical world.[71] Finally, while Gassendi emphasizes the possibility of *believing* in God's ability to manipulate the world, he emphasizes God's sole rationally understood role as a creator of atoms, which are then set into motion in their regular observable way, leaving no room for even probable speculation about God's relationship with phenomena within the universe.[72] Gassendi's God is understood to be strictly outside of the realm of existence which is only comprehensible in a physical sense, as opposed to Descartes's God, whose existence is a rational principle because of its greater perfection and whose existence constitutes and entails its essence ontologically.[73]

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[69] Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 160.

[70] Edward Motley Pickman, "Libertine Ideas in the Time of Richelieu and Mazarin," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 68 (1944): 39.

[71] P. Félix Thomas, *La philosophie de Gassendi* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1889), 301-303.

[72] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 293; Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 417.

[73] Richard A. Watson, "Descartes Knows Nothing," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1984): 406, 410.

By strictly separating human comprehension and knowledge from the question of God's nature and essence, Gassendi rejects transcendental and natural theology. As with Montaigne and Charron, he clarifies a separation between natural and theological knowledge, and clearly qualifies theological understanding as both irrational and politically useful. Gassendi develops these categories when he suggests that "*philosophi*" are those who study "*lumen nature*" and the "*doctores sacri*" or "*theologi*" are responsible for studying Biblical texts and fixing the canons of dogma to be expounded by the Catholic Church.[74] Furthermore, this idea in Gassendi is a clear descendant of what we have called Montaigne and Charron's political Pyrrhonism, since it is a form of fideism which emphasizes the continued role of the church specifically as a political entity codifying dogma and thus purportedly providing stability and preventing civil conflict among the masses. This stabilizing function of the church is cemented by what both Montaigne and Gassendi observe as the physical traditions and practices of the Catholic Church in an almost anthropological sense; as Popkin notes, Gassendi "explained human knowledge of Christiantiy as being based, at least in part, on the pictures and statues that people saw in churches and on what they heard in services."[75] This ideological preoccupation with religion among the masses also allows for a private realm of *libertas philosophandi*, reserved for an intellectual elite with which authors like Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi explicitly identify. This *politique* political ideology is also evident from Gassendi's own closeness to, and work as a political chronicler for, Louis de Valois, to whom he spent dispatches on political events which were primarily characterized by a pacifist patriotism and monarchism.[76]

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[74] Sylvia Murr, "Foi religieuse et 'libertas philosophandi' chez Gassendi," *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques* 76, no. 1 (1992): 85-100.

[75] Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism*, 124.

[76] Carla Rita Palmerino, "Pierre Gassendi's Life and Letters," *Early Science and Medicine* 10, no. 1 (2005): 102

Gassendi's shared anti-rationalist political ideology with Montaigne and Charron is evinced by the explicitness with which he submits his ideas to the censorship of the Catholic Church,[77] defends the purely political importance of Catholic dogmatism in a manner which made readers critical and suspicious about the sincerity of his belief on God, and insists on the complete rational inaccessibility of God and the immortal soul to human experience in a Pyrrhonist or total equipollent suspension of judgement on the matter, though at times implicitly arguing about the implausibility of a perfect being participating the substance of a purely material world. These distinct features, as with Montaigne and Charron, significantly affected the reception of Gassendi's thought and caused readers to question the sincerity of his belief in God.

Gassendi's defense of the idea of an immortal soul is equally purely based upon irrational faith, and all notions related to understanding of the soul receive a fully Pyrronist skeptical treatment, as we have seen in Montaigne and Charron. Gassendi notes that when philosophers "reason and conceive of the existence of God and the separability of the soul, they judge regarding that which is beyond their senses, and thus their thinking cannot but be strictly metaphysical."[78] This epistemological framework in which knowledge about God and the soul are not accessible to the human mind has caused specialists like Pintard to comment on a split between two forms of discourse in Gassendi: a more sincere or spontaneous discourse in which he provides strict support for empiricism, and a discourse which is calculated to provide space for his free-thought, self-consciously submitting his work to censorship and insisting on revelation's role in providing some kind of instinctual or irrational "understanding" of God or of

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[77] See Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 21-22, 85.
[78] Gassendi, *Disquisitio Metaphysica*, 25. My translation.

the soul.[79] It is clear that, as with Montaigne and Charron, the strangeness of this fideist split lead to some problems with the reception of Gassendi's thought. In fact, perhaps one of the greatest impediments to the greater prominence of Gassendist empiricism in the seventeenth century was the fact that no major religious institution or order was active in promoting his thought. Jesuits supported Aristotelian Scholastics while the Benedictines, Genévofains, Port-Royal, and the Oratory supported Cartesianism, putting Gassendi's thought to a disadvantage and relegating it to the more secular but less influential elite *académies*.[80]

Gassendi's fideist views and political Pyrrhonism are not the only features of his epistemology which evince the influence of Montaigne and Charron on his thought. His eclectic use of Hellenistic philosophy to reject rationalist method and construct a weak empiricist skepticism based on the probabilism also places him within the Montaignian and Charronian tradition. In the next section, we will turn to the eclecticism and empiricism of Gassendi, which resembles the Montaignian-Charronian tradition in the way in which it borrows from various ancient philosophical schools to construct a skeptical empiricist philosophy, and rejects rationalism, especially Pyrrhonist equipollence and emerging experiments of hyperbolic doubt which would form the basis for Cartesianism.

2.5 Gassendist Epistemological Method, Eclecticism, and the Montaignian-Charronian Tradition

As we move from questions of epistemology's domain as a separate field from theology to epistemological method itself, in Gassendi it is clear that his views align with Montaigne and

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[79] René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVIIe siècle* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983), Part III, Chapter II.
[80] Lennon, *The Battle of Gods and Giants*, 26.

Charron's assertions that human inquiry begins and ends with the senses. He even calls for a change in philosophical terminology in which the term *a priori* would describe knowledge acquired from experience or sense data, whereas *a posteriori* would describe knowledge and forms of reasoning analyzing such data.[81] As we turn to Gassendi's rejection of Cartesian rationalism's methodology, we will begin by examining its critiques of Pyrrhonist skepticism as a rationalist method of establishing full equipollent skepticism, which we have also seen in Montaigne and Charron.

In the same letter to Faur de Pibrac in which he credits Montaigne and Charron for their influence on his Anti-Aristotelianism and his eclectic reading of ancient philosophy, Gassendi explicitly notes that he is not a disciple of Sextus Empiricus precisely because his philosophy involved such rationalist and equipollent suspension of judgement that it did not include the ability to engage in judgements from day-to-day, or to incorporate experience (*emperia*).[82] On questions like the apprehensibility of physical bodies, Gassendi provided lengthy critiques of the way in which Pyrrhonists utilized rationalist and mathematical puzzles concerning points, lines, and surfaces in order fully suspend judgement on the issue.[83] In addition, in an allusion to probabilism, and within a passage of the *Syntagma* suggesting that philosophers are "fortunate if we attain not what is true but what is probable", Gassendi notes that his philosophy seeks to find a "middle way" (*media quaedam via*) between suspension of judgement and dogmatism, suggesting a more Academic as opposed to Pyrrhonist approach to skepticism.[84]

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[81] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 276.
[82] Ibid., 4.
[83] Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist: Advocate of History in an Age of Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 146.
[84] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 326.

Gassendi also criticizes Descartes for the hyperbolic quality of the thought experiment which launches his First Meditation:

> There is just one point I am not clear about, namely why you did not make a simple and brief statement to the effect that you were regarding your previous knowledge as uncertain so that you could later single out what you found to be true. Why instead did you *consider everything as false*, which seems more like adopting a new prejudice than relinquishing an old one? This strategy made it necessary for you to convince yourself by *imagining a deceiving God or some evil demon who tricks us*, whereas it would surely have been sufficient to cite the darkness of the human mind or the weakness of our nature.[85]

For Gassendi, Pyrrhonist equipollence and full suspension of doubt is strong rationalist principle which is "more like adopting a new prejudice" than a fallibilist epistemology which begins in a place that more closely resembles where the human mind finds itself: forming weak probabilistic judgements about sensory phenomena which are not fully, equipollently, and hyperbolically suspended in doubt as a kind of *a priori* principle.

In this way, Gassendi introduces critiques of forms of skepticism, be they Pyrrhonist or Cartesian, which fully suspend judgement about the veracity of the senses, which for Gassendi are truly *a priori* (and not *a posteriori*) in the sense of being the first and instinctual source of knowledge about the world, even while they (and the reasoning mind) are subject to a relatively large degree of fallibility. Like Montaigne and Charron in their own eclectic empiricist analyses of Pyrrhonism, Gassendi is particularly interested in the *apraxia* objection to Pyrrhonism, because it places emphasis on the philosophical inevitability of beginning with at least some degree of confidence in the senses in order to construct a practical philosophy. In the case of Montaigne, we have seen that he at times (perhaps unfairly) mocks Pyrrho as the kind of philosopher who would walk off the edge of a ship, and at other times shows an understanding of

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[85] Pierre Gassendi, "Fifth Set of Objections" in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

the Pyrrhonists' separation between philosophical inquiry and their daily actions related to apparent sensory phenomena. Gassendi is both similarly fascinated by the *apraxia* objection and similarly inconsistent about how his evaluation of Pyrrhonism relates to this, but like Montaigne he uses the issue to emphasize the importance of a fallibilist approach to the senses as the point of entry for engaging in practical philosophy.

In disputes against Descartes, for example, he accuses Cartesian skepticism of being too extreme and impractical in its rejection of what Gassendi frames as the fallible but crucial criterion of everyday conduct and appearances (*ta phainomena*) according to Pyrrhonist skeptics, which they use to respond to the *apraxia* objection.[86] The way in which Descartes' skeptical thought experiment actively disposes with *ta phainomena* as a legitimate criterion of truth causes him to be an "ardent dogmatist" who does "not accept the appearances of the senses."[87] Insisting that any understanding of the world entails use of the senses in however an imperfect mode, Gassendi even employs a metaphor, noting that Descartes' wholesale rejection of sense perception in his philosophical experiment is equivalent to rejecting the consumption of food on account of being harmed by it one time.[88] Interestingly, Gassendi seems to insist that in this case, the Pyrrhonist response to the *apraxia* objection not only serves a practical measure to avoid harm, but at the very least usefully draws attention to the senses as the starting point for epistemology (even if the Pyrrhonist suspends judgement equally about all conclusions which the senses might lead us to conclude), whereas the similar Cartesian passage on the *apraxia* objection merely allows the philosopher to safely practice his pure rationalism.

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[86] Ibid., 176.
[87] Ibid., 177.
[88] Ibid., 168. See also: 66, 183, and 207, for passages in which Gassendi insists on the unavoidable necessity of beginning philosophical inquiry with sensory phenomena.

While we have seen the way in which Gassendi prefers Academic skeptic epistemology over that of Pyrrhonism, in his view Pyrrhonism has, at the very least, the advantage of suggesting that some relationship between the mind and phenomena is necessary for practical thinking to occur. As Gassendi notes in another rebuttal of Cartesian pure rationalism: "Je pense, dîtes vous ; mais que pensez-vous ? Car enfin toute pensée est pensée de quelque-chose. Est-ce le Ciel ? la Terre ? ou n'importe quoi d'autre ? ou vous-même ?" (D, 83-84, 289 b).[89] We will see that this Gassendist kind of *apraxia* objection and this rhetorical question serve as the launching point for the narrative in Cyrano's *L'autre monde*, in which Cyrano self-consciously gestures at the idea that his knowledge journey cannot begin without the protagonist venturing into the world to experience sensory phenomena. In a similar reflection on the impossibility of cognition without physical sensory objects, Gabriel Daniel's satire will construct and mock the paradoxes of an impossible Cartesian world in which consciousness exists without any sensory phenomena which can be perceived by the mind.

While Pyrrhonism's localization of epistemology in the realm of sense perception is useful for these reasons, Gassendi insists on the preferability of an Academic model which avoids equipollence, and in which sensory phenomena are judged by the reasoning mind as leading to conclusions about the nature of reality which are accorded some degree of probability. As with Montaigne and Charron, a distinct form of weak empiricism or fallibilist probabilism is evident in Gassendi, who insists on the weakness of both the reasoning mind and the unreliability of sensory phenomenon in a particularly skeptical form of empiricism. We will turn to this

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[89] Gassendi makes many similar objections elsewhere: "if you don't believe in earth, sky, and stars, why go outside and look at the Sun?" Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 158.

fallibilistic probabilism as a theme grounded in Academic Skepticism in particular, then turn more specifically to the fallibility of sense perception and that of logic and reasoning.

Gassendi, who shares a distinctly fallibilist empiricism with Montaigne and Charron, is clear on his positive insistence on epistemic humility in an Academic sense, and actively defends the claim that humans cannot understand the nature of reality, in opposition to the Pyrrhonist view suspending judgement on the matter. In the *Syntagma* he defends the Academic argument "that nothing can be known (at least in the Aristotelian fashion), and so there is some knowledge."[90] Gassendi borrows Ciceronian language from the *Academica* to claim that knowledge is hidden in a deep abyss or well, and shares this borrowing with Montaigne who employed it in the *Apologie* and in *De l'art de conferer.*[91]

In addition, he borrows many Socratic tropes of self-deprecation from this tradition to insist on the ineluctable fallibility of human thought, insisting in the *Exercitationes* that he initially esteemed his work and lectures so little that he didn't want to publish them,[92] and later writing: "Since I cannot really persuade myself that the truth of things can be perceived by mortal men, I am far from wishing to sell my wares; and the things that I appear to be asserting here are not to be taken as established facts."[93] François Bernier noted an incessant use of the word *videtur* in Gassendi's work from the *Exercitationes* to the *Syntagma,* an observation which he explicitly ties with an insistence on apparent knowledge from the ancient skeptic tradition, and a certain modesty about his own philosophical enterprise.[94] Bernier also follows his use of an

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[90] Gassendi, *Selected Works.*
[91] Emilio Mazza, "In and Out of the Well: Flux and Reflux of Scepticism and Nature," *Rivista di storia della filosofia* 62, no. 3 (2007): 105.
[92] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 16.
[93] Ibid., 20.
[94] François Bernier, *L'abrégé de la philosophie de Gassendi* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), I, 9-10.

Academic Skeptic trope to praise the paradoxical Socratic wisdom of Gassendi by asserting, in a probabilist mode, that Gassendi is not a perfect philosopher, but one who, according to Bernier's judgement, is most likely to make probable judgements about the nature of the world. In addition, Gassendi himself was not only praised in terms of his purported Socratic wisdom, but also idealized Socrates' statement of his own lack of knowledge, quoting it in the *Exercitationes* and attributing the view to the "most learned among the ancients" including Arcesilas.[95] For Gassendi, then, Academic Skeptic rhetoric and tropes related to the doctrine of *nihil sciri* were a central theme in his work, used in order to establish the impossibility of complete rationalist certitude or hyperbolic skepticism.

It is also clear that Gassendi views his own scientific claims in an Academic skeptic or probabilist mode, allowing for the formation of provisional hypotheses which are revised as new data is collected or more judgement is exercised upon a particular theory. When describing his own theory of velocity in the *Syntagma,* for example, Gassendi provides a candid account of all the different hypotheses he had considered before arriving at the model that he currently (and provisionally) espouses.[96] Even in the case of the atomistic model which is so core to Gassendist epistemology, Gassendi is careful to note that atomism is a physical theory which "may be recommended above all others" and is proposed as a provisional theory.[97] Examples of statements regarding the hypothetical and provisional nature of Gassendi's hypotheses abound in his work, ranging from his theories about how evaporation occurs at the atomic level[98] to his thought on the speed of atoms in various contexts[99] and his take on various speculative physical

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[95] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 101.
[96] Joseph T. Clark, "Pierre Gassendi and the Physics of Galileo," *Isis* 54, no. 3 (1963): 368-9; LoLordo, *Pierre Gassendi and the Birth of Early Modern Philosophy*, 173.
[97] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 102.
[98] Ibid., 406.
[99] Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 290.

theories within Epicurean thought.[100] In the latter case, Gassendi uses the vocabulary of probabilism to emphasize his point: "[S]ince the dogmatics really do not know the greater part of the things they believe they know, the occasion arises only too frequently in the physical sciences to declare that we are fortunate if we attain not what is true but what is probable."[101]

In fact, in Gassendi's epistemological and scientific writing, he explicitly notes that all knowledge formation is simply a process of holding opinions about likely causes and explanations. Gassendi makes statements such as "if you look at the matter carefully, knowledge and opinion can be considered synonyms" and "the expressions 'to have an opinion' and 'to know' are used interchangeably."[102] Gassendi draws attention to his own status as a holder of opinions much as Cicero does in the passage of *Academica* examined in Chapter 1 (II, XX, 66). The Academic Skeptic trope of being aware of one's own status as a holder of opinions and a fallible judging agent is an important epistemological concept and theme in Gassendi's work.

As a part of his probabilism and fallibilist skeptical empiricism, Gassendi's work argues for a limited vision of human knowledge as it applies both to sensory perception and the interpreting mind, noting in an Acadmeic Skeptic mode that complete certainty about the truth or falsehood of any particular theory is unattainable. For example, Gassendi notes that "if all the things that men think they know are subjected to examination by the senses and appraisal by reason, it becomes apparent that no proposition that makes assertions about the nature of a thing according to itself can be affirmed with confidence."[103] This epistemic model emphasizes "examination by the senses and appraisal by reason," a crucial concept in the fallibilist

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[100] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 326.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 102.
[103] Ibid., 101.

empiricism of Montaigne and Charron which we have already seen them explore in their various uses of Hellenistic thought, and which we will see Cyrano examine in his exploration of heliocentrism. This form of verified sense perception both generates the Academic skeptic argument (used by Gassendi in the above citation) that full certainty is not possible, and also provides fallible or probabilistic knowledge about the world. That is, it points to conflicting epistemic models (the square tower and the rounded tower) while nonetheless generating a useful hypothesis about the nature of reality (the tower is more likely the be square once we reason about its nature).

Thus, in this fallibilistic model, like the one found in Montaigne's wheel argument, we will first turn to the epistemic weakness of the senses before moving to logic and reasoning. In a similarity with the Montaignian-Charronian tradition, Gassendi eclectically wields Hellenistic philosophies to discuss the role of sense perception in knowledge formation. For example, Gassendi attacks the *katalepsis* of Stoic philosophy to arrive at his notion of the senses as an inconsistent but necessary epistemological tool.[104] Other uses of Hellenist thought to discuss the fallibility of the senses include thought experiments from Sextus Empiricus's ten modes, and discourse about the need to incorporate sensory input with reason when understanding the size of the Sun within Epicureanism and Academic Skepticism, an issue in which Gassendi, like Montaigne, uses Epicureanism as a tool to reflect on the apparent size of the Sun more than on Epicurean dogmatism with regard to the reliability of sense perception.[105] As we will later explore, Cyrano makes use of stock examples of verified sense perception in the same tradition

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[104] Saul Fisher, *Pierre Gassendi's Philosophy and Science: Atomism for Empiricists* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), xxi.
[105] Barry Brundell, *Pierre Gassendi: From Aristotelianism to a New Natural Philosophy* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), Chapter 2.

and applies them to the question of apparent phenomena and their relationship with the hypothesis of heliocentrism.

Gassendi's fallibilism with regard to sense perception is also clear from his criticisms of Descartes' refusal to begin inquiry with the senses despite their fallibility (and the metaphor of ceasing to eat food on account of being made ill by it on one occasion). The senses are necessarily both fallible and the constitute the only possible way in which to begin forming knowledge. As Margaret Osler notes, for Gassendi sensory experience "needs no justification besides its own immediacy" and "the science of appearances is neither demonstrative nor certain, but at best probable."[106] This immediacy makes sense perception both fallible and necessary in developing human knowledge.

Gassendi's attacks on the weaknesses of logical reasoning resemble those within Montaigne and Charron, in which, as Charron puts it logic "preste armes pour soustenir et defender les opinions anticipées" (38) and is a tool which should not be placed in all hands. Gassendi inscribes himself within this tradition, which emphatically draws upon Academic Skeptic discourses around the dangers of logic. When introducing the subject of logic in his *Syntagma*, Gassendi finds it fitting to provide the following quote from Aulus Gellius in full:

> *The study and knowledge of this discipline in its rudiments ordinarily seems to be horrid, disagreeable, uncivil, and despicable; but once you have made some progress, then at last its advantages will become clear in your mind and a certain insatiable desire to learn will follow. Truly, if you do not put some bounds on this desire, there will be no mean danger that you too, like many others, will grow old in the twisting paths and courses of dialectics as if you were caught on the Sirens' rocks.*[107]

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[106] Margaret J. Osler, "Providence and Divine Will in Gassendi's Views on Scientific Knowledge," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983): 558.

[107] *Attic Nights,* XVI, viii [16-17], translated by Craig Brush in his *Selected Works* of Gassendi.

Gassendi begins his authoritative discussion of logic itself with a stern warning: stressing the way in which the insatiable desire to obtain knowledge becomes a form of bias, leading the philosopher through the "twisting paths and courses of dialectics" to make dubious claims which have no relationship to observed phenomena. This criticism acquires a particularly Academic Skeptic flavor when Gassendi follows with a metaphor from Plutarch: that of the logician who resembles a polyp devouring its own suction cups, getting twisted in circular claims[108] or providing logical structures to affirm theories which have already been assented to.[109]

Gassendi is also well-known for criticisms of circular reasoning in logic. He even points to the enthymeme as a means of avoiding circularity in argumentation.[110] Gassendi's approach to logic, as with sensory perception, involved the idea that it is a necessary but highly fallible tool, and the entirety of his thought on logic was in some sense skeptical or destructive before the publication of the *Syntagma*, itself a text proposing a cautious and deliberate approach to logic and a plethora of potential fallacies to avoid.[111] In his attacks of Aristotelian syllogism, and of Cartesian skepticism, Gassendi points to the issue of circular reasoning or of *diallelus*, which Montaigne had robustly revived in his wheel argument, and which problematizes the use of premises and conclusions which rely upon each other:[112]

> Then I ask whether or not you are arguing in a circle, as they say, falling into a *diallelus*, and begging the question when you prove one proposition by another which cannot itself be proven except by assuming that the first one has been proven.[113]

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[108] Gassendi's criticism of circularity is especially well-known in the context of his arguments against Descartes. See Willis Doney, "The Cartesian Circle," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 16, no. 3 (1955): 324-38; Louis E. Loeb, "Was Descartes Sincere in his Appeal to the Natural Light?" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 26, no. 3 (1988): 377-406.
[109] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 365.
[110] Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 106.
[111] Ibid., 259.
[112] Luciano Floridi, "The Problem of the Justification of a Theory of Knowledge: Part I: Some Historical Metamorphoses," *Journal for General Philosophy of Science / Zeitschrift Für Allgemeine Wissenschaftstheorie* 24, no. 2 (1993): 215.
[113] Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 242.

Gassendi's critique of Cartesian logic is rooted in a tradition of using ancient skepticism and its vocabulary to criticize circular logic,[114] and this question of *diallelus* would equally become influential to the anti-Cartesian tradition of the seventeenth century.

Gassendi's logical fallibilism, combined with idea of fallible sense perception, gives Gassendi's work the same quality of weak or skeptical empiricism which we have seen in Montaigne and Charron. This feature, in addition to the rejection of Pyrrhonist rationalism and equipollence, the use of probabilistic reasoning, and the eclectic and creative reuse of Hellenistic texts in order construct a unique form of skeptical empiricism, and the gapping of theological questions of essence as a political phenomenon, makes Gassendi's work bear the distinctive mark of Montaigne and Charron's own epistemologies.

Before turning to Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel as authors of anti-Cartesian literature, satire, and epistemological fiction within the skeptical empiricist tradition of Gassendi, Charron, and Montaigne, we will address the eclecticism of Gassendi and the relationship that it bears with his fallibilist epistemology and his tendency to accumulate eclectic provisional and fallible hypotheses and ideas as a form of knowledge formation.

Gassendi's thought and relationship with antiquity can sometimes attract the kind of tenuous debates about allegiances to different schools of ancient thought or questions of "influence" that occur in Montaigne; and as with Montaigne, such debates are inevitably muddled by the profound eclecticism of Gassendi as a thinker. Trying out stints as a priest, Hebrew scholar, amateur crystal scientist, and much more,[115] it is hard to think of anyone besides

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[114] Kenneth R. Westphal, "Sextus Empiricus Contra René Descartes," *Philosophy Research Archives* 13 (1987): 91-128.

[115] Lilian Unger Pancheri, "The Magnet, the Oyster, and the Ape, or Pierre Gassendi and the Principle of Plenitude," *The Modern Schoolman* 53 (2): 144.

Athanasius Kircher who combined such profoundly eclectic scientific curiosity with a penchant for dense Erasmian humanism written in baroque Latin.

If Montaigne is sometimes reduced to a Pyrrhonist, or is conceived of as the source for the Pyrrhonist crisis of late sixteenth century France, Gassendi is at times reduced to a Christian apologist for Epicureanism. But, as with Montaigne, this argument is rendered unsound by the complexity of the structure of Gassendi's epistemic thought and its use of fallibilist provisional certainty and hypothesis formation, combined with his deep eclecticism and awareness of various strands of ancient and contemporary thought. Indeed, even in the case of Epicureanism, it is clear that Gassendi thought that Epicurean epistemological claims are best evaluated in conversation with other Hellenistic philosophical schools, and through the lens of a modernized corpuscular theory.[116]

Judith Sribnai's analysis of Gassendi's exegesis of Epicurean texts, for example, notes that he melds Epicurean views with contemporary arguments on optics, and uses Epicurean thinkers as one set of philosophers among many on which to exercise his judgement. Sribnai notes: "Penser, qui est aussi comparer, peser, et donc dans une certaine mesure accumuler, amasser, dépend d'une capacité à renoncer (aux maîtres, aux préjugés, aux habitudes, à l'idée que nous ne posséderons jamais la vérité), pour accueillir l'étrangeté d'une pensée ou d'une parole qui n'est pas la sienne."[117] For Sribnai, Gassendi's encounters with Lucretius and Epicurean thought are another means of maximizing his humanistic encounters and arriving at new methods for reflecting on contemporary issues like optics and corpuscular theory.[118]

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[116] Lynn Sumida Joy, *Gassendi the Atomist,* 144.
[117] Judith Sribnai, *Pierre Gassendi: Le voyage vers la sagesse (1592-1655)* (Montreal: Les Presses de l'Université de Montreal, 2017), 176.
[118] Ibid., 174-176.

Even in the early reception of Gassendi's work, with the publication of the *Abrégé de la philosophi de Gassendi*, François Bernier defended Gassendi as much more than a Christian Epicurean, but emphasized that Gassendi was the kind of philosopher who read very widely, compiled and condensed favored arguments in his readings according to his judgement, and transferred the best of these philosophers within his works.[119] While there is some possibility that Bernier's defense did more to suggest the category of "Christian Epicurean" to readers, undermining his purpose, the image of Gassendi as a humanist compiler of provisional arguments is a coherent with the form and nature of his thought. In fact, Thomas M. Lennon suggests that the eclectic patchwork of ideas, citations from various ancient epistemological schools, and references to contemporary epistemological problems and observations was so dense as to be impenetrable to readers. Lennon thus cites the impenetrability of the eclecticism of Gassendi and some of his followers, especially Bernier and Gilles de Launay,[120] as the cause of the relatively minor status of the Gassendist current of mid-seventeenth-century French thought.

In a key passage of his *Exercitationes*, Gassendi makes a specific endorsement of eclecticism in relation to the Academic Skeptic and probabilistic tradition. In a denunciation of dogmatists who do not dare to consider views outside their philosophical sect, Gassendi encourages his reader to follow the practice of Arcesilaus, who recommended that philosophers attend lectures given by members of philosophical schools which they are not affiliated with.[121] Gassendi promoted and attempted such eclecticism in his own thought, combining provisional certainty and Academic Skeptic probabilism with contemporary corpuscular theory, Epicurean

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[119] Thomas M. Lennon, *The Battle of Gods and Giants*, 80.
[120] Ibid., 71.
[121] Neto, *Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy*, 55.

arguments about light perception and *simulacra*, and even his own observations as an amateur scientist and salon manager.

Gassendi's eclecticism also has the aim of maximizing and accumulating sources of knowledge with the goal of improving his provisional judgements and theories about the nature of reality. In this way, accumulating reams of arguments not only serves as a method for collecting more data about the nature of the world, but also functions as a methodology which allows the author and the reader to maximally exercise judgement on diverse objects of study. This places Gassendi in a tradition of fallibilists like Montaigne and Charron, who encourage and practice textual forms in which encyclopedic lists of eclectic sources are accumulated, providing more opportunities to accumulate data and exercise judgement, which is especially necessary given the fallibility of the reasoning mind and of sense perception. The textual form of Gassendist discourse often involves the enumeration of as many viewpoints and citations of varied philosophical schools as possible, and a process of judgement which follows a rigorous list of all such arguments and their hermeneutic possibilities.[122] In this way, Gassendi immerses the reader in the (often arduous) process of being exposed to a multitude of theories which Gassendi finally deems to be less probable or even unworthy of consideration, mixing, as all of the skeptical empiricists in this study do, more probable theories of reality with less probable ones, as a means of exercising judgement.

For example, instead of taking for granted the view that the earth tilts on its axis, Gassendi exposes his reader to a variety of arguments in favor of the earth's immobility before asserting the theory which he obviously takes to be most probable.[123] Indeed, at one point in his

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[122] Jean-Charles Darmon, "Remarques sur la rhétorique 'probabiliste' de Gassendi," 681.
[123] Jones, *Pierre Gassendi*, 68.

responses to Gassendi's objections to his *Meditations*, Descartes wryly warns his reader not to mistake the extent of Gassendi's prolixity in his objections with the extent of their validity.[124] If Descartes, in his infamous concision, erected a philosophy with formal qualities that corresponded to the neatness and clarity of his rationalist clear and distinct ideas, Gassendi's objections regarding the messiness of judgement also practice and produce a cognitive portrait of this kind of mental process. As Tullio Gregory notes, Gassendi's epistemology involves a continuous process: "Quant ayant trouvé une cause, nous ne sommes pas sûrs qu'elle soit vraie…l'occasion s'offre pour nous d'entreprendre une autre voie ; en la suivant, nous aurons peut-être plus de chance."[125] In his thought, Gassendi renders struggle to continuously consider and replace new hypotheses with ones which are judged to be more probable, and is self-conscious about communicating the fallibility of his judgements and the necessity of considering various objects of thought as a part of this process.

In this way, Gassendi illustrates his methodology and practice of judgement through the eclectic and prolix formal qualities of his works. Having established the eclecticism of Gassendi's thought, its multifaceted and probabilistic engagement with varied philosophical schools, and its attempt to render the process of exercising judgement and hypothesis formation, we will turn to Cyrano de Bergerac and Gabriel Daniel as authors of anti-Cartesian literature and epistemological fiction. In the chapters to follow, we will examine a similar eclecticism in dialogic form, as Cyrano and Daniel render the imperfections of philosophical judgement using the voices of various philosophers and their fallible epistemic claims, which are never wholly proven to be completely true or false. As we will see, both Cyrano and Daniel wield a profound

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[124] Ibid., 186.

[125] Grégory Tullio, *Genèse de la raison classique de Charron à Descartes* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2000), 175.

eclecticism in combination with fallibilistic probabilism, and other features of the Montaignian skeptical empiricist tradition to satirize Cartesian rationalism.

Chapter 3: Cyrano de Bergerac: Skeptical Empiricism, Eclecticism, and Anti-Rationalist

Satire in *L'autre monde*

3.1   Cyrano and the Empiricist Tradition of Montaigne and Gassendi

The influence of the empiricism of Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi on the literary

works and epistemology of Cyrano de Bergerac is distinctive above all in the broad and

consistent epistemological claims throughout his work and its unstructured eclecticism. As

Cecilia Rizza's study has shown, a study of Montaigne's influence on Cyrano must emphasize

broad and consistent formal qualities and arguments which show abundant parallels between

these thinkers, as opposed to close readings and direct textual parallels, where evidence is

potentially misleading when it comes to characterizing deeply anti-systematic thinkers such as

Montaigne and Cyrano.[1] This is also consistent with assessments of seminal scholars like Brun

and Harth of Cyrano as a deep reader of Montaigne.[2] As Rizza notes, this state of affairs in

Cyrano scholarship demands more research on the influences of Montaigne and Gassendi on

Cyrano's thought, as they are distinctive and suffuse the form and epistemological structure of

his work, but largely do not consist in obvious textual references.[3]

It is precisely the epistemic structure of Cyrano's work and its formal qualities, and its

link to influences of Montaigne and Gassendi, which this study will use here to suggest the

strong probability of Cyrano as an author steeped in Montaigne's influence and largely allied

with the Gassendist empirical tradition. In particular, this chapter proposes that Cyrano's

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[1] Cecilia Rizza, *Libertinage et littérature* (Paris: Schena-Nizet, 1996), 348.
[2] Antoine-Pierre Brun, *Autour du XVIIᵉ siècle. Les libertins, Maynard, Dassoucy, Desmarets, Ninon de Lenclos, Carmain, Boursault, Mérigon, Pavillon, Saint-Amant, Chaulieu, Manuscrits inédits de Tallemant des Réaux* (Grenoble: Falque et Perrin, 1901); Erica Harth, *Cyrano de Bergerac and the Polemics of Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 118.
[3] Indeed, few studies propose precise textual parallels with Montaigne, but for one brief exception consult Alan Boase, *The Fortunes of Montaigne* (London: Methuen, 1935), 258-59.

skeptical empiricism involves a complete gapping and Pyrrhonist skepticism with regard to essences, and a reliance on the weak criteria of fallible sense perception and reasoning to arrive at knowledge. As with Montaigne and Gassendi, this deeply skeptical empiricism emphasizes probabilism and hypothesis formation, with an emphasis on exploring a variety of possible realities given the high uncertainty of these methods of knowledge.

Before proceeding with an analysis of these features of Cyrano's *L'Autre monde*, it is important to examine some biographical indications of an influence of Montaigne and Gassendi on Cyrano. In the case of Cyrano's reading of Montaigne, we have evidence not only in the form of Brun and Harth's judgements, but the fact that Cyrano was deeply engaged with sixteenth century humanism and thought. He engaged not only with contemporary epistemological debates, but with a large spectrum of Renaissance thinkers involved in understanding rhetoric, epistemology, and theories of the universe and matter.[4] In addition, many scholars have noted the distinctive mark of Montaigne's cultural relativism on the adventures involving different customs of creatures and inhabitants of the Moon and Sun in Cyrano's works.[5]

When it comes to the influence of Gassendi on Cyrano's life and works, the direct reference he provides in the voice of the *démon de Socrate* is a striking example of praise from a character likely to serve as a model of judgement or be aligned with Cyrano's own views. Other explicit links between Cyrano and Gassendi have been made in biographical accounts of Cyrano's life. Grimarest's 1705 life of Molière has tempted scholars with the image of both Cyrano de Bergerac and Molière as students of Gassendi, but the reliability of Grimarest as a

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[4] For more on this, see Robert Philmus, *Into the Unknown: The Evolution of Science Fiction from Francis Godwin to H.G. Wells* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1970), 129.
[5] Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, *Les Déniaisés : Irréligion et libertinage au début de l'époque moderne*. (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014), 267. Jacques Prévot, *Cyrano de Bergerac : L'écrivain de la crise* (Paris: Ellipses, 2011), 126.

source has long been disputed.[6] More likely connections with Gassendi would include the possibility that he attended his Royal College lectures[7] or came to know Gassendi in some capacity due to his friendship with Chapelle.[8] In any case, Cyrano's engagement with Gassendist physics and epistemology is very explicit and detailed in his *Fragment de physique*.[9] We will aim to show here that Cyrano was not just influenced by Gassendi, but part of continuous tradition of eclecticism and skeptical empiricism embodied by the works of Montaigne and Gassendi and in opposition to Cartesian rationalism. Like Montaigne and Gassendi, Cyrano's empiricism involves a radical, Pyrrhonist neutralization of questions about the soul and God's nature, while at the same time opposing the totalizing equipollence of Pyrrhonist skepticism in the physical world and a rationalist epistemology with regard judgements about appearances, about which many fallible possibilities and hypotheses can be drawn.

Before proceeding with this analysis, however, it is important to remark upon the genre of Cyrano's work in order to better understand its distinctiveness, and its particular relationship with the empiricist tradition. It is crucial to note that Cyrano is best conceived of not as an author of *science fiction,* but one of *savoir fiction,* as Sylvie Romanowski notes.[10] That is, Cyrano is interested in the philosophical preoccupation of epistemology, and understanding the procedure of conducting science more than the practice of science itself.

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[6] J.S. Spink, *French Free Thought from Gassendi to Voltaire* (London: Athlone Press, 1960), 17. Georges Mongrédien, *Cyrano de Bergerac.* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1964), 44-45.
[7] Ibid., 63.
[8] Ibid., 49.
[9] Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit*, 626.
[10] Sylvie Romanowski, "Cyrano de Bergerac's Epistemological Bodies: 'Pregnant with a Thousand Definitions'" *Science Fiction Studies* 25, no. 3 (1998): 415.

Cyrano, like Montaigne, is not a scientist, but a humanist, and he falls within a humanist tradition inaugurated by Montaigne, who emphasized the epistemological content of ancient Greek and Roman thought as opposed to their rhetorical aspects, as observed in Chapter 1 (that is, Montaigne is original in his insistence on a serious, humanistic, and eclectic reception and renewing of ancient epistemology, and the idea that Epicureanism for example contains epistemic ideas that fall into the category of the well-thought, not just the well-said ("bien dire" as opposed to "bien penser").[11] Cyrano also bears the influence of Charron and Gassendi, who emphasized Montaigne's epistemological quest and amplified it with even more interest in epistemology for its own sake (especially questions such as atomism, the constitution of matter, and even humoral psychology which we have observed in Charron in Chapter 2).[12] Like Charron and Gassendi, Cyrano is an author with this particular humanist approach to epistemology, never dispensing with interactions with ancient and eclectic texts (as in Cartesian thought) even while offering a new emphasis on epistemological rigor.

Cyrano is also fundamentally consistent with the work of Montaigne, Charron and Gassendi, since all of these thinkers are concerned with producing a skeptical empiricist epistemology, but largely do not discover or produce new scientific knowledge. This form of empiricism is also pessimistic enough about logical reasoning and mathematics to neglect the practice of producing new theorems and laws, even if they be hypothetical in nature. Koyré notes that Gassendi did lose some amount of intellectual influence because of his disinterest in mathematics,[13] and the skeptical empiricists of this tradition all share this quality, preferring conceptual (even literary) writing as a means of practicing skeptical empiricism. In the adventure

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[11] See our analysis in Chapter 1 and Wes Williams, "How Montaigne Read his Lucretius," 152.
[12] See our analysis in Chapter 2 and Alexander Roose, "La curiosité de Pierre Charron," 157-168.
[13] Alexandre Koyré "Gassendi et la science de son temps," in *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée scientifique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973), 320-321.

narrative of *L'Autre monde*, Cyrano doesn't explain how his burlesque machines function, and is more concerned with the dialogic and epistemological expression of provisional certainty and skeptical empiricism. He is no scientist, but a practitioner, advocate, and theorist of skeptical empiricism, an author of epistemological fiction and not science fiction.[14]

Thus, this study considers Cyrano's work as constituting "savoir fiction," and in particular as involving a commitment to skeptical empiricism in the tradition of Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi. Before preceding with an analysis of this skeptical empiricism, it is important to confront two potential objections to this approach. The first one involves the idea that Cyrano's world is too fantastic, and thus unconcerned with the scientific laws that govern the real world. The second one stipulates that, while Cyrano's fictional worlds deal with content related to epistemology, Cyrano's burlesque and wildly polyphonic work aims, as Patrick Parrinder puts it, to "mock, satirise, discredit, or at best play with" ideas related to epistemology and scientific method, as opposed to advancing any ideas, however nuanced and complex they may be.[15]

In addressing the first of these objections, it is important to note that Cyrano's fictional worlds are not simple flights into fantasy, with no bearing on the real world, but involve philosophical conversations regarding epistemology interspersed with landscapes, observations about animals and governments, and other fictional elements which are often burlesque exaggerations, but serve as a means of reflecting on real world philosophical problems with a deeply epistemological bent. Franziska Sick aptly notes that "Le monde de la lune (ou du soleil)

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[14] Frédéric Tinguely, "Une épistémologie libertine de la découverte : la chance en progrès chez Cyrano de Bergerac," in *La Fabrique de la modernité scientifique: Discours et récits du progrès sous l'Ancien Régime*, ed. Frédéric Charbonneau (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), 72.
[15] Patrick Parrinder, "Science Fiction: Metaphor, Myth, or Prophecy?" in *Science Fiction: Critical Frontiers*, ed. Karin Sayer and John Moore (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 24.

n'est pas un monde opposé au monde réel, mais le point à partir duquel on peut « voir » ce monde réel."[16] The hyperbolic intellect of Cyrano's cabbages and their ability to sense the essences of things prompts discussion and reflection on the inability of humans to do so in the real world; Dyrcona's repeated processes of rebuilding and trying new strange machines for travel becomes a signifier of empiricist method; and, the monarchy of birds poses political and epistemological questions which are precisely applicable to monarchies composed of human beings. In all of these ways, it is crucial to see Cyrano as a writer of epistemological fiction, and quite like Montaigne, someone who used exaggerated anecdotes (about animals and the power of the imagination, for example) to provoke questions about the nature of human knowledge. Cyrano would happy to write, as Montaigne did, that "Les temoignages fabuleux, porveu qu'ils soient possible, servent [dans ce texte] comme les vrais" (I, 21, 105). In Cyrano as in Montaigne, the fallibility of the reasoning mind and the senses opens up a wide array of possibilities and theories of reality, whose variety makes the thesis of an infinite universe and plurality of worlds highly probable (II, 12, 524). In these skeptical empiricist texts, skepticism is credulous as opposed it cynical; it does not close up or restrict probable worlds, but opens up the possibility of new worlds and even new scientific principles, making the attempt to test out as many as possible given the abundance of the universe and the weakness of reason and sense perception. Thus, the strange discussions of different scientific principles and epistemological methods are the expression of a skeptical empiricist epistemology, in which weak probabilistic judgements about provisional hypotheses create an incentive to explore as many eclectic systems of thought as possible.

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[16] Franziska Sick, "Cyrano de Bergerac: le monde dans la perspective de *L'Autre Monde*," *Papers on French Seventeenth-Century Literature* 21, no. 40 (1994): 73.

In addressing the second of these objections, which stipulates that Cyrano's burlesque irony overrides any serious epistemological claims or messages in his work,[17] it is important to note that the abundant and irony of the text often serves to convey and emphasize Cyrano's skeptical empiricism as opposed to burying it. For example, in the pages to follow we will encounter an ironic version of the Cyrano narrator Dyrcona, a seventeenth century salon goer and *érudit*, who flatly conveys a kind of unconvincing fideism, and essentially notes that one should believe in the word of God, essentially, "just because" (Dieu "doit estre cru de ce qu'il dit, à cause qu'il le dit"). This is savage irony at the expense of Dyrcona in a conversation with an equally exaggerated atheist figure, the *fils de l'hôte*, but it is certainly rich with epistemological meaning and it is an interesting commentary on the kind of avowed, suspicious fideism of some of the *libertins érudits*.

Despite the amplified polyphony and irony of Cyrano's text, it is also telling that guiding characters like the *démon de Socrate* are practitioners of hypothesis formation and largely conform to a skeptical empiricist epistemology which attempts to use the weak tools of sense perception and reasoning to understand the world. Cyrano, as a practitioner of dialogic reasoning and skeptical empiricism in his text, identifies with the *démon de Socrate* and at times the *fils de l'hôte* in addition to other guiding characters in a way which gives the text a sense of epistemological direction.[18] Cyrano's fictions largely use burlesque to exemplify the Socratic and Academic skeptic notion that humans cannot attain certain knowledge (an argument prominent in

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[17] For this view, see Judith Sribnai, "Travel Narratives in the Seventeenth Century: La Fontaine and Cyrano de Bergerac," in *A History of Modern French Literature: From the Sixteenth Century to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Christopher Prendergast (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 254-5; Isabelle Moreau, "Sur deux conceptions concurrentes de la matière : contribution à l'analyse du 'matérialisme' cyranien," *La Lettre clandestine: revue d'information sur la littérature clandestine de l'âge classique* 11 (2002): 205-213.

[18] Line Cottegnies, "Margaret Cavendish and Cyrano de Bergerac: A Libertine Subtext for Cavendish's *Blazing World*" *Revue de la Société d'études anglo-américaines des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles* 54 (2002): 178; Joan DeJean, *Libertine Strategies: Freedom and the Novel in Seventeenth-Century France* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1981), 89.

Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi), but it also contains characters which practice provisional hypothesis formation and epistemic humility, and these are more often the butt of light mockery as opposed to savage satire.

3.2   Pyrrhonist Suspension of Judgement on the Essences of Soul and God in Cyrano

This study will now turn to Cyrano's total gapping of questions related to God and soul, a key epistemological theme in the skeptical empiricist tradition. As in passages of Montaigne cited earlier, Cyrano often proposes a wide array of possible theories about the nature of the soul, while suspending judgement about them completely in a form of Pyrrhonist equipollence. As Alexandra Torero-Ibad notes, Cyrano is less concerned with nailing down the precise nature of the soul than proposing "une pluralité de thèses" from atomism to a kind of vitalism involving fire.[19] In addition, for Cyrano as for Montaigne, Sextus Empiricus and the ten modes provide inspiration for equipollent suspension of judgement about the nature of the soul or mind.

As with the some of the more hyperbolic claims and possibilities about animal consciousness in the *Apologie,* Cyrano's fiction makes use of possible realities to show our lack of knowledge about plant and animal minds. On the moon, Cyrano encounters cabbages with hyper-intelligent souls who possess "un intellect universel, une connoissance parfaite de toutes les choses dans leurs causes" (83).[20] The point of this strange possibility is to indicate the inability of humans to reason about the nature of animal souls and consciousness, as is made

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[19] Alexandra Torero-Ibad, *Libertinage, science et philosophie dans le matérialisme de Cyrano de Bergerac*. (Paris: Champion, 2009), 492-4.

[20] For this chapter's citations of *L'Autre monde,* the following edition will be used: Cyrano de Bergerac, *L'Autre monde ou les États et empires de la Lune,* ed. Frédéric Lachèvre (Paris: Garnier, 1932). We cite this edition to make the reader aware of both LeBret's censored version and the edition of the work as Cyrano intended, and we will indicate all instances in which LeBret edits Cyrano's text.

clear in a subsequent remark made by the *démon de Socrate*: "Que si vous me demandés comme je sçay que les choux ont ces belles pensées, je vous demande comme vous sçavés qu'ilz ne les ont point" (84). This radical possibility indicates the inability of the human mind to grasp essences or the nature of consciousness, but it is also used, as with Montaigne, to contrast forms of animal souls and intelligence with (at least the possibility of) a modest and even mortal human soul and intellect. As Anthony M. Beichmann writes:

> Cyrano [distributes] the soul, reason and speech freely throughout the animal and vegetable kingdoms. However, he also went to the other extreme. He not only restored the soul to animals and plants, he also attempted to withdraw it from man. This attempt is an indication primarily of the breadth of his satire.[21]

Of course, these words could equally be used to describe Montaigne's evaluations of human and animal souls and intellect.

This theme of the inscrutability of animal intellect and perception, and the ironic possibility of an intelligent and immortal animal soul and a highly fallible and mortal human one, is repeated throughout *L'Autre monde*. One particularly sharp and ironic example is the claim of the birds that they are the only animals that possess rational and immortal souls; one which significantly ironizes and undermines similar claims made by Cartesian humans. The birds attribute Cyrano's coming to terms with their intelligence to "lumières dont la Nature éclaira ton instinct" (213), and Cyrano seems here to be poking fun directly at *a priori* epistemological claims about the soul, consciousness, and intelligence.[22] Cyrano's claims that plants have souls are also used to satirize religious beliefs related to the human soul, such as a scene in which a philosopher claims to only eat plants that have died of natural causes, since he believes them to

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[21] Anthony M. Beichmann, "Cyrano de Bergerac and the Beast-Machine," *Romance Notes* 10, no. 1 (1968): 111.
[22] For a catalog of the attacks on the idea of the mortal human soul voiced by the birds of this passage, see Busson, *La pensée religieuse française*, 500.

have rational souls and to feel pain.[23] These hyperbolic claims are varied and posited merely as possibilities, but they invariably point to humankind's inability to understand the nature of its own soul, intelligence, and mortality and how it may compare to the status of animal souls.

As with Gassendi and Montaigne, Cyrano gestures towards the idea of a human soul that is material and mortal while primarily insisting on the incomprehensibility of the soul and the impossibility of resolving theological questions about it. The *fils de l'hôte* in *L'Autre monde* implements Pyrrhonism to question common assumptions about humanity's immortal soul in a completely Montaignian spirit. For example, he asks on what basis humans can understand that their souls are immortal and leave the body while the animal soul is mortal and dies with the body. He also asks how it would be possible for the human soul know its immortality if it uses the five senses (and seems to require them to function) during life, but this consciousness disappears after death and provide no access to its subsequent nature.

We've already seen this same argument wielded by Montaigne, who notes that if the soul has a hard time understanding itself and its own nature, it is strictly impossible for it to judge things that are foreign to its conscious experience, like its own death (as Montaigne notes, the soul is relegated to "son estre et son domicile," which it can only imperfectly grasp due to its biases and imagination (II, 12, 541)). We can only, as Charron notes, understand "l'effet et l'action de l'ame" as it is observed by the mind itself (I, 7, 100-101), which Charron emphasizes is material and ceases to operate after death (I, 2, 55). Thus, these kinds of Pyrrhonist strategies, which gesture at our lack of knowledge about the fate of the human soul by insisting on our inability to understand its mortality or relationship to senses and consciousness (especially due to

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[23] Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari*, Radical Botany: Plants and Speculative Fiction* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020), 44.

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the termination of sensory experience after death), resemble the radical fideist suspension of judgement about the soul that we see in the Montaignian empiricist tradition.

The Montaignian and Gassendist tradition is also evident in Cyrano's radical suspension of judgement about the essence and nature of God. The reception of Montaigne and Gassendi as figures providing strategies for skeptical arguments suspending judgement about the nature of God is highly probable, as pamphlets condemned as "atheist" such as *Theophrastus Redivivus* (1659) bore much influence from Montaigne and linked Renaissance thinkers with Cyrano's work.[24] Thus, while Montaigne wasn't a widely popular author in the early seventeenth century, it does make sense that he was well-known and influential within the select coterie of the *libertins érudits*. The character of Cyrano's radical doubt with regard to God's nature and ability to influence the world bears the mark of Montaigne and Gassendi's skeptical conceptions of God as inscrutable, infinite, and characterized by a fully occult and unknowable disposition which questions any relationship between divine and human agency (involved for example in miracles and prayer).

Harth directly compares Cyrano's use of the word "nature" to replace God with Gassendi's use of the term, and even censored versions of Cyrano's *Autre monde* replace his use of "nature" with the word "God."[25] This may even draw one to think of suggestions by Catholic censors that Montaigne speak less often or differently of "fortune" in the *Essais.* Cyrano's description of God as distant from humanity, like the Sun, also recalls Montaigne's idea in the *Apologie* that God can be likened to the sun gods worshipped by Indigenous peoples.[26] After

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[24] Robert Niklaus, "The Eighteenth Century," in *A Literary History of France*, ed. P. E. Charvet (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967), 124.

[25] Harth, *The Polemics of Modernity,* 47.

[26] Montaigne notes that among those who worship divinities given physical form, "je me fusse, ce me semble, plus volontiers attaché à ceux qui adoroient le Soleil…c'est la piece de cette machine que nous descouvrons la plus esloignée de nous, et par ce moyen, si peu connue, qu'ils estoient pardonnables d'en entrer en admiration et reverence" (II, 12, 514).

describing the sun as being as distant from a *crocheteur* as God is from humanity, Cyrano

describes a God "étant incapable de passion" and notes that "il ne sauroit ni haïr, ni aimer

personne" (82). Cyrano also manages to relate the theme of God as the sun to the very

Montaignian discourse of contingency and fortune replacing the idea of divine providence and

agency impacting human fates:

> …l'orgueil insupportable des humains, qui se persuadent que la nature n'a été faite que pour eux, comme s'il était vraisemblable que le soleil, un grand corps quatre cent trente quatre fois plus vaste que la terre, n'eût été allumé que pour mûrir ses nèfles, et pommer ses choux.

> Non, non, si ce Dieu visible éclaire l'homme, c'est par accident, comme le flambeau du roi éclaire par accident au crocheteur qui passe dans la rue.

The idea of contingency also recalls Gassendi and Montaigne's views of divine providence and

miracles, and their eclectic use of Epicurean materialism to insist on the theme of the

contingency and unpredictability of matter, and the incomprehensibility, distance, and even

materiality or immanence of God.

For example, on the sun one of the Selenians explains to Cyrano how atoms behave

according to laws of pure probability and contingency:

> Vous ne savez donc pas qu'un million de fois cette matière, s'acheminant au dessein d'un homme, s'est arrêtée à former tantôt une pierre, tantôt du plomb, tantôt du corail, tantôt une fleur, tantôt une comète, et tout cela à cause du plus ou du moins de certaines figures qu'il falloit, ou qu'il ne falloit pas, à désigner un homme ? Si bien que ce n'est pas merveille qu'entre une infinité de matières qui changent et se remuent incessamment, elles aient rencontré à faire le peu d'animaux, de végétaux, de minéraux que nous voyons ; non plus que ce n'est pas merveille qu'en cent coups de dés il arrive une rafle ; aussi bien est-il impossible que de ce remuement il ne se fasse quelque chose, et cette chose sera toujours admirée d'un étourdi qui ne saura pas combien peu s'en est fallu qu'elle n'ait pas été faite (93-4).

These speculations, and the idea of the *Démon de Socrate* that "ce grand Pontife que vous

voyez la mitre sur la tête étoit peut-être il y a soixante ans, une touffe d'herbe dans mon jardin"

(108) recalls Montaigne and Gassendi's approach to Epicurean atomism. The theme of atomism

is used to emphasize themes that fit within the framework of this Montaignian and Gassendist skeptical tradition: a materialism marked by the unpredictability and contingency of the essential building-blocks of matter, illustrated by a constructed *possibility*, similar to that of Montaigne's speculation that perhaps, at some past or future moment, another series of atoms were aligned in a matter to give rise to another Montaigne.[27] This particular formulation in Montaigne, which emphasizes both the contingency and prodigiousness of atomic combinations, is a remarkably Cyranian theme, and is reminiscent of Cyrano's idea that it would be more remarkable if atoms came together to form an oak tree on one sole occasion, but it is more probable that, given the great quantity of random combinations of atoms that exist, multiple oak trees do exist (92-3).

These possibilities and this theme of contingency relates the unpredictable and unknowable nature of atomic essences and proposes a vision of God which is also Epicurean but with a skeptical bent: distant and inscrutable in its relationship with humanity, not able to respond to miracles and prayers, and above all unknowable. Cyrano's discourse on miracles and its relationship with his conception of God is inflected with Montaigne and Gassendi's thought in the sense that it emphasizes the entirely occult disposition of God, and places any positive theological conception of God in parenthesis in a kind of suspicious fideism gesturing at agnosticism. The parallels between Montaigne criticism's difficulty in categorizing his religious views and opinions articulated within Cyrano criticism are telling in this regard. As with Montaigne, Cyrano is sometimes categorized as more of a Deist or a secular fideist with a sincere belief in God,[28] but the conspicuousness and even contrived nature of his fideism makes

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[27] M.A. Screech, *Montaigne's Annotated Copy of Lucretius*, 134.
[28] Busson, *La pensée religieuse française,* 496; Jean-Jacques Bridienne, "À la Recherche du vrai Cyrano de Bergerac," *Information littéreaire,* 5 (1953): 172.

him seen as an atheist to others.[29] Thus, while Harth sees Cyrano's treatment of miracles, and his

frequent satirical use of the word "miracle" to simply describe strange and random events, as

"distinctive" in the seventeenth century,[30] it is nonetheless clear that they have their origin in

Montaigne's thought on contingency and unwillingness to take strong actions (like condemning

and killing "witches") on the basis of purported miracles.

In fact, within the empiricist tradition which reaches from Montaigne to Cyrano, any

conception of a personal god, interacting with prayers and wishes or granting miracles, is clearly

a social construction or imaginary concept. While Cyrano's *La Mort d'Agrippine* speaks of "Ces

Dieux que l'homme a fait, et qui n'ont point fait l'homme," Montaigne states that humanity "ne

sçauroit forger un ciron, et forge des Dieux à douzaines" (II, 12, 530).

Other patterns consistent with Montaigne and Gassendi's views on God in Cyrano relate

to God's essential nature as inconceivable or infinite. One finds maxims of a Charronian

character in Cyrano's *Fragment de physique*, in which epistemological questions are approached

in a condensed, organized fashion and the inability to understand essences in physics is a more

pressing question explicitly related to the incomprehensibility of God's essence, where God is

understood as a kind of mechanism or agent of causality. In this work, the incertitude of

understanding causality and physics is "augmentée par l'ignorance dans laquelle nous sommes

des secrets de Dieu."[31] Later, Cyrano notes that God's conduct and motivations are "à l'aventure

tout autre que ce que nous nous figurons."[32] In the same passage, Cyrano adds that one cannot

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[29] Antoine Adam, *Histoire de la littérature française au XVIIème siècle* (Paris: Dumomat, 1956): 115; Spink,
French Free Thought, 64-66.
[30] Harth, *The Polemics of Modernity,* 9.
[31] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Oeuvres Complètes,* ed. Madeleine Alcover (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 360.
[32] Ibid*.,* 377-78.

arrive at a "connaissance certaine et évidente des choses dans leurs causes" because of what he calls the "faiblesse de nos raisonnements."

L'Autre monde also arrives at a conclusion about the incomprehensibility of God, and also emphasizes the feebleness of human reason when compared to the infinite nature of God and God's creation. One encounters many arguments such as the following in the text:

> N'en doutez point, lui répliquai-je, comme Dieu a pu faire l'âme immortelle, il a pu faire le monde infini, s'il est vrai que l'éternité n'est rien autre chose qu'une durée sans bornes, et l'infini une étendue sans limites. Et puis Dieu serait fini lui-même, supposé que le monde ne fût pas infini, puisqu'il ne pourroit pas être où il n'y auroit rien, et qu'il ne pourroit accroître la grandeur du monde, qu'il n'ajoutât quelque chose à sa propre étendue, commençant d'être où il n'étoit pas auparavant (14).

In general, this argument which Cyrano poses to the viceroy of Canada, in addition to other versions (including a discussion of multiple worlds and cells within organisms) have a direct linkage with the thought of Gassendi, as Alcover notes.[33] But these ideas find their precise origin in the Montaignian empiricist tradition. These forms of argumentation propose that God, as something infinite, without duration or limitations of its nature or powers, is precisely indefinable, or as Cyrano says: "sans bornes" and "sans limites," leading to the logical impossibility of comprehending God's essence. This idea bears precise similarity to Charron's typically concise rendering of Montaignian ideas at the heart of the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* which we saw in Chapter 2, namely that: "Cognoistre une chose c'est la definer, la borner, sçavoir ses confrontations, son estendue, ses causes, ses fins, ses commens, son milieu, sa fin, son bord." This definition of "knowledge" strictly precludes its operation on the indefinable, the unlimited, and that which has occult causes and essences.[34]

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[33] Madeleine Alcover, *La pensée philosophique et scientifique de Cyrano de Bergerac* (Geneva: Droz, 1970), 164.
[34] Pierre Charron, *Les trois veritez* (S. Millanges: Bordeaux, 1595), 18.

This distinctively Charronian conception of an unknowable and infinite God is definitively secular and combines Pyrrhonist skepticism regarding essences with Epicurean secularism and contingency. This is not, however, the only aspect of secular thinking on the divine from the Montaignian and Gassendist skeptical empiricist tradition which serves as a strong influence for Cyrano's work. While many have argued that Cyrano is more blasphemous, and more remarkably modern in his atheism than any predecessor,[35] we wish here to emphasize that a kind of suspect "apparent" fideism, which draws attention to its own strangeness or inconsistencies, most accurately characterizes Cyrano's conception and presentation of the idea of God. Cyrano achieves this is in a somewhat more explicit way than Montaigne, but his techniques of presenting fideism and allowing the reader to make conclusions about the fragility and absurdity of fideist argumentation are fundamentally Montaignian in quality and origin.

We find in Cyrano, for example, the preoccupation which we find in the Montaignian tradition of clearly articulating fideism just at the moment when a suspect or potentially heretical theological argument is made, in a kind of suspicious apologetic gesture. Just as Montaigne defends himself at the start of *Des prières* before his attack on the idea of a personal God, Cyrano pairs his fideism with moments when he attacks a personal God interacting with humanity to create miracles, for example in texts such as *Lettre contre les sorciers* and *Contre un Jésuite assassin et médisant*:

> Non je ne croy point de Sorciers, encore que plusieurs grands personnages n'ayent pas esté de mon advis, et je ne deffère à l'authorité de personne, si elle n'est accompagnée de raison, ou si elle ne vient de Dieu, Dieu qui tout seul doit estre cru de ce qu'il dit, à cause qu'il le dit.[36]

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[35] See especially Harth, *The Polemics of Modernity*.

[36] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Les œuvres libertines de Cyrano de Bergerac,* ed. Frédéric Lachèvre, Vol. 2 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1921), 212.

As with Montaigne, such statements are especially conspicuous when we zoom out to understand

many of the convictions of the author, including radical Pyrrhonist skepticism about the nature of

God and soul, with occasional strong implications of the immanence of the former and mortality

of the latter. The statement that God "doit estre cru de ce qu'il dit, à cause qu'il le dit" betrays

the lack of philosophical infrastructure on which fideism is based, and likely seeks to undermine

belief in God and gesture at incompatibilities between reason and religion. This is especially true

since the *fils de l'hôte* gets the final word and interrogates precisely this faulty fideist argument

on the part of the narrator.

It is especially the narrator, or the *je* which relates these fantastical philosophical

adventures, which articulates these faulty, flatly fideist philosophical arguments, especially in

scenes like the assembly on the Moon to determine if Dyrcona is a reasoning animal and the

interactions with the *fils de l'hôte* mentioned above.[37] In fact, in many conversations, including

discussion of the soul with the *démon de Socrate,* Dyrcona is presented as nothing less than a

convinced Christian.[38] As Joan DeJean notes, Dyrcona, like some other libertine intellectual

protagonists, was unceasingly presented as having the utmost religious respectability and his

character falls in a fideist category.[39] As with Montaigne, there is first-person declaration of

fideism, but much of the text built around this declaration renders it problematic.

In an era when first-person narrative is rare,[40] the narrator's flat, ironic, fideist

confessions are notable. Montaigne's *je* also makes the fideistic confession, conspicuously

placed in "troublesome" passages, deeply self-conscious, drawing the reader's attention to the

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[37] Filippo D'Angelo, "Le statut du narrateur dans les *États et Empires de la Lune et du Soleil*," in *Lectures de Cyrano de Bergerac: Les États Et Empires de la Lune et du Soleil*, ed. Bérengère Parmentier (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 138-9.

[38] Ross Chambers, "*'L'Autre Monde,*' ou le mythe du libertin," *Essays in French Literature* 8 (1971): 29-46.

[39] Joan DeJean, *Libertine Strategies*, 108.

[40] Mary B. Campbell, *Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 179.

authorial construction of the confession itself. Montaigne draws direct attention to his own deliberate construction of a text that does not trouble the church. Although Cyrano could not have read Montaigne's *Journal de voyage,* published posthumously in 1774, Montaigne's self-conscious account of censoring and perfecting the troublesome passages about fortune, and drawing attention to that act, is distinctly Cyranian in the way in which it emphasizes the authorial, artificial construction of arguments that are acceptable for censors.

In both the case of Montaigne and Cyrano, the reader can combine arguments about the self-conscious confessions of the author with general and impersonal expressions of how authors and forms of religious freedom are suppressed given different cultural contexts. The author's self-conscious self-censorship and these general complaints about censorship combine to make purportedly faith-based understandings of God's nature and existence quite suspect. One comment about the nature of censorship in Cyrano's work can be found in his letter *Contre les sorciers,* in which he writes that the ancient Greeks and Romans "non plus que nous, n'ont pas toujours écrit ce qu'ils ont cru : souvent les lois, et la religion de leur pays les ont constraints d'accomoder leurs préceptes à l'intérêt, et au besoin de la politique."[41] Cyrano not only draws explicit parallels between those who have censored themselves in the past and his present writing practice (the Greeks and Romans censored themselves "non plus que nous"), but he also depicts himself as being imprisoned in Toulouse for his writings. Thus, the Dyrcona narrator character is one which does not openly declare atheism, but is suspected of atheism as readers of Montaigne and Gassendi were. Not only that, this dynamic of declaring belief and suspected atheism is even represented self-consciously in the fictional work.

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[41] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Lettres satiriques et amoreuses, précédées des Lettres diverses,* ed. J.-C. Darmon and A. Mothu (Paris: Desjonquères, 1999), 86.

Finally, fideism becomes suspect because there is no attempt on the part of Cyrano to hide a purely ethical will to believe, which is not an intrinsic criterion of belief, but an extrinsic and conservative goal of fostering a relatively homogenous society characterized by a common religion. This is analogous to Montaigne's political Pyrrhonism, which employs fideism in a skeptical gesture to maintain his *politique* vision of a Catholic state. In his *Apothéose d'un ecclésiastique boufon,* Cyrano writes: « J'avoüe que pour la manutencion des Etas, il y a beaucoup de choses vraies qu'il faut que le peuple ignore, beaucoup de fausses que nécessairement il faut qu'il croie. »[42]

As with Montaigne, a kind of ethical[43] criterion of belief becomes conspicuous in Cyrano, leading many scholars to believe that the only arguments which Cyrano advanced justifying Christianity were related to the ethical impacts of a less orderly or even less moral society.[44] Cyrano's *Mazarinades*, like Gassendi's publications as a monarchist historian and chronicler (and his friendship with Hobbes), provide clear evidence of his political Pyrrhonism, and his conservatism which sees the value of religious monarchy as a means of avoiding civil strife. Religious views and institutions create a paternal relationship between the sovereign and its subjects, and Cyrano thinks it credible that "l'Estcriture qui deffend aux peres d'irriter ceux qui leur sont redevables de la vie, fait la mesme deffense aux Roys au regard de ceux qui leur doivent obsissance."[45] Cyrano also speaks of the "unité de la clémence des souverains et de l'amour des sujets"[46] and makes the following statement of the way in which religion imposes a form of stability which both the sovereign and the subject must adhere to:

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[42] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Lettres*, ed. Luciano Erba (Milan : V. Scheiwiller, 1965), 136.
[43] "Ethical" is meant non-prescriptively here as "relating to ethics" and not epistemology.
[44] Harth, *The Polemics of Modernity,* 49-50.
[45] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Les œuvres libertines,* 257.
[46] Ibid., 258.

> Quelqu'indifférentes ou quelqu'obscures que puisse estre le loix dans les Estats, il y en a tousjours quelqu'une qui s'oppose diversement à la violence des Souverains, pour ce que la Religion qui s'y exerce explique ce qu'un Prince doit éviter et ce qu'il doit suivre. Quelle différence y auroit-il entre l'usurpation et la souveraineté légitime, entre les Tyrans et les Roys, entre les sujets et les esclaves ? Depuis quand les Souverains qui sont appellez les Pasteurs du peuple en doivent-ils estre les bouchers, et quelle est la loy qui nous dispense de toutes les autres ?[47] (257)

Cyrano's political vision in *L'Autre monde,* most explicitly outlined in his utopic government of birds, is also monarchical and pacifist one whose most innovative feature is the idea of changing monarchs every six months, and the rejection of the idea that monarchs derive their authority from God.[48] This passage is the only true political vision in a book which is more concerned with freedom of thought than freedom of action, and which harps on the author's imprisonment, a parodied version of Galileo's trial, and the tyranny of the ideas of the old over the young, but which does nothing to question the monarchical political order. The birds ruled in a pacifist monarchy make arguments above all for liberty of thought, and the Spaniard Gonzalès (parallel to the Dyrcona who is mocked for his strange ideas and leaves Earth on this account) is said to have adventured to the Moon to attain purely intellectual freedom:

> Ce qui l'avoit véritablement obligé de courir toute la terre et enfin de l'abandonner pour la Lune, étoit qu'il n'avoit pu trouver un seul pays où l'imagination même fut en liberté (52).

In Cyrano, we see again and again that secular empiricist epistemology, embodied by Gonzalès, the narrator, a stand-in for Galileo, the *démon de Socrate,* and so many others, is the intellectual legacy which Cyrano wants to transmit individually to the reader in his work. Epistemology is subordinate to a new political vision, and Galileo's scientific enterprise is packaged with a careful fideism to keep it alive within a Catholic political order. Cyrano falls within a tradition of

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[47] Ibid., 257.
[48] J.F. Normano, "A Neglected Utopian: Cyrano De Bergerac, 1619-55," *American Journal of Sociology* 37, no. 3 (1931): 456-57.

thinkers like Montaigne and Gassendi who insist on purely intellectual freedom to advance their empiricist skeptical epistemology, insisting on the impossibility of comprehending God and the soul and providing space for the reader to arrive at a deeply secular empiricist thought individually, while insisting on the ethical necessity of religious ideology of the clergy and monarchy in avoiding civil strife in what they imagine to be a kind of Hobbesian war of all against all.

3.3   Cyrano's Fallibilist Empiricism: Sense Perception and the Reasoning Mind

Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi are fallibilist empiricists, holding that both sense perception and logical reasoning are very weak criteria for understanding the nature of reality, but may be used together in order to understand probable theories about the world. We have knowledge only of the appearances which are known to us through sense perception, and logical reasoning about different appearances allow us to produce probable but highly imperfect theories about the nature of the world.

We also see this epistemic structure consistently throughout Cyrano's writings. In his *Fragment de physique,* he establishes that one cannot have direct knowledge of the nature of objects in the world, but only of appearances from sense perception.[49] Cyrano satirizes deductive reasoning based on *a priori* reasoning in the *Estats de la lune,* especially in passages which describe a kind of instinctual knowledge that God intends the human race to be chaste. Essential "knowledge" is equated with faith and is not presented as a true means of acquiring knowledge, and it is mocked for its idiosyncrasies.

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[49] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Œuvres complètes,* 376-77.

Cyrano firmly places epistemology in the mind's interaction with sensory phenomena. In addition, as with Montaigne and Gassendi, Cyrano combines Academic skepticism and Epicureanism to articulate a theory of secondary qualities, according to which more or less probable theories about the nature of matter (at the atomic level) can be articulated. For example, in his adventures in the Sun, Cyrano notes that fire acts on different substances in different ways, which indicates that it is probable (not certain as in Epicureanism, hence Cyrano's eclecticism here) that their atomic structures interact differently when exposed to heat, and fire is an *effet* provoked by this interaction (158). Probabilistic theories, in an Academic Skeptic mode, can be made about the nature of different forms of matter on fire and the nature of fire itself, but that essence cannot be known, only appearances. In another passage on fire in the *Fragment de physique,* Cyrano asserts that "Puisque, l'épingle ou le feu étant appliqués à la main, nous ne connoissons immédiatement et distinctement que ce qu'ils y excitent, et non pas l'épingle ni le feu."[50] Clear and distinct perception itself is only relegated to the senses, and Cyrano's example of the sensory impression being the most proximate locus of epistemic experience or knowledge formation is similar to Charron's view that only the "face and forme externe" (I, 18, 156) of phenomena are fully comprehensible, but do not lead to knowledge of essences.

In addition, these examples can be conceived of as a reversed form of the Cartesian wax argument: it is only the sensory phenomena like a prick on the finger, a burning sensation, or the sensory phenomena associated with liquid or solid wax that are knowable, as opposed to the fundamental nature or essence of the wax. What is important and clear in this citation is that Cyrano, as with the entire Montaignian tradition and its usage of optical illusions (beginning with Montaigne's criticisms of Epicurean insistence on the agreement between sense phenomena

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[50] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Œuvres complètes,* 375.

with the nature of things), a sensation like the pricking of a pin does not provide fundamental knowledge of the pin. However, since it is a form of sense perception, it is the first locus of knowledge formation and is clear and distinct with respect to its own nature as pure sensation.

In the same way that Gassendi reverses the definitions of *a priori* and *a posteriori,* Cyrano insists on understanding sense perception as what he calls a form of "première connoissance."[51] As Montaigne notes in *De l'experience,* this sensory knowledge comes first and is the beginning of knowledge, but for all that it is not perfect. Cyrano consistently maintains this view of the antecedence of sense perception, making the streams of the five senses flow into the rivers of Memory, Imagination, and Judgement in his solar landscape. The *fils de l'hôte* also expounds on verified sense perception in a Montaignian and Gassendist mode which combines Epicurean and Academic skeptic influences, relating that sense perception is a starting point for knowledge but must be verified and scrutinized by logical reasoning (13). In another key passage emphasizing the antecedence of sense perception, a wise traveler on the Sun able to speak words corresponding to their essences strongly endorses inductive method, noting that he proceeds from effects and appearances to causes and essences.[52]

While sense perception is antecedent, and the definitions of *a priori* and *a posteriori* should be switched according to Cyrano, sense perception, as we have seen in Montaigne and Gassendi, is not a particularly reliable means of attaining knowledge, and Cyrano is what we may call a fallibilist, who emphasizes the weakness of both sense perception and logical reasoning but nonetheless essays probabilistic theories about the nature of reality. Cyrano's employs the arguments of Montaigne and Gassendi on the weakness of sense perception which,

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[51] Ibid., 377-9.
[52] Spink, *French Free-Thought,* 59.

as we have seen earlier, find their origin in Sextus Empiricus's modes, especially arguments

about how different physical positions, states of consciousness, and different sense organs in

animals perceive the same phenomena with different forms of sense perception. Cyrano's

hyperbolic version of this argument comes in his cabbages, which have the superior sensory

abilities compared to human sense organs which are "souvent trompeur" (83). Christian Barbe

notes the similarities between Cyrano's discussion of the sensory capacities of the cabbages and

birds and Montaigne and Gassendi's comparisons of human and animal sense perception.[53] More

specifically, these statements bear the influence of their eclectic use of Sextus Empiricus to

emphasize the fallibility of sense perception without fully dispensing with it as a criterion of

knowledge, emphasizing the need to use reason to verify the most likely theories of knowledge

based on sense perception. In fact, Cyrano makes use of other heavily borrowed arguments from

ancient skepticism within Montaigne and Gassendi, such as the idea that different conscious

states and conditions of sensory organs, such as being blind, influence sense perception. The

démon de Socrates explains to Cyrano that, in the same way that we cannot know sensory

phenomena perceived by other animals and beings, a blind person cannot conceive of "la beauté

d'un paysage, le coloris d'un tableau, les nuances de l'iris" (42).

Thus, examples of this eclectic style of argumentation with Pyrrhonist arguments occur

not only in the use of comparisons between human and animal sense perception, but also in

emphasizing optical illusions, and the way in which different perspectives and conditions create

different forms of sensory perception. We see such an example, similar to Montaigne's borrowed

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[53] Christian Barbe, "Cyrano: la mise à l'envers du vieil univers d'Aristote," *Actes des Journées Internationales d'Etude du Baroque* 7 (1974): 49-70.

examples, when Cyrano tries to convince Viceroy of Canada of the plausibility of heliocentrism, an argument which requires the use of verified sense perception:

> Monsieur…la plupart des hommes, qui ne jugent que par les sens, se sont laissé persuader à leurs yeux ; et de même que celui dont le vaisseau vogue terre à terre, croit demeurer immobile, et que le rivage chemine, ainsi les hommes tournant avec la Terre autour du Ciel, ont cru que c'étoit le Ciel lui-même qui tournoit autour d'eux (13).

Cyrano also inscribes himself in a distinct tradition (Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi) of authors who wield optical illusions, inspired by ancient skeptical arguments, in order to emphasize the need to use verified sense perception to support the idea of hypothesis formation. All of these thinkers have made use of and generated their own examples of optical illusions like Montaigne's trumpet which sounds like it comes from another source (II, 12, 592), or small handwriting appearing clearer to Gassendi's friend with protruding eyes. Cyrano presents another form of this argument: those on a boat, presumably moving at a consistent speed, usually do not perceive that they are moving, even though other sensory phenomena combined with reasoning clearly indicate that they are moving from one destination to another.

In the same way that Cyrano argues that most people reason according to sense perception alone without scrutinizing these appearances with the aid of reason, Montaigne similarly argues that the common person ("vulgaire") "n'ayant pas la faculté de juger les choses par elles mesmes" is likely to leave these judgements "à la fortune et aux apparences" (482). In Chapter 1, we have seen in detail how Montaigne criticizes this kind of Epicurean view on the infallibility of the senses,[54] and in Chapter 2 we have seen how Charron and Gassendi consider *akatalepsis* an ineluctable problem in philosophy; in the example Gassendi gives, one cannot understand the fundamental nature of bread because we perceive it and digest it differently

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[54] This view also challenges Aristotelian arguments about the reliability of sensory phenomena, and also contrasts some Cartesian rationalist arguments about God's benevolence and the impossibility of his creation of a world in which sensory phenomena cause deception.

depending on how hungry we are, how sick and deadened our tongue is, and the like. However, one can study it and make reasonable assumptions about it based on how it acts under different conditions, in the same way that Cyrano has combined various data and logical arguments to propose the heliocentric model as more elegant and more probable.

This idea of verified sense perception, of using both reason and sense perception in concert despite the weakness of these two criteria of knowledge, is what we have called weak or skeptical empiricism, and it is a form of epistemology shared by Montaigne, Gassendi, and Cyrano. While emphasizing the weaknesses of the senses (as we have seen in Cyrano's Montaigne-inflected use of the Pyrrhonist modes), and emphasizing the weakness of reason (arguments in Cyrano which will be treated shortly), both methods allow us to arrive at probabilistic judgements about the world. In the case of sense perception, we have just seen criticisms of this form of knowledge and the need to use reason in concert with it, but we must also note that Montaigne and Cyrano are clear on the necessity of using the tool of sense perception while simultaneously emphasizing the fallibility of this tool. Montaigne directly relates what could be called his mature textual and philosophical methodology in *De l'experience*: while experience is unreliable, it is the first source of knowledge and a useful one to scrutinize as a form of understanding oneself and the world.

If Montaigne emphasizes his first-person experiences in a kind of life-writing or writing of the self, it is notable that Cyrano chose to narrate his lunar and solar adventures in the first-person, a rare choice in seventeenth century France.[55] Even if he does this through a fictional framework, this decision emphasizes the value of using sense perception to verify the unverifiable like for example, the rotation of earth on its axis after Cyrano is propelled in space

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[55] Campbell, *Wonder and Science,* 179.

and lands in Canada. Réné Démoris proposes that the motivation behind Cyrano's use of the first person is epistemological, and he cites two different reasons pertinent to this study: Cyrano wants to emphasize the primacy and necessity of experience as a criterion of knowledge, and to show that the first-person narrator has a kind of phenomenological relationship with sense phenomena and is constantly producing mental judgments about sensory phenomena.[56] The narrator, like Montaigne, is essaying his judgement in eclectic philosophical dialogues and interactions with the world, and is aware of the ineluctable interaction between fallible sense perception and reasoning in this process.

Before turning to the theme of probabilism and scientific method in Cyrano, we will touch upon this phenomenological aspect of Cyrano's work, and its criticisms of logical reasoning and mental processes, which also form an essential part of Cyrano's weak empiricism. We have already seen, as with sense perception, Cyrano's assertion of the necessity of this tool (within the framework of verified sense perception), and we will turn to Cyrano's insistence on the tool's fallibility.

Cyrano's criticisms of Aristotelian rationalism have a particularly Charronian quality: they point sharply and eloquently to the problem of adapting philosophy to principles which are already determined instead of adapting and revising principles themselves:

> [Aristote] accomodait sans doute les principes à sa philosophie au lieu d'accommoder sa philosophie aux principes (69).[57]

Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi all make this precise point: namely that one of the dangers of rationalism is that the entire logical structure, from premise to conclusion, is visible to the

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[56] René Démoris, *Le roman à la première personne* (Paris: A. Colin, 1975), 52-53.
[57] Also see this passage in the *Lettres contre les sorciers:* "…je me moque [des Pédants]…car il est aisé de prouver tout ce qu'on veut quand on ajuste les principes aux opinions, et non pas les opinions aux principes." Cyrano, *Lettres satiriques et amoreuses,* 86.

rationalist in such a way that it is possible to fabricate or adapt premises in a system of thought in order to produce the desired conclusions. Montaigne remarks that in the case of "principes presupposez" in the manner of "Geometriens": "Il est bien aisé, sur ds fondemens avouez, de bastir ce qu'on veut" (II, 12, 540); in Chapter 1 we have also reviewed Montaigne's idea of logical reasoning as a dangerous and pliable tool not to be placed in all hands.[58] Cyrano's weariness of accommodating premises to preconceived philosophies also mirrors Charron, who noted how logic can "preste armes pour soustenir et defender les opinions anticipées" (38) and Gassendi, who warned of the "twisting paths and courses of dialectics" which can justify any preconceived notion one desires.[59]

Cyrano associates this faulty philosophical system-building with the epistemic structure of Cartesian thought, attacking the use of reason among those "docteurs" who consider *a priori* that anyone supporting the hypothesis a universe containing a vacuum is "un idiot" or "un fou," even an "athée" (the latter term appears as "quelque-chose de pis" in LeBret's somewhat softened and censored version) (52).[60] Another attack on Cartesian rationalism's rigid epistemological structure comes when Cyrano's Campanella describes Cartesian physics, noting that "sa Physique…on ne la devoit lire qu'avec le même respect qu'on écoute prononcer des oracles" (242). He later qualifies "principes" of Descartes as being less conducive to science and judgement because they are "suposez" (this is the same word Montaigne used above and elsewhere to critique the tendency to begin with the desired philosophical view and fabricate principles which support it). The idea of Descartes as a kind of oracle, a creator of mythic principles that are presupposed, is certainly far from an endorsement coming from the pen of

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[58] For more on this see MacLean, "Montaigne and the Truth of the Schools," 147.
[59] Margaret J. Osler, "Gassendi's Views on Scientific Knowledge," 558.
[60] See, for example, Alcover's 2004 edition, page 77 for the uncensored version.

Cyrano.[61] Daniel, who modeled much of his otherworldly travel narrative on Cyrano's, will use this theme and critique of Descartes as a kind of mystic as a central preoccupation of his *Voyage du monde de Descartes*. In fact, Daniel produces the same exact critique as Cyrano, specifically discussing the strange mystical capacity which would be required to prevent God from deceiving Descartes about his clear and distinct ideas.[62]

Cyrano even sometimes used mostly old-fashioned Scholasticism to illustrate the dangers of an epistemological structure beginning with, and fully assenting to, first principles doctored to produce the desired conclusions. The critique of pedantism which runs directly through Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi is obvious enough in Cyrano's *Le Pédant joué* and *Contre les sorciers*, where he repeatedly advocates against using the authority of authors like Plato and Aristotle as a criterion or presumed source of knowledge,[63] although he interestingly exempts intuitive knowledge from God from these critiques in a fideist mode.[64] Nonetheless, as we've noted in our chapter on Charron and Gassendi, Scholasticism becomes a rather fringe intellectual tendency towards the middle third of the seventeenth century, and it is logical that Cyrano does not feel the same degree of need to attack it as Montaigne, Charron, or even Gassendi in his early works.

Finally, the way in which Cyrano begins his philosophical journey is itself an indication of his rejection of Cartesian rationalism. If, as noted earlier, the use of the *je* is relatively rare in this period, it points not only to the precedent of Montaigne but also to that of Descartes, and

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[61] Madeleine Alcover, *Cyrano relu et corrigé* (*Lettres, Estats du Soleil, Fragmnents de Physique*) (Geneve: Droz, 1990), 125.

[62] Michael Heyd, "Descartes – an Enthusiast *malgré* lui?" in Sceptics*, Millenarians, and Jews,* eds. Richard Popkin and David S. Katz (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1990), 53.

[63] An example of this kind of argument in Cyrano: "N'embrassons donc point une opinion à cause que beaucoup la tiennent, ou parce que c'est la pensée d'un grand Philosophe, mais seulement à cause que nous voyons plus d'apparence qu'il soit ainsi que d'estre autrement" *Contre les soricers,* 86.

[64] Laurence Rauline, "Les Lettres de Cyrano de Bergerac," 196-7.

may serve to underscore the contrast between Dyrcona's empiricist "I" and his decision to explore the physical universe, as contrasted with the Cartesian epistemological adventure which takes place in a room by his stove.[65] Fittingly in a schema that seeks to replace the *a priori* with the *a posteriori*, the beginning of Cyrano's *L'autre monde,* which provides the motive for his philosophical journey, attempts and discards a series of rationalist *a priori* principles as a means of getting started with the philosophical process before the journey of empiricism and experience begins. As Dyrcona contemplates whether the moon constitutes another world (that preliminary question which gives the two novels their title), he first notes: "je demeurai gros de mille définitions de la lune, dont je ne pouvais accoucher" (6). Without access to experience, Dyrcona simply cannot begin his epistemological journey. We see Dyrcona asking himself a question resembling one we have already seen Gassendi ask Descartes: "Je pense, dîtes vous ; mais que pensez-vous ? Car enfin toute pensée est pensée de quelque-chose. Est-ce le Ciel ? la Terre ? ou n'importe quoi d'autre ?" (D, 83-84, 289 b). Without sense perception, in other words, the mind is a *tabula rasa* and cannot produce *a priori* definitions or principles about anything. Here, the vocabulary of birthing ideas gives a sense of the Socratic *maïeutique* (his dialogic method associated with midwifery) which characterizes the dense dialogues of *L'Autre monde,*[66] and cannot begin without concrete experiences of the world. As with Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi, Socratic method and epistemology is important here, and placed in a framework which, in terms of its pure epistemology, resembles Academic Skepticism more than Platonism.

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[65] Margaret Sankey, "The Paradoxes of Modernity: Rational Religion and Mythical Science in the Novels of Cyrano de Bergerac," in *Religion, Reason and Nature in Early Modern Europe,* ed. Robert Crocker. (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), 43.

[66] Frédéric Tinguely, "Singeries romanesques et anthropologie libertine au XVIIe siècle," *Littérature* 143 (2006): 93.

Equally, in Cyrano's empiricist escape from pure definitions, there is a sense of the

apraxia question that has already been noted in Montaigne, Charron and Gassendi. That is,

without experiencing and interacting with the world, the philosopher is stuck in Pyrrhonist

equipollent suspension of judgement regarding all matters. If he is agnostic about the Cartesian

idea of the infinite divisibility of atoms as Harth suggests,[67] this has to do with difficulty in using

sense perception as a criterion in discerning whether this is true or false. Thus, Cyrano observes

at the start of his epistemological journey that there is no such thing as a practice of philosophy

without experience of the outside world.

3.4   Probabilism and Provisional Certainty in Cyrano

If Cartesianism insists on the truth of clear and distinct ideas, Cyrano is clearly in

company with Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi in his deeply skeptical and empiricist

probabilism, especially in this key passage of the *Fragment de Physique*:

> Il ne faut pas toutefois être si vain, que de croire certainement avoir trouvé le vrai, parce
> que nous pourrions bien soupçonner qu'un autre, possible, quelque jour, donnera une
> explication différente de celle-ci, laquelle satisfera et s'accordera de même à toutes les
> expériences dont la nôtre rend raison. C'est pourquoi tout ce que nous pouvons juger en
> faveur de notre hypothèse, c'est de la faire passer pour vraisemblable, et non pas pour
> vraie. Donc, encore que par la Physique on puisse se proposer (comme nos superbes et
> ridicules Pédans) une connoissance certaine et évidente des choses dans leurs causes, qui
> est, à la vérité, ce qu'on pourroit souhaiter, nous ne le devons pas attendre de la foiblesse
> de nos raisonnemens, à moins que nous ne fussions aidés des révélations d'un Dieu, qui
> ne peut manquer, et dont la conduite est à l'avanture tout autre que ce que nous nous
> figurons. C'est ce qui doit encore augmenter notre incertitude, et nous empêcher de parler
> avec bravade. Après cela, si nous nous confessons inférieurs à ceux qui se vantent d'avoir
> trouvé la vérité, nous obtiendrons au moins par-dessus eux l'avantage d'être plus justes
> estimateurs de la valeur des choses.[68]

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[67] Harth, *The Polemics of Modernity,* 102.
[68] Cyrano, *Œuvres complètes,* 377.

This longer passage is quoted in full because it synthesizes so many elements of the Montaignian skeptical empiricist tradition: a form of probabilism or hypothesis formation which aims at knowledge in a constructive manner while heavily insisting on the fallibility of human reasoning, and an epistemological structure of provisional certainty which insists on the possibility of replacing one hypothesis with another if it is deemed more probable given new information (recall that Montaigne codified the use of the term "vray-semblable," used by Charron and Gassendi as well, for these probabilistic claims inspired by Academic Skeptic thought and the term *probabile*).[69] The passage also includes a fideist insistence on revelation as a criterion belief which is oddly gratuitous and exterior to these empiricist concerns, and an insistence on a kind of Academic Skeptic view of Socratic judgement emphasizing humanity's inability to obtain complete knowledge (and the importance of awareness regarding this epistemic condition). In this passage, physics can only be a "science conjecturale"[70] and there is no absolute certainty possible when pursuing knowledge of the physical world.

This idea of physics as a "science conjecturale" is a framework in which all other epistemological claims fit in Cyrano's work (in other words, Cyrano's epistemology is thoroughly probabilistic). While much has been made of Cyrano's heliocentrism, few remark that, as in Montaigne's case with the Copernican hypothesis, Cyrano conceives of it as the best current hypothesis with a decent probability of being supplanted by another one. Cyrano's arguments for heliocentrism are weaker and follow weaker criteria than many acknowledge: for example, he emphasizes the mathematical simplicity and elegance of the model, and its easier

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[69] See for example (II, 29, 705); (II, 12, 561); (II, 12, 571); (III, 11, 1030), and the articulation of *juidcandi potestas* in passages such as (II, 12, 503-4). This study has seen similar echoes of this precise Montaignian concept of "vray-semblance" in various passages of Charron, who places even greater and liberal emphasis on this epistemological concept in *De la Sagesse*: 42, 128, 149, 386, 400, 404, 410, and PTS 858 among other places.
[70] Ibid., 360.

comprehensibility to a lay person, as something which makes it a more proximate or likely explanation.[71] In this example, Cyrano employs a combination of sense perception and reasoning which is not even close to being fully conclusive about the matter at hand. While Francis Godwin takes every opportunity to use the fictional framework of a lunar exploration to "prove" heliocentric theories, Cyrano is much more interested in simply exposing the reader to debates about heliocentrism.[72] Additionally, we see here a case where Cyrano is more interested in skeptical empiricism as a philosophical structure than the practice of astronomy. Even Cyrano's most aggressive endorsements of heliocentrism are couched within philosophical dialogues and conversations. We return to a passage from earlier in this chapter in which Cyrano couches this theories in a vocabulary of probabilism or *vray-semblance*:

> Ajoutez à cela à cela l'orgueil insupportable des humains, qui se persuadent que la Nature n'a été faite que pour eux, comme s'il étoit vraisemblable que le Soleil, un grand corps quatre cent trente-quatre fois plus vaste que la terre: n'eût été allumé que pour mûrir ses nèfles, et pommer ses choux (13).

For Cyrano, the heliocentric model is more elegant, and he observes bias influencing judgement in the geocentric model, so he supports the heliocentric model as nothing more or less than the most probable or "vray semblable" of theories. Thus, even in cases where Cyrano may be inclined to support a theory, he understands and presents such a theory provisional. In this way, Cyrano's epistemology is in direct alignment with that of Montaigne, who also expressed excitement about heliocentrism as a new cosmological model, but was explicit about its provisional status as a hypothesis and its ability to be replaced by yet another theory (II, 12, 570):

> Le ciel et les estoilles ont branlé trois mille ans; tout le monde l'avoit ainsi creu, jusques à ce que Cleanthes le Samien ou, selon Theophraste, Nicetas Siracusien s'avisa de

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[71] Madeleine Alcover, "Cyrano de Bergerac et le feu : les complexes prométhéens de la science et du phallus," *Rice University Studies in French* 63 (1977): 15.

[72] Edward W. Lanius, *Cyrano de Bergerac and the Universe of the Imagination* (Genève: Droz, 1967), 50.

maintenir que c'estoit la terre qui se mouvoit par le cercle oblique du Zodiaque tournant à l'entour de son aixieu; et, de nostre temps, Copernicus a si bien fondé cette doctrine qu'il s'en sert tres-regléement à toutes les consequences Astronomiques. Que prendrons nous de là, sinon qu'il ne nous doit chaloir le quel ce soit des deux? Et qui sçait qu'une tierce opinion, d'icy à mille ans, ne renverse les deux precedentes?

In addition to passages reinforcing this kind of epistemology of provisional certainty and hypothesis formation, there are also passages in the *Estats de la lune* in which Cyrano shows that he is in concert with the skeptical empiricist tradition of Montaigne, Charron, and Gassendi by consistently making the Academic Skeptic and Socratic assertion that humanity cannot attain complete knowledge of the world, only this probabilistic knowledge (moreover, judgement about humanity's epistemic status is not suspended in a Pyrrhonist manner). Cyrano cleverly invokes the Socratic idea of humanity's ignorance when he suggests that the fruit of the Biblical tree of knowledge actually blinds the eater with a lack of knowledge (27-31).

In addition, in the same way that Montaigne is influenced by Socratic method and humanity's ignorance in an Academic Skeptic sense, Cyrano is interested, given this weak or deeply skeptical empiricism, in exposing and interacting with multiple theories of knowledge, and providing the reader access to these theories of knowledge in a dialogic mode which allows the reader to produce probabilistic judgements about them. Conversations and debates are the constitutive material of philosophy, where theories are debated, deemed more or less probable, and repeatedly replaced and revised. Cyrano also self-consciously attributes Socratic dialogic qualities to Gassendi by having his *démon de Socrate* note that he often visited Gassendi on Earth.

As part of this intellectual tradition inflected with the influence of Academic Skepticism, Cyrano often poses *pro et contra* conversations for the reader to interpret, and the discussions heavily employ words within a lexical field denoting hypotheses and provisional certainty, like

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supposer, proposer, and *vray semblable.*[73] Terms connected with the idea of perceived or supposed truths are core to Montaigne's translation of *probabile* as vray-semblance, his rhetoric of judgement which remarks on principles which are "supposez", and to Gassendi's rhetoric and persistent use of *videtur* observed in Chapter 2.

In addition, the polyphony of philosophical voices in dialogue with Dyrcona in *L'autre monde,* and even Cyrano's *Lettres satiriques et amoureuses,* employ *disputatio* as their rhetorical backbone.[74] Montaigne and Cyrano are similar in their use of dialogic form, in Montaigne's case involving the *je*'s interaction with philosophical texts, and in Cyrano's case involving a narrativized *je* (Dyrcona) in conversation with philosophers talking (Montaigne likely dictated much of his *Essais* and was talking with philosophers in some sense as well). Cyrano's extensive use of dialogue is also notable for the way in which it prefigures philosophical dialogues incorporated with narrative, a form which would increase greatly in popularity in the eighteenth century.[75]

In his polyphonic text, Montaigne selects only secular theories of matter and pares away theological concerns, but having made this choice, he exposes the reader to a cornucopia of empiricist theories of matter, from Epicurean and Stoic ones to humoral psychology. Cyrano also achieves the same thing with his philosophical dialogues, first selecting only non-theological questions, then allowing the reader to encounter theories of matter from the Hellenistic schools to Renaissance alchemists to seventeenth century versions of mechanistic and atomist models. Cyrano exposes the readers to epistemological questions of verified sense perception in his

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[73] Olivier Bloch, "Cyrano philosophant : dualités et pluralismes," in *Lectures de Cyrano de Bergerac: Les États Et Empires de la Lune et du Soleil,* ed. Bérengère Parmentier (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2004), 27-8.
[74] Florence Balique, "La métaphore, figure de l'insolence dans les *États et Empires de la lune* de Cyrano de Bergerac," in *Styles, genres, auteurs,* ed. Gérard Berthomieu and Françoise Rullier-Theuret (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), 69.
[75] Joan DeJean, "Method and Madness in Cyrano de Bergerac's Voyage dans la Lune" *French Forum* 2 (1977): 255.

debate on heliocentrism with the Viceroy of Canada, two theories of matter from Gonzales, mechanistic models and naturalism from the *Démon de Socrate,* materialism and atheism with the *fils de l'hôte,* plenism and atomism with Campanella, and much more. Guilhem Armand has determined that Cyrano is deeply eclectic, but constantly exposing readers to questions about epistemology and secular theories of matter rooted in ancient philosophy and skepticism,[76] and earlier chapters have shown that these questions, and their exposition in a provisional dialogic form, form the bread and butter of Montaigne's *Essais* and its influence on a seventeenth century intellectual tradition known to Cyrano as well.

3.5   Cyrano's Eclecticism and the Montaignian Empiricist Tradition

Since the launching point for Cartesian skepticism is a rationalist, Pyrrhonist skepticism which suspends judgement in all matters, Descartes's prescription to throw away prior philosophical traditions and start anew is a crucial element of his epistemic framework. While this form skepticism leads to a radical rejection and cynicism about prior philosophical traditions, Montaigne, Gassendi, and Cyrano oppose this tradition with probabilism and a radical credulity and willingness to give (at least partial) ear to any philosophical tradition willing to engage with them on the same empiricist and secular philosophical territory. Cyrano engages with Hellenistic philosophy, atomism, Italian Renaissance materialism, various atomistic models, Gnosticism, humoral psychology, and debates within the Gassendist and Cartesian traditions and their intellectual heirs (and much more). While Descartes described himself as the philosopher who used skepticism to cleanse all prior philosophical traditions to start anew, Cyrano's friend

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[76] Guilhem Armand, *Les fictions à vocation scientifique de Cyrano de Bergerac à Diderot* (Pessac: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2013), 166.

Henry LeBret notes that Cyrano "ne blâmat jamais un ouvrage absolument, quand il y trouvait quelque chose de nouveau."[77]

This idea of eclecticism, in which a probabilistic framework encourages Cyrano to expound a free-thinking philosophy of judgement and expose the reader to interact with multiple theories of knowledge, poses a solution to what many scholars have taken to be the rather puzzling amalgamation of philosophical theories presented in *L'Autre monde.* Lavers has insisted on a "an unshakable belief in the unity of knowledge" of an intellectual like Ficino or Pico which motivates his eclecticism,[78] whereas scholars from LaChèvre to Aldington have accused Cyrano of a rather confused incoherence or imprecision.[79] Jean-Michel Gros has asked whether Cyrano should be considered a philosopher at all,[80] a question that rings with familiarity for any Montaigne scholar. This study proposes that Cyrano's interest in a probabilistic epistemic framework and form is more important than the content of philosophical theories in the work, and that this quality is also inspired by Montaigne's *Essais,* in which epistemology is practiced through a formal structure, and the *content*, the actual physics or philosophy of matter, are proposed and provisional. What matters most about the philosophical content in Montaigne and Cyrano is its variety and quantity, and its placement within an epistemic structure which hints at some weak ability to parse out probable models of reality without any final conclusion. A sense of the prodigiousness of the universe, and the idea of a plurality of worlds (and, particularly in the case of Cyrano, microcosmic worlds in our bodies inspired by Giordano Bruno), also create a

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[77] Henry LeBret, "Préface," in Cyrano de Bergerac, *Œuvres complètes,* ed. Madeleine Alcover (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2000), 486.
[78] A. Lavers, "La croyance à l'unité de la science dans 'L'Autre monde' de Cyrano de Bergerac," *Cahiers du Sud* no. 349 (1959): 409-410.
[79] Cyrano de Bergerac, *Voyages to the Moon and the Sun,* trad. Richard Aldington (London: Routledge, 1923), 40.
[80] Jean-Michel Gros, *Les dissidences de la philosophie à l'âge classique* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 186.

sense of humanity's limited knowledge, and the necessity of maximizing interaction with these varied phenomena in order to attain a feeble knowledge of the world.[81]

Not only does Montaigne also support this Epicurean thesis of a plurality of worlds,[82] but like Bruno and Cyrano, he is influenced by what Eric MacPhail calls the "theory of infinite space" and "of the indefinite extension of time" as part of his effort in the *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* to illustrate the vast proliferation of contradictory experiences and opinions that constitute the human experience.[83] Both Montaigne and Cyrano, as we have seen, are specifically interested in the prodigious variety and contingency of atomic matter in Epicurean thought and express the idea that atomic arrangements lead to an endless variety of repeated formations and experiences in this "indefinite extension of time." They both create texts which observe these atomic repetitions (as Montaigne comments on the possibility of a second Montaigne, and Cyrano remarks upon atoms repeatedly forming oak trees). These authors also produce a prodigious formal structure in their works which mimics the continuous novelty and contingency of lived experience.

Given this kind of philosophical eclecticism, and a profound skepticism of credulous exploration of philosophical possibilities, there is a Montaigne-like effort in Cyrano to maximize exposure to philosophical ideas. Cyrano documents the construction and reconstruction of machines that fail and then work, showing us the creative struggle and the dodgy machinery that allows him to travel: and this burlesque struggle of knowledge is more important than any detailed description of the mechanics involved.[84] In fact, at times Cyrano doesn't describe the

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[81] Haydn Mason, *Cyrano de Bergerac, L'Autre Monde* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1984).

[82] "Ta raison n'a en aucune autre chose plus de verisimilitude et de fondement qu'en ce qu'elle te persudae la pluralité des mondes" (II, 12, 524).

[83] Eric MacPhail, "Anthropology and Anthropocentrism in Giordano Bruno and Michel de Montaigne," *Bruniana & Campanelliana* 20, no. 2 (2014): 544-5.

[84] Rosy Delpuech Pinhas, "Les machines cyraniennes: de la parodie au fantasme," *Revue des Sciences Humaines* 186-187 (1982-83): 69.

machinery he uses in any detail at all, as is the case with the rockets with which he propels himself to the Moon on his second attempt. His burlesque machinery refers to an epistemology of continual trial and error, and is even what Eric MacPhail calls "anti-Cartesian" in its lack of physical mechanistic, mathematical and spatial descriptors.[85] His machinery is more important as a means of exploring and essaying ideas which may fail, finding value in exposing himself to as many as possible in order to gather together theories and methods which may be more probable, even if marginally so.

Even fictional imaginings and unlikely anecdotes may provide ideas and models for understanding reality, and as part of this eclecticism, *L'Autre monde* is a document which mixes the imaginative and fictional with the real and uses fictional worlds to explore epistemological structures and ideas. In the same way that Montaigne calls on the reader to employ judgement and determine which anecdotes may be factual or fictional in his work,[86] Cyrano invites the reader to exercise judgement about which philosophical conversations, or hyperbolic fictionalized versions of reality on the Sun and Moon, are likely to represent what occurs in the real world. As Marine Roussillon notes, "Le récit [de Cyrano] se revendique à la fois de la fiction et de la science, installant une équivoque sur son statut, et par conséquent sur le degré d'adhésion qu'il requiert."[87] Cyrano mixes fact and fiction, proposing real critiques of Cartesian views of animal consciousness through burlesque and hyperbolic examples, and unlikely anecdotes like Montaigne's elephants engaging in religious worship have strong parallels with Cyranian discourse. Finally, this blending of fact and fiction produces another important effect

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[85] Eric MacPhail, "Cyrano's Machines: The Marvelous and the Mundane in *L'Autre Monde*," *French Forum* 18 (1993): 37-46.

[86] "Les temoignages fabuleux, porveu qu'ils soient possible, servent [dans les *Essais*] comme les vrais" (I, 21, 105).

[87] Marine Roussillon, "Science et fiction dans les romans de Cyrano de Bergerac" *Libertinage et Philosophie au XVIIᵉ Siècle* 10 (2008): 171.

for Montaigne and Cyrano's weak empiricism: it involves a writing of the self in which the reader becomes conscious of the narrative "I" producing judgements about philosophical texts and arguments being encountered. This awareness of a cognizing agent produces an awareness of bias and faults of judgement, and in the case of Cyrano, the reader encounters Dyrcona, who is an author writing about his adventures,[88] imprisoned for his ideas, often changing his mind, and even a figure who has ideas which appear to be flatly ridiculous, as we have seen in the case of Dyrcona's fideist arguments against the *fils de l'hôte.*

Cyrano insists on the role of the imagination in thinking processes, and as Laurence Rauline notes, "Cyrano, dans la continuité de Gassendi, n'oppose donc pas radicalement la raison et l'imagination."[89] Cyrano is similar to Montaigne, for whom the imagination is both a form of bias and a rich source of creativity for hypothesis formation. In Chapter 1, we examined Montaigne's dual process of judgement (which involves both the ineluctable phenomenological activity of the imagination and the attempt to reign in and organize its judgements), and we saw how Montaigne criticizes the idea that the soul can have a distinct or objective idea about itself without biases related to the soul's greatness, weakness, or immortality (II, 12, 554). Cyrano's insistence on a wildly eclectic imagination which similarly constantly mediates access to reality, but may also spark creative thinking and hypothesis formation, is consistent with this Montaignian discourse and with Gassendi's statements in the Preface of the *Exercitationes,* including several remarks opposing Descartes in the *Disquisitio Metaphysica* on the way in which imagination is responsible for the entirety of human knowledge outside of the pure apprehension of the senses.

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[88] Jacqueline Van Baelen, "Reality and Illusion in *L'Autre Monde*: The Narrative Voyage," *Yale French Studies* 49 (1973): 182-183.
[89] Laurence Rauline, "Les Lettres de Cyrano de Bergerac," 199.

Cyrano especially emphasizes creative powers of the imagination, and links them ineluctably with judgement, in his adventures on the Sun. In fact, mental processes and critical thinking itself is conceived of as *imagination* which is a particular quality of the solar region: "Vous autres hommes ne pouvez pas les mêmes choses, à cause de la pesanteur de votre masse, et de la froideur de votre imagination" (188). As Cyrano's Campanella, a wandering and imaginative philosopher, shows Dyrcona the landscape of the Sun, he indicates the river of the imagination which runs abundantly and the dry river of memory, juxtaposing the value of creative thinking above rote memory.[90] We see both in Montaigne and Cyrano several passages denouncing plagiarism or unoriginal thought, and valuing critical engagement with ideas over the power to store them in memory.[91] This creative use of the imagination involves exposure to books, philosophical discussion, engagement with the world as much as possible, even if this maximal approach impinges somewhat on the ability to remember one's philosophical adventures.

For Cyrano, another important technique for maintaining philosophical eclecticism involves exposing oneself to ideas which are arranged not only according to the imagination, but also randomly. Instead of imposing order on philosophical ideas, this method involves using the atomic, random, and contingent arrangement of things in the world to begin philosophizing, and be a wandering philosopher. The form of Cyrano's work, with condensed, random journeys, accidents, and conversations emphasizes how random encounters lead to discovery. Cyrano arrives at the most circuitous route in each of his goals and invariably accidentally finds

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[90] Mary Jo Muratore, *Mimesis and Metatextuality in the French Neo-classical Text: Reflexive Readings of La Fontaine, Molière, Racine, Guilleragues, Madame de La Fayette, Scarron, Cyrano de Bergerac and Perrault* (Geneva: Libraire Droz, 1994), 135.

[91] Élodie Bénard, *Les vies d'écrivains (1550-1750): Contribution à une archéologie du genre biographique* (Geneva: Droz, 2019), 178.

something he did not intend: having debates about the nature of the Moon with his friends after reading Carpano, trying to launch himself to the Moon and falling down to learn that the Earth had moved, randomly encountering the Viceroy of Canada, and the list goes on with scenes of broken, faltering machinery and imprisonment.

All of these random events lead to discoveries, and we can take as one example Cyrano's fall to the Earth when he intended to arrive at the Moon, and his subsequent observation that the Earth moved during his ascent and descent, landing him in Canada:

> Je descendois vers la terre…j'y retombai quelque temps après, et à compter l'heure que j'en étois parti, il devoit être minuit. Cependant je reconnus que le soleil étoit alors au plus haut de l'horizon, et qu'il étoit là midi. Je vous laisse à penser combien je fus étonné (7-8).

Cyrano then reports a great feeling of joy ("Mon bonheur fut grand…") when he realizes that the Earth must have turned while he was rising up and falling towards the ground. This happiness is the fruit of that random event which happens abruptly and accidentally, and produces even more surprise when he discovers the differing time of day and country he is in. It is these forms of discovery and contingency which characterize the process of knowledge formation all throughout Cyrano's *L'Autre monde*. Cyrano provides a clear model for this form of philosophizing when he observes that Campanella wanders around the Sun as he mulls over ideas, suggesting that it is this quality that makes him a "sage" and a great philosopher.[92]

3.6 Cyrano, the Skeptical Empiricist Tradition, and its Legacies

This chapter has studied several points of continuity between Cyrano de Bergerac's works and a tradition which finds its origins in Montaigne's skeptical empiricism. Cyrano's

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[92] Pierre Ronzeaud, "Entre hasard heuristique et nécessité narrative," in *L'errance au XVIIe siècle,* ed. Lucie Desjardins et al. (Tübingen: Narr Franck Attempto, 2017), 43.

rejection of rationalism, both in the form of deductive philosophy based on first principles and in its Pyrrhonist skeptical form, echo Montaigne and Gassendi's thought on these matters, influenced as it was by their eclectic readings of Hellenistic philosophy. A deeply skeptical, weak probabilism forms the backbone of Cyranist epistemology, and influenced by the *vray semblance* of Montaigne, Gassendi, and their readings of Academic Skepticism, Cyrano insists on using the weak instruments of sense perception and reason (conceived of as the imagination) to arrive at only provisional statements and theories about the nature of reality. This skeptical empiricism and its willingness to make partial conclusions and employ weak epistemic tools also involve an eclecticism which is distinctly opposed to Cartesian thought. It seeks to maximize exposure to different philosophies and theories of knowledge to arrive at the most probable theories of knowledge. Its strongest epistemic claims relate to Academic Skeptic idea that humans lack knowledge: the thesis of a plurality of worlds for example, although these are always proposed as probabilistic theories. Finally, the reader joins the author in this process of eclectic exposure to theories of knowledge, and skeptical empiricism's insistence on the weak but usable criteria of sense perception and reason lead to formal qualities in Montaigne and Cyrano's works which seek to expose the reader to theories of knowledge ranging from the Epicureanism to humoral psychology and even alchemy. This stands in stark opposition to the Cartesian imperative to wipe all prior philosophical thinking clean and begin with rationalist first principles.

In the chapter to follow, we will examine the legacy of Cyrano's skeptical empiricism, including its epistemic content and its formal literary implications, in a smattering of authors of adventure novels and forms of *savoir fiction* who bear the clear influence of *L'Autre monde*. While Cyrano's older contemporary Gassendi and his influence on Locke, Hume, and Boyle and

English empiricism has already been an object of considerable study, our goal here will be to emphasize the literary, philosophical, and formal legacy of Cyrano and his use of epistemological themes from Montaigne and Gassendi. Cyrano offers up a distinct blend of skeptical empiricist thought, combining Gassendi and Charron's deeper focus on pure epistemology as opposed to Montaigne's more psychological and existential explorations of knowledge, with deeply Montaignian formal and literary qualities which amplify the idea of eclecticism as an antipode to Cartesian rationalism's *tabula rasa* approach to philosophy. The following chapter will offer a sampling of Cyrano's distinct impact on literary skeptical empiricist authors, especially Gabriel Daniel's satirical treatment of Cartesianism, which bears the clear influence of Cyrano and is, in different ways, in continuity with Montaignian and Gassendist thought.

Chapter 4: Juxtaposing Empiricist and Rationalist Worlds: Anti-Cartesian Satire and Skeptical Empiricism in Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage du Monde de Descartes*

4.1   Gabriel Daniel: A Skeptical Empiricist Critique of Cartesianism in Context

This study of the tradition of Montaigne's skeptical empiricism concludes with Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage du Monde de Descartes,* a text published in 1690 as Cartesianism faced stronger opposition in France and became a more fractured epistemological tradition. The text represents an ideal ending point in a history of the skeptical empiricist literary tradition in France. It was a culminating work in the genre of philosophical and astronomical fiction in the style of Cyrano, it enjoyed wide diffusion with several editions and translations, it was one of the final seminal and important anti-Cartesian texts, and it quickly became an important text for the future of European empiricism, receiving around a dozen editions and translations in several European languages.[1] The text had a wide influence with an important reception among authors both in France and readers of the English translation, especially skeptics like Bayle and empiricists and satirists like John Locke and Jonathan Swift.

Daniel's *Voyage* establishes the distinctive arguments and formal qualities we have seen in Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano. In a skeptical empiricist mode, it establishes the impossibility of grasping the essential nature of God and things in the world, emphasizing what Montaigne called the "disposition occulte" of God (I, 31, 216). It argues that the weak tools of sense perception and logical reasoning can be combined to form weak, provisional hypotheses about the nature of reality. It furthermore argues that both sense perception and logical reasoning

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[1] Yasmin Annabel Haskell, *Loyola's Bees: Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry* (Kiribati: Oxford University Press, 2003), 167.

are suspect and flawed due to physical conditions and the wildness of the human imagination, depicting Descartes and a host of renowned philosophers much as Montaigne depicted himself: suspect to the bias and moods that ineluctably influence thought. It rejects and mocks the rigid, absolute certainties and hyperbolic skepticism of Cartesian thought (the "ouy" or "non" of Charron's frontispiece) and favors hypothesis formation in addition to philosophical conversations in which opinions and theories are adapted over time. Daniel's text also sounds its own homage to Gassendi, much like Cyrano's, depicting the philosopher as an exemplar of intellectual humility and eclectic philosophical conversationalism. Finally, Gabriel Daniel weaves a deeply eclectic and humanist tapestry of conversations between philosophers, especially in the passages on the Moon (a kind of homage to Cyrano), contrasting them with the monologic form of Cartesian discourse, establishing the difference between skeptical empiricist eclectic discourse and what Daniel takes to be the immodest elimination of prior philosophical traditions in Descartes' pure rationalism.

Before diving into Gabriel Daniel's text and its skeptical empiricist features, we will establish context on Daniel as a culminating figure in the seventeenth century French skeptical empiricist tradition. By the time Daniel's *Voyage du Monde de Descartes* emerged, four decades had passed since Descartes death, enough time to attract significant debate, questioning, rehashing, and rebranding of Cartesianism from figures as various as Malebranche, Pierre Daniel Huet, Rouhault, Antoine Le Grand, Pierre-Sylvain Régis, and many others.[2] This pre-Enlightenment period was a time when pure, unaltered Cartesianism was rare, but forms of Cartesian rationalism were also prominent and enduring in France in new ways, with Nicolas

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[2] Alice Stroup, *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Revolution: From Copernicus to Newton*, ed. Wilbur Applebaum (New York: Taylor & Francis: 2003).

Malebranche recognized as an honorary member of the Royal Academy of Sciences in 1699, and

Fontenelle, a persistent advocate for Cartesian physics, serving as its secretary.[3] It is worth

noting that Cartesianism as a philosophical movement also became significantly more polarizing

because of Descartes' animal machine theory and the increase of the practice of vivisection in

France, and this lead to some Cartesians disavowing (or in some cases defending even more

loudly) this particular aspect of his thought.[4]

However, as Cartesianism became controversial, re-adapted, and debated, rationalism and

Cartesian epistemological method still had significant influence in the period, even in its new

forms. Certainly, Malebranche's rationalism, though significantly adapted, was a prominent

rationalist epistemological method which began with clear and distinct intellectual perception, in

this case the mind's attention to phenomena given by God, in strict opposition to an empiricist

insistence on the fallibility of sense perception and logical reasoning.[5] This made criticism of

Descartes, especially with regard to epistemology, a prescient issue and a central concern for

Gabriel Daniel.

On the other side of the epistemological debate, it should also be noted that at the turn of

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Gassendi not only became popular among the British

empiricists, but also gained in its modest but significant importance in French thought. Scholars

as various as Gilles De Launay, Huet, and Bayle reinforced Gassendi's positive reputation using

the trope of his intellectual humility[6] (one which informed both Cyrano's and as we will see,

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[3] J. L. Heilbron, *Elements of Early Modern Physics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 31.
[4] Erica Fudge, *Brutal Reasoning: Animals, Rationality, and Humanity in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 158.
[5] Thomas M. Carr, "François Lamy and the Rhetoric of Attention of Malebranche," *Romance Notes* 22, no. 2 (1981): 200.
[6] Delphine Bellis, "The Later Sects: Cartesians, Gassendists, Leibnizians, and Newtonians," in *The Cambridge History of Philosophy of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David Marshall Miller and Dana Jalobeanu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 103.

Daniel's homages to Gassendi when exploring the crater of the Moon bearing his name). Well into the eighteenth century, Gassendi came to enjoy prominence with a deeper interest in empiricism in France, leading Jacques-André Naigeon to comment: "Le nom de Gassendi est assez connu de quiconque n'est pas absolument étranger dans la République des lettres."[7] Daniel's text is situated in a period before this increased prominence of empiricism; a time when Cartesian rationalism was prominent enough to warrant the criticism and debate of Daniel and others, but became a somewhat more fractured and questionable tradition.

Where does Gabriel Daniel, the Jesuit, *historiographe de France* under Louis XIV, and author of a strange anti-Cartesian astronomical travel narrative, fit within this epistemological history? Like fellow Jesuit Pierre-Daniel Huet, his thought can be easily misunderstood or difficult to classify. Was he a skeptic, and if so of what kind? Was he an anti-Cartesian as a Jesuit and "Aristotelian", and if so in which sense or senses? As with Montaigne, we will insist on Gabriel Daniel's eclecticism and ability to support and change his mind about probable theories from a variety of sources and thinkers, but we will also show that one of the most prominent epistemological structures throughout his work was his skeptical empiricism. Before moving to this point, however, it is important to address a few potential objections to this view. These include the idea that Daniel's critique of Descartes is aimed primarily at non-epistemic questions like his physics and vortex theory, or that it may be motivated by the dogmatic Aristotelianism of many Jesuit thinkers of the period.

There is a tendency in scholarship about Daniel and Descartes to place emphasis on Daniel's non-epistemic criticisms of Descartes, from his mockery of Cartesian physics and

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[7] J. A. Naigeon, *Philosophie ancienne et moderne, Encyclopédie méthodique* (Paris: Panckoucke, 1791), 540.

vortex theory to his withering satire of the animal machine theory.[8] Roger Ariew even goes so far as to write that Daniel criticized the topics he personally found most offensive, including dualism and the animal machine, noting that his work is related to "metaphysics, theology, physics, and cosmology but not to epistemology."[9]

Despite this, Daniel's work not only contains epistemological critiques and premises we will examine shortly, but upon its release, evoked critical responses within the realm of epistemological thought in France. None other than Pierre Bayle made use of the *Voyage du Monde de Descartes* to accumulate reams of anti-rationalist objections to Cartesian epistemology in a dense compendium for his own skeptical projects and articles.[10] Pierre Coste, editor of Montaigne and translator of John Locke, also found the philosophical and epistemological claims of Daniel to be useful and praised the strength and solidity of them in his *Défense de la Bruyère*.[11] Even while Daniel's criticisms of the *bête machine* show his controversialist side, he also uses the issue to drive at epistemological questions such as the unknowability of human and animal souls, or the use of apparent phenomena combined with reason to formulate the hypothesis that animal suffering and consciousness resembles that of humans to at least some extent.

For some scholars who write of this epistemological significance of Daniel's text, however, Daniel is not to be categorized as skeptic or skeptical empiricist, but as a

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[8] See Justin E. H. Smith, "Gabriel Daniel: Descartes Through the Mirror of Fiction," in *The Oxford Handbook of Descartes and Cartesianism*, ed. Han van Ruler et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 798-801; Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 190.

[9] Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics,* 190.

[10] Dmitri Levitin, *The Kingdom of Darkness: Bayle, Newton, and the Emancipation of the European Mind from Philosophy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 298.

[11] Ralph Heyndels, "Un jésuite dans la lune à la fin du XVIIe siècle. Discours philosophique et diégétique dans le *Voyage du monde de Descartes* (1690), du père Gabriel Daniel," *Recherches sur le XVIIe siècle* 2 (1978): 21.

fundamentally Aristotelian thinker, as with many fellow Jesuits in late seventeenth-century France.[12] Turning towards Daniel's text, it is possible to respond to this objection with the observation that his portrait of Aristotle in the text's lunar landscape is not altogether flattering. He appears "assis sur un siège élevé, qui a plus l'air d'un trône, que d'une chaire d'école" (112), a mocking reference to the authority of his name in the history of European thought. In addition, Daniel's first person narrator often assumes a role of impartiality when listening to and navigating debates between Cartesians and Aristotelians.[13]

It is also important to note that while Daniel's epistemology is fundamentally a skeptical empiricist one, he often places this epistemology in accordance with discussion of some key issues of interest to fellow Jesuits of Aristotelian persuasion, such as the formation of arguments against dualism or the animal machine.[14] As a provocateur and even a communicator of epistemological ideas, Daniel doesn't shy away from the popular issues of his day. What is important to note here is that he does not use these popular issues to put forward Aristotelian notions of the animal soul and its nature such as the idea of the sensitive soul, but uses the tools of skeptical empiricism to call into question any philosophy that claims to understand the essential nature of human and animal souls. Thus, while the broader anti-Cartesian goal and the issues raised resemble those of an Aristotelian Jesuit at first glance, the fundamental ideas of Daniel are quite out of line with that of many French Jesuits of the period, much as is the case with Huet.[15]

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[12] For this view see Sophie Roux, *The Mechanization of Natural Philosophy* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), xiii-xiv; Justin E. H. Smith, "Gabriel Daniel: Descartes Through the Mirror of Fiction," 794-795.

[13] Nicolas Corréard, "Les égarements de la physique cartésienne dans le *Monde de M. Descartes* du R. P. Gabriel Daniel," in *L'errance au XVIIe siècle,* eds. Lucie Desjardins, Marie-Christine Pioffet and Roxanne Roy (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto, 2017), 332.

[14] J. B. Shank, *Before Voltaire: The French Origins of "Newtonian" Mechanics, 1680-1715* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 276.

[15] Corréard, "Les égarements de la physique cartésienne," 326.

There is explicit evidence of Daniel's affinity with Gassendi's thought as a skeptical empiricist in particular, which we will review here. Popkin takes note of Gassendist themes in Daniel's thought, especially with regard to opposing empiricist method to Cartesian's rationalist epistemology.[16] As with Cyrano, Daniel's text contains an explicit homage to Gassendi. His narrator notes the following as he explores the crater of the Moon which bears his name:

> Nous descendîmes dans le Gassendi. Ce lieu nous parut fort joli, et fort propre, et tel, en un mot, que l'a pû rendre un Abbé, comme Monsieur Gassendi, qui a de l'esprit, de l'art, de la science… (103).[17]

As with Cyrano's praise in the voice of the *démon de Socrate*, Daniel's narrator not only highlights Gassendi's intellectual capacity and versatility, but his intellectual humility, a central concern for skeptical empiricists and philosophies of hypothesis formation: "Gassendi était un homme qui avait autant d'esprit que M. Descartes, une bien plus grande étendue de science, et beaucoup moins d'entêtement" (103). While Daniel is more ambiguous about Aritstotelianism, he is rather brash and direct in his praise for Gassendi, especially in direct comparison with Descartes. The question of intellectual humility will be treated in more depth in the analysis to follow.

Finally, it is fitting to provide a note, as with Cyrano, about the genre of Daniel's *Voyage du Monde de Descartes*. While Sylvie Romanowski placed Cyrano in the camp of "*savoir fiction*", Miran Božovič speaks similarly of "phi-fi" or philosophical fiction with regard to Daniel's text.[18] In fact, Daniel's text can be fit into a larger context of astronomical voyage narratives, such as Fontenelle's *Entretiens sur la pluraité des Mondes*. Such texts' ludicrous explorations are not meant to accurately represent any particular future or technologies, but they

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[16] Popkin, *The History of* Scepticism, 374.
[17] We cite the 1691 edition published by Simon Benard in Paris.
[18] Miran Božovič, "'Philosophical Snuff': The Speculative Story of the Mind," in *New Realism and Contemporary Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 6.

do produce an abundance of philosophical dialogues with rich epistemological content.[19] *Le Voyage du Monde de Descartes* is a particularly interesting case of fantasy translating into prescient ideas about real world epistemology because of the satirical conceit of the journey. It is an exploration of a domain of pure intellect populated by the souls of philosophers, and it explores the world of Cartesian physics constructed according to his rationalist philosophy. As we will explore more deeply in what is to follow, the wild, imaginary qualities of this world show that is not a realm of pure reason but rampant imagination, reflecting the skeptical empiricist idea that reasoning and imagination are fundamentally linked. In addition, in a strange and creative satirical move, Daniel alludes to this rationalist space as an impossible and indescribable one with no sensory phenomena or real phenomenal content, raising the *apraxia* objection important to all the figures in the skeptical empiricist tradition, namely that philosophical inquiry cannot begin without sensory phenomena as an object of human reasoning. As with Cyrano, then, Daniel's world is an epistemological, but not scientific work of fiction which uses fantasy to explore very real epistemological subjects and debates.

4.2   The Divine and the Occult: Daniel's Critique of Clear and Distinct Perception of Essences

Like Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano, Daniel is a fundamentally anti-metaphysical thinker who reserves complete equipollent skepticism for questions regarding the essence of God and the soul or mind. While Jean-Luc Solère briefly mentions Daniel's similarity

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[19] Brain Stableford, "Science Fiction Before the Genre," in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

to Gassendi in his explicit delineation of metaphysics as an incomprehensible field of "knowledge",[20] it is worth providing a detailed analysis of this tendency in Daniel's *Voyage.*

This complete, Pyrrhonist skepticism, which fully neutralizes any arguments about the existence of God in full equipollence, is apparent in Daniel's introductory textual remarks. Referring to the "principes très simples et très faciles à entendre" which supposedly allow Descartes to construct his proof of the existence of God and his physics, Daniel notes that his text's aim is to show that "ce système est plein de contradictions" and "une supposition [y] détruit une autre" (6). Here, Daniel announces his intention to show that within the realm of metaphysics, Descartes never manages to escape from his experiments in hyperbolic doubt to arrive at rationalism, but all of his metaphysical statements and presuppositions destroy and neutralize each other. When placing arguments together, Daniel applies the Pyrrhonist method of *anarein*, in which arguments are listed out and shown to be equally (un)likely and contradictory, neutralizing Cartesian arguments about the nature of God and the constitution essential components of the physical universe like extension. We've seen both Montaigne (II. 12, 542) and Charron (I, 7, 100-101) employ this Pyrrhonist *anarein* method specifically to questions of divine essence, making the same observation as Daniel that these arguments contradict and destroy each other.

While Daniel contends that Descartes fails to escape hyperbolic doubt in metaphysical matters, he also maintains that remaining intentionally in this Pyrrhonist doubt with regard to God and the nature of the soul is the correct epistemological position. This is clear in the passage mentioned earlier containing Daniel's praise for Gassendi on the Moon crater bearing his name. Directly after praising his intellectual humility in comparison to Descartes, Daniel notes that

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[20] Jean-Luc Solère, "Un récit de philosophie-fiction: Le *Voyage du Monde de Descartes du Père Gabriel Daniel*," *Uranie. Mythes et littératures* 4 (1994): 158.

Gassendi, in his physics and metaphysics, was "un peu Pyrrhonien…ce qui à mon avis, ne sied pas mal à un philosophe qui, pour peu qu'il veuille se faire justice, connait par sa propre expérience les bornes de l'esprit humain, et la faiblesse de ses lumières (103).[21] Here, Daniel shows direct approval for a Pyrrhonist gapping of essences from philosophical discourse as beyond "les bornes de l'esprit humain", a statement parallel to many of Montaigne's in the *Apologie*, and especially to Charronian discourse on God and metaphysics which emphasizes the limits of the human mind compared with the infinity and boundlessness of the concept of God.

Daniel's criticisms of Cartesian rationalism, in a Gassendist spirit, are quite explicit in demonstrating that Descartes never escapes his experiment of hyperbolic doubt specifically with regard to understanding the essential nature of God. In a scene featuring a Chinese philosopher comparing Western theologies and proofs of the existence of God, a philosophical discussion on Descartes' proof emerges. The speaker provides the example to make the inability of transferring ideas of God to a real phenomenon of God more concrete; he notes that the very idea of a knowing and feeling horse cannot establish the sentience of any particular horse, no matter how clear or distinct one's ideas of a horse may be, unless one is apprehending some evidence of the horse's conscious states in the physical world (168). It is thus the case that, even if God's perfection ontologically entails God's existence, some *évidence* of this perfection must be apprehended in order to have assurance of its real and perfect God:

> Cela supposé, afin que je puisse me démontrer l'existence de Dieu par cette idée (*Un Être souverainement parfait*) il faut non seulement, que ce soit une idée réelle, comme elle l'est en effet, mais encore il faut, qu'indépendamment de toutes les démonstrations ordinaires, il me soit évident, que cette idée est une idée réelle : c'est-à-dire, qu'elle me représente un objet réel, au moins possible, et non pas un objet chimérique (168).

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[21] This passage appears to have been copied from Pierre-Daniel Huet, a fellow Jesuit who arguably has similar Gassendist leanings, and appeared in his *Censure de la réponse faite par M. Régius.* Cited in Corréard, "Les égarements de la physique cartésienne," 334.

Daniel's satire consists in the idea that Descartes' "*démonstrations*" do not constitute "*evidence*", and in this way, the Cartesian God does not strike one as something that participates in the immanent and real physical world, but as something imaginary and perfect, existing only as pure intellection but unable to be apprehended. As Alan Charles Kors notes, Daniel uses his satire to establish that in Descartes' understanding of God, "the idea of a supremely perfect being seem[s], in and of itself, far more chimerical than real."[22]

Daniel similarly emphasizes not only the inconceivability of the perfection of Descartes' God, but also its inconceivable infiniteness. Daniel draws attention to the imaginativeness, constructedness, and what he sees as the absurdity of Cartesian notions of the infinite and the indefinite as they relate to God. Daniel's text includes a parodic version of Descartes' indefinite and highest realm of the sky in the *Traité du monde et de la lumière*, an infinitely extended space in which God can freely create new worlds.[23] Daniel describes his entry into this space:

> …j'entrai dans ces vastes païs, j'y trouvai en effet la plus belle place et la plus commode, qu'on puisse se figurer pour bâtir un Monde, et même pour bâtir des millions, et des inifinitez de Mondes : mais je n'y voiois nuls matériaux pour commencer, ni pour faire la moindre partie d'un si grand édifice (180).

As with Daniel's analysis of God's perfection as a theoretical but phenomenally inaccessible concept, we see Daniel emphasize the inability to conceive of theoretical ideas related to God's infinity without perceiving it, an act of perception which is also absurd, difficult to imagine, and impossible. There is no phenomenal evidence of the infinite Cartesian space of extension in which God can create worlds,[24] and concretizing any kind of encounter with this space renders it

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[22] Alan Charles Kors, *Atheism in France,* 317.

[23] Nicolas Corréard, "Voyager dans le monde des idées : le roman de la philosophie naturelle selon Margaret Cavendish et Gabriel Daniel," *Dix-septième siècle* 3, no. 280 (2018): 418.

[24] Descartes is aware of the objection that infinity is inconceivable to the human mind and uses the word "*indéfini*" to describe the aspects of infinity which can be comprehended by human reason. See relevant passages in *Le Monde* in *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1996), 104-110. For Daniel, this is somewhat of a moot point because in both cases, the mind is reasoning about the essence of something vastly incomprehensible and metaphysical for which little or no phenomenal *évidence* can be produced.

as much more likely to be a chimeric, imagined space in Descartes' mind as opposed to

something that human beings can encounter phenomenally and reason about concretely. When

Daniel tries to look at this space, he encounters no phenomena to provide evidence of its actual

participation in the substance of the immanent world. Daniel spends much of his text criticizing

the vagueness, constructedness, and lack of concreteness of essential qualities of God and

physics in Descartes, and attacks what he takes to be the vagueness of Cartesian terms like

entities, forms, virtues, and qualities to describe essential qualities of nature and physics.[25]

Through his critiques of the vagueness and inaccessible, phenomenally unobservable

qualities of divine essences and physical features in Cartesian epistemology, Daniel claims that

Descartes is back at square one doubting everything, at least within the realm of metaphysics and

some of the stranger claims in his physics which border on the metaphysical. Daniel also

suggests that the human mind is fundamentally unable to comprehend the essence of the soul and

suggests a restricted form of Pyrrhonism in which no probable statements can be made about its

nature because of its metaphysical nature and inability to be perceived as a sensory phenomenon.

When Mersenne and the Cartesians propose to form a peace treaty with Aristotelians on

the Moon in Daniel's *Voyage*¸ a series of discussions ensue in which Cartesian arguments

regarding clear and distinct intellectual perception of the nature of the mind and soul face a

barrage of criticism. This section contains an accumulation of arguments against purported

rationalist principles about the soul or mind.

For example, Daniel's Aristotle moves through a list of arguments which contradict and

cancel out various hypotheses about the location of the mind throughout the body, in the pineal

gland, and elsewhere, presenting all of them as difficult and dubious and suspending them in

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[25] Tad M. Schmaltz, *Early Modern Cartesianisms: Dutch and French Constructions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 309.

equipollent doubt (154-156). Daniel's narrator sums up this Pyrrhonist approach to the soul by noting, "[Aristote] ne rejttait pas même ce que M. Descartes enseigne touchant le siége de l'âme dans la glande pinéale, si on le proposait seulement comme une pure hypothèse, puisque, ce que tous les autres disent, ne vaut pas mieux : mais qu'il ne pouvait souffrir que l'on proposait ce système comme une vérité constante et démontrée" (154). Here Descartes's theory of the pineal gland as the seat of the soul is not taken as any worse or better than a host of other philosophical arguments about its location; all such arguments are hypotheses to be suspended in Pyrrhonist equipollence, and one cannot be understood as being more probable than another. After a series of objections to Cartesian theories of the soul, Aristotle gives voice to a form of skepticism regarding the soul's fundamental nature:

> De tout cela, Aristote concluait que M. Descartes devait avouer avec les plus sages, les moins entêtés des philosophes, que le rapport, que l'âme a avec le corps, pour la perception des objets, est un mystère incompréhensible à l'esprit humain" (157).

Here, the fundamental nature of the soul and its relationship with the body is unequivocally "un mystère incomprehensible." As with the skeptical empiricist figures of this study, the soul and the mind's nature constitute an impenetrable subject and a question which should be suspended in pure Pyrrhonist doubt.

It is also telling that while Daniel is not averse to addressing the prescient and controversial subject of the animal soul's sentience compared with human souls, his attack of the Cartesian position is much more skeptical than Aristotelian in its tenor. Daniel does not so much spell out an Aristotelian model for understanding the animal soul, which would necessarily involve its status as a sensitive soul capable of movement and sensation.[26] In his arguments against animal experimentation, he doesn't provide a philosophical argument regarding the

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[26] Abraham P. Bos, "Aristotle on the Differences between Plants, Animals, and Human Beings and on the Elements as Instruments of the Soul," *The Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 4 (2010): 821-824.

nature of the animal soul, but draws on the argument that animals have sense organs, or that maltreatment of animals could lead to cruelty to humans.[27] Such arguments draw upon apparent phenomena, such as animal behavior or probable conclusions about the psychology of animals compared to humans based upon such behavior.

Daniel's profound skepticism about the fundamental nature of God and soul also manifests itself in a particularly Cyranian form of satire against Descartes, namely, the accusation that his imaginative and uncommon "ability" to have clear and distinct intellectual perception of aspects of God's fundamental nature paints him as a figure who makes occult or magical claims. We've seen Cyrano take a jab at the Cartesian notion of his physical principles resembling something closer to metaphysical or magical ones, noting that "sa Physique…on ne la devoit lire qu'avec le même respect qu'on écoute prononcer des oracles" (242). This Cyranian association between Descartes and a kind of magical thinking permeates the *Voyage*, which frequently draws on the trope and popular notion of an association between rationalist philosophy and the occult. Understanding fundamental essences of God and soul is also understood as a distant, magical, and strange phenomenon for Montaigne, who refers to the "disposition occulte" of God (I, 31, 216), and is fascinated with various cultural rituals around religious worship, and may even have had a familiarity with negative theology.[28]

The running satirical gag of Cartesian occultism starts at the very beginning of the faux travel narrative, when Descartes receives a revelation from God which allows him to combine tobacco with a special herb in order to separate his soul from his body, using his soul to explore the fundamental essences of things. Daniel also pokes fun at Cartesian metaphysical

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[27] Anita Guerrini, *Experimenting with Humans and Animals: From Galen to Animal Rights* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 47.

[28] Vicente Raga Rosaleny, "The Current Debate about Montaigne's Skepticism" in *Skepticism in the Modern Age: Building on the Work of Richard Popkin* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 67.

understandings of God as a form of magical thinking in a passage on Descartes' principle of

God's benevolence, which enables him to implement the criterion of sense perception on a

rationalist basis. Daniel's Aristotle mockingly asks the Cartesians if they have received

revelation from God in their assurance of his benevolence.[29] In these cases, the theme of

revelation is implemented to emphasize the incomprehensibility and occult disposition of God,

and to discredit those who engage in magical thinking by claiming to understand God's nature.

Many other details in Daniel's text accumulate to mockingly associate Descartes with

cultish or magical qualities. For example, in the scene in which Voetius attempts to establish a

peace treaty between Cartesians and Aristotelians, one stipulation of the treaty is that opponents

of Descartes cease using the names "Enthusiast" or "Madman" to refer to him, a tendency in

criticism of Cartesian rationalism which we've seen develop in Cyrano's thought.[30] Descartes'

decision to share his method for separating body and soul with his followers (via the herb and

tobacco from his God-given revelation) also has a cultish quality in Daniel's fictive satire.

As Bradley Rubidge observes, even the quality of being a follower of Descartes, of being

in on the magic-like revelations of Cartesian rationalism, is mocked in Daniel's text.[31] Daniel

discusses a friend of his who was so moved by his reading of Descartes that he took his copy of

the *Meditations* with him to church to engage in prayer and devotions during holy week (4).[32]

Daniel also mocks "zèle extraordinaire" of followers of Descartes he encounters on the Moon

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[29] Heyd, "Descartes – An Enthusiast *malgré lui?*" 53.

[30] Michael Heyd, *"Be Sober and Reasonable": The Critique of Enthusiasm in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries* (Netherlands: Brill, 2000), 116.

[31] Bradley Rubidge, "Descartes's Meditations and Devotional Meditations," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 51, no. 1 (1990): 27.

[32] Giulia Belgioioso and Franco A. Meschini. "Philosopher, méditer : l'expérience philosophique chez Descartes*,*" *Quastio* 4 (2004): 197-198.

who employ arguments from *Méditations Métaphysiques* to "expliquer le mystère de l'Eucharistie" (132).[33]

These textual details poke savage fun at Descartes' metaphysical arguments about God and the soul, painting these epistemic domains as those of the occult. It is also clear that the satirical premise of the entire narrative, in which Descartes' soul wanders separately from his body, draws on associations of this kind of behavior with occult magic in European culture.[34] In particular, however, this kind of critique of would have been legible as a critique of rationalism in the mind of Daniel's readers. Not only had it already been associated with Descartes in Cyrano, but such mockeries were widely applied to Spinoza's rationalism and had precedent in European thought in the 1690s.[35]

Taken as a whole, Daniel's satire attacks any notion that human knowledge can extend to such principles as God, the human soul, and theological concepts like transubstantiation. The two strategies he employs mirror methods of Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano: the methodology of Pyrrhonist *anarein* or accumulation of contradictory arguments to suspend them in equipollence, or the reduction of theology to a kind of occult practice. Daniel accumulates reams of arguments about the location and nature of the soul as Montaigne would pile up different metaphysical theories in the heart of the *Apologie*. In the same way that Montaigne reduces religion to the apparent and physical practices of lighting incense and singing (I, 55, 315) or Charron does with regard to performing rites related to the soul (I, 7, 100-101), Daniel associates theology with tobacco and herbs, devotional books at church, and a kind of

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[33] For more on Descartes' defenses of the Eucharist in his metaphysics see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon, Descartes, and Nietzsche* (United Kingdom: Yale University Press, 1993), 186.
[34] Justin E. H. Smith, *Nature, Human Nature, and Human Difference: Race in Early Modern Philosophy* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2017), 65.
[35] Wiep van Bunge, *From Bayle to the Batavian Revolution: Essays on Philosophy in the Eighteenth-Century Dutch Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 136.

incomprehensible revelation which doesn't have much to do with epistemology, or a serious endeavor to acquire knowledge about the world. This tie between the drive to understand God and occult magic, we have seen, also places Daniel's satire in parallel with the formative lunar satire of Cyrano de Bergerac.

4.3   Daniel's Objections to Rationalist Logic: Imagination, Apraxia, and Circular Reasoning

Daniel not only separates theological matters from the realm of epistemology and human inquiry, but critiques the use of pure reason as a means of building an epistemic model of reality on numerous grounds. Firstly, he uses his satire to raise the *apraxia* objection which preoccupies all of the thinkers we've examined in the skeptical empiricist tradition, asserting that without any phenomenal object of examination and inquiry, philosophical discourse cannot even begin. This study has already touched upon one of the primary objects of Daniel's satire with regard to rationalism: the fantastic and chimeric quality of Descartes' mode of reasoning. By focusing his text on this imaginative quality of Cartesian thought, Daniel makes another point which is fundamental to the skeptical empiricist tradition, namely that human reasoning is a weak but necessary tool for understanding the nature of reality, and it is fraught with many biases, remaining fundamentally tied with the imagination. Daniel's *Voyage* is also characterized two more primary anti-rationalist arguments which appear in our skeptical empiricists: criticism of Cartesian circular logic, and of logic's use as a tool to support pre-determined arguments according to the preferences and biases of the philosopher.

The first objection to Cartesian epistemic use of logical reasoning we will examine relates precisely to the place where Pyrrhonism and Cartesian hyperbolic doubt leaves the

philosopher; in a place where epistemological claims begin and some kind of knowledge needs to be constructed. The skeptical empiricist asserts that, despite the unreliability and changing nature of sensory phenomena, some kind of engagement with the senses is required in order to ensure that knowledge is being formed about the real physical and phenomenal world. Any philosophy which begins with pure reason alone faces the *apraxia* objection, that such a philosophy cannot be practicesd or does not relate to anything phenomenally available in the sensory world that surrounds us. Gassendi summarized it well in a passage objecting to the Cartesian *cogito* examined previously: "Je pense, dîtes vous ; mais que pensez-vous ? Car enfin toute pensée est pensée de quelque-chose. Est-ce le Ciel ? la Terre ? ou n'importe quoi d'autre ? ou vous-même ?" (D, 83-84, 289 b).

Daniel raises a similar objection especially as he satirizes the fantastic, paradoxical, and impossible world of pure intellection that he finds himself in while entering Descartes' rationalist world. After the narrator partakes in the tobacco and herb permitting him to separate mind and body, entering the Cartesian "*Monde*", he notes:

> …ce n'est pas un Monde, mais un chaos…On ne peut même pas s'y remuer. Il n'y a ni lumière, ni couleurs, ni chaud, ni froid, ni sécheresse, ni humidité. Les plantes, les animaux n'y vivent point. On y a non seulement droit, mais même on a ordre de douter de tout. On vous y disputera hardiment la qualité d'homme. Et quoique vous ayez un visage comme les autres hommes, que vous soyez composé de chair et d'os comme eux, que vous marchiez, que vous mangiez, que vous dormiez, et qu'en un mot vous fassiez toutes les fonctions naturelles d'un homme ; on est, dis-je, en pouvoir de vous y disputer cette qualité, jusqu'à ce que vous ayant entretenu et entendu parler conséquemment, on y soit convaincu que vous avez de la raison (2).

Here, Daniel accumulates examples and renders palpable the absurdity and impossibility of a world in which there are no sensory phenomena: from light, color, hot, cold, and humidity to the natural functioning of the human body. There is also reference here to the impracticality of Cartesian hyperbolic doubt; Daniel derides the notion that one can simply ignore or completely

doubt the notion that one is composed of flesh and bones, goes to sleep, and maintains contact with the physical world.

Elsewhere, Daniel continues to employ the unique device of eluding to the impossibility of representing or describing the fictional and decidedly non-existent Cartesian world where his adventures take place. As Adam Roberts observes, Daniel distinguishes himself from other seventeenth century authors of astronomical fiction by omitting information about the physical journey between realms, for example from the Moon to Descartes' "trosième ciel".[36] What needs to be noted here, however, is not only this strange absence of physical adventure and means of transport from one place to the next, but the explicitness with which Daniel draws attention to this omission, emphasizing the impossibility of the Cartesian realm in which the narrator finds himself. When moving from the Moon to the "troisième ciel" Daniel declares:

> Je ne vous dirai rien du détail de ce voyage. J'espère dans quelques jours vous le faire faire à vous-même : je vous dirai seulement, qu'en arrivant nous trouvâmes cette matière telle que nous nous l'étions figurée, sans forme, et sans nul arrangement régulier de ses parties… (33).

Daniel is quite conspicuous about omitting details of his voyage, gesturing at the impossibility, even within a fictional medium, of understanding or describing the realm of Cartesian intellection because of its highly unintuitive lack of any sensory phenomena. The vague description of a place "sans forme" and "sans nul arrangement" contributes to this metafictional irony gesturing at the impracticality and impossibility of Cartesian clear and distinct ideas and rationalist method without sensory input. Daniel also refers to this Cartesian space, a parodic version of the upper heavens in his *Monde*, as a kind of "chaos", making a reference to a space where God decrees and produces the physical laws of nature.[37] Under Daniel's satirical lens,

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[36] Adam Roberts, *The History of Science Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 79.
[37] Alan Charles Kors, *Naturalism and Unbelief in France, 1650–1729* (United States: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 117-118.

Cartesian spaces and principles strike one as fantastic, impossible, and unlikely. Above all, Daniel's ironic and impossible fiction itself constitutes a strong objection to the idea of formulating an epistemology without any recourse to sensory phenomena.

Another objection that Daniel makes to Descartes' use of pure reason as a starting point for epistemology relates to the concept of "clear and distinct" ideas, or forms of reasoning which are exempt from bias. Daniel can be placed along with Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano as part of an intellectual tradition in which reason and imagination are considered to be fundamentally blended together, and the process of eliminating bias is arduous and never guaranteed, but may be possible to some extent. Daniel fundamentally agrees with Montaigne that "Les choses à part elles ont peut estre leurs poids et mesures et conditions ; mais au dedans, en nous, [l'ame] les leur taille comme elle l'entend" (302). The essential qualities of phenomena are impossible to understand because of the phenomenological relationship between the perceiving mind, with its biases, moods, and narratives, and the way in which these manipulate our understanding of phenomena in the world. If Montaigne allows these wandering biases and moods to take control over his process of judgement in order to expose a portrait of the human mind to the reader (even "les excremens d'un vieil esprit" (III, 9, 946)),[38] Cyrano and Daniel do this in a more external, dialogic modality, in which philosophers from Aristotle to Cardano are seen as deeply imaginative, rambling, and subject to all kinds of biases. For the skeptical empiricists, reason, as a quality intimately tied with the imagination, is a deeply flawed tool, but one should strive to use it in the formation of fallible and provisional hypotheses about the nature of reality.

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[38] For an accessible and useful resource on the *Essais* as a portrait of the human mind, see Terence Cave, *How To Read Montaigne* (United Kingdom: Granta Publications, 2014).

For Daniel, as with Cyrano, there is a burlesque insistence on the idea that philosophers are, despite their pretentions, highly fueled by their imaginations and strange fantasies, and cannot separate their imaginative impulses from their philosophizing. If Cyrano refers devastatingly to Descartes as a kind of oracle figure, Daniel paints the image of Descartes as a kind of magician or artist, highly creative and subject to his imagination, and sculpting his own world. Daniel's image of Descartes boasting that he can create a universe in two hours, whipping up stars and vortices with his assistant Mersenne, evokes something closer to a mad genius or even an artist in a studio as opposed to a philosopher exempt from bias.[39] In a preface to Daniel's adventure, in his remarks on Descartes' legacy, he refers to his "assez grande etendue de génie, pour le système entier d'un Monde si bien imaginé…" (6). This backhanded compliment attributes genius and imagination to Descartes, but not much epistemological rigor, as it suggests that his world, and indeed his *Monde* (especially given the choice of capitalization here) is a product of his imagination.

Descartes' upper realm, however, is not the only space of philosophical imagination in Daniel's *Voyage*. In a kind of homage to Cyrano, Daniel's lunar landscape is populated with a series of strange philosophers with imaginative points of view and various foibles. The narrator must endure a quarantine of fourteen years before entering Plato's Republic, finds that Aristotle's Lyceum is especially hostile to Cartesians and only accessible to those who can combat an army equipped with reams of syllogisms, and must endure the rambling and dubious predictions of alchemists and astrologers. In this sense, Daniel has constructed a lunar philosophical landscape true to its Cyranian precedents and populated with philosophers whose activities serve as testimony to the idea that reason and imagination are inextricably linked.

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[39] Ernest Tuveson, "Swift and the World-Makers," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 11, no. 1 (1950): 64.

Daniel's insistence on the individual imaginations of philosophers and the vast array of

opinions they support also poses another challenge to Cartesian rationalism and especially to his

clear and distinct ideas. This objection namely consists in the fact that, as we have seen Charron

and Gassendi argue, if Cartesian clear and distinct ideas were so self-evident and compelling, all

philosophers would adhere to them (Charron notes: "si l'on dit que l'ame estant sçavant par

nature, et sans les sens, tous les hommes seroyent sçavans, et tousjours, entendroyent et

raisonneroyent de mesmes (I, 13, 129)).[40] Daniel piles onto this criticism with his gleeful

observation that even Cartesians vary widely in their approaches to Cartesian principles like his

clear and distinct ideas: "chacun se fait des systèmes à sa fantaisie…[et] se donne la liberté

d'ajouter ou de retrancher ce qui lui plait" (5-6). In this way, Daniel participates in a criticism of

rationalism widely used in the skeptical empiricist tradition, from Montaignian and Charronian

accumulations of metaphysical theories to Gassendi's rejection of Cartesian clear and distinct

ideas on the basis that, empirically, philosophers can be observed to have all kinds of viewpoints

about metaphysical questions regarding the nature and essence of God and the soul.

For Daniel, each person's individual prejudgments and imaginations influence their

philosophical thinking, a principle well-illustrated in a key passage near the end of his

philosophical journey. In the scene, Descartes has ordered his slave to "déterminer le cours des

esprits animaux" in the narrator's brain, and to ensure that they functioned in such way as to

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[40] Gassendi would draw on the same ideas in his explicit criticism of Descartes' clear and distinct ideas. See:
Antonia LoLordo, "'Descartes's One Rule of Logic': Gassendi's Critique of the Doctrine of Clear and Distinct
Perception," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13 no. 1 (2005): 51-72. Gassendi also shares in
Montaigne's practice in the *Apologie* of accumulating various natural scientific views of philosophers in order to
emphasize their agreements on metaphysics and the inability to construct knowledge in this domain, and notes:
"[A]s long as men have been philosophizing, or pursuing truth and the nature of reality, it has not been possible to
find, I do not say one man, but one people, or one sect, that has unearthed the truth and brought it out into the open.
For among mortals there have been born men who were first called "wise men" and later "philosophers" by the
masses, and yet what has any one of them, or what have all of them together, accomplished? In fact, they have
always split into so many different sects that they have left nothing behind them to this day but contention…"
Gassendi, *Selected Works*, 97.

"faire naître des idées cartésiennes" (212). Through this manipulation of his brain, the narrator notes: "mes idées trouvèrent tout d'un coup toutes changés" (212). Suddenly, Daniel's narrator perceives Cartesian phenomena like vortices which populate his world. Furthermore, Daniel adds an observation about the nearby Aristotle:

> Pendant que M. Descartes me révélait ainsi tous ses mystères, le P. Mersenne, et mon vieillard se divertissaient à courir de tourbillon en tourbillon, et ne faisaient pas fort bonne compagnie aux députés de l' Aristote, qui étaient fort embarrassés de leur contenance, et qui tantôt se joignaient à eux, tantôt revenaient vers nous, ne comprenant rien dans tout ce galimatias (...) car n'ayant que des idées péripatéticiennes, ils ne voyaient rien du tout de ce que nous voyions dans ce grand espace, et ils étaient fort surpris de nous entendre entretenir sérieusement de toutes ces fadaises, et de toute ces chimères (227-8).

Once again, a manipulation of the brain and form of "révélation" of "mystères" is what produces the Cartesian worldview and all of its "chimères" in the mind of a philosopher. Without receiving the same revelations, and perceiving the world with the same set of judgements and the same imagination, Aristotle cannot perceive the world in the same way as a Cartesian. The process of philosophical reasoning, and the mind's relationship with and perception of the world's phenomena, is fundamentally influenced by judgements and beliefs (even fantastic "revelations") which make an impression on the mind; these always mediate reasoning which does not have a direct relationship with essential qualities of God, the soul, or the world.

Daniel's *Voyage* not only marries the reasoning mind with imagination, but makes the claim, familiar in Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano, that circular reasoning can serve as a dangerous tool since it allows the philosopher to presuppose a preferred theory in advance, constructing a circular syllogism around it in order to give it authority. If Montaigne claimed that logical reasoning is a dangerous tool and not a "jouet à toutes mains" (II, 12, 545), and Charron claims that such reasoning "preste armes pour soustenir et defendre les opinions anticipées", Daniel extends such images of logical reasoning as a dangerous tool or a weapon by placing

syllogisms on the battlefield in one scene of his satire. In order to enter Aristotle's Lyceum,

Cartesians in particular need to endure a barrage of syllogisms hurled at them. When the old man

accompanying the narrator announces his allegiance to Cartesianism ("Vive Descartes et les

Cartésians"), a commander of twelve responds with surprise and:

> [Il] nous ordonna de ne pas avancer, et envoya aussitôt avertir l'officier de garde. L'avis ne fut pas plutôt venu à l'officier, que toutes ses troupes, a un signal qu'il leur donna, se mirent sous les armes…c'est-à-dire que nous les vîmes incontinent armées de syllogismes, en toutes sortes de figures et de formes, dont les unes concluaient pour l'âme des bêtes, les autres pour la nécessité des formes substantielles dans les mixtes, les autres pour les accidents absolus (107).

In the context of the encounter, we have two polarized philosophical camps in a confrontation,

each determined to defend their pre-determined philosophical views at all costs. Daniel's image

of syllogisms as weapons exposes the risk of determining the views one wishes to defend in

advance ("pour l'âme des bêtes…pour la nécessité des formes substantielles dans les

mixtes…etc.") and using logical reasoning as a tool to staunchly defend those on the battlefield

of philosophical debate. This is antipodal to other uses of reason in accordance with sensory

data, for example, in order to revise and update hypotheses in order to ensure that they

correspond with reality to the best of one's knowledge.

Daniel also takes issue with circular reasoning as another means by which pre-established

principles can be supported using twists and turns of faulty logic. He draws attention to what he

calls a pure "paralogisme": Descartes' circular assumption of the existence of a perfect being

which can be shown to exist on the basis that this perfection ontologically entails existence.[41]

Borrowing from Gassendi's criticisms of Cartesian circular logic examined in Chapter 2, Daniel,

in the voice of Aristotle, criticizes what he takes to be the circular logic of his proof for the

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[41] Alan Charles Kors, "Theology and Atheism in Early Modern France," in *The Transmission of Culture in Early Modern Europe,* eds. Ann Blair and Anthony Grafton (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 249.

existence of God, noting his postulation of a perfect being for which there is no evidence, freeing

himself of the hyperbolic skepticism of the first Meditation by means of this circular reasoning

(87). In an expanded edition of his *Voyage,* Daniel also draws on Gassendist criticisms of

Cartesian circular logic with regard to his postulation of the existence of a benevolent God who

will not deceive him:

> …devant tous les hommes du monde il fera toujours pitoyable et ridicule de vouloir se
> démontrer l'existence d'un Dieu bon et sage et non trompeur, afin de se convaincre que
> *ce qu'on conçoit clairement est vray* : puisqu'il est autant impossible de se démontrer
> cette existence, sans s'être auparavant convaincre de ce principe, qu'il est impossible
> d'arrive à une fin, sans user des moyens, qui seuls peuvent y conduire (324).[42]

Once again, circular argumentation serves as a method for simply repeating and reinforcing a

single argument: that there exists a benevolent God which assures the accuracy of Descartes'

sensory perceptions and his clear and distinct ideas.

Daniel borrows his playbook of criticisms of Cartesian circular arguments directly from

Gassendi. In addition, his fundamental epistemological criticisms of Cartesian rationalist method

are directly parallel with figures of the skeptical empiricist tradition from Montaigne to Cyrano.

Daniel poses the *apraxia* objection that rationalist discourse cannot be the only starting point for

epistemology. Like Montaigne, he points to rationalism's ability to depart in wild and imaginary

directions without any grounding in the senses (III, 11, 1027).[43] In addition, his objection that a

philosophy without any phenomenal object is strictly impossible has a distinctly Gassendist

quality (D, 83-84, 289 b). He also holds the view, fundamental to skeptical empiricism, that

Cartesian clear and distinct principles are impossible because of the ineluctable commixture of

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[42] Here we draw on a subsequent edition, published in 1702 in Paris by Nicolas Pépie. The edition includes these additional criticisms, added by Daniel in this expanded version of the text.
[43] "Nostre discours est capable d'estoffer cent autres mondes et d'en trouver les principes et la contexture. Il ne luy faut ny matière ny baze; laissez le courir : il bastit aussi bien sur le vuide que sur le plain, et de l'inanité que de matiere."

the process of reasoning and that of imagining. We've discussed Montaigne's dual process of judgement, in which the mind imagines and is subject to bias while also attempting to form judgement, and this commixture is similar to Daniel's philosophical world, in which, as in Cyrano's lunar landscape, the enterprise of judgement is mixed together with the strange foibles and biases of the philosophers. Finally, we've seen that Daniel participates in a skeptical empiricist tradition of pointing out that logical reasoning is not a "jouet à toutes mains" (II, 12, 545) as Montaigne would put it, but can be used on the battleground of philosophy to defend judgements one is partial to, or even be malformed and mistreated in forms of circular reasoning that all of the skeptical empiricists are eager to criticize.

4.4   Provisional Certainty, Impartiality, and Intellectual Humility in Daniel's *Voyage*

Having examined Daniel's objections to Cartesian epistemological method, it is fitting to examine his own positive statements and assertions about exemplary epistemology and their similarities with the skeptical empiricist tradition. We will touch on three core topics: provisional certainty (or hypothesis formation), the idea of impartiality in judgement or the attempt to reduce non-epistemic factors from reasoning, and the Academic skeptic theme of intellectual humility and the Socratic contention that absolute certainty or knowledge is not possible.

Daniel's *Voyage* often makes explicit comparisons, quite Charronian in character, between rationalist discourse which only allows for "ouy/non" statements of pure certainty or skepticism, and probabilism's enabling of a discourse of likelihood or *vray-semblance.* In a comparison between Daniel and other French Jesuits of his time, Nicolas Corréard notes that "le Père René Rapin, autre jésuite, aura pu montrer la voie à son confrère Daniel : ranimant

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le scepticisme néo-académique de Cicéron, Rapin juge que Descartes n'a pas assez

douté, et que la faillibilité de l'esprit humain devrait lui interdire de se prononcer

aussi hardiment qu'il le fait."[44]

This method of contrasting Cartesian method with probabilistic and Academic Skeptic

models of provisional certainty is evident in the way in which Daniel employs the term

"vraisemblable" when describing alternatives and objections to Cartesian epistemology. For

example, when a set of Peripatetics gather to produce a series of objections and alternatives to

Cartesian *cogito* and ontological proof, their arguments are described as "vraisemblable" by

Daniel (267). Daniel also uses the term, or at times the term "probable", when providing

assessments of other philosophies and theories, such as those within Euclidean geometry (191).

What is even more striking is a passage in which Daniel suggests that Descartes revise his

rationalism in order to weaken his claims, understanding them as fallible and probabilistic. He

notes in the voice of Aristotle, for example, that Descartes should revise his postulation that

God's benevolence causes all that one perceives clearly and distinctly to be true. In Daniel's

view, this should only be stated as a probable theory, especially given Descartes' prior

demonstration that God's omnipotence clearly grants God the ability to deceive humans:

> Là-dessus Aristote fit des réflexions. Savoir, que Descartes n'avait plus droit de regarder comme une règle de vérité, cet Axiome, *Tout ce que nous concevons distinctement est vrai ;* puisqu'il le rendait douteux, par la raison tirée de la puissance de Dieu : raison, qui lui paraissait si forte, qu'il lui était impossible, y faisant attention, de ne pas avouer, que, si ce Dieu voulait, il ne pût très facilement faire en sorte, que nous nous trompassions dans les choses, que nous concevions très distinctement. Que, supposé cela, l'autre regard qu'il jetait sur l'évidence des propositions, ne devait, tout au plus, que le faire balance, et lui rendre probable, la vérité de sa règle (81).

What Daniel is suggesting here is the concept that certain Cartesian ideas and theories may be

worth pondering, but within a fundamentally different epistemic structure of provisional

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[44] Corréard, *Voyager dans le monde des idées,* 419.

certainty and hypothesis formation as opposed to pure and inviolable rationalist principles. Given

the tensions and imperfections related to various claims, such as the idea that God is capable of

deceiving, or the idea that God's benevolence ensures the accuracy of clear and distinct ideas,

the best course of action is to consider that certain of his claims have some degree of probability

as opposed to being wholly true or false.

Daniel engages in a similar epistemic process of mitigating Cartesian rationalist

assertions as probable ones in his critique of animal automatism. As Rosenfeld notes, Daniel

disarms Cartesian notions of animal automatism by noting that involuntary processes among

animals cannot be "evidence of mechanical nature of every animal" but merely "the likelihood of

some mechanical movements among animals."[45] Daniel also noted that the assertion of the idea

of an omnipotent God leads Cartesians to simply speculate that God would use such power to

create the "machinery" of animal automata, but this is merely a guess or what Cartesians take to

be a probable theory.[46]

The theme of probable and imperfect truths not only applies to evaluations of

epistemological methods among the philosophers in Daniel's text, but also to the broader

structure of the text and the narrative itself, which incorporates a blend of fact and fiction, of

contestations that are not fully true or false but fall within various gray areas. Daniel presents the

reader with a realm of philosophers who, as we've mentioned, imagine as they reason and reason

as they imagine. Daniel is self-conscious about this decision to fill the book with partial truths

and, as is appropriate for the genre of his text, makes playful reference to Lucian's claim that

nothing at all within his lunar narrative is true.[47]

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[45] L. C. Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine* (New York, Octagon Books: 1968), 87-88.

[46] Woosuk Park, "On Animal Cognition: Before and After the Beast-Machine Controversy," in *Philosophy and Cognitive Science: Western & Eastern Studies*, ed. Lorenzo Magnani (Berlin: Springer, 2012), 64.

[47] W. B. Carnochan, *Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 125.

In particular, Daniel notes at the beginning his text that by declaring that "tout ce qu'il va dire est faux", Lucian "se délivre de la plus grande peine qu'il y ait dans la composition de ces sortes d'ouvrages, qui consiste à garder toujours la vrai-semblance dans la narration : obligation autrement indispensable pour tout Ecrivain qui raconte" (3). Daniel continues, noting that he not only is unable to steal Lucian's idea on the charge that this lacks originality, but also cannot take up the same declaration of utter falsity because he is obligated to "observer la rigoureuse loi de la vrai-semblance dans mon Histoire," and his justification for the rigor of his "vrai-semblance" is related to his claim: "Je suis Philosophe, et la profession que je fais de l'être, ne me permet pas de m'accomoder d'une telle conduite" (4).

Daniel not only explicitly ties his own enterprise as philosopher and narrator with the exposition of the "vrai-semblable", but complicates the issue in a way that makes his epistemology accord even more with the skeptical empiricist tradition. Daniel observes that he is a philosopher and obligated to report his story according to that "rigoureuse loi de la vrai-semblance", but he also notes: "Le caractère d'un Philosophe, c'est de dire toujours ou de s'imaginer dire toujours la vérité; ou du moins de vouloir toujours sembler la dire" (4). Here, Daniel is practicing a doubled epistemology of philosophical judgement and bias much as Montaigne does; he tries to report the most "vrai-semblable" and probable theories and observations he can, but he is constantly aware of (and functions under the influence of) forms of bias and imagination which are inextricably linked with judgement. Daniel both wants to provide the philosophical "vrai-semblable" and note that his imagination mediates and problematizes this process; in this way, he winkingly draws attention to both the epistemological rigor and some of the fantastical qualities of his work. This doubleness also seems to apply to the work itself: at times Daniel treats philosophical subjects with probabilistic rigor and aims at impartiality, but

sometimes we catch him rambling with astrologists, or even mentally manipulated into perceiving and imagining the swirling vortices of Descartes.

Having examined the relationship between reason and imagination in Daniel's text, we turn to moments of the text where Daniel and his narrator advocate and espouse a philosophy of judgement which seeks to eliminate bias, maintain impartiality, and make non-epistemic factors irrelevant to the process of judgement. At various moments of the text, Daniel's narrator self-consciously asserts his impartiality during philosophical debates. In the "troisième ciel", before Daniel starts listening to debates between Cartesians and Aristotelians, he declares:

> Mon plaisir était de voir l'ardeur avec laquelle chacun soutenait son parti, et tâchait de m'y attirer : mais je me contentais de louer les uns et les autres, sans trop me déclarer ; et je me servais seulement de la qualité d'arbitre, qu'ils semblaient me déférer de commun accord, pour modérer la trop grande chaleur et le zèle de la Secte, qui les eut quelquefois portez un peu trop loin (178).

Daniel insists here both on the tendency of philosophers to defend their philosophical camps, and on his own effort to judge (serving as "arbitre") without being influenced by these non-epistemic factors. Similar declarations of moderation on the part of the narrator, or recommendations of how a philosopher should behave, employ the language of neutrality and judgement (such as "neutre", "arbitre", and "juge") throughout the text (7, 15, 99, 125, 150, 160). Jean-Luc Solère notes that Daniel uses his philosophical dialogues to observe that "dans le conflit entre aristotéliciens et cartésiens, chaque camp fait preuve d'obstination dans ses préjugés…" but Daniel's narrator "se tient en terrain neutre, se contentant de recenser les forces et les faiblesses de chaque doctrine."[48] In many places, it is clear that Daniel draws attention to the prevalence of prejudgment and ideology in philosophy while simultaneously attempting to combat these forces and reason neutrally.

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[48] Solère, "Un récit de philosophie-fiction," 162-3.

At the very end of Daniel's philosophical adventure, after his mind is cleared of the "esprits animaux" of Cartesian thoughts and restored to its equilibrium, the narrator notes that his mental disposition places him back in a place where he feels able to maintain impartiality, and evaluate philosophical arguments "equitablement":

> Cette vicissitude de mouvements des esprits animaux par les traces peripateticiennes, et par les traces cartesiennes, me semble avoir mis mon esprit dans un certain equilibre, et dans une espece de detachement des deux sectes opposees, qui le rendent capable de juger assez equitablement de l'une et de l'autre (361).

Here as elsewhere for Daniel, attention is drawn to the biases affecting the human mind and the need to maintain "equilibre" and "detachement." At the end of his philosophical journey, Daniel returns to the state of impartiality that characterized his mind before philosophers approached him with passionate convictions about their principles, and Daniel advocates using this state of detachment to evaluate different philosophical schools.

Daniel's approach to philosophical debate and the dialogic nature of his text[49] also signal a stated or attempted commitment to impartiality among different philosophical texts. Speaking of his own approach to philosophical dialogue, Daniel notes: "Je ne sais pas encore trop ce que je suis: je veux tâter de toutes les Sectes, avant que de me déterminer…regardez-moi comme un homme, qui vient d'un païs neutre" (150).[50] Daniel's narrator displays three important tendencies of the skeptical empiricist tradition here: he suspends judgement ("avant de me déterminer"), he aims at a kind of neutrality in engaging in this judgement from an impartial stance, and he makes an effort to expose himself to all the different philosophical schools (an aspect of Daniel's thought we will examine later in this chapter).

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[49] Matthieu Lesueur observes a practice of the "maïeutique" in Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage,* noting that his dialogic text proposes a "verité subjective et anticartésienne." See "Le 'Voyage du monde de Descartes' de Gabriel Daniel : étude d'une philosophie-fiction à vocation scientifique," *Interactions dans les sciences du langage et interactions disciplinaires dans les études littéraires*," 11 (2019): 368-378.
[50] This text is an addition that comes from the expanded edition published by Nicolas Pépie in Paris, 1702.

In the text's exploration of the Moon, Daniel also explicitly associates this kind of

philosophical dialogue with Gassendi, and as Darmon notes, Daniel affiliates the space of the

Gassendi crater with "une *situation,* particulièrement agréable, féconde et favorable aux

échanges savants," drawing on a traditional image of Gassendi as the *doux prêtre* of philosophy

frequenting discussions, lectures, and salons.[51] Having established the "moderation" of Gassendi

and the appropriateness of the location for his temperament, Daniel notes in particular that he

was hospitable to Cartesians, who often visited him and were welcomed "civilement" despite

their widely divergent philosophical views (103).

Daniel associates Gassendi and his narrator with the notion of "moderation", and the kind

of Academic Skeptic modesty of the philosopher aware of the ineluctable problem of bias; or the

philosopher who knows that they know nothing. We've seen Gassendi as the civil and pleasant

doux prêtre, inviting Cartesians over to engage in discussions, attempting not to take himself or

his own views to seriously in discussions. Of course, this persona of civility and intellectual

humility characterizes Montaigne's writing as well. It is worth mentioning that Daniel himself

(much like Cyrano) pursues his philosophical enterprise in a playful satire, which, as we've seen,

doesn't take itself, or any of the philosophers within it, too seriously. As Justin E. T. Smith notes:

> For Daniel, the line between philosophy and anti-philosophical satire cannot be so clear
> as it may have been for Lucian, since even a philosopher *par excellence*, such as
> Descartes, falls into the same sort of delirious wandering of the imagination as the
> fabulist does. Daniel has the upper hand then, not just as a fabulist but indeed as a
> philosopher, to the extent that he understands what he is doing. He knows that he is
> pursuing truth by means of fancy, rather than, as he supposes Descartes to be doing,
> mistaking fancy for truth.[52]

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[51] Jean-Charles Darmon, "Pierre Gassendi et la République des Lettres : questions liminaires," *Dix-septième siècle*
233, no. 4 (2006): 580.
[52] Smith, "Descartes Through the Mirror of Fiction," 795.

One of the ways in which Daniel advocates for the moderate provisional certainty of his epistemology is through the formal qualities of his own text, as with Montaigne's repeated insistence on his humility, Gassendi's at times performative modesty and use of the term *videtur* throughout his writing, and Cyrano's use of satire to deflate the serious pretentious of overly dogmatic or rigid epistemological assertions. While each of these skeptical empiricists fall into problems self-deception (or, as LaRochefoucauld put it, they have a tendency like all of us to "faire voir nos défauts du côté que nous voulons bien les montrer"),[53] these textual stylings of intellectual humility are core ways of signaling the epistemology they advocate for, which involves hypothesis formation, provisional certainty, and probabilistic claims which become updated as more data, information, and theories are encountered.

We will now proceed with an analysis of Daniel's similarities with Cyrano in his strategy of deflating overly rigid epistemological claims, particularly as it is applies to the primary target of satire in his text: Cartesians and Descartes himself. In particular, we will note here the way in which Daniel contrasts what he understands as intellectual humility, and the self-awareness of the philosopher's lack of knowledge in an Academic Skeptical mode, with the rigidity of Cartesian epistemology, whose principles are understood to be fully true or false, which does not account for the biases of the human mind especially as they relate to peoples' identities and physical conditions.

Descartes' own claims about the superiority of human consciousness over animal consciousness, and about his access to clear and distinct principles related to the nature of God and the thinking mind, have often been used as ammunition against him by both early and later

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[53] François de La Rochefoucauld, *Collected Maxims and Other Reflections* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 104.

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critics emphasizing what they take to be his presumptuousness.[54] Much of the criticism also

relates to Descartes' drive to throw away prior philosophical traditions to start anew according to

these rationalist principles. For example, at the end of Daniel's philosophical adventure, when he

discusses remaining in contact with Mersenne and Descartes, the former makes some

ostentatious claims about the value and significance of the latter's philosophy:

> Descartes était le premier, et même le seul philosophe qui eût jamais été au monde, tous les autres n'étaient que des enfants auprès de lui, des chicaneurs et des diseurs de sornettes. Etant invité quelques jours après a une thèse de philosophie, il fallut me faire une violence extrême pour me résoudre à y aller. Je n'y assistai qu'en baillant, et en regardant avec pitié du haut de mon esprit tout ce qui s'y disait (248-9).

Here, Daniel's mockery touches on the idea of Cartesian rationalist principles, accessed directly

by the higher realm of the mind (Mersenne looks down with pity…"du haut de mon esprit"). He

also attacks the way in which Cartesian pure forms of logical deduction do not leave room for

any other theories, ideas, and debates within philosophy.

Daniel's facetious use of the Cartesian realm of the "troisième ciel", and the image of

Descartes creating his own conception of the physical world in the highest of realms, draws upon

similar criticisms of rationalists believing themselves to be in a higher realm, blinded to other

perspectives and even the surrounding world. Instead of engaging in discussion, Descartes

largely speaks in long monologic paragraphs and refuses to engage with the philosophers on the

Moon. The character of Descartes only directly addresses Daniel's narrator when asking about

the contemporary fate of Cartesianism.[55]

Finally, it is worth noting that the text is sprinkled with flyby criticisms of both the "zèle"

and the "entêtement" of Descartes and Cartesians, some of which we've already seen, such as the

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[54] Anita Guerrini, "The Rhetorics of Animal Rights," in *Applied Ethics in Animal Research: Philosophy, Regulation, and Laboratory Applications*, ed. John P. Gluck et. al. (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2002), 63.
[55] Corréard, "Les égarements de la physique cartésienne," 315.

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comparison between Gassendi and Descartes in which the former is characterized by much less "entêtement" than the later. Daniel even makes the claim that Cartesians falsely insist on their ability to overcome their biases but do not practice this in their philosophy, noting his tendency to "me précautionner pour le moins autant contre les préjugés des cartésiens que contre ceux des philosophes ordinaires, les connaissant aussi entêtés à peu près que les autres" (52). Here, Daniel insists that claiming that one's philosophical principles are not subject to bias (because they are clear and distinct rationalist principles) is particularly dangerous and does not defend Cartesians against the bias of the "philosophes ordinaires" whose foibles Daniel observes elsewhere.

4.5   Daniel's Eclectic Humanism and the "Novelle Philosophie" of Descartes

Gabriel Daniel makes his eclecticism evident to the reader in much the same way as his epistemological method; he places it in sharp relief against Cartesian philosophy in order to clarify the former and produce a criticism of the latter. This is especially clear in the distinction between the Moon and the "troisième ciel" as philosophical landscapes with their own philosophical methodologies. While the Moon, a kind of homage to the philosophical realm of Cyrano's *L'autre monde,* is filled with dialogue, debate, and interactions between old and new thinkers of all kinds, from Plato to Cardano, Descartes dominates the landscape of his "troisième ciel", where the narrator encounters him largely on his own, constructing the rationalist architecture upon which he builds his model of the world (of course, Daniel mockingly concretizes this act of philosophical construction). To emphasize the humanism and eclecticism of Daniel, we will thus examine the methodology of lunar philosophy which Daniel seems to advocate and then view the contrasting Cartesian one which is the object of Daniel's satire.

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Daniel's Moon is a dialogic territory in which a great diversity of philosophers and ideas of his time come into contact with each other. Michael Edwards refers to the "desire to chart the contours of world learning" and the "cartographical impulse" of Daniel in constructing his lunar landscape.[56] It is also a place where Daniel's narrator notes with glee, "J'eus le plaisir de voir, que les Esprits Philosophes ne pouvaient s'empecher de disputer, non plus que les Philosophes corporels" (90). The citation attests to the fact that Daniel identifies with, and is most comfortable with this dialogic space, and this eclectic interaction between a great diversity of thinkers is the locus of his epistemology. Daniel expresses a jouissance in wandering about and encountering a diversity of philosophies, and he also thinks it makes his book more accessible. Daniel comments upon this in his introduction:

> J'ai tâché de varier, et d'egaïer un sujet aussi mélancolique, et aussi sec, que le peuvent être des matières de Philosophie, tant par la diversité des incidents, qui me donnent occasion de les traiter, que par quelques points particuliers et assez curieux de l'Histoire du Cartésianisme… (4)

Daniel's lunar journey charts the course of this jouissance of philosophical wandering; he ends up in the same place where he started at the end of his journey on the Moon, and, to use Descartes' metaphor of the forest from the *Discours de la méthode,* he wanders around in the forest instead of resolving to move in a straight line to escape it. For Daniel, this highly dialogic, circular, eclectic wandering among thinkers is a more productive (and entertaining) philosophical methodology.

Daniel's insistence on engaging with prior philosophical traditions and wandering about with Plato and Aristotle is particularly striking for someone who was appointed *historiographe de France* by Louis XIV as the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* had been raging since the

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[56] Michael Edwards, "Intellectual Culture," in *Ashgate Research Companion to the Counter-Reformation* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 301.

late 1680s. In this context, Daniel, in his eclecticism, felt the need to defend reading of ancient philosophers, demanding a "respect pour l'Antiquité" and what he took to be the rich perspectives they offer even to the seventeenth century reader, even calling those who fully reject ancient thought "fiers" and "méprisants" (2). Defenders of the old humanism and engagement with ancient thought like Giovanni Benedetti seemed to have read and been influenced by Daniel's criticisms of Descartes, showing the appeal that Daniel's eclecticism had for critics of the "nouvelle philosophie."[57] Well into the eighteenth century, Daniel's historical works were criticized by Voltaire for their lack of modernity, dusty humanism, and inability to account for differences between contemporary and ancient political contexts.[58] While, as we have seen, Daniel insists on a critical gaze of the ancient philosophers and their strange biases and tendencies, he mixes this critical outlook with dogged admiration and a humanist approach, insisting on thorough engagement with ancient texts well into the *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*. He is thus a late figure in the tradition of philosophical humanism in the style of Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano.

If Daniel is determined to insist on an eclectic engagement with ancient texts, in his typical fashion he also draws attention to the sharp contrast between his approach and that of Cartesianism. Daniel used the expression "la nouvelle philosophie" at least ten times in his *Voyage* to refer to Cartesian thought.[59] Daniel's portrait of Descartes in the "troisième ciel" provides a sharp contrast to the realm of maximal philosophical engagement and dialogue on the

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[57] Harold Samuel Stone, *Vico's Cultural History: The Production and Transmission of Ideas in Naples, 1685-1750* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 47.

[58] Phyllis K. Leffler, "French Historians and the Challenge to Louis XIV's Absolutism," *French Historical Studies* 14, no. 1 (1985): 7.

[59] Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 134.

Moon. Daniel notes that Descartes steals away to this realm in order to "éviter la compagnie d'une infinité d'âmes de Philosophes qu'on voit voltiger de tous cotes dans notre tourbillon" (31).

The praise for Descartes voiced by Mersenne, who calls him the "le seul philosophe qui eût jamais été au monde," also becomes a mischievously satirical jab at the solipsism of this philosopher who inhabits this "troisième ciel" on his own, creating a world without consulting other philosophers. What is more, Mersenne's story of becoming bored at philosophy lectures by non-Cartesians is followed by a highly symbolic action that Daniel seems to criticize; he clears his library of a number of books ("Une des premieres choses que je fis, fut de degrader dans ma bibliotheque les Suarez, les Fonseca, les Smigletius, les Gondins etc.") (249). In the same way that Descartes begins with a blank slate, throwing away prior texts and starting with his own *a priori* principles, Mersenne throws away his philosophy books, cutting off his interactions with other philosophical traditions. Mersenne equally shows his determination to cut himself from other philosophers when it is noted that he requests of the slave of Descartes that he "degage son esprit des préjugés…de la philosophie ordinaire" (48).

In his use of imagery regarding Descartes' solitary creation of his own rationalist world in the *troisième ciel*, and through his imagery of Mersenne dispensing with his philosophical library, Daniel is drawing on a tradition of emphasizing the alleged originality and solitude of Descartes and the origin of his clear and distinct ideas, mocking a kind of imagery which Descartes himself and many Cartesians at times promoted. In *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes himself promotes this image of solitude and originality in his description of his central rationalist clear and distinct principles arriving to him in solitude, huddled in a stove room.[60] Descartes' friend Plemp also promoted a similar image, noting that his friend Descartes did not possess any

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[60] René Descartes, *Discours de la Methode*, ed. Léon Meynard (Paris: Foucher, 1968), 10.

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books at all, and was often confined to solitary meditations which he simply rendered on paper.[61]

Daniel's satire makes use of these images of Descartes, which likely involve some degree of hyperbole or mythologizing about Descartes' own philosophical process, in order to more effectively contrast this philosophical vision with his eclecticism, also associated with a mythology (of the sage in the Academic Skeptic mode), and affiliated with the principle of a kind of eclectic and epistemically humble interaction with a variety of philosophical schools.

While Daniel is highly critical of the "nouvelle philosophie" in its pretentions to abandon prior philosophical texts and begin with pure *a priori* philosophical principles, it is interesting to note an example which seems to show that the salient point for Daniel isn't related to the need to engage with ancient texts for purely antiquarian reasons, but that he is more concerned with an eclecticism, or a desire to engage with other philosophers and theories about the world to enrich one's access to ways of understanding the world. The passage involves an intriguing fiction permitted by Daniel's lunar philosophical realm: the possibility of ancient philosophers who are well-read and up to date on their seventeenth century philosophy. Daniel's Aristotle, for example, provides over ten pages of commentary on Cartesian thought, highlights some points of agreement he maintains with Cartesianism, and even seems keen on flaunting his knowledge of Descartes in front of the Cartesians who have arrived to have a discussion with him.[62] Thus, while eclecticism may involve a complex interaction with ancient philosophical texts, the most salient point of this exercise is the maximization of engagement with varied philosophical principles and theories. The skeptical empiricist practice of humanism, then, at least within his

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[61] Geneviève Rodis-Lewis, *Descartes: His Life and Thought*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 85.
[62] Božovič, "The Speculative Story of the Mind," 8.

fictional world, can move backwards in time for Daniel, from an ancient philosopher to the most innovative thinkers of his time.

Daniel's *Voyage,* through its Cyranian lunar landscape which maximizes interaction among different philosophical schools, insists on eclecticism and maximal critical engagement with both ancient and contemporary philosophical thought in a humanist mode. His stubborn attachment to this kind of eclecticism and textual exegesis, even as "la nouvelle philosophie" came to challenge this model, is sharpened by the contrast he draws between this interactionism among philosophical schools and what Daniel saw as the solipsism and presumptuousness of Cartesianism and its alleged refusal to engage with prior philosophical traditions. Even as debates around the new Cartesian modes of rationalist inquiry emerged, Daniel insisted, much like Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano, on maximizing his own and the reader's engagement with a prodigious and rambling variety of ancient and modern texts.

This study has seen various facets of Gabriel Daniel's thought and textuality which place him within the skeptical empiricist tradition of Montaigne, Charron, Gassendi, and Cyrano. Like all these figures, he is determinedly Pyrrhonist in his metaphysics, including questions on the nature of God and the soul or thinking mind. In other matters, he insists on using the weak criteria of the reasoning mind and sense perception in concert with each other, and maintains a philosophy of provisional certainty which constantly evaluates the "vraisemblance" of different philosophical claims and seeks to maintain whichever is most "vraysemblable", never asserting full certainty about any philosophical claim. For Daniel as for other thinkers in this tradition, maximizing exposure to differing philosophical schools and experiences is the best means to be informed about the world, collect data and claims, and produce judgements about the most probable or "vraysemblable" claims to the best of one's ability. If Descartes sought to rid himself

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of both sensory data and prior philosophical traditions at the outset of his philosophical journey, Daniel and the skeptical empiricists sought to engage with these from the outset, asserting that engagement with them is ineluctably a highly fallible process, but the only way to acquire a weak but appreciable provisional knowledge of the world.

Conclusion

Gabriel Daniel's *Voyage* serves as a fitting final text to examine in this study, as he was among the final figures of the distinct seventeenth-century French skeptical empiricist tradition. Drawing on humanist eclecticism as a response to Cartesian rationalism would become less necessary with the decline of Cartesianism in France, and empiricism would take on its own sense of newness, as the *philosophes* borrowed from what was perceived as a new English empiricism, and started themselves to throw away many of their old books to create new radical philosophies in more empiricist modes. By the 1730s, Newtonianism, which placed greater confidence in both sense perception and especially in mathematical reasoning and logic, gained greater prominence in France as French Jesuits adopted the philosophy and Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* criticized French Cartesianism in comparison with Newton's empiricism in England.[1] While English empiricism itself drew inspiration from Gassendi's thought in a way which has been documented,[2] it deviates significantly from the French skeptical empiricist tradition with its greater confidence in reason and mathematics, its formal qualities which reject incorporating the author's subjective and imperfect process of judgement, and its rejection of eclecticism or late humanism as a major stylistic and philosophical approach. However, we turn in conclusion to the reception of Daniel, since it serves as an interesting case study for examining the impact of the skeptical empiricist tradition on various new forms of skeptical and empiricist thought of the eighteenth century in both France and Britain.

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[1] Jonathan I. Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man 1670-1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 816.

[2] Desiree Hellegers, "Tracking Probabilities: Gassendi and the Culture of Contingency in England," *The Eighteenth Century* 35, no. 1 (1994): 78–85; Fred S. Michael and Emily Michael, "Gassendi and Locke," 381-399; Noa Shein, "Newton's Anti-Cartesian Considerations Regarding Space," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 29, no. 1 (2012): 23.

The 1702 edition of Daniel's *Voyage* contains an introduction in which the author claims that his work had been one of the most successful books printed in France in the past fifteen years. The work appeared in so many translations and editions that Alan Charles Kors has asserted that Daniel wasn't exaggerating with the claim.[3] While rarely read today, the work seems to have had a sizeable impact, remaining in print well into the eighteenth century, coming out in approximately a dozen editions, and released in translated versions in English, Spanish, Italian, and Latin.[4] One of the most important and earliest academic journals in Europe, especially within the realm of natural philosophy, the *Journal des sçavants,* published a positive review of the work upon its release despite the journal's often Cartesian leanings at the time.[5] Pierre Bayle, that great compiler of skeptical arguments in the prodigious *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, so popular in the eighteenth century, used Daniel's book to accumulate objections to Cartesianism.[6]

Daniel's text and epistemological claims would become filtered into French Enlightenment thought not only through Bayle, but through the English empiricists who resonated with opposition to Cartesian rationalism. J. B. Shank claims that Daniel's urbane satire, popularization of empiricism, and trenchant anti-Cartesian arguments had an impact, along with Fontenelle and Regnault, on early eighteenth-century English empiricism.[7] Records indicate that John Locke possessed a copy of the work,[8] whose popularity in the 1692 English

[3] Kors, *Atheism in France,* 317.
[4] Haskell, *Ideology and Industry in Jesuit Latin Didactic Poetry*, 167.
[5] Alice Stroup, "French Utopian Thought: The Culture of Criticism," in *Utopia: The eighteenth Century*, ed. David Lee Rubin (Charlottesville: Rookwood Press, 1999), 11-16.
[6] Rosenfield, *From Beast-Machine to Man-Machine*, 90.
[7] J. B. Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of Enlightenment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 199.
[8] J. R. Milton, "Locke and Descartes: The Initial Exposure, 1658–1671" in *Locke and Cartesian Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 16-17.

translation attested to the growing prominence of Gassendist criticism of Descartes in early eighteenth-century England.[9]

There is even a distinct possibility that Daniel's work not only influenced the English empiricists, but also satirical fiction expressing empiricist ideas, especially the work of Irish satirist Jonathan Swift. It is certain that Swift possessed all three volumes of Daniel's *Histoire de France*, and highly likely that he was familiar with the *Voyage du Monde de Descartes*, especially since his friend Thomas Sheridan owned the text.[10] What is more, an accumulation of objections to the beast machine hypothesis shows textual parallels between Daniel and Swift.[11] In another textual parallel, the cousin of Gulliver, Richard Sympson, makes a metafictional reference to his cousin's travels referring to an "Air of Truth" which is "apparent to the whole"; this is the exact language used in the English translation of the *Voyage*'s preface to refer to "vraisemblance" of the work and the duty of the philosopher to recount what is "vray-semblable."[12]

If this hypothesis of Daniel's influence on Swift is correct, it shows that Daniel's criticisms of the presumptuousness of rationalist philosophy not only resonated with the English Empiricists and Newtonians, but figures like Swift who had a more critical relationship with Newton, especially because of his confidence in mathematics and his more constructive, less skeptical empiricism. Daniel's criticism of rationalism may have informed Swift's criticisms of both Cartesian and Newtonian confidence in mathematics, such as his satirical description of the floating island Luputa, where inhabitants are enamored of arithmetic but make badly fitting

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[9] William Poole, *The World Makers: Scientists of the Restoration and the Search for the Origins of the Earth* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), 20-21.

[10] Kurt Edward Milberger, "Gulliver in the Stable: Anti-Cartesian Satire and the *Bête-machine* in Part Four of *Gulliver's Travels*" in *Jonathan Swift and Philosophy*, ed. Janelle Pötzsch (London: Lexington Books, 2017), 90.

[11] Ibid., 90-96.

[12] W. B. Carnochan, *Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man*, 125.

clothes and are unable to physically use measuring instruments because they overestimate the scope and possibilities of rationalist and mathematical knowledge, and do not account sufficiently for individual sensory phenomena.[13]

With the emergence of Daniel's *Voyage*, the skeptical empiricist tradition of seventeenth century France, with its urbane humor and stylings of intellectual humility, became a popular both in France and England, and emerged as an influential antidote to what many took to be the rigidity and presumptuousness of Cartesian rationalism. At this juncture of profound influence and popularity, as was the case with Cartesianism at the height of its influence, important thinkers who read and borrowed from the skeptical empiricists began forming their own skepticisms and empiricisms which would become influential in many currents of eighteenth-century thought.

As we've noted, Pierre Bayle, probably the most popular and preferred seventeenth-century author among the *philosophes*,[14] compiled the anti-Cartesian criticisms of Gassendi and Daniel, and drew citations and formal qualities of his text from Montaigne.[15] Yet, he also formed a skepticism that was even less confident about the knowledge which sensory phenomena and reason can bring. Bayle's skepticism was also deeply eclectic, and he can be considered a late humanist who put different philosophical traditions in contact with each other, often using the Pyrrhonist method of *anarein* to neutralize their claims. In a profoundly Pyrrhonist form of skepticism, entries in Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* which accumulate arguments against the usability of sense perception as a criterion contain notes which direct the reader to more entries on the profound fallibility of reason, leaving no room for constructive knowledge

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[13] Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* (London: J. Walker & Company, 1819), 175-178.

[14] Haydn Trevor Mason, *Pierre Bayle and Voltaire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963).

[15] For more on Bayle's complex readings and uses of Montaigne, see Craig B. Brush, *Montaigne and Bayle: Variations on the Theme of Skepticism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 2012).

formation. While Bayle's thought exhibits an even more pessimistic skepticism than figures of

the skeptical empiricist tradition, he serves as a key transmitter of anti-Cartesian arguments from

this tradition, especially from Gassendi and Daniel, and shows distinctive parallels with their

fideism and eclectic humanism.

British empiricist figures like Locke, a reader of Gassendi and Daniel, bore their

influence primarily with regard to their core empiricist criticisms of Cartesian clear and distinct

ideas. Locke serves as an ideal thinker for understanding the reception of the French

seventeenth-century skeptical empiricists among the British empiricists. As a pivotal inaugural

figure among British empiricists, his philosophy's attacks on innate principles, as in the first

sections of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* and his distinction between primary

and secondary qualities, were key for figures like Boyle, Hume, Berkeley, Voltaire, and

Rousseau. Locke influenced Boyle and many others, for example, by distinguishing primary and

secondary qualities to gap the question of essences philosophically in order to focus upon

apparent phenomena,[16] in a similar mode as Gassendi's counter-arguments to Descartes' wax

argument, asserting the opposing view that extension or "essential" qualities of substances

cannot be apprehended. A clear axis of influence between Gassendi and Boyle also exists, and

there are records of Boyle's early notes and engagement with Gassendist thought and principles

in his early studies of natural philosophy.[17] However, we will focus on Locke as a pivotal figure

on this empiricist tradition who disseminated his interpretations of 17th century thought as a new

form of constructive empiricism.

His status as a key founding figure in British empiricism and his relationship with

Gassendist thought prompts some scholarly debate about the originality of Lockean empiricism

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[16] Peter R. Anstey, *The Philosophy of Robert Boyle* (United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 28.
[17] Sarah Hutton, *British Philosophy in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 62.

and its potential indebtedness to Gassendi.[18] As mentioned, Locke owned a copy of Daniel's *Voyage* at the peak of the satire's popularity in England. Locke also met with travel writer and Gassendist François Bernier shortly after his publication of his *Abrégé de la Philosophie de Gassendi*, also a part of Locke's library.[19] There is also robust evidence of Locke's early engagement with Gassendi's thought in the form of his notebooks. His notebooks from 1664 to 1667 contain a dense series of notes on Gassendi's *Life of Peiresc* and *Syntagma*.[20]

Though Locke certainly had a significant engagement with the French seventeenth-century skeptical empiricists, his empiricism deviates significantly enough from them to constitute a different philosophical tradition, while remaining influenced by central concepts which find their origin in Gassendist and French skeptical empiricst thought. Through distinctions between primary and secondary qualities, and his readings of Gassendist and Danielian counter-arguments to Descartes, his epistemology is influenced by, and preserves, the quality of the French skeptical empiricists of maintaining the locus of epistemology in the interactions between a reasoning mind and strictly apparent sensory phenomena. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* Locke does, as with authors of the skeptical empiricist tradition, assert that we cannot grasp the "real natures" or essences of things or causes in science, and that fully demonstrable science or knowledge in the Cartesian sense is impossible.[21]

In addition, Locke's use of total and Pyrrhonist skepticism in metaphysical matters, which remain outside his philosophical scope, and his consideration of only apparent phenomena within his epistemology, parallel the skeptical empiricists. His consideration of God and infinity

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[18] See David Fate Norton, "The Myth of 'British Empiricism,'" *History of European Ideas* 1 (1981): 331-334.
[19] Richard W.F. Kroll, "The Question of Locke's Relation to Gassendi" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 45, no. 3 (1984): 339-340.
[20] Richard I. Aaron, *John Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971): 35.
[21] Meyrick H. Carré, "Pierre Gassendi and the New Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33, no. 125 (1958): 113.

borrow from the philosophical trope that Montaigne and the skeptical empiricists promoted in France and had become popular in Britain at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; namely that God's nature is precisely outside the framework of human epistemology and understanding due to his infiniteness. Locke notes:

> …when we apply to that first and supreme being, our idea of infinite, in our weak and narrow thoughts, we do it primarily in respect to his duration and ubiquity; and, I think, more figuratively to his power, wisdom, and goodness, and other attributes, which are properly inexhaustible and incomprehensible, *etc.* For when we call them infinite, we have no other idea of this infinite, but what carries with it some reflection on, and imitation of that number or extent of the acts or objects of God's power…I do not pretend to say how these attributes are in God, who is infinitely beyond the reach of our narrow capacities: they do, without doubt, contain in them all possible perfection: but this, I say, is our way of conceiving them, and these our ideas of their infinity (XVII, 1).[22]

Here, Locke is establishing what Daniel referred to as the "bornes de l'esprit humain" in reference to Gassendi's Pyrrhonism with regard to metaphysics (103); humanity's "weak and narrow thoughts" cannot comprehend the "inexhaustible and the incomprehensible."

Locke would certainly agree with the skeptical empiricist idea that, as Charron put it, "Il faudroit estre infiny, & estre Dieu pour congnoistre Dieu."[23] He launches his own epistemological project in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with an attack on clear and distinct ideas as a criterion of knowledge and a starting point for knowledge formation, and also later rejects the idea that contemplating the "inexhaustible and the incomprehensible" can produce knowledge related to the physical world. While Locke's thought closely parallels that of the skeptical empiricist tradition in that it locates epistemology in the interaction between the two tools of sense perception and the reasoning mind, Locke reserves his statements about the "weak and narrow thoughts" of humanity for his statements on the incomprehensibility of metaphysics, and would not agree with, for example, Charron's statement that "Les moyens que [l'esprit]

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[22] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (United Kingdom: F. C. and J. Rivington, 1817), 194.
[23] Pierre Charron, *Les trois vertiez* (S. Millanges: Bordeaux, 1595), 18.

emploie pour descouvrir [la verité] sont raison et experience, tous deux tres-foibles, incertains, divers, ondoyans." (I, 14, 138). Thus, Locke's empiricism takes the urbane skeptical empiricist and anti-Cartesian tradition of seventeenth-century France as a starting point, particularly for criticizing rationalism, but produces a more constructive empiricism in which sense perception and reason are considered more reliable tools, as opposed to deeply fallible ones.

In some of the clearest textual parallels between Locke and Gassendi, such as one observed by Fred S. Michael and Emily Michael which we will comment on below, we can see both the influence of the skeptical empiricists on Locke and the ways in which Locke manipulates Gassendist discourse in order to build a more constructive empiricism. In his *Institutio Logica* (IV, IV) Gassendi writes:

> The Method of Judgment involves the use of a double criterion or instrument of assessment, the senses and reason.
> Since all things are either presented directly to the senses or are perceived by reason alone (remembering, of course, that in every case it is the senses which ultimately provide the material…), whenever there is a question about something which can be verified by the senses ... we must refer the matter to the senses and rely upon the evidence which they supply....
> When the question concerns a matter which can be resolved by the under-standing alone, then we are required to refer to reason, which has the power to infer from something perceived by the senses some further thing which the senses do not perceive; for example, "whether or not there are pores in the skin." That pores do, in fact, exist (however much they may escape the senses) is proved from the consideration that if they did not, there would be no possibility for the sweat which we perceive on the outer surface of the skin to have made its way there from the inside. Similarly, on the question "whether there is a void," Epicurus infers that there is from the consideration that if there were no void there would be no motion, which the senses do, in fact, perceive.[24]

For Gassendi, sense perception and reasoning fundamentally rely upon each other in the process of knowledge formation *insofar as it is possible*. Gassendi's language here refers to the necessity of using sense perception as a criterion of knowledge since it is the only source for information about apparent phenomena; he notes that we "must" use the senses and "rely upon the evidence

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[24] Pierre Gassendi, *Institutio Logica*, trans. Howard Jones (Assen: Von Gorcum 1981), 160.

which they supply." As with Montaigne's wheel argument in the *Apologie*, his statements about

reason and sense perception in *De l'Experience,* and Charron's idea of these tools as "tres-

foibles, incertains, divers, ondoyans," Gassendi is drawing on the idea that these tools are the

locus of knowledge formation, and humanity is stuck with whatever imperfections such tools

inherently involve.

Compare this with Locke's similar, but differing statements about the role of sense

perception and reason in the formation of knowledge:

> …[O]nly these two faculties [reason and sense perception] appear to teach and educate
> the minds of men and to provide what is characteristic of the light of nature, namely that
> things otherwise wholly unknown and hidden in darkness should be able to come before
> the mind…As long as these two faculties serve on another, sensation furnishing reason
> with the ideas of particular sense-objects and supplying the subject-matter of discourse,
> reason on the other hand guiding the faculty of sense and arranging together the images
> of things derived from sense perceptions, thence forming others and composing new
> ones, there is nothing so obscure, so concealed, so removed from any meaning that the
> mind, capable of everything, could not apprehend it by reflection and reasoning…But if
> you take away one of the two, the other is certainly of no avail, for without reason,
> though actuated by our senses, we scarce rise to the standard of nature found in
> beasts…On the other hand, without the help and assistance of the senses, reason can
> achieve nothing more than a labourer can working in darkness behind shuttered
> windows…reason is here taken to mean the discursive faculty of the mind, which
> advances from things known to things unknown and argues from one thing to another in a
> definite and fixed order of propositions.[25]

Here, Locke insists as Gassendi and the skeptical empiricists do that sense perception and logical

reasoning rely completely on one another in order to produce knowledge, and that "if you take

away one of the two, the other is certainly of no avail." Here, however, there is a difference from

Gassendi in emphasis on the reliability of these two epistemic tools and their interplay, and he

stresses that as long as these two work in concert, "there is nothing so obscure…that the mind

could not apprehend it by reflection and reasoning." In addition, Locke includes a strong

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[25] John Locke, *Essays on the Law of Nature: The Latin Text with a Translation, Introduction, and Notes. Together with Transcripts of Locke's Shorthand in His Journal for 1676* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147-148.

endorsement of syllogism and logical reasoning as a means of knowledge formation here, providing a definition of logical reasoning as a "fixed and defined" method for moving from one argument to another, and advancing it as one of the two faculties which serve to form clear knowledge about the nature of reality.

Thus, although Locke surely drew on Gassendist criticisms of Descartes and very likely on Daniel's epistemological objections to Cartesianism, his epistemology and thought bear significant differences from the French skeptical empiricist tradition of the seventeenth century. Not only is Locke's epistemology more constructive, but his thought is strictly antipodal to the eclecticism of the French skeptical empiricists, and he places greater confidence in the positive role of reason and sense perception in constructing knowledge.

With regard to the role of eclecticism and late humanism for Locke, it is clear that he was more similar to Descartes than to the skeptical empiricists in his reluctance to render his interactions with prior philosophical traditions on the page; he rather preferred constructing his philosophy without making his interactions and readings with prior philosophers explicitly visible.[26] As a result, his philosophical discourse, and that of the English empiricists, also does away with the doubled process of judgement we've seen in Montaigne and the skeptical empiricists. Instead of rendering the imperfections of the process of judgement, and producing what Terence Cave would call a "cognitive" portrait within his work,[27] Locke's writings simply attempt to render what are ostensibly the most unbiased judgements possible for him. While the skeptical empiricists insist on the Socratic literary trope (and artifice) of the judging agent who knows that they know nothing, Locke and the English empiricists largely do not use these

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[26] G. A. J. Roberts, "Boyle, Locke, and Reason," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 2 (1966): 206.
[27] Terence Cave, *How To Read Montaigne¸* Introduction.

literary devices (although Hume is a major exception, incorporating more dialogic, subjective, and relativistic qualities in his works).

The British empiricists focused on a commitment to working with the tools of reason and sense perception, with much less insistence on the inherent bias of human reasoning and its ineluctable connection with the imagination, especially in the eclectic and humanistic process of philosophical exegesis. The Scottish philosopher Hume, with his famous statement that "reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions" may be the most prominent exception to this, and a large array of similarities between the epistemology of Montaigne and Hume have been observed.[28]

In eighteenth-century France, however, the spirit of philosophical dialogue and eclecticism was one of the core influences of skeptical empiricist tradition, leading to fertile philosophical dialogues and skeptical accumulations of arguments as a primary literary mode for engaging in philosophy. It was the Voltairean *conte philosophique* which emerged from the fertile ground of Cyrano's *L'autre monde,* Daniel's *Voyage,* and other wild philosophical fictions from Pierre Borel to the wildly popular Fontenelle.[29] Voltaire's *Micromégas* contains many Cyranian borrowings, and uses the trope of foreign beings to induce philosophical interactions with the thought of Aristotle, Leibniz, Malebranche, and Descartes, often highlighting the faults and foibles of human philosophers.[30] We see in such dialogues the influence of a skeptical empiricist tradition which sought to betray the imperfections and conditions of the process of philosophizing itself, and which observes a profound link between reasoning and imagining.

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[28] Frédéric Brahami, *Le travail du scepticisme : Montaigne, Bayle, Hume* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2001).

[29] Brain Stableford, "Science Fiction Before the Genre," in *Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[30] Ira Wade, *Voltaire's Micromégas: A Study in the Fusion of Science, Myth, and* Art (Princeton University Press, 1950), 80-88.

Largely, however, they strip away most of the late humanism of the skeptical empiricist tradition, engaging more contemporary philosophical debates and questions, and have less of a need to defend the use of ancient authors and texts *per se*. Pococurante of Voltaire's *Candide* had a complete disdain of the Greek and Roman canon and seems willing to throw out these old books, but this is in many ways comic and refreshing. His act of disposing with works of antiquity is certainly not as unsympathetic as Mersenne's act of dispensing with works from his own library in Daniel's text.

Another influence of skeptical empiricism in this study and much of eighteenth-century French Enlightenment thought lies in the legacy of its fideism, and in the relationship between epistemological discourse and questions of divine essence, which also bear some relationship with political discourse. By their own design, skeptical empiricist thinkers from Montaigne through Daniel produced innovations in epistemology and reserved themselves an epistemic intellectual freedom without fundamentally questioning the political order under which they lived or its religious ideologies, partially achieving this through their fideism, which wholly separated epistemological discourse from religious discourse. Part of their strategy and style as innovative epistemological thinkers working under a monarchist and absolutist regimes was to gap the controversial questions of metaphysics, religion, and politics in service of their new epistemology. Without exception, thinkers in this tradition express favor for what they consider to be religiously tolerant monarchist regimes, much like the bird monarchy in Cyrano's *L'autre monde.* Their skeptical empiricism, often framed as a kind of wisdom, did not place confidence in the judgement of the common citizen, and the political implications of this did not place the Gassendists and skeptical empiricists far from Gassendi's friend Thomas Hobbes.

Montaigne indeed emphasized the rarity of the judging mind (and possibly even what he called his "suffisant lecteur") in his philosophy of judgement, using terms like "reiglées", "fortes" and "bien nées" to describe ideal practitioners of the form of judgement that he prescribes.[31] In a passage exclusively devoted to responding to those who found his book "trop hardy et trop libre à heurter les opinions communes," Charron emphasized that "la sagesse n'est commun ny populaire" (41),[32] a view equally consistent with Gassendi's assertion that his "indigestible compositions of mind" would not be understood by a larger public,[33] and the view that "Philosophy is content with the judgement of a few men and deliberately shuns the multitudes," a statement he makes in a letter to du Faur de Pibrac praising his correspondent's suggestion that Montaigne and Charron's works are best enjoyed in solitude.[34]

We also see a mistrust in a common philosophical readership in Dyrcona's fictional persecution and imprisonment for his writings, which are due to their controversial public reception. In addition, as we've reviewed in this study at many turns, the skeptical empiricist tradition treats reason as a tool which is not appropriate for the untrained: not a "jouet à toutes mains" as Montaigne put it. The political implications of such a philosophy of judgement involve advocacy of what these figures conceive of as a tolerant or enlightened monarchy like Cyrano's monarchy of birds; an ideology which does not have much sympathy for democracy or the

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[31] Richard Scholar, *Montaigne and the Art of Free-thinking* (Oxfordshire: Peter Lang, 2010), 107.

[32] Charron also noted that "l'esprit humain est temeraire et dangereux" for the freedom with which it considers "les opinions communes" (140).

[33] Gassendi writes in the *Exercitationes*: "I have called these indigestible compositions of mine by the title of 'Exercises' because I have used them to exercise my mettle and my intelligence. In the beginning it seemed to me that I would need great mettle to break free where so few have tried to stand on their own feet, to rid myself of so many habits contracted since childhood from exposure to common men, to shake off the shameful yoke of this prejudice, as deep as it is widespread, and—what seemed even more serious—all this when I found nobody who approved of my undertaking, indeed when I might be hissed offstage and pointed at with the finger of shame by nearly all men with a reputation for learning." The passage continues with a reflection on the "paradoxes" of his work which he refers to as "opinions surpassing the comprehension of common men." From *Selected Works,* 22-23.

[34] Gassendi, *Selected Works,* 5.

decision-making power of the common citizen, but which aims to separate theological and empirical questions while intellectually challenging religious intolerance within its elite audience.

This issue would remain prescient in the eighteenth century, with many innovative thinkers in epistemology and scientific thought, like Voltaire, opting to gap religious questions in fideist and Deist modes. For example, Voltaire noted that "La raison humaine est si peu capable de démontrer par elle-même l'immortalité de l'âme, que la religion a été obligée de nous la révéler."[35] Notably, Voltaire follows this agnostic statement about the soul with its direct socio-political implications: "Le bien commun de tous les hommes demande qu'on croie l'âme immortelle : la foi nous l'ordonne."[36] Part of the legacy of the seventeenth-century skeptical empiricists involves this kind of agnosticism with regard to metaphysics and the soul which simultaneously allowed the author to dodge religious criticism, promote the forms of social order that religious ideologies allow for, and conspicuously reserve their philosophical scope to realms outside metaphysical concerns. This kind of fideism not only became commonplace in the eighteenth century, but is also an aspect of Bayle's thought, and was certainly absorbed by Bayle in his own readings of authors like Montaigne and Charron.[37] Thus, the seventeenth-century skeptical empiricist tradition's fideism does find some parallels in Enlightenment thought, especially in Voltaire and the widely read Bayle, who similarly gap metaphysics as incomprehensible in service of freethinking. In the case of some thinkers like Voltaire, this fideist skepticism also has political consequences and supports the idea of a religiously tolerant

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[35] Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques,* vol. 8 (Amsterdam: E. Lucas, 1734), 59.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Terence Penelhum, *God and Skepticism: A Study in Skepticism and Fideism* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2012), 25-28.

monarchist system without any hint of republicanism. Stéphane Pujol has even observed

parallels between the political fideism of French Jesuits like Huet and Voltaire's Deism.[38]

However, the fideism of the skeptical empiricist tradition very likely also found an

audience in Rousseau, at the very least in perhaps one of the most famed and pivotal expressions

of his views on religion. Rousseau's readings of Charron's fideism have been studied in relation

to the infamous profession of faith of the Savoyard Vicar in the fourth book of *Émile*. This is a

probable axis of influence, as Rousseau had been recently gifted *De la Sagesse* by Mme Créqui

and included an homage to Charron as a "good and wise priest" in *Émile*[39] (one which seems to

have parallels with the image of Gassendi as the *doux prêtre* of philosophy which we have seen

in Cyrano and Daniel).[40]

In many of these ways, from their fideism and insistence on the link between reason and

imagination to their criticisms of pure rationalism, the skeptical empiricist tradition had a

distinctive impact on the skepticisms and empiricisms of eighteenth-century France and Britain.

Beginning with Montaigne's eclectic reception of ancient sources, and the new rigor with which

he analyzed their epistemological claims, the skeptical empiricists developed a distinctive variety

of humanism insisting on provisional certainty and the necessity of maximally accumulating

sources and data while continuously modifying one's beliefs and principles. Montaigne's

disciple Pierre Charron strengthened the epistemological character of Montaigne's text and gave

it a textual form more conducive to the tastes of a seventeenth century audience, allowing for its

transmission and popularity among Gassendi and his circle.

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[38] Stéphane Pujol, "Forms and Aims of Voltairean Scepticism," in *Scepticism in the Eighteenth Century: Enlightenment, Lumières, Aufklärung,* ed. Sébastien Charles and Plínio J. Smith (New York: Springer, 2013), 194.
[39] María José Villaverde, "Rousseau: Philosophical and Religious Skepticism and Political Dogmatism," in *Skepticism and Political Thought in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 218.
[40] Jean-Charles Darmon, "Pierre Gassendi et la République des Lettres," 580.

At the height of Cartesianism in the seventeenth century, Gassendi's skeptical empiricism served as a somewhat minor but most prominent alternative to Descartes' wildly popular rationalism. This period also produced Cyrano's lunar exploration and satire, whose released fragments experienced delayed popularity in the late seventeenth century and early eighteenth century and fundamentally shaped Gabriel Daniel's anti-Cartesian satire. Finally, Daniel's satire emerged as Cartesianism became more important for its various splintering philosophical camps and served as a target for criticisms of varying severity at the end of the seventeenth century. Daniel's skeptical empiricism produced a best-selling astronomical travel narrative which shaped the anti-Cartesian skepticisms and empiricisms of the eighteenth century, from Pierre Bayle to Jonathan Swift. Readings of the other skeptical empiricists also continued to multiply and produce new skepticisms and empiricisms, from the Montaignian epistemologies of Bayle and Hume to the Cyranian and Danielian quality of the *conte philosophique.*

Far from serving as a precedent to Cartesian hyperbolic doubting, Montaigne's *Essais* gave rise to an epistemological tradition which, for the first time in centuries of European thought, decidedly and deliberately removed metaphysics from the realm of epistemic inquiry. Its power and impact lay in recognizing the deep fallibility of sense perception and logical reasoning, and making these fallible and imperfect tools the beginning and end of epistemic inquiry. This fallibilism would also pose pungent criticisms of the rigidity of rationalist epistemic form and logic in a way that paved the way for eighteenth century empiricist discourse and the *conte philosophique*, encouraging new and freeing methodologies of hypothesis formation, epistemic humility, and maximizing one's encounters with philosophical schools of every tradition as opposed to building a new philosophy from the ground up. The legacy of both the epistemic philosophical claims of this worldview and its formal literary qualities shaped the

empiricisms, skepticisms, and satires of the eighteenth century which wholly eliminated metaphysics, insisted on the empiricist's freedom to form and revise hypotheses, emphasized an acute awareness of the foibles and biases of philosophy itself, and promoted the free and maximal pursuit of intellectual engagement to collect data, improve one's hypothesis, and satisfy intellectual curiosity.

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