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José R. Maia Neto

Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth- Century French Philosophy

The Charronian Legacy 1601-1662

 Springer

Academic Skepticism in Seventeenth-Century French Philosophy

ACADEMIC SKEPTICISM
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
FRENCH PHILOSOPHY

The Charronian Legacy 1601–1662

José R. Maia Neto

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José R. Maia Neto
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*To Elene and Frederico
In memory of Américo Maia de Vasconcelos
Neto (1929–2013)*

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integra nobis est iudicandi potestas
Cicero, *Academica* II.8

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Abbreviations

Ac	Cicero. <i>Academica</i> . Trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
Nat deo	Cicero. <i>De Natura Deorum</i> . Trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994.
Tusc disp	Cicero. <i>Tusculanae Disputationes</i> . Trans. H. M. Hubbell, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960.
C Ac	Augustine. <i>Contra Academicos</i> . Trans. J. J. O'Meara. Westminster: Newman Press, 1950.
M	Sextus Empiricus. <i>Adversus Mathematicos</i> . Trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
PH	Sextus Empiricus. <i>Pyrrhoniæ Hypotyposes</i> . Trans. R. G. Bury, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987.
E	Michel de Montaigne. <i>Les Essais</i> . Édition Villey-Saulnier. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004.
PTS	Charron. <i>Petit Traité de Sagesse</i> . Texte revu par Barbara de Negroni, Corpus des Œuvres de Philosophie en Langue Française. Paris: Fayard, 1986.
S	Charron. <i>De la Sagesse</i> . Texte revu par Barbara de Negroni, Corpus des Œuvres de Philosophie en Langue Française. Paris: Fayard, 1986.
Ex	Pierre Gassendi. <i>Exercitationes adversus aristoteleos</i> . Texte établi, traduit et annoté par Bernard Rochot. Paris: J. Vrin, 1959.
DIA	La Mothe Le Vayer. <i>Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens</i> . Texte établi par A. Pessel, Corpus des Œuvres de Philosophie en Langue Française. Paris: Fayard, 1988.
PTSC	La Mothe Le Vayer. <i>Petit traité sceptique sur cette commune façon de parler 'n'avoir pas le sens commun'</i> . Paris: Gallimard, 2003.
AT	<i>Œuvres de Descartes</i> . 11 vols. Publiées par Charles Adam & Paul Tannery. Paris: J. Vrin, 1996.

- CSM *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. 2 vols. Trans. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- La Pascal. *Les Pensées*. Edition Louis Lafuma, in *Œuvres complètes*. Présentation et notes de Louis Lafuma. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1963.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Pierre Charron (1541–1603) is a much neglected figure in the history of philosophy mainly because he has been mostly seen since the late seventeenth century as a mere and uninteresting disciple of Montaigne's.¹ We can hardly imagine today how much read, respected and admired he was during the first half of the seventeenth century. Charron wrote two important works.² One theological, *Les Trois Vérités* (1593), the other philosophical—*De la Sagesse* (first edition, 1601, second modified and expanded edition, 1604).³ The former had an impact at the occasion of its publication in the field of religious controversy.⁴ The latter had such a huge impact in seventeenth century ideas that it can hardly be fully measured.

Besides the charge of plagiarism, another reason why Charron was rated a second class author is the originality, literary and philosophical interest of Montaigne's *Essays*. One of the first skeptical works in the vernacular, presenting a personal and epistemologically quite sophisticate appropriation of ancient skepticism, Montaigne's view was naturally taken as the paradigm for the examination of early modern

¹ See the article “Charron,” Remark O, in Bayle's *Dictionary*. The view that he was a plagiarist prevailed until recently. An influential representative of this view is Villey (1935, 112ff).

² A third work, the *Discours Chrétiens* did not have the same impact as the others two.

³ Charron tells in the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*, which he wrote to summarize his views, reply to objections and introduce the second edition, that the latter was mainly motivated by objections raised by theologians which lead him to “expliquer et adoucir” (PTS, 822) some passages. But he also expanded important points and did not alter in any significant way the views of the 1601 edition. Barbara de Negroni made a careful comparison of the two editions and arrived at the conclusion that the comparison “remet en cause deux idées généralement reçues sur Charron: que la première édition soit plus authentique et que Charron soit un disciple de Montaigne. La seconde édition, parce qu'elle s'éloigne de Montaigne, est plus cohérent que la première” (de Negroni 1986, 14).

⁴ The three truths are (1) that God exists; (2) that Christianity is the true religion; (3) that Roman Catholicism is the true Christian church. The third truth takes the longest part of the work. It attacks the Huguenot polemist Du Plessis-Mornay. For this controversy and its relation to *De la Sagesse*, see Pessel (2009).

French skepticism. But Charron, so the charge goes, besides deprived of originality, put the content of Montaigne's *Essays* in a systematic form, thus destroying the formal originality of Montaigne and adopting a form perhaps incompatible with genuine skepticism.⁵ However, the recognition of the great value of Montaigne's writing was not immediate. Charron's more traditional style was valued during the early seventeenth century.⁶ Charron's *Sagesse* was more diffused than Montaigne's *Essais* during this period.⁷ One of the purposes of this book is to restore part of the historical and philosophical role played by Charron in early modern philosophy.⁸

Scholars have pointed out the influence of Charron's *Sagesse* in the so called "libertinage érudit" in the early seventeenth century French philosophy and on Descartes and Pascal.⁹ Although those philosophers more enthusiastic about Charron's *Sagesse* were among the so called libertines,¹⁰ he was also received and respected

⁵ See Giocanti (2001, 21).

⁶ Bayle reports—citing Sorel's *Bibliothèque*—Naudé's claim that he "estimait tant [Charron] qu'il le préférât à Socrate; que Socrate n'avait parlé à ses disciples que confusément, et selon les occurrences, au lieu que Charron avait réduit la sagesse en art" (*Dictionary*, article "Charron," remark O). According to Naudé, it is precisely Charron's systematic style that allows him to elaborate the view of wisdom that Socrates could only exemplify.

⁷ "Nous avons ... répertorié pas moins de 44 éditions de la *Sagesse* publiées entre 1601 et 1672. Pour leur part, les *Essais* de Montaigne n'ont connu que 25 éditions dans le même laps de temps. ... Il en va de même pour les traductions puisque la *Sagesse* connaîtra 12 éditions en anglais au XVII^e siècle (contre 5 pour les *Essais* de Montaigne), une traduction en allemand (1669), et une en italien (1698)." (Desan 2009, 5–6).

⁸ This book thus adds to work previously done on the influence of Charron's by Sabrié (1913), Popkin (1954), Dini and Taranto (1987), Adam (1991), Belin (1995), Paganini (1991, 2008), Faye (1998), Gregory (2000), focusing on the debate around skepticism held by the main French philosophers at the time.

⁹ For recent studies on the influence of Charron on the so called erudite libertines, see Chaps. 3 and 4 *infra*; Charles-Daubert (1998, 32–48, 49–65), Gregory (2000, 115–134), Cavaillé (2007), Moreau (2007, 47–67, 2009). For his influence on Descartes, see Chap. 5 *infra*; Sirven (1928, 262–273) on provisional morals; Boase (1935, 209–237) on a number of issues in the *Discours* and the *Cogitationes privatae*; Battista (1966, 205–206) on politics; Adam (1991, 193–198, 1992) on several connections, including the suggestion that Charron's doubt is methodical, intermediary between Montaigne's and Descartes's; Rodis-Lewis (1994, 1995, 71–76) on the influence of Charron's *Sagesse* in Descartes's intellectual autobiography presented in the *Discours*; Belin (1995, 229–238) on generosity; Faye (1998, 293–324) and Kambouchner (2009) on morals. Scholars who have mainly focused on the skeptical connections are Gilson (1925, 173, 179, 234), Popkin (1954), Paganini (1991, 85–97, 2008). For Charron's influence on Pascal, see Chap. 6 *infra*; Orcibal (1956), Adam (1991, 198–202), Carraud (1992, 443–448), Belin (1995, 288–306), Maia Neto (2006).

¹⁰ Gabriel Naudé considered Charron superior to Socrates and *De la Sagesse* inferior only to the Bible (cf. Popkin 2003, 82). Guy Patin recommended the following reading list to a friend: "Lisez la *Sagesse* de Charron, tous les ans, deux fois, les *Epistres* de Seneque en latin, et les *Vies* de Plutarque en françois" (cf. Moreau 2009, 210n). Note that Charron is the only modern author in the list. The classic study about this intellectual movement is Pintard (1983, first published in 1943).

by important religious thinkers. The most famous of these was Duvergier d'Hauranne, the *abbé* de Saint-Cyran, leader of the so called Jansenist movement in France,¹¹ who defended Charron against the charges of being an atheist and libertine rose by the Jesuit François Garasse.¹² A telling example of the controversy about *De la Sagesse*'s religious or irreligious, skeptical or non-skeptical nature, which opposes scholars to this day, is its reception by the minor philosopher Jean de Silhon.¹³ In the preface to the second of his *Deux vérités* (on the immortality of the soul), Silhon strongly attacks Charron for claiming that, though universally received, this belief is the least proved. Silhon also insinuates a connection between Charron's philosophical position on the issue of the immortality of the soul and his morals.¹⁴ However, and most surprisingly, he adds the following note at the end of the book:

Quelques gens d'honneur ont trouvé mauvais de ce que je blasme un peu Charron en mon Introduction de la seconde vérité, j'en ay esté marry, et ne desirant que personne se blesse dans mes escrits, j'en eusse osté l'occasion s'il eust esté en mon pouvoir.¹⁵

In a book published later, in which he combats ethical skepticism, Silhon begins combatting Pyrrhonism, targeting Montaigne specifically, without making any reference to Charron, with whom the author of the *Essays* was often associated at the time.¹⁶

¹¹“Jansenists” was how the enemies called them. They called themselves followers of Augustine.

¹²See Garasse (1625, 730–740), Duvergier d'Hauranne (1626, vol. II, 323–420). This debate has been much commented by Charron's scholars. Most think that Garasse was partially right in uncovering Charron's irreligious views. In an earlier work I claimed that Saint-Cyran misunderstood Charron in considering him an Augustinian (Maia Neto 1995, 25–30). For a contrary view, see Belin (1995, 271–293). Mersenne dedicates a chapter to Charron's *Sagesse* in his *L'Impieté des déistes, athées et libertines de ce temps*. It is the ninth, “Auquel le Theologien porte son iugement touchant les oeuvres, & les opinions de Charron, & de quelques autres Escrivains, & où les impietez sont descouverts, & refutees” (Mersenne 1624, 180–220).

¹³Jean de Silhon (1596–1667) is mostly known as a friend of Descartes who might have plagiarized some of his metaphysical views. The friendship is attested in the letters from Descartes to Mersenne of 18 March 1630 (AT, I, 132) and 31 March 1631 (AT, II, 97) and in a latter probably to Silhon from March or April 1648 (AT, V, 133–139 and, in this same volume, the editorial note about the addressee of the letter, 660n). For Silhon's anti-skeptical views and his relation to Descartes, see Popkin (2003, 136–142).

¹⁴See de Silhon (1991, 121). The title of this book of Silhon's calls to mind Charron's *Les Trois Veritez*. The first truth, that God exists, is the same in both works.

¹⁵de Silhon (1991, 229).

¹⁶See de Silhon (2002, 21–33). The title of chapter 1 reads “Du Pyrrhonisme, Combien la Religion Chrestienne est offensée par cette Philosophie. Montaigne blasmé d'en avoir entrepris la protection.” Silhon also deals with the Socratic Academic acknowledgment that one knows nothing (pp. 27–28), different from Montaigne's radical Pyrrhonism, which he describes as “un estat d'irresolution pepetuelle ... un mouvement sans fin de nostre Raison, qui flotte tousjours sans jamais prendre pied: qui doute de tout et ne s'assure de rien; qui doute mesme si elle doute lors qu'elle doute, et ainsi à l'infiny” (p. 29). Silhon does not indicate that the more plausible position, but which he also attacks, is Charron's.

Charron was also influential in England. *De la Sagesse* was soon translated into English and published in 1606. It was 12 times reprinted in England during the seventeenth-century. He influenced Francis Bacon's theory of the idols and Joseph Glanvill's conception of a scientific *skepsis*.¹⁷

This book does not provide a survey of the whole spectrum of Charron's influence in the first half of the seventeenth-century. Such a work would require the examination of a myriad of minor philosophers and theologians, not to mention a variety of writers who were not philosophers or theologians, many of which were little remarked at the time and have no or little historical, let alone philosophical interest. The book concentrates on the influence of Charron's on the three most important and influential French philosophers of the time, namely, Gassendi, Descartes and Pascal, and a fourth one not as influential as the others, La Mothe Le Vayer, but whose scholarship has been increasing recently.¹⁸ The present book gives a systematic account of this influence, around the issue of skepticism, arguing that it is much more fundamental in the philosophical projects of these philosophers than it has been previously recognized.¹⁹

The next chapter argues that Charron's wisdom, although containing important Stoic and Christian elements, is basically Academic skeptic. I show the two main French Renaissance sources of Charron's Academic skeptical wisdom, namely, Omer Talon (ca. 1510–1562) and Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592). Although the author of the *Essays* is the main source of Charron's view of wisdom, I point out some crucial differences between Montaigne's and Charron's views of skepticism which made the latter at least as much important as Montaigne for the debate about skepticism held by Descartes and Pascal.

The remaining chapters of the book report a battle over Charron's Academic skeptical legacy during the first half of French seventeenth century philosophy. The four philosophers examined disputed the main issues involved in Charron's

¹⁷For Bacon's reception of Charron, see Maia Neto (2011, 230–231). Glanvill was a member of the Royal Society who admired Bacon and Boyle. He concludes his *Scepsis Scientifica*, published in 1665, describing the benefits of intellectual integrity and freedom: "The determinations of the nobler Mind, are but *temporary*, and he holds them, but till better evidence repeal his former apprehensions. He won't defile his assent by prostituting it to every conjecture, or stuff his belief, with the luggage of uncertainties. The modesty of his expression renders him *infallible*; and while he only saith, he *Thinks so*, he cannot be deceiv'd, or ever assert a *falsehood*. But the wise Monsieur *Charron* hath fully discours'd of this *Universal liberty*, and sav'd me the labour of enlarging" (Glanvill 1978, 171–172).

¹⁸The tremendous influence of Descartes and Pascal in philosophy, literature, religion and science goes without saying. That of Gassendi is also fully recognized today by scholars, for instance in British empiricism (see Lennon 1993). For recent scholarship on La Mothe Le Vayer, see Chap. 4.

¹⁹In the case of Gassendi, I claim that Charron is crucial in his first work, the *Exercitationes*.

view. These issues are figured in Charron's frontispiece of his *De la Sagesse*, engraved by Gaultier under his direct orders. It has Wisdom figured as a naked woman standing over a pedestal to the base of which four other women are enchained. These represent the enemies of Wisdom. As Charron himself describes these women, they represent Passion, "maigre, au visage tout alteré;" Opinion, "aux yeux esgarez, volage, est ourdie, soustenuë et par nombre de personnes, c'est le Peuple;" Superstition "au visage transsy, joignant les mains comme une servante qui tremble de peur;" and Science, "vertu ou preud'homme artificielle, acquise, pedantesque, ferue des loix et coustumes, au visage enflé, glorieux, arrogant, avec les sourcils relevez, qui lit en un livre, où y a escrit, OUY, NON." I hold that a central issue in early seventeenth century philosophy turns around Charron's proposition of a skeptical wisdom. On the skeptical front he has as his two main followers François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672) and the Pierre Gassendi (1592–1655) of the *Exercitationes Paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* (Gassendi's first book). Each develops one aspect of Charron's skeptical wisdom. La Mothe develops its contraposition to Opinion and Superstition. Gassendi develops its contraposition to dogmatic Science. Chapter 3 points out the influence of Charron's *Wisdom* in Gassendi's attack on dogmatic philosophy in general, in particular on Aristotelianism. Chapter 4 points out this influence in La Mothe Le Vayer's attack on opinion and superstition.²⁰ La Mothe Le Vayer and Gassendi are therefore follows of Charron who develop and detail Charron's attack on three of the four enemies of Wisdom.²¹ La Mothe attacks superstition and vulgar opinion and Gassendi attacks dogmatic science. On the opposite, anti-skeptical, side, I locate the two major seventeenth century French philosophers: Descartes and Pascal. I claim that the relationships of both with skepticism are illuminated when seen as departing from Charron's skeptical wisdom and aiming at overcoming it. In Chap. 5, I claim that Descartes's proposition of a radical reform of science aims at rehabilitating the Science contrary to Charron's skeptical wisdom so that this new science could get free from the chain and take over Charron's skeptical wisdom in the pedestal. In Chap. 6, I show that Pascal outlines a view of Christian wisdom which is alternative to the views of opinion and superstition

²⁰ Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer were friends at the occasion Gassendi wrote the *Exercitationes* and La Mothe Le Vayer his first skeptical dialogues. Their friendship and the heterodox view sustained by them and by two other friends (Samuel Sorbière and Guy Patin) lead Pintard (1983) to see them as belonging to the same irreligious movement he called "libertinage erudite." Pintard's views of La Mothe will be addressed in Chap. 4.

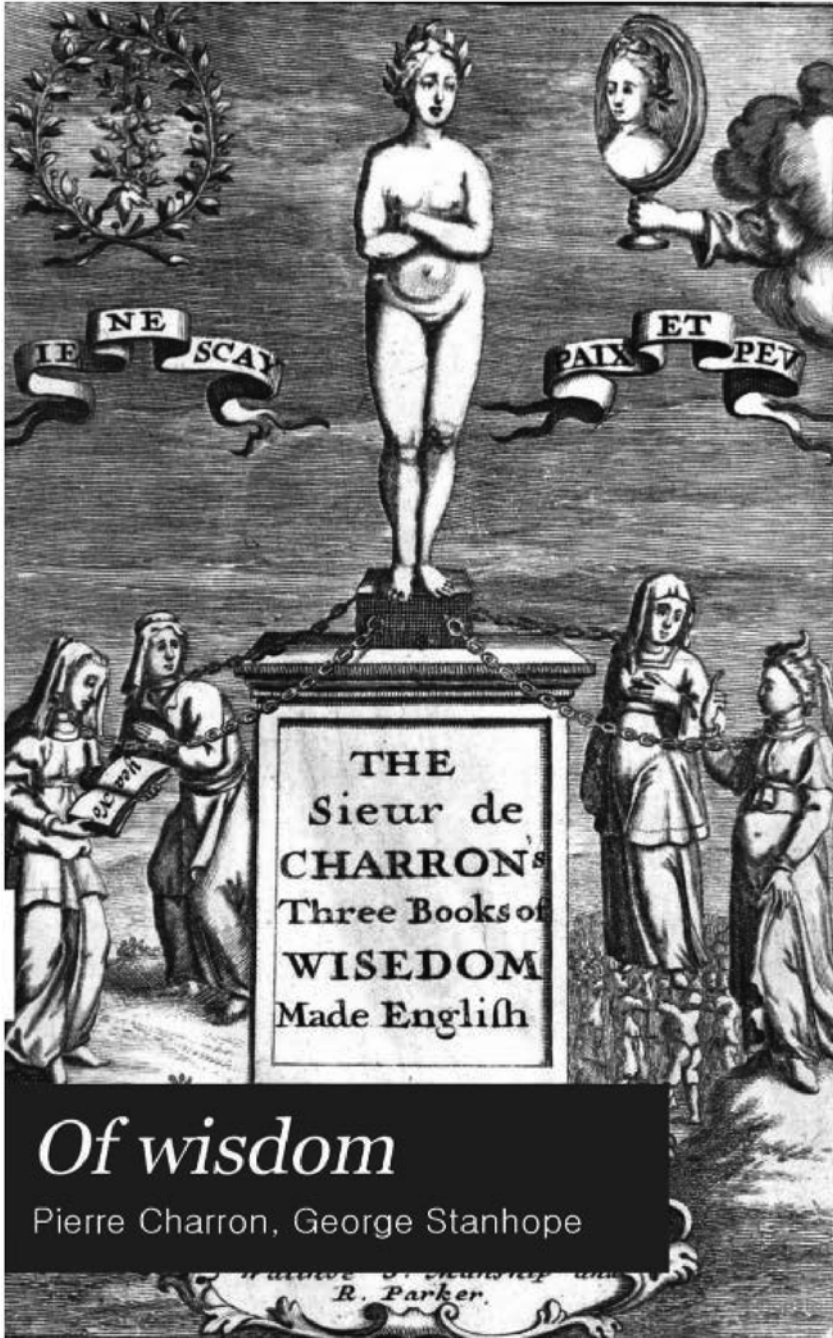
²¹ Charron's views on the passions—the fourth enemy of wisdom—is mostly related to his reception of Stoicism which is not focused in this book. Recent studies on this aspect of Charron's *Sagesse* are cited in Chap. 2.

attacked by Charron and purports to take over Charron's skeptical wisdom in the pedestal. Charron's skeptical wisdom is thus crucial in French philosophy of the first half of the seventeenth century, both for those who take a skeptical position and for those who pretend to overcome this position.

This book explores an important avenue through which Academic skepticism penetrated in seventeenth-century philosophy. The relevance of Academic skepticism in the Renaissance was examined by Charles Schmitt (1972), who focused on direct discussions (translations, commentaries and polemics) of Cicero's *Academica*, our main source for ancient Academic skepticism. Schmitt and Richard Popkin (the other major historian of modern skepticism) believed that after the translation to Latin and publication of Sextus Empiricus' Pyrrhonian works in 1562 (by Henri Estienne) and 1569 (by Gentien Hervet), the interest in Academic skepticism diminished drastically. Sextus' works were much more elaborate than Cicero's and Pyrrhonian skepticism much more philosophically sophisticated than Academic skepticism. Furthermore, the problem of the justification of the rule of faith which was central in the religious controversy that opposed Catholics and Reformers is a particular case of the specifically Pyrrhonian problem of how to justify a criterion of truth without begging the question.²² Recent studies have shown that Academic skepticism continued quite influential despite Sextus and that the coincidence between the Pyrrhonian problem of the criterion of truth and the religious problem of the rule of faith was just one of the diverse articulations between ancient skepticism and contemporary religious and philosophical issues elaborated at the time.²³ This book intends to contribute to the study of Academic skepticism in seventeenth century philosophy by examining the central and most influential legacy of Charron's reception of this Hellenistic school. It does not pretend to be comprehensive. On the contrary, I believe that Charron's legacy is much larger than the debate focused in this book, in which Academic skepticism is central, and that Academic skepticism was diffused in the seventeenth-century also through many other philosophers. I hope this book stimulates further research on the influence of Charron's and the presence of Academic skepticism in early modern philosophy.

²² See Schmitt (1972, 164) and Popkin (2003, xix–xx and 3–16).

²³ See Naya (2008, 2009) and the articles compiled by Paganini and Maia Neto (2009).



- Frontispiece of Charron's *De la Sagesse*, engraved by Léonard Gaultier, following Charron's directions. The image above was scanned by Google from an English translation by George Stanhope, published in London in 1707. Google and the Google logo are registered trademarks of Google Inc., used with permission.

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Chapter 2

Charron's Academic Skeptical Wisdom

2.1 The Ancient Greek Source of Charron's Academic Skeptical Wisdom

Is a skeptical wisdom, a wisdom based on suspension of judgment (*époque*), possible? A quick look at the history of philosophy seems to exclude this possibility since not only possession of knowledge, but certain possession of knowledge, appears as the essential part of the concept. Renaissance philosophers were well aware of the classical definition of wisdom as knowledge of things human and divine and their causes.¹ But there is another concept of wisdom, probably shared by Stoics and Academics, which plays a central role in the French Renaissance. This is the view that stresses not the identification of wisdom with knowledge but its opposition to opinion. This view is, like the other, also related to an ideal of infallibility but opens the possibility of maintaining the ideal in a pessimistic scenario about human knowledge. Because opinion (*doxa*) is by definition deprived of epistemic ascertained ground (contrary to knowledge understood as *episteme*, *scientia*), the wise man never opines because if he does he may fall in error. In order to avoid any risk of holding false views he must restrict his assent to that which cannot be possibly doubted. If nothing meets this standard, he must suspend judgment. This is the specific Academic view of wisdom if we do not go along with Pierre Couissin (1929, 1983) influential view of Academic skepticism as merely dialectical. Couissin's interpretation has been attacked by some recent scholars. A.M. Ioppolo (1986) has claimed that Arcesilaus held views of his own, denying that he argued always *ad hominem* against the Stoics. She provides non dialectical interpretations for all the main concepts related to Arcesilaus' position. Carlos Levy (1997) and Roberto Bolzani Filho (2013) have also argued that Arcesilaus did hold a positive view on wisdom. There are indeed a number of passages in Cicero's *Academica* that can be

¹ Cicero, *De Officiis* I.153 and *De finibus bonorum et malorum* II.37; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, letter 89.5; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists*, I.13.

cited in support of this interpretation. The first of these is Ac I.45 which is very important because it states the reasons which lead Arcesilaus to introduce *epochè* in Plato's Academy.

It was entirely with Zeno, so we have been told, ... that Arcesilaus set on foot his battle, not from obstinacy or desire for victory ... but because of the obscurity of the facts [*rerum obscuritate*] that had led Socrates to a confession of ignorance, as also previously his predecessors Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles, and almost all the old philosophers, who utterly denied all possibility of cognition or perception or knowledge, and maintained that the senses are limited, the mind feeble, the span of life short, and that truth (in Democritus's phrase) is sunk in an abyss ... Accordingly Arcesilaus said that there is nothing that can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself—the truth of this very dictum; so hidden in obscurity did he believe that everything lies, nor is there anything that can be perceived or understood, and for these reasons, he said, no one must make any positive statement or affirmation or give the approval of his assent to any proposition, and a man must always restrain his rashness and hold it back from every slip, as it would be glaring rashness to give assent either to a falsehood or to something not certainly known, and nothing is more disgraceful than for assent and approval to outstrip knowledge and perception.

Although the passage makes clear that Zeno's philosophy was what motivated Arcesilaus' position, it does not appear *ad hominem* in the passage. First we see Arcesilaus holding the view of the obscurity of things and of the weakness of the human understanding, a view held outstandingly by Socrates (this being the essential link between the Academy and skepticism) but also by Socrates' predecessors. Arcesilaus reacts to Zeno because the Stoic broke with this philosophical tradition when he advanced his epistemological theory of the cognitive impression. Second, as the other passages I cite below also make clear, Arcesilaus appears to hold a view of wisdom as contrary to opinion or belief (*doxa*), this being another connection between him and Plato. Assent to that which lacks indubitable evidence is mere belief and so contrary to wisdom.² The following three positive views lead Arcesilaus to *epochè*: the obscurity of things, the weakness of human understanding, and the normative view that the philosopher should avoid any risk of erring.

Arcesilaus' commitment to intellectual integrity appears still more clearly when he is told to have considered "both true and also honorable and worthy of a wise man" the view that "it is possible for a human being to hold no opinions, and not only that it is possible but that it is the duty of the wise man" (Ac II.77). According to Couissin, suspension of judgment would result from Zeno's own (not Arcesilaus') conception of wisdom according to which a wise man shall suspend judgment when he cannot have a clear and distinct impression. But Ac II.77 makes quite clear that Arcesilaus actually agreed with this view of wisdom, the difference between him and Zeno lying only on whether there was any kind of assent that would not constitute mere fallible opinion.³ Such passages corroborate Bolzani Filho's claim

²This is the principle of intellectual integrity, alleged by skeptics and dogmatists alike but, according to the skeptics, actually held only by them. The principle rules that doctrines or propositions not fully warranted by reason shall not be held by the wise man for if he did assent to them he might commit an error. Intellectual integrity is fully stated by Cicero in Ac II.8, a passage which will be often cited and commented in this book.

³See also Ac II.67: "If the wise man ever assents to anything, he will sometimes also form an opinion; but he never will form an opinion; therefore he will not assent to anything." This syllogism

(2013, 75) that “there is a concept of *sapientia* for the Academic, a concept that does not introduce any dogmatism but what results from a rational and unbiased investigation: the suspension of judgment, the refusal of an affirmative definitive speech.”⁴ Charron's *Wisdom* is a full-fledged development of this Academic skeptic concept of wisdom adapted to his time. Its foundation lies precisely on rational unbiased examination which can be exercised fully only by those who have suspended judgment. *Épochè* is thus the central characteristic of the wise man.⁵

The first precondition of Charron's skeptical wisdom appears in the preface to the work, in particular in its extended version in the second edition. Charron dissociates the philosophical conception of wisdom from its entrenched dogmatic view.

Arcesilaus used to approve, for he used to accept both the major premiss and the minor. ... But the major premiss ... both the Stoics and their supporter Antiochus declare to be false, arguing that the wise man is able to distinguish the false from the true and the imperceptible from the perceptible.” Note that Arcesilaus is said to approve the minor premise, that the wise man will never form an opinion. Agreeing with the Stoics on this conception of wisdom, Arcesilaus disagrees that man can have knowledge, that is, clear and certain grasp of the truth, because of his view of the obscurity of things. The following statement also seems unequivocal in attributing this concept of wisdom to Arcesilaus: “the strongest point of the wise man, in the opinion of Arcesilaus, agreeing with Zeno, lies in avoiding being taken in and in seeing that he is not deceived—for nothing is more removed from the conception that we have of the dignity of the wise man than error, frivolity or rashness” (Ac II.66).

⁴The translation is mine. See also Levy (1997, 192–193): “A partir de sa critique de la représentation *cataleptique*, Arcésilas aboutissait donc à la définition d'un sage philosophe, chercheur obstiné d'une vérité insaisissable dans le flux des représentations et des arguments humains. Il pouvait ainsi objecter aux Stoïciens qu'il était le seul à réaliser concrètement le travail philosophique de lutte contre les opinions.”

⁵d'Angers (1976, 44–52), Horowitz (1971, 1998, 223–237), and Iofrida (1978) have wrongly concluded from apparently Stoic passages in *De la Sagesse* that Charron's view of wisdom is Stoic. This would be mainly the case in chapter 3, book II, titled “Vraie et essentielle preud'homie: premiere et fondamentale partie de sagesse,” in which Charron claims that the wise man should follow nature, “entendant par nature l'équité et la raison universelle qui luit en nous, qui contient et couve en soy les semences de toute vertu, probité, justice, et est la matrice, de laquelle sortent et naissent toutes les bonnes et belles loix, les justes et equitables jugemens, que prononcera mesmes un idiot” (S, II, 3, 424). Charron uses Stoic language to describe a concept of wisdom which is mostly Academic since to follow nature is to follow a reason conceived in the Academic fashion, namely, capable of eliminating opinion but not capable of establishing the truth. The main source of this passage is Cicero (*Tusculanarum disputationum*, III.1–2) who accepted Stoic doctrines on ethics but under the Academic mode, namely, provisionally, as probable and not as true. For instance, in the *Tusc disp* V.33, Brutus challenges Cicero to be coherent with what he says in *de Finibus* about the only verbal dispute between Stoics and Peripatetics. He replies: “You are confronting me with sealed documents, and putting in as evidence what I have sometime said or written. Take that way with other people who are handicapped in argument by rules: I live from day to day; I say anything that strikes my mind as probable; and so I alone am free” (*nos in diem vivimus; quodcumque nostros animos probabilitate percussit, id dicimus, itaque soli sumus liberi*). This figure as the epigraph of La Mothe Le Vayer's dialogue “Le Banquet sceptique” in DIA, p. 63. See Chap. 4. Supporters of the view that Charron's wisdom is mostly skeptical are Popkin (1954, 2003), Taranto (1987), Paganini (1991), Gregory (2000), Gontier (1999). None of these scholars (who approach the skepticism in *De la Sagesse* very differently) holds that this skepticism is more Academic than Pyrrhonian. Adam (1991) claims that Charron's wisdom is partially (and only strategically) Academic. Striker (2001, 172) claims that “le sage de Charron n'est pas un dogmatique manqué. Il est un sorte d'académicien qui n'a pas encore tout à fait accepté le probabilisme de Carnéade.”

In fact, the successive development of Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, and scholastic Aristotelianism that dominates the philosophical scene during the seventeenth hundred years that separate Arcesilaus and Charron rendered the work of dissociating wisdom from dogmatic knowledge much harder to the French than it was to the Greek. Charron maintains that although wisdom is related to knowledge (against the popular view that reduces it to prudent behavior) it is not and cannot be related to knowledge of things that lay beyond human limited intellectual capacity. In the preface to the first edition, Charron says that he does not take

ce mot [wisdom] subtilement au sens hautain et eslevé des Theologiens et Philosophes (qui prennent plaisir à descrire et faire peinture des choses, qui n'ont encores esté veuës, et les relever à telle perfection, que la nature humaine ne s'en trouve capable, que par imagination) pour une cognoissance parfaite des choses divines et humaines, ou bien des premieres et plus hautes causes et ressorts de toutes choses. (S, 25–26)

Charron thus sets aside the traditional dogmatic view of wisdom related to metaphysics and speculative theology. In the extended preface to the second edition, he distinguishes divine from human wisdom, defining each as the proper subject of, respectively, theology and philosophy. The philosophical viewpoint is inadequate to access divine wisdom as the theological viewpoint is inadequate to access human wisdom. Charron makes a double movement. On the one hand, he confines theology to what lies beyond human nature, the realm of the supernatural, thereby legitimizing only positive or revealed theology and excluding natural theology.⁶ On the other hand, he restrains philosophy to what lies within the natural grasp of human mind, thereby legitimizing only practical philosophy (in the large Lockean sense of what concerns man's life in man's natural condition in this world) and excluding dogmatic philosophy in general (which pretends to attain the truth) and metaphysics in particular, which pretends to deliver first principles and causes.⁷

In the next section I outline the two major Renaissance sources of Charron's Academic skeptical view of wisdom.

2.2 French Renaissance Sources of Academic Skeptical Wisdom

The ancient Academic view of wisdom was well known during the Renaissance mainly due to Cicero's great influence at the time. It gained plausibility during the sixteenth century because of the crisis of scholastic Aristotelianism,⁸ and

⁶For a different view, which points out elements of natural theology in *De la Sagesse*, see Belin (1995) and Magnard (1999).

⁷According to Barbara de Negroni (1986), Charron is neither a skeptic nor a dogmatist. He believes man is capable of the truth, but needs to rely on experience and tradition.

⁸See Gilson (1947, 93–94) on the divorce between wisdom and knowledge in the Renaissance due to the crisis of Aristotelianism.

also because of the intellectual crisis posed by the Reformation and by the discovery of the new world.⁹

One of the remarkable originalities of Pierre Charron's *De la Sagesse* in the context of the receptions of ancient skepticism is the proposition of a consistent and fully developed skeptical wisdom. The uniqueness of the project can be evaluated if we look both backwards and forwards in the history of skepticism. Looking forward into the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, that is, until Descartes's doubt takes over the philosophical skeptical scene, the tremendous success of Charron's *Wisdom* is largely due to its proposition of a clear and systematic skeptical wisdom. Indeed, for those thinkers opposed to dogmatism—and there were many at a time of crisis of Aristotelian scholasticism—Charron's view that skepticism is not only a viable mode of life but the wise mode of life could not but appear attractive. The remaining chapters of this book show the preeminent role of Charron in the first half of the seventeenth century, both in its main skeptical (La Mothe Le Vayer) or partially skeptical (Gassendi and Pascal) philosophers and in the main anti-skeptical philosopher (Descartes).¹⁰ Looking backwards, skepticism in the Renaissance, with the remarkable exception of Montaigne,¹¹ is usually instrumental for scholarly, philosophical or religious ends alien to skepticism itself. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim for instance, in reviving skepticism to combat Aristotelianism, were interested mainly in apologizing for, respectively,

⁹For the role of the religious controversies in the development of skepticism in the period, see Popkin (2003, 3–16); for that of the discovery of the new world, see Marcondes (2009). For a variety of receptions and uses of ancient skepticism in the Renaissance, see the collective volume organized by Paganini and Maia Neto (2009). Floridi (2002) gives a very complete relation of the manuscripts of the works of Sextus Empiricus during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

¹⁰If we consider the history of ideas after the second half of the seventeenth century, Montaigne is by far the most influential among those who rehearsed ancient skeptical views. Recent studies specifically on Montaigne's skepticism are numerous. I mention the main monographic and collective books published after Popkin's pioneer study: Brush (1966), Laursen (1992), Brahami (1997, 2001), Mienorowski (1998), Giocanti (2001), Demonet and Legros (eds.) (2004), Carraud and Marion (eds.) (2004), Eva (2004, 2007), and Romão (2007). Paganini (2008) provides a very comprehensive and erudite study of early modern skepticism, highlighting the importance of Montaigne.

¹¹Montaigne is the main source of Charron's conception of a skeptical wisdom. Kaye (1982) gives quantitative analysis of the citations of Montaigne's *Essays* by Charron. Most of these citations are about skepticism and the single essay most cited by far is the "Apology for Raymond Sebond." Despite Charron's debt to Montaigne, the charge of plagiarism which haunted Charron since the seventeenth century—Bayle says that "il y a dans les livres de la *Sagesse* une infinité des pensées qui avaient paru dans les *Essais* de Montaigne" (*Dictionary* article "Charron," remark B) and in remark O of the same article, reports Sorel's view that "Charron n'était que le secrétaire de Montaigne et de du Vair," that he "a pris beaucoup de sentences philosophiques mot pour mot des *Essais* de Montaigne"—is no longer considered by Montaigne and Charron scholars who have pointed out numerous and important differences between the two. For example, Barbara de Negroni (1986) and Giocanti (2001, 21) hold that Charron, unlike Montaigne, is not a skeptic. See also the contributors to Demonet and Legros (2004) for a variety of differences (even oppositions) between the two authors' views of human beings.

prophetic knowledge and hermetic theology.¹² For Charron, skepticism, Academic in particular, was not merely strategic. It was the position that accomplished human natural intellectual limited excellence, namely, the “perfection de l’homme comme homme” (S, 32), that is, abstraction made of the benefits human nature could acquire supernaturally, through grace.¹³ The perfection of the human cognitive faculties does not require, against Aristotle’s view, assent to the truth. Truth is the prerogative of God and superior spiritual natures. It cannot be fully apprehended by fallible human beings. This limitation does not imply, however, that the human intellectual faculties are defective. Divorce from the truth is not a privation, only a negation. The faculties can function perfectly (and can only function perfectly) if no assent to something as true is given. As indicated above, Charron takes above all from Academic skepticism (Arcesilaus and Carneades) the foundations of this wisdom, basically, the view of the *rerum obscuritate* to limited human faculties and that therefore the only way to make sure that the wise man does not fall in error is to suspend judgment—*epochè*.

Besides Cicero’s *Academica*, Charron’s main sources of Academic skepticism are two: (1) Montaigne’s reception of ancient skepticism, which Charron learned from the *Essays* and maybe also directly with Montaigne in Bordeaux.¹⁴ (2) The crisis in the Paris university which took place from 1540 to 1562 due to Pierre de la Ramé’s criticism of scholastic Aristotelianism and proposal of a reform of the curriculum. The most relevant aspect of this movement for Charron is Ramus’ close associate Omer Talon’s claim that such reform was in accord with the pedagogical model of the New Academy.¹⁵ Charron may have been influenced by Talon’s ideas either directly (for he was a student in Paris at the occasion) or through Talon’s edition and commentary of Cicero’s *Academica*. In the remaining part of this section I deal with these two French sources, first the earlier Parisian, then the later from Bordeaux.

Gabriel de la Rochemaillet claims that Charron was born in Paris in 1541 and was instructed there “dès son ieune aage aux bonnes lettres: tellement qu’ayant appris en peu de temps les langues Grecque & Latine, dont y avoit lors de celebres Professeurs en l’Université de Paris, il fit bonne provision des sciences

¹²On Gianfrancesco Pico, see Schmitt (1967), Popkin (2003, 20–27), and Cao (2009). On Agrippa, see Compagni (2009). For the scholarly interest in the early revival of Sextus Empiricus by the Italian humanists, see Granada (2001).

¹³These are the matter of divine (not human) wisdom according to Charron’s types of wisdom related above.

¹⁴According to Charron’s biographer and friend Gabriel de la Rochemaillet, Charron met Montaigne in Bordeaux in 1589, that is, one year after the publication of the three books of the *Essays*. Charron “prit cognoissance, & vescu fort familierement avec Messire Michel de Montaigne, Chevalier de l’ordre du Roy, Auteur du Livre intitulé, les Essais, duquel il faisoit un merveilleux cas” (Eloge, non paginated, in Charron 1970). Apart from Rochemaillet’s rapport, which has been challenged by Philippe Ducoux (cf. Faye 1998, 260), we have the exemplar of a book by Bernardino Ochino’s (*Il Catechismo, o vero institutione christiana*, Basilea, 1561) dedicated by Montaigne to Charron with the former’s indication that it is a “liber prohibitus.”

¹⁵The Hellenistic philosophical school New Academy thus recovered (above all against the Stoic school) the true Academic (in the sense of the educational institution) spirit exemplified by Plato’s Socratic dialogues.

liberales & humaines, & mesmes de la Logique, Ethique, Physique & Metaphysique” (Charron 1970, Eloge, not paginated). Considering that students went to college aged 10–12 and that the course took about 7–8 years, this must have happened sometime between 1551/1553 and 1558/1561. The upheaval caused by Ramus in the University of Paris took place in print and in classrooms from the early 40s to the early 60s. In 1543, Ramus published his *Dialecticae institutiones*, in which he proposed a reform of the discipline, and *Aristotelicae animadversiones*, both condemned the following year. But thanks to the protection of the Cardinal de Lorraine, Ramus was appointed professor of philosophy and rhetoric at the College Royal in 1551 and also kept a position at the College des Presles, which was subordinated to the University of Paris. Ramus worked very closely with Omer Talon, who published an *Institutiones oratoriae* in 1545.¹⁶ The editorial and teaching projects were articulated. While one taught dialectics, the other taught rhetoric, following the humanist Ciceronian (and anti-scholastic) view that these two disciplines should be brought together. Talon also published a commented edition of Cicero’s *de Oratore* in 1553 and earlier in 1547 a commented edition of Cicero’s *Academica* in which he relates Ramus’ project of the reform of the university curriculum to the Academics’ conception of philosophy.

The university crisis caused by Ramus and Talon must be placed in the context of the influence of humanism in scholasticism and the reaction by traditional teachers. Lisa Jardine, in a paper on Lorenzo Valla’s *Dialectica disputationes* (written in 1444 and published in 1500) and Rudolph Agricola’s *De inventione dialectica* (1479), shows that these two influential dialecticians changed “the focus of dialectic from syllogism and validity into the murky waters of probable and convincing arguing of a case” (Jardine 1983, 276).¹⁷ They attempted to unify rhetoric and Academic epistemology, according to a project held by Cicero himself. In *Tusculanarum disputationum*, II.9, Cicero claims that he choose the method of examining the two sides of every issue (*in utramque partem*) because this is the way to find the probable and because it is the best oratory practice.¹⁸ Though according to Schmitt (1972, 79–80), Ramus, unlike Talon, did not claim to be an Academic himself, he and Talon were charged with being so by the Paris University teacher—and former dean—Pierre Galland.¹⁹

The coincidence of this Parisian fuss about Academic skepticism and Charron’s studies in Paris sheds light on important views exhibited in *De la Sagesse*. The first of these is the pedagogical nature of the work. The view that skepticism provides a valuable model of education is also present in some of Montaigne’s essays such as “De l’institution des enfants,” but the *Essays* as a whole do not have a preeminent

¹⁶These biographical data about Ramus come from Sellberg (2011).

¹⁷See also Panizza (1978). For criticism of the view of Valla as an Academic skeptic, see Nauta (2006).

¹⁸See also Cicero, *De Oratoria* 12, *Nat deo* II.168.

¹⁹*Pro schola Parisiensi contra novam academicam Petri Rami oratio*, published in 1551. See Schmitt (1972, 92–102). Schmitt also analyzes another work on Academic skepticism published at the same occasion—and probably related to the same context—by Guy de Brués (Schmitt 1972, 102–104). For the whole controversy around Ramus and Talon, see also Huppert (1999, 37–49).

pedagogical intent. Charron's work, on the contrary, is entirely pedagogical. Its aim is to instruct those few who are capable (I return to this point below) to become wise men. The second and main book of *De la Sagesse* gives "the instructions and general rules of wisdom."²⁰ The foundational rules are Academic for they instruct not on how to learn knowledge but on how to unlearn acquired opinions. The first two rules of book II are: "1. Exemption et affranchissement des erreurs, et vices du monde, et des passions, premiere disposition à la Sagesse. 2. Universelle et pleine liberté de l'esprit, tant en jugement, qu'en volonté: seconde disposition à la Sagesse." Charron presents these rules after showing, in the first book about knowledge of oneself and human nature, the internal (the limits of our intellectual faculties, the bad influence of the passions, etc.) and external (the influence of the institutions responsible for our education, the influence of the climate, of social status, etc.) causes of our great susceptibility to hold and become attached to uncertain and false opinions.²¹ The basic feature of Charron's wisdom lies in being able to resist the tendency to take as if it were true what appears with verisimilitude. "L'ordre et la pertinence c'est l'effect de sagesse, et qui donne pris à l'ame, et sur tout se garder de presumption, opiniâtreté ... plustost se tenir au doute en suspens" (S, III, 6, 632).²²

The skeptical Academy appealed to Talon and Charron as the best educational model mainly because its distinctive feature was abhorrence of authority in philosophy, the defense of the *libertas philosophandi* against any kind of previously established dogma or doctrine, which in the context was mainly Aristotelian.²³ Schmitt (1972, 88) points out that Talon's main interest in reviving Academic skepticism lied in its providing a pedagogical model, much more open than the scholastic one thus established. This is first the practice of arguing *in utraquem partem*, which Ramus and Talon attributed not only to Plato and his Academic school but also to Aristotle in the *Topics* but which was not, unfortunately, observed by Aristotle's scholastic followers at the time. This practice was seen as providing the development of rationality, once taken in account that certain possession of truth is not naturally available to human beings. Indeed, Aristotle claims that the method of arguing the two sides is proper when *scientia*, certain cognition from necessary causes, is

²⁰The title of book II of *De la Sagesse* is "Livre Seconde, contentant les instructions et regles generales de Sagesse."

²¹For the internal constraints, see in particular chapters 14, 16, 17, and 18; for the external ones, see the "Cinquesme ... consideration de l'homme," chapters 41–62 of book I *De la Sagesse*.

²²The suspension of judgment proposed by Charron as the perfect condition of the mind achieved by the wise man includes, in the Ciceronian/Philonian way, acceptance of the probable ("vraysemblable"). The assent is mitigated. It does not compromise the wise man's intellectual integrity and philosophical independence with respect to the philosophical schools and doctrines. See S, II, 2, 399–400 and its source in Cicero's *Academics* II.7–8.

²³In "De l'institution des enfans," Montaigne says that "[A] Qu'il luy face tout passer par l'estamine et ne loge rien en sa teste par simple autorité et à credit; les principes d'Aristote ne luy soyent principes, non plus que ceux des Stoiciens ou Epicuriens. Qu'on luy propose cette diversité de jugemens: il choisira s'il peut, sinon il en demeurera en doute. [C] Il n'y a que les fols certains et resolus" (E, I, 26, 151). See also Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond". (E, II, 12, 539–541)

not available.²⁴ In the Academic skeptical scenario, no *scientia* is possible, so the correct employment of reason is not grasping and fixing the truth,²⁵ but the examination in view of finding the most probable. Since probability can eventually be found in any opposing school (Aristotelian, Stoic, Epicurean), all should be given an equal hearing and examined. This practice of inquiry and study, exhibiting intellectual freedom, is, according to Talon in the dedicatory letter of his edition of Cicero's *Academica* to the Cardinal de Lorraine, Cicero's Academic one.²⁶

The authority of Aristotle was seen as a major obstacle to the teaching of philosophy. Under the New Academic model, any authority was suppressed or, according to some interpreters who followed Augustine's view of the New Academics, hidden, this being, according to these interpreters, the reason the Academics did not teach (at least outwardly) Platonic doctrine. As indicated, the method of arguing *in utraque partem* in Cicero aimed at discovering the most probable opinion. Cicero thus replies to the following objection in *Academica* II.60:

There remains their statement that for the discovery of the truth it is necessary to argue against all things and for all things. Well then, I should like to see what they have discovered. 'Oh,' [the Academic] says, 'it is not our practice to give an exposition.' What pray are these holy secrets of yours, or why does your school conceal its doctrine like something disgraceful?' 'In order,' says he, 'that our hearers may be guided by reason rather than by authority.'

The main issue behind this educational model is the view of philosophy and rationality. The Academic skeptics held a view of philosophy deprived of doctrines. Philosophy consisted in rational examination that exposes the lack of

²⁴ See Aristotle. *Topics*, I–II, 100a–101b.

²⁵ The Academics opposed the Stoic view that the essential feature of the wise man is to have knowledge. "But you deny that anybody except the wise man *knows* anything; and this Zeno used to demonstrate by gesture: for he would display his hand in front of one with the fingers stretched out and say 'A visual appearance is like this'; next he closed his fingers a little and said, 'An act of assent is like this'; then he pressed his fingers closely together and made a fist, and said that that was comprehension ...; but then he used to apply his left hand to his right fist and squeeze it tightly and forcibly, and then say that such was knowledge [*scientiam*], which was within the power of nobody save the wise man". (Ac II.145)

²⁶ "Horum novorum Academicorum institutum erat de rebus obscuris utrinque disputare, philosophorum placita, non deorum oracula putare, nullam scholam perpetuò sequi, & tamen in omnibus scholis, quod verum aut verisimile videretur, liberè sequi: Defendat quidem, ait Cicero, quod quisque sentiat: sunt enim libera hominum iudicia: nos institutum tenebimus, nullisque ullius disciplinae legibus astricti, quibus in philosophia necessariò pareamos: quid sit in quaque re maximè probabile, semper requiremus. Idem, Cum Academicis incerta luctatio est, qui nihil affirmant, & quasi desperata cognitione certi, id sequi volunt, quodcunque verisimile videatur" (Talon 1550, 6). By holding a view as probable, the Academic keeps himself detached from it, so in conditions to change the view when something more probable appears. This detachment is the freedom of judgment so appreciated by the Academics. See Ac II.7–8 and note 3 above. According to Montaigne, "[A] Cicero mesme, qui devoit au sçavoir tout son vaillant, Valerius dict que sur sa vieillesse il commença à desestimer les lettres. [C] Et pendant qu'il les traictoit, c'estoit sans obligation d'aucun parti, suivant ce qui luy sembloit probable, tantost en l'une secte, tantost en l'autre: se tenant tousjours sous la dubitation de l'Academie". (E, II, 12, 501)

grounds of the various beliefs.²⁷ This would be true philosophy, etymologically, the search for (not the possession of) wisdom understood as knowledge. As true knowledge cannot be acquired in this world because of the body, wisdom becomes the Socratic emancipation of the pretention to knowledge held by the various philosophical sects, the mind's liberation of attachment to opinions. Talon indicates the division of labor between him and Ramus. While the latter worked in the new dialectics and "& Aristotelicis animadversionibus,"²⁸ he presents to the Cardinal de Lorraine his commented edition of Cicero's *Academica* as an effort to recover the true view and practice of philosophy as the use of reason to liberate one from attachment to opinions.²⁹

The recovery of Academic skepticism as a pedagogical tool happened about 10 years before the translation and publication of Sextus' works in Latin. As Naya (2008, 155) has pointed out, the main of these editions, that of Gentien Hervet in 1569, also dedicated to the Cardinal de Lorraine, "confounds" the Pyrrhonian and Academic traditions in recommending Sextus' work as pedagogically useful to the extent that "it can serve also to improve the learning and comprehension of the philosophy taught today in the schools and the entire circle of the so called disciplines. The best way to learn is to treat the object of study under the form of disputations among opposing points of view."³⁰ Hervet links the pedagogic utility of skepticism to Christian apologetics. This rational exercise will lead to the most probable, which, in its turn, will make possible access to the truth presupposed in the *verisimile* (Cicero's synonym of *probabile*).³¹ Hervet's interpretation of Academic probability most certainly derives from Augustine's use of the doctrine to connect Plato and the New Academy. The Platonic/Christian truth lies not in that which appears *verisimile* to the senses, but in the pure intelligible ideas which are the pattern of sensible things.³² Talon also makes this point, ranging the Stoics, Epicureans and (crucially in the context) Aristotelians on the side of the body and the New Academics and Plato on the side of the mind.³³ This epistemic interpretation

²⁷The Pyrrhonians also hold the view of philosophy deprived of doctrines but their view was therapeutic. They wanted to get rid of opinions because of the disturbance they brought (see PH I.12). They do not emphasize the ideal of critical rationality as the Academics did.

²⁸These correspond to the two works published by Ramus in 1543.

²⁹"Ego vero pro mea parte curavi, ut istam quoque rationem adiuverem: nam ut homines pertinaces, & certis opinionibus in philosophia mancipati, addictique indigna servitute liberarentur, intelligentque verum philosophandi genus iudicio & aestimatione rerum liberum esse, non autem opinione & affectione constrictum, libellum quandam Academiae". (Talon 1550, 4)

³⁰Hervet, "Dedicatory letter of Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos* to the Cardinal de Lorraine," English translation in Popkin and Maia Neto (2007, 91).

³¹"Haec cum fiant, necesse est ut haec exercitatio magnam vim habeat, ad excitanda & acuenda adolescentum ingenia, qui tum demum poterunt verum discernere, cum quae sunt probabilia & verisimilia, ab iis quae secus sunt, dijudicaverint & ex multis probabilibus & verisimilibus latens verum tandem eruerint" (Hervet 1569, preface not paginated).

³²Augustine, *Contra Academicos* III.37.

³³"Contra hos igitur homines [Stoics, Epicureans and Peripatetics] Archesilas, caeterique viriliter & fortiter Socratis exemplo, & virtute sese armarunt, ut nos ab eorum latrunculorum servitute liberate,

of Carneades' probabilism is criticized by Montaigne in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" (E, II, 12, 561–562), which is one of the various Montaignian philosophical positions maintained by Charron.³⁴ The main point of the recovery of Academic skepticism in Charron is the model of rationality exhibited by Socrates and the Academic skeptics, a critical rationalism (in the Popperian sense) or rationalism without dogmas that was much more emphasized by Talon than its eventual Platonic/Christian apologetic use.³⁵

Augustine's interpretation of the unity of the Academy certainly brought prestige to Academic skepticism. He believed the New Academics hid and preserved the Platonic doctrine from the materialism of the other Hellenistic schools until the development of Neo-Platonism and the arrival of Christianity could, respectively, recover the purely intelligible truth and make it fully and widespread available.³⁶ The skepticism of the school, according to this interpretation, posed no threat to the metaphysical truths such as the existence of an immaterial God and an immaterial soul. It was limited to sensible knowledge, strategic and provisional. Its reappraisal by Talon in his and Ramus' battle for intellectual freedom certainly added still more prestige to the school. The high status of Academic skepticism is clear in Montaigne, and this is an ascertained source of Charron's skeptical wisdom. Montaigne says that the end of the Academics is "la foiblesse et humaine ignorance; ce party a eu la plus grande suyte et les sectateurs les plus nobles" (E, II, 12, 502). Charron echoes Montaigne in claiming that "c'est une belle chose, que sçavoir bien ignorer et douter, et la plus seure, de laquelle ont fait profession les plus nobles Philosophes" (S, III, 6, 633). Montaigne says that the skeptical view (Academic and Pyrrhonian) that there is no reason "qui n'en aye une contraire" is the "plus sage party des Philosophes" (E, II, 15, 612; emphasis added). Charron highlights "la modestie Academique tant requise au Sage... fondee premierement sur ces propositions tant celebre [sic] entre les Sages. Qu'il n'y a rien de certain, que nous ne sçavons rien, que la seule certitude et science est qu'il n'y a rien de certain, et que nous ne sçavons rien, *solum certum nihil esse certi, Hoc unum scio quod nihil scio*, que nous ne faisons que quæster, enquerir ... que la verité n'est point de nostre acquest"

& in naturae, quam veteres illi sumopere probaverant, libertatem praestantiamque restituerent: est enim verae philosophiae proprium, homines à opinione ad veritatem, à sensibus ad mentem, à singulis rebus ad universitatem, à caducis & mortalibus ad constantiam & aeternitatem convertere" (Talon 1550, 9). The scholastic Aristotelians held the famous epistemological doctrine that "nihil in intellectu quod non prius in sensu."

³⁴In Charron's works "o cristianismo não é verossímil entendendo-se por este conceito a similaridade ao verdadeiro, o espelhamento da verdade, sentido criticado por Montaigne e jamais adotado pelos cétricos acadêmicos... Por outro lado, compreendendo-se como verossímil o que é convincente, o que pode ser sustentado por argumentos mais impactantes e melhores que outros o cristianismo é sim a religião mais verossímil". (Loque 2012, 192)

³⁵"Se pose alors le but avoué d'une telle diffusion du scepticisme néo-académicien, qui a pour effet paradoxal—mais significatif de la place laissée au scepticisme dans un contexte catholique tridentin—de faire de la σκεψις le moyen privilégié de la refondation du rationalisme. C'est avant tout la promotion de la liberté de pensée, face au dogmatisme obtus de la tradition scolastique, qui est visée par Talon" (Naya 2008, 153).

³⁶Augustine, *Contra Academicos* III.38–42.

(PTS, 838–839). Because the most relevant source of Charron's skeptical wisdom is Montaigne's view of the skeptic in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" as attaining the limited natural perfection of human nature, I now examine this view in detail.

Montaigne's description of the ancient skeptics in the Apology begins dialectical. His arguments seem specifically targeted at those who claim that human beings can know the truth and thus substitute true arguments for those presumed false ones proposed by Sebond. Can man achieve the truth? Montaigne proceeds empirically examining what real men have achieved on this regard, and to this effect he concedes to his opponents the case most favorable to their cause. Rather than looking at the views of brute and vulgar men, he proposes the examination of those who excelled in sharpness of mind, virtue and learning, those in whom "loge la hauteur extreme de l'humaine nature" (E, II, 12, 502). These are the philosophers in general but first and foremost the ancient skeptics. Montaigne's argument is that if the human beings who most excelled in reason and investigation did not find the truth, truth is hardly achievable by human beings. This is the manner Montaigne introduces the ancient skeptics in the Apology for it turns out that it is precisely in them that human nature finds "la hauteur extreme."³⁷ Indeed, if Montaigne's argument begins dialectical, that is, specifically designed to target the critics of Sebond, the continuation of the argument, that is, the favorable and sympathetic way he describes the ancient skeptics, suggests that Montaigne thought that they did achieve "la hauteur extreme de l'humaine nature." The ancient skeptics are portrayed as those who exhibited and exercised the human faculties (cognitive and moral) in their perfection, that is, fully and correctly, without pretending to achieve with them what they cannot naturally achieve, *viz.*, the truth.³⁸ It is to this view that I now turn.

As is well known, Montaigne follows closely the first book of Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* when he presents ancient skepticism. He begins endorsing Sextus' tripartite division of philosophy in which the Academics are held negative dogmatists for holding that truth cannot be found.³⁹ This alignment with Sextus does not prevent Montaigne from using Cicero's *Academica* as a crucial source. In defending ancient skepticism against its detractors, it is mainly Cicero's report of the Academics that Montaigne follows.

[B] Pourquoy ne leur sera il permis, disent ils, comme il est entre les dogmatistes à l'un dire vert, à l'autre jaune, à eux aussi de doubter? ... Et, où les autres sont portez, ou par la coustume

³⁷ This position or strategy of Montaigne's both to introduce skepticism and to contravene dogmatism comes straight from Cicero's *Academica*: "Enough about authority—although you had put the question to me whether I did not think that with so many able minds carrying on the search with such zealous energy, after so many ages since the old philosophers mentioned, the truth might possibly have been discovered". (Ac II.76)

³⁸ By perfection I mean the integrity or entirety of the faculty essential to human beings, the faculty of judgment. Perfection here thus has the Aristotelian sense of full accomplishment of a nature but does not agree with Aristotle's own view of the perfection of the intellect. For according to Montaigne it is not natural to human reason to have knowledge (truth). The perfection of human reason is exercised in the search for the truth, not in its possession, which is a prerogative of God.

³⁹ The division derives from the philosophers' position with respect to the truth. The Dogmatists claim to have found the truth, the Academics claim it cannot be found, the Pyrrhonians keep searching (PH I.2–3).

de leur païs, ou par l'institution des parents, ou par rencontre, comme par une tempeste, sans jugement et sans choïs, voire le plus souvant avant l'aage de discretion, à telle ou telle opinion, à la secte ou Stoïque ou Epicurienne, à laquelle ils se trouvent hippothequez, asserviz et collez comme à une prise qu'ils ne peuvent desmordre—[C] “*ad quamcunque disciplinam velut tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhaerescunt*”—[B] pourquoy à ceux cy ne sera il pareillement concedé de maintenir leur liberté, et considerer les choses sans obligation et servitude? (E, II, 12, 503–504)⁴⁰

Note that the “right of the skeptic to doubt” is first introduced as being at least equal to that of the dogmatist to assent. However, in defending this right Montaigne construes skeptical *epochè* as a much more favorable mental state than belief. As the passage from Cicero’s indicates, his apology for skeptical *epochè* is based on Cicero’s own defense of Academic skepticism, specifically on a crucial passage of book II of *The Academics* in which Cicero introduces his key notion of intellectual integrity (Ac II.7–9). The traditional charge against skepticism is that it is harmful to (not to say incompatible with) ordinary life. Beliefs in the strong sense of assenting to propositions or presentations as true are considered essential to securing ordinary life. So the dogmatic philosopher who ideally holds only to true beliefs is in the best possible position on this regard whereas the skeptic who holds no beliefs at all is (as far as active life is concerned) in a position even worse than that of the vulgar man who holds mostly false beliefs. Cicero’s line of defense to this charge (followed here closely by Montaigne) is to reverse it, arguing for the superiority of suspension over assent on the very moral level where the objection is raised.

The reasons alleged by Cicero and Montaigne to justify the superiority of Academic *epochè* over dogma turn out to be crucial in early modern philosophy, in particular because it becomes the heart of Charron’s conception of wisdom. First Cicero and Montaigne show the non-epistemic grounds of assent, often given before intellectual maturity. Montaigne cites custom, instruction of parents and chance. Cicero cites the emotional (non-rational) influence of some friend or a first hearing

⁴⁰Cicero complains to the Stoic Lucullus: “For you it will be obligatory to ... defend [Stoicism] as you would your life and honour, while to me it is not even left to doubt” (Ac II.119). Defending Pyrrho against the anecdotes related by Diogenes Laertius about Pyrrho’s extravagant way of life such as being followed by friends to keep him from falling into precipices, being hit by cars and attacked by dogs (*Lives IX.62*), Montaigne cites Cicero. “Ils le peignent stupide et immobile, prenant un train de vie farouche et inassociable, attendant le hurt des charrettes, se presentant aux precipices, refusant de s’accommoder aux loix. Cela est encherir sur sa discipline. Il n’a pas voulu se faire pierre ou souche; il a voulu se faire homme vivant, discourant et raisonnant, jouissant de tous plaisirs et commoditez naturelles, embesoignant et se servant de toutes ses pieces corporelles et spirituelles [C] en regle et droicture. [A] Les privileges fantastiques, imaginaires et faux, que l’homme s’est usurpé, de regenter, d’ordonner, d’establir la vérité, il les a, de bonne foy, renoncez et quittez” (E, II, 12, 505). Montaigne’s view of Pyrrho is that he uses his body and mind plainly in accord to human natural capability. Montaigne’s sources are Academic: “For he [the Academic] is not a statue carved out of stone or hewn out of timber; he has a body and a mind, a mobile intellect and mobile senses” (Cicero, Ac II.101). The saying is Homeric as indicated by Socrates in Plato’s *Apology*. Socrates tells his judges that “[t]o quote the very words of Homer, even I am not sprung ‘from an oak or from a rock’, but from human parents, and consequently I have relatives—yes, and sons too, gentlemen ... but all the same I am not going to produce them here and beseech you to acquit me” (Plato, *Apology*, 34d). Socrates means that he will remain strictly rational in his apology, not appealing to the emotions of the judges.

at an early age of some philosopher lecturing on non-evident things.⁴¹ The major evil consequence of this premature and rash assent is the damage it causes in the faculty of judgment (*iudicandi potestas*). The idea is that early commitment to doctrines, philosophical or vulgar, compromises the full-fledged use of reason, that is, its natural capacity to objectively and dispassionately examine the epistemic merits of doctrines. The use of reason subsequent to commitment to doctrines is biased in favor of these doctrines and at least partially blind to conflicting views and facts.⁴² Because commitment to doctrines compromise inquiry, those who suspend judgment are in a better condition to exercise intellectual integrity, which means here first the ordinary sense in epistemology of not giving assent to that which is not warranted by reason,⁴³ and also in that (this being implicit in the first point) his intellect will not be employing its natural full capacity as that of the Academic. Integrity has therefore the normative meaning presupposed in philosophical inquiry and the epistemological one of entirety (full-fledged capacity) of reason. A third aspect of intellectual integrity (a more strictly moral one) is also remarked by Cicero. Assent given before fully examining the pros and cons of a doctrine results from an external (i.e., non-rational) imposition on the intellect. The ultimate ground of this external imposition is authority. Suspension of judgment thus means that the Academic's faculty of judgment or intellect is, unlike the dogmatist's, free from prescriptions by other men, usually the leader of some philosophical school. This explains Talon's revival of Academic skepticism in his fight against scholastic Aristotelianism.

Montaigne is mostly interested in these epistemological and moral aspects of intellectual integrity which he emphasizes and develops further. He cites two lines of this Ciceronian passage (Ac II.8–9), one describing the dogmatist, the other the skeptic, in order to reverse the charge against the latter by showing the superiority of suspension over assent. The dogmatists “cling as to a rock to

⁴¹“For all other people in the first place are held in close bondage placed upon them before they were able to judge what doctrine was the best, and secondly they form judgements about matters as to which they know nothing at the most incompetent period of life, either under the guidance of some friend or under the influence of a single harangue from the first lecturer that they attend”. (Ac II.8)

⁴²The source of this Academic position is Socrates' attitude exhibited above all (though not exclusively) in Plato's early dialogues and, in particular, in the digression on the philosopher in Plato's later dialogue the *Theaetetus*, 172c–177c. In the digression, the philosopher is contrasted with a lawyer. The latter is previously committed to some cause and interest, so his use of reason is entirely compromised by his non-strictly epistemic commitments. The philosopher, by contrast, has no interest and commitment whatsoever except the commitment to the truth. In the footsteps of the digression on the philosopher in the *Theaetetus*, Bayle opposes the dogmatist to the Academic skeptic philosopher by comparing the former to a lawyer and the latter to an impartial reporter of facts and views. See Montaigne's *Essays*, II, 12, 566; Bayle's *Dictionary*, article “Chrysippus,” note G and Maia Neto (1999, 271–272).

⁴³“the Academic School [was] well advised in ‘withholding assent’ from beliefs that are uncertain; for what is more unbecoming than ill-considered haste? and what is so ill-considered or so unworthy of the dignity and seriousness proper to a philosopher as to hold an opinion that is not true, or to maintain with unhesitating certainty a proposition not based on adequate examination, comprehension and knowledge?” (Cicero, *Nat deo* I.1). See also Ac I.45, II.66–68, 77; *De Officiis* II.7–8, III.20; *Tusc disp* II.95, IV.7, V.33.

whatever theory they are carried to by stress of weather.” The skeptics “are more free and untrammelled in that [they] possess [their] power of judgement uncurtailed [*integra nobis est iudicandi potestas*].” The metaphor of the world as a stormy sea or wind where human beings are adrift is a traditional skeptical one.⁴⁴ Because beliefs change (sometimes quite abruptly and radically) the world of experience is like a deep and moving sea where we cannot get hold to anything stable but are rather carried out from here to there until we hold fast to some “rock” (some philosophical doctrine) which, from our distressing perspective, appears to provide a safe harbor from this moving sea.⁴⁵

The main problem of dogmatism according to Cicero and above all Montaigne is that holding doctrines under such conditions is to mortgage (Montaigne’s expression is “*hippothequez*”) our *iudicandi potestas*, thus compromising intellectual integrity. This is precisely what the skeptic does not do. Thus he alone (1) can adequately (uncommittedly) rationally inquire into things (this is the main Ciceronian point) and (2)—a Montaignean development crucial to modern thought—in *epochè* the skeptic finds a safe harbor from the moving world. This harbor is not—like the dogmatists’—some external doctrine in which his intellect is mortgaged or alienated but his own intellect whose integrity takes the place of changing precarious external beliefs as the solid ground of the philosopher’s *ethos*.⁴⁶ Montaigne opposes the autonomy of the skeptic (who finds assurance inwardly, in the integrity of his *iudicandi potestas*) to the heteronomy of the dogmatist (whose assurance depends on something other and external to himself). This integrity is recovered in the dialectical denial of beliefs which are considered artificial (non-natural) obstacles to the full employment (the integrity) of reason. Montaigne thus construes a view of human perfection (in the sense of perfection of a limited nature) on the basis of skeptical *epochè*. Indeed, his description of ancient skepticism emphasizes *epochè*. “[A] Leur mot sacramental, c’est *epochè*, c’est à dire, je soutiens, je ne bouge” (E, II, 12, 505). This description emphasizes the stability it brings to the skeptic’s mind. This stability results from the capacity of the act of suspending judgment to integrate the self: “Je soutiens.” Montaigne follows closely Cicero’s rendering of *epochè* as *sustinere*, which describes the Academic’s capacity to hold back assent from appearances that momentarily strike as true but sooner or later, under different conditions, will appear false. Because of this changing world one is eager to hold to some doctrine. The Academic avoid the evil of rashness by holding back his assent. Montaigne reads in the Academic action of *sustinere* the architectonic constitution of the intellect in its integrity.

⁴⁴There is a report in Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives* (IX.71) that it begins with Homer. See also Plato’s *Theaetetus* 152e, introducing the Heraclitian doctrine of the flux.

⁴⁵It is no wonder that Cicero uses this image to report the Academic tradition. For Cicero the position of the so called Academic skeptics is basically that of Socrates and Plato. The image agrees with Plato’s view of the world of becoming of which human beings can have no stable knowledge. The main source for this view is again the *Theaetetus*, in particular the doctrine of the flux that Plato attributes to Protagoras. This doctrine is directly cited by Montaigne in the conclusion of the “Apology for Raymond Sebond”. (E, II, 12, 601–603)

⁴⁶“Je ne suis pas sujet à ces hypotheques et engagements penetrans et intimes”. (E, III, 1, 792)

Montaigne's view of the skeptic as attaining the limited perfection of human cognitive faculties is restricted to one of his dialectical attacks on Sebond's critics in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond."⁴⁷ Charron takes this view as a model for human beings in general. His master piece, *De la Sagesse*, is designed to teach how to achieve this skeptical perfection and to detail its various practical aspects and implications.

2.3 The Limited Perfection and Excellence Required by Wisdom

Although Charron discards the elevated conception of wisdom held by natural theologians and metaphysicians, he by no means gives up the idea that wisdom implies excellence and perfection.⁴⁸ The excellence and perfection of something does not require its location in a high position in some questionable ontological hierarchy but the full flowering of its proper nature, even if this nature is limited. Applying this to man, and to man's essence, reason, this means that human excellence and perfection does not presuppose the attainment of certain knowledge, as the dogmatist would claim, but only full accomplishment of its integrity. This explains why knowledge of one self and of the human nature, title of book I, is indicated by Charron as a major previous requirement for wisdom. This is the knowledge that points out the limited nature of man's faculties, thereby showing that the kind of wisdom imagined by the dogmatists—certain knowledge of things human and divine—does not belong to man's nature.⁴⁹ This justifies the "modest" Academic wisdom (as Charron often calls it) presented in book II (2, 401, 410). Given that man cannot achieve the truth, the point of wisdom becomes to avoid error. This further justifies the detailed study of human being carried out in book I, which shows the many internal (such as the passions and the weakness of our intellectual faculties) and external (common beliefs) causes of error. The passages cited in the beginning of this chapter show that this is precisely Cicero's view of Academic skepticism. What is probably original in Charron is his view, derived from Montaigne's view of the skeptics, that once this recognition of the limits of the

⁴⁷I argue in Maia Neto (2012, 2013) that through Sebond these critics in fact target the Roman Catholics for the book of Sebond was used in support of Catholic doctrines such as the Eucharist which were being attacked by the Reformers.

⁴⁸For an interpretation of Charron's wisdom which emphasizes human perfection in contraposition to theology, see Faye (1998, 252–274).

⁴⁹One may wonder if this knowledge of the self is compatible with a *skeptical* wisdom. Demonet (1999) claims that it is not, based on a careful analysis of book I. I think that Charron's claims about the excellence and universality of man and self-knowledge, though probably incompatible with Pyrrhonism, are not incompatible with Academic skepticism. They should be read as having the status of Academic probability and not of truth, as he points out in the *Petit Traité* (I cite the relevant passage at the end of next section). However, I shall not argue for this view here since the focus of this book is not on the coherence of Charron's skeptical wisdom but on its influence.

human faculties is reached and error avoided through *epochè*, man achieves his perfection and excellence because human reason attains its full flowering. Unlike Arcesilaus, Charron appears less troubled by the eventual accusation of holding positive views and much more interested in presenting his Academic skeptic wise man as achieving the summit of human limited perfection.⁵⁰ Charron thus gives an anthropological base to his skeptical wisdom.

Cette sagesse humaine est une droiture, belle et noble composition de l'homme entier, en son dedens, son dehors, ses pensées, paroles, actions, et tous ses mouvemens c'est l'excellence et perfection de l'homme comme homme, c'est à dire selon que porte et requiert [sic] la loy premiere fondamentale et naturelle de l'homme, ainsi que nous disons un ouvrage bien fait et excellent, quand il est bien complet de toutes ses pieces, et que toutes les regles de l'art y ont esté gardées: celuy est homme sage qui sçait bien et excellemment faire l'homme: c'est à dire, pour en donner une plus particuliere peinture, qui se cognoissant bien et l'humaine condition se garde et preserve de tous vices, erreurs, passions, et defauts tant internes, siens et propres, qu'externes, communs et populaires; maintenant son esprit net, libre, franc universel, considerant et jugeant de toutes choses, sans s'obliger ny jurer à aucune. (S, 32–33)

To be wise is to “faire l'homme comme homme,” that is, to fully develop human nature, neither leaving underemployed our intellectual faculties nor attempting to reach what are not proportional to them. The knowledge of the human nature provided in book I is thus required for the achievement of wisdom for at least three reasons. (1) It reveals what reason cannot attain—certain knowledge of things, in particular of first principles and causes—and the precise limit of what reason can attain: the *phenomena*.⁵¹ (2) Knowledge of human nature also shows human proneness to assent in the absence of evidence, that is, the force of non-epistemic factors (passions, interest, and education) over the mind.⁵² Awareness of this tendency to rashness or precipitation allows the wise man to contravene it by an effort of the will, by virtue of which he resists dogmatism, making the firm resolution of not to take as truth that which just appears true, the *verisimile*.⁵³ This active aspect of Charron's *epochè* has been remarked by Popkin (1954) and Paganini (1991, 26–30) as a

⁵⁰Another explanation for Charron's difference from the ancient Academics on this point is the influence of Renaissance humanism.

⁵¹“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 bien au faux qu'au vray: nous sommes nais à quester la verité: la posseder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance”. (S, I, 14, 138)

⁵²See Book I, chapter 14, in particular, pp. 140–144. According to Pyrrhonians and Academics alike, *propotéian*, which has been translated to English as rashness and precipitation, lies at the root of dogmatism.

⁵³The impression that strikes or appears as true and therefore causes an inclination to assent is what Carneades calls the *pythanos* impression, translated by Cicero as *probabile* and *verisimile*. Charron's wise men will rather “douter et tenir en suspens leur creance, que par une trop molle et lasche facilité, ou legereté, ou precipitation de jugement, se paître de fausseté, et affirmer ou se tenir asseurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine” (S, I, 43, 292). This requires “preud'homie,” defined as “une droite et ferme disposition de la volonté, à suivre le conseil de la raison” (S, II, 3, 429). I argue in Chap. 5 that this position of Charron's was crucial for Descartes.

peculiar feature of his skepticism (absent from Montaigne's *Essays*) and an important one to the extent that it announces Descartes's methodic doubt. However, this aspect can also be traced to ancient Academic skepticism. Indeed, the Academic skeptics positively argued so that "facilius ab utraque parte ad sensio sustineretur" (Ac I.45), in a way similar to Charron's who gives "four or five" considerations to suspend judgment (S, II, 2, 407–409).⁵⁴ (3) The result of the study of human nature in book I is not only negative. As the wise man finds out what reason is not adequate for, namely, discovering the truth, he finds out for what it is fitted to: unbiased rational inquiry. In this activity he finds the perfection of reason through which he gets rid of wisdom's enemies portrayed in the frontispiece of the book: opinion, science, superstition, and passion.⁵⁵

2.4 Socrates, Arcesilaus and Carneades

The main link between the New Academics and Plato's original Academy is Socrates' pedagogical method, which Plato in *Theaetetus* (148e–151d) calls maieutic. Socrates' followers are not like those of Theodorus', from whom they learn mathematics, much less like those of Protagoras', from whom they learn technics of persuasion. As far as doctrine is concerned, they learn nothing from Socrates. What they learn is that "a life without this sort of examination is not worth living."⁵⁶ They learn a rational critical attitude—to examine any view as much as possible—and intellectual integrity: to accept nothing not warranted by reason. This rigorous examination leads in all cases to the exposition of the lack of rational grounds of the view. So what Socrates induces in his companions is not only to be rational but also (as a consequence) the elimination of previously held beliefs.⁵⁷ This Academic view of Socrates is recovered and updated by Talon, Montaigne and Charron. The first claims that as Socrates attacked the sophists of his time because their pretended knowledge was mere false opinion, so Arcesilaus and Carneades exhibited the same modesty in combatting Stoic dogmatism (Talon 1550, 7–8).⁵⁸ Talon and Ramus thus rehearse this same practice, turning it against the Aristotelian scholastics.

⁵⁴Another source of Charron's move is Montaigne's translation of *sustinere* as *soutenir*, hold fast by oneself, examined above.

⁵⁵This frontispiece was briefly discussed in the Introduction. Opinion is the dogmatism of the ordinary men, Science is the dogmatism of philosophers (in particular, the Aristotelians), and Superstition is the dogmatism of the religious men. In the case of Passion, Charron builds on Sextus' argument (M XI.141–167) that skepticism about values suppresses anxiety to get what one dogmatically considers as good as well as (in case one already possesses what one takes to be good) the fear of losing it.

⁵⁶Plato, *Apology*, 38a.

⁵⁷In the *Sophist* (230b–d), the Stranger says that the Socratic method makes possible a "purification through argument."

⁵⁸For contemporary scholarship on the Academic skeptics' view of Socrates, see Annas (1992) and Bett (2006).

Montaigne presents the skeptics as exercising Socratic rationality without dogma. He claims that the immobility of *epochè*, which in his “Apology for Raymond Sebond” he presents as the most favorable human mental state, is the immobility of the faculty of assenting, that is, holding something as true or false, not of the faculty of reasoning. The mobility of reason is crucial in Montaigne’s view of the skeptics and of the perfection (in the Aristotelian sense aforementioned) of reason. “Ils se servent de leur raison pour enquerir et pour debatre, mais non pas pour arrester et choisir” (E, II, 12, 505). According to Montaigne, this is exactly Socrates’ procedure: “Socrates ... va tousjours demandant en esmouvant la dispute, jamais l’arrestant” (E, II, 12, 509). Socrates is the founder of the pedagogical model that inspired the New Academics.

[C] Il m’est advis qu’en Platon et en Xenophon Socrates dispute plus en faveur des disputants qu’en faveur de la dispute; et, pour instruire Euthydemus et Protagoras de la connoissance de leur impertinence plus que de l’impertinence de leur art. Il empoigne la premiere matiere comme celuy qui a une fin plus utile que de l’esclaircir, assavoir éclaircir les esprits qu’il prend à manier et exercer. [B] L’agitation et la chasse est proprement de nostre gibier: nous ne sommes pas excusables de la conduire mal et impertinement; de faillir à la prise, c’est autre chose. Car nous sommes nais à quester la verité; il appartient de la posseder à une plus grande puissance. (E, III, 8, 927–928)

The first thing to note when we have in view Charron’s view of wisdom is Montaigne’s Ciceronian view that it was Socrates who “ramena du ciel, où elle perdoit son temps, la sagesse humaine, pour la rendre à l’homme, où est sa plus juste et plus laborieuse besoigne, et plus utile” (E, III, 12, 1038).⁵⁹ The object naturally proportioned to human reason is not that of metaphysics or of dogmatic natural philosophy but human morals and life. Second, Socrates exercises reason perfectly. The perfect use of reason is inquisitive. Coming to a conclusion means stopping the investigation, so reason either stops functioning or stops functioning perfectly since any subsequent inquiry will be biased by the achieved conclusion. This is the reason Socrates’ maieutic requires that he remains sterile.⁶⁰ It is also an important part of Socrates’ maieutic Montaigne’s point that Socrates “dispute plus en faveur des disputants qu’en faveur de la dispute.” Socrates’ teaching does not aim at instilling some knowledge in the disciple. His major pedagogic goal is to “éclaircir

⁵⁹“Socrates was the first person who summoned philosophy away from mysteries veiled in concealment by nature herself, upon which all philosophers before him had been engaged, and led it to the subject of ordinary life” (Ac I.15).

⁶⁰“the most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth. For one thing which I have in common with the ordinary midwives is that I myself am barren of wisdom. The common reproach against me is that I am always asking questions of other people but never express my own views about anything, because there is no wisdom in me; and that is true enough. And the reason of it is this, that God compels me to attend the travail of others, but has forbidden me to procreate. So that I am not in any sense a wise man; I cannot claim as the child of my own soul any discovery worth the name of wisdom” (*Theaetetus* 150b–d). Cicero comments on this in Ac I.16 and Plutarch in *Platonic Questions* I.

les esprits qu'il prend à manier et exercer" (E, III, 8, 928).⁶¹ Again, it is the plain, full, use of reason that Socrates wants his disciples to exhibit (refuting their opinions is the practice and requirement of this use). As Montaigne says in the same passage, to possess the truth is a prerogative of God. The proper of man is to search (to inquiry) after it. In fact, the most remarkable feature of Socrates' for Montaigne is his focus on human issues, his recognition that truth lies beyond human reach. So he was the wisest of men precisely for not having the pretension of achieving what lies beyond human nature. And his practice was to combat this pretension. "Socrates estoit homme; et ne vouloit ny estre ny sembler autre chose" (E, III, 5, 892). In keeping to the limits of human faculties, Socrates—like his true disciples, the skeptics—exhibits human perfection.⁶² Referring to the way Socrates argues in Plato's *Apology*, Montaigne says that "[I]à loge l'extreme degré de perfection et de difficulté: l'art n'y peut joindre" (E, III, 12, 1055).⁶³ He says that "l'ame de Socrates" is "la plus parfaicte" which he knows.⁶⁴ Montaigne's skeptical academic view of Socrates sheds light on Charron's vindication of a human wisdom, which is not attained in knowledge of natural and metaphysical things but in self-knowledge which is mainly moral since it reveals the anthropological, moral and epistemic limits of human beings, thereby combating arrogance. This consists in "l'excellence et perfection de l'homme comme homme," "celuy est homme sage qui sçait bien et excellemment faire l'homme" (S, 32–33). This excellence and perfection, which is mainly of the mind, does not comprise assenting to the truth, for "la verité n'est pas un aquest, ny chose qui se laisse prendre et manier, et encores moins posséder à l'esprit humain. Elle loge dedans le sein de Dieu" (S, I, 14, 138). The view that truth is a prerogative of God is Socrates' view presented by Plato in his *Apology*, a view that justifies his ignorance and critical rationalism that exposes the lack of rational justification of the beliefs held by his interlocutors.⁶⁵ Socrates, "le Docteur de sagesse" (S, I, 46, 306) is Charron's main model of the wise man. "[A] Le plus sage

⁶¹According to Charron, "[c]ette façon d'instruire par demandes est excellemment observée par Socrates (le premier en cette besongne) comme nous voyons par tout en Platon" (S, III, 14, 697). Charron's view of Socrates' maieutics, like Montaigne's, is also influenced by Plutarch: "C'est cette belle et grande qualité ou suffisance donnée par preciput à Socrates le Coriphee des Sages, par l'adveu de tous les Sages, duquel il est dit, comme discourt Plutarque, qu'il enfantoit point, mais servant de sage-femme à tous autres les faisoit enfanter". (PTS, 839)

⁶²Socrates "prise comme il doit la volupté corporelle, mais il prefere celle de l'esprit, comme ayant plus de force, de constance, de facilité, de variété, de dignité". (E, III, 13, 1113)

⁶³Charron claims that "Socrates en justice mesme ne le voulut faire [des faux soupçons et accusations] ny par soy ny par autrui, refusant d'employer le beau plaider du grand Lysias; et ayma mieux mourir". (S, I, 37, 247)

⁶⁴For Montaigne's view of Socrates in "De la physionomie," see Faye (2009).

⁶⁵"I have gained this reputation, gentlemen, from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom do I mean? Human wisdom, I suppose. It seems that I really am wise in this limited sense [viz. of learned ignorance]" (Plato, *Apology* 20e). "whenever I succeed in disproving another person's claim to wisdom in a given subject, the bystanders assume that I know everything about that subject myself. But the truth of the matter, gentlemen, is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of God, and this oracle [that Socrates is the wisest of men] is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value" (*Apology*, 23a).

homme qui fut onques, quand on luy demanda ce qu'il sçavoit, respondit qu'il sçavoit cela, qu'il ne sçavoit rien" (E, II, 12, 501).⁶⁶

The devise of the wise man, which figures in the frontispiece of the work, is "je ne sais." Charron points out that this is Socratic ignorance.⁶⁷ He claims that the wise man's statement "Je ne sçay" is "une sorte d'ignorance et de doute, plus docte et assurée, plus noble et genereuse que tout leur [the dogmatists'] science et certitude: c'est ce qui a rendu Socrates si renommé et tenu pour le plus sage: c'est la sciences [sic] des sciences et le fruit de tous nos études: c'est une modeste, candide, innocente, et cordiale reconnoissance de la hautesse mysterieuse de la verité, et de nôtre povre condition humaine, plaine de tenebres, foiblesse, incertitude" (S, II, 2, 402). Charron develops the same points alluded to by Cicero in the passage cited at the beginning of this chapter (Ac I.45) to explain Arcesilaus' introduction of *epochè* in the Academy and in the *Tusculan Disputations* to contrast human beings (who can attain only the probable) and God (who alone have the truth).⁶⁸ Two differences are, however, worth mentioning. (1) The "mysterious" obscurity of the truth and the weakness of man causing the disproportion between truth and human reason, though already exhibited by Socrates in some of Plato's dialogues and characteristic of the kind of skepticism extant among middle Platonists such as Plutarch,⁶⁹ is reinforced by Christian doctrine in Charron's description.⁷⁰ (2) Charron departs from Arcesilaus' position in taking Socrates as the main model of the wise man, affirming his ignorance: "je ne sais."⁷¹ Arcesilaus considered the obscurity of things so overwhelming that he could not know even if he couldn't really know. Charron seems less worried than Arcesilaus with logical problems of consistency and more

⁶⁶ See also *Sagesse* I, 47: "Socrates fut jugé le plus sage des hommes, non pour estre le plus scavant et plus habille, ou pour avoir quelque suffisance par dessus les autres, mais pour mieux se cognoistre que les autres, en se tenant en son rang, faire bien l'homme."

⁶⁷ See Montaigne's commentary: "Après que Socrates fut adverti que le Dieu de sagesse luy avoit attribué le surnom de sage, il en fut estonné; et, se recherchant et secouant par tout, n'y trouvoit aucun fondement à cette divine sentence. ... Enfin il se resolut qu'il n'estoit distingué des autres et n'estoit sage que par ce qu'il ne s'en tenoit pas; et que son Dieu estimoit bestise singuliere à l'homme l'opinion de science et de sagesse; et que sa meilleure doctrine estoit la doctrine de l'ignorance, et sa meilleure sagesse, la simplicité". (E, II, 12, 498)

⁶⁸ After presenting different views on the soul, Cicero says: "*Harum sententiarum quae vera sit deus aliqui viderit: quae veri simillima magna quaestio est*" (*Tusc disp* I.23). This view is much emphasized by Plutarch, as in the long citation of "The E apud Delphos" that concludes Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond."

⁶⁹ See Domini (1986) and Opsomer (1998).

⁷⁰ Although Charron's skepticism is not Christianized as Pascal's and Kierkegaard's (see Maia Neto 1995, 37–64), it receives a significant influence of the Christian religion and theology (more on this in Chap. 4). This theology certainly has a connection with negative theology (as Charron indicates in his *Trois Vérités* and *Discours chrétiens*, and in passing also in *De la Sagesse*). However, on what concerns morals, which is the basic subject and concern in *De la Sagesse*, its affinity is with Molinism not with Augustinianism. I therefore disagree from Saint-Cyran's (d'Haurane 1626) and Christian Belin's (1995) interpretation of this work of Charron's.

⁷¹ But note that Socrates is the main inspiration of Arcesilaus' Academic skepticism, as it is clear in this very passage on the obscurity of things (Ac I.45) for Socrates is the first philosopher cited as avowing this obscurity.

interested in giving to his wise man an assured intellectual and moral position, contrary to the irresolution usually associated to skeptical doubt and made plain by some passages in the *Essays* (cited below) where Montaigne refers to his own irresolution. He thus introduces Socratic ignorance as opposed to the objection—referred to in the *Petit Traité*—that he teaches “icy une incertitude douteuse et fluctuante, telle que des Pyrrhoniens, laquelle tient l’esprit en grande peine et agitation” (PTS, 858). Charron distinguishes his position from that of the Pyrrhonians and argues that the *epochè* of his wise men “ne leur est point peine, ains au contraire un séjour, un repos, c’est la science des sciences, la certitude des certitudes” (PTS, 859).⁷² The certain science in case is not that of any external thing but of oneself, of the integrity of one’s own reason.

Thus far I have argued that Charron’s wisdom develops and adapts to his context views held by Arcesilaus and Socrates according to the New Academics’ view of the latter. I conclude this section with another Charronian Academic position which comes from Carneades: probability. As indicated above, Carneades’ conception of probability has nothing to do with the modern concept of probability as an objective, statistic, measure of the likelihood of something. *Probabile* is one of Cicero’s translations of Carneades’ *pythanos* (the other is *verisimile*) which refers to the impressions or views which have the appearance of truth and therefore induce assent. We learn from Photius’ summary of Aenesidemus’ *Pyrrhonian Discourses* (of which only this summary survived) that the doctrine was relevant in Aenesidemus’ break from the Academy in order to establish (or re-establish) the Pyrrhonian school.⁷³ Sextus denies that there is any difference in impressions concerning probability and Carneades’ doctrine certainly counts on his view of him as a dogmatist whereas he considers Arcesilaus much closer to the genuine skepticism of the Pyrrhonians.⁷⁴ According to Cicero, there was a debate among Carneades’ immediate followers whether the doctrine implied rupture from *epochè*. While Metrodorus and Philo of Larissa believed that it did, since assent was given to the probable impression, Clitomachus argued that Carneades just followed or “approved” the probable impression in practical matters but did not assent, which technically would mean to take it as true.⁷⁵ Cicero’s position is that Carneades kept Arcesilaus’ view

⁷²“il y a difference entre mon dire et l’advis des Pyrrhoniens, bien qu’il en ait l’air et l’odeur, puisque je permets de consentir et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable”. (PTS, 858)

⁷³Photius, *Bibliothèque* III.212.

⁷⁴Carneades’ probabilism is one of Sextus’ main grounds to differentiate Pyrrhonism from the New Academy. “And as regards sense-impressions, we say that they are equal in respect of probability and improbability, so far as their essence is concerned, whereas they assert that some impressions are probable, others improbable” (PH I.227). Sextus recognizes that, unlike Carneades’, Arcesilaus’ “way of thought is almost identical with ours”. (PH I.232)

⁷⁵Cicero considered Clitomachus’ interpretation truer to Carneades’ view. He cites a book by Clitomachus on suspension of judgment which is no longer extant. The key passages quoted from Clitomachus’ book are Ac II.99 and the following one: “‘The Academic school holds that there are dissimilarities between things of such a nature that some of them seem probable and others the contrary; but this is not an adequate ground for saying that some things can be perceived and others cannot, because many false objects are probable but nothing false can be perceived and known.’

of the wise man as not assenting—for this would be to opine and thus to run the risk of committing an error. However, he found “not ... negligible” Philo’s view that that wise man cannot but assent to what is not certain, “that is, ... hold an opinion, but with the qualification that he will understand that it is an opinion and will know that there is nothing that can be comprehended” (Ac. II.148). These opinions have the status of *probabile* or *verisimile*, this meaning that he was well aware they might be false, so that his assent was provisional and detached.⁷⁶

Charron’s position is very much that of Cicero’s: “je permets de consentir et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable, toujours prest et attendant à recevoir mieux s’il se presente” (PTS, 858). This does not mean that he takes the probable as true for this would be harshness, a move the wise man must avoid in order to remain free from error. As he says in the passage, this distinguishes his wise man from the Pyrrhonian, and to this very extent associates him to Carneades’ probabilism taken in the Philonian/Ciceronian fashion. Charron’s probabilism is also the ground of his reply to the classic objection of how can a skeptic present positive views. Charron gives the status of probability to the views presented in the work. He says in the Preface that “tout ce que je propose, je ne pretends y obliger personne, je presente seulement les choses, et les estalle comme sur le tablier: je ne me metz point en cholere si l’on ne m’en croit, c’est à faire aux pedants” (S, 41). By considering the views contained in *Of Wisdom* as probable he is aware they may be false so he does not assent to them as truth. Consequently, he is not attached to these views which, therefore, do not compromise his intellectual integrity. The knowledge of man in book I and the presentation of the rules, presuppositions and applications of wisdom in book II, systematic as they are, do not contradict the content of the skeptical wisdom thereby proposed.⁷⁷ Whereas taking a doctrine as true (believing it) causes attachment to this doctrine, taking it as probable implies detachment, preserving autonomy and freedom. That this attitude with respect to his own position is seen by Charron as specifically Academic is clear in the Preface when he says that many of the objections raised against the first edition of the book resulted from the fact that the critics took for “resolution et determination” what had been proposed

And accordingly he [Clitomachus reporting Carneades’ views] asserts that those who say that the Academy robs us of our senses are violently mistaken, as that school never said that color, taste or sound was non-existent, but their contention was that these presentations do not contain a mark of truth and certainty peculiar to themselves and found nowhere else. After setting out these points, he adds that the formula ‘the wise man withholds assent’ is used in two ways, one when the meaning is that he gives absolute assent to no proposition at all, the other when he restrains himself from replying so as to convey approval or disapproval of something, with the consequence that he neither makes a negation nor an affirmation; and that this being so, he holds the one plan in theory, so that he never assents, but the other in practice, so that he is guided by probability, and whenever this confronts him or is wanting he can answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ accordingly” (Ac II.103–104). See also Ac II.108. See Ac II.78 for the debate that opposed Clitomachus on the one hand, and Metrodorus and Philo on the other, about Carneades’ position on belief. For secondary literature, see Frede (1984) and Bett (1990).

⁷⁶Cicero claims this kind of provisional and detached assent in virtually all his philosophical works. Some examples are Ac II.7–9 and 66; *Tusc disp* I.23, V.33; *De Officiis* II.7–8, III.20.

⁷⁷For a different view, see Giocanti (2001, 21).

“problematiquement et academiquement” (S, 43).⁷⁸ Probability is thus the means to present views without compromising *epochè* and intellectual integrity.⁷⁹ In the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*, commenting on the two basic foundations of wisdom, namely, to examine everything and assent to nothing, he claims that they protect the wise man “de deux escueils contraires, ausquels tombent les fols et populaires, sçavoir testuës opiniastretez, honteuses desdites, repentirs et changemens, et se maintient libre” (PTS, 841). The wise man may thus have opinions but will never be opinionated, which is a consequence of holding the opinions as true. Being rational, he will easily accept having an opinion of his refuted—“il se rend à la raison, et sa confession n'est jamais honteuse, car il n'a jamais affirmé ny opiniastreté” (PTS, 854).

Arcesilaus rejected Socratic ignorance probably because he feared that it contradicted suspension of judgment.⁸⁰ The doctrine of probability was not yet available to him. This doctrine—another Academic view which mainly through Charron was quite influential in early modern philosophy—allows Charron to incorporate the original and major model of the Academic wise man (Socrates) in his own elaboration of wisdom.

2.5 How Charron's *Wisdom* Is Mainly Linked to Montaigne's *Essays*

I claimed above that Charron took Montaigne's description of Socrates and the ancient skeptics in the “Apology for Raymond Sebond” as his model of the wise man. But wisdom is not for everybody: “tous ne sont capables d'entendre, d'advouër, et encores moins de bien pratiquer” (S, II, 2, 386) the freedom of judgment necessary for becoming wise. One of the chapters of book I (chapter 43 of the second edition) divides human beings according to intellectual capacity. Most people is on the lower degree, the vulgar men, “esprits foibles et plats, de basse et petite capacité, nez pour obeir, servir et être menés” (S, I, 43, 291). On the middle there are the “pedants,” who, instead of exercising reason, furnish their memory with scholastic and erudite knowledge. These are “de l'eschole et du ressort d'Aristote; affirmatifs, positifs, dogmatistes.” On the top are the few who are “de l'eschole et ressort de Socrates et Platon,” the *esprits forts* who “aymans mieux douter et tenir en suspens leur creance, que par une trop molle et lasche facilité, ou legereté, ou precipitation de jugement, se paitre de fausseté, et affirmer ou se tenir assurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine” (S, I, 43, 292). These are precisely

⁷⁸ See also the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*, 863: “en toutes telles choses, je n'y oblige personne, ny ne pretends les persuader, bien loing de les dogmatiser.”

⁷⁹ “You, Lucullus, if you have accepted the views of your associate Antiochus, are bound to defend these doctrines as you would defend the walls of Rome, but I need only do so in moderation, just as much as I think fit” (Ac II.137).

⁸⁰ “Accordingly Arcesilaus said that there is nothing that can be known, not even that residuum of knowledge that Socrates had left himself—the truth of this very dictum” (Ac I.45).

those whose *esprit* is strong enough to keep their judgment suspended, not giving assent as true to that which strikes as plausible (probable) but which may be false. In short, they are the few capable of keeping up to intellectual integrity in the epistemological, anthropological and moral senses that I have indicated in Montaigne's description of the ancient skeptics (Sect. 2.2).

Charron's tripartite division comes, indeed, from Montaigne.⁸¹

Les sçavans à qui touche la jurisdiction livresque, ne connoissent autre prix que de la doctrine, et n'advouent autre proceder en noz esprits que celui de l'erudition et de l'art: ... Qui ignore Aristote, selon eux s'ignore quand et quand soyemesme. Les ames communes et populaires ne voyent pas la grace et le pois d'un discours hautain et deslié. Or, ces deux especes occupent le monde. La tierce, à qui vous tombez en partage, des ames réglées et fortes d'elles-mesmes, est si rare que justement elle n'a ny nom, ny rang entre nous: c'est à demy temps perdu, d'aspirer et de s'efforcer à luy plaire. (E, II, 17, 657)

Charron gives a name to this third type, the Academic wise man, endowed with an *esprit* strong enough to avoid error by suspending his judgment. He is the philosopher deprived of doctrines and whose rationality, therefore, is wholly critical, that is, plain. The crucial link between *De la Sagesse* and the *Essays* is that whereas Montaigne is pessimistic about this third superior type,⁸² Charron, though finding very difficult to maintain oneself clean of false beliefs, does think that a few can attain this wisdom and these are those who may most profit from his book.⁸³ If Academic skeptical wisdom is available just for a few according to Charron, it is probably for nobody according to Montaigne. Indeed, important contemporary Montaigne scholars who examined Montaigne's skepticism such as Sylvia Giocanti and Frédéric Brahami have argued that *epochè* is not tenable according to Montaigne precisely because of anthropological reasons.⁸⁴ In the essay on virtue, Montaigne doubts that Pyrrho could maintain the indifference attributed to him in reports by Diogenes Laertius (II, 29, 706).⁸⁵ Furthermore, Montaigne does not present himself as a skeptic or as belonging to the top class in the tripartite division. On the contrary, he claims that "[C] ... nous sommes tous du vulgaire" (E, II, 12, 570). In the "Apology for Raymond Sebond," Montaigne gives himself as an example of how

⁸¹ Charron makes other divisions of human beings. One derives from different geographical locations, for which he relies on Juan Huarte (book I, chapter 42). Two others (chapters 44, 52 and 53) are based on different social positions, professions and other contingencies.

⁸² "[B] Certes il est peu d'ames si réglées, si fortes et bien nées, à qui on se puisse fier de leur propre conduite, et qui puissent, avec moderation et sans temerité, voguer en la liberté de leurs jugemens au-delà des opinions communes. Il est plus expedient de les mettre en tutelle". (E, II, 12, 559)

⁸³ Kogel (1972, 67) notes that Charron relies on Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond" to make the diagnostic of man as miserable and irresolute but that whereas Montaigne argued that man should conform to this condition Charron proposes that it be overcome through the rules and instructions of wisdom.

⁸⁴ *Épochè* is not tenable in Montaigne according to Giocanti (2001, 32–35, 64–73) because of Montaigne's view of the irresolution of the human mind; according to Brahami (1997), because of Montaigne's view of human beings as "believing animals."

⁸⁵ For a detailed analysis of the complexity of Montaigne's view of Pyrrho, see Gori (2009).

easily we change our mind in a description quite contrary to Charron's ideal wise man (more on this below).⁸⁶

Charron's *Wisdom* is mainly directed at those who are capable of wisdom but were not born naturally disposed to it,⁸⁷ and therefore had to acquire it through the hard pursue of a philosophy such as that provided in *De la Sagesse* which teaches how to revert human tendency to precipitation and error. Not surprisingly, the model of the acquired way to attain wisdom is Socrates. "[Q]ui a esté favorablement estrené de nature, et est d'un temperament bon et doux ... il se trouve tout porté à la sagesse." The rules of Wisdom are thus mainly for those "[q]ui autrement, doit avec grand et laborieux estude et exercice du second [pursue of philosophy] rabiller et suppleer ce qui luy default, comme Socrates un des plus sages disoit de soy, que par l'estude de la Philosophie il avoit corrigé et redressé son mauvais naturel". (S, 37)

The preeminent role of Socrates and his followers Academic skeptics in *De la Sagesse* points out its distance from the Pyrrhonian tradition. The main problem of the latter from the viewpoint of Charron's wisdom was its association with disquieting doubt, which was strengthened and more diffused after Montaigne's picture of the Pyrrhonians in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond."⁸⁸ Montaigne's view of the Pyrrhonian as doubting their very doubt (E, II, 12, 503) is clearly contrary to Montaigne's own conception of *epochè* as perfection. The simultaneous presence of these two contradictory views of the ancient skeptics in the same text may have two reasons. First the fact that he first pictured the skeptic mainly in terms of Sextus' Pyrrhonism and then, in the 1588 [B] and posthumous [C] editions, added Cicero's view of the Academic skeptic to this same picture. The second and probably main reason is a difference that must be made between Montaigne's view of the ancient skeptic and his own condition as a skeptic—much less stable than that of his ancient precursors—which may have contaminated his description of the latter.⁸⁹

The view of the ancient Pyrrhonians is an example of a superficial reproduction by Charron of Montaigne's view. Charron transcribes key terms and even whole phrases from the *Essays* in his characterization of the wise man. However, if we

⁸⁶"Ce que je tiens aujourd'huy et ce que je croy, je le tiens et le croy de toute ma croyance; tous mes utiles et tous mes ressorts empoignent cette opinion et m'en respondent sur tout ce qu'ils peuvent. Je ne scaurois embrasser aucune verité ny conserver avec plus de force que je fay cette cy. J'y suis tout entier, j'y suis voyrement; mais ne m'est il pas advenu, non une fois, mais cent, mais mille, et tous les jours, d'avoir embrassé quelqu'autre chose à tout ces mesmes instrumens, en cette mesme condition, que depuis j'aye jugée fauce?" (E, II, 12, 563). I argue in Maia Neto (2012) that the larger context of this claim is a dialectical move offered to Marguerite de Valois in order to provide her with an argument to justify her keeping Catholic even if Calvinism is shown more probable to her. This kind of skeptical fallibilist argument about our cognitive faculties is employed by Descartes in his methodical doubt.

⁸⁷Because of "de la semence des parens, puis au laict nourricier, et premiere education". (S, 35)

⁸⁸Another major problem with Pyrrhonism was its association with irreligion. Though this was a problem related to skepticism in general, the New Academy was less liable to the charge because of its Platonic and Christian use and qualified approval by some Church Fathers, notably Augustine.

⁸⁹A third reason is the fact that in the "Apology for Raymond Sebond" the Pyrrhonians are used by Montaigne in an attack against reason whose aim is to contravene Huguenot rationalism. See Maia Neto (2012).

look closer at the two texts, crucial differences appear. Charron makes subtle but radical transformations in Montaigne's text for whereas Montaigne's interest in this section is to make an apology for the ancient skeptics, Charron's interest is to give a solid moral and intellectual base to his *sage*.⁹⁰ In the following passage, Charron opposes the view that suspension of judgment is an unstable frame of mind, arguing that, on the contrary, it is the most stable frame of mind possible to man. (I italicize the words which appear also in Montaigne).

Mais aux sages, modestes, retenus, c'est au rebours la plus seure *assiette*, le plus heureux état de l'esprit, qui par ce moyen se tient ferme, *droit, rassis, inflexible*, toujours libre et à soy. ... C'est un tres-doux, *paisible*, et plaisant sejour, ou l'on ne craint point de faillir ni se mesconter, l'on est à l'abry et hors de tous dangers, de participer à tant d'*erreurs produits par la fantasie humaine*, et dont tout le monde est plain, de s'*infraquer* en *querelles, divisions*, disputes, d'offencer plusieurs partis, de se desmentir et desdire sa creance, de changer, se repentir se r'adviser: ... Bref c'est se sentir en repos et tranquillité d'esprit, *loin des agitations* et des vices qui viennent de l'*opinion de science que nous pensons avoir des choses*, car de là viennent l'*orgueil, l'ambition, les desirs immodérés, l'opiniastreté*, presumption, *amour de nouvelleté, rebellion, desobeissance*: d'où viennent les troubles, sectes, heresies, seditions que des fiers, affirmatifs et opiniastres, resolos, non des Academiques, des modestes, indifferends, neutres, sursoyans, c'est à dire sages? (S, II, 2, 404).⁹¹

Charron's source is the following passage from Montaigne's "Apology":

[A] Or cette *assiette* de leur jugement, *droicte et inflexible*, recevant tous objects sans application et consentement, les achemine à leur Ataraxie, qui est une condition de vie *paisible, rassise, exempte des agitations que nous recevons par l'impression de l'opinion et science que nous pensons avoir des choses*. D'où naissent la crainte, l'avarice, l'envie, *les desirs immoderez, l'ambition, l'orgueil*, la superstition, *l'amour de nouvelleté, la rebellion, la desobeissance, l'opiniastreté* et la pluspart des maux corporels. Voire ils s'exemptent par là de la jalousie de leur discipline. Car ils debattent d'une bien molle façon. ... Ils ne mettent en avant leurs propositions que pour combatre celles qu'ils pensent que nous ayons en notre creance. Si vous prenez la leur, ils prendront aussi volontiers la contraire à soutenir. ... Et, par cette extremité de double qui se secoue soy-mesme, ils se separent et se divisent de plusieurs opinions, de celles mesmes qui ont maintenu en plusieurs façons le doute et l'ignorance. (E, II, 12, 503)

I want to call attention not to what Charron takes from Montaigne but to what he does not take or changes, appropriating Montaigne's text to his own purposes and views. To begin with, Montaigne's view of ancient skepticism is the main source of Charron's view of wisdom. But whereas Montaigne describes—or intends to describe—specifically the Pyrrhonians, even distinguishing them from the Academics (E, II, 12, 561–562), Charron's sage is modeled after the Academic skeptic. Accordingly, Charron omits the fact that Montaigne is here describing *ataraxia*, a concept specifically Pyrrhonian. Moreover, in the second half of the passage,

⁹⁰ Charron says in the preface to the first edition that he has "questé par cy par là, et tiré la plus part des materiaux de cet ouvrage des meilleurs auteurs qui ont traité cette matiere" (S, 33). He adds in the preface to the second edition that the second book, from which the passage under examination was taken, "est plus mien que les deux autres". (S, 34)

⁹¹ Here and throughout the book the italics are meant to show the similarities between Charron's text and that of the other philosophers discussed in the book.

where Montaigne is explicitly describing the Pyrrhonian dialectical approach—in contradistinction to the Academic—Charron not only omits this description but also explicitly attributes the skeptical wise position just described to “des Académiques.” For Pierre Charron—contrary to Pierre Couissin—the position of the Academics is not merely *ad hominem* for they hold the view of the obscurity of things and of the inability of human reason to reach the truth. Charron adds that in this Academic *epochè* human mind finds its perfection and excellence. This perfection and excellence belongs to the concept of wisdom as also the view that the mind of the wise man is stable in contradistinction to the phenomenal flux.⁹² A doubt—such as the one attributed to the Pyrrhonians by Montaigne—that turns against itself cannot be the firm pedestal that supports Wisdom in the frontispiece of the book.⁹³ On the contrary, it could be described as an “incertitude douteuse et fluctuante, telle que des Pyrrhoniens, laquelle tient l’esprit en grande peine et agitation” (PTS, 858). The general rules of wisdom given in book two are precisely the remedy to this pain and irresolution, so Charron confronts Montaigne, rejecting his dubitative devise “Que sais-je?” and adopting his own affirmative one “Je ne sais.”⁹⁴

Charron’s wise man’s Academic *epochè*—*je ne sais*—is the safe harbor from the stormy flux of the world. But as the description of *epochè* as perfection and excellence suggests, Charron’s characterization of this Academic skeptical wisdom is not only negative. By withdrawing assent from external precarious beliefs the *sage* recovers the integrity and force of his intellect. To use anachronistic but acute Hegelian language, the negation of everything which is external to the mind or spirit (Charron says the wise man judges everything and assents to nothing) expresses the affirmation of reason which entails liberation of the mind from acquired beliefs. Reason finds thereby its autonomous pure nature, that is, its integrity. This appears, for instance, when Charron examines the way the wise deals with science.

L’esprit foible ne sçait pas posséder la science, s’en escrimer, et s’en servir comme il faut, au rebours elle le possède et le regente, don’t il ploye et demeure esclave sous elle. ...
L’esprit fort et sage la manie en maistre, en jouyt, s’en sert, s’en prevaut à son bien et advantage,

⁹²The flux doctrine is in a sense also Academic—of the old Academy—for it is presented in Plato’s *Theaetetus* and *Cratylus*. According to some interpreters, it corresponds to Plato’s own view of the sensible world. See Cornford (1935).

⁹³“J’ay le pied si instable et si mal assis, je le trouve si aysé à croler et si prest au banle...” (E, II, 12, 565). “Je ne puis asseurer mon object [that is, Montaigne himself]. Il va trouble et chancelant, d’une yvresse naturelle. Je le prens en ce point, comme il est, en l’instant que je m’amuse à luy. Je ne peints pas l’estre. Je peints le passage. ... Si mon ame pouvoit prendre pied, je ne m’essaierois pas, je me resoudrois” (E, III, 2, 805). Charron says that an obstacle to wisdom is “la crainte et foiblesse ... peu de gens ont la force le courage de se tenir droicts sur leurs pieds” (PTS, 841). “La sagesse conseille bien mieux de attendre [death] de pied ferme”. (S, II, 11, 523)

⁹⁴If it is in a sense right to say that Charron is a kind of disciple of Montaigne’s, he certainly is not a docile one. Charron’s position here looks like a direct and explicit confrontation of Montaigne’s: “quand ils prononcent: J’ignore, ou: Je doute, ils disent que cette proposition s’emporte elle mesme ... [B] Cette fantasie est plus seurement conceuë par interrogation: Que sçay-je? comme je la porte à la devise d’une balance” (E, II, 12, 527). Charron thinks that, on the contrary, the assured way is “Je ne sçay,” which he “fait graver sur la porte de ma petit maison que j’ay fait bastir à Condom l’an 1600”. (S, II, 2, 402)

forme son jugement, rectifie sa volonté, en accommode et fortifie sa lumiere naturelle, et s'en rend plus habile. (S, 38)⁹⁵

L'esprit foible in this passage is the dogmatic sectarian philosopher who subordinates his reason to some doctrine, thus compromising its perfect functioning. *L'esprit fort* is the Academic skeptic who affirms himself by denying any external doctrine, Christian revelation excepted.⁹⁶ The *esprit foible*, be him a dogmatist or a vulgar man—to quote Cicero's *Academica*, “cling as to a rock to whatever theory they are carried to by stress of weather” (Ac II.8), whereas the *esprit fort*, the skeptic, escapes from this stress affirming himself as rational inquirer. Replying to those who found his book “trop hardy et trop libre à heurter les opinions communes” and its propositions “trop crues et courtes, rudes et dures pour les simples,” Charron says that “les plus fortes et hardies propositions sont les plus seantes à l'esprit fort et relevé ... C'est foiblesse de s'estonner d'aucune chose, il faut roydire son courage, affermir son ame ... juger toutes choses: tant estranges semblent elles: tout est sortable et du gibbier de l'esprit, mais qu'il ne manque point à soy-même” (S, 41). The relevance to early modern philosophy of Charron's affirmation “Je ne sais” is certainly much greater than it has been acknowledged. The skeptical epistemological criticism of philosophical doctrines that occur in the period is perhaps philosophically and historically less important than the affirmation of the self in Charron's Academic skeptical wisdom conceived as rational pure inquiry.

In the summary of wisdom given in the preface to the second edition of *De la Sagesse*, Charron indicates its foundation: “[juger] de toutes choses, sans s'obliger ny jurer à aucune” (S, 33). These are the axes of the philosophy pursued by Socrates which enable him to “redresser son mauvais naturel,” that is, his inclination to hold as true uncertain views which were only probable.⁹⁷ These two aspects are dealt with in the second chapter of book II, “Universelle et plaine liberté de l'esprit, tant en jugement qu'en volonté.” They constitute two of the three parts concerning freedom of judgment. The third, which results from these two, is “l'universalité d'esprit,” by which Charron means the wise man's cosmopolitanism, his detachment from any parochial view, considering the *diaphonia* of human beliefs without being disturbed by those in conflict with the views held in his place and time.⁹⁸ Charron

⁹⁵Charron's source is Montaigne's essay “Du Pedantisme”: “[A] Or il ne faut pas attacher le sçavoir à l'ame, il l'y faut incorporer ... C'est un dangereux glaive, et qui empesche et offence son maistre, s'il est en main foible et qui n'en sçache l'usage”. (E, I, 25, 140)

⁹⁶The exclusion of Christian authentic revelation from the scope of *epochè* is a controversial issue among Charron readers (from Charron's time to today). This is a major point of disagreement between my view of Charron's skeptical wisdom and the very insightful one by Tulio Gregory's (1967, 1992).

⁹⁷In the *Theaetetus* (149b–c), Socrates implies that he held views before he initiated his maieutic. After he began his maieutic, holding positive views become a hindrance to the practice. In *Phaedo*, 97c, Socrates says that he was once pleased by Anaxagoras' view of the cosmos.

⁹⁸“le sage jette sa veüe et consideration sur tout l'univers, il est citoyen du monde comme Socrates, il embrasse d'affection tout le genre humain, il se promene par tout comme chés soy, void comme un Soleil, d'un regard égal, ferme, et indiferent, comme d'une haute guette tous les changemens, diversités et vicissitudes des choses, sans se varier, et se tenant tousjours mesmes à soy, qui est un livrée de la divinité, aussi est-ce le haut privilege du sage, qui est l'Image de Dieu en terre”. (S, III, 2, 406)

claims in the *Petit Traité de Sagesse* that to judge everything but assent to nothing expresses the traditional ancient conception of wisdom, that is, how the ancient Academic skeptics viewed Socrates in Plato's dialogues in which, as Cicero says, "nihil adfirmatur et in utramque partem multa disseruntur, de omnibus quaeritur, nihil certi dicitur" (Ac I.46). This universal *zetesis* and *epochè* work in conjunction in what could be characterized as a virtuous circle.⁹⁹ On the one hand, suspension of judgment, absence of any previously held belief, is a necessary condition for the full exercise of man's reason: unbiased rational investigation. On the other hand, universal investigation is necessary for the maintenance of the judgment suspended since an open, endless and rigorous examination will inevitably undermine the plausibility of any belief or doctrine to which one might feel inclined to adhere.¹⁰⁰ Charron founds his wisdom on Cicero's concept of intellectual integrity, whose key passage (Ac II.8) he cites in this chapter: "hoc autem liberiores et solutiores sumus quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas." The integrity of man's capacity of rational examination is maintained in *epochè*. It is therefore in *epochè* that reason—therefore the human being—attains its fully fledged perfection and excellence.

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⁹⁹ Attribution of a *zetesis* to Charron's wise man does not distance him from the Academics. Sextus' claim that the Academics abandon the search after the truth to the extent that they hold truth to be inapprehensible has been widely challenged. "For even though many difficulties hinder every branch of knowledge, and both the subjects themselves and our faculties of judgement involve such a lack of certainty that the most ancient and learned thinkers had good reason for distrusting their ability to discover what they desired, nevertheless they did not give up, nor yet will we abandon in exhaustion our zeal for research". (Ac II.7)

¹⁰⁰ "qui juge bien et sans passion de toutes choses, trouve par tout de l'apparence et de la raison, qui l'empesche de se resoudre, craignant de s'échauder en son jugement, dont il demeure indéterminé, indifférent et universel". (S, II, 2, 387–388)

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Chapter 3

Gassendi's Attack on Dogmatic Science

Because this book does not pretend to give a complete account of Charron's influence on early modern seventeenth century French philosophy, I examine only Gassendi's first published work, *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus aristoteleos, in quibus praecipua totius peripateticae doctrinae atque dialecticae fundamenta excutuntur, opiniones vero aut novae, aut ex veteribus obsoletae, stabiliuntur*. This is Gassendi's work in which Charron's influence is the strongest (as he avows in the preface) and where skepticism is most wholly supported. Gassendi announces a plan of the work in the preface which would include, in seven books, an examination of Aristotle's positions in all philosophical fields. Only the first book (a critical assessment of Aristotelianism in general) was published in 1624. The second book, on Aristotelian logic, was published posthumously in Gassendi's *Opera*. Gassendi's correspondence in this period attests his admiration for and influence from Charron.¹

In his subsequent works, Gassendi develops a program of rehabilitation of Epicurus. In these works, he claims distance from the skeptics although they continue to be a strong element in his philosophy. In the *Syntagma Philosophicum*, his last and most personal work, Gassendi claims he pursues a "via media" "inter Scepticos & Dogmaticos." In Ciceronian neo-Academic fashion, he claims to hope to find in the

¹Gassendi thanks Faur de Pibrac in a letter written from Aix-en-Provence in 8 April 1621 for sending him Charron's *Discours chrétiens*: "j'ai dévoré ces opuscules avec une avidité certaine: tu as parfaitement deviné que le tempérament et le talent de cet auteur me plairaient; quoique, pour te dire sincèrement ce que je pense, tous ses opuscules me ravissent, aucun ne me sourit autant que la *Sagesse* elle-même dont il a attesté dans la préface qu'il l'avait mise comme couronnement à ses études. Tu a raison de me conseiller d'emporter cet auteur avec moi dans la solitude; de fait, la philosophie se contente de peu de juges et évite délibérément la multitude. Mais existe-t-il un juge plus sain que Charron? surtout s'il a à ses côtés ceux avec l'aide desquels il a avancé lui-même, Montaigne, Juste Lipse, Sénèque, Plutarque, Cicéron. C'est ceux-là surtout et quelques en petit nombre que je me donne comme compagnons" (Gassendi 2004, vol. I, 2). Gassendi's friend and disciple, Samuel Sorbière, also attests Gassendi's great admiration for "Charron et Montaigne" (cf. Berr 1960, 113n).

investigation of nature not the truth but probability.² However, none of Gassendi's works after the *Exercitationes* develop aspects of Charron's skeptical wisdom, and therefore I do not deal with them.³ In his attacks on Robert Fludd and Herbert of Cherbury, in which Charron's influence is much weaker than in the *Exercitationes*, Gassendi still presents himself as a skeptic and was seen as such by his friend Mersenne who was also engaged in these polemics.⁴

In the Preface to his *Exercitationes*, he names his Renaissance sources: first Charron and Vives, and then Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola and Pierre de la Ramé.⁵ The division of the sources in two groups and the indication of what was the specific main contribution of the first group (Vives and Charron),⁶ suggest that these were the main sources of the first two dissertations of this first published book—on the *libertas philosophandi*—and that the second group (Ramus and Gianfrancesco Pico) were Gassendi's main sources for the specific objections to the Aristotelian *corpus* presented in the other dissertations, which are technical anti-Aristotelian points not dealt with by Charron. Charron is thus crucial in Gassendi's early view of philosophy, whose main feature is Academic intellectual integrity. This influence can be traced in the explanation of the title of the work given by Gassendi in the preface.

3.1 The Title of Gassendi's First Work

3.1.1 *Exercitationes*

Gassendi tells that the book grew out of lectures on Aristotelianism he gave in Aix-en-Provence from 1617 to 1623.⁷ Gassendi did what his position as a teacher required from him: the exposition of the Aristotelian philosophy, giving his students, so he claims, means to sustain it. However, intellectual integrity obliged him also to expose to his students the problems and errors he found in this philosophy.

²Gassendi (1658), Vol I, Book 2, chapter 5, p. 79.

³Secondary literature about the *Exercitationes* has considered the work either as plainly skeptical, though favorable to a non-dogmatic model of an experimental science based on the *phenomena* (Popkin 2003, 92–95; Berr 1960, 46–59; Paganini 1991, 40, 54–59); as skeptical only against Aristotelianism (Brundell 1987, 26–27), or has wavered among these two interpretations (LoLordo 2007, 11, 60–61).

⁴See Berr (1960, 60–70) and Popkin (2003, 121–127).

⁵In the letter to Pibrac just cited, he adds Montaigne, Erasmus and Justus Lipsius. On Ramé, see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2.

⁶“Haerebat tamen lethalis arundo generalis praejudicii, quo videbam Ordines omnes probare Aristotelem. Verum mihi animos adjecit, timoremque omnem depulit et *Vivis*, et mei *Charronii* lectio, ex qua visus sum non injuria suspicari Sectam illam non esse penitus probandam, quod probaretur quam plurimis” (Ex, 7). On Vives' Academic skepticism, see Casini (2009).

⁷Cf. Bernard Rochot in Gassendi (1959, VIIIIn).

This critical examination of Aristotelian doctrines lead to suspension of judgment.⁸ Indeed, Gassendi claims that the reasons in favor were at best equivalent to the reasons against Aristotelianism and that showing this was the practice of his teaching at Aix-en-Provence. He decided to publish only the *pars destruans* of his teaching because there were already available too many defenses of Aristotelianism.⁹ I thus suggest that a first meaning of *exercitationes* is related to this pedagogic practice. These various arguments in the books, divided into *exercitationes*, are school exercises that should be contrasted to the scholastic ones (or with Gassendi's perception of them).¹⁰ This explains a good deal of another part of the title to which I shall return below: *adversus aristoteleos*. The Aristotelian teachers of Aristotle sin against intellectual integrity by inducing their students to only defend and never attack Aristotle. This method was contrary to Aristotle's own pedagogy, as stated by Cicero in a passage cited by Gassendi: "Aristotle trained his young students in their school exercises not to discuss subtly in the manner of philosophers, but with the richness of the rhetoricians, both for and against, so that they could speak more elegantly and more richly"¹¹ (Gassendi 1972, 20).¹¹ As indicated in Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2, Cicero combined oratory and Academic dialectics.¹² The exercise which generated the *Exercitationes* was an exercise of intellectual integrity. Cicero has Aristotle teaching in the fashion of the Academic skeptics, i.e., arguing both sides of the question.¹³ Arguing both ways was a method to teach the students epistemic caution, combating harshness in philosophical inquiry.¹⁴ This is the true way of teaching philosophy: uncommitted with any doctrine, disregarding any authority. The exercise is thus the exercise of reason, which is the nature of philosophy to promote, but which dogmatic commitment to some philosophical school, in Gassendi's time, crucially with Aristotelianism, compromises. The philosophers who exercised reason integrally, i.e., in an uncommitted way, were the Academic skeptics. Gassendi thus recovers the true original meaning of an Academic, as a teacher in the Socratic vein, that is, sterile, deprived of any previous knowledge, fully and exclusively committed to the

⁸"sic istud non omittere candoris fuit ingenui, quod assensus cohibendi vera exinde ratio pararetur" (Ex, 9).

⁹"non debuisse me quidpiam in publicum emittere ex iis, quae sunt a me pro Aristotele disputata: cum ecce Mundum jam compleant, quae ab Aristoteleis proferuntur volumina" (Ex, 9).

¹⁰I do not examine here the cogency of Gassendi's many criticisms of Aristotle's philosophy and of the Aristotelians of his time. With respect to Gassendi's main objection to the latter that I do discuss, namely, their disrespect for intellectual integrity and blind submission to Aristotle, I think that Gassendi probably exaggerates this feature to make his point stronger. On scholastic teaching at the time, see Dear (1988).

¹¹"Aristoteles ... Adolescentes in Thesi, non ad hunc morem Philosophorum tenuiter disserendi; sed ad copiam Rhetorum in utramque partem, ut ornatius et uberius dici posset, exercuit" (Ex, 9). See Cicero. *Tusc disp.* II.9 and *De finibus* V.9–10.

¹²See also Jardine (1983).

¹³See Aristotle's *Topics*, I–II, 100a–101b.

¹⁴"Hac ratione videlicet Auditores admonebantur, ne quid temere pronuntiarent: cum nullam esse adeo receptam, speciosamque propositionem et opinionem viderent, cuius non posset opposita ostendi aequae probabilis, vel ut plurimum etiam probabilior" (Ex, 9).

free exercise of critical reason by the student. By exhibiting how philosophy should be practiced and thought, the book at the same time denounces the corruption of true Academic practice in scholasticism.¹⁵ This is the main point of *Exercitatio 2* on the *libertas philosophandi*.¹⁶

In article 1 of *Exercitatio 2*, Gassendi applies directly to Aristotelianism Montaigne's and Charron's view that the correct use of reason is to inquiry and not to assent. The Aristotelians corrupt this use when they preclude themselves from looking into other philosophies (article 3).¹⁷ This is the attitude contrary to Arcesilaus' who exhorted his students to attend the classes given by philosophers of other schools.¹⁸ So while scholastic Aristotelianism represents corrupt philosophy, Academic skepticism represents the genuine one. The fight against authority in philosophy does not appear in Gassendi's *Exercitationes* as a common feature of a variety of philosophical schools. It is specifically Academic, though Gassendi takes it as characteristic of genuine philosophy in general and proper for the wise men. The Academics are not committed to a particular set of doctrines—not even Plato's—but to the truth.¹⁹ Gassendi cites Cicero's crucial passage on intellectual integrity (Ac II.8) to denounce the lack of epistemic ground of the dogmatist's assent to doctrines and the damage this causes on the natural flexibility of reason (thus the need to exercise it in the skeptical fashion).²⁰ The proper place for authority is politics and religion, the field in which one should “captivare Intellectum in obsequium Fidei” (Ex, I, II, 5, 55). Such submission in philosophy is unworthy of the wise man.²¹

¹⁵Gassendi thus appears in this vein as an heir of Omer Talon, a close associate of Ramus, cited as one of his sources in the Preface. According to Schmitt (1972, 79–91), Talon revived Academic skepticism as a pedagogic method that should replace the scholastic one, promoting the practice of free inquiry in opposition to submission to authority. For more details on Talon, see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2.

¹⁶The title of *Exercitatio II* is “Quod immerito Aristotelei libertatem sibi philosophandi ademerint.”

¹⁷Article 1: “Ignava prorsus diffidentia occupavit Aristoteles.” Article 3: “Ut et ipsi penitus facti sint dedititii.”

¹⁸Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* IV.42. In Cicero's *Nat deo*, Cotta says that as a student of Philo's the latter suggested that he attend an Epicurean's class (I.59).

¹⁹In article 3, Gassendi rehearses the Academic view of Socrates' (see *Theaetetus*, 172c–177c) opposition between the philosopher and the advocate. When the Aristotelians examine other philosophical views, they do it “quasi affectati desperatae causae Patroni, qui semper illi deferunt, vitia graviora dissimulantes. Neque enim Judices, disceptatoresque legitimos agunt” (Ex, I, II, 3, 53).

²⁰“(quemadmodum M. Tullius suis temporibus querebatur) ad quamcumque disciplinam sunt, quasi tempestate, delati, ad eam, tanquam ad Saxum adhaerescant; utque sententiam antecessorum, quam semel adamaverunt, pugnacissime defendere malint, quam quid constantissime dicatur, exquirere” (Ex, I, II, 4, 53–55).

²¹According to Cicero, this is Arcesilaus' view of the wise man (see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.1). If Cicero is Gassendi's main ancient source, Charron is his main modern source. One of the main differences between the wise and the vulgar man is the autonomy of the former in contraposition to the latter, “nez pour obeir ... et être menés” (S, I, 291). Descartes shares this same view which he also, like Gassendi, took from Charron (see Chap. 5).

To conclude my commentary on the pedagogical aspect of Gassendi's *exercitationes*, I note that it fits squarely with Charron's diagnosis of contemporary education. In the footsteps of Montaigne's essay on education (I, 26), Charron complains that rather than favoring the free exercise of judgment, traditional education fills the memory of students with views held by authoritative authors.

Le vulgaire, qui ne juge jamais bien, estime et fait plus de feste de la memoire [than the understanding and the imagination] ... et pense il que pour avoir bonne memoire l'on est fort sçavant, et estime plus la science que la Sagesse, c'est toutesfois la moindre des trois ... De cest erreur populaire est venuë la mauvaise instruction de la jeunesse, qui se void par tout. Ils sont tousjours apres à luy faire apprendre parcoeur ... ce que les livres disent, afin de les pouvoir alleguer, et à luy remplir et charger la memoire du bien d'autruy, et ne soucient de luy réveiller et esguiser l'entendement, et former le jugement, pour luy faire valoir son propre bien et les facultez naturelles, pour le faire sage et habile à toutes choses. (S, I, 7, 85–86)

Descartes also was imbued with this view of Charron's (see Chap. 5) but, unlike Gassendi, did not attempt to apply it in the established institutional education at the time.²² Gassendi was a Charronian not only when he debuts in philosophy but also when he debuts as a teacher.

Charron is also important on another aspect of Gassendi's anti-Aristotelian *Exercitationes*. The aim of philosophy is to free one of the prejudices and irrational passions of common vulgar life in order to lead a rational life, avoid errors, thereby attaining the limited happiness available to human beings. This original goal of philosophy was compromised by the Peripatetic philosophers in the schools, so the need to attack them in order to recover true philosophy.²³ Gassendi says that when he achieved the age of reason he could critically examine Aristotle and realize that Peripatetic philosophy did not exemplify genuine philosophy and could not lead to its aim: wisdom. But the authority of the school, accepted by everybody (*generalis praejudicii*), precluded him from rebelling against it, until he read Charron's *De la Sagesse*,²⁴ in which he found the courage to criticize Aristotle and the Aristotelians, give his lectures and publish the book. Charron's voluntarism inspired Gassendi to raise himself against the *generalis praejudicii*, both those of the vulgar men (though it is La Mothe Le Vayer who will mostly deal with these—see Chap. 4) but in particular those whom Charron calls pedants, the Aristotelians.

²²“Un honneste homme n'est pas obligé d'avoir veu tous les livres, ni d'avoir appris soigneusement tout ce qui s'enseigne dans les escholes; & mesme ce seroit une espece de deffaut en son education, s'il avoit trop employé de temps en l'exercice des lettres” (Descartes, *Recherche de la vérité*, AT, X, 495).

²³“Quippe cum fere apud me constet multos plurimum potuisse ad detegendam veritatem, nisi se illam penitus arripuisse credidissent: enitendum duxi, quantum in me esset, retundere hujus tantae credulitatis aciem, probaturus num simul quidpiam ex turgid illa Aristoteleorum praesumptione detraherem” (Ex, 9). It follows that this work of Gassendi's may be seen as a preparation to doctrinaire philosophical tasks. The *Exercitationes* may thus be reconciled with Gassendi's constructive corpuscular philosophy, which he develops in the 30s.

²⁴Though Gassendi does not mention which work of Charron's encouraged him, the letter to Pibrac cited above (note 1) and the context make quite clear that it is *De la Sagesse*.

When Gassendi explains the meaning of *exercitationum* he highlights the effort of the will necessary to get rid of the prejudices of the vulgar and pseudo wise men.

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* (Gassendi 1972, 22).²⁵

Gassendi states here Charron's (and also La Mothe's and Descartes's) pessimist view about the negative damage caused by ordinary beliefs. La Mothe Le Vayer worries mostly with the moral aspect of this damage. Descartes and Gassendi are more concerned with the epistemological aspect. *Contagione* is a quite elucidative expression since it indicates the debilitation of the intellectual faculties, the lack of integrity of the intellect caused by assent to non-epistemically grounded beliefs, and our proneness to assent to them. Charron considers "la *contagion* universelle des opinions populaires et erronnées receuës au monde" (S, I, 14, 142) as one of the main obstacles to wisdom.

il faut estre bien ferme et constant pour ne se laisser emporter au courant, bien sain et préparé pour se garder net d'une *contagion* si universelle: *les opinions generales* receuës avec applaudissement de tous, et sans contradiction sont comme un torrent, qui emporte tout. (S, I, 39, 261)²⁶

It requires much effort of the will to resist assenting to commonly held beliefs. The force of the will necessary to withdraw assent from such beliefs (to sustain *epochè*) is an important part of the meaning of "esprit fort" in Charron. The will must be seriously engaged to put reason to work, examining the epistemological problems of that which appears probable and thus induces assent. The Academics remarked our tendency to assent in face of probable opinions. But as they also knew that probability is totally different from certain science, the wise man must make the effort to resist giving assent, keeping his judgment suspended, in order to guarantee the avoidance of error.²⁷ I show in Chap. 4 that general opinions (including religious opinions) are the main target of La Mothe Le Vayer. Gassendi targets a subclass, those held by natural philosophers (the dogmatic science combated by Charron).

3.1.2 *Paradoxicae*

The propositions put forth by Gassendi in his *exercitationes* strike as paradoxical. Paradoxical here does not mean contradictory but unfamiliar, uncommon, new. The paradoxical opinions in this sense are those which Gassendi endeavors to

²⁵"ad exuendos tot habitus, quos ex vulgi *contagione* ab infantia jam contraxissem; ad excutiendum ignobile jugum tam inveteratae hujus, quam *generalis praeoccupationis*" (Ex, 11), emphasis added. See also Ex, I, I, 2, 25: "Sic solent pulcherrima quaeque, eademque sanctissima, *contagionem* vulgi declinare: quando nihil sic pretiosum est, quod non popularium manuum attractione sordescat."

²⁶Charron's probable source is Montaigne's "De la solitude," which is recommended because "[A] la contagion est tres-dangereuse en la presse" (E, I, 39, 238).

²⁷See Chap. 2, Sect. 2.1.

reestablish with his first book, as he indicates in its subtitle: “in quibus ... opiniones vero aut novae, aut ex veteribus obsoletae, stabiliuntur.” Although these Academic views are very old—according to Cicero, they are the ancient wisdom established by Socrates and, before him, Democritus, Anaxagoras, Empedocles “and almost all the old philosophers” (Ac. I.44), they have become paradoxical—so in a sense “novae”—for they are uncommon since the disappearance of the New Academy. Gassendi even says that they were avoided and banished by the scholastics.²⁸ The replacement of the Academy with the dogmatic schools occasioned the corruption of genuine philosophy.²⁹ In this sense, the wise man Gassendi, who reestablishes these Academic old views, is a paradox to the scholastics. Gassendi's meaning of paradoxical is identical to Charron's, who asks in the *Petit Traité*: “qui ne sçait que le Sage est un *paradoxe* au monde, un censeur et mépriseur du monde?” (PTS, 856). Gassendi explains the meaning of *paradoxicae* as follows:

“paradoxica,” for they contain paradoxes, or opinions surpassing the comprehension of common men. Now by common men I do not mean men of the people ... but the common run of philosophers, whose minds are so low that, *they call barbaric anything that goes against the opinions they have become set in.* (Gassendi 1972, 23)³⁰

This point is further developed in *Exercitatio* II, article 11 (“...excitere jugum nolint *tyrannidis* Aristoteleae”), where Gassendi says that “*barbariemque existiment, si quid audiunt illis adversari*” (Ex, I, II, 11, 65).

The “philosophorum communium” correspond to Charron's pedant who occupies, in Charron's distinction of three kinds of spirits, a middle position between the wise and the vulgar men (Gassendi's “plebeiorum hominum”).

Au second et moyen estage sont ceux, qui sont de mediocre jugement, font profession de suffisance, science, habileté; Mais qui ne se sentent et ne se jugent pas assés, s'arrestent à ce que l'on tient communément, et l'on leur baille du premier coup, sans d'avantage s'enquerir de la verité et source des choses, voire pensent qu'il ne l'est pas permis: et ne regardent point plus loin que la ou ils se trouvent; *pensent que par tout est ainsi, ou doit estre: que si c'est autrement, ils faillent et sont barbares.* ... Ces gens sont de l'eschole et du ressort d'Aristote; affirmatifs, positifs, dogmatistes. (S, I, 43, 291)³¹

This passage of *De la Sagesse* indicates that Gassendi develops (detailing and grounding with arguments) Charron's fight against pedantic and dogmatic “science,” represented in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse* as a woman holding a book where it reads “Oui Non,” and exemplified in their time most and foremost by the Aristotelians. Two Academic motives central in Gassendi's *Exercitationes* are

²⁸The Aristotelians “ejecerunt” “graves omnes Autores e Scholis suis.” He names Plato, Cicero, Seneca, Pliny, Plutarch “and others” (Ex, I, I, 5, 29).

²⁹The title of Ex I reads: “Quod homines Aristotelei ex germane Philosophia Sophisticen effecerint.” Art 2: “Non veram enim, sed spuriam agnoscunt Sapientiae speciem.”

³⁰“PARADOXICAS, quod Paradoxa contineant, seu opiniones praeter vulgi captum. Quanquam vulgus hic intelligo non plebeiorum hominum ... sed Philosophorum communium, quibus ingenium est ita vulgare, *ut vulgi instar Barbariem inclament quicquid praeconceptis semel opinionibus adversatur*” (Ex, 11–13, emphasis added).

³¹I show in Chaps. 5 and 6 the role played by this passage of Charron's on, respectively, Descartes's *preambulae* of methodical doubt and on Pascal's apologetic strategy.

present in Charron's passage: the easiness with which one can give assent to what is commonly held, that is, a fight against rashness in philosophy and non-epistemic grounds of belief (authority) and, in opposition to this, the defense of philosophical freedom against the tyranny of dogmatism. "[The dogmatistes] veulent que l'on se sous-mette souverainement et en dernier ressort à certains principes, qui est une injuste tyrannie" (S, II, 2, 402).³²

3.1.3 *Adversus Aristoteleos*

And since I saw the Aristotelians far surpass all the others both in number and obstinacy, it is easy to see why I undertook my task "in refutation of the Aristotelians". (Gassendi 1972, 23)³³

As I pointed out above, Gassendi's quarrel is much more with the Aristotelians than with Aristotle.³⁴ Sure, Aristotelian doctrine is subjected to detailed criticism in book II, but the main aim of this attack is to diminish the probability (in the Carneadean sense) of doctrines to facilitate disengagement. The main issue in this first work of Gassendi's is not whether Aristotle is right or wrong, but the sectarian submission by Aristotelians to a set of doctrines which compromise the integrity of their intellect and make scientific progress more difficult.³⁵ Because the almost hegemonic sectarianism at Gassendi's time happened to be Aristotelian, Aristotle is the main target.

Gassendi points out that Aristotle himself, who studied in Plato's Academy, was opposed to authority and defended reason. He knew that a real philosopher

³²Charron's source is Montaigne's "Apology for Raymond Sebond": "Vrayement c'estoit bien raison que cette bride et contrainte de la liberté de nos jugements, et cette tyrannie de nos creances, s'estandit jusques aux escholes et aux arts. Le Dieu de la science scholastique, c'est Aristote; c'est religion de debatre de ses ordonnances" (E, II, 12, 539).

³³"Cum autem viderem Aristoteleos et numero, et pertinacia caeteros omnes longe superare: ratio profecto in promptu est, cur negotium mihi sumpserim ADVERSUS ARISTOTELEOS" (Ex, 13).

³⁴"Quod si quis piam forte ex me quaerat, quamobrem inscripserim *adversus Aristoteleos*, non *adversus Aristotelem*, cujus tamen doctrinam videor ex professo impugnare, noverit me potissimum tribus adductum argumentis. Primum quod opera illa, quae hic persequor, non tam ex rei veritate credam esse Aristotelis, quam ex opinione Aristoteleorum. Major quippe, meo iudicio, Aristoteles vir fuit, quam ut ipsi adscribi debeant tam indigna opera. Alterum, quod isti non tam Aristotelis, quam suam, et expressae menti Aristotelis repugnantem saepe defendant sententiam ... Postremum, quod quisquillas, gerrasque quaestionum conglobent in dies, quae Aristoteli in mentem non potuerunt occurrere" (Ex, 13).

³⁵Of course Gassendi also wants to show that Aristotle's philosophy is wrong in a number of topics. But the main occasion for arguing this will be Gassendi's proposition of his own Christianized Epicureanism in the *Syntagma* and other works. For Gassendi's Epicureanism, see Bloch (1971, 172–282) who claims that this Christianization lies only on the surface; Joy (1987), Brundel (1987, 48–82), Osler (1985), Fisher (2005, 192–339), LoLordo (2007, 130–169). For Epicureanism in early modern philosophy in general, see Wilson (2008).

“should not be bound to the opinions of somebody but permit himself the freedom to investigate what is most probable.”³⁶ If Aristotle returned to life in the seventeenth century he would be chocked at seeing his followers holding as certain (*indubita*) what he held as doubtful (*incerta*).³⁷ The latter kind of assent, unlike the former, is what guarantees the *libertas philosophandi*, keeping one free from the danger of becoming opinionated.³⁸ Once again, we find Gassendi rehearsing a Charronian view.

Ceux qui sont venus apres d'esprit pedantesque presomptueux, qui font dire à Aristote et autres tout ce qui leur plait, et tiennent bien plus opiniatement leurs opinions qu'eux ne firent jamais, et les desavouoyent pour disciples s'ils retournoyent, hayssent et condamnent arrogamment cette regle de sagesse [namely, give assent to nothing], cette modestie et surceance academique, faisant gloire de s'opiniatrer à un parti. (S, II, 2, 401)

3.1.4 *Opinionones vero aut novae, aut ex veteribus obsoletae, stabiliuntur*

Academic skepticism appears in Charron and Gassendi as the genuine school of philosophy to the extent that it preserves intellectual integrity, opposing any form of authority in philosophical inquiry, not even that of the founder of the school.³⁹ Even if Gassendi was already persuaded in 1624 that Epicurus' was the best of all ancient philosophies, because the preliminary task, prior to the proposition of any new positive philosophy, was to combat sectarianism and introduce philosophical freedom, it was the ancient skeptics' (not the Epicureans') views that had to be first reestablished.⁴⁰

³⁶“non debere esse adstrictum cujusquam sententiae: sed libertatem permittere sibi investigandi veri similiorem” (Ex, I, II, 6, 57). Gassendi rehearsals Cicero's *Academica*: “neque nostrae disputationes quidquam aliud agunt nisi ut in utramque partem dicendo eliciant et tamquam exprimant aliquid quod aut verum sit au ad id quam proxime accedat” (Ac II.7).

³⁷Gassendi's defense of Aristotle's own way of philosophizing (not Aristotle's doctrines) may also be merely dialectical, designed to embarrass Aristotle's contemporary disciples.

³⁸“Profecto si viveret ipse, videretque in verba sua ita religiose jurari, ut quae olim habuisset incerta, admitti jam cerneret tanquam prorsus indubita: O quam damnaret hujusmodi effoeminatam inertiam!” (Ex, I, II, 6, 57).

³⁹This may be one reason why Plato's doctrine was not taught in the New Academy. See Cicero, Ac II. 60.

⁴⁰The plan of the work mentions a seventh book on moral philosophy which would support Epicurus' view. A letter to Van de Putte from 24 March 1628 confirms this plan. However, I agree with Howard Jones (1981, 27) that Gassendi's aim at this occasion was not yet to rehabilitate Epicureanism but to combat Aristotelianism, presenting an opposing view on morals. Jones dates the former project between the late 1628 and the early 1629, when Gassendi met Isaac Beeckmann in The Netherlands.

In the case of the Ancient skeptics, there were actually no views (doctrines) to be reestablished but their way of philosophizing.⁴¹

Those familiar with the history of early modern skepticism may find strange Bayle's claim that Gassendi was the responsible for reviving ancient skepticism. Bayle refers to the *Logica* of the *Syntagma philosophicum*,⁴² in which Gassendi reviews and replies in great detail to Sextus' modes, semiotics and objections to the criterion of truth. A number of other philosophers put forth skeptical (both Academic and Pyrrhonian) views much before Gassendi. However, most of them revived skepticism not for skepticism's sake but in view of some non-philosophical—in most cases religious—aim.⁴³ True, Montaigne both revived and adopted a skeptical view. But his skepticism was a personal and modified version of ancient skepticism and he did not seem to have had as an aim the reestablishment of ancient skepticism. So Bayle does have a point for the very subtitle of Gassendi's first published work states this aim in an explicit way.

Gassendi makes an autobiographical note in the preface which resembles Descartes's in the *Discourse*, where he first refers to his decision, taken after he

⁴¹The methodic use of skeptical views will also be Descartes's strategy. This is probably the main consequence of the influence of Charron's on the two most influential seventeenth century French philosophers. But an important difference, so I argue in Chap. 5, is that Descartes radically transforms the skeptical doubt, both on what concerns its arguments (he introduces hyperbolic arguments that doubt the existence of the external material world) and on what concerns its aims (Descartes uses doubt to make a radical ontological distinction between the mind and the body). These differences did not remain unnoticed by Gassendi (see his objections to Descartes's First Meditation and his replies to Descartes's replies in Gassendi 1962, 31–59). Uses of skeptical doubt closer to Gassendi's are those of Glanvill's and Locke's. The latter, contrasting himself with Boyle, Newton “and some others” who have given outstanding contributions to natural philosophy, considers himself “an Under-Labourer in clearing Ground a little, and remove some of the Rubbish, that lies in the way to knowledge” (Locke 1975, 10). Glanvill employs almost the same language in the dedication to the Royal Society of his *Scepsis Scientifica*, whose subtitle—*Confest Ignorance, the way to Science*—already indicates the propaedeutic role of the *skepsis*: “In order to the Furtherance (according to my poor measure) of which great and worthy purposes [held by the Royal Society], these Papers were first intended. For perceiving that several ingenious persons whose assistance might be conducive to the Advance of real and useful Knowledge, lay under the prejudices of Education and Customary Belief; I thought that the enlarging them to a state of more generous Freedom by striking at the root of Pedantry and opinionative Assurance would be no hinderance to the Worlds improvement. ... If therefore this Discourse ... may tend to the removal of any accidental disadvantages from capable Ingenuities, and the preparing them for inquiry...” (Glanvill 1978, preface not paginated). The Charronian language used by Glanvill (the fight against attachment to opinion and pedant learning, the emancipation of the mind which recovers intellectual integrity and freedom) reveals a direct influence—see the Introduction to this book. Glanvill seems not aware of the different propaedeutic uses of doubt by Gassendi and Descartes to the extent that he takes the latter's use as basically similar to his own.

⁴²Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, article “Pyrrhon,” remark B, note 10: “Dans son Livre *Fine Logicae*, cap. III, à la page 72 et suiv. du 1^{er} volume de ses Oeuvres, édition de Lyon, 1658.”

⁴³An emblematic case is Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Examan vanitatis doctrinae gentium et veritatis christianae disciplinae* (Mirandola: Bundenius, 1520). For the originality of Montaigne's and Charron's receptions, which prepare the way to Gassendi's, see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2.

left college, to pursue the philosophical life.⁴⁴ Gassendi then relates his disappointment with the Peripatetic philosophy: as soon as he attained the age of reason, he could examine and see how useless it was to lead to happiness.⁴⁵ However, as Aristotelianism was generally held due a “generalis praejudicii,” he found in Vives and Charron the strength to withdraw assent from it.⁴⁶ In *De la Sagesse*, “visus sum non injuria suspicari Sectam illam non esse penitus probandam, quod probaretur quam *plurimis*” (Ex, 7).⁴⁷ He then examined other (presumably dogmatic) schools in which he found nothing more satisfactory.⁴⁸ Disappointed with all dogmatic philosophical schools, Gassendi finally found what seemed to him to be the soundest position: the *acatalepsia* of the Academics and Pyrrhonians.

3.2 *Épochè* as the Safe Harbor

Why Gassendi’s decision to set aside Aristotelianism and examine other philosophical schools was inspired by Charron? Gassendi says that the Aristotelians do not dare to consider views held outside their sect and society, in clear opposition to Arcesilaus’ recommendation that the Academics attend the lectures given by the members of other philosophical schools.⁴⁹ Like the ancient skeptics, Montaigne and Charron, Gassendi attacks the arrogance and groundless of the dogmatists: they are harsh, consequently enemies of true philosophical activity. Their alleged science is in fact an obstacle to the search of science. Presumption of having found the truth compromises free inquiry.⁵⁰ Like Charron, Gassendi dissociates and opposes *scientia*, that is,

⁴⁴ See AT, VI, 3, 22, 27.

⁴⁵ Gassendi says that “cum Adolescens imbuerer Peripatetica Philosophia, probe memini illam mihi undequaque non arrisisse: Qui me enim ad Philosophiam applicandum decreveram ... Ubi mei factus sum juris, coepique rem totam scrutari profundiore indagine, visus sum brevi deprehendere, quam vana esset, ac inutilis foelicitati consequendae” (Ex, 7).

⁴⁶ “Haerebat tamen lethalis arundo generalis praejudicii, quo videbam Ordines omnes probare Aristotelem. Verum mihi animos adjecit, timoremque omnem depulit et *Vivis*, et mei *Charronii lectio*” (Ex, 7).

⁴⁷ “Et qu’ils ne pensent me battre d’authorité, de *multitude*, d’allegation d’autrui, car tout cela a fort peu de credit en mon endroit” (S, 42). In Chap. 5, I show how *De la Sagesse* was crucial for Descartes’s emancipation from all his previous opinions and for the establishment of his new philosophy.

⁴⁸ We find skeptical *diaphonia* in all skeptics of the time (for instance, in Charron’s *Sagesse*, II, 2, 407–408) and in Descartes’s *Discours de la Méthode* (AT, VI, 8).

⁴⁹ See *Exercitatio* II, in particular art 3, where this point is explicit, and 4, when he contrasts it with Ciceronian intellectual integrity (Gassendi cites the crucial passage Ac II.8). Genuine philosophy consists not in membership to a school or holding a set of doctrines. Philosophy is love of wisdom, search after the truth in the Montaignian and Charronian vein, this search being more essential than the attainment of the truth. The truth is a desideratum which motivates the search.

⁵⁰ See *Exercitatio* II, art. I, where Gassendi recovers the meaning of *skepticos* (free inquirer) as given in PH I.1 and Montaigne’s view of the Pyrrhonians, Socrates and the Academics (see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.4).

dogmatic science of the kind he attacks in this book (as he will attack later Descartes's) and wisdom (*sapientia*). He denounces the "harshness and arrogance of the dogmatic philosophers, who solemnly and proudly proclaim to have acquired knowledge of natural things."⁵¹ By contrast, the Academics and Pyrrhonians are "wiser" for, "in order to show the vanity and uncertainty of human knowledge put themselves in condition both to combat everything and to claim everything."⁵² Gassendi rehearsals here Montaigne's view (E, II, 12, 503) that the skeptics have the freedom to attack whatever is proposed since they do not hold any positive doctrine. Charron makes this freedom from beliefs the summit of the excellence of the wise man. Gassendi relates his own position in the *Exercitationes* to this uncommitted way of philosophize, thereby ranking himself among the ancient skeptics.⁵³

In article 7 of *exercitatio* II, Gassendi argues that the role of philosophy is to recover the original natural freedom of the mind, corrupted by the influence of the vulgar man since the first age. The mind is our noblest part and so cannot be kept captive.⁵⁴ Then Gassendi describes the *ethos* of those who recover this freedom, which is the recovery of intellectual integrity (in the sense of the integrity—perfection—of the intellect) through ancient Academic skeptical doubt. I quote the passage in full, and then comment on each part of it.

[1] They have recovered themselves, those who have reached [withdrawn to] such safe harbor. [2] They no longer struggle to defend opinions previously held: they are ready to abandon them like opening a fist. [3] They know the weakness of the human understanding which, not knowing truly the things themselves, can only make probable conjectures about them. [4] For this reason they do not defend anything with severity and arrogance, nor consider Aristotle less liable to err than Pythagoras or Plato, but keep silent and without any disturbance in their mind they consider which opinions, among those opposite held by the dogmatists, reach closer to the truth. [5] Others bow down themselves and are carried away. They experience a true joy in seeing themselves emerging from the tempest in which so many are thrown.⁵⁵

⁵¹ "levitatis, et arrogantiae Dogmaticorum Philosophorum, qui et gloriantur se arripuisse, et tam severe profiteantur naturalium rerum scientiam" (Ex, 7).

⁵² "Sapientius ... qui ut vanitatem simul et incertitudinem humanae scientiae demonstrarent, ita sese comparabant, ut possent tam adversus omnia, quam pro omnibus dicere" (Ex, 7).

⁵³ "Quia vero non tam absolute, quam comparete hinc philosophor" (Ex, I, 17). "Certe nisi philosophari cum hac mihi libertate liceat, malim ego nullam penitus Philosophiam consecrari" (Ex, I, 17).

⁵⁴ See Charron, *Sagesse*, I, 13, 128 and I, 14, 133.

⁵⁵ "quam qui semel adepti sunt, in asyllum adeo tutum sese receperunt. Certe illi jam non sudant amplius in propugnandis, quae prius placuerant, opinionibus: cum tam parati, ac praesto sint quascumque deserere, quam compressam manum explicare. Nôrunt quippe eam esse imbecillitatem humani ingenii, ut cum res ipsas vere non cognoscat, probabiles solum conjecturas circa illas moliat. Ex hoc est, quod nihil severe, ac superciliose defendunt, neque existimant Aristotelem minus errare potuisse, quam Pythagoram, aut Platonem: etsi interea taciti, et sine ulla animi perturbatione cogitent quanam ex oppositis Dogmaticorum opinionibus magis accedat ad veritatem. Caeteros sinunt torquere sese: ipsi vero non sine ingenti animi laetitia experiuntur, ac sentiunt emersisse se ex illis procellis, quibus tam multos jactari conspiciunt" (I, II, 7, 59).

[1] “quam qui semel adepti sunt, in asylum adeo tutum sese receperunt.”

The most remarkable thing in this beginning of the passage is the description of *épochè* (attained by the skeptics) as a refuge from the stormy sea of doctrines and opinions. This passage describes the condition of those whose *ethos* is contrary to that of the sectarian (opinionated) philosophers. Its meaning is clarified in the context of the Ciceronian passage on intellectual integrity (Ac II.8), which describes the dogmatists as being carried out by the tempest (the flux of appearances) and holding fast to the first rock (philosophical doctrine) that appears in their way. The crucial point here is that the asylum, the safe harbor, is not one or other doctrine but suspension of judgment about them. *Épochè* is the safe harbor, first because one thereby avoids falling in error. This is the foundational view of the skeptical Academy when interpreted not as a merely dialectical position, and of Charron’s view of wisdom: because truth is hidden, impossible to be found naturally by the limited and fallible human cognitive faculties, the safer way to avoid committing errors (what the wise man must above all do) is to avoid giving assent.⁵⁶ Second, it is a safe harbor because it means freedom from the disturbance caused by the instability of precarious opinions and doctrines. Rather than “une incertitude douteuse et fluctuante,” Gassendi describes *épochè* as “un sejour, un repos, c’est la science des sciences, la certitude des certitudes” (Charron, PTS, 859). The harbor is safe because it is grounded on the recovered integrity of one’s own intellect and not on some external precarious doctrine or belief.

[2] “Certe illi jam non sudant amplius in propugnandis, quae prius placuerant, opinionibus: cum tam parati, ac praesto sint quascumque deserere, quam compressam manum explicare.”

Once the integrity of the intellect is recovered, one is free of the vicious, advocate-like, use of reason.⁵⁷ Not holding to any doctrine, the use of reason will be impartial.⁵⁸ The philosopher will have the freedom to change views because he holds them only as probable and not as true.⁵⁹ The metaphor of the opening hand is meant as a contraposition to Zeno’s dogmatism. Zeno represents *catalepsis* (cognition) as a fist and science as a fist with the other hand holding it fast: certain knowledge incapable

⁵⁶ See Chap. 2, Sect. 2.1.

⁵⁷ Gassendi shares with Descartes the rejection of what they consider the prevalent use of reason in the schools. “Et ie n’ay iamais remarqué non plus, que, par le moyen des disputes qui se pratiquent dans les escholes, on ait découuert aucune verité qu’on ignorast auparauant; car, pendant que chascun tasche de vaincre, on s’exerce bien plus a faire valoir la vraysemblance, qu’a peser les raisons de part & d’autre; & ceux qui ont esté long tems bons auocats, ne sont pas pour cela, par après, meilleurs iuges” (AT, VI, 69).

⁵⁸ As remarked in Chap. 2, in Charron’s view of the foundation of wisdom, assent to nothing is the condition for examining everything and vice-versa, since only *épochè* allows an endless inquiry not interested in proving views previously held. This open inquiry is the one able to establish equipollence.

⁵⁹ Cf Cicero, *Tusc disp* II.5, IV.47, V.33; *De Officiis* II.7–8, III.20; *De finibus* V.76; Ac II.7.

of being shown false by any argument or empirical evidence.⁶⁰ Dogmatic assent to what one presumes to be the truth entails a strong attachment that compromises intellectual integrity in contrast to skeptical detachment. Gassendi's metaphor of opening the hand means the liberation through *époque* from previously held dogmatism, from the dogmatic conception of *scientia*.⁶¹

[3] “Nōrunt quippe eam esse imbecillitatem humani ingenii, ut cum res ipsas vere non cognoscat, probabiles solum conjecturas circa illas molitur.”

The skeptics are the philosophers who recognize the inability of the human faculties to reach the truth. The ancient Academic *topos* of the “*rerum obscuritate*” (Ac I. 44) was reinforced in Christianity in which a transcendent omnipotent God created them *ex-nihil*, and, as the Renaissance skeptics often remarked, only who has made something can truly know it. Given that truth is out of reach, we must content to the *verisimile* or *probabile*. “[La vérité] loge dedans le sein de Dieu ... 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 bien au faux qu’au vray: nous sommes nais à quester la vérité: la posseder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance” (S, I, 14, 138).⁶²

[4] “Ex hoc est, quod nihil severe, ac superciliose defendunt, neque existimant Aristotelem minus errare potuisse, quam Pythagoram, aut Platonem ...”

Socratic wisdom leads to good manners (this is the conclusion of the *Theaetetus*, 210c) and to Cicero's (following Philo) and Charron's fallibilist view of science, aware that the views can easily turn out to be false.⁶³ To describe the dogmatists' use of reason, Gassendi uses the term “*superciliose*,” which literally means “eyebrows rose.” Charron describes the figure that represents dogmatic science in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse* as follows: “au visage enflé, glorieux, arrogant, avec les sourcils relevez, qui lit en un livre, où y a escrit, OUY, NON” (S, 8).⁶⁴

⁶⁰“then [Zeno] pressed his fingers closely together and made a fist, and said that that was comprehension (and from this illustration he gave to that process the actual name of *catalepsis*, which it had not had before); but then he used to apply his left hand to his right fist and squeeze it tightly and forcibly, and then say that such was knowledge [*scientiam*]” (Ac II.145).

⁶¹ “[Le sage] ne s’heurte, ne jure, ne se lie, ou s’oblige à aucune [chose], se tenant tousjours prest à recevoir le vray ou plus vray semblable qui luy apparoitra” (S, II, 2, 399). See also the *Petit Traité*: “la vérité n’est point de nostre acquest, invention ny prise, quand elle se rendroit entre nos mains, nous n’avons dequoy nous la vendiquer, nous en assurer et la posseder” (PTS, 839).

⁶² Almost the same passage appears in the *Petit Traité*, 839. Charron's source is probably Montaigne: “car la vraye raison et essentielle, de qui nous desrobons le mon à fauces enseignes, elle loge dans le sein de Dieu” (E, II, 12, 541).

⁶³ I develop this issue in connection to La Mothe Le Vayer's *époque* in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.1.

⁶⁴ See also Montaigne: “C’est grand cas que les choses en soyent là en nostre siecle, que la philosophie, ce soit, jusques aux gens d’entendement, un nom vain et fantastique, qui se trouve de nul usage et de nul pris ... [A] Je croy que ces ergotismes en sont cause, qui ont saisi ses avenues. On a grand tort de la peindre inaccessible aux enfans, et d’un visage renfroigné, sourcilieux et terrible. Qui me l’a masquée de ce faux visage, pasle et hideux?” (E, I, 26, 160).

[5] “Caeteros sinunt torquere sese: ipsi vero non sine ingenti animi laetitia experiuntur, ac sentiunt emersisse se ex illis procellis, quibus tam multos jactari conspiciunt.”

The description of the dogmatists carried away by the flux of beliefs comes ultimately from Ac II.8, cited in article 4 of *Exercitatio* II: “ad quamcumque disciplinam sunt, quasi tempestate, delati, ad eam, tanquam ad Saxum adhaerescant” (Ex, I, II, 4, 53).⁶⁵ As I have indicated above, the dogmatists, in the specific case, the Aristotelians, have an “esprit faible” to the extent that they need some doctrine to hold, whereas the skeptics hold on to the strength (integrity) of their own mind. They are “esprits forts.” In considering “les défauts de l’esprit” in his chapter on the understanding of book I *De la Sagesse*, Charron notes that “[t]ous les esprits n’ont pas assez de force et vigueur pour se garantir et sauver d’un tel deluge,” namely, “la contagion universelle des opinions” (S, I, 14, 142). It is worthy comparing this passage of Gassendi’s with the beginning of Descartes’s Second Meditation. In a similar metaphor that represents the doubts of the First Meditation about vulgar and philosophical beliefs as a deep sea, Descartes finds himself unable neither to get to the bottom nor to emerge to the surface.⁶⁶ But staying on the surface (precisely what Gassendi does) will not do for Descartes. So we can see a difference between Descartes’s *cogito* (the indubitable certainty of the self as *res cogitans*, recognized thanks to the strategy of first showing that what is taken as true is at most probable, and then considering the probable as if it were false) and Gassendi’s *asylum*: a self-liberation from previously held beliefs which are now recognized not as true but only as probable.⁶⁷

3.3 Some Epistemological Aspects of Gassendi’s Skeptical Anti-Aristotelianism

Exercises 1–2 of book I of the *Exercitationes* are essentially Charronian. Exercises 3–8 detail, develop or establish the following view stated by Charron in the preface to *De la Sagesse*.

Il faut ouyr, considerer et faire compte des anciens, non s’y captiver qu’avec la raison: et quand on les voudroit suivre, comment fera on? Ils ne sont pas d’accord. Aristote qui a voulu sembler le plus habile, et a entrepris de faire le procez à tous ses devanciers, a dit de plus lourdes absurditez que tous, et n’est point d’accord avec soy-mesme, et ne sçait quelquefois ou il en est, tesmoin les matieres de l’ame humaine, de l’eternité du monde, de la generation des vents, et des eaux, etc. (S, 42)

⁶⁵ Montaigne cites this passage of Cicero’s in E, II, 12, 504.

⁶⁶ “tanquam in profundum gurgitem ex improviso delapsus, ita turbatus sum, ut nec possim in imo pedem figere, nec enatare ad summum” (AT, VII, 23–24).

⁶⁷ In his objection to the First Meditation, Gassendi criticizes Descartes for taking as false what is probable (AT, VII, 257–258).

First of all, *exercitatio* 3 aims at reestablishing philosophical *diaphonia* by arguing that there is no rational justification to prefer Aristotelian philosophy over competing dogmatic ones.⁶⁸ This corresponds to Descartes's diagnosis of contemporary philosophy in the *Discourse*.⁶⁹ But whereas Descartes is just relating the beginning of the path he followed until he elaborated his own philosophy which would put an end to every philosophical disagreement since his philosophy, unlike all previous others, is certain and not merely probable, Gassendi will later argue for the more probability of a reformed (Christianized) ancient philosophy: Epicureanism. He will establish this renewed Epicureanism after Charron's fashion, that is, not in a sectarian way, subduing his mind to the Ancient doctrine, but submitting (revising, criticizing) the doctrine to his mind. Secondly, the internal contradictions in the Aristotelian *corpus* are detailed in *exercitatio* 8 ("Quod apud Aristotelem innumera contradicant") and his errors—those cited by Charron and many others fill the content of *exercitatio* 7 ("Quod apud Aristotelem innumera fallant"). Besides these kinds of problems indicated by Charron, Gassendi also has *exercitationes* on Aristotle's superfluities (ex. 6), deficiencies (ex. 5), and on the uncertainty concerning the authenticity of Aristotle's *corpus* (ex. 4).

Book II on Aristotelian dialectics appeared only posthumously.⁷⁰ Although Gassendi attacks a number of aspects of Aristotelian dialectics and related issues, what has received most attention is the sixth and last *exercitatio*, which shows—as Gassendi puts it in the synopsis of the book—"the weakness and uncertainty of human cognition" and where the Pyrrhonian *fundamenta* are mainly presented. Because the focus of this book is on the influence of Charron's Academic skepticism in the skepticism of the first half of the seventeenth century, I make only three remarks on book II.

The first remark is that the exposition and use of Sextus' material is concentrated in the sixth *exercitatio*. Only a detailed study of the sources of the other five *exercitationes* could establish if Sextus is the major source of the whole book. My suspicion is that the sixteenth century sources cited by Gassendi (Gianfrancesco Pico and Ramus)—are much present in the book, which suggest a balance of Academic (from the French) and Pyrrhonian (from the Italian) epistemological sources. In the synopsis of book II in the preface, Gassendi singles out *exercitatio* 6, for he says that this book presents the "Pyrrhonismi fundamenta" and establishes the following maxim: "*Nihil sciri*" (Ex, 13). But this maxim is not specifically

⁶⁸"Quod rationes nullae sint, quibus Secta Aristotelis videri possit praeferenda."

⁶⁹"Je ne diray rien de la Philosophie, sinon que, voyant qu'elle a esté cultiuée par les plus excellens esprits qui ayent vescu depuis plusieurs siecles, & que neanmoins il ne s'y trouue encore aucune chose dont on ne dispute, & par consequent qui ne soit douteuse..." (AT, VI, 8). I show in Chap. 5 the influences of Montaigne's and Charron's in this diagnosis.

⁷⁰It appeared in Gassendi's *Opera* published in Lyon in 1658. According to Jones (1981, 21–22), although this second book was already written when the first was published in 1624, Gassendi decided not to publish it fearing persecution.

Pyrrhonian (depending on how it is understood, it may be not Pyrrhonian at all). It is also Academic and according to Cicero, held by "almost all the old philosophers."⁷¹

Second, before presenting the ten modes, Gassendi specifies the meaning of the *scientia* (cognition) which will be challenged: the kind of Aristotelian knowledge that pretends to be certain and evident. This means that neither positive revealed theology (which is certain but not evident) nor experimental science (which has a lower degree of evidence but is not certain) are concerned in the skeptical attack. The first exclusion is also made, and based on the same ground, by La Mothe Le Vayer in his skeptical dialogues, notably in the dialogue "Sur la divinité" (see Chap. 4). But in this work, Gassendi is not interested in religion and moral, though they are mentioned in his report of Sextus' tenth mode. His interest (as the end of the book makes clear) is in experimental science. When he relates the tenth mode which deals with "rules of conduct, habits, laws, legendary beliefs, and dogmatic conceptions" (PH I.145), he says that the matter is *infinita* and that he would not dwell on "the various opinions concerning the existence, nature, unity, knowledge, providence and beatitude of God ... nor on the diversity of rituals" (Ex, II, VI, 4, 455). Gassendi's list looks like the table of contents of La Mothe Le Vayer's "Dialogue sur la divinité." His claim that it would be nonsense (*forte absonum*) to deal with such acknowledged facts seems to distance him from the kind of skepticism developed by his friend.⁷² My claim in the present book is that whereas La Mothe le Vayer develops mainly Charron's attack on opinion and superstition (see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2), Gassendi develops Charron's attack on dogmatic science. However, these two trends sometimes come together. I give one example.

One position which Gassendi will develop in later works is nominalism. In book II of the *Exercitationes*, it appears negatively in an attack on universal propositions, which is a part of the attack on demonstration (*exercitatio* V). The Aristotelians claim that the principles of demonstration are universal propositions but this, Gassendi argues, cannot be established. If there were universal propositions they would have to be established inductively. But since the instances are countless, any universal proposition is an instance of rashness, jeopardizing the commitment to intellectual integrity. Even if the same property is verified in a large number of individuals of a species, one cannot claim that this property belongs to the essence of this species, in the same way as "if you had seen three, or four, or a hundred, or even many myriads of Europeans with fair skins and light complexions without ever having seen any Ethiopians and had concluded that all men are white" (Gassendi 1972, 76).⁷³

⁷¹"omnes paene veteres, qui nihil cognosci, nihil percipi, *nihil sciri* posse dixerunt" (Ac. I.44). (Emphasis added).

⁷²We cannot say that Gassendi had Le Vayer in view because he became a friend of him only after the publication of his book.

⁷³"qua si tres, vel quatuor, vel centum, vel multas etiam myriadas Europeorum hominum dumtaxat vidisses albo colore ... conspectis nunquam Aethiopicibus, collegisses haud dubie omnem hominem esse album" (Ex, II, V, 5, 415).

The argument suggests that the problem of induction in Gassendi is not merely epistemological. It compromises intellectual integrity in its epistemic, anthropological and moral dimensions. Gassendi thus gives epistemological content to Charron's (and later La Mothe Le Vayer's) view that philosophical dogmatism (above all Aristotelian) results from European ethnocentrism, a prejudice hard to sustain in face of the discovery of the new world.⁷⁴ This cultural aspect of skepticism is specifically target by La Mothe le Vayer.

My third and last remark is on the other "science" not touched by the skeptical modes according to Gassendi. Indeed, the ten modes aim at suspending judgment about the real nature of the object through the contraposition of appearances: the same air feels cold to some in certain circumstances and warm to others or the same in other circumstances. These appearances appear as contradictory only if there is the presupposition of a real unique nature: the dogmatic view that the nature of air must be either cold or warm. The ten modes thus have a double face: a negative and a positive. If they lead to suspension of judgment about real natures, they expose and value the diversity of appearances, rather than disqualifying some of them as false. Sextus thus says, at the end of each mode, what cannot be said (for instance, that the air is really cold) but also what can be said: that it appears cold under certain circumstance and warm under others. In the same movement through which ancient Pyrrhonism challenges dogmatic views of science, it legitimates empirical science based on the phenomena. This aspect is crucial for Gassendi's project to the extent that it links its *pars destruens* to its *pars construens*—which he develops later by rehabilitating and adapting atomism to his time. Gassendi ends his book II pointing out this constructive aspect of the ancient view (skepticism) he endeavors to reestablish in the *Exercitationes*. The last three articles of *exercitatio* 6 are the following: art. 6: "all we can know is how something appears to some men or to others" (Gassendi 1972, 96); art. 7: "the Pyrrhonists do not malign nature when they proclaim that 'nothing is known'" (Gassendi 1972, 102), and art. 8: "the existence of various branches of knowledge must be admitted in addition to this" (Gassendi 1972, 105).

Following this line of thought, it may well be that the basis for knowledge does exist, but for a knowledge of experience and, I may say, of appearances; for our intellect knows or learns through its experience of numerous appearances. (Gassendi 1972, 104)⁷⁵

This is a Pyrrhonian and Academic view which was much reinforced by the Christian skeptics, by Montaigne and Charron in particular.

la verité n'est pas un aquest, ny chose qui se laisse prendre et manier, et encores moins posseder à l'esprit humain. Elle loge dedans le sein de Dieu ... l'homme [tournoye et tatonne] à l'entour des apparences. (S, I, 14, 138)

⁷⁴One of Charron's modes to achieve *epochè* is "[c]e que nous avons appris de la descouverte du monde nouveau, Indes Orientales et Occidentales" (S, II, 2, 408).

⁷⁵"Deinde vero et illud dari consequenter potest esse causas scientiae; at scientiae tamen experimentalis, et ut sic dicam apparentialis; siquidem Intellectus noster scit, cognoscitve experiundo multa apparentia" (Ex, II, VI, 7, 505).

The true nature of things is beyond human limited faculties. The dogmatist's pretension is really arrogant because it pretends the kind of natural knowledge only God (and maybe disembodied souls) can have.⁷⁶ As the truth cannot be grasped, science understood as pretension of certain knowledge becomes a problem to the mind. Human beings hold as true what can be false and thus become "opinionated," blind to new experiences. Dogmatic science damages the integrity of the natural light of reason which is maintained while it exercises a noncommittal and endless search after the truth. Gassendi's view is thus not only consistent with but the elaboration of Charron's view stated in the preface to *De la Sagesse* that

La science est un tresbon et utile baston, mais qui ne se laisse pas manier à toutes mains: et qui ne le sçait bien manier, en reçoit plus de dommage que de profit, elle enteste et affolite, dit bien un grand habile homme,⁷⁷ les esprits foibles et malades, polit et parfait les forts et bons naturels.⁷⁸ L'esprit foible ne sçait pas posséder la science, s'en escrimer ... au rebours elle le possède et le regente, dont il ploye et demeure esclave sous elle, comme l'estomach foible chargé de viandes qu'il ne peut cuire ny digerer: ... L'esprit fort et sage la manie en maistre ... s'en sert ... à son bien et advantage, forme son jugement ... en accommode et fortifie sa lumiere naturelle. (S, 38)

Gassendi alludes to this "truer and more useful [science]" based on the experience of the appearances of things which was, he claims, methodically transmitted.⁷⁹ Although he does not say so, this method seems to be that of the physicians of the ancient medical empirical school, which was based first on direct experience, and then on the reports of—and reasoning from—this direct experience.⁸⁰ It is not a coincidence that the empirical ancient doctors' method appears in the context of an apology for the Pyrrhonians. Many Pyrrhonian philosophers were empirical doctors, like Sextus *Empiricus* whose medical practice was specified in his name.⁸¹

Gassendi uses this *pars construens* of ancient skepticism to reply to the charge of contradiction. His own anti-Aristotelian position has the status of probability and

⁷⁶This is an important instance of Gassendi's influence on Locke, according to whom we can have science (certain knowledge) only of that which concerns our moral existence (of our own existence, of the existence of God, of our duty, and of the appearances which secure our survival).

⁷⁷This "grand habile homme" is Montaigne: "[La science] est un dangereux glaive, et qui empêche et offence son maistre, s'il est en main foible et qui n'en sçache l'usage" (E, I, 25, 140). "[A] Madame [Diane de Foix, who is pregnant, to whom Montaigne dedicates his essay on the education of children], c'est un grand ornement que la science, et un util de merveilleux service, notamment aux personnes élevées en tel degré de fortune, comme vous estes. A la verité, elle n'a point son vray usage en mains viles et basses" (E, I, 26, 149).

⁷⁸I show in Chap. 5 that this and another similar passage are the sources of Descartes's opening paragraph of *La Recherche de la Verité* (AT, X, 495–496).

⁷⁹"siquidem aliam pepererunt et veriolem et utiliolem, puta experimentalem, rerumque apparentiam. Quocirca et maximae gratiae maximis Viris habendae sunt, quod quae vel experiendo, vel audiendo, vel ratiocinando observârunt, tradere nobis quasi per manus, atque etiam cum methodo, ordine-ve dignati sunt" (Ex, II, VI, 7, 505).

⁸⁰See Galen, *Outlines of Empiricism*, III.

⁸¹Patrick Romanell has pointed out the close links between Gassendi's epistemology and that of the ancient medical empiricists. Romanell argues persuasively that this is a major connection between Gassendi and Locke (Romanell 1991, 476–487).

not of certain science.⁸² Gassendi also replies to the charge that since he recognizes that his position is not certain he cannot pretend to be an alternative to those who pretend to have achieved certainty. He rehearsals what I take to be the fundamental position of ancient and Charronian Academic skepticism: since truth is hidden, intellectual integrity commends that the wise man should suspend judgment because this is the only way to keep oneself free from error. Exhibit a stronger love of truth those who do not give their assent harshly—to what is only probable—but rather examine more rigorously the issue precisely to point out that it is only probable (or improbable) but not true or false. Suspension of judgment is not an obstacle to knowledge. On the contrary, to the extent that it combats rashness it frees one from error.⁸³ Descartes's criticism of the approval of Chandoux's natural philosophy by the audience of *savants* in Paris in a meeting he attended just before he left to The Netherlands to construct his metaphysics indicates precisely the danger of taking what is only probable as true and, therefore, the utility of suspending judgment.⁸⁴ But Descartes thought that through his hyperbolic doubt he could not only avoid error (as Charron, Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer admitted doubt could provide) but also get the truth. This sheds light on Gassendi's harsh criticism of Descartes's doubt whose scope include the *phenomena* (see end of Chap. 5). Gassendi agrees with Descartes that appearances cannot be taken as truth, that one must make an effort to resist assenting to them. But to take them as false is the negative side of Descartes's new dogmatism. Appearances should be taken as appearances.

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⁸²Charron complains that his critics misunderstand the status of his claims in *De la Sagesse*, attributing to “resolution et determination ce qui n’est que proposé ... problematiquement et academiquement” (S, 43).

⁸³“At cur non sit potius in illo eximius quidam veritatis amor, qui ut falli ipse non vult, ita nollet alios amplecti pro veritate fallaciam? Et verum quidem est plurimos arripere incunctanter multa dogmata quasi evidenter nota, et accurate demonstrata, ac proinde quae ipsi se scire certissime arbitrentur. Ille porro, qui considerans, attentiusque examinans omnia, viderit ipsos ex praeoccupatione quadam, veritatis specie decipi, cur censeatur temerarius, si ut ipsi illico assentiri renuat, ac illos etiam admoneat ut dilligentius singula expendant?” (Ex, II, 6, 6, 501).

⁸⁴The source of this episode is Baillet (1691, vol. I, 162). I discuss the relevance of this episode for Descartes's philosophy in Maia Neto (2013).

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Chapter 4

La Mothe Le Vayer's Attack on Opinion and Superstition

Charron's influence on La Mothe Le Vayer has been more noticed than on Gassendi.¹ The affinities between them have been identified in the two main lines of interpretations (about which I shall say more bellow) of La Mothe's philosophy: those few (mainly Popkin and, more recently, Pietro Capitani) who do not rule out the possible sincerity of his avowed fideism and those many who take him as a covered libertine. Although there are important differences in their positions,² what makes La Mothe the seventeenth century philosopher closest to Charron is the fact that the main targets of his skepticism are two of the four enemies of Charron's wisdom pictured in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse*, namely, opinion and superstition.³ These are also the enemies most attacked by Charron himself, because his skeptical wisdom was a

¹A contemporary and Descartes's friend, Guez de Balzac, writes in a letter that "Nous le considérons ... comme le successeur de Montaigne et de Charron" (Wickelgren 1934, 39). Wickelgren claims (p. 95) that La Mothe Le Vayer was more influenced by Charron than by Montaigne. A similar point is made by Samuel Sorbière, who was a great admirer of Gassendi and Hobbes: "Je loue Dieu ... de ce que n'étant pas au-dessus du commun, il m'a néanmoins donné ce bon goût et ce discernement des bons livres qui m'empêche de perdre mon temps à une lecture indifférente de tout ce qui s'imprime. Je loge M. de Balzac dans mon étude immédiatement après Charron et Montaigne, les deux seuls auteurs français que j'égalé aux anciens et que je préfère à tous les modernes en ce qui est du bon sens et de la profonde doctrine. M. de la Mothe le Vayer les suit de fort près, et ces quatre Messieurs font presque toute ma bibliothèque française" (cited by Kerviler 1879, 9). For a different view on the relations between Charron and La Mothe Le Vayer, see Giocanti (2001a, 21). Giocanti opposes the views of Montaigne and Charron and places La Mothe Le Vayer in the footsteps of the former, whose skeptical views he radicalizes and from which he derives an ethics of the *divertissement*.

²One difference is stylistic: whereas Charron's work is systematic and plain (he says he uses a "langage brusque et masle," PTS, 821), La Mothe's style is erudite and baroque. Another difference is that Charron is much more optimistic than La Mothe about human nature (and man's capacity to achieve—limited—wisdom and happiness), though Charron emphasized the difficulty to attain them.

³See the reproduction of the frontispiece in the Introduction. I argued in Chap. 3 that in his *Exercitationes* Gassendi attacks another enemy of Charron's wisdom: dogmatic (mainly Aristotelian) science. La Mothe also attacks dogmatic (mainly Aristotelian) science—see, in

wisdom to live by, and two major obstacles to skeptical practical wisdom (above all in Charron's time) are dogmatic attachment to beliefs and the extension and intensity of superstitious practices in religious life.

La Mothe Le Vayer believed that the best way to carry out his attack on opinion and superstition was to revive ancient skepticism in his Christian context, a philosophical project he called "la sceptique chrétienne."⁴ The project was public and supported by a large number of works published during La Mothe Le Vayer's long life.⁵

La Promenade is one of such works.⁶ It is composed of dialogues between Tubertus Ocella and other characters who meet him to talk about philosophical topics while walking through the allays of the Tulleries garden in Paris.⁷ One such topic is wisdom. Ocella rejects the traditional dogmatic (mainly Stoic) definition of wisdom as knowledge of things human and divine and their causes.⁸ "Or qui est-ce, qui peut avoir cette lumière parfaite des choses divines & humaines, avec la connoissance des causes qui les produisent? Et où se trouvera un esprit qui se puisse raisonnablement vanter de pénétrer jusqu'ou il faudroit aller, pour former & élever sur de tels fondemens cette prétendue science?" (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, IV, 174–175). Of course Descartes is one who pretends to be such *esprit*,⁹ but La Mothe follows Charron in holding a skeptical view of wisdom in the sense of a wisdom divorced from science understood as *episteme*.

Probably referring to the image of Wisdom in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse*, Ocella says that "la vraie Sagesse demeure ferme & inébranlable sur son cube...

particular, his dialogue "De l'ignorance louable"—but he strikes more often opinion in general and more incisively superstition.

⁴Basically, the project consists in the restriction of skepticism to natural things accessed by human beings' natural faculties, thus accepting Christian doctrine on the grounds that it is revealed supernaturally by God. The much debated question whether La Mothe's skepticism is really restricted in this way will be addressed below.

⁵See the works published in the volumes 13 and 14 of La Mothe's *Oeuvres* (the Billaine edition published in 1669), while La Mothe was still alive. The editor says in the "avertissement" to these volumes that "[t]ous ceux, qui connoissent Monsieur de la Mothe le Vayer savent qu'il suivoit la doctrine de Pyrrhon; mais en même tems tous ceux, qui veulent bien lui rendre justice, conviennent, que son Pyrrhonisme n'a rien que de très raisonnable, & que jamais il n'étend ses doutes sur les articles de Foi, ou sur le moindre objet, qui touche la Religion." The project was avowed even in such "official" work as *De la Vertu des Payans* (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, vol. V, 303), which was probably written at Richelieu's request to combat the Jansenists.

⁶This work was first published under the pseudonym of Tubertus Ocella in 1662 at Paris by T. Jolly.

⁷The Tulleries garden is located just besides the Louvre, at the occasion the official residence of the royal family. La Mothe Le Vayer was preceptor of the king's brother, the Duck d'Anjou.

⁸Cicero, *De Officiis* I.153; *De finibus bonorum et malorum* II.37; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Physicists* I.13.

⁹Descartes considered the following title for his *Discours*: "*Le projet d'une Science vniuerselle qui puisse éleuer nostre nature à son plus haut degré de perfection*" (letter to Mersenne, March 1636, AT, I, 339). Gilson points out that the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* aims at unifying science and wisdom which the crises of Aristotelianism had broken apart in a reaction to the kind of skeptical wisdom proposed by Montaigne and Charron (Gilson 1947, 93–94). Descartes's wisdom concerns only knowledge of human things.

Le Sage a toujours le même visage: Sa conduite ne change point, parce qu'elle est toujours conforme à la volonté de celui, qui a dit de lui, *ego sum Deus, & non mutor*" (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, IV, 182).¹⁰ The firmness of the wise man does not lie in the consistency of knowledge—this is the Stoic conception of wisdom—but in the consistency of his *ephetic* stance, the fixed point from which he regards the immense diversity of costumes and beliefs in the world.¹¹ That Charron's view of wisdom lies behind Ocella's view is confirmed in the sequence of the dialogue when Ocella tells Xylinus he is unwilling to "vous debiter les loix de la Sagesse, & les regles qu'en ont préscrites ceux, qui ont été assés hardis pour en traiter. Pour ne rien dire des anciens, Charon [sic], qui l'entreprit ... y réussit si peu avantageusement pour lui, qu'ayant émû bien des frélons contre sa reputation, il se vi réduit à la nécessité d'écrire une Petite Sagesse, qui fût presque une retractation de la premiere" (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, IV, 194). Leaving aside La Mothe's evaluation of the *Petit Traité* (which does not differ much from *De la Sagesse*), the point is that according to Le Vayer one must be *hardi* (courageous) to present the rules of wisdom that go against the vulgar man attached to opinions, against the pedants attached to dogmatic Aristotelian science, and against the pious attached to superstition. Though not presenting rules like Charron, La Mothe does work to enhance such wisdom by combating these enemies. The combat on opinion and superstition is carried out mainly through the exposition of the variety of human beliefs. In this same dialogue on wisdom, Ocella says that "rien ... ne contribuë tant à rendre un homme sage, que de s'instruire sur tout ce qui se passe dans *le Monde*, où les moindres rencontres & les plus petites choses peuvent servir à le perfectionner, & à lui acquerir cette sagesse, où il aspire" (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, IV, 189).¹² This

¹⁰ "[le sage] est citoyen du monde ... il se promene par tout comme chés soy, void comme un Soleil, d'un regard égal, ferme, et indiferent, comme d'une haute guette tous les changemens, diversités et vicissitudes des choses, sans se varier, et se tenant tousjours mesmes à soy, qui est une livrée de la divinité, aussi est-ce le haut privilege du sage, qui est l'Image de Dieu en terre" (S, II, 2, 406).

¹¹ I argue in Chap. 5 that the Academic *ephetic* stance of Charron's wise man, "fondée premiereement sur ces propositions tant celebre entre les Sages. Qu'il n'y a rien de certain, que nous ne sçavons rien, *solum certum nihil esse ceteri. Hoc unum scio quod nihil scio*" (PTS, 839), is transformed by Descartes, thanks to his hyperbolic doubt, into his first principle. In the beginning of the Second Meditation, he claims he will pursue his search for something certain, "vel, si nihil aliud, saltem hoc ipsum pro certo, nihil esse certi, cognoscam. Nihil nisi punctum petebat Archimedes, quod effret firmum & immobile, ut integram terram loco dimoveret" (AT, VII, 24).

¹² See also the dialogue "De la Philosophie Sceptique": "Nous examinons la France, une autre partie de l'Europe, quelque chose de plus esloigné, nous figurans que tout le reste va de mesme, sans jamais faire reflexion sur l'étenduë immense de ce vaste univers ... ny faire ouverture aux yeux de nostre esprit de ce *beau livre du monde*, dont la lecture sert de leçon à la vraye, pure, et essentielle Philosophie. Là nous verrions qu'il n'y a rien de si constant, certain, et arresté en un lieu, dont l'opposite ne soit encores plus opiniastrement tenu ailleurs; et dans la contemplation de cette obstinée *variété*, nous ne nous estonnerions plus si un Philosophe interrogé de quelle matiere l'homme luy sembloit estre composé, respondit, d'un amas de disputes et contestations" (DIA, 24). La Mothe's montaignean/charronian legacy is also found in Descartes (for more details, see Chap. 5). "Et me resoluant de ne chercher plus d'autre science, que celle qui se pourroit trouver en moymesme, ou bien dans le *grand liure du monde*, j'employay le reste de ma ieunesse à voyager, a voir des cours & des armées, a frequenter des gens de diuerses humeurs & conditions,

zesis through the tenth trope leads to (“il arrive [à une]) vie tranquille” “sans que ... le dégoût de cette mer orageuse des affaires du monde puisse corrompre la douceur d’une si agréable possession” (pp. 189–190). “C’est une douceur ... qui n’est en rien altérée ni diminuée par ... le tumulte importun de tant de fous, qui l’environnent” (p. 190).¹³ Ocella opposes the opinions accepted in his place and time to conflicting ones held by others, following the skeptical procedure which leads to the detachment from beliefs that cause disturbance. This procedure calls immediately to mind the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse* where skeptical wisdom lies above and untouched by opinion, carried out by the multitude.¹⁴

La Mothe develops his attack on these two enemies of Charron’s wisdom in a large part of his vast work, but I will focus on his most radical one, *Dialogues faits à l’imitation des anciens*, which was published secretly, in two sets, under the pseudonym of Orasius Tubero, with false date and place of publication. Étienne (1849) and Kerviler (1879) proposed that the first set of dialogues was published in 1630 and the second in 1631, that is, 6 years after the publication of Gassendi’s *Exercitationes*, with whom, as Pintard shows, La Mothe entertained close intellectual relations.¹⁵

a recueillir diuerses experiences, a m’esprouuer moymesme dans les *rencontres* que la fortune me proposoit, & partout a faire telle reflexion sur les choses qui se presentoient, que i’en püsse tirer quelque profit” (AT, VI, 9). “voyant plusieurs choses qui, bien qu’elles nous semblent fort extrauagantes & ridicules, ne laissent pas d’estre communement receuës & approuuées par d’autres grans peuples, i’apprenois a ne rien croire trop fermement de ce qui ne m’auoit esté persuadé que par l’exemple & par la coustume; et ainsi ie me deliurois peu a peu de beaucoup d’erreurs, qui peuent offusquer nostre lumiere naturelle” (AT, VI, 10). The difference, as I claim in Chap. 5, is that whereas La Mothe continues on this approach, Descartes uses it only as one of the personal preliminaries for his project of the foundation of a new philosophy that could reunite wisdom and science. For the source in the *Essais*, see “De l’institution des enfans”: “A cette cause, le commerce des hommes y est merueilleusement propre, et la visite des pays estrangers ... pour en rapporter principalement les humeurs de ces nations et leurs façons, et pour froter et limer nostre cervelle contre celle d’autrui” (E, I, 26, 153). See also, *De la Sagesse* II, 2. For an erudite comparison of this topic in Sebond, Montaigne, Descartes and La Mothe Le Vayer, see Spallanzani (2007).

¹³In the dialogue “De la diuinité,” Orasius says that “pource qu’il n’y a rien de plus opposé à nostre heureuse suspension d’esprit que la tyrannique opiniastreté des opinions communes, j’ay tousjours pensé que c’estoit contre ce torrent de la multitude que nous devons employer nos principales forces” (DIA, 304).

¹⁴Besides Wisdom’s motto (“Je ne sçai”), Charron’s motto is also present in “Le banquet sceptique,” where Xenomanes says that “Peu, et Paix” are “les deux choses du monde que j’estime les plus souhaitables” (DIA, 74). Charron’s motto, together with “know yourself,” were inscribed at the oracle at Delphos.

¹⁵According to Pintard (1983, 127–208), the two formed, together with Gabriel Naudé and Elie Diodati, the “tetrad,” a semi-secret group of intellectuals who talked freely about irreligious views. The period of closer and more frequent interaction was, according to Pintard, just before and during the anonymous publication of the two sets of Dialogues. “Là-dessus, il rencontra Gassendi et Naudé, puis se laisse embrigader par eux dans la ‘Tétrade’; et voici que tout d’un coup ce qui n’était en lui que virtualités ou intentions prit forme. Deux volumes, publiés à peu d’intervalle, de *Dialogues faits à l’imitation des Anciens*, donnèrent enfin carrière à sa réflexion si longtemps contenue” (Pintard 1983, 140).

Opinion is opposed in this work above all by the character Ephestion, the protagonist of the dialogues “De la philosophie Sceptique” and “De l’Opiniastreté.” Superstition is fought above all by Orasius in the dialogue “De la Divinité.”¹⁶ This is not a strict division of labor since Orasius also fights opinion in this and other dialogues. Actually, superstition is a special kind of *opiniastreté*, held in the religious field.

4.1 Ephestion Against the Opinionated

The first dialogue in which Ephestion is the protagonist is “De la philosophie sceptique,” not “De la philosophie pyrrhonienne.”¹⁷ The name of the main character, Ephestion, indicates the centrality of *epochè* in La Mothe’s scepticism. To the extent that *epochè* is central for both ancient skeptical schools, both are recovered by La Mothe.¹⁸ The other character, Eudoxus, names an Aristotelian and indicates, I think, his attachment to opinions (*doxa*). For Aristotle, *eudoxa* (εὐδοξία) means opinions which are generally accepted.¹⁹ As indicated above, commonly held beliefs,

¹⁶Those closer to Le Vayer such as Guez de Balzac knew the real identity of Orasius Tubero (see Kerviler 1879, 90). Scholars have claimed that the pseudonym was easily identifiable (see, for instance, Kerviler 1879, 28). One of the meanings of the Latin *tubero* is “little mount,” “la mothe” in French. “Orasius” derives from the Greek, meaning the one who regards, in French “le voyer,” very close to “Le Vayer.” Another possible source of the pseudonym is a Roman authority—Lucius Tubero—to whom the founding book of ancient Pyrrhonism was dedicated. Aenesidemus’ *Pyrrhonian Discourses* is no longer extant but a synopsis is given by Photius in which we learn that the book was dedicated to Lucius Tubero who was, according to Brochard (1969, 248) a friend and relative through marriage of Cicero’s and, like Cicero and Aenesidemus before his book, a member of the Academy. By dedicating his book to him, Aenesidemus probably wanted to bring Tubero to his new (re)founded Pyrrhonian school. See Caizzi (1992). Note that “Lucius” belongs to the same Latin semantic field as the Greek “Orasius.”

¹⁷Most philosophical works of La Mothe Le Vayer’s contain “sceptique” in the title: “Discours pour montrer que les doutes de la philosophie sceptique sont de grand usage dans les sciences;” “Discours sceptique sur la musique;” “Opuscule ou Petit traité sceptique sur cette commune façon de parler, ‘n’avoir pas le sens commun’;” “Doute sceptique si l’étude des belles lettres est préférable à toute autre occupation;” “Problèmes sceptiques.” “Academiques” in the title of the work “Discours ou Homelies Academiques” means “problematic,” that is, the speeches were written in the neo-Academic skeptical fashion. All these were included in the publication of the works of La Mothe’s during his lifetime.

¹⁸Because this book explores aspects of the Charronian Academic skeptical view of wisdom in the seventeenth century, I focus on this brand of ancient skepticism in examining La Mothe Le Vayer. The Pyrrhonian aspect has been more often studied (see, in particular, Paganini 1997, 2008, 61–100 and Giocanti 2001a). Both scholars indicate the novelties introduced by La Mothe in the skeptical tradition and Giocanti also points out neo-Academic aspects of his skepticism. The relevance of the Academic doctrine of probability in La Mothe’s skepticism has also been examined by Moreau (2007, 537–579), who highlights the dissimilarities and by Capitani (2009, 1–29), who emphasizes similarities without reducing La Mothe’s skepticism to the ancient Academic model.

¹⁹These are the basis of dialectical reasoning which is not apodict as the scientific demonstrative one. See Aristotle, *Topics* I.1 100a–b.

pictured in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse* as a woman sustained by the populace, are one of the four enemies of Charron's Academic skeptical wisdom.

True, La Mothe's admiration for Pyrrho is immense. But Socrates—viewed by the ancient neo-Academics as the founder of Academic skepticism—is also considered, together with Pyrrho, as a founder of *epochè* (DIA, 234). Orasius gives a long list of various philosophers' view of the good, among which “[n]os Academiques, fondateurs de la Sceptique, ont eu leur incomparable Epoche, de laquelle l'orateur Romain parle en ces termes, *quidam Academici constituisse dicuntur extremum bonorum, et summum munus esse sapientis, obsistere visis, assensusque suos firmè sustinere* [3. de fin.]” (DIA, 276).²⁰ This describes Charron's Academic view of wisdom, whose core is avoidance of error given that truth cannot be achieved by human beings. We thus find the term “sceptique” and not “pyrrhonien” in the titles of La Mothe's works because Academic skepticism is also central in La Mothe's philosophical project. What makes the two branches of Ancient skepticism consistent is the fact that La Mothe's skepticism is not rustic.²¹ As Burnyeat (1984) indicates in the case of Montaigne, La Mothe's skepticism is urban.²² His *epochè* is conceived as suspension of judgment concerning the truth or falsity of views. He allows his skeptic to assent to the probable, conceived in the Ciceronian fashion, that is, leaving the holder of the opinion entirely free to reject it once another one appears more probable.²³ La Mothe's attack on Opinion is, like Charron's, in fact an attack on “opiniatreté,” the attachment to beliefs derived from taking them as true.²⁴

Another point that brings to light La Mothe's connection to Academic skepticism is the fact that he was known at his time as the French Plutarch. Charles Perrault claims in his work on the members of the French Academy that La Mothe received such honorific title not only because of his erudition and style but also because of his philosophical affinities to the famous Greek. He attributes to both a kind of Academic skepticism which scholars have attributed to Plutarch.²⁵ This

²⁰In the English translation by H. Rackham (Loeb edition) of *De Finibus*: “the final Good and supreme duty of the Wise Man is to resist appearances and resolutely withhold his assent to the reality of sense-impression” (III.31). La Mothe Le Vayer's implicit claim that Arcesilaus (and not Pyrrho) was the founder of *epochè* reveals the skeptic's acute historical/philological knowledge of the ancient history of skepticism. In fact, according to the available sources, the term was not used by Pyrrho and his follower Timon, but was introduced by Arcesilaus, first head of the New Academy.

²¹See the references to Galen in Burnyeat (1982, 27n).

²²Burnyeat calls it “country gentleman's” skepticism. Barnes (1982) calls it “urbane.”

²³However, as has been argued by Moreau (2007, 537–579) and Loque (2012, 199–247), La Mothe Le Vayer's inquiry differs from Cicero's Philonian one of arguing *pro* and *contra* to find the more probable opinion. The probability of opinions examined by La Mothe is equipollent, in Pyrrhonian fashion.

²⁴The first *Homélie Académique* is “Sur les disputes opiniâtres,” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, Vol. III, Partie II). The ultimate source (behind Charron) is Montaigne: “l'opinion trouve en moy le terrain mal propre à y penetrer et y pousser de hautes racines” (E, III, 8, 923); “L'affirmation et l'opiniastreté sont signes exprez de bestise” (E, III, 13, 1075).

²⁵“On le regarde comme le Plutarque de nôtre Siècle, soit pour son érudition qui n'a point de bornes, soit pour sa maniere de raisonner & de dire son sentiment toujours fort éloignée de l'air

philosophical position is close to Cicero's—the main source and influence of Academic skepticism, whose literary style (the dialogical form) is of course also a major reference to La Mothe's.²⁶ The Greek and the Roman ancient Academics described the fight against opinion as the means to achieve [Academic] wisdom.²⁷ Particularly relevant in La Mothe's attack on *opiniatreté* is Plutarch's explanation of Socrates' sterility: “if nothing is apprehensible and knowable to man, it was reasonable for god to have prevented Socrates from begetting inane and false and baseless notions and to compel him to refute the others who were forming such opinions. For the discourse that liberates from the greatest of evils, deception and vanity, was not a slight but a very great help.”²⁸

Following Montaigne and Charron, La Mothe, like Gassendi, holds that finite human beings have access only to the *vraisemblable*: “nostre humanité ne penetrant pas plus avant que le vraisemblable, quelle temerité sera-ce à nous, si nous prenons le douteux pour le certain, et si nous deffendons aujourd’huy avec pertinacité ce dont nous seron [sic] contraints de nous retracter demain” (DIA, 384).

Laissons aux autres cette profession odieuse de sçavoir toutes choses avec certitude ... et puis que les Dieux n’ont pas voulu que nostre esprit estendist sa sphere d’activité plus loing que l’apparent et le vraisemblable, contentons-nous doucement des bornes que leur providence nous a prescrites, lesquelles aussi bien nous tascherions en vain d’outrépasser. Doutons de tous, puis que c’est le propre de nostre humanité, et afin de ne rien determiner trop legerement, ne donnons pas mesme une assurance entiere de nos doutes Sceptiques. (DIA, 385)

Human beings cannot attain the plain truth because of the senses (the body). Truth is reserved to disembodied intelligences and mainly to God.²⁹ This view is also Platonic according to the Academic reading of Plato found in Plutarch,³⁰ and corresponds to the hard core of Montaigne's and Charron's skepticism.³¹ Dogmatists,

décisif des Dogmatiques” (Perrault, “Les hommes illustres du dernier siècle,” cited in La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, vol. I, I, 33–34). For Plutarch's Academic skepticism, see Domini (1986) and Opsomer (1998).

²⁶Bury (2002) shows that Cicero's *De Natura Deorum* is a model with respect to both form and content of La Mothe's “De la Divinité.” He interprets Cicero's work as irreligious, an interpretation I dispute below.

²⁷Cicero, Ac. II.108.

²⁸Plutarch, *Platonic Questions* I.1000c.

²⁹“Bref, si nous possédons ce *criterium* des Dogmatiques pour la discerner, ou si notre plus haute faculté de juger ne s'étend pas plus loin que le vraisemblable des Sceptiques; de telle sorte que nous ayons bien les instruments pour la chercher; mais non pas ceux qui seraient nécessaires pour la reconnaître ... étant bien loin au-dessus de notre Nature, il la faut tenir pour le propre de Dieu Seul” (PTSC, 57–59).

³⁰See Trabattoni (2005). Plato argues in the *Phaedon* (66b) that human beings cannot apprehend the essence of ideas because the soul cannot totally abstract from the senses. See also Plato's *Apology* 23, which grounds Plutarch's view of Socrates.

³¹Montaigne: “la vraye raison et essentielle ... loge dans le sein de Dieu” (E, II, 12, 541). Charron: “la verité ... [ne] se laisse ... posséder à l'esprit humain. Elle loge dedans le sein de Dieu” (S, I, 14, 138). “La troisieme partie de ceste liberté et cinquiesme office [in the *Short Treatise*] de Sagesse ... est une surseance et indifference de jugement, par laquelle l'homme

out of self-love,³² ignore the epistemological limits determined by human nature, delimited by the “vraisemblable.”

Toutes ces Philosophies qui se vantent de pouvoir discerner le vrai & le certain des choses, sont des Charlatanes qui promettent beaucoup plus qu'elles ne peuvent tenir: nôtre seule Sceptique, qui se contente du vraisemblable, est guidée par une Muse fidele, qui lui donne sur tous sujets les lumieres, que nôtre nature humaine est capable de recevoir. ... [N]ous sommes [très] téméraires que de vouloir savoir avec infailibilité ce qu'à peine les intelligences exemptes de toute matiere peuvent comprendre, & dont la parfaite science est reservée pour le Ciel.³³

La Mothe holds in this passage a neo-Academic Platonic epistemological pessimism. Because the soul is imprisoned in the body, we cannot get the truth and must remain content with the “vraysemblable.”³⁴ Against Telamon's criticism that assent to the “vraysemblable” implies commitment to the truth, the skeptic explains that “quand nous nommons quelque chose vray-semblable, nous n'entendons pas luy donner une ressemblance avec aucune verité positivement établie par nous, mais seulement avec ce qui est réputé vray par les autres” (DIA, 215–216). The parameter is entirely human, anthropological, deprived of any connection to the truth that might be considered as valid regardless of human apprehension. La Mothe's “vraysemblable” is thus much closer to Arcesilaus' original *pythanos* (emphatic, which Cicero translated as *probabile* and *verisimile*) than to Augustine's Platonic/Christian feint image of the truth, a view which, as Emmanuel Naya has showed, was included in the revival of Academic skepticism by Renaissance apologists.³⁵ In La Mothe, “vraysemblable” denotes what appears convincing to human beings in particular conditions. The notion expresses the insurmountable anthropological (physical and cultural) net that determines and conditions human cognition. To take what appears probable as (absolute) truth is to disregard this anthropological predicament.³⁶ Truth-claims are precipitate moves of our assenting faculty that

considerant tout ... froidement et sans passion, ne s'ahurte, ny ne se lie ou oblige à aucune chose, mais se tient libre ... et ouverte à tout, toujours prest à recevoir la verité, si elle se presente, adherent cependant au meilleur et plus vray semblable qui luy apparoit tel” (PTS, 838).

³² See Sextus, PH I.62, Montaigne's “Apology for Raymond Sebond,” and Charron's chapter in *De la Sagesse* on presumption (I, 40).

³³ La Mothe Le Vayer (1756, IV, 221).

³⁴ This passage sheds light on Descartes's project. After charging Chandoux with a kind of charlatanism, for he promises the truth but gives only the “vraysemblable,” he moves to Holland (supposedly following Bérulle advise) to establish a new science (or at least a new metaphysics) not limited by the senses. See Maia Neto (2013).

³⁵ See Naya (2009). Maybe unaware of Sextus' criticism of Academic probability, in the preface to his translation of Sextus' *Adversus Mathematicos*, Hervet says that Sextus' work can be “very effective in stimulating and sharpening intelligence of young people, who only then [after skeptical attack on dogmatists] will be able to distinguish the truth from the probable and likely, thereby extracting the truth that the probable and likely had concealed” (Popkin and Maia Neto 2007, 91).

³⁶ In another *Homélie Académique*, on ignorance, he also supports Ciceronian probabilism: “nous ne laissons pas de soutenir apres Carneades le Fondateur de cette renommée Academie, que si toutes choses sont incomprehensibles à notre esprit trop limité pour les connoître, ce n'est pas à dire, que toutes ces mêmes choses soient absolument incertaines” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, III,

compromise intellectual integrity. By pointing out that what dogmatists take as true is in fact only probable, La Mothe upholds the Academic view of wisdom as avoidance of error.³⁷

The project of reviving ancient skepticism requires replying to the many objections traditionally raised against this philosophy, in particular the *apraxia* charge, since La Mothe's skepticism is (like ancient skepticism) a philosophy to live by. After Ephestion's expansion of Sextus' tenth mode (DIA, 29–58), Eudoxos says that what results from such profusion of modes and *exempla* is “une incertitude perplexe, et comme un bouleversement d'esprit, qui n'est sçait plus desquels il est, ny à quoy s'arrester et tenir ferme; semblable à celuy qui a trop beu, lequel chancelle à droite et à gauche, n'ayant plus de desmarche assurée” (DIA, 59).³⁸ Ephestion denies the charge claiming that “au contraire, il n'y a point de secte de Philosophie qui presente une fin plus souhaitable, ny qui conduise à un port tant à l'abry des orages et agitations, que celle-cy, bien qu'on y arrive imperceptiblement, et comme sans y penser” (DIA, 60).³⁹ The observation of the diversity—the *zetesis* through the tenth mode—is precisely what guarantees stability for it reminds the precarious epistemological status of all beliefs, thus disengaging the mind from them.⁴⁰ *Épochè*

162–163). For other passages in which La Mothe Le Vayer claims to follow probability, see Moreau (2007) and Loque (2012).

³⁷ Cicero's following definition of wisdom is cited by La Mothe Le Vayer in the PTSC, 85: “Nervos atque artus esse sapientiae, non temere credere.”

³⁸ Montaigne describes himself and his *Essays* in similar terms. “Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les rochers du Caucase, les pyramides d'Aegypte ... Je ne puis assurer mon object. Il va trouble et chancelant, d'une yvresse naturelle” (E, III, 2, 804). For a detailed comparison between Montaigne and La Mothe Le Vayer on this issue see Giocanti (2001a).

³⁹ In the *Petit Traité*, Charron replies to the same charge but, unlike La Mothe, he distinguishes the stability of the Academic from the irresolution of the Pyrrhonian: “Ils objectent que j'enseigne icy une incertitude douteuse et fluctuante, telle que des Pyrrhoniens, laquelle tient l'esprit en grande peine et agitation ... Je reponds premierement, qu'il y a difference entre mon dire et l'avis des Pyrrhoniens, bien qu'il en ait l'air et l'odeur, puisque je permets de consentir et adherer à ce qui semble meilleur et plus vray-semblable, tousjours prest et attendant à recevoir mieux s'il se presente. Mais pour venir au point, ... je soustiens que c'est le vray repos et sejour de nostre esprit ... Mais, disent-ils, douter, balancer, surseoir, est ce pas estre en peine? Ouy aux fols, non aux sages” (PTS, 858).

⁴⁰ La Mothe Le Vayer's *demarche* is similar to Descartes's, with at least three differences: (1) Descartes holds Eudoxe's negative view of the skeptics; (2) the skeptical arguments are different: those of La Mothe's are new extensions and adaptations of the ancient tropes whereas those of Descartes's are hyperbolic and new (though inspired by ancient neo-Academic ones); and as a consequence of (2) and of the metaphysical foundation of the mind/body distinction: (3) Descartes transforms the certainty of *epochè* into a substance, the *res cogitans*. (I argue in Chap. 5 that Descartes's move is a reaction to Charron). See *Discours*, third part: “Non que i'imitasse pour cela les Sceptiques, qui ne doutent que pour douter, & affectent d'estre tousiours irresolus: car, au contraire, tout mon dessein ne tendoit qu'a m'assurer, & a rejeter la terre mouuante & la sable, pour trouver le roc ou l'argile. Ce qui me reussissoit, ce me semble, assez bien, d'autant que, taschant a descourrir la fausseté ou l'incertitude des propositions que i'examinois, non par de foibles coniec-tures, mais par des raisonnemens clairs & assurez, ie n'en rencontrois point de si douteuses, que ie n'en tirasse tousiours quelque conclusion assez certaine, quand ce n'eust esté que cela mesme

keeps the subject as it were within himself, detached from opinions, so that when the latter are shown unlikely, as assent to them was fallibilist and detached, no trouble arrives. This absence of trouble is La Mothe's *ataraxia*. Since *epochè* is the means to achieve it, it is the philosopher's safe harbor. "Que s'il n'y a que nostre seule Philosophie qui puisse donner les lumieres, et les forces convenables pour nous arrester au bord de tells precipices, si nostre seule Epoche nous peut heureusement preserver de ce commun naufrage, rendons luy en l'honneur et le gré que nous devons, par une aussi soigneuse culture qu'elle merite" (DIA, 112).⁴¹ I argue in Chap. 3 that also for Gassendi in his *Exercitationes*, *epochè* is the safe harbor from the inconstancy of beliefs.⁴²

When we look closely at the Academic ciceronian notion of "vraisemblance" in La Mothe Le Vayer, we see that his avowal that he often changes his views does not compromise suspension of judgment in the sense of taking these views as true.

Car puisque toutes choses sont si bien colorées, et qu'il n'y a point d'opinion pour extravagante qu'elle paraisse, qui n'ait quelque grand protecteur; pourquoi me hasarderais-je de prendre parti, et de rien déterminer, sinon autant que le vraisemblable le peut permettre, et sous cette importante réserve, de me pouvoir rétracter autant de fois que quelque nouvelle lumière me fera voir qu'il sera expédient de le faire. (PTSC, 85)

At this point I disagree from Sylvia Giocanti (2001a, 13, 2001b) for I think that these retractions do not imply rupture from *epochè* (eulogized by La Mothe) since no assent is given to the truth (it is given only to the "vraysemblable"—such as it appears). Uncertainty and irresolution arises from holding as true beliefs which do not resist critical examination. What are unstable are the opinions examined by the skeptical inquirer (for they are deprived of epistemic ground) not the skeptic himself who considers the instability of the opinions. "Car de croire qu'il y ait de la honte à changer d'avis, et à prendre nouveau party, selon que les vraisemblances se presentent à nous dans cette variété de tant de circonstances, ce n'est pas tesmoigner qu'on les ait examinées comme il faut, et c'est, ce me semble, raisonner peu naturellement" (DIA, 368). To receive "[les] raisons comme vraisemblables" (and not "comme vrais") enable us to "[les] désavouer sans rougir quand nous le jugerons de saison" (PTSC, 88).⁴³ This is a crucial aspect of Cicero's view of Academic

qu'elle ne contenoit rien de certain" (AT, VI, 29). In Descartes's dialogue *Recherche de la vérité*, whose similarity to La Mothe's "De la philosophie sceptique" has been indicated by Popkin (2003, 344n) and Mehl (1999) (besides the similarity of the names of the characters, the common major subject is doubt), Epistemon tells Eudoxe that "[c]es doutes si generaux nous meneroient tout droit dans l'ignorance de Socrate, ou dans l'incertitude des Pirroniens" (AT, X, 512). La Mothe's Ephestion (not Epistemon) denies precisely this charge raised by Eudoxe.

⁴¹This looks like a rebuttal to the charge raised against Pyrrho that he need the help of (dogmatic) friends to avoid being hit by cars and falling into precipices (Diognes Laertius, *Lives* IX.62). In *Metaphysics* IV.15, Aristotle raises the same charge against those who deny the principle of non-contradiction.

⁴²"Chère Sceptique, douce parure de mon âme, et l'unique port de salut d'un esprit qui aime le repos" (PTSC, 73).

⁴³"Je conclus ces deux derniers traicts et offices de Sagesse qui sont cousins [namely, to examine everything and to assent to nothing] ... Par lesquelles le sage excelle pardessus le commun,

probability which was attacked by Augustine. Taking a view as only probable provides the detachment and freedom implied by intellectual integrity. Augustine, on the contrary, wants full commitment even to that of which, due to our epistemic limitations, we cannot have full knowledge (*scientia*). This is mainly the case of morals and,⁴⁴ crucially, Christian revelation.⁴⁵

The epigraph of the “Dialogue intitulé le banquet sceptique” is a citation from Cicero’s *Quaestiones Tusculanae*: “Nos in diem vivimus, quodcumque nostros animos probabilitate percussit, id (αδοξαστωζ) dicimus; itaque soli sumus liberi.”⁴⁶ The passage rehearsals the crucial one on intellectual integrity in *Academica* II.8: “liberiores et solutiores sumus quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas.” La Mothe Le Vayer’s skeptic can be described as an *esprit fort* and as a *libertine* in the following sense. The *esprit fort* is the one which can maintain *epochè*, that is, who can sustain his assenting faculty, not yielding to the inclination to take as true that which strikes him as probable. This means that he can act in ordinary life and philosophize without holding as true any dogma. His life is therefore unconstrained by external opinions. He has emancipated his self from pre-philosophical (ordinary) and philosophical dogmatic (for instance, Aristotelic) opinions. The etymological sense of the term *libertinus* describes one who was a slave, in his case, from the intellectual point of view but, thanks to the strength of his *esprit*, and not through association with other philosophers and schools, was emancipated from beliefs that compromised his intellectual integrity. *Épochè* is the self-emancipation of the chains of beliefs that used to condition his action and thought. These include of course religious beliefs, but are not restricted to them.⁴⁷ Another aspect of La Mothe’s *libertinage* is the enjoyment of the diversity of the phenomena that this emancipated self considers.⁴⁸ The following excerpt shows how intellectual integrity and probability grounds these two aspects of La Mothe’s *epochè*, related to the *esprit fort* and the *libertine*.

Les Dogmatiques, qui sont dans la prevention, ne voyant souvent les choses que du bias qui favorise leur sentiment anticipé, ce n’est par merveille qu’ils inclinent promptement à

se garde de deux escueils contraires, auxquels tombent les fols et populaires, sçavoir testuës opiniastretez, honteuses desdites, repentirs et changemens, et se maintient libre, liberté d’esprit que jamais le sage ne laissera ravir” (PTS, 841).

⁴⁴ Augustine, C. Ac. III.34–36.

⁴⁵ In fields where *scientia* is not possible, Augustine makes a distinction between two kinds of assent: *opinare* and *credere*. The first, justly condemned by the neo-Academics as not proper to the wise man, should be avoided. But the second is justified on the grounds that it concerns matters of fact not directly observed about which no certainty is possible and whose ground is authority and confidence in others (the witnesses). See Augustine’s *De utilitate credendi* and *Confessions* VI.5. This lies behind Pascal’s criticism of suspension of judgment about the immortality of the soul (about which one cannot have certainty apart from revelation) in the famous “wager argument” (La 418) and his attack on casuistry in *Les Provinciales*.

⁴⁶ In H. Hubbell’s translation: “I live from day to day; I say anything that strikes my mind as probable; and so I alone am free” (*Tusc disp* V.33). La Mothe adds “adoxasticus” in Cicero’s neo-Academic claim, using one of the Pyrrhonian strategies to free the skeptical statements from dogmatism.

⁴⁷ More on La Mothe on religion below.

⁴⁸ For more on this aspect, see Giocanti (2001a).

l'un ou à l'autre party, avec tant de pesanteur qu'on ne les en puisse plus demouvoir. ... Mais quant à ceux de nostre famille, qui font les reflexions convenables sur la probabilité de toutes propositions, au lieu de se laisser emporter foiblement à pas un party, ils s'arrestent genereusement sur leurs propres forces, entre les extremitez de tant d'opinions differentes, qui est la plus belle, et la plus heureuse assiette que puisse posseder un esprit philosophique. ... Le Sceptique porte sa consideration, et donne atteinte à tout, mais c'est sans pervertir son goust, et sans s'opiniastrer à rien, demeurant juge indifferent de tant de mets, et de tant de saulces diverses, comme la plus notable personne du convive, au milieu d'une table qu'elle trouve esgalement bien servie par tout.⁴⁹ C'est en ce beau milieu que l'ataraxie se rend maistresse de toutes nos opinions, et que la metriopathie donne le temperament à toutes nos passions par le moyen de nostre divine Epoche. (DIA, 386)

Probability makes possible the life of the skeptic, for he follows, examines, and even rejoices the appearances, without getting attached to them, which would compromise not only his intellectual integrity but also his stability. The detachment of this kind of assent avoids that the diversity and mutability of the appearances cause mutability in the self that considers them.

The other dialogue in which Ephestion is the protagonist, "De l'opiniatreté," makes clear the link between *epochè* and the *esprit fort* in this skeptical Academic context. Ephestion reports a debate he had with Crates (a grammarian) about the Greek origins of some French words (which Crates denied on the grounds of "canons irrefragables de grammaire sur l'etymologie et formation des langues, au prejudice desquels il ne pouvoit rien approuver").⁵⁰ Ephestion attributes this position to Crates' belief that "la force de l'esprit consiste à estre inflexible en ses resolutions, ... à estre inesbranlable du lieu où il se vouloit tenir ferme et arresté" (DIA, 357). After citing the various philosophers' attachment to their doctrines (Plato to the ideas, Aristotle to his rules of logic, etc.), he says: "Or de l'heure qu'un esprit, pour bon souvent qu'il soit, s'est ainsi laissé prevenir de quelque particuliere imagination, et a pris à party de la soustenier, sa force ne luy sert plus qu'à se confirmer et roidir en icelle, rejettant animeusement tout ce qui semble luy pouvoir contrarier" (DIA, 359). The force of the mind turns from the withholding of assent (in which it maintains its freedom) to the holding to the doctrine (to which it becomes attached). This summarizes Charron's phenomenology of the dogmatic mind which describes three degrees of presumption. The first is to believe or to disbelieve.⁵¹ To believe is more common because of "la grande facilité" exhibited by human beings to "croire et recevoir tout ce que l'on propose, avec quelque apparence ou autorité" (S, I, 40, 275). The second degree is to "affermer ou reprouver certainement et opiniatement ce que l'on a legerelement creu ou mescreu" (S, I, 40, 277). Finally, the third, "qui suit ces deux, et qui est le feste de presumption, est de persuader, faire valoir, et recevoir à autruy ce que l'on

⁴⁹"Il n'y a point de meilleure escole pour former la vie, que voir incessamment la diversité de tant d'autres vies, et gouter une perpetuelle varieté de formes de nôtre nature" (S, III, 14, 696). See also PTS, 864.

⁵⁰The fact that the opinionated in the dialogue is a grammarian may come from Montaigne's "De l'institution des enfants," see *Essais* I, 26, 160–161.

⁵¹Charron's analysis is inspired in Montaigne's lack of presumption as described in the essay "De la presumption" (II, 17, in particular 654–659).

croit, et les induire voire imperieusement avec obligation de croire, et inhibition d'en douter" (S, I, 40, 278). This analysis of the opinionated mind ends with its impact in social relations: lack of toleration and persecution. By contrast, the skeptic exhibits lack of presumption because of his *époche*, which entails a dispassionate sociability peculiar to the Academic tradition, from Socrates through Cicero to Montaigne and Charron.

Indeed, Cicero's probability is linked to intellectual integrity and sociability. By citing Cicero's view and practice of probability in *Tusculans* II.5, La Mothe highlights this connexion: "vous connoissez la moderation de nostre secte, et les douceurs que nous fournit nostre acatalepsie en toute sorte de compagnies; tant s'en faut que parmy nous il pust y avoir de ces animositez; *nos qui sequimur probabilia, nec ultra id, quam quod verisimile occurrerit, progredi possumus, et refellere sine pertinacia, et refelli sine iracundia parati sumus*" (DIA, 69). The attack on *opiniatreté* (which can be defined as a strong assent to what is only probable) has also the practical aim of avoiding that controversies, inevitable under free speech, degenerate into fight.

In the introduction to the *Petit traité sceptique sur cette commune façon de parler 'N'avoir pas le Sens commun'*, La Mothe says that the phrase is most often used

à l'égard de ceux que nous croyons avoir des opinions extravagantes, quand elles ne s'accordent pas aux nôtres; parce que cet Amour de nous-mêmes est si puissant, que nous ne considérons nos pensées que comme une partie de notre être, sans les examiner davantage; comme une folle mère qui ne trouve rien de si beau que son enfant, quelques défauts qu'il ait, parce qu'il est sien. De là vient cette animosité ordinaire contre ceux qui nous contrarient, et qu'aussitôt que quelqu'un s'écarte de notre sens, pris pour notre jugement, nous disons qu'il a perdu le Sens commun, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne raisonne ni ne discourt plus comme le reste des hommes raisonnables. (PTSC, 21–22)

La Mothe Le Vayer brings to light the reason of Plato's description of Socrates' philosophical method as maieutic.⁵² The method has two parts. In the first, Socrates helps the interlocutor to bring forth a view on different philosophical topics. In the second, the view is subjected to a rational examination which leads to its refutation. Socrates, who is incapable of giving birth to any view, just helps others to procreate ideas. But the main reason of calling this method "maieutic" has to do with its second part. Because the refuted is emotionally attached to his views as a mother is attached to her newborn baby, most of those refuted get angry at Socrates, which explains the main reason for his condemnation.⁵³ Plato's Socratic point is that emotions have no place in philosophical examination which should be guided exclusively by reason. This is the reason why Socrates and the skeptics have no opinions of their own: they cause non-rational attachment and therefore may compromise the ideal of pure rationality or inquiry to which they are committed. According to Plato, rather than causing an evil to society, Socrates' practice improves rationality and leads to modesty (lack of opiniaticism). The more one has opinions refuted the

⁵² Plato, *Theaetetus*, 149a.

⁵³ *Theaetetus*, 150e–151d. The dialogue finishes with Socrates telling Theaetetus that he must go to court to hear the accusation brought against him by Meletus (*Theaetetus*, 210d).

higher his rational requirement to accept beliefs, the more the integrity of his intellect,⁵⁴ the more gentle with others will he be.⁵⁵

As the passage from the “Banquet sceptique” cited above indicates, Cicero is another crucial source of La Mothe le Vayer’s (and Charron’s) view of Socrates as the main model of the wise man.⁵⁶ La Mothe’s dialogues are certainly inspired on Cicero’s dialogues which in their turn were inspired on Plato’s. After talking about the pre-Socratics (whose philosophical interest was mainly in physical nature), Cicero says that

Socrates on the other hand was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens and set her in the cities of man and bring her also into their homes and compel her to ask questions about life and morality and things good and evil: and his many-sided method of discussion (*multiplex ratio disputandi*) and the varied nature of its subjects and the greatness of his genius, which has been immortalized in Plato’s literary masterpieces, have produced many warring philosophical sects of which I have chosen particularly to follow that one which I think agreeable to the practice of Socrates, in trying to conceal my own private opinion, to relieve others from deception and in every discussion to look for the most probable solution; and as this was the custom observed by Carneades with all the resources of a keen intelligence, I have endeavored on many other occasions as well as recently in the Tusculan villa to conform to the same fashion in our discussions.⁵⁷

I propose to place La Mothe Le Vayer in the Academic skeptical tradition, without prejudice to the Pyrrhonian one, itself an heir of this tradition,⁵⁸ from the Socrates presented in Plato’s aporetic dialogues, through Cicero and Plutarch. Free rational sociability is provided by *époque*.

Ô précieuse Époque! Ô sûre et agréable retraite d’esprit! Ô inestimable antidote contre le présomptueux savoir des Pédants, que tu es de grand usage dans tout le cours de la vie, et

⁵⁴“examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living” (Plato, *Apology*, 38a).

⁵⁵After refuting the best effort of Theaetetus’ to define knowledge, which had been benefited from his previously refuted definitions, Socrates concludes the dialogue: “And so, Theaetetus, if ever in the future you should attempt to conceive or should succeed in conceiving other theories, they will be better ones as the result of this enquiry. And if you remain barren, your companions will find you gentler and less tiresome; you will be modest and not think you know what you don’t know. This is all my art can achieve—nothing more” (*Theaetetus*, 210c). “According to some authorities the end proposed by the Sceptics is ... gentleness” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, IX.108). Modesty is a recurrent qualification of Charron’s Academical skeptical wisdom, see, for instance, S, I, 43, 292; PTS, 838, 853, 859.

⁵⁶In *De la Vertu des Payans*, defending Socrates against some charges, La Mothe le Vayer says that he would be the last to engage in “colere”: “Un homme qui a le premier protesté, que sa plus certaine science consistoit en la connoissance qu’il avoit, de ne savoir rien de certain, n’étoit pas pour s’opiniâtrer dans une dispute, ni pour se mettre en colere, contre ceux, qui avoient des sentimens contraires aux siens. C’est ce qui fait dire à Cicéron en traitant des passions, qu’il nomme fort proprement des perturbations, que la raison leur doit être comme une médecine Socratique, pour les reduire à la moderation” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, V, 123). Chapter 2 shows that Socrates—the Pagan of whose salvation La Mothe has most hope—is the main model of Charron’s wise man.

⁵⁷Cicero, *Tusc disp* V.10–11.

⁵⁸Assuming that the view of Pyrrho as the founder of Pyrrhonism was a creation of Aenesidemus’, who was a former member of the new Academy from which he broke to recover a genuine skepticism not compromised by the probabilism introduced by Carneades and interpreted epistemically by Philo of Larissa. See Chap. 2, Sect. 2.1.

parmi le commerce ou la conversation des hommes, ordinairement si amateurs de leur sens particulier, que tout ce qui s'en éloigne tant soit peu n'est plus à leur dire le Sens commun. (PTSC, 84)

As this common sense cannot be directly confronted, the withdraw from the public place to the private cabinet is the physical counterpart of the psychological detachment from common held beliefs which are privately taken as “problematic” or only “probable,” that is, non epistemically. *Épochè* corresponds, inwardly, to the private cabinet or countryside where open conversations can be held outwardly.⁵⁹ This kind of sociability is strongly modeled upon Socrates’ apology for leisure in the *Theaetetus*, which is the original source of the important topic in the period of the *libertas philosophandi*.⁶⁰ The country scenario in which Descartes’s method of doubt is set in the *Recherche de la vérité* is another evidence of the French early modern skeptical background (from Montaigne through Charron to La Mothe Le Vayer) of the Cartesian philosophy, as it will be shown in the next chapter.⁶¹

The immediate source of La Mothe Le Vayer’s is not the ancient Academics but Montaigne and above all Charron. In fact, the latter’s wisdom is the achievement of this sociability rooted in the rational integrity made possible by *epochè*. The description of the outward behavior of the wise man (in contrast to the dogmatic pedant), given by Charron in the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*, gives an exact picture of the *ethos* and practice of La Mothe Le Vayer’s skeptical characters.⁶² This urban skeptic, open minded and tolerant, is very much modeled after the picture Montaigne gives of himself in the *Essays*, in particular in “De la presumption” (the awareness of the fragility of one’s own opinions and its consequences to social action); “De l’art de conferer” (for intellectual interactions) and “De mesnager sa volonté” (for political/diplomatic interactions).

⁵⁹The private nature of La Mothe Le Vayer’s skepticism has been examined since Pintard (1983). For recent work on this topic, see Bury (2002).

⁶⁰Philosophy requires leisure from pragmatic concerns (*Theaetetus*, 172c–177c).

⁶¹“je n’ay point trouvé de stile plus commode, que celui de ces conversations honnestes, où chacun découvre familièrement à ses amis ce qu’il a de meilleur en sa pensée, & sous les noms d’Eudoxe, de Poliandre & Epistemon, je suppose qu’un homme de mediocre esprit, mais duquel le jugement n’est perverti par aucune fausse creance, & qui possède toute la raison selon la pureté de sa nature, est visité, en une maison de campagne où il demeure” (AT, X, 498).

⁶²“[Le pédant] ne se peut tenir qu’il ne soit partisan, encores qu’il s’en puisse garder, et le fera outré, transporté. [Le sage] tant qui s’il peut tient neutre ou modérateur et commun, et s’il luy convient estre partisan, il le sera avec moderation, et ne fera jamais le pire qu’il pourra au party contraire. ... Si lon vient en dispute et conference, celui-là procedera fièrement d’une façon Magistrale, avec termes affirmatifs et resolut, condamnant roguement les opinions contraires, comme absurdes, fausses, et ridicules. Cettuy-cy modestement et doucement avec mots douteux et retenus, disent, Je ne sçay, peut estre, il semble. Celuy-là se fonde tout sur l’autorité et dire d’autruy, qu’il allegue avec soigneuse cottation des lieux, pour faire monstre de memoire et grand lecture. Cettuy-cy se range à la raison, au prix de laquelle l’autorité luy est peu. Celuy-là ne regarde qu’à vaincre, soutenir et defendre son opinion, à tort ou à travers, se deffaire de sa partie. Cettuy-cy vise tousjours à la verité, à laquelle il tend les bras et joint les mains si-tost qu’elle luy apparoist. Celuy-là veut estre creu” (PTS, 853–854).

4.2 Orasius Against the Superstitious

Most of the dialogue “De la divinité,” except for a fideist introduction and conclusion, relates the diversity and opposition of views held by philosophers and ordinary people on the existence and nature of divinity and an immense variety of religious costumes. This *zetetic* huge nucleus of the dialogue exemplifies what Ephestion understands as an extension of one set of Sextus’ tenth mode, namely, the oppositions which include religious myths (PH I.145–163).⁶³ As the Christian religion is included in this *zetesis*,⁶⁴ scholars have interpreted the fideist claims in the introduction and conclusion of the dialogue as Orasius’ lip service to religious authority. According to this view, contrary to what Orasius says, the rational *zetetic* examination of the dialogue, instead of strengthening the Christian religion, rather undermines it by showing its superstitious nature.⁶⁵

There is no doubt that to fight superstition is Orasius’ main goal in “De la divinité.” This goal makes him, as I said above, a follower of Charron’s at least to the extent that he fights one of the enemies of Charron’s academic Wisdom. The ancient skeptical Academic tradition has two books which specifically target superstition: Cicero’s *On the Nature of Gods* and Plutarch’s *On Superstition*. Both are cited in La Mothe’s “De la divinité,” the former being the single work most often mentioned in the dialogue.⁶⁶ Both Plutarch and Cicero (and Charron) note the danger that this attack lead to atheism.⁶⁷ Would this be Orasius’ case? Most scholars

⁶³“Nostre Sextus s’est contenté de quelques observations singulieres, ou en petit nombre; ... Or pour vous monstrier combien il est aisé d’ajouter à ces commencemens, et d’augmenter cet admirable ouvrage, attachons-nous à quelqu’une de ses parties; et par exemple, arrêtons-nous sur le dixième et dernier moyen, qui considere les mœurs, costumes, et opinions diverses des hommes” (DIA, 29). Sextus’ tenth mode opposes exempla of myths, laws, customs, dogmatic views and life styles: a myth with a myth, a myth with a law, a myth with a custom, and so on in a complete permutation. The point is always the establishment of equipollence (one is no more plausible than its opposition). See Beaudé (1982).

⁶⁴That the Christian religion is considered in the works of Charron and La Mothe Le Vayer should cause no wonder for they propose, respectively, a skeptical wisdom and a skeptical philosophy to their contemporary Christians.

⁶⁵The fideism would be a mask designed to conceal from authorities and vulgar men the irreligious intention of the author displayed indirectly between the lines through irony and fragrant contradictions easily detected by the intelligent reader who has got free from subjection to religion. See Strauss (1952). This view of La Mothe Le Vayer has largely prevailed in the literature. See, among many others, Pintard (1983), Grenier (1949), and more recently: Cavaillé (2002, 141–197), Moreau (2007, 536–579), Gros (2009, 85–105).

⁶⁶In “De la divinité,” as in all other dialogues he wrote, La Mothe exhibits a vast erudition, citing numerous ancient and modern authors. In “De la divinité,” Cicero’s *De natura deorum* is cited ten times, Lucretius’ *De rerum natura* is cited eight times, Sextus’ *Against the Physicists*, which contains a large section on the nature of gods (M IX.49–194), is cited three times (I mention only the acknowledged citations). For the relevance of *De Natura Deorum* in “De la divinité,” both in what concerns literary form and content (though in an irreligious interpretation from which I disagree), see Bury (2002).

⁶⁷Superstition (*superstitionem*) is defined by Cicero as “a groundless fear of the gods” but Epicureans, by attempting to destroy it, also destroy “religion, which consists in piously worshipping

reply yes to this question and some of them attribute this irreligious stance also to Charron,⁶⁸ who says that those who have an *esprit fort* “despise and ridicule religion” for they examine “des affaires de la religion, selon leur portee et capacité” (S, II, 5, 450). Doesn’t this describe exactly Orasius’ *zetetic* procedure? Furthermore, Orasius notes that Plutarch, like Charron and Bacon, find superstition worse than atheism (DIA, 339). However, both Plutarch and Charron hold that a non superstitious religion is possible, though hard to achieve.⁶⁹ Charron points out that “Plutarque deplore l’infirmité humaine, qui ne sçait jamais tenir mesure, et demeurer ferme sur ses pieds: car elle panche et degenerate ou en superstition et vanité, ou en mépris et nonchalance des choses divines” (S, II, 5, 455). Human weakness is of course the main obstacle to achieve wisdom, figured in the frontispiece of Charron’s work as firmly standing on its pedestal. Charron’s view of religion is consistent with his Academic skeptical view of wisdom. Our weakness is the cause of our easily assenting to reports and doctrines deprived of epistemic justification (our *temeritate*). On the other hand, the irreligious position displays dogmatist arrogance, for it presupposes that we are able to fully know religious matters. The skeptical Academic position lies in between. It is able to withdraw assent from popular religious, anthropomorphic views, but at the same time recognizes our incapacity to make judgments on divine matters, due to their obscurity (*obscuritate*)⁷⁰ to finite and weak beings who are not intellectually equipped to grasp the truth, reserved for the gods, only to avoid error and—in Philo’s view, attain the probable.⁷¹ This intermediary position on

them” (*Nat deo*, I.117). By “atheism” here is not meant strictly denial of the existence of god (or the gods) but irreligious views in general, in particular with relation to established religion.

⁶⁸For instance, Cavaillé (2002).

⁶⁹“But there is no infirmity comprehending such a multitude of errors and emotions, and involving opinions so contradictory, or rather antagonistic, as that of superstition. ... We must try, therefore, to escape it in some way which is both safe and expedient, and not be like people who incautiously and blindly run hither and thither to escape from an attack of robbers or wild beasts, or from a fire, and such into trackless places that contain pitfalls and precipices. For thus it is that some persons, in trying to escape superstition, rush into a rough and hardened atheism, thus overleaping true religion which lies between” (Plutarch, *Moralia*, II.171).

⁷⁰“As I said just now, in almost all subjects, but especially in natural philosophy (*physicis*), I am more ready to say what is not true than what is. Inquire of me as to the being and nature of god, and I shall follow the example of Simonides, who having the same question put to him by the great Hiero, requested a day’s grace for consideration; next day, when Hiero repeated the question, he asked for 2 days, and so went on several times multiplying the number of days by two; and when Hiero in surprise asked why he did so, he replied, ‘Because the longer I deliberate the more obscure (*obscurior*) the matter seems to me’. But Simonides is recorded to have been not only a charming poet but also a man of learning and wisdom in other fields, and I suppose that so many acute and subtle ideas came into his mind that he could not decide which of them was truest, and therefore despaired of truth altogether” (Cicero, *Nat deo*, I.60).

⁷¹See Cicero, *Tusc disp* I.23. This Academic skeptical position on religion is not Augustine’s Christianized version who takes advantage of the legend of an esoteric doctrinaire Platonism held by the Academic skeptics to argue that their acceptance of the probable presupposed and pointed to the truth which can be fully apprehended only through grace (Augustine, *C Ac* III.37–43). See Naya (2009, 23–24) for the relevance of this position in the Renaissance, in particular as an apologetic use of ancient skepticism. La Mothe le Vayer’s position on this issue is more cautious than

religion corresponds to Charron's "vraye piété" of the wise man.⁷² Such piety is very hard to achieve due to human weakness (which leads to superstition) and pride (which leads to atheism).⁷³ Because I claim that La Mothe is the main follower of Charron, I have to investigate if the *zetetic* nucleus of the dialogue is consistent with a non superstitious Christianity.⁷⁴

The two references to Charron in the dialogue appear in this *zetetic* nucleus. One of such references (DIA, 342) is to Charron's claim that there is nothing which has not been deified at some place and time. Charron's passage is located in the very beginning of the chapter on the true piety of the wise man.

C'est premierement chose effrayable, de la grande diversité des religions, qui a esté et est au monde, et encores plus de l'estrangeté d'aucunes, si fantasque et exorbitante, que c'est merveille que l'entendement humain aye peu estre si fort abéty et envyré d'impostures: Car il semble qu'il n'y a rien au monde haut et bas, qui n'aye esté deifié en quelque lieu, et qui n'aye trouvé place pour y estre adoré. (S, II, 5, 445)

According to Charron, the person who wants to become wise must examine this diversity of religions. The exact title of the chapter is "Estudier a la vraye piété. Premier office de sagesse." This inquiry is not the dogmatic one of learning theology or of sorting out true religious practices among those described in ethnographic rapports. As an Academic wisdom requires, the acquisition of true piety is negative: the examination of religious diversity aims at eliminating false views on the matter held by the inquirer to the extent that it points out the equipollence between the religious views of one's own place and time usually considered "natural" and those held by people from other cultures usually considered as extravagant and barbarous.⁷⁵ Although we cannot acquire the true religious view through such comparison, we can get rid of false ones. Superstitious piety must thus be exposed so that the

Augustine's (see the *Petit discours chrétien sur l'immortalité de l'âme* in La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, III, 398).

⁷²The study of which is "le premier office de Sagesse" (Book II, chapter 5).

⁷³Pride leads to atheism according to the following reasoning: "if I cannot understand the divinity then it does not exist."

⁷⁴Since the main topic of this book is skepticism I do not investigate the possibility of a "deistic" religion shared by Charron and La Mothe le Vayer. For a recent interpretation along these lines, see Magnard (2006, 342–351). I can only say here that if they hold such a religious position it is held after the Academic probable manner, deprived of any pretention that it is the true religious view.

⁷⁵Paganini (1997, 22) has noted that rather than establishing equipollence, La Mothe Le Vayer often argues much more against than in favor of a Christian doctrine, therefore making the irreligious view more probable. I think that as the religious accepted views are strongly held, he has to argue more in favor of the contrary one in order to establish equipollence. Excessive doubts (paradoxes) such as those that challenge metaphysical principles "sont utiles aux Sceptiques, comme aux maîtres de musique de prendre un peu plus haut, ou plus bas que le juste ton, pour y ramener ceux qui ont discordé; leurs sentiments nouveaux et étranges ayant le même effet pour nous tirer du courant des maximes de la multitude, dont nous ne pouvons trop nous écarter. ... j'ai même quelque soupçon que les plus saines opinions ... sont peut-être les plus paradoxiques, bien que la plupart des nous ne les puissent souffrir; non plus que les vues basses une trop éclatante lumière" (PTSC, 97–98). See Williams (2010, 300) for this strategy in ancient Pyrrhonism. Note that some (*l'esprit fort*) can "suffer" these paradoxical opinions. The goal is Charronian: to liberate the mind

man who aspires to become wise gets rid of the superstitious elements in his or her religious life. This requires the exposition of this diversity, which is not carried over in any detail by Charron, who prefers to concentrate on the common tenants of all religions. La Mothe, who also points out these common tenets, thus appears as a real follower of Charron's, using his vast erudition to display the awkward diversity of religious practices and views.⁷⁶ How can this, in Charron, lead to a wise *Christian* piety? And would La Mothe still follow Charron on this particular point?

Religious diversity is also pointed out by Cicero in his *De natura deorum*. In the introduction to the dialogue, Cicero calls attention to the "multiplicity and variety of the opinions" concerning religion which is a clear indication of the obscurity of the subject, and so of the need to suspend judgment (I.1). The diversity of opinions held by those who uphold the existence of the gods is so various and conflicting, that it would be a troublesome task (*molestum*) to recount their opinions (I.2).⁷⁷ La Mothe goes along with Cicero on the diversity and contrariety of opinions about divinity but, unlike the Roman, seems to take pleasure in relating them.⁷⁸ Wouldn't this reveal his libertine intention, breaking from Plutarch's, Cicero's and Charron's Academic view?

A possible way to answer the question is to examine La Mothe's other quote from Charron's chapter on true piety, which has also been cited as further evidence of La Mothe's *libertinage*⁷⁹: "et Charron soustenant à ce propos dans sa Sagesse, que toutes religions sont estranges et horribles au sens commun" (DIA, 339). Detached from the context, the passage appears as a straightforward attack on all religions, and by citing just these lines, La Mothe Le Vayer may have intended to give just this irreligious impression. When we look at the context of the passage in

from the "tyranny" of vulgar opinions. See Chap. 3, where I examine Gassendi's *Exercitationes paradoxicae* along these Charronian lines.

⁷⁶That this is the central goal of the dialogue is clear from the fact that it circulated in some seventeenth century editions of the *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens* under the title "De la diversité des religions" (for instance, an edition published in Liège, by Grégoire Rousselin, in 1673). This alternative title describes the *zetetic* nucleus of the dialogue, not mentioning the fideist introductory and concluding passages.

⁷⁷"There is in fact no subject upon which so much difference of opinion exists, not only among the unlearned but also among educated men; and the views entertained are so various and so discrepant, that, while it is no doubt a possible alternative that none of them is true, it is certainly impossible that more than one should be so" (*Nat deo*, I.5). See also Sextus, *Against the Physicists*, after relating the arguments for and against the existence of the gods: "As a result of these the Sceptics' suspension of judgment is introduced, especially since they are supplemented by the divergency of the views of ordinary folk about the Gods. For different people have different and discordant notions about them, so that neither are all of these notions to be trusted because of their inconsistency, nor some of them because of their equipollence" (M IX, 191–192).

⁷⁸"Le Sceptique porte sa consideration, et donne atteinte à tout, mais c'est sans pervertir son goust, et sans s'opiniâster à rien, demeurant juge indifferent de tant de mets, et de tant de saulces diverses, comme la plus notable personne du convive, au milieu d'une table qu'elle trouve esgalement bien servie par tout" (DIA, 386). See also "Le banquet sceptique," (DIA, 66 and 105) and "De la divinité," (DIA, 313). For the relevance of this to La Mothe Le Vayer's particular kind of skepticism, see Giocanti (1997, 2001a, 603–675).

⁷⁹See for instance, Cavailé (2001).

De la Sagesse, we see that what Charron means is the Academic view that religion is never proportional to human intellectual standards. Each person's particular reaction to this disproportion will depend on the nature of his/her *esprit*.⁸⁰ The *esprit fort* will take the non-rational nature of religious practices and doctrines as an indication that they are intellectually ridiculous, despising them. The *esprit faible* will take them as too high, "s'estonne et se transsit" (S, II, 5, 450). As in Plutarch, the first is the atheist, the second the superstitious. Now Charron not only (following Plutarch) rejects the atheist position (despite recognizing that it is better than the superstitious position—for it requires an *esprit fort*) but also, of course unlike Plutarch, relates this dualism to Pauline Christian wisdom. He cites the second letter to the Corinthians: "*Praedicamus Jesum Crucifixum, Judaeis scandalum, gentibus stultitiam*" (S, II, 5, 450). The Jews are the *esprits faibles* for whom the man-God crucified is far above their understanding whereas the gentiles correspond to the philosophers, *esprits forts*, for whom this alleged fact is a ridiculous vulgar superstition, which should be despised.⁸¹ The disproportion between man's weakness and God's supreme perfection is the main ground of Charron's claim that religion is the human institution that most shows our misery.⁸² Each attempt made by such limited being, incapable of truth since it is a finite creature, at approaching such Supreme Being can lead only to absurdities (deifications of no matter what, groundless fears, the most horrible anthropomorphisms, etc.). Charron refers to *Les Trois Verités* for the right way for human beings to approach God, the *via negativa* of Saint-Denis and others.⁸³ In *Of Wisdom*, Charron derives the Pauline fideist conclusion, "*captivantes intellectum ad obsequium fidei*," which is of two kinds, the subjection to public authority and to revelation, though the "particular reception" of the latter is always by "voye, mains, et moyens humains" (S, II, 5, 451). This is consistent with Plutarch's view of religious transcendence as cited in the *E Delphos*, the long passage with which Montaigne concludes the *Apology for Raymond Sebond*. We have no communication with being because we are always becoming, only God truly is. Superstition follows from this disproportion and the true religious piety cannot be (at least positively) expressed for language itself is anthropomorphic. Skeptic *aphasia* is the most respectful attitude towards God. What Charron adds to this Plutarchean skeptical view of divinity is the suggestion that Christianity—through its view of wisdom given by Paul—verifies and in certain way materializes (in God man) this ontological disproportion.

⁸⁰ "Ignorance and blindness in regard to the gods divides itself at the very beginning into two streams, of which the one produces in hardened characters, as it were in stubborn soils, atheism, and the other in tender characters, as in moist soils, produces superstition" (Plutarch, *On Superst.* 164e).

⁸¹ In Chap. 6, I examine how Pascal reacts to this view of Charron's.

⁸² This view was picked out by Garasse as one of the most irreligious ones in *De la Sagesse*, whereas the Augustinian Duvergier d'Hauranne, the abbé de Saint-Cyran, one of the leaders of the so called Jansenist movement, took it as orthodox. See Garasse (1625, 398) and Duvergier d'Haurane (1626, 418).

⁸³ Charron. *Les Trois Veritez* I, chapitre 5 in Charron (1970, vol. II, 11–21).

Coming back to La Mothe le Vayer, if we can attribute Plutarch's piety to Orasius, we do not find the Christian connection made by Charron, despite the citations of Paul in the introduction and conclusion of the dialogue: the support of fideism is not directly tied to the exposition, in the *zetetic* nucleus, of the diversity of religion.⁸⁴ La Mothe's conclusion in the *zetetic* nucleus is rather closer to the more skeptical one held by Cicero in *De Natura Deorum*. Divinity is such an obscure matter that there is no end, no resolution, to a rational human discourse about it. In concluding his objections, Cotta deprives his avowed plain Academic skepticism of any suspicion of atheism. He claims that what he said about "*de natura deorum*" was not meant to eliminate them ("*non ut eam tollerem*"), but to make Balbus understand how obscure ("*quam obscura*") and how difficult to explain ("*quam difficilis explicatus*") the matter is (*Nat deo*, III.93). Cotta is very clear that he fights philosophical theology (Epicurean and Stoic) and not traditional religion, a point fully accepted by La Mothe Le Vayer, who claims that true theology is not a science (DIA, 306).

Right after this strictly Academic conclusion, Orasius adds the fideist claim of the need of grace to achieve Christian faith (DIA, 347) which, as Popkin has pointed out, is clearly a *non sequitor* from the examination.⁸⁵ Orasius rehearses Montaigne's (E, II, 12, 506) and Charron's (PTS, 860) argument of the (negative) utility of skepticism to Christian faith, since the ancient philosophy uproots the false merely human beliefs from one's mind, making room for the acceptance of supernatural truths revealed by Scripture. As no internal link between Christianity and skepticism is provided—such as we find in Charron and above all in Pascal—the justification for accepting Christianity is not different from the ancient skeptic's justification for accepting his pagan religion: the acknowledgement of tradition.⁸⁶

La Mothe Le Vayer merely adapts to his Christian context the issue of the relationship between Academic skepticism and religion dealt with by Cotta. The end of book II and the beginning of book III of *De Natura Deorum* deal with the problem of the consistency between philosophical views of religion and traditional religion, or reason and faith. Which philosophy is more compatible with traditional religion, Academic skepticism or Stoicism? Cotta's main point is to deny Balbus' pretention that Stoicism can enhance traditional Roman religion by supporting its

⁸⁴We find in the introduction and conclusion of the dialogue many more references to Paul than we find in Charron, but these are external to the skeptical examination of religion. The main point of these references is to claim that our inability to attain religious truth by our own means indicates the need to submit to revelation. Charron establishes a link between our dual reaction to religion and Christology.

⁸⁵Popkin (2003, 85–89). Loque (2012) is thus right when he differentiates Charron's from La Mothe Le Vayer's skeptical fideism, for the first is not strictly a fideist since he claims in *Les Trois Verités* that Christianity is more probable (in the Philonian Academic fashion) than the other religions and in *De la Sagesse* he does relate the strictly skeptical view of divinity to Christian doctrine. To the extent that La Mothe does not argue in the sense of making Christianity more probable, his fideism is blind.

⁸⁶La Mothe condemns Pyrrho in *De la Vertu des Payans* because he accepted religion only out of tradition, as an appearance, i.e., without taking it as true. For the relevance of his judgment of Pyrrho for the irreligious nature of skepticism, see Paganini (2008, 88–100) and the discussion at the end of this chapter.

tenets with rational arguments. Concluding his speech, Balbus exhorts Cotta to “plead the same cause, and reflect that you are a leading citizen and a pontiff, and you would take advantage of the liberty enjoyed by your school of arguing both *pro* and *contra* to choose to espouse my side, and preferably to devote to this purpose those powers of eloquence which your rhetorical exercises have bestowed upon you and which the Academy has fostered. For the habit of arguing in support of atheism, whether it be done from conviction or in pretence, is a wicked and an impious practice” (*Nat deo*, II.168).

In the beginning of book III, Cotta replies that he could not accept Balbus' views because as he listened to him he already found fault in them and “a man must use his own judgment” (*Nat deo*, III.1). Even if from the pragmatic point of view, given Cotta's position in Rome, he conceded that it would be better for him to be a Stoic, because he is committed to intellectual integrity he remains an Academic, not out of alliance with the Academics, but because he has to follow his own mind. He then explains his own position as an Academic and as a pontiff, replying to Balbus' charge, that is, he does not concede the pragmatic point above and turns it against Balbus: not the Academic, but the Stoic is in trouble with traditional religion. The fact that he is a pontiff

no doubt [means] that I ought to uphold the beliefs about the immortal gods which have come down to us from our ancestors, and the rites and ceremonies and duties of religion. For my part I always shall uphold them and always have done so, and no eloquence of anybody, learned or unlearned, shall ever dislodge me from the belief as to the worship of the immortal gods which I have inherited from our forefathers. But on any question of religion I am guided by the high pontiffs, Titus Coruncanus, Publius Scipio and Publius Scaevola, not by Zeno or Cleanthes or Chrysippus. (*Nat deo*, III.5)

Cotta then cites the rituals, prophecies and prodigies of Roman religion and returns to Balbus the “philosophical atheist” charge.

There, Balbus, is the opinion of a Cotta and a pontiff; now oblige me by letting me know yours. You are a philosopher, and I ought to receive from you a proof of your religion, whereas I must believe the word of our ancestors even without proof (*maioribus autem nostris etiam nulla ratione reddita credere*). (*Nat deo*, III.6)⁸⁷

Like Augustine, who probably bases his view on him, Cicero uses “*credere*” to describe his acceptance of traditional religious views, which he claims are not removed by rational or rhetorical arguments. As is well known, Augustine distinguishes *opinare* and *credere*. The first is justly avoided by the Academic wise man but the latter can be maintained because it does have a rational ground, though not a demonstrative one: traditional authority.⁸⁸ Cotta claims that traditional religious beliefs do not need demonstrative grounds in order to stand for their foundation are the ancestors (*maioribus*), forefathers such as Romulus, Numa and the pontiffs cited, who, Cotta says, were assisted by the immortal gods when they established

⁸⁷ Orasius cites this passage in DIA, 338.

⁸⁸ Authority is grounded ultimately on God, mediately on the Apostles who wrote the Gospels and immediately on the Christian common people—such as Augustine's mother who educated him. See Augustine, *De utilitate credendi* and *Confessions*, VI.5.

the rituals. But to the extent that the Stoic deals philosophically with religious issues, as philosophy requires reasons, he must prove his religious beliefs, otherwise, as a philosopher, he should suspend judgment about them. The Academic is not committed to do the same because he does not pretend to know philosophically anything. The point seems to be the following: Balbus claimed that his Stoic philosophy could fortify Roman religion by providing rational proofs. Cotta denies that this can be done; so his position is only anti-Stoic, maintaining original traditional Roman religion which continues, as before Balbus' attempt, based only on the authority of the ancestors and traditions. In La Mothe le Vayer's case, the point is to justify his recovery of ancient skepticism by eliminating the other ancient pagan philosophies (mainly Aristotelianism). As these cannot be of any help in justifying Christianity, which must be grounded on the authority of tradition, the fact that skepticism has no doctrine that gives probability to Christianity is no obstacle to reviving it. His skeptical arguments show that reason cannot ground religion. La Mothe claims that the observation of the diversity of religions leads him to fortify his faith, but, I should say, following Loque (2012), that this could not happen because Christianity came up from the comparison more probable than the others, but because it vindicates a ground outside human reason/probability. In conclusion, Orasius claims that his exposition of

les diverses pensées des hommes, tant anciens que modernes, touchant la Nature et essence des Dieux, avec les differens honneurs qui leur ont esté rendus, vous pouvez, Orantes, assez facilement vous appercevoir, que quiconque voudra examiner la Divinité à la portée de son esprit, et faire choix par discours humain de la vraye religion, ne se trouvera pas moins empesché à la fin, que Lucien l'est à trouver sa vraye philosophie, laquelle il va cherchant par tout *in reviviscentibus*, sans la pouvoir en nulle part rencontrer. (DIA, 347)

This is the sense in which Orasius claims, just before exploiting the tenth mode, that this exam fortifies his faith. He does not mean that he compared Christianity with other religions and found the former more probable. The point is that they are all equivalent as far as human opinion is concerned, that is to say, as far as *vraysemblance* is concerned in its original psychological (subjective)—not at all epistemological—Carnedian sense. Probability has no role on divine matters exactly because probability concerns only human appearances, as they are determined subjectively and culturally. Divinity lies outside this scope.⁸⁹ He thus rejects not only rational demonstrative theology but also rational probabilistic theology.⁹⁰ So skepticism helps Christians give up the misguided aim of fortifying religion with philosophy.

Balbus taught Cotta nothing (*nihil tu me doces*) about the existence and nature of the gods. The lack of a philosophical ground does not eliminate religious belief from Cotta's mind, for his persuasion is due to "auctoritate maiorum" (the authority of the forefathers) (*Nat deo*, III.7). Note that the attack on authority by the Academic

⁸⁹Orasius doubts that the Emperor of Moscow converted to Christianity because he sent messengers to report on every available religion. "Car ce n'est pas, à mon advis, l'abondance de connoissance, mais bien celle de la grace divine, qui nous peut rendre icy clairvoyans" (DIA, 347).

⁹⁰The *Petit discours chrétien sur l'immortalité de l'âme* is an exception, see note 92 below.

is restricted to the philosophical field. There reason must be absolute. Dogmatic philosophers mix things up. They are bound to authority in philosophy (that of the masters of their schools) and pretend to follow reason in the fields in which one must follow authority (religion and politics).⁹¹ He then says that he needs only one argument: the tradition of our forefathers, “[b]ut you despise authority, and fight your battles with the weapon of reason. Give permission therefore for my reason to join issue with yours” (*Nat deo*, III.9–10). This is the entrance to the dialectical refutation: the Academic requires and brings in reasons only because the Stoic pretends to base his views on reason. Because the reasons alleged by Balbus are weak, he renders “doubtful a matter which in my opinion admits of no doubt at all” (*Nat deo*, III.10). This seems to exclude any positive role of reason in religion. It does not leave it up to superstition, however, because skeptical reasoning acts negatively, removing false views of religion. Augustine tries to solve this dilemma introducing his distinction between *opinare* and *credere*, arguing that the latter may be fortified by *a posteriori* rational arguments. Orasius does not make this step and his non superstitious piety remains entirely Academic. He makes no effort to disguise this stance, writing dialogues “fait à l’imitation des anciens” and claiming that he would be “plus en peine de vous justifier en termes de Religion quelques moralitez purement Physiques, si je ne m’estois déjà fait entendre à vous que je n’ay rien écrit qu’en Philosophe ancien et Payen *in puris naturalibus*” (DIA, 14).

Despite the fideist passages, and with the exception of the *Petit discours Chrétien sur l’immortalité de l’âme*, La Mothe Le Vayer makes no apology for the Christian religion.⁹² In the same way that Charron in *De la Sagesse* works out a secular Academic wisdom which must deal with the relation of this skeptical wisdom to Christianity since he writes for a Christian reader, so La Mothe must deal with the problem of the relation between skepticism and Christianity because he wants to revive this Hellenistic philosophy in his Christian context.⁹³ This means that he is

⁹¹ Renaissance and early modern skeptics (Montaigne, Charron, La Mothe Le Vayer) recognize religion and politics as the proper place of authority. So does Descartes (AT, VI, 13–15, 22–23) and Pascal (see the “Preface to the Treatise on the Vacuum”).

⁹² The *Petit discours chrétien sur l’immortalité de l’âme* (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, Vol. III, Partie I, 387–182) is La Mothe Le Vayer’s sole attempt in Christian apologetics. Although the author’s skepticism is never avowed in this work, important traces of it are the following: (1) the long first section of the work consists in showing that, in particular on the subject of the immortality of the soul, Aristotelian philosophy is of no help in Christian apologetics; (2) he claims that the specific feature of his apology is its modesty, recognizing that reason has a secondary role—and mainly negative (to eliminate errors—p. 394), that one must submit to the doctrine of immortality as one submits to the revealed mysteries that are above reason (trinity, original sin, etc.)—p. 397; (3) although he claims that his arguments in favor of immortality are demonstrative, they are not absolutely certain because its premises are not self-evident, that is to say, they are only probable arguments (unlike Descartes’s in favor of the immateriality of the soul), which explains their elevated number (probability may be thereby increased and some may be persuaded by one argument, others by other, and so on).

⁹³ La Mothe’s apology for skepticism includes the claim of its superiority vis-à-vis the other ancient philosophies. Ephestion says (DIA, 61) that the “Lycée Peripatetique” is good for those who look for wealth, the Portic for those ambitious, the Garden for those attached to “volupté” (if Epicurus

not an apologist for Christianity—as one could think of a Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola or a Pascal—who uses skepticism for religious purposes, but nor can we say that he is a libertine who uses skepticism to destroy the Christian revelation.⁹⁴ He is thus neutral, as a plain skeptic must be.⁹⁵ So he attempts to remove obstacles proper of his time to being a skeptic. His skeptical texts usually reply to traditional objections to skepticism, the main of which at the time is, of course, its alleged inconsistency with Christianity.⁹⁶ This is how his fideism (his claim that skepticism helps one to take a blind jump to faith) and “circumcised Pyrrhonism” (his exclusion of Christian revelation from the scope of *époque*) should be read.⁹⁷ Not that, as he says I think rhetorically, skepticism, once limited, is the best introduction to Christian faith, but defensively, one can be a skeptic and a Christian as one can be—and for centuries was—a “circumcised Aristotelian” (since some Aristotelian doctrines were denied) and a Christian, or a “circumcised Platonist” and a Christian or a “circumcised Epicurean” or Stoic and a Christian.⁹⁸ His friend Gassendi’s main philosophical project was to set up a kind of “circumcised Epicureanism,” an Epicureanism deprived of doctrines incompatible with Christianity such as the eternal nature of the atoms and the material nature of the atoms that make up the soul.⁹⁹ He thus attempts to show that even from the point of view of relation to Christianity, “circumcised skepticism” is better than the others.¹⁰⁰

was not calumniated). Note that the apology requires indicating the merits of skepticism vis-à-vis the other ancient philosophies.

⁹⁴Of course one can argue that his skeptical treatment of religion leads to irreligious and atheistic views.

⁹⁵Paganini (2008, 92) notes that a skeptic cannot be strictly an atheist but argues for the insincerity of La Mothe’s professed fideism. See also Cavaillé (2002, 182): “le scepticisme de Le Vayer ... doit être compris dans le cadre d’une pensée de la dis/simulation. ... moins comme une fin que comme un moyen, un dispositif doctrinal propice à la dissimulation libertine, une arme du soupçon et de la défiance malveillante; moins une méthode conduisant à la suspension du jugement et à l’ataraxie, qu’un instrument critique de dépréciation et d’appréciation, qui crée et entretient le trouble.”

⁹⁶This is the dramatic context of “De la divinité,” for Orantes says in the beginning that the incompatibility of skepticism with the Christian religion is the major obstacle to his acceptance of the former (DIA, 305). At the end, persuaded by Orasius, he believes in the incompatibility of *dogmatic* philosophy with Christianity (DIA, 348–350).

⁹⁷The expression comes from Saint Gregory of Nyssa and is applied to the Christian skeptics in *La Vertu des Payans*: “Car comme a très bien observé Saint Grégoire de Nysse il n’y a pas une de toutes les Philosophies seculieres, où il ne se trouve quelque chose de charnel, & qui est comme un prepuce qu’on est obligé de couper, afin que le corps de chacune demeure purifié, par le moien de cette circoncision spirituelle” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, Vol. V, 146–147).

⁹⁸Loque (2012, 230–247) argues that La Mothe Le Vayer in the “Dialogue sur la Divinité” on the question of the relation between skepticism and Christianity holds the compatibility thesis and the propaedeutic thesis but fails to establish the latter.

⁹⁹See Chap. 3, note 35, for secondary literature on Gassendi’s reception of Epicureanism.

¹⁰⁰“Et puisque la Sceptique Chrétienne ne lui (to the Divine Law) est pas moins soumise, que toutes les autres Sectes, que nous avons déjà catechisées, ses doutes seront d’autant moins à craindre, qu’étant encore Païenne, elle ne laissoit pas de déferer aux constitutions & aux coutumes de son siècle. Voilà ce qui m’a donné des pensées si favorables pour une Philosophie, que je ne crois pas plus criminelle, que les autres, pourvû qu’on lui fasse rendre les respects, qu’elles doivent

Before concluding this chapter I shall briefly comment on the problem, often raised by scholars, whether skepticism is “circuncisable” as the dogmatic philosophies apparently are. In fact, it does not seem to pose a major challenge to circumscribe philosophies which contain a set of doctrines. It suffices to exclude those found flagrantly in conflict with the Bible, even if allegorically interpreted.¹⁰¹ But skepticism contains no doctrine. It is only a *dynamis*, the practice of opposing views,¹⁰² so how can this practice be limited without being utterly destroyed? The answer is the limitation of the objects about which the practice is employed, not of the practice itself. As Hellenistic scholars have pointed out, the limitation of the scope of *epochè* (for instance, to scientific or philosophical explanations, excluding ordinary beliefs) is characteristic of modern skepticism.¹⁰³ But the problem is whether the skeptic who is reviving ancient skepticism in the seventeenth century will resist applying his practice of opposition in such a problematic field (from human standards) and source of so many disturbances as religion and, of course, Orasius applies his skepticism precisely to this matter in “De la divinité.” Moreover, La Mothe Le Vayer himself, in *De la vertu des payans*, calls attention to the danger that skepticism creates a habit of doubting which would be carried over even to the things

où il n'est pas permis d'hésiter tant soi peu, ni d'avoir le moindre doute comme en tout ce qui concerne la Foi & les bonnes moeurs. Mais on ne doit rien apprehender de tel d'une Sceptique que l'on a renduë Chrétienne par le moiën de la circoncison de Saint Grégoire. . . . Elle n'a plus de doutes où il est question de la Réligion. Toutes ses défiances meurent au pied des Autels. Et les dons, qu'elle reçoit du Ciel pour une fin surnaturelle, sont si efficaces, que la Foi, son Esperance, & la Charité, reglent toutes ses connoissances, & donnent la loi à tous ses raisonnemens. (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, V, 308)¹⁰⁴

This same danger is pointed out by Hervet in the dedicatory letter of his translation of Sextus, which, however, did not preclude him from translating and publishing Sextus, considering the other benefits to religion that Sextus' work could bring.¹⁰⁵

toutes à notre sainte Théologie, & comme une suivante seulement, elle soit appellée avec les autres au service de cette divine maitresse” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, V, 309).

¹⁰¹ Of course such “circuncization” may become problematic depending on the centrality of the doctrine circumscribed in the pagan philosophy in question.

¹⁰² “Scepticism is an ability, or mental attitude, which opposes appearances to judgments in any way whatsoever, with the result that, owing to the equipollence of the objects and reasons thus opposed, we are brought firstly to a state of mental suspense and next to a state of ‘unperturbedness’ or quietude” (Sextus, PH I.8).

¹⁰³ See Burnyeat (1982, 1984).

¹⁰⁴ Paganini (1997) claims that La Mothe Le Vayer's dynamics of doubt is irreligious but notes that he is aware of this fact, removing Christianity from its scope. He holds that this “insulation” (it is my term) of Christianity cannot be disregarded by the libertine interpretation but nor can the irreligious dynamics be dismissed by the “fideist” or “sincere Christian” interpretation. In his more recent book (2008, 61–100), Paganini develops further this tension, pointing out the difficulty—even impossibility—of restraining the “dynamis antithétique” in this way and brings out evidence that atheism was already a leaving option at the time. All this, according to him, suggests that, despite what he claims, La Mothe Le Vayer is ultimately working against Christianity.

¹⁰⁵ Hervet's preface is published in English in Popkin and Maia Neto (2007, 90–91). But note that the two main utilities of Sextus' works according to Hervet, namely, an intellectual weapon against

Another problem also remarked by Paganini (2008, 88–100) and Moreau (2007, 554–560) is La Mothe’s condemnation of Pyrrho and the ancient skeptics for accepting religion only as a tradition, that is, not assuming it as true. I find the condemnation itself last problematic than the reason for it. The condemnation itself is not problematic because his project is that of the revival of a circumcised skepticism. In the same way that his condemnation of Aristotle does not imply a condemnation of Aquinas, so his condemnation of Pyrrho does not imply the condemnation of the Christian skeptic.¹⁰⁶ I see a problem in the reason of the condemnation of Pyrrho for it seems to imply that the acceptance of Christian doctrine by the Christian skeptic is epistemic, that is, it involves assent, excluding *epochè*, in which case all the intellectual and social benefits pointed out above deriving from suspension of judgment would be null exactly in such crucial aspect of life at the time. This apparent contradiction might be solved by a strict separation between the natural and the supernatural realms, such that Christian faith somewhat miraculously—it happens at the altar—does not limit the natural benefits of *epochè*. If this hypothesis is correct, the assent to Christianity based only on a decision of the will (DIA, 306) in the absence of a supernatural illumination (grace) would imply a dogmatism as much open to skeptical criticism as that held by the first objector to Sebond attacked by Montaigne in the “Apology for Raymond Sebond” (E, II, 12, 440–448), whose immoral behaviour falsifies the alleged supernatural ground of faith.

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the Reformers and the provision of a way of discerning the most probable, thus approaching the religious truth (something not contemplated at all in Sextus’ work), are not among the utilities of skepticism in its recovery by La Mothe Le Vayer.

¹⁰⁶ He has no hope for the salvation of the ancient skeptics, not because they were atheists (they were not). “Mais outre qu’ils ne se sont jamais déterminés à reconnoitre une cause premiere, qui leur fit mépriser l’Idolâtre de leur tems; il est certain, qu’ils n’ont rien crû de la Nature Divine, qu’avec suspension d’esprit ... & pour s’accommoder seulement aux loix & aux coutumes de leur Siècle, & du païs, où ils vivoient. Par consequent, puisqu’ils n’ont pas eu la moindre lumiere de cette foi implicite, sur laquelle nous avons fondé l’esperance du salut de quelques Païens, qui l’ont possedée conjointement avec une grace extraordinaire du Ciel, je ne vois nulle apparence de croire qu’aucun Sceptique ou Pyrrhonien de cette trempe ai pû éviter le chemin de l’Enfer” (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, V, 300–301). The qualification “de cette trempe” leaves no doubt: the lack of hope does not apply to the Christian skeptic who has explicit Christian faith. Note that in more than one place, for instance in his *Homilies Académiques* (La Mothe Le Vayer 1756, III, 12), Le Vayer distinguishes two kinds of skeptics (the Ephetic and the Christian skeptic). Orasius and the others characters of his dialogues are Christian skeptics.

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Chapter 5

Descartes's Rehabilitation of Science

The “Science” Charron considers one of the four enemies of wisdom is dogmatic science. It is “pedantic,” based on memory, subservient to authority and established in the schools. This model of “science” is contrary to wisdom for it limits the exercise of judgment, whose full flowering is the most fundamental part of the limited perfection required by wisdom. In Chap. 3, I argue that in the *Exercitationes* Gassendi details and develops further this Charronian criticism of dogmatic science and briefly outlines an alternative model of science, hypothetical and experimental. Descartes also takes seriously Charron's criticism of established dogmatic science and proposes an alternative one. On the one hand, Descartes's starting point is much closer to Charron's wisdom than Gassendi's non-dogmatic alternative model of science. But on the other hand, Descartes's radicalization of Charron's position leads to a complete reversal of Charron's Academic skeptical wisdom.

The first scholar who considered Charron crucial for Descartes's doubt was Popkin, one of whose first publications on early modern skepticism deals precisely with the issue.¹ Popkin shows that the idea of a methodical doubt in the sense of a doubt conceived as means to something else is quite central in Charron. He points out two basic differences between Charron and Descartes on methodical doubt: the radical nature of the Cartesian doubt and the fact that in Descartes, in contradistinction to Charron, the result of the skeptical elimination of belief is not a *tabula rasa*. This second difference is generalized in Popkin's *History of Scepticism* to the whole tradition of skeptical fideism in the period. In Descartes, he says,

the process of doubting compels one to recognize the awareness of oneself, compels one to see that one is doubting or thinking, and that one is here, is in existence. The discovery of true knowledge is not miraculous, not a special act of Divine Grace. Instead the method of doubt is the cause rather than the occasion of the acquisition of knowledge. Its truth ... is

¹ See Popkin (1954). It is rather odd that such an important connection has not been explored in recent Charronian scholarship. One remarkable exception is Paganini (1991, 28–29, 2008b), who indicates some innovations that Charron introduces in the skeptical tradition that become crucial in Descartes's methodical doubt, notably, the active role of the will.

the result of Divine intervention—not of sudden, new intervention, but rather a continuous and permanent act of grace that sustains our mind with its innate ideas, and with its natural light that compels us to accept as true that which we are unable to doubt. Thus, the method of doubt leads naturally to the *cogito*, and not supernaturally to truth as the *nouveaux pyrrhoniens* claimed. (Popkin 2003, 151–152)

I agree with Popkin's first difference (the radical nature of Cartesian doubt) but disagree that the result of Charron's doubt is a *tabula rasa* waiting for the miraculous reception of grace. Both in Charron and in Charron's disciples La Mothe Le Vayer and the Gassendi of the *Exercitationes*, skeptical *epochè* is not properly a *tabula rasa* and it is not a means to something different from skepticism itself. If we keep strictly to Popkin's description of the *cogito*, that is, if we set aside the fact that the *cogito* involves the metaphysical doctrine of the non-material essence of the soul, it could apply as well to Charron's *epochè*. So given my agreement with Popkin's first difference (the radical nature of Cartesian doubt), what I argue here is that Descartes is closer to the skepticism of his time not in the skeptical arguments he uses but in the way he pretends to refute skepticism. I propose that the *cogito* can be seen as a metaphysical interpretation of Charron's *epochè* resulting from Cartesian hyperbolic doubt. It is hyperbolic doubt (absent from all skeptics from ancient times to his own) that allows Descartes to transform the most precious acquisition of the skeptics (*epochè*) into the single doctrine, according to him, capable of refuting them.

When Descartes justifies the need of the first two Meditations he says that he had since long—I quote the standard English translation—“seen many ancient writings by the Academics and Sceptics on this subject, and was reluctant to reheat and serve this precooked material” (CSM, II, 94). This English translation is misleading in two respects. First, Descartes refers to books written by many Academics and Sceptics [“libros ... complures ab Academicis & Scepticis scriptos” (AT, VII, 130)] not to *ancient* books written by Academics and Sceptics as the passage has been understood.² There is no reason to restrict these Academics and Sceptics whose books Descartes saw to the ancient philosophers,³ especially given that there were many more Renaissance and early modern than ancient skeptical books available. If we restrict to the ancients, Descartes could have seen only three books, not many as he says, namely those of Sextus, which I think he did not read, and Cicero's *Academica*, which he probably read.⁴ But if we include the period from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth century then the skeptical library is

²Groarke (1984, 297), Fine (2000, 200), Bermúdez (2000, 342).

³See Paganini (2008a, 253).

⁴There are two reasons why I think Descartes was not acquainted with Sextus' books, besides the fact that he never mentions him. First, the diffusion of Sextus' works was restricted, limited to expert scholars and skeptics. Secondly, there is no single text in Descartes directly reminiscent of Sextus. The situation is otherwise on these two grounds with respect to Cicero's *Academica*. See Curley (1978, 58–69), Burnyeat (1982, 3–40), Williams (1986, 117–139), Groarke (1984), and Lennon (2008, 242–244, 2011).

considerably enlarged.⁵ Secondly, Descartes does not say that he was “reluctant to reheat and serve this precooked material,” which suggests that his relation to skepticism was external. A more literal translation of the passage “crambem non sine fastidio recoquerem” (AT, VII, 130) would be something like “it was not without a sickness to my stomach that I re-cooked this cabbage.” *Crambe* (cabbage) stands here for something of bad taste and *recoquere* may have the figurative meaning of digesting (or re-digesting) thoughts, thinking something through again (for instance, for a different purpose). If we bring Charron to the picture, then a different reading of Descartes's rehearsal of these skeptical writings can be provided.⁶

La science est un tresbon et utile baston, mais qui ne se laisse pas manier à toutes mains ... [elle] enteste et affolite, dit bien un grand habile homme,⁷ les esprits foibles et malades, polit et parfait les forts et bons naturels: L'esprit foible ne sçait pas posseder la science, ... au rebours elle le possede et le regente, dont il ploye et demeure esclave sous elle, comme l'estomach foible chargé de viandes qu'il ne peut cuire ny digerer. (S, 38)⁸

Charron refers to the skeptical arguments that lead to wisdom as thoughts that weak minds cannot entertain.⁹ Descartes's doubts in the First Meditation are similar cabbages, this being the reason why, he says (AT, I, 350), the toughest skeptical scenarios (the deceiver and the evil genius) were omitted from the *Discourse* which, written in French, had a larger audience.¹⁰ That Charron is Descartes's most probable

⁵Besides Charron's *Sagesse*, Descartes probably read Montaigne's *Essais* and probably at least one of François de La Mothe Le Vayer's numerous skeptical works (see Mehl 1999; Cavaillé 2003; Paganini 2008a, 248–270). Descartes refers to Montaigne and Charron in a letter to Newcastle of 23 November 1646 (AT, IV, 573) and to La Mothe Le Vayer's *De l'instruction du Dauphin* (Paris: S. Cramoisy, 1640), in a letter to Mersenne of 28 October 1640 (AT, III, 207). There are also textual indications that he read Francisco Sanches' *Quod nihil scitur* (see Limbrick 1982 and Paganini 2009) and Agrippa de Nettesheim's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* (see Mehl 1999, 95–96). He may also have read Gassendi's *Exercitationes* and Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola's *Examen vanitates doctrinae gentium*.

⁶The Duke de Luynes translates Descartes's passage as follows: “ce ne fust pas sans quelque dégoût que ie remâchois vne viande si commune” (AT, IX, 103). “Commune,” which is not in Descartes's Latin original, can have the more neutral meaning of quite diffused, as the skeptical views were among les “honnestes hommes”: “Un honneste homme n'est pas obligé d'avoir veu tous les livres, ni d'avoir appris soigneusement tout ce qui s'enseigne dans les escholes” (AT, X, 495).

⁷Montaigne is this “habile homme”: “[Le sçavoir] est un dangereux glaive, et qui empesche et offence son maistre, s'il est en main foible et qui n'en sçache l'usage” (E, I, 25, 140).

⁸“cuire et digerer les choses receuës par l'imagination, c'est raison ... cette action de ruminer, recuire, repasser par l'estamine de la raison, et encores plus eslabourer, pour en faire une resolution plus solide, c'est le jugement” (S, I, 14, 132). Montaigne uses the same metaphor for judging: “L'estomac n'a pas fait son operation, s'il na fait changer la façon et la forme à ce qu'on luy avoit donné à cuire” (E, I, 26, 151).

⁹“plustost se tenir au doute en suspens, principalement és choses, qui reçoivent oppositions et raisons de toutes parts, mal aisées à cuire et digerer; c'est une belle chose, que sçavoir bien ignorer et douter, et la plus seure, de laquelle ont fait profession les plus nobles Philosophes, voire c'est le principal effet et fruit de la science” (S, III, 6, 632–633).

¹⁰“Au reste certaines choses qui sembloient à aucuns trop cruës et courtes, ou rudes et dures pour les simples: car les forts relevent ont l'estomac assez chaud pour cuire et digerer tout, je les ay pour l'amour d'eux expliqué et addoucy en la seconde edition” (PTS, 864–865).

source here is clear in the *Discourse* where he claims that the decision to doubt everything should be taken neither by vulgar men nor by pedants (AT, VI, 15).¹¹ Charron's skeptical wisdom is what Descartes mainly re-cooked. It is something hard to digest so restricted to strong minds or stomachs, *des esprits forts* such as Descartes.

Charron's influence on Descartes concerns more the preambles of Cartesian philosophy than doctrinarian Cartesianism proper (the exception being the *cogito*), that is, methodical doubt and everything relevant to it (provisional morals, political conservatism, rejection of established peripatetic philosophy, and personal doubt). The relevant Cartesian text is therefore the first three parts of the *Discours de la Méthode*. Sections 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7 cover six topics that are relevant to Cartesian doubt. Another work in which Charron's presence is also noticeable is Descartes's unfinished dialogue *La Recherche de la Vérité* in which he covers precisely the issues of doubt and the *cogito*. Section 5.8 below, in which I examine the connection of the *cogito* with Charron's skepticism is based above all on this work. Finally, it should be noted that some of the Cartesian passages and positions in which I detect Charron's presence are also exhibited in Montaigne's *Essais*. In these cases, Descartes could have got the position directly from Montaigne or indirectly through Charron. At least as far as doubt and the *cogito* are concerned, Charron is much more relevant to Descartes than Montaigne. First, it is Charron who in an explicit way proposes skepticism as a means to expurgate all acquired beliefs; second, it is Charron's Academic version of skepticism ("je ne sais")—and not Montaigne's Pyrrhonian ("que sais-je?")—that can be constructed in a way such as to lead to the *cogito*; and third, the decisive textual evidence points unequivocally to Charron, not to Montaigne.¹²

5.1 *Olympica*

There is evidence of Charron's influence on Descartes's earliest writings and in a quite decisive manner.¹³ In Descartes's famous dream of 10 November 1619, a book of poetry appears that he interprets as representing "la Philosophie & la Sagesse jointes ensemble" (AT, X, 184). He is directed to two verses by Ausone for which he gives the following interpretation: "la pièce de vers sur l'incertitude du genre de vie qu'on doit choisir, & qui commence par *Quod vitae sectabor iter*, marquoit le bon conseil d'une personne sage, ou même la Théologie Morale ... Par la pièce de

¹¹ Descartes's direct source for this passage, to which I return below, is in chapter 43 of book I *De la Sagesse*.

¹² This is confirmed, for example, in Boase's (1935) chapter on Montaigne's influence on Descartes, where most of the textual sources given are from *De la Sagesse*, not from the *Essais*.

¹³ This evidence challenges Curley's (1978, 37ff) hypothesis that Descartes becomes aware of the skeptical challenge posed by the skeptics of his time only after he wrote the *Regulae*.

vers *Est & Non* ... il comprenoit la Vérité & la Fausseté dans les connoissances humaines & les sciences profanes” (AT, X, 184–85). A number of scholars have suggested that the *Est & Non* in Descartes’s dream is a souvenir of Charron’s “Oui et Non,” written on the front-page of the book held by Science in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse*.¹⁴ First Boase and more recently Faye, have indicated a possible Charronian origin also for the other verse (“quod vitae sectabor iter”): “on pense aussitôt à la quatrième ‘instruction et regle generale de Sagesse’ de Charron, qui s’énonce ainsi ‘Avoir un but et train de vie certain. Second fondement de sagesse.’”¹⁵ Finally, Descartes says in the context of his dream that “Dicta sapientum ad paucissimas quasdam *regulas generales* possunt reduci” (AT, X, 217). Belin (1995, 231–232) relates this to the preface of *De la Sagesse* where Charron says that the rules of wisdom can be summarized in four basic ones: “cognoissance de soy, liberté d’esprit nette et généreuse, suivre nature, vray contentement.” As Faye (1998, 319) points out, it can also be related to the title of the central book II: “instructions et *regles generales* de sagesse.”

If we take the autobiographical report given by Descartes in the *Discourse* as historically true, it was at this occasion that he realized the need to eliminate all his acquired beliefs,¹⁶ which corresponds to Charron’s three dimensions of freedom which he underlines as basic features of wisdom in the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*: “Or cette liberté est en plusieurs choses, don’t j’en ay conté trois principales, qui sont trois traicts et offices de Sagesse: l’une ... est une exemption et affranchissement de toutes les choses qui troublent, infestent et gastent l’esprit” (PTS, 833); the second is to “examiner et juger de toutes choses” (834); and the third “est une surseance et indifference de jugement, par laquelle l’homme considerant tout comme dict est, froidement et sans passions, ne s’acheurte, ny ne se lie ou oblige à aucune chose” (838).

¹⁴ Boase (1935, 223–224), Gouhier (1958, 50n18), Adam (1992), Rodis-Lewis (1994).

¹⁵ Faye (1998, 295). The point was first made by Boase (1935, 224). Descartes says in the *Discours* that his goal is to “marcher avec assurance en cete vie” (AT, VI, 10). See also the second maxim of Descartes’s provisional morals (discussed below) and the conclusion of the morals: “ie m’aurais de faire vne reueuë sur les diuerses occupations qu’ont les hommes en cete vie, pour tascher à faire choix de la meilleure; & ... ie pensay que ie ne pouuois mieux que de continuer en celle la mesme ou ie me trouuois, c’est a dire, que d’employer toute ma vie a cultiuer ma raison, & m’auancer, autant que ie pourrois, en la connoissance de la verité, suiuant la Method que ie m’estois prescrite” (AT, VI, 27). Commenting on the discovery of a copy of *De la Sagesse* purportedly given to Descartes precisely in the winter of 1619 by a Jesuit named Molitor (see de Buzon 1994, 1–3), Rodis-Lewis suggests that this “personne sage” is this Jesuit (1995, 76). I find more likely that this is Charron himself.

¹⁶ “pour toutes les opinions que i’auois recuës iusques alors en ma creance, ie ne pouuois mieux faire que d’entreprendre, vne bonne fois, de les en oster” (AT, VI, 13). In the third part of the *Discourse*, also referring to the thoughts he had in 10 November 1619, he says that apart from the moral maxims (which, as I point out below, are also present in Charron’s *Sagesse*) and the truths of faith (which Charron also claims to exclude from the scope of the wise man’s *epochè* (PTS, 859–860), “pour tout le reste de mes opinions, ie pouuois librement entreprendre de m’en defaire” (AT, VI, 28).

This presence of Charron at a crucial moment of Descartes's intellectual life, when he probably discovered the way to a new universal science based on the mathematical method of the geometers, suggests that Descartes considered his method and the new philosophy that could be construed with it to be a response to Charron in which he takes in account Charron's model of Academic skepticism and his rejection of Aristotelian dogmatic science. Descartes's project can be seen against this Charronian background (represented in the frontispiece of *De la Sagesse*) as a radical reformation of Science that would enable it to climb to the pedestal of Wisdom, replacing Charron's skeptical one. By reforming Science to meet Charron's skeptical challenge, Descartes would propose, as he summarizes his mission in his dream, "la Philosophie & la Sagesse jointes ensemble."¹⁷

5.2 Theology

Descartes's reformed philosophy is found—as he says in the full title of *La Recherche de la Vérité*—"par la lumière naturelle ... sans emprunter le secours de la Religion ni de la Philosophie." The autonomy of Cartesian science *vis-à-vis* established philosophy and religion is also affirmed in the *Discourse*. Descartes considered another title to this work: "*Le projet d'une Science vniuerselle qui puisse éleuer nostre nature à son plus haut degré de perfection*" (to Mersenne, March 1636, AT, I, 339). This elevation is made possible by the recovery of the purity of the natural light and thus makes abstraction of any supernatural improvement to human nature due to grace ("sans le emprunter le secours de la Religion") and requires the elimination of all acquired beliefs that could compromise it, notably "sans ... le secours de la Philosophie," the established Peripatetic/scholastic philosophy of the time. He thus conceives of theology as revealed supernatural theology, whose business is reduced in the *Discourse* to "gagner le ciel" (AT, VI, 6). Because the revealed truths are above human understanding, Descartes did not dare to submit them "à la foiblesse de mes raisonnemens" given that in order to successfully examine them "il estoit besoin d'auoir quelque extraordinaire assistance du ciel, & d'estre plus qu'homme" (AT, VI, 8). This seems to exclude rational or speculative theology: "le chemin [du ciel] n'est pas moins ouuert aux plus ignorans

¹⁷In his commentary on the *Discourse*, Gilson says that Descartes's conception of a human science independent of theology comes from Montaigne, Charron and the Christian stoicism of the period. The major difference according to him between the Cartesian and the Renaissance conceptions of wisdom is that while the latter is either based on erudition or empty (he cites Charron's rejection of "wisdom" based on erudition and memory), "[a]vec Descartes, au contraire, la pensée moderne débouche en quelque sorte de la Renaissance. En choisissant les mathématiques comme type de la science, Descartes fait passer la science de la mémoire à la raison. Il peut donc joindre ses critiques à celles de Montaigne et de Charron contre l'érudition scolaire qui garnit la mémoire sans former le jugement." (Gilson 1947, 94).

qu'aux plus doctes" (AT, VI, 8).¹⁸ In contrast to theological investigations, which require the supernatural aid of grace, he rates the search he endeavours to pursue through his recovered natural light the most "solidement bonne & importante" occupation "entre les occupations des *hommes purement hommes*." (AT, VI, 3).

In the preface to *De la Sagesse*, Charron distinguishes human from divine wisdom. Although divine wisdom may "crown" human wisdom, they are in principle autonomous. The divine relates to God, the human to the "Nature pure et entiere" (S, 27). While the former "monte plus haut, s'attent et s'occupe aux vertus infuses ... visant principalement au bien et salut eternel d'un chascun" (S, 30), human wisdom is "l'excellence et perfection de l'homme comme homme ... celui est homme sage qui sçait bien et excellemment faire l'homme" (S, 32–33).¹⁹

The insulation of philosophy from theology is the ground of Charron's and Descartes's similar responses to the charge raised against both of Pelagianism.²⁰ They rely on the autonomy of philosophy *vis-à-vis* theology to argue that their works concern human beings naturally considered (moral philosophy) and not supernaturally conceived (the business of theology, with which Descartes does not deal at all and Charron not in *De la Sagesse*).²¹ The autonomy of philosophy allows Charron to claim that his sage accomplishes the perfection of human nature, which includes his ability to perform genuinely good actions (the perfect "preud'homie"),²² and Descartes to accomplish his "projet d'une Science universelle qui puisse élever nostre nature à son plus haut degré de perfection."²³ The strict distinction of philosophy from theology (the natural from the supernatural) avoids that the achievement of human perfection and genuinely good actions could entail the Pelagian heresy for such perfection and good actions, being natural, have no bearing to salvation, which requires supernatural grace. Descartes explains to Mersenne (27 April 1637) that

¹⁸To Mersenne, 15 April 1630, Descartes says that "ce que ie nomme proprement Theologie" is "ce qui depend de la reuelation" (AT, I, 144).

¹⁹More on Charron's view of the excellence and limited perfection of wisdom in Chap. 2, Sects. 2.3 and 2.4.

²⁰A heresy combatted by Augustine which dismisses the consequences of original sin. Charron's and Descartes's replies are based on Molinism.

²¹When Charron distinguishes human from divine wisdom and says that in *De la Sagesse* he deals only with the former, he says he discusses the latter in his theological works, *Les Trois Veritez* and the *Discours Chrétiens* (S, 28).

²²"Il faut que la preud'homie, naisse en luy par luy mesme, c'est à dire, par le ressort interne que Dieu y a mis, et non par aucun autre externe estranger, par aucune occasion ou induction ... je veux en mon sage une preud'homie essentielle et invincible, qui tienne de soy mesme, et par sa propre racine, et qui aussi peu s'en puisse arracher et separer, que l'humanité de l'homme: Je veux que jamais il ne consente au mal" (S, II, 3, 421–422).

²³The passage of the *Discourse* which suscitated the accusation of Pelagianism is the following: "nostre volonté ne se portant a suivre ny a fuir aucune chose, que selon que nostre entendement luy represente bonne ou mauvaise, il suffit de bien juger, pour bien faire, & de juger le mieux qu'on puisse, pour faire aussy tout son mieux, c'est a dire, pour acquerir toutes les vertus, & ensemble tous les autres biens, qu'on puisse acquerir" (AT, VI, 28). The similarity with Charron's position is remarkable.

“le *bien faire* dont ie parle ne se peut entendre en termes de Theologie, où il est parlé de la Grace, mais *seulement de Philosophie morale & naturelle*, où cette Grace n'est point considerée; en sorte qu'on ne me peut accuser pour cela de l'erreur des Pelagians” (AT, I, 366).²⁴ In the *Petit Traité*, Charron replies to those who “s'offensent en ce que je recommande et fais tant valoir la loy de nature, comme si je voulois dire qu'elle est suffisante, et forclorre la grace... Il est vray que je ne fais pas de grands et longs discours de la grace et des vertus Theologales; Pourquoi en ferois-je? Je sortirois de mon sujet et de mon prix fait, qui est de la Sagesse humaine et non de la divine, des *actions simplement, naturellement, et moralement bonnes*, et non des meritoires. Joins que cette grace est chose qui n'est point de nostre estude, acquist, labeur, de laquelle il ne faut point faire de longs discours ny enseignemens: car c'est un pur don de Dieu” (PTS, 861–862).²⁵

5.3 Philosophy

I turn now to the other body of knowledge also set aside in *La Recherche de la Vérité par la lumière naturelle*. Descartes's diagnosis of the philosophy of his time in the first part of the *Discourse* is essentially the diagnosis of this philosophy given by the skeptics of his time, notably by Charron.

Je ne diray rien de la Philosophie, sinon que, voyant qu'elle a esté cultiuée par les plus excellens esprits qui ayent vescu depuis plusieurs siecles, & que neanmoins *il ne s'y trouue encore aucune chose dont on ne dispute*, & par consequent qui ne soit douteuse, ie n'auois point assés de presumption pour esperer d'y rencontrer mieus que les autres; et que, considerant combien il peut y auoir de *diuerses opinions, touchant vne mesme matiere, qui soient soustenuës* par des gens doctes, sans qu'il y en puisse auoir iamais plus d'une seule qui soit vraye, ie reputois presque pour faux tout ce qui n'estoit que vraysemblable. (AT, VI, 8).

The skeptical context of the passage is Montaignian (if the best minds attempted in vain to find the truth, truth is hardly discoverable at all).²⁶ But more importantly, the skeptical argument Descartes presents here to reject established philosophy is Sextus' mode of *diaphonia*. Because “there has arisen both amongst

²⁴See also the letter to Mersenne of March 1642: “Pelagius a dit qu'on pouuoit faire de bonnes oeuvres & meriter la Vie eternelle sans la Grace, ce qui a esté condamné de l'Eglise; & moy, ie dis qu'on peut connoistre par la raison naturelle que Dieu existe, mais ie ne dis pas pour cela que cette connoissance naturelle merite de soy, & sans la Grace, la Gloire surnaturelle que nous attendons dans le Ciel. Car, au contraire, il est evident que, cette Gloire estant surnaturelle, il faut des forces plus que naturelles pour la meriter” (AT, III, 544).

²⁵Although Charron, like Descartes, conceives of theology as supernatural revealed theology and uses this conception to claim the autonomy of philosophy, he is not as coherent as Descartes on this separation between divine and humane wisdom for he argues that human wisdom is necessary—although not sufficient, else he would be Pelagian—for receiving grace (see S, II, 3, 434). In Maia Neto (1997), I suggested that Descartes finds in the Molinist theologians his argument against the charge of Pelagianism. I now think that Descartes's relation to Molinism was probably mediated by his close and early reading of Charron.

²⁶Montaigne, *Essais*, II, 12, 501–502.

ordinary people and amongst philosophers an interminable conflict ... we are unable either to choose a thing or to reject it, and so fall back on suspension” (PH I.165). This is the skeptical trope most used by Charron, the one which most deeply informs his skepticism: “Cette surceance est fondée premierement sur ces propositions tant celebrées parmy les sages, qu’il n’y a rien de certain, que nous sçavons rien ... *Que de toutes choses l’on peut également disputer*, que nous ne faisons que quæster, ... tattoner à l’entour des apparences, *scimus nihil, opinamur verisimilia*, ... qu’il n’y a opinion aucune tenuë de tous et par tout, *aucune qui ne soit debatue et contestée, qui n’en aye une contraire tenuë et soutenuë*, que toutes choses ont deux anses et deux visages” (S, II, 2, 399–400).

Why does Descartes say it would be a “presumption” his eventual entrance in the philosophical conflict? Sextus’ trope usually works in connection with four others, the five being known as the five or Agrippian modes: infinite regress, relativity, hypothesis, and diallelus (or circular reasoning). Suppose a dogmatist affirms *p*. Because there is someone else who denies *p*, in order to avoid suspension of judgment due to the equipollence between *p* and not-*p* the dogmatist is forced to prove *p*. He thus says that *p* follows from *q*. But again, there is somebody else who denies *q*, so to avoid suspension of judgment he is forced to prove *q*. He can now do this either by bringing in another proposition *r*, which will lead to same problem again and thus to an infinite regress, or he will rely on *p* itself to justify *q*, in which case the skeptic will accuse him of circular reasoning. According to Sextus, the dogmatist’s last resource is “to take as [his] starting point something which [he] doe[s] not establish by argument but claim to assume as granted simply and without demonstration” (PH I.168). But this is the mode of hypothesis, which also leads to suspension of judgment because the skeptic claims that “if the author of the hypothesis is worthy of credence, we shall be no less worthy of credence every time that we make the opposite hypothesis” (PH I.173). The skeptic thus re-establishes equipollence that leads to *epochè* and charges the dogmatist with presumption.²⁷

Charron’s skepticism is based on the articulation of *diaphonia* with hypothesis in the consideration of any philosophical principle. Because the variety of customs and beliefs indicates that there is no universally accepted principle,²⁸ the dogmatist’s pretension to universal truth ignores the equal authority that obtains among men.²⁹ Charron understands claims to knowledge to be received by other people as

²⁷“For, after our solid arguments, we deem it quite proper to poke fun at those conceited braggarts, the Dogmatists” (PH I.62).

²⁸Charron uses extensively the 10th mode based on the discrepancy of values, customs, and beliefs (PH I. 145–163), that was fed, re-enforced, and enlarged at the time by the reports coming from the new world. Of course a major source for him is Montaigne’s *Essais*, in particular the one on the cannibals (E, I, 31). See Chap. 4 for La Mothe Le Vayer’s exploitation of this mode. For the impact of the New World in modern skepticism, see Marcondes (2009).

²⁹“Mais ils [the dogmatists] veulent que l’on se sous-mette souverainement et en dernier ressort à certains principes, qui est une injuste tyrannie” (S, II, 2, 402). “A ceux qui combattent par presupposition, il leur faut presupposer, au contraire, le mesme axiome dequoy on debat. Car toute presupposition humaine et toute enunciation a autant d’autorité que l’autre, si la raison n’en faict la difference. Ainsi il les faut toutes mettre à la balance; et premierement les generalles, et celles qui nous tyrannisent” (E, II, 12, 540–541).

unquestionable principles as a “tour de force” unacceptable in the inward realm of judgment (for it contradicts freedom of judgment and intellectual integrity). Principles can be imposed non-epistemically by legitimate political authorities (in which case they are “accepted” on a strictly behavioural level, do not involve assent, so preserve intellectual integrity and freedom)³⁰ or by God. Charron reconciles his *diaphonic* skepticism with theology (conceived as supernatural revealed theology) in the following way. *Diaphonia* obtains only between equals, that is, among human beings who have equal authority as human beings. But God has no parity with man.³¹ One could adapt Sextus' formula to the case of God by saying that God is infinitely more worthy of credence than any human being. So God can lay down propositions or principles that legitimately command assent even though they are not proved (nor could they be, given the infinite abyss that separates man and God). Because God's statements (revelation) do not constitute Pyrrhonian hypotheses, no equipollence can be established against them and consequently the Christian revelation falls outside the scope of *epochè*.³²

A few important consequences follow from this absolute lack of equipollence between man's and God's principles. First, it explains Charron's view that “la vérité n'est pas un aquest, ny chose qui se laisse prendre et manier, et encore moins posséder à l'esprit humain. Elle loge dedans le sein de Dieu” (S, I, 14, 138). This implies a difference between Charron (and in general, early modern skepticism) and ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism.³³ It also poses a serious difficulty to those who interpret Charron's skepticism (Gregory 1967) or moral philosophy (Faye 1998) as anti-religious. Second, it results from the fact that truth is exclusive to God that

³⁰I return to this point in connection to Descartes's first moral maxim.

³¹See Charron, *Les Trois Vérités*, chapter 1 “Discours de la cognoissance de Dieu” and his *Discours Chrétiens*, “de la cognoissance de Dieu” in *Oeuvres* (1970). Charron's source is Montaigne: “Or n'y peut-il avoir des principes aux hommes, si la divinité ne les leur a revelez: de tout le demeurant, et le commencement, et le milieu, et la fin, ce n'est que songe et fumée” (E, II, 12, 540).

³²“Qui est celuy au monde qui aye droit de commander et donner la loy au monde, sassujettir les esprits, et donner les principes qui ne soyent plus examinables, que l'on ne puisse plus nier ou douter, que Dieu seul le Souverain esprit et le vray principe du monde, qui seul est à croire pour ce qu'il le dit? Tout autre est sujet à l'examen et à opposition, c'est foiblesse de s'y assujettir. Si l'on veut que je m'assujettisse aux principes, je diray ... accordés vous premierement de ces principes, et puis je m'y sous-mettray” (S, II, 2, 403). Of course this concerns only genuine divine revelation. Religion as a mere human institution often constitutes superstition, which is entirely subject to skeptical *zetesis* and *epochè*. See Chap. 4 for La Mothe le Vayer's development of Charron's attack on superstition. Note also that Descartes's exception of revealed theology from the scope of his doubt (AT, VI, 28) has a similar justification.

³³In Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2, I argue that Charron's view is similar to Plutarch's—and, though to a less extent, also Cicero's—Academic one. In the previous chapters, I argue that the skepticism of Charron's, La Mothe Le Vayer's and the Gassendi of the *Exercitationes* can be characterized as *ephetic*.

human cognition is definitely limited to appearances or the “vraisemblable.”³⁴ As Charron says in the passage quoted above, *scimus nihil*, for certain knowledge of the nature/essence of things is possible only for God, who made them, and suffers no limitation of intellect and body. As far as we finite and limited human beings are concerned, *opinamur verisimilia*. Descartes’s own diagnosis of established philosophy as only “vraisemblable” results from his verification of *diaphonia* and corresponds exactly to Charron’s (and the skeptics’ of his time) diagnosis of this or any dogmatic philosophy. The major difference here is that, unlike Charron, Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer, Descartes does not accept this “vraisemblable,” so he considers the whole established philosophy as false, hoping to build a new one on a foundation immune to skepticism.³⁵

Charron’s view that no man has the right to pretend that his opinions be accepted as universal truths also explains Descartes’s claim that in the context of established philosophical *diaphonia*, he suspended judgment because “n’avois point assés de *presomption* pour esperer d’y [the truth] rencontrer mieux que les autres” (AT, VI, 8). I showed in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2, that Charron dedicates a whole chapter of book I to presumption. He describes there three successive and increasing degrees of presumption: (1) “croire ou mescroire;” (2) “affermer ... ou reprouver certainement et opiniatremment ce que l’on a legerement creu ou mescreu;” and (3) “persuader;” above all the “propositions generales et fondamentales, qu’ils [the dogmatists] appellent principes ... desquelles ils enseignent n’estre permis de douter ou disputer;” but which, “si l’on vient à examiner ... l’on y trouvera de la fausseté ... et ... autant d’apparence aux propositions contraires” (S, I, 40, 278). It is in the context of *diaphonia* and of equal authority among man (Pyrrhonian hypothesis) that holding a philosophical doctrine as truth (and pretending that it be universally received) appears as a major exhibition of presumption, for it is an attempt to strike skeptical balance (equipollence) by disregarding the equal moral authority of human beings.³⁶

After neutralizing theology and rejecting established philosophy, in the *Discourse* Descartes relates some preambles to methodical doubt. These are either precautions that must be taken before universal doubt, or attitudes that motivate or facilitate the endeavour. Three such previous conditions are examined below: Descartes’s indication of what kinds of people should not adventure in the route of doubt; the need of a provisional morality to safeguard the life of the inquirer from the universality and

³⁴“tournoyant tousjours et tatonnant à l’entour des apparences ... nous sommes nais à quester la verité: la posseder appartient à une plus haute et grande puissance” (S, I, 14, 138). See Cicero, *Tusc disp* I.23.

³⁵“ie reputois presque pour faux tout ce qui n’estoit que vraysemblable”(AT, VI, 8). In Maia Neto (2013), I examine Descartes’s attack on probability against the background of the reception of this skeptic Academic doctrine by Montaigne, Charron and La Mothe Le Vayer.

³⁶Note that presumption here appears in the context of *diaphonic* established philosophy. It will not appear, according to Descartes, in the context of his new philosophy, where the work of hyperbolic doubt restored the purity of the natural light of reason, thereby eliminating any ground for conflict or *diaphonia*. I return to this point below, showing that Descartes takes into account Charron’s own explication of *diaphonia*.

radical nature of methodical doubt (which includes the indication that the scope of the reform to be undertaken is inward, i.e. concerns only beliefs, and not at all the institutional (political or educational) level); and the experience of travelling, which mitigates assent and thus prepares for hyperbolic doubt.

5.4 Pedants and Vulgar Men

Descartes says that the method of doubt is not for everybody. Two kinds of people should not attempt to get rid of all received opinions. The first group is compounded by those whom,

se croyans plus habiles qu'ils ne sont, ne se peuuent empescher de precipiter leurs iugemens, ny auoir assez de patience pour conduire par ordre toutes leurs pensées: d'où vient que, s'ils auoient vne fois pris la liberté de douter des principes qu'ils ont receus, & de s'escarter du chemin commun, iamais ils ne pourroient tenir le sentier qu'il faut prendre pour aller plus droit, & demeureroient esgarez toute leur vie.

The second group is formed by those who “ayant assez de raison, ou de modestie, pour iuger qu'ils sont *moins capables* de distinguer le vray d'avec le faux, que quelques autres par lesquels ils peuuent *estre instruits*, doiuent bien plustost se contenter de *suiure les opinions de ces autres*, qu'en chercher eux mesmes de meilleures” (AT, VI, 15).

This passage comes from *Sagesse* II, chapter 43, on the difference among men due to their different intellectual capacities. Charron distinguishes three groups that form a pyramid: the vulgar man, which constitutes the gross majority of men, is on the base; the pedant—“gens ... de l'eschole et du ressort d'Aristote; affirmatifs, positifs, dogmatistes” (S, I, 43, 291)—is in the middle; and on the top are the wise men or those who may become wise men by following the rules presented in *De la Sagesse*. These rules comprise, essentially, getting rid of all received opinions and attaining the universality and freedom of *epochè* (these are the two “dispositions” to wisdom; book II, chapters 1 and 2). The pedants “font profession de suffisance, science, *habilité*; Mais qui ... *ne se jugent pas assés, s'arrestent* à ce que l'on tient communément” (S, I, 43, 291). In the *Petit Traité de Sagesse*, Charron adds that the disposition to get rid of all received opinions is not for them for “l'esprit *s'esgarera* et se perdra, se remplissant de foles et fausses opinions” (857).³⁷ What Descartes adds to Charron's passage is their inability to “conduire par ordre toutes leurs pensées,” which derives from his own method inspired in geometry. But the basic reason why these pedants cannot undertake universal doubt is, for both Charron and Descartes, the fact that they do not exercise their faculty of judgment and reason in its perfection. They have not recovered the purity of the natural light, so cannot avoid prevention and precipitation. That Descartes gets his distinction from this

³⁷“Entreprendra d'examiner tout, et iuger la plupart des choses plausiblement receuës du monde, ridicules et absurdes, trouvant par tout de l'apparence, passera par dessus tout: et ce faisant il est à craindre qu'il *s'esgare* et se perde” (S, I, 14, 140).

chapter of Charron is further attested by Charron's characterization of the vulgar man in the same passage: "esprits foibles et plats, de basse et *petite capacité*, nez pour obeir, servir et *être menés*" (S, I, 43, 291).³⁸

The important conclusion here is that the type of people Descartes finds capable of eliminating all received opinions to find the *cogito* and eventually the new Cartesian science reconciled with wisdom is the same type (or at least a subclass) of those few Charron finds capable of achieving *ephetic* Academic wisdom.

5.5 Provisional Morality

Only a few may follow the way of doubt, and even these should first take the precaution of holding a provisional moral code. Because all beliefs will be discharged, a moral guide—even if provisional—is needed to secure practical life. The provisional morality is the part of Descartes's philosophy that has been most often related to Charron's *Sagesse*.³⁹ My contribution is to point out the Charronian connection that is relevant to the issues of doubt and skepticism in each Cartesian maxim.

The first general point is that because Descartes's provisional morality is to be held while the inquirer rejects all his acquired beliefs through universal doubt, it clearly cannot involve holding beliefs (except the moral maxims themselves and the truths of supernatural theology, for the reason indicated in Sect. 5.2 above).⁴⁰ It is thus natural that Descartes would look for such rules in *De la Sagesse*, for Charron's aim in this book is precisely to present a morals for a wise man whose motto is "je ne sçais."

Descartes's third maxim is "tascher tousiours plustost a me vaincre que la fortune, & a changer mes desirs que l'ordre du monde; et generalement, de m'accoustumer a croire qu'il n'y a rien qui soit entierement en nostre pouuoir, que nous pensées" (AT, VI, 25). As has been extensively pointed out, this maxim is Stoic. It reflects the neo-Stoicism of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Of the three moral maxims, it is the one least directly found in Charron, although

³⁸ Montaigne is, once more, Charron's likely source: "Les sçavans à qui touche la jurisdiction livresque, ne connoissent autre prix que de la doctrine, et n'advouent autre proceder en noz esprits que celui de l'erudition et de l'art: ... Qui ignore Aristote, selon eux s'ignore quand et quand soymesme. Les ames communes et populaires ne voyent pas la grace et le pois d'un discours hautain et deslié. Or, ces deux especes occupent le monde. La tierce, à qui vous tombez en partage, des ames réglées et fortes d'elles-mesmes, est si rare que justement elle n'a ny nom, ny rang entre nous: c'est à demy temps perdu, d'aspirer et de s'efforcer à luy plaire" (E, II, 17, 657). Charron gives a name to this third type, the Academic wise man, who has an *esprit* strong enough to avoid error by suspending judgment.

³⁹ See Sirven (1928, 262–273), Boase (1935, 209–237), Rodis-Lewis (1994), Faye (1998, 296–299).

⁴⁰ "Après m'estre ainsi assuré de ces maximes, & les auoir mises a part, avec les veritez de la foy, qui ont tousiours esté les premieres en ma creance, ie iugay que, pour tout le reste de mes opinions, je pouuois librement entreprendre de m'en defaire" (AT, VI, 28).

one can pick up pieces of it scattered in *De la Sagesse*,⁴¹ a work itself influenced by the neo-Stoic movement, in particular by Du Vair.⁴² The emphasized part of the maxim has the Stoic thrust developed by Descartes in his explication of the maxim (namely, to be indifferent towards that which is not within one's power) but it also has an important connection to universal doubt. It indicates that what is being reformed—what we are in conditions to fully reform—is our judgment, and not at all what lies outside us. (This is also dealt with by Descartes in his first maxim, examined below). Charron makes precisely this connection when he says that “c'est l'office de l'esprit genereux et de l'homme sage ... d'examiner toutes choses ... de bonne foy et sans passion, au niveau de la verité ... sans le flater et tacher son jugement de fausseté; et se contenter de rendre l'observance et obeissance à [les loix et coutumes] ... mais nous luy satisfaisons tenant notre jugement et nos opinions saintes et justes selon elle. Car aussi nous n'avons rien nôtre, et dequoy nous puissions librement disposer que de cela, le monde n'a que faire de nos pensées” (S, II, 8, 500).⁴³

Descartes's second maxim is “d'estre le plus ferme & le plus resolu en mes actions que ie pourrois” (AT, VI, 24). When he presents the maxim to Elizabeth (4 August 1645), he removes the provisional character of its earlier presentation in the *Discourse* (where the point is to be firm in the observance of actions based even on dubious beliefs), and is put forward as containing Descartes's particular conception of virtue. “La seconde, qu'il ait *vne ferme & constante resolution d'executer tout ce que la raison luy conseillera*, sans que ses passions ou ses appetis l'en detournent; & c'est la fermeté de cete resolution, que ie croy devoir estre prise pour la vertu, bien que ie ne sçache point que personne l'ait iamais ansy expliquée” (AT, IV, 265). As has been noted by Faye (1998, 297–298), this formulation is similar to Charron's, whose definition of “preud'homie” (virtue) is “une droite et ferme disposition de la volonté, à suivre le conseil de la raison” (S, II, 3, 429).⁴⁴

⁴¹ “& que faisant, comme on dit, de necessité vertu, nous ne desirerons pas dauantage d'estre sains, estant malades, ou d'estre libres, estant en prison” (AT, VI, 26). “Il n'y a point de meilleur remede, que de vouloir ce qu'elle veut; et selon l'advis de sagesse faire de necessité vertu” (S, III, 20, 734).

⁴² Charron acknowledges that he has “fort servy” of Du Vair in the chapters on the passions (S, I, 153). On Du Vair's influence on Charron's *De la Sagesse*, see Kogel (1972, 30) and Tarrête (2008).

⁴³ See also Charron's chapter on the will: “La volonté est un grande piece, de tresgrand importance, et doibt l'homme estudier sur tout à la bien regler ... elle seule est vrayement nostre et en nostre puissance” (S, I, 17, 151).

⁴⁴ See also the *Petit Traité*: “Le sixiesme office et traict du sage qui regarde la volonté, est une forte et ferme probité et preud'homme, laquelle naisse en luy par lui-mesme, c'est à dire par la consideration qu'il est homme” (PTS, 842). The seventh feature of wisdom in the PTS is “viser et se conduire tousjours selon nature et raison” (PTS, 845). Faye and Kogel give Charron's probable source (which could also have been Descartes's) in Du Vair: “Le bien donc de l'homme consistera en l'usage de la droite raison, qui est à dire en la vertu, laquelle n'est autre chose que la ferme disposition de notre volonté à suivre ce qui est honnete et convenable ... le bien de l'homme et la perfection de sa nature consiste en une droite disposition de sa volonté à user des choses qui se présentent selon la raison” (*Philosophie Morale*, pp. 66–67, *apud* Kogel 1972, 62).

This firm resolution to follow reason in Charron means above all the exercise of intellectual integrity (which for Charron is the perfect use of judgment, the faculty which is essential to human beings),⁴⁵ liberating the sage, in neo-Academic fashion, from all acquired opinions and thus keeping him in *epochè*.⁴⁶ In Descartes, it has a crucial role in the resolution to doubt. When he introduces his methodical rules, he says that four would suffice “pouruè que ie prisse vne *ferme & constante resolution* de ne manquer pas vne seule fois a les observer” (AT, VI, 18), which is the only way the application of the rule that commands intellectual integrity (known as the rule of evidence) can provide the elimination of all received opinions.⁴⁷ Descartes’s elimination of the acquired beliefs is deliberated and radical. Paganini points out that one major difference between Cartesian and ancient doubt concerns the role of the will (active in Descartes, passive in the ancient skeptics) and that this is one Charronian innovation in the skeptical tradition closely related to the notion of methodical doubt.⁴⁸ The ancient Pyrrhonian skeptic is led to *epochè* involuntarily, prompted by the conflicting appearances that disturb him and by his habit of investigating them in the skeptical way, that is, through and through until finding equipollence. There is no resolution to doubt. Charron’s wise-to-be is not the ancient Pyrrhonian-to-be who is led to examine issues in order to find relief from some disturbing conflict. He, in a way similar to the ancient Academic skeptics, takes the resolution to get rid of all received opinions and to this purpose voluntarily considers the reasons of doubt.⁴⁹

Descartes’s first maxim is the most entirely Charronian, both in the sense that it is stated in Charron in its entirety and in the sense that it is the most fundamental for Charron. It is also the most provisional of the maxims (it is the only one not presented to Elizabeth) and—what explains this—the most skeptical.⁵⁰ While the other two can be modified to be consistent with an established doctrinal philosophy, the first (this being also a possible reason it is the first in the *Discourse*) is valid only as long as no new beliefs are found satisfactory by reason. As no such beliefs are found by Charron, this maxim holds supreme in *De la Sagesse*.

⁴⁵“Le vray office de l’homme, son plus propre et plus naturel exercice, sa plus digne occupation est de juger” (S, I, 2, 389).

⁴⁶The originality of Charron’s definition of *preud’homie* in face of Du Vair’s (which makes him a much more likely source of Descartes than the neo-Stoic) lies in this application of the firmness of the will to follow a skeptical reason.

⁴⁷Voluntarism is also required to take as false what is just doubtful (AT, VI, 31).

⁴⁸“l’epochè si configura nelle pagine charroniane come un moto energetico di liberazione dal complesso delle credenze, moto che richiede dunque una disciplina ed un esercizio intenzionali tanto dell’intelletto quanto della volontà, secondo una linea di pensiero che giungerà sino a Descartes, con la trasformazione del dubbio da accadimento subito in metodo consapevole e riflesso” (Paganini 1991, 28). See also Paganini (2008b).

⁴⁹See Chap. 2, end of Sect. 2.3.

⁵⁰The maxim is presented in Sextus as one of the four practical rules followed by the Pyrrhonians—PH I.24. It is crucial to explain the Academic position (against philosophical religion but not at all irreligious) in Cicero’s *De Natura Deorum* (see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2).

Descartes's first maxim is "*d'obeir aux lois et aux coutumes de mon païs, retenant constamment la religion en laquelle Dieu m'a fait la grace d'estre instruit dès mon enfance, & me gouvernant, en toute autre chose, suiuvante les opinions les plus modérées, & les plus esloignées de l'excés, qui fussent communement receuës en pratique par les mieux sensez de ceux avec lesquels i'aurois a viure*" (AT, VI, 22–23). Charron's fourth office of wisdom (second in the *Petit Traité*) is precisely "*obeir et observer les loix, coutumes, et ceremonies du pays*" (S, II, 8, 489). He justifies and details the rule in the following way: "En premier lieu selon tous les sages, la regle des regles, et la generale loy des loix, est de suyvre et observer les *loix et coutumes du païs ou l'on est ... Evitant soigneusement toute singularité et particularité extravagante, escartée du commun et ordinaire*" (S, II, 8, 497). Following Montaigne, he explains that this obedience is due "non pour la justice et équité qui soit en elles ... mais librement et simplement pour la reverence publique, et à cause de leur autorité: les loix et coutumes se maintiennent en credit non pource qu'elles sont justes et bonnes, mais pource qu'elles sont loix et coutumes, c'est le fondement mystique de leur autorité" (S, II, 8, 498).⁵¹ Charron's remark that this obedience does not involve assent makes explicit the skeptical nature of this maxim (that it is a practical rule precisely for those who have suspended judgment) and explains the sense and role of the maxim in Descartes's provisional morals.⁵²

Paganini (1991, 30) has indicated that although this is a traditional ancient Pyrrhonian practical rule, in Charron it acquires a new and important dimension. In Charron this skeptical attitude is construed as involving a kind of duplicity absent from ancient skepticism between the wise man's inward (*foro interno*) and his outward behaviour (*foro externo*). Charron's wise man is aware that sometimes he performs an action that he finds gratuitous from the rational point of view. The sage finds tranquillity in this autonomous and secure inward realm preserved from the contingencies and fragility of the external world. Charron (developing a position already present in Montaigne) thus gives philosophical moral relevance to the skeptic's subjectivity, thereby providing a remarkable innovation *vis-à-vis* ancient

⁵¹"Or les loix se maintiennent en credit, non par ce qu'elles sont justes, mais par ce qu'elles sont loix. C'est le fondement mystique de leur autorité" (*Essais*, III, 13, 1072).

⁵²Gilson, who remarks the presence of the maxim in *De la Sagesse*, points out that it "n'engage ... aucunement l'adhésion de la pensée aux usages reçus et laisse intact le problème théorique de la vérité qui s'y rapporte" (Gilson 1947, 235). This maxim is also related—as Gilson notices—to the political conservatism of Charron and Descartes. In this same chapter, Charron has a paragraph "Contre les novateurs des loix." He notes that although there are and have been many "loix au monde injustes," people have lived with them "en profonde paix et repos" for "la nature humaine s'accommode à tout avec le temps." For this reason, attempts at radical social and political reform "produit tousjours plus et plustost mal que bien, il apporte des maux tout certains et presens, pour un bien à venir et incertain" (S, II, 8, 498–499). Descartes says that social institutions and laws should not be reformed in the radical way he is reforming his thoughts "[p]uis, pour leurs imperfections, s'ils en ont, comme la seule diuersité qui este entre eux suffit pour assurer que plusieurs en ont (a Charronian skeptical point), l'vsage les a sans doute fort adoucies ... Et enfin, elles sont quasi tousiours plus supportables que ne seroit leur changement" (AT, VI, 14). See Battista (1966) for a detailed analysis of the skeptical trust of Charron's political thought and its differences from Montaigne's.

skepticism that prepares the field for Descartes's dualism.⁵³ Of course there is an abyss between the Charronian and the Cartesian *ego* of the First and beginning of the Second Meditations⁵⁴ which accounts for the crucial difference between the former's skepticism and the latter's dogmatism. I argue below that the hyperbolic and metaphysical nature of Cartesian doubt is greatly responsible for transforming Charronian moral duality into Cartesian metaphysical dualism.

5.6 Traveling

Consider Charron's four main skeptical "reasons to doubt" (S, II, 2, 407–408): (1) conflict among philosophers; (2) diversity among men; (3) diversity of laws, customs and opinions; and (4) what has come out from the new world. *Diaphonia* underlines all four reasons. (1) is the classical statement of the trope. Charron's target here is above all the Aristotelian principles held by the "pedants." (2) corresponds to Aenesidemus' second mode based on the difference among human beings (PH I. 79–91) and (3)—which comes above all from (4)—to Aenesidemus' tenth mode based on the diversity of customs, laws, and beliefs (PH I. 145–163). Of the ten Aenesidemian modes, the tenth is most used by Charron. This reflects the great impact on European culture derived from the acquaintance with the people from the new world and better provides the kind of liberating experience Charron values in skepticism. Charron's reasons for doubt are conceived as means "[p]our obtenir cet esprit universel, cette generale indifference" (S, II, 2, 407). Charron's two "dispositions" to wisdom are (1st) "*exemption ... des erreurs, et vices du monde*" (S, II, 1, 376) to which "*sert le voyager*" and "*specialement qu'il entre en soy mesme, se tatte*" (S, II, 1, 376–377) and, second, freedom of judgment and of will, acquired through an universal doubt (*epochè*) in face of all philosophical opinions of pedants (philosophers) and all common opinions of the vulgar. "Or il se faut *affranchir* de cette brutalité ... voir tout ce monde visible, comme le trait d'une pointe tres delicate, et y lire une si generale et costante varieté, en toutes choses, tant d'*humeurs*, de jugemens, creances, coustumes, loix ... par là l'on apprend à se cognoistre, n'admirer rien ... *s'affermir* et resoudre par tout. (S, II, 2, 407).⁵⁵

If we now turn to Descartes's description of his own personal doubt and the way he prepares to reach universal methodical doubt as he reports in the *Discourse*, we find precisely this passage from verification of *diaphonia* among philosophers

⁵³Myles Burnyeat argues that idealism is not a philosophical position tenable in the context of ancient philosophy. The "appearances" or *phenomena* that the Pyrrhonians accepted as guide of their practical life could not possibly be considered as (philosophical) true. Referring to Descartes's certainty of his subjective states in the beginning of the Second Meditation, Burnyeat comments that "subjective truth has arrived to stay, constituting one's own experience as an object for description like any other" (1982, 38–39).

⁵⁴Although there is no such abyss with respect to Descartes's own personal doubt as described in parts I–III of the *Discourse*.

⁵⁵This is the aspect of Charron's skepticism most developed by La Mothe Le Vayer (see Chap. 4).

to its verification among ordinary beliefs and customs (10th trope) whose major consequence is precisely the mitigation of assent to acquired beliefs. Descartes resolves “de ne chercher plus d’autre science, que celle qui se pourroit *trouuer en moymesme*, ou bien dans le *grand liure du monde*, i’employay le reste de ma ieu- nesse à *voyasger*, a voir des cours & des armées, a frequenter des gens de *diuerses humeurs & conditions*” (AT, VI, 9), among which Descartes attests “quasi autant *diuersité* que i’auois fait auparauant entre les opinions des Philosophes. En sorte que le plus grand profit que i’en retirois, estoit que, voyant plusieurs choses qui, bien qu’elles nous semblent fort extrauagantes & ridicules, ne laissent pas d’estre communement receuës & approuuées par d’autres grans peuples,⁵⁶ i’apprenois a *ne rien croire trop fermement* de ce qui ne m’auait esté persuadé que par l’exemple & par la coustume; et ainsi ie me *deliurais peu a peu de beaucoup d’erreurs*, qui peuuent offusquer nostre lumière naturelle” (AT, VI, 10).

The crucial gain of confronting different people who hold different customs and beliefs is detachment from one’s own customs and beliefs. This detachment follows from the realization that one’s customs and beliefs are not natural but artificial and acquired. The experience of traveling (or of reading ethnographic reports from distant countries) thus permits the realization that one’s entrenched beliefs are not essential to reason but, on the contrary, compromise the integrity (pure nature, perfection) of the faculty of judgment. In Charron’s *époque* Descartes thus finds doubt used for the emancipation and assurance of the self.

5.7 Skeptics

Descartes’s reference to the skeptics in the *Discourse* is intriguing.⁵⁷ It appears in a context of many borrowings from Charron and in a paragraph in which he states the skeptical Charronian view of traveling as a way to mitigate assent. Notwithstanding, it contains a view of the skeptics emphatically denied not only by Charron but also by the skeptics of his time. Making the exception of “les veritez de la foy,”

pour tout le rest de mes opinions, ie pouuois *librement* entreprendre de m’en *defaire* ... Et en toutes les neuf années suiuanes, ie ne fi autre chose que rouler çà & là dans le monde, taschant d’y estre *spectateur plutost qu’acteur* en toutes les Comedies qui s’y iouent; ... ie *déracinois* pendant de mon esprit toutes les erreurs qui s’y estoient pû glisser auparauant.

⁵⁶“en voyasgeant, ayant reconnu que tous ceux qui ont des sentimens fort contraires aux nostres, ne sont pas, pour cela, *barbares* ...” (AT, VI, 16). Charron says in the chapter on the three kinds of *sprits* that the pedants “pensent que par tout est ainsi, ou doit estre: que si c’est autrement, ils fail- lent et sont *barbares*” (S, I, 43, 291). Gilson (1947, 291) refers to Montaigne’s essay on the can- nibals (E, I, 31, 205): “chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n’est pas de son usage.” The wording and the context of Descartes’s passage suggest that his source is Charron, not Montaigne. Charron is also the probable source of a similar passage in Gassendi’s *Exercitationes* cited in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.1.

⁵⁷For Descartes’s view of the skeptics in his whole corpus, see Lennon (2008, 62–77) and Paganini (2008a, 229–312).

Non que i'imitasse pour cela les *Sceptiques*, qui *ne doutent que pour douter*, & affectent d'estre tousiours *irresolus*: car, au contraire, tout mon dessein ne tendoit qu'a *m'assurer*, & a reietter la terre mouuante & le sable, pour trouuer le roc ou l'argile. (AT, VI, 28–29).⁵⁸

Charron's *Academic* skeptical aim could not be better stated than in this passage, if one means by “roc ou argile” not philosophical but practical assurance, the sense favoured by the context. Indeed, “la terre mouuante” is for Charron and his disciples Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer, as I argued respectively in Chaps. 3 and 4, the realm of the precarious fleeting opinions and beliefs that disturb and which must be rejected to get to *epochè*, the “roc ou argile,” construed as the recovery of the integrity (perfection) of the intellect. For Charron, it is precisely by removing the “sable” that one gets to the “roc.” *Epochè*, he says, is “la plus seure assiette, le plus heureux état de l'esprit, qui par ce moyen se tient ferme, droit, rassis, inflexible, tousjours libre et à soy” (S, II, 2, 404). In a passage from the *Petit Traité*, which I have already quoted in Chap. 2 to contrast Montaigne's own personal doubt, which the author of the *Essays* also attributes to the Pyrrhonians, from Charron's *Academic* doubt, Charron replies to those who “objectent que j'enseigne icy une incertitude *douteuse et fluctuante*, telle que des *Pyrrhoniens*, laquelle tient l'esprit en grande peine et agitation. [Mais] ce ne leur est point peine, ains au contraire un sejour, un repos, c'est la science des sciences, *la certitude des certitudes*” (PTS, 858–859). In the crucial chapter on intellectual freedom, major component of wisdom, Charron says that “Cette surceance [*epochè*] est fondée premierement sur ces propositions tant celebrées parmy les sages, qu'il n'y a rien de certain, que nous ne sçavons rien, quil n'y a rien en nature que le doute, *rien de certain que l'incertitude, solum certum nihil esse certi, hoc unum scio quod nil scio*” (S, II, 2, 399–400). Right after the passage in which Descartes opposes his purpose in doubting (to attain assurance) from the skeptics' (irresolution), he says he succeeded in his search because “taschant a descouuir la fausseté ou *l'incertitude des propositions* que i'examinois, non par de foibles coniectures, mais par des raisonemens clairs & assurez, ie n'en rencontrois point de si douteuses, que ie n'en tirasse tousiours quelque *conclusion assez certaine*, quand ce n'eust que cela mesme qu'elle *ne contenoit rien de certain*” (AT, VI, 29).⁵⁹

⁵⁸To begin with, the resolution of the will to get rid of all opinions, except those of faith, is a Charronian position. In the chapter on intellectual freedom (first disposition to wisdom), in which Charron recommends that one examine everything but assent to nothing, he says that “par *toutes choses*, et aucune chose (car il est dit, juger toutes choses, ne s'assurer d'aucune) nous n'entendons les veritez divines qui nos ont esté revelées, lesquelles il faut recevoir simplement avec toute humilité et soumission ... Mais nous entendons toutes autres choses sans exception” (S, II, 2, 388). Further, the detached attitude that Descartes expresses in the dramaturgic model is also recommended by Charron, “*demourant au mond sans estre du monde*,” it is necessary that the wise man “[descharge] *son ame de tous vices et opinions populaires*, et la r'avoit de cette confusion et captivité, pour la retirer à soy, et la mettre en liberté” (S, II, 1, 379).

⁵⁹Descartes denies that he had produced any positive philosophy before 1628/1629, despite the rumors to the contrary. “Je ne sçauois pas dire sur quoy ils fondoient cete opinion; & si i'y ay contribué quelque chose par mes discours, ce doit auoir esté en confessant plus ingenuément ce

Descartes could find the same kind of defence of the skeptics in Montaigne's *Apology for Raymond Sebond*,⁶⁰ in Gassendi's *Exercitationes*,⁶¹ in the skeptical dialogues of La Mothe Le Vayer,⁶² and in Gassendi's polemical work against Descartes himself, the *Disquisitio*. The view of the skeptics stated in the *Discourse* is related to the objection of *apraxia* raised by the dogmatists against the skeptics since Pyrrho (it was restated at Descartes's time by apologists such as Garasse). Significantly, Descartes presents a similar view of the skeptics in his reply to Gassendi's first objection to the Second Meditation. He says there that his rule to take as false what is uncertain and his universal doubt is not to be taken in ordinary life, for it would lead to the extravagant position of the skeptics who needed the help of friends to move around (AT, VII, 351). Gassendi's reply in his *Disquisitio* is most interesting. He finds Descartes's attack on the skeptics beside the point and wrong, and reverses the charge: the skeptics could live perfectly well because their doubt did not involve *phenomena*, but *phenomena* are included in Cartesian doubt, so it is Descartes who would be trapped in *apraxia* had he not confined his philosophy to the cabinet.⁶³

Descartes seems to have been aware that the doubt of the real skeptics does not have the disastrous consequences related by Diogenes Laertius. In the Seventh Replies to Bourdin, he says that there are skeptics in their time, those like himself, who found the established philosophy unsatisfactory but unlike himself, could not find a new certain one. Descartes's claim is historically accurate and he even implies awareness of the skeptical practical criterion of *phenomena*.⁶⁴ These apparently

que i'ignorois, que n'ont coustume de faire ceux qui ont vn peu estudié, & peustre aussy en faisant voir les raisons que i'auois de douter de beaucoup de choses que les autres estiment certaines, plutost qu'en me vantant d'aucune doctrine" (AT, VI, 30). Descartes is probably alluding to his rejection of Chandoux's philosophy on the bases that it was only "vraisemblable." See Baillet (1691, vol. 2, 160–166).

⁶⁰Montaigne, defending *époque* against assent to probability, says that it is "la plus seure assiete de nostre entendement, et la plus heureuse," a mental position "rassis, droit, inflexible, sans bransle et sans agitation" (E, II, 12, 562).

⁶¹Gassendi says, in a passage commented in Chap. 3, Sect. 3.3, that the skeptics, unlike the dogmatists, preserve freedom: "Nisi forte libertas illa nihili aestimanda est? quam qui semel adepti sunt, in asyllum adeo tutum sese receperunt" (Ex, I, II, 7, 59).

⁶²"Il n'y a point de secte de Philosophie qui presente une fin plus souhaitable, ny qui conduise à un port tant à l'abry des orages et agitations, que celle-cy" ("De la philosophie sceptique," DIA, 60). This and a number of other similar passages are examined in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.1. See Chap. 4, note 40, for the similarities between this dialogue of La Mothe's and Descartes's unfinished dialogue *La Recherche de la Vérité*.

⁶³Gassendi (1962, *instantia* 2, 68–70).

⁶⁴"Neque putandum est eorum sectam dudum esse extinctam. Viget enim hodie quàm maxime, ac fere omnes, qui se aliquid ingenii prae caeteris habere putant, nihil inuenientes in vulgari Philosophiâ quod ipsis satisfaciât, aliamque veriore non videntes, ad Scepticam tranfugiunt... Quippe omnes hodierni Sceptici non dubitant quidem in praxi, quin habeant caput, quin 2 & 3 faciant 5, & talia; sed dicunt se tantum iis uti tanquam veris, quia sic apparent, non autem certo credere, quia nullis certis rationibus ad id impelluntur" (AT, VII, 548–49). The only historically problematic claim of Descartes to Bourdin about the skeptics is that they doubt the existence of God. Paganini (2008a, 243–248) discusses in detail this passage, agreeing that these skeptics referred by Descartes are atheists, the main one being La Mothe Le Vayer. In Chap. 3, I provide a different interpretation of the relationship between La Mothe's skepticism and religion.

contradictory passages on the skeptics can be reconciled if we take into account the fact that Descartes often considers his own hyperbolic doubt as being basically the same as that of the skeptics.⁶⁵ So the passages on the skeptics in the *Discours* and in the reply to Gassendi would not refer to the position of the actual skeptics of his time but to what would result for a skeptic that carried his doubt to its ultimate consequences, that is, to the extreme of hyperbolic doubt. A skeptic who doubts the existence of the material world, including his own body (which none of the real skeptics of his time did), could not in fact live such skepticism. As Descartes says, his hyperbolic doubt is just a philosophical artifice that nobody would seriously undertake. Descartes's statement on the skeptics in the *Discourse* already indicates his rupture from Charron on doubt and skepticism. This rupture is substantiated in the subversion of *epochè*, which becomes a philosophical doctrine (the *cogito*) by the radicalization of doubt.

5.8 *Cogito*

Here is another important remark of Descartes's on the "Pyrrhoniens": "Bien que les Pyrrhoniens n'ayent rien conclu de certain en suite de leurs doutes, ce n'est pas à dire qu'on ne le puisse."⁶⁶ The ancient Pyrrhonians certainly did not conclude anything even close to the *cogito* from their doubt. But Charron says, denying that his position is like the Pyrrhonians', that his Academic *epochè* is "la science des sciences, la certitude des certitudes." The following is the first paragraph of Descartes's *Recherche de la Vérité*. It gives textual evidence of Charron's influence on Descartes's methodical doubt and suggests that Descartes thought that even the first truth of Cartesianism is already present in Charron, even though Charron and his skeptical disciples did not notice it.

Mais il est entré ignorant dans le monde, & la connoissance de son premier aage n'estant appuïe que sur la foiblesse des sens & sur l'autorité des precepteurs, il est presque impossible, que son imagination ne se trouve remplie d'une infinité de fausses pensées, avant que cette raison en puisse entreprendre la conduite: de sorte qu'il a besoin par apres d'un tres grand naturel, ou bien des instructions de quelque sage, tant pour se defaire des mauvaises doctrines dont ils est preoccupé, que pour jeter les premiers fondemens d'une science solide, & decouvrir toutes les voyes par où il puisse eslever sa connoissance jusques au plus haut degré qu'elle puisse atteindre. (AT, X, 495–496)⁶⁷

This *sage* is Charron, the instructions are those of wisdom presented in book II *De la Sagesse*, whose title is precisely "*instructions et regles generales de Sagesse*,"

⁶⁵ See Second and Third Replies, respectively (AT, VII, 130 and 171–172), and *Notae in programma quoddam* (AT, VIII, 367).

⁶⁶ To Reneri through Pollot, April or May 1638 (AT, II, 38).

⁶⁷ In his edition of Descartes's philosophical works, Alquié finds "curieux qu'en ce texte la mise en jeu de celle-ci [the recovery of the integrity of natural light] soit attribuée à un grand naturel ou aux instructions de quelque-sage" (Descartes 1992, II, 1106n2). CSM (II, 400), probably to avoid the puzzle, take "naturel" and "sage" as adjectives modifying, respectively, "talent" and "teacher;" nouns which are absent from the text.

which is the central and most important book of Charron's work, from which Descartes borrows most of his Charronian passages.⁶⁸

This first paragraph of Descartes's *Recherche* begins in a remarkable Charronian fashion: "Un honneste homme n'est pas obligé d'avoir veu tous les livres, ni d'avoir appris soigneusement tout ce qui s'enseigne dans les escholes; & mesme ce seroit une espece de deffaut en son education, s'il avoit trop employé de temps en l'exercice des lettres" (AT, X, 495).⁶⁹ In his characterization of the Pedant, the dogmatic Aristotelian, Charron says that "le Pedant estudie principalement à bien garnir ... sa memoire," in contrast to the wise man, whose aim is to "former et regler son jugement et sa conscience. Celuy-là ... n'apprend et ne sçait rien que des livres, des preceptes, des maistres" (PTS, 851).⁷⁰ Descartes's reference to "infinité de fausses pensées" corresponds to Charron's opinion and science that are acquired precisely through these two ways indicated by Descartes.⁷¹ Not only is Descartes's diagnosis of how we get entangled in false opinions Charronian, but also his position on how one can undo the damage caused by the acquired opinions. In the preface to *De la Sagesse*, Charron says that wisdom can be acquired in two ways: "le naturel, et l'acquis.

⁶⁸I note above that Descartes's claim in *Olympica* that "dicta sapientum ad paucissimas quasdam regulas generales possum reduci" (AT, X, 217) seems related to this title of book II. The reappearance of the claim in the opening paragraph of *La Recherche* shows the early and deep influence of Charron's Academic pedagogical view in Descartes's thought.

⁶⁹The dialogue has three characters. Epistemon is a typical representative of dogmatic/pedantic Science. He "sçait exactement tout ce qui se peut apprendre dans les escholes" (AT, X, 499). Eudoxe, who stands for Descartes himself, is "un homme de mediocre esprit, mais duquel le jugement n'est perverti par aucune fausse creance, & qui possede tout la raison selon la pureté de sa nature" (AT, X, 498). He is someone who has done exactly what Descartes says in the *Discours* (parts I-III) he did after he left college. Poliandre, Eudoxe's disciple, "n'a jamais estudié" for, he tells the other two, his parents "s'estants persuadés que l'exercice des lettres rendoit les courages plus lasches, m'ont envoyé si jeune à la Cour & dans les armées," an itinerary Descartes said he choose to follow: "C'est pourquoy, sitost que l'aage me permit de sortir de la suietion de mes Precepteurs, ie quittay entierement l'estude de lettres. Et me resoluant de ne chercher plus d'autre science, que celle qui se pourroit trouver en moymesme, ou bien dans le grand liure du monde, i'employay le reste de ma ieunesse à voyasger, a voir des cours & des armées, a frequenter des gens de diuerses humeurs & conditions" (AT, VI, 9). For Charron's influence on this topic, see Sect. 5.6 above and his chapter on "des devoirs de parens et enfans": "Quelle plus notable folie au monde, qu'admirer plus la science, l'aquis, la memoire, que la sagesse, le naturel? ... ils veulent l'art et la science: Car c'est un moyen maintenant en l'Europe Occidentale d'acquérir bruit, reputation, richesses. Ces gens cy font de science mestier et marchandise, science mercenaire, pedantesque, sordide, et mecanique ... Au rebours je ne puis que je ne blasme et ne note icy l'opinion et la façon d'aucuns de noz Gentilshommes François ... qui ont à tel desdain et mespris la science, qu'ils en estiment moins un honneste homme pour ce seulment qu'il a estudié, la descrient comme chose qui semble heurter aucunement la Noblesse" (S, III, 14, 686).

⁷⁰This brings to mind Charron's figure of science in the frontispiece of his work, a woman who holds an open book where one reads "oui et non," which also recalls Descartes's *Olympica* (see Sect. 5.1 above).

⁷¹"Foiblesse" is precisely how Charron describes the senses in book I. "De la foiblesse et incertitude de nos sens viennent ignorance, erreurs, et tout mesconte" (S, I, 9, 112). The other major source of beliefs is hearsay and the authority of preceptors, parents, etc: "Presque toutes les opinions que nous avons, nous ne les avons que par autorité" (S, I, 16, 150).

Qui a esté heureux au premier, c'est à dire, qui a esté favorablement estrené de nature ... se trouve toute porté à la sagesse: Qui autrement, doit avec grand et laborieux estude et exercice du second rabiller et suppleer ce qui luy default, comme Socrates un des plus sages disoit de soy, que par l'estude de la Philosophie il avoit corrigé et redressé son *mauvais naturel*" (S, 37).

The immediate source of the opening passage of Descartes's *Recherche* is, however, chapter 43 of book I on the three kinds of "esprits," from which Descartes gets the two types that should not adventure in methodical doubt, viz., the vulgar man and the pedant. Commenting on this passage, I note above that by excluding these two types, Descartes considered that those few who can follow the route of doubt (and eventually become Cartesians) are at least a subset of Charron's third type, the *sage* (or of those who can become wise men by following the "instructions et regles generales de Sagesse" displayed in book II). This is attested in this passage in which Descartes says further that Charron's instructions are necessary "tant pour se defaire des mauvaises doctrines dont ils est preoccupé, *que pour jeter les premiers fondemens d'une science solide*" (emphasis added). Charron's instructions appear here as delivering Descartes's own first philosophical principle, the *cogito*. Note Charron's following characterization of the sage in the chapter on the three kinds of "esprits" that Descartes uses to discourage the pedant and vulgar man to follow his route:

Cette seconde distinction, qui regarde l'esprit et la suffisance,⁷² n'est si apparente et perceptible comme les autres, et vient tant du *naturel* que de l'acquis; selon laquelle y a trois sortes de gens au monde, comme trois classes et degrés d'esprits. ... Au troisième et plus haut étage sont les hommes doües d'un esprit vif et clair, jugement fort, ferme, et solide; qui ne se contentent d'un ouy dire, ne s'arrestent aux opinions communes et receuës ... mais examinent toutes choses qui se proposent, sondent meurement, et cherchent [sic] sans passion les causes, motifs, et ressorts jusques à la racine, ayants mieux douter et tenir en suspens leur creance, que par une trop molle et lasche facilité, ou legereté, ou precipitation de jugement, se paître de fausseté, et affirmer ou se tenir asseurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine (S, I, 43, 291–292).

Charron's wise man attains the perfection of human nature. This perfection concerns also his behavior, but what is crucial is the perfection (integrity) of his intellect or judgment, for the perfection of behavior will follow from that of his judgment. This perfection presupposes emancipation of received opinions that have non-epistemic grounds. This is necessary for the recovery of intellectual integrity. Only someone not committed to previous beliefs (philosophic or otherwise) can perfectly use his faculty of rational examination, which is for Charron (as for Descartes), what is essential to human beings.⁷³ As I have argued in Chap. 2, Charron's sympathy for skepticism derives from his view that the intellect finds its

⁷²The context of the chapter is the distinctions that can be remarked among men. The first one dealt with by Charron in the previous chapter concerns the differences due to different climates and temperaments, in which Charron borrows respectively from Jean Bodin and Juan Huarte de San Juan. For the skeptical thrust of this first kind of distinction, see Gregory (1967). For its place in *De la Sagesse* and relation to the differences due to "l'esprit," see Paganini (1987).

⁷³Charron says that judging is what is most proper to man, what differs him from the beasts. All men judge, but only the sage does it perfectly (S, II, 2, 389–90).

integrity in *epochè*.⁷⁴ Because assent entails commitment, it precludes the inquirer from being free and impartial in his use of reason. According to skeptics old and new, if one examines things in an unprejudiced manner, the balance of equipollence will never be overcome, for, as Charron says, “il y a raison par tout.” That is, provided that one examines the issue through and through, contrary reasons will eventually come up, re-establishing equipollence and leading to *epochè*. What thus becomes crucial in the skeptical investigation (*zetesis*) is to carefully avoid precipitation, that is, “se tenir assurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine.” This specific Academic view of wisdom (to avoid error comes first to find the truth) corresponds to Descartes's first rule in the *Discours* of “ne recevoir iamais aucune chose pour vraie, que ie ne la connusse euidentement estre telle: c'est a dire, d'euitier soigneusement la Precipitation, & la Preuention” (AT, VI, 18), if the latter is—as Labrousse says indicating how it is appropriated by Bayle—“coupée de ses prolongements métaphysiques” (1964, 2, 57). Assent also brings an attachment to the thing believed that compromises the universality of the wise man's mind. Charron says that this universality is maintained precisely in *epochè*, in examining everything but assenting to nothing. Each of these presupposes the other: only in a continuous examination will the sage find somewhere ground to suspend judgment (avoid precipitation) and only with judgment suspended (deprived of preconceptions) will he be able to continue his examination indefinitely, that is, to maintain the perfection and integrity of his intellect.⁷⁵

To appreciate how the certainty of Charron's *epochè* is transformed in the certainty of the *cogito*, consider this other passage from the part of Descartes's *Recherche* that survived only in a Latin translation, in which Poliandre realizes the certainty he gets from his doubt:

As soon as you showed me what little certainty we can have in the existence of things which we can know only by means of the senses, I began to doubt them. This was enough to bring my doubt home to me and to make me certain of it. Thus I can state that as soon as I began to doubt, I began to have knowledge which was certain. But my doubt and my certainty did not relate to the same objects: my doubt applied only to things which existed outside me, whereas my certainty related to myself and my doubting. (CSM, II, 418)⁷⁶

⁷⁴“Or ne trouver pas le vray, ce n'est pas mal juger; mal juger c'est mal peser, balancer ... les oppositions et contradictions raisonnées sont les vray moyens d'exercer cet office de juger” (S, II, 2, 399).

⁷⁵That this view of Charron's, which is crucial for Descartes, is Academic is clear in passages such as the following: “surseance et indifferance de jugement, par laquelle l'homme considerant tout comme dict est ... ne s'ahourte, ny se lie ou oblige à aucune chose, mais se tient libre, universel et ouvert à tout, tousjours prest à recevoir la verité, si elle se presente, adherant cependant au meilleur et plus vray semblable qui luy apparoit tel, ... C'est la modestie Academique tant requisite au Sage par laquelle il est tousjours prest et capable de verité et raison quand elle se presente” (PTS, 838–39).

⁷⁶“Vixdum mihi exiguum illam, quam habemus de rerum, quarum cognitio non nisi sensuum auxilio ad nos pervenit, existentiam, certitudinem ostenderas, cum de iis dubitare incepti, idque simul ad mihi meam dubitationem ejusdemque certitudinem commonstrandum suffecit: ita ut possim adfirmare, simulac dubitare sum adgressus, etiam cum certitudine me cognoscere cecepisse. Sed non ad eadem objecta mea dubitatio, meaque certitudo referebantur. Quippe mea dubitatio circa eas tantum versabatur res, quae extra me exsistebant; certitudo verò meam dubitationem, meque ipsum, spectabat” (AT, X, 524–525).

Poliandre's universal doubt leads him immediately to the certainty of himself.⁷⁷ The same cognitive act through which he gets rid of all received opinions assures him of himself as rational inquirer. The certainty of the self is based on his discovery or recovery of the integrity of his intellect made possible by the universal doubt that eliminates all non-epistemic opinions he had previously acquired. He finds that these opinions are precarious, uncertain, whereas the only thing certain is the power of judgment to examine them. This corresponds exactly to Charron's wise man's situation. As he says, his *epochè* is not "une incertitude douteuse et fluctuante" but, on the contrary, "la science des sciences, certitude des certitudes." The firmness, certainty, self-assured tranquillity of the wise man comes from the fact that he has eliminated everything that is not essential to his integrity. As indicated in Chap. 2, Academic skeptic wisdom consists not in attaining the truth but in getting rid of errors. He recovers the perfection of his pure intellectual nature by erasing from it all "artificielles inventions" (beliefs) acquired over time. Through "universal" doubt (Charron says it is universal) one at the same time gets rid of the outward artificial and precarious and is reconciled with the inward natural and essential.⁷⁸

Where does Descartes break with the skepticism of his time? Why is the *cogito* a refutation of skepticism?⁷⁹ Whence its novelty? It comes from what Descartes calls "les plus extrauagantes suppositions des Sceptiques," extravagances held by no ancient or modern skeptic of his time. These arguments imply a substantial and decisive expansion of the scope of *epochè vis-à-vis* Charron's (and all previous skeptics'). The whole difference derives from what is considered *extra me*, or, conversely, to what is reduced the *me ipsum*. As is well known, the dream and deceiver arguments in Descartes put the very existence of the material world in doubt. As Poliandre says in the passage, his hyperbolic doubt applies to the existence of everything the knowledge of which he acquired through his senses.

Charron says that "il faut bien sçavoir distinguer, et separer nous mesmes d'avec nos charges publiques; un chacun de nous jöite deux rooles et deux personnages,

⁷⁷ It has been noticed, notably by Mehl (1999, 83–91), that Descartes derives here the *cogito* directly from doubt, and not from thought, what makes, according to Mehl, the version of the *cogito* in *La Recherche* a less developed one than that of the *Meditations*. According to Mehl, a still earlier formulation of the *cogito* appears as Socratic assurance in the *Regulae*: "si Socrates dicit se dubitare de omnibus, hinc necessariò sequitur: ergo hoc saltem intelligit, quòd dubitat; item, ergo cognoscit aliquid posse esse verum vel falsum, &c., ista enim naturae dubitationis necessariò annexa sunt" (AT, X, 421). This formulation is even closer to Charron's avowedly Socratic certainty that he knows nothing.

⁷⁸ The tranquility of the mind is the "fruit et la couronne de sagesse." "La tempeste et l'orage a beaucoup moins de prinse et de moyen de nuire, quand les voiles sont recueillies, que quand elles sont au vent; s'affermir contre tout ce qui peut blesser ou heurter [basically, opinions] ... Et ainsi se tenir ferme à soy, s'accorder bien avec soy, vivre à l'aise sans aucune peine ny dispute au dedans ... s'entretenir et demeurer content de soy, qui est le fruit et le propre effet de la sagesse" (S, II, 12, 540–541).

⁷⁹ "Mais, aussitost après, ie pris garde que, pendant que ie voulois ainsi penser que tout estoit faux, il falloit necessairement que moy, qui le pensois, fusse quelque chose. Et remarquant que cete verité: *ie pense, donc ie suis*, estoit si ferme & si assurée, que toutes les plus extrauagantes suppositions des Sceptiques n'estoient pas capables de l'esbranler, ie iugay que ie pouuois la recevoir, sans scrupule, pour le premier principe de la Philosophie, que ie cherchois" (AT, VI, 32).

l'un étranger et apparent, l'autre propre et essentiel. Il faut discerner la peau de la chemise" (S, II, 2, 415). In Charron, everything that is subject to skeptical doubt corresponds to the external (non-essential), "la chemise": philosophical doctrines, customs, traditional beliefs, etc. What corresponds to "la peau" is the essential which is not subject to doubt, but what is rather the precondition (the faculty of judging) and the result (assurance of the self) of doubt. Now this self includes the whole *sage*, his body and his senses. Descartes's break lies precisely in those "extrauagantes suppositions" of dream, evil genius and deceiver God, which include, along with his "chemise," the "peau" itself of Charron's sage in the scope of doubt. Charron's "universal" doubt does not include the body of the wise man (he does not have hyperbolic skeptical arguments) nor could it include given the practical thrust of his skepticism.⁸⁰ Wisdom comprises above all the perfection of the mind (intellectual integrity) but also the integrity of the body.⁸¹ By replacing the actual practical doubt of the skeptics of his time by metaphysical doubt, the firmness and assurance of *epochè* becomes metaphysical (dogmatic) assurance. Furthermore, skepticism itself, construed hyperbolically in the Cartesian fashion, becomes unliveable, for it includes in its scope elements that the traditional skeptics left outside the scope of doubt (the existence of the material world, the body and the *phenomena*) that secured their practical lives.⁸² Descartes's refutation of skepticism has therefore a skeptical base, *epochè*. It is not that an abstract skeptic would be forced to agree on the true of the *cogito*. The skeptic's practical position itself already exhibits it. Descartes's claim in *La Recherche* that Charron's instructions of wisdom are necessary to get rid of all received opinions and to "jeter les premiers fondemens d'une science solide" (AT, X, 496) can be interpreted as follows: a first unquestionable philosophical principle is implicit in Charron's Academic skepticism. His doubt contains a philosophical treasure he does not perceive because of his strictly practical concern.⁸³ What lacks in Charron is the philosophical universalization (beyond the practical frame that restricted it) of his claim that the sage must doubt all things, that he must be universal. Descartes's universal doubt is metaphysical and

⁸⁰ Referring to Sextus' statement of the *phenomenon* as the practical criterion of the skeptics, Burnyeat (1982, 30) says that Sextus' language is "not a language of a man afflicted with radical Cartesian doubt as to whether he has a body to act with and a world to act in at all. One's own body has not yet become for philosophy part of the external world." Burnyeat (1984) distinguishes modern Cartesian doubt from ancient doubt arguing that unlike the latter the former is "insulated" from practical life. See also Paganini (1991, 112–13), who contrasts Descartes's position on this subject to Montaigne's and Gassendi's.

⁸¹ Wisdom is "une droiture et belle composition de *tout l'homme*" (S, 28—emphasis added).

⁸² Paganini (1991, 117–121) shows that with his hyperbolic doubt Descartes destroys the whole practical thrust of skepticism, the ancient and that of his contemporaries. This modification was decisive for the fate of the skeptical tradition, few today considering this philosophy as a philosophy to be lived by and not a merely abstract epistemological position.

⁸³ Right after the passage in which Descartes attributes to the role of the "instructions de quelque sage" to get rid of false opinions and "jeter les premiers fondemens d'une science solide," he says his proposal is "de mettre en evidence les veritables richesses de nos ames" (AT, X, 496).

not practical like Charron's, so it includes any possible theoretical doubt (which is not at all the case in Charron, who is interested only in the real life of the sage).⁸⁴

Descartes says that the *cogito* could be put forward "sans scrupule" as the first principle of his philosophy. In which case would he have scruple to propose a philosophical principle? I think this would be the context of established philosophy against which, following Montaigne and Charron, he raises the skeptical trope of *diaphonia*. In the framework of established philosophy, Descartes says, "il ne s'y trouue encore aucune chose dont on ne dispute, & par consequent qui ne soit douteuse, ie n'auois point assés de presumption pour esperer d'y rencontrer mieux que les autres" (AT, VI, 8). I have related Descartes's allusion to presumption in the context of philosophical conflict to Charron's argument that in such context, it is a major instance of the presumption typical of the dogmatist to pretend to lay down principles to be universally accepted. One man has no authority over another man's judgment, this authority being a prerogative of God. But at this point Descartes has presumably already overcome the *diaphonic* skeptical context and is presenting his first principle derived from skepticism itself. According to Charron, *diaphonia* results from the rule of opinion over man's judgment. Once judgment recovers its integrity through the rejection of all received opinions, no *diaphonia* could possibly appear, for human beings would find agreement in its own pure nature, as it happens with the beasts which have stayed in their natural law, free from the "artificielles inventions" of belief.⁸⁵ And of course *diaphonia* holds only for dogmatists. Not holding any doctrine, the skeptic will be in conflict with nobody. Given that Descartes's doubt too expurgated all previous artificial beliefs and supposedly restored the intellect to its natural integrity, he can expect universal assent to his principle without presumption, and so proposes it without scruple, for it supposedly does not compromise the moral parity that obtains among human beings. Descartes's refutation of skepticism thus appears tailored to the skeptical challenge of his time. He rejects Aristotelian

⁸⁴ Gassendi appears as a follower of Charron's not only in his first published work, the *Exercitationes* examined in Chap. 3, but also in his rejection, in the *dubitatio unica* concerning the First Meditation, of Descartes's skeptical arguments—the evil genius, the deceiver god, and the dream—on the grounds that they are artificial (note that Gassendi's doubt is a doubt to be lived by, a doubt that leads to wisdom, this being the context in which he praises Descartes's goal of getting rid of prejudices) and deviated from tradition (Gassendi 1962, 30). Gassendi sees well—and here as elsewhere in his *Disquisitio* denounces—that Descartes's anti-skepticism begins with his doubt. See Gouhier (1958, 33).

⁸⁵ "Ce n'est pas la verité ni le naturel des choses qui nous remuë et agite ainsi l'ame. C'est l'opinion ... La verité et l'estre des choses n'entre ny ne loge chez nous de soy-mesme, de sa propre force et autorité: *s'il estoit ainsi, toutes choses seroient receuës de tous, toutes pareilles et de mesme façon, sauf peu plus, peu moins, tous seroient de mesme creance: et la verité qui n'est jamais qu'une et uniforme, seroit embrassée de tout le monde; Or il y a si grande diversité, voire contrariété d'opinionns ...*" (S, I, 16, 149). There is no *diaphonia* among the beasts which, because freed of opinions, remain in the realm of natural law. "Pour simplement vivre bien selon la nature, les bestes sont de beaucoup plus advantages; vivent plus libres; assurees, moderées, contentes. Et l'homme est sage qui les considere, qui s'en fait leçon et son profit; en ce faisant il se forme à l'innocence, simplicité, liberté, et douceur naturelle, qui reluit aux bestes, et est tout alterée et corrompuë en nous par nos artificielles inventions, et desbauches, abusant de ce que nous disons avoir par dessus elles, qui est l'esprit et jugement" (S, I, 18, 219).

science, like Charron did, as contrary to wisdom and builds on Charron's wise man to show that, provided only this sage takes his skepticism to its ultimate philosophical consequences, it leads to a new philosophical principle immune to the skeptical problem of *diaphonia* from which a new science capable of taking the place of skeptical wisdom could be developed.

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Chapter 6

Pascal's Rehabilitation of Christian Faith

6.1 Montaigne's Pyrrhonism as a Source of Pascal's View of Skepticism and Charron's Academic Skepticism as a Target of Pascal's Apology for the Christian Religion

Charron is mentioned by name only once in Pascal's *Pensées* and in a depreciative manner.

Préface de la première partie. Parler de ceux qui ont traité de la connaissance de soi-même, des divisions de Charron, qui attristent et ennuient. De la confusion de Montaigne, qu'il avait bien senti le défaut d'une droite méthode. (La 780)¹

This fragment (La 780) reveals Pascal's plan of including in the first part of his unfinished apology for Christianity a discussion of self-knowledge. According to the general plan of the Apology for the Christian religion in which he was working indicated in La 6, this would belong to the first part to show the "misère de l'homme sans Dieu ... autrement ... que la nature est corrompue, par la nature même." Montaigne and Charron thus would be Pascal's main sources for the first part of his apology.

Most Pascal scholars argue that the picture of the self that Montaigne presents in the *Essays* is the main key for reading Pascal on this topic and have almost completely neglected Charron's treatment of self-knowledge in his *De la Sagesse*. Pascal refers to Charron only once, but several times to Montaigne in the *Pensées*. Editors of the *Pensées* and authors of a number of monographic studies point out Pascal's Montaignian sources on this and other issues.² Corroborates this privilege of Montaigne that fact that in this same fragment (La 780) where Pascal talks about Charron and Montaigne, it is

¹Pascal understands the style of the *Essays* as appropriate to the Pyrrhonism he attributes to Montaigne. See La 532: "Pyrr. J'écrirai ici mes pensées sans ordre et non pas peut-être dans une confusion sans dessein."

²See, for example, Croquette (1974, 100ff), who points out that some of Montaigne's themes in Pascal's *Pensées* could have come from Charron's *Sagesse* but minimizes this possibility.

the manner in which Montaigne addresses self-knowledge that gets Pascal's attention in the unfinished part of the text.³

However, I would like to show how the understanding of the strategy and nature of Pascal's apology can be enlarged by comparing it to Charron's *Sagesse*. Several themes in the *Pensées* are better clarified by reference to Charron's *Wisdom* rather than to Montaigne's *Essays*. This is especially the case of Pascal's attitude towards skepticism. Pascal's view of the skeptic, whom he usually calls "Pyrrhonian," is mainly modeled after Montaigne's own skepticism, although the main skeptical arguments he cites are Cartesian. I argue in this chapter that both Pascal's use of the Montaignian Pyrrhonian model of the skeptic and his use of Descartes's skeptical arguments are aimed at striking Charron's Academic model of the skeptic wise man.⁴

Two topics related to Pascal's proof from the doctrine or argument of the true religion (La 149)—that Christian doctrine is vindicated by its capability to explain human predicaments—are widely recognized as central by scholars. These are the role of skepticism in the argument and the effort to rule out the possibility of a moral philosophy independent of religion. Less mentioned in literature is the coincidence of these two aspects.⁵ The author in the period who defends a skeptical morality independent of religion and who is most influential in the libertine circles targeted by Pascal is Charron.⁶ In Chap. 2, I give some examples of the extent (but also of the

³When Charron is cited as a source of Pascal, scholars usually refer to Charron's *Les Trois Vérités*, in whose first book on divinity Charron states that because there is a disproportion between human reason, which is finite, and God, who is infinite, metaphysical proofs of the existence of God should be replaced by pragmatic ones—such as the wager—which are more adequate to human finitude. This view of Charron's also appears in *De la Sagesse*: "L'immortalité de l'ame est la chose la plus ... utilement creüe, la plus foiblement prouuée et establee par raisons et moyens humains" (S, I, 7, 94). The first reader of Pascal to indicate Charron's *Trois Vérités* as the source of Pascal's wager (La 418) is the late seventeenth century erudite and philosopher Pierre-Daniel Huet (see Maia Neto and Popkin 1995). For Pascal's appropriation of Charron's position, see Orcibal (1956). I do not examine *Les Trois Vérités* because my focus is on the influence of Charron's *De la Sagesse* on the skeptical libertines targeted by Pascal in his apologetics. An important Pascal scholar who takes account not only of *Les Trois Vérités* but also of Charron's *De la Sagesse* is Vincent Carraud. He cites La 780 and sets aside Charron's methodic description of the self as inadequate to Pascal's view of the misery of the ego (see Carraud 1992, 289–294). However, because Pascal's work was designed as an apology, the fact that Charron's humanistic view is quite different from Pascal's Augustinian view justifies Pascal's interest and engagement with it. Among Charron scholars, the relevance of *De la Sagesse* to a number of issues in the *Pensées* is unanimously recognized. I mention some of this scholarship below.

⁴For Charron's Academic skepticism and the influence (and its limits) he received from Montaigne on this issue, see Chap. 2.

⁵The reason for this is that Pascal associates the second issue with Stoicism. Because this philosophy is considered by him as contrary to skepticism, the philosophical morality is dissociated from—and even opposed to—skepticism. It is necessary, however, to keep in mind that this contraposition is already part of Pascal's apologetic strategy as he fights and criticizes—by accusing it of being unviable—the skeptical autonomous morality defended and adopted by his libertine interlocutor. See Giocanti (2001, 575–601). I return to this point at the end.

⁶For Charron's influence on the so called "erudite libertines," see Chaps. 1 and 4.

limits) of the presence of Montaigne's *Essays* in Charron's *Wisdom*. However, the position that Pascal first partially appropriates and then seeks to refute is clearer in the systematic presentation of Charron's *Sagesse* than in its main source, the *Essais*.

Another reason for privileging Charron in the confrontation with Pascal is his ambiguous position for a Jansenist. On the one hand he was greatly admired by the libertines target by Pascal but, on the other, he had as one of his most prominent advocates, Duvergier d'Hauranne, the abbot of Saint-Cyran, the leader of Jansenism in France.⁷ I argued elsewhere that Saint-Cyran apparently did not perceive the humanist-naturalist ground of Charron's skepticism, mistakenly considering it as resulting from Augustine's view of fallen man.⁸ One of Pascal's aims was to undo this mistake by exposing the non-specifically Christian—but pagan—ethical commitments evident in Charron's skeptical wisdom, which was, as I have showed in Chap. 4, developed further by some of Charron's followers such as La Mothe Le Vayer.

In Chap. 2, I show that although Charron shares the eclecticism of the Renaissance and exhibits Stoic features in his works, the wisdom that he characterizes and prescribes is essentially Academic skeptic, one of the mains evidences of which is its motto, printed on the book frontispiece: "*Je ne scay*." Pascal's fragment La 428 indicates that this kind of skepticism, presented by Charron as the intellectual attitude of the wise man, is at least one of the targets of his apology:

Ce repos dans cette ignorance est une chose monstrueuse, et dont il faut faire sentir l'extravagance et la stupidité à ceux qui y passent leur vie ... Car voici comme raisonnent les hommes quand ils choisissent de vivre dans cette ignorance de ce qu'ils sont et sans rechercher d'éclaircissement. "*Je ne sais*," disent-ils. (La 428)

I argue in Chap. 2 that Charron's Academic motto differs from Montaigne's famous more Pyrrhonian one: "que sais-je?"⁹ This contrast is important because Montaigne characterizes genuine skepticism as a position that includes itself in the scope of its *époque*. Pascal notes and emphasizes this self-referential aspect of Montaigne's skepticism:

C'est dans ce doute qui doute de soi et dans cette ignorance qui s'ignore, et qu'il appelle sa maîtresse forme, qu'est l'essence de son opinion, qu'il n'a pu exprimer par aucun terme positif. Car, s'il dit qu'il doute, il se trahit en assurant au moins qu'il doute; ce qui étant formellement contre son intention, il n'a pu s'expliquer que par interrogation; de sorte que, ne voulant pas dire: "Je ne sais," il dit: "Que sais-je?" dont il fait sa devise, en la mettant sous des balances qui, pesant les contradictoires, se trouvent dans un parfait équilibre: c'est-à-dire qu'il est pur pyrrhonien.¹⁰

⁷I briefly mention Saint-Cyran's support of Charron in Chap. 1.

⁸See Maia Neto (1995) and Chap. 2 of this book.

⁹Describing Pyrrhonism in the *Apology of Raymond Sebond*, Montaigne observes that given the assertive nature of language and the Pyrrhonian ejection of any assertion—even of the Academic confession of ignorance—the Pyrrhonian would be obliged to make a merely interrogative use of language. See E, II, 12, 527.

¹⁰Pascal, "Entretien avec M. de Sacy" in Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp. 136–137.

Charron's skepticism is not self-referential. It is closer to Academic skepticism and its main source: Socratic ignorance. This difference is one of the reasons there is in Montaigne's *Essais* no elaboration of a skeptical moral imbued of certainty and stability as there is in Charron's *Sagesse*, whose essential element is the certainty of the self made possible by an *epochè* that results from the denial by the wise man of all doctrines and beliefs external to himself: "je ne sais" (emphasis added). Pascal picks up Montaigne's model of skepticism to target Charron's. He strives to rule out the possibility that skepticism and doubt can be used to establish a morality compatible with the divorce between human beings (naturally considered) and truth (which lies in God), in which case skepticism could be an end in itself and no longer merely a means to Christianity. Pascal claims in the *Entretien* and in a number of fragments in the *Pensées* that "Le pyrrhonisme sert à la religion" (La 658). But what serves Christianity according to Pascal is Montaigne's Pyrrhonian skepticism, whose instability is construed by Pascal as characteristic of fallen men, not Charron's, whose view of the limited excellence and perfection of the wise Academic skeptic does not facilitate the leap of faith.¹¹ Charron's model of Academic skepticism is therefore more Pascal's target than source.

Pascal's argument for the true religion requires only one kind of skeptic (and one kind of dogmatist). This is shown in the Lafuma edition of the *Pensées*, in which the phrases crossed out by Pascal in the manuscript are indicated. In fragment La 131, Pascal referred initially to three positions: the "dogmatist," the "Pyrrhonian," and the "Academic," but crossed out the latter to include it under "Pyrrhonian." Pascal collapses Charron's skeptical model into Montaigne's, attributes the Cartesian hyperbolic doubt to this "Pyrrhonian," and thus argues for the non-viability of Charron's skeptical wise man.¹²

6.2 The Moral Consideration of Man

The divisions mentioned by Pascal in La 780 frame book I of Charron's *Sagesse*, "Qui est de la *cognoissance de soy*, et de l'humaine condition" (title of book I). The content of this book corresponds to Pascal's reference to Charron: "Parler de ceux

¹¹ McKenna (2003) argues that Academic skepticism, not Pyrrhonism, may be a way to Christian faith since it accepts an epistemic notion of probability ("vraisemblance") which presupposes the truth (according to Augustine's interpretation of the Academic doctrine) and corresponds to what fallen men can attain. Accordingly, Pascal outlines an apology for the Christian religion whose proofs would be only probable.

¹² In La 109, Pascal opposes the dogmatist (who claims the truth is evident) to the Academic skeptic (who claims the truth is totally hidden) and claims that the Pyrrhonian triumphs in this opposition since "la cabale pyrrhonienne ... consiste à cette ambiguïté ambiguë, et dans une certaine obscurité douteuse don't nos doutes ne peuvent ôter toute la clarté, ni nos lumières naturelles en chasser toutes les ténèbres." This Pyrrhonian position corresponds to the mix of clarity and obscurity which characterizes Christianity according to Pascal (see, for example, La 236). See Chap. 5, Sects. 5.7 and 5.8, for Descartes's transformation of Charron's practical doubt into a metaphysical doubt impossible to be held in ordinary life.

qui ont traité *de la connaissance de soi-même*, des divisions de Charron, qui attristent et ennuient.” Charron’s first book is divided into five considerations about man. Of these, the fourth (concerning morals) and part of the fifth (concerning spiritual variations among men) are the most relevant for Pascal.¹³

The moral consideration is further divided into five aspects: “Vanité, Foiblesse, Inconstance, Misere, et Presomption, qui sont ses plus *naturelles* et universelles qualités: mais les deux derniers le touchant de plus près” (S, I, 228).¹⁴ Each of these appears as a title of a chapter of Charron’s *Sagesse* in the moral consideration of human beings and as a title of some fragment or section planned by Pascal for the first part of his Apology. “Vanité” is the title of one of the sections planned for this part and also figures as the title of fragments La 23, 32, and 46. “Foiblesse” is the title of La 28, “Inconstance” of La 54 and 55, and “Misère” of another section of the *Pensées* and also of fragment La 69 in this section. “Présomption” does not figure as the title of any fragment, even though there is a related one: “orgueil.”¹⁵

The similarity is not restricted to the titles of fragments and sections. For example, in fragment La 54, “Inconstance,” Pascal says that “[l]es choses ont diverses qualités et l’âme diverses inclinations, car rien n’est simple de ce qui s’offre à l’âme, et l’âme ne s’offre jamais simple à aucun sujet. De là vient qu’on pleure et qu’on rit d’une même chose.” In chapter 38 of book I of *Wisdom*, whose title is precisely “Inconstance,” Charron finds this inconstancy in human nature—the soul—which turns the human being into “l’animal de tous le plus difficile à fonder et cognoistre, car c’est le plus double et contrefait ... dont il souffle tantost le chaud, tantost de froid ... tantost aux ceps, tantost en liberté, tantost un Dieu, tantost une mouche. *Il rit et pleure d’une mesme chose*” (S, I, 38, 251–252).¹⁶ Another example is also extracted from Pascal’s analysis of human inquietude: “Nous ne nous tenons jamais au temps *présent*. Nous rappelons le *passé*; nous anticipons *l’avenir* comme trop lent à venir” (La 47). Pascal here seems to reflect about Charron’s chapter “Misère,” where man is described by Charron as “tormenté par le *présent*, ennuyé du *passé*, angoissé pour *l’advenir*” (S, I, 39, 258). Concerning weakness, Charron says that “[e]ncores un témoignage de foiblesse est que l’homme n’est capable que des choses mediocres, et ne peut souffrir les extremitez” (S, I, 37, 249). Pascal exemplifies this view. “Quand on lit trop vite ou trop doucement on n’entend rien” (La 41). “Trop et trop peu de vin. Ne lui en donnez pas: il ne peut trouver la vérité. Donnez-lui en trop: de même” (La 38).

¹³The others concern man’s physical and intellectual nature, how human beings compare with other animals, and human life (basically, its brevity).

¹⁴In the first part of Pascal’s apology, he planned to show “la *misère* de l’homme sans Dieu ... par la *nature même*” (La 6).

¹⁵“Concernent le projet d’une ‘peinture de l’homme,’ nous pouvons relever dans *De la Sagesse* plusieurs points essentiels qui, en tombant sous le coup de la critique pascalienne, indiquent que Pascal a très certainement lu au moins le (les) préface(s) ... La première édition s’ouvre par une ‘générale peinture de l’homme,’ qui se distribue en cinq points qui annoncent certains concepts pascaliens: ‘vanité, faiblesse, inconstance, misère, présomption’” (Carraud 1992, 307n).

¹⁶Similarity noted by Adam (1991, 200).

One of the most relevant evidences that Pascal utilizes Charron in his analysis of the misery of man without God is the fact that Charron takes the opposite features of misery and presumption, whose ancient source is Pliny, as the two essential moral attributes of human beings. In the chapter "Presumption," Charron inquires:

tout le commun ne verifie il pas bien clairement le dire de Pline, qu'il n'y a rien plus *miserable*, et ensemble plus *glorieux* que l'homme? Car d'une part il se faine de tres-hautaines et riches opinions de l'amour, soin et affection de *Dieu* envers luy ... et cependant il se sert tres-indignement: *comment se peuvent accorder* et subsister ensemble une vie et un service si chetif et *miserable* d'une part, et une opinion et creance si *glorieuse* et si hautaine de l'autre. C'est estre *Ange et pourceau* tout ensemble (S, I, 40, 272).¹⁷

The misery/greatness (responsible for presumption) antithesis plays a crucial role in Pascal's view of man: "[i]l ne faut pas que l'homme croie qu'il est égal aux *bêtes* ni aux *anges*, ni qu'il ignore l'un et l'autre, mais qu'il sache l'un et l'autre" (La 121). The crucial difference between Pascal and Charron is that while for Charron such contradictions are natural and have a natural solution, actually the solution indicated in book II *De la Sagesse* on the general rules of wisdom, for Pascal the contradictions have a supernatural origin and therefore cannot be solved in the merely natural realm. Charron points out the evidence of such contradictions and asks how they can be reconciled. Pascal builds on Charron's description and demand to introduce his argument for the true religion. "*Les grandeurs et les misères de l'homme* sont tellement visibles qu'il faut nécessairement que la véritable religion nous enseigne et qu'il y a quelque grand principe de grandeur en l'homme et qu'il y a un grand principe de misère" (La 149). This is furnished by the doctrine of the Fall of Man. "*L'orgueil* contrepèse et emporte toutes les *misères*. Voilà un étrange monstre, et un égarement bien visible. Le voilà tombé de sa place, il la cherche avec inquiétude" (La 477).¹⁸

6.3 Diversion and Reason of the Effects

The doctrine of the Fall is presented by Pascal as an explanation or reason for the phenomenon or effect of diversion. In the logic of the constant reversion from pro to con, Pascal seems to rely on Charron in the analysis of diversion, first in the

¹⁷ See also *Sagesse*, I, 45: "Tu es la plus vuide et necessiteuse, la plus vaine et miserable de toutes [creatures], et neantmoins la plus fiere et orgueilleuse." Charron draws this moral characterization of man from Montaigne: "[A] La presumption est nostre maladie naturelle et originelle. La plus calamiteuse et fraile de toutes les creatures, c'est l'homme, et quant et quant la plus orgueilleuse" (E, II, 12, 452).

¹⁸ "l'homme par la grâce est rendu comme semblable à *Dieu* ... et ... sans la grâce il est censé semblable aux *bêtes* brutes" (La 131). Charron: "ce sont maladies, ils se veulent mettre hors d'eux, eschapper à l'homme et faire les divins, et font les sots; ils se veulent transformer en Anges, et se transforment en bestes" (S, II, 6, 470). Montaigne: "Ils veulent se mettre hors d'eux et eschapper à l'homme. C'est folie: au lieu de se transformer en anges, ils se transforment en bestes" (E, III, 13, 1115). For a rebuttal of the view that the doctrine of the Fall provides a better explanation to the problem of evil than the Manicheanism (the doctrine, initially held and then attacked by Augustine, that there two eternal principles, one good (God) and the other evil (matter), see Bayle's *Dictionary*, article Manicheans, note D. Bayle reaffirms the Academic skeptical position on this matter.

factual validation of the phenomenon, and second, critically, in the condemnation of the phenomenon by the sage, who considers it a feature of the vulgar man who has not reached wisdom. I cite first Charron and then Pascal.

Le peuple ... est une bête estrange à plusieurs têtes ... inconstant et variable, sans arrest non plus que les vagues de la mer ... il n'y à rien plus aisé que le pousser en telle *passion* que l'on veut; il n'ayme la *guerre* pour sa fin, ny la paix pour le *repos*, sinon entant que de l'un à l'autre il y a tousjours du changement; La confusion luy fait desirer l'ordre, et quand il y est, luy déplaist. Il court tousjours d'un contraire à l'autre. (S, I, 52, 335)

Divertissement. Quand je m'y suis mis quelquefois à considérer les diverses agitations des hommes, et les périls, et les peines où ils s'exposent dans la Cour, dans la *guerre* d'où naissent tant de querelles, de *passions* ... j'ai dit souvent que tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, qui est de ne savoir pas demeurer en *repos* dans une chambre. ... Mais quand j'ai pensé de plus près et qu'après avoir trouvé la cause de tous nos malheurs j'ai voulu en découvrir les raison(s), j'ai trouvé qu'il y en a une bien effective qui consiste dans le malheur naturel de notre condition faible et mortelle et si misérable que rien ne peut nous consoler lorsque nous y pensons de près. ... Ainsi on se prend mal pour les blâmer [as Charron does]; leur faute n'est pas en ce qu'ils cherchent le tumulte. S'ils ne le cherchaient que comme un divertissement, mais le mal est qu'ils le recherchent comme si la possession des choses qu'ils recherchent les devait rendre véritablement heureux, et c'est en quoi on [Charron] a raison d'accuser leur recherche de vanité de sorte qu'en tout cela et ceux qui blâment [Charron's sage] et ceux qui sont blâmés [the vulgar men according to Charron] n'entendent la véritable nature de l'homme. (La 136)¹⁹

Charron's inability to explain the phenomenon results, according to Pascal, from the strict separation he makes between human and divine wisdom, with the claim of the autonomy of the human in relation to the divine, whereas for Pascal, the explanation of man's miserable condition requires resorting to the doctrine of the Fall.²⁰ The apologist's strategy is clear.²¹ It consists in showing the portion of truth in the libertine's view of human nature while at the same time showing the partiality and insufficiency of such diagnosis that remains on the surface level of the effects without penetrating in its causes or reasons. Agreeing with the libertine sage in the analysis of the insufficiency of the vulgar man's position, but reverting from the pro to the con, the apologist also shows the insufficiency of the sage's position. Pascal attempts to neutralize the humanistic (non-Augustinian) Christianity of Charron (and above all, of his disciples) by turning his position into an effect whose cause can be found only in Scripture. For Pascal, misery, weakness, inconstancy, etc. are effects whose cause and above all cure can be found only

¹⁹Charron: "l'agitation et la chasse est proprement de nostre gibier: prendre ou faillir à la prise c'est autre chose" (S, I, 14, 136). Pascal: "Ce lièvre ne nous garantirait pas de la vue de la mort et des misères qui nous en détournent, mais la chasse nous en garantit" (La 136),

²⁰"Ils ont un instinct secret qui les porte à chercher le divertissement et l'occupation au-dehors, qui vient du ressentiment de leur misères continuelles. Et ils ont un autre instinct secret qui reste de la grandeur de notre première nature, qui leur fait connaître que le bonheur n'est en effet que dans le repos et non pas dans le tumulte" (La 136).

²¹According to the method indicated in fragment La 701: "Quand on veut reprendre avec utilité et montrer à un autre qu'il se trompe il faut observer par quel côté il envisage la chose, car elle est vraie ordinairement de ce côté-là et lui avouer cette vérité, mais lui découvrir le côté par où elle est fausse."

in revelation. So while he builds on book I of *Sagesse* for the diagnosis of the human predicaments, Pascal thus excludes book II of *Sagesse*, in which Charron sets forth the general rules that, when followed, supposedly would lead to the sage's emancipation from the intellectual and moral deficiencies mentioned in book I. The solution for the problem of humanity whose knowledge is addressed in book I of *Sagesse* and that would be addressed in part I of Pascal's apology, can no longer be the purely human skeptical wisdom that Charron proposes in book II, but depends on the revealed Christian wisdom that is the object of the second part of the apology designed by Pascal: "[q]u'il y a un Réparateur, par l'Écriture" (La 6). The solution to man's moral problems does not depend on natural—although skeptical—wisdom, but on revealed wisdom.

The fragments Pascal gathered in the section "raison des effects" show the likely influence of Charron's *Sagesse* in this topic. For instance, fragment La 91—"Raison des effets. Il faut avoir une pensée de derrière, et juger de tout par là, en parlant cependant comme le peuple"—exhibits precisely the attitude of Charron's skeptical sage. One of the general rules of wisdom presented in book II is to observe the laws, customs, and ceremonies of one's country, but with intellectual detachment, that is, without assenting to the truth of such laws, customs, and ceremonies.

selon tous les sages, la regle des regles, et la generale loy des loix, est de *suyvre* et observer les loix et *coutumes du país* ou l'on est. ... Mais que ce soit ... noblement et sagement, non pour ... la *justice* et *équité* qui soit en elles, ni aussi pour la punition qui en peut advenir, ne leur obeissant pas: Bref non par superstition ni par servitude contrainte scrupuleuse ... mais librement et simplement pour la reverence publique, et à cause de leur autorité: les loix et coutumes se maintiennent en credit non pource qu'elles sont justes et bonnes, mais pource qu'elles sont loix et *coutumes*, c'est le *fondement mystique de leur autorité*. (S, II, 8, 497–498)²²

Charron's passage is the source of La 60.

Sur quoi fondera(–t)–il l'économie du monde qu'il veut gouverner? Sera-ce sur le caprice de chaque particulier? Quelle confusion! sera-ce sur la *justice*? il l'ignore. Certainement s'il la connaissait il n'aurait pas établi cette maxime, la *plus générale de toutes celles* qui sont parmi les hommes, que chacun *suive les moeurs de son pays* ... La *coutume* (est) toute l'*équité*, par cette seule raison qu'elle est reçue. C'est le *fondement mystique de son autorité*. (La 60)²³

The "pensée de derrière" is the suspension of judgment that does not appear in the sage's words and deeds for, like the ancient skeptics, he follows habits, ceremonies, laws and traditions of his time and place. The key point emphasized by Charron is that such observation of laws and customs, despite being imperative given the fragility of social and political life, does not involve assent. Suspension of judgment

²² See Chap. 5, Sect. 5.5, for Descartes's reception of this "rule of rules."

²³ Charron's source is, again, Montaigne: "Car c'est la regle des regles, et generale loy des loix, que chacun observe celles du lieu où il est" (E, I, 23, 118). Also in the *Apology*: "ce que nostre raison nous y conseille de plus vray-semblable, c'est generally à chacun d'obeir aux loix de son pays" (E, II, 12, 578). "[A] Les loix prennent leur autorité de la possession et de l'usage; il est dangereux de les ramener à leur naissance..." (E, II, 12, 583). Although the content of fragment 60 originates from Montaigne, the text suggests Charron as Pascal's probable direct source.

is the central element of the sage's Academic intellectual freedom, which allows him to emancipate from the beliefs, errors, philosophical doctrines, and avoidable passions that assault vulgar and pedant men.

6.4 The Christian Sage Replaces the Skeptical Sage

Also in the “reason of the effects” section, fragment La 83 evokes Charron's skeptical sage and his contraposition to the vulgar men and the dogmatic philosopher (or, in the more frequent Charronian terminology, the vulgar and the pedant, respectively).

Les sciences ont deux extrémités qui se touchent, la première est la *pure ignorance naturelle* où se trouvent tous les hommes en naissant, l'autre extrémité est celle où arrivent les grands âmes qui ayant parcouru tout ce que les hommes peuvent savoir *trouvent qu'ils ne savent rien* et se rencontrent en cette même ignorance d'où ils étaient partis, mais c'est une ignorance savante qui se connaît. Ceux d'entre deux qui sont sortis de l'ignorance naturelle et n'ont pu arriver à l'autre, ont quelque teinture de cette *science suffisante*, et *font les entendus*. Ceux-là *troublent le monde et jugent mal* de tout. Le *peuple* et les *habiles* composent le train du *monde*; ceux-là le *méprisent* et sont *méprisés*. Ils jugent mal de toutes choses, et le *monde* en juge bien. (La 83)²⁴

Pascal builds on chapter 43 of book I of *Sagesse*, in which Charron distinguishes three classes of men according to “the spirit and the sufficiency”: the common or vulgar person, the wise or “esprit fort” who can become wise, and between the two the “demi-habiles”, i.e., the dogmatic philosophers, who Charron says, “*font profession de suffisance, science, habilité*; Mais qui ne se sentent et *ne se jugent pas assés*, s'arrestent à ce qu'on tient communément” (S, I, 43, 291). The sage, on the contrary, “*examinent ... meurement, et cherchent sans passion les causes, motifs, et ressorts jusques à la racine, ayants mieux douter et tenir en suspens leur creance, que par une trop molle et lasche facilité, ou legereté, ou precipitation du jugement, se paitre de fausseté, et affirmer ou se tenir assurez de chose, de laquelle ils ne peuvent avoir raison certaine. Ceux-cy sont en petit nombre, de l'eschole et ressort de Socrates et Platon*” (S, I, 43, 292).²⁵ Pointing out the distance of the sage from the mass of humanity, composed of vulgar men, and to a lesser extent, of “demi-habiles,” Charron asks: “*qui ne sçait que le Sage est un paradoxe au monde, un censeur et mépriseur du monde?*” (PTS, 856).

²⁴Charron's source for this theme is, again, Montaigne: “L'ignorance qui estoit naturellement en nous, nous l'avons, par longue estude, confirmée et averée. Il est advenu aux gens véritablement sçavants ce qui advient aux espics de bled: ils vont s'eslevant et se haussant, la teste droite et fiere, tant qu'ils sont vuides; mais quand ils sont pleins et grossis de grain en leur maturité, ils commencent à s'humilier et à baisser les cornes. Pareillement, les hommes ayant tout essayé et toute sondé, n'ayant trouvé en cet amas de science et provision de tant choses diverses rien de massif et ferme, et rien que vanité, ils ont renoncé à leur presumption et reconneu leur condition naturelle” (E, II, 12, 500).

²⁵For the relevance of this passage of Charron's in Descartes's doubt, see Chap. 5, Sect. 5.4.

Besides verifying the source of the fragment, I note the important reversion that Pascal makes in Charron's text, in the dialectics of the reversion from pro to con. According to fragment La 90, the opinions of the vulgar man,²⁶ denied by the "demi-habile" (which corresponds to the dogmatic philosopher in Charron's classification), are reestablished on a higher level by the "habile" (Charron's skeptical sage), but with "une pensée de derrière," that is, by taking these opinions as "sane," or pragmatically necessary, but not as true. While this skeptical attitude represents the apex of Charronian wisdom, Pascal continues the dialectical ascension and in fragment La 90 presents the "dévot" as denying the position of the "habile" (Charron's skeptic) and thus he returns on a higher level to the position of the "demi-habile." The position of the "dévot" is higher because it is a denial of the skeptical denial of the dogmatic position that denied the vulgar man's opinion, resulting in religious rather than philosophical dogmatism. The dialectics of fragment La 90 does not end, though, in the pious man, for the pious man's position is denied by the "perfect Christian," who therefore returns to the position of Charron's skeptical sage on a higher level. In this dialectic progression, Christian wisdom overcomes skepticism, not as its immediate denial by the pious, but through denial of the pious position. Christian wisdom is thus the denial of the denial of skeptical wisdom. Pascal locates Christian wisdom on the same side (although on a higher level) as skeptical wisdom, and both are opposite to the position of the "demi-habile" (the dogmatic philosopher) and the "dévot" (the dogmatic religious), which corresponds to Charron's "superstitious." Superstition is one of the four enemies of Wisdom, which is represented chained to the pedestal of Wisdom on the frontispiece of Charron's book (see chapter 1). Thus, the dislodgment of Charron's skeptical Wisdom from its pedestal is not work of either the dogmatic philosopher's Science (this is the work of Descartes's, as argued in Chap. 5) or the pious man's Superstition (two enemies of Charron's wisdom) but of a Christian Wisdom that opposes both the pious man's Superstition and the dogmatic philosopher's Science.

In dealing with skepticism, Pascal strikes at the general rules that are the heart of book II of Charron's *Sagesse*. The most relevant fragment in this context is La 131. Skepticism and dogmatism cannot be sustained, neither together (because one is the denial of the other) nor separately, because the dogmatic cannot justify the principles nor can the skeptic suspend judgment about them.²⁷ The impasse can be resolved only through an appeal to the Bible that supernaturally enlightens man about his dual contradictory condition. Christian doctrine (essentially the doctrine of the Fall of Man) renders intelligible man's cognitive and moral condition and the

²⁶ Examples of opinions held by vulgar men are given in La 101: "[d]'avoir choisi le divertissement, et la chasse plutôt que la prise;" "[d]'avoir distingué les hommes par le dehors, comme par la noblesse ou le bien;" "[d]e s'offenser pour avoir reçu un soufflet ou de tant désirer la gloire;" "travailler pour l'incertain, aller sur mer, passer sur une planche."

²⁷ According to Pascal, first principles are indubitable but this is not an assurance of truth, because—as in Descartes—such truth is not absolute but relative to human nature and reason whose truthfulness depends on the determination of the origin of the human being. And this origin, contrary to Descartes, cannot be established by reason because for Pascal there is no totally convincing argument that excludes the hypothesis of a deceiving God (See the beginning of fragment La 131).

Incarnation of Christ is the solution to man's cognitive and moral predicaments.²⁸ Dogmatic wisdom is refuted by skeptical wisdom (here Pascal agrees with Charron), but skeptical wisdom is in turn refuted by Christian wisdom (and here Pascal subverts the possible anti-religious potential of Charron's *Sagesse*).²⁹

In the long La 131 fragment, Pascal opposes the contrary forces of Pyrrhonians and dogmatists to conclude dramatically:

Quelle chimère est-ce donc que l'homme? ... *quel sujet de contradictions ...? Juge de toutes choses, imbécile ver de terre, dépositaire du vrai, cloaque d'incertitude et d'erreur, gloire et rebut de l'univers.* Qui démêlera cet embrouillement? (Certainement *cela passe* le dogmatisme et pyrrhonisme, et toute *la philosophie humaine. L'homme passe l'homme.* Qu'on accorde donc aux pyrrhoniens ... *que la vérité* n'est pas de notre portée, ni de notre gibier, ... *qu'elle loge dans le sein de Dieu.* ...) La nature confond les pyrrhoniens (et les académiciens) et la raison confond les dogmatiques. Que deviendrez-vous donc, ô homme qui cherchez quelle est votre véritable condition par votre raison naturelle, vous ne pouvez fuir une de ces (trois) sectes ni subsister dans aucune. Connaissez donc, superbe, quel paradoxe vous êtes à vous-même. Humiliez-vous, raison impuissante! Taisez-vous nature imbécile, apprenez que *l'homme passe infiniment l'homme* et entendez de votre maître *votre condition véritable que vous ignorez.* Écoutez Dieu. (La 131)

Pascal thus strikes down Charron's skeptical sage. The first evidence that "the Pyrrhonians" of Pascal are the wise men of Charron (or at least include them) is the agreement with the Pyrrhonians that "la vérité n'est pas de notre portée ... qu'elle loge dans le sein de Dieu." Charron actually says in chapter 14 of book I that "la vérité ... [ne] se laisse ... posséder à l'esprit humain. *Elle loge dedans le sein de Dieu*" (S, I, 14, 138).³⁰ In the chapter on presumption in book I, Charron presents the misery/greatness contradiction that Pascal associates with the skepticism/dogmatism contradiction.

Et le povre miserable est bien ridicule. Il est icy bas logé au dernier et pire estage de ce monde, plus eslongné de la voulte celeste, en *la cloaque et sentine de l'univers*, avec la

²⁸"Le pyrrhonisme est le vrai. Car après tout les hommes avant Jésus-Christ ne savaient où ils en étaient, ni s'ils étaient grands ou petits. Et ceux qui ont dit l'un ou l'autre n'en savaient rien et devinaient sans raison et par hasard. Et même ils erraient toujours en excluant l'un ou l'autre" (La 691). The moral solution lies in the reconciliation of glory and misery in the figure of Christ.

²⁹Although Pascal's main skeptical arguments are Cartesian, he also builds on Montaigne and Charron. "Ces deux principes de vérité, la raison et les sens, outre qu'ils manquent chacun de sincérité, s'abusent réciproquement l'un l'autre; les sens abusent la raison par de fausses apparences. Et cette même piperie qu'ils apportent à l'âme, ils la reçoivent d'elle à leur tour; elle s'en revanche. Les passions de l'âme les troublent et leur font des impressions fausses" (La 45). "Or que les sens soient faux ou non, pour le moyns il est certain qu'ils trompent, voyre forcent ordinairement le discours, la raison: et en eschange sont trompez par elle. Voilà quelle belle science et certitude l'homme peut avoir, quand le dedans et le dehors est plain de fausseté et foiblesse; et que ces parties principales, outils essentiels de la science se trompent l'un l'autre" (S, I, 9, 112). Another example: "Imagination. C'est cette partie dominante dans l'homme, cette maîtresse d'erreur et de fausseté" (La 44). Charron: "[I]magination est une tres-puissante chose, c'est celle qui fait tout le bruit, l'esclat" (S, I, 16, 147).

³⁰Montaigne: "la vraie raison et essentielle ... loge dans le sein de Dieu" (E, II, 12, 541). Note that Montaigne says that 'reason'—and not 'truth' as Charron and Pascal put it—lies within God.

bourbe et la lie, avec les animaux de la pire condition, subject à recevoir tous les excremens et ordures ... et se fait croire qu'il est le maistre commandant à tout. (S, I, 40, 273)³¹

In the excerpt below from the preface, Charron characterizes wisdom. It contains the central elements that Pascal reacts to in his counter-attack on what Charron (or his disciples) consider to be “superstition.”

cette sagesse humaine est une droiture, belle et noble composition de l'homme entier, en son dedens, son dehors, ses pensées, paroles, actions, et tous ses mouvemens c'est *l'excellence et perfection de l'homme comme homme* ... celui est homme *sage qui sçait bien et excellemment faire l'homme*: c'est à dire, ... *qui se cognoissant bien et l'humaine condition*, se garde et preserve de tous vices, erreurs ... maintenant son esprit net ... *considerant et jugeant de toutes choses*, sans s'y obliger ny jurer à aucune. (S, 32–33)

The central characteristic of Charron's Academic skeptical sage is, following Cicero's view of the Academics, his intellectual integrity. He judges all things and does not assent to anything as he finds in all issues philosophical or popular *diaphonia*.³² The sage who knows himself and preserves himself from all vices is not, therefore, the Stoic but the Academic skeptic, who judges all things and assents to nothing. Thus in the dramatic sequence of fragment La 131 that shows the contradictions in man—“juge de toutes choses ... cloaque d'incertitude et d'erreur, gloire et rebut de l'univers”—Pascal describes characteristics of Charron's sage, who sees himself as miserable in book I, lodged in the “cloaque et sentine de l'univers,” but who naturally and humanly overcomes such misery (or insulates himself from it) “jugeant de toutes choses” without assenting to any, thereby achieving not only intellectual but also moral integrity and perfection.³³ Pascal combats precisely this way of overcoming misery, this way to achieve perfection of man as man through the rules of skeptical wisdom displayed in book II. Pascal describes as contradictory this Charronian man who recognizes himself as miserable, but who judges all things. Charron describes this miserable condition in book I on self-knowledge. This self-knowledge illuminates, among others, the moral problems of humanity, the solution of which are the general rules of wisdom in book II. Pascal combines these two totally distinct moments in Charron to render

³¹ Charron's source is Montaigne. “Elle [la créature humaine] se sent et se voit logée icy, parmi la bourbe et le fient du monde, attachée et clouée à la pire, plus morte et croupie partie de l'univers, au dernier estage du logis et le plus esloigné de la voute celeste, avec les animaux de la pire condition des trois; et se va plantant par imagination au-dessus du cercle de la Lune” (E, II, 12, 452). Note that Pascal seems to use Charron's—and not Montaigne's—text. ‘Cloaque’ appears only in Charron, and the same is the case with the expression “sentine (Charron)/rebut (Pascal) de l'univers.” This reminder of Charron in Pascal was noted by Adam (1991, 201–202).

³² This attitude is what enables the wise man to avoid the four enemies of wisdom: the vulgar man's Opinion (he verifies the variability and precariousness of vulgar opinions that change—often radically and abruptly—from one country to another, from one age to another, from time to time, etc.), the dogmatist's Science (object of philosophical *diaphonia* and always ultimately founded on a principle of authority not rationally justified), Passion (stimulated by unfounded beliefs), and Superstition (arising from weakness of spirit contrary to the sage's *esprit fort*).

³³ On these different dimensions of integrity in the Academic skeptic's position, see Chap. 2, Sect. 2.2.

skeptical wisdom unlivable and to introduce Christian wisdom in its place.³⁴ Pascal uses aspects of Montaigne's and Descartes's doubt to attack Charron's skepticism. From Montaigne, Pascal preserves the characterization of a doubt, which he attributes to the "Pyrrhonians," that turns against itself and therefore does not provide any stability for the subject who doubts. Ruling out any certainty of the self, it is a characterization of the skeptic contrary to Charron's Academic/Socratic sage. From Descartes, Pascal takes what he calls "les principales forces des pyrrhoniens," namely, hyperbolic doubt, which, given its radicalism and implausibility, cannot be exercised in practical life. Nature impedes hyperbolic doubt.³⁵ Pascal relies on Cartesian doubt to introduce a divorce between skepticism ("Pyrrhonism") and morals, thus rendering unlivable Charron's Academic skeptical wisdom.³⁶ The fact that Cartesian doubt is untenable in practice—which poses no problem for Descartes because his doubt is merely a methodic device—is taken by Pascal, who of course is not interested in methodic doubt, as proof of the internal deficiency of skepticism as a moral philosophy. The aim of Pascal is to show that given the failure of skepticism and that of dogmatism—whose internal epistemological insufficiency is correctly shown by the skeptics—any possible solution for human contrariety within the realm of mere philosophy and nature is excluded. Thus, if Academic skepticism is, according to Charron, the attitude in which man finds his excellence and perfection as man, for Pascal, man infinitely surpasses man, that is, his nature is supernaturally determined.³⁷ The dramatic sequence of La 131 concludes with the demand, given the failure of the only possible philosophical wisdoms, the skeptical and the dogmatic, that one turn to God and listen to the divine wisdom that is revealed in Scripture. Supernaturally revealed Christian wisdom replaces Charron's naturally acquired skeptical wisdom.

³⁴ Christian Belin (1995, 290–306) sees the relationship between Charron and Pascal in an opposite manner. Even though Belin claims that Pascal "ne retient de la *Sagesse* que l'analyse anthropologique, à travers le thème du socratisme chrétien, tandis que le discours sapientiel semble le laisser indifférent" (290), according to Belin with regards to purpose, "l'oeuvre de Charron est incontestablement plus proche de Pascal [than Montaigne's], dans la mesure où elle enseigne aux hommes, beaucoup plus systématiquement que Montaigne, le rejet et la haine de la philautie, de façon à ce qu'ils soient plus réceptifs aux révélations de la divine Sagesse" (291–292). For this reason, Belin, like most Pascal scholars, finds more relevant to Pascal's thought Charron's apologetic work, *Les Trois Vérités* than *De la Sagesse*. I claim, on the contrary, that Pascal is not indifferent to Charron's wisdom exactly because he sees in it not an aid but a hindrance to the receptivity of Christian wisdom.

³⁵ I show in Chap. 5 that Descartes arrives at hyperbolic doubt by engaging with, radicalizing and thereby reverting, Charron's moral doubt.

³⁶ As has been noted by Pascal scholars, e.g. Carraud (1992, 83–87), Pascal's version of the dream argument and his argument from the uncertainty of our origin (from a benevolent God, a deceiver, or by chance) are Cartesian. These arguments are presented in this same fragment La 131 in which Pascal uses Charron's text to reject Charron's position. None of these hyperbolic skeptical arguments are found in Charron who relies on the skeptical argument of *diaphonia* (cf. *Sagesse*, II, 2, 407).

³⁷ See Chap. 5, Sect. 5.2, for the relevance of Charron's separation of human from divine wisdom in Descartes's *Discourse on the Method*.

The message of Christian wisdom is deliberately “anti-rational” in the sense that it is contrary to *a priori* reason. While the main principle of Charron's skeptical wise man is to judge everything, Pascal introduces a sphere in which it is not reasonable to judge and whose intelligibility demands the submission of reason itself. According to Pascal, self-knowledge (a precondition to Charron's wisdom) is not possible in the merely natural scope in which Charron develops his wisdom. To understand the skepticism/dogmatism contradiction, one must go beyond this dual scheme that is restricted to the merely human (natural) philosophical experience and resort to supernatural revelation, specifically to the doctrine of the Fall of Man, the only thing capable of satisfactorily explaining the philosophical contrariety. The insufficiency of *a priori* reason appears in the intrinsically non-rational character of the doctrine which, therefore, could never have been conceived by man, and that therefore could only be revealed. Consider again fragment La 131.

Car il est sans doute qu'il n'y a rien qui *choque plus notre raison* que de dire que le péché du premier homme ait rendu coupables ceux qui étant si éloignés de cette source semblent incapables d'y participer. *Cet écoulement ne nous paraît pas seulement impossible. Il nous semble même très injuste ...* Certainement rien *ne nous heurte plus rudement* que cette doctrine. Et cependant sans ce *mystère, le plus incompréhensible de tous*, nous sommes incompréhensibles à nous-mêmes. ... (D'où il paraît que Dieu voulant nous rendre la difficulté de notre être inintelligible à nous-mêmes en a caché le nœud *si haut* ou pour mieux dire *si bas* que nous étions bien incapables d'y arriver. De sorte que ce n'est pas par les superbes agitations de notre raison mais par la simple soumission de la raison que nous pouvons véritablement nous connaître). (La 131)

Pascal's description of the nature of the Christian doctrine that explains human contradictions is a clear response to Charron. In the chapter on the true piety of the sage, Charron launches an attack against superstition. Religions, Charron says,

Pour se faire valoir et recevoir, elles alleguent et fournissent, soit de fait et en vérité, comme les vraies, ou par imposture ... des Revelations, Apparitions, Propheties, Miracles, Prodiges, sacrés *Mysteres*, Saints. ... Toutes croient que le principal et plus plaisant service à Dieu ... *c'est se donner de la peine* (S, II, 10, 446).

In this same chapter Charron makes his most famous claim about religion, a claim which was cited by La Mothe Le Vayer (see Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2) and interpreted as atheistic by the libertines addressed by Pascal:

Toutes les religions on cela, qu'elles sont *étranges et horribles au sens commun*, car elles proposent et sont basties et composées de pieces, desquelles les une semblent au jugement humaine, *basses*, indignes, ... dont l'esprit un peu fort et vigoureux *s'en mocque*; ou bien *trop hautes*, esclatantes miraculeuses, et *misterieuses*, où il ne peut rien *cognoistre*, dont il *s'en offense* (S, II, 10, 449–450).

Arguing that human contrarieties are not resolved naturally because skepticism and dogmatism are separately and jointly contradictory, Pascal argues that one must resort to a mystery that disgusts, injures, and humiliates *a priori* reason as a requirement of the *a posteriori* reason needed to understand human nature. Therefore, he seeks to strike a mortal blow at Charron's skeptical wisdom and its rationalism, in particular to rationalism in religious matters, which was held by libertines influenced

by Charron.³⁸ The doctrine that explains human contradictions is such that reason devoid of grace and revelation cannot discover it. Here Christian wisdom has a dialectical relationship with skeptical wisdom similar to that displayed in the “reason of effects” section of the *Pensées*. If mundane wisdom of the superstitious is overcome by skeptical wisdom, skeptical wisdom is in turn overcome by Christian wisdom. The genuine Christian is fully aware of the absence of any *a priori* reason for Christian doctrine, just as is the skeptical sage, but going beyond this, the Christian points out the inadequacy or insufficiency of any natural explanation of the contradictions of man. Thus, Christian wisdom rises to a higher level that surpasses and denies skeptical wisdom. “Le péché originel est folie devant les hommes,” says Pascal, “mais on le donne pour tel. Vous [Charron and his disciples] ne me devez donc pas reprocher le défaut de raison en cette doctrine, puisque je la donne pour être sans raison. Mais cette folie est plus sage que toute la sagesse des hommes, *sapientius est hominibus*” (La 695).³⁹ What Charron’s libertine followers consider to be Christian Superstition, the enemy of Skeptical Wisdom, chained to its pedestal, appears in Pascal’s apologetics as genuine Christian Wisdom that breaks from its chains, overthrows Skeptical Wisdom, and takes over the pedestal.⁴⁰

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³⁸I argue in Chap. 4, Sect. 4.2, that religious rationalism was not held by Charron himself and his follower La Mothe Le Vayer.

³⁹Louis Lafuma gives the full citation of Paul, I Cor., I, 25: “Car ce qui est folie en Dieu est *plus sage que les hommes*, et ce qui est faiblesse en Dieu est plus fort que les hommes” (Pascal, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Lafuma, 592 n.153).

⁴⁰This engagement with Charron’s followers can also be verified in the section “soumission et usage de la raison.” “La piété est différente de la superstition” (La 181). “La dernière démarche de la raison est de reconnaître qu’il y a une infinité de choses qui la surpassent. Elle n’est que faible si elle ne va jusqu’à connaître cela” (La 188). Pascal “redresses” “superstition” by transforming it into wisdom when he shows that it is not in the abandonment of reason in face of what is contrary to it that the sage is correct against the opinionating vulgar man, against the dogmatic philosopher and—crucially in the context—against the superstitious pious man. If submission of reason is a demand of reason itself, the Charronian skeptical sage lacks the strength of a true *esprit fort*.

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Chapter 7

Conclusion

The crises of Aristotelianism and of the scholastic educational system were the main reasons for the reappraisal of Academic skepticism in the Renaissance. Schmitt (1972) brought this context to light by making a survey of sixteenth-century Academic skepticism based on the editions and direct discussions of Cicero's *Academica*, our main source for Academic skepticism.¹ The reception was, however, much wider, as more recent work has shown.² The reception of Academic skepticism did not diminish after the translations of Sextus' works in 1562 and 1569.³

¹ See also the more recent and shorter survey by Casini (2009, 40–46) and Giocanti (2013).

² Jardine (1983) shows that Academic skepticism was viewed by major Renaissance authors, in the footsteps of Cicero, as the epistemology compatible with rhetorics. Granada (2001) examines the first reception of Academic skepticism in Italy. Naya (2008, 2009) has examined a variety of receptions of ancient Pyrrhonism and Academic skepticism in the Renaissance and argued that the latter—but not the former—was viewed by Christian authors, following Augustine, as capable of leading to Christian faith. This interpretation of Academic skepticism favored its reception at the time. Levy (2001) and Laursen (2009) have examined Pedro de Valencia's reception of Academic skepticism. Panichi (2009) and earlier Limbrick (1972) and Eva (2013) have argued for the relevance of Academic skepticism in Montaigne's kind of skepticism which has been almost exclusively related to ancient Pyrrhonism. Limbrick (1972) claims that Montaigne's reception resembles Augustine whereas Panichi shows the great relevance of Plutarch's middle Platonic view of Academic skepticism as characterized by the search for the truth.

³ Both Popkin (2003, 35) and Schmitt (1972, 165ff, 1983, 233) believed that because Sextus' works were much more philosophically interesting than Cicero's *Academica*, only after the former became available did skepticism become central in early modern philosophy. Popkin also believed that Sextus' more sophisticated skepticism became very influential because it coincided with the problem, emerged in the Reform and the religious controversies it suscitated, of justifying religious knowledge claims. This generated what he called a “crise pyrrhonienne” in the sixteenth century. I quote the opening paragraph of the first chapter of Popkin's *History of Scpeticism*: “One of the main avenues through which the sceptical views of antiquity entered late Renaissance thought was a central quarrel of the Reformation, the dispute over the proper standard of religious knowledge, or what was called ‘the rule of faith.’ This argument raised one of the classical problems of the Greek Pyrrhonists, the problem of the criterion of truth. With the rediscovery in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries of writings of the Greek Pyrrhonist Sextus Empiricus,

The main instance of this reception after the availability of Sextus' works is Pierre Charron's *De la Sagesse*. Because of the enormous immediate influence of Charron's work, it certainly is the main avenue through which Academic skepticism impacted seventeenth century philosophy. Charron proposes an Academic skeptical view of wisdom, whose main source is Cicero, according to which the crucial characteristic of the wise man is not to attain the truth but to avoid error. It is by avoiding error that human beings attain intellectual perfection. This perfection, understood as intellectual integrity, does not require possession of the truth given its obscurity to limited human beings. The basic disposition to wisdom is acquired by examining everything and assenting to nothing, for these are the conditions in which reason can function fully, that is, unhindered by any previously held belief and committed only to the search of the truth. By achieving and maintaining intellectual integrity, the wise man gets his mind free from the subjection of the passions, from vulgar and philosophical opinions and from political and religious authority.

Charron's fortune in the seventeenth century was immense. In this book I have examined this fortune in four philosophers who are among the most important ones in the first part of the century. La Mothe Le Vayer was Charron's main follower (despite differences, some of which were annotated in Chap. 4) because he pursued the same moral tendency of Charron's skepticism. By combating the opinionated and superstitious man, La Mothe Le Vayer makes a similar emancipatory use of ancient skepticism. He develops the notion of *esprit fort* which becomes central in heterodox and irreligious intellectual movements in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The *esprit foible* assents to views which are only contingently probable to him (in the Carnedean sense) and becomes attached to and a partisan of these views. This compromises intellectual integrity which is understood not only as intellectual honesty but also as the plain exercise of reason in its full critical capacity. In giving assent as truth to views which are only contingently probable, the philosopher limits the power of reason to avoid errors.

While La Mothe Le Vayer attacked mainly the opinionated and superstitious man, his friend Pierre Gassendi attacked, in his first work, the dogmatic Aristotelianism of his time. While La Mothe Le Vayer and Charron were interested above all in developing a skeptical morals, Gassendi, in the *Exercitationes adversus Aristoteleos*, set the bases of a new model of science compatible with the skeptical attitude proposed by Charron: modest, fallibilist, hypothetical, probabilistic, and based on experience. This model of science becomes the model of modern experimental science, as it was adopted by Robert Boyle and the members of the Royal Society.⁴

the arguments and views of the Greek sceptics became part of the philosophical core of the religious struggles then taking place. The problem of finding a criterion of truth, first raised in theological disputes, was then later raised with regard to natural knowledge, leading to la *crise pyrrhonienne* of the early sixteenth century" (2003, 3). For the fortune of Sextus' works from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, see Floridi (2002). For criticism of Popkin's theory, see Ayers (2004), Perler (2004) and Maclean (2006).

⁴See Van Leeuwen (1963, 90–120), Shapiro (1983, 15–73), and Popkin (2003, 208–218).

Unlike Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer, Descartes and Pascal broke with Charron by proposing non skeptical models of wisdom, which were established by overcoming the Charronian Academic skeptical one. These models are obviously quite different—even opposed—but both were elaborated at least partially as responses to—and after accepting up to a point—Charron’s model. The influence of Charron in Descartes is remarkable since his first writings. In the *Discourse*, in the first three parts of which Charron’s presence is most outstanding, Descartes says that he “kept uprooting from [his] mind any errors that might previously have slipped into it.” “In doing this,” he says, “I was not copying the sceptics, who doubt only for the sake of doubting and pretend to be always undecided; on the contrary, my whole aim was to reach certainty—to cast aside the loose earth and sand so as to come upon rock or clay” (CSM, I, 125). This could not describe better Charron’s aim with his reappraisal of ancient Academic skepticism, which is to avoid error and achieve self-assurance, by getting free of the instable field of opinions and getting to the solid rock of his own reason. But in Charron this rock is just a practical stance, not at all a container of metaphysical truths. Descartes transforms Charron’s moral certainty in metaphysical certainty thanks to his hyperbolic doubt. Putting in doubt the existence of the external material world, including the own body of the philosopher, Descartes substantializes the mind, emancipated through doubt, as *res cogitans*.

The tremendous and almost instantaneous philosophical success of Descartes and Cartesianism made Cartesian doubt much more influential—except in some libertine circles—than Charron’s skeptical wisdom. Pascal was the first major thinker to develop a model of skepticism under the influence of Descartes. Like numerous other philosophers who developed skeptical or semi-skeptical views after Descartes, Pascal took very seriously Descartes’s dream and deceiver skeptical scenarios, which according to him cannot be eliminated philosophically, and interpreted skeptically some of the Cartesian doctrines. The new mechanical and corpuscular philosophy supported by Descartes and Gassendi is for Pascal and other skeptics and semi-skeptics of the period clearly superior to Aristotle’s natural philosophy. However, as it improves our comprehension of nature it also shows how ignorant we are of the particular mechanisms responsible for the perceived phenomena.⁵ Pascal holds a skeptical epistemological view but totally rejects and attacks Charron’s view that a skeptical stance is not only viable but the best position available to human beings. He uses Cartesian hyperbolic doubt in order to reject Charron’s Academic skeptical wisdom. He takes Cartesian skepticism as the strongest kind of skepticism and shows that it cannot be a practical alternative to dogmatism. Pascal’s conclusion is that no purely human natural wisdom is possible

⁵One of Pascal’s fragments about Descartes is the following one: “Descartes. Il faut dire en gros: cela se fait par figure et mouvement. Car cela est vrai, mais de dire quelles et composer la machine, cela est ridicule. Car cela est inutile et incertain et pénible” (La 84). Locke is the philosopher who most extensively and famously exposed the limits of natural philosophy along these lines: if the pre mechanical philosophy is basically tautological or unverifiable by experience, the new mechanical view makes it plain that natural philosophy can be only probable.

and therefore Christian wisdom must replace Academic skeptical wisdom which had successfully replaced dogmatic (Stoic, Aristotelian or whatever) wisdom.

After 1660s Charron's influence was mainly indirect. One can distinguish two waves of this influence in the second half of the seventeenth century. The first was two battles, each opposing two of the four philosophers studied in this book. Gassendi attacked what he considered to be Descartes's dogmatic model of science. This battle occurred even in the personal level, caused by Descartes's strong reaction to Gassendi's Fifth set of Objections to the Meditations.⁶ Descartes believed that we could have certainty in metaphysical matters, a position strongly rejected by Gassendi, who followed Charron on this, though, as I argue in Chap. 5, Descartes did not see himself as going against—but as going further than—Charron. The opposition between Gassendi and Descartes, Gassendists and Cartesians, was a hallmark in late seventeenth century philosophy.⁷

The second battle did not get personal. This is the opposition between Pascal and La Mothe Le Vayer on the relations of skepticism and religion. The kinds of skepticism elaborated by each and the relation to Christianity proposed were quite different. I argue in Chap. 4 that La Mothe le Vayer, unlike Pascal, does not establish a connection between skepticism and the specific Christian religion, so his position was interpreted by many, including by the Jansenist close to Pascal Antoine Arnauld, as irreligious.⁸ Although Pascal himself does not mention La Mothe Le Vayer, scholars have shown that either he or free thinkers influenced by him are major targets of his projected apology for the Christian religion.⁹

Other intellectual connections among the four thinkers studied in this book have been examined in the literature. Pintard (1983) has given much relevance to the friendship between Gassendi and La Mothe Le Vayer in the 1620s in the context of the views held by these two thinkers in their works examined in this book. Giocanti (1996, 2001b) and Paganini (2008, 248–270) have argued for the relevance of La Mothe le Vayer's skepticism in Descartes anti-skepticism. McKenna (1990, vol. I, 23–30) has shown the influence of Gassendi's skepticism on Pascal and a myriad of scholars have examined the complex reception of Descartes by Pascal.¹⁰

⁶Gassendi (1962) contains all the rounds of the fight.

⁷The literature on this debate is immense. Lennon (1993) provides a detailed analysis of the main philosophical issues controversial, first in the direct confrontation and then in the followers of Descartes's and Gassendi's, in particular in the two major ones in the period, respectively, Malebranche and Locke.

⁸Arnauld (1777, vol. X, 342) claims that Tubero's (the pseudonym used by La Mothe Le Vayer in the *Dialogues faits à l'imitation des anciens*) *epochè* is contrary to Christian faith.

⁹See Wetsel (1994, 66–77, 113–119, 1999), Maia Neto (1995, 37–64), and above all the detailed study by Giocanti (2001a).

¹⁰For the view that Pascal completely rejected Descartes's philosophy, see, among others, Bouchilloux (1995, 235–254). For an interpretation of Pascal as diverging from, but deeply influenced by Descartes, see Carraud (1992).

The second wave of Charron's indirect influence occurred with the skeptics at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century.

The crucial mediation here is that of Descartes's. As he became famous still in life, his view of doubt and the skeptical arguments he proposed became almost hegemonic in the discussions of skepticism. Pascal is a transitional figure in the history of modern skepticism, for he combines the influences of Montaigne and Charron (hegemonic up to Descartes) and of Descartes.¹¹ The skeptical doubt proposed by the latter was used by Pascal to strike at the skeptical position held by the former.

Late seventeenth century skepticism is deeply marked by Cartesian doubt and the debates around Cartesianism. As the influence of Descartes increases, that of Montaigne and Charron decreases. The three French late seventeenth century philosophers who developed skeptical views (Huet, Foucher and Bayle) were much more influenced by Descartes than by Charron.¹² But by attacking or ignoring Descartes's metaphysics and holding only to the method of doubt, as Labrousse says concerning Bayle, "coupée de ses prolongements métaphysiques" (1964, vol. 2, 57), they endeavored to undo Descartes's metaphysical subversion of Charron's Academic skepticism by holding—at least as far as philosophy is concerned—the Academic supreme commitment to avoidance of error given that truth cannot be naturally achieved by human beings. Foucher, Huet, Bayle were quite influenced by Cartesian doubt. Bayle's *Dictionary* has at its main goal the correction of errors in intellectual, political and religious history.¹³ Huet proposed as the immediate end of his philosophy "éviter l'erreur, l'opiniâtreté, & l'arrogance."¹⁴ Foucher radicalized Descartes's use of doubt to combat materialism in a project which he called Academic.¹⁵

¹¹ Another such transitional figure is Glanvill, see Introduction, note 17.

¹² Charron's direct influence on Foucher, Huet and Bayle, which I suppose little, still waits further inquiry. In the case of Bayle, the article "Charron" in the *Dictionary* seems relevant to at least some aspects of his own skepticism. On Bayle's reception of Charron, see Paganini (1980, 92–96), Bianchi (1988, 141–175), and Adam (1991, 202–206). Huet knew well Charron's work. In his *marginalia* of Pascal's *Pensées*, he notes that Pascal's wager is a reappraisal of one of the arguments in Charron's *Trois Vérités* (see Maia Neto and Popkin 1995 and Orcibal 1956). Although the list of Huet's personal library indicates Charron's works, I could not find the books in the collection preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. In any event, Charron does not seem directly relevant to the main skeptical arguments in the *Traité Philosophique*. Finally, Foucher's philosophy is pretty much the result of his engagement with Cartesianism. Charron's *Wisdom* seems to play no role in it.

¹³ I argue in Maia Neto (1999) that Bayle's skepticism is Academic and show his reception and modifications of the skepticisms exhibited by Charron, La Mothe Le Vayer, Descartes and Pascal.

¹⁴ See Huet (1974, chapter 6: "Quelle est la fin que l'on se propose dans l'art de douter"). Avoiding error is the immediate end, the ultimate end is to prepare for the reception of religious truth. For Huet's fierce reaction to Descartes's view of the plain truth, see Lennon (2008). For the presence of Descartes's doubt in Huet's skepticism, see Maia Neto (2008). For that of Pascal's, see Maia Neto (2006).

¹⁵ For details of the project and the role of Cartesianism in it, see Watson (1966, 1987) and Maia Neto (2003).

The last and most important episode of this second wave of Charron's indirect influence in early modern philosophy is Hume. The author of the *Inquiry concerning Human Understanding* calls in this work "Academic skeptic" his own skepticism. His case is a sign of Charron's ostracism in the eighteenth century since Hume's sources for Academic skepticism are Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, Berkeley and the late seventeenth century French skeptics, Bayle in particular.¹⁶ This is not to say that Charron's influence disappeared. In a letter to Heinrich Köselitz, Nietzsche notes and regrets the oblivion of *De la Sagesse*.¹⁷ Charron's view of the skeptic as an *esprit fort* certainly played a role in one of Nietzsche's most influential views.

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¹⁶ See Maia Neto (1997) and Paganini (1984, 1991, 151–196, 2004, 2010).

¹⁷ See letters to Heinrich Köselitz from 30 March and 16 April 1881, in eKGWB/BVN, 1881, 97 and 103. I thank Rogério Lopes for calling my attention to these references.

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