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The Reconfiguration of *Natura*  
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and the Epistemological Reflections  
in the Prize Questions of the French  
Academies

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# The Reconfiguration of *Natura* and *Ars* in Cartesian Rhetoric and the Epistemological Reflections in the Prize Questions of the French Academies<sup>1</sup>

Martin Urmann

Abstract:

This article discusses the change in the relationship between *natura* and *ars* that occurred when Cartesian language theories penetrated conceptions of rhetoric in France during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In part one, the article considers the reception of Descartes by the French universities and *collèges* in order to explore what I call the epistemic transfer between Aristotelianism and the new Cartesian philosophy. The focus then shifts to Bernard Lamy's conception of rhetoric as presented in his principal work *De l'art de parler* (1675). Based upon the Cartesian theory of passions, Lamy's book redefines rhetoric in a way that has been labelled in current research as a 'grammar of affects'. The fundamentals of the *ars rhetorica* are thus substantially altered, however without eliminating the power of the rhetorical tradition. The third section turns to the prize contests of the French academies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in order to show the extent to which the transformation of rhetorical theory affected the broader practice of eloquence. Moreover, the rhetorical prize contests demonstrate an explicit reflection on the diverging modes of knowledge production that are essential, on the one hand, to the exact sciences and, on the other, to the textual tradition. Particularly striking is the critique of scientific method that was developed by the defenders of rhetoric in the *concours académique*.

## I. Aristotelianism and natural knowledge from the perspective of rhetoric

Loin cet orgueil philosophique  
Qui séduit la crédulité:  
Le doute sage et méthodique  
Seul éclaircit la vérité.  
Interprète de la nature,  
C'est à toi qu'elle a sans mesure  
Prodigué ses secrets divers.  
Viens disputer, nouveau Lyncée,  
Aux fiers élèves du lycée,  
L'honneur d'instruire l'univers.  
...<sup>2</sup>

This ode to Descartes, for which Father Lisle from the congregation of the Doctrinaries was awarded the *prix de poésie* by the eminent Académie des Jeux Floraux in Toulouse in 1710, presents its protagonist as a truly epoch-making figure, setting his work apart from tradition. The author, a professor of rhetoric at the Collège de l'Esquille in Toulouse, subsequently guides

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<sup>1</sup> This article will be published in: *Aristotelianism and Natural Knowledge at Early-Modern Protestant Universities*, eds. Volkhard Wels and Pietro Omodeo, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2018. The research for this article was conducted at the Collaborative Research Center 980 "Episteme in Motion" (Freie Universität Berlin) as part of the project A07 *Erõtoma. The Question as an Epistemic Genre in the Learned Societies of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*.

<sup>2</sup> "Descartes", in: *Recueil de plusieurs pièces d'éloquence et de poésie présentées à l'Académie des Jeux Floraux, pour les prix de l'année 1710*, Toulouse 1710, pp. 1–6, here v. 1–10, p. 1.

the reader through the different areas of Descartes' philosophy, with which he is clearly familiar. Beyond Cartesian astronomy and theory of matter,<sup>3</sup> he is most impressed by the psychology, the theory of passions, that Descartes had developed. Lisle's song of praise demonstrates his keen awareness of the ambivalence of this conception of the soul, which from its first appearance had led both to deterministic and to idealistic interpretations.<sup>4</sup> As the "esclave souveraine", in the author's paradoxical phrase, the soul is subjected to the "lois du corps", while at the same time it is the realm where "la matière, sans connaissance, reçoit [...] des sentiments" and gains spiritual qualities.<sup>5</sup> Although the ode does not explicitly invoke the pineal gland, the famous bridge connecting the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, it shows considerable knowledge of Descartes' conception of the passions and of the far-reaching epistemological consequences of the "doctrine nouvelle".<sup>6</sup>

The new philosophical principles had a particular impact in the theory of affects which Descartes developed, or rather summed up, in *Les passions de l'âme* (1649).<sup>7</sup> This conception of the passions in a way condenses the transformative elements that put rhetorical theory on a new basis in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This leads us to one of the main issues of this article: the reconfiguration of *natura* and *ars* in concepts of rhetoric inspired by Descartes. Accordingly, I seek to show from the perspective of the history of rhetoric how Aristotelianism and natural knowledge interacted in this particular field. This article deals with the complex processes of amalgamation between, on the one hand, the knowledge of the textual tradition based ultimately on the principles of Aristotelian dialectic and rhetoric and, on the other, empirical knowledge based on the observation of nature. This interaction led to a remarkable epistemic "transfer" in the rhetorical tradition.<sup>8</sup> In order to reconstruct this transfer, I will first examine the reception of Cartesian philosophy in the universities and the *collèges* in France in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. I will then turn to the conception of a 'new' rhetoric in Bernard Lamy's *Art de parler* (1675) before focussing finally on the epistemological reflections in the rhetorical prize contests held by the French academies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>3</sup> See *ibid.*, v. 41–60, pp. 3–4.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Stéphane Van Damme, *Descartes. Essai d'histoire culturelle d'une grandeur philosophique*, Paris 2002, pp. 61–72 and pp. 96–110 and François Azouvi, *Descartes et la France. Histoire d'une passion nationale*, Paris 2002, p. 32–35.

<sup>5</sup> Lisle, "Descartes", v. 66, v. 77 and v. 83–84 (pp. 4–5).

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, v. 26, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Panajotis Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung im Rahmen des neuzeitlichen Rationalismus*, Hamburg 2002, pp. 188–196.

<sup>8</sup> On the notion of transfer as the gradual change of knowledge that results from the complex interaction of traditional and novel epistemic elements see Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum/Anita Traninger, "Institution – Iteration – Transfer. Zur Einführung", in: *Wissen in Bewegung. Institution – Iteration – Transfer (Episteme in Bewegung. Beiträge zu einer transdisziplinären Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, vol. 1), eds. Eva Cancik-Kirschbaum and Anita Traninger, Wiesbaden 2015, pp. 1–13.

This approach seems fruitful when we seek to understand Aristotelianism as a dynamic tradition of knowledge open to (certain) debate(s) in several ways. First, it allows us to see that also at the – catholic – universities in France the Aristotelian corpus could be applied to new contexts and, to a certain extent, be reinterpreted. Moreover, the case of Lamy demonstrates how difficult it was to forsake the enduring power of tradition, even when the endeavour was essentially founded on the new notion of nature. Finally, consideration of the prize contests of the French academies is not merely an end in itself. The prize questions allow us to examine how the contestants reflected on the intricate relationship between Aristotelianism and natural knowledge at that time. After the 1720s, this particular genre of public knowledge exchange actually stimulated an intense discourse on the relation between the textual tradition and the new sciences. This discourse bears witness to the reconfiguration of *natura* and *ars* which can be observed in the major rhetorical theories of the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

## II. Descartes in the university

Research has established a very precise understanding of the reception of Descartes' work in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>9</sup> Despite the strong resonance among the leading researchers of the age and before its triumph in the years after 1700, Descartes' philosophy had to pass through a critical phase during which it met fierce opposition from the three major institutions: the church (particularly from the Jesuits), the theological faculties in the universities, and ultimately the Crown. The most spectacular occurrence of this confrontation undoubtedly took place in 1663 when the church placed Descartes' writings on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (even though with the somewhat milder notation of *donec corrigantur*, until corrected).<sup>10</sup>

After the theological faculty of the university of Leuven officially forbid Descartes' notion of substance in 1662,<sup>11</sup> the ban of his teachings in the French universities soon followed. In 1664 the University of Paris issued the first of several decrees demanding that physics classes should be based only on Aristotelian philosophy. In 1671 finally, the *Sorbonne* imposed an overall ban on the teachings of Descartes. Renewed in 1691 and 1704, it halted the introduction of Cartesian metaphysics into the theological curricula. The idea that matter and extension coincide was absolutely incompatible with the doctrine of transubstantiation. Many of the *collèges*, too,

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<sup>9</sup> See especially Van Damme, *Descartes*, pp. 27–137 and Azouvi, *Descartes et la France*, pp. 15–93.

<sup>10</sup> With Descartes' death in 1650, however, this ban was actually definitive. Cf. Roger Ariew, *Descartes and the Last Scholastics*, Ithaca/London 1999, pp. 173–181 and Azouvi, *Descartes et la France*, pp. 23–28.

<sup>11</sup> See Van Damme, *Descartes*, p. 90.

implemented restrictive measures against Cartesianism, in part because of pressure from the Crown.<sup>12</sup>

At the centre of one of the most intense controversies, we find Bernard Lamy (1640–1715), the professor of rhetoric and philosophy at the Oratorian *collège* in Angers.<sup>13</sup> Lamy, to whose rhetorical work I will turn in the next section, early in his career had defended Cartesian ontology in metaphysical questions and continued to teach his positions on the *res extensa* in Angers (from 1673). When, like other Cartesians, he was suspected of advocating democracy as a more rational form of government than monarchy, he was suspended from office in August 1675 by royal decree. The *collège* of Angers, which had long tried to protect him, was now forced to prohibit the teaching of Cartesian positions and to exile Lamy to the abbey of Saint-Martin-de-Miséré near Grenoble. But thanks to the protection of the cardinal Le Camus, Lamy could again take up his courses of philosophy at the *séminaire de Grenoble* as well as publish his theories.

The outcome of the Lamy affair already shows that, in the practice of university or college teaching, there remained some room for manoeuvre with regard to Cartesian philosophy, despite official prohibitions. In fact, there was a sustained interest in Descartes's theories at the French universities and *collèges* from the 1660s, as especially Laurence Brockliss has shown.<sup>14</sup> This interest came from a number of professors who were willing to confront the new teachings and introduce them into their classes. The first to do so were the professors of physics, who discussed mechanistic principles within a system that was still dominated by the Aristotelian tradition. This process of assimilation continued to broaden with the result that by 1690, due to the work of various professors at the University of Paris and beyond, the basis for a more heterogeneous system of physics had been created. This system was capable of absorbing the main tendencies in contemporary natural philosophy – without abandoning the Aristotelian foundation of university physics.<sup>15</sup>

The 1690s, then, marked a turning point as, from that time, the agenda was increasingly set by convinced adherents of Cartesian philosophy who sought to establish mechanics as the defining system of physics at the university. After the University of Paris had been won over in the early

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<sup>12</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 96–102 and Azouvi, *Descartes et la France* 38–42.

<sup>13</sup> On the following see *ibid.*, pp. 43–45. See also François Girbal, *Bernard Lamy (1640-1715). Étude biographique et bibliographique*, Paris 1964, pp. 28–42.

<sup>14</sup> See the fundamental work of Laurence W. B. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. A Cultural History*, Oxford 1987, pp. 197–216, 332–333 and pp. 345–376.

<sup>15</sup> Aristotelian physics, as Brockliss notes, had by then “become a highly eclectic philosophy”. *Ibid.*, p. 350. See also *idem*, “Der Philosophieunterricht in Frankreich”, in: *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, vol. 2/2: *Frankreich und Niederlande*, ed. Jean-Pierre Schobinger (*Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, ed. Friedrich Ueberweg), Basel 1993, pp. 3–32, here pp. 23–25.

1700s, the Cartesian cause soon became widely accepted. By 1720 “there was hardly a *collège de plein exercice* or a regular convent that had not succumbed” to the mechanists. Even though the professors may not have been wholesale supporters of every Cartesian position, the “rejection of Aristotle was rapid and universal”.<sup>16</sup> The new teachings then penetrated even into the classes in logic and to a certain extent even in metaphysics.<sup>17</sup>

It is particularly interesting to see how the professors dealt with the new philosophy of nature, especially in the period between 1660 and 1690 when it had not yet become the new consensus at the universities. In fact, they discussed Descartes’s theses within the traditional framework of the *disputatio* in order to see how they measured up against the Aristotelian system.<sup>18</sup> The axioms of mechanist physics, including its empirical discoveries, thus fed into the dialectical logic of the disputation, which was originally designed to verify or refute propositions. This seeming paradox is understandable if one considers the fact that the *disputatio* remained an essential form of knowledge debate in the early modern period.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, there are important parallels between the two modes of knowledge on a formal level, which facilitated this epistemic transfer. Both Aristotelians *and* Cartesians conceived of physics as a science based on deductive principles. Neither of the camps regarded physics as founded on observation and empirical data. The fact that the two deductive systems, axiomatic on the one hand, dialectical on the other, were quite different in nature was not a major problem to the professors; at least it did not stop them from combining the two modes of demonstration.<sup>20</sup> Besides, both of these theories of physics were based on logical, rather than mathematical principles. Descartes and his followers, to be sure, attached crucial importance to mathematics, but principally as a model for clear deductive reasoning. It was only with Newton that the laws of nature were expressed in a purely mathematical language.<sup>21</sup>

In their discussions of Descartes’s theories, the professors must certainly have realised substantial divergences from the Aristotelian tradition. In this regard, it is particularly interesting to see how they dealt with these differences and thus to examine the terms of the

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<sup>16</sup> Brockliss, *French Higher Education*, pp. 350–351. Brockliss consequently speaks of the “Cartesian era” between 1690 and 1740. The last Aristotelian textbook by the Jesuit Gaspard Buhon actually appeared in 1723, *ibid.*, p. 187.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 197–216.

<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 337–350.

<sup>19</sup> On the persistence of the *disputatio* see especially the contributions in: *Frühneuzeitliche Disputationen. Polyvalente Produktionsapparate gelehrten Wissens*, eds. Marion Gindhart, Hanspeter Marti and Robert Seidel, Köln/Weimar/Wien 2016 and Hanspeter Marti, “Disputation und Dissertation. Kontinuität und Wandel im 18. Jahrhundert”, in: *Disputatio 1200–1800. Form, Funktion und Wirkung eines Leitmediums universitärer Wissenskultur*, eds. Marion Gindhart and Ursula Kundert, Berlin/New York 2010, pp. 63–85. See also Emmanuel Bury, “Les lieux de l’argumentation dans les discours médicaux du XVIIe siècle”, in: *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 55/154 (2005), pp. 35–54.

<sup>20</sup> See Brockliss, “Der Philosophieunterricht in Frankreich”, p. 29.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 30.

epistemic transfer. The most common attitude was the position of Aristotelian eclecticism, which basically preserved the traditional principles of physics while at the same time seeking to integrate the findings of the new philosophy of nature.<sup>22</sup> It is striking to see how important it was to the professors to make the new teachings appear as traditional as possible. Consequently, they preserved the Aristotelian notions of form and element, and they referred to their positions as Aristotelian although they were based on the principles of matter and motion. In this way, Descartes could even be presented as a materialist Aristotelian. This was the perspective taken by François Bayle, a professor of philosophy at the university of Toulouse, who in 1700 dedicated an entire textbook to the reconciliation of Aristotle and Descartes.<sup>23</sup> The more ‘radical’ professors on the other hand tended to present Aristotle as a mechanist *avant la lettre* whose theories had been wrongly interpreted later by the scholastics.<sup>24</sup>

When the divergences from the Aristotelian model were too serious, they were either tacitly ignored or reinterpreted; sometimes the new facts were simply denied. The latter applies especially to the cases of superlunary comets, new stars, and solar *maculae*.<sup>25</sup> Regarding the sunspots, the professors in fact denied their existence in order to prevent harm to the Aristotelian system. Although they had to admit the empirical observation of the phenomena they countered by denying that the spots were situated on the sun.<sup>26</sup>

The reception of Descartes in the French universities and *collèges* is also significant in terms of the confessional dimension natural knowledge had assumed in the early modern period. It clearly shows that, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the dynamic tradition of Aristotelianism was not the privilege of the Protestant universities. It is true that many of the professors who were particularly open to Cartesian theories were reform-oriented Oratorians<sup>27</sup> or even close to Jansenism and hence in a certain way theologically predisposed to the Augustinian heritage in Descartes’ philosophy.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the secular philosophy professors played an important part, especially at the University of Paris. Nevertheless, all of these university lecturers were, of course, of the Catholic persuasion and, more importantly, they taught at catholic institutions.

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Brockliss, *French Higher Education*, pp. 352–359.

<sup>23</sup> See idem, “Der Philosophieunterricht in Frankreich”, p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> See *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> See Brockliss, *French Higher Education*, pp. 342–344.

<sup>26</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 342.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. the detailed prosopographic documentation in *ibid.*, pp. 459–477, here especially pp. 463–468; see also *ibid.*, pp. 348–350.

<sup>28</sup> On this relation see Azouvi, *Descartes et la France*, pp. 24–27 and Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung*, p. 182.

Finally, even among the professors of physics who were receptive to Cartesian philosophy there were many Jesuits.<sup>29</sup>

In the next section, the analysis of Bernard Lamy's *Art de parler* will demonstrate the epistemic transfer that resulted when the Cartesian notion of nature was introduced into the field of rhetoric.

### III. Bernard Lamy and the Reconfiguration of *Natura* and *Ars* in Cartesian Rhetoric

“Les passions ont des caractères particuliers avec lesquels elles se peignent elles-mêmes dans le discours.”<sup>30</sup>

In the first place, it has to be emphasised how Cartesian philosophy fundamentally challenged rhetoric.<sup>31</sup> According to Descartes, the reasonable inner nature of man representing the rational external order is the only legitimate and valid source of knowledge, at least as far as the programmatic level of Cartesian epistemology is concerned. The central position of nature (both external and internal to man) as *the* field of methodical investigation, the deeply rooted scepticism towards all (verbal) media interfering with the direct study of the objects of nature and the inward turn in the interior monologue of reason with itself were all factors that not only undermined the status of rhetoric, but compelled Descartes to reject it in the *Discours de la méthode* (1637):

J'estimais fort l'éloquence, et j'étais amoureux de la poésie; mais je pensais que l'une et l'autre étaient des dons de l'esprit, plutôt que des fruits de l'étude. Ceux qui ont le raisonnement le plus fort, et qui digèrent le mieux leurs pensées, afin de les rendre claires et intelligibles, peuvent toujours le mieux persuader ce qu'ils proposent, encore qu'ils ne parlent que bas-breton, et qu'ils n'eussent jamais appris de rhétorique. Et ceux qui ont les inventions les plus agréables, et qui les savent exprimer avec le plus d'ornement et de douceur, ne laisseraient pas d'être les meilleurs poètes, encore que l'art poétique leur fût inconnu.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> On the confessional dimension see also Brockliss's conclusion regarding France and other parts of Catholic Europe in *The Cambridge History of Science* (ed. Roy Porter, vol. 4: *Eighteenth-Century Science*, Cambridge e.a. 2003, p. 46): “The Jesuit and other Aristotelian professors” did not teach “a physics completely oblivious of contemporary developments in the natural sciences: sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Aristotelianism was a vibrant and eclectic physical philosophy that successfully incorporated most of the new observational discoveries”.

<sup>30</sup> Bernard Lamy, *La Rhétorique ou l'art de parler*, 4th Ed., Amsterdam 1699 (repr. Brighton 1969; abbreviated below as “Adp”), book II, chap. 7, p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> On the following see in particular Thomas M. Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric: Varieties of Cartesian Rhetorical Theory*, Carbondale/Edwardsville 1990, especially pp. 1–5 and pp. 26–31, Gilles Declercq, “La rhétorique classique entre évidence et sublime (1650–1675)”, in: *Histoire de la rhétorique dans l'Europe moderne (1450–1950)*, ed. Marc Fumaroli, Paris 1999, pp. 629–706, here pp. 638–645 and Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung*, pp. 174–190.

<sup>32</sup> René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode pour bien conduire sa raison, et chercher la vérité dans les sciences*, in: *Œuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery, vol. 6, new Ed., Paris 1965, pp. 1–78, here p. 7.

As Descartes had stated earlier in the *Regulae ad directionem ingenii* (1628/29), rhetoric, only probabilistic in nature, was not part of the “cognitio certa et evidens” that “omnis scientia” was to be.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, this denial of rhetoric, presented itself in a highly rhetorical manner,<sup>34</sup> did not lead to the end of rhetoric. Instead, it provoked a new interest in the traditional art of persuasion: it re-focussed the question regarding what actually made a speech effective, or, more generally, how the spoken or written word could most effectively convey the intended message to the public. Besides, there was an urgent need to redefine the specific role of rhetoric among the various and evolving branches of learning.<sup>35</sup>

Cartesian rhetoric – that is seventeenth-century conceptions of eloquence inspired by Descartes, including essentially the works of Bernard Lamy, Nicolas Malebranche, Géraud de Cordemoy, and the *Logic* of Port-Royal –<sup>36</sup> is one distinct and particularly influential way to investigate these questions. In Bernard Lamy’s work *La Rhétorique ou l’art de parler*, first published in 1675, the tensions between tradition and innovation resulting from the reconfiguration of *natura* and *ars* become most apparent.<sup>37</sup> A success from the start, the book reached its sixth edition in 1701 and remained a crucial reference in France throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Lamy’s work was also widely read beyond France, thanks to an early translation into English and a later one into German. In Germany, Gottsched was one of its most fervent admirers.<sup>38</sup>

In Lamy’s *Art de parler*, the crucial shift that is typical of the new Cartesian conception of rhetoric becomes especially evident. Eloquence is no longer conceived as an *ars*, that is as a learnable technique based upon certain normative rules. On the contrary, Lamy wants to develop a theory of language which analyses communication by means of linguistic and psychological methods.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, he seeks to explore the empirical mechanisms operating when the written or spoken word is used effectively and convincingly. This implies a

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<sup>33</sup> “Omnis scientia est cognitio certa et evidens [...]. Atque ita per hanc propositionem rejicimus illas omnes probabiles tantum cognitiones, nec nisi perfecte cognitae, et de quibus dubitari non potest, statuimus esse credendum”. René Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii*, in: *ibid.*, vol. 10, pp. 349–488, here p. 362.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Marc Fumaroli, “Ego scriptor: rhétorique et philosophie dans le *Discours de la méthode*”, in: *Problématique et réception du Discours de la méthode et des Essais*, ed. Henry Méchoulan, Paris 1988, pp. 31–46; Roger Ariew, “Descartes’s Fable and Scientific Methodology”, in: *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 55/154 (2005), pp. 127–138.

<sup>35</sup> See Dietmar Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik. Untersuchungen zum Wandel der Rhetoriktheorie im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, Tübingen 2004, pp. 297–302; Rudolf Behrens, *Problematische Rhetorik. Studien zur französischen Theoriebildung der Affektrhetorik zwischen Cartesianismus und Frühaufklärung*, München 1982, pp. 30–32.

<sup>36</sup> The term is used as in Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric* and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 297–340.

<sup>37</sup> For the following analysis, I rely heavily on the reconstruction and interpretation of Lamy’s work by Dietmar Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 319–340. See also the crucial analysis by Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, pp. 125–167.

<sup>38</sup> See John T. Harwood, “Introduction”, in: *The Rhetorics of Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Lamy*, ed. idem, Carbondale 1986, pp. 131–163, here p. 131 and Girbal, *Bernard Lamy*, pp. 47–48.

<sup>39</sup> See Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, especially p. 303 and p. 314.

fundamental redefinition of the relation between *natura* and *ars*. This transformation was already axiomatic in the *Logique* of Port-Royal (1662), whose authors declare: “Ainsi cet art ne consiste pas à trouver le moyen de faire ces opérations, puisque *la nature seule* nous le fournit en nous donnant la raison: mais à faire des réflexions sur ce que la nature nous *fait* faire.”<sup>40</sup> By denying the foundations of logic and rhetoric in the normative principles of an *ars*, Arnauld and Nicole also delegitimize, like Descartes in the passage quoted from the *Discours de la méthode*, the benefit of rules for those seeking to reason logically and to speak eloquently: “Tout cela se fait naturellement, et quelquefois mieux par ceux qui n’ont appris aucune règle [...], que par ceux qui les ont apprises.”<sup>41</sup> This theoretical idea is diametrically opposed to the rhetorical tradition which had, of course, recognised the dimension of *ingenium*, the natural gift of the orator. But that had always been secondary to *exercitatio* and *studium*, the constant learning and practising of one’s skills by means of the authoritative classical texts.<sup>42</sup> This demonstrates once again how deeply embedded the epistemological ideal of the “mirror of nature” had become, even in rhetoric.<sup>43</sup>

What sets Lamy’s and the Port-Royal authors’ conceptions of rhetoric apart from Descartes, however, is the role attributed to language in the cognitive process. Even for Arnauld and Nicole, who in this respect are much closer to Descartes’s universal epistemological ideal of the *esprit géométrique* than Lamy, it is clear that, apart from the fields of logic and the exact sciences, language does influence human understanding. At least they concede that the established use of words and their polyvalence cannot be simply done away with and that this fact, though irrelevant to logic, is not irrelevant in a broader epistemological perspective.<sup>44</sup> What is more, Arnauld and Nicole, along with Augustine and the *Doctrina Christiana*, consider religious experience as the legitimate field for the evocation of strong affects. This realm is hence crucial to the “return” not of rhetoric but of the “rhetorical” in the *Logique*.<sup>45</sup> Its source and its aim are the passions of the heart.

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<sup>40</sup> Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *La Logique ou l’Art de penser*, ed. Pierre Clair and François Girbal, 2. rev. Ed., Paris 1993, p. 38 (my emphasis). On the *Logic* of Port-Royal see Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, pp. 62–87; Behrens, *Problematische Rhetorik*, pp. 33–83 and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 302–313.

<sup>41</sup> Arnauld/Nicole, *La Logique*, p. 38.

<sup>42</sup> See the fundamental article by Florian Neumann, “Natura-ars-Dialektik”, in: *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 6, Tübingen 2003, col. 139–171 and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 77–87; see also Henri-Irénée Marrou, *Histoire de l’éducation dans l’antiquité*, 2. rev. Ed., Paris 1950, pp. 268–282 and pp. 359–389.

<sup>43</sup> The allusion is of course to Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, new Ed., Princeton/Oxford 2009, especially pp. 45–67.

<sup>44</sup> See the reflections on the “signification proper” in Arnauld/Nicole, *La Logique*, p. 94 and p. 100. This aspect is especially underlined by Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, pp. 84–86.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68–75. In this context, Carr also speaks of “the rhetorical without rhetoric”, *ibid.*, pp. 85–87. See also Behrens, *Problematische Rhetorik*, pp. 77–83.

The strongest criticism of Descartes in this context comes from Pascal. Assuming that different forms of reasoning and specific rationalities are involved in human understanding and, more fundamentally, that man's cognitive faculties are inextricably linked to the passions of the soul and ultimately founded in an intuitive contemplation of the world, Pascal distinguishes the "esprit de justesse" and the "esprit de finesse" from the "esprit de géométrie".<sup>46</sup> The "esprit de finesse" in particular is the expression of spontaneous judgement beyond rational grasp. It relies on a sense of certainty conveyed by the human heart ("cœur"), which for Pascal represents the ultimate source of truth:

Nous connaissons la vérité non seulement par la raison mais encore par le cœur. C'est de cette dernière sorte que nous connaissons les premiers principes et c'est en vain que le raisonnement, qui n'y a point de part, essaie de les combattre [...]. Cette impuissance ne doit donc servir qu'à humilier la raison, qui voudrait juger de tout, mais non pas à combattre notre certitude comme s'il n'y avait que la raison capable de nous instruire.<sup>47</sup>

Lamy's *Rhétorique* takes a position that, like the *Logique* of Port-Royal, affirms the Cartesian idea of methodical science but at the same time gives considerably more weight to rhetoric.<sup>48</sup> The latter is considered the fundamental medium and propaedeutic tool without which philosophical findings could not be conveyed.<sup>49</sup> According to Lamy, only through rhetoric are the abstract notions of philosophy made understandable to man as a sensual being, who is above all exposed to the suggestive powers of the passions. What is more, Lamy believes in the epistemological complementarity of mathematics and rhetoric which goes beyond the traditional ideal of a formal analogy between the two disciplines dating back to Quintilian.<sup>50</sup> For Lamy, rhetoric's task is to develop a natural language of affects which at the same time makes the passions of the heart work towards reason and the methodical ideal of the *esprit géométrique*. To develop a deeper understanding of this theoretical approach, we now have to turn to Lamy's argument presented in the *Art de parler* and especially to his conception of the passions.

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<sup>46</sup> See Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, in: idem, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Michel Le Guern, vol. 2, Paris 2000, fr. 465 and fr. 466, pp. 741–744. On these specific forms of reasoning see Claude Chantalat, *À la recherche du goût classique*, Paris 1992, pp. 64–70, Eduard Zwierlein, *Blaise Pascal*, Hamburg 1996, pp. 73–83 and Declercq, "La rhétorique classique", p. 645 and pp. 650–654.

<sup>47</sup> Pascal, *Pensées*, fr. 101, pp. 573–574. See also the famous passage from the *Art de persuader*: "Personne n'ignore qu'il y a deux entrées par où les opinions sont reçues dans l'âme, qui sont ses deux principales puissances, l'entendement et la volonté", *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Mesnard, vol. 3, Paris 1964, p. 413. For the on-going debate on the notion of *cœur* in Pascal see Vincent Carraud, *Pascal et la philosophie*, Paris 1992, especially pp. 250–273, Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, *Blaise Pascal*, München 1999, pp. 46–50 and Hervé Pasqua, "Le cœur et la raison selon Pascal", in: *Revue Philosophique de Louvain* 95/3 (1997), pp. 379–394.

<sup>48</sup> See also Carr, *Descartes and the Resilience of Rhetoric*, pp. 137–141.

<sup>49</sup> See Lamy, *Adp*, pp. 316–339. On the relation of philosophy and rhetoric in Lamy see also Lyndia Roveda, "Des épines aux fleurs des mathématiques: l'enseignement des sciences chez Bernard Lamy", in: *Archives internationales d'histoire des sciences* 55/154 (2005), pp. 193–202 and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 324–325.

<sup>50</sup> See especially Roveda, "Des épines aux fleurs des mathématiques", pp. 199–201.

What is particularly interesting about Lamy's chief work is the fact that, in some respects, it seeks to establish once more a system of rhetoric, even though the *ars rhetorica* had come under such severe criticism in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially in France, that the authors of the major treatises renounced the term "rhétorique", preferring instead titles like *Art de persuader* (as for example Pascal's work from 1660).<sup>51</sup> Lamy, who explicitly refers to Augustine, Horace, and Quintilian, does not simply dismiss the tradition of rhetoric. He wants to revise it and take it to a new (theoretical) level. In fact, his work is originally divided into two independent parts, the first one dealing extensively with the "art de parler" in terms of an analytical theory of language, the second one, much shorter, treating the "art de persuader".<sup>52</sup> The latter part is, in a way, Lamy's tribute to the *officia*-rhetoric, that is to the classical teaching system of eloquence which goes back to Cicero and Quintilian. It is highly significant that the traditional pillars of the *ars rhetorica* – to which Lamy refers symptomatically as "la science de gagner les cœurs"<sup>53</sup> – are treated so briefly in the *Art de parler*.<sup>54</sup> In fact, Lamy speaks very little of the rules of *inventio* and *dispositio*,<sup>55</sup> two of the five major canons of the art, thereby marginalizing the logical and analytical dimension of rhetoric, which gets "amputée de l'art de la prevue".<sup>56</sup> This low esteem, notably for the system of topics, was well-established in the rationalist critique of rhetoric in France, especially in the Cartesian context.<sup>57</sup>

It must appear even more symptomatic, however, that the principles of *elocutio*, that is the rules of style and tropes, which had constituted one of the key aspects of rhetoric since antiquity, do not figure at all in the framework of the *art de persuader*. Lamy intentionally removes these major topics from the traditional context and elaborates on them from the Cartesian perspective on language and the human passions developed as the *art de parler* in the first section of the book.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, this new theoretical view of *elocutio* constitutes the centre-piece of Lamy's (re-)definition of rhetoric, which Dietmar Till has described as an "Affekt-Grammatik", a grammar of affects.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Declercq, "La rhétorique classique", p. 632.

<sup>52</sup> It is only with the quoted edition from 1699, that the "discours" on the "art de persuader" is integrated into the work as the "livre cinquième" (comprising less than one fifth of the entire book). See also Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, p. 322.

<sup>53</sup> Lamy, *Adp*, p. 330.

<sup>54</sup> This fact puzzled contemporary critics until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Cf. Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 321–324. On the traditional system of the *officia oratoris* see *ibid.*, pp. 71–97 and Karl-Heinz Göttert, *Einführung in die Rhetorik. Grundbegriffe, Geschichte, Rezeption*, 4th rev. Ed., Paderborn 2009, pp. 27–71.

<sup>55</sup> See Lamy, *Adp*, pp. 306–314 and the critical conclusion regarding "cette méthode des lieux" (pp. 314–316). On *dispositio* see *ibid.*, pp. 354–365.

<sup>56</sup> Declercq, "La rhétorique classique", p. 644.

<sup>57</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 632–646 and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 89–92 and pp. 305–307.

<sup>58</sup> See especially the "livre second" of the *Art de parler*, pp. 85–152.

<sup>59</sup> Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 328–334. Regarding the *Logique* of Port-Royal, Behrens, *Problematische Rhetorik*, pp. 77–83, also speaks of a "grammaire affective".

Dismissing the rules of the *ars*, Lamy seeks to demonstrate that eloquent speech stems rather from the natural use of language, that is from its use in accordance with certain natural principles. Instead of prescribing rules with which to structure an eloquent speech, he wants to disclose its non-intentional mechanisms in order to explain what actually happens when communication achieves the effect of convincing others. For Lamy, the key lies in the passions. In essence, he assumes that “les passions sont bonnes en elles-mêmes: leur seul dérèglement est criminel. Ces sont des mouvements dans l’âme qui la portent au bien, et qui l’éloignent du mal”.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the effective regulation of the passions is not a normative matter but rather depends on their correct internal economy. Believing that “l’on ne peut faire agir les hommes que par le mouvement des passions”,<sup>61</sup> Lamy makes the case for fighting passions with counter-passions, even if the latter are dangerous as such.<sup>62</sup> Rightly conceived, rhetoric must hence be a rhetoric of affect that represents the natural movements of the heart – “les mouvements du cœur”.<sup>63</sup> This means not only that the orator must appeal to the emotions of the audience – that, to be sure, had been a founding principle of the *ars rhetorica* since Aristotle. According to Lamy, eloquent speech is the direct expression of the human heart which uses the natural means of passions to articulate itself. Thus, the passions themselves are reflected in language, “les passions se peignent elles-mêmes dans le discours”.<sup>64</sup> For Lamy, the language of the heart is superior to any form of knowledge written in books: “Il n’y a point de meilleur livre que son propre cœur; c’est une folie de vouloir aller chercher dans les écrits des autres ce que l’on trouve chez soi”.<sup>65</sup>

In the *Art de parler*, the human heart takes on exceptional significance as the primordial, natural source of rhetoric. The crucial means for turning the “movements of the heart” into language are the tropes and figures of speech. They are of fundamental importance to Lamy since there is no “langue assez riche et assez abondante pour fournir des termes capables d’exprimer toutes les différentes faces sous lesquelles l’esprit peut se représenter une même chose”.<sup>66</sup> Again, this is only partly surprising against the backdrop of rhetorical tradition and especially given the

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<sup>60</sup> Lamy, *Adp*, p. 343.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>62</sup> Lamy thus thinks that the evocation of stimulating affects is the best remedy against inhibiting passions, even when it comes to strong emotions like anger. If “la colère” is considered “un mouvement, une affection de l’âme qui nous anime à vaincre les empêchements qui nous retardent la possession de quelque bien”, no one can say “raisonnablement qu’il n’est pas permis d’exciter la colère et se servir de son mouvement pour animer les hommes à chercher le bien qu’on leur propose.” Lamy even concludes that: “dans les passions les plus dérégées [...] il y a toujours quelque chose de bon”. *Ibid.*, pp. 343–344.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263. See also p. 108 and pp. 251–254. Lamy also speaks of the “mouvements de l’âme”, *ibid.*, especially pp. 231–232.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108 (see also above, footnote 30).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136. See also Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, p. 332.

<sup>66</sup> Lamy, *Adp*, p. 90.

appreciation of the tropes in early modern rhetorical theory.<sup>67</sup> What is new, however, is Lamy's theoretical explanation of the origins of the tropes: "Ce n'est point l'art qui les règle; ce n'est point l'étude qui les doit trouver [sic], ce sont des *effets naturels de la passion*".<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, in Lamy's description of the tropes the physiological conception of language typical of the *Art de parler* – a work that starts with a chapter on the "organes de la voix" and discusses style in the context of the "qualité de la substance du cerveau et des esprits animaux" –<sup>69</sup> becomes particularly evident. The tropes are in fact considered the immediate correlate of the physiological impact of affects. They directly represent the movements of the passions and "imprint" them into the mind of the reader: "Les figures impriment dans l'esprit des lecteurs les passions dont elles sont les caractères".<sup>70</sup> From here the impressions find a direct way into language, which in Lamy appears, of course, a peculiarly passive medium: "Le discours est l'image de l'esprit: on peint son humeur et ses inclinations dans ses paroles sans que l'on y pense".<sup>71</sup> Here, Lamy shows himself as a firm adherent of Cartesian language theory in general and in particular follows the approach of Géraud de Cordemoy's *Discours physique de la parole* (1668).<sup>72</sup>

Compared to Lamy's theoretical conception, the discussion of the diverse tropes and figures of speech, which constitutes a major part of the second section of the *Art de parler*, appears fairly traditional.<sup>73</sup> This contrast is symptomatic of a greater ambivalence, that is to say the hybrid character of a work throughout which traditional and novel elements are inextricably linked and overlap one another. This is due to the specific way in which Lamy redefines the relation between *natura* and *ars*. Actually, Lamy merely inverts this constellation and gives new theoretical explanations to well-established rhetorical issues. Lamy's reinterpretation of Quintilian's famous comparison of the art of rhetoric with fencing is particularly symptomatic in this respect.<sup>74</sup> Quintilian refers to a fencer who, fighting without art and tactical training, acts merely impetuously. It is only by means of those qualities that he can overcome his adversary, like a good orator outdoes his opponent with well chosen and well prepared words. Lamy actually inverts this simile by arguing that every fighter (or as he says "soldat") in imminent

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 310–313, Declercq, "La rhétorique classique", pp. 644–649 and Göttert, *Einführung in die Rhetorik*, pp. 149–166.

<sup>68</sup> Lamy, *Adp*, p. 137 (my emphasis).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1–5 and pp. 249–252. The physiological approach is very pronounced throughout the entire work.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

<sup>72</sup> On Cordemoy see Behrens, *Problematische Rhetorik*, pp. 87–95 and Till, *Transformationen der Rhetorik*, pp. 314–319.

<sup>73</sup> See the listing of the over thirty tropes and figures of speech which Lamy treats in short articles like entries in a dictionary, *Adp*, pp. 92–100 and pp. 114–135.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 137–141 and pp. 362–363. See also Göttert, *Einführung in die Rhetorik*, pp. 165–166.

danger resorts by natural impulse of the passions to the feints and postures that will save him from defeat.<sup>75</sup> Yet, despite the pronounced re-interpretation, the traditional image symbolising the role of the *ars rhetorica* remains untarnished. Lamy alters the theoretical background which leads to essentially different explanations. But he does not change the substance of the rhetorical tradition in itself.

Nevertheless, the new theory of rhetoric as the natural language of the passions emanating from the human heart was most influential on the way eloquence was conceived until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This becomes particular evident when we turn to the prize questions of the French academies.

#### IV. The Epistemological Reflections in the Prize Questions of the French Academies

“C’est un sentiment [...] auquel il faut se livrer pour le connaître, et que l’âme est d’autant moins capable d’étudier, qu’elle en est plus affectée.”<sup>76</sup>

Finally, the prize competitions held by the French academies offer us a source that is particularly suitable to assess how deeply the transformations of rhetorical theory penetrated into the wider practice of eloquence in France in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, the prize questions represent a genre that mostly attracted authors of average intellectual backgrounds. The participants were typically members of the lower clergy, of the *parlements* or the *artes* faculties of the universities, but also, to a minor (though increasing) extent, *gens de lettres*.<sup>77</sup> Especially after the 1720s, the *concours académique* turned into a popular medium of the Republic of Letters, appealing to more and more participants all over France and beyond. This is above all due to the fact that the contests, judged on the basis of strict anonymity, were open to the general public without any restrictions based on social rank, gender, money, or institutional membership.<sup>78</sup> The prize questions of the French academies, more specifically the eloquence competitions, must thus be considered a supremely valuable source for an intellectual history of rhetoric at an intermediate level: beneath the lofty heights of the preeminent rhetorical theories, they provide rich evidence of the actual practice of eloquence in 18<sup>th</sup> century France.

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<sup>75</sup> “La passion le rend adroit et ingénieux; elle lui fait trouver des armes”. In the case of the orator, these weapons are none other than the tropes: “Les figures sont les armes de l’âme”. Lamy, *Adp*, pp. 137–138.

<sup>76</sup> *Recueil des ouvrages de poésie et d’éloquence, présentés à l’Académie des Jeux Floraux, en l’année 1765*, Toulouse 1765, pp. 58–59.

<sup>77</sup> On the sociology of the participants see the chapter on the *concours académique*, which is still fundamental to the study of this particular genre, in Daniel Roche’s magisterial work *Le siècle des lumières en province. Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789*, 2 vols, Paris 1978, vol. 1, pp. 324–355, here pp. 336–339.

<sup>78</sup> On the regulations of the *concours académique* and its practical implications see the detailed descriptions in Jeremy L. Caradonna’s essential monograph: *The Enlightenment in Practice. Academic Prize Contests and Intellectual Culture in France, 1670–1794*, Ithaca/London 2012, pp. 40–87, especially pp. 50–53 and pp. 78–87.

It is all the more significant then that the *discours* (by a certain M. Taverne) that won the prize at the Académie des Jeux Floraux in Toulouse in 1733 leaves no doubt that it is the specific task of eloquence “d’exprimer dignement les sentiments de notre âme” and, what is more, that “la nature, qui veut conduire tous les hommes à la connaissance de la vérité, a profité des dispositions de leurs cœurs pour parvenir à ses desseins”. To do so, nature only employs, according to the author, “les moyens les plus conformes à nos inclinations. Telle est l’origine de l’éloquence”.<sup>79</sup> The same view is taken by the two other texts submitted that the academy did not select for the prize, but nevertheless decided to publish in its annual *recueil*. One of them draws the concise, very Lamy-like conclusion: “La vraie éloquence [...] trouve dans les passions mêmes de quoi vaincre les passions”.<sup>80</sup> These positions are indeed very common among the authors writing on the nature and function of eloquence in the rhetorical prize questions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>81</sup> The competition held by the Académie de Pau in 1739: “La sagesse n’interdit pas les plaisirs; mais elle en règle l’usage” even adopts one of the new axioms as its subject matter.<sup>82</sup> So in this particular genre and context, too, we find the redefinition of eloquence as a rhetoric of affect, focussed essentially on the passions of the human heart (*cœur*), permitting their *natural* and thus their most effective expression. As such, rhetoric persuades less by normative prescriptions than by appealing to the (right) dispositions of the heart.

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<sup>79</sup> “Discours qui a remporté le prix, par le jugement de l’Académie des Jeux Floraux, en l’année 1733”, in: *Recueil de plusieurs pièces de poésie et d’éloquence présentées à l’Académie des Jeux Floraux, pour les prix de l’année 1733*, Toulouse 1733, pp. 131–148, here p. 134 and pp. 142–143.

<sup>80</sup> “Troisième discours”, in: *ibid.*, pp. 168–188, here pp. 180–181. The second *discours* argues likewise that eloquence essentially “sert à toucher le cœur des auditeurs” and regards the human heart as the seat of truth: “la vérité a des droits si incontestables sur son cœur”. Following the inclinations of the heart eloquence must even “donner à la vérité et à la sagesse les mêmes attraits qui lui faisaient préférer la volupté”. *Ibid.*, pp. 149–167, here pp. 150–151 and p. 166. Everything thus depends on “maîtriser le cœur de l’homme pour régler ses penchants”, as the third discourse notes. Eloquence in this way realises man’s *natural* disposition towards truth, “les rappelle aux premières sources du vrai, à ces dons que la nature a faits à tous les hommes pour leur servir de guide”. *Ibid.*, p. 169 and p. 171.

<sup>81</sup> See as another, earlier example the answers to the question “Si la sagesse qui vient du tempérament est aussi sûre que celle qui vient de la raison”, proposed by the Académie des Jeux Floraux in 1725, in: *Recueil de plusieurs pièces d’éloquence et de poésie présentées à l’Académie des Jeux Floraux, pour les prix de l’année 1725*, Toulouse 1725, pp. 65–84., pp. 85–108 and pp. 109–128. The discourse selected for the prize also argues that “les passions nous fournissent elles-mêmes des preuves incontestables de la force de l’homme [...]. Si quelquefois elles maîtrisent nos cœurs, il peut les dompter à son tour; et en les sacrifiant les unes aux autres, il n’en est point qu’il ne puisse soumettre [...]. L’homme est naturellement porté à la perfection [...]. Il ne peut donc trouver son bonheur que dans la connaissance et dans la possession d’un bien auquel il puisse aspirer. Il faut qu’il remplisse son cœur”. *Ibid.*, p. 68 and pp. 77–78. The second discourse is even convinced that “la sagesse qui vient de la raison est moins sûre dans son principe, parce qu’elle est plus sujette à l’erreur que celle qui vient du tempérament”. This is due to the fact that “la sagesse qui est fondée sur un penchant naturel au bien, sera plus ferme dans son attachement pour la vertu, que celui qui n’a que la raison en partage”. *Ibid.*, p. 88. On the shift towards a *rhétorique du cœur* in the eloquence prize questions see also my article, “Les médias de la réflexion sur le savoir: concours académique, journalisme savant et les discours sur la question du goût”, in: *Friedrich Melchior Grimm – philosophe et homme de réseaux: dans l’Europe des Lumières*, eds. Kirill Abrosimov and Jonas Hock (Romanische Studien, Beiheft 2018), pp.

<sup>82</sup> Accordingly the discourse selected for the prize (by the père Chabaud) argues that “la sagesse [...] ne nous fait point pratiquer la vertu par contrainte et par devoir; mais elle nous la rend aimable et nous donne du goût pour ce qu’elle nous prescrit. Elle nous enseigne une philosophie d’usage qui n’a rien de rebutant”. *Pièces d’éloquence et de poésie qui ont remporté le prix au jugement de l’Académie royale des sciences et belles lettres établie à Pau*, Paris 1746, pp. 3–19, here p. 12.

What is particularly remarkable about the prize competition of 1733 in Toulouse is the fact that the question (or rather the thesis) proposed by the Académie des Jeux Floraux, one of the strongholds of rhetorical tradition in France,<sup>83</sup> had an explicit focus on truth: “L’*éloquence* ne doit avoir d’autre objet que de faire connaître la vérité”. Nevertheless, none of the texts published by the academy contains any explanations of how truth can be established by means of a traditional or revised system of *topics*. The whole logical and analytical tradition of rhetoric thus seems cast aside and irrelevant to its actual purpose. Instead, the emphasis is essentially placed on the style and the effects to be evoked by the rhetoric of the passions. Truth seems indeed to have become a matter of the heart.

This tendency is not the only noteworthy aspect in the evolution of the rhetorical prize competitions. Since the 1730s, the questions set aimed explicitly at launching a debate over the contemporary development of knowledge. This led to what one can call a self-reflection of knowledge,<sup>84</sup> a self-reflection based amongst other things on the beginning specialisation of knowledge and further stimulated by the appearance of the *Encyclopédie* in the 1750s.<sup>85</sup> This development is especially striking when one considers the early history of the prize questions at the French academies. The genre seemed hardly predestined, in fact, for such a self-reflective turn.

Established in 1670 at the Académie française in the disciplines of *poésie* and *éloquence* (the prizes being distributed annually in one of the categories) the *concours académique* was, on the one hand, first of all the medium of the panegyric on Louis XIV and a forum for the discussion of traditional theological and moral topics on the other. This was the case both in the capital and in the provincial academies.<sup>86</sup> It is only in the course of the eighteenth century, in the wake of the second wave of academy foundations after the 1720s, that new fields of knowledge were explored and that the range of subjects treated in the prize competitions started to increase. This was above all due to the new disciplines of the *concours académique*, namely the scientific prize questions, established first at the Académie de Bordeaux in 1715 and then at the Académie

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<sup>83</sup> Not only was the tradition of poetry contests held in Toulouse since the 14th century one of the origins of the academic prize questions. The statutes of the *Jeux Floraux* also served as the model for the structure and regulations of the *concours* when it was introduced at the Académie française in 1670. See Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice*, pp. 15–16, 21–26 and p. 42.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Martin Urmann, “Zwischen *prix de dévotion*, Wissensreflexion und Reformdiskurs. Die Preisfragen der französischen Akademien als literarische und epistemische Gattung und die Frage nach dem ‘Jugement du Public’ an der Akademie von Besançon aus dem Jahr 1756”, in: *Aufklärung* 28 (2016), pp. 105–133, here pp. 128–129.

<sup>85</sup> On the specialisation of knowledge which at the time, to be sure, still took place within the one community of scholars called the Republic of Letters, see the contributions in: *La république des sciences*, eds. Irène Passeron, René Sigrist and Siegfried Bodenmann [*Dix-huitième siècle* 40 (2008)], especially the introduction by the editors (pp. 5–27) and the articles by Jean-Pierre Schandeler (pp. 315–332) and René Sigrist (pp. 333–357).

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice*, pp. 23–32.

Royale des Sciences in 1720, and the historical contests held at the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres since 1734 and soon spreading to the provincial academies, too.<sup>87</sup> The *concours* thus mirrored the contemporary spectrum of knowledge in its tendency towards growing differentiation. At the same time, this meritocratic medium of emulation, which registered an increase from 48 contests in the decade from 1670 to 1679 to 476 competitions in the 1780s, appealed to more and more aspiring members of the Republic of Letters. When it was abolished by the National Convention in 1793, the *concours académique* had mobilized altogether over 10,000 participants.<sup>88</sup>

The scientific prize competitions undoubtedly represented an important source of innovation within the *concours académique*. The questions produced genuine contributions to contemporary scientific research. Very quickly, they became a medium – like scholarly journals, much more accessible and flexible than books – where current problems were collectively discussed by major and (still) unknown researchers. The numerous successes of the Bernoulli family (Jean and his two sons), the Euler family (above all Leonard, but also Charles and Jean-Albert) and of Lavoisier are only the most obvious evidence in this context.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the *prix de science* continuously gained in epistemic as well as in quantitative importance representing 60 per cent of the whole number of contests in 1793.<sup>90</sup> The new empirical knowledge of nature thus found its way into a genre that had originally been established for cultivating the tradition of poetry and eloquence and hence, epistemically speaking, the knowledge of the textual tradition.

Despite the changing functions and topics of the *concours académique*, the rhetorical and poetical prize questions remained one of the pillars of this popular medium for the entire 18th century. Contrary to the opinion so dear to current research on the prize questions, the eloquence contests must not be considered as the progressive forum for the factual debate of new

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<sup>87</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 88–89 and also the most valuable *Appendix F* listing all the prize contests offered by academies, scholarly societies, and agricultural societies in Continental France from 1670 to 1794, URL: <http://www.jeremycaradonna.com/appendix-f>, 28.02.2018 (pp. 335–515).

<sup>88</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, p. 45. Caradonna estimates the total number of participants in the *concours académique* between 1670 and the abolition of the academies in 1793 at between twelve and fifteen thousand. In comparison, the total number of academicians in France over the period amounts to 6.000 (male) persons.

<sup>89</sup> See James E. McClellan, *Science Reorganized. Scientific Societies in the Eighteenth Century*, New York 1985, p. XXVII and p. 94; see also Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice*, p. 92 and p. 149. The brothers Jean and Daniel Bernoulli personally noted, as mentioned by McClellan (*Science Reorganized*, pp. 11–12), that their research on the *theoria magnetis* was launched by the corresponding prize contest at the Académie Royale des Sciences which they won in 1746 together with Euler and Dutour.

<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, the scientific prize questions had numerically outrun the poetic and rhetorical competitions, which constituted 30 per cent of the whole number of contests, by the middle of the 18th century. Cf. Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province*, vol. 1, pp. 343–344.

knowledge.<sup>91</sup> Neither should they be seen in the sceptical tradition of the early modern essay. In fact, the discourses of the *prix d'éloquence* were heavily influenced by the dialectical tradition of the question as an “epistemic genre”.<sup>92</sup> It is thus a technique of knowledge deeply rooted in scholasticism, in the *quaestio* and notably the practice of disputations at the universities,<sup>93</sup> that strongly shapes the academic genre of the prize contests. That is all the more surprising since early modern academies actually presented themselves in strong opposition to the universities and reproved the old methods of the ‘schools’.<sup>94</sup>

The mode of arguing, especially in the early rhetorical prize questions, is therefore astonishingly close to the form of debate known from university disputations. In fact, the texts submitted to the eloquence contests all seek to defend a thesis by refuting the arguments put forward against it. Apart from this technique of argumentation based on clear-cut oppositions and the traditional rhetorical ways of amplification, the subjects of the prize questions at the Académie française also remind us of the contemporary university context. The genre had actually been established as a *prix de dévotion* with a quite narrow focus on conventional moral and theological topics.<sup>95</sup> The discourse which won the prize in 1673 on the question – proposed in the form of a thesis to be defended: “De la Science du Salut opposée aux vaines et mauvaises connaissances, et aux curiosités blâmables et défendues” consequently argues in favour of religious knowledge which is praised in the starkest possible contrast to idle philosophical curiosity.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> The article by Gunhild Berg, “Sind Preisfragen die aufklärerisch-öffentliche Form der *disputatio*? Ein Antwortversuch am Beispiel der Berliner Volksbetrugs-Frage von 1780”, in: *Disputatio 1200–1800*, pp. 167–199, is symptomatic of this tendency. The prize questions are presented as the future-oriented replacement of the *disputatio* as they allowed the open reflection of new knowledge.

<sup>92</sup> It is especially Gianna Pomata who has employed the notion of “epistemic genre”, in order to designate a “standardized textual format [...] handed down by tradition for the expression and communication of some kind of content [...] primarily cognitive in character”. Gianna Pomata, “Observation Rising: Birth of an Epistemic Genre, 1500–1650”, in: *Histories of Scientific Observation*, eds. Lorraine Daston and Elizabeth Lunbeck, Chicago/London 2011, pp. 45–80, here p. 48.

<sup>93</sup> On the disputation and its epistemological as well as its practical implications, see Anita Traninger, *Disputation, Deklamation, Dialog. Medien und Gattungen europäischer Wissensverhandlungen zwischen Scholastik und Humanismus*, Stuttgart 2012. On continuities and changes in this essential medium of the early modern Republic of Letters, see the contributions in: *Frühneuzeitliche Disputationen* (as mentioned above, note 19).

<sup>94</sup> Cf. McClellan, *Science Reorganized* and Roger Hahn, “The Age of the Academies”, in: *Solomon's House Revisited. The Organization and Institutionalization of Science*, ed. Tore Frängsmyr, Canton 1990, pp. 3–12. For a critical revision of this self-fashioning of early modern academies which points out important continuities between these institutions and the universities, see Mordechai Feingold, “Tradition versus Novelty. Universities and Scientific Societies in the Early Modern Period”, in: *Revolution and Continuity. Essays in the History and Philosophy of Early Modern Science*, eds. Peter Barker and Roger Ariew, Washington 1991, pp. 45–59.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Caradonna, *The Enlightenment in Practice*, pp. 23–30.

<sup>96</sup> See the selected “discours” (by the abbé de Melun de Mauvertuis), in: *Recueil de pièces d'éloquence, présentées à l'Académie française pour les prix qu'elle distribue*, vol. 1, 1671–1685, Amsterdam 1750, pp. 129–154. For a more detailed analysis see Urmann, “Zwischen *prix de dévotion*, Wissensreflexion und Reformdiskurs”, pp. 117–20. The texts of eminent literary quality for which Mademoiselle de Scudéry (“De la gloire”, 1671) and Fontenelle (“De la patience”, 1687) won the eloquence contests of the Académie française must thus be considered as the exceptions to the standard of conventional rhetoric that is characteristic of the *prix de dévotion*.

In the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, the eloquence contests also underwent an important change, both regarding the modes of argumentation and the subjects proposed. Under the influence of Enlightenment discourse the prize questions, notably at the provincial academies, dealt more and more with the new philosophical topics of the age, in particular with the changing role of the arts and sciences and the epistemic status of rhetorical knowledge in relation to the observational knowledge of the flourishing natural sciences. The self-reflective turn of the rhetorical prize contests is induced, on the one hand, by the specific focus of the questions proposed, as for example: “Combien les sciences sont redevables aux belles-lettres”/“Combien les belles-lettres sont redevables aux sciences” (Jeux Floraux, 1753/1757), “Si la multiplicité des ouvrages en tout genre est plus utile que nuisible aux progrès des sciences et des belles-lettres” (Académie de Pau, 1754), “En quoi consiste l’esprit philosophique?” (Académie française, 1755), “Quelle a été l’influence de la philosophie sur ce siècle?” (Académie de Besançon, 1772) and, naturally, “Si le rétablissement des sciences et des arts a contribué à épurer les mœurs”, the most famous competition won by Rousseau at the Académie de Dijon in 1750. On the other hand, such reflections can also come up in contests less directly related to epistemic matters, as for example the numerous questions on taste (“gout”) at the provincial academies after the 1730s,<sup>97</sup> on “L’utilité des bibliothèques publiques” (Académie de Pau, 1746) or, as we shall see in detail, in the competition of the Académie de Dijon for 1757: “Est-il plus utile d’étudier les hommes que les livres?”.

Most remarkably, in these eloquence prizes we can witness how the rhetoric of affect is used as a fundamental critique of the claim to universal knowledge asserted by the exact sciences. This critique of science and of its belief in method is at the same time a self-reflection of the rhetorical production of (text-)knowledge. To conclude, I want to analyse two examples from the eloquence prizes in which the typical arguments of this critique, based on the central notion of *cœur*,<sup>98</sup> are developed in a particularly elaborate manner.

The prize contest of the Académie française for the year 1755: “En quoi consiste l’esprit philosophique?” is actually one of the very rare occasions when this illustrious institution took up a much debated, contemporary philosophical issue before its eloquence competitions began to be devoted almost exclusively to eulogies on the *grands hommes*, which lasted until the

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<sup>97</sup> On these competitions see Urmann, “Les médias de la réflexion sur le savoir”, pp.

<sup>98</sup> Instead of the “rhetoric of affect” I will hence speak more specifically of the rhetoric of the heart in the following analysis.

abolition of the *concours*.<sup>99</sup> The answer selected for the prize, by the Jesuit Father Guénard, begins with a survey of the development of contemporary knowledge. The author cannot but pay tribute to the “nouvel ordre de choses” arising from the “génie d’observation” which has kept accumulating more and more findings, “mille vérités particulières”.<sup>100</sup> This process was launched by no other than Descartes, “le père de la philosophie pensante”, who placed “la nature et l’évidence” at the centre of his investigations.<sup>101</sup> Although some of his positions and assumptions needed to be corrected by his successors, there is no denying that Descartes and his method were essential to the “heureuse et mémorable révolution dont nous goûtons aujourd’hui les avantages”.<sup>102</sup>

However, this development has reached a point where, according to the author, it becomes clear that the intrinsic tendency of the “raison géométrique” to transcend all borders needs to become aware of its limits.<sup>103</sup> In fact, this kind of philosophical spirit and its methodical quest for knowledge are characterized for Guénard by a profound “intemperance” and “ivre[sse]”: “cette raison qui ne connaît plus de retour, quand une fois elle a franchi les bornes”.<sup>104</sup> The idea of human knowledge being related to certain boundaries beyond which it starts losing its sense constitutes the epistemological centrepiece of Guénard’s critical reflections. The author consequently asks, “quelles sont donc [...] les bornes où doit se renfermer l’esprit philosophique”; more specifically “les bornes qu’il *doit se prescrire* relativement aux *divers objets* dont il s’occupe”.<sup>105</sup>

The answer is obvious, as Guénard immediately concludes: “la nature elle-même l’avertit à tout moment de sa *faiblesse*”.<sup>106</sup> This leads us to the anthropological basis of the argument which is essential to the rhetoric of the heart: the fundamentally finite character of human nature.<sup>107</sup> It is precisely in its will to disregard this primordial condition and the needs of the “cœur humain”<sup>108</sup> that a wrongly conceived *esprit philosophique* finally becomes dogmatic, carried away by its own “intemperance”, turning into the opposite of what it set out for. Faced with this “excès”, the author brings to mind the very foundations of the philosophical spirit and advocates the

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<sup>99</sup> On the widespread academic genre of the eulogy (“éloge”) see Roche, *Le siècle des lumières en province*, vol. 1, p. 344 and pp. 166–171. Beyond the prize contests, the eulogy was an important medium for the shaping of a collective identity among the academicians. As such, it did not remain uncriticized by the *philosophes*.

<sup>100</sup> “Discours qui a remporté le prix en l’année 1755”, in: *Pièces d’éloquence qui ont remporté le prix de l’Académie française, 1750–1763*, vol. 3, Paris 1764, pp. 73–98, here pp. 75–76 and p. 81.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79–80.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.* and p. 84 (my emphasis). See also *ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* p. 94 (my emphasis).

<sup>107</sup> See also *ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

“exacte sobriété”.<sup>109</sup> It thus becomes clear that the text, far from simply repeating orthodox religious arguments, is not critical of the *esprit philosophique* as such. The critique starts at the point where methodical reasoning transgresses and ignores the multiple borders within which human knowledge is situated. The text thus makes the case, typical of the rhetoric of the heart, for an augmented epistemic sensitivity to boundaries and transitions. This becomes particularly manifest when the author addresses the relation of the *esprit philosophique* with religion as well as with matters of taste (“gout”), especially the arts.

Religion and the “esprit éclairé” are anything but contradictions to Guénard.<sup>110</sup> Again, the legitimate range of knowledge in these matters depends on how the line “séparant les opinions humaines des vérités sacrées de la religion” is drawn.<sup>111</sup> In this particular realm however, the “faiblesse” of man and the shortcomings of the *esprit géométrique* are particularly striking. Hence, when the rationalistic viewpoint is hypostatized reason turns into its opposite and “votre sagesse est convaincue de folie et [...] à force d’être philosophe, vous cessez d’être raisonnable”.<sup>112</sup> With its unifying gaze overlooking the necessity of boundaries, the philosophical spirit must especially be blind to the depth (“profondeur”) of the phenomena it tries to grasp. The dimension of “profondeur”, accessible only through the specific insights of the heart (“cœur”), actually becomes the central epistemic objection to the universal claims of the *esprit philosophique*.<sup>113</sup> What this reasoning fundamentally lacks, is the ability “de [...] comprendre l’infini”<sup>114</sup> since it permanently treats this dimension like a quantifiable entity.<sup>115</sup>

At the same time, questions concerning taste and the arts reveal that the “raison géométrique” is too monolithic a conception to represent the diverse intellectual faculties of man which require a *plurality* of methods. Hence for Guénard, the “discours méthodiques” trying to explain the logic of art which is “presque toute entière dans le cœur et l’imagination” are doomed to fail. They especially fall short of the in-between-dimension of “nuances”.<sup>116</sup> This reveals the universal categories of the philosophical spirit as being simply “[des] abstractions idéales”, too remote from the phenomena at stake.<sup>117</sup> Against the geometric reasoning à la Descartes which is “accoutumé [...] à dépouiller les objets de leurs qualités particulières, pour ne leur laisser

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 92 and p. 94.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., especially pp. 95–96.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>115</sup> “Ce grain de sable que je foule aux pieds est un abîme que tu ne peux sonder; et tu voudrais mesurer la hauteur et la profondeur de la sagesse éternelle [...] par cette pensée, trop étroite pour embrasser un atome?”, *ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

que des qualités vagues et générales qui ne sont rien pour le cœur humain”,<sup>118</sup> Guénard thus becomes the advocate of the irreducible material and sensual dimension of all worldly phenomena. It is only the “faits éclatants et sensibles” which make truth graspable and understandable.<sup>119</sup> And that, for the Jesuit Guénard, also applies – or rather especially applies – to religious truth.<sup>120</sup> It is “touchante dans ses preuves comme dans sa morale” and destined to “entrer dans l’âme par tous les sens”.<sup>121</sup> A form of rhetoric which is acquainted with the secrets of the heart is conscious of the limits of reason and hence for Guénard the more appropriate – and the more valid kind of knowledge. Above all, it is the expression of the various intellectual faculties of man and possesses a sufficiently complex notion of human practice and experience. The latter idea is developed particularly in the answer by the Abbé Millot selected for the eloquence prize of the Académie de Dijon for 1757: “Est-il plus utile d’étudier les hommes que les livres?”.<sup>122</sup> Millot’s argument (in favour of studying men rather than books) is essentially based on a conception of *cœur* as the crucial intellectual and sensible faculty of man. The text actually develops the central anthropological assumptions of the rhetoric of affect, which has left such a strong mark on the rhetorical prize questions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by giving an especially dense and detailed description of the paradoxes of the human heart. Man is thus depicted as “ce mélange singulier de perfections et de défauts”.<sup>123</sup> His heart, “ce théâtre fertile en scènes toujours variées”, is nothing less than the fiercely contested site of pure becoming, “où les désirs se choquent, s’engloutissent perpétuellement les uns les autres; où les passions, sous une infinité de formes, produisent une infinité d’effets étranges et presque incroyables”.<sup>124</sup> In light of the conflicting energies that run through his soul (“âme”) man must remain a stranger even to himself: “tant de fibres entrelacées et confondues qui composent le cœur humain; ces contrastes d’humeurs, de passions, de sentiments qui mettent entre les âmes plus de différence, que l’œil le plus perçant n’en aperçoit entre les visages; ces métamorphoses rapides et fréquentes qui souvent nous rendent méconnaissables à nous-mêmes; ces variétés si délicates

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 95. This is indeed a crucial conviction for the defenders of the rhetoric of the heart: “Combien peu sont assez dégagés des sens pour être touchés de la vérité, si on ne la rend sensible et agréable! L’éloquence, pour ménager notre faiblesse, nous présente cette vérité sous l’appas du plaisir”. *Recueil [...] des Jeux Floraux, pour les prix de l’année 1733*, p. 171 (cited above, note 80).

<sup>120</sup> On the Jesuit tradition of this conception of religious truth see Stéphane Van Damme, “Culture rhétorique et culture scientifique: crise ou mutation de la poétique des savoirs dans la Compagnie de Jésus en France (1630–1730)”, in: *Archives internationales d’histoire des sciences* 55/154 (2005), pp. 55–69, here especially pp. 59–62.

<sup>121</sup> “Discours qui a remporté le prix en l’année 1755”, p. 98.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. Claude-François-Xavier Millot, “Discours qui a remporté le prix à l’Académie de Dijon en 1757”, in: idem, *Discours académiques sur divers sujets*, Lyon 1760, pp. 78–134.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

et multipliées à l’infini”.<sup>125</sup> According to Millot, only a self-reflective thinking grounded in introspection, “la connaissance de soi-même”<sup>126</sup>, and focussing essentially on human practices is able to shed at least some light on this overwhelming complexity. Believing that “la vraie peinture des hommes, ce sont leurs discours et leurs actions”<sup>127</sup> and that “le premier devoir de l’homme est de contempler son être, d’en étudier à fond la nature”<sup>128</sup> Millot dismisses the “méditations abstraites” of purely theoretical book knowledge.<sup>129</sup> This is why he is also sceptical of the capacity of the natural sciences (“les sciences exactes”<sup>130</sup>) – which Millot, himself a partisan of the Enlightenment,<sup>131</sup> admires and endorses in his text more firmly than Guénard – to illuminate the nature of man *beyond a certain point*. The scientific method fails to recognise the extent to which human knowledge is grounded in practices and tends to construct abstract systems of nature “tandis que ceux qui l’habitent [...] nous sont à peine connus”.<sup>132</sup> The most fundamental form of knowledge is hence the study of “les abîmes profonds du cœur humain” and no other branch of learning could be more suitable for that purpose than rhetoric.<sup>133</sup> For Millot, “le grand art de persuader” had always possessed the theoretical insight into the passions of man and at the same time the ability to influence and alter his actions.<sup>134</sup> Revised, in an age of sciences, as an instrument “méthodique et profonde” “[qui] creuse les principes, développe les conséquences, démontre à l’homme ce qu’il doit être”, while simultaneously preserving its distinctive aesthetic sensitivity, rhetoric turns for Millot into the new leading discipline connecting theory to practice.<sup>135</sup> As the most outstanding example of this novel “science des mœurs” the author mentions Montesquieu and his approach in the *Esprit des Lois*.<sup>136</sup> This is why Millot can finally conclude: “l’étude des hommes, loin de

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., pp. 88–89.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., p. 90. On this self-reflective dimension see also *ibid.*, p. 92. It has to be emphasised again that the turn towards the inner nature of man is typical of the rhetoric of the heart: “L’éloquence [...] nous fait puiser en nous-mêmes et développer ces connaissances”. *Recueil [...] des Jeux Floraux, pour les prix de l’année 1733*, p. 171 (cited above, note 80).

<sup>127</sup> “Discours qui a remporté le prix à l’Académie de Dijon en 1757”, p. 89. Accordingly, the value of rules and methods for Millot essentially depends on how “je tâche de les mettre en pratique”, *ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., pp. 90-91.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., p. 114.

<sup>131</sup> After the success of his works on French and English history from the late 1760s, Claude-François-Xavier Millot (1726–1785), who had originally been a teacher of rhetoric at the Jesuit collège of Lyon (which he had to leave for an eulogy on Montesquieu in 1757), won the support of the *philosophes* and became a member of the Académie française (1777) where he was especially endorsed by d’Alembert. Later he also became the preceptor to the duc d’Enghien. See *Dictionnaire historique, ou Biographie universelle des hommes qui se sont fait un nom [...] par F.-X. de Feller*, vol. 4, 8<sup>th</sup> Ed., Paris 1839, p. 451.

<sup>132</sup> “Discours qui a remporté le prix à l’Académie de Dijon en 1757”, p. 87. For this critique of the scientific method see also *ibid.*, pp. 113–116.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 124. See also *ibid.*, pp. 121–123.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 117.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 116. For the praise of Montesquieu see *ibid.*, pp. 109–113. Here, Millot also reacts to criticism which his defence of Montesquieu had provoked before and which may have been the origin of his demission at the Jesuit collège of Lyon.

mettre obstacle aux autres études, les anime et les dirige [...]. Peut-on trop se livrer à une étude aussi propre à satisfaire l'esprit qu'à former le cœur?"<sup>137</sup>

## V. Conclusion

To sum up, I want to point out the specific constellation into which the knowledge of the textual tradition and the empirical knowledge of nature enter in the light of the rhetorical prize questions of the French academies in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, it has to be emphasised again that none of the arguments we have encountered in the context of the *concours* is genuinely new. In particular, the critique of science analysed in the two examples above had been presented in its main aspects in the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, in the answers given by Longepierre and Huet to Fontenelle's and Perrault's astonishing extension of scientific method to the realms of arts and rhetoric.<sup>138</sup> Vico should then elaborate quite similar philosophical arguments in *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* (1708), though this text did not become an important reference in the contemporary debates in France.<sup>139</sup> Here, the critical discussion of the *esprit philosophique* and its epistemological limits was further nurtured, albeit from a sensualist point of view, by Jean-Baptiste Du Bos in his *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (1719) which remained very influential throughout the century.<sup>140</sup>

What is particularly striking about the prize questions is the fact that at a certain point in the evolution of this genre a critique of the exact sciences and their claim to universal knowledge arises; a critique that is developed and presented from a rhetorical point of view. At the same time, the selected discourses – at least a significant part of them, which were also awarded the prizes of renowned conservative academies like the Jeux Floraux – reflect the shifts in the epistemological foundations of rhetoric related to the rise of the natural sciences and the insight into the sensual and affective nature of man. Clearly, we are dealing with a changed kind of rhetoric that has reacted to the major epistemic transformations in the Republic of Letters. It must also be noted, however, that this particular perspective on affects remains rather metaphorical. It is not interested in an interpretation based on a more empirical description of emotions which was a central aim of contemporary philosophy in its search of “une esthétique

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 132 and p. 134.

<sup>138</sup> See especially Larry F. Norman, *The Shock of the Ancient. Literature and History in Early Modern France*, Chicago/London 2011, pp. 153–155, 200–223 and p. 257; Marc Fumaroli, “Les abeilles et les araignées”, in: *La Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes, XVIIème–XVIIIème siècles*, ed. Anne-Marie Lecoq, Paris 2001, pp. 7–218, here especially pp. 178–196.

<sup>139</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 202–203. On Vico's epistemological position see Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung*, pp. 436–444.

<sup>140</sup> See Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment. A Genealogy*, Chicago/London 2010, pp. 24–29; on the deeper philosophical implications of Du Bos' arguments see Kondylis, *Die Aufklärung*, pp. 314–319.

des passions [...] centrée sur l'étude de la subjectivité cognitive et affective".<sup>141</sup> Notably, the rhetoric of the heart – at least as it appears in the specific medium of the prize questions – does not get to the level of individual emotions as it basically follows a pre-subjective conception.<sup>142</sup>

The affective turn of rhetoric, its change into an instrument essentially conceived to understand the passions of the human heart, was certainly not exclusively the result of the Cartesian rethinking of language and eloquence by Lamy and the logicians of Port-Royal. All of the major treatises on *les passions humaines* since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, from Coeffeteau to Senault and Bouhours, raised the status of affects in the interaction of body and soul against the traditional theological doxa and sought to reconceive morals as the right use of passions.<sup>143</sup> And there is of course the influential moralist tradition which for one of their chief exponents, La Rochefoucauld, makes it possible to note in his *Maximes* (1665), in a way as natural as axiomatic: “Les passions sont les seuls orateurs qui persuadent toujours. Elles sont comme un *art de la nature* dont les règles sont infaillibles; et l'homme le plus simple qui a de la passion persuade mieux que le plus éloquent qui n'en a point”.<sup>144</sup> The fact that the Académie de Dijon chose one of La Rochefoucauld's maxims for its *concours* in 1757 – “Il est plus nécessaire d'étudier les hommes que les livres” –<sup>145</sup> shows not only the high esteem for the authors of the *siècle classique* but also how strong the influence of the moralist tradition was at the academies and among the public addressed by the *concours* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

What is more, this way of thinking did not share the Cartesian affirmation of science. On the contrary, it was, both in its style and in its philosophical outlook, fundamentally sceptical of the scientific claim to truth. This becomes most evident, as mentioned above, in Pascal's notions of *cœur* and *esprit de finesse*. Beyond Lamy, the moralist tradition must hence be considered a major source of inspiration for the rhetoric of the heart in the prize questions and for its critique

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<sup>141</sup> Daniel Dumouchel, “L'emprise du ‘Mitleiden’. Mendelssohn et Lessing sur les émotions tragiques et la moralité du théâtre”, in: *Revue germanique internationale* 4 (2006), pp. 121–136, here p. 121. See also Elisabeth Décultot, “Kunstgenuss. Zu Rousseaus Anthropologie der Kunstwahrnehmung”, in: *Genuss bei Rousseau*, eds. Helmut Pfeiffer, Elisabeth Décultot and Vanessa de Senarclens, Würzburg 2014, pp. 115–135.

<sup>142</sup> It is therefore neither an expression of the “personale Prägnanz”, a distinct articulation of the person as such, as in the Enlightenment culture of letter writing. Robert Vellusig, “Aufklärung und Briefkultur. Wie das Herz sprechen lernt, wenn es zu schreiben beginnt”, in: *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert* 35/2 (2011), pp. 154–171, here p. 167.

<sup>143</sup> See Jean-Claude Rambach, “À propos des passions. Ombres et lumières avant Descartes”, in: *Travaux de linguistique et de littérature* 15/2 (1977), pp. 43–65; see also Frank Baasner, “The Changing Meaning of ‘Sensibilité’: 1654 till 1704”, in: *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 15 (1986), pp. 77–96 and Jean Mesnard, “Le classicisme français et l'expression de la sensibilité”, in: *Expression, Communication, and Experience in Literature and Language*, ed. Ronald G. Popperwell, London 1973, pp. 28–37.

<sup>144</sup> François de La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales* (Ed. 1678), in: idem, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Louis Martin-Chauffier and Jean Marchand, new Ed., Paris 1964, pp. 387–471, max. 8, p. 404 (my emphasis). It is also clear that “la force et la faiblesse de l'esprit sont mal nommées; elles ne sont, en effet, que la bonne ou la mauvaise disposition des organes du corps”, *ibid.*, max. 44, p. 409.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, *Maximes posthumes*, max. 550, p. 481.

of science.<sup>146</sup> As far as the latter is concerned, Anthony Grafton is certainly right when he warns us not to assume that “the two cultures” of scientists and humanists were “locked in the battle that the pamphleteers of the New Philosophy called for; they coexisted and often collaborated”.<sup>147</sup> Yet in France since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, notably since the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, there is, at least on the theoretical level, an intense discourse on the methodological differences and epistemological incompatibilities between them.

Believing that the intuitions of the heart are a “sentiment [...] auquel il faut se livrer pour le connaître, et que l’âme est d’autant moins capable d’étudier, qu’elle en est plus affectée”<sup>148</sup> the rhetoric of affect, as presented in the rhetorical prize questions, turns against the epistemological ideal of science. Essentially assuming that human knowledge is finite and valid only within certain boundaries and that man’s *various* intellectual faculties are founded in an intuitive comprehension of the world beyond conceptual knowledge, it formulates a fundamental critique of the exact sciences and their belief in method.

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<sup>146</sup> With the moralist authors not explicitly quoted (neither is Lamy) and footnotes remaining rare in the texts submitted to the rhetorical prize questions – a medium deeply rooted in the ideal of orality – there is no direct evidence of this obvious philosophical relation on the philological level. Pascal is mentioned once however by Millot, “Discours qui a remporté le prix à l’Académie de Dijon en 1757”, p. 107. At the same time, it is clear that as a medium at the intersection of diverse common opinions, positions and theories the prize questions are too hybrid a source to look for one direct, ‘original’ line of inspiration.

<sup>147</sup> Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text. The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800*, Cambridge, Mass./London 1991, p. 5.

<sup>148</sup> This fundamental assumption of the rhetoric of the heart is taken from one of the (published) discourses of the *concours* held by the Académie des Jeux Floraux in 1765: “Déterminer ce qu’il y a de fixe et d’arbitraire dans le gout”, in: *Recueil des ouvrages de poésie et d’éloquence, présentés à l’Académie des Jeux Floraux, en l’année 1765*, Toulouse 1765, pp. 57–82, here pp. 58–59.

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