

## FOREWORD

Between Bacon and Leibniz the moderns sought in various ways to ground the unity of a new framework of knowledge after the pulling down of the inherited Aristotelian science provoked by what we are accustomed to call the Scientific Revolution. This collection of essays aims to explore from a historical perspective the shapes and development of the issue of the unity of knowledge as it was addressed in early modern thought in various quarters and through various projects of reforming the practice of knowledge.

As Francis Bacon put it on the frontispiece of his *Novum Organum*, grafting an apocalyptic vision on a research program, *multi pertransibunt et multiplex erit scientia*. The development of science becomes steadily associated with the end of earthly life, a theme that would resound deeply in Western thought up until Goethe's *Faust*. What grounds then the multiplicity of knowledge? What is the common trunk out of which all realms of knowledge unfold, like the burgeoning branches of the celebrated tree? After the Augustinian imprint of the first Christian centuries and after the admirable effort of the high scholastics' Aristotelian and Christian synthesis, the seventeenth century undertakes new scientific work with the need of a new steady ground. All the big names of the modern era, Francis Bacon, Galileo, Descartes, Robert Boyle, Spinoza or Leibniz, found themselves engaged in the search for a common trunk of wisdom, each of them nourishing the intimate conviction that they possessed the philosophical core which would satisfy the learned men's newly

found appetite for indefinitely extending knowledge. In doing this, all of these masters needed to confront the philosophical tradition that they received, reworking and merging together the old structures of science through this epistemological prism of the search for the unity of knowledge.

The seventeenth century is definitely the one that puts an end, in Western culture, to the ontological reign of the hylemorphic doctrine of substance. Renouncing this Aristotelian model brought about such a radical and wide change in all areas of knowledge and at all levels of teaching or expressing philosophical thought that one could compare it with the reformulation of gravity laws in Newtonian physics or the discovery of unconscious life in nineteenth-century philosophy. This dissolution did not happen in one day. René Descartes, the spirit rightfully thought to be the *fossoyeur* of the “old philosophy”, proposed the alternative model, that of two substances, matter and thought, which can exist independently and can reunite constituting man, the soul being endowed with the power of thinking. His *Metaphysical Meditations*, published in 1641, were to put forth an original argument: since I (the one experimenting knowledge), a being united with my body, can, through thinking, take myself out of my bodily condition, be it only for a limited amount of time, there is no reason to disbelieve in the eternity of the soul. From here Descartes drew the conclusion that death occurred only from a feebleness of the body, from an alteration of the material mechanism’s performance, an alteration which does not infringe upon the soul’s substance.

This was the subject-matter of several international seminars organised by the Research Centre for the Foundations of Modern Thought of the University of Bucharest (<http://www.modernthought.unibuc.ro/>) between 2005 and 2009, with the support of the Philosophy Department of Princeton University, which gathered together senior and junior scholars from

Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia. The authors of these essays raise a number of questions prompted by this new dualistic model – a model which distinguishes between an extended substance, *i.e.* matter, of which the visible world is made and which has been described by means of mechanical philosophy (see, for instance, the animal-as-automaton model famously debated in the seventeenth century), and a thinking substance, which we are only able to know, it's true, from within the soul-body union (which Descartes explored in his later writings on the subject of the “complete man”, *le vrai homme*), but one which definitely exists in God and, if one is to follow revealed theology, in other created beings as well. What might these questions be?

The volume is divided into two sections. The first one groups contributions which focus on the reconstruction of a single frame of knowledge, be it that of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz or Locke, while also discussing the difficulties of harmonizing them with the philosophical tradition. The second section deals with the superposing and the interpenetration of different traditions, raising thus particular issues about the communication among frameworks of knowledge and the constitution of philosophical trends. Such an old philosophical question like that of personal identity and the conceptualization of the individual is seen, for instance, as one of the key elements of this modern re-elaboration while a philosophical theme like that of life emerges as a cornerstone in the attempt of reconfiguring the unity of knowledge.

The first part of the volume is thus composed of enquiries into the projects of some of the major figures of the modern era concerned with establishing connections between various realms of knowledge. Nathan Smith (Boston College) explores the Cartesian question of universal science (*mathesis universalis*) in the *Rules for the direction of the mind*, the first modern treatise on the unity of knowledge, one which sets the tone for the modern preoccupations with defining knowledge. Elodie Cassan (Université

de Tours) studies Cartesian cosmology and its status within the new physics formulated by the *Principles of Philosophy*. Vlad Alexandrescu (University of Bucharest) proposes a new reading of Descartes' texts from the viewpoint of the classical problem of the individuation of physical bodies. Roger Ariew (University of South Florida) looks at the problem of the principle of individuation in Descartes and Leibniz as they draw on its late scholastic roots. Lucian Petrescu (University of Bucharest) investigates the Cartesian view of memory and of the act of remembering, and shows that the relationship between Descartes' physiological research and its guiding metaphysical principles sanctions a distinction between two faculties of memory. Stephen Gaukroger (University of Sydney) proposes a synthetic view of the development of Spinoza's political, theological and ethical theories in relation to his research in natural philosophy, and argues that the rationale of Spinoza's undertaking it is to be found in his principles of natural philosophy. Daniel Garber (Princeton University) takes a fresh look at Leibniz's early preoccupations of reconciling Catholic doctrine and mechanical philosophy, searching for the same grounding principles. Sorana Corneanu (University of Bucharest) looks at Locke's views on the value of natural research and places them in the context of Locke's general anthropology.

New frameworks do not arise from still waters. The second part of the volume contains essays which explore in more depth a few cases of the interpenetration of various traditions in the constitution of the modern frame of knowledge. Massimiliano Savini (Università del Salento) discusses Johann Heinrich Alsted's encyclopedic project with its architectonic as well pedagogical ambitions in the context of early modern German quests for unifying knowledge. Dana Jalobeanu (University of Bucharest) searches for the Stoic sources of Bacon's idea of a fraternity in natural research, one of the grounding ideas of the British Royal Society. Giulia Belgioioso (Università di Lecce) throws new light

on the Cartesian concept of hyperbole offering some interesting examples of the use Descartes makes of it. Igor Agostini (Università di Lecce) presents as case of dialogue between the Aristotelian tradition and the new philosophy in the correspondence between Descartes and the Aristotelian Johannes Caterus. Justin Smith (Concordia University, Montreal) analyses the dialogue between Henry More's Neoplatonic views and Descartes' rationalism in their correspondence on the nature of organism. Mihnea Dobre (University of Bucharest) maps the presence of Cartesian philosophy and of Descartes' followers in two of the most important philosophical journals of the Republic of Letters. Eric Lewis (Virginia University) brings to light the fascinating story of Sir Kenelm Digby and the weapon salve Paracelsian practice of curing wounds. Brandon Look's essay (University of Kentucky) argues for the impact of the Aristotelian tradition on Leibniz's and Locke's metaphysics. All these issues, we might add, derive more or less from the questioning of the dualist view of soul and body throughout the seventeenth century.

The attentive historical investigations proposed by these articles argue for the fruitfulness of the approach of the history of ideas to the constitution of modernity, a perspective which has never ceased to inform modern European thought. I can only hope that the essays gathered here contribute to the further endorsement of this perspective.

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