

*“Libertas philosophandi”, “libero filosofare”,  
“free-thinking”, “liberté de penser”.*

*Variations and transformations in modern philosophy*

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*This article tries to retrace through some authors of the 17th and 18th century the history of the motto libertas philosophandi, which, following its original affirmation and defence of the freedom of the philosopher, scholar or professor, finds in the age of Enlightenment the true universality of political, intellectual and civil rights.*

Key-words: *“Libertas philosophandi”, “Libero filosofare”, “Free-thinking”, “Liberté de penser”, Modern Philosophy.*

In December 2000, the European Parliament, Council and Commission solemnly signed and proclaimed the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. Article 10 protects the *Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion”<sup>1</sup>. Article 11 protects the *Freedom of expression and information*: “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression”<sup>2</sup>.

This is the welcome result of a long history of searching for and defending freedom of thought, with no lack of achievements and setbacks, victories and defeats, accelerations and delays. But the

<sup>1</sup> *Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union*

“Article 10

*Freedom of thought, conscience and religion*

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. The right to conscientious objection is recognised, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of this right”.

<sup>2</sup> *Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union*

“Article 11

*Freedom of expression and information*

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected”.

victories prevailed, making freedom of thought, expression, conscience and religion a public good in which subjects become personally engaged and involved in their own adhesion and fidelity.

This institutional history starts from the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* of 1789, inspired by the *Declaration of American Independence* of 1776. In article 11, the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* states as “l'un des droits les plus précieux de l'homme la libre communication des pensées et des opinions”: “tout citoyen peut donc parler, écrire, imprimer librement, sauf à répondre de l'abus de cette liberté dans les cas déterminés par la loi”.

Many important events mark this long history: the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (UDHR, part of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* adopted by United Nations General Assembly in December 1940), whose articles 18–21 sanction so-called “constitutional liberties” and spiritual, public, and political freedoms, such as freedom of thought, opinion, religion, conscience, speech, and peaceful association of the individual; the *Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms* (*European Convention on Human Rights*, Rome, 4 November 1950), which ratifies in article 9 freedom of thought, conscience and religion as a right of all<sup>3</sup>, and in article 10 adds freedom of expression<sup>4</sup>; the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of the United Nations* (ICCPR, 16 December 1966), which

<sup>3</sup> *European Convention on Human Rights*.

“Article 9 – Freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

2. Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others”.

<sup>4</sup> *European Convention on Human Rights*.

“Article 10 – Freedom of expression.

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. [...]. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary” .

declares in article 18 that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", and in article 19 that "everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression"<sup>5</sup>.

Philosophy has contributed to affirming these universal and inalienable rights with its books, its risks and its teachings. The long history of their expression and assertion can indeed be interpreted as an equally long history of variations, amplifications and transformations of the motto *libertas philosophandi*. Beginning from its original affirmation in defence of the freedom of the philosopher, scholar or professor, this led to a true universality of a range of political, intellectual and civil rights, by interpreting this phrase, since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as a paradigmatic motto of the foundation, constitution and exercise of modern reason itself. Over time, philosophy has written it with affirmations and uncertainties, devotion and perplexity, cries and whispers, sacrifices, simulations and submissions, smoking bonfires even, but also safe shelters. It has furthermore situated it within a theoretical history, which is also a militant program and an enlightened action: it could even summarise the philosophical gesture of the modern age, in its values and certainties, but also in its complexity, its conceptual metamorphoses, its different meanings, sometimes more prudent and sometimes more radical, as well as its semantic translations, sometimes cautious and sometimes clamorous. This history of reason and the right to reason is certainly worth studying<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.

"Article 18

1. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. [...]

Article 19

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.

2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice".

<sup>6</sup> See: R.B. Sutton, *The Phrase Libertas philosophandi*, "Journal of the History of Ideas", 14 (1953), pp. 310-316; M.A. Stewart, *Libertas Philosophandi: From Natural to Speculative Philosophy*, "Australian Journal of Politics History", 40 (1994), pp. 29-46; P.J. Bagley (ed.), *Piety, Peace, and the Freedom to Philosophize*, Dordrecht, Springer Netherlands, 1999; D. Garber, *Freedom to Philosophize: Some Philosophical Questions about Science, Theology, and State in the Seventeenth Century*, in T.M. Lennon (ed.), *Cartesian Views. Papers presented to Richard A. Watson*, Leyden, Brill, 2003, pp. 205-224; M. Ciliberto (ed.), *Biblioteca laica*, Bari-Roma, Laterza, 2009<sup>2</sup>; A. Damanti, *Libertas philosophandi. Teologia e filosofia nella Lettera alla Granduchessa Cristina di Lorena di Galileo Galilei*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2010; F. Ferretto, P. Gori, M. Rinaldi (eds.),

This was our project when, some years ago, we decided on the subject of our European Society for Early Modern Philosophy's Fifth Conference: our ambitious project would study the philosophical history of the phrase *libertas philosophandi*, to which Spinoza gave its canonical form in the title of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, and to which modern philosophy has assigned various meanings and various formulations, such as "free thinking", "liberté de penser", "libero filosofare". Our idea was to reflect together on the conceptual transformations of this phrase in various theoretic fields and its conceptual variations in different historical contexts, and to find it even lying beneath several expressions, less canonical and less evident, perhaps even hidden but no less relevant, at the same time bringing its meanings together in a web of relations with other philosophical ideas including authority, certainty, truth, tolerance, religion, politics, etc.

The articles we have published here, on the twentieth anniversary of the *Charter of fundamental rights of the European Union*, show the wealth of the philosophical debate that animated the three days of the Fifth ESEMP Conference held at the University of Bologna from 9 to 11 September 2019. In their philosophical and historical analyses, they make a decisive contribution to our knowledge of the conceptual background of early modernity, but also offer important theoretical tools to defend the rights and values of freedom of conscience, thought and expression in our present, forcefully and without compromise.

### 1. *A geography for history. Variations of libertas philosophandi during the 17th century*

Despite some rare occurrences of this phrase in the ancient and medieval tradition<sup>7</sup>, the phrase *libertas philosophandi* takes on its

*Libertas philosophandi in naturalibus. Libertà di ricerca e criteri di regolamentazione istituzionale tra '500 e '700*, Padova, CLEUP, 2011; É. Balibar, *Libre parole*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 2018.

<sup>7</sup> For example, in the Latin translation by Marsilio Ficino of the Alcinoüs' *Institutiones de Platonis doctrina*, a reference to *Libertas philosophandi* appears in this form: "Oportet præterea liberali animo philosophum esse" (*Opera [...] in duos tomos digesta*, Basileæ, apud Henricum Petri, 1561: *Alcinoi Philosophi Platonici de doctrina Platonis*, Vol. 2, p. 1946). In the *De æternitate mundi*, Boëthius de Dacia, while not evoking the term *libertas*, reserved only to God, defends the autonomous use of reason in the study of philosophy: "Velle credere sine ratione philosophicum non est" (*Tractatus de æternitate mundi*, ed. by G. Sajó, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1964; in Italy Luca Bianchi published a bilingual Latin / Italian edition, Milano, La Vita Felice, 2017).

theoretical and epistemological depth and prescriptive meaning in the crucial philosophical debates of the 17th century, that decisive moment, sometimes even dramatic, when philosophy and the other sciences became emancipated from theology. This formula vividly summarises the claim, at times shocking, to the right to freely exercise thought, free that is from the authority of the masters and the control of the Church. Spinoza, in the title of the *Tractatus Theologico-politicus – Tractatus Theologico-Politicus Continens Dissertationes aliquot, Quibus ostenditur Libertatem Philosophandi non tantum salva Pietate, et Reipublicæ Pace posse concedi: sed eandem nisi cum Pace Reipublicæ, ipsaque Pietate tolli non posse* – launched the canonical form *libertas philosophandi*, and elaborated this phrase as *libertas philosophandi dicendique quæ sentimus*<sup>8</sup> in his famous letter 30 to Oldenburg of December 1665. He affirms it against "the authority and petulance of the preachers", defending the innocence of *libertas philosophandi* and also its usefulness as regards religion and peace in the State (*salva pietate, et reipublicæ pace*), elevating it to the status of a natural and original right of every man.

And yet the motto *libertas philosophandi*, albeit in different grammatical forms, had already been seen in early modern philosophy. It was the philosopher's battle cry in his request for freedom of thought and expression: freedom in a negative sense as liberation from the authority of books, doctrines and masters, and in a positive sense as self-determination of will and reason in philosophical and scientific research<sup>9</sup>. It is indeed interesting to follow its different inflections in various national contexts, since every philosopher belongs to his own time and every philosophy is sensitive to the historical and political conditions in which it is elaborated, philosophy being not only meditation and solitary reflection, but also a project of transformation, a challenge to tradition and a defence of its own legitimacy.

In Italy, at the time of the Counter-Reformation and the Inquisition, *libertas philosophandi* was both a request and a program promoted by the authors and defenders of the new philosophy and the new science. They claimed, for the philosopher and the teacher,

<sup>8</sup> Spinoza to Oldenburg, 1 October 1665 (Fragment 2), in E. Curley (ed.), *The Collected Works of Spinoza*, Volume II: *Letters* (1665-1669), Princeton-Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 25: "freedom of philosophising and saying what we think".

<sup>9</sup> According to the distinction made by Isaiah Berlin, *Four essays on liberty*, Oxford, OUP, 1969.

autonomy from the authority of books and doctrines: on the sidelines and going against the power of universities and religious institutions, they loudly asserted it as the very condition of scientific and philosophical research. This led them to face no lack of risks and dangers: censure, trial, condemnation, imprisonment, and... the stake, witnesses Bruno, Galilei and Campanella, among others.

In his harsh critique of dominant Aristotelianism, Giordano Bruno claimed the freedom to seek and teach the truth for himself and for every philosopher. *Cuicumque liceat philosophice in philosophia libere opinari*, he writes in a letter to the Rector of the University of Paris<sup>10</sup>: reason itself requires this and truth demands it. In the *Oratio Valedictoria*, he goes even further describing the characteristics of *philosophica libertas* by praising the members of the University of Wittenberg who had welcomed him, a fugitive in exile, with respect and magnanimity: *philosophica libertas* is made up of love for wisdom, acumen of mind, spirit of goodwill, tolerance and freedom of thought<sup>11</sup>.

Galileo states it as a necessary condition for scientific research. He formulated it with the words of Alcinoos – “è verissima la sentenza d’Alcinoos che ‘l filosofare vuole essere libero”<sup>12</sup> –, transforming the Greek philosopher’s enunciation into a strong epistemological requisite and a prescriptive condition for science: scientific research must be free from the restriction of any authority, and free to apply data coming from the senses, experience and mathematics<sup>13</sup>. Galileo repeats this with strength in the letter addressed to the Grand Duchess in 1615, where he claims philosophical freedom in defending and professing Copernicanism. In this letter, dedicated to the relationship between scientific knowledge and biblical exegesis, he affirms that philosophical freedom is the true condition of scientific progress. This is because a complete knowledge of reality has never been achieved<sup>14</sup>, and the continuous exercise of research,

<sup>10</sup> G. Bruno, *Epistolæ ad Rectorem*, in *Jordani Bruni Nolani Opera Latine Conscripta Publicis Sumptibus Edita*, ed. F. Fiorentino, Napoli, Morano, 1879, Vol. 3, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> G. Bruno, *Epistola Valedictoria*, in *Jordani Bruni Nolani Opera Latine Conscripta*, cit., Vol. 1, p. 23.

<sup>12</sup> G. Galilei, *Discorso [...] intorno alle cose che stanno in su l’acqua* (1612), in *Opere di Galileo Galilei*. Edizione Nazionale a cura di A. Favaro, Firenze, Tipografia di G. Barbera, Vol. IV (1894), p. 65.

<sup>13</sup> See also *Lettera al Signor Tolomeo Nozzolini* (1613), in *Opere di Galileo Galilei*, cit., *Ibidem*, p. 297: “con quella libertà che mai non dovrebbe separarsi dal vero modo di filosofare”.

<sup>14</sup> G. Galilei, *Lettera a Madama Cristina di Lorena, Granduchessa di Toscana* (1615), in *Opere di Galileo Galilei*, cit., Vol. V (1895), p. 320: “E chi vuol por termine alli umani ingegni? chi vorrà asserire, già essersi veduto e saputo tutto quello che è al mondo di sensibile e di scibile?”.

made up of "dimostrazioni necessarie e sensate esperienze", always acquires new and richer knowledge, questioning and thus shaking common opinions and the systems consecrated by theological authority. Hence his vigorous request for philosophical freedom, to counter the repression exercised by its enemies. Thus,

*non si dovrà [...] precluder la strada al libero filosofare circa le cose del mondo e della natura, quasi che elleno sien di già state con certezza ritrovate e palesate tutte. Né si dovrebbe stimar temerità il non si quietare nelle opinioni già state quasi comuni, né dourebb'esser chi prendesse a sdegno se alcuno non aderisce in dispute naturali a quell'opinione che piace loro, e massime intorno a problemi stati già migliaia d'anni controversi tra filosofi grandissimi, quale è la stabilità del Sole e mobilità della Terra*<sup>15</sup>.

But, if *libertas philosophandi* had its enemies to fight, it also had strong defenders and victorious interpreters who linked it to the names of philosophers and scientists of the time. Tommaso Campanella, from a terrible prison in Naples, pronounces these names: Telesio and Galileo. And perhaps he adds himself, born, as he says, to eradicate three extreme evils: tyranny, sophistry [and] hypocrisy, precisely in the name of philosophy<sup>16</sup>. Thus, in his idea that adequate knowledge of nature proceeds from nature itself, which must be investigated on the basis of sensible experience, he evokes the freedom of philosophy in his poems when he emphatically describes Telesio. According to him, Telesio re-established, against Aristotle and his disciples, the correct relationships between things and words, inspired by that "*libertà dolce alla verità*" which is the quiver that kills Aristotle, "*de' Sofisti il tiranno*"<sup>17</sup>. But Campanella also recalls *libertas philosophandi* in its Latin formula, and more broadly, when he defends Galileo in his *Apologia* (1616, published in 1622), engaging in an ideal dialogue after reading the *Sidereus Nuncius*, and redefining, by defending Galileo, the relations between philosophy,

<sup>15</sup> G. Galilei, *Lettera a Madama Cristina di Lorena, Granduchessa di Toscana* (1615), in *Opere di Galileo Galilei*, cit., Vol. V (1895), pp. 320-321.

<sup>16</sup> T. Campanella, *Delle radici de' gran mali del mondo*, in [Id.], *Scelta d'alcune poesie filosofiche*, s.l., s.e., 1622, *Proemio*: "Io nacqui a debellar tre mali estremi: /tirannide, sofismi, ipocrisia; / ond'or m'accorgo con quanta armonia / Possanza, Senno, Amor m'insegnò Temi. / Questi principi son veri e sopremi / della scoperta gran filosofia, / rimedio contra la trina bugia / sotto cui tu, piangendo, o mondo, fremi".

<sup>17</sup> T. Campanella, *Al Telesio cosentino*, in [Id.], *Scelta d'alcune poesie filosofiche*, cit., p. 72: "Telesio, il telo della tua faretra / Uccide de' sofisti [...] / Il tiranno senza scampo; / Libertà dolce alla verità impetra".

science and theology. Despite his own reservations towards heliocentrism, Campanella in fact praises Galileo's courage in reading directly, with experience and reason, the "infinite and divine book of nature" written "in living letters" by God<sup>18</sup>. He appreciates his will to amend "human books" that, written in "dead letters which are signs and not things", always require revisions and additions. The same goes for the books of Aristotelian philosophy, which can be modified, corrected or legitimately abandoned with good reason in light of an ever deeper reading of the "book of nature"<sup>19</sup>. All of this, without any danger for theology, as Campanella claims. *Libertas philosophandi*, which inspires the correct method of studying nature through sensible experience and reason, is indeed "more vigorous in Christian than in other nations"<sup>20</sup>. He affirms a reconciliation of scientific research and the Christian tradition in the name of the unity of truth, albeit pursued in human science and divine science with different methods: the first by sensible experience, the second one in the light of the Patristic tradition and following the authority of the Church<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, according to Campanella, he who investigates nature with *libertas philosophandi*, born out of the spirit of discovering the truth and not challenging faith, must not be distracted from further investigations, convinced that knowing creation (*omnia opera Dei*) is the right way to arrive at the Creator.

<sup>18</sup> T. Campanella, *Modo di filosofare*, in [Id.], *Scelta d'alcune poesie filosofiche*, cit., p. 6:

"Il mondo è il libro dove il Senno Eterno / Scrisse i propri concetti, e vivo tempio / Dove, pingendo i gesti e 'l proprio esempio, / Di statue vive ornò l'imo e 'l superno; / Perch'ogni spirito qui l'arte e 'l governo / Leggere e contemplar, per non farsi empio, / Debba, e dir possa: – Io l'universo adempio / Dio contemplando a tutte cose interno. / Ma noi, strette alme a' libri e tempii morti, / Copiati dal vivo con più errori, / Gli anteponghiamo a magistero tale. / O pene, del fallir fatene accorti, / Liti, ignoranze, fatiche e dolori: / Deh, torniamo, per Dio, all'originale!"

<sup>19</sup> T. Campanella, *Apologia pro Galileo, mathematico florentino. Ubi disquiritur, utrum ratio philosophandi, quam Galileus celebrat, faveat sacris scripturis, an adversetur*, Francofurti, Typis Erasmi Kempfferi, 1622, p. 18: "Quapropter delirant, qui putant, ab Aristotele constitutam esse veritatem de caelestibus, et nihil amplius investigandum".

<sup>20</sup> T. Campanella, *Apologia pro Galileo*, cit., p. 27: "[libertas philosophandi] plus viget in Christianis quam in caeteris nationibus".

<sup>21</sup> T. Campanella, *Apologia pro Galileo*, cit., p. 31: "Nec prout Aristoteles aut alius decernit interpretari utrumque [librum], sed omium philosophorum dogmata scire, et sicut legimus in utroque libro Dei propriis sensibus et Patrum spiritu et ecclesiae sanctae foecundissimo intellectu exponere debemus, ab omni invidia et passione alieni, quae iudicium obnubilant et torquent".



*Libertas philosophandi* is therefore not necessarily antireligious, anti-theological or anti-Catholic<sup>22</sup>, just as its absence is not necessarily the sign of fidelity to the tradition of the past or the mark of philosophical conformity to the authority of the masters. Seventeenth century philosophy is too complex, deeply marked as it is by different philosophical cultures and traditions: the new science, with its need for rational demonstrations and its appeal to experience; the renaissance of scepticism, with *epochè* and its tropes<sup>23</sup>; erudite libertinism, with its fine distinctions between the internal and external *forum* and its subtle reinterpretations of Antiquity in a sceptical,

<sup>22</sup> I would like to recall the formula with which the censor Pietro Contegna authorized in 1710 the publication of the work *De antiquissima Italorum sapientia* by Giambattista Vico: "germana philosophandi libertas pietate coniuncta".

<sup>23</sup> I can only quote the chapter "De la liberté de conscience" of Montaigne's *Essais* (L. II, 19), where he exposes bitter considerations on the excesses of license to which religious freedom can lead, enhancing an attitude of adaptation to tradition especially in times of civil wars, but also condemning intolerant zeal. "Il est ordinaire de voir les bonnes intentions, si elles sont conduites sans moderation, pousser les hommes à des effets tres-vitieux. En ce debat par lequel la France est à présent agitée de guerres civiles, le meilleur et le plus sain party est sans doute celui qui maintient et la religion et la police ancienne du pays. Entre les gens de bien toutes-fois qui le suyvent (car je ne parle point de ceux qui s'en servent de pretexte pour, ou exercer leurs vengences particulieres, ou fournir à leur avarice, ou suyvre la faveur des Princes; mais de ceux qui le font par vray zele envers leur religion, et sainte affection à maintenir la paix et l'estat de leur patrie), de ceux-cy, dis-je, il s'en voit plusieurs que la passion pousse hors les bornes de la raison, et leur fait par fois prendre des conseils injustes, violents et encore temeraires. Il est certain qu'en ces premiers temps que nostre religion commença de gagner autorité avec les loix, le zele en arma plusieurs contre toute sorte de livres paiens, dequoy les gens de lettre souffrent une merveilleuse perte. J'estime que ce desordre ait plus porté de nuisance aux lettres que tous les feux des barbares. Cornelius Tacitus en est un bon tesmoin". The chapter ends with an eulogy of the emperor Julian and his tolerance. "Pour parvenir à son effect, ayant rencontré en Constantinople le peuple descousu avec les prelates de l'Eglise Chrestienne divisez, les ayant fait venir à luy au palais, [Julien] les amonnesta instamment d'assoupir ces dissensions civiles, et que chacun sans empeschement et sans crainte servit à sa religion. Ce qu'il sollicitoit avec grand soing, pour l'esperance que cette licence augmenteroit les parts et les brigues de la division, et empescherait le peuple de se réunir et de fortifier par consequent contre luy par leur concorde et unanime intelligence; ayant essayé par la cruauté d'aucuns Chrestiens qu'il n'y a point de beste au monde tant à craindre à l'homme que l'homme. Voylà ses mots à peu près: en quoy cela est digne de consideration, que l'Empereur Julian se sert, pour attiser le trouble de la dissention civile, de cette mesme recepte de liberté de conscience que nos Roys viennent d'employer pour l'estaindre. On peut dire, d'un costé, que de lacher la bride aux pars d'entretenir leur opinion, c'est espandre et semer la division; c'est prêter quasi la main à l'augmenter, n'y ayant aucune barriere ny coercion des loix qui bride et empesche sa course. Mais, d'autre costé, on diroit aussi que de lascher la bride aux pars d'entretenir leur opinion, c'est les amolir et relacher par la facilité et par l'aisance, et que c'est émousser l'éguillon qui s'affine par la rareté, la nouveleté et la difficulté. Et si croy mieux, pour l'honneur de la devotion de nos rois, c'est que, n'ayans peu ce qu'ils vouloient, ils ont fait semblant de vouloir ce qu'ils pouvoient". This eulogy was criticized for its artfulness by the Roman authorities (*Les Essais*, éd. P. Villey, Paris, PUF, 1988 nouv. éd., Vol. II, pp. 668-672, *passim*).

anti-metaphysical and anti-theological sense; the debates and controversies over orthodoxy within the Reformed churches, with their strong opposition to scholasticism and their conviction of a strong link between Reformation and the freedom to philosophise; the epistemological debates of the age, between theorists of innatism and philosophers of experience on the issue of common notions; eclecticism, again, *philosophia eclecticica*<sup>24</sup>, as a permanent condition of philosophising in freedom.

“In such a place of *Philosophic* freedom, as they suppos’d England was”<sup>25</sup>, as Milton wrote in his stirring *Areopagitica*, *libertas philosophandi* was indeed defended also by theologians such as Nathanael Carpenter, a notable philosopher ordained into the Church of England, philosophers such as Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury, considered the father of English deism, and poets such as Milton, an important supporter of the Puritan cause. Nathanael Carpenter entitled his 1621 work *Philosophia libera*, conceived in vigorous opposition to the Aristotelians who, according to him, had betrayed Aristotle’s philosophy itself, which was a philosophy of freedom and of the search for freedom. Thus, in his work Carpenter proposes an eclectic anti-Copernican system of cosmology in the name of *libertas philosophandi* “ab Aristotele introducta”, following only the authority of reason and the Holy Scriptures. He writes this in the *Præfatio*, in which *libertas philosophandi* inspires an eclectic philosophy of progress that Carpenter proposes with the image of dwarves on the shoulders of giants. He concludes:

*Vigeat ergo Veterum Philosophia [...]. Floreat Recentiorum fervor et industria*<sup>26</sup>.

Herbert of Cherbury echoes this idea in the *Epistola ad Lectorem*, the preface to his *De Veritate*, where he declares his commitment to *libere philosophari* in an inquiry into the truth that he undertakes

<sup>24</sup> J. C. Sturm, *Philosophia eclecticica, h.e. Exercitationes Academicae*, Altdorf, J. W. Kohles, 1679 (Francofurti et Lipsiæ, J. W. Kohles, 1698), Vol. I, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> J. Milton, *Areopagitica; A Speech of Mr. John Milton for the Liberty of Unlicenc’d Printing, To the Parliament of England*, London, Printed in the Yeare, 1644, p. 24.

<sup>26</sup> N. Carpenter, *Philosophia Libera, Triplici Exercitationum Decade proposita*, Oxford, I. Lichfield & I. Short, 1622, *Præfatio ad lectorem*, n. p. The work appeared at Frankfurt in 1621 under the pseudonym *N. C. Cosmopolitanus*. Later editions were issued under the name of the author at Oxford. I quote from the edition of 1622.

programmatically under the guidance of the intellect alone<sup>27</sup>. He does not attack religion, but the doctrine of the Church: truth, even religious truth, is not in fact founded on authority, but on universal consent – *consensus universalis*<sup>28</sup> –, based in turn on those *notitiae communes*, which are innate, incontestable and of divine origin<sup>29</sup>.

And, to return to Milton, with his famous *Areopagitica* he goes even further, leaving the university auditoria and the cabinets of philosophers, and addressing civil society in English, to deal with the relationship between the principle of freedom and the principle of authority. Like from a new Areopagus, in this "speech" he defends his work from censorship – the well know *Licensing Act* – and attacks Parliament's "Ordinance for the Regulating of Printing" (1643). He exalts the principle of philosophic freedom<sup>30</sup> by giving his discourse the universal character of a defence of freedom of conscience and expression. Milton's famous praise of books, an emblem of freedom of expression, is well known.

*Who kills a Man kills a reasonable creature, Gods Image; but he who destroyes a good Booke, kills reason it selfe, kills the Image of God, as it were in the eye. Many a man lives a burden to the Earth; but a good Booke is the pretious life-blood of a master spirit, imbalm'd and treasur'd up on purpose to a life beyond life*<sup>31</sup>.

His harsh condemnation of the "tyranny" of the Inquisition is equally well known, in that history of censorship from the Athenians up to the *Imprimatur* of the Catholic Church where he writes his personal impressions after visiting the elderly Galileo, prisoner of the Inquisition "for thinking in Astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought"<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> E.H. of Cherbury *De veritate, prout distinguitur a revelatione, a verisimili, a possibili, et a falso*, Lutetiae Parisiorum, n. e., 1624, *Epistola ad Lectorem*, n. p.

<sup>28</sup> E. H. of Cherbury *De veritate*, cit., p. 43: "Videndum igitur est quænam in Religione in consensu universali sint agnita, universa conferantur".

<sup>29</sup> E.H. of Cherbury *De veritate*, cit., *ibidem*: "Sunt enim notitiæ communes principia illa contra quæ disputare nefas, sive ea pars scientiæ qua, ex sua prima intentione, nos imbutos voluit natura".

<sup>30</sup> Robert S. Sutton underlines the lexical novelty introduced by Milton in the formula "Philosophical freedom" that "seems to have been used for the first time in print in this sentence" (*The Phrase Libertas philosophandi*, cit., p. 316).

<sup>31</sup> J. Milton, *Areopagitica*, cit., p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> J. Milton, *Areopagitica*, cit., p. 24: "And lest som should perswade ye, Lords and Commons, that these arguments of lerned mens discouragement at this your order, are meer flourishes, and not reall, I could recount what I have seen and heard in other Countries, where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes; when I have sat among their lerned men, for that honor I had,

In the France of the *Grand Siècle*, the situation was different and the phrase *libertas philosophandi* took on different forms. Gassendi, for example, re-launched the appeal to *libertas philosophandi* in his *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* (1624), without thereby challenging religious orthodoxy or rejecting the authority of the Church. In this work he revives the humanistic polemic against scholastic Aristotelians with new sceptical arguments taken from Vives and Charron, as well as new elements taken from Ramus and Pico della Mirandola. In the name of the true *libertas philosophandi* professed by Aristotle himself<sup>33</sup> but betrayed by his disciples<sup>34</sup>, he harshly criticizes their blind obedience to the master's authority and their slavery (*sub iugo tantæ servitutis*) to his doctrines – *hoc esse philosophum!* –, defending *animi libertas*, which is “more precious than gold” and is necessary by nature (*naturæ ductu*) to all men and all living beings: *libertate opus est*. That *animi libertas* inspires in the philosopher a confident and serene attitude of research<sup>35</sup>, which, refusing all dogmatic opinion and all prejudice, is open to different philosophical inquiries, interested in different new discoveries, and sensible to different opinions. It is therefore close – as Gassendi writes – to that “famous ἀκαταληψία recommended by the Academicians and the Pyrronians”. Aware of the weakness of the human mind (*imbecillitat[is] humani ingenii*), Gassendi, in his academic scepticism, opposes to the dogmatism of the Aristotelian philosophers, and their presumption to know *severe ac superciliose* the universal and necessary essences of things, a new idea of an empir-

and bin counted happy to be born in such a place of *Philosophic* freedom, as they suppos'd England was, while themselves did nothing but bemoan the servil condition into which learning amongst them was brought; that this was it which had damp't the glory of Italian wits; that nothing had bin there writt'n now these many years but flattery and fustian. There it was that I found and visited the famous Galileo grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition, for thinking in Astronomy otherwise then the Franciscan and Dominican licensors thought. And though I knew that England then was groaning loudest under the Prelaticall yoaik, neverthelesse I took it as a pledge of future happines, that other Nations were so perswaded of her liberty”.

<sup>33</sup> P. Gassendi, *Epistolæ quatuor de apparente magnitudine solis humilis et sublimis*, in *Opera omnia* [...]. *Accessit Samuelis Sorberii præfatio, in qua de vita et moribus Petri Gassendi disseritur*, Lugduni, L. Anisson, 1658, Vol. III, p. 423: “Docuit nos ipse suo exemplo, qua libertate esse debeant, qui rem [philosophiam] quærunt adeo præclaram”.

<sup>34</sup> P. Gassendi, *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos* [...], *Præfatio*, in *Opera omnia*, cit., Vol. III, p. 95: “[In libro I] ratio philosophandi, quæ apud ipsos [Aristoteleos] viget, improbat; et ob dejectam ab eisdem *philosophandi libertatem* expostulatur magnopere”.

<sup>35</sup> P. Gassendi, *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*, cit., Vol. II, p. 107, where he quotes the verses from the Proem of Book II of *De Rerum natura*: “Suave, mari magno turbantibus æquora ventis / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem; / non quia vexari quemquamst iucunda voluptas, / sed quibus ipse malis careas quia cernere suavest”.

ical and experimental science. The latter is defined as *scientia experientiae vel apparentiae*: a phenomenal comprehension and an accurate but never exhaustive description – *historico stylo* – of the variety and particularity of nature and men, which does not claim to reach their essences or causes. This non-dogmatic and always revisable science of phenomena is for Gassendi the only science capable of guaranteeing *libertas philosophandi* as a *philosophica libertas* towards the different philosophical sects, in the name of experience and reason. *Libertas philosophandi* is indeed the essential condition for any *aperta et sensibilis* philosophy, and is the true strength of the philosopher who, by not submitting his mind to the authority of any master, judges without prejudice (*libera iudicandi potestate*), while keeping intact the power to choose *in diem* what appears most probable<sup>36</sup>. Gassendi says this with the words of Cicero, rejecting sceptical *epochè*, but redefining in a probabilistic meaning *libertas philosophandi* as a provisional acceptance of the opinion that seems most plausible. *Nos in diem vivimus*, he writes, thus backing an integrally human conception of philosophising in freedom, which, in its conscious limits and its intrinsic historicity, finds in this phrase by Cicero the justification and legitimation for its autonomy.

In this complex and complicated history of *libertas philosophandi* in France's *Grand Siècle*, when Gassendi embraced it against the Aristotelian philosophical hegemony and La Mothe Le Vayer set out the natural right to freedom in a skeptical sense showing its limits and illusions, and describing with Seneca and Socrates the *liberté philosophique* as inseparable from virtue and the conditions of existence<sup>37</sup>, the case of Descartes is particular, but no less inter-

<sup>36</sup> P. Gassendi, *Exercitationes paradoxicae adversus Aristoteleos*, cit., II, 8, p. 107. Gassendi combines two quotations from Cicero, one from the *Academica priora* (I, 8) and one from the *Tusculanae Disputationes* (V, 33): "Hoc autem liberiores et solutiores sumus, quod integra nobis est iudicandi potestas, nec ut omnia, quae praescripta a quibusdam et quasi imperata sint, defendamus necessitate ulla cogimur. Nam ceteri primum ante tenentur adstricti quam quid esset optimum iudicare potuerunt: deinde infirmissimo tempore aetatis aut obsecuti amico cuidam aut una alicuius, quem primum audierunt, oratione capti de rebus incognitis iudicant. [...] Tu quidem tabellis obsignatis agis mecum et testificaris, quid dixerim aliquando aut scripserim. Cum aliis isto modo, qui legibus impositis disputant: nos in diem vivimus; quodcumque nostros animos probabilitate percussit, id dicimus, itaque soli sumus liberi". See: D. Bellis, *Nos in Diem Vivimus: Gassendi's Probabilism and Academic Philosophy from Day to Day*, in S. Charles & P. Smith (eds.), *Academic Scepticism in the Development of Early Modern Philosophy*, Dordrecht, Springer Verlag, 2017, pp. 125-152.

<sup>37</sup> La Mothe le Vayer proposes a more modest description of philosopher's freedom under the sign of *liberté philosophique*, showing "qu'elle n'est pas bien entiere, puisque elle n'est souvent qu'intellectuelle [...]; [et] qu'elle est si rare à cause de son detachment de tout

esting. His textual declarations and defenses of *libertas philosophandi* are rather rare, and more frequently found in his controversial writings than in his best-known works, but, at the same time, the *liberté entière de la philosophie* inspires his whole philosophy, if not his existence *en philosophe*<sup>38</sup>. In his works, the phrase *libertas philosophandi* is indeed not overly frequent, except for a reference in the *Quintæ Responsiones* to Gassendi<sup>39</sup> and in the *Epistola ad Voëtium*<sup>40</sup>: two texts, that is, which were written in response and in defence of his own philosophy to a highly cultured reader such as Gassendi, and to a venomous and erudite critic such as Gysbert Voet, a tenacious defender of Aristotelian philosophy and the orthodoxy of the Reformed Church. However, this classical motto would perhaps have been somewhat out of place if not superfluous in Descartes' texts, except for the more controversial ones: out of place because Descartes, in general so unconcerned with tradition and erudition,

ce qui lie estroitement nos affections, qu'on peut pardonner à ceux qui doutent de sa veritable existence. Car si la moindre contrainte, ou le plus petit engagement sont capables de nous priver de la jouissance d'un si grand bien, & si cette lettre Espagnole *qui en me ata, me mata*, est, comme je le pense, la plus propre devise que puisse prendre celui qui pretend estre dabs la *liberté philosophique*, qui est-ce je vous prie, suivant nos conjectures precedentes, qui osera se l'attribuer? Et cela estant ainsi, nous ne ferons pas difficulté de repeter encore en ce lieu qu'il n'y a peut-estre personne qui se puisse dire veritablement libre. Les exemples de Demetrius et de Socrate m'advertissent de faire ensuite quelques reflexions sur la servitude de la Cour afin d'opposer à la plus grande liberté qui est la Philosophique, la plus grande servitude, que nous croyons estre celle de la Cour" (*De la liberté et de la servitude*, Paris, A. de Sommaville, 1643, pp. 92-93).

<sup>38</sup> Descartes to Balzac, 25 April 1631, in *Œuvres de Descartes* publiées par Ch. Adam et P. Tannery. Nouvelle présentation, en co-édition avec le C.N.R.S., Paris, Vrin, 1964-1978 (AT) I, p. 198.

<sup>39</sup> R. Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia. Quintæ Responsiones*, AT VII, p. 390: "Itaque rogo ne illi grave sit, quod libertate Philosophica usus fuerim in eius obiectionibus refutandis".

<sup>40</sup> Descartes appeals to freedom to philosophise in the piece of the bitter controversy, the *Epistola ad Voëtium*, that he publishes in Amsterdam (1643) in defence of his theories against the outrageous accusations of scepticism, masked atheism, enthusiasm and ignorance launched against him by the Reformed theologian Voet. Descartes opens with the axiom "tam liberum enim semper fuit philosophari" that inspires his own defence. Praising the *Novatores* and taking sides with them, he defends himself and defends an idea of philosophy that is not subject to the authority of the schools, but is defined as knowledge of those truths that can be grasped with natural light, and, as such, destined to be expanded over time by an assiduous, attentive and lasting rational research conducted in full freedom. If innovation is hateful in religion – "Odiosum quidem est circa Religionem aliquid velle innovare" –, being the religion divine, revealed and perfect, innovation suits philosophy, because it is human, rational and imperfect. "Circa philosophiam, quam ultro fatentur omnes nondum ab hominibus satis sciri, ac multis egregiis inventis augeri posse, nihil laudabilius est quam Novatorum" (*Epistola ad celeberrimum Virum D. Gisbertum Voëtium*, AT VIII-2, p. 3, p. 26). See: *La Querelle d'Utrecht*. Textes établis, traduits et annotés par T. Verbeek, Paris, Les Impressions nouvelles, 1988.

did not like general and abstract expressions – a rhetorical choice in these two texts, in which he adopts the recipient's classical vocabulary to raise the tone of his defence? –; superfluous because *libertas philosophica*, for him, is not a statement of principle but the condition itself of his philosophy, like a philosophical *a priori*. His philosophy is in fact a philosophy of *recta ratio* inspired by Horace's motto *nullius addictus jura in verba magistri*<sup>41</sup>, and stated in his works as the search for truth with the sole method and resources of natural light, *naturale rationis lumen*<sup>42</sup>.

Descartes was a harsh and proud man, free by temperament and by philosophy, aware of the magnitude of his scientific and philosophical project as well as of the risks of defending it at a time when Scholasticism was hegemonic. He was as firm and constant in realising it as he was careful to choose the best circumstances, always jealous of his own independence and concerned about his health, always practicing the art of being one's own self, regulated by reason rather than custom<sup>43</sup>. He chose freedom as the condition of life and the search for truth as the main commitment of his thought, and cultivated the ambitious project of a radical reform of philosophy in the name of reason. He carried out this enterprise with patience and always discreet conduct, but also with the firmness of an unwavering will, between successes and disappointments, enthusiasm and criticism, friendships and enmities, now masked – *Larvatus prode*, according to the famous phrase of his youth – and even hidden from most – *Bene vixit, bene qui latuit*, taking up Ovid's motto (*Tristia*, III, 4), which became the emblem of his life<sup>44</sup>. In his biography, this signifies Descartes' constant concern to preserve his freedom and his tranquillity and to devote himself to research, *tout à lui*<sup>45</sup>, pursued

<sup>41</sup> R. Descartes, *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii*, *Regula II*, AT X, p. 364

<sup>42</sup> R. Descartes, *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii*, *Regula I*, AT X, p. 360.

<sup>43</sup> Descartes to [Huygens], [31 March 1636], AT I, p. 343. A radical critique of the custom inspired by "common sense" in the *Petit traité sceptique sur cette commune façon de parler*: "*N'avoir pas le sens commun*" by La Mothe Le Vayer" (Paris, A. de Sommerville, 1646), in which the author describes the condition of the "grands hommes qui ont préféré la solitude à la conversation civile pour n'être plus infecté par la haleine du peuple" (p. 24). But the Erasmian inspiration of the treatise which condemns "le sens commun" as collective prejudice in the name of infirmity of reason, taking "le parti de la folie", is far, in my opinion, from Descartes' position. In Descartes, the criticism of costume is inspired by the project of seeing clearly "d'un œil de philosophe" in the "diverses actions et entreprises des hommes", and is nourished by the desire to dedicate oneself in tranquillity to the realization of the arduous but decisive project of reconstructing knowledge.

<sup>44</sup> Descartes to Mersenne, April 1634, AT I, p. 286.

<sup>45</sup> R. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, AT VI, p. 15.

in anonymity and with concentration, meditation and silence. In his philosophy, it became more and more clearly the basis of his reflection on the power and limits of knowledge, his biographical data ultimately merging with a general conception of the nature of the mind and of human action in the name of freedom.

This is the strength of Descartes' philosophy: it declares the total responsibility of the mind which, in the first person but without domination, circumscribes its field of inquiry to better affirm the essential value of freedom and the consistence of human knowledge, while respecting the authority of the Church<sup>46</sup> and the customs of his own country<sup>47</sup>, according to the "morale par provision". Founded on its own actions, regulated and measured by its own resources – *proprio Marte*<sup>48</sup> –, Descartes' philosophy wishes to become available in a progressive universality, sure of the truth it establishes in its intelligibility, and useful in the practical objectives that it authorizes "pour nous rendre comme maîtres et possesseurs de la nature"<sup>49</sup>.

The human mind is indeed not a flat mirror, soft wax or white sheet. The human mind is freedom, a value in itself and a good, and even the sovereign good: it is above all a power of intelligence, understanding and transformation, which commands the commitment of the will and disciplines the natural light in its exercise. *Libertas philosophandi* is not only the prerogative – or the risk? – of the philosopher, but is human freedom itself, the right of every man to exercise his reason: this is "la plus grande et la principale perfection de l'homme"<sup>50</sup>. But hence, also, the risks of claiming *libertas philosophandi* when philosophy intercepts history. Descartes was forced indeed to expose and uncover himself, and was called upon to defend himself in delicate situations and engaged in unforeseen roles, sometimes even difficult to maintain. The famous "Utrecht quarrels" with the theologians of this University, that occupied Descartes for several years from the *Epistola ad P. Dinet* (1642) to the *Querela Apologetica* to the Utrecht Magistrates (1645), made this

<sup>46</sup> R. Descartes to Mersenne, April 1634, AT I, p. 285-286: "je ne voudrais toutefois pour rien du monde les soutenir contre autorité de l'Eglise".

<sup>47</sup> R. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, AT VI, p. 23.

<sup>48</sup> R. Descartes, *Regulæ ad directionem ingenii*, *Regula X*, AT X, p. 404.

<sup>49</sup> R. Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode*, AT VI, p. 62.

<sup>50</sup> R. Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia. Meditatio IV*, AT VII, p. 62: "maxima et præcipua hominis perfectio".



emerge strikingly. Descartes lived in hiding by way of a philosophical choice but also for fear of persecution, of which he felt the victim: he sharply condemned the "violent spirit" of his enemies, Voet in particular, who, speaking in the name of the authority, accused him of scepticism, masked atheism, enthusiasm and ignorance. But Descartes firmly and proudly supported his own "*vraies et justes raisons*". His defence, which appeals to *libertas philosophandi*, was not to force things or to change the world – "*car mon humeur n'est pas de naviguer contre le vent*"<sup>51</sup> –, but to claim the innocence of his philosophy inspired by the freedom of reason. He could thus protect the tranquillity of his work and the *loisir* of his studious life, consecrated to the freedom of philosophical research: "*être à soi*"<sup>52</sup>, possessed by none and following his particular way of being a man, this *singularis humanitas* he recognised for himself. It is through this deep link between practical reason and speculative reason, experienced by Descartes across the distance between Dutch cities, that his life becomes interesting for philosophy.

The "Utrecht quarrels" was an important and painful episode in Descartes' life. But it was also an important chapter in the history of Cartesianism in the United Provinces, its diffusion but also its difficulties, and an important event in the history of the controversies in the Dutch universities, where *libertas philosophandi* was the motto of Cartesian professors, but also of some of their opponents. This phrase met with a strange fate, taking on multiple meanings in the different contexts in which it was pronounced.

In Utrecht University, this sentence was a sign of contradiction. On the one hand, from the chair of eloquence and history, in 1639 Æmilius, in his funeral oration for Reneri, an early Cartesian professor, invoked *litterarum libertas* to celebrate under Horace's motto the genius and work of his colleague<sup>53</sup>; on the other, Voet, the implacable enemy of Descartes, condemned *libertas philosophandi* as the indirect cause of atheism, which questioned, according to him,

<sup>51</sup> Descartes to Pollot, 1 January 1644, AT IV, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Descartes to Elisabeth, 1 September 1645, AT IV, p. 282.

<sup>53</sup> A. Æmilius, *Oratio in obitum Clarissimi et præstantissimi Viri Henrici Renerii [...]*, Ultrajecti, Ex officina Ægidii Roman, 1640, p. 7: "*Consuerat autem, ut solent sublimiora ingenia, paulo philosophari liberius, Nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri. Hæc quippe litterarum libertas, ei semper visa est, quod nemini obnoxia, sui juris et mancipii sit*".

the axioms of natural reason<sup>54</sup>. But Leyden University also spoke of *libertas philosophandi*: in 1656 the Governors, in their resolution against Cartesianism, ordered both theologians and philosophers to keep to their own fields in order to preserve the “liberteyt van Philosophheeren” as far as possible, as Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt wrote to his relative Heidanus, a Leyden theologian and one of the most outspoken Cartesians<sup>55</sup>. That same Heidanus, commenting on these universities’ complicated histories, later defended the freedom to discuss philosophical questions, but with “moderation and without undermining the foundation of Reformed religion”<sup>56</sup>.

Finally, the question of *libertas philosophandi* in the Dutch Golden Age is very complex and intricate, linked as it is to the question of the freedom of teaching, connected with the philosophical debates and theological controversies within the Reformed orthodoxy, related to the eclectic philosophical culture of which Gerard Joannes Vossius was one of the most eminent exponents. Thus began a new academic life of *libertas philosophandi* in the name of eclectic philosophy, capable of bringing the best ideas of the history of philosophy together with a desire for independence and autonomy.

In his posthumous text *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis libri II*, Vossius theorizes this, placing euristic doubt at the foundation of philosophical research, witness Aristotle himself<sup>57</sup>, and describing

<sup>54</sup> G. Voet, *Selectæ Disputationes Theologicae*, Ultrajecti, Waesberge, 1648, I: *De Atheismo* (respondens: G. de Bruyn), p. 150. Voet multiplies the meanings of the concept of *libertas* (*libertas scholastica*, *libertas conscientiae*, *libertas exercitii*, *libertas in philosophicis*) in his text *Politicae ecclesiasticae* (Amsterdam, Waesberge, 1666, p. 686). Theorist of the close links between philosophy, scholastic theology and sacred philosophy submitted to biblical authority, Voet argues that the Reformed churches are the only churches that guarantee a moderate tolerance and a tempered freedom of conscience, speech, and academic teaching that he calls *libertas prophetandi*, but, according to Theo Verbeek, always in the frame of the Reformed religion and religious education [*Libertas philosophandi*, in W. van Bunge, H. Krop, P. Steenbakkers, J. Van de Ven (eds), *The Continuum Companion to Spinoza*, London, New York, Continuum, 2011, pp. 252–253], and under specific restrictions close to the *Confessio Belgica* (A. Goudriaan, *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750: Gisbertus Voetius, Petrus van Mastricht, and Anthonius Driessen*, Leiden, Brill, 2006, p. 320).

<sup>55</sup> De Witt to Heidanus, 21 July 1656 (quoted from H. H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2015, p. 405).

<sup>56</sup> A. Heidanus, *Consideratien over Eenige saecken onlanghs voorgevallen in de universiteit binnen Leyden*, Leiden, Arnout Doude, 1676, p. 87 (quoted from H. Krop, *Reformed Orthodoxy and the Libertas philosophandi in the Netherlands*, “Church History and Religious Culture”, 2020, pp. 187–202).

<sup>57</sup> J.G. Vossius, *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis libri II*, Hagæ Comitum, A. Vlacq, 1658, Vol. I, p. 11: “Nempe dubitatio ipsa facit, ut veritatem inveniamus. [...] Scitum vero est quod Ammonius in Categorias addit, ne voluisse quidem Aristotelem, ut in sua quiescamus sententia, sed ut inquiramus in ea”.

this method of research as the permanent and necessary condition of philosophising in freedom. Aware of the variety of opinions of philosophers, along with Democritus, Plato, Cicero, Diogenes Laertius and Plutarch and many others he values a form of humanistic eclecticism, like a *secta electiva vel electrix*<sup>58</sup>, which, far from proposing new and original theories, chooses the best of the others, *nullis addictus jurare in verba magistri*. Here lies its value, not as a provocation or a challenge, but as an awareness of the limits of philosophy itself: the imperfection of the human intellect (*imperfectio humani intellectus*) does not indeed allow us to reach absolute and total truths. Thus, Vossius opposes the authority of the *ipse dixit* with a philosophy of *ingenium* and *judicium*, that with Democritus goes down into the well where the truth is hidden, and questions different philosophical doctrines with assiduous and methodical study, ultimately, after careful examination, coherently choosing the most probable<sup>59</sup> *libero judicio*<sup>60</sup>, as Vossius says with Cicero, always leaving the search open. *Fortasse, videtur*: this is the style of philosophy. But here also lies its difficulty: eclecticism, *optima et laudatissima philosophia*, is also the most difficult philosophy. In fact, according to Vossius, it requires a tenacious love of truth, a profound knowledge of the "sects of philosophers", their theories and their controversies, many years of practice on their books and at their school, an intelligent ability to test and contradict, a great patience of composition. The free judgment of the eclectic who chooses "the flowers" from the philosophers' doctrines to make "a beautiful and fragrant garland"<sup>61</sup> is the result of hard work reserved for a few who know how to overcome the inertia of authority or the ease of fame and consent.

In Germany, the centre of defence of *libertas philosophandi* were Protestant universities which, free from the "tyranny" of the Inquisition, accepted the new anti-Aristotelian science and the new anti-scholastic philosophy in defining and claiming the autonomy of science and philosophy from the primacy of theology. Samuel Pufendorf, from the chair of *Jus naturale et gentium* of Heidelberg University, defended in a letter to his brother Esaias of January 1667 the *illibata philosophandi libertas* against any authority of the ancient

<sup>58</sup> J.G. Vossius, *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis*, cit., Vol. II, p. 109.

<sup>59</sup> J.G. Vossius, *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis*, cit., Vol. I, p. 12.

<sup>60</sup> J.G. Vossius, *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis*, cit., Vol. II, pp. 109-110.

<sup>61</sup> J. G. Vossius, *De philosophia et philosophorum sectis*, cit., Vol. II, p. 117.

philosophers, giving authority in research and education to reason alone, free from subjection to theology<sup>62</sup>. Johann Christoph Sturm, professor of philosophy and mathematics at Altdorf University, defended an eclectic approach to philosophy in the name of the *vera philosophandi libertas*, which he defines with Johannes de Raey<sup>63</sup> as the freedom to judge according to reason after having “wandered” through the various doctrines of philosophers and chosen the best: eclectic, he writes, is the *futurus liber Philosophus*<sup>64</sup>. Christian Thomasius, continuing along Pufendorf’s path in Leipzig, described the professors of many German academies, which favoured a moderate *libertas philosophandi* against the sectarian philosophy of the schools<sup>65</sup>, as supporters of an eclectic philosophy that rejects the authority of the masters, but appeals to the exercise of reason capable of choosing *quidquid veri bonique* from various philosophical theories, harmonizing them in a coherent way<sup>66</sup> without yielding to the *epochè* of sceptics or “the indifference” of syncretists. Eclectic philosophy, necessary and useful in the search for truth and fair in judgment, is according to Thomasius a philosophy of experience and reason based on *sentiendi libertas*<sup>67</sup>, that requires a critical exercise and firm responsibility towards society itself, thus preserved from the philosophical controversies and civil troubles of sectarian philosophy. Joannes Jakob Brucker will offer the system of eclecticism in his *Historia Critica Philosophiæ*, where he searches among the philosophies of the past for a thread uniting a history of truth sustained by a critical rationalism<sup>68</sup>. By way of a critical and compara-

<sup>62</sup> S. Pufendorf, *Letter to Esaias Pufendorf*, 1 January 1667, in Id., *Gesammelte Werke*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1996, Vol. 1: *Briefwechsel*, p. 55.

<sup>63</sup> J. de Raey, *Clavis philosophiæ naturalis, seu introductio ad contemplationem naturæ Aristotelico-Cartesianæ*, Leiden 1654 (Amstelodami, Apud Danielelem Elsevirium, 1677).

<sup>64</sup> J. C. Sturm, *Philosophia eclectica*, cit., Vol. I, p. 75.

<sup>65</sup> C. Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam, sive lineæ primæ libri de prudentia cogitandi et ratiocinandi, ubi ostenditur media inter præjudicia Cartesianorum & ineptias Peripateticorum, veritatem inveniendi via*, Lipsiæ, Apud Autorem, 1688, p. 45.

<sup>66</sup> C. Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam*, cit., p. 42: “Voco autem Eclecticam Philosophiam quæ jubet non dependere ab ore unius, aut in unius magistri verba jurare, sed ex ore scriptisque doctorum quorumcunque, quidquid veri bonique, non docentis auctoritate, sed argumentorum pondere convictus quis cognoverit, in horrea sua colligere, adeoque de suo subinde addere, et ita suis potius oculis quam alienis videre”.

<sup>67</sup> C. Thomasius, *Introductio ad philosophiam aulicam*, cit., p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> J. Brucker, *Historia critica philosophiæ*, Lipsiæ, L. B. C. Breitkoft, 1742-1744, Vol. IV, p. 4: “Ille solus nobis eclecticus philosophus est qui procul ire iussu omni auctoritatis, venerationis, antiquitatis, sectæ similium præjudicio ad unam rationis connatæ regulam respicit, exque rerum quas considerat sibi statuit, natura, indole, et proprietatis essentialibus sibi clara et evidentiâ principia haurit ex quibus iustus ratiocinandi legibus usus, conclusiones dein-

tive method, he proposes a form of philosophical eclecticism capable of choosing the best among the various doctrines, thus favouring the progress of reason beyond the plurality – and the “errors” – of its historical forms. Diderot will make extensive use of Brucker’s pages in his articles of the *Encyclopédie* dedicated to the history of philosophy.

Through its reformulation as the principle and foundation of eclectic philosophy, *libertas philosophandi* thus became *libertas academica* and rational criticism. The theory and defence of a moderate *libertas philosophandi*, capable of choosing and harmonizing different philosophical doctrines in a rational and already critical eclecticism, circulated indeed in German Protestant universities. It was matched by a request for and an affirmation of *academica libertas docendi* under the motto *Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*<sup>69</sup>, fuelled by the works and thought of the so-called *novatores*, Kepler, Galilei, Bruno, Descartes, Gassendi, Hobbes, Huygens, Newton, Burnet. Christoph August Heumann affirmed it, listening to them in the “*Acta Philosophorum*”, convinced of the close link between the intellectual energy of the Reformation and the defence of *libertas philosophandi*. But Christian Wolff was the main theorist in Germany of *libertas philosophandi*. He dedicated to it the whole of chapter VI of the *Discursus præliminaris de philosophia* that opens the *Philosophia rationalis sive logica* like a short treatise, where he gives a complete definition of *libertas philosophandi*<sup>70</sup> – the first? –, claiming *libertas philosophandi* and *libertas docendi* as the rights of the philosopher to express, teach and defend his own philosophical opinions, respecting only the criteria of reason. Reason, in fact, armed with its logical principles, determines the degree of truth or probability of the philosopher’s opinions *in eligenda sententia*<sup>71</sup>, and decides upon their validity, freeing judgment from any prejudice, authori-

de de problematibus philosophicis deducit; hac vero norma posita in legendis philosophorum aliorum meditationibus et expediendis examinandisque doctrinarum ædificiis nihil recipit, quod non rationum severitati et demonstrationis rigori faciat satis”.

<sup>69</sup> [C.A. Heumann], *Acta philosophorum, das ist: Gründliche Nachrichten aus der Historia Philosophica. Nebst beigelegten Urtheilen von Büchern*, Halle, Renger, 1715-1727, Vol. I, p. 618.

<sup>70</sup> Ch. Wolff, *Philosophia rationalis sive logica methodo scientifica pertractata et ad usum scientiarum atque vitæ aptata: præmittitur discursus præliminaris de philosophia in genere*, Francoforti et Lipsiæ, In Officina Libraria Rengeriana, 1728, *Discursus præliminaris*, p. 79: “*Libertas philosophandi est permissio publice proponendi suam de rebus philosophicis sententiam*”.

<sup>71</sup> Ch. Wolff, *Discursus præliminaris*, cit., p. 82.

ty and external interest<sup>72</sup>, subject only to the rules of philosophical method. According to Wolff, the philosopher must be “in definiendo accuratus, in iudicando circumspectus, in demonstrando rigidus, et ordinis tenax”<sup>73</sup>.

There is no danger to religion and morality, Wolff adds: for philosophers and philosophical societies, *libertas philosophandi*, if regulated with the rational method, cannot contradict revealed truths, corrupt customs or destabilize society<sup>74</sup>. Wolff repeats this theory in the first volume of his work *Jus naturæ*, where he defines *libertas philosophandi vel sentiendi* as an inviolable natural right of the philosopher, subject, however, to the restrictions pertaining to the natural obligations of all men toward society<sup>75</sup>. *Libertas philosophandi* needs in fact to be regulated by a system of rules so that it does not become a destabilizing element of community and society. Wolff’s reflection on *libertas philosophandi* and its defence is thus complicated by the problem of its public regulation. This is the sign of a new age of *libertas philosophandi*, when it opens up to public use.

## 2. From “*libertas philosophandi*” to “free-thinking” and “*liberté de penser*”

At the end of the seventeenth century and into the early eighteenth century, the question of *libertas philosophandi* was complicated by new problems when the philosophical debate, inheriting the concept of freedom to philosophise, was linked to new ideas and new requirements of the times. Tolerance in John Locke; tolerance, freedom of conscience, fight against any prejudice, virtuous atheism in Pierre Bayle; atheism, libertinism, freethinking in Anthony Collins: all of these gradually transformed the philosopher’s need for *libertas philosophandi* into a more general request for the freedom of thought, in the sense of an active and public exercise carried out

<sup>72</sup> Ch. Wolff, *Discursus præliminaris*, cit., p. 79: “Philosophus [...] liber in philosophando suo, non alienorum stare debet iudicio philosophiam traditurus”.

<sup>73</sup> Ch. Wolff, *Discursus præliminaris*, cit., p. 81.

<sup>74</sup> Ch. Wolff, *Discursus præliminaris*, cit., p. 96: “Quod si objicias experientiam constare contrarium Benedictum Spinosam philosophatum fuisse methodo mathematica, quæ cum philosophica est eadem: hoc tamen non obstante docuisse quæ religioni et virtuti contrariantur, tum quidem respondeo, utique posse ut quis in applicando methodo philosophica aberret”.

<sup>75</sup> C. Wolff, *Jus naturæ methodo scientifica pertractatum*, Halæ Magdeburgicæ, In Officina libraria Rengeriana, 1746, Vol. 3, p. 738: “Libertas itaque philosophandi non tollit obligationem naturalem eruditum ac hominum promiscue omnium”.

by the philosopher but also by other members of society, if not the whole of humanity. Moreover, in the eighteenth century the expression *libertas philosophandi* itself became increasingly rare in its Latin form, taking on instead forms in national languages that broadened its meaning: from *libertas philosophandi* of academic professors and philosophical controversies to freedom of thought as a critical exercise, a rational examination of different opinions and a free expression of one's own judgment. The philosopher practices this in the first person through the use of sovereign reason, but also undertakes to offer it to an increasingly open and aware society.

This transformation was evident in England as of the title of the famous work by Collins released in 1713, *A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Call'd Free-Thinkers*. In it, the discourse on freedom of thought as an inalienable right<sup>76</sup> of man and an epistemological duty<sup>77</sup> of the philosopher is connected to a defence of the "Sect of so-Called Free Thinkers" – *esprits forts* in French<sup>78</sup> –, who proposed a use of reason "without any restraint"<sup>79</sup> in all philosophical, moral, civil, religious and theological subjects<sup>80</sup>, in the name of evidence.

<sup>76</sup> [A. Collins], *A Discourse of Free-Thinking, Occasion'd by the Rise and Growth of a Sect Call'd Free-Thinkers*, London, n. p., 1713, p. 6: "If the Knowledge of some Truths be requir'd of us by God, if the Knowledge of others be useful to Society, if the Knowledge of no Truth be forbidden us by God, or hurtful to us; then we have a *right* to know, or may lawfully know any Truth".

<sup>77</sup> [A. Collins], *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, cit., p. 33: "If the surest and best means of arriving at Truth lies in Free-Thinking, then the Whole Duty of Man with respect to Opinions lies only in Free-Thinking".

<sup>78</sup> Presenting Collins' *Discourse* in the "Journal littéraire", the author of the review clarified the French and English lexicon of *free-thinking*: "On s'est avisé depuis peu d'années d'appeller en Angleterre *Free Thinkers*, c'est-à-dire *des gens qui pensent librement*, ceux que vous appelez en François des *Esprits forts*. Et c'est un de ces *Free Thinkers*, à ce que l'on croit, qui a écrit ce livret, où il entreprend de prouver que tout homme est en droit de penser librement sur toutes sortes de sujets. Il fait voir les grands avantages qui reviennent à la Société, aux Arts et aux Sciences &c. quand les hommes s'appliquent à examiner en liberté toutes sortes de matières qui méritent leur attention; & les grands incovenients qui arrivent quand on se veut borner l'esprit à cet égard" (La Haie, chez T. Johnson, 1713, V. I, p. 473). Thus in the 1717 French translation by H. Scheurleer and J. Rousset *Discours sur la liberté de penser, et de raisonner sur les matieres les plus importantes. Ecrit à l'occasion de l'acroissement d'une nouvelle secte d'esprits forts. Ou de gens qui pensent librement*. The reference to *esprits forts* disappears from the title of the volume edited by Jean-Pierre de Crousaz, *Discours sur la liberté de penser par M. A. Collins. Traduit de l'Anglois et augmenté d'une Lettre d'un médecin arabe, avec l'examen de ces deux ouvrages* (Londres, 1766 nouv. éd. corrigée).

<sup>79</sup> [A. Collins], *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, cit., p. 25: "Any restraint whatsoever from Reason on Thinking, is absurd in itself".

<sup>80</sup> Among the matters that must be examined by reason are "the Nature and Attributes of Eternal Being or God, of the Truth and Authority of Books esteem'd Sacred, and of the Sense

*The Use of the Understanding, in endeavouring to find out the Meaning of any Proposition whatsoever, in considering the nature of the Evidence for or against it, and in judging of it according to the seeming Force or Weakness of the Evidence*<sup>81</sup>.

No danger comes from the use of reason in such matters, Collins insists. Indeed, according to him, free thinking is an advantage for religion, finally separated from superstition and purged of obscure beliefs in miracles and prophecies. No danger comes to society either, as Collins stresses by naming the ranks of free thinkers who exercised and defended free thought, from Socrates, “the divinest Man that ever appear’d in heathern World”<sup>82</sup>, to Erasmus and Locke.

The *Discourse* aroused much controversy, much criticism and many refutations, including those by William Whiston and Richard Benteley. But it also aroused strong approval in France, in the anonymous collection of texts *Nouvelles libertés de penser* (1743) compiled by three authors, Fontenelle, Du Marsais and Mirabaud (probably a pseudonym of Baron d’Holbach). Right from the title, they take up in French the title of the Collins’ *Discourse* and explicitly refer to it in the *Avertissement* as the inspiration for their text,

*une espèce de parallèle du livre de la liberté de penser de M. Collins parce qu’ils supposent un examen et des réflexions telles que l’homme qui commence à penser est capable d’en faire. Aussi ces deux livres ont-ils le même but qui est de ne pas donner une aveugle crédibilité à des mystères qu’on ne sauroit trop approfondir*<sup>83</sup>.

The author of the first text, presumably Fontenelle, gives the floor directly to Collins, refuting the argument of Pascal’s *pari*, and taking up from the *Discourse* the defence of the right and duty of reason, the sole criterion of the “certain and chimerical”, in order to freely seek the truth in every field of knowledge.

*Puisque c’est uniquement de la connaissance de la vérité, et de ce que nous faisons en conséquence, que dépende notre véritable félicité*<sup>84</sup>.

and meaning of those Books; or, in one world, of the Religious Questions” (*A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, cit., p. 4).

<sup>81</sup> [A. Collins], *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>82</sup> [A. Collins], *A Discourse of Free-Thinking*, cit., p. 123.

<sup>83</sup> *Nouvelles libertés de penser*, Amsterdam, n. p., 1743. *Avertissement*, n. p. The *Nouvelles libertés de penser* was harshly criticized by the “Journal de Trévoux”, which saw the whole collection as the work of “disbelieving libertines”, whose mania was precisely that of “se donner pour Philosophes, sans aucune teinture de Philosophie”.

<sup>84</sup> *Réflexions sur l’argument de M. Pascal et de M. Locke concernant la possibilité d’une autre vie à venir*, in *Nouvelles libertés de penser*, cit., p. 43. The text has been attributed to Fontenelle by Con-



Like Collins, but updating his portrait of the free-thinkers to the 1740s and changing the context to France, the anonymous author of the fifth text of this collection, *Le Philosophe*, attributed to Du Marsais<sup>85</sup>, embodies the request and defence of free thought in a man, *le Philosophe*, the *honnête homme* who walks in the night but "is preceded by the torch"<sup>86</sup> of reason that, like grace for the Christian, always directs and illuminates his behaviour. *Le Philosophe* is sociable by reflection and not by utility, a host only due to the light of his reason and not out of the fear of punishment, free and right "par esprit d'ordre" and not due to superstition, happy among the sweet comforts of well-being and not in lazy, guilty poverty. He is different from other men who are the inert prey of passions, slaves of ignorance, unaware victims of prejudice, superstition and fanaticism. He is "a human machine" that reflects on its own movements, a clock that knows how to mount itself in the free and indefatigable exercise of thought, in the assiduous search for truth, in the constant practice of right judgment. *Le Philosophe* recognizes no other divinity on earth than civil society, no other virtue than the love of humanity, no other faith than that of rational order and rule, no other paradise than the sensitive delicacies of this life and the "commerce des honnêtes gens", no other religion than that of his reason. *L'honneur et la probité*: this is the religion of the hero of Du Marsais, he himself "un philosophe éclairé et un citoyen sage" according to

dorcet who had included it in his philosophical edition of Pascal's *Pensées*. See: A. McKenna, *Réflexions sur l'argument de M. Pascal et de M. Locke, concernant la possibilité d'une autre vie à venir*, "Problemata - Revista Inrernacional de Filosofia", Vol. 4, No. 03. (2013), pp. 303-342.

<sup>85</sup> The report of the manuscript of *Le Philosophe* by the Commissioner Dubuisson is dated first December 1636 (*Lettres du commissaire Dubuisson au marquis de Caumont, 1735-1741*, éd. A. Rouxel, Paris, P. Arnould, 1881-1882, p. 303). "Un ouvrage d'or, *opus aureum*" according to d'Alembert, the short essay *Le Philosophe* was harshly criticised in the "Journal de Trévoux": the author underlined how the term "philosophe" designates those self-styled beaux esprits who attack customs and religion, spreading materialistic theories and denying the spirituality of the soul (August 1743, pp. 2267-2294). Despite these criticisms, this text circulated variously and intensely in the eighteenth century. It appears in reduced form in the anonymous article *PHILOSOPHE* of the *Encyclopédie* and is reprinted in 1770 by Naigeon in a *Recueil philosophique* published in London with the attribution to Du Marsais, and is taken up in an abbreviated and purged version by Voltaire in 1773, who prints it together with *Les Lois de Minos* in volume X of the *Evangile du jour* of the same year, attributing it to Du Marsais. Of the same year 1773 are the London edition in the *Bibliothèque du bon sens portatif* and the edition in the *Pensées Philosophiques. Où l'on a joint le vrai Philosophe*. Naigeon publishes the complete text in volume III (1792) of the *Philosophie ancienne et moderne* of the *Encyclopédie méthodique* in the article dedicated to Du Marsais, commenting on it with the judgment of d'Alembert.

<sup>86</sup> [C.C. Du Marsais], *Le Philosophe*, in *Nouvelles libertés de penser*, cit., p. 176.

d'Alembert<sup>87</sup>, one of those obscure philosophers of which Paris was full, a man of peace, with free and right judgment and an exemplary life. Like all true philosophers, as Voltaire wrote<sup>88</sup>.

The definition of the nature and the role of the philosopher: this is the delicate subject to which d'Alembert dedicates that sort of manifesto of the modern intellectual which is the *Essai sur la société des Gens des Lettres et des Grands*, published in 1753, that is, in the years in which the conflict of the *Philosophes* with power was most dramatic. Thus, in the name of enlightened reason, conscious freedom of thought and the values of an austere morality, d'Alembert places the action of the *philosophes* under the lay trinity of freedom, truth and poverty: freedom as the courage to fight vices, prejudices and injustice; truth as the courage to think and produce ideas in open daylight; poverty as the courage not to fear indigence<sup>89</sup>. D'Alembert calls for a new awareness of the role of culture as political and pedagogical action and an indispensable instrument of civil progress.

*Ce génie philosophique répandu dans tous les livres, est l'instant de la plus grande lumière d'un peuple; c'est alors que le corps de la nation commence à avoir de l'esprit, ou plutôt, ce qui revient au même de s'apercevoir qu'il en manque après deux siècles de peines prises pour lui en donner<sup>90</sup>.*

For that matter, it was d'Alembert himself who wrote, in the *Discours Préliminaire* of the *Encyclopédie*, a eulogy to the *liberté de penser*:

*il n'y a que la liberté d'agir et de penser qui soit capable of produire de grandes choses, & elle n'a besoin que de lumières pour se préserver des excès<sup>91</sup>.*

<sup>87</sup> *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, par une société de Gens de Lettres. Mis en ordre et publié par M. Diderot [...] et quant à la partie mathématique par M. d'Alembert [...], Paris, Briasson, David, Le Breton, Durand; Neuchâtel, S. Faulche, 1751-1766, rpt Fromann, *Eloge de Du Marsais*, VII, p. VIII.

<sup>88</sup> Voltaire, *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, in Id., *Œuvres historiques*. Texte établi, annoté et présenté par R. Pomeau, Paris, Gallimard, Éditions de La Pléiade, 1957, p. 1160.a

<sup>89</sup> J. d'Alembert, *Essai sur la société des Gens des Lettres et des Grands*, in *Œuvres complètes de d'Alembert*, Paris, A. Blin, 1821-22, T. IV, P. II, p. 367: "Je parle de liberté non seulement dans leurs personnes, mais aussi dans leurs écrits; je ne la confonds pas avec cette licence condamnable qui attaque ce qu'elle devrait respecter: le vrai courage est celui qui combat les ridicules et les vices, méanage les personnes, et obéit aux lois. Liberté, vérité et pauvreté, (car quand on craint cette dernière, on est bien loin des deux autres): voilà trois mots que les gens de lettres devraient toujours avoir devant les yeux, comme les souverains celui de postérité".

<sup>90</sup> J. d'Alembert, *Essai sur la société des Gens de lettres et des Grands*, cit., p. 339.

<sup>91</sup> *Encyclopédie, Discours Préliminaire*, I, p. XX.

The theory of a deep connection, both conceptual and historical, between the *esprit philosophique* and the *esprit humain* allows d'Alembert to raise the inescapable demand for the *liberté de penser*. He proposes it as the great instrument of an enlightened history of reason, which inspires a theory of the *philosophe* as the actor of progress and the rational education of the people. He never corrupts or misleads him, as the critics and enemies of the *Philosophes* instead asserted in their censures and attacks.

*Lors même que les Philosophes enseignent la vérité, ils se contentent de la montrer sans forcer personne à la reconnoître; un tel pouvoir n'appartient qu'à l'Être tout-puissant: ce sont les hommes inspirés qui éclairent le peuple, & les enthousiastes qui l'égarerent. Le frein qu'on est obligé de mettre à la licence de ces derniers ne doit point nuire à cette liberté si nécessaire à la vraie Philosophie, & dont la religion peut tirer les plus grands avantages*<sup>92</sup>.

The various articles of the *Encyclopédie* detail the nature, conditions and limits of the exercise of *liberté de penser* – “cette noble liberté de penser & d'écrire”, as d'Alembert defines it in the article *GENÈVE*<sup>93</sup> – from different perspectives, according to the different authors. The plural author of the *Encyclopédie* – une “société de gens de lettres et d'artistes” – thus introduces and practices that permutation and subversion of knowledge which constitutes the true strength of the enterprise and ensures its originality. This theory is stated in the delicate article of ethics *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER* written by Abbé Edme-François Mallet, historian and scholar of late erudition<sup>94</sup>, one of the moderate defenders of religious orthodoxy against all heretical beliefs<sup>95</sup> who were recruited by d'Alembert and Diderot

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*, p. XXII.

<sup>93</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *GENÈVE*, V, p. 578D.

<sup>94</sup> D'Alembert introduces the Abbé Mallet in the *Discours préliminaire* as the author of some articles of theology, ancient and modern history and literature. “On voit [...] combien M. l'Abbé Mallet par la variété de ses connoissances & de ses talents, a été utile à ce grand Ouvrage & combien l'*Encyclopédie* lui a d'obligation. Elle ne pouvoit lui en trop avoir” (I, p. XLI).

<sup>95</sup> In the article *DÉISTES* Mallet presents and refutes the heterodox positions of the deists with a particular emphasis on the *liberté de penser*. “Les *Déistes* modernes sont une secte ou sorte de prétendus esprits forts, connus en Angleterre sous le nom de *free-thinkers*, gens qui pensent librement, dont le caractère est de ne point professer de forme ou de système particulier de religion, mais de se contenter de reconnoître l'existence d'un Dieu, sans lui rendre aucun culte ni hommage extérieur. Ils prétendent que vû la multiplicité des religions & le grand nombre de révélations, dont on ne donne, disent-ils, que des preuves générales & sans fondement, le parti le meilleur & le plus sûr, c'est de se renfermer dans la simplicité de la nature & la croyance d'un Dieu, qui est une vérité reconnue de toutes les nations. Voyez Dieu & Revelation. Ils se plaignent de ce que la liberté de penser & de raisonner est opprimée

for the articles of philosophy and theology in the early stages of the *Encyclopédie*, when a collaboration with theologians was still hoped for. The article *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, as a 'showcase article' balanced between a moderate praise of the *liberté de penser* and a serious criticism of its excesses, opens with a distinction between the "généreuse force d'esprit qui lie notre persuasion uniquement à la vérité" and the erroneous results "qu'on peut attendre, selon les esprits forts, d'un examen libre & exact, je veux dire, l'inconviction"<sup>96</sup>, those of Collins' "redoutable volume", for example. As a skilled controversialist, Abbé Mallet is therefore keen to show the need for the *véritable liberté de penser* as a psychological hygiene defending against precipitation and a rational criticism defending against prejudices, even those on religion absorbed by education. He also however warns against applying it to the truths of faith, which are removed by God from the evidence of reason and consigned to the assent of the will<sup>97</sup>. Making acute distinctions that concern the theory of the

sous le joug de la religion révélée; que les esprits souffrent & sont tyrannisés par la nécessité qu'elle impose de croire des mysteres inconcevables, & ils soutiennent qu'on ne doit admettre ou croire que ce que la raison conçoit clairement. Voyez MYSTERE & FOI. [...] Rien n'est moins uniforme que les sentimens des Déistes; leur façon de penser, presque toujours accompagnée de pyrrhonisme, cette liberté qu'ils affectent de ne se soumettre qu'aux vérités démontrées par la raison, font qu'ils n'ont pas de système commun, ni de point bien fixe dont tous conviennent également: c'est pourquoi les auteurs qui les ont combattus, distinguent différentes especes de Déistes. Abbadie les divise en quatre classes". With Abbadie, Mallet intends to refute the theories of the deists by opposing them with three conceptual difficulties of their theory: "1°. l'insuffisance de la loi naturelle, 2°. la nécessité d'une révélation, 3°. la certitude & la divinité de la révélation contenue dans les écritures des Juifs & des Chrétiens, parce que la nécessité d'un culte extérieur & l'éternité des peines sont des conséquences faciles à admettre, quand ces trois points sont une fois démontrés" (IV, pp. 773-774 *passim*).

<sup>96</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, IX, p. 472: "Ces termes, *liberté de penser*, ont deux sens; l'un général, l'autre borné. Dans le premier ils signifient cette généreuse force d'esprit qui lie notre persuasion uniquement à la vérité. Dans le second, ils expriment le seul effet qu'on peut attendre, selon les esprits forts, d'un examen libre & exact, je veux dire, l'inconviction. Autant que l'un est louable & mérite d'être applaudi, autant l'autre est blamable, & mérite d'être combattu".

<sup>97</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, IX, pp. 472-473: "On ne doit pas s'en étonner; l'importance de la matiere jointe à l'exemple de nos parens que nous voyons en être réellement persuadés, sont des raisons plus que suffisantes pour les graver dans notre coeur, de maniere qu'il soit difficile de les en effacer. Les premiers traits que leurs mains impriment dans nos ames, en laissent toujours des impressions profondes & durables; telle est notre superstition, que nous croyons honorer Dieu par les entraves où nous mettons notre raison; nous craignons de nous démasquer à nous-mêmes, & de nous surprendre dans l'erreur, comme si la vérité avoit à redouter de paroître au grand jour. Je suis bien éloigné d'en conclure qu'il faille pour cela décider au tribunal de la fiere raison, les questions qui ne sont que du ressort de la foi. Dieu n'a point abandonné à nos discussions des mysteres qui, soumis à la spéculation, paroîtroient des absurdités. Dans l'ordre de la révélation, il a posé des barrières insurmontables à tous nos efforts; il a marqué un point où l'évidence cesse de luire pour nous ; & ce

concept but also the pertinence to the present of this problem, Mallet affirms that faith does not necessarily lead to superstition and does not necessarily produce "*des âmes foibles et des génies serviles*", just as *liberté de penser* is not the prerogative of the unbelievers and does not necessarily lead to irreligion. According to Mallet, a relationship of mutual respect may occur between reason and faith, whereby faith does not overturn the foundations of reason and violate its limits<sup>98</sup>, and reason does not aspire to examine the mysteries of revelation without abdicating however its right to evidence and freedom, infinitely contributing in this way to "*établir entre les hommes l'esprit sacré de paix & de tolérance*". The *véritable liberté de penser* thus becomes for Mallet the foundation of tolerance, as, moreover, this article's conclusive reference to the entry *INTOLÉRANCE* by Diderot suggests.

But the article *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, with these distinctions and precautions, these elements of Cartesian rationalism and, at the same time, defences of orthodoxy that could satisfy the censors, does not entirely summarise the philosophical positions that the *Encyclopédie* expresses on this topic. Indeed, *liberté de penser* is examined and analyzed in various other articles, from new and different perspectives, according to the strategy of conceptual diversion and semantic subversion the *Encyclopédie* practices in its project to newly configure the unity of knowledge it pursues. In general, these other articles contain hints, references, allusions, notes, sometimes unexpected and original, sometimes more classic, which, however, in their disciplinary multiplicity complicate the topic and force it towards new results and new reflections. The *esprit philosophique* that inspires the encyclopaedic tree of knowledge here becomes doubt, perplexity, judgment, affirmation, statement, accusation and censorship. One example is the disenchanting article \**Aius-LOCUTIUS*, Diderot's piece dedicated to the Roman god of the word, which is a painful reflection on the possible conflict between *liberté de penser*, on the

point est le terme de la raison; mais là où elle finit, ici commence la foi, qui a droit d'exiger de l'esprit un parfait assentiment sur des choses qu'il ne comprend pas; mais cette soumission de l'aveugle raison à la foi, n'ébranle pas pour cela ses fondemens, & ne renverse pas les limites de la connoissance".

<sup>98</sup> The same expressions in the anonymous article *RAISON*: "Mais une telle soumission de notre *raison* à la foi ne renverse pas pour cela les limites de la connoissance humaine, & n'ébranle pas les fondemens de la *raison*; elle nous laisse la liberté d'employer nos facultés à l'usage pour lequel elles nous ont été données" (XIII, p. 774). Could this article then be attributed to Mallet?

one hand, and the credulity of the people and the respect for national worship on the other, between the truth of philosophy and the tranquillity of society and of the philosopher himself. This conflict is resolved by Diderot with a defence of the innocence of reason and a call to the duty of truth, but only in the silence of his own study and for the use of a small cénacle of friends, as in Cicero's time, in a world necessarily condemned to error, turning to vice and constitutively deaf to the philosopher's words<sup>99</sup>. Another founding article of the freedom to philosophize is *\*ELECTISME* by Diderot, who drafts a protocol for the sober use of reason for which doubt and *liberté de penser* are not among the ruses of scepticism but the hermetic instruments of a new science and a new philosophy based on experience and observation. More sincere, less difficult, less severe and less suspicious than the Pyrrhonian, less pusillanimous than the dogmatic, according to Diderot the eclectic philosopher *ose penser de lui-même*, "going back to the clearest general principles, examining and discussing them, admitting nothing than on the testimony of his experience and his reason"<sup>100</sup>. He does not recognize a master – *nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri* – but, enhancing the *liberté de penser* of which he is so jealous, he forms a philosophy with "the best materials of so many ruined places"<sup>101</sup>. Diderot describes the eclectic philosopher, following Brucker, as the theorist of enlightened reason, but, above and beyond Brucker, he also later presents him as the interpreter of a philosophy of enlightened action. In this history of philosophy he writes from Athens to Paris at the funeral of Montesquieu<sup>102</sup> in the name of *liberté de penser*, Diderot celebrates indeed

<sup>99</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *\*AIUS-LOCUTIUS*, I, p. 241.

<sup>100</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *\*ELECTISME*, V, p. 270: "Les Sceptiques & les Eclectiques auroient pû prendre pour devise commune, *nullius addictus jurare in verba magistri*; mais les Eclectiques qui n'étant pas si difficiles que les Sceptiques, faisoient leur profit de beaucoup d'idées, que ceux-ci dédaignoient, y auroient ajoûté cet autre mot, par lequel ils auroient rendu justice à leurs adversaires, sans sacrifier une liberté de penser dont ils étoient si jaloux: *nullum philosophum tam fuisse inanem qui non viderit ex vero aliquid*. Si l'on réfléchit un peu sur ces deux especes de philosophes, on verra combien il étoit naturel de les comparer, on verra que le Scepticisme étant la pierre de touche de l'*Eclectisme*, l'éclectique devoit toujours marcher à côté du sceptique pour recueillir tout ce que son compagnon ne réduiroit point en une poussière inutile, par la sévérité de ses essais".

<sup>101</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *\*ELECTISME*, V, p. 283.

<sup>102</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *\*ELECTISME*, V, p. 284: "J'écrivois ces réflexions, le 11 Février 1755, au retour des funérailles d'un de nos plus grands hommes, desolé de la perte que la nation & les lettres faisoient en sa personne, & profondément indigné des persécutions qu'il avoit essayées. La vénération que je portois à sa mémoire, gravoit sur son tombeau ces mots que j'avois destinés quelque tems auparavant à servir d'inscription à son grand ouvrage de l'*Esprit des lois*: *alto*

the present "revolution" of reason and entrusts its memory to posterity in a more strictly philosophical sense, as the most beautiful prerogative of humanity, which he vehemently claims for himself as well: *ma raison, & ma liberté de penser*<sup>103</sup>. And it is again Diderot who writes, in the article *RÉFUGIÉS*, a counter-history of the *liberté de penser* describing the persecutions of French Protestants at the time of Louis XIV: these persecutions, writes Diderot, were inspired by

*quelques mauvais citoyens, qui sont les ennemis de toute liberté de penser, parce qu'ils ne peuvent régner qu'à l'ombre de l'ignorance. L'esprit persécuteur devoit être réprimé par tout gouvernement éclairé*<sup>104</sup>.

For Diderot, the history of the past offers lessons and prescriptions for the present: not forget those who, even in the *siècle de la philosophie*, try to stifle the *liberté de penser*.

And it is once again history, which also speaks for the present, that inspires the Chevalier Louis de Jaucourt's inflamed pages defending *liberté de penser* in the article dedicated to Greek oratory<sup>105</sup>. De Jaucourt, as encyclopaedist with radical and anticlerical convictions, interprets the entire history of Greek civilization, from greatness to decadence, as a history of freedom, from the "republican" apogee to the servile and irreversible transformation of the imperial age. And it is again de Jaucourt who, in the article *LIBERTÉ DE CONSCIENCE*, draws up with Bayle a canon of respect for the "con-

*quæsiuit cælo lucem, ingemuitque reperta*. Puissent-ils passer à la postérité, & lui apprendre qu'alarmé du murmure d'ennemis qu'il redoutoit, & sensible à des injures périodiques, qu'il eût méprisées sans doute sans le sceau de l'Autorité dont elles lui paroissoient revêtues, la perte de la tranquillité de cet homme né sensible, fut la triste récompense de l'honneur qu'il venoit de faire à la France, & du service important qu'il venoit de rendre à l'univers!"

<sup>103</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *PYTAGORISME, OU PHILOSOPHIE DE PYTHAGORE*, XIII, p. 621.

<sup>104</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *RÉFUGIÉS*, XIII, p. 907. This anonymous article is attributed to Diderot.

<sup>105</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *ORATEURS GRECS*, XI, p. 565: "Telle fut l'éloquence attique; amie de la liberté, elle se forma sous la république dans les écoles des philosophes, & cessa de régner dès qu'elle cessa d'être libre. La philosophie lui inspira ces sentimens généreux, cette majesté qui sait imposer à la raison sans la contraindre; & l'état républicain lui donna ces manieres fieres, cette confiance, cette hardiesse, qui la fit triompher des souverains. Elle régna tant que les hommes eurent la liberté de penser: dès que la servitude changea les sentimens & les moeurs, elle disparut & s'éclipsa sans retour. Dans les beaux siècles, elle parla en reine, parce qu'elle avoit des rois à combattre; dans ce déclin, elle prit le ton affété & doux d'une courtisane, parce qu'elle avoit à plaire à des tyrans. Les célèbres *orateurs* d'Athènes étoient des philosophes nourris dans la liberté; les sophistes n'étoient que des esclaves, prêts à adorer quiconque les achetoit. Démosthène & les savans magistrats qui partagerent les mêmes travaux & coururent la même carrière, pouvoient être appellés à juste titre, *les enfans des héros*. Les *orateurs* des derniers tems étoient moins que des hommes".

science errante”, concluding however with praise for the “morale éclairée” of the age of Enlightenment, which made obsolete the controversies of the past, “pour traverser les mers sans périls & sans alarmes”<sup>106</sup>. The article *TOLÉRANCE*, to which de Jaucourt refers at the end of his piece, argues with Bayle’s *Commentaire philosophique* as to the close relationship between tolerance, *liberté de penser* and *liberté de conscience*. But the author of these pages, Jean-Edme Romilly, Reformed minister and pastor of the Church of Geneva, is keen to update the question by introducing the distinction of the *Contrat social* between the religion of the Christian and the religion of the citizen. He furthermore takes up new arguments from Montesquieu, to defend the need for and existence of a plurality of religious confessions suited to the customs and habits of the various peoples: of respect for human nature and to protect the harmony of society. And here the voice of the encyclopaedist explodes in an invective against the religious authorities who have called seditious

*ceux qui ne vous demandent que la liberté de penser, de professer la croyance qu’ils jugent la meilleure, & qui vivent d’ailleurs en fideles sujets de l’état*<sup>107</sup>.

Seditious men and heretics, ferocious or enlightened religious, intolerant princes and cheerful orators, obtuse citizens animated by sad passions, pusillanimous writers and philosophers in search of truth: with a historical and philosophical dialectic, the *Encyclopédie* also presents in person the defenders and interpreters of *liberté de penser*, often on the dark background of persecution, and records them in the timeless history of the philosophical struggle of all times against the darkness of ignorance and prejudice. They are the philosophers who walk in the night, but are guided by a torch of reason<sup>108</sup>; they are the eclectic thinkers who, at the dawn of philosophy, “dared to think by themselves” and tried to restore the edifice

<sup>106</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *LIBERTÉ DE CONSCIENCE*, X, p. 904: “Nous laissons à part toutes ces autres questions sur la conscience qui ont été tant agitées dans le siècle passé, & qui n’auroient pas dû paroître dans des tems d’une morale éclairée. Quand la boussole donna la connoissance du monde, on abandonna les côtes d’Afrique; les lumieres de la navigation changerent la face du commerce, il ne fut plus entre les mains de l’Italie; toute l’Europe se servit de l’aiguille aimantée comme d’un guide sûr pour traverser les mers sans périls & sans allarmes. Voyez *TOLÉRANCE*”.

<sup>107</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *TOLÉRANCE*, t. XVII, p. 395.

<sup>108</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *PHILOSOPHE*, XII, p. 509: “il marche la nuit, mais il est précédé d’un flambeau”.



of knowledge by choosing the best stones: Bruno, Cardan, Bacon, Campanella, Descartes, Hobbes, Leibniz, Thomasius, Malebranche, Leclerc among the others<sup>109</sup>. They are also contemporary philosophers such as Voltaire, an implacable and indefatigable defender of *liberté de penser*<sup>110</sup>, or Montesquieu, the philosopher who had given dignity and majesty to his unwavering commitment and, defending the truth, had become the victim of a dull, dark and cruel persecution<sup>111</sup>. They are also the encyclopaedists themselves<sup>112</sup>, gathered together "par l'intérêt général du genre humain et par un sentiment de bienveillance réciproque"<sup>113</sup> in a militant project of enlightened criticism and high divulgation of knowledge, victims themselves of the persecution of the "theological despotism" which, at all times,

<sup>109</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. \*ECCLECTISME, V, p. 283: "L'Eclectisme, cette philosophie si raisonnable, qui avoit été pratiquée par les premiers génies long – tems avant que d'avoir un nom, demeurera dans l'oubli jusqu'à la fin du seizieme siecle. Alors la nature qui étoit restée si long-tems engourdie & comme épuisée, fit un effort, produisit enfin quelques hommes jaloux de la prérogative la plus belle de l'humanité, la liberté de penser par soi-même: & l'on vit renaître la philosophie éclectique sous Jordanus Brunus de Nole; Jérôme Cardan, V. *Philosophie de Cardan* à l'article *CARDAN*; François Bacon de Verulam, voyez l'article *BACONISME*; Thomas Campanella, voyez l'article *Philosophie de Campanella*, à l'article *CAMPANELLA*; Thomas Hobbes, voyez l'article *HOBBISSME*; René Descartes, voyez l'article *CARTÉSIANISME*; Godefroid, Guillaume Léibnitz, voyez l'article *LÉIBNITZIANISME*; Christian Thomasius, voyez l'article *Philosophie de Thomasius*, au mot *THOMASIUS*; Nicolas Jérôme Gundlingius, François Buddée, André Rudigerus, Jean Jacques Syrbius, Jean Leclerc, Malebranche".

<sup>110</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *GENÈVE*, V, p. 578D: "Nous croyons que les éloges dûs à cette noble liberté de penser & d'écrire, sont à partager également entre l'auteur [Voltaire, author of the eulogy of Geneva], son siecle, & *Genève*. Combien de pays où la Philosophie n'a pas fait moins de progrès, mais où la vérité est encore captive, où la raison n'ose élever la voix pour foudroyer ce qu'elle condamne en silence, où même trop d'écrivains pusillanimes, qu'on appelle *sages*, respectent les préjugés qu'ils pourroient combattre avec autant de décence que de sûreté?".

<sup>111</sup> *Encyclopédie*, *Éloge de M. le Président de Montesquieu*, V, pp. VII-XV *passim*.

<sup>112</sup> *Encyclopédie*, *Avertissement des Editeurs*, III, p. XIII: "Enfin nous nous attacherons autant qu'il sera possible, à inspirer aux gens de Lettres cet esprit de liberté & d'union, qui sans les rendre dangereux, les rend estimables; qui en se montrant dans leurs ouvrages, peut mettre notre siecle à couvert du reproche que faisoit Brutus à l'éloquence de Cicéron, d'être *sans reins* & sans vigueur; qui semble, nous le disons avec joie, faire de jour en jour de nouveaux progrès parmi nous; que néanmoins certains Mecenes voudroient faire passer pour cynique, & qui le sera si l'on veut, pourvu qu'on n'attache à ce terme aucune idée de révolte ou de licence. Cette maniere de penser, il est vrai, n'est le chemin ni de l'ambition, ni de la fortune. Mais la médiocrité des desirs est la fortune du Philosophe; & l'indépendance de tout, excepté des devoirs, est son ambition. Sensibles à l'honneur de la république des Lettres, dont nous faisons moins partie par nos talents que par notre attachement pour elle, nous avons résolu de réunir toutes nos forces, pour éloigner d'elle, autant qu'il est en nous; les périls, le dépérissement & la dégradation dont nous la voyons menacée; qu'importe de quelle voix elle se serve, pourvu que ses vrais intérêts soient connus de ceux qui la composent?".

<sup>113</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. \*ENCYCLOPÉDIE, V, p. 636.

has tried to silence reason to reaffirm its own authority and consolidate its own power with the pretext of defending society<sup>114</sup>.

But, according to the encyclopaedists, *liberté de penser* has inspired philosophical discourse since ancient times, in Athens – Socrates, *philosophe par excellence*, example of *liberté de penser* and victim *par excellence* of persecution<sup>115</sup> –, but also in Eastern culture, towards which the *Philosophes* nourished a mixture of charm and admiration, like an imaginary elsewhere in which they find a moral and political system that was potentially a model for all of humanity. For instance, Japan, of which de Jaucourt praises the measures taken by “emperor Taico” (is he Toyotomi Hideyoshi?) in favor of *liberté de penser* in the religious sphere, while condemning the atrocious civil laws “written with the blood” with which he had suppressed the revolts of the princes and the fury of the people<sup>116</sup>. Or again China, where, according to Diderot, philosophy contends for primacy with “les plus éclairées” European nations<sup>117</sup>, and, according to d’Holbach, there are sophisticated *lettrés* theorists of a refined and

<sup>114</sup> *Encyclopédie, Discours Préliminaire*, I, p. XXIII. D’Alembert evokes again “theological despotism” in opposition to *liberté de penser* in his work *Sur la destruction des Jésuites de France*. He affirms that no great philosopher has ever been able to emerge from the religious orders: “l’esprit du corps, l’esprit monastique surtout et plus que tout autre peut-être, l’esprit dominant la société, celui d’un dévouement servile à ses supérieurs donne à la raison trop d’entraves contraires à cette liberté de penser si nécessaire à la philosophie”. Only the Congregation of the Oratory could value men of talent in science and letters: “Cette congrégation est composée d’hommes libres. [...] La liberté dont on y jouit sans être jamais lié par des vœux, la permission de penser autrement que ses supérieurs, et de faire usage de ses talents à son gré, voilà ce qui a donné à l’Oratoire des prédicateurs excellents, des savants profonds, des hommes illustres de toute espèce” (*Œuvres complètes de d’Alembert*, cit., T. II, p. 24).

<sup>115</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *SOCRATIQUE, PHILOSOPHIE, OU HISTOIRE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE DE SOCRATE*, XV, p. 261: “Il montra une extrême liberté dans sa façon de penser. Il n’y eut aucune sorte d’intérêt ou de terreurs qui retînt la vérité dans sa bouche. Il n’écoula que l’expérience, la réflexion, & la loi de l’honnête; & il mérita, parmi ceux qui l’avoient précédé, le titre de *philosophe par excellence*, titre que ceux qui lui succéderent ne lui ravirent point. Il tira nos ancêtres de l’ombre & de la poussière, & il en fit des citoyens, des hommes d’état. Ce projet ne pouvoit s’exécuter sans péril, parmi des brigands intéressés à perpétuer le vice, l’ignorance & les préjugés. Socrate le savoit; mais qui est-ce qui étoit capable d’intimider celui qui avoit placé ses espérances au-delà de ce monde, & pour qui la vie n’étoit qu’un lieu incommode qui le retenoit dans une prison, loin de sa véritable patrie?”.

<sup>116</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *JAPON*, VIII, p. 454: “En même tems que l’empereur, dont je parle, tâchoit par des lois atroces, de pourvoir à la tranquillité de l’état, il ne changea rien aux diverses religions établies de tems immémorial, dans le pays, & laissa à tous ses sujets la liberté de penser comme ils voudroient sur cette matière”.

<sup>117</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *\*CHINOIS PHILOSOPHIE DES*, III, p. 341: “Ces peuples qui sont, d’un consentement unanime, supérieurs à toutes les nations de l’Asie, par leur ancienneté, leur esprit, leurs progrès dans les arts, leur sagesse, leur politique, leur goût pour la philosophie, le disputent même dans tous ces points, au jugement de quelques auteurs, aux contrées de l’Europe les plus éclairées”.

aristocratic philosophy of immanence, which leaves great freedom in matters of religion and nourishes an entirely natural morality<sup>118</sup>.

Voltaire also pays homage to Chinese philosophy and culture<sup>119</sup>. For him China is a fundamental theoretical and political model, embodying, above and beyond chronology, the philosophical ideas he interpreted and defended: *liberté de penser* and tolerance, indeed, but also the fundamental principles of deism and the underlying role of natural morality and natural law. In the article *CATÉCHISME CHINOIS* of the *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire presents an imaginary dialogue between Prince Kou, son of the King of Lou, and Cu-Su, disciple of Confucius, who praises

*cet esprit de tolérance, cette vertu si respectable, qui est aux âmes ce que la permission de manger est au corps. La loi naturelle permet à chacun de croire ce qu'il veut, comme de se nourrir de ce qu'il veut*<sup>120</sup>.

But it is in the article *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, added to the first edition after the 'Sirven affaire', one of the most heated moments of the *lutte philosophique*, that Voltaire theorizes its nature, strength, effects and obstacles. He does so not through philosophical discussions, but by staging an imaginary dialogue between the Portuguese Count Médroso, member of the Inquisition, apologist for its crimes and defender of ignorance<sup>121</sup>, and the English Mylord Bold-

<sup>118</sup> *Encyclopédie*, art. *LETTRES*, IX, p. 433: "Cette doctrine introduisit à la Chine une espece d'athéisme raffiné, à la place de l'idolatrie qui y avoit régné auparavant. Comme l'ouvrage avoit été composé par tant de personnes réputées savantes & versées en tant de parties, que l'empereur lui-même lui avoit donné son approbation, le corps de doctrine fut reçu du peuple non seulement sans contradiction, mais même avec applaudissement. Plusieurs le goûterent, parce qu'il leur paroissoit détruire toutes les religions; d'autres en furent satisfaits, parce que la grande liberté de penser qu'il leur laissoit en matiere de religion, ne leur pouvoit pas donner beaucoup d'inquiétude. C'est ainsi que se forma la secte des *lettrés*, qui est composée de ceux des Chinois qui soutiennent les sentimens que nous venons de rapporter, & qui y adherent. La cour, les mandarins, les gens de qualité, les riches, &c. adoptent presque généralement cette façon de penser; mais une grande partie du menu peuple est encore attachée au culte des idoles".

<sup>119</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, art. *CHINE*: "La religion des lettrés encor une fois est admirable. Point de superstitions, point de légendes absurdes, point de ces dogmes qui insultent à la raison & à la nature, & auxquels des bonzes donnent mille sens différens, parce qu'ils n'en ont aucun. Le culte le plus simple leur a paru le meilleur depuis plus de quarante siècles" (Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1994, p. 170).

<sup>120</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, cit., art. *CATÉCHISME CHINOIS*, p. 138.

<sup>121</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, cit., art. *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, p. 328: "Médroso: que voulez-vous! Il ne nous est permis ni d'écrire, ni de parler, ni même de penser. [...] Ils [les doménicains] ont persuadé au gouvernement que si nous avions le sens commun, tout l'État serait en combustion, et que la nation deviendrait la plus malheureuse de la terre".

mind, an apologist for the freedom to think and speak and defender of its peaceful effects on all of society<sup>122</sup>. But we need to want it and protect it, he affirms.

As Mylord Boldmind responds to Médroso, who cites weakness of the spirit as a justification for blind obedience,

*il ne tient qu'à vous d'apprendre à penser; vous êtes né avec de l'esprit. Vous êtes un oiseau dans la cage de l'Inquisition, le Saint-Office vous a rongé les ailes, mais elles peuvent revenir. [...] Osez penser par vous-mêmes*<sup>123</sup>.

*Sapere aude*: Kant will repeat this motto by Horace as the emblem of the age of Enlightenment, including the idea of freedom to think within the broader context of a public reason that has become critical, not only as the possibility of knowledge, but as the active search for knowledge through "a free and public exam"<sup>124</sup>. And yet, the claim of the right to enlightenment could be resolved by recognising the limits of reason: not with resignation or disappointment, but as a final and definitive discovery of its dignity<sup>125</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> This idea organises the *Traité de la tolérance*: "Je peux me tromper; mais il me paraît que de tous les anciens Peuples policés, aucun n'a gêné la liberté de penser. Tous avaient une Religion; mais il me semble qu'ils en usaient avec les hommes comme avec leurs Dieux; ils reconnaissaient tous un Dieu suprême, mais ils lui associaient une quantité prodigieuse de Divinités inférieures; ils n'avaient qu'un culte, mais ils permettaient une foule de systèmes particuliers" (Genève, 1763, p. 43).

<sup>123</sup> Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, cit., art. *LIBERTÉ DE PENSER*, p. 331.

<sup>124</sup> I. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (1781). Inhalt, *Vorkritische Schriften IV*, p. 9F: "Unser Zeitalter ist das eigentliche Zeitalter der Kritik, der sich alles unterwerfen muß. Religion durch ihre Heiligkeit und Gesetzgebung durch ihre Majestät wollen sich gemeinlich derselben entziehen. Aber alsdann erregen sie gerechten Verdacht wider sich und können auf unverstellte Achtung nicht Anspruch machen, die die Vernunft nur demjenigen bewilligt, was ihre freie und öffentliche Prüfung hat aushalten können".

<sup>125</sup> H. Blumenberg, *Die Legimität des Neuzeit*, Frankfurt/Main, Suhrkamp, 1988 (1966, 1974), pp. 504-506 *passim*.