
Historiographical Approaches on Experience and Empiricism in the Early Nineteenth-Century: Degérando and Tennemann

Silvia Manzo

*Universidad Nacional de La Plata –
IdHICS/CONICET (Argentina)*

This paper examines the views of Joseph-Marie Degérando and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann about empiricism, and the scope and limits of experience as well as its relation to reason and its role in the attainment of true knowledge. While Degérando adopted the “philosophy of experience” and Tennemann advocated Kant’s critical philosophy, both authors blamed each other for the same mistake: if Degérando considered that, despite all appearances to the contrary, critical philosophy fell into empiricism, Tennemann judged that the philosophy of experience was nothing but pure and simple empiricism. Degérando’s and Tennemann’s discrepancies involved not only a discussion of “nomenclatures” and of the role and limits of experience in knowing, but also an epistemological and ideological commitment to the pacification of the intellectual field in the aftermath of the French Revolution. In this line, Degérando’s alignment with the philosophy of experience attempted to distance himself from the politically dangerous sensualism attributed to the idéologie. But, unlike his countryman Charles Villers, he did not want to replace the sensualism by critical philosophy. His opposition to philosophical novelty (which he associated with political revolution) led him to praise only the “eclectic” spirit of Kant’s philosophy.

1. Introduction

In 1804 Joseph-Marie Degérando (1772–1842) claimed, in his wide-ranging *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie*, that all the European philosophical schools of his time shared in different degrees a number of general points, among which he noted a strong distrust of the use of hypotheses and a unanimous agreement to recognize the authority of experience. The battle for the cause of experience has been nearly won and the

tribute currently paid to it by the schools that historically tended to fight against it, bears testimony to that victory. Such a recognition of the legitimate value of experience will result in a more useful science, for it will be increasingly based on well-established facts (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 108–109, 112).¹

In this connection, Degérando judged that the most important issue dividing the European philosophical scene at that time was the distinction between “experience” [expérience] and “empiricism” [Empirisme] (1802–4, 3, p. 438).² In emphasizing the significance of such a distinction, he alluded on the one hand to a mistake that he thought was recurrently made across history and, on the other hand, to the classificatory categories employed by contemporary German historians who had merged both concepts into one. A few years later, in his German translation of Degérando’s *Histoire comparée*, the German Kantian historian Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann (1761–1819) addressed this same question by challenging Degérando’s views.

Whereas Degérando’s approach relied on the “philosophy of experience” and was aligned with the school of Francis Bacon and John Locke, Tennemann’s position was anchored in Kant’s critical philosophy. Both Degérando and Tennemann condemned empiricism as a wrong system which does not conceive experience in a proper way. Moreover, each one qualified the perspective adopted by the other as a kind of “unwanted empiricism”: if Degérando considered that, despite all appearances to the contrary, critical philosophy fell into empiricism, Tennemann judged that the philosophy of experience was nothing but pure and simple empiricism.

This paper will examine the views of Degérando and Tennemann. They allow us to survey the basic elements through which empiricism was discussed in the early nineteenth-century encounter of French philosophy with German critical philosophy. Those elements were maintained well into the century and had consequences on contemporary scientific developments, notably in the emerging psychology of the time.³ Degérando’s commitment to the philosophy of experience was informed by the intellectual-political goal of providing a moderate and eclectic philosophical middle

1. I will quote from Degérando’s first edition of the *Histoire comparée*. As a rule, references to Degérando’s *Histoire comparée* and Tennemann’s translation will be put together, when I want to indicate the parallel passage from the original French commented on by Tennemann. Unless otherwise indicated all translations are my own.

2. The same view on the centrality of experience in the European intellectual debate in the nineteenth century was held later by Cousin. See Antoine-Mahut’s paper in this issue, pp. 680–703.

3. The paper in this issue by Daniel Whistler shows particularly the first point, whereas the contributions of Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Denise Vincenti testify to the later.

way.⁴ That was his main affinity with the Kantian system as a whole. I will contend that by his alignment with the philosophy of experience he attempted not only to distance himself from the extreme empiricism into which he thought some developments of French *idéologie* had fallen, but also wanted to express his strong disagreement with respect to a new character entering the French philosophical scene: German critical philosophy.

2. The Encounter of French Philosophy of Experience with German Critical Philosophy

British, French, and German traditions convergent into the intellectual setting of post-revolutionary France were involved in the nineteenth-century discussion on experience. While eclecticism was beginning to gain ground while *idéologie* was slowly declining, German critical philosophy was entering France through a slow and complex reception which caused a wide range of responses (Bonnet 2007; Quillien 1994; Azouvi and Bourel 1991). Degérando's intellectual and political itinerary expresses the displacement from *idéologie* towards eclecticism and the interactions of both traditions. If the proximity to *idéologie* is evident in his early works specifically concerned with the theory of signs and the generation of knowledge (1800–1802),⁴ in his historiographical work—published in three revised editions between 1802 and 1847—*idéologie* does not play a prominent role but is inserted into an eclectic program which prefigures Cousin's "spiritual eclecticism." From the eclectic standpoint, Degérando endorsed the "philosophy of experience," represented by Bacon and Locke, as the best moderate possible system.

It has been claimed that, besides his obvious and explicit adherence to ideas coming from Bacon, Locke, and Etienne Bonnot de Condillac, Degérando's stance has Kantian components (Hassler 1994, pp. 80–82; Daled 2005, pp. 81–2; Braverman 2015, pp. 18–19). Undoubtedly, Kant was the German philosopher that most received his attention. He was familiar with Kant's works at least since 1797 and even began a translation of some pieces which never reached completion (Hassler 1994, p. 80). His contemporaries Maine de Biran and Charles Villers judged that Degérando tried to conciliate the *idéologie*, the philosophy of Locke or the philosophy of Condillac with Kantianism (Azouvi and Bourel 1991, pp. 238–45; Hassler 1994; Daled 2005, p. 82; Braverman 2015, pp. 15–20). However, the spirit of conciliation that animated Degérando's history did not impede him from maintaining and expressing strong divergences with

4. *Des signes et de l'art de penser dans leurs rapports mutuels* (1800) and *De la génération des connaissances humaines* (1802).

critical philosophy. In fact, what he wanted to rescue as the highest value of Kant's philosophy that which he interpreted as its eclectic gesture, a gesture which coincided with his goal of pacifying the intellectual field. In *Histoire comparée*, he carefully examined and compared critical philosophy against the merits of the philosophy of experience. The result of this assessment, he pointed out, is that the only philosophy which met the proper middle-term and neutral, un-extreme position was the line that connected Bacon to Locke.

Degérando's contact with Kantianism was not limited to Kant's primary sources but extended to his "partisans," among which he included historians of philosophy such as Karl L. Reinhold (1757–1823), Johann G. Buhle (1763–1821), Georg G. Fülleborn (1769–1803) and Tennemann (Degérando 1802–1804, 2: pp. 254, 271–72). He believed that German historiography, including Kantian historians, produced the most important narratives of the history of philosophy (1802–1804, 1, pp. 58–64). As for Tennemann in particular, he regretted that so far only the first two volumes of his *Geschichte der Philosophie* were published and assumed that the series was interrupted.⁵ Even if Degérando suggested that the "extreme redundancy" and the "scarcely pleasant" forms of the work could have harmed its reception, he judges that it could have provided one of the most complete and exact collections of philosophical material (2, p. 254n2).⁶

Tennemann shared Degérando's praise of German historiography and was convinced that his nation did more than any other for the cultivation of the discipline. Why, then, was he engaged with the translation of a French history of philosophy, like Degérando's *Histoire comparée*, a couple of years after it came out in its first French edition? Tennemann explained the reasons motivating his decision: Degérando's history is the most careful and complete French history of philosophy, combining the literary merits typical of the French style with lively exposition, good depictions and comparisons, and clear opinions and surveys. More than this, Tennemann praised so highly the stylistic vivacity and clarity of Degérando's exposition that he

5. In the second edition of *Histoire* he made wide use of Tennemann's *Geschichte* in reference to ancient philosophy. Tennemann's *Geschichte* remained unfinished due to his death, but was not interrupted. It took a long time to publish the 11 volumes (in 12 tomes) that could be accomplished (Leipzig: Barth, 1798–1819). Apparently in Degérando 1802–4, 2, p. 254 the author refers to volume one (1798) and volume two (1799) of *Geschichte*. The other major historical work by Tennemann was the extraordinarily successful *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, a compendium first published in 1812 (Leipzig: 1812, 1816²). See Micheli 2015.

6. Tennemann does not add any remark on Degérando's brief comment on his historiographical work (Tennemann 1806, 1, p. 526).

even judged that, in that regard, French authors surpass German ones (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xvii–xviii). However, Tennemann’s chauvinism emerged again when, unsurprisingly, he suggested that Degérando’s superiority over other French historians might be “a result from his greater familiarity with German literature” (1806, 1, pp. vii–ix). Although Degérando’s expositions sometimes are not detailed enough, the work serves as a proper starting point for further investigations, for it provides insightful comparisons of philosophical systems and excellent remarks on the path of reason across history (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xiv–xv).

An additional reason for translating Degérando lies in the fact that he is one of the few who made the effort to knowing and understanding Kant’s philosophy by reading its work in the German version.⁷ Tennemann took for granted that it is undoubtedly important to know the opinions of a French scholar on critical philosophy and the consequences that critical philosophy can have in as cultivated a nation as France, all the more so given the fact that Degérando’s work would probably influence the reception of Kant in the French learned public (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. x–xi). He was not wrong: Degérando’s work transformed the reception of Kantianism and set the tone of Cousin’s interpretation of critical philosophy (Azouvi and Bourel 1991, pp. 260–62).

We must say that Tennemann’s objective of offering a fluent German rendering of the French original, loyal to the mind and to the content of the work, is mostly accomplished. The translator sought to introduce modifications just to correct formal errors, or to improve and complete bibliographical quotations and references. As for the notes of his own, added in the footnote apparatus, Tennemann decided to hold a middle way between a refutation of the views with which he disagrees, or no refutation at all (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xx–xxi).⁸ As we shall see, the overall strategy of Tennemann’s notes consisted in showing that Degérando’s views, when they were correct, were unconsciously Kantian, while his mistakes were caused in one way or another by his disagreements with critical philosophy. The corollary of this move would reveal that critical philosophy is the best system.

3. Looking for Peace in the Intellectual World

Degérando’s *Histoire comparée* was meant to offer “a geographical map of the doctrines and opinions that constitute the intellectual world” (Degérando

7. The first translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* into French was published in 1835: Kant, I., *Critique de la raison pure*. Trad. Joseph Tisson, Paris, Librairie de Ladrance.

8. Such translation policy is perfectly suited to Tennemann’s historiographical theory. See Micheli 2015, p. 851.

1802–4, 1, p. xvi) and to reach a “treatise of peace” between opposed philosophical schools (1, p. xxxviii). In this context, the author considered both the issue of experience and the classification and nomenclature of alternative philosophical stances on experience to be highly important. All the more so as his historiographical method combines the careful and descriptive registering of philosophical systems as historical facts of the intellectual world—in the vein of Francis Bacon’s literary history—with the classification and nomenclatural procedures practiced by naturalists like Cuvier and Dumas (Piaia 2004, pp. 32–3). Accordingly, the work is divided into two major parts: an historical part which offers a chronological description of philosophical systems; and a critical part which classifies them according to their common “characters,” judges their philosophical value, and finds out the general path of human mind across history.

From the narrative offered in the descriptive part of the work Degérando concludes that, when their peculiarities and differences are put aside, the main concern of all philosophical systems is the generation of knowledge and its legitimation by reason.⁹ Thus, the nature of knowledge and the three main questions related to it (certainty, origin, and reality of knowledge) constitute the fundamental subject of philosophy (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 340–41). This focus on knowledge and its three main questions is one of the main merits which Tennemann recognized in Degérando’s work. That is because every philosophical system starts from certain explicit or implicit assumptions on knowledge and finds its ultimate ground on them (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xii–xiii).

As for Degérando’s goal of pacification, it consists in adopting the system which constitutes a middle way between opposed and exaggerated positions. His approach of history led him to believe that the philosophy of its day was not able to create completely new systems. The best thing to do for a philosopher is to conciliate already available systems in such a way that every exaggeration and error would be left aside (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 562–63; 2, p. 344). In his view only the philosophy of experience meets the condition of being the proper middle way between a series of opposed systems: “dogmatism and skepticism,” “rationalism and empiricism,” “idealism and materialism” (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 505, 562). In this regard, Tennemann pointed out that Degérando’s concern with building an “eternal peace” (rendered by Tennemann as *ewigen Frieden*, resembling Kant’s *Zum ewigen Frieden* [*Perpetual peace*]) in the battlefield of

9. Despite Degérando’s claims that this is a *conclusion* drawn from the descriptive part of the *Histoire*, it seems more like a *presupposition* on which relies the entire narrative of the work. All the more so if we bear in mind that his previous work was directly concerned with the generation of knowledge.

philosophy was also a Kantian concern.¹⁰ However, Tennemann believed that only the Kantian way to reach this aim, namely “the discipline of reason”, can be successful (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xiv–v).

Degérando’s goal of the pacifying of the philosophical battlefield has a philosophical and a political connotation. From a philosophical point of view, his concern with clarifying the meaning and role of experience in attaining knowledge and endorsing the philosophy of experience can be understood as a reassessment of his proximity to the *idéologie* as manifested in some of his previous writings, *Des signes et de l’art de penser dans leurs rapports mutuels* (1800) and *De la génération des connaissances humaines* (1802). From a political perspective, his critical stance towards the philosophy of Condillac, the main inspiration of *idéologie*, and of the *idéologues* in general was linked to his concern with maintaining his reputation untouched by the negative political connotations which both contemporary rightwing and leftwing intellectuals, and Napoleon Bonaparte himself, had associated with this philosophical trend (Daled 2005; Piaia 2004, pp. 37–38). While Bacon and Locke are the heroes of his narrative, Condillac deviated from the right path started by them.¹¹

4. Empiricism and Philosophy of Experience

The first definition of empiricism provided in *Histoire comparée* depicts it as the extreme and exaggerated system which opposed to rationalism. In focusing exclusively on sensible impressions, empiricism “forbids the data obtained from experience to receive the assistance of speculative truths” (Degérando 1802–4, 2, p. 359). Later, empiricism in general is defined as an abuse of the maxims of experience, from which two general consequences derive: 1) the attempt to retain the intellect in a state of passivity and external dependence; and 2) the prohibition of abstract reasoning which establishes links among facts and derives knowledge-claims beyond immediate experience (3, pp. 339, 441).

There is a kind of pre-philosophical empiricism, which Degérando called “blind empiricism” and which consists in a state of ignorance which “abandons itself exclusively to sense impressions, to mechanical habits,

10. We must evoke here Kant’s characterization of metaphysics as a battle field in the preface to *KrV* (A viii – B, p. xv). That critical philosophy entailed an “eternal peace” in the field of philosophy was assumed by other defenders of Kant’s system. See for instance Heydenreich, *Originalideen*, 1: 11, quoted in Park 2013, pp. 21, 165n87. It may be worth noting that *Zum ewigen Frieden* was one of the first of Kant’s works translated into French (1796). See Braverman 2015, pp. 3–4.

11. On Degérando’s philosophical agreements and disagreements with *idéologie*, particularly with Condillac, see Braunstein 1990; Hassler 1994, esp. pp. 80–83; Chappey et al. 2014, pp. 12–13. Piaia 2004, pp. 32, 77 repeats Cousin’s judgment with respect to Degérando’s “hesitant Condillacism.”

[and] to a servile imitation" (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 439; cf. 1, p. 360n1). In contrast, the other kind, coined "systematic empiricism," belongs to philosophy properly. It arises from the methodical and delicate reflection and analysis, by which mind discovers the limitations of the induction and of philosophical systems and decides to reduce all knowledge to particular facts and contingent truths, rejecting any kind of general maxims and principles, and the connection between causes and effects. This philosophical empiricism reduces the intellectual faculties to "external sensation," on the assumption that the human mind is completely passive. Hence, it establishes that mind must not make any deduction above the isolated and temporary sense impressions (3, pp. 439–40).

Philosophical empiricism diversified into several ramifications across history, to the point that it has been known under different names according to the kind of speculations which it excluded from the philosophical compass. Hence, it has been called "materialism," "sensualism," "atheism", and "skepticism." This last denomination has been the most widespread, for, after all, empiricism is in fact "a doubt raised about all general knowledge" (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 441–42n2). The origins of systematic empiricism date back to the ancient sophistic school. In the early modern period it was adopted by Hobbes, Helvetius, Rudiger, and Hartley. Helvétius and Hume are said to be the most important modern empiricists (2, pp. 358–59; 3, pp. 97, 438, 442–5).¹² Particularly relevant for Degérando's reconstruction was to show that Hume's philosophy represented the most elaborated and widespread version of empiricism (labelled "relative skepticism") at the time. Even more important was countering the historiographical identification of Locke as empiricist. The same goes for Bacon, of whom Locke was the most loyal disciple: both philosophers were the most genuine representatives of the philosophy of experience.

Degérando's map of the history of philosophy invokes constantly the distinction between empiricism and the philosophy of experience—also called "experimental philosophy"—and regrets that some "German historians" feign (*affectent*) to confuse them.¹³ Despite the fact that empiricism and the philosophy of experience share the same departure point, namely,

12. The list of the empiricists provided in the historical part is far shorter than the list offered in the critical part.

13. We can conjecture that Degérando is alluding to Reinhold and Buhle, the historians who had developed the widespread distinction between rationalism—empiricism. Notably, Tennemann did not add any comment on this reproach to German historians (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 16n3). This fact could be interpreted as a hint that he did not care for this reproach because he felt that he himself was not alluded by it. For a careful and insightful study of the construction of the distinction between rationalism and empiricism in early German historiography, and the role played by Reinhold and Buhle, see Vanzo

facts, they work on them in very different ways. In empiricism, facts remain “isolated, scattered, [and] unanimated”; they are not allowed to be transformed to reach new truths by the interposition of general truths. In contrast, in the philosophy of experience, facts become “useful” in virtue of general laws subsuming them. If empiricism is an “instinct” which only “sees phenomena,” the philosophy of experience is an “art.” While the philosophy of experience can predict facts and discover natural regularities by means of a methodical interrogation of past facts, empiricism is circumscribed to present facts and assumes that everything in nature is ephemeral and changing (Degérando 1802–4, 2, pp. 359–360n1).

According to Degérando, the origin of the association of Locke with systematic empiricism, is to be found in Leibniz. Certainly, Locke’s recourse to reflection (*réflexion*) as a source of knowledge, the postulation of “identity and relation,” and the role attributed to demonstration, particularly in moral sciences, are enough to deny his alleged adherence to empiricism. Degérando admitted that Locke’s philosophy does not provide all the necessary tools to defeat empiricism, in so far as its arguments in favor of causal connection were too weak and his maxims concerning the inutility of identical propositions were unelaborated. As for Condillac, he admitted that, although in the *Art de raisonner* (1775) the author explains very well the alliance between abstract and experimental truths, in other works his claims about “transformed sensation” might justify counting him as an empiricist (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 445–46).

This attempt to refute the Leibnizian categorization of Locke as empiricist does not prove very efficient. Actually, it succeeds in showing that Locke’s philosophy can be easily developed into empiricism, rather than in persuading that Locke was not empiricist. Both Locke and Condillac are said to have made the mistake of claiming that the process of generalization for attaining knowledge occurs in the same way as the generalization of ideas, and that the order of succession in the acquisition of ideas is the same as the necessary order of demonstration. Such assumptions entail that general truths cannot be anything but remembrances of past experiences. In the same vein, abstract truths cannot function as the principles of demonstrations, for abstract ideas are only acquired from experience. In addition, it follows that “identical propositions” (namely, analytic propositions) are unable to link or to modify in any sense individual facts (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 446–47). Hume’s and Helvétius’s philosophies

2016. On Degérando’s assessment of this distinction see Manzo 2016. A similar claim against the German confusion is found in Dugald Stewart, a representative of the Scottish Enlightenment, reader and friend of Degérando. See Stewart 1854–1860, 1, pp. 396–97n2. See Degérando 1847, 3, p. 52nE.

exhibit the full-fledged negative consequences that can be derived from Locke's or Condillac's principles: while Hume denied necessary causal connection and the possibility of absolute knowledge, Helvétius reduced human intelligence to passive external sensation.

5. The Merits of the Speculative Philosophy

The main concern of Degérando's considerations about empiricism is to solve the problem raised by Hume's skeptical doubts about causal necessary connection: this issue lies at the basis of the fundamental philosophical problem of the day touching the confusion between empiricism and experience (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 448). Degérando's solution to Hume's challenge claims that the mind forms the notion of causal connection by the "interposition of abstract and speculative truths" between facts. Speculative truths are particular kinds of relations between "simple" ideas, that is, of present or past ideas that are "seen and embraced by one only act of the mind" (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 450), regardless of the actual existence of the objects they represent. These ideas can be properly said to be "experimental" in the sense that the mind is conscious of their presence. By discovering the *relations* among simple ideas, the mind obtains *abstract or speculative truths*, which are *a priori*, necessary and universal. Degérando held that "regarding their generality" such truths are "independent and prior to experience." The precise implication given to this expression is in line with Hume's relation of ideas: regardless of the existence of the objects of these propositions, only the mind legitimates their relations, for they do not establish a relation between (real) objects but between perceived ideas. One instance of these speculative or abstract truths is "The whole is greater than its parts" (3, pp. 453–55).

Degérando went one step further by claiming that these speculative truths are useful to the advancement of knowledge. That is because, due to the analogy or the identity which an idea has with another idea, the latter represents the former, transferring its contents to it. In a series of chained ideas, related to each other in such a way that they keep the same analogy or identity, the last idea will be representative of all the previous ones. If the first element of the series is a perception, the last idea will represent it, except for its "actual and objective reality" (*réalité actuelle et objective*),¹⁴ since this is the only characteristic of perceptions which cannot be transferred to an idea. For that reason, speculative philosophy—whose reasonings are based only on speculative truths—may not aspire to draw conclusions containing a reality that was not already provided by the premises. That is, by this way it is impossible to conclude facts from *a*

14. That is, the reality of anything independent of the subject.

priori (in Degérando's sense of the word) premises (Degérando 1802–4, 3: 455–6). These primitive truths—even if they are only abstract and speculative¹⁵—are legitimate universal principles admitted by every human being, as Locke had held. In this sense, they determine *a priori* the possible combinations and conditions for propositions derived from them, from general to subordinated truths (3, pp. 459–60).

Locke, Condillac and, later Kant, Degérando argued, had objected to the possibility that these truths allow for the discovering of new truths. Yet, this objection is unfounded, since although speculative truths are just relations of ideas, they make it possible to find out previously not recognized ideas in the order of speculative knowledge. Unlike Kant, he did not think that new truths are yielded only by synthetic judgments (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 460–62). No wonder, Tennemann disagreed with Degérando by claiming that, in the attempt to argue that analytic judgements amplify our knowledge, he confused the form with the content, the subjective with the objective aspect of knowledge. Certainly, it can be said that the *subject* can discover or become aware of some truths derived from analytic judgments. This does not entail, however, that a new *object* or content of knowledge is discovered, for the object was already included in the judgment. For that reason, there is no new discovery in the strict sense of the word (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 439).

Referring to a doctrine already introduced in his *Des signes* (Degérando 1800, Part I, section II, ch. VI–V) Degérando maintained that those identical truths, which are primitives, are “truths of transformation” (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 463–66; cf. pp. 212–13), because (like it occurs in mathematics) they allow to substitute equivalent expressions, by means of composition and decomposition of already available ideas. On this account, primitive speculative truths are highly valuable means for obtaining new speculative knowledge. In endorsing these views, Degérando's eclectic move recuperates a “true” tenet of what he called “speculative philosophy,” that a moderate philosophical middle-way must keep.

When commenting on Degérando's considerations about the speculative philosophy, Tennemann observed that because of his leaning towards the philosophy of experience, the French philosopher failed to recognize that, besides the wrong kind of speculation analyzed in this chapter, there is a proper speculative philosophy consisting in an investigation of the ultimate foundations of knowledge (namely, Kant's critical philosophy) (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 278; Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 225). Tennemann's judgment, however, failed to notice that, as we have seen and will see in

15. In this context, Degérando seems to reduce everything to identities, although previously he had differentiated between analogies and identities.

the next section, in underlying the positive role of speculative truths, Degérando was indeed pointing out the benefits of speculative philosophy.

6. Causal Connection and the Claims against Empiricism

Regardless of its merits, Degérando believed that speculative philosophy is wrong when it pretends that the identity behind speculative truths allows them to reach new truths about facts, transcending the limits of their empirical basis. This does not entail, however, that speculative truths are useless to gain “experimental knowledge” (*connaissances expérimentales*). To the contrary, they can be of use by being “interposed” between primitive and subordinated factual truths (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 465–66). That is the way in which reason and experience must cooperate to obtain new experimental knowledge. This conciliation between the speculative function of reason and the informative power of experience constitutes the core of the philosophy of experience advocated by Degérando.

Speculative truths can “intermediate” between primitive and subordinated factual truths in different ways. When they interpose themselves between a bundle of immediately perceived facts and a bundle of facts “simply combined by the imagination” they form our notion of causal connection. In this case, speculative truths compare both terms and transform each other to the point of reducing them to similar expressions, making it possible to find out that both terms, despite being diverse in their forms, are “really identical as far as their elements are concerned” and, therefore, that reason is entitled to conclude from one to another, and to transfer to the latter the reality found in the former (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 467–68).

Degérando underlined the reality of causal relations, by claiming that if an “absolute law” would not exist, a constancy of conjoined events wouldn’t either. Given the fact that the human mind perceives constancy by experience, it is entitled to infer the existence of laws. In summary, Degérando argued, the “reasoning supporting the connection of effects with causes is nothing, but a *transformation done by experience*” (n’est donc qu’ une *transformation de l’expérience* [3, p. 478; italics in the original]). By this move, he seems to mean that the transformation done by speculative truths is not a psychological imposition of the mind (or of the mind’s habits) on factual reality. Neither is it a condition established by a transcendental subject. To the contrary, the epistemic “usefulness” of speculative truths has a metaphysical basis which warrants the truth-value of the discoveries gained by it: causal connection between facts (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 469).

That notwithstanding, when arguing how causal connections support the conclusions on facts drawn from the speculative truths, Degérando’s point proves to be quite inconsistent. He argued that the causal relation

is deduced from the supposition of the constancy of phenomena. In turn, such a constancy can only be deduced from present and past experiences with the sole assistance of “transformation or identity reasonings” (Degérando 1802–4, 3: 469–470). Thus, the circularity of this reasoning is obvious: the truth-value of the transformations operated by speculative truths depends on the casual connection which is grounded on an assumption depending on the transformations operated by speculative truths. *A fortiori*, this circularity undermines Degérando’s claim for an alternative solution to explain wherein lies the “secret connection” between causes and effects. In other words, the intermediary function of speculative truths cannot be the clue to solve the question, precisely because the epistemic legitimacy of speculative truths is supported by causal connection.

To illustrate his point, Degérando somehow recreated Hume’s exposition of the genesis of the belief in causal connection and—in a simplified way—draws on Laplace’s etiological principle and on Bernouilli’s stochastic principle for the calculus of probabilities¹⁶ as instruments by which the mind can reach a decision about whether two conjoined events are causally connected by a law of nature (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 471–74; cf. pp. 490–92n1). Unlike the defenders of the calculus of probabilities quoted by him (Laplace, Bernoulli, Prevost and Lhuillier), he thought that the real existence of causation must not be presupposed to demonstrate it through the calculus of probability (3, p. 476n1). On this point, Tennemann sided with the probabilistic approach criticized by Degérando and offered the well-known Kantian solution to the problem raised by Hume (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 450).

In addition, Degérando recovered the epistemic value of induction and hypothesis against the objections raised on them, by arguing that if they are properly and cautiously employed, without exceeding the limits of an empirical basis, they are very useful at indicating the truth and at stimulating imaginative ways for further inquiry (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 495–98). This empiricist criticism of induction actually reveals how harmful to natural sciences and moral sciences systematic empiricism can be. Being tied to individual experiences, empiricism is incapable of combining, generalizing, and transforming them for discovering causes, laws, and systems, and predicting natural events. The same goes when empiricism is applied to the study of the human mind. By reducing every mental operation to passive impressions produced by external stimuli on bodily organs, empiricism ignores the difference between sensation

16. Degérando equates Laplace’s etiologic principle with Bernouilli’s stochastic principle (see Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 474n1). On the probability of causes and associationism in Hume, Condorcet, Hartley, Laplace and Bernouilli see Daston 1988, ch. 4 and 5.

(passivity) and perception (activity) (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 500–501). Condillac is the main target of Degérando’s criticisms in this context.¹⁷ His notion of “transformed sensation” not only is quite obscure, but also confuses the intellectual active faculties with the sensation they act upon (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 500–501). In neglecting the existence of a self as an active principle and eliminating the sound Lockean distinction between sensation and reflection, Condillac proves to be an unruly follower of Locke.¹⁸

7. Critical Philosophy, Empiricism and the Philosophical Middle Way

According to Degérando, the highest merit of Kant’s critical philosophy lies in its awareness of the necessity of a philosophical middle way (Degérando 1802–4, 3: 505–508). This reading transformed the French reception of Kant by advancing a view different from that offered by the main French propagandist of critical philosophy at the turn of the nineteenth century, Charles Villers (1765–1815) (Azouvi and Bourel 1991, pp. 260–265; cf. Bonnet 2007, pp. 50–56; Piaia 2004, 72–75). *Émigré* for many years in Germany and opponent to the *République*, Villers campaigned for establishing critical philosophy as the “new philosophy” which should replace the sensualism dominant in the French philosophical milieu. In Villers’s genealogy, sensualism was an offspring of Condillac’s empiricism which, by suppressing the notion of “reflection” and reducing mental contents and faculties to “sensation”, reformed Locke’s “orthodox” empiricism. D’Alembert, Diderot, D’Argens, La Mettrie, Helvétius and Voltaire created sensualism and developed a metaphysics of sense and a morality of passions, whose inescapable corollary was Jacobinism.¹⁹

Certainly, Degérando agreed with Villers in identifying sensualism and empiricism as an outstanding current deserving criticism. However, he thought that Villers did not expound the true orientation of Kant’s philosophy (Degérando 1802–4, 2: 179n). Their receptions of critical philosophy differed for two main reasons. On the one hand, they had different philosophical and political goals: in contrast to Degérando, Villers did not look for a mild middle way to pacify the philosophical (and political) battlefield, but for a mortal weapon to beat his adversaries. Accordingly,

17. For a good survey of Degérando’s stance towards Condillac’s philosophy, in particular towards the theory of signs from *Des signes* till *Histoire*, see Ricken 1986, pp. 23–8.

18. Tennemann’s thought that Degérando’s interpretation of Locke’s philosophy underestimated the extent to which Locke confined knowledge to the limits of experience (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 257; Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 207). Cousin raised the same criticism against Degérando’s depiction of Locke in his course on Locke. My thanks go to Delphine Antoine-Mahut for this remark.

19. On Villers see Azouvi and Bourel 1991, pp. 113–36; Bonnet 2007, pp. 24–38. On Villers’s genealogy of sensualism see Daled 2005, pp. 64–7.

Villers's exposition of Kant's philosophy emphasized the elements that refuted the greatest mistakes and drawbacks of sensualism. He showed that sensation as characterized by sensualism is insufficient to explain human knowledge, and that critical philosophy provides the very foundation of experience. Besides, he campaigned for a replacement of a moral based on passions and self-interest by the Kantian moral of duty and "reasonable freedom." On the other hand, while Degérando thought that the only possible novelty in the history of philosophy consisted in new forms of harmonizing pre-existent ideas, Villers believed that new systems overcoming the precedent ones were possible. Hence, he saw critical philosophy as the new philosophy that should help France to overcome its intellectual decadence. Certainly, in this positive stance towards Kant's "novelty," Villers introduced a turn into the earlier French reception of Kant. While by 1796 Siéyes saw in Kant's *Perpetual Peace* an allied with the cause of Revolution, Villers advocated for an academic Kantianism, whose novelty would defeat the philosophical background of an illegitimate French political revolution (Villers 1801, I, pp. 148–69, 184–89n1).

The French reception of Kant was newly modified by Degérando's reading. In his opinion, there is an essential opposition between the progress of philosophy and revolution. The claim for radical novelty in philosophy was inescapably linked to the claim for revolution in politics.²⁰ Accordingly, his opposition to philosophical novelty led him to recover only the aspects of Kant's philosophy more akin with eclecticism. However, Degérando observed that, despite Kant's intention, critical philosophy failed to overcome the failures of dogmatism (3, pp. 512–15), rationalism (3, pp. 515–19), idealism (3, pp. 519–25), materialism (3, pp. 525–27), and skepticism (3, pp. 528–36): "If he seems to escape systems that he wants to fight is to rush into the opposite system" (Degérando 1808, p. 211).²¹

Kant's reaction to empiricism was the subject of the last and longest analysis of Degérando (3, pp. 536–45). In this context, the French blamed critical philosophy for the same reason that Tennemann blamed the philosophy of experience: despite his disapproval of many aspects of empiricism, Kant's philosophy is itself an empiricism without knowing it (3, p. 537). This line of argument starts by distinguishing two ways of considering empiricism: one with respect to the principles (of knowing) and the other with respect to its results (that is, the acquired knowledge). Then Degérando pretends to reconstruct Kant's stances, in a way that has

20. On the detrimental link between the "immoderate love of innovation" and illegitimate political revolution see Degérando 1808, pp. 242–44, and Azouvi 1993, pp. 201–2.

21. In Degérando 1808, pp. 210–19, the author repeated the same judgement with respect to critical philosophy as in the first edition of *Histoire*.

scarce support in Kant's texts. As for empiricism with respect to the principles of knowing, Kant holds—according to Degérando—that empiricism only recognizes subjective value to knowledge-claims. Empiricism does not recognize real and objective causal connections between facts. It admits, instead, subjective connections between ideas of facts.²²

In this passage Degérando referred to the *Critique of pure reason* (KrV) B 3: 499²³ (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 537n1). There, empiricism is associated with the antinomy antitheses denying that the world has a beginning, is spatially limited, indivisible, and free. They are said to correspond to “a principle of pure empiricism,” according to which only sensible things exist.²⁴ Although this is indeed one of the few passages where the word “empiricism” (*Empirism*) is mentioned in KrV, there is no reference at all about the objective and the subjective connection as described by Degérando. Concerning this last point, the French philosopher probably drew on the KpV (which he quotes later, as we will see), where Kant uses the denomination “empiricism of principles” (*Empirism in Grundsätzen*) and links it to Hume's account of causation in terms of objective and subjective validity and necessity. Furthermore, somewhere he even indicated its consequences on the third “mathematical” antinomy concerned with the divisibility of the world and on morality.²⁵

That brings us, in Degérando's account, to the Kantian concept of the categories of pure reason: according to critical philosophy causal connection derives from a subjective principle, being one of the “categories”, so that our mind “gives” (or imposes) its laws to nature (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 537–38).²⁶ The final part of this depiction of Kant's views on empiricism with respect to the principles of knowing deals with the argument that supports the objective validity of the category of causation in particular.²⁷ Degérando did not find any conceptual difference between

22. Degérando apparently quoted the second German edition of KrV (1787), although in the footnote (Degérando 1802–4, 2, p. 177n1), where he indicated the editions of Kant's works that he read, he wrongly said “sec. edit. 1794” (actually, Tennemann's replaces “1794” for “1787”, Tennemann 1806, 1, p. 465). Again, in a footnote Degérando (1802–4, 3, pp. 515–16) referred to the second edition (without mentioning the date of publication).

23. My references to Kant's works are to the canonical edition of the Berliner Akademie (Kant 1900–).

24. For Kant's characterization of empiricism in this section, see Vanzo 2013, pp. 56–7 and id. 2014.

25. Kant 1900, KpV 5, pp. 12–13, 52–53.

26. In this case, he referred to Kant 1900, KrV B 3, pp. 165, 263, 830 (and “etc.”) (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 537n1).

27. He roughly translated or rather paraphrased passages from Kant 1900, KrV B 3, pp. 125–26 (#14 of the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories) (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 539n1).

Kant's transcendental deduction and the empiricist view that the connection between facts is nothing but a subjective connection lacking any correspondence to the real and objective world. This line of argument led him to suggest that Kant's views are very similar to (albeit not identical with) Hume's and Hartley's empiricism (3: 539–542). Against Kant, Degérando maintains that he should have noted that the laws that our mind imposes on nature are valid and necessary only for us, but should not pretend to have any validity outside our subjectivity (3: 542).

As for empiricism with respect to the results, Degérando's did not want to discuss the issue, but only to rely on Kant's texts. He seems to point out that the Kantian knowledge of objects of experience *results in* a skeptical stance.²⁸ In this case, the French historian starts by referring to a passage from the *Critique of practical reason* (KpV), alleging that Kant characterizes empiricism regarding the results as the way of philosophizing that “only admits the knowledge obtained from the objects perceived by the senses, and eliminates the so-called *a priori* knowledge [of] the existence of God, of the soul and their properties, etc., from the ambit of genuine knowledge.”²⁹ He immediately paraphrased (between quotation marks!) fragments from the KrV where it is claimed that categories and intuitions are the *a priori* conditions for experience, and that intuitions are always sensible.³⁰ From this perspective, Kant blames Locke for demonstrating the existence of God on the assumption that God can be the object of a sensible intuition.³¹ Degérando charged the “Kantian school” with “accusing” the school of Locke of empiricism, by calling it “*empiricist or sensualist*” (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 542–44).

28. See, for instance, what Kant said in a passage from KpV (indicated by Degérando) referring to the “consequences” of empiricism: “after removing empiricism from its origin, I was able to overthrow the unavoidable consequence [unvermeidliche Folge] of empiricism, namely skepticism first with respect to natural science and then, because skepticism in mathematics follows from just the same grounds, with respect to mathematics as well, both of which sciences have reference to objects of possible experience; in this way I was able to eradicate total doubt of whatever theoretical reason professes to have insight into.” (Kant 1900, KpV 5, pp. 53–4). I quote the English translation Kant 2015.

29. I reproduce here a text between quotation marks that in a footnote loosely refers to the 1792 edition of KpV (“p. 26, 89 ss.” = Kant 1900, 5, pp. 13, 53–4). According to the references offered in Degérando 1802–4, 2, p. 177n1, they should indicate the “second edition of 1795,” but, as Tennemann rightly notes, they refer to the 1792 edition. However, there is no literal equivalence to any passage from those pages. As usual, Degérando paraphrased the original German.

30. Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 544n1 refers accurately to Kant 1900, KrV 3, p. 146.

31. Degérando referred here to Kant 1900, KrV B 3, p. 128, which is quite accurate (Locke is mentioned in id. B 3, p. 127). See also the mention of Locke in this regard in id. B 3, p. 882.

Being nothing but an amalgamation of incompatible elements, critical philosophy had produced new divisions, rather than leading to a pacification of the philosophical field (Degérando 1802–4, 3, pp. 545–46). Degérando’s final remark holds that Kant’s attempts to overcome the deficiencies of previous systems remain ultimately useful in showing that only the philosophy of experience is apt at providing the required solutions and the proper middle way (3, pp. 550–51).

8. Tennemann’s Defense of Critical Philosophy

Tennemann’s comments on empiricism and the philosophical middle way look like an inverted image of the points made by the French historian concerning critical philosophy. He blamed the philosophy of experience for the same drawbacks that Degérando found in Kant. Tennemann rightly claimed that the characterization of the empiricism of principles in the terms used by Degérando is not found in the text referred to by him. Instead, he provided an alternative Kantian general definition of empiricism as the thought that derives all pure rational knowledge (*reine Vernunftserkenntnisse*) from experience, or that denies all *a priori* theoretical or practical knowledge in general, accepting only sensible objects, or objects of experience. In so doing, he reinterpreted the very same page from the KrV B 3: 499 referred to by Degérando, and pointed to further passages from Kant’s works.³²

This definition of empiricism, Tennemann argued, describes the “pure empiricism” endorsed by Kant, and in no way contradicts the principles of critical philosophy. The origin of knowledge resides in experience and no *a priori material* can justify knowledge-claims. If there is any sense in which Kant’s philosophy can be said to be an overt or a hidden empiricism, it is only in this Kantian sense of “good” empiricism (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 497; Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 537).³³

Against what Degérando judged to be Kant’s failure at overcoming the mistakes of the opposite systems, Tennemann’s response argued that the middle way that Kant had provided consists in determining the limits of knowledge *a priori*, so that reason should not aspire to reach objects which are beyond its compass, and it would not conflict with itself its

32. Tennemann refers to Kant 1900, KrV B 3, p. 499 (Antinomies) and B 882 (History of Pure Reason); and id. KpV 5, p. 71 (he cites p. 125 of the 1792 ed.).

33. Later, in his historiographical work, Tennemann will famously describe the philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the combat between Bacon’s and Descartes’ empiricism. However, he did not provide an outright and general definition of early modern empiricism at the beginning of his account, but rather characterized it when exposing the philosophies of its representatives. See Tennemann 1798–1819, 10, pp. 3–6, 7–197; vol. 11, *passim*; Tennemann 1816, # 312.

theoretical and practical applications. By this means, Kant had cancelled the contradiction between dogmatism and skepticism. In Tennemann's view, a deeper and more careful reading of the *KrV* reveals that its results are true, and its methods are wise. In contrast, brief excursions into it will only glimpse contradictions and inconsistencies and mistake the forest for the trees (Tennemann 1806, 2, pp. 502–3).

These drawbacks also disclose that the philosophy of experience is unable to value the foundational work done by critical philosophy and, therefore, has a superficial idea of the relation of critical philosophy to other systems. Despite Degérando's insistence on the differences between empiricism and the philosophy of experience, Tennemann considered them as only one philosophical system. Moreover, he did not find any substantial distinction between Degérando's philosophical preferences and the system endorsed by French contemporary philosophy (Tennemann 1806, 1, pp. xvi–xvii).

However, Tennemann seems to agree with Degérando's strictures against empiricism. Like Degérando praised Kant in that regard, Tennemann valued the merits of Degérando's broad narrative of philosophical systems, because he has properly revealed their extreme views. That notwithstanding, the agreement between both historians ends there. In fact, Tennemann thought that the philosophy of experience actually makes the same mistakes as the previous systems. His line of argumentation consisted in showing that the only way of overcoming the limits of empiricism is to endorse the approach of critical philosophy. Although Degérando has rightly suggested that, in order that knowledge occurs, something given as well as something provided by the faculty of knowing are needed, he did not delineate the precise boundaries of knowledge nor the exact middle way between exaggerations (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 473; Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 508).

Despite the fact that in the Preface, Tennemann broadly associated Degérando with the French philosophy of his time (Tennemann 1806, 1, p. xvii), he later claimed that the author of the *Histoire comparée* disagreed with the idea maintained by the "French school" (*idéologie*) that sensation and reflection are the origin of all knowledges. In contrast, Degérando replaced sensation by experience, and distinguished between internal and external experience. In so doing, Tennemann argued, he went one step further towards the recognition that the source of knowledge is not only the passivity of the mind (*Gemüth*) but also the activity of the understanding (*Verstand*), not only the material given in the experience, but also the elaboration (*Verarbeitung*) and the connection (*Verknüpfung*) performed by reason. The acknowledgment of the activity of the mind was also tacitly and more vaguely contained in the ideas of Degérando's

predecessors. Yet, neither of them dealt with questions which are fundamental for giving account of the nature of knowledge. Hence, Tennemann concluded that Degérando does nothing but to change the names and to keep the content: under the name of philosophy of experience he has reestablished Locke's empiricism (Tennemann 1806, 2, pp. 528–30). Tennemann's appreciation of Degérando's and contemporary French philosophical views on experience is in broad terms similar to Kant's appreciation of Hume's philosophy:³⁴ the French philosophers—to different degrees—began to find out the active role of the mind in knowledge but did not advance towards the *a priori* foundations of knowledge and experience.

With respect to this point, Tennemann provided three interesting final remarks. The first one points to the bias of the argumentation of the *Histoire comparée*: Degérando has established one of the parties, namely the empiricists, as the umpire on a subject where empiricism itself must be judged (Tennemann 1806, 2, p. 529). However, as the second remark claims, empiricism cannot be entitled to judge other philosophies because it has been already objected to itself on account of its incapacity to provide proper principles to solve philosophical problems. In addition, empiricism has been blamed for quarrelling with the practical interest of reason and with man's dignity (2, p. 529).

The last remark objects that empiricism does not provide a delimitation of knowledge, nor the foundation of its uses and of the legitimate application of the faculties of knowing. While it is aware of what is to be explained, it does not grasp the grounds and principles of the explanation. It does not ask "what is experience" or "what is knowledge" because it considers such questions superfluous. Only the indetermination established by empiricism is what could have been considered by Degérando—from the perspective of French philosophers—as something which appears to be suitable to a general philosophical system. That means that Degérando has assumed that the philosophy of experience is constituted by a bunch of simple tenets, most suitable to combine themselves with other tenets. Such tenets carry the philosophy of experience, whose limits are not delimited, into whatever is wanted, and to stop it at that experience that would be found to be convenient (Tennemann 1806, 2, pp. 529–30).

9. Conclusion

Degérando's and Tennemann's discrepancies on experience and empiricism embraced not only a discussion of "nomenclatures" and of the role and limits of experience in knowing. They imported epistemological and political reflections about the pacification of the intellectual field in the

34. See Kant 1900, *Prolegomena* 3, pp. 258–62.

aftermath of the French Revolution. In fact, Degérando rejected the accusations addressed to Bacon and Locke as inspiring the political revolutionary events which took place in recent French history (Degérando 1802–4, 3, p. 580n1). Since, unlike Villers, philosophical moderation was a value shared by Degérando and Tennemann they both celebrated the attempts to construct this middle way.

This search for intellectual pacification took on the form of a refutation of the precedent philosophical systems: rationalism, skepticism, materialism, idealism, dogmatism, and empiricism—in Degérando’s terminology. If empiricism was the main target of this fight it was because experience and its epistemological role was at the core of the philosophy of experience and of critical philosophy as well. Both philosophers were convinced of the centrality of experience for a genuine philosophical system and a true science. Degérando felt the need to clarify the differences between the philosophy of experience and empiricism, because he thought that the way in which precedence was given to experience in the empiricism of his day, particularly for the *idéologues* of the late eighteenth-century, was misguided. Behind that “philosophical” reason, lay the “political” motivation of distancing himself from the philosophical “sect” which had fell into disgrace under Bonaparte eye and had been associated with materialism, a manifestation of French philosophy which Degérando’s narrative intended to occult.³⁵

According to Degérando, this way of understanding experience constituted, in fact, a deviation from the right path announced by Francis Bacon.³⁶ Later, in the third edition of *Histoire comparée*, Degérando insisted on this point by claiming that actually Bacon thought that the opinions of the empiricists were worse than those of the rationalists.³⁷ Experience separated from reason can never reach a genuine knowledge of facts. That is the reason why Degérando devoted so much effort to describe the relevant functions of speculative truths in scientific knowledge. Even if this idea implies a balance between experience and reason, it is evident that the emphasis is put on experience and that explains why the system cherished by Degérando receives the label “philosophy of experience” and not “philosophy of reason.”

35. On the occultation of materialism in Degérando’s account see Daled 2005.

36. He quoted Bacon 2004, p. 21, Preface to the *Instauratio Magna*. Degérando quotes—with a slight omission—the French free translation from Lasalle, Bacon 1800 (an VIII), p. 31. On Lasalle’s secular reading and translation of Bacon’s work see Malherbe 2000.

37. Degérando 1847, 2, pp. 41–2. It should be noted, however, that in the same work (1847, 2, p. 91 note C) he noted that the summary of Bacon’s philosophy offered by Tennemann—who described Bacon as an empiricist in Tennemann 1798–1819, X, pp. 3–5, 26–7)—is the most faithful and impartial that he knew.

Yet, like Cousin, Degérando wanted not only to distance himself from the gross empiricism or sensualism of this day but also from critical philosophy.³⁸ On this account, Tennemann cannot avoid his own objections against the French historian. Despite Tennemann's respect for Degérando's historiographical erudition, rhetorical skills, and serious interest for the critical philosophy, and despite his decision of not intervening too much into the original text, he could not help pointing to Degérando's erroneous assumptions on experience, and, above all, to his distorted reports of Kant's stances toward experience and empiricism. Experience was such a key notion within critical philosophy that it was virtually impossible to leave Degérando's mistakes untouched.³⁹

Both Degérando and Tennemann considered that empiricism—in the several ways that they defined it—was a philosophical system that contained some merits, albeit it required substantial reform to provide a theoretical foundation for knowledge. They celebrated the intention to amend empiricism and to deplete it from its mistakes. However, they blamed each other for being empiricists without knowing it, because they embraced philosophies which fall into a deformed view of experience. Experience was too big an issue to be confused with rough empiricism. That was going to be a challenge fueling the French intellectual debate for the rest of the nineteenth-century.

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38. On Cousin's position in this regard see Antoine-Mahut in this volume.

39. Traces of the continuity of this controversy can be found in the controversy between Schelling and Cousin, facing the challenges introduced by Kantian philosophy. See Whistler's paper in this volume.

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