

Feel (Unfree) to Know (Yourself). Early Modern  
versus 20<sup>th</sup> Century Approach

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## FEEL (UNFREE) TO KNOW (YOURSELF). EARLY MODERN VERSUS 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY APPROACHES

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### *Abstract*

This paper will tackle, first, the history of the “original stance” in the history of European philosophy, in which feelings had to be subordinated to reason-based knowledge. Afterwards I will have a first look at 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenology and neuro-sciences in order to show the apparition and prevalence of the new stance expressed by the imperative “Feel to know”. I will, then, return to Descartes pointing out his ambivalent role in this history: he provided us with a complex theory of love on the one hand whereas, on the other, he introduced the *en Physicien* intention in the theory of passions that rendered him the forerunner of contemporary neuro-scientists (*pace* the “erroneous” Damasio), and the protagonist of the philosophies of life from Dilthey to Michel Henry. Involving Pascal and Malebranche will enrich the picture before the second look at the phenomenologists’ and the scientists’ attitudes to Descartes and the problems of emotions.

**Keywords:** *Augustin, Pascal, Descartes, Malebranche, Damasio, Heidegger, Sartre, love of God, being-in-the-world, somatic marker.*

The original version of the present paper was prepared for the seminar organised by Lynda Gaudemard the general title of which was *Feel to know. Emotion and Cognition in Early Modern Philosophy*. This title has provided the participants with an excellent orientation, and it has also inspired me to conceive the general frame of the paper: first to recall the long periods in which the phenomena variously called feelings, passions, sentiments, emotions were almost unanimously suppressed by

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philosophers and theologians referring to the closed circle of the eternal laws of reason or intellect graspable by way of a special rational or intellectual mode of cognition. Christian theologically-minded thinkers had at their disposal the idea of the unique, personal God providentially directing the earthly events; an idea by way of which they thought to be capable of supporting these laws by way of recurring to God the law-giver who issued them as divine commands. With respect to these periods, in which philosophers and theologians completed the circle by presupposing a cognitive faculty to serve as the foundation for all spheres of human life including that of the desires one could forge imperatives such as “know (yourself) to free yourself from the dominance of feelings!”, or “know yourself to become capable of freeing yourself from your feelings!” When Socrates interviewed by Phaedo about his belief in the ancient myths mentioned the chthonic monster Typho as someone who by all philosophical means ought to be excluded from the direction of our lives, he probably meant precisely the wish to avoid to become a being driven by uncontrolled passions similarly to Augustine’s later *caveat*:

“Augustine: Thus a human being should be called ‘in order’ when these self-same impulses of the soul are dominated by reason. For it should not be called the right order, or even ‘order’ at all, when the better are controlled by the worse. Do you not think so?

Evodius: It is clear.

Augustine: Therefore, when reason (or mind or spirit) governs irrational mental impulses, a human being is dominated by the very thing whose dominance is prescribed by the law we have found to be eternal.

Evodius: I understand and agree.” (Augustine 2010, 16; 1.8 18.64-65)

In my view, even the well-known motto of the intellectualist – “dialectical” – theologians, *credo ut intelligam* – I believe so that I may understand – emphasised *nolens-volens* the intellectual aspect, at least in the final analysis of their arguments that proceeded toward the intellectual grasp of the content of faith valued more than the pure faith at least implicitly. Instead of a *felt* certainty on the *sole* basis of the believer’s *trust* in God, the dialecticians’ belief meant rather something of a *preliminary* character, the necessary presupposition of the *knowledge*

of God the accomplished version of which would be given to the blessed in heaven while one could hope for an anticipation of it through rendering earthly knowledge, especially of God, more and more perfect. Understanding, *intelligere*, also meant a weapon, perhaps *the* weapon and medicament at the same time against the destructive feelings, passions as the example of Abelard testifies it through his *Historia calamitatum*, who took up his scholarly activities immediately after the night of his castration.

And if we turn to the early modern and modern period, we can certainly find some cultural tendencies in which we can discover clear signs of attributing a greater role to the feelings than earlier, such as the 18<sup>th</sup> century “sentimentalism”. However, the main trend remained the intellectualist approach now strengthened by its linkage to a scientific-technical attitude to human nature and society instead of being bound by faith. Rarely do we see thinkers such as Pascal who opposes, and attests precisely by this opposition, *ex negativo* as it were, the dominance of the intellectualist approach. Pascal’s opposition means the tendency to put the emphasis, as far as the role of faith is concerned, on the *felt* aspect of it, instead of the rational or intellectual knowledge about its contents. This becomes evident for instance when Pascal posits at least the divine truths in a sphere in which feelings are primordial:

“I am not speaking here of divine truths, which I would take care not to include under the art of persuasion, since they are infinitely superior to nature. Only God can put them into the soul, and *in the way he thinks fit*.

I know that *he wanted them to enter from the heart into the mind, and not from the mind into the heart*, in order to humiliate the proud power of reasoning which claims it ought to be the judge of what is chosen by the will, and to heel that feeble will which is completely corrupted by vile attachments. Hence, instead of speaking about human matters that they have to be known before they can be loved, which has become a proverb, the saints, speaking of divine matters, say *that you have to love them in order to know them*, and that you enter *into truth only by charity*, which they have made one of their most useful pronouncements.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Emphases added.

Undoubtedly, this is the most prominent of the early modern initiatives to re-set the trend concerning the relation between feelings and knowledge. Our participation in the divine truths, if conceived in a way that gives precedence to the feelings brings us closer to a feeling-centred approach to knowledge in life taken as a whole, not limited to the religious context; for Jansenism was a religious movement that attempted to make the divine truths the foundation for everyday life, and it was within this movement where Pascal's famous reasons of the heart, "which reason itself does not know"<sup>3</sup> (Pascal 1999, 158) originated.

Thus, when in the 20<sup>th</sup> century not only prominent thinkers but also scientists (Damasio 1994, 200) discovered Pascal's "reasons of the heart", their attempts to accommodate his *dictum* to their own systematic context – philosophic or scientific – were certainly legitimate in a *formal* sense although the *contents* they forced in the Pascalean frame were their own, far from Pascal's deeply religious surrender to God.

Probably the first to make use of the "reasons of the heart" was Max Scheler, one of the key figures of the early phenomenological movement. He made use of it when referring to the primordial role of feelings not so much in cognition in general as in the particular sphere of *ethical* cognition belonging to and accessible through the feelings (Damasio 1994, 200). Especially in his Christian period, Scheler could even claim to appropriate Pascal's *dictum* more authentically than others: he argued for the necessity of a *supernatural* revelation prior to and independent of *philosophical-intellectual* concepts of God in order to establish the community of love with God. In spite of this robust religious claim, he offered a genuine philosophical interpretation of God as the "person of persons" who corresponds to the macrocosm, i.e. the world above and comprising the perspective-dependent microcosms constituted by the finite persons.

As is well-known, the global background of our above quotation from Pascal's *Art of Persuasion* is the series of critical remarks in his *Pensées* in which he resolutely denounces Descartes as the founder of a reason-based anthropo- or even ego-centric system, which he famously

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<sup>3</sup> Fr. 277 (Brunschvig) *Le Cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.*

labels as “uncertain and futile”. Re-interpreter of the theorem of the reasons of the heart, Scheler also appropriates Pascal’s critic of Descartes in his *The Human Place in the Cosmos* on purely philosophical basis, and so does Heidegger in *Being and Time*, as we will see later. They are the most prominent adversaries of Descartes in the tradition of the so-called “continental” philosophy, basis of the general handbook-style reception of Descartes in which Pascal’s label has been taken almost at face value.

Undeniably, this overall critique has some foundation in Descartes’ system. However, there are important segments of this system that seem to be neglected by such a criticism. Descartes and the 17<sup>th</sup> century in general are more complex than the usual handbooks or other philosophical interpretations in Pascal’s vein would like their readers to believe. Let me refer, on the one hand, to Denis Kambouchner who did considerable efforts to change the one-sided and distorted picture of Descartes prevalent in the so-called “post-modern” era (Cf. Kambouchner 2015) while on the other hand, I myself have also elaborated on early modern concepts of emotions, the concept of love and especially love of God in Descartes and other 17<sup>th</sup> century thinkers in several publications that can help us to arrive at a more complete picture of those philosophies.<sup>4</sup> In what follows, I will summarize some main points concerning Descartes and Malebranche in order to counterbalance the usual picture that neglects the weighty 17<sup>th</sup> century concepts of love and its conceptual contexts when considering the relationship between feeling and knowledge. I will focus solely on the love of God according to *The Passions of the Soul* in order to compare it to Malebranche’s concept of a love of God, and contrast it with Pascal’s reproaches to Descartes.

My main points of reference will be the passages from the *Passions of the Soul* and Descartes’ correspondence with Elisabeth and Chanut.

In his *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes defines love as “an emotion of the soul caused by a movement of the spirits, which impels the soul

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<sup>4</sup> Marion transfers the general critique on the critique of the cartesian concept of love mainly in his *Phenomene erotique*. My objections to this critique can be found in Boros 2015.

to join itself willingly to objects that appear to be agreeable to it" (§ 79, Descartes 1985, 356).

The next article prepares the cognitive treatment of love insofar as Descartes distinguishes it from *desire* and emphasizes the will's unique role in his account of love:

"[I]n using the word 'willingly' I am not speaking of desire [...]. I mean rather the assent by which we consider ourselves henceforth as joined with what we love in such a manner that we imagine a whole, of which we take ourselves to be only one part, and the thing loved to be the other." (*Ibid.*)

If we search for the reasons for the distinguished role of the will we can refer, on the one hand, to the somewhat enigmatic statement in the *Rules for the direction of the mind*, "Rule 3":

"[...] what has been revealed by God is more certain than any knowledge, since faith in these matters, as in anything obscure, is an act of the will rather than an act of the understanding." (Descartes 1985, 15)

Putting aside the "hermeneutics of suspicion" for a moment, we can see in this statement a reformulation of the *credo ut intelligam* principle. On the other hand, technically speaking, § 80 refers to *Meditation 4* according to which "will" is the soul's active faculty of assenting to what has been presented to it by the understanding. If we assent in love to the *previously known* object we will love the object i.e. we will be *motivated to act* for the sake of the *whole* consisting of the lover and the beloved, within which the lover *willingly* acknowledges to be but a *part*, and possibly the smaller part.<sup>5</sup> The ego *assents* to its own limitation with respect to the other part, obliging oneself not to act egotistically.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Relying on the passage from Rule 3, we can unearth a hidden distinction between the case of the finite objects attracting us through the natural ways of cognition, and the love of the infinite God that can be triggered either by the will itself, if its origin is supranatural, or by the understanding, if its origin is in our understanding.

<sup>6</sup> In his *Elements of the Philosophy of Rights*, Hegel would eventually make use of a quite similar construction against Kant's "individualistic" concept of love conceived as a contract. For some brushstrokes cf. Boros 2019.

Descartes claims that the lovers' voluntary acts are measurable, and the general rule is that the greater part determines the joint behaviour of the whole: the interests of the "greater" will determine the actions of the whole that the "smaller" will have to accept automatically. Obviously, there can be three basic relations of magnitude between the lover and the beloved. Accordingly, Descartes distinguishes three types of love. I confine myself to the third type: when we have more esteem for the object we love, "our passion may be called 'devotion'."<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned above, explaining the *essence* of love by way of the voluntary assent means for Descartes the explanation of our value-orientation in our action-readiness: when we are in love,

"we consider ourselves as joined and united to the thing loved, and so we are always ready to abandon the lesser part of the whole that we compose with it so as to preserve the other part."<sup>8</sup>

And when our love is of the type of devotion, the "interests" of the "greater" part, principally God, and the whole we entered in through our assent ought to be valued more than the interests of the "lesser" part, i.e. ourselves considered in isolation, without our relationship with God. Accepting this line of argument, we accept that "*pure description*" establishes *moral evaluation*, and so it makes us act according to the values established in the act of assenting.

When investigating devotion as the third kind of love, one must take into consideration that the first and third kinds are virtually the same viewed from complementary perspectives: they represent the basic love-relationship between *unequal* parties, within which the love of the lesser part toward the greater is *devotion* while that of the greater toward the lesser is *affection*. This scheme makes us understand the examples of the extreme self-sacrifice:

"In the case of devotion [...] we prefer the thing loved so strongly that we are not afraid to die in order to preserve it." (*Ibid.*)

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<sup>7</sup> See *Passions of the Soul* § 83, Descartes 1985, 357.

<sup>8</sup> Emphasis added.



From a metaphysical perspective, we can also see a hidden dynamic of love in the mutual completion of the first and third kind of love that makes us see love enfolding in a circular movement. God loves us first, as Descartes assumes aligning with the great tradition at least from St. Bernard of Clairvaux to J.-L. Marion. God's love is principally love toward *all* creatures, as Descartes' letter to Chanut (6 June 1647) on cosmic-metaphysical love indicates.<sup>9</sup> However, the human being is unique amidst all created beings not only in the sense of having *le bon sens* but also insofar as the highest activity of her as a thinking being, *res cogitans* is to *feel* love toward God, to devote herself to God. Yet, *feeling* this love is not the first in us: it appears after and on the basis of what we *have learnt*, i.e. *knowing* that God is the most perfect being.

From this point of view, love is a cosmic principle connecting Nature and God, i.e. the most valuable, the most lovable object of love with the bounds of a mutual and circular love. One is tempted to reproach Pascal to have neglected this most important aspect of Descartes' concept of passions. Yet, as I have emphasised, the first step in Descartes is *knowing* God, and it is on the basis of our knowledge that we love Him. This structure can be seen at work in the end of *Meditation 3* where Descartes prompts the reader to make a halt in the process of investigation in order to admire and take delight in Him – *after His existence has been proved, and the doctrine of continuous creation has been established in a rational manner*. In contrast with Pascal, therefore, Descartes sees God having chosen our reason as the appropriate faculty in which our love toward Him is to be aroused. It is the will *led by the intellect* that proves to be *the* powerful device to arrive to the love toward God. Therefore, the emphasis put on the priority of the love of God does not lead him to accept a *traditional* religious concept of the love of God that Pascal misses in his system – rightly from his perspective. We can term Descartes' attitude, as I have suggested elsewhere,<sup>10</sup> *philotheistic*. It consists in the conviction that *our natural human intellect is capable of*

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<sup>9</sup> "I do not see that the mystery of the Incarnation, and all the other favours God has done to man, rule out his having done countless other great favours to an infinity of other creatures" (Descartes 1991, 321).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. for instance Boros 2019, 650 sqq.

*guiding us to a reliable knowledge, and even further to a knowledge-based love of God.*

The most important Cartesian thinker of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Malebranche has also developed a concept of the love of God as the *most perfect* being, and it will be fruitful to have a look at this concept, and to determine its relationship to Descartes' *philoteist* concept and Pascal's reproach for it from the point of view of the relationship between feeling and knowing.

Similarly to Descartes, Malebranche also presupposed that God loves us first, and our task is to find the adequate response to his gratuitous love. The starting point of his philosophy of love is the presence of *natural inclinations* "in" the will that direct the intellect to have its *general* tendency to knowledge focused on *particular* objects. They are the impressions of God's will in the mind that God gives us to provide the means through which we are directed toward the good in the deepest layer of our being. Thus, there is a peculiar circularity in Malebranche's concept of love as well, although not identical with the one we have seen in Descartes: God impresses the inclinations in the human will as acts of His *gratuitous* love to render us capable of acting as He expects us to act, namely as His representatives in this world, guiding the worldly events to their ends that are natural, on the one hand, but "provisioned", as it were in a theological and teleological way, on the other. As Malebranche formulates:

"The love of the good *in general* is the source of all our *particular* loves because, in effect, this love is but our will, for, [...] the will is nothing other than the continuous impression of the Author of nature that leads the mind of man toward the good in general."<sup>11</sup> (Malebranche 1997, Ch. 1, § 3, 267)

What we have in Descartes as the continuous creation of both bodily and mental events and processes, becomes focused on the mental sphere in Malebranche. However, there is also a sharper contrast between them. Descartes as "philoteist" interprets the relationship between God and the human being in *general philosophical* terms, disregarding its *unique character* from the religious point of view

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<sup>11</sup> Emphases added.

whereas for Malebranche, the *exclusivity* of this relationship is the indispensable basis of our whole thinking especially in the moral domain. For, it is by way of “the grace of Jesus Christ” that we “resist the disorderly pleasures” (Malebranche 1992, 1052)<sup>12</sup>. The medicaments Malebranche offers against exorbitant passions rely on the *supernatural* grace that appears *exclusively in Jesus Christ*, the real cause of enlightened joy in us, human beings.

In spite of this clear line of argument that has its foundation in the transcendence of God, in his *Traité de l'amour de Dieu* Malebranche expressly holds that the divine *perfection attracts* man and *incites* him to *love Him* in a *natural* manner.

“[B]ecause the Order [...] is nothing but the relation between the divine perfections, [...] it is clear that the love of Order is but the love of God and of all things, in so far as we consider them through their relation to God. Because loving the Order is nothing but loving God and all things in so far as they stay in relation to the divine perfections [...]” (Malebranche 1992, 1050)

As the first step of explaining the arousal of the love of God as a transcendence-based and a natural event at the same time, Malebranche maintains that God loves himself because He takes joy in Himself: the beauty of the orderly relation of His own perfections makes Him feel pleasure. And we love Him because He continually ingrains in us the natural inclination to love Him. Things attracting us express this inclination *due to their place in the hierarchy of perfection*, i.e., in proportion to the things' *own* perfection, to their own relationship to God. As already mentioned, however, an essential feature of Malebranche's explanation is his connecting this *natural* love to the *gratuitous divine love* expressed in Jesus Christ. Its apex is the point where it incites us to love God *as charitable*, which is *different* from the love of God *as the highest good*. It corresponds rather to the love of *justice*, “love of the Order,” because

“the idea of God as the highest justice is more apt to regulate our love than all other ideas of God that our imagination could make corrupt, in this way evoking illusions in us.” (*Ibid.*)

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<sup>12</sup> *Traité de l'amour de Dieu*, my translations.

As for the above mentioned sharper contrast between Malebranche and Descartes, we can characterise it by way of a reference to their different accounts of the perspective of this-worldly existence, on the one hand, and that of the afterlife in heaven, on the other. Descartes concentrates on the former whereas Malebranche tries to conceive the latter *philosophically*:

“Now there is a fight between the love of beatitude and that of perfection, because the present age is the time of merit, and the aim of the soul’s being in her body is to be put on the test.” (Malebranche 1992, 1055)

Malebranche speaks about the saints not as a *philotheist* such as Descartes, who confines his perspective to the this-worldly existence but in a *theo-logical* manner. It is the perspective of the life to come that Malebranche articulates:

“But in the heavens all that we will like will render us more perfect: all our pleasures will be pure, and we will be united with the true cause that produces them.” (Malebranche 1992, 1055 sq.)

He adds to it that the soul finds its satisfaction in this good due to its unification with it. When speaking about the unification, he even embraces the terminology of the annihilation of the soul used by the contemporary partisans of the idea of *amour pur* (Cf. Malebranche 1992, 1056). When he talks about the *annihilation* of the lover it is the *theological* reformulation of what Descartes wrote about devotion *philosophically* in a *philotheist* manner. Thus, in spite of his involving in the philosophical discourse the life-to-come in heaven, Malebranche remains loyal to the basic Cartesian idea of the ego as a centre of value in its own right. The pleasure of enjoying the order of the divine perfections, “this infinitely sweet and calm pleasure”, the tasting of “even the substance of the divine being itself”, remains intact after the lover has transformed himself in the beloved *together with the will*, due to Malebranche’s concept of the love of God as a *non-natural* love: the act of the will cannot be annihilated. He believes that both the freedom *and* the purity of the love of God must be retained, and they must be harmonized:

“The love of beatitude is a natural impression; [...] Love of the objective beatitude, love of God is my choice [...]. Pure love is nothing but the perfect conformity of our wills to God’s will.” (Malebranche 1992, 1057-8)

Although Malebranche emphasises the independence of the act of the will when loving, his concept of love as a distinguished feeling remains bound to the accomplishment of the intellect necessary to identify the objective, as opposed to an illusory, perfection, beatitude. Between Pascal who unanimously expresses his *deeply-felt* religiosity, and Descartes the *philotheist* guided by the intellect to the love of the most perfect being Malebranche occupies the middle place of a *theo-logically-minded* philosopher.

Having had a look at two versions of the characteristically 17<sup>th</sup> century concepts of love with respect to their different ways of distinguishing cognition as opposed to feeling, we can now turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the thinkers who contributed in a significant way to the rearrangement of these two modes of being-in-the-world. Some of these thinkers also compared their own concepts with the ideas of 17<sup>th</sup> century thinkers.

As the not haphazardly chosen term “being-in-the-world” suggests, Heidegger is the first thinker whom I intend to mention. One way of conceiving his early *chef-d’œuvre* *Being and Time* is to consider it an important document of an “emotivist turn”. Heidegger himself emphasises this turn as partly an accomplishment by, partly a promise of his existential analysis of *Dasein*.

“The phenomena [the different modes of State-of-mind <*Befindlichkeit*>] have long been well-known ontically under the terms *affects* and *feelings* and have always been under consideration in philosophy. It is not an accident that the earliest systematic interpretation of affects [...] is not treated in the framework of ‘psychology’. Aristotle investigates the *páthé* (affects) in the second book of his *Rhetoric*. [...] The basic ontological interpretation of the affective life in general has been able to make scarcely one forward step worthy of mention since Aristotle. On the contrary, affects and feelings come under the theme of psychical phenomena, functioning as a third class of these, usually along with ideation [*Vorstellen*] and volition. They sink to the level of accompanying phenomena.

It has been one of the merits of phenomenological research that it has again brought these phenomena more unrestrictedly into our sight. Not only that: Scheler, accepting the challenges of Augustine and Pascal, has guided the problematic to a consideration of how acts which 'represent' and acts which 'take an interest' are interconnected in their foundations." (Heidegger 2001, 178)

In Heidegger's view, therefore, no forward step was taken in the theory of affects after Aristotle. Although he mentions Augustine and Pascal as exceptions, the only thing he must have had in mind is that they are less to be blamed for the overall failure than the other thinkers from Aristotle to Scheler. Scheler himself appears in *Being and Time* always as the phenomenologist who contributed most to the renewal of philosophy although he failed to recognise the necessity of fundamental ontology, which *Being and Time* was dedicated to. Heidegger's claim and even his wording reminds the reader to Kant famously convinced that in Logic, no further step was taken after Aristotle. Aristotle and Descartes were, therefore, the crucial figures in the opposite sense. Kant praises the "theoretical", Heidegger the "practical" philosophy of Aristotle while both were convinced that Descartes made capital errors: he substantialised the *ego cogitans* (Kant), on the one hand, and identified the extension and the extended substance with the world (Heidegger), on the other.

Today readers can, however, be surprised at seeing that Heidegger ignores the whole 17<sup>th</sup> century radical renewal of the theory of emotions<sup>13</sup> – radical, insofar as its representatives even forged a new term for denoting in a morally neutral manner the affective phenomena. The word "emotion" that was only used in political contexts became a term in the theory of affects after Montaigne's *Essays* and their contemporary English translation.<sup>14</sup> This surprising *lacuna* will, however, cease to be a riddle as soon as we remember how unanimously the thinkers of the whole "phenomenological movement" have been ready to blame Descartes and his contemporaries for the alienation of the human being from herself and making her analysable in the same

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<sup>13</sup> Not to mention Thomas Aquinas' theory of affects in the second part of his *Summa theologiae*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Boros 2011, 182 sqq, with references to G. Soós and H.-J. Diller.

manner as the inorganic bodies are treated. Descartes' promise in the *Lettre-Preface* to his *Passions of the Soul* to treat the passions *en Physicien* instead of analysing them *en Orateur* or *en Philosophe moral* means for the phenomenologists the extension of the scope of natural sciences to the human being, and so the failure to take cognizance of the radical difference between the mode of being of a human being and that of the inorganic objects of the world.

This being said, we would expect that at least our contemporary cognitive scientists, the heirs of the treatment *en Physicien* in Descartes and Hobbes or *en Géomètre* in Spinoza<sup>15</sup> do fill the *lacuna* and duly pay respect to them. Yet, this is only more or less the case. Famously or infamously, Damasio seems to be biased so much by Descartes' mind-body dualism and the thesis of their real distinction that he even titled his otherwise pioneering book "*Descartes' Error*", and thus he failed to grasp those features of Descartes' theory that in a sense prefigured his own concepts. And here I return to the topic of the seminar hosting the original version of this paper, "feel to know" that I have arbitrarily modified in my title to have "feel (unfree) to know (yourself)!" Today scientists, including Damasio who do research in the affective phenomena maintain that it is not at our disposal to choose our starting point, *to feel* or *not to feel*, to accept or to suppress our feelings before knowing. There is a structure in the brain the function of which is to monitor the whole body and its co-habitation and collaboration with its surrounding in order to be able to adjust the bodily processes to the from moment to moment renewed circumstances. Damasio calls the basic feeling originating from this monitoring the *feeling of being*, which is the basis for the function he terms "somatic marker", a function of the feelings to serve as a foundation for any further rational deliberation.

In my view, we can consider Descartes prefiguring this thesis insofar as we find a parallel "feeling of being" in Descartes, at least functionally, not anatomically. In Part 5 of the treatise *On Method* he explains that reason is the "universal instrument" that makes the difference between animals he identifies with automata and real human beings. Human beings can fit themselves in the continually changing

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. the Preface to Spinoza's *Ethics*.

environment, both physical and linguistic by virtue of their faculty of adjusting their physical and linguistic behaviour to the changing situations, whereas animals are capable of performing only the same actions the performance of which has been programmed in them. However, such a continual adjustment even to the continually changing situations cannot be accounted for without a basic *feeling of being* in a sense not dissimilar to that of Damasio, in spite of the fact that Descartes and Damasio link it to different domains within their basically different physiological-neurological theories. One can even go further and maintain that there is also an analogue of the “marker” in Descartes’ philosophy, although it is much less “somatic” than in Damasio, in spite of the fact that it also depends from the corporeal nature of human beings. The theorem in which I believe we can discover a “disguised” marker is the will’s infinite extension overcoming the finite intellect’s *dictamina* by virtue of the inner drive to make decisions even in situations where the intellect is unable to know the circumstances as fully as it is needed in order to make a considered decision. The last passage of the *Meditations* talks about this inner drive as a necessary feature of human existence originating in its finite nature:

“But since the pressure of things to be done does not always allow us to stop and make such a meticulous check, it must be admitted that in this human life we are often liable to make mistakes about particular things, and we must acknowledge the weakness of our nature.” (CSM 2, 62)

It is revealing that Descartes calls this drive weakness, and circumscribes it with terms alluding to negativity such as “pressure of things”, “liable to make mistakes”, “weakness”, and so it seems that he would rather eliminate it, considered *en Physicien*. Yet, this pressure can also be regarded as the warrant of our flexibility we are badly in need of in order to make decisions in most of the situations of everyday life characterised precisely by not having enough rational knowledge to decide. And so we can discover in Descartes the functional analogue of Damasio’s somatic marker.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> This makes me think that the unanimous protest of the *dix-septemistes* against Damasio’s one-sided treatment of Descartes was perfectly justified, on the one hand,



Approaching the conclusion, we can also mention Sartre in this context to point out a feature of his and Heidegger's existential analytic that could also be transposed on the "ontic level", and so interpreted as presupposing a kind of "feeling of being". When Sartre summarizes the outlines of his phenomenological psychology, he says:

"We have said in our introduction that the signification of a fact of consciousness comes down to this: that it always indicates the total humanreality which becomes moved, attentive, perceiving, willing, etc. The study of emotions has quite verified this principle: an emotion refers back to what it signifies. And, in effect, what it signifies is the totality of the relationships of the human reality to the world." (Sartre 1993, 93)

What both Sartre, and Heidegger call "facticity" on the "ontological level", to use Heidegger's terminology, means, I suppose, on the "ontic level" that the affective-behavioural responses to our respective ever-transforming situations are always and principally the results emerging from our becoming aware of the new situations that presupposes necessarily a previous "feeling of being", feeling of, and partaking in the process whereby the new situations have become given *for us*.

To sum up my argument, first I hinted at the opposition of the traditional and the contemporary views concerning the hierarchy of feeling and knowing. Second, I differentiated between Pascal's, Descartes', and Malebranche's stances toward this problem, showing that all of them acknowledge some kind of priority of feeling in our this-worldly state although following different motives – religious, philotheist, theo-logical – and – at least Descartes and Malebranche – stressing the regrettable and provisional character of this priority. Third I referred to 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers and scholars who are not at all concerned with the life-to-come in heaven, and unanimously distinguish feeling against knowing, although they use very different methods, scientific on the one hand, and phenomenological, on the other. Finally,

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and that, on the other hand, perhaps this led to composing his book on Spinoza, another 17<sup>th</sup> century thinker strongly occupied with the study and arrangement of affects, whom he did credit with prefiguring his own theory of emotions.

however, I pointed out those features of Descartes' theory that can be considered prefiguring some of the 20<sup>th</sup> century tenets.

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