Notes on the Making of a Philosophe: Cuenz and Bouhier
Everyone interested in the intellectual development in France during the first half of the eighteenth century knows of the collection of letters that Président Bouhier assembled, chiefly from the late twenties to the middle forties. They have been the subject of a very pleasantly written book by Emmanuel de Broglie, which has attempted to present a series of essays upon the relationships between the Président at Dijon and his correspondents throughout France, usually with generous selections from each (Valincour, Olivet, Le Blanc, Marais, Passionei, and Caumont, and many others of a lesser order of importance who have been treated more casually). The letters themselves serve to demonstrate a special interest on the part of the letter-writer or a commentary upon some important contemporary event, or, very often, an observation upon an outstanding contemporary person. The most informative parts of Broglie’s work are undoubtedly the two chapters dealing with the correspondence between Bouhier and Marais, but the others are not to be treated lightly either, since taken together they constitute in their modest way a sociological portrait of the time. I myself have profited in recent years from the minor exchange that took place between Bouhier and Valdruche, in regard to Voltaire’s intellectual activities at Cirey.

Many years ago, in fact, it seemed to me that the full collection of these Bouhier papers, which are now at the Bibliothèque Nationale, would be very helpful in furnishing us
with some interesting insights into Voltaire’s activities not only of a literary but a political, religious, and moral nature as well, if one wished to take the time to sort out these matters. Indeed, after I had copied the Le Blanc letters as a test case of how they might be used in establishing this background to a period, Mrs. Monod-Cassidy came out with her thesis on Le Blanc, the first part of which showed how effectively this material of Le Blanc could be utilized for these purposes, and the second part of which was a very careful editing of this correspondence. I should add that my close friend Professor Havens knew about these activities and, as in so many other enterprises of like nature, made his contribution to them, too, before any of us.

I confess that my own preoccupation in all these more important moves of my colleagues has practically always been to ferret out in what way these documents and studies tell us something more about Voltaire and his “doings.” I have insisted, for instance, upon the importance of Valdruche’s remarks concerning Voltaire. Coming at the moment of the Cirey retreat when Voltaire was making some effort to conceal his movements, and also to some extent his thoughts, even the low-key observations of a local avocat who was obviously favorably impressed with the new arrival could conceivably add something to our knowledge of the newcomer. This kind of secondary correspondence concerning Voltaire has not always found its way into the Besterman correspondence. Indeed, there is really no reason why it should have done so, since Mr. Besterman had a stupendous job in taking care of Voltaire’s massive production. Nonetheless, I kept telling myself without doing very much about it that if somebody in this computer age wanted to bring together all this personal commentary upon Voltaire and his thought and his works, it could do much to enlighten us about the “real” Voltaire. I venture to add my little marotte that the “real” Voltaire I am talking about is the “poet turned philosophe”—and that event
happened precisely at the peak of the Bouhier correspondence, that is to say, sometime between 1738 and 1744. Naturally, anybody who can throw any light upon that event in my humble but interested opinion deserves a hearing.

Just how far we can go with this "hearing" is unknown, because we really have not made the experiment. Perhaps if I may be permitted here to make a modest beginning, "à titre d'essai," as we used to say when we didn't know whether we had something important to say or not, I can at least start someone who is young and vigorous thinking upon the subject. One point that appeared to me extremely important about Voltaire's intellectual development was the way he turned first from poetry to history. I confessed all along that I did not understand too well how that happened. I could understand that the *Histoire de Charles XII* was a "new" kind of history. I was astounded, however, to realize that the *Lettres philosophiques* were a perfectly logical development of the *Charles XII*. It was merely this "new" history further developed. I made the deduction that the *Siècle de Louis XIV* and the subsequent histories could be expected to carry forward this "new" history. This deduction, though it seemed to me not illogical, did not work too well when I tried to adjust the purpose of each work with the development of the "new" theory of history. Because, specifically, if the *Charles XII* presented the portrait of a country ruined by its king and his government, and the *Lettres philosophiques* was the blueprint of a country that was advanced in civilization and the portrait was presented to the French to show them how they could "advance" their civilization, was the *Louis XIV* devised to be an example of a king who ruined his country as did Charles XII, or of a king who built a civilized nation as did Peter the Great; or was it a demonstration of the way a nation develops all the aspects of its civilization as Voltaire had just demonstrated with his blueprint of the English? Had Voltaire hit upon a new way of writing satirical, moral, political,
or cultural history? If so, which kind was the Siècle de Louis XIV? The question is by no means an idle one, although I admit that my handling of it was none too edifying.

There is no doubt, though, as to where I stand. I believe that history for Voltaire was the transition between poetry and philosophy; that is, he became a *philosophe* by running upon a difficult problem in history, and he solved it not “poetically” but “philosophically.” Of course, it could have been solved “poetically”: Homer did long before Voltaire.

Unfortunately, what I believe is not enough. Where is the evidence? Logic requires that the *Louis XIV* be presented as a glorious age highly developed in civilization—one of the four great ages of man, in fact. But another logic requires that the *Louis XIV* be presented as a king who ruined his country. One could easily be persuaded that the early drafts of the Siècle were modified. Valdruche, one of Bouhier’s correspondents gave us a hint (which I quoted) that such was indeed the case. Here is another passage from the Goujet-Bouhier correspondence, of 26 August 1739, that lends some confirmation to the Valdruche statement:

> Il se prépare [Voltaire] à donner son histoire de Louis-le-Grand et du Sauzet me mande qu’il en a déjà une partie entre les mains et qu’il va mettre l’ouvrage sous presse. Un homme avec qui je suis fort lié m’a dit qu’il avait lu la plus grande partie de cette histoire et qu’il y avait trouvé un défaut dominant, c’est que l’auteur y attaque Dieu et le Roi. On assure que Mr. de Voltaire, mieux conseillé, a passé depuis l’éponge sur ces différents endroits. . . .

However, it is not the making of a “new” historian that concerns me here. What I am interested in doing is describing, defining, or delineating a *philosophe* as he actually existed in Voltaire’s day. This is not an easy task: what usually happens when we undertake this enterprise is that we either accept a portrait of the type as it was given in the century, or we compose a synthetic portrait made up of selected definitions culled
at random, or finally, we imagine ourselves as the *philosophe* and wind up by describing ourselves. I see nothing inherently evil in any of these methods, nor do I condemn anyone who picks his hero of the time and calls him "the *philosophe*," as the time ultimately attributed the title to Diderot. The only thing that sends me into a modest towering rage is to be told that "of course, a *philosophe* is not a philosopher." Since Cuenz's only claim to fame is that he is a *philosophe* becoming a philosopher and since he marks out step by step how it was done to his friend Bouhier, he could, I suppose, be used to reduce the blood pressure of one Enlightenment student, even if it is at the expense of raising the pressure of scores of others.

To make my point, though, I am forced to make three simple statements that have grown out of my more recent studies: (1) the French Enlightenment is above everything else (pagan, modern, scientific, and so on) "*philosophique*"; (2) it was made philosophical by the *philosophes*; (3) they are the natural descendents of the free-thinkers on the one hand and the European philosophers of the seventeenth century on the other. The difference between free-thinker and philosopher in the seventeenth century is that the former is more likely to adopt as his goal, modes, that is to say attitudes, of philosophy (skepticism, stoicism, epicureanism, or naturalism), whereas the philosophers stick more readily to formal branches of philosophy (theology, metaphysics, physics, ethics) and treat their subject more analytically and systematically. There are places where this distinction breaks down, of course, but in general this was the distinction. The *philosophe*, being the descendent of these two groups has to devise some way to merge the two operations. He usually does this by adopting a formal branch of philosophy as the core of his thinking (as when Voltaire in the *Traité de métaphysique* proclaimed "je ramène tout à la morale") and tries to make his attitude conform to his core. Or the *philosophe* would sometimes adopt an attitude toward a particular branch
of knowledge and try to make other branches of knowledge conform to that attitude (for example, skepticism in history to skepticism in natural history to skepticism in theology). The result of this forming and conforming was the production of movement. What made thought move for a philosophe was ideas; he preferred for them to be "free," but if they had to conform to situations that curtailed their freedom, he settled for their "livingness." In this way the philosophe created the myth that ideas are more alive than men and in reality are the only guarantee for the "livingness" of men. Moreover, after 1750, the doctrine of the Encyclopédie became that men are only what ideas have made them.

One of the problems in the organization of thought at the beginning of the Enlightenment is how the intelligent but nonprofessional philosopher could make a synthesis of the philosophers whose systems were so numerous and so contradictory in the seventeenth century. Because the key to the problem of the development of thought from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century certainly involves the reaction of the enlightened thinker of the eighteenth century, who is going to be known as a philosophe, to the systematic philosophe, to the systematic philosophers. Succinctly put, the quality of Voltaire's thought can only be assessed against the development of thought in the preceding epoch. What he came to think and how he came to organize it into what has been qualified generally as unphilosophical can be understood only by reference to the twelve major philosophers—Bacon, Hobbes, Galileo, Descartes, Gassendi, Pascal, Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz, Locke, Newton, and Bayle—with whom he had to deal before organizing his philosophy. And the same would be true of the philosophies of Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Diderot.

In fact, the seventeenth century presents an abundance of individual philosophers, who in their peculiar way express the philosophical tendencies of their milieu, whether it be English, French, German, or Hebrew. In addition, these philos-
ophers had to contend with currents of philosophical thinking that came from antiquity and, because of the peculiar situation of the time, persisted: skepticism, stoicism, epicureanism, and naturalism. Each of these modes of thinking not only had its adherents but opposed each of the others with a vitality that was only exceeded by the opposition of the individual philosophers the one to the other. The thing to remark, however, is that each mode of ancient philosophy entered into the composition of each modern seventeenth-century philosopher and gave color and tone to his system, and many times there were conflicts of two or more modes in the systematic organization of a single philosophy. Nor was this variety of ancient philosophy the sole factor of disorganization. The philosophers of the seventeenth century tended to become scientists or political theorists; or sometimes, as in the case of Hobbes, both scientists and political theorists; or, as in the case of Pascal and Leibniz, scientists, theologians, and political theorists. This phenomenon that was taking place in philosophy was undoubtedly brought about by the shift from the dominance of theology, which was supposed to embrace all these subjects as secondary fields of interest, to the dominance of philosophy, which took over these subjects (including theology itself) as no longer secondary but primary fields of interest.

The consequence of this diversity can be seen in the struggle between the ancient and modern, between theology and metaphysics, between theology and science, or between metaphysics and science, or even between natural science and the science of man. The dilemma of an uncomplicated, but intelligent, individual trying to make some headway in the face of these massive oppositions can only be surmised. It is not an easy matter to trace the reactions of each one of the seventeenth-century philosophers to the complications of philosophic thought of the time. This has never been done, as far as I know, in any consistent way. On the other hand, we have studies upon Voltaire and Leibniz, or Voltaire and Bayle, or Diderot and Descartes, but the authors of these studies find it
sufficient to study the reactions of Voltaire and Diderot to one of these philosophers without further complicating matters by adding ten or eleven others. Voltaire’s situation, however, required that he divide his attention between the whole complex of seventeenth-century philosophy. The problem with him was that his enlightened development demanded consideration of the possibilities attendant upon a synthesis of the thought of all these worthies.

It is fairly easy to work out a timetable of Voltaire’s acquaintance with the various principal philosophers, although we are not too sure about certain specific details. His first serious consideration of one of them began with Malebranche in 1723. He himself confessed in 1738 in a letter to the editor of *Pour et contre* that he had in front of him at that moment a copy of the *Recherche de la vérité*, whose Book 3 had been amply annotated by himself fifteen years before. Professor Mason finds that the first overt reference to Bayle was made in a note to *La Ligue*, dated 1723; two years later, in 1725, he owned a copy of the *Dictionnaire historique et critique*. In 1724 a letter from Bolingbroke undertook to direct Voltaire away from Malebranche and Descartes to Locke and Newton: “Si vous lisez l’Essay sur l’Entendement humain, vous lisez le livre que je connois le plus capable d’y [to the discovery of truth] contribuer. Si vous n’y trouvez que peu de choses, prenez garde que ce ne soit votre faute. Il est sûr que vous n’y trouverez pas les profondeurs de Descartes ni le sublime de Mallebranche” (Best. 185). Bolingbroke added that they both exceeded the limits of scientific reasoning and have been superseded by the Huyghens and the Newtons. Bolingbroke remarked further that Descartes and Malebranche, although profound, were really not philosophers but poets. The English lord asserted that more important as philosophers were Huyghens and Newton. Implied in his statement was the thought that Voltaire would be well-advised to replace his enthusiasm for Descartes and Malebranche by serious study of Locke and Newton. We do not really have
any firm evidence that Voltaire really knew Descartes at this date, June 1724. The works of Descartes, however, that are still in his library are dated 1723 (Les Principes de la philosophie), 1724 (Discours de la méthode), 1724–25 (Lettres qui traitent de plusieurs belles questions, concernant la morale, la physique, la médecine, et les mathématiques), 1724 (Les Méditations métaphysiques), 1726 (Les Passions de l’aâme, Le Monde, ou traité de la lumière, et la Géométrie). The way these dates are bunched around the Bolingbroke letter is very suggestive. Clearly, only one—the Principes, which incidentally Descartes regarded as the textbook of his philosophy—preceded the Bolingbroke advice, but the rest are between the letter and Voltaire's arrival in England.

One would be fairly safe in assuming that he had a speaking acquaintance with Descartes, Bayle, and Malebranche before the English sojourn (1726–29). He was, however, too much engaged with poetry and drama to give any very serious attention to the three. In England he gained apparently the same sort of superficial speaking acquaintance with Bacon, Newton, and Locke. In all probability it was not very profound, although he does seem to have read Pemberton's Introduction to Sir Isaac Newton's Philosophy in manuscript while in England. In the years immediately following the English sojourn, 1729–33, he devoted himself to rather active investigation in Newton's philosophy as preparation for the letters on Newton in the Lettres philosophiques. A major portion of his time was nonetheless given to a careful study of Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding. His correspondence with Cideville and Formont indicate that he perused the Essay three different times during these early thirties, and that dissatisfaction with Locke's solutions, which he thought were too timid, was what led him to undertake the Traité de métaphysique. Since between 1734 and 1739 he made three separate drafts of the Traité, he obviously was deeply engaged with Locke. Since he brought out the Philosophie de Newton in 1738 and a third part in 1740, he was
just as deeply engrossed in Newton. In addition, he had become acquainted with Wolff through Frederick by 1736. Wolff was a follower of Leibniz. Mme du Châtelet devoted half of her *Institutions de physique* to Leibniz and the second half to Newton. The third part of the *Eléments de la philosophie de Newton* was a selection of certain philosophical, scientific subjects (“De Dieu, De l’espace et de la durée, De la liberté dans Dieu, De la liberté dans l’homme, De la religion naturelle, De l’âme, Des premiers principes de la matière, Des monades, and De la force active”), and gave a comparison of the way Descartes, Leibniz, and Newton regarded these subjects. Hence Voltaire was now, by 1740, drawn into a close consideration of Leibniz. He knew at this time at least (1738) the *Théodicée* and Desmaizeaux’s two volumes on Leibniz that included the text of the discussion between Leibniz and Dr. Clarke. Moreover, Voltaire had now (1736–40) become deeply interested in certain “philosophical” subjects: the nature of God, the immortality of the soul, the nature of matter, thinking matter, free will, happiness, friendship, and good and evil. All these special subjects were treated by Bacon, Descartes, Malebranche, Bayle, Leibniz, Newton, and Locke, so that a whole raft of philosophers had gotten into the picture, including Pascal. Two important philosophers missing in the schedule, though, are Hobbes and Spinoza. Not much definite information can be adduced here as to when Voltaire became seriously acquainted with them. A note in the *Notebooks* giving the main points of Spinoza’s philosophy apparently dates from the Cirey period, but we are not too sure. We have always assumed that his view on Spinoza was founded upon Bayle’s article in the *Dictionnaire* and that acquaintance with Bayle may be taken as acquaintance with Spinoza, but we must not go as far as that.

Voltaire’s self-transformation from a poet into a *philosophe* is, as can be divined from the above timetable, a rather complicated affair, destined in fact to become much more complicated before he had completed his course. A relatively
simple example of the same phenomenon can be seen in the case of a more or less normal contemporary citizen of Neuchâtel: Cuenz. He is what might be called "un illustre inconnu," but he is not totally unknown. Broglie has given him a very brief paragraph:

Avec Cuentz de Neufchâtel, Bouhier soutient aussi une discussion en règle sur des sujets philosophiques; celui-là était un partisan décidé des idées de Locke, et le Président avait à jouer ici le rôle contraire, c'est-à-dire à modérer les idées de son correspondant et à défendre les droits du spiritualisme cartésien, que tout Français instruit de cette époque avait été élevé à respecter.  

Charles Des Guerrois in his biography of Bouhier stressed that though the Dijon Président spent forty-six years of his life in the eighteenth century, he reminds one almost exclusively of a seventeenth-century man, not at all of Voltaire’s time. Des Guerrois explains that this impression comes from Bouhier’s interest in the philosophers. But we have just seen in the Voltaire timetable that Voltaire had that interest, too. Des Guerrois’s next remark is more appropriate: "Bouhier discute avec M. Cuenz les plus épineuses questions philosophiques, celui-là est un métaphysicien, occupé à radoubier ses systèmes, et Bouhier veut bien entrer en discussion avec lui, se lançant dans les pures questions métaphysiques: la corporéité de l’âme, l’existence plus ou moins prouvée des substances immatérielles, etc. [sic].” This up to the present constitutes, as far as I know, all we know about Cuenz. It could be shortened, I suppose, to the remark that Cuenz had a philosophical discussion with Bouhier between 1736 and 1744. I might add, precisely at the time when Voltaire was preoccupied with the task of organizing his thought.

In a letter of 9 April 1738, the would-be philosopher of Neuchâtel explained to his Président friend at Dijon that, having taken up the subject of metaphysics many years be-
fore, he had first had to choose between Descartes and Gassendi. Soon, a study of Bayle’s article “Rorarius” in the *Dictionnaire historique* had complicated the situation by introducing Leibniz and Malebranche and a choice had become necessary between “causes occasionnelles” and preestablished harmony.” Chance had brought Cuenz and Bourguet together in Neuchâtel. The latter, who was now a correspondent of Président Bouhier, had been a correspondent and was now an ardent disciple of Leibniz. Acquaintance with Bourguet led Cuenz to a whole series of discussions on metaphysical subjects. Cuenz acknowledged that his new friend Bourguet was a zealous partisan of Leibniz, just as he was an enthusiastic follower of Locke. Indeed, Bourguet, said Cuenz, in an effort to convert him to Leibniz, had given him some of the German philosopher’s articles that he had never had the opportunity to study. But, added Cuenz, “Je fus moins de temps à reconnaître qu’il pourrait bien perdre ses peines avec moi.” Cuenz’s casual remarks about his relation with Bourguet and the way they had involved him in choices between Descartes and Newton as well as between Malebranche, Leibniz, and Locke recall rather vividly the discussions that were taking place at the same time between Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet concerning Descartes, Leibniz, and Newton. The experiences of the two couples show to what extent the reputation of Descartes was still sustained in certain circles in 1738 and confirm the tendency of both Mme du Châtelet and Voltaire to start any debate concerning Leibniz with Descartes’s position. The point, however, should be made that whereas the opposition that had to be resolved by Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet lay between Newton and Leibniz, the opposition that had to be resolved by Cuenz and Bourguet lay between Locke and Leibniz.

It was in his long letter to Bouhier of 9 April 1738 that Cuenz gave a detailed account of his entry into seventeenth-century philosophy. Though the section is not short, it is worthy of some attention, not only because it presents a hu-
man situation that must have been characteristic of many thinkers between 1720 and 1746, but because it also strikingly sums up the dilemma of Voltaire:

M'étant trouvé à Paris depuis 1722 et ayant quelquefois eu plus de loisir même que je n'eusse souhaité, cette curiosité naturelle à l'homme de savoir ce qu'il est et la grande réputation de Descartes me portèrent à commencer par ses Méditations. . . . Mais il me parut que ce grand philosophe était allé un peu trop loin: je ne savois pas avant lui, que ce fût une opinion dont il falloit se défaire, que le corps existe. Depuis il m'est tombé entre les mains l'excellent traité de Mr. Locke de l'Entendement humain qui m'a donné de toutes autres lumières. J'estime qu'on ne réussira guère à devenir bon métaphysicien, à moins qu'on n'adopte ses principes et surtout ce qu'il dit concernant l'origine de nos idées. Enfin, après les Méditations de Descartes, j'ay lu sa méthode, et ai été fort surpris de voir, qu'après avoir si divinement bien raisonné, dans les premières trois parties, il soit tombé comme dans une espèce de délire à la quatrième, où il parle de la nature de l'âme, et où il paraît qu'il y a autant de sophismes ou de paralogismes qu'il y a des mots. J'ai ensuite parcouru le Traité de l'esprit du médecin La Forge, et quelques ouvrages du Père Malebranche, dans lesquels ce philosophe met dans tout son jour le système des causes occasionnelles. Le premier m'a paru un pauvre raisonneur, et le système du second n'est qu'une espèce de fatalisme, au moins j'estime qu'avec les intentions du monde les plus pures, ce philosophe chrétien aurait de la peine à se défendre qu'il n'en résulte que Dieu est l'auteur du péché. Je crois qu'à peu près on en peut dire autant du système de M. de Leibniz, qui à ce qu'il me semble, n'a relevé (l'esprit) que pour le faire retomber de l'autre côté. Il me paraît que M. Bayle, dans quel esprit Dieu le sait, a trop flatté cette âme pré-somptueuse, et qu'en la flattant, il n'a fait que lui ficher plus avant dans sa tête son système chimérique. Ce philosophe, où il raisonne sur l'âme ou sur les formes des bêtes comme il les appelle, tenait le vray entre ses mains, mais comme cela arrive souvent aux plus grands esprits, il a passé le vray, et plus il l'a passé, plus il s'en est éloigné.

J'ai fait des remarques sur les différents auteurs, de même sur quelques écrits du Dr. Clarke, de M. Leclerc, et en particulier le traité de M. Ditton, où dans son supplément, il combat le
sentiment de M. Locke, que Dieu a peu joindre originairement la capacité de penser à quelques parties de la matière. Ces remarques m'ont conduit insensiblement à penser que du débris des trois systèmes connus, on pourrait imaginer à former un quatrième plus simple, qui seroit à couvert de toutes les objections qui ont été faites ici contre les autres en le fondant principalement sur ces deux principes, qu'un être non étendu et purement spirituel, capable du sentiment, de la puissance et de toutes les modifications est une contradiction palpable, et qu'il suffit de distinguer les êtres qui existent en visibles et palpables et en invisibles et impalpables à nos sens grossiers, hypothèse très aisée à concilier avec la révélation et avec les grandes fins qu'elle nous propose et plus propre que toute autre à fermer la bouche aux Phyrrhonniens et aux esprits forts.

These rather lengthy quotations from Cuenz's letter of 9 April 1738 could be supplemented by the very long letter of 4 June 1738 (f. fr., 24410, ff. 255–63). This latter letter is accompanied in time by veritable philosophical dissertations that resemble closely those of Voltaire in the *Traité de métaphysique*: there is one on the nature of God, another on the immortality of the soul and its nature, a third on free will, and a fourth on good and evil.

Bouhier replied to Cuenz's initial letters in a letter in which he grants to his Neuchâtel friend the right to make hypotheses if he wishes. He nonetheless denies that he wants to separate metaphysics from physics, which Cuenz had tried to do (f. 255'). He notes there are difficulties in Cuenz's notion that God is something else than a spirit. He adds, though, that he is not at all upset by the notion that God has created man as a machine, and he ends his letter by affirming that the system of the union of the soul and body, especially that adopted by Leibniz in the doctrine of preestablished harmony, despite the fact that it is supported by very important individuals, seems filled with insurmountable difficulties. Returning to the problem of the nature of God, Bouhier remarked that Cuenz had implied that God was composed of material substance to which Cuenz replied (f. 267) that such was indeed his idea:
"Dieu est un Etre réel et étendu dans sa manière incompréhensible d'exister (non pas matériel et corporel ou composé comme les corps de la matière que nous connaissons) mais dont la nature nous est absolument inconnue." To substantiate this point of view that skirts so close to Spinoza, Cuenz quotes from (of all things) Newton, *Principes*, scholies généraux, pp. 482, 483: "Virtus (Puissance) dit en parlant de la nature divine ce grand homme, après le bon sens, *sine substantia subsistere non potest,*" and added: "C'est précisément mon système." It must be noted that Cuenz wanted particularly to avoid the accusation of adopting the God of Spinoza. He stresses that his concept of the Deity is that He is extent and immense, and He is all-powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent, but he does not wish to identify Him with the universe as does Spinoza:

Dieu est immense, en ce que rien ne le borne, ni ne peut le borner. Aucun être ne peut le borner activement. Si l'univers le borne passivement, c'est que Dieu a bien voulu se borner Lui-même, dans ce sens, et on sentira aisément que c'est sans préjudice de son étendue réelle, quelqu'elle soit.

His example of an immense substance that fills the universe is the sun with sunlight. Finally, he endeavors to strengthen this point of view by passages from the Bible. Cuenz protests that it is impossible to think of a spiritual non-extended Being and an immense Being at the same time. He sees very clearly that if he accepts that God is everything that exists and everything that exists is God, he slips immediately into Spinozism. He attempts to avoid this difficulty by quoting from Houtteville's *Essay sur la Providence.*

As for the nature of the soul, Cuenz adopts the view that it is immortal without being able to explain how its immortality occurs. He affirms his belief that God acts by mediate as well as immediate ways. As Creator and Preserver of the universe, he acts through general laws that he has established. These general laws are known to us only imperfectly. He acts
also through immediate intervention, what we call a miracle. We know miracles only by faith. Cuenz adds that to understand these actions, one has to know "la matière, le plein et le vide, et la nature de nos idées." He promises to explain them in the forthcoming treatise he is projecting. He adds the remark: "Le moindre de mes embarras est d'accorder tous mes principes avec la Révélation (f. 270v)." He reverts over and over to the problem of the immortality of the soul. He admits that the difficulties are extreme, especially because of recent discoveries in biology, which embarrass him: Andry's *Traité de la génération des vers,* for instance, and Réaumur's *Histoire des insectes.*

Cuenz sent to his Dijon friend at this time an "Abrégé" of his views on free will (ff. 274-77). He concluded that seeing that man depends upon God, and upon an infinity of physical causes, he is not a free being. Therefore, the real freedom of man can only consist in aiming at limited, fixed goals:

Ce qu'on appelle communément liberté de l'homme n'est dans le fond autre chose qu'un pouvoir in abstracto inhérent à sa nature, qu'il a de décider dans les occasions entre cette inclination naturelle et les suggestions de sa raison éclairée. Se déterminer pour la première, c'est abuser de ce pouvoir; se décider selon la raison éclairée, c'en est faire un bon usage.

It is from this capacity or power that the duty of man is derived: a duty that consists in cultivating his reason. He thereby acquires all the knowledge necessary to him in order to perform his duties toward God, his neighbor, and himself. If he will listen to his reason enlightened by his knowledge, he can lead a life in conformity with these positive duties. In this sense, man is free:

L'homme est donc proprement responsable de l'usage qu'il fait de sa faculté de connaître, et de sa volonté de se déterminer, et d'agir en conséquence de ses connaissances acquises. Si l'homme est coupable, c'est 1° pour n'avoir pas par sa faute
acquis les connaissances qui lui étaient nécessaires; 2° pour
n’avoir pas suivi le Dictamen de sa raison éclairée.

Cuenz insists that freedom is "exemption de nécessité et de
contrainte." It is true, he admits, that man depends upon a
thousand different circumstances that control him. But he has
notwithstanding to know his duty to God, to his fellow men,
and to himself. Cuenz maintains that given the wisdom and
goodness of God, the freedom of man is assured.

The response of Bouhier to these views on the nature of
God, the immortality of the soul, and free will can be found
on ff. 303–5. of the correspondence. Bouhier acknowledges
that although in his youth he had plunged into metaphysical
speculations, he now finds so many uncertainties in them
among the first-rate philosophers that he has pretty nearly
renounced the study of metaphysics and hence is unfamiliar
with recent works in this field. On the subject of innate ideas,
however, he confesses that he is of Locke’s opinion. On the
problem of the nature and immortality of the soul, he is aware
of so many difficulties that he would advise the suspension
of judgment and adherence to the general opinion in which
all have been reared. He concedes, nonetheless, that there is
nothing contrary to religion in the belief that the soul is
material, since such a view had been adopted by the early
Christian Fathers. On the other hand, he sees no objection to
the view that God can make our soul immortal and capable
of receiving rewards and punishments. None of that runs
counter to Christianity. He adds that notwithstanding these
concessions, he fails to understand why Cuenz insists that "une
substance inétendue est un être de raison." That view would
make God’s immateriality “une chimère.” Only the out-and-
out materialists would dare adopt such an attitude. Bouhier
objects likewise to the distinction between “matière subtile”
and “matière grossière.” Calling subtle matter “esprit” does
not solve the difficulty, though; it is still matter. A better solu-
tion, he suggests, would be the assertion “l’âme est une mod-
ifetration de la matière faite d'une manière imperceptible par l'Être Suprême qui lui a donné la faculté de penser, d'apercevoir, etc., d'où il s'ensuit qu'elle est mortelle de sa nature" but made immortal by the Will of God. Bouhier supports this view by references from Dodwell. Finally, he suggests that Cuenz will do well to consult Beausobre's Histoire du manichéisme on the problems of free will, good and evil, and the nature of God.

The activity of Cuenz about 1738–40 became extraordinarily diverse. It is clear that he was not entirely satisfied with his solutions to the problem upon the nature of God because of his tendency to skirt Spinozism despite his every effort to avoid that result. Cuenz turned to Bayle's Réponse aux questions d'un provincial (Œuvres diverses, 3:940–42) where Bayle undertakes to clarify the nature of God. It was an apt selection for him to make. I cannot here enter into Bayle's discussion. A mere run-down of the subjects will show how they embrace the core of Cuenz's problems in three folio pages:

Preuves de son immatérialité (De Dieu); Conséquences de ce dogme opposées à des vérités qu'on ne peut abandonner (cf. Les raisons qui prouvent l'immatérialité de Dieu, prouvent aussi l'immatérialité de tous les êtres pensants); Difficulté sur l'âme des bêtes; Et sur la liaison locale de l'âme de l'homme avec le corps; Impossibilité d'accorder l'immatérialité de Dieu avec son immensité; Les Cartésiens ne lèvent point la difficulté; Selon quelques Chrétiens les preuves de l'immatérialité de l'âme ne convainquent point; Selon M. Locke l'essence de la substance spirituelle et corporelle nous est inconnue; Objections contre ce sentiment (cf. . . . je ne vois point que l'on puisse dire qu'il y ait dans la matière quelque attribut incompatible avec la pensée, ni qu'il y ait dans l'âme quelque attribut incompatible avec l'étendue); Si l'étendue est distincte de la matière, elle ne peut rendre la matière étendue.

Acquaintance with Bayle's handling of these subjects produced two effects upon Cuenz. They forced him first of all to
adopt an attitude that differs somewhat from Voltaire's optimistic point of view in 1738. In Cuenz's opinion man is more inclined to evil than to good. He asserts that man has need of a revelation and experience. Man consequently is not in this respect free; he needs absolutely God's grace. These views are closer to those of Bayle than to those of Voltaire in 1738. Cuenz concludes nonetheless that in spite of everything, man must have the power to attain the good; otherwise God cannot be good, wise, and just. This conclusion was also Voltaire's in 1738.

Cuenz's dilemma between the wisdom of God and the evil of man is what led Bouhier to suggest Beausobre's *Histoire du manichéisme*. Cuenz followed the suggestion of his Dijon friend and, as Voltaire on a later occasion, turned to Manichaeism and to Beausobre's book. Similarly, Voltaire wrote to M. Formey, 2 January 1752: "J'ai lu, toute la nuit, *L'Histoire du Manichéisme*. Voilà de la théologie réduite à la philosophie." On 13 July 1740 (ff. 306-7) Cuenz quotes Beausobre to support his view that man's errors can be attributed more to the obscurity in which the Deity has left certain matters than to man's evil nature. That view, Cuenz maintains, is not counter to the teachings of Christianity. He asserts that Mani's doctrine is very similar to his own view. "Je ne crois pas," he wrote, "que ceux qui l'ont condamné ayent substitué quelque-chose de mieux digéré, de plus clair, et de plus évident. . . ." In this letter of 12 December 1740 he now explains that "faire de Dieu un Etre inéthendu, c'est traiter Dieu comme un point mathématique," and that would be blasphemy. He argues still that God's immensity implies real extent. He objects nonetheless to having this extent interpreted as extended matter, for fear of falling into Spinozism. "Je ne crois pas," he wrote, "que Dieu remplisse physiquement tout l'espace immense." He acknowledges, though, that he can say nothing specific about God's presence in the universe and nothing about the "figure de l'Etre divin." He, nonetheless, expresses his conviction that "du centre de son essence, de sa nature, de
son étendue réelle, il voit tout, il éclaire tout, il dirige et gouverne tout; rien ne peut arriver, sans qu’il ne le voye et qu’il ne le veuille, ou qu’il ne le permette.”

Bouhier in his reply (f. 325) admits that God’s immensity does not mean that He occupies all space. That interpretation can only lead to Spinozism. He adds that we have no conception of a spiritual substance, and we haven’t the foggiest notion how a spiritual being can occupy the whole universe and even surpass infinity. He adds sententiously that there are many things in nature we cannot understand: the infinite divisibility of matter, space, infinity. Nonetheless, he feels sure that the world did not organize itself, that there must accordingly be a Superior Being, that this Being cannot be matter. He insists that we know absolutely nothing about His nature, and concludes that the substance of Divinity is different from material substance.

About 1738 Cuenz became acquainted with Algarotti’s Neutonianismo. He wrote Bouhier that he had been weighing the accusation that Newton had reintroduced the occultism of Aristotle into physics, and he now feels certain that he can explain how this accusation originated. He has decided to make an “abrégé” of his system and to send it to Sloane and the Royal Society. This he did after having first submitted the “abrégé” to Osterwald and to Werenfels. “Tous ces messieurs m’ont fait des objections, auxquelles j’ai tâché de satisfaire du mieux que j’ay pu.” In the letter of 4 June 1740, to Bouhier, he announced that Sloane had judged his Abrégé de métaphysique worthy of being submitted to the Royal Society. A theologian had been appointed to report upon it. His report “hemmed and hawed,” said Cuenz, but he had found nothing contrary to reason, to religion, or to philosophy. Cuenz had now decided to turn the “Abrégé” into a book. At the same time, he began publishing articles in the Journal Helvétique (4 July 1740): “On Happiness,” “On Conjugal Love,” “On Friendship,” and an “Essay on Free will.” These are some of the subjects treated in Voltaire’s Discours.
en vers sur l'homme. Bouhier having obviously offered some suggestions, Cuenz promised (11 July 1740) to try to clarify his views. He adds: “Le but de mon ouvrage étant de faire taire les esprits forts incorrigibles et de ramener les pyr­ honiens de bonne foi par rapport à cette matière.” On 14 July 1740 he announced that he was working upon the commentary upon Bayle. He explained on 10 February 1741 that the bringing together of all these letters, explanations, replies, commentaries, “abrégés,” will make four volumes, in-8°. Shortly thereafter, he informed Bouhier that he now had enough text to make five or six volumes. “J’examine tous les systèmes,” he stated, “et hypothèses qu’y ont paru jusqu’à présent, et ferai voir qu’ils conduisent tous à établir celui dont il est question, comme le plus probable au moins” (f. 332). On 10 June 1741 he announced he is now studying Cudworth. And he cites the passage in Locke’s Essay where the English­ man maintains that we will never know whether a “material spirit” can think or not. It was the theme song in all of Vol­ taire’s treatment of Locke.

Cuenz now explains (ff. 335v-38) the layout of his book, to be called Système nouveau: two letters on Bayle (one a commentary on what he says about the immateriality of God, the other on chapters 112 and 141 on the continuation of his Pensées sur la comète. Cuenz promised a third chapter on Cudworth’s intellectual system, as printed in the first ten volumes of Le Clerc’s Bibliothèque choisie. These three chapters are to constitute the second volume; the first volume will be devoted to an apology for Locke. A third volume will be composed of the essay sent to Sloane with the commentary that was made by the Royal Society.

Having received volume one, Bouhier wrote, 20 February 1742, that he would have preferred to have Cuenz begin by destroying the three systems that dominate modern thought in order to erect his own system “sur les ruines.” He would have advised a brief presentation of Cuenz’s stand so that one would know right off what he intended to propose. Bouhier
now rejects the notion of "extended Spirit" as a definition of the Deity, and he refuses, having been raised in the opposite opinion, to support the notion of the materiality of the soul. He confesses, nonetheless, that he knows no arguments that will justify that opinion.

Cuenz's book was eventually published in 1742 under the title *Essai d'un sistème nouveau concernant la nature des êtres spirituels, fondé en partie sur les principes du célèbre Mr. Locke, philosophe anglais dont l'auteur fait l'apologie* (4 vols., Neuchâtel, 1742). A copy now exists at the Bibliothèque Nationale. In the *Discours préliminaire*, Cuenz undertakes to give a plan of his work and the history of its development. He confesses the idea of writing Locke's apology was occasioned by an attack against the English philosopher in Prévost's *Pour et contre*. He admits that he welcomed this occasion, since it gave him the opportunity to express his own opinions on the nature of the soul. He states that he is firmly opposed to the doctrine of the pure spirituality of the soul, that is, its absolute non-extension. He places alongside this view the systems of occasionalism (from Malebranche) and preestablished harmony (Leibniz). In short, he admits that he is now opposed to Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz. These systems, he says, encourage free-thinkers and skeptics, stating at the same time that he intends to establish his criticism of these systems upon his doctrine: "C'est sur ce fondement que je me propose de raisonner sur les systèmes des causes occasionnelles et de l'harmonie pré-établie" (p. xi). These two interpretations he now calls inconceivable and contradictory. He professes more respect for the "famous" Descartes, but adds that he is not at all persuaded of the verity of his system. Finally, his attitude toward Leibniz is likewise chiefly negative:

Je crois que l'on en peut dire autant de l'illustre M. de Leibnitz. Son système de l'harmonie, sa *Théodicée* font beaucoup plus d'honneur à la subtilité de son esprit et à sa vaste érudition qu'ils ne servent à l'avancement de la vérité. (p. xiv)
He gives a fairly succinct outline of the subjects that he proposes to treat: the limits of our knowledge, the preliminary principles upon which we reason, the nature of Being considered in general; the nature of God, the origin and nature of power and movement, the vacuum, matter, substance, accident, attribute, and mode; the distinction of man and animal, the origin and nature of all our ideas, free will, miracles. All of these subjects were likewise treated by both Voltaire and Mme du Châtelet. One of the subjects Cuenz promises to treat fully is the nature of the soul and its relationship with the body. He confesses that he is particularly interested in the problem of extension and nonextension of the soul. He is very critical of those who use the geometrical method to build a metaphysics: “L’usage que Spinoza en fit dans son *Ethique en fait connaitre le danger*” (p. lxxii). To this condemnation, he adds that of Wolff and Leibniz. Finally, it should be noted that he quotes from the “illustre Mme du Châtelet.” And well he might, because they are precisely the subjects under discussion at Cirey between 1735 and 1746.

Cuenz takes advantage of his dialogue here with Bouhier to give the outstanding points that he thinks he has made in the *Système nouveau* (f. 345): There is no way to obtain a clear notion of a Being who is absolutely devoid of extent. He can, in fact, be only a figment of the imagination. One can only conclude that the soul has a real extent. This extent which has a reality in the soul consists in a spiritual body—invisible, impalpable, indivisible, and immortal. The active and passive power of the soul has been breathed into it by God. This divine breath is not a substance, it is a mode. The soul comes into the world as a simple animal with unfulfilled potentialities. As these potentialities become realities, they unite first to become internal senses, which combine with external senses, and this combination in turn furnishes the wherewithal for the development of reason and the making of a personality. Though man begins by being an animal, he ultimately distinguishes himself from all other animals by a
more refined organization, by speech, by the ability to pro-
duce abstract ideas. "Cette différence est établie en vertu des
causes finales." Cuenz insists, however, that all the ideas of
the soul have a reality of their own. Its immortality is estab-
lished upon God's "Toute-puissance" and his "Véracité." The
Supreme Being, therefore, must also have an extent that is a
reality, "mais d'une manière incompréhensible à nos lu-
mières." Nonetheless, space that is God's domain really exists,
and movement has its source in the Deity. Space and move-
ment combined, the source of active and latent power, is "un
pur don de Dieu." It imparts to all living beings their percep-
tivity and their motivity. These beings are consequently free.
In a letter of 11 March 1742 Cuenz proposes that one under-
stands by the word "matter" the same sort of thing we see in
the word "color"; that is, it is and is not simultaneously, it has
the appearance of reality and a reality or, as he says, there
is a matter "en tout sens très parfaite" and another matter
that is "raw" matter.

Having organized his thought in the four volumes of the
Système nouveau, it was subjected to some fairly rough treat-
ment in the Journal Helvétique for May-June, 1742, and
Cuenz naturally felt constrained to defend his ideas. Here
Cuenz takes up Trembley's discoveries and Bonnet's discus-
sions of their importance. Cuenz saw in them confirmation of
his system. He insists that had his system not been invented,
the Spinozists would have taken them over to prove the va-
lidity of their system. Cuenz thereupon in the November-
December 1742 number of the Journal Helvétique inserted
two letters in which he utilized Trembley's discoveries to sup-
port his views. To Trembley and Bonnet he now adds Réau-
mur, and takes a decisive step in rejecting Descartes's theory
of animal automatism.

Cuenz was as astounded by these discoveries as Réaumur,
or Trembley whom he had trained, or Voltaire, because the
problem is presented for these "germes," as Cuenz called
them, as for a human being. The point I want to make in con-
cluding is that the extraordinary impact of these discoveries in biology that Cuenz takes as confirmation for his philosophy and Voltaire seems to have taken so lightly as confirmation for his *Micromégas* is really the same problem. I am convinced that Cuenz had never heard of *Micromégas*, and as far as I can tell, Voltaire never heard of Cuenz and his *Système nouveau*. Cuenz took his text, therefore, not from Voltaire but from Réaumur, whom he quoted:

Loïn, ce me semble, qu'on doive avoir quelque peine à accorder que la génération des pucerons se puisse faire d'une manière si simple, on ne doit être embarrassé de ce que, pour opérer la génération des autres animaux, une voye plus composée a été prise par Celui qui ne saurait manquer de choisir les moyens les plus parfaits et les plus convenables (f. 377).

Cuenz's comment should be read with *Micromégas* in mind:

Ce sentiment paraît très probable, comme il est très digne de la justesse de l'esprit et de la grande perspicacité de notre illustre observateur. Mais les questions reviennent: Quel est l'ouvrier de ces germes ou de ces Embryons? Quel est le principe de vie qui anime ces petits êtres? Il est très évident que la chère de ces germes est entièrement passive ici. Elle ne sait, ni ne sent, au moins activement, ce qu'elle fait, si tant est qu'elle agisse véritablement en ces occasions. Ne faut-il donc pas convenir que, comme le dit notre auteur lui-même, qu'un si grand ouvrage n'a pu être fait que par l'intelligence par excellence? Mais comment pouvons-nous concevoir que cet ouvrier tout-puissant le fait? Ce ne peut être, comme j'ai dit, qu'au moyen d'un certain mécanisme qu'il a établi dans la nature, et d'une force qui émane immédiatement de lui et qui après avoir opéré d'une manière qui nous sera à jamais inconnue, au moins en cette vie. L'organisation complète de ces êtres, de ces embrions, les anime et leur donne les facultés qui leur conviennent.

Cuenz calculates that Réaumur's *pucerons* multiply fabulously. He asks therefore if God is busied with making each a soul?

"Ces âmes, supposé qu'elles existent réellement, que sont-
elles? Quelle est leur nature? Que deviennent-elles? Quelle est leur destinée?"

We must now record one final bit of information. In spite of the feverish activity of my friend Cuenz, despite four volumes of his philosophy, the numerous articles of the *Journal Helvétique*, the seemingly interminable correspondence with his friend Bouhier and his unwavering confidence in his system—which does not seem to me to differ materially from the views of Voltaire as one finds them in the Cirey Period and especially in the *Traité de métaphysique*, the section on metaphysics in the *Eléments*, and the *Discours en vers sur l'homme*—the *philosophe* from Neuchâtel announced to the *philosophe* of Dijon, in October 1744, that he had not sold twenty copies of his work. He added, laconically, "selon les apparences, je n'ai rien de mieux à espérer pour l'avenir." Nonetheless, like the true *philosophe* he had become, he added: "Cela n'empêche pourtant pas que je ne continue de travailler à un supplément qui sera une pièce des plus fortes." Apparently, once a *philosophe*, always a *philosophe*. Cuenz, however, had to get his personal satisfaction from the approval of his Dijon friend. On 21 December 1744 he wrote to Bouhier: "Je suis extrêmement flatté de la bonne opinion qu'a de mon ouvrage philosophique un juge aussi compétent et aussi éclairé comme vous êtes, Monsieur; Je sens bien qu'indépendamment des grandes difficultés qu'il y a dans la chose même, par rapport à la prévention qu'il y a dans les esprits, et aux passions qui tyrannisent les hommes, le tems présent n'est pas fort propre, pour donner cours à un ouvrage de cette nature." Never did a *philosophe* make so ill-timed a prophecy. It could be that the only philosophical defect a *philosophe* has is that he lacks a spirit of prophecy. He just has no vision of the future, otherwise he would not have gone to the edge of the abyss and plunged into the French Revolution. However that may be, this fervent follower of Locke finishes as a modest disciple of Leibniz, and a casually interested dabbler in Spinozism, just as Voltaire did. In the same letter of 21 December 1744,
he wrote: "Quant à l'hypothèse des animalcules, Leibniz si je ne me trompe, est celui qui s'est approché le plus du but, mais il resterait à satisfaire à beaucoup de difficultés." The philosophes may not have been good prophets, but they surely understood the philosophers—the immediate philosophers of the past.

2. Fonds français MSS. 24409-24421. Subsequent references will be given in the text.
8. E. de Broglio, Les Portfeuilles, p. 298.