The Atheist's Bible: Diderot and the "Éléments de physiologie"

Caroline Warman

In offering the first book-length study of the "Éléments de physiologie", Warman raises the stakes high: she wants to show that, far from being a long-unknown draft, it is a powerful philosophical work whose hidden presence was visible in certain circles from the Revolution on. And it works! Warman's study is original and stimulating, a historical investigation that is both rigorous and fascinating.

—François Pépin, École normale supérieure, Lyon

This is high-quality intellectual and literary history, the erudition and close argument suffused by a wit and humour Diderot himself would surely have appreciated.

—Michael Moriarty, University of Cambridge

In 'The Atheist's Bible', Caroline Warman applies deft, tenacious and often witty textual detective work to the case, as she explores the shadowy passage and influence of Diderot's materialist writings in manuscript samizdat-like form from the Revolutionary era through to the Restoration.

—Colin Jones, Queen Mary University of London

'Love is harder to explain than hunger, for a piece of fruit does not feel the desire to be eaten': Denis Diderot's "Éléments de physiologie" presents a world in flux, turning on the relationship between man, matter and mind. In this late work, Diderot delves playfully into the relationship between bodily sensation, emotion and perception, and asks his readers what it means to be human in the absence of a soul.

The Atheist's Bible challenges prevailing scholarly views on Diderot's "Éléments", asserting its contemporary philosophical importance and prompting its readers to inspect more closely this little-known and little-studied work. This book is accompanied by a digital edition of Jacques-André Naigeon's "Mémoires historiques et philosophiques sur la vie et les ouvrages de Denis Diderot" (1823), a work which, Warman argues, represents the first publication of Diderot's "Éléments", long before its official publication date of 1875.

The Atheist's Bible constitutes a major contribution to the field of Diderot studies, and is of further interest to scholars and students of materialist natural philosophy in the Age of Enlightenment and beyond.

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8. 1794–95: Garat and the École normale

We already know a bit about Dominique-Joseph Garat from the previous section. We know that he had been a journalist, had met Denis Diderot and immortalised him in the pages of the *Mercure de France*; we know that he was a politician of some visibility during the Revolution. We also know that he was appointed Commissaire of the Comité d’instruction publique after his release from prison and the lifting of his death sentence, that he wrote the report on whose basis the École normale was set up, and was heavily responsible for its conceptualisation, organised as it was around his own lectures on the *Analyse de l'entendement*.¹

A few more details seem necessary to understand Garat’s background and perhaps also to make better sense of some of the hypotheses this chapter will advance.² His admiring portrait of Diderot was in fact something of a professional speciality: he was a celebrated and prize-winning author of eulogies of French statesmen and advisors to kings.

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through the ages, and also of Enlightenment scientist Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle.\(^3\) (In 1820, he would return to the subject of Fontenelle in his *Mémoires sur la vie de M. Suard, sur ses écrits et sur le dix-huitième siècle* [Memoirs on the life of Mr Suard, his writings, and on the eighteenth century], a curious work that we shall have occasion to discuss in Chapter 11.)\(^4\) He attended Mme Helvétius’s influential salon in Auteuil, as Diderot also had (although they probably did not overlap), and he was also a member from 1779 of the connected masonic lodge which astronomer Jérôme Lalande had set up in 1776 with Mme Helvétius’s support, the *Loge des Neuf Sœurs*.\(^5\) Two further members of both Salon and Lodge are the doctor philosopher Pierre-Jean-Georges Cabanis (1757–1808) and his friend the philosopher Antoine Louis Claude Destutt de Tracy (1754–1836); all three, roughly of the same generation (Garat was born in 1749), would write on sensations, ideas, and human understanding, although at this point (1794–95) none of them had yet published anything on this particular area; Garat’s published *École normale* lectures would be their first text of this sort, to be rapidly followed by Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy, as we shall see in the next section/chapter. But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

It seems as if initially Garat had no plan to deliver lectures on this topic himself; the Swiss philosophe and naturalist Charles Bonnet was named instead.\(^6\) Bonnet’s *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l’âme* (1760) would be much praised by Garat (a house speciality, as we have seen) in his first lecture; he declares that ‘nul n’a connu mieux que lui le mécanisme de la pensée’ [no one knew the workings of thought better than he].\(^7\) This is not the first time Bonnet has featured in this study; we looked at Bonnet’s contribution in Chapter 3. But Bonnet was unable

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3 Michel de l’Hospital (1778), Abbé Suger (1779), Charles de Sainte-Maure (1781) and Fontenelle (1784). The Académie Française awarded the last three prizes. Murray, ‘Garat’, in *Dictionnaire des journalistes*.


to take up the position, as he had unfortunately died eighteen months before, in May 1793. As Dominique Julia wryly observes, it makes one wonder what effect the Revolutionary upheavals were having on communication networks within the republic of letters. It is indeed curious that the death of such an important scholar would not have been known in Paris. Might Garat have put forward the celebrated Bonnet as a blind, in full knowledge that he had died the year before, in order to offer himself up as a replacement in seeming humility and selflessness?

Partly what we are evoking here—in the hypothetical republic of letters, or more specifically in the Cercle d’Auteuil or the Loge des Neuf Sœurs—are a series of unofficial networks whose workings, efficacy and reach are not perfectly visible or readable to us, although we can trace membership and speculate on connections. The case of the Comité d’instruction publique and its École normale are different. These are prominent, official, even show-case parts of the government of the new Republic. So they have a different relationship to records, accountability, and reputation. We have already discussed the records of the Comité d’instruction publique, so we already know that while its official workings and records may tell a story of transparent officialdom, there are also many gaps and unknowables. Yet it does matter that they are official organs of the government and also that they are self-consciously new creations of it, reflecting its republican values, because this means that when they speak, they speak for the government. They are public not private; institutional not individual. And we cannot therefore separate content from form. Perhaps we never can, but if we are even considering suggesting that anything from the Éléments de physiologie might have made its way into Garat’s Cours, from, that is, a clandestine and unavowable materialist manuscript written by one of Maximilien Robespierre’s personae non gratae, and which the Comité d’instruction publique avoided recording when given it, and onto one of the most visible stages of the virtuous new Republic, then it seems obvious that

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9 Richard Whatmore considers it unlikely that news of Bonnet’s death would not have got through to Paris, as communication between Geneva and Paris was good, email 22.2.2019; see also Richard Whatmore, ‘Revolution and Empire’, in Against War and Empire: Geneva, Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 228–70 (ch. 7), for ample evidence of letters getting through between the two cities.
anything revealing any aspect of its origins will have had to be well hidden. Its form would have to be completely different. It would have to fit and reflect the École normale. And thus the first question to address is what was the École normale? What was its form, its function, its mode? Were these disputed? Was it successful?

The École normale of 1795, its rise and demise

So, although the idea and indeed the name of the Normal School as a training academy for teachers was imported from Germany, its conceptualisation as a rapid revolutioniser of teaching across the new Republic was directly borrowed from a highly successful military model.10 This was the project to bring citizen students from across the country to the École des armes et des poudres (Weaponry and Gunpowder School) to learn to make canons and the saltpetre and gunpowder to go with them, the idea being that not only would the students learn to make them but that they would return to their districts and then run foundries, and that the military production line would be vastly increased: this was an urgent national need in 1794, when France was engaged in fighting Spain, Portugal, Austria, Prussia, Hanover, and Britain. It worked, and it also functioned as a way of spreading Revolutionary fervour, as the students returned to their districts with official governmental bulletins in hand.11 The decree setting it up and requiring each district to send two citizens aged between twenty-five and thirty within five days, was announced on 14 Pluviôse an II (2 Feb 1794), and the lessons, lasting three ‘decades’ i.e. thirty days (a ‘decade’ referring to ten days rather than years), were due to start on the 1er Ventôse; this duly happened,

10 See Étienne François, ‘L’École normale: une création allemande?’, in L’École normale de l’an III, pp. 31–49. Some of the following analysis can also be found (more fully developed and more fully focused on the École normale itself) in Caroline Warman, “The Revolution Is to the Human Mind What the African Sun is to Vegetation”: Revolution, Heat, and the Normal School Project, The Critical Genealogy of Normality, ed. by Peter Cryle, special issue, History of Human Sciences (2020), 1-18, https://doi.org/10.1177/0952695120946992. I would like to express my thanks to Peter Cryle and to the History of Human Sciences for allowing me to draw on my article here, and also acknowledge my gratitude to Peter Cryle (again) and Elizabeth Stephens for inviting me to their ARC-funded conference workshop on the Critical Genealogy of Normality in Italy, June 2018, where this work was first presented.

and the first graduates of this school were returning to set up or revolutionise their local foundries by 2 Germinal (22 March 1794), just after a grand ‘fête civique’ to mark the end of the lessons, in which the pupils ceremonially presented the saltpetre, gunpowder and one bronze canon that they had made to the Convention nationale.\textsuperscript{12} Jacobin politician Bertrand Barère (1755–1841), member of the Comité de salut public (Committee of public safety) under Robespierre and one of the few who survived his fall to continue as a member of the government, is loud in his acclamation:

L’ancien régime aurait demandé trois ans pour ouvrir des écoles, pour former des élèves, pour faire des cours de chimie ou d’armurerie. Le nouveau régime a tout accéléré. [...] C’est ainsi que l’influence de la liberté rend tous les fruits précoce et les institutions faciles.\textsuperscript{13}

The old régime would have asked for three years to open schools, train students, and complete lessons in chemistry or armoury. The new régime has accelerated everything. [...] This is the influence of freedom, it makes all fruit ripen early, it makes institutions easy.

This is a curious passage. It naturalises the industrial production of weaponry as a harvest as it also naturalises acceleration in terms of an early harvest, and of course it also naturalises the new régime and the process of freedom as a sort of sun. But it took a while (even in these accelerated times) for it to get off the ground. It was Robert Lindet’s report on the state of the nation, delivered on behalf of the Comité de salut public to the Convention nationale on the 4e jour des sans-culottides an II (20 September 1794) that reactivated the project. Lindet’s aim was to make ignorance and darkness—les ténèbres—disappear, and to spread light and knowledge. He wanted the Convention nationale to ‘éclairer le peuple, de l’attacher à la Révolution’ [enlighten the people and make them love the Revolution, bind them to it]: he thinks all French citizens should be educated to be like those from the canton du Valais in Switzerland:

Dans le Valais, tout habitant sait cultiver son champ, les arts et les sciences ; toute maison renferme une collection des meilleurs livres, des

\textsuperscript{12} Quoted by Julia, ‘La Fondation de l’école’, p. 85.
The response of the Convention nationale to Robert Lindet’s call for action was to instruct the Comité d’instruction publique to produce a report within 2 ‘décades’ (that is, twenty days), and its official document used the same terminology of acceleration we saw in Bertrand Barère’s speech:

La Convention nationale, voulant accélérer l’époque où elle pourra faire répandre dans toute la République l’instruction d’une manière uniforme, charge son Comité d’instruction publique de lui présenter, dans deux décades, un projet d’écoles normales [...]¹⁵

The National Convention, wishing to accelerate that time when it will be able to spread education uniformly across the Republic, charges its Committee of Public Education to present to it, in 20 days, a project for normal schools [...]¹⁵

This is where Garat comes in. He duly wrote the report—although it came in 10 days late—and it was delivered by government minister Joseph Lakanal.¹⁶

On 9 Brumaire (30 October 1794), Garat’s report was adopted and decreed. One citizen for every 20,000 population was to be sent by each district to Paris by the end of ‘Framaire’ (December). Each future ‘élève’ or pupil of the École normale would be reimbursed for their travel expenses and paid an allowance. 1500–1600 new pupils duly arrived in Paris.

¹⁵ Quoted in Julia, ‘La Fondation de l’école’, p. 94.
The official opening session was on 1er Pluviôse an III, where high levels of enthusiasm and repeated applause were reported.\textsuperscript{17} The subjects taught were to be Maths, Geometry, Chemistry, Physics, Natural History, Agriculture, Literature, The Analysis of the [human] Understanding, Morals, The Art of Speaking, Geography, and Political Economics. The idea was that each lesson would be followed at a distance of a few days by a debate; in the lesson the professor alone would speak, but in the debate, the pupils would be allowed to intervene. The lecturers were not allowed to read out their work but had to speak it, supposedly improvising. Stenographers would take down what was said, and present proofs of the lessons to the lecturers three days later, which the lecturers would have three hours to correct, and which would then be printed and distributed to the students, who would be able to use them to prepare for the debates. The debates were also taken down by the stenographers, and given to the lecturers to correct—this time they had three weeks to do it. The student speakers however were not given proofs, and were unable to participate in the corrections, as at least one of them bitterly complained.\textsuperscript{18} In fact the debates stopped occurring relatively quickly—around the end of the month of Ventôse (that is, 20 March 1795).\textsuperscript{19} After increasing discussion about the École normale and its functioning, some of which was also to do with the practical living conditions of the students and the sheer expense of it all, the École normale was closed down on 30 Floréal an IV (19 May 1795), with most of the lessons still incomplete.\textsuperscript{20} The stenographed corrected versions of lessons and debates would be publicly published, as it were, only a few months later, in the autumn of 1795 (l’an IV de la République), and dispatched to all the students in their home districts.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} This is Louis de St Martin, quoted by Stéphane Baciocchi and Julia in ‘Un hiver à Paris’, in \textit{L’École normale de l’an III}, pp. 307–70 (p. 317).
The school had been a mixed success. It was supposed to have been only four months long, as indeed it was, but it had started late and none of the lessons were completed. Whether it would repeat on a yearly basis had not been addressed. But, in any case, it was supposed to operate rapidly and efficiently, and it was relatively obvious that this had not happened.

The material organisation had been patchy, and the concrete conditions appalling, for both organisational and natural reasons. Students had arrived by the end of Frimaire (20 December) as they had been ordered to, but lessons did not start until a month later, whereas the modest allowances and travel expenses promised to the students by the Convention were not forthcoming until the lessons actually started. No accommodation had been provided for the students, of whom there were between 1500–1600, and the venue for lessons, the amphitheatre or lecture hall of the Muséum d’histoire naturelle, could only accommodate about half of them. It was also one of the coldest winters of the century and the Seine froze over so no supplies of wood or food could get into the city, which made conditions even worse. There were therefore 1,500 disgruntled students knocking about Paris, and there was some anxiety about the possibility of unrest. Once the lessons actually started, they still did not follow the advertised rota: some of the professors did not finish their lessons (Garat was one), some did not come at all (André Thouin, supposed to teach Agriculture, stayed in Belgium with the French army; Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, due to teach ‘Morale’, came late), and some were simply inaudible. Despite the main mission of the École normale being to train teachers so as to facilitate the rapid onward transmission of all this knowledge, few of the lessons addressed the actual mechanics of teaching. One of the principal pillars of this particular lecture format was that they would be taken down by stenographers who would then write them up, and they had to be printed and distributed to the students in time for them to prepare for the planned follow-up debates.

The whole project was disbanded and not repeated again, as it had initially been supposed to, see the Projet du comité d’instruction publique, 1er Prarial an II, 20 May 1794, article 13, in L’École normale de l’an III: une institution révolutionnaire et ses élèves (2). Textes fondateurs, pétitions, correspondances et autres documents (janvier-mai 1795), ed. by Julia, p. 41.

Yet the stenographers never managed to turn the lectures round in time and, subject to the same appalling conditions as everyone else, became ill and went off sick. Some of the debates became heated and politically contentious—Garat for instance was accused of preaching materialism and atheism, as we will see, and he was not the only one.24 Some students started making representations to the Convention to be allowed home—many had families needing support.

Meanwhile, the École normale—which was originally a Jacobin initiative from before Robespierre’s fall—came under the suspicion because of it. The Assemblée des quatre sections réunies d’Auxerre officially wrote to the Convention on 30 Ventôse (20 March 1795) to ask for an ‘épuration générale de l’École normale’ [general purification of the École normale] whose élèves, they say, were chosen under Robespierre.25

None of this made the operation of the École normale easy, and indeed it never ran smoothly. It did not behave as it was conceived of behaving, that is, rapidly, efficiently, without loss of substance or speed in the transmission.

Interestingly, it was the speed and extent of the ambition that one deputy honed in on in the debate of 27 April 1795 about whether to

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24 Stéphane Baciocchi and Dominique Julia give details of these accusations in their article ‘La Dissolution de l’école’: Antoine-Alexandre Barbier ‘est formellement accusé par le Conseil général de la commune d’avoir “comme Chaumette prêché l’athéisme et d’en avoir fait une profession de foi publique”’ [is formally accused by the General Council of the commune of having ‘like Chaumette preached atheism and of having made a public avowal of his faith in it’]; Pierre Fontanier was denounced on 2 Germinal (22 March 1795) for atheism along with ‘les commissaires qui, pour convertir le peuple à la raison, lui prêchaient l’athéisme en style révolutionnaire’ [the commissioners who, in order to convert the people to reason, preached atheism in the revolutionary style]; Joseph Fourier (one of the élèves who in fact teaches maths to the other élèves) wrote to his friend Bonnard on 28 Ventôse an III (18 March 1795): ‘J’entends toutes sortes de contes à ce sujet. Je n’ajouterai jamais foi à de pareilles sottises, et ce qui rend tout ceci incroyable encore, c’est qu’on me présente, dit-on, comme un dilapidateur et un ivrogne’ [I am hearing all sorts of stories on this topic. I will never believe in such nonsense, and what makes it even more unbelievable is that apparently I am being presented as a spendthrift and drunkard] (‘La Dissolution de l’école’, pp. 431, 431, 433 respectively). On Fontanier, see also http://lakanal-1795.huma-num.fr/wiki/Fontanier_Pierre from the Prosopographie des élèves nommés à l’école normale de l’an III, ed. by Stéphane Baciocchi and Dominique Julia, http://lakanal-1795.huma-num.fr/wiki/Présentation.

close down the École normale or not. This is what Pierre-Marie-Augustin Guyomar, député (elected representative) des Côtes-du-Nord and cloth merchant from Guingamp, said:

Lorsque l’École normale fut établie, la manie des anciens gouvernants régnait encore ; on croyait alors qu’on pouvait faire des savants en quatre mois ; on voulait révolutionner jusqu’à la science [...]. J’observerai que vouloir des cultivateurs faire des savants, c’est une brillante chimère ; pourvu qu’ils sachent lire, écrire et compter, c’est tout ce qui leur est nécessaire.26

When the École normale was set up, the mania of the old rulers still held sway; it was then thought that it was possible to make scholars in four months; they wanted to revolutionise everything, even knowledge [...] In my view, to want to make scholars out of farmers is a brilliant chimera; as long as they can read, write, and count, that’s all they need.

In ‘manie des anciens gouvernants’ we recognise of course a criticism of the Jacobins, now presented as obsessives and subject to mania. The speed is presented as ridiculous, as is the aim we heard positively presented by Lindet in his report to the convention on 20 Sept 1794, only seven months earlier (and subsequent to the fall of the Jacobin régime), that is, to imitate the inhabitants of the Swiss canton of Valais, who read and are interested in their fields and in arts and sciences. Lindet’s aim had been to create an equality that was also an aspiration. Guyomar’s restatement of the needs of farmers is a back-to-basics sort of notion, and makes something as complex and ambitious as the École normale in its 1795 incarnation appear broadly redundant, even a sort of perversion, a monster of mixed parts, like the mythical chimera.

Garat’s Lectures on the Analysis of Human Understanding

Garat is right in the middle of all this. His role in orientating the ambition of the school was decisive: he wanted the school no longer

26 Guyomar, as relayed by the Journal de France no. 942, 8 Floréal an III (27 April 1795), in Une institution et ses élèves (2): Textes fondateurs, ed. by Julia, Appendix 3 (Les débats à la Convention), p. 67; also quoted in Baciocchi and Julia, ‘La Dissolution de l’école’, p. 445.
simply to train teachers but to be ‘la première École du monde’ [the first School in the world].\textsuperscript{27} He chose the subjects and put forward lecturers with whom he had long-standing intellectual affinities, as Julia puts it.\textsuperscript{28} He also tried to get Cabanis to join them (he declined on health grounds).\textsuperscript{29} And as mentioned, once Bonnet’s hoped-for contribution was no longer an option, and Garat had begun to occupy the conceptual space initially (or supposedly) intended for the Genevan naturalist, he gave his own lectures on the Analysis of the Understanding centre stage, presenting their analysis of analysis as the starting point and touchstone of everything else, as we will see.

Why would the Analysis of the Understanding come before all other subjects and be presented as the foundation of all? In common-sense terms, because once one learns to think and learns to learn, then one can learn anything. Thus, Garat envisages his pupils going out to teach learning in general, forming efficient clear minds. This aim is, in his words, perfectly specific: ‘il n’y a qu’une seule manière de bien penser’ [there is only one way of thinking properly], and is the foundation ‘de tout ce qu’il y a de plus grand et de plus réel dans les espérances conçues pour le perfectionnement de l’esprit humain et pour l’amélioration universelle des destinées humaines’ [of everything that is grandest and most real in the hopes conceived for the perfecting of the human mind and the universal improvement of human destinies].\textsuperscript{30} We see the aims, values, and claims of the Republican government in this sentence. In any case, to discover this single manner of thinking well or, in alternative terms, of directing the mind (‘l’esprit’), there is ‘un seul moyen’ [a single means] which is ‘de le bien connaître, de le suivre pas à pas dans tout ce qui lui arrive et dans tout ce qu’il fait, depuis les sensations qui lui sont communes avec les animaux, jusqu’aux conceptions les plus compliquées de la plus vaste intelligence’ [to know it well, to follow it step by step in everything that happens to it and everything it does, from


\textsuperscript{28} Julia, ‘La Mise en œuvre du décret du 9 brumaire: les mesures préparatoires’, p. 132.

\textsuperscript{29} Julia, ‘La Mise en œuvre du décret du 9 brumaire: les mesures préparatoires’, p. 152, n. 40 (from the same letter of 15 Nivôse to Lakanal, see note 27).

the sensations it shares with animals all the way to the most complicated conceptions of the greatest intelligence].

As this term ‘sensations’ immediately tells us, Garat’s programme is to teach the theory of sense-based knowledge with which we engaged briefly in Chapter 3; whether in doing this he also addresses how to teach learning is a moot point. However, he describes the processes by which a sensation becomes an idea and can then be compared to another sensation-based idea; from comparison we come to judgement, and connectedly to memory and imagination. He also talks about how language is a part of this process. In doing so, Garat ‘adopte un sensualisme dans la continuité de Diderot’ [adopts a sort of sensationalism following on from Diderot], as Béatrice Didier summarily puts it in her introduction to Garat’s lectures. But Didier might easily also have said Buffon or Condillac or Bonnet or any number of other adherents of sensationist empiricism. Condillac and Bonnet indeed are often mentioned by Garat; Diderot never. The aim of these lectures is, declares Garat, no less than to establish ‘une science toute nouvelle, qui ne remonte pas plus haut que Bacon’ [a completely new science, which goes no further back than Bacon], and the first thing he addresses therefore is the history of this new science.

Eulogy-like, his ‘Première leçon’ runs through Francis Bacon, John Locke, Thomas Sydenham (1624–89, English physician), Bonnet and Condillac, with glancing references to César Chesneau Dumarsais, Isaac Newton, Galileo, and Johannes Kepler. We note in passing the preponderance on this list of

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34 Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, pp. 71–73 (Bacon); pp. 73–74 (Locke); p. 74 (Sydenham, Bonnet); pp. 74–75 (Condillac); p. 75 (Dumarsais); pp. 72–73 (Newton), p. 75 (Galileo, Kepler). His ‘Seconde leçon’ will range beyond these references, bringing in classical authorities Plato, Virgil and Horace, and from ‘recent’ European thought, Michel de Montaigne, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and altogether in a clump, ‘les Lavoisier, les Berthollet et les Laplace’ (p. 83): of all these, only Rousseau is more than a passing reference (p. 86). Garat will deploy his pluralising trope—‘les Lavoisier’ etc, i.e. people like Lavoisier—again, see below. Jean-Luc Chappey looks...
seventeenth-century rather than recent luminaries, and the presence of only two Frenchmen, Condillac and Dumarsais.

His conviction that human understanding or reason is sense-based leads logically to a second conviction, which is that in order to understand thought, we need to understand sensation. The connections between thought and sensation, and beyond them, the capacities of a given human being, are emphasised from the very beginning of his lectures.

Tout ce que fait l’homme, tout ce qu’il veut, et même, à beaucoup d’égards, tout ce qu’il peut, dépend, en dernière analyse, de la manière dont il sent les choses, dont il les voit, dont il en raisonne, dont il les entend, en quelque sorte.\(^{35}\)

Everything man does, everything he wants, and often, in many respects, everything he is capable of, depends, in the final analysis, on how he feels things, how he sees them, what he thinks about them, how he makes sense of them, in some way.

Thus, it is not surprising to discover in his second lecture a particular push to improve, or in his term ‘perfectionner’ [to perfect], the functioning of our senses. He does not, however, draw attention to this in the plan (also in the second lecture) he outlines, whereby what he identifies as ‘sections’ (rather than separate lectures) will address firstly, the senses, sensations, and the origin of understanding (p. 77); secondly, the faculties of the human understanding (his italics, p. 80); thirdly, the theory of ideas of all sorts (p. 83); fourthly, the immediate and intimate way in which the theory of language or languages is connected to the theory of ideas (p. 86); and fifthly, method, and how ‘bien sentir, bien se servir de ses facultés, bien former ses idées, bien parler […] ne sont qu’une seule et même chose’ [to sense well, to be able to use one’s faculties well, to form one’s ideas well, to speak well […] are one and the same thing] (his italics, p. 89). We have already seen his rhetorical tendency to focus

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\(^{35}\) Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 65 (Programme).
on a single way of thinking properly and a single way of directing the mind, and here we see him present the proper ways to feel, use one’s faculties, form ideas, and speak, as being one single thing. So, he has a plan, and it seems coherent, emphatically so. This, however, is all we have, apart from the two debates, in which he mainly repeats what he had already said in the lectures, and also defends himself against various accusations levelled at him, one by an anonymous letter, and the other by one of his students, the theosophist Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803), of connections to either atheism or materialism.\(^{36}\) (We will turn to these accusations in due course.) This is all we have because the lecture transcriptions that we do have are incomplete, and there are no transcriptions at all for lessons we know from other sources that he did give.\(^{37}\) Furthermore, he did not complete his lecture course.\(^{38}\)

However, the material we do have is cause for interest in itself. As will already be evident, Condillac’s influence is overt, and it was noticed by the students.\(^{39}\) In this context, the word ‘analyse’ is almost

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36 The ‘Programme’ and ‘Première leçon’ were given on 11 Pluviôse an III (30 January 1795). The ‘Seconde leçon’ was given on 23 Pluviôse (11 February). The ‘premier débat’ and ‘second débat’ took place on 29 Pluviôse (17 February) and 9 Ventôse (27 February) respectively. For an outline of the content of Garat’s lectures and debates, see ‘Chronologie et résumés des leçons et des débats’, Léçons d’analyse de l’entendement, in L’École normale de l’an III, vol. 4, pp. 63–64.

37 The final part of the second lecture is missing (p. 63). A lecture from 19 Pluviôse an III (7 February 1795) is missing from the record: in the second debate (9 Ventôse/27 February) Garat reads out a letter from Saint-Martin referring to ‘la conférence du 19 pluviôse’ (p. 100), and another student, Duhamel, also mentions it in his remarks in the same debate (p. 113). There are eyebrow-raised reviews in the press of a lecture he supposedly gave on 4 Ventôse (22 February) which appears to have discussed a theory of a sixth sense connected to love (the press accounts focus with fascinated sarcasm on a detail about a heightened sense of smell connected to sex): see le Courrier universel du citoyen Husson (9 Ventôse/27 February), p. 2, and also the Courrier universel ou l’Écho de Paris, des départements et de l’étranger (30 Floréal an III/19 May 1795), quoted by Julia, ‘Le Déroulement des leçons’, p. 356. Julia also refers to a memoir by Charles-Marie de Salaberry which mentions this lecture, Mon voyage au Mont d’Or (1802). Finally, Paul Dupuy gives two further dates for missing transcriptions of lectures from the 18 and 24 Ventôse (8 and 14 March respectively); they are mentioned in the Feuille de la République (Paul Dupuy, L’École normale de l’an III, in Le Centenaire de l’École normale, édition du Bicentenaire [1895] (Paris: Presses de l’École normale supérieure, 1994), pp. 1–200 (p. 170), https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editionsulm.1538.

38 We don’t know why this is, but there are at least two plausible explanations, which we discuss below.

39 L’élève Fournier wrote a letter describing Garat, specifically mentioning his enthusiastic admiration for Condillac (and Bacon and Locke), see Jean-Robert
automatically associated with Condillac; ‘Condilliacan analysis’ is a well-known and influential mode of analysis with a wide range of applications in ‘Enlightenment’ thought.\(^{40}\) His posthumously published work, *La Logique* (1780) seems particularly pertinent in connection to Garat’s lectures—its full title is *La Logique ou les premiers développemens de l’art de penser*, and the relevance to Garat is not hard to see.\(^{41}\) Divided into two parts, it first focuses on ‘Comment la nature même nous enseigne l’analyse’ [How nature itself teaches us analysis], containing chapters such as ‘Que l’analyse est l’une méthode pour acquérir des connoissances’ [How analysis is the only method to acquire any knowledge] (Chapter 2), ‘Que l’analyse fait les esprits justes’ [How analysis produces accurate minds] (Chapter 3), ‘Analyse des facultés de l’âme’ [Analysis of the faculties of the soul] (Chapter 7).\(^{42}\) The second part is entitled ‘L’analyse considérée dans ses moyens et dans ses effets, ou l’art de raisonner réduit à une langue bien faite’ [Analysis considered in its means and effects, or the art of reasoning reduced to well-made language].\(^{43}\) Garat is not only influenced by Condillac, he is clearly modelling his lectures on *La Logique*, already a well-known


\(^{42}\) Condillac, ‘La logique’, pp. 374, 376, and 384, respectively.

\(^{43}\) Condillac, ‘La logique’, p. 393. There are many passages on reforming and perfecting language; see for example ‘La logique’, II.iii–iv, pp. 399–400.
text and claimed repeatedly by Antoine Lavoisier as his inspiration in reforming chemical nomenclature and language in the ‘Discours préliminaire’ of his seminal *Traité élémentaire de chimie* (1789). The famous Condillac is Garat’s pre-eminent authority, referred to in the course of the lectures alone eight times, ahead of Locke with seven mentions and Bacon with six. Yet the direction Garat takes his lectures in, insofar as we have them, is not quite the same. Instead of this specific Condillacian focus on perfecting language, Garat looks at perfecting the senses, and claims total novelty in even asking whether it can be done. In the conclusion to this second lecture, he makes sure to anchor this question in Condillacian technique, emphasising that all this will be done ‘analytiquement’. And yet the claim for a completely new area, however Condillacian, has been made.

Nor are all of the references to Condillac entirely eulogizing. Garat wonders whether ‘la sécheresse de ses narrations dépourvues de toute imagination et de toute beauté de style’ [the dryness of his accounts devoid of any imagination or stylistic beauty] can be forgiven. On the faculty of imagination, he chastises his eminent forebears—whom he lumps together—for insufficiently separating out the operations of memory, judgement and reason from imagination:

les Locke même, et les Condillac, n’ont pu éviter le vague de certaines idées ; c’est pour avoir négligé de faire ces distinctions qu’on a eu, sur l’imagination, des opinions si opposées ; qu’on a regardé cette faculté

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45 ‘Il n’y a pas lieu de s’étonner que de pareilles questions n’aient pas été faites dans les siècles où l’on était persuadé que nos connaissances n’étaient point originaires de nos sensations; mais il y a lieu à s’étonner que depuis un siècle que cette vérité a été mise dans un si grand jour, on n’ait pas même songé à les faire’ (*Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, Seconde leçon, p. 79, analysed and translated below).
46 ‘Nous serons assurés à l’avance qu’il n’existe et ne peut exister d’autre moyen de bien voir et de bien observer, de bien penser et de bien s’énoncer, que de s’énoncer, de penser, d’observer et de voir analytiquement [...]’ [We can be sure in advance that there neither exists or could exist any other way of seeing well and observing well, of thinking well and speaking well, than of speaking, thinking, observing, and seeing with the analytic method] (*Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, Seconde leçon, p. 89).
brillante de l’entendement, tantôt comme la folle de la maison, tantôt comme la divinité [...].

Even the Lockes and the Condillacs were unable to avoid vagueness in certain ideas; it’s because these careful distinctions were not made that there have been such opposing views about the imagination, and that this brilliant faculty of the understanding has sometimes been regarded as the resident madwoman of the house, and sometimes as a goddess [...]

Interestingly, in the Mémoires historiques et philosophiques, Jacques-André Naigeon would also accuse Locke and Condillac of vagueness on the ‘operations de l’entendement humain’, and he attributes the accusation to Diderot. On the question of ‘moral ideas’, Garat again marks a separation between Condillac and his own, more embodied and experience-based, view.

Condillac a pensé que nous formons les idées physiques sur des modèles que nous présente la nature, et les idées morales sans modèles. Je ne crois pas cette opinion de Condillac très exacte ; je la soumettrai à votre examen : vous jugerez si nos idées morales, mémoire les notions sur les vices et les vertus, n’ont pas leur modèle dans nos diverses actions et dans leurs effets, comme les idées physiques ont leur modèle dans les objets extérieurs qui frappent nos sens.

Condillac thought that we form our physical ideas according to the models which nature gives us, and our moral ideas without models. I do not believe that this opinion of Condillac’s is quite right; I will set it out for your consideration, and you will judge whether our moral ideas, that is to say, our notions of the vices and virtues, do not have their own model in our different actions and their effects, as the physical ideas have their model in the external objects which strike our senses.

So Condillac is an important presence, but Garat does not treat his work as if he were a strict disciple. He credits it, gestures to it, and diverges from it. There is no reason to be automatically suspicious of this sort of academic strategy; do we not all use and acknowledge the work of those who have come before us, while seeking to carve out a small niche for our own contribution? And yet there is some reason to be

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48 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 81 (Seconde leçon, original italics).
50 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 84 (Seconde leçon, original italics).
suspicious in this particular case, because the specific aspects on which Garat diverges from Condillac are ones which are already present in Diderot’s *Éléments de physiologie*. Diderot recommends improving the senses, and wonders why we do not, \(^{51}\) he considers imagination to be a crucial tool of the mind, \(^{52}\) while his chapter on the passions looks consistently and uniquely at passion and action as determined by nature. \(^{53}\) These are striking parallels: could they be coincidental? Or—one step up—do they demonstrate a general awareness of Diderot’s thought in this area, as imbibed through discussion at Mme Helvétius’s salon d’Auteuil? Or, a further step up, do Garat’s lectures suggest that he must have been aware of the *Éléments de physiologie* specifically? A direct comparison of the texts will quickly reveal whether there is anything in the suggestion that Garat may have been aware of or even using the *Éléments de physiologie*.

The following passages, all drawn from the second lecture of 23 Pluviôse (11 February), fill out the areas of possible proximity mentioned above, that is, broadly, sensation and the senses, their variation and improvability (‘perfectionnement’); the imagination and its role in the mind; and finally, passions and natural determinism. The order is not quite the same as Garat presents them in, as I have chosen to follow the normal logical sequencing from simple to complex that all these works on the human understanding follow; that Garat does not quite do the same thing here is partly because he is announcing what he will do, not systematically doing it (which as we know he never does get round to doing, for reasons we will address in due course). However, they all come from the same dense few pages (pp. 79–82). Garat’s statement comes first, and, for ease of comparison, is followed immediately by the closest equivalent from the *Éléments de physiologie*. My own commentary will be limited to drawing out their similarity or divergence.

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52 DPV 475/PQ 303/MT 290.

a. The Variation of Sensations

[Garat] La sensibilité elle-même [...] parait différer d’un homme à un homme, et dans le même homme, d’un instant à un autre instant.  

Sensibility itself [...] appears to differ from one man to the next, and within the same man, from one moment to the next.

[Diderot] La variété des sensations s’explique, ce me semble, assez bien par la variété des manières dont un même organe peut être affecté [...].  

De là ce qui est peine dans un instant, devient plaisir dans un autre ; de là ce qui est plaisir pour moi, est peine pour vous [...].

The variety of sensations can be quite well explained, it seems to me, by the variety of ways in which a single organ can be affected [...].

Hence what is pain one moment becomes pleasure the next; hence what is pleasure for me is pain for you [...].

For Garat, sensibility differs from one man to the next, and within one man from one instant to the next. For Diderot, the variety of sensations can be explained, he thinks, by considering the many ways in which the same organ can be affected, and thus what is pain one moment is pleasure the next, and what is pleasure for me is pain for you. Garat expresses the same opinion as Diderot, although Diderot has a more thinking-aloud quality. He is also more physiological, mentioning organs, and he specifies pain and pleasure and who is feeling them (you and me), where Garat is more abstract and detached.

b. Misleading Senses; Senses Which Correct Each Other

[Garat] Lorsqu’un de nos sens est prêt à nous tromper, tous les autres sont prêts à nous avertir de sa supercherie.

When one of our senses is poised to deceive us, all the others are poised to warn us of its deception.

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54 Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, p. 80 (Seconde leçon).
55 DPV 459/PQ 285/MT 275.
56 DPV 460/PQ 285/MT 275.
57 An organ, as we may remember from Chapter 4, is a general physiological term for any body part, including the sensory organs.
[Diderot] Combien l’organe de l’œil serait trompeur, si son jugement n’était pas sans cesse rectifié par le toucher.59

What a deceiver the organ of the eye would be if its judgement were not constantly rectified by the touch.

Garat explains that when one sense is about to mislead us, the others all jump in to alert us to its trickery. Diderot remarks on how misleading the eye would be if its views were not ceaselessly corrected by the sense of touch. Where Garat gives one (unnamed) sense being corrected by all the others, Diderot avoids the abstracts, not even generalising the sense of sight but specifically focusing on the ‘organ of the eye’ being corrected by touch. They both use the word ‘tromper’ in different forms. In the following example, which considers blindness in connection to the other senses, Garat also brings together sight and touch:

[Garat] Vous savez, et vous y pensez peut-être avant que je vous en parle, vous savez quelle étendue, quelle finesse, quelle sagacité presque miraculeuse, l’organe du tact acquiert dans les infortunés que la nature ou des accidens ont privés de l’organe de la vue.60

You know, and perhaps you are thinking about it before I mention it to you, you know what range, what subtlety, what almost miraculous discernment, the organ of touch acquires in those unfortunate people whom nature or accident have deprived of the organ of sight.

[Diderot] Il est vrai que quelquefois le vice naturel d’un organe se répare par l’exercice plus fréquent d’un autre. Si l’aveugle a perdu la sensation des formes et de tous les sentiments qui en émanent, il est bien plus sensible aux cris […].61

It is true that sometimes the natural defect of an organ can be compensated by the more frequent exercise of another. If the blind man has lost the sensation of shapes and all the feelings that arise from them, he will nonetheless be much more sensitive to different calls.

Garat evokes the extraordinary levels of subtle information the sense of touch can provide a blind person with; he suggests his audience is already thinking of the example before he even mentions it. This tells

59 DPV 457/PQ 282/MT 273.
60 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 79 (Seconde leçon).
61 DPV 508/PQ 347/MT 321.
us how widespread familiarity with this sort of sensationist thinking was during this period, after a century of print discussion about it. Diderot’s well-known *Lettre sur les aveugles* (1749), is presumably an automatic reference point for any such discussions, and it is interesting to see how Garat refers to unspoken associations that his audience already have with what he is saying, ones that must here include the otherwise unmentioned Diderot. Is it an overly suspicious reading to suggest that Garat’s reference to the listeners’ thoughts is a way of avoiding mentioning Diderot’s name? Whether or not it is a conscious strategy of simultaneous avoidance and evocation, he certainly does not mention Diderot. The text from the *Éléments de physiologie* is similar if not identical to Garat’s. Diderot states—in general mode—that it is true that a fault in one organ is often compensated for by using another one more frequently. He turns to the experience of a blind person who loses the sensation of shapes and connected feelings, but who becomes much more sensitive to calls or shouts.

c. Perfecting the Senses, in Particular, the Sense of Touch

[Garat] Nos sens qui sont aussi des organes de notre corps, et les plus délicats de tous, ne pourroient-ils pas de même par des exercices bien appropriés à ce but, acquérir plus de finesse, plus d’énergie, plus d’étendue?64

Could our senses, also organs of our body and the most delicate of all, not also by means of carefully tailored exercises gain greater precision, more energy and range?

[Diderot] Nous exerçons nos sens comme la nature nous les a donnés et que les besoins et les circonstanc s l’exigent : mais nous ne les perfectionnons pas : nous ne nous apprenons pas à voir, à flairer, à sentir, à écouter, à moins que notre profession ne nous y force.65

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62 See above, Chapter 3, section ‘Knowledge Derived from the Senses’.
63 Garat does mention Diderot’s name once, in the first debate, as one of those, along with Rousseau and Claude Adrien Helvétius (Diderot comes last), in whose works ‘la métaphysique’ has been identified and criticised. This in itself is an odd claim. (Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, p. 95 (Premier débat)).
64 Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, p. 79 (Seconde leçon).
We exercise our senses as nature gave them to us and as need and circumstance dictate, but we do not perfect them; we do not teach ourselves to see, to smell, to feel, to hear, unless our profession forces us to.

Garat considers that sensory organs are parts of our body, and can therefore, like other parts of the body, be improved by means of carefully-crafted exercises. They would thereby acquire more precision, force, and reach. Diderot takes it from the other end; he states that we use our senses as nature has given them to us and as need and circumstance require but we do not work on them to make them better; we do not teach ourselves to see, scent, feel, or listen unless our profession forces us to. This explicit criticism constitutes an implicit recommendation, suggesting that we should do. In the next extracts, Garat asks whether it would be possible to create an art of seeing or an art of touching; Diderot imagines what a perfected art of touching would be able to do.

[Garat] Est-il possible de créer un art de voir, qui apprendrait à voir plus rapidement et à de plus grandes distances, un plus grand nombre d’objets à-la-fois sous toutes leurs formes et avec les nuances les plus légères de leurs couleurs ? Est-il possible de créer un art de toucher qui apprendrait à distinguer et à démêler rapidement sur la surface des corps, des formes, des contours, des polis et des aspérités que nous ne pouvons pas même soupçonner, parce que nous ne nous sommes pas exercés à les démêler par nos sensations, et à les distinguer par des noms ?

Is it possible to create an art of seeing, which would teach us to see a greater number of objects faster and at greater distances, and also in all the detail of their shapes and the slightest tones of their coloring? Is it possible to create an art of touch which would teach us to distinguish and rapidly tell apart the shapes, contours, the smoothness and roughness of the surfaces of bodies to an extent that we cannot even suspect at the moment because we are not practiced in using our sensations to tell them apart, and we have no names for these qualities?

[Diderot] Je conçois un toucher si exquis qu’il suppléerait aux quatre autres sens. Il serait diversement affecté selon les odeurs, les saveurs, les formes et les couleurs.

I conceive of a touch so exquisite that it would replace the four other senses. It would be differently affected by different smells, tastes, shapes and colours.

66 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 79 (Seconde leçon).
67 DPV 448/PQ 273/MT 265.
Garat asks whether it is possible to create an art of seeing which would teach us to see a greater number of objects in greater precision both of colour and shape, and to do this quicker and at greater distances. He wonders whether it is possible to create an art of touch which would make it possible for someone to perceive and distinguish subtleties of shape, outline, and surface that are currently unimaginable, because we have no practice in differentiating these sorts of sensation, and we do not have any words to describe them. Diderot is briefer and less exhortatory. He simply, ecstatically, and slightly surreally imagines a sense of touch that would be so exquisite it would replace the other four senses, and would be differently affected by smell, flavour, shape, and colour.

Interestingly, Garat follows this passage with an exclamation of amazement that no one before has thought to consider how to improve or extend sensory perception:

Il n’y a pas lieu de s’étonner que de pareilles questions n’aient pas été faites dans les siècles où l’on était persuadé que nos connaissances n’étaient point originaires de nos sensations; mais il y a lieu à s’étonner que depuis un siècle que cette vérité a été mise dans un si grand jour, on n’ait pas même songé à les faire.  

There’s no reason to be surprised that such questions were not raised in those centuries when people were persuaded that our knowledge did not originate with our sensations; but there is reason to be surprised that in the century since this truth has been made so illuminatingly clear, no one has even thought to ask them.

Given that the Éléments de physiologie does draw attention to exactly this area, one is almost inclined to think this is a pointed remark.

d. Perfecting the Senses: The Eyesight of the Savage Who Sees a Ship Far Out at Sea


68 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 79 (Seconde leçon).
69 Ibid.
Travellers tell us that from the top of the rocks of the Cape of Good Hope, Hottentots can see ships out in the vastness of the sea with their bare eyes, ships which Europeans are scarcely able to see with a telescope.

[Diderot] Un mot sur les formes vagues et indécises pour l’œil. Par exemple, je ne vois en mer qu’un point nébuleux qui ne me dit rien, mais ce point nébuleux est un vaisseau pour celui qui l’a souvent observé et peut-être un vaisseau tres distinct. Comment cela s’est-il fait ? D’abord, ce n’était pour le sauvage, comme pour moi, qu’un point nébuleux.70

A word on shapes which are vague and unclear to the eye. For example, I can’t see out at sea anything but a nebulous and meaningless blob, but that nebulous blob is a ship for someone who’s often seen it, and perhaps even a very distinct ship. How has that happened? Initially it was nothing for the savage but a nebulous blob, just as it is for me.

Garat’s comparison of the ‘primitive’ man who can see better than a European is presented via the medium of travellers’ anecdotes. He tells of the ‘Hottentot’, who, looking out at sea from the cliffs of the Cape of Good Hope, see ships that Europeans can barely see even with the aid of a telescope. Diderot’s is more personal. He compares his own vision, which tells him there is a blob out at sea, to that of someone who is used to looking far out at sea, a person who is subsequently described as a savage; this person sees not a blob but a precisely-delineated ship. An earlier passage in the Éléments de physiologie, in the section on sight, had already clarified the comparison envisaged, i.e. that practice makes perfect, and that the ‘savage’ provides the exemplary model.

[Diderot] Tel qui ne voit pas comme le sauvage, verrait comme lui, si son œil était exercé.71

Someone who can’t see as well as a savage would be able to if he practiced looking more.

Garat takes the idea of practising and perfecting the range of one’s senses in some rather concrete directions. He suggests that the way in

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70 DPV 476/PQ 304–05/MT 291. Terada supplies Diderot’s probable source in Jean-Paul Marat’s De l’homme, MT 475, n. iii. It is of course possible that Garat also draws on Marat irrespective of whether or not he also draws on Diderot. My argument that he is using the Éléments de physiologie has to be based on the sheer accumulation of similarities rather than on any single passage.

71 DPV 457/PQ 282/MT 273.
which Galileo’s telescope successfully extended the normal boundaries of human vision should be a model for what can be achieved without any enabling instrument, and simply by dint of greater skill:

Garat a prodigieusement étendu, par le secours d’un instrument [le télescope], la portée de l’organe de la vue; mais ne peut-il pas exister pour tous les organes de tous nos sens des moyens d’étendre leur sphère sans le secours d’aucun instrument, et seulement par une manière plus heureuse ou plus habile de s’en servir?\footnote{Garat, \textit{Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement}, p. 79 (Seconde leçon).}

Galileo hugely extended the reach of the organ of sight with the help of an instrument [the telescope], but are there no means by which we might extend the sphere of all our sensory organs without recourse to an instrument, and simply by learning a better or more skilful way of using them?

There is no follow-up here to how this might be achieved, just this comparison with an instrument, and then a suggestion that somehow such extensions should be possible; perhaps ‘extension’ is the wrong term, simply a transposed metaphor deriving from the image of the telescope, and that what we should really call it is ‘internalisation’?\footnote{Diderot’s witness on matters of blindness, the ‘aveugle-né du Puiseaux’ [man born-blind of Puiseaux], makes some striking remarks about telescopes, and Garat may have them in mind here. However, the ‘aveugle-né du Puiseaux’ does not want to have a telescope or sight at all; he’d rather have long arms. See Diderot, \textit{Lettre sur les aveugles: à l’usage de ceux qui voient}; \textit{Lettre sur les sourds et muets: à l’usage de ceux qui entendent et qui parlent}, ed. by Marian Hobson and Simon Harvey (Paris: GF Flammarion, 2000), pp. 33, 35; Tunstall, Kate E., \textit{Blindness and Enlightenment: An Essay, with a new translation of Diderot’s Letter on the Blind (1749) and a translation of La Mothe Le Vayer’s ‘Of a Man-Born-Blind’ (1653)} (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), pp. 173, 176. With thanks to François Pépin for this reminder.}

There is something curious here about how an external and mechanical tool, normally used to supplement natural sensory capacities, is here given as a model for what the senses could do by themselves if only they tried. Garat is suggesting that humans could internalise the functions of external tools. It is a rather bizarre application of the idea that the senses might be improvable, perfectible, and it does not seem clearly realisable in any way at all. A humbler way of increasing productivity is also offered; the cup of coffee:
[Garat] Une tasse de café ne donne pas du génie ; mais elle donne au génie le mouvement avec lequel il va produire et créer.74

A cup of coffee does not bestow genius, but it does bestow on the genius the impetus he needs to produce and create.

It does not bestow genius, but it propels a genius into movement so that he can start producing and creating; it gets a genius going. We find no such passages in the Éléments de physiologie about internalising or transposing a telescope-like capacity to other senses, or about drinking coffee.

e. Memory and Imagination

Memory, however, is something both Garat and Diderot consider to have been wrongly overlooked:

[Garat] La mémoire n’a pas toujours obtenu et n’obtient pas encore une grande considération parmi les philosophes.75

Memory has not always attracted much interest amongst philosophers, and it still doesn’t.

[Diderot] L’empire de la mémoire sur la raison n’a jamais été assez examiné.76

The power memory has over reason has never been sufficiently examined.

We have already quoted the passage in which Garat chastises writers such as ‘the Lockes and the Condillacs’ for being a bit vague about the imagination, ‘cette faculté brillante de l’entendement’ (p. 81). For Diderot, imagination is more important than memory; the first has the power to move and inspire, while the latter is simply a faithful copyist.

L’imagination est un coloriste, la mémoire est un copiste fidèle. L’imagination agite plus et l’orateur et l’auditeur que la mémoire.77

Imagination is a colourist, memory is a faithful copyist. The imagination stirs up both orator and listener more than memory does.

74 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 80 (Seconde leçon).
75 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 81 (Seconde leçon).
76 DPV 474/PQ 302/MT 289.
77 DPV 480/PQ 309/MT 295.
So there is a similar estimation of the importance of imagination for both. How do they define it?

[Garat] Qu’est-ce, en effet, Que l’imagination? c’est la faculté de se peindre les objets absents, comme s’ils étaient présents encore, avec tous leurs traits, toutes leurs formes, toutes leurs couleurs, avec toutes les circonstances de temps et de lieu qui les précèdent, les accompagnent et les suivent.\textsuperscript{78}

What, in fact, is imagination? It’s the capacity to paint absent objects to oneself as if they were still present, with all their features, all their forms, all their colours, all the circumstances of the time and place which came before them, went alongside them, and which followed them.

[Diderot] Faculté de se peindre les objets absents, comme s’ils étaient présents, d’emprunter des objets sensibles des images qui servent de comparaison, d’attacher à un mot abstrait un corps, voilà l’idée que j’ai de l’imagination.\textsuperscript{79}

The capacity to paint absent objects to oneself as if they were present, to borrow from perceptible objects images that serve for comparison, to attach a body to an abstract word, that is the idea I have of imagination.

Here, for the first time, we have a word-for-word echo. The definition that Diderot claims as his personal view (‘l’idée que j’ai de l’imagination’) is identically replicated in Garat: imagination is the ‘faculté de se peindre les objets absents, comme s’ils étaient présents’ [capacity to paint absent objects to oneself as if they were present]. Garat fills in his initial proposition by detailing the sorts of ways in which absent objects might be depicted as if they were present. Diderot sketches his in more gnomically: he talks about taking images from sensory objects so as to enable comparison, and of putting an abstract term together with a body (presumably so as to give it life? He does not say so). So the first part of the definition is identical, although the second diverges.

Is this evidence that Garat was using the Éléments de physiologie? One might counter the idea that here Garat really must be copying Diderot by saying that this definition sounds so simple it cannot be unique just to them; it must be a very common formulation. But where else do we find this potentially very common formulation? A wide search has not

\textsuperscript{78} Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 81 (Seconde leçon).
\textsuperscript{79} DPV 475/PQ 302/MT 290.
turned it up yet. Importantly, Condillac does not define imagination in this way, and although he does indeed use the counter-balancing notion of the absent or present object, he uses it to discuss how comparison works. Condillac’s definition of imagination is this: ‘les idées qu’on se fait sont des images qui n’ont de réalité que dans l’esprit ; et la réflexion qui fait ces images, prend le nom d’imagination’ [the ideas that one has are images with no reality other than in the mind; the reflection that these images produce takes the name of imagination]. What Diderot and Garat do, whether separately or together, briskly rewrites Condillac.

Immediately following Garat’s description of imagination, as quoted above, he is moved to exclaim:

[Garat] Qui ne voit qu’une pareille faculté, qui tient plus longtemps les objets sous vos yeux, vous donne le temps et les moyens de les contempler plus à loisir, de les considérer sous toutes leurs faces, pour en saisir tous les rapports ; de rapprocher les objets absents des objets présents et de les comparer, comme si tous étaient présents encore?

Who doesn’t see that such a capacity, which keeps objects before your eyes for longer, gives you the time and the means to contemplate them at greater leisure, to consider them from all different sides and capture all the relationships between them, to bring absent objects close to the objects which are present and to compare them as if they were all still there?

[Diderot] L’homme à imagination se promène, dans sa tête, comme un curieux dans un palais.

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80 Nor has Motoichi Terada found anything. He comments, about this chapter as a whole, that ‘Diderot rédige ce chapitre avec peu de sources explicites’ [Diderot writes this chapter with few explicit sources] (MT 290, n. 233).

81 In his paragraphs on comparison, Condillac writes this: ‘Un objet est présent ou absent. S’il est présent, l’attention est la sensation qu’il fait actuellement sur nous; s’il est absent, l’attention est le souvenir de la sensation qu’il a faite. C’est à ce souvenir que nous devons le pouvoir d’exercer la faculté de comparer des objets absents comme des objets présents. Nous traiterons bientôt de la mémoire’ [An object is present or absent. If it is present, the attention is the sensation that it makes on us at that moment; if it is absent, the attention is the memory of the sensation that it did make. It is to this memory that we owe the power of exercising the faculty of comparing objects that are absent in the same way as we compare objects that are present] (Condillac, ‘La logique’, I.vii, p. 385, just a few paragraphs above his definition of the imagination, see the following note).


83 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, pp. 81–82 (Seconde leçon).

84 DPV 475/PQ 303/MT 290.
The imaginative man walks about, in his head, like a curious person in a palace.

Garat’s rhetorical question addresses a ‘you’ who gets to contemplate objects at leisure; he ends with a repetition of the definition he had already given. Diderot’s imaginative man strolls around his head like a curious visitor in a palace. Their central image of the man who is either leisurely (Garat) or strolling (Diderot) contemplating the objects of his curiosity has a certain parallelism.

At this point, Garat begins to describe people (‘des hommes’) with intense levels of imagination. Imagination, sensibility, calculation, vision, and discovery go hand-in-hand. He draws a rousing picture of the genius, whose imagination is like an army scout and a military commander, or like the rays that precede sunrise, whose intuitions lead to the greatest discoveries. And this, he concludes, is what constitutes the great philosopher: someone whose reason is practically nothing but one huge imagination working according to strict rules.

L’imagination est l’attribut des hommes de la sensibilité la plus forte et la plus exquise : elle est cette sensibilité même ; et plus on sent, plus on a de moyens de voir, d’apprendre et de créer. L’observation et le calcul vérifient ; mais c’est l’imagination qui marche en avant pour découvrir ce qu’il faut soumettre au calcul et à l’observation. Elle est entre les facultés de l’entendement, ce que sont dans les armées, ces avant-gardes qui vont aux reconnaissances, qui devinent et voient en même-temps dans quelle forêt l’ennemi peut être caché, et les sommets dont il faut s’emparer pour tout voir et pour tout dominer. C’est à l’imagination qu’appartient ces pressentiments, qui sont comme ces jets de lumière qui précèdent le soleil, avant que son globe apparu sur l’horizon, ait dissipé les ténèbres. L’histoire des sciences en fait foi ; les découvertes les plus sublimes et les plus utiles au genre humain ont commencé par n’être que les soupçons de quelques hommes de génie ; et la raison des grands philosophes n’a été presque jamais qu’une imagination vaste, soumise à des règles exactes. En un mot quand on n’a que de l’imagination, et qu’on en a beaucoup, on est à-peu-près un fou ; quand on n’a que de la raison, on peut n’être qu’un homme assez commun ; quand on a une raison sévère et une imagination brillante, on est un homme de génie.85

Imagination is the attribute of men with the most powerful and exquisite sensibility: it is sensibility itself; and the more we feel, the more ways

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85 Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, p. 82 (Seconde leçon).
of seeing, learning, and creating we have. Observation and calculation verify, but it is the imagination which walks ahead to discover what needs to be calculated and observed. The relationship of the imagination to the faculties of the understanding is the same as that of the reconnoitring scouts to the army, simultaneously intuining and seeing which forest the army might be hiding in, which vantage points need to be seized in order to gain total overview and total sway. It’s to the imagination that these presentiments belong: they are like those rays of light that pierce through before the sun rises above the horizon and dispels the shadows. The history of knowledge shows this to be the case; those discoveries which are most sublime and useful to the human race started by being no more than the guesses of a few men of genius, and the reason of the great philosophers has almost never been other than a vast imagination subjected to exact rules. In a word, when one only has imagination, and a lot of it, one is almost mad; when one only has reason, one might only be a rather mediocre person, but when one possesses severe reason and a brilliant imagination, one is a man of genius.

On reading this, one is unavoidably reminded of the portrait Garat drew of Diderot in 1779, someone he described then Ile grand homme dont j’avais tant de fois admiré le génie’ [the great man whose genius I had so often admired]. Garat makes it really hard for us here to continue to maintain a sceptical attitude towards the notion that he may have been drawing on Diderot’s work. In the space of two paragraphs, he distances himself from those who are otherwise loudly trumpeted as the masters in this area, he gives a definition of the imagination which is word-for-word identical to Diderot’s which he then illustrates with the image of a person engaged in unhurried contemplation, an image we also find in Diderot, and finally, he launches into rapturous description of the genius’s imagination, their imagination being tantamount to an extremely fine sensibility, and whose intuitions are the discoveries of the future, which itself is strongly reminiscent of the intensely admiring portrait of Diderot he had published sixteen years earlier.

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Summarising the results of this comparison, we see that there are repeated points of similarity: Diderot talks about the variation of sensory perception within one person over time and from one person to the next; so does Garat. Diderot explains that a sense operating alone would make mistakes, but that the senses work together to correct each other’s misperception; so does Garat. Diderot talks about perfecting or improving the senses, and how professional expertise leads to much greater skill in the use of one sense or another; Garat talks about developing skills in each separate sense, and remarks on how extraordinary it is that no one has thought about this before. Diderot discusses this point with the aid of a comparison between the practised ‘savage’ and the unpractised and practically blind ‘European’; so does Garat. Diderot states that the question of memory has never been sufficiently considered; so does Garat. Diderot defines the imagination as the faculty of creating images of absent objects as if they were present; so does Garat. Some differences: Garat extends his thinking about how to improve sensory perception firstly by asking whether we cannot all internalise telescopes; Diderot does not (although they do feature in his *Lettre sur les aveugles*); Garat talks about the effect of coffee on speeding up the cogs of a genius (although coffee cannot actually create genius in the first place); Diderot does not. Garat includes a rhapsodic passage that culminates with a description of the ‘grand philosophe’ and the ‘homme de génie’ and the importance of their imaginative insights that is rather similar to what he had written about Diderot before. In none of this is there a single mention of Diderot’s name. Does this mean he is absent? On the contrary, I think he is present.

There seem to be simply too many parallels for this to be just a coincidence, or the coincidental use of the same sources by both Diderot and Garat. One or two, maybe. But not at this density and level of similarity. I conclude therefore that Garat is demonstrating not only a general awareness of Diderot’s thought but a detailed awareness of the relevant sections of part III of the *Éléments de physiologie*. Whether it was him who also wrote the letter gifting the manuscript to the Comité d’instruction publique, as surmised in the previous section, or whether, as Commissioner of this same Comité d’instruction publique, he might have taken the manuscript under his protection (or nicked it), and then planned to use it for his own lectures on human understanding (which,
as we may remember, he was not initially planning to do, hoping to bring Bonnet in; he himself would probably have lectured on ancient history as he did elsewhere),\textsuperscript{87} we simply cannot know. We do not have enough evidence. But we probably do have enough evidence to say, now, that Garat did have access to the third part of the Éléments, and that we can see that he did from close comparison of the texts. What he would have gone on to do in his lectures, had he completed them, or had the transcriptions of those he did give themselves been completed and published, again, we cannot know. What we do have are the two debates that followed these lectures, including Garat’s rebuttal of a letter accusing him of atheism and also the attack on him made by one of the students, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, who accused him of materialism. In the context, this is highly salient material, and we turn to it now.

Saint-Martin’s attack on Garat

The idea of the debates was to allow some discussion of the lecture material to take place. As we mentioned earlier, the lectures themselves were supposed to have been transcribed in good time before the debate for the students to mull them over, but they never were. In the case of the two debates relating to Garat’s lectures that we have, it looks less like discussion than like fire-fighting. Letters and questions have been sent in to Garat, and he is trying to reply to them; students also ask questions directly. There is a certain formality and politeness (and much use of the appellation ‘Citoyen’), but at points it becomes heated. The first one took place on 29 Pluviôse (17 February) and the second on 9 Ventôse (27 February).\textsuperscript{88} Garat opens the first one with a detailed rebuttal of an anonymous letter he has received, in which his morality and belief in the immortality of the soul are challenged.\textsuperscript{89} Garat swipes away the challenge without too much trouble, but related challenges

\textsuperscript{87} Garat lectures on history at the lycée called the Athénée from 1786 onwards and continues to do so during the Revolution (Gengembre, ‘Introduction’, pp. 46, 49).

\textsuperscript{88} See notes above for the details of the dates on which other lessons or debates by Garat may have taken place.

\textsuperscript{89} Jean-Robert Armogathe argues that this letter was written by La Harpe, and was part of an ongoing spat between the two. Jean-Robert Armogathe, ‘Garat et l’école normale de l’an III’, p. 152.
return in the second debate, which in its printed version is fifty pages long (as opposed to ten pages for the first debate, and six and twelve for the first and second lectures respectively). In fact, part of the reason for this is that Saint-Martin subsequently expanded his objections into a letter, which was published separately in 1795 and included in the 1802 edition of the *Débats*.

That the exchange of views started taking on a momentum of its own is relatively clear from this length and from the publication record.

The first stage of Saint-Martin’s attack ends with this demand:

Citoyen professeur, nous pouvons donc sortir de ce doute désespérant, auquel vous nous aviez réduits ; nous pouvons, dis-je, devant tous les hommes qui voudront réfléchir aux observations que je vous représente, prononcer hautement que la matière ne pense pas : et c’est là le troisième amendement que je sollicite.

Citizen Professor, we can thus get out of the despairing doubt to which you have reduced us; we can, I repeat, in front of all those who will wish to think about the observations which I present to you, loudly proclaim that matter does not think: and that is the third amendment which I seek.

Garat has a long response, which boils down to this: I never said that in the first place. Here it is:

J’ai été plus circonspect encore que Locke; je n’ai ni énoncé, ni annoncé aucune opinion sur les rapports de la matière et de la pensée: cependant on a dit, on a imprimé plusieurs fois dans les journaux et dans les pamphlets que je faisais de la matière une substance éternelle, et de la pensée un de ses attributs. Vous-même, citoyen, vous dont je suis loin d’accuser les intentions, vous paraissez croire que ces deux assertions ont été avancées par moi dans cette École.

J’ai regret d’entrer dans ces explications; mais on les a rendues trop nécessaires. Jamais je n’ai dit que la matière est éternelle: jamais je n’ai dit que la matière pense; jamais je ne le dirai.

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93 Garat, *Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement*, p. 112 (Second débat).
I have been even more circumspect than Locke; I have neither expressed nor declared any opinion on the connections between matter and thought, but nonetheless people have said and often written in newspapers and pamphlets that I was defining matter as an eternal substance and stating that thought was one of its attributes. You yourself, Citizen, whose intentions I am far from calling into question, you seem to believe that these two assertions have been advanced by me in this School.

I regret having to go into these explanations, but it has become all too necessary to do so. Never have I said that matter was eternal: never have I said that matter could think; and never will I do so.

He goes further; he separates the question of matter completely from sensation, so that he does not have to address the former. This is his explicit policy, in which, as he says, he follows Condillac:

L’abbé de Condillac, qui parle peu de religion, écarte presque toujours ces faits matériels associés aux causes et aux actes de l’intelligence: en cela j’ai imité et j’imiterai toujours Condillac; non de peur de paraître matérialiste; si je l’étais, je craindrais peu de le paraître: non de peur de le devenir dans ces recherches physiologiques; si le matérialisme était une vérité, je le croirais utile comme toutes les vérités; mais parce que tout ce mécanisme de nos nerfs, de leur système et de leurs rapports avec le cerveau et les sensations, est beaucoup trop mal connu encore.⁹⁴

Reverend Condillac, who speaks little about religion, almost always avoids the material facts associated with the causes and actions of intelligence: in that I have always imitated Condillac and always will; not for fear of seeming like a materialist; if I were one, I wouldn’t worry much about seeming to be; not for fear of becoming one by undertaking research in physiology; if materialism was true, I would find it useful like all truths are; but because this mechanism of the nerves, of their network and of the links between the brain and sensations, is still much too poorly understood.

This is an illuminating passage, not least for the way in which it bestows a religious identity on Condillac, who was indeed a tonsured priest. However, in all the many previous mentions of his name, he had not once been given that clerical title. So, Garat is clearly using it here for protection, as a shield specifically to fend off these accusations of materialism (which is, as we have already seen, understood to be

⁹⁴ Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 113 (Second débat).
a synonym for irreligion). And secondly, it brings to the fore Garat’s
general understanding of what Condillac can do for him (and what
Garat thinks Condillac does for himself as well), which is avoid any
connection to materialism by dint of never mentioning anything to do
with it, ‘it’ being interpreted directly by Garat here as any aspect of
physiology. It is very helpful to see Garat make this pair of associations
so overtly—materialism and irreligion; materialism and physiology—and
show us how he considers he can best protect himself from any
such attack. He subsequently and almost immediately makes a further
raid on religious language in an attempt to close down the issue, when
he declares that sensations are ‘les premiers phénomènes dont se saisit
la bonne métaphysique’; what good metaphysics starts with (note also
his use of the theological term ‘metaphysics’):

Voilà ma profession de foi, puisqu’il a fallu en faire une. Il est bien
clair que ceux qui ont supposé que je faisais ici une espèce de cours de
matérialisme m’ont accusé, et ne m’ont pas compris.

And there’s my profession of faith, seeing as I had to make one. It is very
clear that those who supposed that I was giving some sort of course in
materialism have accused me without understanding me.

His profession of faith, there it is. An affirmation of belief rather
than ‘a sort of course in materialism’; an either/or situation in which
it was absolutely necessary to deny and quash the latter proposition.
Unfortunately for him, it did not work. As mentioned, Saint-Martin
amplified the dispute further by pursuing it via publication with his
Lettre à un ami ou Considérations politiques, philosophiques et religieuses sur la
Révolution française, suivi du Précis d’une conférence publique entre un élève

95 Naigeon and Cabanis explicitly criticise Condillac’s silence with respect to
physiology and consider it a serious weakness, as we will see. Their view that he
should be mentioning physiology suggests that they favour Diderot’s physiologically-
based account of the mind. In the case of Naigeon, we know this to be true, because
his Mémoires publish the first version of the Éléments; in Cabanis’s, the argument
has to be made with greater circumspection; for Cabanis, see below, for Naigeon,
see his comment ‘Condillac n’en avait pas même une teinture superficielle [de la
médecine] : ignorance qui influe sur toute sa philosophie, et qui réduit à un petit
nombre de pages ce qu’elle a d’utile’ [Condillac had not the slightest knowledge of
medicine, and his ignorance of it has an impact on his entire philosophy, reducing
its usefulness to a very few pages], Mémoires historiques et philosophiques, p. 216.
96 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 113 (Second débat).
97 Ibid.
des Écoles normales et le professeur Garat (Paris, 1795), which the editors of the 1802 edition included in the debates, possibly in order to prevent it flaring up yet again, although in fact any further developments were stopped short with Saint-Martin’s death in 1803. In that Lettre à un ami, Saint-Martin directly and sarcastically addressed Garat’s Condillac strategy:

J’admire toutefois comment vous vous êtes garanti du matérialisme en vous rangeant, comme vous le faites, sous les enseignes de Condillac.\textsuperscript{98}

Nonetheless I admire how you have protected yourself from materialism by standing, as you do, under the banner of Condillac.

In a way, all he is doing here is echoing what Garat himself had already said, that is, that he is a follower of Condillac and therefore cannot be reproached with materialism, but it is helpful to have Saint-Martin confirm that he also considers that that is what Garat is doing. He then proceeds to deride Garat for thinking that Condillac might be able to shield him, as within the pages of that philosopher’s work there are practically ‘pas de passages qui ne me repoussent’ [no pages which do not repel me].\textsuperscript{99} Saint-Martin does not even like Bacon very much.

Saint-Martin was a spiritualist, and his first work, Des erreurs et de la vérité, was published in 1775. Born in 1743, he was more than fifty when he was a student at the École normale, and he was therefore older than Garat himself (the decree requiring districts to send students to the new École normale specified that they should be between twenty-five and thirty years old, as we saw).\textsuperscript{100} So he is not a typical student in any way; he may well have been looking for a dispute of this sort in order to publicise his own work and position. If so, he certainly found it. In his autobiography, unpublished until 1961, he declared with great self-satisfaction that his friends thought he personally had brought down the École normale, and thus thwarted its aim, clear to him from

\textsuperscript{98} Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 134 (Second débat).
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
the beginning, of establishing ‘atheism and the doctrine of matter throughout the Republic’:

Ce but m’avait paru assez clair dès le commencement. C’était d’établir l’athéisme et la doctrine de la matière dans toute la République, et plusieurs de mes camarades ont pensé que ma séance avec Garat avait été le coup de grâce de l’École.\(^\text{101}\)

This aim seemed clear enough to me from the very start. It was to establish atheism and the doctrine of matter throughout the Republic, and many of my friends thought that my session with Garat was the killer blow for the School.

Dominique Julia dismisses these claims as ‘guère plausibles’ [scarcely plausible].\(^\text{102}\) Earlier in this chapter, we briefly sketched in the multiple reasons the École normale folded: there was an increasing volume of denunciations and even demands for an ‘épuration générale’ of any lurking Jacobins, there were attacks in the press, the élèves petitioned to go home. Some of the criticisms were about how the content of the lectures was too advanced and that the specific aspect of how to teach had been neglected. Stéphane Baciocchi and Dominique Julia lay this all out in their remarkable chapter on ‘La Dissolution de l’école’.\(^\text{103}\) It is clear from their analysis that there were multiple factors leading to it being closed down. Saint-Martin’s accusation of materialism is yet another attack, and therefore joins a host of problems that the École was experiencing.

With respect to Garat himself and his decision not to complete his lectures or to publish the ones he had completed, the landscape is a little different. On 19 Ventôse an III (9 March 1795), that is to say, ten days after the bruising second debate took place on 9 Ventôse (27 February), Garat was attacked from a different direction, denounced to the Convention by Louis-Philippe Dumont (deputy of Calvados) as the defender of the September Massacres of 1792 and an actor in the insurrection of 31 May 1793: the Convention decrees that ‘la conduite des chefs et auteurs


de l’insurrection du 31 mai (vieux style) sera examinée par le Comité de sûreté générale’ [the conduct of the leaders and instigators of the insurrection of 31 May (old style) will be examined by the Committee of General Safety]. Dominique Julia states that Garat abandoned his functions at the École normale from this moment, specifically in order to defend himself, publishing his defence in May of that year. This was his Mémoires sur la Révolution ou exposé de ma conduite dans les affaires et les fonctions publiques, completed two days before the closure of the school on 30 Floréal an IV (19 May 1795). And yet, if the Feuille de la République is to be believed, Garat did give one further lecture, on 24 Ventôse (14 March). However, the urgency of Garat’s need to deal with this denunciation and the ensuing action by the Comité de sûreté générale is unarguable.

But is it for this reason alone that Garat failed to complete his lectures, announced with such fanfare as something he had been thinking about for twenty years and which caused him bitter regret not to have completed when he was ‘au pied de l’échafaud’, [at the foot of the scaffold] as he had rousingly announced in the closing words of his first lecture? He could have completed them later, once he had been cleared of the suspicions against him, which he duly was. The 1800–01 edition of the Cercle social was still plaintively requesting that he do so, printing on the very first page of their volumes 7 and 8 that ‘le citoyen Garat n’a plus qu’à réviser également ses premières Leçons sur l’analyse de l’entendement humain; et les Élèves des Écoles normales

105 Armogathe says Garat finished writing his Mémoires sur la Révolution on 17 May 1795/28 Floréal de l’an III, see Armogathe, ‘Garat et l’école normale’, p. 152.
106 Dominique-Joseph Garat, Mémoires sur la Révolution ou exposé de ma conduite dans les affaires et les fonctions publiques (Paris: J. J. Smits, l’an III de la République [necessarily 1795 and not 1794, as the BnF catalogue has it]). Gengembre says that this was much more than a simple self-defence, reminding us that this ‘brochure obtient un réel succès’ [this brochure had real success] (Gengembre, ‘Introduction aux leçons d’analyse de l’entendement de Garat’, p. 48).
107 See above, note 37 in this chapter, as mentioned in Dupuy, ‘L’École normale de l’an III’, in Le Centenaire de l’École normale, p. 170.
108 Garat, Leçons d’analyse et d’entendement, p. 76 (Première leçon). This statement does somewhat go against the fact that we know he hadn’t initially planned to give them, intending this topic for Bonnet, as mentioned. It may have had a merely rhetorical function, to create a sense of excitement and urgency.
ne tarderont pas à en jouir’ [Citizen Garat has only to revise his first Lectures on the analysis of the human understanding, and the Pupils of the Écoles normales will immediately be able to enjoy them]. But he never did release either the unpublished transcriptions or the ungiven lectures. He could have completed this long-contemplated work, and there was clearly an appetite for him to do so; the publishers certainly thought so. I tend to agree, therefore, with nineteenth-century historian Paul Dupuy, who said that he believed that ‘la raison pour laquelle la plus grande partie de son enseignement fait défaut dans le journal sténographique des séances, c’est qu’il a craint de donner prise à ses ennemis qui l’accusaient d’athéisme’ [the reason for which most of his lectures are missing from the Stenographic Journal of the sessions is that he feared to give ammunition to his enemies who were accusing him of atheism] and that ‘au milieu du déchaînement de rancunes qui le menaçait et finit par l’atteindre le 19 Ventôse, il jugea sans doute plus prudent de ne plus laisser imprimer ses leçons’ [in the midst of the torrent of resentment that threatened and finally overwhelmed him on 19 Ventôse, he no doubt judged it wiser not to allow his lectures to be published]. He stopped, fearing further controversy, perhaps not only for himself, but also for the theories of the understanding he had only begun to reveal, and which had become inextricably linked with accusations of atheism and materialism, theories which we have argued were influenced by Diderot’s Éléments de physiologie. In stopping his own publication, he prevented the association from continuing, and he did not return to the theme in print until his curious Mémoires sur Suard et sur le dix-huitième siècle (1820), which we will be examining in a later chapter. His particular analysis of human understanding, however, passed over to Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy, proponents of ‘Idéologie’, as the latter would come to name it in 1796; they claimed his Cours as their source text. In November 1795, Cabanis and Destutt were invited,


along with Garat, to become members of the Institut national, decreed on 3 Brumaire an IV (25 October 1795), five months almost to the day that the École normale had closed. The Institut national replaced the erstwhile Académies royales as a stage for French research, and it was devoid of troublesome students. Garat, Cabanis, and Destutt were made members of the Section Analyse des idées [Analysis of Ideas Section], and it is to that institution and the lectures Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy gave there that we now turn.