

Beyond Raymond Aron

The First Reception of Dilthey in France

Para além de Raymond Aron

A primeira recepção de Dilthey na França

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ABSTRACT This article delves into the reception of Dilthey's work in France during the first half of the 20th century. Rather than focusing on his most famous French commentator of the period, Raymond Aron, this study offers an overview of the appropriations of Dilthey present in the works of Alexandre Koyré, historian of science, and also of philosophy, religions, and German speculative mysticism. Deeply marked by Dilthey's work, Koyré was close to Aron and Bernard Groethuysen, another ignored Diltheyan reader and commentator. This is attested not only by the studies he wrote directly about this author, but also by those in which his name does not appear, including those on the history of German speculative mysticism and the history of science. This seemingly unconventional association underscores the complexity of Dilthey's reception in France, making clear the need to broaden this field of analysis beyond Aron's contributions.

KEYWORDS Dilthey, France, Alexandre Koyré

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RESUMO Este artigo tem como tema a recepção de Wilhelm Dilthey na França, na primeira metade do século XX. Não se trata, contudo, de uma exposição da obra do seu mais célebre comentador francês do período, Raymond Aron. Apresenta-se em linhas gerais a recepção de Dilthey na obra de Alexandre Koyré, historiador das ciências e também da filosofia, das religiões e do misticismo especulativo alemão. Próximo de Raymond Aron e de Bernard Groethuysen, outro leitor e comentador diltheyano ignorado, Koyré foi marcado pela obra de Dilthey, o que é atestado pelos trabalhos que escreveu diretamente sobre este autor, bem como por aqueles nos quais seu nome não aparece, e sobre a história do misticismo especulativo alemão e a história das ciências. A aparente estranheza dessa aproximação nos mostra a complexidade da recepção de Dilthey na França e a necessidade de alargarmos seu campo de análise para além dos trabalhos de Aron.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE Dilthey, França, Alexandre Koyré

In 1990, with the release of *Dilthey et la fondation des sciences historiques* [*Dilthey and the Foundation of the Historical Sciences*], a book that was intended to be the great rediscovery of Wilhelm Dilthey in France, Sylvie Mesure (1990, p. 12) declared that she was resuming a debate that had been going on for more than 50 years: “It is a question of somehow picking up where Raymond Aron’s theses left off in 1938. Almost 50 years later, it seems necessary to extend the effort to ‘acclimate’ the German tradition in France”.¹ Dilthey’s reception in France, diluted in that of “German sociology”, could therefore be summarized as follows: a brief initial sympathy, marked by some translations and articles published at the end of the 19th century;² Aron’s (2018) famous book,

1 Freely translated: “il s’agit à cet égard de reprendre, en quelque sorte, les choses où, en 1938, les thèses de R. Aron les avaient laissées. Près de cinquante ans plus tard, il apparaît nécessaire de prolonger l’effort pour ‘acclimater’ en France la tradition allemande”.

2 Published in the journals *Annales de l’Institut international de Sociologie* (1894), *Revue internationale de Sociologie* (1894), *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* (1896), *Année sociologique* (1896-1897), and *Revue de synthèse historique* (1901) (cited by MESURE, 1990, p. 10).

La philosophie critique de l'histoire [Critical Philosophy of History], from 1938; and the already mentioned book by Sylvie Mesure, from 1990.

Years later, Leszek Brogowski (1997, p. 12) resumed the same historical reconstruction, adding a pessimistic tone to the discussion of its outcomes: “Dilthey’s reception was confusing in Germany; in France, it was only marginal”. After Raymond Aron, with rare exceptions, “no major study covered this enormous gap until 1990”.³ Even Mesure’s work and her project to translate Dilthey’s books failed in their attempt to “acclimatize” the work of the German historian and philosopher to French soil. The project was abandoned in 2002, leading Brogowski (1997, p. 13) to conclude that “Dilthey did not find his audience in France”,⁴ even in the 1990s.

Although Dilthey made no disciples in the country of Descartes, the reception of his work cannot be limited to Aron and Mesure. Bernard Groethuysen, whose work often appears as a recognized (but ignored) exception on the French intellectual scene, was an important disseminator of Dilthey’s works at the beginning of the 20th century. A figure in many German and French intellectual circles, Groethuysen was very close to Dilthey and was responsible for continuing to publish the complete works of the German philosopher and historian after his death in 1911 (DANDOIS, 1995, p. 20). He edited tomes VII and VIII, published by Teubner, in which Dilthey (1992) dealt with the *Introduction aux sciences de l'esprit* [Introduction to Sciences of the Spirit]. Still in France, in the 1910s, Groethuysen began presenting his work on Dilthey, giving lectures and publishing articles. In 1912, he published *Dilthey et son école* [Dilthey and his school] (GROETHUYSEN, 1995a), an article resulting from a lecture given at the now extinct École des Hautes Études Sociales (EHES), in Paris, at a conference devoted to contemporary German philosophy (DANDOIS, 1995, p. 20). In 1926, Groethuysen (1995b) published another important article dealing with Dilthey’s work, titled

3 Freely translated: “la réception de Dilthey en Allemagne a été confuse, en France, elle n’a été que marginale”; “aucune étude importante n’est venue combler cette énorme lacune jusqu’en 1990”.

4 Freely translated: “Dilthey n’a pas trouvé son public en France”.

Introduction à la pensée philosophique allemande depuis Nietzsche [Introduction to German Philosophical Thought since Nietzsche]. In 1934, he wrote another study, titled *Idée et pensée: Réflexions sur le journal de Dilthey* [Idea and Thought: Reflections on Dilthey's Diary] (GROETHUYSEN, 1934), and published it in the journal *Recherches Philosophiques*.

In addition to these texts that dealt directly with the work of the German historian and philosopher, Groethuysen published several other works throughout his life in which he applied the Diltheyian historical method (DANDOIS, 1995, p. 25). His *Les origines de l'esprit bourgeois en France* [The Origins of the Bourgeois Spirit in France] (GROETHUYSEN, 1927) had a certain popularity. A year later, Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre considered inviting him to join the editorial board of the journal *Annales*.⁵ His work, therefore, complexifies the history of Dilthey's reception in France, but it is not the only one to do so.

Other authors in France were also interested in Dilthey's work. Just as in Germany (ASSIS, 2021, p. 5), Dilthey was seen more as a historian of ideas than as a philosopher, especially in the early years of the 20th century, notably due to his work on the young Hegel (DILTHEY, 1905), which had great repercussions, receiving three editions before his death (AMARAL, 1987, p. XX). A June 1, 1931, correspondence from Émile Meyerson (in BENSAUDE-VINCENT; TELKES-KLEIN, 2009, p. 143), a French epistemologist and philosopher, to Henri Delacroix, a philosopher, psychologist, and historian who was a student of Bergson's, shows that this work on Hegel was circulating in certain French intellectual circles. In Meyerson's (1921, p. 409; p. 425) *De l'explication dans les sciences* [On Explanation in the Sciences], one of the pioneering books in the rediscovery of Hegel in France (KOYRÉ, 1973b, p. 236-241), Dilthey appears as a reference. Other works by him, also on the history of ideas, are quoted in that country. This is the case of the second volume of his complete works, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation* [Worldview and Analysis of

⁵ This can be seen in a letter written by Bloch to Febvre in Paris in October 1929. See: Bloch; Febvre (1994, p. 224-225).

Man Since Renaissance and Reformation], originally published in 1914 (DILTHEY, 1999), referenced by Alexandre Koyré (1971, p. 39) in a text on Sébastien Franck, a critic of Luther.

Alexandre Koyré, a historian of the sciences, but also of mystical thought and religions, was, as can be seen from the publication above, an attentive reader of Dilthey's work. Yes, among other reasons, because he was close to Groethuysen.⁶ However, although relegated to the field of the historiography of the sciences – a reductionist interpretation of his work – Koyré's name does not appear in studies on the subject, which is certainly quite understandable. Koyré's presence in the context of Dilthey's reception in France sounds strange because, in addition to being part of different philosophical traditions, so often highlighted by textbooks that almost always mark out national barriers, we recognize in them opposing conceptions. The separation between the natural sciences and the human sciences outlined by Dilthey conforms very poorly to the idea of a history of the sciences à la Koyré – because the Diltheyan separation was based on a deterministic and causalist conception of the natural sciences, with little regard for the historicity of their objects and practices. Aware of the scientific transformations of the 20th century, especially in the field of physics, Koyré saw this historicity as the essential character of the sciences as a whole and anchored his historiographical work in it. We could then deduce that a certain distance would exist between Dilthey and Koyré, but since history does not follow the paths of logic, we would be completely wrong. Koyré was not only interested in Dilthey's work, but he was also deeply affected by it.

The aim of this article is to present in general terms the reception of Dilthey in Koyré's work, placing it in the intellectual context of the first readings and analyses in France of the work of the German philosopher and historian. The following exposition includes, in a single

6 In a letter addressed to Meyerson on February 24, 1924, we see that Koyré (in BENSUADE-VINCENT; TELKES-KLEIN, 2009, p. 232) was addressing Groethuysen when he lost his contacts in Germany. Furthermore, in the issues of the journal *Recherches Philosophiques*, edited by Koyré, we see numerous contributions from Groethuysen, such as the text *Idee et Pensée* [Idea and Thought]. For Dandois (1995), some of these contributions were made at Koyré's request.

block of analysis, the Koyrean texts that deal with and refer directly to Dilthey, as well as studies in which his name does not always appear, and historiographical texts, including both Koyré's lesser-known works from the 1920s on German speculative mysticism and his work on the history of the sciences from the 1930s onwards. The research object in question forces us to work in this way, as Koyré's readings and interpretations of Dilthey entered his historiographical work.

KOYRÉ, READER OF DILTHEY

How can we understand Koyré's interest in Dilthey? First of all, we need to bear in mind the current interpretation of Dilthey's work from the beginning of the 20th century. It was above all a work on the history of ideas and, in fact, more than half of his works followed this approach (ASSIS, 2021, p. 5). It should also be taken into account that Koyré was not always a historian of the sciences. Before becoming one, he was a historian of philosophy, religions and, in particular, German speculative mysticism.

In 1922, in one of his courses at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), we can see Koyré's (2016, p. 61) interest clearly:

The professor began with a preliminary study of Boehme's system, which no longer appears as an isolated phenomenon, but as the result of a long evolution. We tried to find the stages of this evolution in the religious and mystical doctrines of the 16th century. We analyzed the work of Sébastien Franck and Valentin Weigel, on the one hand, and that of Schwenckfeld on the other, as well as one of the most important works for the history of German mysticism, the *Theologia Deutsch*, edited by Luther, paraphrased by Franck, and finally reissued with a very important preface by V. Weigel.⁷

7 Freely translated: "Le professeur a commencé par une étude préliminaire du système de Boehme, qui apparaît non plus comme un phénomène isolé, mais comme l'aboutissement

Before devoting himself to the history of the sciences and the scientific revolution of the 17th century, Koyré studied the work of the Protestant mystic Jacob Boehme in its historical context, marked by discussions with Schwenckfeld, Sébastien Franck, Valentin Weigel, and Luther. The subject of Koyré's research was nothing new. In the 1920s, the 300th anniversary of Boehme's death was being commemorated, and several studies on the Protestant mystic were published. Moreover, since the beginning of the 20th century, authors from his intellectual milieu had already published works on German mysticism, such as Émile Boutroux, Victor Delbos and Henri Delacroix, Schwenckfeld, Sébastien Franck, Valentin Weigel, Paracelsus, Luther and Boehme.

Dilthey was among those authors who devoted themselves to the subject. In the second volume of his complete works, *Weltanschauung und Analyse des Menschen seit Renaissance und Reformation*, Dilthey (1999) dedicates a topic to Franck, described by Koyré (1971, p. 39) as an "admirable article". Also in that volume, Boehme's name appears several times, along with Franck's and Weigel's, in discussions about the transcendental orientation of theology in the 16th century (DILTHEY, 1999, p. 118-119; p. 153; p. 288) and about the belief in the moral and religious character of the astronomical system of the world (DILTHEY, 1999, p. 335). Dilthey's work analyzed the post-Reformation Protestant discussions and their relationship to Boehme's writings, sometimes also describing their place in the history of philosophy. For Koyré, it was a significant reference.

From the point of view of the circulation of texts, this volume of Dilthey's complete works was particularly well known to Koyré. Before settling in France in the 1920s, Koyré had been a student of Edmund Husserl and a member of the circle of phenomenological students who

d'une longue évolution. Nous avons cherché à retrouver dans les doctrines religieuses et mystiques du XVI^e siècle les étapes de cette évolution. Nous avons analysé l'œuvre de Sébastien Franck et de Valentin Weigel d'un côté, et celle de Schwenckfeld de l'autre, ainsi qu'une des œuvres les plus importantes pour l'histoire du mysticisme allemand, la *Theologia Deutsch*, éditée par Luther, paraphrasée par Franck, et enfin rééditée avec une préface très importante par V. Weigel".

gathered around Adolf Heinach, the “Göttingen Circle”. George Misch, Dilthey’s son-in-law and editor of that volume, was one of its members. In addition, Husserl and Dilthey knew each other and even quoted each other’s works in some of their seminars in Göttingen and Berlin. For Dilthey (cited by GENS, 2002, p. 93), Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* were “the first great advance in philosophical research since the *Critique of Pure Reason*”,⁸ and he saw Husserl’s phenomenology as close to his own psychology of the sciences of the spirit. For Husserl (cited by GENS, 2002, p. 99), Dilthey’s work on psychology constituted a “brilliant anticipation and stage of phenomenology”.⁹ Dilthey’s works were therefore well known in Koyré’s intellectual context. But certainly not always with a positive appreciation.

In 1911, after direct contact with Dilthey, Husserl (1992) published an article in the journal *Logos, Philosophie als strenge Wissenschaft* [*Philosophy as a Science of Rigor*], which would become very well known. In this text, he harshly criticized the German historian, especially his *Die Typen der Weltanschauung und ihre Ausbildung in den metaphysischen Systemen* [*Types of Worldview and their Formation in Metaphysical Systems*]. Dilthey (1911) presented a historical conception of philosophy that referred to a “worldview”, which Husserl strongly criticized. For Dilthey (1992, p. 9), “before the gaze that encompasses the earth and all the past, there is no longer any absolute validity to any singular form of conception of life, be it religion or philosophy”.¹⁰ For him, the construction, the ruin, and the rise of various philosophies throughout history revealed the non-existence of a single, universal truth, the metaphysical fallacy. The beautiful philosophical constructions did not reveal being itself, but the uniqueness of their builders, as well as an irreducible

8 Freely translated: “le premier grand progrès de la recherche philosophique depuis la *Critique de la raison pure*”.

9 Freely translated: “anticipation et une étape préliminaire géniales de la phénoménologie”.

10 Freely translated: “au regard qui embrasse la terre et tout le passé, il n’y a plus de validité absolue d’une quelconque forme particulière de conception de la vie, qu’elle soit religion ou philosophie”.

worldview that, according to its own foundations, was true. For this reason, in 1911, Husserl (1992, p. 66) characterized Dilthey as a “historicist skeptic”¹¹ and contrasted his historical view of philosophy with that of phenomenology, which set out to decipher the enigma of the world and of life through the phenomenological apprehension of essences.

Husserl’s negative perception of the German historian’s work was not only shared by Dilthey’s critics. Paul Hankammer, a historian who claimed to be a Diltheyan disciple and a scholar of Jacob Boehme, had the same reading. Among the works that appeared around the commemoration of the 300th anniversary of Boehme’s death, was a 1924 book by Hankammer. His work on the Protestant mystic, *Jacob Boehme: Gestalt und Gestaltung [Jacob Boehme: Form and Organization]*, applied what he considered to be the Diltheyan historical method, based on that “historicist skepticism”. Koyré, who at the time was studying and preparing his state thesis on the same subject – only published in 1929 – read the book and published a significant review criticizing it in the *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions*, titled *La littérature récente sur Jacob Boehme [Recent Literature on Jacob Boehme]*. Curiously, he did not reaffirm Husserl’s criticisms; on the contrary, he defended the German historian’s work. For Koyré (1926, p. 116-117),

Hankammer tries to remake – or make – an image of Boehme that is “valid for our time”. It seems clear to him that the Romantics’ image of him is no longer valid today. Hankammer then sets out to learn “what Boehme should represent for our time”; the importance that his doctrine and his person could – should – have for us.¹²

11 Freely translated: “cético historicista”.

12 Freely translated: “Hankammer essaie de refaire – ou de faire – une image de Boehme ‘valable pour notre époque’. Il lui semble évident que l’image que s’en faisaient les romantiques ne vaut plus rien aujourd’hui. M. Hankammer s’applique donc à dégager ‘ce que Boehme doit représenter pour notre temps’; l’importance que sa doctrine et sa personne pourraient – et devraient – avoir pour nous”.

The historical truth of Boehme's work and the course of its elaboration were not what Hankammer was after, since, for him, every historical interpretation would inevitably be linked to the historian and would reveal more about him than his subject. For him, based on Dilthey, each era formed for itself an interpretative image of the great doctrines and characters of the past. Koyré was assertive. Hankammer, he says, "distorted the image of the theosophist in its historical truth. However, Hankammer would perhaps reply that the 'historical truth' is only a myth, or that Jacob Boehme's true doctrine is constituted precisely in the process of his interpretations"¹³ (KOYRÉ, 1926, p. 117). In this sense, investigating the historical context was unnecessary. For this reason, Hankammer "[deliberately] neglected" all those authors from his spiritual milieu (Schwenckfeld, Sébastien Franck, Valentin Weigel, Paracelsus) and gave us images that were, according to Koyré (1926, p. 117), "consciously 'fabricated'"¹⁴.

Hankammer, however, "wanting to take a practical prescription from Dilthey's historical theory, distorted the meaning of the doctrine and only obtained a false prescription"¹⁵ (KOYRÉ, 1926, p. 117). Dilthey's historical theory did not lead the historian to disregard the historical context of his object. Koyré's reading of Dilthey's theoretical-methodological stance was inspired by what his friend Groethuysen had described in 1912. Dilthey's historical method, totally different from what Hankammer claims, required a dynamic analysis of the particular and the general, of an author's work and its historical environment, neither subsuming the individual to the context, nor conceiving it as separate from it (GROETHUYSEN, 1995a, p. 63). In writing his doctoral thesis – let's remember, also on Boehme – Koyré (2017, p. 508,

13 Freely translated: "Il a (...) faussé aussi l'image du théosophe en sa vérité historique. Toutefois, M. Hankammer répondrait peut-être que la 'vérité historique' n'est qu'un mythe, ou que la véritable doctrine de Jacob Boehme se constitue justement dans le processus de ses interprétations".

14 Freely translated: "néglige de propos délibéré"; "consciemment 'fabriquées' comme images".

15 Freely translated: "M. Hankammer, en voulant de la théorie historique de Dilthey faire une recette pratique, a faussé le sens de la doctrine et n'a obtenu qu'une fausse recette".

emphasis in original) concludes his work by affirming a theoretical-methodological orientation very close to that of Dilthey, along the lines of Groethuysen:

And yet, if the construction of a philosopher is always, as long as it is an expression of his personality and his worldview, individual and irreducible in the very measure that it expresses a concrete personality, it is no less true that in the history of human thought there are “flows of ideas”, vast spiritual rivers, made up of traditions that are enriched by the successive contributions of individuals who make them up and express them in their personal constructions, and which sometimes change course and direction.¹⁶

Following a different interpretation, Paola Zambelli, an Italian historian who specialized in Koyré, also stated the importance of Dilthey for his work in the 1920s. When dealing precisely with the formation of his historical method, Zambelli (2016, p. XVII) places Dilthey practically alongside Husserl, Lévy-Bruhl and Meyerson, authors already recognized by historiography as crucial influences on Koyré’s work. For her, however, Dilthey’s importance was limited to his work on Boehme, Paracelsus and Weigel.

Another historian, Ernst Coumet (1987), also highlighted Dilthey’s role in the construction of Koyré’s work, but he did not limit it to the beginning of his academic career. In the 1930s, as is well known, Koyré extended his research to the field of the history of science, dedicating himself above all to the scientific revolution of the 17th century. For Coumet,

16 Freely translated: “Et, cependant, si la construction d’un philosophe est toujours, en tant qu’elle constitue une expression de sa personnalité et de sa vision du monde, individuelle et irréductible dans la mesure même où elle exprime une personnalité concrète, il n’en reste pas moins vrai que dans l’histoire de la pensée humaine il existe des ‘courants d’idées’, vastes fleuves spirituels, formés de traditions s’enrichissant par les apports successifs des individualités qui les composent et les expriment dans leurs constructions personnelles et qui, parfois, en changent le cours et la direction”.

even in this field, the importance of Dilthey was remarkable. In fact, Coumet had grounds for this interpretation. During this period, Koyré published two reviews that are very significant both from the point of view of Dilthey's reception in France and for the construction of Koyré's work. Mainly in the review of the eighth volume of the *Gesammelte Schriften* [Complete Works], Koyré sets out the core of Dilthey's work. In doing so, however, he gives us the impression of exposing his own work. Such is the similarity that Coumet characterizes this text as a "self-portrait" of Koyré. In fact, Koyré (1932, p. 490) described Dilthey's work in this way:

[Dilthey] thought that the human soul only revealed itself in and through its manifestations; that it was these manifestations of its life and activity, which are called art, science and philosophy, that partially revealed to us the obscure and abundant depths from which they come; he also knew that the "human soul" is only an abstraction and that it is only by analyzing and seeking to understand, through a historical study, the objectified and therefore objective manifestations of its life, by reviving in us the meaning of its historical incarnations, that we can – through the interpretation of this meaning – apprehend and understand certain aspects, certain attitudes and certain fundamental structures of the soul, that we can rediscover, starting from reality, some of its possibilities. Possibilities, attitudes, and structures of soul, rather than spirit, because Dilthey, reacting against the excessive and one-sided spiritualization of man brought about by rationalism, wanted to rediscover concrete man, his concrete soul, a soul that is confused tendency, passion, élan, as much – and even more – as spirit. He knew the importance of the vital, of obscure feelings; he knew that they formed the background that nourished the highest productions of the spirit, a background that was expressed in and through them, but which could never be completely spiritualized. This is also why the

spirit could never fully penetrate it. It could not detach itself from its own depths. That is why history, and history alone (...) could allow us to reach this knowledge of ourselves.¹⁷

This idea of historical work as a search for what is alive, for the élan that nourishes the productions of the spirit, including those of science, was precisely the most characteristic feature of Koyré's work. When analyzing scientific theories, Koyré did not disregard the "obscure feelings", artistic tastes or metaphysical conceptions of scientists. On the contrary, in his main works, whether his Galilaic Studies (KOYRÉ, 1986a) or his famous *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe* (KOYRÉ, 1986b), this historiographical stance is evident. As it would not be possible to make a detailed analysis of these works here, let's look at what he wrote in 1954 about his own work as a historian of the sciences:

What is history, especially the history of scientific or technical thought? A graveyard of errors, or even a collection of *monstra* rightly relegated to the dumping ground, good only for a demolition site. (...) This attitude towards the past – which, incidentally, is much more the attitude of the

17 Freely translated: "il pensait que l'âme ne se révélait à elle-même que dans et par ses manifestations; que c'étaient ces manifestations de sa vie et de son activité qui s'appellent art, science, philosophie, qui nous révèlent, partiellement, le fond obscur et fécond dont ils procèdent; il savait aussi que 'l'âme humaine' n'est qu'une abstraction et que c'est seulement en analysant, et en cherchant à comprendre par une étude historique les manifestations objectivées, et par là même objectives, de sa vie, en faisant revivre en nous le sens de ses incarnations historiques que nous pouvons – par l'interprétation de ce sens saisir et comprendre certains aspects, certaines attitudes et certaines structures fondamentales de l'âme, retrouver, en partant du réel, certaines de ses possibilités. Possibilités, attitudes et structures de l'âme, plutôt que de l'esprit, car Dilthey réagissant contre la spiritualisation excessive et unilatérale de l'homme par le rationalisme, voulait retrouver l'homme concret, son âme concrète, âme qui est tendance confuse, passion, élan, autant – et même davantage qu'esprit. Il savait l'importance du vital, des sentiments obscurs; il savait qu'ils formaient le fond qui nourrissait les plus hautes productions de l'esprit; fond qui s'exprimait en et par eux mais qui jamais ne pouvait se spiritualiser tout entier. C'est pourquoi aussi jamais l'esprit ne pouvait le pénétrer entièrement, ne pouvait se saisir de son propre fond. Et c'est pourquoi justement l'histoire, et l'histoire seule (...) pouvait nous permettre de parvenir à cette connaissance de soi-même".

technician than that of the great creative thinker – is, we confess, quite common, even if it is not at all inevitable. And much less justifiable. It is quite common for those who, from the vantage point of the present, and even from the future towards which their work is directed, glance back at the past – a past long since surpassed – to see old theories as incomprehensible, ridiculous, and misshapen monsters. Indeed, going back in time, he finds these theories at the moment of their death, aged, withered, sclerotic. In short, he sees them as the Belle Heaumière depicted by Rodin. Only the historian finds her in her early, glorious youth, in all the splendor of her beauty. It is only the historian who, by retracing and following the evolution of science, apprehends the theories of the past in their birth and lives, with them, the creative élan of thought¹⁸ (KOYRÉ, 1973, p. 265-266).

The scientific theories of the past only seem like “incomprehensible, ridiculous, and misshapen monsters” to the technician who only sees the form, who practices that “excessive spiritualization” and is thus incapable of seeing what once gave them life. For Koyré, the historian, as he wrote about Dilthey, is the one who knows that the “productions of the spirit”, again including those of the sciences, are not just rational

18 Freely translated: “Qu’est-ce que l’histoire, surtout l’histoire de la pensée scientifique, ou technique? Un cimetière d’erreurs, ou même une collection de *monstra* justement relégués au cabinet de débarras et bons seulement pour un chantier de démolition. (...) Cette attitude envers le passé – qui est, d’ailleurs, beaucoup plus celle du technicien que du grand penseur créateur – est, avouons-le, assez normale, bien qu’elle ne soit pas du tout inévitable. Et, encore moins, justifiable. Il est assez normal qu’à celui qui, du point de vue du présent, et même de l’avenir vers lequel il est tendu son travail, jette un coup d’œil sur le passé – un passé, depuis longtemps dépassé – les théories anciennes apparaissent comme des monstres incompréhensibles, ridicules et difformes. En effet, puisqu’il remonte le cours du temps, il les rencontre, au moment de leur mort, vieilles, desséchées, sclérosées. Il voit, pour tout dire la Belle Heaumière telle qu’elle nous a été rendue par Rodin. C’est l’historien seulement qui la retrouve dans sa prime et glorieuse jeunesse, dans tout l’éclat de sa beauté, c’est l’historien seulement qui, en refaisant, et en resuivant l’évolution de la science, sait les théories du passé à leur naissance et vit, avec elles, l’élan créateur de la pensée”.

constructions, but are also formed by “attitudes and structures of the soul”, irreducible to logical reason, attitudes that nourish them. Thus, the historian is the one who retraces the path and grasps, through historical reconstruction, “the vital”, the *élan* that forms “the background that nourishes the highest productions of the spirit”.

As can be deduced, despite Dilthey’s deterministic and causalist conception of the natural sciences, implicit in the famous division between these sciences and the human sciences – which contradicts his considerations on the irrational aspect of the productions of the (scientific) spirit – it is certain that Dilthey played an important role in Koyré’s historiographical work dedicated to the scientific revolution of the 17th century. Purposely ignoring that division, Koyré inserted his history of the natural sciences (physics) into the human sciences, placing Dilthey’s theoretical-methodological orientation at its heart, a critique of the radical rationalization of man carried out by the 18th century. In a well-known phrase, Dilthey (1992, p. 149) said that “in the veins of the cognizing subject as Locke, Hume and Kant construct it, it is not true blood that flows, but a diluted sap of reason, conceived as the sole activity of thinking”.¹⁹ In the same vein, in one of his courses at the EPHE, Koyré (2016, p. 154) said that Kant’s century is “stupid to the point of being rational”,²⁰ thus justifying himself:

The 18th century, with its philosophy of the Enlightenment, is truly very naïve: people who believe in light, in reason, who represent man in such a simple way, that they do not understand that there are depths in man where the light does not penetrate, and that is where the best is to be found²¹ (KOYRÉ, 2016, p. 153).

19 Freely translated: “dans les veines du sujet connaissant tel que Locke, Hume et Kant le construisirent, ce n’est pas du sang véritable qui coule, mais une sève délayée de raison, conçue comme unique activité de penser”.

20 Freely translated: “[ce stupide XVIII^e siècle], stupide à force d’être raisonnable...”.

21 Freely translated: “Le XVIII^e avec sa philosophie des Lumières, c’est vraiment très naïf: des

Drawing inspiration from Dilthey, Koyré (1932, p. 491) believed that what was best in man, the blood in his veins, was not logical rationality, but rather his soul, “which is confused tendency, passion, élan”,²² made up of feelings, attitudes and ideas that could not be deduced beforehand. That is why the technician cannot foresee them. Only the historian, “going back in time”, can truly grasp them at the moment of the birth of scientific productions. In fact, this Dilthey-inspired historiographical stance became a hallmark of Alexandre Koyré’s history of the sciences.

KOYRÉ AND THE RECEPTION OF DILTHEY IN FRANCE: FINAL REMARKS

Koyré’s historiographical *oeuvre* as a whole, from his works on German speculative mysticism to his studies on the history of the scientific revolution of the 17th century, was marked by the figure of Dilthey. Even if we were to disregard his texts devoted directly to this German historian and philosopher, his historiographical studies – like those of Groethuysen – would already allow us to question the thesis that Aron, in the 1930s, was isolated in France in his interest in Dilthey and 19th-century German historiography.

However, a letter from Koyré to Aron, deposited in the latter author’s archive at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BnF), makes this thesis even more difficult to accept. In the undated letter, which was most likely sent in 1938, due to its reference to the book *La philosophie critique de l’histoire*, published by Aron that year, Koyré comments on each chapter of the book:

gens qui croient à la lumière, à la raison, qui représente l’homme de façon si simple, qui ne comprennent pas qu’il y a dans l’homme des profondeurs où la lumière ne pénètre pas et que c’est là ce qu’il y a de mieux”.

22 Freely translated: “âme qui est tendance confuse, passion, élan”.

I want to tell you the impression I got from reading your book: it is good, really good. (...) I have *reread* your chapter on Dilthey – it is good, and the systematization you give it does not go beyond the limits of what Dilthey could have done. (...) Your “Rickert” seems to me to give him too much importance. (...) Your “Simmel” is good. Your “Weber” is very good.²³

It is suggestive that Aron sent his work to Koyré, a very common gesture in the intellectual circles of the time, as it still is, but there is an interesting detail in this apparently insignificant passage. As we know, there are four chapters in Aron’s book: one on Dilthey, one on Rickert, one on Simmel and one on Weber. In describing the chapter devoted to Dilthey, Koyré gives us a curious piece of information: he says he has read it for the second time. Aron had already shown it separately from his other chapters. We can deduce from this that, as far as Dilthey was concerned, Aron recognized him as a studious interlocutor. He was not alone.

Groethuysen, Koyré and Aron knew each other and established intellectual exchanges. Groethuysen used to go to Koyré’s house in Paris, as witnessed by Georgette Vignaux, Paul Vignaux’s wife.²⁴ According to her, when they talked about Luther and then Augustine, “we knew that there would be no other subject for the whole evening” (VIGNAUX, 2016, p. 210). Groethuysen (1939) was also attentive to Aron’s work, even publishing a review of *La philosophie critique de l’histoire* a year after its publication, a text that Aron, in his *Mémoires* [*Memoirs*], comments on positively. According to him, Groethuysen knew how to understand his work (ARON, 1983, p. 180). In another passage, Aron,

23 BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE (BnF), Paris. *Lettre d’Alexandre Koyré à Raymond Aron*, [1938]. Fonds Raymond Aron, NAF 28060 (1-77), cx. 5, f. 3. Emphasis added; freely translated: “Je veux vous dire l’impression que j’ai eu en lisant votre livre: c’est bien, très bien même. (...) J’ai *relu* votre chapitre sur Dilthey – c’est bien, et votre systématisation ne dépasse pas les bornes de ce que Dilthey aurait pu faire. (...) Votre ‘Rickert’ me semble lui donner quand même trop d’importance. (...) Votre ‘Simmel’ est bien. Votre ‘Weber’ très bien”.

24 Paul Vignaux was also a friend of Koyré. See: Vignaux (2016).

quoting a letter he had received from Jean Paulhan in 1967, makes it clear that they were close. On reading his article *Pourquoi*, published in the French newspaper *Figaro*, Paulhan (cited by ARON, 1983, p. 577) says: “Why isn’t our friend Groethuysen here to read it?”²⁵ Groethuysen had died in 1946. There is another passage in the *Mémoires* that allows us to better understand Aron’s attention to Groethuysen’s work. For Aron (1983, p. 160), he was not just a disciple of Dilthey, his importance went much further. Groethuysen would have influenced Dilthey in his second attempt to construct a “critique of historical reason”, after failing with the psychological approach.

Far from being limited to the production of one author, the history of Dilthey’s reception in France leads us to several paths and intersections, among which, undoubtedly, that of Koyré’s work is the least predictable, but no less important. The unusual fact that works on the history of physics – the classical science of nature – have been marked by Dilthey’s work opens our eyes to the complexity of the first Diltheyan readings on French ground, to other encounters and possible exchanges. A fine example of how the history of ideas can be, as Koyré (1973a, p. 270) himself would say about its subject, “curious, unpredictable and illogical”,²⁶ and therefore fascinating.

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25 Freely translated: “Pourquoi notre ami Groethuysen n’était-il pas là pour le lire”.

26 Freely translated: “Curieuse, imprévisible et illogique”.

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