



Claude Buffier and  
Thomas Reid



TWO COMMON-SENSE  
PHILOSOPHERS

Louise Marcil-Lacoste

All too often it is said that common-sense philosophers fail to justify their appeal to common sense as a philosophical standard, and that they merely repeat one another in the glorification of philosophical trivialities. This book challenges these and other widespread assumptions about common-sense philosophies and provides a major reassessment of an influential segment of the history of ideas.

Claude Buffier (1661–1737) was a French Jesuit whose philosophy earned Voltaire's praise. Thomas Reid (1710–96) was the one Scottish philosopher whose response to David Hume is still taken seriously. In this comparative study Professor Marcil-Lacoste not only refutes common assumptions, but also shows that, despite their similar concerns and the unfounded charge that Reid plagiarized from Buffier, a comparison of Reid and Buffier illuminates a range of significant epistemological issues. Further, she demonstrates that common-sense philosophies can be varied, subtle, and original.

This book also includes an edited and annotated version of Reid's hitherto unpublished *curâ primâ* on common sense prepared by David Fate Norton.

Louise Marcil-Lacoste is an associate professor of philosophy at the Université de Montréal.

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CLAUDE BUFFIER AND  
THOMAS REID  
Two Common-Sense Philosophers

Louise Marcil-Lacoste

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# I

## *General Introduction*

IN THIS BOOK, I want to show that common-sense philosophy is an important segment of the history of ideas and should be reevaluated by philosophers. My general claim is that common-sense philosophy is not taken seriously because of incorrect presuppositions about what it is. In order to substantiate this claim, I shall compare the doctrines of Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid. I chose these philosophers not only because they are important in a history of the doctrines of common sense, but also because their respective views present interesting counterexamples to the general misconceptions about this philosophy.

Common-sense philosophy has often been dismissed as philosophically irrelevant on the grounds that it merely states that men believe certain propositions to be true and that they act in accordance with these propositions. According to this interpretation, common-sense philosophers answer all philosophically important questions in the same way that Diogenes or Dr. Johnson refuted skeptical theories: by appeal to the alleged absurdity of the questions. To appeal to common sense would thus be a matter of repeating something like Diogenes' argument that we refute Zeno's arguments against the possibility of motion by *walking*— or something like Dr. Johnson's argument that *kicking a stone* could refute Berkeley's arguments against the possibility of a material world.

This view of common sense assumes that whenever common-sense philosophers argue, they make use of a very weak form of the *reductio ad absurdum*, the argument *ad risum*. Thus common-sense philosophers would consider a philosophical question adequately answered when they have provoked laughter at the absurdities of statements they reject as too ridiculous to deserve philosophical analysis.

This standard view is really a caricature, which is presented with greater or lesser degrees of sophistication. It has been argued that common-sense philosophers stop (they conclude) where philosophy must begin (it wonders, it questions, it doubts). Some critics have admitted that common-sense philosophies offer interesting arguments against skeptical systems, but have maintained that the function of these arguments is merely negative: they offer nothing by way of alternatives. Other critics have even admitted the soundness of common-sense claims, but they have argued that the appeal to common sense gives too much status to what are merely beliefs accepted without adequate philosophical arguments; at most, philosophy can only start with common sense. For those who feel that I overemphasize these misinterpretations, I shall quote some passages from a classic, Kant's *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

To appeal to common sense . . . is one of the subtle discoveries of modern times, by means of which the most superficial ranter can safely enter the lists with the most thorough thinker and hold his own.

It is a common subterfuge of those false friends of common sense . . . to say that there must surely be at all events some propositions which are immediately certain and of which there is no occasion to give any proof, . . . But if we except the principle of contradiction . . . they can never adduce, in proof of this privilege, anything else indubitable which they can immediately ascribe to common sense, except mathematical propositions, such as twice two make four . . .

. . . [the adept of common sense] gives by his popular language a color to his groundless pretensions . . .

. . . [the adepts of common sense] must grant that they are not allowed even to conjecture, far less to know . . . but only to assume (not for speculative use, which they must abandon, but for practical use only) the existence of something possible and even indispensable for the guidance of the understanding and of the will in life.<sup>1</sup>

However sophisticated this last account, I think it shares the mistaken assumption that all common-sense philosophers are silent about the justification of human beliefs. Common-sense philosophers are held to *evade* the question of the grounds of men's judgments. The basis for their (alleged) reliance on the argument *ad risum* and their

1. See Kant, [106], pp. 6–7, 25, 61, 119.

(alleged) inability to understand the point of skeptical arguments would ultimately rest on an (alleged) confusion between theoretical and practical issues and the subsequent subordination of the former to the latter.

I think that this view of common-sense philosophy, although widely held, is false. The central question of this book may thus be summarized as follows: Is it true to say that common-sense doctrines are interchangeable in that they are all silent about the philosophical justification of the appeal to common sense in philosophy? If we could show that two of the foremost spokesmen for common sense do provide philosophical justification for their doctrines and if we could show further that their justifications are not identical, then, I think, we should have a basis for concluding that other common-sense doctrines need reevaluation.<sup>2</sup>

Let me add that the absence of an accurate history of common-sense doctrines is even more amazing because such philosophies have been quite important and influential—even becoming the institutionalized philosophy in Scotland, France, Spain, Italy, and the United States.<sup>3</sup> Once the actual writings of common-sense philosophers are considered, the tendency to represent all common-sense philosophies by the same caricature is difficult to understand. A brief survey of the claims made on behalf of common sense immediately suggests various and different views of the nature of human knowledge. Shall we say, with Descartes, that common sense is of all things the most equally distributed or, with d'Holbach, that there is nothing more uncommon in the world than common sense? Shall we admit, with Shaftesbury, that it is easier to imagine half mankind run mad and joined precisely in the same species of folly than to reject the truth of common sense? Shall we, like Hume, base our approach to common sense on the awareness of both the obstinacy and the corrigibility of man's "natural" beliefs.

The point is that from Descartes to d'Holbach, from Shaftesbury to Hume, various different postulates about the nature of human

2. For the kinds of issues I have in mind concerning the question of justification, see "Démonstration, vérification, justification," [117].

3. E. Gilson, [77], p. 18, says that we need a history of such doctrines. Working on these lines, see D. F. Norton, [148], and his article in [150]; E. de Angelis, [5]; R. G. Mayor, [138]; E. Pust, [166]. For the influence of common-sense doctrines in French Canada, see my essay, [127].

knowledge have been made on behalf of common sense, and the question whether common-sense philosophers *did* offer a justification for their basic position can be answered only by an analysis of specific common-sense philosophies. In comparing the doctrines of Claude Buffier (1661–1737) and of Thomas Reid (1710–1796), I shall attempt to show the extent to which they take the question of the conditions for a valid claim to knowledge seriously; the extent to which their views on such conditions offer substantial differences; and the sense in which they have much more to offer than the “kicking-the-stone” argument.

Before I begin the comparison between Buffier and Reid, a few remarks are in order concerning the ways in which their specific doctrines have been inadequately treated. Buffier and Reid cannot be presented as “forgotten” philosophers. On the contrary, there are many writings on their doctrines and almost all philosophical dictionaries and most histories of philosophy mention their appeal to common sense.<sup>4</sup>

However, many previous surveys of the works of Buffier and Reid ignore their actual doctrines and focus on a very different question: the extent to which it is possible to make these doctrines fit the models and issues of other philosophical systems. Indeed, because it is assumed that Buffier and Reid were merely writing in reaction to other philosophers, accounts of their philosophies concentrate on how they understood and above all misunderstood Descartes, Locke, Hume, and others. These attempts are confusing not only because any rigorous assessment of these philosophers’ *original* views is generally missing, but also because they fail to take into account the complex historical contexts of the doctrines of Buffier and Reid.

Buffier and Reid are thinkers who belong to different milieus and philosophical traditions: Claude Buffier, a French Jesuit of the early

4. More detailed accounts of the writings on Buffier and Reid will be given in the following chapters on each thinker. There are a few books on Buffier’s works and a much larger number of books on Reid. We have only a few analyses of certain topics related to both thinkers: J. Strasser related Buffier and Reid to Descartes ([195], pp. 177–198). S. A. Grave thinks that Buffier and Reid have the same reaction against philosophical paradoxes and skepticism ([80], pp. 81ff.). G. Ardley sees a new-Cartesian (and anti-Humean) basis in the common sense of Buffier and Reid ([6], pp. 98–101). J. R. Armogathe shows the concern of Buffier and Reid with “egoism,” either metaphysical or moral ([8], pp. 131–138, 152–156).

eighteenth century, was presumably influenced by Cartesian-Malebranchian rationalism; Thomas Reid, a Scottish Presbyterian, late eighteenth century, was presumably influenced by Lockean-Humean empiricism and the moral sense of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson. However, the doctrines of Buffier and Reid cannot be explained merely by reference to the prevailing theories of their time and country. For example, we know that Buffier knew and highly praised Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* and that Reid read Descartes, Malebranche, Arnauld, and other continental philosophers very carefully. Furthermore, although they belonged to different traditions, both Buffier and Reid reacted against the extreme positions of the received philosophies of their countries.<sup>5</sup>

I take this historical complexity and the failure of philosophers to analyze accurately the writings of Reid and Buffier to account for the series of incompatible epithets applied to the views of both. Thus Buffier and Reid are considered by different authors to be both Cartesian and anti-Cartesian, Lockean and anti-Lockean, Humean and anti-Humean, realist and mystic, irrationalist, Aristotelian, Pascalian, Augustinian, Lamennaisian—not to mention the fact that they are said to be more or less enlightened in an age of Enlightenment. Such confusion invites, even demands, an analysis that will provide a more accurate understanding of common sense in this complex period, as well as a better understanding of the actual common-sense philosophies of Buffier and Reid. The important point, however, is that there is little hope of better understanding if we merely try to show the extent to which these common-sense philosophers have misunderstood Descartes, Locke, Aristotle, Hume—or anticipated Lamennais, Cousin, Peirce, Moore.<sup>6</sup>

5. Of course, part of the problem is, for example, that we have little knowledge of the Jesuits' philosophical role during the Enlightenment. See E. Allard [3]; B. Jansen [97]; [98]; P. A. Alletz [4]; A. R. Désautels [60], G. Dumas [65]; A. Monod [141]; B. T. Morgan [146]; Comte de Montbas [142]; J. Pappas [153]; R. R. Palmer, [151], [152]; G. Sortais [191]; L. Marcil-Lacoste [123]. See also D'Alembert [2]; Diderot [63]; and the anonymous [62], [99], [100], [101], [102], [174].

6. To give an example of the difficulties in treating the common-sense doctrines by reference to external evidence, we can compare L. M. Marsak's statement to that of E. Bréhier. For Marsak, the examples of Fontenelle and Buffier "should serve to indicate that even in the height of the Cartesian-Newtonian controversy, in France, the real issue had nothing to do with empiricism vs rationalism" (see [133], p. 32). Bréhier says: "Empiriste et déductif presque tout le monde l'est au 18ème siècle: chacun cherche en chaque science le fait fondamental d'où tout le reste pourra se déduire" (in [23], 2:436).

In the case of Buffier and Reid, my claim that certain preconceptions have impeded attempts to understand their doctrines can be further illustrated by another revealing fact. In 1780, an anonymous author attacked Thomas Reid and charged that Reid had plagiarized Buffier's treatise on common sense published in 1724. The charge made against Reid did not lack vigor. As the author says in explaining his denunciation of "plagiarism, concealment and ingratitude":

whoever will attentively consider his work, and compare it to that of Père Buffier, will certainly find that Reid has the greatest obligations to the learned Jesuit; that he has exerted much art in concealing what he has stolen, and afforded no satisfactory, or even any explanation of his ideas, concerning the principles of common sense.<sup>7</sup>

This attack raised serious questions about the originality of Reid's doctrine of common sense, questions that are still *unanswered* despite work by several historians of ideas. Indeed, as Aguilar has recently shown, the different approaches used in the history of philosophy, either to attack or to defend Reid on this question, have not yet produced any direct or substantial answer based on *internal* evidence.<sup>8</sup>

Whether we consider the lines of defenses used in the nineteenth century by D. Stewart<sup>9</sup> and F. Bouillier<sup>10</sup> or the historical approaches

7. The quotation is from p. xii of the English translation (London: J. Johnson, 1780) of Buffier's *Traité des premières vérités et de la source de nos jugements où l'on examine le sentiment des philosophes sur les premières notions des choses* (Paris, 1724). Hereafter referred to as *Traité*.

8. Juan A. Ventosa Aguilar, *El Sentido Commun en las Obras Filosoficas del P. Claude Buffier* (Barcelona: Seminario Conciliar, 1957). To Aguilar's summary we must add more recent writings on this question: Johano Strasser's article, [195]; B. A. Brody's introduction to his reprint of Reid's works, [169]; K. S. Wilkins's book on Buffier, [203]; and H. M. Bracken's introduction to another recent edition of Reid's works [171]. Strasser only alludes to the question of plagiarism as an already settled question, and Brody straightforwardly affirms that Reid knew Buffier's works *after* he had developed his own ideas ([169], p. xxiii). The conclusions of Wilkins and of Bracken are more accurate: both argue that the question of Reid's originality is an open question that needs reexamination (see Wilkins [203], pp. 12, 112–14; Bracken [171], 1: xxix).

9. D. Stewart, *Elements of the Philosophy of the Mind*, pp. 60–69, in [194], vol. 3; see also Aguilar, [1], pp. 104–7. Stewart's analysis refers to Reid's *Inquiry* only and it concentrates on criteria by which one would distinguish Reid's first principles from Baconian *idolatribus*. Stewart concludes that Buffier's views are superior to that of Reid, and that Reid's acknowledgment of Buffier's *Traité* in his later works shows that the absence of a reference to it in the *Inquiry* proceeds from ignorance.

10. [133], pp. xxxii–xiv. Bouillier does not mention the charge of plagiarism. How-

used by W. Hamilton<sup>11</sup> and J. McCosh,<sup>12</sup> whether we consider the arguments used by twentieth-century writers such as F. K. Montgo-

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ever, concerning Buffier's list of first principles, which he compares to Reid's list of first principles of contingent truths, he says: "Ces analogies sont si grandes qu'il est difficile de ne pas croire qu'il [Reid] en a pris l'idée et l'exemple dans le *Traité des Vérités premières*" (p. xix). "Je trouve en germe, dans le P. Buffier, presque tous les arguments développés par Reid en faveur de la certitude du témoignage des sens" (p. xxxii). Bouillier concludes: "La France aussi peut se vanter d'avoir eu sa philosophie écossaise" (p. xlvi). Concerning a similar rejection of representative ideas, see pp. xxv ff. See also Aguilar, [1], pp. 108–9. According to Aguilar, a Sulpician named Manier (1843) was also interested in the question of Reid's originality in the nineteenth century. He insists on Reid's sincerity as an unquestionable fact. Also Louis Peisse (1840), who translated Hamilton's works into French, affirms the similarity of the two doctrines (see Aguilar [1], pp. 107–8). According to H. Valroger, Manier would have been the editor of Buffier's treatise: *Traité des Premières Vérités et de la source de nos jugements*, nouvelle édition augmentée d'une notice et de notes critiques par un Professeur de philosophie (Paris-Lyon: Adolphe Delahay, 1843). See Aguilar, [1], p. 107, n. 36. Louis Peisse denies that the Scottish philosophy could be called Kantian: "C'est dans les écrits si injustement négligés du P. Buffier qu'on peut trouver une véritable conformité avec les principes de l'école écossaise. Cette conformité est si frappante qu'on ne peut s'empêcher de croire que c'est à cet auteur que Reid a directement emprunté sa méthode, ses vues les plus générales et jusqu'à certaines formes de langage. On peut ajouter à notre honte que cet excellent philosophe serait encore absolument inconnu en France, si Reid lui-même n'avait signalé son mérite. Cette citation de Reid, une mention de M. Destutt de Tracy (Logique, discours préliminaire), deux lignes de Voltaire (Siècle de Louis XIV) composent à peu près toute l'histoire du P. Buffier. Il est surprenant surtout que les disciples de l'école écossaise en France n'aient pas songé, malgré l'indication de Reid, à établir cette filiation" (in Sir W. Hamilton [86], p. xxii).

11. Thomas Reid, *Philosophical Works*, with notes and supplementary dissertations by Sir William Hamilton, introduction by H. M. Bracken. 2 vols. (Hildesheim; Georg Olms, 1967), 2: 788a–789b. Hereafter cited as *Works*. (Note A: On the philosophy of common sense or our primary beliefs considered as the ultimate criterion of truth; see also Aguilar, [1], pp. 109–12.) Hamilton who wants to put down the imputation of plagiarism "once and for ever" argues that there is a tradition of appeal to common sense that goes back to Hesiod, Heraclitus, and Aristotle. Hamilton lists more than one hundred testimonies and concludes that it would be "the apex of absurdity" to presume that none but Buffier could have suggested to Reid either the principle or its designation.

12. James McCosh, [138], pp. 220–23. See also Aguilar, [1], p. 112. For McCosh also there was a tradition of appeal to common sense and he refers to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Turnbull.

mery,<sup>13</sup> T. Segerstedt,<sup>14</sup> and J. F. McCormick,<sup>15</sup> we shall not find any solution to the question of plagiarism based on what Buffier and Reid actually say about common sense. In general, rather than comparing the definitions and the arguments offered by Buffier and Reid, the conclusions concerning Reid's originality rest on decisions about the moment when he could have read Buffier's treatise.<sup>16</sup> Thus we have conflicting divisions of Reid's works into "before/after" he read the French defender of common sense, and the evidence is not convincing: whatever the precise moment, the central question is the extent to which the two doctrines duplicate each other. Accordingly, the conclusions concerning the originality of Reid's doctrine are remarkably vague.<sup>17</sup>

But if the question of Reid's originality is still an open one, the view that the doctrines of Buffier and Reid are very similar is a matter of growing unanimity. For example, P. Hazard, E. Gilson, M. F. Sciacca, A. N. Foxe, E. Bréhier, J. Maréchal, A. Bertrand, and P. Bernard echo F. Ueberweg, P. P. Royer-Collard, A. Sicard, and N. J. Laforêt—

13. Francis K. Montgomery, [144], p. 142; see also Aguilar, [1], p. 113. Montgomery defends Reid's originality in a straightforward appeal to the fact that Reid says, before Buffier, that it is a desideratum of logic that we delineate first principles of common sense.

14. Torgny T. Segerstedt, [183], pp. 5–8, 21, 44–45, 18; see also Aguilar, [1], pp. 113–14. Segerstedt thinks that we can defend the originality of at least Reid's *Inquiry*, where he finds a Baconian influence upon Reid's "empirical" common sense and the Cambridge Platonists' influence upon Reid's "rationalistic" common sense.

15. John F. McCormick, [135], pp. 299–317, esp. pp. 315–16; see also Aguilar, [1], pp. 114–15. McCormick argues that the similarities between the two doctrines are "too pat to be entirely accidental" and concludes that even Reid's *Inquiry* can hardly be said to be original.

16. *Reid Works*, 2: 713b. According to Hamilton, the most probable date is 1767, i.e., when Reid wrote an account of Aristotle's *Logic* in which we find his first mention of Buffier (see 2: 681a, note). Notice also that Reid refers to Buffier three times in his *Intellectual Powers*. See, in particular, Reid, *Works*, 2: 468a–b.

17. Notice that such external criteria also include nationalistic reactions. For example, M. Chastaing is surprised that common-sense philosophy is identified as "Scottish" when it has been defined by a French thinker; on the other hand, Urquhart thinks that "metaphysical Scotland" obviously has an advantage over French philosophy (see Maxime Chastaing, [42], pp. 352–99, esp. p. 356, n. 2; Sir T. Urquhart, "Discovery of a Most Exquisite Jewel," quoted in J. McCosh, [136], p. 25). For references to Descartes, see, e.g., Bouillier, [33]; Strasser, [195]; for references to Bacon, see Stewart, [194]; Segerstedt, [183]; for reference to Thomas Aquinas, see McCormick, [135]; and for references to Hume, see almost all of Reid's commentators.

all see Reid as bringing back and developing Buffier's doctrine of common sense.<sup>18</sup> Apparently, because both philosophers appeal to common sense, it has been assumed that their doctrines must be similar in all philosophically relevant aspects. Thus, if in my analysis of the views of Buffier and Reid I can show that their views are different, it should be possible to provide some answers to the question of the extent of Reid's originality.

Let me add that this situation concerning the cases of Buffier and Reid is more than a historical accident. As I said earlier, there are preconceptions concerning what common-sense philosophy is. Indeed, the peripheral ways in which the question of plagiarism has been approached and the absence of a comparative study of the content of these two doctrines are illustrations of the fact that common-sense philosophies have not received accurate treatment *as philosophies*. It is tempting to see the lack of concern with what these philosophers actually say as a result of the caricatures that are held concerning common-sense doctrines. In any case, it is surely meaningful to realize that the *substantial* answer to the question of plagiarism could only be found precisely where common-sense philosophers are assumed to be silent: in the justification of the appeal to common sense in philosophy.

18. P. Hazard, [88], 1: 117. E. Gilson, [77], p. 16. M. F. Sciacca, [182], pp. 67 (n. 95), 79, 103. A. N. Foxe, [72], p. 134. E. Bréhier, [23], vol. 2, fasc. 2, J. Maréchal, [132], 1: 89. A. Bertrand, [17], p. 371. P. Bernard, [16], p. 1168. F. Ueberweg, [197], 2: 396. P. P. Royer-Collard, in E. Boutroux [19], p. 20. A. Sicard, [184], p. 374. N. J. Laforêt, [110], pp. 67-70.

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## II

### *Claude Buffier*

#### 1. THE CONTEXT OF BUFFIER'S DOCTRINE OF COMMON SENSE

VOLTAIRE WAS ONE of the first to praise Buffier's philosophy. In *Le siècle de Louis XIV*, he included Buffier in his "Catalogue de la plupart des écrivains" and wrote: "Il y a dans ses traités de métaphysique des morceaux que Locke n'aurait pas désavoués; et c'est le seul jésuite qui ait mis une philosophie raisonnable dans ses ouvrages." Despite Voltaire's praise, Buffier's philosophy is still little known. This "shameful neglect," as Louis Peisse once called it, may derive from the fact that Buffier's doctrine of common sense is part of a far-ranging intellectual activity. A brief survey of his publications reveals indeed that this French Jesuit was interested in the intellectual issues of his time and much concerned with systematizing his views on many topics. His attempt to understand all sciences and ideas in their historical development and to present these in a form that would be understandable to the general public can be related to his particular function in the Society of Jesus. From 1699 until his death, Buffier was a "scriptor" at the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Having no teaching responsibilities and being primarily assigned to the writing of educational and literary works, he wrote copiously, to become the author of nearly fifty books. Buffier was also one of the principal authors of the *Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, as well as an active writer for the *Mémoires de Trévoux* from 1701 until his death in 1737.<sup>1</sup>

1. For L. Peisse's statement, see Hamilton, [86], p. xxii. For more details on Buffier's literary activities and its context, see Jean M. Faux, [69], pp. 131-51, esp. p. 147;

His work reaches its peak in 1732 with the publication of *Cours de sciences, sur des principes nouveaux et simples; pour former le langage, l'esprit et le coeur, dans l'usage ordinaire de la vie*.<sup>2</sup> This enormous book includes

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H. Bernard, [15], pp. 176–81; C. Sommervogel, “Essai historique sur les Mémoires de Trévoux” in [189]; Sommervogel is not sure that Buffier was among the first writers of the *Mémoires de Trévoux* (see 1: 8–11; also Jean M. Faux, [69], p. 134; René Pomeau, [162], p. 49; L. M. Marsak, [133], p. 15; Jean Molino, [140], pp. 794 ff.; *Mémoires de Trévoux* (July 1732), p. 1161). It is never mentioned that one of Buffier’s works has been subject to censorship. His *Pratique de la mémoire artificielle pour apprendre et pour retenir aisément la Chronologie, et l’histoire universelle* was published in 1705 in Paris (Nicolas le Cler, Edme Couterot, and M. Brunet) with the approbation of the king. But this book was prohibited a year later, after the detection of a passage was said to be false, injurious, prejudicial, and in opposition to the doctrine of Gallicanism. The (anonymous) author of this censorship charges that the first censor, M. Pouchard, inadvertently approved the publication of Buffier’s book because he wrongly assumed that all priests are orthodox. For the prohibition, see the bottom page of this edition. The passage in question (pp. 145–46) refers to Pope Innocent XI, who refused to grant bulls to French bishops because, says Buffier, the French clergy had not yet withdrawn from the Assemblée of 1681. The censor notices that the passage implies that the French clergy did afterwards withdraw and therefore it is injurious to the theory and practice of Gallicanism. Because of this criticism, Buffier’s rights to publish this book were withdrawn. This censorship does not seem to have greatly affected Buffier’s literary works, even though his *Pratique de la mémoire artificielle* had a new complete edition only in the nineteenth century. Apparently Buffier moved the ecclesiastical section of his *Pratique de la mémoire* into the edition of his history announced in 1714. See at the end of *Les Principes du raisonnement* (Paris: Pierre Witte, 1717). Buffier had already attacked the practice of the law of censorship in *Préjugés*, nos. 326–66, pp. 455–69. On the question of censorship, see F. T. Perrens, [159]; A. Bachman, [9]; I. O. Wade, [199].

2. Hereafter referred to as *Cours de sciences*. Published in Paris by Guillaume Cavalier and P. F. Giffard, in 1732. The references to Buffier’s works are from Carlos Sommervogel, [188], pp. 342 ff.

In the *Cours de sciences*, we have the following: “Grammaire françoise sur un plan nouveau,” pp. 1–292 (hereafter referred to as *Grammaire*). “Traité philosophique et pratique d’éloquence,” pp. 293–420. “Traité philosophique et pratique de poésie,” pp. 421–552. “Traité des premières vérités et de la source de nos jugements,” pp. 553–744 (referred to as *Traité*). “Traité des vérités de conséquence; ou les principes du raisonnement,” pp. 745–892 (hereafter referred to as *Raisonnement*). “Elemens de métaphysique, a la portée de tout le monde,” pp. 893–936 (hereafter referred to as *Métaphysique*). “Examen des préjugés vulgaires; Pour disposer l’esprit à juger sainement et précisément de tout,” pp. 937–1060 (hereafter referred to as *Préjugés*). “Traité de la société civile, et du moyen de se rendre heureux en contribuant au bonheur des personnes avec qui l’on vit,” pp. 1061–1256 (hereafter referred to as *Société civile*). “Exposition des preuves les plus sensibles de la véritable Religion; avec une analyse succincte et suivie,” pp. 1423–70 (hereafter referred to as *Exposition*). “Eclaircissements des difficultés, proposées sur divers traités de ce cours de science” (hereafter referred

many new editions of already published works. It puts together Buffier's views on grammar, eloquence, poetry, philosophy, society and morality, and religion; it also includes a discourse on the study and method of sciences.

Buffier's works were quite popular in Europe, especially in France. In fact, his *Cours de sciences* illustrates many of the features of what was later to be called the Encyclopedist movement. Many of Buffier's ideas are recognizable, even in detail, in the *Encyclopédie* itself: there one finds not only his celebrated distinction between internal and external truths, but also his notions regarding first principles, common sense, reasoning, internal sentiment, society, freedom—about twenty such items in all.<sup>3</sup>

However varied Buffier's intellectual interests were, most of the attention that his writings have attracted was the result of his "new," "peculiar," "audacious" doctrine of common sense, a doctrine first presented in his *Traité des premières vérités et de la source de nos jugements où l'on examine le sentiment des philosophes sur les premières notions des choses* (1724).<sup>4</sup> This doctrine remains remarkably articulate and consistent throughout Buffier's many books. For example, he almost never uses

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to as *Eclaircissements*). "Discours sur l'étude et sur la méthode des sciences," pp. 1471–96. "Dissertations sur divers sujets, Par rapport au Cours des Sciences," pp. 1497–1560. For more details on Buffier's writings, see Montgomery, [144], pp. 10–55; Wilkins, [203], pp. 15–65; René Pomeau, [162], pp. 39, 64–65, 49; Georges Snyders, [187], pp. 86–88, 103; Gabriel Compayré [48], vol. 1, bk. 6, chap. 1; see also A. L. C. Destutt de Tracy, [61], part. 3, p. 135.

3. The articles "Common sense" and "Internal sentiment" are literally the same in the *Encyclopédie* and in Buffier's *Traité*, except perhaps a few commas or a definite or indefinite article. For more details on the articles of the *Encyclopédie* and their corresponding passages in Buffier's works, see Wilkins, [203], pp. 102–3, and appendix. She mentions: agir, appréhension, connaissance, liberté, logique, premiers principes, propriété, raisonnement, sens, sens commun, sentiment intime, vérité, vraisemblable. In a letter (June 17, 1973) she mentions also: division, identité, naturel, as further examples of the reproduction of Buffier's passages. See also Montgomery, [144], pp. 190–95 for a similar list, and Pierre Hermand, [91], pp. 231–32. Notice that at Buffier's time there were 612 collèges, 197 "pensionnats," and many universities belonging to the Jesuits. See A. Sicard, [184], p. 373; C. Rochemonteix, [176], 2 vols.; and M. G. Dupont-Ferrier, [66].

4. In Buffier's lifetime the *Traité* was published in the following editions: Paris: Veuve Mongé, 1724; Paris: Jean Luc Nyon, 1724; Paris: François Flahant, 1724; Paris: Chez François Didot, 1724; also in *Cours de sciences* (1732), pp. 553–744.

the expression “common sense” in any but the philosophical sense his *Traité* is meant to establish and defend.

Although the most articulate statement of the doctrine of common sense is to be found in the *Traité*, Buffier’s views are also expressed in three other books: the *Examen des préjugés vulgaires; Pour disposer l’esprit à juger sainement et précisément de tout* (1704), where one finds a logical analysis of twelve prejudices and a plea for paradoxes contrary to vulgar opinions; *Les principes du raisonnement exposés en deux Logiques nouvelles. Avec des remarques sur les Logiques qui ont eu le plus de réputation de notre temps* (1714), which provides an epistemological analysis of the many meanings of the notion of truth and a plea for enlarging the scope of the modern criteria of truth; and his *Elémens de métaphysique à la portée de tout le monde* (1725), which is a defense of the subtlety, the utility, and the soundness of metaphysics.<sup>5</sup>

In order to understand Buffier’s doctrine, it is thus necessary to analyze not only his *Traité*, but also his other philosophical writings. This has not been done yet, which is all the more deplorable given Buffier’s claim that his doctrine of common sense is central to an understanding of the relationships between his logical, metaphysical, epistemological, and practical views:

First truths, or those which are to be drawn from the inmost recesses and most immediate operations of the human mind, belong to that more extensive science which forms the subject of this treatise. If it shall be considered by some as truly metaphysical, they will not perhaps be mistaken; but, whatever it may be it must so closely accompany, precede or follow logic, that they mutually lend a necessary support to each other. Logic therefore remains in some measure incomplete, until it be joined to this, which likewise, in various places, supposes the former; but those two articles, being united, furnish everything that relates to the science of the human understanding, and teach

5. *Préjugés*, Paris: Mariette, 1704; also in *Cours de sciences*, pp. 937–1060. *Raisonnement*, Paris: Pierre Witte, 1717; also in *Cours de sciences*, pp. 745–892. *Métaphysique*, Paris: Pierre François Giffart, 1725 (also, in 1750, new ed.); Paris: La Veuve Mongé, 1725; also in *Cours de sciences*. The *Préjugés* was republished in 1725 with the following new title: *Examen des préjugés vulgaires, pour disposer l’esprit à juger sainement et précisément de tout, nouvelle édition considérablement augmentée avec l’Analyse et l’Usage Moral ou Littéraire de chaque sujet*, imprimé à Evreux, Paris: Chez Pierre François Giffart et La Veuve Mongé, 1725. The *Principes du raisonnement*, republished in 1724, has the following new title: *Suites du Traité des premières vérités, ou des vérités de conséquence*. Paris: Chez François Didot, 1724.

us to form thence the true art of thinking justly, and with precision;—the object most deserving the attention of man; the most solid fruit of science.<sup>6</sup>

Buffier's views on common sense also question the usual distinction between academic and nonacademic topics. For example, he claims that an analysis of vulgar prejudices is necessary in determining the first principles of common sense because our problem is to make sure we do not mistake these principles for mere stubbornness in opinion. As he puts it, "too much good sense can do harm to mankind," hinting at his permanent target, dogmatism.<sup>7</sup> This concern with ordinary opinions does not imply a neglect of philosophical theory. On the contrary, Buffier sees his doctrine of common sense as an attempt to defend the plausibility and the importance of metaphysics itself.

## 2. THE PROBLEM OF ASSERTING THE CORE OF BUFFIER'S PHILOSOPHY OF COMMON SENSE

Given Buffier's attempt to avoid static categories, it is not easy to pinpoint the essentials of his doctrine of common sense. What I propose is an analysis of Buffier's notion of common sense (1) as a disposition, (2) as a set of first principles, (3) as a philosophical doctrine. My claim is that the relationships between these three levels of analyses of common sense give Buffier's philosophy its originality.

In analyzing Buffier's notions of common sense, I shall rely mainly on the *Traité des vérités premières*, a book which, according to Sir William Hamilton, offers "the most formal and the most articulate presentation of common sense after Lord Cherbury's *De Veritate* (1624)."<sup>8</sup> I shall, however, supplement my discussion of Buffier's views by an analysis of crucial ideas and arguments more fully developed in the three books I mentioned earlier, his *Examen des préjugés vulgaires*, his

6. *Traité*, no. 2, p. 3/p. 2. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to the *Préjugés* and to *Métaphysique* are to the number (no.) in the edition of the *Cours de sciences* followed by the corresponding page (p.) in Bouillier's ed., [33]. The same pattern holds for the *Traité*, with an addition of the corresponding page (/p.) in the English edition of 1780, [30]. The references to the *Raisonnement* are to the number (no.) of the edition of the *Cours de sciences* followed by the corresponding page (p.) in the edition of 1714, [32].

7. *Préjugés*, no. 365, p. 469.

8. Hamilton says: "If we except Lord Herbert of Cherbury, Buffier was the first regular and comprehensive attempt to found philosophy on certain primary truths given in certain primary sentiments and feelings" (in Reid, *Works*, 2: 786–89).

*Principes du raisonnement*, and his *Eléments de métaphysique*. This will not only help to provide a more systematic understanding of Buffier's philosophy, but also to eliminate some misunderstandings, in particular the view that common-sense philosophers are unaware of the problem of defining common sense.

### 3. THE PROBLEM OF DEFINING COMMON SENSE AS BUFFIER SEES IT

In the very beginning of his attempt to defend common sense, Buffier makes it clear that the issue is to define the notion in philosophical terms and to provide a justification for the beliefs that his definition involves. In the *Traité*, his goal is to show that there are truths—first principles—which are epistemologically prior to any other truths. The truth of such principles is guaranteed by their being shown to proceed from the most natural, immediate, and “internal” operations of the human mind. In other words, the attempt is to demonstrate the existence of self-evident truths, which provide the ground of human beliefs, and to show the validity of such grounds.

Delineating first principles is a problem because, according to Buffier, there is a limit to the possibility of *demonstrating* the truth of human judgments. For him, the human mind perceives propositions that are “so clear, so obvious, that they can neither be proved, nor refuted by other propositions of greater perspicuity.”<sup>9</sup> However, philosophers pay little attention to such truths and their implications, while ordinary men—Buffier expects—will find this subject very difficult:

If the subject of this book be interesting to the Reader, how very formidable must it appear to the author! The researches it necessarily implies demand reflections that are frequently abstruse; and, whatever care may be taken to explain in the clearest manner, they are little relished, and frequently as little understood, by men of ordinary capacity. I have in this work endeavoured to found them on common sense; but common sense itself is not always easily conceived, or precisely understood, by those who have not made themselves familiar with objects above the capacity and notions of the vulgar.

It would be some consolation could we securely hope for the approbation of the learned; but this is another difficulty we have to encounter.<sup>10</sup>

9. *Traité*, no. 8, pp. 5–6/p. 6.

10. *Traité*, nos. 3–5, pp. 3–5/pp. 3–5. Buffier's point is that apparently philosophers and logicians prefer abstruse treatises, as if what is unintelligible were sound and what is intelligible could not be.

In order to eliminate the problems created by the inaccurate use of philosophical terms related to common sense and in order to evaluate the truth of the propositions that are said to be self-evident, Buffier's general strategy will thus be an attempt to make his endeavor to define common sense clearly in philosophical terms part of his justification of the appeal to common sense.<sup>11</sup>

Far from holding that common sense is a ready-made notion, Buffier insists that there are serious difficulties in the attempt to define this term. As he remarks, common sense is not very common: philosophers do not agree on what it is and what it means in philosophy, while the common man does not seem to realize that the question of its justification is a serious one. These difficulties, however, derive from a more fundamental problem: the problem of designation and language. Buffier's view on the last issue has not been taken into account when evaluating his definition of common sense. This has created misunderstandings. Indeed, Buffier's main thesis on designations and language indicates that we should *not* assume that a common-sense philosopher cannot defend a skeptical position, in particular on the issue of metaphysical realism.

Buffier notes that it is easy to define a word by using other words. But verbal designation alone does not allow us to reach understanding because, while "men do not differ much as to sentiment, . . . they differ in the words adopted by each sect and to which they are severally attached which produces confusion in discourse and afterwards in thought."<sup>12</sup> Our use of terms is often arbitrary and, for Buffier, one essential part of true logic is an attempt to protect men from the "contagion of words," which is the most dangerous and fruitful source of all errors. Many of our misunderstandings are, properly speaking, mere "querelles de mots," a problem that "verbiage," the habit of using words without attention to their significance, simply reinforces.

While referring to custom in matters of designation, it is important to notice that Buffier does not want to argue that common usage must be used as a standard of philosophical definitions. He is willing to admit that certain distinctions that are made in ordinary language could be relevant to philosophical issues, at least inasmuch as the

11. On the importance and difficulty of the task, see *Préjugés*, no. 356, p. 465; *Métaphysique*, nos. 65–69, pp. 295–97.

12. *Traité*, no. 555, p. 226/pp. 399–400. Here Buffier quotes Locke.