When Thomas Uebel invited me to write a paper on the current situation of history of French philosophy of science, I must admit that I found the task a little daunting. I do not think that it is possible to do justice to the diverse research programmes that scholars in different countries are developing, or to present them as a coherent whole. I would like, however, to make some remarks on the state of this particular field of study, with two provisos: one is that my perspective is somewhat centred in my experience in Great Britain, although it is not limited to it, the other is that I do not aim at an overall presentation of the current state of the study of history of French philosophy of science. Inevitably, my remarks will mainly refer to that part of French philosophy of science that is the object of my own research. I am confident, however, that Anastasios Brenner in his commentary will correct my necessarily partial presentation.

Especially from the point of view of somebody working in the English-speaking world, French philosophy of science appears to be an area of study with clearer boundaries than other national traditions. There seems to be a general understanding that French philosophy of science is different from ‘mainstream’ philosophy of science: this difference has been made official, as it were, in reference works and Encyclopaedias. In this, the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy is paradigmatic: it has two entries, one for ‘Philosophy of Science’, and another, contributed by Gary Gutting, for ‘French philosophy of science’.

French philosophy of science is not perceived as autonomous only by English-speaking philosophers. Indeed, the same distinction as that of the Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy has been proposed by French-language scholars. Dominique Lecourt, for instance, in his overview of the philosophy of the sciences, has presented this discipline first as a largely Austrian and Anglo-American affair (although Auguste Comte is present as a founder father), and then has introduced the ‘French tradition of philosophical reflection on the sciences’ as autonomous from the tradition of logical positivism and its legacy. Lecourt has explained that the distinctive identity of this tradition mainly rests on its constant link between
history and philosophy of science, and on the rejection of empiricism and of a ‘certain logical formalism’.\(^1\)

In fact, there is little difference between Gutting’s and Lecourt’s choices of illustrious names for the pantheon of French philosophy of science, and both place Gaston Bachelard and Georges Canguilhem at the centre of their presentations. Unsurprisingly for a philosopher who has promoted Bachelard’s ideas arguably like no other, Lecourt has declared the former to be the ‘emblematic figure’ of the ‘French tradition of philosophy of science’, and has presented Georges Canguilhem as developing Bachelard’s philosophy. In Lecourt’s account, François Dagognet is the direct inheritor of this tradition, which for him has also produced thinkers who do not sit completely comfortably under the heading of philosophy of science: Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser.\(^2\) Like Lecourt, Gutting has dedicated in-depth analyses not only to Bachelard and Canguilhem, but also to Michel Foucault and Michel Serres.\(^3\) The presence of Foucault is particularly important for an English-speaking readership, who is much more likely to be familiar with his writings than with those of either Bachelard or Canguilhem, to this day not all translated into English.\(^4\) Indeed, some readers would have heard of them because of Foucault, not least due to Gutting himself: his book on Foucault opens with a chapter dedicated to these two philosophers.\(^5\)

Both Lecourt and Gutting provide backgrounds for the major philosophers of the ‘French tradition’ in philosophy of science: the former presents as the ‘fathers’ of this tradition Condorcet, Augustin Cournot and Auguste Comte, but mainly focuses on Pierre Duhem, Henri Poincaré, Emile Meyerson, Abel Rey, Léon Brunschvicg and Alexandre Koyré. Gutting introduces the main part of his article by sketching a history of French philosophy of science in which the main characters are Descartes, the Enlightenment, Auguste Comte, Pierre Duhem, Emile Meyerson and Henri Poincaré. However, the centrality of Bachelard and


\(^2\) Ibid, pp. 113-4.

