

The French Invention of “Psychologism” in 1828

Jean-François Braunstein

IN **REVUE D'HISTOIRE DES SCIENCES** 2012/2 Volume 65 , PAGES 197 TO 212

PUBLISHER **ARMAND COLIN**

ISSN 0151-4105

ISBN 9782200928025

DOI 10.3917/rhs.652.0197

Uploaded: 07/01/2013

Article available online at

<https://shs.cairn.info/journal-revue-d-histoire-des-sciences-2012-2-page-197?lang=en>



Discover the contents of this issue, follow the journal by email, subscribe...
Scan this QR code to access the page for this issue on Cairn.info.



Electronic distribution Cairn.info for Armand Colin.

You are authorized to reproduce this article within the limits of the terms of use of Cairn.info or, where applicable, the terms and conditions of the license subscribed to by your institution. Details and conditions can be found at cairn.info/copyright.

Unless otherwise provided by law, the digital use of these resources for educational purposes is subject to authorization by the Publisher or, where applicable, by the collective management organization authorized for this purpose. This is particularly the case in France with the CFC, which is the approved organization in this area.

The French Invention of “Psychologism” in 1828

Jean-François BRAUNSTEIN*

Abstract: Most French language dictionaries have the term “psychologism” date back to 1906 or 1907. This term would have been translated from German and would thus reflect the debates on psychologism, around Gottlob Frege and Edmund Husserl, which Martin Kusch minutely described in his book, *Psychologism*. In fact the dictionaries are unaware that this term can be found in French since 1838, in the writings of Pierre Leroux, with a very particular meaning, and even earlier in Auguste Comte’s work, who flatters himself, as early as 1828, on “killing psychologism”, with the assistance of François Broussais. We will endeavour to specify in which context the term “psychologism” appeared, the meaning it had, and to what extent it is possible to speak, in relation to the years 1820-1830, of “an early quarrel over psychologism”, which would comprise both similarities and differences, with the great German quarrel at the end of the nineteenth century. Renewed interest in psychologism today calls for such a historical study.

Keywords: psychologism; Théodore Jouffroy; Victor Cousin; François Broussais; Auguste Comte; Pierre Leroux.

Résumé : *La plupart des dictionnaires de langue française font dater le terme de psychologisme de 1906 ou 1907. Ce terme serait traduit de l’allemand et refléterait ainsi les débats sur le psychologisme, autour de Gottlob Frege et Edmund Husserl, que Martin Kusch a bien décrits dans son livre, Psychologism. En fait, les dictionnaires ignorent que ce terme se rencontre en français dès 1838, sous la plume de Pierre Leroux, avec un sens très particulier, voire plus avant encore chez Auguste Comte, qui se flatte, dès 1828, avec l’aide de François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, de « tuer le psychologisme ». Nous nous efforcerons de préciser dans quel contexte est apparu ce terme de psychologisme, quel sens lui est accordé, et dans quelle mesure il serait possible de parler, à propos*

* Université Paris-I, Panthéon-Sorbonne, Département de philosophie, 17, rue de la Sorbonne, 75005 Paris. (E-mail: jfbraunstein@noos.fr.)

des années 1820-1830, d'une « première querelle du psychologisme », qui comporterait un certain nombre de similitudes, mais aussi de différences, avec la grande querelle allemande de la fin du XIX^e siècle. Une telle étude historique nous paraît utile dans une période où l'on constate un regain d'intérêt pour le psychologisme.

Mots-clés : psychologisme ; Théodore Jouffroy ; Victor Cousin ; François-Joseph-Victor Broussais ; Auguste Comte ; Pierre Leroux.

There is at the present time a resurgence of interest in the question of psychologism, from both a historical point of view and a conceptual one. Several publications are evidence of this: the book by Martin Kusch entitled *Psychologism*,¹ which concerns the history of the “quarrel over psychologism” engaged in by German university professors around the year 1900; another by Pascal Engel, *Philosophie et psychologie*,² which has the ambition of rehabilitating a “reasonable psychologism”; and a 1997 special issue of the *Revue Philosophique* on “the question of psychologism.”³ All these works obviously refer to the polemics about psychologism that occurred when Gottlob Frege and then Edmund Husserl protested against an invasion of logic and mathematics, and even philosophy, on the part of psychology. In 1913, 107 German, Austrian, and Swiss professors signed a petition demanding that no more academic chairs designated for philosophy be given to people working in experimental psychology. Wilhelm Wundt answered the petition that same year in his pamphlet entitled, “*Psychology in a Fight for its Very Existence*.”⁴ As has been recently shown,⁵ this dispute is connected to a prior hostility on the part of the defenders of “pure philosophy” with regard to a psychology that clearly desired to imitate the natural sciences. This is the context in which the word *Psychologismus* appeared in German in about 1870 when Johann Eduard Erdmann used it to refer to the empirical psychology of Friedrich E. Beneke.⁶

According to the majority of dictionaries, the word “psychologism” is supposed to have appeared in French in connection with this German dispute around the turn of the century. The *Lalande*

1 - Martin Kusch, *Psychologism: A Case Study in the Sociology of Philosophical Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1995).

2 - Pascal Engel, *Philosophie et psychologie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

3 - *Psychologisme?* Special Issue, *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 122 (1997).

4 - Wilhelm Wundt, *Die Psychologie im Kampf ums Dasein* (Leipzig: Alfred Kröner, 1913).

5 - Léo Freuler, *La Crise de la philosophie au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 2003).

6 - Freuler, *La Crise*, 168.

dictionary⁷ and the etymologically-based *Larousse*⁸ dictionary dated the appearance of the word to 1906 (the *Wartburg*⁹ dictionary said it had appeared in 1907). The word was supposed to have appeared in an article by the logician Louis Couturat in 1906, which warned readers against the menace of "psychologism"; the article stated that psychologism posed a threat to both logic and philosophy, because of the "pretention of psychology to absorb philosophy or at least to pose as its foundation."¹⁰ It was our impression, based on a certain level of knowledge of French philosophy and psychology of the nineteenth century, that the word had actually been employed in French prior to this. This was confirmed by the *Trésor de la langue française*,¹¹ which dated the first use of the term in French to 1840. In fact, we were able to find a number of still earlier uses of the term, dating back to at least 1828. This rectification does not seem to us to be a mere lexicographical detail. It allows us to understand the meaning of the question of psychologism, to the extent that this discussion was developed in France in the 1830s and 1840s, amounting to a "first quarrel over psychologism," and one which cannot be reduced to a simple scientific controversy.

The Offensive of 1826, Led by Psychology: Jouffroy and Cousin

It makes sense to select the date of 1826 as the beginning of this early quarrel over psychologism. Two foundational works of French psychology appeared in that year: the long preface by Théodore Jouffroy which opened the *Esquisses de philosophie morale* by Dugald Stewart,¹² and the *Fragments philosophiques* by Victor

- 7 - André Lalande, *Vocabulaire technique et critique de la philosophie*, 11th edition (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972), 857.
- 8 - Albert Dauzat, Jean Dubois, and Henri Mitterand, *Nouveau dictionnaire étymologique et historique* (Paris: Larousse, 1964), 613.
- 9 - Walther von Wartburg, *Französisches etymologisches Wörterbuch: Eine Darstellung des galloromanischen Sprachschatzes*, Bd. 9 (Basel: R. G. Zbinden, 1988), 502.
- 10 - Louis Couturat, "La Logique et la métaphysique contemporaines," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, XIV (1906): 318-41, here 319.
- 11 - Institut national de la langue française (CNRS), *Trésor de la langue française: Dictionnaire de la langue du xix^e et du xx^e siècle, 1789-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), vol. XIII, 1435. These dates are repeated in most subsequent etymological dictionaries.
- 12 - Théodore Jouffroy, translator's preface, in Dugald Stewart, *Esquisses de philosophie morale* (Paris: Johanneau, 1826), i-clii. On Jouffroy and the founding of French psychology, see Laurent Clauzade, "La Philosophie écossaise et la fondation de la psychologie, de Jouffroy à Garnier et Lélut," in *Philosophie écossaise et philosophie française, 1750-1850*, ed. Elisabetta Arosio and Michel Malherbe (Paris: Vrin, 2007), 151-77.

Cousin.¹³ Jouffroy, a disciple of Cousin, wrote a sort of manifesto on behalf of psychology as an independent science, while Cousin wrote about the interest of the “psychological method” as the basis of his philosophical eclecticism.

In both cases, the use of the term “psychology” was a reaction to the then-dominant usage of the term “ideology” to refer to a science of thinking. Jouffroy explains this very clearly:

The science of the facts of consciousness, distinct from physiology by its instrument and by its object, must bear a name that expresses and signifies this difference. The term *ideology* has too narrow an acceptation; it refers only to a partial science of internal facts. The term *psychology*, which is in common usage, appears preferable to us because it refers to the facts with which this science is concerned, in terms of their most prominent characteristic, which is to be attributed to the soul; and since the principle of these phenomena has not yet been determined, it is of little importance at this point whether we use the word soul or something else to refer to this principle; the word does not predetermine any answer which may be given to the question; not even with regard to public opinion, which is aware that there is a question concerning these things.¹⁴

We must observe that the Ideologists themselves, twenty years earlier, had deliberately chosen the term “ideology” in preference to “psychology.” Antoine Destutt de Tracy put it this way:

The science of thinking does not yet have a name. We could give it the name of *psychology*. Condillac appeared willing to do this. But this word, which etymologically means *science of the soul*, appears to presuppose a knowledge of our being that we cannot flatter ourselves that we possess; in using the term, *psychology*, we would also be indicating that we are occupied with an indeterminate kind of research into first causes, whereas the purpose of all your work is to gain knowledge of effects and their practical consequences. I would therefore much prefer that we adopt the term, *ideology*, to refer to a science of ideas.¹⁵

13 - Victor Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques* (Paris: Sautet, 1826).

14 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, cxxxviii.

15 - Antoine Destutt de Tracy, “Mémoire sur la faculté de penser,” in *Mémoires de l'Institut national des sciences et des arts pour l'an IV de la République: Sciences morales et politiques*, vol. I, (August 1798), 283-450, here 324.

According to Dominique-Joseph Garat, as well, the choice of the term "psychology" was "not at all a happy one," because "by its etymology it refers to the idea of the soul rather than to the idea of the operations of the human mind."¹⁶ So there is already a considerable dispute with regard to the term, psychology.

Jouffroy appears as a disciple of Cousin, who was the first to have understood "the necessity of applying the experimental method to the science of internal facts."¹⁷ Like Cousin, Jouffroy takes the positive sciences as a model, and often cites François Magendie: psychology must use observation and experiment, as the "physiologist" does in using "his microscope and his scalpel."¹⁸ There is no difference between "internal observation, which is also called consciousness or inner sense"¹⁹ and external observation. Both allow for the establishment of laws: "Everything that has been attempted and completed with regard to sensible facts can also, in a manner that is just as solid and no less scientific, be carried out using facts of another nature." It is a question of recognizing the laws of internal facts; "Once these laws have been recognized [we can] make inductions regarding all other associated questions."²⁰ In one sense, internal observation is easier and more certain: experiments in psychology "are much easier to carry out, and permit a much higher degree of exactness in their results" than experiments in the natural sciences, to the extent that every human being represents the entire species.²¹ Certain conditions are necessary in order to permit a high quality "internal observation": "Thus it is that the silence which allows our ears to rest, and the darkness that relieves us of visual perceptions, and the solitude that separates us from the movements and the interests of social life, all bring us back naturally to the feeling of what happens within us."²² According to Jouffroy, this psychology cannot be reduced to physiology, as Magendie desired, but neither can it continue to offer an opinion regarding metaphysical questions.

16 - Cited by Georges Gusdorf, *La Conscience révolutionnaire: Les Idéologues* (Paris: Payot, 1978), 359.

17 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, cxlvi.

18 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, xxi.

19 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, xvii.

20 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, xxxviii.

21 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, xl.

22 - Jouffroy, *Esquisses*, xxix-xxx.

Cousin, on the other hand, in his preface to his own *Fragments philosophiques* of 1826, does not hesitate to connect psychology and metaphysics. For him, the “new philosophy” he intends to establish can be characterized by “the ever more rigorous application of the psychological method.”²³ Psychology thus has the job of leading us toward philosophy, something Cousin refers to in a formula that was much repeated at this time: “Psychology is the condition, and as it were the foyer leading in to philosophy.”²⁴ In fact, psychology allows him to found a theory of “impersonal reason” as well as a “theory of free activity, or of the self.” According to this theory, reason and free will are directly observable through inward-directed observation. From the days of his courses at the *École normale* in 1817 and 1818, Cousin emphasizes, he taught rational psychology, logic, and ontology, in that order. The importance of psychology as an introduction to philosophy would be made clear in the famous “new program” of philosophy of 1832 authored by Cousin, which would have a long-lasting effect on the teaching of philosophy in secondary schools. The influential nature of that program was appreciated by Jouffroy, in the *avertissement* to the second edition (1833) of Stewart’s *Esquisses*:

In the time since the first edition of this book was published, a notable change has taken place in the teaching of Philosophy. The programs of all the Courses of philosophy that are offered in France and registered at the University testify to the fact that almost everywhere, the leading method of teaching has changed from dogmatic to psychological, and that the majority of teachers have embarked upon the path of observation of human nature, the only one that can lead to the knowledge of the laws that govern it, and through such knowledge, to the scientific solution of the great questions that Philosophy has pursued, though in vain, since its beginning.²⁵

23 - Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, xiii. On the relationship between the psychology of the “moi” and metaphysics in Cousin’s work, see Jan Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2005).

24 - Cousin, *Fragments philosophiques*, xii.

25 - Théodore Jouffroy, “Avertissement,” in Dugald Stewart, *Esquisses de philosophie morale*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Jothanneau, 1833), n.p.

The Response of Physiologists in 1828: Broussais and Comte

The first criticisms of these attempts to found psychology in the manner described above can be dated to 1828, in particular to a book by a medical doctor, François-Joseph-Victor Broussais. This book, *De l'irritation et de la folie*,²⁶ is a violent polemic (and Broussais' most famous publication) devoted to the criticism of "psychologists" and "kanto-platonists" like Jouffroy and Cousin, whom he accused of wanting to take over medical science, and of importing German metaphysics into France. Broussais opined that it was necessary to "save the youth of France" and "protect the practice of medicine from the evil it would suffer from a philosophical sect engaged in an invasion."²⁷ Medicine is called on to defend its autonomy: it "must not become a subfield of metaphysics," and "it is the business of no one but physiologists and doctors to determine how things stand with regard to the causality of instinctive and intellectual phenomena."²⁸ Only doctors know how to "connect the phenomena of intelligence with the action of nerve tissue."²⁹

In order to mount this defense, Broussais holds the method used by psychologists, that of interior observation, up to ridicule:

They say that it is necessary to listen to the language of consciousness, and in order to do that we are supposed to have to become calm, to place ourselves in a quiet and dark place, so that none of our senses will distract us; we are supposed to abstract away from all the bodies of nature – in a word, to listen to ourselves think. They affirm in all seriousness that once one has become accustomed to such reverie, an incommensurable perspective opens up before one, a new world, populated with a welter of facts, each one quite admirable, and all interconnected by means of natural relations whose laws can be grasped.³⁰

Broussais goes on to observe that if psychologists really want to develop their power of inner observation, "they can increase its richness the way Orientals do, by taking a dose of opium mixed with aromatics. They will find themselves, like Mohammed, placed

26 - François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie* (Paris: Fayard, 1986).

27 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 11-12.

28 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 19.

29 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 449.

30 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 426.

into a relation with everything that is most extraordinary in the heavens."³¹ He also argues (and this critique will be taken up again by Théodule Ribot and many others) that this method, even if it did exist, would be of very limited worth, because it could only be used by "adult men, fully mature, in good health, and accustomed to exercising the senses."³²

In 1828, Auguste Comte wrote a review that praised the book by Broussais. In the article, "Examen du Traité de Broussais sur l'irritation et la folie," reproduced in his *System of Positive Polity*,³³ Comte approved of the fact that Broussais had dared attack a few, who

[...] for ten years have tried to install German metaphysics in France and to establish under the name of *psychology* a spurious science supposed to be completely independent of physiology and even superior to that discipline, to which alone would belong the study of phenomena that are particularly called moral.³⁴

He congratulated Broussais for having exposed "the emptiness and meaninglessness of psychology."³⁵ Comte accepted Broussais' argument, according to which internal observation in psychology would be limited to sane and healthy adults, impossible for animals, children, or the insane. Comte would have preferred for Broussais to develop further the argument about the logical impossibility of introspection: "It is evidently impossible for someone to observe himself in the course of his own intellectual acts, because the organ that is observed and the organ that is observing are in this case identical, and so the question arises, who is making the observation?"³⁶ In his review of Broussais' book, Comte became the first to employ the term "psychologism." In a letter written on December 9, 1828, he sent his friend Gustave d'Eichthal his review of "the new work by Broussais, who kills psychologism here."³⁷ Comte would resume and develop his arguments against psychologism in the first and the forty-fifth lessons of the *Cours*

31 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 427.

32 - Broussais, *De l'irritation et de la folie*, 435-36.

33 - Auguste Comte, "Examen du Traité de Broussais sur l'irritation et la folie," in *Système de politique positive*, vol. 4 (Paris: Société positiviste, 1929), 216-28.

34 - Comte, "Examen du Traité de Broussais," 218.

35 - Comte, "Examen du Traité de Broussais," 219.

36 - Comte, "Examen du Traité de Broussais," 220.

37 - Auguste Comte, *Correspondance générale et confessions*, vol. 1: 1814-1840 (Paris: Mouton, 1973), 205.

de philosophie positive. According to Comte, the first of the four "principal advantages" of positive philosophy is that it enables us to show the nullity of the "so-called psychological method" by demonstrating the logical laws of the human mind, such as these are manifested in the sciences.³⁸ Psychology has no place in the classification of the sciences; it must be replaced by a study of the organ of thinking, namely, the brain, and a study of the productions of the human mind – meaning on one hand, phrenology, and on the other hand, the philosophy of sciences or sociology, to the extent that sociology is the discipline that caps off and finishes the cycle of the sciences.

It is possible to show that Comte's critique of psychology does not only refer us to Broussais.³⁹ It exists in Comte prior to this, because as early as 1819, in a letter to his friend Pierre Valat, he explained that "one cannot divide one's mind, that is, one's brain, into two parts, one of which acts, while the other watches it act, in order to see how it does it."⁴⁰ The target here was not psychology, which did not yet exist as such, but rather ideology: "The result is that the supposed observations of the human mind considered in itself and a priori are pure illusions; and thus everything we call logic, metaphysics, or ideology is a chimera and a dream, if it is not an actual absurdity."⁴¹ Here as well, the solution consists in replacing the study of the human mind with the study of its productions: "Thus one cannot at all study the human mind *a priori*, in its basic nature, or prescribe rules for its operations; we can only do this *a posteriori*, based on results, or on observations of the facts, and these are the sciences."⁴²

It would seem that Comte drew inspiration here above all from the counter-revolutionary philosopher Louis de Bonald. Bonald, in his *Recherches sur les premiers objets des connaissances morales* (1818), denounces the folly of those who want to "think themselves," thus finding themselves "in the position of a man who wants to weigh himself without a scale and without a counterweight."⁴³

38 - Auguste Comte, *Cours de philosophie positive, Leçons 1 à 45* (Paris: Hermann, 1998), 34.

39 - On this point, see Jean-François Braunstein, "Antipsychologisme et philosophie du cer-veau chez Auguste Comte," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 203 (1998): 7-28.

40 - Comte, *Correspondance générale*, 58.

41 - Comte, *Correspondance générale*, 59.

42 - Comte, *Correspondance générale*, 59.

43 - Louis de Bonald, *œuvres complètes* (Paris: À la propagande des bons livres, n.d.), vol. III, col. 34.

Bonald also ridiculed such people by comparing them to the “madmen of Mount Athos” who spend “entire days with eyes fixed upon their navels, taking for the uncreated Light the perturbations of the vision that this situation engendered.”⁴⁴ Bonald also repeated, even before Comte, the old comparison of the mind and an eye, in order to show that “man can no more think himself without some means that renders him sensible and as it were external, than the eye can see itself.”⁴⁵ According to Bonald, thinking man can only know himself through speaking man. In fact, for Bonald thought is social before being individual, and we should remember that God gave language to man. There is evidently an anti-individualist component in the critique of psychology by Bonald or by Comte. At a later time, psychology would be denounced by Comte as a “Protestant” discipline, by which he meant, individualist. In 1851, he wrote this in the *System of Positive Polity*: “Psychologists, strictly so called, have already for the most part disappeared with the fall of constitutional monarchy; so close is the relation between these, two importations from Protestantism.”⁴⁶ The same anti-individualist point of view inspires the critique of psychology that would be put forward by Saint-Simonians, like the medical doctor Philippe Buchez, who favorably reviewed the book by Broussais in the *Journal des progrès des sciences et des institutions médicales* in 1828, and who also rejected the “psychological method and any eclecticism that “had no other basis than individual reason.”⁴⁷

With Broussais, the term “psychologist,” strongly pejorative, entered common usage; Comte gave brief life to the term “psychologism.” A sort of “quarrel over psychologism” would erupt in following years, particularly as carried on between two newspapers, *Le Globe* in support of Cousinians, and the *Annales de la médecine physiologique* in support of Broussais. The most direct conflict involved the Cousinian philosopher Jean-Philibert Damiron and Broussais himself. At that point the dispute passed over onto more particularly philosophical terrain, opposing “spiritualism” to a “materialism” which held that thought “depends on” the brain.

44 - Bonald, *œuvres complètes*, col. 35.

45 - Bonald, *Œuvres complètes*, 169.

46 - Comte, “Examen du Traité de Broussais,” vol. 1, 73.

47 - Philippe Buchez, “De l’irritation et de la folie par F.-J.-V. Broussais,” *Journal des Progrès des Sciences et Institutions Médicales en Europe, en Amérique, etc.*, X (1828): 79-89, here 85.

The Transformations of the "Quarrel" in 1838: Jouffroy, Broussais, and Leroux

Another significant date in the development of the term psychologism is the year 1838. This year in fact marks the end of the dispute between psychologists and physiologists, but the two old adversaries, Jouffroy and Broussais (who died in this same year) would face each other one more time, although in respect of different arguments. This is also the date of the beginning of continuous usage of the term psychologism, as employed by Pierre Leroux, who would give the term a new meaning, and who would embark upon a different kind of criticism of psychologism.

Jouffroy, in an article published in 1838, and reproduced in his *Nouveaux mélanges philosophiques*, insisted even more strongly than before on the "legitimacy of the distinction between psychology and physiology."⁴⁸ He emphasized the necessity of this distinction: "The feeling that there is a double nature within man appears in one or another form in the opinions of all peoples."⁴⁹ The physiologists have made the mistake of confusing the two parts of this double nature: "In comparing psychological and physiological phenomena, we place in parallel not things of the same order that can be legitimately compared, but things of different orders that can resemble each other in no way."⁵⁰ In fact, according to Jouffroy, man "is conscious that there is within him something other than phenomena; [...] he attains the principle that produces them, the cause that constitutes he himself, which he calls the *moi*."⁵¹

Broussais had become a phrenologist, and now employed an argument based on the plurality of mental faculties against the notion of a unitary self. This was revealed in his final communication before dying in 1838, entitled "Du sentiment d'individualité, du sentiment personnel et du moi, considérés chez l'homme et les animaux."⁵² In this communication, Broussais denounces "the importance that

48 - Théodore Jouffroy, "De la légitimité de la distinction de la psychologie et de la physiologie," in *Nouveaux mélanges philosophiques* (Paris: Hachette, 1861), 163-203.

49 - Jouffroy, "De la légitimité de la distinction," 165.

50 - Jouffroy, "De la légitimité de la distinction," 187.

51 - Jouffroy, "De la légitimité de la distinction," 200.

52 - François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, "Du sentiment d'individualité, du sentiment personnel et du moi, considérés chez l'homme et les animaux," *Mémoires de l'Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*, 2nd series, III (1841): 91-146.

this notion of the *moi* has assumed in current discussions," a notion that "finds itself substituted for the old-school notion of the soul; this notion has come to signify the mind for a number of psychologists in present day philosophical schools."⁵³ According to Broussais, this *moi* or self does not characterize man. He reduces the self to a "feeling of individuality" and observes that it can be found among the higher animals that possess a brain; furthermore, it does not always exist in man. In our species, there is no evidence of this feeling of individuality in embryos, nor in infants: an infant takes a long time to "say I"; when first using this expression, he does not refer to himself."⁵⁴ In adults, finally the "feeling of the self" only arises from the ignorance of the causes that make us act:

In observing himself, [a man] remarks upon the facts of spontaneity, will, and freedom; he has felt their causes in himself, without being able, because of his ignorance of physiology, to grasp them with any of his senses, and little by little, as if despite himself, he has come to believe that the "self" is this cause.⁵⁵

Broussais returns to the arguments he had already put forward in the "Mémoire sur l'association du physique et du moral," a paper he read before the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (in 1834), which was published in 1835 in the *Journal de la Société phrénologique de Paris*.⁵⁶ According to Broussais, "not only does the feeling of the self not exist in embryos and children, and as a result of many diseases; when it is present it is aberrant."⁵⁷ The psychologists err when "they do not make this notion subject to degrees [...] and they do not divide this entity" into parts.⁵⁸ Similarly, in his *Cours de phrénologie* (1836),⁵⁹ he endorsed phrenology, which he had earlier criticized, because the idea of a plurality of mental faculties made it easier for him to attack the concept of a unitary self, something that was becoming established under the influence of Cousin. Indeed, phrenology was at the time employed for this purpose as often as for its materialist arguments. For

53 - Broussais, "Du sentiment d'individualité," 3-4.

54 - Broussais, "Du sentiment d'individualité," 13.

55 - Broussais, "Du sentiment d'individualité," 14.

56 - François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, "Mémoire sur l'association du physique et du moral, lu à l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques, Aug. 16 and 23, 1834," *Journal de la Société Phrénologique de Paris* (1835): 257-77.

57 - Broussais, "Mémoire sur l'association du physique et du moral," 265.

58 - Broussais, "Mémoire sur l'association du physique et du moral," 270.

59 - François-Joseph-Victor Broussais, *Cours de phrénologie* (Paris: Baillière, 1836).

Broussais, "the sign 'self' is one of pure convention" and it cannot be considered a general characteristic of humans: "Man cannot be constituted as man by a phenomenon that only shows itself in him intermittently."⁶⁰ The self is only a possible result, always fragile, of human activity: "The self does not at all govern human morality as has been thought; in many cases it is only a witness."⁶¹ The phenomenon disappears in cases of madness, but nonetheless "no doctor thinks he is treating an animal when he treats a madman, a neurotic, an apoplectic, and so on. Nor will he think this when he examines a child or an embryo."⁶²

But 1838 is also when the quarrel over psychologism changes shape, because of Leroux's entry into the debate. Leroux published the article "Éclectisme" that year in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*,⁶³ which was reproduced the following year in his *Réfutation de l'éclectisme*.⁶⁴ Leroux was deeply hostile to Cousin, and adopted a form of the now classic argument of the supposed impossibility of inner observation in order to attack what he calls "psychologism":

To refute what I am comfortable in calling the hallucination of psychologism, I have found no better counter, to show psychologists the error of their ways concerning the experimental method, applied to the inner life of humans, than to show that subject and object, the audience and the players on stage, necessarily get mixed up in their system.⁶⁵

This comparison with the theater appears to him apt for showing how ridiculous the very notion of inner observation is:

This empty idea, [...] will one day appear as bizarre as would a group of actors who, in the middle of a scene, decided they wanted to watch themselves act. They leave the stage, they take seats down front or in the loge; they watch and listen; they see nothing and hear nothing. The play has stopped and the stage is deserted.⁶⁶

60 - Broussais, *Cours de phrénologie*, 51.

61 - Broussais, *Cours de phrénologie*, 91.

62 - Broussais, *Cours de phrénologie*, 53.

63 - Pierre Leroux, "Éclectisme," in *Encyclopédie nouvelle, ou Dictionnaire philosophique, scientifique, littéraire et industriel, offrant le tableau des connaissances humaines au dix-neuvième siècle par une société de savants et de littérateurs*, ed. Pierre Leroux and Jean Reynaud, vol. IV (Paris: Gosselin, 1838), 465-558.

64 - Pierre Leroux, *Réfutation de l'éclectisme* (Paris: Slatkine, 1979).

65 - Leroux, *Réfutation de l'éclectisme*, 160.

66 - Leroux, *Réfutation de l'éclectisme*, 160-61.

Leroux professes to be shocked that Cousin failed to see the absurdity of this comparison as applying to him – that he has even considered it as proving his point, and that Jouffroy also seems “not to see any difficulty in thinking that the intelligent principle or the self is both subject and object at the same time in respect of psychological observation,” and merely states that this is a “special” property of psychology.⁶⁷

In other writings, especially in an article entitled “Conscience” (consciousness) published in 1837 in the *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, Leroux developed a different critique of psychologism.⁶⁸ Psychologism in this article is considered as something characteristic of a time that has lost the sense of tradition, and therefore digs deeper into the “spleen” of life: “It is the break with the tradition of humanity that has caused this massive disorder, this kind of cessation of living that is today revealed in art and in philosophy,” while “the self cannot understand itself or perfect itself except by observing itself in its prior acts, in its past life, in its history, in the history of humanity.”⁶⁹ “From that point [...] the current development of an immense subjectivity without nourishment and without an object; of the *spleen* and the moral sadness of our times; whence, finally, a desolate poetry and psychologism.”⁷⁰ From this point of view, psychologism is actually the distinctive character of all the literature of that epoch:

Psychology, as it has been defined and as it is taught today in our schools, has no other merit in the eyes of posterity, than to furnish yet another sample of our moral sadness. It is a kind of *spleen*, a variety of *spleen*, like that of Werther, Oberman, René, Adolphe, Joseph Delorme, or Lélia. The psychologist is the contemporary of all these poor souls, he is their philosopher: he has faith in nothing, believes nothing, affirms nothing; he observes himself; they also observe themselves dying. His doctrine is like their poetry, it implicitly leads to the negation of life and suicide.⁷¹

In fact, “as soon as we observe ourselves living, we cease to live.”⁷²

67 - Leroux, *Réfutation de l'éclectisme*, 161.

68 - Pierre Leroux, “Conscience,” in *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, vol. III, 795-813.

69 - Leroux, “Conscience,” 804-5.

70 - Leroux, “Conscience,” 811, footnote.

71 - Leroux, “Conscience,” 804.

72 - Leroux, “Conscience,” 799.

Leroux saw in "Descartes, transformed by the Germans," the origin of this form of psychologism: "Descartes was the first to posit the self independently of a preexistent humanity."⁷³ But the self of the psychologists is even emptier than that of Descartes:

Descartes said the self possessed *innate ideas*. Psychologists have not even retained that part of his views. They make the essence of the self consist of the will and freedom [...]. When you ask the psychologist what it is that this self has, as object of knowledge [...] he will answer proudly, like Corneille's Medea, "Myself alone, and that is enough."⁷⁴

In this sense, the psychologist may be compared to "a man who dying of hunger attempts to eat himself: and [Leroux continues] I would compare the Condillacian materialist to a man who, finding himself in the same position, imagines that he is eating rocks."⁷⁵

Against this psychologism, Leroux, drawing inspiration from Bonald and from less well-known Catholic authors, such as the baron Ferdinand d'Eckstein, suggests returning to the "most profound dogmas of Christianity."⁷⁶ This type of criticism of psychologism will be found among "left-wing Christians" and "humanitarian" Christians, like the medical doctor Philippe Buchez, or Louis Cerise, a doctor who worked in asylums. It was Cerise who would introduce the term psychologism into scholarly discourse in 1843, in the pages of the *Annales Médico-Psychologiques*, in which he published an article entitled "Examen de la doctrine de Maine de Biran sur les rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme par M. Royer-Collard."⁷⁷ In a note, we see that he has the impression of introducing a new word; Cerise explains that, as against "the doctrine of Condillac" who sees man as an "organized machine," Biran appeals to "the observation and personal experience of each one," the instrument employed being "consciousness, which presented by the eclectic school as philosophical par excellence, has given rise to psychologism (if the reader will excuse our using

73 - Pierre Leroux, "Consentement," in *Encyclopédie nouvelle*, vol. III, 813-19, here 815.

74 - Leroux, "Consentement," 815 (Leroux's emphasis).

75 - Leroux, "Conscience," 805.

76 - Leroux, "Conscience," 811.

77 - Louis Cerise, "Examen de la doctrine de Maine de Biran sur les rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme par M. Royer-Collard," *Annales Médico-Psychologiques* II (1843): 1-45.

this expression) which is the basis of the doctrine that is officially taught at the University."⁷⁸

*
* *

It is evident that there were a number of distinct stages in the quarrel over psychologism in France, just as there were "varieties" in the German version.⁷⁹ However, it was not a matter of a conflict between disciplines, philosophy and psychology, because there were at least three actors in the drama. Initially, physiologists and medical doctors were opposed to psychologists: Broussais against Jouffroy. Then, medical doctors opposed philosophers, with Broussais opposing Cousin. Finally, philosophers themselves quarreled: first Comte and then Leroux against Cousin. These academic conflicts did not always depend on the same arguments. First, there were debates about the limits of physiology, and then discussions about the very possibility of internal observation; there were debates about the unity or lack thereof of the self, based on phrenology; and finally, there was an opposition between tradition and individualism, with references to literature, when Leroux attacked psychologism. In the final period, when the hostility toward psychologism was based on a denunciation of psychology as an individualistic science, in writings by Comte and Leroux, a fourth actor appeared: the young science of sociology, with a reference to Bonald. This quarrel, via the press of the period and through encyclopedia articles, extended to participation by a non-specialized public. In the end, it took on fairly significant political and religious overtones, especially in writings by Cousin, Broussais, Comte, and Leroux, and these deserve to be examined in greater detail. The question of psychologism is at any rate far from being purely psychological.

78 - Cerise, "Examen de la doctrine de Maine de Biran," 4.

79 - Kusch, *Psychologism*, 95-121.