



Psychology in France

GEOGRAPHICALLY and ethnically, France is at the crossroads of Europe. The existence of natural boundaries accelerated the formation of the French nation, which rapidly became the most populous in Europe. Such a situation moulded France's attitude towards communication, immigration and, especially, social engineering. Still prevalent today, the social system remains interventionist in nature – perhaps a remnant of Richelieu's centralised administration, which elevated Paris as a capital of all political, social and scientific activity.

This concentration of power bred resentment among the lower and middle classes, sparking a series of violent uprisings and the French Revolution in 1789. The right to assemble and demonstrate was enshrined in the Le Chapelier Law of 1791: this act and the aftermath of the revolution showcased the

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French idiosyncrasies celebrated by the motto '*Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*'.

Such intense historical and cultural backgrounds have constituted a rich psychosocial cauldron for French psychology to emerge from and prosper. Although not exhaustive, this short account will sketch the milestones of French psychology and its current developments.

Cultural determinants

So what is distinct about psychology in France, and how are these areas linked to French history and culture?

The crowd If one has to pick a particularly French contribution to the discipline, it has to be social psychology.

Indeed, it is widely recognised (Richards, 1996) that this psychological realm originated with Gustav Le Bon's *Psychologie des Foules* (1895) – published in English in 1896 under the title *The Crowd*. His description of the irrationality of the 'mass' and its susceptibility to political 'suggestion' embodies the long-lasting concerns of the French with managing great numbers of people. This interest is still alive today through a journal dedicated to this topic: *Les Cahiers Internationaux de Psychologie Sociale*.

Psychiatry Following revolutionary uprisings, the romantic movement had an enduring influence on French psychiatry. Pinel reformed the perception of insanity by recasting it to the 'human condition'; he is particularly remembered for opening the gates of La Bicêtre and La Salpêtrière asylums in Paris. This gave the impetus for a novel approach to psychiatry, which lends more to devising appropriate psychological interventions, even if they first took the form of 'moral therapy'. This legacy nevertheless had some impact on French psychological services, which possess one of the highest ratios of psychologists per head of population in the world (just behind the US and Switzerland).

Intelligence Following the work of his predecessors (e.g. Charcot and Taine), Binet (1903) gave psychology the first standardised intelligence test, initially developed for children with lower than normal capabilities. The score of each child on a series of tasks of increasing difficulty was compared with the average score

BIRTH OF THE FRENCH 'PSYCHOLOGIE NOUVELLE'

Despite being rarely mentioned on the national curriculum, Théodule Ribot (1839–1916) remains credited for the inception of *psychologie nouvelle* (Nicolas & Murray, 2000). His command of English and German allowed him to review and translate several texts, linking English nascent positivism and evolutionary theories (Spencer, Galton, Taine, Hartley) and the German psychophysical tradition (Wundt, Fechner).

In spite of virulent criticisms from La Sorbonne's spiritual philosophers, Ribot completed his thesis in philosophy, where he asserted the superiority of empirical scientific enquiry over metaphysical methods of enquiry. His dissertation brought him great success and was translated into various foreign languages (Ribot *et al.*, 1977).

Ribot continuously struggled to bring the study of the mind closer to the study of the brain, and soon after his doctorate he enrolled at the faculty of medicine to further his comprehension of mental illness. He also required his closer students to graduate in both philosophy and medicine in order to gain a wider understanding of the biological foundations of psychology. He was deeply attached to empirical evidence, and is credited with creating, within the premises of the Collège de France, the first French psychological laboratory. His closer students, Pierre Janet and Georges Dumas, further developed his efforts to give psychology a scientific status. Delboeuf, Charcot and Binet were largely inspired by his prolific writings.

attained by children of that age (the mental age). The ratio of mental age to chronological age was then multiplied by 100 to give the now well-known IQ score.

Qualitative methods The rich literary heritage and the *café philosophiques* tradition have indelibly marked the French scientific arena. Foucault's (1969) seminal work was particularly influential in terms of qualitative research. He imposed a groundbreaking method of investigation now bearing his name: Foucauldian discourse analysis. Those developments were paralleled by Jacques Derrida (1967), who championed the idea of discourse deconstruction. Although both of a philosophical tradition, Foucault and Derrida have raised the interest of many psychologists worldwide (particularly those related to the 'anti-psychiatry' movement).

Neurology It is perhaps the early secularisation of France that propelled its medical advancements, and particularly its progresses in neuroscience. Jean Martin Charcot was an industrious researcher. His work largely contributed to the elevation of neurology to the rank of a solid discipline. He 'blessed' hypnotism and wrote extensively on hysteria. He was certainly ahead of his time, wading into ethical controversies – notably positioning himself against animal experimentation.

The 19th century also witnessed the brilliance of Dr Paul Broca, who, beside his experiments on hypnotism, is especially remembered for his delineation of the motor speech area in the brain that still bears his name. Neuropsychology remains a prevalent part of French psychology today.

Career guidance Recession and economic crises impelled French psychologists to provide career guidance. This profession has blossomed only in the last decade, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, which enables psychologists to become civil servants. As a sign of the time, the legalisation of the title of *conseiller d'orientation-psychologue* (career-adviser-psychologist) coincided with the 1991 economic crisis. In parallel, the profession of *psychologue scolaire* has also attained legal recognition.

Psychoanalysis Perhaps it was the Cartesian mind–body dichotomy, coupled with the irreducible individualism enshrined in the 1789 constitution, which

created a fertile ground for French psychologists to espouse psychoanalytic principles. Indeed, Freud and Jung had many followers in France, such as Françoise Dolto and Jacques Lacan (see Dolto, 1999; Lacan, 2001). This preponderance remains conspicuous today in all areas of psychotherapy. Recently an extraordinary conference in Montpellier (Les États Généraux de la Psychiatrie) reuniting delegates from all theoretical persuasions gave birth to a paper promulgating psychoanalysis as an essential bedrock of the psychotherapeutic professions (Fédération Française des Psychologues et de la Psychologie, 2003).

Ethos of the profession

Around 30,000 psychologists are currently at work in France (six per ten thousand inhabitants). Although French psychologists do not benefit from statutory regulation to the same extent that British psychologists soon will, a recent act of the government compels psychologists to register on a public list in order to become fully recognised.

Approximately half of the psychologists practise in the clinical and social fields. They are appointed either by the government or by private organisations working in the public services. Around 8000 psychologists work in the educational system, and there are roughly 5000 work and organisational psychologists. Although the great majority of psychologists are

employed by social services and private companies, around 2000 psychologists are also working independently.

Universities and professional organisations are currently debating the feasibility of a master's programme (five years) and the adoption of the European Diploma of Psychology (six years). French associations are even contemplating a professional PhD in psychotherapy. These discussions are especially acrimonious, because the practice of psychology in France is legally regulated, while the practice of psychotherapy is not. The adoption of the diploma programme also raises the question of which institution would exert control over supervised practice. Both universities and the freshly founded Fédération Française des Psychologues et de la Psychologie (FFPP) are competing for this responsibility.

As in most other European countries, psychologists who practise independently (typically as psychotherapists) have a much more precarious professional situation than medical doctors or psychiatrists. Indeed, independents' services are neither endorsed nor reimbursed by the national health system. The advent of the FFPP may, however, light a beacon of hope in the face of such instability.

Training and formation

Access to professional practice is reserved to people who have successfully completed a five-year university degree that gives

NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

On one hand, the most general associations attempt to unite the interests of all French psychologists regardless of their theoretical persuasion. The Société Française de Psychologie (SFP: www.sfpsy.org) was established in 1901 (just as the BPS was) and has imposed itself as an overarching structure. It publishes journals (e.g. *Pratiques Psychologiques*), gives bursaries to doctorate students, and organises conferences. The SFP works closely with the government but solely operates at an ethical level by maintaining a *code de déontologie*. Another umbrella organisation is the Association Nationale des Organisations de Psychologues (perso.club-internet.fr/anop), which strives to communicate psychological findings to the media and to protect service users. This is also the body representing French interests within the European Federation of Psychological Associations.

On a smaller scale, other organisations embody more specific research and professional interests. The Association des Conseillers d'Orientations Psychologues (www.acop.asso.fr) aims to represent psychologists involved in career-management, who practise in the educational system. In parallel, educational psychology also possesses its associative platform: The Association Française des Psychologues Scolaires (www.afps.info). Moreover, Ecosens (www.ecosens.org) stems from ecopsychology and promotes the adaptation of psychological concepts to urbanisation and architecture. Finally, the respect of the ethical code and the defence of psychologists as employees are also guaranteed by a trade union: the Syndicat National de Psychologues (www.psychologues.org).

Most of the professional organisations have recently agreed to join forces under the same banner and are now regrouped into the Fédération Française des Psychologues et de la Psychologie (FFPP).

them the title of 'psychologist' protected by statute. All students have to complete the basic theoretical curriculum that lasts for four years. This initial training qualifies them for the conduction of either a DESS (Specialised Superior Studies Diploma) or a DEA (Thorough Studies Diploma, usually constituting the first step towards a PhD), which both include a probation period in a professional practice lasting for 14 weeks. Progressively, and as a part of the ongoing reform of the educational system, master's degrees will supersede the DESS and DEA.

Today, the hundred DESS courses in the 30 different universities that are offering psychology can be classified in three major professional fields: health/clinical psychology, work/social psychology and developmental/educational psychology. Yet DESS courses are multifarious and encompass a wide range of different

specialities. Universities grant 3000 of those diplomas every year.

Psychology in France has been fragmented for a long time, and until recently the various factions were still divided on the question of the standardisation of the profession. In spite of this bone of contention, they adopted a common ethical code in 1996 (*code de déontologie*). Yet this code holds no juridical value, and remains to be recognised by employers and practitioners.

Centres of excellence

French psychopathological research is marked by the predominance of university hospitals (Centre Hospitalier Universitaires: CHU), where most resources are concentrated. Unfortunately, such medical environments have favoured the biomedical models advocated by psychiatrists. The last decade, however, witnessed a radical change with the development of laboratories attached to universities and funded by the government. By contrast with the CHUs, those centres of research are exclusively directed by psychologists.

Furthermore, the creation of psychology departments in both the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS) (www.cnrs.fr) and the Institut National de la Santé et de la Recherche Médicale (INSERM) (www.inserm.fr) constitute a giant step towards the acceptance of psychology as a science. Those two eminent research establishments are indeed well provisioned with neuropsychological instruments. The Institut des Sciences Cognitives (www.isc.cnrs.fr) had, for instance, developed Activis: software facilitating the management of positron emission tomography and magnetic resonance imaging outputs. The institute is hosting more than 15 different teams of researchers, studying phenomena as varied as memory and the recognition of faces (e.g. Baudouin & Tiberghien, 2002) and the neurological foundations of attention in the Rhesus monkeys (Boussaoud, 2001).

Health psychology is currently emerging in the French scientific landscape. The first diploma in health psychology was created in 1996 at the University of Metz, a centre of excellence that particularly emphasises psychosociological and biological factors involved in the onset and course of chronic diseases. These developments have been consecrated by the creation of the Association Française de Psychologie de la Santé (AFPSA) (www.afpsa.univ-savoie.fr).

Finally, parapsychology should be mentioned as a part of the French psychological ethos. Philippe Wallon (1996) from INSERM is one of the main proponents of this field of study. His work is particularly concerned with the unconscious mechanisms underpinning phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance and psychokinesis.

A new dawn

The increasing media interest in psychology has encouraged numerous scientific heralds to 'give psychology away'. The promotion of the victories of psychoanalysis by popular authors such as Françoise Dolto (1999) or Pierre Daco (1988) has been particularly successful. Moreover, the recent publication of the very accessible *Psychanalyse*, coupled with *Psychologies*, second only to *Cosmopolitan* in the glossy market, has largely contributed to the vulgarisation of psychological concepts. But at the same time, such publications may boost the appeal of psychology among the student population, and will certainly continue to do so in the near future.

Such popularity, in concert with the rise of neuropsychology and health psychology, should definitely fuel French research at both the national and international levels. In addition, the determined will of the French government to reshape the educational system in order to espouse the 3–5–8 structure (in years: bachelor's–master's–doctorate), coupled with the promising perspective of the European Diploma, should without doubt stoke further European collaboration.

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