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The French Reception of *Völkerpsychologie* and the Origins of the Social
Sciences

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I.

The part that *Völkerpsychologie* played in the development of the social sciences has not been fully understood.¹ In the second half of the nineteenth century, it represented a serious attempt to establish a “social science”, i.e. an academic discipline that would study communal life, as represented by the *Volk* (the “people” or the “nation”), systematically and comprehensively. In order to do so, the “founders” of *Völkerpsychologie*, the philosopher Moritz Steinthal and the linguist Heymann Steinthal, proposed to introduce methods as rigorous as those of the sciences to the study of the “collective mind”, or *Volksgeist*. In its heydays during the period of classical liberalism from about 1860 to 1890, Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* provided a platform and an outlet for their new approach. After the demise of the journal in 1890 with the retirement of its editors, Wilhelm Wundt became the most pronounced “folk

¹ Since there is no accurate English translation of the German term – contenders were “Folk Psychology”, “National Psychology”, and “Ethnic Psychology” – I will use *Völkerpsychologie* throughout the text. Upon the publication of the English translation of Wilhelm Wundt’s *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* as *Elements of Folk Psychology*, the reviewer of the journal *Folklore* plainly dismissed the decision by the translator to introduce the “neologism ‘Folk Psychology’”. Wundt was really doing social psychology, he argued, and “to treat ‘folk’ as equivalent to ‘society’ or ‘community’ seems an outrage on the English language”. See R.R. Marett, “Review of Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*”, in *Folklore* 27 (1916), 440-41.

psychologist” and spent the last twenty years of his career writing a multi-volume *Völkerpsychologie*. Irrespective of its academic credentials, *Völkerpsychologie* was a symptomatic approach during a transformative period in German, and indeed European intellectual history: based on the idea of progress – both scientific and moral – and on the belief in the primordial importance of the *Volk*, it represented the mind-set of ‘ascendant liberalism’ in an almost pure form. The relevance and importance of *Völkerpsychologie* can be gauged from a list of scholars and intellectuals who discussed its merits as well as its problems: this list includes, but is not limited to, Georg Simmel, Harry Graf Kessler, Martin Buber, Sigmund Freud, Fritz Mauthner, Max Nordau, Max Weber, Wilhelm Windelband and Wilhelm Dilthey.

Moreover, the impact of *Völkerpsychologie* was not limited to German authors. Even though few of the texts that constitute the core of this approach were translated, its reception reached well beyond the confines of German academia.² In the United States, we find a member of the “Chicago School” of sociology, W. I. Thomas, referring to Lazarus and Steinthal’s works in an attempt to refute the “absurdities” of race psychologists, in particular the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, who tried to identify and classify “criminal types” by studying their

² None of Lazarus and Steinthal’s texts on *Völkerpsychologie*, which appeared mainly in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*, were translated. While many of Wundt’s studies on experimental psychology, on ethics, logic, and the history of philosophy were translated into French and English, only his one-volume *Elements of Folk Psychology* (London and New York, 1916), originally published in 1912, appeared in English.

physiognomy.³ The anthropologist Franz Boas, a German-Jewish émigré to the USA, who had studied with the ethnologist Adolf Bastian at the University of Berlin, was an intimate expert on *Völkerpsychologie*. In a famous essay on the history of anthropology, which served as a manifesto to his approach to cultural anthropology, he referred to “*Völkerpsychologie*” as a major influence for linguistic-anthropological studies and specifically mentioned Steintal’s works.⁴ As a true synthesis of the disciplines that studied “man”, Boasian cultural anthropology practised a combination of physical anthropology, ethnology, linguistics and psychology that included perspectives of Lazarus and Steintal’s *Völkerpsychologie*, but went far beyond its scope. His British “counterpart” Bronislaw Malinowski had a similar trajectory. Before he established himself in British academia, he had studied with Wilhelm Wundt in Leipzig, where he had started working on a PhD in

³ W. I. Thomas, “The Scope and Method of Folk-Psychology”, in *American Journal of Sociology* 1 (1896), 434-45, at 438. See W. I. Thomas, “The Province of Social Psychology”, in *American Journal of Sociology* 10 (1905), 445-55; M. Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology. Institutionalisation, Diversity, and the Rise of Sociological Research* (Chicago, 1984), 36. On Lombroso see P. Becker, *Verderbnis und Entartung. Eine Geschichte der Kriminologie des 19. Jahrhunderts als Diskurs und Praxis* (Göttingen, 2002), 291-311.

⁴ F. Boas, “The History of Anthropology”, in *Science* 20,512 (1904), 513-24. See G. W. Stocking Jr., “Franz Boas and the Culture Concept in Historical Perspective”, in Idem, *Race, Culture and Evolution* (Chicago, 1982), 195-233; G. W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition* (Madison, WI, 1996); H. W. Schmuhl, ed., *Kulturrelativismus und Antirassismus. Der Anthropologe Franz Boas (1858-1942)* (Bielefeld, 2009).

Völkerpsychologie, which he never finished. Best known for his efforts in introducing empirical field-work to the study on anthropology, Malinowski agreed with Wundt that anthropology essentially constituted a branch of psychology.⁵ In Russia and the early Soviet Union, Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie* received the attention of the philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) who learned about their work mediated by the literary critic A.N. Veselovskij and the linguist A.A. Potebnja. In a theoretical work on the "problems of types of speech" Bakhtin explicitly referred to Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie* as a way of conceptualizing collective consciousness.⁶ Even in Japan, German *Völkerpsychologie* found its readers and followers.⁷

It was in France, however, where central elements of *Völkerpsychologie* had the most profound effect on scholars and intellectuals who showed a keen interest in the works of Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt. From a German perspective, the popularity and knowledge of *Völkerpsychologie* in France is striking, given the self-centred outlook of Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt, and their general ignorance of

⁵ M. N. Forster, *After Herder: Philosophy of Language in the German Tradition* (Cambridge, 2010), 204-6.

⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and other late Essays*, eds C. Emerson and M. Holquist, (Austin, 1986). A. Hoeschen, "Anamnesis als ästhetische Rekonfiguration. Zu Bachtins dialogischer Erinnerungskultur", in G. Oesterle, ed., *Erinnerung, Gedächtnis, Wissen. Studien zur kulturwissenschaftlichen Gedächtnisforschung* (Göttingen, 2001), 246-8; C. Brandist, "The Rise of Soviet Sociolinguistics from the Ashes of *Völkerpsychologie*", in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 42 (2006), 261-77.

⁷ Richard Reitan, "*Völkerpsychologie* and the Appropriation of 'Spirit' in Meiji Japan", in *Modern Intellectual History* 7 (2010), 495-522.

French academia. The pioneers of the French social sciences, however, closely observed their German counterparts, and in the process appropriated and reworked central perspectives and concepts they found in German *Völkerpsychologie*, which were thus included in seminal works of the early social sciences which have acquired the status of “classical” texts. Some of the best-known French academics and intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – Théodule Ribot, Célestin Bouglé, Ernest Renan, Alfred Fouillée, Emile Durkheim, and Marcel Mauss – commented extensively on Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt, and developed their versions of a “social science” that would reach beyond traditional philosophy, philology and history in a close dialogue with *Völkerpsychologie*.⁸ After outlining the main tenets of German *Völkerpsychologie*, I will reconstruct this French reception of *Völkerpsychologie* and argue that it constituted a significant but neglected process of cultural transfer between Germany and France. The French reception and appropriation of *Völkerpsychologie* is crucial to an understanding of the deeply entangled intellectual relations between the two neighbouring countries around the turn of the century.⁹ Furthermore, it forces us to rethink the formative period of the social sciences: far from being an oddity that can be confined to a German intellectual *Sonderweg*, *Völkerpsychologie* was an integral part of these wideranging debates.

⁸ M. Espagne, *En-deça du Rhin. L'Allemagne des philosophes français au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 2004).

⁹ M. Espagne and M. Werner, eds, *Transferts: les relations interculturelles dans l'espace franco-allemand* (Paris, 1988); M. Espagne, *Les transferts culturels franco-allemands*, (Paris, 1999); J. Paulmann, “Internationaler Vergleich und interkultureller Transfer: Zwei Forschungsansätze zur europäischen Geschichte des 18. bis 20. Jahrhunderts” in *Historische Zeitschrift* 267 (1998), 649-85.

Not least because of its French readers and critics, *Völkerpsychologie* had a lasting impact on the intellectual history of the twentieth century as part of the movement that created the social sciences.

II.

When Moritz Lazarus coined the phrase “*Völkerpsychologie*” in 1851, attempts to characterize the essence of nations or peoples were hardly new.¹⁰ Indeed, some authors could easily trace the “othering” of foreign nations back to Herodotus and Thucydides, a venerable tradition Lazarus and his co-worker Steinthal were well aware of. Heavily indebted to the ideas of Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), they

¹⁰ On Lazarus and Steinthal see I. Belke, ed., *Moritz Lazarus und Heymann Steinthal: Die Begründer der Völkerpsychologie in ihren Briefen*, 3 vols, (Tübingen, 1971-1986); M. Bunzl, “*Völkerpsychologie* and German-Jewish emancipation”, in H. G. Penny and M. Bunzl, eds, *Worldly Provincialism: German Anthropology in the Age of Empire* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 47-85; G. v. Graevenitz, “‘Verdichtung’. Das Kulturmodell der ‘Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft’”, in A. Assmann, ed., *Positionen der Kulturanthropologie* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1994), 148-171; I. Kalmar, “The *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal and the Modern Concept of Culture”, in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 48 (1987), 671-690; C. Köhnke, “Der Kulturbegriff von Moritz Lazarus – oder: die wissenschaftliche Aneignung des Alltäglichen”, in A. Höschen and L. Schneider, eds, *Herbarts Kultursystem. Perspektiven der Transdisziplinarität im 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2001), 39-67; C. Köhnke, ‘Einleitung’, in M. Lazarus, *Grundzüge der Völkerpsychologie und Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by C. Köhnke (Hamburg, 2003), ix-xlii; C. Trautmann-Waller, *Aux origines d’une science allemande de la culture. Linguistique et psychologie des peuples chez Heymann Steinthal* (Paris, 2006).

believed in national progress as much as in the assumption of a harmonic plurality of the different nations that constituted mankind. In contrast to earlier attempts to conceptualize “national character” from Montesquieu to John Stuart Mill, however, their aim was to build a comprehensive discipline that was exclusively devoted to the study of the “folk spirit” (*Volksgeist*). Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* provided an amalgam of the philosophies Joseph Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) and Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and aimed at an alternative to both historicism and philosophical idealism. Their contributions to “*Völkerpsychologie*” kept much of the romantic terminology of the early nineteenth century, most importantly the concept of the *Volksgeist*, as well as an uncritical belief in the *Volk* as the source of everything that was good, true, and beautiful. For Lazarus and Steinthal, the “folk spirit” was not only an important aspect of history, but the driving force of any historical development. Hence they declared the discovering of the “laws of the development of the folk spirit” the main purpose of *Völkerpsychologie*. It would illuminate the causes for the creation, the development and the decline of peoples.¹¹

¹¹ Their main contributions on *Völkerpsychologie* can be found in M. Lazarus, “Über den Begriff und die Möglichkeit einer Völkerpsychologie”, in *Deutsches Museum. Zeitschrift für Literatur, Kunst und öffentliches Leben*, 1 (1851), 112-26; M. Lazarus and H. Steinthal, “Einleitende Gedanken über Völkerpsychologie, als Einladung zu einer Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft”, in *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 1 (1860), 1-73; M. Lazarus, “Einige synthetische Gedanken zur Völkerpsychologie” in *ZfVS* 3 (1865), 1-94; H. Steinthal, “Begriff der Völkerpsychologie”, in *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* 17 (1887), 223-64.

A discipline that focused on the study of man as a social being was overdue, they argued, since psychology had thus far remained incomplete and structurally flawed by concentrating on the individual mind. Man, however, was “by birth a member of a *Volk*, and is thus determined in his mental development in manifold ways”. The “folk”, to which man belonged by nature, represented more than the sum of its parts, Lazarus and Steinthal were convinced.¹² The individual could not be adequately understood “without regard to the mental whole (*die geistige Gesamtheit*) in which it has been created and in which it lives”.¹³ One of the main tasks of *Völkerpsychologie*, then, was to clarify the interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) between the individual and the community. Lazarus and Steinthal understood this relation as an asymmetric one, since the “mental activity” of an individual was always rooted in the “spirit” of the folk. The community regularly took precedence over the individual. Individual achievements could only be understood and explained as products of the folk spirit, even though they were “expressed” by individuals. Language was the prime example to illustrate this point: it was never “invented” or “created” by an individual, but as a means of communication presupposed the existence of a folk community. For civilized nations (*Kulturvölker*), language was the most natural medium to express their peculiarities; it was passed on from generation to generation and perfected in the process. Equally customs, works of art, and the general culture of a folk were products of a “slow and incremental progressive development”, but not

¹² Lazarus and Steinthal, “Einleitende Gedanken”, 27-8.

¹³ H. Steinthal, *Grammatik, Logik, und Psychologie, ihre Prinzipien und ihr Verhältnis zueinander* (Berlin, 1855), 388.

creations of an individual.¹⁴ Each *Volk* thus developed its own “objective spirit” which existed independently of the individual “subjective spirit”. This “folk spirit” turned the multitude of individuals into a coherent people since it functioned as the “bond, the principle, and the idea of a people” through which a nation acquired its unity and became a harmonic, organic entity.¹⁵ Lazarus and Steinthal thus presented the separation of humanity into *Völker* or nations as the natural form of existence. To them, differences between “peoples” were not primarily a cause for conflicts, but rather the precondition for the “development of mankind”. The diversity and pluralism of nations, Lazarus and Steinthal argued, needed to be welcomed and encouraged since it allowed for the advancement of humanity and culture. The approach of *Völkerpsychologie* itself, they believed, would show how the “diversity of peoples” contributed to the “development of the human spirit”.¹⁶

Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* epitomized the mentality of nineteenth century liberals with its belief in science, progress, and the nation; these convictions were re-enforced by their experience of Jewish emancipation. While their support of the national movement in Germany represented the conventional wisdom of middle-class intellectuals, they introduced a notion of the “folk” that showed an exceptional level of reflection and analysis. Even though they considered language as

¹⁴ Lazarus, Steinthal, “Einleitende Gedanken”, 31; M. Lazarus, “Verdichtung des Denkens in der Geschichte”, in *ZfVS* 2 (1862), 54-62, at 57; M. Lazarus, “Über das Verhältnis des Einzelnen zur Geamtheit”, in *ZfVS* 2 (1862), 393-453; see B. Weiler, *Die Ordnung des Fortschritts: Zum Aufstieg und Fall der Fortschrittsidee der jungen’ Anthropologie* (Bielefeld, 2006), 183-90.

¹⁵ Lazarus, Steinthal, “Einleitende Gedanken”, 28-9.

¹⁶ Lazarus, Steinthal, “Einleitende Gedanken”, 5-6.

the most important common trait of a *Volk*, they found it insufficient to define it by language alone, since some languages were used by more than one nation (notably German and English), while other nations, such as Switzerland, used more than one language. Common descent or kinship could not define a nation either, Lazarus and Steinthal argued, since all nations were ethnically mixed. A neat “objective” definition of the nation or the “folk” was hard to come by. As a consequence, they introduced a subjective or voluntaristic notion of the *Volk*: Its existence and reality depended on the will of its members to become a folk and belong to it. The “folk” or nation was the result of a conscious and deliberate decision of its members; it depended on the realization of its members of their common “folk spirit”. The *Volk* was the “first product of the folk spirit”. Therefore, its “character” was flexible and changeable, and it needed to be re-created permanently.¹⁷

Wilhelm Wundt, best known as the “founding father” of modern, scientific psychology, was also the scholar most closely associated with the concept of *Völkerpsychologie*. He devoted the last twenty years of his long career to writing a general and comprehensive *Völkerpsychologie*, which was published in ten massive volumes from 1900 – a task that Lazarus and Steinthal had not even attempted.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ibid., 32-36.

¹⁸ On Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie*, see C. M. Schneider, *Wilhelm Wundts Völkerpsychologie. Entstehung und Entwicklung eines in Vergessenheit geratenen, wissenschaftshistorisch relevanten Fachgebietes* (Bonn, 1990); G. Eckardt, “Einleitung in die historischen Texte” in Idem, ed., *Völkerpsychologie: Versuch einer Neuentdeckung* (Weinheim, 1997), 78-112. A full academic biography of Wundt remains a desideratum, see S. Diamond, ‘Wundt before Leipzig’ in R.W. Rieber, ed., *Wilhelm Wundt and the Making of a Scientific Psychology* (New York and London,

Wundt considered the *Völkerpsychologie* his finest achievement; it formed an integral part of his concept of psychology, which consisted of two separate, but complementary branches. According to Wundt, all psychological knowledge was based on individual psychology, or physiological psychology, which dealt with simple processes of the mind. These could be studied with experimental methods, which he had “borrowed” from physiology and introduced to psychological research. This “scientific” approach to psychology, practised in psychological “laboratories”, established his fame and reputation and secured him his place in the annals of the discipline.¹⁹ Experimental methods were, however, only of limited use for psychologists, Wundt argued, since they could only be applied to the study of the most basic functions of the mind such as reactions, perceptions, and sensations. The more complex, higher “products” of the mind asked for a different approach since they could not be recreated in the set-up of a laboratory, but only observed indirectly: “The same Wundt whose laboratory functioned as the inspiration and model for numerous imitators was also the source for a mounting stream of restrictions on the use of the experimental method in psychology.”²⁰ Complex and “composite”

1980), 3-70; W. G. Bringmann, W. D. G. Balance and R. B. Evans, “Wilhelm Wundt 1832-1920: A Brief Biographical Sketch”, in *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 11 (1975), 287-97; G. Lamberti, *Wilhelm Maximilian Wundt (1832-1920): Leben, Werk und Persönlichkeit in Bildern und Texten* (Bonn, 1995).

¹⁹ See W. Wundt, *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (Leipzig, 1873). This introductory text was Wundt’s most successful and influential work; it was translated into several languages and remained in print long after his death.

²⁰ K. Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990), 36. See M. G. Ash, “Academic Politics in the History of

psychological phenomena were not creations of the individual, but of the folk, Wundt agreed with Lazarus and Steinthal. *Völkerpsychologie*, then, formed the necessary extension of individual psychology in order to arrive at a general psychology that fully explained the development of human life. For Wundt, individual psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* were the two sides of the same coin: clearly distinguished in scope and method, they formed integral parts of psychology as a whole.²¹

A major inspiration for Wundt's *Völkerpsychologie* had been Lazarus and Steinthal's *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft*. He adopted the very term *Völkerpsychologie* and stuck to it despite serious criticism. He also accepted the suggestion that *Völkerpsychologie* should primarily study language, myths and customs. Wundt's concept of *Völkerpsychologie*, then, owed more to the efforts of Lazarus and Steinthal than he was ready to admit. He evaluated their programmatic articles critically and stressed the differences between their approaches; at closer inspection, however, the similarities between the two versions of *Völkerpsychologie* outweigh the differences by far.²² Similar to Lazarus and Steinthal, Wundt's interest in *Völkerpsychologie* was related to his interest in ethics,

Science: Experimental Psychology in Germany 1871-1941", in *Central European History* 13 (1980), 255-86.

²¹ See W. Wundt, *Erlebtes und Erkanntes* (Leipzig, 1920), 218: "Beide, Individualpsychologie und Psychologie der Gemeinschaft, gehören zusammen, und das Denken in seiner die komplexen Vorgänge des Seelenlebens umfassenden Bedeutung läßt sich ebensowenig aus den Eigenschaften des individuellen Bewußtseins allein ableiten, wie sich etwa der Staat als eine rein individuelle Erfindung begreifen läßt."

²² G. Eckardt, *Völkerpsychologie*; Schneider, *Wilhelm Wundts Völkerpsychologie*.

the traditional moral philosophy.²³ He agreed that any study of ethics had to build on “folk-psychological” knowledge and described *Völkerpsychologie* as the “portico” (*Vorhalle*) of ethics.²⁴ The clearest and most concise summary of Wundt’s concept of *Völkerpsychologie* can be found in the introduction to his single volume *Elements of Folk Psychology*, published in 1912.²⁵ In contrast to the multi-volume long version of *Völkerpsychologie* which analysed the appearances of the “folk soul”, i.e. language, myth and religion, and customs separately, the one-volume digest provided a chronologically organized history of mankind (or civilization). Wundt argued that such a comprehensive summary was the real aim of his *Völkerpsychologie*, thus

²³ M. Lazarus, *Die Ethik des Judenthums*, vol. 1 (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1898); H. Steinthal, *Allgemeine Ethik* (Berlin, 1885). D. Baumgardt, ‘The Ethics of Lazarus and Steinthal’, in *Yearbook of the Leo Baeck Institute* 2 (1957), 205-17.

²⁴ W. Wundt, *Ethik. Eine Untersuchung der Tatsachen und Gesetze des sittlichen Lebens* (Stuttgart, 1886), p. iii: ‘Als die Vorhalle zur Ethik betrachte ich die Völkerpsychologie, der neben anderen Aufgaben insbesondere auch die zukommt, die Geschichte der Sitte und der sittlichen Vorstellungen unter psychologischen Gesichtspunkten zu behandeln.’ This study was reprinted and enlarged several times during Wundt’s lifetime.

²⁵ W. Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie. Grundlinien einer psychologischen Entwicklungsgeschichte der Menschheit* (Leipzig, 1912), 1-11. This volume was the only one to be translated into English as *Elements of folk psychology*, London, 1916; most British and American commentators’ knowledge of Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* was restricted to this volume. See T. S. Eliot, “Review of Wundt, *Elements of Folk Psychology*”, in *International Journal of Ethics* 27 (1917), 252-254; G. H. Mead, “A Translation of Wundt’s ‘Folk Psychology’”, in *The American Journal of Theology* 23 (1919), 533-536.

stressing its teleological character. “Development” was the main organizing principle of his approach, and Wundt put forward a number of bold theses about the “origins” of social practices and institutions. Similar to the development of the individual from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, peoples developed in clearly defined stages, he argued. The first stage in this *Völkerentwicklung* was the primitive age, which formed the “lowest level of culture”.²⁶ The primitive age was followed by the totemistic age, defined as a state of mind where, in contrast to modern times, the “animal ruled over the human being”. The next step in the development of mankind was the age of “heroes and gods”; it was defined by the emergence and rule of individuals and the military (*kriegerische*) organization of the “tribal community”, which in turn led to the emergence of the state. The “age of heroes and gods” also witnessed the emergence of national religions; epic tales replaced the myths and fairy tales of earlier times. The fourth stage of the development of mankind was characterized by the predominance of the national state and national religions, which still dominated the present time. The future development of civilization, however, would overcome national divisions and lead to “humanity”, a truly universal world-civilization.

III.

The outline of a comprehensive *Völkerpsychologie* as suggested by Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt included serious conceptual flaws and errors, and contemporary critics did not hesitate to expose these.²⁷ But even the reaction of outspoken critics and

²⁶ Wundt, *Elemente*, pp. 7-8.

²⁷ See [A.] Lasson, “Review of ‘Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft’”, in *Archiv für das Studium der Neueren Sprachen und*

opponents of *Völkerpsychologie* shows, by default, that it was not considered an odd, somewhat outlandish idea of outsiders to the academic community. Rather, it constituted a serious academic approach that had to be reckoned with. Outright critics of *Völkerpsychologie* did not ignore their manifestos and studies, but took the time and effort to study them closely in order to expose the problems and fault lines related to a new “discipline”.²⁸ The international reception of *Völkerpsychologie*,

Literaturen 27 (1860), 209-16, who poked fun at Lazarus and Steinthal’s programmatic article that opened the first issue of their journal and dismissed *Völkerpsychologie* as a misnomer, as did many other critics. On Lasson see U. Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger. Bürgerliche Juden und Protestanten im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2005), 292-4, 300-4. For further critical reviews of Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie* see E. von Hartmann, “Das Wesen des Gesamtgeistes. (Eine kritische Betrachtung des Grundbegriffes der Völkerpsychologie) [1869]” in idem, *Gesammelte Studien und Aufsätze gemeinverständlichen Inhalts* (Berlin, 1876), 504-19; P. Barth, *Die Philosophie der Geschichte als Sociologie. Erster Teil: Einleitung und kritische Übersicht* (Leipzig, 1897), 276-78; L. Tobler, “Zeitschrift for *Völkerpsychologie* und Sprachwissenschaft”, in *Neue Jahrbücher für Philologie und Pädagogik* 83 (1861), 257-80.

²⁸ One of harshest critics of Lazarus and Steinthal was the linguist Hermann Paul (1846-1921), a one-time student of Steinthal and follower of Herbart’s psychology. The introduction to his influential textbook on *Principles of the history of language* included a damning critique of their *Völkerpsychologie*. See H. Paul, *Prinzipien der Sprachgeschichte*, fourth edition, (Halle-on-the-Saale, 1909), 8-15. While critical of parts of Lazarus and Steinthal’s programme, Wilhelm Wundt defended the concept of *Völkerpsychologie* against Paul’s attack: W. Wundt, “Ziele und Wege der

from the USA to Russia and Japan, provides further proof of its impact and importance. The most avid readers of *Völkerpsychologie* outside Germany, however, were to be found in France, where its reception left the most profound traces in the intellectual landscape. Lazarus and Steinthal showed no particular interest in French philosophy: Steinthal, who had lived in Paris for four years in the 1850s and had gained insight into the intellectual and academic world of the French capital, could never shake off his typically German prejudices against French philosophy and culture, which he considered shallow and formalistic. In particular, he dismissed Auguste Comte's works as superficial and long-winded, and complained about the fundamental "lack of psychology" in his writings.²⁹ French scholars were much more open-minded and read Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie* with interest and sympathy. One of their earliest French readers was the philosopher and psychologist Théodule Ribot (1839-1916), a crucial, but somewhat forgotten personality of French academia during the *fin-de-siècle*. Together with Hippolyte Taine (1828-1893), Ribot was one of the main opponents of traditional philosophical "spiritualism". Inspired by both English and German psychology, Ribot was a champion of experimental psychology and instrumental in introducing "scientific" methods to French philosophy. He admired and translated the works of Herbert Spencer, wrote a major study on "psychological heredity" inspired by Charles Darwin and Francis Galton, but was best known for his studies on amnesia and the "diseases of memory".³⁰ A student

Völkerpsychologie", in Idem, *Probleme der Völkerpsychologie*, (Leipzig, 1911 [1886]), 1-35

²⁹ Steinthal to Lazarus, 12. September 1852, in Belke, ed., vol. 1, 266.

³⁰ Th. Ribot, *L'hérédité, étude psychologique: sur ses phénomènes, ses lois, ses causes, ses conséquences* (Paris, 1873), Th. Ribot, *Les maladies de la mémoire* (Paris, 1881).

and friend of Jean-Martin Charcot, he founded the first psychological laboratory in Paris after the model of Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig. Similar to Wundt, with whom he was in correspondence since the 1870s, he favoured a comprehensive psychology that would integrate scientific methods and concepts, but would not be restricted to it. In 1876 he founded the *Revue Philosophique* which he edited until his death in 1916; from 1885 to 1888 he taught at the Sorbonne, and then held the first chair in psychology at the Collège de France until 1901, which was created for Ribot due to the efforts of Ernest Renan.³¹

Ribot's monograph on "Contemporary German Psychology", published first in 1879, mainly served to introduce the new experimental psychology of Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887), Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) and Wundt to an French audience. It also included a chapter on the "Herbart-school" in which he commended the plans for a *Völkerpsychologie* as outlined by Lazarus and Steinthal.³² As the main representatives of this "Herbart-school" in Germany he presented the anthropologist

On the reception of Darwin France see Y. Conry, *L'introduction du darwinisme en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris, 1974).

³¹ S. Nicolas and D. J. Murray, "Théodule Ribot, 1839-1916, Founder of French Psychology: A Biographical Introduction", in *History of Psychology* 2 (1999), 277-301; S. Nicolas, *Théodule Ribot (1839-1916): philosophe breton, fondateur de la psychologie française* (Paris, 2005); R. A. Nye, *The Origins of Crowd Psychology: Gustave Le Bon and the Crisis of Mass Democracy in the Third Republic* (London and Beverly Hills, 1975), 13.

³² Th. Ribot, *La Psychologie allemande contemporaine (Ecole expérimentale)* (Paris, 1879), 49-57. To an English audience, Ribot presented Taine as the "chief representative in France of what the Germans call *Völkerpsychologie*": Th. Ribot, "Philosophy in France", in *Mind* 2,7 (1877), 366-386, at 376.

Theodor Waitz, and Lazarus and Steinthal, thus ignoring Austria and the Habsburg empire where Herbartianism played a much more important role than in Imperial Germany.³³ Waitz, Ribot commented, had amassed facts without arriving at a clear concept of a psychology of races (*psychologie des races*). In contrast, Lazarus and Steinthal were the “real founders” of “ethnic psychology”. Ribot was not much impressed with their individual scholarly contributions: Steinthal’s linguistic works were based on the assumption of an *Allgeist* or general spirit that functioned as the “precondition and bond of every society and as the foundation of moral life”. This notion showed Steinthal’s “metaphysical tendencies”, Ribot opined.³⁴ Lazarus’s main academic work, his collected essays on the “Life of the Soul”, were more the work of a “*moraliste*” than of a psychologist, according to Ribot. It contained fine observations on “humor” as a psychological phenomenon, and on “tact”, “honour” and “glory”. But Lazarus resembled more the poets and *romanciers* on which he had relied for his studies than a serious scholar since he did not possess the “rigorous scientific method” that was necessary to classify facts and establish “scientific laws”.³⁵

Still, Lazarus and Steinthal’s “project” for a future *Völkerpsychologie*, as laid down in the programmatic articles published in the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie*

³³ A. Hoeschen and L. Schneider, “Herbartianismus im 19. Jahrhundert: Umriß einer intellektuellen Konfiguration”, in L. Raphael, ed. *Ideen als gesellschaftliche Gestaltungskraft im Europa der Neuzeit: Beiträge für eine erneuerte Geistesgeschichte* (München, 2006), 447-477; A. Hoeschen, and L. Schneider, eds, *Herbarts Kultursystem: Perspektiven der Transdisziplinarität im 19. Jahrhundert* (Würzburg, 2001).

³⁴ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 49.

³⁵ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 50.

und Sprachwissenschaft, found Ribot's support. He fully agreed with their view that the "people" represented more than the sum of its parts, and that a specialized psychological discipline was necessary to complement individual psychology: "Next to general psychology which studies the individual, there is space for another discipline devoted to the study of man as a social being, or more precisely, the many groups human beings belong to: this discipline is ethnological psychology."³⁶ To make the case for such a discipline, it was necessary to show that individual psychology was an insufficient approach. Adopting the core idea of "mass psychology", Ribot argued that this task could easily be achieved: as soon as people became part of a crowd or large group, they changed their behaviour and developed habits that the individual did not possess. It did not matter where this change in behaviour came from, since it could be observed and thus established as fact. History showed clearly to what degree the character of a people could differ from that of the individuals it was made up of.³⁷ Irrespective of how this difference could be explained, since it existed as a fact, it provided *Völkerpsychologie* (*psychologie des peuples*) with an object of study.

Ribot accepted Lazarus and Steinthal's concept of the *Volksgeist*, "cet esprit d'un peuple", even though he criticized their definition of the "objective spirit" of a people as a "bit mystical" (*un peu mystique*). The example of language as the primary element of the *Volksgeist* convinced him, though. Ribot assumed that the *Volksgeist*

³⁶ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 51: "A coté de la psychologie ordinaire, qui a pour objet l'homme individuel, il y a place pour une autre science consacrée à l'homme social ou plus exactement aux divers groupes humains: c'est la psychologie ethnologique."

³⁷ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 52.

represented the average of a nation; one had to ignore children, “idiots” and “retarded people” as well as outstanding geniuses to study the “objective spirit”, as represented by the remaining average.³⁸ Lazarus and Steinthal had clearly defined the elements which constituted the *Volksgeist* and would form the object of study of the new discipline: Next to language they listed myths, religion, customs, poetry, writing, art, but also practical life, mores, professions, family life, and the many reciprocal relations between these manifestations of the objective spirit. They had thus outlined a proper “scientific” history which could follow the model of the natural sciences and promised to elevate the study of history to the rank of a proper scientific discipline: “The laws of biography, i.e. the development of individual spirits, have to be established by the psychology of the individual; in the same way, the laws of history, which could be called the biography of nations, have to be established by comparative psychology which will thus constitute a truly scientific history.”³⁹ Still, Ribot was well aware of the shortcomings of Lazarus and Steinthal’s grandiose plans. Despite outlining a neat programme of study, and despite the twenty years of its existence, their journal had not fulfilled its promises. It had provided a number of useful materials and documents, but no precise results and no general conclusions. Most of the contributions were of a literary, not scientific character. Most importantly, Lazarus and Steinthal had not provided a clear methodology for their

³⁸ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 53.

³⁹ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 54: “Les lois de la biographie, c’est-à-dire du développement des esprits individuels, doivent se résoudre dans la psychologie de l’esprit individuel; et de même les lois de l’histoire, qu’on peut appeler la biographie des nations, doivent se résoudre en une psychologie comparée qui constituerait la vraie science de l’histoire.”

new discipline; therefore, except for collecting interesting material, they had not yet achieved anything, in contrast to British anthropologists such as Edward Tylor (1832-1917), John Lubbock (1834-1913) and John McLennan (1827-1881), whose research had been ignored by the German folk psychologists.⁴⁰

Ernest Renan (1823-1892) did not stop at commenting on Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie*, but adopted a cornerstone of it, namely their voluntaristic and subjective definition of the nation. He incorporated this notion in his famous lecture on the definition of the nation, albeit for different reasons and in a different context. To the dismay of Lazarus, Renan did not reveal his source of inspiration.⁴¹ In his autobiography, Lazarus claimed that Renan had copied the central points of his famous lecture *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?*, delivered in 1882 at the Sorbonne and which soon became a work of reference for scholars of nationalism, directly from his speech *Was heißt national?* This text was Lazarus's contribution to the debate about antisemitism that had been sparked by the historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896). In order to defend the German Jews against anti-Semitic accusations, Lazarus had employed ideas from *Völkerpsychologie*.⁴² One of Lazarus's

⁴⁰ Ribot, *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 57.

⁴¹ Belke, 'Einleitung', vol. 1, 95-6; Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger*, pp. 86-7.

⁴² E. Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882* (Paris, 1882); M. Lazarus, "Was heißt national?", in Idem, *Treu und Frei. Gesammelte Reden und Vorträge über Juden und Judentum* (Leipzig, 1887), 53-113. See see T. v. Rahden, "Germans of the Jewish *Stamm*: Visions of Community between Nationalism and Particularism, 1850 to 1933" in N. Gregor, N. Roemer and M. Roseman, eds, *German History from the Margins* (Bloomington, 2006), 27-48; Jensen, *Gebildete Doppelgänger*, 232-3.

students, the teacher Alfred Leicht who was in charge of editing his autobiographical writings and tried to preserve the image of his teacher for posterity, even accused Renan of plagiarism because he had not referenced Lazarus's text.⁴³ It is certainly possible that Renan, a scholar who was very familiar with German philosophy, arts and letters, found much inspiration in Lazarus's text. Steinthal had known Renan personally since his time in Paris, and had published a very critical review of his work on the "character of the semitic peoples" in the first volume of the *ZfVS*. Lazarus had met Renan occasionally, too.⁴⁴ Despite this dispute, the similarities between both texts are striking: similar to Lazarus, Renan dismissed attempts to define a nation by "objective" criteria such as language, territory and race as insufficient. All these "objective" factors played a part in the formation of nations and had to be considered by historians and philosophers, Renan argued, but they could not alone explain the characteristics of a nation. Renan argued that the "national spirit" depended as much on common memory as on forgetting, an idea that recalls Nietzsche's "monumental history". To create a strong and powerful national spirit, Renan claimed, it was not only necessary to accumulate knowledge, but also to cast aside the memory national defeats. Importantly, Renan argued that the existence of a nation could not be taken for granted. Rather, it had to be re-enacted perpetually, a mechanism for which he coined the catch-phrase of the nation as a "daily plebiscite". In complete agreement with Lazarus, Renan argued that the nation ultimately rested on the will of its

⁴³ A. Leicht, *Lazarus, Begründer der Völkerpsychologie* (Leipzig, 1911), 19. Leicht's outrage was exaggerated since Renan's text did not include any references.

⁴⁴ See H. Steinthal, 'Zur Charakteristik der semitischen Völker' *ZfVS* 1 (1860), 328-45; E. Renan, *Nouvelles considérations sur le caractère général des peuples sémitiques, et en particulier leur tendance au monothéisme* (Paris, 1859).

members to form a nation; it was “socially constructed”. Furthermore, both Lazarus’s and Renan’s texts were directed at the same opponents, i.e. German-Prussian nationalists such as von Treitschke whose aim was “complete” the political unification of Germany and therefore targeted the alleged “enemies” of the German nation: Catholics, Socialists, and Jews. Lazarus, however, had employed the idea of the nation as a product of the will of its members to defend the rights of the German Jews as full members of the German nation. Renan, in contrast, used the same idea to argue against the claims of German nationalists to the annexed regions of Alsace and Lorraine as “naturally” German provinces.⁴⁵

Within the emerging “Durkheim school” of sociology, German *Völkerpsychologie* was widely acknowledged and discussed in detail. The sociologist Celestin Bouglé (1870-1940), a close collaborator of Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and from 1908 professor at the Sorbonne, evaluated Lazarus’s *Völkerpsychologie* even more positively than Ribot before him. Like many of his contemporaries, Bouglé had been a visiting student at the University of Berlin in the 1880s where he had been introduced to the concept of *Völkerpsychologie* by Lazarus.⁴⁶ Upon his return, he produced a study that introduced a French audience to “the contemporary social sciences” in Germany. Bouglé presented Lazarus to French readers as the founder of “social psychology” in Germany and introduced him alongside Georg Simmel (1858-1918), the economist Adolph Wagner (1835-1917) and the philosopher of law Rudolf von Jhering (1818-1892), thus slightly overestimating the standing and influence of

⁴⁵ On Renan see D. C. J. Lee, *Ernest Renan: In the Shadow of Faith* (London, 1996); F. Mercury, *Renan* (Paris, 1990).

⁴⁶ Espagne, *En-deça du Rhin*, 362-5.

his former teacher at the University of Berlin.⁴⁷ Bouglé summarized the main tenets of Lazarus and Steinthal's approach accurately and without any criticism. The remaining problems and conceptual weaknesses of "social psychology" were irrelevant, Bouglé argued, considering the advantages over traditional "individualist" philosophy that the new approach offered. Lazarus had shown the way not only for psychologists, but for all social scientists eager to overcome the deficits of traditional philosophy that had all but ignored group phenomena and communal life.⁴⁸ Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was equally familiar with Lazarus and Steinthal's *Völkerpsychologie*, but was more reserved in his comments than his colleague Bouglé. Agreeing with Ribot, he complained about the lack of positive results of *Völkerpsychologie*. So far, it was little more than a fashionable term for general linguistics and comparative philology.⁴⁹ The philosopher Henri Berr (1863-1954), the founder of the *Revue de Synthèse*, incorporated Lazarus's concept of *Verdichtung* in history in his early study on "The Future of Philosophy": "The mind is the product of

⁴⁷ C. Bouglé, *Les Sciences sociales en Allemagne* (Paris, 1896), 18-42.

⁴⁸ Bouglé, *Les Sciences sociales*, 38, 42. See W. P. Vogt, "Un durkheimien ambivalent: Célestin Bouglé 1870-1940", in *Revue Française de Sociologie* 20 (1979), 123-39.

⁴⁹ E. Durkheim, "Cours de science sociale: leçon d'ouverture [1888]", in Idem, *La Science Social et l'Action*, Paris, 1970, as quoted in E. Apfelbaum, "Origines de la psychologie sociale en France: développements souterraines et discipline méconnue", in *Revue Française de Sociologie* 22 (1981), 397-407, at 402: "Si nous n'avons rien dit tout a l'heure des intéressants travaux de Lazarus et Steinthal, c'est que jusqu'ici ils n'ont pas donné de resultats. La *Völkerpsychologie*, telle qu'ils l'entendaient, n'est guère qu'un mot nouveau pour désigner la linguistique générale et la philologie comparée."

history; history is thinking in epitome.”⁵⁰ In his major work on the “Historical Synthesis” he was more reserved towards Lazarus and Steinthal. Echoing Ribot’s judgement, Berr praised the “intriguing intuitions” on which *Völkerpsychologie* rested, but complained that it consisted of disparate elements that could not be reconciled in a genuine synthesis. Equally, he considered Wundt’s approach legitimate, but asked for a more “positive” method.⁵¹

While Ribot and Bouglé acknowledged and commented favourably on Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie*, but did not attempt to contribute to this new “discipline” on their own, the social philosopher Alfred Fouillée (1838-1912) became the most famous representative of a genuine French *psychologie des peuples* around the turn of the century. Originally a specialist on Greek philosophy, he turned to the philosophy of history and the study of contemporary society, and introduced a theory of *idées forces* as the motor of historical development and the “glue” of society.⁵² In 1898, he published a *Psychology of the French People* which made ample use of Lazarus and Steinthal’s *Völkerpsychologie*. Most importantly, he adopted Lazarus’s definition of the folk spirit, *l’esprit national*, arguably the most original idea of his

⁵⁰ H. Berr, *L’avenir de la philosophie. Esquisse d’une synthèse des connaissances fondée sur l’histoire* (Paris, 1899), 423: “L’esprit est le produit de l’histoire; l’histoire est la ‘concretion’ de la pensée.”

⁵¹ H. Berr, *La synthèse en histoire. Essai critique et théorique* (Paris, 1911), 108. On Berr see *Henri Berr at la culture du XXe siècle: histoire, science et philosophie*, ed. by A. Biard et al. (Paris, 1994). On Berr’s views of Germany see P. Schöttler, “Henri Berr et L’Allemagne”, in *ibid*, 189-203.

⁵² A. Fouillée, *L’évolutionisme des idées-forces* (Paris, 1890); *Idem, La psychologie des idées-forces*, 2 vols, (Paris, 1893).

Völkerpsychologie. According to Fouillée, the national spirit was not only an effect, but also a cause, and it was not only defined by individuals, but defined them as well.⁵³ Like Ribot before him, Fouillée also referred to the results of mass psychology as an aid for *Völkerpsychologie*. Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), Scipio Sighele (1868-1913), and Gustave Le Bon (1841-1931), had shown, he argued, that as part of a group, the individual changed his character; hence large groups, and certainly nations, could not simply be treated as an addition of individuals. Every nation, Fouillée maintained, had its own unique consciousness and its own will, but the reigning individualism in the study of politics, economics, psychology and ethics had obscured this simple fact. Just like every individual was characterized by a set of *idées-forces*, every nation had a similar set of guiding ideas.⁵⁴

Fouillée's main target, however, were not the "individualists" who had ignored the importance of society and the nation, but the craniologists and phrenologists who tried to explain the differences between nations by studying the average form of skulls or the weight of brains. He referred to the jurist and sociologist Ludwig Gumplowicz (1838-1909) and Gustave Le Bon as representatives of such an approach; his main opponent, however, was the count Georges Vacher de Lapouge (1854-1936), an outspoken racial antisemite and follower of the "Aryan myth".⁵⁵ To counter the ideas of scientific racism, which had become increasingly popular by the end of the nineteenth century, Fouillée employed a paraphrase of Lazarus's definition

⁵³ A. Fouillée, *Psychologie du peuple Français*, Paris, 1898, 4.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 6, 11.

⁵⁵ Ibid., ii-iii. See G. Vacher de Lapouge, *L'Aryen: son rôle sociale* (Paris, 1899); J. M. Hecht, "The Solvency of Metaphysics. The Debate over Racial Science and Moral Philosophy in France, 1890-1919", in *Isis* 90 (1999), 1-24.

of the nation. A nation could never be defined exclusively by physiological, ethnographic, or economic factors. Rather, “national individuality” manifested itself through psychological forces, namely language, religion, literature and art, buildings, and the image a nation held of itself and of others. Therefore, Fouillée pleaded for a middling position between “idealists” and “materialists”: He conceded that biological factors played a part in constituting a nation, but could never exhaustively explain its peculiarities. As the three “major causes” that formed a nation, he identified its “constitution”, “temperament” and “mental character”.⁵⁶ In contrast to Lazarus and Steinthal, then, Fouillée put more emphasis on biological factors in defining a nation, but he ultimately and emphatically agreed with their “voluntaristic” definition of the folk spirit.⁵⁷ The “essence” of a nation was to be found in its “conscience”, not in physical traits. Despite Fouillée’s effort in outlining a balanced approach to *Völkerpsychologie* that would meet academic standards, he invited similar criticisms as Lazarus and Steinthal: his book on the mind of the French people as well as a further study, which compared the characters of the major European nations, merely listed common stereotypes and clichés, dressed up as social science. Fouillée had not discovered the method that would have allowed for the scientific study of the ‘mind of

⁵⁶ Fouillée, *Psychologie du peuple Français*, 14-15, 22.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 74: ‘Sans aller jusqu’à soutenir, avec Lazarus, que l’être des peuples ne repose sur aucun rapport objectif et proprement naturel—identité de race ou communauté de langue, régime des biens, etc.—il faut accorder que les rapports subjectifs et les dépendances sociales vont sans croissant: un peuple est avant tout un ensemble d’hommes qui se regardent comme un peuple, “l’œuvre spirituelle de ceux qui le créent incessant”—son essence est dans la conscience.’

the nation', hence his writings did not go beyond the speculations of journalists and travel writers.⁵⁸

Wilhelm Wundt had started publishing his *Völkerpsychologie* at a time when the social sciences, and particularly sociology, were slowly emerging as distinct disciplines, after decades of latency. He had clearly distinguished *Völkerpsychologie* from sociology, and one of the reasons he stubbornly stuck to the much debated term *Völkerpsychologie* over “social psychology” or “sociology” was the “presentist” outlook of the latter. The champions of sociology, in turn, could not ignore Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* since it too obviously overlapped with their own efforts to study “society” as a whole. Many sympathetic critics of Wundt argued that he had really created a “social” psychology, and *Völkerpsychologie* found itself in competition with sociology to establish a true social science, positioned in between the natural sciences and the humanities. Emile Durkheim, the French “founding father” of sociology, owed much to Wundt in his efforts to establish the “new sociology” in France. Having spent the academic year 1885-86 in Berlin and Leipzig in an effort to make himself familiar with the German “moral sciences”, he gained a first-hand experience of Wundt’s psychology, and subsequently wrote two reports for the French Ministry of Education on the state of the “positive sciences” and on “moral philosophy” in Germany.⁵⁹ A former student of Théodule Ribot – who in turn admired Wundt’s

⁵⁸ See A. Fouillée, *Esquisse psychologique des peuples Européens* (Paris, 1903). Henri Berr ridiculed Fouillée for even attempting to write such a study on his own and publish it in one volume; see Berr, *La synthèse en histoire*, 86.

⁵⁹ S. Lukes, *Emile Durkheim, his Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1992), 86-98.

experimental psychology⁶⁰ –Durkheim was particularly impressed by Wundt’s anti-metaphysical approach to moral philosophy. His report on the “moral sciences” was in fact an extended review of Wundt’s *Ethics*, which he compared to the works of the “socialists of the chair” (*Kathedersozialisten*), namely Adolph Wagner and Gustav Schmoller (1838-1917), as well as Albert Schäffle (1831-1903) and the philosopher of law Rudolf Jhering. As Durkheim explained, in contrast to the “Manchester”-school of political economy all these scholars agreed that “society” was not simply a collection of individuals, but constituted an object of its own. Secondly, they had demonstrated that morality as well as the law were not intellectual abstractions, but empirical facts that had to be studied as such.⁶¹ Durkheim confirmed that Wundt’s method was “purely empirical” (*nettement empirique*). He strongly agreed with him that “collective phenomena” such as morality and religion had to be studied empirically, and that social psychology (as Durkheim’s translation of *Völkerpsychologie*) would provide the relevant material to do so. It was a common mistake to view the individual as the “principal motor” of social life whereas “collective facts” such as ethics and religion originated in other social facts.⁶² According to Durkheim, Wundt’s study was outstanding for mainly two reasons: first, it was rigorously based on facts and avoided abstract or normativist speculations, and

⁶⁰ Ribot, *La Psychologie allemande contemporaine*, 215-297.

⁶¹ E. Durkheim, “La science positive de la morale en Allemagne” *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 12 (1887), 33-58, 113-142, 275-284, at37: ‘Il est faux de dire qu’un tout soit égal à la somme de ses parties.’ The second part of this essay was completely devoted to Wundt’s *Ethics*.

⁶² Durkheim, “La science positive de la morale”, 113, 116, 118-119.

second, it showed that morality had “evolved” according to laws that science was to determine.⁶³

In his later career, Durkheim played down the inspiration he received from Wundt, and German scholarship in general, mainly because he was keen to be seen as a truly original scholar, but also because he was accused of having lifted the main elements of his sociology from German authors. In 1907, the Belgian Catholic writer Simon Deploige attacked Durkheim directly and argued that his sociology was not French in origin, as Durkheim had proudly claimed, but nothing but a paraphrase of German ideas. All of Durkheim’s “main ideas were basically German in origin”, Deploige stated, and therefore alien to French thinking.⁶⁴ His denunciation was part of a general polemic against Durkheim’s school and the Nouvelle Sorbonne which constituted, in Wolf Lepenies’s words, a “rear battle of the Dreyfus affair”. The defamation of Durkheim’s sociology as “German” and foreign thus included a barely disguised anti-Semitic accusation.⁶⁵ To his defence, while conceding that he had learned much from German philosophy and social science, Durkheim insisted on the originality and “Frenchness” of his approach, and played down German influences on his sociology. Still, and despite his reputation as a harsh and ruthless reviewer,

⁶³ Durkheim, “La science positive de la morale”, 138.

⁶⁴ Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 92. See S. Deploige, *Le conflit de la morale et de la sociologie*, (Louvain, 1911), translated as *The Conflict between Ethics and Sociology*, trans. C. C. Miltner (St. Louis and London, 1938).

⁶⁵ W. Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen: Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 2002), 50.

throughout his career treated Wundt's works with respect and referred to them in all his major studies.⁶⁶

In 1913, Durkheim published a long review of Wundt's *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie* in his own journal, *L'année sociologique*. This article showed him much more sceptical towards Wundt than in his earlier comments on the *Ethics*.⁶⁷ The fact that Wundt insisted on the name *Völkerpsychologie* instead of "social psychology" did not convince Durkheim. Wundt's dismissal of sociology as a limited and "presentist" approach revealed an odd understanding the discipline; thus far, Durkheim explained, his own contributions to sociology had been criticized not for an exaggerated concern with the present, but for their focus on ancient and primitive forms of civilization.⁶⁸ Moreover, Durkheim was not convinced by Wundt's method of studying contemporary primitive civilizations in order to gain insight into the origins of civilization, since even the most primitive forms of civilization had come in contact with modernity and could hence not be treated as an early form of human development. Wundt's interpretation of the four "ages" of mankind showed, Durkheim continued, that he had not kept abreast of specialized research. He had misinterpreted totemism and ignored its religious and social character. In addition,

⁶⁶ E. Durkheim, *De la division du travail social*, seventh edition, (Paris, 1960), 213, 215; E. Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* [1912], trans. C. Cosman (Oxford and New York, 2008), 128; R. A. Jones, "The Positive Science of Ethics in France: German Influences on *De la division du travail social*", in *Sociological Forum* 9 (1994), 37-55.

⁶⁷ E. Durkheim, "Review of Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*", in *L'année sociologique* 12 (1913), 50-61.

⁶⁸ Durkheim, 'Review of Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*', 51.

Wundt was not able to account for the sudden appearance of the “individual” during the age of “heroes and gods”. Most importantly, Wundt’s argument rested on assumptions of the philosophy of history which presupposed that mankind developed in a steady, uni-linear way towards a clear goal, “humanity”. Oddly in a study of *Völkerpsychologie*, Wundt had ignored national differences in his effort to present the history of mankind as one integrated process. In contrast, Durkheim explained, the history of civilization had to be compared to a tree with many related, but different branches. In sum, Durkheim concluded, Wundt’s study was too ambitious and had forced him to employ simplifying concepts. Despite these serious objections to Wundt’s study, however, he still found much to praise in it. Arguably, it was impossible for any individual scholar to answer all the questions that *Völkerpsychologie* raised. Wundt had done the best that was possible for an individual scholar, and whatever the “objective value” of his synthesis, it demanded the respect of the reader.⁶⁹ When Marcel Mauss (1872-1950), Durkheim’s nephew and close collaborator, reviewed the volumes of Wundt’s ten-volume *Völkerpsychologie* devoted to his own specialism, myth and religion, for Ribot’s *Revue philosophique*, he came to similar conclusions: As “one of the last encyclopaedic minds in Germany”, Mauss wrote, Wundt’s work showed “the usual flaws of the philosopher – excessive systematization, hasty generalization, multiplied and complicated divisions”. But even specialists could profit from his work since he tried to clarify facts and define concepts that were frequently used, but often overlooked.⁷⁰ Mauss praised Wundt’s study of the development of art, especially his

⁶⁹ Durkheim, ‘Review of Wundt, *Elemente der Völkerpsychologie*’, 60-1.

⁷⁰ M. Mauss, “L’art et le mythe d’après M. Wundt”, in *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’étranger* 66 (1908), 48-78, translated as “Art and Myth according to Wilhelm

“genetic classification of various arts” and the distinction between “plastic arts” and “musics”. But Wundt, surprisingly, had not captured the social nature of art, but had tried to “explain history by individual psychology, by the general faculties of human consciousness”. Wundt had ignored the creation and the enjoyment of art, therefore his study had “no psychological life and no philosophical interest” because it was unrelated to “sociological reality”.⁷¹ Similarly, Wundt did not provide a clear understanding of “myth” because he had missed one of its essential elements, i.e. belief.

Similar to Georg Simmel, who had appropriated central concepts of Lazarus’s *Völkerpsychologie* such as the “objective spirit”, Durkheim had made good use of concepts he had found early on in his career in Wundt’s philosophical writings. Durkheim did not simply borrow these concepts, but translated and reformulated them. What Wundt had called the “folk soul”, often misunderstood as a “metaphysical” definition of “national character”, Durkheim presented as “collective representations”. Where Wundt had taught that the “facts of moral life” had to be considered “social facts”, and that values, ideas and belief-systems had to be studied with the same rigorous methods as the material world, Durkheim couldn’t agree more. In contrast to Wundt, then, Durkheim did not try to write an all-encompassing, universal world history, but restricted himself to more limited topics, and avoided the temptation of an open teleology in the manner of Wundt. He put more effort into developing a universal methodology that would provide the means to study “society”

Wundt” in *Saints, Heroes, Myths, and Rites: Classical Durkheimian Studies of Religion and Society*, ed. and trans. by A. Riley, S. Daynes, and C. Isnart (Boulder and London, 2009), 17-38.

⁷¹ Mauss, “Art and Myth according to Wilhelm Wundt”, 18, 21-2.

in a comprehensive way. Wundt, then, seems to have served Durkheim as much as an inspiration as a foil in his effort to establish a truly scientific sociology.⁷²

IV.

Historians of psychology, their eyes fixed on the origins of “scientific” psychology, have regularly ignored the contribution of *Völkerpsychologie* to the development of their discipline.⁷³ Despite recent attempts to include *Völkerpsychologie* into the history of the psychology on account of its resemblance to a holistic “cultural psychology”, historians of psychology continue to produce “useable pasts” of their discipline which play little attention to alternative, non-behaviourist approaches to the study of the mind.⁷⁴ Similarly, historians of sociology and cultural anthropology do not consider *Völkerpsychologie* a part of the tradition that created their respective

⁷² Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 86-98; Lepenies, *Die drei Kulturen*, 82; Apfelbaum, “Origines de la psychologie sociale en France”.

⁷³ See in particular E.G. Boring, *A History of Experimental Psychology*, second edition, (Englewood Cliffs, 1950 [1929]); For recent histories of psychology see for instance B.R. Hergenhahn, *An Introduction to the History of Psychology*, sixth edition, (Belmont, 2009), 265-71; C.J. Goodwin, *A History of Modern Psychology*, third edition, (New York, 2008), 98-120. An exception is K. Danziger, *Constructing the Subject: Historical Origins of Psychological Research*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).

⁷⁴ M. Cole, *Cultural Psychology: A Once and Future Discipline*, (Cambridge, MA and London, 1996); J. D. Greenwood, “Wundt, *Völkerpsychologie*, and Experimental Social Psychology”, in *History of Psychology* 6 (2003), 70-88; G. Jahoda, *Crossroads between Culture and Mind: Continuities and Change in Theories of Human Nature* (Cambridge, MA, 1992).

disciplines, either.⁷⁵ This reluctance to adopt *Völkerpsychologie* into the grand narratives of disciplinary development comes as no surprise since the term is commonly associated with simplified notions of “national character”, and with attempts to present national prejudices and stereotypes as serious and sound scholarship. Sometimes, *Völkerpsychologie* is even seen as a form of scientific racism.⁷⁶ As a consequence, even historians of nationalism have dismissed the once venerable approach as little more than propaganda and have shown little interest in a “failed” discipline fraught with conceptual problems.⁷⁷

The French appropriation of German *Völkerpsychologie* helps to correct such entrenched views. There are several reasons that explain the popularity of German *Völkerpsychologie* in France. First, it reflected the “German crisis of French thinking” after the defeat of the French war of 1870-71 which provided its immediate

⁷⁵ An exception is M. Bunzl, “Franz Boas and the Humdoldtian Tradition: From Volksgeist and Nationalcharakter to an Anthropological Concept of Culture” in G. W. Stocking Jr., ed., *Volksgeist as Method and Ethic. Essays on Boasian Ethnography and the German Anthropological Tradition*, Madison, 1996, 17-78.

⁷⁶ See for instance M. Dierks, “Thomas Mann und die ‘jüdische’ Psychoanalyse. Über Freud, C. G. Jung, das ‘jüdische Unbewußte’ und Manns Ambivalenz”, in Idem and R. Wimmer, eds, *Thomas Mann und das Judentum* (Frankfurt-on- Main, 2004), 97-126 (100); Katja Marmetschke, *Feindbeobachtung und Verständigung: Der Germanist Edmond Vermeil (1878-1964)* (Cologne, 2008), 14-15; for an attempt to save the reputation of Wilhelm Wundt’s *Völkerpsychologie* see A. Brock, “Was Wundt a ‘Nazi’?”, *Theory and Psychology* 2 (1992), 205-223.

⁷⁷ See for instance H.-U. Wehler, *Nationalismus. Geschichte, Formen, Folgen* (Munich, 2001), 7; Th. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918. vol. 1: Arbeitswelt und Bürgergeist* (Munich, 1990), 631.

context. Followed by the collapse of the “second empire”, the civil war of the commune and the establishing of the Third Republic, this defeat caused a period of intensive soul-searching on the French part, and convinced many that the military defeat was due to the superior system of higher education in Germany, especially in Prussia.⁷⁸ A number of French scholars and academics went on pilgrimages to German universities to study and learn from their alleged superiority, which led to a wave of intellectual transfers across the Rhine. The appropriation of *Völkerpsychologie* in France was part of this movement, and it remained a one-sided affair. *Völkerpsychologie* was most appealing to scholars who were trying to establish a proper science of the “social” that would go beyond that stale “individualism” then dominant in French departments of philosophy, and thus make a contribution to the study of contemporary, modern society. The Germans, it seemed to French observers, were well advanced in this regard. And while there was no lack of home-grown French attempts at formulating a social psychology in the guise of mass or crowd psychology, equally considered as one of the “precursors” of modern social psychology, German *Völkerpsychologie* offered French social scientists a welcome alternative to this approach, which was most successfully represented by Gustave Le Bon. Based on an elitist, anti-democratic outlook, Le Bon was generally suspicious of the importance the “crowd” had achieved in the modern age. He compared the behaviour of the *foule* to that of women, savages and children, who were all deemed incapable of rational thinking. Crowd psychology, then, was a barely disguised defence strategy of the rational, male individual against the onslaught of the democratic age that promised to emancipate previously excluded groups. As such, it had little in common with *Völkerpsychologie*, which was based on a positive, even

⁷⁸ C. Digeon, *La crise allemande de la pensée française (1870-1914)* (Paris, 1959).

idealized view of the *Volk* as the origin of culture and civilization. *Völkerpsychologie* thus offered a perspective for those French authors who might have accepted the main tenets of Le Bon's crowd psychology, but did not agree with the political ideology that underpinned it. Furthermore, *Völkerpsychologie* provided an alternative to the simplified theories of physical anthropology. While Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt had not even engaged in a discussion of physical anthropology, but simply dismissed it as insufficient, Alfred Fouillée in particular employed *Völkerpsychologie* to this end.

In addition, and in contrast to English-speaking countries, French academics and intellectuals had fewer problems with translating the peculiar German term *Völkerpsychologie*, which helped the transfer of German concepts to France considerably. The term itself could be rendered accurately as "*psychologie des peuples*" – keeping the plural of *Völker*, in contrast to the English translation "folk psychology". However, only Fouillée used this literal translation "*psychologie des peuples*" emphatically and consistently. Ribot introduced it alongside "*psychologie des races*" and "*psychologie ethnique*", and Bouglé, true to the Durkheim school, preferred to speak of "*psychologie sociale*". Similarly, the awkward, but crucial term *Volkgeist* could be translated into French as "*esprit national*", or, more liberally, as "*esprit public*". This inconsistency in the use of the terminology of *Völkerpsychologie* was not merely a problem of translation, but one of definition: A number of German reviewers of Lazarus, Steinthal and Wundt had expressed their concerns about the suitability of the very label "*Völkerpsychologie*". While agreeing with the general aims and outline of the new "discipline", they found its name misleading, inaccurate or even pretentious. Most French readers of German *Völkerpsychologie* agreed with this view, and Durkheim made the most successful suggestion when he introduced Wundt's concept of a *Volkseele* as "*representations collectives*". Even though

Durkheim agreed that the collective representations of each nation were distinct and unique – thus attesting the importance of the nation for his sociology – his free “translation” of Wundt’s term proved more successful than the German original with its romantic baggage. The level of abstraction of Durkheim’s terminology made its future popularity possible: It was in the works of the French “founding father” of sociology that the central concept of *Völkerpsychologie* survived, albeit in altered form and thus well hidden.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ In the German context, the works of Georg Simmel, who had studied with Lazarus and Steinthal, owed most to *Völkerpsychologie*. See G. Simmel, ‘Psychologische und ethnologische Studien über Musik’, in *ZfVS* 13 (1882), 261-305. C. Köhnke, *Der junge Simmel in Theoriebeziehungen und sozialen Bewegungen* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1996), 30, 51-62; D. Frisby, *Simmel and Since. Essays on Georg Simmel’s Social Theory* (London and New York, 1992), 28-29.