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‘After the God and the Man, the Patient’: Jules Soury’s Psychopathology of Jesus and the Boundaries of the Science of Religions in the Early Third Republic

Abstract

In *Jésus et les Évangiles* (1878) Jules Soury applied the findings of nineteenth-century psychiatry to Christian history and concluded that Jesus had suffered from paralytic dementia. Though Soury sought to emulate his teacher Ernest Renan’s hugely successful *Vie de Jésus* (1863), the book failed to generate comparable enthusiasm. Indeed despite the success of anticlerical psychiatry in the same period, Soury’s appropriation of psychopathology ultimately sabotaged his historical career. This article situates Soury’s work in a broader debate about the institutionalization of the ‘science of religions’ or *sciences religieuses*. This discipline was central to the Opportunist Republicans’ attempts to secularise the higher education system during the 1880s. I demonstrate how liberal Protestant scholars like Maurice Vernes secured the hegemony of a conception of *sciences religieuses* that, despite the prevalent scientism of the early Third Republic, represented the rejection of a materialistic interpretation of religious history.

‘After the God and the Man, the Patient’: Jules Soury’s Psychopathology of Jesus and the Boundaries of the Science of Religions in the Early Third Republic

Jules Soury opened his 1878 life of Jesus with an unusual variation on *ecce homo*: ‘After the God and the man, the patient.’¹ And Soury meant psychiatric patient. His thesis in *Jésus et les Évangiles* was simple: Jesus was insane. His actions could be explained as consequences of the progression of his insanity, which could in turn be attributed to physiological roots. The evidence had always been present in the Gospels but previous scholars had been unable to comprehend it as they lacked the analytical tools granted by modern psychopathology. When seen through the lens of the new diagnosis of ‘general paralysis of the insane’ Jesus’ monomaniacal attitude to religion, delusional belief in miracles and the self-destructive conduct that led to his arrest and ultimate crucifixion all made perfect sense.

Jésus et les Évangiles was an idiosyncratic attempt to synthesise two forms of analysis which were both central to the ideology of scientific progress in late nineteenth-century France: biblical criticism and medical pathology.² Published just as republican secularists took the helm of the Third Republic from the governments of ‘Moral Order’, Soury’s book might have caused a perfect storm. In fact I will argue in this article that *Jésus et les Évangiles* was a failure, albeit an interesting failure. Soury sought to generate scandal and to inaugurate a new brand of historical psychology which would revolutionize the study of religious history. He achieved neither. The book faded rapidly into obscurity and Soury definitively failed to build a career in the history of religions; instead he became an influential historian of neuroscience.

Recent scholarship has examined Soury’s later prominence in this guise, from which he entranced figures as different as Maurice Barrès and Anatole France, and eventually spoke

out as a vehemently antisemitic nationalist during the Dreyfus Affair.³ Historians of racism such as Daniel Gasman and Zeev Sternhell have consequently considered Soury as an architect of biomedical antisemitism or even French fascism, while Toby Gelfand and Ruth Harris have convincingly explored the consequences of Soury's early professional marginalization for his politics.⁴ Whereas these analyses have treated Soury's early career as part of the genealogy of his eventual antisemitic nationalism, this article is instead concerned with situating *Jésus et les Évangiles* at the confluence of a particular set of intellectual currents and within a specific institutional context during the early years of the Third Republic. A familiar historiographical narrative recounts how the ideals of science and secularism thrived as oppositional republican ideals under the Second Empire in the 1860s, achieved a high watermark of political influence under the 'République aux républicains' in the late 1870s and 1880s, and then fell into a murkier period with the Catholic *Ralliement* and the cultural assault on positivism during the 1890s.⁵ While recent literature has stressed the contingency of these developments, historians have less often considered how particular and competing definitions of science and religion structured the surrounding debates.⁶

The failure of Soury's book is instructive here because it draws our attention to the limits of purportedly secular and scientific religious history during its emergence as an established academic discipline. Between 1877 and 1886, the so-called Opportunist Republicans conclusively secularized the study of religion within the French higher education system. Under the impetus of campaigning ministers such as Paul Bert, they ejected theology faculties from the universities and symbolically replaced them with new posts, such as the chaire d'histoire des religions at the Collège de France in 1880, and new departments, most notably the Fifth Section (sciences religieuses) of the École pratique des hautes études (EPHE) in 1886. By isolating Soury from these new institutional venues, the government and leading academics engaged in what sociologists of science call 'boundary-work': the effort to

define the boundaries of a new discipline by distancing its practitioners from those who seek to make authoritative claims about the same subject-matter.⁷ French historians of religion pushed Soury's materialist psychiatry beyond the boundaries of their discipline so as to restrict its procedures to the careful and sympathetic examination of religious texts. Their methodological principles were instead derived from a predominantly Protestant body of scholarship that viewed religion as an innate and universal human desire rather than a psychological aberration. They believed that historians could derive a religion's ultimate meaning by examining its scriptures and the context of its evolution. This conception of the 'religious sciences' subsequently assumed a hegemonic position within French academia, which would not be challenged until the rise of Durkheimian sociology at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁸ While several historians have traced the genealogy of Protestant influence within this emerging discipline, this article will demonstrate that they have largely underestimated the significance of a road not taken.⁹

I

It is a cliché in writing about Jules Soury that he has been neglected or forgotten by historians but, despite their best efforts, he no doubt remains unfamiliar to many readers. He was born on 28 May 1842 to a humble family on Rue Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre on the Parisian Left Bank, just across the Seine from Notre-Dame.¹⁰ An artisanal autodidact in his teens, he attended evening courses at the École des Arts et Métiers and the Bibliothèque Saint-Geneviève while working as an apprentice optician for his poor parents. Having taught himself Latin so as to better understand the intricacies of Descartes and Pascal, Soury entered the Lycée Louis-le-Grand after his apprenticeship, before moving onto the Sorbonne where he received his bachelier ès lettres in 1862.

The germ of Soury's interest in the history of religions was planted around 1863, when the philologist Michel Bréal introduced him to Ernest Renan, the Breton historian who had lost his Catholic faith and deserted the seminary when Soury was only a toddler.¹¹ When the two met, Soury was a twenty-one-year-old student at the *École des Chartes* and Renan was teaching his Hebrew course from home. The latter had been suspended from the *Collège de France* in 1862 when his inaugural lecture denied the divinity of Jesus and his book on the same controversial topic was about to go to press. Appearing in summer 1863 after a long gestation, Renan's *Vie de Jésus* sought to provide a historical account of the life of Jesus through a purportedly disinterested re-evaluation of contemporary sources, especially the New Testament. It denied its hero's divinity and miracles outright, while retaining sympathy and admiration for a unique historical figure who had inaugurated a revolution in human morality. Alongside the hundreds of thousands of copies that the book sold in a few months, dozens of pamphlets and newspaper articles soon assailed the historian with accusations of atheism, conspiracy and irreligion.¹² By the end of 1863, Soury's Hebrew teacher was the most prominent and divisive writer in Europe.

The young Soury was enraptured by such close proximity to a leading intellectual celebrity. By his own account, Soury owed Renan not just his training in philology and palaeography but 'the habit of thinking and feeling critically'.¹³ He appeared to be a favoured student. The two walked as 'master and disciple' around the Bois de Sèvres and when Renan went abroad to research, Soury felt both anguish at the separation and delight at being one of the travelling scholar's chosen correspondents.¹⁴ He was eager to please Renan until 1867, when the professor seemed to pass off Soury's hard work on an encyclopaedia entry as his own.¹⁵ The younger man's admiration for his mentor never fully evaporated: he dedicated his eventual doctoral thesis to Renan and continued to refer to the grand historian as his 'maître'

well after the latter's death.¹⁶ The event nonetheless damaged their friendship, which never truly recovered.

This personal rupture came just as Soury was embarking on a new intellectual journey among the neurologists and psychiatrists at the Salpêtrière hospital. The most famous figure in this milieu was Jean-Martin Charcot, whose 'anatomo-clinico' method combined clinical investigations with autopsies, in order to determine specific lesions in the brain or spinal column that caused nervous illnesses.¹⁷ Charcot formed part of a broader emphasis on what Jacqueline Carroy and Régine Plas have called 'psychophysiological parallelism': the idea that 'any internal event can be related to a physical event'.¹⁸ Soury's own mentors were the anatomists Auguste Voisin, who studied the pathological anatomy of asylum patients, and especially Jules Luys, who introduced him to microscopic neurology. While Charcot emphasised the clinical application of his findings, Luys was at the time a respected experimentalist who excavated the physiological underpinnings of mental phenomena from the laboratory.¹⁹ Soury called this world of dissections and brain images the 'acropolis of knowledge'.²⁰ The impressionistic methodology of Soury's early mentors must have seemed quaint by comparison.

Soury followed his teacher's footsteps into anatomy of the nervous system rather than clinical psychiatry, while Luys used his student's historical background to bolster his essentialist arguments about human psychology.²¹ Soury became particularly fascinated by the elaborations of 'neuropathy' and 'general paralysis of the insane' that had originated among mid-century 'alienists' such as Louis Calmeil at the Charenton asylum, Bénédict Morel at the Salpêtrière and Voisin's teacher Gustave Moreau de Tours at the Bicêtre hospital.²² Though Soury's work on Jesus would draw heavily on these earlier scholars, it should be noted that Charcot and his students continued to recognise 'general paralysis of the insane' as a clinical diagnosis into the late nineteenth century.²³

In the 1870s, Soury set about developing a peculiar synthesis of these two formative intellectual exposures: religious history and psychopathology. *Jésus et les Évangiles* must be seen as part of a broader effort to develop an independent scholarly reputation through publishing. Soury built a modest profile with a series of articles on religious and cultural history in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, as well as through scientific and historical pieces in major republican newspapers such as *Le Temps* and *XIX^e Siècle*.²⁴ Just as importantly, he accumulated political contacts. These included Bert, with whom Soury collaborated on *La République française*'s regular scientific digest, and who, alongside the newspaper's editor Léon Gambetta, was about to take the reins of the Republic.²⁵

In the late 1870s Soury broke out into book publishing with a number of studies on a variety of historical and religious subjects, from the Christianity and the history of the Near East to materialism and eighteenth-century French society.²⁶ Throughout these new works, Soury consistently sought to grant scientific cachet to historical analysis by integrating psychology. His *Portraits de femmes* opened in 1874 with the assertion that, in the wake of modern psychological discoveries, it was no longer possible to view historical actors as 'irreducible'; by 1877 he was arguing for the importance of synthesising Darwinian ideas of heredity into scientific historical writing; and in 1878 he opened his *Essais de critique religieuse* with the unambiguous declaration: 'Atheism and scientific materialism inspired these studies'.²⁷ There was nonetheless often a disjunction between Soury's introductory declarations of psychological materialism and his more impressionistic historical practice.²⁸ Hints of Soury's future efforts to explain religious history through psychiatry came in a piece on the Russian Skoptsy sect, who performed castration and mastectomy to cleanse their bodies of lustful temptation. Here, Soury called Muhammad an 'epileptic' and argued that Jesus had acted in a state of delirious spiritual ecstasy. He even asserted that only those Christians who practised self-mutilation had 'realised Jesus's pure doctrine'.²⁹

Soury shared the aspiration to a psychological explanation of historical actors with a previous generation of scholars, including Renan and Hippolyte Taine. But whereas the latter largely held to nebulous mid-century definitions of psychology which grew out of philosophy, Soury wanted to ground his own historical method in laboratory findings and clinical practice.³⁰

The distinction between these conceptions of psychology can be illustrated by comparing Soury's work to his obvious model, Renan's *Vie de Jésus*. The latter had offered two sorts of psychological analysis. On the one hand, Renan sought to situate Jesus' intellectual and emotional development in the context of race, climate, geography, personal relationships and contemporary religious tendencies. He emphasised, for example, how first-century Galilee's superstitious beliefs shaped Jesus' belief in his own miraculous powers, and how his Jewish ethnic heritage affected his rhetorical and argumentative style.³¹ Renan's analysis here recalled Taine's famous exhortation that one must situate historical phenomena according to their *race, milieu* and *moment*.³² On the other hand, Renan attempted to give his readers access to Jesus' resolutely human moods and motivations. He evoked, for example, the anger and melancholy that filled Jesus when faced with his lack of success in Jerusalem.³³ Central to Renan's work was the belief that when Jesus was treated as a thinking and feeling human being, his dignity was not effaced but restored. Jesus became a historical great man rather than a theological type, emerging from the factors which determined his psychology through the singular morality that he achieved as an individual.

Soury's life of Jesus rested on Renan's narrative but drew conclusions which inverted the story's meaning. His Jesus was a delusionary radical consumed by fatal mental and physical deterioration. Soury called his work a 'diagnosis' of Jesus: it charted the progression of 'congestive madness', a chronic form of dementia induced by hyperactivity of the nervous and circulatory system that gradually and fatally eroded Jesus' brain and surrounding blood

vessels.³⁴ The pithy account in *Jésus et les Évangiles* began with Jesus abandoning his serene family life, possessed by the ‘idée fixe’ that the Messiah would imminently arrive on earth.³⁵ Driven into the desert by religious exaltation, Jesus experienced vivid hallucinations of the devil which any modern doctor would attribute to delirium. Little by little he came to believe that he was the Messiah – his most intense delusion – before descending into the suicidal ‘absurdity’ of his last days in Jerusalem.³⁶ This account ultimately stripped Jesus’ actions of moral value: his eventual death was simply the inevitable legal consequence of his brazen blasphemy against the Jewish establishment and revival of seditious language against Rome.³⁷

Soury’s narrative used psychopathology to overturn the teleology of previous biographies. Christians had seen in Jesus’ life the gradual, tragic, yet ultimately successful fulfilment of his messianic mission. Nineteenth-century rebels such as Renan respected the laudatory contours of this narrative even as they secularised its meaning. The Passion traditionally represented the sacrificial culmination of Jesus’ mission and achieved special prominence in the mid-nineteenth century; part of the Catholic ‘culture of suffering’ identified by Richard D. E. Burton.³⁸ The visions of Anna Katharina Emmerick, a German nun who suffered from apparent stigmata, were transcribed into a popular lay text which drew out the protracted dolour of Jesus’ torture and execution.³⁹ By contrast Soury described the crucifixion with a few purely technical sentences; he even went so far as to describe the vegetative state which Jesus was, fortunately, spared by his early death.⁴⁰ Devotional literature offered a language and aesthetic of corporal suffering which dealt in exterior manifestations: lash-marks, stigmata, the Saviour’s face and his women’s tears. Soury’s account inverted this: its physicality was interior, with cold descriptions of ‘excessive cerebral vascularisation’, ‘turgid and swollen’ blood vessels and ‘the grey matter of the encephalon’.⁴¹

Soury was partly mimicking mid-nineteenth-century alienists who had used historical and religious examples to illustrate new illness classifications. Calmeil had, for example, elaborated his diagnosis of ‘théomanie’ by reference to the eighteenth-century convulsionaries of Saint-Médard.⁴² *Jésus et les Évangiles* also drew on alienists’ use of evolutionary models of human development. Moreau de Tours and Morel had heavily emphasised the role of heredity in mental illness as early as the 1850s, though Darwinism probably bolstered such claims less than might be imagined, given its slow reception in France.⁴³ Soury’s passion for ideas of hereditary degeneration drew on his close association with Ernst Haeckel, the eminent German biologist who used his pioneering research into cellular biology to develop a contentious synthesis of Darwinian natural selection and his Lamarckian faith in inherited characteristics. Soury formed the conduit for Haeckel’s diffusion among French scientists, translating his works into French and introducing him to scholarly societies.⁴⁴ In *Jésus et les Évangiles*, Soury therefore sought to root Jesus’ mental illness in a hereditary context. He claimed that alcoholism and dementia were clearly discernible among Jesus’ relatives: a bunch of ‘maniacs, epileptics, suicides and drunkards’ including the visionary James the Just.⁴⁵

Historians of anticlericalism and caricature have demonstrated that many authors wrote scandalous parodies of the Bible and the life of Jesus, especially after the relaxation of censorship laws in 1881, wherein one could find all kinds of alcoholic, meretricious and libidinous depictions of Jesus.⁴⁶ But the moral thrust of Soury’s narrative was obfuscated by his use of another trope of mid-century alienist writing: the common physiological roots of genius and madness.⁴⁷ This idea allowed Soury to emphasise the irrationality and inevitably of Jesus’ actions without necessarily removing him from the heroic plane of human achievement. Jesus might have been an ailing ‘neuropath’, Soury suggested, but then so were Socrates, Pascal, Newton and Spinoza: ‘Nervous disease ... has produced more than a

messiah.⁴⁸ Soury's protestations were nonetheless at best inconsistent and at worst disingenuous. Unlike Renan, for whom Jesus' teachings and actions retained transcendental value despite their human origins, Soury's narrative made clear that the Gospel's teachings were irrevocably tarnished by their madness. What genius could be imputed to the 'absurd' ejection of the money-lenders from the temple if it rested on Jesus' basic misunderstanding of contemporary Jewish practise, or to his curse of the fig tree if it expressed the incoherent rage of a delusionary?⁴⁹

Psychopathology thus offered Soury what biblical and historical criticism had offered Renan: a purportedly scientific discourse with which to confront received accounts of the life of Jesus. From Soury's perspective, Renan's *Vie de Jésus* had been 'a work of transition' between ignorance and science and its author's failure was that he was too much the artist to acknowledge all 'the sad and bitter truths of the scholar'.⁵⁰ By contrast Soury could offer an entirely 'detached' account: *Jésus et les Évangiles* did not discuss emotions but instead explained symptoms, which were in turn described as physiological processes. Because Soury did not cling to the idea of Jesus' inalienable greatness, he did not have to agonise over explanations of his alleged miracles or visions in the desert the way Renan had: they simply proved his madness.

II

Soury's brazenly materialistic posture would initially seem to embody the mounting self-confidence of the Third Republic's new secular elite. Jan Goldstein has demonstrated that an 'anticlerical partnership' between the state and psychiatrists came together in the late 1870s, displacing the 'collective discomfort' of the psychiatric profession under the Second Empire.⁵¹ Charcot's argument that pathologists could locate the lesions causing mental diseases in precise sections of the brain ('cerebral localisation') had recently triumphed over

alternate theories within the Parisian medical profession.⁵² The idea that medical psychology was a powerful opponent of religious superstition, which had been a feature of the early alienists' work, was now a potential weapon in the Republic's 'culture war' against popular Catholicism. In the 1880s and 1890s luminaries like Charcot and Émile Zola mobilized a pathological conception of religious superstition, this time not to diagnose historical characters but to confront contemporary miraculous cures at Lourdes and female 'hysterics' in Parisian asylums.⁵³ A psychopathological assault on Jesus would seem to encapsulate perfectly this unholy intellectual alliance between republican scientism and irreligion. Soury was, moreover, directly connected to the influential milieu of psychiatrists and republican politicians through his friendship with figures like Bert. Why then did *Jésus et les Évangiles* fail?

There is no doubt that Soury sought to provoke a scandal. He published with the price-cutting popular house Charpentier, home of Zola's *L'Assomoir*, and the editors bought Soury advertising space in major newspapers. Here, he was introduced as 'the well-known scholar' whose book was 'bound to provoke many debates (*nombreuses polémiques*)'.⁵⁴ Soury did win a single favourable review from André Lefèvre on the front page of *La République française*.⁵⁵ The author was an anthropologist of religion with deeply held materialist convictions who had notably collaborated with Soury on the newspaper's historical bulletins. Lefèvre praised the book's application of specialist medical knowledge to a religion he held in evident contempt, calling it 'a very plausible portrait and biography'. A particular merit was that, unlike other recent works in 'the science of religions', Soury's unflinching approach did not 'risk perpetuating [religion's] empire'.⁵⁶

It is significant that the most vocal public support for Soury's thesis came from anthropological circles. Like psychiatrists, late-nineteenth-century French anthropologists sought answers in the body. They placed great faith in the power of anatomy and autopsy – in

particular, autopsies of the brain – to resolve questions of individual and racial difference. But among anthropologists, physiological and evolutionary ideas mingled with a more thoroughgoing attack on the very idea of religion than in the period's mainstream anticlericalism. Alongside other freethinking colleagues such as Paul Broca, Lefèvre had co-founded the independent *École d'anthropologie de Paris* in 1875 and was later appointed to its *chaire d'ethnographie et linguistique*.⁵⁷

Unfortunately for Soury this seems to be one of the few times any major newspaper noticed his book. Even worse, prominent highbrow journals neglected to review *Jésus et les Évangiles*, from the mainstream *Revue des Deux Mondes* to specialists like the *Revue philosophique* and *Revue de théologie et de la philosophie*. As for the clamorous debate the publishers anticipated, there was no discernible pamphlet reaction to *Jésus et les Évangiles*.

At a basic level, Soury's book was poorly pitched. In the 1860s, Renan's mixture of sympathy and shock-value had inspired debate over both his conclusions and his intentions. Despite a few allusions to the proximity of genius to madness, Soury's text offered little of such productive ambiguity: he gave believers an unflinching denigration of their saviour, and the new secular elite a potentially embarrassing form of extreme and antagonistic materialism. The fashionable literary review *La Jeune France* concluded its brief notice in a tone of sarcastic disavowal: 'The thesis is original. We will not discuss it here. Let us simply say that, for a sick man, Christ seems to have done pretty well. What might he have done if he had been healthy!'⁵⁸ Renan himself, whom the Third Republic had reinstated to the Collège de France and eventually transformed into an intellectual icon, wrote to the linguist Max Müller that Soury was 'rotted by a deplorable forgetfulness, an unbearable vanity, a pitiful lack of seriousness'. He continued: 'with Soury one is never sure of anything'.⁵⁹

More broadly, Soury's failure tells us something about how the sciences were being defined in the emerging disciplinary divisions of French academia. Although the late 1870s

heralded an age of confidence and official acceptance for psychiatry in Parisian hospitals, medical faculties and courts, Soury's strange blend ran counter to developments elsewhere in the capital. In particular, his ideas fell afoul of a cadre of religious historians who ultimately clustered around the journal *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (founded 1880). This group was predominantly composed of liberal Protestants like Maurice Vernes (the *Revue's* editor) and Albert Réville, who went on to dominate the discipline of 'religious sciences' across the closing decades of the nineteenth century.⁶⁰

These scholars sought to make inter-religious comparison based on textual criticism into the disciplinary paradigm for secular religious history. In theory the formation of disciplines devoted to the comparative study of the world's religions implied the radically ecumenical view that all religious systems were equal or at least relative. Accordingly, Vernes argued forcefully that religious history should be liberated from any sectarian dogma. Réville meanwhile exemplified the commitment to treating world religions within a comparative frame by consecrating the 1880s to a mammoth study of non-western religions—from 'uncivilized peoples' to Central American civilisations and finally China.⁶¹ In practice, Tomoko Masuzawa has demonstrated that the Western idea of 'world religions' inscribed a new form of Eurocentrism because, more often than not, liberal European scholars viewed Protestantism or Judeo-Christian religion more generally as the refined endpoint of an evolutionary process.⁶² This was certainly true of the French liberal Protestants and their close relationship to the republican elite ensured that such ideas effectively became government doctrine. Albert Réville, for example, wrote the entry for 'Religions' in the powerful educationalist Ferdinand Buisson's *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, wherein he defined religion as an essential human instinct and outlined a clear evolutionary path from fetishism to modern Christianity.⁶³ It is unsurprising that such

historians, however liberal, had no time for the idea of a demented Christ and shied from giving Soury print exposure.

Vernes provided the exception to this wall of silence, resorting instead to ridicule. He was the only prominent reviewer of *Jésus et les Évangiles* in 1878, attacking the book's idiosyncrasies in a derisive article for a literary periodical.⁶⁴ We should read this particularly vehement reaction to Soury as anxiety over guilt by association. Vernes defined himself as the most rigorously scientific member of his milieu: despite his Protestant origins he was irritated by the way his colleagues eulogised their religious subjects and he lamented their apparent lack of objectivity.⁶⁵ Soury's work threatened to denigrate the emerging discipline from the opposite direction: anti-Christian materialism. The book so enraged Vernes that he frequently cited it as a foil for his methodological arguments. In the introduction to the first issue of *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, for example, Vernes argued that the concept of the 'science of religions' had recently been disgraced 'by a writer whose talent cannot excuse his extraordinary fantasies' and who had associated the phrase with 'systematic views which appear to us much more harmful than useful to our intended aims'.⁶⁶ Ernest Havet, who represented the free-thinking wing of this group, did issue a partial justification of Soury in 1881: while not endorsing the latter's conclusions, Havet accepted that it was logical at least to consider the question of whether Jesus was mad and defended Soury's scholarly freedom to pursue the truth.⁶⁷ Vernes, for whom Havet usually embodied the best sort of secular scholarship, immediately reproached such leniency to Soury and again dismissed the latter's 'bizarre parade of medical assertions' as an unscientific flight of fancy.⁶⁸

While Soury might have expected a hostile reaction from such scholars, who, in his view, had insufficient knowledge of the progress of the natural sciences, he thought he might at least rely on his acquaintances in high places. The key figure in the reorganisation of higher education in this period was his friend Bert, a vehemently anticlerical physiologist

who had studied under the iconic experimental scientist Claude Bernard and was closely allied to Gambetta. A veteran of the pre-constitutional Assemblée nationale who represented the comparatively dechristianized department of the Yonne, Bert was elected to the Chambre des députés as part of the republican landslide of 1876. He immediately tried to eradicate the state universities' Facultés de théologie, finally succeeding in 1882. They ultimately relocated to the new 'free'—that is to say privately operated—foundations such as the Instituts Catholiques. Bert continued his efforts to secularize the higher education system through a series of bill proposals and budget amendments over the following decade, which included a spell as ministre de l'Instruction publique under the notoriously short-lived Gambetta administration of 1881-2.⁶⁹

Bert believed that the establishment of new institutional venues for the secular study of religion should necessarily complement the purge of theology. His first venture was therefore the proposal to establish a chaire d'histoire des religions at the Collège de France, to which numerous public figures believed that Bert and his powerful ally Gambetta would anoint Soury.⁷⁰ Bert's own leanings on the chair's subject-matter are best illustrated by the fact that, during a parliamentary debate on the issue, he joked that it would be more appropriately branded 'comparative mythology'.⁷¹ Throughout 1879 the rumour that Bert intended the chair for Soury inspired politicians and the press to take positions. As one would expect, conservative newspapers thought the choice would be 'scandalous' while anticlericals supported Soury's candidature on the basis that it would be excellent to have a free-thinker in the chair.⁷² The free-thinkers at *Le Globe* were happy to dismiss Soury's work on Jesus as far-fetched while arguing that, in a liberal society, the government could appoint a professor without necessarily endorsing his views.⁷³ After this war of whispers in the press, the Bonapartist Henri Blachère released the issue onto the floor of the Chambre des députés during a debate on the education budget on 28 July 1879. Blachère ridiculed Bert and

condemned his apparent intention to reserve the Collège's new chair for 'a writer who is well-known for his attacks on Christianity, a journalist at the *République française*'.⁷⁴ Like Blachère, the clericalist *L'Univers* dared not name Soury outright but concurred that Bert had invented the chair for his 'protégé', whom it described as an atheist 'ringer for Renan' who had insulted Jesus' reputation. The paper asserted that the author shared Bert's 'audacious ignorance' and if appointed would be 'the laughing-stock of the scholarly world'.⁷⁵

Beneath this public debate, Soury and Vernes spent 1879 targeting the ministère de l'Instruction publique with energetic private lobbying campaigns; the former through a slightly anarchic series of handwritten letters and the latter in a more orderly sequence of notarised résumés.⁷⁶ Soury and Vernes' perceptions of the government's political and scientific priorities shaped their appeals for patronage. For men who considered themselves so dissimilar, it is striking how often they repeated each other's arguments. The two scholars seem to have believed that the ministry would favour the most explicitly secular approach possible. Vernes even tried to jilt his fellow liberal Protestants by arguing that they were too implicated in organised religion to give the position his 'absolutely *laïque*' disposition.⁷⁷ Both Soury and Vernes likewise stressed the existence of a coherent international discipline that was leaving France behind. They thus depicted the chair as a patriotic necessity; equivalent positions had been established in England, Germany and the Netherlands. Equally, both scholars agreed that the course's teaching should be structured around the essential distinction between Semitic and Indo-European religions.⁷⁸

Crucially, Soury and Vernes both sought to present themselves as the most authentically scientific candidates for the job. Again their language dovetailed: Soury repeatedly described the chair's remit as the 'comparative science of religions', which could be defined as 'the science which proposes to research and connect [religions] through the use of exact and rational methods', while Vernes stressed that 'the new chair must be ...

scientific’ and that its holder should ‘apply to religious facts and ideas the exact procedures of the rational and experimental method’.⁷⁹ The only clues that the two candidates had radically different conceptions of what this scientific method entailed were first Soury’s conception of the international disciplinary context, which included experimental psychologists and the founders of German *Völkerpsychologie* alongside a list of famous religious historians and philologists, and secondly the biological metaphors through which he described religious development.⁸⁰ Soury compared the evolution of Greek religion from primitive Hellenic cults to the ontogeny of the human foetus as it developed from a simple embryo into a complex vertebrate, while the Indo-European and Semitic religious groups were treated as discrete ‘organisms’ rather than mere families.⁸¹

The dispute surrounding the appointment came to a political dénouement in December 1879 when the budget bill arrived in the Senate. The Collège de France’s administrator Édouard Laboulaye tried to remove funding for the chair, arguing that by explicitly concerning itself with ‘religion’ the new post was potentially iniquitous to the institution’s ‘ancient serenity’. In a celebrated response, the ministre de l’Instruction publique Jules Ferry defended the move in terms of academic freedom and as a step forward for France’s scientific reputation. Ferry placated anticlericals with declarations that the position would recognise the insights of decades of anti-Catholic scholarship. But the minister was careful to appease moderates by emphasizing that his vision of the nineteenth century’s new ‘science of religions’ consisted in historical textual criticism. He concluded by overtly reassuring those who feared a controversial appointment that the government would take ‘special care ... to place into this chair a man of science and not a fighting man [homme de combat]’.⁸² The implication was clear: Ferry would not let the chair go to a divisive materialist like Soury.

In January 1880 the government overlooked both Soury and Vernes to name Albert Réville as the inaugural Professor of the History of Religion. Réville, the Protestant pastor, adhered more closely than Soury to the internationally recognized standards of the history of religions. Vernes' arguments against employing a man of religion had fallen on deaf ears in a cabinet that had apparently decided not to risk implanting more radically secular approaches to the subject at the Collège de France. Stung by his usurpation, Soury risked whatever prospects remained by writing a viciously abusive letter to Ferry in which he ranted about the loss of 'his chair' and, hubristically, threatened to bring down the ministry by revealing his unjust treatment.⁸³ Despite these outbursts and warnings to the government from Soury's thesis examiners that he had deviously concealed the extent of his materialism, in 1881 the government compensated Soury with a position as maître de conférences in the 'history of psychological thought' (histoire des doctrines psychologiques) at the Fourth Section (sciences historiques et philologiques) of the EPHE.⁸⁴ While historians have justifiably attributed Soury's survival to a large dose of luck, the fact that he was able to retain an academic career despite having threatened to 'break' the almighty Ferry 'like glass under the weight of [his] pen' suggests that someone in the government, probably Bert, felt that they owed him a debt or at least took his erudition seriously.⁸⁵

Soury's appointment was a conclusive sign that the government had incorporated the disciplinary divisions marked by Vernes and his predominantly Protestant colleagues. Soury's new title clearly restricted him to the history of psychology and he soon abandoned writing on the history of religions. The very conception of Soury as a serious historian nonetheless rankled many at the Fourth Section. In a letter signed by almost all its directeurs d'études, Soury's new colleagues protested against the appointment to the ministre de l'Instruction publique.⁸⁶ The signatories included even Bréal, who had first introduced the teenage Soury to Renan. The historians and philologists articulated their concerns primarily

in the language of academic self-governance: the ministry had jeopardized the section's traditional freedom, coherence and excellence by installing a professor without prior consultation. But the scholars also made an argument about disciplinary divisions. They complained that Soury's vision of history did not fit their carefully developed course structure and that he would be better employed in what was then the Third Section (sciences naturelles). The letter declared: 'The connections between psychology and the natural sciences are ... more plentiful than between psychology and the historical and philological sciences.'⁸⁷ The government ignored the academics' pleas, though the section subsequently marginalized Soury from its major historical activities for nearly two decades.⁸⁸

As Soury retreated from his particular vision of a scientific history of religions, Bert succeeded in establishing a dedicated secular institution for research into religious subjects in 1886: the Fifth Section of the EPHE, dedicated to 'sciences religieuses'. Ironically, Bert housed the Fifth Section in the Sorbonne premises that had been vacated by his ejection of the Faculté de théologie de Paris.⁸⁹ Though the new section's name neatly mimicked the nomenclature of other EPHE sections such as 'sciences historiques and philologiques', it was not intuitive. More affirmative formulations such as 'la science des religions' or 'la science de la religion' had been more popular among religious historians and linguists who followed the example of Renan's celebrated teacher, the philologist Émile Burnouf.⁹⁰ The name 'sciences religieuses' was a more recent Protestant coinage that transposed the Catholic seminaries' 'sciences sacrées' into the secular language of 'sciences sociales' or 'sciences politiques'.⁹¹ The new section's name thereby evoked a pluralistic conception of social-scientific scholarship rather than the laboratory certainty so beloved of Soury. For the first two decades of its existence the Fifth Section was moreover heavily staffed by liberal Protestant scholars. These included Vernes, the German-educated theologian Auguste Sabatier, Soury's vanquisher Albert Réville and the latter's son Jean. While the Fifth Section

represented the apex of the early Third Republic's drive to institutionalise a purportedly scientific study of religion, it also therefore secured the ascendancy of a specific and especially reconciliatory conception of what the 'religious sciences' should involve.⁹²

III

For all the bitterness that Soury would continue to harbour against those who had denied him his promised chair, he soon flourished in the more explicitly psychological post at the EPHE. It was in this context that admirers such as Barrès and France encountered the reclusive polymath, 'a scalpel in hand and a brain on the table'.⁹³ In this respect Soury's career trajectory differed from Gustave Le Bon, another idiosyncratic scholar whose synthetic ambitions struggled to find credibility within the increasingly specialized fin-de-siècle academic system. Whereas Le Bon appealed to a broader public through publications, Soury reoriented himself within the academic system. But though Soury left the history of religions behind him, the question of religion in general and Catholicism in particular continued to plague him. Soury was drawn to the ascetic streak in Christianity and much of the appeal to his students seems to have been rooted in his mysterious, monastic lifestyle and distant, prematurely wizened demeanour. As early as 1881 the writer Jules Claretie wrote that the young scholar 'devoted himself to science with a quasi-sacred taste for study which makes one think of the Benedictines of old', while André Rouveyre later called him 'a delicious blend of laboratory rat and militant monk [moine ligueur]'.⁹⁴ During the Dreyfus Affair Soury grafted clericalist politics onto his monastic behaviour, worshipping the immutable Catholic traditions of the French nation with an intensity which owed much to the death of his mother in 1896.⁹⁵ Soury became an example of how republican ideals like scientism could be turned against the republic's own democratic values.⁹⁶ He liked to contrast his atheist

materialism with his conservative politics, declaring himself to be, ‘without paradox, a clerical atheist in the Catholic tradition’.⁹⁷

According to Soury this unusual position was coherent because acquiring conclusive truth about the world was impossible. So long as religion occupied only ‘the place that the unknown and unknowable occupies for the philosopher or scholar’, Soury believed that there was ‘no possible conflict’ between the scientist and the man of religion.⁹⁸ While this attitude took on a new valence during the Affair, it was rooted in a philosophy of science which he had defended since the late 1870s. Indeed, in an essay contemporaneous with *Jésus et les Évangiles*, Soury had argued that ultramontane bishops were preferable to liberal ones, going so far as to call the latter ‘the shame of the church’: nothing was more foolish than to attempt to reconcile science and religion, the point was that they should confine themselves to separate spheres of human existence.⁹⁹ Speaking to Claretie after the debacle over the Collège de France appointment, Soury defended his position in the same terms. The confidence that science would provide ‘some new faith, capable of replacing religion and metaphysics’ debased contemporary thought; by contrast, ‘truly elevated science’ bowed before life’s unknowable infinity.¹⁰⁰ In Soury’s version of events, this distinctive philosophy underlay the contempt which greeted him on both sides of the aisle: ‘I fear that it will be my destiny to be snubbed by believers and unbelievers all at once.’¹⁰¹

Fervent biological antisemitism was the most prominent development in Soury’s later thought and this ultimately provided a more enduring obstacle to his academic career than mere philosophical differences.¹⁰² It also had troubling implications for his work on Jesus. If, as Soury firmly believed by the 1890s, there was an unassailable physiological difference between Aryans and Semites which in turn dictated distinct psychological and religious temperaments, how could Jesus have produced the religion of the Aryans from the race of the Semites? Soury did not have a clear answer to this problem. Turning back to Renan’s work

on Aryan and Semitic language groups, he and Barrès recognised that the master's ideas on race were muddled. In his early works Renan had expressed outright deterministic views about Jewish racial characteristics, which Soury later cited with great frequency in his antisemitic propaganda.¹⁰³ But Renan had gradually developed more ambiguous views. Like many contemporaries he was happy to assert the supremacy of Christianity to Judaism, but also believed in a direct lineage of monotheism between Judaism and Christianity: the Jews' world-historical role was to produce the beautiful idea of monotheism and Jesus' was to make this idea work in a poetic European form.¹⁰⁴

By contrast Soury agreed with Haeckel, his mentor in evolutionary theory, that monotheism separated man from nature and promised him an impossible transcendence. Haeckel believed that evolutionary materialism had conclusively rooted man in a holistic and interconnected natural system that bore closer analogy to a pantheistic vision of the world.¹⁰⁵ Soury developed this by painting monotheism as a Semitic poisoned chalice that had passed into Christianity to the ruin of the latter. If there was truly a common Aryan or Indo-European heritage that spanned India and Europe, then it would not be found in Christianity's borrowed monotheism but in the mysticism, poetry and ritual of an indigenous people who were naturally pantheistic. Where Renan had affirmed that 'it is the glory of the Semitic race to have made the religion of humanity', Soury declared that 'it is the greatest crime of Israel to have infected our Aryan races of the West with its monotheism'.¹⁰⁶

Whatever the logical credibility of Soury's laborious attempts to resolve the conflicts in his political and professional views of race and religion, their sincerity should not be underestimated. In 1898 he retracted *Jésus et les Évangiles*, protesting that though he still held open the possibility of retrospective psychological analysis, he now recognised that the Gospels did not provide sufficiently complete materials for such an effort.¹⁰⁷ He destroyed remaining copies of the original book and released a new edition, *Jésus et la religion*

d'Israël, with the offending psychiatric diagnoses expunged. Soury did not want 'injustice towards the dead—men or gods' on his conscience.¹⁰⁸ An anticlerical doctor who sought to revive the pathological approach to Jesus later ridiculed Soury's decision to reissue the book, calling him 'a scholar frightened by the truth.'¹⁰⁹ But Soury's decision to reconsider his representation of Jesus was not entirely surprising. Christopher Forth has demonstrated that the body of Christ was one of the figurative centres of contestation during the Dreyfus Affair, whether in Dreyfusard analogies of the accused to Jesus on the cross or antisemitic accusations of Jewish deicide.¹¹⁰ Soury's heterodox Christology made him an anomaly in the anti-Dreyfusard camp and the new book's preface firmly rooted his retraction in the cult of ancestors which defined his racist-nationalist politics in the aftermath of his mother's death: 'let us listen with deference to those distant voices, voices of those whom we have loved, and from whom we retain ... the strict probity of simple people.'¹¹¹ In other words Soury now wished to save the Catholic public from his own radical materialist theories.

It was a strange fate for an unusual book and it had a curious side-effect. Deprived of the psychopathological master-narrative which had driven the original book, Soury's new account of the life of Jesus was less idiosyncratic. It retained the staple discoveries of modern biblical criticism but framed them in declarations of respect for Christianity and sympathy for the faithful public. Soury's new life of Jesus, in other words, read much like Renan's old one.

IV

By the close of the nineteenth century Soury's psychopathological history of religion had definitively failed either to plant institutional roots in the historical profession or to survive its author's political evolution. Soury's ultimate failure as a religious historian illustrates the complex position of Christianity within republican ideology. Although republicans were overwhelmingly united behind the drive to free education from superstitious

clerical hands, they were not universally committed to attacking religion itself. In certain disciplines such as anthropology, medicine and psychiatry, materialist approaches to the body were useful tools in the opposition to Catholic beliefs about bodily sanctity or miraculous visions. But when institutionalising a secularised history of religion, ministers' first priority was simply to ensure that scholars had a disciplinary space where they were free to investigate sacred texts according to rigorous academic principles. With their international connections and respectful approach to past religious actors, Liberal Protestant historians provided a better fit with republican aims and ideals in this field than the heterodox Soury.

Soury's twin obsessions with Semitic peoples and biological determinism found a more enduring audience once they were fused into racist propaganda in the late 1890s. Historians have naturally been drawn to Soury's sinister political legacy and it has been easy to dismiss him as a doomed also-ran in the intellectual history of religion. But during the second half of 1879 it seemed to many in the press, the academic establishment and even the cabinet that the government would appoint a man who had diagnosed Jesus with paralytic dementia to the inaugural chair in religious history at the illustrious Collège de France. It is a striking illustration of the unexpected alliances of the turn of century that a scientist who dined alongside Marcellin Berthelot and Henri Poincaré at the banquet in defence of science in 1895 could have become so important on the anti-Dreyfusard right. By tracing Soury's trajectory back to the Third Republic's earliest years, this article has sought to suggest that his longer career tells an even more complex and counterintuitive story about religion, science and politics in nineteenth-century France than the work of previous historians has already suggested.

Just as Soury set about retracting *Jésus et les Évangiles*, the Protestant scholars who had helped reroute his career began to face a more robust challenge to their hegemony. In the late 1890s academics around Émile Durkheim's *Année sociologique* argued that a credibly

scientific treatment of religion should turn away from individuals' interior beliefs and the ideas trapped inside religious texts; they should instead examine societies' exterior religious practices. The Durkheimians were more successful than Soury in infiltrating the institutional framework of religious history: two leading lights, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, won election to the Fifth Section in 1900 and 1901 respectively. Unlike Soury, these scholars formed part of a well-organised phalanx of like-minded academics that sought to permeate Parisian academia.¹¹² These Durkheimians shared the republican elite's Dreyfusard allegiances and commitment to secular education, while also providing a critical approach to religion that incorporated a self-confident discourse about the triumph of reason.¹¹³

While the Durkheimian challenge lent the dispute over how to practise the science of religion in republican France renewed vigour, Soury's forgotten alternative illustrates this debate's protracted and contentious heritage. Beneath the early Third Republic's apparent scientism raged battles over which approaches were legitimately scientific and where they should be appropriately housed within the regime's evolving institutional framework. The life and afterlife of *Jésus et les Évangiles* reminds us that the conflict between science and religion in the late nineteenth century involved competing definitions of both terms, as well as distinctive arenas in which those definitions competed for legitimacy.

Notes

¹ ‘Après le dieu et l’homme, le malade.’ J. Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles* (Paris, 1878), 5.

² On biblical criticism and republicanism: J. Lalouette, *La Libre Pensée en France 1848-1940* (Paris, 1997), 183-218; I. Strenski, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice* (Leiden, 2003), 114-6, 120-1. On medical authority in the Third Republic: R. A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, & Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, 1984); J. D. Ellis, *The Physician-Legislators of France: Medicine and Politics in the Early Third Republic, 1870-1914* (Cambridge, 1990). On psychiatry specifically, the key work remains J. Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987).

³ M. Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, 14 vols (Paris, 1929-57). Soury looms over the first three volumes, covering 1896-1904. See also A. France, *La Vie littéraire* (Paris, 1949), v. 320-30; R. de Gourmont, *Les Idées du jour* (Paris, 1917), ii. 117-9; A. Rouveyre, *Souvenirs de mon commerce: Gourmont—Apollinaire—Moréas—Soury* (Paris, 1921), 233-56.

⁴ D. Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York, 1998), 101-34; Z. Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (Paris, 2000), 285-98; T. Gelfand, ‘From religious to bio-medical anti-Semitism: the career of Jules Soury’, in A. La Berge and M. Feingold (eds.), *French Medical Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Amsterdam, 1994), 248-79; T. Gelfand, ‘Jules Soury, *Le Système Nerveux Central* (Paris, 1899)’, *Jl Hist Neuroscience*, 8 (1999), 235-47; R. Harris, *The Man on Devil’s Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (London, 2010), ch. 10.

⁵ P. Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (London, 1995), 31-47; J. Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2011), 344-88; H. Serry, *Naissance de l’intellectuel catholique* (Paris, 2004); H. W. Paul, ‘The debate over the bankruptcy of

science in 1895', *Fr Hist Stud*, 5 (1968), 299-327; J. Grondeux, *La Religion des intellectuels français au XIX^e siècle* (Paris, 2002). The theme is threaded through older syntheses such as J.-M. Mayeur, *Les Débuts de la Troisième République 1871-1898* (Paris, 1973); C. Nicolet, *L'Idée républicaine en France (1789-1924): Essai d'histoire critique* (Paris, 1982).

⁶ S. Hazareesingh, *Intellectual Founders of the Republic: Five Studies in Nineteenth-Century French Republican Political Thought* (Oxford, 2001), 3-4, 285-6 and *passim*. The importance of conceptual considerations of 'science' and 'religion' in this period is exemplified by F. Laplanche, *La Bible en France entre mythe et critique (XVI^e-XIX^e siècle)* (Paris, 1994); M. Despland, 'Sciences of religion in France during the July Monarchy (1830-1848)', in A. L. Molendijk and P. Pels (eds.), *Religion in the Making: The Emergence of the Sciences of Religion* (Leiden, 1998), 31-43.

⁷ The seminal article is T. F. Gieryn, 'Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists', *Am Sociol R*, 48 (1983), 781-795; pursued further in T. F. Gieryn, *Cultural Boundaries of Science: Credibility on the Line* (London, 1999). An application treating the British historical profession in the same period as this article is I. Hesketh, 'Diagnosing Froude's disease: boundary work and the discipline of history in late-Victorian Britain', *Hist Theory*, 47 (2008), 373-95.

⁸ In this article I use 'science of religions' and 'religious sciences' synonymously. While the differing connotations of '*science de la religion*', '*science des religions*' and '*sciences religieuses*' are discussed below where relevant, in practice nineteenth-century scholars used them largely interchangeably at least until the fifth section's foundation in 1886. The adjectival use of 'religious' (e.g. 'religious sciences') was moreover largely confined to France and Italy, whereas elsewhere the discipline normally took forms equivalent to 'science of religion(s)': Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité*, 291-3.

⁹ Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité*, 285-334; P. Cabanel, ‘L’Institutionnalisation des “sciences religieuses” en France (1879-1908): une entreprise protestante?’, *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français*, 140 (1994), 33-80; I. Strenski, ‘Durkheim, Disciplinary, and the “Sciences Religieuses”’, in A. Anderson and J. Valente (eds.), *Disciplinary at the Fin de siècle* (Oxford, 2002), 153-9; Strenski, *Theology*.

¹⁰ Accounts of Soury’s life rely on his short autobiography, J. Soury, ‘Ma Vie’, in *Campagne nationaliste, 1899-1901* (Paris, 1902), 15-71; for a concise summary, P. Huard and M.-J. Imbault-Huart, ‘Jules Soury (1842-1915)’, *Revue d’histoire des sciences et de leurs applications*, 23 (1970), 155-64.

¹¹ The classic autobiographical account is *Souvenirs d’enfance et de jeunesse*: E. Renan, *Œuvres Complètes*, 10 vols (Paris, 1947-61), ii. 711-931.

¹² There are too many works to cite on Renan and his *Vie de Jésus*. For a concise summary of the book’s contents, N. Richard, ‘Le Jésus du “cinquième Évangile”’: Renan et la légende du Christ’, in J. -P. Resweber (ed.), *Le Jésus des philosophes* (Strasbourg, 2008), 201-220; for the publishing history, J.-Y. Mollier, *Michel & Calmann Lévy, ou la naissance de l’édition moderne 1836-1891* (Paris, 1984), 319-26; for the reaction, A. Pitt, ‘The cultural impact of science in France: Ernest Renan and the *Vie de Jésus*’, *Hist Jl*, 43 (Mar. 2000), 79-101.

¹³ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 27.

¹⁴ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 26-32.

¹⁵ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 30-2. The entry was ‘Jean Duns Scot, frère mineur’, in *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 43 vols (1733-2005), xxv. 404-67.

¹⁶ The literary critic Jules Claretie described how Soury had copied out for him Renan’s privately-circulated memorial work to his dead sister, in its entirety and by hand, with a ‘quasi-sacred’ devotion. *Le Temps*, 27 May 1881.

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- ¹⁷ The scholarship on Charcot is enormous. An excellent summary is C. G. Goetz, M. Bonduelle and T. Gelfand, *Charcot: Constructing Neurology* (Oxford, 1995), on the anatomo-clinical method 65-71.
- ¹⁸ J. Carroy and R. Plas, ‘The origins of French experimental psychology: experiment and experimentalism’, *Hist Hum Sci*, 9 (1996), 76.
- ¹⁹ Goetz et al, *Charcot*, 53-4.
- ²⁰ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 35.
- ²¹ J. Luys, *Études de physiologie et de pathologie cérébrales* (Paris, 1874), 60-3.
- ²² Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 34-8; Gelfand, ‘Anti-Semitism’, 253.
- ²³ J.-M. Charcot, *Clinical Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System*, trans. T. Savill, ed. R. Harris (London, 1991), 61-3.
- ²⁴ Many of these early articles were subsequently incorporated into the books discussed below.
- ²⁵ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 34. The articles under Bert’s stewardship were anthologised as P. Bert (ed.), *Revue scientifique, publiées par le Journal “La République Française”*, 7 vols (Paris, 1879-85), though unfortunately the individual pieces are unsigned.
- ²⁶ The other books were: *Études de psychologie. Portraits de femmes* (Paris, 1875); *Études historiques sur les religions, les arts, la civilisation de l’Asie antérieure et de la Grèce* (Paris, 1877); *Essais de critique religieuse* (Paris, 1878); *Études de psychologie. Portraits du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1879); *Bréviaire de l’histoire du matérialisme* (Paris, 1881).
- ²⁷ Soury, *Portraits de femmes*, i-ii; Soury, *Études historiques*, 316-7; Soury, *Essais de critique religieuse*, v.
- ²⁸ Soury, *Portraits du XVIII^e siècle*, 209, 216-7, 230 on Rétif de La Bretonne.
- ²⁹ Soury, *Essais de critique religieuse*, 368, 375.

³⁰ Taine had moved closer to a physiological analysis of psychology than Renan with *De L'Intelligence*, 2 vols (Paris, 1870) but Soury felt the book lacked committed engagement with recent scientific work. Ironically, given the context of this article, Taine later counselled Soury on the importance of treating non-controversial subjects in order to build a successful academic career. H. Taine, *Sa Vie et sa correspondance*, 4 vols (Paris, 1902-7), iii. 252-5, iv. 72-5.

³¹ Renan, *OC*, iv. 246, 251, 288.

³² H. Taine, *Introduction à l'histoire de la littérature anglaise (L'Histoire, son présent et son avenir)*, ed. H. B. Charlton (Manchester, 1936), 39.

³³ Renan, *OC*, iv. 316.

³⁴ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 7, 14, 13-6.

³⁵ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 8.

³⁶ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 76-7, 78.

³⁷ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 88.

³⁸ R. D. E. Burton, *Holy Tears, Holy Blood: Women, Catholicism, and the Culture of Suffering in France, 1840-1970* (London, 2004).

³⁹ A.-C. Emmerich, *The Dolorous Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, from the Meditations of Anne Catherine Emmerich* (London, 1862). See T. A. Kselman, *Miracles & Prophecies in Nineteenth-Century France* (New Brunswick, 1983), 95-112.

⁴⁰ Soury, *Jésus et les évangiles*, 14.

⁴¹ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 11-3.

⁴² L.-F. Calmeil, *De La Folie, considérée sous le point de vue pathologique, philosophique, historique et judiciaire, depuis la renaissance des sciences en Europe jusqu'au dix-neuvième siècle* (Paris, 1845), i. 81-2.

⁴³ R. E. Stebbins, 'France', in T. E. Glick (ed.), *The Comparative Reception of Darwinism* (Chicago, 1988), 119-61; F. G. Henry, 'Anti-Darwinism in France: science and the myth of nation', *Nineteenth Cent Fr St*, 27 (1999), 290–304.

⁴⁴ His translations of Haeckel might be seen as providing a coterminous theoretical complement to the materialist ideas he pursued through his own publication projects. They appeared as: *Les Preuves du transformisme, réponse à Virchow* (Paris, 1879); *Le Règne des protistes, aperçu sur la morphologie des êtres vivants les plus inférieurs, suivi de la classification des protistes* (Paris, 1879); *Essais de psychologie cellulaire* (Paris, 1880).

⁴⁵ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 18.

⁴⁶ J. Lalouette, 'Introduction', in Gabby, *Bible-Express illustrée* (Paris, 2007), x-xiii; G. Doizy, 'De la caricature anticléricale à la farce biblique', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 134 (2006), 63-91.

⁴⁷ J.-J. Moreau (de Tours), *La Psychologie morbide dans ses rapports avec la philosophie de l'histoire, ou de l'influence des névropathies sur le dynamisme intellectuel* (Paris, 1859). See G. Becker, *The Mad Genius Controversy* (London, 1978) and the more recent treatment by M. Gill, *Eccentricity and the Cultural Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Oxford, 2009), ch. 8.

⁴⁸ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 35, 6-7.

⁴⁹ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 9-10, 77-84.

⁵⁰ Soury, *Jésus et les Évangiles*, 41.

⁵¹ J. Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1987), 361, 351.

⁵² Goetz et al, *Charcot*, 120-3.

⁵³ R. Harris, *Lourdes: Body and Spirit in the Secular Age* (London, 1999), ch. 10; J.

Goldstein, 'The hysteria diagnosis and the politics of anticlericalism in late nineteenth-

century France', *Jl Mod Hist*, 54 (1982), 209-239. On the practical consequences of anti-Catholicism for French psychiatry, see also I. Dowbiggin, 'Alfred Maury and the politics of the unconscious in nineteenth-century France', *Hist Psychiatry*, 1 (1990), 255-87; I. Dowbiggin, *Inheriting Madness: Professionalization and Psychiatric Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1991); R. Harris, 'The "unconscious" and Catholicism in France', *Hist Jl*, 47 (2004), 331-54.

⁵⁴ *La Figaro*, 4 Apr. 1878. The same notice appeared in e.g. *Le Temps*, 10 Apr. 1878.

⁵⁵ *La République française*, 14 Apr. 1878.

⁵⁶ *La République française*, 14 Apr. 1878.

⁵⁷ *1876-1906. L'École d'anthropologie de Paris* (Paris, 1907), 38, 67, 165-6.

⁵⁸ *La Jeune France*, 1 May 1878. A columnist in *Le Siècle* expressed similar sentiments, 15 Apr. 1878.

⁵⁹ Renan to M. Müller, 19 December 1879. Renan, *OC*, x. 818.

⁶⁰ Cabanel, 'L'Institutionnalisation des "sciences religieuses"'; Strenski, *Theology*.

⁶¹ M. Vernes, 'Introduction', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1 (1880), 1-17; A. Réville, *Histoire des religions*, 3 vols (Paris, 1883-9).

⁶² T. Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions, or, How European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (London, 2005).

⁶³ A. Réville, 'Religions', in F. Buisson (ed.), *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, 4 vols (1882-8), 1830-4. See also discussion in Strenski, *Theology*, 89-93.

⁶⁴ M. Vernes, 'Jésus et les Évangiles, par Jules Soury', *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature*, 5 (1878), 269-72.

⁶⁵ Strenski, *Theology*, 123-8; L. Rétat, *L'Israël de Renan* (Bern, 2005), 20. Vernes would later prove to be the Protestant most favourable to the election of Durkheimians to the EPHE, see Strenski, *Theology*, 167-9.

⁶⁶ M. Vernes, 'Introduction', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1 (1880), 16.

⁶⁷ E. Havet, 'Critique des récits sur la vie de Jésus', *Revue des deux mondes* (1 Apr. 1881), 606.

⁶⁸ M. Vernes, 'Bulletin critique de la religion chrétienne (vie de Jésus)', *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 4 (1881), 219n1.

⁶⁹ For Bert's role in higher education see S. Kotovtchikhine, *Paul Bert et l'Instruction publique* (Dijon, 2000), partic. 246-8; the classic account of the broader political context is J. Grévy, *La République des opportunistes 1870-1885* (Paris, 1998), partic. ch. 14.

⁷⁰ P. Bert, *Amendement au budget de 1880, pour demander la suppression des cinq Facultés de théologie et la création au Collège de France d'une chaire d'histoire des religions, séance du 10 mars 1879* (Paris, 1879). The provisions which suppressed the theology faculties were ultimately withdrawn as they had to be pursued through more direct legislative means: Kotovtchikhine, *Paul Bert*, 246.

⁷¹ His adversary that day was the Bonapartist Granier de Cassagnac. *Le Journal des débats*, 20 Jul. 1879.

⁷² For the former, *Le Figaro*, 17 Mar. 1879; for the latter, *La Liberté*, 24 May 1879.

⁷³ *Le Globe*, 16 Jun. 1879.

⁷⁴ *Le Journal officiel*, 28 Jul. 1879.

⁷⁵ *L'Univers*, 30 Jul. 1879.

⁷⁶ A[rchives] N[ationales] F17 13556 contains a variety of unnumbered materials surrounding the appointment including a noteworthy series of manuscript essays submitted by the candidates: M. Vernes, 'Chaire d'histoire comparée des religions projetée près le Collège de France' (5 Nov. 1879); J. Soury, 'La Chaire d'histoire des religions au Collège de France' (1879); J. Soury, 'Mots sur l'utilité de la représentation de l'histoire des religions dans le haut enseignement' (1879).

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- ⁷⁷ AN F17 13556, M. Vernes to Ministre de l'instruction publique, 8 Nov. 1879.
- ⁷⁸ AN F17 13556, Vernes, 'Chaire d'histoire comparée des religions'; Soury, 'La chaire d'histoire des religions'.
- ⁷⁹ Emphasis in original. AN F17 13556, Soury, 'La chaire d'histoire des religions'; Soury, 'Mots sur l'utilité'; Vernes to Ministre, 8 Nov. 1879; Vernes to Ministre, 14 May 1879.
- ⁸⁰ AN F17 13556, Soury, 'La chaire d'histoire des religions'.
- ⁸¹ AN F17 13556, Soury, 'La chaire d'histoire des religions'; Soury, 'Mots sur l'utilité'.
- ⁸² J. Ferry, *Discours et opinions de Jules Ferry*, ed. P. Robiquet (Paris, 1893-8), vii. 241, more generally 232-41.
- ⁸³ AN F17 23521, J. Soury to J. Ferry, 20 Mar. 1880.
- ⁸⁴ AN F17 23521, Rapport sur les thèses de M. Soury, 31 May 1881.
- ⁸⁵ AN F17 23521, Soury to Ferry, 20 Mar. 1880.
- ⁸⁶ AN F17 23521, M. Bréal et al (twenty-two signatories) to Ministre de l'instruction publique, 4 Dec. 1881.
- ⁸⁷ AN F17 23521, Bréal et al to Ministre, 4 Dec. 1881.
- ⁸⁸ The events surrounding Soury's failure and subsequent appointment are treated from the perspective of the development of his antisemitism in Gelfand, 'From Religious to Bio-Medical Anti-Semitism', 255-7; Harris, *Man on Devil's Island*, 204-5.
- ⁸⁹ Lalouette, *Libre Pensée*, 154.
- ⁹⁰ É. Burnouf, *La Science des religions*, 4th edn (Paris, 1885). First published 1872.
- ⁹¹ Poulat, *Liberté, laïcité*, 291-2; J. Baubérot, 'Avant-Propos', in Baubérot (ed.), *Cent ans de sciences religieuses*, 9.
- ⁹² It transpired that the winning combination of scholarly zeal and political will was difficult to export to a broader context. Despite their success in higher education, the architects of 'sciences religieuses' failed to instigate the subject at the school level and it remained

predominantly a research discipline: M. Despland, 'Les Sciences religieuses en France: Des sciences que l'on pratique mais que l'on n'enseigne pas', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 116 (2001), 5-25.

⁹³ France, *Vie littéraire*, 321.

⁹⁴ *Le Temps*, 21 May 1881; Rouveyre, *Souvenirs*, 254.

⁹⁵ For Soury's extreme reaction to his mother's death, whereby he stripped down his already austere lifestyle to a monastic diet of bread and water, see Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, i. 64, 66-72, 73-4. Harris has convincingly demonstrated the role that Soury's 'mother-love' played in shaping the contours of right-wing nationalism, *Man on Devil's Island*, 201-16.

⁹⁶ Nord, *Republican Moment*, 43-4, 47, 245-6.

⁹⁷ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 52.

⁹⁸ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 281, 233.

⁹⁹ Soury, *Essais de critique religieuse* (Paris, 1878), vii.

¹⁰⁰ *Le Temps*, 27 May 1881.

¹⁰¹ *Le Temps*, 27 May 1881.

¹⁰² Gelfand, 'From religious to bio-medical anti-Semitism', 257-8.

¹⁰³ Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, in *OC*, viii. 127-589; Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, i. 75; Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 92, 105, 127, 170. For commentary on race in Renan with reference to this text see M. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. A. Goldhammer (London, 1992), 51-81; T. Todorov, *On Human Diversity: Nationalism, Racism, and Exoticism in French Thought*, trans. C. Porter (London, 1993), 90-170; E. Said, *Orientalism* (London, 2003), 123-48.

¹⁰⁴ Renan, *OC*, iv. 85-96.

¹⁰⁵ Haeckel and Soury's contempt for monotheism and therefore Judaism, the first monotheistic religion, was connected to their crusade against transcendental dualism, as they believed the latter was a necessary consequence of the former. See Gasman, *Haeckel's Monism*, 25-6.

¹⁰⁶ Renan, *OC*, iv. 87-8; Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 9.

¹⁰⁷ Soury, *Campagne nationaliste*, 41-4, 273-4.

¹⁰⁸ Soury, *Jésus et la religion d'Israël* (Paris, 1898), iii.

¹⁰⁹ C. Binet-Sanglé, *La Folie de Jésus: Son hérédité, sa constitution, sa physiologie* (Paris, 1908), 13.

¹¹⁰ C. E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (London, 2004), 67-102; Harris, *Man on Devil's Island*, 34, 46, 226-9, 264-71.

¹¹¹ Soury, *Jésus et la religion d'Israël* (Paris, 1898), iii.

¹¹² Strenski, *Theology*, 152-80; Strenski, 'Durkheim, Disciplinary'; J. I. Brooks, III, 'Institutionalizing Durkheimian sociology of religion: the case of the fifth section', *Thinking About Religion* [online journal], 2 (2002)

<<http://organizations.uncfsu.edu/ncrsa/journal/v02/johnbrooks.htm>>, accessed 5 June 2008;

J.-P. Vernant, 'Les sciences religieuses entre la sociologie, le comparatisme et l'anthropologie', in Baubérot (ed.), *Cent ans de sciences religieuses*, 79-88.

¹¹³ S. Lukes, *Émile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (London, 1973), 76-9, 320-59, 530-46; S. Stedman-Jones, *Durkheim Reconsidered* (Cambridge, 2001), 44-61; L. M. Greenberg, 'Architects of the New Sorbonne: Liard's purpose and Durkheim's role', *History of Education Quarterly*, 21 (1981), 77-94.