At the beginning of the 20th century, Alfred Binet sought teaching positions at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne. Binet wanted to develop experimental psychology in France, but the strong psychopathological orientation of French psychology blocked his ambition. The 1st part of this article relates the history of the introduction of psychology, via Théodule Ribot, to the Sorbonne and the Collège de France. Ribot’s premature retirement from the Collège de France in 1901 triggered a battle that led to Binet’s repeated failure to gain access to these institutions of higher education and the success in 1902 of Ribot’s students: Pierre Janet at the Collège de France and Georges Dumas at the Sorbonne.

One of the most perplexing questions in the history of French psychology is Why did Alfred Binet (1857–1911), one of the most outstanding figures in the field (see Wolf, 1973, for a biography), never teach in a French institution of higher education? It has often been said that he possessed a personal fortune that provided for his needs; however, the archives show that Binet sought to teach at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne at the beginning of the 20th century. When, in 1903, a former student of Binet, the Romanian Nicolae Vaschide (1874–1907), wrote a report on the state of education in psychology in France, he noted the appalling situation of university psychology (Vaschide, 1903). Although there were quite a few laboratories in Paris, they could not train students in large numbers. Many of these laboratories were located in psychiatric hospitals connected with the Paris Faculty of Medicine, whereas others depended on the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE), a research institution attached directly to the Department of Education; among the latter was Binet’s laboratory (see Nicolas &
Segui, in press). Vaschide deplored the lack of adequate institutional avenues for training in experimental psychology, as did Binet, who wanted to develop this branch of psychology neglected by his contemporaries. Binet’s goal was to be recognized as the leader of experimental psychology in France; he had led a series of conferences on this theme in Romania from April 29 to June 9, 1895 (Bejat, 1965, 1966; Bejat, Alexandru, & Anatol, 1965), attracting Vaschide in this way to his laboratory in Paris (see Herseni, 1965, for a biography).

In this article we first relate the history of the introduction of experimental psychology to France at the Sorbonne and Collège de France, where the prevailing orientation was pathological rather than experimental (see Carroy & Plas, 1996). It was Théodule Ribot (1839–1916), the founder of French psychology (Nicolas & Murray, 1999), who first introduced education in psychology within the context of more general academic reforms at the end of the 19th century. Through his work, he opposed spiritualist philosophers (see Brooks, 1998) and criticized the introspective method they inherited from Victor Cousin and Théodore Jouffroy (Ribot, 1870/1873, 1879). Ribot was the founder of the Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger (1876), the pages of which were largely open to experimental psychology (Nicolas & Penel, 2002). Above all, however, he stamped a psychopathological mark on French psychology (Ribot, 1873, 1881, 1883, 1885).

Binet considered himself the successor to Ribot, who had taught experimental psychology first at the Sorbonne in the form of free courses (1885–1888) and then at the Collège de France in the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology (1888–1901). Ribot’s premature retirement from the Collège de France in 1901 triggered a battle that led Binet to fail repeatedly to gain access to institutions of higher education and to the success of Ribot’s students, Pierre Janet and Georges Dumas, who continued Ribot’s work in psychopathology. This psychopathological orientation had been abandoned a long time before by Binet after his departure from Charcot’s department at the Hospital of the Salpêtrière at the end of the 1880s. However, the debate was rejoined between psychopathology, which perpetuated the philosophical branch of the late–18th-century ideological school, and experimental psychology, which dealt with “normal” man and had its source in the physiological and biological sciences of the second part of the 19th century. In this debate, which is still visible in France today, we locate the source of Binet’s failure to face down Ribot’s students.

Higher Education and Psychology in Paris in the 1880s and 1890s:

The Pioneering Teaching of Ribot

The history of French psychology is linked with two academic institutions: (a) the Sorbonne and (b) the Collège de France. The real superiority of the Sorbonne to other French universities derived from the possibilities it afforded for involvement in the intellectual and political life of the capital (Rivé, 1987). The Paris Faculty of Letters became the summit of the system during the professorship of the spiritualist philosopher Victor Cousin (1792–1867), who played an important part in reorganizing higher education in France. Serious scholarship was almost exclusively confined to Paris, so that individuals with intellectual ambitions (scholarly or otherwise) were ineluctably drawn there. Moreover, the Sorbonne
granted a substantial number of higher diplomas and degrees (the license and agrégation intended for schoolteachers, and the doctorate, a research degree required for appointment to a faculty chair). It was quite naturally in the Paris Faculty of Letters that signs of interest in the discipline of psychology first appeared. The other universities also served the need for secondary education, both by training future teachers and by administering the baccalauréat (a state examination), which confirmed successful completion of the secondary curriculum. Original research was a subordinate consideration, and much of it was undertaken at institutions outside the faculty system, such as the Collège de France and the EPHE.

The Collège de France—devoted, like the Sorbonne, to teaching—was founded on principles opposed to those of the medieval university (see Charle, 1986). It was to be a place where cultivated teaching removed the professors from contact with the general public. Conflict within the Collège de France in the second half of the 19th century came from its specialists and scientists (Marcelin Berthelot, Claude Bernard, Ernest Renan, et al.). The creation of chairs in the 1860s encouraged a growing erudition that widened the gulf between the professors and the general public. The procedure for the nomination of a new professor was rather complex, involving a “double presentation” for the chair being created by the minister, with the concurrence of the assembly of the professors of the Collège de France. A vote on the candidate took place first at the Collège de France, then at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques. The minister had the final decision. Hence, entering the Collège de France was the sign of official recognition of the scientific value of the candidates’ researches. However, because for budgetary reasons the number of chairs is limited (e.g., 40 in 1888), admission to the Collège de France was, and remains today, extremely difficult. In general, candidates had to wait for the departure (retirement, death, or dismissal) of a titular for a chair to be available, although not necessarily in the same discipline.

It was within the context of academic reforms (see Liard, 1888–1894; Prost, 1968; Weisz, 1983) that teaching psychology was surreptitiously introduced first at the Sorbonne in 1885 (Brooks, 1993; Nicolas, 2000), then at the Collège de France in 1888 (Nicolas & Charvillat, 2001). These reforms, which began in the mid-1860s, were initiated in response to moral shock triggered by the military defeat of Austria (in 1866) and France (in 1871) by Prussia. Observers of that time, among them the famous scholar Ernest Renan (1823–1892), considered to be the spiritual father of the Third French Republic, believed that the power of Germany was due mostly to the quality of its academic system (Renan, 1864, 1867). Thus, throughout the years 1870–1880, successive reforms favored innovation in the French academic system. Several reformers, among them the physiologist Paul Bert (1872) and the philosopher Emile Boutroux (1882), suggested the introduction of psychology at the university in a form to be determined (physiological, experimental, comparative, or some other). The dogmatic brake exerted by the opposition of academic philosophers, administrative slowness, political inertia, and chronic lack of funds slowed the process to the point that this promise was not realized until several years later, and then under exceptional conditions.
Ribot had considered teaching the new psychology as early as 1880, as evidenced by a letter he wrote to Espinas on February 25, 1880 (see Lenoir, 1970). He was willing to accept a position at the EPHE but found that that institution had “no space” for him because of its commitments to other disciplines.

The appointment of Paul Bert (1833–1886) as minister of public instruction gave Ribot a little hope, but he was rapidly disappointed. During his short ministry, Bert founded on November 30, 1881, a chair in the history of psychological doctrines at the EPHE, but this chair was given not to Ribot but to a long-standing friend of Bert, Jules Soury (1842–1915), who taught a course in the history of doctrines in psychophysiology with a positivist and materialist theoretical perspective. (Soury is usually considered the first historian in the field of neurology; see Haymaker & Schiller, 1970.) Ribot took this surprise appointment as a personal failure.

In accord with the commitment to reform in French universities, the minister of higher education, Albert Dumont (1842–1884), pressed Ribot to apply for a free course at the Sorbonne, but he refused. Finally, in 1885, scientific psychology was introduced to the Sorbonne thanks to the initiative and authority of the new minister, Louis Liard (1846–1917), a philosopher open to new ideas. Continuing Dumont’s work after his death, Liard promoted psychology at the Sorbonne by a ministerial order; it would be fruitless to oppose this order.

Most philosophers were spiritualists and espoused Victor Cousin’s ideas. The psychology of spiritualism was, however, very superficial; it was only a literary expansion of the truths of common sense; the few facts to be met with in it were borrowed from Scottish philosophy. However, as Carroy and Plas (2000) noted, psychology had become a central component of spiritualist philosophy. Opposition to the introduction of new trends in psychology was expressed by Elme Caro (1826–1887) and Charles Waddington (1826–1894); the attitude of their leader, the philosopher Paul Janet (1823–1899), was more ambiguous. Their chief argument was the disastrous influence of materialist and positivist tendencies in philosophy represented by the figure of Ribot.

Back from vacation in June 1885, Ribot learned that a course in psychology had been created for him at the Sorbonne by ministerial order. By another official order of July 31, 1885, Ribot was named to teach the first course in experimental psychology in France. He received his official nomination August 11, with a salary of 3,000 francs starting in November 1885. He began teaching on Decem--

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1 Here is the content of this letter:

A few friends unacquainted with the University urged me several times to become authorized to teach the new psychology somewhere. The Collège de France appeared hazardous to me; I had thought to go to the École des Hautes Études. I would have been content with 2000 francs, a sufficient amount to pay someone, for which I would have passed off the bulk of my Revue Philosophique. I sounded out Monod, Maspéro, etc.: they replied that it would be very interesting, but that there was a 3rd section of archeology to create and three chairs of Coptic, etc., and that there was no space. I immediately retreated into my shell. . . . In sum, I tried something for the first time in ten years, and I was stopped in limine. I think however that it would have been capital to create this post, even in a very modest form. (Lenoir, 1970, pp. 169–170)
ber 7, 1885; the whole course was published in the *Revue Politique et Littéraire* (Ribot, 1885; see Nicolas, 2000). The event’s considerable importance was noted by Lionel Dauriac (1847–1924), a contemporary and friend of Ribot who made no mistake about its meaning (Dauriac, 1885):

The entrance of M. Ribot to the Faculty of Arts of Paris, will be one of the most considerable philosophical event[s] of this time. There is no possible mistake: *Novus rerum nascitur ordo*. . . . The doors of the old edifice half-open to let pass dissidents and heretics. What a revolution! But why are we talking about dissidents and heretics since it is agreed that the Sorbonne stopped being a church? Thus any distinction will disappear between sane and insane philosophy? Thus, provided you know your subject well, will everyone freely say what he knows and teach what he thinks?—Without a doubt, and things will happen in the University of Paris as they happen in English and German Universities, no more[,] no less. La Sorbonne has entered upon a new path, an absolutely new path: this, it is important to say and to congratulate her. The opening . . . of Mr. Ribot’s course is the first move in a direction that we will have to walk again and maybe for a long time in order to accomplish all the desirable modifications. Until now, we might have thought these modifications postponed. From now on, one might believe that the present generations will see them accomplished. (pp. 297–298)

*The Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology at the Collège de France (1888–1901)*

On November 16, 1887, Ribot heard surprising news from Ernest Renan, the administrator of the Collège de France (letter to Espinas dated November 17, 1887; see Lenoir, 1975): Big changes were under way at the Collège, changes that would result in Ribot being transferred there from the Sorbonne. By a decree of December 6, signed by President Sadi Carnot and sponsored by Spuller, the minister of public instruction, the Chair of the Law of Nature and of People, created in 1774 and held by the philosopher Adolphe Franck (1809–1893) from 1856 to 1887, was officially transformed into the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology. The title of the chair had been debated for a long time; it was intended by the spiritualist philosopher Charles Lévêque (1818–1900), a colleague of the philosophers of the Sorbonne, to prejudice Ribot’s application at the Collège and favor the candidature of Henri Joly (1839–1925).

The emotions aroused by Ribot’s appointment were keen. The Assembly of the Collège de France was accused of promoting a particular scientific doctrine and being narrow-minded and intransigent, as well as working to subvert the Declaration of Human Rights and the patriotic claims of the time. The fear was expressed that under the guise of positivistic psychology and scientific methodology materialist doctrines that French spiritualist philosophers had always strongly fought would be surreptitiously introduced (see Caro, 1867; Janet, 1864, 1867).

On December 23, Ribot officially applied for the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology. At its next meeting, which took place on January 22, 1888, the assembly accepted Ribot’s candidature (see Assembly of the Collège de France, 1888). Although Ribot was the winner of the first round, the coming battle at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques was likely to reverse the decision taken at the Collège de France.
On January 28, the philosopher Jules Simon (1814–1896), permanent secretary, read the request from the minister of public instruction that the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques designate two candidates for the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology. Despite Paul Janet’s support, Ribot’s candidacy was rejected by the Department of Philosophy, headed by Franck, who had chosen Joly as a substitute for his chair during the year 1886–1887. The final vote took place at the session of February 11, and Joly was elected.

However, the new minister of public instruction, Léopold Faye, ratified the decision of the Collège de France, as had always been done in similar situations (Charle, 1986). Despite the vicissitudes, Ribot finally obtained the chair at the Collège de France on February 18, with a decree signed by Carnot, Faye, and Liard (1888).

In an article published that year in the Revue des Deux Mondes, Paul Janet (1888) attempted to justify his timid support of Ribot. He explained that the old title had been dropped not for doctrinal but for practical reasons. Higher education had not renounced teaching the philosophy of law. The topic could be revived in one form or another, either at the Faculty of Arts or at the Faculty of Law, without the creation of a new chair. At the same time, Paul Janet tried to dispel the suspicion surrounding the new chair, and above all he tried to give advice to Ribot, whose orthodoxy had always left something to be desired. Janet thanked the assembly for its choice of a comprehensive title that would give physiologists and magistrate philosophers, men in ethnological psychology or in animal psychology, pedagogues, and “pure” psychologists a chance to compete for the chair, which was not the exclusive domain of one speciality. Janet proposed that the true name of the new science should be objective psychology and that it should be neither materialist nor spiritualist but exclusively experimental and scientific.

The approval of Ribot was very well received in the field of psychology. In an interview published in the newspaper Le Temps on August 25, 1900, Ribot recalled a congratulatory note he had received from William James. Georges Dumas (1866–1946), one of Ribot’s most faithful students, remarked on the expressions of approval by Ernest Renan (Dumas, 1939). A long-awaited event had come to pass: the entry of scientific psychology and of its founder to the Collège de France. One hundred twenty people (including alienist doctors, candidates for the agrégation, and naturalists) attended the first session on contemporary psychology on April 9, 1888. In the opening lesson (Ribot, 1888; see Nicolas & Charvillat, 2001), Ribot presented the situation of psychology in 1888 in the countries that had started to develop the new science (France, England, Germany, Italy, and the United States).

Ribot’s success in the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology, which had a lasting influence, has been noted by many writers. An anonymous article on philosophy at the Collège de France (later attributed to Halévy & Brunschvicg) published in the first volume (1893) of the Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale, emphasized that Ribot’s success “was not only due to the remarkable clarity of his courses, the abundance of documents, the range and reliability of his knowledge, but also to the nature of his teaching” (Halévy & Brunschvicg, 1893, p. 369). The contents of Ribot’s courses at the Collège de France were published in articles and books beginning in 1890. In 1896 appeared La Psychologie des Sentiments (The Psychology of Feelings; Ribot, 1896), in 1897...
L’Évolution des Idées Générales (The Evolution of General Ideas; Ribot, 1897), and in 1900 Essai sur l’Imagination Créatrice (Essay on Creative Imagination; Ribot, 1900a), which were published in seven new editions and translations in German, Spanish, and Russian. However, during the academic year 1895–1896, Ribot progressively stopped teaching at the Collège de France because of health problems, and he proposed Pierre Janet (a nephew of Paul Janet) as his successor. Janet, who would also succeed Ribot at the Sorbonne in the course in experimental psychology in 1898, replaced him at the Collège from December 1895.

Binet’s Work in the 1880s and 1890s

Binet was offered a chair in psychophysiology at the University of Bucharest in 1895 while he was serving there as a guest lecturer. He declined the offer, partly because he hoped to secure a position in France. The name of Binet and his work were greatly appreciated by his contemporaries (Wolf, 1973). Today, Alfred Binet is a name familiar among psychologists primarily for his development, with Théodore Simon (1873–1961), of the first useful instrument for the measurement of intelligence (Binet & Simon, 1905, 1908, 1911). However, these tests are only partially representative of the scope of Binet’s work, especially between 1880 and 1900. The large majority of Binet’s research had little to do with intelligence tests; instead, it involved detailed investigations of a broad variety of cognitive phenomena. Despite Binet’s relative lack of fame except for his intelligence tests, recent publications have been directed toward areas of his work. Thus, Siegler (1992) showed that Binet was an investigator of developmental, experimental, educational, and social psychology.

Binet’s first interest in psychology developed almost independently of his formal education. (He enrolled in law school in 1872, and he received his licence to practice in 1878, but he was not particularly taken with the profession.) Beginning in 1879, he read, on his own, books and articles by major thinkers of the time, especially English associationists such as John Stuart Mill and Herbert Spencer, and the Scottish psychologist Alexander Bain. In 1880, he wrote his first article, “On the Fusion of Similar Sensations” (Binet, 1880), which showed a relative independence from the associationist tradition. The influence of associationism is apparent in his first book, The Psychology of Reasoning, Based on Experimental Researches in Hypnotism (Binet, 1886/1899), in which the theory of reasoning is purely associative. The processes involved in reasoning are held to be like those involved in perception: The impression or idea of an object awakens by similarity the idea of a similar object formerly experienced, which in turn arouses by contiguity certain other ideas; thus the passage is made from minor, through middle, to major term. This book was written in the atmosphere that pervaded the Salpêtrière, where Binet began work with Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893) and Charles Féré (1852–1907) in 1883 and soon became interested in abnormal psychology and hypnotism. During this period (1883–1890), Binet defended Charcot’s hypotheses on hypnotic transfer and polarization almost unquestioningly against severe criticism from the Nancy school. He wrote numerous articles and three books; the first book, written in collaboration with Féré and entitled Animal Magnetism (Binet & Féré, 1887), is a systematic presentation of the results of the study of hypnotism in France; the second one is a book never
published in French, entitled *On Double Consciousness* (Binet, 1889), which consists of a series of articles published in the “Open Court” collection; the last one, *The Alterations of Personality* (Binet, 1892), includes discussions on successive personalities (in spontaneous or induced somnambulism) and coexisting personalities.

While at the Salpêtrière, Binet sharpened his research skills in the embryological laboratory of E. G. Balbiani (1825–1899). There he became acquainted firsthand with the rigorous procedures of biological research. This work culminated in 1894 in his being awarded a doctorate in natural science from the Sorbonne and appointed director of the Laboratory of Physiological Psychology. Already in 1891 a chance meeting between Binet and Henry Beaunis (1830–1921), then director of the laboratory, had led to Binet’s being offered a position there (see Nicolas, Segui, & Ferrand, 2000). This laboratory was founded in 1889 and was attached to the natural sciences section of the EPHE. In the laboratory Binet conducted a series of investigations remarkable for both quality and quantity. The diversity of topics can be seen by considering his most important publications from just one typically productive year, 1894. These include two books: one an introduction to experimental psychology methods (Binet, 1894b), which is the first French laboratory handbook, and the other on the psychology of expert calculators and chess masters (Binet & Henneguy, 1894). There was also a series of important articles, notably on memory (cf. Nicolas, 1994; Thieman & Brewer, 1978), published in the first volume (1895) of the first French psychological journal, *L’Année Psychologique*, which Binet founded in 1894 (see Nicolas et al., 2000). In the early 1890s Binet was thus a prolific writer and judged by his contemporaries to be a good psychologist. It is no wonder that he declined the offer in Bucharest at the time he was being nominated to the directorship (without remuneration) of the Laboratory of Physiological Psychology to succeed Beaunis.

During the first years of its existence (1895–1901), *L’Année Psychologique* contained Binet’s writings for the most part. As the 1890s progressed, Binet focused increasingly on the goal of understanding and measuring individual differences in intelligence, emphasizing complex mental processes as the main locus of differences. This key insight appeared in Binet’s first major article on the subject (Binet & Henri, 1896). This initial article described a plan to develop an easy-to-use test of individual differences in mental functioning, which was realized by Binet and Simon between 1905 and 1911. Binet perceived this “personal factor” as so important that he insisted on searching for the physical signs of emotivity in changes in capillary circulation, heart rhythm, and respiration. He published with his collaborators in *L’Année Psychologique* between 1896 and 1898 several articles on the physiological effects of emotions and of physical and intellectual work. In 1898, Binet and Henri devoted the first volume of a *Library of Pedagogy and Psychology* to mental fatigue, with chapters on the physiological and psychological effects of mental work. The second volume of this collection, entitled *Suggestibility* (Binet, 1900), was a very important book in which Binet presented a historical and technical abstract of the experimental work that had been done in the field of suggestion, and he added new ideas of his own (see Cunningham, 1988). He showed that group experiments produce (a) a division of functions, with some children becoming leaders and others followers; (b) an increase in suggestibility; and (c) a strong tendency toward imitation.
In 1900, Binet, along with Ferdinand Buisson, was instrumental in organizing the Société Libre pour l’Étude de l’Enfant, an association of psychologists, teachers, and principals concerned with practical problems in the schools. It was not long before he persuaded the board of the Société to establish a publication, the *Bulletin*, which he edited.

**Binet’s Failure to Attain Chairs at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne in 1902**

*The Collège de France: Bergson’s Report (October 1901) and Binet Versus Janet (January 1902)*

When Ribot announced his retirement in June 1901, effective November 1, 1901, Binet proposed himself for the position. On July 4, 1901, he wrote to his close friend, Paul Passy (see Wolf, 1973):

You know perhaps that Ribot has just resigned, and I am presenting myself against Janet Pierre [sic] to replace him. It will be a rough campaign, in which I am happily supported in the most vigorous manner, and if I lose, it will not be my fault... For over twenty years I have been active in psychology, as you know; I educated myself all alone, without any master; and I have arrived at my present scientific situation by the sole force of my fists; no one, you understand well, no one has ever helped me. I have done experimental psychology, the title of Ribot’s chair, and I am really the only one in France who has done so. Neither Ribot nor [Pierre] Janet have done it; the former is a critic, and the latter carries on pathological psychology with hypnotism, hysteria, etc. (Binet, 1901)

In October of the same year, the Assembly of the Collège de France thought it useful to question the preservation or the transformation of the chair. A ministerial letter dated October 30, 1901, officially asked the assembly to reach a scientifically based decision. The philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was in charge of writing a detailed report (Bergson, 1901). After a first failure in January 1900 to obtain the Chair of Modern Philosophy, Bergson was nominated in April 1900 to the Chair of Latin and Greek Philosophy with the support of a report written by Ribot himself (1900b).

In his own report, Bergson examined the reasons in favor of the preservation of the chair, noting that the chair was the culmination of the progress realized by the science of psychology during the last 30 or 40 years. He showed that psychology always tried to be “experimental” and “comparative” but that during many previous centuries it had had no reliable methods of experimental measurement, no means to distinguish in conscious life what is really simple and what is really complex, and no process of analysis. Modern psychology came from a synthesis of two different sides: one clinical and French, the other laboratory based and German.²

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² Here is the content of Bergson’s (1901) report:

From [a] clinical side first, many thanks to French doctors. The work following Broca’s discovery showed by the means of various aphasias how apparently simple psychological functions were really complex, whereas Charcot’s observations and those of his colleagues led them to define, to analyze and almost to measure the various degrees of personality itself. From the laboratory side then, thanks mainly to Wundt and his students who imagined
Bergson proposed retaining the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology, and the assembly decided unanimously to follow his recommendation. Bergson had stressed that (a) psychology was a relatively new science in whose brief history France had played a great role; (b) it was a very well developed science abroad, especially in United States and Germany; and (c) there was no place in France where it was taught by a chaired professor except the Collège de France. Thus the Collège was in the front rank of the science. We can reasonably suppose that Bergson was influenced in his decision to support retaining the title of Ribot’s chair by the good personal relations between them. First, Bergson knew Ribot very well; he had met Ribot many times and had published a few articles in Ribot’s journal Revue Philosophique de la France et de l’Etranger. Second, even if their philosophical conceptions were divergent on numerous points (e.g., the concept of memory; see Nicolas, 1998), they respected each other. Third, as noted above, Bergson was elected to the Collège de France on the basis of a report written by Ribot.

The recruitment of the future professor of experimental and comparative psychology was decided during the assembly session of January 19, 1902, under the presidency of Gaston Paris. The two candidates who applied for the vacant chair were (a) Pierre Janet (1859–1947), doctor of arts (1889) and of medicine (1893) and lecturer in psychology at the Sorbonne, and (b) Binet. The two most famous representatives of French scientific psychology at the time were thus face to face. Each candidate was supported by a report: Janet’s was authored by Bergson and Binet’s by the physiologist Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904), successor of Flourens in the Chair of Natural History of Complex Bodies. Marey was also the successor of Claude Bernard at the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques: He is still known for his work on cardiac activity and chrono-photography, an important step toward cinematography.

Bergson (1902) presented the credentials of Pierre Janet and then examined his works, which he called important both in the results obtained and in the new direction it had given to psychological science (see Appendix A). He noted that the study of hysteria, which constituted the center of Janet’s work, revealed the methods and instruments to measure quantitative variations of elementary psychological facts.

These two psychologies, one based on pathological observation and the other on direct experimentation[,] met: they also joined the old introspective psychology. Today, there is only one psychology, true positive science which has like other positive sciences its own research methods, and also its own instruments and laboratories. This psychology is represented in relatively new universities like the ones in America by chairs carrying indeed the title of psychology. There is virtually no big university in United States without its professor of psychology: one such university has two. In Germany, many universities have real chairs of psychology that still carry, without a doubt, the title “philosophy” but they are given in fact to psychologists by profession.

The framework of our teaching renders more difficult the introduction of pure psychology into our universities. This psychology is well represented by a complementary course at the Sorbonne, by a laboratory of psychology (Binet) and by a course of history of psychology at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes (Soury), but it has its own chair only at the Collège de France. It must keep it there. To this important science, in which the most beautiful discoveries are due to French scientists, it is necessary that one of our great chairs be devoted. And because this teaching does not exactly fit into our classical frames, it is at the Collège de France that its real place is.
importance of subconscious phenomena. Bergson acknowledged that “No doubt that everything is not completely new in his method nor in the results of his investigations. But an original idea in sciences is the one that uses, organizes, renders alive and fruitful preexisting elements.” Bergson pointed to Janet’s success as a substitute for Ribot at the Collège, concluding that “both via his teaching and his work, he has shown he is definitely worthy to occupy the chair of experimental and comparative psychology.” Bergson’s championing of Janet would have not surprised anyone who was interested in psychology and closely followed contemporary trends. Bergson wanted to perpetuate philosophy in the new psychological movement, continuing a tradition in which psychopathology was a philosophical branch of the idealist school at the end of the 18th century (see Nicolas, 2001, 2002).

Then Marey (1902) proposed Binet to his colleagues (see Appendix B). He noted that after 5 years at the Salpêtrière, Binet had persuaded himself that “the study of hypnotism as interesting as it was did not provide by itself a basis sufficiently large on which to build a scientific psychology, and he thought it was necessary to replace it in priority with the study of the normal person.” Emphasizing the novelty of Binet’s experimental work, Marey supported scientific psychology on the model of physiology and the biological sciences.

The presentations by Bergson and Marey were followed only by a question posed by Croiset, who asked if Janet would leave the Sorbonne if he obtained the chair. The answer from Bergson was affirmative. Finally, Henneguy supported the candidacy of Binet, citing Binet’s investigations of various animals and his studies in the field of comparative psychology. The president of the session consulted the assembly, the members of which declared themselves sufficiently informed and ready to vote. There were 29 voters, and the required majority was set at 16. Janet received the 16 votes, and Binet obtained the remaining 13. In its session of February 15, 1902, the Academy of Sciences confirmed this result. On February 17, 1902, the Department of Higher Education officially nominated Janet to the Chair of Experimental and Comparative Psychology.

Why was Binet rejected for the chair? Janet (1939) himself wrote: “Ribot did me the honor of choosing me as his substitute at the Collège de France; he helped me to obtain his chair when he decided to retire” (p. 27). Ribot was thus Janet’s patron, and a basic requirement for university promotion was membership in the circle surrounding a distinguished patron (Clark, 1968, 1973; Clark & Clark, 1971). The quality of Binet’s work in experimental psychology was not sufficient to help him beat a candidate who was already a teacher in the Collège and supported by Ribot.

The Sorbonne: Binet’s Candidacy Against G. Dumas (March 1902)

Janet’s election to the Collège de France left open his position at the Sorbonne as Maître de Conférences in experimental psychology. Binet decided to seek this position, as he indicated in a letter on March 11, 1902, to Professor Louis Havet (see Wolf, 1973):

I am presenting myself for the course in experimental psychology that Janet had at the Sorbonne . . . I have as my competitor Dumas, one of my friends, in fact. . . . I am no longer unknown to you; my friend, Passy, has spoken of me to you, and
moreover you were at the Collège where you heard the discussion and report of M. Marey, which, I have been assured, was very favorable toward me. I believe I have some chance of succeeding at the Sorbonne, where I shall be defended by M. Boutroux. I am older than Dumas, and I believe that I can say—for it is exact truth—that he has neither my scientific records [titres], nor my authority, nor my age. He is, I am told, more scholarly than I. I am a doctor of sciences and I am reproached for not being a doctor of letters; but a month ago I was exempted from obtaining the licence, and I shall deposit my two theses for the doctorate of letters tomorrow. I am then in order . . . (Binet, 1902)

On March 15, the Council of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris (CFA; 1902) met under the presidency of Dean Croiset to take action regarding the lecturer position in experimental psychology made vacant by Pierre Janet’s departure. First came a discussion of whether to retain the position, which was paid for by the faculty (and not by the Department of Higher Education, as had been the case during Ribot’s time) at the rate of about 6,000 francs per year. After an exchange of observations by three professors, the council voted unanimously to retain the position.

The dean then read the letters of candidacy from Binet and Dumas, the latter a doctor in arts (Dumas, 1900) and in science (Dumas, 1895) and director of the laboratory of psychology at the Faculty of Medicine. Before opening the floor to discussion, he read a letter from Emile Boutroux (1845–1921), professor of history of philosophy and successor of Paul Janet, who was unable to attend the meeting. Boutroux praised Dumas’s abilities but went on to call Binet “one of the most eminent representatives of experimental psychology in our country, and thus a man altogether suited to giving the course on experimental psychology created by the University of Paris” (CFA, 1902, p. 65).

The discussion that followed the reading of this letter illustrates very well the climate of distrust toward the new psychology, with its concentration on experiment and neglect of pathology. The first to speak was Victor Brochard (1848–1907), professor of the history of ancient philosophy since 1894 (he succeeded Waddington). Brochard said that to his great regret he disagreed with his friend Boutroux. It was not that he was unaware of Binet’s accomplishments but that he considered something essential to be missing: Binet had never taught, and consequently the faculty could not know how effective he would be as a professor. Furthermore, Binet was a doctor in science, not arts, which would put him at odds with the degrees held and granted by the faculty. If Binet wanted afterward to defend a thesis for a doctorate of arts, Brochard wondered how he would relate to a jury of colleagues. To these important objections of academic form Brochard added objections of content, questioning the philosophical point of view of Binet, who was not a logician or a pedagogue. He noted that when he was research director in philosophy in 1894, he had suggested that students follow the work of Binet’s laboratory, but the students preferred to attend the lectures of Ribot first and then Pierre Janet. Dumas, with his doctorates of arts and medicine, seemed to Brochard to be more in the tradition of truly French experimental psychology, as represented by Cabanis and Taine, and so to be altogether suited to be the successor of Pierre Janet.

Brochard’s view perfectly represents those of the majority of academic philosophers at the Sorbonne. Gabriel Séailles (1852–1922), holder of the Chair
of Philosophy since 1898, ironically praised Binet’s laboratory work as a great favor to the science to which he was devoted. In sum, experimental psychology was a good thing, but only outside the university. Alfred Espinas (1844–1922), an old friend of Ribot and assistant professor in the Faculty of Arts since 1889, said that he had great esteem for the work of Binet and was not surprised by the decent number of votes Binet obtained in the election at the Collège de France, but he added that the Collège de France was not the Sorbonne. Furthermore, according to him, Dumas had the indisputable advantage that he could take part in all the duties of his colleagues in philosophy, such as examinations of any kind. Victor Egger (1848–1909) agreed with his three colleagues in the Department of Philosophy, noting that Dumas had a philosophical culture that seemed far superior to that of Binet. For him, Binet was an acute observer and without a doubt a very sensitive experimentalist, a collector—an encyclopedist, so to speak, who commented with sagacity on the facts—but Binet’s psychology was not deep enough and lacked a solid basis. Awarding him a doctorate of arts after the event would be embarrassing both for Binet and for the faculty, whose judgment would not be free any more. For Egger, Dumas was the true successor of Ribot, Charcot, and Pierre Janet; therefore he was the ideal candidate for his colleagues in philosophy.

Only Auguste Bouché-Leclerq (1842–1923), professor of ancient history since 1887, defended Binet’s candidacy, noting that

his colleagues in philosophy, led maybe without their knowing it by their habits, have in this comparison of the two candidates depreciated the qualities of one candidate to exalt those of the other. He thought that they asked a lot from Binet and in sum they did not give him much credit. It is true that Binet is not doctor of the Faculty, but others before him defended their thesis when they already taught at the Faculty. Binet is not professor, but who knows if he will not reveal himself as such the day he will have to teach the results of his work and his research; we cannot contest at least that he widened the limits of psychophysics nor that the director of L’Année Psychologique is a very renowned scientist not only in France but also abroad. Furthermore he has the advantage of about ten years over his rival and to his credit an amount of work much more important. (CFA, 1902, pp. 68–69)

After this long discussion, the faculty proceeded to the vote, with 19 votes cast for Dumas and 7 for Binet. (There were 28 votes in total, including 2 blank votes; CFA, 1902, p. 69). Why was Binet rejected? We noted earlier that a basic requirement for university promotion was membership in a circle around a distinguished patron. Binet had no patron. Dumas was in Ribot’s circle: “As a former student of Théodule Ribot . . . I followed his courses at the Sorbonne, and then at the Collège de France during all the time he was a professor there” (Dumas, 1939, p. 5). Moreover, Dumas was an agrégé in philosophy, a doctor of medicine, and, of utmost importance, a doctor of letters. As Clark (1968) noted, for a professorship at the Sorbonne,

The ideal type included a brilliant secondary school record followed by study at the exclusive training school for future university students, the École normale supérieure; an agrégation . . . in philosophy; several years’ experience teaching philosophy in provincial lycées . . . completion and successful defense of two theses for a doctorat ès lettres. (pp. 47–48)
Binet met none of these prerequisites, and thus his failures at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne were not a surprise.

Conclusion

Despite these two successive failures, Binet did not lose hope of one day teaching experimental psychology. Addressing the criticisms leveled at him, he wrote articles and a book on philosophy (Binet, 1905). After the death of the sociologist Gabriel Tarde (1843–1904), Binet tried again to obtain a chair at the Collège de France. On May 22, 1904, writing to his friend Jean Larguier des Bancels, general secretary of L’Année Psychologique, he sadly noted Pierre Janet’s continuing opposition to him. On June 2 he wrote,

I will first apply to the chair left vacant by Tarde in modern philosophy. But I think Bergson wants to take it by exchange, and I will ask then for a transformation of his chair into scientific philosophy or something like that. (Binet, 1904)

On November 9, Bergson (1904) officially requested a transfer to the Chair of Modern Philosophy; the Chair of Greek and Latin Philosophy that Bergson vacated was never transformed.

The orientation of French psychology might have changed significantly with the arrival of Binet at the Collège de France, as occurred in the case of Henri Piéron (1881–1964). However, Binet never got that far, having been rejected by the academic philosophers. French psychology was characterized by insufficient differentiation from other disciplines (Ben-David & Collins, 1966) and by excessively high boundaries among different educational institutions (Brooks, 1993). Psychology and philosophy remained undifferentiated within the Faculty of Arts of the University of Paris. The presence of psychopathology within the degree course of higher educational institutions was accepted only with philosophers as teachers. Although experimental psychology was rejected by many philosophers, scientists were favorable to its introduction. However, this introduction continued to be associated with institutional difficulties. Between 1880 and 1950, psychology in France remained an activity of individuals rather than of a self-perpetuating community (see Nicolas, 2002).

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### Appendix A

Excerpt of the Report Established by Bergson (1902) on Pierre Janet and Published in the Minutes of the Archives Nationales (classification mark F-17–13551)

Mr. Bergson presented the titles of Mr. Janet. Born in 1859, Mr. Janet entered l’Ecole Normale in 1879 and came out in 1881 with an agrégation in philosophy. He obtained his doctorate in Arts in 1889. He taught philosophy at the secondary schools of Châteauroux and Le Havre then in Paris at the secondary schools of Rollin, Louis le Grand and Condorcet. From 1889 to 1893, he studied medicine in Paris: he is a doctor of medicine. From 1895 to 1897 he replaced Mr. Ribot at the Collège de France, from 1898 to 1901, he replaced him during the first semester. Since 1898 he has been giving a course of psychology at the Sorbonne and he is the director since 1890 of a laboratory of psychology at the Salpêtrière. Such is his curriculum vitae.
Mr. Bergson then examined the work of Mr. Janet. This work, he said, is important both in its results obtained and in the mainly new direction given to psychological science. Between the normal state of the person, which constituted the unique object of study of the old psychology, and mental alienation, which even under its lightest form always witnessed a deep and general alteration of psychological life, Mr. Janet came to find a series of morbid states consisting according to him in a shrinking of the field of consciousness. Taken together these morbid states could be classified under the heading “hysteria,” but Mr. Janet linked to hysteria a large number of degeneration, impulsion, obsession, phobia, idée fixe, affective, intellectual or motor troubles which appeared to him as coming from the same causes. The study of hysteria constituted the center of his work. If we put aside in this the work corresponding more specifically to the professor of philosophy, a classic edition of Malebranche [Janet, 1886], a classic handbook of philosophy [Janet, 1896], a Latin thesis on the borrowings of Bacon from alchemists [Janet, 1889a], it remains books on psychological automatism (one volume in 8 octavo) [Janet, 1889b], on mental states of hysteric (two volumes in 12 octavo) [Janet, 1893, 1894], on neurosis and idées fixes (two volumes in 8 octavo) [Janet, 1898; Raymond & Janet, 1898], the second book written in collaboration with Mr. Raymond, whose goal is to go deeper into hysteria and to use it to analyze normal personality.

What first draws Janet’s attention are anaesthesia and strange amnesia often encountered among hysteric. By means of experimentation, mainly new, Mr. Janet showed that sensations seemingly abolished are still felt, that memories seemingly lost are still present but that these memories go down from the level of consciousness strictly speaking to lower levels of the subconscious of personality. Thus hysteria must show and must allow us to study experimentally a decrease of the strength of attention or of power of mental synthesis. The patient unable to maintain under the eye of his consciousness the totality of his sensations and memories drops a certain number of them, abandons them, “becomes narrower” almost unintentionally.

But it reveals to us the importance of subconscious phenomena in the various forms of hysteria and even maybe in the normal psychological life. Mr. Janet pursued his work on subconscious states. He imagined various methods to bring them to express themselves in a way to record themselves. He showed that many hysterical phenomena and similar troubles are true idées fixes that did not appear to the consciousness of the patient as idées fixes of the insane person but that, subconsciously, have an influence without him knowing it on his conscious personality and dictate him sometimes his acts, his movements, his attitudes. Such is the dominant idea of the work of Mr. Janet. No doubt everything is not completely new in his method nor in the results of his investigations. But an original idea in sciences is the one that uses, organizes, renders alive and fruitful preexisting elements. Mr. Janet is not only a scientist. He is also a professor. He obtained as the substitute of Ribot real and justified success at the Collège de France. Both via his teaching and his work, he showed he was definitely worthy to occupy the chair of experimental and comparative psychology.

Appendix B

Excerpt of the Report Established by Marey (1902) on Binet and Published in the Minutes of the Archives Nationales (classification mark F-17–13551)

The candidate I propose to my colleagues to be in first position is Mr. Binet. From 1882 he started the noted work on hypnotism that he did at the Salpêtrière on Charcot’s
demand. Mr. Binet’s goal is, alone or in collaboration with Dr. Féré, to disentangle the part of suggestion, mainly from unconscious suggestion, in phenomena of hypnotism and hysteria. We were at a time where what seems obvious today was not even suspected; in studying hypnotism we did psychology without knowing it; we feared the voluntary simulation of patients, but we almost ignored the danger of unconscious suggestions. Mr. Binet did at that time, not only by his books (the animal magnetism, in collaboration with Féré [Binet & Féré, 1887], alterations of personality [Binet, 1892], the psychology of reasoning [Binet, 1886/1899], the double consciousness [Binet, 1889]) and by his articles in the *Revue Philosophique*, but also with the influence he had around him, a work of criticism extremely useful, and he avoided many errors that we were about to make.

After a prolonged period of five years at the Salpêtrière, Mr. Binet persuaded himself that the study of hypnotism, as interesting as it was, did not provide by itself a sufficiently large basis to build a scientific psychology, and he thought it was necessary to replace it in priority with the study of the normal person. Such is the leading idea which inspired him, and for twelve years all his work, for which he grouped around him many students in his laboratory of physiological psychology of the Hautes Études.

There is no time for me to enumerate all the investigations we owe him: we can say that he took part in all parts of psychology, to studies of the histology of the nerve cell, of the constitution of ganglions nerves in invertebrates; then vivisection experiments and meticulous observations of insects secured his competence in the field so unexplored of comparative psychology [Binet, 1894a]. The study of the physical man made use of a large number of known methods and required the intervention of many new procedures because he wanted to know in turn the anatomical construction of the intelligent mind, the most important signs of physical vitality, the influence of intellectual work on the speed of the heart, the heat of the body, the capillary circulation, the blood pressure, the respiration, the nutritive exchanges, the measure of the muscular strength of physical fatigue and its restoration, the coordination of movements and the manual dexterity. These investigations required either the use of the graphic method, of which Mr. Binet improved various details, or the construction of a certain number of new instruments.

But it is the study of the normal man that especially demanded the attention of Mr. Binet and gave him the occasion to do original research [Binet, 1894b, 1900; Binet & Henri, 1898]. Taking as a starting point the investigations of Wundt and his students, Mr. Binet tried to widen them and he aimed high, his studies on the adult, the child, the schoolboy, on the abnormal, the professional of arithmetic, chess [Binet & Henneguy, 1894], prestidigitation, his research on the measure of sensations showed him that it was necessary to submit to methodical experimentation the highest functions of the mind, and it is so he founded individual psychology [Binet & Henri, 1896], a new science, devoted to determine the skills of each of us, which is important from the social point of view.

The teaching of Mr. Binet at the Collège de France would have a double merit; the first would be general, it would spread to entire psychology, and the second, given a highly experimental character, would be presented with the methods of natural sciences with observations and instruments, in short under a really scientific form.

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