

THE ORTHOPHRENIC INSTITUTE OF DOCTOR VOISIN AND THE EDUCATION OF THE SO CALLED “OUT OF THE ORDINARY LINE” CHILDREN IN FRANCE DURING THE JULY MONARCHY (1830-1848)

O INSTITUTO ORTOFRÊNICO DO DOUTOR VOISIN E A EDUCAÇÃO DAS CRIANÇAS “FORA DA LINHA COMUM” NA FRANÇA DURANTE A MONARQUIA DE JULHO (1830-1848)

EL INSTITUTO ORTOFRÉNICO DEL DOCTOR VOISIN Y LA EDUCACIÓN DE LOS NIÑOS “FUERA DE LA LÍNEA COMÚN” EN FRANCIA DURANTE LA MONARQUÍA DE JULIO (1830-1848)

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ABSTRACT: This article examines how a first medical-pedagogical experiment was set up under the July Monarchy, to manage children considered as being “out of the ordinary line”. This experiment sought both to adapt their education to their particularities and to prevent, in doing so, the formation of potential criminals or alienated. This experimentation was set up by the alienist Félix Voisin in his “orthophrenic institute”. We show both what were the principles, inspired by phrenology, which guided this experimentation; what were the medical-pedagogical techniques implemented in this institute; and more specifically how these experimentations paved the way to a first thematization of the so called “abnormal” children and of what will become the so called “conduct disorders” of the difficult child.

KEYWORDS: Phrenology. Orthophreny. Alienism. ‘Abnormal’ children.

RESUMO: O artigo analisa como se deu a implementação, durante a Monarquia de Julho, de um primeiro experimento médico-pedagógico visando as crianças consideradas “fora da linha do comum”. Esse experimento, que buscava adaptar uma educação às particularidades dessas crianças e, assim, prevenir a formação de potenciais criminosos e alienados, foi elaborado pelo alienista Felix Voisin sob o nome de instituto ortofrênico. Mostramos quais foram os princípios – inspirados na frenologia – que guiaram sua experimentação; quais eram as técnicas pedagógicas aplicadas; e, sobretudo, de que maneira esses trabalhos estiveram na origem da primeira tematização das crianças ditas “anormais” e do que virá a ser o transtorno de conduta da criança difícil.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Frenologia. Ortofrenia. Alienismo. Crianças ‘anormais’.

RESUMEN: El artículo analiza cómo se llevó a cabo la aplicación, durante la Monarquía de Julio, de un primer experimento médico-pedagógico dirigido a niños considerados “fuera de la línea común”. Este experimento, que pretendía adaptar una educación a las particularidades de estos niños y, así, evitar la formación de criminales y alienados en

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potencia, fue elaborado por el alienista Félix Voisin bajo el nombre de instituto ortofrénico. Mostramos, al mismo tiempo, cuáles fueron sus principios -inspirados en la frenología- que guiaron su experimentación; cuáles eran las técnicas pedagógicas aplicadas; y, sobre todo, de qué manera estos trabajos estuvieron en el origen de la primera tematización de los llamados niños “anormales” y de lo que sería el trastorno de conducta del niño difícil.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Frenología. Ortofrenía. Alienismo. Niños “anormales”.

Introdução

On Monday, 23 February 1835, the liberal poet and playwright, Néponucème Lemerrier, reads, in the *Académie des Sciences*, a dissertation that denounces the dangers of applying the orthophrenic doctrine in the education of children. He criticizes the fragility of a “conjectural” doctrine that intends to mark in advance “the position that each individual must occupy in a society” (JOURNAL, 1835, [n.d.], our translation). To do so, he emphatically attacks the fatalism of the phrenological principles that guide orthophrenic practice. This criticism is, in fact, somewhat unfair because, as we will see, orthophrenia seeks, on the contrary, to intervene preventively in the case of children whose guardians “generally give up on modifying” and “fighting [...] against their innate dispositions, modify their organism, change their constitution and save them from the fatality that often weighs on their heads” (GAZETTE, 1834, p. 3, our translation). Far from being fatalistic, phrenology reveals a strong therapeutic optimism and the conviction that it is possible to intervene on innate propensities, including the hereditary predispositions of children. Furthermore, Lemerrier points out the repugnance that some parents might feel “in letting them classify (their) son or (their) daughter as belonging to the category of limited, or even extraordinary beings, from which criminals and heroes arise” (GAZETTE, 1834, p. 3, our translation), since they already have difficulty accepting placing their children in a classic orthopedic institution when they present a physical deformity. Finally, and above all, Lemerrier observes that the work performed by these orthophrenics aims, under the pretext of preventive improvement, to

[...] lead (*those children considered outside the common line*) towards the common qualities of *beings born like everyone else* [...] they would not have seen - in the student considered as distracted, taciturn, inattentive, impetuous or cowardly - a person who would become a serious scholar, an invincible orator, a sublime writer or artist, a celebrated politician, a famous warrior: they would suffocate, in their unruly growth from this lack of vision, a



Michelangelo, a Descartes, a Luther, a Pascal, an Eugène, a Mirabeau (ANNALES..., 1835, p. 512, our translation)².

Today, Einstein replaced Descartes, but Lemerrier's criticisms refer us, singularly, to the debates that have taken place, recently, regarding the evaluation of behavioral disorders in children and adolescents; fatalism, fragility of diagnostic categories, effects of stigmatization and normalization³. We could add one last accusation: there are insinuations that orthophrenics compressed, with pressure screws, the cerebral organs that lead children to evil and that, after discovering them, they would stimulate those that lead them to good... here, of certain denunciations of the so-called "aversive" methods defended by behaviorists for the treatment of autism... We will see that the treatment promoted by the orthophrenic practice is, in fact, of a very different order: it aims to act preventively against certain propensities through a action on children's physical, intellectual and moral environment and adapting the child's education to their own abilities and tendencies.

1st Doctor Voisin's orthophrenic pension, a precedent in the treatment of "abnormal" children in the early 19th century

All these criticisms by Lemerrier actually refer to a specialized establishment, founded in 1834 in Issy, by the alienist Félix Auguste Voisin, a student of Esquirol, who has been running an establishment with his friend Jean-Pierre Falret since 1832, of the insane in Vanves, a municipality of which he became mayor in 1832. Voisin was also in charge, in 1833, of educating idiots at the *Hospice des Incurables* on Rue Sèvres, an educational device he adopted in Bicêtre when he was hired as a doctor in 1840, by this hospital. It is he who brings, to this institution, another character who will play an important role in the treatment of idiots and in his future tutelage of "abnormal children": Edouard Seguin, with whom he will work until 1844⁴. The orthophrenic establishment in Voisin, which will remain active for only a few years,

² This criticism of the normalization operated by orthophrenia is also expressed, for example, by François Foy: "the orthophrenic doctrine is the dream of an honest soul full of concern for his fellow men; but, from a dream to reality, the distance is enormous [...] What? Do you want to mold children's brains to your liking? Do you want to command the agents of the spirit, those of passion? But who guarantees that your brains reach perfection? that the spirit of yours is superior to that of other men [...]?" (FOY, 1845, p. 452-453, our translation).

³ See, in France, numerous debates that arose after the publication of Inserm's collective expertise, *Troubles des conduites des enfants et des adolescents en 2005*.

⁴ On Seguin, see notably Pélicier and Thuillier (1996). On the differences in principles between Seguin's and Voisin's methods, see Doron, (2011, p. 1231-1253). If Voisin is based on a clearly organicist and inspired conception of phrenology, Seguin, in turn, emphasizes functional lesions of the nervous force that would subtract the instincts of the will and defends a more spiritualist approach, which is why he defends Leuret's 'moral treatment' against Voisin and Ferrus. It should also be noted that, unlike Voisin, Seguin does not have a medical education and is not part of alienist circles. All this makes him an "outsider" who will be fired from Bicêtre before going



had the objective – as specified in the very favorable report of the doctor Charles Marc who was in charge of visiting him – “to consecrate itself to children who, due to their innate or acquired, flee and escape – in colleges and other boarding schools – from the influence of uniform methods, calculated according to the common, vulgar dispositions of individuals who seek a general education” (MARC, 1834, p. 4, our translation).

It is, without a doubt, the first establishment specialized in the treatment of these children that the end of the 19th century would classify as abnormal⁵ and that Voisin (1830), in turn, describes as “out of the ordinary”. We note here that this is a precedent that, although it has fallen into oblivion, was well known by the promoters of institutions for abnormal children at the end of the 19th century, such as Bourneville or Paul Boncour. Knowledge of this precedent is explained by the fact that one of his descendants, Felix Voisin, was a deputy for the Seine-et-Marne region, police chief of the Seine region and played a central role in the development of specialized treatments for violators or difficult children and adolescents; and that two others of his descendants (Auguste and Jules) were alienists of the first order, engaged in the treatment of idiocy. The very expression “orthophrenia” was still widely used in the 1890s by defenders of institutions for the abnormal, as an equivalent to “medical-pedagogical”. Thus, Bourneville created, in 1892, in Vitry, a medical-pedagogical institute or orthophrenic institute for children affected by nervous diseases, while Paul-Boncour (1911) theorized the “orthophrenic gymnastics”, which

[...] aims – by focusing on muscle education – to act above all in the education of attention, memory, imagination, will. While ordinary gymnastics tends to fall into automatism and habit, orthophrenic gymnastics, on the contrary, avoids this automatism by constantly provoking the activation of the different faculties (PAUL-BONCOUR, 1911, p. 338, our translation).

Its conception is not far from the practices that Voisin developed in his orthophrenic establishment, although it was based on a reflection coming from phrenology.

Historiography has studied very well the development of the field of irregular childhood at the end of the 19th century and the affirmation of a hybrid mandate, on the border between medicine and pedagogy, applied to children considered deviant. Historians have shown how, in France, the laws they imposed on primary education in 1881-1882 highlighted the problem of “abnormal” children and led to the development of a medical-psychological specialization to

into exile in the United States. This exile will, paradoxically, be a chance for him as he will become a central figure in the treatment of idiots and the mentally handicapped in the United States and then internationally.

⁵ For more details on the history of this notion, popularized by the works of Michel Foucault, and on Voisin's central role in the emergence of the category, see Doron (2015, p. 387-403).



care for them. Historiography has also highlighted the important development of public and private institutions for difficult children during the same period (VIAL, 1999; QUINCY-LEFEBVRE, 1997). But, curiously, it focused less on the first moment, which constitutes the years 1830-1840, although these years were essential to the emergence of a medical-pedagogical power over childhood, that is, in the formation of an alliance between practices and alienist and pedagogical doctrines targeting children considered as deviant, from the point of view of their intellectual and moral dispositions, from the normal line. This moment is central in the formation of the category of abnormal children, itself integrated as an element within a broader field that goes from idiocy to genius, passing through mental illness or criminality, and which defines the space of mental anomaly. In fact, if Voisin thus delimits the field of irregular childhood, it is because he considers it – as he emphasizes in his dissertation, in 1830, defending the abolition of the death penalty (abolition that he will defend throughout his life) – the nursery of the alienated, the great criminals and the common lawbreakers (VOISIN, 1830). It is not possible to separate, in Voisin's work as in that of other alienists of this period, the engagement in the medical-pedagogical field of the engagement – parallel – in the medical-judicial field (in this case, the penal and prison field) as well as in the discussions about the treatment of idiocy.

The end of the Restoration and the beginning of the July Monarchy constitute, in fact, a decisive moment within the articulation between alienism and educational practices as well as between alienism and penal practices⁶. This is a moment of intense reflection – both on the side of social reformers gathered in philanthropic societies (such as the Society for Elementary Education and the Society for Christian Morals) and on the side of those who support more materialist and socializing doctrines – regarding development of asylum rooms for young children and primary education (in parallel with reflections, in the same circles, on penal reform and prisons) (DUPRAT, 1993; LUC, 1997). It is, moreover, a moment in which alienism, as a medical discipline, is not yet formally institutionalized. It is part of the broader scope of public hygiene and, in this context, one of its strategies to strengthen itself consists of investing in the judiciary field (as was so well analyzed by Jan Goldstein) and in the pedagogical field by promoting a type of moral and mental hygiene applied to childhood. Voisin perfectly represents this dual strategy. Based on a specific model, that of idiocy (which, at that time, was a subject much discussed within mental medicine)⁷ and a materialist doctrine (phrenology)⁸, he sought

⁶ The case of the mobilization of psychiatry within the penal and prison field has been better studied, especially under the impulse of Foucault (1999). See Goldstein (1989), Renneville (2003) and Guignard, (2010).

⁷ For perspective, see Lachapelle (2007, p. 627-648).

⁸ On phrenology in France, see Renneville, 2000.



to implement a grid of analysis and medical techniques both in the educational and penal fields. He does so, it should be noted, within a humanist logic that aims to improve and include the most excluded segments of humanity (idiots, criminals, “perverse” children) and in connection with a political project. Voisin is, in fact, an adherent of liberal and republican currents: he is linked to Ferrus, inspector of establishments for the insane, chief physician of Bicêtre, and old friend of Manuel, one of the main opposition deputies during the Restoration. These close ties between alienism and liberal or republican movements form an all-too-overlooked subject within the history of alienism during the Restoration and the July Monarchy. It is necessary, at least, to reiterate them, since many of the alienists' initiatives are directly inscribed within a political program of social reform⁹.

2nd “What is possible to do for the correction of bodily deformities, it is also possible and necessary to be done for the rectification of dangerous propensities” : theoretical foundations of preventive orthophrenia

Let's try to capture the fundamental principles on which Voisin bases the legitimacy and the need to intervene, in a preventive way, in the field of childhood, using medical-pedagogical techniques.

A) Phrenology and the art of developing propensities

Voisin, as we have said, is an alienist marked by phrenology. He is a member of the phrenological Society of Paris of which he was president from 1839-1940. He is one of those humanist phrenologists, such as Benjamin Appert, who think that phrenology makes it possible to profoundly transform human reality by acting dynamically on propensities and, at the same time, provides a knowledge that allows adjusting (as far as possible) the penalty, the pedagogy, and even the political and social classification of individuals' propensities¹⁰. It is necessary to remember that the years 1830-1840 saw the growth of Saint-Simonism, Fourierism and proto-socialist currents that aimed to attribute to each individual his social classification according to his *abilities*. For Voisin, all men share the “total form of the human condition” (VOISIN, 1832, p. 122, our translation), that is, they all carry within themselves, as more or less developed potentialities, the set of propensities that constitute man. “One man differs from another merely in more or less” (VOISIN, 1830, p. 25, our translation) so he observes, adopting a fundamental

⁹ Evoking just two cases, two key characters of nascent alienism: Philippe Buchez and Ulysse Trélat are central figures in secret societies and republican struggles during the Restoration and the July Monarchy.

¹⁰ See Renneville (2000) and Doron (2011, p. 1173-1194).



dogma of phrenology that is also defended by Broussais among others¹¹: everything is a question of the quantitative development of these propensities; some being too developed and others not enough. This point must be stressed since he opposes phrenologists to other alienists who think that certain behaviors (perversions of instincts, moral monstrosity, etc.) are not the result of a quantitative difference, but of a qualitative deviation and a radical disturbance.¹²

Among these propensities, Voisin distinguishes three spheres: “animal propensities” or instincts that contain the propensity for reproduction or destructiveness, the affective or moral sphere, and the intellectual sphere. According to a common phrenological logic, each sphere (and each propensity in a given sphere) can be affected, in isolation, by an excessive or insufficient development, leading to *partial idiocies*. One of the central challenges of human development is the issue of balance between these different spheres and, mainly, the need to keep the animal sphere under the control of the affective and intellectual spheres. Thus, great criminals and moral monsters are characterized by an exaggerated development of animal propensities (especially destructiveness) and an underdevelopment of moral propensities.

In the skulls of criminals in general, the animal man, in whole or in part, is perfectly designed both by his nature and by the vice of his education; the moral man and the intellectual man are, in a way, only sketched in his person. Most criminals are therefore ill-born children or, in cases where they do not show faulty organization, have been placed in the outside world in horrible circumstances (VOISIN, 1839, p. 48, our translation).

We must insist: moral monsters are, therefore, men like the others, but with certain propensities that have developed too much and others, not enough. They are “beings outside the common line”. But as this development is dynamic and because it is a quantitative deviation, these beings outside the common line are inserted in continuity with many others: they enter a quantitative scale that goes from idiots to geniuses, from difficult children to great criminals, passing through mass of “average” men, of men within the common line.

In addition, this scale is *dynamic*, that is, its positions are not fixed, especially if there is intervention with adapted medical-pedagogical instruments, as soon as possible. If, in fact, the greater or lesser development of an organ depends, in part, on the organization, it depends, above all, on education and exercise.

Lack of exercise can delay the activity and development of an organ. It is on this fact that we base the precept of preventing, as far as possible, the exercise of organs that can become dangerous for children [...] and, on the other hand,

¹¹This is the famous “Broussais principle”, analyzed by Canguilhem in *Le normal et le pathologique*

¹² For a detailed discussion see Doron (2011, p. 1195-1226) and Doron (2018, p. 311-325).



of stimulating organs whose tendency is advantageous (GALL; SPURZHEIM, 1812, p. 117, our translation).

It is therefore necessary to conduct a true preventive education of propensities, based on the data of phrenology. This is where we find Voisin's committed humanism: he attributes an absolutely central role to the development of the various faculties and to education. This development is a process that is always receptive to modification.

We ask, repeatedly, for education for the youth, without realizing that instruction must and can exist, beneficially, for all ages [...] there is no stage of life in which faculties cannot be usefully exercised, in which man cannot be strengthened by favorable habits [...] let us, therefore, multiply the benefits of instructive power; let us create establishments for men of all ages, in any state, of any position (VOISIN, 1830, p. V-VI, our translation).

This almost indefinite extension of a medical-pedagogical power applies, at the same time, to criminals, idiots and madmen. The continuum of the abnormal is formed, therefore, in conjunction with this “instructive power” that aims to “neutralize the influence of the motivations that result from the vices of the organization or social institutions and that, according to the state of abandonment in which they left us, lead us, practically against our will, towards crime, misfortune, madness” (VOISIN, 1830, p. V-VI, our translation).

B) The model of partial idiocy

The analysis that Voisin proposes is marked by the emphasis given to a very peculiar model: that of idiocy. Without referring in detail, here, to the history of the relationship between idiocy and alienism during the years 1800-1820 (LACHAPPELLE, 2007; DORON, 2011), it is worth remembering that in the work of Pinel and Dubuisson, idiocy was presented as a condition that fundamentally affected the *intellectual* faculties. It inscribed itself as a prolongation of mental alienation, as the maximal and incurable state of madness. In fact, it is this diagnosis of idiocy that Pinel, as early as 1800, gave to the case of Victor, the famous “savage of Aveyron”, Itard's patient, and thus attested to his incurability. Itard surrendered to this diagnosis in 1806, when he noticed the physiological limits that impeded the advancement of his educational work (CHAPPEY, 2017). Contrary to what the somewhat binary political reading of the case of Victor proposed by Jean-Luc Chappey (2017) claims, the advance of phrenology during this same period does not correspond to an essentialization and affirmation of a fixism linked to the ends of the ideals of perfectibility and political reaction. Quite the contrary: we will see that, with Voisin, the resource of phrenology allowed the pursuit of the ideal of perfectibility by offering the possibility of transforming even born idiots, acting in



depth on their organization¹³. Before examining this aspect, it is necessary to remember that, between 1817-1820, Esquirol had increased the gloomy character of the diagnosis of idiocy by making a firm distinction between the disease (alienation or dementia, for example) and a state (such as idiocy), a distinction that is fundamental because it will cross the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, between "abnormal state" and "disease". The state of idiocy is, for Esquirol, innate and definitive: it is marked by an absence of development of the intellectual faculties. It excludes any and all treatment. It is in relation to this position that we must place the originality of Voisin's position, as well as that of Seguin who – at the same time – develops an analogous operation, but from a very different theoretical framework.

Voisin rejects Esquirol's definition and asserts that, first of all, there are various forms of idiocy besides those involving the obliteration of intellectual faculties. It rests on two principles of phrenology: 1. Man has multiple propensities linked to different organs. 2. He may be affected by disorders localized and specific to each of his propensities.

Idiocy respects no faculties of any kind. It can affect man in a partial or complete way in all his potentialities of being. Sometimes it affects you in your survival and reproduction instincts, sometimes it affects you in your moral feelings, it is possible, sometimes, to have greater or lesser intelligence and not possess or possess only a small degree of this or that primitive propensity, this or that such power of conservation and reproduction (VOISIN, 1843a, p. 10, our translation).

It is not pertinent, therefore, to limit oneself to identifying alterations in the scope of intellectual faculties: it is necessary to know whether

[...] would there also not have been, in the integral and partial development of certain parts of the brain of some individuals, such marked differences in relation to the manifestation of affective qualities, feelings and propensities, that they would be an indication of mutilations or disproportionate proportions (VOISIN, 1830, p. 27-28, our translation).

There are "partial idiocies" just as there are partial follies, which affect only the sphere of moral propensities or sentiments. Voisin's analysis is different from Seguin's in terms of its principles, but the two coincide in their result: they deprive the intellectual and cognitive predominance of idiocy, examine it in its functional alterations and point out the acts and the

¹³ This is where the originality of the works of Voisin and Séguin comes from, which distance themselves from Pinel and Itard in this regard. We will note that the same therapeutic optimism was established at the same time for cretins, especially through the Adenberg Institute, created by Dr Guggenbühl in 1841 (DORON, 2011, p. 942-986).

propensities, the character and the moral feeling in the same measure as intellectual aptitudes¹⁴. This result, for both Voisin and Séguin, is accompanied by a deduction: it is possible to *treat* idiots through a medical-educational device.

This displacement, which emphasizes localized disorders of moral propensities or feelings independently of any intellectual disorder, is found in the principle of classification of idiocy that Voisin (1843a) adopts, as well as in his diagnostic analysis framework, that is, in the which he applies to idiotic children when they enter his establishment. This picture presents itself as an “instinctive, moral, intellectual and perceptive examination” that begins with the “faculties of conservation and reproduction”, among which we also identify attachment. Voisin evaluates it by asking the following questions: “Does he have an affective character? Does he have, on the contrary, tendencies to live alone?” The procedure for evaluating the destructive instinct is the same: “Is he violent, does he have a habit of breaking, bursting, tearing or burning objects? Is he cruel in his pranks on his peers?” And to gauge the cunning instinct too: “Is he a hypocrite, a liar?” (VOISIN, 1843a, p. 29-34, our translation). Then follow the moral feelings, the external senses and the education of the senses and, finally, reduced to a tenuous portion, the intellectual and reflective faculties. The prominence of the sieve of instincts, propensities and affections requires, then, the lifting of many small deviations from the norms, which allow the construction of a general profile of an abnormal subject. We are here at the exact moment of the birth of the abnormal child. Furthermore, this sieve allows for a natural classification of degrees of idiocy. As Voisin (1843b, p. 327, our translation) says, “every kind of faculty can be compromised in isolation: hence a totally natural classification of the different kinds of idiocy according to the total or partial lack of nervous center functions”.

This shift has a double consequence. On the one hand, it indefinitely expands the field of idiocy and, for example, allows criminals to be considered as being affected by partial idiocies of moral feelings, without harming the intellectual faculties¹⁵. Or again, it raises the identification, through a fine analysis of behaviors, of mild disorders in the development of propensities in children. And, above all, it makes it possible to found a device that aims to act, as soon as possible, in the development of faculties, through techniques of stimulation or inhibition, in the model of education for idiots, but applied preventively to children. It is exactly the Orthophrenic Institute project with which we will conclude.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that, in doing so, they unknowingly adhere to a model proposed by the American physician Benjamin Rush, who considered the existence of an absence of moral development and localized pathologies, limited to the moral sense and the will, supported by philosophy of the Scottish moral sense, and claimed medical jurisdiction over these diseases. see Rush (1812).

¹⁵ For more details, see Doron (2015).



Special education and preventive therapy

The title of the work published by Voisin in 1830 clearly stated: his project is aimed at “children who leave the common line and who, due to their innate or acquired particularities, commonly form the nursery of the insane, the great men, the great criminals and the vulgar violators of our laws”. Childhood becomes, from then on, a double point of focus. On the one hand, it is the moment in which the development of various propensities is triggered and, on the other hand, the moment in which one can intervene in this process so that it is modulated.

We could often foresee and prevent the impulses of these ill-constituted beings [...] we would catch up with them at the very moment when they first manifested their tendencies, and through the application of the laws of physiology, by the instructions of experience, we would manage to form an special education plan (VOISIN, 1830, p.29, our translation).

Furthermore, childhood is revealed to be the phase in which characters are formed and in which, in the slight inflections of propensities, great crimes and great follies are prepared.

Hence Voisin's interest in the education of children “outside the common line” to which he dedicates his specialized establishment. He distinguishes several categories of children to whom he intends to propose forms of treatment adapted to their characteristics: 1. “children disadvantaged by nature [...] poorly born, born poor in spirit”: all the intermediate degrees that go from complete idiocy to ordinary guy. 2. Children who “have been addicted since childhood, who have had the misfortune of being surrounded by bad influences and being misguided”, “leaved in a bad way”; 3. Children who “are totally out of the ordinary”, “children in which animality predominates; over which wild instincts, propensities, and feelings exercise a continual tyranny” who, in the future, will become “dangerous men”; 4. Finally, “children who, being the daughters of alienated parents, are fatally predisposed to mental alienation” (VOISIN, 1843a, p. 94-98, our translation).

By qualifying his method as *orthophrenic*, Voisin explicitly associates himself with the orthopedic tradition that, since Andry, has aimed to correct deviations from the norm from the bodily point of view. It is about “by all possible means, (*of*) doing for the weakness of the intelligence, for the vices of the heart, for the defects of the spirit and for the deformities of the soul, what others do for the deformities of the body. It is no longer about orthopedics, it is about orthophrenia” (VOISIN, 1858, p. 392). It is clear that the passage through the phrenological doctrine allows establishing this link between orthopedics – correction of bodily deviations – and orthophrenia – correction of propensities. Phrenology establishes the possibility of acting effectively, through a directed exercise, in the development of such or such propensity, through



such or such cerebral organ. But it is necessary, here, to avoid caricatural readings that can sometimes be suggested. In fact, the educational methods developed by Voisin are much more equivalent to a type of mesopolitics¹⁶ that seeks “its modifiers in physical, moral and affective agents, always calculated according to the individual and the effects he (*wants*) to produce”. It is about mobilizing the resources of the physical and moral environment to guide and improve the individual's tendencies, stimulating or inhibiting them through adapted exercises and to “create (*for each child*) a way of existence calculated in the particularities of their intellectual and moral being” (CROMELINCK, 1842, p. 191-192, our translation). The fact is that Voisin is explicitly opposed here to a form of general education that would not take into account the specific abilities and tendencies of each child. It is entirely inscribed in the continuity of the reflections that, in the years 1820-1830, denounced the abstraction of the human subject and aimed at adapting institutions (political, penal, educational and work as well) to the particular capacities and dispositions of each one. Marc sums up this underlying project very well when he notes in his report:

The ideas that Dr. Voisin begins to apply are based on indisputable observational facts. We can no longer deny the evidence that nature is unequal in its divisions and that the system of equality of faculties – so strongly recognized by the philosophers of the last century – can no longer sustain itself, even for a second, today. It is true that general forms were determined for the species, but [...] each man has his own temperament, his own characteristic; he has in himself the fundamental and special reason for his life. This is what constitutes the organic conditions of being; organic conditions that, until now, had not been considered (MARC, 1834, [n.d.], our translation).

It should be mentioned that this position can be part of very different political projects and, in particular, the socialists who support Fourier and Saint-Simon fully agree in thinking about a social organization that takes these individual capacities into account. For Voisin, it is about ensuring, in the best possible way, a combination between the organic capacities of individuals and the establishment of a physical, intellectual and moral environment suitable for the development of their education. He “does not advocate a teaching method based on fixed and immutable means; he (*wants*) to make a special study of each particular case, unlike ordinary pedagogues who give all their care to students whose conception is more privileged” (CROMMELINCK, 1842, p. 191, our translation). He chooses to focus on those who were most disadvantaged and seeks to “be master of all the impressions that will touch the child”, seeking

¹⁶ The term “mesopolitics” was borrowed from Ferhat Taylan (2018). This term is perfectly suited to describe the way in which Voisin endeavors to act on the physical and moral environment of the child to guide the development of his faculties.



to stimulate such force and smother such other, making him “contract habits” through certain exercises, keeping him calm or stimulating and exhausting the child with certain games or with gymnastics (CROMMELINCK, 1842, p. 191, our translation).

The article that the *Journal belge des connaissances utiles* dedicates to the orthophrenic establishment describes the procedures employed by Voisin in different categorized targets. This article sees, in Voisin, the example of the doctor who understood “the dignity of his social mission” and strives to “develop all our faculties” (JOURNAL BELGE, 1834, p. 202-204, our translation). The text describes the orthophrenic establishment as “a kind of moral asylum for an infinity of young children, despair of their families, who end up ending their days in Charenton¹⁷, at the Conciergerie¹⁸, or in prisons”, an establishment in which “the that orthopedists practice for the rectification of the dimension of the limbs [...], on a large scale, for the direction of the spirit and for the cerebral organs”. The article explains how Voisin works on born idiots, reinforcing outside forces to help the organs develop. Regarding the second category, that of “addicts since childhood”, it is a question of bringing their faculties back “to their primitive and normal state”, that is, to their state prior to the deviations caused by education. In the third, Voisin strives to achieve “harmonious balance between the propensities that tend to break their natural hierarchy”, that is, striving to reestablish the predominance of intellectual and moral faculties over animal propensities. Finally, for the last category, he tries, through a physical, intellectual and moral regimen, to free the organism “from the terrible tyranny of habit. For heredity is nothing but the habit of certain procedures of nutrition, of certain vital movements” gymnastics (CROMMELINCK, 1842, p. 191, our translation). We observed, then, that even the children of alienated people, considered prone to fatality, do not lack the possibility of re-education.

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¹⁷ N. do T. Charenton Asylum was a former psychiatric asylum that would become a Public Health Facility Esquirol or Hôpital Esquirol.

¹⁸ N. do T. It is in the Conciergerie building that the Palais de Justice de Paris.



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