



[Compte-rendu] Ferdinand Buisson, penseur de l'autorité: Du théologique au pédagogique. Par Anne-Claire Husser. Travaux de philosophie, volume 29. Edité par André Charrak et Denis Kambouchner. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019. 466 p.

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individual stories” to “speak for themselves” (8). Agency, as a result, seems to escape representation: it is self-evident, naturalized, and, at times, dehistoricized. There is nothing intrinsically rebellious about masturbation, arson, bodily destruction, or any of other acts that Toth celebrates as modes of resistance. These are all fundamentally shaped by the situation, structure, and expectations of the institution. In other words, they are not “external” to power. Toth’s recovery of the voices of these young boys from fragments in the archives is truly admirable but his examples only confirm that context always molds agency and that sources, in fact, never “speak for themselves.”

Furthermore, while Toth carefully maps out contextual changes from 1840 to 1937, it is not always clear how these shifts affected the power struggles within Mettray. For instance, Toth barely mentions colonialism and yet, some of his evidence is saturated with racialized language (references to the *bagne* and the *caid* for example, 80). This seems especially surprising given that his first book centered on penal colonies and that so much fantastic scholarship on incarceration has pushed us beyond methodological nationalism to reconsider the relationship between metropole and colony.⁶ It is clear by now that empires reshaped the interior frontiers of the nation and that social anxieties about French identity (especially childhood) were only exacerbated with colonial expansion. Ironically, the most salient and trenchant critiques of Foucault today point not to his inattention to agency but to his apparent blindness to broader global and colonial settings. How then, did France’s massive colonial growth impact the project of “internal colonization” at Mettray? More broadly, can we treat Mettray less as an *object* and more as a *problem*, as a fascinating lens to rethink power and subjectivity throughout the nineteenth century from a comparative perspective? Finally, how can Toth’s rich empirical study help us engage critical carceral studies—one of the most vibrant and stimulating fields in both France and the US, especially around questions of gender, race, and intersectionality?

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⁶ See, e.g., Dominique Kalifa, *Biribi: Les bagnes coloniaux de l’armée française* (Paris, 2009); Miranda Frances Spieler, *Empire and Underworld: Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, MA, 2011); Peter Redfield, *Space in the Tropics: From Convicts to Rockets in French Guiana* (Berkeley, CA, 2000).

Ferdinand Buisson, penseur de l’autorité: Du théologique au pédagogique. By Anne-Claire Husser. Travaux de philosophie, volume 29. Edited by André Charrak and Denis Kambouchner. Paris: Honoré Champion, 2019. Pp. 466. €58.00.

With this dense work, Anne-Claire Husser, a specialist in the philosophy and history of educational ideas, offers readers the substance of her thesis “Du théologique au pédagogique: Ferdinand Buisson et le problème de l’autorité,” submitted to the École normale supérieure de Lyon in 2012. In her introduction, Husser offers a masterly twenty-page biographical synthesis of the work of Ferdinand Buisson (1841–1932), a key figure in the Third Republic’s effort to replace the influence of the Catholic Church in society with a secular moral code taught in the state school system and supposed to be acceptable to believers of all stripes. As Director of Primary Education in France, Buisson was an architect of the Ferry laws (1881–82) instituting secular education and free and compulsory

public primary schooling. He later served as chair of the parliamentary committee that implemented the law of separation between church and state (1905) and in 1927 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Author of an important pedagogical compendium entitled *le Nouveau Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d'instruction primaire* (1911), he promoted educational ideas that still shape the French educational system at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Buisson's identity as a Protestant also nourished a causal theory still commonly accepted in France. According to this theory, Protestantism served in the predominantly Catholic society of France as a springboard for establishing French *laïcité*, usually (though imperfectly) translated into English as "secularism." Eugène Sue (1804–57), a very close friend of Buisson and a supporter of his ideas, expressed this view by saying that Protestantism served as a "bridge religion" leading to the outcome he called for: "a superior society where man will finally be emancipated from the practice of any religion" ("Quelles cause ont amené la réaction catholique?," *Journal de la Haye*, November 6, 1856).

Anne-Claire Husser does not accept this theory. Following in the footsteps of Laurence Loeffel, Patrick Cabanel, and Pierre Ognier (25), she warns that the phrase "from the theological to the pedagogical" that forms the title of her book describes only Buisson's intellectual chronology and not "a univocal transfer from the religious sphere to the profane sphere" (27). Recalling that one of Buisson's first pedagogical publications was *De l'enseignement de l'histoire sainte dans les écoles primaires* (The teaching of sacred history in the primary schools; Paris, 1869), she shows that, in Buisson's view, "the pedagogical and the political work on the theological from the outset" (28, and chap. 3).

The main body of the book is divided into two parts that are united by the common thread of Buisson's conflicted relationship with authority (17), which the author uses to explain the coherence of Buisson's thought as a liberal Protestant, a pedagogue, and subsequently a free-thinker and radical socialist (389). A lengthy and judiciously presented bibliography and two indexes, one of names and the other of themes, complete the volume.

Anne-Claire Husser's objective, based on Buisson's texts, is to illuminate the origins of the ideas that governed his republican and democratic conception of education through his theology of "secularizing authority" (390). She clearly designates as the cornerstones of Buisson's thought his rejection of the authority both of the Bible and (following Sébastien Castellion, to whom he dedicated his thesis) of the Reformed tradition of predestination. While he failed in his attempt to found a deconfessionalized, undogmatic church in Neuchâtel, he maintained the principle that the authority of the conscience takes precedence over that of the Bible. It was in the crucible of this rejection and this principle that Buisson broke with traditional political authority and forged his radical-socialist educational and political thought. Buisson posited the norm of "interior authority" (392) based on the "intuitive method" (256–70). The desired "neutrality" of the state-run school, which he assimilated to a deconfessionalized public space (325), was already present in the form of the "church" that he had tried to found in Neuchâtel, which was to serve as a meeting place for followers of all religions.

Husser offers a fine presentation of the theological issues distinguishing orthodox Protestantism from what she might have called Buisson's ultra-liberal Protestantism (213–35). Thus she establishes that the cradle of Buisson's ideas should be sought not in orthodox Protestantism but rather in the French Revolution.

As a thinker, Buisson was clearly an evolutionist. With the movement of *christianisme libéral* that he founded, he claimed to complete Luther's Reformation. In fact, according to Buisson, Luther had only changed the forms of worship that affected the practices of the people and removed the idols from the Church. The "formulas," as Buisson called them, that is to say the doctrines, were still to be reformed.

The “idol” of dogma continued to enthrall both the “orthodox” and the “rationalist.” *Le christianisme libéral* was to be “the new way,” distinguished from its predecessors and bringing the Reformation to its completion by offering no redemption other than education.¹ “A merciful God who wants to save his victims and who, for this purpose, has no other means than to cruelly strike his innocent Son in their place! No, no, this God is not ours, and we cannot ask our children to believe in him,” Buisson exclaimed.² He disseminated this position in the new sacred history that he published, intending to shape young minds by a liberal approach to the Bible, purged of texts he considered as “barbaric,” irrational, or nourishing superstition, and providing a universal moral catechism, the first step “of the liberal Church to the laic school” (163–68). Here, a comparison with François Guizot, a Protestant involved in the Reformed Church and the Minister of Education who gave his name in 1833 to the first law requiring communes to open boys’ schools, would have further strengthened the author’s argument.³

Anne-Claire Husser conducted this research at a time when the book *A Religion for the Republic: The Secular Faith of Ferdinand Buisson* (2010) by the philosopher Vincent Peillon (President Hollande’s Minister of Education from May 16, 2012 to April 2, 2014) was being debated. It was in this context that Buisson’s break with established authority inspired the author to make this concluding plea not to submit blindly to Buisson’s own authority: “Let us wager that the rediscovery of his [Buisson’s] thought, begun a few years ago, will, by the light it throws on the republican tradition to which we are heirs, aid us in guarding against the slavish cult of the lost greatness of yesterday’s school, while inviting us to take the full measure of our own historical task” (397).

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¹ “The orthodox profess to believe a certain number of fundamental truths, which they consider as revealed by an inspired book, the Bible, and as inseparable from the Christian religion: these truths are called dogmas. The heterodox, better known under the name of rationalists, submit all these dogmas to examination and reject all that they believe to be contrary to human reason. A third party, which places itself not between the other two, as is sometimes said, but quite apart from and above them, today claims the double title of evangelical and liberal: it is, up to now, the least understood and for this very reason the least numerous of the three.” Ferdinand Buisson, *Le christianisme libéral* (Paris, 1865), 5–6.

² Ferdinand Buisson, *La religion, la morale et la science, et leur conflit dans l’éducation contemporaine* (Paris, 1900), 42.

³ See, e.g., Anne Ruolt, “L’École Républicaine est-elle le fruit des idées et de valeurs protestantes?,” *Recherches en Éducation* 14 (2012): 110–27.

Hiding the Guillotine: Public Executions in France, 1870–1939. By Emmanuel Taïeb. Translated by Sarah-Louise Raillard. Foreword by Mitchel P. Roth. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020. Pp. xxii+290. \$49.95 (cloth); \$24.99 (e-book).

On June 17, 1939, Eugen Weidmann, a German serial killer, was guillotined in front of the Saint-Pierre prison in Versailles. Numerous spectators took pictures of the execution, although it was illegal to do so. Perhaps because of this, the president of the French Republic, Albert Lebrun, banned public executions shortly thereafter. Executions were carried out inside prisons from that moment until the abolition of the death penalty in 1981.