

# **Longing for Consolation**

Emotive failure and changing affective niches for late nineteenth century French materialists.

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## **Summary:**

The aim of this thesis is to understand the workings and meaning of consolation for late nineteenth century “*Libres Penseurs*” - the community of positivist, materialist, anticlerical thinkers that dominated public debate in the French Third Republic. It argues that these thinkers experienced emotive failure as they tried to dismiss Catholic consolation, but continued to experience its lack. Furthermore, it shows that in their attempt to resolve this emotive failure, some of these thinkers started to rely on scientific experiment as an affective niche affording a secular experience of consolation.

This thesis is divided in three chapters. The first chapter contrasts materialist and catholic arguments about consolation. It shows how consolation became highly controversial as materialists argued that it was both useless – since science would soon bring an end to human suffering - and harmful – since it pacified sufferers instead of activating them to fight for better living conditions. The second chapter sheds light on materialist writings that are expressive of a certain longing for consolation. Following a biocultural understanding of human experience, this thesis does not explain this longing away as the result of a natural human need for consolation, but argues that these materialists longed specifically for catholic forms of consolation, and that they did so because they were still attuned to Catholic environments that afforded Catholic consolations. It accounts for this on the basis of an enactive framework for the understanding of experience, that sees experience not merely as constructed by discourse, but as emerging from the reciprocal engagement of an actor with other aspects of their environment, such as objects, sounds, or other persons. Despite their firm beliefs in a materialist world, materialists continued, by virtue of their attunement to Catholic affective niches, to long for the Catholic experience of consolation that was no longer rationally tenable to them. Drawing on and expanding William Reddy’s theory of the emotive, this chapter shows that this conflict led them to experience emotive failure: many did no longer allow themselves to feel consoled by religion, but did not succeed to completely give up on it either. In response to this emotive failure, some materialists chose to readjust to the Catholic affective niches they had known from their youth. They converted back to Catholicism to feel the related consolations once again. Others, however, tried to develop new forms of secular consolation, by developing new affective niches. This second strategy forms the subject of the last chapter of this thesis. The secular forms of consolation developed by materialist thinkers were based on the idea of the eternal circulation of matter, and on the idea of the progress of science. In the last part of this thesis, it is argued that to some materialists, scientific experiments, as demonstrations of the power of the mind over matter holding the promise of a future end to all human suffering, became affective niches affording secular consolations.

*Pour Opa, qui a pris au sérieux ce drôle de projet d'histoire des émotions, et qui, d'une patience infinie et avec l'oeuil du détail, a trouvé les pistes dont j'avais bien besoin en rentrant bredouille des archives Parisiennes. Et pour Mamy, qui m'a encouragé à profiter de la vie avec énergie, à oser faire ce qui paraît difficile, et à reprendre le travail après de délicieux repas (végétariens, ou pas). Mille mercis, je vous aime de tout mon coeur.*

## Content

<u>Introduction</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Chapter 1. Dismissing Consolation</u>	<u>17</u>
1.1 Why materialists have anything to say about the heart.	17
1.2 Consoling the ill and the dying: savior or useless intrusion?	19
1.3 Consoling humanity: eternal justice or pacifying illusion?	23
<u>Chapter 2. Longing for Consolation</u>	<u>33</u>
2.1 The difficulty of giving up on consolation.	33
2.2 Affective niches affording Catholic consolations.	39
2.3 The emotive failure of materialist thinkers.	49
<u>Chapter 3. Affective niches affording secular consolations</u>	<u>55</u>
3.1 Two ideas for a secular consolation.	55
3.2 The consolation of reason and science for Jean-Martin Charcot and Émile Zola.	58
3.3 Jules Claretie and scientific experiment as an affective niche.	66
<u>Conclusion and Discussion</u>	<u>71</u>
<u>Primary Sources</u>	<u>75</u>
<u>Literature</u>	<u>78</u>

## Introduction

A decade after the death of Jean-Martin Charcot - the famous late nineteenth century ‘father of Neurology’ - an in memoriam was published in the *Annales Politiques et littéraires* entitled “Charcot, le consolateur.”<sup>1</sup> This eulogy was written by Jules Claretie, a novelist who had often attended Charcot’s public demonstrations of hypnotism, and who decided to depict him as the great consolator of his time; as the person who brought order and peace to the patients residing in what had for a long time been the “Enfer de la Salpêtrière.”<sup>2</sup> This emphasis on Charcot’s consolatory capacities is surprising, as he is known today as concerned much more with the categorization of hysteria and with public demonstrations of hypnotic experiments, than with healing - let alone consoling - his patients. When looking at his treatises, his published lectures and even his unpublished medical observations, actual mentions of consolation are barely present. If anything, consolation was not a term that Charcot himself liked to put forward to describe his work. Why, in that case, did consolation become, to Claretie and others, key to Charcot’s legacy?<sup>3</sup> How should we understand the meaning of their use of the term consolation, and to whom exactly were Charcot’s practices consolatory?

It is with these questions that this thesis starts and ends. In answering them, my aim is to understand the workings and meaning of consolation for late nineteenth century “Libres Penseurs” - the community of positivist, materialist, anticlerical thinkers that dominated public debate at the time of the “République des Républicains.”<sup>4</sup> In the last decades of the nineteenth century, many of these Freethinkers, consisting of mostly male politicians, scientists, doctors, writers, artists and journalists, were firm atheists who contributed to the thorough secularization of, mostly Parisian, public institutions. Their story, according to historian Jacqueline Lalouette, represents a capital moment in the long history of the relation between men and their idea of God.<sup>5</sup> This thesis sheds new light on this relation by showing that the upsurge of materialist thinking and policy went hand in hand with the rise of what I will call ‘the problem of consolation.’

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<sup>1</sup> Jules Claretie, “Charcot, le consolateur.” *Les Annales Politiques et Littéraires* 21, no.2 (September 20, 1903), 179-180.

<sup>2</sup> Id. 180.

<sup>3</sup> Besides Claretie, Charles Féré also emphasized Charcot’s consolatory capacities, and a front-page article in the *Croix*, published the day after Charcot’s death suggested explicitly that Charcot could never have consoled his patients. Charles Féré, “Charcot et son œuvre” *La revue des deux mondes*, Tome 122, (1894) 410-424, 422.: Le Moine, “Charcot” *La Croix*, August 19, 1893, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Jacqueline, Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

<sup>5</sup> Id., Conclusion, Ibook.

According to Historian Jan Goldstein, consolation was an “art” that Catholicism had “cultivated assiduously” over centuries.<sup>6</sup> These Catholic forms of consolation had “systemized the rhetorical forms through which human beings might bring this soothing psychological aid to one another.”<sup>7</sup> More specifically, historian Frédéric Gugelot characterized the Catholicism of nineteenth century France as “un catholicisme de consolations.”<sup>8</sup> Only Christianity, it was argued by nineteenth-century French Catholic thinkers, could provide consolation.<sup>9</sup> Such Consolations were given to those suffering from illness or impending death by offering a reason for their suffering - the absolution of sins -<sup>10</sup> but also by offering the perspective of eternal justice and health in the afterlife - captured in the often-cited passage of the Gospel of Matthew: “Heureux ceux qui pleurent, car ils seront consolés.”<sup>11</sup> In 1864, Reverend Father Alexis Lefebvre of the congregation of the Compagnie de Jésus in Paris, described these two types of consolation as that of faith and that of hope. Throughout this faith and hope, an important aspect of Christian consolation was the presence and commiseration of God or Jesus Christ, as someone you were suffering with. This aspect is vividly described by dr. Alfred Devers, who at the time was chief doctor of the Hospital of Saint-Jean-d’Angély in the southwest of France:

Celui qui a connu l’angoisse des grandes souffrances; celui qui a connu l’impuissance des consolations humaines; celui qui pour se relever a posé son cœur broyé et meurtri sur le cœur de Jésus; celui qui a senti ce cœur sacré battre sur son propre cœur; celui qui a vu l’aiguillon de la douleur se briser à ce contact divin et une infinie consolation succéder soudain au deuil de son âme, celui-là a senti Dieu.<sup>12</sup>

As I will show in the second chapter, the concrete day to day presence of nuns, priests, rituals and symbols, were crucial to this religious experience of consolation.

In their conflict with Catholicism, many materialists explicitly criticized these Christian ways of consoling, and this is where “the problem of consolation” arises. The problem of consolation is best understood as the experience of the lack of consolation that emerged as the

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<sup>6</sup> Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 203.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 203.

<sup>8</sup> Frédéric Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2010), 374.

<sup>9</sup> see, for instance, the introduction to Alexis Lefebvre, *Consolations* 11th ed., (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1864), I.

<sup>10</sup> Lefebvre, *Consolations*, 8-12. See also, Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 203-204.

<sup>11</sup> Alexis Lefebvre, *Consolations* 11th ed., (Paris: Delhomme et Briguet, 1864), 18-28: 23 “Dieu vous donne en ce moment sa grâce de force, de patience pour souffrir; et demain il vous donnera sa gloire, espérez bien et consolez-vous.”

<sup>12</sup> Devers, *Le Christianisme et le Matérialisme devant la raison et la science*, (Saint Jean d’Angély: E. Lemarié, 1877), 168. See also: Lefebvre, *Consolations*, 12-13.

protagonists of the *Libre Pensée*, convinced of the progress of humanity and the promise of an end to all suffering, not only declared the death of God, but also declared all consolations obsolete. Consolation was seen as harmful - since it prevented active efforts towards a better future - and as unnecessary – since science would bring universal health and justice to humanity. Of course, the end of suffering did not arrive in the blink of an eye, and I will argue here that to address the uncertainty that remained or ensued, it seems many materialists still longed for the consolations that religion had offered before.

I propose to interpret the meaning and workings of consolation for late nineteenth-century French *Libre Pensée* through the application of an enactive model of cognition. In doing so I hope to show, and this is the second aim of this thesis, that this model can serve as an interpretative framework for the history of experience. Before detailing my source selection and chapter outline, I will start by giving a brief overview of the way this thesis relates to the previous historiography on the tensions between Catholicism and the *Libre Pensée* in late nineteenth century France. Thereafter, I will introduce my methodological and theoretical approach - the enactive framework - while situating it in its own methodological tradition.

#### Contributions to historiography on the *Libre Pensée*, secularization and medical science

The history of the *Libre Pensée*, and of its tensions with catholic thinking in the third republic, was long neglected by historians. One of the reasons for this neglect, according to historian Maurice Agulhon, was that in the last decades of the twentieth century, French historians viewed class struggle as the driving force in the nineteenth century, and therefore barely paid attention to the disputes between liberal and catholic members of the bourgeoisie, nor to the anticlerical character of uprisings amongst the working class.<sup>13</sup> They thus neglected the history of what Agulhon calls the “war of religions.”<sup>14</sup> This changed when Jacqueline Lalouette, in 1997, published the first monograph on the history of Freethinking in France between 1848 and 1940.<sup>15</sup>

The history of the *Libre Pensée*, as Lalouette’s work exemplifies, is strongly related both to the history of anticlericalism and laicity, and to the history of science. In a sketch of the very rich and diverse historiographical tradition on Laicity in France, Lalouette points out that this historiography has focused almost exclusively on the question of the secularization of

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<sup>13</sup> Maurice Agulhon “Préface” in: Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> Maurice Agulhon “Préface” in: Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008).

<sup>15</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), Introduction, Ibook.; Jean-Marie Mayeur Review of *La Libre pensée en France 1848-1940*, by Jacqueline Lalouette, in *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 54, No. 6 (1999), 1403-1405, 1403.

public schools, thus leaving the secularization of, for instance, the system of law but also of medicine relatively underexamined.<sup>16</sup> As was argued by Hervé Guillemain, moreover, the history of the relation between scientific and religious practices of medicine and healing, has often been represented as a history of confrontation and opposition. In his recent work *Diriger les consciences*, Guillemain proposed to understand this relation as one of exchange and reciprocal influence.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in *The End of the Soul. Scientific Modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology* Jennifer Michael Hecht elucidates the formative role played by a fervent anticlericalism and atheism in the development of modern science, and anthropology in particular. Through this atheism, the theistic tradition itself influenced anthropology as Hecht argues that anthropologists in the last decades of the nineteenth century “came to provide a kind of replacement cult, complete with death rites in the form of an autopsy society and a variety of other services that paralleled Catholic ritual.”<sup>18</sup> I wish to contribute to these strands of research by showing how materialist thinking or *Libre Pensée* was shaped, in important respects, by the religious scaffolding of their thinkers' experience of (a lack of) consolation. In addition to historiography on the *Libre Pensée* in particular, I hope to contribute to research on the shaping of masculine scientific identities in the late nineteenth century. As Heather Ellis has shown for nineteenth-century Britain, the ideal of “scientific men” was by no means stable. Rather, it was shaped, contested and reshaped again and again throughout the decades. For instance, Ellis, opposes a kind of manly hero of the 1830s and 1840s characterized by “moral qualities, in particular sincerity, humility and self-discipline.”<sup>19</sup> to the “cold and calculating model of scientific masculinity” of which scientists were accused around the early 1880s.<sup>20</sup> More recently, in *Humane Professions*, Rob Boddice shed light on the “emotion work” done by scientists, in the United States, United Kingdom and Germany in the last decades of the twentieth century, to justify this callousness and “transform it into a humanitarian medical

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<sup>16</sup> Jacqueline Lalouette, “Laïcité et séparation des Églises et de l'état: esquisse d'un bilan historiographique (2003-2005)”, *Revue Historique*, 307, 4 (849-870), 866.; See also Jacqueline Lalouette, “Sur la laïcité républicaine” lecture at Paris8 for the *Journées d'étude: Tolérance, liberté de conscience, laïcité: quelle place pour l'athéisme?* (2016) <https://vimeo.com/139707370>; For more historiography on Laïcité in France; Jean Baubérot, “Les enjeux scientifiques de l'historiographie de la loi de 1905. Un bilan”, in *Laïcité et Sécularisation dans l'Union Européenne, Bruxelles, Éditions de l'université de Bruxelles*, 2006, 21-32.; Patrick Cabanel, *Entre religions et laïcité: la voie française, XIXe-XXIe siècles*, (Toulouse: Privat, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> Hervé Guillemain, *Diriger les consciences, guérir les âmes: une histoire comparée des pratiques thérapeutiques et religieuses (1830-1939)*, (Paris: La Découverte, 2016), 8.

<sup>18</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht, *The end of the Soul. Scientific modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain 1831-1918*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 10.

<sup>20</sup> Heather Ellis, *Masculinity and Science in Britain 1831-1918*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 11.



masculinity.”<sup>21</sup> In this thesis, I will build on these findings and show that the moral ideals that played a role in determining models of masculinity in France were intertwined with and co-determined by certain experiential requirements and practices of emotional navigation.

Importantly, this thesis is not limited to scientific and medical men, but studies novelists, journalists and politicians as well. What these men had in common was a loose association with the Libre Pensée, and a fierce rejection of God and the Catholic church. I do not use the term Libre Pensée in its narrow sense, comprising only those who adhered to actual Libre Pensée societies, but in a broad sense, incorporating all those who trusted only their reason, and wanted to get rid of religious beliefs.<sup>22</sup> The fact that, according to Lalouette, the period between 1880 and 1914 represented the heyday of the Libre Pensée associations, will, however, play an important role here as the political and institutional background of the experiences I am studying. During the Third Republic, more than a thousand associations of the Libre Pensée existed in France, aimed at secularizing the French state, as well as the French mind.<sup>23</sup> These Libres Penseurs were part of what Lalouette calls the second wave of Libre Pensée associations, characterized by its strong materialism and atheism.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, in contrast with the deistic character of the first wave of Libre Penseurs that were prominent in the 1840’s, these second wave thinkers actively fought against the idea of god, arguing that religion was the enemy of science.<sup>25</sup> Following the broad understanding of Libre Pensée, but situating it in late-nineteenth-century France, I will here use the terms Libre Penseurs, materialism, atheism or antiseccularism somewhat interchangeably to point to this loose community of thinkers.

Combining the history of a broad understanding of Libre Pensée and its relation to religion, I will engage with different strands of historiography in which consolation is mentioned but never historicized or at the center of the analysis. The important exception, which showed the nineteenth-century contestation in France of a centuries-old Christian authority over consolation in western Europe, is Jan Goldstein’s classic, *Console and Classify* (1987). Goldstein has pointed to the role of the concept of consolation in the self-definition of medical psychiatry as it developed in opposition to the early nineteenth century upsurge of catholic institutions for the care of persons with mental illnesses. Situated right after this

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<sup>21</sup> Rob Boddice, *Humane Professions: The Defence of Experimental Medicine, 1876-1914*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 3.

<sup>22</sup> In Contrast with Lalouette, who follows the narrow definition: Jacqueline, Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), Introduction, Ibook.

<sup>23</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), Introduction, Ibook.

<sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Lalouette, "Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870)." *Romantisme* 21, no.73 (1991), 57-67, 57.

<sup>25</sup> Lalouette, "Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870)," 58.

upsurge of both secular and religious institutions, and just before the introduction of psychotherapy, the late nineteenth century in France is particularly interesting for a study of these shifting authorities on consolation. It is the period in which, as pointed out by Hervé Guillemain, the secular, medical perspective penetrated the Catholic church and the rest of society.<sup>26</sup> It is worthwhile to look at the history of the *Libre Pensée* and of secularization again, to shed light, through the concept of consolation, on the experiential aspects of the tensions between Catholicism and secularization, and on the role these experiences played in the development of a secular understanding of medicine and science.<sup>27</sup> I will describe the method by which I aim to make this contribution in the following section.

### Methodology and methodological state of the art

To begin with, this thesis is concerned with the phenomenon of consolation. It starts with the conviction that practices of consolation - soothing words, an embrace or a kiss - are far from self-explanatory or natural. Rather, it is the inextricable dynamic of bodily features and cultural context that make certain physical acts consolatory to some, but stale, offensive or inappropriately intimate to others. In looking at historical practices, I will therefore resist the temptation of offering a full-fledged definition of consolation before examining my sources, nor propose an understanding of consolation as a natural and universally human need. Rather, I will situate the use of the term 'consolation' in its own historical context and understand the longing for consolation as a historically specific longing for a historically specific type of consolatory practice.

Instead of using universalizing definitions, I will follow a certain broad conception of the kind of thing consolation is. Consolation is understood here as an encounter between an actor and their socio-material environment that has a transformative effect on the actor's experience - from bad to good, from worried to relieved, from distressed to happy, from ill-feeling to better, etc. This outlook sets this project apart from those of earlier historians interested in the phenomenon, as it focusses not on verbal forms of consolation and the changing norms governing such texts, but much more on the way interpersonal relations and relations to objects and spaces gave shape to, and were in turn shaped by, consolatory practices and their experiential effects.

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<sup>26</sup> Guillemain, *Diriger les consciences, guérir les âmes: une histoire comparée des pratiques thérapeutiques et religieuses (1830-1939)*, 11.

<sup>27</sup> Following Rob Boddice's point on readdressing much studied historical topics from an emotions history perspective in the conclusion to "Rob Boddice, *The science of sympathy: Morality, evolution, and victorian civilization*, (Champaign (IL): University of Illinois Press, 2016), 137-138.

Indeed, although in the past decade, the subject of consolation has been of growing interest to scholars in different disciplines – such as Philosophy (Foessel 2015), Religion studies (Klass 2022), and Psychiatry (André 2022) – most scholarship on the history of consolation remains limited to scattered case studies working on the norms surrounding verbal consolation.<sup>28</sup> Such historical studies of consolation often revolve around one type or body of consolatory texts. A few examples are Colin and Jo Atkinson’s work on nineteenth-century North American parlor songs - where they argue that these sentimental songs about the loss of a loved one replaced the “more formal consolation literature of poets and clergymen” - and Raymond Baustert’s large-scale analysis of the ideas underlying epistolary consolation in the first half of the Seventeenth century.<sup>29</sup> Last year, historian Michael Ignatieff published *On Consolation: Finding Solace in Dark Times*, where, in contrast with most historians concerned with consolation, he attempts to study the topic throughout the ages.<sup>30</sup> His aim, however, is to find a kind of Western-European shared experience of consolation from antiquity to the present, thereby ignoring the historical specificity of consolatory practices and experiences.

In their focus on discursive and normative aspects of verbal consolation, historians have moreover largely neglected spaces and non-verbal practices, and are only recently starting to pay attention to the way these shaped experiences of consolation. I will build on the work done by Christoph Jedan, Avril Maddrell and Eric Venbrux, whose *Consolationscapes in the Face of Loss*, published in 2018, represents an important exception to the verbal-centered studies of consolation.<sup>31</sup> This edited volume groups a number of interdisciplinary (including historical) articles on consolation in Europe and the global south. Through the concept of consolationscapes, this book shows the importance of spaces and practices of consolation in shaping different experiences throughout societies. Furthermore, I will contribute to the newly rising interest in the *experience* of consolation, examples of which are Ronald K. Rittgers’ work on consolation in the age of reform, and the work of Sarah Elizabeth Wilson on consolation in

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<sup>28</sup> Christophe André, *Consolations. Celles que l'on reçoit et celles que l'on donne*, (Paris: Iconoclaste, 2022); Dennis Klass, *Culture, Consolation, and Continuing Bonds in Bereavement: The Selected Works of Dennis Klass*, (Milton: Routledge, 2022); Michaël Foessel, *Le temps de la consolation*, (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Colin. B. Atkinson and Jo B. Atkinson, “Changing attitudes to death: Nineteenth-century parlour songs as consolation literature,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 23, No.2, (1992), 79-100.; Raymond Baustert, *La consolation érudite: huit études sur les sources des lettres de consolation de 1600 à 1650*, (Tübingen: Günter Narr Verlag, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *On consolation. Finding Solace in Dark Times*, (New York: Macmillan, 2021).

<sup>31</sup> Christoph Jedan, Avril Maddrell and Eric Venbrux, eds. *Consolationscapes in the face of loss: Grief and consolation in space and time*, (Milton: Routledge, 2018).

Late Medieval England.<sup>32</sup> While Wilson studies the politics of written accounts of grief that exceeded late Medieval social norms, Rittgers argues that the new forms of verbal consolation in the age of reform ‘worked’ in the sense that their ‘users’ did feel consoled by them. In his work, Rittgers shows that the early modern period was characterized by an unprecedented proliferation of verbal consolation and that the protestant reformation in Europe should be understood primarily as a reform in consolation.<sup>33</sup>

Besides setting this project apart from most classical works on the history of consolation, my understanding of consolation as a transformative encounter between an actor and their environment aligns this project with the growing interest amongst historians of the emotions and experience in the role of the environment in the shaping and changing of experience.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, historians have increasingly engaged with theories of cognition that propose to rethink the way the mind relates to its environment by seeing it not as the propositional interpretation or discursive construction of otherwise meaningless sense data, but as a kind of engagement or attunement with an already meaningful environment. Indeed, it is argued that human intentionality cannot be explained as a computation of the brain but should be seen as a dynamic system incorporating the mind, the body and the world.<sup>35</sup> Historians have thus made use of ecological psychology,<sup>36</sup> of theories of situated cognition,<sup>37</sup> of the actor-network theory,<sup>38</sup> and of dynamical systems theory<sup>39</sup> to argue for the entanglement of the mind with its world. Despite the differences between these models, the general consensus here is that, as was argued by Smail: “there is no such thing as humanity without the material environment in which we lived and evolved.”<sup>40</sup> In this thesis, my aim is to contribute to the application of situational theories of cognition in historical research, and to further our understanding of what

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<sup>32</sup> Ronald K. Rittgers, "The age of reform as an age of consolation," *Church History* 86, no. 3 (2017), 607-642.; Sarah Elizabeth Wilson, "Beyond Consolation: The Ethics and Politics of Sorrow in Late Medieval England" (Doctoral dissertation, Northwestern University, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> Rittgers, "The age of reform as an age of consolation," 2017; see also: Jan Frans Van Dijkhuizen, "'Never Better': Affliction, Consolation and the Culture of Protestantism in Early Modern England," *Journal of Early Modern Christianity* 5 no.1 (2018), 1-34.

<sup>34</sup> Ruth Leys, *The ascent of affect*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).; Monique Scheer, "Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion," *History and theory* 51, no. 2 (2012), 193-220.; Daniel Lord Smail, *On deep history and the brain*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, William M. Reddy, "The unavoidable intentionality of affect: The history of emotions and the neurosciences of the present day," *Emotion Review* 12, no.3 (2020), 168-178.; Leys, *The ascent of affect*, 14-15.

<sup>36</sup> Leys, *The ascent of affect*,

<sup>37</sup> Scheer, "Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion".

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Lord Smail, "Neurohistory in action: Hoarding and the human past." *Isis*, 105, no.1 (2014), 110-122.

<sup>39</sup> Rob Boddice and Mark Smith, *Emotion, sense, experience*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

<sup>40</sup> Smail, "Neurohistory in action: Hoarding and the human past." 115.

it means to understand humans as biocultural entities, as was recently proposed by Rob Boddice and Mark Smith.<sup>41</sup>

I will do so by proposing the application of an enactive understanding of emotions and experience. The value of the enactive approach for historical research lies in the fact that it allows for an understanding of cognition as emerging from a culturally meaningful *and* embodied relation to our environment. Indeed, in this view, living organisms are always, by virtue of their biological organization, creating meaning.<sup>42</sup> This creation of meaning, or “sense-making”, is the cognitive process by which organisms are constantly attuning and reattuning to their environment in order to survive and persist as autonomous beings. By virtue of this perspective, of their aim to survive, the environment is never neutrally given: it is always given according to a certain perspective and action-readiness. The organism in this view is not interpreting sense data but perceiving so-called “affordances.” An affordance, in an enactive understanding of cognition, is an opportunity for action given by the environment in relation to someone’s physiology and skills.<sup>43</sup> For instance, a glass of water affords people who are encultured in a contemporary European society and have relevant abilities or skills, to drink water from, without the need to mediate that act by reflection on the objective qualities (surface, weight, color) of the glass. The process of making sense of one’s environment is not propositional or representational but shaped by direct interaction with it.

An important enactive concept that I will use in this project, is that of the affective niche: an aspect of the environment that, by its attunement to a certain actor, affords this actor the same specific experience time and again.<sup>44</sup> For instance, a certain song may afford you the same specific feeling of nostalgia time after time, whereas hearing it might ‘feel’ differently to a person with a completely different personal and cultural background. Because affective niches afford experiences, studying them allows us to shed light on “the situated context of

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<sup>41</sup> Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, sense, experience*.

<sup>42</sup> Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1992).; Giovanna Colombetti, “Enaction, Sense-Making and Emotion,” in *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, edited by John Stewart, Olivier Gapenne, Ezequiel A. Di Paolo, (Cambridge (Mass): MIT Press, 2010).; Giovanna Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2014); Giovanna Colombetti, “From Affect Programs to Dynamical Discrete Emotions,” *Philosophical Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2009): 407–25.

<sup>43</sup> First coined by James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), but see for a more recent discussion: Jesse Prinz and Daniel Shargel, “An Enactivist Theory of Emotional Content,” in *The Ontology of Emotions*, edited by Hichem Naar and Fabrice Teroni (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2018), 110–129, 114–115.

<sup>44</sup> Colombetti, Giovanna, and Krueger, Joel, “Scaffoldings of the affective mind,” *Philosophical Psychology* 28, no.8 (2015), 1157–1176, 1160.

possibilities” of experiencing.<sup>45</sup> Individuals often make niches themselves, such as a playlist, a prayer or a way of holding someone’s hand, and can use those as tools to alter their experiences.

Through the concept of the affective niche, the enactive framework invites and justifies paying attention to the way historical actors actively sought to engage with and shape their environment in order to alter their experiences. It provides an explanatory framework for the way in which contextually specific, situated, experiences can arise, and allows historians of experience to pay attention to the interplay of material, social and cultural aspects of an actor’s environment - including beliefs and norms, but also, for instance, habits, objects and other persons.<sup>46</sup> In the case of consolation, it can be particularly relevant to look at the engagement with other persons, and at the way in which other person’s acts or even experiences can become affective niches for someone. In this project, I focus not on individual experiences of grief, pain or empathy, but on consolatory interactions. As I will argue in the last chapter of this thesis, the enactive framework allows me to understand how consoling another person can have a consolatory effect on the consoler as well.

Lastly, I believe taking a dynamical biocultural perspective on experience invites us to reimagine the way in which we understand stability and change. There is no longer a biological unchanged basis, nor can there be a complete, but changeable, determination by culture.<sup>47</sup> Rather, stabilized discourses are shaped and pressured by embodied experiences that are constantly transgressing the limits of what can be said - for instance when available categories seem unfit for the diagnosis of an experienced disease - and reversely, stabilized embodied experiences are constantly resisting changes of discourse - which is the case in the story I want to tell in this thesis.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, if embodied experiences are not determined by discourse alone, but by the interplay of a living organism with its linguistic, social and material environment, this means that changes in discourse alone will not directly lead to an equal change in experience.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rob Boddice and Bettina Hitzer, *Feeling Dis-Ease. Experiencing medicine and Illness*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).

<sup>46</sup> Marie van Haaster, “History of Experience, Philosophy of Mind,” Master’s Thesis Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, 2021.

<sup>47</sup> See: Reddy, W. M. (1997). Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions. *Current Anthropology*, 38(3), 327–351. for argument against the idea of culture as constructed by culture; and Boddice, R., and Smith, M. (2020). *Emotion, sense, experience*. Cambridge University Press., 21-22.

<sup>48</sup> See also: Boddice, R. and Hitzer, B. (2022) *Feeling Dis-Ease. Experiencing medicine and Illness*, Bloomsbury, 17-18.

<sup>49</sup> Joan Scott proposed to view emotions as discursive constructs: Scott, J. W. (1991). The evidence of experience. *Critical inquiry*, 17(4), 773-797, 797.; For a balanced critique of her position see: Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, sense, experience*, 18-20.

### Selection of Sources

Before turning to the chapter outline, let me briefly describe the way I selected the sources for this thesis. Since my project began with questions about Charcot's consolatory practices, I started by visiting the archives of the Salpêtrière, located in the Hospital of the Kremlin-Bicêtre in Paris, to look for descriptions of consolation in concrete medical practices. I did not find any of those there, since the handwritten medical observations of the Salpêtrière were strongly oriented towards diagnosis and hardly ever described therapeutic acts. Having simultaneously searched online for sources mentioning both 'consolation' (and declinations of that term) and 'Salpêtrière,' and read secondary literature on Charcot, I realized that Charcot was described as consolatory only in a few descriptions of his work by others, and that his consolatory capacities were just as often contested on the basis of Charcot's personal atheism or of the secularity of the Salpêtrière. It occurred to me that the consolatory character of Charcot might have been something that was more important as a topic of public debate, than as an actual part of medical or scientific practices. I decided to focus on the meaning of consolation within those debates, and thus to broaden my source base from those produced within the confines of the hospital and concerning therapeutic practices, to those produced by the wider social group of Claretie and Charcot.

To search for these sources, I made use of the digitized database of the Bibliothèque Nationale Française, on BNF.Gallica.fr. As this database contains newspapers, treatises, novels and political debates, and has a detailed search engine, it allows for the compilation and comparison of the use of the term 'consolation' across different source types and authors. I delimited my searches in two broad categories. On the one hand, I searched for sources containing both the term 'consolation' (and its declinations) and terms relating to the process of secularization of Parisian hospitals, such as Laïcisation, Hôpital, and Bourneville - an important front man of these processes, member of associations of Libre Penseurs and of the municipal council of Paris, and disciple of Charcot at the Salpêtrière.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, I searched for more 'abstract' sources, such as treatises, by the combination of the term consolation with either Libre Pensée, materialism, positivism, medecine or even science.

Besides these searches, I continued reading secondary literature on the Libre Pensée to follow certain leads to specific persons I encountered here. For instance, I read through the novels that were written about the Salpêtrière and mentioned by Bertrand Marquet in his *Les romans de la Salpêtrière*. Here, I came across both Zola and Claretie's novels. I found the work

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<sup>50</sup> Hecht, *The end of the Soul. Scientific modernity, Atheism, and Anthropology in France*, 250.

of François Coppée, a convert to Catholicism who wrote about consolation, in a Frédéric Gugelot's *Les Conversions au Catholicisme*.<sup>51</sup> A last example, which is simultaneously the one exception to my textual source base, is the painting of one of Charcot's open lectures by André Brouillet, which I will briefly discuss in the last chapter.<sup>52</sup>

Importantly, although my source collection is based on the data mining for specific words, my analysis of those sources is not limited to the study of verbal forms of consolation. Rather, reading the passages surrounding the term 'consolation' I pay particular attention to descriptions of practices, of interpersonal interactions and of the interaction with objects. In doing so, I aim to uncover a part of the rich landscape of affordances that gave shape to the historically specific experiences of that period.<sup>53</sup> Discourse is still crucial to this analysis, but, as described previously, not the sole nor the most determining factor in the constitution of experience.

Of course, this method of source selection has certain limitations. To begin with, it will not allow me to give an exhaustive account of all materialist thinking, nor allow me to quantitatively weigh the importance or presence of consolation in their thinking. The aim of this thesis, however, is not to give a completely representative and exhaustive account of the experience of consolation amongst late nineteenth-century French *Libre Penseurs*. Rather, this should be seen as an explorative study of the ways in which consolation, and the lack thereof, were experienced by at least part of these thinkers. I have attempted to point to common patterns in the writing of some materialist thinkers, but this does not mean that these patterns were homogeneously shared by all materialists. Furthermore, the method I have chosen has led me mostly to sources that were written by a certain intellectual elite. I do not aim to make claims about the experiential effect of materialist thinking for everyone in society. Rather, I focus on the experiences of those who wrote and spoke about these matters in the sources I am studying. The effects of these debates, treatises and novels on a broader public will have to be studied in a prospective project. What I believe I can demonstrate with the sources I have found in this way, and interpreting them from within the enactive framework, is that consolation did puzzle some materialist and Catholic thinkers at the time, and that materialists devised different ways to respond to those questions in practice.

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<sup>51</sup> Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, 373.

<sup>52</sup> Bertrand Marquer, *Les romans de la Salpêtrière: réception d'une scénographie clinique: Jean-Martin Charcot dans l'imaginaire fin-de-siècle*, (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> Erik Rietveld and Julian Kiverstein, "A rich landscape of affordances." *Ecological psychology* 26, no.4 (2014), 325-352.



## Chapter outline

This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first aims to uncover the abstract ideas, the discourse, on consolation that was developed by materialist thinkers, in contrast with their Catholic counterparts. In the second and third chapters, my aim is to gain an understanding of the way consolation (and its lack) were experienced by materialist thinkers. I argue that those experiences can only be understood by going beyond the discourse and paying attention to the interplay of ideas with the material environment (practices, other persons, objects) of these thinkers. I will do so by showing in the second chapter that dismissing consolation was described as taking courage and virility, and that in some cases the peace of mind promised by religious consolations became so appealing that some *Libre Penseurs* gave up and converted back to Catholicism. Resisting the temptation of explaining this as the ‘natural’ resurgence of some kind of universally human longing for consolation, I will argue that the lack of consolation these materialists were experiencing was due specifically to the fact that they were, despite their antithetical ideas, still attuned to Christian ways of seeking and obtaining consolation. The aim of the third chapter, finally, is to show the ways in which materialist thinkers did try to resolve this problem of consolation by coming up with alternative consolatory practices. Their consolation was based not on eternal justice in a life after death but, amongst other things, on a positivist trust in scientific progress and in the power of the human mind. I will conclude by arguing that Charcot created, through his public demonstrations of hypnosis, a new kind of affective niche that afforded this secular type of consolation. It was the sight of his patients exhibiting exactly the expected behavior, and thereby demonstrating the power of the mind over the body, that afforded the bystanders, amongst which was Claretie himself, a sense of consolation. The consolation Claretie described in his in memoriam for Charcot was not primarily that of patients from their suffering, but the consolation of the materialists in Charcot’s public from the unbearable uncertainties and mysteries of life.

## CHAPTER 1 - DISMISSING CONSOLATION

The aim of the first chapter is to uncover the politics of consolation amongst late nineteenth-century Parisian catholic and materialist thinkers. This discourse analysis gives an impression of a part of the environment in which the materialist experiences of consolation were shaped. In order to sketch this discursive context, I contrast it with the ideas on consolation expressed by contemporary Catholic thinkers. In studying sources for this chapter, I have sought to give an impression of some recurring arguments on consolation in both materialist and catholic thinking. This does not mean, however, that all materialists and catholics thought alike. As pointed out in the introduction, the aim is not to be complete, but to describe ideas that pertained at least to a part of these loose communities.

### **1.1 Why materialists have anything to say about the heart**

Before turning to materialist ideas on consolation, it is important to briefly point out why consolation became a topic of discussion for them at all. To many Catholic thinkers at the end of the nineteenth century, the intertwinement of materialist science and morality was, to say the least, not self-evident. For instance, in his treaty *La religion et les sciences de la nature*, the widely read Swiss Christian apologist Jean Frédéric Bettex argued that just as with money or force, a moral man would use science morally, and an immoral men would use it immorally: “L'homme moral emploiera ses forces, son savoir et son argent moralement; l'homme immoral immorallement.”<sup>54</sup> Science, to Bettex, did not in itself provide a morality, and had to be paired with the external moral standard that only religion could offer. Science without morality would, he argued, never make men happy in life, nor console them in the face of death: “La science (...) ne peut, ni rendre l’homme vraiment heureux pendant sa vie, ni le consoler à l’approche de la mort.”<sup>55</sup>

This separation of science and morality became strongly contested in the nineteenth century. Paul-Émile Littré, whose 1862 dictionary definition of consolation was remarkably devoid of any reference to religion, voiced, in his *Conservation, Révolution, Positivisme*, the

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Frédéric Bettex, *La religion et les Sciences de la nature* (Genève: J.H. Jeheber, 1898), 219.

<sup>55</sup> Id.

question of imaginary interlocutors who would be fine with adhering to positivism and materialism intellectually, but were opposed to the idea that these philosophies should impose a new morality as well.<sup>56</sup> These imaginary opponents resisted the idea that positivism would shape not only their minds, but their hearts as well: “Et serait-ce autre chose si après vous avoir permis de saisir notre esprit, nous vous permettions de saisir notre coeur?”<sup>57</sup> In response, Littré argued that positivism was a kind of religion, a belief not in god but in humanity, and that it was intertwined with a social morality that would free the poor from their suffering.<sup>58</sup> Jacqueline Lalouette describes this positivistic belief in humanity and social justice, accomplished by the progress of science by observations and experiment, as central to the endeavours of the associations of Libre Pensée: “La souffrance, les privations, les macérations n’avaient plus de raison d’être.”<sup>59</sup> Science stood in the service of the progress of humanity, and was thus directly related to a social morality. Similarly, in his popular philosophy book *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, Felix Isnard, a materialist doctor from the north of France, argued that philosophy represented the search for truth and justice, and that it was as necessary to society as food to the individual: “Sans elle, il n’y aurait ni stabilité politique, ni état social possibles.”<sup>60</sup> In his discussion of materialism and spiritualism, which were to him the two most prominent doctrines in philosophy of his time, he did not merely judge them on their degree of truth, but also on their moral qualities.<sup>61</sup> He argued that materialism, which was founded on observation, experimentation and reason, would bring humanity closer to the truth, and provide the best morality because it would bring about “le règne de la justice sur la terre,” instead of in heaven.<sup>62</sup>

It was in the context of this positivist belief in their power to end all human suffering, that consolation became an object of thought for some materialist thinkers. As I will show in the following sections, however, many materialists thought about consolation only to dismiss it: there was no space for consolation in their scientific morality.

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<sup>56</sup> Paul-Émile Littré, *Conservation, Révolution, Positivism* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique de Ladrangue, 1852), 280.; Paul-Émile Littré, *Dictionnaire de la langue Française*, Tome 1., a.b.c. (Monte-Carlo: Editions du Cap, 1862).

<sup>57</sup> Littré, *Conservation, Révolution, Positivism*, 280.

<sup>58</sup> Id., 283-284.

<sup>59</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, Conclusion, Ibook.

<sup>60</sup> Félix Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme* (Paris: C. Reinwald and Cie, 1879), V-VI.

<sup>61</sup> Id., X.

<sup>62</sup> Id., XV. For a detailed analysis of the “morale laïque,” see: Jean Baubérot, *Histoire de la Laïcité en France*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000), 57-62.

## 1.2 Consoling the ill and the dying: savior or useless?

As I briefly described in the introduction, Catholic consolations were to an important degree oriented towards the relief of suffering in the face of illness or death. It was argued by many Catholic doctors that religion needed to be present in medical practice as it offered a certain feeling of consolation that could either speed up the healing process, or in other cases help patients to die calmly. In his treaty *Apostolat des Médecins*, the Catholic doctor N.S. Boivin, gave us a telling description of this effect as he praised, an exemplary doctor for his combination of medicine and religion. He described him as a “véritable apôtre,” because he not only converted disbelievers back to religion, but also saved countless patients and consoled countless others with his “parole amie” when they could no longer be healed. Giving, besides medical care, the consolations of religion, provided patients with both the health of their body and the health of their soul: “Plusieurs autres le remercièrent des soins désintéressés qu'il leur avait prodigués, en même temps qu'il faisait entrer dans leur cœur les consolations de la religion et qu'il leur rendait la santé de l'âme avec la santé du corps.”<sup>63</sup> Healing and religious consolation thus went hand in hand.<sup>64</sup> In the introduction to his *Considérations philosophiques sur les rapports des sciences médicales avec la morale religieuse et sociale*, A. Maydieu, a provincial doctor in the department of Cher, also wrote about the importance of religiosity in doctors. He argued that although medical science had made great progress in the early nineteenth century, driving out physical suffering as much as possible, it could not on its own address moral suffering. Moral suffering was, to him, much more terrible, and could only be relieved by religion and its “moral consolations.”<sup>65</sup> Medicine and religious morals were “deux leviers qui remuent l'âme et le corps,” and he argued that keeping these two inextricably related parts together was necessary for the efficient working of therapeutics:

(...) que fait le médecin, la plupart du temps, quand il est mandé au chevet de la souffrance? Il se hâte d'interroger sur les causes de la maladie, et quand il les a bien connues, s'il comprend son devoir, l'intérêt de sa réputation et celui de son malade, il fait usage des *consolations morales*; car il sait bien qu'une fois l'esprit calmé, une heureuse influence réagira sur les organes.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> N.S. Boivin, *Apostolat des Médecins*, (Bauvais: Imprimerie D. Pere, 1875), 29.

<sup>64</sup> See also: *La laïcisation des hôpitaux: Appel à tous les amis des pauvres*, (Paris: H. Oudin, 1905), 89.

<sup>65</sup> A. Maydieu, *Considérations philosophiques sur les rapports des sciences médicales avec la morale religieuse et sociale* (Argent (Cher): Chez L'auteur, 1861), 9.

<sup>66</sup> Id. My italics

According to him, each doctor knows that the combination of religious consolations and medicine are crucial for the mutual relief of moral and physical suffering. The use of religious consolations makes the doctor, in a similar argument as that made by Boivin, into a priest himself.<sup>67</sup> As a priest and doctor, he uses morals and medicine to achieve both consolation and relief of suffering:

“Le médecin remplit véritablement alors les fonctions de prêtre, il est prêtre lui-même puisqu’il s’adresse à l’âme. La philosophie morale et la médecine ne sont donc pas si étrangères l’une à l’autre qu’on veut bien le dire; au contraire elles se prêtent *un mutuel appui pour consoler et soulager le malheur*.”<sup>68</sup>

Finally, the idea of closely connecting medicine to religion was expressed by Jean-Baptiste Vitteaut, member of the académie de Dijon, who argued in the appendix to “La médecine dans ses rapports avec la Religion”, that he desired for medical science to spiritualize towards the end of the century, and not only to heal, ease and prevent illness, but also to console: “À la fin de ce siècle elle est appelée, si elle se spiritualise, à guérir souvent, à prévenir plus souvent les maladies, à soulager le plus souvent, à consoler toujours.”<sup>69</sup>

In stark contrast with these Christian ideas, some Libre Penseurs argued fiercely against the use of consolation. In the following, I will describe three types of counterarguments that recur in sources. To begin with, some argued that Christian consolations did not work: they did not have a consolatory effect. This was argued by a Freethinking doctor, dr. Tacaud, in a novel written by deterministic biologist Félix le Dantec.<sup>70</sup> In this novel, *Le conflit*, Le Dantec portrays the encounter of two old friends, one of which became priest and the other Libre Penseur and doctor, at the Sanatorium d’Hauteville. For a few days, they go on walks together and discuss all kinds of philosophical topics, ranging from the intelligence of animals to the idea of the infinite. A visit to the death bed of a young man living in the area occasions a long discussion about death. In this discussion, Le Dantec lets his main character, Tacaud, take up a critical stance towards Catholic consolations. The explicit aim of their visit to this young man is to offer consolations to his mother, but only Tacaud speaks to her since he understands her

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<sup>67</sup> A. Maydiou, *Sensations physiques et morales, passions, leur influence sur la santé de l’homme et des peuples* (Argent (Cher): Chez L’auteur, 1875).

<sup>68</sup> Maydiou, *Considérations philosophiques sur les rapports des sciences médicales avec la morale religieuse et sociale*, 9-10.

<sup>69</sup> Jean-Baptiste Vitteaut, *Correspondance du Docteur Vitteaut: avec des notes sur sa vie, les hommes et les choses de 1830 à 1902 par lui-même* (Chalon-sur-Saone, Imprimerie Française et orientale, Émile Bertrand, 1902), 355.

<sup>70</sup> Marc Crapez, *La gauche réactionnaire. Mythes de la plèbe et de la race*, (Paris: Berg International Éditeurs, 2014), Persistance du Néo-encyclopédisme.

dialect.<sup>71</sup> As soon as they leave the woman's house, the priest inquires insistently whether she had asked for a priest before her son's death, and whether her son received his last sacraments.<sup>72</sup> This question is clearly unimportant to Tacaud, who says that they only discussed the financial problems she was facing now that her son had died. The priest is horrified and exclaims that the poor boy has now been deprived of the last saviour of religion: "le pauvre garçon a été privé des derniers secours de la religion!"<sup>73</sup> To this Tacaud answers sarcastically that he is sure that the mother is deeply worried about this and will spend the rest of her life muttering prayers for the souls in purgatory, scared of her son coming to haunt her at night. That, he adds, will be the consolation that religion offers her: "voilà la consolation qu'elle tirera de sa croyance pleine de superstitions."<sup>74</sup> In other words, religious consolations do not bring peace of mind; they bring worries and it is much easier to just accept that someone is completely dead: "Elle serait certainement bien plus tranquille si elle croyait comme moi que son fils est mort tout entier; elle n'aurait que le chagrin de l'avoir perdu et d'être privée de sa pension."<sup>75</sup>

Secondly, a recurring argument made against religious consolations targeted their intrusive character. Consolations were seen as ways of hindering free thinking and the freedom of conscience. Indeed, it was argued that nurses and priests in hospitals reveled in last minute conversions, thereby winning souls for Christianity, but impinging on the freedom of conscience precisely at those times where patients were at their weakest point.<sup>76</sup> For this reason, many associations of Libre Pensée organized hospital visits to protect their ill against these possible attempts to convert and infringe on their liberté de conscience, by "strengthening the convictions of weakened persons."<sup>77</sup> Religious personnel in hospitals was said to favor religious patients,<sup>78</sup> and specifically, as was argued by Larousse in his *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXème siècle*, those who appeared to be receptive to Catholic consolations: "la vie y est presque toujours intolérable aux malades trop peu croyants ou trop peu souples pour accepter avec l'empressement voulu les consolations de la religion."<sup>79</sup> The impression that religious consolations were infringements on the freedom of conscience of the ill was widely shared. It

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<sup>71</sup> Félix Le Dantec, *Le Conflit: entretiens philosophiques* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1901), 128.

<sup>72</sup> Id., 128.

<sup>73</sup> Id., 128.

<sup>74</sup> Id., 134.

<sup>75</sup> Id., 134. My italics

<sup>76</sup> Id., 135.

<sup>77</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, Ch.II, La Laïcité des services hospitaliers, Ibook. My translation of: "affermir les convictions de personnes affaiblies".

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Pierre Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle* Tome 9 (Paris: Administration du Grand Dictionnaire Universel, 1877), 385.

is probably what led the anthropologist, linguist, and member of the Paris municipal council Abel Hovelacque to interrupt a plea for the conservation of priests at the bedside of dying patients in hospitals by saying: “Let him [i.e. the patient] die in peace.”<sup>80</sup> And finally the sentiment seems to have been shared by the doctor George Simler, who in an article on the miracles of magnetism in the *Journal du Magnétisme* wrote that when on night he felt his blood stopped circulating freely in his limbs, he did not want to ask for the help of one of his Catholic colleagues because he feared “the dreadful consolations of Catholic religion.”<sup>81</sup>

Lastly, it was argued that religious consolations, besides being ineffective and intrusive, had become useless in the face of the increasing progress of medical science. In her description of the history and present state of nurses in hospitals Anne Emilie Hamilton, for instance, wrote that it was understandable that the care of the soul had been one of the most important tasks of religious nurses in view of the primitive character of medical care at the time: “l’œuvre principale des filles de la Charité doit être la cure d’âme, ce qui est très naturel étant donné (...) l’état absolument rudimentaire des soins matériels dont on entourait alors les malades.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Isnard wrote that religious institutions had become useless in the face of scientific progress: “(...) préparons-nous à assister sans regrets à l’écroulement des religions devenues des institutions vieilles et désormais inutiles.”<sup>83</sup> The bright future of humanity would make religion and its care for the soul useless. Taking the three points discussed here together, it was argued by materialists that religious consolations did not work, were intrusive, and were obsolete.

### **1.3 Consoling humanity: eternal justice or pacifying illusion?**

Beyond these three types of arguments against the use of catholic consolations in health care, some materialist thinkers felt that consolation obstructed the way towards a better future for humanity at large. Indeed, it was argued that once consoled by Christian ideas of eternal justice and health after death, sufferers would stop trying to better their situation in life. Christian

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<sup>80</sup> M. Hovelacque in: “Les Aumôniers des Hôpitaux” *Annales Catholiques*, January 7, 1882, 20-25, 21. My translation of: “Laissez-le mourir en paix.”

<sup>81</sup> George Simler, “3e Somnambulisme”, in *Journal du Magnétisme*, Tome XIV, ed. Du Patot (Paris, 1855) 583-586, 584. My translation of: “J’appréhendais surtout qu’il ne voulût m’offrir, outre les secours de la médecine, les redoutables consolations de la religion catholique.”

<sup>82</sup> Anna Émilie Hamilton, *Considérations sur les infirmières des hôpitaux* (Montpellier: Imprimerie Centrale du Midi, 1900), 43-44. ”

<sup>83</sup> Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, XIV-XV.

consolations were based on illusions, and although these illusions were indeed consolatory - “la Divine illusion, qui console”<sup>84</sup> - they only worked as they turned sufferers away from reality - and thus prevented them actors from working towards social justice on earth.

This worry about the effects of consolation seems to have been part of a larger debate about the effects of the revolutions in France. The nineteenth century had been marked by the twists and turns of revolutions and restorations, which already in 1840 led Alfred Musset to depict his century as suffering from two wounds - that of 1793 and that of 1814. He argued that those things that the revolutionaries had fought for had not been achieved, and that people now suffered from the end of the moral system that had before the revolutions functioned at least to explain the unjust organization of society. The French Revolution had promised an end to all suffering, and as the restoration turned many of its measures back around, it became clear how little of this freedom and justice had been attained, and how much suffering remained. Musset described this period as a period in between an orderly past that was lost and a just future yet to come: “Tout ce qui était n’est plus ; tout ce qui sera n’est pas encore.”<sup>85</sup> Remarkably, he wrote that revolutionaries had not only told “the poor” that the justice and eternal life that they had patiently waited for did not exist, “(...) tu prendras patience jusqu’au jour de la justice: il n’y a point de justice,” but also that they had been wasting their tears and those of their family, because there was no God to whom these cries could be offered: “Tu amasses tes larmes et celles de ta famille, les cris de tes enfants et les sanglots de ta femme pour les porter aux pieds de Dieu à l’heure de la mort: il n’y a pas de Dieu.”<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Musset describes the rebellion of “the poor” not only as one that dethroned the rich by telling them that they were nothing more than men, but also one that turned against the priests saying: you who have consoled me, you have lied to me:

Alors il est certain que le pauvre a séché ses larmes; qu’il a dit à sa femme de se taire, à ses enfants de venir avec lui et qu’il s’est redressé sur la glèbe... Il a dit au riche: tu n’es qu’un homme; et au prêtre; toi qui m’as consolé, tu en as menti.<sup>87</sup>

Musset describes the religious consolations as the lie that priests told ‘the poor’ to keep them patient and accept their suffering. As the revolution did its work, ‘the poor’ dried their tears

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<sup>84</sup> Pierre Veber, *Les Veber’s Les Veber’s Les Veber’s* (Paris: Emile Testard, 1895), 58.

<sup>85</sup> Alfred Musset, *La confession d’un enfant du siècle* (Paris: Ancienne Maison Quantin, 1891), 21.

<sup>86</sup> Musset, *La confession d’un enfant du siècle*, 20; Mgr Turinaz, “Le Patriotisme”, *Annales Catholiques* Tome XLIII (February 17, 1883), 339-345; 343.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.



and rejected the god given authority of the rich and the priests, but thereby gave up on consolation. The wounds that Musset's century is suffering from, come from the fact that after giving up on that which was consoling, the suffering of 'the poor' did not end. On the contrary, Musset and his contemporaries had much the same problems of their predecessors, but they did no longer have access to the Christian system of thought that brought them consolation. They had lost the answers that had consoled them before the revolution: "Lorsque autrefois l'opresseur disait: "À moi la terre ! - "À moi le ciel !" répondait l'opprimé. A présent que répondra-t-il?"<sup>88</sup> Addressing those who in the future would live in justice and peace, Musset wrote: "Plaignez-nous plus que vos pères; car nous avons beaucoup des maux qui les rendaient dignes de plainte, et nous avons perdu ce qui les consolait."<sup>89</sup>

Interestingly, these passages of Alfred de Musset were cited at length more than 40 years later in a piece on the effect of laicisation in *Annales Catholiques* by Mgr. Turinaz, Bishop of Nancy from 1882 to 1918 and fervent polemic opposing anticlericalism in France.<sup>90</sup> Turinaz agreed with Musset's analysis of the disillusionment of French society, and with his account of the way revolutionaries had told the poor that the priest who consoled them deceived them. However, instead of directing himself to those who in the future will live in justice, Turinaz used Musset's account to argue that this desolation of the poor is what led, and will lead, to social disorder. Indeed, Turinaz cited Musset to argue that one should not be astonished about the social unrest tormenting France. This unrest was caused by the destabilizing of the Christian system of thought that caused the poor not to wait for justice in heaven any longer, but to ask for it in the present: "Le pauvre croyant à lui et à ses deux bras pour toute croyance s'est dit un jour: Guerre au riche ! à moi aussi la jouissance ici-bas, puisqu'il n'y en a pas d'autre ; à moi la terre puisque le ciel est vide."<sup>91</sup> It was in order to bring social order back that Turinaz combatted the doctrines of the revolutionaries and argued that those things that had given consolation to "the poor" needed to be returned to them: "Rendez au travailleur et au pauvre la certitude de la récompense éternelle et divine; rendez à ceux qui souffrent la consolation, à ceux qui meurent l'espérance."<sup>92</sup> Consolation for Turinaz, was not valuable in and of itself, nor meant to benefit healing or a calm death, but solely utilized as a means to stabilize the French state and its international reputation.

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<sup>88</sup> Musset, *La confession d'un enfant du siècle*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Id., 22.

<sup>90</sup> Mgr Turinaz, "Le Patriotisme", *Annales Catholiques* Tome XLIII (February 17, 1883), 339-345, 343.

<sup>91</sup> Musset, *La confession d'un enfant du siècle*, 21 in Turinaz, "Le Patriotisme", 343.

<sup>92</sup> Turinaz, "Le Patriotisme", 344.

A similar argument was made in another article in the *Annales Catholiques* of 1883, whose anonymous author cautioned readers that “the poor” would shout “malheur à la république!” when realizing not only that their life had not improved materially, but also that they have lost the most necessary of their possessions; their right to religion.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Albert-Eugène Lachenal argued in *Le Matérialisme, voilà l'ennemi* that men without the moral guide and consolations of religion threw themselves in the threatening ranks of socialism and attacked “les bases essentielles de l'ordre social.”<sup>94</sup> In another anonymous article in the *Annales Catholiques* of November 12th 1887, titled “La Révolution”, it was argued that in Christian society, there was no “question sociale,” because religious institutions would leave no pain without consolation: “des institutions fondées et soutenues par le dévouement religieux ne laissaient (...) aucune douleur sans consolation.”<sup>95</sup> It argued that the revolution had failed, and that today, the works of the church were the best that people had left.<sup>96</sup>

The argument that consolations are all that ‘the poor’ had left, returns in other works as well. Socialism, it was argued, offered nothing in return for the consolations it had taken away: “Enfin, aux consolations de la vie future, à l'immortalité de l'Âme, le matérialisme substitue la fatilité: il dépouille l'homme de l'espérance, et, pour tout avenir, lui promet le néant.”<sup>97</sup> Similarly, the Doctor Alfred Devers, wrote in *Accord de la science et de la religion*, that to find “la paix de l'âme”, hesitant readers should steer clear from materialists precisely because, pretexting to explain nature, they sow in the hearts of men “de désolantes doctrines”, and strip the afflicted from “la dernière consolation de leur misère.”<sup>98</sup> Bettex mockingly stated that materialists had nothing to offer to those who suffer: “sur les questions fondamentales de l'existence, l'incrédulité ne sait rien et n'explique rien. Elle nie et ne crée pas, elle se moque et ne console pas; elle critique et n'enseigne pas, elle ôte tout à l'homme et ne lui donne rien.”<sup>99</sup> He argued that materialists often said: “drink and eat today because you might be dead tomorrow”, but that those who suffered such hardships that they could no longer appreciate these pleasures were determined to cry and die unconsolated:

— Alors, mon pauvre ami, je ne sais plus que te dire; tu l'as entendu, ces savants prouvent qu'il n'y a pas de Dieu, et que la matière éternelle qui t'a créé, ne sait pas même que tu existes. Comment pourrait-elle compatir à tes douleurs ou les soulager? Désespère et meurs! Car le sombre évangile

<sup>93</sup> “La république et le pauvre (1)”, *Annales Catholiques* Tome XLIII (January 12, 1883), 74-76.

<sup>94</sup> Albert-Eugène Lachenal, *Le Matérialisme, voilà l'ennemi* (Annecy: J. Niérat and Cie, 1880), 43.

<sup>95</sup> “La Révolution” *Annales Catholiques*, November 12, 1887, 363-368, 366.

<sup>96</sup> Id., 367.

<sup>97</sup> Lachenal, *Le Matérialisme, voilà l'ennemi*, 48.

<sup>98</sup> Devers, *Le Christianisme et le Matérialisme devant la raison et la science*, 405.

<sup>99</sup> Bettex, *La religion et les Sciences de la nature*, 292.

de ces apôtres des lumières le déclare: Malheur aux déshérités d'ici-bas, car il n'y a point d'autre vie ! — Malheur à ceux qui souffrent l'injustice, car il ne sera jamais fait droit! — Malheur à tous ceux qui pleurent, car ils ne seront jamais consolés!<sup>100</sup>

The idea that the materialists had shattered religion but offered nothing in return, was of course contested by materialist thinkers. Isnard explicitly addressed this critique by arguing that the thing that spiritualists, presumably in contrast with materialists, did have to offer, was nothing more than a generous and sterile illusion: “Votre compassion part d’un bon naturel, mais elle n’est qu’une généreuse et stérile illusion ; car en quoi peut-elle leur profiter?”<sup>101</sup> Those who had suffered and died did not benefit from good thoughts, and those good thoughts therefore served only to console the Catholic thinkers themselves: “*Votre cœur est soulagé, je le veux bien, mais voilà tout; et les morts ne bénéficient pas de vos pensées.*”<sup>102</sup> Isnard argued that materialists and spiritualists were saddened by the sight of the same injustices, “vous déplorez les injustices dont tant d’individus ont été les victimes; nous les déplorons autant que vous,”<sup>103</sup> but that two different moralities ensued from this feeling. Indeed, to Isnard, this “douleur” inspired Catholics to invent a fictional future life, whereas to materialist, it imposed the duty to prevent the next generations to suffer from the same injustices: “de les épargner aux enfants de ces victimes.”<sup>104</sup> In order to help the sufferers, and at the same time to ease their own sadness for them, materialists were committed to better the future.

A similar point was made by Littré, who argued that the positivist morality would not only free ‘the poor’ from their suffering, but also help the rich to benefit humanity – which in turn would benefit themselves as they were saddened by the suffering of others.<sup>105</sup> Lastly, we find this argumentation in a municipal debate about working conditions in Paris on the 26th of June 1886, where M. Longuet put forward that, compared to Catholics, the materialists had a stronger responsibility to better working conditions precisely because they could not console:

Eh bien! Messieurs, pouvez-vous nier, vous materialistes, libres-penseurs de toute école, que vous ayez, plus que nos collègues de la droite, le devoir d’améliorer le sort des victimes de l’organisation économique et de l’ordre social; les catholiques promettent aux travailleurs, pour les consoler de leurs souffrances terrestres, une réparation ultérieure; et nous, qui leur avons enlevé cette espérance chimérique ou qui tentons tous les jours de la leur enlever, nous les condanerions a un éternel enfer sur cette terre même! Allons donc! c’est impossible. Plus que les

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<sup>100</sup> Id., 285.

<sup>101</sup> Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, 53.

<sup>102</sup> Id., 54. My italics.

<sup>103</sup> Id., 55.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Littré, *Conservation, Révolution, Positivism*, 283-284.

croyants, donc, vous avez l'imperieux devoir d'améliorer le sort de ceux qui travaillent et qui souffrent.<sup>106</sup>

This point was made in defence of a law that would limit the working hours to 8 hours a day, and called on the materialist sentiment of responsibility for the suffering of humanity. Thus, the materialist position held a certain promise and commitment to end suffering for the next generations, instead of offering consolations to themselves or to catholic thinkers.

It is important to note here, that two levels of consolation have emerged from these passages. Indeed, it seems that the idea of consoling those who suffered was consolatory for Catholic thinkers themselves. The materialists discussed here, however, could not be consoled by the idea of consoling others, because, as we saw, they resented the religious consolations' pacifying effect: "par rapport aux morts, votre conception de la vie future est une généreuse, mais stérile illusion. Et maintenant, par rapport aux vivants, votre croyance n'est plus seulement stérile, elle est nuisible."<sup>107</sup> Isnard argued that social injustices were always man-made, and caused by education, institutions, ignorance, or weakness.<sup>108</sup> The aim of materialism was to make them disappear; to focus on improving the concrete lives of those suffering. Religion, on the other hand, only offered narcotics: "Est-ce un simple narcotique que vous voulez apporter aux maux de la société, ou bien un remède radical?"<sup>109</sup> These narcotics were harmful because they had no long-term effect, they brought "une consolation momentanée", but no real relief, and resignation: "le courage passif de la souffrance sans l'énergie de la lutte; vous accepterez et subirez votre mal sans réagir."<sup>110</sup> Religion and its "conception illusoirement consolante" of a second life, gave a passive courage to support suffering, but not the energy to fight and improve your situation.<sup>111</sup> Giving up on these illusions enabled one to help the suffering in an effective way instead of rocking them with vain promises.<sup>112</sup> According to Isnard, religious consolations in the end were not even consolatory; they were irritating: "Vous dites que ces croyances sont fortifiantes pour les malheureux, les opprimés et les désespérés de ce monde ; je prétends qu'elles sont énervantes."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Longuet in: "Conseil Municipal de Paris: Compte rendu de la séance du Mercredi 28 juillet" *Bulletin municipal officiel de la Ville de Paris* 5, no. 209 (29 Juillet 1886) 1761-1776, 1774.

<sup>107</sup> Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, 55.

<sup>108</sup> Id., 56.

<sup>109</sup> Id., 56.

<sup>110</sup> Id., 67.

<sup>111</sup> Id., 67-68.

<sup>112</sup> Id., 68.

<sup>113</sup> Id., 67.

The arguments about the harm of consolation's pacifying effects can also be found in literary works. For instance, writer and historian Jules Claretie, the author of the in memoriam for Charcot with which I started this thesis, describes, in his novel *Les amours d'un interne*, the contrast between two men, a painter and a doctor, in their relation to a woman, Jeanne, with whom they are both in love. Jeanne is worried about the illness of her mother, and whereas the painter successfully consoles her by giving her hope for things that will never happen, the doctor, Vilandry, does not console her but tries to fight the illness: "Vilandry ne consolait pas: médecin, il savait ce qu'était ce mal. Il le combattait."<sup>114</sup> This argument, that Vilandry finds himself incapable of consoling Jeanne because he, being a doctor, knows the illness, implies that consolations run counter to the medical profession or expertise of the doctor. It runs counter to "combating" the illness.

The opposition between fighting for justice and health, and passively accepting consolations, is also present in Emile Zola's famous novel *Lourdes* (1894). This book was directly inspired by Charcot's work on Lourdes, *La Foi qui guérit* (1892), to which I will return in the last chapter of this thesis.<sup>115</sup> Zola's *Lourdes* is much studied by historians and it is one of the many literary works that at the time were written about Lourdes.<sup>116</sup> This work, however, stands apart from most of those others as it is written from a secular perspective.<sup>117</sup>

Zola wrote this book after thorough field research in Lourdes, as was usual at the time for naturalist writings.<sup>118</sup> *Lourdes* is therefore often seen as a socio-historic document, or a "reportage romancé."<sup>119</sup> The genre of naturalism was the literary counterpart of materialist and positivist thinking. Writing, in this view, was meant to approximate a form of scientific observation, as its aim was to study and approach the truth of human nature: "Le roman apparaît comme le genre suprême pour les naturalistes dans la lignée de la philosophie positiviste - qui exige que la littérature fournisse des documents sociaux et psychologique en vue d'une connaissance scientifique de l'homme."<sup>120</sup> As Zola wrote himself about his novel *Thérèse Raquin*, "mon but a été un but scientifique avant tout. (...) Qu'on lise le roman avec soin, on

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<sup>114</sup> Jules Claretie, *Les amours d'un interne* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1881), 274.

<sup>115</sup> Bertrand Marquer, *Salpêtrière*, Dictionnaire des naturalismes, 2017).

<sup>116</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans."; Kathleen Ann Comfort, "Divine Images of Hysteria in Emile Zola's *Lourdes*," *Nineteenth-century French studies* 30, no. 3/4 (2002), 329-345.; Eduardo Cintra Torres, "La foule religieuse de Lourdes chez Zola et Huysmans," *Mil neuf cent, Revue d'histoire intellectuelle* 1, no. 28 (2010), 35-58.; Guillaume McNeil Arteau, "Enquête et documentation dans Lourdes de Zola," *Poétique* 191, no. 1 (2022), 59-74.

<sup>117</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 213.

<sup>118</sup> Id., 214-215.

<sup>119</sup> Id., 215.; Comfort, "Divine Images of Hysteria in Emile Zola's *Lourdes*," 329).

<sup>120</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 151, (2010), 213-228, 215, 217.

verra que chaque chapitre est l'étude d'un cas curieux de physiologie."<sup>121</sup> *Lourdes* in this sense, can be seen as a study of the phenomenon of hysteria, and of the way it was understood both by science and religion. Indeed, it was not only strongly influenced by Charcot's *La foi qui guérit*, but also dealt with similar thematics, to which I will return in the last chapter.

*Lourdes* was published in August 1895, after the Rougon-Macquart series and as the start of a new series on three cities; Lourdes, Rome and Paris. It received a lot of criticism from Catholic journals, which argued that Zola intently diminished the miracles that he saw in Lourdes.<sup>122</sup> At the same time, the book was extremely popular: 121,000 copies were sold in the first two months, and it was Zola's third most sold novel on the first of March 1898.<sup>123</sup> The book (and series) portrayed Pierre Froment, a Priest who has stopped believing in God and who travels to Lourdes with Marie de Guersaint, a woman he is in love with. Marie was paralysed since she fell from a horse when she was 13 and experienced the sudden death of her mother shortly after. She could be seen, in the eyes of contemporary medicine, as a "textbook case of hysteria" both by virtue of her symptoms, her trauma, and the sexual effects it had, since she was described as remaining stuck in "girlhood" after the accidents.<sup>124</sup> Whereas Marie hopes to be healed in Lourdes, Pierre travels along in hopes of reviving his faith. Before leaving, however, a doctor tells Pierre that it is probable that Marie will heal in Lourdes, and that this will not be due to any religious miracle, but to the effect of her strong belief that the holy water in Lourdes will heal her. This is exactly the *faith healing* that Charcot writes about in his essay *la foi qui guérit*. When Pierre and Marie arrive in Lourdes, Marie is indeed healed, but this does not strengthen Pierre's religion. Rather, it only confirms his idea that the presumed miracles happening in Lourdes can be scientifically explained.

The last parts of the book describe Pierre and Marie's way back to Paris in a train filled with other persons with illnesses who had, mostly unsuccessfully, traveled to Lourdes to find health. During their way back to Paris, we follow Pierre's reflections on what was happening in Lourdes. Pierre, in this novel, appears to be the spokesperson of Zola: "pour défendre ses opinions et montrer son scepticisme."<sup>125</sup> In general, Zola described many priests in his books. According to Henri Mitterand and Gugelot priests fascinated him as they had the "même rêve de rédemption de l'humanité, mais selon des modèles philosophiques radicalement opposés."<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Émile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*, (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1909), 6.

<sup>122</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 215.

<sup>123</sup> Id., 215-216.

<sup>124</sup> Comfort, "Divine Images of Hysteria in Emile Zola's *Lourdes*," 331.

<sup>125</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 217.

<sup>126</sup> Henri Mitterand, in: Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 220.

Zola's character Pierre, the atheist priest, despises the turn towards spiritualism and consolation that many members of a younger generation were making: "il était plein d'un mépris douloureux pour les jeunes cerveaux manquant de bravoure devant la connaissance, retournant à la consolation d'un spiritualisme mensonger, à la promesse d'une éternité de bonheur, dans la mort souhaitée, exaltée"<sup>127</sup> There was, towards the end of the nineteenth century, a spiritualist 'air du temps', declaring the "fameuse banqueroute de la science", to which Pierre is firmly opposed.<sup>128</sup> Elsewhere, Zola described humanity as a sick person, seeking religion out of need for consolation: "mon symbole est que l'humanité est une malade, aujourd'hui, que la science semble condamner, et qui se jette dans la foi au miracle, par besoin de consolation."<sup>129</sup>

Pierre's reflections on the train to Paris begins with a dominating feeling of pity: "de son voyage, il ne restait déjà plus à Pierre qu'une immense pitié."<sup>130</sup> Thinking about all the suffering he has seen, he burns from desire to relieve this pain: "Aussi ne pouvait-il songer à ces pauvres gens sans brûler du désir de les soulager."<sup>131</sup> He contemplates, to do so, the option of closing down the 'Grotte', to encourage the ill to try something else, a different effort or a different kind of patience: "de prêcher un autre effort, une autre patience." But his feeling of pity does not allow for that:

(...) sa pitié se révoltait. Non, non! Ce serait un crime que de fermer le rêve de leur ciel à ces souffrants du corps et de l'âme, dont l'unique apaisement était de s'agenouiller, là-bas, dans la splendeur des cierges, dans l'entêtement berceur des cantiques. (...) Ou était donc l'homme dur qui aurait eu la cruauté d'empêcher les humbles de croire, de tuer en eux la consolation du surnaturel, l'espérance que Dieu s'occupait d'eux, qu'il leur réservait une vie meilleure dans son paradis?<sup>132</sup>

The consolations of Lourdes, to him, are illusory - an argument we encountered before - but this illusion does help to cope with life: "le mensonge qui aide à vivre."<sup>133</sup> Lourdes, to Pierre, was as successful as it was only because of these illusions as it promised: "de la consolation, du mensonge, ce pain délicieux de l'espérance dont l'humanité souffrante a une continuelle

<sup>127</sup> Émile Zola, *Les trois villes; Paris* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1898), 195.

<sup>128</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes; Paris*, 196.

<sup>129</sup> Letter of Zola to Jacques van Santen Kolff, 9 mars 1894, cited by: Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 2010, 220.

<sup>130</sup> Émile Zola, *Les trois villes; Lourdes* (Paris: Bibliothèque Charpentier, 1894), 590.

<sup>131</sup> Id., 590.

<sup>132</sup> Id., 590.

<sup>133</sup> Id., 591.

faim, que rien n'apaisera jamais."<sup>134</sup> Pierre's thoughts go on like this for a while, but slowly, as the train progresses and passes by church after church in the landscape, he grows more and more concerned:

Cette religion de la souffrance humaine, ce rachat par la souffrance, n'était-ce pas encore une leurre, une aggravation continue de la douleur et de la misère? Il est lâche et dangereux de laisser vivre la superstition. La tolérer, l'accepter, c'est recommencer éternellement les siècles mauvais. (...) On exploite les peuples, on les vole, on les mange, quand ils ont mis l'effort de leur volonté dans la seule conquête de l'autre vie.<sup>135</sup>

Religion was consolatory, but in a dangerous way. It was dangerous to tolerate these illusions because they would let suffering drag on and worsen from generation to generation, while people were becoming increasingly passive: "un abatardissement de toutes les énergies."<sup>136</sup> Pierre concludes that it is crucial to develop in men, as early as possible, the habit of personal efforts and the courage to face the truth - even if this meant letting go of the divine and consolatory illusion: "au risque d'y perdre l'illusion, la divine consolatrice."<sup>137</sup>

## Conclusion

In this first chapter, I described the controversy that emerged around the phenomenon of consolation in the late nineteenth-century intellectual elite of France. I argued that a number of materialists rejected the use of consolation on the basis of its inefficiency, its harm, and its uselessness. These arguments were mostly made in the context of a broader sense of responsibility for the fate of the lower classes. Indeed, it was argued that both materialists and Catholics felt the same feeling of sadness for the suffering of others, but whereas the Catholic worries were relieved by the idea of consoling humanity, the materialists argued that they could not feel consoled by giving 'the poor' such consolations. Indeed, these consolations would harm them before anything else. Furthermore, they argued that neither the lower classes nor themselves needed those consolations, because the bright future of humanity was about to make suffering a thing of the past, and consolations obsolete.

Let us recall, at this point, Claretie's in memoriam for Charcot. It seems even more intriguing now than at the outset of this study. Indeed, although the general opposition of

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<sup>134</sup> Id., 88.

<sup>135</sup> Id., 591.

<sup>136</sup> Id., 592.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.



materialists to consolation might explain its absence from most of Charcot's work, it certainly does not elucidate why Claretie, a materialist thinker himself, depicted Charcot specifically as a great consolator. To understand the reason why he did so, we need to take a closer look at the materialist's opposition to consolation. In the next chapter, I will argue that this opposition was not all pervasive: despite their anticlerical reasoning, many materialists still longed for the consolations that religion could offer.

## CHAPTER 2 - LONGING FOR CONSOLATION

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the emotive failure experienced by materialist thinkers who, although they had argued against the need for consolation, still longed for it. I will start by describing the longing for consolation that is expressed in some materialist writings, and then account for this longing as an emotive failure, on the basis of an enactive reading of Reddy's concept of emotional navigation.

### 2.1 The difficulty of giving up on consolation

To the Christian apologist Jean Frédéric Bettex, whose writings about the relation between natural sciences and religion were discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most important inconsistencies of materialism was their hatred of religion.<sup>138</sup> He argued that if religion were a mere thought or hallucination, as materialists contended, then these materialists should be completely indifferent to it, as it would vanish with the humans believing in it, and leave no trace, have no effect on the material universe.<sup>139</sup> To Bettex, the problem for materialist thinkers, however, was that these hallucinations did clearly have an effect on the world. And the effect they had, he argued, was one of consolation:

(...) s'il est prouvé - et nul, je crois, n'osera le nier, - que ces hallucinations ont consolé des milliers de gens dans les plus grands chagrins de la vie, et même dans la mort la plus terrible, il en résulte, avec une logique inexorable, que ces phénomènes, en soi parfaitement indifférents et sans valeur, en ont une relative pour l'individu, et que nous devons les considérer comme un des calmants les plus précieux.<sup>140</sup>

Understanding religion as “un opium dont l'action bienfaisante est constatée,” Bettex argued, materialists should not only have the “humaneness” to suggest its use to all others, but also try it out themselves: “le matérialiste devrait, par humanité, non seulement la recommander à tous ceux qui souffrent, mais en faire l'essai lui-même, avant de saisir le revolver ou la fiole de morphine, comme il le fait souvent.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Bettex, *La religion et les Sciences de la nature*, 7.; See also: Christoph Raedel, *Von der Weisheit des Glaubens: Jean Frédéric Bettex als christlicher Apologet*. (Göttingen: VandR unipress, 2006).

<sup>139</sup> Bettex, *La religion et les Sciences de la nature*, 281.

<sup>140</sup> Id., 281-282.

<sup>141</sup> Id., 282.

Although Bettex himself was not a materialist, I do start this chapter with this passage, because he made an interesting observation about materialist thinking. Indeed, he pointed out that materialists could not be indifferent to religion, precisely because, despite it being ‘mere’ thought, hallucination or transcendence, it did have an undeniable effect on people: it consoled them. Of course, Bettex’s aim with this argument was to point to the internal inconsistencies of materialism, and his argument should not necessarily be taken at face value. His observation is interesting, however, because it seems to reflect a trend that can be seen in materialists’ accounts as well; many, indeed, were not indifferent to religion.

### Courage, virility and childhood attachments

To begin with, some materialist authors described the renunciation of religion, the renunciation of this ‘consolatory illusion,’ as something that took courage. We already encountered this in the previous chapter, in Zola, who wrote about having the “courage de la vérité” in the face of the risk of losing consolation.<sup>142</sup> In both Zola and Isnard’s work, moreover, the courage described here goes hand in hand with a certain notion of virility. Zola made this idea very explicit as his character Pierre says that children and women should not be ridden of their religious consolation: “On ne peut demander encore ni aux enfants ni aux femmes l'héroïsme amer de la raison.”<sup>143</sup> Similarly, Isnard wrote: “Soyons hommes et sachons préférer à l’erreur, quand même elle nous consolerait, la vérité qui peut nous déplaire aujourd’hui, mais qui demain nous grandira et fera notre bonheur.”<sup>144</sup> This passage in Isnard also expresses the fact that religious consolations could still, even on materialist thinkers, have a consolatory effect. It was a pleasant feeling to let oneself be consoled by religion. Zola’s main character Pierre, when he realizes he will not be able to marry and have kids with Marie, longs for that kind of religious consolation: “Encore s’il avait conservé la foi, il y aurait trouvé l’éternelle consolation.”<sup>145</sup>

Giving up on the consolations of religion thus was not an easy thing to do. This difficulty was often related to the fact that some materialists had been attached to it since childhood.

oh! alors, faisons *avec courage* un *sacrifice* nécessaire, dépouillons-nous virilement de ces croyances fausses *qui ne nous sont chères que parce qu’elles ont été les compagnes de toute notre*

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<sup>142</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes; Lourdes*, 592.

<sup>143</sup> Id., 567.

<sup>144</sup> Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, 67.

<sup>145</sup> Id., 560.

*vie*, mais qui sont incapable de faire notre bonheur, et raillons-nous franchement au matérialisme.<sup>146</sup>

We find references to childhood memories in other materialist reflections on consolation as well. The religiosity that some materialists had experienced as children, it seems, established the grounds for the longing for consolation that they experience later in life – even when they no longer believed in the basis for that consolation. A poem written by doctor and medical scientist Paul Broca also attests to his longing for the consolation he had experienced as a child. He wrote this poem upon the death of a young girl, Fanny:

Ah ! Pourquoi n'ai-je plus, comme dans mon enfance,  
la croyance au réveil qui succède au trépas,  
cette foi qui console en donnant l'espérance  
de retrouver là-haut ceux qu'on pleure ici-bas!

Mais à scruter les lois de la nature humaine,  
à chercher la lumière et la réalité,  
ma foi s'est dissipée, ainsi que l'ombre vaine  
des fantômes des nuits, fils de l'obscurité.

Et maintenant, hélas, quand la mort implacable  
ensevelit mon cœur au fond d'un caveau noir,  
nul baume n'adoucit la douleur qui m'accable  
et nulle fiction ne m'offre son espoir.”<sup>147</sup>

Finally, the difficulty of not being able to console is expressed obliquely in the novels of Jules Claretie and Emile Zola. In *Les amours d'un interne*, Jeanne ends up falling in love not with the doctor Vilandry, who had a “cold” and “correct” kind of devotion to her, but with Paul Combette, the painter who did console her and openly pitied her: “Le dévouement même de Vilandry, toujours prêt, mais toujours correct, timide et froid en apparence, n'était point comparable à ces effusions de cœur de Paul Combette.”<sup>148</sup> In Zola's *Lourdes*, it is not directly Pierre's incapacity to console Marie that stands in the way of their relationship, but his rational thinking that prevents him from truly joining in Marie's faith.<sup>149</sup> In both cases it seems their rationality lets the doctors live in a colder, loveless world of reason.

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<sup>146</sup> Isnard, *Spiritualisme et Matérialisme*, XIV. My italics.

<sup>147</sup> Poem in private archives of M. Philippe Monod-Broca, cited in: Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), ChIII, Portraits et parcours libres penseurs, Ibooks.

<sup>148</sup> Claretie, *Les amours d'un interne*, 274.

<sup>149</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes; Lourdes*.

### Returns to spirituality

Besides these sources of materialist or naturalist thinkers who express the lack of consolation and still adhered to materialism, some other writers grew closer to religion or even converted back to catholicism altogether. These phenomena, both of the spiritualization of literature and of the waves of conversions, have been amply described by historians. Reading both these analyses and primary sources, it appears that both these phenomena are expressive of a search for means of consolation.

Let me begin by discussing the spiritualization of literature. In the 1890s, a shift was operated in literature from the naturalism of the school of Médan towards a more spiritually or religiously inspired literature.<sup>150</sup> Just as positivists and materialists had been criticized for not being able to grasp the truth of nature, some novelists started to contest the capacity for exact descriptions that naturalist writers had promised.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, a new generation of writers aimed for their work to be not only informative, but meditative as well.<sup>152</sup> This shift has been understood as the result both of an opposition to the experienced persecution of the church, and of an attraction to religious certainties and answers.<sup>153</sup> It did not necessarily mean a return to religion, but writers did pay a different attention to it in their work: “Identité des interrogations, proximité des thèmes, un air du temps se dégage qui tient d’une forme diffuse de spiritualisme, d’attention, à défaut d’adhésion, aux impresions religieuses.”<sup>154</sup> Describing this process, historian Frédéric Gugelot cited L’abbé Klein, a professor at the *Institut catholique de Paris*, who reflected on this change by relating it to a need for truth, and for consolation:

Mécontentes et déçues de n’obtenir de la sagesse humaine aucune réponse satisfaisante à ces éternelles questions de la destinée, qui semblent retrouver le poignant intérêt que la science positive se vantait d’avoir pu détruire, les âmes chercheuses de la génération nouvelle se sont enfin demandé si la religion ne pourrait pas leur dire des paroles plus vraisemblables et plus consolantes.<sup>155</sup>

While some authors and artists only grew closer to religion without completely adhering to it, others did make a complete return to Catholicism. These conversions to

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<sup>150</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 218.; Comfort, "Divine Images of Hysteria in Emile Zola's Lourdes," 344; Peter Michael Wetherill, Review of *Lourdes*, by Emile Zola. *Romantisme* 96 (1997), 117-118.

<sup>151</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 219.

<sup>152</sup> Id., 219.

<sup>153</sup> Id., 219.

<sup>154</sup> Id., 218.

<sup>155</sup> Félix Klein, *Le mouvement néo-chrétien dans la littérature contemporaine* (Paris, Librairie Didier: 1892), 23-25. in: Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 218-219.

happened remarkably often at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. The first of these waves occurred in the 1880s, and has been explained as a reaction to the radical anticlerical politics of the 1880s, combined with the prevalence of positivism in philosophy and naturalism in literature.<sup>156</sup> These conversions were themselves highly controversial, as many *libre-penseurs* saw them as forced, or as caused by the weakness and fear of the last moments before death. Catholics in turn often gave them a large presence in the press to celebrate intellectuals that had returned to god.<sup>157</sup> In his seminal work *Les conversions des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France*, Frédéric Gugelot studied the reasons for these conversions, and argued that whereas some desired to return to God as an answer to the chaos that rationalism had created,<sup>158</sup> others desired to be forgiven for their sins, or to find relief from suffering.<sup>159</sup> Catholicism, to Gugelot, formed a “refuge” for the anxieties of the suffering.<sup>160</sup> Besides their own suffering, Gugelot also described the experience of the suffering of loved ones, their death, and the loneliness ensuing, as reasons for conversions.<sup>161</sup>

An example of someone converting explicitly in order to feel consoled, was François Coppée, poet, writer and *libre penseur*, who converted on Octobre 30th of 1897. His conversion, according to Gugelot, was occasioned by his suffering from a severe illness that confronted him with the weakness of human life: “la prise de conscience de la faiblesse de la vie humaine.”<sup>162</sup> Coppée described his journey to conversion in his (at the time) famous book *La Bonne souffrance*.<sup>163</sup> He was raised a Catholic, strayed from the religious path in his adolescence, and later subscribed to materialist thinking to explain his atheism.<sup>164</sup> As described by Gugelot, Coppée’s conversion was one towards a consolatory Christianity: “Il retrouve les racines d’un catholicisme de consolations, si présent au XIXème siècle.”<sup>165</sup>

It is important to note here, that Coppée’s conversion, although occasioned by his own suffering, was strongly related to the suffering of humanity at large. It was the “spectacle de tant d’injustice” that made it inconceivable to him that there would not be any justice in

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<sup>156</sup> Václava Bakešová, “Phénomène des conversions au catholicisme parmi les intellectuels en France au tournant des XIXe et XXe siècles,” in *Panorama des études françaises en Europe centrale*, edited by Adran Bene (2017), 107-114, 108.

<sup>157</sup> Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, 373.

<sup>158</sup> Id., 365.

<sup>159</sup> Id., 373.

<sup>160</sup> Id., 375.

<sup>161</sup> Id., 377-382.

<sup>162</sup> Id., 373.

<sup>163</sup> Id., 374.

<sup>164</sup> François Coppée, *La bonne souffrance* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1898), 6.

<sup>165</sup> Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, 374.

the afterlife.<sup>166</sup> He asked himself not only why he was suffering himself, but also why suffering and tears in general existed. For a long time, he could not find an answer to these questions: “En présence de ces redoutables problèmes, l’esprit humain, on le sait, n’a trouvé que des solutions incertaines et d’ailleurs contradictoires. Aucune ne me satisfaisait.”<sup>167</sup> Materialist writings, he argued, often prophesied a future social state in which all would equally receive their share of bread and science, “la nourriture du corps et de l’esprit.”<sup>168</sup> This social state, however, had not been realized. Progress, Coppée argued, was dishearteningly slow, and the lower classes of society were still suffering.<sup>169</sup> In the meantime, the only answer for those suffering was to return to religion, which at least brought hope, justice, truth and happiness for the afterlife.<sup>170</sup>

As Frédéric Gugelot argued, religion was often the answer to uncertainty and doubt,<sup>171</sup> and Coppée’s conversion clearly brought him a sense of calmness and serenity: “Je sors de mon épreuve physiquement diminué et destiné à subir, probablement jusqu’à la fin, l’esclavage d’une infirmité fort pénible. Cependant, parce que j’ai lu et médité l’Evangile, mon cœur est non seulement résigné, mais rempli de calme et de courage.”<sup>172</sup> As religion was the last resort for humanity, Coppée reproached himself for having been arrogant enough to try to destroy this consolation: “Foi des humbles! Dernier trésor de consolations pour la pitoyable humanité! Combien ceux qui te combattent et te détruisent sont malfaisants et coupables, et combien je le fus moi-même, qui me reproche plus d’une page dictée par l’ironie et par l’orgueil!”<sup>173</sup> He published his conversion journey with the aim of getting others to give up on their last bit of arrogance and to surrender to religion again,<sup>174</sup> and urged his readers to confess their sins to a priest, as they would leave “consolés,” feeling their soul as light as if it was growing angel wings.<sup>175</sup> In any case, Coppée himself did succeed in finding consolation again: “J’ai eu ce bonheur, en effet, que sur le soir de mes jours, quand reparut la souffrance, (...) Dieu a laissé tomber sur moi un rayon de sa miséricorde et m’a rendu les consolations de la prière et de la foi.”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Coppée, *La bonne souffrance*, 9.

<sup>167</sup> Id., 9.

<sup>168</sup> Id., 136-137.

<sup>169</sup> Id., 136-137.

<sup>170</sup> Id., 138.

<sup>171</sup> Gugelot, *La conversion des intellectuels au Catholicisme en France 1885-1935*, 377.

<sup>172</sup> Coppée, *La bonne souffrance*, 14.

<sup>173</sup> Id., 136.

<sup>174</sup> Id., 31.

<sup>175</sup> Id., 256.

<sup>176</sup> Id., 8.

It seems that for many materialist thinkers, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the shift to a materialist world was difficult to make, precisely because it led them into a consolationless world. And although they argued fiercely against the need for consolation, it appears that they still longed for precisely that feeling of consolation that they were trying so hard to abandon. Interestingly, in a debate in the Senate in 1881, Lambert accuses antisectionarists who, even if they often argue against religion for others, would like to die in the religion they were born into, and with religious consolations:

Et cependant, même à Paris, surtout à Paris, il y a des gens qui croient. Parmi ceux qui ne pratiquent pas, beaucoup tiennent à mourir dans la religion dans laquelle ils sont nés. Parmi ceux mêmes qui mènent le plus vivement la campagne antireligieuse, on en trouve qui, tout en ne voulant pas de religion pour les autres, ne refusent pas pour eux les consolations de la dernière heure.<sup>177</sup>

The tension between the dismissal of consolations and the longing for it, is reminiscent of something Lalouette pointed out when evaluating the success of materialist thinkers. According to her, the *Libre Penseurs* succeeded in changing public institutions, but did not succeed in secularizing the French *mentalités*. The reason for this, according to her, was that they did not offer alternative practices and symbols to substitute the religious “habitus.”<sup>178</sup> Lalouette does not, however, give a further explanation of how this habitus worked in relation to experiences, nor explain why the alternative practices and symbols would have had an effect on the secularization of the French *mentalités*. In the following paragraphs, I will propose a possible solution to these questions by giving an enactive interpretation of the consolatory practices occurring amongst late nineteenth century Catholic thinkers.

## **2.2 Affective niches affording Catholic consolations**

### **Situated experience**

A possible explanation to this apparent contradiction would be to say that the longing for consolation is nothing more than a natural, universal, human need, and that it was only a matter of time until it would resurrect after the materialists’ rejection. This explanation presumes the existence of a certain universal and unchanging feeling of being consoled, to which humans

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<sup>177</sup> M. Lambert de Sainte croix in: “Discussion d’une interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat: compte rendu in-extenso*, May 30, 1881, 736-745, 740.

<sup>178</sup> Jacqueline, Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, (Paris: Albin Michel, 2008), Conclusion, Ibook.



would always tend. The presence of such, or any, universal and fixed emotions, however, has not yet been convincingly proven by neurological research; no fixed emotion programs have yet been found in the brain.<sup>179</sup> Thus, the universality of emotions is not to be presumed. Rather, an increasing number of researchers, from philosophy of cognitive science, neuroscience and history have argued that emotional experience is highly context-dependent.<sup>180</sup> Instead of presuming, like Ronald Rittgers, that “the practice [of consolation] grows out of the human desire to mitigate pain and to manage strong emotions,” I follow Hitzer and Boddice’s rejection of the idea of “some kind of fundamental substrate of humanness, to be mined from under all the cultural muck.”<sup>181</sup> It is either untrue to say that human beings always seek to be consoled, or devoid of meaning, since that which is consoling can be radically different from time to time and place to place. The longing for consolation expressed in the materialist writing discussed above, is not to be explained away as ‘natural,’ but to be accounted for from within its historical context.

Denying that experiences of (a longing for) consolation are universally stable, however, does not amount to saying that they are completely constructed by culture. A constructivist understanding of experience would hardly be able to account for the longing of materialists for religion. Indeed, if discourse were to determine the way we feel, then in this case the materialist thinkers should not only *argue* that religious consolations no longer work, but also *experience* that they do not work. Relatedly, after Lalouette’s mention of the ‘habitus’ one might expect an explanation of this phenomenon on the basis of Monique Scheer’s understanding of emotions as practices. This framework, however, does not explain why materialists, after dismissing catholic consolatory practices, still longed for it. If emotion *is* a practice, than the absence of that practice would explain the absence of the corresponding emotion, but not the longing for it. Instead of conceiving of emotions *as* practices, I contend that emotions are embodied, meaning-making, acts *afforded by* practices, and by other aspects of the environment.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> For an argument against the Basic Emotions Theory proposed by Paul Ekman, see: Lisa Feldman Barrett, “Solving the emotion paradox: Categorization and the experience of emotion,” *Personality and social psychology review* 10, no. 1 (2006), 20-46, 27.

<sup>180</sup> See for instance: Rob Boddice “History Looks Forward: Interdisciplinarity and Critical Emotion Research,” *Emotion Review* 12, no. 3 (2020) 131-134.; Giovanna Colombetti “What Language does to Feelings,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 16, No. 9, 2009, 4-26.

<sup>181</sup> Rittgers, “The age of reform as an age of consolation,” 11.; Boddice and Hitzer, *Feeling Dis-Ease. Experiencing medicine and illness*, 5.

<sup>182</sup> Scheer, “Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion”, 206. The difference between these two positions lies in their respective understanding of the conditions of possibility of subjective experience. In short, experience, to Scheer, is determined by the pre-existing cultural script of embodied practices. The enactive approach, in contrast, does not

This brings me to the enactive biocultural understanding of human cognition, which I believe fits best to explain the problem of consolation.<sup>183</sup> This approach understands cognition not as a computational process happening in the brain alone, nor as a construction on the basis of discursive concepts, but as something that is acted out, or enacted, by the organism; it is an active engagement of the organism with its environment.<sup>184</sup> It is a process of attuning to an environment, where this environment itself is not neutral but perceived in terms of this attunement or of the cognitive activity of the organism.<sup>185</sup> Different enactive accounts of emotion and affectivity have been developed,<sup>186</sup> but I will in this thesis follow Colombetti's enactive understanding of emotions as stabilized forms of dynamical engagement with the environment. Such emotions are evaluative in a non-cognitive way as the evaluations arise from the embodied and situated character of the organism: "Evaluations arise in this organism in virtue of its embodied and situated character, and the whole situated organism carries meaning as such - not by way of some separate abstract cognitive-evaluative faculty."<sup>187</sup> Thus, this enactive understanding of emotion allows us to see emotion as shaped by an engagement with the body and the environment, including institutions, norms, objects, spaces, but also other people, their acts and their experiences. These sociocultural and material aspects of the environment scaffold one's experiences.<sup>188</sup> The emotions that humans have nowadays in western culture, can be seen as specific dynamical but stabilized forms of meaningful

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grant practices a primacy over subjective experience; meaningful experience is acted out, or enacted, but pertains to living organisms from their very outset. Living organisms, in this view, are organized in such a way that organisms are always creating meaning, and this meaning-making is not rule based, but shaped by direct and repeated interactions with a rich environment – which often contains practices.

<sup>183</sup> For the biocultural understanding of cognition see: Boddice and Hitzer, *Feeling Dis-Ease. Experiencing medicine and illness*; Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, sense, experience*. Enactivism was first proposed by Maturana and Varela (1987/1992) and Varela et al. (1991), and many works have since been published to develop and apply this theoretical framework. It has traditionally been described as part of the 4E theories, consisting of Embodied, Embedded, Enacted, and Extended cognition, to which recently Emotive has been added. These five conceptions are intimately related to each other, and often combined. I follow Ward and Stapleton's explanation of the intertwining of these different claims as following from the understanding of cognition as enactive: "If cognition is enactive, then it is also embodied, embedded, affective and potentially extended." Dave Ward and Mog Stapleton, "Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embedded, affective and extended," in *Consciousness in interaction: The role of the natural and social context in shaping consciousness* edited by Fabio Paglieri, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2012), 90, 104.

<sup>184</sup> Ward and Stapleton, "Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embedded, affective and extended," 91.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ward and Stapleton, "Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embedded, affective and extended."; Jesse Prinz and Daniel Shargel, "An Enactivist Theory of Emotional Content," in *The Ontology of Emotions*, edited by Hichem Naar and Fabrice Teroni (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2018), 110–129.; Michelle Maiese, "Body and emotion," in *The Routledge handbook of embodied cognition*. Edited by Lawrence Shapiro, (London: Routledge, 2014), 249-257.

<sup>187</sup> Colombetti, "Enaction, Sense-Making and Emotion, 146.

<sup>188</sup> See, for instance: Peter Stilwell and Katherine Harman, "An enactive approach to pain: beyond the biopsychosocial model," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 18, (2019), 637-665.; Colombetti, and Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the affective mind," 1157.; Giovanna Colombetti, "Emoting the Situated Mind. A taxonomy of Affective Material Scaffoldings," *JOLMA* 1, NO. 2 (2020), 215-236, 216.

engagement with the environment.<sup>189</sup> Thus, one could still say that in the enactive view, experiences are ‘constructed,’ as they are not pre-existing inborn programs. However, these constructs are not determined by discourse alone and are not brain-centered: they are constructed through the reciprocal engagement between an actor, whose system is organized in such a way that it allows for subjective experience and intentionality, and all different aspects of its environment.

This view of emotions as shaped not by a “separate abstract cognitive-evaluative faculty”, but by the interplay of an actor and its environment, is of particular interest here. Looking specifically at consolation, it appears indeed that the Catholic form of consoling was based not only on ideas of the afterlife and sins, but also scaffolded in large part by objects, practices and interpersonal interactions. In the next section, I will describe the way a religious feeling of consolation in late nineteenth century France was scaffolded and worked.

### Catholic consolatory environments

The situation in Parisian hospitals (and cemeteries) in the 1880s and 1890s offers many descriptions of such consolatory practices and objects. The upsurge of materialist thinking had very concrete effects on society in late nineteenth-century Parisian hospitals, as, after winning the elections of 1879, the republican *Libre Penseurs* started a period of thorough reforms. In studying these reforms, historians have mostly focussed on the secularization of the French school system that started at the time. A less well-known history is that of the secularization of public hospitals. As was pointed out by Lalouette, these reforms can to an important degree be attributed to the work of the second wave of *Libre Penseurs*, of whom a remarkable number were medical practitioners.<sup>190</sup> Concretely, the reforms consisted of three measures: the expulsion of nuns and charity congregations, the expulsions of priests, and the prohibition of Catholic symbols and rituals. One of the most prominent actors in the secularization of hospitals was Désiré-Magloire Bourneville, a doctor at the Salpêtrière under Charcot and convinced *Libre Penseur*.<sup>191</sup> It was due to his efforts, amongst others, that between 1879 and 1890 the congregations had left almost all Parisian hospitals (besides Saint-Louis and L’Hôtel Dieu, that would be laicised in 1908).<sup>192</sup> In order to replace all these nurses, Bourneville created four

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<sup>189</sup> Colombetti, *The Feeling Body: Affective Science Meets the Enactive Mind*, 70.; Marie van Haaster, “History of Experience, Philosophy of Mind,” Master’s Thesis Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, 2021, 13.

<sup>190</sup> Lalouette, “Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870),” 57.

<sup>191</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, ChII., Laicisation des hôpitaux, Ibook.; Jacqueline Lalouette, “La Libre Pensée, l’Eglise et la crémation,” *Le mouvement social*, 81-91, 82.

<sup>192</sup> Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, ChII., Laicisation des hôpitaux, Ibook.

schools for secular nurses in the Bicetre, Salpêtrière (both in 1878), la Pitié (1881) and Lariboisière (1895). These changes were the subject of fierce debate in journals, treatises, as well as in the Paris municipal council and Parliament.

In short, Catholic nuns were accused by Republicans of many horrible acts, but most prominent in these accusations was the idea that they privileged Catholic patients and mistreated atheists (thereby pressurizing the freedom of conscience of patients), that they were unhygienic due to their costumes, disobedient towards doctors, and had no professional schooling.<sup>193</sup> Linking the Catholic consolations that religious sisters provided directly to the freedom of consciousness, Larousse argued for the expulsion of religious personnel from hospitals: “Quand donc comprendrons-nous, en France, que la liberté est le dernier mot de l'ordre (...)?”<sup>194</sup> The conservatives, on the other hand, often argued that the secularization of hospitals would lead to a lack of consolations for patients and their families: “la privation de toutes consolations religieuses.”<sup>195</sup> The idea of a lack of consolation was so important, that it was included as the first point in the political program of a Catholic party in Lille, l’union de la France Chrétienne, as an argument for the conservation of nurses and priests in hospitals: “(...) nos pauvres et nos malades sont condamnés aux souffrances sans consolations dans l’hôpital.”<sup>196</sup> Interestingly, this program detailed the different aspects of secularization that would lead to a lack of consolation: “Plus de Christ sous leurs yeux pour les soutenir, plus de sœurs pour les traiter en frères et leur prodiger les soins dont la religion seule a le secret. Plus de prêtres pour ouvrir aux mourants les portes du ciel. N’est-ce point la pire des persecutions !”<sup>197</sup> The deprivation of consolation was not primarily related here to the effects of revolutionary ideas, as we saw in the first chapter, but to very concrete changes in the environment of the ill. As was argued repetitively in parliamentary debates and newspapers, consolation was the task of the nurses, but also of priests, and of religious symbols, and the expulsion of these aspects of the environment was what would lead, so it was argued, to desolation. I will briefly describe the way each of these three categories were said to console patients.

The first important change was the disappearance of the Catholic nurse to whom consolation was a central task:

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Larousse, *Grand dictionnaire universel du XIXe siècle*, 385.

<sup>195</sup> Lachenal, Albert -Eugene, *Le Spiritualisme voilà la vérité*, 1882.

<sup>196</sup> “Le Programme” *La Croix*, 14 avril, 1891, 1.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

“Elle se propose non seulement de guérir, mais de soulager et de consoler. Là où elle ne peut pas ramener la santé, elle doit s’efforcer de rendre la paix, d’adoucir les souffrances de la maladie et les angoisses de la mort. Or, c’est à quoi elle ne saurait parvenir sans le concours de la religion.”<sup>198</sup>

Her religious consolatory capacity was often described as based on her devotion; this devotion allowed for a truly intimate relationship to grow between her and a patient.<sup>199</sup> It was argued that she was much more devoted than secular nurses, because her work was one of calling, for which she did not need to be paid, and because she would never have a husband, children or home to return to after work.<sup>200</sup> Armand Deprés, surgeon at the Hopital de la Charité from 1880 and deputy of the Seine department from 1889-1893 for the liberal republicans, gave an elaborate description of the different aspects of this devotion in a parliamentary debate. To him, healing occurred not only by means of medicine, but by means of consolations as well - and only religious nurses, due to their selfless devotion, would offer those: “Ce n’est pas avec de médicaments seulement qu’on guérit (applaudissements à droite). Il faut aussi au malade des consolations: les religieuses les lui donnent tandis que les infirmières ne sont pas payées pour cela.”<sup>201</sup> The consolatory practices of care performed by the religious nurse, according to Deprés, were countless, and consisted of two things. She kept the ill or dying company: “la religieuse était là, en sorte que si le malheureux recouvrait un instant la raison, il voyait auprès de lui un regard bienveillant où il puisait quelque courage.”<sup>202</sup> And while keeping them company she prayed for them: “(...) quand un malade est condamné, quand il va mourir, l’infirmière laïque le quitte et va à ses affaires: au contraire la religieuse reste là auprès du mourant (...); sa religion lui commande de réciter les prières des agonisants et elle les récite agenouillée au pied du lit.”<sup>203</sup> She gets “attached” to those who suffer most, and the “supreme consolation” she offers is the promise that other sisters will take care of a dying patient’s children: “et cette promesse toujours tenue, adoucit les derniers moments du malheureux (très bien! très bien! à droite).”<sup>204</sup> Deprés argued that now that the religious nurses were expelled from the hospitals, ‘the poor’ were left alone. Armand Deprés presented the religious consolation of nurses as a replacement for the role of friends and family with whom higher classes could surround themselves when dying at home: religion here seems understood as a

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<sup>198</sup> Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert, “La Laïcisation des hôpitaux” *Annales Catholiques*, June 18, 1881.

<sup>199</sup> “La laïcisation des hôpitaux: Appel à tous les amis des pauvres,” (Paris: H. Oudin, 1905, 20-21.

<sup>200</sup> Lambert de sainte croix in: “Discussion d’une interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat: compte rendu in-extenso*, May 30, 1881, 736-745, 740.

<sup>201</sup> Armand Deprés in: “La Laïcisation des hôpitaux à la chambre: Séance du 18 décembre” *Annales Catholiques*, December 27, 1890, 704-713, 711.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

kind of company for the poor. Relatedly, it was often argued that the family of a patient would feel consoled knowing that a patient was consoled by sisters or had asked for religious sacraments.<sup>205</sup> Others argued that the nurse had, beyond her devotion and caring acts, become a kind of a symbol herself; in several sources we find the sight of her characteristic hat as an element that brought hope and consolation.<sup>206</sup>

The second measure of secularization of hospitals, the expulsion of priests, was also described as resulting in desolation. The new regulations still allowed priests to enter hospitals, but not to live in them and to speak only to those patients who, upon entering the hospital, had signed a document attesting to their desire to see a priest. Catholic members of the senate and the municipal council of Paris argued that priests would now, due both to the distance to be bridged to the hospital and the additional paperwork, always be too late to give the “last consolations” to patients: “l’aumônier arriverait presque toujours trop tard et l’infortuné mourrait sans les consolations de la religion.”<sup>207</sup> The consolations of religion here seem to be the last sacraments; a promise of entering heaven. In addition to delaying the priests, it was argued that the paperwork and control imposed on priests had a second drawback; it would hinder de “caractère de discrétion et d’intimité” of the relationship between priests and patients, which in turn would prevent patients to express their most sincere desires: “l’obligation de déclarer publiquement ses intentions fait expirer sur les lèvres de plus d’un moribond l’aveu de ses désirs les plus sincères.”<sup>208</sup> This was described by the Cardinal of Paris, Guibert, in an open letter published in the *Annales Catholiques* on the 18th of June 1881. He added that this would prevent the formation of reciprocal trust, and that this trust was necessary to give true consolation:

Il faut que le prêtre soit à même de donner à chaque instant à ceux qui le demandent le secours de son ministère; et pour que ce ministère apporte au malade, au lieu d'une émotion pénible, une vraie consolation, il est nécessaire que les voies soient préparées par la confiance réciproque; qui ne peut se former que dans les visites et dans les entretiens particuliers.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Le duc de Broglie “Interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République Française, débats parlementaires*, May 31, 1883, 594-610, 599; Buffet in: “Dépôt de Projet de loi” *Journal officiel de la République Française, débats parlementaires*, May 10, 1883, 467-477, 473.; Despatys in: “Question de M. Delabrousse au sujet des mesures prises dans les cimetières” *Bulletin municipal officiel*, November 25, 1882, 794-796, 796.

<sup>206</sup> “Discussion du rapport de M. Navarre sur la laïcisation de l’Hotel-Dieu et de Saint-Louis (suite de la discussion)” *Bulletin Municipal Officiel*, 14 novembre 1903, 3601-3615, 3601.

<sup>207</sup> Despatys in: “Les Aumôniers des Hôpitaux” *Annales Catholiques*, January 7, 1882, 20-25, 21.; Lerolle in: “Budget spécial de l’Assistance publique. - Suite et fin de la discussion.” *Bulletin municipal officiel*, December 24, 1890, 3906-3916, 3907.

<sup>208</sup> Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert, “La Laïcisation des hôpitaux” *Annales Catholiques*, June 18, 1881, 647.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid.

Beyond the intimate relationship with priests and the devotedness of religious nurses, other aspects of the environment were described as playing a crucial role in consolation. We already encountered, for instance, the practice of praying. In the senate, M. Buffet described how the prohibited collective prayers and the religious advice given by nurses to their patients represented for almost all of them: “une suprême et souveraine consolation.”<sup>210</sup> He relates that one of those nurses asked whether she was still allowed to make the sign of a cross, to which it was answered yes, but only if nobody saw it.<sup>211</sup>

Another element that returns in sources regularly, is the sight of a crucifix.<sup>212</sup> The Crucifix was described by Lefebvre in his *Consolations* as a crucial symbol for consolation because it symbolized the Christ’s suffering for the absolution of sins:

La Croix, c’est l’image d’un Dieu qui souffre et qui meurt...Mais pourquoi, et pour qui?...Pour le péché et pour le pécheur. C’est le sacrifice d’expiation et d’amour...La justice et la miséricorde se sont rencontrées sur cette montagne célèbre et se sont embrassées sur la Croix.<sup>213</sup>

Lefebvre argued that it was precisely to console those who are suffering that the church put crosses at death beds, on tombs and in prisons; on all places of human suffering: “C’est parce que la Croix est la lumière et la consolation des âmes fidèles que l’église en met partout, partout où l’on souffre.”<sup>214</sup> Without these crucifixes, without the sight of a cross, Lefebvre argued poignantly, those who suffer would not have the strength to wait for death:

- Sans elle, le malade désespéré n'attendrait peut-être pas la mort. - Sans elle, l'orphelin se briserait la tête sur la tombe de sa mère. - Sans elle le prisonnier se laisserait mourir de faim; le prêtre succomberait sous le poids de ses peines amères ; et les rois de la terre, sans elle, se perdraient dans les épines de la richesse, ou dans la gloire et les plaisirs du trône. Mais elle soutient, elle console tous les cœurs.<sup>215</sup>

The crucifix supported, consoled all hearts - and its absence would lead people to despair and even to kill themselves.

Even if the effects of the disappearance of crosses from hospitals and graveyards, when this was carried out two decades after Lefebvre’s writing, were probably less severe than predicted here, one can imagine that it did leave people, who had grown used to looking at

<sup>210</sup> “Discussion d’une interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat: compte rendu in-extenso*, May 30, 1881, 736-745, 744.

<sup>211</sup> “Discussion d’une interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat: compte rendu in-extenso*, May 30, 1881, 736- 745, 744.

<sup>212</sup> Consolation offered by prayer: Béranger in: “Dépôt de rapports” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat*, June 30, 1883, 784-794, 784.

<sup>213</sup> Lefebvre, *Consolations*, 226.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Id., 226-227.

those crosses, with a feeling of desolation. This was, at least, argued for in several municipal debates. Despatys, at the time the *Prefet de la Seine*, argued in the debate of 25th of November 1882, that the disappearance of crucifixes from cemeteries would leave families without consolation. He added that the practicing of religion without symbols was impossible, and that even though laws could forbid them, symbols would continue to exist in the hearts of Parisians.<sup>216</sup> Turinaz, whose arguments about the social order brought about by religious consolations were discussed in the previous chapter, also argued for the need to return to the people the divine symbols, such as the crucifix, that had offered them consolation: “Rendez au peuple (...) le crucifix et les symboles augustes dont la vue éclairait son âme et fortifiait son cœur.”<sup>217</sup>

In an article titled “Les fruits de la laïcisation”, an anonymous author argued, sarcastically, that at least the crucifix, the hat of the nurses, their soft prayers, and the divine consolations of priests walking past hospital beds would now no longer offend Freethinkers who themselves were doing well:

“du moins le crucifix n’offusque plus les regards des libres-penseurs qui se portent bien ; on n’aperçoit plus les blanches cornettes des Soeurs de Saint-Vincent de Paul ; on n’entend plus les doux murmures de la prière, et le prêtre ne se promène plus à travers les lits en répandant les divines consolations.”<sup>218</sup>

Importantly, the sources I describe here are not first-person accounts of consolatory experiences by patients in these hospitals. Rather, they are argumentative essays and speeches given by politicians about people who, most of the time, were not part of the same social group. At times, these men explicitly distanced themselves from ‘the poor’ in the hospitals. For instance, when Armand-Deprés attempted to convince his fellow politicians of the importance of religious consolations by the bedside of hospital patients, he argued: “Vous n’y attachez pas d’importance, soit ! moi non plus. Mais quand un des vôtres meurt il a auprès de lui des parents, des amis ; au contraire le pauvre a l’hôpital est seul (...).”<sup>219</sup> We cannot, therefore, reliably deduce from these sources alone that patients did experience desolation after the secularization

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<sup>216</sup> Despatys in: “Question de M. Delabrousse au sujet des mesures prises dans les cimetières” *Bulletin municipal officiel*, November 25, 1882, 794-796.

<sup>217</sup> Turinaz, “Le Patriotisme”, 344.

<sup>218</sup> “Les fruits de la laïcisation”, 354.

<sup>219</sup> Armand-Deprés in: “La Laïcisation des hôpitaux à la chambre: Séance du 18 décembre” *Annales Catholiques*, December 27, 1890, 704-713, 711. See also: Lambert de Sainte croix in: “Discussion d’une interpellation” *Journal officiel de la République française. Débats parlementaires. Sénat: compte rendu in-extenso*, May 30, 1881, 736-745, 740.



of hospitals. The statements made here were meant to convince others in the context of a debate and may for this purpose at the very least have been exaggerated. In some of those sources, we do find descriptions of acts of patients or patients' families - when, for instance, it is stated that many people complained about the disappearance of priests.<sup>220</sup>

In the published correspondences of Vitteaut, a Christian doctor to whom I briefly referred in the first chapter, we do find a first-person account of consolation by means of the combination of a specific Christian discourse with Christian objects and rituals. Indeed, at the end of his book, Vitteaut gives a personal description of the way in which he consoled a friend and his mother, who according to him had been influenced by materialist ideas, on her deathbed. When he realized he could no longer ease her pain medically, he started to have “intimate” conversations with her on Heaven and its hope. Then, “quand son âme fut suffisamment préparée”, he dressed “l’autel du sacrifice” close to her bed - placing on a table the *Imitation of Christ*, and on that book their family crucifix.<sup>221</sup> Finally, the priest came and gave her the holy host, which Vittaut helped her swallow with a cup of herbal tea.<sup>222</sup> As a result, it seemed to him that she did feel consoled: “Alors je vis dans toute la physionomie de ma mère ce calme que donne la confiance dans une vie meilleure.”<sup>223</sup> He hoped that he himself would also have the chance to die consoled in this way: “J’ai désiré plus d’une fois finir mes jours comme cet ami et comme ma mère qui, sur les bords de l’abîme, au moment du plus grand danger, purent jeter l’ancre dans le sein de la miséricorde divine, et moururent consolés.”<sup>224</sup>

The actual experiences of patients in public hospitals should be made the subject of further study, but the detailed description of Vittaut, in combination with all the arguments made in journals and political debates, do make it plausible that to many catholic officials, doctors, journalists and politicians, religious practices, social interactions and symbols were crucial to the shaping of experiences of consolation. To them, it was only by means of, and in combination with, these concrete encounters, practices and symbols, that the religious ideas of hope and resignation were consolatory.

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<sup>220</sup> Joseph-Hippolyte Guibert in: “La Laïcisation des hôpitaux” *Annales Catholiques*, June 18, 1881, 647.; See also: Felix Platel (Ignotus), *Paris-Secret* (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1889), 5: describes that a dying woman in an hospice asked for a priest.

<sup>221</sup> Vittaut, *Correspondance du Docteur Vitteaut*, 356.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

<sup>224</sup> Id., 357.

### **2.3 The emotive failure of materialist thinkers**

Having established the importance of the material environment, of practices and of interpersonal relations for the workings of consolation according to late nineteenth century Catholic thinkers, I will in this section turn back to the longing for consolation experienced by materialist thinkers, and argue that this phenomenon is best understood by combining the enactive concept of affective niches, with Reddy's concept of emotive failure.

We saw, in the previous section, the consolatory workings of the sight of a crucifix, of the sound of a prayer and of the devoted engagement with nurses and priests. Since the material objects, practices and interpersonal interactions described here constitute elements of the environment that afford a specific experience time and again - in this case the Christian kind of consolation of late nineteenth-century Paris - we can understand them as affective niches. One of the characteristics of affective niches is their transparency: we engage with our environment through them.<sup>225</sup> This does not mean that such objects are invisible or that they cannot be reflected upon, but rather that they have become part of our engagement with the world in such a way that they alter this engagement without needing to be reflected on.<sup>226</sup> In the present case, the sight of a crucifix or the sound of a prayer did not need to be reflected on to scaffold a specific experience of consolation.

We find a telling example of this in a novel by Édouard Rod, one of the materialist authors who grew closer to religion in the last decades of the nineteenth century - without ever fully converting to it. Édouard Rod, a Swiss man who lived in Paris and started his writing career in the naturalist tradition (he was close to Zola), turned away from this genre as he published one of his most important and widely read works: *Le sens de la vie*.<sup>227</sup> This book, according to commentator Victor Giraud, was representative of the generation of young authors who became less interested in exact observations of the external world, and increasingly concerned with matters such as the soul, infinity, and the meaning of life. Giraud argued that this book was Édouard Rod's psychological autobiography - an observation of his own moral personality expressed through the main character.<sup>228</sup> Just as with Zola's *Lourdes*, this autobiographical character as well as the popularity of the novel make it a particularly

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<sup>225</sup> Colombetti, and Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the affective mind," 1170.

<sup>226</sup> Evan Thompson and Mog Stapleton, "Making sense of sense-making: Reflections on enactive and extended mind theories," *Topoi* 28 no.1 (2009), 23-30, 29. See also: Ward and Stapleton, "Es are good. Cognition as enacted, embedded, affective and extended," 103.

<sup>227</sup> Giraud, Victor, "Esquisse contemporaines: Édouard Rod I: Le Naturaliste et le Neo-Chrétien" *Revue des Deux Mondes* 14, no. 1, (March 1, 1913), 122-146.

<sup>228</sup> Id., 135.

interesting source. The novel is set up as a kind of diary, with day to day notes of a Parisian sceptic thinker reflecting on aspects of his life such as his marriage and paternity, but also on his relation to religion. A period in which his young daughter is threatened by a severe illness spurs reflection on the hardships of life. He debates with himself whether, if he were religious, he would hate god for bringing so much sorrow to life, or thank him for ending his daughter's suffering so early. He concluded these considerations by taking a strongly indifferent and atheistic stance:

Des mots! des mots!.. Qu'elle vive, qu'elle meure, que nous pleurions ou que nous soyons consolés, qu'importe!... Nous ne sommes rien, et c'est folie que de remuer le ciel pour le moindre accident qui nous touche. Au milieu de la paisible indifférence des choses qui nous enveloppe dans l'éternel mouvement dont nous sommes les imperceptibles atomes, que sont donc nos cris et nos maux? Pourquoi nous obstiner à les grossir de telle sorte qu'ils tiennent une place dans l'Infini?<sup>229</sup>

Taking this perspective on life and death, on suffering and consolation, Rod seems to present a perfect specimen of the indifference that Bettex argued would be the most suitable affect for a true materialist. Reading the rest of the book, however, it is clear that the main character is not indifferent to the possibility of the loss of his daughter, and it seems that in these 'indifferent' passages he is trying to find a way to console himself in a secular way – or rather, he seems to be trying not to feel the need for consolation at all. In the very last chapter of the book, the main character walks past the church of Saint Sulpice in Paris, and without really knowing why, enters the church and listens to a mass. Upon entering, he is immediately carried away by the candles, the organ, the singing and the devotion of kneeling people in the church: “Les cierges, l'encens, la grande voix de l'orgue, les chants du chœur et la psalmodie du prêtre répandent dans votre âme un trouble qu'augmente encore la foi contagieuse de la foule agenouillée...”<sup>230</sup> He stays until the end, although he has forgotten his Latin and does not understand what the songs are about. Here, the combination of the space of the church, its smell, the sound of the organs, the collective faith of the people in the space, forms an affective niche; they do not need to be reflected upon or understood to scaffold Rod's main character's experience. By entering the church, and engaging once again with these niches, he renewed an experience that he vaguely remembered from his childhood: “Entré en indifférent, curieux de renouveler une impression oubliée, je l'ai trouvée plus forte que je n'aurais cru (...).”<sup>231</sup> Then, as the church

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<sup>229</sup> Édouard, Rod, *Le sens de la vie* (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin et Cie, 33rd ed., 1926), 146.

<sup>230</sup> Id., 304-305.

<sup>231</sup> Id., 305.

empties, he feels a strong longing to believe again himself. He wants to renew the experience of faith he remembered, and in order both to remember the words to prayers he knew as a child and simultaneously to erase his last doubts, he starts to murmur the Lord's prayer: "et, dans un double effort pour faire jaillir de ma mémoire les formules perdues et pour secouer de ma pensée le joug de l'esprit qui nie, je me mis à murmurer - des lèvres, hélas ! des lèvres seulement: 'Notre père qui êtes aux cieux!'"<sup>232</sup> Thus, Rod's character finds himself muttering the words to a prayer he still remembered from his childhood, in order not only to find the words again, but also in order to attain an experience of faith again. He is not trying to convince himself by arguments, but to reattune to those practices and objects that afforded him a sense of faith in his youth. Just as I do not need to reflect on a bike, on its height or on the orientation of its steering wheel in order to ride it, I do not necessarily need to reflect on the piece of music I am listening to in order to feel comforted by it. Such aspects of our environment that one is attuned with become transparent parts of the way one engages with the rest of the world.<sup>233</sup> The brain-body system adapts to their use and it is through them that it engages with the world.

Thus, Rod's character successfully re-attuned to the affective niches he had known from his childhood. Before entering that church however, he had for a long time not experienced that feeling of faith. Indeed, in certain situations, the transparent relation one has to their environment can break down, which will often lead to reflection on the object that was a transparent affective niche before.<sup>234</sup> If the use of that affective niche was a means to experiencing a specific experience, the lack of that niche can lead to a lack of that experience. In our present case, for instance, the disappearance of crucifixes from public spaces led to an inability to attain the specific experience of consolation that was usually afforded by the sight of such crosses, and it is probable that Rod's character did for a long time not want to enter churches because he dismissed religion and its consolations.

These moments, in which either an affective niche does no longer "work," or in which it has become inaccessible, are akin to what William Reddy called moments of emotive failure. Emotive failure occurs when, despite effortful navigation, one does not succeed in attaining the experience one is longing for. These kinds of situations occur regularly, and often unproblematically. They are the result of the indeterminacy of the emotive effect: saying "I

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<sup>232</sup> Id., 313, in Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 218.

<sup>233</sup> Colombetti, and Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the affective mind"; Elena Clare Cuffari, Ezequiel Di Paolo, and Hanne De Jaegher. "From participatory sense-making to language: there and back again." *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 14, no.4 (2015), 1089-1125, 1116.

<sup>234</sup> Colombetti, and Krueger, "Scaffoldings of the affective mind," 1170.

am Happy” can sometimes lead to you feeling happier, and in other cases have the opposite effect, of realizing that you are not that happy after all.<sup>235</sup> Importantly, however, emotive failure can also be the result of political, cultural, systems or social injustice.<sup>236</sup> The interrelated phenomena of precarity, structural discrimination, or restrictive emotional regimes can be seen as situations that lead to emotive failure, either because of the inaccessibility of certain affordances, or by the ineffectiveness of available affordances.

As was pointed out by William Reddy, constructivist models of emotion cannot account for those situations in which we fail to emote in the way expected in the dominant discourse.<sup>237</sup> It was to solve this problem, that he argued for an understanding of emotions not as constructed by a preexisting discourse, but as the product of effortful navigation. Reddy made two important points about emotion: first, there is a kind of feedback effect between the words one uses to describe how one feels and the way one feels. Indeed, emotion expressions have an emotive effect: they are transformative of the experienced emotion they were meant to describe. Second, actors actively use this feedback effect to alter the way they feel – and to attain the experiences that they are supposed to have given a certain discourse. I believe both these phenomena can be explained within an enactive framework as the result of an attunement between an actor and the language they use.<sup>238</sup> The words one uses are, in this sense, co-constitutive of the experience felt because these words afford us to feel a certain way: words are affective niches scaffolding our environment “in which specific behaviors and experiences can thrive.”<sup>239</sup>

Besides fitting well, explaining the emotive effect from an enactive perspective is beneficial for two reasons. First, the enactive model allows for a nonrepresentational and non-internalist grounding for Reddy’s theory of the emotive. It replaces the computationalist models of cognition on which Reddy’s concept was originally based, and which could not, in contrast with the enactive model, account for the intentional character of experience.<sup>240</sup> Secondly, the enactive framework allows us to expand Reddy’s concept from verbal emotion expressions to

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<sup>235</sup> Reddy, “Against Constructionism”, 331; Reddy, *The navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions*, 96-100, 104-105.

<sup>236</sup> William M. Reddy, *The navigation of feeling: A framework for the history of emotions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>237</sup> William M. Reddy, “Against Constructionism: The Historical Ethnography of Emotions,” *Current Anthropology* 38, no.3 (1997), 327–351.

<sup>238</sup> For Colombetti’s discussion of Reddy: Colombetti “What Language does to Feelings,” 15.

<sup>239</sup> Colombetti “What Language does to Feelings,” 13;

<sup>240</sup> Reddy, “The unavoidable intentionality of affect: The history of emotions and the neurosciences of the present day, 175.; Marie van Haaster, “History of Experience, Philosophy of Mind,” Master’s Thesis Philosophy, University of Amsterdam, 2021, 13.

non-verbal aspects of the environment. Actors do not only enter into a reciprocal engagement with the words they use, but also, as described earlier, with the other affective niches they are attuned to. Seen from this perspective, emotive failure can occur not only when one is not allowed to verbally express certain experiences in a certain way, but also when one is not allowed to attune to certain aspects of the environment that affords certain experiences.

Taking this broad understanding of emotive effects, I believe the materialist thinkers under consideration here were, by the lack of successful attunement to existing Catholic affective niches, experiencing emotive failure. Although they aimed to be indifferent to consolations and not to need them anymore by arguing against their value and effect, they continued to long for a feeling of consolation and to reminisce about the feeling that religious consolations had brought them. Their dismissal of Catholic forms of consolations, both in discourse and in the related and situated practices - such as the reforms of public hospitals, but also in scientific practice - did not lead to the experience that consolation was not needed. Rather, it often led to a longing for precisely the consolation that they had stamped obsolete. Instead of becoming indifferent to the absence of consolation, they experienced it as a lack. They either did not allow themselves to feel the consolations they would feel by engaging with Christian symbols - as was the case for Zola, who expressed the courage it took to give up on these symbols - or the symbols did no longer work although a part of them still wanted them to - as was expressed in Paul Broca's poem. This failure coincided with a goal conflict; which is what Reddy called emotional suffering.<sup>241</sup> A conflict between the aim of not needing consolation, and the aim of feeling consoled. The materialists I discussed did not want to feel the need for consolation, nor did they want to feel consoled by religion, but they still felt that need, and in some cases even still felt the consolation it offered them. This happened not because those feelings of consolation or those feelings of the need for consolation are natural, nor because these feelings were constructed on the basis of discourse, but because these materialists were attuned to an environment that afforded a feeling of consolation that they could no longer attain.

In response to this emotive failure and emotional suffering, some materialists attempted to readjust to their environment. One option was yielding to the attraction of the aspects they were used to engaging with in order to retrieve the exact feeling of consolation they were longing for. This was the case for some of the converts we described in the first section of this chapter. We see this in Rod, whose main character is not trying to convince himself of

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<sup>241</sup> Reddy, *The navigation of feeling: A framework for the history of emotions*, 124.

Christianity by means of arguments, but by muttering the words to one prayer he still remembered from his youth, in order to reattune to the environment that once afforded him to feel calm. Similarly Coppée wrote that he reconquered his faith by returning to the candidness of his youth: “Quant à moi, pour reconquerir la foi dans toute son intégrité et telle qu’on me la donna dans mon berceau, je m’efforce de retrouver la candeur de mon enfance...”<sup>242</sup> He succeeded to feel at peace solely by returning to the ‘discipline of religion’ through the practices of self-examination and prayer: “cette paix de l’âme ne s’obtient que par l’admirable discipline de la religion, par l’examen de conscience, par la prière.”<sup>243</sup> Both Coppée and Rod returned to the practices and environment of their youth, with the aim to regain the experience of faith and consolation they had known before.

## Conclusion

Bettex, in his attempts to discredit materialism, wrote that one of its biggest problems was that it did not make people enthusiastic: “(...) on ne voue pas sa vie à la matière éternelle, et on ne meurt pas avec joie pour les dogmes de la force immuable ou de l’entropie de l’univers. Tout cela vous laisse froid (...).”<sup>244</sup> We have now established, however, that just like religion, materialism did not leave all materialists indifferent. It led to a lack of consolation. Importantly, this lack was not specific or inherent to materialism. Rather, as I have argued, it was the result of the goal conflict and emotive failure that arose during the shift that materialists made to atheism in a religious society. Beyond the ideas about life after death, the Catholic form of consolation was based in large part on symbols, practices and interpersonal interactions, to which some materialists were still attuned, and for which they had not yet proposed alternatives. Besides those who responded to this emotive failure by recalibrating with their environment and making use of religious affective niches again, others developed new, secular affective niches that afforded them ways to feel consoled even within materialism. They will be the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>242</sup> Coppée, *La bonne souffrance*, 138.

<sup>243</sup> Id., 18.

<sup>244</sup> Bettex, *La religion et les Sciences de la nature*, 292.

## CHAPTER 3. AFFECTIVE NICHES AFFORDING SECULAR CONSOLATIONS

The development of a secular form of consolation was a form of emotional navigation, in which it was attempted to readjust one's engagement with the environment in such a way that the concurrence of non-religious ideas, objects and practices afforded a non-religious sense of consolation. I will start this chapter by briefly sketching two ideas that formed the basis for the secular consolations developed towards the end of the nineteenth century in France. In the second and third section, I will try to understand the workings of these forms of consolation.

### **3.1 Two ideas for a secular consolation**

#### Circulation of matter: Consolation in the face of the death of a loved one.

The idea of the eternal circulation of matter was, besides the primacy of matter, one of the fundamental principles of materialism. Lalouette suggested that the eternal circulation of matter was the most influential materialist principle in France in part because it represented a kind of consolation for those who no longer believed in life after death: "Aussi vieille que les théories atomistiques, elle était familière et en outre susceptible d'offrir une sorte de consolation poétique à des personnes s'étant volontairement refusé le réconfort de l'au-delà et des retrouvailles dans l'éternité ave des êtres chers."<sup>245</sup> The eternal circulation meant that deceased persons were still in a sense present on earth, since their matter would resolve and be returned to nature. As an example, Lalouette cites Eugène Noël, in *Fin de vie*:

Ces restes d'une personne aimée, que dans un jour de déchirement vous déposez au cimetière, si vous les laissez à eux-mêmes, vivants qu'ils sont toujours, ne tarderaient pas à se donner pour tombeau l'univers entier. Dans l'air, dans le parfum des fleurs et des fruits, vous les retrouveriez ; bientôt, ils feraient partie de vous-mêmes [...] Qui n'aimerait à se répéter, en pensant à un ami disparu: « c'est quelque chose de lui qui dans cette fleur me sourit, qui me refait le sang en ce grain de blé, me délecte et enivre en ce beau fruit, me rend la santé dans cette bonne plante médicinale. La tombe, comme on l'entend, me semble une impiété; la nature ne connaît pas la tombe, tout au plus y voit-elle un buffet à ses marguerites.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Lalouette, "Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870)," 63.

<sup>246</sup> Eugène Noël, *Fin de vie: notes et souvenirs*. (Rouen: Julien Lecerf, 1902), 69-70.; Lalouette, "Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870)," 63.



There is an interesting parallel between this type of consolation and the Christian one we discussed in the first chapter. Indeed, whereas some materialists warned against the risks of religious consolatory resignation, others seemed to subscribe to a kind of positively valued secular resignation. We find this in *Le Dantec*, whose main character argued that religious consolations brought only unrest and prevented those suffering from feeling calm in their sorrow.<sup>247</sup> A similar argument is expressed by the main character of Edouard Rod, who, still at the sickbed of his daughter, tried to resign to the hardships of his fate and to feel consoled by the idea that every suffering is temporary:

Acceptons-les pour ce qu'ils valent: courbons-nous sans révolte sous leur tyrannie presque inévitable; consolons-nous en sachant qu'ils sont passagers, et qu'ils iront un jour, avec toutes nos joies, tous nos amours et toutes nos pensées, se résorber dans l'abîme d'inconscience d'où nous sommes sortis.<sup>248</sup>

### Progress as consolation for uncertainty and human suffering

The second consolatory idea for secular thinkers is strongly related to the first. Indeed, although a resignation to nature can lead to passivity, it can also represent a trust in the progress of science through the thorough understanding of nature, which in turn, as we saw in the beginning of the first chapter, would lead to the end of all suffering for humanity. The anthropologist Charles Letourneau proposed such a form of consolation when he wrote, in *Science et Matérialisme*, that the progress of science is inextricably related to the desire of men for equity and justice, and that the idea that such progress is inevitable is consolatory: “le progrès, comme nous l'avons défini, est nécessaire, illimité et (...) *il faut se consoler du présent en regardant le passé et en entroyant l'avenir.*”<sup>249</sup> One should feel consoled by the idea that the past was worse than the present, and that the future will bring improvement. We find a similar kind of consolation, on a smaller scale, in Auguste Voisin, alienist in the Salpêtrière, who described that doctors could console themselves when they were uncertain of how to diagnose a pathology by the knowledge that time and observations would always resolve their problems:

En face de ces difficultés inextricables, nous ne sommes consolé de notre impuissance que par l'observation de ce qu'on rencontre à chaque pas en pathologie, où nous voyons la confusion s'introduire sitôt qu'on aborde le diagnostic différentiel au début des maladies. Quel est en effet le médecin qui, dans tous les cas, reconnaîtra une tuberculose aiguë d'une fièvre typhoïde ou d'un simple embarras gastrique fébrile? Mais laissez au médecin ordinaire quelques jours

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<sup>247</sup> Le Dantec, *Le Conflit: entretiens philosophiques*, 135.

<sup>248</sup> Édouard Rod, *Le sens de la vie*, 145-146.

<sup>249</sup> Charles Letourneau, *Science et Matérialisme* (Paris: C. Reinwald et Cie, 1879), 257. My italics.

d'observation, et il arrivera à ce diagnostic différentiel; de même laissez au médecin aliéniste quelques jours, et il arrivera à établir le diagnostic.<sup>250</sup>

This passage refers not to the suffering of humanity as a whole, nor to the progress of science in an abstract sense, but to the day to day progress yielded by scientific observation. It shows that the difficulty of not knowing, the difficulty of not being able to diagnose, to classify disease, was experienced by some scientists as a powerlessness of which they need to be consoled. And it shows that this consolation could be brought only by observation, and patience. The difficulty of uncertainty is also implied by Le Dantec's main character Tacaud, who argues that God cannot "calm" his "besoin de savoir": "Je constate seulement que le Dieu auquel vous croyez ne m'explique rien; c'est un mot, dont vous calmez votre besoin de savoir et qui a la vertu magique de vous décider à ne pas essayer de comprendre."<sup>251</sup> Tacaud concludes the discussions on death that we discussed at length in the first chapter, with the assertion that not knowing things is not only dangerous, but that it also feels good to him to understand life: "(...) il n'est pas désagréable d'y voir clair pendant sa vie."<sup>252</sup>

It is important, at this point, to reflect on an aspect of consolation that has been present throughout the texts studied in this thesis. Earlier, we distinguished two strongly interrelated levels of consolation. The consolation with which materialist and Catholic thinkers are concerned is, on the one hand, that of the suffering population or humanity at large, and on the other hand, a consolation for their own suffering about the suffering of the population. As we saw at the beginning of the first chapter, having the capacity to console humanity was described as something that was consolatory to the Catholic thinkers themselves. The *Libre Penseurs* however, could not find consolation in the idea that humanity was being consoled, as this consolation could lead to a harmful passivity. In the previous chapter, we discussed several materialists who felt the need to be consoled for their own personal suffering, in the face of illness and death. Whereas some turned back to religion to satisfy this longing, others felt consoled by a kind of resignation to nature through the idea of the eternal circulation of matter. The second type of secular consolation we have encountered here, the one based on the idea of progress, however, seems to be concerned both with the suffering of humanity in general, and with a related personal suffering - the suffering from uncertainty in the face of the mysteries of

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<sup>250</sup> Auguste-Félix Voisin, *Leçons cliniques sur les maladies mentales et sur les maladies nerveuses* (Paris: Librairie J.B. Baillière et Fils, 1883, 352).

<sup>251</sup> Le Dantec, *Le Conflit: entretiens philosophiques*, 170.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

nature. These materialists did not feel consoled by consoling humanity, but by trusting that they would succeed, in the future, by means of science and reason, to end human suffering.

I believe it was this type of consolation, felt by some materialists on the basis of trust in the progress of science, that drove Jules Claretie, in his eulogy, to depict Charcot as the great consolator of his time. In the following sections, I will explain how this consolation worked by drawing on Zola's interpretation of Charcot's writing on faith healing, hysteria and hypnosis, and subsequently argue that Charcot's scientific demonstrations itself formed affective niches affording consolation to the materialist thinkers in his audience.

### **3.2 The consolation of reason and science for Jean-Martin Charcot and Emile Zola**

#### From Lourdes to Paris: faith healing and the consolation of scientific progress

Charcot wrote about the relation between hypnosis, hysteria and faith healing in *La foi qui guérit* - one of the publications he made before his death in 1893. Charcot, at the time, had grown famous in France and internationally for his research on hysteria and hypnosis. In addition to his scientific prowess, part of his reputation was based on the fact that the institution he was working in, the Salpêtrière, had become, under his direction as well as his colleague Bourneville's, one of the first completely secular hospitals in Paris. This fact is relevant for our present purposes since this secularization and professionalization affected the role of consolation in the care for persons with mental illnesses. As was shown by Jan Goldstein in *Console and Classify*, the early nineteenth century saw, alongside the early development of a medico-scientific interest for mental illness, a strong resurgence of religious congregations taking care of persons with mental illnesses.<sup>253</sup> Although physicists tried fiercely to distinguish their "scientific" approach from religious, "charlatanistic" work, their method, the *traitement moral*, was firmly rooted in religious care.<sup>254</sup> Shaped by this religious care, to which consolatory practices had been central, consolation became an important part of the secular *traitement moral*.<sup>255</sup> "Though they had shorn it of explicit religious content, the psychiatrists nonetheless referred to this soothing and empathic therapeutic intervention as consolation."<sup>256</sup> According to Goldstein, this religiously inspired consolation was, throughout the nineteenth

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<sup>253</sup> Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 198.

<sup>254</sup> Id., 200-201

<sup>255</sup> Id., 210.

<sup>256</sup> Id., 5.

century, combined with an anatomical-clinic endeavor to classify or categorize pathology.<sup>257</sup> The tensions between these two aspects of the developing profession of scientific psychiatry went hand in hand with continuous rivalries between the secular and religious approaches to mental illness. A discussion of the relation between priests and doctors by doctor Jean-Pierre Falret, doctor at the Salpêtrière, implicitly shows this. Falret finds consolation highly important and argues that it is for this reason that priests need to be admitted to live in hospitals and to take care of the patients.<sup>258</sup> Indeed, in order to be able to console them, priests need to build a relationship of trust with their patients.<sup>259</sup> Importantly, he argues that priests can very well live in harmony with the medical practitioner.<sup>260</sup> A few decades later, however, at the time of Charcot and Bourneville, the Salpêtrière was fully secularized. It is interesting, in this respect, to compare two “visites” to the Salpêtrière published 34 years apart. The first, published in *L'expérience, Journal de la médecine*, described many religious rituals that were part of the therapeutic practice and experienced as consolatory.<sup>261</sup> The second, on the contrary, described a blind patient whose only consolation lay in listening to the bible but who could not find any consolation anymore since none of the people around her shared her beliefs and would read the bible to her.<sup>262</sup> The secularity of the Salpêtrière aroused much criticism in papers.<sup>263</sup> Some even argued that Charcot, when he did not succeed in healing his patients, secretly sent them to Lourdes, to let them be cured there and lured the public into thinking that he had himself cured them.<sup>264</sup>

It is in the context of these controversies that Charcot's essay about faith healing, *La foi qui guérit*, is particularly interesting. It was written at a time in which, alongside the secularization of public hospitals in Paris, an enormous amount of people left for Lourdes year after year in hopes to be healed by the virgin Mary that had appeared there.<sup>265</sup> As I mentioned

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<sup>257</sup> Id., 5.

<sup>258</sup> Jean-Pierre Falret, *Des maladies mentales et des asiles d'aliénés: leçons cliniques et considérations générales* (Paris: J. B. Baillière et fils, 1864), 666-670.

<sup>259</sup> Id., 669.

<sup>260</sup> Id., 670.

<sup>261</sup> Lasiauve, “Deux visites à la Salpêtrière,” *L'Expérience, journal de Médecine et de Chirurgie* 7, no. 303, April 20, 1843, 258-260.

<sup>262</sup> M. de L., “Une visite à la Salpêtrière,” *La Femme* 6, no. 16 (October 1, 1884), 149-151.

<sup>263</sup> M. Deprés in: “Diocèses de France,” *La semaine religieuse du diocèse de Rouen*, 25, no. 14 (April, 4, 1891), 331-333.; x.x. “A la Salpêtrière” *Le Gaulois: Littéraire et politique* 12, no. 329 (August 7, 1880), 2.

<sup>264</sup> See, for instance, Boissarie, *L'histoire de Lourdes*, *Annales Catholiques*, August 10, 1889, 289-299, 297.; Le Moine, “Charcot,” *La Croix*, August 19, 1893, 1.

<sup>265</sup> Ruth Harris, *Lourdes. Body and spirit in the secular age*, (New York: Penguin, 1999), xiii, 9-10; Gugelot, “Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans,” 219.

in the first chapter, Zola's novel *Lourdes*, was inspired by Charcot's book on Faith healing, published two years prior - and itself inspired by an earlier visit of Zola to Lourdes.<sup>266</sup>

In *La foi qui guérit*, Charcot, aimed to give a scientific explanation for the miraculous healings that were operated in Lourdes. To him, it was crucial to any doctor to understand how this mysterious faith healing worked, because it was something that had the potential to heal when all else had failed: "la *faith-healing* me paraît être l'idéal à atteindre, puisqu'elle opère souvent lorsque tous les autres remèdes ont échoué."<sup>267</sup> In this essay, Charcot discussed the elements that, to him, determined the workings of these presumed "miracles."<sup>268</sup> He argued that faith healing was occasioned by the combination of the particular sensibility of certain minds to hypnotic suggestion, with the particular characteristics of certain diseases that were hysteric in origin: "pour qu'elle trouve à s'exercer, il faut à la *faith-healing* des sujets spéciaux et des maladies spéciales, de celles qui sont justiciables de l'influence que l'esprit possède sur le corps."<sup>269</sup> Faith healing could thus be explained scientifically, and could happen both in scientific and in religious contexts.<sup>270</sup> The difference between faith healing through religion and through science lay not in the facts, but in the way those facts were interpreted.<sup>271</sup>

Charcot did indeed send some of his patients to Lourdes, but not because he questioned the limits of science.<sup>272</sup> It was because he was interested in studying the workings of religious faith healing in order to be able to apply it in his own field. Indeed, his own use of hypnosis on hysteric patients, Charcot was applying the principles of faith healing - the influence of the mind over the body: "Les hystériques présentent un état mental éminemment favorable au développement de la *faith-healing*, car ils sont suggestibles au premier chef, soit que la suggestion s'exerce par des influences extérieures, soit surtout qu'ils puisent en eux-mêmes les éléments si puissants de l'auto-suggestion."<sup>273</sup>

As I pointed to in the first chapter of this thesis, the "miraculous" healing of Zola's Marie in *Lourdes*, can be seen as an example of a scientifically explainable *faith healing*: it was Marie's suggestibility, the hysteric character of her illness, and the context of materials and practices at the shrine that occasioned her recovery. I also described, in the first chapter, how Pierre, at the end of *Lourdes* and in the train back to Paris, concluded that religious consolations

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<sup>266</sup> Isabelle Delamotte, "La Place de Charcot dans la documentation médicale d'Émile Zola" *Les Cahiers naturalistes: bulletin officiel de la Société littéraire des amis d'Émile Zola*, 45 no.73 (1999) 287-299, 290-291.

<sup>267</sup> Jean-Martin Charcot, *La foi qui guérit* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1897), 1.

<sup>268</sup> Charcot, *La foi qui guérit*, 3.

<sup>269</sup> Id., 6-7, 37.

<sup>270</sup> Id., 3.

<sup>271</sup> Id., 32-33.

<sup>272</sup> Id., 35.

<sup>273</sup> Id., 37.

were based on illusions, and that those illusions were dangerous. As he came closer and closer to Paris, however, Pierre had a kind of epiphany. He realized that it is his reason, from the start, that prevented him from giving into these illusions. Reason made him suffer, but also made him happy: “Ah! La raison, il souffrait par elle, il n’était heureux que par elle. (...) il ne brûlait que de l’envie de la contenter toujours davantage, quitte à y laisser le bonheur.”<sup>274</sup> It was reason that had led him to search for a natural explanation for everything he could not understand, always thinking: “il y a certainement une explication naturelle qui m’échappe.”<sup>275</sup> Instead of pitying the suffering people in Lourdes, he now realized that he had to act, to live, and most importantly, to fight suffering by means of reason.<sup>276</sup> He realized that if his age knew such a great resurgence of religiosity, it was because religion, with its “eternel mensonge d’un paradis,” was the only option for all those humans who could no longer face their earthly misery.<sup>277</sup> It occurred to him, moreover, that science would never be enough for humanity, and that it would always be necessary to leave a door open to religion, to mystery.<sup>278</sup> Then an idea struck him: this open door to mystery, had to be a door to a new religion, one that would replace the exhausted consolation of Catholicism:

Oui ! une religion nouvelle, cela éclatait, cela retentissait en lui, comme le cri même des peuples, le besoin avide et désespéré de l’âme moderne. La consolation, l’espoir que le catholicisme avait apporté au monde semblait épuisé, après dix-huit siècles d’histoire, tant de larmes, tant de sang, tant d’agitations vaines et barbares. C’était une illusion qui s’en allait, et il fallait au moins changer d’illusion.<sup>279</sup>

This new religion, to Pierre, should be closer to life, closer to earth, it should accommodate scientific truths that had been learned, and, most importantly, it should not teach a taste for death: “Et surtout une religion qui ne fit pas un appétit de la mort.”<sup>280</sup> Indeed, to him, all this veneration of death paralysed action in life as it led to a “haine de la vie, le dégoût et la paralysie de l’action.”<sup>281</sup> But how to shape a religion that would not idealize transcendence or an afterlife? At the end of *Lourdes*, Pierre is in doubt, feeling lost between an old religion that had died, and a young one not yet born: “Où donc était la formule, où donc était le dogme qui comblerait l’espoir des hommes d’aujourd’hui? (...) quelle sorte d’illusion, quel mensonge divin pouvait

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<sup>274</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes; Lourdes*, 592.

<sup>275</sup> Id., 592.

<sup>276</sup> Id., 593.

<sup>277</sup> Id., 594.

<sup>278</sup> Id., 594.

<sup>279</sup> Id., 594.

<sup>280</sup> Id., 595.

<sup>281</sup> Id., 595.

germer encore dans la terre contemporaine, ravagée de toutes parts, défoncée par un siècle de science?”<sup>282</sup> Pierre is desolated and decides to wait for the new religion to start: “Lui, *désolé*, n’était sûr que de tenir son serment, prêtre sans croyance veillant sur la croyance des autres, faisant chastement, honnêtement son métier, dans la tristesse hautaine de n’avoir pu renoncer à sa raison (...) Et il attendrait.”<sup>283</sup> In other words, Pierre in this passage realizes the strength and importance of reason and science, and at the same time realizes that humanity needs some kind of mystery beyond science and reason. These two things, the consolation of religion and the progress of science seem incompatible - and it makes Pierre feel desolated.

Interestingly, Pierre does find an answer to what kind of religion this new religion should be at the end of the third book of this trilogy, in *Paris*, where he again exclaims: “Une religion nouvelle! une religion nouvelle!”<sup>284</sup> This time, he argues that it is probable that science will one day solve humanity’s longing for an afterlife, because it will enable us, as a kind of alternative consolation, to understand everything: “Certes, le divin semblait nécessaire à l’homme comme le pain et l’eau, toujours l’homme s’y était rejeté, affamé du mystere, semblant n’avoir d’autre consolation que de s’anéantir dans l’inconnu. Mais qui pourrait dire que la science, un jour, n’étanchera pas cette soif de l’au-delà?”<sup>285</sup> Science will inevitably one day answer all humanity’s questions: “Une religion de la science, c’est le dénouement marqué, certain, inévitable, de la longue marche de l’humanité vers la connaissance.”<sup>286</sup>

Zola’s trilogy thus ends with a kind of trust in the future. Pierre realizes these things as his fourth son Jean is born, and he is happy. He knows now that he can wait, just as farmers wait for their crop to grow after they have planted the grain. Indeed, it appears to him that great scientists have planted their grain, that time will bring their plants to life and that in a few centuries the religion of science will be ripe to be harvested: “Darwin, Fourier et les autres, ont semé la religion de demain, en confiant au vent qui passe la bonne parole, que de siecles il faudra sans doute pour que la moisson lève!”<sup>287</sup> This will in the end bring the kingdom of god to earth, even if it means that some will suffer a moment from the death of their consolatory illusion: “Les temps viendront où ce royaume de Dieu sera sur la terre, et que l’autre paradis menteur soit donc fermé, même si les pauvres d’esprit doivent un moment souffrir de cette mort de leur illusion.”<sup>288</sup> In sum, the new religion Pierre is proposing is the religion of science, and

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<sup>282</sup> Id., 595.

<sup>283</sup> Id., 597.

<sup>284</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes; Paris*, 597.

<sup>285</sup> Id., 597.

<sup>286</sup> Id., 597.

<sup>287</sup> Id., 598.

<sup>288</sup> Id., 598.

it is rooted in patience, not for life after death, but for the bright future of justice and truth that humanity will achieve by hard work. The book ends with Pierre's wife Marie showing Paris to their newborn: "Tiens! Jean, tiens! mon petit, c'est toi qui moissonneras tout ça et qui mettras la récolte en grange! Paris flambait, ensemence de lumière par le divin soleil, roulant dans sa gloire la moisson future de vérité et de justice."<sup>289</sup>

The consolatory character of hypnosis and its promise for the future of science and humanity

To understand what religious consolation had, in an abstract sense, in common with Charcot's *faith healing*, the analysis of Jean Camus and Philippe Pagniez is highly revealing. These two doctors of the Salpêtrière published, in 1905, an overview of the history of psychoanalysis. They argued that although Charcot was mostly concerned with understanding how hypnotism worked and did not pay a lot of attention to its therapeutic effects,<sup>290</sup> he did use "la suggestion hypnotique comme procédé de traitement des manifestations hystériques."<sup>291</sup> To Camus and Pagniez, psychotherapy was the follow-up of the médecine morale and of hypnotic suggestion. All three followed the same core idea: the idea that the mind has a strong effect on the body, and that treating the mind can help heal the body: "on se souvient que 'l'homme fait lui seul une conversation intérieure qu'il importe de bien régler' (Pascal). A l'origine de bien des maladies sont les erreurs de cette conversation intérieure, et par la persuasion et le raisonnement le médecin peut la régler."<sup>292</sup> In this sense, they argued, consoling was not merely a work of charity, but much rather a work of wisdom: "donner à des malades le réconfort d'une parole de consolation et d'espoir n'est pas seulement faire oeuvre de charité, mais aussi faire oeuvre de sagesse."<sup>293</sup> Linking consolation to hypnotic suggestion in this way, and understanding both as the exercise of the mind over the body, transforms consolation, for materialists, into something that is reasonable to do. This is another kind of consolation than the one we found in the Christian accounts, and one that seems compatible with the ideas of Zola's Pierre in *Lourdes* and *Paris*. Indeed, it is a consolation through science and on the basis of the strength of the mind - in which we recognize Pierre's idealization of reason.

Thus, Charcot succeeds in explaining faith healing in scientific terms as healing through suggestion, and Zola, in *Lourdes* describes the transformation, in Pierre, from the desolation that arises from this realization of a godless world, to the search for a new kind of consolation;

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<sup>289</sup> Id., 608.

<sup>290</sup> Jean Camus and Philippe Pagniez, *Isolement et Psychothérapie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, éditeur, 1904), 50.

<sup>291</sup> Id., 50.

<sup>292</sup> Id., 82.

<sup>293</sup> Id., 82.



one that is based on rationality, on the force of reason. The two texts have in common not only the same subject, of the relation between scientific and religious healing, but also the importance of the power of the mind. For Charcot, this mind is the thing on which and by which suggestion is operated and faith healing works. For Zola, it is reason and science that will bring truth and justice in the future. We have, on the one hand, the direct influence of the mind on a body, scientific practice at work, and on the other hand the more abstract power of the mind over matter, science piercing the mysteries of (human) nature.

Although it takes up a more central position in Zola's work, the question of knowledge, science and mysteries was also explicitly thematized in the very last paragraph of Charcot's *La foi qui guérit*:

Est-ce à dire que, des a present, nous connaissons tout dans ce domaine du surnaturel tributaire au premier chef de la *faith-healing* et qui voit tous les jours ses frontieres se retrecir sous l'influence des acquisitions scientifiques? Certainement non. Il faut, tout en cherchant toujours, savoir attendre. Je suis le premier à reconnaître qu'aujourd'hui: "There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in our philosophy." (Shakespeare)<sup>294</sup>

Goldstein emphasizes that in this passage, Charcot shows a humble side of himself, usually hidden behind a positivist armor: "Charcot has afforded us an unaccustomed, poignant glimpse of himself here; he appears without the armor of his positivist certainties, humble in the face of the unknown."<sup>295</sup> Charcot's acknowledgement of uncertainty, however, is quite significantly relativized by the word "aujourd'hui." This temporal limitation of his uncertainty was not cited by Goldstein, but is crucial to our understanding of this passage: it shows that Charcot's 'humble' acknowledgement contains in itself a promise. He encourages scientists to be patient, while continuing to search: "il faut, tout en cherchant toujours, savoir attendre," and this is not because there are things that they *cannot* know, but because there are things that they cannot *yet* know. By being patient, while searching on, this knowledge will *inevitably* be acquired. Read as an encouragement to be patient, this passage contains both a positivistic belief in the progress of science, and a reference to the difficulty that scientists can experience, as we saw in 3.1, when their experiments and observations do not, *immediately*, resolve all mysteries. To be patient, to wait for the religion of science to develop, is also the exhortation with which Zola's character Pierre concludes *Paris*. The reason that had persisted throughout his trip to Lourdes, and that kept him from feeling consoled by the illusions of religion, now represented in itself a new kind of consolation for Pierre: just as Charcot knew that science would,

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<sup>294</sup> Charcot, *La foi qui guérit*, 38.

<sup>295</sup> Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 382

eventually resolve all mysteries, Pierre knew that science would eventually bring about the end of suffering. And after these realizations, in stark contrast with his experience of desolation at the end of *Lourdes*, *Paris* ends with Pierre feeling happy: “heureux, très heureux, plus heureux que je ne l'ai jamais été”. Could we say he was, in a secular way, consoled?<sup>296</sup>

According to Goldstein, Charcot’s *La foi qui guerit* should primarily be understood as an expression of the continuous influence of the *traitement moral* that had been so prominent at the start of the nineteenth century. Charcot, to her, returns to practices of consolation for his patients:

“Unexpectedly and obliquely, then, the theme of consolation of that once religious and now secular balm which operates on the troubled spirit - finds its way into the work of the last of the great nineteenth-century French psychiatrists, linking him more firmly than would initially appear to the therapeutic tradition of Pinel and Esquirol. Charcot usually took pains to play down, perhaps even to conceal this theme; yet his 1892 article on faith healing had announced it as a constant in his medical practice.”<sup>297</sup>

To Goldstein, Claretie’s in memoriam is “the clearest appreciation of this aspect of Charcot’s work and public persona (...).”<sup>298</sup> This reading of both Charcot’s work on faith healing and Claretie’s take on him is convincing, but I believe my analysis of the shifting meanings and experiences of consolation could add something to her analysis.

Of course, I have no means, with my sources, to say whether Charcot’s patients ever felt consoled by his practices. Moreover, historians have emphasized that Charcot was primarily a neurologist, rather than a psychiatrist, and that he remained more interested in classification than in healing.<sup>299</sup> Isabelle Delamotte argued in her article “La place de Charcot dans la documentation médicale d’Émile Zola”, that Charcot did not take up the responsibility for ending human suffering: “il ne s’est jamais senti investi d’une mission sociale et ne s’est jamais posé en moraliste.”<sup>300</sup> Indeed, as I argued at the start of this thesis, it is probable that Charcot did not himself actively try to console his patients. In the context of the problem of consolation, however, Zola’s take on Charcot’s *La foi qui guerit*, does suggest that the

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<sup>296</sup> Zola, *Les trois villes*; *Paris*, 602.

<sup>297</sup> Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 382.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> See for instance: Asti Hustvedt, *Medical muses: Hysteria in nineteenth-century Paris*, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2011), 12.; Isabelle Delamotte, “La Place de Charcot dans la documentation médicale d’Émile Zola” *Les Cahiers naturalistes: bulletin officiel de la Société littéraire des amis d’Émile Zola*, 45 no.73 (1999) 287-299,

<sup>300</sup> Isabelle Delamotte, “La Place de Charcot dans la documentation médicale d’Émile Zola” *Les Cahiers naturalistes: bulletin officiel de la Société littéraire des amis d’Émile Zola*, 45 no.73 (1999) 287-299, 299.

possibility of governing matter with the mind was in itself experienced as consolatory, not by the patients, but by materialists. In the following, and last, section, I will return to Claretie's eulogy and give an alternative reading of this article on the basis of the understanding of consolation we have now gained.

### **3.3 Jules Claretie and scientific experiment as an affective niche**

Jules Claretie was a well-known and prolific novelist, journalist and historian of late nineteenth-century Paris, known not only for his many novels, but also for his observations of Parisian life published in his series *La vie à Paris*. In the first chapter of this thesis, I already mentioned him as the author not only of the eulogy for Charcot, but also of the novel *Les Amours d'un interne*. In order to write this novel, which was one of his early works and heavily based on observations, he sought to be introduced to Charcot.<sup>301</sup> He modeled one of the characters in the book after Charcot, and was present regularly at Charcot's *Leçons du Mardi*.<sup>302</sup> It is inspired by his many visits to the Salpêtrière, and by his encounters with Charcot, that Jules Claretie wrote "Charcot, Le Consolateur." We even find him depicted as a member of the audience in André Brouillet's famous painting *Une Leçon clinique à la Salpêtrière* (figure 1).<sup>303</sup> Looking at this painting, we can easily imagine the setting of an incident described by Claretie at the end of his eulogy:

J'ai vu, un jour, des magistrats à qui il démontrait, par vivante expérience, qu'une pauvre fille hystérique peut dominée, pètrie par une volonté supérieure, devenir irresponsable. C'était en été, sous un plafond de verre chauffé par le soleil. Un vieux juge, gros et rouge, très ému du reste, s'évanouit, et, pour le soigner, Charcot réveilla vivement la pauvre hypnotisée qui, en une minute, s'empressant, soignant le magistrat et lui faisant de l'eau sucrée, devint, de malade, infirmière. - Merci, merci. répétait le sexagénaire menacé d'apoplexie. Il y avait, dans l'aventure, tout un symbole en action. Charcot venait de démontrer au magistrat une vérité; et en même temps, d'une pauvre fille secouée par l'hystérie, il faisait une dévouée qui sauve, une collaboratrice de son œuvre immense: le Mal combattu, la Vie consolée.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> Georges Grappe, *Jules Claretie* (Paris: E. Sansot and Cie, 1906), 34

<sup>302</sup> Ibid.

<sup>303</sup> Olivier Walusinski, *Une Leçon clinique à La Salpêtrière André Brouillet (1857-1914) Une peinture de la neurologie autour de Charcot* (Monts: Oscitatio, 2021). Figure 1: *Une Leçon clinique à La Salpêtrière* by André Brouillet, extracted from: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>.

<sup>304</sup> Jules Claretie, "Charcot, le consolateur." *Les Annales Politiques et Littéraires* 21, no.2 (September 20, 1903), 179-180, 180.

Claretie describes here how one day, while Charcot was demonstrating the phases of hysteria on a hypnotized woman, one of the judges in the audience fainted. Claretie was amazed to see that Charcot immediately woke the woman out of her hysteric attack and that she swiftly started to take care of the ill magistrate. To



Figure 1

Claretie, this event was “a symbol in action”, a “truth”, an evidence of Charcot’s capacity to combat evil and console Life, with a capital L. In my first reading of this passage, I was under the impression that the Life consoled here, had to be the life of the patient, who, through hypnotization was calmed down and, according to Claretie, felt consoled. This interpretation was confirmed by Jan Goldstein’s situation of this eulogy as “the clearest appreciation” of Charcot’s return to, or continuation of, the consolation of persons with mental illnesses as it had been part of the *traitement moral* in the first half of the nineteenth century.<sup>305</sup> As I previously pointed out, however, my sources cannot tell me anything about the actual experience of the patient, and do tell me something about the experience of consolation of members of Claretie’s social group.

Indeed, I believe that the consolation described here is primarily the consolation of Claretie and his peers, who were present in Charcot’s audience, would read this eulogy, and had probably read both *La foi qui guerit*, and Zola’s *Lourdes*. I will highlight a few aspects of Claretie’s in memoriam to explain how this consolation worked.

To begin with, in describing the person of Charcot, Claretie emphasized his eloquence as well as the clarity of his thinking, of teaching, and his mastery of knowing, analysing and comparing:

Non, jamais je n'oublierai la conversation exquise, la causerie éloquente de Charcot (...) causerie extraordinaire, nourrie de faits, traversée et illuminée de verbes étincelants (...) avec une clarté saisissante, des mots qui peignaient, des phrases courtes et profondes, le maître enseignait, à cet étudiant de hasard, enfiévré par les problèmes que le savant lui, avait résolus, l'art de connaître, d'analyser, de comparer.<sup>306</sup>

<sup>305</sup> Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, 382.

<sup>306</sup> Claretie, “Charcot, le consolateur,” 179.

Moreover, mentioning *La foi qui guerit*, Claretie elaborates on Charcot's devotion to science, the power of the mind over bodies: "Foi éperdue en la science, en cette influence de l'esprit sur les corps assez efficace pour amener la guérison, enrayer les maux, cicatrizer jusqu'à des ulcères."<sup>307</sup> Claretie mentions Charcot's citation of Shakespeare about the fact that science did not yet have all the answers, but takes no notice of Charcot's encouragement to be patient. Rather, he refers to it in order to eagerly argue that Charcot *did* give the answers to these uncertainties: "Mais, *ces choses* de la terre et de l'au delà, Charcot les étudiait, les devinait, les expliquait. Il fallait le voir en cet hôpital (...)." <sup>308</sup> To him, Charcot already succeeded in explaining those mysterious things between earth and heaven in the Salpêtrière.

In the first mention of consolation in Claretie's eulogy, he describes Charcot as consoling "his time", a time characterized by neuroses:

Le siècle des névrosés a trouvé en lui son docteur. Le Paris neurasthénique de ces dernières années, vouées au pessimisme, fut le tributaire de ce grand Parisien, à l'oeuil aigu et enfoncé dans l'orbite profonde, et qui gardait sur la Vie un regard clair, brillant comme l'acier.<sup>309</sup>

We get a sense here that the "névrosés", the "Paris neurasthénique", is not limited to the actual patients of the Salpêtrière; Claretie imagines and worries about a nervous Paris at large.<sup>310</sup> Charcot's "miracle", to Claretie, is that he succeeded in turning the "detritus of Paris" back into men, women and mothers.<sup>311</sup> Charcot had transformed the old institute of the Salpêtrière into a modern hospital, including the first school of the Salpêtrière.<sup>312</sup> Before he came to the Salpêtrière, all types of "hystero-épileptiques" were mixed up: "tous les dolents, les hurlants, les convulsionnaires, étaient misérablement confondus dans une promiscuité sinistre."<sup>313</sup> The classification of diseases brought about a certain order in the hospital, and this order served not only the patients, but science as well. The patients of the Salpêtrière were, to Charcot, a "reservoir of material."<sup>314</sup> This order and knowledge demonstrated, again, the power of science and the human mind over the mysteries of life. Claretie compared Charcot to Newton and other physical scientists in his capacity for observations, and argued that knowing an illness,

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

<sup>309</sup> Id., 179.

<sup>310</sup> The theme of neurosis was central to many accounts of the experience of modern cities given by European contemporary thinkers, see for instance: David Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity. Theories of Modernity in the work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, (MIT Press: Cambridge MA, 1986), 72.

<sup>311</sup> Id., 180.

<sup>312</sup> Charles Féré, "Charcot et son œuvre" *La revue des deux mondes*, Tome 122, (1894) 410-424, 424.

<sup>313</sup> Claretie, "Charcot, le consolateur", 180.

<sup>314</sup> Asti Hustvedt, *Medical muses: Hysteria in nineteenth-century Paris*, (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2011), 12.

diagnosing it, was, for Charcot, primary to healing: “Pour apprendre à guérir, il faut d’abord, avoir appris à connaître!”<sup>315</sup> Thus, both through the progress of science in general and through the concrete practice of hypnotizing, Charcot exhibited a control over the nature of diseases and over patients, in order to heal them.

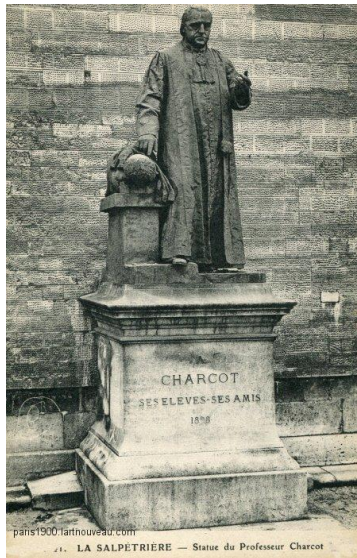


Figure 2

Indeed, in his article, Claretie discussed a statue of Charcot (figure 2), erected five years after his death. It shows him in professor’s outfit and pointing to a skull: “désignant du doigt, sur le crâne d’un mort, quelque localisation cérébrale.”<sup>316</sup> However, Claretie argued, Charcot might as well have been represented as staring at a “poor hysterical girl” telling her: “- Tu guériras !”<sup>317</sup> By making a parallel between this statue and Claretie’s imagined alternative, Claretie draws a parallel between Charcot’s control over scientific, neurological, knowledge, and his control over patients whom he could heal by commanding them, or hypnotically suggesting to them, to get better. It is right after these observations, that Claretie wrote that Charcot was a great

consolator: “Il fut un grand consolateur en son genre, un “chasseur” de souffrances.”<sup>318</sup> Claretie wrote, moreover, that Charcot was an “apôtre”, who “domina son temps et le consola.”<sup>319</sup> Thus, it seems that Charcot’s consolatory capacities were inextricably related to a certain kind of control or domination; a domination of science over disease, of the mind over bodies.

This is reminiscent of Gilman’s analysis of the painting by Brouillet I mentioned before. The painting shows Charcot, in the middle of a demonstration of hypnosis on one of his patients, Blanche Cardin. In front of them, a host of men forms their audience, and behind them two female nurses stand ready to catch or take care of Cardin if she falls. At the back of the room, behind the audience and, as Gilman pointed out, only in sight of Charcot, Cardin, and the nurses, Brouillet depicted a painting of a woman in hysteric attack.<sup>320</sup> Gilman notes that Blanche Cardin’s pose reflects the “arc-de-cercle” depicted on the back of the room. On the

<sup>315</sup> Id., 180.

<sup>316</sup> Claretie, “Charcot, le consolateur”, 179.; Figure 2. Charcot’s statue, commissioned by his close friends and placed in front of the Salpêtrière, sculpted by Falguière. Extracted from Paris-unplugged.fr. See: Hélio Afonso Ghizoni Teive, Paula Marques, Francisco Manoel Branco Germiniani, Olivier Walusinski, “Requiem for a neurologist: the funeral rites of Jean-Martin Charcot.” *Arq Neuropsiquiatr* 75, no. 11 (2017), 827-829.

<sup>317</sup> Claretie, “Charcot, le consolateur”, 179.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Sander L Gilman, *The Image of the Hysteric*. In *Hysteria Beyond Freud*, Edited by Sander L. Gilman et al. (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020) 345-452., 345.

basis of these and other observations, he argues that hysteric patients learnt how to act as a hysteric on the basis of the rich imagery of hysteric poses produced by scientists at the time.<sup>321</sup> Instead of going into the experience of Blanche Cardin or other patients, I would like here to shift attention back to the audience.<sup>322</sup> One can imagine that the perfect performance of hysteric postures and movements, prompted by Charcot's hypnotic suggestion and paired with his categorization, symbolized, to this audience, the control that human minds could have over matter. I believe the integration of all these different aspects of Charcot's scientific demonstration that afforded consolation, not primarily to his patients, but to the members of his audience.

The anecdote of the fainting judge shows us this second level of consolation most clearly. Indeed, what is striking about this scene is that in addition to the hysteric woman, who is turned into a devoted nurse, we find the judge in a position of need. The endpoint of Charcot's work is not the hypnotization of a patient, but the capacity of the hypnotized patient to collaborate in his work and to console others. The judge being healed by a former patient is a symbol for the power of the mind and of science reaching further than the direct premises of the hospital, to other parts of society; to the materialists attending to Charcot's classes. The "Life" with a capital L that is being consoled here, is not in the first place that of the patient, but Life as it is understood by Claretie. It is Claretie and his peers, such as the judge in this anecdote, who are being consoled through Charcot's demonstration of hypnotism, of his domination of this woman, of disease, of nature or of Life in general. By turning a patient into a devoted nurse, Charcot demonstrated to the magistrate a truth, and this truth, it seems, lay in the power of science and the mind to end suffering. This is what is consolatory to Claretie and his peers, who can let go of their uncertainty about the future of science and humanity.

The scene is, in Claretie's words, 'a symbol', and I believe we can understand this symbol as an affective niche, consisting of Charcot himself - who with his knowledge and eloquence exemplified the power of the mind - and of his scientific experiment - which demonstrated the power of the mind over bodies as well as the abstract notion of progress that resulted from it. As such, Charcot and his *Lecons du mardi*, formed a concrete affordance for Claretie and his peers, who, attuned to this secular affective niche, had found a new way to feel consoled.

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<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> For an analysis of the way hysterics did, in their performance of hysteria, find a way to feel and express their pain, see: Rob Boddice, "Hysteria or Tetanus? Ambivalent Embodiments and the Authenticity of Pain." in *Emotional Bodies: Studies on the Historical Performativity of Emotions* edited by Dolores Martin-Moruno and Beatriz Pichel (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2019), 19-35, 24-26.

## Conclusion and Discussion

At the outset of this thesis, I proposed to understand consolation as an encounter, between an actor and their socio-material environment, that has a transformative effect on the actor's experience. My aim was to understand what aspects of the socio-material environment of materialist thinkers in late nineteenth century France contributed to this transformative effect and led those actors to feel (a longing for) consolation. In doing so, I hope not only to have offered a compelling account of the experiential effects of materialist thinking and consolatory practices in late nineteenth century France, but also to contribute to the efforts of historians to develop interdisciplinary frameworks for the study of situated human experiences.

In the first chapter, I showed how the process of secularization turned consolation into a highly controversial phenomenon. Materialist thinkers argued not only that consolation was ineffective and useless, but also that it was harmful as it removed an important impetus for efforts to achieve a socially just society. Going beyond their argumentative and practical dismissal of Catholic consolation, I argued in the second chapter that this position led to a kind of longing or lack of consolation amongst materialist thinkers. Indeed, I showed that despite the internal logic of their position, giving up on consolation was a difficult thing to do: it was described as taking courage and virility. Some longed to return to the experiences of consolation of their childhood, and for others, the peace of mind promised by religious consolations became so appealing that they gave up and converted back to Catholicism. These sources seemed to imply that the religious consolations still had some kind of grip on these materialist thinkers, even though they were no longer rationally tenable to them.

Resisting the temptation of explaining this as the 'natural' resurgence of some kind of universally human longing for consolation, I argued that the lack of consolation these materialists were experiencing was due specifically to the fact that they were, despite their antithetical ideas and practices, still attuned to Christian ways of seeking and obtaining consolation. This problem becomes apparent when we acknowledge that experiences, such as the experience of being consoled or of longing for consolation, are neither naturally given, nor merely constructed by discourse, but constituted by the interplay of an actor and affective niches; discursive, social and material aspects of the environment to which the actor is attuned. Experiences have a kind of resistance or impenetrability to discourse precisely because they are not completely constructed by it but constituted by the interplay of attunements to many different aspects of the environment. Expanding William Reddy's concept of the emotive effect on the basis of Giovanna Colombetti's enactive understanding of emotional experience, I



argued that not only verbal expressions, but other aspects of the environment could enter into a looping, reciprocal engagement with an actor's experience. These then become affective niches that can be used, just as verbal expressions, for the effortful navigation of experience. This allowed me to argue that materialist thinkers, due to the disruption of their attunement to catholic consolatory affordances, experienced emotive failure.

In response to this failure, some materialists gave in to the affordances of Catholic Consolations by converting back to Catholicism. This allowed them, through the engagement with the niches that they had engaged with in their childhood, to reexperience the feeling of consolation that they were longing for. Others took an opposite strategy; instead of returning to the feeling of Catholic consolation through re-engagement with Catholic environments, they created new, secular, niches that afforded a secular experience of consolation. In the third chapter, I described those strategies. I concluded that it was as a kind of secular consolation that we should read Claretie's depiction of Charcot as the great consolator of his time. Just like Pierre in Zola's novel *Lourdes*, Claretie found consolation in the strength of reason, and Charcot, while he hypnotized patients and 'dominated' them into doing whatever he asked, demonstrated just that: the power of the mind over the body. Thus, it was not primarily the consolation of Charcot's patients that Claretie talked about, but his own and that of his materialist peers. They felt consoled by the order amongst Charcot's patients, by Charcot's way of dominating patients through hypnotic suggestion, and by his knowledge and capacity for scientific classification; all were demonstrations of the power of reason and of the progress of science. A direct association was made between the success of Charcot's day to day scientific experiments and the promise of the end of human suffering, and thus the sight of his demonstrations left the public consoled.

This thesis contributed to existing literature on the *Libre Pensée* and Secularization by showing the experiential effects of materialist ideas on materialist thinkers. In line with Hervé Guillemin's call for attention for the reciprocal influence of religion and science, it showed that despite their firm distantiation from religion, many materialists were not indifferent to religion, and that this led to the development of secular forms of consolation. Furthermore, it provided a more elaborate explanation of Lalouette's thesis that secular thinking did not secularize French minds, and at the same time pointed to those ways in which this thinking, combined with specific practices, objects and interactions, did lead to new types of experiences. Indeed, I argued that the secular affective niches developed by materialist thinkers could afford a new and secular experience of consolation to that specific group. Lastly, it contributed to the history of nineteenth century French medicine and psychiatry by showing that consolation did not only

play a role as a, contested, therapeutic method directed at patients - as was argued by Jan Goldstein - but was also present, albeit in a different form, as a crucial part of the experience of materialist scientists, doctors, authors and journalists.

As I briefly pointed out in the introduction, this study was a limited and explorative one. A subsequent analysis could benefit from a transnational approach, looking at the way in which the thinking and experiences of the Libre Penseurs were influenced by, and influential to, a broader international community.<sup>323</sup> Some of the arguments made in this thesis run in parallel to those made by Rob Boddice in *Humane Professions* on the Anglo-Saxon context, about the harnessing of scientific experiment as a way to end all human suffering in the future. It would be valuable to explore the reciprocal influences that shaped the development of this thinking at the time.<sup>324</sup>

Moreover, it is important to emphasize that the secular form of consolation I described at the end of this thesis was not necessarily homogenously shared amongst materialists, and did not sweep all religious consolations away. It is probable that it reached further than Charcot, Zola, Claretie and the other authors I discussed - as many of them were well known and widely read, but it surely did not convince everyone or shape everyone's experience of consolation. In a further study, a larger group of thinkers could be examined in a more systematic way, and the Catholic responses to these secular alternatives could be investigated. Indeed, religious forms of consolation remained very popular and in response to the secularization of Parisian hospitals, private associations started to create Christian private hospitals.<sup>325</sup> Furthermore, some congregations that were expelled in France started to shift their efforts towards missionary work.<sup>326</sup>

One thing I hope this thesis can help demonstrate, is that consolation is not simply a wholesome and beautiful way of feeling better accessible to all at all times. Rather, each time period brings forth its own ways of consoling and its own experiences of consolation. These different experiences can be painfully inaccessible or ineffective, or happen at the expense of

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<sup>323</sup> See for instance: Lalouette, "Une rencontre oubliée: la Libre Pensée française et les savants matérialistes allemands (1863-1870)."

<sup>324</sup> Boddice, *Humane Professions: The Defence of Experimental Medicine, 1876-1914*.

<sup>325</sup> Gugelot, "Les deux faces de Lourdes. Lourdes de Zola et Les foules de Lourdes de Huysmans," 219.; Ruth Harris, *Lourdes. Body and spirit in the secular age*, (New York: Penguin, 1999), 10. Different catholic counterassociations were set up with the aim to build hospitals with priests and nuns, such as the Société Anonyme Hospitalière and L'oeuvre de Notre-Dame de Consolation. Moreover, from 1893 onwards, Catholics in municipality were striving to bring the congregations back to the public hospitals (Lalouette, *La libre pensée en France, 1848-1940*, ChII. Laïcisation.

<sup>326</sup> Matthieu Brejon de Lavergnée, *Le temps des cornettes. Histoire des Filles de la Charité, XIXe-XXe siècles*, (Paris: Fayard, 2018).

others. As Daniel M. Gross argued in *The secret history of emotions*, saying that emotions are universal comes at a cost; it makes us lose sight of the very real ways in which our conception of emotion excludes and includes certain parts of society.<sup>327</sup> Universalizing consolatory experiences is a way of smoothing out the difficulty of the situated experience of seeking consolation.

This thesis started with Claretie's eulogy for Charcot. The consolation described here, appeared at first sight to be directed to the patients in the Salpêtrière: Charcot as the great consolator of women suffering from hysteria and other diseases. Instead of following this focus on the patients, however, this thesis turned its attention back to Charcot, Claretie and their peers, who, through the scientific domination of matter and bodies, attempted to feel consoled themselves. Indeed, I showed that the switch to a secular way of life was not an easy one to make for many late nineteenth century materialist thinkers. Their efforts led to a lack of means to feel consoled, and to the experience of a longing for the type of consolatory experience that they aimed to dismiss. By "looking back"<sup>328</sup> at these thinkers, this thesis pointed not only to the situatedness of their experiences of consolation, but also to the situatedness of the related practices of science. Scientific experiments were not affectively 'neutral' and self-explanatory steps in the progress of knowledge, but served, complete with the public exhibition of certain patients, as a means for the navigation of these materialists' own emotive suffering.

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<sup>327</sup> Daniel M. Gross, *The secret history of emotions*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 19-20.; See also: Boddice and Smith, *Emotion, Sense, Experience*, 33.

<sup>328</sup> Terri Kapsalis, *Public privates. Performing gynecology from both ends of the speculum*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 37.

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