

*Eric Laurent**

How We Inform the People**

On Saturday March 12, France Culture ran a radio program in the series “Science-frictions” produced in collaboration with *Le Monde*, from 12 to 12:30 pm. Its title: “Can psychoanalysis be evaluated?”

Michel Alberganti, from the Science section of *Le Monde*, used the sentence pronounced by Health Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy as his point of departure. According to Douste-Blazy, psychic suffering “cannot be evaluated, nor can it be measured.. Alberganti countered it straightaway. He adopted the point of view of the Inserm (National Institute for Health and Medical Research) report, as if this “collective expertise” was the voice of science and asked three questions, each more biased than the others. Here they are (the parentheses are mine):

Can a single Minister decide to banish (nothing less) a report undertaken by the principal medical research institute in France?

Can psychoanalysis refute the very principle of an evaluation of its practices and results when a great number of patients put their trust in it? (The Minister claimed that it is psychic suffering that cannot be evaluated nor measured).

The Inserm report is a synthesis of almost a thousand studies on psychotherapies worldwide. Can the method the researchers followed be scientifically criticized and, as such, can their results be contested? (Note the hijacking of the nice word “researcher” to designate experts who think they know everything).

In response, he called Mr. Cottraux and Mr. Widlöcher to a “face-off.” He carefully hid that Mr. Widlöcher had already been heard by the experts, and had encouraged them. We were led to believe that there were two points of view, but in fact the two of them are as thick as thieves.

Mr. Widlöcher began by saying that he was “surprised” by the Minister’s gesture. The document may be criticized, but the report was ordered after all. . .

He went on to say that he was partial to evaluation, which is inevitable when one works in the healthcare professions.

There are two tendencies in the psychoanalytic movement, he continued, the IPA and the others. Mr. Widlöcher thinks he can claim that no member of the IPA was present when the Minister spoke. He emphasized that the other current, represented by Roland Gori, Elisabeth Roudinesco and Jacques-Alain Miller, is not part of his parish.

As for Cottraux, he said that this study was poorly read for malicious reasons. Psychoanalysis is not at issue in it; short-term psychotherapies inspired by psychoanalysis are. With the same persuasive tone he must use in the therapies he practices, he declared: “We have only studied “psychodynamic (psychoanalytic) therapies.”

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It just doesn't add up. It's like hearing O'Brien in Orwell's novel *1984*. No, we did not discuss psychoanalysis; we discussed psychoanalysis in parentheses.

Cottraux also guaranteed that the evaluation had been made on the request of patient associations and Bernard Kouchner. Cottraux thus presented himself as simultaneously sponsored by consumers and the major Left political party.

He complained that he had been censored. Those who support behavioral therapies are now presenting themselves as the victims of a Minister's inconsiderate schemes, while they are the ones militating in science's favor. Yet, the report is sold in bookstores, on line, it can be entirely downloaded from the Inserm website. One can also consult the sites of associations for Cognitive Behavioral Therapies (CBT), and now the France Culture radio website. Oh the poor persecuted! How brave they are indeed!

After Cottraux's tirade, Widlöcher felt relieved. "I am relieved," he said. It does not concern psychoanalysis. He recognized that short-term psychoanalytical therapies are not psychoanalysis and that they cannot function without persuasion. In this way, moreover, they are closer to CBT. As for psychoanalysis, he said, it must be evaluated.

He distinguished between psychoanalysis applied to people with "life difficulties," where the therapeutic benefits are difficult to evaluate, and psychoanalysis integrated into health care systems, where its effectiveness must be evaluated. It is as if we have gone back to listening to former health minister Mattei's discourse, which carefully distinguished between "the blues" and true "disorders" as outlined in the DSM. Clearly, Widlöcher is in this camp.

Throughout the interview we learned that he has often worked as an assessor at the Inserm, in order to establish protocols in the pharmaceutical treatment of depression. We also learned that he was the first president of the French Association for Practitioners of Behavioral Therapies, at a time when he considered them unjustly persecuted. He was surprised that the representatives of these associations are now persecuting him and psychoanalysis and at their arrogance.

Having Widlöcher speak as a so-called defender of psychoanalysis is like being in a Fritz Lang film in which the police chief is none other than the terrible Dr. Mabuse. He who is supposed to defend psychoanalysis turns out to be the first president of the French Association of CBT. He who is supposed to defend psychoanalysis hides behind the miserable distinction between short-term therapies, or targeted action, and long-term therapies that serve to "prevent lapses." He who is supposed to defend clinical practice admits a distinction between "life difficulties" and DSM recognized "disorders."

It might be an occasion here to recall Freud's opposition to authoritarian suggestion and the exercise of persuasive power. He only mentioned Freud once, citing his infamous 1918 phrase about his refusal to mix the pure gold of psychoanalysis and the base lead of authoritarian psychotherapies. Subtle Germanist that he is, Widlöcher mentions that the German text does not speak of lead, but of copper. Copper, he says, "is a very useful alloy." It's just unbelievable!

Everyone should listen to this radio show. It is an instrument for edification.

When confronted with Cottraux's brutal attack, Widlöcher's defense consisted in repeating (I summarize): we are doing the evaluation, but it is difficult and it is taking a long time. One cannot evaluate a treatment for schizophrenia in three months; it takes years. One would think he has never even read the Inserm report. CBT practitioners and expert statisticians like Bruno Falissard, who went to Polytechnic, do not back off in the face of these details. They think they know perfectly well how to measure CBT's effectiveness in

treating personality disorders, and in six months. They do not see where the difficulty comes from. They know how to measure, luxuriously. Caring for schizophrenics over long distances is another thing altogether. The difficulty, the humility inspired by the recent dramatic events in Pau and at the Jean Moulin medico-psychological center, does not occur to them.

Cottraux blandly accepted Widlöcher's contortions. He reminds him that CBT are equal to psychoanalytic therapies in their effectiveness in treating personality disorders. Well well! He forgot about his earlier rhetorical precautions. In passing, he recognized the over enthusiastic CBT associations' blunders. But, really, one should understand them: it has been shown that CBT are more effective in treating fifteen out of sixteen disorders.

Here we quickly arrived at the true subject of the radio show. The journalist, who had pretended to set two colleagues in a face-off, brought up the common ground between Cottraux and Widlöcher: the denunciation of "*La Cause freudienne*."

Widlöcher asserted that he feels no solidarity with those who practice a technique in which "one does not think with the patient" and with short sessions. The journalist then asked why the psychoanalysts he represents have not made their "approval of the report" more loudly heard.

Cottraux denounced "*La Cause freudienne*" as a "manipulative lobby that has played an entirely negative role in this story." He likened us to Tartuffe and the Company of the Holy Sacrament. We would be a sect seeking to get its hands on the State. He noted that, if the director of the radio program would like, such violent statements could be cut from the radio show before being played. They were not. Perhaps others were.

How did Cottraux arrive at this lovely analysis? By speaking with thirty or so colleagues in Quebec, England, and the United States.

To summarize: thirty of Cottraux's colleagues, which it takes three countries to bring together, are Reason. The twelve hundred people that attend the Psychoanalysts' Forum are a sect. How long will it take Cottraux to realize that it could very well be the opposite? In France, there is only a small group of behavioralists, but they cast a quite an unfortunate shadow on French thought. It is true that the CBT practitioners have managed to make the highest representative of the IPA, over which Widlöcher presides, fold. What would our Argentinian friends affiliated with this group say?

The final moments of the exchange, as the journalist noted, were bathed in "reconciliation." Cottraux said all the good he thinks of Fonagy's report, promoted by the leaders of the IPA, which seeks to force an out and out evolution in psychoanalysis worldwide. In fact, Fonagy has invented nothing of worth in psychoanalysis today. His point of view only encourages the proliferation of administrators that want to colonize and bring all practices and activities, in Europe as in the United States, into line. Our two colleagues agreed that Fonagy's path is the path of the future and that German and Swedish psychoanalysts have shown the importance of the measure and traced the way.

In the end, Widlöcher clarified that if he had known how things with the report were going to turn out, he would have put greater "methodological" precautions into place. And, furthermore, due to a lack of time, he had not been asked his final opinion. In short, he washed his hands of it. This is Widlöcher's idea of psychoanalytical ethics.

Widlöcher himself had told Elisabeth Roudinesco that Lacan had refused to shake hands after his last meeting with him. Now we can better understand why.

The same methods used in this radio program governed Catherine Vincent's article in *Le Monde* on March 9.

They pretend to questions the pros and cons as if in a "scientific debate." It is nothing but a Potemkin village, a pure pretence. In reality, they question people who think the same thing; they do not give voice to a true opposition. This finds its expression in *Le Monde*'s "letters to the editor."

It appears then that after the "structuralist" phase of the history of the human sciences, a small group has seized hold of the prestige of the signifier "science" and wants to bring the human sciences, restored to their certainties and delivered from post-modern relativism, into line.

This leaves room all over the field for "little techniques" like CBT, which, like the "little biology" denounced by Philippe Pignarre for its comparative "medicine versus placebo" test trials, would like to grow into a science. Generalized benchmarking is taking place everywhere instead of articulated thought. Perhaps we could use this occasion to remind those who read *Le Monde* what one of the newspaper writers, Jean-Paul Fitoussi, recently wrote about the benchmarking.

Throughout the interview, Widlöcher cited the fable of the "fox and the stork." He would have been better off mentioning "the frog that wanted to be as big as the ox." As for maneuvers of certain members of the "Science" rubric in *Le Monde*, they are hardly scientific. It is time that the world was informed. It will be.

Translated by Vivian Rehberg