



The Post-Revolutionary Self: Politics and Psyche in France, 1750-1850

Jan Goldstein

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In the wake of the French Revolution, as attempts to restore political stability to France repeatedly failed, a group of concerned intellectuals identified a likely culprit: the prevalent sensationalist psychology, and especially the flimsy and fragmented self it produced. They proposed a vast, state-run pedagogical project to replace sensationalism with a new psychology that showcased an indivisible and actively willing self, or *moi*. As conceived and executed by Victor Cousin, a derivative philosopher but an academic entrepreneur of genius, this long-lived project singled out the male bourgeoisie for training in selfhood. Granting everyone a self in principle, Cousin and his disciples deemed workers and women incapable of the introspective finesse necessary to appropriate that self in practice.

Beginning with a fresh consideration of the place of sensationalism in the Old Regime and the French Revolution, Jan Goldstein traces a post-Revolutionary politics of selfhood that reserved the Cousinian *moi* for the educated elite, outraged Catholics and consigned socially marginal groups to the ministrations of phrenology. Situating the Cousinian *moi* between the fragmented selves of eighteenth-century sensationalism and twentieth-century Freudianism, Goldstein suggests that the resolutely unitary self of the nineteenth century was only an interlude tailored to the needs of the post-Revolutionary bourgeois order.

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