



# Johann Gaspar Spurzheim: The St. Paul of phrenology

John van Wyhe

Department of Biological Sciences, National University of Singapore, Singapore

## ABSTRACT

Franz Joseph Gall's wayward discipline Johann Gaspar Spurzheim greatly modified Gall's original system and introduced it to the English-speaking world. Through an active program of itinerant lecturing, publishing and converting disciplines, Spurzheim made phrenology. He also developed a philosophy of following the laws of nature that was adopted and further promoted by his disciple, George Combe. Combe's book *The Constitution of Man* (1828) became one of the best-selling works of its genre in the nineteenth century. Thus Spurzheim, never particularly original, exercised an enormous influence on nineteenth-century culture.

## KEYWORDS

Biography; George Combe; diffusion; historiography; phrenology; Spurzheim

## Introduction

Johann Gaspar Spurzheim (1776–1832) occupies an unusual position in the history of science. He is considered both important and obscure. Although he is mentioned no less than 12 times in the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, there is no entry for him. His name has been given variously as Johann Gaspar, Johann Caspar, and just Caspar. In the *Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (1970–1976), his name is given as Johann Christoph Spurzheim. This erroneous name was first attributed to him in 1844 (Callisen 1844). The historian Roger Cooter wrote of Spurzheim in 1984:

We know hardly more than that he was raised a Lutheran and that prior to studying medicine in Vienna at the turn of the century he was a student of divinity and philosophy at the University of Trèves ... due to the paucity of the right sort of biographical material. (Cooter 1984, 51)

A paucity there surely has been because Spurzheim was neither a Lutheran nor, it seems, a student of divinity and philosophy at Trèves (Trier). It has even been suggested that Spurzheim was a homosexual (Lynch 1985).

Despite his obscurity, Spurzheim can justifiably be called one of the most influential men of science of the nineteenth century. This is so because Spurzheim single-handedly transformed and transplanted phrenology to the English-speaking world. The social diffusion set in motion by Spurzheim's peripatetic lecturing, writing, and self-publicizing changed the face of nineteenth-century culture (van Wyhe 2004, 2007). Hundreds of societies were founded to discuss and promulgate his doctrine, thousands of books and articles were published expounding or condemning it, and millions of people came either to believe some or much of it—and it can safely be said that almost every

adult human being in the Western world had heard of it. Few men of science are able to boast of such influence on the culture of their day or succeed in disseminating and perpetuating their ideas to such an extent. Yet Spurzheim was no great genius or even a very original thinker. The core of his phrenology was learned from his master and the founder of the doctrine, Viennese physician Franz Joseph Gall (1758–1828). Hence, it is hard to imagine that Spurzheim was anything other than a phrenologist.

However, his surviving 215 or so letters (from 1807–1832) make it clear that Spurzheim had other interests that help to explain why phrenology came to develop the way it did in the English-speaking world. He was an early anthropologist and theorized on laws of heredity, race, insanity, education, social organization, and natural laws of morality and nature. Spurzheim was not just a phrenological crank; he was a man of science fully enmeshed in the society of his time. As a learned gentleman, he moved almost seamlessly among elite men of science and medicine in France, Great Britain, Ireland, and America.

## Spurzheim

Spurzheim was born on December 31, 1776, in Longuich, a small town nestled along the Moselle river in Germany close to the border of modern-day Luxembourg. He was baptized on the same day in the nearby baroque Catholic church of St. Laurentius as Caspar Sportzheim, son of Johann Sportzheim (1741–1787) and Anna Maria Bosenkeil (d. 1802), tenant farmers of the Maximiner abbey estate in Longuich, owned by the Benedictines. Southwest of the church lies the abbey complex of St. Maximin. Dating back at least to the twelfth century, the present buildings were rebuilt in 1714. Under the occupation of Napoleon's army from 1804, the Benedictine estates were secularized. In 1808, the farmland was divided into five portions and sold.

Spurzheim's godfather was given as Nikolaus Justen from Switzerland, standing in for R. D. Caspar Bosenkeil from Ochtendung.<sup>1</sup> Before standardized spelling, Caspar, Gaspar, and Kaspar were alternative spellings of the same name. Spurzheim used Gaspar when signing his books and letters. He was the fifth of seven children. His brother Willibrod became a watchmaker in Oedenburg in Hungary, Karl Theodor Heinrich became a master saddler in Vienna, Franz died (c. 1797) at Trier, and Joseph Lorenz worked as a saddler in Vienna. Spurzheim's sister, Theresia, married Nicolas Hermsdorf of Schweich (near Trier) and had a large family. She was widowed by 1834.

Spurzheim only spent his earliest years in the Maximin farmhouse in Longuich. Around the year 1797, the family moved to Trier. The last son, Franz Anton, was baptized in 1782 at St Michael in Trier. Most of those attending the church were servants and manual laborers of the Maximin cloister. Spurzheim's father died in 1787. His mother continued to live in the parish until her death in 1802 in the house of her brother, who was a clergyman at Selterns, near Limburg, in the Grand Duchy of Hessen.

In autumn of 1790, three years after the death of his father, Spurzheim entered the Gymnasium at Trier. Here he acquired the first rudiments of Greek and Latin. He was clearly intelligent, distinguished himself as one of the foremost students, and won several

---

<sup>1</sup>Kirchenbuch Nr. 1 der kath. Pfarrei St. Laurentius in Longuich, p. 70. Familienbuch Lonquich. Bistumsarchiv Trier, Abt. 77, Nr. 82.

prizes for scholarship.<sup>2</sup> By September 1796, he had completed all six classes. The French army occupied Trier in August 1794, and the university closed in 1798. As Spurzheim later wrote “At the beginning I was destined to become a clergyman, but when the French occupied my country I went to Vienna, 1799, in order to study medicine.” (Spurzheim to George Combe, March 13, 1821, National Library of Scotland, MSS.7201–7515)

Two of Spurzheim’s brothers had already settled in Vienna. Joseph Lorenz was a saddle boy who died in 1809 at the age of 29. The elder, Karl Theodor Heinrich, was a saddle master and wagon builder until his death there in 1838.<sup>3</sup> Spurzheim was received into the family of a Count Splangen<sup>4</sup> as tutor to the latter’s two sons. Spurzheim passed his first *viva voce* in October 1803, the second in March 1804, and he was awarded his doctorate on August 7, 1804 (not 1813, as some sources state).

Count Splangen’s physician was Franz Joseph Gall. Gall had begun, in the early 1790s, to create a new science of mind and brain that would eventually evolve, via Spurzheim’s changes, into phrenology (see van Wyhe 2002, 2004). Gall offered public lectures on his new science from 1796 at his home in Vienna. Spurzheim began attending these lectures in 1800. In 1804, presumably after completing his doctorate, Spurzheim was employed by Gall as a dissectionist and assistant. Gall purportedly paid Spurzheim 1200 florins *per annum* (Moscati 1833). In later years Spurzheim attempted to overemphasize his creative role in Gall’s science or phrenology. Rather than admitting that he was Gall’s paid dissectionist, Spurzheim wrote, “I was simply a hearer of Dr Gall till 1804, at which period I was associated with him in his labours and my character of hearer ceased.”<sup>5</sup> These words were repeated endlessly, usually verbatim, by phrenologists throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to emphasize the authoritative paternity of the man who was the source of their doctrines.

Gall’s lectures and any future publications were banned by imperial decree in December 1801, ostensibly because Gall had no permission to lecture in his home, and his lectures were inappropriately materialistic, irreligious, and attended by ladies (Lesky 1981). In 1805, Gall was invited by his elderly father to visit him at the family home in Tiefenbronn in Swabia before he died. Gall took the opportunity to recommence lecturing on his favorite subject outside Austria. Spurzheim accompanied him as dissectionist and assistant. Gall’s lecture tour was repeatedly extended as nobility, physicians, and *literati* in city after city invited him to lecture on his new science of the brain and mind, which Gall called *Schädellehre* (doctrine of the skull). Gall was showered with money and gifts and became a great celebrity. As merely the dissectionist and demonstrator of the famous Dr. Gall, Spurzheim was almost never mentioned in the countless books and newspaper accounts of Gall’s lectures across Europe (Blöde 1805; van Wyhe 2002).

After years of traveling, Gall and Spurzheim arrived in Paris in 1807. Here their reception was particularly warm and publication of the doctrine seemed a possibility, so they stayed. It is from this period that the first known Spurzheim letters began. They show us that at this time Spurzheim (Figure 1) was still thrilled to be close to the center of

<sup>2</sup>Trierisches Wochenblatt 1791, Nr 40, 1792, Nr 39, 1793, Nr 38, 1795, Nr 39 1796, Nr 38.

<sup>3</sup>His son, Karl Spurzheim (1809–1872), became a well-known alienist.

<sup>4</sup>This name is given in almost all accounts of Spurzheim’s life, but no record of anyone by this name has been found. It must be a misspelling. Spangen is a possible alternative.

<sup>5</sup>Come (1824, 11). This quotation is from Spurzheim’s *Essai Philosophique sur la Nature morale et intellectuelle de l’Homme*, Appendix p. 213. This introduction by Come also emphasizes strongly Spurzheim’s common laboring character; Gall and Spurzheim were “constantly together, and their researches were conducted in common” (p. 12).



**Figure 1.** A portrait of Spurzheim drawn by his wife and engraved by W. H. Lizars. Frontispiece to Mackenzie, *Illustrations of Phrenology* (1820).

attention and fame, Gall, and that he did not yet claim copaternity of the science. Gall recommenced lecturing in November 1807.

### **The break with Gall**

The separation of Gall and Spurzheim has been a source of speculation since the early nineteenth century. Here a new account is given taking account of all surviving evidence. In Paris, Spurzheim was 31 and began to grow ambitious to be more than just the assistant of Dr. Gall. He spoke of setting out on his own. Gall wrote to friends at the time,

The sole reason the name Spurzheim is on my work (the *Mémoire*), and will be written on the large one is that he knows my doctrine completely, has already contributed much to its perfection, and will propagate it further after my death. I was never jealous of the praise of men, and the doctrine must persist because it is true and useful. (Neuburger 1917, 24)

The joint *Mémoire* was presented to the French Institute on March 14, 1808. Five men of science, led by the great comparative anatomist Georges Cuvier (1769–1832), presented a report in response on April 18.<sup>6</sup> Cuvier found the cerebral anatomy largely unoriginal, although the least flawed of the work. Cuvier could see no grounds for deriving

<sup>6</sup>The report was probably written solely by Cuvier. See Outram (1984). See also Cuvier's 1822 account of the controversy with Gall in Flourens (1856, 189). See also the valuable discussion in Clarke and Jacyna (1987, 43).

psychological claims from the anatomy of the brain. Gall was essentially rejected and informed that his work was useless for science. He was not elected to the *Académie des Sciences* (see Gall 1821). Historian Dorinda Outram wrote that for Cuvier, the 1808 controversy with Gall meant consolidating Cuvier's own authority to define proper science (Outram 1984, 124). With profitable lectures to give and a wealthy elite clientele as a physician (which his fame assured him), Gall remained in Paris, becoming a naturalized citizen in 1819.

A settled period of lecturing and the preparation of publications began. Gall's first treatise on his science was published as *Anatomie et physiologie du système nerveux en général, et du cerveau en particulier* (1810, 1812). Spurzheim, it seems, furnished only the references and directed the completion of engravings (Gall 1818, xvii). In later years Spurzheim claimed as much as he could: "all anatomical discoveries made after 1804 are the result of my labours" and, "My discoveries form its (*Anatomie et physiologie*) principal object" (Spurzheim 1826, xiv). These distortions have remained largely unrecognized and unremarked.<sup>7</sup> In later years, Spurzheim's acolytes maintained the story of Gall misappropriating Spurzheim's work (Gibbon 1878, 211).

In June 1813, Spurzheim left Gall. Henceforward they pursued their interests independently, and it is not known that they ever met again. The reasons for and context of the separation of Gall and Spurzheim remain obscure. There may have been a sudden angry break, although surviving letters show that the two continued to correspond at least until 1816. It is clear that Spurzheim continued to consider Gall as a patron who could confer benefits on him.

Clearly the two men differed as to how the doctrine should be developed and applied. Gall must have rejected Spurzheim's speculations and inclinations. Living with Gall, Spurzheim could not publish his own ideas (or Gall's) or, it seems, contract any profitable financial arrangements. Many years later, Spurzheim wrote to his Scottish disciple George Combe (1788–1858):

I was since told that Madame Gall opposed to my visiting her husband [on his deathbed]. — Let it be observed en passant that I suspect the same person having greatly contributed to Gall's first attacking me.<sup>8</sup>

Spurzheim left Paris in June 1813 and traveled to Vienna, perhaps because he had nowhere else to stay apart from with his brother, the saddler. It is from Vienna, in September 1813, that the lengthiest part of the surviving correspondence begins. The letters were written to a young French woman named Honorine Pothier (c. 1790–1830).<sup>9</sup> Pothier was the widowed daughter of a wealthy Parisian family with two sons and one daughter. Spurzheim and Pothier hoped to marry, but because Spurzheim had no fortune, it was considered impossible. Spurzheim set out to earn money as Gall had done when traveling about Europe in 1805–1807.

In January 1814, Spurzheim left Vienna and traveled to Britain. Spurzheim had studied English, at Gall's suggestion, so he was prepared to lecture on new ground. Spurzheim was

<sup>7</sup>The exceptions are John Elliotson's lengthy footnotes providing full citation comparisons and quotations from his own conversations with the elderly Gall.

<sup>8</sup>Spurzheim to G. Combe, August 23, 1828, NL Scotland.

<sup>9</sup>Pothier's maiden name is given at the Countway Library and by writers that have cited the letters (e.g., Walsh and Kaufman) as Perier. However, a close reading of the letters indicates that Perier was Honorine's brother-in-law; he was married to one of her two sisters. Although Perier was therefore part of her family, it was not her maiden name.

unknown apart from his name sharing the title page of Gall's works since 1808. Almost nothing was known about the doctrine in Britain or Spurzheim's role in the collaboration with Gall. It was a unique opportunity to shape his own name and image. Rather than lecturing on "craniology" or "the system of Dr. Gall" or some such name as Gall's doctrine had been known in British periodicals, Spurzheim chose to claim copaternity for the whole doctrine. His first "respectable medical and amateur" London listeners (at three Guineas each) heard lectures on "the physiognomical system of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim" (*Philosophical Magazine*, 44, Dec. 1814, 470).<sup>10</sup>

Spurzheim would always afterward maintain that the science was as much his as Gall's. Spurzheim never revealed the fact that he was only Gall's paid dissectionist and assistant, and that Gall alone had lectured in Europe. Spurzheim also claimed that he had cowritten Gall's works, which bore both names on the title page, and it was claimed that he later plagiarized Gall's works (which were not translated into English until after Spurzheim's death). Gall later complained:

Of the one hundred and twenty pages ... one hundred and twelve are copied from my own works. ... He will say that he was right to do this, because he is supposed to be the collaborator. At least he could have indicated the source of his riches ... others have already accused him of plagiarism. It is at the very least, quite ingenious to make up books by means of scissor snips. (Hollander 1920, 340–343; see, e.g., John Elliotson's (1840) lengthy footnotes providing full citation comparisons and quotations from his own conversations with the elderly Gall.)

As "phrenology" consisted of the followers of Spurzheim's teachings, there was never any doubt for them that he was an authority equal with Gall, and often his superior. Ever since 1814, Spurzheim had been described in the English-speaking world as a cofounder, associate, collaborator, or partner of Gall; and phrenology, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, was "the theory originated by Gall and Spurzheim". These references were often the exact phrases used by Spurzheim (see Combe 1824; Poole 1824; Capen 1836; Gibbon 1878, vol. 1, 151, 211). Spurzheim sometimes advised his disciple George Combe not to give too much credit to Gall: "Hitherto in your journal you ascribe more to Gall than he deserved. ... Gall stood still since 1813 when I left him" (Spurzheim to Combe [before 15] March 1830. NL Scotland). Clearly, Spurzheim was ambitious, status-conscious, and not entirely honest.

Spurzheim made considerable alterations to Gall's original system. He arranged the faculties of the mind into a hierarchical taxonomy of orders and *genera* ascending from faculties common to man and lower animals, such as *Philoprogenitiveness*, the love of offspring (starting at the back of the head and moving forward), to "the moral sentiments," some of which were shared by man and animals, and other sentiments proper to man, such as veneration. He added new faculties to Gall's 27, resulting in 33. Spurzheim also changed the names of several faculties. He also asserted that the faculties had proper and improper functions. Finally, he added the traditional theory of the four temperaments or humors (lymphatic, sanguine, bilious, and nervous) to the system.

---

<sup>10</sup>Spurzheim's first four publications carried Gall's name in the title in an effort to appear equal with Gall as codiscoverer. Only after controversy had made Spurzheim well-known did he cease to make use of Gall's name.

## Spurzheim's lectures

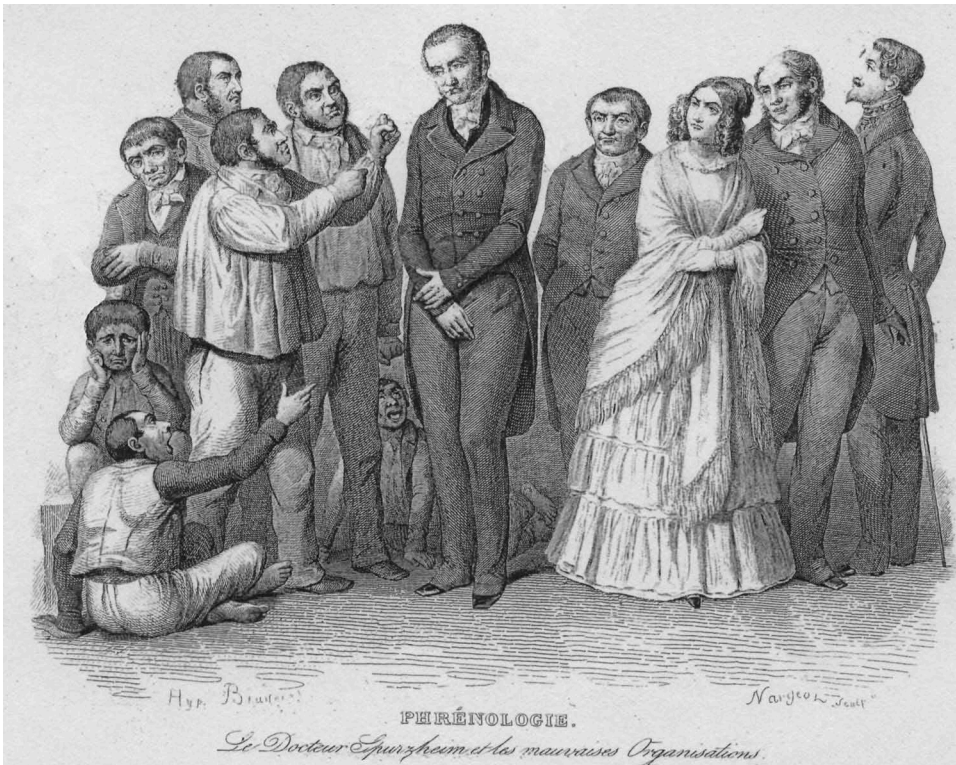
Spurzheim's first lectures were delivered at his London lodgings, the first floor of 11 Rathbone Place near Oxford Street, which had a room "large enough for fifty auditors" (Spurzheim to H. Pothier, June 12, 1814, Countway B MS C 22.1 fd. 1). He also invited the editors of newspapers to attend *gratis* knowing that a mention in print, by bringing more auditors to subsequent lectures, would more than compensate for a few free tickets. From London, in September 1814, he wrote, "I have already a good number of prosolites who speak for me, and engage other persons to attend my lectures" (Spurzheim to H. Pothier, September 1, 1814, Countway B MS C 22.1 fd. 1). He took steps to ensure the propagation of his doctrine. "I ... make acquaintances with different persons who can be useful in inserting different articles in scientific journals" (Spurzheim to H. Pothier, September 20, [1814], Countway B MS C 22.1 fd. 1).

Spurzheim described his lectures as "demonstrative lectures." Like Gall, he lectured without notes and offered dissections when he could procure fresh brains of humans or other animals, and he always made use of skulls, busts, models, and diagrams. Spurzheim would tell his audience about a particular faculty of the mind and then offer some examples of its corresponding bump from his large collection of skulls and casts or point to a chart to make an anatomical point clear. Auditors were able to buy charts or books with diagrams from Spurzheim or a bookseller.

Spurzheim's first book, *The Physiognomical System of Drs. Gall and Spurzheim*, was published in 1815. He then set off on his lecture tour of Great Britain. He traveled first to Bath and then Bristol. In September he traveled to Dublin and later to Cork, Limerick, Coleraine, and Waterford. While in Ireland, he first saw the devastating review of his book in the *Edinburgh Review* (Gordon 1815). The anonymous author was a young and ambitious Edinburgh anatomy lecturer named John Gordon (1786–1818) whose work focused on the brain. Spurzheim was an unwelcome interloper who threatened to overturn accepted dissection techniques and certainly was receiving more attention than Gordon. The review was ferocious and soon notorious. The *Edinburgh Review* was one of the most widely read and respected periodicals in Britain. The review both hurt and helped Spurzheim. Sales of his book suddenly slumped. Although Spurzheim was widely thought to be a charlatan or a fool, at least now almost every literate person in Britain had heard of him and his doctrine.

By April 1816, he was in Liverpool. He traveled through Manchester, Lancaster, and Carlisle before reaching Edinburgh in July 1816. What ensued was a masterstroke for Spurzheim. Taking a letter of introduction, he called on Dr. Gordon, who was said to be away. Spurzheim tried again until Gordon received him but pretended not to recognize his name. Spurzheim then gave a public demonstration of his cerebral dissection techniques with a copy of the *Edinburgh Review* open beside him. He demonstrated to a large audience, in Gordon's own lecture theater at Surgeons' Square, that the structures and characteristics described in his book could be demonstrated despite the mocking denial in the *Edinburgh Review*. Many who had previously laughed at Spurzheim began to think he had been unfairly misrepresented.

Outside the anatomy theater, Spurzheim continued to promote his system. He had met an Edinburgh lawyer named Dundas on the coach to Edinburgh, and perhaps this gave him access to this community of educated Edinburgh society. It was at the home of the



**Figure 2.** Hippolyte Bruyères, *La Phrénologie: Le Geste et la Physionomie* (Paris: Aubert, 1847, facing p. 513). Bruyères was Spurzheim’s son-in-law. He claimed that this posture was particularly characteristic of Spurzheim.

solicitor James Brownlee that Spurzheim was introduced to George Combe. Combe would become the leading phrenologist in Britain and, after Spurzheim’s death, the world. After six months in Edinburgh, Spurzheim had turned the city from the focus of his greatest embarrassment into the phrenological capital of the world. In 1820, a number of gentlemen converted by Spurzheim founded a society devoted to his science, which had then come to be known as phrenology.

In July 1817, Spurzheim returned to Paris with the intention of settling there. He married Honorine Pothier in 1818, and they lived in the Rue de Richelieu, Paris. In the remains of The Henderson Trust Collection at the University of Edinburgh Medical School are several large diagrams apparently sketched by Pothier and used by Spurzheim in his lectures. Also in the collection of the Wellcome Institute, London, is a pencil drawing of Spurzheim from 1825 by Pothier.

In 1818, Spurzheim published—in French—his work on insanity (Spurzheim 1818). This was followed in 1820 by his *Essai philosophique sur la nature morale et intellectuelle de l’homme* (*A Philosophical Catechism of the Natural Laws of Man*). In the following year he received the title of doctor from the University of Paris in order to practice medicine there. In 1818–1819, the Paris *Athénée* hired Spurzheim to lecture on the “nature of moral and intellectual man applied to social institutions” (Staum 1995). His work with the insane is depicted in a drawing by his son-in-law.



During these years in Paris we have almost no evidence of him, but he was probably reading writers such as Cabanis, Baron d'Holbach, and Constantin François de Volney. Cabanis argued that changing people's environment could perfect them and make them equal, and this would then be passed on as had purportedly been done with animals. We can gather that Spurzheim read these authors because it was from their works that his philosophy of natural laws was largely derived (Figure 2).

This philosophy is first evident in the manuscript of his *Philosophical Catechism of the Natural Laws of Man* (in French). Spurzheim proclaimed divinely ordained, invariable, inherent, and regular natural laws to which “all inanimate and all living beings are subject” (Spurzheim 1825, 12). He presented three classes of laws to which man was specifically subject: vegetative, intellectual, and moral. These laws exerted a mutual influence, it was evil to break them—and suffering and unhappiness were the result. “All suffer alike who infringe, as all without exception prosper who obey, the natural laws” (Spurzheim 1825, 22). Spurzheim claimed to work his way toward his conclusions from the properties of matter to ask: “*What is the grand object of the philosophy of man? ... to show the necessity of man's ... submission to the laws which nature imposes*” (Spurzheim 1825, 6–7; emphasis in the original). The role nature played in Spurzheim's text was the same role it came to play in the phrenology controversies in which he had taken part—that of the ultimate authority of appeal (van Wyhe 2003). The emphasis on the necessity of man's submission was an indirect attack on the authority of revelation and an assertion of Spurzheim's “undoubtedly egotistical” authority as a great philosopher (Cooter 1984, 51).

Spurzheim's natural laws were clearly derived from the writings of the French *idéologue* and revolutionary writer Constantin François de Volney (1757–1820), whose *La Loi Naturelle* (*The Law of Nature*; 1793) was also written as a catechism. Volney's other work, *Les Ruines, ou méditations sur les révolutions des empires* (*The Ruins, or Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires*; 1791), probably also influenced Spurzheim. For Spurzheim, the moral was whatever was in harmony with all the innate faculties of man (as revealed partly by phrenology). Spurzheim announced that, were his philosophy to be adopted, “Morality would become an exact science” (Spurzheim 1825, 20). So Spurzheim's philosophical program shared the scientific pretensions of his phrenological life while extending his claims to authority even further. Some of the scientifically necessary alterations of behavior included those with hereditary diseases or defects should not have children (an injunction to become more familiar in the later eugenics movement), neither should close relations; extremes of behavior were also to be avoided, such as unbridled accumulation of wealth in business, and abuse of privilege—especially inherited privilege. The only privilege that was acceptable was for those who invent or make useful discoveries (such as Spurzheim himself). Only privately did Spurzheim confess: “Nature is my greatest authority. I reject every interpretation [of the Bible] which is not conformable to the eternal and universal laws of Creation” (To George Combe, December 5, 1826, NL Scotland).

Spurzheim's *Catechism* was translated into English in Edinburgh in 1822 by the Scottish medical writer and member of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society, Robert Willis (1799–1878).<sup>11</sup> George Combe later claimed that he read the French manuscript

---

<sup>11</sup>Willis also translated Spurzheim, *Anatomy of the Brain*, 1826.

in 1824.<sup>12</sup> The *Catechism* was printed in 1826, but, following Combe's advice, it was withheld and not distributed. Fearing the condemnation of its secular naturalism which Combe foretold, Spurzheim did not publish the small volume until June 1828—the very month when Combe published his *Constitution of Man*. Curiously, however, *Catechism* bore the date 1825 on its title page and its title was changed to *A Sketch of the Natural Laws of Man*.<sup>13</sup> Combe's work became one of the bestselling philosophical works of the century; in print until 1899, it sold at least 300,000 copies. Its influence is difficult to exaggerate (see van Wyhe 2004). Yet it was borrowed almost wholesale from Spurzheim.

Spurzheim also gave two three-month lecture courses each year on his version of phrenology in Paris. From 1822, the Jesuits forced the government to restrict public lectures to those that were licensed. In 1824, Spurzheim was refused a license to instruct a class larger than 20. As he later wrote to George Combe, "It was necessary for me either to give up lecturing on Phrenology and to stick to the practice of Medicine in Paris or to give up my practice in Paris and to lecture in England" (Spurzheim to G. Combe, December 5, 1825, NL Scotland). Spurzheim returned to England in March of 1825. Much had changed since his departure in 1817. His doctrines had been further spread by his acolytes, and societies and journals had been founded to propagate them further.

His wife died after a long illness in London in December 1829. Thereafter Spurzheim continued to travel and offer lectures in Paris, London, and Ireland. His most ambitious destination resulted from an invitation to lecture in the United States. He arrived in Boston in June 1832. There, he continued to visit public health institutions and perform public brain dissections and lecture on phrenology. He fell ill and died of fever in Boston on November 10, 1832. His American hosts were so impressed by him that he was buried with honors, and a new phrenological society was founded in December 1832 to carry on the discussion and dissemination of his doctrines. Despite his short sojourn in the United States, Spurzheim had succeeded in establishing the phrenological movement there (see Carmichael 1833; Walsh 1972).

## Acknowledgments

For help and advice during the research over many years that lay behind this article, I am grateful to Nils Bütner, Anne Secord, Jim Secord, Shelley Innes, Marc Renneville, Thora Bleckwedel, Antranig Basman, Clare Brown, Carly Douglas, Lee Perry, Chris Mycock, Paul Eling, Stanely Finger, and Vassiliki Michou.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

---

<sup>12</sup>See the preface to most editions of Combe's *Constitution of Man*.

<sup>13</sup>Spurzheim, *A Sketch of the Natural Laws of Man* (1825; actually 1828; Boston ed. 1833, 5th American ed. Boston, 1839; another ed. was New York, 1840). Revised and republished (Glasgow, 1844, pp. 34); *The Natural Laws of Man: A Philosophical Catechism* (7th ed. Manchester, London; c. 1870). See Cooter, *Phrenology in the British Isles* (1989, pp. 312–313).

## References

- Blöde K. A. 1805. *Dr. F. J. Gall's Lehre über die Verrichtungen des Gehirns, nach dessen Dresden gehaltenen Vorlesungen in einer fasslichen Ordnung mit gewissenhafter Treue dargestellt. Mit einer dreyfachen Abbildung eines von Gall bezeichneten Schädels*. Dresden: Arnold. 2nd supplemented and improved in 1806.
- Callisen A. C. P., ed. 1844. *Medicinisches Schriftsteller-lexicon der jetzt lebenden Verfasser*. Copenhagen.
- Capen N. 1836. *A Biography of the author*. In *Spurzheim, Phrenology, in connexion with the study of physiognomy*. 3rd ed. American ed. Boston, MA: Marsh, Capen, & Lyon.
- Carmichael A. 1833. *A memoir of the life and philosophy of Spurzheim*. Dublin: Wakeman.
- Clarke E., and L. S. Jacyna. 1987. Nineteenth-century origins of neuroscientific concepts. *Medical History* 32(2): 211–13.
- [Combe G]. 1824. Preliminary dissertation on the progress and application of phrenology. *Transactions of the Phrenological Society* 1:1–62.
- Combe G. 1828. *The Constitution of Man Considered in Relation to External Objects*. Edinburgh: Anderson.
- Cooter R. 1984. *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cooter R. 1989. *Phrenology in the British Isles: An Annotated, Historical Bibliography and Index*. Metuchen, NJ, & London: Scarecrow Press.
- Elliotson J. 1840. *Human physiology incorporating much of the elementary part of the institutiones physiologicae of J. F. Blumenbach*. 5th ed. London: Longman, Orme, Browne, Green, and Longmans.
- Flourens P. 1856. *Recueil des éloges historiques lus dans les sciences publiques de l'Académie des sciences*. Vol. 2. Paris: Garnier.
- Gall F. J. 1818. *Anatomie et Physiologie du systeme nerveux in general et du cerveau en particulier*. Vol. 3. Paris: d'Hautel.
- Gall F. J. 1821. *Demande pour être nommé membre de l'Académie Royale des Sciences*. Paris.
- Gall, F. J., and J. G. Spurzheim. 1810–1819. *Anatomie et physiologie du système nerveux en général, et du cerveau en particulier*. Paris: F. Schoell.
- Gibbon C. 1878. *The life of George Combe, author of "The constitution of man"*. Vol. 2. London: Macmillan.
- [Gordon J]. 1815. The doctrines of Gall and Spurzheim. *Edinburgh Review* 25 (June):227–68.
- Hollander, B. 1920. *In search of the soul: And the mechanism of thought, emotion, and conduct*. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co.
- Lesky E. 1981. Der angeklagte Gall. *Gesnerus: Revue trimestrielle publiée par la société d'histoire de la médecine et des sciences naturelles* 38:301–11.
- Lynch M. 1985. "Here is adhesiveness": From friendship to homosexuality. *Victorian Studies* 29:67–96.
- Moscato, F. M. 1833. Biographical paper on the character and phrenological organization of Dr. Spurzheim. *Lancet* 18 (20 Jan.):399–403.
- Neuburger M. 1917. Briefe Galls an Andreas und Nannette Streicher. *Archiv für Geschichte der Medizin* 10:3–70.
- Outram D. 1984. *Georges Cuvier: Vocation, Science and Authority in Post-Revolutionary France*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Philosophical Magazine*, 44, Dec. 1814, p. 470.
- Poole R. 1824. View of some of Dr. Spurzheim's lectures as delivered at Edinburgh in the Winter of 1816. *Transactions of the Phrenological Society* 25:89–130.
- Special Collections Section of the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine. Boston, MA: Boston Medical Library, B MS c 22.
- Spurzheim J. G. 1818. *Observations sur la folie ou Sur les dérangements des fonctions morales et intellectuelles de l'homme*. Paris: Treuttel et Würtz.

- Spurzheim J. G. 1825. A sketch of the natural laws of man [actually 1828], Boston edition, 1833, 5th American edition Boston, 1839; another edition New York, 1840. Revised and republished Glasgow. 1844.
- Spurzheim J. G. 1826. *A philosophical catechism of the natural laws of man*. London: Charles Knight.
- Spurzheim J. G.. c.1870. *The natural laws of man: A philosophical catechism*. 7th ed. Manchester, London.
- Staum M. 1995. Physiognomy and phrenology at the Paris Athénée. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (3):443–62. doi:10.2307/2710035.
- Trierisches Wochenblatt. 1791. Nr 40, 1792, Nr 39, 1793, Nr 38, 1795, Nr 39 1796, Nr 38.
- van Wyhe J. 2002. The authority of human nature: The Schädellehre of Franz Joseph Gall. *British Journal for the History of Science* March 35:17–42. doi:10.1017/S0007087401004599.
- van Wyhe J. 2003. Science vs. religion or my gods are better than your gods? The controversies over Combe's *Constitution of Man* 1826-60. *Intellectual News*. Vol. 11/12, 24–31.
- van Wyhe J. 2004. *Phrenology and the origins of Victorian scientific naturalism*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- van Wyhe J. 2007. The diffusion of phrenology through public lecturing. In *Science in the marketplace: Nineteenth-century sites and experiences*, ed. A. Fyfe and B. Lightman, 60–96. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Walsh A. 1972. The American tour of Dr Spurzheim. *Journal for the History of Medicine and Allied Science* 27:187–206. doi:10.1093/jhmas/XXVII.2.187.