

Thesis

Origin and Methods of Hypnotism

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"The quality of animal bodies rendering them susceptible to the influences of heaven and earth" - such were the extravagant and meaningless terms in which, one hundred and thirty years ago, Anton Mesmer^{defined} his theory of animal magnetism. Uddiford, somnambulism, electro-biology, mesmerism, hypnosis - these are some of the names that have been applied to the phenomena of hypnotism in their development from the supernatural to the scientific form.

During the early period of his career, Mesmer cured or pretended to cure diseases by the application of magnets to various parts of the body. Later, however, the magnet was discarded and the magical healing fluid was transmitted to the patient by means of "magnetic passes" or hand applications. Mesmer's fame spread rapidly after his arrival in Paris in 1778, and to accommodate the large number of applicants,

the baguet was invented. This was an open vessel set on a three-legged stool with numerous bent iron rods projecting from it and the bottom covered with bottles. The magnetizer charged the baguet with the fluid from his own body, the patients then joined hands, placed themselves in contact with the rods, and received the "influence of heaven and earth." The room was darkened and fantastically decorated, soft strains of music came from some invisible source, mesmericians self clad in flowing robes moved from place to place, touching a subject here and making passes there, until the whole scene became mysterious, weird and exciting in the extreme. An eye-witness says:

"Some patients remain calm, and experience nothing, others cough, spit, feel slight pain, a local or general heat, and fall into sweats; others are agitated and tormented by convulsions. These convulsions are remarkable for their number, duration, and

force, and have been known to persist for more than three hours. They are characterized by involuntary, jerking movements in all the limbs, and in the whole body, by contraction of the throat, by twitchings in the hypochondriac and epigastric regions, by dimness and rolling of the eyes, by piercing cries, tears, hiccough, and immoderate laughter. They are preceded or followed by a state of languor or dreaminess, by a species of depression, and even by stupor."

Such were the results which followed the application of Mesmer's magnetic fluid.

In 1784 a joint Committee from the Faculty of Medicine and Academy of Sciences, with Benjamin Franklin as a member, investigated Mesmer's practice, and declared his cures to be not permanent, the existence of the fluid not proved, and concluded by attributing all results to excited imagination and mechanical irritation. A secret report was also submitted to the King which claimed that

mesmerism was dangerous to morality and should be prohibited, because of the danger to which women were liable while under its influence. Mesmer's popularity was destroyed, patients flocked around him no longer, and he left Paris to pass the remainder of his days in obscurity.

But the germ of truth existed among all this mass of worthless rubbish, and though unrecognized at the time, it was destined to develop into rational and enduring form.

In 1784, M. de Puysegur, while magnetizing a peasant in the usual manner produced unwittingly an entirely new phenomenon—artificial somnambulism. The young man responded readily to suggestion, and imagined himself in such various conditions as the experimenter chose to suggest. Puysegur made many valuable discoveries and obtained many results in accord with the scientific practices of to-day, but unfortunately he clung to the fluid theory and the subject was

supposed to exhibit such supernatural powers that little true progress was made, though the honor of discovering this state must be given to Puységur in spite of his false explanations.

From this time until 1840, animal magnetism was in a chaotic state. One Commission from the Academy of Medicine affirmed its existence in 1831, and a similar Commission denied the same thing in 1837. Fakirs travelled about the country giving exhibitions of their marvellous powers, and it was even claimed that animals and plants were susceptible to their influence. One person of that time gravely recommends a promenade lined with magnetized trees as a most healthful device for invalids!

Finally James Braid, an English surgeon came upon the scene to place the subject on a rational basis. Commencing as a sceptic, he regarded the phenomena as due to a subjective condition of the patient, and proceeded to demonstrate his theory.

The subject was placed in a chair and requested to look fixedly at the neck of a bottle held a short distance from the eyes and a little above their level. Soon the eyelids closed, tears ran down the cheeks, and he fell into a sleep.

Braid also observed that the moods of the subject changed as his position was varied, when placed in the attitude of anger with clenched fists, he commenced to box, and so on through the attitudes expressing the various emotions. Braid made many other interesting observations and was the first to apply the term hypnotism. The fluid theory was utterly disproved and when it became known that the phenomena depended upon the subject instead of the peculiar personal attributes of the operator, the number of experimenters was greatly increased.

Many methods of producing hypnosis were found, though perhaps that used by the Abbe Tarja was the most peculiar. The subject was seated in a chair, the eyes closed, and then

in a loud and imperious tone he would command, "Go to sleep!" Strange to say the desired result nearly always followed.

Gradually it came to be recognized that the principal thing was that the subject should have confidence in the operator's power to hypnotize him, and when he was successfully persuaded that it could be done, it was not necessary for the operator to even think of it. Susceptible subjects would go into the condition when simply told that a certain person was trying to overcome them, and the following case illustrates the point well. Dr. Brauwell of Yorkshire sent this order to one of his subjects

"Go to sleep at once, by order of Dr. Brauwell, and obey Mr. Turner's commands, J. Miller Brauwell"

The patient immediately fell asleep upon reading the order, and had sixteen teeth extracted without experiencing any pain.

About 1580, the physicians at the

Salpêtrière hospital with Charcot at their head, commenced a scientific study of hypnosis in all its stages, and their labors more than anything else have caused the great advances made in modern hypnosis.

This is the method used with new subjects. The operator seats himself before the subject, holds her hands in his, and looks steadily in her eyes. After a few minutes the eyes become red and moist, then close and she falls back asleep. In restless patients, the thumbs were sometimes pressed upon the eyeballs and sleep induced with the fixed gaze. The principal point is to make the patient believe the result will ensue; all other circumstances are mostly non-essential and can be varied at the will of the operator.

Charcot attempted to classify three distinct nervous states as follows:

1 The cataleptic state. Produced by fixed gaze, intense and unexpected-

ed noise, or following the lethargic state by simply raising the eyelids. The cataleptic subject remains motionless unless disturbed, and then the parts of the body retain ~~retain~~ almost any position given them; there is also insensibility to pain.

II Lethargic state, Produced by fixed gaze, or following the cataleptic by simply closing the eyes. Insensibility to pain also characterizes this state, the limbs are flaccid and do not retain a given position, and mechanical excitement produces muscular contraction.

III Artificial somnambulism, Produced by fixed gaze and also in many other ways, follows lethargy or catalepsy by a simple pressure or friction on the scalp, the subject seems to be asleep, but the most distinguishing feature of this state is the readiness with which he responds to suggestion.

It is only fair to state, however, that nearly all the experiments made at

the Salpêtrière were upon females and especially were subject to hysteria, so many of the results obtained there would not be under ordinary circumstances.

The method used by the traveling hypnotist who goes about the country giving exhibitions is as follows:

The subject is seated in a chair with both feet squarely on the floor and the palms of the hands upon the knees. He is told to relax all the muscles in his body and let his mind be perfectly passive. The eyes are then closed and the operator strokes them lightly with his fingers, and makes downward passes in front of them at the same time he keeps talking in a steady, monotonous tone of voice, telling the subject that his eyelids will soon begin to stick fast.

"Now your eyelids are sticking fast!"

x x x "Now they are sticking tighter yet!"

x x x x "Now they are fastened tight shut and you can't open them, no matter how hard you try!" As the

hypnotist makes this last remark, he presses one finger on the root of the nose between the eyes, and if the subject is a good one he will be unable to get them open.

A state of artificial somnambulism has been produced, and now the hypnotist proceeds to put him through a series of performances

that are in the highest degree amusing to the audience. He is told that he is fast to his chair and cannot get up, and though he struggles and apparently tries with all his might to do so, his efforts prove unavailing, or again he is told that he is riding a horse and proceeds to gallop about the stage on the back of a chair. The suggestion of heat is given and a stick turns him like a red hot poker, or an umbrella may become so unheavy that he cannot lift it. An hallucination may be produced and he will go through all the motions of eating and drinking with nothing but thin air

in front of him. Insensibility may be produced to pain and punctures with needles will not draw blood nor affect him any more than as if he were a pin cushion. He may be rendered insensible to all sounds save the operator's voice, and then the loudest noise will not affect him. Finally a state of catalepsy may be produced by suggestion in which the body becomes stiff and rigid and if supported only by the heels and shoulders seems capable of bearing up almost any weight. It is said that in an experiment by one of the Harvard professors a young lady weighing only seventy five pounds was put in this condition and sustained the enormous load of thirteen hundred pounds! But the most interesting case of all comes when with practiced and susceptible subjects, clairvoyant powers are developed. To follow this line however would take us beyond the scope of

our thesis. There seems no end to the possibilities of hypnosis, and the variety of experiments is limited only by the ingenuity of the operator.

Now a few general remarks. An idiot cannot be hypnotized, it is impossible to concentrate his thought. No one can be hypnotized against his own wishes, a passive condition of the mind is necessary.

The subject when he comes out has only a hazy idea of what has taken place and remembers nothing definitely unless he has been given the suggestion that he will do so. The spell is removed by simply telling the subject to wake, "you are all right now" or something of that effect and there is no danger whatever unless the operator gets scared, loses control of himself and tries violent methods, if left alone, the subject eventually wakes up of his own accord. The dangers of hypnosis have been greatly exaggerated, for there are three things the

- subject cannot be made to do,
 1st - He will not destroy his own
 property
 2^d He will not hurt himself
 3^d He will not violate his own con-
science,

Such in brief is the origin, and
 some of the methods of modern hyp-
 notism. The mesmerist need pro-
 cess no supernatural powers, nor
 is his body impregnated with any
 "magnetic fluid" The subject is made
 to believe a certain thing is going to hap-
 pen, and then naturally enough he ex-
 periences all the effects of an actual oc-
 currence. It is simply another proof
 of the superiority of mind over matter,
 Magic and mystery have been re-
 legated to the past and scientific in-
 vestigation has destroyed the claims
 of the quack and the charlatan.

"There is nothing great in the world but
 man

There is nothing great in man but mind"

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