

Hypnosis as an epistemological challenge in the field of medicine: a brief contribution to history PSY

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At the end of 2017, two reasons led me to study the reception of animal magnetism and hypnosis in Portugal. On the one hand, I was interested in understanding the clinical and social importance reached throughout the 19th century by the so-called "romantic medical systems" - where mesmerism was inserted, together with homeopathy and other clinical systems - in a historical moment that coincided with the growing affirmation and consolidation of the anatomical-physiological paradigm in the medical sciences. And, on the other hand, because I have been able to verify, as a compulsive frequenter of libraries, that not a single copy existed, in the lands of Camões, of the work *De La Cause du Sommeil Lucide ou Étude de la Nature de L'Homme* (1819).

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It is certain that the work would be re-edited in 1906 (without being translated) and that the 20th century would bring a new historiographic attention to Faria's path and theoretical work. But it remained unexplained why his work had been forgotten throughout the 19th century in Portugal. In such a way that the first reference to his work appeared more than seventy years after the publication of that study on lucid sleep, and it would be up to Gil Montalverne de Sequeira, in a thesis entitled *Hypnotism and Suggestion* (1888). The question was: hadn't scientific hypnosis caught the attention of Portuguese doctors and surgeons?

Following these questions, the research I was able to conduct led me to conclude that animal magnetism and hypnosis had aroused intense curiosity in Portugal, especially during the first half of the 19th century. The medical class, surgeons, professors and university students, not forgetting the lay public, showed a great deal of interest in these practices, in parallel with what was happening in other countries like Brazil or England,

where the same curiosity had manifested itself after the 1830s (Barreiros, 2020; Veronese, 2017; Nicholls, 2013).

The periodic press, which even decreed animal magnetism as an object of curiosity and fashion, offered abundant news about magnetization sessions held in the houses of the Aristocracy before a select and avid public (*Periódico dos Pobres no Porto*, 27 de Maio de 1845, p. 495). But, from the point of view of the university and scientific institutions, the gaze seemed quite different: a powerful anathema would be directed both towards certain doctors who exercised magnetization and towards lay practitioners who were persecuted and accused of the illegal exercise of medicine according to the laws then in force. On the other hand, professional associations seem to have refused to discuss the subject, contributing to converting animal magnetism and hypnosis into true scientific taboos, a circumstance that was not even mitigated by the real possibility of making them as ways to perform surgery without pain, in a period immediately before the discovery of the anesthetic effects of ether and chloroform (Barreiros, 2020, pp. 514- 517).

In fact, despite the collective curiosity around these practices, the Portuguese specialized medical literature silenced, until late, the curiosity for the subject. It is likely that the very doctors and surgeons who became interested in the subject were self-censored based on that institutional climate of *invectivation*. And, in part, it is to this that the critical misfortune of Abbot Faria's work is due. But going further in this archaeology of forgetfulness, it is worth remembering that hypnosis constituted a real epistemological challenge in the field of psychiatry and medicine. And that this challenging character is also part of the equation of this forgetfulness.

The triumph of anatomopathology - which I interpret as a paradigm, in medicine, in the sense attributed to it by Thomas Kuhn - made hypnosis a system of practices and beliefs inconsistent with the force ideas defined within the paradigm itself: crucial importance of the organic location of the disease and differential diagnosis, to the detriment of the doctrine of crises and the tendency towards absolute diagnosis which, it should be stressed, psychiatry had great difficulty in abandoning (Foucault, 2006, pp. 265-266).

Based on the intersubjective influence, on a specific idea of the disease as an energetic blockage and conveying the importance of the doctrine of crises,

hypnosis appears simultaneously as a new doctrine and as an archaism. A new doctrine because, among other things, it gives a central and unprecedented place to the concrete patient in the field of therapeutic relationships (Sloterdijk, 2011, p. 238). Archaism because it will persist in the doctrine of crises, a theoretical-practical instrument that has matured in the galenical hypocratic tradition, and represents the "turning point" that determines the evolution of the disease, whether in the direction of a recovery of health or the death of the individual (Cardoso, 2009, pp. 11-14). The crisis thus shares the nature of kairological time: it represents the opportune moment that imposes the decision and, when it is not properly used, can lead to an unfavorable outcome.

But if it is true that "magnetic crises" were a fundamental aspect of the new doctrine, it is worth remembering that psychiatry at the beginning of the 19th century still could not do without that notion. Philippe Pinel will even give a central place to the crises in the cure of mania and Jean-Etienne Esquirol will go further when he states in *Das Paixões* (1805), that it is not through reasoning that one can cure mental alienation, but "it is only by giving a moral shake, placing the alienated in a state opposite and contrary to that in which he found himself before resorting to this medium", ending, "(...) crises are for the morbid alterations of the solid and the fluid what moral shakes are for the diseases of the intellectual and moral man (Esquirol, cited by Pigeaud, 2009, p. 41).

I believe that the epistemological challenges raised by hypnosis and the inconsistency of some of its assumptions with the triumphant medical paradigm are essential to understand the reasons why it became, in the Portuguese 19th century, both an object of intense intellectual curiosity and a taboo subject within scientific and academic institutions. On the other hand, as a case study, the history of hypnosis allows us to better understand the logic of paradigms and the dynamics of exclusion that are associated with them in terms of objects, methods or general problems to work with. And it reminds us that, from the point of view of scientific institutions, there is a fine line between healthy curiosity and illicit and inappropriate curiosity. It is that, in this as in other cases, they do not refrain from restraining what we can call, like St. Augustine, "the excesses of curiosity".

In Portugal, we would have to wait for the fin de siècle so that hypnosis, becoming more silent among the laity, could become a subject for specialists, giving rise to a second wave of greater critical detachment, contrasting with the first condemnatory wave. Signs that it was, perhaps, framed in the logic proper to the current paradigm.

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