

Julian Ochorowicz

Julian Ochorowicz (1850-1917) was a Polish philosopher, psychologist and inventor. He was a keen advocate of the medical benefits of hypnosis, and also pursued interests in psychical research, carrying out notable investigations of psychokinetic phenomena with mediums.

Life and Career

Julian Leopold Ochorowicz was born on 23 February 1850 in Radzymin, near Warsaw. He studied natural sciences at the University of Warsaw, then went on to obtain a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Leipzig, with a thesis on conditions of consciousness. In 1874 he returned to Warsaw, where he became a leading voice in the Polish positivist movement. He also published poetry in *Przegląd Tygodniowy* (*The Weekly Review*) under the pen name Julian Mohort.

In 1881 Ochorowicz was appointed assistant professor of psychology and philosophy at Lwów University. Pursuing a career in clinical psychology, he subsequently spent many years in Paris, working with the mentally ill at the Salpêtrière hospital and in private practice, using hypnosis as a therapy. At around this time he started working on telegraphic inventions, producing improved types of telephone and microphone, and experimenting with televisual technology.¹ He later continued his private practice in Warsaw before taking up residence in Wisla in southern Poland.

Ochorowicz has been described as 'one of the most restless and open minds of his era'.² However, his professional prospects were adversely affected by his interest in hypnosis, which at the time was regarded with suspicion in Poland, and his many writings on the subject were largely ignored.³ In his later years he developed an interest in physical mediumship, experimenting with Eusapia Palladino and Stanisława Tomczyk.

Hypnosis

Ochorowicz became interested in hypnosis while still at school, experimenting with classmates.⁴ At the Salpêtrière hospital in Paris he had the opportunity to use it as a therapy for patients suffering from nervous disorders, concluding that it was 'neither pathological (the view of the Salpêtrière school), nor just due to suggestion (the view of the Nancy school of Auguste Liebeault and Hypolyte Bemheim), but represented an anomalous state of consciousness.'⁵

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Ochorowicz also held that hypnosis had not replaced 'animal magnetism', the concept popularized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries by Anton Mesmer and his followers, and which was based on the idea of a 'magnetizer' manipulating a 'fluid force'. Instead, he held that 'magnetism' (or 'mesmerism') and hypnosis were separate and distinct processes.⁶

Ochorowicz used a device of his own invention named the 'hypnoscope', a cylindrical magnet into which a person inserted a finger and which, he claimed, could reveal that person's susceptibility to hypnotism.⁷ Critics doubted its efficacy and it was never subsequently taken up.

Mental Suggestion

In 1887 Ochorowicz published *De la Suggestion Mentale* [[Mental Suggestion](#)], describing experiments with hypnotized patients that appeared to show evidence of telepathy and clairvoyance. In the case of a woman whom he hypnotized regularly as treatment for fainting fits, instructions to perform certain actions that he gave her mentally (that is, without saying them out loud) – to lift her right hand, to get up and come to him, to move a chair, to take off her bracelet – were all performed by her.⁸

With [Frederic Myers](#) he successfully replicated earlier experiments in which individuals were hypnotized at a distance and obeyed instructions given telepathically.⁹ He also described phenomena described by others, including an ability shown by certain hypnotized subjects to correctly diagnose ailments,¹⁰ and reported further testimonies of clairvoyance.¹¹

Ochorowicz's experimental work was acclaimed in a preface by [Charles Richet](#), a Nobel prize-winning physiologist who had also carried out extensive researches in clairvoyance, although he doubted whether Ochorowicz's theories about the processes at work would carry much weight.

The book was translated into English and can be read [here](#).

Mediumship Research

Ochorowicz experimented in his youth with [table-turning](#), a craze which had swept the US and Europe in the 1850s. He subsequently became interested in the claims of séance mediums to perform psychokinetic feats, which, however, he attributed not to the action of discarnate 'spirits' but rather as 'a momentary transfer of nervous-muscular energy beyond the organism and into the environment under the influence of the imagination when the medium was in a monoideistic state' – a phenomenon he described as 'ideoplasty'.¹²

In May 1893, Ochorowicz travelled to Rome to investigate the Neapolitan medium [Eusapia Palladino](#), giving detailed descriptions of the phenomena he observed and precautions taken against fraud (which, however, he only published in 1913).¹³

Ochorowicz was among those investigators who were convinced that much of the more striking phenomena were genuine, while conceding that Palladino often attempted to cheat, if sometimes unconsciously.

In November of that year he brought Palladino to Warsaw where investigations continued for a few weeks. These received much local press publicity, including testimonials by credible professional people in her favour and denunciations by sceptics. He also attended investigations at Charles Richet's house in France, acting both as sitter and note-taker.¹⁴

Around 1908, Ochorowicz began working with [Stanisława Tomczyk](#), a young woman whom he was treating for the effects of trauma. These included spontaneous psychokinetic phenomena of the poltergeist type. By experiment, Ochorowicz found that Tomczyk, seated at a table, could cause small objects placed on the surface to move, apparently by mind-power alone. (See [here](#) for a full description.)

Selected Works

Books

How to Investigate the Soul? On the method of psychological research (1869). Warsaw: Druk. L. Boguslawskiego.

From the Diary of a Psychologist (1876). Warsaw: Wladyslaw Debski.

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336-44; 357-70.

Nouvelle étude expérimentale sur la nature des rayons rigides et du courant médiumnique (1911). *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* 21, 161-66; 199-203; 230-36; 276-80.

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[Zjawiska Medyumiczne](#) [Mediumistic phenomena, part 2] (1913/2018b). (Trans. by C. Bernard & Z. Weaver). *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 32, 349-411.

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Gawlik & Furtak (2017): 'In the early 1880s, he patents a "new microphone conveyor system" and a "telephone system that plays loud speech". Ochorowicz's telephone - giving good quality sound and independent of Bell's and Edison's patents - arouses great interest. At one of the exhibitions, where visitors could listen to Ochorowicz transmitted by a device from a distant "Marseillaise" hall, French President Jules Grévy personally congratulated Ochorowicz. The telephone went into mass production in France, but had to be constantly improved.'
- [2](#). Gawlik & Furtak (2017).
- [3](#). Weaver (2019), 70.
- [4](#). Weaver (2019), 70.
- [5](#). Weaver (2019), 70-71.
- [6](#). Weaver (2019), 71.
- [7](#). Ochorowicz (1891), 17; Weaver (2019), 74.

- [8.](#) Ochorowicz (1891), 62-76.
- [9.](#) Ochorowicz (1891), 81-103.
- [10.](#) Ochorowicz (1891), 107-18.
- [11.](#) Ochorowicz (1891), 178-95.
- [12.](#) Weaver (2019), 72.
- [13.](#) Ochorowicz (1913/2018a, 1913/2018b).
- [14.](#) Lodge (1894), 306-57.

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