

# MESMER, THE FRANKLIN COMMISSION, AND HYPNOSIS: *A Counterfactual Essay*

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**Abstract:** The author reviews the social and scientific context for both Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism and the evaluation of that theory by the Franklin Commission. If Mesmer had never lived, someone else would have introduced magnets into medicine; and if the Franklin Commission had never met, someone else would have found the theory of animal magnetism invalid. Mesmer's theory was an imperfect analogy conditioned by the scientific vocabulary of his time, and the Franklin Commission's debunking of his theory left Mesmer's effects both unchallenged and unexplained. Both Mesmer and the Franklin Commission suffered from the fact that in their time scientific psychology was not merely unavailable but considered impossible.

In the history of psychology and psychotherapy, Mesmer and the Franklin Commission often play a prominent role. Ellenberger (1970) found in Mesmer the roots of Freudian psychoanalysis and other psychodynamic approaches to psychiatry, including psychogenic theories of mental illness and insight-oriented psychotherapies (see also Crabtree, 1993). Even before Freud, mesmerism influenced the Mind-Cure and New Thought movements in 19th-century America, laying the foundation for an emphasis on self-help in contemporary American culture and the interest in self-healing that lies at the center of American complementary and alternative medicine (Fuller, 1982, 1986). As neurology developed in the middle portion of the 19th century, Benjamin Carpenter and Thomas Laycock took mesmerism as evidence of the "reflex action" of the brain above the spinal cord, thus laying the foundation for contemporary notions of unconscious automatisms (Miller, 1995).

This history is sometimes presented as a deterministic sequence of historical events. For example, according to the standard interpretation of events, without Mesmer hypnosis might not have been invented at all. Except perhaps for a passing reference to the Temples of Asclepius,

Manuscript commissioned May 1, 2001; final revision received April 2, 2002.

<sup>1</sup>Preparation of this article was supported by Grant #MH-35856 from the National Institute of Mental Health. For additional background on Mesmer and the Franklin Commission, see Kihlstrom, 1984).

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The *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, Vol. 50, No. 4, October 2002 407-419  
DOI: 10.1177/002071402237724

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where the priests stimulated healing dreams by whispering in the ears of sleeping patients, most standard histories of hypnosis begin with Mesmer (e.g., Gauld, 1992; Tinterow, 1970). From Mesmer and the Franklin Commission, this history runs through the Marquis de Puységur and the Abbé Faria; to Elliotson, Esdaile, and Braid in Britain; to Charcot, Janet, Liebeault, and Bernheim in France; and to James, Sidis, and Prince in the United States. From James and Prince, it is only a short leap to the pioneering experimental work of Young, Hull, and White before World War II, and what Gauld (1992) rightly called a "golden age" (p. 579) of hypnosis in the latter half of the 20th century.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, one of the techniques of modern historiography, variously called counterfactual, virtual, or alternative history, imagines what the outcome would have been if a certain historical event had been different or a certain historical figure never lived or made a different choice (Cowley & Ambrose, 1999; Ferguson, 1997). What if the Persian fleet had defeated the Greeks at Salamis in 480 B.C., or if the Ottoman Turks had brought cannons to the siege of Vienna in 1683? What if Annie Oakley had missed Kaiser Wilhelm II's cigar and killed him in 1889, or if the 1919 Treaty of Versailles had been less harsh toward Germany, or if Hitler had invaded the Middle East or England, instead of Russia, in 1941? What if Mikhail Gorbachev had never come to power in the Soviet Union, or if he hadn't initiated his policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* when he did, or at all? By imagining how things might have been different, historians gain new perspectives on particular events and persons, identify genuine turning points in history, and expose the radically contingent rather than deterministic relations among historical events. In this article, I pose a series of counterfactual questions, asking what might have happened had Mesmer not promoted his doctrine of animal magnetism and had the Franklin Commission not tested his claims the way it did.

### WHAT IF MESMER HAD NEVER LIVED?

Mesmer usually gets the credit, if that is what it is, for the doctrine of animal magnetism, but it should be understood that other physicians were also working with magnetism in the 18th century. Ancient Greek physics assumed that "action at a distance" was mediated by an immaterial substance, such as ether, and 18th-century Cartesian physiology assumed that the will influenced the muscles through vibrations transmitted through an ether-like substance encapsulated in the nerves (Finger, 1994; Miller, 1995). Mesmer's 1766 medical dissertation, *De planetarium influxu*, was not about astrology, as is sometimes claimed

<sup>3</sup>In this article I rely heavily on Gauld's (1992) authoritative history of hypnosis and on Pattie's (1994) scholarly biography of Mesmer. For ease in exposition, references to primary sources are omitted, and the interested reader is referred to these texts, as well as to Tinterow's (1970) anthology.

(McNally, 1999), but rather derived from some passing speculations by Isaac Newton himself about the influence of gravity on the body (Miller, 1995). In fact, the thesis was essentially plagiarized from a book by the English physician Richard Mead published more than 20 years earlier (Pattie, 1956, 1994). By the same token, the medical use of magnetism goes back at least as far as Paracelsus, the 16th-century Swiss physician and alchemist, and William Maxwell, his 17th-century Scottish follower. Michel-Augustin Thouret, reporting to the Royal Society of Medicine, found that the 27 propositions of Mesmer's 1779 *Memoire sur la decouverte du magnétisme animal* could be found among the 100 aphorisms of Maxwell's 1679 *De medicina magnetica*. Indeed, the 1784 report of the Royal Society of Medicine (the *other* French royal commission) concluded that "instead of being a piquant novelty animal magnetism is an ancient system abandoned a century ago" (Pattie, 1994, p. 163).

It is therefore clear that the medical application of magnetism was in the air, so to speak, whether Mesmer promoted it or not. In fact, in 1775, Maximilian Hell, the Austro-Hungarian Astronomer Royal, published a report of magnetic cures already achieved in France and England. Hell needed a physician to collaborate in further research and sought out Mesmer. Their treatment of a patient suffering from a gastrointestinal disorder was successful enough to stimulate a priority dispute between the two, as a result of which Mesmer abandoned the "mineral" magnetism of ferrous substances in favor of a doctrine of "animal" magnetism emanating from the nervous system. If Mesmer had not been available, Hell would likely have found some other collaborator in a city that hosted Europe's most distinguished medical school. Perhaps it is a good thing he found Mesmer: otherwise we might be writing about "hellism" or some such. But even without Mesmer, it seems likely that something like the Franklin Commission might well have ended up investigating someone like Mesmer, anyway.

#### WHAT IF MESMER HAD LEFT NO HEIRS?

One problem with the standard timeline is that hypnosis as we know it today, or even as Janet and James knew it in the 19th century, bears little resemblance to the phenomena produced by Mesmer. Modern hypnotists do not pass their hands over their patients' and subjects' bodies, and modern patients and subjects do not fall into convulsive crises. In this respect, the real pivotal figure in the history of hypnosis research may be Amand-Marie-Jacques de Chastenet, the Marquis de Puységur, who treated the peasant Victor Race in 1784 and accidentally discovered artificial somnambulism and rapport—the latter leading to the phenomena of suggestion that lie at the core of hypnosis as we know it today (Ellenberger, 1965). It was Puységur who revived animal magnetism in 1807, long after the disgraced Mesmer had decamped to obscurity in Switzerland. It was Puységur who recognized the importance of

psychological factors such as will in animal magnetism and speculated that the technique could be used in the treatment of mental as well as physical illnesses. And it was Puységur's own successors, such as J. P. F. Deleuze, A. J. F. Bertrand, and J. D. Dupotet, who developed the theory of willpower and brought animal magnetism into the mental asylums of France—and Dupotet, as well, whose demonstrations were witnessed by Elliotson, leading to the revival of animal magnetism in Britain. Of course, all of this began with Mesmer himself, but an equally important counterfactual question is: What if there had been no Puységur?

Or Braid: It was Braid who in 1843 coined the term *hypnosis*, referring to nervous sleep, completing the divorce of artificial somnambulism from its mesmeric origins—a brilliant public-relations move that permitted later generations of scientists to approach the phenomenon from a fresh perspective (Gravitz & Gerton, 1984; Kihllstrom, 1992; Kravis, 1988). No matter what the phenomenon was, so long as it was associated with Mesmer and the doctrine of animal magnetism, even if only in name, it was going to go nowhere. Braid also offered alternative physiological and psychological theories of the phenomenon that permitted Carpenter and Laycock to take artificial somnambulism seriously as evidence of the reflex action of the brain (Miller, 1995).

Some years later, Charles Richet played a similar role in France, leading to the work of Charcot, Janet, and Bernheim, and thus to Freud as well. But it was not mesmerism or animal magnetism that Richet reintroduced to France: His seminal 1875 paper—which had such influence on Charcot, Janet, Liebeault, and Bernheim—was titled “*Du somnambulisme provoqué.*” When James incorporated observations of artificial somnambulism into his seminal analysis of consciousness, thereby legitimizing the study of hypnosis within the new scientific psychology, he referred to hypnosis, Janet, and Bernheim, not to Mesmer and animal magnetism (Kihllstrom & McConkey, 1990).

After the debacle of the Franklin Commission, without the developments represented by these landmark figures, Mesmer himself would be no more than a footnote in the history of medicine, like Paracelsus; he would not appear in histories of psychology at all.

#### WHAT IF THE FRANKLIN COMMISSION HAD NOT INVESTIGATED MESMER?

With respect to the Franklin Commission, it is worth remembering that in 1775, following his successful treatment of Franzl Oesterlin and Professor Bauer, Mesmer distributed his “Letter to the People of Frankfurt,” describing his views on animal magnetism, to every European academy of science, requesting comments on his work. Again, after publishing his *Memoire* in 1779, he explicitly requested an investigation of his techniques—first by the French Academy of Sciences, then by the Royal Society of Medicine, and then by the Faculty of Medicine at the

University of Paris. Although these efforts were unsuccessful, Charles D'Eslon, medical director of the Faculty, studied with Mesmer and became a proponent of animal magnetism (Brown, 1933).

In 1781, after the Faculty refused to convene a commission to investigate his techniques, Mesmer informed his patients that he would discontinue their treatment. Finally, Marie Antoinette, one of whose friends was a patient of Mesmer's, offered to arrange a royal commission as well as an annuity to support Mesmer's practice and teaching. Mesmer ultimately rejected this offer. Mesmer's rationale, as he made clear in a letter to the queen and in his 1781 *Precis historique des faits relatifs au magnétisme animal*, was that he did not want the issue of the practical utility of his discovery to be confused with his financial well-being (Pattie, 1994). But mostly, it appears, Mesmer wanted endorsement by formally established learned societies of scientists or physicians, his peers, not an ad hoc group of mere "commissioners."

Thus, long before 1784, Mesmer was no stranger to the academic scrutiny of medical techniques. In fact, in 1775, he himself had been commissioned by the Elector of Bavaria to investigate the cures achieved through exorcism by Johann Joseph Gassner, a priest who believed that many cases of disease were the work of the Devil and treated patients by means of exorcism. In the course of this work, Mesmer demonstrated his techniques to the Munich Academy of Sciences and successfully treated its director for a variety of pseudoneurological and somatoform complaints. Mesmer concluded that Gassner was sincere and many of his cures valid but that they were actually achieved by means of animal magnetism, not by the casting out of devils. The Gassner episode may be seen as an early example of the comparison of rival treatments, and it yielded Mesmer the only academic honor he ever received—election to the Munich Academy of Sciences. More important, Mesmer's stance can be seen as a triumph of the medical model, that disease is the product of natural causes, over the supernatural model, that disease is the work of devils (Kihlstrom, 2002; see also Shagass, 1975; Siegler & Osmond, 1974).

In the end, of course, animal magnetism was investigated by not one but *two* royal commissions: the Franklin Commission, drawn from the Faculty of Medicine and the Royal Academy of Sciences and chaired by Benjamin Franklin, American ambassador to France (McConkey, 1985; McConkey & Perry, 1985), and a second commission drawn from the Royal Society of Medicine.<sup>4</sup> And, of course, they investigated D'Eslon,

<sup>4</sup>The report of the Franklin Commission is sometimes known as the "Baillly Report," because it is often thought that it was edited by Jean-Sylvain Baillly, one of the commissioners from the Royal Academy of Sciences; it was accompanied by a "secret report" (reprinted in this issue and in Shor & Orne, 1965) on the supposed dangers posed by animal magnetism to the virtue of women. The second commission, of the Royal Society of Medicine, was largely redundant with the first and seems to have been convened mostly because the medical society didn't want to be left out. In any event, its report was largely a duplication of the Franklin Report, except for a dissent by Antoine-Laurent de Jussieu. Pattie (1994) provides

not Mesmer—partly, Pattie (1994) suggests, because D’Eslon had a number of Marie Antoinette’s friends as patients and partly because of Mesmer’s poor ability to speak French. Moreover, D’Eslon, being a French subject as well as a highly regarded member of the Faculty of Medicine, was more likely to accept the verdict if it proved negative.

There is no doubt that the studies performed by the Franklin Commission are masterpieces of the experimental method, and it would be appropriate to teach them in the methods and design courses that we offer today on both undergraduate and graduate levels. Franklin and his colleagues deduced certain hypotheses from Mesmer’s theory, as he himself expressed it, and tested these hypotheses in a rigorously controlled fashion. On the basis of these experimental results, they concluded that Mesmer’s theory was wrong in every detail, that Mesmer’s effects were due entirely to touch, imitation, and imagination, and that of these, imagination was the most important (Tinterow, 1970, p. 123).

As powerful as this conclusion is, we did not necessarily need the Franklin Commission to reach it. Pattie (1994) notes that as early as 1781, after the refusal of the Faculty of Medicine to evaluate animal magnetism, three faculty members proposed a controlled experiment not unlike one actually performed 3 years later by the Franklin Commission. Furthermore, in May 1784, after the Franklin Commission had convened but before it completed its experiments and wrote its report, Claude-Louis Berthollet reached a conclusion very similar to the Franklin Commission’s. Berthollet, a high-ranking member of the Faculty of Medicine who attended Mesmer’s lectures and demonstrations at the Society of Harmony, observed that the identical procedures could induce or terminate crises, depending on what patients expected. Accordingly, he concluded that all the effects of animal magnetism were due to imagination and imitation (Pattie, 1994, p. 133).

Mesmer’s rejection of the three doctors’ proposal as an insult to his honor shows that he wanted any evaluation to focus on his cures, not on the theory of animal magnetism. In fact, D’Eslon and Mesmer replied with a counterproposal for what amounts to a randomized clinical trial: 12 patients selected by the Faculty of Medicine to be treated by Mesmer and 12 more to be treated by members of the Faculty. Thus, Mesmer and the Faculty were working at cross-purposes. Mesmer wanted validation of his cures; but, if the academy were going to evaluate Mesmer’s treatment at all, it was going to be in terms of its underlying scientific basis, not simply in terms of its efficacy. Even without the extensive formal experiments of the Franklin Commission, it seems clear that Mesmer’s own demonstrations provided enough data to impeach the theory of animal magnetism. As the scientific basis for medical practice

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a summary of the second report, as well as an excellent account of the ensuing “pamphlet war” between Mesmer’s proponents and opponents and of the satires and plays of the period written on the subject of Mesmer and animal magnetism.

strengthened, Mesmer's theory was bound to have been debunked eventually. And, the debunking would have had little or no effect. Mesmer quickly retired to obscurity in Switzerland, but D'Eslon attacked the commissions' reports in his *Observations sur les deux rapports* (1784) and contributed to a *Supplement aux deux rapports* that described the successful treatment of 115 cases (D'Eslon died in 1786).

### WHY 1784?

As a footnote, we might inquire why the Franklin Commission convened when it did. One of Mesmer's patients was a friend of Marie Antoinette, and certainly the queen had some influence with the king. Part of the reason may also lie in Mesmer's violent reaction when D'Eslon began treating patients independently of him, which may have made it seem that Mesmer was interested in money after all. In fact, Mesmer was obsessed with money, and even his supporters complained about the fees he charged to teach them his technique and his constant demands for additional financial support. Even after the Franklin Commission published its report, his followers demanded that he publish his discovery so that everyone could use it. When Mesmer failed to do so, Caullet de Veumorel, like D'Eslon a personal physician to the Comte d'Artoir, brother of King Louis XVI (and later, after the Bourbon restoration, to become King Charles X), did so on his behalf. The *Aphorismes de M. Mesmer*, published in 1785, are tantamount to a verbatim transcription of Mesmer's lectures, including his views on diseases of the nervous system.<sup>5</sup> Despite the reports of the two royal commissions, the *Aphorismes* were published with the approval of the Royal Censor and went to three editions (Pattie, 1994). Had Mesmer not taken on more of the appearance of a charlatan, he might have been left alone.

Another reason was certainly the participation of Mesmer's followers, if not Mesmer himself, in radical activities in the run-up to the French Revolution of 1789 (Darnton, 1968; see also Gravitz, 1997). For example, in 1783 the Society of Universal Harmony (originally called the Lodge of Harmony) was founded by Nicolas Bergasse, one of Mesmer's patients and disciples, for the promotion of Mesmer's ideas, and it was quickly followed by the founding of similar societies in the provinces. As the Society's original name suggests, many Society members were also Freemasons, associated with both anticlericalism and bourgeois liberalism. Even one of Franklin's grandsons, Temple, was a member of the Society of Harmony! (McConkey, 1985; McConkey & Perry, 1985)! Bergasse himself was involved in agitation against various aspects of the *ancien regime*, including the medical and scientific establishment, as were other members of the Society, such as Jacques-Pierre Brissot and Jean-Louis Carra, and Bergasse was later to become a leading member of the

<sup>5</sup>Interestingly, the *Aphorismes* contain the first mention of postmagnetic amnesia, which had also been mentioned by de Jussieu in his minority report (Pattie, 1994).

Estates General. In 1793, immediately after his final return to Vienna, Mesmer was briefly arrested on suspicion of revolutionary sympathies, and in fact many of his Austrian friends were involved in the "Vienna Jacobin conspiracy" (Pattie, 1994, p. 233) of 1794. One was even hanged for treason. In the hands of the Society of Harmony, the doctrine of animal magnetism became a political theory in disguise, and in 1784, King Louis may well have wanted to nip this aspect of revolutionary spirit in the bud. Had Mesmer not been involved, however tangentially, with revolutionary activities, he might have been left alone.

Still another important factor was Mesmer's chronic inability to give a coherent account of how his treatment worked. In his 1781 *Precis historique*, Mesmer acknowledged that "the learned world" had found the propositions listed in the 1779 *Memoire* "unintelligible" (Pattie, 1994, p. 86), and he went on to explain why:

I am accused of equivocal conduct because I do not publish the theory of my doctrine. I answer that I cannot. . . . The object which I discuss eludes positive expression. There remains for me, to make myself understood, only images, comparisons, approximations. Whatever accuracy one may put into language, it always presents imperfect aspects. (Pattie, 1994, 118-119)

Bergasse himself complained of the contradictory and incoherent nature of Mesmer's ideas, and the Society soon established a Committee on Instruction in an attempt to determine which aspects of Mesmer's doctrine were true and which in error. If Mesmer had been clearer about what he was doing, he might have been left alone. But, of course, he could not have been clearer: the science of his time failed him.

#### WHAT IF "IMAGINATION" HAD BEEN THE PROVINCE OF SCIENCE?

It must be remembered that, with the possible exception of the blind pianist Maria Theresa Paradis (Pattie, 1979, 1994), no one—not even the Franklin Commission—ever doubted that Mesmer's cures were genuine or that he was able to succeed where conventional approaches had failed. But evidence of efficacy was not sufficient for academic approval. The scientific revolution had made physicians increasingly dissatisfied with purely *empirical* treatments, which were known to be effective but whose underlying mechanisms were unknown (Magner, 1992; Porter, 1997). In the emerging profession of scientific medicine, theories of treatment, like theories of disease, had to conform to what was known about anatomy and physiology. Then, as now, this scientific basis distinguished medicine from quackery and so was an important source of the physician's professional authority. While Mesmer wanted approval for his technique, the academy wanted verification of his theory. As the Franklin Commission put it, "The animal magnetism may indeed exist without being useful, but it cannot be useful if it does not exist"



(Tinterow, 1970, p. 89). And, of course, they quickly showed it did not exist.

One problem with debunking experiments then, as now, is that when they succeed they leave nothing in place of the thing debunked. This is almost always a mistake because the object of the debunking may still be of interest. The Franklin Commission proved conclusively that Mesmer's cures were not mediated by the flow of animal magnetism, or indeed any kind of physical force, but they left the cures themselves unchallenged and, aside from some hand-waving in the direction of "imagination," unexplained. If Mesmer lacked a scientific vocabulary adequate to explain his effects, as even his admirers complained, so did the Franklin Commission.

The sad fact is that 18th-century science had no idea what to do with the mind. Indeed, the dualistic legacy of Descartes led Kant to declare that because mind could not be measured, psychology could never be an experimental science (Leary, 1982). This view did not prevent Kant from writing what amounts to the first introductory textbook in psychology (see Hatfield, 1998; Kant, 1798/1978; Kihlstrom, 1998), but it took 50 years before Weber and Fechner could prove Kant wrong with respect to the "lower" mental processes of sensation and perception and another 50 years for Ebbinghaus to prove him wrong with respect to the "higher" mental processes of learning and memory. Scientific research on imagination, expectation, and social influence took even longer to take hold. If psychology had been as advanced as physics and physiology in the late 18th century, Mesmer might have had a different theory. Certainly, the conclusions of the Franklin Commission, that his effects were due to imagination, would not have had the negative impact that they did. Instead, they would have opened up whole new vistas for psychology, psychotherapy, and psychosomatic medicine.

#### THE LESSONS OF MESMER— AND OF THE FRANKLIN COMMISSION

The report of the Franklin Commission has been described as "enduring testimony to the power and beauty of reason" and "a key document in the history of human reason," which "should be rescued from its current obscurity, translated into all languages, and reprinted by organizations dedicated to the unmasking of quackery and the defense of rational thought" (Gould, 1991, pp. 190, 191). A later analysis finds in Mesmer the prototype for the hyperbolic promotion by charismatic figures of so-called power therapies that lack appropriate scientific foundations (McNally, 1999). Mesmer was undoubtedly an enthusiast for animal magnetism, and in the end his theory proved wrong, but he was no stranger to rationality, and there is no justification for implying that he was a quack. Mesmer had his personal and professional faults, among which were an unseemly preoccupation with money and the idea, as

D'Eslon put it in his 1780 *Observations sur le magnétisme animal*, that there is "only one disease, one remedy, and one cure" (Pattie, 1994, p. 94). But the Gassner episode, in which Mesmer explained faith-healing in terms of natural rather than supernatural forces, shows that he was no less a materialist than the commissioners who later investigated him. And his proposal to the Faculty of Medicine for a comparative clinical trial shows that he was not ignorant of the virtues of scientific investigation.

In proposing that academic investigation focus on the practical utility of his technique, rather than its underlying mechanism, Mesmer was not trying to avoid debunking: He was putting his work on the line. In some sense, Mesmer reversed the premises of the Franklin Commission: If animal magnetism has an effect, it must exist. Any doubt that it had effects would be resolved by his proposed clinical trial. As for the mechanism underlying the efficacy of his technique, Mesmer had nothing to offer but an invisible force mediated by an invisible fluid—in other words, something like magnetism. No wonder that even Mesmer found his theory unintelligible. He literally had no vocabulary to conceptualize what was going on, and he was forced to rely on imprecise analogies. Ultimately, in the hands of the Franklin Commission, these analogies proved invalid as well as imprecise, but that's not Mesmer's fault. Psychogenic theories of mental illness, the notion of psychosomatic illness, and the idea of unconscious mental life were all a century away. And before they could appear, psychology itself had to become a science. That psychology was not a science in the latter part of the 18th century is not Mesmer's fault.

Viewing the whole episode from the hindsight of two centuries, the last of which has seen the development of a science of the mind that is fully equal to any of the "natural" sciences, one has to wonder what might have happened if anything like modern psychology had been available to Mesmer and the Franklin Commission. Would Mesmer have proposed the theory of animal magnetism at all? Probably not. Even if he had, would he and his supporters have been so vigorous in their rejection of the Commission's findings? Probably not. Instead, Mesmer and his followers, good materialists that they were, would have gone on to try to determine the mechanisms by which "imagination" and other mental states can influence bodily processes. Indeed, in an age where placebo effects and the emotion-disease connection are major topics of interest for both psychology and medicine, that is just what we are now doing.

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### **Mesmer, die Untersuchungskommission und Hypnose: Eine den Tatsachen entgegengesetzte Abhandlung**

John F. Kihlstrom

**Zusammenfassung:** Der Verfasser überprüft das gesellschaftliche und wissenschaftliche Umfeld von Mesmers Theorie des animalischen Magnetismus sowie die Beurteilung dieser Theorie durch die königliche Untersuchungskommission (Franklin Commission). Wenn Mesmer nie gelebt hätte, hätte jemand anders Magnete in die Medizin eingeführt; wenn die Untersuchungskommission nie zusammengetreten wäre, hätte jemand anders die Theorie des animalischen Magnetismus verworfen. Mesmers Theorie war eine unvollkommene Analogie, die vom wissenschaftlichen Vokabular seiner Zeit geprägt war; die Ablehnung seiner Theorie durch die königliche Kommission ließ Mesmers Heilerfolge sowohl unwiderlegt als auch unerklärt. Es gereichte zum Nachteil von Mesmer und der Kommission, dass in der damaligen Zeit eine wissenschaftliche Psychologie nicht nur nicht existierte, sondern als unmöglich betrachtet wurde.

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### **Mesmer, la Commission Franklin, et l'hypnose: Un essai contre-productif.**

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**Résumé:** L'auteur passe en revue le contexte social et scientifique de la théorie de Mesmer sur le magnétisme animal et l'évaluation de cette théorie par la commission Franklin. Si Mesmer n'avait jamais vécu, quelqu'un d'autre aurait utilisé des aimants en médecine; et si la Commission Franklin ne s'était jamais réunie, quelqu'un d'autre aurait invalidé la théorie du magnétisme animal. La théorie de Mesmer était une analogie imparfaite, conditionnée par le vocabulaire scientifique de son temps, et la commission Franklin, en

démystifiant les effets de la théorie de son Mesmer les laissa incontestés et inexpliqués. Mesmer et la Commission Franklin ont souffert du fait qu'à leur époque la psychologie scientifique n'était pas simplement indisponible mais l'ont considéré comme impossible.

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**Mesmer, la Comisión Franklin, y la hipnosis:  
Un ensayo contra la corriente**

**John F. Kihlstrom**

**Resumen:** El autor hace una revisión del contexto científico y social tanto de la teoría de Mesmer del magnetismo animal como de su evaluación por la Comisión Franklin. Si Mesmer no hubiera vivido, algún otro hubiera introducido imanes en la medicina; y si la Comisión Franklin nunca se hubiese reunido, alguien más hubiera determinado la falta de validez de la teoría del magnetismo animal. La teoría de Mesmer era una analogía imperfecta condicionada por el vocabulario científico de su tiempo, y la desacreditación por la Comisión Franklin de la teoría de Mesmer no criticó ni explicó sus efectos. Tanto Mesmer como la Comisión Franklin sufrieron del hecho de que en su tiempo la psicología científica no sólo no estaba disponible, sino que se le consideraba imposible.

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