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The Approaches of 19th Century Polish Scholars Towards Spiritualism

ABSTRACT

The article presents the most important theories by Polish scholars who have attempted to explain spiritualist phenomena from the mid 19th century until Poland regained independence. It sheds light on the initial effort of reconciliation between spiritualism and Christian dogma, which was later replaced by doctrines anticipating the idea of the unconscious, followed by research on the physical results of its action. Rev. Adam Jakubowski's viewpoint is presented and juxtaposed with that of Bronisław Trentowski. Both theoreticians delineated the main paths of inquiry into the issue of spiritualism, until Julian Ochorowicz (inspired initially by Wiktor Szokalski's work) went public with his own theory of *ideoplastia*, supported by his research on thought suggestion. The whole theory, however, based on the assumption of the existence of the ethereal, collapsed when Albert Einstein's theory of relativity appeared. This brought the necessity to work out new conceptions explaining *mediumic* phenomena which were named so by Ochorowicz for the purpose of distinguishing them from the so-called supernatural or otherworldly ones. New conceptions had already been preliminarily sketched by Ludwik Krzywicki and involved his theory of *spontaneous cerebration*. The circles interested in mediumic phenomena saw their greatest hopes in the *experiential metaphysics* of Edward Abramowski, whose research was interrupted by his death.

Nevertheless, a radical change in perspective had occurred during half a century of studies on spiritualist phenomena. Spiritualism was a movement meant to provide empirical proofs for the existence of suprasensual reality and to save the idea of supernatural beings, so deeply rooted in culture but undermined by rationalism. However, the majority of scholars accepting the reality of the phenomena observed during séances tended to see

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in them mere manifestations of some unknown abilities of the human psyche, and this put an end to the hope of preserving traditional structures of thinking. What followed was the collapse of those efficient ethical and axiological tools of shaping social order which were legitimised by the most powerful authority – the other world. Still, the studies have influenced significantly the shape of many contemporary conceptions, the conception of the unconscious being one of them.

KEYWORDS

spiritualism, mediumism, experiential metaphysics, spontaneous cerebration, ideoplastia, the unconscious, Catholicism

In the mid 19th century, the American press – closely followed by the European – was flooded with messages about communicating with another world via mahogany tables. Initially, the Polish press – unaware of the future impact of these practices – ignored them. It was only on 14 April 1853 that “Czas,”¹ edited in Cracow, decided to publish the news. “Kurier Warszawski,”² “Gazeta Warszawska,”³ and other journals followed.

Those early Polish reports were usually limited to presenting the history of the phenomenon with references to the foreign press. Interest shifted towards Polish ground when the professors of the Jagiellonian University – Edward Fierich,⁴ Emilian Czyrniański,⁵ and Stefan Kuczyński⁶ – gathered around a mahogany table at Antoni Sławikowski’s,⁷ the chair of the Faculty of Oph-

¹ *Duchy pukające i skaczące stoły* [Knocking ghosts and jumping tables], “Czas” 1853, nr 84, p. 2.

² “Kurier Warszawski” 1853, nr 101, p. 504.

³ *Stoły wirujące* [Rotating tables], “Gazeta Warszawska” 1853, nr 101, p. 1 (n.p.).

⁴ Edward Fierich (1817–1896) after graduating from Lvov University was nominated district commissioner. In 1850, at the time of the Germanisation policy, he was nominated professor at Jagiellonian University. At the beginning of 1853 he became dean of the Faculty of Law, a position he held until 1859, followed by a double re-election to the same position. In 1872 he was appointed president of Jagiellonian University. He was also a member of Academia of Learning in Cracow. See: “Ateneum. Pismo Naukowe i Literackie” 1896, nr 12, p. 610.

⁵ Emilian Czyrniański (1824–1888) graduated from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences at Technical Academy in Lvov, then became professor Rochler’s assistant. Since 1851 he taught chemistry at the Jagiellonian University. In 1852 (according to “Ateneum” in 1859) he was granted the title of doctor *honoris causa* in philosophy. In 1874 he was appointed president of the Jagiellonian University.

⁶ Stefan Kuczyński (1811–1887), physicist and meteorologist, from 1881 to 1882 president of the Jagiellonian University, member of Academy of Learning.

⁷ Antoni Sławikowski (1796–1870), ophthalmologist, professor at the Institute of Medicine and Surgery in Lvov, since 1851 professor at the Jagiellonian University. Considered a pioneer in Polish ophthalmology.

thalmology at Jagiellonian University, and published later in “Czas”⁸ the protocol from the experiment confirming spontaneous table-turning. Meanwhile, academic circles were called upon to explain the phenomenon.

The first response came from “Czas” on May 22nd under the title *Kilka uwag w zastosowaniu do obrotów stołowych, wypukiwań i magnetyzmu zwierzęcego*⁹ [A few remarks concerning rotating and knocking tables and animal magnetism]. The author was Rev. Adam Kacper Jakubowski (1801–1882) who at that time served as rector at the Piarist Community in Cracow. The article proved so important that it soon appeared in the form of an independent booklet.¹⁰

Jakubowski’s considerations introduced an order of sort into the flood of sensational news and gave it a certain direction. One of the first supporters of Jakubowski was Walery Wielogłowski (1805–1865), who published a booklet *O poruszeniu i wróżbiarstwie stołów* [On moving and fortune-telling tables] the same year. Despite some criticism, particularly one voiced by the clerical-conservative “Przegląd Poznański,”¹¹ Jakubowski’s and Wielogłowski’s publications outlined the general shape of the Catholic approach to Polish spiritualism in its early stage.

Meanwhile, scholars were working on their own attitude to this issue. This was expressed cautiously and in the context of other topics rather than in separate publications. One of the most interesting texts written at that time but published much later was *O harcach i bredniach duchów stołowych* [About the pranks and blathers of table ghosts] by Bronisław Trentowski.¹² The views presented by Trentowski apparently were not foreign to academia for they were partly repeated in *Panteon wiedzy ludzkiej* [Pantheon of human knowledge],¹³ and their anticipation may be traced back to *Demonomania, czyli Nauka nadziemskiej mądrości w najnowszej postaci* [Deamonomania or the

⁸ S. Kuczyński, *List o skaczących stołach* [Letter concerning jumping tables], “Czas” 1853, nr 87, p. 2.

⁹ A. J[akubowski], *Kilka uwag w zastosowaniu do obrotów stołowych, wypukiwań i magnetyzmu zwierzęcego* [A few remarks concerning rotating and knocking tables, and animal magnetism], “Czas” 1853, nr 115, pp. 1–2.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ “Przegląd Poznański. Pismo Sześciotygodniowe” 1853, nr 17, pp. 79–82.

¹² The manuscript was kept by the family and it was only Trentowski’s grandson – Mściśław Budkiewicz – who published it in autumn 1937, in “Kurier Metapsychiczny”, a supplement to “Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny”.

¹³ B. Trentowski, *Panteon wiedzy ludzkiej lub Pantologia, encyklopedia wszechnauk i umiejętności, propedeutyka powszechna i wielki system filozofii* [Pantheon of human knowledge, or: pantologia, encyclopedia of all sciences and learning, universal propedeutics, and a great system of philosophy], Poznań 1881, t. 3, pp. 678–679, 694–695, 698.

Science of supernatural wisdom in its new form].¹⁴ It is hard to ascertain whether the booklet *O harcach i bredniach duchów stołowych* [On the pranks and blathers of table ghosts] was presented to a broader audience at that time, yet the article *O ruchu i odpowiedziach przedmiotów nieżywotnych ze stanowiska filozofii* [On the motion and responses of non-animated things from a philosophical viewpoint],¹⁵ signed A. Dł..., was known, and Trentowski himself was familiar with it and made a number of references to it.

The scholars who in the mid 19th century commented on spiritualist phenomena usually did not cast their reality into doubt. What many of them did question was the assumption of the interference of supernatural forces and beings. Trentowski referred back to the experiments with galvanised frogs and to the discussion in which some argued that the cause of the dead frog's movements was *spiritus vitalis*, or an otherworldly spirit permeating an animal body, while others pointed to an electromagnetic power acting as the animating force. Rev. Jakubowski also concluded that if a chain of hands may cause movements of tables and other objects, one must assume that some power is acting. He believed that this power might be material in which case it should be studied. If, however, it were of a spiritual nature, it would probably be a manifestation of some dark forces in action. The previously mentioned author signed as A. Dł. evoked the term *spiritus vitalis* in terms of a force which animates and dominates matter but remains at the same time in a relation of tension with it. The domination of *spiritus vitalis* was believed to imply development and growth, the domination of matter, in turn, to cause "the victory of the power of decay over the power of life"¹⁶ and – finally – death. Additionally, Wielogłowski adopted power as his main category, but he thought of it as originating in a magnetic fluid subdued to human will and in the lower region of the spiritual world inhabited by those human souls which had not been sufficiently purified to move to higher levels.¹⁷ It seems that ultimately the standpoints were polarised along the lines of different conceptions of the power in question, and in particular of its origin.

Rev. Jakubowski thought that the studies on the power behind the moving tables might possibly lead to "the elucidation of many unknown and misun-

¹⁴ Idem, *Demonomania, czyli Nauka nadziemskiej mądrości w najnowszej postaci, postaci* [Deamonomania or the Science of supernatural wisdom in its new form], Poznań 1844.

¹⁵ A. Dł., *O ruchu i odpowiedziach przedmiotów nieżywotnych ze stanowiska filozofii* [On the motion and responses of non-animated things from a philosophical viewpoint], "Czas", 1853, nr 140.

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 1.

¹⁷ W. Wielogłowski, *O poruszeniu i wróżbiarstwie stołów* [On table moving and fortune-telling], Kraków 1853, p. 58.

derstood scientific principles and truths.”¹⁸ He then asked what the cause of movement might be which lacks evident cause and he concluded that it might only be something weightless and flexible, like Mesmer’s magnetic fluid but of different properties. He finally assumed that there are three kinds of fluids running along the nerves: ethereal, of power, and of sense. Yet, having named them so, he imagined them rather as weightless, extended substances.¹⁹ He believed that the first and the second type caused table movements. Representations of reality, he believed, were evoked in the ethereal fluid. They originated in knowledge delivered by the senses, yet they did not necessarily correspond to anything in the surrounding world. Information reflected in the fluid was ordered by the brain and nervous system, until it assumed a “more or less clear shape.”²⁰ Knowledge obtained in this way consisted of sensual images and so it was sensual per se, which for Jakubowski meant that it was, in a sense, material.

The force – he thought – must also be of a material nature because the results of its actions were material. Yet, the impossibility of measuring knowledge and power against such parameters as weight or volume suggested that they existed at the crossroads of two worlds – material and spiritual.

Knowledge and power understood in this way were for Jakubowski the tools of reason and will. General representations were created by reason on the basis of images delivered by knowledge, and then realised by will by the means of power. The situation was different when knowledge and power were dormant (for example while sleeping) while memory and imagination were still active. This is when dreams appeared. When the sleep was unnatural, for example magnetic, then the knowledge of the sleeper “like an electric spark” illuminated the knowledge and found answers.

An analogical mechanism was at work, according to Jakubowski, behind the moving tables. They were moved by the power emanating from the participants in séance experiments. Whenever they responded to questions by knocking, it meant that except for power they were animated by the knowledge of the participants. Jakubowski also hypothesised about a “sort of a separate

¹⁸ A. J[akubowski], op. cit., p. 1.

¹⁹ The idea of a “magnetic fluid” was common at that time. It was believed that celestial bodies, the Earth and all living organisms influence one another via “a subtle and omnipresent fluid (fluid, ether of Newton), which permeates all beings”, see for example: J. Baudouin de Courtenay, *Rzut oka na mesmeryzm czyli Systemat wzajemnych wpływów i skutków, objaśniający teorię i praktykę magnetyzmu zwierzęcego* [A glance at mesmerism or a System of mutual influences and effects, explaining the theory and practice of animal magnetism], Warszawa 1820, p. 8.

²⁰ A. J[akubowski], op. cit., p. 1.

knowledge manifesting itself through power.”²¹ It was said to consist of forgotten images wandering among people gathered around the table, images which “come to appearance like neutral figures out of a real or imagined world.”²²

Jakubowski considered the phenomenon of moving tables first and foremost in terms of mechanisms similar to those responsible for the phenomenon of magnetism, even though his reflection about “forgotten images” may suggest associations with the subconscious. As for Wielogłowski, he assumed that the source of power was magnetic or ethereal fluid – he used the terms interchangeably – proper both to “people in flesh and blood and to fleshless ghosts,”²³ the table being as if “placed in-between the two plates of a galvanic stack battery, facilitating electric polarity.”²⁴

According to Bronisław Trentowski, in turn, the tables were moved by an electromagnetic power, which on the one hand had the property of “animating” lifeless things and on the other – of “reifying” living creatures and making them powerless. Both situations, in fact, resulted from the same process. If electromagnetic power was activated by people (everybody was said to have such a power at their disposal), it acted accordingly with their will. That is why every object under the influence of the sitters’ hands could become electrically conducive, sensitive to the current. Its action depended on a variety of factors. Trentowski agreed with the author signed A. Dł..., that the reactions of the table resulted from the influence exerted on them by the people in the chain of hands, unless among the participants there was someone “of powerful seriousness and will, or someone with most powerful emanation of electromagnetic fluid.”²⁵ Then the table was said to be obedient to this person.

An incoherence can be traced in Trentowski’s remaining considerations. He accepted from the article *Myśli o ruchu i odpowiedziach przedmiotów nieżywotnych ze stanowiska filozofii* the idea that a soul liberated from a single subjective self becomes united with the “universal spirit and its knowledge,” and this is how it gains access to the answers to the questions asked during the séance.²⁶ But this suggests the possibility that information

²¹ Ibidem, p. 2.

²² Ibidem.

²³ W. Wielogłowski, op. cit., p. 59.

²⁴ Ibidem.

²⁵ B. Trentowski, *O harcach i bredniach duchów stołowych. Nieznany rękopis Bronisława Trentowskiego z 1853 roku* [On pranks and blathers of table ghosts. An unknown manuscript of Bronisław Trentowski], “Kurier Metapsychiczny” 1937, nr 14, supplement to “Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny” 1937, nr 296.

²⁶ Ibidem.

obtained during the séance goes beyond the participants' knowledge and this is what Trentowski had rejected. Trentowski was aware of this incoherence and tried to explain it by claiming that God himself is a personal "I" Consciousness / personal Self, and by creating the kingdom of spirits, namely of single, personal conscious selves, he exhausted this sort of consciousness. There is, however, His word, which belongs to this kingdom of spirits and which created our world – the world which contains divinity but not divine consciousness, or – in other words – is endowed with an impersonal self. A human being, unaware of the fact that he is in possession of a spark of this impersonal divine consciousness/self, longs for a personal Self. Yet God's word, while creating the world, also created the powers that are active in it. The most elementary ones are attraction, repulsion and gravity. On higher levels of development they become light, warmth and fire, then: magnetism, electricity and electromagnetism, next: sensibility, mobility and life, and finally: hatred, love and self-rebirth, followed by: thought, feeling and the human Word, which creates the human world.²⁷ Electromagnetism, preceded by gravity and fire and followed by life, self-rebirth, and the human word, can use even tables as a tool for its [the word's] utterance. But only the human word may speak in this way because no earthly thing can be a window to another world. God – says Trentowski – has given each man a different "window", namely – an "inner man," "immortal, belonging to another world, full of divinity, capable of seeing God and other divine things. [...] The other world is not open to us on our command,"²⁸ so the belief in the possibility of communicating with it via tables is a superstition.

The conceptions of Bronisław Trentowski and of Rev. Adam Jakubowski aimed to explain the phenomenon of moving tables in terms of worldly factors and argued against the ideas of supernatural intervention. Wielogłowski represented bolder ideas and ventured into an immaterial world, which he considered to be a parallel reality, where spirits, liberated from material but not from ethereal flesh, may act by means of will and magnetism upon people, just as people can act upon them. Entering into this sort of relations could turn out, in his view, to be harmful both physically and spiritually. What was particularly dangerous, according to him, was the fact that only the lower,

²⁷ Idem, *O harcach i bredniach duchów stołowych. Nieznany rękopis Bronisława Trentowskiego z 1853 roku* [On pranks and blathers of table ghosts. An unknown manuscript of Bronisław Trentowski], "Kurier Metapsychiczny" 1937, nr 15, supplement to "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" 1937, nr 331.

²⁸ Idem, *O harcach i bredniach duchów stołowych. Nieznany rękopis Bronisława Trentowskiego z 1853 roku* [On pranks and blathers of table ghosts. An unknown manuscript of Bronisław Trentowski], "Kurier Metapsychiczny" 1938, nr 4, supplement to "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" 1938, nr 88.

deceptive spirits would respond to man's calling since beings of lower order, like people in general, could not command higher, pure spirits.²⁹

“Przegląd Poznański” called Rev. Jakubowski an “admirer” of speculation, one who “thinks that he has said something deep when claiming that he has discovered *the fluids of power and knowledge*.”³⁰ It also expressed critical comments on Walerian Wielogłowski's booklet for not only did it not deny the reality of some phenomena observed during séances, but accepted them as real.³¹ Still, it appreciated the parts devoted to the spiritual world.³² Wielogłowski endowed spiritualist phenomena with deeply religious meaning, claiming that accordingly with God's will they are a reminder of the supernatural world, often forgotten by people, who live as if it did not exist.³³

These early voices of Polish Catholicism seem to have been open for further investigation while at the same time they warned against playful experiments conducted out of pure curiosity, particularly if those experiments aimed at uncovering otherworldly mysteries. In the meantime, The Holy See worked on its official position.

In 1856, according to *Encyklopedia Kościelna* [Church Encyclopedia] by Rev. Michał Nowodworski,³⁴ after *Der Spiritismus und das Christentum* of 1881 by Jesuit Johann Wieser, pope Pius IX condemned spiritualism in the encyclical *Supremae*. These days, however, it is difficult to find any trace of this document even in the archives of the Vatican. In another document – an encyclical *Singulari Quidem*, published on March 17th the same year – Pius IX condemned only certain attitudes such as indifferentism,³⁵ and all those who “foolishly and criminally prefer reason to the authority of [...] God”³⁶ and “make no distinction between the different creeds, agree with everybody, and maintain that the haven of eternal salvation is open to sectarians of any religion.”³⁷ Neither did his *Syllabus Errorum* of December 8th 1864 name spiritualism directly although it did point to other harmful trends.³⁸

²⁹ W. Wielogłowski, op. cit., pp. 65–66.

³⁰ “Przegląd Poznański” 1853, nr 17, pp. 80–81.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem, p. 81.

³³ W. Wielogłowski, op. cit., p. 75.

³⁴ *Encyklopedia Kościelna podług teologicznej encyklopedii Wetzer'a i Weldego* [Church Encyclopaedia after Theological Encyclopaedia by Wetzer and Welde], red. Rev. Michał Nowodworski, t. 26, Warszawa 1903, p. 252.

³⁵ Pius IX, Encyclical *Singulari Quidem* of 17th March 1856, p. 3.

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 6.

³⁷ Ibidem, p. 3.

³⁸ Papież Pius IX, *Syllabus błędów*, tłum. i wpraw. M. Wojciechowski, [online] http://www.opoka.org.pl/biblioteka/W/WP/pius_ix/inne/syllabus_08121864.html [access: 9.07.2015].

It was only during the papacy of Leo XIII (February 1st 1882) that Roman Apostolic Penitentiary prohibited the participation, including passive, “in spiritualist consultations or games,” and apostolic constitution *Officiorum ac munerum* of 25th January 1897 prohibited publishing, reading and owning books containing guidelines for evoking ghosts. One year later, on 30 April 1898, the Congregation of Holy Office issued a decree finally banning all spiritualist practices.

Pius X continued Leo’s XIII policy in the *Catechism* published on 18 October 1912. One reads there that it is a sin against the first commandment to engage in “superstition, idolatry, fortune-telling, black magic, and spiritualism, which belongs to fortune-telling and black magic.”³⁹ Benedict XV upheld this prohibition with a decree on 24 April 1917.⁴⁰

The position of the Vatican on the issue of spiritualism, then, was finally crystallised only in the last two decades of the 19th century and, as it seems, mainly under the influence of conservative-clerical circles, which from the beginning recognised an enemy in spiritualism. In Poland they were concentrated around the previously mentioned “Przegląd Poznański,”⁴¹ “Pamiętnik Religijno-Moralny,”⁴² which from 1863 was issued as “Przegląd Katolicki,” as well as by a later journal “Przegląd Lwowski,” published by Rev. Edward Podolski. All in all, the Church left the study of spiritualist phenomena to science while prohibiting any other interest in them.

After 1853 *Fantazyjne objawy zmysłowe* [Phantasmatic sensual phenomena] by Wiktor Szokalski⁴³ played a particular role among the publications contributing to the development of the reflection on spiritualism. Szokalski was an ophthalmologist and a chief physician at the Institute of Ophthalmology at the Jagiellonian University. He was interested in spiritualist phenomena as examples of a particular form of auto-suggestion. He came to distinguish two processes here: one producing illusions, the other responsible for the impression of seeing phantoms created by the imagination, such as specters and apparitions. They were a result of the mind’s impact on the senses, and more precisely – of will uncontrolled by reason as happens, for example,

³⁹ *Catechismo della dottrina Cristiana, Pubblicato per Ordine del Sommo Pontifice San Pio X*, ch. 4, part.1, art. 1, point 194.

⁴⁰ See: P. Siwek, *Zjawiska parapsychologiczne* [Parapsychological phenomena], “Duszpasterz Polski za Granicą” 1960, nr 2, pp. 18–19.

⁴¹ Published between 1845 and 1865 by brothers J. i S. E. Koźmian.

⁴² “Pamiętnik Religijno-Moralny” was published from 1841 to 1862.

⁴³ W. F. Szokalski, *Fantazyjne objawy zmysłowe* [Phantasmatic sensual phenomena], t. 1: *Sny, widma i przywidzenia* [Dreams, phantasms, illusions], Kraków 1861, t. 2: *Senne marzenia* [Dreams], Kraków 1863.

while dreaming. Because of this book, Szokalski is counted today among the forerunners of the idea of unconsciousness. It exerted an enormous influence upon Julian Ochorowicz who, while he was still a secondary school student, engaged in his first experiments.

Initially interested in magnetism, Ochorowicz quickly expanded the scope of his interests to embrace spiritualism. This was sealed by Henryk Siemi-radzki, who arranged a meeting between Ochorowicz and the medium Eusapia Palladino, in his Roman villa at via Gaeta. After the experiments carried out during the meeting, Ochorowicz – deeply moved – invited Eusapia to Warsaw. Her arrival was preceded by a series of articles *Nowy rodzaj zjawisk* [New type of phenomena] published in “Tygodnik Ilustrowany” since July 1893. Ochorowicz presented there his own theory of mediumship phenomena. By replacing the term “spiritualism” with “mediumism” he wished to emphasise the fact that his research concentrated on the medium and its unusual abilities and not on the exploration of another world.⁴⁴

Ochorowicz was engaged in the investigation of spiritualist phenomena until the end of his life and he finally summarised the results of his work in *Zjawiska mediumiczne* [Mediumic phenomena]. His conception was based on the theory of *ideoplasty*, which had been developed and presented earlier in the second edition of *De la Suggestion mentale* [On mental suggestion].⁴⁵

By ideoplastia, Ochorowicz understood a phenomenon, in which a representation causes sensory symptoms, for example when an idea of heat causes sweating. The reaction was believed to prove the relation between psychic and physical processes, which he called *ideoorganic association*.⁴⁶ While studying mediumic phenomena, Ochorowicz concluded that the phenomenon of ideoplastia may go beyond a single organism, or – in other words – that an image or an idea born in a person’s mind is – under certain circumstances – capable of exerting physical influence on another organism and on its own environment. This sort of ideoplastia he called *motion* or *physical ideoplastia*. Yet, the conception of physical ideoplastia did not account for all the phenomena observed during spiritualist séances. Ochorowicz, then, supported it with a conception of material ideoplastia supported by the idea of “doubling.” It assumed that a human organism, besides its usual material form, has yet another, subtler, ethereal one. Under certain conditions it may depart from the material body, causing visual or even tactile sensations.⁴⁷ The “ethereal body,

⁴⁴ See for example: J. Ochorowicz, *Kwestya mediumizmu* [The question of mediumism], “Życie” 1897, nr 4.

⁴⁵ Idem, *De la Suggestion mentale* [On mental suggestion], Paris 1889.

⁴⁶ Idem, *Zjawiska medyumiczne* [Mediumic Phenomena], t. 1, Warszawa n.d., p. 117.

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 156.

as I understand it,” Ochorowicz wrote, “is not anything suprasensual. Just like I do not consider ether in physics to be a separate kind of (weightless) matter, but rather a fourth or fifth stage of attenuation of regular matter [...], so I do not consider the ethereal body to be something super-physiological, but rather an invisible, second pole of the visible form which we call a body, one capable of triggering physiological processes explained by physics and chemistry.”⁴⁸

Ochorowicz had no doubts as to the existence of ether and based his whole conception on this hypothesis. “Thought, whatever it is in itself,” he wrote, “is, at the same time, a certain motion of ether. Ether is not limited by the surface of the body, so thought must be reflected in the surrounding ether, beyond bodily boundaries.”⁴⁹ The ability of thoughts to influence ether allowed, in his view, for materialisation (the condensation of ether until it assumed a visible form), setting things into motion or causing changes in their weight via the so-called rigid rays, which acted as a lever composed of condensed ether. By means of ether a medium could receive a variety of messages because others’ knowledge, desires, and ideas were “reflected” in it.

The theory of ether, however, was replaced by the special relativity theory formulated in 1905 by Albert Einstein, and this fact undermined the bedrock of Ochorowicz’s conception. Yet, there had already appeared a different explanatory attempt concerning séance phenomena, formulated by Ludwik Krzywicki (1859–1941) in *Cerebracja żywiołowa*⁵⁰ [Spontaneous cerebration], published in 1898.

On the one hand, Krzywicki conceived of séances as “laboratories run inconsiderately by ignorant people, who study human psyche” and attribute its action to immaterial beings.⁵¹ On the other hand, he condemned scientists for “an a priori rejection of facts, which indeed have taken place.”⁵² Therefore, he intended to account for the facts in a rational way, assuming physiological psychology as his point of departure.⁵³ With this in mind, he employed the categories of the conscious and unconscious self, or – the conscious and unconscious mind. He also noted that the latter is probably much broader than the former. It allowed for recalling things absent for the conscious self, preventing errors, and suggested appropriate solutions. What bothered Krzywicki

⁴⁸ Ibidem, pp. 158–159.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, p. 120.

⁵⁰ L. Krzywicki, *Cerebracja żywiołowa. Przyczynek do psychologii spirytyzmu* [Spontaneous cerebration. A contribution to the psychology of spiritualism], Warszawa 1898.

⁵¹ Ibidem, pp. II, III.

⁵² Ibidem, p.16.

⁵³ Ibidem, p. 81.

was the question of what happens when the unconscious self dominates the whole self and he concluded that this is the case in mediumism.⁵⁴ He thought that during a trance, some unconscious strata of the self could organise themselves into an independent personality, one different from the regular, conscious one.⁵⁵ By creating such a personality, they could bring to the surface forgotten abilities, equally surprising for the observers and for the medium him/herself. They all originated in psychic depths and the whole process recalled, for example, shamanic trances. Useful advice, hints, and even the premonition of future events might occur among the manifestations of psychic recesses. They were based, though, on subliminal observation because only what was already tacitly known might be revealed during a séance. The very phenomenon of spontaneous cerebration was a phenomenon well-known to most cultures, each of them employing different means of reaching and unlocking it.

Krzywicki's conception did not define precisely what the unconscious self was. The scholar, however, believed in the possibility of studying it extensively and, ultimately, of dispelling the doubts concerning at least some of spiritualist phenomena. He limited himself exclusively to the phenomena associated with the so-called lower order spirits, such as: automatic writing, oral messages transmitted via a medium, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and moving objects. What remained were the so-called higher order manifestations, such as levitations, materialisation, aports.

Ludwik Krzywicki's conception makes him more of a follower of Wiktor Szokalski than Julian Ochorowicz was. So was the case with Edward Abramowski (1868–1918), who was expected to continue Ochorowicz's work, or, at least, to provide spiritualism studies with a similar impetus.

Abramowski is said to have repeatedly claimed that he wouldn't die until he found the secret of life after death. Particularly in his later years he intensively studied spiritualist phenomena, telepathy and clairvoyance. One year prior to his death in 1917, he launched a series of public lectures, entitled *Metafizyka doświadczalna* [Experiential metaphysics].

Experiential metaphysics was not based on concepts because concepts created by reason did not reach things, but rather on experience and on what experience intuitionally assumed to be certain. Abramowski held that there was an unconscious and unnamed invariable in all perceptions. He called it tacit perception. Under certain circumstances, when the intellect was weakened or paralysed, tacit perceptions were the only immediate and pure experiences.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, p. 68.

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 76.

This might be the case in mystical trance. Such states were related to the so-called qualitative sensations. In contrast to regular sensations, which were objectless, they carried a thing. Someone holding a tacit perception was in touch with something which – intellectually inaccessible – had the status of reality. This sort of reality was given in intuition. Things given in thoughts were, according to Abramowski, of a twofold nature – objective and subjective. The objective one was accessible to intuition, where the content of thought originated. The subjective aspect was defined by apperception, appropriate for a thinking subject. Apperception synthesised raw, intuitional experience into a thought, yet the former did not disappear. It remained hidden in perceptions and concepts, and that is why man may be said to be constantly in touch with things, even though in regular, conscious states he is faced only with their intellectual form. This is the metaphysics of reason. However, when intellectual operations are suspended, an immediate access is open to things extra-phenomenal and extra-mental, to noumenal reality, to the world of Platonic ideas, and to things in themselves. This is the field of experiential metaphysics.

The conception of experiential metaphysics raised great hopes in the circles interested in spiritualism but they faded with the death of Abramowski. Experiential metaphysics was a project made legitimate mainly by the introspection practiced during a long and intense fight against a disease. Thus, any possible followers would find it difficult to formulate the project in more detail and to design a method on the basis of a theory known exclusively from lectures.⁵⁶ Abramowski ultimately became a legend among the circles interested in spiritualist phenomena, while Ochorowicz remained the one who explained them.

Between the two World Wars, the studies were continued but mainly by passionate amateurs. Nevertheless, a radical change in perspective had occurred during half a century of studies on spiritualist phenomena. Spiritualism was a movement meant to provide empirical proofs for the existence of supra-sensual reality and to save the idea of supernatural beings, so deeply rooted in the culture but undermined by rationalism. However, the majority of scholars accepting the reality of the phenomena observed during séances tended to see in them mere manifestations of some unknown abilities of the human psyche, and this put an end to the hope of preserving traditional structures of thinking. What followed was the collapse of those efficient ethical and axiological tools

⁵⁶ Respective manuscripts were ordered and published only in 1980 (see: E. Abramowski, *Metafizyka doświadczalna i inne pisma* [Experiential metaphysics and other texts], wyboru dokonał, wstępem i koment. opatrzył. S. Borzym, Warszawa 1980).

of shaping social order which were legitimised by the most powerful authority – the other world. Still, the studies have influenced significantly the shape of many contemporary conceptions, the conception of the subconscious being one of them.

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