

IAN HACKING ON  
PIERRE JANET:  
A CRITIQUE WITH  
FURTHER  
OBSERVATIONS

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Having received positive reviews in major newspapers, Ian Hacking's interesting book, *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (1995), looks to be an influential new publication on the subject of dissociative identity disorder (formerly multiple personality disorder). It is unfortunate, therefore, that this book contains a number of errors regarding Pierre Janet's works in general, and in particular, concerning his contributions to the origin of dissociation theory.

Hacking suggests that too big a role has been attributed to Janet in the history of dissociation. He claims that this distortion of Janet's prominence is the result of Ellenberger's book, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970), which devotes a large and sympathetic chapter to Janet and which, according to Hacking, includes "virtually nothing" about Janet's later works. Hacking concludes:

Hence the legend has accumulated around Janet that he was the great founder of the theory of dissociation. (...) Ellenberger unwittingly made it possible for Janet to become the patriarch of dissociation. (Ellenberger, pp. 44-45)

Hacking's book makes several claims regarding Janet's work. Hacking credits Janet as the inventor of the word "dissociation" (in its present psychiatric sense), although he claims that Janet dropped the use of this word after the publication of his philosophical thesis of 1889, *L'automatisme psychologique* [*Psychological Automatism*].

Hacking suggests that Janet eventually ceased taking the diagnosis of multiple personality disorder seriously, as he came to consider it simply as "a special case of what is today called a bipolar illness. That is, he [Janet] came to think that multiples are manic-depressives" (p. 44). As proof of Janet's apparently reduced enthusiasm, Hacking points to Janet's book, *Les Névroses* (Janet, 1909), asserting that this work was "rather dismissive of doubling" (p. 133), and to the fact that

in Janet's later book, *Psychological Healing* (Janet, 1919/1925), only one page out of 1,147 is dedicated to multiple personality or double personality.

Hacking pays special attention to descriptions of Janet's use of the so-called "substitution technique" in the treatment of traumatic memories. He refers to Janet's early example of a patient named Marie (1889), who "at the age of six had been made to sleep beside a girl terribly suffering from impetigo on one side of her face. His patient would break out in hysterical marks, and would experience loss of sensibility, even blindness, on that side of her face. So Janet used hypnosis to suggest to his patient that she was caressing the soft beautiful face of the girl she had lain beside at age six. All symptoms, including the partial blindness, disappeared" (p. 195). Hacking seems to suggest that this substitution technique was Janet's only method of or contribution to treating patients' traumatic memories. Hacking also claims that Janet viewed the application of this substitution technique as quite a simple accomplishment where all memories "were removed, with a few words of hypnotic suggestion" (Hacking, 1995, p. 252).

Although these descriptions of Janet's work from Hacking's book seem to offer interesting speculations, a review of Janet's original writings provide materials that contradict or correct these specific claims. Corrections of these inaccuracies, to set the record straight, would seem to be important, since many contemporary publications on dissociation, dissociative disorders, and psychological trauma draw upon his pioneering studies. Using the opportunity of commenting on Hacking's representatives of Janet, a few remarks will be made on several current issues to which Hacking referred in his book.

#### CORRECTIONS OF HACKING'S MISREPRESENTATIONS OF JANET

##### 1. Janet Did Not Invent The Word "Dissociation"

Janet did not invent the word "dissociation" in its present psychiatric sense. The first French author to use the term, with its more or less current meaning, was Moreau de Tours (1845). In the 1880s the concept of dissociation was similarly used by Richet (1884), Charcot (1887), Gilles de la Tourette (1887), and Myers (1887) (cf. Crabtree, 1993; Van

der Hart & Horst, 1989). It was Janet, however, who studied dissociative phenomena most systematically and who developed a theory of dissociation that serves as the basis of modern thinking on trauma and dissociation.

## 2. *Janet Did Not Discontinue Using the Concept "Dissociation" After the Publication of His 1889 Dissertation*

Janet continued to use the term "dissociation" after his philosophical dissertation, *L'Automatisme Psychologique* (Janet, 1889). In fact, dissociation remained one of the key concepts in Janet's study of the various manifestations of hysteria, which he continued to address well into the 1900s (for an overview see Van der Hart and Friedman [1989]). In 1907 Janet defined "hysteria" as:

a form of mental depression characterized by the retraction of the field of personal consciousness and a tendency to the dissociation and emancipation of the systems of ideas and functions that constitute personality. (Janet, 1907, p. 332)

In his book *Les Névroses* (Janet, 1909a, p. 345) (to which Hacking also referred), Janet used a similar definition, and he added that these systems of ideas and functions constitute *by their synthesis* the personality. In one of his most cherished papers, "*L'Amnésie et la dissociation des souvenirs par l'émotion*" (Janet, 1904), one to which he returned repeatedly in his later work (e.g., Janet, 1919/1925, 1928, 1929, 1932, 1935), Janet presented his prototype for the analysis and treatment of dissociated traumatic memories. In this paper Janet described his patient Irène, a young woman who developed amnesia for the traumatic death of her mother and the events of the months preceding her demise. Irène suffered from crises in which she dramatically relived the tragic night of her mother's death: dissociative episodes for which she was subsequently amnesic. Janet, who helped Irène "realize" her mother's death and integrate the memories related to it, remarked that:

since the moment in which Irène was able to think voluntarily about her mother, she stopped thinking about her involuntarily... The hysterical crises stopped completely (Janet, 1904/1911, p. 527). Irène was cured because... she was to complete the assimilation of the event. (Janet, 1919/1925, p. 681)

It is true that in Janet's later work on the subject, (e.g., the case of Irène), the word "dissociation" is used less frequently. However, it is evident that Janet's clinical approach is still deeply rooted in his dissociation theory, even though it is enriched by his later theoretical developments. These developments pertain, among other things, to "oscillations of the mental level," which he described in terms of psychological force and psychological tension. Psychological

force refers to the total amount of psychological energy available, while psychological tension reflected the level of organization of this energy and the capacity for reflective, creative, and competent action (cf. Van der Hart & Friedman, 1989).

## 3. *Janet Was Not Dismissive of the Concept of Multiple or Double Personality*

My reading of Janet's later publications, in which he discussed multiple or double personality, suggests that he was far from dismissive of this concept. However, as with many other issues, a superficial reading of Janet's work can be misleading. Janet made a strict distinction between clinical and experimental observations, which he valued tremendously, and theories or opinions about these observations, which he treated with much less respect. Thus Freud, who tended to value theory over observation, used Janet's remark that the "subconscious" (a concept Janet originated) was "*une façon de parler*" as an argument to attack his position, while Hacking used Janet's remark that double personality was a special kind of bipolar disorder to support his own position.

Hacking is correct that Janet came to regard double personality, as he called it, as a special kind of bipolar disorder. However, Janet did not equate the two disorders. Rather he saw the former as the hysterical (i.e., dissociative) counterpart of the latter (Janet, 1909a, 1929). It was his study of his patient Marceline (whom he called "an artificial Félicité") that was the foundation for certain notions on double (rather multiple) personalities (Janet, 1909b). Like Félicité X, Marceline exhibited two mental states: an incomplete one which was characterized by memory gaps, in which she was sad, and an alert one in which there was an integration of the senses and of memory. That is, Marceline exhibited a depressed state and an active state (which Janet evoked using hypnosis, hence his notion of Marceline as "an artificial Félicité"). Janet concluded that these mental states "isolate themselves from each other because of phenomena of amnesia, and apparently form two existences, two separate personalities" (Janet, 1909a, p. 270). He argued that the above-mentioned variations of Marceline's mental level corresponded with state-dependent memory in her two personalities. It should be noted that Janet (1889) was also interested in chemical aspects of state-dependent memory.

However, not only in his early works (Janet, 1887, 1889, 1898), but also in later publications, Janet (1907, 1909a, 1928, 1929) showed continuous interest in the phenomenon of multiple personality. His early observations concerned several DID patients such as Lucie and Léonie (Janet, 1887, 1889) with at least three alter personalities. In his literature he also repeatedly paid attention to a number of DID patients, including Estelle (the DID patient discussed by Despine in 1840 and, in 1889, referred to by Janet) and Louis Vivet (the DID patient seen by so many of Janet's contemporary colleagues). In 1907 Janet summarized the differences between Louis

Vivet's alter personalities in terms of modifications of memory, character, and sensibility and emotion. In a chapter indeed called, "The double personalities," in his book on the evolution of the personality (Janet, 1929), Janet reconsidered these modifications, paying attention in particular to the modifications of memory in DID. He distinguished again the two basic types: two-way amnesia ("somnambulismes réciproques"), which he considered very rare, and one-way amnesia ("somnambulismes dominateurs"), which was more common. However, "between these two extreme forms, one can place innumerable observations which have in common that they are much more complicated than the former" (Janet, 1929, p. 496), (i.e., the multiple personalities).

Incidentally, in this same 1929 chapter Janet also made a critical comment about a work on DID, reflecting a concern of present-day specialists in the field of diagnosis and treatment of patients with DID: "He has a too admiring tone; one could almost say that he has a bit [un peu] mystical tone. This is the manner of people who have personal beliefs, beliefs to which they attach all their interest and which they want to impose on us a bit. One would believe that this author was not occupied with curing his patient, but rather to transforming her more and more" (1929, p. 498).

#### 4. Janet Did Not Solely Rely on His Substitution Technique in the Treatment of Traumatic Memories

In Janet's major opus, *Psychological Healing* (Janet, 1919/1925), far from solely discussing his substitution technique, Janet summarized the principles of his various approaches to the treatment of traumatic memories. Using his treatment of Irène as his prototype, his main approach to traumatic memories described facilitating the assimilation and integration of these memories. In later work he emphasized the role of "realization" in this process (Janet, 1935). Janet regarded realization as a way of unifying all aspects of our lives, including traumatic experiences, and to connect the future and the past with the present. These concepts of realization and integration form the basis for modern treatment approaches with traumatic memories.

Janet (1919/1925) resorted to his substitution method in those cases in which the patient was overwhelmed by a continuous reactivation of traumatic memories and appeared unable to assimilate or integrate these memories. In evaluating this method he noted twenty-six cases in which it had produced positive results. He remarked, however, that "the method has grave drawbacks. It is unlikely to succeed except in very suggestible hystericals; it is tedious, as a rule, and its application is difficult" (Janet, 1919/1925, p. 678). This conclusion is in contradiction to Hacking's description of Janet's position as a belief that memories could be removed with "a few words of hypnotic suggestion."

#### 5. It is Incorrect That Ellenberger Said "Virtually Nothing" About Janet's Later Work

It is unclear exactly what Hacking meant by "Janet's later work." If we take at face value Hacking's remark that Janet dropped the word "dissociation" after publication of *L'Automatisme Psychologique*, my best guess is that this reference is to writings after 1889. Or perhaps Hacking meant works after Janet's main case studies of hysteria (i.e., *Névroses et Idées Fixes*, which was published in 1898), when he began also to study another class of neuroses (which he called psychasthenia)? In either case, a mere glance at the contents of Ellenberger's chapter on "Pierre Janet and Psychological Analysis" demonstrates that Hacking's claim is incorrect. Ellenberger's chapter (1970, pp. 356-406) contains the following sections: 1) philosophy, 2) psychological automatism, 3) psychological analysis, 4) the exploration of neuroses, 5) the dynamic theory, 6) the great synthesis, and 7) psychology of religion. The second section (six and a half pages) pertains to Janet's 1889 dissertation. However, if that is the cut-off point Hacking refers to (for later works), we can note that he dedicated another forty pages to Janet's later work. If Hacking makes the arbitrary cut-off point around the publication of *Névroses et Idées Fixes* in 1898, Ellenberger still includes twenty-eight pages of discussion for Janet's remaining work.

#### ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Over and above these corrections of Hacking's statements on Janet (and Ellenberger), three other issues deserve further comment. Firstly, at the end of his book, Hacking (p. 267) spoke out for "tentative and cautious skeptics." "In their hearts," he stated, "they suspect that the outcome of multiple therapy is a type of false consciousness" (p. 267). Apart from that curious expression, "multiple therapy," the current clinical literature (e.g., Kluft, 1993) as well as my own clinical experience demonstrates that the opposite is true for those patients who go all the way in therapy and reach unification of their personality. Their path is, indeed, to use Hacking's very own words, "the growth and maturing of a person who knows herself" (p. 267). Having a therapist who is willing and able to be a true witness of both their past and present suffering, they become able to become true witnesses of themselves (cf. Laub, 1995). Having nothing to hide anymore from themselves, they are finally able to be themselves and live their own life in freedom.

It is true that the goals of realization and integration of traumatic memories, and fusion of all alter personalities, is not feasible for all DID patients. Some of them appear not to have the necessary resources to face their traumatic memories, and need to develop, at least for the time being, ways of containing these memories, and ways of coping better with their alter personalities. Within the framework of acknowledgement of their past and present suffering, they are helped

to live as much as possible in the present, thanks to a more or less "covered" past – a life which is lived at the surface (Appelfeld, 1993). Given the acknowledgement of the patient's traumatization, and appreciating divided consciousness as a way of coping with it, I would not so much regard this kind of supportive therapy as a way of inducing "a type of false consciousness" (Hacking, 1995, p. 267). This description better characterizes treatments aimed at the rejection of alter personalities and the invalidation of their post-traumatic stress symptomatology (cf. McHugh, 1995). Clinicians involved in this kind of endeavor function as "false witnesses" (cf. Caruth, 1995).

Secondly, Hacking (p. 8) states that the majority of present day psychiatrists do not accept the diagnosis of MPD/DID. In a recently published article on Canadian psychiatrists' attitudes to DID, Mai (1995) found that its existence was doubted by some 27.8% out of a sample of 180 psychiatrists: in Mai's own words, a "substantial minority" only. In other words, at least a large majority of Canadian psychiatrists accepts the diagnosis.

Finally, and perhaps most fundamentally with regard to Hacking's emphasis on the idea that in different historical episodes DID patients are different because their doctors view them differently, I would like to quote a statement made by Janet in a discussion between psychiatrists and neurologists on another dissociative phenomenon, *hemianesthesia*, which was considered very rare at the time (Janet, Hallion, Claude, & Dupré, 1909). Janet's words may be equally important with regard to current studies of the literature on double and multiple personalities:

If instead of observing the patients, we read the various published medical observations, we see a big difference between the number of notable cases of hemianesthesia, especially when we consider the French medical literature. On this point I am in complete agreement with these gentlemen. In the past every physician who respected himself always noted the sensitivo-sensory hemianesthesia in each hysteric he examined. Today one only rarely ventures into publishing observations of this kind. But what does this prove? It simply proves that the medical spirit has changed, that the teaching of influential masters isn't the same anymore and that fashion has changed, that's all. In the past one was congratulated when one had described hemianesthesia and one had seen it very sincerely everywhere; since several years, one needs a certain courage to observe hemianesthesia, and one doesn't see it anymore. It has been the same for a lot of other illnesses, in all eras in which there have been medical disputes, because one changes much easier

medical theses than one changes patients.

(Janet et al., 1909, p. 1618)

## CONCLUSION

In his version of the history of double and multiple personalities, Hacking (1995) has attempted to create a myth which dismisses Janet's prominent role in analyzing the dissociative nature of hysteria, that "illness of the personality" (Janet, 1909a) which includes dissociative identity disorder. It is true that Janet dealt with this subject in only some of the 20,000 printed pages of his work, but his interest in it was more deep and pervasive than Hacking has indicated. ■

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