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Madness and Method:

Enrico Morselli and the Social Politics of Psychiatry, 1852-1929

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
Requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in History

By

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor David Warren Sabean, Chair

In late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe, the nascent discipline of psychiatry struggled between its tethers to the material world and its nonmaterial aspirations. Most psychiatrists were physicians beholden to their medical training, whose interest in the mind raised questions germane to philosophical inquiry. While they sometimes promoted psychiatry as the most ambitious of the human sciences, their research methods remained materialist. They sought to understand the most traceless and immaterial – and at the same time most human – qualities of the mind and spirit through empirical and positivist experimentation. In many ways, these scientists worked in the umbrage of a long Cartesian shadow, either explicitly or implicitly drawing conclusions about the relationship between mind and matter. But in the mid-nineteenth

century, Darwinism and evolutionary theory changed the terms of this debate, giving nature, mankind, and man's mind a history and theory for change over time.

This dissertation investigates the scientific career and intellectual pursuits of Enrico Morselli (1852-1929), an Italian psychiatrist who participated vociferously in the biological, medical, social, and political debates of his day. It takes Morselli as an important transitional or intermediary figure between two sides of a discourse on how to biologize human nature. On the one hand, Morselli was deeply entrenched in physiological psychiatry, physical anthropology, and criminal anthropology and modern biology and medicine – all of which relied heavily on bodily material evidence to “prove” the nature of illness, physical or moral. On the other, Morselli was inspired by scientists of another stripe and aspired to the questions posed by classical philosophy; he was a follower of Auguste Comte, Ernst Haeckel, and was learned in classical philosophy as well as Kant, Hegel, and Marx. As a psychiatrist, Morselli not only biologized the mind; modern empirical and positivist science led him to psychologize the body. Morselli exemplifies the way that the human sciences attuned to the broader social, political, and cultural context of post-Risorgimento Italy.

Morselli himself offers a wealth of resources about intellectual and scientific life in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. A patriotic polymath, Morselli's eclectic approach to what he called “scientific philosophy” led him to wear many hats: psychiatrist, anthropologist, sociologist, neurologist, alienist, and philosopher. His work is often cited and his achievements are clear: most histories of Italian psychiatry discuss Morselli, including his insane asylum reform; major studies on French sociologist Émile Durkheim refer to Morselli's precursor work on suicide; writings on phobias include the two terms he coined, taphephobia (the fear of being buried alive) and dysmorphophobia (now called “body dysmorphic disorder”); histories of Italian anthropology

reference his first Italian textbook on the subject; books of the criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso note Morselli's objections; and studies on the Italian reception of Freud must include Morselli's two-volume critique, the first of its kind in Italian. In addition to this shortlist of achievements, Morselli also published his opinions on the woman's question, divorce, sexuality, eugenics, World War I, colonialism, racism, spiritism, and theories on education for the public. He served as an expert witness for highly publicized and often scandalous court cases, worked as a professor, a medical director for asylums and clinics, and served as an Italian senator.

Because of the heterogeneous nature of the Morsellian oeuvre, this dissertation focuses on five concepts in order to navigate Morselli's clinical research and psychiatric theories, and connect his scientific philosophy to his broader social and political concerns. They capture Morselli's concept of the embodied mind and psychical body that infiltrated his psychiatric work and broader social and cultural thinking. The chapters are as follows: "Death: Self-murder, free will, and social facts"; "Energy: applications in mental theory and treatment"; "Work: disease, cure, and national ethos"; "Spirit: ghostly psyche and psychiatry of the soul"; and "Mind: the limits of consciousness." By focusing on these subjects, this dissertation addresses concepts that reflect the political and social struggles embedded into self-understanding.

The dissertation of Daphne Claire Rozenblatt is approved.

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2014

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Dedicated to my family.

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## *Chapter 1. Introduction: Enrico Morselli, psychiatrist for the nation*

For the fatherland, with Science, toward Humanity.<sup>1</sup>

Of the nosographic histories from 1877 to 1878 of Macerata's state insane asylum, only one account was personally recorded by Doctor Enrico Morselli (1852-1929) during his first years as the institute's *medico primario*. Usually these descriptions roughly corresponded to an itemized questionnaire that ascertained symptoms of mental illness and sometimes offered a diagnosis; normally they were written by the referring doctor who recommended that his patient be interned. However, the case of Doctor Ezechiele Ricciuti was unusual in that the local doctor himself was being committed to the *Asilo di Santa Croce* in Macerata.

Morselli's description of Ricciuti's symptoms did not follow any of the standard questionnaires. In particular, he detailed social interactions with family and patients that led Morselli to diagnose the doctor as suffering from dementia and moral insanity (*follia morale*).<sup>2</sup> Born in the province of Molise, Ricciuti was about 47 years old when admitted. His common-law wife was formerly employed as his maid, and together they had two children, one whom he named "Finocchio" ("Fag"). Ricciuti's behavior was troubling: the family never lived in the same residence for more than four months, and he severely beat his wife on several occasions.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Giuseppe Portigliotti, "Il Maestro: la Vita, le Opere," *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, vol. XVI, num. 1-2 (Gennaio–Febbraio 1929), 7-15.

<sup>2</sup> Moral Insanity was defined as "a disorder which affects the feelings and affections, or what are termed the moral powers, in contradistinction to those of the understanding or intellect (Prichard)." *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine: Giving the Definition, Etymology and Synonyms of the Terms Used in Medical Psychology with the Symptoms, Treatment, and Pathology of Insanity and the Law of Lunacy in Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 2 (London: J. & A. Churchill, 1892), 813. See also Hannah Franziska Augstein, "J C Prichard's Concept of Moral Insanity—a Medical Theory of the Corruption of Human Nature," *Medical History* 40 (1996), 311-343.

The doctor was no better to his children, who he claimed were not his own. While he was sometimes kind, he generally “hated [them] to death,” particularly the boy, and tried to place them in an orphanage under the names “Tizio” (“Guy”) and “Caso” (“Accident”). When his brother demanded that he legitimize his marriage in church, Ricciuti quarreled, became very depressed, and “cried excessively.” Then he began to treat his patients cruelly. Mostly farmers, Ricciuti refused to see them and mixed up their prescriptions, often causing them harm. Finally after he grabbed a farmer by the throat and attempted to strangle him, Ricciuti was brought to the insane asylum, red in the face, cloudy-eyed, trembling, and convulsing. Though he calmed down significantly in the insane asylum, his strange behavior continued and he seemed, overall, unaware of his condition. There are no further records about the fate of Doctor Ezechiele Ricciuti in the Macerata asylum archives.<sup>3</sup>

Though Morselli’s treatment of Ricciuti is but a brief and early episode in a career that spanned over half a century, it may be taken as emblematic of the way Morselli thought about his work and his specific concerns as a psychiatrist and asylum doctor. The copious details reflect his training in clinical psychiatry and anthropology and the attention of a student of the mind and human behavior who believed that every manifestation of mental illness must be individually understood. By asylum standards, abnormal human behavior was the norm, of course, but the case of Doctor Ricciuti raised specific concerns about the vulnerability of the social and intellectual elite to mental illness, which were central to Morselli’s moral, ethical, and philosophical concerns. In the case of Ricciuti, whose symptoms were mainly “immoral behavior” but who was “intellectually intact,” Morselli may have seen a disturbing alter ego who reflected the risks of mental illness common, to all classes and backgrounds.

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<sup>3</sup> “Ricciuti, Ezechiele,” *Storie Nosografiche dal 20 Aprile 1875 al 6 aprile 1878*, vol. 8, Archivio di Stato di Macerata, Italy.

This dissertation takes for its subject the clinical practice and publications of Enrico Morselli, of whom the simplified description of “Italian psychiatrist and alienist” obscures more than it elucidates. In addition to psychiatry, Morselli researched and published in anthropology, neurology, sociology, and philosophy. In his day-to-day occupation, Morselli worked as an asylum medical director, professor of psychiatry, the head of a private clinic, and editorial board member or editor-in-chief of several journals, some strictly psychiatric and others broader in scope. Additionally, he published extensively and in a variety of formats, including textbooks on psychiatric diagnosis and anthropology, psychiatric monographs, articles on specific diagnoses and treatment, research into asylum reform, and cases-studies for his expert psychiatric opinions for criminal cases. He also wrote about sociology, sexuality, and eugenics, the criminal sciences, and topics of popular interest. Taken as a whole, Morselli’s approach to psychiatry was eclectic and his approach to modern human life was psychiatric.

Morselli’s diverse interests and career ambitions offer many possibilities for historical research. However, any project taking Morselli for its subject must confront the issue of biography, and in recent years, the relationship between history and biography has resurfaced as a subject of historiographical interest. Giovanni Levi described four principal models for the relationship between history and biography. The first, “prosopography and the standard biography,” assumes the life under investigation to be representative of the norm in a given place and time. The second, “biography and context,” emphasizes the importance of context in shaping the realm in which the historical subject acts and makes decisions. The third, “biography and borderline cases,” takes abnormal and marginal cases to shed light upon the historical context, and the fourth, “biography and hermeneutics,” takes its material to be “intrinsically discursive,”

holding no essential truth but open to continuous interpretation.<sup>4</sup> This dissertation has been informed by the first two models that Levi describes without strictly adhering to either. As a biographical subject, Morselli is representative of the place and time in which he lived and the profession which came to define him. At the same time, he is both symptomatic of broader social, cultural, intellectual, and scientific trends of post-Risorgimento Italy and singular in his often bullheaded response to those trends. In the constellation of *fin-de-siècle* Italian psychiatric thinkers, Enrico Morselli may not have been the brightest star, but he was nevertheless an essential point in the shape of that constellation.

The utility of biography has also become a special subject to historians of science, who have faced the challenge of explaining how biography adds to a historical field that takes science for its subject: a “technical skill and knowledge, which, in the preferred idealization, draws little from the broader culture except material resources.”<sup>5</sup> In expanding the subject of their inquiry to include social and cultural perspectives, historians of science have written biographical studies within all the categories Levi describes. Furthermore, in reflecting on biographical practice, some historians have emphasized the importance of literary genres as they apply to historical figures and specifically, the figure of the scientist.<sup>6</sup> Others have argued that the purpose of a scientist’s biography can extend beyond strict historicism: namely, popularizing the field among a larger readership or alternatively, returning to the basic questions of the ancient Greek philosophers about meaning and living a good life, which one historian calls “existential

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<sup>4</sup> See Giovanni Levi, “The Uses of Biography,” *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 89-111.

<sup>5</sup> Theodore M. Porter, “Is the Life of the Scientist a Scientific Unit?,” *Isis*, vol. 97, no. 2 (June 2006), 316.

<sup>6</sup> See Thomas Söderqvist, *The History and Poetics of Scientific Biography* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007); Mott T. Greene, “Writing Scientific Biography,” *Journal of the History of Biology*, vol. 40, no. 4 (Dec., 2007), 727-759.

biography.”<sup>7</sup> Whatever approach it takes, biography has been used to historicize the sciences and their process, to reflect on the importance of context and contingency, and to question the typology of the scientist along with the assumptions that typology presumes. In a certain sense, scientific biography may be understood as a counterweight to recent histories of scientific objects. While such histories chip away at the timelessness of scientific truths and discoveries by granting historicity to nonhumans, biographies further emphasize their timeliness by granting the utmost specificity to the scientist as a historical unit worthy of investigation.<sup>8</sup>

This dissertation is biographical without attempting a biography. Though the study centers on a specific individual, “explained and interpreted in part from the perspective of the personal,” it aims to present a series of “ideational” biographies, each dealing with a conceptual problem that connected Morselli’s theoretical writings to his clinical practice and the broader social, political, and scientific context in which he lived and thought.<sup>9</sup> Ideational biography is meant to emphasize the plasticity of Morselli’s thoughts and concepts. Sometimes they appear almost innate, other times inchoate, and only some of them matured completely. Sometimes they were enacted or acted upon, not always as the direct objects of investigation. Nevertheless, all the subjects of this dissertation gestated in Morselli’s mind for years, forming through scientific and broader social discourse and years of clinical practice. Most of these biographical sketches deal with concepts that endured throughout the course of Morselli’s professional, intellectual, or

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Söderqvist, *Science as Autobiography: The Troubled Life of Niels Jerne*, translated by David Mel Paul (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), xxiii.

<sup>8</sup> Bruno Latour, “Do Scientific Objects Have a History? Pasteur and Whitehead in a Bath of Lactic Acid,” translated by Lydia Davis, *Common Knowledge*, v. 5, n. 1 (Spring 1996), 76-91.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Renders & Binne de Haan, “Introduction. The Challenges of Biography Studies,” in *Theoretical Discussions of Biography. Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, edited by Hans Renders and Binne de Haan (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013).

actual life, giving the dissertation five beginnings and endings that overlap chronologically and thematically.

None of the subjects of this dissertation are strictly identifiable as the subject matter of psychiatry or any other discipline, and such topics offer two advantages. First, they help capture a system of knowledge as it was coming into being. Instead of focusing on the ideas that have come to define late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century psychiatry, such as hysteria, neurosis, melancholia, its blunt physio-materialism or brazen positivism, this dissertation has aimed at the seams of its patchwork or the grouting of its mosaic. As a result, the arguments these chapters present may appear less causal than correlational. Second, it emphasizes how that system of knowledge adopted, revised, or corresponded to certain structures of thought from well outside its basis of expertise. A system, composed of interacting and interdependent components that combine into a single unit, implies a certain dexterity, even as it is somewhat fossilized into a discipline. A structure, whether concrete or intangible, implies a certain permanence to the patterned events that take place within that structure. Thinking about the loosely defined concepts employed in psychiatry's adolescence in these terms can emphasize the intellectual tensions that persisted through the founding of the discipline. In the choices of its subject matter and the perspective through which those subjects are viewed, this dissertation is a contribution to the well-established canon of historical works that contextualize intellectual and scientific movements within their broader social, political, and cultural frameworks.



*Enrico Agostino Morselli (1852-1929)*

Enrico Morselli offered his own idea about the relationship between biography and mental character in the brief autobiography he wrote in 1907. He stated:

Every tendency of the heart, every personal instinct, maybe every predisposition remains latent in all men until it is awakened by circumstance; for the most part, they are the

small events of life, those that give birth to the associations of sentiments and ideas in which our personality is interested and coordinates itself.<sup>10</sup>

The event that sparked Morselli's "love of natural beauty" occurred when he was ten years old. While traveling with his mother on a vacation, they were caught in a violent hurricane, and nearby to where they took refuge, a lightning bolt struck a large tree, ripping it apart. Instead of being afraid, the young Morselli enjoyed the event immensely as a romantic adventure.

Enrico Agostino Morselli was born on 17 July 1852 in Modena, Italy. His father Giuseppe, an accountant, was 11 years older than his mother Melania Saccozzi, who belonged to the noble class. The rest of the Morsellis were local farmers outside Modena; Giuseppe was the first in his family to go to school and gain civil status working for the Ducal Financial Office. Because of his affiliation with the House of Este, Giuseppe was arrested during the 1848 Revolutions but escaped unscathed. In contrast, the Saccozzi's were patrician, inscribed in the "libro d'oro" on the city of Correggio. Morselli's maternal relatives were conservative: they were educated, learned in the arts, and served in public office. However, Morselli noted that one of his great uncles had liberal opinions and became affiliated with Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872) as an exile in London. Another great uncle, General Agostino Saccozzi, became the chief general for the Ducal troops of Modena from 1846-1863.

In 1855, Giuseppe Morselli served as a captain of the "Urban Militia" of Modena during an outbreak of cholera when he caught a fever and died, leaving behind three-year-old Enrico and his pregnant wife. The impoverished family returned to the Saccozzi residence where they were placed under the care of Morselli's maternal uncle Vittorio, who "with great authority from his high position" took charge of Enrico's education in "rigid patriarchal custom" until his

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<sup>10</sup> Onorato Roux, *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei. Memorie Autobiografiche di Letterati, Artisti, Scienziati, Uomini Politic, Patrioti e Pubblicisti*, vol. III, *Gli Scienziati* (Florence: Bemporad, 1910), 337-338.

death.<sup>11</sup> Morselli described their state of care under Vittorio as “a pathetic, if not humiliating state of subjection, tolerated out of compassion rather than treated with the kindness that someone so prematurely widowed deserved.” The house was regal and politically charged. It was the only house, besides the Palazzo Ducale, to have a “guardia militare d’onore,” and in one of his earliest memories, Morselli recounts the night in June 1859 when his great uncle Agostino Saccozzi led his troops into war against the nationalist cause, and the disgrace Morselli caused when he pinned on his chest the tricolor cockades with the word “Annexation” written on top.<sup>12</sup>

After their stay at the Saccozzi house, the Morsellis were sent to an aunt in Brescello, but later returned to Modena where they were soon impoverished. There, Enrico excelled in his schooling, studying Latin, grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and Italian literature, including Gioberti’s *Primato*, which “warmed the heart with sentiments of *Italianità*.”<sup>13</sup> His school was filled with nationalist spirit, and he was teased for his family’s ties to the Austrians. Later in his secondary schooling as he prepared to enter the clergy, he had a crisis of faith. He lost his fervor for religious devotion and became “extremely cold to the facts of religions, hostile to priests and Catholicism in general, but above all full of idealistic aspirations.”<sup>14</sup> Morselli became “most religious” in what he considered to be the highest meaning of the term: he was disgusted with dogma and ritual, but he still believed in “God as creator and Nature as created...the soul as immortal and responsible for all its acts in life.” He wrote:

I fashioned for myself a God without priests and without altars, and in that way, I became a pure deist, still without knowing entirely the value of my religious-philosophical

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<sup>11</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 321.

<sup>12</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 322-323.

<sup>13</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 333.

<sup>14</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 340-341.

attitude. Furthermore, meditating on the relationships between God, man, and the world, I was drawn to the natural sciences, from which I have never again left: these were the reasons I ended up as a positivist.<sup>15</sup>

The young and increasingly rebellious Morselli was kicked out of his school after he accused a teacher who recounted the biblical story of creation of knowing nothing.

In the late 1860s to early 1870s, social upheaval included the radicalization of the Italian youth, and at the University of Modena, Morselli developed his political opinions apart from his family. He embraced the local coffee shop culture and became part of a student group that discussed science, philosophy, and politics, and organized protests. In those years, Giuseppe Garibaldi and his troops attempted to capture Rome, but were defeated at Mentana by a combination of French and Papal troops, and in 1870, the Vatican council declared the infallibility of the pope. Later, there was the conquest of Rome, the plebiscite, and the Law of Papal Guarantees, making a provisional peace with the pope. Inspired by Giuseppe Mazzini, Morselli became a fervent anticlerical nationalist; he represented student movements, became affiliated with the republicans, and joined the *Circolo Mazzini*. But soon, conflict broke out between him and his companions who were drawn to the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the socialist International Working Men's Association. Morselli left student political group and devoted himself to medicine.

At the University of Modena, Morselli decided to study medicine for both practical and intellectual reasons: it offered a secure career of social prestige and it allowed him to continue his studies in the natural sciences. Darwin's theories of evolution spread through the natural sciences, and Morselli became a committed positivist and evolutionist. His studies also led to his renunciation of deism and spiritualism, and he turned to the materialist approaches of Ludwig

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<sup>15</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 340-341.

Büchner (1824-1899) and Jacob Moleschott (1822-1893). For Morselli, medicine was his way of returning to “better knowing the secrets of the human structure.”<sup>16</sup> There he would study zoology with Giovanni Canestrini (1835-1900), anatomy with Paolo Gaddi (1806-1871), and chemistry with Giuseppe Antonelli. It was Gaddi who turned Morselli’s interests from the strictly theoretical to practical osteology by introducing Morselli to craniological research.<sup>17</sup> Gaddi taught Morselli how to study and analyze skulls and skeletons at his museum, and it was based on this research that 18-year-old Morselli wrote his first article on craniology, “Sopra una rara anomalia dell’osso malare” (“Regarding a rare anomaly of the zygomatic bone”).<sup>18</sup> He then became secretary for the Society of Naturalists of Modena and a correspondent for the Royal Medical Academy of Turin.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Morselli confessed himself not to be a very devoted student, and was, by character and psychic temperament, an autodidact.

Prior to specializing in psychiatry, Morselli spent six months training in anthropological research at the Museum of Florence under the tutelage of Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910), one of Italy’s pioneering anthropologists and one of the country’s first serious students of Darwin’s theory of evolution.<sup>20</sup> By the end of his schooling he was well-versed in theory but with little practical experience, and his family situation worsened. After his mother died in 1874, he obtained a medical position in Siena where he met Carlo Livi. Under Livi’s tutelage, Morselli opted to specialize in psychiatry, and when Livi became director of the insane asylum (*frenocomio*) of Reggio Emilia, he took Morselli and Augusto Tamburini (1848-1919) with him.

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<sup>16</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 346.

<sup>17</sup> See *Enrico Morselli e le Scienze dell’Uomo*, 2200; Onorato Roux, *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, vol. 3 (Florence: R. Bemporad e figlio ed., 1910), 384.

<sup>18</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Sopra una rara anomalia dell’osso malare,” *Archivio Antropologico*, II, 322-330.

<sup>19</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 349.

<sup>20</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 359; Giuseppe Armocida and Gaetana Silvia Rigo, “Paolo Mantegazza,” *Dizionario Biografico Italiano*, vol. 69 (2007).

Together they founded the *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina Legale delle Alienazioni Mentali* (*Experimental Journal of Psychiatry and Legal Medicine in Mental Insanity*) in 1875. The next year, Morselli's dissertation on blood transfusion was published.

In 1877, Morselli became the medical director of the Asilo di Santa Croce in Macerata, where he spent three years reforming the insane asylum in the same manner that Livi had refashioned the Reggio Emilia asylum. He aimed to minimize the use of restraints and extend ergotherapy to more patients. Two years later he was offered the chair of psychiatry at the University of Turin, and he also assumed the directorship of the Royal Insane Asylum of Turin. After bitter disputes with the asylum administration, Morselli gave up his position as medical director but continued to teach at the University until 1889. Because of the continuing struggles with the asylum administration, which he complained would not allow him to carry out his research and professorial duties, he eventually gained a new position in Genoa, where he taught for the rest of his life. There, Morselli's career flourished again. In 1887 he founded his own private sanatorium, Villa Maria Pia, and in 1894, he became the director of the department of neurology at Genoa's general hospital.

Morselli published extensively throughout his life on psychiatry, anthropology, sociology, neurology, criminology and criminal court cases, politics, and philosophy. His first major study after the publication of his thesis, *Il Suicidio: Saggio di Statistica Morale Comparata* (*Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics*) (1879), became a bestseller and was considered the most important statistical research into suicide prior to Émile Durkheim's publication twenty years later. Later, he published the two-volume *Manuale di Semeiotica delle Malattie Mentali* (*Manual of the Semeiotics of Mental Illness*) (1885), a handbook of clinical psychiatric practice and theory, and *Antropologia Generale: L'uomo secondo la Teoria dell'Evoluzione* (*General Anthropology: Man according to the Theory of Evolution*) (1908), a

compilation of the lectures he gave on anthropology in Turin. A year earlier in 1907, he published a two-volume polemic entitled *Psicologia e "Spiritismo": Impressioni e Note Critiche sui Fenomeni Medianici di Eusapia Paladino* (*Psychology and "Spiritism": Impressions and Critical Notes on the Medium Phenomena of Eusapia Paladino*), which detailed his experiences participating in the séances of Paladino and his opinion on the reality of spiritist phenomena. He continued to publish major studies all the way up to his death, including *L'uccisione Pietosa (l'Eutanasia: in Rapporto alla Medicina, alla Morale ed all'Eugenica)* (*Mercy Killing: Euthanasia in Relation to Medicine, Morality, and Eugenics*), a treatise evaluating the arguments for and against euthanasia (1923), and *La Psicanalisi. Studii ed Appunti Critici* (*Psychoanalysis. Study and Critical Notes*), a critical explanation and assessment of Freud's new technique and theory for explaining mental disorder. Morselli also offered his psychiatric expertise to evaluate the cases of brigand Giuseppe Musolino, child-murderer Carlo Grandi, and the murderous siblings Linda and Tullio Murri, among others. Throughout those years, Morselli also published articles for scientific journals and popular newspapers including *Il Pensiero Italiano*, *Rivista di Filosofia e Scienza Affini*, *Rivista Ligure di Scienze*, *Lettere ed Arti*, *Ateneo Ligure*, *Riviera Ligure*, among others.<sup>21</sup> His son, psychiatrist Arturo Morselli, compiled Morselli's writings on human sexuality into a posthumous collection entitled *Sessualità Umana secondo la Psicologia, la Biologia e la Sociologia* (*Human Sexuality according to Psychology, Biology, and Sociology*).<sup>22</sup> Beyond the *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria e Medicina Legale delle Alienazioni Mentali*, Morselli was involved with several other journals. In 1880, he founded the *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, in 1912 he helped found *Psiche. Rivista Internazionale di Psicoanalisi e*

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<sup>21</sup> See Patrizia Guarnieri, *Individualità Difformi. La Psichiatria Antropologica di Enrico Morselli* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), 31.

<sup>22</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Sessualità Umana secondo la Psicologia, la Biologia e la Sociologia*, edited by Arturo Morselli (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1931).

*Scienze dell'Uomo*, and in 1914, he took over *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, which he ran until his death.

### *Some questions*

It is fair to say Enrico Morselli was a man of his times. A staunch nationalist, atheist, then socialist and later eugenicist, a student of medicine, anthropology, psychiatry, and later a proponent of sociology, neurology, and critic of psychoanalysis, a man learned in physics, philosophy, and a critic of spiritism, an admirer and critic of criminal anthropology, and a man who followed debates about sexuality, women's rights, race, and war, Morselli kept abreast of politics, science, philosophy and contemporary events. But at the heart of his intellectual production were two interrelated goals: the task of founding and fostering psychiatry as a scientific discipline and the creation and propagation of what he called "scientific philosophy."

In the late nineteenth century, psychiatry was still a young discipline. Its proponents still sought to turn insane asylums into places of scientific practice from the religious institutions they once were, and to establish professorships and academic chairs in the field. Morselli was unquestionably a key part of this change. He remained one of psychiatry's strongest proponents and defenders in Italy, arguing against conservative Catholics, spiritists, and later, neo-idealists like Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile.<sup>23</sup> In the early-twentieth century, Morselli defended the discipline once again, this time against what he saw as the corrupting force of psychoanalysis.

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<sup>23</sup> Patrizia Guarnieri, "Between Soma and Psyche: Morselli and Psychiatry in late-nineteenth-century Italy," *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry*, vol. 3, *The Asylum and its Psychiatry*, edited by William F. Bynum, Roy Porter, and Michael Shepard (New York: Routledge, 1988), 110.

The late nineteenth century was also imbued with the spirit of positivism and the belief that science as a system of knowledge could replace that of religion and philosophy. Auguste Comte (1798-1857) promoted a philosophy that was synthetic, destined to touch upon every facet of human existence, and positive, having the ability to alter the course of human development.<sup>24</sup> In Italy, its surrogate forefathers included Carlo Cattaneo (1801-1869), for whom positivism was closely connected with his nationalist politics, and Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), who nurtured the relationship of positivism to the social and psychological sciences.<sup>25</sup> Morselli also promoted positivist science as both disciple and doctinaire. Drawing on the religion of humanity of Comte and the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Morselli began his own “modest, but active part” in the diffusion of positivism” through his own scientific research and attempt to start a scientific philosophical movement that would reestablish all of philosophy on positive empirical scientific research.<sup>26</sup> Morselli’s project was embodied in the *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* (1880-1891).

Morselli saw his psychiatric ambitions as part of a larger aim at a scientific philosophy. It was the task of science to establish facts, but facts alone were not the basis of truth nor could they instruct mankind on how to live. As he once put it: “Facts are the primary matter of science, but they are not science, just as bricks, however wrought and shaped but divided, do not

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<sup>24</sup> Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, translated by J. J. Bridges, a new editing with an introduction by Frederic Harrison (London: George Routledge & Sons, 1908).

<sup>25</sup> Cattaneo realized little of his project to found philosophy as a “synthesis of the sciences,” except for one essay, *Psicologia delle Menti Associate*. See Roberto Ardigò’s *La Psicologica come Scienza Positiva* (Mantua: Colli, 1882).

<sup>26</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 355. See Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic program of French Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Ellen Frankel Paul, “Herbert Spencer: The Historicist as a Failed Prophet,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 4 (October-December, 1983), 619-638; Paul Elliot, “Erasmus Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and the Origins of the Evolutionary Worldview in British Provincial Scientific Culture, 1770-1850,” *Isis*, vol. 94, no. 1 (March 2003), 1-29.

constitute a building.”<sup>27</sup> For Morselli, the key to building the edifice of truth was the human mind, and it was the responsibility of psychiatry to understand the mind and foster its health, virtues, and talents. Psychiatry, therefore, was the cornerstone for both science and philosophy, which were to be united for the betterment of mankind.

In this quest to found a scientifically grounded study of the mind with an ulterior moral purpose, Morselli had to confront several questions regarding how psychiatry was to relate to its broader political, social, and scientific context. These sometimes had clear answers: politically and socially, for instance, Morselli saw psychiatry as a science in service of the national cause. Other times, such questions highlight the underlying tension between the development of psychiatric theory and clinical practice: Morselli found them regularly to be at odds. Lastly, there were also questions that challenged the legitimacy of psychiatry as a science and returned it to its philosophical roots: namely, when dealing with mental phenomena, what constituted the real versus unreal? These three questions continually resurface throughout this dissertation.

### *Politics and the nation*

As a child, Morselli was filled with the nationalist spirit, and he was an active participant in political circles well into his twenties, but in his later years, Morselli appeared somewhat jaded by the nation’s politics. In 1907, he stated: “I believe that it was my fortune not to be dragged by flattery into public life, despite my friends’ urging: I escaped from that siren forever.”<sup>28</sup> But while Morselli claimed to have made his last contribution to politics in 1878 when he delivered a commemorative speech for King Victor Emanuel II, he may have meant

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<sup>27</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Introduzione,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, anno primo (luglio 1881-giugno 1882), iv.

<sup>28</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 354.

nationalist politics. Morselli became an active participant in socialist debates and for a time, a socialist supporter, and throughout his life, his scientific publications were steeped in the politics and social questions of the young nation. While his autobiography implies disillusionment with political activity, it does not capture the political inflections of Morselli's scientific research or political purpose of Morselli's psychiatric career.

For Morselli, psychiatry was a scientific discipline ideologically aligned with the modern state, and its practitioners were servants to the young nation. In the quest to transform the Italian peninsula into a nation, young republicans had to declare war against the Holy See and seize Rome for their nation's capital. Positivist science promised that progress was possible and offered methods on how to achieve that progress. Furthermore, with evolutionary theory, the biological sciences could offer another explanation for the existence and history of mankind that countered the dogma of the Catholic Church. As is clear from Morselli's autobiography, during the 1860s and 1870s, scientific training, nationalist spirit, and anticlericalism went hand in hand.

With unification, public and political interest increasingly turned to the Italian national character, and psychiatry, unlike other disciplines, could offer its expertise to the formation (or reformation) of Italian citizens. With the new authority of psychiatry, the state took control of insane asylums and psychiatric hospitals from religious authorities with the promise of medical cure and an explanation for a man's moral nature. The ideals of the modern state were often embedded in this treatment of human interior life, affecting the treatment and diagnosis of mental illness. Psychiatric expertise extended beyond the asylum and included prison reform and educational reform.

For Morselli, the scientist himself was essential to Italy's new national identity, and he promoted Italy's scientific heritage in two ways. Participating in the retrospective glorification of Italy's past, Morselli looked to figures such as Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and Giordano Bruno

(1548-1600) as evidence for Italy's scientific genius as well as its anticlerical heritage. But he also celebrated his most notable contemporaries, even those with whom he continually disagreed, such as Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909). In this way, he participated in the construction of Italy's new national identity, which may be said to have been "rooted in a tradition of invention as well as in the invention of tradition."<sup>29</sup>

At the end of the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, Morselli followed the development of the socialist party in Italy and across Europe, and he sympathized with the movement. While he ultimately rejected the political movement, he did so in accordance with his Mazzinian republican ideals. As an exploited class, laborers had the right to protest the conditions in which they lived and worked and demand representation. At the same time, class politics based on interests and ideals undermined the citizen's duties to the nation as well as the fostering of a common political interest among its people. While Morselli lived long enough to witness Benito Mussolini's rise to power and March on Rome in 1922, he offered little in the way of political commentary. At 70 years old, Morselli continued to publish and practice clinical psychiatry, but he devoted his last years to exploring eugenics and psychoanalysis.

All of these political attitudes permeated Morselli's psychiatric work. While the relationship between political and social discourse and scientific developments has become a well-established research agenda, it continues to offer considerable historical insight and deserves particular emphasis in post-Risorgimento Italy.

### *Theory and Practice*

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<sup>29</sup> Carol E. Harrison and Ann Johnson, "Introduction: Science and National Identity," *Osiris*, vol. 24, no. 1, Science and National Identity (2009), 3.

Morselli's first passion was theory and his second was practice, but throughout his life, he devoted much of his time to both. He wrote several multi-volume works that placed him at the center of popular psychiatric debates and social questions, and he was a truculent debater who often wrote into newspapers to defend his work and would carry out extended arguments with his peers. At the same time, he spent much of day in the insane asylum or sanatorium, where he treated patients and also conducted his research. Often times, the theories Morselli promoted were at odds with his own clinical practices: the psychiatric ideas he was invested in were sometimes unprovable or related poorly if at all to his own research.

Morselli wrote about the relationship between theory and method. As a committed positivist, Morselli believed that all of human knowledge should be founded on scientific research that was empirical and experimental, and he reiterated this stance throughout his life. For Morselli, the ideal experiment was controlled and could be repeated, and evidence should be gathered and calculated systematically. When Idealism spread throughout Italy courtesy of Benedetto Croce (1866-1952) at the turn of the century, Morselli staunchly defended the successes of positivist science and denied the critiques of its method.

Despite his insistence on the methods of positivist science, his conclusions and convictions did not always follow from Morselli's clinical practice or scientific investigations. Often, he was most committed to the theories for which he had neither. New therapies and diseases could be explained through political discourse to distinctly different ends, and old therapies or reasoning in the same way. Sometimes the explanation Morselli offered for the stance he held regarding a particular theory consisted of a pastiche of ideas from modern science or was based on older concepts that had not, and often could not, be proven experimentally.

Question regarding the relationship of theory and practice in Morselli's career demonstrate the problems in the construction evidence, the determination of fact, and the

arguments for what constituted scientific proof in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These problems offered particular challenges to the discipline of psychiatry, wherein evidence for mental illness was often based on the testimonies of the patients themselves, or their friends and family, and furthermore, that evidence had to be interpreted by the psychiatrist. Determining evidence for the human psyche also had to be related to either the etiology of a disease, or a therapeutic method. While some of Morselli's ideas were more concretely based on his clinical or experimental practice, others were based on conjecture. Morselli was a skilled rhetorician, and the same explanation that could lead him to question one treatment could suffice as a justification for another. Belief and ideas were recognized in Morselli's psychiatry to be powerful forces that could induce sickness or cure, but were difficult to address in modern psychiatry.

### *Reality and Belief*

Morselli's crisis of faith was not only the impetus for his renunciation of religion, but it was also at the core of his psychiatry. Morselli was a materialist who rooted all psychic phenomena in the physical body, and he debated most passionately with those who undermined the organic basis of the mind. Late-nineteenth-century psychiatry grounded itself on physiology, using empirical methods to measure and quantify human internal life, but the development of such methods simultaneously revealed the limitations of such an approach. Psychiatric diagnoses could be constituted from several symptoms, and such descriptions led to debates about disease etiology. However, symptoms of mental disorder could include irregularities in physical form or behavior (for instance, neurological) or purely psychological symptoms (emotional problems). In the case of the latter, symptom assessment depended on the cooperation of the patient as well as

the psychiatrist's (subjective) assessment of the patient's subjective assessment of his or her own thoughts and feelings. Healing a patient also required such complicity. Throughout diagnosis, treatment, and cure, psychiatrists of all stripes had to face aspects of their medical science whose "reality" was difficult to understand and assess. Many of the fundamental aspects of clinical psychiatric practice still fell short of the empirical and material evidence its practitioners strove for.

Because of the nature of its medical evidence, psychiatry was particularly vulnerable to at least three problems that challenged the "reality" of a psychiatric illness or treatment. First, there were many instances in which a cure was based on the patient's belief in its efficacy, rather than its empirically provable effects. The question of whether a cure worked materially or morally challenged the scientific legitimacy of psychiatry and made it comparable to non-psychiatric cures, household remedies, or the skills of religious caretakers. Furthermore, it made psychiatry particularly vulnerable to quackery and charlatanism. For Morselli, cures that worked because of the belief of the patient rather than from their biochemical or physiological efficacy were still useful in psychiatric care. However, he was careful to distinguish between them as he perceived them.

Second, there were many instances in which a patient's morbid symptoms were based on their beliefs. Patients could suffer from religious or political insanity, fears of persecution, a sense of their own ugliness, or delusions of being in contact with the spirits of the deceased. Patients who presented such symptoms left psychiatrists with two challenges. First, they had to define the point at which a belief became morbid. Extreme religious or political devotion, for instance, could be compared to the symptoms of the mentally ill; such symptoms would be related to more general psychiatric theories religious and political phenomena. Second, diseases based on beliefs left little room for an organic etiology and problematized the psychiatric

assessment of character. Certain insane patients bore characteristics virtually indistinguishable from the savant or genius, whose rational capacities related to their belief systems atypically. Morselli's early publication of a patient autobiography reflects his interest in the relationship between radical (in this case political) belief, rational intelligence, and insanity.<sup>30</sup>

Third, diseases whose reality was defined through the evidence presented by the patient made psychiatric diagnoses particularly vulnerable to fraud. Patients could be motivated to feign illness or other psychic phenomena for several reasons: insurance compensation, escape from domestic life, or to gain fame for extraordinary powers. Furthermore, they could not escape the influence of family, friends, and other social groups in assessing their own wellbeing. The psychiatrist, therefore, not only had to assess a patient's symptoms to adduce a diagnosis, but he also had to adjudicate the veracity of such symptoms and the motivations behind their presentations. For Morselli, however, fraud was not simply a matter of deceit; it was a matter of the patient's mental state and susceptibility to suggestion from family, peers, or their own fears, evidencing a different psychiatric verdict.

At its core, psychiatry was a scientific discipline whose principle object of investigation was poorly defined. While Morselli may have defined the mind as the organ of thought in his textbooks, he acknowledged that it required special interpretation. The reality of the material was inseparable from the reality of invisible forces. Instead of a reality "beyond which another reality exists...that we arrive at knowing through phenomena," one had to "penetrate the divine, or the energy, to enter all the parts of the material world and finish in mixing up the two species of Reality into only one."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Un Genio da Manicomio: Autobiografia d'un Alienato* (Sanseverino Marche: Tipografia Editrice C. Corradetti, 1877).

<sup>31</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Introduzione," *I Problemi dell'Universo*, Ernst Haeckel, translated by Amedeo Herlitzka (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1904), xiii-xiv.

## *Chapters*

This dissertation contextualizes five concepts that were crucial to Morselli's psychiatric practice that were not necessarily part of his psychiatric training. The first chapter deals with Morselli's writings on suicide, and the reconciliation of his philosophical leanings with science as a tool for the modern state. The second deals with electricity and how Morselli's clinical use of electrotherapy related to its development in physics and thermodynamics and its broader theoretical treatment in relationship to monism and the operations of the mind. The third chapter discusses the role of work as a basis for both psychiatric treatment and disease in the modern nation state. The fourth chapter deals with the question of the spirit as it was raised by spiritist movements and the problems it posed for disciplinary psychiatry. The last chapter deals with the concept of the mind by focusing on Morselli's confrontation with psychoanalysis.

## *Chapter 2. Death: self-murder, free choice, and social facts*

### *1. Introduction: suicidology as philosophy in the Morsellian corpus*

It is not accidental that Morselli's first major scientific study dealt with the problem of suicide. When the Royal Lombard Institute of Sciences and Letters announced a competition inviting Italian intellectuals to write about the problem of suicide in 1876, it had long since been considered a problem of escalating proportions and symptomatic of the dangers of modern society.<sup>32</sup> Having already begun to study suicide in 1875, Morselli submitted *Il Suicidio: Saggio di Statistica Morale Comparata (Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics)*, which was published in 1879. It was his first major work after the publication of his dissertation on blood transfusion in 1876, and the bestseller would quickly be established as the most complete study of suicide of its day. The work was quickly translated into English, German, Russian and ran a dozen editions.<sup>33</sup>

At the time the work was published, Morselli was an ambitious 27-year-old. He had recently finished his medical degree and trained in both anthropology under Paolo Mantegazza (1831-1910) and psychiatry under Carlo Livi (1823-1877). He was filled with nationalist spirit and schooled in evolutionary theory, craniometry, and physiological psychiatry, and in 1878, he became the medical director of the insane asylum *Asilo di Santa Croce* outside Macerata. This

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Teresa Brancaccio, "The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society": Enrico Morselli's Suicide, Moral Statistics, and Positivism in Italy," *Journal of Social history*, vol. 46, n. 3 (Spring 2013), 706.

<sup>33</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Il Suicidio: Saggio di Statistica Morale Comparata* (Milan: Dumolard ("Biblioteca Scientifica Internazionale"), 1879). First Edition. Translated as: *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics: By Henry Morselli, The Original Expressly Revised and Abridged by the Author for the English Version* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co., 1881, 1883, 1899. New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1882, 1897, 1903, 1968); *Der Selbstmord ein Kapitel aus der Moralstatistik* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1881); *Le Suicide. Essai de Statistique Morale Comparée*, translated by A. Pastore (s.i., s.n.). For Russian editions, see Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

background is not the most likely for the man who would write the seminal work based on statistics.<sup>34</sup> After all, Morselli professed to be a poor mathematician, and he described his own experience with statistics as a struggle.<sup>35</sup> After writing *Il Suicidio*, Morselli never again carry out any major statistical study.

While the majority of *Il Suicidio* consists of statistical analyses of the factors affecting suicide, including a person's country, climate, age, time of day, occupation, and mental state, this attempt to establish factual information regarding suicidal tendencies brought Morselli to theorize about the idea of free will, evolution and its relationship to modern society, consciousness, and the meaning or purpose of voluntary death. Morselli dealt with the question of suicide in articles written before and after *Il Suicidio*, he treated suicidal patients throughout his career as alienist, and much later in life, he again returned to the question of self-murder in the treatise he wrote on euthanasia. This chapter examines how Morselli came to understand the relationship between death by "unnatural causes," through both his clinical and empirical practices and the concepts that evolved throughout the course of his lifetime. While the explanation he offered for suicide in 1879 was based on three triangulating ideas—voluntarism, evolution, and consciousness—he would readdress the same issue 44 years later through a different set of ideas, including consensus, pain, and the soul (or spirit). What Albert Camus would call the "only truly serious philosophical problem" was also a key philosophical question for Morselli, but one that could be understood through scientific investigation.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Enrico Morselli, *La Trasfusione del Sangue*, "Biblioteca dello Studente e del Medico Pratico" (Rome: Loescher, 1885).

<sup>35</sup> Onorato Roux, *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei. Memorie Autobiografiche di Letterati, Artisti, Scienziati, Uomini Politici, Patrioti e Pubblicisti*, vol. III, *Gli Scienziati* (Florence: Bemporad, 1910), 344.

<sup>36</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, translated by Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), 11.

This chapter addresses Morselli's understanding of suicide as a development out of two different investigatory methodologies and at two very different points in his life. First, it will address his clinical experience with suicidal patients, the way suicidal patients were diagnosed and treated, and the liability issue that such patients caused for psychiatric facilities. Second, it will address Morselli's statistical investigation of suicide and contextualize his methodology within the nationalist spirit and statistical traditions of Risorgimento Italy. Third, it will discuss Morselli's theory for the increase in suicide in nineteenth-century Europe, and fourth, it will discuss Morselli's ideas about euthanasia in the early twentieth century. It will conclude with some historiographical notes on Morselli and his own demise.

## *2. Experience: asylum from the self*

On 18 August 1881 at around 4.30am, Antonia Perotto hanged herself within the confines of Turin's Royal Insane Asylum. When she was admitted on 24 March 1881, the 31-year-old was diagnosed with "lipemia" and already had suicidal tendencies.<sup>37</sup> But because Perotto was a relatively calm patient, even sociable and talkative, she slept with the rest of the female patients who did not require physical constraints to their cots. That night, Perotto evaded orderlies, sneaked out of her ward, and passed through a corridor door whose lock had been broken for many days. Because the corridor was not usually patrolled by the orderlies, she was able to hide herself and prepare. Subsequently, she hanged herself from the bars of a window.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Lipemia, or lypemia, was defined by Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol as "a disease of the brain characterized by delusions which are chronic and fixed on specific topics, absence of fever, and sadness which is often debilitating and overwhelming..." Cited in German E. Berrios, *A History of Mental Symptoms: Descriptive Psychopathology since the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 303.

<sup>38</sup> See "Sessione delli 22 Agosto 1881," Deliberazione della Direzione dal 24 Gennaio 1881 al 19 Dicembre 1881. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

The asylum administration board set up a committee to investigate the “disgraceful event,” which found the night watch to be only partly to blame. Up till the night before her death, Perotto had an “appearance and demeanor that was entirely calm.” Although the staff knew about her “dangerous tendencies” to suicide, extra constraints seemed unnecessary. The lock to the corridor door had been broken for weeks, and while a work order had been placed, the repairs were not yet carried out. While the night watch should have paid special attention to the corridor, it was not technically their responsibility.<sup>39</sup>

The committee was more critical of Morselli, the asylum’s newly hired medical director (*medico primario*). That morning, Morselli was notified of the suicide, but he arrived at the insane asylum very late, sparking a bitter dispute between Morselli and the administration about the duties of an asylum medical director. When the administration critiqued Morselli’s tardy arrival, he replied that his arrival made no difference to the welfare of the patient: Perotto hanged herself early in the morning, was not found for several hours, and the morning shift physician had pronounced her dead. He also informed the administration that according to modern science, a hanged person whose neck did not break would live on average 5-10 minutes. But Morselli’s explanation did little to assuage the administration’s suspicions. They distrusted his testimony and accused him of neglecting his duties and the welfare of the patient. Had he carried out his daily rounds at 5.30am as he was supposed to, they retorted, this conflict would not have happened. But Morselli claimed that he regularly made his rounds at 7.30am with no dispute. But for the administration, Morselli’s medical explanations did not excuse his failure to follow asylum protocol.

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<sup>39</sup> See “Sessione delli 22 Agosto 1881,” Deliberazione della Direzione dal 24 Gennaio 1881 al 19 Dicembre 1881. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

Antonia Perotto was one of many patients to attempt or successfully carry out suicide inside the asylum. During Enrico Morselli's tenure, at least five other events were recorded in the administration's meeting minutes. The attempts of two male patients were noted unceremoniously. On 31 May 1880, a patient named Lateltin tried to kill himself by cutting his arms with a piece of glass, then later, undoing the bandages. In this case, the orderlies (*infermieri di guardia*) were reprimanded for not properly watching the patient, and two were punished.<sup>40</sup> On 26 September 1883, another patient, Davico, succeeded in taking his own life. Again, the case garnered little interest, and the administration simply admonished the guard on duty for his faulty oversight.<sup>41</sup> Both cases were relatively uncontroversial.

Another two suicide victims were asylum employees. About a week after Lateltin's attempt, the asylum's office manager (*capo-officina*) Rena killed himself on the asylum grounds between 9 and 10 June 1880. Because he was not a patient and therefore not subject to surveillance or monitoring, the administration determined that this incident (*accidente*) could neither be foreseen nor prevented.<sup>42</sup> A few years later on 22 January 1883 around 7.45am, the former cellar manager (*cantiniere*) Crova also killed himself on the asylum grounds. Having long since suffered from pulmonary tuberculosis, he had already received his last rites and written his will before firing the shot that "instantly rendered him a cadaver." Because he kept the revolver secretly and shot himself while the asylum staff was serving the patients breakfast, the

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<sup>40</sup> "Sessione delli 31 Maggio 1880," Registro delle Deliberazioni cominciato il 15 dicembre 1879 terminato il 17 gennaio 1881. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

<sup>41</sup> "Seduta delli 3 8bre 1883," Deliberazioni della Direzione dal 18 luglio 1883 al 2 aprile 1884. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

<sup>42</sup> "Sessione delli 14 Giugno 1880," Registro delle Deliberazioni cominciato il 15 dicembre 1879 terminato il 17 gennaio 1881. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

administration determined that he had meditated upon this act for some time and concluded their deliberations by restoring his property to his legitimate heirs.<sup>43</sup>

The last suicide dovetailed the Perotto incident and led Morselli to propose some extra preventative measures against suicide attempts. On 20 September 1881 around 7.30am, a patient named Petitti, housed in the section for agitated patients (*sezione agitati*), used some rope and a metal ring to hang himself from the iron bars of a window. However, the knot fell apart and Petitti survived. Morselli recommended new policies to the administration. Nurses (*infermieri*) should not leave restraining belts, hand cuffs, strait-jackets, etc., around the wards, nor should bed straps and buckles be left dangling from bed frames. Not only could they be used in suicide, but they were also “rather disagreeable, reminding [the patients] too much of the forced and painful repressions to which insanity obliges us, with its furies and its upsetting impulses. It is worth reflecting that thanks to those straps and belts, suicides and homicides have happened in other insane asylums that did not exercise necessary surveillance of the matter.”<sup>44</sup> The asylum administration agreed, urging Morselli to implement the new protocol.

Suicide posed a problem for asylums and psychiatrists: it was clearly the worst outcome for a patient undergoing clinical treatment, but it could neither be diagnosed nor treated directly. Morselli closely studied the work of Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840), who understood suicide to always be a symptom of mental illness.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, Morselli considered suicidal tendencies to be a symptom for several other psychiatric diagnoses, including schizophrenia, dementia, hysteria, melancholia, manic-depressive psychosis, paranoia, and

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<sup>43</sup> “Seduta del 24 Gennaio 1883,” *Deliberazioni della Direzione dal 30 agosto 1882 al 18 luglio 1883*.

<sup>44</sup> “Sessione delli 3 ottobre 1881,” *Deliberazioni della direzione dal 24 gennaio 1881 al 19 dicembre 1881*. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy, 141.

<sup>45</sup> Esquirol typified this view. See John C. Weaver, David Wright, *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 93.

anxiety.<sup>46</sup> Correspondingly, treatment for suicidal tendencies was the same as for other psychiatric symptoms: work therapy, baths, tonics, purgatives, massages, and electrotherapy. As the Perotto case exemplifies, when dealing with a suicidal patient, the diagnosis was less important than the symptom. Asylum administration never questioned the psychiatrist's medical verdict, but usually faulted orderlies or physicians for their oversights.

Suicide also highlighted the importance of prevention as treatment. In order to successfully treat a suicidal patient, asylum staff had to prevent the suicidal attempt before it took place. While there was no expectation that asylum patients would necessarily be cured—indeed, patients regularly died under asylum care—patient suicide clearly pointed to the shortcomings of asylum staff. Furthermore, prevention was not a simple matter. The cunning demonstrated by suicidal patients problematized suicidal tendencies as symptoms of insanity. Suicide attempts had been blamed on hysterical fits or bursts of passions, both of which emphasized the victim's lack of free will at the time of the suicide attempt.<sup>47</sup> As Antonia Perotto demonstrated, suicide could be premeditated among the insane, demonstrating a clear will to die. With no other psychiatric symptom did prevention and liability go so clearly hand in hand.

The Turin asylum records also demonstrate that despite its definition as a symptom for mental illness, in practice, suicide was not always treated as such. During Morselli's tenure as medical director, two of the four successful suicides were of asylum employees. However, the incidents did not cause particular alarm among administration or personnel. Because they were not under asylum care, the administration did not assume responsibility for the deaths. Furthermore, the incidents were not discussed as signs of mental illness. In the case of the cellar

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<sup>46</sup> See clinical files from the Sanatorio Morselli, Villa Morselli Via Maria Pia, Archivio Storico Psichiatra, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>47</sup> See Brière de Boismont, *Du Suicide et de la Folie Suicide* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865).

manager Crova, the administration even justified his actions because of his advanced age and poor health. Even in the asylum, the space best equipped to deal with suicidal tendencies, the options for treatment were very limited, and alienists like Morselli emphasized prevention.

### *3. Analysis: establishing statistical facts*

Morselli's adoption of a statistical approach to suicide corresponded to the limitations of clinical treatment. Not only were alienists limited in the ways they could treat suicidal patients in their care, but such patients also represented a fraction of the cases that occurred across society at large. Furthermore, asylums could only treat victims who were unsuccessful in their attempts and had no way of offering preemptive care to those outside hospital walls. Morselli's study was part of the late-nineteenth-century movement to use statistical studies in service of the Italian state, and it also took part in the movement toward social hygiene. Once broad social risk factors could be assessed, scientists could "prescribe" for society at large, for instance, through education. Nevertheless, Morselli also saw limitations to the statistical approach when dealing with a problem such as suicide. While statistics could assess the large-scale risk factors to society, they could offer little insight into the workings of the individual mind.

Through his statistical study of suicide, Morselli offered his services to the Italian state statistical project. In the 1860s, statistics became part of Italian state building, performing "a work of ideological and political legitimation," but also contributing to the "creation" and "production" of the Italian nation.<sup>48</sup> Modeled on the statistical heritage of the Napoleonic and

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<sup>48</sup> Silvana Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 4.

Restoration period, statistics were used to research and quantify specific social “problems.”<sup>49</sup>

The alignment of statistics with state interests was solidified with the establishment of a national statistics bureau which “intensified concerns about the persistence of local differences within the country, but revealed a nation at odds with the “civilized” ideal of its Western European counterparts, and most of all, reflected disturbing rates of illiteracy and criminality,” of which suicide was one phenomenon.<sup>50</sup> In Italy, the “old university statistics” flourished well after the 1860s, when Morselli accumulated the most statistics on suicide to date from across Europe.<sup>51</sup>

At the same time, Morselli joined both the continuing debate about suicide in both Italy and Europe, in which statistics played a key to both representing and assessing the severity of the epidemic. In the spirit of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, suicide represented a special threat to the young and talented, a tragic attribute of modern culture. In Italy, statistical research into suicide dated back to the early nineteenth century with the work of economist and statistician Melchiorre Gioia (1767-1829) and physician Antonio Fossati (1806-1885).<sup>52</sup> Both performed statistical studies on the region around Milan during the 1820s to 1830s, and both raised concern over the moral impetus for the increase in suicide, crediting its rise to factors beyond mental insanity. This link between rising suicide rates and the moral state of society would be developed by physician and fellow alienist Serafino Bonomi, one of Morselli’s statistical sources and chief competitor in 1876. Bonomi argued that the link between suicide rates and homicide rates and illiteracy was inversely related, giving further evidence to the direct

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<sup>49</sup> *Numbers and Nationhood*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Maria Teresa Brancaccio, ““The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society”: Enrico Morselli’s Suicide, Moral Statistics, and Positivism in Italy,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 46, n. 3 (Spring 2013), 703.

<sup>51</sup> Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820-1900* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 37.

<sup>52</sup> See Melchiorre Gioia, *Filosofia della Statistica* (Milan, 1826); Melchiorre Gioia, “Nota dei suicidj avvenuti nelle Provincie Lombarde negli anni 1817 al 1827,” *Annali Universali di Statistica, Economia Pubblica, Storia, Viaggi e Commercio* 17 (July 1828). Cited in “The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society,” 701-702.

link between “the degree of moral development and civilization of the population.”<sup>53</sup>

Furthermore, in international comparison, he tied religious rates to religious and racial differences.

Like Bonomi, Morselli understood his statistical study of suicide to be in service of the nation. Suicide was of national importance,

...since nations are constituted, by developing, and transforming themselves through millions of individuals, it was natural that the science of order and numbers should be applied in a uniform way to the progression of living and operating numbers. From this was brought to light that perpetual element of force and development, the principle of organic and functional transformation, or the *dynamics of population*.<sup>54</sup>

But for the staunchly anticlerical Morselli, aggregate numbers offered a way to analyze suicide that evaded both religion and metaphysics, which had failed to explain the “true nature of suicide.”<sup>55</sup> Morselli argued that “modern knowledge” was “more than sufficient to demonstrate to us the ineffectiveness of the means proposed by philosophers and moralists to combat its increase.”<sup>56</sup> From a philosophical debate and religious sin, suicide was reformulated as a social illness, a psychological disease, and a sign of degeneration and biological inferiority, and therefore of key interest for the modern state.

Morselli expanded on Bonomi’s statistics by working with Luigi Bodio (1840-1910) and drawing on the work of Adolph Wagner (1835-1917). Then general secretary of the *Ministero di*

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<sup>53</sup> “The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society,” 703-704.

<sup>54</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Some research that has examined the role of statistics in Morselli’s work include: Theodore M. Porter, “Statistical and Social Facts from Quetelet to Durkheim,” *Sociological Perspectives*, vol. 38, no. 1, Celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Émile Durkheim’s “The Rules of Sociological Method” (Spring, 1995), 15-26; Stephen Turner, “Durkheim among the Statisticians,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 32, issue 4 (October 1996), 354-378; “The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society.”

<sup>56</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 497.

*Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio* and later director of the *Servizi Statistici del Regno* in 1872 and head of the International Statistical Institute, Bodio is credited with increasing the methodological sophistication and developing the technical language of statistics in Italy.<sup>57</sup> He saw statistics as an “auxiliary science,” a tool of liberal economics that would supply the “primary material” for observing the political economy and “moral phenomena,” including causes of death, about which Bodio published a short pamphlet in 1892.<sup>58</sup> Morselli shared this perspective, writing: “Applying the science of numbers to moral facts and human actions, which have until now escaped definite and clear laws and which the old metaphysics wanted us to recognize as the expression of the most unbounded liberty, is perhaps the greatest conquest of modern thought.”<sup>59</sup> Bodio gave Morselli access to his own library of statistics and appears to have tutored Morselli in the matter, who Morselli called an “inexhaustible source” for the statistical analysis of *Il Suicidio*,<sup>60</sup> which appears to have gained Bodio’s stamp of approval.<sup>61</sup>

Morselli also drew upon the work of Adolph Wagner, the German economist who published *Die Gesetzmässigkeit in den scheinbar willkürlichen menschlichen Handlungen vom Standpunkte der Statistik* in 1864. In this study on marriage, suicide, and crime across the German territories, Wagner correlated sex, income, season, and geographical region with the

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<sup>57</sup> Franco Bonelli, “Luigi Bodio,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 11 (1969); *Numbers and Nationhood*, 233.

<sup>58</sup> Luigi Bodio, *Della Statistica nei suoi Rapporti coll’Economia Politica e colle Altre Scienze Affini. Prelezione...al Corso di Statistica della R. Scuola Superiore di Commercio in Venezia li 3 dic. 1868*, (Milan: Treves, 1869); Luigi Bodio, *Sulla Statistica delle Cause di Morte per l’Anno 1890* (Rome: Reale Accademia dei Lincei, 1892).

<sup>59</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 3-4.

<sup>61</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Le Leggi Statistiche del Suicidio secondo gli Ultimi Documenti (1879-1885)* (Milan: Stabilimento Giuseppe Civelli, 1885). Estratto dal *Giornale della Reale Società Italiana d’Igiene*, n. 4 e 5 (Anno XII), xvi. In the beginning of *Il suicidio*, he thanked Bodio for his “gentle friendship” and “precious advice.” Bodio appears to have agreed with the results of Morselli’s findings in *Il Suicidio*. See Luigi Luzzati, *La Libertà di Coscienza e di Scienza. Studi Storici Costituzionali* (Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1909), 413.

method and number of suicides in a given place.<sup>62</sup> For Wagner, statistical regularity was not actually a law, though it demonstrated a certain determinism to human behavior that questioned individual freedom.<sup>63</sup> Morselli did not claim to alter any of Wagner's statistics, though he did expand on them, particularly for the numbers for Italy.<sup>64</sup> Morselli, however, described his own work as different from Wagner's: "for the fundamental concept which informs [Morselli's] interpretation of that phenomenon of morbid social psychology, that is, the tendency of civilized populations toward voluntary death."<sup>65</sup>

It was this "morbid social psychology" that Morselli promised to address in his own study *Il Suicidio*. Morselli described society as a great and complicated "organism" whose functions affected and manifested in individual psychology and its behavioral expression, emphasizing the effect of collective social dynamics over the will of the individual. It was "laws that regulate the social organism, the individualism of human actions disappears, as in a most complicated mechanism of movement a single wheel constitutes a small part of the collective activity."<sup>66</sup> Correspondingly, morbid social psychology had to be treated collectively, but as held true for individual clinical treatment, the "only possible cure" for social suicidal tendencies was "prophylactic." The outcome of Morselli's statistical research was an emphasis on the "educational" cure:<sup>67</sup> "*To develop in man his power to coordinate feelings and ideas, to reach a*

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<sup>62</sup> Adolph Wagner, *Die Gesetzmässigkeit in den scheinbar willkürlichen menschlichen Handlungen vom Standpunkte der Statistik* (Hamburg: Boyes & Geisler, 1864). The book achieved some fame but was later almost universally rejected in the German territories, which perhaps accounts for its brief publishing history and lack of translation.

<sup>63</sup> Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 130.

<sup>64</sup> See *Il Suicidio*, introduction.

<sup>65</sup> "Il suicidio. Saggio di statistica morale comparata," 3.

<sup>66</sup> "Il suicidio. Saggio di statistica morale comparata," 46.

<sup>67</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 497.

*certain view of life; in other words to give force and energy to his moral character.*"<sup>68</sup>

Education, through its broad reach, offered the only possibility for treating suicide through "social hygiene."<sup>69</sup>

While statistics were, for Morselli, "the only true method of extending the Galilean method to social phenomena or individual consciousness," they still had their limitations in relation to the human mind.<sup>70</sup> While the same results could be obtained "from moral analysis of men and populations" as from "the brute digits of statistics," clinical psychiatry could never penetrate the "universal and perennial" of the collective.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, psychiatry still played an importance service in understanding suicide. He wrote:

It would certainly be a mutual good to statisticians and alienists to offer more speculation about the psychological and demographic laws of suicide (*autochiria*) and add it to synthetic results... Only in this way can the understanding of suicide—or better yet suicidal tendencies—become one of the most positive acquisitions of social psychology and cease its exclusive reliance on philosophical and juridical systems.<sup>72</sup>

For Morselli, there were certain parts of the individual psyche that statistics could not explain, and in the years leading up to the publication of *Il Suicidio*, Morselli developed his position in response to both the statistics of Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874) and Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), both of whose methodological approach to statistical analysis, Morselli believed, distorted the perception of the individual.

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<sup>68</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 499. Emphasis in original.

<sup>69</sup> See *Le Leggi Statistiche del Suicidio secondo gli Ultimi Documenti (1879-1885)*.

<sup>70</sup> *Le Leggi Statistiche del Suicidio secondo gli Ultimi Documenti (1879-1885)*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 44, 45-46.

<sup>72</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 40.

First, Morselli rejected Adolphe Quetelet's "average man" (1796-1874), which compiled the averages of the measurable attributes of a group of individuals. For Morselli, the question was about what the average mean of biological characteristics explain about their individual phenomena, and his position grew out of his early studies in craniology and anthropology. In an article from 1875, he stated, "Unfortunately for [anthropology], there is no shortage of measurements: many value the enormous accumulation of numbers without results and without law as constituting a nice patrimony for the anthropologist."<sup>73</sup> Data alone could not explain biological phenomena, and the "average man" flattened such data. Not only did such an artificial type not exist in nature, but was flexible to endless revision through the endless accumulation of data. Quetelet's approach emphasized the problematic relationship between mathematics and biology, as Morselli explained "the average can be useful to us, and may even be necessary for our faculties for abstraction which we often easily abuse, but I very much doubt the real value of the *average of biological facts*."<sup>74</sup> As early as 1875, Morselli wrote:

We are obligated to collect numerous facts, as many as we can, and to give them an *average*: but what does a spurious average obtained by calculating our measurements represent of nature? The most certain evidence that our averages signify little or nothing is that we must extend these measurements to a great number of cases, since we obtain even more spurious averages when we limit ourselves to a few. When considering the immense series of individual variations, even our richest craniological series is a rather

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<sup>73</sup> Enrico Morselli and Augusto Tamburini, "Contributo allo Studio Sperimentale delle Degenerazioni Fisiche e Morali dell'Uomo. I. Idiotti," *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria*, vol. 1 (1875), 62.

<sup>74</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Critica e Riforma del Metodo in Antropologia Fondate sulle Leggi Statistiche e Biologiche dei Valori Seriali e sull'Esperimento: Ministero d'Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio. Annali di Statistica* (Rome: Tip. Eredi Botta, 1880), 3.

small thing. With multiplying facts, there is every reason to believe that the law based on an insufficient number of observations would always have to be modified.<sup>75</sup>

If the average were used to judge something like the skull, it would commit a “grave error in regards to the average as an expression of reality.”<sup>76</sup>

As an alternative to the “average man,” Morselli endorsed the “serial analysis” of anthropological data, which could better account for the various biological types that occur in the attributes of a given species by preserving individual variation and the existence of a number of typical types.<sup>77</sup> Through the serial process, one could “distinguish the number of so-called phenomena of population-biology (*demobiologici*)” and specific cases that corresponded to specific influences.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, it could emphasize the minimum and maximum of a scale of variation, comparable to the system established by Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) to evaluate the stimulation of the nervous system. “The fruits” of such a method would “not be lacking and what damage it causes to science [would] be compensated for by cutting off ...an overly blind faith in the artificial proceedings of arithmetical averages (*medie*).”<sup>79</sup>

Second, Morselli critiqued the physiological quantification of Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), and they came to debate the relationship of criminality, insanity, and suicide. In *L'uomo*

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<sup>75</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Sul peso del cranio e della mandibola in rapporto col sesso, ricerche craniologiche,” *Archivio per l'Antropologia e la Etnologia*, v. 2 (Anno V) (Florence, 1875), 149.

<sup>76</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Critica e Riforma del Metodo in Antropologia Fondate sulle Leggi Statistiche e Biologiche dei Valori Seriali e sull'Esperimento: Ministero d'Agricoltura, Industria e Commercio. Annali di Statistica* (Rome: Tip. Eredi Botta, 1880), 3.

<sup>77</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Critica e Riforma del Metodo in Antropologia, Fondate sulle Leggi Statistiche e Biologiche dei Valori Seriali e sull'Esperimento* (Rome: Tip. Eredi Botta), 1880. The title translates as *Critique and Reform of Method in Anthropology, based on Statistical and Biological Laws of Serial Values and Experimentation*. The springboard for this extensive article was Gustave Le Bon's *Recherches Anatomiques et Mathématiques sur les Lois des Variations du Volume du Cerveau* (1879). Morselli claimed that although Le Bon had not accredited Morselli as he rightfully deserved for his earlier ideas about a serial methodology for anthropological statistics.

<sup>78</sup> *Critica e Riforma*, 28.

<sup>79</sup> *Critica e Riforma*, 176.

*Delinquente*, Lombroso theorized that born criminal could be detected through physical and psychological “anomalies” which could be classified, counted, and studied, and the work quickly became an international bestseller.<sup>80</sup> Lombroso directly linked insanity and criminality through the resurrection of man’s atavistic characteristics. As a symptom of madness, he believed suicide could serve as a “real advantage” to society at large.<sup>81</sup> Morselli was also adopted by degeneration theory, and he adopted many of Lombroso’s ideas about atavism and degeneration and the threats they posed to human civilization.

Morselli’s understanding of suicide developed in dialogue with Lombroso. Prior to publishing *Il suicidio*, Morselli wrote three studies on suicide based on the prison statistics he attained from the “Statistica ufficiale delle Carceri” (“Official Prison Statistics”), published by the Regio Ministero dell’Interno (Direzione generale delle carceri), as well as his own experiences with inmates.<sup>82</sup> In these studies, Morselli sometimes adopted Lombroso’s positions but also criticized him for neglecting suicide in his writings on criminal behavior. Morselli

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<sup>80</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L’uomo Delinquente Studiato in Rapporto alla Antropologia, alla Medicina Legale, ed alle Discipline Carcerarie* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1876). First edition. For a good summary of this position, see Enrico Morselli e le Scienze dell’Uomo nell’Età del Positivismo. See also Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: a European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1981); Pierpaolo Martucci, *Le Piaghe d’Italia: I Lombrosiani e i Grandi Crimini Economici nell’Europa di Fine Ottocento* (Milan: F. Angeli, 2002); Mary Gibson, *Born to Crime: Cesare Lombroso and the Origins of Biological Criminology* (Westport, London: Praeger Press, 2002); David G. Horn, *The Criminal Body: Lombroso and the Anatomy of Deviance* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, translated and with a new introduction by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: its Causes and Remedies*, translated by Henry P. Horton (London: William Heinemann, 1911), 415. Quoted in “The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society,” 706.

<sup>82</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il suicidio nei delinquenti, studio statistico a medico-legale del Dr. Enrico Morselli,” *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria*, vol. 1 (1875). Reprinted as *Il Suicidio nei Delinquenti, Studio Statistico a Medico-Legale del Dr. Enrico Morselli lib. Docente d’Antropologica nella R. Università di Modena, Medico presso il Manicomio di Reggio, associato Estero della Società d’Antropologia di Parigi, Socio Corrispondente della R. Accademia di Medicina di Torino, ecc.* (Reggio-Emilia: Tip. Stefano Calderini e Figlio, 1876); Enrico Morselli, *Contributo alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente. Note Statistiche ed Antropologiche sui Delinquenti Suicidi pel dott. Enrico Morselli* (Milan: Tipografia Fratelli Rechiedei, 1877); *Contribuzioni alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente...Dell’Influenza della Pena sui Detenuti Dedotta dalle Statistiche Disciplinari Carcerarie* (Reggio-Emilia: Tip. Stefano Calderini e Figlio, 1877).

viewed prison populations as having the same human variation as the population at large. While prison inmates were more likely to commit suicide overall, the tendency was not directly correlated with their criminality nor mental illness. Morselli found that the most culpable and immoral prisoners infrequently committed suicide; in fact, they rarely did. Rather, despite their psychological differences, criminal predisposition toward suicide was affected by the same factors—being male, single, or mentally ill—as the population at large.

Instead of inferior biological makeup, Morselli credited higher suicide rates in prison to prison social structure and prison life.<sup>83</sup> For instance, most suicides took place amongst prisoners who were recently admitted to the prison, amongst those held in solitary confinement, strictly punished, severely shamed, as well as amongst younger inmates and those who were repentant.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, suicide rates reflected the differences between different prison systems: suicide rates were higher in more severe prisons, among those kept in isolation, among those without labor, and among recent arrivals who had never been to prison before. Disregarding the criminally insane, “normal” inmates closer in characteristics to the free population were more likely to commit suicide according to their treatment and confinement than the easily identifiable “criminal men.” He reasoned:

Can one reasonably support [the idea] that those unhappy men would have committed their crimes under the influence of [the same] alienation of the cerebral functions that then pushed them to attempt or commit suicide? Here is how statistics greatly helps [using] numbers to penetrate in the intimate processes of psychical manifestations....<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> See *Contributo alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente. Note Statistiche ed Antropologiche*, 28-33, 78-80.

<sup>84</sup> “Il Suicidio nei Delinquenti, Studio Statistico a Medico-Legale del Dr. Enrico Morselli,” 33-34.

<sup>85</sup> *Contributo alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente. Note Statistiche ed Antropologiche*, 29.

The effects of such strict disciplinary social arrangements were comparable to similar systems with strict punitive systems, such as the military. For Morselli, this was also evidence of the need for prison reform. He wrote, “we do a good service to the delinquent and a terrible one to society with the infliction of punishments, as it has been done till now, behind a false concept of social vendetta.”<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, the wide variety of contradictory explanations for suicide detracted from any religious or philosophical understanding of suicide as a moral act, especially in relation to a man’s criminal nature. In fact, suicide also doubled as an act of atonement, defiance, perseverance, dignity, or personal failure.<sup>87</sup> Alternatively, Morselli believed it could serve as an act of defiance and freedom to withdraw from society entirely.<sup>88</sup> He explained, “we certainly can’t be surprised by the psychological process that drags the unhappy to take their own life.”<sup>89</sup>

#### *4. Suicide: voluntary acts, evolution, and consciousness*

While the majority of *Il Suicidio* is devoted to the causal “analysis” section that consists of moral statistics, the second section of explanatory “synthesis” offers an evolutionary explanation for the increasing suicide rates in modern society. Morselli’s data demonstrated that suicide rates could not be universally tied to mental illness, problematizing his interpretation of suicide. If suicide was always defined as an act of insanity, then insanity could explain the victim’s lack of free will and inability to differentiate between right and wrong. But if suicide was not an act of insanity and statistics demonstrated regular rates of suicide across a wide

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<sup>86</sup> *Contribuzioni alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente...Dell’influenza della Pena*, 5.

<sup>87</sup> See *Enrico Morselli e le Scienze dell’Uomo nell’Età del Positivismo*, 2208.

<sup>88</sup> “Il Suicidio nei Delinquenti, Studio Statistico a Medico-Legale del Dr. Enrico Morselli,” 37.

<sup>89</sup> See *Contributo alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente. Note Statistiche ed Antropologiche*, 21-22.

variety of factors, then victims could exhibit a quality like free will. But how could an individual's free will toward death be explained evolutionarily? Because suicidal tendencies could not be tied to class or intelligence—and often society's most talented members were prone to suicidal impulses—an explanation for modern suicide was of great urgency for the future of human civilization. In response to the riddle of insanity, free will, and social evolution, Morselli developed an explanation for modern suicide in which individuals living in advanced societies faced increasing levels of mental competition. Because members of society's upper echelons vied among themselves for advantage, they suffered from increasing mental pressure and subsequently, disease. While Morselli argued that there was no evidence that free will existed, individuals were still capable of "voluntary acts." Suicide, therefore, demonstrated the paradoxes of the social evolutionary process, which made victims of its most important members and thwarted its own progress.

Morselli's theory grew out of his reading of Esquirol's *Des Maladies Mentales Considérées sous les Rapports Médical, Hygiénique et Médico-Légal* (1838) and de Boismont's *Du Suicide et de la Folie Suicide* (1865), which offered opposing positions on the relationship between insanity and self-murder. An alienist close to Philippe Pinel (1745-1826), Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol (1772-1840) believed that all acts of suicide were due to mental illness.<sup>90</sup> After conducting extensive research in the insane asylums of Paris, Esquirol classified mental illness into five groups: lipemia (or melancholy), monomania, mania, dementia, and imbecility.<sup>91</sup> Whether the victim had suffered from a long-term malady or was struck down by a "delirium of passions," mental illness negated their free will and brought about the act

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<sup>90</sup> Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Des Maladies Mentales Considérées sous les Rapports Médical, Hygiénique et Médico-Légal* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1838). For an extensive discussion of Esquirol, see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>91</sup> See John C. Weaver, *Sadly Troubled History: the Meanings of Suicide in the Modern Age*, 35.

spontaneously. In contrast, Alexandre Brière de Boismont (1797-1871) argued that suicide could either be an act of sanity or insanity.<sup>92</sup> After surveying thousands of French cases from the Archives du Parquet, he observed that the insane who committed suicide were either subject to hallucinations or suicidal impulses that were difficult to treat, while suicide among the sane and healthy could be understood through different factors: heredity, advanced age, and being unmarried.<sup>93</sup> For de Boismont, suicide had increased because “[t]he time in which we live is not only wrought by *ennui*, this sickness of advanced civilizations [but] a universal confusion of ideas, a general weariness, the complete disillusionment with everything we have praised and adored.”<sup>94</sup> As one commentator put it: “The safeguard against that sane form of self-destruction, which arises because a man doubts whether it is worth his while to live, is found in the consciousness that there is a nobility in suffering, if suffering come in the way of duty, and that every one of us has his place and duty fixed here by One wiser than himself.”<sup>95</sup>

Morselli took the thesis that suicide rates had increased in modern society and revised it by shifting from the question of insanity per se to emphasize the question of free will and evolution. Free will had long since been emphasized in discussions about the relationship of insanity to suicide, sociologists and psychiatrists falling roughly into two camps: explanations that faulted insanity tended to implicate will as central to suicide, while explanations that used statistics to characterize social trends were more deterministic. Psychiatric studies that

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<sup>92</sup> For an extensive discussion on de Boismont’s research into suicide, see Joward I. Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Spring, 1993), 461-490.

<sup>93</sup> Brière de Boismont, *Du Suicide et de la Folie Suicide* (Paris: Germer Baillière, 1865).

<sup>94</sup> Brière de Boismont, “De l’influence de la Civilisation sur la Suicide,” 179-180. Cited Howard I. Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought,” *Journal of Social History*, vol. 26, no. 3 (Spring, 1993), 464.

<sup>95</sup> “Review. *Du Suicide et de la Folie Suicide. On Suicide and Suicidal Madness*. By A. Briere de Boismont, M. D. Paris. 1865. Second Edition,” *The Medical Times and Gazette. A Journal of Medical Science, Literature, Criticism, and News*, vol. I (1866), 131.

understood suicide through mental illness, such as that of Esquirol, denied free will, while that of Pierre-Egiste Lisle, which viewed suicide as an act of free will akin to murder, made it criminal.<sup>96</sup> Social analyses of suicide offered a similar range of perspectives. Statistics that examined aggregate behavior encouraged a very deterministic outlook, exemplified by Adolph Wagner's notable metaphor—which sparked vociferous critiques—of the king who could order the amount of deaths and other choices in his kingdom per annum.<sup>97</sup> Others used statistics to come to free will's defense. Quetelet's average man and aggregate numbers appeared to call the existence of free will into question, but he vocally defended the place of free will within his system:<sup>98</sup>

Man can be considered in different aspects; above all, he has his individuality, but is further distinguished by another privilege. He is eminently sociable; he willingly renounces part of his individuality to become a fraction of a larger body (the state), which also has a life of its own and different phases... The part of individuality that is thus engaged becomes a regulator of the main social events.<sup>99</sup>

Most of these thinkers came to the defense of free will, either making it fit into their statistical reasoning or by critiquing the use of statistics in the human sciences.

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<sup>96</sup> See Pierre-Égiste Lisle, *Du Suicide: Statistique Médecine, Histoire et Législation* (Paris: J. B. Baillière, 1856); German E. Berrios, *A History of Mental Symptoms: Descriptive Psychopathology since the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially 447.

<sup>97</sup> See *Die Gesetzmässigkeit in den scheinbar willkürlichen menschlichen Handlungen vom Standpunkte der Statistik*; See John C. Weaver, *A Sadly Troubled History: the Meanings of Suicide in the Modern Age*, McGill-Queen's/Associated Medical Services Studies in the History of Medicine, Health and Society #33 (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 26 for example; see Chapter 6, "Statistical Law and Human Freedom," Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking 1820-1900* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).

<sup>98</sup> Stephan M. Stigler, *The History of Statistics: the Measurement of Uncertainty before 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 172.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in Alain Desrosières, *The Politics of Large Numbers. A History of Statistical Reasoning*, translated by Camille Naish (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 81.

Morselli strongly rejected the utility of free will (*libero arbitrio*) in explaining human behavior, specifically in the case of suicide. With anticlerical fervor, Morselli began *Il Suicidio* by describing the religious and metaphysical concept of “unbounded freedom” as unprovable through the methods of scientific investigation. “Free will” was simply a fabrication, or “scarecrow” (*spauracchio*) that had no actual basis in observable human behaviors. Such a philosophical or religious concept not only lacked the benefits of empirical and positivist science, but it also hindered suicide’s proper investigation. Relying on “unlimited” individualism allowed researchers to skirt the “phenomena of social life.”<sup>100</sup>

While Morselli rejected free will on scientific grounds, suicide was still, by definition, an act that took place by one’s own hand, and he navigated this problem by defining suicide as a “voluntary act.” Suicide victims were “not free” but they still were “moving from a logical process, its premises remaining unknown to us in many cases: it is the extrinsic manifestation of a phenomenon of the consciousness that escapes us.”<sup>101</sup> Suicide was still enacted by the individual, unlike, for instance, the non-voluntary action of an epileptic fit. Here Morselli made a psychological distinction between “human will” and “free will.” He explained that “all voluntary human actions are the manifestations of the naturally inherent functions of the cerebral organism,” but the individual consciousness itself was not free.<sup>102</sup> External and social forces that affected the “internal psychic processes of collective humanity” had greater influence over suicide than “subjective modifications of the *I (l’io)*,” or self-reflectivity and self-awareness.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 21.

<sup>101</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 23.

<sup>102</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 7.

<sup>103</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 22, 21.

The proof for Morselli's argument was his moral statistics and victims themselves, for "nothing is more evident, more *objective* than a cadaver."<sup>104</sup>

Instead of an act of free will, Morselli explained suicide as the result of modern evolution in which extreme pressures of mental competition endangered society's best and most talented individuals. As a student at the University of Modena, Morselli studied anthropology and anatomy just at the moment when Darwinian evolutionary theory swept through the Italian sciences. In those years, Morselli became a staunch evolutionist and materialist, and his training in physiological psychiatry prioritized organic etiologies of mental illness. Furthermore, Morselli read widely, and he studied the work of Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893), Bénédict Morel (1809-1873), Cesare Lombroso, Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1913), and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903).<sup>105</sup> In *Il Suicidio*, Morselli emphasized two aspects of the evolution of modern societies. First, there was increasing pressure for limited resources, and he reminded readers of the ideas about population growth of Thomas Malthus (1766-1834). Growing populations outstripped their resources, increasing competition among mankind. Second, in advanced human civilization, competition was principally mental. Morselli drew on the work of Herbert Spencer, who argued that human psychology could be explained by "intelligence," events in one's external relations had reciprocal internal relations, and "mental inheritance," that "psychical successions" could be inherited and accumulated in a lineage over time.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> See Martin Fichman, *An Elusive Victorian: The Evolution of Alfred Russel Wallace* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For more on Herbert Spencer, see Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Stockfield: Acumen, 2007); Robert J. Richards, "Spencer's Conception of Evolution as a Moral Force," in *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*, Science and its Conceptual Foundations Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>106</sup> See Herbert Spencer, *Principle of Psychology*, and Robert J. Richards, "Spencer's Conception of Evolution as a Moral Force," in *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior*, Science and its Conceptual Foundations Series (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 286.

Morselli was not alone in offering an evolutionary explanation for suicide. Other evolutionary approaches promoted a deterministic approach to self-murder that gave suicide the semblance of biological justice. Lombroso and others had expanded on the ideas of Bénédict Morel, whose degeneration theory proposed that noxious activity caused a regression of human characteristics.<sup>107</sup> In this view, suicide was the result of atavistic tendencies, linking it to criminality and insanity. As an outcome of the biological change in human characteristics over time, suicide was, in this view, the unfortunate outcome of an individual's inferiority or failure to complete. For example, Lombroso's student Enrico Ferri (1856-1929) described suicide as "one of the forms of [biological] defeat."<sup>108</sup>

While Morselli accepted Morel's theory of degeneration, he argued that only sometimes did it explain suicide, and he also complained that Lombroso's own treatment of suicide was inadequate.<sup>109</sup> While an evolutionary explanation for modern suicide would seem to suggest that suicide victims had weaker constitutions and were naturally eliminated from the species through the course of evolution and competition, often times, suicide or suicidal tendencies persisted in those who appeared to have competitive advantage. While degeneration might explain suicide among the insane or those suffering from alcoholism, it became problematic for suicides among society's elite, privileged, and talented.

Morselli proposed a theory that emphasized suicide as a result of the evolution of the mind. For Morselli, the problem resided in the "genesis and evolution of the phenomena of

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<sup>107</sup> See Bénédict Morel, *Études Cliniques: Traité théorique et pratique des Maladies Mentales, considérées dans leur nature, leur traitement, et dans leur rapport avec la médecine légale des aliénés*, 2 vols. (Paris: V. Masson; J.-B. Baillière, 1852-1853); G. E. Berrios, *The History of Mental Symptoms: Descriptive Psychopathology since the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 428-429.

<sup>108</sup> See Cesare Lombroso, *Crime: its Causes and Remedies* (London, 1911, 1897), 415. Quoted in "The Fatal Tendency of Civilized Society," 709.

<sup>109</sup> Lombroso himself was not a psychiatrist but his work was highly influential on psychiatrists, neurologists, and alienists in Italy.

consciousness.”<sup>110</sup> Competition, both organic and mental, took place within every realm and level of society, but while more primitive societies still relied on physical strength and skill to succeed, modern society demanded ever-increasing intelligence. For the “comparatively limited number of victors” who were “the strongest, the best formed, [and] the cleverest,” competition never ceased. In the popular English translation of *Il Suicidio*, the competition described by Morselli becomes reminiscent of both the Thomas Hobbes’s struggle of all against all, and Adam Smith’s unlimited wants:

Amongst civilized men there are many wants to be satisfied, hence the weapons of the combatants are more complicated and noble. All the interesting phenomena of social life, all the progressive phases of civilization, have their origin in that constant struggle of man against nature, against other men, against himself; since history is nothing but the work of that human selection through which civilization has passed from one people to another, being conquered by those who have brought to greater and more rapid perfection their material or moral weapons.<sup>111</sup>

What nineteenth-century Europeans perceived to be symptomatic of the dangers of modern society, Morselli saw as the natural outgrowth of the mental struggle for survival in which the mind was man’s most important asset.<sup>112</sup>

Mental competition, however, had the paradoxical quality of becoming the greatest danger to society’s most advanced members. Civilized societies pitted the most advanced and evolved men against one another, leading to human selection for intelligence, but also mental

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<sup>110</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 22.

<sup>111</sup> *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 357.

<sup>112</sup> See Howard I. Kushner, “Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity,” in John Weaver and David Wright, *Histories of Suicide: International Perspectives on Self-Destruction in the Modern World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

defeat. Competition, on the cerebral level, had accelerated all too quickly, leading to increased suicide rates that posed the greatest threat to “precisely the superior man...an effect of those natural laws to which civil societies (*convivenze civili*) obey.”<sup>113</sup> As Morselli reminded readers in one article, even Napoleon confessed the desire to “sever spontaneously the line of his stormy and distressing existence.”<sup>114</sup> Morselli explained modern suicide through the extreme pressures of mental competition that endangered modern society’s best and most talented individuals.

For Morselli, the threat suicide posed to society’s elite endangered the future of society at large. A scientific study of suicide had to consider “not only the psychological evolution of the individual, but also the universal and synthetic laws, and their relationship with social life.”<sup>115</sup> Suicide among the mentally fit was ultimately detrimental to the whole and had to be understood “according to the law of evolution in civilized populations,” laws that were different than those of primitive society.<sup>116</sup> Mental competition led to fatigue, mental weakness, and mental illness:

To all appearance there exists in civilized society the greatest tranquility and serenity of mind, but in the meantime no one ceases from making a show of his own talents, skill, force, and character, and now this rivalry is a latent devouring fever, which seizes us all, which winds about our fibres, and which urges us on to over-work....through our very cultivation we are driven to attempt by great efforts to exceed our faculties; we all desire to advance by great steps, and in this unbridled career there are very few who do not fall breathless before reaching the goal.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Il suicidio. Saggio di statistica morale comparata.”

<sup>114</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Suicidio e Viltà,” *Gazzetta Piemontese della Domenica* (29 May 1886).

<sup>115</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 36.

<sup>116</sup> *Il Suicidio*, 478.

<sup>117</sup> *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 369.

Morselli suggested curtailing the threat of suicide through socially responsible to ensure the growth and development of society as a whole. It was modern society's vulnerable elite that Morselli sought to protect.

Morselli continued to argue for social responsibility in response to suicide victims throughout his life. In the debate over the disturbingly close relationship between genius and insanity (or, as he put it, the "divine concept" of genius and "morbid physiology"), Morselli distinguished himself from other theorists who emphasized biological deficiency and disease. When writer Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) attempted to kill himself in 1892, he became the subject of discussion amongst Italian scientists. While Lombroso and others found "degenerative epileptic neurosis" to be the root of de Maupassant's genius, Morselli claimed that theories about human "abnormality" had to be approached through clinical observation and experimentation.<sup>118</sup> Instead of a single etiological cause, Morselli continued to fault the heightened speed of evolution and competition that paradoxically threatened society.

At the end of his life, Morselli would return to the question of suicide. Although he had previously revisited the question, in 1923, he published *L'uccisione Pietosa (l'Eutanasia: in Rapporto alla Medicina, alla Morale ed all'Eugenica)* (*Mercy Killing: Euthanasia in Relation to Medicine, Morality, and Eugenics*), a full treatise evaluating the arguments for and against euthanasia.<sup>119</sup> Eugenics had spread throughout Europe and Morselli participated in these discussions. *L'uccisione Pietosa*, however, was written in direct response to German psychiatrist Alfred Hoche (1865-1943), who published *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens: ihr Maß und ihre Form* (*Allowing the Destruction of Life Unworthy of Living*) in

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<sup>118</sup> Augusto Guido Bianchi, *La Patologia del Genio e gli Scienziati Italiani. Inchiesta a Proposito del Caso di Guy de Maupassant* (Milan: Max Kantorowicz, 1892), see 18, 37-48.

<sup>119</sup> Enrico Morselli, *L'uccisione Pietosa (l'Eutanasia: in Rapporto alla Medicina, alla Morale ed all'Eugenica)* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1923).

1920.<sup>120</sup> In this three-part discussion, Morselli reviews the arguments for euthanasia, against euthanasia, and then concludes by presenting his own position between the two extremes.

By the time Morselli wrote *L'uccisione Pietosa*, he had participated in eugenics discussions for over ten years. Even as early as 1908, Morselli began discussing ideas about the future results of human evolution; he presented Nietzschean ideas in his lessons on anthropology, arguing that a future man, the *Metantropos*, would evolve from his present condition.<sup>121</sup>

Morselli attended the first International Eugenics Congress, at which he argued for the importance of psychology for the new science and he continued to discuss eugenics through a series of articles.<sup>122</sup> Morselli believed that psychiatric conditions were inheritable and that races could also be identified through psychiatric characteristics and tendencies. While Morselli endorsed intervention into human procreation to improve the race and nation, he also emphasized what he saw to be the scientific shortcomings of eugenics and remained relatively restrictive regarding the eugenic methods he endorsed.

In *L'uccisione pietosa*, Morselli presents a critical review of the practice of mercy killing, arguing against Hoche's proposal to kill the mentally ill, and restricting the majority of his discussion to "voluntary death chosen by he who is tired of living and the facilitation of suicide."<sup>123</sup> For Morselli, those who endorsed Hoche's views had misunderstood human

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<sup>120</sup> Alfred Hoche and Karl Binding, *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens: ihr Maß und ihre Form* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1920).

<sup>121</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Antropologia Generale: l'Uomo secondo la Teoria dell'Evoluzione; Lezioni dettate nelle Università di Torino e di Genova (corsi liberi 1887 al 1908)* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1911).

<sup>122</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Ethnic Psychology and the Science of Eugenics," in *Problems in Eugenics: Papers communicated to the first International eugenics Congress held at the University of London, July 24<sup>th</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup>, 1912*, Eugenics Education Society (London: Eugenics Education Society, 1912; See Francesco Cassata, *Building the New Man: Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth-Century Italy*, translated by Erin O'Loughlin (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2011).

<sup>123</sup> *L'uccisione Pietosa*, 9.

consciousness and the purpose of pain of human evolution. Furthermore, he required the consent of the person to be killed regardless of their suffering or health.

While proponents of mercy killing argued that it ended human suffering, Morselli argued that pain was a natural aspect of human life and part of the evolutionary process and that one person's suffering could not be judged by another. He warned: "take Pain out of human evolution, and you will have arrested Progress."<sup>124</sup> Pain was insufficient because it also required access and understanding for another person's consciousness and unconsciousness, which, Morselli argued, psychiatrists had barely begun to understand. In this work, Morselli again considered many of the same questions that arose in *Il suicidio*, but in this case, the question of social responsibility and medical authority over life and death was further amplified. Pain, disease, and acts such as suicide were as much the obligations of the society that bore and nurtured the individual as they were to the individual in which they manifested themselves.

In his argument for a very strict definition of euthanasia, Morselli again skirted the concept of free will, also criticizing a person's "consent" as a reason for enacting euthanasia. After *Il Suicidio*, Morselli began to place greater emphasis on the suffering and the psychological aspects behind suicide, at one point quoting Giacomo Leopardi: "Wherever one meditates without imagination and enthusiasm, one detests life: it means that the knowing (*cognizione*) of things leads to the desire for death, etc."<sup>125</sup> Nevertheless, suicide proved that consent could be entirely unrelated to evolutionary advantage or health. Mankind still knew too little to understand who were useful or useless to human evolution, and no one knew the "ends" of nature.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *L'uccisione Pietosa*, 265.

<sup>125</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Scritti Varii Inediti* (Florence: Carte Napoletane, 1906), 387. Cited in Enrico Morselli, "Prefazione," in Enrico Altavilla, *Psicologia del Suicidio* (Naples: Perella, 1910).

<sup>126</sup> *L'uccisione Pietosa*, 56.

Morselli concluded that it was not for a physician either to choose death for a patient or assist in their suicide. He wrote, “one does not have the right to propel a life toward death in a moment in which neither philosophy nor science knows that which exists in the hereafter (*Oltrevita*).”<sup>127</sup> While in one sense, eugenics fit Morselli’s advocacy for greater social intervention into the lives of Italian citizens, it did so exactly in the manner to which Morselli was opposed. Morselli again reminded readers that one could not simply eliminate the lives of those whose maladies were often social in origin. He wrote “Now, these causes are as much of the moral order... as the physical order.... In reality they have a collective origin, and are thus the product of the evils of the social body.”<sup>128</sup> For Morselli, euthanasia was “almost entirely irreconcilable” with the mutual responsibilities of civilization.

##### 5. Conclusion: footnotal legacies, Durkheim, and the psychosocial crux

From Morselli’s over 50 year-long career, *Il Suicidio* is most often cited of his works. It has regularly been footnoted in the history of suicide research and has been acknowledged as foundational to Émile Durkheim’s sociological study 20 years later. The connection between Durkheim’s *Le Suicide* and Morselli’s *Il Suicidio* demonstrates that the latter was widely read and very influential, especially for what is arguably the most renowned study on suicide in modern history: Durkheim used Morselli’s statistics and cited his text regularly. In one article on suicide and birthrates written nine years prior to the publication of *Le Suicide*, Durkheim closed his article in dialogue with Morselli. He wrote,

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<sup>127</sup> *L’uccisione Pietosa*, 271.

<sup>128</sup> *L’uccisione Pietosa*, 263-264.

[Suicide] has often been presented as an outcome of the conflict between individual interests and its progress understood through its increasing frequency in the struggle for life (Morselli). But it is also due to the other purely social causes, moral if one would like, [and] as we have just pointed out, it could be one of the most important causes.<sup>129</sup>

Durkheim's statement testifies to the widespread acceptance of Morselli's evolutionary theory for suicide and that his own emphasis on the social causes of suicide was still negotiable.

*Il Suicidio* endured after *Le Suicide*, and contemporaries did not universally agree that *Le Suicide* had eclipsed *Il Suicidio*. While *Le suicide* testified to the power of the sociological method, its implications for suicidology were less clear, and those who doubted whether Durkheim had succeeded in his goal used Morselli's study as a counterweight.<sup>130</sup> One reviewer wrote:

There is room for a new study of suicide. Morselli's book, which must still be regarded as the most comprehensive and on the whole the most scientific manual on the subject, is now nearly twenty years old, and is not out of date but disfigured by many hasty generalisations, which more recent writers have shown to be unfounded. It can scarcely be said, however, that Prof. Durkheim has replaced Morselli's manual.<sup>131</sup>

The merits of Durkheim's text did not automatically negate those of Morselli's, and *Il Suicidio* continued to be reprinted.

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<sup>129</sup> Émile Durkheim, "Suicide et Natalité: Étude de Statistique Morale," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, T. 26 (Juillet à Décembre 1888), 463.

<sup>130</sup> See for instance: Augusto Bosco, Review, *Rivista Italiana di Sociologia* (November 1897), 378-379; Gustavo Tosti, "Suicide in the Light of Recent Studies," *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 3, no. 4 (January, 1898), 464-478.

<sup>131</sup> Havelock Ellis, "Review: Le suicide. Étude de Sociologie, by Émile Durkheim," *Mind*, New Series, vol. 7, no. 26 (April, 1898), 249.

There is no disputing the originality of Durkheim's study or the insightful—and sometimes critical—appraisals he offered of Morselli's own work. Durkheim clearly disagreed with Morselli on at least three points. First, Durkheim offered a powerful critique of the first part of *Il Suicidio* in which he undermined Morselli's catalog and analysis of the factors affecting suicide rates through a social rereading of the same material. Although Morselli lived for over 30 years after *Le Suicide* was printed, he never replied. Second, Durkheim rejected the use of insanity to explain suicidal actions, a subject about which Morselli remained ambiguous. And third, Durkheim squarely rejected Morselli's appeal for increased moral education “to develop in man the power of coordinating his ideas and feelings, so that he may be able to follow a definite purpose in life.” For Durkheim, this was “to ascribe to education a power it lacks.”<sup>132</sup> Education was a mirror for society that could not offer the prophylactic treatment Morselli hoped it would.

The intellectual decoupling of *Il Suicidio* and *Le Suicide* has obscured what the two texts have in common and the points at which their authors agreed, although sometimes reticently. Beyond their shared statistical method, the theories they promoted were not necessarily contradictory. While he did not develop a sociological analysis of suicide that could compare to that of Durkheim, Morselli was not opposed to the sociological method: on the contrary, he endorsed it. In turn, Durkheim never clearly rejected Morselli's evolutionary explanation for the increase in suicide. His commentary from 1888 (quoted above) implies that the evolutionary and sociological theories could exist side by side. Furthermore, the concept of evolution appears in *Le Suicide* with some frequency, although Durkheim never clearly outlines his position. But Durkheim did describe the fluidity between the realm of the individual and the social as part of

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<sup>132</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson, edited with an introduction by George Simpson (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951), 372.

both individual distinction and the continuousness of evolution.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, it was through evolution that a social—or “collective”—tendency could become stronger or weaker, and variation was necessary for such change to take place. Buried in a footnote, Durkheim contemplated the role of mental illness in obscuring the relationship between variation and the evolution of social tendencies, and the ambiguous relationship between health and illness. He wrote:

What helps make this question unclear is the failure to observe how relative these ideas of sickness and health are. What is normal today will no longer be so tomorrow, and vice versa. The large intestines of primitive man are normal for his environment but would not be so today. What is morbid for individuals may be normal for society. Neurasthenia is a sickness from the point of view of individual physiology; but what would a society be without neurasthenics? They really have a social role to play. When a state is said to be normal or abnormal, one must add, “With reference to this or that,” or else one is misunderstood.”<sup>134</sup>

Here Durkheim encapsulates Morselli’s theory better than Morselli ever did, not only acknowledging the role of evolution in affecting and sustaining a characteristic such as suicide in society, but using it to explain the persistence of mental illness such as melancholy even in an advanced society.<sup>135</sup> Another variant of this discussion was widely spread across Italy, where psychiatrists such as Morselli and Lombroso debated the relationship of genius and insanity. While the theoretical scope of *Il Suicidio* did not impress all of its readers—one reviewer complained that the “fact seems to be, that although the statistics undoubtedly go to prove

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<sup>133</sup> *Suicide: a Study in Sociology*, 313.

<sup>134</sup> *Suicide: a Study in Sociology*, 365.

<sup>135</sup> *Suicide: a Study in Sociology*, 366.

something, the discovery has not yet been made of what that something is....”—Morselli’s ideas about free will, mental competition, and moral disease reflected the broader European discourses defined by evolutionary discourse, moral statistics, and questions of social psychology.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, they attest to the biological and evolutionary roots of sociological theory in the nineteenth century.

Enrico Morselli died in 1929. His students testified to his youthful rigor and intellectual precocity up until his last days, when he was struck with pulmonary bronchitis. His faithful student Eugenio Tanzi described his death in the following way:

Two days of pulmonary bronchitis cut him down quickly, without him being able to see his end. It was voluntary euthanasia (*eutanasia spontanea*), and if I merit saying it, he did not hesitate, following today’s current philanthropy, more sincere than that the old, of indulging in a merciful death for the sake of others (those condemned to suffer long and incurable torments and with their approval), thus procuring to the unwilling doctor or relatives incapable of leading to the death to suffer beyond the limits of human tolerance.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Review of H. Morselli, *Suicide: An Essay on Comparative Moral Statistics*, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 9 (1882), 607. Quoted in Daryl Lee, “Accounting for Self-Destruction: Morselli, Moral Statistics and the Modernity of Suicide,” *Intellectual History Review*, 19:3, 348. See Pier Francesco Peloso, “Approach to the study of suicide in the essays of Enrico Morselli (1879) and in the successive hypotheses of Durkheim and Freud,” *Pathologica*, 84, 1089 (Jan.-Feb. 1992), 107-120; Irina Paperno, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky’s Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Ty Geltmaker, *Tired of Living. Suicide in Italy from National Unification to World War I, 1860—1915* (New York: Peter Lang, 2002); “Accounting for Self-Destruction: Morselli, Moral Statistics and the Modernity of Suicide.”

<sup>137</sup> Eugenio Tanzi, “Enrico Morselli,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, vol. XVI, n. 1-2 (Gennaio-Febbraio 1929), 16.

### *Chapter 3. Energy: applications in mental theory and treatment*

Psychology is none other than a chapter in biological Energetics.<sup>138</sup>

#### *1. Introduction: A case study, Cesare Mattei and Electro-homoeopathy*

When Count Cesare Mattei died in 1896, the possessions he left behind included a small fortune, a castle he helped design called *Rocchetta*, and the secret recipes to his world-renowned electro-homoeopathic treatment. The destination of his estate became hotly contested, however, when Mario Venturoli-Mattei, Cesare Mattei's disowned heir, sued for his recently estranged father's property. Mattei, who had no children of his own, had disinherited his first heir and nephew Luigi after he gambled away most of the family estate. After Mattei had reestablished himself with the profits from his popular electrohomoeopathic cures, he adopted Venturoli, his long-time assistant, and later Sofia Condescu, Venturoli's Romanian bride. But in the last three years of his life, Mattei's ingenious eccentricities, seen by many as the source of his fantastical medieval-orientalist palace and his "vegetable electricity" cures, now morphed into the morbid symptoms of senile dementia. Cooped up in his castle concocting his panacean globules and liquids, he became paranoid and suspicious of the other household members. This culminated in the "Turkish coffee incident," in which Mattei accused the Venturoli-Matteis of plotting to kill him by poisoning his regular drink. They were promptly disowned (see figures 1, 2, and 3).

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<sup>138</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Sulla Terapia Vibratoria nelle Malattie Nervose e Mentali. Note Critiche del prof. Enrico Morselli* (Genoa: Stab. Tip. Colombo, 1893), 11.



Figure 1. Rocchetta Mattei, mid-late nineteenth century  
Grizzana Morandi, Bologna



Figure 2. Packaging for electrohomeopathic cure, n.d.



C. MATTEI

Figure 3. Portrait of C. Mattei

After Mattei's death, the Venturoli-Matteis took the matter to court. Their lawyer asked Enrico Morselli to offer his expert opinion on the question of whether he found "Count Cesare Mattei of Bologna, deceased 3 April 1896, in a state of mind from December 1895 until his death that he validly had his [mental] faculties at his disposal [to write] a will."<sup>139</sup> Since his subject was already dead, Morselli formulated his verdict based on "factual evidence" (*prova di fatto*) which included a vast collection of extensive correspondence, published materials, and *Rocchetta* itself.<sup>140</sup> In his analysis, Morselli carefully considered Mattei's eccentric personality,

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<sup>139</sup> <<Si il Conte Cesare Mattei di Bologna, deceduto ivi il 3 Aprile 1896, Si Trovava dal Dicembre '95 sino alla Morte in tale Stato di Mente da Potere Validamente Disporre delle sue Sostanze per Testamento.>> Enrico Morselli, *In Causa di Testamento. Sullo Stato Mentale del Conte Cesare Mattei Inventore dell'Elettromiopia. Perizia Psichiatrica* (Genoa: Tipografia di Gio. Batta Carlini, 1899), 1.

<sup>140</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 3.

the products of his so-called genius (*Rocchetta* and electrohomoeopathy), and the late onset of his irrational behavior.<sup>141</sup>

The study Morselli published on the trial's posthumous defendant professed a two-fold purpose. First, it judged the changes Mattei made to his will as null and void by reason of insanity. Morselli argued that the Venturoli-Matteis should be restored as legitimate heirs and denied the local Christian confraternity, to which Mattei afterward bequeathed his property, any rights to the estate. Second, it used Mattei's achievements as evidence that Mattei was a genius, making the case an important piece of evidence to the ongoing debate about the nature of genius, in which Morselli took a position against Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), Max Nordau (1849-1923), and others. Morselli claimed that the case of Cesare Mattei was the first wherein the hypothesis that genius was a form of insanity could be tested out with "the touchstone (*pietra di paragone*) of legal criteria regarding civil capacity. For this reason alone, the case will draw the attention of all alienists and lead them to meditate upon the coherence of some of the most sensational consequences of [these] new doctrines."<sup>142</sup> However, Morselli stayed firm in his conviction that genius was not necessarily a form of insanity. In order to explain his seemingly contradictory stance—simultaneously negating the will's validity by reason of insanity and affirming Mattei's genius as a phenomenon independent from mental illness—Morselli turned to the details of Mattei's disease history. Mattei suffered from senile dementia, the unfortunate outcome of poor health in old age.

By arguing that Mattei's mental illness came about late in life (as opposed to a hereditary or congenital condition), Morselli disassociated Mattei's insanity from his early life

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<sup>141</sup> Electro-homoeopathy has several variations in spelling in a number of languages. They include "electro-homoeopathy," "electrohomeopathy," "elettro-homeopatia," and "elettromiopatia."

<sup>142</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 18.

achievements, including the invention of electrohomeopathy, and the evaluation of electrohomoeopathy's legitimacy as a medical treatment was arguably Morselli's third implicit agenda. Because Mattei's invention of electrohomoeopathy served both as evidence of his mental state and constituting intellectual property of immense value, this assessment was fundamental to both the legality of Mattei's revised will and what the will entailed. By claiming that electrohomeopathy was the invention of a genius, Morselli lent credibility to the treatments effects. At the same time, Morselli argued that electrohomeopathy's development lacked proper scientific technique, and its purported therapeutic results lacked scientific proof. Nevertheless, medical chicanery could still have therapeutic potential. The question of how to explain the therapeutic effects of a false cure, however, remained open.

Morselli's judgment in the Mattei trial exemplifies how the development of new medical (or pseudomedical) therapies challenged the way clinicians could prove the efficacy of a "cure." The explanation of the cure or treatment of a disease could be as challenging to substantiate as a disease's etiology, and both could be the subjects of heated debated. But in the nineteenth century, scientific and technological advances brought about advances heralded as modern or scientific medicine, and with it, the identification of other medical practices labeled as "pseudoscientific."<sup>143</sup> For psychiatrists such as Morselli, such "pseudoscientific" treatments posed both a problem and an opportunity. Evidence for the cause or cure of a psychiatric problem were harder to prove; at the same time, medical "cures" that lacked sufficient proof could be explained psychologically. From the late eighteenth century to the nineteenth century, the connotation of the term "placebo" changed in medical practice: from "a common place method or medicine," sometimes knowingly prescribed by doctors to cure a patient despite the

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<sup>143</sup> See Roy Porter, "Scientific Medicine in the Nineteenth Century" and "Nineteenth-Century Medical Care" in *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997).

biochemical ineffectiveness of the drug, it came to be “mere placebo,” sometimes insinuating that a treatment was fraudulent.<sup>144</sup> Through his assessment of electrohomeopathy, Morselli entered into an ongoing discourse and effort of scientists and physicians to identify and bolster the methods of “proper” scientific and medical research and to exclude what were deemed to be improper research methods and their resulting conclusions and therapies from what was to be modern scientific medicine.<sup>145</sup>

The case of Cesare Mattei also demonstrates the way that developments in the physical sciences and the spread of new energy sources affected medical practices and the way they could be legitimized. While attempts to apply electricity to the medical treatment of the human body dated back to the eighteenth century, the proliferation of technology that utilized electricity in the nineteenth century included a vast number of new medical devices and equipment of both “scientific” and “pseudoscientific” nature.<sup>146</sup> “Medical electricity” had a vast number of proponents with different ideas about how the energy form could be applied to the human body.<sup>147</sup> Along with the inventions and techniques of physicians christened as “medical” came

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<sup>144</sup> See the etymology of “placebo,” in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, June 2006); see also Robert Jütte, “The Early History of the Placebo,” *Complementary Therapies in Medicine*, 21 (2013), 94-97.

<sup>145</sup> For an interesting discussion of this problem and its relationship to electrical medical experimentation, see Stanley Finger, “The Colonist and Medicine,” in *Doctor Franklin’s Medicine* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). See also: Kevin M. McConkey and Campbell Perry, “Benjamin Franklin and Mesmerism, Revisited,” *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 50:4 (2002), 320-331; Mark A. Best, Duncan Neuhauser, and Lee Slavin, *Benjamin Franklin: Verification & Validation of the Scientific Process in Healthcare, as demonstrated by the Report of the Royal Commission on Animal Magnetism & Mesmerism* (Trafford Publishing, 2003).

<sup>146</sup> See Edward Shorter, *Psicosomatica: Storia dei Sintomi e delle Patologie dall’Ottocento a Oggi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1993), 163-167; Stanley Finger, *Origins of Neuroscience: A History of Exploration into Brain Function* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 431-435; H. Selcon, “The first century of mechanical electrotherapy,” *Physiotherapy*, 87, 4 (2001), 208-209; Sander L. Gilman, “Electrotherapy and mental illness: then and now,” *History*, 19, 3 (2008), 339-357; Anne Harrington, *The Cure Within: A History of Mind-Body Medicine* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

<sup>147</sup> See Giuliano Pancaldi and Paola Bertucci, eds., *Electric Bodies: Episodes in the History of Medical Electricity*. Bologna Studies in History of Science 9 (Bologna: Università di Bologna, Dipartimento di Filosofia, 2001).

the development of technologies and techniques that included electric needles, electric belts, and other systems of applying electricity to, or conducting electricity throughout the human body designated as quackery.<sup>148</sup> Among these various applications, the case of electrohomeopathy is interesting. Mattei created a system of potions that corresponded to an established, though disputed, medical philosophy and he succeeded in maintaining control over its production and those who could practice his new technique throughout Europe. In Mattei's electrohomeopathic empire, the claim that distinguished his cures from those of others was that they were electrical in substance. He wrote:

...when I have seen with surprise the disorganized parts reorganized, I said: *these remedies act on the entire organization*. Finally when I have seen certain morbid affections disappear by simply touching them with certain liquids, and these liquids produce the effect of ordinary electricity, even the shock, perfectly astonished myself, I cried out: *this is electricity*.<sup>149</sup>

Mattei argued that his medical system improved that of homeopathy through the application of electricity. Furthermore, Mattei's cures could spread and be used without costly equipment and their purity maintained through his own trademarking, manuals, and pamphlets.

This chapter explores the way that concepts of energy, and specifically electricity, entered psychiatric treatment and discourse in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.

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<sup>148</sup> Carolyn Thomas de la Peña, "The Materials of American Studies: Reading Electric Belts," *American Studies*, vol. 44, no. ½, New Voices in American Studies (Spring/Summer 2003), 219-246; Paola Bertucci, "Revealing Sparks: John Wesley and the Religious Utility of Electrical Healing," *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 39, no. 3 (September 2006), 341-362; Rebecca Herzig, "Subjected to the Current: Batteries, Bodies, and the early History of Electrification in the United States," *Journal of Social History*, vol. 41, no. 4 (Summer 2008), 867-885.

<sup>149</sup> Cesare Mattei, *Electro-homoepathy: the Principles of New Science Discovered*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Bologna: Printing Office Mareggiani, 1880), 14. See also Iwan Rhys Morus, *Frankenstein's Children: Electricity, Exhibition, and Experiment in Early Nineteenth-Century London* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1998); Takahiro Ueyama, *Health in the Marketplace: Professionalism, Therapeutic Desires, and Medical Commodification in Late-Victorian London* (Palo Alto, CA: Society for the Promotion of Science and Scholarship, 2010).

Psychiatrists such as Morselli responded to such discourses, incorporating and experimenting with “energy oriented” cures in their psychiatric practices, and embedding concepts of energy into his philosophical perspectives and understanding of the human body. By the late nineteenth century, both scientific and technological advances offered new ways to conceptualize energy and envision its role in the betterment of humanity. Morselli drew on these discourses and borrowed vocabulary and terminology to justify both his treatment and his medical philosophy. At the same time, that same medical philosophy was grounded in theories of monism and evolution had recently been revitalized by Ernst Haeckel. However, the concept of energy presented challenges to medical practice and philosophy, as exemplified by Mattei’s electrohomeopathic cures, and it also reflected the challenges *fin-de-siècle* physicians and psychiatrists faced in modernizing their treatment and concept of the mind.

This chapter relies on interrelated terms whose definitions were often plastic. Morselli used “energy” and “force” in a series of ways. While Morselli followed the achievements of nineteenth-century physics, often referring to the law of energy conservation, he also was invested in neurological debates. Furthermore, Morselli also used energy to refer to life force, or vital energy. Energy sometimes referred directly to a specific treatment that conveyed electricity or heat throughout the body. Other times, energy became a metaphorical way for describing thoughts as if they were transformative mental excretions. This chapter will often refer to energy, force, and these various forms of energy, in terms of their scientific applications and also in terms of their philosophical implications.

## *2. Electrotherapy: criticism and pedagogy*

As to the rest, just as it would be an exaggeration to attribute all the advantages of electro-hydrotherapy solely to the physical action of electricity or to thermal-mechanical stimulus, it would be absurd to attribute [its advantages] entirely to the so-called “medicine of the imagination.”<sup>150</sup>

Morselli’s use and experimentation with new electrical technologies and therapies aimed at affecting the inner motions or energy of a patient’s body demonstrate the ways in which psychiatrists attempted to manipulate the inner state of a patient, what they perceived to be their partial success in doing so, and the problems in proving the efficacy of such a treatment. While in some cases, Morselli found certain therapies effective in treatment specific maladies, in other cases he saw their healing effects to be the result of “suggestion.” While Morselli would go on to be an advocate and practitioner of electrotherapy, he did so in spite of the proper empirical proof he desired of a positive science.

By the time Morselli began experimenting with electricity and other energy-based cures in the 1880, the practice was at least a hundred years old.<sup>151</sup> Traced back to the Leyden jar, electricians quickly began to investigate the potential healing powers of electricity, and “medical electricity” soon came to denote “the applications of electric shocks and sparks to the treatment

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<sup>150</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Sull’ Azione Fisiologica dei Bagni Idro-Elettrici Monopolari (Faradici e Galvanici). – Osservazioni del Prof. Enrico Morselli, Medico-Direttore del Nuovo Stabilimento Idroterapico <<La Salute>> in Andorno (Biella). (Communicate alla R. Accademia di Medicina di Torino nella seduta del 6 maggio 1887),” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* (Turin: Fratelli Dumolard, 1887), 28.

<sup>151</sup> See Margaret Rowbottom and Charles Susskind, “Electricity Becomes a Science (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries),” and “First Steps in Electrotherapy (18<sup>th</sup> century),” in *Electricity and Medicine: History of their Interactions* (San Francisco: San Francisco Press, 1984); Lissa Roberts, “Science Becomes Electric: Dutch Interaction with the Electrical machine during the Eighteenth Century,” *Isis*, vol. 90, no. 4 (December 1999), 680-714; Paola Bertucci, “The Electrical Body of Knowledge: Medical Electricity and Experimental Philosophy in the Mid-Eighteenth Century,” in Paola Bertucci and Giuliano Pancaldi, eds., *Electric Bodies: Episodes in the History of Medical Electricity* (Bologna: CIS, Dipartimento di Filosofia, 2001); James Delbourgo, *A Most Amazing Scene of Wonders: Electricity and Enlightenment in Early America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); Paola Bertucci, “Therapeutic Attractions: Early Applications of Electricity to the Art of Healing,” in Harry A. Whitaker, C. U. M. Smith, Stanley Finger, eds., *Brain, Mind and Medicine: Essays in Eighteenth-Century Neuroscience* (Boston: Springer, 2007); Marta Cavazza, “Early Work on Electricity and Medicine in the Bologna Academy of Sciences: Laura Bassi and Giuseppe Veratti,” *Electricity and Life: Episodes in the History of Hybrid Objects*, edited by Giuliano Pancaldi (Bologna: CIS, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Università di Bologna, 2011), 7-34.

of various diseases, in particular palsies and ‘nerve disorders.’”<sup>152</sup> Across eighteenth-century Europe, research into electrotherapy began, affected by “local networks” and “ambient sociopolitical conditions,” which could taint its development as the work of dilettantes and con artists, or scientists and physicians.<sup>153</sup> In Italy, electric machines had served for aristocratic amusement before they were investigated for their potential healing properties. At the University of Bologna, researcher Gianfrancesco Pivati (1689-1764) published a pamphlet proclaiming his that he had discovered a way to treat physical maladies with electrified tubes, and later Giuseppe Veratti (1707-1793) and Laura Bassi (1711-1778) continued such investigations prior to the rise of Luigi Galvani (1737-1798).<sup>154</sup> Beyond its healing properties, medical electricity was used as evidence for the “power of life,” life force, or vital power that animated living beings.<sup>155</sup>

In the mid nineteenth century, research into medical electricity developed in relation to advances in positivist medicine and the invention and commercialization of electric machines and technologies in what has been characterized as a “general renewal” of interest in the therapeutic possibilities of electricity, popularized through the publications of Guillaume Duchenne (1806-1875), Daniel Tuke (1827-1895), Emil Du Bois-Reymond (1818-1896), and others.<sup>156</sup> Electrotherapeutic machines and technology were part of a general increase in the demand for electrically powered devices, which spread quickly throughout hospitals and medical

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<sup>152</sup> Paola Bertucci, “Therapeutic Attractions: Early Applications of Electricity to the Art of Healing,” 271.

<sup>153</sup> “Science Becomes Electric: Dutch Interaction with the Electrical machine during the Eighteenth Century,” 700-702.

<sup>154</sup> See “Therapeutic Attractions: Early Applications of Electricity to the Art of Healing” and “Early Work on Electricity and Medicine in the Bologna Academy of Sciences: Laura Bassi and Giuseppe Veratti.”

<sup>155</sup> See Axel Helmstädter, “Recharging the Battery of Life—Electricity in the Theory and Practice of Drug Treatment,” *Pharmacy in History*, vol. 43, no. 4 (2001), 134-143.

<sup>156</sup> A. W. Beveridge and E. B. Renvoize, “Electricity: A History of its Use in the Treatment of Mental Illness in Britain during the Second Half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century,” *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 153 (1988), 157-162.

treatment, as well as through home devices or sold as popular remedies.<sup>157</sup> Electrotherapy offering cures to a vast range of illnesses, often blurring the line between institutionally-ordained medical devices and those otherwise. Toted as a therapeutic technique based on the most recent scientific advances lent credibility and prestige to the treatment of electrotherapy; at the same time, the spread of the popular version of electrical treatment diminished its scientific capital.<sup>158</sup>

Nineteenth-century electrotherapy also became an important treatment in the fields of psychiatry and neurology. In many ways, electrotherapy was comparable to a treatment like hydrotherapy.<sup>159</sup> While hydrotherapy had long since been used in western civilization, physicians of the nineteenth century strove to make hydrotherapy “scientific,” studying and specifying the way specific forms of the treatment could be applied to a wide range of maladies.<sup>160</sup> Like hydrotherapy, electrotherapy would also be extensively used in modern psychiatric treatment; both were used extensively in the hospital of Salpêtrière by Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893).<sup>161</sup> In psychiatry, electrotherapy was often used in cases of paralysis,

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<sup>157</sup> See *Frankenstein's Children*, 231. See also Lisa Rosner, “The Professional Context of Electrotherapeutics,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 1 (1988), 64-82; Lori Loeb, “Consumerism and Commercial Electrotherapy: The Medical Battery Company in Nineteenth-Century London,” *Journal of Victorian Culture*, vol. 4, no. 2 (1999), 252-275.

<sup>158</sup> See John E. Senior, *Rationalising Electrotherapy in Neurology, 1860-1920* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Oxford, 1994).

<sup>159</sup> See Douglas C. Lewis, “Hydrotherapy,” *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Body-Mind Disciplines*, edited by Nancy Allison (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1999), 99-102.

<sup>160</sup> See John Harvey Kellogg, *Rational Hydrotherapy. A Manual of the Physiological and Therapeutic Effects of Hydratic Procedures, and the Technique of Their Application in the Treatment of Disease* (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis, 1904); Simon Baruch, *The Principles and Practice of Hydrotherapy. A Guide to the Application of Water in Disease for Students and Practitioners of Medicine* (New York: William Wood and Company, 1899); Giuseppe Ria, *La Idroterapia del Medico Moderno Studiata Secondo la Fisiologia e la Clinica* (Naples: Stabilimento Tipografico dell’Ancora, 1874).

<sup>161</sup> See Christopher G. Goetz, Michel Bonduelle, Toby Gelfand, “Spas, Hydrotherapy, Electrotherapy and Other Adjuncts,” *Charcot: Constructing Neurology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

hysteria, and it became explicitly linked with nervousness.<sup>162</sup> Electrotherapy would continue to be used well into the twentieth century; during the interwar period, it fell out of popularity, which one scholar related to Freud's rejection of the treatment in favor of the cathartic cure.<sup>163</sup>

In Italy, physicians began publishing their own manuals and texts on electrotherapy, the first of which was Plinio Schivardi's (1833-1908) *Manuale Teorico Pratico di Elettroterapia* (*Theoretical and practical Manual of Electrotherapy*) in 1864.<sup>164</sup> The guidebook was technical, focusing on the equipment and methods for using electricity. Italian physicians could turn to other research that advanced the study of electricity in the body, including the work of Carlo Matteucci (1811-1868), Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne (1806-1875), Claude Bernard (1813-1878).<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, it appears that electrotherapy had not become part of medical or psychiatric education when Morselli studied in the 1870s. In 1875, Morselli published an article detailing all of the traditional and most recent psychiatric treatments, explaining their history and applications and evaluating their effectiveness. However, electrotherapy was not included in this list.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Edward Shorter, *Psicosomatica. Storia dei Sintomi e delle Patologie dall'Ottocento a Oggi*, 125; Sander Gilman, "Electrotherapy," *History of Psychiatry*, 19, no. 3 (2008), 339-357; See in particular Andreas Killen, "Electrotherapy and the Nervous Self in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 48-80.

<sup>163</sup> See Sander L. Gilman, "Sigmund Freud, Electrotherapy, and the Voice," in *Diseases and Diagnoses: The Second Age of Biology*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2010), 159-196.

<sup>164</sup> Christian Carletti, "From Body to Machine: Electro-Medicine in mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century Italy," in *Electricity and Life: Episodes in the History of Hybrid Objects*, edited by Giuliano Pancaldi (Bologna: CIS, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Università di Bologna, 2011), 49-63.

<sup>165</sup> See Carlo Matteucci, *Trattato dei Fenomeni Elettrofisiologici degli Animali* (Paris, 1844); *Corso di Elettrofisiologia* (1857); Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, *De l'Électrisation Localisée et de son Application à la Physiologie, à la Pathologie et à la Thérapeutique* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière, 1855).

Claude Bernard, *Leçons sur la Physiologie et la Pathologie du Système Nerveux* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et Fils, 1858);

<sup>166</sup> See Enrico Morselli, "Progressi della Terapeutica nel 1875," *Rivista Critica Retrospettiva dallo Sperimentale* (Florence: Tipografia Cenniniana, 1876).

Although Morselli never wrote a treatise or manual discussing electrotherapy at length, the reviews he wrote of new therapeutic techniques, asylum and sanatorium records, educational materials as well as his library holdings attest to his enduring interest and employment of electrotherapy in his clinical practice. Several reviews that Morselli published on a number of therapeutic treatments, including vibratory therapy, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, and radiotherapy reflect the processes through which Morselli evaluated and understood therapeutic techniques. Additionally, asylum and sanatorium records reflect Morselli's attest to Morselli's approval of electrotherapeutic techniques and his increased usage of those techniques over time. However, these sources offer limited information. From Morselli's private sanatorium after he moved to Genoa, the clinical files reveal Morselli's extensive use of electrotherapy.

Morselli read extensively on topics such as energy and electricity, both as they pertained to physics and more specifically, work on electrophysiology and electrotherapy.<sup>167</sup> In his own

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<sup>167</sup> For example, a copy of H. Helmholtz's *Mémoire sur la Conservation de la Force: Precede d'un Exposé Élémentaire de la Transformation des Forces Naturelles* (Paris: V. Masson et fils, 1869), can be found in Morselli's personal library. Other books from Morselli's personal library relevant to this chapter are: Duchenne De Boulogne, *De l'Électrisation Localisée et de son Application à la Pathologie et la Thérapeutique: par Courants Induits et par Courants Galvaniques Interrompus et Continus* (Paris: Chez J.-B. Baillière, 1855); S. Balfour, *L'energia, sue Forme, sue Leggi, sua Conservazione* (Milan, 1875); Reginald Henry Pierson, *Compendium der Electrotherapie* (Leipzig: Abel, 1882); Paul Vigouroux, *De l'électricité Statique et de son Emploi en Thérapeutique* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1882); Rinaldo Ferrini, et al., *La Luminosità Elettrica dei Gas e Materiale Radiante* (Milan: Fratelli Dumolard, 1882); Godefroy Bardet, *Traité Élémentaire et Pratique d'Électricité Médicale* (Paris: O. Doin, 1884); Pietro Pogliaghi, *La Trasmissione Elettrica dell'Energia* (Milan: Fratelli Dumolard, 1884); Carl Neumann, *Wegweiser zur praktischen Verwertung der Elektrizität als Heilkraft* (Leipzig: Arnoldische Buchhandlung, 1886); Theodor Stein, *Lehrbuch der allgemeinen Elektrisation des menschlichen Körpers* (Halle: W. Knapp, 1886); Emile Ferrière, *La Matière et l'Énergie* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1887); Max Th. Edelman, *Electrotechnik für Ärzte* (Munich: Fr. Bassermann, 1890); Domenico D'Arman, *La Conducibilità Elettrica nel Corpo Umano* (Venice: Stab. Tip. Lit. Dell'emporio, 1894); Henri Bordier, *De la Sensibilité Électrique de la Peau: Recherches Expérimentales sur les Conditions Physiques de son Excitation et de son Exploration* (Paris: Baillière, 1897); Arsène Joseph Despau, *Genèse de la Matière et de l'Énergie. Formation et fin d'un Monde* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1900); Arsène Despau, *Causes des Énergies Attractives: Magnétisme, Électricité, Gravitation* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1902); Louise G. Robinovitch, *Sommeil Électrique, Inhibition des Mouvements Volontaires et de la Sensibilité, par des Courants Électriques de Basse Tension et à Interruptions Modérément Fréquentes; Épilepsie Électrique et Électrocution* (Nantes: Dugas, 1906); Felice Marco, *L'elettricità Svelata. Contributo all'Interpretazione degli Enigmi della Fisica Mediante l'Ipotesi degli Elettroni Vorticosi* (Turin: G. B. Paravia, 1907); Roberto D'Aragona, *Tutto è Energia (Moderna) Teoria degli Elettroni* (Piacenza: Società editrice libraria pontremolese, 1908); Abel Rey, *L'énergétique et la Mécanisme au Point de vue des Conditions de la Connaissance* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1908); W. Ostwald, *L'energie. Traduit de l'Allemand, per E. Philippi* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1910); Serge Voronoff, *Vivre: Étude des Moyens de Relever l'Énergie Vitale et de Prolonger la Vie* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1920); von Ziemssen, *Handbuch der Elektrotherapie* (Leipzig: Vogel, 1880-1884), reprinted as *Elettroterapia* (Naples, s.d.).

understanding of electrotherapy, Morselli drew heavily on the work of Duchenne de Boulogne, Hugo von Ziemssen (1829-1902), and Emil du Bois-Reymond (1818-1896), all of whom participated in the advancement of electrophysiology and demonstrating electrical conduction in the human form. Most often, Morselli referred to the work of du Bois-Reymond, who not only demonstrated the conductivity of nerves and muscle tissue but showed, as one contemporary put it, that “all muscle and nerve activity is of a purely electrical nature, and that the muscles and nerves were constantly in the condition of a closed electrical chain.”<sup>168</sup> Under the tutelage of Johannes Müller, du Bois-Reymond began his research into animal electricity by reading the work of Carlo Matteucci, “On the Electrical Phenomena of Animals,” who first argued that electricity could not only be conducted through the biological form, as had been demonstrated by Galvani, but was inherent to the living form and could be produced by it.<sup>169</sup> Du Bois-Reymond was said to have improved upon the observations of Matteucci in large part due to his improved technologies, in order to more exactly determine the electric activity within a human being, but furthermore, to argue that living tissue was made up of electric molecules that constituted the behavior of that tissue.<sup>170</sup>

In Morselli’s own research, he agreed with the finding of du Bois-Reymond and others that electricity was an active force within the body, and the effects of electricity on the body

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<sup>168</sup> Berger. Quoted in *Berlin Electropolis*, 67; for a detailed study on Emil du Bois-Reymond, see Gabriel Finkelstein, *Emil du Bois-Reymond: Neuroscience, Self, and society in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

<sup>169</sup> See Mortiz Schiff, “Carlo Matteucci: His Merits in Physiological and Medical Physics,” *The Lancet* (July 22, 1876); and Giuseppe Moruzzi, “The Electrophysiological Work of Carlo Matteucci,” *Brain Research Bulletin*, vol. 40, no. 2, 69-91; Marco Piccolino, “Carlo Matteucci (1811-1868), the “frogs pile”, and the Risorgimento of Electrophysiology,” *Cortex*, vol. 48, issue 6 (June 2012), 645-646.

<sup>170</sup> See “Emil du Bois-Reymond,” *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, vol. 8 (1911). For du Bois-Reymond’s technical improvements to research apparatus, see Gabriel Finkelstein, “M. du Bois-Reymond Goes to Paris,” *The British Journal for the History of Science*, vol. 36, no. 3 (September 2003), 261-300.

could be used in diagnosis (figure 4). In *Manuale di Semeiotica delle Malattie Mentali: Guida alla Diagnosi della Pazzia per i Medici, i Medici-Legisti e gli Studenti* (1894-1898). He wrote,

Electric sensitivity permits us to determine the level of excitability of sensitive nerves, such as the electric contractility of the motor nerves: this consists in sensations of diverse natures, depending on the form of materials and stimulated organs – therefore in the skin, muscles, sensorial apparatuses, nerves, and bowels, the subjective effect of electric stimuli is reduced to the reawakening of their sensations and specific impressions with the additional element of “pain.”<sup>171</sup>

Here Morselli describes the objective reactions of the body but his approach is not materialist, giving credit to the “subjective” effects and including a chart measuring pain according to the body part stimulated and in what way. These objective and subjective reactions to electric stimulation of the nerves and muscles could in turn be correlated to mental illnesses and different kinds of electric charges could be used in psychiatric diagnosis.<sup>172</sup> Nevertheless these methods were far from perfect; Morselli demanded that further evidence be collected on psychiatric patients’ abnormal reactions to electric stimulus.

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<sup>171</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Manuale di Semeiotica delle Malattie Mentali: Guida alla Diagnosi della Pazzia per i Medici, i Medici-Legisti e gli Studenti. Volume 1. Generalità. Esame Anamnestico, Antropologico e Fisiologico degli Alienati* (Milan: F. Vallardi, 1894-1898), 372-373.

<sup>172</sup> *Manuale di Semeiotica*, vol. 1, 225.

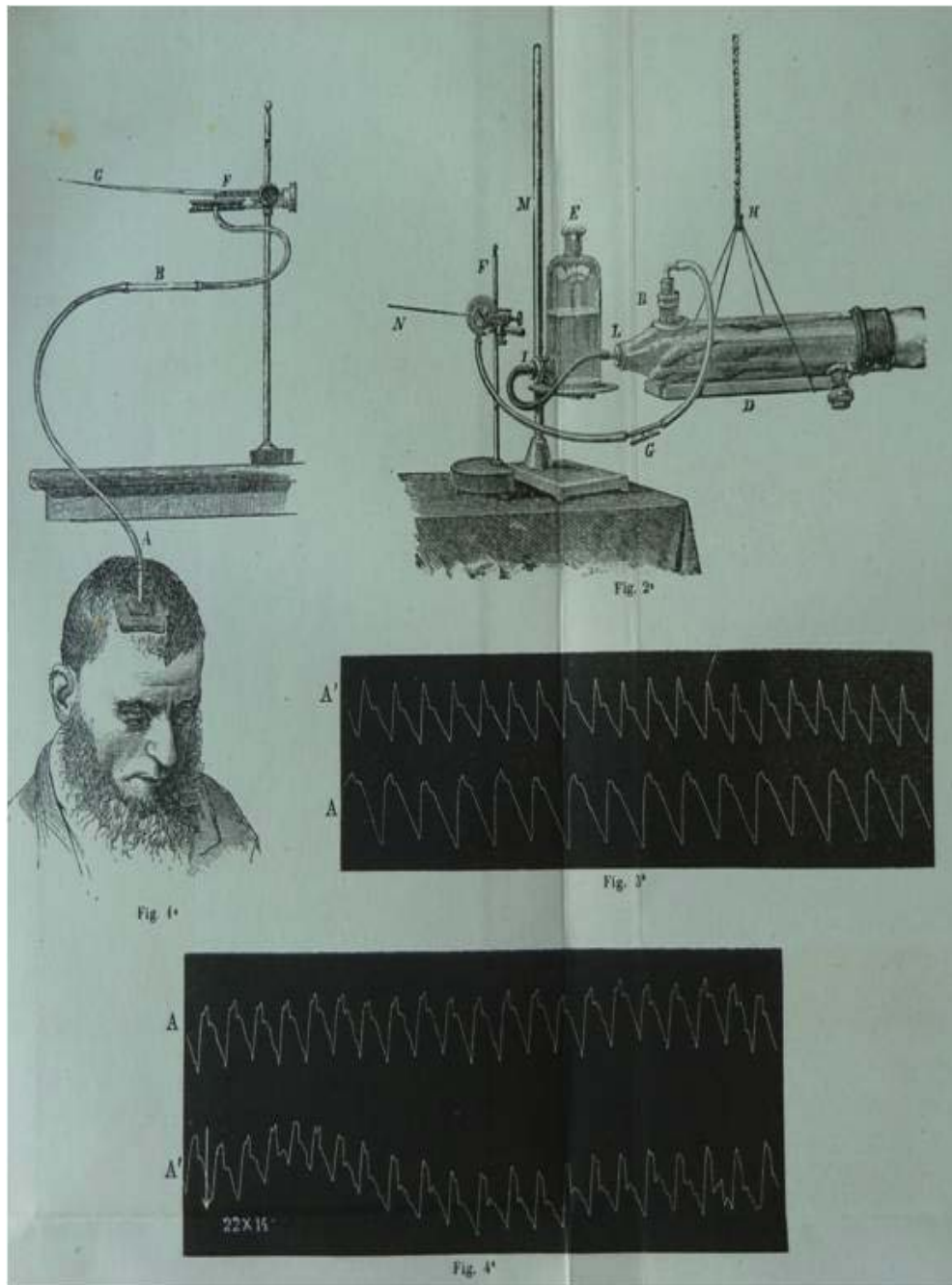


Figure 4. Example of experiment in electrodiagnostics performed with Gabriele Buccola

Morselli's use of electrodiagnosis and electrotherapy also relied on the research of his peers, and his close working relationship with Gabriele Buccola (1854-1885), who experimented with the role of energy in the body under the tutelage of Morselli. Before he was hired at the

Turin insane asylum by Morselli, Buccola had studied with Morselli's peer and colleague Augusto Tamburini (1848-1919).<sup>173</sup> A pioneer of Italian psychopathology, Buccola's experimental research focused on the neurological transmission and the relation of sensation to thought. In one major study, *La Legge del Tempo nei Fenomeni del Pensiero (The Law of Time in the Phenomena of Thought)*, he examined the timing between physiological reactions and mental phenomena.<sup>174</sup> He was also interested in how the energy of certain cell groups vibrated in order to explain mental illness and the use of galvanic stimulation of the auditory system to try to diagnose mental illness.<sup>175</sup> He wrote: "The battle for life in mental forms is a psychological law, and they survive for the continual conflict that is provided with much greater energy."<sup>176</sup> Buccola's greater technical expertise in designing experiments and calculating results made him essential to Morselli's bioelectric research. For instance, when Morselli chose to evaluate the new vibratory methods of Charcot, Buccola set up and carried out the experiments with patients. While Buccola oversaw the hands-on aspects of experimentation, Morselli steered their conceptual course. Although Buccola published a few of his own studies, Morselli wrote and published the summaries and conclusions about their joint work.<sup>177</sup> Their joint resignation in

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<sup>173</sup> Silvia Degni, "Between Phrén and Psyché: Gabriele Buccola and his Contribution to the Birth of Experimental Psychology in Italy," *Physis Rivista Internazionale di Storia della Scienza*, 43, nos. 1-2 (2006), 407-424; Silvia Degni, Renato Foschi, and Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, "Contexts and Experimentalism in the Psychology of Gabriele Buccola (1875-1885)," *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 43, no. 2 (Spring 2007), 177-195. See also Silvia Degni, *All'origine della Psicologia Scientifica Italiana: Gabriele Buccola tra Filosofia Postivista e Tradizione Psichiatrica* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2013).

<sup>174</sup> Gabriele Buccola, *La Legge del Tempo nei Fenomeni del Pensiero: Saggio di Psicologia Sperimentale* (Milan: Fratelli Dumolard, 1883).

<sup>175</sup> Gabriele Buccola, "La Reazione Elettrica dell'Acustico negli Alienati, Ricerche di Semeiotica Psichiatrica," *Rivista di Freniatria* (1885), 13.

<sup>176</sup> Enrico Morselli and G. Seppilli, *Gabriele Buccola. Commemorazione* (originally printed in *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, anno IV, vol. IV, fasc. 4 (maggio 1885) (Milan and Turin: Fratelli Dumolard, 1885), 10-11.

<sup>177</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *Sulle Vibrazioni Meccaniche nella Cura delle Malattie Nervose e Mentali* (Feltre: Panfili Castaldi, 1892), 8-9; Enrico Morselli, *Sulle Vibrazioni Meccaniche nella Cura delle Malattie Nervose e Mentali, nota Preliminare. Estratto dalla Gazzetta degli Ospitali*, n. 102, anno 1892 (Milan: Francesco Vallardo, 1892);

response to Morselli's forced retirement from the Turin Insane Asylum reflects the close relationship between the two scientists.

Although exact dates are unclear, Morselli began experimenting electric apparatuses in the 1880s when he moved to Turin, where he served as a professor at the university and medical director of Turin's Royal Insane Asylum, one of Italy's largest and comparatively better funded asylums. Prior to Italian unification, Turin had become an intellectual and scientific hotbed, as it offered intellectual freedoms and closer contacts with the rest of Europe unavailable throughout much of Italy after the Restoration, and this intellectual and scientific heritage endured. He worked with other leading scientists such as Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), Camillo Golgi (1843-1926), and Giulio Bizzozero (1846-1901), and physiologist Angelo Mosso (1846-1910). It was in those years that Morselli increasingly turned to neurology, and electrodiagnosis and electrotherapy. However, at this stage his experimentation was still limited. The meeting minutes of asylum administration record several requests that Morselli made to purchase new electrotherapeutic equipment.<sup>178</sup> Most of these requests, however, were denied for budgetary reasons. The clinical files from Morselli's tenure at the Turin asylum offer little insight regarding treatment. The clinical papers include patient histories, a diagnosis, details about how the patient came to the asylum and their symptoms, but they rarely included information about treatment. This information can only be garnered from handbooks and psychiatric guides, which usually recommended ergotherapy, hydrotherapy, tonics, or diets.

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Enrico Morselli, *Ancora sulla Terapia Vibratoria nelle Malattie Nervose. Seconda Nota del Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Florence: E. Bruscoli, 1892); *Sulla Terapia Vibratoria nelle Malattie Nervose e Mentali. Note Critiche* (Genoa: Stab. Tip. Colombo, 1893), 9.

<sup>178</sup> See "Elenco degli Strumenti Acquistati a Spese del Consorzio Universitario per l'Istituto Psichiatrico" in "Seduta delli 13 Giugno 1883," 162; "Strumenti per la Clinica" in "Seduta delli 2 gennaio 1884," 95; "Tavolo Elettrico Provvisto," in "Seduta del 31 Marzo 1886," 185.

After his transfer to the Genoa, Morselli's use of electrotherapy increased dramatically. There Morselli served as a professor and head of the university's neurological clinic, where he taught courses specifically on electrotherapy. The extant records from the academic school year of 1894-1895 show that Morselli disseminated the treatment to a large number of students. That year, he taught a course in Neuropathology and Electrotherapy three times a week and for a total of 84 classes, with 65 students enrolled in the course.<sup>179</sup> Morselli also discussed bioelectricity and its applications in the two-volume psychiatric manual he dedicated to his students, *Manuale di semeiotica delle malattie mentali: guida alla diagnosi della pazzia per i medici, i medici-legisti e gli studenti* (1894-1898). At his private clinic Villa Maria Pia, Morselli used electrotherapy extensively. Together with hydrotherapy, the vast majority of patients were treated with these cures, whether they suffered from melancholy, hysteria, sclerosis, paralysis, dementia, schizophrenia, or other disorders. In the majority of cases, Morselli treated his patients with these standard treatments and also purgatives, sedatives, or in some cases, specific dietary prescriptions, chemical cures, etc. Only in a few cases would certain specifications regarding electrotherapy be given, for example, the faradization of the cranium, or galvanization.

Despite the credence Morselli lent to researchers of electrophysiology and his confidence in electrodiagnosis, and his own employment of electrotherapy and hydrotherapy, Morselli's actual understanding in the effectiveness of cures that could alter the flow of energy or biorhythms of the body was somewhat skeptical. Late-nineteenth-century psychiatrists such as Morselli had a new and advanced technology at their disposal that offered the most advanced or modern possibilities for treatment, and at the same time, the question of how to prove that

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<sup>179</sup> Regia Università di Genova. Libera Docenza. Anno Scolastico 1894-95. *Specchio dell'Insegnamento Dato dai Liberi Docenti nell'Anno Scolastico 1894-95 nella R. Università di Genova e delle Retribuzioni ad Essi Spettanti*. Archivio di Stato di Genova. 2157 [2244] (1814-1895). Carte Diverse: a. Documenti relativi al pagamento di stipendi e pensionari al personale docente e non docente dell'Università.

effectiveness of that technology remained open. At the end of the nineteenth century, Morselli evaluated hydrotherapy, vibratory therapy, and electrotherapy, all which he found to have skeptical results. Nevertheless, Morselli directly encouraged electrotherapeutic research among his readership, for instance when he encouraged hydrotherapists to adapt the “especially beneficial methods called “physical” in which one uses other forms of fundamental cosmic energy, such as electricity.”<sup>180</sup>

Morselli admitted that treating mental illness through energy-based therapies was difficult. Morselli reminds his readers that “the choice of electric apparatuses for the alienist is not as grave as it is for the electrotherapist: even without possessing such big apparatus...one can study electro-muscular phenomena with more simple apparatuses.”<sup>181</sup> For example, he reviewed Charcot’s vibratory therapeutic techniques that were being popularized at the time, as well as hydroelectric baths.<sup>182</sup> In such articles, Morselli partly condoned these new treatments while heavily critiquing them. Although he generally recommended electric and vibratory treatments as an effective treatment for epileptic patients, they were difficult to apply to other psychological or neurological disorders. Even the discovery of radiation offered simply another alternative form of energy with questionable applications. Morselli wrote,

Radioactivity, for its part, will constitute only another chapter in the treatise on the “forms of energy,” and will comfortably put itself in agreement with heat, light,

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<sup>180</sup> “L’idroterapia Moderna e i suoi Intenti,” 9-10.

<sup>181</sup> *Manuale di Semeiotica*, vol. 1, 229.

<sup>182</sup> In light of developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is noteworthy that in addition to evaluating electrotherapy, Morselli also evaluated attempts at brain surgery to change a person’s mental state. See “La Cura Chirurgica dell’Idiotismo,” *Gazzetta degli Ospitali* (August 1893). *Memorie Scientifiche*, vol. 9. Biblioteca San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

electricity, magnetism. Also these forms of energy, when discovered (scientifically) by man, were no less miraculous, and to their times not less revolutionary for knowledge.<sup>183</sup>

Morselli's extensive experimentation with heat in the form of hydrotherapy, and with electricity in the form of electrotherapy, and other similar cures demonstrated that neurological pulses could be manipulated by electric stimuli and that the nervous system transferred messages to the mind. However, the energy that operated within the body had not yet been mastered. Overall, Morselli avoided the blanket endorsement of any treatment. While encouraging research and sometimes recommending a treatment for a particular illness, Morselli also issued strong warnings against its misuse and fanatical—rather than analytical—approval.

In the absence of a neurological or physiological proof for the effectiveness of cures such as electrotherapy, Morselli explained their therapeutic possibilities through the power of suggestion. In this way, Morselli joined a small number of researchers who objected to the argument that such cures affected energy flows or blockages within the body. Morselli referenced neurologist Paul Julius Möbius (1853-1907), who argued that electrotherapy's effectiveness was based on the power of suggestion. By "suggestion," he indicated that the treatment's therapeutic effects were caused by the "imagination," in other words, "through mental processes, albeit not consciously."<sup>184</sup> Electrotherapeutic cures, therefore, had more in common with hypnosis. In the case of the hydroelectric bath, Morselli compared the effects of galvanic and faradic electric currents and the monopolar and bipolar approaches, and offered his judgment about which worked better for neurological reasons versus the power of suggestion. He concluded by cautioning that their curative effects could be the result of the power of

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<sup>183</sup> Enrico Morselli. *Il Radio e le Tendenze Trascendentali. Estratto dal Fascicolo 1 della Rivista Ligure* (Genoa: Tip. Fratelli Carlini, 1904), 3.

<sup>184</sup> Holger Steinberg, "Electrotherapeutic Disputes: the 'Frankfurt Council' of 1891," *Brain: A Journal of Neurology*, vol. 134 (2011), 1238.

“suggestion,” and that “more than any other curative method [, it is] advantageous to the illusions of both doctor and patient.”<sup>185</sup> While Morselli saw “suggestion” as a viable curative technique, it also meant that in the majority of cases, the new hydroelectric bath offered no advantage over the traditional bath.<sup>186</sup> Morselli had similar criticisms for Charcot’s vibratory method, and these critiques were strengthened by nationalist sentiment. Morselli compared Charcot’s technique with that of Italian physician Carlo Maggiorani (1800-1885), who devoted the later years of his career in part to the study of bioelectricity and whose experiments Morselli had witnessed over the course of several years (1877-1879).<sup>187</sup> Morselli argued that Maggiorani’s methods were more physiologically affective and based on electrotherapeutic findings. Charcot’s techniques, in contrast were only effective on the psychological level; Morselli categorized them as “psychotherapy,” not neurological therapy.<sup>188</sup>

While Morselli regarded “suggestion” as an acceptable treatment for patients if it had therapeutic effects, he also underscored the importance of distinguishing between suggestion and physiology. This differentiation was not only accurately to understand the causes behind a cure, but also to prevent the adulteration of science by the many mystical movements that threatened to appropriate the discoveries of modern science. Morselli claimed that “often times, hydrotherapy and electrotherapy are applied in illogical and inopportune ways; sometimes even hypnotic and sedatives are abused, and often without physiological information.”<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> “Sull’azione Fisiologica dei Bagni Idro-Elettrici Monopolari,” 26.

<sup>186</sup> “Sull’azione Fisiologica dei Bagni Idro-Elettrici Monopolari,” 25.

<sup>187</sup> *Sulle Vibrazioni Meccaniche... Nota Preliminare*, 5.

<sup>188</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Sulla Terapia Vibratoria...Note Critiche*, 9.

<sup>189</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Metodo Clinico nella Diagnosi Generale della Pazzia. I. Esame Anamnestico degli Alienati. Conferenza del Prof. Enrico Morselli (Marzo 1882). (Due Conferenze Estratte dal corso di Psicologia Patologica e Clinica Psichiatrica, Dato nella R. Università di Torino nel marzo-giugno 1992.” *Memorie Scientifiche*, vol. 5. Biblioteca Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa.

Proponents of occultism, transcendentalism, spiritism, and psychicism used discoveries such as X-rays and radiation to prove the existence of an invisible, spiritual world. Therefore, when Morselli reviewed Marie Curie's discoveries about radiation, he warned against their misappropriation as either a panacea based on suggestion or as proof that “*unknown forces*” exist, demonstrating a “transcendental *occult* world, a phenomena not only hyper-psychic, but hyper-physical, and in fact, extra-scientific!!”<sup>190</sup> This anti-spiritist concern would also percolate through another critique of the new vibratory methods.<sup>191</sup> For Morselli, non-critical reviews of modern energy cures also risked opening up psychiatry to scientific quackery.

Morselli's accepted electrotherapy as a viable treatment for the very reasons he critiqued a “pseudoscientific” cure such as electrotherapy. Nevertheless, Morselli was relatively fair in his consideration of the latter. Neither claiming it a formulaic elixir nor dismissing it as a nefarious nostrum, Morselli described *elettromiopia* as an “empirical curative system” which distinguished it from occult charlatanism and other medical frauds.<sup>192</sup> Mattei had clearly developed this system over time, absorbing popular knowledge of physiological findings, animal electricity, and the curative therapies of faradic and galvanic currents. The novelty of Mattei's invention was its fusion of Hahnemann's homeopathy with his dilettantish knowledge of electrotherapy. Morselli, however, judges electricity in this context as no more than a “verbal analogy.”<sup>193</sup> While Morselli lent no scientific credence to Mattei's distillation of vegetable electricity, he argued that Mattei's method was not without principle and reflected certain

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<sup>190</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Radio e le Tendenze Trascendentali,” Estratto dal Fascicolo 1 della *Rivista Ligure* (1904), 5.

<sup>191</sup> *Ancora sulla Terapia Vibratoria nelle Malattie Nervose*, 7.

<sup>192</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 9.

<sup>193</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 19.

intellectual talents. Mattei's misguided ideas were not in itself evidence for insanity. But despite its empiricism and internal logic, Mattei's system was still a pseudoscience.

Like electrotherapy, Morselli conceded that electrohomoeopathy still had therapeutic effects and these effects were the result of both practitioner and patient belief. The cure was not internationally renowned because of its "integral system of medicine" but rather "from the intensity of faith that he knew how to inspire in the crowds of people in all civilized countries."<sup>194</sup> If Hahnemann's motto was *similia similibus curantur*, Mattei's version might have been *omnia fide curantur*. According to Morselli, Mattei's "pure mysticism of a good Catholic" was easily molded to medical means, and he inspired the masses to have faith in his cure in the same way they would in religion. After all, "[t]o believe firmly in power is already power, for whoever is preparing to cure the body or soul of the sick."<sup>195</sup> While *elettromiopia*'s empiricism was built on faulty scientific knowledge, its actual therapeutic technique – that of belief – brought it closer to psychiatry than most physicians would dare to admit. By reason of faith alone, electro-homoeopathy "is in great part a chapter of Psychotherapy: and Mattei intuited and skillfully made use of it from the beginning."<sup>196</sup>

Paradoxically, this curing by belief made electrohomoeopathy comparable if not parallel to other "scientific" forms of electrotherapy discussed previously in this chapter. Its scientific tenets may have been faulty at best, but the other forms of electrotherapy Morselli evaluated and taught often fared no better under scrutiny. According to Morselli, the therapeutic benefits of electric baths, electric shock, and the likes could rarely prove to be physiological in basis. Besides a few cases such as with epileptic patients, electrotherapies proved no more effective

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<sup>194</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 17.

<sup>195</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 41.

<sup>196</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 40.

than their non-electric counterparts. Morselli argued that such treatments could either convince patients of their own healing or, alternatively, evoke the empathy and caring attention of family relatives. Even in the case of brain surgery, which bore a similarly troubled history to that of electrotherapy, Morselli saw its curative effects as social in nature.<sup>197</sup> In other words, the treatments that were designed to have a direct effect on the material of the human body were, if successful, basically psychological or social.

In the end, the Venturoli-Matteis were heirs to a simultaneously illegitimate medicine and legitimate therapy, one that pointed out the problems that pervaded both scientific and popular medicine. Morselli did not dismiss these positive results as placebo but instead explained them as psychological and social. Moreover, he argued that neither Mattei nor his followers were insane; their faith in *elettromiopia* was similar to other systems of belief such as religion, spiritism, occultism, and animal magnetism, a subject explored in the next chapter. In judging Mattei as insane by reason of his genius, psychiatrists were making the same kinds of methodological flaws as Mattei, who mistook vegetable mixtures for vegetable electricity capable of curing mankind, to which Morselli responded:

The impartial study of the history of medicine shows us that the appearance of empirical systems similar to that of Electro-homoeopathy is an inevitable logical effect of the imperfections and uncertainties of the biological sciences. One proclaims the absurdity of these systems: but when we judge the value of any one of these among the many theories that have dominated Medicine in the past, we need not leave ourselves to judge them by the narrow criteria of actual knowledge and doctrines, but rather maintain that prudent reserve or doubt that is indivisible from true knowledge.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> See “La Cura Chirurgica dell’Idiotismo.”

<sup>198</sup> *In Causa di Testamento*, 26.

### *3. Energy theory: ramifications in scientific philosophy*

Morselli's understanding of the mind also reflected the way broader notions of energy and debates about its relationship to form and spirit affected the philosophical bases for late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century psychiatry. While Morselli was only partially successful in addressing the role of electricity, heat, and vibrations in his clinical psychiatric treatment, the concept of energy became fundamental to his understanding of the human mind and his world view more generally. In the second half of the nineteenth century, monism offered an explanatory perspective to rival that of the church, which could extend the domain of scientific analysis to include subjects that had formerly been left apart. This general tendency as well as its specific movements and organizations had ramifications across the spectrum of human knowledge, including spiritual and cultural subjects, and it was particularly consequential for psychiatry. In his descriptions of the energies of the mind, Morselli adopted the monist philosophy of his Ernst Haeckel absorbed the language of modern physics, and carried over his own anticlerical position into the argument. From this scientific pastiche, Morselli shaped a position about the energy operated in the mind and society.

Monism is said to have achieved "a position of dominance" during the nineteenth century due to what has been referred to as the "religion" or "world view" popularized by Ernst Haeckel (1837-1919). Haeckel had claimed to have provided evidence for the proposition of Baruch Spinoza, which stated that "mind and matter, or thought and extension, were but two modes of a single substance." Through evolution, the natural sciences had gained a theory that "explained not only the multiplicity of biological life, but also developments in human consciousness and

civilization, and linked them altogether into a single meaningful totality.”<sup>199</sup> Monism offered a unifying and unbounded philosophy that could connect and relate the facets of human and natural existence through empirical scientific inquiry, as well as an alternative answer to what du Bois-Reymond identified as the “two widely-diffused errors with regard to the limits of natural science,” first the origins of movements (causation) and the origins of consciousness. Presuming a single principle or force behind all phenomena, monism held that “the whole is prior to its parts, and thus views the cosmos as fundamental, with metaphysical explanations dangling downward from the One.”<sup>200</sup> Basing the problem of consciousness in neurology and sensations, consciousness was also taken to develop out of atoms and cells, or substance.<sup>201</sup> Monism offered an alternative to Cartesian mind-body dualism and was of particular consequence to the disciplinary psychiatry, which defined itself through the treatment of mental maladies through medical means.<sup>202</sup>

Morselli borrowed much from Haeckel, and the two shared friendly relations. The latter had contributed to the *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* in the 1880s and had asked Morselli to review the eighth edition of his *Storia Naturale della Creazione* for an Italian audience.<sup>203</sup>

Additionally, Morselli edited and wrote the introduction to the Italian edition of *Die Welträtsel* in

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<sup>199</sup> Todd H. Weir, Weir, Todd H. “The Riddles of Monism: An Introductory Essay,” in *Monism: Science, Philosophy, Religion, and the History of a Worldview*, edited by Todd H. Weir, Palgrave Studies in Cultural and Intellectual History (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 2.

<sup>200</sup> Jonathan Schaffer, “Monism: The Priority of the Whole,” *Philosophical Review*, vol. 119, no. 1 (2010), 31-32.

<sup>201</sup> See David H. DeGroot, *Haeckel's Theory of the Unity of Nature: A Monograph in the History of Philosophy* (Boston: B.R. Grüner Publishing, 1982); Niles R. Holt, “Ernst Haeckel's Monistic Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 32, no. 2 (April-June, 1971), 273.

<sup>202</sup> This has resurfaced as a question of interest in psychiatry. See: Kenneth S. Kendler, “Toward a Philosophical Structure for Psychiatry,” *American Journal of Psychiatry*, vol., 162, no. 3 (2005), 433-440; Niall McLaren, “Monist Models of Mind and Biological Psychiatry,” *Ethical Human Psychology and Psychiatry*, vol. 12, no. 2 (July 2010), 122-133.

<sup>203</sup> Enrico Morselli. *La Storia Naturale della Creazione secondo Ernesto Haeckel*, Estratto dalla *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Serie 2, Anno IX, vol. IX, luglio 1890 (Turin: Tip. L. Roux e C., 1890).

1904, translated as *I Problemi dell'Universo*.<sup>204</sup> *Die Welträtsel*, or *Riddle of the Universe* was a full expose on his monist philosophy, carefully tracing the evolution of the soul and consciousness back to substance, and arguing for the unity of nature and common source for or force behind all phenomena. Haeckel's *The Riddle of the Universe* was also seen to be the manifesto of a "modern ecclesiastic" of science in the "conflict of science and religion" that had become increasingly tense in the late nineteenth century.<sup>205</sup> In it, scientific rationality and the discoveries of the modern sciences offered an explanation for the human consciousness or spirit that challenged those of religion. In Germany, the result was the *Kulturkampf* in which Bismarck's civil government introduced secular policies in an effort to diminish the power of the Catholic Church.<sup>206</sup>

Like Haeckel, Morselli also argued strongly for a monistic understanding of science and natural phenomena. Morselli believed that dualism "reflected...the distance maintained with farsighted artifice between philosophy on one side and the natural sciences on the other...claiming that the two are streets upon which Italian thought moves, parallel and in opposition, never meeting..."<sup>207</sup> Dualism forced strict divisions between force or material, spirit or matter, the mechanical or dynamic.<sup>208</sup> Through evolutionary theory, monists could combine those two roads into one. Evolution "as a general theory of the cosmos or as a method for

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<sup>204</sup> Ernesto Haeckel, *I Problemi dell'Universo. Prima Traduzione Italiana Autorizzata dall'Autore del Dott. Amedeo Herlitzka con una Introduzione sulla Filosofia Monistica in Italia e Aggiunte del Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1904), xii.

<sup>205</sup> Joel McCabe, "Preface," in Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Joel McCabe (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1900), xii.

<sup>206</sup> See A. J. Lustig, "Erich Wasmann, Ernst Haeckel, and the Limits of Science," *Theory in Biosciences*, 121, issue 3 (2002), 253; Michael B. Gross, *The War Against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

<sup>207</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 11.

<sup>208</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 28.

philosophizing” was “not restricted in its applications to the origins and development of living forms.”<sup>209</sup> Rather, it could connect the natural sciences to those moral or spiritual.<sup>210</sup> For Morselli, however, this evolutionary monism was not to be teleological, which he believed distorted the natural sciences by imposing an anthropomorphic interpretation on it. Instead, it was to emphasize the mechanisms behind such changes, which he believed proved the logic of monism.<sup>211</sup> The mechanism to which he referred and which he discussed earlier in the text, was most likely “energy.”

Like Haeckel, Morselli’s embracement of monism was part and parcel of his religious and political stance against the Catholic Church and a rejection of its explanation for the human soul. Like Germany, Italy also had its culture wars in which anti-Catholics campaigned against both the temporal and spiritual authority of Pope Pius IX.<sup>212</sup> Risorgimento ideals combined with longstanding anticlerical traditions.<sup>213</sup> For Morselli, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) represented the unique ties of monism to the Italian peninsula, and his promotion of Bruno as one of the forefathers of monism was part of broader nationalist movement to uphold scientific enemies of the Catholic Church as modern Italy’s new cultural heritage.<sup>214</sup> Morselli argued that the history of philosophy and scientific discoveries all led toward a monistic understanding of the universe,

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<sup>209</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 4.

<sup>210</sup> Here Morselli follows the divisions of knowledge promoted by Wilhelm Wundt. In this discussion of monistic philosophy, Haeckel is conspicuously absent.

<sup>211</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 16.

<sup>212</sup> See Manuel Borutta, “Anti-Catholicism and the Culture War in Risorgimento Italy,” in *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy*, edited by Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 191-213.

<sup>213</sup> “Anti-Catholicism and the Culture War in Risorgimento Italy,” 198.

<sup>214</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *Giordano Bruno: Commemorazione Pronunciata nell’aula Magna del Collegio Romano: 26 febbraio 1888* (Turin, Naples: L. Roux, 1888). See also: David Kertzer, “Giordano Bruno’s Revenge,” *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes’ Secret Plot to Capture from the New Italian State* (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 258-271.

and among Pythagoras, Galileo, Spinoza, and Leibniz, Bruno was to be held in highest esteem. Morselli described Bruno's monism as based in "material as the true essence of things" and pictured Bruno as the intellectual predecessor to modern psychiatry. He described the importance of sensibility in Bruno's work, and "sensory power" was one manifestation of the universe's energy. He wrote,

For scientific and evolutionary monism, to which I am honored to ascribe myself, the question of the sensibility of primordial elements is altogether secondary... because it is evident that...we need to consider this most fundamental sensory power inherent to a unique and universal Reality manifesting itself to us in the form of Energy that continues in space and time.<sup>215</sup>

By giving precedence to Bruno, Morselli attempted claim the specifically Italian roots of modern monism and its ties to modern psychiatry.

While Morselli described *The Riddle of the Universe* as "the most courageous, most complete and lucid synthesis of the monistic and evolutionary philosophy that has appeared in the last forty-five years," and always credited his use of certain ideas to Haeckel (ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny), Morselli attempted to distinguish his monist philosophy from that of Haeckel.<sup>216</sup> He agreed that Haeckel had championed scientific and evolutionary monism, but did not cite Haeckel as a source of his own monism, which he claimed predated Haeckel's international bestseller.<sup>217</sup> Morselli's monism did develop from early on his career. Though Morselli always explicitly desired to unite science and philosophy, his original stance was much more tentative. From the inaugural issue of the *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Morselli alluded

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<sup>215</sup> *Giordano Bruno*, 16.

<sup>216</sup> *I Problemi dell'Universo*, xi.

<sup>217</sup> *I Problemi dell'Universo*, xii.

to the need to synthesize and unify the sciences but he avoided the term monism or strongly pressing this agenda.<sup>218</sup> He would more clearly and vocally express these in later publications and blame the separation of science and philosophy on the unreasonable disciplinary prejudice and superstition, and scientists' fear of charlatanism.<sup>219</sup> For Morselli, monism was the philosophical tenet necessary to ground philosophy in science. The aim was to connect the entire cosmos to consciousness and knowledge. He wrote,

In this way our consciousness of the cosmos and its phenomena will develop itself out of a new corpus and a new force, but the one and the other will integrate themselves into a general system from our [consciousness], oh how insufficient! Cosmological notions, to give it one more try, are better yet a confirmation of the great and real unity that corresponds to the logical unity of our thought.<sup>220</sup>

Instead, Morselli claimed to be in the lineage of Bruno and referenced Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920), Roberto Ardigò (1828-1920), among others. For Morselli, the shortcomings of Haeckel's monism were psychological and sociological.<sup>221</sup> Psychologically, its principal deficiency rested in its inability to resolve "the principle problem of consciousness." Haeckel did not know "how to pass from physical-chemical processes of the nervous cells to the most elementary facts of pleasure and pain, discernment and memory." Sociologically, Morselli found the book to be an extension of political polemics and inattentive to real historical problems, abstract social questions, and phenomena of the collective psyche.<sup>222</sup> At the same

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<sup>218</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Introduzione," *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, vol. I, no. 1 (1881).

<sup>219</sup> See *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia and Evoluzionismo Monistico*.

<sup>220</sup> *Il Radio e le Tendenze Trascendentali*, 3.

<sup>221</sup> *I Problemi dell'Universo*, xxiii.

<sup>222</sup> *I Problemi dell'Universo*, x.

time, he claimed that Haeckel's "violent attacks" against the Church and the Pope were warranted and that the book was still to date, the best exposé on evolutionary monism.

Despite the objections Morselli claimed to have toward the place of consciousness in Haeckel's monism, both employed "energy" as the force through which the mind-body relationship could be understood. In *Die Welträtsel* (or *Riddle of the universe*), Haeckel heavily employed the language of energy, directly tying it to monism. For Haeckel, matter and energy were inextricably linked. He wrote "If we adhere to the monistic idea of substance...which takes it to be the simplest element of our whole world-system, we find *energy* and *matter* inseparably associated in it."<sup>223</sup> For Morselli as well, energy provided the monistic world view with a unifying principle that was dynamic, flexible, and transformational substance, which operated throughout animate and inanimate objects, and the human form and mind.<sup>224</sup> Both Haeckel and Morselli referred to the laws of modern physics. For Haeckel, they offered a way of bringing the "spiritual forces' of human nature" into the natural sciences, and he borrowed concepts of repulsion and attraction, and potential and kinetic energy.<sup>225</sup> Morselli most often referred to Julius Robert von Mayer (1814-1878), who he directly credited for his ideas about the conservation and transformation of energy, and Morselli wrote that "the general and only law that dominates even in vital phenomena is the *law of conservation of energy and the equivalence of all its forms.*"<sup>226</sup> Morselli took this as proof that energy was the grand unifying principle of the

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<sup>223</sup> Ernst Haeckel, *The Riddle of the Universe at the Close of the Nineteenth Century*, translated by Joseph McCabe (New York, London: Harper and Brothers, 1902), 198.

<sup>224</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 39.

<sup>225</sup> *The Riddle of the Universe*, 214, 231.

<sup>226</sup> Enrico Morselli, "La Psichiatria Moderna nei suoi Rapporti con le Altre Scienze. Prelezione al Corso di Clinica Psichiatrica dell' Anno 1890-91 Compilata su Appunti Stenografici Raccolti da Studenti." (Estratto dalla *Riforma Medica*, n. 103, Maggio 1891) (Naples: Tipografia della Riforma Medica, 1891).

universe, and therefore further proof of the inherent connectivity of the cosmos.<sup>227</sup> For Morselli, Mayer's contribution to theory of energy conservation was also metaphysical; though he grouped Mayer with Dalton and Bell, Crookes, Helmholtz, and Joule, he compared his theory to Pythagoras' number, Democritus and Epicurus' atom, Bruno and Leibniz's monad, Spinoza's substance, Fichte's idea and Spencer's reality.<sup>228</sup>

The basic function of monism—to bind together and connect matter and mind, substance and spirit, or body and thought—carried over to Morselli's understanding of the mind and consciousness.<sup>229</sup> Through Morselli's own experimentation and those of his peers, he could observe energy as mutable and transformative, and it extended to the mind. But while it directly tied man's mental and psychic experience to his corporal existence, Morselli attempted to account for what a more mechanistic understanding of physical stimulation precluded. While the mind could not exist outside of the body, bodily sensorial experience could not entirely explain the mind. But if thought functioned as energy, then conservation and transformation could substitute for a spiritual explanation of the elaborate workings of the human psyche. Morselli expounded on this idea at length,

One can place before the naturalistic concept, in fact, psychic facts which result from the activity of the nervous system that, in turn, result in the transformation of living forces, or *actual energy* of the force of tension or *potential energy* contained and accumulated in the nervous elements. Nevertheless, there remains an unresolved enigma for us, because

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<sup>227</sup> *L'evoluzionismo Monistico*, 8; *Il Darwinismo e l'Evoluzionismo*, 8; Enrico Morselli, *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia* (Milan, Turin: Fratelli Dumolard, 1887), 22. See Kenneth L. Caneva, *Robert Mayer and the Conservation of Energy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>228</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *L'evoluzionismo Monistico nella Conoscenza e nella Realtà* (Milan, Turin: Fratelli Dumolard, 1889), 8; Enrico Morselli, *Il Darwinismo e l'Evoluzionismo* (Milan: Dumolard, 1891), 15; *Giordano Bruno*, 40; *I Problemi dell'Universo*, xiv.

<sup>229</sup> *La Filosofia Monistica in Italia*, 30.

it lies beyond the limits of modern science, and it is: how does *sensation* originate from this movement of atoms, and how a given molecular modification – and no other – transforms into *consciousness*.<sup>230</sup>

Here Morselli used energy conservation to explain sentient thought, but the results of that energy transformation were manifold. In the same text Morselli elaborated on the dynamics of psychic force in terms of energy when he wrote,

It is true that the most elevated mental phenomena – sentiments, ideation, and volitional determination – lack the direct proof of these antecedents, and appear to be born out of a union with other [phenomena] unrelated to an organic foundation, and [have] a purely dynamic or functional genesis: but the transformation of psychic forces exists in the figurative sense, and the general and sole law that also dominates vital phenomena is the *law of conservation of energy and the equivalence of all its forms*.<sup>231</sup>

Energy not only provided a modern scientific basis for monistic philosophy, it could also explain consciousness itself. Differing from more physiological explanations, energy could account for invisible but provable forces that paralleled the workings of the mind.

What transformed into consciousness was thought, and thought could be explained as a form of energy. According to Morselli, the problem that monists of the past had faced was their inability to identify the substance that united the cosmos. They were caught up in an attempt to “reduce all forms of energy to the motor,” and subsequently, “to reduce *thought* to *movement*”: simple motion failed to explain the complexity of human thought.<sup>232</sup> However, the matter was also unclear to Morselli. At one point, he claimed that thought could not be compared to a force

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<sup>230</sup> Enrico Morselli, “La Psichiatria Moderna,” 13.

<sup>231</sup> Enrico Morselli, “La Psichiatria Moderna,” 12.

<sup>232</sup> “La Psichiatria Moderna,” 6.

like electricity because “the forces of physics are cyclical, in other words, they reproduce the same phenomena, while thought is not cyclical.”<sup>233</sup> At another point, he stated that “the superior Consciousness is perceptible whenever it reaches a spark which makes an invisible electric current burst when it meets a given resistance. Who would doubt that that spark is not obviously a force or form of Energy that passes silently through wire conductors?”<sup>234</sup> The flexibility of the parallel energy offered for human thought offered Morselli a variety of ways to illustrate his understanding of the mind.

Beyond this, energy also linked the internal individual human experience with social experience. While energy in the human body was difficult to manipulate, the conquest of inorganic energy could liberate mankind. Morselli found himself introducing a subject matter already debated in France and England. In an essay entitled “The future of human power over nature” (1881), Enrico Morselli asked “What, in the future, will be the natural forces that prepare man to be victorious in his battle against the nature that surrounds him, and that will render him ever more [nature’s] master?”<sup>235</sup> His answer was new forms of inorganic energy. Forces such as electricity, in particular, would drive human society’s development. This would hold true until mankind discovered how to harness the power of the sun or discovered other forms of energy yet unknown.

This conquest and utilization of inorganic energy was of moral and political significance. Solar power and electricity had the potential to liberate mankind from its physical enslavement. Technological and industrial progress had moral valence. Morselli wrote,

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<sup>233</sup> Cesare Baudi de Vesme, “Una conferenza del Morselli a Venezia,” *Rivista di Studi Psichici*, anno VI, n. 1 (gennaio-febbraio 1900), 57.

<sup>234</sup> Enrico Morselli, *La Psicanalisi: Studii ed Appunti Critici*, vol. 1 (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1926), 45.

<sup>235</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Rivista Sintetica: L’avvenire della Potenza Umana sulla Natura,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Anno Primo (Luglio 1881 – Giugno 1882), 317.

Future civilization will no longer have those seemingly free slaves that today we call working class and yesterday we called serfs. Only electricity is capable of giving us all this and even more: in this way we will be able to utilize all natural forces, and store, transport, and distribute them according to the scale of our needs.<sup>236</sup>

In another text, Morselli described future man's triumph as based on the solution of physical and technical problems through the mastery of of the "enormous energy of the tides and the waves, mechanical force and atmospheric motions, internal heat and other forces endogenous to the planet."<sup>237</sup> Energy offered a liberation that was not only physical but political; it would raze old class systems and render defunct antiquated social structures of domination.

Despite the potential development of human society through the exploitation of inorganic energy, Morselli still thought society reflected both man's unique mental power but also the limitations of human physiology. Morselli argued that the continual perfection of man's brain had led human civilization from stones and crude weapons to agriculture and animal domestication. Coal and gas would later become the primary drivers behind nineteenth-century European modernization and industrialization, and solar power and electricity would illuminate mankind's future. But while the human mind allowed for the mastery of inorganic energy forms, human physiology also limited the realms of its control. Morselli wrote,

The number of possible manifestations of cosmic energy is without a doubt infinite, but the number of those that we can know depends on the nature of the senses we possess; in

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<sup>236</sup> "L'avvenire della Potenza Umana sulla Natura," 321.

<sup>237</sup> Enrico Morselli, "L'umanità dell'Avvenire," "Lezione Trentesima Quarta: L'umanità dell'Avvenire," (Edizioni Trabant, 2008), 4. Reprinted from *Antropologia Generale: L'uomo secondo la Teoria dell'Evoluzione; Lezioni dettate nelle Università di Torino e di Genova* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1911).

this way, to become knowable, a manifestation of any energy whatsoever must be traced back to a form (heat, light, electricity, etc.) that is perceivable for us.<sup>238</sup>

In Kantian tone, Morselli argued that man's discoveries in energy were limited by its sensorial experience to what it could perceive and feel.

Because the human mastery over new sources of energy was a product of both the possibilities of the human mind as well as the limitations of the human body, it was also of philosophical and psychological importance. For Morselli, "Our limited consciousness of the world is none other than the consciousness of physical-chemical alterations produced in our organ by the forces that surround us," and psychology proved that forces as man perceives them are "only a pure illusion of our spirit." The human experience of energy resulted from a processing of unknowable natural forces.<sup>239</sup> But Morselli interprets this, at best, indirect knowing of energy as also having exponential possibilities. Potential energy sources reflected human potential, and he questioned whether "the future will not be far from the discovery of a new and until now unknown form of energy, from which humanity will be able to extract a source of motor force just as powerful if not superior to our imagination?"<sup>240</sup> Despite the overtly technological, social, and moral agenda of this brief article, Morselli concluded with an idealistic reassertion of the mind and its study, psychology, which he once called "none other than a chapter in biological Energetics."<sup>241</sup>

#### *4. Conclusion: Limitations, Cerletti, pain, and electrotherapy*

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<sup>238</sup> "L'avvenire della Potenza Umana sulla Natura," 324.

<sup>239</sup> "L'avvenire della Potenza Umana sulla Natura," 323-324.

<sup>240</sup> "L'avvenire della Potenza Umana sulla Natura," 323.

<sup>241</sup> *Sulla Terapia Vibratoria...Note Critiche*, 11.

The aims of this chapter have been to discuss the role of energy in clinical practice as part of Morselli's philosophical system, as an ideological concept, as the subject of an important legal case in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. From Galvani and Volta to Maggiorani and Mattei, Morselli proved himself to be well-informed on the materials, applications, and conceptual misappropriations of bioelectricity in psychiatry and medicine, and in many ways, representative of his times. Electricity and concepts of energy function in three distinct ways in Morselli's psychiatric and intellectual work. First, the technical manipulation and application of electricity and other energy treatments opened up therapeutic possibilities for neuropsychiatric illness. Morselli taught and propagated these treatments though he never fully endorsed them. When publishing reviews of new technologies, Morselli positioned himself as a sober-minded judge whose opinion could affect which techniques were introduced to Italy from abroad. Second, Morselli incorporated energy into his theoretical writings. There it sometimes served a sometimes nebulous, sometimes explicit role supporting a monistic understanding of the universe and human experience and it was particularly apt at connecting mind and body. The old dualistic notion of the mind as detached or as spirit could be challenged by understanding the mind as a process of energy.

This chapter has also sought to explore the relationship between energy in Morselli's practice and in his theory. Morselli's theoretical work was reliant upon his experimental work. While he was careful in his claims and arguments about how energy could be applied to the body for diagnostic or therapeutic purposes, highlighting the problems of proving therapeutic effectiveness, these experiments still demonstrated that energy operated within the body and the mind, communicating sensations, affecting movement and so forth. Harnessing, controlling, and manipulating this energy conducted through the nervous system was something scientists had not mastered. While Morselli implemented new technologies such as electrotherapy in his clinical

practice only with clear caveats, he endorsed a concept of the mind in which thought was understood in terms of energy. This was part of the basis for his monist philosophy. Tests and experiments, whether successes or failures, still gave clear evidence that energy operated within the body, connecting body and brain and less clearly brain and mind. The mind, as a product and consequence of biological energy, offered a way for Morselli to ground and legitimize his scientific philosophy.

Lastly, Morselli's concern for the misappropriation of bioelectricity and other similar substances can be seen in his legal-medical case study on Cesare Mattei, the inventor of electrohomoeopathy. The text reflects Morselli's concerns as a psychiatrist trying to protect a young discipline from pseudoscientific confusion and to define the real possible applications of electricity in psychiatric care as opposed to those based on the power of suggestion. Morselli carefully drew a line between energy applied scientifically to the human body and energy co-opted by pseudoscience. For Morselli, to evaluate Mattei was to navigate rough waters. While still paying respect to an important and influential figure, he backed the property rights of his heirs. And while Morselli argued that Mattei's electrohomoeopathic cures were not the product of his late-life senile insanity, they did not belong to the realm of scientific medicine, despite their possible effectiveness. Taken together, these three facets of Morselli's work reflect the interplay between his practical and theoretical work. Morselli was a strict empiricist and took philosophy seriously at the same time, and he was equally if not more concerned with damming up pseudoscientific claims about energy and the spirit before they could flood his burgeoning discipline.

Beyond what energy reveals about Morselli's own work, approach, and methods, it may also be fruitful to consider Morselli's work and ideas about energy and the mind in a broader historical context, some of which has direct bearing on Morselli's own history. If the story of

Italian bioelectricity begins traditionally with Galvani and Volta, then it ends with Ugo Cerletti and electroconvulsive shock therapy (ECT), still notorious for the seizure-like fits its patients endured before attaining clarity of mind. The benefits and dangers of ECT are still debated and ECT itself has become the general understanding of what electrotherapy is. Although Ugo Cerletti lies beyond the principal scope of this chapter, considering the work of Cerletti in light of Morselli may elucidate the swiftly changing medical milieu of early-twentieth century psychiatric therapy and the possible ties between electrotherapy and electroconvulsive shock therapy. Considering their contextual overlap, as well as the direct connection between the two, emphasizes their points of difference and the changing notions of the responsibilities of the psychiatrist during the interwar period.

Cerletti's career was in many ways a direct outgrowth of the psychiatric training system and standards that Morselli and his close colleagues had created. Ugo Cerletti (1877-1963) first studied medicine at the University of Turin, entering the university whose psychiatry department Morselli had pioneered. After a sojourn in Heidelberg, Cerletti took his degree in 1901. Later he served as an assistant for Ezio Sciamanna and Morselli's close colleague Augusto Tamburini until World War I. Morselli and Tamburini had been students together and collaborated on several articles and trained with Carlo Livi (1823-1877), whom they helped found *La Rivista sperimentale di freniatria e medicina legale, in relazione con l'antropologia e le scienze giuridiche e sociali*, which is still in print today. Additionally, Cerletti also studied with Morselli's other collaborator, Camillo Golgi, who won the Nobel Prize for his work on the nervous system in 1906. After working in Germany and France, in Rome, Milan, then Bari, Cerletti was called to the University of Genoa in 1928, where he took over Morselli's chair upon his death. In 1935, Cerletti returned to Rome where he did his most important institutional revamping as professor of psychiatry and Director of the Clinic for Nervous and Mental

Diseases. But it was in Genoa where Cerletti began seriously investigating the use of electricity, inducing epileptic fits in dogs, and he continued this research after moving to Rome and teaming together with Lucio Bini, culminating in the development of electroconvulsive shock therapy.<sup>242</sup>

While it is unclear how Cerletti attained his appointment at Genoa, the circumstances suggest that Morselli either had something to do with his selection or at least knew about it.<sup>243</sup>

The two had been in contact since at least 1921.<sup>244</sup> When Cerletti took over the chair, he assumed control of psychiatric education and the university clinic which Morselli had controlled for the last 30 years. In the wake of Morselli's dominance over Genoese neuropsychiatry, Cerletti delivered his university eulogy and also wrote an opening tribute to Morselli in the *Quaderni di psichiatria*. Several newspapers reported on the university memorial and commemorated Cerletti's eulogy. He claimed that Morselli was a psychiatrist and philosopher whose interests covered the entirety of man, "the soul, the chief problem of matter and spirit, the contrast between materialism and consciousness, until the threshold of the unknowable." But he was also the "practical psychiatrist who revealed his sublime humanitarian merits in the insane asylums of Macerata and Turin...teaching how the insane asylum did not need to be a place of custody but a home to cure..."<sup>245</sup>

Cerletti also wrote the opening tribute of a series devoted to Morselli in the *Quaderni di psichiatria*, the journal that Morselli had founded anew and ran for the last few decades of his

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<sup>242</sup> Edward Shorter and David Healy, *Shock Therapy: a History of Electroconvulsive Treatment in Mental Illness* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 34.

<sup>243</sup> There are two places this answer could be: either in Cerletti's fascicolo personale at the University of Genoa, or in his archives in Kansas City.

<sup>244</sup> See clinical file #1469 of Tea G. M., box #1223, folder "Donne. Mi - Mo - Mu - N - O," Archivio di Villa Maria Pia, S2I Italia, Genoa Borzoli, Italy.

<sup>245</sup> "La commemorazione di Enrico Morselli all'Università Popolare," *Il Lavoro* (20 February 1930). See also "Il prof. Enrico Morselli Commemorato all'Università Popolare," *Giornale di Genova* (20 February 1930); Dott. Ry, "La Morte di Enrico Morselli," *Corriere della Sera* (19 February 1929); "La Morte di Enrico Morselli," *La Cronaca*; "Enrico Morselli," *Rinascimento Medico*, anno VII (febbraio 1929).

life. The eulogy evidences that Cerletti was very familiar with Morselli's psychiatric work, university reputation, and devotion to scientific psychology. In the article, Cerletti proclaimed Morselli one of the fathers of modern Italian scientific psychiatry, the latest and last of a group of psychiatrists that had made Italian psychiatry the wonder of the world (the others were Cesare Lombroso, Augusto Tamburini and Leonardo Bianchi), who was great not only for his publications, but also for his inspiring teaching. Cerletti described Morselli as one of the psychiatrists that had fought to find the real links between soma and psyche, or body and mind. At the same time, Morselli was not mechanistic; he sought instead "to take up the failures of these doctrines – that which went unexplained – the phenomenon of consciousness. He saw the movement of atoms, vibrating, whirling, or of some other species that he had imagined, but could not conclude that a movement could ever explain even the simplest phenomenon of perception." It was for this reason that Morselli "wanted to go deeper into philosophical investigation and touch the confines of what we can know and of that which we can never know."<sup>246</sup> Cerletti described Morselli's research and writing as all having the purpose "of clarifying, of illuminating the most obscure sides of a dark science... Today, he is greatly credited...for uniformity of method and for the identification of intentions [of psychiatry;] he took it to the same level as the other biological disciplines."<sup>247</sup> Not only was Cerletti familiar with Morselli's psychiatric work; he also understood Morselli's grander objectives and the aims that transcended his individual studies.

Though Morselli and Cerletti were in contact with one another and worked in the same context, the two figures fall within different frameworks. Historical research on Morselli has

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<sup>246</sup> Ugo Cerletti, "Enrico Morselli," in *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, Fondati da Enrico Morselli. Redattore-Capo: M. Kobylinski. Vol. XVI (marzo-aprile 1929) (VII), num. 3-4, 44.

<sup>247</sup> "Enrico Morselli," 41.

remained limited and focuses on his psychiatric theories while his utilization of electricity and energy are completely overlooked. While many studies have researched bioelectricity and electrotherapy from Galvani and Volta through the 1800s, Morselli has not been included because he was neither a great theorist nor inventor in terms of bioelectricity.<sup>248</sup> Apart from a few more comprehensive works from the 1980s, Morselli's recent historical treatment has been restricted to articles examining isolated aspects of his work.

Cerletti has also received scant historical attention but his historical portrait has been scarred by both stigma and impassioned defenses of his controversial legacy, which is still undergoing revision today. Recent works have attempted to recast Cerletti as a romantic figure instead of an evil doctor, or have used the history of his invention as an argument for wider utilization of electroconvulsive shock therapy, but this rereading often leaves the realities of his research barely intelligible.<sup>249</sup> Both of these positive or apologetic outlooks rely on context, at least in part, to explain and legitimize Cerletti's actions, and they usually place Cerletti within the history of other convulsive therapies, beginning with Manfred Sakel's insulin coma therapy and Ladislaus Meduna's metrazol therapy, isolating the research agenda of electroshock from electrotherapy.

Considering the contexts in which Morselli and Cerletti operated in relation to one another as well as their direct connections may offer a some background for Cerletti's work, in which a rich variety of neuropathological treatments were being invented, tested, and experimented with and to which Cerletti was surely exposed. The story that the impetus for ECT came after Cerletti watched butchers in Rome stun pigs unconscious before slaughter might be

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<sup>248</sup> See for example, Paola Bertucci and Giuliano Pancaldi, *Electric Bodies, Episodes in the History of Medical Electricity* (Bologna: Università di Bologna, 2001).

<sup>249</sup> See for example Shorter and Healy's *Shock Therapy*; Roberta Passione, *Ugo Cerletti: il Romanzo dell'Elettroshock* (Reggio Emilia: Aliberti, 2007); G. E. Berrios, "The Scientific Origins of Electroconvulsive Shock Therapy: a Conceptual History," *History of Psychiatry*, 8 (1997), 105-119.

less a “eureka” moment than another piece of evidence upon a whole gamut of electrotherapeutic experimentation. Situating Cerletti’s work in the broader history of electrotherapy and other neuropsychiatric treatments gives context to the choices Cerletti made in developing his approach. Electroshock did not evolve only out of other convulsive therapies, but most likely out of other electrotherapeutic techniques as well. Furthermore, their overlapping place and time may emphasize the disparity between how they understood psychiatric therapy. Morselli’s own writings as well as what his contemporaries wrote about him come out of the schooling of Carlo Livi. Morselli’s mentor was a kind of Italian Philippe Pinel, and Morselli continued with Livi’s approach, taking out old restraint devices and cleaning out abusive practices and punishment as therapy, and replacing it with “moral” therapies such as ergotherapy. Pain was associated with punishment, not therapy, which Morselli regarded after experimental study as having no real therapeutic effect.<sup>250</sup> For Morselli, pain was also an important index of electric techniques and limited the application of electricity to the human body. Cerletti’s cure, in contrast, does not maintain this moral framework. The experience of pain, shock and risks undertaken by the patient were not considered.

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<sup>250</sup> See: Enrico Morselli, *Contribuzioni alla Psicologia dell’Uomo Delinquente. I. Dell’influenza della Pena sui Detenuti Dedotta dalle Statistiche Disciplinari Cacerarie. Nota del Dott. Enrico Morselli, Direttore del Manicomio di Macerata* (Reggio-Emilia: Tip. Stefano Calderini e Figlio, 1877); Enrico Morselli, “Algometria Elettrica” in *Manuale di Semeiotica*, vol. 1, 374-381.

## Chapter 4. Work: disease, cure, and national ethos

Liberty, Cure, Work.<sup>251</sup>

### 1. Introduction: the unfortunate case of Pietro Guglielmino

When Pietro Guglielmino died after a few months after admission to the Turin Asylum in 1883, a dispute broke out among asylum personnel. The heated debate was not about Guglielmino's treatment while in custody of the Royal Insane Asylum (*Regio Manicomio*), but about the purported cause of death. Guglielmino, a middle-aged railroad laborer, was sent to the asylum after incurring a blow to the head at work. After performing an autopsy on the body, Morselli blamed the workplace injury for the fatality. However, the place where Guglielmino had been hit had not scarred internally or externally. The visible scar tissue and internal tissue damage that blinded Guglielmino in one eye were the results of a previous accident. Much of the dispute was about the relation of a lesion to the cause of death: Was the lesion evidence for trauma-induced neurosis?<sup>252</sup>

Morselli's explanation for the cause of death also left out important information from Guglielmino's medical case history and anamnesis. In his report, Morselli did not mention that Guglielmino had already been hit on the head or shown earlier symptoms of mental illness (*alienazione mentale*) and alcoholism. Upon learning of these omissions, the asylum administration set up committee to investigate the matter. The committee questioned Morselli, who admitted that the pleas of Guglielmino's wife influenced the way he wrote the autopsy

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<sup>251</sup> Credited to Enrico Morselli in Guido Ruata, "Per Enrico Morselli," *Note e Riviste di Psichiatria. Periodico Quadrimestrale dell'Ospedale Psichiatrico Provinciale di Pesaro*, vol. XVII, anno LVIII, n. 1 (gennaio-aprile 1929), 199-208. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

<sup>252</sup> See "Seduta delli 25 Febbraio 1885," *Manicomio di Torino, Deliberazione della Direzione dal 9 Aprile 1884 al 18 Marzo 1885*, posizione n. 36, inventario generale n. 4, 43, Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy, 175-176.

report. If the railroad accident was the official cause of death, she would receive a pension of 20 *lire* a month.<sup>253</sup>

The conflict haunted Morselli for years to come. In response to the insurance claim of Guglielmo's wife, railway officials sent their own inspector to examine the clinical records. According to the railroad company's doctor, Guglielmo's death was due to his preexisting mental illness, and they dismissed the pension claim.<sup>254</sup> Morselli admitted to procedural wrongdoing but held that his original conclusions were based on his psychiatric and neurological expertise. Despite the facts that he had considered the wife's interests and left out important details of the patient history in his report, he argued that a lesion was not the sole proof of mental trauma. However, the asylum administration sided with the railway company. In the wake of this incident, one administrator retired, a physician quit, and Morselli resigned on 11 March 1885.<sup>255</sup> In 1889, he moved to Genoa where he recommenced his clinical and experimental research as *professore straordinario* and regained access to asylum patients. He would never direct an asylum again.

The Guglielmino incident highlights how changes in modern industry affected clinical psychiatric practices: with an increase in industrial and railroad labor came an increase in workplace injuries, especially to the head and spine, leading to the diagnosis of "traumatic neurosis" (*neurosi traumatica*). While its symptoms and causes were disputable, traumatic neurosis was always triggered by some physical trauma that resulted in psychiatric and neurological symptoms. But industrial workers were not the only ones to suffer from traumatic

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<sup>253</sup> See "Seduta delli 25 Febbraio 1885," 177.

<sup>254</sup> See "Seduta delli 25 Febbraio 1885."

<sup>255</sup> See "Seduta delli 25 Marzo 1885," "Seduta del 1 Aprile 1885," and "Seduta delli 15 Aprile 1885," Manicomio di Torino, Deliberazione della Direzione dal 9 Aprile 1884 al 18 Marzo 1885, posizione n. 36, inventario generale n. 4, 43, Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy, 5.

neurosis – farmers had long since fallen off horses and children fell on their heads – psychiatrists began to relate this disease to the dangers of the modern economy, sometimes calling the disease “railway brain” or “railway spine.”<sup>256</sup> In this way, traumatic neuroses became specifically associated with the working classes and the dangers of modern industry.<sup>257</sup>

The Guglielmino case also reflects some of the ways in which the broader meaning of work affected clinical psychiatric practices. In the nineteenth century, work became a crucial term of political discourse. During the Risorgimento, work became patriotic, and industriousness was promoted as an essential component of national character. By the end of the nineteenth century, political movements such as socialism and communism reflected the changing political representation of workers and increasing class tensions based on the industrial economy.<sup>258</sup> The dispute resulting from Guglielmino’s death reflects how problems such as worker’s exploitation (in this case, dangerous conditions) and worker’s rights (in this case, to a pension) affected psychiatric discourse. Thus a diagnosis or statement about the cause of death, such as the one Morselli chose for Guglielmino, had an important social in addition to medical meaning, allying the psychiatrist with one of two strongly conflicting interests. Favoring the interests of the patient and his family had personal consequences: the administration overrode Morselli’s

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<sup>256</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Le Neurosi Traumatiche Particolarmente Considerate nelle Forme Suscettive di Risarcimento. Studio Clinico e Medico-legale* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1913), 8.

<sup>257</sup> There have been several recent studies on trauma and modern labor, mostly in the German context. See: Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, eds., *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Jason Crouthamel, “War Neurosis versus Savings Psychosis: Working-Class Politics and Psychological Trauma in Weimar Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 37, no. 2 (April 2002), 163-182; Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930*, series edited by Sander L. Gilman and George J. Makari, Cornell Studies in the History of Psychiatry (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003); Andreas Killen, *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity*, series edited by Edward Dimendberg, Martin Jay, and Anton Kaes, Weimar and Now: German Cultural Criticism (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>258</sup> See, for example, the discussion of “lavorismo” in Silvana Patriarca, “Making citizens of character,” in *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

opinion in favor of the insurance company and eventually ousted Morselli from the asylum. By diagnosing an industrial worker with traumatic neurosis, a psychiatrist justified the political and personal interests of patients and their families against industrial employers and insurance companies, often to his own detriment.

This chapter explores the way that concepts of work entered psychiatric discourses and practices in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Psychiatrists such as Enrico Morselli responded to debates about the social, ideological, and scientific significance of work, which in turn were embedded in their clinical practice. As a term replete with moral valences in Italy's public discourse, work carried broader debates of critical importance to the Italian nation into modern psychiatry. This chapter examines the meaning of work in psychiatric treatment and psychiatric diagnosis. Indeed, work therapy (or ergotherapy) was used to treat patients and reflected nationalist language and ideas and was promoted as a moral and mental cure. Here, Morselli perpetuated and legitimized nationalist discourse in scientific terms. In the first place, science was mobilized to treat what was regarded as Italy's dangerous national flaw, indolence. Work therapy became a central aspect of the burgeoning asylum-village and there conflated mental cure and social productivity. Mental maladies associated with industrial labor developed new nosologies beyond traditional matters of neurasthenia, hysteria, and melancholy. The underlying question which provoked strong political and social response was whether modern labor practices could induce insanity. The question of responsibility and compensation changed the implications of psychiatric diagnosis and subjected psychiatrists to the pressures of opposing interests. In this case, Morselli absorbed the language of socialism and discourses on worker's rights.

Exploring the concept of work in Morselli's psychiatric practices also reflects the precarious position of the psychiatrist as a servant of the state. To begin with, psychiatrists in

post-Risorgimento Italy became public intellectuals and public servants. Offering a new basis for knowledge to replace that of the Catholic church, scientists such as Morselli offered their expert opinions on a range of issues important to the state and often of public interest. For the most part, they worked for state institutions: insane asylums and university clinics. Beyond being technicians of the human body and mind, they often managed small, partly self-sufficient asylum-villages. Examining the way work was employed in psychiatric practices also reflects how psychiatric work itself evolved as it gained disciplinary autonomy, affecting both the psychiatric practice of patient care as well as the psychiatric definitions and understanding of disease.

## *2. Work as treatment: from morality to freedom and from rights to duties*

One must always come to a decision that is morally and financially profitable for public Administration.<sup>259</sup>

Morselli's use of ergotherapy (or work therapy) exemplifies how psychiatrists drew upon contemporary discourses to justify psychiatric practices that they could not explain empirically. By promoting ergotherapy as one of the basic psychiatric treatments for the mentally ill, Morselli perpetuated the legacy of his mentor, Carlo Livi. But as a "moral cure," ergotherapy aimed at the psychological well-being of the patient, and psychiatrists such as Morselli preferred experimental and physiological "proof" of a cure's efficacy. But Morselli explained the treatment in terms that were not, strictly speaking, psychiatric. Instead, he turned to natural science and national discourse to justify conflating patient care with asylum economy.

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<sup>259</sup> Enrico Morselli and Prospero Peyron, *Relazione sul Manicomio Provinciale di Racconigi* (Racconigi: Tip. Felice Bruciafreddo, 1908), 21. Biblioteca di Ospedale Neuropsichiatrico Prov. Racconigi, Racconigi, Italy.

By the time Morselli implemented ergotherapeutic programs at the Macerata insane asylum in 1878, the practice was already at least a century old. A legacy of eighteenth-century asylum reform, ergotherapy was pioneered by Philippe Pinel (1745-1826) and Vincenzo Chiarugi (1759-1820) in the asylums of Bicêtre (Paris) and Bonifacio (Florence), and it quickly spread to England, Germany, and the United States.<sup>260</sup> Work therapy was viewed as a moral therapy in which “kindness, reason, and tactful manipulation were more effective for dealing with the inmates of asylums than were fear, brutal coercion and restraint, and medical therapy.” Moral therapy included “all nonmedical techniques, but more specifically it referred to therapeutic efforts which affected the patient’s psychology.”<sup>261</sup> In this way, work therapy was considered a humane treatment aimed at the patient’s moral well-being.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, psychiatrists such as Morselli were caught between two different psychiatric frameworks. On the one hand, most were students of the old guard for whom asylum reform was about removing (or improving) methods of restraint and engaging patients in the morally cleansing activities of everyday life. On the other, the younger generation sought to establish psychiatry as a discipline, emphasizing empirical research, using statistics, and offering physiological explanations for diseases and cures. Increasingly, treatment was to be demonstrable and preferably quantifiable. Late nineteenth-century Italian psychiatrists tacitly approved of ergotherapy, accepting it as a “rationally ordered work activity,” but they excluded it from scientific psychiatric investigation.<sup>262</sup> While Morselli never objected to ergotherapy as a “decided and habitual execution of the natural law of bodily labour, so

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<sup>260</sup> “Ergoterapia,” *Enciclopedia Treccani* (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2009).

<sup>261</sup> See Eric T. Carlson and Norman Dain, “The Psychotherapy that was Moral Treatment,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 117 (1960), 519; William F. Bynum, “Rationales for Therapy in British Psychiatry: 1780-1835,” *Medical History*, vol. 18, no. 4 (October 1974), 317-334.

<sup>262</sup> “Ergoterapia,” *Enciclopedia Treccani*.

contributive and essential to human happiness,” he also addressed its moral valances in the political and scientific language that was gaining increasing currency in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>263</sup>

Although Morselli never wrote a treatise addressing ergotherapy directly, two kinds of documents reveal his adaptation of older ideas to liberal ideology: the asylum records of Macerata, Turin, and Racconigi, and his own published articles. The asylum records include clinical files, which provide some insight into work therapy. Most of the patient records (*pandette*) from Morselli’s days as an asylum director in Macerata and Turin (1878-1885) did not include patient treatment, while almost every clinical file from Morselli’s Genoa clinic vaguely mentions “moral therapy.” The administration meeting minutes, however, include letters and debates between Morselli and the administrative board that record disputes over different understandings of patient labor. Morselli’s published documents on insane asylum reform also reflected his understanding of work therapy. Additionally, Morselli’s interest in ergotherapy was part of a broader concern for asylum reform, evidenced in the two major journals he edited, *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* (1881-1891) and *Quaderni di Psichiatria* (1912-1929), which included several articles comparing European asylum designs and criticizing Italian asylums such as the one he headed in Turin. They attest to Morselli’s enduring interest in asylum improvements (including their work colonies) as well as his harsh criticisms of asylums that refused to adopt innovations in patient care.<sup>264</sup>

In emphasizing ergotherapy, Morselli directly emulated his mentor Carlo Livi (1823-1877). Born to a family of Tuscan merchants, Livi studied medicine at the University of Pisa

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<sup>263</sup> Philippe Pinel, *A Treatise on Insanity: In Which are Contained the Principles of a New and More Practical Nosology of Maniacal Disorders than has yet been offered to the Public*, translated by D. D. Davis (Sheffield: W. Todd, for Messrs. Cadell and Davies, Strand, London, 1806), 216.

<sup>264</sup> See, for example, “Una causa contro il Manicomio di Torino,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista di Coltura e di Classe*, anno III, fasc. 10-11 (30 maggio – 15 giugno 1913).

prior to the 1848 revolutions, in which he fought as a patriot in the battles of Curtatone and Montanara. He continued to study inductive pathology and experimental philosophy in Florence and later became medical director of the insane asylum of Siena.<sup>265</sup> After severe disputes with the Sienese authorities when Livi tried to throw out the nuns who worked in the insane asylum (he claimed that the presence of females was overstimulating for the patients), he directed the insane asylum of Reggio Emilia. He also taught at the University of Modena, where he met Enrico Morselli and brought him to work at the asylum. Livi is best remembered for his asylum reform and attempts to develop legal medicine (*medicina legale*), but his most well-known writings were about the death penalty and forensic psychiatry.<sup>266</sup> In 1875, he founded the journal *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria e di Medicina Legale*, with Morselli as a coeditor. The relationship between the two was very close. Morselli sang Livi's praises and in turn, Livi described Morselli as having the "mixture of talents of intellect, spirit, trustworthiness" necessary for an asylum medical director.<sup>267</sup>

Morselli admired Livi's efforts to improve the asylum and justified his own ergotherapeutic agenda with the name of his mentor. In the obituary he wrote in 1879, Morselli praised Livi's asylum reforms as great triumphs in the face of adversity. Livi enlarged Reggio Emilia's agricultural and industrial colony (*colonia agricola-industriale*) to make it the "first in

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<sup>265</sup> See Ottavio Andreucci, *Carlo Livi: Cenni sulla Vita Scientifica in Relazione più Specialmente alle Discipline di Ordinamento dei Manicomi Italiani* (Milan: Tip. Ed. Lombarda, 1877); G. Armocida, "Livi, Carlo," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 65 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2005); Selene Anceschi Bolognesi, *Carlo Livi: una Luce fra le Grandi Ombre per i Nudi di Mente, 1823-1877* (Rome: Federazione Italiana Associazioni Ospedaliere, 1979).

<sup>266</sup> See Carlo Livi, *Contro la Pena di Morte: Ragioni Fisiologiche e Patologiche* (Siena: Mucci, 1862); *Frenologia Forense. Ovvero delle Frenopatie considerate relativamente alla Medicina Legale* (Milan: Chiusi, 1863-1868).

<sup>267</sup> Letter from Carlo Livi to the Asylum Administration of Macerata (30 December 1876). Manicomio Provinciale, fascicolo 456. State Archives, Macerata, Italy.

Italy for size, regulation, and results.”<sup>268</sup> According to Morselli, it was “specifically with work that Livi expected the greatest advantages in the cure of the insane (*alienate*),” and he quoted Livi’s statement: “An insane asylum without work would be most disarranged, filthy, and distressing to offer this poor human nature.”<sup>269</sup> Additionally, Morselli praised Livi’s use of female patients as workers and his extension of patient duties to include tasks that necessitated the use of “dangerous instruments” while guaranteeing the safety, responsibility, and supervision of the patients. After training under Livi for two years, Morselli was appointed medical director (*medico primario*) of the insane asylum of Macerata in 1877 where he described his reform plans as nothing short of “plagiarism.” His goal was to create “a copy of the asylum of Reggio, as faithful a copy as is within our powers and is allowed by the different establishment.”<sup>270</sup>

Despite his claims to replication, Morselli went beyond Livi’s advances. While Livi emphasized ergotherapy as curative and cleansing, Morselli showed a greater concern for patient productivity. In Macerata, he increased the size of the colony to include more workers and longer work hours, and he diversified the kinds of industry patient’s performed. Macerata would have a “blacksmith, carpenter, glass-worker, tinsmith, shoemaker, weaver, and there will be about 20 calm patients (*malati tranquilli*) assigned to those offices.”<sup>271</sup> He advised other asylums to do the same: “In the first [section] you could place the patient farmers, gardeners, and those adept with livestock; you could also set up a creamery and cowshed. In the second [section], the patient laborers could live, and there you could situate all of the offices, those of the carpenters,

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<sup>268</sup> Enrico Morselli and Augusto Tamburini, “La Mente di Carlo Livi,” *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria e di Medicina Legale*, vol. V (1879), 33.

<sup>269</sup> “La Mente di Carlo Livi,” 20.

<sup>270</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, anno I, n. 1 (gennaio 1878), 4.

<sup>271</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, 4.

blacksmiths, glass-worker, the shoe shop and tailor, etc.”<sup>272</sup> Morselli also expanded the duties of female patients to include sewing, cleaning, and other traditionally female domestic tasks. Later at the Turin asylum, Morselli expanded patient labor to include laboratory work and assisting in psychiatric experiments and research (figures 1, 2, and 3).



Figure 1. Patient barbers cutting the hair of other patients. Macerata, 1870s.

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<sup>272</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Relazione del Ch.mo Prof. Morselli sulla Visita Fatta al Manicomio Interprovinc: V. E. II. in Nocera* (Nocera Infer.: Tipografia del Manicomio, 1887), 12-13.



Figure 2. Pigsty. Macerata, 1870s.



Figure 3. Female patient laborers

As Morselli expanded patient labor, he also explained it in new ways. In some instances, he borrowed language from the natural sciences, comparing human labor to the fundamental physical motions. He wrote,

Who is lazy in the great office (*ufficio*) of the universe? Even in atoms of matter, all is motion (*moto*), all is work: work is the prerogative of all living things and it must be an even stronger reason for man. To stay healthy, cheerful, content in his state, to live and have the right to live, man must work and work to be honest, a good citizen, and a good father to his family.<sup>273</sup>

By paralleling work with movements in nature, Morselli implied that human labor was a part of the natural order underlying therapeutic intervention. On the one hand, such comments echoed Livi, who wrote: “Work, beyond savings and richness is education and cheerfulness (*giocondità*); it is a preservative and cure; it is the most powerful help given to the art of health, because work is movement, and movement is life.”<sup>274</sup> On the other, such statements reflect Morselli’s familiarity with broader discussions taking place in the social and natural sciences and related to the idea of the human motor.<sup>275</sup> Accredited to Hermann Helmholtz and modern thermodynamics, the idea of the human body as machine (instead of organism) spread during the second half of the nineteenth century. For Morselli’s psychiatry, this implied that just as the body obeyed the same laws of energy as a machine, so did the mind. Morselli read extensively in modern physics and theories of energy, and he worked with some of the key physiologists that used the human motor as a model for their research. For example, Angelo Mosso (1846-1910), best known for writing the first physiological study on fatigue, was a close colleague of Morselli

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<sup>273</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, 5.

<sup>274</sup> “La mente di Carlo Livi,” 20.

<sup>275</sup> See Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor. Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), especially Chapter 5, “The Laws of the Human Motor.”

at the University of Turin and a regular contributor to Morselli's journal *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*.<sup>276</sup>

Morselli connected the concept of work in the natural sciences to work as an attribute of national disposition, and as the quote above reflects, being a good man and citizen depended directly on one's ability to work. In this way, Morselli tied a scientific explanation of work to the national cause and to popular discourses about how to shape the Italian national character.<sup>277</sup> These discourses played an important role in Italian unification (*Risorgimento*), often comparing Italians with their northern neighbors to either criticize or complement the people of the Italian peninsula, and the promotion of Italian cultural primacy came with a strong critique of Italian vices.<sup>278</sup> Work played into both sides of this discourse. One important proposal for the reform of national character promoted work as a new national ethic or religion: in post-Unification Italy, a profusion of publications dedicated to the ideology of "lavorismo," or "religion of work," promoted the morals of work and duty for both the individual and the nation.<sup>279</sup> In a certain sense, work was to cure the nation of its degeneration and heal it from its moral vices. Morselli recommended ergotherapy for his patients in the same patriotic language.

Not only was work a cure for both national character and individual disease, work was a national duty that extended to asylum patients as well. The universe itself was the great

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<sup>276</sup> See Angelo Mosso, *La Fatica* (Milan: Treves, 1891). The study ran through several editions and was translated widely.

<sup>277</sup> For a good overview of this historical research agenda, see Lucy Riall, "Nation, Identity and Nationalist Politics," in *Risorgimento: the History of Italy from Napoleon to Nation State* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan: 2009). See also, Silvana Patriarca, "National Identity or National Character? New Vocabularies and Old Paradigms," in *Making and Remaking Italy: the Cultivation of National Identity around the Risorgimento*, edited by Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna von Henneberg (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001); Silvana Patriarca and Lucy Riall, eds., *The Risorgimento Revisited: Nationalism and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>278</sup> See Silvana Patriarca, *Italian Vices: Nation and Character from the Risorgimento to the Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>279</sup> *Italian Vices*, 71.

workplace, and it was work which granted the rights the man and citizen. In fact, work was a duty of the citizen that could not be compromised:

We are inflexible, most severe in everything, but especially in insisting upon work by all those who *can*. For us *ability* (*potere*) must be *duty* (*dovere*), and in it we may congratulate ourselves: all our cures remain useless, if they are not assisted by this powerful impulse of the heart and human reason, which is work.<sup>280</sup>

“Ability,” “duty,” “will” (*volere*), and work resonated with late-nineteenth century popular discussions of national character. The idea of work as a national duty harkened back to Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), who emphasized that duties—above and beyond rights—were the basis of republicanism and the representative state.<sup>281</sup> In fact, Morselli claimed it was the Italian people that demanded ergotherapy for their mentally ill. He wrote, “we can proclaim out loud nowadays:—‘you are few by now, you are isolated, everywhere one cries out to you *work, work* for the insane...”<sup>282</sup> Morselli promoted ergotherapy as not only a cure for patients, but the patient’s fulfillment of his other national duties.

Complementing his promotion of work as a duty and cure was Morselli’s critique of indolence (*ozio*), which further set ergotherapy into a language of nationalist fervor. In writing about the merits of ergotherapy, he took on a position typical of Italian patriots of his day, simultaneously praising Italy’s cultural and historical heritage while at the same time implicitly accepting stereotypes of the Italian people, whose laziness was viewed as a toxin and national sin. If work were a panacea, then laziness was a poison that adversely affected every aspect of man’s existence:

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<sup>280</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, anno I, n. 1 (gennaio 1878), 5.

<sup>281</sup> See Nadia Urbinati, “Mazzini and the Making of the Republican Ideology,” *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* vol. 17, no. 2 (2012), 188.

<sup>282</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, 5.

From laziness come all ailments, and first of all is the loss of health: the organism is weakened by laziness, its activities deteriorate, the wheels that make up its incomparable mechanism get rusty, and the lazy man becomes the worst that can be. Is it possible for laziness to have a less damaging effect in disturbed and disordered minds?<sup>283</sup>

Again, Morselli's castigation of indolence echoes an enduring discourse on Italian national character which began with Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852). Gioberti's *Del Primato Morale e Civile degli Italiani (On the Moral and Civil Primacy of Italians)* contained a section entitled "Invective against Italian *Ozio*," which claimed that Italy's uniquely lazy character led to the destruction of Italian genius and the downfall of the peninsula.<sup>284</sup> While Morselli reviled indolence, for physiologists the enemy was fatigue (*fatica*): "the paramount manifestation of the body's limits to produce work" and "a greater threat to the future of a modern industrialized nation than either rapacious capital or the atavistic worker lacking in discipline and time sense."<sup>285</sup> For his colleague, physiologist Angelo Mosso, bodily labor could be organized in order to avoid fatigue; for Morselli, in contrast, the Italian personality had to be conquered. Triumph came through work and training: "...we will continue our progress as long as occupation and activity give us the most advantages over your most beloved laziness."<sup>286</sup>

While Morselli emphasized the merits of work therapy in terms of science and patriotism in his articles and asylum gazette, in private asylum communications Morselli emphasized them in terms of asylum management. In the late nineteenth century, insane asylums were still poorly-funded institutions that relied on local municipal funding and that of the patient's family when

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<sup>283</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, 5.

<sup>284</sup> *Italian Vices*, 24-25.

<sup>285</sup> *The Human Motor*, 121.

<sup>286</sup> *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata*, 5.

possible. In the quest for self-sufficiency and partial autonomy, psychiatrists promoted the idea of an “Asylum-Village” (“*Manicomio-Villaggio*”) in which able patients labored to sustain the asylum (excluding disciplinary measures and medical treatment).<sup>287</sup> The history of the asylum-village remains obscure: one of the first models for such patient care was the Belgian village of Gheel, which traced its origins to the sixth century.<sup>288</sup> In the 1860s, the Gheel village asylum became a matter of heated psychiatric debate. While some praised it as an alternative to the insane asylum because it allowed the mentally ill to live with families and partake in village life, others condemned patterns of abuse that were considered, in some instances, far worse than those of the insane asylum. For most psychiatrists, one of the chief concerns was the lack of professional care. As one critic explained, Gheel’s merits were “over-rated, or at least...its defects have been considered too leniently. We are not willing, besides, to reduce the advantages of a tutored and systematized management to the level of a peasant or villager, comparatively uninstructed, and less uniformly open to superintendence and control.”<sup>289</sup> With the “asylum village,” or what was in one instance called the *manicomio a padiglioni* (“pavilion asylum”), psychiatrists sought a compromise: patients had professional psychiatric care in a village atmosphere which they worked to maintain.<sup>290</sup> The asylum model spread across Europe and America and was promoted in different ways. In Italy, the asylum village offered an economical

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<sup>287</sup> *Relazione sul Manicomio Provinciale di Racconigi*, 19. Though the idea for the “asylum-village” is a commonplace reference in histories of the insane asylum, I have not yet found any monograph or other study specifically dealing with its development.

<sup>288</sup> See Ian Dowbiggin, *The Quest for Mental Health: a Tale of Science, Medicine, Scandal, Sorrow, and Mass Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 75-77.

<sup>289</sup> *The British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review: or, Quarterly Journal of Practical Medicine and Surgery*, vol. XXII, (July-October, 1858), 234.

<sup>290</sup> For “family care” see “Extracts from the Writings of Wilhelm Griesinger, a Prophet of the Newer Psychiatry,” translated by Frank R. Smith, *The American Journal of Insanity*, vol. 60, 216-218. For “manicomio a padiglione,” see Franca Fedeli Bernardini, *Tratti e (Ri)tratti di un Manicomio: Disegni dell’Ospedale di Santa Maria della Pietà di Roma: Padiglione VI, Museo della Mente-Ex Ospedale Psichiatrico di S. Maria della Pietà, 19 maggio-7 giugno 2003* (Rome: De Luca Editori d’Arte, 2003), 61.

way to treat the poor.<sup>291</sup> For Italian psychiatrists who had responded to asylum critics by claiming “Our poverty, but not our will, consents,” the village model offered better care by balancing asylum finances. Pioneered in Rome, the asylum village quickly spread across Italy.

Morselli’s quest for an increasingly self-sufficient and autonomous asylum was already apparent in Macerata, but he boldly articulated his vision for an asylum village in his 1908 proposal for asylum renovations in Racconigi. Written together with engineer Prospero Peyron (1862-1945), the plans were to turn a former explosives factory (*polverificio*), into a new and modern asylum, emphasizing the “technical and financial” challenges of the project. Their goal was to implement a system that “could evoke the beautiful examples of Reggio Emilia, Perugia, and Macerata...without mentioning the most recent Insane Asylums or, moreover, villages of the most civilized foreign Countries.”<sup>292</sup> In this proposal, worker patients (*tranquilli lavoratori*) were strictly separated from the incurable and were housed closer to the fields or general services. Outnumbering their male counterparts, female worker patients received larger accommodations and were placed close to the laundry center (*lavanderia*). Calm non-worker patients (*tranquilli inoperosi*) were left “exclusively in the old barracks, even the patients in these living quarters (*locali di soggiorno*) could become laborers if they became better, since work always transforms, reorders, and disciplines in every Insane Asylum.”<sup>293</sup>

The Racconigi asylum-village was the culmination of a long-term project of increasing patient productivity. While Morselli continued to mention work as a moralizing therapy, he came strongly to emphasize it as a productive activity that profited the asylum as a whole. While at Macerata, Morselli had moved from Livi’s terminology of moral cleansing and improvement to a

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<sup>291</sup> “Rome. The New Manicomio,” *The Lancet*, vol. 1 (27 June 1896), 1834.

<sup>292</sup> *Relazione sul Manicomio Provinciale di Racconigi*, 4, 19.

<sup>293</sup> *Relazione sul Manicomio Provinciale di Racconigi*, 21.

language of freedom and duty. Increased responsibilities would “give to the insane the greatest appearance of liberty.”<sup>294</sup> By 1908, however, his interest lay almost entirely in productivity. This is illustrated by two graphs tabulating the patient worker population. Published in the *Gazzetta del Manicomio di Macerata* in 1878, the first graph still used categories of *pazienti tranquilli* (calm patients) or *pazienti agitati* (agitated patients), and who were then tabulated as able or unable to work, tracking work hours and the tasks performed in detail (see figure 4). By the time Morselli wrote up his plans for the Racconigi asylum, two principle categories for patients were the “inactive calm” and the “working calm” (figure 5).

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<sup>294</sup> “La Mente di Carlo Livi,” 35.

abbiamo il 54 010. Ecco ora il numero di tutti questi lavoratori ed i mestieri nei quali si occupavano il dì 30 di novembre, giorno del resto uguale per l'attività dei nostri malati a tutti quelli che fa luce sulla terra:

Uomini		N. 110
Presenti		
Pensionari (non lavoratori)		7
Inabili		3
Lavoratori		21
Scrivani		68
Pittori ed inverniciatori		2
Fabbri		1
Falegnami		3
Calzolai		1
Sarti		3
Fornai		4
Cucinieri		5
Muratori		5
Giardinieri e agricoltori		8
Ortolani		4
Boari		1
Lavoratori in paglia e sparto		16
Piccoli mestieri		1
Servizi interni		6
Occupazioni diverse		12

Donne		N. 84
Presenti		
Inferme		4
Inabili		1
Lavoratrici		46
Filatrici		18
Tessitrici		3
Dipanatrici		2
Calzettaje		6
Cucitrici di bianco		12
Incaricate della pulizia		2
Occupazioni in servizi interni		3

Se poi volete ancora delle cifre statistiche (adesso dove non entra mai la Statista?) vi daremo una lunga tabella, irta di numeri. Sono le giornate di lavoro fatte dai nostri malati nel quadrimestre marzo-giugno 1877, aspettando che pubblichiamo la tabella del secondo semestre in uno dei prossimi fogli.

Predominarono in quel quadrimestre fra gli uomini i lavori manuali e di servizio interno, la coltivazione dell'orto, la fabbrica del pane e dello paste, l'agricoltura e il giardinaggio, i lavori da muratore ed imbianchino, la lavorazione colla paglia e coi vimini, le occupazioni di sciltojo, l'arte del dipingere e inverniciare, i servizi della cucina ecc.

Fra le donne le occupazioni più estese furono quelle del filare, far la calza, del cucire e ammendare, l'attendere alla pulizia, il tessere e dipanare ecc. Nelle occupazioni diverse van compresi anche i piccoli servizi prestati nella cucina dello Stabilimento da non poche malate.

Nel momento in cui scriviamo il lavoro è sai più attivo che in quel primo quadrimestre, primo che ci appartenga, essendo stato il braio quasi tutto speso in preparare uomini e

Giornate di lavoro dei malati nel quadrimestre Marzo-Giugno 1877.

Uomini

LAVORI	Marzo	Aprile	Maggio	Giugno	Totale
Scrivani	40	26	36	41	143
Pittori ed inverniciatori	37	44	26	21	128
Fabbri	28	28	26	29	111
Falegnami	—	3	—	1	6
Calzolai	—	9	30	46	105
Sarti	24	24	28	24	97
Fornai	70	91	116	95	372
Cantinieri	4	1	2	—	7
Cucinieri	56	31	31	31	149
Spaccalegna	57	58	25	9	109
Muratori ed imbianchini	93	78	53	25	249
Agricoltori e lavoratori di terra	14	92	64	84	254
Giardinieri	83	58	70	66	259
Boari	30	30	10	5	75
Guardiani di animali	—	—	—	10	10
Ortolani	101	101	85	128	415
Lavoratori in paglia e vimini	28	49	67	54	178
Piccoli mestieri	34	51	20	44	146
Incaricate della pulizia	168	155	172	174	669
Attendenti alla Farmacia e Infermeria	30	26	26	56	112
Sorveglianti ai lavori	—	48	—	13	51
Occupazioni diverse manuali (pompe, facchinaggio ecc.)	329	238	345	288	1180

Donne

LAVORI	Marzo	Aprile	Maggio	Giugno	Totale
Filatrici	416	402	379	409	1606
Dipanatrici	26	41	41	41	149
Tessitrici	26	33	39	17	115
Sarte	17	42	84	85	226
Stiratrici	1	4	2	2	9
Calzettaje	249	221	194	193	857
Cucitrici in bianco	280	226	225	250	959
Incaricate della pulizia	52	31	38	60	221
Attendenti all'Infermeria	17	19	13	23	76
Occupazioni diverse manuali (pompe, facchinaggio ecc.)	35	48	60	56	197

TOTALE DEL QUADRIMESTRE

	Marzo	Aprile	Maggio	Giugno	Totale
Uomini	1150	1195	1254	1164	4741
Donne	1117	1029	1095	1116	4415
Totale	2247	2285	2549	2280	9156

Figure 4. "Activities of our patients" (left), and "days worked by patients" (right).

	UOMINI	DONNE
<i>Quartiere d'osservazione . . .</i>	30	31
<i>Tranquilli inoperosi . . . . .</i>	120	120
<i>Tranquilli lavoratori . . . . .</i>	40	100
<i>Paralitici e luridi . . . . .</i>	100	100
<i>Infermi . . . . .</i>	38	38
<i>Semi-agitati . . . . .</i>	100	100
<i>Agitati . . . . .</i>	50	50
<i>Totale . . .</i>	478	539

Figure 5. Patient population of Racconigi

The Racconigi asylum plans reflect Morselli's ability to adapt his discussion of work therapy to suit administrative bodies that had to balance the budgets of underfunded and increasingly populated institutions.<sup>295</sup> While in 1879, Morselli still promoted Livi's belief that through work "the agitated gain tranquility, the melancholics comfort, the beleaguered in happiness, the stupid in quick-wittedness, the monomaniacs in distraction, the imbeciles and idiots in composure, the weak gain vigor, all gain in health," Morselli increasingly turned to an economic justification.<sup>296</sup> However, Morselli's appeal to asylum economics was largely unsuccessful. In 1880, Morselli moved to the insane asylum of Turin where the administration kept a tight watch on Morselli's activities and rarely approved any of the changes he recommended. Moreover, Morselli's plans for Racconigi were never implemented. They were

<sup>295</sup> See Enrico Morselli, "Il Mantenimento dei Pazzi e le Provincie di Alessandria e di Genova," *Rivista di Beneficenza Pubblica* (Milan: Tipografia Editrice Lombarda, 1880).

<sup>296</sup> *La Mente di Carlo Livi*, 20.

still “an effect of an economically disastrous ideal,” and critics of his plan added to his asylum reform “space, air, and water” (*area, aria, acqua*), also “money.”<sup>297</sup>

### 3. *Work as disease: trauma and worker’s rights*

As with ergotherapy, Morselli’s treatment of traumatic neurosis reflects the way broader notions and debates about work affected patient care in *fin-de-siècle* Italian society. While Morselli used political and scientific discourse to justify ergotherapy, he had to defend the diagnosis of traumatic neurosis against conflicting interest groups. In the 1860s and 1870s, psychiatrists began to study trauma-based psychiatric and neurological illnesses, and diagnoses quickly became associated with the problems and dangers of modern society and industry. Emblemized by the railroad, travel and industrial accidents led psychiatrists to debate the importance of the “lesion,” or physical wound, in determining psychiatric illness: could a physically undetectable lesion affect the psychological state of the patient? The dispute echoed psychiatry’s longstanding search for the material basis of psychiatric symptoms. At the same time, it triggered fears of class conflict that pitted workers against employers, and along with them, their physicians. In defining and diagnosing traumatic neurosis, Morselli navigated worker and employer interests, confronted socialism, and attempted to preserve the autonomy of the psychiatric profession. Concerns over contemporary Italian society and politics were as influential in shaping Morselli’s etiological explanation of traumatic neurosis as his psychiatric and medical training.

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<sup>297</sup> *Sul Progetto di Riordinamento del Manicomio di Racconigi dei Signori Prof. E. Morselli ed Ing. P. Peyron. Relazione della Commissione delegate dalla Deputazione Provinciale* (Cuneo: Tipografia Fratelli Isoardi, 1908), 4. Biblioteca di Ospedale Neuropsichiatrico Prov. Racconigi, Racconigi, Italy.

Traumatic neurosis was still a relatively new diagnosis when Morselli was studying medicine. In 1866, British physician John Erichsen (1818-1896) identified victims of railway accidents as trauma victims, and in 1889, Berlin neurologist Hermann Oppenheim (1858-1919) coined the term, “traumatic neurosis.”<sup>298</sup> Its early proponents ascribed symptoms such as “general weakness, problems with memory, irritability, anguish, the inability to work, [and] heart palpitations” to “undetectable organic changes in the brain.”<sup>299</sup> Oftentimes patients had no external wounds or scarring, and in their absence, Oppenheim and others proposed the existence of immaterial wounds which caused untraceable permanent changes to the brain. The question threatened the privileged relationship psychiatrists had cultivated between the medicine of the mind and that of the body, and the problem traumatic neurosis posed to physiological psychiatry would guide the history of the diagnosis.

In its earliest phase, traumatic neurosis was linked to railway accidents, but by the 1880s and 1890s, it was associated with all kinds of workplace injuries. As railways and companies were increasingly held accountable for such injuries, the question of the “lesion” became one of legal proof. At the same time, Jean-Martin Charcot (1825-1893) redirected the debate again, claiming that “trauma was not a principal, originating cause of the nervous disorders; rather, it operated secondarily, as the triggering mechanism of a hereditarily grounded malady.”<sup>300</sup> By arguing that an accident was not the actual cause of the disease, he bolstered the position of

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<sup>298</sup> See John Erichsen, *On Railway and Other Injuries of the Nervous System* (London: Walton and Maberly, 1866); Hermann Oppenheim, *Die traumatischen Neurosen nach den in der Nervenlinik der Charité in den letzten 5 Jahren gesammelten Beobachtungen* (Berlin: A. Hirschwald, 1889).

<sup>299</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000), 3. See also Paul Lerner, “Rationalizing the Therapeutic Arsenal: German Neuropsychiatry in World War I,” *Medicine and Modernity: Public Health and Medical Care in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Germany*, edited by Manfred Berg and Geoffrey Cocks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 121-148; Enrico Morselli, *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*.

<sup>300</sup> Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner, *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 119.

employers and insurance agencies avoiding compensation. Shortly thereafter, traumatic neurosis would become inextricably linked with World War I when a condition known as shell shock gave Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) the evidence to argue that traumatic illness was not triggered by a physiological lesion, but a wound to the mind. The war produced a controlled group of soldiers who underwent similar experiences. However, while some manifest shell shock, others did not. Freud linked the disease to memory: psychic trauma was not a result of “the experience itself which acted traumatically, but its delayed revival as a *memory* after the individual had entered sexual maturity and could grasp its sexual meaning.”<sup>301</sup> Like Charcot, Freud discredited the disease’s material basis.

There is a 30-year gap between Morselli’s first significant encounter with the disease and his major treatise on the matter, but it appears that the 1883 case of Pietro Guglielmino left a lasting impression on him. While defending his diagnosis, Morselli cautioned against some of his past mistakes. He emphasized the importance of skepticism toward patients and their families, stating: “Don’t ever allude to possible disturbances that the ill person should or could suffer from: — don’t link them with the complaints and the oaths of relatives, and in particular the wife....”<sup>302</sup> In spite of Charcot’s popular interpretation of traumatic neurosis as a form of hysteria, Morselli took the side of Oppenheim and continued to brand “railway spine” and “railway brain” (as traumatic neurosis was once known) with the dangers of modern industry and labor.<sup>303</sup> But by the time Morselli finally published his extensive study *Le Neurosi Traumatiche, Particolarmente Considerate nelle Forme Suscettive di Risarcimento: Studio Clinico e Medico-Legale (Trauma-Induced Neurosis, Particularly Considering those Forms Subject to*

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<sup>301</sup> See “Freud and Trauma,” in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, 20.

<sup>302</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 431-432.

<sup>303</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 8.

*Compensation: A Clinical and Medical-Legal Study*), he was too late. A year later, World War II, shell shock, and Freud would change the debate over the disease entirely. Nevertheless, the study may be read as a belated retort to the asylum administration that sided against him in 1883, as well as the coda to a lost battle to link physical trauma to psychological symptoms.

Three kinds of documents offer us insight into Morselli's ideas about traumatic neurosis: the administrative notes of Turin, the patient files from his private clinic outside Genoa, and the articles and manual Morselli wrote on the subject. The administrative notes from the Turin asylum give us a relatively detailed account about the case of Pietro Guglielmino, examples of disputes over worker compensation, and a portrait of psychiatric expertise as vulnerable to the interests of business and insurance agencies. The clinical files from Villa Maria Pia, Morselli's treatment center outside Genoa, evidence Morselli's diagnosis and treatment of the disease in a clinical setting. Lastly, Morselli published a number of articles on the disease in the 1900s to be followed by his 1913 study *Le Neurosi Traumatiche, Particolarmente Considerate nelle Forme Suscettive di Risarcimento. Studio Clinico e Medico-Legale*. These documents not only reveal how Morselli understood the disease, they also reflect Morselli's particular concern over the role of the workplace in causing trauma and the problems created by employer liability and worker simulation.

Morselli's publications offered his take on the disease's etiology, which he argues was a "true and proper *psychoneurosis*."<sup>304</sup> At the Congress for Professional Diseases held in 1911, Morselli complained that his colleagues had often misunderstood traumatic neurosis because they were looking for a pathology that was anatomical in origin.<sup>305</sup> He argued that traumatic

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<sup>304</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 10.

<sup>305</sup> See *Atti del 3. Congresso Nazionale per le Malattie del Lavoro (Malattie Professionali: Torino, 13-16 ottobre 1911)* (Turin: Tip. Lit. Checchini, 1911); see also N. Castellino, V. Anzelmo, G. Castellani, and F. Pofi, *Breve Storia della Medicina del Lavoro Italiana* (Rome: Pubblicazioni dell'I.S.U. Università Cattolica, 2000).

neurosis was – like hysteria, neurasthenia, and psychasthenia – a “psychogenetic syndrome” – a set of symptoms psychological in origin and in nature.<sup>306</sup> He blamed the confusion over the disease on medical professionals who had forgotten the importance of what they could not yet see or understand: “As I already said, we ignore the real organic or anatomic substratum of neurosis in general and of the traumatic in particular: one can only imagine the existence of the most acute molecular disorder.”<sup>307</sup> Morselli had closely followed the advances made by Rudolf Virchow (1821-1902), whose research into cellular biology demonstrated that changes at the cellular level could cause disease. It was at the microscopic level, Morselli suggested, that the origins of traumatic neurosis could be found.

The subject simply required more study, and Morselli’s manual described the psychological symptoms and treatment of the disease, filling in a consequential gap:

None of these neuropathologists or clinicians – not even our own alienists – has thoroughly analyzed the psychogenic process that the vast majority of the traumatized go through and is organized into a portrait of the so-called traumatic neurosis.<sup>308</sup>

While the origins of a disease were often hard to determine, they could also be characterized by a reliable set of symptoms.

Morselli’s explanation for traumatic neurosis reflected the general position he took in this debate, which was particularly vociferous in Italy. Psychiatrists in post-Risorgimento period had to take a stance on the work of criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), who argued that physical attributes could be used to detect the “born criminal.” Lombroso’s ideas spread beyond criminal deviance to mental illness generally, and Morselli became one of

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<sup>306</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 10.

<sup>307</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 13.

<sup>308</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 9.

Lombroso's intellectual sparring partners. Morselli continually insisted that there was no one-to-one correlation between a physiological "sign" and a psychiatric condition, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the case of traumatic neurosis.

The extant files from Morselli's clinic document how he diagnosed and treated patients for traumatic neurosis. Morselli ran the private Villa Maria Pia clinic from 1889 until he passed it on to his son Arturo Morselli a few years before his death in 1929. There are about a dozen files that deal with patients suffering from what Morselli diagnosed as traumatic neurosis.<sup>309</sup> The patients ranged in age from 8 to 67 years old, and while all the patients suffered from some sort of traumatic injury to the head, only a few were injured in railway accidents or workplace injuries. Other patients had attempted suicide, and one young boy had fallen off a bicycle and fractured his skull. Patients suspected of traumatic neurosis were usually first treated for their physical wounds in a regular hospital before being sent to Villa Maria Pia. There a physician would record their patient history, which included any hereditary illnesses in the family, past illnesses and accidents, current physical and psychological symptoms, and a description of the event which had sent the patient to the hospital. Their physical injuries were documented, their vision tested, and the areas of their bodies where they felt pain charted (figures 6, 7, and 8). The range of symptoms had a general consistency: after the body had healed, patients continued to feel pain or were partly paralyzed, or they suffered from changes in personality, moodiness, anger, or depression. It is important to note that Morselli had several other patients who suffered from workplace injuries and received worker's compensation or were diagnosed with head trauma without being diagnosed with traumatic neurosis. While the Villa Maria Pia clinical files demonstrate that patients diagnosed with traumatic neuroses were the victims of a diversity of

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<sup>309</sup> Archivio di Villa Maria Pia, S2I Italia, Genoa Borzoli, Italy.

accidents, the minority of patients suffering from a *workplace* accident were Morselli's major interest. Morselli's publications on traumatic neuroses look exclusively at such cases.<sup>310</sup>

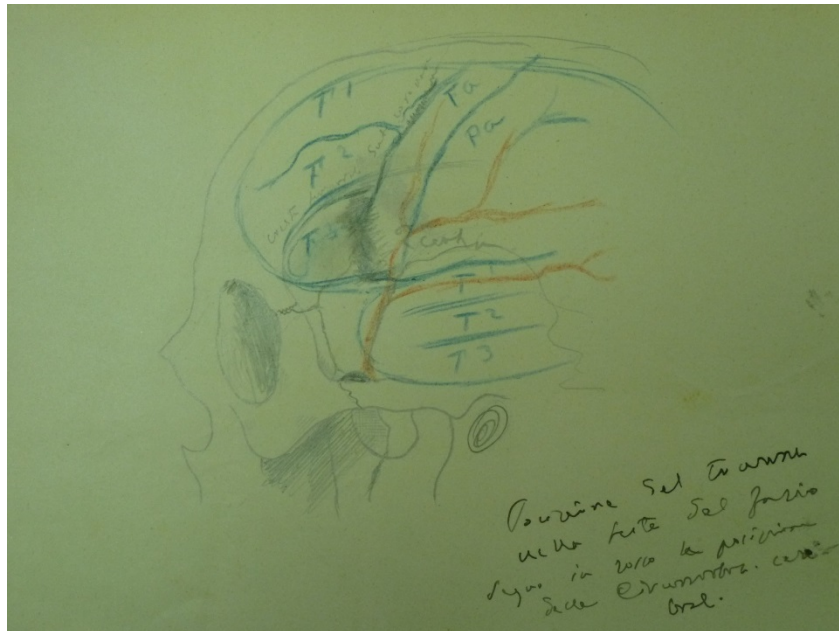


Figure 6. Example of a detailed illustration of cranial injury.

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<sup>310</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Trauma in Disastro Ferroviario, Istero-Neurosi Traumatica, Nevrite Cervico-Brachiale, Coxalgia e Claudicazione, Lezione Clinica del Corso di Neuropatologia*, (originally published in *Rivista sugli Infortuni del Lavoro*) (Modena, 1902).

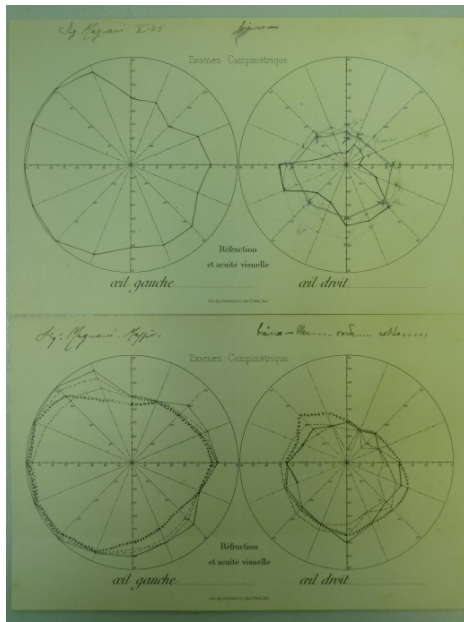


Figure 7. Visual Examination.

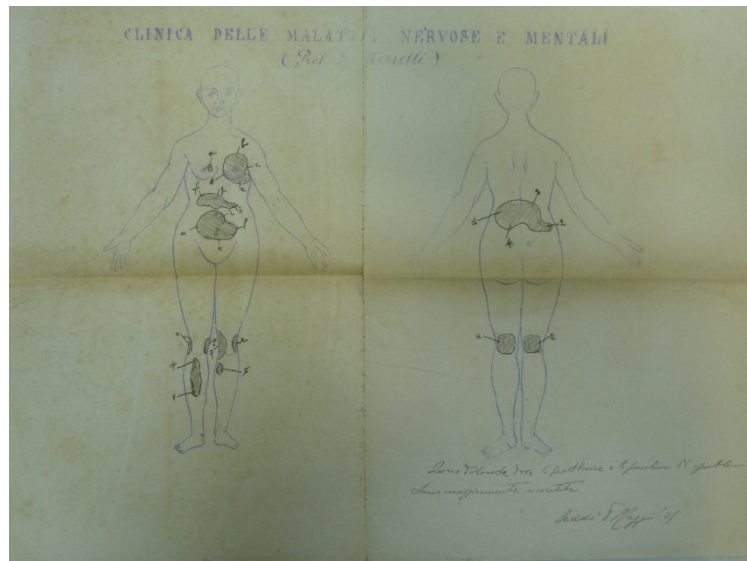


Figure 8. Illustration of painful areas on one patient's body.

By undermining the significance of the lesion while insisting that physical trauma could manifest psychiatric symptoms, Morselli offered a disease etiology that allowed psychiatric professionals the greatest flexibility in diagnosis. Morselli's ideas about traumatic neurosis followed his basic psychiatric philosophy, but they also protected the diagnosis against rival physicians hired by businesses or insurance agencies. For employers, such a diagnosis was costly, and they denied worker's compensation based on two objections: the lack of a lesion consistent with the patient's symptoms or a preexisting condition such as hereditary mental illness or alcoholism. For psychiatrists such as Morselli, the stakes were raised again by new European legislation. Morselli closely studied the workplace insurance laws put into place in Germany in 1885.<sup>311</sup> It was only in 1898 that Italy passed similar laws to insure workers against

<sup>311</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 4-5. See also: Wolfgang Schäffer, "Events, Series, Trauma: The Probabilistic Revolution of the Mind in the Late Nineteenth and Early twentieth Centuries," and Greg A. Eghigian, "The German Welfare State as a Discourse of Trauma," in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*; Andreas Killen, "Railway Accidents, Social Insurance, and the Pathogenesis of Mass Nervousness, 1889-1914," in *Berlin Electropolis: Shock, Nerves, and German Modernity*.

workplace injury.<sup>312</sup> This legislation escalated the debate, increasing the tensions between employers and workers and the rival psychiatrists that took their clients' side. For Morselli, the problem pitted doctors against one another based on class interests. He wrote:

For the most part, trustworthy doctors called on behalf of the traumatized insist on the reality and gravity of the injury or accident's pathological consequences; instead, those assigned by an insurance agency or consultants of industrial enterprise are inclined to consider the assertions of the sick and [the disease's] importance with the extreme severity, so much as to deny its very existence.<sup>313</sup>

As demonstrated by the title of his study *Trauma-Induced Neurosis, Particularly Considering those Forms Subject to Compensation: A Clinical and Medical-Legal Study*, Morselli was keenly interested in the effects of insurance and compensation on workplace injury diagnosis.

On one side, Morselli protected the psychiatrist's verdict against employers and insurance agencies, while on the other he protected it against workers and their families. Affirming that traumatic neurosis could exist regardless of physical scars or lesions also made it easier for patients to feign illness. In the debate about workplace injury, employees and their families also manipulated psychiatric diagnoses in order to obtain compensation. In this way, the clinic became a site of class conflict between the "dominant classes" and the "proletariat." While the new insurance legislation protected workers against exploitation, insurance agencies also played essential "economic functions" and had to be protected against workers simulating disease.<sup>314</sup>

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<sup>312</sup> *Breve Storia della Medicina del Lavoro Italiana*, 100.

<sup>313</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Sulla Diagnosi Obiettiva della Neurosi Traumatica. Lezioni Cliniche del Prof. Enrico Morselli. Lezione I.a (7 marzo 1912)," *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista di Coltura e di Classe*. Anno II, fasc. 3 (marzo 1912), 4.

<sup>314</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 449.

Morselli recognized simulation of disease as common with traumatic neurosis but hardly unique to it. In fact, simulation was a longstanding problem for psychiatrists. Patients feigned an incredible variety of illnesses with varied motives: to escape work, flee families, or be housed in a hospital. But the more a patient had to gain, the harder it was to prove simulation. Workers were not alone, and “frequently, in so many cases among soldiers, conscripts, criminal offenders, workers insured against the risks of work, or members of societies of mutual aid—among public and private employees—all moved by some interest, we must go through great pains to unmask fraud.”<sup>315</sup> While “many different kinds of insanity are simulated,” in each case the responsibility fell to the psychiatrist to detect that simulation.<sup>316</sup> In this sense, detailed instructions Morselli wrote for the “objective diagnosis” of traumatic neurosis were as much about combatting fraud as they were about detecting disease.<sup>317</sup> Such guides considered both physiological and psychological symptoms and included long descriptions of the victim’s physical appearance, physiological reaction, bodily pain and sensitivity, changes in sensorial perception and emotional state. While a patient might fake several psychological symptoms, psychiatrists could detect the inconsistencies of feigned symptoms with the psychosomatic profile of the victim of traumatic neurosis.

Another problem similar to simulation was suggestibility, and the two were often confused. Both were motivated in some way by compensation: simulating patients consciously feigned illnesses while suggestible patients were susceptible to the ideas and opinions of others. In this sense, traumatic neurosis was not only an individual disease but also a social malady. He

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<sup>315</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 245.

<sup>316</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 245.

<sup>317</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Sulla diagnosi obiettiva della Neurosi traumatica,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista di Coltura e di Classe*, Anno II, Fasc. 3 (Marzo 1912); “Sulla diagnosi obiettiva della Neurosi traumatica,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria. Rivista di coltura e di classe*, Anno II, Fasc. 4 (Aprile 1912).

wrote: “The etiology of traumatic neuroses is more social or collective than individual in this sense: beyond proclaiming laws that make insurance obligatory for workplace accidents, the actual spiritual disposition is generally dominated by pecuniary interests.”<sup>318</sup> In other words, the increase in accident coverage for laborers also increased worker’s desire for compensation. For Morselli, this had a real effect on the psyche of patients, making them more likely to manifest symptoms of neurosis. It wasn’t simply “fraud,” but “*hetero-suggestion*” (“*etero-suggestione*”), which was “most common and strongest among the victims (*sinistrati*) of the working classes.”<sup>319</sup>

While for Charcot, suggestibility invalidated the disease as a unique entity and proved trauma to be another form of hysteria, Morselli saw suggestibility as a significant feature of traumatic neurosis. Similar to hypnosis, suggestibility was a factor of a person’s emotional constitution, and Morselli took a patient’s emotional state as a consequential factor in developing illness. Instead of viewing emotionality as evidence against a diagnosis, Morselli viewed it as a contributing factor to the reality of the disease. He wrote:

We physicians are certain about the pathogenic effects of emotion on the [human] vessel. There are emotional states (anxieties) that are notorious producers of arteriosclerosis, and other more intense emotions can rupture cerebral capillaries... but for now, what hazard could have happened if the emotion had not occurred? Evidently, the predisposition would have passed innocuously and unobserved. If [the effects of emotion] are permitted and approved of among patients suffering from epilepsy, Parkinsons, or myotonia, etc., then there’s no reason to exclude it in the etiology of traumatic neurosis.

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<sup>318</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 18.

<sup>319</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 252, 445.

Unlike simulation, a patient's suggestibility did not mean culpability, and many victims of traumatic neurosis suffered from the "pathogenic action of emotions."<sup>320</sup>

Two groups strongly affected the emotions, and therefore suggestibility, of a patient. The first was the patient's family, and Morselli advised that patients be removed from their domestic situations to avoid the "extremely suggestive lamentations and advice of relatives," who could transform the most "ingenuous" worker into an "exploiter." Again, Morselli never forgot the Guglielmino case, which taught him that the most dangerous relative was the wife who "acted unfavorably because of the affectionate misapprehensions (*affetto malinteso*)...being the jealous guardian of the domestic economy, the woman reveals herself to be generally greedy and determined to demand compensation for damages doubted by the man."<sup>321</sup>

The second group affecting a patient's suggestibility was made up of socialists and political radicals and is worth exploring in some depth. While socialist ideas had spread throughout the Italian peninsula prior to state unification, the founding of the Italian Socialist Party (*Partito Socialista Italiano*) in 1892 marked the entry of labor-defined politics into institutional politics, and socialism forcefully challenged the nationalistic connotations of work. Morselli had mixed feelings about socialism, and his opinions changed throughout the course of his career. On the one hand, he clearly rejected the socialist party and their proposals for expanding worker's rights. On the other, he endorsed the moral concerns that socialism addressed. Morselli seemed to agree with Marxian class analysis and sometimes reached out to the left, but he critiqued socialism on the same grounds as Mazzini. Socialism encouraged politics based on interests rather than ideals and incited social conflicts and – Morselli would add

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<sup>320</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Sulla Psicogenesi Emottiva ed Ideativa della Neurosi Traumatica," *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista di Cultura e di Classe*, anno III, fasc. 8-9 (aprile-maggio 1913), 145-146.

<sup>321</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 445.

– subverted human evolution. Morselli’s political perspectives tinted his psychiatric practice, and in the case of traumatic neurosis played a decisive factor in his understanding of the disease.

Well before Italian socialism was officially founded as a party, Morselli expressed vocal concerns over its spread. His earliest comments on the movement harshly rebuked the “wicked passions and damaging seductions of socialism,” which he regarded as a corrupting force for workers.<sup>322</sup> Born from a merger of revolutionary socialists (*Partito socialista rivoluzionario di Romagna*) with the workers’ party (*Partito operaio italiano*), the socialist party was a force of disorder that undermined the national project. However, Morselli gave “scientific reasons” rather than nationalist reasons for his disapproval: socialism was not based on a “system of knowledge.” This system of knowledge (science) could not replace a “system of feelings” (religion), and since religion “had lost its value and since science had not yet acquired it, one understands how socialist aspirations could spread throughout the masses.” For Morselli, comparing socialism with religion was a way to denigrate the movement for offering “hope” but not the betterment of the working class.<sup>323</sup>

Despite his outward rejection of socialism as a political movement, Morselli reached out to the left and sometimes sympathized with their perspective.<sup>324</sup> Morselli sang the praises of his “close friend,” criminologist and sociologist Enrico Ferri (1856-1929), and respected his leftist

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<sup>322</sup> Enrico Morselli, *L’istituto di S. Lorenzo in Aversa*, (Estratto dalla *Rivista della Beneficenza Pubblica e degli Istituti di Previdenza*), anno 1878, fascicolo di febbraio (Milan: Tipografia Emilio Civelli, 1878), 10.

<sup>323</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Un Congress pel Miglioramento della Specie Umana” (Genoa, 29 Febbraio 1912). *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 14. Biblioteca Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa.

<sup>324</sup> Morselli was recognized for his socialist empathies in at least two texts. See Alfredo Agiolini, *Cinquant’anni di Socialismo in Italia* (Florence: G. Nerbini, 1903), 263; Gustavo Macchi, *Il Socialismo Giudicato da Letterati, Artisti, e Scienziati Italiani*. Guido Mazzoni Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.

sociology.<sup>325</sup> He wrote articles for leftist papers (one communist newspaper rescinded his article recommending the Bible be banished from public schooling), and he also criticized the upper classes.<sup>326</sup> Furthermore, Morselli's social commentary was informed by class analysis. For instance, on a few occasions when Morselli wrote about the problem of white-collar crime, specifically banking fraud, he critiqued the bourgeois for "constituting the intermediary between the high and low classes and formed for the most part of heterogeneous elements," which "for the laws of historical necessity...is given to economic corruption and to shady and sly conflict (*lotta*)."<sup>327</sup> Morselli had little better to say about the upper classes, which he characterized as "dominant," "exploitative," and simply subject to a different moral corruption from the lower classes.<sup>328</sup>

Morselli regarded socialism as an "important causal element" among the working classes that increased the severity of a disease induced by industrial labor.<sup>329</sup> Longer work shifts combined with the expansion of big industry to transform the worker into an "automaton." Mechanical labor was taxing: the habitual routines of mechanical industry made workers generally disinterested in their labour, and boredom and monotony curbed the worker's

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<sup>325</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Gli Scandali della Banca Romana Osservati Sociologicamente e Psicologicamente," *La Sera di Milano* (4 ottobre 1893). *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 10. Biblioteca Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa.

<sup>326</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Sante Parole!," *Il Lavoratore di Trieste* (11 luglio 1905). *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 13; "Qual'è la Vera Aristocrazia," *La Parola del Popolo*, anno 1, n. 6 (Padova, dagli student di quella Università) (1897). *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 13, Biblioteca Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa.

<sup>327</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Preface," *La Delinquenza Bancaria nella Sociologia Criminale, nella Storia e nel Diritto*, by Rodolfo Laschi (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1899), 10. It is worth noting that the word used here, *lotta* is the same word used to denote evolutionary "struggle" as well as class "conflict."

<sup>328</sup> See also "Gli Scandali della Banca Romana Osservati Sociologicamente e Psicologicamente"; "Le Forme Mitiche ed Ideali del Socialismo," *Letteratura Moderna* (Turin, 1890); "Rivista Analitica: *Il Socialismo Contemporaneo*, di Giovanni Rae. Prima trad. Ital.. del prof. Angelo Bertolini, con un Cenno sul socialismo in Italia. – Firenze, succ. Le Monnier, 1889, volume di pag. XXVI-500," *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, volume 8 (1889), 311-313.

<sup>329</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 19.

intelligence and made him extremely “tired,” “vulnerable” to stress, and “hot-tempered.” The stresses caused by industrial work were further complicated by:

...the enormous diffusion of socialist ideas added to the feeling that workers had rights without having to carry out their duties correspondingly.... I am not opposed to believing that socialism, having assumed in many minds an almost religious, utopian character, has rendered the masses even more suggestible. In the case of work accidents, they have often heard denunciations against “capitalist” exploitation; this greater suggestibility can easily turn into the damaging consequences of trauma.<sup>330</sup>

Modern labor weakened the mental constitution of the working class, which then absorbed socialist ideology and led to class conflict. Therefore, the worker who suffered a workplace accident and manifested traumatic neurosis was thrice a victim: of labor routine, physical injury, and socialism.

Just as Morselli rejected the socialist party while empathizing with its moral position, he diagnosed very few workers with traumatic neurosis while sympathizing with the worker’s position generally. In fact, Morselli even stated that traumatic neurosis should be understood according to social psychopathology:

...it would be as a means of defense of the weak against the strong, servants against masters, proletariat against the dominant classes, the individual against state and collective organizations, even when the affected individuals do not consciously offer the use of this weapon in the battle. The falsehoods, simulations, perseverant trickery, and mythomania should be considered with a certain leniency. We should remember that, in another form, society bears the sole responsibility for creating conditions favorable to the development of lies as defense. In in a great number of cases, traumatic neuroses

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<sup>330</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 19.

constitute in essence an antisocial phenomenon; this is an unconscious consequence of the “fight for Rights.”<sup>331</sup>

In the end, it was not just suggestible patients who could not be held responsible for the diagnosis; simulating patients should not be held responsible for the misdiagnosis. By accepting deceit as a form of social resistance and claiming traumatic neurosis to be a social psychopathology, Morselli essentially validated simulation as a “rightful” wrong, an illness caught in dangerous workplace conditions. Feigned illness was the symptom of a sick society.

#### *4. Conclusion: the psychiatric profession, the work of a bourgeois scientist*

Ergotherapy and traumatic neurosis represent the way in which social and political discourses about work were embedded in psychiatric practice and theory. Whether in treatment or diagnosis, concepts of labor and debates about its meaning to society, politics, health, and the self colored Morselli’s perception of patients and patient care and his understanding of mental illness. If we understand a word like “work” as an object of continual negotiation, then it is an object whose meaning and value change with every bid placed. In his psychiatry, Morselli argues on both sides, taking positions that contrast if not conflict with one another. How did Morselli reconcile—or did he even need to—his position as an asylum director in which he managed patient laborers with his insistent support of the victims of labor-induced insanity? If the doctor is in the details then the devil is in the idea. Morselli’s system of knowledge, psychiatry, was not impervious to the massive political, social, and cultural changes facing Italy.

A study of work in the career of Enrico Morselli also possesses a self-effacing irony: both ergotherapy and traumatic neurosis reflect the various pressures on the psychiatric profession

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<sup>331</sup> *Le Neurosi Traumatiche*, 252.

from the asylum institution itself as well as from society and industry. Additionally, they demonstrate the efforts of psychiatrists to maintain professional autonomy in their practices and theories. The psychiatric profession in Italy evolved in the insane asylum, where psychiatrists practiced under the supervision of administration and board members. Made up of the upper class, these supervisors had to approve when patients were admitted or released, when new equipment was bought or renovations took place, when a physician could take leave, the hours of treatment, and the purchasing of medicines and asylum devices. And when a conflict arose with staff, patients or their families, when a patient died and particularly when the death was questionable or cost someone money, the psychiatrist had to answer to the asylum's administrative board.

In addition to demonstrating the complicated role work played in patient treatment, the case of Pietro Guglielmino also reveals the kinds of tensions between psychiatrists and supervisors that shaped the psychiatric profession. In this light, the Guglielmino story is part of a longer narrative that began long before 1883 and would continue until Morselli abandoned the city of Turin altogether. As the climax of a series of disputes, the Guglielmino incident highlights what was more explicitly at stake in these conflicts: not only patient welfare, but also administrative liability, the maintenance of asylum order, and experimentation and clinical research. Beyond technical and procedural details, the longstanding disputes between Morselli and the administrative board may be understood as a continual debate about what the responsibilities of the psychiatrist consisted of, the knowledge that his occupation entailed, and what psychiatric work actually was. Whereas the administration emphasized the medical director's chief duties as enforcing the norms and treatments that made up the asylum's day-to-day operations, Morselli insisted that his responsibilities to patient welfare were also fulfilled by improving the treatment and understanding of mental illnesses.

This tension dates back to 1880 when Michelangelo Porporati retired as medical director and joined the asylum's directorial board. As the young and renowned reformer of Macerata's rural asylum, Morselli was asked to take up Porporati's charge.<sup>332</sup> The little that is known about Porporati helps clarify tension between the medical director and former medical director turned administrator. Porporati was the student of psychiatrist Giovanni Stefano Bonacossa (1804-1878), who assigned him the task of initiating a new insane asylum at Collegno (outside of Turin) based on the idea of creating an "autonomous community."<sup>333</sup> Upon Bonacossa's death in 1878, Porporati substituted for Bonacossa's position at the university and served as medical director for Turin's insane asylum. In 1879, however, the medical faculty of the University of Turin rejected his application for professorship. By 1880, Morselli was nominated as both professor and asylum director, where "sustaining much opposition, he abolished all methods of coercion."<sup>334</sup>

The generally conservative tenor of the administration appears to have been set by its doctor members, Porporati and Angelo Perotti, who focused on asylum discipline and bureaucratic procedure.<sup>335</sup> From the administration's point of view, the role of the asylum medical director was similar to that of a highly skilled technician or manager whose chief responsibilities were to the procedural and technical correctness of patient treatment as well as

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<sup>332</sup> There is not much information available on Michelangelo Porporati. He was the student of the more Giovanni Stefano Bonacossa (1804-1878), and served as asylum director for two years. See Silvano Montaldo and Paola Novaria, eds., *Gli Archivi della Scienza. L'Università di Torino e Altri Casi Italiani* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2011), 42-43.

<sup>333</sup> M. U. Dianziani, "Giovanni Stefano Bonacossa (1804-1878)," *Personaggi, Accademia delle Scienze di Torino* (Published online 02 July 2005).  
[http://www.torinoscienza.it/accademia/personaggi/giovanni\\_stefano\\_bonacossa\\_20041](http://www.torinoscienza.it/accademia/personaggi/giovanni_stefano_bonacossa_20041)

<sup>334</sup> *Cesare Lombroso. Professor all'Università di Torino, 1876-1909 nei Documenti dell'Archivio Storico* (Archivio Storico dell'Università, Dal 5 giugno al 31 luglio 2009). Published online:  
[http://www.unito.it/unitoWAR/ShowBinary/FSRepo/M009/Allegati/Mostre\\_e\\_convegni/catalogo.pdf](http://www.unito.it/unitoWAR/ShowBinary/FSRepo/M009/Allegati/Mostre_e_convegni/catalogo.pdf)

<sup>335</sup> Even less is known about Angelo Perotti than Michelangelo Porporati. See Antonio Marro, "Il Manicomio di Torino," *Annali di Freniatria e Scienze Affini* (1888). Republished on <http://www.psichiatriaestoria.org>

the management of their daily routines. Porporati's own psychiatric discourses and writings present a generally conservative view of patient diagnosis and discipline, while Perotti's great innovation for the insane asylum was a new model for iron beds to which epileptics and other agitated patients were strapped.<sup>336</sup> Additionally, the minutes from the administration's weekly meetings are riddled with complaints regarding incomplete patient records (*storie cliniche*), procedural vagueness and a general neglect of protocol. For the administration, proper treatment relied on proper records and the admittance or release of every patient waited for the approval of the asylum directors.<sup>337</sup>

For Morselli, the asylum medical director improved patient welfare largely through experimentation and the expansion of psychiatric knowledge. In this sense, the administration and Morselli saw the "science" of psychiatry differently. With constraints in time, assistance, and funds, Morselli prioritized research into new technologies and treatments, scientific conventions, and student training over paperwork and other quotidian responsibilities (see figure 9). In focusing on the reform of asylum facilities as well as patient treatment, Morselli failed to follow the asylum's schedule or procedures. While the administration often affirmed Morselli's requests to expand and improve clinics and research equipment within budget constraints in hopes of

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<sup>336</sup> *Prolusione al Corso di Clinica Libera di Psichiatria detta dal Dottore M. Porporati addì 15 Aprile 1879 per Incarico Avutone dalla R. Direzione del Manicomio di Torino* (Turin: Tipografia Celanza e Comp., 1879); *Valore dell'imitazione nella Trasmissione di Pazzie d'identica Forma. Memoria letta alla Reale Accademia di Medicina di Torino il 28 luglio 1876 dal socio Prof. M. Porporati* (Turin: Tipografia V. Vercellino, 1876); *Clinica Psichiatrica nel R. Manicomio di Torino. Discorso Preliminare sui Pregi ed Utilità della Psichiatria detti il 6 marzo 1876 dal Dottore M. Porporati*. "Miscellanee Mediche," 2.A1.15. Biblioteca di Ospedale Neuropsichiatrico Prov. Racconigi, Racconigi, Italy; The promotion of Perotti's bed model began in early 1882 until it gained Morselli's official medical approval and was adopted in Turin in late 1883. "Seduta delli 31 ottobre 1883), Manicomio di Torino, Deliberazione della Direzione dal 18 luglio 1883 al 2 Aprile 1884, posizione n. 42, 56. Biblioteca Medica di Torino, Collegno, Italy.

<sup>337</sup> The board saw itself as continuing a Turinese legacy of charity to the community and ultimately responsible for patient welfare. By design, it included representatives from the elite of Turinese society, including lawyers, engineers, nobles and physicians.

“better results for science and for humanity,” some of these approvals were a matter of common sense.<sup>338</sup> In one instance, Morselli requested better teaching facilities because the patients used in instruction were traumatized by the rooms in which the lessons took place. In this case, the administration agreed that the site of maceration vats and half-finished autopsies negatively affected patients and granted use of another room.<sup>339</sup> But in his last years as asylum director, most of his requests were rejected, and Morselli was not able to balance the pursuit of his scientific investigations with managing the asylum’s day-to-day affairs. Shortly before leaving his asylum post, he complained to the administration about working 16 hours a day and his ill health and requested a bed and room to sleep inside the asylum. This request was summarily denied.



Figure 9. Psychiatrist working in an examining room, Macerata, 1870s

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<sup>338</sup> “Seduta delli 31 ottobre 1883,” *Manicomio di Torino*. 42. *Deliberazioni della Direzione dal 18 Luglio 1883 al 2 Aprile 1884*, 58.

<sup>339</sup> “Seduta delli 18 Luglio 1883,” 4.

Although Morselli continued his psychiatric career as a professor at the University of Turin, this too came to an end. In a letter dated 9 April 1889, Doctor Enrico Morselli detailed the changes he saw necessary for psychiatric education at the University of Turin, improvements crucial to “the existence and the future of the University Clinic for Mental Disease.”<sup>340</sup> As with Bonacossa, the position of head professor of clinical psychiatry and medical director of the insane asylum were held simultaneously under Morselli’s tenure until 1885. But Morselli insisted that as a professor, he required certain privileges in the asylum. First, he should have the right to choose asylum patients for clinical and experimental psychiatric education. Second, he needed better facilities with modern medical tools inside the asylum itself. For Morselli, psychiatry was “a positive science that proceeds with an objective method, instruments, and rather complicated devices.” But despite important progress, it “lacks the means to accentuate its scientific direction.”<sup>341</sup>

Morselli’s letter sparked a heated debate that ultimately led to his transfer to Genoa. The asylum administration vehemently opposed Morselli’s requests, citing his animosity toward them and claiming that his attempts at more “technical” and “scientific” psychiatry conflicted with their primary responsibility for patient welfare. Specifically, Porporati cited the two cases in which Morselli purportedly mishandled patients. First was the case of Guglielmino, and second was that of Andrea Berrino, which also dealt with work compensation. After two denied requests for permission to leave the asylum to work, Berrino was allowed to make lithographs with a

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<sup>340</sup> Enrico Morselli, letter to Rettore Anselmi, 19 April 1885, ASUT, Affari ordinate per classes, 1884-1885, fasc. 4.10 Clinica psichiatrica, XIV B 89, Archivio Universitario di Torino, Turin, Italy. The royal city’s university was arguably one of Italy’s largest and most prestigious, and it had pioneered psychiatry by establishing the discipline’s first chair in Italy in 1856.

<sup>341</sup> Enrico Morselli, letter to Rettore Anselmi, 19 April 1885, ASUT, Affari ordinate per classes, 1884-1885, fasc. 4.10 Clinica psichiatrica, XIV B 89, Archivio Universitario di Torino, Turin, Italy.

compensation of 10 *lire* a month.<sup>342</sup> The details are unclear, but Berrino claimed he had not been adequately compensated for his labor. The administration blamed Morselli for the confusion and the expenditures.

When Porporati responded to the university rector regarding the request and citing Morselli's mishandling of patients, Porporati emphasized the potential dangers to the patients. He asked:

Really, who will respond on behalf of the sick of the clinic if not the Insane Asylum (Manicomio), the same [institute] responsible to the relatives and the authorities of the hospitalized trusted to its custody? ... If a mishap occurs, an escape, a serious injury, a suicide or something similar, who will the responsibility be traced back to?<sup>343</sup>

By highlighting the hypothetical risks of Morselli's request, Porporati was able to block Morselli from the asylum and hinder his psychiatric research. In order to reproach Morselli, Porporati drew upon fears that were shared by the committee at large. As one administrator wrote about the asylum in 1884:

...when doctors act without surveillance, where they are absolute masters without effective controls, without someone to protect the ill against certain perversions, have we not known excessive passion for science to have dragged away more than a few of its lovers? The motto is celebrated: *faciamus experimentum in corpore vili*. Now who will defend the poor sick against these experiments?<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> "Sessione delli 12 aprile 1882," *Deliberazioni della Direzione dal 19 dicembre 1881 al 23 agosto 1882*. N. 40, 99; "Seduta delli 4 ottobre 1882," 41. *Deliberazione della Direzione dal 30 Agosto 1882 al 18 luglio 1883*. 16; "Seduta delli 27 febbraio 1884," 42. *Deliberazioni della Direzione dal 18 Luglio 1883 al 2 Aprile 1884*, 137.

<sup>343</sup> Michele Porporati, letter to Rettore Anselmi, Turin, 23 July 1885, ASUT, *Affari ordinate per classes, 1884-1885*, fasc. 4.10 *Clinica psichiatrica, XIV B 89*, Archivio Universitario di Torino, Turin, Italy.

<sup>344</sup> C. G. Tallone, *La Carità in Torino. Il Regio Manicomio* (Turin: Tipografia Eredi Botta, 1884), 99. *Collezione Simeom, Serie B, n. inv. 702, 204/206*, Archivio Civico di Torino, Turin, Italy.

Framed as changes made out of concern for patient welfare, the administration restricted family visits, patient mobility and work, and prohibited Morselli's clinical research. However, the effect of those changes on patient welfare is debatable. By portraying the asylum director as dictator, whose double-role as scientist threatened patients, the administration painted Morselli – once proclaimed the asylum's liberator – as a psychiatric torturer. First ousted from his directorship then rendered impotent in his professorship, Morselli's twofold job loss was the double-dipping nadir of an otherwise remarkable career that evidences the tensions behind shifting notions of psychiatric work in the *fin-de-siècle*.

## *Chapter 5. Spirit: ghostly psyche and psychiatry of the soul*

### *1. Introduction: the case of a failed medium Maria P.*

In January 1911, the “curious spiritist facts” surrounding a young rural girl made newspaper headlines in the small Ligurian town of Arquata Scrivia. For about a month, 16-year-old Maria P. had been continually pelted by stones while leaving or entering her parents’ home or those of friends. The strange occurrences and the rumors that followed impelled town mayor Eugenio Persano to clear up the matter publicly. Neither he nor the town police chief had witnessed the events, but they investigated the home where most of them had taken place. Persano found the girl in an “abnormal state, trembling continuously as if her body were possessed, with such troubled respiration that it was almost impossible for her to breathe.” The girl was afraid and in pain. The authorities had looked for the “individual having fun throwing rocks at [the victim’s] door,” but were unable to find the culprit of this local mischief.<sup>345</sup> The town soon turned to the supernatural, fearing that some “poor devil” had taken residence in their town or that there was some “witchcraft,” and they feared “reprisal.”<sup>346</sup>

While it is unclear whether the townspeople understood the showering of stones to be a supernatural occurrence or a reaction to the girl’s own occult practices, the mayor held a series of séances with the girl to explore the possibility of otherworldly explanations. The first few

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<sup>345</sup> “I fatti spiritici di Arquata Scrivia. Chi è la fanciulla bersagliata dai sassi. Un’intervista col Sindaco,” Newspaper clipping included in the clinical file of Maria P., circa January 1911, file #679/708, box 1221, Sanatorio Morselli, Villa Morselli Via Maria Pia, Archivio Storico Psichiatra, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>346</sup> “Seduta Spiritica tenuta in casa della Punta Maria a Pessano” and “Ila Seduta tenuta in Arquata Scrivia,” Clinical file of Maria P.

consisted of simple questioning.<sup>347</sup> In the first séance, the medium responded that she was possessed though the spirit forbade her revealing its name. The transcription ends shortly after Maria confirmed that the events taking place were indeed the “effect of magic.” During the second séance, Maria also confirmed that there were *libri di comando* (books of black magic) on the premises, and that the spirit she was channeling had made use of these books, and during later séances, Maria’s examiners introduced a spirit board consisting of a numbered alphabet (figure 1).<sup>348</sup> Holding a triangular pointer, Maria would indicate letters, which the witnesses noted and attempted to decode (figures 2). While the exact letters and numbers changed from session to session, the names “Paolo” and “Pajan” reoccurred. Through yes or no questioning, the former was identified as the married man who had pelted Maria with stones and the latter as the spirit of the dead man she was channeling. Later, Maria would answer that the two were in fact the same person. But in the preliminary séances, most of the questions revolved around Maria’s personal and spiritual safety: was she safe at home, who had pelted her with stones, whom she had told she had contact with the dead, and why?

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<sup>347</sup> Persano’s notes from the séances he held include few details beyond they place where they were held, the questions that were asked, and the answers.

<sup>348</sup> “Seduta Spiritica tenuta in casa della Punta Maria a Pessano” and “Ila Seduta tenuta in Arquata Scrivia,” Clinical file of Maria P.

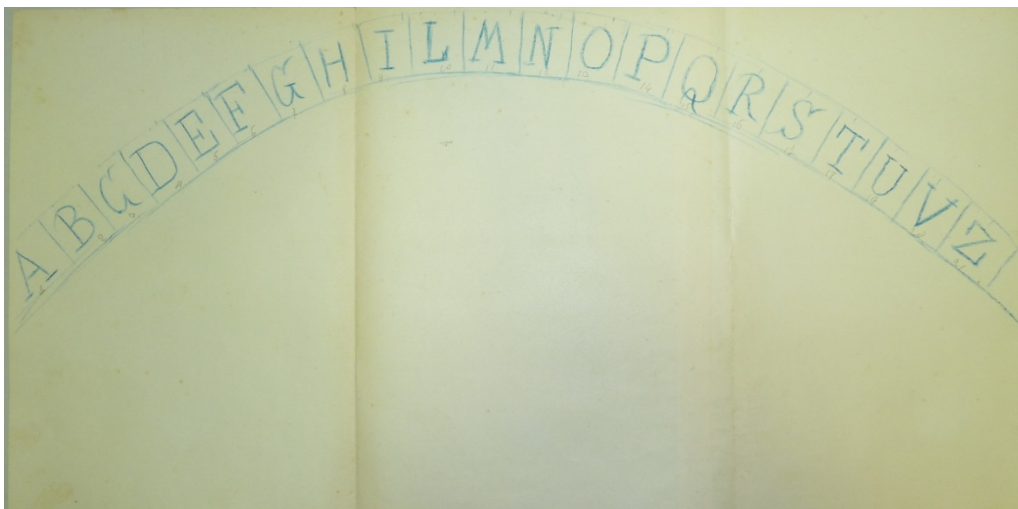


Figure 1. The *alfabeto* or spirit table of Maria P.

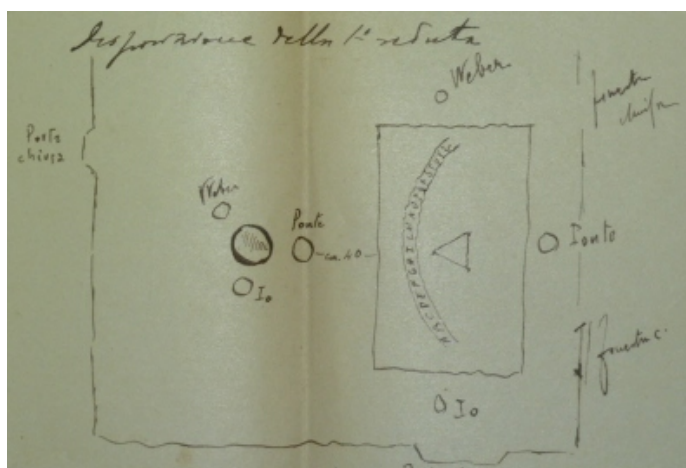


Figure 2. Arrangement of séance with Maria P.

News of the events spread across Liguria and soon caught the attention of Enrico Morselli, who offered free treatment for her at his private sanatorium, Villa Maria Pia in Albaro, where Maria checked herself in on January 12, 1911. Together with another spiritist researcher identified as Weber, Morselli continued to investigate Maria P.'s mediumship. During her stay at the sanatorium, at least four more séances were held, one in Morselli's home. However, the séances had now taken the tone of an interrogation; Morselli's questions focused on the veracity

of the girl's responses, detailing her tone and behavior, rather than the actual content of what she had to say. After confirming that he had recreated the same conditions under which the séances had taken place in Arquata Scrivia, and that Maria was literate, they again used the "alphabet" (spirit table). Morselli caught Maria glancing at the board, but she "diverted her eyes, looking away as soon as she saw she was observed" though she had gazed downward to "change the letters." Later, Morselli's partner Weber saw Maria moving her foot to make the table "dance as it had in Arquata Scrivia," where, Maria insisted, the table had really moved. Morselli repeated similar questions about Paolo and Pajan, but by the last séance, Maria was in a bad mood. Morselli asked "So Paolo Paja. Is it a dead man?," to which she responded, "No." Morselli continued, "Does he exist?," and again she answered, "No."<sup>349</sup>

In the sanatorium, Maria was treated like any other patient. Upon her admittance, her anamnesis was recorded, detailing the suspected supernatural events. In addition to being pelted with stones, she had twice fainted after believing she had seen the devil in the shadows and had to call for help. Sanatorium personnel also noted that a certain Girolamo Paja wasn't on good terms with Maria's family and that the girl had continually had a problem with bedwetting. Five days later on January 19, Morselli examined the girl, who appeared to have some psychiatric or neurological abnormalities. In addition to bedwetting, the right side of her body was abnormally sensitive. But the doctors paid more attention to what the girl was trying to conceal. During her physical examination, Morselli found the patient to have a "white ribbon, now dirty, tightly tied under the rib cage." When questioned about the ribbon, the girl blushed, mumbling that she didn't know why she wore it or for how long she had worn it. When asked if she had a suitor (*galante*), she became angry and irritated, and later "mistrustful" and "ambiguous," and made "rude" gestures before throwing herself on the bed and refusing to answer more questions. After

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<sup>349</sup> "I Seduta," and "IV Seduta, 21-I," Clinical file of Maria P.

the séance held at Morselli's home, her erratic behavior became worse: she was offended "because she saw that [the physicians] didn't believe in the reality of the phenomenon." Later, another doctor and a nurse caught her feigning more supernatural occurrences and injuring another patient in the process. Having "seen the manipulation perfectly," they took her away. That week Maria urinated twice in her bed, despite a nurse continually escorting her to the bathroom throughout the night, and later she was caught wetting her sheets intentionally before "running off laughing." On February 2, the girl was finally released.<sup>350</sup>

The case of Maria P. attests to Enrico Morselli's long-term interest in supernormal psychic phenomena and his efforts to expose spiritist phenomena as fraud. By the time the girl arrived at Villa Maria Pia, Enrico Morselli had investigated hypnotism, spiritism, psychicism, telepathy, the occult, and mediumship for over 25 years, had written a series of scientific studies and articles for the popular press, and published a two-volume study on the medium Eusapia Paladino. While Morselli approved of hypnosis and would later promote several "metapsychiatric" theories, he adamantly opposed spiritism and in fact, might be regarded as its most vocal enemy in Italy. The clinical files of his young patient clearly demonstrate Morselli's efforts to discredit any spiritist phenomena. He had involved himself in the case without being solicited, offered his services free of charge, and examined Maria's potential neurological and psychological abnormalities. Mayor Persano was delighted to have a series of "scientific studies," which offered an explanation for the strange events causing a stir in the town, conducted by Morselli and his son Arturo (b. 1878), also a psychiatrist at Villa Maria Pia.<sup>351</sup>

Spiritism was one of several beliefs in purported supernatural phenomena that began in the nineteenth century and maintained a strong following for a century, including telepathy,

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<sup>350</sup> "Diario clinico-storico della Sig.ra P.," Clinical file of Maria P.

<sup>351</sup> Letter from Eugenio Persano to Enrico Morselli (12 January 1911). Clinical file of Maria P.

ghost hauntings, theosophy, and other occult spiritual practices. While keeping in mind all of these phenomena and critiquing several, including telepathy and automatic writing, Morselli focused on spiritism.<sup>352</sup> While it was often considered a translation of spiritualism, a movement founded by Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail (alias Allan Kardec) (1804-1869), Morselli differentiated between the two.<sup>353</sup> According to Morselli, one could be a spiritualist, “admitting the dualism of human nature composed of spirit and matter, or even the predominance and pre-existence of the spirit over and before matter,” without being a “spiritist.”<sup>354</sup> Spiritualist movements dated back to the beginning of western civilization; Kardec had founded a “neo-spiritualist” movement. In contrast, Morselli defined spiritism as:

...a combination of doctrine (theory, facts and consequences) that believe in the survival of the soul or the spiritual part of man, in its evolution across time and space, and in the possibility that the souls of the deceased (the “spirits”) have a means for communicating with the living. According to the “spiritists,” the “*medium*” was in the middle, usually denoting a person exceptionally equipped with the faculty or special “forces,” which are given the name medium (*medianico*) and, in the abstract, “mediumism” (*mediumnismo*) and “mediumship” (*medianità*).<sup>355</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *I Fenomeni Telepatrici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche. Osservazioni Critiche sul Neo-Misticismo Psicologico*, Estratto dall'Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia, vol. XXVI, fascicolo 2 (1896) (Florence: Salvatore Landi, 1897); Enrico Morselli, “Sulla “Lettura del Pensiero” Sunto di Conferenza e Polemica,” printed in *Caffaro*, Genoa, and *Tribuna Giudiziaria*, Naples (Febbrajo 1899); Enrico Morselli, “Il Radio e le Tendenze Trascendentali,” Estratto dal Fascicolo 1 della *Rivista Ligure* (Genoa: Tip. Fratelli Carlini fu Gio. Batta, 1904).

<sup>353</sup> See E. S. “Spiritismo,” *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti*, vol. 32 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1936). For a recent and detailed discussion of Allan Kardec and the birth of spiritualism as a religion, see Guillaume Cuchet, “Le retour des Esprits, ou la Naissance du Spiritisme sous le Second Empire,” *Revue d'Histoire Moderne et Contemporaine* (1954-), t. 54e, no. 2 (Apr.-Jun., 2007), 74-90.

<sup>354</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”: Impressioni e Note Critiche sui Fenomeni Medianici di Eusapia Paladino*, vol. 1 (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1908), 6.

<sup>355</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, 5.

What distinguished spiritism from other spiritualist movements was “the precise and determined belief in the interference (*intervento*) of an “Entity” or “occult Intelligence” (for the most part of the deceased) in certain facts that occur in the presence of mediums...and in the possibility of their communication.”<sup>356</sup> The medium received messages from the spirits of the deceased through table rappings, automatic writing, and spirit boards (later commercialized as ouija boards).<sup>357</sup> Eusapia Paladino was one of these mediums, and Morselli partook in over 30 séances with the renowned Italian “modern soothsayer” (*pitonessa moderna*), whom he studied psychologically in his two-volume study.

Morselli’s attempt to disprove spiritist phenomena was aimed to reinforce the superiority of psychiatry as a system of knowledge best fit to understand the abnormalities of mind and character. This chapter explores Morselli’s critique of spiritism as part of a mission to forge and protect the nascent discipline of psychiatry. In order to do so, Morselli clarified the place of both spiritism and psychiatry in the murky space between religion and science. Spurred on by his longstanding anticlericalism, Morselli argued that spiritism was best understood as a religious phenomenon. Likewise, Morselli analyzed spiritist claims to the scientific method and generally rejected their proof regarding the veracity of spiritist phenomena. In other words, spiritism, a religious movement, laid false claims to the scientific method, while psychiatry, a scientific discipline, employed the scientific method in order to investigate mental phenomena such as religious belief. At the same time that Morselli’s ideas about spiritism were also a defense of disciplinary psychiatry, the threat of spiritism also forced him to clarify his understanding of the

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<sup>356</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, 6.

<sup>357</sup> *I Fenomeni Telepatici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche*; “Sulla “Lettura del Pensiero” Sunto di Conferenza e Polemica”; “Il Radio e le Tendenze Trascendentali.”

“spirit” in terms of psychiatry. In this way, Morselli sought to discredit spiritism as a mystical and pseudoscientific movement and reclaim the “spirit” for psychiatric study.

Except for psychiatry proper, Morselli wrote more about spiritism than any other topic, and his analysis of spiritism (or psychicism as it was often called) placed him at the center of several public discourses that pitted skeptical scientists against proponents of spiritism. These debates formed a web of relationships between a number of movements (spiritism, spiritualism, psychicism, and its cousins, occultism, mesmerism, hypnosis, and telepathy) and their practitioners (religious, irreligious, spiritist believers, mediums, mystics, hypnotists, spiritist scientists, or as Morselli called them “pseudoscientists,” and non-believing scientists), which challenge any simple categorization of their participants. Histories of spiritism often focus on its relationship to the crisis of faith and religious authority in the nineteenth century, or the rise of science and its struggle to distinguish its methods and subjects from popular manifestations, the masses, and pseudo-scientific imposters. Alternatively, it has served as an uncomfortable borderland made up of popular culture and belief and practitioners, continually attacked by both of its neighbors, science and religion.<sup>358</sup>

Turn-of-the-century Italy was ripe for such a debate. As in France, Italy’s scientific community was also the site of rampant anticlericalism, and the young nation had to contend

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<sup>358</sup> Some recent research includes: Thomas A. Kselman, *Death and the Afterlife in Modern France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Heather Wolfram, *Stepchildren of Science. Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870-1939*, Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine (Amsterdam, New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009); Alex Owen, *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005); Lynn L. Sharp, *Secular Spirituality: Reincarnation and Spiritism in Nineteenth-Century France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006); John Warne Monroe, *Laboratories of Faith: Mesmerism, Spiritism, and Occultism in Modern France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); M. Brady Brower, *Unruly Spirits: The Science of Psychic Phenomena in Modern France* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Sofie Lachapelle, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France, 1853-1931* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011); Peter Lamont, *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). See also Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

with the Holy See for the loyalty of its people. Italian unification had required a nationalist war against the temporal domain of the Holy See, and the new nation's Catholic population served as millions of bargaining chips between the nation's new government and the embodiment of divine authority, Pope Pius IX, imprisoned by his own wish in the Vatican. And as in the rest of Europe, many of Italy's important intellectuals and scientists became convinced by spiritist phenomena. However, the balance between skeptical and believing scientists changed dramatically when criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso endorsed occult occurrences. Lombroso dominated the Italian sciences in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and his advocacy for spiritism threatened the foundations of the scientific disciplines he represented. Finally, Italy was home to Eusapia Paladino (1854-1918), arguably one of the most famous mediums of the time. Holding séances across Italy and abroad, Paladino was key to spreading spiritism internationally. Paladino's popularity and the alternative supernatural explanations she provided for the workings of human inner life demanded a response from the nation's established—but not unified—psychiatric community.

While spiritism became the topic of serious discussion for scientists and intellectuals from all disciplines, it posed a special threat to psychiatry because it highlighted the paradoxes of psychiatry's subject matter, the mind. In order to legitimize their discipline as a science and distinguish their study of the mind from philosophy, medically trained psychiatrists based their understanding of the mind on its organic underpinnings. Psychiatric research made progress in terms of what it could prove about the mind through its biological substrate, but at the same time such research also revealed the limitations of the materialist approach. For Morselli, psychiatry's position at the boundaries of biological or material research admitted both the essential biological core of the science as well as the necessity to extend beyond it.

Psychiatrists such as Morselli were vested in the distinction between the *psychic* and the *psychiatric*; indeed, the subject matter of spiritism and psychiatry bore similarities. Just as psychiatry was based on the study of patients whose erratic behavior and ideas attested to their mental maladies, spiritism relied on the study of mediums whose supernatural behavior and ideas attested to the reality of the world beyond. Both claimed to have access to human inner life and offered evidence-based approaches to the otherwise invisible phenomena of the human mind or spirit. For critics, spiritist movements returned to older concepts of the spirit that psychiatrists had battled against, but later spiritist incarnations adopted empirical and evidence-based approaches that lent credibility to secularized otherworldly happenings. As such, spiritism posed a new threat to the psychiatric project that echoed its ongoing struggle against religion.

Spiritism posed an intellectual challenge and a practical threat to disciplinary and institutional psychiatry, and Enrico Morselli was one of its most vocal opponents. This chapter considers his arguments with both scientific spiritists and scientists converted to spiritism, and argues that Morselli played a decisive role in the conflict between spiritism and psychiatry in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. It also explores Morselli's arguments against spiritism as outgrowths of his own anticlericalism and his need to secure the principles of positivist science. Though his position evolved throughout the course of his career, by 1907 Morselli took a position between the two extremes of the spiritist debate. Either spiritism was "entirely true... which would be most grave for science, philosophy, religion, and the practice of human life," or its "irregular combination of a doctrine of facts and consequences is a heap of foolishness, deceit, superstitions, as almost all who don't believe and aren't inclined to seeing it as a rotting religion have judged it."<sup>359</sup> Either it was a religious truth or scientific falsity. For Morselli, what was at stake in his extensive debates was the integrity of his own scientific

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<sup>359</sup> *Psicologia e "Spiritismo"*, 8-9.

practice, the distinction between pseudoscience and science, the psychic and the psychiatric, and the spirit and the mind.

## *2. Frauds and turncoats: scientific spiritism and spiritualized science*

Spiritist movements dated back to the 1840s and 1850s in America and England and were debated in the late 1860s and 1870s. But in Italy, spiritism became a matter of heated public discourse only after Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909) pronounced spiritist phenomena a fact subject to scientific study, causing a number of scientists to turn spiritist, and likewise, spiritists to turn scientist. Enrico Morselli engaged with both groups, first as a friendly conversant and increasingly as a vocal opponent of spiritism, developing his own understanding of spiritist phenomena through this engagement. Furthermore, Morselli's debates with both Lombroso, Italy's most prominent psychiatric expert, and Giovanni Battista Ermacora and Cesare Baudi de Vesme, editors of the journal *Rivista di Studi Psicici (Journal of Psychical Studies)*, reveal the extent to which the established scientific principles of institutional psychiatry were threatened. This section will discuss both the impact of Cesare Lombroso's conversion on the Italian scientific community, as well as the efforts of Ermacora and Baudi de Vesme to legitimize spiritism through psychiatry, and Morselli's response to the two.

In 1888, Neapolitan Professor Ercole Chiaia (1840-1905) publicly invited Cesare Lombroso to witness and attest to the possibility of spiritist phenomena.<sup>360</sup> At that time, Lombroso already held the university chair in legal medicine at the University of Turin, where Morselli had served for the previous eight years as professor of psychiatry. After the publication

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<sup>360</sup> Ercole Chiaia, "Una sfida per la scienza. Lettera al Prof. Lombroso (firmato X.), in *Fanfulla della Domenica* (19 agosto 1888). There is little information available on Ercole Chiaia. See Ugo Dettore, *L'altro Regno: Enciclopedia di Metapsichica, di Parapsicologia e di Spiritismo* (Milan: Bompiani, 1973).

of *L'uomo Delinquente (The Criminal Man)* in 1876, Lombroso had become one of the most renowned Italian scientists, both at home and abroad.<sup>361</sup> Because Chiaia was unable to provide the well-lit room Lombroso insisted upon, Lombroso declined the invitation. In 1891, however, when Lombroso was traveling in Naples, he accepted the challenge. Together with several others—“all physicians and scientists” —Lombroso witnessed the spirits channeled by the famous medium Eusapia Paladino (1854-1918):

Then a heavy mahogany table, on which had been placed a bell, bumped the seat of professor Lombroso and tried to mount the little table that was in the middle of the professors. Standing up and moving between Eusapia and the table that moved forward, professor Vizioli forcefully attempted to stop it, but it raced off three meters away from the other table. In the meantime, Vizioli felt himself being nipped at, and [all the while] the above-mentioned doctors held the hands of the medium.<sup>362</sup>

Lombroso was so convinced by the phenomena he witnessed that he publicly recanted his skeptical statements from the past, famously stating, “I am ashamed and regretful of having so tenaciously battled the possibility of so-called *spiritist* facts; I say facts, since they are still contrary to theory. But the facts exist; and I pride myself on being a slave to facts.”<sup>363</sup> In 1909, Lombroso published *Ricerche sui Fenomeni Ipnocici e Spiritici*, which was translated into English posthumously as *After Death – What?*.<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>361</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo Delinquente: Studiato in Rapporto alla Antropologia, alla Medicina Legale ed alle Discipline Carcerarie* (Milan: Hoepli, 1876). See Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, translated by Mary Gibson and Nicole Hahn Rafter (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>362</sup> Pasquale Turiello, *Lo Spiritismo Italiano e la Scienza: Memoria letta alla R. Accademia di Scienze Morali e Politiche della Società Reale di Napoli* (Naples: Tipografia delle Regia Università nel già Collegio del Salvatore, 1897), 31.

<sup>363</sup> Cited in Edoardo Bozzano, *Cesare Lombroso e la Psicologia Supernormale*, in *L'opera di Cesare Lombroso nella Scienza e nelle sue Applicazioni* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1906), 49.

<sup>364</sup> Cesare Lombroso, *Ricerche sui Fenomeni Ipnocici e Spiritici; con 57 Figure Intercalate nel Testo e 2 Tavole Separate* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1909); Cesare Lombroso, *After Death—What?: Researches*

Lombroso's public declaration caused a "pandemonium" among his colleagues and the Italian intellectual world.<sup>365</sup> Séances spread across Italy, and spiritist Alexander Aksakov, a Russian diplomat to Brazil and founder of the German metapsychical journal *Psychische Studien* organized another series of séances with Paladino in October 1892 in Milan. Lombroso also continued to participate in séances and wrote a number of articles about his experiences, published in both Italy and abroad, and in 1896, he dedicated an entire section of his journal *Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali e Antropologia Criminale (Archive of Psychiatry, Criminal Sciences and Criminal Anthropology)* to the matter.<sup>366</sup> Proponents of spiritism used Lombroso's conversion as a testimonial to the scientific truth of the phenomena they investigated. The spiritist journal *Luce ed Ombra (Light and Shadows)* cited Lombroso's "genuine spiritist faith," and the *Rivista di Studi Psicici* dedicated several articles to his work.<sup>367</sup> Lombroso's experience was also pivotal for other intellectuals such as Luigi Capuana.<sup>368</sup>

For scientists like Morselli who remained unconvinced by séances and mediums, Lombroso's conversion constituted a dangerous threat to the enterprise of empirical science. Francesco Cosentini (1870-1940), politician, sociologist, and a friend and colleague of Morselli, wrote:

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*into Hypnotic and Spiritualistic Phenomena* (Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, England: Aquarian Press; New York, N.Y.: Sterling Pub. Co., 1988, 1909).

<sup>365</sup> Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *Cesare Lombroso. Storia della Vita e delle Opere* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921), 302.

<sup>366</sup> Fabrizio Pesoli, "Aspetti della Ricerca Scientifica sullo Spiritismo in Italia (1870-1915)," *Università degli Studi di Milano (Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia)*, 1999, 87.

<sup>367</sup> "Per Cesare Lombroso," *Luce e Ombra* (novembre-dicembre 1909), 52; "Cronaca: A Proposito del Prof. Lombroso," *Rivista di Studi Psicici*, vol. 4 (settembre 1898), 223-224.

<sup>368</sup> See Jonathan Robert Hiller, "'Bodies that Tell': Physiognomy, Criminology, Race and Gender in Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Italian Literature Opera," *University of California, Los Angeles Dissertation* (2009), 181.

In truth, Cesare Lombroso was maybe more attracted to the spiritist movement because of that tendency to strange originality, which characterizes many of his most recent conceptions, rather than his plunge into the mystical dream of the *beyond*. Cesare Lombroso...could have much more opportunely profited from the study of medium phenomena to enrich the illustrative material of his criminal anthropology.<sup>369</sup>

Even Catholic critics handled the matter delicately. While they dismissed the crude materialism of modern science, they admitted it was a “good reply to so-called psychicists, spiritists, and dilettantes of spiritism.” But modern scientists had made the mistake of throwing out ancient metaphysics and even modern physics only to “blaze definitions, affirmations, and totally new and transcendent principles,” as did the “eminent doctor Cesare Lombroso.”<sup>370</sup>

Morselli outspokenly disagreed with Lombroso. The two had participated in at least one séance together, in which a medium manifested the spirit of Morselli’s mother. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle recounted the event in his *History of Spiritualism*:

When Morselli asked his mother for a proof of identity, she touched his forehead with her hand, seeking for a wart there, but because she touched the right side and then the left, on which the wart really was, Morselli would not accept this as evidence of his mother’s presence. Lombroso, with more experience, points out to him the awkwardness of spirits using the instrumentality of a medium for the first time. The truth was that Morselli had, strangely enough, the utmost repugnance to the appearance of his mother through a medium against his will. Lombroso cannot understand this feeling.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>369</sup> Francesco Cosentini, “Spiritismo,” *Rivista d’Italia*, anno VI, fasc. 3-4 (marzo-aprile 1903), 522.

<sup>370</sup> “Le Case Infestate,” *La Civiltà Cattolica*, serie XVIII, vol. III, fasc. 1228 (22 giugno 1901), 401.

<sup>371</sup> Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, vol. 2 (New York: George H. Doran, 1926), 194-195.

For Morselli, Lombroso's spiritist convictions and the "pleasing inward excitements" and "gratitude" Lombroso had when his own mother's spirit was manifest were dangerous to empirical science. Morselli himself summarized the situation best when commenting on Lombroso's study of haunted houses: "The passage of a Lombroso to the side of those who believed in the survival of personal consciousness and in the possibility of communication among the living and dead, constitutes an event of grave significance for today's crisis of scientific and philosophical thought."<sup>372</sup>

Morselli was careful to critique Lombroso with a tone of respect and deference. The two had been colleagues for years in Turin, and Morselli continually praised Lombroso as one of the world's greatest scientists and dedicated his last major work to his friend in 1926.<sup>373</sup> But while he supported Lombroso's discoveries that tied the physical anthropology of man to his criminal nature, Morselli maintained his methodological differences.<sup>374</sup> Morselli continued this same approach in regard to Lombroso's enthusiasm for spiritism. In his study on Paladino, Morselli was careful to praise Lombroso's insights and his "passionate and sincere articles" while fundamentally disagreeing with his conclusions.<sup>375</sup> In one commentary on Lombroso's study on spiritism, Morselli simply stated that the approach was "not really "psychiatric," as he says, but psychophysical."<sup>376</sup> Even when journalists reiterated and popularized Lombroso's studies on spiritism for the masses, Morselli tempered his critiques, instead commending its writer for his

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<sup>372</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Fakiri e Case Infestate in un Conflitto sullo Spiritismo: Intorno all'Ignoto. Prima Risposta a Cesare Lombroso* (Lugano: Casa Editrice del Coenobium, 1909), 85. Cited in "Aspetti della Ricerca Scientifica sullo Spiritismo in Italia (1870-1915)," 128.

<sup>373</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *La Psicanalisi: Studii ed Appunti Critici*, 2 vols. (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1926).

<sup>374</sup> See Augusto Guido Bianchi, *La Patologia del Genio e gli Scienziati Italiani. Inchiesta a Proposito del Caso di Guy de Maupassant* (Milan: Max Kantorowicz, 1892).

<sup>375</sup> *Psicologia e "Spiritismo"*, vol. 2, 188.

<sup>376</sup> *Psicologia e "Spiritismo"*, vol. 1, 137. In response to Cesare Lombroso, "Le Spiritisme et la Psychiatrie. Explication Psychiatrique de Certains Faits Spiritiques," in *Annales Sciences Psychiques*, II, 1892, 143-151.

powers of observation.<sup>377</sup> And when Morselli wrote a tribute to Lombroso in 1906, he made no mention of Lombroso's spiritist research.<sup>378</sup>

Despite Morselli's attempt to avoid any direct conflicts with Lombroso, the two came to represent polar scientific opposites for the Italian public and were often discussed together.<sup>379</sup> One spiritist commentator noted Morselli's objection to spiritist facts respectfully, comparing Lombroso's conversion to spiritism, with the "astute observer [and] a profound psychologist" Professor Morselli, who "did not believe he had found the proof for his conversion in his memorable episodes in the Circle of Minerva."<sup>380</sup> Spiritist enthusiast Sir Arthur Conan Doyle described Morselli as a "bitter sceptic with regard to the objective reality of psychic phenomena," unlike Lombroso.<sup>381</sup> According to Doyle, Morselli held a position similar to the critical spiritist researcher and physiologist Charles Richet (1850-1935), the difference being that Morselli, unlike Richet, "has been the means of powerfully influencing public opinion."<sup>382</sup> In another instance, a commentator claimed that "Even Enrico Morselli is among the latest "discoverers" of spiritism, 20 years after Cesare Lombroso!"<sup>383</sup> The frequent commentary connecting Lombroso and Morselli attests to their roles as the two decisive scientific authorities on spiritism in Italy.

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<sup>377</sup> Luigi Barzini, *Nel Mondo dei Misteri con Eusapia Paladino. Preceduto da uno Studio di C. Lombroso e Seguito da Molte Illustrazioni Medianiche* (Milan: Casa Editrice Baldini, Castoldi, 1907), vi-vii. Luigi Barzini (1874-1947) was a popular journalist, politician, and war correspondent.

<sup>378</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Cesare Lombroso e la Filosofia Scientifica," Estratto dal Volume: *L'opera di Cesare Lombroso nella Scienza e nelle sue Applicazioni*, edito dai Fr. Bocca in occasione del Congresso di Antropologia criminale tenuto in Torino (aprile-maggio 1906) (Turin: Tip. Vincenzo Bona, 1906).

<sup>379</sup> See for instance, Luigi Arnaldo Vassallo, *Nel Mondo degli Invisibili* (E. Voghera, 1902).

<sup>380</sup> Anselmo Vecchi, *Spiritismo. Pagine Sparse* (New York: Italian American Printing, 1914), 101.

<sup>381</sup> *History of Spiritualism*, 193, 195.

<sup>382</sup> *History of Spiritualism*, 195.

<sup>383</sup> Gabriele Morelli, "Intorno all'Ignoto. Lo Spiritismo all'Avanguardia," *Coenobium* (Lugano: Casa Editrice del Coenobium, 1908), 102.

Lombroso's conversion triggered an upsurge of spiritist publications in Italy, some written by other scientists and physicians, and others written by spiritists who increasingly claimed that the experimental method proved the truth of the phenomena they witnessed. In this increasing discursive overlap between "science" and spiritism, psychiatry was the discipline most susceptible to "pseudoscientific" appropriation. Spiritist proponents attempted to use psychiatry to validate their own studies in a number of ways. First, they convinced scientists such as Lombroso, who held the academic chair of psychiatry in Turin, and the colleagues who joined him at his first séance, including neuropathologist Leonardo Bianchi (1848-1927), psychiatrist Augusto Tamburini (1848-1919), and neurologist Raffaello Vizioli.<sup>384</sup> Second, they promoted the discussion of spiritism in psychiatric congresses, celebrating the increasing presence of a "psychical group" at the International Psychological Congress, and advertising the leadership of psychologists such as Pierre Janet (1859-1947) at their own congresses.<sup>385</sup> Third, they encouraged collaboration with psychiatrists in both spiritist and psychiatric journals, such as that of Lombroso, and they targeted psychiatric skeptics like Morselli.

One of the principal mouthpieces for Italian spiritism was the *Rivista di Studi Psicici* (1895-1904). The journal went through two incarnations, and both reflect the attempt of spiritists

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<sup>384</sup> Luigi Barzini, Cesare Lombroso, *Nel Mondo dei Misteri con Eusapia Paladino Preceduto da uno Studio di C. Lombroso* (Milan: Casa Editrice baldini, Castoldi & C., 1907), 4.

<sup>385</sup> See "Le Lotte coll'Accademia" *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, anno VI (Gennaio-Febbraio 1890), 45-49; "Un Istituto Psicico Internazionale in Parigi," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, anno VI, n. 5-6 (Maggio-Giugno 1890), 129-138; "L'Istituto... psicologico," and "Il Congresso Spiritico e Spiritualista in Parigi," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, anno VI, n. 9-10 (Settembre-Ottobre 1890), 314 & 315-320; "Il Movimento Psicico. Una buona circolare pubblicata dal gruppo psichico dell'Istituto Psicologico. Un giudizio autorevole sull'Istituto, il fachimero meraviglioso," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile Dedicato alle ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni Telepatia, Telestesia, Premonizione, Medianità, ecc.*, serie II, anno 1, n. 1 (gennaio 1903), 30-33; "L'assemblea dell'Istituto Generale Psicologico di Parigi," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile Dedicato alle ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni Telepatia, Telestesia, Premonizione, Medianità, ecc.*, serie II, anno 1, n. 3 (marzo 1903), 114-115; "L'Inaugurazione della Nuova Sede dell'Istituto Generale Psicologico di Parigi," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile Dedicato alle ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni Telepatia, Telestesia, Premonizione, Medianità, ecc.*, serie II, anno 1, n. 3 (marzo 1903), 115-116; "Il Movimento Psicico. Una Seduta dell' "gruppo psichico" dell'Istituto Generale Psicologico di Parigi. Strumento Misuratore di Fluidi Umani," *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, serie 2, anno 2, n. 4 (Aprile 1904), 140-143.

to merge their research with that of psychiatry. The *Rivista di Studi Psicichici* was first founded and edited by Giovanni Battista Ermacora (1858-1898). Born to a rich family from outside Udine, Ermacora studied math and physics at the University of Padua, where he wrote a thesis entitled “Sovra un modo d’interpretare i fenomeni elettrostatici, saggio sulla teoria del potenziale” (“Regarding a way of interpreting electrostatic phenomena, essay on the theory of potential [energy]”).<sup>386</sup> After learning about spiritism from the descriptions of experiences with mediums in Rio de Janeiro, published in F. W. H. Myers’s *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, Ermacora searched the rural communities of Udine for “some good mediums capable of producing some of those phenomena that many still attribute to the skillful deception of professional mediums.”<sup>387</sup> The group included persons of all classes and ages and met several times, trying to channel spirits in order to move a table. When the table finally moved, Ermacora was convinced by the mediumship of an 11-year-old girl named Anna. Ermacora tried to establish an Italian Society for Psychical Research modelled after that of London but failed, and he began publishing the *Rivista di Studi Psicichici*.<sup>388</sup> Ermacora was also credited with popularizing and spreading the fame of the medium Eusapia Paladino, and he organized a series of séances with the medium in Milan and Naples, responsible for winning the adherence of many men of science.<sup>389</sup>

Under Ermacora’s directorship, the journal printed spiritist news from abroad, the articles of both Italians and other Europeans, and included his own regular contributions, which

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<sup>386</sup> Cesare Baudi de Vesme, “G. B. Ermacora,” *Rivista di Studi Psicichici. Periodico Mensile*, anno IV, n. 4, 5 e 6 (Aprile, Maggio, Giugno 1898), 103.

<sup>387</sup> “G. B. Ermacora,” 104.

<sup>388</sup> Arthur S. Berger and Joyce Berger, *The Encyclopedia of Parapsychology and Psychical Research* (New York: Paragon House, 1991).

<sup>389</sup> “G. B. Ermacora,” 105.

emphasized a “scientific” approach to spiritism. Under his control, the journal put a heavy emphasis on telepathy, electricity in spiritist phenomena, and the séances held by Paladino. For Ermacora, spiritism was the investigation into the “nature of intelligences that manifest themselves as such,” and spiritism “acknowledges the presences of intelligences of their own existence, that is, personality foreign to the living.”<sup>390</sup> Scientists who denied the reality of the supernatural did so because “they have the fortune of [studying] all things with simple appearance.”<sup>391</sup>

Shortly before Ermacora’s death in 1898, Cesare Baudi di Vesme became director of the journal, moving its headquarters from Padua to Turin.<sup>392</sup> Little research has been done into the biography of Baudi de Vesme (1862-1938). He was born to an Italian father and French mother in Turin, and was most likely the son of Count Carlo Baudi de Vesme (1805-1877).<sup>393</sup> After Ermacora’s death, he was “entrusted” with the editorship of *Rivista di Studi Psicici* by Lombroso, and he simultaneously published and edited the *Revue de Etudes Psychiques*;<sup>394</sup> at the same time, he also studied Eusapia Paladino and other mediums extensively.<sup>395</sup> He published *Le Merveilleux dans les Jeux de Hasard*, dealing with predictions in games of chance in 1930, and later the two-volume *Storia dello Spiritismo*, the first volume dealing with “Primitive Man” and the second “Peoples of Antiquity,” both of which were translated into German, French, and

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<sup>390</sup> “G. B. Ermacora,” 105.

<sup>391</sup> “G. B. Ermacora,” 107.

<sup>392</sup> *Rivista di Studi Psicici*, anno IV, n. 4, 5, and 6 (Aprile, Maggio, Giugno 1898).

<sup>393</sup> See Maria Fubini Leuzzi, “Carlo Baudi di Vesme,” *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 7 (1970).

<sup>394</sup> There is virtually no biographical information on Giovanni Battist Ermacora. There is one reference to Ermacora in Harry Price, *Fifty Years of Psychical Research, a Critical Survey* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1939).

<sup>395</sup> Nandor Fodor, “Count Cesar Baudi de Vesme,” *An Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* (1934).

English, and he also translated the works of several other Italian spiritists into French.<sup>396</sup> His extensive publications reflect Baudi de Vesme's international stature, prestige, and influence in the world of spiritism.

In assuming directorship of the journal, Baudi de Vesme claimed to carry out Ermacora's mission to further "the way of *true* science, so far from the official scholastic [science] and from affirmations not based on the most rigorous positivism."<sup>397</sup> Like Ermacora, Baudi de Vesme was a heavy-handed editor, but he changed the emphasis of the journal. While Ermacora published mostly on séances and telepathy, Baudi de Vesme focused more on other supernatural occurrences and the rivalry between spiritists and psychiatrists. He included articles discussing Lombroso's opinions on spiritist phenomena, reviews of psychiatric work in favor or against spiritism, and articles from scientists in support of spiritism.

Morselli corresponded with both editors, and their exchange reflects the escalating tensions between an increasingly confident and litigious group of spiritists and an increasingly combative Morselli. What is clear is that both Ermacora and Baudi de Vesme actively launched a strong offensive against whatever critiques Morselli had to offer of any spiritist phenomena. Under Ermacora's editorship, scientist and philosopher Joseph-Pierre Durand de Gros (1826-1900) critiqued Morselli's psychiatric ideas about human individuality and personality, to which

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<sup>396</sup> Cesare Baudi di Vesme, *Le Merveilleux dans les Jeux de Hazard, Loterie, Courses, Bourse, Cartes, Roulette, etc.* (Paris: Société Parisienne Édition, 1929); Cesare Baudi di Vesme, *Storia dello Spiritismo*, 2 vols. (Turin: Roux Frassati e Co., 1896, 1897). Translated as *Geschichte des Spiritismus* (Leipzig: Mutze, 1898); *A History of Experimental Spiritualism*, 2 vols. (Rider & Company, 1931); *Histoire de Spiritualisme Expérimental* (Paris: Éditions Jean Meyer, 1928). See also Ernesto Bozzano, *Les Phénomènes de Hantise*, translated by Cesare Baudi di Vesme, preface by Dr. J. Maxwell (Paris: F. Alcan, 1920); Ernesto Bozzano, *Phénomènes Psychiques au Moment de la Mort*, translated by Cesare Baudi di Vesme (Paris: Éditions de la Bibliothèque de Philosophie Spiritualiste, 1923); Marco Picone Chiodo, *La Conception Spiritualiste et la Sociologie Criminelle (Spiritualisme: Criminalité, Hystérie, Folie)*, translated by Cesare Baudi di Vesme (Paris: G. Ficker, 1929).

<sup>397</sup> "G. B. Ermacora," 103.

Morselli politely, but strongly responded.<sup>398</sup> Later, Ermacora dedicated a five-page review to Morselli's article on telepathic phenomena. The articles appear to have grown out of cordial private correspondence, but when Morselli cast strong doubt on telepathy, comparing it to hallucinations and mysticism, Ermacora responded that:

Going deeper into [Morselli's] study with the materials now at our disposal, the author, with his impartial mental dispositions, certainly could have made a serious contribution. But disgracefully and despite his good will, he could not escape the preconceptions that are endemic to the scientific world, nor really go into the depths of his argument.<sup>399</sup>

Again, with Baudi de Vesme, what began as a relatively peaceable exchange quickly escalated. Soon after becoming editor, Baudi de Vesme commented on a public lecture Morselli gave on the "psychological problem of the end of the nineteenth century."<sup>400</sup> He agreed with much of what Morselli had to say, including his discussion of spiritism as a new religion, but Baudi de Vesme disagreed with Morselli's critique of dualism, saying:

"You believe that it is the helmsman who directs the ship? Hurray! Take away the rudder and the ship will drift away. Therefore is the vessel directed by the rudder??" We say to him: "But excuse me! The mind that directs the vessel is its helmsman: if you break the rudder, the helmsman will no longer be able to carry out his duties, but [the vessel] will

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<sup>398</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Corrispondenza" (Genova, 30 Maggio 96), *Rivista di Studi Psicologici. Periodico Mensile dedicato alle Ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni di Telepatia, Chiaroveggenza, Premonizione, Medianità, ecc.*, anno II (1896), 215-216; J. P. Durand, "Correspondenza" (Arsac, 28 giugno 1896), *Rivista di Studi Psicologici. Periodico Mensile dedicato alle Ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni di Telepatia, Chiaroveggenza, Premonizione, Medianità, ecc.*, anno II (1896), 256.

<sup>399</sup> G. B. Ermacora, "Prof. Enrico Morselli. – I Fenomeni Telepatici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche. Osservazioni Critiche sul Neo-Misticismo Psicologico. Landi, Firenze 1897. Estratto dall'Archivio per l'Antropologia e l'Etnologia, vol. XXVI fasc. 2, 1896," *Rivista di Studi Psicologici. Periodico Mensile Dedicato alle Ricerche Sperimentali e Critiche sui Fenomeni di Telepatia, Telestesia, Premonizione, Medianità ecc.*, anno III (1897), 69-84.

<sup>400</sup> Cesare Baudi de Vesme, "Una conferenza del Morselli a Venezia," *Rivista di Studi Psicologici*, anno VI, n. 1 (gennaio-febbraio 1900), 55-59.

continue to exist.” In this way we can be manifestly soul as long as it is connected to the body that we also call *life*.<sup>401</sup>

Later, Baudi de Vesme called Morselli the “black sheep” of the spiritists, to which Morselli took great offense.<sup>402</sup> Baudi de Vesme pointed out that Morselli had changed positions, coming to acknowledge the reality of spiritist phenomena while disagreeing with the explanation spiritists gave.<sup>403</sup> Writers for the journal antagonized Morselli for the duration of the journal, characterizing his science as “negative positivism and dualistic monism.”<sup>404</sup> In reaction, Morselli increasingly challenged the experimental proof for spiritism.

### *3. Neo-Mysticism, Anti-Clericalism, and Belief*

Morselli built his critique of spiritism and his response to Lombroso and the leaders of *Rivista di Studi Psicici* on two strategies: the first was to liken spiritism to religion and the second was to distance it from science. Morselli saw spiritism as largely a mystical movement that functioned as a religion, having its own dogmas and rituals, and he linked the soaring popularity of spiritism to the failure of religion to maintain the belief of the masses. However, spiritism was far more dangerous than the “shams” presented by religion because its leaders, so-called mediums, often suffered from psychiatric disorders. Furthermore, spiritism endangered the progress of society as a whole by infecting the European scientific community. By emphasizing

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<sup>401</sup> “Una conferenza del Morselli a Venezia,” 58.

<sup>402</sup> “Una replica del prof. Morselli,” document 199, Memorie Scientifiche, volume 12, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>403</sup> “Una dichiarazione del prof. Morselli,” *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, anno VI, n. 5-6 (Maggio-Giugno 1900), 191-192.

<sup>404</sup> Francesco Porro, “Positivismo Negativo e Monismo Dualista,” *Annali delle Scienze Psiciche. Periodico Mensile*, anno 1, n. 2 (dicembre 1904), 65-74.

what spiritism shared in common with religion, Morselli distanced spiritism from his own psychiatric practice, which also explored human phenomena still only tenuously tied to their material substrate. By affirming that spiritism was what psychiatry was not, Morselli tried to protect the sanctity of psychiatry as a science.

Morselli's religious critique of spiritism was founded on his anticlericalism, which was widespread in professional psychiatry. With the epistemological foundations of psychiatry relying on a fusion of medicine and philosophy, psychiatrists used anticlerical rhetoric to undermine religious authority and justify its own institutionalization. As with its northern neighbors France and Germany, anticlericalism was an essential component to the founding of Italy as a modern nation state.<sup>405</sup> Agnostic, atheistic, and anticlerical sentiments had grown in Italy throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, spurred on simultaneously by positivism and the accelerated decline of liberal Catholicism and the failure of church reform.<sup>406</sup> But unlike their northern neighbors, Italian patriots founded their nation by waging war against the Holy See and taking Rome, the seat of the Church's temporal power, for its destined capital. Psychiatrists joined the national cause, "medicine as power and the psychiatric hospital as a penalty for disobedience."<sup>407</sup> By medicalizing the insane asylum, psychiatrists wrested control of institutions formerly controlled by church authorities and offered medical explanations for mental illness countered those religious arguments.

Morselli was a vocal critic of the church and saw the Italian nation as the savior of its people in the face of religion. His anticlerical sentiments were largely spurred on by the national milieu in which he was immersed, but they were also tied to the spread of Darwinism across

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<sup>405</sup> Giorgio Candeloro, *Storia dell'Italia Moderna*, vol. 5, *La costruzione dello stato* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1968).

<sup>406</sup> See Giorgio Candeloro, "Anticlericalismo e Ateismo," in *Storia dell'Italia Moderna*, vol. 5, 376.

<sup>407</sup> Michel Foucault, *Gli Anormali. Corso al Collège de France (1974-1975)* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000), 139.

Italy. Morselli credited his “revolutionary” instincts to his mother, who “did not share any of the hatred, prejudices, or bigotry” of the noble class to which she was born, and planted the “seed of [his] agnostic anti-dogmatism and very heated feelings of *italianità*.”<sup>408</sup> His early school years were also marked by the spirit of revolutionary nationalism; his academy had been recently secularized and the students wore military uniforms, and Morselli, the smallest of all, was called “the son of the regiment.”<sup>409</sup> At the University of Modena, his anticlerical sentiment was further encouraged by his studies in biology and anthropology. Morselli studied with Giovanni Canestrini (1835-1900), translator and principle proponent of Darwinism in Italy.<sup>410</sup>

Positivist science and evolutionary theory specifically became part of Morselli’s attack on Catholicism and religious dogma generally. Morselli described evolution as the “thorn in the eye of all believers,” which the mystics “could not pardon for having destroyed the last of the great illusions in which human consciousness lain for many centuries.”<sup>411</sup> In response to a defender of Catholicism, Morselli proclaimed that men were not “degenerate angels or creatures made in the “image of God,”” and the Bible was unconvincing, for “[b]etween the scientific hypothesis and the Chaldean myth of Adam and Eve, it’s not difficult to judge which has been a failure.”<sup>412</sup> Of the biological sciences, psychiatry was the most threatening to Catholicism because it provided medical explanations for mental illness as alternatives to possession and evil.

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<sup>408</sup> Onorato Roux, *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei; Memorie Autobiografiche di Letterati, Artisti, Scienziati, Uomini Politici, Patrioti e Pubblicisti, Raccolte e Corredate di Cenni Biografici* (Florence: Bemporad, 1909), 324.

<sup>409</sup> *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei*, 330.

<sup>410</sup> See Alessandro Minelli and Sandra Casellato, eds., *Giovanni Canestrini. Zoologist and Darwinist* (Venice: Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 2001).

<sup>411</sup> Enrico Morselli, *La Pretesa “Bancarotta dell Scienza.” Una Risposta del Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Estratto dalla *Rivista di Sociologia*, serie II, vol. I) (Palermo: Remo Sandron, 1895), 12.

<sup>412</sup> See Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906), “Une Visite au Vatican,” *Revue de Deux Mondes* (1 gennaio 1895); *La Pretesa “Bancarotta dell Scienza”*, 13.

Instead, “questions related to the essence of the spirit and its substantial quiddity, the immateriality of consciousness and the distinction of its faculties... [that is,] the old arsenal of metaphysics are excluded from the psychological sciences.” Instead, the goal of modern psychiatry was to create a “psychology without a soul.”<sup>413</sup>

Morselli’s anticlerical and antireligious sentiments were closely tied to his work as a psychiatrist and alienist working for the modern state. During his tenure as medical director of Macerata, Morselli praised Victor Emanuel II, king of Italy, as “truly our Christ, the Word of our Redemption, the Messiah awaited by the philosophers and prophesied by Dante,” who had resolved “that terrible question of the relationship between the Church and State, between Faith and Reason, that had lasted for eighteen centuries of struggle, fermenting in the consciousness of civilized Europe.”<sup>414</sup> In 1888, he gave the commemorative speech in honor of the statue of Giordano Bruno, newly erected in the Campo de’ Fiori in Rome.<sup>415</sup> Bruno simultaneously promoted a national mythology of Italian scientific genius and attested to the new nation state’s defiant position against the Catholic Church, and Morselli claimed that Bruno “should have been a symbol of peace and compassion in the hands of the believer; in the hands of the priest, he was instead the symbol of savage revenge.”<sup>416</sup>

For Morselli, much of spiritism could be explained as a religious phenomenon: “[I]ike every other closed System of Ideas,” spiritism “wants to be, and firmly believes itself to be, the

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<sup>413</sup> *Introduzione alle Lezioni Psicologia Patologica e di Clinica Psichiatrica letta nella R. Università di Torino addì 17 marzo 1881 dal Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Estratto dal Vol. II, fasc. IV dell’*Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali ed Antropologia Criminale*) (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1881), 15.

<sup>414</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Vittorio Emanuele II nella Storia dell’Incivilimento. Discorso letto dal Prof. Enrico Morselli, Direttore del Manicomio Provinciale alla solenne Commemorazione del 17 gennajo fatta dall’Associazione liberale monarchica di Macerata* (Macerata: Stab. Tipografico Bianchini, Febbrajo, 1879), 9.

<sup>415</sup> See David Kertzer, “Giordano Bruno’s Revenge,” in *Prisoner of the Vatican: The Popes, the Kings, and Garibaldi’s Rebels in the Struggle to Rule Modern Italy* (Boston, New York: Houghton and Mifflin, 2006), 258-271.

<sup>416</sup> Enrico Morselli. “Giordano Bruno. Commemorazione Pronunciata nell’Aula Magna del Collegio Romano (Turin-Naples: L. Roux e C., 1888), 67.

Truth.”<sup>417</sup> By providing a new version of both religious dogma and ritual, spiritists took advantage of an opportune moment when religion, and specifically Christianity, was losing the faith of its followers. Spiritist groups attracted the “most disillusioned souls and those most unsatisfied with the old “true” religions who were “not fulfilled by the positive results of scientific knowledge, not calmed by the consideration of natural laws, and who anxiously searched for beliefs for the needs of their minds and hearts.”<sup>418</sup> While spiritism might not have been a religion in “the strict sense,” its adherents actively promoted it as such, envisioning it as “the religion of the twentieth century, as socialism would be to politics,” and “the greatest idea that can linger among terrestrial humanity.”<sup>419</sup>

While spiritists shared their belief in an invisible world of souls with Catholics, spiritists used “spiritist facts” gathered from séances as proof of their beliefs. For Morselli, these “facts” were not always the result of fraud, but they did not necessarily prove the presence of a spirit without form: “spiritist dogma” relied on “anthropomorphism worthy of all the religious faiths that made the deceased survive in the beyond (*Altra Parte*) with the same faculties that we men possess during our terrestrial life.”<sup>420</sup> When spiritists began to promote ideas that conflicted with western monotheistic religion, such as reincarnation, they were still modelling their beliefs on the religions of the East or returning to the animistic practices of the past.<sup>421</sup> Even in their attempts to employ the scientific method to prove spiritist facts, “the “modernists” in spiritism fell into the same mental conditions of uncertainty and lethargy as the “modernists” of

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<sup>417</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 8-9.

<sup>418</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 10-11.

<sup>419</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 34.

<sup>420</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 17.

<sup>421</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 24.

Catholicism.”<sup>422</sup> In its dogma and beliefs, spiritism was almost identical to the religions its proponents fought to undermine.

Spiritism was also subject to antireligious critique because it relied on set forms of worship or practice. Even if religious leaders rejected it as such, spiritism acted as one “even having its own ritual!”<sup>423</sup> The “new cosmic-philosophical-social religion” was based on the inexplicable phenomena that occurred during séances, each beginning with a “rite of evocation” (*rito evocatorio*).<sup>424</sup> Séances usually began with an “initial ceremony that consisted of prayers or sacred chants that were part of the spiritist technique” and would end with a “prayer of gratitude.”<sup>425</sup> All of the spiritist phenomena were an elaborate display of rites, the first of which was the “little rapping, dancing, and talking table,” which began in America before spreading to Europe, and was simply the ““altar” of a new cult.”<sup>426</sup> The shaking table (*tavolo pulsante*) was followed by those present forming a chain (*formazione di catena*),<sup>427</sup> the adorning of séance participants in “priestly regalia” (*laticlavo*),<sup>428</sup> the “photographic rite” (“rito, diciamo così, fotografico”), the spirit board, and other parts of the “séance ritual.”<sup>429</sup> Nevertheless, table-turning and the likes were losing their power due to the “skeptical hands of physicists, physiologists, psychologists, and alienists,”<sup>430</sup> and mediums proved to be frauds were

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<sup>422</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 558.

<sup>423</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 34.

<sup>424</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 123; vol. 1, 21.

<sup>425</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 203, 123.

<sup>426</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 21, 217.

<sup>427</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 321.

<sup>428</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 35.

<sup>429</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 203; vol. 2, 264.

<sup>430</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 217.

“debaptized” (*sbattezzata*).<sup>431</sup> Those who sought to revise spiritism through “psychic research” still had too much “indulgent compassion for the mystical-religious impulses of the old and unrepentant doctrinaires.”<sup>432</sup> For Morselli, such ritual practices constituted the most primitive phase of religious development.

Despite Morselli’s impassioned anticlericalism, his distaste for spiritism far exceeded that for religion because of the threat spiritism posed to human civilization. While the monotheistic faiths had cultivated theological explanations and exegetic practices that fostered sophisticated moral systems, spiritism based its belief system on séance ritual and myth, which allowed psychological abnormalities to suffice as evidence for contact with the spiritual world. Spiritist dogma relied on the séance, which “always consisted in exploiting the pathology of the nervous system of the so-called ‘medium.’”<sup>433</sup> Furthermore, among the factual truths obtained from spiritism were deceit, trickery, and disease, for:

As in an alchemist’s crucible, they simmer together truth and falsehood, good faith and the most brazen charlatanism, sincere observation and the inventions of a sick mind, the great historical event and the most insignificant news report, and the more or less positive research of scientists and the assertions of the silly woman. They say that this protean muddle of an innumerable multitude of facts is now the visible and palpable proof of the invisible and intangible, the inexplicable miracles of science, the revelation of a cosmic world beyond, and the manifestation of natural superorganic forces still unknown.<sup>434</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 558.

<sup>432</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 35.

<sup>433</sup> See Peter Lamont, “Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence,” *The Historical Journal*, 47, 4 (2004), 897-920; *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 50.

<sup>434</sup> Enrico Morselli, *I Fenomeni Telepatici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche. Osservazioni Critiche sul Neo-Misticismo Psicologico*, Estratto dall’*Archivio per l’Antropologia e l’Etnologia*, vol. XXVI, fascicolo 2 (1896) (Florence: Salvatore Landi, 1897), 6-7.

Most philosophical or scientific hypotheses that had “no direct relationship with life” could remain “a mistake, a false concept, an inexact system of ideas,” and not “adversely influencing the health or the happiness of mankind,” but spiritism had to be examined differently.<sup>435</sup> The rituals that allowed spiritism to persist in its “inferior manifestations, in the beliefs of followers incapable of reflecting on their faith,” were much like the polytheistic beliefs of ancient Greece and Rome that survived for centuries among the masses.<sup>436</sup> In other words, spiritism represented an atavistic turn for mankind because it bore undeniable similarities to “animistic beliefs.” Furthermore, the “spiritism-system or religion...preaches the return of a primitive euhemerism to the cult of the ancestors.”<sup>437</sup> By taking myth for actual events in human existence, spiritism represented a religious regression toward primitive beliefs and intellectual degeneration.<sup>438</sup> The spread and propagation of spiritism, therefore, constituted a “psychic epidemic among the masses.”<sup>439</sup>

Spiritism presented an even further danger of destroying the project of positivist science because it “threatened to drag down the minds of the elite (*menti non volgari*), some of which had openly broken with positive philosophy and were completely returning to the religious beliefs and theological and scientific dogmas of the past.”<sup>440</sup> Spiritists had successfully converted many of Europe’s intelligentsia and many of its scientists. As Morselli put it as in 1892, “Other times I have fought the current, and I believe, false and damning tendency of mysticism, or better, a type of “new mysticism” that manifests itself, for some time now, even in the so-called

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<sup>435</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 9.

<sup>436</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 36.

<sup>437</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 53.

<sup>438</sup> “Euhemerism,” *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed 01 April 2014, <http://www.oed.com/>.

<sup>439</sup> *I Fenomeni Telepatrici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche*, 5.

<sup>440</sup> *I Fenomeni Telepatrici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche*, 5-6.

field of science.”<sup>441</sup> Psychology and the moral sciences now had to contend with movements of “*neo-idealism... modern spiritualism or neo-spiritualism...occultismo... and ultra-psychicism,* which were composed of a heap of “psychic phenomenon” poorly observed and even worse interpreted” not only among the masses but among their own colleagues.”<sup>442</sup>

#### 4. Evidence, proof, and fraud

Spiritism also challenged Morselli to defend disciplinary psychiatry by explaining its relationship to science. By 1907, spiritism had already gone through many iterations. He observed that as its “superior manifestations” — its intellectual explanations — were “already fading and breathing with great difficulty,” spiritists turned to empirical methodology to prove the veracity of spiritist fact.<sup>443</sup> On the one hand, the dozens of publications, congresses, and thousands of collaborators were part of a “fervent” movement “engaged [in the] fight against the materialistic sciences of the nineteenth century.” Entire “schools, churches, and sects aspired to a new mysticism, a reborn idealism, occultism, intuitionism, enlightenment, and even magic and alchemy, spontaneously revived from their medieval tomb, where just yesterday they lay dead and rotting.”<sup>444</sup> On the other, spiritists had begun to promote a “scientific spiritism” that promised empirical proof for the existence of the spirit and would compensate for the system’s

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<sup>441</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Lo Studio dello Spiritismo. Intervista con un Redattore della “Gazzetta Piemontese” (dettata nell’ottobre 1892,” *Memorie Scientifiche*, vol. 9, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>442</sup> *I Fenomeni Telepatici e le Allucinazioni Veridiche*, 6.

<sup>443</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 36.

<sup>444</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 10.

“failure.”<sup>445</sup> While its religious facets threatened to corrupt the masses, its use of the scientific method threatened the scientific project as a whole, and specifically psychiatry. Morselli defended his profession by articulating the flaws of spiritism as a scientific endeavor and by offering a psychiatric explanation for spiritist facts.

When Morselli first discussed spiritism, he was not concerned with proving or disproving its phenomena scientifically. As he saw it, questions of the spirit simply were not germane to scientific study, although psychical occurrences did provide interesting materials for the sciences of the mind. In 1881, he wrote, “if we exclude the dilemma of “spiritualism or materialism” that science cannot resolve, then [spiritism] remains a fertile field of study for psychology and an inexhaustible source of discoveries above and beyond the facts.”<sup>446</sup> Nearly twenty years later, Morselli, by then a vocal participant in the debate, still maintained that “despite twenty years of experience and hundreds of séances of the most diverse “subjects,” I have never seen even a small phenomenon *in front of my own eyes, body, and mind* that was explainable through [spiritism] and not the well-known and much appreciated laws of psychology and physiology.”<sup>447</sup> Any credibility that scientists had lent to spiritist phenomena could be explained by their character: they were psychically no different than anyone else, except for a strong desire to discover and research new truths.<sup>448</sup> But by 1907, Morselli published a two-volume study entitled *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”: Impressioni e Note Critiche sui Fenomeni Medianici di*

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<sup>445</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 34.

<sup>446</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Introduzione alle Lezioni Psicologia Patologica e di Clinica Psichiatrica letta nella R. Università di Torino addì 17 marzo 1881 dal Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Estratto dal Vol. II, fasc. IV dell’*Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali ed Antropologia Criminale*) (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1881).

<sup>447</sup> “Tra Spiritismo e Psychismo. Una lettera del prof. E. Morselli,” *Rivista di Studi Psicici. Periodico Mensile*, anno VI, n. 9-10 (Settembre–Ottobre 1900), 358.

<sup>448</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Lo Studio dello Spiritismo. Intervista con un Redattore della “Gazzetta Piemontese” (dettata nell’ottobre 1892,” *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 9, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

*Eusapia Paladino (Psychology and “Spiritism”: Impressions and Critical Notes on the Medium Phenomena of Eusapia Paladino)*, which detailed his experiences participating in the séances of Paladino and his subsequent analysis of spiritism.

While skeptical scientists could use the scientific method to disprove spiritism, those who employed it as proof of spiritist phenomena were accused of misunderstanding its logic. According to Morselli, none of the séances conducted or narrated by the spiritists could guarantee the “severe experimental method” necessary to prove something scientifically. Morselli instructed the public that the scientific method consisted of two processes, “observation and experimentation”:

Experiment consists in varying the determinism of phenomena, analyzing it minutely and breaking it down into its single factors, and in this case the material and psychological factors exist in the *medium* and in the persons that assist in their procedures. Now this analytic study, this breakdown of complex facts into simple elements, is the only way through which to know the truth.<sup>449</sup>

Researchers attending séances had to arbitrate the circumstances, the date and place where they were held, the lighting, and they often strove with difficulty to recreate circumstances to turn the séance into an experiment.

For Morselli, spiritism as a practice could never be verified by the scientific method because the “experience” of a séance was entirely determined by the medium. The spiritist explanation was that spirits chose specific persons as the means of communication because they were “exceptionally equipped with skills or special ‘strengths.’”<sup>450</sup> It was up to the medium to

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<sup>449</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Lo Studio dello Spiritismo. Intervista con un Redattore della “Gazzetta Piemontese” (dettata nell’ottobre 1892,” *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 9, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>450</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 5.

determine whether a spirit wanted to manifest itself and how: misspellings on the spirit board and other mistakes or the failure of a séance to produce evidence of a visiting spirit could be blamed on the mysterious ways of the spirit world, the confusion in communicating with that world, or the spirit's discontent with the circumstances of the séance. In a sense, the experimenters could never fully wrest control of the séance from the hands of the subject that they researched. Applying the scientific method, therefore, was impossible.

Additionally, so-called spiritist facts sometimes had very little to do with one another. For Morselli, the “so-called spiritism is...an artificial accumulation of facts that often do not have any relationship among themselves except that they take place in the presence of certain individuals or *mediums*, and in so-called séances.” However, these spiritist facts were so different as to preclude mutual explanation. For example, automatic writing could be explained by the “disintegration of the personality, with separate activity in the unconscious sphere, *as one can see every day experimentally proven* in many hypnotized subjects.” Dancing tables, if not simply the work of “trickster” (*ingannatori*) mediums, could be explained by the medium's unconscious movements. Messages from spirits and spirit possession could be understood through psychiatric theories. Spiritist phenomena were better explained individually, whether as charlatanism, self-hypnosis, mental illness, or other psychiatric conditions.<sup>451</sup>

Despite his critiques of “scientific spiritism,” Morselli believed that he could study spiritism “scientifically” and he distinguished two different types of medium phenomena. Intellectual mediumship “based on the subjective psychological processes of the medium, is not susceptible to scientific investigation,” while physical mediumship “manifests in objective, tangible, and visible facts, and is therefore perceived by the senses of those present, ascertainable

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<sup>451</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Lo Studio dello Spiritismo. Intervista con un Redattore della “Gazzetta Piemontese” (dettata nell’ottobre 1892,” *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 9, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

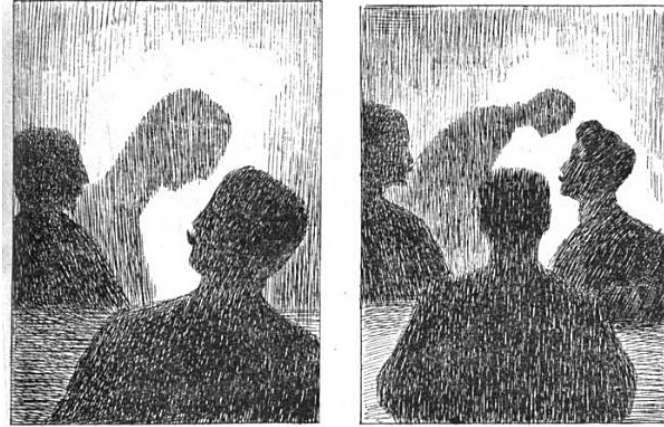
through mechanical means and with devices and even measurable up to a certain point.”<sup>452</sup> Psychiatry could easily explain automatic writing, purported spirit possession, or clairvoyance, but it had few answers for ghostly apparitions, table rappings, or levitations. Charlatanism and personality disorders could explain the intellectual mediumship of Germana T., a 20-year-old medium best known for her automatic writing. Morselli carefully cataloged and evaluated the credibility of her contact with historical figures, including Jesus Christ, King Victor Emanuel II, Pope Pius IX, King Umberto I, artists and scientists such as Dante Alighieri, Torquato Tasso, Alessandro Manzoni, Giuseppe Verdi, and Cesare Lombroso, mythical persons such as John King, the spirit channeled by Eusapia Paladino, among many others.<sup>453</sup> Even so, Morselli’s vehement refutation of intellectual mediumship was not categorical. In the séance in which Morselli’s own mother was channeled, he took issue with the details of the spirit manifestation, not the medium’s psychiatric state (figure 3). Morselli claimed that the spirit channeled was too corpulent, forgetful, and confused to be his mother, while Lombroso explained that spirits often took on the “words and gestures and body from the medium.”<sup>454</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Nel Mondo dei Misteri. Impressioni di un Uomo di Scienza sui Fenomeni <<Eusapiani>>,” Estratti dal *Corriere della Sera*, nos. 10, 14, 20 (febbrajo e marzo 1907).

<sup>453</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Su di un Caso di “Medianità Scrivente” a Personalità Multiple. Contributo alla Critica Psicologica dello “Spiritismo,” Estratto dalla Rivista *Luce e Ombra* (Milan: Tipografia Enrico Zerboni, 1911).

<sup>454</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Attacchi e Contrattacchi sul Terreno della Psicologia Supernormale, Esame Critico-Comparativo di un’Opera Recente sul “Problema dell’Anima,” Estratto dalla Rivista *Luce e Ombra* (Milan: Unione Tipografica, 1909), 32; Cesare Lombroso, “Psychology and Spiritism,” *The Annals of Psychological Science*, vol. VII, nos. 44 & 45, 376.



Altre forme fantomatiche prodotte dall' Eusapia  
nei recenti esperimenti a Genova e a Torino.

Figure 3. Example of ghostly forms produced by Eusapia Paladino<sup>455</sup>

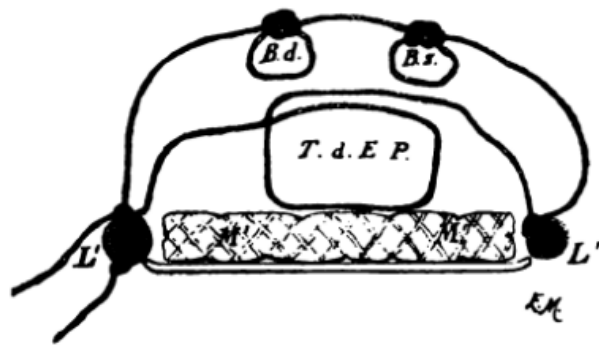
The question of physical mediumship, however, posed more serious problem. While some cases could be easily disproved as fraud, others could not be explained through psychiatric theory. In the case of the medium Signora D'Espérance, who could purportedly dematerialize part of her body in contact with the spirit world, Morselli critiqued the circumstances of the séance: witnesses could no longer “see the legs and feet of the medium under her clothes flowing down from the seat.”<sup>456</sup> Furthermore, the medium was never examined by a physician and seemed prone to autohypnosis. For Morselli, D'Espérance's purported bodily disintegration could be explained through simple illusions, the medium's own willingness to believe in the phenomenon as well as that of her audience. But unlike other mediums, Paladino became the object of Morselli's prolonged study because of the physical evidence she could manifest that Morselli could not explain. The rooms which held Paladino's séances were carefully scanned for

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<sup>455</sup> Luigi Barzini, *Nel Mondo dei Misteri con Eusapia Paladino Preceduto da uno Studio di C. Lombroso e Seguito da Molte Illustrazioni Medianiche* (Milan: Casa Editrice Baldini, Castoldi & C., 1907).

<sup>456</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Sulla così detta “dematerializzazione parziale d'un medium”. Articolo in Difesa d'una Citazione,” 1075

planted devices and secret contraptions, and the body of the medium herself was carefully controlled, either undressed then re-clothed in the presence of the scientists present, or other times, “firmly bound to the bed...only clad in a chemise and drawers, without any fabric which could serve to form the drapery around the head of the apparition” (figure 4).<sup>457</sup> Despite dozens of séances and the attempts of scientists to control the medium’s environment and prevent fraud, Morselli and the other witnesses failed to explain Paladino’s spiritist phenomena, the most impressive of which was table levitation (figures 5 and 6).

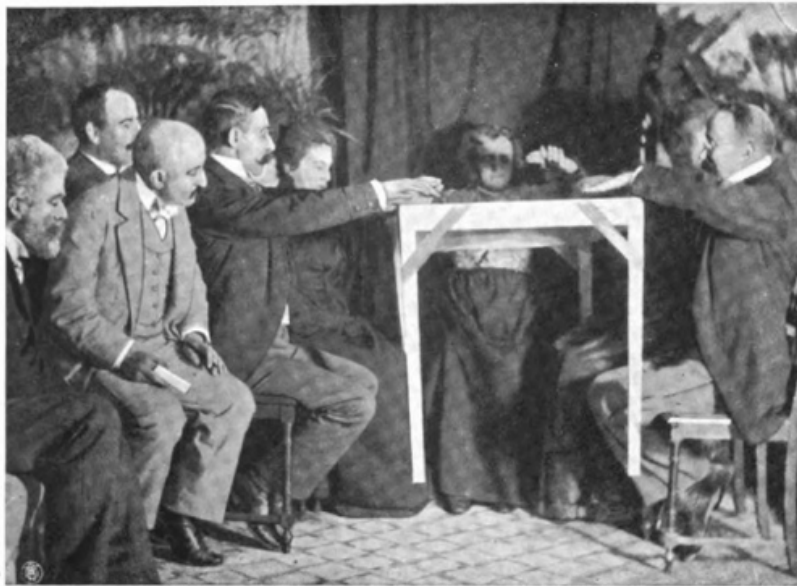


Come è stata legata la Paladino la sera del 1° marzo 1902  
(vista in sezione trasversa).

[L/L'', le due sbarre laterali del lettuccio; MM', il materasso, su cui giace Eusapia; T. d. E. P., il giro della corda attorno al tronco della medium; Bd, Bs, i nodi attorno ai due polsi].

Figure 4. A cross-section sketch demonstrating how Paladino was bound to a mattress

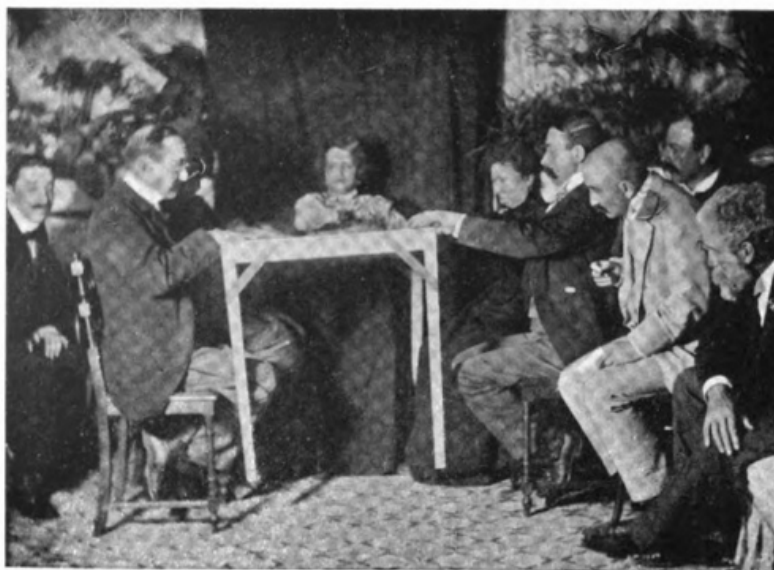
<sup>457</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Mediumship and Conjuring (in Connection with Eusapia Paladino),” *Annals of Psychological Science* (Agosto-Settembre 1908), 359.



Prof. Porro                      Sig.<sup>a</sup> Rey                      Eusapia                      Sig.<sup>a</sup> Peretti  
 Dott. Venzano F. Avellino  
 Cap. De Albertis                      Prof. Morselli

Fotografia istantanea di una "levitazione" di tavolo (Seduta del 31 maggio 1901)

Figure 5. Table "Levitation," 31 May 1901



F. Ferraro                      Sig.<sup>a</sup> Peretti                      Eusapia                      Sig.<sup>a</sup> Rey                      Prof. Porro  
 Prof. Morselli                      F. Avellino                      Dott. Venzano  
 Cap. De Albertis

Fotografia istantanea di una "levitazione" di tavolo (Seduta del 31 maggio 1901).

Figure 6. "Table Levitation," 31 May 1901

If Morselli rejected spiritism, he came to reconsider the notion of the spirit. Because of the evidence Paladino manifested, Morselli argued that while some of the spiritist phenomena were real, they could be explained without the supernatural forces which spiritists adduced. Something like the spirit described by spiritists could exist, but “if the spirit exists, it exists in that it is different from the material; we cannot address it without abusing it with the anthropomorphism worthy of children and savages.”<sup>458</sup> Something beyond the biological form could exist, but it was dangerous to assume it had an identity like that of a living human being.<sup>459</sup> But even if spiritist facts could be established, “spiritualist theories” would continue to “thwart scientific tendencies, and stop [psychiatry’s] development in comparison with the rest of medicine.”<sup>460</sup> It was spiritism that hindered the proper study of the spirit.

Relying on “scientific psychology,” Morselli adopted certain “metapsychical convictions,” and his attempt to redefine the spirit divorced from spiritualist theories aligned him with other “metapsychical” researchers such as Charles Richet (1850-1935), Frederic William Henry Myers (1843-1901), and William James (1842-1910).<sup>461</sup> Like spiritism, what Morselli sometimes referred to as “metapsychiatry,” “metadynamism,” or the “biopsychic” or “metapsyche” represented a series of initiatives taken by scientific researchers to explain otherworldly phenomena with a more rigid “scientific approach.” Like the terms spiritism and spiritualism, which were often used interchangeably, metapsychicism (*Metapsichica*) was also sometimes used as a synonym for scientific spiritism, though Morselli distinguished between the

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<sup>458</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 5.

<sup>459</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Lo Studio dello Spiritismo. Intervista con un Redattore della “Gazzetta Piemontese” (dettata nell’ottobre 1892,” *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 9, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>460</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Introduzione alle Lezioni Psicologia Patologica e di Clinica Psichiatrica Letta nella R. Università di Torino addì 17 marzo 1881 dal Prof. Enrico Morselli* (Estratto dal Vol. II, fasc. IV dell’*Archivio di Psichiatria, Scienze Penali ed Antropologia Criminale*) (Turin: Ermanno Loescher, 1881).

<sup>461</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 557.

two. For Morselli, what united the metapsychical movement was the rigor of maintaining “observation and experimentation first; then explanations and inductive doctrines.” The key for Morselli was metapsychiatry’s Sherlockian inductive reasoning, which began “before compromising its destiny by giving birth and outlet to unfounded and premature hypotheses...to put itself on the secure path toward exact Research.”<sup>462</sup>

Morselli argued that “biotic or psychic forces (better yet “biopsychic”), agents in the operation of the living organism also extended beyond itself, but with a determined circle of its surrounding space.” Instead of a possessing spirit, the forces that emanated from the medium were their own biopsychic manifestations. It was a hypothesis that “attributes extraordinary phenomena—above all objective and physical of the mediumship—to the exclusive action of the person of the medium.” It occurred “without any intrusion of unknown super-terrestrial agents, but with and similar actions (although considerably weaker) of the other individuals present.”<sup>463</sup> In this explanation, the psyche could extend beyond the biological form although it was always attached to it, much like an aura. In some ways, this biopsychic extension bore some similarities to the theories of telepathy that Morselli had critiqued, with two major differences. First, in telepathy, the psyche of the medium could extend beyond the form and penetrate the mind of another, to a certain degree with the other’s compliance. Second, the proof for telepathy was always problematic and could be explained through both hypnosis and the power of suggestion. In contrast, biopsychic forces could manifest themselves as physical interventions beyond the form and could not be explained through psychology. At one point, Morselli used the term “fluidic-dynamic” and explained:

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<sup>462</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 73.

<sup>463</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 522.

Different antagonisms and confluences can exist between the unknown forces emanating from the séance participants; and the medium can try to organize them in a way to neutralize their contrasts or favor their harmonies, just as an electrician would do with the constitutive elements of a battery from which he intends to obtain a higher charge.<sup>464</sup>

While still lacking concrete proof for their existence, Morselli—without “any anxiety in [his] positivist soul”—saw the possibilities in biopsychical (or metapsychical) explanations that combined notions of energy based on electrical models with the idea of the aura. Theorists were promoting the “neuro-aura,” “radiating and circulating neural forces,” “currents of polarity” that could circulate around a person, or, drawing on theories of magnetism, “vital electricity” to explain the phenomena, some still retaining the possibility for a disembodied spirit (figure 7).<sup>465</sup> These theories could support the “psychodynamism” Morselli supported, but not spiritism.

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<sup>464</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo,”* vol. 2, 436.

<sup>465</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo,”* vol. 2, 436-440.



Raffigurazione del processo di "materializzazione", secondo l'ipotesi dell' "elettricità vitale", del D<sup>r</sup> POL ARCAS.

Figure 7. Process of “materialization” according to the hypothesis of “vital electricity”<sup>466</sup>

By offering this explanation for spiritist facts, Morselli reintroduced spiritist phenomena into the framework of psychiatric analysis. Morselli argued that while some of these phenomena could be explained by normal psychology, psychopathology, or neuropathology, others had remained in the “semi-darkness of supernormal psychology, or aberrant in the ultra-cognitive area, and will be absorbed by the full light of biopsychology.” It was the responsibility of psychology, psychiatry, and neurology to reclaim these “organic powers currently maintained as occult or biopsychic forces unknown to this day.”<sup>467</sup> Because these metapsychical convictions built upon the patrimony of already secure knowledge, they were the most likely to survive both

<sup>466</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo,”* vol. 2, 439.

<sup>467</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo,”* vol. 2, 543.

inductive and deductive reasoning. It was the “psychodynamic hypothesis” that “glimpsed at the existence of “unknown psychic forces” in the Cosmos, and positioned itself provisionally in the series of other natural “forces” acknowledged by science and philosophy.” In this way, the metapsychic offered a middle ground between two extremes, for “every thesis has its antithesis, but it always ends in a synthesis.”<sup>468</sup> It was just a matter of time until spiritism would be eliminated from metadynamics and the metapsychic.<sup>469</sup>

### 5. Conclusion: comparisons with hypnotism

In an often cited episode, Morselli witnessed the Belgian hypnotizer (*fascinatore*) Alfred d’Hont – stage name Donato – magnetize several volunteers from the audience at the Teatro Scribe in 1886.<sup>470</sup> The performances caused a stir in Milan and worried local authorities, who feared the spread of “psychic deterioration” and “pathological sexuality.”<sup>471</sup> The public displays of “animal magnetism” were strongly criticized by a number of scientists, including physiologist Jacob Moleschott (1822-1893), physiologist Angelo Mosso (1846-1910), Cesare Lombroso, and pathologist Giulio Bizzozero (1846-1901), who collaborated with journalist and politician Giovan Battista Bottero (1822-1897) in his series of editorial pieces on the matter in the *Gazzetta del Popolo*.<sup>472</sup> Among the Italian scientific community, Morselli was the only one to dissent. Having arranged a private display of this magnetism with the help of his colleague Eugenio

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<sup>468</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 1, 9.

<sup>469</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 565.

<sup>470</sup> See Patrizia Guarnieri, *Individualità Difformi*, 102-107; 109-110; “Aspetti della Ricerca Scientifica sullo Spiritismo in Italia (1870-1915).”

<sup>471</sup> Clara Gallini, *La Sonnambula Meravigliosa. Magnetismo e Ipnatismo nell’Ottocento Italiano* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1983), 221-224.

<sup>472</sup> Detailed in *Individualità Difformi*, 103.

Tanzi (1856-1934) in the hotel Albergo Europa, Morselli was quickly hypnotized, began to stutter, and when commanded to sleep, he fell into a deep slumber.

For Morselli, the phenomenon of hypnosis was real and subject to scientific inquiry. It was an “indisputable fact that there was neither duplicity nor charlatanism in his public experiments,” and in an article written for the public, Morselli detailed the history of “animal magnetism” from Mesmer through Allan Kardec (1804-1869), describing it as “a combination of processes destined to challenge the human body with uncommon phenomena, derived from a specific anomalous state of the nervous system.”<sup>473</sup> As such, hypnosis was subject to scientific inquiry:

In my opinion, science has... only two justifications: the knowledge of phenomena that is culture, and the application of this knowledge to human needs, that is social benefit.

Therefore, he who studies and uncovers the mysteries of his cabinet has as much merit as he who disseminates beneficial knowledge worthy of dispelling ignorance and bettering the material conditions of humanity.<sup>474</sup>

Throughout his career, Morselli continued to publish on the possibilities and potential of magnetism, hypnosis, and suggestion, and he used hypnosis regularly as a treatment in his private clinic.<sup>475</sup> As the one scientist to speak against Moleschott, Mosso, Lombroso, and

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<sup>473</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Il Magnetismo Animale. La Fascinazione e gli Stati Ipnocici*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Riveduta ed ampliata (Turin: Roux e Favale, 1886), 4-5; Enrico Morselli, “Il Magnetismo Animale e la Fascinazione del Donato,” Article date 29 aprile 1886. Found in *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 7; Enrico Morselli, “L’ipnotismo sulle Scene,” (1908). Found in *Memorie Scientifiche*, volume 12, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>474</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Il Magnetismo Animale*, vii.

<sup>475</sup> See Enrico Morselli and Eugenio Tanzi, “Contributo Sperimentale alla Fisiopsicologia dell’Ipnocismo. Polso e Respiro negli Stati Suggestivi dell’Ipnosi,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, 705-729; See the clinical files, Sanatorio Morselli, Villa Morselli Via Maria Pia, Archivio Storico Psichiatria, Genoa, Italy; Enrico Morselli, “Contributo Critico-Sperimentale alla Fisiopsicologia della Suggestione. Sui Fenomeni di Credulità per Suggestione non Ipnocica nelle Persone Sane,” *Rivista Speciale di Opere di Filosofia Scientifica*, vol. 9 (1890), 513-522.

Bizzozzero's opinion that public demonstrations of hypnotism be banned, his work served as a touchstone for larger public debates on the matter.<sup>476</sup>

Morselli's defense and experimentation with hypnosis has been connected to his experimentations with spiritism. Patrizia Guarnieri recounts the story of Morselli's experience with Donato as the beginning of his research into the unconscious, which would later lead into his response to Freudian psychoanalysis. In an unpublished dissertation, Fabrizio Pesoli concurred with much of Guarnieri's story, further emphasizing how hypnosis helped shape Morselli's understanding of the mind, and specifically, the concept of *cenestesi*, defined as a general feeling of the total sum of internal feelings, which, in a balanced state of health, gave an individual the general feeling of wellbeing.<sup>477</sup> In this model, "consciousness is only...an episode, [something] extra added to thought, that does not change biological nature."<sup>478</sup> Morselli's writing on hypnosis would be followed by his articles critiquing the mind reader Pickman and "mental suggestion," and later telepathy.<sup>479</sup>

For Morselli, hypnosis and spiritism were comparable in one sense: both could be the product of charlatans or genuine practitioners. He wrote:

There are false magnetizers and genuine magnetizers, just as there are those who are really magnetized and those who only pretend to. This is not to say that a very large

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<sup>476</sup> See Filippi, "Review: Il magnetismo animale, la fascinazione e gli stati ipnotici, Prof. Enrico Morselli (Turin: Roux e Favale, 1886)," *Lo Sperimentale. Giornale Italiano di Scienze Mediche*, Anno XL, Tomo LVII (Florence: Tipografia Cenniniana, 1886), 438-439; "Ipnotismo, Tornato di Moda," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, serie 3, vol. 13, quaderno 865 (Florence: Luigi Manuelli, 1886), 5-18.

<sup>477</sup> G. Fu., G. C. "Cenestesi," *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani* (Rome: Istituto Giovanni Treccani, 1931).

<sup>478</sup> Enrico Morselli, Enrico Morselli, *Il Magnetismo Animale. La Fascinazione e gli Stati Ipnotici*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Riveduta ed ampliata (Turin: Roux e Favale, 1886), 101-102. Cited in "Aspetti della Ricerca Scientifica sullo Spiritismo in Italia (1870-1915)," 113.

<sup>479</sup> See Enrico Morselli, *Le così dette Esperienze di Divinazione del Pensiero Eseguite dal Pickman in Italia: Lettera Aperta al Prof. Angiolo Filippi*. Estratto da *Giornale Medico lo Sperimentale* (Florence, 1890); *I Fenomeni Telepatichi e le Allucinazioni Veridiche*.

group of phenomena, well worthy of study, does not exist.... Likewise, militant spiritism in both America and Europe has a great deal of fraud and trickery, but we must not infer that all the physical phenomena of mediumship are false.<sup>480</sup>

But while both were subject to the fraudulence of tricksters and charlatans, the one phenomenon could often explain the other: much of the experience of mediums could be explained as hypnotic state. In this way, Morselli distinguished the figure of the hypnotist from the medium: while the hypnotist was a trained “technician” in revealing the unconscious dynamics of the mind, the spiritist suffered from the delusions of the mentally ill, was capable of self-hypnosis, or suffered from a personality disorder.<sup>481</sup> Likewise, telepathy, mindreading, occultism, and ghostly visitation also were phenomena that could be studied scientifically, not as real occurrences in and of themselves, but as symptomatic of psychic disorder.

Both hypnosis and spiritist manifestations offered possible venues through which the scientist could study phenomena that occurred deep within the recesses of the mind, and those that occurred beyond its confines. Just as hypnosis gave access to dynamics of the mind usually obscured from observation, the “spirit,” or the possibility of an mental force that extended beyond form, allowed for something similar. The problem was that spiritism was made up of an “immense heap of facts called ‘spiritist,’ poorly clustered under this single and selfsame label.”<sup>482</sup> Without such dogma, the spirit, scientifically understood, challenged the meaning of the material confines of the mind. While hypnosis drew psychiatrists like Morselli into the depths of the unconscious, spirit phenomena took them to the outer limits of mental phenomena.

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<sup>480</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Mediumship and Conjuring (in Connection with Eusapia Paladino),” *Annals of Psychological Science* (Agosto-Settembre 1908), 372.

<sup>481</sup> *Individualità Difformi*, 104.

<sup>482</sup> *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*, vol. 2, 543.

This chapter has explored Morselli's investigations into spiritism, and his critique of the movement and its evidence as constructed between two polarities, religion and science. The dichotomy between these two systems of knowledge was something that Morselli had to continually clarify and redefine in order to distinguish his practice of psychiatry and science from that of "pseudoscientific" spiritist investigators. In the end, this exchange led Morselli to reexamine his own position regarding the spirit and to allow for its possible existence. To this end, this chapter has largely reiterated Morselli's positions and those of his opponents, but should not be seen as a categorical endorsement of the terms of "religion" and "science" as he understood them. Instead, Morselli's writings and experimentation should reflect the plasticity and negotiability of these systems of knowledge, for a "true man of science knows through experience that in complicated and arduous questions...over the nature of *real* or *illusory* phenomena produced, one cannot negate or affirm this lightly and without contemplation." He portrayed "science" as a practice by degree, destined for improvement but susceptible to corruption. No one, after all, was "obligated" to follow Morselli: "How beautiful is the freedom of thought!"<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Una Lettera del prof. Morselli sullo Spiritismo," Dal *Caffaro* (27-28 maggio 1901),

## Chapter 6. Mind: the limits of consciousness

### 1. Introduction: Freud and the mind

When Enrico Morselli's *Psicanalisi* was published in 1926, it was a commercial success and received "wide circulation in the Italian scientific world."<sup>484</sup> The "famous" work had two winning factors:<sup>485</sup> it was backed by a powerful printing press and was written by one of the forefathers of Italian psychiatry. Furthermore, the two-volume work had enduring appeal. Thirty years later, historian of psychoanalysis Michel David testified:

Still today, young people longing to learn about psychoanalysis purchase Morselli's treatise from bookstalls where it is never missing! One cannot underestimate the negative influence of a work that—written in good faith with informative scrupulousness—is unfortunately undone by an almost total incomprehension of its subject.<sup>486</sup>

The evidence David offered to blame Morselli for halting the spread of psychoanalysis throughout Italy prior to World War II also attested to the work's widespread acclaim.

In contrast to its popular reception in the 1920s, the work received comparatively little scholarly attention. Some contemporary reviewers offered warm accolades, while others harshly denounced it. One described Morselli as "judicious," "knowledgeable," and "the living Glory among Italian thinkers," and the "monumental" book as a "true pleasure."<sup>487</sup> The lengthiest

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<sup>484</sup> Giovanni Pietro Lombardo, Renato Foschi, *La Psicologia Italiana e il Novecento: le Prospettive Emergenti nella Prima Metà del Secolo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1997), 219.

<sup>485</sup> Pierpaolo Martucci, *Le Piaghe d'Italia: i Lombrosiani e i Grandi Crimini Economici nell'Europa* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2002), 17.

<sup>486</sup> Michel David, *La Psicoanalisi nella Cultura Italiana* (Turin: Boringhieri, 1966), 175.

<sup>487</sup> Review of "Enrico Morselli, *La Psicanalisi. Studii ed Appunti Critici*," in *Genesis. Rassegna di Studi Sessuali e di Eugenia*, vol. 6 (1926), 207-208.

published critiques of *Psicanalisi* were written by both Freud's greatest detractors and strongest proponents, and both offer insight into the social, cultural, and religious climate of Italy in the 1920s. On the one hand, Morselli's study provoked the ire of conservative Catholics. Jesuit professor of theology at the Gregorian Pontifical University (Pontificia Università Gregoriana) Father Francesco Maria Gaetani harshly condemned *Psicanalisi* in the Catholic Church's major mouthpiece *Civiltà Cattolica*, decrying it as "something horrifying," an extreme offense to "all principles of morality," and a "great attack on Catholicism."<sup>488</sup> On the other, the youthful Italian followers of Freud accused *Psicanalisi* of complete incomprehension and misrepresentation of their Viennese mentor. The most strident critique was written by Edoardo Weiss (1889-1970), Italy's leading proponent of psychoanalysis. At the behest of Freud, Weiss published a 16-page review in *Archivio Generale di Neurologia, Psichiatria e Psicoanalisi* in which he brutally criticized *Psicanalisi*. What was believed to be "a systematic and objective exposition of this discipline [psychoanalysis], at least in its fundamental concepts," instead offered "delusions [to the] incautious customer!"<sup>489</sup> The two reviews reflect the different ways the opus could be received: while the former saw it as a descriptive endorsement of psychoanalysis, the latter saw it as misleading and malicious.

Some of the most scathing condemnation was expressed in private correspondence and began with a personal dispute between Morselli and Weiss. In 1925, Morselli wrote to Weiss inquiring about Freudian concepts and therapy. But what originally appeared to Weiss a friendly exchange began a fiery dispute. Morselli invited Weiss to speak at an Italian psychiatric convention held that same year in Trieste. After Weiss's session, "Morselli himself wanted to

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<sup>488</sup> See Francesco Maria Gaetani, *La Psicanalisi* (Rome: La Civiltà Cattolica, 1925); Roberto Zapperi, *Freud e Mussolini: La Psicoanalisi in Italia Durante il Regime Fascista* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2013), 92.

<sup>489</sup> Edoardo Weiss, "Morselli – *La Psicanalisi* – Bocca, Torino 1926," *Archivio Generale di Neurologia, Psichiatria e Psicoanalisi*, fasc. 3 (15 novembre 1926), 364.

close the discussion by criticizing Freud's analysis, distorting his concepts, without considering all the explanations [Weiss] had given him in correspondence." Weiss was "shocked at this hypocritical and false attitude, as were a number of psychiatrists."<sup>490</sup> Even Italian psychologist and professor Vittorio Benussi (1878-1927) turned on Morselli. The man Morselli had praised as one of the two Italians who had understood Freud from the beginning called Morselli's study "dishonest and shameful."<sup>491</sup> Morselli and Weiss's peaceable letter exchange degenerated into protracted squabbling in publications replete with insults and defamation, Weiss's scathing review of *Psicanalisi* provoking Morselli's own vengeful reply.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) himself joined in the discussion, but while the letters Freud wrote to Morselli were very polite, those sent to his disciplines expressed the offense Freud had taken to *Psicanalisi*. On 18 February 1926, Freud wrote to Morselli:

While reading your important work on psychoanalysis I noticed with regret that you cannot accept our youthful science without great reservations, and I have to comfort myself with the divergence of opinion inevitable in such difficult topics as well as with the certainty that your book will contribute a great deal toward arousing the interest of your compatriots for psychoanalysis.<sup>492</sup>

Freud closed the letter cordially, stating "In the past I wouldn't have hesitated to ask your permission to visit you on my next trip to Italy. Unfortunately I cannot consider traveling at the

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<sup>490</sup> Paul Roazen, *Edoardo Weiss: The House that Freud Built* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 107.

<sup>491</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Attorno alla Psicanalisi," *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, vol. XIV, anno V, no. 1-2 (gennaio-febbraio 1927), 18; Letter to Edoardo Weiss, 1 gennaio 1927, cited in Anna Maria Accerboni, "Vittorio Benussi e Edoardo Weiss a Confronto sull'Inconscio," *Rivista di Psicoanalisi*, fasc. 4 (1998), 813-833.

<sup>492</sup> Letter 219 to Enrico Morselli, 18 February 1928, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, selected and edited by Ernst L. Freud (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1992), 365.

moment.”<sup>493</sup> In a letter to psychoanalyst Edoardo Weiss, however, Freud called Morselli’s critique “stupid and malicious prattle.” He gave unquestioning support to Weiss, stating “If you should ever in any connection want to let him know that I approve your criticism completely, I leave that up to you.”<sup>494</sup> To Hungarian psychoanalyst Sándor Ferenczi (1873-1933), Freud called the treatise “manure and rubbish!”<sup>495</sup>

*Psicanalisi*’s market success and its critical appraisal offer two contrasting portraits of how the book was received in Italy. On the one hand, the book appealed to a broad audience, sold well, and clearly had readers who subscribed to its views. On the other, it mustered little outright support from experts in the field, instead inciting vicious responses from his critics who decried the work as misleading. These responses indicate that the text resonated with popular scientific discourse and that Morselli was still respected and highly influential in Italy. At the same time, Morselli’s unceremonious views were seen as threatening and offensive to both conservative Catholics as well as a new generation of psychiatrists.

While many scholars have used *Psicanalisi* as evidence for the Italian scientific community’s hostility to psychoanalysis, this chapter understands it to be the result of a steady engagement with European scientific and intellectual discourses. Nominally, *Psicanalisi* is a summary and critique of the principles and practice of psychoanalysis, but in order to write it, Morselli drew on psychiatric, philosophical, and popular debates about the nature of the mind. The critique was historical and discursive. Based upon the other intellectual debates that Morselli had long since followed, it placed Freud’s theories in the broader history of European philosophy

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<sup>493</sup> Letter 219 to Enrico Morselli, 18 February 1928, *Letters of Sigmund Freud*, selected and edited by Ernst L. Freud (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1992), 365-366.

<sup>494</sup> Quoted and translated in Paul Roazen, *Edoardo Weiss: The House that Freud Built* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2005), 109.

<sup>495</sup> Sigmund Freud, Sándor Ferenczi, “Letter 1048, January 1926,” *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi: 1920-1933* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1993).

and psychiatry. By presenting alternative ideas to those of Freud, Morselli not only critiqued psychoanalysis but embedded his own ideas about the mind into the latest contribution to an ongoing discourse about psychoanalysis. With “more than 700 pages, overburdened with endless self-citations that would have been better to halve,” the book was arguably just as much about Morselli as about Freud.<sup>496</sup> *Psicanalisi* may be seen, therefore, as a kind of Rubin vase in which the principle portrait of Freudian psychoanalysis also has the Morsellian concepts of the mind as its reverse image.

This chapter will explore three of Morselli’s interlocking critiques of Freud’s notion of the mind. First, Morselli chastised Freud for what he saw as a misappropriation of evolutionary theory, which was embedded into every layer of Morselli’s critique. Morselli saw Freud as an evolutionary thinker who debased “maybe the greatest intellectual heritage of the nineteenth century” by ignoring the organic basis of evolutionary theory and employing it metaphorically instead of scientifically.<sup>497</sup> This led to an inversion of what Morselli saw as the proper way to understand mental evolution. Second, Morselli discredited Freud’s notion of the unconscious. Morselli conceded that Freud was right to point out the large part the unconscious played in the human psyche, but he had oversimplified the relationship between the unconscious and consciousness. Morselli viewed Freud’s explanation of the mind as warped; it gave too much power to the role of the irrational in human behavior. Third, Morselli employed Bergson’s philosophical ideas regarding the roles of time and space in the mind to critique Freud’s spatial understanding of the mind as well as his notion of conflict. The mental conflict envisioned by

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<sup>496</sup> Patrizia Guarnieri, *Individualità Difformi: La Psichiatria Antropologica di Enrico Morselli* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), 118-119.

<sup>497</sup> Enrico Morselli, *La Psicanalisi: Studii ed Appunti Critici*, vol. 1 (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1926), 13.

Freud was antagonistic and dramatic, simplified mental processes, and ignored what might be better understood as peaceable exchange.

In addition to the evidence it offers about early-twentieth-century debates about the mind, the publication of *Psicanalisi* and its reception reflect the precarious place of psychiatry in Italy in the early-twentieth century. By the late-nineteenth century, psychiatrists had successfully established their discipline as part of the medical field. However, they continued to battle other scientific, pseudo-scientific, and philosophical movements that either attacked their discipline directly or undermined its scientific credibility. As explored in the last chapter, Morselli had already spent decades debunking spiritism; in the later years of his life, Morselli argued with Italian idealists, continued to battle Catholic conservatives, and took on psychoanalysis.

*Psicanalisi* is not only Morselli's response to Freud, but it also captures his debates and reactions to a number of other intellectual movements that either threatened disciplinary psychiatry or endangered the field's credibility.

The publication of *Psicanalisi* also took place at a time when the Italian psychiatric community was changing. By 1926, Morselli was 73 years old, and much of the Italian psychiatry's old guard was dead or no longer active. Most importantly, Cesare Lombroso (b. 1835) had died back in 1909. The criminal anthropologist had been the last Italian researcher of the mind sciences with any overwhelming national and international stature. All of Freud's earliest Italian proponents were of a younger generation: Levi Bianchini (b. 1875), Vittorio Benussi (b. 1878), Edoardo Weiss (b. 1889), Luigi Baroncini (b. 1878), and Gustavo Modena (b. 1876) were all at least 20 years younger than Morselli. Morselli was one of the last psychiatrists of his generation in Italy, and consideration for his stature and influence surely tempered the public critiques of Freud and his followers. Continual disciplinary struggles, a changing population of psychiatric personnel, and a series of new intellectual debates compiled with

continuing scientific discourses provide the backdrop for a portrait of Morselli's *Psicanalisi*, and this chapter attempts to shed some light on the juncture between philosophical and psychiatric debates about the mind in the early twentieth century.

## 2. *Evolution and the mind: perspectives from scientific philosophy and psychoanalysis*

While it never became a topic of explicit discussion in *Psicanalisi*, evolutionary theory is at the core of Morselli's critique of Freudian theory. A staunch evolutionist, Morselli highlighted the ways in which psychoanalysis relied on the human mind changing over time, but he disputed the way this change over time was portrayed. On the one hand, Morselli's discussion of Freud's evolutionism was a compliment: he empathized with Freud's attempts to employ evolutionary theory. On the other, Morselli saw its misapplication as the basis for a flawed science. Freud ignored the foundations of psychiatry in organic evolution and furthermore, the external forces that effected the mind. His approach reflected the turn to idealism, which had resurfaced in Italy and was at odds with positivist science. As a result, Freud inverted the evolutionary development of consciousness and the unconscious and misconceived the nature and structure of the mind.

Morselli was one of the strongest proponents of evolutionary theory from the time when he was a student at the University of Modena, but he never strictly adhered to any specific school of evolutionary thought. At 18 years old, Morselli "renounced forever" his "religious ideals" and "philosophical culture"; he converted from a "Deist and Spiritualist" to a "positivist and evolutionist."<sup>498</sup> He later edited volumes on Charles Darwin and by Ernst Haeckel, and

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<sup>498</sup> Onorato Roux, *Infanzia e Giovinezza di Illustri Italiani Contemporanei. Memorie Autobiografiche di Letterati, Artisti, Scienziati, Uomini Politic, Patrioti e Pubblicisti*, vol. III, *Gli Scienziati* (Florence: Bemporad, 1910), 354.

incorporated evolutionary theory into his psychiatric, anthropological, and sociological writings.<sup>499</sup> For Morselli, the “philosophy of Evolution” would “remain unshakeable in its fundamental contours.” If it could not last as “a system of unifying explanation for the cosmos,” then it would certainly endure as “a method of causal investigation of phenomena.” While these “fundamental contours” were the principles set by Charles Darwin (1809-1882), Morselli was not a strict Darwinian. He read widely across the sciences and believed that even Darwin’s principle of selection would be “subject to profound modifications in the future. Even among the numerous organic factors of evolution, a place of honor still must be surrendered to other [factors] yet unknown.”<sup>500</sup>

For Morselli, an eclectic and moderate approach to evolution was a matter of national character. Morselli declared on behalf of Italian science:

We were and we are positivists, but without following Comte or Taine in their entirety, we have been and we are evolutionists, but without attaching ourselves to Herbert Spencer’s rather heavy cart...[and] without restricting the factors of biological mutation to the sole selection of Charles Darwin, which we always associate in our thought with Lamarck, and later De Vries.<sup>501</sup>

Likewise, the Italian scientific disposition could not embrace psychoanalysis, and because of “that sense of measurement that characterizes the Latin mentality, for the sobriety with which we

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<sup>499</sup> For example, see Enrico Morselli, ed., *Carlo Darwin e il Darwinismo nelle Scienze Biologiche e Sociali. Scritti Varii di G. Canestrini, G. Cattaneo, A. Lora, G. Marinelli, E. Morselli, G. Romiti, G. Tarozzi, G. Trezza e T. Vignoli* (Milan: Dumolard, 1892); Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel, Amedeo Herlitzka, Enrico Morselli, *I Problemi dell’Universo: Prima Traduzione Italiana Autorizzata dall’Autore* (Turin: Unione Tipografico, 1904); Enrico Morselli, *Un Carattere Atavico dell’Evoluzione Umana* (Milan, Turin: Dumolard, 1882); Enrico Morselli, *Il Darwinismo e l’Evoluzionismo* (Milan: Dumolard, 1891).

<sup>500</sup> Enrico Morselli, ed., *Carlo Darwin e il Darwinismo nelle Scienze Biologiche e Sociali. Scritti Varii di G. Canestrini, G. Cattaneo, A. Lora, G. Marinelli, E. Morselli, G. Romiti, G. Tarozzi, G. Trezza e T. Vignoli* (Milan: Dumolard, 1892), x.

<sup>501</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 4.

try every novelty, for that spirit of scientific skepticism, we Italians are aliens to every kind of hyperbole.” Instead, Morselli called for an approach to the “method of evolution” that was inclusive, balanced, not dogmatic, and incorporated different perspectives into an eclectic approach.<sup>502</sup>

This heterogeneous approach to evolutionary theory was particularly important for explaining the human mind. The mind evolved as did the body, but the processes affecting that evolution far outnumbered those affecting the physical form. To this end, Darwin’s concepts did not suffice.<sup>503</sup> Morselli wrote:

To suppose that the entire last three decades have passed without bringing about any changes to the theory of “natural selection,” without having added or taken anything away from the original concepts of Darwin, would also suppose that today’s science is incapable of progress: for a sincere and impartial evolutionist, that would actually negate the most beautiful and highest form of Evolutionism that refers to the development of human consciousness.<sup>504</sup>

As a philosophy and method, evolution was tasked with explaining human consciousness, and according to its logic, younger theorists would inevitably surpass the achievements of their forefathers. These theorists would expand evolutionary theory of the mind by departing from its material basis. It was “in the consciousness of *I* [and] personality that this intensification of communal homogeneous consciousness reaches its highest level. In as much as it is systematized

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<sup>502</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Darwinismo e l’Evoluzione,” Estratto dalla *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Anno X, vol. X (serie 2) (Milan-Genoa: Fratelli Dumolard, 1891), 275. See also Enrico Morselli, “La Filosofia Monistica in Italia,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, anno VI, 1887.

<sup>503</sup> For information about mental evolution in the work of Darwin, his predecessors and his followers, see Robert J. Richards, *Darwin and the Emergence of Evolutionary Theories of Mind and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>504</sup> *Carlo Darwin e il Darwinismo*, x.

and carries sentiments and a concept of the person, it will be as far away from the origins of life.” Though the evolution of human mind demanded that nonorganic factors be considered, Morselli never untethered the psyche from its material basis.

Evolutionary theory was foundational for Morselli’s understanding of the human psyche, and likewise, his philosophical ambitions. He believed that evolution had to go beyond science because “the human mind does not stop with the objective study of the phenomenon and its laws: it also wants to penetrate its nature; it is not contented with the *how*, it needs the *why*. In this way, every scientific doctrine always implies a meta-empirical problem.”<sup>505</sup> Understood as a dynamic method or philosophy instead of a set of rules or laws, evolution could be applied to every facet of existence and offered a way to unite the scientific research of life:

Evolutionism has been much more than Darwinism for some time, since it seeks to stabilize the nexus between all the facts of nature, from the elementary mechanical event to the most elevated event of consciousness: if it does not discover the intimate essence within it, which is the metascientific problem, it still indicates its genesis. It is no wonder that it is so varied in its principles, numerous in its applications, and progressive in its developments.<sup>506</sup>

Drawing upon the religion of humanity of August Comte (1798-1857) and the synthetic philosophy of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), Morselli attempted to create a school of “scientific philosophy” in order to promote “the direction of philosophy which is no longer a complex of speculative systems, but solely the synthesis of partial scientific doctrines, the expression of the

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<sup>505</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Darwinismo e l’Evoluzione,” Estratto dalla *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, anno X, vol. X (serie 2) (Milan-Genoa: Fratelli Dumolard, 1891), 292.

<sup>506</sup> *Carlo Darwin e il Darwinismo*, x.

highest general truths that derive uniquely and primitively from the study of facts.”<sup>507</sup> In the journal he founded and edited, *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* (1880-1891), empirical research in the biological and social sciences complemented inquiries into the subjects germane to philosophical and religious inquiry, and evolution often took center stage.

In terms of the scope of their scientific projects, Morselli and Freud had much in common. Both were biological thinkers that sought to explain the human mind and offered a scientific world view based on evolutionary theory.<sup>508</sup> For decades, Morselli had promoted a scientific philosophy in which evolutionary theory was a founding principle, but he lambasted Freud for attempting something similar. Morselli complained that psychoanalysis was not only as a new kind of psychology or science, but it was also a new “*Weltanschauung*” that attempted to explain human existence and civilization. If Freud defined psychoanalysis as an “investigation into psychic processes otherwise inaccessible”—namely unconscious processes—and if all nervous disorders derived from this “unaware, instinctive dynamism,” then psychology had gained a method of investigation. Psychoanalysis constituted:

a general Doctrine suitable to awaken us, not only to the most intimate and profound mysteries of our personality, but also to many of the highest manifestations of the human psyche in History, Morality, Mythology, Religion, Art, and Jurisprudence—in other

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<sup>507</sup> On Comte, see Andrew Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity: The Post-Theistic program of French Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); T. R. Wright, *The Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On Spencer: Ellen Frankel Paul, “Herbert Spencer: The Historicist as a Failed Prophet,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 44, no. 4 (October-December 1983), 619-638; Paul Elliot, “Erasmus Darwin, Herbert Spencer, and the Origins of the Evolutionary Worldview in British Provincial Scientific Culture, 1770-1850,” *Isis*, vol. 94, no. 1 (March 2003), 1-29. Quote from Enrico Morselli, “Introduzione,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, vol. 1 (luglio 1881- giugno 1882), vi.

<sup>508</sup> See Frank Sulloway, *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, reprint edition, 1992).

words, almost the entire Human Evolution throughout the ages...in which the above-mentioned instinctive tendencies are the primary cause.<sup>509</sup>

Both Freud and Morselli offered an evolutionary framework for understanding human behavior and existence. In terms of the ambitions of the psychoanalytic project, Morselli accused Freud of exactly what he had himself attempted over 30 years earlier.

The similarities between Morselli and Freud were just as much the cause for Morselli's vitriolic critique as were their differences. Morselli viewed Freud's use of evolutionary theory with mixed sentiment. On the one hand, he praised Freud's use of evolutionary theory as the "most acceptable and praiseworthy" part of psychoanalysis,<sup>510</sup> and he defended Freud against conservative Catholic critiques such as that by Francesco Maria Gaetani, writing "I applaud Freud for what he has done in favor of the Doctrine of Evolution... for the species of *Homo sapiens* and human onto-phylogenesis, as much for the organic as for the mental. Today this is more alive than ever." But while he commended Freud for incorporating evolution into psychoanalysis, he scolded Freud for the way he did it. Morselli wrote, "I will always be the first to applaud the work of Freud for raising the destiny of Evolution in Psychology and consequently in Biology again. However, I cannot adapt myself to these hypothetical doctrinal applications of an abstract law...."<sup>511</sup> Because Freud had mistaken its fundamental tenets, the entirety of psychoanalysis was based on a dangerous misinterpretation and application of evolution to the human psyche.

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<sup>509</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 1-2.

<sup>510</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Attorno alla Psicanalisi," *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, vol. XIV, anno V, nos. 1-2 (gennaio-febbraio 1927), 14.

<sup>511</sup> Francesco Maria Gaetani, "La Psicanalisi," *Civiltà Cattolica* (16 novembre, 20 dicembre 1926); Enrico Morselli, "Attorno alla Psicanalisi," *Quaderni di Psichiatria: Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, vol. XIV, anno V, nos. 1-2 (gennaio-febbraio 1927), 14; *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 271.

More troublesome than the scope of Freud's project was the way he understood and misapplied evolutionary theory. Despite purporting an eclectic and manifold approach to evolutionary theory, Morselli did hold on to some of its fundamental tenets, and it was Freud's failure to adhere to these principles that provoked Morselli's critique. First and foremost, Freud undermined the material substratum of the evolutionary process that Morselli saw as essential to any question about the nature of consciousness. As he once phrased it:

*“What is the psyche! What is consciousness and what function does it have in the world?”*

This main question is comprised of other secondary [questions]: *what is the organ of the psyche and consciousness?* – what is the relationship between the *brain and thought*, between the body and the spirit? ...Is this a *natural force* like the others, a *special force*, or *something beyond force and matter?*<sup>512</sup>

While Morselli believed that the factors influencing mental evolution extended far beyond the physical, at the same time, they could never escape the material realm. Morselli had observed that “Man is formed in the definite direction of Evolution under the influence of certain circumstances of life,” but at the same time, “only mental Evolution will go on unfolding always higher, exceeding the limits conceded by physical Evolution, and governing it with specific intents.”<sup>513</sup> While Freud had the right theory, he substituted partial therapeutic results for the “empirical criteria of scientific truth.”<sup>514</sup> In terms of the “true fanaticism” he inspired, Morselli compared Freud to Gregor Mendel (1822-1884): both were important for understanding

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<sup>512</sup> “Il problema psicologico nel Secolo XIX. Conferenza del prof. E. Morselli,” *Servizio Telegrafico Particolare del Caffaro*, Memorie Scientifiche, vol. 11, Biblioteca Morselli, Azienda Ospedaliera Universitaria San Martino, Genoa, Italy.

<sup>513</sup> Enrico Morselli, “L’umanità dell’Avvenire,” “Lezione Trentesima Quarta: L’umanità dell’Avvenire,” (Edizioni Trabant, 2008), 20, 63. Reprinted from *Antropologia Generale: L’uomo secondo la Teoria dell’Evoluzione; Lezioni dettate nelle Università di Torino e di Genova* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1911).

<sup>514</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 36.

“biopsychic” research, but they went to opposite extremes. While Morselli was confident that much would be saved from Mendel’s “biological heredity,” he believed that only a few of Freud’s observations were likely to be saved from what one psychiatrist “ironically called a “Metapsychiatry.””<sup>515</sup>

Bolstering Morselli’s critique of psychoanalysis was the strong stance he took against idealism, which had recently resurfaced again in Italy. Morselli had contended with the intellectual movement revived in Italy by Benedetto Croce (1866-1952), publishing articles for the popular press as early as 1906.<sup>516</sup> Croce directly attacked positivism, claiming that philosophy was the only “true science” because it worked with pure concepts and the speculative method, unlike the natural sciences, which worked with “impure” concepts born from the practical needs.<sup>517</sup> As one contemporary commentator put it,

To [Croce] spirit is the one reality, and spirit, as best known to us, is—essentially—historical becoming; the truth of knowing is *making*; the truth of evolution is history, which is the Universe’s self-making, and Man is, so far, the highest self-consciousness

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<sup>515</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 10.

<sup>516</sup> Although Croce has continued to be a figure of some historical interest, little recent work has been done specifically on Croce’s idealism. See Angelo Crespi, “Idealism and Religion in Contemporary Italian Philosophy,” *Mind*, New Series, vol. 24, no. 94 (April 1915), 222-239; Patrick Romanell, “Romanticism and Croce’s Conception of Science,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (March 1956), 505-514; R. G. Collingwood, *Essays in the Philosophy of History*, edited by William Debbins (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1965); Michele Abbate, *La Filosofia di Benedetto Croce e la Crisi della Società Italiana*, Nuova Editizione (Turin: Einaudi, 1966); Mario Corsi, *Le Origini del Pensiero di Benedetto Croce* (Naples: Giannini Editore, 1974); David D. Roberts, “Croce and Beyond: Italian Intellectuals and the First World War,” *The International History Review*, vol. 3, no. 2 (April 1981), 201-235; Enrico Morselli, “Scienza ed Idealità” (Per un Numero Unico Compilato dagli Studenti dell’Università di Pavia) (Genova, 1906); Enrico Morselli, *La Psicologia Scientifica o Positiva e la Reazione Neo-Idealistica*, Prefazione all’opera di Adelchi Baratono *Fondamenti di Psicologia Sperimentale* (Savona: Tipografia D. Bertolotto, 1906); Enrico Morselli, “Il Neo-Idealismo e la Scienza,” *Il Resto del Carlino* (Numero Dedicato a G. Bruno) (18 febbraio 1907).

<sup>517</sup> Patrick Romanell, “Romanticism and Croce’s Conception of Science,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, vol. 9, no. 3 (March 1956), 509.

achieved by this process, while particular individuals are stages or historical phases of this becoming of the Universal Spirit; hence the identity of history and philosophy...<sup>518</sup>

For Morselli, in its attempt to “escape science... neo-idealistic production is not philosophical, but literary; furthermore it is neo-romantic literature.”<sup>519</sup> Croce had mistaken the origins of “so-called pure concepts” which were “the result, not the origin.”<sup>520</sup>

In terms of the mind, the primary position Croce gave to pure concepts was anti-evolutionary and went against human progress. Idealists “needed to destroy the human brain of all heredity that had been left by a thousand prior generations, millennia of physio-psychic adaptation, and millions and millions of individual lives along the long and endless course of biological evolution.”<sup>521</sup> To adopt such a philosophy was to undermine the very parts of the human mind necessary for the mind’s own evolution:

... after the many conquests of knowledge (*conoscenza*) in the endless domain of natural laws, to abandon one’s self to the easy calm of intuition is to betray the evolutionary laws of the mind...is to renounce the characteristic faculties of man which are ratiocinative: it is to replace Life with its organic instincts above Thought...<sup>522</sup>

For Morselli, human reason was the key component of mental evolution. Furthermore, Croce could not explain why “psychic facts repeated themselves in all the details of the world.” There was a logic to psychic experience that related to the external and natural world. Just as everyone

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<sup>518</sup> Angelo Crespi, “Idealism and Religion in Contemporary Italian Philosophy,” *Mind*, New Series, vol. 24, no. 94 (April 1915), 223.

<sup>519</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Neo-Idealismo e la Scienza,” *Il Resto del Carlino* (Numero Dedicato a G. Bruno) (18 febbraio 1907).

<sup>520</sup> Enrico Morselli, *I Limiti della Coscienza*, Estratto dagli *Atti della Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze, VI Riunione, Genova, ottobre 1912* (Rome: Tipografia Nazionale di G. Bertero e C., 1913), 24.

<sup>521</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 24.

<sup>522</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Il Neo-Idealismo e la Scienza,” *Il Resto del Carlino* (Numero Dedicato a G. Bruno) (18 Febbraio 1907).

observed the bend in a stick placed under water, “no one can free themselves of their relationships with the consciousness of others.”<sup>523</sup> Mental evolution took place in relation to the external world and the minds of others.

Psychoanalysis posed the same ontological problem as idealism: both uprooted psychogenesis—the origins of psychological phenomena—from its material foundations. But while idealism had at least defined the role of sensation in connecting internal phenomena to external experience, psychoanalysis had muddled this connection. Morselli agreed with the idealists up to a certain point:

What I know about Reality outside of Myself I know because this Me comes from modified sensations... where we positivists are opposed to the idealists is this: if the I submits to those sensorial modifications, it is because a Reality exists that acts upon us, and we do not have any right to imagine it ...or a Reality essentially diverse from that which we perceive.<sup>524</sup>

Sensation was critical to both psychiatrists and idealists. In contrast, “No psychoanalyst ever defined what “perceptions” or “ideas” are, or for that matter the memories, tendencies, or impulses...the substrate which can be attributed to the “physiological Unconscious.””<sup>525</sup> Freud had ignored the “material” and “life” factors of psychogenesis, which led to a misconception of the unconscious and subsequently, the human psyche in its entirety.<sup>526</sup>

According to Morselli, the “dogmatic illusions” of the unconscious and consciousness began with Freud’s misapplication of evolutionary theory. Freud had never properly theorized

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<sup>523</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 24.

<sup>524</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 71.

<sup>525</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 71.

<sup>526</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Il Darwinismo e l’Evoluzionismo* (Milan: Dumolard, 1891), 266.

sensation and therefore more broadly, the relationship between the internal life of the mind and the external experience of the material world. What resulted was an evolutionary inversion in which consciousness evolved out of the unconscious. Although even Freud admitted that there was no real “fixed barrier” between the unconscious and consciousness, for Morselli it was a question of origins. While for Freud, “[e]very single process pertaining first the psychic system of the Unconscious can then, in given circumstances, pass into the psychic system of Consciousness,” Morselli argued for the opposite: “Every single process pertaining to the system of Consciousness can pass to take part in the system of the Unconscious.”<sup>527</sup>

### *3. Structure of the psyche: relating unconsciousness and conscious states*

Morselli’s most critical remarks regarding psychoanalysis were reserved for Freud’s notion of the unconscious. While this critique was based on Morselli’s understanding of evolutionary theory, it also reflected Morselli’s engagement with broader scientific and philosophical discourses that pertained to the nature of the mind. He had grappled with conscious and unconscious states throughout the course of his career, exploring hypnosis, sleep walking, and mediumship, but the Freudian unconscious provoked Morselli to address the unconscious directly for the first time.<sup>528</sup> In Morselli’s words, Freud reconstituted the unconscious as “the major part of our psychic lives” with the “exclusive [and] thankless task of immersing the greater or superliminal Consciousness under the wave of inferior, beastly, and ignoble tendencies.”<sup>529</sup>

Reversing the hierarchy between conscious and unconscious states made the unconscious the

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<sup>527</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 66.

<sup>528</sup> See “Sondaggi nell’Inconscio,” in *Individualità Difformi*, 102-139.

<sup>529</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 56. See also: Sebastian Gardner, “The Unconscious,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Freud*, edited by Jerome Neu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 136-160.

driving or controlling force within mankind. Basing his critique on philosophy, psychiatry, and psychological research, Morselli claimed that Freud had skirted the scientific method and inappropriately adapted philosophical models to psychiatric purposes and dangerously reordered mental structure. Beyond the threat the Freudian unconscious posed to empirical and evidence-based methods of medical psychiatry, it also challenged Morselli to clarify and develop his own understanding of own views about the mind and human nature. The result was a text that nominally treated the Freudian unconscious, but simultaneously presented that of Morselli.

Morselli's first objection to Freud's notion of the unconscious was that he drew upon philosophical notions of the unconscious, but that he neither understood their implications nor was he current with philosophy's most recent achievements. Psychoanalytic claims that Freud had "discovered" the unconscious were "erroneous": he had not even made the unconscious the "protagonist, Hero," on the "stage of the theater where the dynamism of psychic phenomena occurs."<sup>530</sup> The notion of the unconscious was modern, overturning the mind as conceived by ancient philosophers, but it was "entirely an evolution of the great systems of modern and contemporary philosophy."<sup>531</sup> Morselli traced the earliest ideas about the unconscious back to Leibnitz's discussion of "minimal perceptions" (*percezioni minime*), through Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, and concluding with Nietzsche's idea of "will to power" (*volontà di Potenza*).

Freud not only ignored the philosophical canon, but he also overlooked the achievements of contemporary philosophers who embraced biological explanations of the mind and unconscious. Morselli often cited Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) idea of *élan vital* as offering a "systematic universality and primitiveness in the formation and evolution of the Spirit," and

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<sup>530</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 55.

<sup>531</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 43.

Robertò Ardigo (1828-1920), Morselli's close friend and colleague. In an article Morselli published in the *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, Ardigo wrote:

As the word *Life* signifies *vital facts* in general [and] the word *Motion*, movements, thus the word *psyche* signifies *psychic facts*; and these are states of consciousness that are the opposite of unconsciousness (*inconsapevolezza*)... The cogitative [and] aware work for the thinker is determined by unconscious dispositions that the thinker carries with him also when he is not conscious. Yes, this is most true: and without it one cannot explain psychic facts. But unconscious dispositions are not in themselves the psychic entity: they are truly the material modifications produced by the cerebral apparatus for that same exercise.<sup>532</sup>

While Morselli could embrace the unconscious as subject to psychiatric study, he accepted the identification of the unconscious with the biological or as “the base (*vitale*) upon which the *psychic* unfolded.” Like Ardigò, Morselli argued that consciousness was simply an “abstraction”—a position he maintained from at least 1912—and likewise, so was the unconscious.<sup>533</sup> As Morselli saw it, Freud ignored the philosophical heritage he was indebted to as well as its most recent advances and rapprochement with the biological sciences.

Likewise, Morselli believed Freud had also ignored his debt to the work of psychiatrists, particularly those involved in psychical research. Morselli often cited the objections of positivist psychiatrists who emphasized the importance of empirical psychiatric phenomena, but he also referred to the psychoanalysts who had broken away from Freudian doctrine, such as Carl Jung (1875-1961) and Alfred Adler (1870-1937). In 1912, Morselli discussed Jung's word association

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<sup>532</sup> Roberto Ardigò, “Sull'equivoco dell'Inconscio di Alcuni Moderni,” *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica* (1888), reprinted in *Opere Filosofiche*, vol. 5, quoted in *Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 44.

<sup>533</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 4; *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 51.

and how it could be used to improve Freud's methodology.<sup>534</sup> Jung's technique calculated the time it took for a subject to respond to a "stimulus word" with a "reaction word,"<sup>535</sup> making it "until now the only scientific method of the psychoanalytic Technique." The achievement was not Freud's, but belonged to the Zurich school of psychoanalysis.<sup>536</sup> Furthermore, the technique had been pioneered by "most illustrious" experimental psychiatrists "Ebbinghaus, Kraepelin, Münsterberg, and Binet."<sup>537</sup> Morselli also compared his own objections to the Freudian Id (<<Io>>) and its relationship to the preconscious with Adler's concept of inferiority complex. One could only have "the idea and feeling of one's own inferiority and inadequacy because one possessed the intellectual (rational) goals of comparison." Morselli argued that Adler's theory "referred to an ideal that the Subconscious cannot create, but that only the most aware intelligence infers from the recognition of Reality."<sup>538</sup> Morselli shared the criticisms of both physiological psychiatrists who studied individual phenomena of the unconscious such as sleepwalking or hypnosis, as well as psychoanalysts who adhered to the experimental method and appeared to preserve the biological substratum in their theories. However, they offered little in the way of an alternative to the structure Freud imagined for the mind.

To provide an alternative explanation for the existence of the unconscious, Morselli turned to psychical researchers such as William James (1842-1910), Frederic William Henry Myers (1843-1901), and Charles Richet (1850-1935). Specifically, Myers's posthumous *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* was an essential component of Morselli's

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<sup>534</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Alcune Osservazioni sul "Metodo della Associazioni" Applicato alla Psicoanalisi," *Psiche: Rivista di Studi Psicologici* (1912).

<sup>535</sup> Carl G. Jung, "The Association Method," *American Journal of Psychology*, 31 (1910), 219-269.

<sup>536</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 2, 77.

<sup>537</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 2, 78.

<sup>538</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 76.

critique.<sup>539</sup> *Human Personality* was a collection of Myers's vast writings that discussed, sleep, hypnotism, sensory and motor automatism, ghostly apparitions, and other "metapsychological" phenomena. Distinguishing his work from spiritism and occultism, Myers replaced the idea of the spirit or soul with that of personality and offered proof it could survive bodily death. Myers considered his study to be scientific and psychological, avoiding both metaphysics and theology, and he began by exploring more of "the capacities of man's incarnate personality than psychologists unfamiliar with this new evidence had thought it worth their while to undertake."<sup>540</sup> However, this personality was not a unitary whole, but consisted of "distinct streams of consciousness," or geological layers.<sup>541</sup> Likewise, this manifold personality was made up of layers of consciousness, which Myers called "subliminal" (comparable to unconscious) and "supraliminal" (comparable to conscious). While the supraliminal region was a "special phase of mentality, teleologically evolved for adaptation to our natural environment," the subliminal was the "enveloping mother-consciousness in each of us."<sup>542</sup> William James summarized his ideas best:

The corner-stone of [Myers's] conceptions is the fact that consciousness has no essential unity. It aggregates and dissipates, and what we call normal consciousness,—the 'Human Mind' of classic psychology,—is not even typical, but only one case out of thousands....

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<sup>539</sup> Frederic William Henry Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903); Id., *La Personnalité Humaine: sa Survivance, ses Manifestations Supranormales*, translated and adapted by Samuel Jankélévitch (Paris: F. Alcan, 1905). It is most likely that Morselli was unfamiliar with Myers's writings until at least 1905. *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* was compiled and published posthumously in 1903 and translated into French in 1905. Morselli's personal library contains the French edition.

<sup>540</sup> Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, edited and abridged by his son Leopold Hamilton Myers (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), 10.

<sup>541</sup> Alan Gauld, "Frederic William Henry Myers, 1843-1901," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004); online edition, May 2011.

<sup>542</sup> William James, "Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, vol. XVII (containing parts XLII-XLV) (London: R. Brimley Johnson, 1903), 16-17.

Myers thereupon makes the suggestion that the whole system of consciousness studied by the classic psychology is only an extract from a larger total, being a part told-off, as it were, to do service in the adjustments of our physical organism to the world of nature. This extract, aggregated and personified for this particular purpose, has, like all evolving things, a variety of peculiarities.<sup>543</sup>

Myers' emphasis on the disunity of consciousness and unconsciousness, better fit with Morselli's adherence to consciousness as a conglomeration of conscious facts.

Myers offered a way around what Morselli saw as the idealism of the Freudian unconscious, but Morselli took it one step further. Like Freud, Myers emphasized the subliminal as the proto-stage of consciousness, but the subliminal could interact with the supraliminal in a number of ways: their cooperation resulted in genius, their changing and mixture could result in states of hypnosis, and the invasion of the supraliminal by the subliminal resulted in automatism.<sup>544</sup> Additionally, psychical research entertained the possibility that the human psyche extended beyond the simple human form. As Freud understood it, the unconscious related to deep inherited sexual experiences passed down through human evolution, but he ignored the input of external reality and the possibility that psyche extended beyond the confines of the individual mind. Morselli wrote that:

[O]ur psychic life extends far beyond the open zone of our ordinary awareness. The thinking subject, that is the "I" of the philosophers, ignores this domain that is only determined by circumstances (dreams, automatisms, instinctive acts, sleepwalking: neurosis, psychosis, deliria; states of mediumship and clairvoyance, telepathic

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<sup>543</sup> "Frederic Myers's Service to Psychology," 20.

<sup>544</sup> *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, 80.

hallucinations, telekinesis, etc.): in that case the far vaster Unconscious comes close to the rather limited consciousness, and it emerges from it, and it commands it.<sup>545</sup>

While the unconscious was “truly an overturning of the old scientific positions,” it was not Freud’s doing alone. Furthermore, both Freud and Myers had mistaken the evolution of consciousness: according to Morselli, it was not consciousness that had surfaced from the unconscious, but vice versa. In this chicken or egg argument, Morselli understood the unconscious to be an “immense aura of phenomena that habitually takes away Consciousness and conserves itself in the name of “psyche”; that which was in the light and therefore appeared dominant becomes a fraction of the entirety of psychic life.”<sup>546</sup>

Morselli used the philosophical and psychiatric heritage of the unconscious not only to undermine Freud’s theory, but also to object to the epistemological foundations of psychoanalysis. Freud had conflated philosophical inquiry with scientific explanation. The first mistake Freud had made was that he began with abstractions or generalized categories of the mind but ignored their factual phenomena. The whole of the Freudian unconscious, therefore, was a misconception. Morselli implied that Freud had learned nothing “[f]rom all the distinctions that we have made between the innumerable mass of unconscious psychic phenomena,” and that “when we say “Un-” or “Subconscious” (mistakenly held as synonyms), we generalize every faculty of the Spirit too much, which has its own part or sphere beyond or below Consciousness.” Not only had Freud failed to distinguish the various psychic processes that constituted the unconscious, these same processes permeated consciousness as well. Nevertheless, the unconscious was given “the principle task of coordinating and organizing

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<sup>545</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 42.

<sup>546</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 42.

without the participation of Consciousness except as a spectator.”<sup>547</sup> Psychoanalysis lacked the specificity required of empirical science, and Freud’s broad generalizations blinded him to the connections between the unconscious and consciousness and subsequently, the important role consciousness still played.

The second mistake Freud made was that he mistook metaphors for the material reality of the mind. Morselli critiqued Freud’s spatial explanation of the relationship between consciousness and unconsciousness. In one version, Freud imagined the mind as an apartment containing a waiting room and a parlor, between which a door or threshold impedes the entry from the one to the other. The waiting room was filled with troubled and malicious beings (*irrequieti e di cattiva natura*). The figure of Cerberus held them back from entering the parlor, but every so often, they garnered the strength to break through “in spite of the defenses of their watchdog” (figure 1).<sup>548</sup> In a later version, Freud envisioned the mind as a kind of eyeball, with the iris turned to the outside world corresponding to consciousness and the *I* (*Me* or *Ich*), in this case “constituted by the sum of images, ideas, emotions, sentiments and coordinated reactions of personality posed by the self. Behind that was the self (*Sè*), the sum of “uncoordinated, anonymous, impersonal, hereditary or atavistic forces, instincts, egoistic tendencies...”<sup>549</sup> For Morselli, these schemes were in the end the same, both having “something childlike and of the artifact” (figure 2). Instead of reflecting the “dynamism” of the psyche, they simplified them into an “unadulteratedly affective character.”<sup>550</sup> Even if Morselli agreed that the “illuminated region of our psychic activity is smaller than the rest in the shade,” still “every unilateral or incomplete

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<sup>547</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 49.

<sup>548</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 57.

<sup>549</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 58.

<sup>550</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 59.

construction of the Psyche is a building that contains in itself the same reasons for its coming ruin...Freudism is a hypercritical, hasty, and dangerous affect.”<sup>551</sup> Morselli lamented that in Freud’s scheme, “the great coordinating and organizing activity of the Unconscious becomes “Thought” or the “real I” in that it corresponds to Reality that surrounds us and that which is also inside of us.”<sup>552</sup> But it wasn’t the unconscious that was a replication of the outside world; rather, it was “in Consciousness that one found reflected external Reality, whether referring to the material world or the spiritual world.”<sup>553</sup>

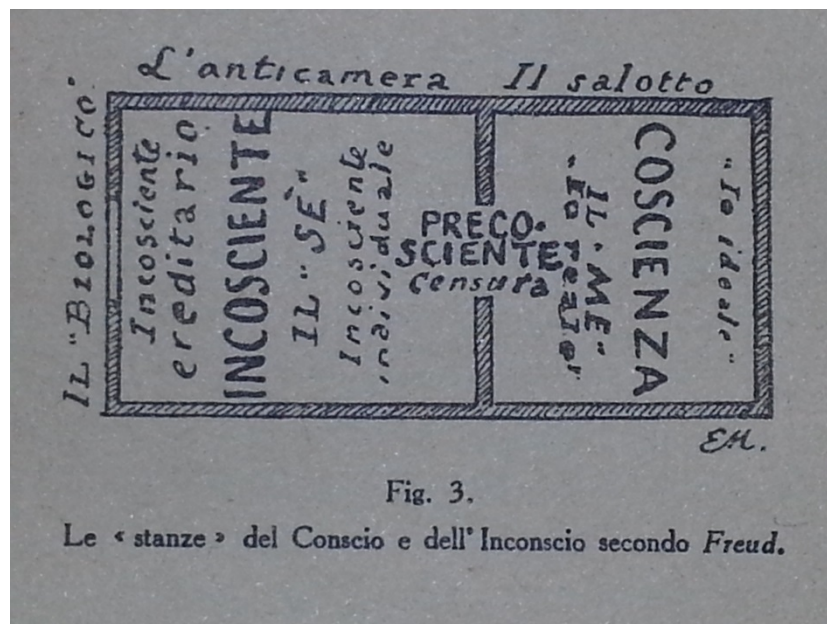


Figure 1. The “rooms” of Consciousness and the Unconscious according to Freud

<sup>551</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 61.

<sup>552</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 49.

<sup>553</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 60.

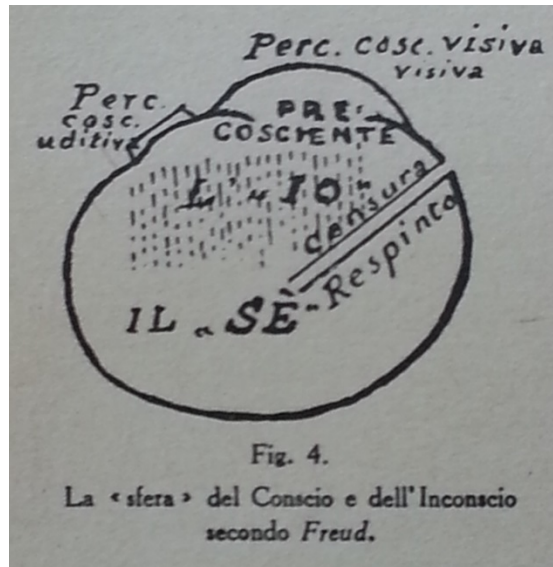


Figure 2. The “sphere” of Consciousness and the Unconscious according to Freud

To counter Freud, Morselli proposed his own schema for the mind, which he partly based on the work of Belgian psychologist Georges Dwelshauvers (1866-1937).<sup>554</sup> In this scheme, Morselli preserved the physiological basis of the mind and attempted to create order from Freud’s overly abstract design. Morselli divided the unconscious into two sections: the “irrational Unconscious” and the “rational Unconscious.” The irrational unconscious consisted of the “bio-psychological,” the “hereditary,” and the “physio-psychological.” While the bio-psychological consisted of “organic structures and dispositions” common to all, the hereditary was that which psychoanalysis had best described, explaining the survival of psychic regression.<sup>555</sup> The physio-psychological, in contrast, dealt with latent thought and what Freud’s

<sup>554</sup> Dwelshauvers published extensively on psychology, the unconscious, and philosophy. Some titles include: *La synthèse mentale* (Paris: Alcan, 1908); *L’inconscient* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1916); *Les Mécanismes Subconscients* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1925); *Traité de Psychologie* (Paris: Payot, 1928); *L’étude de la Pensée; Methods et Résultats* (Paris: P. Téqui, 1934). There is little scholarly work on Georges Dwelshauvers. See Miquel Siguan, Montserrat Kirchner, “Georges Dwelshauvers. Un Psicólogo Flamenco en Cataluña,” *Anuario de Psicología*, vol. 32, n.1 (2001), 89-108; Montserrat Kirchner, M. C. Gimeno, “Georges Dwelshauvers (1867-1937),” *Revista de Historia de la Psicología*, vol. 7, n. 4 (1986), 71-82.

<sup>555</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 46.

“dynamism” had poorly described.<sup>556</sup> However, these unconscious processes were all rooted in biology and did not lack order. The other section of the unconscious was the “rational unconscious,” which enabled “mental synthesis.” The question was

...whether the unification of the “I” forms a logical nexus through sensations, images, ideas, feelings, desires, and tendencies—that is, between the constitutive elements of the personality. It is this unification of the same essence of “Spirit” that derives from biological spontaneity from that same psychic activity, but it perfects itself with practice, education, and reflection. The rational Unconscious stabilizes order, imposes ideation on the categories of space, time, and causality... and it synthesizes the multiple impressions and disparate senses into coherent representations and notions that then unite and develop through reason.<sup>557</sup>

While Morselli concurred with Freud about the power of the unconscious over consciousness, the source of its strength was rooted in biology. Furthermore, the unconscious was dynamic and constituted from several kinds of mental activities, including reason which prevailed there as it did in consciousness, and was derived from conscious engagement with the external world.

#### *4. Space and time: models for conflict, oblivion and exchange*

Following his critique of the Freudian unconscious, Morselli analyzed the way that Freudian “conflict” painted a stark and inaccurate picture of the motions within the mind. The two critiques were interrelated, and often in addressing one, Morselli addressed the other. The bridge between the two for him was the philosophy of Henri Bergson (1859-1929), who

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<sup>556</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 48.

<sup>557</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 48.

challenged the way that inner states of consciousness were understood in terms of space and time and upended “the privileged position that had been accorded to space in both philosophical and scientific renderings of reality.”<sup>558</sup> The blueprint Freud offered for the psyche exaggerated the extent to which conflict was the basis of mental motions because he mistook the relationship of space and time within the mind. Furthermore, he submerged all such conflicts into the unconscious and blamed them on the libido. Instead, Morselli offered an alternative portrait of psychic activity based on exchange and offered a portrait of the mind that could account for an infinite variety of mental actions and interactions.

If the Freudian unconscious was the foundation of psychoanalysis, then his notion of conflict was the “fulcrum of the psychopathology of neurosis and psychosis.” Morselli described “internal conflict” as follows:

According to Psychoanalysis, through its murkiest, most archaic, infantile, or random elements, the psychic dynamic of the Unconscious reveals its contents to us, which is usually immoral, strange, obscene, or selfish. But the superior Consciousness (*Coscienza*) rebels against these, and...tries to “reject” (“*respingere*”) its invaders, causing “repression” to take place. It thus saves the equilibrium of psychic and mental forces and maintains the individual’s thought and conduct on the path toward Morality and Health.<sup>559</sup>

Mental conflict was the natural result of the clash between the unconscious and consciousness and served as the basis of psychopathology as well as the symptoms of everyday life.

Manifesting in complexes, censorship, and repression, this “internal conflict” was not only the

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<sup>558</sup> Mary Ann Gillies, “(Re)reading *Time and Free Will: (Re)Discovering Bergson for the Twenty-First Century*,” in *Understanding Bergson, Understanding Modernism*, edited by Paul Ardoin, S. E. Gontarski, and Laci Mattison (New York, London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 11.

<sup>559</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 171.

“cornerstone of psychological pathogenesis (*psicopatogenesi*) of neurosis and psychosis,” but it was also the basis of “our dreams and our deliria.”<sup>560</sup>

Morselli saw this portrayal of movements of the mind as inaccurate because it depended on Freud’s spatial construction of the unconscious and consciousness. Not only was Freud’s mental mapping misleading, such a design was impossible. Though consciousness had been “exclusively constituted of spatial elements,” and we had learned to speak of consciousness in terms of “fields” or “concentric zones” or “peripheries,” such colloquial language did not constitute scientific evidence.<sup>561</sup> The same held true for the unconscious. For Morselli, the problem was that “our psychological and scientific language is poor, and we need to use terms that are easily understood by all.”<sup>562</sup> Psychoanalysis “abuses these purely metaphorical schemes,” and it was “[o]ut of the intellectual need for understanding and reconciliation that we want to have a special image of these internal (psychic) phenomena, but it is always a metaphor from the outside world that interjects itself within us.”<sup>563</sup> At the same time that Freud mistook spatial metaphors for the unconscious and consciousness as actual psychiatric fact, he denied the affect of external stimulation on internal states. This contradiction made “Freudism...a hypercritical, hasty, and dangerous affectation.”<sup>564</sup>

Morselli’s ideas were based on the philosophy of Henri Bergson, who subverted longstanding notions about how space and time functioned in consciousness. Bergson began with the problem of numbers and multiplicity. A number could be both the representation of an object

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<sup>560</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 171.

<sup>561</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 6.

<sup>562</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 7.

<sup>563</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 51.

<sup>564</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 61.

and the representation of a concept, but while material objects could be localized in space, “psychic states,” or even “mental images” persisted as a succession of moments in an “ideal space” as “pure duration.”<sup>565</sup> In the “multiplicity of states of consciousness, which cannot be regarded as numerical without the help of some symbolical representation,” the “necessary element is *space*.”<sup>566</sup> The immediate experience of consciousness was temporal, and its spatial experience resulted from this qualitative multiplicity, causing states of consciousness to endure. This pure duration was “the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live.”<sup>567</sup> Psychic processes proceeded in time, though they appeared to manifest in space.

Freud had not only granted too much spatial reality to states of consciousness, but he ignored the temporal dynamic of thought. Morselli wrote:

In reality, psychic life is poorly adapted to our records and spatial allegories: rather, we should conceive of it with temporal images. In its structure and in its dynamic, it is in a perennial flux of subjective events, and is dependent on external stimulation (relations with the World, with objective Reality) as well as internal stimulations (the organism, subjective Reality).<sup>568</sup>

States of consciousness were not homogenous but heterogeneous in their content, interacting and developing within the confines of the mind as well as in relation to the outside world over time. The dynamism of psychoanalysis was a “pseudo-dynamism,” in which mental motion was “all *quantity* (forces, resistance, energies, barriers, etc.), but...not *quality*,” portraying a “game of

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<sup>565</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Idea of Duration,” in *Key Writings*, edited by Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey (London: Continuum, 2002), 53.

<sup>566</sup> “The Idea of Duration,” 54.

<sup>567</sup> “The Idea of Duration,” 60.

<sup>568</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 54.

“forces” and “tendencies” without the “qualitative” to constitute the intrinsic substance of the Psyche.” While Freud saw mental activity as occurring in space, Morselli saw it as a qualitative experience in which psychological states unfolded temporally. The mental landscape of psychoanalysis greatly restricted its utility for a psychology which was “limited and subject... to a portion of our tendencies.”<sup>569</sup> The dynamism of the Freudian mind was, in fact, rather flat because it ignored the “succession of qualitative changes,” which constituted the pure duration of consciousness.<sup>570</sup>

The rooms of the unconscious and unconscious Freud described resulted in internal mental dynamics that were “tumultuous” and “tragic” forms of “drama” and “antagonism.”<sup>571</sup> The conflicts Freud described may exist, but he had grossly exaggerated their role in the psychic process and simplified their causes to sexuality and the libido. While Freud’s emphasis on sexuality in the psyche was persuasive, conflict itself was not necessarily moral or sexual in character, nor was it always against social norms.<sup>572</sup> Furthermore, the concepts of “struggle” and “antagonism” were already implicit in psychiatric representations of the mind but did not have to be the dramatic encounter between consciousness and unconscious that Freud described.<sup>573</sup> For instance, Morselli argued that many of the phenomena Freud understood as repression could easily be explained by forgetting. “Oblivion” (*oblio*) occurred naturally in the mind and allowed

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<sup>569</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 2, 7.

<sup>570</sup> “The Idea of Duration,” 61.

<sup>571</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 218.

<sup>572</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 192, 196.

<sup>573</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 65.

for the “condensation of memories and their disfiguration.”<sup>574</sup> Here again, Freud had not taken into consideration the effect of time on mental processes and memory.<sup>575</sup>

In contrast to Freud’s clearly defined mental structure and activities, Morselli portrayed consciousness and the unconscious as abstractions. Morselli saw Freudian conflict as “mechanistic” and complained that it reduced psychic activity to “a clock in which we only see the spring and without considering the alignment of the hands.” But forces, resistance, and tendencies were not fixed or inflexible; they were mutable and “they change necessarily in accordance with the needs of life, with the circumstances in which we find ourselves.”<sup>576</sup> Furthermore, “[i]n reality, phenomena and facts of our vital activity which have that particular quality of being conscious do not exist.” What was called consciousness was only a collection of facts from internal life, and “that is all we know, not only in regards to ourselves, but also in regards to all other beings.”<sup>577</sup> The same held true for the unconscious. Freud’s scheme had limited the possibilities for psychic action that “thought would be betrayed by its own expression in language.”<sup>578</sup> Instead, “consciousness is infinitely complex and infinitely varied, that is that psychic facts are innumerable and most different. The truth is that spiritual life is a complex, and that the elements which make it up are inseparable.”<sup>579</sup>

Without the set structure that Freud and others had insisted on, mental activity could be portrayed as an endless array of transfers, exchanges, and motion. For Morselli, the “psychic facts deposited in the Unconscious and [those] arising from there in accordance with vital

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<sup>574</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 216.

<sup>575</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 218.

<sup>576</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 2, 8.

<sup>577</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 4.

<sup>578</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 22.

<sup>579</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 8-9.

necessities... exist in a continual exchange, an incessant and unswerving nexus that renders every separation absurd and greatly limits the “conflicts” upon which Psychoanalysis are based.” Morselli instead saw the mind, and the evolution of the mind in terms of exchange. In this understanding, mental conflict was tempered by the total of mental motions. Among the many psychic facts perceived by the mind and those deposited in the unconscious or those that emerging from it, there was a “continual exchange, and unswerving link that renders every separation absurd and greatly limits the “conflicts” on which Psychoanalysis is based.”<sup>580</sup>

To counter Freud, Morselli offered an image of psychic motion that allowed for unbounded flexibility. The psyche was like “those marine currents that form in a more expansive fluid mass: ...this mass appertains to its character of *unlimitedness* (and thus symbolizes the theory of the subconscious).” In this way, Morselli invoked and developed a common metaphor for thought. Monism had dominated modern psychology and reduced “all phenomenology of the spirit to one unique and continuous stream,” but this concept was “limiting,” as was “the current that establishes itself between two shores.”<sup>581</sup> Even the fluvial imagery of Frederic Myers was restrictive: describing the psyche as two streams of which one was always present (consciousness) and the other was an undercurrent (the subliminal), they could run parallel, countercurrent, or merge with one another.<sup>582</sup> While some patterns might be identified, there was no set course or pattern: a conscious act was an “incessant “current” of (psychic) Energy that enlivens [Consciousness] by crossing from one point to another in accordance with anatomical and physiological structures and associations and stimulating its different parts...”<sup>583</sup> Morselli’s

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<sup>580</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 65.

<sup>581</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 8-9.

<sup>582</sup> See *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*.

<sup>583</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 1, 54-55.

map of the mind had no set banks, boundaries, or territories. Rather, the psyche was a series of streams or currents running through an endless ocean.

This limitlessness was the essence of psychic life. Morselli wrote, “Life is no more than an amalgam of relationships, not just different and varied in degree but in nature and substance. No “tendency” of the psycho-engine is conceivable without the objective of representing all of its characteristics.”<sup>584</sup> Evolution was not based only on conflict, but on continuity, and the philosophy of evolution would go on “absorbing into it the theory of selection and survival of the most adapt but always abiding by the concept of continuity of life and thought.”<sup>585</sup>

What Morselli described here was not group consciousness but individual paths of self-consciousness that followed a similar trajectory. The duration of mental processes, not their inherent conflicts, is the basis of the mind and personality:

...this ascending and heterogeneous development is conditioned, has a precise determinism, and becomes regulated by causal necessity: the human personality is not a contingent product; it is not random, nor willed, but always and only the result of an evolution that doesn't create itself, but is created, that isn't free, but is necessary.”<sup>586</sup>

## 5. Conclusion: historiographical notes

*Psicanalisi* was the result of an engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis that began as early as 1909 when Morselli first made mention of Freud's work in print.<sup>587</sup> Beginning in 1912,

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<sup>584</sup> *La Psicanalisi*, vol. 2, 7.

<sup>585</sup> *Carlo Darwin e il Darwinismo*, x.

<sup>586</sup> *I Limiti della Coscienza*, 28.

<sup>587</sup> See Maria Pia Prodi, “L'ingresso della Psicoanalisi in Italia Letto Attraverso la *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria* (1906-1938),” *Rivista Sperimentale di Freniatria*, fasc. 1-2 (2002).

he directed the journal *Psiche* together with Sante De Sanctis (1862-1935) and Roberto Assagioli (1888-1974), who studied psychiatry and wrote his dissertation thesis on psychoanalysis in 1910. In spirit, the journal was reminiscent of Morselli's *Rivista di Filosofia Scientifica*, and psychoanalysis was one of its major themes.<sup>588</sup> But Morselli himself only addressed psychoanalysis directly in one article, which focused on the word association of Carl Jung (1875-1961) and how it could be used to improve psychoanalysis.<sup>589</sup> *Psiche* was becoming the major mouthpiece for psychoanalysis before its publication was suspended in 1915. Morselli made scant mention of Freud until 1926.

Since 1926, the historiographical portrayal of Morselli as wholly inept in his response to Freud seems to have taken its cues from Morselli's first critics. Even Edoardo Weiss's detailed comments about Morselli's mistakes lacked an overall response to the fundamental issues Morselli raised. For instance, Weiss complained that Morselli's understanding of the unconscious was "simplistic and slanted."<sup>590</sup> In turn, Morselli carped that Weiss had not included his "true scientific situation regarding the problem of the Unconscious, the Id and Non-Id, the Ideal and the Real, the irrational and rational psyche, Instinct and Reason."<sup>591</sup> Neither scholars of his generation nor the a new era of scholars and historians who referred to him after World War II have attempted to deal with the core of Morselli's critique of Freud.

Morselli's *Psicanalisi* has not fared much better in the eyes of historians. Most historical commentators have aligned themselves with the positions of the subjects under their

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<sup>588</sup> See Gabriella Sava, <<*Psiche*>> (1912-1915). *Sui Primi Percorsi della Psicologia Italiana* (Galatina (Lecce): Congedo Editore, 2004).

<sup>589</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Alcune Osservazioni sul "Metodo della Associazioni" Applicato alla Psicoanalisi," *Psiche: Rivista di Studi Psicologici* (1912).

<sup>590</sup> Edoardo Weiss, "Morselli – *La Psicanalisi* – Bocca, Torino 1926," *Archivio Generale di Neurologia, Psichiatria e Psicoanalisi*, fasc. 3 (15 novembre 1926), 366-367.

<sup>591</sup> Enrico Morselli, "Attorno alla Psicanalisi," *Quaderni di Psichiatria. Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, vol. XIV, anno V, nos. 1-2 (gennaio-febbraio 1927), 19.

investigation, either emphasizing the book's significance within the history of Italian psychiatry or critiquing the book within the history of psychoanalysis. *Psicanalisi* has received honorable mention in the case of the former, but the loudest voices have been in the case of the latter. The tone was set by Michel David, who echoed Morselli's contemporary critics. Writing in the 1960s when Freudian psychoanalysis returned to Italy, David judged the book as having "scarcely any hermeneutic value and [offering] few truly original or positive ideas in comparison with the already enormous international [body of] literature, which Morselli openly copied...for this reason he did not give it a detailed analysis."<sup>592</sup> For David, the book testified to the attitudes of the positivist school of Italian neuropsychiatry. Another critic wrote:

Let's not forget that nowadays, the two volume work *Psicoanalisi*, written in '26 by Enrico Morselli from high up in his university chair in psychiatry, has become a masterpiece of ignorance and above all comicality; and let's not forget with what ignorance and arrogance physicians wrote about psychoanalysis...<sup>593</sup>

Furthermore, in trying to understand why psychoanalysis failed to spread throughout Italy prior to World War II, some critics went so far as to blame Morselli's work. Cited at the beginning of this chapter, David's lamentations attest to his belief that psychoanalysis should have spread throughout Italy if only its destiny had not been thwarted.

Historians who have dealt with *Psicanalisi* have also placed the work in its social and political context: when Morselli published his last great work, Italy had been under fascist rule for four years. On the one hand, historians have generally tended to describe fascism as hostile to psychoanalysis and a major factor that curbed its spread in Italy throughout the interwar

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<sup>592</sup> *La Psicoanalisi nella Cultura Italiana*, 174.

<sup>593</sup> Anna Maria Accerboni, ed., *La Cultura Psicanalitica: Atti del Convegno, Trieste 5-8 dicembre 1985* (Pordenone: Studio Tesi, 1986), 161.

period.<sup>594</sup> According to David, fascism, together with positivist science, idealism, and Catholicism hindered the spread of psychoanalysis throughout Italy.<sup>595</sup> On the other hand, other historians have made much of an admittedly “small but intense” psychoanalytic culture beginning in 1922 based in Trieste.<sup>596</sup> Because most of the Italian proponents of psychoanalysis were Jewish, the Italian psychoanalytic school would be entirely snuffed out with the passing Italian Racial Laws (*Leggi Razziali*) in 1938.

But David went further. In an attempt to unpack the relationship of Freudism to fascism, David cited Morselli’s writings on social and crowd psychology. Titling Morselli a socialist, anticleric, and materialist, David claimed that Morselli was “constrained to defending that which he had already burned,” and when describing Morselli’s differentiating between a social leader (*meneur*) and demagogue (*capopopolo*), David claimed “It is understood that between Napoleon and Masaniello, Morselli would not have hesitated to place Mussolini near the first and not with the agitator of individuals connected by semi-hallucinatory beliefs.”<sup>597</sup> In the wake of David’s study, most other historians of psychoanalysis have taken a similar, but less inflammatory approach to Morselli’s work, noting its significance but not taking it seriously from a scholarly point of view.

The question of Freud, Morselli, and the intellectual heritage of fascism has also been broached in another way: historians seeking to explore Freud’s Jewish identity or alternatively, the role of anti-Semitism in the criticism of psychoanalysis have also turned to Morselli’s

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<sup>594</sup> See George Makari, “The Psycho-Politics of Freedom,” in *Revolution in Mind: The Creation of Psychoanalysis* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008); Eli Zaretsky, “Fascism and the Destruction of Classical European Analysis,” in *Secrets of the Soul: A Social and Cultural History of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Vintage, 2005).

<sup>595</sup> See *La Psicoanalisi nella Cultura Italiana*.

<sup>596</sup> See Mauro Pasqualini, “Origin, Rise, and Destruction of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Fascist Italy, 1922-1938,” *Psychoanalysis and Politics: Histories of Psychoanalysis under Conditions of Restricted Political Freedom*, edited by Joy Damousi and Mariano Ben Plotkin (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7-33.

<sup>597</sup> *La Psicoanalisi nella Cultura Italiana*, 38.

engagement with Freud. In a letter Morselli wrote to Freud, he included a brief pamphlet he wrote on the “Zionist question,”<sup>598</sup> to which Freud responded:

But your brief pamphlet on the Zionist question I was able to read without any mixed feelings, with unreserved approval, and I was pleased to see with what sympathy, humaneness, and understanding you were able to choose your point of view concerning this matter which has been so distorted by human passions. I feel as though obliged to send you my personal thanks for it. I am not sure that your opinion, which looks upon psychoanalysis as a direct product of the Jewish mind, is correct, but if it is I wouldn't be ashamed. Although I have been alienated from the religion of my forbears for a long time, I have never lost the feeling of solidarity with my people and realize with satisfaction that you call yourself a pupil of a man of my race – the great Lombroso.<sup>599</sup>

Again, the subject of both letters has been dealt with anecdotally, to substantiate either Freud's Jewish identity or Zionist sympathies or to mention Morselli's prejudices without further analyses.<sup>600</sup>

Only historian of psychiatry Patrizia Guarnieri has engaged more critically with the content of *Psicanalisi*. In her brief monograph on what she calls Morselli's “anthropological psychiatry,” she offers a useful overview of Morselli's *Psicanalisi*.<sup>601</sup> In it, she gives more credit

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<sup>598</sup> Enrico Morselli “Introduzione. La Questione Ebraico-Sionistica nei Riguardi dell'Etnologia,” in Arturo Ruppini, *Gli Ebrei d'Oggi dall'Aspetto Sociale* (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1922), vii-liv.

<sup>599</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Letter from Sigmund Freud to Enrico Morselli, February 18, 1926,” *Letters of Sigmund Freud, 1873-1939*, 365-366.

<sup>600</sup> See Sander L. Gilman, *Freud, Race, and Gender* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 121; Thomas Stephen Szasz, *The Myth of Psychotherapy: Mental Healing as Religion, Rhetoric, and Repression* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978), 145; Moshe Gresser, *Dual Allegiance: Freud as a Modern Jew* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 185-186; Marthe Robert, *From Oedipus to Moses: Freud's Jewish Identity* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 183; Peter Gay, *A Godless Jew: Freud, Atheism, and the Making of Psychoanalysis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 126.

<sup>601</sup> See *Individualità Difformi*, 118-139.

to Morselli's positions, his insight into Freud's indebtedness to Darwinian evolution, his critique of Freud's method—which appeared to Morselli a mirror for religious confession—and his reserved acceptance of Freud's take on sexuality. Guarnieri summed up Morselli's stance in two points. First, “let sleeping dogs lie”: how did it help for someone to know that they really desired their mother, father, sister or brother? Second, “don't dramatize”: everyone may have had different experimentations with their sexuality in their youth, but this did not necessarily constitute psychosexual trauma.<sup>602</sup>

The continuity between the responses of Morselli's psychoanalytic and historical critics reflects the extent to which a Freudian paradigm has affected the shape of the history of modern psychiatry. But psychoanalysts promoted a reading of Freud that neglected the broader scientific context in which Freud developed his psychoanalytic concepts and methods. Beginning in the 1980s, historians reevaluated this historical interpretation. Historians such as Frank Sulloway and Patrizia Guarnieri have reconsidered their subjects—Freud and Morselli respectively—in a broader historical context.

The purpose of this chapter has not been to prove where Morselli was right and Freud or his followers were wrong. Rather, it has aimed to recover a critical debate about psychoanalysis and the nature of the mind that reflects the rich context of the Italian mind sciences in the early twentieth century and merited the attention, critical or commendatory, of popular and scientific readership. By endorsing the commentary of Morselli's contemporary critics, scholarly reactions over the decades have perpetuated a reading of Morselli's text that allows the historically victorious Freud to remain victorious. At the same time, this suppressed moment in which an Italian critic responded to Freud foreshadows the responses of other Freudian critics in the postwar era.

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<sup>602</sup> *Individualità Difformi*, 122-123.

## *Chapter 7. Conclusion: the dynamics of psychic life*

After a severe lung infection, Enrico Morselli died in 1929, a death which his trusted colleague Eugenio Tanzi described as “voluntary euthanasia.”<sup>603</sup> In his will, Morselli declared: “I always loved my Homeland intensely. I worked all of my life for the culture of my Country, for Science, and for Family... I always had one aim: Truth, or that which appeared to me to be the Truth.”<sup>604</sup> But what appeared to be the truth had changed dramatically throughout the course of Morselli’s 77-year-long life, and Morselli’s last testimony matches purposeful conviction with existential doubt. In all of Morselli’s writings, all of his patients treated, all of the opinions offered on all of the subjects he studied at length—the vast majority of which have not been discussed in this dissertation—what or where was the truth that Morselli had been aiming for?

Morselli was born into a household whose alliances were torn between the leaders loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the nationalist cause, and as a student, he became a follower of Mazzini, and later in life, clearly bore socialist sympathies. He began his career in the rural insane asylum of Macerata, moved to Turin as its asylum facilities were fitted with electric lighting, and ended his career in Genoa in a private clinic that mostly catered to the middle and upper classes with the most recent therapeutic technologies. He participated in the eugenics movement, treated the soldiers who came home from World War I, and patients suffering breakdowns from harassment by the fascists. As a young man, he participated in the spread of positivist science and propagation of psychiatry and defended his scientific project against waves of rivals, which included spiritists, neo-idealists, and psychoanalysts. By 1929, the truth to which Morselli had clung so tightly may have appeared to be rather uncertain.

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<sup>603</sup> Eugenio Tanzi “Enrico Morselli,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, vol. XVI, n. 1-2 (Gennaio-Febbraio 1929), 16.

<sup>604</sup> *Quaderni di Psichiatria*, vol. XVI, num. 1-2 (Gennaio–Febbraio 1929), 4.

In his eulogy to Morselli, Ugo Cerletti described Morselli as one of four men who had brought about the “miracle” of Italian psychiatry in a time when “to say Psychiatry was to say Italy.” The other three men were Cesare Lombroso, Augusto Tamburini, and Leonardo Bianchi. Of these four, only one—Lombroso—has become the subject of extensive historical investigation. Morselli’s own legacy that seemed so certain to his colleagues at the time of his passing has not been the subject of dispute because it has not been the subject of extensive research. This dissertation has used the bountiful source material from Morselli’s publications and the archival records from the universities and psychiatric facilities where he worked to explore a series of interrelated questions about psychiatric theory and practice in the context of *fin-de-siècle* Italy. It offers a series of brief excursions into the Morsellian corpus, beginning with Morselli’s most famous study, *Il Suicidio: Saggio di Statistica Morale Comparata* (1879), and connecting it to one of Morselli’s last major achievements, *L’uccisione Pietosa (l’Eutanasía) in Rapporto alla Medicina alla Morale ed all’Eugenica* (1923). It then discusses Morselli’s understanding of energy and its relationship to psychiatric treatment and his understanding of the mind, his nationalistic conception of work and its role in both diagnosis and treatment, and his debates about spiritism and a scientific understanding of the spirit in relationship to his anticlericalism and defense of the psychiatric discipline. It concludes with Morselli’s last major scientific treatise before his death—his critique of psychoanalysis and his own theories of the mind.

If Ugo Cerletti’s statement that Morselli was one of the four to bring about the miracle of Italian psychiatry holds water, then we might ask: exactly what kind of miracle did Morselli help bring about? Morselli was not a great theoretical innovator, did not found his own school or method of psychiatry, nor does he appear to have been a great experimenter or singular in his approach to clinical treatment. Instead, he had a finger in every pot. In addition to his studies on

suicide, spiritism, and psychoanalysis, he wrote the first Italian textbook on anthropology, one of its first guidebooks to psychiatric diagnosis, expert testimony in a series of court cases of national and international notoriety, and he argued vociferously with Italian neo-idealists such as Benedetto Croce. He also wrote extensively about asylum reform, sociology, politics, sexuality, neurology, and philosophy. When taken individually, his contributions to specific psychiatric, scientific, social, and political discourses reflect the work of a man who closely followed the debates important to the Italian public and offered the commentary of an evolutionary and materialist researcher of the mind. Taken as a whole, they reflect his eclectic approach to the human sciences, the philosophical commitment that his scientific endeavors entailed, and the continual contemplation of the contours of his discipline and defense of its purpose. For Morselli, engaging with all of these subjects was part of purpose of science: to bring together all empirical and experimental knowledge into one coherent and interrelated system. Such an eclectic approach was part and parcel of Morselli's attempt to found a scientific philosophy as well as a psychiatric approach to humanity. As one commentator put it, "if one could *physicize* the psyche, continually researching its organic connections, from the other end, one could *psychicize* matter."<sup>605</sup> Of the two approaches to the mind-body connection, one might assert that Morselli argued more earnestly for the latter.

In his research, Morselli regularly returned to the questions of what constituted the "nature" in human nature, the evolution of consciousness, and the dynamics of psychic life—questions that today would be considered in terms of the theory and history of the self. Jerrold Seigel identified three dimensions in which the self has been understood in Western culture: the bodily or material, the relational, and the reflective. While the first locates selfhood in the

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<sup>605</sup> Claudio Pogliano, "Prefazione," *Individualità Difformi: La Psichiatria Antropologica di Enrico Morselli* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1986), 12.

physical form, and the second locates the self through social and cultural interactions, the third locates it in self-reflectivity or self-awareness, the ability of the self to actively engage with and affect its own being. As dimensions, the physical, relational, and reflective are extensions in a given direction, and therefore they are not mutually exclusive, can bear contradictions, and usually cannot capture the entirety of a view of selfhood in and of themselves.<sup>606</sup>

Morselli accounted for all three of these dimensions of the self. He discussed selfhood with a diverse vocabulary. He used terms like the self (*l'io*), individuality (*individualità*), personality (*personalità*), character (*carattere* or *indole*), nature (*natura*), mentality (*mentalità*), spirit (*spirito* or *anima*), and most continuously throughout his writings, the psyche (*psiche*) or consciousness (*coscienza*). However, these terms were not interchangeable. Morselli often referred to individuality in his earlier writings, but he also called the concept into question when he argued that free will was only a philosophical and religious dogma. While Morselli often referred to character as a given set of traits that were more or less innate, he later used personality to emphasize the self as a set of intertwining streams of consciousness. Despite his emphasis on nature and mentality in much of his psychiatric writings, he continued to use spirit and soul as well; Morselli would give these terms a specific definition in his efforts to fashion them into the objects of scientific investigation.

Morselli also emphasized how selfhood related to its broader material, social, and spiritual context. His attempts to figure out the relationship between these versions of the self and their larger context led him to engage with a number of disciplines that took him far beyond a restrictively positivist, materialist, evolutionist, and psychiatric lens. The hereditarily—or later, genetically—defined self also developed in social contexts that were familial, fraternal, national,

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<sup>606</sup> Jerrold Seigel, “Dimensions and Contexts of Selfhood,” *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Wesetern Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3-44.

or based on class relations. But he also used terms to imply a more ambiguous context. The self could also be placed through mesology (*mesologia*), a term implicating the relationship of the environment or substance in which an organism lived, or in a specific “context of action” (“*ambiente della gesta*”);<sup>607</sup> these affected a person’s cenesthesia (*cenestesi*), a general or indeterminate feeling which one only becomes aware of consciously when its tone becomes disturbed.<sup>608</sup> In other words, a sense of one’s self had to be understood across entirety of the body and beyond.

For Morselli, the self was a psychic phenomenon in which consciousness was one important manifestation. While the self was anchored in the body and shaped through human relationships and social context, its evolutionary destiny relied on the self-aware and self-reflective human consciousness. One of the principal objects of his psychiatric investigation and philosophical discussion, consciousness was the part of the psychic self that could be acted upon with the force of human will, and its shaping and development was of specific importance to positivist science. Morselli wrote,

...the concept of the progress of consciousness, and therefore the birth and transformation and the incessant tumbling of our ideas about man and nature is imprinted on every page, every line of the universal history and specific histories of every scientific discipline. It’s not a novelty, even if someone wants to draw the conclusion that the science of “facts,” with its always short-lived hypotheses and explicit theories, is a

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<sup>607</sup> “Mesologia,” *L’Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*. <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/mesologia/>

<sup>608</sup> “Cenestesi,” *L’Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*. <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/cenestesi/>

temporary instrument, of which man serves for a while and then liberates himself with scorn, turning to other more useful ideals and other more utilizable hypotheses.<sup>609</sup>

Morselli believed that consciousness was only one facet of the human mind, and perhaps even but a small part of it. But it was the aspect of the psychic self over which the scientist had leverage and was of utmost importance to the development of human knowledge. It was the advancement of human consciousness that would advance positivist science.

The psychic self, however, could not simply be explained in terms of consciousness and unconsciousness. For Morselli, the psyche was not only the product of physiological and mental evolution; it was also the producer of human experience. Morselli was “scientifically... certain only that Life and Psyche are one and the same, that these are born and develop and are perfected together.” Furthermore, the “more perfect their aggregation, the more complex the exchange of cosmic energy that comes to it, and the more elevated results are even in the degree of psychic activity, or “psychicity” attained by the living organism.”<sup>610</sup> For Morselli it was a matter of monistic logic: if the psyche was tied to the soma, then it followed that the soma was bound to the psyche. The two were “coeternal” and “coexistent”: between the body infused with mind and mind diffused from body was the circuitous experience of life.<sup>611</sup>

For Morselli, the self as psyche was not limited to the body or the individual, or even the human. Mankind’s material existence and every facet of life were infused with the psyche, but that psyche could extend beyond the human form. What had been sometimes been mistaken for

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<sup>609</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Psicologia e “Spiritismo”*: *Impressioni e Note Critiche sui Fenomeni Medianici di Eusapia Paladino*, vol. 1 (Turin: Fratelli Bocca, 1908), 3.

<sup>610</sup> Enrico Morselli, *Manuale di Semeiotica delle Malattie Mentali*, vol. 2 (1895). Quoted in “Psiche e Soma. Considerazioni Tretrospettive di Psicopatologia Generale,” *Quaderni di Psichiatria. Rivista Teorica e Pratica*, anno V, vol. XIV, num. 5-6 (Maggio-Giugno 1927), 85.

<sup>611</sup> Enrico Morselli, “Introduzione,” *I problem dell’Universo*, by Ernst Haeckel, translated by Amedeo Herlitzka (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1904), xiv.

the ghostly presence of the deceased could be explained the extra-bodily presence of the psyche. Understood in this way, the “spirit” was the extension of the self beyond its clearly identifiable confines that had been mistakenly anthropomorphized. His rejection of a disembodied individual spirit did not mean his rejection of the psyche beyond the human body, and he entertained what the limitless potential of a cosmic conscience: it was beyond the limits of the living organism, and beyond sensorial experience or representation, that one could entertain the possibilities of a “consciousness of the entire Universe.” It was “in cosmic evolution that an elementary consciousness similar to ours certainly appears together with life, but the life that we recognize is only that which is terrestrial.”<sup>612</sup> Morselli critiqued the idea of the psyche being restricted to the human form as a strictly anthropomorphic view of the world. In other words, while Morselli understood the self to be psychic; it was not limited to the human form nor was it uniquely human.

Morselli once described the realm of knowledge (*il dominio del sapere*) as a cloud in the process of condensation, and the metaphor is worth quoting at length:

at the center is a small nucleus that is solid and bright, around which is a narrow strip that is fluid and translucent, followed by a larger zone that is barely distinct, and then a very large area even fainter and shadier: beyond which is an immense shadow. Thus the limits of the known are not that which is knowable, and the hues between the different areas change in their clarity and expansion. The center is made of the phenomena that are perceived and acknowledged by all, known and verified, proven by experience, demonstrated by reasoning, adapted to our thinking, utilized for our needs and feeling and life. But in the indefinite zones, there are entire categories, most numerous—in fact

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<sup>612</sup> Enrico Morselli, *I Limiti della Coscienza*, Estratto dagli *Atti della Società Italiana per il Progresso delle Scienze, VI Riunione, Genova, ottobre 1912* (Rome: Tipografia Nazionale di G. Bertero e C., 1913), 11.

innumerable without a doubt—of inconclusive phenomena that escape for a while the investigation and rules of human logic; that don't have a precise character, that remain imperceptible for a long time, only because they are not perceived by our *disarmed* senses or mind which is not prepared to receive them; and that they seem situated more toward the Unknowable that don't have the same boundaries as the knowable.<sup>613</sup>

What held true for scientific investigation and the systems of knowledge it created also held true for the confines of the individual psychic experience and the self: the realm of what was knowable was hazy and knowing was incomplete, and this also applied to the self. In his aim for what was true, what appeared to be true was the most constricted part of the limitless scope of knowledge.

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<sup>613</sup> *Psicologia e "spiritismo*, vol. 1, 4.

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