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Pierre Janet



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Pierre Janet

Pierre Marie Félix Janet

(French: ; 30 May 1859 – 24 February 1947) was a pioneering French psychologist, philosopher and [psychotherapist](#) in the field of [dissociation](#) and [traumatic memory](#).

He is ranked alongside [William James](#) and [Wilhelm Wundt](#) as one of the founding fathers of psychology.

Pierre Janet

Biography

Janet studied under [Jean-Martin Charcot](#) at the Psychological Laboratory in the [Pitié-Salpêtrière Hospital](#) in [Paris](#). He first published the results of his research in his philosophy thesis in 1889 and in his medical thesis, *L'état mental des hystériques*, in 1892. He earned a degree in medicine the following year in 1893.

In 1898, Janet was appointed lecturer in psychology at the [Sorbonne](#), and in 1902 he attained the chair of experimental and comparative psychology at the [Collège de France](#), a position he held until 1936. He was a member of the [Institut de France](#) from 1913, and was a central figure in French psychology in the first half of the 20th century.



Born	30 May 1859 Paris
Died	24 February 1947 (aged 87) Paris
Nationality	French
Fields	Scientific career Psychology , philosophy , psychiatry
Influenced	Alfred Adler , Sigmund Freud , William James , Carl Jung

Theories

Janet was one of the first people to allege a connection between events in a subject's past life and his or her present-day trauma, and coined the words "[dissociation](#)" and "[subconscious](#)". His study of the "magnetic passion" or "rapport" between the patient and the hypnotist anticipated later accounts of the [transference](#) phenomenon.

The 20th century saw Janet developing a grand model of the mind in terms of levels of energy, efficiency and social competence, which he set out in publications including *Obsessions and Psychasthenia* (1903) and *From Anguish to Ecstasy* (1926), among others. In its concern for the construction of the personality in social terms, this model has been compared to the social [behaviorism](#) of [George Herbert Mead](#) something which explains [Lacan](#)'s early praise of "Janet, who demonstrated so admirably the signification of feelings of persecution as phenomenological moments in

social behaviour".

Developmental hierarchy

Janet established a developmental model of the mind in terms of a hierarchy of nine "tendencies" of increasingly complex organisational levels.

He detailed four "lower tendencies", rising from the "reflexive" to the "elementary intellectual"; two "middle tendencies", involving language and the social world; and three "higher tendencies", the "rational-ergotic" world of work, and the "experimental and progressive tendencies".

According to Janet, [neurosis](#) could be seen as a failure to integrate, or a regression to earlier tendencies, and he defined [subconsciousness](#) as "an act which has kept an inferior form amidst acts of a higher level".

Influence on depth psychology

William James

In his 1890 essay *The Hidden Self*, [William James](#) wrote of M. Janet's observations of "[hysterical somnambulist](#)" patients at Havre Hospital, detailed in Janet's 1889 Doctorate of Science thesis, *De l'Automatisme Psychologique*. James made note of various aspects of [automatism](#) and the apparent multiple personalities ("two selves") of patients variously exhibiting "trances, subconscious states" or alcoholic [delirium tremens](#). James was apparently fascinated by these manifestations and said, "How far the splitting of the mind into separate consciousnesses may obtain in each one of us is a problem. M. Janet holds that it is only possible where there is an abnormal weakness, and consequently a defect of unifying or coordinating power."

Freud

Controversy over whose ideas came first, Janet's or [Sigmund Freud](#)'s, emerged at the 1913 Congress of Medicine in London. Prior to that date, Freud had freely acknowledged his debt to Janet, particularly in his work with [Josef Breuer](#), writing for example of "the theory of hysterical phenomena first put forward by P. Janet and elaborated by Breuer and myself". He stated further that "we followed his example when we took the splitting of the mind and dissociation of the personality as the centre of our position", but he was also careful to point out where "the difference lies between our view and Janet's".

Writing in 1911 of the [neurotic](#)'s withdrawal from reality, Freud stated: "Nor

could a fact like this escape the observation of Pierre Janet; he spoke of a loss of 'the function of reality', and as late as 1930, Freud drew on Janet's expression "psychological poverty" in his work on civilisation.

However, in his report on psychoanalysis in 1913, Janet argued that many of the novel terms of psychoanalysis were only old concepts renamed, even down to the way in which his own "psychological analysis" preceded Freud's "psychoanalysis". This provoked angry attacks from Freud's followers, and thereafter Freud's own attitude towards Janet cooled. In his lectures of 1915-16, Freud said that "for a long time I was prepared to give Janet very great credit for throwing light on neurotic symptoms, because he regarded them as expressions of *idées inconscientes* which dominated the patients". However, after what Freud saw as his backpedalling in 1913, he said, "I think he has unnecessarily forfeited much credit".

The charge of plagiarism stung Freud especially. In his autobiographical sketch of 1925, he denied firmly that he had plagiarized Janet, and as late as 1937, he refused to meet Janet on the grounds that "when the libel was spread by French writers that I had listened to his lectures and stolen his ideas he could with a word have put an end to such talk" but did not.

A balanced judgement might be that Janet's ideas, as published, did indeed form part of Freud's starting point, but that Freud subsequently developed them substantively in his own fashion.

Jung

Carl Jung studied with Janet in Paris in 1902 and was much influenced by him, for example equating what he called a complex with Janet's *idée fixe subconsciente*.

Jung's view of the mind as "consisting of an indefinite, because unknown, number of complexes or fragmentary personalities" built upon what Janet in *Psychological Automatism* called "simultaneous psychological existences".

Jung wrote of the debt owed to "Janet for a deeper and more exact knowledge of hysterical symptoms", and talked of "the achievements of Janet, Flournoy, Freud and others" in exploring the unconscious.

Adler

Alfred Adler openly derived his inferiority complex concept from Janet's *Sentiment d'incomplétude*, and the two men cited each other's work on the issue in their writings.

Publications

In 1923, Janet wrote a definitive text on [suggestion](#), *La médecine psychologique*, and in 1928-32 published several definitive papers on memory.

While Janet did not publish much in English, the 15 lectures that he gave to the [Harvard Medical School](#) between 15 October and the end of November 1906 were published in 1907 as *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria*. He received an honorary doctorate from Harvard in 1936.

Of his great synthesis of human psychology, [Henri Ellenberger](#) wrote that "this requires about twenty books and several dozen of articles".

See also

- [Alfred Binet](#)
- [Henri Bergson](#)
- [Henri Ey](#)
- [Henri Piéron](#)
- [Jean Piaget](#)

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4. [^] Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (1970) p. 147 and p. 406.
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6. [^] Ellenberger, p. 386
7. [^] Ellenberger, p. 405-406.

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- [Pierre Janet & the 'Reality Function'](#)
- [JANETIAN STUDIES electronic journal of the Institut Pierre Janet](#)

Works of Pierre Janet

- [La Médecine Psychologique](#) Important book by Pierre Janet. It clarifies what he thought about Suggestion. (PDF download) (in French)
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