



The Soul Reconsidered: Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911) Reads Charcot in *For a New Science*

(Per una nuova Scienza, 1898)

(Commented Documents)

Francesco Brigo¹

¹ Innovation, Research and Teaching Service, Teaching Hospital of the Paracelsus Medical Private University (PMU), Azienda Sanitaria dell'Alto Adige, Bolzano, Italy. ORCID: 0000-0003-0928-157

Corresponding Author:

Francesco Brigo

E-mail address: dr.francescbrigo@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the overlooked intellectual connection between Italian novelist Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911) and French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–1893), with particular focus on Fogazzaro's 1898 lecture *Per una nuova Scienza* ("For a New Science"). Charcot—renowned for his groundbreaking work on hysteria and hypnotism—serves in Fogazzaro's thought as both a literal and symbolic gatekeeper between the rigid empiricism of positivist science and the emergence of a spiritually attuned scientific paradigm. Fogazzaro, deeply committed to reconciling science and faith, interprets Charcot's public endorsement of hypnotism as a cultural turning point that legitimized previously marginalized psychic phenomena. Through vivid allegory, he portrays Charcot's acceptance of hypnotism as the opening of the gates of "official science" to a procession of outlawed ideas such as telepathy, spiritualism, and mental suggestion. Engaging with a broad intellectual tradition—from Franz Anton Mesmer to Pierre Janet and Charles Richet—Fogazzaro constructs a learned yet critical narrative of 19th-century scientific and spiritual discourse. He challenges the reductive tendencies of materialist positivism for excluding the soul and advocates for a new science that would integrate Western empirical methods with Eastern metaphysical insights. While cautious of spiritualist excesses, Fogazzaro sees in phenomena like hypnotism evidence of a deeper, irreducible spiritual principle within the human being. Ultimately, he positions himself as a mediator between faith and reason, science and soul—an intellectual poised at the threshold of a new spiritual science.

Keywords: Charcot, Jean-Martin; Fogazzaro, Antonio; Hypnotism; Hysteria; Positivism; Spiritualism

Introduction

Jean-Martin Charcot was a central figure in the late nineteenth century, not only within the realms of science and medicine but across the broader cultural landscape. His lectures at the Salpêtrière Hospital—particularly during the final phase of his career—drew widespread attention from the popular press and were attended not only by physicians but also by individuals from the artistic and literary worlds.

Among these cultural intersections, the relationship between Charcot and novelists stands out as particularly compelling (Koehler 2001; Koehler 2013; Bogousslavsky and Tatu 2025). Though often marked by tension, this relationship was intellectually stimulating and fruitful. Charcot's persona and ideas frequently appeared in literary works and continued to influence literary debates well beyond his death.

One especially interesting and previously overlooked example is the attention given by the Italian writer Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911) to Charcot's role in the study of hypnotism and hysteria. This is notably discussed in Fogazzaro's address *Per una nuova Scienza* ("For a New Science") (Fogazzaro 1898; Brigo 2025). It is this aspect of Charcot's legacy that the present article seeks to explore.

Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911)

Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911) was an Italian novelist, poet, and intellectual born in Vicenza into a devout and liberal Catholic family (Strappini 1997). His father, Mariano Fogazzaro, was actively involved in the Risorgimento and deeply shaped Antonio's moral and political sensibilities. Educated in the classical tradition, Fogazzaro was exposed early to European literature and developed a lasting admiration for authors such as Heine, Chateaubriand, and Victor Hugo.

Although he pursued legal studies at the universities of Padua and Turin—primarily to fulfill his father's expectations—his true vocation was literature. After earning his law degree in 1864, he briefly practiced law before dedicating himself fully to writing. His early works consisted of poetry and occasional verse, but he soon gained national recognition for novels that grappled with the complex interplay between faith, science, and modernity.

Among his most celebrated works are *Malombra* (1881), a gothic novel exploring spiritual and psychological conflict; *Daniele Cortis* (1885), a political and religious drama; and *Piccolo mondo antico* (1895), a semi-autobiographical novel that became a cornerstone of modern Italian literature. Its sequel, *Piccolo mondo moderno* (1901), continued to explore the tensions between religious belief and secular thought.

Fogazzaro's writing is distinguished by its profound spiritual sensibility and its effort to reconcile Catholic doctrine with contemporary scientific and philosophical developments, including Darwinian evolution (Strappini 1997). This intellectual project culminated in *Il Santo* (1905), a controversial novel advocating for spiritual renewal within the Church. The book was placed on the Vatican's Index of Forbidden Books in 1907. Fogazzaro's repeated interventions in the heated debates surrounding Darwinism reflect his broader aim: to challenge the materialist assumptions of positivism and to promote a synthesis between empirical inquiry and moral-spiritual values (Strappini 1997).

Despite ecclesiastical condemnation, Fogazzaro remained a respected public figure. He was appointed senator of the Kingdom of Italy in 1896, became a leading voice in the Liberal Catholic movement, and was nominated multiple times for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

In the final phase of his life, Fogazzaro became increasingly active in public affairs. He held numerous positions in municipal and religious institutions, delivered lectures, commemorative speeches, and public addresses—many of which were later collected in volumes (Strappini 1997). His public engagement mirrored his literary mission: to elevate the spiritual dimension of human life and to advocate for a culture rooted in both reason and faith.

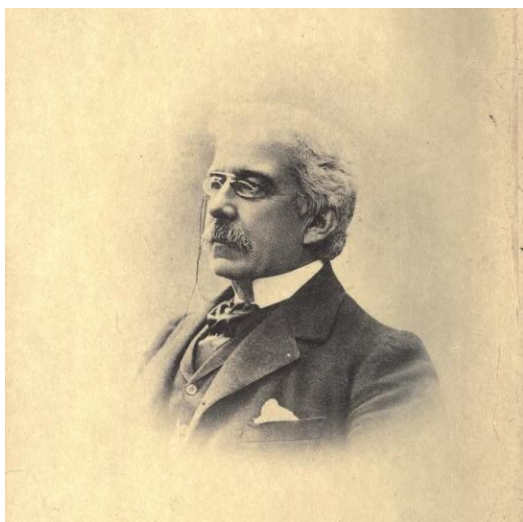


Figure 1. Photograph of Antonio Fogazzaro (1842–1911), photographer and date unknown. Reproduced in: Fogazzaro A. *Le poesie*. Milano: Baldini, 1908.

For a New Science

In January 1895, Fogazzaro delivered two lectures in Rome on “*The Mysteries of the Human Spirit*.” (Molmenti 1899). A few months later, on March 15 and 19, he presented revised versions of these talks under the title “*The Mysteries of the Human Spirit and Science*” at the Accademia Olimpica in Vicenza, of which he was a member (Unknown 1892). The texts of these lectures were later compiled and published in a volume in Milan in 1898, under the title *For a New Science* (*Per una nuova Scienza*) (Fogazzaro 1898).

In this work, Antonio Fogazzaro offered a sweeping reflection on the long-standing divide between official science and the realm of the marvelous—the strange, the psychic, the spiritual—which had been systematically excluded from respectable inquiry (Fogazzaro 1898). Central to this historical transformation was the figure of Charcot, whose endorsement of hypnotism in 1878 signaled not only a scientific shift, but a symbolic breach in the fortress of academic orthodoxy.

Fogazzaro traced this evolution from the late 18th century, when the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815) had introduced his controversial theory of animal magnetism to Parisian society. Mesmer, described by Fogazzaro as “the enchanter—in wig, sword, and violet silk suit, walking with his iron wand in a dimly lit hall among groups of ladies and gentlemen

to the sound of an invisible harmonica,”¹ became the first martyr of this psychic frontier (Fogazzaro 1898). In 1784, Mesmer and his followers were condemned by the Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Medicine in Paris. Fogazzaro emphasized how Mesmer was “excommunicated,” forced into exile, and how those who supported him were compelled to “swear that animal magnetism did not exist and that they would never again utter its name.” (Fogazzaro 1898).

Yet the idea did not die. For fifty years, animal magnetism continued to be practiced quietly, especially in rural areas. In the 19th century, other figures such as James Braid (1795–1860), a Scottish physician, and James Stanley Grimes (1807–1903), an American attorney, phrenologist, and mesmerist attempted to reframe Mesmer’s ideas under more clinical terms—coining hypnotism and electrobiology. These reformulations tried to shed the mystical language that had damned Mesmer’s work. But science remained hostile. The Academy of Medicine famously declared that it would henceforth treat any proposal on animal magnetism “as the Academy of Sciences treats proposals concerning perpetual motion and the squaring of the circle.” (Fogazzaro 1898).

It was not until Jean-Martin Charcot, one of the most prestigious scientists of the time—“member of the Institute, professor at the Faculty of Medicine, physician at the Salpêtrière”—openly embraced hypnotism that the tide began to turn. Fogazzaro highlighted the symbolic weight of the moment: “In 1878, Dr. Charcot [...] dramatically converted to hypnotism, exactly one century after Mesmer’s arrival in Paris.” (Fogazzaro 1898). Though Charcot had no intention of reviving Mesmer’s mystical reputation, his experiments mirrored many of Mesmer’s methods. “Aside from charlatanry and greed,” Fogazzaro observed, “how much of Mesmer is there in Charcot’s methods!” Mesmer had induced altered states by pressing parts of the body; Charcot theorized the existence of “hypnogenic points” that, when stimulated, could trigger catalepsy or sleep (Fogazzaro 1898).

Through experiments on patients like Rosa, a hysterical subject at the Salpêtrière, Charcot demonstrated how applying pressure to the elbow could induce trance, and how magnets could shift symptoms from one side of the body to the other. In the presence of Abbé Méric,² Charcot hypnotized Rosa, caused catalepsy on one side, and watched as Méric brought a magnet near the opposite side. “After two minutes, her right arm and leg relaxed, and the catalepsy passed to the left,” Fogazzaro recounted (Fogazzaro 1898).³ On another occasion, Rosa was hypnotized

¹ Mesmer’s iron wand was a tangible instrument used during his *séances*, believed to channel the mysterious force of animal magnetism. The text also references the glass harmonica, a musical instrument invented by Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) in 1761. It produces sound by rubbing moistened fingers on a series of rotating glass bowls, each tuned to a different pitch. Known for its ethereal and haunting tone, it was used by Mesmer during his *séances* to create a hypnotic and mystical atmosphere, enhancing the emotional and sensory experience of his audience. It was especially popular in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and used by composers like Mozart and Donizetti.

² Joseph Élie Méric (1838–1905) was a French Catholic priest, theologian, philosopher, and intellectual active in the late 19th century. He held doctorates in theology, philosophy, and letters, and was affiliated with the Sorbonne.

He is best known for his involvement in the study of psychic and spiritual phenomena, particularly through his leadership in the *Académie des sciences psychiques*, which he founded after a dispute with the earlier *Société des Recherches Psychiques*. He directed the journal *La Revue du monde invisible* for ten years, promoting a dialogue between Catholic spirituality and psychical research. Méric’s work reflects a broader late 19th-century interest in reconciling faith, science, and the unexplained, particularly in response to the rise of positivism and secularism. He was particularly active in promoting a spiritualist interpretation of psychic phenomena, often in contrast to the strictly materialist or medicalized views of figures like Charcot. He also published extensively on moral philosophy, atheism, and the role of the clergy in modern society.

³ The text closely follows the account given by Léo Taxil in *Le Diable au XIX siècle* (1892): “Au moyen d’un aimant, on transfère, en deux minutes, d’un côté à l’autre du corps du sujet [Rose], la sensibilité, la contracture et la paralysie.” (“By



and placed behind a screen, while a mute girl sat opposite her. As a magnet was introduced near Rosa, the mute girl began to speak—while Rosa herself became speechless.

These experiments, once unthinkable in scientific circles, were now not only possible but respected—because Charcot had endorsed them. “Charcot did not have to fight,” Fogazzaro remarked (Fogazzaro 1898). “Fortunately for him, by 1878 the old warhorses of the Academy who had fought campaigns in 1825, 1831, and 1837 against animal magnetism were dead.” (Fogazzaro 1898). Thus, he entered science’s inner sanctum unchallenged, his authority shielding hypnotism from ridicule.

In the first section of his lecture, Fogazzaro dramatizes such a profound transformation through a vivid allegory. He portrays official science as a grand 17th-century palace—well-fortified and vigilantly guarded against any resurgence of “those ridiculous superstitions, those absurd theories.” (Fogazzaro 1898). Within this palace, the house prince is none other than Dr. Jean-Martin Charcot.

One evening, Charcot receives an unexpected visitor: a strange figure whom he escorts through the main doors and presents to his astonished colleagues. “Hypnotism,” he announces. Some object, noting that Charcot’s own name appears on the guest’s papers—making him both sponsor and guarantor. Nevertheless, the majority agree to admit hypnotism into the house. But soon, without Charcot’s knowledge and without anyone noticing, the street door remains ajar. Through it slips a masked procession of other long-rejected phenomena: telepathy, clairvoyance, apparitions, psychic forces. The house is thrown into confusion. The admission of hypnotism had changed everything.

This passage is so effective and incisive that it warrants being reproduced in its entirety (Fogazzaro 1898):⁴

I imagine, like Durand (de Gros), official science in 1878 as a grand and ancient building in the style of the 17th century, designed and founded by the glorious masters of the experimental method on a site reclaimed from ridiculous superstitions, absurd theories, and fantastical medieval hypotheses. It was erected, stone by stone, upon firm foundations by successive generations of disciples who made it a splendid construction and took pride in it, believing that, one day, they could reach the heavens with their method, their tools, and their stones. It was both a palace and a fortress, well-fortified and well-guarded at every gate against any possible return attack from those ridiculous superstitions, those absurd theories, those fantastical hypotheses already fought and driven away by the original builders. The splendid halls of the palace are still today adorned with monuments of the most famous pontiffs of the natural sciences, with inscriptions that glorify the omnipotence and consistency of the laws they discovered, exalting human reason and the human senses as the sole sources and instruments of every scientific advance. I see, wandering through this place in 1878, a crowd dressed in black, adorned with many decorations, uniformly grave in appearance, but showing—at least to a careful observer—divergent tendencies in their eyes. There are old men, and not lacking are young men who, to their very core, feel the honor of belonging to the house and are ready to defend its traditions with the most ardent zeal. But there are other young men—and above all, men in the prime of life—who, though housed in a splendid residence, feel a lack of air, a stifling closeness, a heavy atmosphere of the old regime. Nothing in their speech reveals this, but while the first group—conservative in spirit—never approaches

means of a magnet, sensitivity, contracture, and paralysis are transferred, within two minutes, from one side of the subject’s [Rose’s] body to the other.”) (Taxil 1892).

⁴ Translated from Italian by Francesco Brigo. The paragraph structure of the original Italian text has been preserved.

the windows, the others do go to them, and it is likely they see and hear what is happening outside among the laymen.

One evening, the palace's main door opens at the signal of a house prince: Dr. Charcot. A strange figure appears on the threshold. Charcot offers his arm, leads him in, and presents him to the astonished colleagues: "Hypnotism." Immediately the mysterious figure pulls out and offers a document that justifies his entry. The learned examine it. The document is in perfect order; hypnotism is described there with scientific precision. The date of birth is missing, but it matters little—they'll simply write "today." The father's name is missing, but the presenter does not object to inserting "Charcot" in the blank space. Some conservatives wish to point out that the certificate already bears Charcot's signature, that in the end, Charcot is both presenter and certifier, and that he is perhaps asserting his authority a bit too much—but his authority is so great, and he has so many admirers and friends inside, that no one dares protest. The figure is admitted; he is immediately surrounded, touched, examined, interrogated, dragged from group to group, from hall to hall. But what happens now? Without Dr. Charcot's knowledge, without anyone realizing it, the street door has remained open. A swarm of masked misfits—friends and companions of Hypnotism—rushes in noisily. The guards run to intervene, cries ring out from above: "Shut the door!" But the door is hypnotized—it no longer shuts. The bizarre masks climb the stairs shouting, burst into the hall. An enormous confusion ensues. These newcomers bear an alarming resemblance to the monstrous medieval phantoms that once possessed the place. They call themselves Mental Suggestion, Telepathy, Bilocation, Psychic Force, Clairvoyance, Spiritism, Materialization, Apparitions of the Dead, of Ghosts, of the Living. Their appearance in the halls causes a true revolution. Everyone shouts; some want to throw the intruders out the window. But the prevailing faction decides to let them stay—on the condition that they remove their harlequin costumes, dress more decently and soberly, abandon their street-performer habits, change their romantic postures, and scrupulously respect the laws and regulations of the experimental method, submitting to every exam, every interrogation, every possible test. The followers of Hypnotism agree immediately—but this does not restore order to the halls. Though they shed their eccentric garments, they cannot shed their fantastic and unruly nature. Even when being examined, they examine in turn, adopt insolent behavior, sometimes even mock the experimental method. Occasionally, they smash some old worm-eaten and venerable piece of furniture, deliver speeches on physical laws that clash scandalously with the solemn epigraphs on the walls—so much so that they make the hair of the great scientists' statues stand on end. There is even talk of malicious enchantments, and fear arises that the very august edifice of science may, through some occult work of theirs, be in danger.

Fogazzaro also recalls Charcot's role as president of the Society for Physiological Psychology, established in Paris,⁵ where the secretary was Charles Richet (1850–1935)—a future Nobel laureate who investigated mental suggestion and clairvoyance. The society included members such as Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894), Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909), and Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893), who joined in exploring the boundaries of the paranormal.

In the remainder of his address, Fogazzaro no longer mentions Charcot (1825–1893) directly but turns to a critical analysis of the role played by some of the century's most prominent scientists in the study of hypnotism and its extensions. Alongside the Parisian society, he references the Society for Psychical Research in London, which he praises for its seriousness. This British society counted among its members notable figures such as Alfred Russel Wallace

⁵ *Société de Psychologie Physiologique*, founded in Paris in 1885. The first French institution devoted to both psychology and parapsychology, was modeled after the Society for Psychical Research in London (1882) and played a pioneering role in early psychological science in France.



(1823–1913), Darwin’s co-theorist of evolution, and William Gladstone (1809–1898), the former Prime Minister of Britain.

Yet, as Fogazzaro notes, the scientific world remained deeply divided. For example, the psychologist Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920) mocked the dualistic implications of these studies, declaring with sarcasm: “I ask myself whether we must admit that the only world apparently real around us is, in fact, composed of two vastly different worlds: one being the universe of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Leibniz, and Kant—governed by immutable and eternal laws; the other, a lesser world of goblins, spirits, witches, and mediums—capable, for the benefit of hysterical people, of turning all the laws of the greater world upside down.” (Fogazzaro 1898).

Other important researchers discussed by Fogazzaro include Pierre Janet (1859–1947) and his study of the patient Léonie, a woman who appeared to exhibit a split personality.⁶ Similarly, Eugène Azam (1822–1899) and his case of Felida pointed to the phenomenon of dual consciousness.⁷ Fogazzaro notes that some theorists—such as Joseph-Pierre Durand de Gros (1826–1900)—even speculated that each individual harbored multiple subconscious selves, forming a kind of “colony” of spirits.

Fogazzaro firmly rejected these theories of psychic fragmentation. While he acknowledged the mysterious power of habit and automatism, he insisted on the indivisibility of the human soul. “There is no plurality of persons in the same human individual,” he affirmed. He recounted an experiment by Janet in which a hypnotized subject, Lucia, responded with the name “Adriana” as an invented secondary personality. But Fogazzaro argued that Janet had projected his own expectations onto the subject: “It seems evident to me that in this experiment he deceived himself, became the victim of a double suggestion—he suggested to the hysterical subject, and he suggested to himself.” (Fogazzaro 1898).

Even experiments in telepathy—such as those conducted by Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917),⁸ who mentally commanded hypnotized patients to move or speak—were approached with caution. Yet Fogazzaro believed that, taken together, these studies pointed toward a new understanding of human nature. If mental action at a distance were possible, if thought could cause wounds or visions, if people could appear to others at the moment of death, then materialism was no longer sufficient. These phenomena, he argued, pointed to the existence of a spiritual principle within the human being—something irreducible to matter.

To support this vision, Fogazzaro turned to Eastern traditions, praising the Indian philosophical method for its approach to the study of the soul. In this context, he cited a Brahmin mathematician who, at a Theosophical Congress in Chicago, lamented the spread of Western materialist science in India while welcoming the West’s renewed interest in the spiritual:

“He joyfully welcomed [...] a curious movement of sympathy growing in America and Europe, where certain mystical spirits turn toward India—great, declining, venerable ancestress of our

⁶ Janet P. *L’automatisme psychologique: Essai de psychologie expérimentale sur les formes inférieures de l’activité humaine*. Paris: Félix Alcan; 1889.

⁷ Azam E. *Hypnotisme, double conscience et altérations de la personnalité: le cas Félida X*. Preface by J.-M. Charcot. Paris: J.-B. Baillière et Fils; 1887

⁸ Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917) was a Polish philosopher, psychologist, and inventor active in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A key figure in Polish Positivism, he championed empirical science and rational inquiry. He studied under Wilhelm Wundt and became a pioneer in hypnosis, telepathy, and altered states of consciousness. Though skeptical of spiritualism, he conducted extensive research on mediums like Eusapia Palladino, proposing scientific explanations for paranormal phenomena. See: Ziolkowska AM. The 100th anniversary of the death of Julian Ochorowicz (1850–1917). *Hist Psychol*. 2018;21(1):74–78.



peoples and our languages—to learn from her the science of the human soul, and above all, the method of studying it.” (Fogazzaro 1898).⁹

Fogazzaro concluded with a call to action: the founding of a new science—one that would unite the rigorous observation of the West with the moral and mystical preparation of the East. This science would not seek sensationalism, but truth. “Go forward,” he urged, “in the calm and rigorous study of occult psychic phenomena. There is a science to be founded here: the science of your instinct, your love, your faith,” with the ultimate mission “to exalt the spirit, to expand at dizzying speed the dominion of intelligence over matter, and to transform society through love.” (Fogazzaro 1898).

And in Charcot’s bold gesture—the scientific rehabilitation of hypnotism—Fogazzaro saw not the conclusion of a debate, but the beginning of a revolution: one that might ultimately lead to the experimental confirmation of the soul, and to the reintegration of the spiritual within the scientific worldview.

Critical Discussion and Contextualization

In his later years, Fogazzaro’s thought became increasingly focused on the need for a spiritual renewal of culture and science. This vision was most clearly articulated in his public addresses and essays, where he called for a reconciliation between the empirical rigor of Western science and the introspective, metaphysical traditions of the East. *For a New Science* stands as a manifesto of this aspiration: a call to found a new discipline that would unite reason and faith, observation and intuition, science and soul (Fogazzaro 1898).

What emerges from this text is Fogazzaro’s remarkable familiarity with the scientific debates of his time and the key figures involved. Although he never explicitly cites his sources, it is clear that he possessed a deep and nuanced understanding of contemporary medical and psychological literature. For example, his reference to the experiments conducted by Charcot on the patient Rosa, in the presence of Joseph Élie Méric (1838–1905)—a Catholic theologian and philosopher affiliated with the Sorbonne and active in psychical research and spiritualist studies (Méric 1891)—is drawn almost verbatim from *Le Diable au XIXe siècle* by Léo Taxil (Taxil 1892). Fogazzaro’s discussion is rich in detail, demonstrating not only a solid grasp of scientific findings but also a capacity for critical engagement with their broader philosophical implications.

Fogazzaro’s critique is particularly directed at positivism, which he sees as a worldview overly fixated on material facts—on the *positum*, that which is given and measurable. He challenges this reductionist approach, arguing that it fails to account for the more elusive, spiritual, and subjective dimensions of human experience.

⁹ Although not explicitly named, the reference is to Gyanendra Nath Chakravarti (1861–1936) an Indian scholar, philosopher, and prominent figure in the Theosophical movement. Educated in both Western and Eastern traditions, he began his academic career as a lecturer in physical science and later became a professor of mathematics at the University of Allahabad. In 1893, Chakravarti played a significant role on the global stage by representing the Theosophical Society at the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago. This event was a landmark in interfaith dialogue, and Chakravarti’s lectures were well received, contributing to the growing interest in Eastern spiritual traditions in the West. He travelled to England and the United States with Annie Besant and other Theosophists, delivering talks that emphasized the unity of religious thought and the spiritual depth of Indian philosophy.

See: Judge WQ. G. N. Chakravarti. In: Eklund D, ed. *Echoes of the Orient: The Writings of William Quan Judge*. Vol II. 2nd rev. ed. Point Loma Publications; 2009: 487-488.

Especially compelling is Fogazzaro's treatment of Jean-Martin Charcot, whom he presents as both a representative of positivist science and, paradoxically, as someone open to phenomena traditionally excluded from scientific inquiry. In Fogazzaro's reading, Charcot quite literally and symbolically "opens the door" to hypnotism—an act that signifies a broader willingness to engage with the unknown and the immaterial. This duality in Charcot's position—rooted in empirical rigor yet receptive to the unexplained—becomes a powerful emblem of the transitional moment in which science found itself at the turn of the century.

Fogazzaro also highlights the coexistence of positivism and spiritualism in late 19th-century thought—a period saturated with what, in hindsight, appear to be irreconcilable dimensions. The fascination with the darker phenomena of spiritualism was widespread in 19th-century France; one need only recall Victor Hugo (1802–1885)'s experiments with the *table tournante* (Hugo 2014). Yet with the rise of positivism came the attempt to wrest these phenomena from the realm of the inexplicable and illuminate them with the light of science.

Thus, phenomena such as demonic possession and the mystical ecstasies of saints were reinterpreted by Charcot and his students through biological and scientific frameworks—as manifestations of hysteria, a condition they regarded as biologically rooted, transhistorical, and transcultural (Charcot and Richer 1887). A notable example is the work of Georges Gilles de la Tourette (1857–1904), particularly his *bibliothèque diabolique*, which offered critical analyses of cases such as the possessions of the nuns of Loudun and the figure of Sister Jeanne des Anges (1602–1665) (Legué and Gilles de la Tourette 1886). Charcot himself addressed these tensions in a letter to the Italian scholar Giulio Melotti (1857–19??), in which he discussed hypnotism and its influence on the masses (Charcot 1887). He lamented the "vulgar propagation of hypnotism" and praised the Italian government's decision to suppress public theatrical displays of somnambulism by magnetizers. In Charcot's view, such measures were necessary to prevent the spread of mass hysteria. He further insisted that medicine alone should retain full authority over hypnotism, applying it exclusively "for the treatment of the sick, or for physiological or psychological research," and explicitly rejecting any external interference (Charcot 1887).

This rationalizing impulse extended beyond the Salpêtrière. Nobel laureates Pierre Curie (1859–1906) and Marie Curie (1867–1934), along with future laureate Charles Richet (1850–1935), all expressed interest in the spiritualist phenomena surrounding the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino (1854–1918)—a sign of the era's complex entanglement of scientific rigor and metaphysical curiosity (de Ceglia and Leporiere 2020). This was not the irrational erupting within the rational, but rather an effort to illuminate the obscure and bring it under the disciplined control of scientific inquiry.

Rather than treating the domains of spiritualism and positivism as mutually exclusive, Fogazzaro explores the tensions and overlaps between them, being actively engaged with contemporary debates on hypnotism, dual consciousness, and psychic phenomena. His vision is not one of rejection, but of synthesis: a call for a new science—one that does not abandon empirical observation, but expands its scope to include the inner life, the soul, and the spiritual dimensions of human existence. While he remained cautious of spiritualist excesses, he believed that these phenomena pointed to dimensions of human experience that materialist science could not fully explain. His approach was neither credulous nor dismissive, but rather exploratory—seeking to expand the boundaries of legitimate scientific inquiry.

Fogazzaro's legacy is thus twofold. As a novelist, he gave voice to the moral and spiritual dilemmas of a society in transition, crafting narratives that remain central to the canon of

modern Italian literature. As a thinker, he stood at the crossroads of science, religion, and philosophy, advocating for a vision of knowledge that was both intellectually rigorous and spiritually open.

References

- Bogousslavsky J, Tatu L. Charcot and Léon Daudet: A missed love story? *J Hist Neurosci.* 2025;34(2):322-330.
- Brigo F. (translator). Fogazzaro A. For a New Science (Per una nuova Scienza, 1898); English translation by F. Brigo. *The Charcot Journal*, 2025; 1(1):13-26.
- Charcot JM, Richer P. *Les démoniaques dans l'art*. Paris: A. Delahaye et E. Lecrosnier; 1887.
- Charcot JM. *Nuove lezioni sulle malattie del sistema nervoso e in modo particolare sull'isterismo nell'uomo fatte alla Salpêtrière negli anni scolastici 1884-85 ed 1885-86 raccolte con consenso dell'autore dal dott. Giulio Melotti; coll'aggiunta di una prefazione del prof. Charcot intorno alla proibizione degli spettacoli ipnotici*. Milano: Vallardi; 1887.
- de Ceglia FP, Leporiere L. Becoming Eusapia: The rise of the “Diva of Scientists.” *Science in Context.* 2020;33(4):441–471. doi:10.1017/S026988972100020X
- Fogazzaro A. Per una nuova scienza. In: *Discorsi*. Milano: Cogliati; 1898:97-137
- Hugo V. *Le Livre des Tables: Les séances spirites de Jersey*. Edited by Patrice Boivin. Paris: Gallimard, Folio classique; 2014.
- Koehler P. About medicine and the arts. Charcot and French literature at the fin-de-siècle. *J Hist Neurosci.* 2001;10(1):27-40.
- Koehler PJ. Charcot, La Salpêtrière, and Hysteria as Represented in European Literature. In: Finger S, Boller F, Stiles A, eds. *Progress in Brain Research*. Vol 206. Elsevier; 2013:93–122.
- Legué G, Gilles de la Tourette G, eds. *Sœur Jeanne des Anges, Supérieure des Ursulines de Loudun: Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée, d'après le manuscrit inédit de la bibliothèque de Tours*. Paris: Aux Bureaux du Progrès Médical; 1886.
- Méric E. *Le merveilleux et la science: Étude sur l'hypnotisme*. Nouvelle édition. Paris: Letouzey; 1891.
- Molmenti P. Antonio Fogazzaro. II. Il Filosofo e l'Uomo. In: *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti. Volume Ottantaquattresimo della Raccolta Volume CLXVIII*. Roma: Direzione della Nuova Antologia; 1899:645-667
- Strappini L. Fogazzaro, Antonio. In: *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*. Vol 48. Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana; 1997. Accessed July 25, 2025. https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/antonio-fogazzaro_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/
- Taxil L. *Le diable au XIXe siècle*. Paris & Lyon: Delhomme et Briguet; 1892.
- Unknown author. I Misteri dello Spirito Umano e la Scienza. In: *Atti dell'Accademia Olimpica di Vicenza*. Volumi 26–33. Vicenza: Accademia Olimpica d'Agricoltura, Scienze, Lettere ed Arti; 1892:20-22



Specific Statements

Permissions: The original text of *Per una nuova Scienza* by Antonio Fogazzaro is in the public domain.

Patient Consent: Not applicable.

Funding: The author received no specific funding for this work.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Provenance and peer review: Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed. Submitted: July 20, 2025. Received in revised form: August 1, 2025. Accepted: August 9, 2025.

Disclaimer

The content provided on The Charcot Journal website is for informational and educational purposes only. It is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read on this site. The Charcot Journal and its contributors do not accept any responsibility for any loss which may arise from reliance on information contained on this site.

Terms and Conditions

Unless otherwise stated, all content is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). You may share the content for non-commercial purposes, provided that (a) proper attribution is given to the original authors and The Charcot Journal; (b) the content is not modified or adapted in any way. Commercial use and the creation of derivative works are not permitted without prior written permission from the copyright holder. Authors retain full copyright and may reuse their own work in any form, including for commercial purposes. The website may contain links to third-party websites. We are not responsible for the content or practices of these external sites. We reserve the right to update or modify these terms at any time without prior notice.