

Monday 24 May 1971

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Greetings from Uphill-----

I had to read and comment on some more of that Identity Theory and Philosophy of Science stuff, and hope that come June 15 or so I won't have to be bothered with it any more.

It turns out there is a horrid character in Australia (Adelaide) name of Prof. J. J. C. Smart, who wants sensations and brain-processes to be absolutely identified in a strict sense of identity. Fortunately there are critics, as D. L. Gunner of the University of Melbourne, and several American and English critics as well.

You brought up the prediction, shared in by many, that someday machines will be conscious. There are articles about this by Hilary Putnam, and quite some time ago a book by Pierre de Latil, THINKING BY MACHINE, and not quite that long ago, THE MINDS OF ROBOTS by James T. Culbertson. To me this is all crass crude Hugo Gernsback stuff.

I am not ready at this time to concede that a machine or computer will be conscious in the way I am. I would concede this: There might be a complex feedback and self-sensorial arrangements that would be an analog of consciousness in the same sense, and no more, as core-storage is now called "memory". Up to the present, it is the programmer and the reader-of-the-printout who provide whatever sense or meaning the output of the computer possesses.

Another thing that will bring up the idea of machine consciousness will be when microorganisms are bred for use in some kind of bio-computer where possibly some artificial analog of brain-cell-networks will be organized. Also, the fact that machines which can learn already exist, encourages extrapolation into the Wild Blue Yonder.

In Cybernetics and also in The Human Use of Human Beings, Norbert Wiener stretches the concept of materialism until it almost busts open. He claims that information, in his information-theory sense, is neither matter nor energy. This sort of extension may be a welcome way out for the materialists of today.

But the New Physics and the proliferation of "elementary particles" and the new questioning of space being full instead of empty, all make my advocacy of neutral monism more and more agreeable. I will send you another Neutral Monism pamphlet.

Recently I read the composer Cyril Scott's autobiography, Bone of Contention, written at the age of 91. He embraced a brand of occultism akin to Theosophy, which he clearly states is a refined materialism, with matter being increasingly attenuated as one goes from plane to plane, but all governed by higher orders of physical laws and never reaching immaterial idealism.

Ouspensky and Gurdjieff seem to have a similar notion, of a refined materialism. So do a lot of people. Sometimes it is clearly stated as Cyril Scott did, sometimes it is all muddy and fuzzy and semiconscious and crogged. I am afraid to bring up Ouspensky and Gurdjieff lest you call me a fuzzy whatnot of a Confusionist, but I suspect something about all their gobbledygook: I suspect that the nonsense one sees on rapid reading of it, and the contradictions and inconsistencies and hogwash, are a smokescreen to dissuade all but the sincere initiates, for whom there is some kind of cryptic cipher buried there. Unfortunately, the nonsense is so blatant and disgusting and exasperating that this real meaning may have been hopelessly garbled--alas! I fear this is the case.

It is impossible to refute a lie that has some truth in it. There is the problem. For instance, many materialists desperately want all sick people who read Mrs. Eddy's books to die as soon as possible to prove that it is completely false--but what am I to think, when after a Christian Science practitioner visited my mother in the hospital in 1959, she stopped drinking and no longer clobbered me with bottles and no longer screamed all night at me for no reason? Should I have stood on stoic antireligious principles like some of the obnoxious general semanticists I knew, and some of the other horrid pests who plagued me then, and let my mother go back to drinking so Christian Science could be refuted? I wouldn't be here today if I had--I would have gone mad. Whatever was done to my mother was successful and my very life was saved. So chalk up one for idealism.

But it has also been my experience that the idealists are the cool cucumbers and the contented cats, whereas the materialists are the obnoxious pests who scream and rant and rave and ridicule. There is one such who phones me twice a month--he is a chemist for a Hollywood concern--and spends 20 minutes or so denouncing parapsychology and especially J.B. Rhine and all his works and pomps. What practical value does all his emotional raving have? Would he make more money if ESP were finally refuted and laid to rest? Or is he subconsciously afraid somebody is going to read his mind?

Frankly, the material world of hardware and energy doesn't seem to care whether you are a materialist or an idealist or a dualist. Oscillators go on oscillating just the same, and acids neutralize bases just the same, and this typewriter would --must have during the 50 years of its existence--functioned equally well for whatever kind of writer used it.

To get away from my own experience, I will cite D.L. Gunner's objections to J.J.C. Smart's insistence that all is hopelessly dead matter. Smart pleads for his identity theory, but cannot adduce any experimental proof from the external world. All he has to offer is an emotional appeal, just as emotional as that of any mystic. He pleads the neatness, simplicity, tidiness, and elegance of Occam's Razor--of not having mental and physical, but just physical and nothing but.

This is something like the compulsive neurotic, the driven hand-washer and scrubber-of-floors-till-you-can-eat-off-them.

You must accept the identity theory because it looks better. Better to whom? It's better because I say so. You don't want to be a sloppy dirty bum, do you? And so on with the emotions of a repressed religious instinct that will out some way or other.

Look at the newspaper or magazine or TV: you will see that the US and some other countries have a ruthlessly materialist ersatz religion, sports. The self-discipline and -denial of athletes exceeds that of the ascetics of old. And no Heaven at the other end for reward. A most cruel tyranny of something called "form" and another thing called "breaking previous records". And there are newspapers and others who whip the public up to rabid insane fanaticism with this ersatz religion.

I smell a whole colony of rats. The hypocrisy and fuzziness and illogic is not all on the side of the Fundamentalist Christians or the Buddhist and Yogic Mystics or the Theosophists or the myriad hippie cults. I have suffered under this kind of crypto-religion for many years. My father tortured himself with the conflict between 19th-century skepticism and Catholicism and wanted me to go through life just as miserable as he was.

He conformed to the hilt and where did it get him? 74 years of misery, so far as I know. Uptight as any IBM-er.

On the other side of the ledger, about the time I met you, some 8 years ago, one of my then acquaintances was pushing me very hard to go into his brand of mysticism. He wrote a book about it, and brought me others. He wanted me to give up composing and building musical instruments, and to sell newspapers on the street-corner, throw my mother away, and devote my time to mystical meditation and some kind of sex-cult about which I never quite learned the details, except that it was tied in with Henry Miller's brand of astrology and some kind of fatalism. He refused to believe I was ill, and thought I had a moral obligation to dress up and to wear false teeth no matter how much they hurt or how much they cost. He ridiculed all those who agreed with me on anything.

With him and with Dianuttics and Sciendollargy, I have had quite as much annoyance from self-styled "mysticism" as you say you are having right now. I don't blame you for resenting it, and you do have the right to be angry. But many of these things are not genuine mysticism, ~~wharrrr~~ and that, whether there be genuine mysticism or no. The mysticism in the preceding paragraph was a device to sell horoscopes, books, magazines, and talismans. ~~Hubbard's~~ Hubbard's stuff is a device to rob people of both money and ambition, and give them boring referentless abstractions in return. There was a bunch of quacks who joined general semantics and used it to further their own bank accounts and their own selfish motives. The self-improvement rackets are a horrible drain on society. If you can afford them you don't need them.

There are many greedy people who do not believe in their own cults, and this has given idealism and mysticism and religion and metaphysics very bad names. As witness the underground papers. And the psychedelic shops. And the drug culture. What is idealistic or spiritual, I want to know, about taking

dope and thereby handing your body over to chemical influences? It differs in degree only from suicide by poison. And often that is precisely how it ends. I still remember my experiences while being operated on under anaesthetics, but I wouldn't call them mystical or spiritual, anymore than the toxic deliria when I had a fever of 104° or so. Isn't it the supreme hypocrisy when pushers induce people to take drugs as an escape from the Establishment, when the drug trade is capitalism at its cruelest? This equating or identifying the drug experience with the mystical experience is the tragedy of our age. I'm sorry there are so many such deceivers and deceived there around you.

I have no time for those who believe that alcoholism is the royal road to creativity. A number of people are angry at me because I won't drink with them. But I have seen the damage it does, and in my precarious condition it would be just plain suicide. But the sale of liquor is so profitable that it just could be that anti-intellectualism and fuzziness of thought is being fostered to make people more eager to get drunk and to take drugs. What I did not spend on drinking and smoking, built all those instruments and paid postage on my publications and bought the mimeo machine and supplies. And then some.

Your worries about whether science is worthwhile are paralleled by the misgivings of those who want me to stop composing because music is futile in their opinions. Do you know what I suspect? Jealousy. Nearly all those who used such arguments on me were jealous of me, even though they had no reason to be. It is possible, even though not too likely, that someone who envies you secretly would plant this kind of doubt in your mind in an attempt to sap your ambition and motivation. I don't have much of this right now, but believe me, when I was anywhere from 18 to 30 years old, it was a severe problem--and usually, someone else told me about someone being jealous. That is, it wasn't my own imagination.

Thanks for exploding the myth of the Information Explosion for me. After sleeping on it I see it your way. That's quite a relief, one less thing to worry about. I would think that there may be some tie-in of your idea of no real threat from too much information, and the miserable failure of the Information Retrieval Crash Programs of the 1950's. How about that?

Yours