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Greetings from uphill----

Next Monday I shall probably be exposed to the super-up-tight people of Mensa again--the fellow who has maintained a subgroup the last two years or so has suddenly moved within walking distance of here--at the BOTTOM of this hill and a few blocks west--I guess he had more sense than I. Oddly enough, he has lived for almost the twenty years I did, in my former neighborhood and all the houses around University of Southern California have been condemned by Urban Renewal (what's that about free enterprise? and a man's home is his castle??). so with the meeting-place that close I have no alibi.

Indubitably, up there in Berkeley there must be all kinds of MENSA members, and no doubt they are after you to join. At that lecture I gave last year, there were interesting people, but they were so stressed-and-strained, so keyed-up near the breaking point, that it made me uneasy. I will be healthier and live longer if I associate with people who may not be that intelligent, but who are more relaxed and less frustrated and don't imply the question "Why aren't you exerting every ounce of effort in everything you know, as I am?". Or, "You can do it; and you know you can do it, therefore you must." Even if it makes me ill again.

It's bad enough to have the mechanistic materialists' ersatz religion of sport, but it's even worse to have another ersatz religion of technology-worship (I think scientism is not too accurate, even though I have used this word a number of times). Maybe the collapse of "21" and "The 364,000 Question" was a good thing--it prevented or at least postponed the setting up of another pseudo-cult. These imitation-religions are very insidious, just as when Korzybski was denouncing philosophy he was intensely being a philosopher, and so for everyone else who utters such denunciations. To be a genuine agnostic is a very precarious balancing-act.

In connection with my Neutral Monism pamphlet, and the new sequel I will write someday, few people get my message about the average engineer or businessman or teacher who is a materialistic monist on weekdays, but a dualist churchgoer on Sundays. They may go through life with these contradictory beliefs and never do the two confront one another. On those occasions when I triggered just this confrontation, I was bitterly resented. This holding two contradictory beliefs in watertight compartments seems to be the Norm, alas!

And when I suggest that someone try the Neutral-Monist balancing-act, they don't like that either. It also is too precarious.

I forgot to tell you something about Berkeley. I was living in San Francisco in 1935 and my father had some notion of my attending Berkeley part-time and then maybe a few years later enrolling as a special student when I was old enough. But he insisted that on my first trip across the bay from San Francisco

I proceed immediately to the Newman Club and confer with the priests and the Catholic students there, lest the irreligious influences lead me astray. Or lest I take Extension courses I shouldn't be taking. I then visited Prof. Alexander Kaun who then was teaching various of the Slavic languages--I already knew some Russian so the order in which the other Slavic languages should be studied was my main question. I have never seen Berkeley since that date, so maybe a few things have happened in 36 years, eh wot?

The marvelous plans never went through because I was so ill and had all those toothaches and early in 1936 all my teeth were pulled at once. But I came close. That would have been very trying on all concerned--a teacher of ~~ix~~ Slavic languages with all those sibilants, and no teeth. Obviously I wouldn't have finished the years of courses required for a degree in that subject. And of course that was the Depression and no money was available for my education and I was too ill to earn any.

So I went to course to libraries.

Now to come up on one phase of the ESP question which seems to be ignored by the eager proponents as much as by the opponents: The so-called laboratory tests for ESP rely almost exclusively on visually-oriented behavior. I.e. those confounded Zener cards with in-... visual symbols on them. Occasionally, other kinds of cards with pictures or numbers or letters. Very rarely, drawings of objects in hidden boxes. Practically never, sounds or smells or touchable objects or taste-having items, or phenomena not accessible to the ordinary senses such as current flowing in wires or chemical reactions which have no visible sign (e.g. an acid neutralizing a base when no indicator is used).

This comes in all manner of side-issues which are practically always ignored, both by the experimenters and the debunkers. For instance, the role of visual memory-images, the role of one's writing skill and reaction-time in writing down the allegedly received message on a record-form, one's visual imagination, one's biases from experience with language and sensory impressions, and worst of all the process of a "sender" looking at or thinking of a visual symbol and re-encoding this into some kind of form, transmitting it, and then the receiver not responding directly to whatever might be received but re-encoding it or imagining it in terms of his sense of sight. And, comparing it with memory-images which were received via the orthodox senses. Is it any wonder that the margin-above-chance is so tiny? And so elusive? Even without the other problem which has been discussed--that of monotony, boredom, apathy, the sheer loathing of anything you are forced to think about and attend to for a long series of statistical experiments.

Some years ago I was invited to take part in a series of rehashes of the Rhine experiments with those blasted cards and record-forms and two statisticians and a science-fiction writer and a couple of quacks and some other oddballs. The psychologist (I quote around him if you want to) and director and group official whose office the tests were conducted in, I despised for being so greedy and unscrupulous, which didn't help my or his attitude any; and another fellow there, who put up a big front in some business office, hated me to pieces, so that didn't help either.

My efforts to stage an airtight test, based on the psychogalvanic reflex# (the receiver would be connected to an ohmmeter and would not be allowed to see its dial, which another experimenter would read; the sender in another room would ask the needle to move in this or that direction or remain steady or wiggle from side to side in accordance with drawing a card from a pack) was resented and only one such test went through.

Since there are so many ways the affair can go wrong, the usual criticisms by skeptics are unnecessary and superfluous. Look at all these other things that could totally spoil the lab experiments without any need to bring up the usual arguments at all.

My attitude that there probably are psi phenomena is based on my own spontaneous, unsought experiences, not on any books or tall tales or highly-artificial laboratory situations. I don't consider this any stranger than that a human being can store auditory memory-images in time-order, and that a human being can learn algebra and logic and get the same answers that other people get.

We simply do not know enough to come to conclusions about such things--there certainly aren't enough data to decide whether this does or does not violate the known physical principles. "It seems that" and "One would assume" and "According to the best authorities" are not genuine explanations. What have I to lose by waiting? Pascal's Wager again.

Why don't I end this on a facetious note? If psi is true (I avoid "yes" because this begs questions; psi might be just another physical sense) then I could become financially successful and prosperous and maybe even filthy-rich by sending out telepathic commercials. If I become well-to-do, that ought to be proof enough; and if I ~~remain~~ remain poor, all I lose is a few minutes a day of time spent trying to get to sleep or of time spent trying to stretch and yawn and get up in the morning.

Yours