

A LONG, COOL LOOK AT ALIEN INTELLIGENCE

by C. Maxwell Cade

Part V — "It's All in the Mind"

JUST as Alice, when she was falling down the rabbit-hole, kept muttering to herself, "Do cats eat bats?" and sometimes, "Do bats eat cats?" (since she couldn't answer the question either way round), we have asked, "Are UFOs poltergeists?" and also, "Are poltergeists UFOs?"

At this stage, many orthodox scientists (and orthodox laymen, for that matter) will say that in our efforts to be open-minded we have become empty-headed, muttering meaningless conundrums to ourselves. However, I prefer to think of these questions as being more like the famous *Koans* of Zen Buddhism—problems which are insoluble by the use of the intellect ("What is the sound of one hand clapping?"), but which may be employed deliberately to shock the personality into transcending the intellect and seeing what lies behind or beyond the problem, through the power of the intuition. It does not matter whether we consider intuition to be "the ability subconsciously to collate facts and draw inferences" or "a minor psychic power". The fact is that intuition (whatever its proper definition may be) is an experience of everyday reality, and it often succeeds in vanquishing problems with which the intellect cannot even get to grips.

A great deal of nonsense is written about "scientific method", mainly by people with no experience of scientific research. Anyone who has ever had to conduct real research, forcing a pathway through unknown mental territory, will know that progress is seldom made by neat, logical steps, beginning from carefully selected facts. The really creative scientist usually begins with a "hunch" or "guess" (i.e., an intuitive feeling) that the proper approach to his problem is such-and-such. He tries this approach, and having reached the desired answer, he then carefully reasons backwards to the starting point. Later (not to show how clever he is, but in order to write-up the research in a logical manner for other people to follow), the work is laid out *as if* it had been neatly and logically planned from the start. The value of the scientific method is largely in preparing a formal proof of a result, which frequently was arrived at intuitively in the first instance. The man who sets out to plod painfully towards a mental goal is in danger of missing anything really new, for as Alexander Pope wrote:

"Say first, of God above, of man below,
What can we reason but from what we know?"

Reasoning is, as Rignano expressed it, a form of

experimenting, not with things themselves, but with their mental symbols. We cannot reason without concepts, and all of logical thinking boils down to re-shuffling preconceived ideas. Hence the superiority of the experimental approach of science over the philosophical approach of the Greek scholars of classical antiquity: an experiment honestly performed may cause the experimenter to cast away his preconceived ideas and start again. But even the experimental method still has the disadvantage that the results have to be interpreted, and (at least, usually) interpreted in terms of preconceived theories and hypotheses.

I think it was William James, that great psychologist, who said that Science had so fallen in love with Scientific Method as to care no longer for truth. It is only Truth as technically verified by The Method which is acceptable. Kenneth Walker wisely pointed out that to believe that scientific method can give the whole truth about the world in which we live is like looking through a keyhole into a room and believing that one sees the whole of that room.

All of which is merely by way of drawing attention to the limitations of Orthodoxy, and especially of the orthodox way of thinking about things. A mind which believes that there is only one "right" way to attack a problem, is a shut mind, and none the less shut because it proudly proclaims itself to be open. And even open minds (like yours and mine), which are willing to look at problems in fresh ways, may still shrink from accepting the answers they find, because they are (as G. N. M. Tyrrell said) "distressingly unfamiliar". Let us now continue our study of the possible relationship between the extraterrestrial and the parapsychological, whilst endeavouring not to keep our minds half-shut.

A New Look at Collective Hallucinations

In both parapsychology and ufology there are many people who are prepared to swear that they have personally witnessed some phenomenon which is utterly beyond scientific (or even common-sense) explanation. The "contactee" reports are of this kind, although they embrace a wide spectrum, from what might be a rag-day hoax of students to what exceeds the wildest of fantasy-fiction.

Now either these people have had some kind of real experience with a verifiable external reality or (neglecting the occasional hoaxers and publicity-seekers) they have had a fantasy experience which they believed to be real. Such hallucinatory experiences, even when vouched for by groups of people, are quite well known.

Apart from the classical stories about the Indian Rope Trick, we have recently seen new legislation introduced for the control of stage shows using hypnotism, so successful have some of the "illusions" been.

What is really interesting, and even urgent, about UFOs as hallucinations, is that such great numbers of people should have hallucinations of a stereotyped kind. Not that the happening is really anything new; the Devils of Loudun, the Angels of Mons, and a host of stories from religious literature all come into this category of a seemingly-real, shared experience, which is nevertheless unique to a particular set of individuals. Very recently something of a similar nature was found under virtually laboratory conditions.

In October 1967, the Society for Psychical Research carried out a series of experiments to investigate the possibility of mass-telepathy. The experiments were carried out at the Caxton Hall, London, under the leadership of Sir Alistair Hardy, F.R.S., and used from 100 to 200 volunteers at a time. Some of the participants (in the open hall) looked at drawings on a blackboard and tried to "transmit" the pictures to others (in separate closed cubicles). On one or two occasions it was found that, whilst none of the "percipients" had got the correct picture, several localised groups had all got the same (incorrect) idea. For example, the picture on the blackboard might have been that of a black cat, but one group of percipients (each segregated in his or her own closed cubicle) all drew a bird in a tree, whilst another isolated group all drew something like waves on the sea.

I do not wish to stress this finding too much, particularly as it is new and has not yet been exhaustively studied, but in conjunction with other evidence it is enough to convince me that mere numbers of witnesses provides no proof of the objective reality of a supposed phenomenon. If the evidence of a group provides evidence for anything at all, it is evidence of a shared mental experience.

It is now necessary to examine some of the ways in which thought can be influenced from external sources without the mediation of the usual sensory channels, and some of the ways in which the function of the sensory channels can be altered so as to change the state of balance between the organism and its environment.

The (mis)interpretation of sensory data

In the early days of psychology it was quite generally thought that the picture which we build up of the outside world was simply a mosaic of sensations, and that a closer study of sensation would eventually lead to a considerable understanding of our mental life. Such a belief is quite untenable today. We now know that, as Kenneth Walker said, further study of the sensory veil which stands between us and reality leads only to a better knowledge of the veil, and not of that which it conceals. We do not merely sense our environment, but we interpret it, and no two of us interpret it in the same way. Moreover, we can sometimes reach the same interpretation from quite different sensory data, as when one man hears a story told over the radio, another reads the same story in a book, whilst a third

(being blind) reads it with his fingers in the Braille version.

Perception is a most complicated process, which involves the fitting together of the mosaic of sensation, comparing the pattern with the immediate past (the same room may seem hot to a man who has just come in from the snow, yet cold to another who has just left a hot bath), weighing it in the light of past experiences, and colouring it with desires, interests and prejudices. Perception, far from being a simple physical interpretation of sensory data, is a complex synthesis from physical, emotional and intellectual factors. To quote again from William James: "Whilst part of what we perceive comes through our senses from the object before us, another part (and it may be the larger part) always comes . . . out of our own head."

One factor which has a large bearing upon perception is our state of arousal, and this in turn is closely linked to the level of stimulation to which we are subjected. It is fairly well known nowadays that sensory deprivation has a powerful disorientating effect and that it seriously interferes with perception, whilst sensory stimulation (within limits) increases both perception and motor performance.

State-of-arousal is a perfectly real physiological factor which can be measured by means of simple electrical apparatus, but it is a factor which is commonly overlooked even in investigations which depend upon it. It is no coincidence that all the most marvellous "psychic phenomena" have been reported from seance rooms which were dimly lit, silent but for faint background music, and in which the observers had been confined for some time, and it is well known too that truck drivers, radar observers, astronomers, and others who sometimes perform routine tasks of extreme monotony are often subject to hallucinations after prolonged spells of concentration. Hallucinations of this type seem to be the organism's attempt to provide itself with sensory stimulus, but the most bizarre and striking hallucinations are usually due to neurological disease.

The famous neurologist, W. Grey Walter, has described the case of a man suffering from a war-time shrapnel wound who had epileptiform seizures which were preceded by visions of an ugly old woman. The witch-like vision was dressed in rags and tatters and emitted an abominable odour. The patient commented that she bore a certain resemblance (in her less unpleasant aspects) to his grandmother. The truly remarkable feature of such hallucinations is that they can easily be induced by electrically stimulating the damaged or diseased part of the brain, and that they cease completely after surgical removal of the affected tissue. Such highly-organised hallucinations are very much rarer than simple sensory effects like nasty smells, blobs of light, strange noises, and various emotional disturbances.

Apart from hallucinations, there are a number of other odd mental states concerning which little is known. Sleep is still something of a mystery, and recent experiments on the transmission of ideas to sleeping people seem to indicate that something like telepathy may operate more readily under these conditions. Sleep-learning is another phenomenon to be borne in mind,