

IS THERE A SIXTH SENSE?

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There are not many hypotheses capable of guiding research into the nature of telepathic and precognitive perceptions.

Charles Richet's concept of the sixth sense or cryptesthesia has become unpopular as a result of objections that have no real basis. The independence of these perceptions from time and space has never been proved. And to say that one sense can't perceive what doesn't yet exist for the others is to forget that all our senses are reciprocally precognitive.

Furthermore the research of Bykov who carried on Pavlov's work on the conditioned reflexes seems to support the theory of a sixth sense. Bykov has proved that there are anatomical structures in the viscera which have a sensitivity comparable to that of the sense organs. He calls these structures interoceptors. Unconscious impulses from these interoceptors can—according to the pattern of the conditioned reflexes—set in motion other organic reactions. The circulatory system participates closely in the work of the interoceptors.

Great possibilities for further study are apparent here. Since the trance state is accompanied by an increase in blood pressure, the question arises whether external factors may not act upon the organism for instance through the blood stream.

An attempt might be made to influence telepathically certain isolated organs, unstable colloids, the encephalographic or electrocardiographic tracings of a percipient, his blood formula or blood chemistry, etc. The problem of "telepathic agreement" must be examined from the same biological viewpoint. A parapsychological study would complete the anthropological, medical and psychological observations of agents

and percipients so that we may compare their organic likenesses with their telepathic agreement.

A reflexological analysis of our data would be most desirable. The inability of the great clairvoyants to see into their own future—in contrast to the perceptions of less gifted individuals which almost always relate to emotional experiences, accidents to relatives, etc.—seems to arise from the paradoxical inversion of reflexologists. That is to say that the stimulation of the nerve cells reaches a limit beyond which excitation produces the opposite effect—inhibition.

Far from contradicting spiritualist concepts, the theory of a sixth sense brings us closer to the doctrines of the Hindus. According to M. Eliade, the Hindus hold that “the states of consciousness are refined forms of the same substance which created the physical and biological world. Between psychic states and inanimate objects or living beings there are only differences of degree. But between psychic states and the spirit there is an ontological difference. They belong to two distinct types of being.”

The influence of a nervous mechanism which curbs or facilitates parapsychological perceptions shows to what an extent our cognitive powers depend on our earlier attitudes. A moral effort can free the scientist from his insensibility or mental confusion and render accessible to him the rational relationships hidden behind an apparent incoherence. To discover the truth, one must open oneself to it. Hence, morality appears as a method of acquiring knowledge.

It would be impossible to overestimate the importance of parapsychological research. The troubles of our times can only be cured when science integrates the sixth sense and its evidence into its view of the world. Only by filling in this tremendous gap will it be able to retrieve its mistakes—mistakes which are different from but symmetrical with those of so-called “primitive” civilizations.