

Perception: Some Western trends
New Research and New Questions
(Some Western Trends)

(Dr. Paul Gregoris)

There is in the west today, particularly among more perceptive scientists themselves, a fresh questioning of the ^{general} validity of ^{the perceptions underlying} scientific truth and of the scope of its method.

Scientism, i.e. the view that the modern scientific method is capable of leading us to all truth, was generally a phenomenon of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, though there are still many scientists who hold that view. Especially with the advent of modern nuclear physics and relativity theory, the absoluteness of scientific knowledge could no longer be ^{held as} a scientific position.

Albert Einstein and Robert Oppenheimer, ^{OPPENHEIMER} two of the outstanding scientists of the previous generation, began developing a philosophy of the two ways of perceiving reality. Oppenheimer, in his book on Science and the Common Understanding developed the thought that our way of thinking is

1. New York, Simon and Schuster, 1954

terms of time and history was one of two alternative efforts of man to perceive the world of reality. The other alternative, ~~was to~~ ~~be~~ called "the way of eternity and timelessness". The one could not be reduced into the other.

"They are, as we have learned to say in physics, complementary views, each complementing the other, neither telling the whole story."²

In other words, Oppenheimer held the view that, just as physicists have today to hold together the corpuscular and undulatory views of light ~~in order to~~ as complementary to each other, the scientific world view has to be held together with what some workers call the mystical world-view, in order to perceive a full picture of reality as it is.

Einstein, though very much a mystic, preferred to speak about the "speculative" grasp of reality which should complement scientific perception, which according to him gives only indirect knowledge of reality.³

This view that ^{modern} science opens up only a partial perception of reality is leading western scientists to a new openness towards Eastern philosophy, especially Hinduism and Buddhism.

² op. cit. p. 69

³ See P.A. Schilpp, Ed. Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist,
N.Y. Harper + Bros. 1959. p. 248.

The literature on perception in the west is overwhelming.

Quantum mechanics, particle physics, relativity theories — these were only part of the challenge to the monarchical authority of the scientific method. The other challenge came from the "drug experience". Huxley started the ball rolling with his Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell. As the rarity of Mexican Peyote ^{PEYOTE} gave way to the laboratory proliferation of LSD, experiments became widespread. ~~and~~ Robert Masters, (greater authority than Timothy O'Leary), came out with his Varieties of Psychedelic Experience⁴, which has become a classic on the subject today.

It was soon discovered that the ^{experience} ~~what was~~ induced by drugs could be induced by pure suggestion, with or without hypnosis. The work of Robert Masters and his wife Dr. Jean Houston has led to some astonishing discoveries about perception. A report on their work appeared in Harper's Magazine in January 1974. I ~~was~~ had a long interview with Dr. Jean Houston, who has very high respect for India. Their technique is

⁴ Masters, R and Houston, J. Varieties of Psychedelic Experience, New York, 1969

To alter our ordinary perception through suggestion. Robert Masters has created a "cradle", following clues from witchcraft, shamanism and possession states. It is a triangular piece of metal on which the subject stands. His back is supported by a ~~stretched~~ canvas ^{stretched between two posts} back-rest, and he is strapped to the cradle by wide bands like seat belts. The whole thing is suspended from the apex of a four-pole pyramid. The platform swings about six inches above the ground. The slightest movement of your body sets the platform twisting and swinging. The subject is ^{totally} blinded by goggles which prevent him from seeing what he is going. In about a quarter of an hour, the subject is in trance - in what Masters and Houston call ASC or Altered State of Consciousness. The suggestions have been administered ~~z~~ before getting into the cradle ~~z~~ by Masters or Houston.

Professor ~~those~~ who had experienced it described it to me. The mind changes. A new world opens up. One can leave one's body behind and travel to distant lands, experience unusual ~~things~~ ^{events}, see colours, hear languages, learn things, go back to childhood experiences and so on. Later Masters and Houston abandoned the cradle and
1 - or no. need to induce

The subjects are usually highly educated people - professors, artists, psychiatrists and so on. They all experience images of various kinds, new learning situations, new heightening of inner perception, new ways in which non-linear and non-verbal thinking can take place with great profit to understanding.

They have published a do-it-yourself volume on Altered States of consciousness techniques called Mind Games⁵. Perception can be altered by group work under a knowledgeable leader.

The same kind of inclusion results from the work of the anthropologist Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda is well-known to the younger generation in the west. The New York Times ~~book~~ review on Castaneda's first book: The Teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui Way of Knowledge⁶, characterised the book itself as "an extraordinary spiritual and psychological document... destined for fame". In this first book, the social scientists' scientific certainty is undermined by exposure to the perception

5 Masters and Houston, Mind Games, New York, Delta, 1972.

6. New York, Ballantine Books, 1969, By 1973 the book had reached its 17th printing.

of a "non-ordinary reality" and also exposure to extreme terror. The whole work of Castaneda can be characterized as field notes of a modern social scientist's wandering back and forth between two realms - ordinary reality and non-ordinary reality. In his second book (A Separate Reality) Castaneda gave further field notes from his apprenticeship to Yaqui ~~the~~ Sorcerer Don Juan, and his further exposures to non-ordinary reality, the encounter with strange beings and giant, moth-shaped 'allies'. The third book, Journey to Ixtlan and the fourth one, Tales of Power have completed the series, which contribute the best scientific documentation of a ~~mass~~ wizard's world of non-ordinary reality.

Castaneda's work and its implications have been widely discussed in scientific journals and periodicals. An article in the Philosophy of Science Magazine by Prof. Lawrence Foss is entitled: "Does Don Juan really fly?"⁸ Prof Foss calls attention to the problematic nature of what we call factual truth, and our ordinary perception, particularly the perception of the intellectual tradition in which western science flourishes.

7 New York, Pocket Books, 1972

Joseph Whitton Pearce in his work entitled The Crack in the Cosmic Egg⁹, based on the work of Castaneda, argues that our scientific Cosmos is only one possible construct, and that other constructs of the Cosmos (such as that of Don Juan) may exist which are just as valid in ~~and fair~~ ^{and} terms of experience. We bring a social consensus to our perception and, strange enough, reality confirms our consensus. As Sir Arthur Eddington once said

"The mind has by its selective power fitted the process of Nature into a frame of law of a pattern largely of its own choosing; and in the discovery of this system of law the mind may be regarded as regaining from Nature that which the mind has put into Nature."¹⁰

This mutually reinforcing set-up between social consensus and perception has thrown the certainty of scientific judgments into serious doubt. Science is today regarded by many as only one among many ways of perceiving reality, and science cannot make sense of all the data

9. New York, Julian Press, 1971.

10. The Nature of the Physical World, New York, Macmillan 1931. p. 467.

that it encounters.

Our present science is a 17th Century European Construct which has been gaining social consensus all over the world. It is efficient in dealing only with a small segment of the spectrum of reality. Robert E. Ornstein of the Institute for the Study of Human Consciousness, the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute, has done considerable work on The Psychology of Consciousness,¹¹ where he develops the old Huxleyan idea that the senses actually produce and select data for perception. The electromagnetic spectrum is enormous - from cosmic rays to radio waves. What is visible to our naked eyes is but a small slit. We can see only waves of between 400 and 700 billionths of a meter in length, whereas the total range is from less than one-billionth of a meter to more than a thousand metres.

Hence Ornstein's Conclusion:

11. The Viking Press, New York, 1972

"Science is one of the most restricted and rare forms of knowledge available to man. Our senses limit, our central nervous system limits, our personal and cultural categories limit, language limits, and beyond all these relections, the rules of science cause us to further select information which we consider to be true. By a slow conservative process of construction science gradually builds a stable core of knowledge..... Most cultures are fundamentally based on this achic, linear mode -- the way of language, science and history. Ours is so thoroughly based on it that many have almost forgotten that other constructions of individual consciousness, other cultural styles, are even possible." ¹²

Till a ~~A~~ few years ago, the data of parapsychology could be ignored by science as irrelevant or uncertain. Today this is no longer possible. The UNESCO has recently devoted one issue of its prestigious periodical 'The Impact of Science on Society' (Octr-Decr 1974)

12. op. cit. p 41.

To a study of the 'Parasciences', another journal published by Stanley Krippner is entitled Psycho-energetic systems¹³, and deals with acupuncture, brain research, bio-electric fields, Kirlian photography, etc., including material from China, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. A new discipline is coming to birth called 'Psychotronics', which is "the inter-disciplinary scientific investigation of the relationships among consciousness, energy and matter". The International Association for Psychotronic Research¹⁴, has already held two international conferences (first in Prague, second in Monte Carlo, June-July 1975).

This new willingness to take the hitherto neglected data of parapsychology has given rise to a whole crop of new books, not all of them of the same ~~to~~ scientific reliability, ~~so~~ but most of them highly suggestive in the way they handle the evidence.¹⁵

13. available from Gordon and Breach Science Publications, one Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016. 4 issues a year. annual subs. \$ 19.50.

14. Address: Box 107, Cotati, Calif 94928, U.S.A

15. For example: John Taylor Superminds: An Enquiry into the Paranormal, New York, The Viking Press
 John Beliff, Ed. New Directions in
Elect Science, 1974
 Lo Science.

Another source of ...

interesting research on meditation techniques that is daily gaining ground in the West. William Johnston's Silent Music, The Science of Meditation¹⁶ and Lawrence Seshan's How to Meditate¹⁷ are good examples. ~~Henry~~ Marilyn Ferguson's The Brain Revolution¹⁸ gives an admirable summary of the new research. Fascinating new data has been unearthed about the hemispheric asymmetry in brain function. It appears that linear, logical, time-sequence thinking is the domain of only one hemisphere in the ~~human brain~~ Cerebral Cortex (left), while the right hemisphere (which controls the left side of our body) operates in a more holistic and non-linear way.¹⁹ Human perception is both rational and trans-rational, and the two ways of dealing with reality, the scientific-technical (left hemisphere) and the poetic-holistic (right hemisphere) are coordinated by the inter-connecting Corpus Callosum.

Experiments show that if Sodium Amytal is injected into the left hemisphere, no analytical conceptualization of the environment is possible, and if injected into the Carotid artery

-
16. Robert E. Ornstein, See also Claudio Naranjo and On The Psychology of Meditation, New York, The Viking Press, 1971.
17. New York, Little Brown, 1975
18. New York, Taplinger, 1974
19. See J-E. Bogen and G.M. Bogen, The Other Side of the Brain III, The Corpus Callosum and Creativity, Bulletin of Neurological Society 34(1969) pp 191-220

The analytic side is released from man. influences and the subject experiences ^{EUPHORIA} euphoria. Perception is thus clearly seen as linked to various centres in the brain; reality changing as the perceiving apparatus changes. And only a part of perception is sensory or rational.

Yet another source from which new material is coming is the renewed interest in the late Dr. Jung's psychological theories. Ina Proff's work on Depth Psychology and Modern Man²⁰, Edward Edinger's Ego and Archetype²¹ and the post-humous publication of Jung's l'homme et ses symboles²², have all revealed a fresh view of the individual ego in relation to the collective, and of time in relation to eternity (the concept of ^{SYNCHRONICITY} synchronicity), which have again put new questions about the validity of our perception of ordinary reality.

There are many other impacts which show how limited is the range and scope of scientific perception ~~is~~. One need only

20.

21. Penguin Books, Baltimore, Maryland, 1973.

22. Edinger is chairman of the New York Institute of the C.G. Jung Foundation

22. Robert Laffont, Paris, 1964. English Title: Man and His Symbols, Aldus Books Ltd. London, 1964.

The interesting research by the Kirilians in the Soviet Union on 'aura photography', a ^{lens-less} process of photographing the electro-magnetic waves around the human body and other bodies,²³ The evidence slowly accumulates to reveal the amazing wealth of forces and fields that contribute to the universe and how man himself functions in relation to these.

We are now ready for a new perception and a new philosophy, perhaps? After all the job of philosophy is to perceive reality and to interpret it. And all our philosophies are social constructs, in dialectical relation to our consensus about perception. Can we now proceed to a new corporate effort which takes into account the perceptual experiences of both East and West?

23 Kirilian photography, sometimes called aura photography, is a lens-less process in which the object is placed ~~on~~ directly on film in a high frequency electrical field. Living organisms (plants and people) produce a glittering multi-coloured field of light in the film-image, something parallel to the 'aura' around the heads of saints in traditional painting.

... .. believe that this field