



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

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Mrs. Laura A. Dale, Editor
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Dear Laura:

The last issue of the Journal was excellent! As a result, I should like to submit the following as a letter-to-the-editor.

Cybernetic Models of Psi

I have followed Dr. Braude's (1979) and Dr. Stanford's (1979) discussion of cybernetic control models of psi with great interest. While I applaud Dr. Stanford's efforts to encourage theorizing outside the cybernetic model, I am in agreement with Dr. Braude in not believing that the evidence is strong for rejection of cybernetic modeling. I would like to broach two other lines of thought as to why there does not seem to be an obvious relationship between apparent complexity of PK task and level of results, one of the most central aspects of Braude's and Stanford's discussion.

While we would certainly expect decrements in performance when the complexity of a PK task begins to reach or exceed the current limits of a person's PK capacity, I would argue that we may not have collected any data about this end of the PK capacity curve at all. In a recently published theory on the nature of the mind-body relationship, Emergent Interactionism (Tart, 1979), I have postulated that mind and body are two qualitatively different kinds of reality, not reducible to each other. Very briefly, psi "within" the organism is the ordinary mode of mind-body interaction, i.e., mind "reads" relevant states of the brain by clairvoyance of neural patterns

and affects brain firing patterns by using PK on semi-stable, quasi-random neural processes. If the normal and habitual mode of PK use, then, is affecting a very complex, interacting, and distributed set of neural processes within the brain, then even our most complex laboratory PK tests to date have been incredibly simple. Thus laboratory PK tests are a distraction from ongoing "normal" PK activity and by virtue of being so simple may be hard to do, rather like asking an exceptionally skilled concert pianist, while he or she is in concert, to see if he can activate a single motor neuron in his hand. It can be done, with biofeedback training techniques, but it is hard to go from what seems to us "easy" and "natural" control over complex, coordinated muscle movements to such an apparently "basic" act.

As Dr. Stanford (1979) recognizes, shifting the source of PK to a mental as opposed to a neurological level does not relieve us of the eventual need to get more specific and devise empirically testable predictions. The only PK-relevant prediction I have made so far from this Emergent Interactionist approach is that more complex, more "brainlike" PK test devices should be easier to influence than simple mechanical devices, but such devices (which would be orders of magnitude more complex than current PK test devices) have yet to be built. I am confident that specificity can be added to this kind of approach as we work on it, but it is not necessary in the very early states of learning about psi.

I would also argue that almost all laboratory PK data can profitably be viewed as samples from the very earliest stages of a potential learning of improved PK performance. The arguments I have made elsewhere (Tart, 1966; 1976; 1977) that ESP should be learnable in talented, motivated percipients under conditions of immediate feedback should also apply to PK. Although fast or immediate feedback has been common in PK studies, it should be noted that the general level of PK brought to the task is generally miniscule.

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If the psi quotient (Timm, 1973) of about 10% that I have estimated as the talent threshold for learning ESP with immediate feedback is extrapolatable to PK learning, then practically all persons ever tested for PK in the laboratory have been well below this threshold and have not, as predicted from the learning theory application, shown any increase in PK performance. If talented PK agents could be given immediate feedback training and learn to use PK adequately, however, we would be in a much better position to discuss the fit of various theories to the data. The general level of PK manifested in laboratory tests to date is usually so small (even if statistically significant) as to hardly be out of the noise range, and so not suitable for model or theory testing. To use the automobile analogy that both Stanford and Braude draw on, I do not believe we have really been testing the ability of the driver to control the car as it moves over the road, and whether or not it fits a cybernetic control model: we have been measuring tiny vibrations in the car body as the electric windshield wipers occasionally move over a dry windshield. Things will be quite different when a talented driver learns how to start the engine and actually drive down the road.

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