

27 January 1964

READING 2

We have had enough *theory* for the moment; there are of course further recent discoveries we shall have to know about, but there are certain experiments we need to make first.

The keynote of the threefold 'alerting system' that we have been discussing, is that there is a part of the mind which is designed for no *specific* function, but only (in the words of its discoverer) for 'waking from sleep or alerting to attention'.

Now with regard to *Attention*; we have often thought that attention can similarly be of two kinds – specific attention (attending to some special sight or sound or thought or action) and general attention (a state of attention not directed towards anything specific, but just to *being aware*); and that the two were different or opposed to one another in some way.

Our experiments during the next week or two need to be devoted to this general state of attention. We want to try to get to it and retain it at any moment when there are no special claims on our attention; and we want to collect the best formulated observations and examples of what happens then, for this book which is to be published. Chiefly we want first to answer the following questions:

1. What actually happens to our attention when we wake up in the morning or suddenly 'come to ourSelves' during the day?
2. Are there any advantages to be derived from moments of this general state of attention, either when we happen to be doing something or not doing anything in particular?
3. If so, what helps to produce it? Can it be prolonged? What puts a stop to it?
4. From those using some technique we want to find out if a special technique is essential in order to get the alerted state of general attention, or whether they feel they could get it equally reliably without.

An example was given you last Monday of certain beneficial effects on one's memory when driving a car along a complicated and once familiar road, and simply trying to keep this general state of attention.

In short, we have to collect any evidence we can to prove or disprove the hypothesis that 'the well-trained machine will throw up what we want, just when we want it without any special effort, if the attention be working naturally and normally'.

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