
Off the Beat

Geller performs for physicists

Some physicists among our readers have criticized us for paying attention to the strange feats of Uri Geller, the young Israeli who can bend keys without touching them (SN: 11/10/73, p. 300). Other physicists, however, are interested and somewhat perplexed as the following report delivered to us by the theoretical physicist Jack Sarfatt indicates.

We present Sarfatt's report in *Off The Beat* rather than in our regular news columns because we are somewhat dubious about its being science news: No one has yet published a testable hypothesis about what is going on.

Before presenting the report we would like to enter the caveat that physicists should be the last people on earth to reject psychokinesis out of hand since they have a name for it, Pauli effect, that refers to one of their most distinguished and colorful colleagues, the late Wolfgang Pauli.

Pauli, who was mercifully a theoretical physicist, was notorious for being able to foul up any experiment in sight by his mere presence in the laboratory. The most outrageous Pauli story we have come across—and we remember reading this in the memoirs of a reputable physicist, but we can't remember whose memoirs—concerns James Franck, who at the time was doing vacuum-physics experiments at the University of Göttingen.

Vacuum experiments in those days were done with complex arrays of glass tubing. One day at about noon, Franck's experiment suddenly blew up or—as the modern jargon would have it—imploded. Franck checked everything out and could not understand why. Some days later he got a letter from a friend in Copenhagen that told him by the way that Pauli had arrived in Copenhagen on the day of the accident. Franck checked out the circumstances of Pauli's trip and discovered that at the exact moment of the disaster Pauli's train was standing in the Göttingen station. Case closed.

The above story may have to be qualified as possibly apocryphal since we do not have sworn affidavits attesting to it. Sarfatt's report on the latest Geller-Prüfung refers to a veritable cloud of witnesses. Here it is:

Uri Geller was tested on June 21, 1974 by John Hasted (professor of experimental physics, Birkbeck College, London) and David Bohm (professor of theoretical physics, Birkbeck

College). Participants and witnesses to the test include the physicists Keith Birkinshaw and Ted Basin and myself. Also present were the writer Arthur Koestler and the psychic researcher Brendan O'Regan. Several experiments were conducted.

In one of them, Geller placed Sarfatt's hand on top of several metallic objects which included a flat circular disk allegedly cut from a single crystal. A piece of plastic separated the palm of Sarfatt's hand from the disk. Geller's hand was in contact with Sarfatt's for approximately two minutes. Upon examination, the circular disk was found to be significantly bent. Detailed studies of the disk are being conducted at the Birkbeck Laboratories. A precise monitoring of the location of the disk during Geller's psychokinetic action could not be made. However, it was absolutely impossible for the disk to have been tampered with by means of tricks while it was under Sarfatt's hand.

Geller also succeeded in triggering a very strong burst from a Geiger counter tube that he held in his hand. The creation of the burst happened almost simultaneously with Geller's expressed intention to create it. The magnitude of the burst was conservatively estimated by Hasted to be in the region of 100 to 150 counts per second which should be compared to a normal background rate of about one per second. Hasted is now carefully studying automatic recordings of this event and several others similar to it. The creation of the burst was correlated with strong breathing and signs of great physical exertion on Geller's part. Geller complained of a sensation similar to an electric shock. There was no possibility of any electric shock coming from the instrumentation.

Geller then succeeded in bending several pieces of metal by psycho-energetic action. These objects included the blade of a knife and a key belonging to Bohm. The flow of water from a tap on to the metal seemed to make the bending occur more easily. The bending times were of the order of several tens of seconds.

Another test of Geller was made on June 22, 1974, at Birkbeck. Geller was able to repeat his performance of the day before with the Geiger counter tube. Witnesses to this test included the American concert pianist, Byron Janis and the artist Maria Cooper Janis. On this occasion, Koestler reported a strong sensation simultaneous with the Geiger tube burst. Koestler was visibly shaken for several minutes. Geller also succeeded in bending the house key of the science fiction writer, Arthur C. Clarke while being continuously watched by Clarke, Koestler, A. V. Cleaver (former director of the Rockets Division, Rolls Royce Ltd.)

and Arthur Ellison (department of electrical engineering, City University of London). Clarke, who was previously skeptical of Geller's authenticity has publicly challenged any magician to "put up or shut up" in regard to duplicating Geller's feat under identical conditions.

Geller also succeeded in duplicating a drawing made by Koestler. Full details on the Birkbeck tests are being prepared for publication by Hasted and Bohm. Independent tests were made by John Taylor (department of mathematics, King's College, London) with Geller during the last week in June. My personal professional judgment as a Ph.D. physicist is that Geller demonstrated genuine psycho-energetic ability at Birkbeck, which is beyond the doubt of any reasonable man, under relatively well controlled and repeatable experimental conditions. While the experimental conditions were not perfect, the events at Birkbeck do represent a major step forward in the new field of experimental psycho-energetics.

—Jack Sarfatt

On the statistics of scientific meetings

In the court of Nero, tradition tells us, there was an official called *arbiter elegantiarum*. The holder of this office was one Petronius, traditionally identified with the author of that polymorphous perverse romp, *Satyricon*, which Federico Fellini recently made into a revoltingly fascinating film. The function of the said Petronius at court was to be a kind of Emily Post at the orgy, determining who reclined where and who took precedence over whom in the games and sports that were indulged in.

I propose that what the scientific world now needs is a kind of *arbiter scientiarum*, an officer whose function it would be to review the precedences of scientific meetings and avoid conflicts. Perhaps the International Council of Scientific Unions would be a proper body to set up such an office.

The thought comes up because of a recent week, that of June 10, during which I could have attended three separate meetings for enlightenment and profit. To review them, they were: a conference on experimental general relativity in Cambridge, Mass., a meeting on submillimeter radio astronomy in Bishop, Calif., and a meeting on quantum electronics in San Francisco.

The choice finally went to the quantum electronics meeting. Cambridge was early out because it was clear for other reasons that I would have to be in California at the time. It would be disingenuous to pretend that the venue of the quantum electronics meeting in my favorite city of all North America,