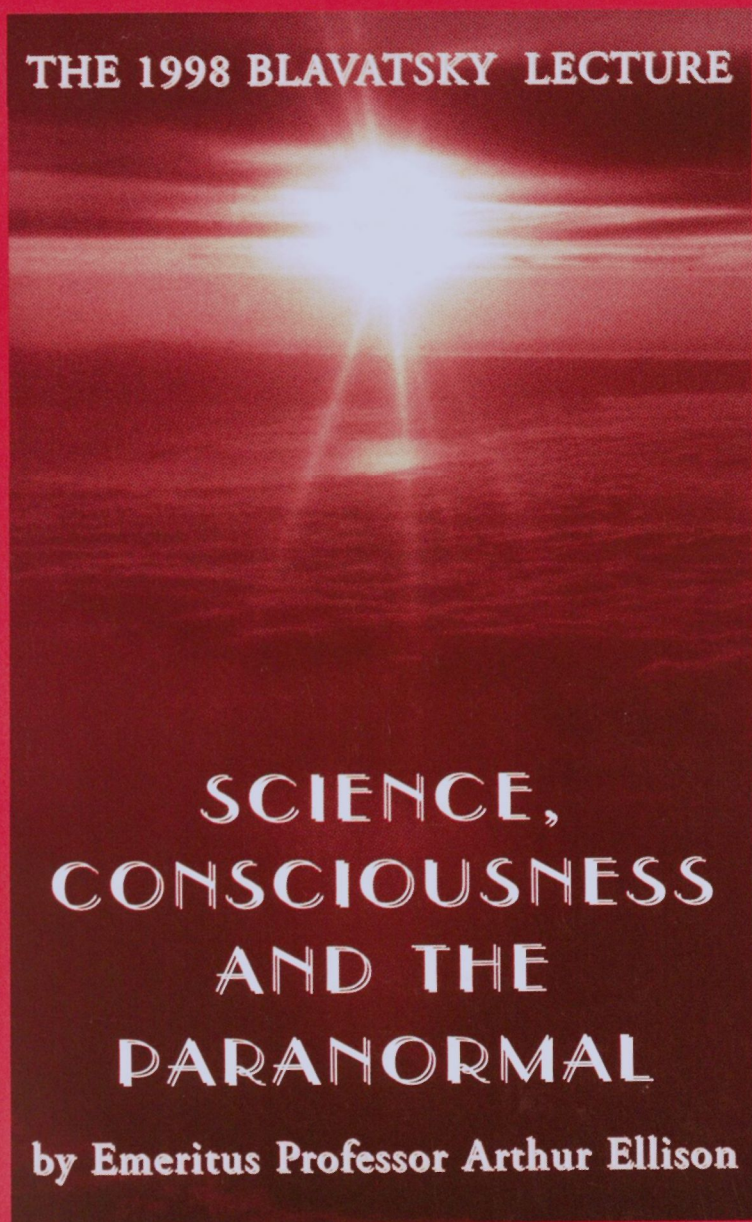


**THE 1998 BLAVATSKY LECTURE**



**SCIENCE,  
CONSCIOUSNESS  
AND THE  
PARANORMAL**

**by Emeritus Professor Arthur Ellison**

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# SCIENCE, CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE PARANORMAL

by Emeritus Professor **Arthur Ellison**

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In this lecture, Emeritus Professor Ellison will discuss his approach to the Theosophical descriptive model of the universe at all its levels and consider the way, it seems to him, members were evidently intended to approach this model as indicated by the Three Objects.

He will consider and briefly review the work of the Science Group, some of which was reviewed in the book *Psychism and the Unconscious Mind*, and possible lessons to be drawn from the Group's subsequent demise.

He will then briefly consider the activities of other bodies who have taken up the pioneering research on Third Object matters dropped by the Science Group.



## INTRODUCTION

*May I first thank the Executive Committee of the Theosophical Society in England for giving me the privilege of delivering the Blavatsky Lecture of 1998. I shall do my best to justify their confidence in me. Having read many of the others I think that this is going to be a rather unusual Blavatsky Lecture. May I start off by telling you why - and warn you that I may be ruffling a few feathers! I ask your forgiveness right away! Any views that may at first sight appear controversial I am sure that you will accept in the light of our first Object and that warm regard we all have for each other and each other's opinions in the TS. This lecture will also give me a splendid opportunity to express the enormous respect and admiration I feel for HPB.*

*I do not propose to fill this lecture with references (few of which would be looked up by the readers) but to give mainly my own ideas and experiences, some of which I have expressed in earlier lectures. A book at present being written will give much more detail and elaboration.*

## PART I

First, may I say this. I am not a 'deep student' of Blavatsky as I suppose all Blavatsky Lecturers have been and I must explain what I mean by this. I have long known that I seem to be congenitally incapable of taking anyone's word for anything really important. In other words I am basically a man of science and not of faith. If I read something and cannot understand it then I put it on a mental shelf and await further information, or I actively seek that information. Now HPB's writings - and I am sure you all know this as well as I do - are not something that one can read and understand right away. I am not willing - and never have been - to 'study' them in the sense of trying to understand something that I already believe.



H. P. Blavatsky



Annie Besant

May I quote HPB's most distinguished student Annie Besant (AB), in view of the fact that in this lecture I shall be dealing with what she calls 'super-physical researches'. *"When we are dealing with investigations into other worlds, into the past of our globe, into the various evolutions, ... into races and subraces; ... the story of the past ... we are not in the region of revelation, we are in the region of research; exactly the same canons that we apply to research of the ordinary scientific kind apply to this research, exactly the same caution in accepting results, exactly the same readiness to repeat experiments that have been made, to revise opinions, to recast conclusions that may have been arrived at on insufficient data ..."* And she goes on: *"... to proclaim one person as an infallible authority on a subject unknown to the proclaimer, is to show fanaticism rather than reason."* Finally: *"The Theosophical Society cannot be injured by any researches carried on by its members; its Third Object justifies them in their work. But it may be injured by the blind zeal of those who pin their faith to any one investigator, and denounce all the rest."*

Now I must say a little about my own Theosophical history and I hope that you will then feel able to understand why I shall be saying the things that I have planned. 'To walk the Path first know the ground on which you stand.' (It is a good exercise for us all occasionally to consider what is **our** present understanding of ourselves and the universe. Each of us must find **our own way**. My way is certainly through good open-minded science - not, I emphasise, 'normal science'. This will become clearer later.)



**Prof. Eddington**

I grew up in a home where my father was a member of the Society and my favourite reading, besides the popular science of Jeans (an astronomer) and Eddington (a physicist), was Theosophical books. My father used to take me and my sister regularly to the Sunday public Theosophical lectures of the Annie Besant Lodge in Birmingham and my sister and I attended for a long time the Friday evening classes of Mrs Winifred Micklam. She was a great inspiration to us both. The Sunday lectures I remember included such speakers as Mr Hawliczek and Colonel Chodkiewicz, besides more English-sounding members like C. R. ('Dickie') and Doris Groves, Sidney and Josephine Ransom, Clara Codd, Lavender Berry, Wallace and Doris Slater, Ianthe Hoskins (happily still with us) and many others, several of them also still with us.



**Ianthe Hoskins**

I mention all this because I go back a long way in the Theosophical Society (something like 70 years, with about 60 years of actual membership) and I have experienced and thought deeply about many events, disturbing and otherwise, which occurred within it. Clear memories arise within my mind of a number of things which greatly shook the Society. The events when Krishnamurti rejected the role thrust upon him by Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater occurred a little before I was a critical thinker, but I do remember very well when Mr Gardner suggested that the two Mahatmas, reported to be behind the formation of the Society, did not

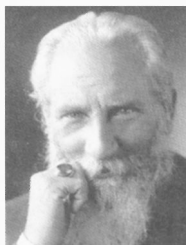
in fact ride white horses in a valley in Tibet or eat oat cakes, like the TS literature (Annie Besant, C. W. Leadbeater) described. Older members will perhaps remember that AB and CWL described how they went each night into the astral plane to receive teachings and took with them the young Krishnamurti. (That little gem of a book, *At the Feet of the Master*, which I used to carry about with me as a boy and a young man until it literally fell apart with age and use, that book was said to be the teachings received by the young Krishnamurti while literally sitting at the Master's feet in that valley in Tibet.)



**J. Krishnamurti**

E. L. Gardner explained this (and I remember well his doing so) as the operation of what HPB had called 'unconscious kriyashakti' or, in more modern terminology, the dramatizing powers of the unconscious mind. He was not exactly considering it meaningless fantasy - it was clearly not that - but not at all to be interpreted in the rather literal way that AB and CWL appeared to think was the truth. Shall I ever forget the fuss that took place in our beloved TS as a result of that! This illustrated well to me how some members idolised particular TS Leaders and believed literally every word they said - and what a shock it was to them when a prominent member doubted. (You are perhaps going to hear some comparable shocking doubts in the next few minutes, I fear. Having **beliefs** is, I consider,

not how HPB wanted us to behave in her Theosophical Society. And this is clearly what she taught AB, who conveyed it so clearly to us.)



C. W. Leadbeater

I remember a book I read avidly as a young man called *Invisible Helpers* by CWL. He described how he and AB used to travel around the world in their astral bodies while their physical bodies were sleeping. They went to people, they said, who were in need of help and gave them the help they needed. How were we to understand that? It clearly means that it is possible to see the physical world from the astral world and take action which is helpful. Is it possible to do that? I shall be saying a little more about that later and mention experiments to find out

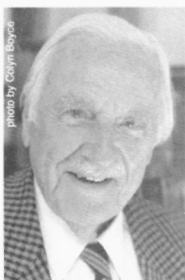
whether it can be true.

One answer to this question is implicit in the representation of a human being which I read in many Theosophical books in my early days. Jinarajadasa wrote a book on Theosophical principles called appropriately *First Principles of Theosophy*. He set out in that book, amongst other things, what I usually call the Theosophical layer-cake model of the 'planes of nature' and the different bodies of human beings with which we can make contact with those planes. His terminology was after AB and CWL and in some respects a little different from that of *The Secret Doctrine*. For example, the words etheric and astral became interchanged. Our distinguished fellow member Geoffrey Farthing has pointed this out clearly. To some extent the scheme appears to be based on the Vedanta teachings of a sector of Hinduism.



C. Jinarajadasa

Other smaller books I read at that time, called Theosophical Manuals, had such titles as *The Seven Principles of Man*, *Man and His Bodies*, *The Astral Plane*, *The Devachanic Plane*, *Death and After*, *Karma*, *Reincarnation*, variously by AB and CWL. And I well remember Colonel Powell's books - about the so-called etheric including, I think, vampires and werewolves! How exciting this all was. But was it true? I shall also refer to this later.



Geoffrey Farthing

Geoffrey Farthing pointed out that we were reading too much the AB/CWL and other literature and perhaps neglecting HPB. That was certainly true and we can only support him in it. However, knowing how difficult HPB is to understand - and I think particularly of *The Secret Doctrine* - AB, with CWL, surely were endeavouring to make it simpler for us and we can appreciate what they were trying to do. And we must remember always that the material they gave us (including that from HPB, of course) is to be investigated (where possible) **rather than** to be blindly believed, and not quoted in lectures to the public or to other societies as the 'truth'. HPB would not be smiling kindly on us if we ever did that.



**Phoebe Bendit**

avidly.

The slightly later generation of Theosophists did not produce nearly so many books. One I remember studying in detail was *Man Incarnate* by the Bendits. This dealt with 'etheric vision' and medical diagnosis based on it and illustrated well to me a number of worries I had about 'clairvoyance'. I shall mention later work we did in the Science Group of the Theosophical Research Centre showing most of this book to be fundamentally in error. (Perhaps we should be putting warning slips inside some of our older books!) However, I read them all

When I was about 21 years old I could 'explain' (to my shame now) all the seven planes of nature, with their subplanes, and all the seven bodies of man with which we made contact with those planes, and how we evolved both physically and, more importantly, spiritually. I could explain the various races of man and the purpose of each. I could explain how the 'Life Wave' went around the various planets of the system and I could even make diagrams illustrating all this. (I used to give lectures about it, usually forgetting, like many others of us, to say that it was all a hypothesis of pioneer investigators and needed scientific checking or modifying - and the TS Objects were designed to tell us to do that. I have long ago thrown away those lecture notes!) I was enormously inspired by such books as *Light on the Path*, *In the Outer Court* and, a little later, by the books of that brilliant psychic Geoffrey Hodson. (I shall have more to say about him a little later too.)



**Geoffrey Hodson**

This almost completes my introduction and I ask your forgiveness for making it a personal history. However, my personal history must have been multiplied many times in the lives of other members of the Society. By this time I was in my early 30s and I met a young musician and singer, who became my first wife. After a couple of years or so we had bought a plot of land and built a house on it. Our first child was on the way. Some of the older members may well remember my first wife: she gave Theosophical lectures in several Lodges and we visited Camberley together.

At that time I took a very important step in my Theosophical life when I resolved that I now knew enough about life and its purposes and should act. So I decided to take it all very much more seriously and really try to 'live the life'. Six months or so later my young wife suddenly died. All that I had read about certain spiritual decisions speeding up karma came back to me together with all the rest of the teachings I had been reading for so many years. (I suppose that sort of thing too is not uncommon amongst Theosophists.) I deeply wondered whether those 'teachings' were really true or not! This is a quite usual result of the sort of trauma through which I was going at that time.

My wife's father, in the latter half of a successful career, was absolutely devastated by her death and quite unable to continue his life. I was at my wits end to help him, which I thought I surely should be able to do from my vast knowledge of life and its purposes and arrangements! He found his local Vicar's promises of light perpetual shining on her helped him not at all. (I remembered the story of the man who asked for bread and got handed a stone - in this case by his local vicar.) He seemed to me (like so many of us in this science-based culture) to need some **evidence** that she continued in a life beyond death. I wondered whether Spiritualism in its aspect of mediumistic communication had anything worthwhile to offer. Would she be able to reassure him that she still existed? I had vague memories of HPB's 'astral shells' explanation of a Spiritualist séance.



Gautama Buddha

The Buddha and one of the Theosophical Masters said that we were not to believe something because it was written in some book that men considered sacred, nor indeed presumably in any other book. So it seemed to me right to find a good medium and try a séance. (Such things are forbidden in the Esoteric Section) This was to be a piece of open-minded scientific research and of course psychical research is an important part of the Third Object of the Theosophical Society. To my delight my wife came through 'like a bomb', as the saying goes, enormously glad to be able to reassure us all that she was in good shape and happy. She referred to many things related to her interests and there seemed to me little doubt that it was indeed she. The script - received by automatic writing - gave her relative exactly what he needed to continue his life. He never needed another communication from her.

I continued this Third Object research myself and the second time for some reason it was very different. The automatic writing seemed as though it was an imperfect recording based on the previous one. All the life and sparkle seemed to have left it. What a lot I learned from all this!

So we come to my 'second incarnation'. At that time it was suggested to me that I might like to consider leaving industry where I worked and take up an academic career. After considerable thought I agreed and moved to London and started my 'second incarnation' in this body that I still have. I had been doing a great deal of thinking as a result of all that had happened to me. I realised a number of important things that I had not earlier appreciated about the Theosophical Society, about AB, CWL and others, but especially about HPB.

The first thing I realised was that the Society has **three** Objects and the Second and Third involved open-minded critical research. HPB had not intended us to read all those books I had been reading in such an uncritical way. She had put forward hypotheses (the so-called 'teachings') for our careful critical evaluation and consideration and I had not been doing that. And her leading and most famous pupil, Annie Besant, while doing her best to help us with that research, had

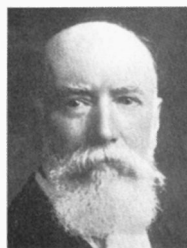


explained in one of her books and elsewhere (as I quoted earlier) that the research she and Leadbeater had been doing and the contributions they had made, were not to be accepted by us in the uncritical way I had been accepting them all those years. She said that it was the task of us later workers to discover the errors of the earlier workers and put them right, and so build firm foundations for the Temple of Truth which in due course we should hopefully erect.

May I say again how sadly wrong I had been all those years in reading **and believing** those many books. I began to realise so clearly that my own errors were many times multiplied by others whom I had admired. I realised that many of those learned lectures from so many platforms that I had heard with admiration had merely been copied from books - especially from HPB's own books. This is not what we are supposed to do! This is surely not what HPB wished us to do when **all three** Objects were written.

'Studying Theosophy', then, does not mean reading all those books written by the earlier Founders and Leaders, trying to understand them, and uncritically believing everything in them. I have lost count of the number of 'study courses' in Theosophy in which, sadly, that is exactly what is done. A Theosophical study course **must** involve critically reading **other** books written by thinkers and investigators outside the Society, and comparing and contrasting the different points of view. In these ways we shall come to our own views which may well be different and certainly better for us than the views of earlier members written in a very different world many years ago. 'Comparative religion, philosophy and science' could hardly be clearer. This is surely what HPB wanted us to do. She herself was the first to speak of her own shortcomings and wanted us to go on from where she had had to leave off. She had 'lifted only a corner of the veil'.

And what of the Third Object, the modern term for which is psychical research or (as the Americans call it these days) parapsychology? (Perhaps the Third Object also includes 'spiritual research' which probably includes meditation, which I have practised for many years. However, I propose to confine myself here to what I know best - psychical research.) There are excellent books summarising all that we have learned over the years since our Society was founded. Yet many members appear to have opinions based on quite outdated views. For example, let us consider hypnosis and mediumship. We have learned a great deal since HPB's day. She would be the very last person to suggest that we should read what she wrote about these matters and believe it literally and uncritically. She herself said that there were many errors in *Isis Unveiled*; exactly the same applies to *The Secret Doctrine* and we shall look at some of these a little later. And while we are mentioning errors, exactly the same most certainly applies to *The Mahatma Letters*. We in the Theosophical Society were not to be a group of religious believers but critical modern thinkers.



**A. P. Sinnett**  
recipient of the  
Mahatma Letters

Let us consider some examples. First, hypnosis is quite different from mesmerism. Also, there is no question of a hypnotist dominating with his will power a subject for hypnosis. Will power is not involved at all. The subject hypnotises themselves and the hypnotist merely tells them what to do with their mind. Hypnosis has enormous therapeutic potential, as anyone who has studied and practised it knows. Many of us need to update our views on hypnosis. Of course one should not co-operate with a hypnotist who is not a person of integrity who knows the subject of hypnosis well - but there is no loss of will power. The easiest subjects to hypnotise are those who have trained minds, because they are able to do what the hypnotist suggests.

And mediumship? HPB suggested that if we tried to communicate with the departed we should merely be talking to 'astral shells'. Of course this is usually true, just as a 'physical shell' is what is at this moment communicating with you. The only way to find out what is the real truth about mediumship is to **practise the Third Object**, have a few sittings with a few mediums and see what **you** think. Then discuss it with fellow members who are doing the same. And **critically** read books about mediumship and psychical research. When did a Lodge last have a discussion meeting in which members discussed critically recent sittings they had had with mediums? This is our Third Object! You cannot learn about such things by reading someone else's writings. HPB did not wish us to do that. She surely did not wish us to read what she wrote over a century ago and behave as though nothing has been discovered since.



**Professor Crooke's Test to show that the spirit and the medium were separate entities.**

In this picture, Crookes is looking at Katie King with a phosphorus lamp while the medium, Florence Cook, is in trance.

*from a drawing by S. Drigin*

I have myself spent many years carrying out research into these various areas of the paranormal and what I have learned is poles apart from what I read in all those books I studied so uncritically in my 'last incarnation'! How many of our members are members of the Society for Psychical Research or of the Scientific and Medical Network or of the Society for Scientific Exploration, and attend some of their lectures and conferences and read their literature to get a different point of view? Some of us are - but surely not nearly enough.

## PART II

### The Theosophical Research Centre and the Science Group

Now I would like to consider another aspect of the activities in our Society - HPB's Society - which were carried on some years ago. There are severe lessons for us all to be learned here. I would like to discuss the Theosophical Research Centre and especially the Science Group.

When I came to London to work in 1958 and started the 'academic' half of my life I rapidly became involved with our London Headquarters' activities and also with the activities of the Society for Psychical Research, of which I had also long been a member. The Science Group of the Theosophical Research Centre met on Saturday afternoon once a month and I joined that group, which was chaired by Dr Lester Smith, FRS (our former most distinguished Theosophical scientist). The Science Group started following an earlier informal group first meeting in about 1927, well before the TRC started. Its Journal - the *Science Group Journal* - came into existence at the end of 1957 as a result of the enthusiasm of Neville Reed, to whose dedicated work I would now like to pay tribute. The Committee of the Group was also the Editorial Board who provided two referees for each offered paper. Neville Reed typed and duplicated all the copies of the Journal himself as a labour of love. (The *Science Group Journal* title was changed to the *Research Centre Journal* in the early 1970s and became *Theosophy/Science* about 1977 and eventually, when it was taken over by the American Section in the mid-1980s, *The Theosophical Research Journal*.)



Lester Smith

photo by Colin Boyce

The leading members of the Science Group took very seriously the views I have enunciated earlier: that we were not to believe anything because it was written in some book or because it was stated by some authoritative figure. They took very seriously all three Objects and conducted research, studying the work of others outside the Society to make the comparative study which our Founders wished us to undertake. They read the Society for Psychical Research literature and the publications of anyone interested in the sorts of topic in which we were interested in the TS. And in the monthly Saturday afternoon meetings all the findings were critically discussed. We had resolved, under Lester Smith's guidance to continue, so far as we were able, to produce *TRC Transactions* based on our deliberations. We ran also the *Science Group Journal*, which was used as a working document for the circulation of our ideas and tentative views before they became crystallised and in a form suitable for a Transaction. An editor was chosen for each topic we selected; it was the job of the editor to keep notes of the discussions and to write them up in

due course for later critical deliberation and to form the basis of the publication. We produced several books in this way. I shall never forget the joy and enthusiasm of those days and the excitement of making new discoveries, especially the work we did with volunteers who allowed us to study their psychic faculties. What a lot we all learned! I imagined HPB's joy, wherever she was, looking down metaphorically at her Society pursuing **all three** Objects and learning so much from that, just as, I feel sure, she intended us to do.

In those days we had enthusiastic Theosophical members all over the world interested in what we were doing in the Science Group in London. We also had enthusiastic support from so many people having psychic gifts when we wished to study them scientifically to find out whether our traditional views were right or wrong. I myself took a particular interest in the faculties of psychics and what is now called altered states of consciousness (ASCs) and I found a ready willingness



**Hugh Murdoch**

to carry out searching experiments with me on the part of the psychics and healers at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain. Some very valuable work was done (and of course published) with their help. I spent a whole year of Saturday afternoons observing what occurred as mediums were 'trained'. We learned a great deal too from investigations carried out in South Africa and in Australia by our most gifted TS psychic of the time, Geoffrey Hodson, ably assisted by Dr D. D. Lyness and by Dr Hugh Murdoch, happily also still with us.

Sadly the best known Theosophical psychic in the London area refused to give us any assistance. She said that she found the noise and bustle of London too inhibiting - so we offered to go out to her in the country. She then said that she could not work with us scientific TS members, whom she described as a group of 'sceptical scientists'. So by a great and ingenious effort we devised an automatic apparatus so that she could carry out the experiments without our presence or knowledge and the apparatus would keep a record of the results. She then said that she simply would not work with us. You must decide for yourselves why that was.

One of the most important and significant projects of those valuable years related to what we called the 'discrepancies' between statements to be found in our older Theosophical publications and the findings of the science of the time. May I give you a few examples. I shall then go on to consider the effects of a proposed deeper study of these 'discrepancies' on some of the older and leading members of our Society in the UK at the time and what occurred subsequently, which has had those far-reaching effects on the Society, reverberating over the years since. This whole business reminded me, as I said, of the disturbance that occurred following the E. L. Gardner revelations and, earlier, the Krishnamurti fuss.

If anyone would like to read in detail an analysis of many 'discrepancies' and the philosophy of the Science Group regarding them, material will be found in

*The Science Group Journal* dated Oct.-Nov. 1960 and in many others. The boxes containing the SGJs are in the library at Gloucester Place. (Perhaps some of that material should be reprinted.)

May I quote two paragraphs from an article of 1960. “The Theosophical Society the world over finds itself today in difficulty, with a declining membership and no clear sense of the way ahead. Perhaps we are out of tune with the times. This may be because we have not pursued all three Objects with sufficient energy and enthusiasm. We have perhaps tended to put forward too dogmatically the early presentation of the Theosophical theory. We have tended to ‘teach’ the theory, to ‘explain’ the planes and man’s functioning on them, almost as though we really **knew** it to be the truth. We have tended to quote those we assume (by faith) to know, against all the precepts given to us by our founders and leaders. Few Lodges these days are trying to become familiar with the views of modern philosophers and scientists. Yet this is surely our duty as serious Theosophists accepting the second Object.

“An attitude towards the third Object has arisen over the years almost completely inhibiting the pursuit of the work there described. It is of course necessary to have a positive objective approach, before work in the séance room, or with the radionic box (to quote only two examples) is useful. Encouragement to suitably qualified members to engage in these activities (particularly in regard to ‘mediumship’) has not been conspicuous. Yet the knowledge gained through such work (much of it carried out by others) is of vital importance to our Society, as will be seen later.” (That completes the quotation.)



**Stephen Phillips**

Now let us look at one or two of those ‘discrepancies’. Geoffrey Hodson, working with Dr Lyness, looked at *Occult Chemistry* in the light of modern knowledge. Lester Smith, Wallace Slater, Corona Trew with Dr Margadant and his colleagues were also involved. They had difficulty in finding any meeting points between the occult reports and modern findings. Discrepancies are listed. (Dr Stephen Phillips



**Corona Trew**

has done much more recent and valuable enlightening work on these matters.)

A second example: CWL in *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry* and in other places gives the date of the first dynasty in Egypt as 5000 BC. Radio carbon dating was later available and showed clearly that the date was about 3000 BC. Again, in *The Inner Life* CWL gives many details of human life on Mercury. Modern scientific knowledge of Mercury showed that that could not possibly be true. AB also said, in connection with clairvoyant research including her work with CWL: “We are not dealing with theories but with records of observations, or flights of fancy,

or a mixture of the two.” This is a very significant and scientific statement and emphasises the problem faced in assessing the results of research into what we today call altered states of consciousness.

It was pointed out to us that the occult reports often corroborated the speculations of the leading scientists of the time (especially if they belonged to the Society) and when they are later shown to be false the occultists who confirmed them are left in a difficult position. I think particularly here of CWL and Sir William Crookes joining the Society at the same ceremony. HPB placed considerable emphasis on the speculations of these leading scientists. Both AB and CWL received occult instruction from HPB.



Sir Wm Crookes

We considered whether auto-suggestion might be a possible factor. However, we kept in mind that new scientific work might vindicate the occult version.

A final example or two: In AB's *The Pedigree of Man* and also in *The Secret Doctrine* the 'imperishable sacred land', the 'North Polar Continent', was described. This was 'the first continent which came into existence and capped the whole North Pole like one unbroken crust, and remains so to this day'. At that time the American nuclear submarine *Nautilus* was actually sailing under the polar ice cap.

There are many such discrepancies in *The Mahatma Letters* and *The Secret Doctrine*. If the Letters are taken as a substantially correct recording of their views, the Adepts do not appear to appreciate that science progresses by the negation of earlier theories. They often supported earlier views long since known to be mistaken by later generations of scientists. Dr Tudor Edmunds gave two examples: the theory of phlogiston and the astronomical theory placing the earth in the middle of the universe with all the stars revolving around it. Both these theories were at one time believed by scientists and are supported in the Letters. A quotation from *The Mahatma Letters*: 'We believe in that much laughed at phlogiston.' (You will remember that phlogiston was supposed to be given out in the process of combustion. We now know that actually oxygen is taken in during that process. Of course it was 'much laughed at'.) And 'The relative distance between planets remaining ever the same.' And a final quotation: 'Jupiter and some other planets whose little luminous points hide now from our sight millions of stars.' These statements are obviously ridiculous to us but they were not to earlier scientists and one is forced to give serious consideration to the possibility that they represent a correct account of the ancient teachings on these subjects.

If you would like to read more detail of these discrepancies and a great many more of them you will find them in the SGJ to which I referred. There are also data in other issues of that Journal.



These discrepancies between scientific views of the time (many of them certainly correct) and views expressed in our 'classical' literature such as *The Secret Doctrine* and *The Mahatma Letters*, were causing a great many ruffled feathers in some older and senior members who, despite the three Objects and the warnings of our early Leaders which I have already quoted, and perhaps because of their continuous quoting of these and other old books as though they were sacred and infallible texts, decided that they must act. The first thing they did was to say that every discrepancy was evidently to be taken symbolically. This was clearly not the case - in my view and the views of most of the other scientists in the Science Group. However, they said that what we had been doing was all very 'negative and unconstructive' and voted to discontinue having a Discrepancies Sub-Committee. So that work ceased.

I remember so clearly at the time finding that quite unbelievable and indeed almost fantastic in view of our Objects - but it happened just as I have said. Neville Reed - a good and enthusiastic Theosophist if I ever met one - resigned from the Science Group and the Society. Many members all over the world must have been shocked and disappointed. (I have no way of finding out how many other resignations there were.) Perhaps the impact was not quite so powerful as that resulting from the Krishnamurti withdrawal or the E. L. Gardner opinion but it was something I have never forgotten, together with the shock that I suffered. I could see so clearly that open-minded study of our theories, correcting them and updating them as we learned more (in accordance with our Objects), would have led to many scientists and many other thoughtful people joining the Society as a forward-looking open-minded set of people having modern scientific views and a spiritual background. However, that was not to be. We were led in another direction.

Sadly we now very understandably no longer have a Science Group of well-qualified scientists in the TRC and the number of scientists left in the Society (or who join it) can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Their natural home became the Scientific and Medical Network, which started 25 years ago and is doing very well what some of us wanted the TS to do - emphasising both good open-minded progressive science and also the spiritual life - and is growing at a very rapid rate. (It is already very much bigger than the TS in England.) In the Network every member is entitled to ask for the **evidence** of the truth of any statement anyone makes - always in a spirit of kindness, tolerance and open-mindedness (in other words, in the spirit of the TS First Object). Vigorous and open-minded objective and thoroughly scientific discussions are proceeding in that spirit, some of them on the Internet - many of them concerning 'occult' statements to be found first in our TS literature (as I often point out). HPB, after all, was the pioneer who **started** all this in the West.

That was one of the saddest events that happened to me in my long membership of the Society. A second was when, after serving on the Executive Committee for many years I finally realised that my views - along these lines -

would probably continue, so far as I could see, to put me in a minority of one. So I resigned from the Executive and devoted much of my effort to the Network and the SPR.

What I wanted to do in the last part of this lecture was to summarise some of what I have learned about human consciousness over my years of study of psychological research and philosophy on the basis of that initial Theosophical background I described earlier. We shall see - especially those of you who know *The Secret Doctrine* much better than I do - that HPB had plenty of enlightening spiritual and other material of enormous value in her magnum opus. We might be able to sort it out, correct the errors in the light of later discoveries, and perhaps one day fully understand it by following **all three Objects**, as I suggested earlier.

I hope that we produce no more books about science with the aim of showing that science is now 'vindicating Theosophy'. Surely Theosophy is a living growing thing and a matter of opinion anyhow. It has not been written down once and for all, and our job is not to 'teach' it. And the work of Theosophical scientists is not one of vindication but of correction and updating. We should be adding to it and putting right the errors, as HPB intended by giving us all three Objects. If we do this well then hopefully scientists and many others will join us again. But this uphill task will be much harder than it would have been all those years ago.

## PART III

### The importance of practical research into the Third Object and altered states of consciousness

As I suggested earlier, I consider that HPB gave us the Third Object for good and important reasons and we should, all of us in the Society, try to acquire some understanding of it and especially try to experience first-hand some 'altered states of consciousness' (ASCs). This can teach us an enormous amount - far more than we would get by only reading about it. I have often heard that the Third Object is for study only by those with a specialised interest and/or scientific training. I do not at all agree. I shall give my reasons in this section of the lecture.

First, may I say this. The TS started in New York (suggested, I think, by Col. Olcott) as a body to study 'magic' practically, with especial emphasis on learning the 'projection of the double' or, as we should say today, the out-of-body experience. New members expected to be taught to do this and HPB and Olcott intimated that occult instruction would be forthcoming by adepts. HPB got approval from 'higher up'. It was only several years later, on transfer of the headquarters to India, that it was considered that Westerners were not suitable for practical occult instruction for various reasons and the first Object was devised and emphasised. HPB was considered by those 'higher up' to have been a little hasty but they regretted perhaps having encouraged her. The Objects were then much more like we have them today. Needless to say, members left the Society in droves and many joined other bodies which did claim to offer 'occult instruction'.



**Henry S. Olcott**  
co-founder of The  
Theosophical Society

Now may I summarise what I have myself learned through following the Third Object. The first fact I learned was this. I had long believed, because it was described in some of those Theosophical books I listed a little earlier, that the astral body and indeed all the subtle bodies, interpenetrated the physical body and projected into the space around. These formed the so-called aura. (That no doubt would have been part of the promised occult instruction!) This is manifestly untrue yet it is 'taught' widely, not only within the Society by those who do not read SPR literature or the old SGJs and TRC Transactions, but also outside it, by those who have read our older Theosophical books (not the Transactions). There is, in fact, more than one 'space' and the subtler bodies appear to be in **different** spaces. (Similarly, the physical world and the 'dream world' are in different spaces and do not 'interpenetrate' each other.) When a psychic is functioning at two levels of consciousness at the same time then their two visions appear to be superimposed and the personal unconscious mind puts the physical and astral bodies (if that is what they are

perceiving) to their vision on the same centre line because they belong to the same person. 'Feeling subtle material' with the hands or 'seeing' it in a dim light with the eyes or detecting it with a pendulum (all described in our early books) are all examples of pseudo science. These illusions and the optical illusions obtainable by using the so-called Kilner screens and goggles were sorted out by experiment, explained and published in the days of the Science Group. (If and when we reprint our older books we really should insert correction slips informing the readers of these errors and giving references to the evidence for their truth. These older books have been copied and reproduced (and lectured about) with all their errors by generations of later writers.)

A second fact I learned concerns the out-of-body experience (OBE). If the 'facts' I had earlier read had been true an experience of the OBE state would have proved human survival of bodily death. My experience involved 'seeing' the physical world (or what looked like the physical world) from 'another body' - presumably the 'astral body'. But I rapidly learned that there are sometimes subtle, sometimes symbolic, changes to this apparently solid objective physical world. In any case, I reasoned, can one truly see the physical world without one's physical senses? This gave me an important philosophical clue regarding epistemology (theory of knowledge) which I shall mention later. Then regarding the OBE part at the beginning of the near-death experience (NDE), now experienced by many millions of people, Michael Sabom, a cardiologist, discovered by comparing what was described as seen and heard by the experiencers during their OBE with their medical records, that it was accurate. Yet their five senses were closed in clinical death. What are we to make of this?

I have found many times in séances that even though the ostensible communicators speak as though they can see us and know what we are doing they are obviously unaware, for various reasons. They are never able to tell me a random number which I would write for them to read to me in the dark of the room. (So telepathy from me to them is not usually functioning either.) With this experience I wondered how Leadbeater had been able to perceive the people he and Annie Besant claimed to help in *Invisible Helpers*. Perhaps this is another example of unconscious kriyashakti or dreaming fantasy? How can we tell? The answer is surely to do some appropriate experiments and find out. So I propose now to describe experiments I have done and am doing into altered states of consciousness. By pursuing the Third Object in this way we shall be sure, whatever the result, to learn a great deal - just as HPB, I am sure, intended for us.

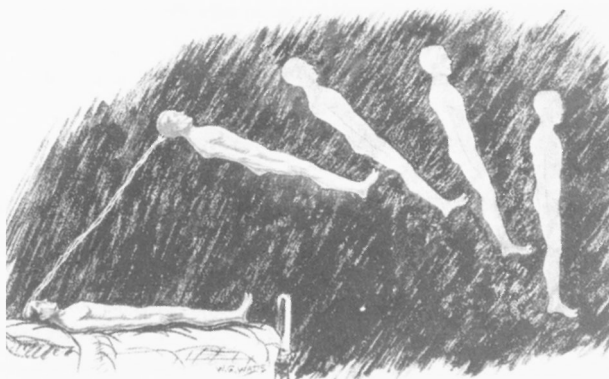
I have found a great deal of open-minded support in the Scientific and Medical Network for this study and many members have expressed interest in developing ASCs and having that personal experience which is surely an essential prerequisite to modelling (forming a theory) or, as we tend to say, understanding. I often suggest that science is a process - the process of building mental models patterning and ordering the experiences normal rational people have.

These experiences are only in our minds: we can in principle never have anything else, at least not at this level of consciousness. Scientific facts are those experiences and it is with these that we must work. If we are to construct theories (models) or indeed test someone else's theories, we must ourselves have experience of them. Talking about such things as the life immediately after death - or life in the astral plane, if you prefer - can hardly be sensibly carried on with no experience of it. Analysing the books of others is no substitute. And lucid dreaming (which I shall mention later) is probably in essentials the same as life in the astral plane. We experimenters carrying out the Third Object can hardly die and report back (although I hope that some of us might do that in due course), but we can learn to have lucid dreams. (My evidence for that statement is that I have done so myself and, if I can, anybody can as I am not in the least bit psychic but an ordinary somewhat persistent down-to-earth engineer.)

## Out-of-body experiences

The same applies to out-of-body experiences. I learned to have my two OBEs in a month after one hour's practise a night (against a background of many years' practise of meditation) and again it seems reasonable to say that if I can anyone can, provided they are persistent enough. All I did was to use the methods described by Muldoon

and I first found myself cataleptic - unable to move a muscle. (That is quite usual when the physical body falls asleep and is so in dreaming.) Then I used my imagination to float upwards and had the experience of apparently freeing myself from the physical body. The ceiling approached and I passed through it and



### PROJECTION OF THE ASTRAL BODY

according to Sylvan Muldoon

then through the roof into the sky, with ever increasing velocity. The catalepsy remained (in 'both bodies'). The second time I resolved to go elsewhere and acquire evidence, Muldoon had discovered that the catalepsy disappeared if one were a few metres away from the body. So I floated horizontally through the window frame into the garden. Then I felt two hands grab my head and return me firmly into the

body. I have not yet discovered the explanation of that occurrence. You might imagine for yourself how a Spiritualist might explain (describe) it in terms of their theoretical model and how a psychiatrist might do the same.

Now I have about a dozen people in various parts of the world able to have OBEs who have volunteered to work with me and they are trying to read a 3-digit random number that I have on the top of one of my bookcases. We communicate by e-mail as airmail is too slow. I am alternatively using a row of three objects, each standing for a digit, as 'alpha-numeric' information (words and figures) are notoriously difficult to perceive psychically (perhaps needing the left brain hemisphere rather than the right to 'process' them).

The first subject to try that experiment was the wife of a man I wrote to out of the blue in Southern Ireland because I liked his books. He wrote to me that his psychic wife could have OBEs if he helped her with hypnosis. Neither had ever been to our house and we had not met. In the first four experiments she got two of the three digits correctly each time (ignoring the order). If you assume that this result was obtained by chance then the odds are about 2000 to 1 against (a statistician friend has calculated). That is very highly significant. The fifth experiment was very intriguing. My friend told me that they had an artist friend who could also have OBEs if he hypnotised her and he could send her with his wife to see whether this would help. This occurred before I had e-mail and my letter telling him that I had changed the number crossed his letter telling me that two projectors were coming. His wife 'saw' the same three digits as last time - but they were all wrong as they had been changed. The new subject got two of them right! Since then his wife has achieved scarcely any successes at all. We are doing our best to try to find out why this is.

You will appreciate the relevance of this to the remarks I made earlier concerning whether it is possible to see the physical world from an 'astral projection' and how we should take the book *Invisible Helpers*. I should add one further remark. The projector not only tried to read my numbers: she also described my study. Some of this was roughly right, and some wrong. This descriptive sort of experiment is difficult to evaluate, which is why I use digits. If a subject would prefer 'objects', living or inanimate, rather than digits then, as I have said, we can easily use them, each object standing for a digit, and the statistics will be unchanged. There are also other ways to carry out this experiment, as we shall see later.

Some forty years or so ago I had a volunteer hypnosis subject to whom I suggested (and who was then able to have) an OBE and the aim then was to read (if possible) a three-digit random number produced at the back of an electronic box by pressing a button at the front. She was to tell me what it was through her lips in the normal way. She did so correctly, which I discovered by myself going to the back of the box and reading it. (The odds against getting it by chance are, of course, 1000 to 1 against.) However, when I tried to carry out a run of twenty experiments



like that, without myself looking, putting into the box from the front the numbers she told me (for internal electronic comparison and score keeping so that no one would ever know the numbers through the senses) she was unable to read the numbers, saying that they were too small to see clearly. This left me with an ambiguous result. Her success might have been due to **dramatized precognitive telepathy** from me rather than directly 'seeing' from her 'subtle body'. I have described that experiment again to illustrate the difficulties of this study of ASCs and epistemology. (Carrying out experiments like that in stages easier for the percipients is part of my current research.) It is perhaps important to note that some quantum physicists would say that the number does not exist until someone has observed it. We shall refer briefly to this later.

## Lucid dreaming

May I now discuss another ASC, namely lucid dreaming. Lucid dreaming is dreaming in which the dreamer is well aware that they are dreaming, can state their name, address and telephone number, have all their normal memories and are well aware that their physical body is asleep in bed. Having all their memory and normal critical faculties means that they are able to carry out experiments. May I describe briefly experiments I have carried out in this state - which may well be in the so-called astral world.

But first I should say that it is necessary to train to enter the lucid dreaming state. This is not difficult and entails keeping a dream notebook (in which all dreams remembered are recorded) and remembering to carry out 'reality checks' at intervals during the normal day. A reality check is a self-question 'Am I dreaming now?' and a check to find out. My favourite check is to attempt levitation. If I am not dreaming then I find myself unable to levitate but if I am dreaming then I (usually) float upwards. Having achieved lucidity in the dream state the next thing to do is to maintain it, otherwise (in my case) I usually awaken. The first recommended way to continue dreaming lucidly is to spin round like a top. I tried this several times and it was not successful: I still awakened. So I devised a way which I found did work for me. I found that if I kept my attention firmly on the consciousness I was in, then I remained lucidly dreaming: I did this by closely examining some nearby object, not allowing myself for an instant to contemplate the possibility of waking up. Many years of concentration and meditation helped considerably. The first time I did this I examined all the colours and cracks in a nearby stone. This worked excellently and I remained lucid for some 48 minutes. As time in the dreaming state is usually 'real time' i.e. normal physical world time, I was able to do a number of educative things. I first noted my own state: I felt fit and well and exceptionally joyful.

On another occasion I examined my body and observed it as apparently completely 'normal': my heart appeared to be beating just the same as usual, my breathing was as usual, the scenery was just as usual (except that I did not recognise it). There was no superficial difference. (This is important and is referred to later.) I delighted in looking at the beautiful old houses on the street where I found myself and remembered the experiment that I intended to carry out. I felt that it should be possible to find a Wise Old Person - a 'Jungian archetypal figure' - and get advice. (Perhaps, had I considered the possibility, I might have travelled to a 'valley in Tibet' and found a 'Mahatma' from whom I might have obtained the advice I felt I needed.) So I wandered out of the village and into the countryside. There I made my silliest mistake: I thought that I might find a WoP in a university. I found three young men talking together and asked them if there was a university nearby. One of them said 'Yes' and motioned over the fields. I observed a group of grey stone buildings. How I made that observation I do not know because I had to levitate some three metres to float over the hedge and across the fields to those buildings. Descending in a cloister I walked along it looking for someone from whom I could ask directions. I found three more young men sitting round a table. On the point of asking them I awakened.

There are perhaps two comments to make here. One of them is that Jung mentions somewhere how the unconscious likes threes. (I am not qualified to interpret the symbols one finds in 'dreams' - and there are many.) The second is that I must devise a regular system to remain lucid in these dreams or my experiments may get similarly disrupted in future. Regarding that experience, I shall never forget the great joy and delight and the freedom I felt. It was almost a mini-mystical experience. What a joy it would be to the disabled if, after we have learned more about it, we could teach them lucid dreaming!

On yet another occasion when I became lucid things were very different. I found myself in the middle of a field. The sun was not shining and there was a drizzling rain. I had earlier discussed the first experience with my wife and wondered where a WoP might be found. She wisely suggested that I look for a likely building and 'expect' to find him or her inside. On this occasion I observed a house at the edge of the field and resolved to try that. I levitated and shot towards a window, passing through it head first without any shattering of glass (this was another experiment). Landing on my feet on the floor of a carpeted room I observed an old man dressed in a Sufi-type turban and a yellow silk robe sitting in an armchair surrounded by cross-legged young men. This seemed more like success so I approached him with respect and he asked me for my name and telephone number, both of which I gave him. I looked for a piece of paper on which I might write them down but all the paper I could find had already been written all over. I thought it should be possible to press hard with a pencil such that the information about me would be legible. The only pencil I could find had a broken point. Never one to be easily daunted I resolved to use a finger nail to expose some lead to enable me to write. However, I had meanwhile observed my WoM more closely and he looked

none too clean, having several weeks' of soup stains on his robe. The 'students' also appeared somewhat unkempt - but this is not unusual for students! I felt sure that a genuine WoM would at least be clean so I excused myself and shot out through the window again. In the middle of the field I awakened. I am still wondering whether I was foolish to think that WoM are necessarily clean! All those I have met in the normal way have been!

Before leaving the OBE and the LD I should say this. First, most people are not cataleptic as I was when they have an OBE. My state was surely because



**Sylvan Muldoon**

Muldoon, whose book I was following, had stated that one would be. (It was 'suggested' to me by Muldoon and I have noticed that what we 'believe' in these subtler states tends to be 'true'. If you believe everything a 'guru' tells you this will usually be confirmed by experience!) Secondly, very often it appears that the apparently normal surroundings of the room where the projection has taken place sometimes change unaccountably and the projectors find themselves in the countryside. I wondered whether they are then in the state of a lucid dreamer. This I have as yet been unable to discover. If it is the same then it should be possible to go in the lucid dream to the room where the sleeping body appears to be, or indeed anywhere else in the physical world such as my study, and read my random numbers. That is an experiment urgently needed. It would be valuable to know this reliably because lucid dreaming appears to be easier to learn than does the OBE and the ability to pass at will between the two states leads to various useful scientific possibilities. Shamanic 'journeying' is probably also much the same - travelling in an 'ideoplastic' astral world in which what one **believes** is usually true. (The lady in Southern Ireland I mentioned earlier has just had another success in 'reading' my random numbers - but via the three objects I put there this time. In a 'shamanic journey' she was 'told' by a bushman, who drew the objects standing for the digits in the sand with a stick!)

In my various studies of the Third Object I have attended many séances and had many discussions with mediums, psychics and ostensible 'communicators'. Many times I have asked the question 'Is the lucid dream an experience of the astral plane and is it possible to meet someone there who has recently died?' Most times the answer has been 'Yes'. If that is true - and we really do not know whether it is true or not until we have ourselves found out, and in a way which can be repeated by other investigators - then a most important experiment becomes possible. That experiment would enable new and much more reliable scientific evidence for human survival of bodily death to be obtained - and without the intermediation of psychics. As bereavement is one of the most intense of all human suffering and especially so in our materialistic Western culture, we desperately need this good scientific evidence. (Perhaps it is true that spiritually advanced human beings spend but little time in the astral world after physical death. How can we know this unless we do some experiments of this kind and find out?)

At present the best evidence for survival is, in my view, the so-called cross-correspondences. In this a number of deceased former members of the SPR Council communicated, through various mediums all over the world who did not know each other, disconnected scraps of information. Much of this was based on classical Greek literature all of which meant nothing to any of the mediums or anyone else until it was sent to the SPR in London and studied as a whole. Some bits provided clues to other bits and formed consistent patterns characteristic of the ostensible communicators, many of whom had been Greek scholars. Their aim had been, they said, to prove their thinking planning presence in the present, but not in this world.

How much better and more persuasive would evidence be when obtained first hand from living people who were not psychic and who, for example, were able to discover correctly the key to a cypher or to a set combination lock, arranged before their death by a co-operating recently deceased person. The evidence would appear to be on the same basis as any normal evidence communicated in the usual ways from one person to another. Most people would find this sort of evidence compelling. Bereaved people would surely find it a great help. And they might in due course be able themselves to learn how to obtain it at first hand. (Most people, certainly most 'scientists', are not aware of the 'mayavic' (illusory) nature of the normal physical world and our normal consciousness. To them this would probably appear to be a sound experiment!) I have heard from an old scientific friend in the last day or two that he himself recently had a conversation with his deceased wife in a lucid dream - but it was not set up as a scientific experiment as she appeared to have initiated this herself for a particular reason.

I do not suggest that communication with the departed is possible for ever. It surely would not be. But how valuable it would be in the short term! And we cannot possibly know whether all this is possible (or, for some reason, impossible) unless we try. (And 'trying' does not mean looking up some old book, believing what is found there, and rewriting it in modern terminology!)

There are various other ASCs and I am hopefully planning that groups of science-oriented people will soon be trying to achieve them reliably so that experiments can be carried out and a better and clearer understanding of them achieved. Among such states which I have experienced are one of the oldest of them all, shamanic journeying, and Jung's guided creative imagery. It appeared to me as though both are 'astral travelling' with the Jungian creative imagery based on shamanic journeying. I have as yet only a limited experience of these.

## PART IV

### Tentative conclusions

In the final portion of this lecture I should like to consider a little of what I have learned from this vigorous pursuit of the Third Object and its implications for our Western science and philosophy, briefly mentioning also medicine and psychiatry.

One of the most important things I have learned has been the enormous importance of belief, touched upon earlier. Many years ago I well remember thinking that belief was something important to avoid and we should aim to discover the 'facts'. However, I now see, as a result of many experiments, how important belief is in all our lives and how impossible it is to avoid. I am referring to the beliefs we ourselves hold and not to the business of believing something someone else has told us or which is written in some book. This has little to do with 'faith'. I am referring to the sort of belief we have that the sun will come up tomorrow or that when we look out of our window we shall perceive the scenery much as it was yesterday. This belief goes down deeply into the personal unconscious mind and we would perhaps describe it as 'knowing'. We have an enormous number of beliefs of this kind - in other words we 'know' many things. Many people would say that I am not talking about belief at all but I most certainly am. They would say that the existence of the physical world all around us is not a matter of belief but a fact; that it is there whether we believe it or not. I do not agree. Now may I describe briefly two experiments which illustrate the importance of belief.



**Complete levitation of a table  
in Professor Flammarion's salon (1906)  
through mediumship of Eusapia Paladino.**

First, SPR member and psychiatrist Ken Batcheldor did a series of table levitating experiments with 'sitter groups'. He discovered the importance of what he called a 'temporary suspension of belief' in regard to table levitation. His experiment involved the sitters each drawing a card at random at the beginning of the séance, one of the cards giving one of them permission to levitate the table normally, in the dark of the séance, by putting their hands under it. But they were not to do this too often. The table was equipped with instruments which showed later whether a levitation had been produced

normally or paranormally. (The latter means levitation when there was no force underneath it being exerted by anyone.) Equipment kept a record of every event. Batcheldor found that when the table levitated and most of the sitters thought that it had been paranormal then it was more likely to occur again and truly paranormally. It was necessary for the sitters to **believe** - if only temporarily - that it had been paranormal for this to occur. (These séances do not involve any ostensible 'communication' with the 'next world'.)

My second example involves paranormal metal bending. I had experience some years ago which showed me indisputably that a little girl of eleven bent a very strong heavy steel teaspoon (which I had brought myself) by gently rubbing it between finger and thumb, not touching it with her other fingers and the spoon's not leaving my sight at any time. Arthur Koestler witnessed this at the same time, as did his wife. All the little girl was doing was saying to herself as she rubbed 'Bend! Bend!' and she knew it might bend 'because she had seen Uri Geller do it'. The only relevant difference between that little girl and me was that I have taken courses in metallurgy and strength of materials and I **knew** you could not bend steel by merely stroking it. The difference between us was **belief**. I know of other older people who have bent spoons by gently rubbing them - at the spoon-bending parties that once used to be held. Sometimes the spoons bent - to their great surprise - showing that 'temporary suspension of belief' had occurred. When that little girl bent her spoon like that I immediately grabbed it and felt it. It was not hot or peculiar in any way: it was just bent. It might just as well have been bent by a man with very strong hands.

Now if that spoon was just an object in the normal physical world, as most of us believe of most things most of the time, then it was an object of steel and what determined its behaviour are the 'scientific facts' covered in courses on metallurgy, strength of materials and crystallography. I have often described how Uri Geller stroked Arthur C. Clarke's Yale key while Clarke held it down with his finger on a flat surface. The key bent upwards into the air. Koestler was also present as a witness on that occasion. Again, the difference between Geller and the others present was our beliefs. He **knew** it might bend when he wished it to do so. (I do not suggest that this would occur every time: we do not yet know the limits of belief, but they are clearly very different from what most of us think.) Perhaps spoons and keys and every other normal object are something different from what we think. Perhaps they are nothing but 'thought forms' and can change with a change in thought. (If you think this is so you are an Idealist and not a Realist.)

Table levitation is an example of psychokinesis (PK). The best experiments in PK have been carried out by Robert Jahn and his team at Princeton University. The subject sits in front of what is in effect a very fast electronic coin-tossing machine randomly producing 'heads' and 'tails'. They attempt to influence the number of say 'heads' by thinking alone. The random behaviour of such a machine is well understood by scientists (as a statistical 'normal distribution') and



if its behaviour is altered then the possibility of this alteration's occurring by chance can be calculated. It has been found that most normal subjects can produce an effect on the pulses, but some are better than others. The effect is always very small, of the order of a half of one per cent. shift in the distribution. Strangely some subjects find that the shift they produce is in the opposite direction from their 'effort'. Others can produce a shift in one direction but not the other.

Mysterious things are occurring in the personal unconscious! Generally the odds against chance can be made as high as desired by carrying out more experiments. When I visited Princeton to inspect their research I found it scientifically impeccable. What has been learned from this could be of considerable practical importance. For example, supersonic fighter 'planes are substantially automatically controlled by computer. It seems clear that the concerns of the pilot could in principle affect the electronic switching and possibly produce a crash.

Other research carried on by Jahn at Princeton relates to what has been called remote viewing. A subject sits in a locked room with one experimenter and then another experimenter receives from the computer a site to be visited, randomly chosen from a large number of such sites. The second experimenter drives to the chosen site and walks around, noting in detail the scenery, sounds and ambience. The subject in the locked room describes impressions which arise in his or her mind. Those impressions sometimes agree remarkably well with



Robert Jahn

those acquired by the second experimenter. Ingenious statisticians have worked out a way by which the odds against chance as accounting for the agreements can be calculated. Again these sometimes give enormous odds against chance as accounting for the agreements. It is important to observe that the team have varied the distance widely between subject and remote experimenter - from nearby to thousands of kilometres. The odds against chance are not affected by this. They have also varied the time between the subject's receiving the impressions and the experimenter observing the randomly chosen site. This also has no effect on the significance of the results and this includes making the time both positive and negative. In other words, the subject in the locked room can acquire his or her impressions of the site **before** it has been randomly selected by the computer and the second experimenter has visited it. This also makes no difference to the accuracy of the impressions.

These experimental facts are clearly of enormous importance and indicate that the paranormal impressions are independent of space and time. They are obtained in the 'region of non-locality' of quantum physics - or the unconscious, if you prefer that term. This will be mentioned later.

The recently declassified Remote Viewing experiments of the United States espionage programme seem to me to show clearly that 'targets' can sometimes be accurately described using various 'models' to add a form to the 'collective

significant but do not occur on every trial, perhaps because the subjects have already been conditioned to the 'normal'. In other words, they consider psi to be possible but not very likely every time. We really do not know where the limits lie.

I would like to suggest that the philosophical position called **idealism** might be a better basis for science than realism. Idealism is the philosophical position that there is nothing but ideas - in the mind. And, as we shall see later, there may well be only one mind. As the Eastern traditional teachings have pointed out to us, set out by HPB in *The Secret Doctrine*, there is **nothing but** mind. The separate objects surrounding us in physical space are part of the **maya** (roughly illusion, or appearance) and the separation between us human beings is part of the illusion as we all share the same mind. This is of course the basis of our First Object. It is also one of the interpretations of Quantum Theory, as we shall shortly see.

What we believe, primarily as a result of our upbringing in our culture, leads then to many of our experiences which appear to be independent of ourselves. (I am not suggesting that they all are.) So I suggest that the physical world is a mind world - just as, we have been told, are the astral and higher worlds. However, we have had much more experience of the physical world than of the other worlds. But you will remember that in my lucid dream when I examined my body it appeared to be just the same as this one I am using now. I of course did not have the opportunity of dissecting it but I would guess that it would be just the same as my physical body **only** for a knowledgeable anatomist.

I am sometimes asked how I can be an engineer if I think that the world is only in the mind. My answer is that I am not only an idealist but also a pragmatist. Where the normal model of a 'real' physical world serves very well I go on using it, including all the models (theories) of our Western science. But I am careful not to consider these models Real. The astral world is much more 'ideoplastic' as we do not have many concrete ideas about it and because most members of humanity have so little conscious experience of it. We can try things like levitation and rapid movement without walking and find that they can work. Telepathy seems to be a fact although I do not yet have experience of that in a lucid dream. (The conveying of ideas seemed like normal speech.) However, the general scenery of the astral world appears to be much the same as that of the physical world because we take those ideas with us when we transfer our consciousness to it. But there are differences and, as you might expect, they reflect ourselves with our expectations, conscious and unconscious (especially the latter).

I did want to mention before finishing one or two matters at the frontiers of science and concerned with quantum physics. That great physicist Niels Bohr and his colleagues produced what is called the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics. In essence, it seems to me, they suggested that the world we observe depends on our consciousness for its meaning and reality. Objects are a set of 'possibilities' (expressed as a 'wave function') until we observe them and 'collapse

the wave function'. Schrödinger stated that consciousness is a singular with no plural. (The physicist Amit Goswami has given a good scientific reason why we each appear to have our own consciousness - as a result of a 'tangled hierarchy'.) Physicists have carried out many ingenious experiments and, it seems to me, shown clearly that the 'I' and 'my' in our materialistic dualistic language are grossly misleading. Correlated photons at opposite ends of the universe remain correlated when one of them is observed and its wave function collapsed. The distant one then **instantaneously** changes to maintain the correlation. Consciousness is clearly non-local or transcendent - just as the mystics experience it. Jahn said that what he called 'quantum mechanical metaphor' was greatly helpful in understanding his experiments. (May I mention that I am not a physicist and had to check the above with professors of physics - and they do not all have that particular view.)

Confusions in regard to quantum physics are surely caused by arguing on the basis of realism. Objects have to be one thing or another and the physical universe is not like that. Particles have a nature depending on the experiment we use to observe them. We ourselves are bringing about what appears to be happening. Conscious choice is of enormous importance in the production of this physical world. Surely we must see that there is no fixed and material world independent of ourselves when we are not observing it? We get what the observer wants or expects to see. One cannot understand nature by leaving out consciousness. The more we have the same experience the more likely we are to have it again. The universe has habits, as Sheldrake has also suggested. Many of us have not had many experiences of the astral world so we should perhaps expect strange things to happen!



Rupert Sheldrake

I promised earlier when we were considering the OBE and the NDE and the apparent true seeing of the 'physical world' to discuss how this could be possible when the five senses were closed in clinical death. We observed earlier that there is no way of proving that there is a 'real world out there' (outside our own bodies) at all; we further observed that our own bodies are one of those 'objects out there' and that the whole philosophical situation at the basis of 'normal science' is thoroughly confused. Popper and Eccles (philosopher and neurologist) spoke in their collaborative book of what they referred to as World Number 1, which they imagined as 'out there' and the cause of World Number 2, which was the normal physical world, inside our minds and the result of our senses and brain 'modifying' or otherwise altering in some unknown way World Number 1. So they suggested that World Number 1 was intrinsically unknowable. This is all a little different from the naive 'normal physical world' assumed as the basis of normal science. I am here suggesting that there is in fact no World Number 1.

If all is mind or thought and the 'world out there' an illusion, as is thought so widely in the East, then this is a perfectly valid way of looking at this problem of the nature of the world, i.e as a collection of what might be called 'thought

forms'. These would be in a way independent of us human beings yet modifiable by thought or belief. The facts seem to me to show strongly that this is so. (For example, consider the NDE observers of the 'normal physical world' from their OBE state.) Many of those facts involve the 'paranormal' and are hardly ever examined or taken seriously by the 'normal scientists' and, as suggested earlier, were not known to the 'classical' philosophers.

Much of what I have been saying you can find in HPB's writings if you look carefully, particularly that very ancient Eastern idea (and modern quantum mechanical idea) that there is nothing but mind. Some of her writings are certainly symbolic and a problem with symbolism is that it can fit more than one thing - as is sometimes necessary. (Our language is based on a very naïve realism - the experiences that we 'normal' people have all shared.) In attempting to express transcendental or metaphysical matters and necessarily using our normal dualistic language based on that realism that we have referred to so much we are bound to use simile and metaphor. What alternative is there?

But *The Secret Doctrine* is not all symbolism - much of it is 'normal science' of well over 100 years ago. There is no alternative, in my view, for good Theosophists, than to follow **all three** of HPB's Objects and find 'truth' for ourselves, using her material to provide excellent 'working hypotheses' (her expression for *The Secret Doctrine*) to test. We shall learn a very great deal on the way - and it will be our own real knowledge, not just belief! This is surely what she intended for us.

## ARTHUR ELLISON

### Biographical Information



The author, a Chartered Electrical and Mechanical Engineer, has been a member of the Theosophical Society in England for some sixty years. He was one of the founders of Rugby Lodge and, after coming to London, a member of the Executive Committee for many years. He was chairman of the Theosophical Research Centre and of its Science Group, also for many years. He contributed to several of the TRC publications, and has also published *The Reality of the Paranormal* (Harrap, 1988). His last appointment before retiring

was as Professor and Head of the Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering at the City University, London.

During part of this time Professor Ellison was twice President of the Society for Psychical Research (including the centenary year) and a founder member of the Scientific and Medical Network and of the Research Council for Complementary Medicine. He is a member of the Parapsychological Association. He was a committee member of the UK Branch of the International Association for Near-Death Studies from its foundation. He suggested to the BBC that they invite to the UK for a programme on the paranormal a young Israeli called Uri Geller, who was then in the United States. He has been involved with him and with Matthew Manning in research. For eight years in succession he ran a week's full-time course on the scientific investigation of the paranormal at Loughborough University.

Professor Ellison was at one time an editorial consultant to *The Unexplained* magazine and to *Reader's Digest* on a volume they published on the paranormal. He is at present a Vice President of the Society for Psychical Research and of the Network. Professor Ellison lectures widely in the UK and abroad including to scientific and other societies and to schools. He has an entry in *Who's Who*.



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