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[Biographies](#)

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[Photographs](#)

[Theory](#)

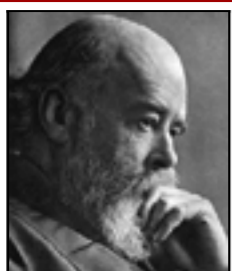
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Sir Oliver Lodge FRS

President of the Radio Society, Physical Society, British Society, Society for Psychical Research and Rontgen Society. Professor of Physics in the University of Liverpool, Principal of the University of Birmingham. Knighted. Sent a radio message one year before Marconi.

The Possibility of Survival from a Scientific Point of View

- Oliver Lodge -

I SHOULD not have known the truth about the friendly co-operation of a spiritual world - existing under conditions beyond our normal perception - had I not received indubitable proof of the persistent continuity of individual personal existence. The survival of personality is therefore a theme which is bound to run as a guiding thread through most of these chapters, though I do not think it necessary in this volume to discuss the available evidence; nor need I assume that my readers are similarly acquainted with the facts and equally convinced.

The hesitating attraction which some people feel for the subject of what is often called spirit communication, and the instinctive dislike or repulsion which others feel for the same subject, is due partly to the influence of surroundings, and partly to the general attitude of the community in which they live. If ever the facts became generally accepted by scientific men, the attitude of the public would be gradually changed; religious people also would without insuperable difficulty adjust their views to acceptance of phenomena generally agreed upon, as they have already done in connection with the at first heterodox discoveries of astronomers, geologists, and biologists. But as long as scientific acceptance is limited to a comparatively few individuals here and there, the general public if uninstructed do well to be cautious, and to wait for a clearer consensus of opinion among those presumably best qualified to judge of reality. For science is or ought to be a study of reality wherever it is to be found, independent of any conclusions or consequences that may be drawn from it, and irrespective of any influence that the spread of knowledge may exert upon human life and conduct.

Assertions about supernormal or unusual phenomena are plentiful enough; but at present there is an element of uncertainty about them which militates against their general acceptance as fact. Trustworthy and crucial evidence is difficult to obtain, and there is a natural disinclination to enter upon a course of research without some *a priori* probability that the quest would lead to something real, and not into a quagmire of popular superstition and folk-lore. Testimony about obscure mental phenomena and psycho-physical happenings has been prevalent throughout human history, and among all races of men; but the phenomena testified to are at first sight so contrary to the general trend of human experience that they are naturally looked at askance, and are not examined with the same keenness and perspicacity as have been devoted during the last century or two to what seemed to be more natural phenomena, - that is to say phenomena which can be repeated in the laboratory at will, about which some guiding theory can be formulated, and which are more harmonious with the general trend of scientific progress. It can hardly be merely because the asserted facts are extraordinary, or because they do not appeal to the senses in the ordinary way, that they are disregarded and suspected: for many of the facts in orthodox science are of this character. The constitution of an atom, and the orbits of an electron, make no direct appeal to the senses; they have to be explored by recondite methods; yet the difficulty of a complete comprehension of them does not deter competent explorers from giving them minute and sustained attention, or from elaborating theories, which, however imperfect, are susceptible of gradual improvement, and seem to open the way to a wider truth. The supersensual phenomena dealt with by mathematicians are just as difficult of direct apprehension, and involve just as much speculation and hypothesis, as any of the barely credible mental phenomena which come under discussion.

The aloofness of science is not really because the phenomena are elusive and difficult of observation; rather it is because they appear to run counter to preconceptions or prejudgments, or what may be called rational prejudices, based upon a long course of study of natural phenomena, with which these asserted occurrences appear to be inconsistent; so that any favouring testimony has to be criticised, continually suspected, and frequently discarded, because it appears to be testimony in favour of what is *a priori* impossible or absurd. The aim of science has been for the most part a study of materialistic phenomena, a study of mechanism, the mechanism whereby results are achieved, an investigation into the physical processes which go on, and which appear to be coextensive with nature. Any theory which seems to involve the action of Higher Beings, or of any unknown entity controlling and working the mechanism, is apt to be extruded or discountenanced as a relic of primitive superstition, coming down from times when such infantile explanations were prevalent. Such ideas seem to belong to a time when there was no adequate notion of the coherent scheme of physical process which must underlie all the baffling and inscrutable operations of nature.

There was a time, for instance, when the movements of the planets were attributed to psychic guidance, the action of angels or some other beings; when thunder and lightning were the direct manifestations of the wrath of Zeus; when plague pestilence and famine were a commentary on human sinfulness, and were stemmed, not by medical and sanitary effort, but by the erection of altars and the humble submission of sacrificial atonements. The triumph of Newton and Laplace consisted in showing that the regular though puzzling phenomena occurring in the heavens were to be accounted for mechanically by the force of gravitation. Thus it was that modern science was born; and on those lines it has continued its successful career. Portents were thus reduced to order. Lightning became one of the inanimate manifestations of electricity: volcanoes were due to the spontaneous radioactivity of complex atoms: disease was due to the secretions of microbes and bacteria, which were visible under the microscope. And the ambition of science was to find a physical cause, on the same sort of lines, for every occurrence of whatever nature it might be. This ambition, which was formulated by Newton himself as a hope and aspiration, has been justified by long, continued experience. A physical process underlies every class of phenomenon. The evolution of living things, the evolution of the stars and planets, the birth and death of worlds, are going on before our eyes. Even the evolution of matter itself is under consideration. The stars have yielded up their secrets, the atoms also. The laws of physics and chemistry reign supreme throughout the cosmos.

What wonder then, in face of this magnificent achievement, if spiritualistic views and hypotheses are looked at askance as a backward step, a reversion to barbarism, a giving up of the clue which human genius has found so successful; or even as treachery to the pioneers and architects who have erected the splendid structure of modern science. What wonder if the attempt is made to explain every mental process as a chemical action in the cells of the brain, to explain every action of live things as the activity of physiological mechanism, and to hold that when the physiological process is interrupted, or the machinery destroyed, all vitality necessarily ceases; in other words that life and mind are the working of an organism, and that when the organism ceases to function, they completely perish.

And yet many biologists have themselves, when they began to philosophise, encountered a real difficulty. The mechanism was complete as far as it went: the physical processes of every action could be traced, either in fact or in imagination: but there was an outstanding difficulty about consciousness, which could not be explained by mechanism. Their own awareness of the processes going on was itself something more than the mere processes. There were things in human nature which escaped their physiological ken, which seemed to be of a different order, something which made use of mechanism, but which transcended it, something towards which mechanical science give no clue. The sense of beauty, for instance. What piece of mechanism could contemplate its own beauty? What mechanical device could understand its own working? How could human beings plan and contrive and design, and form theories, and seek to apprehend the universe, if they were nothing more than mechanical structures? The only way consistent with philosophic materialism was to suppose that consciousness was a kind of illusion, and that these mysterious functions could probably be themselves reduced to mechanism if only we had sufficient knowledge. But the formation of such a hypothesis as that is conspicuously irrational. It is leaving the safe ground of science, the exploration of reality, and denying some parts of reality itself. Such denials are illegitimate, and are themselves superstitious.

It has become pretty obvious that human nature is more than mechanism, that it utilises the physical energy and the physical and chemical processes of its organism, but that in every important aspect it transcends those processes. Even the mere sensation of colour and tone are more than belong to the physical world: physically there is nothing except vibrations of different frequency. Emotion again, the emotion raised by poetry, drama, music, far transcends the admittedly physical basis of these things. Man plans and contrives and directs the forces of nature to higher ends: he uses and dominates the material universe: he has some understanding of it: he feels sympathy and affection: he has faith and hope - and love. These elements in his nature are far more than molecular processes going on in the brain. These higher attributes are displayed and manifested by chemical processes, but in themselves they transcend and outlast them; they belong to another order of existence, interpenetrating and utilising the material, but not limited by or coextensive with it.

Well, that is the view to which some of us have been led: that is the view which I think most philosophers now take. Hence the *a priori* prejudgments and prejudices are now altered. If there is testimony bearing upon the perennial existence and survival of these higher things, we need no longer look at it askance, or consider it as foreign to our perception of reality. Reality is a much bigger thing than the mechanicians had thought. Their perceptions are true as far as they go, but we can go much further. Testimony to survival need no longer be unacceptable. Indeed we should expect something of the kind. What survival means, and what its implications are, may still remain to be ascertained, but there is a *prima facie* case for investigation. We are not traitors to science when we explore mental processes, however unusual and surprising they may be. There is a large amount of evidence that personality persists, that individuals continue after the destruction of their bodily organism. They may find it difficult to manifest their continued existence; but, according to the evidence, they have managed to do so. The evidence must be scrutinised with great care; but there is no reason to disbelieve it on *a priori* grounds. The body of evidence has grown of late years, and is growing. So that many now have no doubt that their loved ones continue, that they are still watching and helping and guiding, as of old; that realities do not go out of existence, that these higher attributes of man are just as real as any others, more real because more persistent. We feel assured that there will come a time of reunion, that intelligence and character and tastes and aptitudes persist, and that love is the dominating power in the universe, - a universe far greater and higher than its merely material manifestations.

In its own field the revelations of science are magnificent; and, if we exclude the element of Personality, which science hardly deals with, it may be true, as Lord Moynihan has recently declared, that the God of science is a greater and more glorious Being than the God of the Theologians.

God of the star-swarm and the soul,
The conscious Will that made the world
From ether-drift and cosmic dust,
Such is the God we know and trust.

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- [On the Asserted Difficulty of the Spiritualistic Hypothesis from a Scientific Point of View](#)
- [Do We Survive?](#)