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Paradigm Shift: A Challenge to Naturalism

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Idealism was the dominant philosophy in the Western world in the early 20th century, a holdover from its prominence in the previous century. Stressing the metaphysical reality of mind or spirit and the epistemological centrality of ideas, idealism stood in stark contrast to naturalism, which took its position as the dominant school of thought in the middle of this century. Naturalistic convictions often included the supreme reality of matter, the belief that nature could potentially explain all phenomena, and faith in the empirical, scientific method as the chief means of discovering facts. Such beliefs continue to exercise control on many areas of study.

One interesting facet of the history of ideas is the possibility that either new data or new ways of interpreting the data will encourage new paradigm (or world view) shifts in thinking.¹ Many trends indicate that just such a major shift may now be taking place. Just as idealism gave way to naturalism earlier this century, naturalism may now be losing its position of supremacy as a world view.

Physicists Puthoff and Targ, after research at Stanford Research Institute, published *Mind-Reach*, whose first chapter, "When the Paranormal Becomes Normal," appropriately asks, "Where will you be standing when the paradigm shifts?"² The authors consider that a shift in thinking may be occurring.

¹ Of special interest is Thomas S. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). The present article uses the term "paradigm" to denote a world view, or an interpretive model for explaining reality.

² Harold Puthoff and Russell Targ, *Mind-Reach* (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1978).

In agreement with this thesis Koestler explains that a "profound transformation of the physicist's world view" is now taking place—a change that involves the shattering of many established scientific concepts. He holds that those who ridicule the recent studies in parapsychology are in approximately the same position as those who belittled Einsteinian physics earlier this century. A similar breakthrough in studies of the human mind may now be imminent.³

An issue of the *SCP Journal* was dedicated to an investigation of these changing trends. As reported by Fetcho: "Science, the health professions, and the arts, not to mention psychology and religion, are all engaged in a fundamental reconstruction of their basic premises."⁴ In another article Albrecht and Alexander note the rising influence of these new developments:

In the last five years, however, both the scope and the intensity of the occult/mystical encroachment upon the consciousness of the scientific "establishment" have greatly increased. . . . Certainly the Eastern/occult view of reality is riding on the momentum of a cultural and intellectual shift of enormous proportions—and not just in physics.⁵

What reasons may be given for such alleged changes in the contemporary world view? As Kuhn points out, one paradigm is often basically intolerant of change, even though nature must frequently be forced into its inflexible conception of reality. Further, contrary facts are sometimes ignored.⁶ Some believe that naturalists are often guilty of suppressing the facts to propagate their dogma.

A more subjective reason for change is that people are ready for a new way of thinking. When such a time arrives, a different model suddenly "appears" and begins to influence contemporary thought.⁷

A number of factors suggest that the influence of the naturalistic, radically empirical paradigm may be declining. Naturalism fails to give an adequate answer in four areas: methodology, the origin of life, theistic argumentation, and philosophy of the mind.⁸

³ Arthur Koestler, *The Roots of Coincidence: An Excursion into Parapsychology* (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 50.

⁴ David Fetcho, "In Face of the Tempest, Jonah Sleeps," *SCP Journal*, August 1978, p. 3.

⁵ Mark Albrecht and Brooks Alexander, "The Sellout of Science," *SCP Journal*, August 1978, pp. 19, 26.

⁶ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 24.

⁷ Compare Kuhn's major thesis with that of C. S. Lewis in one of his technical works, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964), esp. pp. 218-23.

⁸ The purpose of this article is not to develop contemporary arguments in each area, but rather to chart trends that may illustrate a general direction in recent thought. It is hoped that presenting a survey of the research of numerous scholars will acquaint the reader with a broad perspective of where new paradigms may be headed.

Methodology

The naturalistic conviction that the scientific method of empirical observation and testing is the only (or the supreme) guide to knowledge has been a popular belief in many circles. Along with this position is the view that nature's laws can explain all phenomena apart from any deity or divine purpose. Science alone yields knowable truth and other methods are unable to reveal factual knowledge. The majority of scholars, however, hold that this methodology is much too narrow and that there are other viable ways to learn. The question here is not whether the scientific method is a means of discovering truth, for virtually all hold that it is useful in ascertaining factual data. The issue is whether naturalism is an adequate world view by which to explain *all* events and facts. In other words in order for naturalism to be a viable paradigm, it must account for all data because it allows for no other source. But many philosophers hold that while the scientific method and mechanistic concept of nature are useful in understanding portions of the universe, they are inadequate to explain all reality.⁹

Also many have pointed out that there is no empirical verification of the belief that the scientific method is the only way to know facts. That is, there is no empirical means by which one can demonstrate that the only way to learn is by scientific empiricism. A comment by Brightman, leveled against mechanism, is applicable to naturalism as a whole:

If we declare that mechanism is the sole and complete explanation of everything we are going far beyond scientific verification. . . . It is arbitrary and unphilosophical to take one aspect of our scientific experience, such as the principle of mechanism, and extend it so as to cancel the meaning of our most meaningful experiences.¹⁰

Thus one may hold that the scientific method is a superior one without being the only one. What may be the *best method* cannot be confused with the *only truth*.

Just as the verification principle failed its own test of verifiability, thereby providing a major factor in the downfall of logical positivism earlier this century, so it is now being realized that any belief in strict empiricism is largely problematic for the same reasons—such a belief cannot be verified. One cannot demonstrate that scientific empiricism is the only way to learn; to suggest that it is

⁹ This is not a new development in philosophy, either. For example see Edgar Sheffield Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 277.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 377-78; cf. p. 487.

confuses good evidence with the only evidence. Knowable reality is broader than allowed by the naturalistic paradigm; naturalism fails as the only approach to truth. Other evidence points to a reality beyond that of the naturalistic paradigm.

Origin of Life

Naturalism cannot give an adequate account of the origin of life. Naturalism postulates that at some point life arose from nonlife. Spontaneous generation of some variety is therefore required. However, science has long rejected such a hypothesis. As such, naturalism attempts to describe the *survival* of the fittest without explaining the *arrival* of the fittest.¹¹

Naturalistic science is unable to supply an answer to this question of life; atheistic evolution is incapable of adequately accounting for the data. Numerous scientific efforts involving probability theory have revealed that it is extremely improbable that chance could produce even the first complete set of genes and the proteins needed for minimal life. Coppedge found that even after making several concessions to chance the probability of a random sequence yielding just one gene or protein is 10^{236} .¹² Calculations by other scientists, even from a naturalistic, evolutionary perspective, similarly reveal that there is only an infinitesimal chance for such a beginning for life. The naturalistic physicist Guye spoke of a probability of 2.02×10^{231} for chance dissymmetry in an extremely simple protein.¹³ Salisbury suggested a probability of 10^{415} for mutations accounting for a new enzyme.¹⁴ Yale biophysicist Morowitz calculated a probability of 1 chance in $10^{339,999,866}$ for the chance formation of the correct bond energies for a minimal cell.¹⁵ Quastler postulated two extreme limits of the improbability of life occurring by chance. The smaller figure was 1 in 10^{255} while the larger extreme was approximately 1 in 10 to the three trillionth power (13 digits).¹⁶

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 379

¹² James F Coppedge, *Evolution Possible or Impossible?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), esp pp 230-36

¹³ Charles-Eugène Guye, reported in Pierre Lecomte du Nouy, *Human Destiny* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947), pp 33-34, as cited by Coppedge, *Evolution Possible or Impossible?* p 234

¹⁴ Frank B Salisbury, "Natural Selection and the Complexity of the Gene," *Nature*, October 25, 1969, p 234, cf Coppedge, *Evolution Possible or Impossible?* p 235

¹⁵ Harold J Morowitz, *Energy Flow in Biology* (New York: Academic Press, 1968), p 99, cited in Coppedge, *Evolution Possible or Impossible?* p 235

¹⁶ Henry Quastler, *The Emergence of Biological Organization* (New Haven, CT: Yale

Naturalists typically respond that life in the universe could have occurred by chance because of the vast amount of time—about 20 billion years. However, this begs the question in favor of naturalism, and as many have pointed out, even this is not enough time. Using Guye's probability figure, even if the possible combinations were produced at the speed of light, it would take 10^{243} billions of years to obtain even *one* protein molecule on earth!¹⁷

More recently astronomer Hoyle and his colleague Wickramasinghe concluded that there is only one chance in $10^{40,000}$ that even a single enzyme could have evolved by random processes, a figure that is "statistically impossible." It would require more attempts to form one enzyme than there are atoms in all the stars in all the known galaxies. This statistic was not arrived at by guessing but by computations based on the necessary components of enzymes.

Therefore according to Hoyle and Wickramasinghe, spontaneous generation is impossible, requiring a miracle. "Because of the impossibility of the chance formation and development of life anywhere in the universe"¹⁸ and since the universe is not eternal, they have abandoned the steady state theory Hoyle helped formulate years ago.¹⁹

Yockey studied the likelihood that naturalistic processes could account for the origin of life, which would involve some form of spontaneous biogenesis. He concentrated on explanations for the existence of information content in living organisms as contained in DNA.²⁰ There is more information in the DNA in one human cell than there is in all the books in the Library of Congress, and that one cell contains far more information than there is human knowledge concerning the entire universe!²¹

Yockey concluded that the spontaneous origin of life could not account for the encoding of this tremendous amount of data.

The "warm little pond" scenario was invented *ad hoc* to serve as a materialistic reductionist explanation of the origin of life. It is unsupported

University Press, 1964)

¹⁷ Guye, reported in du Nouy, pp 33-34, and cited by Coppedge, *Evolution Possible or Impossible?* p 234

¹⁸ Chandra Wickramasinghe's testimony appears in Norman L. Geisler, *The Creator in the Courtroom: Scopes II* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1982), pp 148-53

¹⁹ Sir Fred Hoyle and Chandra Wickramasinghe, *Evolution from Space* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1981), idem, "Hoyle on Evolution," *Nature*, November 12, 1981, p 105

²⁰ See, for example, Hubert P. Yockey, "An Application of Information Theory to the Central Dogma and the Sequence Hypothesis," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 46 (1974) 369-406

²¹ Robert Gange, *Origins and Destiny* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986), pp 162-64

by any other evidence and it will remain *ad hoc* until such evidence is found. . . . One must conclude that, contrary to the established and current wisdom a scenario describing the genesis of life on earth by chance and natural causes which can be accepted on the basis of fact and not faith has not yet been written.²²

True, these studies do not completely rule out naturalism. However, they do present a formidable roadblock to a rational formulation of a naturalistic theory for the origin of life.

Some naturalists hold that since life exists, naturalistic evolution must have occurred, in spite of the improbabilities. Others contend that some as yet unknown laws must have allowed life to begin without the action of any supernatural Being, again in spite of the improbabilities. These solutions beg the question. It is circular to assume naturalistic evolution to be the case in spite of the evidence against such nontheistic solutions.

Naturalism cannot account for the origin of life. Naturalism requires spontaneous generation and ignores an array of enormous odds against chance development of human life.

Theistic Argumentation

When theistic argumentation is brought up, a negative response is often evoked. Few care to approach the question of God's existence by venturing into the world of abstract reasoning. Yet different avenues of inquiry have appeared in what had been treated by some as a stalemate. And again naturalism appears to be losing ground.

Time magazine noted that a "quiet revolution" taking place in philosophical circles has reopened the logical quest for a rational theism. Pointing out that science has been less presumptuous and closed minded on such issues in recent years, the article notes the revival of newly refined arguments for God's existence, many of which utilize the "modern techniques of analytic philosophy and symbolic logic that were once used to discredit belief."²³

John Donnelly edited an anthology of essays by key philosophers in the linguistic analytic tradition who argue for a revival of certain forms of natural theology. Donnelly also points out the irony of using such philosophical techniques in this way when they had once been considered anathema to any theological formulation.²⁴

Theistic argumentation has taken on some decidedly new fea-

²² Hubert P. Yockey, "A Calculation of the Probability of Spontaneous Biogenesis by Information Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 67 (1977): 396.

²³ "Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, April 7, 1980, pp. 65-66, 68.

²⁴ John Donnelly, ed., *Logical Analysis and Contemporary Theism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972), "Editor's Preface."

tures in contemporary thought. Even some scholars who have not been very interested in the past are taking more notice. Rather than developing any specific case, a few recent trends will simply be noted.

For example Hoyle and Wickramasinghe, both previously non-theistic, have concluded that God must exist. To counter their own agnosticism, they concluded that one is "driven, almost inescapably" to the conclusion that a Creator is responsible for the design and spread of life in the universe. In fact Hoyle and Wickramasinghe concluded that these calculations conclusively demonstrate the existence of God, so much so that it can no longer be questioned on scientific grounds, for the Creator's existence has been brought "into the realm of empirical science."²⁵

Yockey's research has led others to accept God's existence. Gange asserts that though vast quantities of information were utilized when the first living things appeared, nature itself was not the source of this complexity.²⁶ Capitalizing on Yockey's statement that the vast information in living systems is the same as the mathematical pattern of a written language,²⁷ Geisler asks how such could result from a chance system. Some, however, hold that it is unjustified to "jump" from such data to God's existence. But definite and extremely complex patterns of information proceed from intelligence. One is justified, Geisler argues, in concluding that this data proceeded, not from chance development, but from an intelligent, ordered beginning.²⁸

Naturalism, in its attempt to explain life, must resort to some form of infinite regress. But Craig, among others, utilized the cosmological argument for God's existence to argue cogently that infinite regress in the universe is not possible, according to the canons of both philosophy and science. For instance any infinite temporal regress of events is an actual infinite and therefore cannot exist. Also a temporal series of events is a collection formed by successive addition, but it cannot be an actual infinite.²⁹

²⁵ Wickramasinghe in Geisler, *The Creator in the Courtroom* *Scopes II*, pp 148-53, cf *Evolution from Space*, p 130

²⁶ Gange, *Origins and Destiny*, pp 79-80

²⁷ Yockey states, "The sequence hypothesis applies directly to the protein and the genetic text as well as to written language and therefore the treatment is mathematically identical" (Hubert P Yockey, "Self-Organization Origin of Life Scenarios and Information Theory," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 91 [1981] 16)

²⁸ Norman L. Geisler, "The Collapse of Modern Atheism," in *The Intellectuals Speak Out about God*, ed Roy A Varghese (Chicago Regnery Gateway, 1984), pp 142-44

²⁹ William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (New York Barnes and

Astronomy uses the expansion of the universe to date its absolute beginning, which again makes infinite regress untenable. Also the second law of thermodynamics reveals that the universe is running down, thereby pointing up that the universe is a finite number of years old. For Craig, the only way out of the dilemma is to conclude that God exists and is personal in that He chose to create the universe.³⁰

One other approach to the existence of God should be mentioned. This is the eclectic, cumulative argument recently popularized by Swinburne, who holds that while individual deductive theistic arguments are not compelling, the total inductive effect of many of them lends probable weight to theism.³¹

The current revival of theistic arguments, from the analytic philosophical tradition and from contemporary science, is yet another sign of the current dissatisfaction with naturalism. Since infinite regress is untenable, these arguments take on new significance, both individually and collectively. They provide the best explanation for the existence of the universe and life, which cannot be said for the naturalistic hypothesis.

Philosophy of the Mind

One of the most forceful, recent threats to naturalism is new developments in the philosophy of the mind. In particular, evidence for life after death is one of the most important ingredients in a theistic system.³²

Empirical studies have gone far beyond the more popular works over a decade ago that reported several investigations of near-death experiences. Many skeptical scholars noted that anecdotal accounts of dying persons who report similar experiences are not admissible as scientific data and are equally well explained by hallucinations or by other medical or psychological hypotheses. However, new data have disproved such alternative theses according to their own empirical criteria and have presented strong evidence at least for a

Noble, 1979), part II His particular form of the cosmological argument, called the Kalam argument, refers to the impossibility of infinite regression

³⁰ *Ibid*, pp 110-40 Also see William Lane Craig, *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe* (San Bernardino Here's Life Publishers, 1979), esp pp 83-91

³¹ Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1979)

³² For some other aspects of this subject not discussed here, but which give further evidence of the dualistic nature of man, see J P Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 1987), chap 3, and Lawrence W Wood, "Recent Brain Research and the Mind-Body Dilemma," *Asbury Theological Journal* 41 (1986) 37-78

minimalistic view of life after death. Two points in particular will be mentioned: corroborative experiences and corroborative testing.³³

Many cases have been reported in which dying persons viewed individuals, events, or circumstances in another place with amazing accuracy when they were comatose. In other words they reported independently corroborative data that would not normally have been in the range of their sense experience even if they were fully conscious at the time, in spite of the fact that they were near death or already pronounced dead. Some of these reports were investigated using rather ingenious controls and other quantitative data. This research found that at least some of these persons reported facts that they could not have known by natural means.

Another type of corroboration is from cases in which an individual, after a near-death experience, reports having just seen a loved one whom he claims was also deceased. In the more evidential cases, the loved one was not previously known to have been dead either by the one who was near death or in some cases by anyone immediately involved. As a result, the experiencer was sometimes so convicted that his entire attitude toward death was altered to a sense of peace, well-being, and even a desire to be with the loved one. Later it was discovered that the other individual had already died, sometimes at that very hour.

Some near-death experiences have been reported during the absence of brain waves. Eminent cardiologist Schoonmaker announced the results of his 18-year study of 1,400 near-death experiences, including those of about 55 persons whose experiences took place while flat EEG readings were recorded.³⁴ The most vivid experiences these people had, many of which were also corroborative, occurred when their brains registered no known activity, sometimes for periods of 30 minutes to three hours. This is strong evidence that consciousness may exist after death. It is of course conceivable that the EEG may not in fact measure all brain activity (though at the present time the absence of brain wave function in the EEG is both the best and the most widely accepted definition of brain death).

Independently corroborative experiences and testing also compliment each other. While there was no brain or heart activity, individuals have reported near-death experiences that were independently verified by others, even over a distance. A woman with a flat EEG reading and no vital signs had been declared dead. She sponta-

³³ The following data are the result of a lengthy investigation to be presented in a forthcoming book on the subject of evidence for life after death

³⁴ Some of this information was received from a personal interview with Fred Schoonmaker, June 1, 1982

neously revived about three and one-half hours later. She reported floating above her body during the resuscitation attempts. She described precisely the procedures used to try to rescue her, how many persons came into the room, what was said (she even related a joke that was told to relieve the tension), and most interestingly, she reported the designs on the doctors' ties. All of this information was carefully checked with the medical records and with the doctors who were present, and it was discovered that her total description was correct, even though her EEG reading was flat during this time.³⁵

This combination of flat EEG readings and empirically corroborative scientific data presents strong evidence for at least a minimalistic view of life after death, which disproves a major pillar of naturalistic thought. In fact even the many other cases of clinical (or reversible) death that are accompanied by corroboration, sometimes of a rather spectacular variety, are also good evidence since these verified observations themselves are unexplained in known natural terms and because they evidence consciousness beyond the initial states of death. Therefore while irreversible death has obviously not occurred in these instances, the crucial point is that these occurrences are not explained by any known bodily function, since clinical death (and sometimes brain inactivity) has already occurred. This consciousness presents evidence strong enough to indicate a probable case for the initial stages of life after death.

This minimalistic life, however, is not a detailed heavenly existence; irreversible death is not required in order to establish the point being made here. Rather, if the brain is not functioning (or is otherwise unable to account for the corroborated phenomena in question) and the person is still verifiably conscious during that time, then such is minimalistic life at that moment. Thus if veridical consciousness is both separate from and extends beyond brain activity, there is no reason to think that, just because the latter has not irreversibly ceased, one can somehow magically account for this life by naturalistic means. Since such intellectual faculties therefore exist independent of brain activity (and even when it has momentarily ceased), there is no viable reason to assume that the permanent cessation of brain activity would affect personal consciousness. This data actually provides strong evidence for consciousness beyond death precisely because such has both survived temporary brain cessation and cannot be explained by normal bodily activity anyway.

³⁵ This specific case is reported by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. For example see her essay "The Experience of Death," in *The Vestibule*, ed. Jess Weiss (New York: Pocket Books, 1972), pp. 57-64; cf. "Life after Death?" *Newsweek*, July 12, 1976, p. 41.

In an article in *The Humanist*, Beloff argued that the evidence is strong enough that even humanists should admit survival after death and try to interpret it in naturalistic terms. Perhaps this signals a new shift in attitude on this subject. Beloff stated that the evidence points to a "dualistic world where mind or spirit has an existence separate from the world of material things." He admitted that this could "present a challenge to Humanism as profound in its own way as that which Darwinian Evolution did to Christianity a century ago." Yet, he added, naturalists "cannot afford to close our minds . . . to the possibility of some kind of survival."³⁶

In an American Psychological Association convention a panel discussed the nature of near-death experiences. Only one of the panelists, UCLA psychologist Ronald Siegel, held that those could be explained totally by natural means. However, when challenged later by cardiologist Michael Sabom to explain his then unpublished corroborative accounts by naturalistic means, Siegel responded that he was unable to do so. The other panel members agreed that near-death research points to or provides evidence for a spiritual realm and life after death.³⁷

Some may object that subjective phenomena such as hallucinations or perhaps a combination of physiological and psychological causes are able to account for such data. Whereas some examples can certainly be explained in such a manner, these attempts cannot provide an adequate account of those cases which are accompanied by objective corroboration, since they indicate that something has actually been perceived beyond merely subjective categories.

A common question is whether such experiences can be explained by brain activity. That is, could not the physical (or material) body be viewed as the cause? However, the reported cases where brain activity was absent provide a major critique of that view. Also the examples of multiple near-death experiences in which an individual reports veridical information concerning the death of another who had "gone on before" provide possible data regarding the deceased individual which is not accounted for by the reporter's brain function.

The suggestion that the latter information could have been received by telepathy from a living person (or by some similar means) does not account for the conviction of well-being and the peaceful desire to be with the deceased, since such mental information would presumably include the fact of the death and a negative emotional

³⁶ John Beloff, as cited in David Winter, *Hereafter What Happens after Death?* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1972), pp 33-34

³⁷ "Near-Death Experiences Defy Single Explanation," *Brain-Mind Bulletin*, September 14, 1981, pp 1, 3

reaction from the one from whom the information was "received." In other words if the near-death experiencer had somehow learned of the death of the loved one from a living individual, this would not account for the sense of peaceful contentment and the willingness to join the loved one.

By way of contrast, how many persons in everyday life react positively when suddenly informed of the death of a loved one? Yet those who claim to discover such information from the newly deceased person while both are near death do seem to respond positively. While those cases do not constitute proof, they do provide further evidence for initial life after the death of the body (including the brain).³⁸

Some ask, How can one gain evidence for life after death from individuals who have not yet died? The medical distinction must be made between biological death, which is physically irreversible, and clinical death, which is a cessation of measurements such as pulse or heartbeat. (Near-death experiences are not viewed as miraculous returns from biological death, though such would provide an additional reason to reject naturalism!) It is difficult to deny that there are many cases of corroborated experiences beyond (and during) clinical death.

But do the latter actually qualify as evidence for life *after* death? Life after death should not be misinterpreted as some mystical dimension; in its simplest (or minimalistic) form, it indicates conscious life beyond the death of the physical body. But could such life always depend, perhaps in some subtle way, on the central nervous system? If not, then it would seem that such experiences are evidence of minimalistic life after death. Verifiable consciousness while brain readings are nonexistent (a sort of middle ground between clinical death and irreversible death) and veridical reports regarding those who have already died (occasionally some time before) together point to life beyond at least the initial stages of death.

Do not those individuals always report a beautiful, heavenlike environment, and are not these reports given by even non-Christians? Various responses could be given. Not all have reported blissful experiences; many persons have also noted the sensation of being in hell. However, since it has already been acknowledged that none of these persons has actually suffered biological (irreversible) death, why should they have in fact gone to hell at all? Perhaps, it is argued, they did not see hell because they had not finally died. Here it must also be remembered that positive experiences by dying per-

³⁸ Other scenarios are also possible but do not seem to account for the known data adequately.

sons need not be interpreted as a trip to heaven; it could simply have been the immediate relief from cancer or an injury-wracked body. One medical researcher has produced evidence that many people who did not remember anything at all from the time they were near death could actually have had hellish experiences but subsequently blocked them out of their minds.³⁹

Detailed interpretations of one's experiences are notoriously tricky things. Interpretations of the same data vary widely from person to person, and accounts frequently differ from what most others perceive. A related conclusion is that people's near-death explanations reflect popular concepts of the afterlife held at that time.⁴⁰

Near-death experiences therefore cannot be used to describe (or interpret) heaven or hell but only to argue that certain types of veridical information do confirm the minimalistic conclusion that conscious life has been corroborated beyond at least the initial stages of death and that such cannot viably be explained by brain (or other bodily) activity. That such consciousness exists beyond the veil of death does seem to be a *fact* and as such is a serious problem for naturalism.⁴¹

Conclusion

A number of factors suggest that the influence of naturalism may be declining. Scientific investigation is still held in great esteem but a broader view of the universe is becoming more widely accepted.

While many thinkers agree that naturalism is insufficient, this is sometimes as far as their agreement extends. In reality, then, the newer attitude is actually a conglomeration of perspectives, with beliefs about the "supernatural," for example, ranging from pantheism to theism. Therefore one must be cautious in making generalizations as if this were a single movement.

At any rate there is undoubtedly a greater interest in philosophical and theological topics that were frequently considered taboo by

³⁹ For details on such reports of hell, see Maurice Rawlings, *Beyond Death's Door* (Nashville Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1978) Also see his sequel, *Before Death Comes* (Nashville Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980)

⁴⁰ For example Carol Zaleski has found that medieval accounts of near-death experiences, in contrast to contemporary ones, gave an especially prominent place to the torments of hell, since this was perhaps the major feature of the teaching at that time Today many say that such an experience will be blissful because God is not judgmental and accepts all persons Zaleski concludes that the *interpretation* of these experiences is largely conditioned by what people popularly believe at that time (*Other-World Journeys Accounts of Near-Death Experiences in Medieval and Modern Times* [Oxford Oxford University Press, 1987])

⁴¹ Space does not permit the consideration of further objections here But the data do suggest a strong case which can withstand criticism

many just a generation ago. One could reject the view that an actual paradigm shift is occurring and still maintain the more important conclusion that naturalism is incorrect in a number of areas.

Naturalism employs a too narrow methodology, it cannot meaningfully account for the origin of life, there is strong evidence for God's existence, and there is strong evidence for at least a minimalistic concept of life after death. All this is extremely damaging to the naturalistic thesis. In fact if the criticisms of naturalism in even one of these areas are correct, naturalism is difficult to defend. For example naturalism must be able to explain life in order to be a comprehensive world view. Likewise, if God exists, naturalism simply cannot be true.

This article is not an apologetic for a particular world view. Instead the article has sought to survey some reasons for the downfall of naturalism. Some evidences have been suggested that are at least in harmony with a theistic system.

Some non-Christian thinkers, who also reject naturalism, might claim that their world views are likewise compatible with this data. Some have embraced Eastern thought and therefore disagree significantly with Christian theism too.

With this tendency toward Eastern philosophy, areas that demand attention and critique include certain extravagances in scientific interpretation, the unverifiability of strict monism, occultic tendencies, questions concerning the reality of evil, pointers to the personhood of God, and the lack of consideration of God's miraculous acts in history. And yet, seen from one angle, this new mindset might still be considered a welcome relief to the sterility of naturalism, even though critiques must still be forthcoming.

The prospect of a possible shift toward "religion,"⁴² even of a general (and mixed) variety, should encourage Christians to become more engaged in apologetics. If an ideological shift is occurring, Christian thinkers should be in the forefront. Some who hold other world views such as certain forms of Eastern thought attempt to compete with Christians in the area of evangelism, and religious openness may not exist for long; the new trends could possibly be swayed significantly in one direction or another. With such an opportunity perhaps unavailable in recent times, Christians must not pass up the opportunity afforded by the present intellectual climate to influence their generation with a theism that is truly Christian.

⁴² One intriguing topic concerns the extent to which Eastern views are open to truly supernatural concepts such as God's actions in history or His interaction in the lives of believers. It might in fact be argued that the Eastern (New Age?) tendencies are actually a type of expanded naturalism that embraces a few quasi-theistic concepts.



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