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Religions' Potential and Science's Two-by-Four Dilemma

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Abstract

The contrast between the accepted view of life in modern science and that grossly held by traditional religions is stark and significant. Science's material-only view of life appears to be largely unquestioned by many educated people and this effectively has blocked serious consideration of religious understandings. Yet it will be argued herein that science's vision is easily challenged by consideration of unusual behaviors, and more broadly its reliance on DNA appears to be unraveling. Herein the basics of science's materialist model will be considered via some relevant texts, but with particular consideration on writings by the psychologist Steven Pinker. Arguments for materialism's failure - and science's associated two-by-four dilemma - will then focus on DNA's broad heritability crisis, with a backdrop of under-appreciated behavioral conundrums.

A simple gross vision of religions will be adhered to herein. This vision includes the existence of souls, an afterlife, and an approachable mysterious divine entity(s) and/or understanding. Some introductory support for that religious vision will be provided by looking at a number of soul-suggestive behavioral enigmas. The larger argument here supporting a basic religious vision is that it shows up innately and that this is unlikely to have fallen out of evolution. Additionally, for a look at the possible validity of a basic religious purview discussions turn to the observations and insights of a young child along with their subsequent profound experiences during World War II. That chronicle, as found in Jacque Lusseyran's *And There Was Light*, provides some relatively detached support for religions, and as such is significant.

Finally, the larger implications - including with regard to philosophy - will be touched on.

Keywords: Science; Religions; Scientific materialism; Natural religion; Genetics; Missing heritability; Terminal lucidity; Philosophy; Meaning

Introduction - Science, Materialism, and Some Hubris

Critical to the modern educated perspective is the scientific model of life - materialism. The writings initially attempt here to provide some relevant perspectives on materialism as well as the associated modern standoff between religion/spirituality and science.

A simple and rather modest introduction to that model and the associated understanding of evolution was offered by the late prominent biologist Ernst Mayr in his book, *What Evolution Is*. In the beginning of that book, Mayr had politely introduced the Religion-versus-Science terrain by suggesting that:

> creation stories are found in the folklore of peoples all over the world. They filled a gap in mankind's desire to answer the profound questions about this world that we humans have asked ever since there has been human culture. We still treasure these stories as part of our cultural heritage, but we turn to science when we want to learn the real truth about the history of

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> the world (Mayr [1], pp: 4-5). The rest of Mayr's book went on to explain why science is so confident of their evolutionary vision. It is also notable that the basic evolutionary vision - as nicely presented in Mayr's book - really is not complicated. From a scientific perspective the "real truth" about evolution, is arguably as therein suggested, "simplicity itself" (Mayr [1], pp: 115).

An additional introduction to scientific materialism can be found in another 2001 book, one which attempted to support the existence of divinity via physics, physicist's Bernard Haisch's *The God Theory*. Therein Haisch had written:

> [w]hile there are certainly scientists with spiritual beliefs, the de facto dogma of modern science is clear: The physical, material world of matter and energy is all there is and all that possibly could be. Everything you see around you everything you think or feel can ultimately be explained in the terms of physics, chemistry, biology, or genetics. All spiritual knowledge is, ultimately, no more than outdated mythology and superstition [2].

He then went on to add frankly that:

> [t]his negative, even hostile, view of spirituality is widely accepted in many scientific circles. In fact, merely raising the possibility of God and the existence of supernatural realms elicits immediate charges of "heretic" and "lunatic". The handiwork of the heavens, the amazing craftsmanship of creation, is no longer seen as the signature of divine purpose. Today the handiwork serves only to confirm the inert laws of particle physics as embodied in the "standard model". I appreciate Haisch's efforts but suggest the above "terms" could be pruned down to "physics", and moreover frankly suggest that his book's elaborate efforts involving quantum fields provide rather distant explanations for life's mysteries. Simpler approaches might be better.

Another relevant description was provided by the biologist Ursula Goodenough. In her book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, Goodenough provided a straightforward perspective:

> [a]ll of us, and scientists are no exception, are vulnerable to the existential shudder that leaves us wishing that the foundations of life were something other than just so much biochemistry and biophysics. The shudder, for me at least, is different from the encounters with nihilism that have beset my contemplation of the universe. There I can steep myself in cosmic Mystery. But the workings of life are not mysterious at all. They are obvious, explainable, and thermodynamically inevitable. And relentlessly mechanical. And bluntly deterministic. My body is some 10 trillion cells. Period. My thoughts are a lot of electricity flowing along a lot of membrane. My emotions are the result of neurotransmitters squirting on my brain cells. I look in the mirror and see the mortality and I find myself fearful, yearning for less knowledge, yearning to believe that I have a soul that will go to heaven and soar with the angels (Goodenough [3], pp: 46-47).

Notably, this bleak characterization is part of a book which attempted to offer a science-based surrogate for traditional religions, a substitute that Goodenough termed religious naturalism. For further context, Goodenough comes from a prominent academic-connected family, including a brother who was a Nobel-winning, solid-state physicist. She also has had long standing involvement with the Institute on Religion in an Age of Science [4]. Some other scientist authors also have made such an appeal for science as a substitute for religions, including James D. Watson at the end of his (along with Andrew Berry and Kevin Davies') book, *DNA: The Story of the Genetic Revolution*.

A notably literate, religion-sympathetic, and death-focused analysis can be found in the novelist Julian Barnes' *Nothing to be Frighten of*. The book also appeared to have been an intellectually competent effort and perhaps having a brother who is professional philosopher helped. Barnes' book opened with "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" (Barnes [5], pp: 3), the conclusions, though, end up being focused on the very sober implications associated with genetic determinism. Furthermore, the book was indirectly a testament to the sway of science in the contemporary intellectual sphere, as even sincere and sympathetic individuals like Barnes seem unable to begin to question materialism [6].

This write-up will now move on to introduce some challenges facing scientific materialism before discussing how religions (or dualism) could shed light on those challenges. This standoff is significant in an all-around sense, including of course for the intellectual terrain that is philosophy.

Methodology

A variety of literature covering surprising behaviors was obtained and then considered. These included books and articles on observations of prodigious intellectual abilities. It additionally included articles on some remarkable phenomena from the medical domain like terminal lucidity; the possible psychological import of some heart transplants; and multiple personality (or dissociative identity) disorder. It also included some articles and books on the unfolding

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missing heritability problem and the associated import. Also a book and some articles dealing with the existence of our natural religion were also considered. The remarkable transcendent experiences of Jacque Lusseyran were explored via his autobiography. All together then this literature review provided a basis for developing this manuscript which considers challenges to scientific materialism and the potential of religious beliefs and perspectives.

Science's Expectations and Apparent Challenges

As evident above science is very confident of its model of life. In his essay "Science is Not the Enemy of the Humanities" the psychologist Steven Pinker framed scientific research in some rather idealistic terms. He then went on to succinctly introduce science's molecular-only vision:

> The processes of life, for example, used to be attributed to a mysterious elan vital; now we know they are powered by chemical and physical reactions among complex molecules [7].

Pinker then went on to specifically introduce science's "deep and elegant principles", and in particular DNA's role in realizing their model in which "life depends on a molecule that carries information, directs metabolism, and replicates itself".

Additionally, from the inside cover of geneticist J. Craig Venter's, *A Life Decoded: My Genome: My Life*, it was suggested that "[o]f all the extraordinary achievements of the past century, perhaps none can match the deciphering of the human genetic code, both for its technical brilliance and its implications for our future". The import of that work and the subsequent genetic searches was suggested to chart "a landscape in which we will discover the most intricate workings of our species, the particularities of our own genetic makeup" and eventually this will lead to a world "in which inherited biology is no longer necessarily destiny" [8].

Some of the logic behind the DNA-based field of behavioral genetics (and somewhat in parallel, personal genomics) was sketched out by Steven Pinker:

> schizophrenia is highly concordant within pairs of identical twins [about 50% of the time when one is affected so is the other twin], who share all of their DNA and most of their environment, but far less concordant within pairs of fraternal twins, who share only half of their [variable] DNA … and most of their environment. And this situation appears to be representative of "virtually every cognitive and emotional disorder or difference ever observed". Thus Pinker went on to suggest:
>
> [a]utism, dyslexia, language delay, language impairment, learning disability, left-handedness, major depressions, bipolar illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sexual orientation, and many other conditions run in families, are more concordant in identical than in fraternal twins, are better predicted by people's biological relatives than by their adoptive relatives, and are poorly predicted by any measurable feature of the environment (Pinker [9], pp: 46). Together this implies that the many variations in our behavioral (and also health) tendencies appear to follow patterns connected to our biological parents. The variations in innateness tend to be quite obvious, but the inheritance-packaging isn't (except in the case of physical appearance). The apparent biological/inheritance packaging, though, became clearer through formal studies. Also some might argue that the above assessment shortchanged environmental contributions to schizophrenia [10].

Continuing, in its evolutionary blueprint role DNA is supposed to provide the basis for inheritance and the associated variability. After 1900 this connection appeared to be nailed down through progress in molecular biology and genetics. As Ernst Mayr wrote:

> [o]ne can never fully understand the process of evolution unless one has an understanding of the basic facts of inheritance, which explain variation. Therefore, the study of genetics is an integral part of the study of evolution. But only the heritable part of variation plays a role in evolution (Mayr [1], pp: 89). DNA thus is believed to contain design codes for organisms and also the heritable subset of DNA - the elements that get passed along in conceiving new life - are to provide a basis for evolutionary dynamics (along with a backdrop including environmental changes and mutations).

In a gross sense the presumed workings or mechanics of life are laid out in laborious detail in an academic text like *Evolutionary Analysis* by Jon C. Herron and Scott Freeman [11]. Therein a number of the observed or inferable aspects of life - including the production of new species and some remarkable instinctive behaviors - are confidently described as being the product of natural selection-based DNA dynamics. A simple and rather significant instinct discussed is kin bias in which individuals (as observed in a variety of ways and among different species) appear to have a pretty strong bias in favor of their biological relatives. Herron and Freeman even included strong and sad evidence of this bias by comparing the homicide rates of children between their biological versus their non-biological parents (Herron and Freeman [11], pp: 574). It appears from a number of their examples that organisms somehow have a remarkable DNA-specified ability to distinguish and then favor other

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organisms based on their DNA similarity.

Another key point here is that DNA should encode for the wide range of instinctive behaviors. Ernst Mayr thus wrote that:

> There are reasons to believe that behavioral shifts have been involved in most evolutionary innovations, hence the saying "behavior is the pacemaker of evolution." Any behavior that turns out to be of evolutionary significance is likely to be reinforced by the selection of genetic determinants for such behavior (known as the *Baldwin effect*) (Mayr [1], pp: 137). Thus, the behavioral implications associated with a segment of DNA code should be significant to its treatment under natural selection. Therefore, a gene that somehow furthers helpful behavioral inclinations in a species should tend to spread over time, whilst those furthering unhelpful behaviors should tend to become less prevalent. "Helpful" implying making positive contributions to reproductive success.

It turns out, though, that there are a number of basic challenges to this DNA-based vision. The differences between monozygotic twins - beyond their appearances - form one set of challenges. In a simple case the likelihood of concurrence on male exclusive homosexuality amongst (male) monozygotic twins is only 20 to 30 percent (Collins [12], pp: 204-205). And in a broader sense, as Steven Pinker pointed out with regard to behavioral inclinations, "identical twins are 50 percent similar whether they grow up together or apart" and further that "something is happening here but we don't know what it is" (Pinker [9], pp: 372). The nature plus nurture framework may be routinely assumed, but the apparent fit of that framework is loose.

Instinctive behaviors form another set of challenges. Materialism dictates that "[t]he entire behavioral information available to the newborn" should be encoded in their DNA (Mayr [1], pp: 253). Yet some birds have been shown to demonstrate an innate knowledge of migration routes, a point which even astonished the Nobel laureate James D. Watson [13]. Also, a number of animals - including dung beetles - appear to utilize the positions of nighttime stars in order to navigate [14]! Another amazing (and very sober) example involves the incredibly skilled, multi-level, neural-targeting attacks that emerald jewel wasps carry out on American cockroaches (and to their species' credit, some cockroaches seem to have their own innate martial arts-like, potent defensive strategy) [15]. For more of such puzzling instinctive behaviors readers might see (Pinker [16], pp: 179-183).

But does it really appear possible that the molecule deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) could be shaped by natural selection to encode for the making of brains so precisely enhanced for such skills? For some context, the inferable workings of DNA do appear to be rather imprecise - as apparent in the lack of concurrence observed with monozygotic twins and also the variable import found with disease-influencing genes (described under the terms, penetrance and expressivity).

Continuing, one human behavioral challenge is hyperthymesia syndrome in which experiencers display an ongoing day-by-day recall of their lives and also significant events. Such memories have been observed to be "highly organized in that they are associated with a particular day and date" and that this occurs "naturally and without exertion" [17]. Embedded within hyperthymesia is the remarkable ability to map arbitrary dates to the corresponding day-of-the-week (termed calendar calculation). How such extraordinary abilities could have fallen out of our evolutionary history, which was presumed to have been akin to an endless survival epic, been stored in DNA, and then effectively uploaded into homo sapiens brains, is quite difficult to imagine.

Finally, introduced here is one notable set of instinctive behaviors, before moving on to the big picture and the associated two-by-four problem. A number of speciations (or species-creating) events are believed to have been driven by behavioral differentiation. In a simple example, among the Hawaiian genus of crickets, Laupala, there appear to be 38 separate species and the distinguishing aspect among them appears to be the males' mating song along with the corresponding female song preference (Herron and Freeman [11], pp: 625-626). Those instinctive songs consists of a simple series of pulses and the distinguishing feature appears to be the pulse rate. Somehow then the collection of Laupala cricket species in Hawaii appear to have segregated themselves off on the basis of males' mating call frequencies! Of note here is that this incredibly simple behavioral dynamic has "astonishing[ly]" evaded efforts to isolate its genetic basis. This failure with regard to such a minimal behavioral dynamic suggests problems with much more complicated instincts, including our own innate religious beliefs.

Science's Big Two-By-Four Dilemma

A puzzling point is that numerous behavioral studies have suggested that DNA (or nature) only accounts for about half of the variation in humans innate behavioral tendencies, whilst environmental influences appear to be substantially less potent. It appears that outside of some specific fears and perhaps a few familial positions (like political affiliation), growing up in a family appears to contribute little to an individual's inclinations [9,18]. Officially, this comes across in adoption studies, but perhaps it is also apparent in the relatively fixed nature of our own personalities and

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dispositions. This situation is perhaps most evident with monozygotic twins (even when conjoined), and thus Pinker's earlier given 50 percent claim. This situation is the focus of extensive discussions in Pinker's *The Blank Slate* (specifically with regard to the three laws of behavioral genetics).

In a parallel situation, our innate disease susceptibilities are the focus in the field of personal genomics. The apparent genetic contribution therein is reflected in the cliche, "it runs in families". Although not a focus herein, it is notable that the missing heritability problem is also present in this field as alluded to in an (originally italicized) quote, "*[h]ow likely is it that a quantity of genetic variation that could only be called enormous (i.e. more than 90-95% of that for 80 human diseases) is all hiding in what until now had been considered genetically unlikely places?*" [19]. Beyond those cases, some diseases already have an identified DNA contribution, as for example with cystic fibrosis and sickle cell anemia, but much more commonly this relationship is simply assumed.

Moving along toward the titled two-by-four dilemma, in his book *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker included the following passage in his chapter on children, "the question of what makes people within the mainstream of society different from another - whether they are smarter or duller, nicer or nastier, bolder or shyer - the nature-nurture debate, as it has been played out for millennia, is over, or out to be" (Pinker, [9], pp: 8). Backing up Pinker was specifically a quote from the behavioral geneticist Eric Turkheimer, that "[t]he Nature-Nurture Debate is over".

Pinker's objective in that big chapter (and moreover the book, *The Blank Slate*) was to hammer home the evidence that we each have innate behavioral tendencies, and that the idealistic blank slate hypothesis (wherein conditioning is the dominant factor) is deeply flawed. Thus Pinker went on to comment on the quality of the case for DNA origins as major contributors to behaviors. That case had apparently "been replicated in many studies, several countries and over four decades. As the samples grew (often to many thousands), the tools were improved, and objections were addressed, the results like the Star-Spangled Banner, were still there" (Pinker [9], pp: 372). His conclusion was thus that behavioral genetics is of course an appropriate title, since a big part of our individual behavioral packages (seemingly in parallel with our physical appearances) seems to be DNA-given. Potential contradictions aside, that is science's conclusion.

The author suggests that apart from DNA's potential role in this, the existence of innate behavioral tendencies is largely self-evident as are athletic aptitudes. Continuing, if intellectuals got into a big turf war over the existence of our sense of humor (some arguing it exists, whilst others claiming it didn't), would detached individuals feel pulled into this (beyond perhaps finding humor in the discussions)? Innate behavioral qualities - including personalities - are obvious.

In characterizing the situation, Pinker moreover had written that, "[i]n announcing that the nature-nurture debate is over, the psychologist Eric Turkheimer was not just using the traditional mule-trainer's technique of getting his subjects' attention, namely whacking them over the head with a two-by-four", he then went on to give the above empirical studies synopsis (Pinker [9], pp: 372). Although, Pinker was specifically targeting adherents to the blank slate philosophy (in which individuals are viewed as psychologically omni-malleable), perhaps the same two-by-four business has played itself out broadly for decades via science's confident proclamations with regard to their DNA-based vision of life. Reader's might reread some of the earlier quotes. It would not be hard to write a large book filled with prominent scientists putting their particular confident spin on genetic-based materialism.

Yet moving on, the contemporary status on this position is given in Eric Turkheimer's blog as "Gloomy". The blog's title (after "Eric Turkheimer") is "Gloomy Prospect Blog" since twenty-five years after his science-affirming declaration they still can't find the expected DNA origins. Despite enormous search efforts among our limited variable DNA their investigations have thus far proved fruitless in attempts to uncover many of the expected genetic connections. How much has changed since the acknowledgement in 2008 of the "beyond belief failure" of the initial "tour de force" investigations using the common genetic variants [20]? A situation which was further elaborated on in 2010, including the apparent rift between those acknowledging that failure and those claiming that the work had produced "mind blowing" progress [21]. In fact as a few insiders have acknowledged - perhaps most notably David Goldstein - they in fact have found next to nothing. Goldstein in a 2017 article was quoted on the genetic search business in claiming that "[p]eople working in the [big] schizophrenia genetics field have greatly over-interpreted their results" and that they should utilize "a whole lot more humility" [10].

Continuing, readers can recall Pinker's earlier-given confident characterization of the genetic connection for the susceptibility to schizophrenia. Investigations with regards to that mental illness were given an update in a 2022 article by Ellen Barry entitled "The 'Nation's Psychiatrist' Takes Stock, With Frustration" [22]. Therein was a discussion on Thomas Insel's 13 years as head of the National Institute of Mental Health. As Barry had written, Insel had "helped allocate $20 billion in federal funds and sharply shifted the focus of the National Institute of Mental Health away from behavioral research and towards neuroscience and genetics".

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That article seemed disjoint in its discourses ranging from descriptions of the abject failure of the genetic searches (and with them possible neurobiological help), and onto those consistent with their irrepressible optimism. Even a longtime critic of the big genetics investment still characterized those efforts with "[t]he end result of these last 30 years is an exciting intellectual adventure, one of the more fascinating pieces of science in our lifetimes, but it hasn't helped a single patient".

More sober news can be found in global prospectives on this very difficult condition. As Tanya M. Luhrmann had pointed out in her article "Beyond the Brain", "[s]chizophrenia has a more benign course and outcome in the developing world" [23]. Luhrmann touched on the underlying downside associated with science's bio-robotic vision (as captured in Insel's *Scientific American* article, "Faulty Circuits"). It turns out that in our country people with schizophrenia commonly spend a lot of time homeless in part because as Luhrmann pointed out "[t]hey dislike the diagnosis even more than the idea of being out on the street, because for them the idea of being 'crazy'" is worse. Additionally, Luhrmann wrote that "Indian families don't treat people with schizophrenia as if they have a soul-destroying illness". Our self understanding perhaps matters more than we comprehend. For some additional context, those findings come from Stanford's Tanya Luhrmann who appears to have dedicated a good portion of her career to dismissing the potential validity of religious beliefs.

Having introduced science's unfolding two-by-four dilemma - in which their long trumpeted genetic assumptions are getting two-by-four'd by reality - it is worth introducing biology's relevant overlap with religions. It is our innate or instinctive religion in which we appear to come equipped with. In Justin L. Barrett's, *Born Believers - The Science of Children's Religious Belief*, evidence was given that infants tend to possess an innate belief in souls/God/gods, to be believers in what the book called a "natural religion" [24]. His book gave some striking examples in which the positions of atheists were rebutted by their young children (Barrett [24], pp: 5-6). As Barrett suggested "[c]hildren are prone to believe in supernatural beings such as spirits, ghosts, angels, devils, and gods during the first four years of life" (Barrett [24], pp:3). He later added, "[e]xactly why believing in souls or spirits that survive death is so natural for children (and adults) is an area of active research and debate" and further that there appears to be agreement "that children are born believers in some kind of afterlife" (Barrett [24], pp: 120). This is a mysterious and significant phenomenon.

Our natural religion was also considered in a popular news article [25]. Therein a professor of psychology and director of Yale University's Mind and Development Lab, Paul Bloom, was quoted in saying that, "[t]he universal themes of religion are not learned... They are part of human nature... Creationism – and belief in God – is bred in the bone". Similarly, an Oxford University psychologist, Olivera Petrovich, having surveyed "several international studies of children 4 to 7" was quoted in concluding that, "the belief in God as a 'creator' is 'hardwired' in children and that 'atheism is definitely an acquired position'".

This innate religion will be followed up in some detail later, but for now it is suggested that this instinct deserves a significant place in the religion-and-science (and relevant metaphysical) discussion(s). Additionally, Barrett's claim that it "is an area of active research and debate" does not appear to be true. He and others in his field appear to have simply assumed that these beliefs fell out of evolution.

The author adds a personal observation. Perhaps my strongest reason for believing in God was given to me by a young child. The author was in the midst of an adult conversation on the subject of God when a perhaps 3 years old child walked into the conversation and stated simply, "There is a God". The kid paused and then repeated this matter-of-fact claim. The author knew the child's background and wasn't aware of any church attendance. Moreover given the nature of young children and this child's very sincere statement, it came across as something they really knew. This incident made a strong impression and it furthered the author's sense that involved intellectual arguments for the existence of God are probably secondary.

Behavioral Two-by-Fours

This section considers a number of behavioral phenomena that challenge science's bio-robotic vision. The challenges they offer are obvious. I get started with the soul-suggestive phenomenon of terminal (or paradoxical) lucidity.

Terminal Lucidity

An introductory discussion on terminal lucidity showed up in a *Scientific American* blog piece by the psychologist Jesse Bering, "One Last Goodbye/ The Strange Case of Terminal Lucidity" [26]. That blog article discussed earlier work by the biologist Michael Nahm that reintroduced the topic [27]. Nahm described terminal lucidity as:

> The (re-)emergence of normal or unusually enhanced mental abilities in dull, unconscious, or mentally ill patients shortly before death, including considerable elevation of mood and spiritual affectation, or the ability to speak in a previously unusual spiritualized and elated manner [27]. In considering the modern period-neglected topic of terminal lucidity, Bering had perhaps responded to his own experiences as he

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had been with his dying mother as she somehow had managed "five minutes of perfect communion with me when, ostensibly, all her cognitive functions were already lost".

The terminal lucidity phenomena recently garnered a bit of general attention and some cases were presented for example in *The Guardian* [28]. That *Guardian* article was well done and contained some poignant episodes based on the recollections of relatives. In one case a woman whose life had taken a very difficult turn in the mid-1990's into what was diagnosed as vascular dementia. Her behavior got much worse as "she became paranoid, aggressive, [and] verbally abusive" and she as a result ended up in a care home. Additionally, her "short-term memory was shot, and the rest of it was patchy". During the last 2 years she was described simply as "angry, depressed and confused", but her family "visited anyway, sitting with her while she wanted to die".

In October 2004 the woman was admitted into a hospital due to a urinary tract infection. For about a week she was minimally conscious but then on a Sunday as a relative recalled:

> "She was sitting up in bed", smiling as we walked in. For the next two hours she laughed and joked, completely cognitive, coherent … lucid. A lifetime of memory had returned, and we took advantage of it as she regaled with episodes from her past. My mum [mother], who knew many of them, quietly verified them. Her funny, eloquent, vibrant mother had returned. 'It all came back to her in one rush,' remembers my mum. 'It was like a bolt of lightning. The clouds cleared.' After we left that afternoon, my grandma slipped back into a semi-conscious state, soon not knowing who my mother was, and died within days [28]."

This phenomenon is not new, and as such not likely to be a response to novel drugs or technology. Perhaps the most striking case, involved a severely disabled young woman named Anna ("Kathe") Katherina Ehmer [26,29]. Her case occurred in 1922 and had some official verification as Kathe had been a patient in a mental hospital and her episode was observed by both the hospital's chief physician and also its director. Both of these officials went on to independently and consistently characterize Kathe's difficult life (including several bouts with meningitis infections) and her remarkable rejuvenation.

Kathe had been born with severe disabilities and as such appeared to be withdrawn environmentally and also appeared to have been unable to speak. And yet during the last half-hour of life she somehow reportedly sung, and in particular this involved the refrain, "*Where does the soul find its home, its peace? Peace, peace, heavenly peace*!" Elsewhere it was reported that those "present were rendered speechless themselves; some sobbed in bewilderment; others felt they had witnessed a miracle of the soul" [30].

Turning attention now to a fine clinical review, "Terminal lucidity: A review and a case collection" published in the *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics* [31]. That paper begins by pointing out that what is now termed terminal (or paradoxical) lucidity, "has been reported over the past 250 years, but has received little attention". Given the remarkable nature of this phenomenon that lack of attention appears surprising. Perhaps, though, some clarification is offered by the subsequent observation that "discussions and case reports" became "almost absent in the medical literature" during the 20th century. This absence might well reflect the growing hegemony of materialism as described by authors such as Rupert Sheldrake [32].

Nahm, et al. review included details with regard to 19 clinical cases (excluding Anna Katrina Ehmer's). The review also mentioned that there could be at least two distinct versions of this phenomenon. One in which there is a gradual return to mental coherence during the last month or so, which was suggested to happen "in conjunction with the decline of bodily vitality". Consistent cases cited included a schizophrenic person who after spending 17 years in a "profoundly regressed catatonic state" somehow gradually returned to a lucid state before dying. Another version of lucidity appears to happen "when full mental clarity can emerge suddenly just before dying". Notable is that researchers had observed this distinction sometime ago, in fact one 1826 report was cited [31].

For brevity's sake only 2 short cases (of the sudden lucidity variety) will be considered but suggest that readers consider obtaining this significant (and only 4 and 1/2 pages long) article. The first case described here involved a young man suffering from lung cancer which had spread to his brain. This 2007 report mentioned that as the end of his life approached a brain scan revealed that "little brain tissue" remained since "the metastasized tumors [had] not simply pushed aside normal brain tissue but actually destroyed and replaced it". As a result in his final days he lost the ability to speak or move. Yet according to his wife and a nurse:

> an hour before he died, he woke up and said good-bye to his family, speaking with them for about five minutes before losing consciousness again and dying [31].

A second case involved a 1990 report of a 5 year old boy who had been in a coma for three weeks. The boy was under the influence of a malignant brain tumor. During that time the boy reportedly had been "almost constantly" in the presence of relatives. Then following the advice of their minister the

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relatives told the boy that it was ok if he died. Next:

> [s]uddenly and unexpectedly, the boy regained consciousness, thanked the family for letting him go, and told them he would be dying soon. He did in fact die the next day [31].

Recent efforts to ascertain the commonness of terminal lucidity were also described. One survey involved interviewing nursing home staff and it found that "interviewees from all units reported first hand accounts" of confused seniors "suddenly becoming lucid enough in the last days of life to recognize and say farewell to relatives and carers". In another nursing home survey it was found that "7 out of 10" caregivers reported having observed patients during the past five years with "dementia and confusion becoming lucid a few days before death" [31].

An update was given in a 2025 special edition of *Scientific American*, "The Conscious Brain". Therein, in "A Final Lucidity" by Jordan Kinard [33], a gerontologist Jason Karlawish was quoted saying that with regard to lucidity, "our study wasn't a prevalence study" since "we found [that] lucidity was more common than it was the exception in dementia patients". And as researcher Dr. Sam Parnia pointed out, "If you talk to hospice nurses and palliative care doctors, they all know about this [terminal/paradoxical lucidity]," he then added that, "[b]ut no one's ever studied it properly because no one ever thought anyone would take it seriously enough" [28]. And why wouldn't others take it seriously?

That science is starting to reinvestigate terminal lucidity is quite significant and hopefully materialism-based barriers elsewhere can break down too.

The Prodigy Neighborhood

This section considers a number of expressions of exceptional intelligence showing up in young children. These seem to offer a straightforward way to challenge materialism. When you have cases of little kids showing up in adult-like focused fashion that would appear to represent a serious and not transient obstacle facing the scientific vision of humans and their development.

Discussions get started with some examples associated with the phenomenon of the Einstein syndrome (as described in the same-named book by Thomas Sowell). Sowell pointed out that children with this condition tend to have "speech development [which] lags far behind that of other children their age, while their intellectual development surges ahead of their peers" (Sowell [34], pp: 1). Such children are often very determined (or willful), their precocious intellects are focused in music and/or analytical areas, and they also tend to possess outstanding memories. They also are likely to be weak socially and late with regard to toilet training. Another characteristic is that they are almost always born into families with technical and/or musical members. Such Einstein kids appear to show up in a nerd-committed fashion.

Moving on to some Einstein examples. In one instance the three year old "silent" son of a professor was involved in the following incident:

> The older boy, now five, had learned to read and would entertain his doting parents by doing so aloud. One evening he came upon a word he did not recognize, and struggled with it. At which point his brother toddled over, peered at the text and read out the sentence perfectly. Following that, he again lapsed into silence for several months and only then began to speak easily (Sowell [34], pp: 19). Another instance involved a child who "became deeply absorbed in listening to Bach, to the point of being moved to tears" (Sowell [34], pp: 85). Thomas Sowell also described how his own son displayed exceptional child lock breaking abilities prior to the age of one (Sowell [34], pp: 41). He also wrote that a five year old in his study group had helped his teacher and mother "when they had problems using the computer" (circa the 1990's). Additionally, the five year old could "play the piano with his eyes closed" (Sowell [34], pp: 12).

Sowell also described some notable adults who seemed to have had the syndrome as children. One was the pianist Arthur Rubenstein who as a young child demonstrated an extraordinary attachment to the piano. When asked to leave the drawing room (where the piano was), he "screamed and wept". Eventually he started playing the piano at age 3. Later when his father brought him a violin Arthur "reacted by smashing it, earning himself a spanking" (Sowell [34], pp: 39). That was the kind of strong-willed behavior that Sowell felt would be "all too familiar" to Einstein syndrome parents. Furthermore, after hearing the first suite of Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt* performed, Arthur Rubenstein, returned home "to play almost all of it - to the amazement" of his family. At that point he still not five years of age and had not received "formal instruction under a professional musician". He later gave his first public performance at age seven (Sowell [34], pp: 40).

Additional exceptional abilities involve savant syndrome as depicted in Darold A. Treffert's excellent *Islands of Genius* [35]. Beyond the traditional autistic savants the book also considered acquired savant syndrome in which prodigious behaviors seem to follow neural setbacks. The preface of *Island of Genius* introduced some highlights:

> Kim Peek, the inspiration for the movie Rain Man, memorized 12,000 books. He is the Mt. Everest of memory with bottomless factual recall in multiple

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> areas of expertise including history, geography, literature, music, sports, science and religion, to name only some. Treffert suggested that Peek became a living version of Google. Next, Matt Savage who:
>
> couldn't stand noise or being touched as a child, [yet] very quickly mastered the piano at age 6 1/2 and had his first CD of jazz composition at age eight. Matt is recognized worldwide now as "the Mozart of Jazz," a title conferred on him by the famous jazz artist Dave Brubeck.

And next is Leslie Lemke who:

> is blind, severely cognitively impaired and has cerebral palsy. Yet he played Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 1 flawlessly after hearing it for the first time at age 14. Leslie, who has never had a music lesson in his life, is a musical genius.

Such exceptional people have "savant syndrome, a rare but remarkable condition in which incredible abilities - 'islands of genius' - coexist side by side, in jarring juxtaposition, to certain disabilities" (Treffert [35], pp: 13-14). Darrold Treffert was drawn to these mysteries and felt they represented a fundamental challenge to our understanding of ourselves. One problem he conveyed was how some people seem to know things they never learned, or as Matt Savage's teacher said of Matt, "[h]e seems to know things that are beyond his own existence" (Treffert [35], pp: 17).

Throw in acquired savant syndrome and you have an amazing collection of conundrums. In one acquired example:

> a 54-year-old surgeon gets struck by lightening which he survives. After several weeks of mild memory impairment, he develops an obsessive interest in classical music which was not present pre-incident. He learns to play the piano but has a recurrent, intrusive, unrelenting tune in his head which he subsequently transcribes into a major sonata; he now performs professionally (Treffert [35], pp: 15).

The surgeon's medical skills appeared to remain intact.

Finally, from the nearby realm of prodigies, Treffert had this about a five-year-old boy named Jay who had composed 5 symphonies:

> [h]is fifth symphony, which was 190 pages and 1328 bars in length was professionally recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra for Sony Records. On a *60 Minutes* program in 2006 Jay's parents stated that Jay spontaneously began to draw little cellos on paper at age two. Neither parent was particularly musically inclined, and there were never any musical instruments, including a cello, in the home. Yet at age three Jay asked if he could get a cello. Jay's parent then took him to a music store and to their amazement he "picked up a miniature cello and began to play it", although his parents claimed he hadn't seen a real cello before. Subsequently, "he began to draw miniature cellos and placed them on music lines". That apparently was the start of his composing. With regard to composing Jay later commented:
>
> that the music just streams into his head at lightning speed, sometimes several symphonies running simultaneously. "My unconscious directs my conscious mind at a mile a minute," he told the correspondent (Treffert [35], pp: 55-56).

Treffert appeared to do a good job of characterizing these mysteries. His stated conclusion with regard to them was that:

> no model of brain function, including memory, will be complete until it can fully incorporate and explain this jarring contradiction of extraordinary ability and sometimes permeating disability in the same person. Until we can fully explain the savant, we cannot fully explain ourselves nor comprehend our full capacities (Treffert [35], pp: 14). That conclusion could be extended to a number of forms of prodigious abilities.

Because Darold Treffert operated in the modern realm (he was literally censured for "merely mentioning" that he had encountered reports of extrasensory perception during his investigations (Treffert [35], pp: 23)), he seemed compelled to make physicalist sense out of these mysteries. His explanation involved what he called "genetic memory", and in particular that savants have somehow tapped into humanity's shared DNA-based storage of skills and knowledge. Treffert then offered a technical analogy of the factory-installed software on a computer and his specific storage vehicle was the epigenome, which involves the enfoldment or packaging of the genome (which is believed to play roles including with the differentiation of cell types and also addictions [36]. Treffert went on to confidently claim that "[b]ottom line: genetic memory exists" (Treffert [35], pp: 60-61). There do not appear to be, though, reports supporting anything like this capability.

The area of exceptional intelligence is potentially significant to the science versus religion discussion. It not only offers substantial challenges to science's molecular-only vision, but it also - along with terminal lucidity - suggests something deeper is going on. That deeper stuff might reflect beyond-physical capabilities associated with souls.

Some Other Challenges

This section briefly overviews some challenges facing materialism.

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One challenging area is the unfortunately taboo topic of paranormal research. One engaging overview book was *Extraordinary Knowing* by the academic Elizabeth Mayer [37]. In it, Mayer's experiences with psychics and then a variety of other paranormal topics were discussed. Some of these paranormal findings were quite striking, including some of the work performed at Stanford Research Institute (SRI).

Continuing, paranormal phenomena are perhaps very rare; overwhelmingly ignored by scientists; reflexively dismissed if not laughed at by skeptics (and others uncritically); but they suggest that on occasion, the human mind can include some quite mysterious abilities. Do they deserve the contempt falling out of the science camp? No. But do they deserve the hype coming out of the paranormal camp? Even in Elizabeth Mayer's book - written by initially skeptical outsider - the repeated point of emphasis was that such phenomena 'change everything'. I don't think they change much (although, they might beget psyche crises for materialists). The big related question appears to be - is there a large, life-relevant "mental universe" behind such paranormal blips?

A couple of phenomena that are quite suggestive of souls and are big puzzles, are the psychological impact of some heart transplants and also the very difficult condition of multiple personality (or dissociative identity) disorder. The former striking phenomenon was described in a paper "Organ Transplants and Cellular Memory" by Paul Pearsall, Gary E. Schwarz, and Linda G. Russek [38]. Therein a number of cases in which recipients of transplanted hearts appeared to also acquire a number of donor psychological characteristics (and the recipients were minimally informed of donor characteristics). In fact, reports have claimed that a "transfer of personality characteristics from one person to another" followed some such surgeries, and that it has been noted for over 50 years [39,40]. In particular these reports have suggested that this transference process involves four components: "(1) changes in preferences, (2) alterations in emotions/temperament, (3) modifications of identity, and (4) memories from the donor's life" [39]. In one case an eight year old transplant recipient appeared to acquire persistent nightmares which eventually led to the arrest of the person who had murdered the corresponding donor [41].

These transplant reports are rather stunning and as an aside from their specific content, they highlight the enormous difference between the intuition of everyday people in which such (soul-suggestive) transferences are not too surprising; and the materialism-dictated logic of science in which such phenomena are of course impossible. Our everyday intuition appears to be compatible with the existence of souls. Such transplant phenomena also seems to offer a simple argument for the existence of free will. How could someone make neural connections for the decision making of a deceased person whilst it unfolded in another living person, or for that matter the apparent reappearance of mental coherence as with terminal lucidity?

The multiple personality disorder is another puzzling happening and also a very difficult condition. This was addressed in a fine *Scientific American* article, "A New Therapy for Multiple Personality Disorder Helps a Woman with 12 Selves", by Rebecca J. Lester [42,43]. With this condition there can be multiple personalities which "regularly take control of the person's behavior, as well as recurring periods of amnesia". Lester's patient, Ella, referred to her personalities as "parts" and among the reported 12 parts the claimed ages ranged from two to sixteen. This presents a very challenging circumstance in which an experiencer can regularly "wake-up" in surprising circumstances.

Reconsidering Our Natural Religion

Another conundrum facing the modern understanding of life is the existence of our natural religion. Somehow we show up as infants with beliefs consistent with a crude version of some traditional religions ("some" here as the author is not qualified to comment on a number of traditional religions, let alone the many other ones). The evidence for, and scientific interpretation of, this phenomenon was presented in Justin L. Barrett's Born Believers, and moreover apparently echoed in other academic-oriented materials including Tanya M. Luhrmann's How God Becomes Real [44]. From that perspective this simply reflects our evolutionary history plus ordinary environment.

Pursued initially here is the opening of Barrett's book as it appears instructive of the contemporary religion-versus-science situation. Barrett opens his book with an encounter he had while on a train in India. A fellow passenger had caught his attention and he was informed by a second passenger that that man was supposedly a "saint". The passenger in question (or saint) then initiated a conversation with Barrett in which he offered Barrett "explanations of various aspects of Hinduism". Eventually, the conversation turned to the reason for Barrett visiting India.

Barrett then elaborated on some on his intentions, in particular to study "people's concepts of gods". Barrett then proceeded to talk about some of his tentative findings, including that while adults have trouble coherently talking about God, children do not seem to have that difficulty. Barrett was then surprised that the Indian conversant seemed to take his points seriously. In fact the Indian man went on to ask Barrett, "Do you want to know why?". Barrett then affirmed and that Indian (identified in the text as a

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Brahmin) went on to explain (in Barrett's words):

> [T]hat on death, we go to be with God and are later reincarnated. As children had been with God more recently, they could understand God better than adults can. They had not yet forgotten or grown confused and distracted by the world. In a real sense, he explained, children came into this world knowing God more purely and accurately than adults do (Barrett [22], pp: 2). *Born Believers* then went on to elaborate on Barrett's subsequent findings and then stated, "[p]erhaps surprisingly, the evidence to date suggests that as the Brahmin indicated, children show remarkable natural affinities for thinking about and believing in gods" (Barrett [22], pp: 3).

Barrett's book - along with apparently the rest of the science-fixated and religion-rationalizing field - then proceeded to layout a materialist explanation for the Indian's message. At no point in the book was it mentioned that their scientific framework - beginning with our minds' apparent bias towards assuming agency - is also consistent with the existence of souls which is basic to religious points of view (including Hindu). Furthermore, that children being less educated or conditioned (and obviously less science-influenced) might still prominently possess that innate soul-based perspective. Thus Barrett apparently couldn't take religions seriously, beyond perhaps something like the earlier point made by Mayr that religions' "stories" are "part of our cultural heritage" (Mayr [1], pp: 4-5), along with their speculative evolutionary hypothesis.

Moving onto elaborate on some details associated with our natural religion as were obtained through investigations with young children. These studies have suggested that we are born inclined towards some beliefs including:

1. That there are "[s]uperhuman beings with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and emotions."
2. That "[e]lements of the natural world such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by some kind of superhuman being(s), who must therefore have superhuman power."
3. That "[s]uperhuman beings generally know things that humans do not (they can be super-knowing or super-perceiving, or both), perhaps particularly things that are important for human relations."
4. That "[s]uperhuman beings may be invisible and immortal, but they are not outside space and time". They also possess "character, good, or bad."
5. That "[l]ike humans, superhuman beings have free will and can and do interact with people, sometimes rewarding and sometimes punishing them."
6. That "[m]oral norms are unchangeable, even by superhumans."
7. That "[p]eople may continue to exist without their earthly bodies after death" (Barrett [22], pp: 138-139).

Altogether, young children seem inclined to believe that there is a significant unseen additional living realm. That realm is believed to have a somewhat overlapping presence with our Earth realm, including a mysterious design-oriented aspect. Perhaps some of the "superhuman beings" are simply souls in disembodied form, and as such might have access to abilities that embodied souls rarely do.

Justin Barrett went on to carefully qualify findings about this natural religion. In particular he emphasized that these beliefs are conceptually primitive and that their extension into agreement with more typical religious theology is not easy. It appears that young children (and Barrett suggested adults too) might be naturally religious, but they're not inclined to be theological. Maybe the intellect can be overkill in the spiritual realm.

A soul's experiences after death might then contribute to our innate sense of the existence of those superhumans. Alternatively, pre-birth experiences in the soul realm could be significantly retained, at least for awhile until the demands and distractions associated with embodied life push them to the margins. This might account for the 'spacy' quality of infants. This transition could be coincident with the onset of the mysterious childhood amnesia in which we lose personal memories of our first three or four years [45], (Tucker [46], pp: 90). The biggest mystery above is number 2, an innate belief involving the design of the material world. One possible explanation is that this design orientation is carried over from the disembodied realm, a realm in which a soul's experiences have been purported to be dream-like. That dream-like aspect seems inferable from near-death experience literature or in a religious document like the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* [47].

Additionally, for those concerned about permission slips from physics, it is worth remembering that about 95 percent of the inferable universe is not accounted for - the so-called dark matter and dark energy mysteries [48,49].

Did these religious or spiritual beliefs somehow fall out of our evolutionary history and thus were stored in DNA and subsequently uploaded into and then realized in infant brains? From a scientific perspective this simply has to be the case. Even without the unfolding failure to tie DNA to many of our basic characteristics, though, this appears to be a questionable hypothesis.

A more direct possible connection to traditional religions can be found in the book, *Autobiography of a Yogi*, by P. Yogananda. Therein, in addition to an extraordinary memoir of a determined religious life coupled with a sustained effort

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to tie together religious teachings (principally Hindu and Christian), there is also a creationist vision presented. That vision was elaborated on, but in simplest form it claims that the world is "nothing but an objectivized dream of the creator" (Yogananda [50], pp: 146). An additional extraordinary claim made therein is that with sufficient esoteric training one can then manipulate some of that dream world. Yogananda's book was also unusual in its claims of witnessing miracles. Controversial as they are in the modern world, perhaps such rare miracles offer glimpses of corroboration for traditional religions' miracles as well as some form of creationism.

A Religious Life - And There Was Light

In order to provide for some basic living support for religions and their purviews, I turn to the "Memoir of a Blind Hero of the French Resistance in World War II", a portrayal of young Jacques Lusseyran in *And There Was Light* [51]. In addition to the above-given cover's subtitle (in which "Hero" was likely a contribution of the publisher), there also is a description found on the back cover, "one of the most powerful and insightful descriptions of living and thriving with blindness, or indeed any challenge, ever published". This remarkable book appears to offer basic support for religious perspectives and also some associated wisdom. By choosing a person's experiences which were largely detached from particular religious teachings (although his life was enmeshed in a Christian society), it could add some objectivity.

The thoughtful balance in the chronicle is evident from the opening setoff page. There Lusseyran laid out his motivation directly:

> [w]hen you said to me: "Tell me the story of your life," I was a not eager to begin. But when you added, "What I care most about is learning your reasons for loving life," then I became eager, for that was a real subject. His motivation seems appropriate, as the details of our lives are perhaps secondary to our underlying motivations and inspirations. He went on to write that this is in particular notable, "since I have maintained my love of life through everything: through infirmity, the terrors of war, and even in Nazi prisons." Next, he further stripped away the superficial by pointing out that this reason for loving life somehow did not fail, even, "in misfortune nor in good times, which may seem easier but is not."

Jacque Lusseyran continued that as an adult it is challenging to get at some basic material, and added that "[w]orse yet, it is the university professor I have become". With regard to his writing he was hoping to return to the "simplicity of a child" to convey his "real subject".

That key development (or subject) in Lusseyran's life is that he somehow had encountered an inner light which transformed his life and even somehow left him with a simple form of vision. His encounter shortly after an accident left him blind at age eight. In his new found sightless circumstances he "began to look more closely, not at things but at a world closer to myself, looking from an inner place to one further within". Circumstances had perhaps helped as he became more inwardly perceptive (Lusseyran [51], pp: 11).

That inner awareness seemed to facilitate his encounter with an inner light. Lusseyran found that encounter to be an:

> indescribable relief, and happiness so great it almost made me laugh. Confidence and gratitude came as if a prayer had been answered. I found light and joy at the same moment, and can say without hesitation that from that time on light and joy have never been separated in my experience (Lusseyran [51], pp: 11). He had had them or "lost them together". With his revelation he somehow had crossed a threshold and was then able to experiment and extend his novel inner light connection. Lusseyran interpreted this development at times as an unearned gift from God and for years considered it to be his secret. As someone who has been around meditational/religious efforts for years I suggest that such transformations are rare and usually involve years of religious practices.

In a subsequent description of one of his wide-ranging talks with his close friend, Jean, Lusseyran discussed the change in perspective that followed his inner light revelation. In a lengthy quote:

> I explained to him that it was a preconceived idea which made the process [rebounding from introversion] hard for him - an idea, by the way, which almost everyone shares - that there are two worlds - one without, the other within. I kept having to explain all over again because Jean wanted to believe me but couldn't. The preconceived idea always stood in the way.
>
> "We talked about this at least once a week in the frame of mind of people going to Mass on Sunday. After all, it was a religious subject. The reality - the oneness of the world - left me in the lurch, incapable of explaining it, because it seemed obvious. I could only repeat: 'there is only one world. Things outside only exist if you go to meet them with everything you carry in yourself. As to the things inside, you will never see them well unless you allow those outside to enter in.'"

If these were simply philosophical assertions they probably wouldn't have facilitated his remarkable life. Somehow this was a living perspective and Lusseyran who added:

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> To pass from the inner light to the light of the sun was not the work of the senses. A click sufficed, a slight change in point of view, like turning one's head a hundredth part of a circle. It was enough in the end to believe. The rest came by itself. This didn't seem like a gross shift but nonetheless it had a profound effect. Lusseyran went on to add:
> "To convince Jean (which mattered terribly to me) I assembled all my arguments. If he wanted to be completely happy, there must be only one world, for this was the indispensable condition."
>
> "This joy was well known to me. It was the Grace of my state of being. When I read in the gospels that the Word was made Flesh, I told myself that this was indeed true. At the same time I was aware that I had done nothing to deserve it. It had simply been given to me, and I prayed God that Jean, too, should receive it (Lusseyran [51], pp: 76-77)."

Somehow Lusseyran, although detached from any mystical or religious trainings, had stumbled onto what might be described as a Unity state. This encounter wasn't transient, instead he had got a foothold and quite a bit of his book then chronicled his efforts to integrate that profound transformation into his increasingly challenged life.

Jacque Lusseyran also pointed out the fragile quality of his inner connection. Any strong contrary focuses - as with anger, impatience, jealousy, or fear - faded the connection and the transcendent vision was clouded by "fog or smoke" (Lusseyran [51], pp: 15). This dynamic "took the place of red and green [moral] lights" and left Lusseyran looking for "friendship and harmony" (Lusseyran [51], pp: 15). His ongoing maintenance of morality was then seemingly guided by feedback from the inner light connection.

The messages put forth in *And There Was Light* included both that of inward potential and also tangibly, its apparent big impact on his life. Lusseyran accomplished extraordinary things, including during his French resistance role and also during his stay in Buchenwald concentration camp. The book's final paragraph summarized his experiences with two claims:

> The first of these is that joy does not come from outside, for whatever happens to us is within. The second truth is that light does not come to us from without. Light is in us, even if we have no eyes (Lusseyran [51], pp: 280).

Lusseyran's revelations about an inner light and unity also provide some evidence for the existence of the type of transformations that religions and mystical traditions touch on. From the author's knowledge of Buddhism, Lusseyran's revelation appear to have been roughly consistent with the goal of an enlightenment experience. Consistent with this in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* it is suggested that this "mind of yours is inseparable luminosity and emptiness in the form of a great mass of light, it has no birth or death" (Freemantle and Chogyam [47], pp. 87). Perhaps Lusseyran's light experience reflected a close connection with the underlying soul.

Continuing, in the *Autobiography of a Yogi*, Paramahansa Yogananda had written:

> "Let there be light! And there was light." In the creation of the universe, God's first command brought into being the structural essential: light. On the beams of this immaterial medium occur all divine manifestations. Devotees of every age testify to the appearance of God as flame and light. "His eyes were as a flame of fire," St. John tells us, "….and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength." (Yogananda [50], pp: 303).

A number of the discussions therein focused on light as both an essential feature of breakthrough experiences, and more generally as an elemental aspect of the universe and its creation.

More is added here to elaborate on Lusseyran's experiences and their significance. Whilst in Buchenwald Lusseyran was tested to an extreme degree. At one point, as desperation had almost breached even his inner sanctum, he encountered a deep positive force:

> [h]ave I said that death was already there? If I have I was wrong. Sickness and pain, yes, but not death. Quite the opposite, life, and that was the unbelievable thing that had taken possession of me. I had never lived so fully before.
> "Life had become a substance within me. It broke into my cage, pushed by a force a thousand times stronger than I. It was certainly not made of flesh and blood, not even ideas. It came toward me like a shimmering wave, like the caress of light. I could see it beyond my eyes and my forehead and above my head. It touched me and lifted me to overflowing. I let myself float upon it."

Additionally:

> There came names which I mumbled from my depths of my astonishment. No doubt my lips did not speak them, but they had their own song: "Providence, the Guardian Angel, Jesus Christ, God". I didn't try to turn it over in my mind. It was just not the time for metaphysics. (Lusseyran [49], pp: 252-253). And he drew his strength from that connection. Lusseyran then provided a synopsis for his new difficult situation: there was one thing left which I could do: not refuse God's help, the breath he was blowing upon me. That was the one battle I had to fight, hard and wonderful all at once: not to let my body be taken by fear. For fear

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kills, and joy maintains life (Lusseyran [51], pp: 253). Lusseyran's subsequent and final eleven months at Buchenwald appear to have been significant testimony to that empowerment. He claimed that he was somehow "carried by a hand" and thus "free now to help the others; not always, not much, but in my own way I could help". Specifically, he could help by trying to show "other people how to go about holding on to life" by sharing some of his inward-found joy and light (Lusseyran [51], pp: 254).

Yet in the modern science-influenced world you can sense its place as an outlier by noting the description of the book on the back cover. Yes, Lusseyran did heroic things despite being blind, but there is no hint of the profound religion-resonant nature of his experiences. While few among us appear likely to be blessed with something like his breakthroughs and grace, on the other hand his experiences offer a testimony that there exists beneath the surface a deeper reality which religions have attempted to address. Perhaps after death such breakthroughs become more plausible for the rest of us.

Touching on a final point here, Lusseyran eventually became a follower of the German mystic/educator Rudolf Steiner [52]. His parents were as well and this point was raised in an earlier version of Lusseyran's book (the author lost his earlier copy), but then was apparently deleted in later editions (like that referenced here). Perhaps because of the obscurity of Steiner and also his belief in reincarnation, the publisher perhaps decided to remove that material (as they did any religion-resonant appraisals of the book). Nonetheless, perhaps it is best for those interested in a spiritual/religious path to find one that seems most fitting and then try to live it.

Final Discussions

Science is fixated on a material-only explanation for life. As the author has regularly received critical feedback on that claim, text opens here with more supporting points.

The foundation for the materialism position is the belief that physics has covered all of the life-relevant factors. Thus, the physicist Lee Smolin simply wrote, "[t]welve particles and four forces are all we need to explain everything in the known world" (Sheldrake [32], pp: 319). In other samples of this confident logic, the physicist Richard Feynman wrote that "[e]verything that living things can do can be understood in terms of the jigglings and wigglings of atoms" [53], and the physicist Michio Kaku's wrote that "the unification of quantum physics not only revealed the secrets of the universe, it also united the tree of life" (Kaku [54], pp. 87). The latter point conveys Kaku's characterization of Erwin Schrödinger's efforts in try to "banish the life force from biology" (Kaku [54], pp. 85). In a few nutshells those quotes appear to capture the ground floor of modern science's physics-based position with regard to life. Even a recently-published article in which a physicist opens by suggesting that "[t]he fundamental nature of living things challenges assumptions the physicists have held for centuries", then proceeds to focus on some general aspects of life as evidence of more complicated embedded physics (and with it new opportunities for physicists) [55]. But do any of these people bother to notice living phenomena that are more puzzling - and potentially more significant - than new complexity theories?

On the other hand, the maverick Rupert Sheldrake went to considerable lengths to critique the materialism position; its rise within science; and also the unrealistic aurora of science as reflected in attitudes among its followers (nicely captured in a quote from the entertainer Ricky Gervais (Sheldrake, [32], pp: 27)). If idealism has peaks in the modern world, one of them applies to scientific materialism.

Sheldrake's efforts were impressive but simple challenges to the materialist's vision are also readily available to outsiders as well. How plausible are some of the standout prodigious intellectual behaviors or our innate religious beliefs? While genetics' heritability challenge is conceptual, neuroscience's neuron-only logic is perhaps more easily questioned. Can any neuron-based model for example, begin to account for the extraordinary effortless and dated memories associated with hyperthymesia syndrome, or the return to coherence found with terminal lucidity?

Returning to the plausibility of religions, there are a number of arguments potentially offering support for religions and also God. Of concern here are not rationalization efforts such as appear in material like *Born Believers*. A meaningful challenge might be to find objective evidence that religions are onto something significant. Along those lines there have been physics-based arguments including those found in works such as [56,57]. Perhaps there is something therein, although again such approaches seem remote.

In the aforementioned special edition of *Scientific American* there was some additional content relevant to philosophical and religious perspectives, and this included a significant article on free will. That article by Aaron Schurger et al, "The Case Against Free Will" [58,59], focused on how difficult it would be to empirically demonstrate the non-existence of free will, and moreover alluded to problems with the earlier neuroscience-based efforts to disprove it. Perhaps the presumed physical determinism of life provides a strong enough basis for the default intellectual assumption that there is no free will. But unfolding questions surrounding that determinism, broadly with the missing heritability situation and also with phenomena suggesting a disconnect between the brain and behavior, including terminal lucidity and the

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heart transplant conundrums, offer counterarguments. Additionally, a significant point included in the Schurger et al article was that this is an important topic since they regularly get, "e-mails asking - often in desperation - about neuroscientific studies that seem to threaten the possibility of free will" (and further a 2014 *Scientific American* article suggested that "skepticism about free will erodes ethical behavior". A conceptual point here is that any model allowing free will (and with it a meaningful basis for a soul) would seem to require a break from equations and the associated physical determinism.

Returning to science's two-by-four dilemma, it appears to be a very big affair. They have created enormous momentum behind their materialist/DNA understanding of life, and have also pushed their certainty with regard to it. As the heritability crisis suggests, though, they could be wrong in a gross way - as well as in discrete ways as suggested by behavioral enigmas (for a succinct look at such challenges readers might see (Christopher [53])). Having two-by-four'd the public with their vision, how are they going to respond to this unfolding situation?

As Bernard Haisch pointed out in *The God Theory*, though, there is enormous resistance within science to any breaks from materialism, let alone the coherence associated with religious beliefs. You can see this, for example, in a number of works by Pinker including his 2013 essay in *The New Republic*, "Science is Not Your Enemy". That essay is in large part a tour of scientific hubris, with a particular effort to also target religions. A number of his points are akin to "[t]he moral worldview of any scientifically literate person - one who is not blinkered by fundamentalism - requires a radical break from religious conceptions of meaning and value". Did any academic question his certainty with regard to materialism in that prominent essay?

It is also noteworthy that the unfolding DNA deficit could be consistent with the intuition offered by the prominent (Nobel laureate) physicist Eugene Wigner. Wigner had written in an essay about a possible conflict or contradiction at the intersection of the "laws of heredity and of physics" [60].

Bridging the divide between religion and science would be challenging. One noteworthy effort was Tarthang Tulku's, *Mind Over Matter: Reflecions on Buddhism in the West,* which chronicled Tarthang's sober experiences in teaching Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Written after nearly 30 years of teaching efforts, Tarthang included a number of thoughtful observations including those with regard to difficulties encountered in teaching Buddhism in the West in an "Age of Science". Tathang didn't, though, wade into the sequential life or reincarnation-based paradigm that is central to Buddhism [61].

The life of someone like Jacque Lusseyran is certainly relevant, although it does reflect a rare occurrence. We can perhaps learn from such extraordinary individuals, but on the other hand, encounters with divinity usually entail a life of sustained hard work and commitment which appears to be the nature of a determined religious life. The author also notes that although Lusseyran deemphasized the intellect with regard to his light/divine connection, he was also a highly educated person (who became a professor) and used that capability in both his French resistance efforts and also during his residence in Buchenwald (including his facility with languages).

In the strikingly broad and lucid book, *I Am That*, the author Sri Nisargadatta made one basic and repeated assertion [62]. That was that the bottom line with a spiritual life is simply "earnestness". With that suggested commitment we might then learn our (mundane and) spiritual lessons including those associated with moral challenges which constitute part of the curriculum. The faith part could entail a belief that staying with one's religious practices and commitment - come what may - will allow things to ultimately make sense and work out.

Additionally, in Yogananda's, *Autobiography of a Guru,* he emphasized that different faiths simply constitute different paths. That was a commendable effort and grates against the routine and divisive practice of arrogance.

All together there are a number of reasons to question the molecular-only scientific vision of life. As an admitted outsider to academic philosophy and religion (and more generally academia), I can only suggest that questioning materialism could open interesting and intellectually fruitful doors. People long ago, including the philosophically and/or religiously inclined, could have had valid insights into the nature of life. Do not be fooled by the hubris surrounding modern science.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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