

## THE DOWNSIDE OF SCIENCE EDUCATION

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*Abstract: In spite of the many technological and medical advances it has brought to the world, mainstream science has failed us in the area most important to our overall well being – spirituality. Not only has science failed to provide us with any meaning in life, it has vehemently resisted the very belief that gives meaning to life, the survival of consciousness at death. As a result, the world has become increasingly materialistic and less spiritual. Orthodox religion has failed badly in filling the void left by science, primarily because in its self-serving, fear-motivated agenda it has shut itself off from further revelation and truth. Rather than further encouraging science education, as urged by President Obama, we should consider restoring education in the liberal arts and humanities.*

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*An unfortunate awareness has overtaken our species: masses of men and women everywhere no longer believe that they have even the slightest chance of living beyond the grave. The unbeliever pronounces a death sentence on himself. For millions this can be not merely disconcerting but a disastrous perception.*

– **Alan Harrington, *The Immortalist***

*Critical rationalism has apparently eliminated along with so many other mythic conceptions the idea of life after death.*

– **C. G. Jung**

At first glance, President Barack Obama's recently announced campaign aimed at encouraging middle and high school students to pursue science, technology, engineering, and math classes and careers seems like a very worthy one.

Who can possibly find fault with such a plan? Perhaps the Amish or some religious cult that rejects modern medicine, maybe even extreme religious fundamentalists who see science as a threat to long-standing dogma and doctrine.

I have no such religious beliefs, but I do have real reservations about encouraging more education and careers in science and technology, at least if it is to the detriment of education in the liberal arts and humanities, which it most certainly would be. No doubt science and technology have given us greater comforts, conveniences, and longevity, but they also have made us angry, arrogant, apathetic, anxious, apprehensive, alienated, and aimless. These afflictions are a result of attempts by mainstream science to totally eradicate a belief in the survival of consciousness at physical death, or as it is more commonly called, an *afterlife*.

“At the heart of this distress, the illness may be identified, simply and without sham, as the fear of aging and death,” wrote Alan Harrington in *The Immortalist*. (Harrington, 6).

Harrington’s assertion is supported by pioneering psychiatrist Carl Jung, who saw death anxiety as significantly affecting the emotions and overall well-being of humankind. As Jung expressed it, the person who believes in an afterlife “follows the tracks of life and lives right into his death” without the despair of the non-believer. (Jung, 306)

In his 1973 Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *The Denial of Death*, Ernest Becker, a cultural anthropologist, stated that the fear of death is the mainspring of human activity – “activity designed to largely avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny for man.” (Becker, Preface xvii) He said that repression – burying the idea of death in the subconscious while pursuing meaningless activities – is a negative force opposing life energies.

William James, the pioneering psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychical researcher, suffered from fits of depression, what he called “soul-sickness,” as a result of his doubts about the survival of consciousness. “A nameless *Unheimlichkeit* (i.e., fear, despair) comes over us at the thought of there being nothing eternal in our final purposes, in the objects of those loves and aspirations which are our deepest energies,” he wrote. (James, 17)

Alfred Russel Wallace, co-originator with Charles Darwin of the natural selection theory of evolution, put it this way: “If the question should be finally decided in the negative, if all men without exception ever come to believe that there is no life beyond this life, if children were all brought up to believe that the only happiness they can ever enjoy will be upon earth, then it seems to me that the condition of man would be altogether hopeless, because there would cease to be any adequate motive for justice, for truth, for unselfishness, and no sufficient reason could be given to the poor man, to the bad man, or to the selfish man, why he should not seek his own personal welfare at the cost of others.” (Wallace, 2)

The bottom line here is that a belief in the survival of consciousness at physical death is critical, at least for most people, if they are to traverse life in a positive manner. But “science” seemingly opposes the idea of an afterlife, thereby offering nothing more than a march toward an abyss of nothingness, total obliteration of the personality, extinction. Thus, life becomes meaningless, which leads to hopelessness and depression, and these feelings can manifest themselves in many negative ways, including violence and apathy.

“The aim of science has been for the most part a study of mechanism, the mechanism whereby results are achieved, an investigation into the physical processes which go on, and which appear to be coextensive with nature,” Sir Oliver Lodge, the distinguished British physicist and electricity and radio pioneer of a century ago, explained the conflict. “Any theory which seems to involve the action of Higher Beings, or of any unknown entity controlling and working the mechanism, is apt to be extruded or discountenanced as a relic of primitive superstition, coming down from times when such infantile explanations were prevalent.” (Lodge, 29)

Ego clearly adds much fuel to the conflict. “The fear of being irrational is powerful,” Dr. Arthur Hastings, professor and director of the William James Center for Consciousness Studies,” explained in a 2002 issue of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*.

“In this Western culture, which is strongly rationalistic, the charge of being irrational is a damning one.” (Hastings, 82)

Hastings further suggested that many scientists, acting out of fear, arrive at a *determination not to believe*. This, he concluded, is often a product of ego defense mechanisms, such as rationalization, projection, and dissociation.

Dr. John O’M. Bockris, a retired professor of physics, agrees. “It is simply hubris - that exaggerated pride in one's own achievements which means that - and this applies in particular to professors at universities - those whose careers have been built upon certain theories - existing viewpoints - and who have taught a science based on these, are horrified to learn that they may not have been speaking the truth,” he wrote in his 2005 book, *The New Paradigm*. (Bockris, Intro.) Bockris blames these closed-minded scientists for leading many in the West to approach death without hope, thereby giving rise to a more materialistic and hedonistic world.

### **Crushing of the human spirit**

Resistance to spiritual matters by science is not new. It grew out of the Ages of Reason and Enlightenment but really gained momentum with *Darwinism*. “Never, perhaps, did man’s spiritual satisfaction bear a smaller proportion to his needs,” wrote Cambridge scholar Frederic W. H. Myers in his 1903 classic, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, referring to the period around 1882 when the Society for Psychical Research was founded. “The old-world sustenance, however earnestly administered, [was] too unsubstantial for the modern cravings. And thus through our civilized societies two conflicting currents [ran]. On the one hand, health, intelligence, morality – all such boons as the steady progress of planetary evolution can win for the man – [were] being achieved in increasing measure. On the other hand this very sanity, this very prosperity, [brought out] in stronger relief the underlying *Weltschmerz*, the decline of any real belief in the dignity, the meaning, the endlessness of life.” (Myers, Intro.)

In his 1988 commencement address to Cornell University graduates, Frank Rhodes, then president of Cornell, addressed the problem relative to science, pointing out that its reductionist thinking has been adopted by academia and has resulted in abstraction, detachment, and moral abstention and depersonalization. Consequently, he told graduating seniors, setting meaningful goals will be difficult.

In a 2003 keynote address at a University of Buffalo conference on “Fostering Ultimate Meaning,” Dr. Alexander Astin, director of the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California at Los Angeles, said that developing a meaningful philosophy of life was the top value for college students in the 1970s, but that students today are more focused on material gain. He attributed the value shift to the growing influence of television.

In his 2009 book, *The End of Materialism*, Charles Tart, a professor emeritus of psychology at the University of California, stated that material progress brought about by science and technology has been accompanied by a shift in our belief systems, a shift that has resulted in the “partial crushing of the human spirit.” (Tart, 192) However, Tart was quick to point out that it is not really science, *per se*, but “scientism” which is to blame. He defines scientism as a “materialistic and arrogantly expressed philosophy of life that pretends to be the same as essential science but isn’t.” (Tart, 38)

In effect, scientism is another word for scientific fundamentalism and is to science what religious fundamentalism is to religion. Just as the religious fundamentalist is closed-minded and non-wavering in his strict adherence to the letter of his good book, whichever book it happens to be, the scientific fundamentalist is so hung up on the scientific method that he becomes blinded to things that do not easily subject themselves to strict scientific testing.

“[The] constant rechecking of ideas against observable reality is where scientism corrupts the essential scientific process,” Tart wrote. (Tart, 194)

As Jung saw it, “rationalism and doctrinarism are the disease of our time; they pretend to have all the answers,” when there is so much more to be discovered. (Jung 300)

“To have too much intellect is sometimes a hindrance to the simple comprehension of things as they are,” wrote the renowned French astronomer Camille Flammarion. (Flammarion, 5-6)

### **Soulless nation**

Do we need a scientific study to attest to the words of Harrington, James, Becker, Jung, Lodge, Myers, Wallace, Hastings, Bockris, Rhodes, Astin, and Tart? Isn't it obvious without scientific measurement that we are rapidly becoming a soulless nation and world, one governed by the so-called “Seven Deadly Sins”? *Anger* is manifest in everything from world terrorism to simple road rage. *Lust* is openly celebrated on television and in the movies, and various forms of sex are reportedly now common in middle school. *Greed* and *envy* drive our advertising industry and the economy. *Pride*, more appropriately translated to arrogance, is rampant among our revered athletes as well as our politicians and other leaders. Following the belief that pleasure is the highest good, *gluttony* and *sloth* can be observed all around us. All the while, celebrities have become our gods.

“Deprived of rebirth vision, men suffer recurring spells of detachment, with either violence or apathy to follow,” offered Harrington. “And so the twin detachments of violence and apathy, side by side, are growing stronger and advancing within us.” (Harrington, 36) Harrington saw mass-atheism as responsible for most, if not all, of society's ills, including misplaced sexual energy. “Orgies, husband and wife swaps, and the like, more popular than ever among groups of quite ordinary people, represent a mass assault on the mortal barrier,” he opined. (Harrington, 35)

Clearly, scientism, which seems as prominent in science as evangelism is in religion, has significantly undermined spirituality by writing off the most important issue concerning us, the survival of consciousness. Those who buy into this nihilistic philosophy begin marching lockstep, like robots, toward extinction in the abyss while displaying a limited ability to reason and act independently. Hence, eat, drink, and be merry is their philosophy. Having “fun” has become the mindless goal of our youth.

“The decisive question for man is: Is he related to something infinite or not?” wrote Jung. “That is the telling question of his life. Only if we know that the thing which truly matters is the infinite can we avoid fixing our interest upon futilities, and upon all kinds of goals which are not of real importance.” (Jung, 325)

Because advances in science have progressed more rapidly than man's ability to adjust or adapt to them, physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually, we appear to

have a learning gap, one in which the liberal arts and humanities have lagged well behind science and technology. It has been reported that fewer and fewer students opt for liberal arts and/or humanities studies these days. (There is a significant overlap between liberal arts and humanities, but not completely.)

### **Humanism not the answer**

Many secular scientists preach humanism, a philosophy of right-living, altruism, morality, ethics, and benevolence without spiritual implications, but, clearly, such a philosophy has had little influence on the masses. The humanistic philosophy is still a philosophy of materialism, one in which the person strives to be one with his or her toys and in which repressed death anxiety manifests itself in a myriad of physical and psychological ills, especially during the second half of life.

The humanist's seemingly altruistic belief that life's primary goal is to make the world a better place for our children fails to get to the root of the problem, as no matter how one rationalizes that philosophy, no generation will ever enjoy full fruition. If science were to succeed in erasing all of humankind's problems, allowing our children to live in peace and harmony with unsurpassed comforts and conveniences, those benefactors still face extinction, even though science might extend the average life span by 20 or 30 years. What would those children experiencing Utopia then do for their children? To what end the progeny? True peace and harmony cannot exist without a purpose in life, and that purpose can be found only in eternity and a belief that consciousness does survive death.

Moreover, the humanist advises us to live in the present and savor every waking moment. So easy to say, so difficult to carry out, unless one is a total Philistine. As William James reasoned, one cannot effectively live in the moment without some concern for the future. "Every one knows how when a painful thing has to be undergone in the near future, the vague feeling that it is impending penetrates all our thought with uneasiness and subtly vitiates our mood even when it does not control our attention; it keeps us from being at rest, at home in the given present," he advanced. (James, 13)

"The state of anxiety, the feeling of powerlessness and insignificance, and especially the doubt concerning one's future after death, represent a state of mind which is practically unbearable for anybody," offered Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom*. (Harrington, 9)

The humanist counters by asking how an eternity that involves no more than floating around on clouds, strumming harps, and praising God 24/7 is bearable. In this, he shows his ignorance in that his conception of an afterlife is limited to that offered by orthodoxy.

As James observed, the bravado of the humanist frequently erodes with age, as he marches even closer to the abyss.

### **Orthodox religion has failed**

Orthodox religion has done little to stem the tide or enlighten. In fact, the extremists – the fundamentalists and evangelists of both Christianity and Islam – have aggravated the situation with their closed-minded, self-righteous, and prejudicial mindsets. Seeing their addiction to superstitious and unreasonable beliefs, such as a wrathful God and a dichotomous afterlife, many people schooled in science are quick to divorce themselves from such a mindset and convert to a more rational and nihilistic philosophy.

Even though a number of distinguished psychical researchers and parapsychologists have developed evidence over the past 160 years strongly suggesting an afterlife, orthodox religion has ignored or rejected the evidence, apparently because some of it is not totally consistent with established dogma and doctrine. While ignoring or rejecting the evidence for an afterlife, orthodoxy has also shunned modern revelation offering a much more intelligent and logical afterlife than the humdrum heaven and horrific hell that it teaches. .

As H. H. Price, a British philosopher and eminent Oxford professor of logic, saw it, the primary obstacle confronting the survival hypothesis is an “intelligible hereafter.”

Clearly, orthodox religion has failed by stressing worship, blind faith, and a closed book, over right action, conviction, and ongoing revelation, thereby offering only a shallow and superficial belief in an unappealing afterlife. With few exceptions, people who call themselves religious fear death as much as those who do not believe in an afterlife. Their religion is not enough to sway them from materialism and its extreme, hedonism.

“Too many indeed hold the solemn verities concerning the hereafter in a sort of half consciousness, believing in them, yet nevertheless not fully realizing them,” wrote Dr. Madison Peters, a Christian author of a century ago. “They must flame within us, setting our whole moral and intellectual nature on fire, sending a life current of energy through every part of our being, arousing us to impetuous action and to sustained effort born of strong conviction.” (Peters, 87)

### **A preponderance of evidence**

“Personally I regard the fact of survival after death as scientifically proved,” wrote Dr. James Hyslop, a professor of logic and ethics at Columbia University before becoming a psychical researcher. “I agree that this opinion is not upheld in scientific quarters. But this is neither our fault nor the fault of the facts. Evolution was not believed until long after it was proved. The fault lay with those who were too ignorant or too stubborn to accept the facts. History shows that every intelligent man who has gone into this investigation, if he gave it adequate examination at all, has come out believing in spirits; this circumstance places the burden or proof on the shoulders of the skeptic.” (Hyslop, 480)

Many others, including Myers, Lodge, Flammarion, Professor Robert Hare, Sir William Barrett, and Dr. Richard Hodgson, have made a similar affirmation after extensive research. Contrary to claims that the science of these early researchers is outdated, their research is as solid as ever, and while it has been mostly ignored, it offers at the very least a preponderance of evidence that consciousness does survive bodily death. For many, it is evidence that meets the “beyond a reasonable doubt” standard of the law. More current research in mediumship, near-death experiences, past-life studies, electronic voice phenomena, and induced after-death communication has added considerably to the old research.

And yet it is ignored or scoffed at by mainstream science. Unfortunately, indications are that even many modern parapsychologists are not familiar with some of the best evidence and that many of them are also victims of scientism. Arthur Hastings, referred to earlier, has observed a “fear-to-believe tendency” in parapsychological circles as well as in mainstream science. “It is evident from the discussion of inertial force of established

scientific ideas and preconceptions,” Hastings explained, “that there is a field of influence from the scientific paradigm or worldview that is accorded consensual reality in the scientific community.” He called this a “paradigm fixation” resulting from an investment in the data, conclusions, conceptions, and methods of the paradigm. (Hastings, 90)

“Science is incompetent to make comprehensive denials about anything,” Lodge stated. “It should not deal in negatives. Denial is no more fallible than assertion. There are cheap and easy kinds of skepticism, just as there are cheap and easy kinds of dogmatism.” (Lodge, 227)

### **Closing the robotic gap**

If some degree of sanity and serenity in the world is to be achieved in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it must begin with restoring some balance between the material and the spiritual. Key to this is the acceptance of the survival of consciousness at death, a belief in the immortality of the soul, at least as a strong hypothesis. Such a belief gives true meaning and purpose to this life in recognizing that this life is a learning experience for a much larger life. Those who believe that *nothingness* is all that awaits us at death cannot help but subscribe to a materialistic way of life.

With science far outdistancing man’s ability to adapt and adjust to the changes, and with organized religion unable to fill the “robotic gap” created by the changes, increased education in science and technology, as suggested by President Obama, hardly seems appropriate at this time. If technological advances are retarded as we wait for the gap to close, so what? What’s the hurry? The Amish have long existed without advanced technology and seem to do it with greater happiness and peace of mind than the rest of the world.

A more appropriate goal might be to encourage young people to pursue the liberal arts and humanities – grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, and logic – while adding in courses in metaphysics and parapsychology, so that they can think for themselves and perhaps even discover some meaning in life. Of course, the possibility of requiring courses in metaphysics and parapsychology is *nil* and would be strongly resisted by both science and religion.

Just possibly, by restoring liberal arts and humanities to the college curricula, we will eventually find more people better able to understand the corruption of both science and religion and we may then be able to gradually overcome the egocentricity, intolerance, hatred, hypocrisy, disorder, flux, strife, moral decadence, chaos and fear we see in the world today.

“A man should be able to say he has done his best to form a conception of life after death, or to create some image of it, even if he must confess his failure,” Jung asserted. “Not to have done so is a vital loss.” (Jung, 302)

As Dr. Herman Feifel, professor of psychiatry at the University of Southern California School of Medicine during the middle of the last century, wrote, our concern with death should not be a sign of a cult of indifference to life or a denial of it, but rather it needs to be understood that in gaining an awareness of death, we sharpen and intensify our awareness of life.

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