

Remarks On Janusz Slawinski's Paper

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The paper by Janusz Slawinski, "Electromagnetic Radiation and the Afterlife," is interesting for several reasons. First, it attempts to ground the hypothesis of an afterlife in biophysical concepts. This is an important direction to follow, since whatever might survive the death of the body must have some lawful connection to evolutionary biology. Second, the paper focuses on light, a concept that is theoretically interesting from a physical and biological viewpoint but that is also rich in symbolic, psychic, and spiritual significance. Light would indeed seem to be a promising candidate for providing the synthesis between the natural and the spiritual orders of being.

The paper attempts to "sketch the frame of a biophysical hypothesis claiming that the real and essential part of us—our conscious self—might survive the death of the body and exist in another dimension. That idea stems from the biophysical interpretation of the recent findings of spontaneous radiation from living systems." Several types of electromagnetic emission associated with normal, stress-ridden, and dying cell populations are described. Not enough, however, is said, beyond the bare assertion of a hypothetical connection, as to how these necrotic radiations relate to the essential or conscious self. Referring to the work of Raymond Moody and others, Slawinski cites reports on electromagnetic radiation from the human brain during the near-death experience (NDE). But, so far as we now know, the "ineffable light" that the author alludes to in the NDE is a psychological experience, possibly associated with some psi components. But how this inner light experience relates to physically detectable necrotic radiation is a question about which we have no data. That there is such a relation is a meaningful hypothesis; unfortunately, Slawinski doesn't explain how it can be tested.

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The author goes on to discuss the notion of "electromagnetic consciousness." First, he speaks of the possibility of electromagnetic (EM) fields being a "supreme factor" in organizing life itself. Slawinski also invokes the concept of the hologram in his sketch of a type of neovitalism. Again, I am sympathetic to the implied critique of mechanistic biology, but not enough is said to clarify the hypothesis or how we might test it. Further, Slawinski speaks of the electromagnetic nature that consciousness "has." The problem lies in defining the exact relationship between consciousness and the EM fields. Are they causally related, and if so, is it a one- (epiphenomenalist) or a two-way (interactionist) relationship? Or is the relationship one of identity?

Slawinski suggests that the whole carrying EM field, bearing all the information resulting from the organism's life experience, may separate from the organism at death or during an out-of-body experience. Presumably, then, we have here an electromagnetic model for psi transmission. For if the EM field model of the self were to account for survival-related phenomena, it would most likely have to account for psi phenomena in general. Unfortunately, there are logical and empirical arguments against the electromagnetic theory of psi functioning. On the empirical side, I will just mention studies performed by L. L. Vasiliev (1976), in which telepathic recipients were enclosed in metal-lined rooms that screened out waves from the electromagnetic spectrum, except those of very low frequency and correspondingly great lengths. That blockage did not interfere with the telepathic interaction, thus arguing against the electromagnetic hypothesis.

Slawinski admits that necrotic radiation at the moment of death may merely be the byproduct of the system's degradation from order to chaos or increased entropy. He advances a few technical arguments why this might not be so, but he scarcely succeeds in ruling it out. Throughout his discussion, moreover, he tends to conflate the thermodynamic and the psychological senses of the word "information," although at one point he says that "it hardly seems possible to reduce the problem of consciousness and its survival of bodily death to the level of elementary particles, or even further, to the elementary quantum phenomenon."

According to Slawinski, the most crucial part of his hypothesis consists of the linkage between the notion of "electromagnetic consciousness" and the special theory of relativity. According to that theory, the speed of light is an absolute to which space and time are subordinate. On the basis of that, Slawinski speculates that consciousness, somehow borne on the hypothetical EM field, and released from the body at death, may enter another " 'dimension' where space and time are fused

into one reality." That condition may well be what is sometimes called immortality or eternity, a state of pure being outside ordinary time and space.

In my view, the ideas expressed in this paper should be investigated further. I appreciate the underlying sentiment of hoping to be able to unite physical theory, biology, parapsychology, and religion, through the symbol and physics of light. Any empirical and theoretical hints toward that grand end deserve our attention. But there are obstacles here. First, I would like to see the connection between the necrotic radiation and the concept of the conscious self established more carefully; and the objections, logical and empirical, to an electromagnetic theory of psi and the self would have to be confronted.

Some philosophers would say that no matter how esoteric the physics, whether we use photons, gravitons, tachyons, etc., as the building blocks of our spiritual universe, the idea of reducing mind, self, or psi to anything physical will never be coherent. On the other hand, we ought not to rule out the possibility that whatever it is that may survive bodily death is a curious mixture of mind and matter (or energy), a *tertium quid*. After all, just this may be said of certain features of apparitional phenomena or even, for that matter, of dreams: they seem to straddle two worlds, two universes of discourse. Specific and new empirical findings, as I take the sphere of necrotic radiation to be, may offer clues to this other world of hybrid entities. The main problem, as with all experimental science, is coming up with ways to define a hypothesis so that it can be falsified. Short of that, such speculations remain part of an ever-growing mythology of scientific spiritualism.

References

Vasiliev, L. L. (1976). *Experiments in distant influence*. New York, NY: Dutton.