

Wenn die Dunkelheit ein Ende Findet: Terminale Geistesklarheit und andere Phänomene in Todesnähe [When Darkness Comes to an End: Terminal Lucidity and Other Phenomena around Death] by Michael Nahm. Crotona Verlag, 2012. 286 pp. €17.95 (hardcover). ISBN 9783861910244.

Michael Nahm, biologist and forestry scientist, is also known as a researcher and author of many publications about spontaneous paranormal experiences in current and past times. His current book *When the Darkness Comes to an End* is valuable, not only because it is an impressive case collection of the wide range of phenomena before and at death, but because it is much more than that. It discusses possible approaches to explanations for as-yet-unexplained phenomena. This concerns *light*, which has a double focus, one meaning a clarity of mind and the other meaning the unusual lights observed around a death. The terminal lucidity part of the subtitle (discussed in Chapters 1–4) refers to the first group of experiences, a sudden mental clarity shortly before death. The second part of the subtitle (discussed in Chapters 5–8) covers OBEs, NDEs, deathbed visions, and mysteriously acoustic and visual phenomena such as unusually beautiful music, lights, and fog. Further attention is given in the book to the aftereffects of those experiences on the mind and body. They can affect the personal worldview and attitude to life, but also lead to unusual bodily changes, spontaneous healing, and even healing in the context of hypnosis. The emphasis of the book is on cases of persons with serious psychological diseases and organic brain damage who have a sudden remarkable comeback of mental alertness shortly before the end of their life.

The book builds bridges between historical and new case reports and literature, integrates old reports by showing the same or similar basic patterns, and covers the huge field of experiences in the context of dying and death. It integrates several unique topics, which are, so far as I know, not described or even discussed in the current scientific context, presumably because they have been dismissed as anecdotal stories. Nahm's book finishes with a philosophical treatise on the nature of a "background reality" and on the value of a positive attitude toward death (Chapters 9–10). Seen as a whole, the text is a true pleasure for the reader, written in a very comprehensive style with accuracy in details and references—a rare combination in scientific literature. Many original case reports, both old and new, are cited and bring life to the matter. Michael's maxim: The reports should be taken as face value, even if some of them might have natural explanations or be in a way deceptive, since as a majority they could

speak for themselves. The book is rounded off with a useful international bibliography of not fewer than eleven pages.

Chapter 1 introduces "Terminal Lucidity." Nahm establishes that the topic has been known for centuries although it has only recently, thanks mainly to Peter Fenwick, caught the attention of science. In Germany his book is a first-ever on this topic. An overview is made of the medical pioneer work on the frequency of historical cases where the foregoing mental confusion is followed by the occurrence of spontaneous lucidity. Such a case is that of the "bear man," who had not spoken for 52 years, but imitated the behavior of a bear and only regained his speech when he became seriously ill. Recent cases are also reviewed, for instance that of a five-year-old boy who came back from a three-week coma and could finally speak to his family, the day before he died.

In the second chapter, he takes up the two major contrasting "Explanatory Approaches to Terminal Lucidity": reducing them to biochemical processes in the brain versus the impossibility of reducing them. The latter reductionist model was favored during the time of the German *Romantik* by Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert and later by the renowned authors Carl du Prel, Friedrich Happich, and Wilhelm Wittneben.

The third chapter on "Mysterious Medical Results in the Brain" branches out, discussing the implications of "massive brain injuries and surgeries," hydrocephalus, and Savant syndrome, as well as infant prodigies. A section on "The Human behind the Scenery" argues for the importance of hemispherectomy, strokes, and other damage to the brain for a theory of the mind-body relationship. The question is raised whether the brain is the producer or filter for the content of consciousness. The case of the Keulen twins of Potsdam, Germany, who apparently are able to gain knowledge about the content of books without reading them, leads Nahm to see the door opening to a huge field of research and to speculate that if there are more such cases, the exact 1:1 relation between mind and brain, where brain is the producer of consciousness as the reductionist theory asserts, is deficient, while the filter theory would support the reality of ESP as the *modus operandi*.

"Unexplained Bodily Changes" around death are the focus of Chapter 4, a diverse chapter which additionally covers changes due to hypnosis and to multiple personalities along with "Healing and Improvement of Physical Symptoms Shortly before Death." Many of the previously forgotten cases along with contemporary case material (such as Penny Sartori's) are rather striking. Nahm introduces several other strange bodily phenomena along with their spontaneous improvement. One such case concerns a woman who was able to get rid of several painful warts under her feet by directing healing

light onto them during her lucid dreams. A more well-known case is the teenager who had skin that was like fish scales, a rare genetic disease (ichthyosis), which could be remarkably reduced by hypnotic suggestion. Michael deserves credit for pointing out that in this context “the sudden whitening of the hair” (leukotrichia) is a common enough phenomenon for research. He illustrates this with a case given by a former director of the medical university clinic in Frankfurt am Main. The conclusion from all this is that the mind or some psychological factor has a clear determining influence. In short, mind reigns over matter. The philosophers of the era of the German *Romantik* got it right after all.



Chapter 5 gives an overview of “Near Death Experiences” including OBEs which among these topics is the most known area of research internationally, while Chapter 6 focuses on the “Visions around Death,” the so-called deathbed visions. Michael Nahm is forthright in relating his own experiences including a personal OBE in which he perceived accurate details of the surroundings. He has also experienced about 100 lucid dreams. Nahm gives his reasons for rejecting the biochemical hallucinatory theory and thereby questioning the 1:1 relationship between mind and brain. For him there are too many facts that seem to contradict this view, and which fit rather better into the filter model.

Less known and discussed than other NDE phenomena is the occurrence of “Mysterious Music around Death,” which forms the theme of Chapter 7. Michael has collected 47 cases of this sort dating back to Gregor the Great (540–604), but in 31 cases the “supernatural” music, as it is often described, was heard by several persons, sometimes independent of each other and at different times, but nevertheless at the same deathbed. This further leads Nahm to support the Romantic idea, that here there may be “aspects of the otherwise hidden reality penetrating the awaking consciousness of humans and connecting especially those who are very near to each other” (p. 232).

Chapter 8 about “Mysterious Lights and Fog around Death” focuses on some neglected aspects of the literature. Here we are concerned not with the so-called light at the end of a tunnel or the being of light associated with NDEs, but rather the lights seen by others around dying persons.

Nowadays those lights can still be seen in various forms, such as foggy clouds or flickering air, dark shadows or shining haze at the time of death, most often emanating from the lower part of the body. Michael Nahm's collection consists of 113 such cases plus 29 special cases in which bright halos were seen around the head. This fascinating phenomenon, which was understood in traditional folk language as the soul leaving the body, up to now unjustly has been completely ignored by science.

Chapters 9 and 10 on "The Background Reality of Being (*Sein*)" and "Death as a Friend" is a well-reasoned, philosophical discussion of the physical and biological aspects of the universe, including an excursion into the difficulties of evolutionary biology (Chapter 9), and suggestions on how to come to terms with death (Chapter 10). Here again the orthodox biochemical explanation runs into difficulties. Nahm shares the view of Georg Friedrich Daumer (1872) when he expresses his incomprehension at the far-fetched hypothesis of mainstream science since it seems those unexplained phenomena "obviously belong together and have a common ground" (Daumer). Last thoughts are given to ethical implications of the themes of the book and in appealing to the "human behind the scene" (p. 273) by emphasizing the deeper meaning and individual task in the life of every person, albeit often unknown. The final message is: Make friends with death, but be patient and take life as it is.

Wenn die Dunkelheit ein Ende Findet promises an inspiring reading, offering hard data as well as a philosophical treatise stretching out to the unknown. The philosophers of the *Romantik* would have liked it and I hope many others today will also.

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Annekatrin Puhle is currently engaged in research on dreams of deceased people, which cannot satisfactorily be explained by psychological means.

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