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INVENTING THE AMERICAN WAY OF DEATH,
1830–1920

JAMES J. FARRELL

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The Cosmological Contexts of Death

The idea of death was alive and well in America between 1600 and 1830. Thus, when Victorian Americans considered the question of death, they drew upon answers that successive generations of Englishmen and Americans had supplied. As exemplars of the Reformed Tradition, New England Puritans formulated the most refined and influential early interpretation of death in America. During the eighteenth century, however, the Puritan synthesis disintegrated and moved in two directions at once. Both Unitarianism and evangelical religions came from Puritan parentage. Unitarianism also embraced the Enlightenment, while evangelicals, like Romantics, represented a reaction to Enlightened ideas. This first chapter explores the interpretations of death which were embedded in the ideas of the Puritans, the Enlightenment, Unitarianism, Romanticism, and the Evangelical Era. It presents the cosmological contexts for death, and sets the stage for the dying of death after 1830.

The creation of cosmologies, or "cosmization," grounds humanly meaningful values in the fundamental order of the universe. By constructing cosmologies, people create the universe in their own image. That image develops in specific social circumstances, and shapes the experience of people in those circumstances. Usually people try to keep social conceptions in accord with social conditions and vice versa, and their success or failure is the primary concern of cultural history. Therefore, this chapter also examines the social contexts of the cosmological contexts of death.¹

Cosmology is the study of the origins, structure and processes of the universe as a whole. A cosmology is a model of the universe, based on inherited beliefs and new findings about the universe. The model describes what the components of the universe are, how they began, and how they interact. It tells people who they are in relation to other components of the universe, how to view their bodies and their desires, where they came from and where they are going, what they can know and how to know it, how to act in relation to nature and the supernatural, and what their lives mean. With regard to death, a cosmology explains what death is, what causes death, why it occurs, how to prepare for death, how to act in the face of death, and where human death fits into a cosmic system. A cosmology thus transforms a physical fact into a meaningful event. By creating models of the universe, cultures create contexts for death.

Cosmization is not necessarily religious, but when a sense of the sacred accompanies cosmization, religion is the result. In America, religious cosmologies treat death more directly than their secular counterparts, both in theory and in practice. Therefore, although secular cosmologies contribute to the theoretical treatment of death in religious cosmologies, the role of religion in affecting attitudes toward death must be emphasized. While it cannot provide a complete explanation of American death attitudes, religion does reveal deep-seated human convictions about the meanings of life and death.²

The Reformed Tradition

Prior to 1500, the cosmos of Western culture was essentially Roman Catholic. The upheavals of the Protestant
Reformation, however, undermined the unity of European Catholicism and its cosmological system. But one of Protestantism's manifestations, the Reformed Tradition, underlay the essential religious unity of the English colonies in America. The Reformed Tradition described a cosmos that included a sovereign God and a sinful people inhabiting a natural world that responded surely to God's special and general providences, but unpredictably to human manipulation. Because the Reformers believed that "in Adam's fall, we sinned all," they also believed that all people fully deserved death and damnation from God. Faith in God's goodness and a covenantal theology offered hope to people, but not security.  

The New England Puritans carried this cosmology to America. Their transatlantic voyage involved a New World, but not a new cosmos. To them, therefore, death represented the decision of a personal God to call an individual into eternal life. In his diary, Samuel Sewall recorded that "all Engagements of Spirit, and Advantages notwithstanding; the Changes that befall Men, they come neither before or after, but in the appointed Hour, or the precise Time, foreappointed of God." In the margin, he later added "An Excellent Doctrine. Providence of God."  

Because of the excellence of the doctrine, the Puritans expected people "to acquiesce in the Sovereign Disposal of God as to mens honouring of Him in Doing, or Suffering, or both." Correctly conceived, God's call of death offered the dying Puritan a final chance to cooperate in the divine plan for the cosmos. 

Death had entered this providential plan in the Garden of Eden, as a punishment for Adam's original sin. "The first sting of death," wrote minister Leonard Hoar, "is that it came into the world through man's own fault. . . . It is sin brought in death as a curse and a punishment. Death comes from God, not as instituting the course of Nature at first; but as revenging sin." If the Puritans had seen death solely as punishment, they surely would have despaired. But they also saw death as a sign of God's solicitude, a proof of the continual execution of His plan. To some Puritans, dying was even a God-given opportunity for improvement. When Samuel Sewall visited the dying Mr. Chiever in 1708, he heard Chiever's touchingly beautiful interpretation of God's work in death. "He said, The Afflictions of God's people, God by them did as a Goldsmith, Knock, knock, knock; knock, knock, knock, to finish the plate: It was to perfect them not to punish them." In his desire to share this insight, Sewall "went and told Mr. Pemberton, who preach'd." 

The Puritans also saw Christ's death and resurrection as the main demonstration of God's regard for His people. Too frequently, we forget that the Puritans were Trinitarians who considered Christ's comings as important events in their cosmos. They believed that the sufferings of their dying God atoned for the sin of Adam and offered the hope of salvation to select people of subsequent generations. This belief balanced the idea of death as punishment for sin, and made dying an event of creative possibilities for Puritans. 

The balance between punishment and perfection appeared also in Puritan interpretations of the afterlife. Death itself was a divine punishment for inherent depravity and willful sinfulness, but it also opened the way to hell, the ultimate punishment of the unregenerate. "Death temporal is a shadow of eternal death," said Jonathan Edwards. "The agonies, the pains, the groans and gasps of death, the pale, horrid, ghastly appearance of the corpse, its being laid in a dark and silent grave, there putrifying and rotting and becoming exceeding loathsome and being eaten with worms (Isa. 66. 24) is an image of hell, and the body's continuing in the grave, and never rising in this world is to shadow forth the eternity of the misery of hell." In similarly graphic images, other Puritan preachers often stoked the fires of hell, but Puritans were not immobilized by the fear of hell, because they also held the hope of heaven. They never expressed assurance that any individual would go to heaven; indeed, they struck a reference to "sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal
life” from the Book of Common Prayer. 11 But if they were not sure and certain, they certainly were hopeful. They repeatedly used the familiar image of life as a pilgrimage, an image which implied that pilgrims would return to their heaven-home at death.12 Sometimes the Puritan hope for heaven extended to exhilaration over the idea. In 1677, Sewall recorded that “death never looked so pleasingly on me as Feb. 18 upon the hearing of Mr. Thacher’s 3 Arguments. Methought it was rather a privilege to dye, and therein be conformed to Christ, than, remaining alive at his coming, to be changed.” 13 Eleven years later, Rev. Joseph Eliot told Sewall that “the two days wherein he buried his Wife and Son, were the best that ever he had in the world.” 14 And in attending Mr. Chiever in 1708, Sewall told his friend that “The last Enemy was Death; and God had made that a friend too.” 15 For Sewall and for many early American colonists, death appeared as a friendly enemy and a fearful friend.

This ambivalence about death did not confuse the Puritans. Their preachers encouraged people to fear death, but they also consoled people fraught with fear. Samuel Willard, Sewall’s pastor, reminded his assemblage that “it is a cursed death you are going to; well may it be called a King of terrors. Read over the miseries that accompany it, and say whether it is not to be trembled at.” 16 But he also served his congregation The Mourners Cordial Against Excessive Sorrow Discovering What Grounds of Hope Gods People Have Concerning Their Dead Friends. And when Sewall’s daughter Betty expressed terror at the prospect of dying unrepentant, Sewall “called for Mr. Willard, who prayed excellently that Light and Comfort would come out of her pain.” 17 Six years earlier, Sewall himself both frightened and comforted his son Samuel. In his straightforward style, Sewall recalled how religion served both as a sting and as a solace:

Richard Dummer, a flourishing youth of 9 years old, dies of the Small Pocks. I tell Sam of it and what need he had to prepare for Death, and therefore to endeavour really to pray when he said the Lord’s Prayer; He seem’d not much to mind, eating an Apple; but when he came to say, Our Father, he burst out in a bitter cry, and when I ask what was the matter and he could speak, he burst into a bitter cry and said he was afraid he should die. I pray’d with him, and read scriptures comforting against death, as, O death where is thy sting, etc. All things ours. Life and Immortality brought to light by Christ, etc. ’Twas as noon. 18

Puritans kindled the flames of fear, not to immolate themselves, but to throw light on their mortality, their sinfulness, and their need to prepare for the coming of God’s grace. They focused on “the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.” 19 Their experience of mortality taught them about the contingency of death, but they reinforced these teachings with other illustrations. When a freezing rain ruined many trees near Boston, Samuel Sewall exclaimed, “How suddenly and with surprise can God destroy!” 20 And when “a Glass of Spirits” fell off a stool in the Sewall home “and broke all to shivers,” he said that “twas a lively Emblem of our Fragility and Mortality.” 21

The suddenness and uncertainty of death required a constant readiness on the part of concerned Puritans. Whenever Samuel Sewall attended a funeral (and he attended many) he prayed God to sanctify the occasion, and to help him prepare for death. When his sister died, for example, Sewall noted that “now God begins to part us apace. Two are taken away in about a quarter of a year’s time, and me think now my dear Bror and Sister are laid in the Grave, I am, as it were lain there in Proxy—The Lord . . . put me in preparedness for my own Dissolution. And help me to live upon Him alone.” 22 On another occasion, Sewall prayed, “The Lord help me to redeem the time.” 23 In this way, remembrances of death refined the richness of life. Like modern thanatologists, the Puritans felt that a constant awareness of death could enhance the quality of their lives.
Puritan preparationism made the ritual of the deathbed more important than the ritual of the funeral. Samuel Sewall, for example, visited many of his dying friends to give them "a Lift towards heaven." At bedside, people prayed, read the Bible, and conversed in earnest tones about religion. Occasionally, doubts plagued the dying Puritan, and like a Mr. Sanford that Sewall visited, "he feared that all he had done for God was out of hypocrisy." But more frequently, the persons "dy'd a strong Death," surrendering themselves to the grace of God. In their burial customs, the early Puritans followed A Directory for the Publice Worship of God, a handbook compiled at the Westminster Convention of 1645, which charged that "when any person departeth this life, let the dead body, upon the day of Buriall, be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for publique Buriall, and there immediately interred, without any Ceremony." Because they associated the time of death with the time of judgment, the Puritans felt that they could do no more for the dead person than to dispose of the body. Therefore, they avoided the Papist ceremonies which suggested that post-mortem prayers or indulgences could assist in salvation. Instead, they gathered in the home to console the survivors for their loss and to congratulate them on the dead person’s journey to rest and reward. Ministers might attend a funeral, but generally they did not deliver a sermon.

By 1700, however, elaborate and expensive ceremonies superseded the simple solemnity of burial, at least among Sewall’s friends and acquaintances. In that year, Sewall reported that he “went to the Funeral of Mrs. Sprague, being invited by a good pair of Gloves.” In addition to gloves, survivors presented people with scarves, rings, wine, rum, and food. People began to pray at funerals, and ministers began to preach funeral sermons. And survivors began to place symbolic stones on gravesites. By the time of the Great Awakening, Puritan patterns of death behavior had changed markedly.

The increasing complexity and commercialization of life shaped the conventions of death as well. The Puritan way of death suited the simple life of a religious people living in relatively isolated agricultural communities. But extended imperial control, more mercantile activity, and an increased exchange of information with England exerted an external influence for change, even as economic and geographic growth encouraged social diversity, political dissent, and cultural controversy within towns and colonies. These internal social changes produced a stratified social structure, an ideology of “opportunistic individualism,” and “a world more impressed with England and with men’s social differences than with Puritanism and the community of the saints.” Predictably, however, it took a religious upheaval to confirm this course of social change. The explosion of the Awakening undermined the coherence of the Puritan cosmology and encouraged new efforts of cosmization. As orthodox Puritans and their opponents sought to ground a new social order in the essential scheme of the universe, they created new contexts for death.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment introduced cosmological conceptions which repudiated this traditional scheme and affected American intellectual development throughout the nineteenth century. Between 1700 and 1800, but especially in the final forty years of the eighteenth century, Enlightenment thought spread among the educated classes of the Eastern seaboard, presenting an alternative to the ideas of the Reformed Tradition. In this new Enlightenment formulation, God relinquished the foreground of the cosmological canvas to nature, but retained a place in the background and the past. God had created the intricate mechanism of the universe, and now He merely watched as people sought to discover the natural laws by which it operated. Although not all
these laws were known, confidence of their eventual discovery minimized the sense of mystery previously associated with nature. 32

As Daniel Boorstin has shown, the idea of an “economy of nature” governed by natural law legitimized the active, functionalist work—scientific, social, political, and economic—of the Jeffersonian generation. It objectified “the primary value of workmanship and energy, and apotheosized the ability to organize a natural chaos into a self-governing natural society.” 33 It also allowed Enlightenment thinkers to embrace an optimistic interpretation of history which underlay most nineteenth-century social thought (and the dying of death)—the idea of progress.

The Enlightenment portrayed progress as the liberation of individuals from the restraints of the past. In The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine looked forward to an age without kings or priests, injustice or fear. Many leaders of the Enlightenment shared Paine’s political libertarianism and anticlericalism, and tried to overcome the institutional obstacles to individual freedom. But many people also shared his opposition to “tyranny over the mind of man,” a tyranny sometimes supported by fear, an atavistic emotion in a world populated by rational beings. Benjamin Smith Barton, a nephew of David Rittenhouse, claimed that the history of various nations showed “that a part of their religious, and a large part of their superstitious notions, have arisen out of fear.” 34 Unlike the Puritans, who recognized the powerful and constructive uses of fear, the men of the Enlightenment preferred to appeal to reason. They made just such an appeal in their treatment of death.

Enlightened people did not dwell on death as had their Puritan ancestors. In fact, the Enlightenment deprived death of some of its sting by removing it from the Reformed religious context. Like Benjamin Franklin, deists believed in “the existence of the Deity; that he made the world and governed it by his providence; that the most acceptable service of God was the doing of good to men; that our souls are immortal; and that all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter.” 35 But they emphasized the idea of death as a natural occurrence, an essential part of the economy of nature. Because they doubted the doctrine of depravity, damnation no longer necessarily lurked behind death. Nor did it seem painful or particularly frightful to die. Instead of stressing their dependence on God, enlightened people approached death with a sense of self-reliance, and ideally, they experienced a serene and stoic death. Without excessive emotion, they simply left life behind them and looked for the approval of posterity. In many ways, they anticipated the verdict of history more than the judgment of God. 36

They also expected posterity to avoid or postpone death. In a grand vision of progress, Franklin wrote to Joseph Priestley that “it is impossible to imagine the Height to which may be carried, in a thousand years, the Power of Man over Matter. We may perhaps learn to deprive large Masses of their gravity and give them absolute Levity, for the sake of easy Transport. Agriculture may diminish its labor and double its produce; all diseases may by sure means be prevented if not cured, not excepting Old Age, and our Lives lengthened at pleasure even behind the antediluvian Standard.” 37 As this vision suggests, Franklin considered death a natural process that people could eventually manipulate.

Most Americans, however, did not immediately share this conception of control of death. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment shaped American political development, but it failed to secure its whole cosmological constitution for the people of the United States. After 1790, a sharp reaction to radical Enlightenment ideas developed in America. Even among the leaders of the Enlightenment, the stoic response to death did not prove satisfying. In 1816, Thomas Jefferson asked John Adams “what is the use of grief in the economy.” Adams, ever the enlightened Puritan, replied that “Grief, as a
mew Passion must necessarily be in proportion to sensibility.” It forces people “to reflect on the Vanity of human Wishes and Expectations; to learn the essential Lesson of Resignation,” and it challenges people “to fabricate all the good We can out of all inevitable Evils, and to avoid all that are avoidable. . . among which are our unnecessary Apprehensions and imaginary Fears. Though Stoical Apathy is impossible, yet Patience and Resignation and tranquility may be acquired . . . very much for the happiness of Life.” In abbreviated form, Adams’ answer suggests the etiology of the dying of death. When middle-class ideas of “sensibility” and “sentiment” enlisted in the enlightened fight against fear, the dying of death would be well underway. Unlike his hubristic Victorian successors, however, the Puritan Adams resigned himself to inevitable evils like death and grief. By themselves, the ideas of the Enlightenment did not transform the American approach to death.

Ultimately, however, the process and success of the American Revolution brought selected Enlightenment ideas and attitudes to the common people of America’s farms and farming communities. The Revolution “stood as an inspirational model of men’s power to alter their own lives, to think new thoughts, to act on the best ideas of mankind, to liberate themselves from the dead weight of the past,” and from the dread weight of death. In establishing Committees of Correspondence and in supplying the Continental soldiers, the rural people of America increasingly linked themselves to networks of communication and commerce. Consequently, they began to think in terms of natural economies and of free exchange in the marketplace, and they extended the market metaphor to ideas, morals, marriage, and labor. Like the economy of nature, these social economies would be governed by natural law, and by the liberal ideology which interpreted natural law. In this way, more than in its specific ideas on death, the Enlightenment eventually affected the dying of death.

Unitarianism

In American religion, the effect of the Enlightenment appeared first in Unitarianism, which appealed to the commercial and professional classes of Boston. Assuming that “only Christianity could counteract the evils of nineteenth-century commercial society,” the Unitarians preached a gospel of “capitalism, theism, liberalism, and optimism.” “While they welcomed America’s industrial transformation, Boston’s moral elite were anxious to keep its consequences under control.” In this way, Unitarians used “sentimental religion and ethical absolutism” to authorize and ameliorate the effects of the ideology of opportunistic individualism. In an era of intense economic and social change, said Henry Adams, “nothing quieted doubt so completely as the mental calm of the Unitarian clergy. . . . Boston had solved the universe.”

Boston’s solution combined elements of both the Enlightenment and traditional religion. Like themselves, the Unitarians’ God was both rational and personal, in contrast to the Creative Abstraction of the Enlightenment. Unlike those traditional Christians who stressed the sovereign power and wrath of God, however, the Unitarians emphasized His benevolence. James Freeman Clarke, in fact, referred to God as “the Eternal Goodness.” The Unitarians similarly shared the Enlightenment’s positive evaluation of people, and believed in the possibility of human perfection. Rational individuals, created in likeness to God and exercising free will, could ultimately save themselves. In anticipation of almost all of the nineteenth century’s cosmological configurations, therefore, Unitarianism emphasized the human agency of the self-made man.

Like deists, Unitarians professed belief in a vague “future state of reward and punishments.” Early Unitarians maintained the traditional belief in future punishment, but rejected literal descriptions of hell and of the eternal duration of damnation. Later, James Freeman Clarke claimed that
“Unitarians believe in many hells and many heavens, according to the character and condition of each person. They believe that the purpose of future suffering will be reformatory and not vindictive; and that if a man is selfish and willful, it is best for him to suffer the consequences of these evils in order to become better.” This optimistic vision of the afterlife colored aspects of the Unitarians’ present life, including their interpretation of death. Unitarian conceptions of death derived from those of the Enlightenment and the Reformed Tradition. A personal God supervised the natural processes which caused death, but confidence in His benevolence and in human rationality minimized fears of condemnation. Serene and stoic death still appealed to Unitarians, but they replaced the simple death of the Enlightenment with a more symbolic passing. They also minimized the distance between death and life, between the dead and the living. When his son George died in 1822, William Ellery Channing wrote an extremely emotional letter about “the void in a parent’s heart when a child is taken.” But he immediately filled the void by asserting that death “is not that wide gulf between us and the departed which we are apt to imagine. . . . Francis, Ann, my child, and our beloved Barbara, are gone from us, but not lost to us.” James Freeman Clarke marveled that Americans could look upon birth and death as nonchalantly “as we look upon waking in the morning, and falling asleep at night.” But he, too, employed the analogy to ask “is it not likely that our change from this life to the next will be equally gradual, and perhaps as unconscious? We shall find ourselves familiar and at home in another state, before we are conscious of entering it.” Even before the spiritualist interest of the 1850s, the Unitarians began to conceptually construct a bridge between this world and the next.

These beliefs about the proximity and familiarity of the afterlife appeared in Unitarian funeral services. Edward Everett Hale, the editor of James Freeman Clarke’s Autobiography, wrote that “when he compiled his service book, he put into the funeral service some of the usual psalms referring to death; but before long he ceased to use these. He knew from his own experience that we never believe so little in death as when we stand by the open grave, and in those hours he appeared to reach a yet deeper faith and a higher hope. While he spoke, the heavens seemed opened, and things unseen and eternal were made real to sorrowing hearts. Death was swallowed up in life.” Unitarians emphasized the continuity of life instead of the finality of death.

Clarke repeatedly described the world as “an admirably furnished school,” and Unitarians in general regarded death as an instructional tool. Their major educational innovation was Mount Auburn Cemetery (1831), a rural cemetery that marked a new direction in conceptions of death, and that served as a model for American cemetery reform before the Civil War. Unitarians expected individuals who visited Mount Auburn to be impressed by religious interpretations of life and death. They viewed the death of “informed” individuals as a graduation ceremony to advanced celestial instruction. And they described heaven as a sort of class reunion, where they would meet again with common school classmates. In his last days, James Freeman Clarke repeatedly “expressed his undoubting trust in a reunion hereafter with those who had gone before and those who were to follow him.” This interpretation of life and death as stages of instruction appealed to many Americans who also applauded the work of educational reformers in the antebellum period. It also emphasized the human rationality that Unitarians assumed. And it effaced the fear of death that infused the interpretation of the Reformed Tradition. “Though an unhappy style of religion has sought to make death terrible,” wrote Clarke, “it has not succeeded. God fills the heart with a better faith.” In the early nineteenth century, the Unitarians offered a religious alternative to the death doctrines of traditional theology.
Unfortunately, Unitarianism's emphasis on rationality limited its appeal, as God apparently still filled many hearts with another faith. Many Americans agreed with Emerson, who decried "the corpse-cold Unitarianism of Brattle Street." Like enlightened thinkers, however, the Unitarians were intellectually influential without being numerous. Their principles affected all American denominations, which either reflected or reacted against the liberal ideology of Unitarianism. Still the mainstream of American thought in the early nineteenth century flowed in another direction, which invited widespread participation by emphasizing the emotional and intuitive resources available to the masses. This Romantic current, which infused democratic ideology as well as cosmology, branched in America into Evangelicalism and its opposite, religious liberalism.

**Romanticism**

The Romantic cosmology celebrated the essential correspondence of God, nature and humanity. God, or the Spiritual Presence that sometimes substituted for God, permeated both nature and people. The remote and abstract God of the Enlightenment entered His creation, sometimes to the sacrifice of His own identity. Spirit formed the foundation of Romantic philosophy, but Romantics generally focused on the various forms in which spirit was found, namely in nature and humanity. Asher B. Durand illustrated the integral interaction of the universe in his painting *Kindred Spirits* (1849). It depicts Thomas Cole and William Cullen Bryant in a peaceful natural setting, kindred in their relationships to each other, to nature, and to the spirit that informed them all.

The Romantic movement of God into nature was not simply a process of *Deus in machina*. In fact, the identity of the divine and the natural altered the static, mechanistic conception of nature that had prevailed in the Enlightenment.

The Romantics saw nature as a dynamic organism infused with vital force. The regular motions of the Enlightenment's mental machine gave way to the mystery and majesty of a nature that seemed to have taken personal traits from the traditional God, and transformed them into a feminine character. In this way, the Romantic combination of God and nature engendered a further change in the nineteenth-century cosmos, as Mother Nature rivalled Father God as the source of vital force and the cause of death in the cosmos.

Romantics considered the Enlightenment and Unitarianism elitist for their insistence on reason as the source of meaning and action. Romanticism emphasized an expanded consciousness, including reason but adding intuition and imagination to the individual's intellectual arsenal. Because people who lacked the rigorous training of reason still possessed intuition and imagination, the Romantic epistemology increased the number of people who could be expected to attain the truth. In this way, the Romantic cosmology justified American individualism, the political expansion of the franchise, and the social decline of deference which occurred in the early nineteenth century. Similarly, because Romantics considered the mind an active agent for shaping ideas and experience instead of a passive receptor of sense impressions, they also justified the activism of the American people.

While some Romantics refrained from an instrumental approach to nature, others exploited Romantic ideas in the interest of economic and geographic expansion. For Thoreau, the Romantic concept of nature could be defined as the sphere of no human control. He insisted that "I love Nature partly because she is not man, but a retreat from him. None of his institutions control or pervade her." Most Americans, however, wanted to master nature, and interpreted her femininity as an invitation to invasion. When joined with ideas of spiritual omnipresence, the concept of virgin land allowed Americans to maintain a cosmological spirituality during their
conquest of a continent. When phrased as “free land,” the idea became a central component of the emerging ideology of the Northern middle class. Paradoxically, then, the spirit of Romanticism contributed to the development of American possessive individualism.\(^{54}\)

Indeed, Thoreau's characterization of Nature as a "re- treat" from man suggests that even radical Romantics recognized the superior force of the armies of competitive individualism. Although a retreat is "a safe, quiet, or secluded place," it also implies a "giving ground before opposition" and "a period of retirement or seclusion, especially one devoted to religious contemplation away from the pressures of ordinary life." Thus, the conception of Nature as "retract from the world" served more as a safety valve than as a wrench in the wheels of capitalist culture. Conceptions of the home, the suburb, and the rural cemetery as utopian retreats from the city served the same social and psychological function.\(^{55}\)

In the Romantic context, death had two main meanings. Viewed one way, the correspondence of God, humanity and nature made death the ultimate communion with the universe, the return of the individual to Mother Nature. In "Thanatopsis," William Cullen Bryant early advanced this soothing and cyclic conception of death. In "A Forest Hymn," he returned to the theme:

Lo! all grow old and die, but see again,
How on the faltering footsteps of decay
Youth presses—ever gay and beautiful youth
In all its beautiful forms. These lofty trees
Wave not less proudly that their ancestors
Moulder beneath them... Life marks the idle hate

Of his arch-enemy Death—yea, seats himself
Upon the tyrant's throne—the sepulchre.
And of the triumphs of his ghastly foe
Makes his own nourishment. For he came forth
From thine own bosom, and shall have no end.\(^{56}\)

In this interpretation, death was literally swallowed up in life, as the forest fed on the decaying forms beneath it. Bryant celebrated the immortality of life, even as he admitted the inevitability of individual deaths. This Romantic rendering of death encouraged people to consider death a natural occurrence, and to accept the coming of death as a friendly visit. By placing death in the organic growth of nature and in the cycle of seasons, these Romantics made it a natural and easy experience, the final sign of human correspondence with the universe.

Bryant's interpretation of death also carried instructional import. He concluded "A Forest Hymn" by addressing God

Be it ours to meditate,
In these calm shades, thy milder majesty,
And to the beautiful order of thy works
Learn to conform the order of our lives.

Like many Romantics, including Emerson, Bryant expected that Americans could learn important lessons from nature. Boston's Unitarians shared this belief, and they institutionalized these Romantic expectations in the rural cemetery, which they considered a common school for the American multitudes. Echoing the strains of Bryant's forest hymn, the author of Mount Auburn Illustrated, a guidebook in the "Rural Cemeteries of America" series, suggested that "we may well gain a lesson from nature amid such scenes of tranquil beauty, and learn to conform our lives to the order of her works in view of both the present and the future."\(^{57}\)

A second group of Romantics, however, saw death as a source of the sublime, an awe-inspiring event that elevated human emotions to peak sensitivity. Like Edgar Allan Poe, they stressed the horror of death in order to elicit fear, the strongest of human emotions. They considered death an adversary, and the struggle between death and the individual as a battle of epic proportions. They emphasized the horrors of
death and the grave, the futile fight with conqueror worm, and the terrible prospect of burial alive. Besides producing a sense of the sublime, this view of death also increased grief for survivors, who imagined the deceased in the midst of death's horrors. It also heightened awareness of the emotions engendered by death and the funeral, and stimulated efforts to channel these feelings in the direction of social order.

Rather than succumb to the raging emotions of this sublime Romanticism, "civilized" Americans circumscribed these emotions with sentimentality, which was "part of the self-evasion of a society both committed to laissez-faire industrial expansion and disturbed by its consequences." Romantics recognized reality, passed judgment on it, and maintained myths for their aesthetic value. Sentimentalists either refused to recognize reality or failed to pass judgment on it, and maintained myths for their peace of mind. Just as the cult of "romantic" love obscured the social and economic inequalities of Victorian marriage, so the indulgent sentimentalization of death disguised its reality and finality.58

Sentimental Americans domesticated death, thus trying to overcome their terror of it, by developing socially acceptable channels for Romantic expressionism. When an individual died, sentimental survivors directed their private grief into public mourning. They swathed themselves in mourning clothes and decorated their homes with crepe and funeral wreaths. Choosing funeral furnishings to convey a sense of melancholy beauty, they also interred the individual in a rural cemetery that capitalized on the conventions of Romantic naturalism to supply emotional reassurance to survivors. And finally, they erected an elaborate monument to the memory of the dearly departed. All of these outlets for expression of grief followed well-defined social forms and required substantial outlays of money. Thus, by socializing the emotional intensity of Romantic individualism, sentimentalism established itself as a civic virtue. It also established a style of funeral service that persisted throughout the nineteenth century.

The Evangelical Era

Although sentimentality shaped the form of the early Victorian funeral, evangelical revivalism supplied its religious content. Drawing on the revival tradition of the Great Awakening, new revivals burst forth in Eastern colleges and backwoods settlements at the turn of the century, both as a reaction to the irreligion of the Enlightenment and as a response to the material preoccupations of the frontier experience. Until 1830, revival leaders generally preached a gospel opposing social and cultural change and enjoined Christians to return to the faith of their fathers. After 1830, under the influence of men like Charles Finney, many revivalists preached a gospel of progress, challenging Christians to create a new world governed by religious self-control. As Paul Johnson suggests in A Shopkeeper's Millennium, this was "the moral imperative around which the northern middle class became a class." Because they experienced as religious problems the disobedience and social disorder that resulted from new relations of production, master workmen and manufacturers responded quickly to the evangelical call. They accepted the idea of a perfect social order voluntarily constructed by people of moral free agency, and they exerted their economic power as employers to enlist the allegiance of workers in the fight for middle-class morality. Although evangelical rhetoric often opposed the spirit of Christianity to the spirit of competitive individualism, evangelical activity actually promoted Christian accommodation to capitalism.59

Evangelicals emphasized the importance of scripture, a conversion experience, and a life (and death) of Christian witness. They stressed God's persuasiveness more than His power, His moral government more than arbitrary election, the voluntary sinfulness of His people more than their innate depravity, and free agency and moral accountability more than predestination. By 1850, the revivals of the militant middle class had ravaged the American landscape, and changed the
structure of social and religious life. At the time of the American Revolution, Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Anglicans claimed the lion’s share of church membership. By 1800, the Baptists had surpassed Congregationalists, with Methodists close behind. Twenty years later, both the Baptists and the Methodists boasted 2,700 churches, compared to 1,700 for the Presbyterians and 1,100 for the Congregationalists. By 1850, the Methodists’ 20,000 churches made them the preeminent Protestant denomination in America.60 By that time also, the doctrinal differences between the major Protestant denominations had narrowed so much that one can characterize the period between 1825 and 1915 as “The Methodist Age in America.” In 1850, most Americans approached the issues of life and death from a religious perspective colored by sixty years of successful evangelicalism. By 1920, although both scientific naturalism and religious liberalism had attracted adherents, these religious views still probably predominated.61

Although it concentrated mainly on the moral lives of converted Christians, the emerging Protestant consensus of the evangelical era also extended to death. Most Protestants of the period interpreted death in Biblical terms. The 1842 catechism of the Old School Presbyterians asked “Shall all men die?” and provided the annotated answer, “Death being threatened as the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23), it is appointed unto all men once to die (Heb. ix. 27); for that all have sinned (Rom. v. 12).”62 Henry Boynton Smith, the moderator of the New School Presbyterians and the most influential instrument of the 1869 reunion, also referred to the Bible to teach that “temporal death is a penal consequence of sin” and that “this death . . . includes pain and suffering.”63 Like the Presbyterians, most Americans of the evangelical era believed that God intervened directly with death to chastise his sinful children and to remind survivors of their own mortality.

Because of their greater belief in human agency, Christians of the evangelical era encouraged preparation for death as much as the Puritans. In 1834, William B. Sprague, a prominent Albany minister who had turned from Congregationalism to Presbyterianism in 1829, published Letters on Practical Subjects to a Daughter. Appropriately, the book concluded with a chapter on “Preparation for Death.” Sprague felt that “the great majority of mankind manifest an absolute aversion to the contemplation of death,” because “man is guilty” and afraid to “ponder the prospect of a retribution.” For the unforgiven sinner, then, preparation for death required repentance for sins and faith in the saving power of Christ. For the Christian, however, preparation for death went beyond this simple assurance of salvation. A Christian should die “in the exercise of a triumphant and elevated faith,” so that his/her death could “speak forth the all-sustaining power of the gospel.”64

To achieve the goal of a glorious death, Sprague suggested several preparations. He first enjoined his readers to “meditate frequently and solemnly on death. . . . Meditate on the certainty of the change; on the nearness of its approach; on the circumstances which will probably attend it;—the parting with friends, the dropping of the earthly tabernacle; the pains, the groans, the dying strife, which may be crowded into the last hours; on the amazing scenes which must open upon the spirit the moment death has done its work, and on the riches of that grace which secures to the believer a complete victory in his conflict and a triumphant entry into heaven.” In this way, the Christian could “transfer from time to time some new affections from earth to heaven.”65

Secondly, Sprague advised his readers to “beware of the world. . . . Remember that the spirit of the world is directly opposed to the spirit of the gospel, and that both cannot find a permanent lodgement in the same bosom.” Finally, he recommended that readers “cultivate a spirit of devoted piety.” Living a Christ-like life, he said, “constitutes true preparation for death.” In concluding his collection of letters, Sprague
stressed the signal importance of the subject. “Whatever other purpose might be answered by them,” he said, “it would be with me a matter of little moment, provided they should have no effect in preparing you for death and eternity.”

In more specific circumstances, American evangelicals also encouraged preparation for death. In 1842, the Presbyterian directory for worship outlined the minister’s role in the visitation of the sick. According to this outline, the visit should be educational, comforting, and exhortatory. The minister, said the manual, “shall instruct the sick out of Scriptures, that diseases arise not out of the ground, nor do they come by chance; but that they are directed and sent by a wise and holy God, either for correction of sin, for the trial of grace, for improvement in religion, or for other important ends: and that they shall work together for good to all those who make a wise improvement of God’s visitation, neither despising his chastening hand, nor fainting under his rebukes.” Seeing God as the cause of disease and death, Americans of the evangelical era derived a moral meaning from the experience. They sought to balance anticipation of God’s glory with apprehension of His justice, and so they provided that “the minister must endeavour to guard the sick person against ill-guarded persuasions of the mercy of God, without a vital union to Christ; and against unreasonable fears of death, and desponding discouragements; against presumption upon his own goodness and merit, upon the one hand, and against despair of the mercy and grace of God in Jesus Christ, on the other.” “In one word,” concluded the directory, “it is the minister’s duty to administer to the sick person instruction, conviction, support, consolation, or encouragement, as his case may seem to require.”

But the sick person was not the only recipient of these clerical ministrations. Indeed, the Presbyterians recommended that “the minister may improve the present occasion to exhort those about the sick, to consider their mortality; to turn to the Lord and make their peace with him; in health to prepare for sickness and death, and judgment.” In many ways the events of a religious person’s life were simply occasions for the contemplation of death.

Protestants of this period also used the idea of death to exhort people to immediate action. Lyman Beecher, perhaps the preeminent American evangelical, used the fear of death to inspire his unregenerate children to convert to Christ. In 1819 he wrote to William that “while I am as successful as most ministers in bringing the sons and daughters of others to Christ, my heart sinks within me at the thought that every one of my own dear children are without God in the world, and without Christ, and without hope.” Beecher pointed out that “a family so numerous as ours is a broad mark for the arrows of Death. I feel afraid that one or more of you may die suddenly, and I be called to mourn over you without hope. To commit a child to the grave is trying, but to do it without one ray of hope concerning their future state, it seems to me, would overwhelm me beyond the power of endurance.”

Having whipped William with the bonds of filial responsibility, Beecher then asked him “to save me from such an hour on your account.... Awake, I beseech you, my dear son, and fly to Christ.” As this indicates, the emphasis on human agency created considerable anxiety over death in the evangelical era. Along with the privatization of the home and the celebration of intimacy and affection within its confines, it may also explain the enormous literature on the death of children, as parents agonized over an ailing child, “hoping all the time that death would terminate its sufferings, and fearing that something worse than death would be the result.” Free agency made people able to assist in their salvation, but it did not assist infants and children, since moral accountability rendered people responsible for their failure to receive the Spirit.

By the same token, however, Protestants in the evangelical era could appreciate, if not actually celebrate, the death of a regenerate Christian. They often recounted deathbed
scenes that demonstrated the power of the gospel, and they considered it “a great privilege to stand by the dying bed of God’s children.” When Lyman Beecher’s first wife died of consumption in 1816, for example, family and friends gathered at the bedside, where they heard her describe the blessings of her life and her expectations of heaven. She dedicated her sons to missionary work, and consigned all her family into God’s hands. Lyman then offered her back to God, and she died. A neighbor considered it “a most moving scene to see eight little children weeping around the bed of a dying mother,” but “very cheering to see how God could take away the sting of death, and give such a victory over the grave.” Twenty-seven years later, when one of those children died, Harriet Beecher Stowe echoed the sentiment, writing to the rest of the family that “the deepest and most powerful argument for the religion of Christ is its power in times like these.” Religious people of the evangelical era did not welcome death, but their faith often stabilized their adjustment to death.

The funeral itself expressed these ideas of death. The Presbyterians provided that “when the season for the funeral comes, let the dead body be decently attended to the grave and interred. During such solemn occasions, let all who attend conduct themselves with becoming gravity; and apply themselves to serious meditation and discourse; and the minister, if present, may exhort them to consider the frailty of life, and the importance of being prepared for death and eternity.”

The Methodist “Order of the Burial of the Dead” also mixed some assurance of salvation for believers with restatements of God’s sovereignty and human sinfulness. At the graveyard, the minister met the corpse with the hopeful gospel message, “I am the resurrection and the light, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, shall never die.” After a similar passage from the book of Job, he identified death as God’s work and encouraged acquiescence in the sovereign disposal of the Lord, saying, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.”

At the grave itself, as attendants lowered the coffin into the ground, the minister noted the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and the vanity of human aspirations. “Man that is born of a woman,” he said solemnly, “hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery.—He cometh up, and is cut down like a flower: he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.” The minister then acknowledged human sinfulness, and began a succession of prayers for God’s mercy with the words, “In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?” Identifying death with pain, the minister prayed God to “deliver us not into the pains of eternal death” and to “suffer us not at our last hour for any pains of death to fall from thee.” After returning to the theme of the resurrection of the regenerate, the minister again asked for God’s mercy and intoned the Lord’s Prayer. The Collect repeated the congregation’s belief in resurrection and immortality, and their pleas for mercy; then the service ended with the collective prayer, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us all evermore.”

This recommended funeral service featured a restatement of belief and a preparation for death by the living. It counterpoised fears of death, decay and damnation with hopes of regeneration and resurrection. It made no explicit reference to the deceased and it contained no prayers for his/her salvation. It offered little immediate consolation to the living, because it concerned itself more with abstract death than with the death of the individual. Undoubtedly, ministers adapted this suggested service to the personal needs of the disconsolate by playing variations on the themes of the order for burial. In time, the Methodist Church itself changed the
Order of the Burial of the Dead. The most drastic changes occurred only after 1900, under the influence of liberal religion, and must therefore be considered in that cosmological context. For most of the Methodist Age, however, the Methodists prescribed a delicate balance of fear and hope in funeral service.

The evangelical era had an ambivalent impact on American attitudes toward death. On the one hand, because of their involvement in the process, some people felt more assurance of their own salvation than their Puritan predecessors.77 On the other hand, for the same reason, the death of an unregenerate individual engendered more anxiety than in the Puritan era when people left election in God's hands alone.78 After 1850, the delicate balance of the evangelical era tipped away from fear and anxiety and toward assurance. By that time, however, scientific naturalists and religious liberals had begun to identify the religious partisans of the evangelical era as the caretakers of Calvinism in the modern world. From this perspective, both naturalists and liberals modified early nineteenth-century ideas of death, a development explained in detail in subsequent chapters.

By reforming the Reformed Tradition, Americans of the evangelical era added a new cosmology to Puritanism, the Enlightenment, Unitarianism, and Romanticism. Between 1600 and 1830, American cosmologies generally shifted focus from God to nature to humanity. The series of cosmological contexts for death also exhibited a progressively higher evaluation of humanity, and a concomitant sense of greater human control of the universe. Some of these cosmologies encouraged fear and submission to an inevitable death, an event charged with moral significance. Other models of the universe suggested that people might approach a morally neutral death more confidently, sure of their ability to avert or postpone death, or to transcend it in everlasting life. After 1830 Americans drew on these earlier intellectual traditions to interpret the stark fact of death. In a characteristic spirit of eclecticism, the American Victorians collected and combined elements of these cosmological systems to create satisfying explanations of death. To these, they added the ideas of scientific naturalism and religious liberalism. Chapters Two and Three study the construction of this eclectic intellectual edifice.
Death and Scientific Naturalism

2

After 1850 scientific naturalism was the crucial catalyst of the dying of death. Throughout American history, people had incorporated science into their cosmologies. Not until the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, however, did science assume an independent role in American life. Even then, the influence of science was generally limited to intellectuals who pursued it as an avocation. In the nineteenth century, due to the promotion and patronage of the middle class, science established itself as a vocation and secured institutional support. Through the mass media, scientific assumptions and attitudes became common among "the moderately educated, moderately articulate, and modestly prosperous, church-going Americans whom we associate with the middle-class consensus." As people accepted these naturalist assumptions and attitudes, they began to deal with death differently. They saw death as a natural phenomenon governed only by the laws of nature. Influenced by the success of scientific medicine and the sanitation movement, they set out to eliminate the causes of death, including old age. From Darwin's Origin of Species, they drew a species perspective of life, death, and immortality, which they institutionalized in life insurance. In doing so, they amended their cosmological inheritance, and modified the meaning and management of death for Americans.¹

In general, nineteenth-century Americans viewed science as the impartial testing, description, and theoretical construction of natural and/or social phenomena. But since science is an important part of the social construction of reality, it is never absolutely impartial. Especially in areas of limited verifiable content—like death—science can easily be shaped to social purposes. In the nineteenth century, the scientific method allowed certain Americans to isolate aspects of the natural and social worlds as problematic, and to propose solutions for them without questioning the underlying structures of science or society. The assumed impartiality of the method increased the authority of science, and made such "solutions" acceptable to many Americans. In general, Americans chose "those scientific plausibilities which fitted most conveniently into their social needs and presuppositions." Therefore, the "didactic metaphors" of nineteenth-century science, including interpretations of death, supplemented the value system of its middle-class missionaries, even as it began to superecede some specific values.²

Both the intellectual isolationism and the inductive methodology of nineteenth-century science were essential to its emotional relevance. Assuming that they could easily synthesize discrete items of information, naturalists prided themselves on their factual focus. By 1906, Thorstein Veblen defined the culture of modernity as "peculiarly matter of fact."³ Even earlier, an advocate of the sociological-statistical study of the family argued that "the time has come when social studies demand that we start with indisputable facts, as far as they can be discerned. Dogmatism and sentiment are more and more coming under ban as guides to the work of social reform."⁴ The author's veiled references to religion and Romantic sentimentality as "dogmatism" and "sentiment" only accentuated the distinctive self-concept of scientific adherents. In the period between 1850 and 1920, scientific
thinkers asserted their authority over many of the “facts” of modern civilization, and tried to relegate religious and sentimental interpretations to a secondary status.\(^5\)

By themselves, the inductive assumptions of scientific naturalism did not undermine existing cosmologies. Some of the findings of nineteenth-century scientists did, however, unsettle cosmological systems. Most important in this regard was the synthesis of evolutionary naturalism, associated with the works of Charles Darwin and his followers.\(^6\) In admirable inductive fashion, Darwin supplied the “facts” to call old cosmologies into question. But more important than his careful presentation of facts was his hypothetical construction of them. Combined with naturalist assumptions about admissible evidence, Darwin’s construction of reality was the most important catalyst of cosmological change in the nineteenth century.

In the *Origin of Species* (1859) Darwin contended that nature operated by a process of natural selection, a process that included random variations of life forms, the struggle among them for existence, and survival of the fittest. Darwin observed that random differences within members of a species offered advantages to certain types and promoted survival in the struggle for limited resources. Over time, the hereditary transmission of advantageous variations eventuated in new species, which then spawned their own random variations. Thus the process of natural selection operated uniformly over long periods of time, ostensibly without conscious direction and without predictable future results.\(^7\)

The *Origin of Species* was a text on biology, but “as the Bible itself had long been taken for a biological and geological treatise, so the *Origin* became a treatise on religion and ethics, eventually in politics and sociology.”\(^8\) In the same way, although the *Origin of Species* described the origins and development of life in the universe, it also changed conceptions of how evolutionary processes worked in the contemporary world.\(^9\) Working from its theory of nature, the *Origin* also affected conceptions of God and humanity. In its most extreme form, evolutionary naturalism sentenced both God and humanity to seeming insignificance. A completely naturalistic cosmology would contain no God, a neutral nature imbued with force and power, and a mechanistic man propelled by the lawful operation of that nature by which he was defined and conditioned. Most American naturalists, however, construed the cosmos differently.

The initial assumption of strict scientific naturalism excluded any discussion of the supernatural. Even more than in the Enlightenment, God could be banished from the cosmos. Some naturalists claimed that “matter and force are the only reality,”\(^10\) thus defining the traditional Deity out of existence. Theists circumvented this result by defining God, as John Fiske did, as “Cosmic Force.”\(^11\) Even that admission of God into the cosmos severely revised His traditional form and function. “Cosmic Force” lacked the personality that had made God particularly relevant to people. The general applicability of “Cosmic Force” to cosmic processes also undermined the human uniqueness that derived from God’s special creation of separate species.\(^12\) Finally, the conception of natural selection detracted from the doctrine of design, whereby God created each life form for a specific purpose. The random variations of natural selection, only some of which proved purposeful, thus imperiled the posture of natural theology.\(^13\)

In short, the God of evolutionary naturalism was insufficiently distinguished from nature to offer anything to His supposed creation. Even His continuation as “Cosmic Force” could provide little security for humans concerned not so much about their origins and existence, but about their end. Naturalists discussed where they had come from, but not where they were going.\(^14\)

Nature was the focus of naturalist thought; propositions about God and people flowed from conceptions of nature. For naturalists, nature was the new locus of causality in the cosmos. It was also a new nature. The naturalists junked the
cyclical mechanism of the Enlightenment, weaned themselves from the nurturant nature of Romanticism, and substituted a nature red in tooth and claw, a jungle in which chance chose the evolutionary winners. Unlike the Newtonian universe of the Enlightenment, but more like the dynamic universe of Romanticism, the order of the naturalistic universe was change. Newton's nature did not change. The planets revolved in orbits determined by mathematical laws, while all life existed in the form initially endowed by the First Cause. Thus the future was held fast by the laws of the present. Evolutionary naturalism did not suggest new paths of planetary orbit, but it did affront the fixity of species, and by the random process of natural selection, it also affected the fixity of the future. Paradoxically, it introduced a deterministic indeterminacy into the cosmos. A cast of creatures bound to the direction of natural selection would play parts in a drama lacking both a climax and an ending.

As naturalism affected the fixity of the future, it also revised other conceptions of time. As evolutionary naturalism derived some of its strength from an earlier generation's sense of geological time, so it also bestowed subsequent generations with a changed idea of time. Previously the assumed immortality of humans made them unique, but now the conception of an unending evolutionary process implied that the universe too was immortal. The Christian concept of the end of the world, effected by the transcendent God prior to final judgment and compensation, died with the traditional Deity, because even "Cosmic Force" worked only within the laws of nature.

As evolutionary naturalism affected conceptions of time and immortality, it also altered ideas of mortality. The process of natural selection depended on the occurrence of death. The necessary corollary to the survival of the fittest was the extinction of outmoded species. This system made survival, or life, a value in itself, not because it was a gift from God. In addition, although death drove the evolutionary process, collective death and not the death of individuals was the focus. Darwin's emphasis on the origin and extinction of species undercut the importance of individual deaths. If naturalists revalued and collectivized the end of life, they generally ignored the ends of life. They had little need of teleology. They valued the means of life, not the ultimate ends. Most naturalists put progress in the evolutionary process, but even then, others like Thomas Huxley did not "see much justice in natural selection. It means progress and death; but the progress is very remote, and the death very immediate. It is not very clear what compensation the *Eohippus* gets for his sorrows in the fact that millions of years later, one of his descendants wins the Derby." Even those naturalists who saw progress as part of the evolutionary process failed to define the future, except in terms of a vaguely improved present. But improvement implied a value judgment which strictly scientific naturalists shunned. Practically, most naturalists sacrificed logical consistency to subjective assurance and made the judgment. Taking their understanding of nature and natural selection as the beginning, they foretold further human comprehension and control of the cosmos. Thus, the knowledge of nature provided people not with proofs of God's existence, nor with inspiration, but with confidence in their own abilities. The road of rationalization that produced this confidence was sinuous, if sincere, for it conveniently bypassed the fact that the nature of the naturalists included humanity.

For the naturalists, the nature of human beings flowed directly from their relation to nature. From Romanticism to naturalism, humans moved from mystic communion to material identity with nature. Simply stated, people were animals who had evolved from less complex forms of life. There were two reactions to this realization. Critics of evolutionary naturalism deplored the perceived animality of people, especially in relation to the assumed spirituality of people in earlier cosmologies. But most naturalists, and especially opti-
nists, emphasized the intelligence of the human race in relation to its newly acknowledged ancestors.

The first approach focused on the incompatibility of naturalist conceptions of humanity with the Biblical account of creation, fall, and redemption. In Genesis, a personal God had molded Adam and Eve in His own image, thus bestowing dignity and distinctiveness upon His highest creature, and making life a moral drama. In spite of God's generosity, Adam and Eve had sinned, and had been banished from the Garden of Eden. Even then, however, God graciously provided an opportunity for redemption of the human race. The evolutionary account of human development read differently. People were not children of God, but scions of lowly life forms. This interpretation of human origins deprived people of inherent human dignity and spiritual significance. In addition, these lowly origins precluded a fall and negated the need for redemption. Instead, the naturalists stressed the slow but steady development of the human organism. But this development, critics asserted, lacked explanation for moral values in the world and could not differentiate human intelligence from animal instincts. Thus, critics labeled evolutionary naturalism a brutal philosophy.

The naturalists approached the evolutionary origins of the human species from a different perspective. Some naturalists situated both God and human spiritual significance within the evolutionary system. Others needed no religious foundation for their cosmos. Buoyed by the apparent primacy of people in the evolutionary development, by human understanding of nature and natural selection, and by a social interpretation of the struggle for survival, these naturalists maximized human power, morality, and rationality in relation to the other orders of creation. They acknowledged the animal origins of the human race without admitting its essential animality. Aware of natural laws, people could subsequently modify them for their own benefit. As the sociologist Lester Frank Ward observed, "Man's task is not to imitate the laws of nature, but to observe them, appropriate them, and direct them." Thus, in a sense, the species itself would become supernatural.

There was an important social component to this form of scientific supernaturalism. In this interpretation of evolutionary naturalism, one of the elements of human uniqueness was a social nature which invited cooperation of the members of the human species against other species. Unlike the Romantics, who stressed human correspondence with and submission to nature, the naturalists emphasized competition with and mastery of nature. Mastery of nature extended to conquest of self as well. The intelligence and morality of individuals must control the residual traces of animality in them. In the same way, the intelligence and morality of humanity could be consulted to alter the environment which would otherwise condition the species. This reasoning contributed heavily to the rise of the social sciences, and to an optimism perhaps best expressed by the undergraduate orator who claimed in the 1850s that "Social Science is the Healer, the life-thrilled Messianic Healer of the human race. It is the herald on the misty mountaintop, proclaiming through all this burdened earth, that THE KINGDOM OF MAN IS AT HAND." Thus, many naturalists celebrated their supernatural status, and placed themselves firmly in "the tradition in which evolution was fulfilled in the emergence of humanity, interpreted at its best in terms of divinity."

In the context of scientific naturalism, the meaning and management of death changed. Naturalists redefined death as a natural process. Strict naturalists discarded the deist idea of God as First Cause of the cosmos and as the ultimate cause of death. Instead they attributed death solely to natural causes. Eventually, under the influence of Elie Metchnikoff, some naturalists even asked "Is There Such a Thing As a Natural Death?" By 1910, hopes were high that death could finally be conquered. Evolutionary naturalism also shifted the focus of death from the individual to the species. Consequently, in as-
sessing the place of death in evolution, many naturalists preferred to stress the immortality and improvement of the race rather than the mortality of the individual. Finally, this species perspective of death became institutionalized in the business of life insurance, which sustained individual survivors by statistically calculating the rates of death of the species. All of these developments aided the dying of death, and receive fuller treatment below.

American acceptance of a scientific ethos involved an implicit redefinition of death, one that considered “the phenomenon of death” as “belonging strictly to the natural.” In 1845, the definition of death in the *Encyclopedia Americana* proposed that “death, in common language, is opposed to life, and considered as the cessation of it. It is only, however, the organic life of the individual that becomes extinct; for neither the mind nor the matter which constituted the individual can perish. That view of nature which considers the whole as pervaded throughout by the breath of life, admits only of changes from one mode of existence to another.” Its reference to “the breath of life” associated it with Biblical imagery, explicit vitalism, and implicit supernaturalism. By 1903, under the influence of scientific naturalism, the *Americana’s* definition of death had changed.

Death, in common language, a state opposed to life, and considered as the cessation of it. Strictly speaking, we can trace only the cessation of organic life. The matter of which the body is composed does not perish on the death of an organized being; it undergoes various changes, which are known by the names of decay and putrefaction, and which are the preparation for its being subservient to new forms of life. What becomes of the mind, or thinking principle, whether in man or animal, is a matter of philosophical conjecture or religious faith. The investigations of science do not throw the least light upon it.

Between 1845 and 1903, the naturalist interpretation of death drove supernatural and vitalist assumptions out of the definition. The scientific expropriation of the facts of life extended even to the fact of death. This redefinition of death as a “matter of fact” derived conceptual support from similar developments in the study of disease. Between 1832 and 1866, for example, Americans had reinterpreted the causes of cholera. Discarding the evangelical view that God caused cholera, they began to see the epidemics as a social problem with sanitary solutions. “Disease had become a consequence of man’s interaction with his environment; it was no longer an incident in a drama of moral choice and spiritual salvation.” Naturalists played down the arbitrary aspects of divine distribution of death and disease, and emphasized the orderly arrangement of these phenomena in nature. One such naturalist wrote that “throughout the civilized world the reign of the miraculous is gradually losing power and prestige, superseded by the reign of law.” Under the reign of [the] law, naturalists themselves came to power and prestige by asserting their comprehension and control of the cosmos. In a 1912 article on “Our New Attitude to Disease,” Earl Mazo claimed that

the old feeling of helplessness and hopelessness in the fear of epidemics is gone. It was hard even for pious persons to say that it was God’s will when they saw their lives cut off in their beginning or in the prime of their usefulness by infectious diseases. Today we know that it is not ‘God’s will’ that children should die of diphtheria or young men be destroyed in the flower of their manhood by typhoid fever. We are awake to the fact that it is man’s ignorance or man’s carelessness that is responsible, and we are inspired to work on toward the glorious ideal set before us by Pasteur when he said, ‘It is within the power of man to cause all infectious diseases to disappear from the earth.’

A doctor who spoke at the 1910 convention of the National Funeral Directors’ Association made the transfer from disease to death. In the past, he said, people saw death “as the expression of divine will. . . . But today we have thrown off the
shroud of mystery and mysticism thrown about the uncertainty of man’s life and looked the causes of death square in the face.”

Naturalists assumed that “we may look upon death as a product of natural causes, the same as any other natural phenomenon, and that these causes are bound to the fixed, and as we believe beneficent, laws of the universe.” This conception of death as “natural” brought them to consider the nature of a natural death. Between 1850 and 1920, two interpretations of natural death appeared in America. Both formulations contributed to the dying of death, but in different ways. The first maintained that death was “only natural,” and encouraged people to accept the painless ministrations of nature. The second interpretation defined death as disease, and offered expectations of an eventual cure.

The first formulation of natural death presumed to efface the fear of death by defining death as an integral and natural component of life. “The death process must be regarded as one which is always going on, even in the actively growing cell. In other words, the death process is a normal part of the life processes.” This interpretation of death appealed to the idea of process that Romanticism introduced and naturalism popularized in the United States. Accordingly the idea of death-as-process seemed more natural than death-as-instantaneous-and-intervening-event.

Other people also incorporated death into life by arguing analogically. Authors asserted, for example, that “it is as natural to die as it is to be born,” or “it is as natural to die as to live—and as easy,” or that death was as natural as sleep. These people played upon a widespread identification of the natural with the good; believing in the beneficence of the laws of nature, and assuming the inevitability of death, they hoped to reduce popular resistance to death by labeling it “natural.” By showing that the process of death paralleled previous life experiences, they suggested that people could also cope with their final experience, and they called for the calm acceptance of death. Using semantics more than science, they tried to teach people that a natural death was not fearsome.

This first formulation of natural death emphasized its ease, largely by analogy to other natural processes. Ideas about the ease of death appeared in other contexts as well, particularly in articles which propounded the painlessness of death. Pain is a basic human problem, closely associated with the problem of death. In theocentric cosmologies, pain and death demonstrated God’s displeasure with transgressions of His law. In a providential polity, the will of God appeared in plagues, earthquakes, and other incidents that caused human pain and suffering. In this context, religious journals like the 1850 Methodist Quarterly Review could confidently assert that “the agonies of death are horrifying . . . however bright the prospect beyond, particularly to those who enjoy health and prosperity.” But if suffering served as punishment for sins, it also served as compensation for them. The righteous person suffering at death could expect both relief from pain and a measure of mercy from God in recognition of the agony of atonement. In this, a Christian followed the example of Christ, who suffered and died to save sinners.

The “disappearance of God” from the naturalist cosmology necessitated a reconsideration of this moral calculus. The perception of pain as either punishment or compensation became obsolete. For naturalists, pain provided instead a warning of transgressions of the new god, nature. Extreme naturalists considered the pain purposeless, but most American naturalists saw the painful symptoms of disease or injury as signs for scientists, clues to the cures that would surely be discovered. This approach assumed improvement and a basically benevolent nature, incorporating the interpretation of naturalism acceptable to most Americans.

In addition to the disappearance of God, the discovery of anaesthesia also compelled a new look at the place of pain in the cosmos. When Dr. Henry Smith Williams reviewed
“The Century’s Progress in Scientific Medicine” for Harper’s Magazine in 1899, he viewed the discovery of ether as “a revelation of greater immediate importance to humanity than any other discovery that had come in the century, perhaps in any field of science whatever.” Most other Americans agreed. Shortly after the discovery of anaesthesia, Americans coined the word “painkiller” and made the prevention of pain a primary value. In “Some Thoughts on Pain and Death,” H. B. Marriott-Watson wrote that “the aim of this life, if it would do what nature desires for it, should be the avoidance of pain and the acceptance of death in due time. . . . In truth, if we are looking about for a philosophy, that in which the greatest amount of unnecessary pain is averted would seem to be, on the whole, the highest and best we may obtain.” Armed with medical anaesthesia, Americans hoped to add a physical dimension to the Stoic and Epicurean philosophies. Instead of serenely enduring pain, they would utterly eliminate it.

Physicians used anaesthetics especially in surgery and childbirth, but Americans applied a mental anaesthetic to kill the pain of death. In 1869, Dr. Benjamin Richardson wrote “In Articulo Mortis” for three related reasons:

1) To declare that Nature, which is to us the visible manifestation of the Supreme Inteligence, is beneficent in the infliction of death, that, if thwarted in her ways, she is still beneficent, and that she may be trusted by her children.

2) To declare the great law and intention of Nature, that in death there should be no suffering whatever.

3) To declare to men, that whatever there is in death of pain, of terror to the dying; of terror, of unsatisfied sorrow to the living, is made pain, made terror, made sorrow; and that to attempt the removal of these is the noblest and holiest task the spirit of man can set itself to carry out and to perfect. It is to give euthanasia to the individual, millennium to the world.

Richardson’s beliefs in a beneficent nature, in the painlessness of death, and in preventive death therapy were seconded by many authors in the subsequent half-century. “Physical dis-

solution was long regarded as intensely painful, and by-gone literature is full of such phrases as ‘the last struggle’ and the ‘final agony,’ which are now entirely without significance,” observed Junius Henri Browne in 1888. “The act of dying, it is now ascertained, is absolutely free from suffering, is really unconscious; insensibility always preceding it.” Other writers reinforced this view, constantly proclaiming the painlessness of death. Some claimed that the body produced its own anaesthetic to prevent the pain of death. Others admitted that pain accompanied many diseases, but denied that suffering persisted until death. That event, they explained, was perfectly peaceful and sometimes even enjoyable.

Americans employed many analogies and images to express “the modern belief that the process [of death] is easy.” Woods Hutchinson acknowledged that “while disease is often painful, death itself is gentle, natural, like the fading of a flower or the falling of a leaf.” In an article entitled “Sleep and Death,” however, John H. Girdner highlighted the most popular image of painless death in periodical literature. One writer stated matter-of-factly that “in fact it is as painless as falling asleep.” Dr. E. L. Keyes believed it “to be more than probable that the final act of dying is as simple and painless as going to sleep—and practically, we all die daily, without knowing it, when we go to sleep for the night.”

Beyond its implication of painlessness, the image of death as sleep marked important changes in American attitudes toward death. The most popular early American image of death had been the pilgrimage, with its implication of a postmortem journey back to God. To cross the river, to go to heaven, to pass to a better home, all were euphemisms for death that emphasized movement or progression to a final goal. The image of sleep was more ambiguous. One who sleeps goes nowhere and experiences nothing, unless he or she awakes refreshed. A few Americans acknowledged the improbability of immortality in these terms. Most Americans conceded, however, that “it may be that death is an eternal
sleep, and the grave the end of all things, as some philosophers hold. But the instincts of humanity recoil from the doctrine.” Instead they believed that the sleep of death preceded the last great awakening.55

Ironically, however, the same person whose instincts recoiled from the idea of death as perpetual sleep advocated the establishment of national cemeteries, and a cemetery is etymologically a place of sleep. Even when they saw how the image of death as sleep could imply annihilation, Americans maintained its currency because the sense of sleep confirmed their experience of life. Whereas the “American pilgrimage” implied a continuity of life and death, the image of death as sleep emphasized the discontinuity of a strife-filled life and a peaceful death. As the pace of their lives quickened, Americans used ideas and institutions to counterpoint the acceleration of the civilization. The image of sleep and the institution of the rural cemetery served the same purpose. Both assured Americans that the sleep of death followed the strenuous life and preceded a restful resurrection. And both made the experiences of death and burial seem more “natural.”56

The second interpretation of the nature of a natural death made death seem more unnatural. By narrowing the number of natural causes of death to none, these naturalists propounded not the analogical acceptance of death, but the expectation of the eventual avoidance of death. Especially after 1900, many naturalists argued that they might imminently cure the disease of old age and liberate people from the iron grip of death. This second formulation of natural death culminated with the question “Is There Such a Thing as a Natural Death?” but it began with the study of unicellular organisms.

Evolutionary theory stressed the continuity of life from lower forms to higher forms, so that scientists assumed that the investigation of unicellular organisms somehow applied to human beings. Thus some naturalists claimed that “the death of a single protozoa is equivalent to the death of one of the higher animals.”57 When protozoa proved capable of surviving several hundred generations, then some people felt that humans might also achieve such longevity. More importantly, however, they claimed that the research showed that death was not inherent in life.58

To explain the continued occurrence of human death, C. S. Minot, a Harvard biologist, advanced a specialization-differentiation thesis whereby death became the compensation for complexity of structure. Drawing from the evolutionary outlines of Herbert Spencer, Minot concluded that “Death . . . is the price we pay for our more complex life. Age and death, though not inherent in life itself, are inherent in the differentiation which makes life worth living.” By this means, Minot and other naturalists preserved a compensation theory of death, though in a form more Spencerian than supernatural.59

Emerging views of natural death also stemmed from experimentation with various tissues of living beings. Alexis Carrel, the Rockefeller Institute researcher who won the 1912 Nobel Prize in physiology and medicine for his work on organ transplants, proved able to preserve life functions of organic tissues in artificial solutions, and to graft the tissues onto other organisms where they continued to function. To some naturalists, who assumed that the whole equalled the sum of its parts, these results promised the possibility of preserving whole organisms in a similar manner. These researches, wrote one author, “will bring us much nearer to the solution of the old unsolvable problem of life and death. What, indeed, is that death which every part of an organism can survive for a longer or shorter period?”60 Another naturalist offered even more hope, noting “the view of modern physicians . . . that death is by no means the sudden change which our minds, laden with metaphysical tradition, imagine. We talk of something—the soul—flying away from the body. But it may not be . . . Doctor Carrel has shown that every function of life save consciousness can be kept up. This authority sees noth-
ing extravagant in the idea that medical science may some day go a step further.” 61 By a similar logic, John H. Girdner denied that death was the cessation of life, because the cells of the human body survived in other forms. For this reason, he preferred to substitute the word “change” for “death” in the language, to say that “John Doe changed at Bellevue Hospital to-day” or that “Richard Roe . . . is changing.” By thus separating death from individuality and by semantic substitution, Girdner hoped to reduce fears of death. 62

Medical definitions of disease also affected emerging views of natural death. During the nineteenth century, hereditary theories of disease were superseded by ideas of diseases as discrete microbial entities invading the human body to wreak destruction and death. This new definition of disease encouraged naturalists to consider old age and death as outside agents as well. Combined with medical successes in controlling diseases, this conception of death as a disease offered the expectation of imminently increased longevity. 63

More than any other individual, Elie Metchnikoff popularized this possibility of prolonging life. Born in Russia in 1845, Metchnikoff emigrated in the 1880s to Italy, where his blood research led him to the discovery of the causes of immunities. In 1888, he moved to Paris, where after seven years he succeeded Louis Pasteur as the head of the Pasteur Institute. He also shared the 1908 Nobel Prize for medicine. Although he remained in Europe, Metchnikoff influenced Americans through his publications, and through the publicity he received. For example, the American journalist Edwin E. Slosson included Metchnikoff in a series on “Twelve Major Prophets of Today” in the 1911 Independent magazine. 64 In his writings, Metchnikoff offered Americans hope that the “due course” of death might be diverted. In his “Studies of Natural Death,” he defined natural death as “the phenomenon resulting from the organization of a being, and not from accident.” Like John Girdner, he considered death by disease an accident. And he believed that “old age is an infectious chronic disease,” caused by autointoxication—bacilli lodged in the large intestine and poisoned the whole organism. The implied conclusion of this sequence of thought was that “if old age is correctly characterized as a disease and especially if it is due in part to microbial invasion, it ought to be possible to cure or postpone it.” 65 Metchnikoff prescribed that people eat yogurt and/or drink buttermilk to battle autointoxication, because these milk products provided lactic bacteria to combat the poisonous varieties. This cure of old age earned Metchnikoff the title of “the modern Ponce de Leon searching for the Fountain of Immortal Youth and finding it in the Milky Whey.” But it also meant that Metchnikoff had renounced the notion of a natural death. He and the Americans who followed his logic argued against the inevitability of death and against unfounded fears of death. In effect, the conceptual elimination of natural death offered the possibility of physical immortality. 66

It also entailed a considerable revision of conceptions of nature. For Emerson, “Nature, in the common sense, refers to essences unchanged by man; space, the river, the air, the leaf.” In the negation of natural death, however, death did not remain unchanged by man. In the natural order of things, people did not live long enough to die a natural death. Paradoxically, only human intervention against invading diseases allowed the eventual occurrence of natural death. 67

For some people, the paradox was problematic, because the prolongation of life became an end in itself. They wished to set limits of intervention. Simeon E. Baldwin, the president of the American Social Science Association, noted regretfully that “in civilized nations and particularly of late years, it has become the pride of many in the medical profession to prolong . . . lives at any cost of discomfort or pain to the sufferer or of suspense and exhaustion to his family.” This, said Baldwin, was “another form of unnatural death,” and he proposed to let nature run its appointed course to painless death. Preferring natural euthanasia to artificially prolonged
life, Baldwin championed "the natural right to a natural death." In this, he marched to a different drummer, one step ahead of his time, for most Americans seemed to accept the artificial ministrations of the medical profession. They hoped that doctors could cure the disease of death, thus literally causing the dying of death.68

Metchnikoff's speculation about natural death focused on individuals, but not all speculation about death took an individual approach. Indeed, many naturalists envisioned a species perspective of death, which diffused the fear of death by focusing on the adaptive group instead of the mortal individual. Taking their cue from the evolutionary hypothesis regarding the origin and development of species, they subordinated the deaths of individuals to the development of the race. And they argued that an individual's immortality depended on his descendants more than on the deity.

The species perspective of death derived primarily from the naturalists' collective consideration of life. As early as 1844, the scientist John W. Draper admitted that "in the system of the universe an individual is not known, but action takes place on masses. Nor are the laws of nature ever bent to give benefits or bring punishment on any individual. They go into effect with an inexorable decision."69 By 1901 H. B. Marriott-Watson complained that "the tragedy of life is that there is no account taken of individuals; it is the stream of tendency that matters. . . . The wages of sin against her [nature] is death; yet as in the case of her rewards, she visits not the individual." Nature, he said, "prefers to deal with the race."70

Other people went further and eliminated individuality altogether. C. S. Minot claimed that "individuality, as it is generally understood (i.e., as something always equivalent to itself), does not exist in nature, except as a rather fantastic notion of the human mind." And Thomas Edison argued that "we are not individuals any more than a great city is an individual. If you cut your finger and it bleeds, you lose cells. They are the individuals."71 Thus, naturalists deemphasized individuality in two ways. The first focused on collective humanity, or the species, as befits a naturalistic outlook. The second also studied the species, but only in terms of its members' physical structure as systems or cycles of cells. In America, only the first interpretation appreciably affected attitudes toward death.

Naturalists complemented their collective consideration of life in the cosmos with a species perspective of death. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Harvard geologist Nathaniel Southgate Shaler made two attempts to explain "a naturalist's judgment of life and death." In The Individual he looked at death not in "the religious way—in the manner that goes beyond the facts, or, perhaps we should say, above them; but in the matter-of-fact way—that which looks alone to the phenomenal for the explanation sought." He described the evolution of death and claimed that death entered the natural system "only when the principle of the advance of successions of generations was established." He admitted "the apparent difficulty, that there is no profit to the individual in his own death," but maintained that "the life of the series . . . is the eminent characteristic of the organic realm." Acclaiming death as "an inevitable corollary to advancement," he equated evolution with the most potent idea of the nineteenth century, progress. At the same time, he assigned the individual a meaningful place in the epic of evolution.72

Shaler saw, however, that Americans still feared death, and he attributed their fear of death to instinct and religion. At one time, said Shaler, the fear of death had served the species as a survival mechanism. Then, as individuals extended their range of sympathy, religion brought "the ancient and deeply founded instinct of fear into action," united it "with other movements of the mind," and created "a keener sense of comradeship." As religion became more and more sympathetic, however, the need for fear disappeared, but fear itself remained, because "it is indeed the nature of religion to remain behind the state of moral advance of the people who
hold it.” People still feared death because they did not understand the organic community that their death inevitably advanced. Shaler looked finally for an extension of sympathy that would overcome the fear of death. “It is by pushing beyond the individual to the kind, by turning our formal self out of itself toward others that the surest help for this inherited evil is to be gained.”

Many people saw signs of such an extension of sympathy in American institutions near the turn of the century. Shaler himself noted that the family, the church, the state, corporations, clubs and benevolent societies all institutionalized sympathy and transcended the life of individuals. In 1904, another writer observed that “for twenty-five years we have been witnessing a reaction against the individualistic tendencies that characterized the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century.” At mid-century, he recalled, “the age of the individual seemed at hand. . . . Then all at once a curious change came over the business world, and, with it, a great backdraft of collective feeling swept individual life once more under a resistless social control.” Americans expressed this collective feeling in corporations, life insurance companies, professional associations and benevolent societies, all of which affected the meaning and management of death in the age of corporate capitalism. These cooperative enterprises complemented the naturalistic conception of death.

This species perspective of death did not prevent individuals from dying. But in directing the attention of Americans away from individual death, it mitigated the fears derived from a former focus on the individual. Instead of selfish contemplation of a “personal end,” some Americans celebrated their attempt “to enlarge our spirit to include, as far as possible, the life of the universe.” By extending their attention and sympathy to the universe, they managed to avoid the stark confrontation with death that earlier cosmologies encouraged. In this respect, the species perspective of death, a naturalistic reformulation of the focus of death, was an integral aspect of the dying of death.

According to some naturalists, the species perspective of death also promised immortality to the individual. Like traditional conceptions of immortality, species immortality involved self-transcendence, but in a form more mundane than mystic, more automatic than achieved. The proponents of species immortality simply accepted the collective focus on death and carried it indefinitely, if not infinitely, into the future. “We are immortal,” declared Woods Hutchinson, “if we but form a sturdy link in the great chain of life.” Advocates of species immortality claimed that “humanity survives although the individual perishes. This theory, which is not recent, had its origin in that phase of nature which showed a constant disregard of the individual and a steady care for the type or class. It found its way from science into literature, where it took the form of a lofty sentiment and became almost a religion.”

It became a “religion of reproduction” for Abbott Kinney, whose 1893 Conquest of Death advised Americans how to breed immortality. Alarmed by the spread of abortion and contraception, Kinney feared the extermination of the race. Therefore, combining eugenics and eugenics, he explained how men and women could improve their genetic inheritance, choose suitable mates, and “perpetuate improvements in individual action” through reproduction. “We can get a thoroughbred man as certainly as we have obtained a thoroughbred horse,” he predicted confidently.

Such reproduction promised personal immortality. “For parents,” said Kinney, “there is no old age, no death. Their lives and youths are renewed, and blossom in themselves newborn, the offspring of their loins. The parents live again, and may be immortal in the child.” He cautioned, however, that people “should not consider the immortality of the body through reproduction to be in any conflict with the immortality of the soul. The one is a belief based on demonstrated
fact; the other is a faith founded on revelation.” And so Kinney preached his naturalist “Religion of Children,” insisting that “the basis of this true religion is life, its continuance, and, above all its improvement... Religion demands the child. Children are a religion. The home is the holy of holies. It is the true church. The parent is the priest. Immortality is the child, and paradise is the perfection to which by procreation we progress without plan or perception.”

The species perspective of life, death and immortality focused the attention of Americans, not on death and the deceased, but on survivors and posterity. In this way, naturalism provided a theoretical justification for life insurance, which developed in response to the demands of an emerging capitalist wage-labor system. That system, which began in the United States in the early nineteenth century, made workers dependent upon a wage earned by selling their labor to an employer. It undermined the self-sufficiency of individual families in an economy of farming and domestic manufacture. When a worker died, neither his wife nor children could replace his income, because the specialization and division of wage labor prevented him from passing either property or productive tools to his family. However, the industrial order which separated work from the home still required workers to provide for any contingency, including death. Life insurance met that requirement for millions of Americans after 1830. Stated simply, life insurance provided that for periodic payments of a stated small sum, a policyholder’s beneficiaries would receive a large amount of money at the time of his death. At the same time, the dynamics of industrial development required large amounts of capital, which could be amassed and invested by life insurance companies. By encouraging the acquisitive and speculative instincts of Americans, life insurance companies served both as stimulus and solution to the problems of American economic development.

The growth of life insurance in America occurred almost entirely after 1830. In that year, nine life insurance companies held policies worth only $600,000. By 1850, there were forty-eight companies with policies valued at $97,000,000. In 1900, eighty-four companies held fourteen million policies worth $7,573,000,000, about one life insurance policy for every five Americans. By 1920, three hundred thirty-five companies held sixty-five million policies worth $40,540,000,000, roughly two policies for every three Americans.

Especially in the early years, Americans promoted life insurance as a reform movement designed to aid widows and orphans. “One reason for the growth of life insurance is easily given,” asserted one author of the 1870s; “it affords the surest and only means, perhaps, by which a man of limited means can effectively protect his family against the poverty which his death might occasion.” Describing poverty as “Robert Burns’ disease,” an early insurance rate book prescribed insurance as “The Great Preventive.” Just as the concept of death as disease made death conquerable, so the concept of poverty as disease made it susceptible to human treatment as well. Promoters projected life insurance as a cooperative war on poverty.

Like the species perspective of death, life insurance refocused attention from the death of an individual to the lives of the survivors. The very name “life” insurance reflected this purpose. An insurance policy guaranteed not the life of the policyholder, but the lives of his beneficiaries. In this way, life insurance was a form of human conservation. As a form of human cooperation, life insurance also demonstrated a commitment to a species perspective of life. Shaler wrote in 1901 that the growth of social institutions like life insurance showed “the gain we have made concerning the fear of death.” As support systems, he considered such institutions as perhaps the most important innovations of the nineteenth century. But he also valued life insurance “in large measure” for “the change of attitudes toward death which it has fostered.” Shaler felt that “the moral advantage of the life insurance system” was its ability to bring men “to face death in an unselfish
manner; to face it as men who consider their lives not as their own, but as a part of the larger life of their kind.”

Josiah Royce shared Shaler’s assessment of the life insurance system. In *The Hope of the Great Community*, Royce praised what he called “an age and a civilization of insurance.” He claimed that “the growth of the natural sciences as well as the technical industries of mankind” had created promising forms of human cooperation. Like Shaler, Royce admired the practical operations of life insurance companies, but he preferred those indirect workings of the insurance principle which taught people the limitations of ethical individualism. According to Royce, the greatest social power of life insurance was “the fact that a man does not in general purchase an insurance policy merely for the transient creature of to-day called ‘himself,’” but for beneficiaries. “His linkages with such beneficiaries,” said Royce, “may join him to the whole social order.” According to people like Shaler and Royce, life insurance unselfishly applied a species perspective of life and death. By doing so, it provided “a measure of the social progress and condition of a people.” By their use of a species perspective, Shaler and Royce and others linked life insurance to the progressive elements of the age.

Many people considered life insurance a democratic and egalitarian reform, as well as a progressive force. “The mutual life-insurance system is a democracy,” claimed Stephen H. Tyng, referring to the voluntary participation of individuals both for their own good and for the good of the group. The system also seemed egalitarian in its redistribution of risk, each person of a particular age and physical condition paying only for the average risk of death of persons similarly situated. The first major American insurance company was called, in fact, “The Equitable.”

Life insurance proponents also praised its educational impact on individuals. People heralded the instructional aspect of insurance just as they emphasized the lessons to be learned in cemeteries. Life insurance, said Stephen Tyng, “has been an important educational factor of every community which it has influenced, in habits of economy, prudence, and providence.” “It fosters in an eminent degree self-respect, self-reliance, and virtue among the people,” echoed another writer. Life insurance taught people how to act in a modernizing America. Its system of advance payments for a future contingency required forethought, responsibility, discipline, and a peculiar form of delayed gratification. Its offer of eventual savings encouraged the thrift necessary to “the accumulation of national wealth.” Unlike the rural cemetery, which urged people to contemplate past deaths and to respect their earthly predecessors, life insurance taught people to prudentially calculate the effects of a future death, and to provide for their earthly successors.

The conceptual strength of the life insurance enterprise derived as much, however, from its scientific base as from its humanitarian claims. Writers constantly stressed the statistical underpinnings of life insurance, appropriating the prominent reputation of the science of statistics in the nineteenth century. The American Statistical Association had been established in 1839, preceding most other scientific and professional associations by at least a decade. By mid-century, “statistics were becoming the reality of science.” In 1860, Oliver Wendell Holmes observed that “the two most dominant words of our time are law and average, both pointing to the uniformity of the order of being in which we live. . . . Analysis and classification have been at work upon all tangible and visible objects.” By that time, actuaries had also analyzed and classified the previously inscrutable scourges of death. “While nothing is more uncertain than the duration of a single life,” observed the father of life insurance, Elizur Wright, “nothing is more certain than the average duration of a thousand lives.” The statistical tables which Wright constructed gave life insurance scientific validation. Far from relying on
pagan superstitions and theological beliefs about the mysteriousness of the universe, life insurance depended upon the hard rock of fact, upon the laws of mortality.88

The empirical basis of life insurance implied acceptance of a naturalistic cosmology. Life insurance assumed the uniformity and continuity of natural occurrences. Insurance actuaries viewed death as a predictable natural event and not as an arbitrary exercise of divine will. The supernatural might yet have a supervisory role in the universe, but in general, life insurance replaced divine providence with human prudence. When opponents of the enterprise complained that life insurance thwarted God’s plan by reducing the intended effects of death upon survivors, proponents responded, in effect, that God helps those who help themselves. They also placed life insurance in a religious context by citing “the heavenborn precept to bear each other’s burdens.” This particularly appealed to the social conscience of religious liberalism. These emphases on human activity and cooperation were not, however, the only signs of cosmological change. Indeed, the very use of the terms “insurance” and “assurance” reflected changes in cosmological conceptions. For the Puritans, “assurance” of salvation was the final stage of spiritual growth. God gave “assurance” to the saints. By 1850 their descendants purchased “assurance” by the dollar. Life insurance dealt not with the spiritual state of the soul, but with the financial state of survivors.89

Life insurance attempted to eliminate risk from the cosmos. The American Popular Life Insurance Company defined “the essential of life insurance” as “freedom from anxiety.” Whereas the assured Puritan still questioned the authenticity of his assurance, the insured American of the nineteenth century could depend on “the scientific security of the system.” The insurance enterprise attacked risk and insecurity by substituting group liability for individual liability. Just as the corporate structure of life insurance companies limited legal liability for stockholders, so the operation of the companies limited financial liability for policyholders certain of the coming but not the timing of death. By about 1900, in both economy and religion, “the sense of the significance and excitement of risk was withering.”90

The financial security of the statistical community replaced, to some extent, the emotional security of personal communities—the family, the neighborhood, the town. Just as the cemetery as a “city of the dead” replaced family plots, churchyards, and community graveyards, so life insurance replaced the informal aid of family and friends with a formal system of financial compensation for death. In a period characterized by specialization and professionalization, by education, abstraction, and impersonality, life insurance reflected a rational, organizational approach to life and death. In an era of economic and industrial growth, life insurance capitalized on its modernistic associations. It made a profitable business out of the prospect of death.91

Another sort of impersonality also existed in the life insurance system: people buying life insurance assigned a monetary value to human life. In a society increasingly structured so that spouses and children could not replace a wage-earner, life insurance set a cash value on the eventual labors of breadwinners. One writer noted simply that “a life that is earning money for those dependent on it has as distinct a money value to them as a house or a business block, or ship, or stock of goods to its owner, which value those dependent lose when that life ceases.” To some extent, the principle of cash convertibility enhanced the value of human life, as insurance had earlier only covered property and animals. In an increasingly materialistic society, a measurable value could be a sign of considerable significance. On the other hand, to the extent that the commercial value of life replaced earlier forms of cosmic value, the new life insurance system undercut the importance of human life by considering it convertible to money and subsequently to other forms of property.92

Even though the statistical precision and modernity of
Life insurance appealed to Americans, these scientific systems aimed at a traditional goal—the preservation of the family. Most people bought life insurance from this personal perspective, but even in protecting this primary group, others introduced the species perspective. A Prudential representative noted in 1921 that “today the protection of the family by life insurance is recognized to be a social and civic duty,” and not merely a self-interested decision by a family provider. Like the arguments for family plots in cemeteries, therefore, the idea of preserving the family by life insurance suggests the conceptual centrality of a traditional institution in a modern social system.

Just as the aim of life insurance differed from its modernistic system, so also the practice of life insurance differed from its theoretical promise. In the early years especially, life insurance did not provide security for families, because insurance owners seldom held their policies until they died. In 1864, only 15 percent of policies terminated as a result of death. All other terminations came from “lapsed” or “surrendered” policies. By concentrating their energies on sales rather than service, the insurance companies precipitated an insurance crisis in the 1870s. Many companies failed, as sales slumped and confidence dropped during the general depression of the decade. In New York state, the number of insurance companies fell from seventy-one in 1870 to forty-five in 1875, while the number of policies increased only 3.6 percent after successive five-year growth periods of 274 percent (1860–65) and 257 percent (1865–70). Shoddy practice did not destroy the conceptual allure of the enterprise, however, and by the 1880s the remaining companies had recouped their losses and re-established their markets.

Industrial insurance, an innovation of the 1870s, helped account for the renewed acceptance of life insurance. “Industrial insurance is so called,” explained a former president of the pioneering Prudential Insurance Company, “because the system is primarily designed to meet the needs of wage-earners employed in manufacturing industries, and the weekly premium payments coincide with weekly payment of wages and salaries. The premiums are from 5 cents to 70 cents a week.” For these payments, a policyholder received a small death benefit averaging $120 in 1895, but increasing to $150 in 1920. Obviously industrial insurance did not protect the worker’s family from eventual poverty brought on by the loss of a breadwinner, but only from the immediate impoverishment of a costly funeral. In 1895, approximately 6.8 million industrial insurance policies were in force; by 1920 there existed over 46 million such contracts. More than ordinary life insurance, therefore, industrial insurance offered death benefits that were both cause and effect of a movement for costly funerals.

Between 1830 and 1920, life insurance became an established American institution. Spurred by the spread of scientific naturalism, it changed the management of death in America, and in the process, it generated new meanings of death for people in “an age and civilization of insurance.” Both scientific naturalism and its cooperative corollaries affected religious liberals, cemetery superintendents, and funeral directors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Like life insurance entrepreneurs, these people mixed naturalist assumptions with other ideas to deprive death of its sting, and to speed the dying of death in America.
ounce can ultimately do nothing about death. In the very years when economics and environmental issues show us the limits of natural resources and the limitations of human ingenuity, death is the ultimate emblem of finitude. It reminds us, as did W. H. Auden, that "death is not understood by death; nor you, nor I."


8. “The worth of an historical interpretation dealing with questions of how or why or so what must be judged by aesthetic rather than scientific standards: a particular answer is seldom wholly right or wrong, but is more complex or coherent or convincing or weighty or provocative or profoundly honest than a competitor” (David Grinam, “Introduction,” *Notions of the Americans 1820–1860* [New York: George Braziller, 1970], p. 6).


12. “Death is the condition par excellence in which to find operating the social construction of reality” (Richard A. Kalish and David K. Reynolds, *Death and Ethnicity: A Psychosocial Study* [Los Angeles: Ethel Percy Andrus Gerontology Center, 1976], p. 189).


Chapter 1. The Cosmological Contexts of Death


2. In this, I follow Donald Meyer, who said that “I take it just that in the religious extensions of their thoughts people reveal more of what they thought of themselves than what we would know without them. As to the problem, how to read back and forth between self-concepts and God-concepts, there is no formula, except perhaps the formula that to think there is no relation is always mistaken” (Meyer, *The Positive Thinkers: A Study of the American Quest for Health, Wealth, and Personal Power from Mary Baker Eddy to Norman Vincent Peale* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965], p. 15).


11. Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, p. 73. In 1708, Samuel Sewall called the “Common-Prayer ‘burial service’ ‘a lying, very bad office, makes no difference between the precious and the vile. . . . They ought to return to us, and not we go to them by sinful Compliances’” (Sewall, *Diary*, 1:602).


17. Sewall, *Diary*, 1:345–46. When a daughter died later in 1696, Sewall spoke to the member of the family “to our mutual comfort I hope” (Sewall, *Diary*, 1:364).


21. Sewall, *Diary*, 1:378. Two years earlier, after a storm had
broken many windows in Boston. Sewall "got Mr. Mather to pray with us after this awful Providence; He told God He had broken the brittle part of our house, and prayed that we might be ready for the time when our Clay Tabernacles should be broken" (Sewall, Diary, 1:330–31).

22. Sewall, Diary, 1:417.


25. Sewall, Diary, 1:33.


34. May, Enlightenment, pp. 124, 216; Funk, "Enlightenment Thought," p. 4; Cassara, Enlightenment, pp. 216–18.


46. Clarke, Autobiography, p. 110. On Mount Auburn, see Chapter Four.


50. Durand is roughly representative of the Hudson River School of American painting, which flourished between 1825 and 1860. Together with writers like Bryant and James Fenimore Cooper, these artists expressed a vision of America that often equated nature with the nation (Perry Miller, "Nature and the National Ego," pp. 264–10). Miller stresses "the American theme, of Nature versus civilization." Note here that notions of nature are framed in reference to a product of people, rather than in opposition to the supernatural.

51. Barbour, *Issues*, p. 66; Stromberg, *European Intellectual History*, p. 33. There is an important difference between mechanical and organic conceptions of the universe. A machine is made and powered by forces outside itself. An organic entity, like a plant, contains in its germinal stage the total characteristics that govern its development. It is made and powered by forces intrinsic to self. Consequently, organic adjustments are harder to make than mechanical ones. In addition, a machine follows a regular route, while an organism introduces the possibility of non-cyclical change, of unpredictable and uncontrollable variability.


55. See Chapter Four for a discussion of these institutional retreats.


62. The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States of America (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1842), p. 230. This constitution was ratified by the General Assembly in 1821, and amended in 1833. Interestingly, it was not revised after the opening of the schism in the church.


68. Presbyterian Constitution, p. 516.

70. Beecher, Autobiography, 2:412. Like much of his theology, Beecher's position on infant depravity and damnation was ambivalent. The New School Auburn Doctrine held that "infants are a part of the human family, and their sufferings and death are to be accounted for on the ground of their being involved in the general moral ruin of the race induced by the apostasy" (Beecher, Autobiography, 2:37–43, 391, 394; Marsden, Evangelical Mind, p. 253). The idea of God's moral government still could provide consolation for the parents of children who died unregenerate. When Lyman Beecher's small son Freddy died in 1820, his daughter Catherine wrote that "were it not for the support of religion, I think mama would sink; but she is a most eminent Christian, and feels resignation and comfort from above" (Beecher, Autobiography, 1:430).

71. Beecher, Autobiography, 1:295. They also recounted deathbed scenes of the unregenerate, as a lesson to survivors. Theodore Weld, for example, recalled both types of death at Lane Theological Seminary during an outbreak of cholera (Beecher, Autobiography, 2:315–19).

73. Beecher, Autobiography, 2:459. In considering George's death, Lyman Beecher felt the consolations of his faith, but noted also that "while Faith submits, Nature feels the charm of disappointed hopes" (Beecher, Autobiography, 2:457). Despite the support of their religion, Americans of the evangelical era still suffered greatly at the death of loved ones.

74. Presbyterian Constitution, pp. 516–17. At Union College, when a student died, his colleagues gathered around the coffin to hear a sermon on preparation for death (Weisberger, They Gathered at the River, p. 107).

76. Doctrines and Discipline, pp. 117–18.
77. Presbyterians believed that people "may, without extraordinary revelation, in the right use of ordinary means, attain assurance" (Presbyterian Constitution, p. 97). According to one of his sons, Lyman Beecher felt confident to face death, but never spoke of his own condition with assurance (Beecher, Autobiography, 2:556).

78. For a prime example of such anxiety, see Catherine Beecher's consideration of the death of an unregenerate friend in Beecher, Autobiography, 1:479, 502–03.

Chapter 2. Death and Scientific Naturalism


5. Charles Hodge, the Princeton Presbyterian theologian who spearheaded opposition to the same scientific tendencies, realized that "the truths on which all religion is founded are drawn within the domain of science. . . . Religion has to fight for its life against a large class of scientific men." But even Hodge accepted the naturalists' factual focus, claiming that "theology will not be poetry, but a science," and that "religious men believe with Louis Agassiz that facts are sacred. They are revelations from God." . . . Religious men admit all the facts concerned with our solar system. . . . Ought not this to satisfy scientific men? Must we accept their explanation and inference? . . . It is to be remembered that the facts are from God, the explanation from men; and that the two are often as far apart as heaven and its antipode" (John Dillenberger, Protestant Thought and Natural Science [New York: Doubleday, 1960], pp. 237–43).

6. True to its name, the idea of evolution did not just burst into the intellectual environment full-bred. It appeared, almost randomly, throughout the early nineteenth century, proved adaptable as a form of intellectual life, and survived. People of the late nineteenth century eulogized the very idea of evolution. See, for example, Simeon E. Baldwin, "The Natural Right to a Natural Death," Journal of Social Science 37 (Sept. 1899): 14.


10. Barbour, Issues, p. 109. This intellectual materialism should be distinguished from a social materialism and worldliness that also affected the meaning and management of death in America.


13. Dillenberger, Protestant Thought, p. 227. Many who had relied on the doctrine of design in their cosmological formulations again agreed with Charles Hodge that "the denial of design in nature is virtually the denial of God." Others realized that "Darwin had delivered a devastating blow to a simple, a naively simple form of the design argument" and that it was "still possible to argue for directivity in the process of life" (Barbour, Issues, p. 91). But some were strictly scientific and argued against natural selection because it implied more design than it delivered. John William Draper found the term natural selection "very unscientific, very inferior to the old term adaptation. It implies a personification of Nature. It is anthropomorphic. But Nature never selects, never accepts or rejects, knows nothing about duties, nothing about fitness or unfitness. Nature simply obeys laws" (Leverette, "Science and Social Values," p. 75). Note here that nature is no longer feminine, no longer personal. Instead a neuter nature is now open to the manipulation of the only personality left in the cosmos—humanity.


16. While naturalists elucidated laws of natural selection, these laws offered predictability only in terms of statistical probability—in other words, in terms of groups, and not of individuals (Barbour, Issues, p. 87; White, Science and Religion, p. 16). For the effects of this group focus on ideas and institutions of death, see the discussion of life insurance on pp. 66–73.

17. "Life and death are but the counters with which some vast game is played above us, beyond all, and seeming to these poor mental eyes to be at once crucial and inessential. . . . What is death to us is but part of [Nature's] game" (H. B. Marriott-Watson, "Some Thoughts on Pain and Death," North American Review 173 [Oct. 1901]: 546).


19. Irvine, Apes, Angels and Victorians, p. 339. The question of compensation for Eshhippus was obviously overwhelmed by the question of compensation for individual people. See Chapter Three.

20. Even when human comprehension of nature culminated in despair, as in some forms of deterministic materialism, the fact of understanding was salve, because "understanding implied not only control and emotional reassurance but also a necessary rationale for the manipulative
activism that many Americans still admired (Rosenberg, No Other Gods, p. 51). People assumed, even in regard to death, that "nothing is appalling when understood" (Virginia Garland, "Death and Life" from 'Earth Messages,' Overland Monthly 47 [1906]: 325).


22. Note also that the story of the creation of Adam and Eve stressed the origin of individuals as much as the origin of species (Dillenberger, Protestant Thought, pp. 216–19).


24. Carter, Spiritual Crisis, p. 49. A. R. Wallace, Darwin's double in the development of a theory of natural selection, differed from Darwin in his emphasis on human distinction from other orders of creation, based on both brain size and cultural advantages. He thus sought to avoid the "genetic or temporal form of 'reductionism' which finds the significance of an entity not in its smallest parts, as with eighteenth-century materialism, but in its most primitive beginnings" (Barbour, Issues, pp. 92–93; Roland N. Stromberg, European Intellectual History since 1789 [New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968], p. 101; Dillenberger, Protestant Thought, p. 225).

25. See Chapter Three.

26. Darwin's The Descent of Man (1871) emphasized that "as man grows more civilized the natural process is in all its higher and determining phases superseded by an ethical" (Irvine, Apes, Angels and Victorians, p. 190).


30. Rosenberg, No Other Gods, p. 12; Orville H. Platt, "Invention and Advancement," in Popular Culture and Industrialism, 1865–1890, ed. Smith, pp. 40, 50. Less sanguine naturalists like Henry Adams concluded that "modern science . . . had ended by discovering that there were no simple, immutable laws which gave unity, consistency, and order to the universe." Thus, Adams claimed, "chaos was the law of nature; Order was the dream of man" (Herbert F. Hahn, "The Education of Henry Adams Reconsidered," College English 24 [March 1963]: 447). But optimists simply accepted chaos and actively attempted to order it, thus again affirming the importance of people in the order of the universe.


33. "What strikes the historian is the totality of the Mid-Victorian impulse to contain the life experiences of the individual from birth to death by isolating them as science" (Burton J. Bledstein, The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America [New York: W. W. Norton, 1976], p. 55). What also strikes the historian of death and dying is the emphasis on decay in the second definition, an emphasis that accompanied arguments for cremation and embalming. See Chapter Five, below.


35. Carter, Spiritual Crisis, p. 102; Platt, "Invention and Advancement," p. 45.


39. Ivan Ilich dates the idea of "natural death" to the fifteenth century, but in America it was not widely discussed until the nineteenth century (Ivan Ilich, Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health [New York: Pantheon Books, 1976]).


52. Cyclone Coney, The American Pilgrimage (Stillwater: Oklahoma State University, 1960). Late nineteenth-century Americans still referred to the dead as "God's pilgrims," but the sleep image received more emphasis.

53. See Louise Pound, American Euphemisms for Dying, Death, and Burial (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). Another euphemism, also increasingly popular, was the term "pass away." Like the image of pilgrimage, this implies movement, but it entails no goal, thus also intimating American insecurity about immortality.


56. "Death is the twin brother of sleep," stated a classicist at the 1901 convention of the American Association of Cemetery Superintendents. "I like to think of death as sleep. Sleep is good for the tired body, and it is good for the tired mind, and after sleep comes awakening." (W.J. Holland, AACS 15 [1901]: 13). In Greek mythology, Hypnos, the god of sleep, was seen as the twin of Thanatos, the god of death (Glenn M. Vernon, Sociology of Death: An Analysis of Death-Related Behavior [New York: Ronald Press, 1970], p. 35).


65. Metchnikoff, "Studies of Natural Death," pp. 272–76; Slosso, "Elie Metchnikoff," p. 1243. "Essentially his aim seems to me, said Slosso, "to be the same as that of Epicurus: to relieve mankind of its two great evils, pain and fear, the fear of the gods and the fear of death, the first to be dissipated by showing it to be imaginary, and the second by welcoming death at its proper time." Metchnikoff wanted people to achieve the condition of orthobiosis—a cycle from birth to death from which extraneous accidents have been removed, and in which each successive phase comes in its due course" (P. Chalmers Mitchell, "The Straight Way of Life: Metchnikoff's Philosophy of the Prolongation of Life and Vigor, with an Easy Descent to Death," World's Work 15 [Nov. 1907]: 954); Lankester, "Metchnikoff," p. 21. Metchnikoff's idea that natural deaths were nonexistent or rare was not a new one; see also Papillon, "Physiology of Death," p. 272; Yorke-Davies, "Why Grow Old?" p. 235; Mitchell, "The Straight Way of Life," p. 9543; Girdner, "Sleep and Death," p. 222; "The Microbe of Old Age," Current Literature 40 (Jan. 1906): 75; NFDA 31 (1912): 58; Midleton, "Flesh That Is Immortal," p. 590; Hendrick, "On the Trail of Immortality," pp. 313–14.
69. Fleming, Draper, p. 48.
76. Hutchinson, "Death as a Factor in Progress," p. 637.


94. Van Amringe, "Life Assurance," p. 249; Homans, "Insurance Crisis," p. 256. These statistics are based on the experience of insurance companies in New York. The number of companies peaked in 1870, but the number of policies increased until 1873. The 3.6 percent increase in policies between 1870 and 1875, therefore, masks the fact of actual decline after 1873. On the less-than-perfect practices of life insurance companies, see also North, "Capital Accumulation," pp. 241–43; 250; and Dowd, Funeral Management, p. 75.


Chapter 3. Religious Liberalism and the Dying of Death


15. Ahlstrom, "Theology in America," p. 296; Charles E. Rosen-