

ESSAY

A Critique of Arguments Offered Against Reincarnation

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Abstract — In his recently published book *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996). Paul Edwards has offered a number of arguments against the possibility of reincarnation. It is a sweeping effort to show that the very idea of reincarnation is illogical and indefensible. While not arguing directly for reincarnation, this essay criticizes the main arguments, methodology and polemics wielded in what is more an effort to debunk than to carry out the critical examination claimed in the title of the book. In criticizing Edward's arguments this essay is criticizing the major objections available against the reincarnation hypothesis.

Keywords: reincarnation — philosophy

Introduction

In his recent book *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), Paul Edwards examines critically both the belief in reincarnation and the belief in the Law of Karma. For the author, both beliefs are mutually entailing and demonstrably indefensible. The author is strongly inclined to think that the belief in reincarnation is conceptually incoherent (rather than simply false) because of the "nonsensicality" of such notions as the "astral body" and the "womb-invasion" of the prospective mother by the soul or astral body. (p. 28) However popular such beliefs may be, the author seeks to show that they are not only foolish myths, unworthy of any rational human being, but also part of the tide of irrationalism sweeping the Western World. (p. 7) People who believe in reincarnation are lost to some fantastic form of occultism. (p. 58) Indeed, at every turn in the book the author feels quite strongly that no reasonable human being could take belief in reincarnation seriously, as even a minimally rational thesis. In passing, the author also defends the view that any argument for any form of personal post mortem survival is indefensible. Reincarnation is especially absurd, and any form of

Editor's Note: Via an intermediary, Edwards declined an offer to publish a response to this essay. See also in this issue of the Journal (p. 569) an additional book review by James G. Matlock of Paul Edwards' *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 1996).

Cartesian dualism runs on all fours with it, primarily because any form of mind-body dualism entails the existence of astral bodies.

For the author, taking any form of reincarnation seriously is certainly a sign of deep cognitive inadequacy; and, not infrequently, advancing the belief as a sound belief may well be a mark of moral turpitude falling under the rubric of a "holy lie" not uncommonly offered by religious fanatics or amusing brain-dead spiritualists. Indeed, nobody who knows anything at all about philosophy or science could be tempted to take the belief in any form of *post mortem* survival seriously. Often the author asserts, either directly or indirectly, that believers in reincarnation and mind-body dualism are not at all different from the kind of true believer associated with fanatical religious sects or fanatical occultists. What is interesting about the book is that it contains all of the major objections one can find in the literature against the belief in reincarnation, and examining the arguments offered by Edwards should count as an examination of the available arguments against the thesis, although, to be sure, as we shall see, Edwards has a few objections of his own that are not likely to be found anywhere else.

The book, incidentally, has seventeen sections, all of which confront, either directly or indirectly, arguments favoring either reincarnation, or some form of personal survival of death. These sections bear the titles: 1. Reincarnation, Karma, and Competing Doctrines of Survival; 2. The Moral Argument; 3. The Law of Karma; 4. Child Prodigies, *Deja Vu* Experiences, and Group Reincarnations; 5. The Rise and Fall of Bridey Murphy; 6. More Hypnotic Regressions and "Progressions"; 7. Spontaneous Memories of Earlier Lives; 8. The Conservation of Spiritual Energy; 9. The Astral Body; 10. Telephone Calls from the Dead, Birth-marks, and the *Modus Operandi* Problem; 11. Dr. Kubler Ross, Dr. Moody, and the New Immortality Movement; 12. The Fantasies of Dr. Kubler Ross; 13. Dr. Grof, LSD and the Amorous Snake Woman; 14. The Population Problem and Other Common Sense and Scientific Objections; 15. The "Interregnum": What Happens Between Lives?; 16. More about Dr. Ian Stevenson, the "Galileo of Reincarnation"; 17. The Dependence of Consciousness on the Brain; and Irreverent Postscript: God and the *Modus Operandi* Problem.

In any case, I submit that no argument offered in this book succeeds in advancing a plausible skeptical position because, apart from a number of other problems, the book conspicuously fails to confront effectively the central argument favoring the only rationally defensible form of reincarnation (or some form of personal survival) with any persuasive objections. To be sure, belief in reincarnation, *as the author conceives it*, may well be worthy of rational rejection or consignment to the realm of religious inspiration or fanaticism; but the central question is whether the author's construal of the nature of reincarnation is a strawman that excludes the only form of reincarnation for which there is no adequate refutation, and for which the empirical evidence offered on its behalf amounts to offering a sound argument which it would be irra-

tional to reject. Let me explain, and then proceed to examine other specific arguments offered in the various sections of the book.

The Definition of Reincarnation

What seems basically problematic about this book is that the reincarnation hypothesis means different things to different people, and the author seeks to refute what he takes to be the main reincarnation thesis; but nowhere do we find a clear definition of what the main reincarnation thesis is, although the author is quite certain that any and all forms of reincarnation have certain collateral assumptions that are patently absurd — before one even looks at any proposed argument or evidence for the belief. Doubtless, there are some forms of reincarnation that are rationally indefensible, depending on what the advocates of those forms see as implied by the belief in reincarnation. But, as noted above, the question is whether there is any form of personal reincarnation (and by implication, the mind-body dualism) that is defensible by appeal to empirical evidence. To characterize the reincarnation thesis (along with mind-body dualism) in such a way that it must imply a host of absurd claims is, as we shall see, to offer a *strawman* of the thesis because we can defend a common form of reincarnation that does not imply such absurdity. Even so, the author has not the slightest doubt that there is no form of reincarnation that is even minimally defensible in any way.

Moreover, the author never states just what he would accept as evidence for belief in some form of reincarnation because his every inclination is to think that the thesis is so absurd that nothing could possibly count as evidence for the view. Curiously enough, however, the author also asserts that certain empirical facts show conclusively that the belief in reincarnation must be false. He says, for example, that absence of true memory beliefs in the evidence often offered counts powerfully for the falsity of the thesis (p. 27; 234). This is curious because if the reincarnation hypothesis is empirically meaningless, it should not be empirically testable and falsifiable, and if it is empirically testable and falsifiable by appeal to some fact or other, it should not be vacuously falsifiable. To say that a hypothesis is a meaningful empirical hypothesis is to say that the hypothesis has test implications at the sensory level, sensory implications that allow us to either confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis. If nothing could conceivably count by way of test implications at the sensory level for either the truth of the hypothesis or the falsity of the hypothesis, it is not an empirical hypothesis. Moreover, standardly, if one can only empirically falsify a particular hypothesis (and nothing could conceivably count for confirming it or accepting it), or if one could only confirm the hypothesis (and nothing could conceivably count for falsifying the hypothesis), it is not an empirical hypothesis; it is a dogma. One cannot have it both ways: the thesis cannot be both absurd and yet empirically falsified. Nor can it be empirically falsified and yet nothing count in principle as evidence for its rational

acceptability. (Hempel, *Introduction to Philosophy of Natural Science*, Prentice Hall, 1972. p. 54)

At any rate, for the sake of discussing adequately some of the author's more central objections to belief in reincarnation, let us simply assert the following statement as a hypothesis — without caring to say what might prompt the hypothesis:

There is something essential to some human personalities, however we ultimately characterize it, which we cannot plausibly construe solely in terms of either brain states, or properties of brain states, or biological properties caused by the brain and, further, after biological death this non-reducible essential trait sometimes persists for some time, in some way, in some place, and for some reason or other, existing independently of the person's former brain and body. Moreover, after some time, some of these irreducible essential traits of human personality, for some reason or other, and by some mechanism or other, come to reside in other human bodies either some time during the gestation period, at birth, or shortly after birth.

Call this the *minimalist reincarnation hypothesis or thesis*. Notice that this hypothesis can also serve as a particular definition of reincarnation. As such, it does not commit us to any particular characterization of the nature of the core of human personality, or of what is essential to it, except that it not be construed straightforwardly and exclusively in customary terms of either a brain state, properties of a brain state, a complex of brain states, or biological properties caused by the brain. It is, if you will, a certain Lockean something-we-know-not-what which seems to be a basic causal agent and, as C. D. Broad says, possibly shares certain properties common to physical matter as we now understand it. It is the repository of certain memories and other dispositional traits not identifiable with brain states, properties of brain states, or biological states caused by the brain. Nor does the above definition commit us to knowing why or how reincarnation occurs, or for how long, or for what end. Nor is there any implication as to what the surviving essential stuff does while between incarnations, whether it is visible in any way, or where it goes; and the definition implies nothing as to how frequently the process of reincarnation occurs for those core traits which might reincarnate. Nor does the definition commit us to the belief that what is essential to everybody in some way always reincarnates, rather than that it only sometimes occurs. Finally, our definition does not say that every aspect of a personality reincarnates whenever reincarnation occurs, but only what is essential (or core) to the personality, namely only that which would be sufficient to identify the person. This minimalist conception of reincarnation is consistent with both Platonic conceptions of personality (which exclude bodily continuity as a necessary condition for personal identity) and Aristotelian conceptions of personality which may require bodily continuity as essential to human personality. Reincarnationists all agree that something essential to human personality sometimes survives biological death. Under the above definition, the full person may well be more than what survives, but

what survives is certainly essential or core to the person, and sufficient to distinguish the person from any other person that might have existed. I believe that this definition of reincarnation is something that would be accepted minimally by all major forms of the belief in reincarnation and the question is whether we have any evidence for this definition as a hypothesis about the nature of human personality.

What are the empirical test implications for the above hypothesis? What might one accept as evidence empirically confirming to some degree that this sentence is true? The reincarnation hypothesis, as defined above, is, I submit, confirmed by the evidence offered in the stronger cases presented by Ian Stevenson, and in the growing number of cases presented by others. In other words, given a basic assumption about what human personality must include (namely systematic memories proper to only that person, and perhaps other individuating traits having to do with other non-propositional dispositions) if we came across a large number of non-fraudulent, methodologically sound cases in which subjects claim to remember having lived an earlier life, and if their claims are accompanied by a rich number of detailed and verified memory claims about events that only the former personality could know, and if they had non-propositional skills that could not have been learned but which were demonstrably the skills possessed by the former historically authenticated personality, then we would need to conclude that we had confirmed the above hypothesis... because that is what we would expect if the hypothesis were true, and if having certain systemic memories is necessary and sufficient for identifying a particular person. Nothing else could plausibly explain as well the data in these cases. Similarly, if such data never occurred, we would not have any reason to accept the hypothesis; or if we subsequently found that such cases were all items of fraud or hoax (or a significant number of the stronger cases were subsequently discovered to be so), then the thesis would be empirically disconfirmed. In fact, in some of the past examined cases, Stevenson, for example, concluded quite properly that the data in those particular cases did not support the thesis and that the data in those particular cases clearly failed to support the hypothesis as an explanation of that data. Let us assume that this is the main reincarnationist thesis and ask whether Edwards' objections to reincarnation apply successfully to it. If they do not, then, we will need to conclude that we have no strong objection to the empirical proof that there are minds that reincarnate. Whether there are minds that do not reincarnate, is not an empirical question that one can answer by looking at only the data for reincarnation. Let us turn to the specific arguments offered in the book.

Edwards' Objections to Reincarnation

1. For the author, the belief in reincarnation is opposed to all of the most widely held views on the mind-body problem, and is also opposed to one of the major current theories about personal identity. The latter view holds that however much more than a body a human being may be, personal identity

involves bodily continuity. For the author, unless this latter view can be shown to be false, reincarnation is ruled out from the start. (p. 15)

Certainly, if some essential human traits survive biological death and then reincarnate, widely held views on the mind-body problem are false and, certainly also, that would show that even if bodily continuity is essential to human personality, what is also essential to human personality can, and does, sometimes survive biological death. If bodily continuity is both necessary and sufficient for personal identity, then of course, reincarnation is impossible, along with any form of survival. Indeed, if the evidence for reincarnation, as defined above, is compelling, then those views are false. What the author seems to think is that one must have some evidence independently of the evidence offered for reincarnation to show that bodily continuity cannot be necessary for personal identity, that one must refute the view that personal identity involves bodily continuity before one looks at the evidence for reincarnation, when in fact the evidence for reincarnation is the evidence against just such a view of personal identity. The evidence for reincarnation would be evidence against such views; and one cannot defend such views by insisting that we not look at the evidence for reincarnation until we find other evidence showing that bodily continuity is not a necessary condition for personal identity. Corporealism is directly challenged by the evidence for reincarnation; one does not need to show such corporealism false before one is epistemically justified in examining the evidence for reincarnation. If we took this argument seriously we would need to defeat those hypotheses which we challenge before we could appeal to the evidence challenging those hypotheses. That just cannot be done; and to insist on it would be to render one's cherished (and possibly philosophically popular) beliefs ever incapable of being refuted. Such a move makes the belief in any form of reincarnation *a priori* false because nothing could ever count as evidence in favor of the hypothesis. Besides, appealing to the popularity of a philosophical position is hardly a good reason showing that one ought to adopt such views. In a fair argument the burden of proof is equally distributed. The evidence offered for reincarnation is at one and the same time the evidence against the kind of dualism the author seeks to defend.

2. In characterizing reincarnation further, the author claims that the belief in reincarnation *assumes* that a person's mind does not require the *particular* body or brain with which it is connected in the present life; and the author claims, as we shall see, that this *assumption* is almost certainly false. (p. 16) For the reincarnationist, however, this would be less an assumption than it would be an *implication* of the thesis if it were true. To call it an assumption is tantamount to saying that reincarnationists assume, without benefit of any evidence, the thesis which they assert. Perhaps some reincarnationists act that way, but the thesis in favor of reincarnation could not rest on such an assumption without it simultaneously begging the question in favor of reincarnation. The richer case studies do not assume reincarnation, arguably they show it as evidence implied by the hypothesis.

3. In Chapter Two, the author makes short shrift of the argument based on the moral order of the world. This is the argument to the effect that the existence of injustice in the world requires belief in reincarnation. It is a bad argument and the author is quite right for criticizing it, and wondering how it managed to become so widely accepted. One might add, of course, that it is likely that the only reincarnationists who offer it are those who accept the doctrine on religious grounds, and who, for some reason or other, are committed to the view that one of the main purposes of reincarnation is to balance the scales of justice in some way. But none of that is implied by the minimalist definition offered above and for which the evidence offered in the stronger cases is relevant.

4. Chapter Three is an attack on Karma and the attack seems quite sound. The author considers this an attack on reincarnation because he believes that reincarnation, as it is generally understood and widely accepted, implies a doctrine of Karma, as the author construes it. Here again, however, it is important to note that belief in reincarnation, as minimally construed above, does not require any position at all on what the purpose of reincarnation is. Religious believers in reincarnation make such claims, but the essential empirical evidence for reincarnation implies nothing at all about Karma. So, the objection is irrelevant to the empirically defensible form of reincarnation offered above.

5. Chapter Four examines the argument from Child Prodigies, *Deja Vu* Experiences, and Group Reincarnations. Here the author examines and quite rightly rejects arguments going back as far as 1888 which say that we cannot explain the existence of child prodigies (such as Sir William Hamilton), *deja vu* experiences, or groups of genius without appealing to reincarnation. And, of course, some people have made those bad arguments. In this chapter, incidentally, under a section entitled "God of the Gaps," the author accuses Stevenson of being guilty of the "God of the Gaps" fallacy which, as we know, as the fallacy of exploiting gaps in scientific explanations by plugging in God as the cause of certain phenomena. According to the author, Stevenson, by analogy, exploits gaps in scientific explanations by appealing to reincarnation as the only possible way to fill in the gaps. Such a move, for the author is "preposterous" and he states, there "is no need to bring in reincarnation or any occult causes." (p. 57)

In defense of Stevenson, however, we should note that the author's charge is a straw man. Stevenson does not argue for reincarnation on the grounds that the belief explains items (such as certain phobias) not explained in current science. We all know that a good scientific hypothesis, when independently confirmed and not falsified in terms of its deductive consequences invariably provides unanticipated explanatory power for other phenomena not yet explained. However, this latter phenomena is not part of the independent evidence that confirms the hypothesis rather than a logically positive feature of a theory or hypothesis well-established on independent grounds. But it is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for a well-confirmed hypothesis. It adds

confirmatory value and justifiably increases confidence in the hypothesis. Stevenson was merely pointing out the explanatory power the thesis might have after it is confirmed as true on independent grounds evidenced in the richer case studies. So, the author distorts Stevenson's comments here by asserting that these comments are somehow to be taken as the independent evidence for the hypothesis.

Moreover, Stevenson's point on this issue is actually quite cautious. He asserts that there seems to be some need for a factor in addition to heredity and environment to explain certain behaviors. He then goes on to say that if reincarnation occurs then "appeal to reincarnation to explain these phenomena is at least worthy of consideration as a possible explanation" (as cited on p. 55-56 in Edwards). This ascription of the "god of the gaps" fallacy to Stevenson is based on only one of many of this author's misunderstandings (I do not say deliberate distortions) of Stevenson's views and positions.

6. In Chapter Four the author also asserts what he reasserts at length later in Chapter 15 and what he also takes to be *the basic objection to reincarnation explaining anything in a scientific context*, namely that the hypothesis *explains* nothing. For the author the belief in reincarnation cannot compete with physiology, genetics, or psychology as explanations of human behavior. Reincarnation, for the author, is not even a testable hypothesis. (p. 58)

But the response to this objection seems straightforward. Apart from the fact that there are fine explanations in science that are not causal explanations (we explained, for example, the data in twin studies on schizophrenia by hypothesizing that the cause was in fact purely genetic long before we identified the gene causing it in a certain portion of the cases), we have also shown above just how the reincarnation hypothesis, as defined above, is quite testable and confirmable in terms of what we can reasonably specify as the deductive implications of the hypothesis, if only we assume that having certain systemic memories is essential to being the persons we are.

7. He also says here in Chapter Four that reincarnationists, in general, talk vaguely about the soul acquiring skills and knowledge in a previous life and taking these along to the next incarnation. He claims that one must pin them down and inquire about the mechanics of **transmission**.(p. 58) In other words, if reincarnationists cannot explain how the soul transmits from one body to another the previous skills or dispositions, then the argument for reincarnation is unacceptable. He then asserts that the only plausible explanation of the transmission makes belief in reincarnation false. He says:

I think that reincarnationists who are not altogether lost to some fantastic form of occultism will admit that the transmission from the Hanauer to the Mozart body occurred via the brain and nervous system of the new embryo. If they admit this they have tacitly admitted that Mozart's special ability is due to certain features of his brain that are not present in the brain of other human beings. Reincarnation has in a sense become redundant. It will no doubt be replied that reincarnation is still necessary to account for the special features of Mozart's brain. However, if we have reason to believe in what I

call the "sufficiency" of genetics and embryology, this will take care of the last reincarnationist stand.(p. 58)

He develops this argument again in Chapter 15. The obvious response to the author here is that one may well know that something has occurred without knowing how it occurs, and a failure to know how it occurs does not undermine the evidence that it occurs. In the definition of reincarnation offered above, the evidence confirming it confirms nothing about *how* it occurs but only *that* it occurs, and no defensible form of reincarnation need deal with any form of the *modus operandi* problem. The author seems to think that we cannot know that Citation won the fourth race at Suffolk Downs unless we know how he did it. At any rate, as the definition above makes explicit, the essential reincarnation hypothesis can be shown to be true without our being able to show how it occurs, or why it occurs, or how often it occurs, or whether everybody reincarnates in this minimalist way.

8. Chapter Five is about the famous Bridey Murphy case, and the author discredits it as a compelling case for belief in reincarnation. Cryptomnesia and suggestibility under hypnosis can, according to the author, explain the whole case. He says that this case is "total and utter rubbish." He also says this is a fairly typical case, and we are supposed to generalize from it. In fact, the author never considers even one rich xenoglossy case because, as he says in the preface, Sarah Thomason has shown in a "devastating" critique that it is impossible that a person could speak in a foreign language not learned in the normal way. The author does not consider or present Thomason's arguments, nor does he examine any of the replies to her position; he rather asserts that they are devastating refutations of the claim that one can speak in a language not learned. He simply refuses to look at some of the most interesting evidence for reincarnation because one person wrote a criticism of the evidence in one case, and then, without saying what her arguments were and why they hold up in the light of serious criticism from other sources, illegitimately generalized to all other cases of xenoglossy. This is the same section where he states, by implication, that most who believe in reincarnation or mind-body dualism (both of which he classifies as occult beliefs because they entail belief in astral bodies) are either insane or semi-insane. He said, for example, of the main subject in the Bridey Murphey case:

Virginia (Tighe) sounds like a basically sensible, down-to-earth middle American, quite different from most of the insane or semi-insane persons who are attracted to the occult. I doubt that she would ever take any talk about astral bodies seriously. (p. 72)

Never mind that this makes of Plato, Aristotle, all the best medieval Philosophers, Descartes, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Locke, Berkeley, Kant (for openers) believers in the occult because they believed in the existence of minds, the important point is that for so doing they were either insane or semi-insane.

By the way, even if the author is quite right in believing that The Bridey Murphey Case is not much of a case to rely upon for evidence for reincarnation (although some thoughtful people at the time thought differently), it is difficult to imagine anybody who would now defend belief in reincarnation based on solely confirmed memory claims taking this case as a particularly rich or clear case. Oddly, the author admits that "far better books in defense of reincarnation — containing more substantial documentation and less flimsy arguments have been totally ignored by the press." (p. 62) So why spend a whole chapter arguing against this case and not looking at better cases, cases such as those involving rich and independently confirmed memory claims, memories that only the deceased could have had, along with certain acquired skills and responsive xenoglossy? And certainly Stevenson, while admitting that it offered some reasonably confirming evidence, never listed the Bridey Murphey Case as a particularly evidential case. It was never properly investigated. Compare it with the Bishen Chand Kapoor case, or the Lydia Johnson *qua* Jensen case, the Gretchen case, the Swarnlata case, and a host of others that satisfy the memorial standards of high reliability and independent corroboration. In other words, attacking the Bridey Murphy case in great detail is attacking another straw man in the discussion. There are much stronger cases, and very many of them. Incidentally, Stevenson does not regard cryptomnesia as a plausible explanation of all of Bridey Murphy's memory claims... (see p. 78 and Footnote 38 and whether the Irish exhibition could plausibly hold the information Murphy testified to).

9. Chapter 6 justifiably criticizes new-age types who believe they have good evidence for reincarnation (as well as for future lives) simply from regression therapy in the absence of verified memory claims. But this criticism is not new. We all know that for certain purposes regression therapy is generally problematic as a technique for producing the sort of memory claims that can provide strong evidence, although on occasion one might come up with interesting memory claims that are authenticated as memories that only the former personality could have. Witness, for example, the Lydia Johnson *qua* Jensen case. Admittedly, however, the best evidence comes from spontaneous cases involving young children between the ages of two and five who are not hypnotized.

Moreover, in confronting the evidence from spontaneous memories of earlier lives, the author offers a critique of the Ryall Case (p. 103) which Stevenson regards as strong but somewhat damaged by the fact that we have no record of the historical existence of the former personality where we would expect to find it. Here again, however, as in the Bridey Murphy Case, the author selects problematic cases as typical cases and where there is some evidential problem and ignores the rest of the confirming evidence in demonstrably stronger cases. Of the Ryall case, moreover, the author asserts without evidence, that Ryall was eventually exposed as either a hoaxer or the victim of delusions (p. 103). Michael Green was supposed to have shown as much. But we never see Michael Green's argument... just as we never see Wilson's logic examining

many of the best cases and finding all of them wanting. In fact, some of Ryall's memory claims did check out, but the author never says how many or whether the ones that did check out are memory claims that only the deceased could have had. And because some of Ryall's (he does not say how many) crucial memories were not confirmed, the case fails as evidence for reincarnation. The fact that Stevenson admits that the Ryall case was not as strong as he originally thought does not mean that it is not probative at all. Any failed memory shoots down the case for the author even if the remaining number of memories is very large and cannot be explained on natural or normal grounds, and even if they are confirmed memories that only the previous personality could have had.

11. The Astral Body is the topic of discussion in Chapter Nine and the author again asserts that the very concept of an astral body is absurd and, because all reincarnationists are required to believe in astral bodies or souls, belief in reincarnation is, by implication, absurd. As the author sees it, the evidence usually given for astral bodies from OBEs and NDEs is more evidence for delusion than anything else. Here the author cites Susan Blackmore, and he also goes after the Wilmot case, a case which one should never list as an evidential case: again, another straw man (p. 113). Space prohibits here a detailed examination of the author's position on astral bodies, but I submit that, for all the wrong reasons he has overlooked the evidence that counts strongly for belief in the existence of minds based on OBEs and NDEs. Like Blackmore, he overlooks those strongly confirmed cases with veridical content that cannot be explained by appeal to hallucination or even ESP, and, like so many others, ignores the Osis-McCormick experiments.

By the way, nothing the author discusses on OBEs or NDEs is relevant to reincarnation as defined above, because, as we noted above, belief in reincarnation does not require anyone to positively characterize the surviving part of personality in terms of astral bodies as the author construes them. In fact, the evidence gleaned from OBEs and NDEs need not commit us to anything like an astral body as the author characterizes it. Nothing in the evidence confirming belief in reincarnation, as characterized above, entails the existence of astral bodies as the author describes them: in short, another straw man.

Moreover, the author argues that unless one can explain how astral travel can take place at speeds in excess of airplanes, how astral bodies acquire navigational skills for getting to certain distant and unknown locations and finding without maps a friend's house in San Francisco (for example), nobody ought to take this astral travel stuff seriously. In short, for the author, neither Ritchie nor any other astral traveler should be taken seriously until they can explain how astral bodies succeed in making their trips. Here again, the author commits the simple epistemological error of thinking that because we do not know how something takes place, or what the cause of it is, we do not know that it takes place. In the end, the point worth repeating here is that any attack on astral bodies based on evidence from OBEs or NDEs is irrelevant to the question

of reincarnation because the reincarnation hypothesis is not committed to a description of what survives in terms of what the author characterizes as an astral body. It will be enough to describe the post-mortem surviving stuff as essential to human personality and not a visible part of the brain, or any brain state, or biological property caused by the brain. As we saw above, the reincarnation hypothesis does not require that one be able to see the surviving stuff in a disembodied state, as one might an astral body of the sort the author characterizes. Naturally, the author also thinks that anybody who believes in mind-body dualism needs to believe in astral bodies and therefore must be equally committed to the absurd or occult.

12. In Chapter Ten the author discusses Telephone Calls from the Dead, Birthmarks, and the *Modus Operandi* Problem. On the question of Birthmarks, the author examines the Corliss Chotkin case and says:

Although Stevenson's multi-volume work on birthmarks has not been published, several of the case histories he has reported do include, as an essential part of the evidence for reincarnation, details about the birthmarks of the individuals and their alleged relation to wounds and illnesses of the earlier bodies. I will briefly discuss the case of Corliss Chotkin Jr. It will serve as a useful illustration of the kind of evidence that so greatly impresses Stevenson. It is a typical Stevensonian case and the objections to it would, with some minor adjustments, apply to all the others. (p. 136)

Unfortunately, the author examines the case as it is presented briefly in a synopsis in *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* and not as it is presented originally in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. Here, as elsewhere, what the author says about the details of the cases presented by Stevenson, and the possibility of fraud, shows that he has not read the cases as presented in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. And claiming that the Chotkin case is a typical Stevensonian case, is quite false as there are at least three logically distinct kinds of cases which Stevenson presents and which vary in terms of evidential force, although in each kind of case the evidence offered is sufficient. At any rate, for the author, the main objection to the Chotkin Case is that there is no conceivable way in which the scars of Victor Vincent could have been transferred to the body of Corliss Chotkin. For the author, nonphysical bodies are just not the sort of thing to which physical scars could be transferred. Moreover, do the scars shrink for the new body? (p. 139) This is another instance of the *modus operandi* objection of which the author is demonstrably fond. (p. 139) Interestingly, here the author says that although we sometimes know (as in the case of aspirin, for example) that something was the case without being able to say how it occurred, in the case of reincarnation we have not even the foggiest idea how the scars move around. (p. 140) Unfortunately, the author claims that this *modus operandi* problem, as he explicates it, is "fatal" not only for birthmark cases, but also for the entire reincarnation theory. (p. 140) In this context the author says:

By the way, I do hope that Stevenson's four volume work will find a publisher. He seems to me a sincere but deluded man and he does deserve his day in court. What is more, publication of the book would give pleasure all around. Stevenson and his supporters would be delighted. As for the publishers I do not believe that they would lose any money. Given the state of education in the world, especially the United States, there will be plenty of believers or would-be believers to buy such a profusely illustrated defense of reincarnation. As for myself, it would be a joyous occasion for additional comments about this absurd nonsense in a later edition. (p.140)

Presumably, somebody will inform the author that Praeger has now published the two-volume work entitled *Reincarnation and Biology* (after Paragon Press earlier reneged on a signed contract to publish it in 1991) and that the author can begin anew showing joyfully that such body scars did not and could not occur because we do not know how they could occur in the way depicted. Doubtless, the author is so committed to the *modus operandi* problem that he will infer it a waste of time and money to read these two volumes, since he already knows that, given this fatal objection, all the cases presented must be instances of fraud, delusion, hoax, sloppy methodology, holy lies or insanity.

Nowhere, incidentally, does Stevenson claim that the existence of body-scars from wounds received earlier is necessary in order to justify belief in reincarnation. As noted above, there are at least three distinct kinds of cases, no one of which involves body-scars, that would be sufficient for drawing the conclusion in favor of the minimalist belief in reincarnation. Stevenson is impressed, as indeed we all should be, with the fact that sometimes in well-confirmed cases based on non-fraudulent and verified memory claims and on such cases combined with the presence of relevant non-propositional skills not learned, we have such scars as appeared in the same location on the bodies of the previous historical personality.

Chapters 11 and 12 are on Kubler-Ross, Moody and the new immortality movement. Here the author attacks Kubler-Ross after noting that she is the most uncritical person in the history of the world. He adds that she definitely belongs in the book because she believes in astral bodies, and the author wants to say more about how stupid it is to believe in astral bodies. He also pillories those who might think minds exist because, he claims, believing in minds actually commits one to belief in astral bodies. This chapter is also similar to the next chapter (Chapter 13) bearing the title Grof, LSD and the Amorous Snake-Woman.

In the name of Victorian humor, these last three chapters involve tasteless ridicule more than anything else, and none of the discussion advances a critical examination of the most plausible evidence for belief in reincarnation. Since it is very unlikely that Kubler-Ross, or Moody, or Grof seek to offer a critical and philosophically defensible proof of survival based on OBEs, it serves no purpose to attack them for failing to do so. (In my book, (Almeder, 1992), incidentally, I spent much time on OBEs and it might have been better

for the author to have examined those arguments, including the Osis-Mc-Cormick experiments, rather than look at other arguments that are so easily dismissed).

Chapter 14 is about The Population Problem and Other Commonsense and Scientific Objections. Here the author presents five objections against Reincarnation. They are:

(1) *Tertullian's* Objection. According to this objection, the reincarnated person begins as a baby and not as a fully mature person "How is it that they come back at one uniform age?" (Why?) As the author sees it, John Hick also endorses this objection when he points out that babies are not born with adult egos "as they would be if they were direct continuations of egos that had died at the end of normal lifespan" (as cited on p. 223). The author (Edwards) goes on to say that "it is little less than scandalous that no reincarnationist ever attempted to reply to this argument." (p. 223- 224) He then goes on to say that the one plausible explanation in terms of the metaphysical soul (which does age) is distinct from the empirical ego... and naturally this answer is absurd because the distinction presupposes that we can make sense of a metaphysical soul which is really nothing more than an astral body, and belief in astral bodies is absurd beyond belief.

The proper response to Tertullian's objection, of course, is that it is not an objection, but rather a question; and even if somebody were to answer that he/she does not know why reincarnated souls do not begin as full continuations of past adult egos, that is irrelevant to the evidence that some essential traits of human personality sometimes reincarnate, and that some of these traits are adult memories and non-propositional skills. If Tertullian's question is by implication to be taken as a worthy objection, what exactly is the objection? That reincarnation, as we defined it above, cannot occur because if reincarnation were ever a fact it would need to occur in the way Tertullian thinks it would be suitable for it to occur? Or that it cannot take place in the way specified in the minimalist's thesis because we can imagine another way in which it might take place? Even if Tertullian's question is an interesting question, (rather than the bold undefended assertion that reincarnation as defined above cannot occur) the answer is irrelevant as evidence against the thesis defined above which asserts that it does occur in the way specified in the thesis.

(2) Reincarnation is Incompatible with Darwinian Evolution. "Evolution teaches that our consciousness developed gradually along with the development of the brain and the nervous system (p. 225). The reincarnationist is committed to holding that no such development has occurred because it is the same soul that has migrated from body to body."

The response to this objection seems simple enough. Evolutionary theory does not teach that consciousness developed gradually along with the development of the brain and the nervous system. To see that this is so, one can simply consult any reputable and standard college text in biology treating the subject of evolution. Nor does biology even teach that consciousness, as we under-

stand it, is no more than a brain state or a biological property caused by brain states. Biology makes no claim that minds or souls or consciousness is a biological property of any sort. That is an inference drawn by others who choose to conclude as much from the fact that biology makes no testable claims about such entities. Biologists tend not to make philosophical claims about the nature of the mind and the degree to which biology is prepared to defend the view that minds or souls are really brains, brain states, or biological properties caused by the brain. And it would be remarkable if it did, because such claims could not be empirically testable without begging the question against the belief in minds.

(3) *The Recency of Life*. (p. 225) According to this objection, science shows that after the big bang there was no life here for billions of years; but "Reincarnation in all forms postulates a series of incarnations stretching back into the past without limit, and this is clearly inconsistent with the facts." By implication, for the author, contemporary western believers in reincarnation are not the least bit interested in the findings of science.

In response to this objection, it should be obvious that the thesis of reincarnation specified above as the minimalist thesis makes no such claims about when the process started, and the defense of that thesis requires no such belief. It is just not true that reincarnation in all its forms postulates a series of incarnations stretching back into the past without limit. The empirical evidence for the minimalist thesis does not imply that at all.

(4) *The Population Objection*. This is the author's favorite objection (p. 226), and it seems to him quite conclusive against the major form of reincarnation, in spite of the imaginative responses of "true" believers. (p. 226). The earliest statement of the population objection is found in Tertullian's *Treatise on the Soul* in which Tertullian speaks of the "luxuriant growth of the human race" observing that this cannot be reconciled with the notion of the stationery population to which reincarnationists are committed. (p. 226) Tertullian's argument is as follows: the population will be some 10 billion by the year 2016 while at the time of Christ the population of the world was 200 million. The author goes on to say:

As we saw earlier, reincarnationists are opposed to any doctrine of "special creation" of souls. It denies that new souls are ever added to the world. All souls have always existed. Every birth is a rebirth, the rebirth of a soul that has already existed. All this clearly rules out any population increase. Reincarnationists who believe that some souls are eventually allowed to give up their earthly existence and merge into the Absolute or Nirvana are committed to the view that in the long run the population must decrease. Other reincarnationists imply that the total human population is stationary. In either case, whether committed to a stationary or decreasing population, reincarnation appears to be refuted by the population statistics. (p. 226)

The author then says:

It is noteworthy that this argument has hardly ever been discussed by any of the academically respectable reincarnationists. I suspect that the reason for this is the great difficulty of finding an answer that would strike a sober person as even remotely credible. (p. 227)

The author then lists a number of inadequate responses from Buddhist reincarnationists, and he also lists Geddes MacGregor's objection to the effect that now that we know how vast the universe is and how vastly populated it must be by rational souls, the objection has no weight, as an objection that is given over to noxious *ad hoc* assumptions. Reincarnationism, Edwards urges, is not a theory for which there is any observational evidence. (p. 230) And, of course, such assumptions as those made by MacGregor are not, according to the author, testable. He also distorts Stevenson's position in Stevenson's reply. Indeed, the author accuses Stevenson of stating the issue obscurely and misleadingly. The author then goes on to say that the problem is that "the population increase *seems* (emphasis added) incompatible with the stationary or decreasing population implied by the major form of reincarnationism." He then goes on to say that the population problem can be avoided by anybody prepared to offer a drastically modified version of reincarnationism, namely the version that says only that people sometimes reincarnate. (p. 253) In other words, for the author, somebody who holds that reincarnation occurs, but that it need not be universal, could quite consistently admit the population growth without invoking any of the *ad hoc* assumptions. "There is something appealing about the modesty of this revised position, but it is easy to see why it has not commended itself to most believers in reincarnation... Many of the arguments for reincarnation, if they were valid, would show that all human beings are the reincarnation of previously existing souls." (p. 233) Moreover, according to the author, if this modest form of reincarnation were true we would have difficulty figuring out who was, and who was not, reincarnated and hence not be able to explain human behavior in terms of Karma.

In brief response to this objection, one might note that the minimalist form of reincarnation, as defined above, is in fact the only defensible form of reincarnation; and because that form does not imply that everybody reincarnates the population objection does not work against it. The question is whether the modest form is supported by the empirical evidence. If it should turn out that under the modest form of reincarnation we would not be able to pick out who among us have as part of our current persona a reincarnated person (or person-part), then the author says we would not be able to explain human behavior in terms of Karma. On this point, it is worth noting again that the modest form does not seek to explain human behavior in terms of Karma. It makes no claim as to why such a process would occur. If the modest form is not identifiable with the common forms accepted by certain religious beliefs, then the author

should deal with the question of whether the evidence offered by Stevenson and others actually supports this modest form and, if it does, what that means by implication for understanding human nature. Incidentally, I argued for the modest form of reincarnation in my book, and argued that that is all Stevenson's evidence requires; and, in light of this argument, I also argued that the assumptions behind the population objection would presuppose a form of reincarnation that Stevenson did not argue for and for which the evidence he offers does not support. I submit that sane, sober and academically respectable reincarnationists have replied quite successfully to the population objection and that if the author were not so busy wantonly vilifying those who disagree with his views, he might have seen the replies. As a matter of fact, Stevenson's reply to the population objection is subtle and quite telling. I also argued that even if one did hold out for universal reincarnation, the population objection would still have no weight rather than simply be an implication of the truth of the thesis. The population objection, like so many other objections here, is a red herring because based on a straw man construal of what a reasonable reincarnationist must believe. In fact, many people (including MacGregor, Ducasse, Stevenson and myself) have replied quite well to the population objection.

(5) *The Absence of Genuine Memories of Previous Lives is Powerful Evidence Against Belief in Reincarnation.* (p. 234) The author made this claim back on p. 27, where he says that "the two criteria of bodily continuity and memory are not on a par and that the memory criterion presupposes that of bodily continuity while the converse does not hold." According to the author, we need a criterion for distinguishing between false and true memories because "people often sincerely remember things that did not happen...." For the author, it is evident that the memory criterion cannot help us to distinguish between such true and false memories. We have to fall back on another criterion and the only one that seems to be available is bodily continuity. (p. 237)

In response to this objection, it is easy to determine whether a person's memory claims are false. If the event which she claims to remember can be shown never to have taken place, then the memory claim is false. And if there is no way of confirming the claim then there is no good reason to accept the claim as a true memory claim. Similarly, if a person claims to remember having buried his money forty years ago in a jar under his hen house, then finding the jar there with the specified sum and certifying that nobody else could have buried it there at that time or at a later time, then his memory claim is true. Of course, sometimes some memory claims are not testable because they testify to events for which there could be no empirical evidence presently available..., for example, what my father said just before he died when we were alone in the room. On the question of reincarnation, if somebody claims to remember having buried his golden spoon with his initials in the cement foundation of the State Street Church in Boston on April 3, 1843 then finding the spoon after breaking up the foundation (and knowing that the location of the spoon was not known to anybody else and that the spoon was in fact placed in the founda-

tion on April 3, 1843), surely counts for verifying the memory claim, unless, of course, one holds *a priori* that one cannot have a true memory of an event that one did not witness in his current lifetime; and if one does hold this latter view, how explain the fact that the memory claim is true and that the subject's belief is true? As Derek Parfit claims, if we saw such events transpire, we might want to change our definition of what memory consists in, and abandon the view that the brain is the carrier of memory (p. 227 in pb edition of *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford, 1980). If there is nothing that I would accept as a valid memory claim of a past event that the subject could not have witnessed in his current body, then it seems to be a dogma with me that bodily continuity is both necessary and sufficient for personal identity, when there is as strong an intuitive basis for thinking that systemic memories are sufficient for identifying distinct persons.

Chapter 15. The Interregnum: What Happens Between Lives

In this chapter, the author offers some vintage remarks on *post mortem* survival. He notes, for example, that belief in reincarnation could not be true because we would have no idea where the surviving personality traits would be after death. This is another form of the *modus operandi* objection, no better for the repetition. After pointing to Stevenson's claim that the mind is a non-physical body composed of some kind of matter, but that it must be matter quite different from what we usually mean by that term, the author concludes that Stevenson does not say he believes in astral bodies, but that it is hard to see how Stevenson can avoid believing in something of the same kind. The author goes on to say:

When I first read the remarks just quoted I could not help wondering where the intermediate body came from. The answer to this question is given in Stevenson's 1980 Presidential Address to the Parapsychological Association, in which he reveals himself as an out-and-out occultist. The second body, which we have available at death, is nothing other than our mind which we had or which we were all along. Stevenson is, of course, a dualist and he calls himself a radical interactionist, but no dualistic interactionist known to me among philosophers, of the Cartesian or the Humean variety, has ever identified the mind with a body. We are once again told that images have spatial location... the mind is thus "extended"...Before leaving this topic, I should observe that Stevenson has in no way established what he evidently desires to show, that the mind, *i.e.* the second body, exists in a space that is just as objective as physical space. (p. 245)

In response, C. D. Broad, C. J. Ducasse, and H. H. Price, (among others) in fact identified the surviving mind as an object that shared in common with physical objects some physical properties and thus they held to a modified Cartesian substance-dualism that allows for personal survival of a substance that had to be extended without being fully identifiable with physical objects as we now understand them. Besides, if we do have minds (distinct from brains and not reducible to brains or biological properties caused by brain states) they

are certainly extended in some way, as my mind would be everywhere I am and not now anywhere else. That is why my mind would exist in real space, namely, because my body is in real space and my mind is everywhere my body is. Rather than call Stevenson, C. D. Broad and all other mind-body dualists (such as Plato, Aristotle, all the medievals, Locke, Berkeley, Descartes, Leibnitz, Spinoza, Kant, and right up to MacTaggart, Sidgwick, Ducasse, James, Peirce, David Lewis, and David Chalmers) out-and-out believers in the occult, why not call them metaphysicians, who posit theoretical entities because the existence of such entities provides unique explanatory power for bodies of data that cannot be plausibly explained otherwise? After all, that is how we came to believe in quarks and the particles contained in them.

And, moreover, for the author, *womb invasions* would need explanation. How would nonphysical bodies succeed in invading wombs? Here again, according to the author, unless we can explain how the surviving person (or person part) can succeed in invading wombs for the purpose of reincarnation, we have no reason to believe that reincarnation takes place. In response, of course, it is helpful to remember that the defensible form of reincarnation, the minimalist form, implies nothing as to when the reincarnation takes place. For all we know, it takes place immediately after birth, without benefit, if you will, of unwelcome womb invasions.

Chapter 16 is about Dr. Ian Stevenson. After ridiculing my supportive claims about Stevenson's work, the author then claims, in proceeding to examine Stevenson's views, that anybody who believes in reincarnation is committed to a host of collateral assumptions the most important of which are:

(a) when a human being dies, he continues to exist not on the earth but in a region we know not where as a pure disembodied mind or else as an astral or some other kind of a nonphysical body;

(b) although deprived of his brain, he retains memories of life on earth as well as some of his characteristic skills and traits;

(c) after a period varying from a few months to hundreds of years, this pure mind or non-physical body, which lacks not only a brain but any physical sense organs, picks out a suitable woman on earth as its mother in the next incarnation, invades this woman's womb at the moment of conception of a new embryo, and unites with it to form a full-fledged human being;

(d) although the person who died may have been an adult and indeed quite old, when he is reborn he begins a new life with the intellectual and emotional attitudes of a baby;

(e) finally, many people born in this way did not previously live on the earth, but (depending on which version of reincarnation one subscribes to) in other planes or on other planets from which they migrate (invisibly, of course) most of them preferring to enter the wombs of mothers in poor and overpopulated countries where their lives are likely to be wretched;

(f) the collateral assumptions listed so far are implied by practically all forms of reincarnation, but in Stevenson's case there is the additional implica-

tion that the memories and skills that the individual took over from the person who died and that are transmitted to the new regular body appear there for a relatively short time during childhood to disappear forever after;

(g) If Stevenson's reports are evidence for reincarnation they must also be evidence for the collateral assumptions just mentioned (p. 255).

For the author, all these assumptions constitute the crucifixion of reason, and a rational person will conclude that Stevenson's reports are seriously defective or that his alleged facts can be explained without bringing in reincarnation. In short, the initial presumption against reincarnation is so strong that the burden of refuting it will be heavy indeed. He then says:

In a simplified form, the question before a rational person can be stated in the following words: Which is more likely — that there are astral bodies, that they invade the womb of prospective mothers, and that the children can remember events from a previous life although the brains of the previous persons have long been dead, or that Stevenson's children, their parents or some of the other witnesses and informants are, intentionally or unintentionally, not telling the truth: that they are lying, or that their very fallible memories and powers of observations have led them to make false statements and bogus identifications? (p. 256)

In response to all this, please notice that, given the above definition of the minimalist thesis of reincarnation (that form of reincarnation for which Stevenson argues exclusively in terms of the case studies he presented), the sentences stating the alleged collateral assumptions a, c, e, f, and g are clearly false. A and d are true, but hardly constitute a "crucifixion of reason" rather than what is implied by the minimalist thesis.

Further, philosophers will recognize the type of argument offered in the last of the above quotes. It is not unlike the Bayesian move made by David Hume offered in one of his arguments against the existence of miracles. The argument in question is that because, apart from evidence at hand, there is no prior probability for such an extraordinary event as a miracle, and because there is indeed a fairly high probability of error based on simple sense perception and human fallibility, then it is obviously more probable that miracles do not exist. One need not believe in miracles to notice that Hume's argument is as nice a case of question-begging as one could ever find in any introductory logic book. The structure of the argument strategy proceeds as follows: whenever anybody offers an argument that challenges the paradigm position of materialistic monism, argue that it has no real probability in its favor because it conflicts with those theses that have a prior probability of being correct because they are consistent with what we already know, namely, what is asserted in the paradigm position. In such a case, then any probability in favor of human error and deceit in these matters will show that the evidence offered against the paradigm is defective. There is a great deal of epistemological voodoo in this particular Bayesian move, apart from the implicit claim that any adequate explanation of anything must be consistent with the current paradigm. If this

strategy were sound, then there would never be any way to show the paradigm theory false, or crucially defective. There are other reasons why this Bayesian move is unacceptable, but space here prohibits any further discussion.

In this Chapter we also get a discussion under *Holes in the Reincarnation Cases*. These cases are supposed to read better in summary than when they are examined in close detail (p. 256) According to the author, they all have big holes in them. This we are supposed to know, of course, because the author examines one case that originally appears in *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Volume One — Ten Cases in India.* (1975) This is the case of Jagdish Chandra, born March 4, 1923. Here the author actually examines (after reminding us that he has shown the fatal flaws in the Corliss Chotkin case) only one of the cases offered by Stevenson and criticized by one J. Fraser Nicol (*Parapsychological Review*, 1976). The author simply repeats the assertions made by Nicol about this one case, and makes much of the fact that neither Stevenson nor any of his associates has bothered to respond to Nicol's critique. In fact, incidentally, Stevenson did respond (quite convincingly I believe) to Nicol's main criticism of this case. The response occurs in *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (University Press of Virginia, 1978) p. 297, note #19. But, in the face of the supposedly devastating objection offered by Nicol, (and unanswered by Stevenson or anybody else) the author's allegedly plausible alternative explanation for the data in the Jagdish Chandra case, is simply that the case in question is a religious fabrication not uncommon in India. Given other features of the case (such as verified memory claims of events that only the previous personality could have known) this alternative explanation could not explain crucial facts in the case, facts ignored by both the author and Nicol. Moreover, even if the author were right to reject the Jagdish Chandra case for the reasons offered by Nicol, logically generalizing to the remaining thousands of cases is, of course, nothing short of breathtaking in the effort to convince us that all the cases offered (under any of the three distinct types) have big holes in them.

In this chapter the author also endorses another critique of another case offered by Stevenson. This time the case is the Sujith case and the critique is offered by one B. N. Moore whose main criticism is that the previous personality died only a little more than six months before the birth of Sujith. Sujith's mother said that he was born only after a seven month pregnancy (something that has not been independently confirmed). (p. 258) In other words, according to Moore, Sujith's mother was pregnant with him one month before the previous personality died. In any event, by way of response here, whatever the embryological facts, the objection clearly presupposes that any form of reincarnation is committed to the view that reincarnation must take place sometime very early in the gestation process, when in fact the minimalist view, as defined above, makes no such assumption. All the evidence for the defensible form of reincarnation is consistent with reincarnation taking place at any time during the period of gestation, or at the moment of birth, or shortly after birth. And so it goes.

In this chapter, the author repeats objections to Stevenson's case studies, objections raised by Wilson, Roll and Chari. These criticisms I have already discussed in my book (Almeder, 1992), but the author chose to ignore them. And, of course, we need to look at the objections the author ascribes to an anthropologist, Dr. Barker. Barker could not find a convincing case in which there was convincing evidence of the presence of an element of the paranormal. Why this should count as evidence against reincarnation rather than show the failure of Dr. Barker to read or understand the most interesting cases is quite unfathomable.

Here also the author raises the question of why most of the cases reported occur outside the Western World. His answer is that this is because in those countries where such cases are reported the level of intelligence is considerably lower and, most often, in cultures where people already believe in reincarnation. The implication is obvious: we only find such cases where religious fanaticism and ignorance reign supreme in cultures where there is antecedent belief in reincarnation. In America, for example, the reporting of such cases is almost nonexistent because, according to the author, given the presence of intelligent critics the cases could not hold up under careful scrutiny.

In reply to this objection, it may be helpful to remember that, however tempting it is to construe cases reported from non-Western sources as cultural constructs, the richer cases hinge on verified memory claims of events in the subject's previous life that only the previous personality could know or have witnessed. Such cases also sometimes include the subject speaking in the language of the former personality, a language the subject has not learned in her current life. In no case would we find a particularly evidential case in which the memories of the subject pertain to items of information that were a matter of public record and hence known to the subject's immediate family or relatives.

Moreover, there is a substantial number of credible cases from America, England, and Canada. Stevenson is preparing for publication, a book on cases in America. The author remains convinced, of course, that even after the publication of this book, there will be nothing of any real evidential value in the cases examined. Prior to even looking at it, the author is sure they will reveal gaping holes when examined. Although there is a substantial number of cases reported and examined in America, Stevenson's hypothesis on why there have not been as many cases reported in America as in other lands is that, among other factors, in America children are more often dissuaded from telling such stories. He also entertains the hypothesis that this latter phenomena could also be due to the fact that if there are a large number of reincarnations in America, then since people often reincarnate in the same general locale, children reincarnated in America are likely to have some antecedent disposition to strongly disbelieve, and hence not take seriously, what would otherwise count as persuasive memories of a past life. To this hypothesis the author responds with the following philosophical comments:

Stevenson evidently lives in a cloud-cuckoo-land, and he regards the wildest and most fanciful assumptions, many of which are of questionable conceptual coherence, as being on an equal footing with straightforward empirical hypotheses. He resorts to such extravaganzas whenever the specter of cultural factors accounting for reincarnation beliefs raises its menacing head. (p. 268)

In fact, however, even if not directly verifiable, Stevenson's proffered explanation of why we do not seem to have very many evidential cases reported in America is by no means incoherent. Besides, the author's objection (if name-calling can be called an objection) overlooks the fact that there is now a substantial number of credible cases in America, and the important issue is to explain the data in the richer cases, wherever they occur, when the appeal to cultural factors alone fails, as it invariably does in the richer cases. Indeed, as people have frequently noted, the appeal to cultural factors to explain the richer cases fails very demonstrably when one looks at the details in the cases offered. The author has not, of course, looked at those arguments nor at the richer cases that do not lend themselves to the thesis that such cases are cultural or religious fabrications. Finally, Stevenson has examined and published a number of cases in which subjects claim to remember having lived past lives and has concluded that in those cases the subject's claims are of little evidential value and should not be taken as verified. In those cases, alternative hypotheses are as plausible if not more plausible. We all know what would count for empirically falsifying the hypothesis of reincarnation, but it seems clear that the author does not know what would count for empirically falsifying his claim that this hypothesis could never be true.

In the end, incidentally, even if there had been no cases of reincarnation reported in America, that would not show that the cases reported in foreign lands are dismissable as cultural fabrications. For all we know, it could just as easily show that, for some reason or other, people just do not reincarnate in America. After all, who ever said that if the minimalist reincarnation hypothesis is true then it must follow that people will reincarnate in every geographical area on the planet so that we end up with a nice politically correct geographical distribution? In fact, however interesting it may be, one does not need to explain why there may be no cases reported in any particular geographical area; the problem for the author and others is to explain the data in those cases where they do appear and when the appeal to cultural factors fails, as it clearly does in the richer cases. As it is, there are many noteworthy cases reported in America and some of these will appear in Stevenson's forthcoming publication on cases in America.

The author's claim that Stevenson has a penchant for advancing totally unfalsifiable statements (p. 269) is an irresponsible claim. Belief in reincarnation is an empirically falsifiable and verifiable hypothesis for all the reasons we saw above, and the data confirming or falsifying the hypothesis in any particular case is in the data offered in that case. The author further attempts to undermine the evidence for reincarnation by attacking Stevenson for bad judgment

because of the so-called Ransom report. Mr. Ransom was an assistant to Stevenson many years back who claimed that he became disillusioned in working on reincarnation-type cases because he thought the methods employed were sloppy, and that there were various forms of bias in the investigative methods. Ransom said this back in the 1970's. He also said there was a bias among the investigators to find the paranormal where he thought it did not exist. He also wrote a summary of his reflections for the author (see p. 276) in which he states, *inter alia*, that in only 11 of the approximately 1,111 cases then examined, had there been no contact between the two previous families before the scientific examination had begun. (p. 277) Whether what Ransom says is true or not is certainly interesting. Of course, if what Ransom wrote in private correspondence is true, one can also see it as supporting the claim that in at least 11 of the approximate 1,111 cases examined early in the research project, we have strong evidence for reincarnation. Did Stevenson claim that those early 1,111 examined cases were all verified cases or particularly rich cases? Did the author read the Preface to *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* and the Introduction (p. 17) to *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*? In both places Stevenson states clearly that no case can be a clearly paranormal case if the information the subject has about a previous life could have been conveyed normally to the subject from either the subject's family or the existing family of the subject in the alleged former life. The point here is that we need to examine the richer cases that Stevenson and others offer as strong cases and see if they have the methodological defects Mr. Ransom said were there. In none of the richer verified cases supporting the minimalist thesis (that some people reincarnate) will one find the sort of methodological problems Mr. Ransom claimed were there. Besides, citing private correspondence without offering Stevenson an opportunity to reply also seems unwholesomely biased and is of no evidential value when the cases offered as rich evidence have none of the problematic methodological features Mr. Ransom cites. Here again, if anybody takes the time to look at the large and growing number of case studies actually offered (and I believe very few critics actually do so), Mr. Ransom's and other's criticisms about the methodology employed will dissolve. Let them begin with the Swarnlata Case, and see if what Ransom says fits that case.

The last Chapter is on consciousness, and the author develops what he calls "the weightiest argument," namely, that if anybody knew anything at all about science one would readily see that consciousness cannot exist independently of brains. For the author, the evident or obvious dependence of consciousness upon the brain makes reincarnation and other forms of personal survival impossible. He also notes that according to H. H. Price the evidence for reincarnation is the best challenge to data against materialism, understood as the view that consciousness is either a particular brain state or a biological property of a particular brain state. The author goes on to reject this argument primarily because of all the holes he has already noted in the case studies. In this discus-

sion, moreover, the author shows no awareness of the sophisticated arguments and literature offered by many philosophers such as Noam Chomsky, C. D. Broad, David Lewis, David Chalmers, and John Smythies, for example, on either the qualia problem or on other reasons why reductive materialism, as it is usually understood, is so terribly unsatisfactory. As it is, one can argue that one of the strongest empirical challenges to the author's view that consciousness cannot exist independently of brains is offered in the best case studies offered by Stevenson and others, cases most of which (including the xenoglossy cases) are ignored by the author who illegitimately generalizes from such weak and strikingly different cases as the Chotkin Case and the Bridey Murphy case.

Finally, all too often in his book the author asserts, without showing as much, that the views of those with whom he disagrees have been devastatingly criticized by others, and that those who disagree with what the author asserts are guilty of various outrageous distortions, not to say forms of delusion, stupidity, insanity, malice and even holy lies. Indeed, it seems that for the author, anybody who ever believed even in mind-body dualism is a philosophically incompetent dolt or a dishonest knave — and in most cases both. But good arguments for his bottom line are never there. In fact, this book may stand as an enduring monument of *ad hominem*s, false charges of fallacy, straw men, illegitimate generalizations and sloppy scholarship.

It is all part of the author's rhetoric of seeking to poison the well for any honest defense of mind-body dualism. This is how the strategy works: Take some well-known advocates of a certain thesis (preferably somebody who is not a philosopher or a scientist... somebody such as Shirley Maclain or Sylvester Stalone) and show how their statements about the existence of minds are worthy of sarcasm and ridicule; and then if you come across a philosopher or a scientist of note who may take the question seriously, either ignore them or ridicule them while distorting their views. In this way, one can succeed in poisoning the well without examining the strongest arguments; and also create an emotional hostility to the thesis by asserting simply that all people who adopt these views are equally ridiculous. It will also help if you can insinuate that their spouses left them justifiably for more psychologically normal companionship. Thereafter, assure everybody that the reason you do all this is to disinterestedly raise the intellectual and moral standards of Western Civilization out of a high-minded search for, and love of, the truth which is very much threatened by those who may find the view you reject as even mildly plausible. Then when one finally gets to the interesting arguments for belief in reincarnation or mind-body dualism (as in Chapter 17) distort it, misrepresent it in various nonsubtle ways, and then walk off into the sunset, having defeated one's personal enemies... all of whom fall naturally into the category of fundamental religious fanatics. In this way we advance the cause of rational belief formation.

In fact, this book calls to mind Bertrand Russell's claim that nothing so convinced him more of Plato's Theory of Forms than Aristotle's critique of it. But at least Aristotle had the good sense to realize that name-calling and gross distortion, or deliberately ignoring other people's central arguments is neither philosophical nor particularly informative.

Any good this book might have done in pointing to the excesses of the new-age community is eclipsed by a thorough failure to do what it set out to do. If good logic counts for anything, the author fails to notice that while pointing to those who believe in reincarnation as religious fanatics or mental incompetents, there are three fingers pointing backwards toward him.

Appendix

Incidentally, in a footnote which occurs on p. 254. The author says:

I should hate to have Almeder as a supporter. We already noted his false claim that Nietzsche was a believer in reincarnation. An article of his, which was rejected by *Free Inquiry* in 1988 is listed in his 1992 book as "Forthcoming in *Free Inquiry*." In Chapter Two of his book he presents as established fact the reincarnation case of Dr. Arthur Guirdham who was thoroughly exposed in Ian Wilson's *Mind Out of Time*. Almeder mentions Wilson's book a number of times, but does not tell the reader of Wilson's *expose'* of Guirdham. In a devastating review of Almeder's earlier *Beyond Death* in the *Journal of Psychical Research* (April 1989) the reviewer, Michael Coleman, after listing Almeder's numerous quite outrageous distortions, remarks, "Such practices would be reprehensible for a layman, and are inexcusable in a professional philosopher." I could not agree more.

For the record, and by way of response, while one might still defend the claim that Nietzsche argued for some form of reincarnation, (although, to be sure, not the minimalist version outlined above) I never argued that the minimalist thesis was plausible or even worthy of acceptance because other famous philosophers believed in it. So whether Nietzsche, or anybody else for that matter, happened to believe in reincarnation is irrelevant to the main argument I offered in defense of belief in reincarnation. No philosopher before Stevenson had such compelling evidence. Concentrating on whether Nietzsche believed in reincarnation while ignoring what I did argue (especially by way of response to Edwards' earlier views which re-appear in this book) is a red herring. If I made a mistake on what Nietzsche argued in this regard it pales by way of significance in the presence of the author's claim that anybody who ever believed in Cartesian mind-body substance dualism was an irrational believer in the occult because it implies belief in the existence of astral bodies of the sort the author has described. I will happily admit I was wrong in ascribing any reasonable form of reincarnation to Nietzsche, and then add by way of substitution the names of McTaggart, Price, Ducasse, and C. D. Broad... to a list of others including Plato. But, to repeat the point, doing as much is irrele-

vant to the main argument and would, if anyone took it as evidence for reincarnation, be a simple instance of the fallacy of appeal to authority.

Secondly, in response to his second comment (that I listed in my book as forthcoming, an essay which was rejected by Free Inquiry), I have a copy of the corrected galleys of that essay which was invited and, after suitable revisions and shortening, accepted for publication in 1986 by the editor at the time. After numerous telephone inquiries and letters that were not answered by the editor, I was informed only very recently by the current editor, Mr. Madigan, that he knew nothing about the paper, but that I could, if I so chose, write another paper on humanism and reincarnation and submit it to Free Inquiry for editorial review and possible publication. What is interesting is that he never asked to see the galleys of the earlier essay, and apparently never took the time to contact the earlier editor who accepted the essay for publication. I take this last letter as confirmation for the claim that Free Inquiry invited and accepted a paper for publication, which it subsequently decided to not publish, without informing the author until ten years after the corrected galleys were sent forth. Naturally, I will no longer list this essay as forthcoming.

Thirdly, with regard to Dr. Guirdham's case and the author's claim that I presented it as an established fact (meaning, presumably that I presented it as conclusive evidence of reincarnation); what I argued in that section was rather that the Bishen Chand case and the Swarnlata case were the strongest. What I said about Guirdham's investigation, or the Mrs. Smith case was the following:

The Mrs. Smith case may not match all the ideal-typical characteristics, involving as it does a long-ago past life. But the recitative xenoglossy exhibited by Mrs. Smith, and her consistent memory of previously unknown but then often verified historical facts, qualify the case as worthy of serious consideration in the context of this study.

All the cases I discussed were listed as sorts of cases. They typify certain logical features that would be hard to explain assuming absence of fraud, hoax, cultural influences, or sloppy methodology. In the cases I listed as excellent, there was strong evidence that fraud, hoax, cultural influence, and sloppy methodology could not be seriously entertained as the cause of the data. With regard to the Mrs. Smith case, I argued later (p. 30 of *Death and Personal Survival*) that the recitative xenoglossy in these cases could not be refuted for the reasons Thomason offered. And I know of nobody (Wilson notwithstanding) who has shown that Smith's memories of past events about things that were not part of the public record could be explained normally. This could not be explained by appeal to paramnesia, or cryptomnesia or, by implication to cultural forces because the evidence confirming those memories was not available to her or to anybody at the time she first made the claim. (I refer to the color of the robes worn by the Cathar priests, for example). And in the Swarnlata case, there were 20 instances in which someone wrote down what the child said long before any attempt was made to verify those statements. Finally, after

discussing the possibility of fraud, hoax and sloppy methodology as a way of explaining the stronger cases, what I said in the book was simply this:

Indeed, in the absence of our being able to show that the case studies are flawed in one of the ways just suggested, what the cases do show is that human personality (whatever it is) survives death and, by implication, that human consciousness *can* (emphasis added) exist (along with propositional memories and non-propositional skills) independently of brains, flourish for a period without a body as we know it, and reincarnate. So, the charge that all this is just too incredible for any rational person to believe is a blatant bit of question-begging, unworthy of a reasoned response.

Fourthly, Mr. Coleman's review of my earlier book was not a "devastating review mentioning numerous outrageous distortions." This is a general claim that the author makes of many others. Incidentally, he never mentions just what made the reviews "devastating" or just what were the "distortions." I saw Coleman's criticism as a criticism for failing to write a different book, namely a more ambitious one. I responded to his criticism, in any event, by writing *Death and Personal Survival* where I showed how his basic criticism, a criticism of one case in the earlier book, was mistaken. Otherwise, Coleman claims I overlooked important criticisms which others made of the cases I discussed in the earlier book. At any rate, I wonder if Edwards is aware of other positive and generous reviews offered even by others... including the editor of the *Journal of Psychical Research* (where Coleman's original review occurred) who thought the latter book excellent. In the same journal, I have also recently responded to some of Coleman's recent reservations about my latest book. Doubtless, Edwards will find Coleman's latest comments a "devastating critique pointing to numerous and outrageous distortions" and see no real need to mention what the arguments were, or even that a response was made to the offering.

Reference

- Almeder, R. (1992). *Death and Personal Survival, the Evidence for Life after Death*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.