

THE EXPLANATORY VALUE OF THE IDEA OF REINCARNATION

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The idea of reincarnation is presented as having considerable explanatory value for several features of human personality and biology that currently accepted theories do not adequately clarify. Reincarnation is not offered as a substitute for present knowledge derived from genetics and understanding of environmental influences; it may, however, usefully supplement such knowledge.

The present paper does not present evidence from cases suggestive of reincarnation. It does, however, cite cases of subjects who have claimed to remember previous lives, most of whose statements have been verified in the course of detailed investigations. For each case, a reference is provided to a detailed published case report furnishing the evidence in that case.

The idea of reincarnation may contribute to an improved understanding of such diverse matters as: phobias and phobias of childhood; skills not learned in early life; abnormalities of child-parent relationships; vendettas and bellicose nationalism; childhood sexuality and gender identity confusion; birthmarks, congenital deformities, and internal diseases; differences between members of monozygotic twin pairs; and abnormal appetites during pregnancy.

Empirical studies of cases of the reincarnation type have so far not provided any evidence that justifies using reincarnation as an explanation for the occurrence of child prodigies or the large inequities in socioeconomic conditions of humans at birth.

Theories are the ideas with which scientists connect initially unrelated observations in order to achieve a wider understanding of processes that may lead to prediction of events and better control over them. One of the best illustrations is provided by a theory so old that we do not know who first thought of it—the idea that the earth is a sphere. This simple conjecture made sense of such diverse observations as the disappearance of the hulls of ships before their masts when they sail away from viewers on land; the roundness of the earth's shadow on the moon during an eclipse; and the ability to return to

one's starting point by continuing to move in one direction only, such as westward. This paper will propose and expound the idea of reincarnation as a potentially unifying theory that can make intelligible a number of disparate and seemingly unrelated observations in the fields of psychology, psychiatry, biology, and medicine.

The explanatory power of reincarnation² for the questions it may bear upon seems so considerable that it evokes memories of some earlier theoretical systems in medicine and psychiatry that were presented as

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² Reincarnation, briefly defined, includes the idea that men consist of physical bodies and minds. At a person's death, his physical body perishes, but his mind may persist and later become associated with another physical body in the process called reincarnation. Some persons may find the word "mind" in this definition unclear or otherwise unattractive. They may certainly substitute another word such as "soul" or "individuality." I intend only to indicate a component of human beings not comprised in our present understanding of their physical bodies, which component may persist after physical death.

having wide explanatory value. I am thinking here of such examples as phrenology and homeopathy. These systems ultimately collapsed, at least as general theories, because the explanations put forward by their adherents far outdistanced empirical observations that could support them. I shall try to avoid this error by restricting my use of reincarnation as an explanation to observations that have independent support from the detailed investigation of cases of the reincarnation type.

The observations reported here and in the articles and books to be cited were made in the first instance in the pursuit of evidence bearing on the question of the survival of human personality after physical death. A small number of investigators have been obtaining and analyzing data bearing on this question ever since the founding of psychical research, now usually called parapsychology, in 1882.³ It is neither possible nor necessary to summarize here all of the different types of evidence relevant to this question. Suffice it to say that at present most parapsychologists regard the data relating to the survival question as suggestive but far from fully persuasive. They believe that even the most authentic data indicative of survival may be susceptible to alternative interpretations. The most important of these is that evidence ostensibly communicated by discarnate personalities may in fact derive from extrasensory perception between or among living persons.

The study of cases of the reincarnation type offered the possibility of a new approach to evidence bearing on the survival question—can one ask a more important one?—but no dividends for the solution of other scientific questions were anticipated at the time the research began. If now research on cases of the reincarnation type helps to clarify a number of unsolved problems in branches of science outside parapsychology, this good fortune may derive

³ The precise date derives from the fact that the Society for Psychical Research was founded in London in 1882. It was the first organization established for the scientific investigation of the phenomena now called parapsychological.

from the fact that the subjects of cases of the reincarnation type differ in important ways from those who furnish nearly all of the other types of evidence bearing on the survival question. The latter are almost invariably adults; moreover, they make their observations of an apparition, for example, for a minute or several minutes and no longer. During and after that period, the subject's personality changes little or not at all; rarely does he undergo any profound change of personality, or any change at all, unless it is in his conviction about survival after death; such conviction does come to many persons who have the experience of seeing an apparition (40) or of looking down on their bodies after accidents or during surgical operations (11). In contrast, the subjects of cases of the reincarnation type, at least of the best of them, are small children between the ages of 2 and 6. The statements they make and the associated unusual behavior they show usually last for several years and sometimes much longer, and these abnormal utterances and conduct begin during what would be considered the formative years of their lives.

Most psychiatrists and psychologists today believe that infancy and childhood are more important periods in the formation of personality than any later periods; but this idea is only an assumption, as I mentioned some years ago (36). Cases of the reincarnation type challenge it and suggest that although personality is indeed being formed in childhood, its development actually begins much earlier in other terrestrial lives anterior to the child's present life. If we allow ourselves to think of the formation of human personality as extending further back in time than conception and birth, we may be able to explain better than we now can a number of anomalies in child development and human personality for which, up until now, theorists have had to invent "epicyclic" addenda to their theories that simply increase their top-heaviness and suggest that they have overlooked some additional essential component.

Here I need to offer a disclaimer. Earlier I criticized such comprehensive theoretical

systems as homeopathy and phrenology for speculations and dogmatic pronouncements that ran far ahead of the facts; but the devisors of these systems committed another and graver error. They advanced their theories as having universal validity within the territory claimed. Thus, homeopathy had some answer for *every* disease, and phrenology offered explanations of nearly every aspect of human behavior. Occasionally these systems acknowledged the existence of other relevant factors outside their own theories, but more often their authors expressed a smug contentment with the complete overthrow of prior knowledge. Enthusiasts have not been lacking who have claimed with equal confidence that reincarnation offers answers for nearly all of the questions which earlier theories of human personality have failed to solve. As I am no fanatic, however, I think it is essential to emphasize strongly that I am not offering reincarnation as a comprehensive system capable of explaining everything we need to know about child development and human personality; nor do I think of it as replacing present knowledge derived from genetics, other branches of biology, and the study of environmental influences in the development of personality. The idea of reincarnation is offered as a supplement only, not as a substitute for knowledge in these areas. It suggests a third factor, in addition to genetic and environmental factors, for understanding the problems it touches on.

In inviting readers to consider reincarnation as having explanatory value, I am therefore not questioning any acknowledged facts; but I am questioning some assumptions. The most important of these is that human personality consists of nothing but the expressions of the molecules and cells of which our physical bodies are built. The corollary of this assumption, that human personality could have no existence before or after the physical body of its current manifestation, is equally in question. I am fully aware of the gravity of challenging these assumptions and I do not wish to make this challenge to anyone unwilling to examine the evidence that I believe justifies it; nor am I presenting

that evidence without appreciation and acknowledgment of its many imperfections. It is far from compelling toward any conclusion except that of the importance of further investigations of the type of case that has provided it.

Since probably few readers of this paper will already have read reports of cases of the reincarnation type, I shall next offer some account of the typical case of this type, the distribution of reported cases, and the methods used in their investigation and analysis.

Cases of the Reincarnation Type

TYPICAL CASE OF THE REINCARNATION TYPE

A typical case of this type begins when a small child, usually between the ages of 2 and 4, starts to tell his parents, and anyone else who will listen, that he remembers living another life before his birth. His statements about the previous life which he claims to remember are nearly always accompanied by behavior which is unusual in the child's family, but which harmonizes with the statements he is making about the deceased person he claims to have been. For example, if the child claims to remember a previous life as a wealthy man with many servants, he is likely to refuse to do any household chores or other menial work, no matter how poor his family is.

A child claiming to remember a previous life usually asks to be taken to the place where he says he lived during that life, and for this reason, or to satisfy their own curiosity, his parents nearly always try to find the family to which he seems to be referring. If the child has furnished enough details, especially identifying proper names, and if the distances involved are not too great, the search for the family of the person he has been talking about is nearly always successful. (Sometimes this deceased person⁴ is already

⁴ It has been found convenient to refer to the deceased person about whom the child is talking as the "previous personality." The term can be used whether or not an actual deceased person has been found whose life corresponded to the child's statements; nor does its use imply any commitment to a

known to the child's family, but such cases are necessarily weak with regard to evidence of anything out of the ordinary.) The child is then usually found to have been accurate in about 90 per cent of the statements he has been making about the deceased person whose life he claims to remember. Reports about that person's behavior made by surviving members of his family usually indicate also close correspondences between that behavior and the unusual conduct the child has been showing in his family.

In the usual case of this type, the child's utterances concerning the previous life reach a peak of volume and detail between the ages of 3 and 5. After this, the imaged memories of the previous life appear to fade in most cases; sometimes the memories persist until later, but the child may talk less or not at all about them. At about the same age, but often somewhat later, his unusual behavior also recedes. The majority of children subjects of these cases develop along entirely normal lines in later childhood and adolescence. In some, however, the influence of the memories of the previous life may last into adulthood.

Reports of cases of this type were published sporadically from the late 1890s through the 1930s. In 1960, I published summaries of some of these previously recorded cases and also an analysis of 44 cases of which the published reports seemed sufficiently reliable for at least provisional acceptance of these cases as authentic (35). I concluded that the evidence offered in connection with the best of these cases justified an intensive investigation of whatever new ones could be discovered. In the following year (1961), I began field investigations of cases in Asia, and have continued them ever since as time and funds permitted. With the help of colleagues and assistants, I have now assembled data on more than 1600 cases of the reincarnation type.

DISTRIBUTION OF REPORTED CASES

Cases of the reincarnation type have been reported (and investigated) more fre-

particular explanation of how the child obtained any correct knowledge he showed about the person identified.

quently in some parts of the world than in others. The principal sites of abundant reported cases are: northern India; Sri Lanka; Burma; Thailand; Vietnam; western Asia, especially south central Turkey, Lebanon, and Syria; and northwest North America, among the natives of that region. The peoples of these areas (of the groups among whom the cases occur) believe in reincarnation. This fact has led some uninformed persons to suppose that the cases offer nothing of interest, but are myths shaped by the expectations of the cultures in which they occur. It happens, however, that cases of this type also occur in areas of the world whose peoples find the idea of reincarnation uncongenial or even heretical. Cases similar in their main features to those of the areas mentioned above have been found in Europe and North America (apart from the areas of the native tribes in the northwest) and will be reported in due course. It remains true, however, that the cases reported from these latter regions are less numerous and in general poorer as to details apparently remembered by the subjects than those of the areas mentioned where the cases occur frequently.

It seems likely that a circular relationship exists between the cultural beliefs of a region and the occurrence and characteristics of the cases there. I have discussed at greater length elsewhere the presently available observations and some conjectures concerning the relationship between the cases presently known about and the cultures in which they occur (28, 32-34, 38). If a reader of this paper is learning about cases of the reincarnation type for the first time, and if he has some knowledge of the ways in which culture-bound beliefs can influence behavior and observations of behavior, he may think that cultural influences can adequately account for all of the data generated in the investigation of these cases. Such influences do explain much about the cases, but they cannot alone explain the cases away. The best of the cases have provided good evidence that the child subject had somehow demonstrated knowledge of a deceased person that he could not have acquired normally (29-31, 39). How he came to have

this knowledge is the main question in investigating and interpreting these cases, but it is one to be resolved only through the examination of individual cases and not by generalizations about cultural influences.⁵

METHODS OF INVESTIGATING CASES

The methods used for the investigation of these cases have been those traditional in parapsychology since the end of the last century (13, 18). These, in turn, derived from the methods used by lawyers, historians, and to some extent by psychiatrists, in their attempts to reconstruct past events. Parapsychologists adapted these methods to the needs of their material, and cases of the reincarnation type have required some further modifications of method to suit the exigencies of this particular type of case. Since this paper is primarily concerned with presenting reincarnation as a hypothesis deserving more attention than it has received, and since I have elsewhere given a full account of the methods used in investigating cases of the reincarnation type (30, 39), I shall confine myself here to the barest outline of the methods used.⁶

The data of the cases derive mainly from interviews with firsthand informants. These are, on the side of the child subject of the case, his parents and other members of his family or neighbors who are qualified as firsthand informants and available to give evidence. Statements of the child himself are always noted (sometimes tape recorded) if he is still talking about the previous life he claims to remember. After

⁵ It will be convenient in the later parts of this article to refer to the child as having memories of a previous life without adding qualifying adjectives such as "purported," "claimed," etc. This is not intended to shirk the question of whose memories the child is speaking about or, stated another way, how he acquired the correct information he expresses about the related previous life to which he refers; But since the present paper is not concerned with the evidence of reincarnation as such, I shall refer readers to the literature cited where such evidence can be examined.

⁶ Readers content with an *aperçu* of the methods used in this research will find it in a chapter I have published elsewhere (37). This chapter also provides one report of a fairly typical case of the reincarnation type.

testimony on the child's side of the case has been recorded, the whole procedure of interviewing several or more informants is repeated with the family of the previous personality whose life the child claims to remember. This person has usually been identified by the time investigators reach the case; but if he has not, and if the child has given sufficient detail to justify the attempt, the investigators will try to find a family corresponding to the child's statements. Great importance is attached to independent verification of the child's statements with the family of the related previous personality. The oral testimony of informants is supplemented by any written records or documents, such as birth and death certificates, hospital records, and diaries, that can be traced and examined or copied.

Informants are frequently interviewed more than once. Later interviews furnish information about the consistency of the informants' accounts, permit the filling in of gaps in the information already obtained, and allow for further observations of the child as he grows older. The gradual recession of the child's imaged memories and of the related unusual behavior can thus be observed over a period of some years.

Since errors of memory—whether motivated or due to inaccuracies of observation and recollection—are the main sources of weakness in these cases, every effort is made to reach them early, to check the testimony of one informant against that of others, and to analyze discrepancies among the statements of different informants and between those of the same informant on different occasions.

The cases are of very uneven quality; in some, the evidence furnished by the informants is extremely weak, but in others a thorough investigation, including the interrogation of many informants, has led to judgments that the cases are authentic—that is, that the informants have given accounts of events that adequately correspond to what did in fact occur when the case developed. In a small number of instances, an investigator has actually reached the scene of the case as it started to develop and before the two families con-

cerned had met. He could thus make a written record of what the child said about the previous life before his (the child's) statements were verified. In these rare cases, we can confidently eliminate lapses of memory as a source of error.

ANALYSES OF THE CASES

Each case is analyzed individually with regard to alternative interpretations for it; in addition, the data of all of the cases are being analyzed with a computer for the detection of recurrent characteristics.

In the analysis of individual cases, I consider the following principal interpretations: fraud; errors of memory, especially paramnesia and cryptomnesia; extrasensory perception on the part of the child concerned, together with the construction by him of an imaginary previous personality whose life he claims to remember; "inherited memory"; "possession" of the child by a discarnate personality; and reincarnation. Interested readers will find full discussions of these interpretations of the cases elsewhere (29, 35, 39). Here I shall only say that, for at least some cases, the interpretations alternative to reincarnation, although they cannot be firmly excluded, seem less likely. Said in another way, for these cases the alternative interpretations require suppositions which are just as mind-stretching as is reincarnation itself, at least for most Westerners. The reader is not asked to let others judge these issues for him. By the time this paper appears, I shall have published, or will shortly publish, detailed individual reports of 55 cases. In preparing these reports, I have tried to include sufficient information so that a reader can make up his own mind about the authenticity of the cases and the best interpretations for them.

In the computerized analysis of large numbers of cases, a search is being made for both similarities and differences in the features of cases occurring in different parts of the world. Some features common to cases from many different (and culturally separated) parts of the world have been found. These seem to be "universal"

features of the cases.⁷ In addition, cases within particular cultures often differ from those of other cultures so that they also have culture-bound features.

If a reader comes to believe from the foregoing summary of evidence, or better still, from an examination of detailed case reports, that there is in fact some evidence in favor of the idea of reincarnation, he is asked to take a further step before considering some particular observations that reincarnation may help to explain. This is to suppose that some persons may have no imaged memories of previous lives, but nevertheless may carry over from such lives important residues of behavior learned and practiced during them.

Such an assumption will be easier for those who remember two important types of observations. First, since the experiments on posthypnotic suggestions of Liébauld and Bernheim in the mid-19th century, we have known that a person may carry out instructions to perform a certain action while at the same time having complete amnesia for the fact that he has been given such instructions. The hypnotist can first give the subject a suggestion of something he will do after he is brought out of hypnosis, and then tell the subject that he will forget that the hypnotist has told him to perform the action. The subject will then not remember later the real cause of his posthypnotic behavior. Many of our actions in everyday life provide even simpler examples. We know how to walk, but few of us remember the days of infancy when we learned to walk. I am not there-

⁷ The high incidence of violent death in the previous personalities concerned in these cases provides an example of such a "universal" feature of the cases. I have elsewhere provided data that show the high incidence of violent death in the previous personalities of the cases investigated in eight different cultures (29, 38). In fact, this feature is not quite universal since the cases occurring among Tibetan lamas (*tulkus*) do not show it; the previous personalities concerned in their cases have nearly always died natural deaths. I should add that the concerned previous personalities in the cases of the Tibetan *tulkus* differ in other respects from most of those figuring in other cases. They are, for example, all said to have been persons of advanced spiritual attainments.

fore saying anything new if I remind readers that we can have behavioral memories in the absence of any imaged memories about the origin of the behavior.

Second, as already mentioned, the subjects of cases of the reincarnation type vary greatly in the number of imaged memories of the previous lives they claim to remember. Some remember a few details only; others seem to have almost total recall for the previous life remembered. The subjects also show a wide variation in the amount of unusual behavior related to the remembered previous lives; and the extent of this unusual behavior correlates poorly with the abundance of imaged memories of the previous life expressed by a subject. Furthermore, the related behavior often persists some or many years after the subject has completely forgotten whatever imaged memories of the previous life he had. These facts make it possible to envisage that some persons may have had previous lives of which they have no imaged memories, but from which nevertheless they may have derived important ingredients of their characters.

Types of Observations That Reincarnation May Explain

In this section, I shall base my remarks only on cases that investigations have shown to be both authentic—that is, derived from reliable information—and providing evidence of some paranormal process. By a paranormal process is meant, in parapsychology, an event that cannot be explained in terms of the presently known sensory organs and motor capacities. In most of the cases, a favorable judgment about the occurrence of a paranormal process was made because the child subject included in his statements about the previous life which he claimed to remember information that, from all of the evidence, he could not have acquired by normal means of communication with the family of the deceased person he was talking about, or by other normal means. Some of the cases include other apparently paranormal features, such as the exhibition of skills which the child had not been taught

and could not have learned since birth. Detailed reports of most of the cases may be found in the articles and books cited; a small number of unpublished cases will be mentioned. In most of the sections that follow, I shall allude to cases of the reincarnation type with verifiable memories⁸ in which the subjects showed characteristics or behavior related to their statements about the previous lives. I shall propose that similar characteristics and behavior in other persons not having memories of previous lives may nevertheless have a similar provenance, that is, may derive from previous lives of which the persons concerned have no imaged memories.

PHOBIAS OF CHILDHOOD

Numerous subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have shown phobias in early childhood that their parents could not account for by any known traumatic event of the child's earlier life and that were not shared by other members of the family. These phobias, however, harmonized with the cause and circumstances of the death of the deceased person whose life the child was claiming to remember. For example, subjects⁹ of these cases have shown phobias of water (Shamlinie Prema, Ruby Kusuma Silva, Süleyman Zeytun), motor vehicles (Sleimann Bouhamzy, Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne), bladed weapons (Derek Pitnov), and a particular food, curd (Parmod Sharma). The identified previous personalities of these cases had died, respectively, from drowning, motor vehicle accidents, stabbing, and infectious enteritis secondary to eating contaminated curd. Other subjects showed phobias for the places where the related previous personalities had died violently.

⁸ I shall cite two cases (those of Wijanama Kithsiri and Tin Aung Myo) in which the subject's apparent memories have not been verified. I shall refer to 10 unpublished cases; reports of all but two of these are in various stages of preparation for publication.

⁹ Cases will be cited by the name of the subject. Appendix 1 gives a list of the subjects whose cases are cited. They have been arranged in alphabetical order of *first* names with indications of the article or book cited in the list of references in which a detailed report of the case has been published.

Ravi Shankar Gupta, Necati Çaylak, Myo Min Thein, and Süleyman Zeytun showed such reactions.

Not all subjects of reincarnation type cases show phobias corresponding to the mode of the related previous personality's death. For example, Gopal Gupta, who remembered the life of a man who was shot to death, showed no phobia of firearms; and Bongkuch Promsin, who remembered the life of a man who had been stabbed to death, showed no phobia of bladed weapons. However, such exceptions are not surprising since not all persons who experience a near fatal event, such as a serious wounding, later develop a phobia of the weapon or circumstances of that occasion.

Many children suffer from unusual fears that can be traced to some frightening event experienced earlier by the child, to suggestions given to him by a parent, or to the child's imitation of someone who had a similar phobia (2, 26). For many childhood phobias, however, none of these common explanations apply because an appropriately formative event or influence from surrounding persons cannot be discovered. Recourse is then usually had to a symbolic interpretation wherein it is supposed that a child's phobia of water, for example, symbolically expresses some other fear for which evidence can be adduced or conjectured. I wish to suggest that some phobias of early childhood may derive from noxious events of previous lives even when the children affected have no imaged memories of such events.

PHILIAS (STRONG INTERESTS) OF CHILDHOOD

Many subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have shown special interests and appetites in childhood quite different from those of their families, but corresponding to those of the persons whose lives they have claimed to remember. Several of the subjects, for example, manifested in early childhood a precocious and, in their families, unexpected interest in religion. These include Disna Samarasinghe and Ratana Wongsombat, who claimed to remember the previous lives of women who had been unusually pious and active in religious activities.

Another subject, Corliss Chotkin, Jr., showed an interest in engines that he shared with the previous personality whose life he claimed to remember, but not with his father. However, since the previous personality was the uncle of Corliss's mother, a genetic influence from some common ancestor cannot be excluded in his case. Another subject, Ramesh Sukla, also showed a precocious strong interest in automobiles when he was less than 3 years old; he claimed to remember the previous life of a man who had had a strong interest in automobiles. Another subject, Kumkum Verma, showed a marked interest in snakes when she was a young child; so did two of her siblings, although her parents did not; but Kumkum also showed a complete fearlessness toward snakes. She claimed to remember the life of a woman who had kept a cobra as a pet and a deterrent to thieves.

Interests apparently derived from a previous life are not always laudable. Three subjects, Bishen Chand Kapoor, Ramesh Sukla, and Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne, expressed surprising appetites for alcohol in early childhood; they claimed to remember the previous lives of heavy consumers of alcohol. Sujith Lakmal also tried to smoke cigarettes as a young child; the related previous personality of his case had been a cigarette smoker as well as an alcoholic. Sanjiv Sharma, who claimed to remember the previous life of a woman who smoked tobacco, also tried to smoke cigarettes when still a young child. Sunil Dutt Saxena asked to smoke a hookah when a young child; he claimed to remember the previous life of a man who had smoked a hookah. Another subject, Jagdish Chandra, asked for *bhang* (an intoxicant used in India) when he was a young child, an extraordinary request in his family; he claimed to remember the previous life of a child of a man who had used *bhang* and, although I did not verify that this child had taken *bhang* himself, I think it quite likely that he did. Still another Indian subject, Om Prakash Mathur, said that he had carried over the habit of smoking the intoxicant *charas* from the previous life he claimed to remember; I verified that the

related previous personality in his case had been "very fond" of *charas*.

The subjects of these cases frequently express in play some activity or interest of the previous personality whose life they seem to remember. Thus, Sukla Gupta called a block of wood, which she handled like a doll, by the name "Minu." This made no sense to her parents until Sukla began relating details of a previous life she said she remembered. When these details were later verified, it was found that the person whose life Sukla was remembering had died in young adulthood, leaving an infant daughter called Minu. The subject of another case, Sleimann Bouhamzy, as a small child arranged five eggplants and two potatoes to which he then gave the names of the five sons and two daughters of the man whose life he claimed to remember. Another subject, Lalitha Abeyawardena, when a small child, played at teaching school. She wrapped herself in adult clothes, provided herself with props representing a blackboard and pointer, and addressed an imaginary class of pupils; she remembered the previous life of a schoolteacher. Two other subjects regularly played in childhood at tending imaginary shops. These children, Parmod Sharma and Wijanama Kithsiri, claimed to remember previous lives as, respectively, a shopkeeper and a merchant's son. Parmod's statements were verified, but Wijanama's have not been, although his case does contain a few other apparently paranormal features. Another subject, Erkan Kiliç, played at the activities of a club owner, dispensing drinks and offering the charms of a female singer. He claimed to remember the previous life of a man who had owned a nightclub. Another subject, a Burmese girl (Tin Aung Myo) who claimed to remember the (unverified) life of a Japanese soldier killed in Burma during World War II, played at being a soldier until the age of about 10.

I suggest that reincarnation may provide an explanation for unusual interests and activities shown by some children who do not, however, claim to remember anything about a previous life. Many children exhibit strong appetites and interests for

which, as with many phobias, it is easy to see a connection between the special interest of the child and some stimulus or encouragement in his environment. For example, among the great composers Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and Brahms all had fathers who were musicians and we have no difficulty in attributing their musical genius to heredity, early environmental influences, or a combination of both; but we also have examples of unusual childhood interests that we cannot explain along these lines.

The case of the German-English composer George Frederick Handel provides one such instance. His ancestors had no known interest in music. His father, a surgeon, sternly opposed the inclination to music that Handel showed in childhood. His mother appears to have been neutral or mildly opposed to it in passive compliance with her husband's wishes (8, 9). A deviant maternal aunt seems to have encouraged Handel in his wish to become a musician, but it taxes credulity to suggest that her covert support was sufficient to counteract his parents' wishes in the matter unless some other influence had been in play. Among similar examples from other fields the cases of Elizabeth Fry, the prison reformer (16), and Florence Nightingale (42), the founder of modern nursing, are outstanding. Both showed in childhood *Anlagen* of the interests which they expressed so fully and so successfully in their adult years and both did so against the currents of their families' inclinations. The contrast between child and family was particularly strong in the case of Florence Nightingale, whose parents were almost exclusively absorbed in the social entertainments of the upper class of Victorian England. Schliemann, who excavated Troy, declared his intention of doing this when he was less than 8 years old (23); and Champollion, the founder of Egyptology, showed his interest in this subject when still a child. According to his recollections later, he was not yet 12 when he determined to decipher the Egyptian hieroglyphics—and was confident that he could do it (14). He and Schliemann, in contrast to G. F. Handel, Elizabeth Fry,

and Florence Nightingale, received encouragement from their families; nevertheless, the extremely early manifestation of an intense interest in a particular subject seems to call for some factor in addition to heredity and environmental support. Still another example of such precocious declaration of interest occurred in the childhood of Michael Ventris, who deciphered Linear B, the script of the Mycenaean. At the age of 7 he had purchased and studied a German book on Egyptian hieroglyphs and at 14 he "vowed . . . to take up the challenge of the undeciphered Cretan writing" (5, p. 1). I have not been able to learn of any family influences relevant to Ventris' early development as a philologist.

None of the persons referred to in the preceding paragraph had, so far as I know, the slightest memory of a previous life. But since, if reincarnation occurs, behavior may be carried over from one life to another without corresponding imaged memories, and since no other explanation is at hand for the unusual interests these persons showed in childhood, I think reincarnation at least worthy of consideration as a possible explanation for them. I also suggest that a craving for stimulants and intoxicants, such as tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, may be carried over from one life to another.

SKILLS NOT TAUGHT OR LEARNED IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

Several subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have shown skills in early childhood that, according to informants for their cases, they could not have learned through instruction or imitation of older persons.¹⁰ In each case, the skill in question was one which the related previous personality was known to have had. I have described examples in my reports of the cases of Corliss Chotkin, Jr. (expertise

¹⁰ I am not referring to elementary reflex responses such as a baby's suckling at the breast or bottle that we subsume under the label "instinct." I mean instead the developed skills that, unlike suckling, require adaptation to changing stimuli. Examples of such skills would be riding a bicycle, skiing, playing the piano, and speaking a foreign language, or even one's native language.

with marine engines), Swarnlata Mishra (Bengali songs and dances), Paulo Lorenz (use of a sewing machine), Bishen Chand Kapoor (ability to play the *tablas*, a type of drum), and Disna Samarasinghe (cooking and weaving of coconut leaves for roofing thatch).

Parents not infrequently remark that a child has demonstrated a skill without being taught it or given an opportunity to imitate others in it. We may have difficulty in some instances in being quite positive that the child in question has not had some opportunity to watch another person perform the skilled action and then to practice it himself without being observed; and yet I believe that some children have unquestionably demonstrated unusual aptitudes for the acquisition of skills, and have even demonstrated the skills themselves, when it seems reasonably certain that no one could have taught them these. I suggest that such children, even when they have no imaged memories of previous lives, may nevertheless have acquired such aptitudes or skills in previous lives.

This topic will receive some further discussion in a later section on child prodigies.

CHILD-PARENT RELATIONSHIPS

Many subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have openly rejected their parents and have claimed that the latter are not their "real parents." These, they insist, live elsewhere and they wish to return to them. Sometimes such children threaten to run away to these former parents, and a few actually start down the road in an effort to reach them. Subjects of cases who showed this behavior include Ravi Shankar Gupta, Prakash Varshnay, Veer Singh, Shamlinie Prema, Warnasiri Adikari, and Wijanama Kithsiri.

In a number of cases, the desire of the child to return to the previous family which he claims to remember derives from a longing not for the parents of the previous personality but for "his" or "her" spouse or children of the previous life. Cases of this kind include those of Sukla Gupta, Kumkum Verma, Necip ünlütaşkiran, and Mahes de Silva. These subjects

also showed varying degrees of alienation in their families. Their reason for lessened interest in their present homes differs from that of the children who wanted to go to the remembered previous parents, but the effect in generating unhappiness between the child and his parents is similar.

It is possible to cut oneself off from family members by methods other than that of expressing a longing to go to another family elsewhere. One device is that of claiming to have belonged to a family of superior caste and wealth in a previous life, and to belong to it still, although living in an undesired exile among poor and inferior persons. Several Indian subjects of cases of the reincarnation type who have been born into lower caste families have claimed to remember previous lives as members of the Brahmin caste. Dissatisfied with the situations in which they find themselves, they have demonstrated a "Brahmin snobbery" by demanding the deference, perquisites, and special food of Brahmins to which they felt themselves entitled. Examples of this type of behavior occurred in the cases of Jasbir Singh, Jagdish Chandra, Gopal Gupta, and Veer Singh. Other subjects, not bothered about caste, have nevertheless reproached or derided their parents for the poverty of their homes that provided a pitiful contrast to the luxurious mansions and style of living which they claimed to remember from previous lives. Bishen Chand Kapoor, Sunil Dutt Saxena, and Indika Guneratne illustrated this kind of behavior.¹¹

¹¹ Among the cases cited in this paper (and in my published reports), more subjects remember previous lives in higher socioeconomic conditions than remember previous lives in lower ones. This fact may stimulate the thought that the cases consist only of wish-fulfilling fantasies. In this connection, several observations need to be made. First, a feeling of missing better conditions once enjoyed may act as a motive or facilitator for real memories. Second, the wish-fulfilling aspects of a congenial previous life cannot alone account for the evidence (in many cases) that the subject showed paranormal knowledge about the previous life remembered. Third, numerous cases have occurred in which the subject remembers a previous life in a *lower* socioeconomic situation than that of his family; and fourth, among Hindus and Buddhists no merit is attached to having been in a superior position in a previous life—this, on the contrary, indicates some "demotion" due to misconduct.

Many children who have no imaged memories of previous lives act as if they did not belong in their families. They treat their parents and siblings with indifference or hostility and encounter similar attitudes in return. Such alienation of a child within his own family is thought by some theorists to result from an infantile trauma or even from a prenatal rejection of the child by his parents; and it is also sometimes held to be the precursor of a vulnerability in later life to serious mental illness such as schizophrenia. Research into troubled child-parent relationships has usually started with the parents, on the assumption that they have more control and therefore more responsibility for any gulf of affection that develops between them and one of their children. Comparatively scant attention has been given to rejecting behavior initiated by a child himself. Kanner (15) reported, however, that children who later developed autism often failed in infancy to reach out toward their parents when they were being picked up by them. Perhaps such rejection of the parents derives from unhappy experiences with the parents in a previous life.

Child psychologists and psychiatrists often learn of strange alliances within families. For example, a brother and a sister may exhibit a closer relationship with each other than either shows toward either parent; or a daughter may show strong affection for her mother and distaste for her father. Sometimes parents comment on the departure of their children's behavior from the expected relationships between them and their children. A mother may say, for example, "My son acts toward me as if he were my father, not my child"; or "You would think from the way my daughter treats me that she was my aunt instead of my daughter."

In the West, remarks of this kind rarely advance into conjectures about relationships in possible previous lives; but in cultures with a strong belief in reincarnation, special attachments of particular members of a family to each other are often explained on the basis of a close relationship during a previous life. The gentleness of Eskimo parents toward their children and their complete abstention from all corporal

punishment of them derives from their belief that their children were, in previous lives, one of their parents (or possibly another deceased relative), and that they, the present parents, may become the future children of their children. These ideas have a general restraining influence even in the absence of evidence that any particular child has memories of having been a parent's parent or other relative in a previous life. In many instances, however, Eskimo (and also Tlingit) children do have such memories. In a small series of 15 Eskimo cases, the subject and previous personality belonged to the same family in seven (almost half) of the cases (34). Among 43 Tlingit cases of the reincarnation type, the subject and previous personality were members of the same family in 38 (88 per cent) of the cases (34). It is natural for the persons concerned in such cases to explain special attachments between members of the family as residues of closeness in the remembered previous life. Cases in which the subject and related previous personality belong to the same family rarely include satisfactory evidence of reincarnation or any other paranormal process because of the possibility that the subject might have acquired information about the related previous personality through normal means. Several Tlingit cases of this type have nevertheless provided evidence of fairly good quality, and such cases offer models for explaining special attachments for each other on the part of members of other families who, however, have no imaged memories of previous lives that might account for such closeness.

In a small number of cases, a person has, before dying, predicted that he would be reborn as a child in a particular family; then later a child of that family born after this person's death has had memories of having been the person who made the prediction. Examples of such apparently fulfilled predictions occurred in the cases of William George, Jr. and Corliss Chotkin, Jr. In some other cases, a subject having memories of a previous life has claimed that he (or she) came into his family because of a connection with an existing

member in a previous life. Thus, Manju Bhargava said that she was born to her parents because her older sister Uma had been her daughter in the previous life that she said she remembered. Uma had no memories of a previous life, but she and Manju were unusually close to each other and seemed to have a special relationship in a rather large family.

VENDETTAS AND BELLICOSE NATIONALISM

Patriotic fervor and its most destructive expression, nationalistic warfare, have long been thought adequately explained by the workings of heredity supplemented by the tales that parents tell their children about the wickedness of the enemy. This may be all there is to be said about the otherwise completely senseless perpetuation of local and international quarrels, or there may be more.

One feature in cases of the reincarnation type found so far in those of all cultures studied (with one exception) is the extremely high incidence of violent death in the related previous personalities. For cases of eight cultures with data analyzed, the incidence of violent death in the related previous personalities ranges from a low of 29 per cent (among the Haida of Alaska and British Columbia) to a high of slightly over 78 per cent in Lebanon and Syria (29, 38). The incidence of violent death in these groups far exceeds that of the general population of their communities. Although some of these violent deaths are accidental or suicidal, the majority are homicidal. Given this fact, it is of interest to record the attitudes of the subjects toward the persons who, they say, murdered them in their previous lives. Some are forgiving, but others are not. Several children subjects have spoken openly about revenging themselves on the assailants when they became big enough to do so. These include Ravi Shankar Gupta, Bongkuch Promsin, and Semih Tutuşmuş.

A case studied by one of my assistants in Lebanon, but not yet by myself, seems particularly instructive in this connection. Raouf Hamra is the subject of this unpublished case. He lives in a somewhat isolated village deep in the mountains east of

Beirut. Its inhabitants are divided rather evenly into two factions that have been feuding for at least a century. It is said that if a member of one party in the village is killed, his funeral cannot be held until a member of the other side has been killed. Raouf Hamra, who was born in this village, remembered a previous life as a member of the clan opposed to that of his family. His family, believers in reincarnation, accepted him in good part; but he himself, when the fighting started, got into a condition of distressing perplexity concerning the side he should be on.

In Burma, my associates and I have studied a number of cases (none so far published) the subjects of which claim to have been in their previous lives American or British soldiers and airmen who were killed in Burma during World War II. The parents of some of these children reported that mention of Japan or of the Japanese acted as an incitement to angry expressions on the part of the children. We have also studied seven Burmese cases in which the subjects claim to remember previous lives as Japanese soldiers who were killed in Burma during World War II. I have not learned that any of them showed special animosity for Westerners, but several have expressed a longing to return, as they see their situations, to Japan, and two have made invidious comparisons between conditions in Burma and the preferable circumstances they claim to remember from their lives in Japan.

In modern times, within the last several hundred years, blood feuds have persisted most strongly in isolated mountain areas such as the Scottish Highlands and Appalachia, on islands such as Corsica and Cyprus, and among partially separated nomadic groups such as the Bedouins. The isolation of such peoples encouraged inbreeding and at the same time interfered with their receiving pacifying influences from outside. I may point out, however, that such isolation is not incompatible with the suggestion that reincarnation may contribute to the perpetuation of vendettas and nationalistic warfare since the cases of the reincarnation type so far investigated show a strong tendency for the

subject to be born within the same culture and near the community where the related previous personality had lived and died. ("International cases," such as those observed in Burma, do occur, but they are comparatively rare.)

The case of Derek Pitnov suggests the happier possibility that pacific inclinations may also be carried over from one life to another. Derek Pitnov was identified at his birth with a Tlingit leader who, contrary to the traditions of intertribal feuds, had sought to develop peaceful relations with former enemies. Derek Pitnov himself engaged in such harmonizing labors.

CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY AND CONFUSION ABOUT GENDER IDENTITY

A number of subjects of cases of the reincarnation type have overtly expressed sexual aspirations toward the wives, mistresses, or girlfriends of the related previous personalities, or to someone in the subject's family who is assigned by him the role of imperfect substitute. I have given examples of such behavior in my reports of the cases of Imad Elawar, Bishen Chand Kapoor, Bongkuch Promsin, and Necip Ünlütaşkiran. The cases of this group have in common the feature that the related previous personalities all died in young adulthood, that is, during the years of greatest sexual activity.

One of the universal features of cases of the reincarnation type is the almost invariable tendency, mentioned earlier, for the subject to forget the memories of a previous life between the ages of 5 and 8. This coincides with the age at which the child leaves his narrow home circle and begins a wider participation in life outside the home at school and elsewhere. I have suggested that these new experiences become deposited among the child's memories in a layer above those of the previous life which then gradually become inaccessible (39). It happens that this age of first attendance at school and wider social activity is also the age designated by Freud as the beginning of his "latent period," when the overt manifestations of sexuality observed in earlier childhood cease (or diminish) until adolescence (10). In the wider perspective of per-

sonality development that the idea of reincarnation suggests, the latent period described by Freud can be regarded as a special instance of a larger general process. If sexuality manifested in early childhood derives not from a rigidly determined unrolling of personality in a fixed order of development, but is at least partly due to memories and behavior carried over from previous lives, we should expect that it would diminish and disappear as do other imaged and behavioral memories of previous lives as a child grows older.

I have investigated numerous cases of the reincarnation type in which the subject claims to remember a previous life as a person of the opposite sex. I have published five reports of such cases, those of Gnanatilleka Baddewithana, Paulo Lorenz, Dolon Champa Mitra, Ruby Kusuma Silva, and Ampan Petcherat. In each of these cases, the subject as a child showed traits characteristic of the opposite sex, that is, of the sex of the person whose life he (or she) was claiming to remember. These traits included partiality for the clothes of the opposite sex and a strong tendency to the play or other activity of persons of the opposite sex. Such tendencies occurred even in instances in which the related previous personality had been reported to have expressed premortem a wish to change sex if he should be reborn. In most cases, the initial behavior appropriate for the opposite sex becomes gradually replaced, as the child grows older, by behavior normal for a child or person of its anatomical sex; but exceptions occur. Tin Aung Myo, a Burmese girl who claims to remember the (unverified) previous life of a Japanese soldier killed in Burma during World War II, has remained intransigently masculine in her conduct and outlook up to her middle 20s.

The cases of children who have remembered previous lives as persons of the opposite sex may throw light on cases known in modern psychiatric terminology as instances of gender identity confusion. Persons to whom this phrase is applied believe that they really belong to the sex opposite to their anatomical one. When it was fashionable to ascribe all emotional disorders to the ineptitude or misconduct of parents,

cases of gender identity confusion were also blamed on them. Those who preferred evidence to surmise sought for it in the attitudes and conduct of parents toward children who had or later developed gender identity confusion. They found it in some cases, but not in others. Instances have occurred in which a child rejected its anatomical sex at an early age and in which it seems clear that the parents did not influence the child toward feelings or conduct inappropriate for its sex (43). Experiences of this kind are baffling for the persons involved (3, 17), and generate humility even in the most sanguine believers in parental influence (12). A biological factor, such as Klinefelter's syndrome, has been imputed in such cases and evidence for it found in some, but not in others (4). It seems fair to say that Western psychiatrists and psychologists have no fully satisfactory explanation for the occurrence of gender identity confusion.

In cultures such as those of Southeast Asia with a dominant belief in reincarnation, cases of gender identity confusion are accepted as due to an immediate previous life as a person of the opposite sex even when the subject has no imaged memories of such a previous life. This explanation promotes acceptance of the condition on the part of the subject and the members of his family with the result that one rarely finds in such cultures the extreme anxiety or dysphoria that occurs in the West in related cases. I believe that reincarnation should be considered as an explanation for such cases even when the person afflicted does not remember a previous life.

BIRTHMARKS, CONGENITAL DEFORMITIES, AND INTERNAL DISEASES

When the subject of birthmarks is broached in conversation, a listener eager to dampen the fires of curiosity may hastily remark that everyone has one or more birthmarks and ask what is unusual about that. The answer is: Nothing at all. Yet if we get beyond that triteness and ask why a person's birthmark is in one location of his body instead of another we raise a question that genetics cannot always answer, but that reincarnation, in some cases, may.

The subjects of cases of the reincarnation type often point to marks on their bodies (which their parents say are birthmarks) and assert that it was at these locations that bullets or bladed weapons fatally wounded them in the previous lives which they seem to remember. I have examined at least 200 such birthmarks. They vary greatly in appearance. Some are simple areas of increased pigmentation, although usually much larger than the common freckle or flat naevus. (In a smaller number of instances, pigmentation is less at the birthmark than in the surrounding skin.) In many instances, the birthmark is three-dimensional and the area is partly or wholly elevated, depressed, or puckered. Many such birthmarks cannot be distinguished, at least by me, from scars of acquired wounds with which they would be confused except for the strong affirmations of parents that the marks in question existed at birth, or were noticed soon after birth. I have published reports of such birthmarks in the cases of Derek Pitnov, Charles Porter, Henry Elkin, and Corliss Chotkin, Jr.

In some instances, a pigmented mole (elevated naevus) is in question. The subject has a mole at a particular location that is said to correspond to a mole at the same location on the body of the previous personality whose life the subject claims to remember. In the single case of this type that I have reported up to now, that of William George, Jr., the previous personality was the subject's own paternal grandfather. Since the location of moles may be inherited, a genetic factor cannot be excluded in this case. But if a genetic factor is responsible, we are left with the question of why one particular child (out of 10 in this family), instead of another, had the mole at this location, that child happening also to be the one of the 10 children who had memories of the life of their grandfather. In some other still unpublished cases, the subject who had a mole was not related to the previous personality who was said to have had a mole in a corresponding location. Genetic factors would not be in play in these cases.

Some of the subjects of cases of the rein-

carnation type have major congenital malformations such as greatly deformed limbs or even complete absence of fingers, toes, or hands. Such a subject, when he begins to talk about the previous life that he claims to remember, explains that at the time "he" was killed in the previous life, the murderer severed the deformed or missing organs before delivering the *coup de grace* that terminated that existence. The deformity is then usually on the presumed reborn murderee, not on the murderer as the moral rectitude of some persons would wish and expect. In a small number of instances, a deformity has occurred on the body of a subject who remembers a previous life as a murderer. It happens that the only case with a congenital deformity of which I have so far published a detailed report, that of Wijeratne, is a member of this small group.

Other subjects of these cases suffered from internal diseases that corresponded to illnesses from which the related previous personalities also suffered. Inquiries have shown that other members of the subject's family either have not had the disease in question at all or have had it in a much milder form than the subject. Examples of such diseases occurred in the cases of Sukla Gupta (facial pimples), Marta Lorenz (laryngitis and bronchitis), Norman Despers (myopia), and Bishen Chand Kapoor (ophthalmitis not further specified).

I consider cases of the type mentioned in this section so important that I have decided to publish further reports of them in separate volumes now in preparation where they will be discussed together.

Here I shall add only a few more remarks to answer questions that almost certainly will arise in the minds of even the most open-minded readers. First, as to the correspondence between the birthmark, deformity, or internal disease of the subject and lesions on the body of the related previous personality, I may mention that in 17 cases of this type I have obtained medical documents, such as hospital records or autopsy reports, which provide written records concerning the location of wounds or diseases on the related previous

personalities of these cases, these locations corresponding to those of the related subjects' birthmarks. In other instances I have had to rely on the oral testimony of informants which has usually had enough concordance among different witnesses to justify confidence. Second, to those who suggest that the child's account of a previous life is composed by him (or his parents) to explain the birthmark or deformity, I ask how this alone tells us how the child (or his parents) obtained all of the correct information they had concerning a deceased person about whom (in at least some instances) they had known absolutely nothing. More important yet, even if the narrations of a previous life are developed to explain the birthmark or deformity, how are we to explain the occurrence of the birthmark or deformity itself? There are clear alternatives ahead here. We may fall back to the fortified position offered by the label "coincidence" or advance cautiously toward a new understanding of causal factors. If, on further study, reincarnation seems to be the best explanation for cases of the type discussed in this section, its relevance will extend deeply into problems of biology and medicine.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MEMBERS OF MONOZYGOTIC TWIN PAIRS AND CONJOINED TWIN PAIRS

Monozygotic twins have uniform (or nearly uniform) genetic material and an early environment that is, in many instances, quite similar even when not completely identical. Conjoined (Siamese) twins have a uniform genetic material and, of necessity, a uniform environment. Particularly awkward questions, from the point of view of current theories about personality development, arise from frequent reports of wide differences in the personalities of the two members of a conjoined twin pair. The pair of conjoined twins who gave rise to the expression "Siamese twins," Chang and Eng, showed marked differences in personality. Chang drank alcohol excessively and had periodic alcoholic debauches, whereas Eng was a teetotaler (6, 19). Summarizing his own and

others' observations of marked personality differences between the members of conjoined twin pairs, Newman (19) stated,

"One would expect such twins, since they have not only a common heredity but a common environment (for they must be in the same environment all the time), to be even more strikingly similar than pairs of separate twins that are not so intimately associated. The fact is, however, that Siamese twins are almost without exception more different in various ways than any but a very few pairs of separate one-egg twins. One of the most difficult problems faced by the twinning specialist is that of accounting for this unexpected dissimilarity of the components of Siamese twin pairs" (pp. 67-68).

Monozygotic twins often show marked differences of personality and, as is now well known, may be discordant for schizophrenia even when they have been reared together or spent many years together and thus have similar, although not identical, social influences exerted on them (1, 27). Differences in the uterine environment of the members of a twin pair and other environmental variations in the immediate postnatal period may account for the noticed deviations in personality between the members of monozygotic twin pairs. There is room, however, to consider other possible factors, such as that a human personality has a history antecedent to the conception of its body. The parents of identical twins sometimes report that they observed such marked differences in behavior in the twins at such an early age that it does not seem likely they themselves could have brought it about. I am suggesting that some such differences may derive from different experiences in previous incarnations.

Genetic factors alone do not account for all of the variance found at birth in monozygotic twins. For example, genetic factors contribute an important component to the etiology of harelip and cleft palate. Eight per cent of dizygotic twins are concordant for harelip and cleft palate and 30 per cent of monozygotic twins are (24); but we require some other explanation to account

for the 70 per cent of monozygotic twins that are discordant for cleft palate. Conjoined twins may be discordant for harelip and cleft palate (21, 22, 41). Some variation in the uterine environment is at present invoked to account for such discordances.

Monozygotic twins not infrequently show marked differences in weight at birth and subsequently develop different physiques, one being taller and heavier than the other. The initial differences are usually attributed to variations in blood supply or other factors affecting the twins during gestation.

In my collection of cases of the reincarnation type, 10 subjects are members of a twin pair. In seven of the pairs, one twin alone had memories of a previous life or one of the pair had more abundant memories than the partner. In the remaining three pairs, we lack sufficient information for an assessment of differences on this feature. Nine of the twin pairs were same-sex twins; one pair were of different sexes.

I have published a summary of one twin case (Alexandrina Samona) and a more detailed report of another (Ramoo and Rajoo Sharma). In the case of Ramoo and Rajoo, the twins (boys) appear to be identical from their facial appearance. They said they remembered the previous lives of another pair of twins (also brothers) who had been murdered in a village approximately 14 kilometers away. At the age of 9, Ramoo was at least 5 centimeters taller than Rajoo. The twin whose life Ramoo said he remembered had been taller than his brother during their childhood, although later their relative heights became reversed.

In the case of another pair of twins, Khin Ma Gyi and Khin Ma Nge (unpublished case in Burma), the two girls concerned both claimed to remember previous lives as their own grandparents. One of the girls thus said she had been a man in the previous life. As with Ramoo and Rajoo, one would suppose, on the basis of facial similarity, that Khin Ma Gyi and Khin Ma Nge are monozygotic. However, in other respects of physical appearance, they differ markedly. Khin Ma Gyi, who

says she remembered the previous life of their grandfather, is more heavily built and muscular than her twin sister, Khin Ma Nge, who claims to remember the previous life of their grandmother. Khin Ma Gyi has more memories of the previous life than her sister; she had prominent masculine characteristics when younger, although these became modified as she grew older. Her sister is the more dominant, although the less intelligent of the two. These characteristics correspond to those of the twins' grandmother who had been a rather bossy person, but illiterate; the grandfather had been a government officer, and so could read and write.

I wish to suggest with regard to monozygotic twins that genetics can help us to understand the similarities between the members of a pair and reincarnation may help us to understand the differences.

ABNORMAL APPETITES DURING PREGNANCY

During pregnancy many women experience strange longings for unusual foods or for those that are out of season. These are called pica in clinical medicine. Husbands sometimes relate tales of submissively going out in a blizzard to find a store that could provide a pregnant wife with fresh strawberries in January. We do not usually examine deeply accounts of this kind as it seems sufficient to attribute them to a caprice on the part of the pregnant woman taking advantage of the special devotion that most husbands feel toward their wives when they are pregnant; but here again, there may be something else to inquire about.

In a number of cases of the reincarnation type known to me, the subject has shown a craving (or perhaps an aversion) for a particular food. His mother has reported that during her pregnancy with him she experienced an unusual appetite (or aversion) for the same food, and the food in question has been found to be one for which the related previous personality had a similar craving or dislike. If such cases are interpreted as instances of reincarnation, they suggest that the previous personality in its nascent state had influenced the pregnant mother to conform to

its tastes. Examples of this type of experience occurred in the cases of Gamini Jayasena, Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne, and Bongkuch Promsin.

Some Relevant Observations Inadequately Explained by Data from Cases of the Reincarnation Type

Careful readers may have noticed that the above inventory of observations that reincarnation may explain omits two types of observations for which, among popular writers on the subject, reincarnation is adduced as a logical, almost unavoidable explanation. I refer to child prodigies and the uneven distribution of good fortune at birth. It is regrettable, but undeniable, that two types of observation for which reincarnation would seem a most logical explanation are in fact ones for which almost no empirical evidence has been found. I have therefore segregated these topics in the present section and will discuss each of them briefly. I wish to emphasize that I am not saying that the study of cases of the reincarnation type will never explain child prodigies and the varying social situations of human beings at birth. I am only asserting that presently available data cannot help us to do so.

CHILD PRODIGIES

The extraordinary accomplishments in early childhood of prodigies such as Mozart and Mendelssohn in music, Gauss in mathematics, and Macaulay and Mill in literature seem to invite positively the explanation of reincarnation. How else, it has been asked, are we to account for such skills exhibited at such early ages and so far exceeding anything of the kind previously exhibited in their families? Unfortunately, to the best of my knowledge, no Western child prodigy has ever claimed to remember a previous life.

Among Indian cases of child prodigies that have come to my attention, I studied one case of a girl who was credited with an inexplicable ability to recite Sanskrit scriptures at the age of 3 and who also claimed to remember a previous life. By the time I met her, however, she was about 9 years old and it proved impossible to sep-

arate then the components of her skill which derived from extensive practice in earlier years and any skill at memorizing verses, or actual memories of them, that she might have acquired in a previous life. Furthermore, the previous life she claimed to remember was remote and unverifiable. In recent years, two other Indian cases of child prodigies have come to my attention and I have initiated investigation of one of these. In both cases, the subject is reported to have spoken Sanskrit verses without having learned these normally; and in both cases, the subject is said to have remembered a previous life (with verifiable details) in which the Sanskrit verses were learned. It is premature to say more about these cases, but if they stand up to further scrutiny they may provide support for the idea that at least some child prodigies have acquired their unusual knowledge and skills in previous lives.

INEQUITIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF GOOD FORTUNE AT BIRTH

In the "one life" eschatology of orthodox Christianity (and orthodox Islam also), our destiny after death depends upon our conduct during the single life to which God assigns us. We all have the task of improving ourselves to the greatest possible extent during the lifetime we are allotted. God has chosen to send some souls to inhabit deformed bodies in urban slums, while He has had others born in healthy bodies on country estates. The differing circumstances of birth are unimportant since each soul has an equal opportunity to attain the goal of moral perfection—including, it must be supposed, hydrocephalic monsters and idiots of other types who are stored in colonies for the mentally deficient until an early death releases most of them. In effect, official Christianity has no curiosity about the uneven distribution of good fortune at birth and the suggestion that God tests men in different ways during a single lifetime depicts Him as fallible, as unjust, or both. Most contemporary scientists adopt the same general position, because according to them persons consist of physical bodies only; since there is no person "in the body," no

question of justice or even of luck arises with regard to the varying conditions of human beings at birth.

Hinduism and Buddhism, on the other hand, offer answers to the inequities in the conditions of different humans at birth. According to their teachings, we have all earned the circumstances of our present births by our conduct in previous terrestrial lives. The concept is referred to in Hinduism and Buddhism by the word "karma." "Karma" is a Sanskrit word meaning "action," but it has become applied more narrowly to those actions which lead to consequences in another life. The idea of karma permits a sense of justice to enter into our conjectures and allows also the hope that we may make amends in a future life for our failings in this one.

There is, however, almost no evidence in the case material that I have assembled that offers any empirical basis for the concept of retributive karma. The cases do show, to be sure, many instances of a child in a poor family recalling a previous life as a wealthy person or, conversely, a child in a rich family claiming to remember a life of poverty; but examination of the previous personalities in these cases does not reveal degrees of evil or goodness which allow us glibly to account for the great differences between the subject's circumstances and those of the related previous personality. There may be two reasons for this. First, the related previous personality of a case may have had secret vices and virtues which, if we knew about them, would explain the difference in circumstances between his life and that of the subject. This is an unhelpful conjecture, however, at least for empirical studies, because if we cannot obtain information which exists, it may as well not have existed. Second, the circumstances of the subject's present life may derive not from his conduct in the immediate past life that he remembers, but from that in some far anterior life, the good or bad of which is just now being repaid to him. This last suggestion, often put forward by exponents of the doctrine of karma, is irrefutable, but also unlikely to obtain any support from empirical investigations.

I am far from asserting that some process like retributive karma does not occur, but I do insist that, whereas I claim there is some evidence for reincarnation itself, almost none exists that supports the idea of retributive karma. Many persons who have read popular distillates in the West of Hinduism and Buddhism think that the doctrine of karma is inseparable from the idea of reincarnation. This is wrong and needs correction by a better understanding of the cases and beliefs related to reincarnation occurring among many groups who believe in it, but who have no concept about it corresponding to the idea of karma found in Southeast Asia (20, 25, 28, 29, 34, 38).

Although the cases so far studied provide no significant evidence in favor of retributive karma, they do offer some for what I call developmental karma, that is, for the carry-over from one life to another of personality traits. These include not only a particular body of cognitive information, but also behavioral qualities including aptitudes in the moral sphere. Furthermore, the concept of reincarnation implies an ineluctable responsibility for one's own development and for the consequences of one's actions. In this respect, it offers an approach to the understanding and control of human behavior quite opposite to prevailing ideas concerning the responsibility of families and of society for individual misconduct.

Predictions Based on the Idea of Reincarnation

It may be said that if reincarnation has value as an explanatory theory, it should be possible to make predictions based on it. With this I entirely agree, but allowance must be made for the length of time that will be required to confirm most predictions that the theory may stimulate.

A few predictions have been made on an assumption of the occurrence of reincarnation. The most notable of these have been predictions that birthmarks already existing would be found at a certain place on the body of a person if he was examined, and predictions that an unborn baby would have birthmarks corresponding to

scars (or other marks) on the body of a living person who had not yet died or who had just died. Examples of such predictions of birthmarks being made pre-mortem by persons who believed that they could select their parents for the next incarnation occurred in the cases of Corliss Chotkin, Jr., and William George, Jr. I have investigated a number of other cases of this type and will report their details later.

The idea of reincarnation offers the possibility of large scale demographic predictions of changes in the conditions and behavior of groups of people. It will take much discipline, however, to frame such predictions so that the results will clearly favor either reincarnation or some alternative theory.

Concluding Remarks

Persons who say that they remember previous lives are quite rare, even in those areas of the world such as the countries of Southeast Asia where cases of the reincarnation type occur more frequently than elsewhere. The total number of cases so far investigated is still very small and we should make generalizations from the data to other groups of persons only with great caution. If some persons with congenital deformities and gender identity confusion have remembered previous lives with verified details, it is quite clear that the majority of such persons have not. One may ask then what bearing the cases of persons who have had imaged memories of a previous life may have on our understanding of the conditions of those who have not. The most we can say about this is that if reincarnation seems a reasonable explanation for some instances of congenital deformities and gender identity confusion, it ought to be considered at least provisionally as a possible factor in other cases. I have prepared the way for this suggestion by mentioning earlier that there is little correlation between imaged memories and behavioral memories in subjects of cases of the reincarnation type and that behavioral memories may persist after imaged ones have been forgotten. The behavioral memories may in fact long outlast the imaged

ones and persist at least into middle adulthood (see, for examples, the cases of Jagdish Chandra and Bishen Chand Kapoor). Subjects who experience this differential fading of imaged memories and behavioral memories are then in the position of demonstrating some unusual behavior, apparently derived from the habits of a previous life, while at the same time remembering nothing of the actual events of that life. This being so, it is conceivable that if reincarnation occurs, many persons are born who never have any imaged memories of a previous life, but who show behavior unexpected for persons in their families that derives from previous lives.

I have investigated some instances of what may be pure behavioral memories of a previous life occurring with no correlated imaged memories. In one case, an apparently ordinary white American boy was unusually partial to American Indians. He liked to wear their dress and regularly took their side in any review of the history of relations between Indians and white persons or in any current controversy between them and white persons. No other member of his family shared his enthusiasm for American Indians, which made him something of an outsider among them. This child had no imaged memories of a previous life as an American Indian, but he acted to a considerable extent as if he were one in fact. In another equally instructive case, the subject had an extraordinary fascination for the sea and ships although he had grown up in an interior area of the United States and belonged to a family whose other members did not show the slightest trace of interest in seafaring. Cases such as these provide no direct evidence for reincarnation, but they are harmonious with it, and reincarnation seems to provide an explanation which is otherwise lacking for such unusual behavior.

Friendly critics of my investigations have pointed out that reincarnation is itself an irrefutable hypothesis. We can never show that it does not occur; nor are we ever likely to obtain conclusive evidence that it does occur. I can imagine the "perfect case," but have no expectation of

finding it. All of the cases I have investigated so far have some flaws, many of them serious ones. Neither any single case nor all of the investigated cases together offer anything like a proof of reincarnation. They provide instead a body of evidence suggestive of reincarnation that appears to be accumulating in amount and quality. For the most part, science advances through the development of probabilities making one interpretation of a particular phenomenon more likely than another. I anticipate a gradual further accumulation of evidence that will make reincarnation seem to an increasing number of informed persons a more probable explanation than others for cases of the type that I have reported. This cannot happen, however, until larger numbers of scientists become aware of the evidence so far obtained. This in turn may depend upon a greater appreciation by other scientists of the explanatory value that the idea of reincarnation may provide for a number of important unsolved questions of biology and medicine.

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APPENDIX 1

List of Cases Cited

Note: The cases are listed in alphabetical order of the subjects' first names. The references are to the article or book where a detailed report of the case has been published. The cases are indexed in the books by the first names of the subjects.

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|--|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Alexandrina Samona (7, 35) | Lalitha Abeyawardena (31) | Ratana Wongsombat (29) |
| Ampan Petcherat (29) | Mahes de Silva (31) | Ravi Shankar Gupta (39) |
| Bishen Chand Kapoor (30) | Manju Bhargava (unpublished case) | Ruby Kusuma Silva (31) |
| Bongkuch Promsin (29) | Marta Lorenz (39) | Sanjiv Sharma (unpublished case) |
| Charles Porter (39) | Myo Min Thein (unpublished case) | Semih Tutuşmuş (unpublished case) |
| Corliss Chotkin, Jr. (39) | Necati Çaylak (29) | Shamlinie Prema (31) |
| Derek Pitnov (39) | Necip Unlutaşkiran (unpublished case) | Sleimann Bouhamzy (39) |
| Disna Samarasinghe (31) | Norman Despers (39) | Sujith Lakmal Jayaratne (31) |
| Dolon Champa Mitra (30) | Om Prakash Mathur (unpublished case) | Sukla Gupta (39) |
| Erkan Kiliç (29) | Parmod Sharma (39) | Süleyman Zeytun (29) |
| Gamini Jayasena (31) | Paulo Lorenz (39) | Sunil Dutt Saxena (30) |
| Gnanatilleka Baddewithana (39) | Prakash Varshnay (39) | Swarnlata Mishra (39) |
| Gopal Gupta (30) | Ramesh Sukla (unpublished case) | Tin Aung Myo (unpublished case) |
| Henry Elkin (39) | Ramoo and Rajoo Sharma (30) | Veer Singh (30) |
| Imad Elawar (39) | Raouf Hamra (unpublished case) | Warnasiri Adikari (31) |
| Indika Guneratne (31) | | Wijanama Kithsiri (31) |
| Jagdish Chandra (30) | | Wijeratne (39) |
| Jasbir Singh (39) | | William George, Jr. (39) |
| Khin Ma Gyi and Khin Ma Nge (unpublished case) | | |
| Kumkum Verma (30) | | |