

Some Questions Related to Cases of the Reincarnation Type¹

IAN STEVENSON

When I accepted the invitation to give the lecture on which this paper is based and mentioned to someone the title I had selected, she suggested that a more appealing one would read: "Answers to Questions Asked About Cases of the Reincarnation Type." But I rejected this proposal because I prefer to present and discuss the questions than to pretend that I can answer them. Naturally I have thought of some answers, but I hold them quite tentatively. I shall be content if my review of these questions stimulates readers to think about them and to develop answers which are more satisfying than I think mine are likely to be.

These questions all suppose that reincarnation takes place and they encourage speculations about its processes. However, they are in no sense intended to ignore the question whether reincarnation does in fact occur. The case material I have collected and am studying still requires careful scrutiny with regard to alternative interpretations.² We would be guilty if we neglected this, but no less so if we did not allow our minds to range farther ahead in conjectures about details of the processes of reincarnation if it does occur. Indeed, these two approaches are complementary because by thinking about the details of reincarnation as if it happens we may come to see weaknesses in our concepts of it that can improve our collection and analysis of the evidence for or against it.

I have selected eight questions about reincarnation from among those asked most frequently.

1. *How do you account for the fact that cases of the reincarnation type occur only in cultures where the belief in reincarnation is widely held?*

Put in this form—and it nearly always is—the question implies something which is not true. We have found numerous cases of the reincarnation type in cultures where the majority of the people do

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² Readers interested in the evidence for reincarnation developed from empirical case studies will find a discussion of some of this evidence in Stevenson (1974b). Additional reports of individual cases have been published by Stevenson (1972a, 1972b, 1973b, 1973c, 1974a), by Stevenson and Story (1970), and by Story and Stevenson (1967). Reviews and analyses of groups of cases from different cultures appear in Stevenson (1966, 1970, 1973a).

not believe in reincarnation or are positively hostile to the idea. I have now about forty cases whose subjects are children of the United States. (I refer here to the continental U.S. and am not including in this figure the approximately 100 cases we have registered among Alaskan natives.) Cases also occur in Europe and occasionally in Central and South America. We have also found them sporadically among groups in Asia such as the Sunni Muslims of India and the Christians of Lebanon and Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon), who do not by religious affiliation believe in reincarnation.

It remains nevertheless true that cases are reported much more frequently in cultures where the belief in reincarnation is widely held than in those where it is not. Before offering some answers to the question (as thus posed) I should like to suggest that, since the majority of mankind believes in reincarnation, it would be at least as fair to phrase it in the reverse manner and ask: Why do so few people claim to remember previous lives in cultures where the belief in reincarnation is not widely held? This backward way of looking at the matter suggests one possible answer.

Careful readers will have noticed that I referred to *reported* cases. We have no valid information about the *actual* incidence of cases. We only know about those that we learn about. Perhaps then cases occur just as often in cultures such as our own, where reincarnation is not widely believed in, as they do in those where it is. But these former cases are not reported—either by the subject himself or by his parents—out of fear of ridicule or ostracism. Since the subjects (and their parents) of some American cases have expressed such fears to me, and often have only revealed the cases known to them with much trepidation, one may suppose that many other cases are completely hidden by the subject or, if he is rash enough to tell his parents, suppressed by them.

I do not think, however, that suppression by the subject or his parents tells the whole story. Other factors may come into play. Supposing that reincarnation occurs, Western persons who reincarnate have almost certainly in their previous lives not believed in reincarnation. This may have two effects on someone who does in fact survive death and reincarnates.

First, his disbelief in reincarnation would naturally include denial that anyone could remember a previous life and this could act as a powerful suggestion inhibiting the carry-over of actual memories from one life to another.

Secondly, the disbeliever in reincarnation, if he survived death and reincarnated, would bring with him no conceptual system that would make intelligible any memories of his previous life which happened to break through the just mentioned negative suggestion about the impossibility of having any such memories. Thus, if he

somehow did experience imaged memories of a previous life, he would not know how to account for them and would be inclined to reject them, just as we all tend to dismiss experiences for which we have no ready explanation. Accepting strange experiences means finding a place to put them within our conceptual system and if we cannot do this comfortably it is easier to get rid of them by denial.

I think something like this happens rather often when persons in a Western culture have what appear to be memories of a previous life. A considerable number of subjects of Western cases have told me that when they were children they had imaged memories of what seemed to them at the time a previous life. At that age, however, they did not know what to make of such images and they usually kept the experiences to themselves. Then later—often many years later—they heard or read about reincarnation and it suddenly occurred to them that this could be the explanation of their childhood experiences. A person who remembers a previous life as, say, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or a Druse, has a great advantage in understanding apparent memories of a previous life because he may bring with him a framework of beliefs that makes it intelligible. This understanding does not need to have the clarity of the imaged memories of the previous life; it may be much vaguer, a mere adumbration or intuition, and yet enough to reassure the person having it that imaged memories seemingly of a previous life could in fact be just that. And if in this way such a person can understand and integrate any memories of a previous life that he may have, he can allow them to remain in his consciousness and also permit other related ones to develop.

Perhaps some readers will find it difficult to believe that a small child could have any developed concepts against which to judge the appropriateness of unusual experiences such as apparent memories of a previous life. To this I can only repeat that a number of Western subjects have told me as adults that when they were children they found the experience of seeming to remember a previous life quite baffling because they had no way of fitting it into other thoughts they were developing then about life and the nature of man. I have never heard such a complaint from Asian members of a culture believing in reincarnation. In India children are exposed to the teaching of reincarnation at a very young age. As a consequence, by the time any Hindu child has fully developed memories of a previous life, say between the ages of three and five, he may already have learned enough about reincarnation so that he can accept the memories for what they seem to be instead of rejecting them as alien and unlikely to be true. I am also suggesting, however, that if his parents have omitted to tell him about reincarnation, he may nevertheless remem-

ber enough about the belief from a previous life so that he accepts his imaged memories of details of such a life as natural.

Perhaps a third factor enters into the varying incidences of reported cases in different cultures. If reincarnation occurs, the interval between death and rebirth may be greater in the West than it is in Asia and other parts of the world having both a belief in reincarnation and a high incidence of reported cases. The available evidence on this point, still very meager, suggests that the average interval between death and presumed rebirth is in fact longer in the Western cases than in those of Asia. If further analyses of larger numbers of cases confirm this, then for Westerners the longer sojourn "elsewhere" between earthly lives may result in greater erosion of memories between lives than occurs in persons who are reborn more rapidly. The fewer Western cases could then consist of those in which an unusually short interval between death and rebirth occurred or those in which memories somehow broke through despite a longer interval.

Yet a fourth factor may diminish the penetrance of memories of previous lives in Western persons if they reincarnate. This is their migratory, almost nomadic way of life. In a considerable number of the Asian cases the subject makes his first remarks about the previous life, and sometimes later ones, when he has noted some contrast between his situation and what he seems to remember of the previous life. A girl, for example, watches her mother cooking rice and suddenly remembers that *she* used to cook it differently in her previous life. She bursts out with reproaches of incompetence to her startled mother. Now, for this sort of thing to happen the two situations must be sufficiently similar so that the second stimulates a memory of the first. In the familiar phrase of psychologists of memory: recognition is greater than recall. When the events which are potentially comparable differ too much, the second will include insufficient stimulating detail to evoke recollection of the first.

Some observations of our "international cases" harmonize with this interpretation. By an "international case" I mean one in which the subject recalls a previous life as a resident of a different country and culture, e.g., a Burmese subject who says he was an American bomber pilot shot down in Burma by the Japanese during World War II. Ranjith Makalanda (Stevenson, 1974b), a Sinhalese boy who claimed to remember a previous life in England, provides another example of an "international case." Now it is an odd and for me most disappointing feature of these "international cases" that up to the present not a single subject of more than fifty such cases has remembered sufficient details, including proper names of persons and places, to permit our tracing a previous personality corresponding to his statements. This might derive from the marked

difference between the subject's situation in, say, Sri Lanka or Burma and the previous life in England or America that he is trying to remember. Some similar disparity may interfere with memories when a subject born, say, in Chicago in the 1960s tries to remember a previous life in San Francisco in the 1860s. Without some *points de repère* he may bring through only the scantiest details, insufficient in number and quality to permit verification of the apparent memories.

Before leaving this topic I should like to remind readers of the possibility of a circular relationship between the belief in reincarnation and the incidence of cases. The belief certainly promotes the cases by allowing persons to express any memories they may have of previous lives and perhaps also, if I have conjectured correctly, by directly facilitating the carry-over of memories from one life to another. In addition, the cases support the belief by helping to make it credible through providing, or appearing to provide, evidence for it.

2. *Cannot inherited memory or something like the "Collective Unconscious" account for the apparent memories of past lives?*

Inherited memory certainly offers one interpretation for those cases in which the subject is, or may be, a direct descendant of the person whose life he claims to remember. But cases of this type occur rather rarely. In the majority of cases a subject A remembers the life of a person B who died in a completely different family just one or several years before A was born. Therefore A cannot possibly be descended from B and no question of inherited memory arises. This is even true in those instances, such as often occur among the Tlingit Indians, in which the personalities concerned belong to the same family. Among the Tlingits the previous personality (characteristically) was a brother or uncle of the subject's mother and therefore not his *direct* ancestor, but a collateral relative on his mother's side (Stevenson, 1966).

3. *If reincarnation occurs for some people, does everyone reincarnate?*

How can we possibly answer this question, referring as it does to billions of human beings, when we have less than thirteen hundred cases so far assembled and partially investigated and analyzed? One often finds, however, that this question is followed by another: If reincarnation occurs, how do you account for the "population explosion?" Since many persons seem to have mistaken ideas about the number of human beings who have lived on the earth, I feel justified in going a little deeper into this second question.

The recent great increase in the world's population, if it continues, could bring difficulties for the reincarnation hypothesis, but they have not reached us yet. We have only rough estimates of the number of human beings who have lived on the earth since the origin of man. They all depend on assumptions of various kinds such as estimates of the date of the origin of man—for this it seems that you can choose any figure between 600,000 and 1,600,000 years ago—and the rates of population growth in ancient times. (We have more reliable figures for the growth of population during the last few hundred years.) Plausible estimates of the number of people who have lived on the earth vary between 69 billion (Keyfitz, 1966) and 96 billion (Wellemeier, *et al.*, 1962).³ The population of the world today is about four billion. Therefore, conservatively assuming 80 billion human lives altogether, each human soul (to use a convenient expression) could have had, on the average, opportunities for twenty incarnations.

The foregoing estimate—appallingly crude as it is—makes the further quite unjustified assumption that the interval between death and rebirth has remained constant throughout man's existence. But perhaps the "intermission" between lives was once very much longer than it is today. In such a period many souls would exist in the state (whatever that may be) between terrestrial lives and few would be incarnated. In recent centuries conditions could have altered so that now more souls are incarnated and fewer remain in the discarnate condition. In this way we can, if we wish, think of a finite number of souls which are now reincarnating much more rapidly after death than formerly.

But even these speculations do not exhaust the possibilities. For we can at least conceive that human souls evolved and "graduated" to human bodies from subhuman animals, even though we have no evidence that directly supports this conjecture. And finally—here we approach science fiction—human souls may also have "emigrated" from other solar systems to our planet.

Having referred to population trends in relation to reincarnation, I may also mention the fact that the ratio of male to female births has been found to increase during and after some wars. Such increases were found in Massachusetts during the American Civil War

³ Winkler (1959) made a calculation yielding a much higher figure, 5620 billion. Keyfitz (1966) suggested that Winkler had made the unjustified assumption of a constant rate of increase in the world's population. Keyfitz wrote that if he used such an assumption with his own formula, he would have arrived at the figure of approximately 552 billion human lives. We know that in fact the rate of growth of the world's population in recent years has greatly exceeded that of earlier times, but we have little reliable information about population growth rates for periods before the beginning of modern demography in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. And the farther we extend our inquiries into the remote and protohistoric past the more we replace facts by guesses.

(Willcox, 1916), in Germany after the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 and the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71 (Prinzing, 1906),⁴ in Great Britain after the First World War (Martin, 1943), and in several of the allied countries during and after the Second World War (MacMahon and Pugh, 1954; Martin 1943; Myers, 1949). These figures have been interpreted as indicating the capacity of Nature to compensate for the increased numbers of men dying during wars. The concept of reincarnation provides an explanation of how such a process might work through more male personalities seeking to be reborn after wars in which more men than women had been killed. However, let us not embrace this interpretation hastily; others may apply as well or better. Factors such as delayed marriages and higher incidences of first-born children (among which there occurs a higher male/female ratio) during and after war may account for the data (MacMahon and Pugh, 1954; Martin, 1943; Teitelbaum, 1970).⁵

Hecker (1846) reported the occurrence of increased births, especially multiple ones, after the great plague of the Black Death that killed off about one quarter of the inhabitants of Western Europe between 1347 and 1350. Hecker stated: "After the cessation of the Black Plague a greater fecundity in women was everywhere remarkable—a grand phenomenon, which, from its occurrence after every destructive pestilence proves to conviction, if any occurrence can do so, the prevalence of a higher power in the direction of general organic life. Marriages were almost without exception, prolific, and double and triple births were more frequent than at other times. . . ."⁶

⁴ Prinzing stated that the increase did not appear in France after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. He cited earlier sources for his statements which I have not myself consulted.

⁵ Orthodox demographers should also refrain from hasty interpretation of the facts. The peak of higher male/female sex ratio in births in the United States came in 1946, but as this was also the peak year of that period for new marriages there would have been a higher incidence of first born in 1947 than in 1946. The factor of a tendency for a higher male/female sex ratio to occur in first births should have influenced the peak of sex ratio to come in 1947 instead of in 1946 (MacMahon and Pugh, 1954).

In an earlier report in which they analyzed British data bearing on the increased sex ratio of births before, during, and after the Second World War, MacMahon and Pugh (1953) stated: ". . . we may conclude that the increased sex ratio during the war years was probably not the result of changing birth rank distribution of births." Elsewhere MacMahon and Pugh (1954) modestly remark: ". . . some factor or factors associated with war, or the end of war, influences the secondary sex ratio in man. A belief in the wisdom of Divine Providence in increasing the proportion of males born at such times is not essential to the rationalization of this relationship, although it must be admitted that no more satisfactory explanation is yet available" (p. 291).

⁶ Hecker wrote in the early nineteenth century. The German edition of his book was published in 1832. He seems to have consulted original sources liberally, but did not cite one for the assertion about increased fertility of women and a greater incidence of multiple births after the plague ceased. Ziegler made no mention

4. *Can reincarnation occur without a causal link between conduct in one life and the circumstances of another?*

Questions of this type usually derive from knowledge and assumptions about the concept of karma as expounded in the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism. The word karma subsumes a variety of different factors through which one life supposedly becomes causally linked with another. But its best known reference is to a presumed moral "law" which brings about retribution for misdeeds in one life in the form of unfavorable social, economic, or other personal circumstances in another one, not necessarily the one immediately following that of the bad conduct. The doctrine equally supposes that meritorious behavior leads in another life to improved circumstances.⁷

I may say parenthetically that up to this point I have found very little evidence to support the idea of retributive karma in the case material that I have studied. This does not mean that such evidence does not exist or that retributive karma does not occur. And if it is true that the accounts of misdeeds may not be settled until many lives after that in which they are committed, then the concept of retributive karma is virtually irrefutable and probably also unlikely to obtain much empirical support. Pending the development of further data, however, the lack of support for the concept of retributive karma in the evidence from cases so far available should provide some check against the fantasies of those persons who seek to attribute all their fortunes and misfortunes to the workings of karma from some previous life.

Our question here, however, is not whether karma occurs, but whether one can believe in reincarnation without some concept more or less similar to the Hindu-Buddhist idea of it. That the people of Southeast Asia have linked the idea of karma to that of reincarnation does not necessarily mean everyone else must do so and indeed we find that members of some other cultures hold the belief in reincarnation just as strongly as the people of Southeast Asia, but without the concept of karma or anything approaching it. We can in fact identify four rather distinct concepts of reincarnation. For all I know there may be many others, but these seem to me the more

of the phenomenon in his excellent study, *The Black Death* (1969). In a personal communication to me Ziegler (1970) wrote that he had never come across any report of increased multiple births after the great plague of the fourteenth century in the contemporary accounts of it. We should therefore accept Hecker's report cautiously until such contemporary sources, if they exist, can be traced.

⁷ Works outlining the concepts of reincarnation in Hinduism and Buddhism are so plentiful in the West as almost to obviate the need for any references to them. But, believing in the value of primary sources, or works closely based on them, I venture to recommend Hume (1931) and Prabhavananda and Isherwood (1944) for Hinduism, and Warren (1896) and Rahula (1967) for Buddhism.

prominent and important ones. In presuming to summarize them I am eager to avoid any suggestion that every member of a culture that I identify with a particular concept would necessarily accept my description of it. Some persons naturally deviate from the generally accepted beliefs of their society. I shall give each major concept a short title which will merely label it without doing justice to the variations of it that may occur.

1. *Moral Conduct in Earlier Lives Influencing Circumstances of Later Ones.* This refers to the belief in karma found in Hinduism and Buddhism (with some variations) according to which moral conduct in one life influences circumstances in later ones. Desires and wishes have little or no influence on later lives. The goal of life is to cease to live by ridding oneself of all cravings which inevitably draw one back into terrestrial incarnation. One must ultimately eliminate such cravings and "get off the wheel of rebirth" by attaining Nirvana.⁸ This belief is essentially life-negating. Hindus and Buddhists often fear being reborn more than dying. They regard earthly life as inevitably fraught with suffering and basically undesirable.

2. *Moral Conduct Not Influencing Circumstances in Later Lives but Ultimately Summed Up for Final Judgment.* This belief is held (with some variations) by the Alevis (of south central Turkey) and by the Druses (of Lebanon and Syria), members of a religion of Islamic origin, although severed from orthodox Islam. According to this view, God assigns a soul to different situations in successive incarnations so that it may experience a wide variety of opportunities for development. The soul advances by trying to improve its conduct in the stations of life to which God directs it. God does not punish or reward a person in one life for his sins or virtues in a preceding one. At the same time, the accounts of a man's conduct through all his lives are computed at the Day of Judgment, at which time, according to the results, he will be despatched for eternity to Heaven or Hell. Wishes have no influence on the circumstances of another life; only God's will dictates what will next be best for the evolution of a particular soul. This concept considers terrestrial life positively. It is not to be avoided or abandoned, as Hinduism and Buddhism teach. But neither is it to be squandered in merely sensual pleasures that lead to no improvement of the soul, and eventually a

⁸ Schopenhauer (1908, p. 583) devoted an interesting footnote to the etymology of the word "Nirvana." Various hypotheses attribute different origins to the word, but they all amount to its meaning in modern English: "extinction." For Buddhists at least, what becomes extinguished on attaining Nirvana is what we familiarly call "personality." A distinction is drawn between extinction of personality and annihilation.

time of reckoning occurs. This may be long postponed, but cannot be avoided.

The foregoing suggests that in the Druse-Alevi concept of reincarnation only a remotely distant punishment or reward provides an incentive for personal reform. But this unjustly omits the desire men have to become good—however feebly expressed it seems in most of us. One Druse succinctly remarked to me: "Remorse is our only punishment, a sense of having done well our only reward."

3. *Terrestrial Lives Occurring Successively Without Causal Connections or Ultimate Judgments Based on Moral Conduct.* The people of West Africa who believe in reincarnation regard terrestrial life as desirable and the period of "intermission" as an unwelcome interlude between earthly lives (Parrinder, 1954, 1956). They have no concept of evolution from one life to another and none of causal links between moral conduct in one life and the circumstances of another. The West Africans do believe, however, that sins will be punished and virtue rewarded in the discarnate world, but not in another terrestrial life.

I have not yet had any personal experiences of cases of the reincarnation type in West Africa; nor have I had an opportunity to inquire among the peoples of West Africa about their beliefs in reincarnation. Variations occur among different tribes (Deschamps, 1970; Uchendu, 1964; Zahan, 1965). The belief in terrestrial reincarnation as something desirable seems, however, to be widespread. Parrinder (1954, 1956) remarked upon it in Nigeria. Thomas (1968) made systematic inquiries concerning the beliefs in reincarnation among tribes farther west and also elsewhere in Africa. He found that 89 per cent of his respondents thought that discarnate persons *wished* to reincarnate.⁹ This is not incompatible with the belief expressed by 73 per cent of them that reincarnation was obligatory and not optional.

Malinowski (1954) described a belief in reincarnation among the Trobriand Islanders which includes no connection between one life and another based on moral conduct.

4. *Wishes, Including Voluntary Selection, Influence the Circumstances of Successive Lives.* Plato (1935) expounded this concept in some detail in *The Republic*. He depicted in the report of Er (pp. 318-325) how souls choose the circumstances of their next lives. In

⁹ A similar poll taken in Southeast Asia might show that respondents there also attributed the wish to reincarnate to discarnate personalities. The important difference would lie in the undesirability of reincarnating felt in Hinduism and Buddhism, but not in West Africa. For the Hindu-Buddhist a discarnate person may crave rebirth, but he should not do so. For the West African such a desire is neither reprehensible nor hindering.

the discarnate state souls are punished for misdeeds and rewarded for virtuous conduct. But when they are ready to reincarnate they *choose* the circumstances of their next lives. Whatever wisdom they have obtained from previous lives, and from the punishment they have endured in the intermediate state of existence after death and before rebirth, guides their selection of a life for the next incarnation. According to Er, persons who had "participated in virtue by habit and not by philosophy" chose foolishly "for they had not been disciplined by labors" (pp. 323-324). In contrast, those who "had themselves endured labors and had seen the labors of others, were in no hurry to make their choice. . . . The choice was mostly governed by what they had been accustomed to in their former life" (p. 324). Plato, still quoting Er, then went on to describe the motives of Odysseus' choice: "It so happened that the soul of Odysseus came forward to choose the very last of all. He remembered his former labors and had ceased from his ambition and so he spent a long time going around looking for the life of a private and obscure man. At last he found it lying about, ignored by everyone else; and when he found it he took it gladly and said that he would have made the same choice if the lot had fallen to him first" (pp. 324-325).

The concept of human evolution figures prominently among the platonic ideas of reincarnation, but it is not a system of development through automatic rewards and punishments from one life to another as in the karma of Hinduism and Buddhism; nor is it one of deterrence based on the fear of an ultimate judgment as found among the Islamic sects believing in reincarnation. Rather, it supposes consciously planned evolution through choices guided by the wisdom gained in prior lives.

The idea that wishes and desires may influence conditions of another life is found in modern times, especially among the Tlingits of Alaska¹⁰ (Stevenson, 1966) and sometimes among other groups that believe in reincarnation, such as the Igbo (Uchendu, 1964).

It is not my purpose to argue the merits of any one of these concepts of reincarnation. I aim merely at opposing the widespread notion that you cannot think about reincarnation without the idea of karma or something similar. If reincarnation occurs karma may also occur, but it may also not occur, or not occur in the ways that have been popularly taught and widely accepted. I believe that words have a youth, a prime, and sometimes a burdensome senility when they may delay the development of new ideas. Karma may be such a word that has passed its best period and I find myself feeling freer in thinking about reincarnation when I do not use it.

¹⁰ The Tlingits also believe (or believed) that conduct, especially bravery in battle, may determine circumstances of a future life (Pinart, 1873).

5. *If reincarnation does occur, what is it that reincarnates?*

This question is sometimes phrased: "What is the 'it' that reincarnates?" Put this way, the question suggests a soul or entity that reincarnates and this is essentially the concept of Hinduism—a soul passing from one physical body to another. We find a similar belief—with variations—among the Druses, the West Africans, the Alaskan natives, and most other people who believe in reincarnation.

The concept of a soul is not, however, necessary to a belief in reincarnation. The Buddhists, at least those of the Theravada division, subscribe to the doctrine of *anattā* or no-soul. According to them, there exists only a grouping of constantly changing mental processes, but no enduring self or soul (Malalasekera, 1966; Nyana-ponika, 1959; Rahula, 1967). At death the cravings of the deceased person's last mental processes initiate a new set of processes in an intermediate plane of existence and after a varying interval of time these, or their successors, in turn activate a new physical body which then carries some of the cravings and other qualities of the first person.

The Buddha contented himself with drawing attention to the flux of constantly changing images and feelings that we call our "self." He declared profitless all speculation about the exact nature of what is reborn and we should do well to follow his direction until we have more data to guide our metaphysical wanderings.¹¹

We can, however, give some answers to the question: If reincarnation occurs, what attributes does the subject have which informants say were also observed in the related previous personality? We can identify three such components. First, both have imaged memories of the same events as apparently perceived by the same person. Secondly, both seem to share feelings and many other aspects of behavior related to emotions such as phobias, phobias, interests, habits, and skills. (I include skills in this group because I think the acquisition and maintenance of skills depend on interest and therefore ultimately derive from emotion.) And thirdly, they may share physical qualities as exemplified by diseases from which both may suffer and by birthmarks and deformities on the body of the subject that correspond to wounds or injuries on the physical body of the related previous personality.

I find myself thinking increasingly of some intermediate "non-physical body" which acts as the carrier of these attributes between one life and another. The idea of an extensionless mind existing after death and before rebirth has no appeal to me, because images have extension and, so it seems to me, they must exist on or in

¹¹ For illustrations of the Buddha's attitude to the question of *anattā* see Rahula (1967, p. 66), Smart (1964, pp. 33-35), and Warren (1963, pp. 129-150).

something else that has extension. I think of this "something else" as a kind of body. It also seems to me that the imprint of wounds on the previous personality must be carried between lives on some kind of an extended body which in turn acts as a template for the production on the new physical body (to be occupied by the presumably reincarnating personality) of birthmarks and deformities that correspond to the wounds on the body of the previous personality. This hypothetical intermediate body must exist in some state of which we know almost nothing, although some subjects of reincarnation cases have claimed to remember experiences after death and before (presumed) rebirth when they were apparently housed in such a body. I shall be publishing accounts of such experiences in case reports now in preparation.

Before leaving the subject of an intermediate body let me add that such a body must be composed of elements quite different from those with which we are familiar both in our ordinary perceptions and in the abstractions of physicists. That is why I earlier used the phrase "non-physical body." We may say if we wish that it is composed of some kind of matter, but this must be a matter quite different from what we usually mean by that term. And similarly we must expect that this intermediate body will be subject to quite different "laws" from those which govern our familiar physical bodies.

6. *Why does not everyone remember a previous life?*

This question is sometimes offered as a reproach by those who recognize a degree of justice in our having successive lives with which to improve ourselves and repair the effects of our failures and deficiencies and yet raise the objection that the system seems imperfect unless everyone can carry over full imaged memories from his previous lives. (Even in cultures such as that of India, where nearly everyone believes in reincarnation, only a few persons claim to remember previous lives.) Why, these critics say, should a person be born deaf and dumb as a consequence of some sin or crime and be expected to profit from his situation when he does not know what wickedness his disability expiates? How can he do better if he does not know what he did not do well? I admit the force of this objection but it assumes or demands that things should be the way we want them to be. The universe may not be just or, as seems more likely to me, it may be just in ways that we cannot yet understand. This question, furthermore, seems to me both ethically naive and psychologically shallow. It is the former because it suggests that we cannot improve ourselves morally by applying general principles. For myself I am glad that I am honest in everyday life through the economy of a general principle. When the temptation to an act of dishonesty

arises I do not need to have flash into my mind the painful memories of occasions in childhood when my mother improved my honesty with specific lessons. I can keep my hand out of the till without remembering times when I should not have put it into the cookie jar. In the same way I am not only content, but positively relieved, that I know and can remember $12 \times 5 = 60$ without having to see inwardly, each time I need this fact, the school room blackboard with which I first learned the multiplication table. The abilities we have to generalize from one or a few experiences to others, and to remember a lesson without recalling the occasion of learning it, seem to me highly efficient and perhaps absolutely necessary for adaptation in a single life. Why should we ask more of the processes by which we distill whatever knowledge and wisdom we may have gained in previous lives? If reincarnation occurs, we should expect that the processes of memory would not become different when we remember a previous life from what they are when we remember (or do not remember) events of our childhood.

The above is preliminary to a more direct attempt to answer the question posed in this section. We do not at present know why everyone does not remember a previous life. But we do know a little about the sorts of persons who do remember them. Before I outline our fragmentary knowledge of their characteristics, I wish to say that I find it puzzling that anyone would *want* to remember a previous life. To paraphrase a Great Teacher: "Sufficient to one life is the evil thereof." Persons who remember a previous life are by no means always happier for having done so. The majority seem to me less happy than other persons until they forget their memories. As children they are often involved in painful conflicts with their parents when they remember a second set of parents, and perhaps a wife and children as well! And many of the memories recalled by subjects of these cases are of unpleasant events such as domestic quarrels, crimes, and violent deaths. I think it may be better to consider those who remember a previous life as suffering from a defect rather than as having a gift. Memories of a previous life may harmfully intrude into affairs of the present and interfere with adaptation to it. In this connection it is not inaccurate to compare subjects of cases of the reincarnation type with neurotic and schizophrenic persons who think constantly and too much about events of their childhood or early adulthood. (In other respects, however, the subjects of the reincarnation cases should not be regarded as mentally ill.)

If we examine the kinds of persons whose lives the subjects remember we see at once that they are from a deviant group. In all cultures so far investigated we have found a high incidence of violent death among the previous personalities of the cases. (See Table I).

INCIDENCE OF MODES OF DEATH OF PREVIOUS PERSONALITY IN CASES OF THE REINCARNATION TYPE FROM SEVEN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Mode of Death	Sri Lanka Cases (40 cases)	Tlingit Cases (47 cases)	Indian Cases (105 cases)	Thai Cases (24 cases)	Lebanese and Syrian (Druse) Cases (55 cases)	Burmese Cases (85 cases)	Turkish (Alevi) Cases (77 cases)
Violent							
Male	7	19	28	7	30	39	47
Female	4	0	15	2	6	3	10
Total	11	19	43	9	36	42	57
Natural							
Male	9	8	25	3	6	20	14
Female	9	7	25	8	4	10	3
Total	18	15	50	11	10	30	17
Unknown							
Male	6	7	7	3	5	8	2
Female	5	6	5	1	4	5	1
Total	11	13	12	4	9	13	3
Percent of Violent Death/Total Known Causes of Death	38.0 %	56.0 %	46.2 %	45.0 %	78.3 %	58.3 %	77.0 %
Percent of Violent Death/Total Known Causes of Death in General Population	3.4 % ^a	19.9 % ^b	6.7 % ^c	— ^d	— ^d	— ^d	4.5 % ^e

^a Data from 1947. From *Demographic Yearbook*, United Nations, 1951, pp. 396 ff.

^b Data from 1967 (for non-white inhabitants of Alaska). From *Vital Statistics of the United States*, Vol. 2, Part A, pp. 1-163. Washington, D.C., United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

^c Data from 1963, derived from surveys in Poona and Bombay Corporations and public hospitals of Rajasthan. From *Demographic Yearbook*, United Nations, 1970, p. 699.

^d Reliable data unavailable.

^e Data from provincial capitals only for 1954. From *Demographic Yearbook*, United Nations, 1956, p. 704.

The lowest incidence of violent deaths among the previous personalities that we have found up to now is that in Sri Lanka (38 per cent) and the highest incidence that in Lebanon (78 per cent) and Turkey (77 per cent) with the incidence in other cultures falling somewhere between these two extremes.

The incidence of violent death is far higher among the previous personalities of the cases than among the general population from which they come. It seems likely that some connection exists between the violent deaths of the previous personalities and the subjects' memories. If so, this is a new and important finding that has emerged from the recent systematic studies of cases of the reincarnation type. Perhaps the violence of the death of the previous personality provides an intense experience which enhances and preserves memories of it in the subject.

Persons dying violently may also reincarnate more rapidly than those dying natural deaths and I hope we shall soon have some empirical data on this point from the analysis of a large number of cases with regard to the "intermission" period after violent as opposed to natural death. Unfortunately for this particular analysis, the cases with death from natural causes may be those of persons who, *for other reasons*, also reincarnate quickly.

We should remember, however, that murder (or another type of violent death) is not enough by itself to start a case of the reincarnation type. Subjects who remember previous lives with violent deaths are much less numerous than persons who die violent deaths. We do not yet know what factors make some violent deaths more memorable than others.

In addition to violent deaths, two other circumstances seem to occur frequently in the circumstances of the previous personalities of these cases at the time of death. First, many of those who die naturally do so when young, often in childhood or early adulthood. Secondly, many of those who reach adulthood have small children to care for at the time of death. I call members of this group of previous personalities those with "unfinished business." They are usually young women. Concern about infants and young children "left behind" figures prominently in the memories and behavior of the subjects remembering the lives of such persons.

Two character types occur frequently among the previous personalities who have died natural deaths. These are, briefly described, greedy wealthy men and devout generous women. Their lives may be remembered for quite different reasons. According to Buddhist concepts the greedy wealthy men, if reincarnated, may remember previous lives because of their attachment to their wealth. On the other hand, the devout generous women, if reincarnated, may remember previous lives because their piety and the practice

of meditation have clarified their minds and thereby enhanced and preserved all their memories, including those of a previous life. I need hardly add that there are many greedy women and pious men; but in general persons attached to wealth tend to be men and devout generous persons tend to be women.

7. *Can hypnosis bring out supplementary details of a previous life partially remembered?*

My present answer to this question is that in general hypnosis does not help to bring out additional, verifiable details of a previous life. In several cases of persons who have had spontaneous memories of apparent previous lives with insufficient information for verification I have tried hypnosis in an effort to bring out additional details, for example of names, that might be verifiable. I have not succeeded in the endeavor in a single case. The results have not encouraged me to continue, but I intend nevertheless to do so.

Having broached the subject of experiments in regression induced by hypnosis to so-called previous lives, I may here say something about those cases in which apparent memories of such lives have emerged only during the hypnotic state. The majority of claimed memories of previous lives evoked in this way seem to me utterly worthless. This should not be surprising since hypnosis tends to liberate the mind from its usual controls and to release the imagining and dramatizing powers of its subconscious levels. The "previous lives" which then emerge are often superficially plausible, but most of them deserve no more credence than our dreams, which are similarly the products of ordinarily subconscious levels of the mind freed during sleep from the inhibitions of the waking state. A careful examination of most of the "previous lives" elicited by hypnosis often shows grotesque anachronisms and implausibilities, and the residue is usually quite unverifiable.

Although skeptical about most "previous lives" elicited during hypnosis, I do not reject all experiments of this type as valueless. Indeed, I am quite convinced that in a small number something important and genuine has occurred. I think of the case of Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1965; Ducasse, 1960) and that of T. E., the subject who spoke Swedish when under hypnosis and transformed to the personality of "Jensen" (Stevenson, 1974c), as exceptional examples requiring us to continue exploring the possibilities of hypnosis for improving the evidence of survival after death.

I hope to publish later a review of the whole subject of experiments with hypnotic regression to "previous lives." Suffice it to say here that I think we should pay more attention to the concept of *depth* in hypnosis. Granted that authorities on hypnosis differ about what

constitutes "depth" and how to measure it, I think they will generally agree that during such experiments some subjects are more deeply hypnotized than others and, in my opinion, it is only in a deep hypnosis that subjects can get back to mental contents that may derive from real previous lives. At the more superficial levels of hypnosis the material elicited resembles that of ordinary dreams and has no more value than the usual dream as to anything of interest for parapsychology. Subjects at these levels are likely to talk about imaginary "previous lives."

Even when a subject during an experiment in hypnotic regression brings out material that can be verified, we still have the problem of excluding normal sources for his acquisition of the correct information stated. For this reason, I would favor more experiments with children since we can examine more easily the sources of information to which they have had access than those of adults. Children also make excellent hypnotic subjects, which provides a second reason for my favoring them as subjects in future experiments of this type.

8. *Why do not more subjects say something about experiences between death and rebirth?*

Most subjects have nothing whatever to say about the period of "intermission" between the death of the previous personality and their own birth. The elapsed "earth" time is a total blank in their memories. However, a small number of subjects recount experiences during this "intermission" period. These usually correspond closely either to habits of the previous personalities or to expectations of what should happen after death based on the local religious or other cultural traditions. Thus a Tlingit will tell how after death he was taken in a canoe across a lake to woods and then later sent back across the lake to be reborn. And an (Asian) Indian may describe a meeting after death with Krishna or Lakshmi.

Reports of the foregoing type occur sporadically in the cases of every culture. But in those of Burma and Thailand we obtain reports of claimed memories of "intermission" experiences much more often than in the cases from elsewhere. The accounts of the Burmese and Thai subjects have certain recurrent themes. They frequently include the memory of meeting with a sage dressed in white who befriends the deceased person and eventually guides him to the home of his new birth. The subject often also describes some food, usually fruit, offered to him as the previous personality when he was about to be reborn. This is the "fruit of forgetfulness."¹² Some

¹² In Vietnam a similar tradition occurs, but there the amnesia-inducing substance is offered in *soup* instead of in fruit! Is this a Chinese influence on Vietnam?

subjects claim to have somehow evaded eating the proffered fruit and credit this disobedience with the preservation of their memories of the previous life and "intermission." In addition to these types of experiences in "another realm," Thai and Burmese subjects (as well as occasional ones elsewhere) rather often say that they observed and remembered events happening to members of their (previous) family or friends during the period between the deceased personality's death and the subject's birth. Moreover, some Thai and Burmese subjects claim to have an almost total recall for everything they experienced during the period between death and presumed rebirth.

The merits of such claims have to be judged separately in each individual case. I am concerned here only with the question why we should have reports of such experiences so much more often from the subjects in Burma and Thailand than from those of other cultures. My own tentative explanation relates this higher incidence of "intermission" reports to the more frequent and more assiduous practice of meditation in these countries than we find in most other parts of the world.¹³ Since one aim of the meditator is to become continuously conscious without any lapses—eventually extending into the period of physical inactivity known as sleep and beyond that, to and through death itself—it is perhaps to be expected that persons trained in this practice would, if they reincarnated, bring over detailed memories of their "intermediate" experiences. But here we confront just one more aspect of these cases which urgently calls for a more penetrating analysis of data collected from larger numbers of them.

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¹³ Mr. R. R. Boonyoros of the Faculty of Humanities at Chiangmai University, Chiangmai, Thailand, to whom I described this interpretation, thinks it wrong. He told me that he believes it betrays a tendency toward Western idealism of religious practices in Thailand and that in his opinion the average person there does not practice meditation with any great earnestness. I have nevertheless noticed that subjects who say they remember many details about the "intermission" period sometimes recall the lives of persons who meditated.

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*Division of Parapsychology
Department of Psychiatry
School of Medicine
University of Virginia
Charlottesville, Virginia 22901*