

COMMENTARY

Questions of the Reincarnation Type

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Abstract—Field studies of cases of the reincarnation type (CORTs) tend to suggest that paranormal aspects are due to some kind of reincarnation involvement, partly because these studies were mainly carried out in communities that traditionally accept and interpret paranormal findings as evidence for reincarnation. Based on field research of several hundred CORTs, this is an attempt to present data that can be regarded as being well-established and which support explanation of psi via living agents. Questioning reincarnation assumptions may be regarded by some critics as an admission of major problems associated with this research. However, by emphasizing basic data, i.e., apparently paranormal information provided by children about deceased persons, the importance of these investigations may be more readily appreciated even by scientists who generally reject all results associated with reincarnation research. This discussion is less concerned with the evidence for paranormal aspects of the cases (which have been examined in various publications) but more with questions, which follow from the assumption that the majority of cases include paranormal components. This paper is mainly based on fieldwork results, which are in agreement with a living agent psi explanation. It is not an examination of particular historical or contemporary cases that perhaps appear to support the survival hypothesis.

Introduction

In areas with cultural traditions that include reincarnation as a possible occurrence, a minority of young children have information about persons who died before these children were born.

Empirical findings (1) indicate that a significant amount of such information about a person who has died and perhaps other connections reported by a child can be regarded as paranormal. That means, the information and connections are not due to genetic and or other normal environmental factors. When (1) is accepted, many parents of these children as well as other members of these communities also assume (2) “that these children are the reincarnations of the relevant persons who died before these children were born”.

Reincarnation has been defined in various ways. For this discussion, reincarnation implies the continuation of the previous personality (PP) beyond what can be explained by genetic and/or other normal factors. We do not suggest that (2) may never occur, but we suggest that it is of interest to show that many CORTs—including those that this author (JK) has investigated and which support (1) can be explained with living agent psi involvements alone.

This may look like a biased view in favor of explanations based on extra-sensory information transfers that can occur without reincarnation, but in a way a strong statement of this view is desirable because the strength of the reincarnation hypothesis was probably sometimes exaggerated because children could generally only be found in communities that accepted and explained the connections between children and the corresponding previous personalities (PPs) with just the reincarnation hypothesis.

In the end it is, of course, a somewhat subjective assessment, whether this paranormal information and these connections are more easily accommodated by assuming a reincarnation or a living agent psi framework. However, the data from fieldwork investigations carried out by this author gradually over a period of time increasingly indicated—against earlier expectations—that the reincarnation hypothesis is not the appropriate explanation for the paranormal data which JK and others accumulated.

A list of some of the terms used may help to clarify the subsequent discussions. The subject (S), usually a child, is a person who apparently has paranormal information about a deceased person, the previous personality (PP), who had died before S was born. Excluding genetic, environmental, and other normal factors and similarities, reincarnation suggests that S has a significant connection with PP and that S is in some ways the continuation of PP.

The suggested continuation based on reincarnation as well as the connection between S and the corresponding PP, can also be accounted for by the living agent psi assumption. It is assumed that S's connection with PP occurred on account of paranormal information transfers involving living persons.

Announcing dreams suggest to parents and others associated with S that this S has a paranormal connection with a particular PP. Locally this is usually regarded as an indication that S is the reincarnation of PP.

The discussion presented here is mainly based on case studies in Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar (Burma), which were carried out by the author (JK). They provide an illustration of the complexity and the difficulties associated with this research. Eventually such discussions and further case studies are likely to lead to a better understanding of the paranormal connections. Simple answers to the various questions at present are premature and possibly misleading.

This is mainly due to the fact that most cases cannot be clearly placed into convenient categories, for example with respect to the degree of independent

verifications. On account of these uncertainties, statistical evaluations at this stage would only appear to provide a clearer framework.

In controlled tests with relatively unselected subjects, evidence for psi can generally only be obtained at a fairly low level of significance. Information apparently due to some form of survival is often regarded as more complex and beyond the range of psi explanations. Stephen Braude (1992) in an article "Survival or Super-psi" suggests that an expanded version of psi can still overcome the problems associated with explaining apparent survival evidence with this so called super-psi hypothesis. Mishlove's and Engen's (2007) archetypal synchronistic resonance (ASR) theory accepts and incorporates parapsychological findings without survival or reincarnation involvements. Both theories avoid survival and reincarnation. Lamarck's theory suggesting that some information and skills acquired by parents during their lives may be passed on to their children without any genetic or environmental involvement would also be in agreement with psi.

This paper strongly suggests that most and perhaps all CORTs can be better fitted into a framework of psi without the reincarnation or survival hypothesis. Some CORTs may require the super-psi hypothesis, but most CORTs can probably still be accommodated within a psi framework without the super-psi extensions.

Children in CORTs are highly self-selected, with only a minority involved. These children are at an age when they do not make their statements in a rationally controlled way, and their responses may at times occur at an unconscious level. These are conditions that may very well encourage relatively strong psi results. It must also be kept in mind that although CORTs may include statements which at times are dramatic, surprising, and significant, primarily to the adults associated with these children, these statements may quantitatively not be at a much higher level of psi compared to results in controlled laboratory tests.

Numerous field studies (Stevenson, 1977, 2001) confirmed that some children revealed a number of details about persons who died before these children were born that cannot be readily explained by various normal processes. Although for a particular case it is never possible to rule out a normal explanation with absolute certainty, the large number of children, also referred to as subjects (Ss), who provided apparently paranormal information, suggests that these connections between some Ss and the corresponding deceased persons, also referred to as previous personalities (PPs), occur to a significant degree (Tucker, 2000, 2007). Nevertheless, this research is often ignored and is only occasionally acknowledged in mainstream science.

The term *paranormal* that is used in this discussion unfortunately has some surplus meaning, suggesting perhaps an acceptance of explanations that cannot

be justified. Paranormal is intended here as a neutral term, only indicating that at present no established explanations exist for a connection or relationship which cannot be readily dismissed as being merely due to chance. This does not rule out the possibility that events which at present are labeled as paranormal may eventually be regarded as normal but within a different and as yet unknown system of explanatory hypotheses.

Although in various publications the term *memories* of a previous life is used, this term has a range of meanings that may not be justified, and therefore *information* is the preferred term unless relatives and others connected with a case are the ones being quoted.

Any discussion that involves reincarnation is likely to touch on religious and other belief systems, and therefore it is desirable to clarify the intention of this paper. It is not a discussion about the reality or otherwise of reincarnation, but an examination to what extent empirical case study data that are regarded as paranormal can perhaps be better understood without assuming any reincarnation involvement. This is a difficult task because the basic data can usually only be collected in communities with some traditional acceptance of reincarnation.

If some paranormal information transfers between living persons are accepted, then the basic data from case studies can also be included under this heading. This seems to be a more parsimonious approach, compared to alternatives, which involve the reincarnation hypothesis. But quite apart from these general considerations, with very few exceptions the actual fieldwork experience does not suggest to JK that reincarnation was involved. To some extent this is a subjective judgment, but one which only developed after several years and increased when more and more cases were investigated.

Basic Data

The distribution of cases with paranormal information, the distribution of relevant data, the age range of Ss who provide information, and a perhaps different kind of forgetting provide the basic data from which this discussion can proceed. Particular dreams, referred to as announcing dreams, may also provide limited basic data. The term *reincarnation* will be examined in some detail later. Stevenson (1977) was careful to refer to “cases of the reincarnation type” (CORTs), avoiding the claim that reincarnation—whatever that may mean—necessarily occurs.

Publications emphasize cases with subjects who provided a relatively large amount of information. A child who makes only a few statements may by chance be in some agreement with what is known about a PP. However, children who can reveal many details about previous lives are in a minority among CORTs. This may encourage skeptics to say that this confirms their suspicion that most

cases are based on spurious agreements which are due to chance or due to some information which a child may have encountered in his or her present life—perhaps without anybody else being aware of it. Each of the few remaining cases with a large number of details can then be dismissed as the “one in 20 case” which can be expected by chance among the other insignificant ones.

However, field studies of several hundred cases rather suggest that the majority of the weak ones, i.e. those with children who provide a rather limited amount of information, cannot easily be dismissed. The evidence for this can be found in the wider framework of these investigations. Apart from emotional involvements and other details that may be noticed—but which are to some extent based on subjective observations and assessments—there are also specific behavioral peculiarities as well as birthmarks and birth defects that suggest a paranormal connection between a child and the PP, even when a child does not make many statements about a previous life.

This can be better appreciated by an example of an actual case (unpublished case in the archives of the Division of Personality Studies (DOPS) at the University of Virginia): In a Turkish village JK met the relatives of a PP who had died at the age of 9 years. When PP was alive, one of his daily chores was to collect water from a well. In another village about 12 k away, but with limited contacts between the two communities, a boy who was born after the PP had died, mentioned the name of the PP and not much else. S’s parents inquired whether someone with this name had died before S was born and located PP’s relatives. They arranged a visit but S did not recognize anybody and did not answer any questions that referred to PP. However, S said that he remembered where “he” collected and carried water from a well some distance from PP’s house. The well was no longer in use because the village in the meantime had been connected to a water scheme. The path to the well was no longer visible. Nevertheless, S found it without much hesitation or help from anybody. PP’s relatives did not accept S as the rebirth of PP. At the same time, they had no explanation how S could have known where the disused well was. PP’s relatives believe in reincarnation but did not accept S because they expected that he would remember more about PP and recognize some family members.

This example raises the question: Are there some Ss with paranormal information who are not rebirth cases, at least not in the way in which this term is locally used? There is no doubt that different communities have different traditional expectations when the term *reincarnation* is mentioned. It is generally agreed that something of the previous personality must be present in the child who is regarded as the rebirth of the PP. The Ss in some ways are regarded as the continuations of the PPs.

Stevenson (1977) suggested that with the concept of an immortal soul, reincarnation can be regarded as the transfer of a soul from a dying person to a new-

born child. “And from the concept of a prenatal existence of the soul it is a short step to the idea that the soul has incarnated in other physical bodies before the birth of the present one” (Stevenson, 1977:633). Although Stevenson’s statement may not be in agreement with more complex definitions based on particular belief systems, it would be accepted by most families in Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar who experienced children with information about deceased persons. Stevenson also argued convincingly that the overwhelming majority of “readings” and “hypnotic regressions” with some rare exceptions only produce false and misleading information.

On account of assumed rebirth connections, Stevenson and Keil (2005) refer to a possible third element in personality. It is possible that on account of information about a PP but probably also on account of the family reactions to such information, an S may develop some personality characteristics that are not predominantly due to genetic or environmental factors.

Ss are often related to the PPs, and a genetic component must be expected. Observations of animal behavior suggest that even quite specific and unusual behavior patterns may reoccur due to genetic factors. Although genetic similarities are more likely when the Ss are closely related to the corresponding PPs, some behavioral patterns may also reoccur—sometimes quite unexpectedly—among Ss who are only distantly related to the PPs. In small and relatively isolated communities, genetic factors are likely to play a role even if the Ss are regarded as unrelated to the corresponding PPs. These considerations demand that a great deal of care must be used before the connection between an S and a PP is tentatively placed in the paranormal category. If in a particular region a sufficient number of cases can be found that would allow an evaluation of the genetic influence, this would be a desirable research extension for the future.

Based on tangible evidence only, it is difficult to define reincarnation beyond the requirement that some continuation—not merely based on genetic or other normal connections between the S and the PP—must exist. However, this is only a necessary and not a sufficient condition.

Evidence from field studies supports a paranormal connection between Ss and the corresponding PPs. If for many and perhaps for most cases, reincarnation does not provide an adequate framework for these connections, something else, which tentatively could be called “pre-personality psychic absorption from a past life”, could be involved. That means, at a very young age, before the S has developed a personality structure with boundaries, S absorbed information that persisted from a past life. It is possible to suggest different frameworks for these connections, which perhaps avoid the notion that chunks of information may persist in time without a personality still connected to them. However, this depersonalized notion is perhaps the best way to visualize this alternative interpretation of CORTs presented in this paper.

Fieldwork experience suggested to JK that thought pools or thought bundles may persist for some time because frequently young children provide additional information when they meet for example PP's relatives or encounter objects or locations with which PPs were associated.

It could be argued that this is also some kind of evidence for survival. However, there is no active continuation of the PP. In a way S reacts to a story that was written by PP when PP was alive, and, depending on the way S reads the story, S's reactions may differ from time to time.

This is not in disagreement with the living agent psi hypothesis. These reactions by children could also be explained by the super-psi hypothesis and ASR. Instead of paranormally accessing information from thought pools or bundles, which may have persisted for some time after the PPs had died, children may simply access past events with super-psi.

The pregnant mother or other relatives of the S may also become aware of information from a past life through a so-called announcing dream (Stevenson, 2001), which suggests that the child to be born is connected to a particular PP. S's relatives sometimes know the PP who appears in such a dream, but frequently the dream only indicates a connection to an unknown PP. If during a pregnancy the PP is known to the person who has the dream, the dream itself cannot be regarded as being paranormal, but, for example, a dream about an unknown PP could include paranormal information.

There is no doubt that for a long time different communities have more or less accepted some of the basic data as evidence for survival of bodily death (SBD) and/or reincarnation. From a scientific point of view, SBD and/or reincarnation may not be regarded as the most plausible explanations of specific cases. This discussion does not suggest that the probability for SBD is zero. It depends on individual belief systems whether this probability could have a sufficiently high value.

Physiological Connections

There is clear evidence that some Ss have birthmarks or birth defects that are similar to marks or defects of the corresponding PPs (Stevenson, 1997). In a way this could be regarded as the most tangible evidence of a paranormal connection when genetic connections can be ruled out with some confidence. However, up to about 100 years ago some medical scientists in the West regarded maternal impressions as a reasonable explanation for some birthmarks and birth defects (Drzewiecki, 1891; Kahn, 1912). It was assumed that they were caused by the mental impression that the mother experienced prior to or during pregnancy. Most of these impressions apparently occurred when a woman "saw"—usually with intense emotional involvement—marks or injuries that later reappeared as similar marks or defects when her child was born (Stevenson, 1997).

There are also examples of mothers who imagined injuries on for example a dying husband, which later corresponded to the birthmarks and defects with which her child was born. The YTK case (Keil & Tucker, 2005a) is such an example. YTK's mother clearly and with good reason assumed that PP was marked and injured in certain ways even though she never saw these injuries and even though most of these marks and injuries did not actually exist.

If the PP for a particular case was a stranger, this would seem to rule out the possibility that a maternal impression could account for a birth mark (BM) which corresponds to PP's injury. As the YTK case clearly shows, the maternal impression may be based on an internally perceived image of PP's injury and does not necessarily require an actual encounter between S's mother and PP's injury. Dreams play an important role, sometimes establishing connections between "stranger" PPs and Ss. Consequently a maternal impression may also be based on a dream about a stranger, a dream which S's mother may not necessarily remember. Since some BMs can be readily traced back to maternal impressions, this explanation should also be applied to stranger cases unless the maternal-impression hypothesis can be ruled out for other reasons.

Particularly in some regions of Myanmar as well as in Thailand it was and is sometimes customary to mark a dying person with for example charcoal, in the expectation that the rebirth Ss will be born with corresponding birthmarks—called experimental birthmarks. During the last 40 years this custom was seldom practiced, and only a small number of cases were identified. It is therefore unlikely that in recent years the corresponding marks on Ss can be dismissed as being due to chance because a large number of PPs were marked in the first place. Although the majority of the PPs were simply marked with charcoal blotches about the size of a large coin, some quite specific marks reappeared as birthmarks (The Bussakorn case; Keil, 1996). In summary, there is good evidence that maternal impressions and experimental birthmarks provide an explanation for at least some of these physiological connections between PPs and Ss, and which do not require reincarnation assumptions.

The question must also be raised why some children have birthmarks and birth defects similar to marks and injuries of the corresponding PPs, but why other Ss who apparently also have connections—based on information—do not have any physiological manifestations that connect them to the PPs. Although there is no clear answer to this question, it seems that the maternal-impression hypothesis may have a wider range of conditions—compared to reincarnation—which could explain the presence or absence of birthmarks and birth defects. Physiological manifestations on account of mental states and activities may among others depend on the intensity (Kelly, 2007) with which for example mothers experience "maternal impressions". Other variables may also be involved, for example whether the maternal impression is experienced prior

to or during pregnancy and the time interval between this experience and the birth of a S.

When investigations establish that for example relatives of the PP “accept” an S as the rebirth of the PP, the meaning that is attached to this term by those who use it may also have substantial variations depending on the particular circumstances. For example, a Turkish woman whose husband died about two years after they were married, accepts a boy in a neighboring village as the rebirth of her husband. She said she is fond of the boy and glad that her husband is reborn, and then added “but the boy is not my husband” (unpublished case in the archives of DOPS). On the other hand, particularly some parents of deceased children often accept the Ss as if their children had returned. Some of these Ss were adopted or more informally encouraged to live with the families of the PPs.

The Distribution of Cases

The question could be asked: Has everybody some connection to a previous personality beyond a genetic component although only a minority at some stage of their lives became aware of it? This question cannot be answered on an empirical basis. Only a few children are identified as rebirth cases, even in communities where cases are readily reported. From studies in countries where reincarnation is generally accepted, it is clear that for various reasons sometimes children who refer to previous lives are discouraged from making such statements. Some parents, even when they listen with interest to what their children tell them, do not reveal this to others. Consequently it is difficult to estimate the percentage of children who can be regarded as rebirth cases.

After studying many cases in Thailand, Turkey, and Burma (now called Myanmar), it seems that in some areas of Burma the highest percentage of rebirth cases are publicly acknowledged. But even under these favorable conditions, probably fewer than one in 100 children appear to be rebirth cases. Although more children can be identified in small Burmese villages compared to similar villages in Thailand and Turkey, this does not mean that the actual percentage of the cases is necessarily different. In Thailand some families fear that a rebirth case may be regarded by neighbors as a sign of primitive superstition, and in Turkey different sections of the Muslim population have opposing views about the reality of reincarnation.

In some communities—not related to particular countries—sometimes fears are expressed that children with memories of past lives do not live long. Discouraging children from speaking of previous lives is then regarded as a safeguard. For these as well as other reasons, an uncertain number of cases remain unknown beyond a small family circle. Even within one and the same family a child may be accepted by some and not by others. Some fathers in

particular may object if their children say something like “you are not my father . . .” even if the parents generally accept the idea of reincarnation.

Most children make their first statements about a previous life when they are still quite young, shortly after they have started to speak. At such an early age it is difficult to judge whether the children understand the meaning of what they are saying and whether their first statements were triggered by an external stimulation. (Sometimes the area where the previous personality died can be a stimulus that triggers such a statement from a child.)

Compared with siblings, many parents report that children with information about previous lives are more serious and mature, perhaps partly because they speak about matters that other children in the same age group do not as yet talk about. It is not always clear whether the children are really more mature or refer to “adult” matters without fully understanding the meaning of what they are saying. This view is partly supported by JK’s observations that some of these children have episodes when they refer to previous lives but also periods during which they behave like most of the other children in their age group.

Although these first indications of apparent memories of a previous life are by no means uniform, it is fair to say that at such an early age children do not tell coherent stories. Some say something like: “You are not my mother”, and when questioned about the name of the mother, sometimes a name or some other identification is provided. Although a minority of these children makes such statements with emotional intensity, most children can be discouraged from further expressions about a previous life by simply ignoring their statements or by some kind of an outright rejection: “Do not talk nonsense, I am your mother”. If there is no encouragement or acceptance, most children will not continue to refer to a previous life.

If a child provides information about a PP with some emotional involvement, this may be regarded as an indication that the child is the reincarnation of a previous personality. However, it is difficult to eliminate alternative explanations. The child’s emotional expressions may be unrelated to the PP, the child may primarily react to emotional responses by others, and also some young children in their present lives may already be aware that information about death and related matters require emotional responses. Although no tests have been conducted to establish percentage figures, the predominant absence of emotional involvement was the striking experience when CORTs were investigated in Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar.

Another question, which must also be raised, is whether the connections between Ss and their corresponding PPs are always present from birth. Alternatively, do some children create and add paranormal connections when for example for the first time they see relatives of the PPs or the places where

the PPs died? If it is assumed that somehow a child carries in his or her mind all relevant information from birth, it is difficult to suggest a physiological basis. This does not mean that such information may not be present at birth. In fact, observations have indicated that during their first encounters some Ss seem to respond in particular ways to relatives of PPs well before these Ss have learned to speak. Some birthmarks and birth defects also suggest that paranormal connections may exist from birth. If genetic dispositions are unlikely and if it can be assumed that maternal impressions could not have been involved, the question remains: Is it certain that all the paranormal information in connection with a case is present from birth, or are some aspects added later, and are there some children who do not have any paranormal connections at birth but who acquire them at a later stage?

When cases are investigated for the first time, many Ss have already talked about their previous lives. Some Ss are already adults when they are interviewed and have forgotten what they had said when they started to refer to PPs. Relatives do not always take an interest, particularly if the PPs are not yet identified. Consequently, it is difficult to judge whether some children had perhaps no information about PPs until well after they were able to speak.

Almost all children forget what they had said about a previous life by the time they are about 6 to 7 years old and occasionally by about 10 to 12 years old, and some may only talk about such matters for a few months. JK had an opportunity to revisit a number of Ss after periods of up to 15 years. Although no statistical records were established, the overriding experience in Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar was, in agreement with the figures mentioned, that most children (or adults) had no direct memories of their earlier statements about PPs or related matters. Some had no memories at all, others were to some extent aware of what had occurred on account of later discussions with family members or others. Only a very small number had some remaining direct memories, or had memories that could not be clearly identified as being due to access to information in later life. If this is kept in mind, it may not be unreasonable to conclude that in all communities a small number of children apparently have information about PPs, but only some of these children are acknowledged as possible reincarnation cases. There are reports that in Western countries without a tradition of reincarnation expectations some children also made statements (apparently referring to previous lives) which their parents ignored but later remembered when they became interested in this topic.

Although it is much more difficult to find CORTs in some communities compared with others, it remains uncertain whether there are significant differences in the occurrence of such cases.

The Distribution of Cases in Relation to the Time Interval between Death and Rebirth

There is no doubt that a higher percentage of cases is reported when Ss are identified as apparent rebirth cases within a short time interval (e.g., one or two years) after the PPs had died. Cases with much longer intervals have been found and examined. Investigations usually only start once a child is regarded as a rebirth case. If the corresponding PP died for example 12 years ago, it is obviously more difficult to collect reliable data about the PP. On the other hand, a long time interval can also reduce the risk that Ss in their present lives may have heard something about the PPs. Some impressive cases with a long interval have been published, for example the KA case (Keil & Tucker, 2005b).

In some communities, only children who are born within a short time interval after the PPs had died are accepted as rebirth cases. Such a belief creates further distortions. Even without definite time restrictions, it is likely that on account of an increasing time interval fewer children are recognized as rebirth cases. It is difficult to judge whether this decrease in numbers is due to decreasing numbers of existing cases or due to a decline in the interest and in the success with establishing connections between Ss and PPs.

The distribution of relevant data may also have a bearing on the distribution of cases. There is clear evidence that a higher proportion of cases—compared to the general population—involves PPs who died unexpectedly, for example due to accidents or prematurely for various reasons. Consequently, communities in which this happens more frequently are more likely to report a somewhat higher percentage of rebirth cases. At present it is not clear whether this can be confirmed, because it is difficult to compare communities when only small percentages are involved. It may be desirable to suggest percentage figures of PPs who died prematurely. However, there is also the problem that relatives of persons who died prematurely, often under dramatic circumstances, are much more likely to establish contacts with Ss who could be regarded as the rebirths of these PPs. In other words, these cases are more likely to come to our attention. This does not mean that the higher proportion should be regarded as an artifact, but it may be premature to indicate percentage figures.

The term *sex change* case is used when an apparent rebirth child is of the opposite sex to the corresponding PP. Such cases are reported in Thailand, Myanmar, and other countries, but are almost absent in Turkey. This raises the question of how far cases are accepted and reported and consequently how far is the distribution distorted on account of traditions and beliefs and perhaps how far do such traditions have an actual influence on the existence of cases. The virtual absence of acknowledged sex change cases in Turkey is mainly due to traditional and religious expectations according to which this kind of rebirth is not possible. Nevertheless, one such case was investigated and accepted by

the relatives involved. They said that although this does not normally happen, if God decides that such a rebirth should occur, then it does occur (unpublished case in the archives of DOPS).

In Turkey, Sunni Muslims generally and particularly in some rural areas do not accept the possibility of reincarnation. This disbelief is based on an interpretation of the Koran with which the Alevi Muslims do not agree. Several cases with Alevi Ss and Sunni PPs were reported and investigated. Some of the relatives of the Ss tried to confirm that the PPs revealed by the Ss existed, but they did not try to contact the Sunni relatives of the corresponding PPs. Further investigations (during which the relatives of the PPs became aware of the Ss) indicated that some of PP's relatives privately accept the rebirth Ss, but also tried to keep their acceptance a secret. At times investigations had to be conducted in such a way that neighbors remained unaware. Again, there is a suggestion that in groups with different expectations the number of existing cases may be similar even when virtually only one group acknowledges these cases.

Different Memories

As was indicated earlier, whenever it was possible *memory* (about a previous life) was replaced with *information* because this kind of memory may be quite different from memories about the actual lives of Ss. It is difficult to assess whether children who are interviewed when they are about 6 to 8 years old directly convey information about previous lives, remember what they had said about this when they were younger, or remember what they had heard from other persons with whom they had contacts. Nevertheless, some impressive cases strongly suggest that at the age of about 6 years or somewhat older, a substantial minority of children still seem to have direct information (memories) about previous lives.

At the age of about 6 years, many children experience their first day at school and still remember some aspects of this many years later. However, most children with information about previous lives apparently completely forget what they had said earlier by the time they are 10 to 15 years old. Some may still be able to talk about it because they are reminded by others of what they had known and said, but they no longer seem to have direct information about their previous lives. Percentage figures would be desirable, but are probably only misleading because of uncertainties with respect to the cases that should or should not be included in such an analysis.

There are exceptions. In a remote region of Turkey, JK heard of a few husbands who apparently killed their wives but were never charged because of local traditions. When a particular woman was murdered, her husband was suspected but not charged because there was insufficient evidence. The actual murderer was never apprehended. Some years later, a girl who apparently had

some paranormal information about the PP, also claimed that PP's husband killed "her". JK met this girl again when she was a young adult. She told him that she still has direct "memories" of her previous life. When JK mentioned to her that most Ss forget by the time they are 10 to 15, she said, how can I forget, I see "my husband" almost every day in the village (unpublished case in the archives of DOPS).

The question of whether the memories of previous life events and the memories of early childhood events disappear at a similar rate cannot be answered with confidence because no systematic tests were conducted. Nevertheless, children who apparently completely forgot what they had said about previous life events often seemed to be able to speak about early childhood events which apparently occurred at a time when they had still referred to previous life events.

A further matter that requires some attention is the question: Are there PPs with more than one corresponding S? It is not uncommon in field research to hear that a particular child could be the rebirth of a particular PP, and to find later that another child is regarded as the real S. Usually this happens at an early stage of the investigation and no further time is spent to check whether perhaps an additional child could also have paranormal information and connections to the same PP. To some extent this is due to the implied assumption that there should be only one S in connection with a particular PP, an assumption that is only justified if alternatives to the "simple" reincarnation hypothesis suggested here can be rejected. From an anthropological point of view, Antonia Mills (2001) refers to one case of multiple "come backs" or rebirths of an elder among the Gitksan, a native group in British Columbia, Canada. Mills found that 12 children were locally regarded as the rebirths of this elder. In one of the 12 cases, the mother of the "come backs" felt her daughter had been misdiagnosed or mis-recognized. Mills reports that the identification processes were based on traditional expectations that closely match the criteria identified by Stevenson for noting cases. However, there is a possibility that genetic and environmental factors, as well as perhaps unconsciously biased observations, may have influenced some of the rebirth attributions. Nevertheless, Mills' case study clearly shows that in a community without multiple "come back" expectations, cases of this type can occur but are rarely reported. This case was attributed to the unusual wish of the elder to come back multiple simultaneous times.

In 2006, JK became aware of a case in Turkey. Two Ss provided fairly detailed information about the same PP, and at some stage the relatives of PP apparently accepted both Ss. In 2007, JK was able to return to this case and found that although PP's relatives now apparently only accept one of the two Ss as the rebirth of PP, both Ss had provided information that seems to con-

nect them to the same PP. The acceptance at present of only one S by PP's relatives seems to be based on an early visit by this S who lives much closer to PP's home than the other. If it can be generally confirmed that some PPs have connections to two or more Ss, this would support the suggestions that relatively disconnected "free floating information" from a PP may persist in time and may be absorbed by more than one S. However, some more complex reincarnation hypotheses in connection with particular belief systems may accept multiple simultaneous or overlapping reincarnations of one PP.

In connection with other case studies in Turkey during May 2007, JK was reminded of another minority that seems to agree with the assumption that Ss absorb information from some kind of "thought pools"—as mentioned earlier—which persist in time after PPs have died. For a 2007 case in Turkey (the D. D. case near Antakya, unpublished case in the archives of DOPS), there was substantial evidence that the S was born 15 to 18 days before the PP had died. That is the transfer of information did not take place from the death of PP to the birth of S. JK had encountered something like 30 to 50 cases of this type before. If there was only a discrepancy of a few days, it was usually assumed that the death date of the PP was incorrectly recorded in the first place. It is not unreasonable to assume that for a few cases the official death date is misleading because PP's mental existence had stopped—perhaps kept "alive" artificially—before the body finally died. Particularly in rural districts in Turkey, births are often registered when it is convenient to go to the appropriate office. The actual birth date is not regarded as particularly important—often birthdays are not traditionally celebrated, and so further discrepancies may occur.

Nevertheless, it seems very likely that a substantial percentage, but probably only a minority, of these Ss with a birth/death discrepancy were really born before the corresponding PPs had died. Additional similar cases presumably exist but are not recognized—and do not come to our attention—because of local expectations that Ss must be born after the PPs have died. These cases do not agree with the simple reincarnation assumption that some kind of soul or essence from the PP enters the unborn S when PP dies, but support the assumption that perhaps for weeks after a S was born, he or she may absorb something from PP's "thought pool" which persists for some time after PP had died. That means a living agent psi involvement perhaps in agreement with the super-psi or ASR theories accounts for the paranormal connections.

Some particular Ss seem to be connected to the corresponding PP's because of family relationships. Some connections between Ss and the corresponding PPs with respect to stranger cases seem to be based on visits to or contacts with the same events and or localities, but there are other cases that at present cannot be included under a particular category.

Perspective

After this brief review, it may be appropriate to summarize the discussion in terms that were initially suggested.

- 1) What are the basic data that can be regarded as being well-established? (Although it must be acknowledged that the majority of PPs may be related to the corresponding Ss, the following statements refer to findings after normal communications and genetic connections were regarded as highly unlikely.)
 - a) Ss with information about previous lives are not limited to particular communities, but the recognition of these cases depends on traditions and beliefs which differ substantially.
 - b) Most Ss provide relevant information from an early age, usually shortly after they have started to speak.
 - c) It is uncertain whether evidence for a rebirth case can be claimed from the time of birth, except when birthmarks suggest paranormal connections. (It is then assumed the marks are not due to genetic dispositions or maternal impressions.)
 - d) There are some relatively subjective observations that some Ss reveal connections to PPs from the time they are born, but this cannot be easily confirmed even for a small number of cases. It must also be acknowledged that relatives who claim paranormal connections from the time of birth expect these Ss to be rebirth cases.
 - e) A substantial number of sex change cases occur in Thailand and Burma, but with rare exceptions cannot be found in Turkey where traditional and religious beliefs deny the possibility of such cases. Cultural and traditional expectations in various countries have a strong bearing on the different percentage of children who are regarded as rebirth cases. However, at present it is not possible to estimate whether these expectations are sufficient to account for these differences.
 - f) Children who are regarded as rebirth cases compared with other children in the same age group are locally often regarded as being more mature and serious.
 - g) Persons who die prematurely and/or unexpectedly are more often connected to Ss compared with persons who die naturally at advanced age.
 - h) Birthmarks and defects of some Ss appear to be connected to similar marks and defects of the corresponding PPs, but only a minority of Ss are born with these physiological manifestations.
 - i) Inconsistencies with respect to the absence or presence of marks and

defects can be more readily appreciated if the maternal-impression hypothesis is thought to be involved.

- j) One case was investigated with two Ss who provided fairly detailed information about the same PP. Antonia Mills (Mills, 2001) also referred to a case with multiple Ss in Canada. There were also indications that more cases of this kind exist, but—with the above exception—to date no investigations about possible second or multiple Ss were carried out.
 - k) A small substantial number of cases have been investigated with Ss who apparently were born before the corresponding PPs had died. Compared with the reincarnation hypothesis suggested in this paper, these cases are in better agreement with the assumption that after an S has been born, he or she may absorb information from a “thought pool” which persists for some time after a PP had died.
 - l) Evidence for experimental birthmarks was confirmed. For most Ss with such marks, the maternal-impression hypothesis is the most appropriate assumption.
 - m) Most Ss forget information about their previous lives by the time they are 6 to 7 years old and occasionally 10 to 12 years old or earlier.
 - n) The process of forgetting information about previous lives appears to be different from forgetting other information about events experienced in early childhood. This is a somewhat subjective statement, which requires a more systematic assessment in the future.
- 2) Reincarnation as the interpretation of the above statements is accepted by many communities, but evidence is probably limited to a relatively small number of cases. ESP or some other expression suggesting a psychic information transfer may be a more appropriate term. The relatively high number of CORTs (which as suggested may also be called ESP cases) compared to the general evidence for ESP may be due to psychic information transfers or super-psi, which perhaps occur more readily when Ss are quite young and not as yet encapsulated in their own awareness and identity.
 - 3) Psychic information transfers provide a better framework for the basic data than reincarnation. If ESP or a paranormal information transfer can occasionally occur between living persons and if such a transfer can occur over various distances and time intervals, the term psychic information transfer as an explanation for CORTs, in contrast to reincarnation, requires no further assumptions.
 - 4) Perhaps it is more accurate to call the essential core of CORTs “pre-personality psychic absorption of information from a past life” and to restrict the term *reincarnation* to those cases that agree with a detailed definition of reincarnation.

- 5) Reincarnation requires the assumption of the continuation of some aspect of the PP, which becomes associated with a new fetus. It is difficult and perhaps impossible to suggest criteria that would clearly identify an S as a reincarnation.

Without suggesting that answers to the various questions can be readily provided, the following considerations may suggest a possible framework within which these questions may be pursued. An alternative to the survival of bodily death as an explanation for these CORTs is the suggestion that during the last phase of life some “thought bundles” may be emitted and may emerge beyond the boundaries of the dying person. These “thought bundles” may then independently persist for periods of time and may occasionally be absorbed by a very young child who is not as yet encapsulated within his or her own personality.

These free-floating “thought bundles” are more often concerned with practical matters that featured in the life of the dying person and do not usually reflect any significant personality characteristics. The information may be quite trivial and relatively incoherent. Persons who die unexpectedly are more likely to emit such “thought bundles” and perhaps produce more energetic and long-lasting versions. These “thought bundles” may get attached to particular objects and situations, which in turn may facilitate access even after a long time interval.

Fieldwork experience suggests that Ss access information which has persisted for some time, but with super-psi or ASR Ss may also have been able to access information from the past.

The assumption that survival of bodily death is not a necessary conclusion if the basic data are accepted, is based on the following argument: Paranormal communications between living persons and the direct acquisition of such information by some living persons can account for the basic data under consideration. These paranormal communications provide a simpler and scientifically more appropriate framework, requiring less complicated assumptions than the survival hypothesis. In other words, for the cases discussed here, most likely the survival hypothesis is unnecessary.

In a similar way, the maternal-impression hypothesis requires less complicated assumptions, because it can be accepted that physiological changes occur on account of mental states (for a recent overview of relevant empirical data, see Kelly, 2007). In other words, maternal impressions—although not well understood—are in good agreement with physiological changes.

Experimental BM cases also support the assumption that maternal mental states are the primary cause for these marks. Some children were born with marks or injuries of the corresponding PPs even though the mothers of these

children apparently had never seen or known the PPs. The KTY case (Keil & Tucker, 2005a) clearly indicates that a mother's mental image rather than the actual perception of a PP's injuries is sufficient to cause S's BMs.

There are some "stranger" cases with mothers who apparently have no recollections that they ever imagined what happened to the PPs but whose children had BMs which were later found to be in good agreement with marks on the PPs. If it is kept in mind though that dreams play an important role, it seems reasonable to assume that these cases can also be included in the maternal-impression category even though the mothers have no recollections of the dreams which presumably were responsible for the mental states that caused the BMs.

Some birth/death discrepancies, when Ss are born before the corresponding PPs have died, also agree with the assumption that paranormal information can still be absorbed—perhaps for some weeks—after the S has been born.

The assumption that dreams—which the mothers no longer remember—could be responsible for BMs may appear to be somewhat unlikely. However, there are probably time intervals of several weeks between such dreams and the birth of children with BMs that may have developed on account of maternal impressions experienced during these dreams. Such dreams may easily be forgotten when pregnant women have to cope with many issues prior to the birth of their children. However, more important is the assessment that the expectation of BMs as signs of survival is even more unlikely.

The question remains whether based on case studies the term *survival of consciousness* is justified. The term *thought pool* instead of "thought bundle" in association with a PP perhaps conveys more clearly a suggestion that what a very young child (and occasionally a pregnant woman in her dream or a medium) can access is not just a fixed printout, but a pool or container with information, which can respond in a variety of ways depending on the way the child or adult had a connection with this thought pool. (Some computing procedures could probably simulate this process.)

In one way this connection seems to justify the term "survival" of consciousness, but this connection probably occurs without the ability to generate new thoughts, which are based on an awareness and interaction with the real world. Such limitations indicate that the term *survival* is not justified. Perhaps the persistence of thought bundles or thought pools in association with a PP is all that can be suggested.

The different interpretations of CORTs presented here as suggestions are not the only possible ones. In traditional scientific developments, usually one answer is finally regarded as the correct one. However, the German expression *sowohl als auch*, i.e. "one answer as well as others" is more appropriate when complex living systems are examined, and instead of always attempting to replace one interpretation with another it may be more realistic to accept

multiple explanations. Nevertheless, the author hopes that this different interpretation of CRTs will encourage new research approaches.

The majority of cases in Turkey, Thailand, and Myanmar involve Ss and PPs who are related or had known of each other. This does not explain why a particular S seems to be connected to a particular PP, but these connections more or less occur in agreement with what can be expected under the circumstances. It is more difficult to suggest how for example a particular S could have a connection with an unknown and unrelated PP who lived in a different city more than a decade ago. The suggestion that “thought bundles” from a dying person may persist in time and may get attached to objects, localities, people, or situations is perhaps an indication of how such an unexpected connection could have occurred.

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