

BOOK REVIEW

Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory by James G. Matlock. Rowman & Littlefield, 2019. 408 pp. \$39 (paper-back). ISBN 978-1538124796.

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Vienna

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At 1606:22, Clipper 759 informed the tower that it was ready for takeoff. At 1606:24, the local controller cleared the flight for takeoff, and at 1606:30, the first officer acknowledged the clearance. The acknowledgment was the last radio transmission received from Clipper 759.

On July 8, 1982, Pan American World Airways Flight 759 (Clipper 759), a Boeing 727-235, N4737, was a regularly scheduled passenger flight from Miami, Florida, to Las Vegas, Nevada, with an en route stop at New Orleans, Louisiana. About 1607:57 central daylight time, Clipper 759, with 7 crewmembers, 1 nonrevenue passenger on the cockpit jumpseat, and 137 passengers on board, began its takeoff from runway 10 at the New Orleans International Airport, Kenner, Louisiana.

At the time of Flight 759's takeoff, there were showers over the east end of the airport and to the east end of the airport along the airplane's intended takeoff path. The winds at the time were gusty, variable, and swirling. Clipper 759 lifted off the runway, climbed to an altitude of between 95 feet to about 150 feet above the ground, and then began to descend. At 1608:57, the Ground Proximity Warning System (GPWS) activated and "Whoop whoop pull up whoop. . . ." was recorded. The airplane struck a line of trees about 2,376 feet beyond the departure end of runway 10 at an altitude of about 50 feet above the ground. The airplane continued on an eastward track for another 2,234 feet, hitting

trees and houses, and then crashed into a residential area about 4,100 feet from the end of the runway.

The airplane was destroyed during the impact, explosion, and subsequent ground fire. One hundred forty-five persons on board the airplane and eight persons on the ground were killed in the crash. Six houses were destroyed; five houses were damaged substantially.^{1,2} Moreover, nine people on the ground suffered severe injuries.

The aircraft hit the ground with a considerable left bank angle, firstly hitting an oak tree with the left wing, cutting the power and the telephone lines mounted on poles, then destroying the houses of the Schultz family, the neighboring house, and a few others, and eventually cartwheeled and broke into pieces. Kerosene spilled from the ruptured tanks and ignited although there was a thunderstorm with heavy rain; three members of the Schultz family staying in their house were badly burned, one of them died in hospital. Among those killed on the ground—actually the first victim along the swathe of destruction caused by the crashing/impacting aircraft—was Jennifer Schultz, then eleven years of age, who was in the carport (perhaps sitting on a swing there as she used to do) when disaster struck.

On March 11, 2008, in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, a girl, Rylann, was born to the O'Bannion family. Rylann appeared to be developing earlier than usual, but she showed some curious habits, e.g., for some time she kept sleepwalking. She started complaining that her hair touching her back hurt her back; she drew dramatic fits about putting on shirts. The clothing, she would complain, hurt her back, neck, and shoulders—it felt like her skin was burning.

Referring to a photograph she mentioned time and again, she said she had been “bigger” than on that picture, a statement that didn't make sense to her mother at that point in time. Eventually, at the age of three years and five months, again touching the topic of having been “bigger” before, she said: “Mommy, I died. I was in our backyard. It was raining. I was alone but I wasn't scared. Then the rain shocked me. It was raining a lot. There was a loud noise, then the rain shocked me. I floated up to the sky then.”

As the O'Bannion family subscribed to the Catholic faith, reincarnation was not a subject to consider. Over time, Rylann added new bits of memory; at the age of five she started talking about what

happened to her “in heaven” after her death (meeting God and Jesus, and ‘Grandy Sally’ whom she had never met in reality), and that “you can choose to come back if you died before you were supposed to.” Once, out of the blue, she said “I remember the name of Jennifer.”

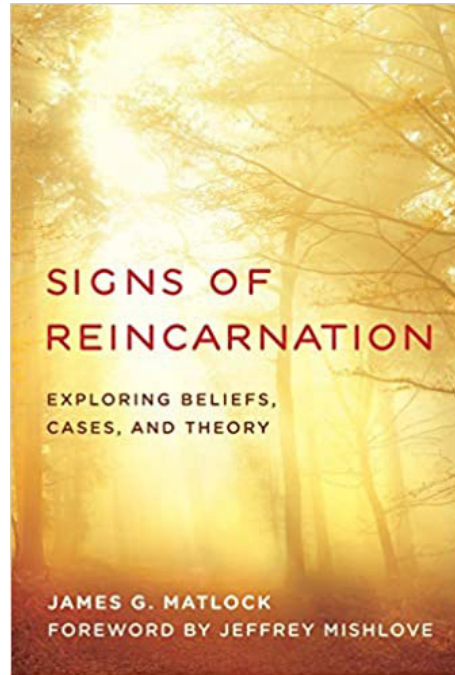
In 2013, Lifetime television aired a series *Ghost Inside My Child*. Rylann’s mother resolved to watch this program together with Rylann and her brother, hoping that seeing other children claiming to recall previous lives would help Rylann with respect to pieces of her own memory, perhaps eliciting more. Rylann disliked that TV program as she felt it was creepy and overly dramatic; on the title of the series she commented, “It’s not a ghost inside of you. It’s you, just different.”

The case evolved further when, in March 2014, she recalled a dream, “I was standing there in the yard and saw a plane crash.” (While most fragments of memory came back in the waking state, some appeared in dreams, too.) Rylann’s mother started a web search for plane crashes; there were numerous pages on Pan Am 759 crashing in Kenner, Louisiana, as this has been the flight accident with the then highest amount of compensation paid to various families affected by a crash.

Rylann’s case appeared in a later episode of the *Ghost Inside My Child* series; the TV crew had taken her and her mother to the village of Kenner where Rylann showed some peculiar behavior such as finding the way to the toilet in a house she had never been in before in her life, opposite the former Schultz’ house, etc. Unfortunately, the Rylann episode was heavily edited. Through the *Signs of Reincarnation* Facebook Group established by James Matlock in 2014, Rylann’s mother came in contact with the author who started proper investigations (including interviewing witnesses in Kenner, procuring Jennifer’s autopsy report, etc.).

At the end, there were thirty-two statements by Rylann referring to Jennifer and the plane crash; Matlock rates twenty-five of those “correct, substantially correct, or plausible,” while eight are “incorrect or implausible, but of these only four are demonstrably false or highly unlikely.” The latter refers to Jennifer’s first (later corrected) statement she had died in the yard of their present house (probably a conflation with other impressions), the color of the family car, the number of dresses Jennifer owned, etc.; the false statements were made only once, never

repeated. Whether Jennifer was killed by a strong electric pulse (somehow by the broken telephone cables hanging close to the ground, by lightning during that thunderstorm, or by static discharge of the plane in proximity to the ground) or killed by the fire is discussed; the autopsy report states that the trachea contained no soot (indicating that the *exitus* occurred prior to the fire reaching the body, i.e. electrocution being a possibility); however, the corpse had been badly charred and hence no definite answer on the girl's cause of death can be given.



This case, a recent one and meticulously investigated by Matlock, fills the major portion of the opening chapter of James G. Matlock's book *Signs of Reincarnation*, a book that developed from courses the author taught on reincarnation research and theory. This representative case study is followed by deliberations on "What Is Reincarnation?" and "Challenge to Materialism," the latter drawing heavily on ideological quotations by various thinkers, not all of them well-digested, while the former reflects on the idea of reincarnation in various societies, various religious systems, and during various periods in time; interwoven with that are considerations on the terminology to be used. While for most authors the word *reincarnation* indicates the top domain, Matlock prefers *rebirth* instead; where Stevenson talks of the *former personality*, Matlock prefers the *former person*, etc. Some of these terminological suggestions are not convincing; rather they might be confusing, particularly for newcomers to the field for whom after all this book is intended.

The next chapter, *The Belief in Reincarnation*, is broken down into

three sections: *Signs, Beliefs, and Customs in Animistic Cultures; A Brief History of the Belief in Rebirth, West and East; and Karma, God, and the Individual in Rebirth Theory*. The anthropological and historical aspects, though mostly well-known, are nicely compiled and underpinned by an abundance of references, yet the sequence in which they are covered is not clear, neither chronological nor regional, nor ordered by the importance of belief in reincarnation in the respective society. Unwarrantedly, much space is devoted to (Adyar-) Theosophy; while Blavatsky's enormous impact on modern occultism cannot be denied, it needs to be acknowledged that what she amalgamated into her teachings is based on older occult literature (which she plagiarized or at least quoted without stating any references) or stems from pure fantasy as there is no evidence for the real existence of the *Masters* she refers to; moreover, there is no evidence she ever entered Tibet as she claimed, thus—for the sake of argumentation—Theosophical teachings are worthless. As may be expected, classical Greek philosophers and their teachings are touched upon, as well as Neoplatonism; and so are Gnostic and early Christian doctrines as well as Judaism; Islamic sects (or peoples in their self-conception) are mentioned very briefly. The Hindu and the Buddhist persuasions are discussed as well as the pivotal notion of *Karma*. Different solutions to the *selection problem* (how souls choose their future parents) are discussed, including the teachings of Allan Kardec. Altogether, the wording *rebirth theory* as used by Matlock seems a bit high-pitched: There are several opinions, irreconcilable with one another, and not backed by any empirical evidence.

Talking about *Research Methods and Interpretative Frames*, Matlock stays with the format of three sections per chapter (and for the remainder of his book). The first section bears the heading *Accounts of Past-Life Memory Recorded before 1960*. Again we are brought into Greek antiquity (Pythagoras, Apollonius of Tyana), then the findings of a Dutch sinologist makes us jump to China in the 3rd century A.C., later we visit cases in Japan, Burma, and India. The first significant European case, that of Alessandrina Samonà of Palermo, Italy, was published by Charles Lancelin in 1922. Edgar Cayce and “Bridey Murphy” are mentioned in passing; concluding this period, Ian Stevenson published his epoch-making paper in 1960: *The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations* (in the *Journal of the American Society*

for *Psychical Research*, in two parts). The next section of this chapter deals with *Ian Stevenson's Field Research and Its Critics*. The problem was the one of coming in to the case too late: Usually the *previous person* had been identified and the child had met the *previous family* before Stevenson learned about the case, thus he could only establish what had already transpired. He interviewed as many firsthand witnesses as possible on "both sides" of the case, allowing them in the first stage to recall without being prompted, then going down a checklist of frequently occurring features; later he re-interviewed the interviewees over a period of time to check for consistency. His methodology reached far beyond that and was steadily improved; he used to cooperate with locals, not only for translation purposes but also for insight in customs and beliefs, etc. In 1961 he started his investigations in India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), later travelling to Lebanon, Brazil, and Alaska. These field studies were funded by the multimillionaire Chester Carlson (Xerox Corporation), famous for his more-than-generous financial support of the ASPR and their then Research Director Karlis Osis. Stevenson later extended his investigations to some European countries, Burma, Thailand, Turkey, and Nigeria. As Stevenson dominated the CORT (Cases of the Reincarnation Type) research for a few decades, all this is supposed to be already familiar to the reader.

Nonetheless, Stevenson's research work met with criticism by skeptics, mostly arguing that the patterns Stevenson found were mere coincidences; in particular, they criticized Stevenson's "backwards reasoning" from birthmarks to fatal wounds. Matlock quotes skeptical voices at length, providing many references within the critical literature.

Discussing *Interpretative Frames for Reincarnation Cases*, Matlock gets closer to the core of the reincarnation issue; however, in order to do so he again goes back to philosophers from classical antiquity already covered in previous chapters, and to the Vedanta, and to Theosophy, probing what they teach about the nature of the soul. From there, he jumps to cases of self-identification where a person is convinced they have been reborn after a former life . . . (usually as a person of historical importance). These cases are not rare. (I personally know two ladies living in Vienna, one of them of Danish nationality, who both claim to have been Marie Antoinette, the infelicitous wife of Louis XVI and who was beheaded during the French Revolution; each of them keeps telling

me that she is *the real Marie Antoinette* and the other one is an imposter.) Matlock moves on to narrate a few cases where social constructions involved led to wrong conclusions and misinterpretations. More important, in my view, is discussing reincarnation vs. *super-psi* (the extrapolation of psi beyond the empirical data) aka *living agent psi* or even *robust living agent psi*. Matlock enumerates the respective opinions of quite a number of researchers in the field; however, each one only rather briefly without going into details that would be desirable. Genetic memory, spirit possession, the psyche at death fragmenting into pieces, personal or local connections, psychometry, “thought bundles” . . . there are many ideas but no sound theory. Although these ideas are very speculative and not backed empirically it would be interesting to look into these more deeply. (It might be noted that the psychoanalyst/parapsychologist Alfred, Baron Winterstein used the notion of “surviving fragments” of the [composite] soul to explain hauntings.)

In the chapter *Child Studies*, Matlock supplies several examples of how everyday occurrences might trigger memories of a past life, particularly the first memory. One case, for instance, is of a three-year-old girl, riding with her father (the author himself) in their family car. They stop at a traffic light, with a motorcycle next to them, prompting the little girl to start a conversation with her father, “Daddy, do you like to ride on motos?” (Moto, in Spanish, is short for motorcycle.) To which the father replied, “no, I don’t, they scare me,” upon which the girl said, earnestly, “you have to hold on real tight.” Surprised, the father asked, “honey, when did you ride on a motorcycle? Was it in Lima?” “No,” was her answer, “it was a long time ago. Before I came to you and Mommy.”

From recalling bits and pieces relating to the “previous life,” and further from discussing various types of memory, the author arrives at the crucial question of how and where the memories are being stored. At first glance, the question as such appears to be a problematic one as the interrogative pronoun “where” demands an answer in relation to space, yet the memory is not an object with any spatial extension. Matlock shifts this problem as he pronounces memory as “registered in the subconscious part of the mind,” yet not “exactly like bits on a computer hard drive.” He thinks of memories “as imperfectly mirrored representations that are susceptible to psychological processes during

their registration, storage, and retrieval in and from the subconscious.” This, so he argues, is corroborated by NDEs (near-death experiences), during which memories are formed then and retrieved later, after recovery, or mediumistic communications that often imply memory formation, storage, and retrieval in a discarnate state. While I readily admit that it makes sense to arrange these phenomena tentatively together and to examine them jointly, there are a few caveats. In the first place, one needs to be cautious not to explain one unknown phenomenon by another one. Secondly, as far as NDEs are concerned, Matlock’s assertion that “the brain is shut down or effectively off-line” is questionable (critical sources, such as Gerard M. Woerlee on the famous Pam Reynolds case, are not referenced). Moreover, the “discarnate state” Matlock mentions in the context of mediumistic communications is kind of an interpretation, not an established fact. Indeed, we do not have any evidence of the very existence of discarnate minds. Thus, Matlock’s conception of memory is therefore question-begging.

In the following chapter, *Behavioral Identification with the Previous Person*, Matlock re-narrates a number of cases, drawn from several sources. For the reader, it is one of the merits of this book—maybe *the* merit—to encounter a wealth of case studies scattered all over the ever-growing number of publications on the topic of reincarnation.

Birthmarks and Other Physical Signs are what I would rate as perhaps the most interesting aspects of the entire “reincarnation syndrome.” What Matlock presents to the reader in this section are rebuttals to critics, case reports with partly detailed descriptions, some statistics on the frequency of occurrence, experimental birthmarks, and various beliefs in tribal societies associated with birthmarks or birth defects. While one may think of birthmarks mimicking fatal wounds received in the previous life, the span of these phenomena is much wider, e.g., Hindu boys who recall previous lives as Muslim men who may be born without foreskins. Last not least, Matlock touches on the conceptional aspects of birthmarks, criticizing Stevenson’s notion of the *psychophore* (thought as a carrier conveying memories, behavior, and form from one life to another).

The most interesting topic presented in the chapter *Child Studies: Secondary Signs of Reincarnation* refers to intermission memories, i.e.

memories of the period after the death of the previous person and before the present incarnation. Basically, they can mainly be broken down into two groups, one belonging to an extramundane place (be it “heaven,” be it an equivalent in a different tradition), the other one referring to the earthly plane during choosing the parents-to-be. Encounters with Jesus or angels, or other religious figures depending on religious belief, welcoming or guiding the deceased, are reported, as well as encounters with deceased relatives. These intermission memories resemble the “heavenly” or transcendental stage of NDE reports, displaying a cross-culturally common structure, whereas the details vary from region to region, from one religious persuasion to the other, and, finally, from person to person.

One detail calls for being highlighted: Some children ascribe their ability of recalling elements from their previous lives to the fact that they didn’t accept food or beverages offered to them during the intermission period. Matlock points to the fact that this corresponds to drinking water from the river *Lethe* (and thereby inducing forgetfulness, in contrast to those who drink water from the river *Mnemosyne* inducing omniscience). One might ask the questions whether this element of ancient Greek mythology is based on experiences of children talking about previous lives, or, conversely, these reports Matlock refers to are induced by (at least fragmentary) knowledge of the mythology of the Greek underworld. However, not all children talking about their experiences during the intermission point at the correlation of non-accepting food and the ability to retrieve memories.

As far as the selection problem (choosing parents for the next incarnation) is concerned, there is, again, based on what those children report, apparently a wide variety of possibilities, e.g., spirits assisting in some cases, etc. Obviously, cases where the intermission period is less than nine months raise general suspicion. Postnatal replacement reincarnation cases complicate the issue even further; Matlock distinguishes them from *walk-in cases* akin to possession.

For some *Universal, Near-Universal, and Culture-Linked Patterns*, Matlock provides some statistical data including a few tables that facilitate the overview of several countries regarding issues like the medium intermission length; percentage of family, acquaintance, and stranger cases; and percentage of sex change cases.

The chapter is closed by discussing *The Psychological Impacts of Past-Life Memory*, i.e. the socio-dynamic effect on the affected families and the environment, quoting at length studies by the late Erlendur Haraldsson and other investigators.

The first lines of the second-to-last chapter, *Past-Life Recall in Adulthood and Third-Party Reports*, state that reincarnation cases of adults are weaker than those of children and are so in various aspects. Adults seldom report unstimulated or uncued memories in the waking state.

(May I add my own experience, dating back some 35 years, during military service. There was one fellow officer of the same rank whom I always had a somewhat strained relationship with. Once I asked him what he thought was the reason we do not get that well along with one another relative to all the others. His explanation was that we had met in a previous life, during WWI, both being Air Force officers, but on opposite sides—he German, I British—and that he had sent me down to the ground during aerial combat. This could have been pure fantasy were it not for the fact I have a liking for flying which he could not have been aware of by normal means (leaving aside ESP). Indeed, I am fond of flying aerobatics still today; I love doing loops and rolls and spins and all the other figures, akin to the dogfights of WWI. Questioned about the basis for this assertion, he replied he simply knew it, neither did that knowledge come as the recollection of a particular scene nor in the form of a dream, it was simply a type of pure, not-concrete, not-vivid awareness that is not furtherly retraceable, and he felt certain about it.

There is a difference between psychological validity and factual validity, Matlock emphasizes (that also would apply to my narration just above), past-life memories may have good psychological validity but lack factual validity. While in agreement with the author on this, I think Matlock does not pursue to a desirable degree what a person's needs or gains are by remembering (or inventing) a previous life.

Several cases are open to interpretations of different kinds, e.g., reincarnation or multiple personalities/dissociation; while Matlock had touched on this issue in a previous chapter, he here goes more into the details of competing approaches in one particular case (Sharada). Based on the fact that the two personalities eventually merged (as has

been possible in such extraordinary cases as Sally Beauchamp), there is not much space for interpreting the case as a CORT.

Fantasy and Fact in Past-Life Regression under Hypnosis. Much has been published on the famous Bridey Murphy case that Matlock analyses in this section, arriving at the conclusion that Bridey Murphy never existed, which is reasonable. He reviews the activities of psychotherapists/hypnotherapists and the problem of them possibly planting their own prejudices onto their subjects. What he does not mention is the fact that psychotherapists—different from investigators—earn their living by applying their methods and have a vested interest in spectacular cases. In addition to hypnosis, G. M. Glaskin's *Christos Technique* to induce ASCs (altered states of consciousness) has been used for experimental regression into previous lives; that could have been mentioned in this context. While this method is very easy to apply, the questionableness of the veridicality of the retrieved memories (or fantasy productions) is the same as with hypnosis.

Altogether, Matlock maintains—and rightly so—that spontaneous cases have more to offer than hypnotic regression.

The same is true—*mutatis mutandis*—for *past life readings*, etc., as outlined in the last section of this next-to-last chapter we have been talking about (Chapter 6), *The Contribution of Shamans, Psychics, and Mediums*. Albeit belonging to a different category, Semkiw's approach that has become rather popular lately is briefly reviewed.

After all this tour d'horizon, Matlock opens his final chapter, *The Process of Reincarnation*, with this paragraph:

Reincarnation cases do not stand alone in suggesting that the mind has an existence apart from the body. I begin this last chapter with an examination of other evidence of mind/body interaction and postmortem survival, then return to and refine my theory of the reincarnation process. In the final section, I summarize my "processual soul" theory, constructed from the case data, and compare it to the rebirth concepts promoted by animism, the world religions, Theosophy and New Age metaphysics.

In the first section Matlock compiles and summarizes all the (well-known) indicators for the mind working independently of the (e.g., impaired) body, sometimes relying on already existing synopses

without going to the original sources. Matlock names this section *Beyond Materialism* and indeed all that is assembled here cannot be explained by a purely materialist–mechanic interpretation. The weakness, however, is that from this criticism of materialism no vision is emerging at all of what kind of different approach could address the mind–body problem in a more appropriate way. Matlock sympathizes with Stapp’s dualist interactionism, based on the probabilistic nature of quantum interactions, yet the problem (that Matlock seems to ignore) is the same as with the Popper–Eccles and any other kind of interactionism: How can two totally different elements, the material body and the non-material mind, interact upon one another?

Personal Identity and Postmortem Survival: In this section Matlock embarks on an examination of the philosophical debates about personal identity, personal survival, and the nature of postmortem states of consciousness and how reincarnation fits into these.

Matlock commences by quoting Atmanspacher, Stapp, and Chalmers. One would expect that he discusses dual-aspect monism (Atmansbacher/Fach is listed as a reference), yet this is not the case— not surprisingly as dual-aspect monism is hardly compatible with discarnate souls floating around somewhere on an extramundane plane and refusing to taste the fruits of forgetfulness. Likewise, Chalmers and his *hard problem*: Just naming it doesn’t replace a proper philosophical debate; this is name-dropping rather than argumentation. Matlock returns to the notion of the unconscious, quoting Myers and Freud, and in a different context C. G. Jung, leaving all others aside. While Ellenberger’s monumental work is listed within the references, no mention is made of Dessoir’s *Double Ego* covered in Ellenberger, let alone other (earlier) similar concepts from H. B. Schindler (*Day and Night Pole of the Soul*), etc. Myers, Matlock writes, thought of subliminal and supraliminal levels of mind. Fine. Freud’s *unconscious*, again following Matlock, is “the repository of forgotten memories and repressed conflicts.” This representation by Matlock fails to take notice of the fact that Freud later replaced this layer or strata model by the one of different instances, the Id, the Ego, and the Superego. (Other psychoanalysts, e.g., H. J. Urban, followed with accepting the notion of a superego.) Now to C. G. Jung: Matlock portrays his *unconscious* as just like Freud’s, just with the addition of the collective unconscious. That

doesn't do justice to Jung. For Jung, the unconscious is the potentially expanding part of the mind, where creativity is located.

Matlock states that an individual's subconscious may be expected to maintain its memories and personality intact throughout the period we call death. Apart from the toggling between *unconscious* and *subconscious*, this statement just reflects Matlock's personal belief but is in no way compelling.

Next, Matlock asks, "What criteria do we use to identify a surviving individual with a deceased person?" and adds that philosophers are divided over whether memory or physical features are more important in recognizing someone we know. In my opinion, this discussion doesn't hit the mark. Back in 1976, in a book chapter (unfortunately only in German), I used the overarching notion of *information*. The memory of a certain event may be seen as a story which in turn may be seen as a certain amount of information, and the same holds for the physical appearance which can be described in some detail. The forty-five years that has elapsed since the publication of that book has brought the computer into every household. Hence, in today's wording I might rephrase what I wrote above: The memory of a certain event may translate into so-and-so many bits and bytes, and so does the physical appearance. A photo of someone taken by my smartphone may be displayed on my computer screen, may be sent by e-mail, may be burned on a CD or a DVD; however, in any case it is a certain amount of information. If we leave aside the concrete details (whether memory or physical appearance) and limit ourselves to viewing the problem of recognition, the recognition issue boils down to comparing two sets of information, one originating from a purported deceased person and retrieved by the assistance of a medium (or uttered by a child claiming past-life memories), and the other one available on the terrestrial plane—contained in the memories of surviving persons, in photo albums, in libraries, and in archives. Given that they match to a certain degree, the recognition (and further the identification) is successful, otherwise it fails.

If successful, the next problem arises: What is the source of the information purportedly coming from the deceased, is it really from the beyond or are there alternative explanations? Surely there are: psi—or even *super-psi*. As we don't know the limits of psi, it makes sense to

tentatively extrapolate it beyond what has hitherto been experienced. In this view, super-psi could be the source of that information that claims to stem from beyond the grave. I am afraid I cannot see any possibility to distinguish between the two—similar to the problem of which came first: the chicken or the egg?

Henceforth, I rate the problem of purported otherworldly communications as proof of afterlife as irresolvable on logical grounds. Occam's razor would suggest staying with living-agent psi as there is no independent evidence for a non-physical entity (soul) existing without being linked to a physical body, thus this would be a new *ens*, while *entia non sunt numeranda praeter necessitate* [entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity]. Ultimately, the only (practical) judge for this discrimination might be the degree of complexity, but this again is a very subjective measure, falling into the category of personal belief rather than scientific reasoning.

Back to Matlock: He speculates as to what degree a personality is fixed postmortem or able to change (to develop). The considerations he engages in are not convincing, neither this way nor that.

The next problem he tackles is the existence or otherwise of a quasi-material *subtle body* to which the mind is attached or not, kind of an *astral body*. Matlock does away with this notion, he assumes the reincarnating mind would (e.g., in cases of birthmarks) introduce alterations to the genetically engineered body directly, via PK (psychokinesis).

Matlock then proceeds to discuss *substance dualism*, which he, following Whitehead, rejects in favor of idealism; Whitehead believed, and so does Matlock, that an individual's experiential stream survives his death; Whitehead's process metaphysics would allow for the survival of personality, discarnate agency, and elective reincarnation.

Matlock's own idea on reincarnation, in short, is as follows:

An experiential stream persists with its identity intact until its reincarnation. At that point, at the subliminal level the stream continues unimpeded, but at the supraliminal level there is a decisive break brought about by the engagement with the new body and brain. We begin each life with a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, onto which the past impresses itself through involuntary memories and unconscious influence on our behavior. Autobiographical

knowledge of the past is lost, or at least pushed deep into the subconscious mind, when the connection is made to the new brain. My [Matlock's] revised process model acknowledges the discontinuity of conscious awareness between lives while asserting the subconscious continuity of self over successive lives. I will name it the Processual Soul model or theory. The processual soul theory recognizes a dualism of mind and body, but its dualism is a type of idealist property dualism rather than substance dualism. There is only one substance, and that is consciousness.

So far, Matlock's own theoretical approach is the processual soul theory—apparently not a theory in the Popperian sense that could be falsified, but perhaps that would mean asking too much. Moreover, the terminology is a bit questionable, as reincarnation might be called processual, but not the soul as such.

The final section deals with rather bizarre occurrences, reincarnation of animals in species lines, a boy having formerly been a python, reincarnation in groups, concurrent reincarnation, two or more spirits coexisting in one body, experiences of transplant recipients, and some more strange things . . .

The book has xxi plus 386 pages; Matlock's own text runs along 276 pages. The book is augmented with a Foreword by Jeffrey Mishlove (*Reincarnation versus Archetypal Synchronistic Resonance*) and an Afterword by Michael Nahm (*Implications of Reincarnation Cases for Biology*), a ten-page *Glossary of Specialized and Technical Terms* (containing a few rather dubious definitions), an extensive *References* section (49 pages), and a *very* useful Index (both names and topics).

Let me add a few words on Michael Nahm's Afterword. In the beginning he gives a quick historical rundown of the notion of evolution in biology, both mainstream and dissident (inheritance of acquired properties). An enhanced biological perspective would call to incorporate psi. Vitalistic models of evolution would comprise three modes: random variation/mutation corresponding with the mainstream, plus inheritance of acquired properties, plus non-mechanistic organizing principles.

Reincarnation cases involving bodily characteristics such as birthmarks are difficult to explain within the framework of conventional biology. Hans Driesch, founder of neo-vitalism, proposed an additional

kind of causality, a consideration that may be applicable to these aspects of the formation of the body, too. Nahm maintains that dualistic and monistic position do not exclude each other; they merely apply to different reference systems.

Reincarnation cases signify that regarding the ontogenesis of their subjects, there is a third factor at work that supplements genetics and environmental influence in the formation of human personality and physical features—this aspect alone has the potential to contribute to the necessary paradigm shift in biology.

While I concur widely with Michael Nahm's position—his excellent representation of the present situation in biology vis-à-vis the challenge of integrating reincarnation into an expanded biology as well as his request for a paradigm shift that goes well beyond accommodating CORT—my opinion of James Matlock's text is a bit more reserved. The mastering of the topic is admirable, the numerous references he quotes permit a comprehensive picture both of the phenomena in question and the theoretical positions of leading researchers in the field; however, several of these representations are inaccurate. This book—rather small compared with the voluminous works of Stevenson—might replace an entire library. Nothing is new, yet it is well-compiled, and the index permits easy search and access of particular features or patterns.

My first point of critique is the arrangement of the material. There are many places where a certain topic is dealt with, and at a later occasion it is taken up again. I suspect the intention of the author might have been to demonstrate the interconnections, and, perhaps, to reinforce the contents by repetition (maybe a residuum of the fact that the book originated from courses for students). Anyway, an arrangement of the material where one topic is treated after the other might be preferable. Secondly, some aspects are dealt with rather superficially, as demonstrated above. Thirdly, I can't find Matlock's processual soul theory to be progress, let alone convincing. With stark exaggeration, one might say what is good in this book is not new, and what is new is not good. Nonetheless, for a certain segment of readers—those who want to get a general overview and are not keen to delve into philosophical details—Matlock's book might be quite recommendable.

NOTES

- ¹ U.S. National Transportation Safety Board. (1983, March 21). *Aircraft Accident Report, Pan American World Airways, Inc., Clipper 759, Boeing 727-235, N4737, New Orleans International Airport, Kenner, Louisiana, July 9, 1982, NTSB/AAR-83/02*. [Reprinted in 2006 as *Aircraft Accident Reports on DVD* by Flight Simulation Systems] <https://www.fss.aero/accident-reports/dvdfiles/US/1982-07-09-US.pdf>
- ² See also <https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/AAR8302.pdf>