

## ESSAY REVIEW

### **Ian Stevenson's *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*: An Historical Review and Assessment**

**Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation** by Ian Stevenson. University Press of Virginia, 1980 (second edition). 396 pp. \$25.93, ISBN 9780813908724.

#### **Introduction**

*Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (first published in 1966) is a classic of 20th-century parapsychology that can still be read with profit.<sup>1</sup> Along with *Children Who Remember Previous Lives* (2001),<sup>2</sup> it is an ideal introduction to Stevenson. The latter work, intended for the educated general reader, provides an overview of 40 years of research and includes capsule summaries of several cases, but *Twenty Cases* contains detailed reports that illustrate reincarnation-type cases much more fully.

The cases reported in *Twenty Cases* come from India, Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Lebanon, Brazil, and the United States (the Tlingit Indians of Alaska). They were selected from about 200 personally investigated by Stevenson in order to show the variety of features this type of case presents. The subjects of all were young children at the time they claimed to have lived before. Collectively these twenty cases help define “cases of the reincarnation type,” as Stevenson came to call them, though they vary substantially in detail.

The book includes both evidentially strong and weak cases, cases among strangers and in the same family, cases with strong behavioral features, cases with birthmarks and congenital deformities related to the previous person,<sup>3</sup> a case with a change of sex between the previous person and the subject, and a case in which the previous person died after the birth of the subject. The last type is extremely rare. Stevenson worked for years on a volume that was to include “anomalous date” cases, but it remained incomplete at his death in 2007 and has not been published. He also did not live to complete a planned volume on non-tribal American cases, although he analyzed a series of 79 of them in an article published in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* in 1983 (Stevenson, 1983b).

The Canadian-born Stevenson was already a tenured professor and Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia Medical Center when he turned his attention to reincarnation-type cases. From 1960

on, he enjoyed the financial support of Chester Carlson, inventor of the Xerox process. Carlson endowed a Chair and Stevenson became Carlson Professor of Psychiatry in 1964. In 1967, he resigned as chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and established a Division of Parapsychology (later renamed the Division of Personality Studies)<sup>4</sup> within it. From then on, he devoted all of his efforts to psychical research. Carlson continued to give annual donations, and on his death in 1968 left a \$1,000,000 bequest to the University of Virginia in support of the work (Stevenson, 2006).

*Twenty Cases* was first published in 1966 in the *Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research*, and reprinted with additional material that included followup information on the subjects by the University Press of Virginia in 1974 (Stevenson, 1974b). In this historical review, I describe reincarnation studies in Anglo–American psychical research before *Twenty Cases* appeared, the reception that book received, and the influence it has had. I also assess it from the vantage of current research. If nothing else, *Twenty Cases* brought a new type of spontaneous case<sup>5</sup> to the attention of parapsychologists and the world, although some scholars, like Almeder (1996), believe that it (together with the works that succeeded it) accomplished much more and that it would now be “irrational” to deny that reincarnation occurs.

### Reincarnation in Psychical Research Before 1960

Phenomena related to survival of death were a core subject matter of parapsychology from the outset. Indeed, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) was founded in 1882 partly to look into the claims of Spiritualism (Gauld, 1968). The earliest work centered on mediumship, apparitions, and other spontaneous cases. Investigations in these areas furnished the main empirical support for and against survival, and were debated back and forth for decades, stalemated by questions about the limits of ESP and the possibility that some form of “super-ESP”<sup>6</sup> could dispose of the evidence (Gauld, 1961, Hart, 1959).

In his landmark *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, F. W. H. Myers carefully considered two cases often discussed in the context of reincarnation. One was that of Lurancy Vennum (Stevens, 1887), who took on the personality of a dead girl, Mary Roff, for about four months, during which time she recognized people from Mary’s life, but not her own (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1:360–368). Lurancy returned to herself, however, and this case is better regarded as one of possession than of reincarnation. The other case was that of H el ene Smith, the pseudonym of a trance medium who claimed to have had several previous lives, among other places in India and on Mars (Flournoy, 1900). This case was persuasive to many in French spiritualist circles, but psychologist Theodore Flournoy demonstrated how the “past-life” personas were produced by the medium’s subconscious (Myers, 1903, Vol. 2:130–144).

Myers agreed and understandably concluded that “for reincarnation there is as yet no valid evidence” (1903, Vol. 2:134).<sup>7</sup>

Reincarnation was not a tenet of Anglo–American Spiritualism,<sup>8</sup> but Theosophy embraced it and promoted it heavily (Besant, 1897, Cooper, 1920, Walker, 1888).<sup>9</sup> Psychical research took little interest in it,<sup>10</sup> though a few workers did comment on it. Sir Oliver Lodge believed that individual spirits emanated from a common “larger self” and accepted pre-existence but not reincarnation in the ordinary sense (1907:85–87). James Hyslop of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) was skeptical, in the absence of good evidence that previous lives could be recalled (1906, 1919). Sir William Barrett, who was not troubled by the memory problem, found the prospect attractive (1917:287–291). Hereward Carrington thought that its plausibility rested on survival of death in general being proved (1930:57).

The official Spiritualist position notwithstanding, mediumistic communicators not infrequently spoke about reincarnation, and at times asserted links to the mediums in past lives they said they had shared. Frederick Bligh Bond (1924) employed an automatist (an automatic writer) in his psychic archaeology at Glastonbury Abbey and she transmitted communications from a monk who claimed to have known both Bond and her in previous lives there. J. Arthur Hill (1929) reported on a series of automatic scripts in which communicators claimed to be successive reincarnations of a man in love with a previous incarnation of the automatist. Lady Nona, the communicator in the Rosemary case of apparent Egyptian xenoglossy<sup>11</sup> (Hulme & Wood, 1936, Wood, 1935), claimed to have known Rosemary, the medium, in an earlier life three thousand years before.

These cases and others like them are more properly ones of mediumship than of reincarnation, in that the mediums do not themselves claim to remember previous lives (unless we want to take the position that the communicators, rather than being independent entities, are parts of the mediums’ personalities). The story of Nyria (*Soul of Nyria*, Praed,<sup>12</sup> 1931) is different. It was initiated in an hypnotic session with the hypnotist suggesting a return to a life in ancient Rome and continued in trances of which the subject, a young English woman, had no conscious awareness. Nyria purported to be a slave-girl and gave an account full of verified names and other period detail well beyond the normal knowledge of the subject, although the existence of Nyria herself was never confirmed.

*Soul of Nyria* is not the only example of supposed past-life memory cast as fiction. Beginning in 1937 with the best-selling *Winged Pharaoh*, Joan Grant published a series of historical novels told in the first person which in 1956 she said were based on memories of previous lives. From an early age, Grant experienced dreams with what she believed were fragmentary memories. In

her 20s, she trained herself to access this “far memory” and began dictating, in trance, her seven novels, set in ancient Egypt, classical Greece, and contemporary Rome, Renaissance Italy, and among American Indians in pre-contact times (Grant, 1956, Kelsey & Grant, 1967).

Some have credited the impressive output of Pearl Curran writing as Patience Worth to past-life memory, although Patience herself repeatedly denied reincarnation. She identified herself as a 17th-century English woman who had emigrated to the American colonies and been killed by Indians there. She dictated through a Ouija board and then through automatic writing six long novels and an array of other literary works. Most of the novels are set in 17th-century England, but one is set in Victorian England (two hundred years after Patience is supposed to have lived) and another in Biblical-era Palestine. Like *Soul of Nyria* and the far-memory novels of Joan Grant, these works are replete with recondite period detail and language that Curran did not know or use normally (Prince, 1927, Yost, 1916), and their source remains a mystery (Braude, 2003).

Thanks to the Spiritism of Alan Kardec (1875), which like Theosophy endorsed the idea, reincarnation was taken more seriously in continental Europe than in Great Britain and the United States, and European psychical researchers took more interest in it than did their American and British counterparts. Albert de Rochas (1911) is well-known for his pioneering exploration of hypnotic age regression to previous lives, but perhaps because his book has not been translated into English it is not generally realized that the regressions compose only a small part of the presentation. It is a wide-ranging discussion of reincarnation that includes a review of spontaneous cases culled from a variety of sources, including Fielding (1898). Even less well-known is a book by de Rochas’s countryman and colleague Charles Lancelin (1922), who described the important Italian child case of Alessandrina (Alexandrina) Samona, one of the earliest European cases on record. This case has the interesting feature that the rebirth was heralded in multiple ways (in dreams, séance communications, and poltergeist raps). There are striking physical and behavioral similarities with the previous person, and Alessandrina apparently recalled an incident from that person’s previous life.

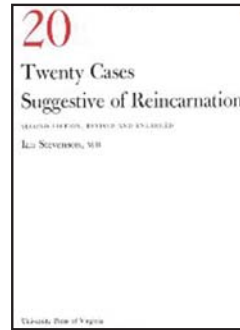
In 1924, R. B. S. Sunderlal reported four Indian cases in the *Revue Métapsychique*.<sup>13</sup> That same year, Gabriel Delanne (1924), a follower of Allan Kardec, released another general study of reincarnation. In addition to surveying spontaneous child cases, child prodigies, and déjà vu experiences, Delanne examined cases of retrocognition and reviewed cases in which rebirths had been announced in mediumistic communications. Again, because his book has not been translated into English, it has had little influence on Anglo–American psychical research. Other French Spiritists, such as Geléy (1920, 1930) and

Flammarion (1923), whose works have been translated, are better-known, but unfortunately, although they endorse reincarnation, they do not mention the many spontaneous cases documented by Rochas, Lancelin, and Delanne.

The publisher Ralph Shirley (1936) produced the first well-rounded analysis of the evidence for reincarnation in English. He discussed the strengths and weaknesses of automatic writing, hypnotic age regression, and spontaneous memories, including many of those assembled by the French writers. He briefly mentioned Shanti Devi, based on an Indian newspaper story.<sup>14</sup> Yeats-Brown (1936) summarized many of the same cases. The following year, Arthur Osborn (1937) treated reincarnation as an aspect of the human experience in *The Superphysical*. This book contains descriptions of several British cases, gathered in response to Osborn's own surveys. Osborn's cases are less evidential than those of Shirley and Yeats-Brown, but they give a sense of the quotidian ground from which the better cases spring.

Age regression to previous lives under hypnosis was largely a parlor game of mesmerists and amateur hypnotists before the researches of de Rochas (1911), and after him there are no significant reports until Bernstein's *The Search for Bridey Murphy* exploded into public awareness as a newspaper serial in 1954 and a best-selling book in 1956 (Bernstein, 1956). Bridey Murphy purported to be a 19th-century Irish woman, and Bernstein's book convinced many people that reincarnation had occurred. Although her account of herself included obscure details that were verified, the case was attacked on various grounds, and the public lost faith in Bridey as quickly as it had fallen for her (Ducasse, 1960). Another veridical hypnotic regression case, that of Naomi Henry (Blythe, 1956), passed almost unnoticed in the wake of the Bridey Murphy controversy, and after Zollik (1958) showed how easy it was to construct fantasies under hypnosis, psychical research all but abandoned age regression as a reliable doorway to previous lives.

The "life readings" of the psychic Edgar Cayce began as an inadvertent offshoot of his health or "physical readings" (Cerminara, 1950, Sugrue, 1942), but quickly became part of a post-world-war cult craze that continues to this day. Many of Cayce's physical readings and prescriptions were uncannily accurate, so there was a presumption of authenticity for the life readings as well. He attributed not one but a series of lives to each petitioner, with links between lives explained through various types of karma. Many readings had the same sequence of settings for the lives, such as "Atlantis, Egypt, Rome, the Crusades period, and the Early [American] Colonial period," explained



on the theory that period-cohorts tended to reincarnate together (Cerminara, 1950:43). The entranced Cayce said that he drew information partly from the subconscious of petitioners and partly from the “Akashic Records” (Cerminara, 1950:45). Although it was possible to verify information given for the more recent lives in a few instances, earlier lives were not amenable to checking, and psychical researchers discounted Cayce’s readings further by pointing out that they came from a sensitive rather than from the subjects themselves.

In a well-received book published in 1953, the Australian physicist Raynor Johnson tied together psi, survival, and mystical experience in a grand portrait of human nature reminiscent of Myers. He argued for reincarnation and karma, which like other authors he considered to go hand in hand, and pointed to child prodigies, déjà vu experiences, and occasional memory claims (citing Shirley, 1936) as evidence of pre-existence and reincarnation.

Among philosophers, J. M. E. McTaggart (1906) advanced a reasoned argument for what he called the “plurality of lives,” avoiding the word reincarnation, perhaps because of its occult associations. He found support in love at first sight (the lovers had known each other in earlier lives) and innate character traits, arguing at length that the self might persist through a series of lives while having memories only of the present one. James Ward (1911), in his Gifford Lectures of 1907–1910, considered reincarnation to be consonant with the economy of nature and superior to the Christian concept of bodily resurrection as a theory of immortality.

C. J. Ducasse (1948, 1951), who was well-acquainted with psychical research and served for years on the ASPR Board of Trustees, wrote at length on reincarnation or, as he termed it, transmigration. Ducasse (1951) cited the Japanese case of Katsugoro (Hearn, 1897), in which a seven-year-old boy made verified statements about a child who had died in another place several years before, as an example of a memory claim, and considered various objections to the idea of reincarnation. C. D. Broad (1958), who like Ducasse was well-acquainted with psychical research, conceptualized reincarnation in terms of his theory of  $\Psi$ -components. He regarded reincarnation as the most likely form survival might take, but offered no evidence of it.

Paul Siwek (1953) contributed what appears to be the first thoroughgoing skeptical treatment of reincarnation,<sup>15</sup> although it was directed not to psychical research but to Theosophy, which continued to be the most prominent promoter of the idea in England and America. Siwek addressed déjà vu and apparent memories arising in dreams and under hypnosis, as well as the claims of children. He was skeptical of the last because of children’s tendency to fantasize and suggested that Indian cases might be prompted by cultural expectations.

### Enter Ian Stevenson

In 1960, Stevenson published a literature review that ushered in a new chapter in the study of reincarnation. He reported having found 44 apparently credible accounts of persons who claimed to remember having lived before. In 28 of these cases, the subjects had made at least six statements relating to the previous life and the two families were unknown to each other before the previous person was identified and the statements were confirmed. The majority of the subjects were young children, like Katsugoro, Alessandrina Samona, and Shanti Devi. The cases came from 13 countries, including India, Burma, Italy, England, Belgium, Greece, Cuba, Mauritius, Japan, France, Syria, Canada, and the United States (Stevenson, 1960).

The previous lives in these cases all occurred close by the subjects and not long in the past, very different from what Western occult traditions, cases like Rosemary and Nyria, the far-memory novels of Joan Grant, and the life readings of Edgar Cayce, had led one to expect.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the memories were veridical, long the gold standard of spontaneous cases in parapsychology. No one since Shirley (1936), Yeats-Brown (1936), and Osborn (1937) had brought cases like these together and they were little-known. Most writers on reincarnation appealed to logical argument and quoted cultural luminaries who believed in it. Their evidence consisted largely of child prodigies and déjà vu experiences, and many took pains to explain why previous lives were not normally recalled (e.g., Johnson, 1953:385–388). No one seems to have realized there were so many spontaneous cases on record, or that they shared such a class similarity.

In their last major works, Ducasse (1961) and Broad (1962) referenced Stevenson's paper, although it appeared too late for them to consider at length. Ducasse, who had been in contact with Stevenson and received from him complete reports of several cases, analyzed some of the more impressive (1961:241–247) and concluded that they provided "the best conceivable kind of evidence" for reincarnation (1961:306). Broad concurred that the best of them were "strongly suggestive" of reincarnation (1962:411). A. J. Ayer also may have had Stevenson's paper in mind when he wrote: "I think it would be open to us to admit the logical possibility of reincarnation merely by laying down the rule that if a person who is physically identified as living at a later time does have the ostensible memories and character of a person who is physically identified as living at an earlier time, they are to be counted as one person and not two" (1963:127).<sup>17</sup>

A dissonant note was sounded by C. T. K. Chari, a professor at the Madras Christian College in South India. He pointed to similarities among mediumship, possession, reincarnation, and multiple personality, arguing that what seem to be past-life memories are fantasies produced in altered states of

consciousness (Chari, 1961–1962a, 1961–1962b, cf. Stevenson, 1961–1962). These papers were quickly followed by others that offered explanations in terms of cryptomnesia (Chari, 1962a), paramnesia (Chari, 1962b), and psychometry allied with GESP (general extra-sensory perception) (Chari, 1962c).

Stevenson's paper caught the attention of two other people who were to have a profound influence on his life. One was Chester Carlson, whose importance has already been noted. The other was Eileen Garrett of the Parapsychology Foundation. At the beginning of 1961, she told Stevenson that she had heard of a child case in India and offered him funds to investigate it. By the time he left for India and Ceylon later that year, he knew of a few other cases, but he went expecting to find children who only spoke about having lived before. He should have been prepared by the accounts he had reviewed for behaviors, physical traits, and birthmarks related to the previous persons as well, but these latter features of the cases caught him by surprise, and he was slow to appreciate their significance. He was surprised also by the large number of additional cases he learned about. Later, with Carlson's support, he went to Lebanon, Brazil, and Alaska. He returned to several of these places more than once. The result was *Twenty Cases* (Stevenson, 2006).

### ***Twenty Cases and the Cultural Conformance Theory***

*Twenty Cases* introduced terminology that has been adopted by other researchers, and it set the standard for investigating and reporting reincarnation-type cases. Stevenson's methods were modeled on the investigations of spontaneous cases by the early SPR and emphasized the careful recording and consideration of facts, aimed at establishing paranormality. The great majority of cases were some years old and the two families had met by the time Stevenson arrived, so his research centered on interviews with first-hand witnesses and the scrutiny of what written documents were available. Only rarely did he reach a case before it was "solved," allowing him to make a record of the subject's statements and behaviors before attempting to verify them, and to observe the initial meeting of the subject and the family of the previous person, if the latter could be identified. Solved cases with records made before verification are ideal because the investigator can reduce the chance of informants misremembering or forgetting key details, but they are rare (Keil & Tucker, 2005).

The twenty case studies are grouped by country or culture with each section prefaced by a resume of the reincarnation beliefs of that region or people. Most reports include tabulations of statements and behaviors along with brief comments that are expanded upon as appropriate in the general discussion. Each report describes how the case was investigated and assesses possibilities such as fraud, malobservation, tricks of memory, and so forth, as well as sundry



paranormal explanations, before deciding that the case is best interpreted as one of reincarnation. The arguments are summarized and reconsidered in a chapter at the end of the volume.

Neither in that chapter nor elsewhere does Stevenson assert that the cases prove that reincarnation occurs—only that the best of them are highly suggestive of it. Of the book's reviewers, Beloff (1966) and McHarg (1969) accepted this conclusion, with McHarg pointing out that what reincarnated appeared to be something less than a full personality. Chari (1967) proposed various alternative explanations, including ESP. Louisa Rhine (1966) suggested that the cases might be the result of parents unconsciously shaping the behavior of their children to conform to cultural expectations about reincarnation, a position anticipated by Siwek (1953) and assumed by many later critics.

The fullest and most oft-cited expression of the psycho-cultural (or socio-psychological) theory was made by Brody (1979) in a review of a later book by Stevenson. Pasricha (1992), however, found that parental guidance could not account for cases in North India, and Schouten and Stevenson (1998) tested the possibility by comparing cases with and without written records made before verification. On the psycho-cultural theory, cases with written records would be expected to have many fewer verified statements than cases without them. The test did not support this theory. Children in the group with written records made more statements, an average of 25.5 as against an average of 18.5, a statistically significant difference ( $p < 0.01$ ), while the percentage of correct statements was roughly the same in both groups—76.7% in the cases with written records and 78.4% in the cases without them.

Mills (1990a, 1990b) studied several Indian cases with differences of religion (Hinduism and Buddhism) between the previous person and the subject and wondered why religious parents would choose to impose another religious identity on their children. We could ask a similar question about the large number of Indian cases with differences of caste. Also, many parents attempt to stop their children from talking about their memories, believing that they will suffer from them in some way.<sup>18</sup> Suppression attempts are seldom successful (Stevenson & Chadha, 1990), but if the parents are responsible for the cases, why do they seek to quash them once they have brought them into being? Is it because they have taken on lives of their own, so to speak? Many children insist they have other families and demand to be taken to their previous homes, and this must not be pleasant for their parents to hear.

The psychological and interpersonal conflicts necessary to produce reincarnation-type cases in the psycho-cultural theory led Rhine (1966) and Brody (1979) to call for explorations of the children's psychologies. This has now been done by Haraldsson and his colleagues in Sri Lanka (Haraldsson, 1995, 1997, Haraldsson, Fowler, & Periyannanpillai, 2000) and Lebanon

(Haraldsson, 2003) and Mills (2003) in India. Children with past-life memories are viewed by their parents as being more highly strung, more tense, more argumentative, and more anxious and fearful than children in matched control groups (though teachers do not report behavioral problems, and in fact the children perform better in school than their peers). They score higher on dissociation scales but are no more suggestible than their peers. In Lebanon, where 80% recalled violent deaths, they seemed to suffer from a mild PTSD. On the whole, differences between the groups appear to be attributable to effects of the memories and do not explain them. Braude (2003), however, wants more information on what psychological needs the memories fulfill in a particular case. He regards the statements of Stevenson and others on this point as superficial (as they often are), but it is not at all clear that further probing would turn up anything of consequence.

Cultural conformance theories (of which psycho-cultural theories are a variety) are challenged by the veridical aspects of the cases, the birthmarks and other physical features of many, and the strong emotions and personations exhibited by the children, forcing critics to include super-psi (as super-ESP is now called) in their explanatory paradigms. Braude (1989, 1992, 2003) believes that super-psi has not been properly appreciated and suggests that the children may be accessing it in psi-conducive dissociated states (2003:24). There is little doubt that, given sufficient ingenuity, super-psi can be stretched to cover any eventuality, and therefore in a strict sense it cannot be ruled out, no matter how crippling its complexity becomes. However, not everyone finds it as plausible as Braude does. Griffin (1997) introduces what he calls retroprehensive inclusion, essentially a new type of psi, to account for survival cases in general, but regards even that as failing to explain the better reincarnation-type cases.

In any event, super-psi would operate within cultural confines and be dependent upon the cultural conformance theory, so any evidence against the latter would count also against the former.<sup>19</sup> With this in mind, let us examine some of the cases in the book.

### Seven Cases

A Lebanese Druse boy, Imad Elawar, expressed over and over again his joy at being able to walk. He gave many names and other details that pertained to a man from another town who had been bedridden, probably with tuberculosis of the spine, for two months before he died. Imad also had a pronounced fear of large motor vehicles. The man whose life he recalled had been involved in a bus accident and had had a cousin who had died following a truck accident.<sup>20</sup> He had spoken French well and Imad learned that language quickly, although no one else in his family could speak or understand it. This case was unsolved when Stevenson reached it and he was able to record much of what Imad said

and how he behaved before searching for and identifying the previous person, and thus it cannot easily be attributed to cultural construction (which may be why Angel, 1994a, 1994b, attacks Stevenson's research methods instead, cf. Stevenson, 1995).

An Indian boy named Ravi Shankar was born with a long, linear mark, closely resembling the scar of a knife wound, across his neck. He spoke about having been murdered, named the killers, and gave other details of the crime, in which the head had been severed from the body. Ravi's birthmark is typical of birthmarks in reincarnation-type cases. Few are of the common types but rather are congenital marks matching wounds and other marks on the bodies of the deceased persons whose lives the children recall (Stevenson, 1997a). The men Ravi named as the murderers lived in his town, and he was afraid of them whenever he saw them. His fear remained with him as he grew older, even as his imaged memories faded.

The case of Mallika, an Indian girl, is strikingly different. Imad was between one and a half and two and Ravi between two and three years old when they made their first statements, apparently spontaneously. Mallika was four when her family moved to a new city, where they rented the ground floor of a house. The first time she visited her landlord's apartment, upstairs from her own, she noticed some embroidered cushions, and said that she had made them. She later commented on several other things in the apartment that identified her with the landlord's wife's deceased sister. She exhibited some striking behavioral similarities to this woman, but she made no statements that were not recognitions.

Younger children, many of whom make their first statements as soon as they begin to speak, are more likely to make them spontaneously, while subjects of Mallika's age or older are more likely to make them in response to something they have seen (Matlock, 1988, 1989). It is as if the images have increasing difficulty breaking into consciousness as the children age.<sup>21</sup> Pratomwan Inthanu, a Thai woman, was 20 when veridical memories of two different lives came to her while meditating (Stevenson, 1983b). Uttara Huddar was 32 when she met a man she believed to be the reincarnation of her past-life husband and began to enter periodic fugue states, in which she behaved and spoke like an early 19th-century Bangali woman called Sharada (Akolkar, 1992, Stevenson, 1984).<sup>22</sup>

Not only was Mallika relatively old (for a child subject) when she made her recognitions, her case is a rare South Indian case, the only one among seven Indian cases in *Twenty Cases*. The population of South India is largely Dravidian or descended from Dravidian tribes, the most prominent of India's indigenous peoples. The Indo-European speaking Aryans arrived in North India around 1500 BC and their religion, Hinduism, adopted the belief in reincarnation from the peoples they encountered there (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1953, Obeyesekere,

1980). Belief in reincarnation is as strong today in South India as it is in the rest of the country. If beliefs sufficed to produce the cases, we would expect to find as many in the south as in the north, yet there are few cases in South India (Chari, 1967, Pasricha, 2001).

The comparative lack of cases in South India again shows the cultural conformance theory to be too facile, issues of veridicality aside. Moreover, reincarnation is not a single monolithic belief but a general term that designates a set of kindred beliefs and sub-beliefs. The exact beliefs and sub-beliefs vary from tradition to tradition (Neufeld, 1986, O'Flaherty, 1980). If the cultural conformance theory were correct, cases should reflect not only the general belief in reincarnation, but the local beliefs also (or in particular). However, at least in North India, this is not so. People unacquainted with actual cases expect them to develop in ways they do not (Pasricha, 1990).

Still, we can find traces of cultural influences on reincarnation-type cases, if we step back a little. Let us take the example of intermission length, the duration of the interval between lives. Intermission length varies across cultures more or less in line with cultural expectations, though it does not match them closely (Matlock, 1990b:225–226). For instance, the Druse expect the deceased to reincarnate in a newborn immediately upon death. The median intermission length for 79 of Stevenson's Druse cases was eight months, the second shortest of all the cultures in which he had studied cases (Stevenson, 1986:212),<sup>23</sup> but longer than the expectation.

If the cases are produced in conformance with cultural demands, it is hard to understand why the Druse would create this awkward situation for themselves. They hypothesize brief intermediate lives to make up the extra time (Stevenson, 2001:176), thereby bringing their belief into conformance with the cases, but would it not be easier to imagine fully culturally compliant cases from the start? From a reincarnation perspective, the tendency for intermission length to vary by culture can be explained if a person's beliefs can influence the circumstances of his or her rebirth (Matlock, 1990b:238). This may seem improbable, but I will give other examples of its possible occurrence later.<sup>24</sup>

The North Indian case of Swarnlata is instructive for very different reasons. Swarnlata was three and a half when she drove with her family through a town unknown to her and said they were near her old house. Thereafter she described what were evidently spontaneous memories of an earlier life. Her father and an outside investigator made notes of her statements, which the investigator then matched to a woman from the designated town who had died several years before Swarnlata's birth. When Swarnlata was taken to meet this woman's family, she recognized numerous people and places from her life, even passing tests intended to mislead her.

Swarnlata also performed dances and songs she said were from another

life, intermediate between the life she recalled best and her own. She sang the songs in Bengali, the language of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). This intermediate life was never confirmed, but in the 1974 second edition of *Twenty Cases*, Stevenson reported that the songs had been identified as traditional ones from the Bengal region. Although Swarnlata was unable to converse in Bengali, as Uttara Huddar did, her singing is a form of recitative xenoglossy. If the intermediate life was real, Swarnlata's main memories may have been stimulated by her environment, even though the life to which they related was not the most recent one.

Another noteworthy Indian case in the collection is that of Jasbir, who at the age of five suffered a serious illness and seemed to die, but revived and after he had recuperated claimed to be a different person, named Sobha Ram. This case is similar to the case of Lurancy Vennum, except that Lurancy's possession by Mary Roff lasted less than four months, whereas Sobha Ram came to occupy Jasbir's body permanently. In this respect, it is like the Sumitra case (Stevenson, Pasricha, & McLean-Rice, 1989), also one of permanent possession or "replacement reincarnation," to coin a term.<sup>25</sup> It is different from the Uttara Huddar case in that Sharada was not an invading entity but was connected to Uttara as a past-life personality whose initial emergence was triggered by a highly emotional encounter. The revitalized Jasbir gradually came to accept his new circumstances and developed normally in them, even accepting the name Jasbir, which he at first resisted.

The Ceylonese case of Wijeratne is the only case in *Twenty Cases* to feature a birth defect related to the previous person. Wijeratne claimed to recall the life of a man who had killed his arranged bride when she refused to move from her parents' house after their civil wedding but before this was publicly celebrated in a marriage feast. He had been tried for the crime, convicted, and hung. Wijeratne was born with a shrunken left arm, the same arm the previous person had used to wield the murder weapon.

Wijeratne attributed his deformity to karma, but reincarnation-type cases provide scant evidence of karma as a moral system of rewards and punishments, much less as conceived in this coercive, cause-and-effect way. Although there are many Asian cases in which the social and economic situation of the subject varies greatly from that of the previous person, there is no discernable correlation with what is known about the previous person. Because the karmic reason for the shifts in social status is not apparent, the assumption is that there must be something that is not known, perhaps something from an anterior or intermediate life, that has resulted in the present circumstances (Stevenson, 2001). Again, beliefs are adjusted to fit the cases, not the other way around, as advocates of the cultural conformance theory would have it.

Karma is considered moral because it is derived from one's actions (and

sometimes one's thoughts, intentions, etc.), good and bad. It has been taken by many writers as a corollary of reincarnation and advanced as an ethically appealing aspect of the belief (e.g., by Osborn, 1937, and by Johnson, 1953). But there is nothing about reincarnation that logically entails karma, and in small-scale or tribal societies like the Dravidian and Tlingit, reincarnation beliefs do not include it (Matlock, 1993, Obeyesekere, 2002).<sup>26</sup> *Karma* is a Sanskrit word that originally denoted ritual action but came to be linked to reincarnation and took on its moral coloring in Hinduism and Buddhism after they had acquired the belief in rebirth from Indian tribal peoples (Füerer-Haimendorf, 1953, Obeyesekere, 1980, 2002). I return to this issue in my discussion of Stevenson's Tlingit cases, below. If not evidence of karma, Wijeratne's case can be explained as due to the previous person's belief that his conduct would have this result, and thus is another example of a person's beliefs influencing the reincarnation process.<sup>27</sup>

The case of Paulo Lorenz, one of two Brazilian cases<sup>28</sup> in the book, has several interesting features, not least of which is that Paulo recalled the life of his deceased sister, Emilia, who had poisoned and killed herself, saying that she wished to be reborn a boy. Paulo did not start speaking until he was three and a half. The first thing he said was to tell another child, who was about to put something in his mouth, that it was dangerous to do that. He identified with Emilia, and until he was four or five refused to wear boy's clothes. He only accepted trousers when an old skirt of Emilia's was used to make him a pair. Neither Paulo nor Emilia showed any interest in cooking and both disliked milk and had the habit of breaking corners off bread. Most importantly, both were skilled at sewing, the only members of a family of fifteen who showed any aptitude for it. Paulo recognized and demonstrated how to thread and use Emilia's sewing machine when he was younger than four years old.

Sex change is one of the features of reincarnation-type cases that varies according to cultural expectation, being found most often in places with traditions that allow for it, and seldom or not at all where it is believed not to happen (Matlock, 1990b:226–227). This sometimes is held to be a telling point in favor of the cases as cultural constructions, but it could just as well be that in places that sex change is thought impossible, people do not consider it an option for themselves, and so return as members of the same sex.

In the majority of sex-change cases, the subjects adjust to their new anatomical sex, but in some cases, gender confusion persists for years (Mills, 2004, Stevenson, 1977b, Tucker & Keil, 2001). Paulo began to lose his intense feminine traits when he was about six but was effeminate even in adulthood. He never married and, Stevenson tells us in the second edition of *Twenty Cases*, he killed himself when he was 43. Most of the other subjects in *Twenty Cases* moved beyond their childhood memories and developed normally, but

Wijeratne also experienced difficulties. He suffered a series of psychotic breaks triggered by imagined rejections by women he liked and was several years late in qualifying for university studies. Such severe adjustment problems are rare, but less extreme ones have been reported on occasion. Mills (2006) describes memories that impeded arranged marriages in two Indian cases because the subjects, then in their twenties, still had strong attachments to the persons they considered their past-life spouses. Shanti Devi provides another example of the same (Lönnerstrand, 1998:84–85).

### Animistic Reincarnation

We turn now to the Tlingit cases. These are divergent from the other cases in some respects, although they share many features with them. The Tlingit are an Alaskan Indian tribe whose reincarnation beliefs are rooted in a long Amerindian (Jefferson, 2009, Mills & Slobodin, 1994) and global (Matlock, 1993) tradition that includes the Dravidians and others. This is the tradition called animism, a collection of beliefs about souls and spirits and their operation in the natural and supernatural worlds (Tylor, 1871).<sup>29</sup> Belief in postmortem survival is universal in animistic societies and reincarnation beliefs are more common than might be thought. Half of the world's tribal peoples in cross-cultural samples have or at one time had them (Matlock, 1993, 1995).<sup>30</sup>

In discussions of reincarnation beliefs, a contrast is often made between Hindu and Buddhist ideas. This is an important distinction, because Buddhists do not recognize an eternal soul but imagine rebirth propelled by attachments to the material world (with karma playing a central role), whereas Hindus conceive of a personal soul that continues to evolve through a succession of lives (O'Flaherty, 1980). However, there is another contrast to be made, and that is between reincarnation beliefs that incorporate karma and those that do not. I believe this latter distinction to be the more basic and so group Hindu and Buddhist beliefs together in opposition to animistic ones (Matlock, 1996). Because reincarnation-type cases provide little evidence of karma, regardless of the culture from which they are reported (Stevenson, 2001:251–253), they fall under the heading of Animistic reincarnation.

Without the concept of karma,<sup>31</sup> the Tlingit and other tribal peoples are free to believe that they may exercise some control over the reincarnation process, and in two of the Tlingit cases in *Twenty Cases* (Corliss Chortkin, Jr., and William George, Jr.), the previous persons stated their intentions to be reborn to the mothers of the subjects. Planned returns were expressed in the two Brazilian cases in *Twenty Cases*, but they are unusual under Indic belief systems (including Jainism and Sikhism along with Hinduism and Buddhism),<sup>32</sup> where karma is thought to govern the rebirth process.<sup>33</sup> Planned returns are distinctly animistic in implying a discarnate agency, and Stevenson (2001:39) regarded

them as the only variety of reincarnation belief for which there is empirical evidence.

However, the Tlingit cases are weaker evidentially than those of Southeast Asia, and Stevenson evinced relatively little interest in them. He published papers on the Tlingit (1966a) and neighboring Haida (1975a), but never produced a volume of case reports about them, as he did for other cultures (1975b, 1977a, 1980, 1983b). The weaknesses stem in part from the planned returns, which set up the expectation of the rebirth, thereby opening the cases to charges of parental and societal shaping in accordance to the expectation. Another reason is that in most Tlingit cases (including all seven in *Twenty Cases*), the previous person and the subject are related, so that the subject in theory could have learned about the previous person normally or paranormally from relatives. These cases are also often less well-developed, with fewer statements and recognitions attributed to the subjects, than are the better Southeast Asian cases (though rich cases may occur also among tribal peoples; see Mills, 2010).

A striking feature of the Tlingit cases in *Twenty Cases* is the birthmarks. Six of the seven have birthmarks, but elsewhere in the collection they appear only in the case of Ravi Shankar (Wijeratne's birth defect is of a different order). Along with planned returns, announcing dreams,<sup>34</sup> and physical and behavioral similarities, birthmarks are signs that allow the Tlingit to identify a child with a particular deceased person even before he or she begins to talk (de Laguna, 1972, Matlock, 1990a). These signs, which have become well-known as recurrent features of reincarnation-type cases, have been reported by ethnographers and other observers in relation to animistic reincarnation beliefs for many years. They were noted by Tylor (1871:3–5), who assumed that they had occurred from time immemorial and suggested that they were the foundation of the belief in reincarnation, as seems very possible.

In small-scale tribal societies, a premium typically is placed on returning in the same lineage or kin grouping, allowing for an almost literal "social reproduction." When signs suggest a child is a returning relative, he or she may be given that person's name and grow up to take on or to qualify to take on that person's rights and responsibilities and even to inherit his tangible and intangible property (Matlock, 1990a, 1993, Mills, 1988). However, when signs suggest that the child is the reincarnation of someone outside the kin grouping, this also is accepted, and reincarnation thereby promotes social cohesion (Mills & Champion, 1996). In the much more populous Indic societies, the pattern is reversed, with the majority of cases occurring between non-relatives, often strangers. This is because, as Obeyesekere puts it, "karma theory produces dislocation and the dispersal of kin" in rebirth (2002:344). It does so by de-emphasizing personal relationships and ascribing rebirth to an impersonal moral force.



I suggest that personal agency always plays a role, but different sets of expectations (on the part of the previous persons), generated by different cultural ideals (discarnate agency vs. karma), produce the different outcomes (same-family cases in animistic societies vs. non-relative and stranger cases in Indic societies). Beliefs about the reincarnation process influence the cases from the inside, as it were, carried by dying persons into their postmortem state. Discarnate actors are involved in selecting their new births, unconsciously if not consciously.<sup>35</sup> This accords with animistic thinking and is what I call Animistic reincarnation.

Keil (1996) called cases in which the child makes no or very few statements “silent” and “near-silent” cases. His data suggest that these account for a relatively small percentage of cases among the Turkish Alevi, whereas the impression one receives from the ethnographic literature is that silent and near-silent cases are in the majority in tribal societies. The less well-developed tribal cases are like cases from Europe and non-tribal North America (Harrison & Harrison, 1991, Jacobson, 1974, Osborn, 1937, Rivas, 2003, 2004, Stemman, 2005, Stevenson, 1960, 2003, Tucker, 2005) in being notably underdeveloped and often unsolved. Moreover, solved cases similar to those from other places, have been reported from Europe and non-tribal North America (Cockell, 1994, Leininger & Leininger, 2009, Stevenson, 1960, 1983a, 1983b, 2003, Tucker, 2005). There is no correlation between the strength of reincarnation beliefs and the strength or even the appearance of cases. Both strong and weak cases may occur where the belief is weak or absent as well as where it is strongly present, and cases where the belief is strongly present are not always strong as we saw in the instance of South India<sup>36</sup> and see again with the cases from tribal societies. We must therefore seek explanations for these cases in terms of something other than the belief in reincarnation.<sup>37</sup>

The same year the revised edition of *Twenty Cases* appeared, Stevenson introduced the idea of a psychophore to explain how reincarnation might operate. He described the psychophore as an “intermediate ‘non-physical’ body which acts as the carrier of . . . attributes between one life and another” (1974a:406). He returned to this idea in *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, where he speculated at greater length about processes (2001:233–254). The psychophore would not simply convey characteristics, but would have will and intention at its disposal. It might exercise some initiative, such as waiting for a body of the desired sex to be available, if it did not operate on the developing zygote directly. The psychophore sounds very much like an astral body—perhaps a “minded” astral body, to borrow a term from Wheatley (1979)—and it harmonizes well with my concept of Animistic reincarnation.<sup>38</sup>

If reincarnation happens for some, does it happen for all? Griffin assumes that the only people who have reincarnated are those who remember having

lived before (1997:186), but silent cases suggest that reincarnation may occur without imaged memories, and it is possible that a person might reincarnate without having any indication of it whatsoever. And if we all reincarnate, we may all have past-life memories accessible to us. They may enter consciousness on occasion, and perhaps be retrievable under hypnosis, trance, and other dissociative states, as we find with adults such as Pratomwan Inthanu and Uttara Huddar. They may also lie in the background of fictional productions such as those of Pearl Curran and Joan Grant. I believe the assumption that we all reincarnate handles the data better than the assumption that only some of us do, but as Stevenson observed (2001:216), we may never be certain on this point.

### Stevenson's Legacy

*Twenty Cases* depicted reincarnation very differently than had been imagined before Stevenson's 1960 paper, and it more than confirmed the findings and fulfilled the promise of that paper. All the major recurrent features of reincarnation-type cases appear in the book.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, it is remarkable how well it lays out the parameters of this type of case. Subsequent work has added details but has not changed our understanding in any substantial way. Moreover, as I have shown, the twenty cases collectively provide the basis of a theoretical conception of reincarnation in terms of an Animistic as opposed to an Indic model, a way of thinking about reincarnation radically different from that assumed before 1960.

*Twenty Cases* did much to pull reincarnation studies out of the realm of speculation and to provide it a scientific footing. However, Stevenson's fellow parapsychologists were slow to recognize its significance, and the larger world of science, to which Stevenson appealed constantly, has yet to come to grips with it (Edelstein, 2008). Attitudes may be changing, however. Astronomer and science writer Carl Sagan, a skeptic about most things parapsychological, wrote in his last book that he regarded reincarnation-type cases to be one of the few promising areas of research in the field (Sagan, 1997:302).

One reason for Stevenson's early difficulty in parapsychology was his adherence to the old SPR style of field investigation at a time when the gravitational center of the discipline had moved from spontaneous cases and survival questions to laboratory studies of ESP under the influence of J. B. Rhine (Alvarado & Zingrone, 2008). Stevenson was out of step with the majority of his colleagues, especially in the United States. It was widely believed that he was the only researcher turning up reincarnation-type cases, something easily disproved (Matlock, 1990b). Similar cases had been reported by many people over many years, and other investigators, such as Brazilian parapsychologist Hernani Andrade, were finding them also. However, because Andrade published

in Portuguese (e.g., 1988), he was and still is not as well-known in the English-speaking world as he should be (but see Playfair, 1975, 2006, and Andrade, Rossi, Playfair, & Lima, 2010, for English-language summaries of his cases.)

Of those Stevenson trained to assist him in the field, Satwant Pasricha has made the most significant contributions, but she is not the only one. K. S. Rawat has recently co-authored an article and a book with newcomer Titus Rivas (Rawat & Rivas, 2005, 2007). Stevenson's research has attracted others as well. Anthropologist Antonia Mills was acquainted with the reincarnation beliefs of the Indians of British Columbia when she met Stevenson in 1984 and became interested in cases (Mills, 1994). Stevenson underwrote her work with the Gitksan and Beaver, reported in 1988, as well as her first field trips to India, in 1987 and 1988, in an attempt to "replicate" his findings (Mills, 1989). Later, she joined Erlendur Haraldsson and Jürgen Keil in a larger replication of Stevenson's research (Mills, Haraldsson, & Keil, 1994).<sup>40</sup>

As readers of this *Journal* know, Pasricha, Mills, Haraldsson, and Keil have continued to report reincarnation-type cases and have carried the research in new directions. Haraldsson (1995, 2000, 2003) has studied the psychology of the child subjects, Mills (2001, 2006, 2010) is demonstrating the power of combining anthropological and parapsychological approaches, and Keil (1996, 2010) is drawing attention to unusual and problematical cases. Meanwhile, Tucker (2005) has been working with non-tribal American cases, Rivas (2000, 2003, 2004) has reported cases from The Netherlands, and an increasing number of original accounts are appearing in popular publications (Bowman, 1997, 2001, Cockell, 1994, Harrison & Harrison, 1991, Leininger & Leininger, 2009). Important new voices are also emerging on the side of commentary and critique (Edelman & Bernet, 2007, Moura Visoni, 2010, Nahm & Hassler, 2011). Stevenson's passing has not brought an end to serious reincarnation studies, as some may have expected.

I have focused on the professional reception of *Twenty Cases* because that is where Stevenson placed his emphasis, but I cannot altogether ignore the popular sphere, for it is there that the book has had its greatest impact. By 1990, *Twenty Cases* had been translated into seven languages and sold some 50,000 copies (Stevenson, 1990), astonishing for a university press offering. It is difficult to find a book on reincarnation published after 1966 that does not refer to it. Many popular books summarize its cases and conclusions, making them more accessible to a wide audience. Angel identifies it as "one of the most influential sources of empirical evidence for reincarnation" (1994a:481) and says that his students in the philosophy of religion routinely cite authors who have been persuaded by it.

As of 1990, Stevenson's research had received little attention from academia (see Matlock, 1990b). Since that date, it has been addressed by several

philosophers, who have raised the level of discourse on the subject considerably. Angel (1994b) limits himself to the case of Imad Elawar, but Almeder (1992), Becker (1993), Paterson (1995), Edwards (1996), Griffin (1997), Braude (2003), Grosso (2004), and Lund (2009) treat Stevenson's work generally. Edwards, a humanist, ridicules much of the data. Almeder, as already noted, is convinced. The others fall somewhere in between. Most contrast reincarnation with super-psi and psycho-cultural explanations. Griffin, Becker, Lund, Paterson, and Grosso lean toward reincarnation, but Braude favors super-psi.

Stevenson had high hopes for *Reincarnation and Biology*, his massive two-volume examination of birthmarks and birth defects (1997a, 1997b). This "medical monograph" includes detailed reports of 225 cases, together with supporting photographs and citations from autopsy reports, and he was very disheartened when it was met with silence. Edelstein (2008) suggests that this non-reaction was due in part to Stevenson having done little to show how reincarnation could be integrated with biology. His psychophore concept was not well-enough articulated to serve the purpose. I agree with this, but I think there may be other large obstacles also. One is Stevenson's steadfastly parapsychological presentation. He was very much a psychical researcher of the old school and was not good at communicating with scientists of other disciplines, despite his many publications in mainstream journals. Another part of the problem may lie with the word *reincarnation*.

Do the cases Stevenson studied suggest or support reincarnation? Not if we define it in the Indic sense, as involving karma. If we want to say that these cases suggest reincarnation, we must be clear that we mean Animistic reincarnation, and we would do well to point out that the evidence we have suggests that it occurs most often in the same community or region and that there typically are very few years between lives.<sup>41</sup> There is no hint in the spontaneous cases of past lives centuries before in distant foreign lands, as was commonly envisaged before 1960. Nor is there much evidence of past lives spent as animals, as is allowed under Hinduism and Buddhism (and in some societies with animistic beliefs). In other words, we must distinguish an empirically based, scientific understanding of reincarnation from a religious or occult one. We may also want to follow McTaggart's lead and come up with a new name for the process.

Stevenson's most important legacy arguably lies in making reincarnation a problem for science, not merely religion and philosophy, but we must now take the next steps. It is good to show that reincarnation is logically coherent and that it makes better sense of the data than other theories do, but until we can demonstrate its relation to established concepts in biology and psychology, we will not have advanced much beyond where we were in 1960, as far as the majority of scientists are concerned.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, although I think that current data point in the direction of reincarnation, we must be cautious in our

conclusions, since it may turn out that our present ideas are not quite right and that another solution, which we cannot yet see, is the correct one. Regardless, reincarnation-type cases without a doubt present a problem for science, one that we will always be indebted to Stevenson and *Twenty Cases* for having brought to our attention.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> *Twenty Cases* remains in press in its 1980 paperback edition.
- <sup>2</sup> The 2001 publication is a updated edition of the book of the same title published in 1987.
- <sup>3</sup> Stevenson referred to the person of the previous life as the “previous personality,” but persons and personalities are not at all the same thing. The individuals concerned were more than personalities, and I prefer the term “previous person” (Matlock, 1990b).
- <sup>4</sup> The current name is Division of Perceptual Studies.
- <sup>5</sup> I use the term “spontaneous case” as it used in parapsychology, to denote paranormal experiences. Spontaneous past-life memories resemble what psychologists call involuntary memories and flashbulb memories, except that many have behavioral and physical components.
- <sup>6</sup> Super-ESP is ESP of a nature and range not otherwise observed.
- <sup>7</sup> There was, however, more evidence than Myers realized. The earliest recorded reincarnation-type cases presently known are Chinese cases dating from the 3rd to the 10th centuries AD (De Groot, 1901:143–145, and Paton, 1921:26–27, per Gauld, 2008:33, Note 7). Nineteenth-century cases are described by Wortabet (1860:308–309n; retold by Oliphant, 1880:322–323), Hearn (1897:267–290), and Fielding (1898:335–353). Signs of the sort now recognized to be recurrent features of cases appear in the reports of travelers, missionaries, and government functionaries from the 17th through the 19th centuries (Tylor, 1871:3–5). Besterman (1930) cites 19th-century examples from sub-Saharan Africa, and Matlock and Mills (1994) have several 19th-century references for North American native societies.
- <sup>8</sup> Many Spiritualists were opposed to reincarnation because they thought that it was contradicted by mediumistic communication and because mediums were said not to hear about it from deceased communicators. This was not the case in continental Europe, where Kardec’s Spiritism and, later, Steiner’s Anthroposophy were popular (see Note 9), leading to tensions between adherents of the different spiritualist schools (see Alvarado, 2003:83–84, for examples of the Victorian Spiritualist attitude toward Spiritism).

- <sup>9</sup> Other occult systems, including Spiritism (Kardec, 1875), Anthroposophy (Steiner, 1914), and Rosicrucianism (Heindel, 1909), also taught reincarnation, but Theosophy was by far the most prominent in the earlier part of the 20th century in the United States and Great Britain. On reincarnation and 19th-century Spiritism in France, see a recent book by Sharp (2006).
- <sup>10</sup> Rogo (1985:17–18) suggested that the SPR's lack of interest in reincarnation may have stemmed from their dislike of the Theosophist Helena Blavatsky, whom they had investigated and found a fraud (Hodgson, Netherclift, & Sidgwick, 1885). Another factor may have been doubts raised by the different positions taken by Spiritualism and Spiritism (Sudre, 1930).
- <sup>11</sup> Xenoglossy is the correct use of an unlearned language. It may be either recitative (use of words or expressions only without the ability to converse) or responsive (use of language in an interactive way, showing the ability to understand as well as speak).
- <sup>12</sup> This author has generally been cited in psychical research as Campbell-Praed (e.g., by Rogo, 1985, and Stevenson, 1960), probably because Shirley (1936) hyphenated the name. However, the name is not hyphenated on the title pages of her books and appears as Praed in the catalog of the Library of Congress, the authority followed by most libraries.
- <sup>13</sup> Sunderlal submitted this paper first to the *ASPR Journal*, but the editors thought it possibly a hoax because similar cases were unknown to them (documents in the ASPR archives).
- <sup>14</sup> The case of Shanti Devi began to develop in the early 1930s and led to a formal investigation in the middle of that decade (Gupta, Sharma, & Mathur, 1936). Shanti retained her memories into adulthood, which permitted other investigators to interview her as well (Bose, 1952, Lönnerstrand, 1998, Rawat, 1997). Today it is one of the best-known Indian child cases but this was not so in the period before 1960. Ducasse (1961) appears to have been the first after Shirley (1936) to comment on it in English. Tenhaeff (1958) dealt with it, but in Dutch, and an English translation of his book was not published until 1972.
- <sup>15</sup> Objections were raised earlier by Pringle-Pattison (1922), whose concept of reincarnation was informed mainly by Hindu and Buddhist teachings. Siwek's treatment is, so far as I know, the first skeptical one to deal extensively with memory claims.
- <sup>16</sup> Indeed, Ducasse doubted the regressions of de Rochas (1911) not only because they were not veridical but because the lives ostensibly recalled were located in France rather than in distant locales (Ducasse, 1961:274).
- <sup>17</sup> However, Ayer made the same point a few years earlier (1956:193–194), so this passage may be no more than a coincidence of timing.
- <sup>18</sup> Stevenson has found this idea in various parts of the world, among the Alaskan Tlingit and Nigerian Igbo as well as throughout South Asia (2001:96).
- <sup>19</sup> I do not have space to consider other ESP models, such as Murphy's application of Carington's psychon theory (Murphy, 1973), Roll's long body (1982), or Keil's thought bundles (2010), but as none transcend culture, the same general considerations apply to them also. See Matlock (1990b) on the earlier theories and Nahm and Hassler (2011) on Keil.
- <sup>20</sup> Stevenson learned about another man who as a child claimed to remember the life of the cousin who had been killed in the truck accident. Because both he and Imad spoke about the same accident, albeit from different points of view, this case has been por-

trayed as one of “merged and divided” rebirth by Roll (1977, 1982) and Rogo (1985). There would seem little basis for this reading (Matlock, 1992). Apart from the truck accident, the memories of the two subjects were entirely distinct.

- 21 Adult spontaneous past-life memory cases have received relatively little attention. In adults, apparent memories (much less-developed and less often veridical than in young children) tend to arise in dreams, trances, and other altered states (Jacobson, 1974, Lenz, 1979, Osborn, 1937, Pasricha, 1990:109–112, Rogo, 1985, 1991).
- 22 This case is commonly known by the name of the previous person, Sharada. It has been analyzed as one of possession rather than reincarnation by Griffin (1997) and Braude (2003), but both Stevenson (1984) and Akolkar (1992), who investigated it, treat it as one of reincarnation. The key is appreciating that Uttara was relatively old at case onset. She was practiced in meditation and this may have played an important role in the way her memories presented (Matlock, 1988).
- 23 The median intermission was four months among the Haida of Alaska. The longest median intermission of ten societies compared was 141 months in a series of 25 non-tribal U.S. cases (Stevenson, 1986:212).
- 24 I am suggesting something more than the idea that thoughts at the point of death have an influence on the new birth, as one finds in Tibetan and other forms of Buddhism. I mean long-held, firmly established beliefs that may be largely unconscious and may persist after death in the “mind” of a discarnate actor who brings about his or her own reincarnation.
- 25 Only a few other cases of this sort have been reported (Barrington, Mulacz, & Rivas, 2005, Pasricha, 1990:104–109, Stevenson, 1983b:171–190). However, although rare, the phenomenon is common enough in India to be recognized by a special name in Hindu religious thought—*parakaya pravesh*, which refers to the entry of a wandering soul into a physical body, replacing the soul with which the body was born (Nivedita Nadkarni, personal communication). *Parakaya pravesh* generally is glossed as “possession” in English, though this obscures the fact that it covers both temporary and permanent forms of possession.
- 26 Karma is also missing from ancient Greek and other reincarnation concepts, as Obeyesekere (2002) shows in some detail. It is found only in the Indic religions and occult systems such as Theosophy that are derived from them.
- 27 It is interesting that Wijeratne did not have a birthmark related to the hanging. I suggest that he did not because the previous person was more concerned (perhaps preoccupied) with the murder he had committed. I do not think that birthmarks are automatically produced but rather that they are conditioned by the previous person’s focus of attention and emotional attachments. This hypothesis allows us to explain why not all death wounds produce birthmarks and why some represent marks made to the body after death, as well as why some represent wounds or marks from earlier in life (Stevenson, 1997a, 2001).
- 28 Despite opposition from the Catholic Church, reincarnation is widely accepted in Brazil, with beliefs derived from the West African culture of former slaves, reinforced by the Spiritism of Allan Kardec.
- 29 The animistic worldview is fundamentally empirical. Tylor (1871), who introduced animism, argued that concepts of the soul and its survival of death were suggested by observations and experiences such as paranormal dreams, apparitions, and what we now call out-of-body and near-death experiences. Tylor believed that the soul was

then generalized to lower animals and in some situations to plants and to natural force and even to words and names, although these last are by no means universal features of animism as it appears in the ethnographic record (Matlock, 1993, 1995).

- <sup>30</sup> Animistic peoples do not necessarily see a conflict between ancestral spirits and reincarnation. In a cross-cultural study (Matlock, 1995), I found a statistically significant relationship ( $p = .003$ ) between beliefs in reincarnation and active ancestral spirits, those thought to interact with the living in some way. In another study, I found a significant relationship ( $p = .035$ ) between beliefs in reincarnation and the fragmentation of the soul upon death (Matlock, 1993:128–129). Typically, the soul is thought to split three ways upon death, one part staying with the corpse, another part going on to the land of the dead, and a third part reincarnating.
- <sup>31</sup> In the introduction to the Tlingit cases in *Twenty Cases*, Stevenson described what he thought were indications of karma in Tlingit beliefs and speculated that these were influenced by contact with Buddhism. However, the examples he gives of karma are of no more than a belief in the continuity of identity from one life to another and have no reference to the moral qualities of actions with which karma is concerned. He does not repeat this assertion on other occasions.
- <sup>32</sup> This classification of Hindu with Buddhist, Jain, and Sikh beliefs as Indic is problematic because in Hinduism, unlike in the other religions, there has long been debate about whether karma is the result of individual action alone or whether it is implemented or adjusted by God (O’Flaherty, 1980). In modern Hinduism, God is involved in the mediation of karma to such an extent that modern Hinduism is better assigned to a Theistic category (Nivedita Nadkarni, personal communication). In Theistic reincarnation, God determines how a new birth is assigned. Other examples of Theistic reincarnation beliefs are the Druse and Alevi (see Stevenson, 2001:38).
- <sup>33</sup> Obeyesekere (2002) compares planned returns in animistic societies to the “rebirth wishes” that often are a part of Buddhist merit-making rituals. The latter may include desires to be reborn to certain people, especially in the same family, but Obeyesekere—I think correctly—reads these as survivals of earlier animistic beliefs because they are fundamentally at odds with karma (2002:344).
- <sup>34</sup> Announcing dreams are dreams in which a deceased person appears and “announces” his or her intention to be reborn, usually to a certain woman.
- <sup>35</sup> This brings us to the “selection problem” (the problem of how the new parents are selected), but I do not have space here to go further into the issue. For a longer discussion, see Stevenson (2001:236–244), and see also the literature on intermission memories (Rawat & Rivas, 2005, Sharma & Tucker, 2005, Story, 1975:191–199).
- <sup>36</sup> Chari (1967) observed that there are few cases not only in South India, but in most of North India also. It appears that reincarnation-type cases occur more frequently in some places than others. The reasons for this variation would seem to have little to do with belief but are not yet understood.
- <sup>37</sup> This conclusion would be stronger if it were more than impressionistic. Tucker’s (2000) Strength of Case Scale could be used to rate the strength of cases, which could then be compared to the strength of reincarnation beliefs in different cultures, if this could be assessed in some way.
- <sup>38</sup> Many religious traditions and occult systems have similar concepts, but Stevenson introduced his neologism, which means “soul bearing,” to avoid their connotations (2001:309). Elsewhere he suggested that the psychophore might be composed of mor-



phogenetic fields (1997b:2086–2088). However, he left the idea undeveloped, and as Gauld points out, it “seems to be simply a dummy concept filling (pending further information) a vital gap in an explanatory system” (2008:31).

- <sup>39</sup> This includes intermission memories (see Note 35). The second Jasbir said that after his death as Sobha Ram he met a holy man who told him to take refuge in the first Jasbir’s body. This is an example of what we may call “assisted reincarnation,” an exception to the rule that discarnate actors take the initiative in Animistic reincarnation.
- <sup>40</sup> These replication studies were aimed at seeing if different persons, working with the same methods, would find similar cases and come to similar conclusions regarding them. All three found it easy to discover similar cases. Mills and Haraldsson agreed with Stevenson’s conclusions, but Keil preferred an ESP interpretation (Mills, Haraldsson, & Keil, 1994).
- <sup>41</sup> According to Stevenson, all but a few cases have intermissions of less than three years (2001:120). There are solved spontaneous cases with longer intermissions, but not on the order of centuries, and long-distance or international cases are also rare. Even when these do occur, we cannot be sure that there have not been intervening lives intermediate in distance as well as time. This issue relates to the selection problem and a fuller discussion will have to await another occasion.
- <sup>42</sup> One way would be to link the psychophore or minded astral body concepts to Sheldrake’s (1981, 2009) morphogenetic fields and morphic resonance (Matlock, 1988, 1990b). Stevenson (1977b:2086–2088) saw this, but, as Edelstein (2008:98) points out, Sheldrake has had little success in getting his own ideas accepted.

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