

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Response to “How To Improve the Study and Documentation of Cases of the Reincarnation Type? A Reappraisal of the Case of Kemal Atasoy”

The Essay by Vitor Moura Visoni in *JSE*, 24(1), Spring 2010, pp. 101–108, makes a number of criticisms of our Research Article “Children Who Claim To Remember Previous Lives: Cases with Written Records Made before the Previous Personality Was Identified,” *JSE*, 19(1), Spring 2005, pp. 91–101, which we will address by section:

The Participation of the Interpreter. We disagree that “such investigations have already suffered enough from the accusation of fraud on the part of the interpreters.” One interpreter 40 years ago was accused of fraud in unrelated work, but his interviews were subsequently validated by other interpreters. When the child in the current case was interviewed, the interpreter’s motives were irrelevant. Since the child was describing an obscure person from 50 years before, whose existence JK [the author] was only able to confirm after great effort, the interpreter could not reasonably be accused of falsifying the interview. At the time of the interview, he did not possess any information about the previous personality that he could have put in the mouth of the child.

The Interview with the Child. The author recommends recording all interviews. We have recorded interviews on occasion, but we agree with the concerns Dr. Haraldsson mentioned. Though having interviews recorded and transcribed might seem ideal, the process of getting them can be impractical, or worse can impact on the quality of the information being obtained.

The author also objects to the presence of the mother during the interview. We think anyone who has had experience with children would recognize that the chances of getting a six-year-old child to share information with strangers who do not speak the same language without a parent or close attachment figure present are extremely remote. In this case, the boy’s mother could not have fed him any information since she knew nothing about the person being described.

Regarding the number of interviews, the boy and his family were interviewed multiple times, though we acknowledge that our paper could have been clearer on that point. The most important interview by far, however, was the first one, which was conducted before anyone tried to verify the child’s statements. Dr. Haraldsson is right that multiple interviews can help ensure that there is consistency about what the child was alleged to have said before the case was solved. In this case, there is no question about what the child said before the case was solved, because JK solved it after interviewing the child.

We agree that finding as many witnesses to the child's statements as possible is helpful and often essential. In this case, the child had not made statements to anyone but his immediate family, as we stated in the article. More significantly, multiple witnesses are often needed to confirm that the child had the knowledge about the previous personality that his parents claim. In this case, that issue is not in doubt since the case was unsolved at the time of the initial interview.

The Interview with Mr. Toran Togar. The author argues that JK should not have been the one to conduct the confirmatory interview. When JK was searching for people who could tell about the history of the home in question, it would have been impractical to locate an informant and then say the interview would have to wait until another researcher could be flown in from another country, a researcher who would not know what to ask in order to confirm the boy's statements. That issue aside, the author is correct that a recording would serve as stronger confirmation of the interview than notes alone, but again there are practical issues as to why we do not routinely record interviews.

Tests of Recognition. The author faults the lack of recognition tests in this case. As we noted in the paper, the boy was beginning to forget details of the purported life by the time his statements had been verified. That and the changes that would have occurred in the city during the 50 years following the previous personality's death meant that the slim chance that he would be able to recognize places was outweighed by the factors, such as the expense to the investigation and the time required of the boy and his parents to travel 850 km each way, that made such a trip impractical. We do agree that if recognition tests are to be performed, they need to be tightly controlled to be of significant value.

Psychological Tests. We are unaware of any psychological disorder that could lead a child to know numerous details about a man who lived 850 km away and died 50 years before.

Description of the Case Though we do not have a verbatim transcript of the interviews that were conducted, we do provide a list in our paper of all the statements the boy made before any attempt was made to verify them.

Is It Still a Strong Case? On this point, we are in full agreement with the author's positive answer. We also think given the practical constraints that are a necessary part of this kind of fieldwork, the investigation of the case involving multiple trips to Turkey to interview multiple witnesses was quite sound.

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Reply to Tucker and Keil

I would like to thank them very much for the attention that Tucker and Keil have given to my reappraisal of the case Kemal Atasoy. Their reply is, in several points, very informative and satisfying. However, I have the impression that the authors may have considered my suggestions somewhat unnecessary to guarantee the authenticity of the case, therefore not considering it profitable to employ them. I believe that some of the measures that I have suggested, if adopted more often, could help us better understand the modus operandi of the phenomenon underlying CORTs (cases of the reincarnation type), serving thus not merely as a safeguard against fraud or other alternative naturalistic explanations. This way, the use of psychological tests, not only providing us a better guarantee against possible explanations based on children's suggestibility, could also help in explaining, for example, why some of the children who had a violent death in a previous life have phobias, birthmarks, or birth defects in their present life while others (also having had a violent death in a previous life) have not. Could it be that this former group has the same profile of people who display stigmata or of people who have "relived" traumatic experiences with the help of hypnosis or drugs and then developed skin conditions similar to the ones they had during the original experiences? More psychological tests in children could help to address these types of questions. Therefore, I hope researchers will employ them more frequently, not only as part of the replication process that science calls for but also as a tool for unraveling the modus operandi of CORTs.

Finally, I still consider that the use of micro cameras would overcome, if not all, at least many of the problems that researchers face today in registering interviews, when compared with traditional cameras. The investigation of CORTs have always used a methodology much akin to forensic science, and a tighter similarity to it could only make the investigation more robust.

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Weight of the Soul: 28 Grams?

Carlos Alvarado's historical writings always make interesting reading, not least his work on Duncan MacDougall's experiment on the loss of weight at death—"On Duncan MacDougall's Experiment on the Loss of Weight at Death," Letter to the Editor, *JSE*, 23(3), Fall 2009, pp. 343–348. MacDougall's piece of research also gave me a surprising series of experiences:

In 1971, I published a book in Swedish, which later appeared in several

foreign editions. The purpose of the book was to give an overview of research in parapsychology at that time, with emphasis on the survival problem. Among many other research reports, I mentioned the experiment by Duncan MacDougall in 1907.

The German edition of my book was published in 1973 or 1974. At the book release, a journalist looked in the book and saw my notice about the MacDougall experiment. He did not read very carefully, so he cabled out the news that I had done this research. During the following years, I received dozens if not hundreds of letters from around the world asking for reprints or details of my experiment. I became undeservedly famous for having weighed the soul. A French magazine made a joke of it and published a fun picture of me with a big 28-gram weight on my head. As late as 2000, a man in Germany published somewhere that I had made this experiment in the hospital of Kristianstad in 1972. (Retrocognitive precognition? I did not move to Kristianstad until 1979.)

The English edition of my book was translated by a woman living in a small town in the United States. In 1974 she read in her local newspaper that I had weighed the soul. She was obviously the only person in town to know the facts, so she called the editor. With a sigh he said: "It was the only good piece of news that day."

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References

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- Jacobson, N. O. (1974). *Life without Death? On Parapsychology, Mysticism, and the Question of Survival*. New York: Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence. (Original Swedish edition in 1971, *Liv efter döden?* Göteborg: Zindermans)

Human Weight Loss upon Death

Regarding "Rebuttal to Claimed Refutations of Duncan MacDougall's Experiment on Human Weight Change at the Moment of Death", by Masayoshi Ishida, *JSE* 24(1):5–39, I agree with MacDougall that the body loses weight on death.

The body is an aqueous system under pressure, and dissolved gases are lost when the heart quits pumping. Just consider that a one-liter bottle of beer will lose 2 grams of CO₂ when the pressure is removed by taking off the cap.

May your entropy ever increase,
 FRANK G. POLLARD