

The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories
of Former Incarnations
*The Winning Essay of the Contest
in Honor of William James*

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PART II. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER
INVESTIGATIONS

Part I of this essay¹ provided an analysis of various kinds of data adduced as evidence of reincarnation and hence of survival. The major portion of this part consisted of a summary of 28 cases of claimed memories of former incarnations in which it was possible to identify the apparently remembered person and to show that the facts allegedly remembered matched in six or more items the corresponding facts of the life of the deceased person. Seven of these cases, all previously published elsewhere, were used to illustrate this type of case. The present part of the essay will offer an analysis of the data of these cases with regard to competing hypotheses and then offer suggestions for further inquiries.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA
WITH REGARD TO VARIOUS EXPLANATORY HYPOTHESES

Before discussing the various hypotheses which occur to me as deserving consideration in trying to understand the data from these cases, I will mention my assumption that the particular statements of the persons claiming these recollections apply to the lives of the persons they claimed to have been. When the claimed memories and the known facts match on only one or even several items, we cannot easily exclude coincidence in the matching. For this reason, I have considered too weak for further study those instances in which less than six items of claimed memories were matched against the facts. As the number of matched items increases, and these often amount to 15 or more items, there seems little doubt that the apparent rememberer (Person A) has knowledge of another deceased person (Person B). We need then to consider how he obtained this knowledge. Of the hypotheses which occur to me, some suppose normal acquisition of knowledge about the deceased person, some suppose paranormally derived knowledge without survival of physical death, and others suppose some form of survival. A discussion of these several hypotheses follows.

¹ I. Stevenson, "The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations. Part I. Review of the Data," *JOURNAL A.S.P.R.*, April, 1960, pp. 51-71.

1. *Fraud*

In considering any ostensibly paranormal phenomena we should weigh first the evidence for and against the occurrence of fraud. In these cases we have to depend upon the word of the rememberer and sometimes his relatives that he had never been to the home nor known of the previous person whose life he claims to remember. I know of one instance of claimed memories of a former incarnation exposed as fraudulent.² Conceivably, individual cases of this series may have been organized and presented as hoaxes, although I do not know of evidence that any were. I find it impossible to believe that all or even many of the cases depended solely on fraud. In this connection we need to remember that most of the rememberers were children under the age of ten. The perpetration of fraud would then seemingly require the inclusion in the conspiracy of their parents and of the persons ostensibly verifying the claimed memories who usually lived in another town some distance away. In the case of Shanti Devi, for example, Kedar Nath Chaubey and several of his relatives in Muttra would have had to participate to carry off a hoax.

Unconscious fraud provides a slightly more plausible hypothesis. By unconscious fraud I mean the possibility that the rememberer never actually related all the statements attributed to him; he only mentioned one or two of them, sufficient to lead to the identification of Person B; then (according to this supposition), after Person B had been identified (but not before), further statements were imaginatively attributed to the child. In short, a kind of collective hallucination occurred in which several persons said the child made statements which in fact he did not make. This hypothesis is certainly relevant to some of the items apparently matched. In comparing different reports of some of the cases I have noticed that in a small number of items the reports disagree regarding the claimed memories; or one report will mention certain items and a second report other items, with still other items common to both reports. (The reports I have studied of the case of Shanti Devi illustrate these discrepancies.) These discrepancies may, however, be errors of journalism, not necessarily of verification, and in any case such discrepancies as I have found in the reports apply only to a few items of the apparent memories. More serious objections to the hypothesis of unconscious fraud arise from the following two points. First, in a considerable number of instances witnesses outside the family were told of the child's recollections before attempts to verify the facts. In some instances written records were made before verification, or requests for verification

² T. L. Rampa, *The Third Eye*, Doubleday and Company, New York, 1957.

were sent in the form of a letter which documented at least some of what the child had said. Secondly, in a considerable number of instances the child made his statements over a period of time, sometimes five years or more, before verification was attempted. Frequently the impatient insistence of the child persuaded the parents reluctantly to look further into the matter. To attribute these cases to unconscious fraud then means supposing that the parents imagined that the child had made the claimed statements not once but many times over a number of years.

Before leaving the subject of fraud, I will mention briefly the attitudes towards reincarnation held in different countries as perhaps being relevant to motives for perpetrating fraud. As a large number of the cases in this collection occurred in India and Burma, one might suppose that the almost universal belief in reincarnation in these countries would provide a tempting ready-made audience for a hoax. Financial rewards do not seem to have occurred, but a certain amount of publicity undoubtedly did for some of the rememberers, although by no means all. However, we have no evidence of special enjoyment of the publicity, and some of the children seemed to dislike it strongly.

We should remember also, I think, that cultural differences as well may account for there being fewer cases of this kind in the Occident than in the Orient. For if the culture of India and Burma favors the telling of stories of reincarnation memories, that of the Occident does not and may lead to the ignoring or to the suppression of some developing recollections. In a number of instances of this series, the memories came in fragmentary fashion over a period of time. It seems probable (as happens with ordinary memories) that the telling of one memory with concentration on it evoked other memories. Sometimes the first memory would erupt in a burst of emotion in the presence of astonished parents who would then inquire further and elicit more details. The attitude of the parents and other inquirers can powerfully influence the recall of memories as every psychotherapist who tries to help his patients recall the past will testify.

Although Hindus and Buddhists believe in reincarnation, few Westerners know that many Hindus and Buddhists consider unfortunate and even destined to die young those who actually recall past lives. This superstition seems to have influenced a number of the parents of the children in this series to discourage their children from talking about alleged memories and to oppose attempts to verify the statements made. In some instances the records mention that the memories gradually faded either spontaneously or under the antagonistic pressure of the parents who forbade the child to speak of them.

2. Derivation of the "Memories" Through Normal Means with Subsequent Forgetting of the Source

This hypothesis seems much more plausible to me than that of fraud, either conscious or unconscious. It is probably the principal explanation of the data which must be excluded before we can give any consideration to the various hypotheses of paranormal cognition. In the first place, we need to remember that we can acquire knowledge and subsequently forget our source of acquisition while recalling the facts learned. Dr. Harold Rosen cites a case which illustrates this.³ A young man while hypnotized began to talk in a strange language eventually recognized as Oscan, a dialect of Italy in the 3rd century B.C. The subject wrote out what he was saying, which proved to be an Oscan curse. Further investigation showed that the subject had sometime before day-dreamed in a library while his eyes rested on a grammar of Oscan which happened to be lying open on the table before him. Quite unconsciously he had absorbed the phrases of Oscan which he had read. Then subsequently in the hypnotic trance these phrases reached expression. In his ordinary waking state the subject had no remembrance of the source of his knowledge of this fragment of this ancient language.

In another instructive case,⁴ an English army officer and his wife, touring in the country, came to a wayside pool which they both simultaneously thought they recognized. As they knew they had never been in that part of the country before, they began to think they must have lived there in some previous existence. They pointed out this object and that, finding these familiar to each, so that they became quite convinced of having lived there before. Upon returning to London they revisited an art gallery where they had been just before starting on their tour. There they saw again the picture of a wayside pool which they had noticed on their first visit to the gallery but which they had forgotten in the interval. This, then, was a case of *fausse reconnaissance à deux*.⁵

Zolik has studied the creation during hypnosis of completely

³ H. Rosen, in *A Scientific Report on "The Search for Bridey Murphy,"* Milton V. Kline, Editor, Julian Press, New York, 1956.

⁴ L. S. Lewis, Correspondence in *London Morning Post*, November 5, 1936.

⁵ A number of cases of this kind have been reported from the time of Coleridge in the 18th century, who described a case of an illiterate servant girl who talked Hebrew during a fever. It was discovered that she had picked up (without understanding) some phrases of Hebrew from a rabbi who employed her years before and who declaimed aloud in her presence while she worked. This kind of case is discussed further by Brand Blanshard, "Proof in Psychical Research," *JOURNAL A.S.P.R.*, July, 1957.

or partially fictitious "previous existences."⁶ His subjects, being instructed under hypnosis to remember a previous existence, did so with considerable plausibility. They reported "recalling" a "previous existence" as a personality whose ingredients were derived from persons they had known in childhood or from novels or theatrical productions known to them. In the waking state Zolik's subjects denied any previous knowledge of the persons "recalled" or information about them. However, when re-hypnotized and properly instructed, they could remember the source of the information they had used to construct the "previous existence" fantasy.

Such experiences and experiments as those summarized in the preceding paragraphs oblige us to consider whether the subjects of the present series might have acquired normally the information they told to others as "memories." I do not think we can answer this question categorically; we can only consider probabilities. But these seem to me to favor a belief that the children did not have normal knowledge of apparent memories. I have already suggested that we should segregate (Type 3b) cases in which both Person A (the rememberer) and Person B (the deceased) belonged to the same family or to families of close neighbors. Among the remaining 28 cases of Type 3c, we might further eliminate 4 (including the case of Eduardo Esplugas-Cabrera), in which the families lived or had lived in the same town. We might further eliminate 1 additional case in which one parent was known to have visited the second town in which the apparently remembered person had lived. These eliminations would still leave more than 20 cases in which the parents were apparently unfamiliar, not only with the existence of the previous Person A, but also with the area in which he lived. They likewise were sure that the remembering child had never visited, prior to attempts at verification, the area of the previous existence. Such statements by no means exclude the possibility of the child's having acquired the information normally either from the parents themselves (who had then forgotten their sources) or from visitors whose visits had been forgotten or unknown to the parents. We can be reasonably sure of one point about the possible normal acquisition of the information; in most instances no written records of the remembered Person B existed, or whatever records did exist did not include all the remembered items. Verification then depended upon the recollections of other living persons or upon inspection of the remembered home and

⁶ E. S. Zolik, "An Experimental Investigation of the Psychodynamic Implications of the Hypnotic 'Previous Existence' Fantasy," *J. Clin. Psychol.*, Vol. 14, 1958, p. 179. (Also unpublished data presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, 1958.)

town by the verifiers. Also in many instances the child's statements began before he could read. So the information must have been obtained, if it was derived normally, largely or entirely from other living persons. Eleven of the 28 percipients spoke of their recollections at the age of four or earlier, some beginning at ages one and a half and two. During these early years of a child's life, the parents would be likely, I think, to know and remember whether any visitor had had contact with the child sufficient to instill into its mind the ingredients of a previous personality. Yet we cannot say positively this could not have happened in these cases.

We need to remember that items normally acquired can become mingled with those paranormally derived in the productions of persons apparently remembering past lives. I have not considered that the case of "Bridey Murphy"⁷ is especially important because no person corresponding to "Bridey Murphy" has been found to have existed. In my classification this case belongs to Type 1a or possibly Type 2b. The case is instructive, however, because of the probable complexity of factors contributing to the formation of the "Bridey Murphy" personality and her statements. It seems possible, although by no means certain, that the rememberer in this case, Mrs. Virginia Tighe, had some acquaintances in childhood who were Irish or familiar with Ireland. We cannot say with certainty how much they may actually have communicated to Mrs. Tighe of what she subsequently seemed to have recalled as having happened to her while in existence as "Bridey Murphy." Her remarks included expressions which were authentically Irish, e.g., "linen" for "handkerchief" and others which were more characteristically American, e.g., "downtown" and "candy." Some of the statements which were at first thought erroneous, e.g., of the existence of iron beds in Ireland in the early 19th century, were subsequently verified or at least shown to be possibly correct. Even if Mrs. Tighe acquired some of "Bridey's" knowledge of Ireland in a normal (and forgotten) manner, she had also acquired a number of items of information about Ireland (e.g., the Meadows outside Cork) which were unfamiliar at first even to authorities on Ireland and required considerable research before being verified. I am inclined to think these items were somehow acquired paranormally by Mrs. Tighe. They may then have been woven into the fabric of the personality of "Bridey Murphy" who may or may not have actually existed. Professor Ducasse has written a penetrating analysis of the data in the "Bridey Murphy" case in which he examines and undermines the evidence alleged to

⁷ M. Bernstein, *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, Doubleday and Company, New York, 1956.

show that Mrs. Tighe must have acquired through normal means all the information given out by "Bridey Murphy."⁸

3. Racial Memory

The similarities of symbols in dreams and myths of all humans has led Jung and others to suppose that we all possess what Jung calls a "collective unconscious." In this portion of our mind, hidden from access except under special circumstances, lie dispositions and memories carried over from the past of the human race. Much instinctual behavior seems to illustrate and justify this concept. For example, some female animals may care for their young even when they themselves have had no such mothering care and therefore could not have learned this behavior. This theory may account for certain general aptitudes of human behavior and even perhaps for the passing-on within the same family of special traits or skills. We certainly have not discovered the limits of genetic transmission. However, the extension of this hypothesis to account for the apparent memories of former incarnations under discussion here encounters serious obstacles. It might apply in instances where the percipient (Person A) belongs to a line descending from Person B. But we have already seen that in most of the cases of this series the second person was born in another family in another town. The second birth usually occurred within a few years of the death of the first person. This would make impossible any transmission of information from the first to the second person along genetic lines.

4. Extrasensory Perception of the Items of the Apparent Recollections in the Minds of Living Persons

We have next to consider the possibility that the rememberers acquired through clairvoyance or telepathy the information then claimed to have been "remembered." Against this hypothesis is the fact that with two exceptions none of the rememberers, who were nearly all children, was ever known to exhibit anything like clairvoyance or telepathy on other occasions. However, other adult persons who have claimed to remember past lives, e.g., Mlle. Smith studied by Flournoy,⁹ and Joan Grant,¹⁰ did exhibit extrasensory perception at other times than during such remembrances. Assum-

⁸ C. J. Ducasse, "How the Case of *The Search for Bridey Murphy* Stands Today," *JOURNAL A.S.P.R.*, January, 1960, pp. 3-22.

⁹ T. Flournoy, *Des Indes à la Planète Mars. Étude sur un Cas de Somnambulisme avec Glossolalie*, Lib. Fischbacher, Paris, 1900.

¹⁰ J. Grant, *Far Memory*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1956.

ing the exhibition of extrasensory perception to account for these cases, we would have to suppose that in those instances in which a child reported additional memories over a period of years, he continued to have paranormal faculties over these years yet restricted these powers to communication with the living persons who had the relevant items of information in their minds. Many persons have had only one paranormal experience in their lives, e.g., seen one apparition; but it must be unusual for a person with a marked capacity for extrasensory perception to have it confined over some years to communications with one person or small group of persons who themselves are completely unknown (in the beginning) to the percipient.

In most of the instances of this series, Person B had died less than twenty years before the birth of the rememberer (Person A). In some instances, only a year had elapsed between B's death and A's birth. Persons with memories capable of verifying the facts still lived in most of the cases, and in many instances these were persons still mourning or at least missing the deceased person B. They might have been thinking about him and therefore acting unconsciously as agents for the paranormal transmission of information about him. If they were not thinking about him, then we would have to suppose that the percipient somehow happened to select these persons from whose subconscious minds he drew the information apparently "remembered" about the deceased person.

Clairvoyance of contemporary conditions alone would not account for the memories. For in several instances the percipient accurately reported buildings as they once were, not as they were at the time of verification. Verification in some instances came by direct inspection of the sites described, but in other instances, e.g., the cases of Katsugoro and Shanti Devi (as well as the Bhan case mentioned in Part I¹¹) verification came only from the confirmation of living persons who recalled that the buildings, trees, etc. once existed as the percipient described them. The episode of Shanti Devi's directing a search for the money her husband had removed from her hiding place requires a particularly complex explanation. If we suppose that she derived information about this money and its hiding place only from telepathic reading of K. N. Chaubey's mind, we must account for her learning that the money once was buried there by his previous wife, without learning that he had since removed the money. The telepathic hypothesis of these cases requires, in such instances, an ability of the percipient to select information from the mind of the agent about how things

¹¹ W. C. White, "Cruise Memory," in *Beyond the Five Senses*, E. J. Garrett, Editor, J. B. Lippincott, New York, 1957.

were formerly, while rejecting (when changes have taken place,) information about how things were at the time of the statements and their subsequent verification.

These objections by no means exclude the hypothesis that the percipients derived the information of their statements by some form of extrasensory perception. But this explanation, if correct, would make these cases instances of a very unusual development of such perception. If we compare the veridical information given by these percipients to that provided by other mediums, we have to imagine the feats of most mediums surpassed. For in these instances we have to suppose telepathic communications in which there is no sitter, either primary or proxy, nor any object to stimulate perceptions as in psychometry. And these feats of unstimulated extrasensory perception would have to occur in small children (for the most part) not known (with one exception among the children) to exhibit such powers in other matters.

5. *Retrocognition*

A number of persons have reported deriving information about past events of which, to the best of their knowledge, they had not gained information through normal means. Miss Edith Olivier's account of perceiving a county fair at Avebury, discontinued 65 years earlier, provides an example of this.¹² So does the account of a ceremonial apparently viewed in Salisbury Cathedral several hundred years after it occurred.¹³ Some sensitives with skill in psychometry have shown a capacity for reconstructing the past. The experiments of Dr. Gustav Pagenstecher and Dr. W. F. Prince with Señora M. Reyes de Z.¹⁴ illustrate such powers.

Such feats of retrocognition have made plausible for some persons the hypothesis that a record exists of everything that happens. This record is supposedly imprinted on some immaterial substance to which some persons achieve access under special conditions. The theory does not become strengthened or weakened by further hypotheses about the "etheric" or other nature of such a record. The following points deserve remembrance in considering retrocognition as an explanatory hypothesis of the cases of this series.

¹² E. Olivier, *Without Knowing Mr. Walkley*, Faber and Faber, London, 1939. (I have not been able to study this information at first hand. I take my information from R. C. Johnson, *The Imprisoned Splendour*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1953.)

¹³ F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, Longmans, Green and Company, New York, 1903.

¹⁴ G. Pagenstecher, "Past Events Seership," Editor, Walter Franklin Prince, *Proc., A.S.P.R.*, Vol. 16, 1922.

The instances of retrocognition published in the literature of psychical research seem to have at least one or more of the following features. The percipient is always (a) at the scene of the retrocognized events, e.g., in Salisbury Cathedral; or (b) stimulated by some object connected with the events themselves or persons participating in them, e.g., a slip of paper, knife, or ring; or (c) in an altered state of consciousness, e.g., gazing at a crystal or in a trance. These conditions do not apply to the great majority of the percipients of the present series of cases. In some instances, the percipient's return to the scenes of earlier life seems to have stimulated additional memories. Thus Shanti Devi while in Delhi seemed to recall little about her former parents and chiefly recalled memories of her married life. But on her visit to Muttra, memories of her former parents apparently became stimulated so that she recognized them among a crowd of fifty persons. However, for the most part, the percipients were neither in an altered state of consciousness (apparently) nor exposed to stimuli which seem to be a common accompaniment if not an absolute requirement of retrocognitive experiences.

6. *Precognition*

Precognition is another hypothesis requiring paranormal cognition but not survival. According to this interpretation of the data, the percipients have anticipatory visions of the subsequent verifications of the statements made. To account for the correspondence between the statements made by the percipients and the subsequently verified facts, some paranormal cognition would still be required. This hypothesis does not, therefore, have any of the advantages of the hypothesis of simple telepathy or clairvoyance; it has one disadvantage, namely, that the statements made were never expressed as a view of the future, as precognitive experiences sometimes (certainly not always) are. On the contrary, to the percipients the backward view in time was never questioned. They described and always seemed to experience the percepts as having happened, as being for them what we call memories. Precognitive percepts, as in dreams, even when they carry no explicit temporal characteristics, such as a premonitory warning of trouble to come, nevertheless are rarely, if ever, confused with memories. They may mean nothing to the percipient until fulfilled later, but they do not seem to resemble memories.

7. *Communication from a Surviving Personality or Part-Personality*

Hypotheses about these data which include some form of survival all depend for their plausibility on our dissatisfaction with the

alternative hypotheses which explain the facts either through normal communications or through paranormal communications but without survival. The proof of survival, if obtained, seems to lie in a complete exclusion of the alternative hypotheses which do not require survival even though they may depend heavily on paranormal cognition. However, if a student of these data believes that simple telepathy between the living does not explain the statements claimed as memories of former incarnations, he is not thereby free to assert that reincarnation is the only remaining hypothesis worthy of attention. At least two other possibilities remain.

The first of these is that the information derived about a dead person comes from a surviving personality or a part-personality. The communicator would not need to be the person about whom the information is obtained. Three principal arguments against this hypothesis, all of which are weak, occur to me. The first is that the apparent memories for the most part became conscious during a normal state of consciousness. However, some communications suggesting contact with discarnate personalities as strongly as any recorded, namely, those of Mrs. Willett,¹⁵ occurred in a state of consciousness only slightly altered from what was habitual for this medium. Secondly, some mediums who have had experiences with communications from ostensibly discarnate personalities and also apparent memories of former incarnations claim to distinguish these kinds of experience. I attach little importance to this argument. Mlle. Smith, so extensively studied by Professor Flournoy,⁹ exhibited communications purporting to come from discarnate personalities, e.g., a control called Leopold, and at other times assumed the personalities of various persons whose lives she claimed to have lived previously. One of these personalities, a Martian, was certainly fictitious and another, Marie Antoinette, almost certainly so. A third personality, a Hindu princess, presented a more difficult problem, because she made statements about a little-known area of India which were subsequently verified only after much research and discovered in a book which Mlle. Smith almost certainly had never read.¹⁶ But apart from the evaluation of this particular "memory," the productions of Mlle. Smith illustrate well the difficulty in dissecting memories and fantasies; a claim by a medium that she can herself

¹⁵ G. W. Balfour, "A Study of the Psychological Aspects of Mrs. Willett's Mediumship," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. 43, 1935.

⁹ Flournoy, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ But she may have read other sources of the information. Professor Flournoy discusses such other possible sources in a later book: *Nouvelles Observations sur un Cas de Somnambulisme*. This I have not studied and my information on this point is taken from Myers, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 139.

distinguish between these in no way shows that she can. Thirdly, if the percipients derived information from discarnate personalities about the lives apparently remembered, why did the communicators each confine their communications to information about one person? Such rationing of information is certainly uncommon, if it occurs at all in other mediumistic experiences. But then, the cases of this series may be the examples of this.

8. *Possession*

Supposing some form of survival is alone capable of explaining the information of the percipient, the temporary possession by the previous personality of the body of the reporting personality might account for the phenomena. We have some evidence that this kind of thing may happen. By this I mean that in certain mediumistic experiences the body of the medium becomes so completely controlled by another personality that observers believe it occupied by a deceased personality whose special characteristics they claim to identify. Examples of this kind of communication are found in the sittings of Mr. Drayton Thomas with Mrs. Leonard,¹⁷ and in some other reports of trance phenomena.¹⁸ Ordinarily such transformations of personality last only a few minutes, but at least one instance has occurred in which the transformation extended several months. I refer to the case of Lurancy Vennum,^{19, 20} whose body was apparently occupied by the spirit of Mary Roff for several months, many years after Mary Roff had died. Mary Roff had died when Lurancy Vennum was 15 months old. The families of the two children lived in the same town but were only slightly acquainted. During the period of "possession," the Mary Roff personality showed a knowledge of the affairs of Mary Roff quite beyond the known information possessed by Lurancy Vennum. Moreover, she exhibited the personal characteristics of Mary Roff to a degree which quite convinced her parents that she had indeed reincarnated for this period. Regarding this point we should remember the extraordinary capacity of sitters to believe credulously that they have communicated with their deceased loved ones when hearing ostensible

¹⁷ C. D. Thomas, "Personal Control in Trance Sittings," in W. H. Salter, *Trance Mediumship*, S.P.R., London, 1950.

¹⁸ Bozzano, *Luce e Ombra*, Rome, 1920. (Quoted in A. T. Baird, Ed., *One Hundred Cases for Survival After Death*, B. Ackerman, New York, 1944.)

¹⁹ E. W. Stevens, *The Watseka Wonder. A Narrative of Startling Phenomena Occurring in the Case of Mary Lurancy Vennum*. Religio-Philosophical Publishing House, Chicago, 1887.

²⁰ W. James, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1890, p. 396.

communications at mediumistic séances. Yet one would be less easily deceived by daily contact with the other personality over a period of months. The case of Lurancy Vennum was well studied and seems to make plausible the hypothesis of temporary possession as an explanation for apparent memories of former incarnations. However, in none of the percipients of the present cases did another personality claim to be communicating or occupying the body of the percipient, as seems to happen in mediumistic controls of this kind, and indeed as happened in the case of Lurancy Vennum. "Mary Roff" then claimed to be Mary Roff and to recall her terrestrial life as Mary Roff; she never claimed that the personality who was Lurancy Vennum had once been Mary Roff. For most of the percipients of this series there was no shift in personality during the reporting of the memories. A possible exception to this occurred in the case of Shanti Devi who on her trip of verification to Muttra used (to what extent was not reported) the dialect of Muttra in her speech. Another more definite exception occurred in the case of an American housewife who, in a deep hypnotic trance, not only claimed to remember a life as a Confederate soldier, but assumed the accent, idiom and attitudes of this man.²¹ In many other instances of apparent memories of former incarnations, transformations of personality of varying degrees have occurred, e.g., in the case of "Bridey Murphy,"²² the case of "Naomi Henry,"²³ and the case of "Rosemary."²⁴ However, the occurrence of such transformations of personality does not establish the phenomena as due to possession. Transformations of personality can occur during simple regression, such as in the return to earlier behavior commonly found in mental illness. Thus a person remembering how he once felt and behaved can again exhibit these feelings and behavior. This can also occur during ordinary acting. The same might occur in the recall of memories of past lives. True possession, we must suppose, involves a transformation of personality; but transformation of personality does not necessarily mean possession by a discarnate personality. One may be transformed and ostensibly "possessed" only by memories of one's earlier personality or by a split-off portion of one's present self as in multiple personality.

²¹ Personal Communication from an investigator of this case.

²² Bernstein, *op. cit.*

²³ H. Blythe, *The Three Lives of Naomi Henry*, The Citadel Press, New York, 1956.

²⁴ F. H. Wood, *This Egyptian Miracle*, John M. Watkins, London, 1955.

9. *Reincarnation*

Of the various hypotheses to be considered I have left reincarnation to the last so that its claims to attention may derive from the consideration and possible rejection of competing explanations of the data. The writer of a review of this kind has the privilege and perhaps the obligation of saying how he personally interprets the data. I will say, therefore, that I think reincarnation the most plausible hypothesis for understanding the cases of this series. This is not to say that I think they prove reincarnation either singly or together. Indeed, I am quite sure they do not. But for each of the alternative hypotheses I find objections or shortcomings which make them for me unsuitable explanations of all the cases, although they may apply to some.

Thus I find it difficult to believe that the cases all resulted from hoaxing or even from unconscious fraud in which supposed witnesses retrospectively imagined that a child had said things he did not say. I find it difficult to believe that small children could have normally acquired information about dead persons in other towns about whom little or nothing was written. If they had done so, they would have had to be primed by visitors who knew the deceased and whose meetings with the children were either unknown to the children's parents or completely forgotten. I find it difficult to believe that all the percipients could have derived the information through telepathy only. If they did this, then they accomplished feats of retrocognitive extrasensory perception without (in all but three instances) any alteration in their habitual states of consciousness or behavior. These exclusions seem to me to leave some form of surviving personality as the source of the information. The restriction of the communications to information about one person, the lack of alterations of consciousness, and the absence, in most cases, of any transformation of personality make less likely the hypotheses of communication with another surviving personality either with or without control of the percipient. This leaves reincarnation as the remaining substantial hypothesis.

I have already mentioned that I do not think the data provide anything like proof of reincarnation. I attach little importance to the number of cases in this series. The "faggot" analogy of evidence whereby it is supposed a number of cases, each individually weak, gain a strength by their similarities does not appeal to me. The weaknesses might be in different places and spuriously concealed by their similarities. In the present series, for example, let us suppose that two or three cases resulted from the willingness of parents to perpetrate a hoax with the aid of their children for a little publicity; then let us suppose that in two or three other

cases percipient and witness imagined after checking that the percipient made many more statements than he did before the checking, so that a few coincidences became amplified into many false correspondences; then let us also suppose that in some additional cases visitors told stories about other people to children, and the parents did not know this or forgot about the visitors; and let us finally suppose further that a few more percipients actually had considerable capacity for extrasensory perception — matching that of the best known sensitives — even though they did not otherwise demonstrate their abilities. In this way, even a series of many more cases than the present collection might melt away without providing any strength for the reincarnation hypothesis by their mere numbers. Obviously one thoroughly investigated case could carry us farther than a hundred cases in which we cannot exclude various alternative explanations.

I prefer another quality of faggots to their supposed increased strength. This is that when kindled they give out more smoke than a single stick, and the smoke can lead us to the fire. A large number of cases in which the recall of true memories is a plausible hypothesis should make that hypothesis worthy of attention. I think the number of cases in the present collection confers that respectability on the hypothesis, even though many of these cases may have particular aspects which make some other hypothesis more plausible in such cases. Expectations can harmfully influence perceptions. If we proceed in an investigation with the expectation of confirming a particular hypothesis, we may think we discover more evidence for it than we do. But the reverse type of misperception can also occur with equal harm. If we reject offhand, as most Westerners are inclined to do, the hypothesis of reincarnation, we may exclude from our investigations those conditions which could permit further relevant data to emerge.

Rosen³ and Zolik⁴ view apparent memories of previous existences as fantasies harmonious with the psychological needs of the subject. Their work has shown that this explanation suffices for some cases. But does it for all? The capacity to imagine a former existence has existed for ages. Novelists, playwrights, and actors have used their talents along this line for centuries. The creation of another personality does not arrest our attention; but it is arrested by the inclusion in this personality, or in statements about it, of information which the narrator could not apparently have acquired normally. Further investigation of "previous existence" statements should turn to the study of the paranormal elements in the narrations.

³ Rosen, *op. cit.*

⁴ Zolik, *op. cit.*

PROPOSALS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATIONS

To resolve the claims of rival hypotheses concerning the apparent memories of former incarnations will require much painstaking investigation in the future. It is doubtful if today we have thought of all the alternative possibilities, much less devised means of evaluating them in individual cases. Nevertheless, we can do much more even with the subjects and techniques now available. I have divided the proposals I will make into two groups.

(a) *Methods of Eliciting Further Images of the Kind Experienced as Memories of Former Incarnations*

Obviously the more we can elicit in suitable subjects the kinds of images which percipients experience as memories of former incarnations the better our position for deciding whether these really are what the percipients usually claim them to be. A number of investigators have used hypnosis extensively in research into this subject. Hypnosis seems certainly to aid some people to bring up images of the kind under consideration. In the cases with which I am familiar, a transformation of personality in which the rememberer assumes the personality of the ostensibly remembered person seems to occur more frequently with hypnosis. This does not need to be an obstacle to the careful study of such cases.

I cannot agree with those who believe that "memories" evoked under hypnosis are always likely to have been put into the mind of the subject by the hypnotist or offered to the hypnotist by the subject in an effort to please the hypnotist. Certainly the subject becomes more suggestible during hypnosis and some of his productions may be memories of the present life or fictions invented to satisfy the requests of the hypnotist. Yet other productions may have derived from paranormal perceptions. We should evaluate the paranormal elements apart from the methods of producing the ostensible memories. I shall discuss this problem in the next section.

Two further features of hypnosis deserve mention. First, under hypnosis it is quite possible for the regression to be partial and also to fluctuate from time to time during a hypnotic session. We have already seen that "Bridey Murphy" used some expressions which were clearly "American," mentioned some items which may have derived from early learned information about Ireland, and mentioned still other items knowledge of which was possibly obtained paranormally. In other cases it has been possible for the subject to understand English spoken to him while he spoke and largely responded in a foreign tongue, unfamiliar in the waking state.

Secondly, hypnosis is by no means an essential feature of the production of the images which are experienced as memories of former lives. Nearly all the percipients of the present series produced their memories in normal states of consciousness. The interests of the subject and that of his listener undoubtedly influence the production of these images. Psychiatrists know that patients tend to dream in the style of their therapists or not to dream at all if their therapists show no interest in their dreams. The whole complex relationship between subject and listener can undoubtedly similarly influence the production of these images. Dr. Blanche Baker has a considerable interest in this subject, and her patients seem often and easily to bring up images which they experience as memories of former incarnations. They do this while lying down in a state of relaxation with the eyes covered but are far from deeply hypnotized.

Of the cases I have grouped as Type 3c, in which a person remembered another definitely identified person, only one of the remembrances occurred exclusively during a dream. In one other case, the rememberer recalled during a dream some additional items of information about his supposed earlier life. Nevertheless, some persons have had during dreams apparent recollections of former lives which included information about earlier times and other places they were satisfied they could not have gained normally. These would be examples of Type 2a and 2b in my classification. Dreams therefore may prove an important additional source of material relevant to this question.

In the so-called hallucinogenic drugs, such as lysergic acid diethylamide, we may have powerful tools for the uncovering of whatever memories exist. Some of these drugs seem more effective in inducing recall than others and deserve further study. We should perhaps call them mnemogenic drugs. A number of investigators have reported (a) that drugs such as lysergic acid have a far greater capacity to induce the recall of forgotten memories of present lives than any previously used substances such as sodium amytal and (b) that certain subjects bring up fantasies or images in which they seem to be in some foreign land, or earlier time, e.g., in Paris at the time of the revolution, in ancient Egypt, etc. Sandison has interpreted these images as expressions of the Jungian archetypes.²⁴ However, in some subjects whose experiences have come to my attention the images have organized into connected or sequential stories and were experienced as memories of former incarnations.

²⁴ R. A. Sandison, A. M. Spencer, and J. D. A. Whitelaw, "The Therapeutic Value of Lysergic Acid Diethylamide in Mental Illness," *Journ. Mental Sci.*, Vol. 100, 1954, p. 491.

The capacity of certain images to evoke the memory of others is well known to students of memory. A visit to a boyhood home may arouse memories of the events which took place there. Conceivably many of the *déjà vu* experiences which impress the percipient as partial memories of former incarnations may be just that. The present scene may draw the memories close to the surface and give a sense of familiarity while falling short of sufficient clarity for evidential detail. But perhaps a careful study of such impressions under proper circumstances might bring out further details. Payne and Bendit²⁵ describe the experience of an Englishman who became ill when visiting Florence and while delirious seemed to recall with much detail a previous life in Florence. In this case the combination of stimulation from the local scene and the altered consciousness brought by the fever may have facilitated this fantasy which he had never had before. Joan Grant reports that the playing of music on a mandolin stirred up in her the first of a whole series of apparent memories of a life as a strolling player which she subsequently published as her novel, *Life as Carola*.¹⁰

Crises with emotional arousal seem to have played a part in evoking some apparent memories of former incarnations. Investigators should therefore attend to the productions of patients during severe stress, especially those who show much emotional arousal. Severe illnesses, operations, and the approach of death may stimulate these images in some people, either by the emotional arousal or by the altered state of consciousness which frequently accompanies these conditions.

Since the majority of instances in the present series occurred in children, investigators should look for further examples among children. Parents in the Occident are so disposed to think reincarnation nonsense that some time may elapse before children feel sufficiently free to disclose whatever fantasies of this kind they have. Whether or not reincarnation does occur, if a child thinks he remembers a previous existence and his parents think he could not possibly do so, the child will soon say little about the subject to the parents.

(b) *Methods of Evaluating the Paranormality in the Apparent Memories*

As more spontaneous cases of this kind come to the attention of investigators, they should receive the careful study which few

²⁵ P. B. Payne and L. J. Bendit, *This World and That*, Faber and Faber, London, 1950.

¹⁰ Grant, *op. cit.*

of them until now have had. When investigators can talk to a percipient before verification is attempted, they can make written records of the alleged memories prior to checking. They can also perhaps talk with the child or other rememberer to elicit both further possible memories and possible sources of normally acquired information about the deceased person. In addition, they may learn much more than we already know about the circumstances which seem to favor the occurrence of such memories.

In evaluating cases of apparent memories of former incarnations, investigators should first try to exclude the possibilities of fraud, conscious or unconscious, and normal acquisition of the reported information on the part of the percipient. I have nothing new to add about the detection of fraud, but will make a few comments on excluding normal sources of information. I think in this respect children may provide excellent subjects. When a small child of, say, less than three years old, reports these apparent memories we have a chance to exclude firmly the possibility that he acquired the information normally. Obviously some parents do not know what persons have talked with their children and communicated what information. But I submit that some parents do know with reliable accuracy whether their children have ever met someone from a distant town or not. The older the child the weaker must become our convictions about the limitations of his sources of information. Of adults, one can rarely say they could not possibly have acquired information through normal channels. Even illiterate people learn much from television, radio, and moving pictures. One can only estimate, and then roughly, the probability that a particular person could not have acquired the information he imparted in a normal way. In this hypnosis may help. Zolik's subjects who concocted "previous existence" fantasies at his request while hypnotized also told him when under hypnosis the sources of their fantasies. So far as I know, none of the percipients of the present series were questioned under hypnosis about the sources of the information they imparted as memories. If such subjects revealed a source of information earlier in the present life their fantasies would be understood. If they did not reveal such a source and claimed absolutely no source except their own memories, this would still not validate the experiences as true memories. If it did, then Mlle. Smith once lived on Mars.⁹ Nevertheless, searching for sources of normally acquired information through questioning the subject under hypnosis could aid in eliminating some cases in order to permit the fuller study of the remainder along other lines.

⁹ Flournoy, *op. cit.*

In everyday life memories serve us rather well, and we ordinarily do not need to question their accuracy. Unfortunately, memories can be extremely and demonstrably inaccurate while the rememberer remains convinced of their validity. Students of psychopathology have learned thoroughly that a patient may present with complete sincerity a story of an event as having happened to him when in fact it did not happen. For this reason, we cannot believe that something happened to a person simply because he claims to recall a memory of it. Joan Grant¹⁰ suggests as a means of discrimination between fantasy and memory (of former incarnations) the percipient's ability to modify the image. In the otherwise extremely interesting and perceptive account of her experiences, I find this one of the least useful comments. Experiments have shown that the act of recalling a memory can alter it so that at the next recall the remembered image has departed further from the original stimulus than it would in the same length of time if it had been left unrecalled. Plasticity in an apparent memory does not prove it a fantasy. I am equally confident that durability of the images does not prove them memories.

In learning to discriminate memories and fantasies, attention to the physical components of apparent memories may prove helpful. When we recall an experience that was accompanied by strong emotions, we bring back some or all of the original emotions. Such evoked emotions, like their originals, include a wide variety of physiological changes which vary with the intensity of the emotion and with certain poorly understood characteristics of the recalling person. But considerable physiological changes may occur in the viscera and the skin. Such emotional recollections may reproduce physical changes of a traumatic nature. Thus during the recall with emotion of a whipping, bleeding wounds at the sites of original wounds have been known to appear; rope marks around the wrists of a man who was once brutally tied have reappeared when he recalled his suffering.^{26, 27} The intensity and even severity of such changes might tempt us to believe that they prove these experiences actually happened to the person who claims the memory of them. Unfortunately, we have to stop short of this conclusion. Students of mysticism have found that, when stigmata appear on the bodies of religious persons worshipping before a crucifix, the stigmata on the mystic appear in the same places as the wounds in the image of Christ before which they have worshipped.²⁸ Thus identification

¹⁰ Grant, *op. cit.*

²⁶ R. L. Moody, "Bodily Changes During Abreaction," *Lancet*, Vol. ii., 1946, p. 934.

²⁷ —, "Bodily Changes During Abreaction," *Lancet*, Vol. i., 1948, p. 964.

²⁸ H. Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism*, Burns Oates, London, 1952, p. 123.

influences both the occurrence and location of imitative wounds in someone who has not himself been crucified and who does not claim (however strong his identification with Christ) that he has. We can conclude then that when marked physical changes occur in the bodies during apparent recall, these changes relate to some previous strong emotional experience. The experience may have been an event which happened to the percipient or may have derived from some extremely strong identification. In some cases in which this happens we may be able to assure ourselves that no such identification has occurred, and this would increase the plausibility of considering the physical changes to be accompaniments of the recall of an experience.

Several persons reporting apparent memories of former incarnations have reported physical experiences accompanying the recall of such images, either in the direction of the worsening of a symptom or its dramatic improvement. Thus Martin reported a variety of physical changes occurring in several different subjects during apparent vivid recalls of previous lives, the recalls in these cases amounting to an apparent reliving of previous experiences.²⁹ Dr. Blanche Baker reported seeing an area of erythema on the back of a patient the day after this patient recalled being stabbed in the back in a previous existence.³⁰ A sensitivity and phobia to feathers disappeared completely following the recall of a painful experience with vultures which had apparently occurred in a previous existence.³¹ Further study of such cases may help in our understanding of what constitutes a true memory and what a fantasy.

Experiences, whether or not recalled as memories, may affect structure as well as function. In three of the cases whose records I have studied, various similar physical features, e.g., marks, deformities, or asymmetries, are reported to have occurred on both the percipient and the person remembered. Thus in one case not otherwise considered important, a boy who claimed to remember having been killed in the First World War was found to have on his body two marks strikingly similar to scars of bullet wounds. I have already cited the physical similarities noted between the two Alexandrina Samonas. In two other instances with the accounts of which I am familiar, special features of the appearance of particular children were accurately predicted by sensitives who claimed to be communicating with the discarnate personalities about to be reborn.

²⁹ A. R. Martin, *Researches in Reincarnation and Beyond*, Martin, Sharon, Pa., 1942.

³⁰ B. Baker, Personal Communication.

³¹ J. Grant, Personal Communication.

Such small but possibly important similarities of physical appearance may occur more often than they are observed. When many years separate the death of one person and the percipient who claims to recall his life, the living verifiers of the facts may not recall small details of physical appearance. As I have already mentioned, parents can influence a child to behave like a dead child and may tell him stories about the dead child which the second child subsequently remembers as applying to himself; and for these reasons we should observe extreme caution in studying instances of apparent memories of former incarnations when both persons occur in the same family. Yet I think we should not discard such cases altogether. For parents may make comparisons of details of physical appearance and behavior which could prove as important as specific recollections. Certainly parents cannot influence physical stigmata and can influence little or not at all special talents such as the ability to handle marionette dolls or drums, two skills shown at an early age by children who claimed to recall earlier lives in which they possessed such skills, but were known not to have learned these skills in their present lives.

Adaptations of the word association test (with measurements of physiological responses) may prove useful in distinguishing different personalities from each other. Let us suppose that we wished to attempt the distinction of a personality calling himself Napoleon Bonaparte from one calling himself Emperor Maximilian. We could read to each a list of common feminine names, among which we could embed the names "Josephine," "Marie Louise," and "Carlotta." We should then expect to find that a genuine Napoleon Bonaparte would show an emotional response to the words, "Josephine" and "Marie Louise," but not to "Carlotta," while a genuine Maximilian would show the reverse pattern of response.

We may also investigate profitably instances of apparent memories of former incarnations in which the rememberer speaks a foreign language quite unfamiliar in his ordinary state. Richet called this xenoglossy. Now we know that a child may learn fragments of a foreign language, forget its source and subsequently produce in adulthood some phrases of the language. Some writers have attributed such feats to knowledge from a previous existence. In most such cases, however, the subject has not conducted a conversation with observers but has only babbled a few recognizable phrases in the foreign tongue. The rememberer does not understand what he says; nor can he understand the same language spoken to him. We may call these instances of "recitative xenoglossy" and contrast them with true responsive xenoglossy in which the subject can indeed converse with others in a foreign language.

Cases of this kind occur extremely rarely. Of special value among these cases of xenoglossy are instances in which the language spoken is a dead one. The most extensively studied of such cases is the "Rosemary" case in which a young medium spoke a tongue identified as ancient Egyptian.²³ She could converse fluently in this tongue. An Egyptologist who collaborated in the investigation vouched for its authenticity. Recently a case has occurred in which the subject spoke an early Norwegian dialect which bore a relationship to modern Norwegian similar to that between Chaucerian and modern English. In her trances, this subject assumed the personality of a Norseman of medieval times and conversed in the dialect mentioned although still capable of understanding some English. There is no evidence that this subject ever had contact with modern Norwegian, much less anyone who could speak this ancient form of Norwegian. Further study of this case and a full report are planned. Cases of responsive xenoglossy have the greatest importance for this subject. When we can exclude normal acquisition of knowledge of the foreign language by the subject, the explanatory hypotheses become helpfully reduced and almost restricted to possession and reincarnation.

CONCLUSION

The evidence I have assembled and reviewed here does not warrant any firm conclusion about reincarnation. But it does justify, I believe, a much more extensive and more sympathetic study of this hypothesis than it has hitherto received in the West. Further investigation of apparent memories of former incarnations may well establish reincarnation as the most probable explanation of these experiences. Along this line we may in the end obtain more convincing evidence of human survival of physical death than from other kinds of evidence. In mediumistic communications we have the problem of proving that someone clearly dead still lives. In evaluating apparent memories of former incarnations, the problem consists in judging whether someone clearly living once died. This may prove the easier task and, if pursued with sufficient zeal and success, may contribute decisively to the question of survival.

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²³ Wood, *op. cit.*