

Biased evaluations of regression experiences

How reincarnation disbelievers subjectively interpret data

by Jan Erik Sigdell, Slovenia (regression therapist, formerly in Switzerland))

A few cases of regression experience have been investigated in a rather tendentious manner and then became spread as “proofs” against reincarnation, since the experience “obviously” resulted from cryptomnesia. I here intend to reinvestigate four such investigations to show that the claimed results are not conclusive, but largely guided by the preconceived intention to arrive at this kind of “proof”, and therefore have a touch of “wishful thinking”.

Furthermore, who has a long experience with regression therapy will be quite aware that the facts and data, which our rational mind is eager to find and evaluate, are of a secondary importance to the soul. What is more important to the soul is why something happened, and maybe how, but hardly where and when [1]. In respect to karma it is also important for the soul to know what lessons it should learn from its experiences and the relationships to other souls involved. So when a subject is asked for data that are irrelevant to his soul, however relevant it may appear to someone else’s rational mind, what can we expect?

The Matthew case of Jonathan Venn

The American psychologist and hypnotherapist Jonathan Venn has reported a case of regression under hypnosis [2]. The actual patient, called Matthew, experienced himself as the French pilot Jacques Gionne Trecaulte who died August 1914 in the first world war from being shot by a German pilot. The shot hit his chest and Matthew related this to his strong chest pains for which no medical explanation had been found, which disappeared after the third regression. He was allegedly shot by a machine gun, but such guns were not installed in German planes before October 1914. Wow, an error! The minor difference of not more than two months became a decisive factor. The not very improbable possibility that a few German planes were experimentally equipped with machine guns at an earlier date, before doing it with all of them, was not taken into consideration. Also not that it may have been another kind of gun fire that the American client interpreted as one might expect it to day. The statement “August 1914” may quite easily be an unconscious estimate or guess and will not be accurate.

Of 30 facts that could be checked, mainly by means of American sources, 16 were correct and 14 “false”, among the latter the machine-gun fire, which should obviously be regarded as an uncertainty rather than an error. Many of the other facts declared as “false” concern names of places that – mainly according to American documents - appear to be non-existent in France. Most of the 17 further facts could only be investigated through French sources, in mail correspondence with French authorities, who found them inapplicable or not identifiable. Venn did not research all this in France himself, which is understandable in view of the effort that would have been required, even though he visited Thionville, where Jacques claimed to have lived. If, however, he had personally done a more extensive research in France, a different picture might have evolved.

A few other researchers of regression cases, like Linda Tarazi*, did go through extensive and time-consuming efforts of researching themselves at actual locations, and even found confirmations where the authorities did not (or did not invest much interest in the question). To declare all such facts as “false” is jumping to a conclusion, since “unconfirmed” would be the honest statement. Among these facts is the name Jacques Gionne Trecaulte that was not verified by (mainly remotely) consulting French archives. Does that really prove that he never existed? Or is this just another “unconfirmed” statement. One will have to question if the name was spelled correctly. There is also a place named Trecaulte with a large soldier cemetery from the first world war. Should the possibility have been checked that one was actually dealing with “Jacques Gionne from Trescault” (or maybe

* See Tarazi, Linda: *Under the Inquisition – an experience relived*, Hampton Roads, Charlottesville VA, 1987. An exceptional example of extensive and meticulous research that fully confirms a remarkable past-life regression experience.

buried in Trescault)? Or a different spelling? There are family names like “Geonne” and “Giaunne”, which are pronounced very similarly. As we can see, various alternatives are often not taken into consideration, especially when (as in this case) the “remote researcher” knows no French.

One might have discovered that a village *Airons* exists west of Thionville (though quite far from there, whereas the name “Arions” was not found, “error” 17), that there really is a St. Joseph’s Church in Paris (but it is not a cathedral, “error” 18), that a name *Neuviere* might apply where “Nieuvere” was not found (“error” 30), and so on. Why could not a French pilot have participated, even though the British kept reconnaissance over the German invasion (“error” 27)? And though the Germans temporarily called the town “Diedenhofen” during their occupation, the French will no doubt have continued to call it Thionville (“error” 32)! Thus we could continue to tediously go through all the data marked as “false” in the table of Venn and question quite a number of such statements.

The real intention of the Venn, in view of his Christian background [3], appears to be building a case for cryptomnesia. He states that attempts to exclude cryptomnesia would be paradoxical, since if data exist, they are available to both the researcher and the client and he asks how we would prove that the client had no access to them? But he does not consider the reverse: how would we prove that in fact he had such an access? The latter would at least need to be shown as probable on the basis of evidence. The mere existence of information cannot be regarded as proof. Venn’s demand for absolute accuracy is sometimes extreme. Matthew stated that German troops crossed the Belgian border August 3, 1914 ... “false” ... it was August 4 ... A difference of *only one day* is sufficient for Venn to declare the statement as wrong! It must indeed be exact to be accepted by him, and that looks like intention. The information about the marriage of Jacques and Monique April 1912 is also stated as false, as well as the maiden name of Monique and that they had a son. How could Venn do that when he could not verify Jaques’ existence? Family data belong in the list of errors (when that is what they really are) only if the person can be identified, since they can otherwise not be investigated. Or else they are merely unconfirmed. Declaring them as “false” may be regarded as misleading...

In our society it is quite normal to allow for and accept uncertainties and inaccuracies in people’s memories, and that is even more motivated in the case of past-life memories.

Alternative spellings are not considered. Only the spellings that are conceived by Matthew’s and Venn’s American minds as “correct” French are accepted, and no other. There would, for example, be no “General Clermond” – but there could well have been a Clairmond, Clairemond or Clairmont. The same applies to various names of places and streets. Without a sufficiently long and active personal sojourn in France, Venn’s research lacks in reliability and becomes much of a “desktop research”. He could take an example in Tarazi.

The consequence is, therefore, that the Matthew case is not disproven but only brought to question, since several “errors” are nothing more than unconfirmed statements that were not (or could not be) sufficiently investigated.

“Debunking test”

Edwin S. Zolik has introduced a method [4,5] for “debunking” a regression experience. The person is again hypnotized and asked where he or she *in the life to day* read or heard about the actual experience or a similar story. Zolik reports a case in which a man experienced himself as being an Irishman by name Brian O’Malley.

Zolik’s main case

According to the experience, Brian O’Malley had been an officer in the “Her Majesty’s Irish Guard” and died 1892 after a falling from a horse. The client, who had that experience, was soon after hypnotized again and asked if he had the story from a book or a movie. The question seemed to confuse him. He was then instead asked if his parents had told him about it. He then remembered that his grandfather had had a conflict with a certain Timothy O’Malley, an Irish soldier in the British Army, who he hated, since he had to leave Ireland because of him. That man would have died

after an accident with a horse. The first names are different and no other fitting information than the horse accident could be found concerning Timothy O'Malley.

The client's grandfather was not his real grandfather, but the father of his foster-father. The client's mother had died and his real father had given him in care of another family. For that reason, the man he called grandfather did not like the child. The boy had once taken a horse out of the stable and later returned it without any harm. The grandfather was furious when he found out about that. After this incident, the boy did everything he could to be accepted by the grandfather, apparently much in vain.

Now Zolik wants to interpret this as if the man had unconsciously identified himself with O'Malley to please him, which seems quite far fetched. Why should he of all people identify himself with someone the grandfather hated? And why did the first names not fit? Zolik gave no explanation for that.

One may rather claim that O'Malley and the grandfather came together for karmic reasons since they needed to reconcile on the soul level. Thus Timothy O'Malley could have reincarnated as the boy. That would fit the concept of karma and also explain why the grandfather rejected the boy, in whom he would (on the soul level) recognize his enemy. It does, however, not explain the difference in the first names. But many persons have more than one first name...

One remark by the man is retold by Zolik without any comment. Under hypnosis the man had said "He killed ... horse ... horse" and was very excited. That sounds as if someone had killed the horse and maybe thus caused the accident. Who? Could it be the grandfather? Did he for that reason have to leave Ireland? That could explain why the grandfather reacted so aggressively when he found out that the boy had taken the horse out from the stable. These are, of course, speculations, but why did Zolik not ask questions that could clarify this?

In any case, a proof against reincarnation can hardly be derived from this. Zolik's way of asking questions is rather guiding and the answers also contained information that apparently could not come from the grandfather. O'Malley seems to have been a womanizer and when the client was asked if the grandfather had told him that, he denied it. The grandfather had only talked about a "blackguard". The only data that really fit are the family name and the riding accident.

To claim that this would prove cryptomnesia appears to have a touch of "wishful thinking" since other possible explanations were not considered. However, alternative explanations would have to take the unwanted hypothesis of reincarnation into consideration...

A further case of Zolik

Websites [6] and books (such as [7]) refer to another case that Zolik [5] investigated.

The actual client experienced himself as being a certain Dick Wonchalk in 1875, born 1850. He lived alone at a river, much like a tramp, and lived from fishing and the nature. When it became cold, he went down along the river to a town, where he sat around in taverns. He died 1876 from a disease.

References claim that this case was "carefully researched" by Zolik, but according to the report by Zolik himself [5] it was done rather superficially. It was "found" that the "fantasy" would come from a movie the person had seen just a few years earlier, with a story that in a "major portion ... was *similar* to the fantasy" (my enhancement). The person could not tell the name of the movie. Nothing more is mentioned about it. There is also no mentioning of the name of the man at the river, nor of other facts or details in the movie that could agree with the experience.

This cannot be called a "careful research", but it rather looks like Zolik saw a preconceived idea confirmed and, therefore, took no interest in further investigation, because he had what he wanted (maybe a further investigation could even have endangered the desired result)... The movie is only diffusely mentioned and no effort to identify it is described. This is actually astonishing, since it should not have been too difficult to identify the movie if the man saw it some three years earlier, and then Zolik would most probably have mentioned this...

Seen from the reincarnistic aspect, one may rather expect that the movie became a bit of a *déjà-vu* experience, since the person had an unconscious memory of a *similar* experience. It is, however, in such cases possible that in a regression experience an own real experience mixes with details from (in this case) a movie. This points at another difficulty in the evaluation of such experiences. An agreement with a “source” in to-day’s life cannot exclude the possibility that behind all that could also be an own personal experience, and the agreement cannot be definitely regarded as disproving reincarnation.

Important question not asked!

A question that would have been important in this case is: “Why did that movie make such an impression on you?” Did the regressor not think about asking this, or did he maybe not want an answer that could jeopardize the desired result?

It is quite obvious that such reports are too uncritically accepted by those who oppose reincarnation, since they see what they want. The reproach is usually made towards believers in reincarnation (in the case of a positive report), and is often justified. But it is no less valid for those who seek to disprove reincarnation.

The “rule” seems on *both* sides to be: go only as far as you see your preconceived idea verified, but not further, because a continued investigation could endanger your opinion.

A case in Finland

The Finnish psychiatrist Reima Kampman (1943-1992) has adopted the “test” and describes a case in which a young woman experienced herself as Dorothy in medieval England [8]. She sang a “summer song” in old-style English. In a second hypnosis session she was told to go back to a situation in this life, in which she had the first time heard or read the song. She actually had briefly passed through a book about the history of music [9], in which the song was printed, with musical notes.

I have checked this information. In that book, only about a third of the song is printed, which I found out since I discovered the whole text in another book [10]. Because Reima Kampman died in 1992, I contacted his wife and sent her an audiocassette with the question, if I might have a copy of the tape recording with Dorothy. The answer was that Reima Kampman had accidentally erased the tape through recording something else on it. I then asked if one had the impression that Dorothy had sung a whole song, or only a part of it. To this I received no reply. If she had sung more than the minor part printed in the Finnish book [9], the question would arise, from where she had the rest...

In any case it has to be noted that the question was quite suggestive. Kampman assumed from the beginning that the first contact with the song must have occurred in this life and formulated the question accordingly and in a rather guiding manner. A more objective procedure would have been to leave fully open, where and when she the very first time heard or sung that song – if in this life *or before* (in any case carefully leaving out any formulation which refers only to this life to day). But then Dorothy might have come up again, and it almost looks as if one did not want to this happen... Directing it all towards this life turns the “test” into a kind of circular proof.

So why did the girl, passing through the book, notice that song in it and not another? The reincarnistic explanation would be that she *unconsciously recognized it*.

In April 2007 I had the opportunity to see a video recording about this case. In this video, the woman actually does sing only as much as is printed in the Finnish book. However, the video is obviously a *remake*, a later set-up and not an original recording! It is said that the woman at that time (when she was a young woman, almost a girl) knew no English, but that she learned the language later. She is seen sitting hypnotized in front of a window with a wintry landscape outside. Then she, with the same camera position, sits awake in front of the same window with the same landscape outside and comments in *fluent English* that this would only be a case of cryptomnesia, and that she would not believe in reincarnation. Obviously in the same adult age as when she is sitting there hypnotized.

This proves nothing! The only proof would be the *original recording* of the actual first session with – at that time – the young woman. And that very recording is said to have been accidentally erased by Kampman... One rather has a feeling as if one wanted to avoid the sensitive question about how much she sang (others may have asked it or one may simply have recognized that this could be a problem) through a later setup with an adjusted version. Whatever – certain questions remain unanswered: How could she at that time (without knowledge of English) sing the song with a seemingly correct pronunciation of the *ancient English*, and not pronounce the briefly seen words in quite a Finnish way (a point that may easily be missed by persons who do not have some acquaintance with the Finnish language). Kampman writes in his book that this has been confirmed by a language specialist. And how could she, after only a glance at the song in the book, also absorb the musical notes such that she sang the correct melody? Could she read notes at that time? Would this not be better explained though *acoustic cryptomnesia*, i.e., that she had also *heard* the song? There is no indication that she did hear the song in to-day's life – but she may well have heard and even sung it – in a past life, and then it is not a case of cryptomnesia...

In his book [11] Kampman leaves the question about reincarnation open. In his thesis [12] he only briefly touches the subject in the review of the literature. Information from a Finnish friend indicates that Kampman came under criticism from colleagues, who regarded him as too indulgent towards the reincarnation question, and that he came under pressure to take a clearer stand against reincarnation. Could the video be seen in this context?

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