



RESEARCH  
ARTICLE

# The Composition of Ian Stevenson's *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*

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## HIGHLIGHTS

The answer to why some people rather than others develop specific maladies might be found in the concept of reincarnation as implied by Ian Stevenson's work, although the mainstream medical community dismisses this idea.

## ABSTRACT

Ian Stevenson was trained as a physician and, later, as a psychiatrist. He made significant contributions to biochemistry, psychosomatic medicine, and other areas before turning to parapsychology in mid-career. From the start of his involvement in parapsychology, Stevenson was interested in claims to remember previous lives. As his research with such claims progressed, he became convinced of reincarnation's potential to shed light on unresolved problems in medicine. This paper describes the background and traces the development of Stevenson's classic collection of case reports, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, whose first edition appeared in 1966. Stevenson expected his monograph to be recognized as making the important contribution he believed it did and thought that it would lead to public funding for further research on reincarnation. Sixty years on that has yet to happen, perhaps due to Stevenson's emphasis on the proof-oriented aspects of the cases he reported, to the neglect of other issues that might have connected more easily with mainstream interests, and more directly countered criticisms of his research methodology.

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## INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, I published in this journal a historical review of Ian Stevenson's *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (Matlock, 2011). That article was based exclusively on published sources, but I have since been given access to unpublished correspondence and other materials housed at the Division of Perceptual Studies (DOPS), a unit within the Department of Psychiatry and Neuro-

behavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia, and at the New York-based Parapsychology Foundation. These unpublished materials support a much more nuanced portrayal of Stevenson's early engagement with parapsychology and the lengthy process that led to the book's appearance in the *Proceedings* of the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) in 1966 (Stevenson, 1966).

*Twenty Cases* proved to be a commercial success for the ASPR and was republished in 1974 by the University

Press of Virginia (Stevenson, 1974a). A paperback edition introduced in 1980 is still in print, a highly unusual circumstance for a university house. Not only is *Twenty Cases* Stevenson's best-selling collection of case reports—and the only one of his several books that many people have read—it has become a classic in parapsychology and reincarnation studies, justifying this updated look at its composition.

The first section of this article is based largely on published accounts (Kelly, 2013; Stevenson, 1989, 2006; White, 2007). Unless otherwise noted, all information in later sections derives from the unpublished materials I obtained from DOPS and the Parapsychology Foundation.

A who's who of people figuring in the narrative is presented in the Appendix.

### STEVENSON'S EARLY LIFE AND CAREER, 1918–1955

Ian Stevenson was born in Montreal on October 31, 1918, near the end of the Great War on the continent of Europe and at the start of the global influenza pandemic that followed. He was the second child and second son of his parents; his brother Kerr was 21 months old when he was born. Their mother, Ruth, who was English, and father, John, who was Scottish, had moved to Canada when John accepted a post as a political correspondent for the *Toronto Star* newspaper. The family resided in Ottawa when Stevenson entered the world.

From birth, Stevenson suffered bouts of bronchitis, which in infancy led to bronchiectasis, the permanent inflammation of the bronchial tubes. Bronchiectasis may have a genetic origin and may be associated with diseases such as cystic fibrosis, but Stevenson's family had no history of chronic respiratory infections, nor was Stevenson afflicted with cystic fibrosis or other sometimes contributory ailments. The influenza pandemic in his first year and the harsh Canadian winters he endured thereafter likely aggravated his condition, which appears to have been congenital (Stevenson, 2006, p. 13). Although he learned to manage his bronchiectasis, it remained with him and may have been the source of what, late in life, he identified as the "leitmotif" of his career, the question of why one person rather than another developed a given malady (Stevenson, 1989).

In 1923, when Ian was about five, Ruth decided to take him and Kerr to Los Angeles, in the hopes that the milder climate would improve Ian's health. John remained in Ottawa, but visited them occasionally over the two years they lived in California. Their stay there appears to have achieved its principal aim: The exacerbations of Ian's bronchiectasis abated and perhaps ceased for a while. Neither Kerr (White, 2008) nor Ian (Stevenson, 1989,

2006) mentions them as a feature of this period.

While living in Los Angeles, Ruth became acquainted with Richard and Isabella Ingalese, whose occult philosophy was a variation on the Theosophy of H. P. Blavatsky popular in those years. After Ruth and the boys returned to Ottawa in 1925, Theosophy began to occupy a major place in her library. Ian read many of those volumes, but because he could see no way to evaluate their claims, he was unpersuaded by them.

Ian continued to be bothered by the bronchiectasis that kept him out of school for days at a time, but thanks to an unusually retentive memory, when his health was good, he jumped ahead of his peers academically. At the age of 13, in 1931, he was sent to an innovative "public" ("private" in American parlance) school called Bryanston in Dorsetshire, England. Bryanston employed the Dalton Plan, an educational system influenced by Montessori methods. It emphasized self-pacing and group learning rather than teacher-centered classroom instruction. At Bryanston, Ian developed a strong interest in history. According to Kerr, he memorized "almost every historical date of importance worldwide" (White, 2008, p. 13). At the back of many of his books, he made notes of dates, places, people, events, and other facts he wished to remember, as well as errors he encountered. In 1935, he started keeping a record of the books he read. He maintained this record until 2004, three years before his death, at which point it included 3535 entries.

In 1937, Ian enrolled at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, intending to major in history, but he was there for only two years. World War II was in the offing when he returned home for the summer of 1939. His medical condition made him ineligible for military service and he switched to McGill University in Montreal for the fall term. At McGill, he studied physics, chemistry, and biology, along with history. After receiving his B.Sc. in 1940, he enrolled in McGill's medical school. He excelled at this new pursuit, completing the four-year program for an M.D.C.M.<sup>1</sup> degree in three years and graduating at the top of his class in 1943.

Stevenson did the first year of his postgraduate residency at Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal, conducting research in biochemistry. Unfortunately, his bronchiectasis returned and intensified, and after several instances of pneumonia, he was advised to relocate to a warmer and dryer environment. He completed his residency and internship at St. Joseph's Hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1945–46, and the following year, held fellowships in internal medicine at the Alton Ochsner Medical Foundation and in biochemistry at the Tulane University School of Medicine, both in New Orleans, Louisiana. The move to the southern United States brought about an immediate

improvement in his health, as had the earlier sojourn in Los Angeles.

As Denis Fellow in Biochemistry at Tulane, Stevenson undertook research on the oxidation of rat kidney slices in association with Emil L. Smith. Stevenson and Smith's findings ran counter to the views of German chemist Otto Warburg, who in 1931 had been awarded the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. Stevenson thought little about the significance of this until a German acquaintance told him that his paper could not have been published in Germany, owing to the esteem accorded Warburg there. This introduction to the politics of academic publishing left a great impression on Stevenson: "From this episode I may date my strong interest in all the obstacles that confront the conduct of original research and the communication of its results," he later said (Stevenson, 1989).

The research with rats had another, more profound effect on Stevenson, and brought about another change of direction. To use rat kidneys in their experiments, he and Smith had to sacrifice the rodents. He found this repugnant and realized he was not interested in reductionist science and its concern with body parts, but would rather devote his efforts to "something closer to whole human beings" (Stevenson, 1989). He applied for and received a Commonwealth Fund fellowship to study with Harold Wolff and Stewart Wolf at New York Hospital in New York City. Wolff and Wolf were establishing reputations in psychosomatic medicine, exploring the role of mental states in disease etiologies. Stevenson made an additional life-altering decision at this time. Before leaving for New York in the fall of 1947, he married pediatrician Octavia Reynolds, whom he had been courting in New Orleans.

The New York Hospital group was concerned with a variation of Stevenson's leitmotif question: Why, under stress, did one person develop asthma, another high blood pressure, and a third a peptic ulcer? Harvard physiologist W. B. Cannon had previously shown that fear and rage evoked changes in the body similar to those that came with physical exertion. He called this the "fight-or-flight response": The body reacted to perceived threats by preparing to do battle or to flee. Wolff and others at New York Hospital elaborated on Cannon's idea with conjectures about the symbolic meanings of physiological responses to stress. A woman who reacted to her predicament with a running nose was trying to wash her troubles away; a man whose bronchial tubes constricted during an asthma attack wanted to shield himself from an unpleasant truth. Some of Wolff's group sought to identify attitudes that would predictably induce certain symptoms.

Stevenson had little patience with this sort of effort. He could not believe that cardiac arrhythmias served

any meaningful purpose for those afflicted by them. He noticed that physiological responses similar to those appearing under stress might occur when people were unusually happy and began to collect examples of physical symptoms associated with pleasurable emotional states. Beethoven and Goya, for instance, were ailing, but declined and died in response to news that made them ecstatically happy. His colleagues' reaction to these accounts was not what he had expected. Wolff, in particular, continued to insist that physiological symptoms had meanings and served purposes for the persons experiencing them. Stevenson waited to publish his findings on the physiological effects of positive emotional states until his two years at New York Hospital were over. He published many other articles in psychosomatic medicine over the next few years, more than 30 altogether between 1949 and 1954 (Kelly, 2013).

In 1949, Stevenson became a naturalized U.S. citizen.<sup>2</sup> That fall, he returned to New Orleans as Assistant Professor of Psychiatry and Medicine at the Louisiana State University School of Medicine. Three years later, he was promoted to Associate Professor of Psychiatry, having enrolled in the New Orleans Psychoanalytic Institute, then a branch of the Washington (D.C.) Psychoanalytic Institute. He left psychosomatic medicine not so much because of differences with colleagues at New York Hospital, but because it had failed to develop into the specialty he had anticipated. He considered going into internal medicine, but psychiatry, he thought, offered greater promise for studying the effects of mental states on the physical body.

Stevenson remained in psychoanalytic training until 1958, although he did not care much for it. He judged some of what he learned to be beneficial, but the atmosphere of the institute, tightly focused on the teachings of Freud and a few of his followers, ran counter to his eclectic inclinations. For Freudians, religion and art were expressions of infantile cravings. Adult psychological conflicts stemmed from failures to overcome the Oedipus (for men) or Electra (for women) complexes, sexual attractions to parents of the opposite sex. Stevenson considered Freud's ideas no less reductionist than the biochemistry he had left behind. Moreover, when put to the test, these ideas failed to find empirical support. In *Sex and Repression in a Savage Society*, anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1927) had shown that the Oedipus complex did not obtain among the matrilineal peoples of the Trobriand Islands and so could not be universal.

Stevenson read Aldous Huxley's (1954) *The Doors of Perception* when it was published and shortly thereafter met Huxley, although exactly when and where I have not been able to determine. Stevenson was impressed

by Huxley's account of what happened when he ingested mescaline, the active substance in peyote, and by the potential of psychedelic drugs for psychiatry. Huxley held that a healthy brain acted on consciousness like a reducing valve, restricting conscious awareness to that which was useful in navigating the material world and furthering the survival of the species. Psychedelics like mescaline disabled the reducing valve by depriving the brain of glucose, letting through a wider range of perceptions and greater access to a Mind at Large. Over the next few years, Stevenson took or had administered to him a variety of drugs and anesthetics, mostly LSD and mescaline, as part of a hunt for narcotics that could assist in psychiatry. He was among the first academics to conduct research on psychedelic drugs. Between 1957 and 1961, he authored or co-authored ten journal papers on the topic (Kelly, 2013).

Reflecting on the drugs' effect on him, Stevenson observed that his body's sensory apparatus was defective: His eyesight was poor, his hearing imperfect, and his sense of smell dull. By contrast, Octavia was a gifted amateur artist, with acute perceptions that permitted her to take in aspects of the physical world to which he was oblivious. Mescaline vastly improved his appreciation of this outer world. The beauty of the colors he saw inwardly under its influence made him forever after more sensitive to color in both art and nature. LSD was different. It brought not beautiful colors, but memories of his early life. In one LSD session, he had a mystical experience, a sense of unity with all things. Following his second session, he passed three days "in perfect serenity" (Stevenson, 1989).

These experiences increased Stevenson's conviction that mind and body were independent entities. Consciousness certainly interacted with and was affected by the brain, but he could not understand how the brain could produce consciousness. He could not believe that his brain generated the images he saw while under the influence of the drugs, even though the changes to his neurochemistry engendered by the drugs made these images possible. During his drug trips, he apprehended nothing that did not originate in his mind. He had no verifiable extrasensory perceptions, as were sometimes reported with psychedelics. His drug experiences enhanced his interest in extrasensory abilities, but were not the genesis of that interest, he wrote (Stevenson, 1989).

### ENTRY INTO PARAPSYCHOLOGY, 1955–1958

From its inception in 1935, Stevenson's record of books read shows that he perused volumes on parapsychological phenomena along with literature, history, the

healing arts, philosophy, and occasional works of occultism and Theosophy. Gradually, his reading on topics closer to parapsychology increased. In 1951, he took up Jan Ehrenwald's (1948) *Telepathy and Medical Psychology*. At the end of 1954, he read J. B. Rhine's (1953) *New World of the Mind*. The latter book is primarily a popular summary of experimental research conducted by the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University, but on page 242, Rhine mentions the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR), which he notes had a Medical Section that included Ehrenwald and other psychiatrists. Stevenson had not gotten in touch with the ASPR during his stint at New York Hospital and seems to have been unaware of the Society's existence before the mention by Rhine, but he was quick to act on the information. He joined the ASPR in February 1955 and began to receive its quarterly journal.

In March 1956, Stevenson was asked if he wished to be considered for the tenured position of Professor of Neurology and Psychiatry and Chairman of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia School of Medicine. He was receptive, although he did not want to leave New Orleans for another year, due to commitments there. He stated that he was concerned with integrating psychiatry with other areas of medicine, undergraduate teaching, research, and writing. In his job interview, he admitted to a burgeoning interest in parapsychology.<sup>3</sup> Stevenson's appointment at the University of Virginia came in March 1957, effective July 1. He was not yet 39 years old when he and Octavia moved to Charlottesville in the summer of 1957.

Stevenson read Morey Bernstein's *The Search for Bridey Murphy*, a bestselling account of an age regression to an apparent previous life, when it was published early in 1956. At some point, Stevenson got in touch with Bernstein, but this correspondence has not survived, and we cannot be certain of the date. That they were in contact is clear from a July 1956 letter Stevenson received from philosopher C. J. Ducasse of Brown University. From 1951, Ducasse had been a member of the ASPR's Board of Trustees and was book review editor of the Society's journal, the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research (JASPR)*. Ducasse had a longstanding interest in reincarnation as a possible way of surviving death (a topic he had explored in his 1953 *Nature, Mind, and Death*), and was then working on his *A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life After Death* (Ducasse, 1961). Ducasse (1956) reviewed *The Search for Bridey Murphy* and later (Ducasse, 1960) responded to the skeptical backlash the case received. Ducasse also was in contact with Bernstein, who mentioned Stevenson to him.

In his July 1956 letter, Ducasse invited Stevenson to review hypnotherapist Milton V. Kline's edited collec-

tion of essays, *A Scientific Report on The Search for Bridey Murphy* (Kline, 1956), for *JASPR*. Stevenson's review duly appeared in the January 1957 number. It was his first publication in parapsychology and his first dealing with reincarnation. He noted that there had been considerable reaction to Bernstein's book from psychiatrists, such as the authors recruited by Kline, who argued that the hypnotic subject might have constructed Bridey's life story from things she had heard and read about Ireland. This position could not rightly be called scientific, because no alternatives were considered, Stevenson held. Although, for various reasons, Bridey's story did not provide strong evidence for reincarnation, the regressed subject had recalled sundry recondite details that could not be explained as knowledge picked up casually. The case, therefore, deserved more than a curt rejection, in line with preconceived assumptions. "In proclaiming science the authors have only succeeded in defending orthodoxy," Stevenson concluded (1957, p. 37).

At the University of Virginia, Stevenson continued to produce articles for medical journals on topics ranging from how children acquire behavior, to the role wishes play in dreams and psychoses, to the emergence of multiple personality disorder (Kelly, 2013). He completed his first book, *Medical History-Taking* (Stevenson, 1960c). But, increasingly, his attention was shifting to parapsychology. In 1957 and 1958, he wrote to several other persons affiliated with the ASPR, including Laura Dale, office manager and editor of the Society's publications, as well as psychiatrist Robert Laidlaw and social psychologist Gardner Murphy, both members of the Board of Trustees. Laidlaw, recently retired from the psychiatry department at Roosevelt Hospital, was in private practice in New York. Murphy, who had served as president of the American Psychological Association in 1944–45, had been closely involved with the ASPR throughout the 1940s when he was at Columbia University. His involvement lessened in 1952 when he moved to Topeka, Kansas, to become Director of Research at the Menninger Foundation, although he continued on as the ASPR's First Vice-President and, in 1962, succeeded to the presidency.

During the same period, Stevenson sought out Eileen Garrett, who had teamed with philanthropist Frances Payne Bolton to found the Parapsychology Foundation in New York City in 1951 (Alvarado et al., 2001). Bolton, who was independently wealthy, gave up much of her salary as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1940 to 1969 to various causes, including parapsychology. With Bolton's financial backing, Garrett sponsored professional conferences and publications and oversaw the distribution of funds through research grants.

By 1958, Stevenson was sitting with mediums in Phil-

adelphia and other cities. He aspired to undertake studies of age regression to previous lives, à la Bernstein. He had heard of a Louisville, Kentucky, housewife who had regressed to the life of a Confederate soldier who had fought at Shiloh and Nashville, and proposed to bring her and others to Charlottesville for observation and testing. Another investigation concerned a woman, to whom Stevenson assigned the appellation T.E., who, when regressed under hypnosis, identified herself as a man named Jensen Jacoby and spoke Swedish responsively, if only to a limited extent. Jensen could understand English and reply to it, but he responded more readily when addressed in Swedish. He spoke some English, but in a heavily accented and halting manner. The regressions in question had occurred in eight sessions between 1955 and 1956, but they had been tape-recorded and could be assessed by persons other than the two Swedish speakers who had conversed with Jensen. Besides having the tapes appraised by linguists, Stevenson arranged for new sessions and interviewed persons acquainted with the family to verify that T.E. had not had an opportunity to learn Swedish in her present life.

At the suggestion of Laidlaw and Murphy, Stevenson applied for a Parapsychology Foundation grant and received \$1,500 for 1959, allowing him to give up some of his clinical hours for parapsychological research.

## CENSUS OF REINCARNATION CASES, 1956–1960

Stevenson and Ducasse shared an interest in reincarnation and traded opinions about books and authors from their first interchange in July 1956. In a September 1956 letter, Stevenson wrote that he had read a book by DeWitt Miller on reincarnation. It was mostly nonsense, he thought, but it had a chapter by a psychiatrist, Russell G. MacRobert (1956), who interpreted purported memories of past lives as spirit obsession. Stevenson thought this might be true in some instances, but probably not all. In reply, Ducasse informed him that MacRobert was a member of the ASPR's Medical Section. MacRobert took survival seriously and was interested in mediumship, but he assumed reincarnation was impossible because of its apparent conflict with mediumistic communication.

Ducasse sent Stevenson a manuscript in which he discussed means of retrieving past-life memories. Stevenson commented that he had doubts about the value of hypnosis because of the extraordinarily heightened suggestibility that is a feature of the hypnotic state. This might make a great many spurious recollections possible. Of course, it would not disqualify memories including information that could be independently verified or those, like the T.E.-Jensen Jacoby case, with responsive xeno-

glossy. Still, the most valuable cases seemed to Stevenson to be those of involuntary recoveries of memories in the waking state. He had come across seven accounts of the latter kind in the scholarly and popular literature. He found it interesting, “although not surprising in view of what we know about memory,” that all seven of the spontaneous cases had child subjects. An example was the 1911 Italian case of Alexandrina Samona, in which a child appeared to be reborn to the same parents and was given the same name as her predecessor.

This is Stevenson’s first reference to a “census” of past-life memory claims he was undertaking. Stevenson and Ducasse did not correspond again until the end of August 1957, by which time Stevenson was in Charlottesville. He had continued to collect reincarnation accounts and now had “about 75,” 20 of which, if they had transpired as reported, he judged to be quite good evidentially, requiring either reincarnation or retrocognitive ESP as explanations.

The ASPR’s Laura Dale referred Stevenson to Henrietta Weiss-Roos, who had been identified by a sensitive as a reincarnate, although she had no past-life memories. Dale also passed on to Stevenson a February 1958 letter from Hemendra Banerjee, director of the Seth Sohan Lal Memorial Institute of Parapsychology in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, India. Banerjee proposed an international registry of reincarnation cases similar to Stevenson’s census, but of yet-undocumented claims. Stevenson replied to him in March with encouragement and suggestions and began to hear from Banerjee about unreported Indian cases, which he added to his census.

When the ASPR announced an essay contest in honor of William James (Essay contest, 1958), Stevenson stepped up his search for published accounts of reincarnation. This activity consumed most of the hours he spent on parapsychology in 1959 under the Parapsychology Foundation grant. By the time he submitted his contest entry in August, he knew of 44 cases that seemed to require a parapsychological explanation. The cases came from 13 countries in Europe, North America, and Asia. In 28, there were no known connections between the past and present families, yet the subjects made six or more verified statements about the previous life. The verifications were possible because the previous lives recalled lay close to the present lives in space and time. Several cases were described in detail and appeared to be satisfactorily reported, in books or journals. Stevenson provided summaries of example cases, presented a statistical overview of his data in tabular form, and explained why spontaneous experiences furnished better evidence for reincarnation than events relived under hypnosis or communicated through mediums. He submitted his essay

in July 1959, and on September 15, Ducasse notified him that he had won the prize. His paper, “The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations,” appeared in *JASPR* in two parts in April and July 1960 (Stevenson, 1960a, 1960b).

### FIELD INVESTIGATIONS, 1961–1963

Aside from the Weiss-Roos case (Stevenson, 1960a, pp. 57–58),<sup>4</sup> Stevenson’s contribution was based exclusively on published reports. Under the heading, “Proposal for Further Investigations” (Stevenson, 1960b, pp. 110–112), he discussed the promise of regressions for probing reincarnation and the possibility of past-life memories arising under the influence of psychedelics, but said nothing about field investigations. He had heard from Banerjee about Jasbir Singh, but this was an unusual case, involving a change of personality upon recovery from an apparently fatal illness. Stevenson wanted answers to a great many questions before he felt confident writing about it, as he ultimately did in *Twenty Cases*.

In July 1959, Banerjee began to urge Stevenson to come to India to pursue his own investigations. Stevenson replied that although he would like to do so, he had neither the time nor the means. As Banerjee continued to inform him about new cases, he started to think about obtaining funds, however. In a September letter to Ducasse acknowledging the essay prize, he told him he had decided to apply for a Parapsychology Foundation grant for the purpose, and asked if he would support this. Ducasse said that he would. If the Parapsychology Foundation was not interested, perhaps the Asia Foundation would be, but when applying to the latter, Stevenson should make the proposal about more than reincarnation cases, Ducasse advised.

At the start of October, Stevenson raised the possibility of a research trip to India with Eileen Garrett, emphasizing the growing number of cases that were coming to his attention. Banerjee had four cases awaiting investigation and he had heard about others from other correspondents. Garrett wrote back with a warning about Banerjee. Banerjee was known to the Parapsychology Foundation and J. B. Rhine as someone who picked up material from magazines and published it as his own. “Forgive my note of caution, but I think it would be useless of you to embark on this, and then to find yourself being used and not altogether scientifically,” she warned, turning down his \$2,500 request as premature. She did not see that the trip would accomplish anything that could not be achieved through correspondence.

Following a suggestion from Robert Laidlaw, Stevenson next approached the ASPR’s Research Commit-

tee. Gardner Murphy, who had visited India in 1950, was encouraging, but felt that entire Board of Trustees, not just the Research Committee, should make the decision. Ducasse now was cooler toward the prospect. He was “not oversanguine about how fruitful of anything solid such a trip as you contemplate would be likely to be,” but deferred to Murphy. Stevenson wrote to Garrett again, first in May, when he told her that since his *JASPR* paper had gone to press, he had learned of several additional cases that seemed to deserve investigation, then in September, after the second part of his paper had appeared, letting her know he had hopes that the ASPR would support him. Garrett responded with a handwritten note saying that she had reconsidered and would underwrite his trip to India.

Stevenson began to plan a research tour for the summer of 1961. Banerjee had given him preliminary details about three cases besides Jasper Singh: Sukla Gupta, Prakash Varshnay, and Swarnlata Mishra. These cases had similar features but also presented variations. Swarnlata Mishra was said to recall two previous lives, the penultimate one substantially better than the more recent. Stevenson requested information on where the children and their purported previous families lived, and how far apart they were, to construct his itinerary and budget. Banerjee arranged for Stevenson’s affiliation with the University of Allahabad and, with the support of J. B. Rhine, came to the United States in April and May 1960. Bannerjee and Stevenson met in late April to refine the tour arrangements. At Banerjee’s suggestion, Stevenson wrote an appeal for information about additional cases, to be submitted to Indian newspapers.

Stevenson decided to visit Ceylon (renamed Sri Lanka in 1972) following India. Since March, he had been in touch with a British expatriate living on the island, Francis Story. Story was a lay monk and Religious Director of Bauddha Dharmadutadhara Sangamaya in Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte. He was associated with the Buddhist Publication Society in Kandy, which had put out a book he had written describing reincarnation cases he had examined during eight years in Burma (Story, 1959). Stevenson considered doing his own research in Burma (now Myanmar) but gave up the prospect when his inquiries to that country went unanswered. Meanwhile, Story had learned about a promising Ceylonese case (the case of Gnanatilleka Baddewithana) that Stevenson wanted to examine. He planned to spend a week in Ceylon at the end of August.

Stevenson finalized a \$4,533 grant proposal and submitted it to the Parapsychology Foundation in November 1960. He was requesting too much, he was advised, not by Garrett herself, but by a member of her staff. The Foundation was “deeply interested” in his investigations,

he was told, but could provide a maximum of \$2,500, \$1,500 for the trip and \$1,000 to support writing up the results. Perhaps the ASPR would cover the additional expenses. Stevenson queried Ducasse about the possibility, but Ducasse said he did not think Stevenson would find enough cases to justify the outlay, and declined to back an approach to the ASPR.

By this point, Stevenson was convinced that Ducasse was wrong: He had received a good response to his newspaper appeals and had preliminary information on several Indian cases. He had requested funds to stop in Europe for consultations on the way to India, but omitted these layovers and flew directly to Delhi, arriving there on July 17. After going through the roster of cases and deciding which to inspect more closely, he spent two weeks operating out of Delhi with Banerjee as assistant and interpreter. For another three weeks, he traveled around India, meeting fellow researchers, some of whom had been his correspondents on cases. One, P. Pal of Itachuna College in West Bengal, had made his own investigation of the case of Sukla Gupta, which he was shortly to publish in Banerjee’s *Indian Journal of Parapsychology* (Pal, 1961–62) with an introduction by Stevenson (1961–62).

Most of the cases Stevenson included in his tour were located in the northern or central Indian states, with a single comparatively weak one in the southern part of the country. Altogether, he spent time on 17 cases in India and four in Ceylon. The past and present families were unrelated and unknown to one another in all except one case. In three cases, it was not possible to identify the previous incarnation, but in the others, Stevenson interviewed witnesses to both the present and previous lives. One of the Ceylonese cases represented the past life of an Indian boy who recalled having resided in Ceylon. Stevenson suspected deception in one case but saw no evidence of it in the others. In two cases, he was able to conduct interviews in English or French, without interpreters. Some case subjects had grown out of childhood and no longer remembered what they had said when younger; in these cases, Stevenson could obtain accounts of the memories from their elders only. In the case of Swarnlata Mishra, records had been made in writing before the previous incarnation of the penultimate life was identified.

Stevenson set out on his Asian tour with the assumption that the recitation of memories was the most salient aspect of the cases and was surprised to discover that not only did the children describe events about which they should have known nothing, but their behaviors matched the behaviors of the deceased people with whom they identified (Stevenson, 2006, p. 16). Two children (one Indian, the other Ceylonese) who claimed to remember living in England exhibited English mannerisms. Two girls

who recalled having been male were noticeably boyish in their interests and demeanors. Swarnlata Mishra performed songs and dances, which she said belonged to her intermediate life in West Bengal. Stevenson included these details in a report filed with the Parapsychology Foundation.

Stevenson made a presentation about his trip to the annual meeting of the Parapsychological Association (PA) in September. Murphy afterward told him that he had given a "most thoughtful and stimulating report." Banerjee heard "daily" that the address had been "very favourably received" and observed, "it appears that you have changed the course of the parapsychology movement." Stevenson reprised his PA talk at the ASPR in November 1961. I have not found a copy of the written text, and one may not exist. Probably, the talk echoed Stevenson's report to the Parapsychology Foundation and emphasized the subjects' behaviors as well as their memory claims. It almost certainly concluded with a call for follow-up investigations to learn more about cases of this type.

Follow-up investigations were made possible by Chester Carlson, whom Stevenson had met at the 1960 PA convention in New York City, ten months before he went to India and Ceylon. Carlson had become a multi-millionaire thanks to his invention of the dry-copying Xerox process in the 1930s. Before his second marriage, he had accepted that the mind was a product of the brain and that mental activities were strictly physical operations. He began to question this assumption when he married a second time. His new wife, Dorris, had a history of psychic experiences, which led him to look into the research being done by Rhine at Duke, then to make financial contributions to Rhine's Parapsychology Laboratory and to attend the parapsychology discipline's professional meetings (Stevenson, 1989b, 2006).

At the conclusion of the September 1960 PA convention, Stevenson and Carlson went to lunch. Carlson told Stevenson that his wife believed she had memories of a previous life in early 18th-century France. Upon his return to Charlottesville, Stevenson sent Carlson reprints of his journal papers in parapsychology and they entered into a regular correspondence. In the Spring of 1961, Carlson offered to help Stevenson financially. Since Stevenson already had Garrett's commitment for his trip to India, he asked only for a portable tape recorder. Carlson promptly sent a check. He believed Stevenson's work was important and wanted to provide any assistance desired.

Stevenson waited until after his PA presentation in September 1961 to broach the financial issue with Carlson again. He hoped to raise the subject at a luncheon after the meeting, but others were present, so he wrote it in a letter afterward. First, he explained that the tape

recorder had proven less useful than anticipated. It had been impossible to have private conversations in India. Recognizing a group of voices on tape was difficult, besides which there was uncertainty about the spelling of names. He was accustomed to psychiatric interviewing and found that detailed written notes captured more of the essence of what was said and done; written notes were also easier to consult as required later. He sold the tape recorder (a small battery-operated model) in India, devoting the proceeds to unforeseen expenses of the trip.

Stevenson's fieldwork had shown the need for further investigations, which in the immediate term could be pursued by Banerjee, Pal, and Story, if he could cover their travel requirements. He had in mind \$1,000 to distribute among the three of them, "not necessarily equally." His trip had given him the opportunity to observe these men in action. Pal and Story could be assigned tasks without supervision, but Banerjee needed guidance. Stevenson was confident he could provide this from Charlottesville, waiting for three or four years before returning to India himself. When he was satisfied they had done what they could, he and Banerjee would write up a report of 12 to 15 Indian cases. Stevenson and Story likewise would report on three or four Ceylonese cases. He would also like to send Story to Burma and Thailand, where he had contacts, in search of cases there.

Carlson was delighted to be asked for further assistance. His new check reached Charlottesville on September 21, and Stevenson immediately began communicating with Banerjee, Pal, and Story about things he wanted them to do with the money he could now provide. Story followed up on cases in Ceylon, then went to Burma and Thailand. Pal researched Swarnlata Mishra's purported Bengali life and tried to identify her songs and dances. Banerjee proved more difficult to manage. Stevenson wanted him to finish collecting data on cases for which he had already opened files, but Banerjee was more interested in identifying new cases, both in India and abroad. He did some work on the cases to which Stevenson gave priority, but was eager to go to Nepal, and talked Carlson into directly financing a trip to Turkey. When Stevenson heard about this, he discouraged Banerjee from going to Lebanon to look for cases there.

Stevenson was concerned that Banerjee was spreading himself too thin. He thought it best to study a few cases thoroughly and get them published; after that, research funds would flow more freely, he believed. In October 1962, he reminded Banerjee that he wanted as much detail as possible: "It seems to me that we have a sufficient number of cases, indeed more than enough, so it is quite clear that there is something important to be studied in all these cases and something strongly sugges-



tive of rebirth. What we must now do, I think, is gradually tighten our investigations in every way possible and possibly investigate fewer cases more intensively rather than a great number superficially." He would soon send the draft of a report of the four Indian cases (Jasbir Singh, Swarnlata Mishra, Sukla Gupta, and Prakash Varshnay) he considered sufficiently well investigated to be published.

At the same time as he was working with Banerjee, Pal, and Story to ready reports on his research in India and Ceylon, Stevenson began to investigate cases among the Tlingit Indians of southeastern Alaska. Early in 1961, Louisa Rhine had sent him a letter she had received about a Tlingit boy who had recognized, and claimed as his own, a gold watch that had belonged to the person whose life he seemed to recall. After an unsatisfactory period of correspondence, Stevenson realized he needed to investigate the case in person. With \$500 provided by Carlson, he went to Alaska for a week. With the assistance of witnesses with whom he had corresponded, he was able to look into this and three other cases on this occasion.

In the summer of 1962, Stevenson made a follow-up visit to Alaska. He expected on this second trip to complete his study of the four cases on which he had begun work, but besides doing so, he learned about four additional cases. None of the Alaskan cases were as rich in statements and behaviors as were the Asian cases he had studied. Most involved returns among relatives, which reduced their evidential value. Nonetheless, they followed the patterns of the Asian cases and directed attention to features that were relatively uncommon in them.

The Tlingit cases gave Stevenson abundant examples of what he decided to call "announcing dreams" (pregnancy dreams in which deceased persons appeared) and birthmarks resembling scars on the bodies of deceased persons, both of which the Tlingit relied upon to ascertain the previous identity of a newborn child. The birthmarks seemed especially significant. Stevenson was acquainted with birthmarks purportedly related to reincarnation, principally in accounts from Burma (Fielding-Hall, 1898; Story, 1959). Altogether, he knew of 25 cases with birthmarks commemorating injuries or other scars on the bodies of deceased persons. He decided to add an Indian example, the case of Ravi Shankar Gupta, to the paper he and Banerjee were preparing. Ravi Shankar claimed to recall having been decapitated and had a linear birthmark across the front of his neck consistent with such a wound.

Stevenson had received intriguing reports of past-life memories in South America as well, so late in the summer of 1962, before his return trip to Alaska, he went to Brazil and Argentina. He returned with enough material to write about two Brazilian cases, both in the same family. These cases had features similar to the cases he was studying

elsewhere, although again, there were differences. An unusual number of Brazilian subjects claimed memories of someone of the opposite sex and included gender-nonconforming behaviors. Paulo Lorenz was especially interesting because he recalled having been his deceased sister, who had killed herself, saying she wanted to be a boy. When he was not yet four years old, Paulo demonstrated how to thread and use his deceased sister's sewing machine.

Stevenson initially planned to write up his cases in a series of papers for *JASPR* and the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, the latter a publication of the Parapsychology Foundation, but was persuaded it would be better to combine them in a single book-length *Proceedings* for the ASPR. He had been due to go to Zurich on sabbatical in August 1962, but circumstances required him to put this off a year. He used the delay to further his reincarnation monograph. In December 1962, he sent Ducasse a draft of the Jensen Jacoby case coauthored with T.E.'s husband, six Indian cases coauthored with Banerjee, four Ceylonese cases coauthored with Story, seven of his Tlingit cases, and his two Brazilian cases. He still had to compose the Introduction and General Discussion.

In February, Ducasse wrote to say that he had read over everything Stevenson had sent and was much impressed. The investigations had been painstaking. The evidence was presented in an effective manner and with appropriate caution. He thought the monograph deserved to be published by the ASPR and would recommend it to the Board of Trustees at their March meeting. Ducasse used the title *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* in reporting actions of the ASPR Board to Stevenson. Presumably, this was the title Stevenson gave to the manuscript he sent to Ducasse in December 1962.

The Board appointed a special committee of five to "read, evaluate and recommend disposition of Dr. Stevenson's paper." Besides Ducasse, the committee members were Gardner Murphy, Robert Laidlaw, George Hyslop, and Alan MacRobert. George Hyslop, the son of James Hyslop, served as president of the ASPR from April 1941 until January 1962, when Murphy succeeded him. Alan MacRobert was a minor player at the ASPR and in parapsychology about whom nothing is recorded except his brief tenure on the ASPR Board (1961–64). It seems likely that he was related to Russell G. MacRobert either as a brother or son.

Stevenson did not submit the monograph's final chapter, the General Discussion, until the middle of April 1963, and continued to update sections he had already submitted. On April 25, he left for another ten days in Alaska, necessitating revisions to the Tlingit chapter upon his return. He asked Story and Banerjee to read over

the chapters they were coauthoring. He wanted Banerjee to collect more data for the recently added case of Ravi Shankar Gupta. "You must think me a fiend for details, but I do think this pays off," he said. "Without this attention to detail, the attitude of the tough-minded experimentalist to spontaneous cases is justified."

By late April 1963, committee members were reading different parts of the manuscript. Ducasse, as chairman, reviewed everything, but the others saw portions only. Murphy was sent the chapters on India and Brazil, along with the General Discussion; Laidlaw, the chapter on Alaska and the General Discussion; Hyslop, the Jensen Jacoby case, the chapter on Ceylon, and the Introduction; MacRobert, the Jensen Jacoby case, the chapter on Brazil, and the Introduction. Comments were to be sent to Ducasse for forwarding to Stevenson.

Murphy was impressed with the parts he saw, but asked what if some material was acceptable, some not? Psychical research was at a critical juncture, and presentation mattered. It was imperative that they separate themselves from popular writing on similar topics. Stevenson granted that the material was of uneven quality, but the deficiencies of some cases were balanced by the strengths of others. The 20 cases were representative of the genre and ought to be read together. The Indian philosopher C.T.K. Chari had launched a sustained assault on past-life memory claims in a series of recent papers (1962a, 1962b, 1962c, 1962d), but few people could see his distortions; the publication of a large bloc of cases was required as a response and corrective.

Acceptance of the monograph was delayed not only by Murphy's concerns, but by the opposition of Hyslop and MacRobert. James Hyslop had doubted the possibility of reincarnation and George Hyslop thought the ASPR should honor his father's memory by preserving his feelings on the matter. Ducasse expressed the hope that a favorable three-to-two decision would be reached at a June 12 committee meeting, then ratified at a Board meeting later that day, but this did not happen. Stevenson grew increasingly frustrated with the process. Considering that Chari was able to publish widely while never stepping away from his armchair, he was astonished that the ASPR would not accept his report based on field investigations. He wanted to get out his monograph to account for himself at his university and because he believed it would attract funds for future research.

The committee's comments on the manuscript were delivered to Stevenson at the beginning of November 1963. Some of the comments were good and useful, some were captious, but he was going to do his best to accommodate them all, he told Francis Story. He agreed with Murphy about publication standards and was mindful of

his own reputation. This was not a matter of satisfying critics outside of parapsychology only, however. "The last year has certainly shaken my rather bland belief that we had fair freedom of investigation and expression in the West. . . . Then too, as Professor Ducasse recently pointed out to me, even in such an unorthodox subject as psychical research, there exists an orthodoxy and an unorthodoxy. And I obviously belong to the unorthodox wing of this unorthodox group!"

## SETBACKS, 1964-1965

Stevenson returned a revised draft of his monograph late in January 1964, incorporating new data on some cases, in addition to addressing the committee's concerns. With the *Twenty Cases* manuscript out of the way, he wanted to get on with a book about psychiatric interviewing he was supposed to be writing on his sabbatical. He was hoping to complete the first draft of this book before returning to Charlottesville in September. Ducasse considered the revised draft of *Twenty Cases* a substantial advance and expected a favorable decision at the March meeting of the evaluation committee and Board. Murphy, however, wanted all committee members to read the full final draft. He thought the Jensen regression case weakened the impact of the spontaneous cases and would prefer to see it withdrawn. He could not follow Stevenson on the need for quick decision. The ASPR ought to put out the best product possible, he contended.

Stevenson felt that the committee was acting unfairly. He had not encountered such obstacles with any of the papers he had published in mainstream journals. The ASPR had run articles about reincarnation before, including one of Chari's recent pieces (1962a). He, Stevenson, had gone to the trouble of investigating the cases in the field, rather than simply accepting accounts that arrived in the mail (as Murphy and Louisa Rhine did). He could not understand the protracted delay, especially after he had made the requested changes.

MacRobert resigned from the evaluation committee when his Board term expired in January 1964. He was replaced by Laura Dale on the committee and, along with another departing member, by Chester Carlson and Gertrude Schmeidler on the Board. On March 17, the reformed committee accepted Stevenson's monograph for publication in the ASPR *Proceedings*, with the proviso that Stevenson be the sole author, the other names being introduced by "with the assistance of" at the head of the appropriate chapters. The motion to send the recommendation to the Board was made by Hyslop, who withdrew his opposition at the last moment. Ducasse presented the recommendation to the Board, which accepted the vol-

ume unanimously. On March 18, Dale telegraphed Stevenson in Zurich with the news.

Dale's telegram reached Zurich while Stevenson was on an 18-day trip to Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel, researching reincarnation among two heterodox Shia Islamic sects, the Alevi and the Druze. Banerjee had put him in touch with Reşat Bayer of Istanbul, and Bayer had notified him about several Turkish Alevi cases. Additionally, while in Brazil in 1962, Stevenson was given a lead in a Druze case in Lebanon. He also had preliminary information about a case in Israel.

Stevenson wrote to Story about his Middle East tour on March 27, immediately upon his return to Zurich. In southeastern Turkey, he had found a larger concentration of cases than in Asia and Alaska. He had studied two "with rich detail" and a half-dozen others "having less detail." The patterns were those now familiar from elsewhere in the world. There were many cases with announcing dreams and birthmarks, although these were not as common as in Alaska. With Bayer, he had gone back over the Alevi case Banerjee had studied and found that his investigation had been disturbingly superficial. The case appeared stronger than Banerjee had represented it as being, but it was clear that Banerjee had been careless in recording facts and often had not asked pertinent questions, Stevenson confided in Story.

In Lebanon, Stevenson had the good fortune of finding, for the first time, a case in which the previous life had not yet been identified. He was able to record testimony from the subject, Imad Elawar, and his family, then follow up on this information and trace the deceased person to whom Imad's memories referred. The experience taught him much about how past-life memories presented and the difficulties that could arise in the course of their verification. Imad's parents misconstrued some of his statements (inferring that one name he mentioned repeatedly was that of his previous incarnation and another was that of that person's wife) and relayed their assumptions to Stevenson as things Imad had said. This sent Stevenson down blind alleys, and his initial inquiries in the village Imad had indicated were unproductive, but after Stevenson returned to the family and obtained a cleaner list of Imad's statements, he was able to match them to a deceased Ibrahim Bouhamzy. Ibrahim had spent the last month of his life bedridden with tuberculosis, which might help explain why Imad had repeatedly expressed surprise at being able to walk when he was young.

The Imad Elawar case investigation made a strong impression on Stevenson. He had begun to think there was not much more to be done with the reincarnation cases, because it seemed that investigators would invariably arrive on the scene after the main events were over

and could never be certain how they had unfolded. The Imad Elawar case showed this assumption to be wrong. If investigators were able to follow cases from the outset, they could be more confident they had missed nothing of relevance, and it would be possible to make closer observations of psychological and behavioral correspondences between the past and present lives. With his renewed enthusiasm for reincarnation studies, he was more than ever determined to get out of his administrative commitments at the University of Virginia and devote his full time to field research.

Stevenson was relieved by the ASPR Board's decision to publish his monograph, but when he learned about the requirement that he be the sole author in letters from Ducasse and Laidlaw, which arrived a few days later, he had a new set of concerns. His association with Banerjee had been a source of difficulty of late and now apparently was having an impact, as he had feared it would. The problem was not only Banerjee's carelessness, as troubling as that was. Banerjee had allowed people to believe he held a Ph.D., when he did not. Stevenson had referred to him as "Dr. Banerjee" for 18 months before discovering the truth (in April 1963). Banerjee had been in a doctoral program, but had not completed the requirements for the degree. Stevenson had encouraged him to go back and finish up, but Banerjee had not done this. Banerjee's duplicity over his degree was one of the reasons for Murphy's reservations about Banerjee's coauthorship, and Murphy had evidently passed on his concerns to other Board members.

Stevenson had no objection to eliminating Banerjee as coauthor and only crediting his assistance in the four Indian cases in which he had been involved, but removing Story and T.E.'s husband as coauthors of their contributions created problems. Story had investigated one of the Ceylonese cases on his own, and it would be inappropriate to include this case with himself as the sole author, Stevenson felt. The situation with the Jensen case was different and more complicated. Stevenson had researched it independently of T.E.'s husband, but as the hypnotist, T.E.'s husband was closely connected to it. For a while, he preferred not to share authorship with Stevenson, but when he learned that he needed to have a professional paper to his credit to gain access to a library he wished to consult, he changed his mind. Stevenson had agreed to have him as coauthor, but for that to happen, the Jensen case would have to be included in the monograph.

While these issues were under discussion, T.E.'s husband introduced a new concern. Although he had not previously objected to the inclusion of the Jensen case in the monograph, he now expressed misgivings about having it associated with a series of children's past-life memo-

ries. That would imply that he accepted a reincarnation interpretation of the Swedish xenoglossy, whereas he believed Jensen was a discarnate spirit who had possessed his wife. Stevenson agreed to remove the report, but it was too long for a journal publication. It would require a *Proceedings* of its own, which meant another financial subsidy.<sup>5</sup> Story's case, on the other hand, could be published independently in *JASPR*. It appeared there in April 1967 (Story & Stevenson, 1967), Stevenson in the interim having had the opportunity to join in its investigation.<sup>6</sup>

The removal of Story's case, along with Jensen Jacoby, left the monograph with eighteen cases. Stevenson suggested adding the Imad Elawar case he had discovered in Lebanon, together with a seventh Indian case (Parmod Sharma) on which he had done sufficient work, to bring the total back to twenty. This proposal was accepted by Ducasse in late April, subject to Board approval, just before another Banerjee-related crisis erupted.

The new issue was another Stevenson had seen coming and tried to avert. Banerjee, it had emerged, had been in J. B. Rhine's employ at the same time Stevenson was sending him money and tasking him with reincarnation-case investigations. From 1958 to 1963, Banerjee had conducted card-guessing tests of ESP between mothers and their school-aged children, experiments which had been showing good results. Neither Rhine nor Stevenson knew the extent to which Banerjee was engaged with the other. Rhine was prepared to tolerate Banerjee's affiliation with Stevenson to a point, but when he realized that Banerjee was more interested in reincarnation case studies than in telepathy experiments, he cut him off financially and, in April 1963, severed all ties to him.

Around the same time, rumors of fraud began to circulate in the parapsychology community. Stevenson never accepted these. He believed that Banerjee was as sloppy in his experimental record-keeping as he was in his field research, and encouraged him to address the rumors privately before they broke into the open and came to the attention of the ASPR trustees. But that did not happen. The April 1964 issue of the *Journal of Parapsychology* carried a review of a five-year report from Banerjee's institute (Rao, 1964), which insinuated that Banerjee had faked his results. The ASPR Board immediately withdrew approval for Stevenson's monograph as it stood.

Ducasse wanted the four cases "contaminated" by Banerjee (Jasbir Singh, Prakash Varshnay, Ravi Shankar Gupta, and Parmod Sharma) removed from the monograph.<sup>7</sup> Because these were among his strongest cases, Stevenson did not want to take them out. He was considering withdrawing the manuscript from the ASPR when it occurred to him that he might return to India and reinvestigate the cases with new assistants. With Carlson's sup-

port and the approval of the ASPR Board, he went back to India for four weeks in August and early September, stopping in Lebanon for three days of further research on Imad Elawar. Sami Makarem of the American University, Beirut, assisted him in Lebanon on this occasion. In India, he arranged to have two interpreters on each case. P. Pal and Jamuna Prasad, Deputy Director of Education for the state of Uttar Pradesh, filled this role, except in the case of Ravi Shankar Gupta, for which Prasad had acted as Banerjee's interpreter. Stevenson also had Story come to India to back him up. The two interpreters, Story and Stevenson, kept independent notes, which they compared the day they were made, resolving discrepancies before they left the area. In addition, Stevenson had all documents translated by Banerjee retranslated.

Stevenson expected his reinvestigations to vindicate Banerjee. Instead, although he discerned no evidence of deceit on Banerjee's part, there were manifold indications of carelessness. After his return to Zurich, he wrote Banerjee a blistering letter terminating his affiliation with him, at least until he completed his Ph.D. and gained some appreciation for investigative procedure. His reinvestigation was a turning point for Stevenson in other ways. It made him realize the benefits of reinterviewing witnesses after a period away. The follow-up interviews provided checks on the reliability of memories, furnished the opportunity to fill in gaps in testimony, and permitted him to learn how the children had fared since he had last seen them. From then on, Stevenson employed two interpreters to compare translations and make it more difficult to overlook details of witness testimony.

Back in Zurich, Stevenson set about revising his manuscript once again. He had to update not only the chapter on India but also the Introduction and General Discussion. He sent the updated chapter to Story, Pal, and Prasad for approval, then turned to his book on psychiatric interviewing, determined to spend on it what remained of his sabbatical.<sup>8</sup> He put off the final revisions of *Twenty Cases* until he returned to Charlottesville, forwarding to Ducasse his final draft in May 1965. It was accepted for copyediting without further alteration, and discussions on financing resumed. The 362-page monograph was published in September 1966 with the assistance of Carlson and Garrett, sent out to ASPR members free of charge, and offered to the public at the price of \$6.00. The initial issuance of 7,000 copies sold out in twelve months, and the book was reprinted.

## THE RECEPTION OF TWENTY CASES, 1966-1967

*Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* is written in the style of psychical research. The emphasis is on

demonstrating the veridicality of statements and behaviors, showing that they cannot be explained by reference to the children's present lives, and arguing that reincarnation is the most satisfactory way to account for them.

The case reports follow a standard format. They open with a summary of a case and its investigation, discuss the geographical relationship of the sites of the past and present lives, consider possible means of communication between the past and present families, list the people interviewed, and treat at greater length the child's statements, recognitions, and behaviors relating to the previous personality, as Stevenson referred to the earlier incarnation. He supplied tables of these items, noting the witnesses for each. The reports conclude with comments on the evidence of the children's "paranormal knowledge."

In his General Discussion, Stevenson considered a range of hypotheses to account for this paranormal knowledge and other features of the cases. He believed his investigations would have uncovered deception, were it a factor. He considered cryptomnesia (source amnesia), the possibility of which Chari (e.g., 1962a) was fond of emphasizing, but could see no evidence for that either. He spent some pages on what he termed "extrasensory perception plus personation." ESP alone could not be responsible for identifications with the previous personality: Information acquired through ESP would have to have been mobilized subconsciously to generate the behavioral and emotional elements of the cases, but nothing like this was known from cases of spontaneous ESP. Skilled behaviors, such as Swarnlata's Bengali songs and dances and the ability of Paulo Lorenz to use his sister's sewing machine, required practice to perfect, and posed an even greater challenge to the ESP hypothesis. The exceptional knowledge and behavior might be attributable to obsession or sporadic possession by a discarnate personality, but the birthmarks could not be. On the whole, Stevenson thought, reincarnation provided the best explanation for the data he had assembled (1966, pp. 291–354).

*Twenty Cases* was reviewed in both mainstream and parapsychology journals. Most of the reviews were written by Stevenson's friends, who walked a tightrope between advocacy and academic respectability. In a sympathetic review for the *American Journal of Psychiatry*, Robert Laidlaw (1967, p. 128) stated, "the question of the survival of part of the individual beyond physical death should be of vital interest to every psychiatrist." Writing in the *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, Gardner Murphy (1967, p. 167) recommended the book "as a broadening study from a socio-cultural and philosophical point of view." In the most reflective review, for the *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, James F. McHarg (1969) speculated that unresolved conflicts at the time of death might have stimu-

lated a transfer of information via ESP and that the question of personal reincarnation depended on the definition of "person."

Armando Favazza (1967) praised the case studies in *Medical Opinion and Review* but cautioned that they were not scientific because they were not laboratory-based. Jan Ehrenwald (1967), in the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, suggested the possibility of "doctrinal compliance," whereby psychiatrists of different persuasions elicit evidence to match their expectations. Donald West (1967), a British psychiatrist associated with the Society for Psychological Research, said in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* that "Dr. Stevenson concentrates on the issue of evidence for the paranormal; but at the same time he has provided an admirable collection of case studies illustrating the operation of cultural factors in shaping the child's perception of reality." John Beloff (1967), a psychologist at the University of Edinburgh, reviewed the book for the *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*. He agreed that all alternative interpretations of the case data failed, yet reincarnation faced formidable obstacles to acceptance in Western culture. *Twenty Cases* was, he believed, a work of major importance, but it would be long before it was recognized as such.

C.T.K. Chari reviewed the book twice, first for *Śaiva Siddhānta: A South Indian Quarterly Journal of Philosophy and Religion* (1966) and then for the *International Journal of Parapsychology* (1967). His argument in *Śaiva Siddhānta* was that the "sensational reports" of reincarnation were best understood as instances of spirit possession. In the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, he downplayed this idea and instead introduced a litany of concerns: Stevenson's dependence on interpreters, the possible effect of parental influence on children, and the potential for genetic transmission of physical anomalies. The children's "patchy memories" hinted at pathological states of consciousness, Chari believed; apparent past-life memories might actually be "veridical hallucinations" that incorporated information retrieved via ESP.

The relative paucity of cases in southern as opposed to northern India indicated to Chari a conformance to cultural demands. He devoted special attention to Stevenson's single South Indian case, that of Mallika Aroumougam. Mallika's case was one of the weakest in terms of memory claims, but had interesting behavioral features. When her father moved to Pondicherry for a job, he rented the ground floor of a house. Mallika was not quite four years old when she first visited the landlord's quarters upstairs. There, she noticed chair cushions and announced that she had made them; in fact, they had been crafted by the landlady's deceased sister, Devi. Thereafter, Mallika began to go upstairs regularly, where she responded to

other articles and made other observations suggestive of having been Devi. Her behavior was witnessed only by the landlord's family, yet Mallika's father and grandfather assured Chari that the case was without foundation. From this, Chari concluded that the witnesses interviewed by Stevenson were unreliable and discounted Mallika's recognition of her landlord as Devi's brother-in-law, which was documented in a police report.

Stevenson (1968) responded to Chari's review in a letter to the journal editor. Genetic transmission of physical traits would not account for the appearance of birthmarks in unrelated families or from wounds received at death. True, more cases were reported in some areas than in others, but cultural conditioning was not the only way to account for this uneven distribution; it could be that, for some reason, more cases developed in certain places. Regarding parental influences, although Indian parents might be receptive to past-life memory in general, they tended to be skeptical of claims that appeared in their own families. As to Mallika Aroumougam, since her father and grandfather had not witnessed any of her relevant behavior, their opinions were immaterial in judging the case. Moreover, Chari provided no justification for his rejection of Mallika's recognition of Devi's brother-in-law, as recorded in the police report.

In her review in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, Louisa Rhine (1966) was concerned principally with the parapsychological aspects of Stevenson's work. She noted that reincarnation presumed postmortem survival; however, inasmuch as the survival question was still undecided, research on reincarnation was "strictly speaking, premature" (Rhine, 1966, p. 264). Reincarnation research could be justified only if it promised to provide stronger evidence of survival than other phenomena, but did it? She alleged that Stevenson was only able to solve his case by assuming that Imad Elawar's parents had made some wrong inferences. Rhine accepted that Stevenson had ruled out fraud and cryptomnesia, but thought that he had not given due attention to the possibility of parental influence, nor was she prepared to set aside the involvement of clairvoyant ESP. She faulted Stevenson for employing an "old" understanding of ESP, allotting responsibility to the agent rather than to the percipient. She speculated that physical traits like birthmarks matching wounds might be acquired characteristics in the Lamarckian sense.

Stevenson (1967) responded that it was not true that the identification of Ibrahim Bouhamzy depended on his correcting Imad's parents' mistaken inferences. These had put him on the wrong track initially, but Imad had said enough specific things about Ibrahim to make the identification secure. The mistaken inferences were all about connecting the dots, not the dots themselves.

More generally, parental imposition of identity could not explain how the parents obtained the information to shape their children's behavior, nor could it account for the persistence of the children's memories, and it could not be squared with attempts by some parents to suppress their children's memories. Ravi Shakar Gupta's father beat him mercilessly whenever he talked about the previous life, but this succeeded only in making the boy afraid of his father, and he continued relating his memories to others. Clairvoyance would not account for the targeted selection of deceased individuals, nor for behavioral identifications or physical signs. Physical characteristics could not be inherited in most cases because there was no genetic avenue for transmission from the deceased to the child. Rhine was refusing to fairly confront the evidence. Stevenson (1967, p. 154) concluded by quoting a line attributed to Heraclitus of Pontus: "If you expect not the unexpected, you shall not find the truth."

## CONCLUSION

Critics of Stevenson's reincarnation studies have sometimes charged that he was driven by the Theosophy to which he was introduced by his mother to "prove" the reality of reincarnation, but his story does not support this notion. Stevenson indeed became acquainted with reincarnation in the Theosophical texts he read as a child, but because he could see no way to test Blavatsky's claims, they held no appeal for him. His medical career was concerned with a very different set of issues as he moved from one specialty to another, trying to find one that dealt satisfactorily with the relationship between mind and body, particularly the problem he regarded as central to his life—the question of why people developed the particular illnesses they did. Almost certainly, Stevenson's preoccupation with this question was prompted by his own bronchiectasis, for which no satisfactory explanation was provided.

Although he appears never to have stated this openly—certainly, he never speculated about it in print—one must wonder whether Stevenson came to think the answer might lie in reincarnation. As he studied case after case, he was brought to realize that not only memories and behaviors, but also physical traits—including internal diseases—might be carried forward from life to life (Stevenson, 1997). Marta Lorenz, one of the Brazilians about whom he wrote in *Twenty Cases*, recalled having been a woman who intentionally contracted tuberculosis after her father twice forbade her to marry men with whom she was in love. Marta suffered from recurrent upper respiratory infections, much like Stevenson. Stevenson was born during the 1918 influenza pandemic; it would not be

surprising if he wondered whether he might be the reincarnation of someone who succumbed to the disease.<sup>9</sup>

Skeptical critics (e.g., Augustine, 2015; Edwards, 1996) have been merciless in their attacks on Stevenson's interviewing style, his habit of spending only a few days with case subjects, and his use of interpreters, among other things (Matlock, 2022b). Philosopher Stephen Braude (2003) introduced a series of more sophisticated critiques, arguing that Stevenson's inquiries and interpretations were psychologically superficial, and that he betrayed an inadequate grasp of crucial issues concerning language competency, dissociation, and the relevance of studies of savants and prodigies.<sup>10</sup>

In Stevenson's defense, it should be remembered that he was a seasoned psychiatric interviewer who wrote textbooks on proper technique (Stevenson, 1960c, 1969); he did not approach his fieldwork naively. He was aware of potential pitfalls in his practices and did what he could to mitigate them. From the outset, he supplemented his own field research with that of professional colleagues, who sent him information about cases before and after he arrived on the scene and acted as his interpreters while there. After the Banerjee debacle, Stevenson adopted the routine of using two interpreters for each interview, in order to ensure that everything of significance was recorded faithfully. He learned the value of reinterviewing witnesses after a time away, and in his later studies, did this regularly, sometimes following his subjects for years before publishing reports about them (Stevenson, 1975, 1977a, 1980, 1983, 1997, 2003). Moreover, a comparison of Stevenson's investigation and report of Gnanatilleka Baddewithana to an earlier, independent investigation of the case by a Ceylonese team headed by H. S. S. Nissanka not published in English (until 2001: Nissanka, 2001) found that although Stevenson missed considerable detail, he got nothing wrong, despite spending only two days on the case and working partially through interpreters (Matlock et al., in press).

There can be little doubt that the criticisms, nonetheless, have been successful in directing attention away from Stevenson's work. An entrenched commitment to a reductionist view of consciousness as brain-generated surely played its part in this. However, Stevenson's mode of presentation did not help. His parapsychological orientation and emphasis on establishing reincarnation as the most satisfactory interpretation of his cases did not connect well with workers in other disciplines; he did not change his style even when publishing in mainstream journals, as, thanks to his professional background, he was sometimes able to do (Kelly, 2013). Critics like to deride and dismiss Stevenson's case studies as "anecdotal," ignoring the extensive investigative effort behind

them. Case studies are widely employed in medicine, so that aspect of Stevenson's method should not have been off-putting, but it may be that because he published the bulk of his cases in books, rather than in peer-reviewed journals, they were overlooked by much of his intended audience.<sup>11</sup> None of his case collections after *Twenty Cases* sold very well, and those from the University Press of Virginia (Stevenson, 1975, 1977a, 1980, 1983) were retired after only a few years.

Stevenson's research met considerably more resistance than he imagined it would, and the funds he hoped would flow after the publication of *Twenty Cases* were never forthcoming. Stevenson applied to the Ittleson Family Foundation and visited the National Institute of Child Health and Development in the autumn of 1966 but was turned down by the former and received no encouragement from the latter. In the Spring of 1967, he submitted an application to the New World Foundation, which purported to finance research on postmortem survival, but that too was rejected summarily. Stevenson submitted grant applications to the National Science Foundation (NSF), the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) after the publication of the second edition of *Twenty Cases* (1974) and the first volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series (1975), but none were successful.<sup>12</sup>

More generally, Stevenson's hoped-for recognition of reincarnation as an explanatory force for many unanswered problems in medicine (expressed in Stevenson, 1977b, 1997, 2000) has yet to come about. But it may be too soon to render a final judgment on Stevenson's contribution. The research program he initiated has survived him (Matlock, 2019), and he may still have the last say, proving correct John Beloff's (1967) verdict on *Twenty Cases*, that although a work of major importance, it would be long before it was appreciated as such.

## IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS

Stevenson's story has lessons for reincarnation research going forward. There is little reason to suppose that simply amassing more evidence and reporting it in the same ways that Stevenson reported it will make more headway in reaching the mainstream medical, academic, and scientific communities than he was able to achieve. Priority should be given to publishing in journals as opposed to books, at least initially. Researchers would do well to begin connecting their research to mainstream concerns, moving beyond a strict proof orientation to incorporate process-related variables, directly confronting issues such as those identified by Braude (2003). Many common skeptical complaints can be dealt with effec-

tively by seeking out cases with written records made before verifications are attempted, as with Gnanatilleka. A prospective research program that followed children from birth would both supply information on the prevalence of cases and document their unfolding, furnishing insights into the nature of past-life memory retrieval and the course of its manifestation (Matlock, 2022a).

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## ENDNOTES

1. M.D.C.M. stands for *Medicinae Doctorem et Chirurgiae Magistrum*, Doctor of Medicine and Master of Surgery.
2. Marquis Who's Who (1968, p. 1609).
3. Stevenson (1989).
4. Stevenson included a longer report of the Weiss-Roos case in *European Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (2003).
5. The Jensen Jacoby case was eventually published after T. E.'s husband's death until the title *Xenoglossy: A Review and Report of a Case*, as Volume 28 of the *ASPR Proceedings*, although never distributed to members. The simultaneous publication by the University Press of Virginia (Stevenson, 1974b) was limited in its sales, and the book was soon taken out of print.
6. Stevenson (1977) later included his own report of the case in the second volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series.
7. Stevenson argued successfully that Swarnlata Mishra had not been affected by Banerjee because he had done a complete reinvestigation of the case in English, without interpreters. Pal, not Banerjee, had researched the Bengali songs and dances from Swarnlata's purported intermediate life.
8. This book was published in 1969 as *The Psychiatric Examination* (Stevenson, 1969).
9. We learn from a September 24, 1960, letter to Ducasse that Stevenson had his own past-life memories, although it is not clear whether they included someone who died of the flu in 1918. Nor

do they appear, in themselves, to have been a strong motivating factor for him, at least in September 1960: "I have had a couple of apparent memories of previous lives, myself. I must say, however, that though these have been important to me, I cannot consider that they have brought as much conviction to me as the evidence I have studied from the cases of the kind of which we are familiar. The reverse has been true; that is, the evidence acquired from my study of other cases has made me more receptive to the possibility that these apparent memories I have had are in fact just that and not pseudo-memories or fantasies, as I might have been inclined to believe ten years ago."

10. Braude (2003) also criticized Stevenson for having too shallow an appreciation for the possibilities of information acquisition through psi, what is called super-psi or living-agent psi (Braude, 2016), but he has since backed away from this opinion. Braude (2021, pp. 31–32) now considers social construction in its various forms to be more likely than psi as an explanation for the reported case phenomena. This mirrors the progression in Stevenson's thinking. In *Twenty Cases* (1966, pp. 343–373), he gave much attention to the possibility of "ESP plus personation," but in the third volume of his *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* series (1980, p. 343), he wrote that he had come to think that the two most viable alternative explanations for the cases were "normal means of communication of the information attributed to the subject, and reincarnation." Stevenson's research and writing, therefore, emphasized ruling out normal means of information acquisition.
11. Stevenson originally intended to publish the cases collected in *Twenty Cases* in journals, but was persuaded to bring them together in a *Proceedings* instead. Thereafter, he published some of his cases in journals before including them in books (Kelly, 2013), but as his work proceeded, the number of cases quickly exceeded what journals would accept. Also, Stevenson could describe cases at greater length in books. A comparison of the space devoted to cases with birthmarks of the head and neck in periodicals as opposed to *Reincarnation and Biology* (Stevenson, 1997) found a mean of 2.1 pages in the former versus nine pages in the latter. Reincarnation research is unusual among the sciences in its use of books to present much of its data (Matlock, 2024).
12. In July 1976, Stevenson told Beloff that "the federal government now has a completely clean record of having turned down every application for a research grant [in parapsychology] it received during in the last two years." Recently, he had "a long and



painful conversation” with an NSF staffer assigned to summarize the reasons for rejection of a 1975 proposal. He professed to be “astonished at the adamant rejections of paranormal explanations as at least deserving of consideration in studying cases of the reincarnation type.” The man had told him “frankly that he saw no possibility of the National Science Foundation supporting my research in the foreseeable future. . . . He quoted one reviewer as saying that he had no objection to private funding of my research, but could not allow government money to be spent on it.”

<sup>13</sup>. Jim Tucker (personal communication).

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## APPENDIX: WHO'S WHO

The following list supplies brief identifications of the many individuals, of diverse backgrounds, referenced in this paper.

**Hemendra Nath Banerjee.** Director of the Seth Sohan Lal Memorial Institute of Parapsychology in Sri Ganganagar, Rajasthan, India, and Editor of the *Indian Journal of Parapsychology*.

**Reşat Bayer.** Stevenson's Turkish colleague and research assistant; of Istanbul.

**John Beloff.** 1920–2006. Lecturer and then Professor of Psychology at University of Edinburgh, 1962–85.

**Morey Bernstein.** 1920–99. Colorado businessman; author of *The Search for Bridey Murphy* (1956).

**Helena Blavatsky.** 1831–91. Russian-American author; originator of the occult system Theosophy.

**Frances Payne Bolton.** 1885–1977. Delegate to the US House of Representatives from New York State, 1940–69; co-founder, with Eileen Garrett, of the Parapsychology Foundation, 1951

**Chester Carlson.** 1906–68. Physicist; inventor of the Xerox copying process. Philanthropist and major benefactor.

**Dorris Carlson.** 1910–1981. Wife of Chester Carlson.

**C. T. K. Chari.** 1909–93. Philosopher, Madras Christian College, Madras, India

**Laura Dale.** 1918–83. ASPR office manager and Editor of ASPR publications, intermittently, from 1941 onwards.

**C. J. Ducasse.** 1881–1969. French-born analytical philosopher. Professor of Philosophy at Brown University, 1926–58; Member of the ASPR Board of Trustees, 1951–65; chairman, publications committee, 1959–65.

**Jan Ehrenwald.** 1900–88. New York City psychiatrist; member of the ASPR's Medical Section in the 1950s and early 1960s.

**Armando Favazza.** 1941– . American psychiatrist with medical degree from University of Virginia best known for his studies of cultural psychiatry.

**Eileen Garrett.** 1892–1970. Renowned British mental medium who, with the financial assistance of Frances Bolton, founded the Parapsychology Foundation in 1951.

**Aldous Huxley.** 1894–1963. British philosopher and writer, author of *The Doors of Perception* (1954), which described his psychedelic experiences under mescaline.

**George Hyslop.** New York City psychiatrist, son of James Hyslop, President of the ASPR Board of Trustees, 1940–62; First Vice-President, 1962–65.

**James Hervey Hyslop.** 1854–1920. American philosopher; Director of the ASPR, 1907–20.

**Richard and Isabella Ingalese.** American authors, affiliated with the 19th century New Thought movement, similar in some respects to Helena Blavatsky's Theosophy.

**Milton V. Kline.** 1923–2004. Psychiatrist, editor of *A Sci-*

*entific Report on the Search for Bridey Murphy*.

**Robert Laidlow.** 1929–2014. New York City psychiatrist, founder and chairman of the department of psychiatry at Roosevelt Hospital, 1949–57; member of the ASPR Board of Trustees,

**Alan F. MacRobert.** Member of ASPR Board of Trustees, 1961–64.

**Russell G. MacRobert.** New York City psychiatrist; member of the ASPR's Medical Section in the 1950s and early 1960s

**James F. McHarg.** 1917–2003. Consultant Psychiatrist and Honorary Senior Lecturer in Psychiatry at the University of Dundee, Scotland.

**Gardner Murphy.** 1895–1979. Personality and social psychologist, Director of Research at Meninger Foundation, 1952–68; First Vice-President of ASPR Board of Trustees, 1940–62; President, 1962–72.

**P. Pal.** Professor of Psychology at Itachuna College, West Bengal, India.

**Jamuna Prasad.** Deputy Director of Education for the state of Uttar Pradesh, India / Indian psychologist. Served at Bureau of Psychology, Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India, in various capacities from its inception in 1947; as Director from 1959, except for a few months spent as Deputy Director of Education for Uttar Pradesh.

**Octavia Reynolds.** Maiden name of Stevenson's first wife.

**J. B. Rhine.** 1895–1980. American botanist and parapsychologist at Duke University, founder of the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University in 1935.

**Louisa Rhine.** 1891–1983. American botanist and parapsychologist, wife of J. B. Rhine.

**Gertrude Schmeidler.** 1912–2009. Research psychologist at City College of the City University of New York; member of ASPR Board of Trustees,

**Emil L. Smith.** 1911–2009. American biochemist.

**John Stevenson.** Scottish-born Canadian journalist; Stevenson's father.

**Ruth Stevenson.** Stevenson's mother.

**Francis Story.** 1910–71. Lay monk and Religious Director of Baudha Dharmadutadhara Sangamaya in Sri Jayewardenepura Kotte.

**T. E.** Pseudonymous initials of subject of Jensen Jacoby responsive xenoglossy case (Stevenson, 1974b).

**Donald West.** 1924–2020. British psychiatrist associated with the Society for Psychical Research.

**Kerr White.** 1917 - 2014. Stevenson's elder brother. He assumed the surname "White" to satisfy a childless maternal uncle who wished to have his surname passed on.<sup>13</sup>

**Stewart Wolf.** 1914–2005. American physician, pioneer in psychosomatic medicine.

**Harold Wolff.** 1898–1962. American physician, along with Stewart Wolf pioneer in psychosomatic medicine.