

## Reincarnation and the Simulation Hypothesis -

Lessons from Past Life Regression Therapy

about the Usefulness of a Consciousness-Based Paradigm

The perennial doctrine of the world as an illusionary appearance (*maya* in Hinduism) and of all things empty of inherent existence (*svabhava* in Mahayana Buddhism) is currently re-emerging in various forms of the *Simulation Hypothesis*. The suggestion that reality may be a sophisticated (virtual) simulation has triggered an intense public debate as well as criticism for being impracticable, unfalsifiable, hence not a scientific question. This line of critique must be considered valid, chiefly on the ground that any attempt to falsify an illusion may be part of the illusion itself. Furthermore, if one level of simulation could ever be verified, the search for a simulation of the simulation or the original simulator, would create an infinite regress akin to the 'problem of the first cause' (Gleiser). Yet, the basic unfalsifiability of the simulation type of hypotheses does not mean that they are scientifically irrelevant. Rather, they may indicate the rise of a Kuhnian scientific revolution, during which new assumptions are discovered and assessed – as assumptions go, not by verifiability or falsifiability but for their *usefulness*.

Reincarnation and past-life therapy constitute fields in which consciousness is regarded as primary to physical reality, which is treated as a (quasi) simulation. In a qualitative study conducted by the author, subjects from varied national and cultural backgrounds were given the chance to explore past and future lives over the course of a dozen hypnotherapeutic sessions. The aim of the study was not to verify reincarnation, rather to assess the psychological usefulness and potential therapeutic benefits of the emerging narratives. It has been found – as the individual begins to see their current life as a story embedded in a larger context of past and present development – that a qualitatively different way of thinking arises. It allows to take up vantage points that are more dissociated, from which life events become less gripping, so that the developmental value of each situation can be explored. Various techniques (e.g. getting into the mind of the opponent, reframing the intent, regressing to the root of a relationship problem, an 'incurable' symptom, a phobia, or even a body integrity identity disorder) can be employed to unlock the healing potential within.

As a result of the process, external events lose their relative importance compared to the internal psycho-alchemical processes they catalyse. Each life constitutes a new level of awareness, at which the subject of the previous level becomes the object of the next (c.f. Kegan), allowing for the change and transcendence of past patterns (e.g. turning personal weaknesses into strengths). The sense of Self gradually widens. From a 'skin-encapsulated Ego' identity, it moves towards a higher-self-being whose existence spans many lifetimes, until ultimately, it reaches identification with the singularity consciousness (*Brahman*, the creative principle and absolute cause itself) that collects and integrates all experiences of every individual incarnation like a cosmic computer analysing the data of its simulations.