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Reincarnation and the Simulation Hypothesis - Lessons from Past Life Regression Therapy about the Usefulness of a Consciousness-Based Paradigm

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Abstract

This paper discusses the potential usefulness of the simulation hypothesis in terms of providing for new assumptions that can be used for the study of consciousness. It is argued that consciousness cannot be studied in any progressive way within the currently mainstream materialist paradigm. Neither its basic assumptions (matter as the building block of all-there-is) nor its methodology (with its requirements for objectivity, measurability, reproducibility etc.) are compatible with consciousness – which is subjective and phenomenological in its nature. For the study of consciousness a new science with new assumptions and new methodology need to be created for which the simulation hypothesis gives a promising starting point. The simulation hypothesis assumes that a world can be created based on information, which comes close to a pure consciousness-based paradigm (assuming consciousness is fundamental, matter is derivative of consciousness). Examples from a qualitative experiment into reincarnational therapy – linking the past with the present and the future in a teleological way – highlight the usefulness of the consciousness-based paradigm for dealing with the human mind.

The Simulation Hypothesis

The simulation hypothesis – once science fiction or a fringe idea of science – is gaining considerable momentum in academic and public debate (e.g. Virk, 2019; Bostrom, 2003). The idea that reality as we perceive it may be a sophisticated computer-generated immersion, is no longer so outlandish as we are witnessing the advances in virtual and augmented reality technologies. Even though we may not yet have the full computing power necessary to create a virtual reality that would be indistinguishable from the physical world as humans perceive it, the stages of progressing towards such a *simulation point* (Virk, 2019, 108ff) can already be detected. Even a leisurely visit to Disneyworld's *The Void* – where a fully interactive digital environment blends with the physical room – can leave the visitor not just entertained but pondering the question: *What is reality?* Is it a collection of atoms and molecules that can be objectively be studied or is it something more akin to... information?

The basic idea that the ultimate nature of reality might be quite different from the physical world as we experience it, is – of course – much older than the digital era. It has fascinated as well as tortured thinkers ever since the early days of philosophy. Twenty-five centuries ago, in the East, Zhuangzi woke up one morning from a dream in which he was a butterfly and asked aghast: 'How can I know whether I really am the philosopher who dreamt he was a butterfly – or perhaps I am the butterfly now dreaming that I'm the philosopher?' (c.f. Zhuangzi/Watson, 1968). Meanwhile, in the West, Plato warned his

contemporaries that they all are like prisoners in a cave, chained in a way that they can see but a mere shadow theatre of the real world (Plato/Grube/Reeve, 1992: 514-521). *Maya* – the world as an illusionary appearance – is a central tenet in Hinduism, where only Brahman, the ultimate source or consciousness is considered real. Buddhism goes even further, by teaching that all things lack inherent existence (*shabhava*).

These deep roots of the perennial doctrine of the world as an illusionary appearance allowed for the quick growing of new branches on the same tree in our modern, digital times. The simulation hypothesis emerged in science fiction as early as in the 1960s and '70s. In the 1964 novel *Simulacron-3* by Daniel F. Galouye people live in a computer-generated reality without realising it. The 1973 German television serial *World on Wire* (*Welt am Draht*) by Fassbinder follows a computer scientist who creates a virtual reality world inhabited by simulated people, only to discover that his own reality may be a simulation as well. By the time when *The Matrix* came into the cinemas (1999), there was already some scientific speculation that the exponential growth of computing power could lead to the creation of ultra-realistic simulations indistinguishable from reality (Vinge, 1993). It was also argued that if such simulation has ever been possible, it may have been already created. A high number of 'ancestor simulations' could exist and we may already be living in such a simulation (c.f. Bostrom, 2003).

New Assumptions for a New Paradigm

The suggestion that reality may be a sophisticated (virtual) simulation has triggered not only intense public debate but also (well-earned) criticism. The simulation hypothesis has been regarded impracticable and unfalsifiable, hence not suitable as a scientific question. This line of critique must be considered valid, chiefly on the ground that any attempt to verify or falsify an illusion may be part of the illusion itself. (Imagine, for instance, a scientist who conducts an experiment using the proper scientific method – all scientific controls in place, reproducibility etc. ensured – but does it *in a dream*. In this case, we could hardly call the results valid. Instead, we would quickly run against what Sheldrake (2012: 291) the 'illusion of objectivity' which is inherent in any system where consciousness plays a role – as it would in a virtual simulation.)

Furthermore, even if one level of simulation could ever be proven, 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, 2021). How could we ever know, let alone prove, when we have reached the basement-level of all simulation, the basement civilisation that has created it all?

Yet, the basic lack of verifiability and falsifiability of the simulation type of hypotheses must not mean that it's all academically irrelevant. Quite the contrary, it indicates that we are touching upon *assumptions* that can per definition not be proven. As Thomas Kuhn pointed out in his seminal work on *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), assumptions cannot be assessed in terms of true or false, rather must be chosen for their *usefulness*. At times, when the dominant paradigm of 'normal science' is challenged by too many anomalies not explainable with the current assumptions, the period of revolutionary science begins. New assumptions must be found that allow for the study of those anomalies, so that our understanding can broaden. Firmly established, old-fashioned academics are

likely to defend their old assumptions (as well as their methodology) vehemently and aggressively against the proponents of the new way of thinking. The outcome of such a 'paradigm war' is not chiefly determined by evidence, but depends on multiple interpersonal-psychological and socio-political factors. (Persons who have invested their entire professional career on developing ideas within a certain set of assumptions, will unlikely be willing to let go of these.) Sometimes, it takes generations of thinkers to die out, before a new paradigm with a new set of assumptions and new methodology can establish itself.

This paper argues that we *are* currently in the middle of a *scientific revolution*. The simulation type of hypotheses hold value *not* because they are true (or not), rather because they mark the quest for new assumptions. Our current, materialist paradigm works with the *analog* assumption that the universe is based on matter and operates within fixed and continuous laws governing physical objects. While this assumption has proven very useful since the days of the Copernican revolution to bring upon us our entire technological civilisation, we have important anomalies *not* explainable within the materialist paradigm. Anomalies came up, for instance, in physics: Quantum theory has brought some big ones, such as:

- the *observer effect* (the fundamental aspect of quantum mechanics that suggests that the very act of observing a system can change the state of that system) or
- *quantum entanglement* (that 'spooky connection' between two particles whose properties remain dependent on each other even when separated by vast distances) and
- *non-locality* (the fact that these connections cannot be explained by classical mechanisms of cause and effect that operate in close proximity).

Furthermore, the entire field of phenomena related to human consciousness (the mind) cannot be explained within the old, materialist paradigm, such as:

- *out-of-body experiences* (personal experiences of perceiving the world from a vantage point outside of the physical body, during which the person may see their physical body from an external perspective, e.g. floating above it),
- *near-death experiences* (an out-of-body experience during the temporary clinical death of the body, often involving the sensation of moving through a tunnel, meeting deceased loved ones and religious or spiritual guides, oftentimes being subjected to a life review),
- *shared-death experiences* (a spiritually transformative experience during the death of a loved one), and
- *memories of past lives* (in children who reported remarkable and verified details of apparent previous existences, see esp. Stevenson, 1966; Tucker, 2015).

These remarkable, extensively documented and numerous cases of anomalies cannot be explained or even further studied within the ruling, materialist paradigm. (If matter is assumed to be the fundamental building block of everything and the brain hence assumed to produce consciousness, it remains a logical impossibility that consciousness could ever exist independently of the body.) Yet, ignoring these cases handicaps science: They are relatively common and constitute deeply meaningful, sometimes traumatic, life events for the individuals involved – yet they are often forced to remain silent and do not receive adequate counselling.¹ It is in the nature of a paradigm change that phenomena which constitute a

¹ Of the near-death-experiencers I have interviewed over the course of my studies, many told me that I was the only or one of very few people they ever told us about their experience. Some reported dismissive,

logical impossibility in the old paradigm, may become explainable with the new: hence it is time to find new assumptions.

The simulation hypothesis is valuable, as it provides new assumptions to be considered and with that, a possible foundation for a contemporary, non-materialist science. In his paper 'Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?' Oxford philosopher Nick Bostrom (2003) lays out as the necessary assumption for a simulation theory that consciousness must be regarded as *substrate independent*, i.e. not being seen as dependent on 'carbon-based biological neural networks inside the cranium' but must be regarded as transferable, for instance, to silicon-based processors inside a computer. While Bostrom's assumption moves towards acknowledging consciousness as being disparate from matter, it is still dualistic in nature (as it sees matter as a carrier of consciousness). A pure consciousness-based paradigm would regard consciousness fundamental to physical reality, i.e. see 'matter derivative of consciousness' (Planck, 1931)². In his book 'My Big TOE – Theory of Everything' physicist and consciousness researcher Thomas Campbell suggests a pure consciousness-based paradigm. He sees reality as a simulation created by consciousness itself (which is seen as the fundamental creative power). The purpose of this simulation is to evolve our consciousness: all our experiences within the simulation are generated to facilitate this evolution.

This pure, consciousness-based paradigm thus works with two assumptions: 1. consciousness is fundamental, the material world is derivative of consciousness 2. consciousness is evolving. These can be considered as new assumptions suggested for a new paradigm, we must assess these assumptions in terms of *usefulness*. What can we gain from these assumptions and how can we test this?

Reincarnation Studies for Testing the Consciousness-Based Paradigm

In my work as a hypnotherapist – involuntarily, at first – but I came across cases in which clients began to recall events, seemingly from past lives. For a while, I tried to avoid going deeper into such material, as this was such an intellectually infuriating field to work with: There is no established methodology or any possibility to test the (historic) validity of past life memories emerging from therapeutic settings. (Even memories from a current life cannot be validated if no external information is available.) At the same time, there is enough suggestive evidence – coming from research into children's spontaneous memories – which indicate that past life materials should be taken seriously (see esp. Stevenson, 1966, Tucker, 2015). Also, these kind of memories do emerge when we work open-mindedly with the human psyche. As Bache (1994: 15) pointed out, reincarnational material tends to show up whenever techniques are used that are 'capable of penetrating into deeper levels of

sometimes even hostile behaviour of their doctors when they tried to mention what has happened to them. One lady, who ended up in hospital after being stampeded by horses, told me that her doctor forbid her to mention her near-death experience, else he would make sure that she remained locked up in a mental institution forever.

2 These are words of Max Planck, who told an interview to The Observer as early as in 1931: 'I regard consciousness as fundamental. I regard matter as derivative of consciousness. We cannot get behind consciousness. Everything that we talk about, everything that we regard as existing, postulates consciousness.' With that, the Nobel laureate father of modern quantum physics, laid down the very foundation of the consciousness-based paradigm.

consciousness.’ Among other things that arise from the collective psychic realm (ancestral imprints, mythic and archetypal contents of the collective unconscious etc.) past life memories constitute the most fascinating, at the same time, most controversial group of transpersonal phenomena (c.f. Grof, 1988: 84ff).

In the East, the idea of reincarnation has been considered valid as a philosophical or religious concept for thousands of years, while in the West, the great Abrahamic religions, have rejected (or ignored) it at large. Western science considers reincarnation an *impossibility*: If the assumption is that matter produces consciousness, the brain can impossibly hold memories from times before it was born. If we, however, turn the materialist assumption around and consciousness primary, it becomes not only possible but even plausible the same source consciousness can bring into existence multiple lives to an ongoing evolution.

These assumptions gave me the a paradigmatic background sufficient to begin to work with past life cases. Without trying to verify or falsify reincarnation itself, I began to conduct some *prima facie* qualitative research into materials that emerged from hypnotic regressions. The idea was to conduct *series of sessions* (about a dozen) with the same individuals, exploring past life memories in conjunction with present life issues, even future goals and (subconscious) tendencies, and see 1) whether any patterns can be detected and/or 2) what changes unfold in the client’s life as a result of such work. Essentially, I was beginning to test the consciousness-based paradigms in regards to its *usefulness*.

Simulation-Type Patterns Found in Reincarnational Materials

As we will see below, during the work with reincarnational material certain regularities began to emerge – which were consistent with patterns one would expect if the world we perceive would indeed be a simulation. It is a tenet of the simulation hypothesis that ‘the world’ (as we perceive it through the simulation) is designed as a participatory system. Contrary to the materialist paradigm, which views the universe as a product of random occurrences, a simulation would not be random, but programmed to react to the decisions of the participants who are moving towards a meaningful goal (like players in a purpose-driven video game).

In his book, the ‘The Simulation Hypothesis’ MIT computer scientist Rizwan Virk (2019) brings examples of actual phenomena observable in our reality that are indicative of such a responsive system. His examples range from quantum physics (in particular, the *double-split experiment*, where the presence of the observer seems to influence the behaviour of wave-particles) through the *anthropic interpretation of cosmology* (according to which the properties of the universe are not random but seem to be uniquely suited to support the existence of conscious observers) to the *Global Consciousness Project* (the results of which suggest that mass human consciousness reacting to global events, such as the 9/11 attacks, can have a direct impact on (otherwise) random number generators; see Nelson, 2019).

Similarly, my qualitative study into reincarnational memory patterns has brought to light a number of phenomena which indicate that the system we are observing – the series of lives human lives – is not random, but responsive to individual choices, even attitudes. The majority of these phenomena can be grouped into one of the following categories: karmic imprinting, karmic relationships, reverberation over time, synchronicities, syntropy, and life

reviews – each of which shall be presented with some examples below.

- Karmic Imprinting

According to all the religious traditions that teach reincarnation as a central doctrine (Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism), all our actions, even thoughts and words, have their consequences. *Karma* is to be understood not so much as a system of punishment and reward, rather as cause and effect, not only in a sense that the quality of our actions determines the quality of our life experience, but also that the quality of our consciousness determines the perception of reality itself.³ Some consciousness researchers shy away from using the word *karma* due to its religious connotations and the victim-perpetrator dichotomy it might imply and suggest alternative terms. Analaura Trivellato (2015) speaks of *thosenic reverberation* (*thosenic* as an abbreviation for thoughts, sentiments and energies): a concept similar to karma, which also allows for *acausal* connections (akin to quantum entanglement or synchronicity) transcending time and space.

In the past life materials I've collected, I found both types of patterns: Causes set in the a past which have produced effects in future lives (these I call karmic imprinting) as well as fields of thoughts, sentiments, and energies which carry on across multiple lives (these I call reverberations).

The following is a striking example of some causes set in a past life that seem to have clear effects in the present life. Note that the remembrance of these causes in the present has brought healing, not only psychologically, but even on the physical level.

Joshua, a middle-aged American client, remembered a past life as a Nazi concentration camp officer. In this Nazi life, he was at one point made to shoot one of his mates. The bullet hit through the right eye. That incident led to a two-months crisis, during which the officer realised that it was evil what they were doing. Yet, he had no way to get out – ‘they would have shut me or the Russians would have tortured me with my SS tattoo’.

At the end, he shot himself in the head.

In his present life, Joshua was reborn Jewish but always felt ‘alienated’ from that identity), He also grew up always feeling ‘scared yet fascinated by all the Nazi, World War II stuff.’ He had life-long eye problems, rendering him legally blind on his right eye. Also, he developed a brain tumour in his head, at the same place where the bullet hit in his previous life. After remembering the past life origin of this and developing an attitude of self-forgiveness, the tumour disappeared completely.

- Karmic Relationships

Karmic relationships can be seen as a special case of karmic imprinting. These are connections between individuals that may originate in shared past life experiences, as they

³ The concept of subjective perception is illustrated by the Buddhist parable about a bowl of liquid is seen differently by different beings (who have different levels of consciousness): a god sees a bowl of nectar, a human being sees water, while a hell beings sees the same bowl full of pus. According to this teaching, consciousness determines perception.

exhibit some pre-established dynamics, sometimes of the positive kind (e.g. ongoing mutual cooperation), other times involving unfinished issues, conflicts or third party interference. These kind of relationships demonstrate well the responsive nature of the reincarnational life-cycle system, as they force the involved party to work through those unresolved issues, break negative (repetitive) patterns, and find healing or resolution. Once understanding is acquired and solution gained, the dynamics tend to shift, either by healing or ending the relationship.

Liz, a German woman in her late 30s, had trouble in her current relationship with Jakob. Even though she was in love with him and could even imagine him as the father of her future child, they broke up multiple times because of the interference of his ex-girlfriend Kate. (Kate, often feeling ill and needy, kept contacting Jakob for consolation and he always prioritized her need.)

In her past life regression session, Liz saw herself as a Russian 'babushka': an old woman who has been neglected by her husband throughout their lives. The husband (whom she recognised from his eyes as Jakob) led a fun and quite open affair with a widow from the village (same consciousness as Jakob's current ex-girlfriend) while she, as the wife, was left alone. They were childless and she had nothing else to do but attending to the housework and nurse her husband, when later in life an accident left him bed-ridden and alcoholic.

Even though Liz had imagined her karmic past with Jakob to be 'much more dramatic,' this remembrance allowed her to practice mindfulness of her own feelings and needs. Letting go of other people's trouble and setting her own healthy boundaries resulted in a renewal of the relationship. As a result, she is soon getting married to Jakob, who is now the father of her sweet, 3-year old daughter.

- Reverberation over Time

At times, when we compare several past lives of the same individual, instead of seeing particular cause and effect patterns (like a killing wound from a past life matching a malady in the present life) we can find entire *fields* of thoughts, sentiments, and energies (in short: *thosenic* fields) that extend across time and space. In these cases, lives upon lives are connected by a recurring interest, a passion – with interconnected problems – that leads the individual towards ever increasing levels of self-actualisation. This is not unlike the *COEX-systems* (*Systems of Condensed Experiences*) Stanislav Grof writes about, a term which refers to a web of experiences organised around a powerful emotional centre, which shows up repeatedly through various processes (e.g. through guided imagery, holotropic breath-work, psychedelic experiences, dreams, bodywork, somatic techniques, and regression therapy). Past life work does not only allow for the discovery of these *thosenic* fields, but can heal interferences and interruptions that may have occurred during their evolution.

Fabienne, a writer of mystical novels from Switzerland, has been on the search for sacred knowledge her entire life. This knowledge she calls 'magic' has, however, remained quite elusive throughout her life. Our inquiry into her past lives revealed that this was an

ongoing pattern: The interest in magic (for instance: as a sacred musician, as a priestess working with chants, even as a Knights Templar) has always been there, yet always in a dampened form, not allowing for full access.

One particular life in the 13th century, England, cast light on the (or one) obstacle to reclaiming and spreading such magical knowledge. As a young boy in that life, he knew and practised natural magic in the woods, but when his parents sent him away to become a monk, he had to suppress his inclination. Years later, he met a rich woman with husband and children, who used to come to the convent and who was like him: She also knew magic. They developed an innocent friendship that made them both happy as they could share their like-minded interest. Later, however, there was a trial and they were both burned by the Church. He felt very guilty, responsible for her fate, too and vowed 'never to do magic again.'

- Synchronicities

Ever since C. G. Jung has published his famous first example of 'meaningful coincidences,' synchronicities keep showing up, constituting the most striking anomalies indicating that our reality may be of the simulation type. Synchronicities occur when inner events meaningfully coincide with outer events, without a cause and effect connection (*acausal* element). The outer event may be very small, but hold great significance for the experiencer. The seeming *impossibility* of such an *acausal* connection is precisely what draws attention and signals great significance for the experiencer (subjective element). In Jung's original example, nothing more happened outwardly, than a small insect tapping at the window. The episode became highly significant because that insect resembled the golden scarab Jung's patient saw in a recent dream. This *acausal* correlation that was so surprising that it helped the patient get out of the constraints of her strictly rational thinking and thus shattered her resistance to therapy.

Synchronicities disturb with their impossibility, at the same time awaken and comfort with the meaningful message they deliver to the individual. They leave us with the very deep impression that the system we are living in is not random, but communicates with us in subtle, yet powerful ways.

Sebastian, during his past life regression, remembered participating in using forced labour during the building of a fortress in 1750. The day after the session, he experienced a remarkable synchronicity. The moderator of a program he watched (Goodall, 2013) spoke the following sentence:

'In the year 1750, something changed and that was you.'

The improbable, almost bizarre rendering of this sentence made him acutely aware of the turning point in 1750. It was significant not only for that one life but the overall, multidimensional evolution of his consciousness: It was through the realisation about the wrongdoings of slave trade that he began to develop compassion. In Buddhist terms, this was his first step towards Bodhicitta, the heart-mind directed towards the alleviation of suffering of all sentient beings – which is considered to be the single most

important turning point in the evolution of an individual consciousness.

Another meaningful, startling coincidence happened to Sebastian towards the end of his session series. We were exploring his highest possible future path, where he can best fulfil his existential program (individual purpose). During a visualisation, he met up with a Wise Old Man, who gave him some life-changing thoughts and also handed over to him a blue marble. 'I'm giving you this blue marble as a proof that this experience is real' he said. We thought this was an interesting sentence, even though it was hard to imagine why receiving an imaginary blue marble in an imaginary setting would prove anything. The next day, however, when Sebastian went out of his apartment building in the morning rain, he stepped onto something hard in a puddle. He bent down and picked up a hard little thing from under his feet: It was the blue marble the Old Man gave him the day before.

- Life Reviews

Another powerful phenomenon that points towards a simulation type of system, is the prevalence of life reviews. In these non-ordinary states – which can occur in the context of near-death experiences as well as in reincarnational therapy – the individual consciousness can visit the realm after death/in-between lives and experience a remarkable review of the life just lived. Cases of life reviews are numerous, well-documented (c.f. Moody, 2001), and show several remarkable features that indicate the experiential-experimental nature of life as a virtual experience. The individual consciousness has the chance to review the effect of their actions, in a panoramic, non-linear way, remarkably not only from their own perspective, but of all involved. (For instance, the emotions caused to others through one's actions can be felt.) Notably, this review is not judgemental in nature: the goal does not seem to be condemnation or approval, rather a kind of assessment, like evaluating the results of an experiment.

William, an American librarian and theologian, remembered a past life during the Vietnam War as a US soldier. Getting into the uniform felt like entering a 'less than human existence.' He died in that war, ambushed by the Viet Cong, while his troop was sitting around in their camp, casually smoking joints, even laughing. Death felt peaceful and librating. He began to see everyone from above... and the jungle... the hill-tops all around on this sunny day... before flying through the tunnel with vast speed.

In 'Paradise,' an older woman was greeting him. She knew him and took him through a life review. It started with revisiting his childhood: he saw himself being buckled up in an infant car seat, his parents and siblings around the Christmas tree, and himself in elementary school, with JFK pictures on the class room wall. Throughout childhood and adolescence he has been experiencing the energy of peace and love, until he was thrown into the military which was the complete absence of that.

The life review made it distinctly clear that there's an energy flow of love and the opposite of that: the energy flow of power. The latter brings forth into being the military machinery, which takes people's energy away, traps their souls, and steals their freedom.

To experience these opposing energies was a lesson to be gained from that life: There always is a choice between 'God's ways and men's ways' as William put it and because of this past life experience, he can now clearly see the difference. Today, William lives a life dedicated to God, fulfilling 'mission after mission after mission' dedicated to the Bodhissatva vow of compassion, for the benefit of all living beings.

Interestingly, a computer metaphor came up in some of the life reviews visited. Even though in-between-life experiences are generally ineffable and can only be described as an approximation of the events which seem larger than the brain can hold, the comparison with a computer program seems appropriate. During life reviews, experiential materials from the previous incarnation(s) are being evaluated, like a computer program would evaluate the results of a teleological simulation.

In a personal life review, I saw a structure that could be likened to a planet-size, 3D puzzle, consisting of parts that all fit together. Each consciousness (part) after a particular incarnation floated back to form together a giant computer. Inside, all experiences were connected and assessed. Those individuals whose lives were more connected, were now closer to each other, too. When the assessment was completed, the structure exploded from within and the parts were sent into yet another incarnation.

Isabel, a student from Brazil, saw a previous life review during a session we were conducting to find out more about her current life's purpose. The following extract of the session transcript illustrates that she, too, saw the life review in a computer analogy context.

Viktória: Who's there?

Isabel: A middle aged man, like my dad – but he's more athletic and has round, ball-shaped shoulders. He wants to show me something, take me to a place...

Viktória: Where?

Isabel: It's like a computer lab. I can feel energies here very strongly – they seem to interact with the computers. There are many computers, all at the wall. I can feel some rotational movement... it is pulling me into one of the computers.

- Syntropy – Glimpses into the Future

Most of us are familiar with the concept of *entropy*, the tendency of a closed physical system to move towards increased levels of disorder. Lesser known is *syntropy*: the law symmetric with entropy, expressing a tendency to move towards increased levels of harmony. It has been suggested, if entropy governs physical systems, syntropy may be a quality of life and while entropy is moving from the past into the future (causality), syntropy presupposes attractors from the future (diCorpo/Vannini, 2015). While there is experimental as well as theoretical evidence for the *retrocausality* inherent in the idea of syntropy (c.f. diCorpo/Vannini, 2015: 27-35), the idea may sound like science fiction, until we consider it psychologically.

Psychologically, the idea of future attractors is not new. Viktor Frankl, the father of logotherapy, used his personal experiences as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, where he observed that those who maintained a sense of purpose and held onto a future goal were psychologically the most likely to survive even extreme suffering and despair. The pull of a future goal is the mental factor that allows for having increased levels of harmony in our lives. We may think, for instance, of a swimmer who trains 6 hours a day, has a schedule supplemented with adequate rest periods and a specific diet to ensure optimal performance. If we ask him, why he does all that, he would reply that he's training for the Olympic Games. *The Olympics is in the future* – and it is this future goal which ensures that he lives at much higher levels of organisation (harmony) than the average person.

The Past, the Present, and the Future – And How it is all Connected

Integrating a powerful future vision into one's life is an important part of reincarnational work if it was meant to have the best psychological impact. Past life work remains unfinished until we begin to connect the dots of the past with the issues of the present and the possibilities of the future. When working with clients over a dozen or so sessions, we usually dedicate a third of the time to exploring past life episodes, another third to working with issues arising in the present, and a last third mapping out future alternatives.

For that work, we have the techniques of *future life progressions* available – not for divination but for making unconscious trajectories conscious. The client may, for example, ask: *Where will I be in 10 years time if I continue the life I'm living?* – Then we can use guided imagery of a time machine to visit a future day in the framework of a structured interview. If the life so seen is not satisfactory, we come back into the present and ask again: *What sort of changes do I need to make to arrive in a different, better future?* (The question, of course, can be specified to the individual situation.)

Sometimes, a single session of this kind can change a person's fundamental behaviour or free him from addiction. A gambling addict client of mine saw himself, during his future life progression, on the streets, lonely and homeless. As a result of his gambling habit, in the future, he would have lost his wife and their child. Horrified, he asked how he can change the timeline and the answer submerging from his unconscious was to channel his entrepreneurial spirit and courage away from the casinos into starting his own enterprise. Two years later he reported having established his own business and living happily with his wife and their toddler.

The real power of reincarnational work becomes apparent, when we aim to connect the dots in a way that the trajectory towards one's *highest possible future* can be found. James Hillman (1996), in a radical break from Freudian psychoanalytic tradition, discovered that it was not so much the upbringing of a child and the role of the parents that was decisive in how someone's life would unfold. More important than nature or nurture, is the soul's purpose each human is born with. Hillman calls it the *acorn*: the inner seed of one's authentic form, destiny, and purpose of existence. Some call it the *existential program*: the inherent mission a person is born to fulfil. (It is very common in near-death experiences that the dying is sent back into life with the explanation that their mission was not fulfilled yet. Interestingly, it is *never* revealed what that mission was – finding it out seems to be part of

the game.)

Future life progressions can be targeted towards finding one's existential program and align with it. For that, we must formulate the initial question accordingly, for instance: *What is my life going to be like in X years time, when I'm on my highest path, living my existential program to the fullest?* Once that future life is envisioned, we can come back from that imaginary future and ask the transformational question: *What do I need to do in the present to get onto (or stay on) that path?*

A glimpse into the future allows to make sense of past experiences: set-backs, challenges, even downright suffering can be reframed as a learning process that leads to increased levels of autonomy, authenticity, and happiness.

With Fabienne – who has been in search for the miraculous throughout many lives but lost the connection with magic when he and his lady friend were being burnt at the stake – we were venturing into a possible future in which this connection with the magical (invisible) world is re-established.

In this future (10 years from now) she could see herself writing on the veranda of a house in the woods: She's working on a novel. The way she's now working has opened her the path to the invisible realm. She has learned how to get in contact with entities and found someone who was helping her, who's not human, but 'more of spirit.'

In this way, writing has become for her a way back into the miraculous, like music used to be once upon a time. To get into this higher, evolutionary state, certain lessons had to be learned, most notably: doing things with ease, not forcing herself to anything, not getting into a competition with other people, not trying to save them, rather develop a sense of humour, and see life events like a movie, during which 'nothing is so important.' At the end, the invisible (non-physical) world is proving to be more important than any manifestation in this or other lives.

With William, on his last session, we explored a future incarnation, which would be at the next level of his conscious evolution. He says a new place in a new time:

'This place is like a planet, but not quite physical – almost like a spectrum of light. Human eyes could not see it as inhabited, more like as a ball of gas. But there are many here, like me, who have had many incarnations, now learning about spiritual energy flow. Our task here is to conduit and further expand the energy into the physical world, like light expanding into darkness, the sperm seeking an egg...

I can see now, what an expansive time there is in front of me, no end in sight for growth! I have far to go, but the journey is sweet and much better lives await us than we could ever have here on Earth.

A Sense of Expansion and Psychological Empowerment

The sense of growth William was describing, is typically arising from completing a series of explorations into one's karmic past, present, and future. As the individual collects

more data from past lives and future possibilities the sense of Self widens, typically through the following stages:

- At the beginning, individuals see themselves as nothing more than individual bodies with mental functions, as *skin-encapsulated egos* (Alan Watts) whose life is restricted to a time period between cradle and grave.

- As more reincarnational data is gathered, it appears that this life is an evolutionary link within a larger chain of meaningful events. Life is no longer restricted to a single and chance occurrence, but is seen embedded in a larger fabric of events.

- With time, the person gets used to seeing events from a *Higher Self* perspective, which allows for an inner alchemy to occur. Even intense suffering, such as a traumatic past can be reframed as being deeply meaningful for the overall evolution of consciousness. This perspective, like the life review, enables the individual to see at any event not just from a personal perspective, but also from an *evolving* personal perspective, as well as the perspectives of everyone involved.

- At last, every life is seen as consciousness evolving. The distinction between *my* past life or *your* past life or someone else's past life, present life, or future becomes obsolete. Those who have reached and experienced this stage, see consciousness as a singularity (c.f. *Brahman* in Hinduism, which is the creative principle and absolute cause itself). This single consciousness, creates, collects, and integrates all experiences of every individual incarnation like a cosmic computer analysing the data of its simulations – presumably to bring forth the best possible mode of existence.

This enlarged world-view allows to see conflicts and problems from a much larger perspective. It creates a certain safe distance from the troubles of life, at the same time a gives a greater motivation to overcome them. In that sense, the reincarnational world-view, rooted in the consciousness-based paradigm, is highly empowering.

From an academic point of view it allows us to research hitherto inaccessible 'anomalies' – the vast realm of death and why we are alive; it allows therapists, healers, and helpers to further develop systems that eliminate human suffering.

As a conclusion, the consciousness-based paradigm is a *useful* – the only useful – paradigm when it comes to the study of the human condition. While the materialist paradigm has been extraordinarily useful and successful to bring upon us our technological civilisation, it has gotten nowhere when it comes to understanding consciousness. It is time to make a complete paradigm change, even beyond dualism, to be able to take a truly transformative journey into life, death, and meaning.

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