

Author's response:HEINER SCHWENKE¹**“There is no Greater Impediment to the Advancement of Knowledge ...”
On Conceptual Problems and Other Issues in Reincarnation Research²*****Introduction***

In my article “Past-Life Experiences: Re-Living One’s Own Past lives or Participation in the Lives of Others,” which is a slightly extended translation of a lecture, I sought to present some key ideas from my book *Die Leben der Anderen* [The Lives of Others] (Schwenke, 2020). I am grateful to the commentators for engaging with my condensed text.³ While I cannot address all of their objections here, I will seek to consider them in the revised English version of my book. It seems to me that theory building in reincarnation research suffers from a lack of awareness of conceptual issues. Therefore, I will focus on this aspect in my response to the comments.

Some Conceptual Problems

Michael Nahm (2021: 404) criticizes my “focus on semantic and linguistic problems”, since “in science, phenomena come first, not the names and concepts that somebody has attached to them.” It is clear, however, and Nahm would probably agree, that everything that enters into scientific discourse and contributes to scientific knowledge must be expressed in language. Therefore, it is of elementary importance for the functioning of the sciences that the terms employed by science be as unambiguous as possible.

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3 Some of the misunderstandings may be a result of translation problems, which in turn are not only due to a lack of linguistic competence but to differences between the English and German languages. For example, in German, it is possible to distinguish between *Erleben* and *Erfahrung*, but both are usually translated as ‘experience.’ *Erleben* expresses more of the subjective side of an experience, while *Erfahrung* more of the objective side. Another relevant example is *Wissenschaft*, which has a larger scope than science and includes the humanities (*Geisteswissenschaften*).

At the very beginning of his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Thomas Reid states: “There is no greater impediment to the advancement of knowledge than the ambiguity of words. To this chiefly it is owing that we find sects and parties in most branches of science; and disputes, which are carried on from age to age, without being brought to an issue” (Reid, 1785: 9). Today, the terminological situation of the sciences is considerably better than in Reid’s time. This may be, besides binding definitions and use of formula language, also due to the fact that often artificial expressions such as ‘positron’, ‘mRNA’, or ‘pulsar’ are used. But a philosophy that deals with the whole variety of human experience and reflects the life-world foundations of science can hardly do without expressions of ordinary language. Their polysemy is often more pronounced in philosophical research. In Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Roelcke (1991: 199, 204) found twelve transcendental philosophical and eleven other meanings of ‘reason’ (*Vernunft*). The extreme polysemy of basic philosophical terms certainly contributed to Ludwig Wittgenstein’s description of philosophy as “a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (Wittgenstein, 1968: 47e [§ 109]).

Reincarnation research shares with philosophy numerous ambiguous expressions, such as person, identity, soul, spirit, mind, memory / remembering, consciousness, (extrasensory) perception, and knowledge. Also ‘reincarnation’ has different meanings. For this reason alone, there is no doubt that reincarnation research cannot avoid semantic analysis. This is also obvious from the commentaries.

Person

The polysemy of the term ‘person’ plays an important role in the commentaries. In James Matlock’s case, the problem is not that he switches between different normal-language meanings of ‘person’, but rather that his philosophical-systematic concept of person lies entirely outside the ordinary spectrum of ‘person’. I presented his position in my contribution under the heading “non-personal reincarnation concepts” in a concise two sentences: “James Matlock, following Alfred North Whitehead’s process philosophy, postulates that there are no persons, but only streams of experiential events. Such a stream may survive the death of the body and reincarnate in another human body” (Schwenke, 2021: 372). From Whitehead’s metaphysics, it follows – in my eyes compellingly – that persons in any normal sense do not exist. For Whitehead, as Matlock himself writes, “the fundamental building blocks of reality are momentary events called actual occasions” (Matlock, 2019: 299, cf. 254). A ‘person’ for Whitehead is “a sequence of events” (Hartshorne, 1980: 41, transl. H. S.). An “experiential subject” is eliminated (Whitehead, 1929/1978: xxviii). ‘Events’ and streams or sequences of events, however, are something quite different from ‘persons’ in normal language. For example, ‘persons’ can be ‘rewarded’ or ‘punished’, but ‘events’ cannot. Events, on the other hand, can ‘happen’, but persons cannot.

Whitehead uses the expression 'person,' but at the same time he denies that there is such a thing as a person in the ordinary sense. An implication of Whitehead's metaphysics is also that it is ultimately meaningless to speak of reincarnation at all because events (and streams of events) cannot reincarnate from a conceptual point of view. The reason is, as I wrote, that the time of an event is an essential feature of that event. A later event would always be a different event (see Schwenke, 2021: 373). Matlock emphasizes that he does not strictly adopt Whitehead's philosophy, but he understands his own approach as an "amendment" and "extension" of Whitehead (Matlock, 2019: 255; 2021: 399). With all due respect, Matlock could not rightly claim to elaborate on an amendment or extension of Whitehead's process metaphysics if his own approach rejected the very basis of Whitehead's process metaphysics. Indeed, there are no indications in Matlock's *Signs of Reincarnation* that he indeed would reject the Whiteheadian basis. To give some other examples: An ontology that rejects Plato's doctrine of ideas could not be an "extension" of Plato, and an epistemology that rejects *a priori* categories of the mind would not count as an "amendment" of Kant. On the basis of these considerations, I think it is fair to say that Matlock, because of his Whiteheadian metaphysics, implicitly denies that there is such a thing as a person in any ordinary sense, although he still uses the word 'person.'

Even in places where Matlock does not explicitly refer to Whitehead, he seems to reject the ordinary concept of a person. Thus, he said that "mind, psyche, spirit and soul" are "roughly equivalent to consciousness" (Matlock, 2019: 124). I do not understand this equivalence to mean that Matlock understands consciousness as something substantial like "mind, psyche, spirit and soul." Rather, "equivalent" seems to denote that the mind, psyche, spirit, and soul are something processual, like consciousness. Matlock's non-personal conception of reincarnation becomes very clear when he mentions, as a "core definition" of reincarnation, "the transfer of some aspect of a human being's life force to the body of another human being" (Matlock, 2019: 36). Elsewhere, Matlock uses 'life force' and 'consciousness stream' as synonyms: "the transfer of the life force or consciousness stream of a human being to the body of another human being" (Matlock, 2019: 301). But 'force' and 'stream' have quite different meanings. A force is a kind of power, whereas stream is a process. One can have a lot of force, but not a lot of stream. A logical-semantic confusion regarding the word 'person' also seems to me to be present in the following passage: "Now to the question 'What does it mean to say that a person has survived or reincarnated?' People who identify a child as the reincarnation of a deceased person do not mean that he is the same person as before. They recognize that he is a different person, with something of the personality, behavior, or physical features of the previous person" (Matlock, 2019: 251, cf. 2021: 400). I doubt whether ordinary thinking is indeed attached to such an obvious contradiction. If person A "has survived or reincarnated", it follows that the surviving and reincarnated person "is the same person as before," namely person A. I think the confusion arises from the fact that the subject of survival / reincarnation changes from

“person” in the first sentence to “the child” and “he” in the following sentences (see also Schwenke, 2020: 27 fn. 9).

Determining the normal range of meaning of an expression is an empirical question, and one should not rely solely on one’s own sense of language to answer it. I consider evidence from recognized dictionaries to be a useful starting point for such investigation. I therefore welcome that Karen Wehrstein consulted dictionaries for her paper. But she does not give her sources when she claims that “[d]ictionary definitions of ‘person’ clearly describe an incarnate human only” (Wehrstein, 2021: 415). In any case, her statement is not true of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (see OED, November 2021). If ‘person’ in English really denoted incarnate humans only, then non-human animals could not be persons for linguistic reasons alone, which would rightly set animal rights activists on edge. If ‘person’ in English really denoted incarnate humans only, then the theological century-old idea of God as a person would simply be nonsensical, and theologians could not have failed to notice that. If ‘person’ only refers to incarnate humans, then the idea of a personal afterlife without a physical body would be contrary to language, hence also that of a personal reincarnation (apart from reincarnation in zero time).

Identity

The word ‘identity’ has many different meanings. The basic meaning is ‘sameness’ (see Lorenz, 2008; Noonan & Curtis, 2018). For the idea of personal reincarnation, the question of personal identity in the sense of sameness is crucial: Is a person named x who once lived *the same person* as the person named y who lives now? I argued that a person cannot take on a different personal identity because that would mean that they would become a different person (see Schwenke, 2021: 369–370, fn. 4). Wehrstein criticized my view. She objected that there are children who apparently “have two identities” (Wehrstein, 2021: 415). Obviously, however, she is concerned with a different form of identity, probably more in the sense of ‘role’. Sameness is not something a person can ‘have’.

Memory

‘Memory’ is a notoriously ambiguous term. The eminent researcher on memory, Endel Tulving, called on his fellow researchers to pay more attention to conceptual analysis (Tulving, 2000). I distinguished ‘memories’ from one another in the strong and the weak sense (Schwenke, 2021: 376–377). If memories are considered a form of knowledge, they are always ‘reliable’ or ‘true’. They cannot be false because knowledge cannot be false. Here we have a strong notion of memory, which does not need any further qualification. However, research often speaks of

'false memory.' Here a weaker notion of memory is present, in which memory is like a belief that can be true or false. A memory in the weaker sense can be purely fictitious and still be called a memory. Due to the ambiguity of the word 'memory,' we can speak of memories (in the weaker sense of beliefs) that are not memories in the stronger sense (knowledge).

In my opinion, this reasoning applies analogously to memories in the sense of re-experiencing. Re-experiencing can neither be true nor false (because experiences cannot be true or false), but they can more or less resemble a previous experience. Among the essential features of an experience, I also count the experiential perspective, which is the perspective from which the experience was lived. If the presumed re-experiencing is experienced from an outside perspective or from different, shifting perspectives, then it is doubtful whether it is a "re-experiencing" of a previous experience at all. An actual case of re-experiencing an experience that a person had in a previous earthly life would mean that one is identical with that person. This would then imply reincarnation. However, people experience their lives almost exclusively from the first-person perspective. Cases of past-life experiences (PLEs) in which the experiential perspective deviates from the first-person perspective can hardly count as remembering (in the sense of re-experiencing) a previous life. Rather (if they are truthful regarding the objective content of the experience) they may count as another kind of access to events from the past. Masayuki Ohkado objects that "people are quite flexible in visual perspective when they recall or re-experience events in which they were involved" (Ohkado, 2021: 410). He does not elaborate on this argument. It seems to me that his failure to distinguish between a strong and weak sense of 'memory' might be significant to his objection. In the literature cited by both Ohkado and me, 'memory' is obviously used in a weak sense (that allows for false, unreliable memories). This might have contributed to Ohkado's acceptance of certain experiences that most certainly are not true to the reality of any previous experience as instances of re-experiencing a previous life.

In distinguishing between remembering as re-experiencing and remembering as knowledge, I referred to Gardiner & Richardson-Klavehn (2000). Wehrstein claims that I "had felt the need to invent new terms for episodic memory and for semantic memory or autobiographical impression" (Wehrstein, 2021: 412). As far as I understand the terminology of memory research, remembering as re-experiencing is thought to correspond with episodic memory, but is not identified with it. 'Episodic memory' seems to denote a faculty, 'remembering' refers to a conscious state involving mental time travel. Tulving, who is credited with coining the term "episodic memory," says that episodic memory is a „hypothetical memory system" that "makes possible mental time travel through subjective time, from the present to the past, thus allowing one to re-experience [...] one's own previous experiences" (Tulving, 2002: 5). Re-experiencing is also simply called 'remembering': "Remembering refers to intensely personal experiences of the past – those in which we seem to recreate previous events and experiences with the

awareness of reliving these events and experiences mentally. Remembering entails mental time travel that intimately engages one's sense of self" (Gardiner & Richardson-Klavehn, 2000: 229). Philosophy has long recognized memory as re-experiencing (see Schwenke, 2020: 55–56 fn. 30).⁴ If PLEs were memories, they would be cases of remembering as re-experiencing and not remembering as knowledge, because they are like mental time travel. But reincarnation research has been primarily interested in children's paranormal knowledge of a past life. However, a paranormal knowledge of a person's past does not at all mean that one was that person.

Possession and Reincarnation

In reincarnation research, reincarnation has been declared a form of possession (see, e.g., Matlock, 2019: 174). I criticized this approach from a semantic point of view: "There are always two beings involved in possession, a host person and a possessing entity. Conceptually, possession can be ended by expelling the possessing entity; the host person is then cured and can live on (on earth). Reincarnation, on the other hand, involves only one person who connects to a new physical body. If they were expelled, the organism would die" (Schwenke, 2021: 382). Nahm apparently considers my criticism "unacceptable from a scientific perspective" (Nahm, 2021: 404). He seems to think that I have used the "traditional Western and Christian concept of possession" for "evaluating phenomena" (ibid.). He apparently does not recognize that 'reincarnation' and 'possession' are fundamentally different concepts in English. In an analysis of meaning, analytic philosophy i. a. uses the method of substitution tests (see Hoche & Strube, 1985: 148–165). A substitution test makes conceptual differences clearer than any dictionary entries could, and I already employed it above. If 'reincarnation' were a hyponym to 'possession' in ordinary language, then one would expect that the substitution of 'possession' ('to possess s.b.', 'to be possessed') and 'reincarnation' ('to reincarnate', 'to be reincarnated') and *vice versa*, would not lead to any fundamental change in the meaning of a sentence, and surely not to a meaningless sentence. But this seems to be exactly the case. It makes sense, of course, to say "A man was possessed by the devil" – but "A man

4 Wehrstein's criticism here is oddly inaccurate. I said that reincarnation research has neglected the distinction between remembering as re-experiencing and remembering as knowledge. Against my claim she cites the distinction between two types of *remembering as knowing* in reincarnation research (autobiographical knowledge and autobiographical impressions) and complains: "to say reincarnation research has neglected distinctions between types of memories is an injustice" (Wehrstein, 2021: 413). She also incorrectly attributes to me the claim that "episodic memories [...] are rare in child cases" (ibid.). I only said that there are hardly *any accounts (descriptions) of child PLEs* (see Schwenke, 2021: 370–371, fn. 5, 379), which is undoubtedly true.

was reincarnated by the devil” seems to mean something quite different, if anything at all. It does not get any better the other way around. One can of course say “I will reincarnate” in accordance with normal language, but the phrase “I will possess” is incomplete because ‘to possess’ requires an object (to possess somebody or something). These examples show the fundamental linguistic difference between the expressions: ‘possession’ and ‘reincarnation’. For the sake of the argument, one might try the insertion of an object. Since ‘reincarnation’ can be used without reference to another person or entity, one could try the same with ‘possession,’ for example “I will possess me” or “I will be possessed by me.” But this is nonsensical because one can only be possessed by another being, not by oneself. Linguistically, a possessing entity can be ‘driven out’ (“He drove out a demon from a man”). But if I were identical with this possessing entity, I would be driven from myself (“He drove me out from myself”), which is nonsense. Subsuming reincarnation under possession strikes me as, to use Nahm’s words, “inacceptable from a scientific perspective,” namely, as an attempt to defuse a factual challenge to a hypothesis via a semantic manoeuvre. One could speak of a *Begrifferschleichung*, i. e., of the subreption of a concept by shifting its meaning. If, as Nahm contemplates, one was to use the term ‘parakayapravesh’ instead of ‘possession,’ the problem of subsuming reincarnation under possession would not disappear, as long as ‘possession’ is used to define ‘parakayapravesh’.

Consciousness

In connection with the term ‘consciousness,’ the phenomenon of *Begrifferschleichung* by equating unequal terms surfaces very clearly. I claimed that consciousness cannot be investigated by scientific methods. Nahm (2021: 405) doubts this claim. The direct way to refute my claim would have been to state some scientific method, equally applicable by anyone in principle, by which consciousness can be directly or indirectly recorded. Nahm could also have attacked my arguments for the scientific inaccessibility of consciousness (see Schwenke, 2021: 373–374, in more detail Schwenke, 2014: 171–184). However, he neither names any scientific method nor refutes my arguments. Instead, Nahm appeals to the alleged consequences of my view: “Otherwise, numerous scientific research branches [...] were pointless and doomed to fail from the start” (Nahm, 2021: 405). It is true that numerous branches of science deal with consciousness, but I do not consider such studies “pointless” at all. However, this research is mislabeled when suggesting that consciousness *itself* is being studied with scientific methods. Rather, bodily correlates or signs of consciousness are studied with such methods. In consciousness research, it is especially common for consciousness to be readily equated with brain activity. Sometimes, consciousness is first equated with information and

this information is then equated with physical structures.⁵ Such conceptual manoeuvres do not always come from a lack of conceptual diligence, but sometimes are a part of a naturalistic or materialistic agenda that declares everything to be objects of the natural sciences.⁶

Some Other Issues

Suppositional Reasoning

I wrote (Schwenke, 2021: 378) that because of the scientific inaccessibility of consciousness and thus of persons, science is left with “suppositional reasoning”, in the sense of Fisher, (1989) with regard to the question of personal reincarnation. (The reader may note that in the following I use ‘science’ in the broader sense of *Wissenschaft*, which of course includes subjects like philology, logic, or mathematics.) Nahm objected that scientists are “typically concerned with ‘suppositional reasoning’ only. Anything else is the exception rather than the rule” (Nahm, 2021: 406). This may be a misunderstanding. According to Fisher, the question of truth is not raised in suppositional reasoning. In the empirical sciences, it is quite decisive regarding whether the statements about the obtained data are true. In other words, it is crucial that the data reported are not invented. The most beautiful model is rubbish if the data underlying this model is fiction. With respect to reports about PLEs, however, one cannot test by scientific means whether they are fictitious or true. However, one can evaluate such reports scientifically, e. g., analyze the phenomenology of the reported experiences and examine whether they fit the interpretation that they are memories of former lives. The reference to reality remains excluded. In this respect, I speak here of ‘suppositional reasoning.’ The detachment from the reference to reality becomes especially clear in philological, text-immanent research. For example, one can scientifically investigate the question of whether the Jesus of the synoptic gospels predicted an apocalyptic end of the world. The question of whether a real Jesus claimed such a thing remains entirely excluded. Exclusion of the reference to reality becomes even clearer when we look at analyses of purely fictional texts. For example, one can investigate the question of whether Glorfindel, from

5 If one applied to this the schemes of the three realms of Frege, or the three worlds of Popper (see Frege, 1918/1956; Popper, 1981), one could say that first the second realm / world 2 is shifted into the third realm / world 3 and these then into the first realm / world 1.

6 I also said that knowledge in the normal sense involves consciousness, and therefore one cannot determine a person’s knowledge through scientific methods (Schwenke, 2021: 386). Wehrstein’s counterargument seems to beg a question (Wehrstein, 2021: 413). She simply assumes that a neurosurgeon’s “knowledge of neurosurgical technique” can be “tested scientifically” (ibid.) but gives no hint how this should be possible.

the first age of Tolkien's universe, is identical with the Glorfindel of the third age. Here too one can make scientific hypotheses that suit the textual material better or worse, and here too there is the possibility that a hypothesis will be (more or less) falsified by textual findings.

Personal and Scientific Knowledge

It is interesting that Dieter Hassler believed that if I "had my own experiences of successful regressions" (Hassler, 2021: 420, transl. H. S.) I would have reached a different assessment. This gives me the opportunity to very briefly say something about the relationship between personal knowledge and scientific knowledge. I am convinced that scientific knowledge can never completely replace personal knowledge but presupposes and builds on the latter (see Schwenke, 2005; 2014: 180–184). Even if reincarnation escapes the grasp of the sciences, I still think there might be personal knowledge in relation to the reincarnation issue. It seems possible that subjects can be rationally justified in believing that the existence of reincarnation is probable on the basis of their personal experience.

ESP and Direct Participation in Experiences of Others

Ambiguities can of course also arise from differences in the everyday and the technical use of one and the same word. According to etymology and normal linguistic usage, 'telepathy' seems to have certain proximity to the concept of direct participation in the experiences of others (see Schwenke, 2020: 155). In parapsychology, however, telepathy, as a form of extrasensory perception, is defined as "paranormal acquisition of information about the thoughts, feelings, or activity of another conscious being" (Glossary, 1991: 439; see Schwenke, 2021: 385). 'Acquisition of information about the thoughts, feelings, or activity of another [...] being,' however, is entirely different from 'direct participation in experiences of others' as a kind of experiencing. One reason for this is that information can be true or false but experiencing cannot. On the other hand, experiencing can be weak or strong or have a temporal extension but information cannot. That is why it also seems impossible to hold 'psychic transference of information' as synonymous with 'direct participation in experiences of others,' as Wehrstein (2021: 414) obviously does. Moreover, it is unclear whether 'direct participation in the experiences of others' can be generated by 'information acquisition' (see Schwenke 2021: 386), and if so, whether it would then – semantically speaking – still be 'direct participation in the experiences of others'? Nevertheless, without giving any reasons, Nahm calls "extrasensory perception [] an indispensable prerequisite for all his [i. e., Schwenke's] models of direct participation in the past lives of others" (Nahm, 2021: 406).

Are there Detailed Descriptions of PLEs of Small Children?

Matlock found it “especially odd that Schwenke should write that ‘if one looks for accounts of child PLEs, one will find virtually nothing’” (Matlock, 2021: 402). Matlock could have easily refuted my claim by citing some accounts of child PLEs, but he did not. I would like to elaborate a bit on this point. When I looked more deeply into near-death experiences (NDEs), I learned from NDE reports that subjects quite often adopt the experiential perspective of others during life reviews in the context of NDEs. Since I was familiar with PLEs, I wondered whether this phenomenon might also play a role here (see Schwenke, 2017). Therefore, I looked for accounts of PLEs from which the experiential perspective emerged. Naturally, I wanted to investigate my question using the best-attested cases. My research project included a stay in Charlottesville to review the DOPS files for PLE accounts. However, I could already see from my review of the material published by Stevenson and others that, at most, only fragments of young children’s descriptions of their PLEs were reproduced. I discovered virtually no clues about the experiential perspective. I approached Jim Tucker to ask if what I was looking for could be found in the files of the DOPS, but he gave me no hope and my research trip fell short. If someone would provide me with such experiential accounts, it would be appreciated for the English version of my *Die Leben der Anderen*. In the literature mentioned by Wehrstein (Wehrstein, 2021: 413) I could only detect fragmentary descriptions of child PLEs. In only one child statement was there a rudimentary reference to the subjective aspect of experience (Mills, 1989: 158: “I *could not see* their faces”; emphasis added).

Are there Clues for an External Perspective and a Switch of Perspective in Children’s PLE Accounts?

Given the sparseness of children’s accounts of the subjective side of their PLEs, it is little surprise that I could find virtually no clue of the experiential perspective of children’s PLEs. My only somewhat clearer findings on this matter come from Bowman’s *Children’s Past Lives*. Ohkado (2021: 408–409) states that he could not find the relevant passages, so I will provide them below. On p. 15 of the 1997 Element edition of *Children’s Past Lives*, which I used,⁷ 6-year-old Chase Bowman gives a quite weak reference to the external perspective in the PLE he had at age five. He is quoted with using the distancing word ‘see’: “Mom, remember when I saw that I was a soldier [...]?” On p. 19, Chase’s account is quoted at length as he once again experiences his presumed former life as a soldier at age 6. From his description, the outside perspective, without a doubt, emerges: “I see a black man on a porch – that’s me.” On pp. 11–12, the PLE of nine-year-old Sarah Bowman is described. She appears to have experienced a switch of perspective during

7 Readers should be aware that the 1998 Bantam paperback edition of *Children’s Past Lives* has a different pagination.

her PLE. Initially, Bowman reports, “Sarah told her story as an observer, objectively reporting what she saw. [...] Then [...] Sarah’s perspective shifted. Now she spoke as the young girl, in the present tense” (Bowman, 1997: 11). It is not entirely clear whether the visual perspective also changes, but the description makes this more likely than not. I would like to add that deviations from the first-person perspective are not limited to regression and unsolved cases (see, for example, the PLE of Pratomwan Inthanu in Stevenson, 1983: 141–142). The interpretation of PLE as participation in experiences of others does not depend on deviations from the first-person perspective since there are numerous cases in which the first-person perspective of another person was apparently taken in these experiences.

Is Soul Exchange Described in Child PLE Accounts?

Matlock and Stevenson did consider reincarnation by soul exchange. I said I did not regard this to be impossible in logical terms, but that I had found nothing of the sort in the accounts of experiences between reincarnations (see Schwenke, 2021: 383). Matlock writes that this showed my “less sure grasp of the reincarnation literature” and claims “there are in fact such accounts” (Matlock, 2021: 401). However, there is no such description in the literature he references. He admits that “none of the cases suggest that the original possessor was forced out of his body” (Matlock, 2019: 176). But a description of a consensual soul replacement is also lacking in the literature cited by Matlock. To avoid misunderstandings: I am referring to descriptions of the process of soul exchange in PLE accounts, not to circumstantial evidence in support of the hypothesis that such soul exchange must have occurred. With possession, for example, there is a description of a possessed person, how he was forced out of his body by a foreign entity and then, from an external perspective, heard it speak from his body (see Alexander, 2010: 33–35). From the field of near-death experiences, I referred to an account in which the experiencer was about to enter a newborn child during his out-of-body excursion in order to reincarnate in the child’s body (see Schwenke, 2021: 387–388). If soul replacement actually exists, one might therefore expect that there are descriptions of this process. Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn quite accurately describes his postmortem approach to the baby in whom he would reincarnate, but he did not describe how he entered the baby and replaced the child’s person or soul (see Stevenson, 1983: 177). Rather, he held the somewhat surprising view that the apparently healthy child had no soul (‘mind’) (see Stevenson, 1983: 188; cf. Matlock, 2019: 175).

Super-Psi

Ohkado (2021: 411) asks why I did not address super-psi as an explanation of PLE. The reason for my reluctance is that I do not know of any definition of super-psi that would allow for

logically falsifying (see for this concept Popper, 1989) a super-psi explanation. If Ohkado can provide me with a definition of super-psi that meets this criterion, I will gladly consider it for the English version of *Die Leben der Anderen*.

Physical Continuity vs. Reincarnation

Among the various misunderstandings, one assertion of Matlock's was particularly surprising to me. He claims: "[H]e [i. e., Schwenke] accepts physical continuity as a requirement for reincarnation, which he therefore deems logically impossible" (Matlock, 2021: 400). Matlock not only cites no evidence for this claim, his assertion also contradicts my definition of reincarnation as "a new earthly life in *another* physical body" (Schwenke, 2021: 376), and the whole argument of my article.

Conclusion

Many of my arguments certainly need improvement. The reincarnation thesis is by no means "refuted" by my considerations (Hassler, 2021: 419, transl. H. S.), it is "still a likely possibility" (Ohkado, 2021: 408). After all, my investigation was not, as I emphasized several times, about the occurrence of reincarnation in general, but about the best interpretation of PLEs (see, e. g., Schwenke, 2021: 369–370, 378, 385). Despite all the objections, I do not believe that the commentators have appreciated the full potential of the hypothesis that PLEs are about participation in the experience of others.

In conclusion, I would like to return to the relevance of method in reincarnation research. Henri Bergson, in his inaugural address as a President of the Society for Psychical Research in 1913, said, "It was William James, I think, who defined the difference between the professional and the amateur by saying that the latter interests himself especially in the result obtained, the former in the way in which he obtains it" (Bergson, 1920: 62–63). One may question this definition but there can be little doubt that reincarnation research would benefit from increased methodological awareness, especially on conceptual issues.

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