

CRITIQUE OF A STUDY PURPORTING TO EVIDENCE REINCARNATION

"[T]he sins of the fathers are visited upon their children."
Exodus 34: 7

In a paper written by Jim B. Tucker, MD, *The Case of James Leininger: An American Case of the Reincarnation Type*, evidence is presented to support the claim of the reincarnation in one man of the soul of another now dead. Dr. Tucker's case study is available for perusal through an internet search under the title EXPLORE May/June 2016, Vol. 12, No. 3, and is obtainable at the reference shown in the footnote.¹ The following is a synopsis of the facts reported: the reader should peruse the case study itself for more precise details.

At or about the age of two years, an American child, James Leininger born in August, 1998, began having nightmares of a plane crash. At first confusedly, then with some detail, the child told his parents that he had been involved in an aeroplane crash. He illustrated the event with actions illustrating the impact, typical of a child of that age, but at an almost obsessive level. Later he gave the name of a ship, *Natoma*, the name of a friend on the ship, and the location and circumstances of the crash in which he said he had been killed. The pilot was identified subsequently as an American, James M. Huston Jr., who was shot down in the course of the Battle of *Iwo Jima* on March 3rd, 1945. He had flown from the aircraft carrier *Natoma Bay*.

Preliminary

The case study proceeds in the fashion of the experimental scientist who arrives at conclusions through the study of phenomena, that is, it proceeds *inductively*, from effects to cause. This mode of investigation suffers from the uncertainty inherent in any science (the term 'science' is used generically) which relies on effects whose number may be insufficient to assure the certainty of conclusions as to the cause. It lacks the advantages available, for instance, to the mathematician whose study is of fixed forms, best illustrated in that branch of his discipline called geometry, where the investigator's conclusions arrive at certain immutable conclusions. The mathematician proceeds *deductively*, from cause to effects contained within the cause.

Mathematics is not alone in enjoying the advantages of this *modus operandi*. It shares it with that science (again the term is used generically) which studies neither the physical attributes of things nor their conformity with mathematical laws, but their exercise of the most basic realities of essence and existence. That is, it studies their being. This is philosophy where the term 'philosophy' is used in its strict sense not in one rooted in modern errors.

The case study has a number of shortcomings. The first is its frequent reliance on reported rather than direct speech. Instead of quoting the words actually used by the boy, James, or

¹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1550830716000331?via%3Dihub>

his parents, the author gives a commentator's version. Lawyers refer to this as 'hearsay'. It is objectionable because it allows coloration of the words of the speaker by the one reporting. It may be done innocently but it leaves the door open to error. The second shortcoming is the author's relation, so unlikely as to challenge belief, that a child of less than two years of age was capable of expressing himself with the precision attributed to him. The third is the absence of any adequate report of the state of the family into which the boy James was born and raised, the setting in which he lived, and the fidelity, or otherwise, of his parents to their religion and to moral principle, and whether there were in the family behavioural problems.

Fourthly, while the case study looks to exclude the possibility of explanations for the phenomena reported other than that the child James Leininger was identical with the person, James M. Huston Jr., who had died in the battle of *Iwo Jima*, it ignores an explanation which is consistent with sound philosophy and human experience.

Reincarnation

Reincarnation is a belief held by Hindus and Buddhists. It was maintained among the Greek philosophers by *Plato* and his followers and, among early Catholic theologians, by the somewhat heterodox *Origen* of Alexandria (c.185 - 253). It was part of the beliefs of certain Christian and non-Christian sects such as the *Manicheans* who flourished in Europe and North Africa in the time of St Augustine (4th Century) and in southern France around the town of Albi (its adherents called, eponymously, *Albigensians*) in the time of St Dominic (12th Century), and by members of an associated sect, the *Cathari*. Manicheism is a 'religion' grounded in the assertion that reality is founded on two principles, one good the other evil, an impossible premise because it implies that evil is a something positive, when it is by definition something negative, a *lack of something*, the lack of a due good.

The thesis of reincarnation is rejected by the Catholic Church on the authority of St Paul in *Hebrews 9: 27* where he teaches:

"As it is appointed unto men once to die, and after that comes judgement, so Christ was offered once to exhaust the sins of many..."

Other Explanations

The author refers as a possible explanation for the phenomena attributed to extra sensory perception (ESP), whose tenets are not explicable by normal physical or biological processes. But ESP has never been more than conjectural.

There are, however, other possible explanations supported by objective evidence. The first of these is of the passing of intuitive intellectual knowledge between persons in certain recognised settings. This is recognised to occur between—

- mother and infant child,
- twins - especially monozygotic twins,
- close siblings,
- certain married couples,

- a father and one or other of his children,
- a mother and one or other of her children,
- certain close friends.

Something similar, connatural knowledge of meteorological conditions has long been recognised as existing among sailors and fisherman and those who spend much of their lives in the open air.

There is another possibility. Since intellectual knowledge is an immaterial reality and, as such, not bound by the limitations of time and place, it can happen that a man or woman may receive, contemporaneously with its occurrence, knowledge of an event from which he or she is physically removed. There is plenty of evidence of this in the public forum. Many will be aware of a family member knowing, without being able to explain how, of the death of a relation or friend at the moment it happened when that event occurred in another place or even in another country. It has occurred, moreover, that knowledge of an event has *preceded* its occurrence. There was a report of one who received foreknowledge of the murder of the Archduke Ferdinand and his wife in Sarajevo in June 1914 which precipitated the appalling slaughter of the First World War.

Knowledge can pass, then, from one person to another in a fashion other than via the usual means of sound, sight or touch, whether directly or via the mediacy of an instrument such as telephone or video camera but, it seems, only in circumstances of familiarity between those involved. Because of the lack of comity between the family of the boy James Leininger and that of the late James M. Huston, these modes of transmission seem inapplicable.

But neither of these possible means of the passage of knowledge involve more than that one knows what has befallen another. Neither involves belief that one is experiencing what befalls, has befallen, the other. Neither involves assertion that one is identical with the other.

There is a third possibility which requires an extensive preamble.

Philosophical Criticism

Until the sixteenth century the vast majority of the populace in the Christian world accepted the moderate realist philosophy of Aristotle (4th Century BC) as providing the only sound analysis of reality. From the time of Boethius (5th Century AD) Aristotle's teaching had some influence in Europe. It had fascinated certain Muslim thinkers, among them, Avicenna (Ibn Sinna, 980-1037) in Persia, and Averröes (Ibn Rushd, 1126-1198) in Cordoba, Spain. Muslim commentaries, along with Latin translations of Aristotle's thought, were made available to St Albert the Great and St Thomas Aquinas in the 13th Century who adapted it to the demands of the Christian faith. The historian Henry Sire has exposed for the modern age its value.

"All other thinkers have begun with a theory and sought to fit reality into it; Aristotle is the only philosopher to have begun with reality and devised a system by which to understand it. He may thus be called the only scientific philosopher, though to put it that way is to connive at the modern flattery of science. It would be equally true to say that the philosophical framework of all scientists, as of any practical thinker, is essentially Aristotelian..." [H] A Sire, *Phoenix from the*

Ashes: The Making, Unmaking, and Restoration of Catholic Tradition, Angelico Pres, Kettering Ohio, 2015, p. 25]

Aristotle teaches that everything that exists (everything material) is comprised of two principles, one formal, the other material, *form* and *matter*. The matter provides the ‘stuff’ of which a thing is made while the form is the influence that *determines* it to be what it is as, e.g., a house, a boat, a table, a chair, a computer or whatever. The two principles unite in the existing thing, and abide in it in such fashion that it is impossible for the form to ‘migrate’ because it *specifies* the thing—literally, makes it be *this*—while, at the same time giving it existence. A carpenter imposes a form on the materials he has, as e.g., that of a boat with a centreboard, and this fixes it no matter how much he may wish he had built it with a keel. Another builds a house with tall ceilings only to discover the shortcomings in doing so. He has to live with the result. In each case the *form* chosen *fixes* the thing made.

These examples are taken from human art. But the same principles apply to natural things and, among natural things, especially to the living because, as Aristotle remarks: “for living things to live is the same as to be”. Take from a living thing its form, its soul or principle of life, and it ceases not only to live; it ceases to exist! This is what befell the airman James Huston when he was killed in the crash of his aeroplane in March 1945. He ceased to be—at least in a body, here on earth. This qualification is necessary because in the case of the rational animal, his soul, the thing that determines both *what* he is and *that* he is, is *subjectively immaterial*, a reality not comprised of matter and, therefore, incapable of corruption.

In all natural material things there is a proportionality between—

natures *powers* *acts* *ends*

A dog possesses canine *nature*, exercises the *powers* of a dog, does canine *acts* and achieves a canine *end* (the maintenance of its life, the propagation of its species). In this it replicates the activity of every other brute animal. Though it may manifest certain immaterial effects, its soul is material such that when the dog dies both body and soul cease to exist. In contrast, the soul of a man, since it is in essence *immaterial*, exercises *powers* consistent with such a nature, i.e., powers which, since they are *immaterial*, enables it to do *immaterial* acts. It follows that it is directed to an *immaterial*, i.e., *eternal*, end.

The following illustration, of the contrast in the acts of a man and his dog, has been used before on this website. The two, travelling in a utility, observe on the road ahead a lump. Both see the same thing, perhaps the dog sees it better. As the vehicle approaches, the details of ‘the lump’ become clearer. But what the dog observes and what the man observes of the thing differs in accordance with a principle enunciated by Aristotle and his followers, called the *Principle of Receptivity*. It runs: *Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the recipient*. The principle is easily demonstrated. The volume of water a thimble can contain differs dramatically from what a dam can contain because of the difference in each receptacle.

The playing of a fine work on the piano moves the one who is musically inclined: it is lost on the tone-deaf. Colours red and blue make no impression on the sight of the colour-blind.

'The lump' on the road ahead will interest the dog if the thing falls within those a dog is programmed to notice—in general something living: e.g., a hen, a rabbit, another dog. It will not interest the dog if it is an old sugar bag, someone's jacket, or a dead animal. But whatever it is, it will interest the man because he can identify *what* it is—in philosophical terms, its *quiddity*. The dog knows singular things. He sees *that* the thing is. His master, in contrast, sees *what* the thing is because he knows universal realities, the natures of things. And he can do this because his immaterial *nature* gives him that immaterial *power*. Aristotle put the power of intellect as high as this: *man is capable of knowing all things*. A dog can only do acts that respect this thing or that. It is limited to here and now. A man can do things irrespective of time present, irrespective of place, irrespective of this thing or that. A man can plan for the future: a dog cannot.

Yet man is material, and the majority of his actions involve material, i.e., singular, things. He cannot, like God, create, except in a secondary sense when, using materials provided by nature, he produces something of his own invention. Nor, when parents generate a child, do they create it. They are but instruments of his creation. The new child, like his parents, is animated by an immaterial, immortal, soul. The parents do not have the power to give the child such a soul for he or she is not a work of the mind but of the body. Sound philosophy (supported by the Catholic Church) teaches that at the moment of conception God intervenes to give the child his *immaterial* soul.

As remarked above, this soul both *specifies* the man—makes him be *this*, unique, man—and gives him existence. So did the soul he received on conception specify the man James Huston and give him existence. When he died, on or about March 3rd, 1945, his soul returned to its Maker for judgement and his eternal destiny. Though time ceased for him, *the person James Huston continued in existence* and will continue in existence forever. It has to be conceded that the state in which he then found himself is an unnatural one for a man is not merely a soul but a compound, soul and body. This discrepancy the Catholic Church holds, in accord with Christ's teaching in *Matthew 22: 23 et seq.*, will be remedied at the end of time when the bodies of all who have died will be restored to them. The Church teaches too, specifically, that the resurrection of each man's body will be in his own body, not in that of another, nor some 'aethereal' body, but in that in which he has lived and moved in this world.

The boy born some 53 years later to Mr and Mrs Bruce Leininger and named by them 'James', received from God at the moment of *his* conception an immortal soul which *specified* him, made him that unique man James Leininger, gave him—continues to give him—existence. It was not the soul of another man, not the soul of James Huston that he received but the specific *form* (his soul) which determined him to be the man James Leininger.

Now it might be objected following the argument above about man-made things: “I could alter my boat from a centre-boarder to one with a keel, or alter the ceiling of my house. I could demolish my large work-bench and, with the materials, make a small shed. Why could not the same occur in the natural order?” The answer is that, because they proceed from human will, ever imperfect in its operations, the forms used in human art (artificial things) are alterable even if this may involve difficulties. Natural things, because they proceed from God whose works are perfect, are immutable.

But there is another and more profound consideration. To assert that the soul of a man is capable of migration so as to be the form of some other man is to treat it as only *accidentally* joined to the matter with which he and his body are constituted. (This is the way form and matter in the things man makes are joined - *accidentally*.) But the conjunction of soul and body is not accidental but *essential*. St Thomas Aquinas deals with the point in this fashion:

“[T]he soul is united to the body as its form and act... [and] it is natural to every form to be united to its proper matter, otherwise that which is made of form and matter would be something apart from nature. But that which befits a thing naturally is attributed to it before [any other influence]... because the latter is in it [only] by accident, [but] the former through itself.” *Summa Contra Gentiles* Bk. II, ch. 83, 10

A little earlier in the same work he deals with what is necessary if one thing is to be the substantial form of another thing:

“[T]wo requirements must be met. First, the form must be the principle of the substantial being of the thing whose form it is... [t]he second... that the form and the matter be joined together in the unity of one act of being.” *SCG* Bk. II, ch. 68, 3

From the moment of his conception James Huston exercised one act of being. From *his* conception, James Heininger exercised another, and distinct, act of being.

The Family Setting

There are gaps in Dr Tucker’s case study in respect of the Leininger family which ought concern the reader. Let us take one obvious instance. The parents are described as “a Protestant couple living in Louisiana, USA”. Now Protestantism is a religion whose central tenet is that all that is needed for salvation is what is set forth in the Bible, Old and New Testaments, a mindset characterised as ‘*sola scriptura*’. In accordance with this the child’s parents were bound in their belief by the expression of St Paul in chapter 9 of his *Letter to the Hebrews* set out above which rejects the theory of reincarnation. No explanation is given for their departure from principle.

Here is another. Every child comes from God—not from his parents but from God—as said above. The child in his innocence exercises a native simplicity in perception and judgement. It may said with conviction: “you can fool a professor of philosophy or of science but you cannot fool a two year old”. The reason is that, until the child’s thinking is corrupted by teachers or peers, or by atheistic radio or television commentators leading him to embrace the serial stupidities that afflict modern society, he retains his God-given innocence. (The terms ‘he’, ‘him’ and ‘his’, are used here to indicate genus, not gender.) Moreover, a child’s mind is a *tabula rasa*, a clean slate, which is why he is so impressionable and teachable, and why it is

such a delight for parents and primary school teachers to work with him. No child of two years of age could begin to utter the aspirations attributed to the child James Leininger unless some strong external influence had been brought to bear on him.

Dr Tucker's case study recites the child's exposure by his father, at or before this age, to the visual and other sensory stimuli provided by a flight museum including videos. These far exceed the basic realities in which nature directs a child two years of age to become absorbed to ensure his proper development; things such as grass, leaves, slugs, snails, birds, trees and climbing them, water and puddles and splashing around in them; running, jumping and playing. Hence, the action of the father, whom one would be safe in assuming allowed his own interests to dictate his treatment of the child, was inappropriate and, it is suggested, disposed James to the reception of other, more deleterious, influences.

Intellectual Beings Other Than Man

It is part of the ignorance of the modern world, derived from the abandonment of Aristotle's teaching and the obscuring effects of 'the Enlightenment', to regard the human intellect as unique in reality. The root cause of this blindness was the revolt against God by Martin Luther some 100 years prior, adopted and enforced in England by the tyrant Henry Tudor (Henry VIII), and on the Continent by Luther's successors, Melancthon, Calvin and others, and by secular rulers who, seeing the pecuniary advantages of rejecting the authority of God and His Church, joined it. The flourishing of this *theological* error among the populace soon manifested itself in widespread *philosophical* error.

It reduced the sound thinking of Aristotle's *metaphysics*, that the greater part of reality is immaterial, to the level of *physics* manifest in the stilted philosophy known as *materialism* which denies any reality that is not material, not detectible by the senses. Luther's revolt produced another philosophical evil which is perhaps even more harmful, *subjectivism*, whose contention it is that truth is measured not by reality but by human opinion, the adoption of which sophism has reduced modern life to its present chaos.

Aristotle and his commentators, Muslim and Catholic, insisted that there are diverse degrees of beings that possess intellect, and among these man, because he is dependent on information abstracted from bodily senses and must work from proposition to proposition to arrive at truth, is far and away the weakest.

The Church's theologians teach that these other intellectual substances, which the Church calls 'angels', have great powers over nature, and among them there are the fallen angels, the devil and his minions, identified by Christ of whose interference with mankind the Church warns. The Church teaches that the devil can influence us in one of three ways, by—

- temptation,
- infestation,
- possession.

Of these, the first is universal: everyone suffers it. The third is rare but not perhaps as rare as is thought. The second, *infestation*, occurs frequently among those who lead an intense prayer life and sometimes among those who do not. Infestation can occur in respect of a *place*, which is often referred to as 'haunted', or in respect of a *person*.

Evidence of infestation *in respect of place* may be found in the histories of saints such as St Teresa of Avila, St Dominic or St John Bosco. The author has heard of similar experiences of a nurse in Papua New Guinea. The natives, with the benefit of personal experience, were only too aware of the influence of evil spirits in their midst. Something of the same can be read in the narrative of the late Peter Ryan in his classic text about his experiences as a junior Army officer in PNG, *Fear Drive My Feet* (Melbourne, 1959).

The devil's infestation can also happen *to persons*, a feature in the life of the *Curé of Ars*, St John Vianney, in southern France. No one could be persuaded to stay in his presbytery for the devil's disturbances there.

There is one known to the author who can relate experiences of diabolic infestation that befell him, in or about 1995, after he began to resist the efforts of his parish priest who decided he would permit schoolchildren preparing for First Communion in the primary school under his care to do so without first confessing their sins in Confession. He had further experiences of the same some years later in southern New South Wales when he stayed with friends, husband and wife, who had taken into their care three psychologically disturbed girls (11, 8 and 4) whom State authorities had removed from their parents for, among other things, exposing them to voodoo videos. It became clear to him that one of the three, the 8 year old, was affected by the devil's influence: she would scream, shout and bang doors on the slightest provocation.

He stayed the first night in a room above a large garage separate from the house but could not get to sleep for the banging of a steel door below. He secured the door and went back to bed only to suffer further disturbance. A steel pipe was being tossed around the concrete floor. He descended again: there was nobody in the garage, no lights were lit. He realised with the benefit of his previous experience what was afoot. He removed the steel pipe and, using holy water he kept with him, splashed the four walls of the building while called on Christ to rid the place of the devil's influence, after which there was peace.

The nurse referred to above had done something similar on an occasion she related of her time in Papua New Guinea. She advised that she had arrived at a village and was to stay in a new grass house built for the native catechist, but the natives refused to let her do so. She pressed them and discovered that some evil spirit which had been disturbing the village had tossed coals from the fireplace around the interior of the hut and covered the inside walls in black marks. She assembled the natives and went around the house blessing it with a crucifix she carried with her. After that the hut suffered no further disturbance.

The Solution

These instances have been detailed that the reader may understand that there is objective, credible, evidence of the existence of intellectual beings capable of misleading men (and, *a fortiori*, children) as to the state of their souls. Christ said of the devil: “He is a liar and the father of lies...” [John 8: 44]. It ought be clear from the instances cited above that the devil loves to peddle lies as he loves to disturb the peace of men. The claim that James Leininger is identical with the dead pilot, James Huston, is a lie because reincarnation is impossible.

The key to the source of the child’s assertions is to be found in the early section of Dr. Tucker’s case study where he reports that, in or about February, 2000, after his attendance with his father at the flight museum and its stimuli, the boy began to suffer nightmares. (Later in the text this is clarified as occurring around the time of a second visit to the museum, two months later: so in April, 2000.) No child of the age of two years, naturally innocent, suffers nightmares without the intervention of some extrinsic malevolent influence.

It is clear that the boy could not have come by knowledge of the details of the circumstances of the service life of the pilot James Huston and the many other details he is reported to have provided unless it had been conveyed to him by some intellectual agent. The devil is an intellectual agent. If human researchers are capable of uncovering details of the pilot’s circumstances, his life and death, from the historical record, nothing prevents another and more powerful intellect obtaining them. Moreover, since angels exercise great powers over nature, nothing impedes one of them possessed by the inclination to evil from transmitting these facts to a child *disposed for their reception* so as to convince him he had experienced them himself.

In the view of this writer, as a result of his father’s inappropriate conduct, the boy James Leininger was affected by a form of diabolic infestation which persuaded him that he was identical with the dead pilot James Huston. Nor was it a coincidence that the Christian name of the pilot was the same as that of the child. This was simply a device employed by that malevolent intellect to lend the lie an appearance of verisimilitude.

Michael Baker

September 30th, 2024—*St Jerome, Doctor of the Church*