

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Comment on Raymond Moody's Interpretation of Past-Life Memories

To the Editor:

I wish to comment on an inadvertent oversight pertaining to one of my articles in this *Journal*: “Tucker, Stevenson, Weiss, and life: Renditions of the transcendent view from past-life memories” (Gibbs, 2017). I recently happened to discover and read Raymond Moody’s (1990) book, *Coming Back: A Psychiatrist Explores Past-Life Journeys*. Had I been aware of this book at the time I wrote the article, I certainly would have referred to it.

It is remarkable that this pioneer of near-death experiences also pioneered work on past-life memories. Moody of course couldn’t have known about Jim Tucker’s (2005, 2013) subsequent work, but I was surprised that he made no reference to Brian Weiss’s work—until I realized that perhaps Moody wasn’t aware of it; after all, Weiss’s first major work, *Many Lives, Many Masters*, was published around the same time, in 1988. Moody did appreciatively note Ian Stevenson’s (e.g., 1974) earlier careful investigation of children’s spontaneous past-life claims.

I was also surprised by Moody’s (1990) possibly excessive caution in his interpretation of the phenomenon. As readers may recall, his primary interpretation was that past-life regressions are therapeutically beneficial self-explorations utilizing the imaginative power of the unconscious mind. However, he did not rule out a transcendent interpretation and acknowledged puzzling cases involving detailed and idiosyncratic evidence independently corroborating past-life memories. Partly because it could be “wishful thinking” (p. 217), Moody was reluctant to embrace definitively the phenomenon’s implied insight into the continuity of human consciousness (van Lommel, 2010) across lifetimes—and hence into “life itself as being a sort of learning process” (Moody, 1990, p. 216).

Moody remained cautious in his subsequent (2012) autobiographical work *Paranormal: My Life in Pursuit of the Afterlife*. Again, as readers may recall, in my article (Gibbs, 2017) I raised caveats as well, citing those of Stevenson, Tucker, and even Weiss. Nonetheless, I continue to attribute ontological validity at least to the corroborated cases and

emphasize the impressive convergence of these related phenomena—not only past-life memories and near-death experiences but also terminal lucidity and nearing-death awareness—toward a transcendent understanding of human life.

References

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