

BOOK REVIEW

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Babies Are Cosmic: Signs of Their Secret Intelligence by Elizabeth Carman and Neil Carman, babiesarecosmic.com, 2019, 350 + xiii pp., \$19.95 pb (ISBN 978-0-9600713-0-2), Kindle ed. \$12.99 e-book.

In 2018, mainstream memory researchers Shazia Akhtar, Lucy V. Justice, Catriona M. Morrison, and Martin A. Conway published a survey of 6,641 adults who supplied descriptions of their earliest memories and the ages at which they were “encoded.” To the researchers’ surprise, nearly 40% of respondents claimed to have memories from before they were 24 months old, and 16% said they had memories from before they were 12 months old. Based on their assumption that neural structures are not well enough established by 24 months for memories to be encoded in the brain, they concluded that these purported early memories were “fictitious.” They speculated about how “such improbable, fictional first memories could have arisen,” contrasting them with “more probable first memories, those with an age at encoding of 3 years and older” (p. 1612). They made no effort to verify the accuracy of the reported first memories; they simply assumed them to be fictitious or not depending on the respondent’s reported age at the time of occurrence.

In the book under review, Elizabeth and Neil Carman present a compilation of very early memories, including memories of birth, the intrauterine period, conception, a discarnate state prior to conception, and previous lives. There are also accounts of a variety of prenatal

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contacts between mothers and their unborn children. This book represents the latest installment in what has become a sizeable popular genre of “prebirth” memories (e.g., Dyer & Garnes, 2015; Hallett, 2002; Hinze, 1997; and two earlier books by the Carmans, 1999, 2013), but, as the Akhtar et al. (2018) perspective indicates, these experiences are not ones that mainstream memory researchers take seriously. Akhtar et al. (2018) did not even note if any of their respondents reported memories of birth or before.

In my view, the Carmans’ new book is easily the best of its kind. What makes it stand out is the discussion in the early chapters of Freud’s conception of infantile amnesia, analysis of “types” of prebirth memory, and the references throughout to the scholarly literature on the topic—especially Ohkado (2015) and Ohkado and Ikegawa (2014). The bulk of the book is devoted to memories reported by mothers whose children related these things. They include accounts from several countries outside the Anglo-American cultural sphere, submitted through social media. Most of the accounts appear here for the first time, although some are drawn from previously published texts. The organization progresses backwards from birth, to the intrauterine period, conception, and before. The final chapters recount children’s statements about what appear to be previous lives. The book is illustrated by original drawings and cartoons. References to sources are collected in notes at the end of the volume, which also includes a list of references and an index, scholarly appurtenances often omitted from works intended for a general readership.

The Carmans may have hoped that this book would advance in medical and scientific communities an appreciation of prebirth memories of young children, but it seems unlikely that it will make much headway there. Part of the reason is the unfortunate, unexplained, and rather meaningless title, *Babies Are Cosmic*; another part is the decision to self-publish rather than to go with a mainstream publisher. There is also the problem that the accounts are almost entirely anecdotal, in the words of a single informant—generally the mother—without follow-up queries to elicit additional information or to seek corroborating witnesses or documentation. Moreover, few of the cited cases are veridical: They do not involve events that are verified to have occurred. The Carmans make a mistake opposite the one made by Akhtar et al. (2018): Rather than assuming the purported memories to be fictitious, they assume them to be genuine, without (with few exceptions) showing them to be so.

Studies of prebirth memories may be compared to studies of near-

death experiences (NDEs) and past-life memories, both of which areas of exploration are much better established. As the Carmans point out (pp. 71–72), prebirth memories raise issues similar to NDEs, in that they suggest that memory registration does not depend on a fully functioning brain. Past-life memories are different; if they are what they seem to be, they would have been laid down while a mind was incarnate, albeit in a different body. Nonetheless, past-life memories, no less than NDEs and prebirth memories, presuppose memory storage in and retrieval from somewhere apart from a brain. In a recent book (Matlock, 2019) I suggested that that somewhere is the subconscious part of the mind.

I propose that people think of consciousness as duplex, having both conscious and subconscious strata, and that which survives death and reincarnates as a stream of consciousness continuous with embodied life (Matlock, 2019). If that is so and I am right that memories are registered in the subconscious, they would be available to discarnate minds and to newly-incarnate minds, regardless of the stage of development of their associated brains. And if memories can be recorded directly in the subconscious, without the mediation of a brain, then it would be possible to register memories during the intermission between lives as well as during NDEs. Veridical perceptions related in prebirth memories (Rivas, Carman, Carman, & Dirven, 2015), reincarnation-intermission memories (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen, 2016), and NDEs (Holden, 2009; Rivas, Dirven, & Smit, 2016) give reason to think that these suggestions are not unwarranted.

Prebirth memory studies will need to improve substantially in terms of their scientific rigor before they can make the contribution they have the potential to make. Reincarnation studies have progressed as far as they have because Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker from the University of Virginia as well as other researchers have worked within the parapsychological tradition of investigating spontaneous cases in the field, interviewing all pertinent firsthand witnesses, emphasizing cases with veridical aspects, and collecting supporting documentation when available. What before 1960 seemed highly improbable to most parapsychologists has come to seem quite possible and even likely (Matlock, 2019). Prebirth memories are an important complement to memories of past lives and experiences near death, but from an academic research perspective they have a lot of catching up to do.

I recommend *Babies Are Cosmic* as an introduction to prebirth memory and prenatal mother-child communication—but with a warning: Unless readers are already committed to a point of view that ac-

cepts the notions of extra-cerebral memory and independence of consciousness from the body, they may find the accounts in this book less than convincing.

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