

Reincarnation as a Complement to the Flawed DNA-Based Model of Life: Potential Contributions to Our Disposition towards Family and Religion/Spirituality

Ted Christopher

Rochester, NY, USA

Email: tchrist7@rochester.rr.com

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Abstract

Briefly summarized here are some reasons why the DNA/genetic model of life appears to be inadequate (for more details see previous OJPP paper). Given its foundational role with regards to our understanding of life and its challenges, this is significant. The traditional dualistic reincarnation model is introduced. That model is then considered, along with the DNA model, as potential explanations for our natural religious instincts. Next, the two models are considered as possible bases for the phenomenon of kin orientation or bias. Together the case is made that a soul-based reincarnation model offers some explanatory advantages therein over the genetic-based (material-only) model. Finally, and of potential practical and philosophical significance, the corresponding imports for life and meaning are considered.

Keywords

Reincarnation, Evolution, Genetics, Kin Bias, Natural Religion, Philosophy, Metaphysics

1. Introduction—Background

Earlier work introduced the idea that science's molecular-only vision of life is seriously challenged via some accepted remarkable behaviors, or by consideration of life's functional complexity (Christopher, 2020a, 2017a; Sheldrake, 2012a, 2012b). With such consideration the expectations placed on DNA seem unrealistic.

The general point made in those works, though, was that the bigger problem

facing the scientific model is with regards to the testable expectations placed on DNA as a vehicle for inheritance. Despite a backdrop of there being very limited variable DNA available to specify for a range of human outcomes (or traits) and combined with extensive genetic searches already completed: there has in fact been minimal success in finding the expected genetic/DNA origins. Alternatively, this situation could be characterized as an “absolutely beyond belief” outcome of “almost nothing” found (Wade, 2008; Hall, 2010; Horgan, 2014; Balter, 2017; Cepelewicz, 2019). It should be increasingly clear to people following personal genetics research that the venerated DNA model is in trouble. The era of unquestioned faith in DNA, as a basis for intellectual certainty and also for practical breakthroughs should be winding down. At a minimum, this unfolding situation should encourage serious head-scratching.

The historical extension of this situation is found with DNA’s assumed role as a basis for evolutionary dynamics. As the late prominent biologist Ernst Mayr pointed out, “[o]ne can never fully understand the process of evolution unless one has an understanding of the basic facts of inheritance, which explain variation (Mayr, 2001: p. 89)”. That presumed inheritance role is equivalent to the common assumption that DNA forms the conception-beget blueprints for organisms.

Of note here is that this paper is in large part a follow-up to an earlier *Open Journal of Philosophy* paper which focused on some challenges posed by DNA’s presumed evolutionary roles (Christopher, 2022). Thus there is a little redundancy between the two papers. Additionally, the paper furthers earlier efforts which investigated general explanations available with a reincarnation dynamic. Along those lines, another paper (Christopher, 2017a) discusses those efforts in the context of Ian Stevenson’s extensive investigations.

A simple example of the unfolding heritability situation was inadvertently presented in a 2019 pair of *New York Times* articles (Bullock, 2019; Phelps & Wedow, 2019). Those articles revealed the supposedly successful outcomes of a huge study which had attempted to determine the DNA basis for the tendency to have sex with a same-sex partner. The study had been performed by “first-rate scientists” and additionally involved a substantial effort to produce sensitive portrayals of its findings. But with regards to the article by two relevant researchers (Phelps & Wedow, 2019) a number of the Reader Picks comments weren’t buying the study’s successful outcome. These comments included:

[t]his research clearly shows that there is no straight answer, pun unintended. If looking into the DNA of 500,000 people didn’t help, what will?

Another reader got a bit animated:

[l]ess than 1% of variation!

I almost choked on my pork and beans when I read that.

Less than 1% of variation is risible, not even the beginnings of understanding the phenomenon.

Dudes, get back to us if and when you have something to report.

I now let the findings as given in Bullock's article speak for themselves. That article reported:

[r]esearchers specifically identified five genetic variants present in people's genomes that appear to be involved. Those five comprise less than 1 percent of the [inferred] genetic influences, they said.

And when the scientists tried to use genetic markers to predict how people in unrelated data sets reported their sexual behavior, it turned out to be too little genetic information to allow prediction.

After fifteen years of extensive searches geneticists still appear to be striking out on this and many other behavioral (and health) tendencies.

Furthermore, basic conceptual obstacles exist for the presumed DNA dynamics. These include the haphazard nature of genomes and also the apparent ambiguity of their genetic specifications. The haphazard nature of genomes is apparent in the enormous variability in the size of genomes amongst different organisms (Herron & Freeman, 2014: pp. 582-591) and also in estimates of the functional portion of our own genomes, only 8 percent in one estimate (Zimmer, 2015). The ambiguity aspect is apparent in the divergence of monozygotic twins (bolstered by the apparent limits of environmental effects), and also generally in the variability of symptoms/conditions expressed by bearers of specific genetic alleles. That variability is described by the dual phenomena of reduced penetrance and variable expressivity (MedlinePlus, 2021).

In some cases, there are well established DNA origins, in particular for a number of particular disorders and also physical features. In addition to some relatively common conditions such as sickle cell anemia, there are as James D. Watson et al. pointed out "vast numbers of single-gene disorders, the current genetic disease database lists several thousand, but the majority are extremely rare, each occurring in just a few families" (Watson, 2017: p. 337). A potential implied general success, though, is with appearance since monozygotic twins often look very similar and offspring can distinctly reflect their parents in that regard. So the current confirmed DNA-heritability situation might be outlined as sporadic successes set against some unfolding broad failures. Overall, this suggests that either the heritability failures represent serious flaws in the genetic investigations, or that they accurately reflect DNA's limited functioning.

This unfolding heritability impasse can be approached in alternative fashion. Rupert Sheldrake has argued that the expectations for DNA roles should have been seen as excessive all along. He does so by simply noting the enormous complexity challenges starting with the requisite specifications for the functional shaping of proteins, further along the structuring of cells, and onto inheritance patterns (Sheldrake, 2012a, 2012b). His approach picks up on historical work which suggested the need for morphogenetic or memory-based guiding fields in order to help realize organisms' complicated functional forms and also behavioral tendencies. With this model, DNA is largely relegated to specifying the (linear) blueprints for a body's proteins. Thus instead of relying completely on

DNA specifications this approach suggests that our own complicated development as organisms relied on the memory of that of earlier organisms. In a simple example the un-learned ability of some birds to know their migration routes reflects then their utilization of the memory somehow established via earlier migratory efforts.

I briefly note here, though, one shortcoming with regards to Sheldrake's morphogenetic approach. Sheldrake uses the similarity found between monozygotic twins, in particular those raised separately, as significant evidence for the functioning of morphogenetic fields. He suggests that such fields are making such separated-at-birth twins more similar. The problem here, though, appears to be that the main mystery expressed by monozygotic twins, irregardless of how they were raised, is their big differences (Bouchard et al., 1990; Pinker, 2002; Harris, 2006). This has always been a large and apparently under-appreciated mystery. Thus Steven Pinker acknowledged that "something is happening here but we don't know what it is (Pinker, 2002: p. 380)". Possible morphogenetic contributions to behavioral alignment do not appear helpful in differentiating such twins. How could they help explain mysteries such as having the concurrence rate of male exclusive homosexuality be only about 20 to 30 percent between monozygotic twins (Collins, 2010: pp. 204-205)?

Sheldrake's work is certainly very significant and interesting but another possible limitation with a field-based inheritance explanation is that it doesn't appear to ultimately change the paradigm of life. It would seem to just add another layer of physics to the existing molecular-only description. Additionally in a practical sense, could morphogenetic fields offer any insight into, or potential help with, our mental suffering?

I move on to consider a premodern sequential life-based explanation for the missing heritability problem. As reported in previous works, a life-after-life explanation would place the requisite memory demands associated with the missing heritability on the incarnating souls (as opposed to DNA) (Christopher, 2017a, 2017b). This approach might offer explanations for the enormous variance found in the personalities of animals (Angier, 2010; Christopher, 2017a, 2017b). It could also provide explanations for such puzzling phenomena as prodigies and transgender children. Another simple insight might be with regards to surprising innate phobias (Stevenson, 1997, 2000), and also perhaps with instinctive phobias. Furthermore, an underlying dynamic of souls' being drawn to their parents-to-be, along with a tendency to maintain behavioral inclinations, might allow for a gross fit to the missing heritability problem for behavioral tendencies, and perhaps also with disease tendencies (Christopher, 2017a). In a simple example, a number of problematic behaviors like excessive drinking of alcohol and also smoking appear to be heritable (such that "more than 50 percent of the overall risk for alcoholism is attributable to" genetic factors) (Nurenburger & Bierut, 2007). But instead of expecting a questionable DNA basis for such problematic habits, the transcendental alternative is to view the habit as an expres-

sion of behavioral continuity across lives. A soul previously got stuck in an unhealthy habit and eventually they were drawn in their rebirth towards previously connected people (as parents-to-be, who might well share their habit), and unfortunately that challenge tends to continue in their subsequent life.

Earlier work outlined some particular explanations based on reincarnation. That work included discussions on hypotheses for some mental illnesses (Christopher, 2017b, 2019). But the modern backdrop to those efforts is of course research by investigators like Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker (Stevenson, 1997, 2000; Tucker, 2005, 2015). In a 2013 blog entry for *Scientific American* the psychologist and self-identified skeptic Jesse Bering reviewed Stevenson's reincarnation work (Bering, 2013). In it Bering wrote that:

when you actually read [the cases] firsthand, many are exceedingly difficult to explain away by rational, non-paranormal means. Much of this is due to Ian Stevenson's own exhaustive efforts to disconfirm the paranormal account. "We can strive towards objectivity by exposing as fully as possible all observations that tend to weaken our preferred interpretation of the data," he wrote. "If adversaries fire at us, let them use ammunition that we have given them." And if truth be told, he excelled at debunking the debunkers.

I suggest that the big question, though, appears to be with regards to the general fit of a reincarnation phenomenon. How much should we care about reincarnation if it apparently happens once in a blue moon? A possible role as an alternative inheritance vehicle would suggest that the sequential-life dynamic could be a fundamental aspect of life. Soul-based contributions could then not only contribute insight into some particular conundrums, they could be involved with broader dynamics too including an underlying big question, "How Did Mankind Evolve (Mayr, 2001, pp. 233-264)?"

Finally, the biggest support for this vision might simply be its prevalence in the premodern world (Head & Cranston, 1967; Carter, 2012, pp. 18-20). That a life-after-life belief was so common is significant in and of itself.

This paper will outline some possible reincarnation-based explanations for organisms' particular attachment to relatives (or kin), and also humanity's innate disposition towards dualistic religious/spiritual beliefs. Along with considering a reincarnation-based scheme, the corresponding presumed DNA-based dynamics will also be discussed. What is it that accounts for such fundamental aspects in our lives as spiritual/religious yearnings and also apparent fixation on family? One way or another, I suggest that as curious human beings it is worth questioning the "atoms and the void"-deep minimalism which is the default modern understanding of life. Finally, the two paradigms will be compared for their respective philosophical imports.

2. Simple Evidence for a Soul

The potential gross support to be presented herein offers some indirect evidence

for souls as an alternative vehicle for inheritance, in particular in the context of two evolutionary phenomena. As a preliminary warmup consider more direct evidence in the form of terminal or paradoxical lucidity. That phenomenon is introduced here via some discussions found in psychologist Jesse Bering's *Scientific American* blog piece, "One Last Goodbye/The Strange Case of Terminal Lucidity (Bering, 2014)." In that writeup Bering considered something that was possibly officially first characterized by a German biologist Michael Nahm in a 2009 article (Nahm, 2009). Therein Nahm had described terminal lucidity as:

The (re-)emergence of normal or unusually enhanced mental abilities in dull, unconscious, or mentally ill patients shortly before death, including considerable elevation of mood and spiritual affectation, or the ability to speak in a previously unusual spiritualized and elated manner.

In a subsequent Nahm article, written with Bruce Greyson, it was mentioned that in a study of 49 cases, 41 of them involved surprising verbalizations during the last week of life (Nahm & Greyson, 2009). Additionally, in 21 of the cases the verbalizations came on the same day as death. In some cases severely mentally impaired individuals had gradually returned to near normal lucidity before dying. Bering mentioned one case involving a man who had been catatonic for nearly 2 decades before his reemergence to a near normal state.

Other cases are considered elsewhere including in a 2021 article in *The Guardian* (Godfrey, 2021) and a 2019 article in *Psychology Today* (Mendoza, 2019). As one doctor pointed out after consideration of surveys, "it is safe to say that this phenomena exists, and likely exists more often than we expect (Godfrey, 2021)." In such articles poignant episodes recalled by relatives who witnessed miraculous rejuvenations of seemingly cognitively-gone people are given. In one such case a witness recalled that the rejuvenation of her grandmother:

She was sitting up in bed, smiling as we walked in. For the next two hours she laughed and joked, completely cognitive, coherent...lucid. A lifetime of memory had returned, and we took advantage of it as she regaled with episodes from her past. My mum [mother], who knew many of them, quietly verified them. Her funny, eloquent, vibrant mother had returned. "It all came back to her in one rush," remembers my mum. "It was like a bolt of lightening. The clouds cleared." After we left that afternoon, my grandma slipped back into a semi-conscious state, soon not knowing who my mother was, and died within days (ibid).

But the most striking case as transcribed by Jesse Bering also as given in another article by Nahm and Greyson (Nahm & Greyson, 2014), involved a severely disabled young woman named Anna ("Kathe") Katherina Ehmer and it occurred in 1922. Her case had substantial verification in that as a patient in a mental hospital her sudden lucidity episode was observed by that hospital's chief physician Wilhelm Wittneben and also its director Friedrich Happich. In any case an apparently severely retarded young woman somehow as she approached

her death was observed to be transformed into a spiritualized state and somehow singing “*Where does the soul find its home, its peace? Peace, peace, heavenly peace!*” Shortly thereafter she passed away.

Terminal lucidity obviously poses a conundrum for materialism and is suggestive of the presence of souls. To his credit Jesse Bering, with a job in psychology and at one point a blog at *Scientific American*, wrote in understated fashion that, “on face value, one has to admit that the story of Kathe Ehmer is something of a puzzle”. Bering had some personal connection in the matter since he had been with his dying mother who had managed “five minutes of perfect communion with me when, ostensibly, all her cognitive functions were already lost”. Not surprisingly, as suggested in *The Guardian* article, science will focus on a brain-only explanation for this baffling phenomenon.

Other phenomena that offer possible direct evidence for the existence of souls include near death experiences (Holden et al., 2009) and medium-based investigations (Carter, 2012). I add a bit on the latter as Chris Carter’s book, *Science and the Afterlife Experience*, contains remarkably corroborated descriptions of apparent medium-based communications with deceased individuals. The sustained accounts offer what appear to be a consensus on a life-after-life dynamic with moral underpinnings. Additionally, the accounts appear to have been communicated without reference to any religions.

Before moving on to considerable discussions with regards to two evolutionary phenomena, a simple example of an evolutionary dynamic is considered. In a fine *Scientific American* article, “The Evolution of Primate Color Vision”, by Gerald H. Jacobs and Jeremy Nathans the apparent historical development of the trichromacy in old world primates is described (Jacobs & Nathan, 2009). Instead of the common two distinct visual pigments typically found amongst mammals, the eyes of old world primates (including humans) have three, facilitating improved color vision. The underlying transformation apparently involved a sequence of errors in DNA processing by which the earlier two pigment genes were changed into three (thought to have involved some mutations followed by a recombination error). That updated DNA as demonstrated in experiments with mice allowed for better distinguishing across the color spectrum. For reasons including possible improvements in the ability to distinguish ripe fruit, this genetic update became a natural selection winner and thus spread over time (although some variation still exists among humans and thus the presence of color blindness).

What is relevant here is that the presumed physics were not complicated. Some changes in a stretch of the DNA molecule produced an additional blueprint for a pigment which in turn could be utilized to significant effect within retinas. The resulting improved optical response came directly from the new pigment which in turn came directly from the associated gene. Behavioral and belief updates on the other hand, would seem to require considerably more complicated DNA changes so as to elicit coherent changes in the functioning of brains.

3. Our Innate Religious Beliefs or Instincts

Although perhaps neglected in most evolutionary literature, our species appears to come equipped with simple religious beliefs or inclinations. Justin L. Barrett's book, *Born Believers—The Science of Children's Religious Belief*, presented evidence that infants tend to possess an innate understanding of the existence of souls/God/gods, to be believers in what Barrett termed a “natural religion” (Barrett, 2012). The book contained a number of striking examples including ones in which the positions of atheists “had been rebutted by their young children. As Barrett expressed” [c]hildren are prone to believe in supernatural beings such as spirits, ghosts, angels, devils, and gods during the first four years of life” (ibid.: p. 3). He later added:

Exactly why believing in souls or spirits that survive death is so natural for children (and adults) is an area of active research and debate. A consensus has emerged that children are born believers in some kind of afterlife, but not why this is so (ibid.: p. 120).

This framework was also discussed in an article at a popular news site where they stated:

Olivera Petrovich, an Oxford University psychologist, surveyed several international studies of children aged 4 to 7 and found that the belief in God as a “creator” is “hardwired” in children and that “*atheism* is definitely an acquired position.”

Paul Bloom, a professor of psychology and director of the Mind and Development Lab at Yale University, writes, “The universal themes of religion are not learned...They are part of human nature...Creationism, and belief in God, is bred in the bone (Wallace, 2021).”

Barrett additionally included a chapter listing some basic features of our natural religion. These had been gleaned from research with children and they suggest that we are born inclined to hold several beliefs including:

- 1) That there are “[s]uperhuman beings with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and emotions.”
- 2) That “[e]lements of the natural world such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by some kind of superhuman being(s), who must therefore have superhuman power.”
- 3) That “[s]uperhuman beings generally know things that humans do not (they can be super-knowing or super-perceiving, or both), perhaps particularly things that are important for human relations.”
- 4) That “[s]uperhuman beings may be invisible and immortal, but they are not outside space and time”. They also “have character, good, or bad.”
- 5) That “[l]ike humans, superhuman beings have free will and can and do interact with people, sometimes rewarding and sometimes punishing them.”
- 6) That “[m]oral norms are unchangeable, even by superhumans.”

7) That “[p]eople may continue to exist without their earthly bodies after death (Barrett, 2012: pp. 138-139)”.

It appears that children are inclined to believe that there is sort of a parallel, unseen complementary living realm. That realm is also believed to somehow to make design-oriented contributions to the natural realm.

Barrett went on to qualify these findings. In particular he emphasized that such beliefs are conceptually primitive and that their extension into agreement more typical religious theology is not easy. It appears that young children (and Barrett suggested adults too) might be naturally religious in a primitive way, but on the other hand they are not inclined in a theological sense.

Barrett did not address the possible validity of these beliefs, including the critical afterlife belief which was nominally an “area of active research and debate”. These striking findings were simply placed within the materialist framework, as fallout from evolution and nurture, or “biology plus ordinary environment”. Justin Barrett, in fact, went so far as to suggest that research into “systems of the human mind” “make belief in some kind of god almost inevitable” (ibid.: p. 20). That statement and Barrett’s followup, as well as similar content in T. M. Luhrmann’s *How God Becomes Real* (Luhrmann, 2020), appear to be good examples of the intellectual hegemony of materialism, since confidently concluding that our innate religious beliefs were the “almost inevitable” outcomes of evolution is an enormous stretch. For additional context here Steven Pinker succinctly described our particular slog through evolution as having been akin to a “camping trip that never end[ed]” (Pinker, 1997: p. 207). And so natural selection supposedly drove the selection of spiritual belief-forming DNA/genetic variants as a result of the historical challenges we faced as determined campers.

Barrett and fellow researchers apparently found some satisfaction, though, in rebutting the common argument that with regards to religious beliefs, people simply parrot what they’ve been taught. Barrett did provide an alternative explanation that he heard from an Indian man who had explained to him (in Barrett’s words):

[T]hat on death, we go to be with God and are later reincarnated. As children had been with God more recently, they could understand God better than adults can. They had not yet forgotten or grown confused and distracted by the world. In a real sense, he explained, children came into this world knowing God more purely and accurately than adults do (Barrett, 2012: p. 2).

In the previous *Open Journal of Philosophy* paper I provided two relevant examples from my own experience.

4. Religious Instincts—A Reincarnation-Based Interpretation

The simple alternative explanation here is that our religious instincts reflect our experience in the disembodied state. Somehow as souls return from the disembodied state

bodied state that experience stays with them along with a possibly crude understanding of the interplay between the two realms. In relation to the above claim that we eventually grow “distracted and confused by the world”, perhaps the initial fading out of the religious vision coincides with the onset of infant amnesia in which we somehow lose the memories of our first three or four years of life (Tucker, 2005: p. 90), and potentially what preceded it (Christopher, 2017b: pp. 156-157). Prior to such an initial shift in perspective, it appears there can be some vivid expressions of our natural religious beliefs and also, albeit much less frequently some explicit expressions carried over from an earlier life.

Perhaps the experience of one historical figure reflected a bit of this innate dynamic. Albert Einstein as described in Roger Highfield and Paul Carter’s biography, *The Private Lives of Albert Einstein*, may have gradually transitioned from an initial natural reverence for God to a subsequent reverence for science and a resulting rejection of religion at about age 12 (Highfield & Carter, 1994: p. 17). That initial reverence for God was described in another biography as involving his “compos[ing] his own hymns for the glorification of God, which he sang to himself as he walked home from school” (Isaacson, 2007: p. 16). But at age 12 his plunge into reading popular science had led him to believe “that the stories from the Bible could not be true, and [he] swung to the opposite extreme of fervent doubt” (Highfield & Carter, 1994: p. 17). Transitions like this might be common, in particular for the intellectually-inclined.

A possible complication, though, with our natural religious beliefs is that it would seem that just as the interpretations of our ordinary experiences can be shaped by conditioning, our subsequent out-of-body experiences might also be. One relevant example might be with near-death experiences (NDEs). Some sincere Western NDE accounts such as those chronicled in *Heaven is for Real* by Todd Burpo (Burpo, 2010) and sincere Eastern accounts such as those given in *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth* by Tulku Thondup (Thondup, 2005) appear to strongly reflect details consistent with the local religious teachings. In the latter book it is suggested that our experiences after death “reflect our habits and emotions” as were established by “the way our culture and belief system” conditioned us (ibid.: p. 7).

Moving along here, a classic reincarnation-related source is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (TBD) (Fremantle & Trungpa, 1992). Somewhat of a modern variant is the aforementioned practically-oriented guide, *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth* (Thondup, 2005). As suggested in those books the disembodied state is akin to a volatile, super-psyche realm in which a soul is not physically grounded and tends to vividly experience in part its own memories or projections (as consistent with the above comments). In a sense the psychological state in the disembodied realm might then be sort of an amplified version of our ongoing stream of consciousness experience. The Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa suggested that those vivid perceptions in the disembodied state (the common Tibetan term is bardo):

[should be] so strong that someone recently born should have memories of the period between death and birth; but then as we grow up we are indoctrinated by our parents and society, and we put ourselves into a different framework, so that the original deep impressions become faded except for occasional sudden glimpses. Even then we are so suspicious of such experiences, and so afraid of losing any tangible ground in terms of living in this world, that any intangible kind of experience is treated half-heartedly or dismissed altogether (Fremantle & Trungpa, 1992: pp. 4-5).

A further point suggested in the TBD is that when the soul is in the bardo state there is enormous freedom including the ability to “arrive anywhere you want instantaneously as soon as you think of it” (ibid.: p. 173) and further that a soul can “perform everything [it] can think of and there is no action [it] can not do [presumably within its dream-like experience]” (ibid.: p. 174). Exercising that freedom is not recommended, though. Also suggested is that the mind in the bardo state is “nine times more clear” than our everyday mind (ibid.: p. 167), although that clarity competes with the bardo’s volatility (characterized as being “like a feather in a storm” (Thondup, 2005: p. 87)). Further the clarity is suggested to allow a soul to “see and hear from many others who, like [themselves], are wandering in the bardo” (ibid: p. 87). Altogether then from this perspective, the soul’s experiences after death might contribute to our innate sense of the existence of superhumans. Those superhumans might then simply be souls. More subtly, perhaps some of the innate sense of the world being designed could be carryover from the post-death state, a time during which our reality has been suggested to be significantly manufactured by our own psyches.

A large and complementary component of our natural religion, the existence of God, might best initially be supported via its natural occurrence. Strong or direct evidence for the existence of God, though, appears to be difficult to obtain.

For those inclined towards physical interpretations, the spiritual realm and its dynamics might somehow be tied to the large unfolding mysteries termed dark matter and dark energy (Hossenfelder & McGaugh, 2018; Battersby, 2016). When much of the inferable mass/energy content of the universe (totaling roughly 95%) is missing that suggest a serious deficit in our physical appreciation of the universe.

At a minimum I hope more people can become aware of the mysteries associated with our innate spiritual beliefs. I have suggested here reincarnation’s potential to explain some of the features of our natural religion, but the big picture here is of a collection of far-reaching mysteries.

5. Kin Selection

Considered next are some phenomena presumed to be shaped by kin selection which is when natural selection favors “traits that result in decreased direct fitness if they increase the survival and reproductive success of close relatives”

(Herron & Freeman, 2014: p. 460). Such traits tend to work to the detriment of an individual bearer thereof, but can help further the underlying genetic allele's frequency. This can happen since the bearer's relatives are more likely to also have that genetic allele. Thus, in this roundabout fashion, natural selection would appear to be able to have supported the behavioral bias of favoring one's relatives.

There are two forms of genetic fitness. One is the direct fitness of a gene which measures its contribution to an individual's survival and reproductive success. The other is the indirect fitness, which measures the contribution of a gene/trait to the fitness of relatives. One example might then be a particular DNA variation (or allele) that tends to further maternal care inclinations. The resulting boost in maternal commitment might come at a cost to mothers with the allele, but that boost could well increase the survival likelihood of their offspring. Such a dynamic would tend to increase the frequency of the motherhood-boosting allele.

The following briefly touches on a few kin selection examples as given in the fifth edition of the text, *Evolutionary Analysis* (Herron & Freeman, 2014). An overlapping bigger collection can be found in the previous OJPP paper (Christopher, 2022). One kin study looked at the adoption of orphaned, nursing baby squirrels by mother squirrels (Herron & Freeman, 2014: p. 463). The researchers found that among 34 litters orphaned during lactation, 7 were concurrent with available lactating squirrel moms who were (genetic) relatives. In 5 of these cases a squirrel kitten was adopted by a related mom, while none of the other litter's kittens were adopted. The squirrel mothers appeared to somehow have factored in a genetic connection with their adoption decisions.

In another study, researchers observed the chick-care efforts of reed buntings (a small ground-nesting bird) (ibid.: pp. 586-570). Reed buntings are monogamous socially, but not otherwise. Consequently, one set of genetic tests found that 86% of the nests contained chicks that were sired by a male other than the mother's nest (and social) mate. Researchers then observed the parental care of mothers and fathers relative to the fraction of chicks sired by an outsider. To do this they looked at the number of feedings provided by mothers and fathers across two clutches in a single season. Consistent with kin selection, researchers found that fathers tended to provide more feedings to nest mates in nests with a higher percentage of chicks they had sired. For mothers, though, there wasn't a statistically significant difference in their treatment of the two clutches. In commenting on this finding, Herron and Freeman, suggested out that the male, "bird's brain has a mechanism that adjusts the level of effort the male expends in caring for a brood, based on cues that indicate his probable level of paternity" in the brood. This is a remarkable capacity.

In a human study 1000 wills written in British Columbia, Canada were examined and the planned redistribution of wealth considered. The study found that 55.3% of that wealth was bequeathed to relatives versus only 7.7% to

non-kin (with the remaining 37% bequeathed to spouses). The researchers then looked at the breakdown of the planned distribution to closer relatives (offspring and siblings) versus further removed ones (grandkids, nieces, nephews, and cousins) and found that the closer ones were chosen to receive more (46.5% versus 8.9%, respectively). Although, this process could have been influenced by cultural factors, Herron and Freeman:

concluded that the data are in broad accord with kin selection theory. This does not require us to imagine that people composing wills routinely draw pedigrees, calculate direct [fitness] costs and indirect [fitness] benefits, and divide the wealth accordingly. It suggests only that natural selection among our ancestors left us with a tendency to feel more generous to more closely related kin (*ibid.*: p. 464).

This conclusion about kin selection is understated. That our survival and reproductive history has somehow established DNA alleles to allow for the brains of individual organisms to be built to detect and then preferentially treat others based on the degree of genetic ties is amazing. Think of the above squirrels case and note that the moms apparently distinguished kin versus non-kin orphaned babies and then tended to treat them differently. On the hand, it took an extended effort across 9 years involving the efforts of researchers to tag individual squirrels and then monitored their survival and reproductive successes. All told the researchers had recorded the significant outcomes of 2230 litters from 1101 squirrel moms. Those researchers had sort of played dedicated observational gods in recording the kitten-raising outcomes of a squirrel community over 9 years. On the other hand, how plausible is it that evolution-beget DNA specifics have equipped squirrel moms to behave in accordance with kin selection's logic?

Furthermore, with humans there have been studies suggesting that children raised by two biological parents are better off than those raised by one or more non-biological parents (in the text's examples the non-biological parent appeared limited to fathers). Some studies of traditional cultures found that fathers appear to treat their biological children better than stepchildren, and further that the former are more likely to survive childhood (81% versus 57% percent for a group of Indians in Paraguay) (*ibid.*: p. 572).

Another study considered children raised in a rural Caribbean village and found that those living with two biological parents tended to have lower cortisol levels implying lower stress levels (*ibid.*: p. 572-573). Children with a co-resident stepdad also tended to experience more illness (which is consistent with the higher cortisol levels). Another study considered the relative outcomes for the two groups of children with regards to a terrible outcome, that of being a homicide victim of a parent. This study considered homicide rates for children raised with and without a co-resident stepparent using Canadian data from 1974 to 1983 and found that the relative homicide risk was 70 times higher for children living with a stepparent. This very sad (and thankfully rare) phenomenon was again attributed to an evolution-produced capacity to favor kin.

6. Kin Selection—Possible Reincarnation-Based Interpretation

The above studies appear to demonstrate a strong bias along the lines of kinship. The question asked here is whether the assumed natural selection-shaped genetic basis, and secondarily, a neural one, is really feasible? Furthermore, can a reincarnation-based dynamic provide an improved explanation?

The premodern belief that an incarnating soul is drawn to their future parents has been suggested as an alternative basis for the missing heritability (Christopher, 2017a, 2017b). Perhaps that same hypothesized draw could also help establish a loose connection among kin. In addition to a possible previous connection between offspring and their parents, siblings who were drawn to their parents might also be more likely to have had some past-life connections, and with it a tendency towards attachment. This process might also be strengthened some by a tendency towards local rebirths.

Additional reincarnation-based support to be considered here is with the practice of adoption. If an incarnating being were drawn to their subsequent parents then there might be a significant deficit or loss experienced by adopted children. That is with an underlying draw of souls to their future parents, along with a tendency towards continuity, that could present difficulties for adoptees. It turns out there is a phenomenon called adoption grief which might be consistent with such a reincarnation-based understanding.

Adoption grief involves the common experience of grief by an adoptee for a lost connection to a birth parent or parents and it appears to be generally accepted. In adoptee and author Sherrie Eldridge's *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* this grief pretty much filled the book and was largely behind the "twenty things" (Eldridge, 1999). A psychologist and a psychiatrist were quoted from the book *Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self*, "unlike other losses we have come to expect in a lifetime, such as death and divorce. Adoption [grief] is more pervasive, less socially recognized, and more profound (Eldridge, 1999: p. 5)."

Eldridge also quoted an open adoption practitioner and child welfare supervisor, James Gritter, who explained in his book *The Spirit of Open Adoption*:

We must be careful not to sanitize, sentimentalize, or even glamorize the pain of adoption; it really is miserable stuff, and it is intensely personal. It is interior. The pain of adoption is not something that happens to a person; it is the person. Because the pain is so primal, it is virtually impossible to describe (ibid.: p. 7).

Some adoptee quotes included "it feels like a part of me is missing" (ibid.: p. 7) and "I have spent my whole life roaming and never felt stable" (ibid.: p. 8).

In a less grief-oriented presentation, the book *Raising Adopted Children* by (non-adoptee) Lois Ruskai Melina described that adoptive parents "often expect their children to need some time to adjust to a new family" but they could "be

surprised to find the children grieving for these losses years after the move” (Melina, 1998: p. 147). Continuing Melina wrote that:

as Brodzinsky and his colleagues point out in *Being Adopted*, children who were adopted as infants usually “do not express the shock, deep depression, uncontrollable crying, or intense rage that are commonly part of acute or traumatic loss.” Instead they may be withdrawn, distracted, confused, “clingy”, or have occasional bouts of sadness or anger (ibid.: p. 147).

A relevant example showed up outside the adoption literature in the magazine *Sports Illustrated*. Therein the sportswriter Rick Reilly reported on experiences with his adopted daughter (Reilly, 2006). The daughter had been born to an unwed Korean young woman and subsequently adopted by the author and his wife at 4 months of age. As a child his daughter “thought constantly about her birth mother”. As a result the author, his wife, and their then 11 year old adopted daughter went to Seoul to try to get to see the birth mother. After some effort a short meeting with the birth mother was realized. At it the very tense birth mother did not make eye contact with her biological daughter. After a minimal exchange consisting of the daughter asking her prepared questions, the birth mother’s interpreter suggested it was time to leave. The birth mother at this time broke out of control and sobbing heavily embraced her biological daughter. It seemed that the birth mother “wouldn’t let [the daughter] go”. After this very emotional meeting the 11 year old daughter was “beaming” and commented “it feels like it fixed a little hole in my heart”.

The third and final question that the adoptee had asked her birth mother prior to the latter’s emotional release was “when you had me, did you get to hold me?” The birth mother’s answer was “no”. From a conventional perspective, the emotional release of the birth mother could have been expected. She would have been very conscious of her pregnancy and was very likely to have had strong (perhaps evolution and/or culturally-influenced) concerns about her daughter even after she was adopted. Their separation could well have been an ordeal for the birth mom even in her subsequently married-with-children state. Additionally, it is also worth noting that via the same hypothesized dynamic the mother was also likely to have had a previous life connection with her daughter.

But how did the adopted daughter end up with such a strong connection to someone she had never met? Further, even if like some other adoptees they had met when she was an infant, how could this bond have survived? The aforementioned phenomenon of childhood amnesia somehow erases the memories we have from the first three or four years of our lives (Tucker, 2005: p. 90). As a personal example, I have been repeatedly told about significant happenings around me as an infant prior to a move at about age 4. I can’t recall any of it and am thus unable to generate significant feelings when told about those events.

Additionally, the related topic of conditioned attachment has been studied in infants. In the text *Understanding Children’s Development* by Peter K. Smith et al. it was suggested that at around 6 months an infant can start to display signs

of such attachment. Based on work by John Bowlby and a student of his, J. W. Anderson, Smith et al. wrote that:

[t]he infant preferentially orientates to and signals at one or more discriminated persons. This marks the beginning of attachment. The infant is more likely to smile at the mother or important caregivers, for example, or to be comforted by them if distressed. Exactly when this occurs depends on the measures used, but it is commonly observed at around 5 - 7 months of age (Smith et al., 1998: p. 73).

From this perspective an infant's brain development combined with their personal experiences, allows for displays of conditioned attachment after about 6 months. Thus, even neglecting childhood amnesia, a 6 month attachment milestone seems too late to explain the grief of adoptees who had experienced separation earlier.

Adoption grief could be consistent with the higher levels of cortisol seen in children raised with a stepparent, although in the case of adoption both parents would be non-relatives. On the other hand, the existence of adoption grief appears to challenge the logic of kin selection. As previously noted, kin selection would have had to specify within organisms a brain-based facility to distinguish and differentially treat others based on kin status. But to explain adoption grief in those adopted at a very young age it would seem necessary to establish the kin orientation right from the start in infant brains. Furthermore, how could natural selection have shaped some sort of biological guidance system to show up in an infant's life and in particular fixate on one missing biological parent? Note that the fixation in the above Korean adoptee example appears to be on one parent. I suggest that adoption grief might be more consistent with a lost relationship, as opposed to a generic preference for kin. A related point here is that we appear to reserve serious emotional wrenching for losses (as opposed to what might be termed pseudo-wrenching over more superficial ego-tied losses, as in athletics).

Additionally, in many traditional societies infants spend considerable time with unrelated but nurturing adults (usually women). In fact a distributed-mothering relationship appears to be something that our species appears to be comfortable with. Along these lines, the primatologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy pointed out that:

[a]mong the Efe foragers of Central Africa, babies spend 60 percent of their daylight hours being toted around by somebody other than their mother. In 87 percent of foraging societies, mothers sometimes suckle each other's children, another remarkable display of social trust (Angier, 2009).

So why would there be such an underlying sense of loss in adoptees for a biological parent or parents?

Moving along here to some possible reincarnation overlap. From an examination of some traditional African reincarnation beliefs it was suggested that "the ancestor is only reincarnated in his own family" (Head & Cranston, 1967: p. 173).

Likewise amongst the Australian aborigines it has been reported that some believe their babies are the “reincarnation of deceased ancestors” ([Columbia Encyclopedia, 2000: p. 2874](#)). But in the modern era’s much more populated and dynamic world perhaps reincarnation outcomes would likely extend well beyond a soul’s previous family. Consistent with this, researcher Jim Tucker pointed out that among cases suggestive of reincarnation, “[t]o hear of children crying for years for their [current] family to take them to their previous parents until the family finally relents is not unusual ([Tucker, 2005: p. 116](#))”.

Further consideration moves on to two relevant cases suggestive of reincarnation. These cases are taken from Jim Tucker’s *Life Before Life* and they involve young children who displayed strong regret for not getting the parents they had previously wanted. These cases were unusual in that the apparent memories were almost exclusively from the discarnate realm, not the previous life. Both claimed to have been *in utero* in earlier failed pregnancies of other women. In one of those cases the failure was a miscarriage and in the other an abortion. If a reader has some sensitivities on either of these issues they might consider skipping these descriptions.

In the miscarriage case a boy named Bobby from North Carolina had “frequently talked about wanting to live with his cousins” (*ibid.*: pp. 164-8). Bobby “repeatedly said that he belonged with his cousins” and referred to the oldest boy amongst his cousins as his “big brother”. These statements didn’t arouse much interest with Bobby’s parents who figured it reflected a passing preference to his cousins’ larger family. This changed when after a bath the four and a half year old Bobby first queried his mother on her memories of his being inside her and then his younger brother Donald being inside her, and then on Donald and him together being inside her. When his mother corrected him with regards to the last scenario, Tucker reported that Bobby added “they were in her tummy at the same time but did not get born”. After a subsequent correction by his mother, Bobby responded that “he and Donald had been in Aunt Susan’s tummy at the same time, rather than his mother’s, and asked why Aunt Susan did not give birth to them.”

At this point Bobby became incensed at his two and a half year old brother Donald and reportedly screamed:

Donald, it is all your fault. I told you I wanted to get born real bad, and you didn’t want to. How did you take me out of there, Donald? Why didn’t you want to get born? Tell me how you did it. Tell me how you took me out of there.

After restraining Bobby his mother added his brother Donald didn’t understand what he was yelling about. Bobby insisted he did and then Donald removed his pacifier and yelled back “No! I wanted Daddy”. Bobby then responded back yelling “I didn’t want Daddy, I wanted Uncle Ron!”

After a calming period Bobby reportedly went on to tell his mother that after that failed pregnancy he tried to be born again to Aunt Susan but his cousin Re-

becca was there. Bobby said “I wanted to be in there, and she wouldn’t let me. I tried to kick her out, but it didn’t work. She got to be born, and I didn’t.” Bobby went on to say, “I sure did have to work hard to get here, Mom.”

The Uncle Ron here was the brother of Bobby’s father. Uncle Ron’s wife Susan had had a miscarriage involving male twins seven years before Bobby was born. This miscarriage had occurred after the birth of their only son (the boy whom Bobby had termed his big brother). The miscarriage had happened thirty-three weeks into the pregnancy and a subsequent examination showed that there had been a vulnerable umbilical cord which the doctors thought may have been pinched closed when a twin rolled over on it. Bobby had also made some accurate comments with regards to his parents’ wedding (during which his mom was pregnant with him) and with regards to his own difficult birth.

The point of note here, though, was the apparent preference to be born with a specific parent and that this circumstance was similar to an adoption in that the child ended up with different parents. Bobby’s younger brother Donald also offered a single utterance about his own previous (and realized) preference. In Bobby’s case, his preference was apparently pretty significant at least while he was young (and his previously desired parents were now relatives).

In the second relevant case from Tucker’s *Life Before Life* a young girl in Florida appeared to identify a woman who previously had been pregnant with her and this pregnancy had ended in an abortion. For the girl, Kendra, this perception was very significant (ibid.: pp.114-6). At age 4 and a half years old Kendra went to her first swimming lesson. Her coach was named Ginger and upon arriving Kendra reportedly “immediately jumped into Ginger’s lap and acted very lovingly towards her. When Ginger had to cancel a lesson three weeks later, Kendra sobbed uncontrollably.” This was the beginning of some very unusual behavior by Kendra.

Upon getting back to her swimming lessons, Kendra reportedly started talking about her instructor Ginger frequently. Within a few weeks Kendra reportedly described to her mother an abortion and said that Ginger had had one and that “I’m the baby that was in her tummy.” Kendra’s mother later found out from Ginger that nine years before Kendra was born, Ginger had been unmarried and sick and had had an abortion. The child Kendra then proceeded to go through tremendous anguish, feeling that she would die because Ginger had not delivered her. After visiting a therapist and going through a ceremony to confer a sense that she had been “born” to Ginger, Kendra’s fear of death appeared to subside.

Although Ginger was frequently unfriendly towards Kendra, Kendra’s ongoing intense desire to be with Ginger eventually led Kendra’s mother and Ginger to work out an arrangement whereby Kendra was to spend three nights a week at Ginger’s home. Later after a fallout between the women, Ginger decided to stop seeing Kendra. Kendra then reportedly did not talk for four and a half months. The child “showed no interest in activities, ate little, and slept a lot.” After this

period she met with Ginger for a couple of hours and spoke again for the first time in telling “Ginger that she loved her”. After the meeting Ginger started calling Kendra again, but Kendra seemingly consoled started to return to a more normal life and didn’t want to go to Ginger’s house anymore. Ginger’s transition out of distress might be consistent with a transition to infant amnesia in which earlier memories, including possibly pre-life ones, start to fade away (Christopher, 2017b).

These events were deeply disturbing for Kendra’s mother who was not only concerned about her daughter’s wellbeing but also potential evidence for reincarnation. With her particular Christian views she had felt “that she was committing a sin by merely buying a book on reincarnation during Kendra’s troubles.” Kendra had never been alone with Ginger at the swimming lessons and had no apparent normal basis for her strong reaction to Ginger. Eventually, as Jim Tucker reported, Kendra’s mother decided, “that Kendra’s spirit had been looking for another body after Ginger’s abortion, but she did not accept the idea that reincarnation is a process that normally occurs.”

Kendra’s experience is consistent with the traditional belief that an incarnating being can be attracted to one or both of their parents and also suggests that such a connection can continue and re-surface in a subsequent incarnation. From this perspective, Kendra’s close encounter as a child with Ginger appeared to trigger a psyche-avalanche associated with their previous connection. A potential parallel with an adopted child experiencing grief is that this thwarted earlier desire to be with a parent (or parents) can continue and cause distress (as evident physically with higher levels of cortisol). A difference, though, with Kendra’s and Bobby’s circumstances is that from a life-after-life perspective they also likely experienced some personal draw to at least one of their subsequent parents.

So a reincarnation explanation for our tendency to be oriented towards kin could indirectly be based on an underlying draw to at least one of our parents, and thus ultimately previous life experiences. The overall effect on a family of that rebirth draw could be that its members might tend to share more history, and with it attachment, with each other than with outsiders. The evolutionary version of this would entail selective modifications to our DNA to somehow bias us towards our genetic relatives. As such the previous squirrel moms would have been drawn to their squirrel kitten adoptions via a detected genetic similarity. With the reincarnation model you could have a particular explanation for the deep sense of loss experienced by an adoptee which doesn’t seem as likely from a kin versus non-kin distinction. Somewhat of a parallel exists with regards to the exceptional closeness found between monozygotic twins. From a reincarnation point of view that closeness could reflect relations prior to the current life (Christopher, 2017a), while from a genetic perspective it would reflect a response to their shared genome.

An additional point here is that any explanation for our tendency to be biased towards kin also has to allow for some contradictory behaviors. Killing amongst

siblings (siblicide) is common in nature and that challenges evolutionary logic (Herron & Freeman, 2014: p. 480). In particular, killing a sibling who shares about half of their variable DNA with you contradicts the logic of natural selection whereby genes are posited to have been selected in part because they tend to preserve themselves across generations. With a transcendental understanding there could be more flexibility. Offspring from that perspective tend to be drawn to one or both of the parents, but those draws are not generic and in fact different siblings would have separate live histories and might have been drawn in their rebirths to different parents (as suggested in Bobby and Donald's case). With a past lives' perspective, which could include conflicts, this could allow for more motivational elements.

Finally, as mentioned earlier some traditional reincarnation beliefs insist that the process is bound to families, but perhaps this hypothesis was more likely and also consistent with small closed populations. Within the suggestive cases investigated by Jim Tucker and Ian Stevenson there were ones in which the selection of parents did not appear to involve any previous personal connections. Some striking examples involved children claiming to remember the life of a soldier in an invading army. A general note here is that such a dynamic might offer an explanation for standout individuals within a family (or in a larger sense, a group). They could have incarnated as outsiders.

7. Discussion

The descriptions laid out herein consider two different takes on fundamental domains in our psyche lives, family and religion/spirituality. From the scientific or materialist point of view DNA simply has to perform its heredity duties and thus there is no room for alternative (and certainly dualistic) understandings. The resulting take on life is not surprisingly rather stark. The reincarnation understanding would first suggest that our intuitions about a lasting distinct self are accurate, and thus that our life could involve deeper interconnections and meaning.

I first consider a modern intellectual perspective on life and with it reality. In a 2012 *Scientific American* article about the dynamics of black holes, the physicist author Caleb Scharf had written:

[o]ur existence in this place, this microscopic corner of the cosmos, is fleeting. With utter disregard for our wants and needs, nature plays out its grand acts on scales of space and time that are truly hard to grasp. Perhaps all that we can look to for real solace is our endless capacity to ask questions and seek answers about the place we find ourselves in (Scharf, 2012).

We, essentially a collection of epi-phenomena emanating from lumps of biologically-active molecules can try to expand the knowledge base about the underlying vast ensemble dynamics of matter that presumably gave rise to us and perhaps consider this process as meaningful. Scientists have given a number of other stark materialists' appraisals of life. If in fact the materialism-based under-

standing of life holds, and I suggest the DNA as language of life is the critical test, then perhaps such appraisals are legitimate and of course intellectually honest.

Another materialism framing example can be found in the fine 2008 book by the novelist Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be frightened of* (Barnes, 2008). Barnes' book dealt with his take on death and with it quite a bit of life. The book opened with the sentence, "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" [ibid.: p. 3]. The essential backdrop to the work was that Barnes had opted for an intelligent understanding of life and death which of course means science, and this was not surprisingly rather bleak. With this perspective Barnes could still intellectualize and philosophize around a bit (his brother is a philosopher). His wide-ranging and very literate effort included taking some shots at atheists, philosophers, and more generally modern trends (although there he shortchanged frenetic distraction-ism in favor of "frenetic [commercial] materialism"), but to little end as he surmised. In a relevant quote he stated:

We discover, to our surprise, that as (Richard) Dawkins (i.e., "Mister Meaninglessness") memorably puts it, we are "survival machines, robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes". The paradox is that individualism, the triumph of free-thinking artists and scientists, has led us to a state of self-awareness in which we can now view ourselves as units of genetic obedience. My adolescent notion of self-construction, that vaguely, Englishly, existentialist ego-hope of autonomy, could not have been further from the truth. I thought the burdensome process of growing up ended with a man standing by himself at last, *homo erectus* at full height, *sapiens* in full wisdom, a fellow now cracking the whip on his own full account. This image...must be replaced by the sense that, far from having a whip to crack, I am the very tip of the whip itself, and that what is cracking me is a long and inevitable plait of genetic material which cannot be shrugged or fought off. My "individuality" may still be felt, and genetically provable; but it may be the very opposite of the achievement I once took it for [ibid.: p. 93-94].

Furthermore, "[n]ow, alone, we must consider what our Godless wonder might be for" [ibid.: p. 93]; Christianity is a "beautiful lie" [ibid.: p. 53]; and modern alternative pursuits, the "secular modern heaven of self-fulfillment", and their purported realization of happiness is "our chosen myth" [ibid.: p. 59]. And of course, "[t]he air has been let out of the tyres of free will" [ibid.: p. 181].

A basic contemporary intellectual sentiment was nicely provided by a friend of Barnes' [ibid.: p. 124]:

I think the theory of evolution explains it all. It's a very beautiful theory, come to think of it, a marvelous and inspiring theory, though it has grim consequences for us.

Additionally, in a more subjective sense Barnes wrote [ibid.: p. 148]:

But the brain mappers who have penetrated our cerebral secrets, who lay it all out in vivid colors, who can follow the pulsings of thought and emotion, tell us that there is no one home. There is no ghost in the machine. The brain, as one neuropsychologist puts it, is no more or less than “a lump of meat”.

Barnes appears to be an educated and very perceptive person (as well as an excellent writer) and he frankly characterized quite a bit of the fallout from the modern scientific perspective. How many educated people would question his points? In fact in a *New York Times* review Garrison Keillor commented cavalierly, “[a]ll true so far as it goes, but so what” (Keillor, 2008). Perhaps excepting his deflation of the “modern secular heaven”, isn’t Barnes’ take on life essentially that of modern (secular) educational systems?

On the other hand, the premodern reincarnation understanding is consistent with a long-lasting ultimate self or soul (sophisticated Buddhists might quibble with that description, though). The life-after-life or transcendental dynamic suggests that such souls could have their own trajectory. Intermixed here would of course be connections with other souls and as suggested herein that might prominently include those within are one’s family. Such longer histories with family members might then account for both the extraordinary closeness and also challenges commonly found within families.

A transcendental aspect would support our deeper intuitions with regards to death, both in that it is not the end and also that it is potentially a critical event. It also undercuts the logic of suicide as it would not be possible “to end it all”. Additionally, religions could have some objective validity and as such offer support. Also the natural religion suggests we come into our lives with some recollections of the dynamic intermediate state. Perhaps that is consistent with the “spacey” quality young children appear to have. Another point with regards to the intermediate state is that uncontrolled flashbacks to it might offer some insight into schizophrenia (Christopher, 2019).

Given the suggested life-after-life perspective this could add motivation for trying to slow down, pay attention, and thus more fully learn our life lessons (which seem to be mostly non-sophisticated). The suggested interconnected personal histories might help increase awareness of the needs of others. Additionally, it could boost motivation to act on our sustainability challenges. This might in part translate to trying to pursue simpler lives so as to help with our pending long transition with regards to energy usage (Smil, 2015, 2019). Finally, a transcendental vision could motivate some to further investigate religious beliefs and perspectives.

On the latter point Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions* offers a good overview (Smith, 2009). For reincarnation related information you will have to look around a bit. Buddhism like other religions does offers simple suggestions to increase the likelihood of a positive (and potentially liberating) after-death transition (Thondup, 2005). Additionally, since individual cases explicitly suggestive

of reincarnation cases are rare you might also want to investigate philosophical works.

For those looking for information on possible deeper transformations you can see Chapters 5 and 6 in *Three Pillars of Zen* by Philip Kapleau (Kapleau, 1980) for some otherwise taboo accounts, and/or see the remarkable chronicle contained in Jacque Lusseyran's *And There Was Light* (Lusseyran, 2014). I think that such transformative experiences could correspond to breaking through our deeply-entrenched, me-and-the-world story and thus coming to appreciate our underlying existence and freedom as a soul. But such experiences are rare ("taking many years of total dedication" (Thondup, 2005: p. 8)) and from a transcendental perspective tended to be viewed as a goal to be pursued across lifetimes. A thorough and insightful book is *I AM THAT* by Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (Nisargadatta, 1973) which contains transcripts from many far-reaching conversations. The author's simple take on some of this terrain and its potential psychological significance is found here (Christopher, 2020c).

8. Conclusion

Life inevitably entails challenges including plenty of inter-mixed psychological and philosophical ones. From the perspective of materialism many of these have a substantial genetic basis. That assumption is questionable. From the premodern life-after-life perspective the explanatory shortcomings of DNA are expected and our challenges can be viewed as potentially offering positive learning experiences. The reincarnation perspective provides a different outlook on life beginning with the possibility of improving our lives beyond the current one. It also provides a motivational boost for dealing with our unfolding sustainability crisis. This alternative perspective may also offer traction for traditional religious views, views which apparently show up as innate beliefs.

A basic point the author suggested in (Christopher, 2020a) is "that science's physics-only based model of evolution never made sense as a possible vehicle for dualistic or transcendent phenomena". As a result, I suggest that those interested in such phenomena turn some attention to evolution and the associated conundrum of "How Did Mankind Evolve?" (Mayr, 2001: pp. 233-264). Also of note is Steven Pinker's discussion of the unlikeliness of intelligent life's evolution (Pinker, 1997: pp. 150-155). For an introductory discussion weighing in with an alternative take on the evolutionary process, you might the latter portions of (Carter, 2012).

The potential to push beyond the conceptual boundaries of materialism should be of philosophical interest. To truly understand our living experience and its implications could entail plenty of homework including questioning the assumptions of modern science.

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